Forced, Forbidden and Rejected Motherhood in Margaret Atwood's

The Handmaid's Tale

University of Tampere
School of Modern Languages and Translation Studies
English Philology
Pro Gradu Thesis
June 2006
Nina Sipilä

Tampereen yliopisto
Kieli- ja käännöstieteiden laitos
Englantilainen filologia

SIPILÄ, NINA: Forced, Forbidden and Rejected Motherhood in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

Pro Gradu- tutkielma, 82 s., lähdeluettelo
Kesäkuu 2006

Tutkielmani aiheena on äitiys ja sen representaatiot Margaret Atwoodin romaanissa *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). Atwood on kautta linjan tuotannossaan ollut kiinnostunut feministisistä teemoista, ja äitiys yhtenä eniten naisen asemaa määrittävänä tekijänä on keskeinen teema hänen dystopiassaan. Atwood kuvaa romaanissaan äitiyden äärimmäisenä naisten alistamisen keinona: lisääntymiskykyiset naiset on pakotettu hengen uhalla tuottamaan jälkeläisiä uudelle valtakunnalle, lisääntymiskyvyttömät/ -haluttomat naiset palvelevat joko vaimoina, taloudenhoitajina, miesten seksuaalisten nautintojen tyydyttäjinä, tai kolonioissa siivoamassa hengenvaarallisia jätteitä. Naiset ovat täysin kahlittuja biologian perusteella.

Tutkielmani teoreettisena viitekehyksenä on 1960-80 -lukujen feministinen äitiysdiskurssi sekä teoreettinen tutkimus äitiyden representoinnista. Feministitutkijat ovat tuoneet esille, että äitiys ei muodostu vain eletystä äitiydestä, vaan äitiyttä tuottavat yhteiskunnassa monet tekijät; äitiys on sekä biologinen että sosiaalinen rooli. Naiseuden representaatiot ovat yleisesti seuranneet karkeaa madonna-äiti – huora -kahtiajakoa, kuten useat tutkijat toteavat. Lisäksi kiinnostuksen kohteena tutkimuksessani ovat naisten väliset suhteet, ja erityisesti äiti-tytär -suhde.

Etsin teoksesta erilaisia äitiyden ilmenemiä. Pohdin vastaavatko Atwoodin representaatiot äidille perinteisesti annettuja rooleja, ja kuinka Atwood kuvaa ideaalia äitiyttä vai ottaako hän siihen kantaa lainkaan. Ylläpitääkö teos ydinperhettä vai haastaako se hyväksymään myös muita perhemuotoja? Koska teoksessa on myös äitiydestä kieltäytyneitä naisia, mitä Atwood ajattelee biologisen äitiyden merkityksestä naiseudelle?

Analyysissani osoitan, että Atwood haluaa romaanissaan tuoda esiin erilaisia äitihahmoja, biologisia ja sosiaalisia, herättääkseen keskustelua äidin roolista. Hän ei kuvaa ideaalia äitiyttä, vaan jättää sen avoimeksi. Hän kritisoi ydinperhettä instituutiona ja esittää muiden perhemuotojen näkemistä vaihtoehtona. Äiti-tytär – suhteessa Atwood tuo esiin matrilineaarisuuden tarpeellisuuden. Atwood korostaa paitsi naisten, myös sukupuolten välistä solidaarisuutta. Näenkin, että Atwood ottaa kantaa yhteiskunnalliseen keskusteluun, jossa konservatiivisia perhearvoja pyritään korostamaan naisten itsemääräämisoikeuden ja valinnanvapauden uhalla.

Asiasanat: äitiys, representaatio, äiti-tytär –suhde

Table of contents

1. Introduction

Motherhood concerns us all: everyone has a mother and all women have the theoretical possibility of becoming a mother. Motherhood has the personal, social and cultural levels. Due to the ubiquitous and problematic nature of the topic it has been one of the most fruitful and polemic issues for feminist researchers to study. In the 1960s and 70s, during the second wave feminism, it was a major theme for debate and criticism, and the fervent quest began for disentangling the myths of motherhood, which are reproduced by the representations of mothers.

Margaret Atwood, one of the most famous contemporary writers in Canada, has approached the topic of motherhood from the perspective of mental and bodily coercion: her novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) is a dystopian vision of motherhood and womanhood. Atwood has throughout her career been interested in how women use power and how power is exercised on them. She has discussed various feminist themes in her novels: for example, the objectification of women in *Edible Woman* (1969); the female victimization in *Surfacing* (1972); identity and the mythical images of women in *Lady Oracle* (1977); female bodily experience in *Bodily Harm* (1981); private history and the vicissitudes of female friendships in *Cat's Eye* (1988), *The Robber Bride* (1993), and *The Blind Assassin* (2000); power politics in *Alias Grace* (1996); and child prostitution and apocalyptic reproduction in *Oryx and Crake* (2003). Her latest work *The Penelopiad: The Myth of Penelope and Odysseus* (2005) is a retelling of Homer's story from Penelope's point of view. "Perhaps it could be said that in all her literal work Atwood explores the unequal sexual politics that shape and restrain the lives of her protagonists" (Buxton, 2001: 43). In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the patriarchy has become fully totalitarian, most women are powerless, and some women ruthlessly use the little power they have on other women.

In her dystopia Atwood has created a future society where producing offspring is at the very core of the story, and women fully oppressed and labelled merely according to their ability to "breed". As Atwood's protagonist, the Handmaid called Offred, defines women in the Gileadean society: "There are only women who are fruitful and women who are barren, that's the law" (Atwood 1996: 71).

Offred's story takes place in the state of Gilead, situated in the near future in New England, Maine.[1] The elite of Gilead is formed by the Commanders: men who have legislated the new rule and imposed themselves the right to use fertile women for their personal reproductive purposes because of the infertility of their wives.[2] The Handmaids are women who have been proved fertile before the Gileadean regime, mothers who have already given birth. Each Commander is ordained one Handmaid at a time in order to breed a child to the household. The Handmaids are named after their Commanders' first names: Offred, Ofwarren, Ofwayne etc. to mark that they are the property of their masters, and also that should they fail in their duty, they are easily replaceable by another nameless woman who(se womb) may be *of* somebody.

Offred is a mother of a five-year-old daughter - or, her daughter was five when she was taken away from her. Offred tells her story in the Republic of Gilead: she recalls how the new right-wing religious fundamentalist regime came into force and what preceded it. It is a story of a woman who has lost her property, freedom, family, own name, bodily autonomy – all is taken away from her in that order in the military take-over – and is struggling against losing her whole identity to the new role of a surrogate mother.

---

[1] The choice of the setting is deliberate: New England, Maine was the seat of Puritan New England, and Atwood's ancestors came from there (Kormalý, 1996).

[2] As Kaplan notices: "Most women are infertile due to the excessive chemicals in the air and radiation released from an earthquake on the San Andreas fault" (1992: 213). In addition, most Wives have passed their fertile age.

Furthermore, not only the Handmaids but also other women in *The Handmaid's Tale* are in one way or the other intertwined in the process of reproduction. The Handmaids and the Wives most perceptibly: the Handmaids as the forced biological mothers, the actual breeders; and the Wives as the receivers of the babies, who emotionally reject their role as adoptive mothers. Other women in the novel, the militant Aunts, the servant Marthas, the prostitutes at Jezebel's brothel and the women who have been defined 'Unwomen' are assigned other duties supporting the oppression of women because they cannot produce children. Therefore all the women in the novel are defined by their relation to motherhood: either forced upon them, forbidden from them or as a role rejected.

The Handmaid's Tale is considered a profound maternal dystopia as the paternal, repressive new regime is organized at its most fundamental level to control childbirth (Kornfeld, 2002: 17). Atwood has not chosen to include technological inventions helping the reproduction, but returned back in time and taken the model of forcing women to bear children against their free will from the biblical story of Rachel and Jacob, in which the maid Bilhah is forced to act as a surrogate mother for the childless Rachel:

> As when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children,
> Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me
> Children, or else I die.
> And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel; and he
> said, Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from
> thee the fruit of the womb?
> And she said, Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her;
> and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have
> children by her. - Genesis, 30: 1-3

The same subversion of the female body and mind happened in the United States both during the slavery and in the segregated South when white men raped African-American women in order to produce more mulatto slaves (Rich, 1976: 34). In Nazi Germany women were forced to act as surrogate mothers (Atwood, 2005: 99). And furthermore: "While women in the U.S. were experiencing the unravelling of the women's movement [in the eighties], women in

fundamentalist cultures such as Afghanistan were suffering profound repression" (Kornfeld, 2002: 17). Thus, all the dystopian elements in the novel have their foundation in real life events. Women as mothers have been (and are) oppressed systematically in different parts of the world. In Atwood's words: "There is nothing in the book without a precedent" (2005: 100).

The Handmaid's Tale has been studied extensively. It is defined as a science fiction novel, and Atwood received Arthur C. Clarke Science-Fiction award for the novel in 1987.[3] Various theorists (LeFanu, 1988; Kormalý, 1996; Kornfeld, 2002, etc.) discuss *The Handmaid's Tale* as a representative of feminist science fiction. They present the characteristics and the possibilities of SF in order to show evidence for Atwood's choice for the genre as a mainstream writer. LeFanu argues that because SF is free from the constraints of realism, and since it borrows from horror, mythology and fairy tale (which are all very characteristic of Atwood's writing in general), it "offers means of exploring the myriad ways in which we are constructed as women" (1988: 188). Furthermore, motherhood, surrogacy and procreation are important themes in women's SF.[4] As Kornfeld puts it: "Women's science fiction has been exploring what it means to give birth, to meddle with procreation, or to rear children ever since Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein*" (2002: 4). In addition, mother/daughter relationship is an issue in many feminist SF novels (ibid: 5).[5]

---

[3] Atwood herself defines *The Handmaid's Tale* speculative fiction, or more precisely, dystopian fiction, because in her view science fiction includes things that are not possible today. In Atwood's view in her novel: "[N]othing happens that the human race has not already done in the past, or that it is not doing now, perhaps in other countries, or for which it has not yet developed the technology" (2005: 92).

[4] To mention some well-know feminist science fiction novels: Ursula K. Le Guin in *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) introduces hermaphroditic individuals, which can thus be both mothers and fathers. In Marge Piercy's utopia *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) women have given up their reproductive power and instead, babies are born from machines called brooders and they have three female and male mothers. Suzette Haden Elgin's dystopia *Native Tongue* (1984) presents a similar scene of motherhood as Atwood: fertile women, in Elgin's novel the women of linguists, are obliged to bear as many children to the state as they possibly can, and then they will be useless.

[5] For example, Octavia Butler and Suzy McKee Charnas discuss mother-daughter relationship in their works.

"Most theorists admit that notions of utopia, science fiction, and fantasy overlap to some degree" (Donawerth and Kolmerten, 1994: 2). Hence, *The Handmaid's Tale* may be considered representing both feminist SF and utopian literature. It has often been compared with other utopian and dystopian literature. As Feuer notices:

> *The Handmaid's Tale* has been hailed as "a feminist *1984*" because of the similarities between the totalitarian societies in the novels, the use of nightmare images and "nighttime dreams and memory flashes to recapture elusive past through which their protagonists try to retain their individual humanity. (1997: 84)

Jenny Wolmark considers the novel a critical dystopia, and argues that Atwood's intention is not to depict the hideousness of a world in which patriarchy has become fully totalitarian, but to alert us "to the necessity to rethink the forms which contemporary gender relations take" (1994: 107). Also, Coral Ann Howells notices that the novel is "closer to the new feminist scholarship which has moved beyond exclusively female concerns to a recognition of the complexities of social gender construction" (1996: 128).

Moreover, intertextuality is one of the most studied aspects of the novel. Atwood uses intertextuality widely in all her work, and one reason for this must be, to quote Kormalý [6], the aim to break "the barriers between the past and the present" thus to make the "continuum of human experience" more visible (1996). The literary allusions are multiple in the novel: Atwood refers to mythical and historical events, the Bible, Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, and *Little Red Riding Hood*, to mention the most obvious ones. The literary allusions Atwood uses as subtexts also discuss women's position, thus they intensify her message of the feminine continuums (which will be discussed in chapter 4).

In her work *Mother Without Child* (1997) Elaine Tuttle Hansen discusses the concept of motherhood in *The Handmaid's Tale*. She analyses mothers without children and

[6] Note: in the electronic version of Kormalý's article the original page numbers are not marked.

concentrates on the protagonist Offred. However, the motherhood touches every woman character in the novel, not only Offred. Therefore, in my view, Hansen does leave space for further studies on the topic of motherhood from the perspectives of the other women.

In this thesis, I intend to study how motherhood as a forced, forbidden and rejected role is represented in the novel. I try to conclude what Atwood might suggest with the dystopian representations of motherhood since she writes that: “The Dystopian bad design is the Utopian good design in reverse – that is, we the readers are supposed to deduce what good society is by seeing, in detail, what it isn’t” (2005: 93). In the analysis chapters and the conclusion I will note and point out Atwood’s ideas about different kinds of mothers, female relations, and family forms. How does she perceive the meaning of motherhood and mothering to women? What in her view is the ideal family form or ideal mother?

In chapter 3 I discuss first forced motherhood, as the Handmaids and the Wives are both forced into motherhood; second, I examine the women characters that have rejected motherhood, or lost the choice for it. In chapter 4, I study motherhood as forbidden role for the protagonist Offred and her mother and argue that the novel contains the characteristics of a matrilineal narrative.

The theoretical background for my study comes from the feminist discussion on motherhood that has its roots in Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949). In sub-chapter 2.1 I will sketch the historical line of motherhood discussion before the second wave feminism, and introduce the important works from the 1960s’ and 70s’ by Kate Millett, Adrienne Rich and Nancy Chodorow. In the 1980’s the focus in the discussion changes to some extent, and I will present Sara Ruddick’s and Ann Oakley’s ideas about motherhood. My presentation about the theorising of motherhood covers thus in more detail three decades. The academic research on the topic is enormous, and because the scope of this study is

limited, I have chosen to review only some of it and discuss a few important works at more length.

In my analysis I will focus on the representations of motherhood. Therefore, in sub-chapter 2.2 I will introduce theorising about representation by the same feminists I discuss in 2.1, and also by scholars specialised in representation (Stuart Hall, Suzanna Danuta Walters, Myra Macdonald and Richard Dyer). They all argue that motherhood is clearly not only a personal experience, but also a social and cultural construction, which is to large extent produced by representations.

Moreover, in 2.3 I will briefly study the feminist theorising about mother-daughter relationship, because in my view Atwood has made a clear political decision to represent mothers and daughters, as she does not include sons in her novel. In addition, the other female relationships are also important in the novel. The characteristics of matrilineal narratives in general as Yi-Lin Yu presents them, will be discussed, and in chapter 4 I will examine the matrilineal features in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Thus, I aim at a coherent analysis of the forced, forbidden and rejected motherhood from the perspectives of all women in the novel. I believe that Atwood wants to arouse more discussion about motherhood, and women's right to either choose it or not. She takes part in the feminist discussion and expresses her opposing attitude towards the dominating political atmosphere, which curtails not only women's rights, but human rights in general.

2. Feminist motherhood discourse

In this chapter I will present the theoretical basis for my study, which comes from the feminist discussion on motherhood and mother/daughter relationship, feminist literary criticism and representation theories. First, I discuss the feminist views on motherhood in the previous decades in order to demonstrate the polemics of the topic. Second, the viewpoint is of representation: how mothers have been and are represented in literary works. Third, I concentrate on the mother-daughter relationship.

2.1 Feminist Views on Motherhood

In this sub-chapter I will introduce the historical line of feminist discussion on motherhood since the second wave feminism in the 1960s till 1980s to form the basis for my analysis of the representations of motherhood in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Margaret Atwood depicts feminist demonstrations in her novel, which can be compared to the women's liberation movement of the sixties and seventies. Furthermore, she discusses the consequences of this movement to motherhood as a social construction.

Feminists of different eras have been interested in motherhood because the position of women as mothers has been considered central for understanding women's situation in broader context (Walters, 1992: 142). The discussion on motherhood has swelled from one end to the other arguing that motherhood strongly oppresses women, but that on the other hand, it can also be empowering. In *The Handmaid's Tale* motherhood is evidently the key to women's oppression, but as I will argue later, it is also a strongly empowering factor in the protagonist Offred's life.

Before beginning with the discussion in the 1960s, I will first present briefly some historical facts leading to the changes in the mother's role, and then, introduce Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), which as a revolutionary feminist pioneer work is still often cited by today's scholars. De Beauvoir's thesis on women being suppressed because of biology, which determines women's role in society narrowing it to the reproductive role, has been of great importance in the discussion on motherhood.[7]

In the 19th century biological essentialism dictated the conceptualisation of motherhood, and motherhood was argued to be women's "natural" biological task, destiny and will: because women had the reproductive ability, they were to use it and to enjoy bearing and rearing children.[8] With the Industrial Revolution work moved outside home and the private and public sphere were separated as women's environment and men's world (Brannon, 1999: 165). 'The Doctrine of Two Spheres' and 'the Cult of True Womanhood' were created to serve the purpose of keeping women inside home and taking care of children and of the needs of the husband (ibid: 165-7).[9] Child rearing became the primary responsibility of (white, middle-class) women, and in this process of closing women inside home and privatising nurturance, maternal work was on the one hand, devalued in society (Bassin, Honey, and Kaplan, 1994: 5) but on the other hand, it was appreciated because mothers were regarded as maintaining and passing moral (patriarchal) values to children and

---

[7] De Beauvoir's work has often been judged defective by recent feminists, as Judith Still points out. But nevertheless, she is widely studied and cited as a founding Mother, and also excused on account of the point of time she wrote her work (Still, 1990: 325). In addition, in the field of literary criticism Pam Morris in her *Literature and Feminism* (1993) recognises de Beauvoir's importance and inspiration to later literary critics, and states that de Beauvoir with her own example shows that women critics have the "right" to question the canonical classics by prestigious male writers and the images of women that they represent (1993: 16).

[8] For example, Elaine Showalter points this out in *A Literature of their Own* (1977): she argues that women writers of the 19th century were considered primarily mothers, and secondarily, creative artists (1977: 73).

[9] 'The Doctrine of Two Spheres' promoted the idea about divergent areas of interest and influence for the two sexes: women's sphere is home and children, men's sphere work and the outside world. 'The Cult of True Womanhood' had its basis in Christianity and 'true woman's' four cardinal virtues were: piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity (Brannon, 1999: 166-7).

husbands, and as the goddess of the middle-class home, promoting consumption (Kaplan, 1992: 21). The modern nuclear family was born and its cornerstone was the mother (ibid: 17).

The First World War shook the structure of the nuclear family as men went to war, and women entered the labour force in large numbers. Between the two world wars many steps were taken for the improvement of women's rights and the extension of women's roles.[10] However, in spite of all the transitions, the nuclear family did not disperse and the mother remained central inside the family. Yet her role was now more susceptible to a change (ibid: 18). The working mothers were disapproved in spite of the evident need for their contribution, and they were made feel guilty for producing 'eight-hour orphans' even if they had made arrangements for the childcare before taking jobs (Walters, 1992: 49).

Thus, it may be noted that before Simone de Beauvoir and the Second World War, which radically changed the political and social atmosphere, the social myth of motherhood was not so much questioned than enforced in society. According to Bassin, Honey and Kaplan "the early feminists chose to revalue motherhood, and they used maternal values of collectivity and nurturance to argue against the individualistic values of capitalist culture" (1994: 5). The message in society for women was evident: "although women *could* do anything, authentic women would choose to be at home with their families" (Walters, 1992: 70).

De Beauvoir fully questioned the role of woman and mother in society. Her argument, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," summarizes her thoughts on gender (Koskela 1997: 142). Hence, in de Beauvoir's opinion, women are raised and socialised into the subordinate role of women (and mothers). She wants to draw a clear line between sex and gender, and notes that because sex and gender have not been separate

[10] For example, the women's suffrage movement, which had started already in the 19th century, during the 1st wave feminism, was intensified. Furthermore, in the 1920s the first waves of female liberation came ashore: the number of childless women was increased, women got access to higher education and there was an increasing number of lesbian relations in public (Kaplan, 1992: 18).

concepts, women have been defined merely by biology and reproduction: “Woman has ovaries, a uterus: these peculiarities imprison her in her subjectivity, circumscribe her within the limits of her own nature. It is often said that she thinks with her glands” (de Beauvoir, 1953: 15). Therefore, de Beauvoir sees menstruation and maternity as pitfall to women, and argues that women are not considered subjects using their brain, but objects acting by the impetus of their bodily cycle. Furthermore, submissiveness and dependence have been central elements in womanhood, and therefore it has been easy to deny social power and liberty from women. As a conclusion, de Beauvoir wants to oppose the biological determinism according to which biology defines women’s destiny.

In *The Handmaid’s Tale* the Handmaids are reduced to the role of breeding objects that live by their bodily cycle so that they can fulfil their role of forced surrogates, and the women at Jezebel’s brothel, who have either rejected motherhood or are not fertile anymore, are compelled to act as sex slaves - Atwood takes de Beauvoir's arguments about women's otherness to a nightmarish extent and depicts a society where women have no human value and their bodies are exploited in a merciless manner. De Beauvoir’s arguments can thus be seen fully implemented in the novel in my view.

Following de Beauvoir in the 1960s the second wave feminists wanted to break free from the ideal (American) nuclear family of the fifties with a suburban home, pets and household appliances. Several feminist theorists argued that motherhood is the major source of women’s devaluation. Mothering was regarded as serving the purposes of patriarchy in closing women inside the home, thus alienating them from social power (Friedan, 1963; Millett, 1969).[11] Also, the nuclear family with its outmoded nineteenth-century forms was challenged as middle-class mothers were working outside the family (Kaplan, 1992: 18).

---

[11] It must be noted that most of these theorists are white, middle-class women, thus the debate on motherhood is to great extent culture bound. Black women in the United States have very different history influenced by slavery and racial discrimination. Also Robbinson points out this: “[W]hen white feminists speak

Many feminists of the era were of the opinion that motherhood is oppressing, but I will discuss only Kate Millett in more detail, because of her considerable influence on the motherhood discussion and her importance as a feminist literary critic. Some of her statements regarding patriarchy and maternity could be, in my opinion, applied to *The Handmaid's Tale*.

The feminist literary criticism emerged at the end of 1960s–in the beginning of the 1970s, and the representations of women and motherhood were a significant topic. First the focus was on the texts written by male authors, and in her classic *Sexual Politics* (1969) Kate Millett analyses the misogynist representations of women by the canonised male writers, D.H Lawrence, Henry Miller, Norman Mailer and Jean Genet. She argues that male writers reflect their masculine fears in their misogynist literary images, and suggests further that the purpose of these representations is to entitle the mental and physical coercion that men exercise over women so as to sustain male sexual authority (1969: 313). In other words, Millett is of the opinion that literature, written by men, teaches the acceptance of traditional sex roles, which serve the patriarchal rule, and reproduces the sexual politics of the real world in the fictional world of their novels (Light, 1983: 242-3).[12] Millett's work inspired women critics to reread male literary texts and male critics in order to reveal the misrepresentations of women and the marginalizing of women writers.[13] Soon the focus, however, was turned into reading female authors, and because they were excluded from the literary canons, alternative women's canons were established (Morris, 1993: 51).

---

of "women", are we actually speaking of white women, heterosexual women, middle class academic women?" (Robbinson, 1991: 4).

[12] However, Millett has been criticized for simplifications in her arguments and for the perception that womanhood contains 'an essence' that the male writers intentionally represent in a distorted manner (Koskela, 1997: 144). Futher, Millett's study is regarded necessary as giving rise to a debate, but lacking and biased in its analysis (Bowlby, 1988: 272).

[13] Also Mary Ellman's *Thinking about Women* (1968) provoked discussion on the misrepresentations of women by male writers and critics (Morris, 1993: 15). Furthermore, Elaine Showalter in *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) opposes the negative critique of women writers by male critics and introduces the term 'gynocriticism', by which she means turning the focus on women's writing and analysing it from the female point of view (ibid: 66).

Millett vigorously criticizes patriarchal oppression of women and she claims that "[p]atriarchy's chief institution is the family" (1969: 33). She states that traditionally wife and children have been considered father's property and he has had the right to treat them as he wishes, abuse them physically, even murder or sell them (ibid). Though this is no longer the case in today's societies, Millett argues that patriarchy still ordains the subordinate role of mothers and children in the family.

In *The Handmaid's Tale* the chief institution is no more the nuclear family, but an extended form of a family, and it is not even called a 'family', it is a 'household'. As Offred defines the modification of a family in which they live in Gilead: "*Household*: that is what we are. The Commander is the head of the household. The house is what he holds. To have and to hold, till death do us part" (Atwood, 1996: 91). The households are the Commanders' property and they hold the power, but some ostensible power has been given to the Wives in order to maintain the inequality between different groups of women, and hence impede them objecting the rule together. The division of power follows 'The Doctrine of Two Spheres' - the Wives rule in the domestic scene:

> The Commander knocks at the door. The knock is prescribed: the sitting room is supposed to be Serena Joy's [his wife's] territory, he's supposed to ask permission to enter it. She likes to keep him waiting. It's a little thing, but in this household little things mean a lot. (*ibid*: 97)

Furthermore, Millett takes the example of Nazi Germany when she describes the worst scenario of motherhood. She notes that coerced and bribed surrogacy was then introduced as a method for raising the birth rate. She concludes: "Governments who manipulate population growth have two choices: making maternity pleasant or making it inescapable" (1969: 166). Atwood has written that one historical fact influencing her novel are the events of Nazi Germany (2005: 99). In *The Handmaid's Tale* maternity is inescapable, and it is certainly made pleasant neither for the Handmaids as the biological mothers, surrogates, nor to the Wives as adoptive mothers. Besides, women who have refused

motherhood are either used as prostitutes or servants or declared ‘Unwomen’. I will examine the aspect of forced and rejected motherhood in chapter 3.

In addition to Millett, the feminists of the 1960s and early 1970s announced similar critical opinions on patriarchal control over family, women and motherhood, and wanted to question openly motherhood as a role for all women.[14] As the contraceptives were invented and introduced (the pill was invented in 1960) there was a real choice for women to have or not to have babies. Thus the bodily autonomy of women was increased. Furthermore, feminists claimed political decision makers for more public childcare, thus freedom of choice for mothers. I will discuss the similarities between these ideas of the second wave feminists and *The Handmaid’s Tale* in sub-chapter 4.2 since Offred’s mother resembles the feminist activists of the decades.

In the 1970s the critical discussion on motherhood continues. The most influential works on motherhood of the 1970s are Adrienne Rich’s *Of Woman Born,* 1976, and Nancy Chodorow’s *The Reproduction of Mothering*, 1978.

Adrienne Rich, a lesbian feminist theorist and a poet, adds to the 1960s discussion on motherhood constraining women, and she calls the patriarchal control of mothering “the institution of motherhood”, which she strongly opposes. Rich’s main argument in her classic *Of Woman Born* is that it is the institutionalisation of motherhood that maintains the male dominance in society alienating women from and imprisoning them in their bodies (1976: 13). The patriarchy wants to control motherhood because of the fear of women’s procreative power, which is incontestable compared to the paternity, which is more insecure (Rowland, 1987: 513).

---

[14] Among the most influential ones: Betty Friedan in her *Feminine Mystique (*1963) calls home a prison for women, and Shulamith Firestone in *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) regards pregnancy and childbirth objectionable experiences to women and motherhood a barrier to gain social power; she demands the severance of motherhood from womanhood. Likewise, in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1974) Juliet Mitchell considers that rearing children has been “an instrument of oppression”.

Furthermore, Rich protests strenuously against the stereotypical images of motherhood. First, she is against the idea of the female body represented either ultimately good or bad depending on its function, and second, the image of the perfect mother that imposes strict setting for motherhood. “I was haunted by the stereotype of the mother whose love is ‘unconditional’; and by the visual and literary images of motherhood as a single-minded identity” (1976: 23). Consequently, Rich brings into discussion the representation of women as sacred when they are mothers and their bodies are in the maternal use: carrying children, feeding and protecting them. Because the religious image, the figure of the Virgin Mary, is such a strong image attached to motherhood, sexuality does not belong to mothers. When women’s bodies are regarded as sexual, they are represented “impure and corrupt”, as an allurement to the male sexual desire. I will present the representation of mother’s body further in chapter 2.2.

Besides criticizing the institutionalising of motherhood and the misrepresentations of women and mothers, Rich wants to highlight the experience of mothering. She reminds us that giving birth and mothering are enriching personal experiences, which give women an opportunity to get in touch with their body and children. She argues that instead of the patriarchal self-sacrificing maternal love, mothers should aim at exceeding the limits of institutionalised mothering and refuse the role of victims in society: women's reproductive role should be celebrated, not degraded.[15]

In addition, Rich brings into motherhood discussion the interest in mother-daughter relationship. In Yu’s view this offers new issues for cultural feminism and forms the ground for studying maternal thinking and matrilineal writing (2005: 16). I will briefly discuss the

[15] Rich has been accused of essentialism because of her idealising arguments about women’s ‘natural’ abilities. However, as Marianne Liljeström notices this critique is misleading, because Rich explicitly accentuates that there is nothing ‘natural’ in the complex of motherhood (2000: 260). However, many feminists disagree with Rich’s idea of celebrating women’s reproductive role.

feminist research on mother-daughter relationship and matrilineal narratives in sub-chapter 2.3.

The other influential work from the 1970s, which I present here, is by Nancy Chodorow, a psychoanalyst and a feminist. The feminist psychoanalysts argued that "fear and anger toward the mother [are] bulwarks of [the] patriarchal structures" in Western society (Kornfeld, 2002: 4). In *The Reproduction of Mothering* Chodorow takes an objective standpoint with the Freudian psychoanalytic movement, which had disregarded motherhood.[16] She challenges Freud's phallocentrism and pays a lot of attention in her work to the girl's pre-Oedipal and post-Oedipal identification phases, concluding that as maternal qualities are not intrinsic to women, it would be possible to contribute to different fe/male psychic patterns if men took the primary responsibility for child-caring and the mother was released from her position of the exclusive care-taker (Kaplan, 1992: 33).[17] Consequently, Chodorow explains in her work how the earliest mother-child relationship maintains the role division in child caring so that the mother has perpetually the leading role. Chodorow states that: "Women's mothering is one of the few universal and enduring elements of the sexual division of labour" (1978: 3), and she calls for a fundamental change in the organising of childcare in our culture.

Chodorow also points out the generative aspects of mothering, and argues that mothering provides mothers and daughter with connections and strengths that are rare in

[16] Millett's argument about Freud's psychoanalytic theory portraying women inherently inferior to men and claiming that women can achieve true femininity only as wives and mothers, contributed to feminists rejecting psychoanalysis (Morris, 1993: 94). This rejection was fierce, and in 1974 Juliet Mitchell in her *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* attempted to mitigate it by suggesting: "[P]sychoanalysis is not a recommendation for a patriarchal society, but an analysis of one. If we are interested in understanding and challenging the oppression of women, we cannot afford to neglect it" (Mitchell, 1974: xv). However, the tension between feminism and psychoanalysis remains. Psychoanalytic theory looks at motherhood from the (male) child position, not from the mother's point of view, and furthermore, Freud is not interested in studying the psychic consequences of mothering for women (Kaplan, 1992: 45). Thus, the origins for Chodorow's theoretical and political thinking arise from the work of two feminist psychoanalysts: Karen Horney's theory of women's positive qualities (opposed to Freud's negative view of female) and the object relation theory of Melanie Klein.

[17] Kaplan notes here that Chodorow's solution to the redistribution of roles is problematic, because she confuses the social and psychic mothers, and her concept on 'good mothering' finally depends still on the capacity of the mother (1992: 33-4).

male relationships (1978: 176). Furthermore, Chodorow's importance in the study of mother-daughter relationship is widely recognised, and I will introduce her ideas about the mother's influence on the daughter in sub-chapter 2.3.

Thus, these two classics of the 1970s motherhood discussion, Rich's and Chodorow's studies on maternity, may be defined as introductions to a new outlook favouring a distinct woman culture in which women's experiences and virtues, motherhood, mother-daughter relationships, nurturance and pacifism, are to be valued as privileges over men (Yu, 2005: 5).

To conclude the discussion of the 1960s and 70s, motherhood was seen to repress, silence and restrict women's lives to the extent that it was preferable to separate mothering from womanhood. Elaine Tuttle Hansen summarizes aptly the feminist discussion on motherhood from the 1960s in her work *Mother without Child*:

> The story of feminist thinking about motherhood since the early 1960s is told as a drama in three acts: repudiation, recuperation, and, in the latest and most difficult stage to conceptualise, an emerging critique of recuperation that coexists with ongoing efforts to deploy recuperative strategies. (1997: 5)

Hence, to paraphrase Hansen, the feminist discussion on motherhood from the roots of de Beauvoir had mostly concentrated on first, disclosing the institution of motherhood and striving for a position in which women no longer would be constrained by mothering and childcare; and second, revealing the myths of motherhood. In general, the feminist literature of the 1960s and 70s either questioned motherhood as a destiny for all women and demanded alternatives for childcare, or ignored the issue (= repudiation). Since the late 1970s the personal experience of mothering, the mother's subjectivity and the social meanings of motherhood became important (= recuperation) (Ross, 1995: 379), and there was a change in the discussion on motherhood towards emphasising the positive and generative aspects of maternity, which in the 1980s were central. The eighties' discussion reaffirms and celebrates motherhood, but leaves aside women without children (ibid: 398). Also, "the celebratory

mode of the 1980s" inadvertently bypasses and excludes the demoralizing or even agonizing aspects of motherhood and mothering, one of them being those of nonmothers (Yu, 2005: 4).

In the 1980s the middle-class women engaged in full-time work, and as the mother was not always at home anymore, the traditional family gender roles were altered so that the father took more responsibility in nurturing, even if the main responsibility was still carried by the mother (Kaplan, 1992: 18). The nuclear family was no more the sole accepted family form for raising a child, also one-parent families and lesbian relationships were increasingly an alternative. Due to this social change, motherhood was now seen more also as a positive choice than merely a restrictive, forced role for all women. As Chodorow and Contratto put it in their essay "The Fantasy of the Perfect Mother" (1980): "Feminist writing now recognizes that many women, including many feminists, want to have children and experience mothering as a rich and complex endeavor (1980: 54). Also Julia Kristeva, though being critical, argues that anti-motherhood attitude is alienating, and she celebrates women's bodily experience of motherhood in her famous essay on motherhood "Stabat Mater" (1987) (Yu, 2005: 43).[18]

Furthermore, thanks to the new reproductive technologies, also the freedom from biology was an issue in the eighties along with the freedom to enjoy mothering. As the reproductive technologies guaranteed that there were other pathways to motherhood than heterosexual relationship, lesbian couples received the possibility to mothering, and in addition, it may be argued that women's control over their bodies was fortified to some extent (Schwartz, 1994: 242).

The counter-reaction for the liberation movements in the eighties was however pronounced and "feminism's gains were portrayed as setbacks to women and to society, causing everything from male stress to spinsterhood to an increase in adolescent crime"

[18] The French feminists, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, have contributed to the discussion on motherhood from the 1980s in their work based on Lacanian psychoanalysis and Saussurean linguistics. The ideas of these feminists are intriguing, but as the scope of my study is limited, and they lie outside it, I will leave them out.

(Kornfeld, 2002: 17). The fundamentalist Christian right movement and the Moral Majority movement "established the grass-roots base for the Reagan-Bush era [… and] successfully transformed the Republican Party into an anti-feminist, anti-gay, anti-abortion fortress" (Stacey, 1996: 3). Hence, in the mid-1980s Reagan's and Thatcher's right-wing governments introduced anti-feminist policies and reinforced the nuclear family again. As Kornfeld argues, the traditional idea of maternal service was highlighted again and maternal power diminished (2002: 4). Offred mothers her child in a similar atmosphere of the "backlash" era, and then ends up losing her child after the coup d'état by the patriarchal fundamentally religious regime. Accordingly, *The Handmaid's Tale* is seen as one example of voicing "the common fear of feminists that such conservatism may end in women losing the rights they had fought very hard to win" (Kormalý, 1996).

Besides the discussion on motherhood introduced above, Sara Ruddick and Ann Oakley bring interesting aspects into the motherhood discussion in the 1980s. I will introduce them in more detail because their ideas are relevant, in my opinion, in analysing *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Sara Ruddick, a feminist philosopher, inaugurated the term "maternal thinking" in her essay "*Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace*" in 1980. Ruddick wants to emphasize the philosophical aspect of mothering and describe the thinking that arises from the work mothers do. The preservation and the social acceptability of a child are two basic interests in the maternal work wherefrom the maternal thinking arises. Maternal thinking includes seeing oneself positively, thus getting free from the ideology of womanhood and motherhood that has been defined by patriarchy. She places emphasis in particular on maternal thinking because, as I previously noted, mothering has been considered 'natural' in women's life and normally 'natural' does not include 'thinking'.

Furthermore, Ruddick notices the motherly guilt that the mother feels (and is socialised into feeling) if something goes wrong in child's growth process, and on the other hand, the lack of credit given to mother when everything goes fine (1980: 215).[19] She aims at demystifying the cultural construction of images of good and bad mothers, and places emphasis on "the reality of the practical work involved in mothering, which, she argues, passes on good values to society in general" (Yu, 2005: 16).

Moreover, Ruddick argues, that birthgiving and mothering as an experience and practice are quite unlike each other. She states that if giving birth and mothering were considered separated activities, there would be an opportunity for less gendered mothering and freeing women from their biological destiny (Ruddick, 1994: 36). Ruddick's theory is also very interesting for she is trying to create more equality between sexes in the process of childbirth. The idea of reducing the meaning of biological motherhood, along with Ruddick's thought of birthgivers turning into objects of property because of their uterus with which they are identified, is the very same that Atwood is using in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Ann Oakley as a sociologist studies motherhood from the perspective of sociology and psychology, and in her *Women Confined* (1980) she presents a more critical point of view to motherhood compared to Chodorow, Contratto and Ruddick. She criticizes the male society for idealizing motherhood, and points the huge gap between the fact how mothers are perceived and represented in society - "…mothers thus stand for the purest kind of selflessness" (1980: 286) - and how women feel about motherhood:

> [W]hat is characteristic of childbirth and becoming a mother today is the tendency for women to feel they have lost something, rather than simply gained a child. What is lost may be one's job, one's life-style, an intact 'couple' relationship, control over one's body or a sense of self, but the feeling of bereavement cannot be cured or immediately balanced by the rewards of motherhood. (*ibid*: 280)

[19] The mother-blame is one of the prevailing attitudes in the Western society. Mothers are often blamed for the emotional and psychical problems of their children (Walters, 1992: 152).

In order to create more equal mothering Oakley ends up proposing "the abolition of fixed gender roles especially in the family and pertaining to social parenthood; and the formal and informal teaching of realistic parenthood and childbirth to both females and males from infancy onwards" (ibid: 295) which echo the discussion on motherhood from the previous decades. Furthermore, she proposes more control for women in giving birth. By this she means empowering women in labour so that unnecessary medical intervention would be deducted, and women would have the possibility to choose for example domestic labour instead of the hospitalized birth (Oakley, 1980: 295).

Atwood's dystopian vision of labour corresponds to Oakley's proposals for returning to female controlled childbirth. Offred recalls a film shown to the Handmaids in the Red Centre about labour in pre-Giledean society:

> What she'd [Aunt Lydia] just showed us was a film, made in an olden-days hospital: a pregnant woman, wired up to a machine, electrodes coming out of her every which way so that she looked like a broken robot, an intravenous drip feeding into her arm. Some man with a search-light looking up between her legs, where she'd been shaved, a mere beardless girl, a trayful of bright sterilized knives, everyone with masks on. A co-operative patient. Once they drugged women, induced labour, cut them open, sewed them up. No more. No anaesthetics, even. Aunt Elizabeth said it was better for the baby, but also: *I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children.* (Atwood, 1996: 124)

It seems that in her novel Atwood transforms Oakley's empowering proposals into neglecting women's wishes in childbirth and causing pain, as that is ordered in the Bible as well. The birthgiving mother is an object in the hospitalised birth, and in Gilead she is merely an object without the choice for anaesthetics, even if the birth is totally a feminine scene there; the baby, not the mother, is the subject in both pictures.

Consequently, E. Ann Kaplan argues in her *Motherhood and Representation* (1992) that mother's subjectivity became an issue only in the 1980's because in the earlier decades the mother had been in the margins. By this she means that mothers were not given a voice of their own but they were studied "from an Other's point of view; or represented as an

(unquestioned) patriarchally constructed social function" (1992: 3).[20] And, in the 1980s the new reproductive technologies, in-vitro-fertilization, artificial insemination, embryo freezing and the increase in mother-surrogacy,[21] challenged the mother's role more dramatically than ever before (Kaplan, 1992: 18). The pro-life and anti-abortion movements place the rights of the foetus before the pregnant woman's rights. As Kaplan notices:

> [A] concern for the foetus that once again marginalizes the mother: the foetus now takes her place at the center of things, while the mother's body and subjectivity recede. Indeed, the foetus is seen not only as being *in its own right*, but a being *with its own rights*, which are often in opposition to (and privileged over) those of the mother. It is discursively constructed as if it already were a *subject*, and one which once again supersedes the *mother's* subjectivity; 'mother' is literally reduced to a holding vessel - the non-subject that makes possible the child's subjectivity - in a bitterly ironic exaggeration of the way patriarchal culture has *always* positioned the mother... (*ibid*: 14)

The marginal position of the mother that Kaplan notices is exactly the position of the Handmaids in the novel. Offred describes it: "We are for breeding purposes: we aren't concubines, geisha girls, courtesans. We are two-legged wombs, that's all; sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices" (Atwood, 1996: 146). Despite the object position, the subjectivity of the mother in the novel is heard in the voice of the narrator: she is telling a story about women's history, a (her)story about how she was mothered, and what it is like to be a mother.

Atwood has chosen not to include reproductive technology in her dystopia, (even if many feminist science fiction novels present a hideous scene of motherhood due to the development of different technologies which exploit women) and as the contemporary discussion on motherhood is to great extent influenced by the rapid development of the different reproductive technologies and their effect on female body and mind,[22] I will leave

---

[20] Other feminist scholars such as Sara Ruddick, Jessica Benjamin, Marianne Hirsch and Susan Robin Suleiman have also stated their concern with maternal subjectivity (Yu, 2005: 7).

[21] In 1978 the first child (Louise Brown) was born through in vitro fertilization (Schwartz, 1994: 242).

[22] For example, Adria Schwartz writes in her essay "Taking the Nature Out of Mother": "Women are increasingly rejecting the constraints placed upon them by biology. The associative link between women, fertility, and motherhood is being eroded, if not broken, in the laboratory. The traditional shame of barrenness, the inevitable sterility of menopause, the onerous ticking of the biological clock, the very legitimation of womanhood by reproductive function, are all called into question by alternative modes of reproduction" (1994:

the most recent discussion out of my study, and discuss the representations of mothers in the next chapter.

2.2 Representing Mother

In the previous chapter I outlined the general historical line of feminist motherhood discourse, and now I will turn to the aspect of representing motherhood. I will present theorising about representation, which I use in the aim at unveiling the different representations of mothering in *The Handmaid's Tale.* The theorists whose ideas I present here and apply in my analysis, are the feminists mentioned in the previous chapter (De Beauvoir, Rich, Millett, Morris, Kaplan etc.), and scholars specialised in representation: Stuart Hall, Suzanna Danuta Walters, Myra Macdonald and Richard Dyer.

Feminist theorists argue that motherhood is a social construction, which is greatly produced by representations but also by social institutions, law and education for example (Millett, 1969; Rich, 1976; Kaplan, 1992; Woodward, 1997 etc). In other words, motherhood is not something innate and immutable, women do not possess a universal 'mother feature' which is revealed when they become mothers, but motherhood is a cultural and social construction.[23] Representations of motherhood reproduce it in society in various ways. Stuart Hall defines representation in general:

> Representation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language. It is the link between concepts and language which enables us to *refer* to either the 'real' world of objects, people or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events (1997: 17).

---

242). In addition, the contemporary feminists Judith Butler, Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway add to the discussion on motherhood with their studies about the metamorphosis of women and the cyborgs.

[23]As Suzanna Danuta Walters remarks, since the mid-1970s there has been a phenomenal growth in the literature on women and representation studying all kinds of cultural artifacts (1992: 14).

Thus, Hall states that representing things is a linguistic way of conceptualising the world: objects are given meaning when they are represented. Also, as it is not possible to present the reality as it is, every depiction of reality must be considered representation. And, as Pam Morris argues along with Hall: "No representation tells it as it is; all representation has to be seen as the site of ideological contestation – a linguistic space where opposing views engage in a struggle for dominance" (1993: 65).

The representation of women in Western culture has been, and still is greatly, under the influence of the dichotomy Virgin Mary and whore, or in Rich's terms, the asexual Victorian angel-wife and the Victorian prostitute (1976: 34). Hence, as mothers have been represented and perceived accordingly, there has not been much space for diverse images. Mothers are either fully dedicated to their children, sacrificial, patient, care taking mums, who smell of homemade buns; or malevolent, selfish, overinvolved, controlling women, who are to blame for their children's problems.

One reason for this dichotomy in the representation of women and mothers stems from the fact that Western culture is fundamentally influenced by Christianity, and the models for motherhood and parenting derive from the Christian cultural heritage (Dyer, 1997: 15). The biblical imagery is profoundly present in the representation of mothers: Virgin Mary or Madonna is the embodiment of the perfect mother who is self-sacrifying and devoted to her mothering role. As Richard Dyer notes in his work on representations of race, white Virgin Mary provides a virtuous model of behaviour for women to be passive, noble, merciful, receptive and to consider motherhood the supreme fulfilment of one's nature (1997: 17) The Madonna-mother reproduces the idealized mother myth in Western culture (Woodward, 1997: 247) and "teaches us that nurturing is a spiritual experience untouched by either the complications of physical passion or our own desires" (Macdonald, 1995: 133). In other

words, the Christian cultural heritage has a powerful effect on representations: mothers are required to be asexual, altruistic creatures.

The Christian myth of the sacred mother is undoubtedly one of the most prevailing ones in the representations of mothers in Western culture. The image of the holy mother and child is reproduced in Western art; stained glass windows, paintings, statues and literature. Atwood refers to the classic posture of a mother and child in Offred's longing, painful memories of her lost child and forbidden motherhood: "I remember the pictures of us I had once, me holding her, standard poses, mother and baby, locked in a frame, for safety" (1996: 74). I will emphasis the importance of the Madonna-mother myth in the representations of motherhood since the biblical allusions are copious in Atwood's novel beginning from the Rachel and Leah story in Genesis, which she cites on the first page of the novel.

Hall states that objects are given meaning by *how* they are represented, "the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images of them we produce, the emotions we associate with them, the ways we classify and conceptualize them, the values we place on them" (1997: 3). De Beauvoir argues that in the representations of women, woman is often perceived as the "other": "frail not strong, emotional not rational, yielding not virile" (1953: 229); thus, the representations of women contain negative images and emotions, and women are consequently depicted inferior to man. These kinds of binary oppositions (man/woman, mind/body, active/passive, culture/nature, strong/weak etc.) include a power relation, the first term is privileged over the second, reflecting hence the idea of masculinity as pseudo-universal. Women are in de Beauvoir's view represented by men as incarnations of all moral virtues from good to evil.

Accordingly, feminist literary critics Millett and Morris state that especially male writers' representations of women are reduced to this twofold notion. Already in the 1960s feminists wanted to disentangle the oppressiveness of the all-giving, ever-sacrificing mother

myth, and unmask the consequential single-minded representations of mothers. Millett argues that the reason for male writers' representations of women as virgins or whores is to sustain male sexual authority in society (1969: 313). Mothers cannot be sexual for then they would disturb the social order. Walters clarifies this dichotomy in representation: 'mother' versus 'woman', 'nurturance' versus 'sexuality', 'public' versus 'private' (1992: 22).

Over twenty years after Millett, Morris likewise argues that the powerful canonical literary texts by male writers reinforce the dichotomy of depicting women and mothers as either angel-like, submissive figures or as monsters and whores, and the reason for these misrepresentations is to justify male subordination of women (1993: 67). She is of the opinion that the negative representations "reflect men's fear of losing power and control in the sexual act" (ibid: 33). Therefore, because in the negative representations the masculine gaze condemns women's sexuality as unfeminine and teaches that women should be ashamed of their bodies, Morris advocates female writers' representations of women that celebrate women's sexuality and the beauty of the female body (ibid: 64). This argument of Morris's may be considered somewhat outdated: the masculine gaze no more dooms women's sexuality as as unfeminine. Yet, it could be argued that women's sexuality and bodies are still regulated by the masculine gaze.

The female bodily experience is one of the important research topics of women studies (Braidotti, 1994: 55), and as Walters points out, the objectification of the female body in representations is considered 'normal'. She states that: "In this society of the spectacle, women's bodies *are* the spectacle upon which representation occurs" (1992: 14). In the representations of motherhood, the bodily aspect is noteworthy for motherhood is strongly a physical experience. In addition, Dyer notes: "To represent people is to represent bodies" (1997: 14).

Furthermore, Dyer argues that the body is the basis in the Christian imagery,[24] and the split between body and mind is fortified in the Bible (1997: 14). This split between mind and body follows de Beauvoir's idea of the binary oppositions, in which the latter is inferior and often also evil. However, (as Rich also notices) Mary's body is not regarded evil but sacred because of her virginity: "she does nothing and indeed has no carnal knowledge, but is filled with God" (Dyer, 1997: 16). Virgin Mary's bodily experience gives women the model of passive, expectant and graceful behaviour (ibid: 7).

The bodily autonomy is one of the aspects of motherhood discussion in the sixties and the seventies. Rich discusses the representation of the female body, and notes that in patriarchal mythology and culture it has been regarded on the one hand as "impure, corrupt, the site of discharges, bleedings, dangerous to masculinity, a source of moral and physical contamination, 'the devil's gateway'" (1976: 34), and on the other hand, the body of the sacred mother is asexual, pure and nourishing maternal body. Rich argues that this double thinking has no origins in women's actual sensuality but it derives solely from the male viewpoint and control (ibid).

Atwood represents this division in her novel with the distinction that even the nourishing maternal body is no more sacred. All female bodies are crudely tyrannized: the Handmaids (and Wives) are forced into the oppressive sex scene which includes three persons; [25] abortion is forbidden even if the likelihood for genetic disorders is great; Handmaids are forced to give birth without anesthetics; and women at Jezebel's brothel are used for sexual pleasure. None of the women in the novel have bodily autonomy whatsoever.

---

[24] Dyer notes that particularly the representation of body is present in the birth and death of Christ, and takes as an imposing example the image of the dead Christ in the lap of Mary, which portrays at the same time motherly cradling and death (1997: 15).

[25] Atwood reveals the background for sexual oppression in her novel: "Sexual relations in extreme Dystopias usually exhibit some form of slavery or, as in Orwell [*1984*], extreme sexual repression (2005: 95).

This humiliating of all female bodies along with the deprivation of maternal care for children are some elements, which make *The Handmaid's Tale* nightmarish.

Furthermore, in the novel the Handmaids are spoken of as vessels that passively receive the seed. As Rothman notes, in a patriarchal kinship system "the essential concept is the 'seed', the part of men that grows into the children of their likeness within the bodies of women" (1994: 143). Handmaids' bodies are veiled in long red dresses, despite the constant control under which they live, they bath alone so that their bodies are kept in secret, and they are actually forbidden to use face cream or hand lotion because as Offred puts it: "We are containers, it's only the insides of our bodies that are important. The outside can become hard and wrinkled, for all they care, like the shell of a nut. […] They [the Wives] don't want us to look attractive" (Atwood, 1996: 107). Handmaids' bodies are regarded as utensils and their minds are captured so that they cannot speak freely, write or read, and they are even forbidden their own names: "My name is not Offred, I have another name, which nobody uses now because it's forbidden" (ibid: 94). As the Handmaids have been reduced to their bodies, and more specifically, to their uterus,[26] they feel shame and despair, and long for a personhood (Schwartz, 1994: 247).

The longing for personhood is attached to the representations of mothers. As discussed earlier, the figure of the mother is the central icon of the unselfish caring person in Western culture. And, in Macdonald's view, the idealised Virgin mother makes us admire the virtuous qualities she symbolizes instead of noticing her as a person (1995: 133). Mothers are represented as persons caring for others (children, men, aging parents etc.), not as individuals on their own right. Also, Bassin, Honey and Kaplan remark in *The Representations of Motherhood*: "the predominant image of the mother in white Western society is of the ever-bountiful, ever-giving, self-sacrificing mother. [T]his mother is not a subject with her own

[26] De Beauvoir points out that historically woman has been defined as '*Tota mulier in utero*', 'woman is a womb' (1953: 13).

needs and interests. […][S]he finds fulfilment and satisfaction in caring for her offspring" (1994: 2-3). Perhaps because of this unselfish character of the mother, she has often been depicted from somebody else's viewpoint. Moreover, as mentioned in 2.1, till the eighties mother had been studied from an Other's (child's or other fe/male adult's) point of view instead of listening her own voice (Kaplan, 1992: 3).

Atwood turns these arguments upside down: the whole story is told by one mother, Offred, from her own perspective only, and Offred even indicates that she tells the story as she wishes, it might have been told otherwise also:

> This is a reconstruction. All of it is a reconstruction. It's a reconstruction now, in my head, as I lie flat on my single bed rehearsing what I should or shouldn't have said, what I should or shouldn't have done, how I should have played it. […]
>
> It is impossible to say a thing exactly the way it was, because what you say can never be exact, you always have to leave something out, there are too many parts, sides, crosscurrents, nuances; too many gestures, which could mean this or that, too many shapes which can never be fully described, too many flavours, in the air or on the tongue, half-colours, too many. (1996: 144)

In the end of the novel the reader learns that the story was not written but oral, so the reader has particularly been listening to this mother's voice. Moreover, Offred talks widely about her own wishes, needs and interests, and depicts her own mother and Moira as strong individuals. She has been telling the story in her hiding place with the threat of being caught. But as Morris puts it: "We can know our world only because we can represent it to ourselves. Representation is perhaps the most fundamental of all human activities, structuring our consciousness of ourselves and of external reality" (1993: 7). In the oppressive world of the Handmaid, representing her experiences as a woman and a mother is a way of constructing and preserving her identity. Atwood gives voice to the "vessel" in the patriarchal society.

2.3 Mother – Daughter Relationship

The academic work on the mother/daughter relationship is ample, but as it is only one aspect in my thesis I have restricted my presentation to the theorists I consider important for this study. Therefore, I will introduce briefly the above mentioned noteworthy theorists' Adrienne Rich's and Nancy Chodorow's ideas on mothers and daughters from the 1970s, when the topic began receiving scholarly attention, but I mainly refer to the more recent works of Suzanna Danuta Walters and Yi-Lin Yu on the representations of mother/daughter relationship and the matrilineal narrative, because my main interest lies in the representations of motherhood and in the female relationships of Atwood's novel, which in my opinion, can be characterized matrilineal.

Mothers and daughters emerged as a topic worth representing and studying in the second wave feminism, before this it had gained only secondary attention (Walters, 1992: 138). Rich's *Of Woman Born* (1976) gave rise to a larger theoretical interest and respect in the topic. Among other aspects of motherhood she discusses the mother/daughter relationship and emphasizes in general the mother/child bond, but accentuates the strength of the mother–daughter relationship because women experience pregnancy and birth, and they share female physical attributes (ibid: 147). "Woman has always known herself both as a daughter and as a potential mother" (Rich, 1976: 118).

Mother–daughter relationship is one of the essential relations in women's lives. Walters states that for most women it seems to be vital to define their relationship with their mother in order to know themselves better. Because women have the possibility to become mothers, and thus mother their children and work in this feminine continuum, they want to know and understand how they were mothered themselves (1992: 3). As argued before, motherhood is on the one hand, a personal experience, which can be enriching and

empowering, and on the other hand, an institution defined and controlled to great extent by (patriarchal) society.

Rich's main critique is pointed towards the institutionalisation of motherhood and the patriarchal family, which in her view violates the fundamental unit of mother and child. She regards "the loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter" as "the essential female tragedy" (1976: 237), and with this statement wants to emphasize the need for female bonding, 'sisterhood', and courageous mothering instead of the sacrificial mothering ordered by patriarchy.[27] Furthermore, Rich states that the patriarchal society victimises the mother, and as this is humiliating to her, it also mutilates the daughter who learns to carry the mother's self-hatred and guilt (1976: 243). The mother-blame, which is so prevalent in the Western culture, derives from the maternal guilt. Because mothers and daughters feel their biological alikeness they identify with each other strongly, and therefore in the mother/daughter relationship there are "materials for the deepest mutuality and the most painful estrangement" (Rich, 1976: 226). Rich discusses 'matrophopia', the fear of becoming one's mother, which she sees as an outcome of the self-hating mother's daughter trying to break free from the restrictions and degradations the mother has transmitted to her (ibid: 235).

Rich's resistance to the patriarchal dominance over mother/daughter relationship is accompanied by feminists, and Walters insists for an "active feminist intervention" for recovering the bond between mothers and daughters, and women in general (1992: 145-6). In addition, Rich discusses the refusal of being a victim and the need for the mother to expand the limits of her own life in order to demonstrate the daughter that she has the right for freedom (from the constraints of patriarchy) (1976: 246-7). I will study these aspects further in the analysis chapters 3 and 4.

---

[27] Walters calls this dismantling of the male-dominant family a very central part of the feminist project in general, and argues for the need of alternative family forms instead of the nuclear family (1992: 8)

As mentioned earlier, Nancy Chodorow presents a feminist psychoanalytic point of view to mothering and mother/daughter relationship. Yu and Walters both accentuate Chodorow's importance, and Walters states that "[w]ith the feminist inflection Chodorow gives object relations, the daughter as well as the mother assumes a new importance and centrality" (1992: 148).[28]

One of Chodorow's main arguments in her analysis of the mother/daughter relationship is that because mother will be likely to see herself in her daughter (more than in her son) the separation and individuation process is difficult for both daughter and mother to carry out. She accentuates the need for daughter's differentiation from mother because she regards the daughter's autonomy, her sense of individuated self as fundamental for psychological development.[29]

Chodorow is also concerned with the unequal division of mothering work and the effects it has on daughters. She argues that "[w]omen's mothering reproduces itself cyclically. Women, as mothers, produce daughters with mothering capacities and the desire to mother. These capacities and needs are built into and grow out of the mother-daughter relationship itself" (1978: 7). Thus, she believes that as mothers see themselves in their daughters and experience sons as "other", different from themselves, they respond differently to their female and male children, in a way that they are more intimate with daughters, consequently passing on "mothering" (Weingarten, 1998: 26). Chodorow continues that in order to equip also sons with the same kind of 'mothering capacities', and thus break the psychological patterns maintaining patriarchy, parenting should be performed by both sexes. However, in this

---

[28] Yu argues that not only Chodorow, but psychoanalytic feminisms in general have introduced an abundant picture of female cultural virtues opposed to the emptiness that Freud and Lacan present (2005: 46). Marianne Hirsch adds to this discussion in her *Mother/Daughter Plot* (19--), but because I have chosen to introduce only one psychoanalyst (Chodorow) in more detail, Hirsch lies outside the scope of my study.

[29] Other psychoanalysts, Jane Flax (1985) and Jessica Benjamin (1988) emphasize it as well. However, as Walters remarks, the psychological terms 'separation', 'differentiation', 'autonomy', etcetera, are not innocent, but gendered, and they must be utilized with prudence.

solution Chodorow leaves out homosexual and single parents, as Walters rightly points out (1992: 150). Therefore, Chodorow's solution cannot be considered strengthening the solidarity and autonomy between women of different age groups, but potentially increasing the mother-blame and highlighting the importance of a more equal nuclear family. In Atwood's novel mothering is performed in different family forms, and, in my view, Atwood takes a resistant stance.

Suzanna Danuta Walters has in her work a historical perspective on the mother/daughter relationship, and she emphasizes that the ideas about "good" mother/daughter relationship have varied according to significant changes in society at large. She argues that the earlier mentioned 'Doctrine of Two Spheres' and 'The Cult of True Womanhood' in the nineteenth century united mothers and daughters in the domestic world (1992: 11-12), where as in today's society mother/daughter relationship is dichotomised between the psychological concepts 'bonding' and 'separation', which in Walters's view force women apart because they contain the assumption that mothers and daughter must pass thought these 'psychological phases' and remain separated in order to achieve mature relationship (ibid: 16).

Moreover, according to Walters, the (patriarchal) institutions, which represent mothers and daughters, (for example the mass media) have reinforced the ideas of 'mother-blame' and 'maternal sacrifice' in their biased representations (ibid: 18). In the seventies "[t]he mother/daughter relationship is typically defined within the narrow terms of loud, interfering, guilt-making but well-meaning mother and loving and tolerant but often exasperated daughters" (Walters, 1992: 129). This depiction resonates with Offred and her mother, and will be studied further in chapter 4.2.

Furthermore, Walters argues that the 'backlash' of the eighties (Reagan-Bush era, discussed in chapter 2.1), which reduced women's choice and control over their own bodies

and reproduction, and represented mothers and daughters as rivals and hostile towards each other, takes mother/daughter relationship, and women's position in general, back into a "prefeminist" era (1992: 187).[30] In my opinion, this is what Atwood wants to warn about in her dystopia, and I will give evidence supporting this statement in the analysis chapters.

In order to adopt new perspectives to the topic, the reconsideration of mother/daughter relationship is required; women must rewrite their history as women and encourage the continuum of women (ibid: 8). Walters sees the importance of daughters aiming at understanding the reality of their mothers' (and grandmothers') lives and options, instead of taking a superior and arrogant position in rebelling against the 'outmoded' mother.

A way for rewriting women's history, and accordingly understanding mothers' lives and making women's experiences visible, is the matrilineal narrative, which includes (at least) three generations of women. "Women who are mothers interpret their own experience through having had a mother, and the experience of motherhood is reconstructed through the past and by memory" (Woodward, 1997: 244). The matrilineal narratives tell the stories of several generations of women at once, thus they reconstruct the identity of the central character(s) in the feminine continuum, showing the importance of the female ancestors and providing women with a means of self-recognition (Yu, 2005: 2). The female protagonist in a matrilineal narrative often identifies with her female ancestor. But every woman in the matrilineal chain is an active creator of the story, not just a passive recipient (ibid: 21).

In her work on the matrilineal narratives in contemporary women's writing Yi-Lin Yu uses Nan Bauer Maglin's (1980) definition of matrilineal literature:

1. The recognition by the daughter that her voice is not entirely her own;

---

[30] Yet, Rosi Braidotti expresses an opposite point of view because in her view: "[I]n the eighties, feminist theory celebrated both the ambiguities and the intensity of the mother–daughter bond in positive terms – 'écriture féminine' and Irigaray's paradigm of 'the politics of sexual difference' being the epitome of this trend" (2002: 205). The return to the "prefeminist" era happened in Braidotti's opinion in the 1990s.

> 2. The importance of trying to really see one's mother in spite of or beyond the blindness and skewed vision that growing up together causes;
> 3. The amazement and humility about the strength of our mothers;
> 4. The need to recite one's matrilineage, to find a ritual to both get back there and preserve it;
> 5. And still, the anger and despair about the pain and the silence borne and handed on from mother and daughter. (Yu, 2005: 26)

In Yu's view matrilineal narratives not only strengthen female solidarity, but also offer means for discussing the ambivalent, sometimes conflicting and tense relationship (ibid). Based on these characteristics of matrilineal narratives, I argue in chapter 4 that *The Handmaid's Tale* can be characterized as a matrilineal story, aiming at female strength and solidarity.

3. Forced and rejected motherhood

In this chapter I will first discuss the representation of surrogate mothers, the Handmaids, and the adoptive mothers, the Wives, who are both forced into their biological or social mother roles in the novel. Second, I study all the different groups of women without child in the novel: lesbians (Moira), feminists, intellectuals, nuns, Aunts, Wives and, Marthas. They are thus women who have rejected motherhood or who do not have the choice anymore.

Rich points out the control of patriarchy not only on mothers but on non-mothers as well, which is the central issue in this chapter:

> [T]he regulation of women's productive power by men in every totalitarian system and every socialist revolution, the legal and technical control by men of contraception, fertility, abortion, obstetrics, gynecology, and extrauterine reproductive experiments – all are essential to the patriarchal system, as is the negative or suspect status of women who are not mothers (1976: 34).

3.1 Motherhood in Gilead

Reproduction is on central pedestal in the novel since the birth rate in Gilead, and before it, is low due to the environmental catastrophes and the individual choice of many women not to have children. Children are scarce and not in sight as Offred remarks when she walks on the street in Gilead:

> The lawns are tidy, the facades are gracious, in good repair; they're like the beautiful pictures they used to print in the magazines about homes and gardens and interior decoration. There is the same absence of people, the same air of being asleep. […] As in those pictures, those museums, those model towns, there are no children. (Atwood, 1996: 33)

The solutions for low birth rate in pre-Gileadean society had been artificial insemination, fertility clinics and surrogate mothers; in Gilead the first two are outlawed and the only

solution for reproduction is surrogacy. Consequently, the framework for motherhood in Gilead is of utmost coercion: reproductive women are given the 'choice' between surrogacy, sex or death. That is, they can either work as surrogates, prostitutes in an exclusive brothel for Commanders and other powerful men, or if they refuse these options, as cleaners of highly toxic, lethal waste.

Hence, the biological mothers in Gilead are women who have been forced and 'educated', or more precisely, indoctrinated in the Red Centres (red is the colour of the Handmaids in the dress code system of Gilead according to which all women are dressed in different colours) into their position to serve as Handmaids before they are placed into a Commander's household to perform their duty. The fundamental Christian rule of Gilead justifies the surrogacy with biblical basis. Offred recalls the re-education process in the Red Centre, which included load of quotations (suitable for the purposes of Gilead) from the Bible:

> It's the usual story, the usual stories. God to Adam, God to Noah. *Be fruitful and multiply, replenish the earth.* Then comes the mouldy old Rachel and Leah stuff we [the Handmaids] had drummed into us at the Centre. *Give me children, or else I die. Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb? Behold my maid Bilhah. She shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her.* And so on and so forth. We had it read to us every breakfast, as we sat in the high-school cafeteria, eating porridge with cream and brown sugar. (Atwood, 1996: 99)

Accordingly, the Handmaids will give birth to their Commanders' babies and the Wives will be the adoptive mothers. This scene of forced surrogacy is similar to the historical events of Nazi Germany, which Millett describes as the worst scenario of motherhood (1969: 166), and which Atwood has mentioned as one of her sources of the novel (2005: 99). Moreover, Atwood reminds us of the polygamy presented in the Old Testament, but also of the underground polygamy in today's Utah (2005: 99-100) and the coercion for reproduction in Romania (1996: 317). Furthermore, during slavery, black slave women were utilised as surrogates by white men in order to increase the number of mulatto slaves in the United States

(Rich, 1976: 34). Thus, it can be argued that a simple reading of the novel is not possible: these things do not just happen in Atwood's fictional novel, there are various points of reference in the world history. The oppression of women as mothers has been and is a systematic procedure that numerous women have been and are faced with.

The Handmaids have been mothers before the new regime, consequently "demonstrated their reproductive fitness" (Atwood, 1996: 316). Their children have been taken away from them and given, as the Aunts explain it to the horrified Offred who has unwillingly been separated from her daughter, to "people who are fit. You are unfit, but you want the best for her. Don't you?" (ibid: 49). The Handmaids are defined 'unfit' mothers not because they would have neglected or abused their children, but simply because they belonged to a wrong society class (not the ruling class), because they were re-married (or their husbands were – Gilead does not accept divorces) and because they are fertile, hence possible objects for abuse for the reproduction purposes of the state. Their oppression is complete as they are condemned unfit for children of their own, name of their own, bodily autonomy, home, economic independence – they are deprived of everything.

The same scene of losing one's child will be repeated when the Handmaids give birth: they are allowed to breastfeed the baby for a short period because: "they [Gileadean society] believe in mother's milk" (ibid: 137),[31] then the baby will be the Wife's property and the Handmaid will be transferred to another Household "to see if she can do it again, with someone else who needs a turn" (ibid). Accordingly, Handmaids' children are placed in families that belong to the high society class, thus all the children in Gilead are raised by the elite, with the sole exception of the non-envied Econowives who belong to the lower social class, bear their own children, and do the house chores themselves. As Wolmark notices, their

[31] This echoes the role of women in different society classes in the 17th-19th centuries, when wet nurses breastfed the newborns of high class women.

dresses are red, blue (colour of the Wives), and green (colour of the servants) striped since "they are expected to perform all three functions" (1994: 103). [32]

Even if the Handmaids are told that they are 'unfit' as mothers of their own children, the image of the perfect mother, Madonna mother, is applied in their preparation as the fundamental Christian rule unscrupulously applies the biblical images and stories for its purposes. Aunt Lydia highlights the need for the Handmaids to behave passively and understandingly, and she wants to create the image of the Virgin mother, a virtuous, impenetrable woman. She is thus saying that the Handmaids need to be chaste with all other men, except the Commanders. Offred tells that the Handmaids are taught to pray for "emptiness, so we [Handmaids] would be worthy to be filled: with grace, with love, with self-denial, semen and babies" (Atwood, 1996: 204). In addition, Aunt Lydia advises the Handmaids: "What you must be, girls, is impenetrable. She called us girls" (ibid: 39). This is surely ironical as the Handmaids have already given birth, they cannot be considered girls nor impenetrable. Moreover, the double moral is absolutely striking: the Handmaids are practically raped in the repulsive scene including a Handmaid, Wife and Commander (the biblical trinity somewhat altered?) in order to become pregnant. As Kormalý notices: "The handmaids' prescribed position as child-bearers reducing them to "wombs on legs", also forces on them the roles of mistresses, adulteresses, and prostitutes" (1996). In other words, what the patriarchal rule presents as a necessary, spiritual, and non-sexual procedure, appears to the reader most evidently as an extremely offensive way of exploitation. It also reinforces the chasm between different groups of women, thus prevents female solidarity, which is one of the aims and cornerstones of the Gileadean society.

[32] Econowives are not discussed much in the novel. They are women who live in their first marriage (as their husbands too). Furthermore, they are not considered threat to the new rule, as they are heterosexual, not educated, nor concerned about the feminist issues - therefore they are allowed to keep their children.

Even if all women in the novel are oppressed, the Handmaids may be considered the most tyrannized. They have been denied the basic human rights of liberty, property, and freedom of speech, and they are even not allowed to use their own names. Handmaids are called after their Commanders' first names: their identities are dismissed because they are regarded merely as bodies receiving the seed and delivering the offspring. The maternal body exists only in favor of the foetus. It is not up to the mother to decide for example even about her diet during the pregnancy. Because the foetus is the focus, and its well-being is utterly important, the Handmaid as the vessel carrying it is controlled by statistics and studies and so forth, as Aunt Lydia teaches the Handmaids: "Healthy food. You have to get your vitamins and minerals, said Aunt Lydia coyly. You must be a worthy vessel. No coffee or tea though, no alcohol. Studies have been done" (Atwood, 1996: 75).

Offred expresses her ambivalent relation towards her body, which no longer belongs to her but to the Household and the state of Gilead for whom she, as her presumably fecund maternal body, exists only for the means of reproduction. Previously she has not had a problematic relation towards her body, but now that it is the only thing that she is valued for, she resents it. Offred suffers because she has lost along with her basic human rights her personhood.

Atwood seems to refer to de Beauvoir when Offred defines her new bodily position: she says she is "not born like that", but is forced to present a bodily image of a "two legged womb[s], sacred vessel[s], ambulatory chalice[s]" (ibid: 146) in order to breed a child to the Household:

> I used to think of my body as an instrument, of pleasure, or a means of transportation, or an implement for the accomplishment of my will. I could use it to run, push buttons, of one sort or another, make things happen. There were limits but my body was nevertheless lithe, single, solid, one with me. Now the flesh arranges itself differently. I'm cloud, congealed around a central object, the shape of pear, which is hard and more real than I am and glows red within its translucent wrapping. Inside it is a space, huge as the sky at night and dark and curved like that, though black-red rather than black. Pinpoints of light

> swell, sparkle, burst and shrivel within it, countless as stars. Every month there is a moon, gigantic, round, heavy, an omen. It transits, pauses, continues on and passes out of sight, and I see despair coming towards me like famine. To feel that empty, again, again. I listen to my heart, wave upon wave, salty and red, continuing on and on, marking time. (Atwood, 1996: 83-4)

Offred's description resonates with de Beauvoir's argument about menstruation and maternity as a trap to women, and that women are perceived as objects acting by the impetus of their bodily cycle. In the novel the Handmaids' lives depend directly on the rhythm of their bodies. Morris sees the literary depictions of menstruation, and the use of sea and tidal imagery and symbolic landscape in them, as in Offred's portrayal above, copious in women writers' texts in general because of the importance of the female bodily experience (1993: 84).

Offred, and the other Handmaids, are forced to regard themselves as wombs, and feel desperate, "empty" every month if they are not impregnated. The forced surrogacy is their only means of survival, and therefore when Offred menstruates, she says: "I have failed once again to fulfil the expectations of others, which have become my own" (Atwood, 1996: 83). Rich's words about women being imprisoned in their bodies (1976: 13) can be applied here since the Handmaids are incarcerated that way.

According to the representation theorists the maternal body is represented asexual and pure, sacred almost (Macdonald, 1995; Dyer, 1997). This is as well what the Aunts teach the Handmaids to be and behave like. However, in Atwood's dystopian vision neither the adoptive mothers, the withered Wives nor the raped Handmaids carrying the wanted, yet despised babies (for the antipathy towards their breeding process), are depicted as such. On the contrary, the Handmaids' non-expectant bodies are regarded as impure and tempting to men, thus possibly dangerous (red is the colour of alert) to the extent that they are curtailed from tip to toe. In Walters's view, mothers are perceived asexual in society, because otherwise they would disturb the social order (1992: 22). Non-mothers on the other hand, as Rich points, are regarded "dangerous to masculinity" (1976: 34) in their sexuality. Offred

seems to realise this when she passes two young guards with her partner Ofglen at one of the gateways in Gilead:

> As we walk away I know they're watching, these two men who aren't yet permitted to touch women. They touch with their eyes instead and I move my hips a little, feeling the full red skirt sway around me. 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, 1996: 32)

The Handmaids have been ripped off all power and rights, including the power to rule their own body. Therefore Offred enjoys noticing the little power she still has.

As maternal bodies, which all the Handmaids have been indoctrinated to aim at, the Handmaids should be perceived as sacred Madonna mother incarnations according to the teachings in the Red Centre. Instead, the Handmaids are considered objects of envy by the other Handmaids and Wives. As Offred states when she and Ofglen see pregnant Ofwarren (Janine) when they are shopping:

> As we [Offred and Ofglen] wait in our double line, the door opens and two more women come in, both in red dresses and white wings of the Handmaids. One of them is vastly pregnant; her belly, under her loose garment, swells triumphantly. There is a shifting in the room, a murmur, an escape of breath; despite ourselves we turn our heads, blatantly, to see her better; our fingers itch to touch her. She's a magic presence to us, an object of envy and desire, we covet her. She's a flag on a hilltop, showing us what can still be done: we too can be saved.
>
> The women in the room are whispering, almost talking, so great is their excitement.
>
> "Who is it?" I hear behind me.
>
> "Ofwayne. No. Ofwarren."
>
> "Show-off," a voice hissed, and this is true. A woman that pregnant doesn't have to go out, doesn't have to go shopping. The daily walk is no longer prescribed, to keep her abdominal muscles in working order. She needs only the floor exercises, the breathing drill. She could stay in her house. And it's dangerous for her to be out, there must be a Guardian standing outside the door, waiting for her. Now that she is the carrier of life, she is closer to death, and needs special security. Jealousy could get her, it's happened before. All children are wanted now, but not by everyone. (*ibid*: 36)

Because all women in the novel are defined according to their reproductive ability, and the Handmaids' lives depend on it, pregnancies are not jointly celebrated but envied and coveted. The different groups of women are made jealous of each other since some of them have gained privileges by abusing the others. The jealousy of the Wives can even be destructive as they have power over their Handmaids, and if they wish to do so, they can send the Handmaids into the colonies or get them killed on whatever excuse.

The jealousy of the Wives does not only derive from their envy for the pregnancy. The Wives who do not have children ("Not every Commander has a Handmaid: some of their Wives have children. *From each,* says the slogan, *according to her ability; to each according to his need.*" Atwood, 1996: 127) are forced to let their husbands have a sexual intercourse with Handmaids, and be a part of the act in the same bed. The Aunts explain this to the Handmaids in the Red Centres seeking for their empathy: "Try to think of it from their point of view, she [Aunt Lydia] said, her hands clasped and wrung together, her nervous pleading smile. It isn't easy for them" (ibid: 24). And furthermore, Aunt Lydia warns:

> It's not the husbands you have to watch out for, said Aunt Lydia, it's the Wives. You should always try to imagine what they must be feeling. Of course they will resent you. It's only natural. Try to feel for them. […] Try to pity them. Forgive them, for they know not what they do. […] You must realize they are defeated women. They have been unable… (*ibid*: 56)

Again, the Handmaids are pleaded for their Virgin Mary qualities of submission and understanding with this biblical request. Further, the servant Marthas gossip about their infertile matrons, and the extreme jealousy of one Wife who killed her Handmaid's baby: "*Stabbed her with a knitting needle, right in the belly. Jealousy it must have been, eating her up"* (ibid: 21).

Thereby, Atwood does not present Wives as caring, loving adoptive mothers who receive a gift, a baby that they really want. Their motivation for wanting a child lies in the possible societal rise following the birth of a healthy (male) child. As Kornfeld argues: "The

primary and often only power women have maintained within patriarchal structures has come from the dependence of children" (2002: 6). Consequently, the only appreciated and accepted role for women has been that of a mother. The Handmaids' and Commanders' children may be considered the Wives' status symbols. Moreover, when the baby will be born and the Handmaid sent to another post, the Wife is free from the humiliating and offensive process of breeding and birthing. She does not have to endure the polygamy - another woman in her house and bed - anymore. In my view, that is the position that Wives envy each other more than the baby. In Offred's words:

> It's hard to imagine her [Serena Joy] with a baby. But the Marthas would take care of it mostly. She'd like me pregnant though, over and done with and out of the way, no more humiliating sweaty tangles, no more flesh triangles under her starry canopy of silver flowers. Peace and quiet. I cant't imagine she'd want such good luck, for me, for any other reason. (Atwood, 1996: 214)

The Wives are older women, so that they could possibly be grandmothers. However, even if Atwood depicts them with a cane, greying hair and knitting scarves, there are no (grand)motherly (or sisterly) features attached to them. There are no scenes with a Wife and a child, except the birth of Ofwarren's baby in which Ofwarren's Wife receives the baby in her arms after it has been washed, and she "looks down at the baby as if it's a bouquet of flowers: something she's won, a tribute" (ibid: 136).

The Wives consider Handmaids sluts; Serena Joy, whom Hammer notices being "neither serene nor joyous" (1990: 40) expresses her enmity towards Offred directly, and she suggests that their relation could be perceived as her purchasing the baby and Offred her freedom: "I want to see as little of you as possible, she [Serena Joy] said. I expect you feel the same way about me. […] As far as I'm concerned, this is like a business transaction (Atwood, 1996: 25). This antipathy is mutual, even if Offred first feels disappointed for not receiving a motherly matron: "I wanted, then, to turn her [Serena Joy] into an older sister, a

motherly figure, someone who would understand and protect me" (Atwood, 1996: 25-6). The life in the Household quickly changes Offred's thoughts, and later she states:

> Once I'd merely hated her [Serena Joy], for her part in what was being done to me; and because she hated me too and resented my presence, and because she would be the one to raise my child, should I be able to have one after all. (*ibid*: 170)

Serena Joy wants the baby eagerly, and in order to see Offred pregnant she is ready to betray her husband who most probably is also sterile. She suggests Offred have a relationship with their chauffeur Nick. Offred cannot refuse her order, and actually does not even want to because of the physical attraction between her and Nick, and her "hunger to commit the act touch" (Atwood, 1996: 21). That is the only occasion when Offred feels some kind of togetherness with Serena Joy. She says: "[F]or this moment we are cronies, this could be a kitchen table, it could be a date we're discussing, some girlish stratagem of ploys and flirtation" (ibid: 215).

Offred and Nick end up having a passionate sexual relation, first ordered by Serena Joy, later from their free will even if it is strictly outlawed. In the end of the novel Offred thinks that she is pregnant with Nick's child:

> I put his [Nick's] hand on my belly. It's happened, I say. I feel it has. A couple of week and I'll be certain.
> This I know is wishful thinking.
> He'll [the Commander] love you to death, he says. So will she [Serena Joy].
> But it's yours, I say. It will be yours, really. I want it to be. (*ibid*: 283)

Notwithstanding the fact that she knows she has to give up their baby, Offred begins to relish in the thought of mothering the child. The oppressive conditions in which she lives in do not hinder her thinking about mothering as desirable. It could be argued that "maternal thinking" (Ruddick, 1980) arises in her in the form of preserving her unborn child. Offred points out that the Handmaids do not always give up their babies willingly: "[T]here's been a fight over the baby; which happens more than you'd think. Once she [Ofwarren] had it, she may have resisted giving it up. I can see that" (ibid: 226). Furthermore, Offred grieves the reduced

meaning of biological motherhood in Gilead. She longs for some kind of recognition as the biological mother, and perhaps Atwood discusses here also the invisibility of mothers in history in general:

> And there will be family albums, too, with all the children in them; no Handmaids though. From the point of view of future history, this kind, we'll be invisible. But the children will be in them all right, something for the Wives to look at, downstairs, nibbling at the buffet and waiting for the birth. (Atwood, 1996: 240)

Furthermore, it could be argued that Atwood sees family as a social unit adaptable for change. The children will belong to the family albums, but the parents can be others than the biological ones.

The birth scene in Atwood's dystopian vision minimizes the role of the biological mother. Giving birth together, as well as lying in the fertilization process together, is humiliating both to the Handmaid and the Wife. When Ofwarren = Janine gives birth, she first labours with the help of Aunts and in the company of other Handmaids. In the meanwhile the Wife of Warren imitates the labour: "A small thin woman, she lies on the floor, in a white cotton nightgown, her greying hair spreading like mildew over the rug; they massage her tiny belly, just as if she's really about to give birth herself" (ibid: 126). When Janine reaches the second stage, the Wife enters the labour room: she "has a tight smile on her face, like a hostess at a party she'd rather not be giving" and she "scrambles onto the Birthing Stool, sits on the seat behind and above Janine, so that Janine is framed by her: her skinny legs come down on either side, like the arms of an eccentric chair" (ibid: 135). When the baby is born, it is handed to the Wife to name it, and Janine is left with the physical afterbirth pains and the pain of loosing her newborn child. Hansen interprets this as: "Every woman, even the procreative mother, is a mother without child in Gilead, where children belong to the male-dominated regime" (1997: 172).

The Wife's white gown symbolizes her 'purity', and thus the idea of the Virgin mother is attached to her as well. However, as discussed above, Atwood does not represent Wives as unselfish caring persons, which is the ideal image of mother in Western culture (Macdonald, 1995: 133). Instead, Wives with their selfish greediness for having a baby, are reflections of the evil stepmothers in fairytales, selfish, malevolent and controlling women. They do not respect the sensitivity and miracle of the birth but:

> […] get a little drunk on such a triumphant day. First they'll wait for the results, then they'll pig out. […]They talk too loud, some of them are still carrying their plates, their coffee cups, their wine glasses, some of them are still chewing, they cluster around the bed, the mother and child, cooing and congratulating. (Atwood, 1996: 135-6)

Gilead is "undoubtedly patriarchal in form, occasionally matriarchal in content" (ibid: 320): women control the birthgiving, which in previous society had been increasingly male dominant. The birth scene is entirely female since: "What we're aiming for, says Aunt Lydia, is a spirit of camaraderie among women. We must all pull together" (ibid: 234). The falsity and irony of this statement is obvious for in spite of the seeming "pulling together", the power is in the hands of Aunts and Wives, and Handmaids have been taken away their independence. Oakley (1980) argues for the empowerment of women in birth: the possibility for choosing domestic birth and giving birth naturally, without medical intervention (if not exceedingly necessary) instead of the hospitalised birth. In Gilead the labour takes place at home without anaesthetics, however, not in order to empower the birthgiving woman, but because the Bible orders women to feel pain in labour. Kornfeld points that: "The patriarchal and fundamentalist republic of Gilead may well allow women to give birth in the natural, home settings as feminist authors such as Rich […] advocated, because it then takes the baby" (2002: 17).

When the baby has been taken away from the Handmaid and given to the adoptive Wife, the scene is over. Other Handmaids are sent to their Households. Seeing the birth and

the loss of the newborn brings memories of the earlier pregnancies and babies. Offred pronounces this loss and pain:

> By now I'm wrung out, exhausted. My breasts are painful, they're leaking a little. Fake milk, it happens this way with some of us. We sit on our benches, facing one another, as we are transported: we're without emotion now, almost without feeling, we might be bundles of red cloth. We ache. Each of us holds in her lap a phantom, a ghost baby. What confronts us, now the excitement's over, is our own failure. (Atwood, 1996: 137)

The Handmaids face both forced and forbidden motherhood, and in chapter 4.1 I will discuss the aspect of forbidden mothering.

Surrogate motherhood as a forced form of procreation has happened in history numerous times, and is happening all the time in different parts of the world. In my opinion Atwood is saying that surrogacy could be an option for motherhood, but absolutely not in a way that it is done in the novel and in the previously mentioned historical events she has used as her sources. She is reminding us that the less powerful (women) will always be exploited by the powerful. Furthermore, sadly enough: "[T]he best and most cost-effective way to control women for reproductive and other purposes [is] through women themselves" (Atwood, 1996: 320).

3.2 Moira and Other Women Without Child

All women in Gilead may be considered women without child. The previously discussed Handmaids (in 3.1) are forced to give up their children and live with their phantom images; the Wives expect Handmaids to deliver them children, but there is no successful example of surrogacy in the novel; Moira and other women at Jezebel's brothel have rejected motherhood as the means of rescue; Unwomen, Aunts, Wives, and Marthas are not fertile anymore. The

irony in Gilead is that its main problem is the scarcity of children, thus all women are defined according the capacity to fill in the void, and in the end there are no women with children.

According to various feminist critics motherhood is a social construction produced by social institutions and cultural representations (Millett, 1969; Rich, 1976; Kaplan, 1992; Woodward, 1997 etc); thus it is not, and should not be perceived as something innate and biologically determined like de Beauvoir stated already in the forties. Moreover, Gimenez argues to the point: "[M]otherhood, if conceived as a taken-for-granted dimension of women's normal adult role, becomes one of the key sources of women's oppression" (1983: 287). There have always been women who have rejected motherhood, and not approved of it as "a taken-for-granted" role. However, because of the high level of institutionalisation of motherhood, in Rich's words:

> Throughout recorded history the "childless" woman has been regarded (with certain specific exceptions, such as the cloistered nun or the temple virgin) as a failed woman, unable to speak for the rest of her sex, and omitted from the hypocritical and palliative reverence accorded the mother. "Childless" women have been burned as witches, persecuted as lesbians, have been refused the right to adopt children because they were unmarried. They have been seen as the embodiments of the great threat to male hegemony: the woman who is not tied to the family, who is disloyal to the law of heterosexual pairing and bearing. (1976: 251-2)

In Gilead "the woman who is not tied to the family" is locked up in brothel: lesbians are persecuted, their networks are destroyed as one of the first acts of the coup d'état. Moira, Offred's best friend, exemplifies a childless woman who rejects motherhood as a personal choice and a feminist statement before and during the Gileadean regime. She is an old friend of Offred's, a lesbian feminist, who worked before Gilead actively for women's freedom to choose: "[S]he [Moira] was working for a women's collective, the publishing division. They put out books on birth control and rape and things like that, though there wasn't as much demand for those things as there used to be" (Atwood, 1996: 187). Moira has chosen childlessness also because of her sexual orientation and principles. She is thus double the

threat to the male hegemony: she refuses both the obligatory heterosexuality and motherhood, in other words, the traditional roles of a wife and a mother. To cite Rich's words: "[B]ehavior which threatens the institutions, such as illegitimacy, abortion, lesbianism, is considered deviant or criminal" (1976: 42). Because of her character and sexual characteristics Moira is considered "a cunning and dangerous woman" (Atwood, 1996: 141) as Aunt Lydia describes her.

Since Moira is of fertile age, she is first educated to become a Handmaid. Offred recalls Moira's involuntary arrival to the Red Centre:

> I must have been there [in the Red Centre] three weeks when Moira came. She was brought into the gymnasium by two of the Aunts, in the usual way, while we were having our nap. She still has her clothes on, jeans and a blue sweatshirt – her hair was short, she'd defied fashion as usual – so I recognized her at once. […] There was a bruise on her left cheek, turning purple. (Atwood, 1996: 80-1)

Moira manages to escape the Red Centre twice. The first time she is brought back, and her feet are battered as a warning to the other Handmaids. The second time she is caught, she is first brutally tortured: "I'd [Moira] rather not talk about it. All I can say is they didn't leave any marks" (ibid: 260), and then given the choice: "They said, this [Jezebel's brothel] or the Colonies. Well, shit, nobody but a nun would pick the Colonies. I mean, I'm not a martyr" (ibid: 261). Consequently, Moira's objection to the male rule is beaten remorselessly: as a lesbian she has to provide heterosexual services for the privileged men in the Jezebel's brothel.

Atwood depicts Moira, despite the apparent loss of her identity, as a strong individual (as opposed to Offred's passivity which I will discuss in the next sub-chapter). She fights for her beliefs: freedom of choice and equal rights for all, and in the captivity of the Red Centre she maintains the spirit of resistance. Offred admires her courage, and Moira's strong character reassures and gives her strength. Offred admits that: "It makes me feel safer, that Moira is here [in the Red Centre]" (ibid: 81). Furthermore, when Moira talks about

escaping, Offred panics: “I’ve [Moira] got to get out of here, I’m going bats. I [Offred] feel panic. No, no Moira. I say, don’t try it. […] Moira, don’t. I couldn’t stand the thought of her not being here, with me. For me” (Atwood, 1996: 100).

When Moira escapes the Red Centre, Offred describes the Handmaids’ feelings not as jubilant about Moira’s freedom, but frightened of what would happen to them (in Gilead all women can be punished for an individual’s crime in order to maintain the fear and control inside a group of women). In my view, metaphorically, this is a depiction of the attitude towards a woman who rejects motherhood in society: she is considered a “loose” woman, since a woman without a child is “free” and therefore somewhat threatening to wo/men with children. In other words, a non-mother lies outside the established social order, and shakes it:

> Moira was out there somewhere. She was at large, or dead. What would she do? The thought of what she would do expanded till it filled the room. At any moment there might be a shattering explosion, the glass of the windows would fall inwards, the doors would swing open… Moira has power now, she’d been set loose, she’d set herself loose. She was now a loose woman.
>
> I think we found this frightening.
>
> Moira was like an elevator with open slides. She made us dizzy. Already we were losing the taste for freedom, already we were finding these walls secure. In the upper reaches of the atmosphere you’d come apart, you’d vaporize, there would be no pressure holding you together (Atwood, 1996: 143)

Thus, Moira’s escape does not prompt other women in the Centre to fight for freedom; instead, they turn inwards and surrender. In a way, they do not reject the motherhood forced upon them, but consent to it as their inevitable role. This seems curiously to resonate with Kornfeld’s argument: “This turning inward, this valorizing of endurance, reflects the mood of feminists during the Reagan years when models of maternal power retreated behind the more traditional idea of maternal service” (2002: 4). Atwood express her political opinion against the “backlash” era of Reagan, and she arouses the question: have the Handmaids internalized the idea of maternal service in the Red Centre or already before Gilead? Is Atwood proposing further that the idea of the maternal service is deeply rooted in society? The “institution” of

motherhood is such a powerful factor influencing motherhood that it seems to leave the personal experience of mothering aside.

In addition, Hammer argues that Offred seems to suggest that in order to survive, "one must surrender" (1990: 43). Nevertheless, when Offred meets Moira at the Jezebel's almost in the end of her story, and learns that Moira has not tried an escape there, and indeed says that she is quite alright, Offred is apprehensive and does not approve Moira's surrender:

> I don't want her [Moira] to be like me. Give in, go along, save her skin. That is what it comes down to. I want gallantry from her, swashbuckling, heroism, single-handed combat. Something I lack.
>
> "Don't worry about me," she [Moira] says. She must know some of what I'm thinking. "I'm still here, you can see it's me. Anyway, look at it this way: it's not so bad, there's lots of women around. Butch paradise, you might call it." (Atwood, 1996: 261)

Moira thus maintains her sense of humour and identity as a lesbian despite the horrible conditions she is forced to live in. Moreover, as Schwartz points out: "There is only one woman who retains her name throughout the narrative: Moira. Moira is a resister from the outset" (1994: 247). In addition, it could be argued that Moira manages to refuse motherhood as a role she never wanted, even if in the dystopian alternative which she is faced with does not encourage that kind of argument too far.

Moreover, Moira and Offred have discussed their utopian views before the new regime, and Moira's Utopia was "a women-only enclave" (Atwood, 1996: 181). However, as Feuer points out, Atwood offers in Moira's "butch paradise" a ruthless overthrow of this kind of separatism (1997: 89). As I see it, Atwood is of the opinion that separate spheres of life for women and men are definitely not the key for a better world. Furthermore, Kornfeld argues:

> Atwood suggests that women and men […] must work together as individuals. […] [C]ooperation among individuals of both sexes moves away from the separatist feminism represented […] by Offred's mother who believed that "a man is just a woman's way of making another woman". Such attitudes, Atwood indicates are counterproductive, subject to backlash, and misguided as well. (2002: 18)

However, Atwood neither seems to condemn Moira's lesbian identity, as Moira is a positive character in her resistance and intelligence, nor value heterosexuality over lesbianism. It could be argued that with Moira's example (as with the example of a fundamentalist religious belief) Atwood points out the dangers of every kind of fundamentalism, be they sexual, religious or political.

The other resisting women, other lesbians, feminists, and intellectuals are oppressed too. They are either with Moira at the Jezebel's, or send to the Colonies: they are defined 'Unwomen' as they cannot be utilized for the reproductive purposes. Wolmark notes: "Only the 'Unwomen' have no status. These are the women who cannot or will not fit into the new structures, and who are sent to the 'Colonies' as labourers or to state brothels. In either case, they are rendered invisible in the fabric of Giledean society" (1994: 102). Offred's own mother is an 'Unwoman' and sent to the Colonies – in the sub-chapter 4.2 I will discuss her character in more detail.

Offred meets Moira and the other prostitutes when her Commander takes her at the Jezebel's for a one night visit as the climax of their secret relationship. He wants to show how bold he is, as taking a Handmaid to the brothel is of course highly forbidden, and have sex with (that is, rape) Offred without her wife's presence. The Commander lists the prostitutes to Offred, and it can be noted that intelligent women who used to have power in (male) society are now considered dangerous, and therefore suppressed:

> That one there, the one in green, she's a sociologist. Or was. That one was a lawyer, that one was in business, an executive position; some sort of fast-food chain or maybe it was hotels. I'm told you can have quite a good conversation with her if all you feel like is talking. (Atwood, 1996: 249-250)

The conventional dichotomy in the representations of women either as mothers or whores is in my view highlighted here: Atwood does this by offering fertile women either the role of surrogate mothers (who are actually also forced into the role of whore) or prostitutes. As

mentioned above, Morris (1993) argues that the biased representations of women are used for the justification of male order, and in my opinion, that is what Atwood ironically points out.

In spite of the religiousness of the Gileadean regime, also nuns are persecuted, as they are to quote Rich's words, "disloyal to the law of heterosexual pairing and bearing" (1976: 252). The nuns are forced to abandon their conviction and childlessness, and convert in public in a ceremony called "Women's Prayvaganza". They have to "renounce their celibacy, sacrifice it to the common good" (Atwood, 1996: 232). Here, again, Gilead reveals its hypocrisy: forcing nuns to the sexual act can be regarded as extremely blasphemous, but as it serves the Gileadean regime, it is justified. However, the nuns remain threatening in the eyes of the Giledean rulers as Offred explains when she is watching the Prayvaganza (the ceremony for conversion and group weddings):

> The old ones they send off to the Colonies right away, but the young fertile ones [nuns] they try to convert […] They aren't allowed to become Wives though; they're considered, still, too dangerous for positions of such power. There's an odour of witch about them, something mysterious and exotic […] they don't let go easily. (*ibid*: 232)

All in all, the treatment of the 'Unwomen' and the nuns implies that the rejection of motherhood for other than biological reasons (infertility) is considered perhaps the most dangerous feminine act towards the male rulers.

The older women in the novel without children, Aunts Wives, and Marthas have either rejected motherhood when they were still fertile, or they have always been infertile. As Rich puts it in her work, the childless women have traditionally been seen as "failed women" and they are expected to serve as "missionaries, nuns, teachers, nurses, maiden aunts; to give rather than to sell their labor…" (1976: 251-2). In Gilead, the childless women are identified as empty vessels incapable of giving birth, and they are given duties to support the rule. Marthas are servants in the Households and Aunts serve as agents of control because of:

> A genuine belief in what they called "traditional values", or for the benefits they might thereby acquire. When power is scarce, a little of it is tempting.

> There was, too, a negative inducement: childless or infertile or older women who were not married could take service in the Aunts and thereby escape redundancy… (Atwood, 1996: 320-1)

The Aunts work hard not to be redundant to the male rulers and they "brutalize their younger, fertile charges out of jealousy and fear" (Hammer, 1990: 40). The Aunts as an agency is one branch of surveillance in Gilead; in Foucault's terms, they maintain the "discipline" (Foucault, 1979).[33] As Hammer notes: "The novel constantly emphasizes the omnipresence of the scrutinizing gaze" (1990: 45).[34] Aunts are represented as sadistic controlling women in their khaki dresses with the military breast pockets and with their cattle prods, resembling along with the militant (Nazi) allusions the wicked fairy-tale stepmothers.[35] They also work as midwives, and with their militant presence symbolize male power in the otherwise feminine birth scene. Aunts take the baby away from the birthgiving Handmaid immediately after it has been born, and hand it to the Wife.

The childless Wives (discussed in sub-chapter 3.1 from the point of view of "forced motherhood") are older bitter women. Atwood does not enlighten the reasons why they did not have children when they were still fertile, except for Serena Joy. She might have been considered "a career woman" in the pre-Gileadean society, who chose her activist career over a family. She preached new right-wing evangelicalism and stood up for what we could call the "Cult of True Womanhood" and "The Doctrine of Two Spheres" (discussed in chapter 2.1). Serena Joy advocated what Rich defines in her work as "old associations linked to women":

---

[33] Foucault discusses Bentham's "Panopticon" in *Discipline and Punish* (1979) and argues that it is an idealization of the disciplinary mechanism. Further, he states that any regime inevitably uses discipline to control its citizens.

[34] Other agencies of surveillance are the Eyes (the secret police) and the Guardians, which are both men. "[T]here are two men, in the green uniforms of the Guardians of the Faith […] The Guardians aren't real soldiers. They're used for routine policing and other menial functions […] they're either stupid or older or disabled or very young, apart from the ones that are Eyes incognito" (Atwood, 1996: 30).

[35] Atwood uses a lot of fairy-tales and Gothic imagery in her work.

> … woman's place is the "inner space" of the home; woman's anatomy lays on her an ethical imperative to be maternal in the sense of masochistic, patient, pacific; women without children are "unfulfilled", "barren", and "empty" women (1976: 97-98).

As a childless woman captured because of her "empty, unfulfilled inner space" she is "enraged and embittered by the existence which her successful advocacy now imposes upon her" (Hammer, 1990: 40). Also Howells states: [Serena Joy] now finds herself trapped within that New Right ideology which she had helped to promote. (1996: 134).

The Wives have a very limited living space, the home is seemingly their territory, but their power is very restricted covering the power over Handmaids and servant Marthas, and other domestic issues. Their lives are filled with endless patient waiting (as the Handmaids' also) for a pregnancy that they emotionally reject. Kormalý argues that the emptiness of their lives derives from the physical sterility, which can be seen "symbolic of their spiritual sterility" (1996).

Offred describes various times Serena Joy's "barrenness" with metaphors about flourishing and dying flowers in Serena's garden, and she sneers at Serena's knitting: "she stays in the sitting room, knitting away at her endless Angel scarves, turning out more and more yards of intricate and useless wool people: her form of procreation, it must be" (Atwood, 1996: 162). Thus, "Serena appears to Offred like an ageing parody of the Virgin Mary, childless, arthritic and snipping vengefully at her flowers" (Howells, 1996: 134).

Emptiness in the Wives's lives is represented also in their behaviour in the birth scene: "[T]he Wives hang around for hours, helping opening the presents, gossiping, getting drunk." (Atwood, 1996: 146). Furthermore, as regards their free time "activities":

> Sometimes, however, Serena Joy is out, visiting another Commander's Wife, a sick one: that's the only place she could conceivably go, by herself, in the evenings. […] They get sick a lot, these Wives of the Commanders. It adds interest to their lives. (*ibid*: 162) [36]

[36] This getting sick resembles the image of middle-class women in the 19th century as fragile and hysteric creatures. Wolmark argues that [t]he intention of the new state of Gilead is to restore things to 'Nature's

Moreover, the Wives could be argued to work for the maintenance of the foucauldian discipline. As their lives are directed according to the reproduction cycle, they, as well as the Marthas, watch the calendar and inspect Offred's sheets.

The servant Marthas take care of Handmaids' nourishment, and their existence mainly in the kitchen resembles the maternal work that is attached to motherhood. With their domestic characters they are similar to the stay-at-home mother in nuclear family. In Offred's Household the Marthas are two (possibly black) women, Rita and Cora, who have passed their fertile age. Rita strongly disapproves of Offred and swears that instead of debasing herself like that, she would choose the Colonies. Cora, on the other hand, enthusiastically wants a baby to the Household and defends Handmaids: "Anyways, they're doing it for us all, said Cora, or so they say. If I hadn't of got my tubes tied, it could of been me, say I was ten years younger. It's not that bad. It's what you'd call hard work" (Atwood, 1996: 20).

Cora longs for mothering. She observes Offred's health and is eager to see signs of pregnancy: "It's one of those early signs, she [Cora] said, pleased. That, and throwing up. She should have known there hadn't been time enough; but she was very hopeful" (ibid: 159). Offred describes Cora's wishes for mothering as offering a compensation for the domestic work she does in the Household. Would a child in the Household also compensate something in her previous life? She has rejected motherhood in the past for some reason, but regrets now getting her "tubes tied". When she hears about Ofwarren's baby, she "smiles at me [Offred], a smile which includes. These are the moments that must make what she is doing seem worthwhile to her" (ibid: 145).

Cora could be described as "a mother without child". She "mothers" Offred to the extent that is possible in the oppressive atmosphere and tries to create some kind of bond

---

norm' […] (1994: 102) and it could be argued that the Gileadean male rulers consider their Wives behaviour 'natural' to women in their position.

between them. Offred realises that “she wants a little child to spoil in the kitchen, to iron clothes for, to slip cookies into when no one’s watching” (ibid). To use Rich’s words: the dichotomy “childless woman” versus “mother” is a false polarity, which serves the institutions of motherhood and heterosexuality. Rich is of the opinion that no such simple categories exist (1976: 250). Atwood points this out in the novel. When Offred leaves the Household, she grieves for Cora: “I was her hope, I’ve failed her. Now she will always be childless” (Atwood, 1996: 307). The biological mother-to-be is sorry for the childless woman who would be more or less the social mother because, as Offred notes, even if the Wives are the adoptive mothers, “the Marthas would take care of it [the baby] mostly” (ibid: 214).

The childless women in Atwood’s novel have various reasons for rejecting motherhood. Atwood is suggesting that first of all, the generalization of women (or mothers) is risky. Women cannot be considered a unity (no more than men) functioning on a biological basis, but individuals making their personal choices. Therefore Atwood depicts different women with different attitudes towards mothering. Second, biological motherhood should not be in Atwood’s view the most profoundly defining character in womanhood. Women may be mothers without biological children (Cora) or women may reject the role of biological mother without losing their womanhood.

4. Forbidden motherhood

Motherhood is highly constrained and forbidden from most women in the patriarchal Gileadean regime, and the protagonist Offred's child has been unwillingly taken away from her. Offred recalls her daughter and herself as mother, and reconstructs her past with the memories of her mother and herself as daughter. In the following sub-chapters I will study Atwood's representation of two mothers, how she perceives mothering in different family forms, and how she depicts the mother/daughter relationship. I will also discuss the matrilineal features of the novel.

4.1 Offred as Mother

In the captivity of the new regime Offred tries to maintain her sanity, identity and personality by telling her story with the flashbacks of her (mostly, it looks like) happy family life before Gilead. Throughout in her narration she recalls the time when she was expecting her baby and when her daughter was a small child. She describes her memories of motherhood with details, drawing a picture of a loving, caring, devoted mother, who enjoyed mothering. Most of the flashbacks are beautiful, idyllic images of her sweet daughter with whom Offred spent a lot of time dedicated and attentive to her wishes and needs; teaching her things and perceiving life through a small child's eyes:

> We would go there [ice cream store], when she was little, and I'd hold her up so she could see through the glass side of the counter, where the vats of ice cream were on display, coloured so delicately, pale orange, pale green, pale pink, and I'd read the names to her so she could choose. She wouldn't choose by the name, though, but by the colour. Her dresses and overalls were those colours too. Ice cream pastels. (Atwood, 1996: 174)

The memories of her daughter are often aroused by a physical experience, as touching, feeling, and experiencing are strongly connected to mothering. For example, when Offred is having a bath before the Ceremony night, she remembers what her daughter smelled like and how she felt in her arms after a bath. Also, when Offred is on her way to the Prayvaganza and walks through the clean picked lawns with no dandelions she recalls:

> Rings, we [Offred and her daughter] would make from them [dandelions], and crowns and necklaces, stains from the bitter milk on our fingers. Or I'd hold one under her chin: *Do you like butter?* Smelling them, she'd get pollen on her nose. (Or was that buttercups?) Or gone to seed: I can see her, running across the lawn, that lawn there just in front of me, at two, three years old, waving one like a sparkler, a small wand of white fire, the air filling with tiny parachutes. *Blow, and you tell the time*. All that time, blowing away in the summer breeze. It was daisies for love though, and we did that too. (Atwood, 1996: 224)

Or, Offred remembers photos taken of her and her daughter and cherishes the secure atmosphere of the mother-child dyad in those photos. She endeavours picking details, so that she would not lose her child in her mind as well: "Behind my closed eyes I can see myself as I am now, sitting beside an open drawer, or a trunk, in the cellar, where the baby clothes are folded away, a lock of hair, cut when she was two, in an envelope, white blonde. It got darker later" (ibid: 74).

Hansen argues that as a mother Offred behaves to her best knowledge and loves her daughter adequately (1997: 170). Atwood represents Offred mostly as a selfless and patient mother. Offred does not seem to feel she has lost something, as Oakley (1980) argues many women feel when becoming mothers; rather, she seems to think of motherhood as a very rewarding phase in her life. It could be argued that in her devotedness Offred is close to the image of the Virgin Mary. Dyer attaches to the Madonna mother the attributes passive, noble, merciful, receptive (1997: 17); and these can in my opinion be attached to Offred as mother.

Offred is a working mother with a job she enjoys, but she appears to dedicate herself also to house chores and her family. In Gilead, when she comes to the kitchen in the Household after doing the shopping for the Marthas, she recalls the housework she used to do:

> The kitchen smells of yeast, a nostalgic smell. It reminds me of other kitchens, kitchens that were mine. It smells of mothers; although my mother did not make bread. It smells of me, in former times, when I was a mother. (Atwood, 1996: 57)

Offred says that she was a mother who made bread herself and thereby she put some extra effort in the housework, and apparently enjoyed it. In this memory of everyday life she tells something essential about her own mother and their relationship too. She distinguishes herself from her mother, and has wanted to mother her daughter differently from the way she was mothered (this will be discussed further in sub-chapter 4.2). It is easy to imagine Offred wearing an apron with a blissful smile on her face puttering in the kitchen. Hence, Offred is the "ideal" mother according to the social norms of the society in which she lived in. She is not "just" a housewife, but also a career mother. She seems to have internalised the idea of the "good" mother.

Consequently, Offred dreamt about and lived in a "perfect" American nuclear family, with a child, husband, suburban home, two cars and a pet. She remembers a dream Luke and she had before they had their daughter and made their dream come true in most parts:

> Luke and I used to walk together, sometimes, along these streets. We used to talk about buying a house like one of these, an old big house, fixing it up. We would have a garden, swings for children. We would have children. Although we knew it wasn't too likely we could ever afford it, it was something to talk about, a game for Sundays. (Atwood, 1996: 33)

This dream (and the previous life) of Offred's repeats exactly the above discussed dollhouse image that the second wave feminism (and Offred's radical feminist mother) wanted to break free from in order to make other family forms acceptable in society also. Thus, Atwood represents Offred as resembling the average (white, heterosexual, middle-class) mother of the 1980s; devoted to her mothering role, but in spite of the Madonna-mother characteristics Offred is not solely self-sacrifying because she participates in the working life and her daughter is in daycare. As Hansen also states, Offred would probably be quite a traditional mother and wife if she was allowed to be (1997: 159). However, she is not allowed to carry

on mothering in Gilead but is doomed as an "unfit" mother because of Luke's former marriage (according to Gileadean interpretation second marriages are against the Bible), but mostly of course because she is a fertile woman who does not belong to the "ruling class" and therefore she is an easy object to abuse.

Furthermore, Atwood's depiction of the nuclear family is not that picturesque as it might look like at first glance. In my view Atwood does certainly not see the nuclear family as desirable. In Kornfeld's words: "[Atwood] reflects the conviction of Russ, Piercy, and Charnas [other feminist science fiction novelists] that the nuclear family must be abandoned" (2002: 18). The critique towards nuclear family may read in Offred's flashbacks: they include mostly only herself and her daughter, not her husband Luke. Offred's relationship with her husband is not equal and Offred has the primary responsibility for child-caring and housework. Offred buys the clothes and makes the school lunches for their child. Her husband Luke is present at home, but his participation in taking care of their daughter is quite restricted. Offred recalls the incidents when she was worried about their baby, and Luke's reaction was either accusing or indifferent:

> She could get one of those [plastic shopping bag] over her head, he'd say. You know how kids like to play. She never would, I'd say. She's too old. (Or too smart, or too lucky.) But I would feel a chill of fear, and then guilt for having been so careless. It was true, I took too much for granted; I trusted fate, back then. I'll keep them in a higher cupboard, I'd say. Don't keep them at all, he'd say. (Atwood, 1996: 37)

In this scene of ordinary life Luke criticizes Offred's common sense, and in a broader picture, her maternal work, and in my view, increases her motherly guilt (Ruddick, 1980) instead of supporting or sharing parenting equally.

Offred, a daughter of a feminist single mother, has a husband who has been married before and cheated on her wife before divorcing, and who takes pleasure, despite the seeming respect for Offred and her mother, in ridiculing women:

> [Luke] liked to choose what kind of meat we were going to eat during the week. He said men needed more meat that women did, and that it wasn't a superstition and he wasn't being a jerk, studies had been done. There are some differences, he said. He was fond of saying that, as if I was trying to prove there weren't. But mostly he said it when my mother was there. He liked to tease her. (Atwood, 1996: 73)

Offred accepts this chauvinist attitude and along, as Millett (1969) put it in her work, in general, the subordinate role of mother(s) and child(ren) in the family. Luke actually resembles the men in Gilead, like Hammer suggests: "Luke may have chosen her [Offred] over his first wife for the same reasons the commander favors her over his spouse – Offred is younger, more sexually attractive, and fertile" (1990: 43). Furthermore, Hammer claims that Offred appears to have exercised little control over her former life in spite of her education, career and intelligence (ibid). Her situation in Gilead could thus be argued not to differ that much from her previous marital life with Luke. Hence, Atwood is reminding that it would be too simple to see Offred's former life as perfect and ideal, and her life in Gilead as utterly horrible. Things are more complicated; a simple reading of her novel is not possible. Also in Wolmark's words:

> The narrator's memories of her life in pre-Gilead times are juxtaposed against her present restricted existence and through this device the narrative suggests that most of the features of the masculine hegemony were already in place. The main difference between 'now' and 'then' is that this [masculine] hegemony has become overtly repressive. (1994: 101)

And, Wolmark continues: "One strengths of Atwood's writing is that it suggests how the familiar and the taken for granted can be transformed with relative ease into structures of oppression" (ibid: 103). Thus, Offred's life seems to repeat the pattern of taking things for granted, and submitting to oppression.

When the coup d'état takes place and women and men start to protest together against the new rulers and especially the reduction of women's rights, Offred and Luke stay at home because in Luke's opinion they should not participate in the demonstrations:

> I didn't go on any of the marches. Luke said it would be futile and I had to think about them, my family, him and her. I did think about my family. I started doing more housework, more baking. I tried not to cry at mealtimes. By this time I'd started to cry, without warning, and to sit beside the bedroom window, staring out. (Atwood, 1996: 189)

Offred obeys Luke and does not fight for her rights, but sacrifices her needs for the benefit (in Luke's view) of her family. In Walters's term, Offred has adapted the idea of the 'maternal sacrifice' (1992: 18). Hammer argues that: "[I]n a large sense, Offred has always been a handmaid – a woman who serves others, but never herself" (1990: 43).

Offred is, however, very disappointed with Luke in his attitude towards the reduction of women's rights. Instead of sharing Offred's feelings of stupefaction, fear and perfidy, Luke assents to the by no means reasoned cutting off women's rights and acts if Offred needs soothing and protection like a baby:

> Luke knelt beside me and put his arms around me. I heard, he said, on the car radio, driving home. Don't worry, I'm sure it's temporary.
>
> Did they say why? I said.
>
> He didn't answer that. We'll get through it, he said, hugging me.
>
> You don't know what it's like, I said. I feel as if somebody cut off my feet. I wasn't crying. Also, I couldn't put my arms around him.
>
> It's only a job, he said, trying to soothe me.
>
> I guess you get all my money, I said. And I'm not even dead. I was trying for a joke, but it came out sounding macabre.
>
> Hush, he said. He was still kneeling on the floor. You know I'll always take care of you.
>
> I thought, already he's starting to patronize me. Then I thought, already you're starting to get paranoid. (Atwood, 1996: 188)
>
> […] He doesn't mind this, I thought. He doesn't mind it at all. Maybe he even likes it. We are not each other's, any more. Instead, I am his. (*ibid*: 191-2)

The ambivalence in Offred's life is notable: her own mother has fought hard for women rights and her best friend Moira, whom she admires and considers a heroine, is a lesbian feminist activist; yet Offred has chosen to live and have a child with Luke who instantaneously approves of her wife's exploitation by society.

The protagonists in Atwood's novels are often victims of mental or bodily coercion, and one of her themes of interest is how these women are empowered. Hansen argues that

Offred is a very typical protagonist of Atwood's fiction: she is ordinary and "she is aware of and even seems to relish her own ordinariness, her limits and weaknesses, her failures of courage and wit" (1997: 170). Thus, Offred is an example of a passive woman who becomes conscious of the state of affairs when it is a bit too late. Offred describes her own (and most people's) attitude before the coup d'état:

> But we lived as usual. Everyone does, most of the time. Whatever is going on is usual. Even this is usual, now.
>
> We lived, as usual, by ignoring. Ignoring isn't the same thing as ignorance, you have to work at it.
>
> Nothing changes instantaneously: in a gradually heating bathtub you'd be boiled to death before you knew it. (Atwood, 1996: 66)

Offred succumbs to the fact that she has been denied her liberty, and among other things, her motherhood. In Gilead the separating of mothers from their children, forbidding the biological motherhood is explained as a necessary sacrifice for a new society: "You are a transitional generation, said Aunt Lydia. It is the hardest for you. We know the sacrifices you are being expected to make" (ibid: 127). The Handmaids are not able to fight against the kidnapping of their children. Hence, De Beauvoir's critique of women's submissiveness and dependence could be applied to Offred and other Handmaids. In a dystopia the alternatives are of course very limited, but is Atwood implying that women's alternatives are also scarce in real societies, and women are often expected to make sacrifices for the "common good", take the role of the Virgin Mother to some extent? In addition, as Wolmark argues:

> Offred has, by implication, colluded in the emergence of Gilead through her own indifference, and when one of the Aunts declares that 'Gilead in within you', this emphasises the way in which patriarchal hegemony is maintained not by means of force but through the ideology of gender. (1994: 105)

Despite the state of affairs in Gilead, Offred, however, tries at the same time to hold on to her daughter, but because it is so painful, to let her go in her mind:

> She fades, I can't keep her here with me, she's gone now. Maybe I do think of her as a ghost, the ghost of a dead girl, a little girl who died when she was five. […]

> [I] think about a girl who did not die when she was five; who still does exist, I hope, though not for me.
>
> They were right, it's easier to think of her as dead. I don't have to hope then, or make a wasted effort. (Atwood, 1996: 73-4)

The physical separation from her daughter leads to the psychic separation: Offred begins to lose her hope and think of her daughter as dead or at least never within reach for her anymore. As Kornfeld puts it: "She begins in the maternal voice, longing for her lost child, indulging in reminiscences. But by the time the book ends, she realizes that the passage of time has 'obliterated' her, made her 'A shadow of a shadow, as dead mothers become'" (2002: 18). Accordingly, Offred experiences the psychic separation from her child extremely agonizing. Serena Joy shows secretly Offred a picture of her daughter (as an exchange for Offred's acceptance of the sexual relationship with Nick), and when Offred sees how her child is altered during the years they have been separated, her feelings are mixed with relief, longing, pain and disappointment:

> Is this her, is this what she's like? My treasure.
>
> So tall and changed. Smiling a little now, so soon, and in her white dress as if for and olden-days First Communion. […]
>
> You can see it in her eyes: I am not there.
>
> But she exists, in her white dress. She grows and lives. Isn't that a good thing? A blessing?
>
> Still, I can't bear it, to have been erased like that. Better she'd brought me nothing. (Atwood, 1996: 240)

Hansen describes Offred's despair for losing her child also psychically: "she has reached rock bottom, with nothing left to love" (1997: 174).

When Gilead forbids motherhood, it also violates and disrupts the matrilineal chain of women. Offred realises when she watches her daughter's eyes in the photo that "I'm not there". She understands that her daughter has been lied to so that she would not miss and think about her mother: "They must have told her I was dead. That's what they would think of doing. They would say it would be easier for her to adjust" (Atwood, 1996: 74). In my view Offred does not feel pain only for herself for the fact that she has been erased from her

daughter's life, but she also feels sadness for her daughter, as she will have lost her mother and grandmother. Because the maternal feminine continuum is cut, the daughters in Gilead will not have the opportunity to recite one's matrilineage as Offred is reciting hers in the novel. In Yu's words without a motherline "women will have no sense of themselves, their history and their past" (2005: 99). Yu argues further that when narrating a matrilineal story, the daughter realises that "her voice is not entirely her own" (2005: 26). To Offred reciting her matrilineal story is a crucial means of self-recognition. Kormalý states that Offred's story is "both a physical search for Offred's lost mother and child, and a spiritual one for her own identity" (1996).

Accordingly, Offred's character is developed more resistant in the novel. She balances between "knowledge and ignorance, action and inaction, anger and numbness, resistance and submission" (Hansen, 1997: 171). The end is left open: will Offred regain her freedom and find her daughter, mother and husband? Is she courageous enough to act? Hansen argues that she is unable to act and awaits the new pregnancy to save her, even if she knows that she will not be allowed to mother that child either (1997: 174). However, in the very end Offred is taken to her hiding place when she is pregnant with Nick's child, consequently, she will have lost the opportunity for conceiving a child to the Commander and the regime. Therefore in my view Hansen's interpretation is not quite sufficient.

In her hiding place Offred dictates her story about the forbidden motherhood and lost liberty, and with that action shows courage in making women's experiences visible and rewriting women's history. As Howells states: "[H]er treasonable act of speaking out in a society where women are forbidden to read or write or speak freely effects a significant shift from 'history' to 'herstory'" (1996: 126-7). Offred's narration is, however, ridiculed in the "Historical Notes", which is the epilogue of the novel by the chauvinist male historian James Darcy Pieixoto who says:

> Some of them [the gaps in the history] could have been filled by our anonymous author, had she had a different turn of mind. She could have told us much about the workings of the Gileadean empire, had she had the instincts of a reporter or a spy. (Atwood, 1996: 322)

Thus, the male historian is arguing that Offred's story is too one-sided, as he would like to have heard about something else than women, mothers, and motherhood, which he does not seem to consider important. He discredits Offred's narrative and "obliterates Offred as a person; he never tells what happened to her because he does not know and he is not interested" (Howells, 1996: 146). However, as Howells argues to the point:

> Offred's Tale claims a space, a large autobiographical space, within the novel and so relegates the grand narratives to the margins as a mere framework for her story which is the main focus of interest. […] In the process of reconstructing her as an individual, Offred becomes the most important historian of Gilead. (*ibid*: 127)

For Offred (and women in general, it could be argued) motherhood and female relations are vitally important, and therefore she focuses on them in particular. Atwood uses irony here again in pointing out the extreme importance of telling the story from a different point of view than that of the (male) rulers. The forbidden motherhood and the violated motherline are utterly important topics, which she wants to emphasize in her novel. "The loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter is the essential female tragedy" as Rich argues (1976: 237), and thus there is a need for female bonding and courageous mothering instead of the sacrificial mothering ordered by patriarchy. This idea can be read in Atwood's novel as well.

4.2 Offred's Mother

Offred's flashbacks from her previous life include numerous memories of her own mother. Her matrilineal narrative includes thus three generations of women, her mother, herself and

her daughter. As Woodward argues, women interpret and reconstruct the experience of motherhood through the past and by memory, hence through having had a mother (1997: 244). The characteristics of matrilineal narratives (presented in sub-chapter 2.3) can in my view be applied to Offred's narration about her mother, and I will examine them here in more detail.

Offred as a mother lived in a nuclear family, but as a child she lived together with her single mother. Her mother wanted to have a child but not a man. The grounds for her choice were simple in her view: "I don't want a man around, what use are they except for ten seconds' worth of half babies. A man is just a woman's strategy for making other women" (Atwood, 1996: 130-1). Consequently, Offred has never seen her father, and she does not include him in her narration, as he is not included in her life in any way. Offred's mother spoke about the issue once in her straightforward style, when she was visiting Offred and Luke in their suburban home:

> Not that your father wasn't a nice guy and all, but he wasn't up to fatherhood. Not that I expected it of him. Just do the job, then you can bugger off, I said, I make a decent salary, I can afford daycare. So he went to the coast and sent Christmas cards. He had beautiful blue eyes though. (Atwood, 1996: 131)

Offred does not seem to miss her father, having one parent is enough for her. She criticises her mother various times, but never about raising her without a father. Offred's mother told Offred many times that: "You were a wanted child. God knows…" (ibid: 190), and it seems that Offred accepts her mother's choice for wanting her only. In my view she tries to understand her mother's life even if she has chosen to live differently, for example to share parenting. When Offred is an adult and a mother herself, her mother tells her how lonely she felt as a single mother: "Sometimes she would cry. I was so lonely, she'd say. You have no idea how lonely I was. And I had friends, I was lucky one, but I was lonely anyway" (ibid: 132). Offred reaction towards her mother is empathetic concerning that issue. It could be argued that she is really trying to see her mother "in spite of or beyond the blindness and

skewed vision that growing up together causes" (Yu, 2005: 26), which is characteristic of matrilineal narratives.

Offred's mother gives birth to Offred at a fairly old age, and she is furious about the reactions her choice aroused in her friends and in the hospital:

> I had you when I was thirty-seven, my mother said. It was a risk, you could have been deformed or something. You were a wanted child, all right, and did I get shit from some quarters! My oldest buddy Tricia Foreman accused me of being pronatalist, the bitch. Jealousy, I put that down to. Some of the others were okay though. But when I was six months' pregnant, a lot of them started sending me these articles about how birth defect rate went zooming up after thirty-five. Just what I needed. And stuff about how hard it was to be a single parent. Fuck that shit, I told them, I've started this and I'm going to finish it. At the hospital they wrote down "Aged Primipara" on the chart, I caught them in the act. That's what they call you when it's your first baby over thirty, over *thirty* for godsake. (Atwood, 1996: 130)

The personal level of mothering is left aside in Offred's mother's experience and the control by society and other women is emphasized. Offred's mother is under constant scrutiny: she is accused of being pronatalist, that is, having no global conscience when giving birth to a baby, desiring the role of a biological mother in a world which is full of children without proper living conditions. Furthermore, she is being frightened because of her age and her choice for single-parenthood. This reaction echoes the feminist discussion on motherhood of the 1960s and 70s when "having a baby in the face of a population explosion or without first dismantling the patriarchy [was] ill-judged or irresponsible" (Kornfeld, 2002: 7). Moreover, the institution of motherhood can be observed dictating quite strictly the fitness of women as mothers (proper age, marital status, etc.).

The reasons for Offred's mother's choices derive from her political and sexual orientation. She is a feminist activist, has many lesbian friends, and is presumably lesbian herself. Offred recalls how her mother described her attitude towards men in general:

> [T]here's something missing in them, even the nice ones. It's like they're permanently absent-minded, like they can't quite remember who they are. They look at the sky too much. They loose touch with their feet. They aren't a patch

> on a woman except they're better at fixing cars and playing football, just what we need for the improvement of the human race, right? (Atwood, 1996: 131)

Therefore she wants to oppose the nuclear family and to raise her child alone. She could thus be argued to refuse in Rich's terms 'the compulsory heterosexuality of our culture' (1980) and the patriarchal rule.

Accordingly, Atwood describes Offred's mother as a strict feminist resembling the feminists of the 1960s and 70s. Or, as Hansen puts it, Offred's mother is represented as "a somewhat pathetic and stereotyped seventies radical" (1997: 191). Kormalý (1996) goes even further, and states that as a militant feminist Offred's mother can be considered culpable for the oppression exercised on women.[37] In addition, Howells discusses Atwood's attitude towards "militant" feminism: "As a feminist with a deep distrust of ideological hardlines, she [Atwood] refuses to simplify the gender debate or to swallow slogans whole, for slogans always run the risk of being taken over as instruments of oppression" (1996: 131).

Offred's mother uses 'slogans' and participates for example in a demonstration for women's freedom to choose motherhood or to reject it. Offred and the other Handmaids are shown a document in The Red Centre about women activists from the previous decades in order to teach what they absolutely cannot do in Gilead and remind them of their lost freedom 'to' do something, instead of the Gileadean notion of freedom 'from' something. Offred sees her mother fighting for women's rights:

> …then I see my mother. My young mother, younger than I remember her…
> The camera pans up and we see the writing, in paint on what must have been a bedsheet: TAKE BACK THE NIGHT. This hasn't been blacked out, even though we aren't supposed to be reading. The women around me breathe in, there's stirring in the room, like wind over grass. Is this an oversight, have we gotten away with something? Or is this a thing we're intended to see, to remind us of the old days of no safety?
>
> Behind this sign there are other signs, and the camera notices them briefly: FREEDOM TO CHOOSE. EVERY BABY A WANTED BABY. RECAPTURE OUR BODIES. DO YOU BELIEVE A WOMAN'S PLACE IS

[37] In Kormalý's (1996) view Offred's mother is as quilty of women's oppression as Serena Joy with her right wing evangelism, Offred with her passivity, and Aunts in their female military officers role.

> ON THE KITCHEN TABLE? Under the last sign there's a line drawing of woman's body, lying on a table, blood dripping out of it. (Atwood, 1996: 129-130)

When Offred was a child her mother took her too to the demonstrations. Offred recalls an incident when she was a child and supposed to go for a walk and feed the ducks with her mother:

> That's it: she said we were going to feed the ducks.
>
> But there were some women burning books, that's what she was really there for. To see her friends; she'd lied to me, Saturdays were supposed to be my day. I turned away from her, sulking, towards the ducks, but the fire drew me back. […]
>
> The woman handed me one of the magazines. It had a pretty woman on it, with no clothes on, hanging from the ceiling by a chain wound around her hands. I looked at it with interest. It didn't frighten me. I thought she was swinging, like Tarzan from a vine, on the TV.
>
> Don't let her *see* it, said my mother. Here, she said to me, toss it in, quick. (Atwood, 1996: 48)

Offred is first offended because her mother is not solely dedicated to her on their Saturday walk, but meets her friends at the same time and takes part in a feminist demonstration. When she is asked to take part, she shows some childish interest though. However, Offred sulks at her mother for not giving her enough attention in her opinion and remembers further how she did not like her mother's attitude towards her when they were in a company of other people, like in this scene of burning porn magazines:

> You want to throw one [magazine] on, honey? she said. How old was I? Good riddance to bad rubbish, she said, chuckling. It okay? she said to my mother.
>
> If she wants to, my mother said; she had a way of talking about me to others as if I couldn't hear. (*ibid*: 48)

Offred experiences the same kind of dismissal in the Household when the Marthas, Rita and Cora, discuss who will do the bath for Offred: "They're talking about me as though I can't hear. To them I'm a household chore, one among many" (ibid: 58). Did Offred feel, in spite of her position as the only and very much wanted child, not being given enough attention to? Is that why she wants to dedicate herself to her only child? Atwood does not explicitly discuss

this, but perhaps it could be argued as giving one explanation for Offred's devout, unselfish, and even sacrificial mothering.

Offred does not share her mother's fervour for the feminist issues in any phase of her life. Yet the feminist issues remain close to her life even when she has moved away from her mother's home. Her best friend Moira is a lesbian feminist activist who admires Offred's mother and says: "Your mother is neat [...] Later: she's got pizzazz. Later still: she's cute. She's not cute, I would say. She's my mother" (ibid: 265). Offred looks up to Moira for the same reasons she has disfavoured her mother: Moira's independence and strong opinions. With Moira she discusses gender issues, the equality between sexes, women's exploitation in society. When they ponder about their Utopian views of the world Moira even notices that they resemble Offred's mother: "Moira laughed. Listen to us, she said. Shit. We sound like your mother. We both laughed then…" (Atwood, 1996: 181).

Rich's discussion about the need for the mother to demonstrate her daughter that she has the right for freedom from the patriarchal dominance resonates with Offred's and her mother's characters. Offred has been made conscious of the feminist issues since she was a child, her mother has tried (too) hard to raise some feminist conscience in her, yet she has adopted an indifferent and submissive way of living. In Chodorow's terms Offred could be defined as carrying the separation and individuation process to the extreme. Could it thus be argued that she feels that her autonomy would be threatened if she supported her mother's thoughts? She feels pressured and expected too much, as she says when she is thinking about her mother in the Red Centre after seeing an 'Unwoman documentary' (a film about feminist activists' manifestations) where Offred's mother appears:

> She expected too much from me, I felt. She expected me to vindicate her life for her, and the choices she'd made. I didn't want to live my life on her terms. I didn't want to be the model offspring, the incarnation of her ideas. We used to fight about that. I am not your justification for existence, I said to her once. (*ibid*: 132)

In her narration Offred admits her embarrassment and anger about her mother's lifestyle and remembers that when she was a teenager she "wanted from her a life more ceremonious, less subject to makeshift and decampment" (Atwood, 1996: 190). She also strongly disapproved of her mother's activism then and recalls an incident from that time:

> I remember her coming back to one of our many apartments, with a group of other women, part of her ever-changing circle of friends. They'd been in a march that day; it was during the time of porn riots, or was it the abortion riots, they were close together. There were a lot of bombings then: clinics, video stores; it was hard to keep track.
>
> My mother had a bruise on her face, and a little blood. You can't stick your hand through a glass window without getting cut, is what she said about it. Fucking pigs.
>
> Fucking bleeders, one of her friends said. They called the other side *bleeders*, after the sign they carried: *Let them bleed*. So it must have been the abortion riots.
>
> I went into my bedroom, to be out of their way. They were talking too much, and too loudly. They ignored me, and I resented them. My mother and her rowdy friends. I didn't see why she had to dress that way, in overalls, as if she were young; or to swear that much.
>
> You're such a prude, she would say to me, in a tone of voice that was on the whole pleased. She liked being more outrageous than I was, more rebellious. Adolescents are always such prudes.
>
> Part of my disapproval was that, I'm sure: perfunctory, routine. (ibid: 189-190)

As Wolmark notices: "She recalls feeling both embarrassed and oppressed by her mother's commitment to radical feminism, since she herself had no strong feelings about it" (1994: 105). At least at that time Offred wished more 'traditional' mothering from her mother, but her mother's personality and interests impeded her from taking the role of the Virgin Mother that would have seem to pleased Offred more than her mother's outrageousness. Offred's mother seemingly perceives motherhood, to use Rich's words, as "*one part* of female process; […] not an identity for all time (1976: 36-7). However, to Offred motherhood apparently is the most durable part of her identity before Gilead and in Gilead as she is forced to identify herself with her womb, her maternal body.

In addition, Offred again expresses her feeling of being ignored by her mother: "They ignored me, and I resented them" (Atwood, 1996: 190). Later on, however, in her adult

life she appears to have spent quite a lot of time with her mother. Offred recalls that her mother "breezed in and out of my house as if I were the mother and she were the child. She still had that jauntiness. Sometimes, when she was between apartments, just moving in to one or just moving out, she'd use my washer-dyer for her laundry" (Atwood, 1996: 264). Offred's and her mother's relationship was very (in)tense. Offred's mother could be described in Walters's term "loud, interfering, guilt-making but well-meaning mother" and Offred "loving and tolerant but often exasperated daughter" (1992: 129). As Offred describes her mother's habits and character: "She liked to come over to my house and have a drink while Luke and I were fixing dinner and tell us what was wrong with her life, which always turned into what was wrong with ours" (Atwood, 1996: 130).

Offred seems to be annoyed by her mother's interference in her life style and by the fact that she does not cease to preach feminism:

> As for you, she'd say to me, you're just a backlash. Flash in the pan. History will absolve me.
>
> But she wouldn't say things like that until after the third drink.
>
> 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. Look at him, slicing up the carrots. Don't you know how many women's lives, how many women's bodies, the tanks had to roll over just to get that far? […]
>
> Now, Mother, I would say. Let's not get into an argument about nothing.
>
> Nothing, she'd say bitterly. You call it nothing. You don't understand, do you. You don't understand at all what I'm talking about. (*ibid*: 131)

In Offred's mother's opinion Offred takes everything for granted and enjoys (or does not even understand to enjoy) the liberties her mother's generation fought for her and her generation. Walters (1992) notices this gap between different generations of woman and emphasizes the need for daughters to aim at understanding the reality of their mothers' lives. In that way, mothers and daughters could regard each other more as belonging to the matrilineal continuum and not taking superior positions in their relationship.

Since Offred has experienced her mother's activism both embarrassing and oppressing, she cannot help but takes a superior position and comments about the birth scene

in Gilead, which is supposed to be a culmination of the female co-operation in the new society: “Mother, I think. Wherever you may be. Can you hear me? You wanted a woman’s culture. Well, now there’s one. It isn’t what you meant, but it exists” (Atwood, 1996: 137). This is an ironic comment, but at the same time it shows some sad arrogance. One characteristic of matrilineal narratives is “the anger and despair about the pain and the silence borne and handed on from mother and daughter” (Yu, 2005: 26). Matrilineal narratives include also these negative feelings, which are or can be resolved by mutual understanding and respect “based on a recognition of a common heritage” (ibid).

Furthermore, the matrilineal narratives are partly based on the daughter’s recognition that her voice is not entirely her own, her mother’s life will be heard in her life also (ibid). Yu notes the issue about mother’s voice and subjectivity that the feminist theorists (for example, Kaplan, 1992 and Macdonald, 1995) were concerned about:

> [The]daughter’s pleading for her mother’s voice resonates, in part, with recent Western feminists’ concern with discovering the mother’s voice and letting the mother speak. On of the contentious issues regarding motherhood within recent feminist scholarship has been focused on constituting maternal subjectivity from the perspective of mothers (Yu, 2005: 104).

Because mother has been the central icon of the unselfish caring person in Western culture, she has not been noticed as a subject on her own right. Offred’s mother cannot be considered resembling this typical image of mother, but Offred as a mother fits well in the description.

Offred seemed to be tired with her mother speaking all the time and requiring all the attention. Then again, when she is recalling her mother, she does try to hear and give her voice. When the Handmaids are watching the ‘Unwomen documentary’ in the Red Centre, Offred sees her mother in it, but the voice has been taken off: “They don’t play the soundtrack… they don’t want us to hear what the Unwomen are saying” (Atwood, 1996: 129). Women are silenced overall in Gilead, and now that Offred would be eager to hear what her mother is saying (perhaps also act according to her mother’s message?), she no more has

the chance for that. Her mother has been defined as an Unwoman because of her age and ideas, having no rights and doomed to slow, painful death in the Colonies as Moira tells Offred when they meet at the Jezebel's brothel:

> I saw you mother, Moira said.
>
> Where? I said. I felt jolted, thrown off. I realized I'd been thinking of her as dead.
>
> Not in person, it was in the film they showed us, about the Colonies. There was a close-up, it was her all right. She was wrapped up in on of those grey things but I know it was her.
>
> Thank God, I said.
>
> Why, thank God? said Moira.
>
> I thought she was dead.
>
> She might as well be, said Moira. You should wish it for her. (Atwood, 1996: 264)

Offred realises then that she does not remember exactly when she saw her mother for the last time: "I can't remember the last time I saw her. It blends in with all the others; it was some trivial occasion" (ibid: 264). Thus, Offred could be accused of taking her mother, as well as the rights that her mother fought for women, for granted.

The mother-daughter relationship is a very difficult relationship, and it does offer, in Rich's words: "materials for the deepest mutuality and the most painful estrangement" (1976: 226). Offred analyses the relationship of her and her mother and says, "I admired my mother in some ways, although things between us were never easy" (Atwood, 2006: 132). Moreover, she thinks about her mother tenderly and remembers that when her mother lingered over the baby photo albums of Offred, she once again said that Offred was a wanted child:

> She would say this a little regretfully, as though I hadn't turned entirely as she'd expected. No mother is ever, completely, a child's idea of what a mother should be, and I suppose it works the other way around as well. But despite everything, we didn't do badly by one another, we did as well as most.
>
> I wish she were here, so I could tell her I finally know this. (*ibid*: 190)

Offred seems to realise something essential about mother-daughter relationship, and forgive her mother for something that she previously had blamed on her.

"The amazement and humility about the strength of our mothers" (Yu, 2005: 26) is one theme in matrilineal narratives. In my opinion, Offred's narration reveals that attitude also along with her critical attitude towards her mother. And, in Howells's words: "Through time Offred gradually learns to appreciate the heroism of her mother who in life had been such a source of embarrassment, just as she begins to understand the dimensions of her own loss: 'I've mourned for her already. But I will do it again, and again'"(1996: 134). It could be argued that with the depiction of a non-traditional mother, Offred's mother, Atwood wants to present another acceptable model for mothering, hence expand the boundaries of motherhood, which are even today quite strictly defined in society. Atwood does not depict either Offred or her mother as ideal mothers, but leaves the concept of 'ideal mother' open for discussion.

5. Conclusion

In this thesis, I have analysed how Margaret Atwood represents motherhood in her dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. She argues that dystopias offer means for realising what utopias would be like since as counterexamples dystopias show the nightmarish world, and hopefully evoke thoughts in the readers (2005: 93). Therefore, I have examined the representations of mothers in the novel, and attempted to deduce what Atwood wants to point out with these dystopian depictions of motherhood as a personal experience and as an institution; what would the utopian vision of motherhood in her view be like?

For the theoretical support I chose feminist discussion on motherhood from the 1960s to the present day. The discussion has been manifold, and it offers a lot of material for interpreting the novel. Atwood is a profoundly informed author and the human rights and feminist issues are a constant concern of hers. She discusses these issues in most of her literary works, not only novels, but also in poetry and critical writings. Therefore, feminist theorising on motherhood was to large extent applicable to her novel, and I noticed that many theorists' arguments resonate with the ideas Atwood presents in the novel.

I also took into consideration theorists' views on representations. Mothers have often been represented reducing the depictions of them to the image of the Virgin Mary due to the fundamental influence of Christianity on the Western culture. Thus, such features as sacrificial, patient, noble, and so on, are attached to mothers when they are culturally depicted. This representation is of course oversimplified, and as Atwood presents the nightmarish image of motherhood after the coup d'état by fundamental Christian rule, she does not assent to the Madonna-mother image smoothly, but wants with her narrative to enlarge the frames within which mothers are evaluated as ideal or non-ideal mothers. She is

very much aware that motherhood is a social and cultural construction greatly reproduced by representations.

Furthermore, I also focused on the mother-daughter relationship, as Atwood has chosen to describe only mothers and daughters in her novel. Based on Yu's definition of the matrilineal narratives, I argued that *The Handmaid's Tale* may be considered a matrilineal narrative.

Thus, in the analysis part, I first discussed the representation of mothers who were forced into their roles. That is, the Handmaids were coerced to work as biological mothers, the surrogates, and the Wives as the adoptive mothers. The Virgin Mary image is tried on both groups of women, but it does not fit either. Mostly because the patriarchal fundamentally religious rule is so profoundly hypocrite that the submissiveness and unselfishness of the Madonna mother is made impossible for both mothers. Atwood furthermore questions the need for those qualities attached in motherhood in general. The coercion to motherhood affects the women in the way that they loathe and hate each other, and are thus hindered to see the opportunity for female solidarity and mothering together.

Second, I examined the women who had rejected motherhood. I discussed lesbians (Moira in specific), feminists, intellectuals, nuns, Aunts, Wives, and Marthas. I noted that Rich's and other theorists' arguments about the threatening and suspicious position of women who are not mothers in society was applicable to Atwood's fictional society. In the novel, women who did not want to become mothers, or who did not have the choice anymore were either locked inside male dominated institutions (lesbians and intellectuals in Jezebel's brothel; Marthas and Wives in the Commanders' Households, the converted nuns as well), sentenced to death (Unwomen were sent to the Colonies), or utilized as sadistic female officers (Aunts). Motherhood could be argued to be such a restrictive factor in women's lives that without that restriction women are considered a threat to the male hegemony as they

would not be tied to birthgiving and care-taking, and women with children regard them menacing somehow too. Atwood ironically emphasizes this fear of a "loose" woman by her depictions of the women without children who are all, in one way or the other, silenced and suppressed. In addition, she underlines the falsity of the polarity "childless woman" versus "mother", which Rich notices in her work. Atwood's representations of mothers suggest that also other women than biological mothers can be considered mothers.

In the chapter of forbidden motherhood, I discussed the protagonist Offred as a mother and her own mother. They represent different kinds of mothers: Offred is a self-sacrifying mother, dedicated to her mothering; Offred's mother is an independent woman, a feminist who wanted to raise her child alone, and she does not sacrifice her career and interests for her mother's role. Atwood does not, however, in my view present either mother as an ideal mother, but depicts them as possible ways of being a mother. Nonetheless, she does articulate a serious worry about conventional motherhood, which includes the maternal service in the unequal setting of the nuclear family. She points out the need for courageous instead of sacrificial mothering. The frightfulness of separating the women's and men's spheres of life can be read various times in the novel. Atwood aims at increasing the understanding and co-operation of the different sexes.

Moreover, motherhood should definitely not, as Atwood sees it, be constrained by patriarchy as it has been, and still greatly is. The novel emphasizes the need for female solidarity, and with the counterexample of cutting the matrilineal chain between Offred, her daughter, and her mother, stresses also the importance of matrilineal continuums. Atwood wants to underline the importance of noticing one's mother as a person, not merely the birth-giver and caretaker, and understanding the reality of the mother's life.

In addition, she is warning about the indifference or even arrogance of the new generations toward the achievements of the previous ones. The totalitarian state of Gilead was

possible because of the indifference to the feminist issues: the women of Offred's generation took too much for granted. The human rights issues are permanently of importance, and Atwood is reminding her readers that they should not be forgotten.

All in all, Atwood is saying that inequality based on biology and alienation of the two sexes does not belong to a utopian society. Moreover, women, no more than men, should not be perceived as an entity of people who can be generalised and treated according to stereotyped images. Atwood, as I see it, dreams about a society where individuals would not be labelled and could make their independent choices without being coerced according to their societal position, sexual or political orientation.

Additionally, she takes a stance in the conventional history writing from the male point of view, which has disregarded women's history. She highlights the existence of different points of view, and the importance of bringing the female point of view also to the daylight.

Studying the topic of motherhood has been fascinating, and this study could be continued for example comparing how Atwood depicts motherhood in her other novels, or poetry and critical writing. Would her representations of mothers in a non-dystopian scene resonate with the representations I have examined in *The Handmaid's Tale*? Atwood clearly points out that what happens to the women in this novel cannot be considered a separate or occasional tragedy. To conclude in Atwood's words (2005: 95):

> Dystopia, its nightmare mirror image, is the desire to squash dissent taken to inhuman and lunatic lengths. […] if we can't visualize the good, the ideal, if we can't formulate what we want, we'll get what we don't want, in spades. It's a sad commentary on our age that we find Dystopias a lot easier to believe in than Utopias: Utopias we can only imagine; Dystopias we've already had.

Works Cited

Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid's Tale*. London: Vintage, 1996. First published in Toronto: McClelland and Steward, 1985.

-----. *Writing with Intent. Essays, Reviews, Personal Prose: 1983-2005.* New York: Carol and Craf, 2005.

Bassin, D., Honey, M. and Kaplan, M.M. Ed. *Representations of Motherhood*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994.

de Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1953. First published *Le Deuxième Sexe* in France: Editions Gallimard, 1949.

Bowlby, Rachel. "Flight Reservations: The Anglo-American/ French Divide in Feminist Criticism". In *Feminist Literary Theory, A Reader*. Ed. Mary Eagleton, 271-274. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.

Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

-----. *Metamorphoses, towards a materialist theory of becoming.* Cambridge: Polity, 2002.

Brannon, Linda. *Gender: psychological perspectives*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999.

Buxton, Jackie. "Atwood, Margaret". In *Contemporary Novelists, 7th Edition,* 40-45. St. James Press, 2001.

Chodorow, Nancy. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978.

Chodorow, Nancy and Contratto, Susan. “The Fantasy of the Perfect Mother”. In *Rethinking the Family: Some Feminist Questions.* Ed. Barrie Thorne and Marilyn Yalom. New York : Longman, cop. 1982.

Donawerth, J.L. and Kolmerten, C.A. *Utopian and Science Fiction by Women. Worlds of Difference.* Liverpool: Syracuse University Press, 1994.

Dyer, Richard. *White.* London: Routledge, 1997.

Feuer, Lois. “The Calculus of Love and Nightmare: *The Handmaid’s Tale* and the Dystopian Tradition”. *Critique*, 83-95, vol. 38, no. 2, 1997.

Firestone, Shulamith. *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*. London: Cape, 1971.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish.* New York : Pantheon, 1979.

Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique.* New York: Dell Publishing, 1963.

Gimenez, Martha E. “Feminism, Pronatalism, and Motherhood.” In *Mothering: Essays in Feminist Theory.* Ed. Joyce Trebilcot, 287-314. Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983.

Hall, Stuart. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage, 1997.

Hammer, Stephanie Barbe. “The World as It Will Be? Female Satire and the Technology of Power in ‘The Handmaid’s Tale’”. *Modern Language Studies*, 39-49, vol. 20, no. 2, 1990.

Hansen, Elaine Tuttle. *Mother without Child: Contemporary Fiction and the Crisis of Motherhood.* London: University of California Press, 1997.

Howells, Coral Ann. *Margaret Atwood.* London : Macmillan Press, 1996

Kaplan, E. Ann. *Motherhood and Representation: The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama.* London: Routledge, 1992.

Kormalý, Sema. “Feminist Science Fiction: The Alternative Worlds of Piercy, Elgin and Atwood”. *Journal of American Studies of Turkey*, 69-77, no. 4, 1996. http://www.bilkent.edu.tr/~jast/Number4/Kormali.html

Kornfeld, Susan. “Suppression and Transformation of the Mother in Contemporary Women’s Science Fiction”. The Faculty Humboldt State University, 2002.

Koskela, Lasse. *Lukijan ABC-kirja, Johdatus kirjallisuuden nykyteorioihin ja kirjallisuudentutkimuksen suuntauksiin.* Helsinki : Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 1997.

LeFanu, Sarah. ”In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism and Science Fiction”. In *Feminist Literary Theory, A Reader*. Ed. Mary Eagleton, 187-188. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.

Light, Alison. “Feminism and the Literary Critic”. In *Feminist Literary Theory, A Reader*. Ed. Mary Eagleton, 242-5. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.

Liljeström, Marianne. *Feministejä: Aikamme Ajattelijoita.*Tampere: Vastapaino, 2000.

Macdonald, Myra. *Representing Women. Myths of feminity in the popular media.* London: Arnold, 1995.

Millett, Kate. *Sexual Politics*. London: Hart-Davis, 1969.

Mitchell, Juliet. *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974.

Morris, Pam. *Literature and Feminism, An Introduction.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1993.

Oakley, Ann. *Women Confined: Towards A Sociology of Childbirth*. Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1980.

Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born, Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1976. (repr. 1986)

Rich, Adrienne. "Compulsive heterosexuality and lesbian existence." In *Women, Sex and Sexuality*. Ed. Stimpson and Person. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

Robbinson, Sally. *Engendering the Subject. Gender and Self-Representation in Contemporary Women's Fiction.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991.

Ross, Ellen. "New Thoughts on 'The Oldest Vocation': Mothers and Motherhood in Recent Feminist Scholarship". *Signs*, 397-413, vol. 20, no. 2, 1995.

Rowland, Robyn. "Technology and Motherhood: Reproductive Choice Reconsidered". Australia: Department of Women's Studies, Deakin University, 1987.

Ruddick, S. *Maternal thinking: Toward a politics of peace.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1980.

Schwartz, Adria. "Taking Nature Out of Mother". In *Representations of Motherhood*. Ed. Bassin, D., Honey, M. and Kaplan, M.M. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994.

Stacey, Judith. *In the Name of the Family, Rethinking Family Values in the Postmodern Age*. Boston: Beacon Press, cop. 1996.

Still, Judith. "A Feminine Economy: Some Preliminary Thoughts". In *Feminist Literary Theory, A Reader*. Ed. Mary Eagleton, 325-326 . Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.

Walters, Suzanna Danuta. *Lives Together/ Worlds Apart. Mother and Daughters in Popular Culture*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992.

Weingarten, Kathy. "Sidelined No More: Promoting Mothers of Adolescents as a Resource for Their Growth and Development". In *Mothering Against the Odds*. Ed. Garcia Coll, C., Surrey, J., Weingarten, K., 15-36. New York : Guilford Press, 1998.

Wolmark, Jenny. *Aliens and Others: Science Fiction, Feminism and Postmodernism*. New York: Harvester Wheafsheaf, cop, 1994.

Woodward, Kathryn *Identity and Difference*. London: Sage, 1997.

Yu, Yi-Lin. *Mother, She Wrote: Matrilineal Narratives in Contemporary Women's Writing.* New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2005.