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Do Not Let Them Grind You Down

A comparison of the protagonist's assertiveness in both Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and Bruce Miller's TV series adaptation (2017).

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1. Introduction

This MA dissertation is devoted to Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, one of the most famous dystopian novels of postmodern English literature. The main purpose of this dissertation is to draw a comparison around the main character, Offred, with the recent series adaptation, produced by Bruce Miller (released on Hulu on April 2017).

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale,* published in 1985, is considered as a singular and compelling novel of the dystopian genre as, "what distinguishes Atwood from those dystopian classics is its obvious feminist focus" (Malak, 1987, 11). It addresses one of the main issues of our current society: the sociocultural place of women and their involvement in their communities, including the reconsideration it conveys regarding gender equalities. Therefore, although the novel was written in 1984, it still bears a particular relevance and significance nowadays since the author puts into perspective many of our contemporary societal concerns with a wise discernment which subtly unsettles the readers in their most profound beliefs. Atwood's dystopian novel is indeed very startling since it describes a forthcoming world in which women have radically lost all their most basic human rights. In this totalitarian society named the "Republic of Gilead," a new repressive government has been established upon religious motives and a rigid hierarchy has been promulgated, which utterly divides society between strictly segregated categories of citizens. The main character, Offred, has thus been assigned as a "Handmaid" to a prominent leader and his wife to carry a child for them, as many women are infertile due to former ecological issues.

The novel and the series' illustration of the appalling way women are treated in this patriarchy hence provoked an uproar in many countries concerned with gender equality. Besides, the series is related to a real political impact nowadays, since many feminist movements inspired themselves from Offred's tale:

> "Since its first season, *The Handmaid's Tale* has been upheld by many women as a rallying cry for the feminist resistance. The image of red robed and white bonneted women from the classic feminist text has become as celebrated as Rosie the Riveter" (Bernstein, 2018).

Therefore, the novel, renewed and re-popularized by the series, resonates more than ever as a symbol of engagement against patriarchy, and Offred becomes the embodiment of the defense of not only feminine, but also human most fundamental rights. Moreover, the series stirred up many debates in the USA because it resonates with people's political situation. Indeed, the mass

media and press are currently depicting a misogynistic president, condemning new laws prohibiting abortion, denouncing the progression of right wings parties, of populism, and many more issues seem to rattle the foundation of a democratic and open-minded America. There is a palpable wake-up call among citizens concerned with current political controversies, which creates the angst that Atwood's novel might not be so far from reality, as the actress playing Offred on screen herself discusses: "It's just that now there are actual things happening with women's reproductive rights in our own country that make me feel like this book is bleeding over into reality" (Elizabeth Moss qtd. in Reilly, 2017). Due to that close relation between our own society and the dreadful reality the novel and the series both depict as a plausible nightmarish future, *The Handmaid's Tale* truly becomes a politically engaged testimony of resistance against women and human oppression: "Within the current landscape of the #MeToo movement, and a multitude of circumstances in the current political climate that mirror the show far too closely, it is truly one of the most important shows on television" (Feldman, 2018).

Furthermore, there is no doubt that *The Handmaid's Tale* definitely makes its readers familiar with the dystopian genre as many of its typical features are encompassed in the novel, which creates that disturbing closeness with people's experience. The particularity of this fiction actually lies in "the mundane and ordinary quality of the dystopian lives it depicts" since, under the description of a restrictive daily routine, such as shopping trips or small talks, the novel depicts an ordinary disciplined life in which "small deviations" (Hansot, 1994, 56) appear. David Ketterer (1998) notes as well in his article "Margaret Atwood's 'The Handmaid's Tale': A Contextual Dystopia", that some other characteristics of the patriarchal society of Gilead remind us of typical dystopias; a palpable lack of freedom and independence for the characters, the perpetual scrutiny of the established oppressive power or the rebellious enterprises such as the escape attempts and the underground movement "Mayday". Furthermore, the context of war with foreign countries, the society's general isolation, the scant supplies and the seclusion of women in a highly hierarchical society are essential dystopian features, which disturbingly mirror human civilization's many failures as we know it. The characters are thus faced with a rigorous system, but in which some breaches also appear, since there is a slight but non-negligible possibility of resistance and the existence an anti-government movement: "Atwood's novel follows a typical dystopian plot: in the face of a powerful regime, the narrator follows the dystopia's norms; then, some possibilities for resistance arise because of cracks in the power structure […]*"* (Stillman & Johnson, 1994, 70-71). Therefore, escape seems possible in spite of the authoritarian politics and the repressive rules, which can be

distinguished as a utopian element within the dystopia itself.

Besides, the frontier between utopia and dystopia is quite blurred in *The Handmaid's Tale* as in many other dystopian works, as assumed by Kumar: "Dystopia is not so much the opposite of utopia as its shadow. It emerged in the wake of utopia and has followed it ever since. So close are the genres that it is not always clear what is a utopia and what a dystopia" (2013, 19). Atwood herself considered a new way of defining those genres and states: "Ustopia is a word I made up by combining utopia and dystopia—the imagined perfect society and its opposite—because, in my view, each contains a latent version of the other*"* (2015, 13). The possibility of resistance and the hope of getaway are indeed elements that belong to utopian aspirations. Utopia and dystopia are genuinely intertwined in Atwood's novel, which contains a few subtle utopian optimistic prospects that are allowed to shine through the grim dystopian plot. Those elements specifically will be the center of this research paper. Moreover, in spite of the various typical dystopian characteristics the novel comprehends, it has its own specificities, as Ketterer states: "Atwood's dystopia must be distinguished from the traditional kind as a particular variant of what I shall term a 'Contextual Dystopia' […]" (1989, 213). Indeed, Atwood is not only interested in the past and the former context of the narration, but also in the future and what will succeed after the tale, which makes it an uncommon writing of its kind: "This kind of writing, critical and ambiguous and mainly produced by feminist writers, has become the preferred form for an expression of struggle and resistance" (Baccolini, 2004, 520).

Therefore, in both media, Offred has a strong utopian will to resist the established power and the constant domination that is imposed on her. Gilead's dystopian society, which she thus tries to fight relentlessly, subjects her in almost every aspect of her life. Nevertheless, Offred's degree of assertiveness has been questioned by many critics since the novel's publication, as Weiss points out as well:

> "One of the major areas of debate among scholars of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* is the question of Offred's heroism. Is she a valiant rebel challenging the regime's domination and oppression? Or is she a powerless victim of Gilead's oppression? Or is she instead a willing or unwitting participant in the regime?" (2009, 120).

For that reason, it is worthwhile to analyze to what extent she defies the regime through an analysis of its means of control in both media. The fact is that the novel and the series differ in many ways in their illustration of Offred's sense of defiance. On the one hand, in the novel, one can observe Offred's internal rebellion as a struggle to survive and to cope with her reality.

However, she passively responds to that repressive power, since she never gets bold enough to take concrete actions against the system. She thus forges an indirect form of resistance in silence and stoicism. She mostly devotes herself to an exercise of survival by keeping her sanity intact, through the stories and anecdotes she tells herself (Hansot, 1994, 57). Moreover, as Cataldo herself argues quoting Baccolini, Offred is self-centered in her resistance against the patriarchy: "Offred is not heroic; rather she lacks courage, tends to compromise, and is full of unsolved contradictions and selfish fears" (2013, 171). Nevertheless, she still embodies a rebellious figure, and her reflections are important as they "constitute a site of resistance and struggle against the obliteration of individuality the regime enforces" (Baccolini qtd. in Cataldo, 2013, 171). In the novel, she thus appears to be externally compliant, but still uses her inner-self as a means of defiance. On the other hand, in the series, this rebellion is gradually externalized in many regards. As the series evolves, she tends to become more confident and to take her fate into her own hands, as she tries to challenge the power which is imposed on her in an active way. She does not only attempt to survive, but rather to create a genuine resistance against patriarchal repression. She thus has different ways to oppose the regime that encloses her, but, in both media, Offred's intrinsic hope and her will to regain a sense of selfness are central elements in her fight. In a nutshell, Offred goes through a discernible evolution in the novel and the series and leads her resistance in distinct but yet forceful ways, which will be the focus of this dissertation.

The main aim of this research paper is thus to determine whether this dystopian narration eventually leaves some scope for utopian hope in spite of the quite pessimistic background it is framed over. A thorough analysis will be made to figure out to what extent both media differ in the matter, through their illustration of Offred's assertiveness in the face of a repressive regime. For that purpose, the next chapters will be devoted to a study of the way Offred relates to her self but also to people around her. Therefore, this leads to a final question, which is whether Offred will eventually manage to change the outcome of her story and escape from the dystopian circle that entraps her.

2. Analysis: The Various Aspects of Offred's Resistance

2.1 Offred's relation to her self

"I am no bird; and no net ensnares me;
I am a free human being with an independent will,
which I now exert to leave you"
— Charlotte Brontë (1847, 293)

To begin with, Offred's most intricate struggle in the Republic of Gilead is the way she perceives her "self" and identity, as these fundamental aspects as a human being are obliterated within this dystopian society. Therefore, she must undertake laborious efforts to maintain her lucidity and her determination to resist total erasure, while everything that defines her is being torn apart by the burdensome patriarchy she lives in.

2.1.1 Recreation of Identity

Gilead's regime has various ways to control individuals – most particularly women – within its dystopian society and, to this extent, dismantles their identity and most intrinsic being, as Stillman and Johnson equally argue: "Gilead also adopts measures specifically aimed against women, their individuality, and their identity" (1994, 73). In both media, Offred must constantly strive to regain a sense of self in such restrictive conditions of life. The Handmaids' Tale is indeed a "woman's tale of resistance" and survival within a grim reality which reduces human beings to mere commodities (Howells, 2018, 2).

The first aspect through which Gilead ensures its control is its rigid hierarchical system (YouTube, The Goods, 2017). There is a deep segregation between people, a division in casts, which makes human interactions very difficult:

> "The handmaid in Atwood's narrative is similarly objectified and silenced. The fundamentalist, totalitarian regime of Gilead has subjugated women, restricting them to limited roles of servitude – Handmaids, Wives, Aunts, Marthas, even Jezebels and valuing only their service or their reproductive capacity." (Falk Jones, 1991, 8).

People are defined by their usability, especially women, not by their identity nor as independent individuals, since "Women are much more controllable when they live within their appropriate boxes. As Offred knows, boundaries are crucial" (Raschke, 1995, 259). Moreover, the threat of total and definite erasure of identity lies in the fact that, if Offred dares to refuse the new identity

that is imposed on her, she might be declared an "Unwoman" and sent to the Colonies, as Raschke further argues: "And if the woman refuses the identity ascribed, she becomes a nonperson, a nothing. As a Handmaid, Offred's function is to reproduce; that is her definition in life" (1995, 259).

Furthermore, uniforms are also part of this hierarchization within society (YouTube, The Goods, 2017). Human beings cannot distinguish themselves from others, which is a strong means of power for the regime as well, as it imposes its own social order to keep individuals under control. The differences between human beings, as well as their particularities, are wiped out. The most appalling aspect of these codes is the white wings hiding the Handmaids' faces and restricting their view (Cataldo, 2013, 161). In the TV series, this visual limitation appears on screen thanks to the use of the camera's type of shot, that is, the "shallow-depth of field focus"[1], as Renée mentions: "Morano and Watkinson use it to obscure the perspective of the viewer, because the perspective of the characters, namely Offred, is obscured" (2017). This way of filming helps to depict the perspective of Offred as a victim of the totalitarian patriarchy she experiences, since the audience gets access to the same restricted viewpoint as the protagonist through those shots. This enhances the limited amount of knowledge she has access to as well as her struggle to go beyond that constraint.

There is also a significant emphasis on colors in the novel and the series. Miller's adaptation makes those colors stand out on screen and uses their visual meaning to a great extent, as clothing is color-coded. The overall tone of the series is yellowish, greyish and blue, which reflects the regime's segregation, following the uniforms' colors. These are pale, sickening tones, and there is no brightness nor vivid colors of life or joy, which intensifies the general suffocating atmosphere which affects Offred. Moreover, most scenes are quite dark, which is probably meant to reflect the character's inner struggle, misery and the oppression of the regime. Light only comes from natural sources, as to induce that, although Offred is entrapped in that dismal society, utopian hope is in the background and still succeeds to shine through the dystopian obscure haze. In the series, one can thus notice the importance of visual storytelling (lighting, costumes, etc.) as it suggests many clues of underlying meaning to the audience, as well as the ideological ideas the series intends to convey (Benshoff, 2016, 34).

[1] "A shallow DoF means you can deliberately blur out details in either the background or foreground of the scene, allowing you to draw the viewer's attention to one particular subject or part of your scene. Therefore, a shallow DoF is good for close ups of faces and creating a sense of intimacy around the focal point within your shot". Definition retrieved from https://www.canon.com.au/explore/glossary/shallow-dof. Accessed 9 May 2019.

Moreover, the Handmaids' names become another means of control, since they are identified as properties and objectified, which makes them less than human beings: "Her own name has been taken from her, replaced by a patronymic possessive-Of-fred, suggesting also "offered". Without a name or voice, the handmaid is an object" (Falk Jones, 1991, 8). In addition to having lost their names, women are censored since free-speech has been prohibited as well, and there is no place for women's voices in Gilead anymore, as Falk Jones further argues: "Women, no longer allowed to read, write or think, have lost their voices" (1991, 8). Literature has been destroyed, and language is restricted to some biblical expressions ("Praise be", "Blessed day", "Under his eye") which make every exchange impersonal and neutral. Speech is formalized and narrowed, imposing Gilead's limitation and preventing individuals from any rebellious communication. These restrictions on freedom of speech create a constant fear to speak in a "deviant" way and therefore of being punished (YouTube, The Goods, 2017). Controlling speech is gradually leading to the control of thoughts, as people are constrained by coded interactions that entrap them, which is an aspect Offred will constantly fight throughout the novel and the series, thanks to her mental play with language.

The last and most significant aspect of control in Gilead is the crushing patriarchy Offred lives in (YouTube, The Goods, 2017), as men dominate society and take decisions about the way women should live, restricting their free-will and independency to better dominate them. They strip them of their rights and identities to rule over society without protestations. They forbid anything that can make them independent (money) or enable them to think freely and keep a critical stance (literacy). The Handmaids live in captivity, as they are kept in their Commander's house, and can witness the destruction of their former cities and familiar places. The regime attempts to erase the past to better tighten its grip on individuals, and, as a consequence, there is no "sense of belonging" anymore, since sites of memory are disappearing (YouTube, The Goods, 2017). Train stations are controlled, cultural sites (such as universities, churches or cultural monuments) are destroyed, and Handmaids like Offred are not allowed to "[…] walk down the streets alone or go any farther than the limits imposed upon them […]" (Cataldo, 2013, 161). Offred is confined in a restrained area and it makes no doubt that her occasional trips are no more than an illusion of faint liberty, to better control individuals: "Now and again we vary the route; there's nothing against it, as long as we stay within the barriers. A rat in a maze is free to go anywhere, as long as it stays inside the maze" (*THT*, 254). These physical limitations, added to the psychological ones, thus form an entire part of Offred's

confinement and sense of enclosure, which she relentlessly resists. As Raschke summarizes, "It all works together in creating Gilead's story, which can mean only one thing—Gilead's version of the story", which Offred refuses recklessly to recognize as her own truth (1995, 258).

Consequently, within the context of Gilead's dystopian society described in the novel and its cinematic adaptation, and faced with these various aspects of oppression, Offred makes permanent efforts in an attempt to recreate her identity and find back a sense of self. Therefore, some acts of utopian resistance can be noticed. However, the protagonist's utopian will to resist appears distinctly in the novel and the series. Whereas in the novel the main character's rebellious attitude is rather insinuated and tenuous to discern, it tends to be much more conspicuous in the series adaptation, as will be further developed. Margaret Atwood besides describes the utopian elements of her novel stating that: "[…] There are two: one is in the past—the past that is our own present. The second is placed in a future beyond the main story by the Afterword at the end of the book, which describes a future in which Gilead—the tyrannical republic of The Handmaid's Tale—has ended […]" (2015, 57).

As regards Offred's past, Hansot suggests that the protagonist makes an internal inquiry and, "[in] […] her isolation Offred elaborates 'selves' for her own sanity […]" (1994, 57). She tells herself stories and merges them with an interrogation of her present as she tries to interpret the behaviors she tended to ignore in the past. Her new attitude regarding the circumstances she endures as well as her reminiscences are both acts of "hidden resistance" and "an exercise in survival" (Hansot, 1994, 59), and therefore of hope if related to Atwood's definition. Remembering her past helps her to cope with her present as she finds an alternative to it and offers a possibility to go indirectly against what is imposed on her. Her privileges and identity from the time before might have been stripped away, but she thus reshapes herself as a new being in the restrictive and harsh reality of Gilead. In order to survive and break away from the regime's mold, she resists Gilead's tyranny by telling her tale and internally recreates her own version of reality, as Howells points out: "Marginalized and disempowered by Gilead's repressive social policies and its fundamentalist patriarchal representations of womanhood, Offred tells her tale of gendered struggle for survival as a speaking subject. She vigorously resists the state's view of women as commodities […]" (2018, 6).

Hogsette equally discusses the fact that her storytelling is a strong means of resistance, as she goes against Gilead's imposed truth and creates a story of her own: "It would appear that

by telling her story, Offred reconstructs her subjectivity and articulates her own alternative perception of reality" (1997, 264). She finds a sense of self back as an independent speaking subject and shares her story in a world that forbids such emancipation. This resistance in the novel appears only to the readers though, as she never acts it out, but only through her imaginative mind: "[…] in the blank spaces of her highly routinized existence, when enforced passivity frees her from performing the handmaid's role, she undertakes a sustained and silent interrogation of her former and present personae" (Hansot, 1994, 58). Offred indeed keeps silent and relatively passive in her revolt, and secretly preserves her sanity while performing the role Gilead is expecting from her as a means of survival, as Howells specifies as well: "Her problem within the catastrophe of Gilead is how to survive psychologically. Never openly rebellious (a useless strategy if one intends to last) Offred survives by devising her private revisionary script which continually challenges Gilead's master discourse" (2018, 9).

Hence, as Howells (2018) indicates, Offred's priority is physical and mental survival as she has been deprived of everything that characterized her as an independent individual. She thus fights, encouraged by her survival instinct, to keep that individuality untouched in spite of the underlying danger and threat of the regime's violence. However, Howells further adds: "Only at the end does she lose this vitality and succumb to fatigue and indifference […]" (2018, 8). In the novel, her internal struggle to resist the regime' eradication of her identity does not lead her to actual resistance and she does not choose to act on her destiny, but rather capitulates in the face of oppression as she is "rescued by the plot mechanism […] and her story ends with an unexpected revival of hope" (Howells, 2018, 9). This revival of hope, related to a possible escape gate and better future as Atwood previously mentioned, is thus not due to her assertive behavior since she abandoned the idea of resistance by the end of the novel, and let her fate "into the hands of strangers" (*THT*, 453). Eventually, in the novel, her desire to keep a sense of individuality and to survive as an independent human being actually fails: "Offred does try to retain some sense of herself as a distinct individual differentiated from others, but that self breaks down inexorably and in the most minute detail" (Stillman & Johnson, 1994, 73). Offred tries to survive and to preserve her most intrinsic being but fails at the enterprise because her fear of the regime is too great for her to keep nurturing that inner strength and determination. She might internally show resistance, but her external compliance to keep surviving under the regime finally turns her into a complicit victim of the system:

> "Offred also fails to maintain her identity – to structure a sense of self, to connect with others, and to act – because in Gilead even apparent forms of resistance or attempts to create, maintain, or grasp an identity frequently turn into complicity with the regime" (Stillman & Jonhson, 1994, 75).

Moreover, she is fully aware of that failure in the novel (Falk Jones, 1991, 9), suggesting that her story is far from being the one of an heroic political activist: "I wish it showed me in a better light, if not happier, then at least more active, less hesitant, less distracted by trivia. I wish it had more shape" (*THT*, 409). Hogsette implies as well that Offred disregards the potential impact of her own narration as a testimony of woman's resistance at some point: "Even as she narrates her story, Offred contemplates the futility of speaking out. She considers withdrawing into her self and dismissing any responsibility she may feel toward contributing to the cause of liberating women" (1997, 275), and further uses this particular extract as an example of her loss of faith:

> "I don't have to tell it. I don't have to tell anything, to myself or to anyone else. I could just sit here, peacefully. I could withdraw. It's possible to go so far in, so far down and back, they could never get you out" (*THT*, 346-347).

In spite of her former drive to resist Gilead, in the novel, she eventually avoids getting involved personally in the Resistance and chooses to ignore and avoid any responsibility instead of taking risks, just as she did in the time before Gilead. She recognizes the fact that she failed in her attempt to revolt against that oppressive society and to preserve her identity, but still, she laments her inaction because she is aware that she spoiled her chance to take action and change her fate: "I've been wasting my time. I should have taken things into my own hands while I had the chance. […] I should have paid attention" (*THT*, 450-451).

On the contrary, in the series, Offred keeps determined in her struggle against Gilead's patriarchy and the audience can observe that strength through the numerous voice-overs during which Offred speaks out her defiant willingness to resist the oppressor, as Poniewozik declares in his review for *The New York Times*:

> "Offred is a captive. Nevertheless, she persists. She keeps a spark of self cupped in her hands. The series relies heavily on her narration, but not just for exposition. It's how we hear her true voice, defiant, spirited, even mordantly funny. Passing the hooded bodies of three men hanged by the government — a priest, a doctor and a gay man — she comments: 'I think I heard that joke once. This wasn't the punch line.'" (2017).

In Miller's adaptation, Offred remains lucid and keeps a certain distance with her reality, partly thanks to her sense of humor and ironic wits, but also thanks to the way she relates to people around her, as will be further discussed in this dissertation. She actually manages to keep that

inner strength and to translate it into effective resistance. For that reason, all the cinematic aspects the series exploits are meaningful, and the visual codes of each episode are to be interpreted by the audience. They might help to seize how Offred's internal resistance, illustrated by the voice-overs which parallel Offred's inner reflection in the novel, is translated into an external one. While the character can constantly share her thoughts with the readers, the screen adaptation must seek new ways to make the audience grasp Offred's rebellious mindset. Indeed, thanks to the actress' role-playing and general setting – such as her tone of voice, her facial expressions, the looks she gives when she interacts with people around her, the background colors or the play with shadows and lights, for example – Offred's rebellion appears on screen under a brand-new light. The character's intense desire to act out her emotions, as well as her yearning for freedom that the audience can observe through those visual cues, is enhanced, notably thanks to the numerous close-ups, as Reilly mentions:

> "The primary challenge for Morano was turning what she calls this 'internal, cerebral story' full of flashbacks and voiceover into visually arresting episodes. She opted for intense close-ups of Moss' expressive face and, along with the wardrobe department, paid careful attention to color" (2017).

By contrast with the novel, these hints of Offred's internal struggle to recreate her identity will gradually grow more powerful in the series, to end up with Offred's unrelenting externalized rebellion, as will be further analyzed in the following chapters.

2.1.1.1 Flashbacks Are Surfacing

As previously mentioned, one of the first elements to consider as part of utopian hope within Offred's storytelling is the conception of the past. In both narrations, the main character is brought back to some flashbacks that help her to deal with her condition. In the novel, resistance subtly appears in the act of remembering as the character pays meticulous attention to everything that surrounds her: "That ability to summon up absent presences is one of Offred's major survival strategies, testimony to the power of discourse as an act of personal survival" (Howells, 2018, 10). Through Offred's imaginative efforts and reconstructions as a partial testimony of the time before, Offred manages to resist Gilead's erasure of the past and of her former and true being, as Hershman mentions as well: "They [Offred's memories], along with her act of storytelling, are what bring her back to the realization that life can and should be different and that she does have the power to fight back" (2018, 63). Her memories and the act of storytelling are Offred's ways to recreate her identity and assert herself. This prevails both for the novel and the series, since:

> "[…] Offred survives confinement by envisioning a utopian other place to which she might escape. This 'other place' is her pre-Gilead past […] She craves these glimpses of normality as others crave the perfect utopian society. They provide the utopian space within Atwood's critical dystopia […]" (Tolan, 2005, 21).

Offred's memories are thus tiny elements of utopian hope that shine through the novel and the series' plot.

However, in the novel, these reminiscences and sites of memory are gradually obliterated and crushed down by the Gileadan society, and Offred eventually surrenders in her attempts to keep these memories vivid. She finally chooses to live fully in the present, which means that she gives up on her former life and freedom. She must indeed make a distinction between present and past in order to survive in a society which seeks to erase her former being to reshape her in its own present vision, as Hershman states: "Throughout *The Handmaid's Tale*, June must recognize her clear before and her clear after and must use one to survive and resist the other" (2018, 57). However, towards the end of the novel, Offred lets her present take over her past, as she commits herself in her relationship with Nick and seems to forget, whether willingly or not, the very memories that gave her the strength to keep preserving her identity and free will. Her memories are a central part of her resistance, as they remind her of who she truly is, that she has a past that built her as a unique human being. Nevertheless, she is not determined enough to face Gilead's overwhelming brainwashing, as Stillman and Johnson argue: "Throughout the book she tries to hold on to these, but they fade away. […] She feels erased by time, no longer a presence in her daughter's existence, when she is eventually shown a recent picture of her daughter" (1994, 73). Eventually, Offred does not manage to draw her strength from these memories, not only because they gradually fade away under Gilead's repression, but also because they are rooted in pain and a deep sense of loss, as Howells discusses as well:

> "Yet such returns are shot through with ambivalence; they may be 'blessings' […], but they are also acute reminders of loss and powerlessness. Moira's story is not one of triumph, Offred's mother has been sent to the colonies, and […] the photograph spells a double erasure for both Offred and her daughter" (2018, 10).

Whereas, in the novel memories are linked with pain and are eventually forgotten, in the series, Offred truly draws her inner strength from these memories and uses them actively to foster her will to resist, as Hershman equally argues: "It is *because* June remembers what freedom felt like, […] that she establishes a lens through which she is able to find the courage for resistance in her after" (2018, 56-57). In other words, thanks to her remembrance and the

preservation of her identity through the indefectible consciousness of her past, Offred manages to fight her oppressor and takes advantage of that inner strength to take the lead and speak out as a rebellious figure in Miller's adaptation.

Besides, on the one hand, in the novel, Offred proceeds to the reminiscence of her past solitarily, as Hansot indicates: "But if resistance […] requires shared understandings and collective behaviors, Offred's solitary rememberings fall short, at best a necessary preparation for this more public behavior" (1994, 59). On the other hand, in the series, she shares histories of the past with other women. Indeed, during the last episode, Offred passes on a secret package that contains a bundle of letters, testimonies of other women living under Gilead's yoke. Therefore, not only does she share her story thanks to her storytelling, but, through this emblematic act, she also shares the ones of those other survivors, which is an act of collective resistance. The Offred "of the series" is not selfish and self-centered like the Offred "of the novel", but rather embodies a figure of political resistance, struggling for the common good.

As regards the cinematic techniques implemented to render Offred's reminiscences and inner struggle, one can notice the numerous jump-cuts[2], match cuts[3], abrupt transitions and various sound effects accompanying those flashbacks, to establish a clear changeover between the scenes. These techniques seem to be used to recreate Offred's consciousness more accurately, since, as McFarlane specifies in his study on film adaptation: "Those words spoken in voice-over accompany images which necessarily take on an objective life of their own. One no longer has the sense of everything being filtered through the consciousness of the protagonist speaker […]" (1996, 16). The transitions between those scenes are indeed intended to recreate a continuous flow as in the character's own mind and render the original subjective account of the protagonist. This is one of the most essential elements of this dystopia, as Offred's self-consciousness is her major place of struggle and resistance. That recollection of flashbacks creates a flow and a guiding thread, as though the audience was following the character's stream of thoughts. This process is named continuity editing[4], which means that the audience observes

[2] "A rapid, jerky transition from one frame to the next, either disrupting the flow of time or movement within a scene or making an abrupt transition from one scene to another". Definition retrieved from: https://community.dur.ac.uk/m.p.thompson/filmterms.htm. Accessed 7 May 2019.
[3] "A match cut is any transition, audio or video, that uses the elements from the previous scene to fluidly bring the viewer through to the next scene […]". Definition retrieved from: https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/match-cuts-creative-transitions-examples/. Accessed 7 May 2019.
[4] "The conventions through which the impression of an unbroken continuum of space and time is suggested, constructing a consistent storyline out of takes made at different times". Definition retrieved from: https://community.dur.ac.uk/m.p.thompson/filmterms.htm. Accessed 7 May 2019.

a recollection of various shots, apparently unrelated as it covers different periods, but it eventually connects into one consistent story narrated by the character. In the series, the audience can notice as well a change of colors when flashbacks appear on screen, as colors are more vivid, emphasizing the past freedom of Offred. Moreover, the same shallow depth of field technique as mentioned before is used to render partial images of her flashbacks, and to suggest the protagonist's limited viewpoint she was responsible for in the past. Renée highlights the fact that this type of shot is also used to "make a connection between the age of Gilead and the time before its existence, both of which seem to suffer from 'limited perspective'" (2017). Indeed, through those flashbacks Offred realizes her lack of action while she still had freedom. This emphasizes her recurring inaction in the novel, by contrast with her growing political involvement in the series, as will be further developed.

Finally, the use of various emblematic music choices for those flashbacks also plays a significant role in Miller's adaptation, as Dray discusses:

> "I often ask myself what Offred would be listening to if she could press play in a scene. It helps the audience relate to her and reminds us that she came from our world – but it also helps illustrate the not-so-distant past during the flashbacks, amplifying the freedom felt in pre-Gilead times" (2018).

Those music choices are thus partly made to make the audience feel closer to the protagonists and create a sense of disturbing resemblance with the audience's own world, as Berkotwitz argues: "The producers have done well by adding some sonic color to the palette. Flashbacks that find June (Elisabeth Moss) rocking out to Gwen Stefani and Kylie Minogue both clarify the timeline, and lift viewers briefly into the light" (2018). The various songs' lyrics convey some nuance as they add depth to the global meaning and generally reflect the emotions, thoughts or contextualize the experience of the protagonist. In this case, the audience, identifying with artists of its own generation, thus identifies with the protagonist herself and then feels equally overwhelmed by the suffocating atmosphere of Gilead and this feeling of captivity. Those music cues appear regularly during the series –not only during flashbacks – and help the audience to grasp in a better way Offred's drive to resist and to fight back the oppressor.

Hence, all these elements help to create the story's essence, as there is more to say than what is explicit, just as in the novel. Those aspects – such as colors, types of shots or soundtracks – indeed give meaning in a society that stifles individuals' freedom of speech, since what Offred feels or is not allowed to say is still reflected through visual means or sounds. In

this regard, the series tends to illustrate more explicitly Offred's growing sense of rebellion and assertiveness as compared to the novel, since the means implemented enhance in many ways her restless fight and bold resistance.

2.1.1.2 A Name of One's Own

As mentioned previously, the Handmaids in Gilead are stripped of their names since they become the property of their oppressors, as Hogsette discusses: "[…] the Handmaids become the possession of their respective Commanders, and their subsequent new names reflect the way in which the Republic structures its social hierarchy around levels of subservience and ownership" (1997, 268). In consequence of that loss of selfness, the characters struggle to reassert their identities and singularities, which is a challenging and strenuous effort as their agency is utterly wiped out, as Raschke develops:

> "The Handmaids' names, formed by a preposition and its object, mark them not only as claimed property, but as non-subjects. […] By saying 'Of Fred' instead of 'I am of Fred,' the subject (of the sentence) is effaced, thus diminishing the chances of a Handmaid constructing herself as an 'I' (as a subject or a self). Total erasure" (1995, 259).

Therefore, in both media, the ability to share names appears as tiny cracks of hope in Gilead's bleak society, as Hansot equally argues: "The knowledge of real names constitutes a hidden transcript, a small deviance" (1994, 58). Asserting one's name is an act of defiance as it conveys an awareness of the past and of the characters' former identities. In the novel, although the reader can never be confident about Offred's real name (supposedly June), Offred still demonstrates its value in her storytelling:

> "Offred also insists on the importance of knowing what is in a name: 'Alma. Janine. Dolores. Moira. June.' But it is doubtful that the names Offred supplies are the 'real names.' If this is so, if the names too are a 'reconstruction,' then perhaps they serve as a palimpsest that supplies a means of resistance" (Raschke, 1995, 264).

She also reminds herself of her former name and therefore clings to the memory of an independent and free self: "I want to be valued, in ways that I am not; I want to be more than valuable. I repeat my former name, remind myself of what I once could do, how others saw me" (*THT*, 152). She knows her name gives her status and some consideration back, as a valued human being. For that reason, she tells her name to Nick, because she wants to feel "known": "I tell him my real name, and feel that therefore I am known. I act like a dunce" (*THT*, 414). Nevertheless, she is aware that she is taking risks, and that his sympathy for her could be

misleading. Choosing to remain in her complacency, she does not seek to figure out whether he is honest or not and, therefore, if this is worth taking the risk of revealing her true self. More importantly, she never shares her actual name with anyone else, because she does not manage to connect with people around her, not even the readers – who must guess her identity.

In the series, the fundamental role of names also appears but in a different way, as Offred shows cleverness and resilience, which she lacks in the novel. At some point, after she told Nick her name as in the novel, Offred wants to know his real name as well, because she realizes she can hardly trust him and that he needs to demonstrate his loyalty if he wants her to be his ally. She proves him that, in order to resist the oppressor, mutual trust and solidarity are fundamental, and she thus pushes him towards resistance by her side. The knowledge of one's name, therefore, becomes a way for her to connect with others in her resistance but also to evaluate their sincerity and allegiance. Moreover, she claimed her name in front of him not only to feel "known" and valued, but mostly because she needed to voice her frustration and eagerness to resist the oppressor by asserting herself. Indeed, she decided to assert her name in front of Nick because of the intense frustration she felt after she met the Ambassador of the Mexican Trade Delegation, and had to say she was satisfied with her situation in order to please Serena and the Commander. She had the chance to reveal to the Ambassador, a person external to Gilead, all the sufferings she endures, but she did not seize the opportunity out of dread of what might have happened to her if she did. Therefore, filled with anger and frustration she burst into Nick's room and asserted her name in an explosion of rage.

Another example of the fundamental role of names in the series is when Ofglen tells Offred that her real name is Emily, which creates a strong bond between the two protagonists of the resistance movement. From that moment on, they know they can rely on each other, and that they will stick together in their struggle. Moreover, towards the end of the series, when Offred reads the letters of all the other women trying not to be forgotten in Gilead, they all begin their note by asserting their names, because it is a way for them to connect with others and to find a sense of self and identity back. By sharing their names, they hope they will be remembered and that their personal stories will be shared in the future, as a testimony of their experience as individual beings in this totalitarian regime. In the series, characters thus assert their names as a means of bold defiance and resistance against the regime. All the resistant characters use the knowledge of names as a weapon against Gilead's tyranny, while in the

novel, those names, especially Offred's, remain hidden remnants of a past which is deeply undermined.

As evoked before, in the novel the reader actually never really knows Offred's original name, as Cataldo argues as well: "[…] the narrating voice belongs to the protagonist herself, which makes her more than just an anonymous character, although the reader never learns her real name" (158, 2013). Moreover, in the novel, the name "June" only appears twice, among which once in a list of other Handmaids' names, but the reader has no real clue that June is actually hers. Offred seems to keep her name as a secret memory of a distant past:

> "I keep the knowledge of this name like something hidden, some treasure I'll come back to dig up, some day. I think of this name as buried. This name has an aura around it, like an amulet, some charm that's survived from an unimaginably distant past. I lie in my single bed at night, with my eyes closed, and the name floats there behind my eyes, not quite within reach, shining in the dark" (*THT*, 130).

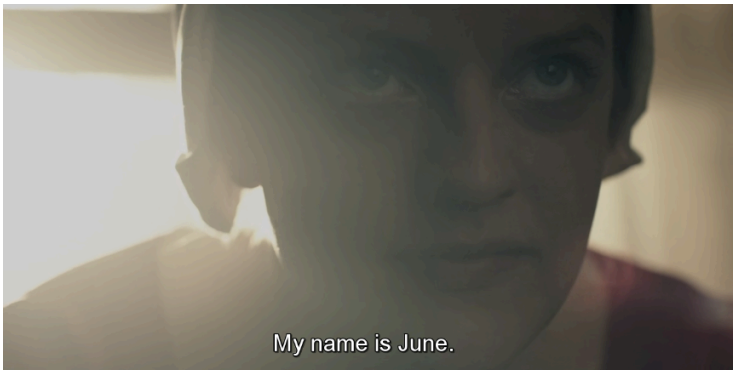
She never manages to dig up that buried part of her identity and fails at reconnecting with her former self as an act of resistance against her subordination to patriarchy. She does not dare to resist the new identity Gilead forces upon her, nor manages to reassert herself as a free individual. In the series, right from the end of the first episode, she states strongly the names of her daughter and husband, and the episode's last shot frames her asserting her own real name in a close-up on her determined expression. By contrast with the novel, she thus openly asserts herself as a free being and makes clear that she intends to keep her identity untouched and to fight back, as Howell discusses as well: "At the end of the first episode, though it is forbidden, Offred tells us her true name, June. This voicing of intention is amplified by Lesley Gore singing over the closing credits, 'You Don't Own Me'" (2019, 8). The song's lyrics are indeed quite representative of Offred determination to survive, as Dray asserts:

> "'Don't tell me what to do, and don't tell me what to say, and when I go out with you, don't put me on display…'
> A song that roars with defiance in the face of socially ingrained sexism, this may be an obvious choice for the first episode – but it's perfect, nonetheless" (2018).

Howells further argues that June, as compared to Atwood's novel, is "increasingly heroic" and "less inclined to silence and inwardness" (2019, 8) as, right from the series' beginning, Offred speaks out her revolt through the bold assertation of her name. The audience can already witness her defiant attitude, which suggests that it is only the beginning of her resistance.



Season 1, episode 1, 55'38"



Season 1, episode 1, 55'50"

Furthermore, the setting accentuates other aspects such as a light and shadow effect through a backlighting which frames Offred's bowed figure that sticks out in the room. This emphasizes her oppressed and docile condition and the confinement she is struggling with. It also creates an opposition with her reflections and the fact that she eventually asserts her name, looking determinedly upwards. One can see that she is still aware that she has a past since she already asserts it more strongly than in the novel through that voicing of thoughts, and this is further underlined by the whole setting. This opposition between darkness and light is indeed very meaningful since it emphasizes those dualities that are suggested throughout the narrative, as McFarlane also underlines: "[…] contrasts of lighting, one of the codes which most forcefully articulates the oppositions which are at the heart of the film" (1996, 57). They reinforce, on the one hand, the contradiction between her reflections that are a site of struggle as they allow her a form of escape, and, on the other hand, the general sense of oppression as she is kept in captivity in that austere bedroom. In addition, the camera is framing her from a low angle, that is, below the subject matter, which is supposed to enhance the character's power. Here again, a sense of duality can be discerned as she is looking downwards but also trying to reassert herself through her thoughts and reminiscences of the past, while the camera seems to elevate her position during this inner reflection.

Eventually, asserting June's name actually conveys a duality in itself which hardly appears in the novel, that is, the struggle between the protagonist's inner and outer selves. This

alternation between those two names enhances the protagonist's forced compliance and bursts of defiance, which is a dialectic reflecting her constant struggle, as Howell indicates:

> "[…] HULU's series not only restores Offred's voice to the center of its storyworld, but showrunner Bruce Miller envisions that voice as a distinct character, June. For Miller, the closest relationship and the biggest conflict… is between June and Offred: Offred is pushing compliance while June is pushing rebellion, and trying to live even while… trying to survive" (Howell, 2019, 7-8).

In the novel, the compliant Offred seems to play the main role through her silent revolt as an exercise of survival, and she eventually surrenders to the regime's oppression without letting her true self speak out. On the contrary, in the series, June is gradually empowered as she becomes an emblematic figure of resistance and assertiveness, showing an indefectible hope as regards to her future. June manages to speak out Offred's internal revolt, while she never truly shows up in the novel and remains only a potential rebellious self.

2.1.1.3 Language Through The Tale

As already discussed, in Gilead's regime, women are not allowed to read or write, and therefore, to think freely: "[…] the loss of literacy imposed upon women in this dystopian universe becomes the regime's most vicious weapon" (Hoge, 2018). However, as tiny cracks emerge in the regime's power, language still appears in Offred's tale as a potential weapon against her subservience: "This repression of language serves only to make the language and storytelling that is available even more powerful because it is controlled" (Hershman, 2018, 62). For Offred, language is a form of escape and resistance in both media, especially because literacy is supposed to be prohibited to women. Thanks to her play with language, she detaches herself from her present condition, and her mental exercise helps her disconnect from her bleak reality: "Another escape is through language. Language, she ironically observes, is a litany she uses to compose herself" (Hansot, 1994, 62). In the novel, she compares her "self" to something she must compose, just as we compose language, which reflects that language is fully part of her identity: "I wait. I compose myself. My self is a thing I must now compose, as one composes a speech. What I must present is a made thing, not something born" (*THT*, 104).

Through the way she exploits language, she recreates a reality of her own, her own truth, as she keeps a certain distance with her experience as a Handmaid and puts her world under a new perspective. This way, she resists Gilead's crushing grip on free-speech:

> "For Offred, playing with such slippage is not just an alternative system of representation or a way to fill her time, but a means of subversion and a technique for survival. Her 'dialogic word play' resists the 'official speech' of Gilead" (Raschke, 1995, 263).

She evaluates how speech is controlled and restricted, reflects on those facts, and keeps a critical stance as one can notice through this extract:

> "*Things*, the word she used when whatever it stood for was too distasteful of filthy or horrible to pass her lips. A successful life for her was one that avoided *things*, excluded *things*. Such *things* do not happen to nice women" (*THT*, 87).

Words in Gilead are indeed chosen carefully to correspond to the regime's ideology, which Offred is deeply aware of. For that reason, she questions her reality thanks to that critical standpoint she manages to preserve. This is a form of freedom for her, since, although she is verbally restricted, she is still able to think as an independent individual:

> "[…] the act of storytelling affords Offred the opportunity to interrogate her world, her identity, and the position of that identity in her world. Working from a deconstructive theory of language, LaCombe suggests that language use is both politically oppressive and, ultimately for Offred, self-liberating" (Hogsette, 1997, 264).

Offred also thinks about forbidden words, those which became useless, meaningless in her new world. This way, she acknowledges the autonomy and privileges she enjoyed in the past, when all those words meant something and were related to free-will and independence, such as the simple fact of having a *job*, for example:

> "It's strange, now, to think about having a job. *Job*. It's a funny word. It's a job for a man. […] All those women having jobs: hard to imagine, now, but thousands of them had jobs, millions. It was considered the normal thing. Now it's like remembering the paper money, when they still had that" (*THT*, 266-267).

As she reflects about those past realities, she gradually builds a testimony about the times before Gilead, and, through the affirmation of that past, she creates a new awareness aimed against Gilead's imposed ideology. Offred plays wittingly with language as words are one of the only remains of the past, and of a forgotten reality she clings to, as Bouson indicates as well: "They are also signposts to the reality she is determined to hold on" (1993, 149). She dwells on an obliterated past which is still vivid in her mind only, and therefore emerges as a subversive backlash against Gilead's attempt to erase past customs and meanings:

> "She discovers that just as Gilead uses language to construct one version of reality, she too can use it to construct another, subversive or, at least, counter version, one that directly attacks the version that Gilead promotes. By telling her story, Offred fashions an alternative reality and forces it into the world, into history and thus makes possible social and political change" (Hogsette, 1997, 270).

Her mental exercise as well ensures that she is able to preserve her sanity, her mental abilities and that her intelligence as a human being is unaffected, although everything that makes her human has been taken away from her: "These are the tests, and I am sane. Sanity is a valuable possession; I hoard it the way once hoarded money. I save it, so I will have enough, when the time comes" (*THT*, 168). Her mental liberty, therefore, becomes her lifeline and a source of hope, and for that reason, she explores the new possibilities of the multiple meanings of words: "She loves words, she loves to listen to them, to play with their meanings, to explore the play, to take figurative words literally and literal words figuratively, to examine roots and derivations" (Stillman & Johnson, 1994, 72). For example, this rational and cognitive drill appears in the novel through the following extract:

> "I sit in the chair and think about the word *chair*. It can also mean the leader of a meeting. It can also mean a mode of execution. It is the first syllable in *charity*. It is the French word for flesh. None of these facts has any connection with the others. These are the kind of litanies I use, to compose myself" (*THT*, 168).

As Bouson argues, Offred uses words not only to go against Gilead's forced meanings, but also to keep the sense of control she still has access to, although limited: "Through her dialogic wordplay and focus on words, Offred not only registers her resistance to the official speech and totalizing discourse of the state, she also signals her desperate desire to retain some sense of control" (Bouson, 1993, 149). This sense of control helps her to create a mask, to behave like the regime wants her to, while she actually thinks otherwise.

In the novel, she plays with double meanings and makes subtle allusions to her resistance, although it remains a silent one: "There is something subversive about this garden of Serena's, a sense of buried things bursting upwards, wordlessly, into the light, as if to point, to say: Whatever is silenced will clamour to be heard, though silently" (*THT*, 234-235). This extract reflects Offred's unvoiced revolt and discourse of freedom which grows silently but still perseveres into the light (Howells, 2018, 6). She compares her own struggle with that garden, suggesting that her story might finally be heard in the future.

She also uses irony a great deal as a demonstration of her critical stance and wit, which opens a door for self-liberation, as Wagner-Lawlor argues:

> "The discovery of ironic double talk, the ability to communicate in a way that apparently toes the partly line while allowing for secondary meanings to resonate is crucial for Offred's shifting sense of position within Gilead. These fleeting moments of mutually acknowledged irony open a small space of freedom […]" (2003, 84-85)

For instance, when the Commander tells her he has a surprise for her, she answers: "'What's that?' I say. 'Chinese chequers?' I can take these liberties; he appears to enjoy them, especially after a couple of drinks. He prefers me frivolous" (*THT*, 355). Through this small defiance of language, Offred asserts herself and her free-will to some extent. Using her sense of humor proves her ability to resonate like an independent and mindful individual. Language play gives Offred some sense of freedom and autonomy. However, this sense of control and self-liberation through language seems to remain quite restrained in the novel. She allows herself a bit of humor now and then, but still, it is only because she knows the Commander tolerates and even likes her occasional grit. Most importantly, she does not take advantage of that critical ability to truly defy the system, as Stillman and Johnson argue:

> "But her critical play with language leads to no action – indeed, the play may seduce her into depoliticizing the implicit issue and into inaction. […] No amount of verbal construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction seems able to help Offred understand, communicate, or resist" (1994, 75).

Therefore, in the novel, Offred keeps a critical distance with Gilead's imposed meanings and language, which is a form of independence to some extent, but she does not go further than that. She imagines multiple possibilities and stories, which emphasize her ironical perception of her reality, but this leads her to non-commitment, as Wagner-Lawlor considers: "Offred's narrative is famously indeterminate; its very structure is determined by ironic provisionality, the refusal to commit to any one version. For that reason, it seems to me that despite all we know about Offred, she remains peculiarly distant" (2003, 86). Offred indeed creates various versions of her past as she mingles her memories with imaginary fancies and constructions, but this clever wordplay only encourages her into inertia. She never chooses any version of her mental fantasies, because choosing means engaging oneself:

> "The things I believe in can't all be true, though one of them must be. But I believe in all of them, all three versions of Luke, at one and the same time. This contradictory way of believing seems to me, right now, the only way I can believe in anything" (*THT*, 164).

Offred thus experiences a deep sense of duality, as Wagner-Lawlor further highlights: "This contradictory way of believing, itself fundamentally ironic, allows her again to resist choosing" (2003, 88). However, this refusal to accept any immutable truth is also a way to go against Gilead's controlled version of it. Offred chooses multiplicity over one imposed truth, which remains an act of resistance, although she avoids any choice-taking in the enterprise. Indeed, this form of awareness is self-liberating:

> "Throughout the novel Offred gradually learns not to accept 'authorized' versions of any story or text. In perhaps the deepest irony of the novel, *because* of Gilead, Offred understands what freedom was, and how limited it is now when she must risk so much to regain even a little. Self-awareness is the real gift of such scenes of irony, and ironized awareness eventually colors everything she says and, finally, does" (Wagner-Lawlor, 2003, 88).

Nevertheless, the fact is that she never does anything tangible to use efficiently that subversive awareness. As compared to the series, Offred's constant fear of choosing any side, or to compromise herself, is far from spurring her rebellious side: "Why am I frightened? I've crossed no boundaries, I've given no trust, taken no risk, all is safe. It's the choice that terrifies me. A way out, a salvation" (*THT*, 96).

Moreover, her awareness of language's possibilities does not lead her to connect with people around her and communicate with them: "Offred has a wry sense of humor, but she limits humor's subversive potentials by not using it in the presence of others at crucial points (such as her opening, mutually exploratory discussions with Ofglen)" (Stillman & Johnson, 1994, 75). As will be further illustrated, Offred indeed does not try to connect much with her fellow handmaids in the novel, and eventually avoids any form of rebellious communication. On the contrary, in the series, she rapidly realizes Ofglen is her ally, and that she can speak freely to her:

> "*Offred*: Do you think it's safe to talk here?
> *Ofglen*: If we're careful
> […]
> *Offred*: I was an assistant book editor. […] Once we did nine volumes on the history of falconry.
> *Ofglen*: Oh, man. Actually it sounds like it'd be fun to me right now.
> *Offred*: Yeah, it kind of sounds amazing.
> *Ofglen*: I worked at the university. Lecturer in cellular biology.
> *Offred*: Wow. I thought all the college professors were sent to The Colonies or…
> *Ofglen*: I have two good ovaries. So they were kind enough to overlook my sinful past. Lucky me."[5]

One can observe that their exchanges are natural, they casually talk and even joke together, which Offred never manages to do in the novel as she never trusts Ofglen enough to show her true self. Their relationship remains trivial, and Offred does not perceive their occasional talks as a possibility to share intimate thoughts or memories: "I know it, I can feel speech backing up inside me, it's so long since I've really talked with anyone. The terse whispered exchange with Ofglen, on our walk today, hardly counts" (*THT*, 287). While in the series, she connects with Ofglen quite rapidly, and exchanges with her subversive information about her past life, she never really engages in their relationship in the novel, and therefore never puts words on what she actually thinks. She keeps the remembrance of her past and her ironical wit well-

[5] "Birth Day." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 2, Hulu, 2017. 3'12".

hidden and struggles alone through that internal rebellion. She never externalizes the new meanings she creates nor shares the memories of her past with anyone, and therefore never gives a concrete shape to her rebellion.

Furthermore, in the novel, there is another example of Offred's failure to take advantage of the system's tiny cracks and to act rebelliously thanks to the power of language. For instance, when she is given the chance to write down a few words – which means transgressing the rules – while she is with the Commander during one of their illicit meetings, she does not seem convinced by the power of the words she puts down on paper. She acknowledges that the pen she holds is a tool of power and that literacy is supremacy, but still she talks about it as an unattainable possibility, as she muses:

> "I print the phrase carefully, copying it down from inside my head, from inside my closet. *Nolite te bastardes carborundorum*. Here, in this context, it's neither prayer nor command, but a sad graffiti, scrawled once, abandoned. The pen between my fingers is sensuous, alive almost, I can feel its power, the power of the words it contains. […] I envy the commander his pen. It's one more thing I would like to steal" (*THT*, 289).

When she writes down those meaningful words, instead of giving her power and confidence, they appear as devalued, meaningless just as a "sad graffiti", unnoticed and deprived of interest. Although she suggests that the commander's pen is a symbol of power, she is still under his control, the pen is not hers and, therefore, she cannot possess freedom. She wishes she could steal that power from the Commander, but yet she never takes concrete actions for that purpose. Besides, she is not writing thanks to her free and independent will, but because the Commander allows this act, which is then not a proper subversive act.

In the series, on the contrary, although she uses no pen, she scratches with the tip of a key a response to the Latin phrase in her closet: "*You are not alone*". This self-liberating act of writing empowers her to a great extent, since this sense of solidarity will be an essential factor in Offred's rebellion, as will be further developed in the next chapters. Therefore, in the series, the act of writing appears as a fierce weapon aimed against Gilead's patriarchy and enhances women's emancipation, as Hoge further argues:

> "[I]n Gilead, the written word in the hands of a women is explicitly a form of rebellion. Nowhere is this portrayed more powerfully than in episode ten, the first season's finale, when Offred finally opens the package from Mayday—the brown paper package she's literally risking her life to deliver—only to discover a bundle of letters" (2018).

In the tenth episode indeed, the power of words and storytelling is put forward as a means of feminine solidarity against the repressive patriarchal power: "Like the woman who left the

message in the closet, June and the other Handmaids find ways to tell their stories as well and, ultimately, find ways to retain or recreate their identities through their storytelling abilities" (Hershman, 2018, 62). As she scratches that message in her closet, Offred asserts her determination to fight back and to tackle the repression women suffer. When she then discovers other women's testimonies thanks to the bundle of letters she reads, the power of language finally appears most clearly as women's most powerful weapon. The fact of writing as a collective act of storytelling announces the rebellion that will follow and the protagonist's resistance: "*The Handmaid's Tale* shows us that there is a way to resist and that not only recognizing this oppression but sharing personal narratives of oppression is a large step in the direction of resistance and justice" (Hershman, 2018, 65).

To summarize, in both media, Offred uses language and storytelling to resist, since it helps her to preserve a connection with her past and gives her enough strength to endure her present: "June's act of storytelling gives her a way to not only connect herself with her before, but provides a way for June to use her before to understand and resist her present self and the post-apocalyptic after in which she finds herself" (Hershman, 2018, 62). However, while it remains an internalized process of resistance in the novel, she manages to act it out in the series. She materializes this act of storytelling as she actively shares her story with her fellows, deliberately writes a message in her closet and reads other women's testimonies. The act of writing, reading and sharing personal narratives in the series demonstrates that she boldly takes risks and uses literacy straightforwardly against the regime, which is a hint that she will soon get out of control, by contrast with the novel.

2.2 Offred's relationships

The second aspect in which Offred's assertiveness is much more striking on screen than in the novel can be found in her relationships. Due to the segregation created by the dystopian society she lives in, which most powerful tool is division, she does not have many possibilities to develop genuine relationships with people around her. The fact that she is being isolated and the general sense of anxiety that impregnates the atmosphere in the Republic of Gilead limit her will to act and to get involved in the rebellious movement "Mayday" (Hansot, 1994, 58). As Manoj Jacob argues, creating friendships is a perilous act under Gilead's regime: "Treachery is so ingrained in every aspect of life in Gilead, that Offred realizes that even considering the

act friendship is dangerous" (2015, 88). However, while in the novel she is quite detached from social interactions and avoids connecting with people out of fear of the regime, she seems much more willing to build a sense of cohesion and solidarity in order to use it as a strength in the TV series. Moreover, in the series, Offred takes advantage as well of her interactions with the powerful figures of the regime to defy the control which has been imposed on her. The following section thus illustrates how Offred gradually gets bolder and even empowers herself as a woman in her relationships with male and female figures in the series, while she seems rather hesitant in the novel.

2.2.1 Female Bonding

> "But I hate to hear you talking so like a fine gentleman, and as if women were all fine ladies, instead of rational creatures. We none of us expect to be in smooth water all our days"
> — Jane Austen (1818, 78)

2.2.1.1 Negotiating With Her Female Icons

In both Atwood's novel and Miller's adaptation, Offred identifies to some rebellious female figures and takes them as examples for her own resistance, as Adelina Cataldo indicates as well: "Offred is not the only rebellious character in the novel, but there are other courageous female figures that serve as a background" (2013, 170).

To begin with, one of the most crucial female figures for Offred in the novel and the series is her friend Moira. Cataldo points out that Moira seems to be a source of inspiration for all the Handmaids, and especially for Offred: "Finally, there is Moira, whom Offred believes to be a real heroine, a source of hope. She never becomes a handmaid, since she escapes from the Red Center and becomes, for the women still there, a kind of secret idol" (2013, 170). However, in the novel, Offred fears that boldness as well, since the sense of independence Moira embodies and her determination to keep her free-will unaltered makes Offred feel "dizzy" and anxious, as she ponders:

> "Moira had 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 sides. She made us dizzy. Already we were losing the taste for freedom, already we were finding these walls secure" (*THT*, 207).

Of course, Offred admires her friend in many ways, not only because of her strength of character, which she already proved in the time before. But also, because she managed to escape

from the Red Centre – the place where fertile women are indoctrinated to become Handmaids –, becoming an active agent of her destiny. Offred says she became a "fantasy" after her escape, because thanks to Moira's audacity the Handmaids were able to perceive that the Aunt's power "had a flaw to it" (*THT*, 207). When Offred loses herself in her thoughts, during one of her many moments of inner-reflections, she sometimes imagines what Moira would have done as an example for her own wish of boldness: "If I were Moira, I'd know how to take it apart, reduce it to its cutting edges. I have no screwdriver, but if I were Moira I could do it without a screwdriver. I'm not Moira" (*THT*, 263). Nevertheless, in the novel, Offred never goes beyond those imaginary subversive acts. Therefore, the fact that Offred compares herself to Moira throughout the narrative highlights her failure to match her "revolutionary alter ego," as Allan Weiss mentions: "Moira's main role in the novel may well be exposing Offred's cowardice through the difference between how they behave" (2009, 137). Offred herself is aware that she cruelly lacks her friend's braveness and resilience as she reminisces: "You were such a wimp, Moira says, but with affection. […] And she's right, I know that now as I kneel on this undeniably hard floor, listening to the ceremony drone on" (*THT*, 343). Offred fully recognizes the fact that her fear of the regime is too great to come close to Moira's boldness, and she knowingly chooses complacency over risking her life.

Nevertheless, while in the novel Moira embodies the braveness and heroism Offred is lacking, the series depicts Offred under a very different light. Of course, just as in the novel, she uses memories of her fearless friend to galvanize her own struggle, as when she is locked up in her room for days, thinking: "Moira, you would not stand for this shit. You wouldn't let them keep you in this room for two weeks. You would find a way out. You would escape. Get up"[6]. As one can see, she gets energized by her memories of Moira and takes concrete actions thanks to it, since she then finds a way to improve her condition. More importantly, whereas in the novel Moira escapes on her own, in the series, Offred is involved in that bold escape attempt with her, bullying one of the Aunts and tying her to a pipe to get out of the Red Centre. The Aunt tells Offred "I know this was not your idea,"[7] and indeed, it might have been Moira's. A bit before they both escape from the Red Centre, there is a scene during which they exchange a few words in the toilets, through a tiny crack in the wall. The restrictions imposed on the Handmaids are very judiciously illustrated thanks to the way the scene was shot. The camera is filming in turn parts of Offred and Moira's faces in extreme close-ups through the small hole,

[6] "Nolite Te Bastardes Carborundorum." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 4, Hulu, 2017. 39'05".
[7] Idem, 25'27".

allowing the audience to experience the scene from their point of view. This highlights their wish to resist the rules, in spite of the very narrow perspective and liberty they experience, as communicating with each other is prohibited and can only happen during those furtive moments, separated by a wall. During that scene, Moira shows Offred a sharp weapon she made out of the toilet's system and Offred, seemingly destabilized, tells Moira they will get "posted soon," to what Moira replies "You sound like Aunt Chlamydia […] Posted could be worse. It sounds like some sort of forced surrogacy or something" [8]. Offred, at that moment, still hopes they will get out of there and rejects the idea of rebellion, thinking naively it might get better after their time at the Red Centre, while Moira sounds much more down-to-earth and already feels that the worse is yet to come.



Season 1, episode 4, 05'02"



Season 1, episode 4, 05'15"

Nonetheless, although Offred sounded unsure about the idea of taking their fate into their own hands, she still agreed to follow Moira and does not lose her temper in the endeavor, on the contrary. During their escape in the fourth episode, when they eventually make it to the railway station, Offred is waiting for Moira to find their way but she is stopped and questioned by one of the guards of the regime. One can feel the tension at that moment, the background music and sounds becoming louder, as Offred could give them both away and jeopardize the whole enterprise. The guard keeps asking her questions suspiciously, and his voice gradually fades away in the background, becoming dull, while Offred realizes she will not be able to run away with Moira. The scene is also shot in slow motion, which dramatizes that moment when Offred gets caught and grasps that last instant of liberty. The slow-motion enhances the fact as well that everything is happening quite fast, and Offred has to react quickly to save her friend's skin. She whispers something to Moira who can read on her lips and understands she must take

[8] "Nolite Te Bastardes Carborundorum." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 4, Hulu, 2017. 5'08".

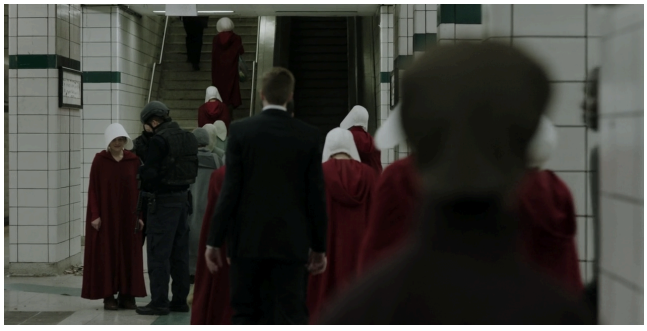
the train and escape alone. Offred knows what will happen, and she makes a decision; she chooses her own fate. Moira seems to hesitate, but Offred smiles at her confidently and nods, to encourage her to go, leaving her behind. She might have been caught, but she is still in control, since she chooses to save her friend. This is a tiny moment of confidence and of hope. She keeps stuck in that grim reality, but at least she managed to protect her friend. The minute Moira goes on the train, her facial expression changes, out of fear of what will happen next. She takes a breath and takes off her confident mask as if she were trying to hide her anxiety from Moira the whole time. She remained strong to reassure Moira, but then she lets it all out, and this is emphasized through the contrast between the two close-up shots on her face, highlighting the dramatic aspect of the whole scene as well as the strength and solidarity Offred is capable of in such a moment of distress.



Season 1, episode 4, 38'11"



Season 1, episode 4, 38'29"



Season 1, episode 4, 38'18"

This cinematographic aspect is actually an essential part of the series' whole setting. As mentioned before, the choice of filming thanks to the shallow-depth of field technique, which means that there will be a clear focus on a specific aspect of the image – in the series, most generally Offred's face –, is deliberate as it creates a meaningful visual language. Pushack specifies the essential function of this cinematic approach as well: "*The Handmaid's Tale* incorporates the effect in a systematic way, as motive of its visual language" (2017). This technique plays a fundamental role in the interpretation of the various scenes, especially those depicting Offred's assertiveness, and creates a general aesthetics in the screen adaptation. In

the series, the camera generally focuses on Offred's facial expressions in many close-ups, with a small depth of field, which puts forward Offred's face over the rest of the image. This allows the audience to interpret her facial expressions and guess her inner reflections which is of prime interest, since, in this extremely controlled environment, her only agency is firstly mental. It helps to capture the character's point of view and state of mind but also underlines the narrow perspective and scant liberty she is given in the dystopian society of Gilead. The shallow focus indeed " literally narrows the visual information" to the audience, which reflects the character's own narrow perspective of the world as well as the oppression she experiences (Puschak, 2017). The fact that she shows assertiveness in her attitude, in spite of that global state of confinement, is thus amplified and highlighted by the whole setting and way of filming. Finally, although Offred gets caught and dreads the regime, she still sacrifices herself so that Moira can run away, which is in itself a strong act of bravery. Of course, she knows she will be severely punished for it by the Aunts back at the Red Centre, but, in spite of the evident fear on her face, she seems prepared to take the risk.

Moreover, towards the end of the novel and the series, Offred and Moira are finally reunited at Jezebels, a brothel where the Commander had taken Offred for one illicit night together and where Moira works as a prostitute. In this place, Moira seems to have lost her strength as a rebellious figure. Nevertheless, Offred's reaction is very different in the two media. In the novel, although Offred seems disappointed by Moira's resignation and loss of volition, she is aware that herself is lacking in courage and therefore cannot blame her friend, as it can be read in this extract:

> "She is frightening me now, because what I hear in her voice is indifference, a lack of volition. Have they really done it to her then, taken away something – what? – that used to be so central to her? But how can I expect her to go on, with my idea of her courage, live it through, act it out, when I myself do not? I don't want her 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" (*THT*, 387).

As Howell mentions: "their conversations are brief, irreverent, and precious. Moira bridges past and present, a reminder of lost pleasures and possibilities of friendship, conversation, and community" (Howell, 2019, 4). In spite of Moira's renouncement, Offred takes those few minutes as a chance to connect with her, as she is aware this might be the last time, and soon overlooks her friend's disengagement. She forgives her friend's loss of determination, and just passively enjoys those ultimate moments of connection with Moira and her past.

In the series, when Offred meets Moira at Jezebels, the disappointment rapidly replaces the first feeling of joy to find her friend back. Offred is puzzled by Moira's resignation, and tells her: "We're gonna find a way to get you out of here, okay?"[9]. Offred is determined to change her friend's situation, but Moira, this time, seems to have completely given up on the idea: "June I know the way out. Black van, feet first. That's it. Look, forget about escaping. That's Gilead, no one gets out"[10]. Moira has finally surrendered to Gilead and her rebellious spirit has evaporated since their time at the Red Centre. But Offred, refusing to yield to the regime's oppression and still wishing for unforeseen possibilities, replies: "Luke's got out,"[11] which is a source of hope for her. The second time they meet at Jezebels, Offred informs Moira about the secret package she is trying to get for the resistance, and, once again, she proves her strength compared to her friend:

> *Moira*: "This is fucking ridiculous. Risking your life because Alma said so?"
> *Offred*: "It's just a package"
> *Moira*: "It could be anything, a bomb, anthrax, what do you know?"
> *Offred*: "I hope it is."[12]

Offred seems prepared to anything, even the worse. She is now a full member of the Resistance and she is ready to become a criminal if necessary. When she realizes Moira does not support her, and that she has renounced to fight for her freedom, Offred condemns her deliberate compliance in the face of the oppression. She tells Moira she did not "give up like a coward"[13] when all hope seemed to be lost, and replies fiercely to her friend's stoicism: "Moira, do not let them grind you down, you keep your fucking shit together, you *fight* !"[14]. She uses the translation of the Latin words she read on the wall of her closet ("*Nolite te bastardes carborundorum*"), taking the scratch of her predecessor as a call to fight in order to trigger Moira's willpower. Offred shows a real strength of character, refusing to give up, and therefore considers that Moira is failing her. However, Moira eventually decides to send the package for the Resistance to Offred and manages to escape from Jezebels thanks to her wake-up call, finally restoring some hope in the series, as Hershman mentions: "Miller again gives audience members hope that the feminine resilience and grit we see in Moira can indeed deliver an enslaved character to freedom" (2018, 58). Whereas in the series utopian hope thus appears

[9] "Jezebels." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 8, Hulu, 2017. 36'33"
[10] Idem. 36'35".
[11] Idem. 36'43".
[12] "The Bridge." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 9, Hulu, 2017. 29'45".
[13] Idem. 31'50".
[14] Idem. 31'11".

clearly, the reader has no clue whether Moira is still alive at the end of the novel, which is suggested through the last bleak words of an almost indifferent Offred:

> "I'd like her to end with something daring and spectacular, some outrage, something that would befit her. But as far as I know that didn't happen. I don't know how she ended, or even if she did, because I never saw her again" (*THT*, 388).

Whereas, according to Weiss, Moira's role as a rebellious figure contrast sharply with Offred's inaction in the novel (2009, 137), the screen adaptation depicts how those two resistant women inspire and support each other in their restless fight to gain their freedom back.

Another heroic figure Offred clings to in the novel is her mother. She has ambivalent memories about her, since, on the one hand, she admires her mother for her role as an activist, but, on the other hand, she had an unstable life as a child because of her mother's temper. In the novel though, she realizes the strength her mother had back in the time before Gilead, as she is now deprived of all the rights her mother fought for. She is aware that she lacked the same courage when she was younger and still had a chance to fight for her freedom, as Weiss notes: "It was easy for fundamentalist to take away her freedoms because she never truly valued them, let alone sought to defend them […]" (2009, 133). However, in the series, the mother never appears in Offred's memories during the first season (she does not appear until the second one). Actually, instead of sharing the memory of an activist mother, one can see that Offred is herself depicted as an activist in her memories of pre-Gilead times. The audience can witness images of her rioting with Moira among a dense crowd of revolted citizens, risking their lives, just as the mother used to do in the novel. Although Bruce Miller decided to leave the image of the mother aside in the series' first season, the audience can thus guess her through Offred's natural sense of rebellion and political commitment.

Therefore, Moira and Offred's mother are two influential marginalized figures, playing an essential role in Offred's demonstrations of assertiveness in the series. On the contrary, the novel makes a clear distinction between Offred and those two reckless women, as Stillman and Johnson suggest: "Moira and Offred's mother share several important characteristics, which Offred admires but cannot emulate. They both possess a rebellious, impertinent, and public humor. They both define themselves, overcoming society's powerful expectations of women like themselves" (1994, 80). Both her mother and Moira take actions and empower women in the novel, which Offred is able to epitomize in the series only.

Furthermore, during her time in Gilead, Offred is paired with Ofglen, another Handmaid. At first, both in the novel and the TV series, she keeps her distances as she does not trust Ofglen, who might be spying on her. But soon she realizes Ofglen is actually a member of the resistance movement "Mayday". Ofglen thus confirms her belief that there is a resistance, which Offred is quite thrilled about:

> "I'm so excited I can hardly breathe, but I keep a steady pace.
> […]
> 'You can join us,' she says.
> 'Us?' I say. There is an us then, there's a we. I knew it.
> 'You didn't think I was the only one,' she says.
> I didn't think that. It occurs to me that she may be a spy, a plant, set to trap me; such is the soil in which we grow. But I can't believe it; hope is rising in me, like sap in a tree. Blood in a wound. We have made an opening." (*THT*, 259-260)

In the novel, Offred seems at first relieved to know that an underground movement exists, and she then places all her hopes in Ofglen, who embodies some kind of leading figure in the resistance against the regime. She tells Offred she should help to gather information about the Commander for the Resistance. However, Offred always keeps fearful and does not dare to genuinely take part and ally with Ofglen. Right after that moment of sudden hope as she realizes she is not alone after all, she panics when she sees a black van in the street, thinking: "There must have been microphones, they've heard us after all" (*THT*, 261). The constant sense of dread of this invisible power is tangible and limits the protagonist's will to get involved in more daring acts, as it can be perceived in Offred's further sentence: "What I feel is relief. It wasn't me" (*THT*, 262). This is probably the reason why Offred never fully commits herself to the Resistance nor come closer to Ofglen, although she might have wished it at some point. As Freibert argues as well: "Ofglen, shopping companion, friend, and member of Mayday, serves Offred in one sense as an ideal but also as a warning that sacrificing for others diminishes one's own life" (1988, 286). Allying with Ofglen would be a way out of isolation and desperation, but it is also a bold risk she might not be ready to take. Moreover, although Ofglen might be one of her only friends in that bleak society, she keeps things from her, like her secret meetings with the Commander, for instance. When Ofglen finds out and tells Offred the members of the Resistance know about it, she seems ashamed, telling her she had no choice. She probably feels guilty about the fact that she actually enjoys those meetings, which she thinks Ofglen could not understand. This highlights Offred's lack of trust since she fears her judgement, which appears other times in the narrative as well: "I can't say I do know or Ofglen will wonder how" (*THT*, 332). At some point, Ofglen asks Offred anew to find out anything she can about the Commander and to commit herself:

> "You could go into his room at night, she says. Look through his desk. There must be papers, notations. The door is locked, I murmur. We could get a key, she says. Don't you want to know who he is, what he does?" (*THT*, 414-415)

This might be the only chance for Offred to act and actively resist the way she is being used and monitored, but still she lacks courage as well as a true sense of friendship to engage with Ofglen: "despite broad hints and specific requests from Ofglen, Offred does not encourage or assist her fellow Handmaid and so she cannot avail herself of the strengths that could flow from (dangerous) friendship and commitment" (Stillman & Johnson, 1994, 74).

Besides, Offred's lack of political commitment most clearly appears in the way she relates to Ofglen. The more Ofglen tries to connect with her, the more Offred seems to detach herself from any form of involvement:

> "'There's a password,' she says.
> 'A password?' I ask. 'What for?'
> 'So you can tell,' she says. 'Who is and who isn't.'
> Although I can't see what use it is for me to know, I ask, 'What is it then?'" (*THT*, 310)

Offred does not show much interest in the way the Resistance is organized, or even in the fact that she could find other allies in that network to give her strength and support in her struggle. She does not even seem to see the clandestine organization as a source of hope anymore, as Hansot mentions as well: "Offred finds it difficult to believe in these truncated transcripts. The initial elation of finding an ally, a friend in the crowd, gives way to the tedious work of gleaning scraps of information for others to piece together in a picture" (1994, 65). Offred grows skeptical about the possibility of effective resistance. The secret exchanges with other conspirators and furtive gleanings of information even seem "improbable" and "childish" to her (*THT*, 310). She does not have the faith that this collaboration and solidarity between members of the underground movement might stand the chance to serve as a real weapon against the regime:

> "Passwords, things that cannot be told, people with secret identities, dark linkages: this does not seem as if it ought to be the true shape of the world. But that is my own illusion, a hangover from a version of reality I learned in the former time" (*THT*, 310)

It seems that the underground Resistance and Ofglen's involvement as a rebel are too foolish and nonsensical facts for Offred to believe in. A bit further, she actually discards Ofglen's alliance and finally surrenders to the regime with relief:

> "I hardly listen to her, I no longer credit her. The things she whispers seem to me unreal. What use are they, for me, now? […] I can't, I say to Ofglen. I'm too afraid. Anyway I'd be no good at that, I'd get caught. I scarcely take the trouble to sound regretful, so lazy have I become" (*THT*, 414).
>
> "Ofglen is giving up on me. She whispers less, talks more about the weather. I do not feel regret about this. I feel relief" (*THT*, 416).

Eventually, towards the end of the novel, when Ofglen gets caught as a conspirator, Offred panics, only thinking how she could easily betray her: "It hasn't occurred to me before, but now I see: If Ofglen's been caught, Ofglen may talk, about me among others. She will talk. She won't be able to help it" (*THT*, 438). Offred lives in perpetual fear of others, even of the person that might have supported and protected her, and, in this dystopian society, "[t]he threat of betrayal is always in the background" (Hansot, 1994, 65). Later on, when Offred is told about Ofglen's suicide, her reaction is self-centered as she is only focused on her own survival in a very pragmatic way, which enhances her outright lack of empathy and solidarity. Her cowardliness and self-interest completely take over, as she reflects: "So she's dead, I am safe, after all. She did it before they came. I feel great relief. I feel thankful to her. She has died so that I may live. I will mourn later" (*THT*, 440).

On the contrary, in the series, Offred adopts an utterly different attitude with Ofglen. From the beginning, when Ofglen makes her understand she actually stands on her side, Offred then takes that glimpse of hope as an opportunity to connect with her. During the second episode of the series, she proposes her to "take the long way" when they go back home after their errands, in order to be able to exchange a few words with her. It seems obvious that she needs to create a contact, to engage with people and build relationships. On their way back, a black van with Eyes suddenly stops in front of them, as in the novel, but here Offred's reaction is much different. After they captured someone in the street and left, Ofglen tells her "it's okay to be relieved it wasn't you," and Offred answers "That was *someone*"[15]. This highlights the greater empathy she is capable of, compared to Offred in the novel. This is why Ofglen then proposes her to join the underground movement and help other people. At first, Offred says she is not "that kind of person" and seems to hesitate, to what Ofglen replies "No one is until they have to be"[16]. As in the novel, Offred is fearful of what being part of the resistance might cost. However, in the series, she is able to evaluate the political consequences this oppressive regime has resulted in, as well as the damage it has caused to her country. She seems much more aware of the gravity of the circumstances and willing to act in a protest against it. While she gets

[15] "Birth Day." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 2, Hulu, 2017. 5'30".
[16] Idem. 5'55".

caught in a spiral of fear in the novel, she goes beyond that angst in the series, because of the urge of the situation. She manages to move beyond her self-interest because there is a greater purpose at stake, which she is aware of in both media, but not willing to engage with in the novel. In Atwood's novel, she tends to ignore the real implications of that society and the consequences it has, even on her own existence, just as she did in the time before. Her present lack of political commitment indeed enhances the part of responsibility she has regarding what happened to the former democracy she used to live in, as Weiss reminds us:

> "[T]hat is precisely Atwood's point: totalitarian regimes arise because people are too complacent or afraid to resist them, or actually welcome them. Our own cowardice or selfishness does not excuse Offred's; instead, her cowardice and complicity convict us all, because we share it" (2009, 137-138).

In the novel, Offred's complacency is simply a continuation of her previous lack of interest in politics. By contrast, in the series, her assertiveness appears in the way she envisions society, thanks to her political consciousness. For example, in the following extract of the series, after Ofglen's revelation about "Mayday", it can be noticed that Offred proceeds to the exact same reflection as in the novel. She finds it hard to believe that a secret network might exist, as if it was too surrealistic to be in accordance with her own reality. But the striking difference with the novel is that she then speaks in terms of political facts. She describes what is actually happening and she is fully aware that the United States, a previous place of freedom and free-will, has fallen:

> "There is an 'us'? It seems imagined, like secrets in the fifth grade. People with mysterious histories and dark linkages. It doesn't seem as it should be the true shape of the world. […] Now, Anchorage is the capital of what's left of the United States. And the flag that flies over this city has only two stars. Now, darkness and secrets are everywhere. Now there *has* to be an 'us'. Because now, there is a 'them'".[17]

She is capable of comprehending this stark reality and the series of events that led to the Republic of Gilead, and that political consciousness drives her into the resistance. She does not live in ignorance nor in denial, as in the novel. She becomes aware that, in order to fight against that tyrannical power, against a "them", she will have to become a full member of the resistance like Ofglen, of the "us", which she is reluctant to do in the novel.

Later in the second episode, Offred nervously confesses to Ofglen that the Commander wants to see her alone. She evidently trusts her and considers her as a true ally, while she keeps her relationship with the commander selfishly secret in the novel. Towards the end of the

[17] "Birth Day." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 2, Hulu, 2017. 6'26".

episode, she is even eager to tell Ofglen what she has learned about the commander – that he is going to Washington and that he wanted, oddly enough, to play scrabble with her. She is proud of the way she manipulated the commander and acquired some form of power over him, and she thus wants to share it with Ofglen: "Ofglen. I can tell her that the Commander is going to Washington. Will she be surprised by the scrabble game? She'll be glad I let him win. She'll be proud of me for that"[18]. But she ends up in complete shock when she realizes Ofglen has been replaced. The preceding triumphant music abruptly stops, Offred looks at the new Ofglen with an air of confusion and her disarray seems total. She understands that she has just lost the only friend and ally she had in the regime. A dull sound replaces the joyful music that could be heard in the background a minute before, and Offred seems to panic, looking around for any sign of danger. She loses all the confidence she had gained, not because she is afraid of Ofglen's possible betrayal as in the novel, but rather because she finds herself alone again. The growing friendship between them gave her confidence and assertiveness, because she had found a pillar to lean on, and we can feel Offred's regret: "I didn't even know her name. Offred is gone"[19].

Furthermore, in addition to having lost her only ally, Ofglen's arrest creates a trigger for Offred. It helps her to measure the extent to which the regime is persecuting people: "Now I'm awake to the world. I was asleep before. That's how we let it happen"[20]. This is the reason why, soon after Ofglen gets caught, Offred's first burst of courage happens, as an Eye and Aunt Lydia come to question her about Ofglen. At first, she desperately makes a silent prayer to God and confesses she is willing to do anything to avoid pain, imploring:

> "Please God, I don't want pain. I don't want to be a doll, hanged on the Wall. I want to keep on living. I will do anything. Resign my body freely to the uses of others. I will sacrifice, I will repent. I will abdicate, I will renounce…"[21].

Her fear is palpable, thanks to a close-up on her face. There is almost no light in the room and the whole scene is very dark, as though to demonstrate the general sense of oppression of the regime, in which no light is allowed to shine. Offred is looking down, and the deafening sound of her fast-beating heart can be heard in the background, as if the audience was in Offred's own body being overwhelmed by the dread. This setting emphasizes the moment of distress she experiences. However, during that scene, and in spite of that sense of anxiety, she does the exact opposite of "renouncement". When they ask her if she knew "what she was" –

[18] "Birth Day." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 2, Hulu, 2017. 44'05".
[19] "Late." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 3, Hulu, 2017. 01'45".
[20] Idem. 02'17".
[21] Idem. 29'10".

that is, a "gender traitor" –, Offred answers she knew "she was gay,"[22] suddenly looking very confident. She deliberately uses those forbidden words as she daringly answers to Aunt Lydia's question with an air of defiance. A bit further, when Aunt Lydia asks her why she did not report the fact that she was a "gender traitor", Offred once more answers sharply "because she was my friend"[23]. Besides, although the Aunt threatens her because of her foolhardiness, warning her to remember her scriptures, Offred then uses those same scriptures against her. She transforms the words she knows by heart in an audacious mockery, looking straightforwardly at the Aunt and smiling bitterly in a last glimpse of recklessness: "I remember"[24]. Her assertiveness shows out as she stands up for Ofglen as a loyal friend. Her inner rebellion is externalized for a tiny moment, and she risks a lot, but she is completely aware of it and willing to do it. This is one of the first hints of Offred's audacity and grit, which will emerge gradually and keep showing up more distinctly throughout the series. Her sense of friendship gives her strength and willpower, which is something she is evidently lacking in the novel. The contrast between the first close-up of Offred, shot from a high angle, depicting her like a powerless figure, and the second one, emphasizes that change of facial expression as she defies the authority. At first, she stood silently begging, but she ends ups outwardly defiant.



Season 1, episode 3, 26'10"



Season 1, episode 3, 30'40"



Season 1, episode 3, 31'40"

[22] "Late." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 3, Hulu, 2017. 29'56".
[23] Idem. 30'36".
[24] Idem. 31'40".

This scene contrasts sharply with Offred's attitude in the novel. Actually, after being told that Ofglen has been caught, she imagines what will happen if she betrays her. She deliberately acknowledges that she could not stand the fact of being tortured:

> "I would not be able to stand it, I know that; Moira was right about me. I'll say anything they like, I'll incriminate anyone. It's true, the first scream, whimper even, and I'll turn to jelly, I'll confess to any crime, I'll end up hanging from a hook on the Wall." (*THT*, 438).

She knows that she would give away her friend, or anyone else, without a second thought to avoid pain. In the novel, Offred is definitely not willing to compromise.

Eventually, in the series, when Offred meets Ofglen again, she tells her she cannot be part of the resistance anymore, because she became too dangerous. But Ofglen also tells her to join and help "Mayday", which Offred seems eager to do, in spite of her new partner's objections to her taking risks. Ofglen then tells her her former name, Emily, and we can feel that a real sense of friendship has been created. A bit further, Ofglen's final act of rebellion, when she steals a car and drives over one of the guardians, seems once again to inspire Offred's own wish to resist. Ofglen looks elated and Offred smiles during her friend's enterprise, as if they were both in communion during that subversive accomplishment, although she could be hanged – or worse – for that. When Offred then thinks about Ofglen then, she says: "They didn't get everything. There was something inside her they couldn't take away. She looked invincible"[25]. This scene actually echoes a previous one in the series, that is, a flashback of Offred and Luke's first meeting, before Gilead. While June and Moira are queuing to buy a hotdog in the street, Moira notices Luke and asks his opinion about various pictures of June. He picks one and says he likes it because she looks "invincible" on it. This parallel between the two scenes and the two characters apparent "invincibility" thus reinforces the deep connection between Offred and Ofglen. Ofglen's fate might be sealed, but at least she left resisting, which gives hope and enough strength to Offred to keep on fighting. The two characters are strongly connected in the series thanks to their unrelenting will to act and resist.

Finally, Offred's predecessor at the Commander's house is also an important part of her own rebellion, since the inscription she left in solidarity in the bedroom's closet gives Offred hope and determination, as Howell mentions as well: "this scratched message is both an act of moral courage and an act of hope for the future. In this respect, its discovery by Offred might

[25] "Faithful." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 5, Hulu, 2017. 47'00".

be regarded as what Atwood calls 'a little utopia'" (2019, 4). This unexpected hidden message proves that there are actually bits of hope in this grim dystopia, since Handmaids still manage to communicate and support each other in a regime that stifles them, as Offred suggests in the novel: "It pleases me to think I'm communing with her, this unknown woman. […] It pleases me to know that her taboo message made it through […]" (*THT*, 83). Both in the novel and the series, Offred thus "cherishes it as a motto for her resistance against Gilead" (Cataldo, 2013, 171). However, in the novel, she does not take advantage of it in an active way and remains quite pessimistic about the real impact those few words might have:

> "It sounds in my head now like a prayer, more like a command; but to do what? Useless to me in any case, an ancient hieroglyph to which the key's been lost. Why did she write it, why did she bother? There's no way out of here" (*THT*, 227).

She finds some comfort in the idea that another woman was there, trying to survive as well, but it remains just that; as scant consolation. Furthermore, at some point in the novel, Offred seems to lose her faith, as she muses: "*Nolite te bastardes carborundorum*. Fat lot of good it did her. Why fight? That will never do" (*THT*, 347).

Eventually, towards the end of the novel, when she completely surrenders to Gilead, she further underlines the emptiness of meaning of those words to her: "Don't let the bastards grind you down. I repeat this to myself but it conveys nothing. You might as well say, Don't let there be air; or, Don't be" (*THT*, 447). She definitely rejects any form of feminine solidarity, even with a woman who has probably lived in the exact same harsh conditions as she did.

On the contrary, in the series, she draws strength from that sentence, which never stops inspiring her. For instance, there is a scene during which she lies down in her closet desperately, touching the scratches on the wall and thinking, with some hope: "Words. It's Latin, I think. Someone wrote it. In here. Where no one would ever see it. Was it Offred? The one who was here before? It's a message, for me"[26]. Later on, she actually decides to use this new war cry for her own resistance, as she finds the courage to defy the Commander and his wife thanks to it. She chooses to use the story of the brave woman who scratched those words and reminds the Commander of the fact that her predecessor committed suicide. This way, Offred uses his guilt as leverage on him and gains some sense of control over her oppressed condition. It seems that, although she only had this tiny message left from her predecessor, it helped her to find some

[26] "Nolite Te Bastardes Carborundorum." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 4, Hulu, 2017. 4'15".

guidance in her rebellion and encouraged her combativeness to a great extent, as she declares with conviction, surrounded by her fellow Handmaids, in a voice-over: "There was an Offred before me. She helped me find my way out. She's dead. She's alive. She is me. We are Handmaids. Nolite te bastardes carborundorum, bitches"[27]. Offred suggests that her predecessor is alive through the group, that her story is remembered and that she is not forgotten. She becomes a source of power and hope for the resistance. Besides, the scene is depicted through a symbolic image, during which the audience can observe all the Handmaids walking together, as one unified group. The scene is shot in slow-motion, and one can notice all the Handmaids joining the group two by two, forming a powerful community.

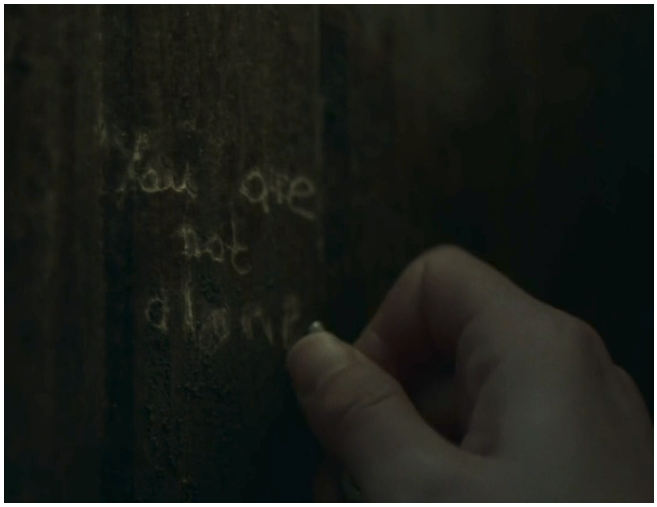


Season 1, episode 4, 51'10"

Furthermore, towards the end of the series, Offred herself leaves an inscription under the other one in Latin in her closet, scratching with a key "*You are not alone*". As already evoked, the act of writing is a strong act of defiance since literacy is prohibited for women in the Republic of Gilead, which makes it even more powerful: "Writing and reading are forbidden […] Physically isolated from other Handmaids, she has no reliable collective support for her enterprise" (Hansot, 1994, 60). Besides, Offred is aware that writing is a subversive doing since, in the series, she herself warned Moira, who was scratching a few words in the toilets back at the Red Centre: "Oh God, don't do that. […] If they catch you writing, you will lose a hand. You know that, it's not worth it," to which Moira replies, "Yes, it is. And once we get out of here, there's gonna be a girl that comes in here and reads it. It will let her know she's not alone"[28]. Therefore, the act of writing those few words in her closet enhances the fact that Offred grows more fearless and gradually leaves the compliant part of her personality behind.

[27] "Nolite Te Bastardes Carborundorum." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 4, Hulu, 2017. 50'45".
[28] Idem. 05'35".

She imitated Moira's boldness, as she remembers how she always defied the system in small deviations such as that graffiti in the toilets, although that could cost a hand. She takes her, as well as Ofglen, as examples for her rebellion and shows a strong sense of solidarity with other women, a quality she lacks in the novel. She tries to connect relentlessly with others and wants to leave a message for the woman after her, thus finding new support for collective resistance and defiantly scratching words with the only tool she has.



Season 1, episode 8, 46'00"

In the novel, she also entertains the idea to leave something in her bedroom for the Handmaid that will follow her in the Commander's house:

> "I find the daffodils, crisp at the edges where they've dried, limp towards the stems, use my fingers to pinch. I will press this, somewhere. Under the mattress. Leave it there, for the next woman, the one who comes after me, to find" (*THT*, 153).

She hesitates to steal a flower in the sitting room in order to leave a trace, a testimony of her existence, and to connect with her successor. But, by contrast with the series, she never achieves that personal wish in the novel, and it just remains one of her many fancies.

The difference between the novel and the series thus appears quite starkly through those icons Offred uses as models for her own resistance. On the one hand, as Stillman and Johnson argue, in the novel, "[E]ven as she dreams of individual actions in other women, she is not able to do any more than that: dreaming, imagining, without being able to propose for them any specific, possible actions" (1994, 80). Eventually, in Atwood's novel, Offred seem to "betray" her mother, Moira and even herself by her lack of action and her deliberate choice to ignore what was actually happening, as she has been "Unwilling to work with her mother and Moira before Gilead, with Moira at the Red Center, or with Ofglen […]" (Stillman & Johnson, 1994,

81). She acknowledges that she failed to take concrete actions in the past along with trying to foster a political consciousness. However, Offred's reluctance to act is also related to the fact that Atwood's dystopia leaves little scope for self-assertion against the regime. All the rebellious female figures in the novel actually failed to carry on their resistance at some point, as Hammer argues:

> "Significantly, the rebellious females of Offred's world are all defeated: Ofglen commits suicide in order to protect the May Day underground; Moira's escape attempt is thwarted and she is imprisoned in the city's brothel; Offred's own mother is glimpsed in a film-documentary about the dreaded toxic-waste colonies. To survive, Offred seems to suggest, one must surrender" (1990, 42–43) .

Therefore, Offred chooses another kind of strategy for her own sake, one of silent and inner revolt. On the other hand, in the series, she proves her will to resist and to fight back the oppressive power which is imposed on her, no matter what the consequences might be. Miller's adaptation enables hope to emerge in a greater way, as all those surviving women gradually gain more power, Moira eventually escaping from Jezebels and Ofglen, although caught by the Eyes, leaving in a final stunning act of rebellion. At first, Offred takes those women as examples, but soon she no longer sees them as unreachable rebellious icons, since she becomes as bold as them in her own actions. It appears that it is rather Moira who fails her, giving up at some point when all hope seems to be lost, as well as Ofglen, who avoids talking too much with her, seemingly traumatized after the sufferings she endured. It is rather Offred who gives them strength back and cares for them, although it could cost her own life. Hence, inspired by their sense of resilience and grit, she pushes their example further for the resistance and fearlessly puts into practice the boldness she learned from all these combative women.

2.2.1.2 Handmaids' Stories

> "Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel;
> they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do"
> — Charlotte Brontë (1847, 129-130)

In the novel, Offred systematically fails to connect with people around her. She remains quite isolated and is "caught in the powerful grasp of dystopia" (Stillman & Johnson, 1994, 75), since the totalitarian regime strictly secludes individuals. This way, it imposes its domination over people and prevents them from fostering rebellious ideas, since Gilead's regime "needs to keep its citizens separated and alienated from each other in order to assure their fearful compliance and prevent their conspiratorial interaction" (Stillman & Johnson, 1994, 76). Offred

has thus little scope for social interactions or any kind of friendship that could help redefine herself as a human being. Besides, under Gilead's repression, female solidarity is gradually disappearing (Manoj Jacob, 2015, 85), as any kind of proximity or alliance between women is seen as potentially subversive and dangerous for the regime, which intends to control them as well as each of their interactions.

Therefore, in the novel, Offred avoids connecting with other human beings, becoming a genuine victim of Gilead's repression. This restraining system indeed prevents her from "[…] intersubjective interactions and communications of any but an extremely limited and repressed sort, without privacy and scope for her own will […]" (Stillman & Johnson, 1994, 74). Her lack of commitment is thus noticeable, not only in the time before, when she ignored all the changes that were gradually leading to that totalitarian society, but also in her present relationships with other women. She is aware that trying to create any sort of bonding with other women would be a dangerous enterprise, and that very few people living under Gilead's yoke would take that risk, as she considers: "[…] Rita would not allow it. She would be too afraid. The Marthas are not supposed to fraternize with us. […] 'All right,' I say. I don't smile. Why tempt her to friendship?" (*THT*, 17). She makes few attempts to connect with her fellow Handmaids and, when she dares to show a sense of unity, it is in an extremely cautious way: "I see several women I recognize, exchange with them the infinitesimal nods with which we show each other we are known, at least to someone, we still exist" (*THT*, 435). Thanks to those imperceptible acts of recognition, the Handmaids try – as far as they can – to redefine their identity and survive as independent individuals. Within this tyrannical society, friendship becomes a transgression and a site of resistance (Hansot, 1994, 67), as well as a source of power and a way to rebel against a despotic system. Offred sometimes wishes to transgress the rules, to communicate with her fellows in order to find some support and to be reassured. But as soon as she entertains the idea, she reconsiders the risk and does not dare to cross boundaries:

> "I wonder whether I can, in the dark, lean far over to the right without being seen, and whisper, to the woman next to me. What will I whisper? I will say, Have you seen Moira. Because nobody has, she wasn't at breakfast. But the room, although dim, isn't dark enough, so I switch my mind into the holding pattern that passes for attention" (*THT*, 184).

Other women sometimes try to create contact with her as well, but it never goes further than a few inaudible whispers:

> "[…] the woman next to me says, low in my ear, 'Are you looking for anyone?' […] I want to tell her my name, but Aunt Elizabeth raises her head, staring around the room, she must have heard a break in the chant, so there's no more time" (*THT*, 191).

Hence, Offred has "a deep wish to establish female solidarity" (Manoj Jacob, 2015, 87) as well as a sense of community with women around her, but she never fulfills that wish, whether by lack of perseverance or because of the unyielding authority she is submitted to. In any case, she is aware that any possibility of solidarity and support in the household is hopeless as well, as she ponders: "They're talking about me as though I can't hear. To them I'm a household chore, one among many" (*THT*, 76); or, a bit further, thinks: "I am like a child here, there are some things I must not be told" (*THT*, 84). She thus remains a rather lonely and powerless individual in that stifling society.

However, although the regime keeps individuals isolated to avoid rebellion, there are still some tiny moments and activities during which Offred might take the chance to connect with other Handmaids in feminine solidarity, as she shares with the readers as well: "This is one of the places where we can exchange news more freely, pass it from one to the next" (*THT*, 330). Yet she never takes those moments as an opportunity to communicate with her fellows, nor to keep informed about the resistance. She does not engage in a rebellious way during those activities, as Stillman and Johnson indicate:

> "But when Gilead sponsors activities that bring together Offred with other Handmaids […] Offred participates as the government would wish. […] When she finds opportunities for surreptitious communication with Handmaids, Offred ventures neither new connections […] nor new friendships rooted in shared suffering" (1994, 76).

For instance, during the "Birth Day", when Janine delivers her baby, there is a furtive moment of shared joy among the Handmaids to have accomplished such a miracle, as though they all achieved that together. There is even an act of collective solidarity when they all gather around Janine, so that she will not have to witness the absurd spectacle of the elated Wife who steals her baby: "We stand between Janine and the bed, so she won't have to see this" (*THT*, 196). But this shared empathy soon disappears when Offred gets confronted with her stark reality, and that tiny moment of solidarity almost turns into envy, which she conveys with a hint of irony:

> "What confronts us, now the excitement's over, is our own failure. Mother, I think. Wherever you may be. Can you hear me? You wanted a women's culture. Well, now there is one. It isn't what you meant, but it exists. Be thankful for small mercies" (*THT*, 197).

This observation highlights the fact that women are turned against one another, because their only purpose is to bear children for a society in which their fate is determined by their fertility. There is a rivalry between women about pregnancy, as their lives literally depend on it. Female solidarity has vanished because the system deeply segregates them. There is indeed a "women's culture", but obviously not of the right kind. The Wives are against the Handmaids, who are in turn repelled by all the other casts (the Marthas and Econowives), which limits Offred's inclination to act: "Though Offred desperately wants to rebel and reassert her agency, the matriarchy ensures that she and the other Handmaids remain isolated and powerless within the domestic hierarchy […]" (Manoj Jacob, 2015, 88). For that reason, in the novel, Offred does not undertake many efforts in her attempts to connect with other women, as her fear of authority is deeply rooted and she constantly distrusts women around her: "The culture of Gilead is based on fear and suspicion; women are rewarded for spying on and betraying other women. Gilead, then, is indeed a culture of female treachery" (Manoj Jacob, 2015, 88). Besides, this fear of treachery among women already appears during Offred's time at the Red Centre, where they all suffer the same way. When Offred talks about Janine, she makes clear that all the other Handmaids reject her, although she is one of them:

> "The fact that she told Dolores all about this encounter in Aunt Lydia's office meant nothing. It didn't mean she wouldn't testify against us, any of us, if she had the occasion. We knew that. By this time we were treating her the way people used to treat those with no legs who sold pencils on street corners. We avoided her when we could, were charitable to her when it couldn't be helped. She was a danger to us, we knew that" (*THT*, 206).

Yet, because of Offred's constant wariness and prudence, she is never able to enjoy the benefits of friendship. She isolates herself in her fear and paranoia of treason, and lacks any sympathy for her fellows, such as Janine for example: "I don't even feel sorry for her, although I should. I feel angry. I'm not proud of myself for this, or for any of it. But then, that's the point" (*THT*, 431). The regime seems to have succeeded in its attempts to confine women and deeply divide them, leaving no space for fellowship. As Stillman and Johnson argue, Offred eventually removes herself from the group and remains indifferent to the common good: "Offred shows herself to be self-absorbed, focused on her own happiness or survival, and unconcerned with women as a group, with society at large, and even with the quality of her own life" (1994, 81).

Furthermore, during one of the collective activities organized in Gilead, the "Salvagings", Offred realizes the Handmaids could be very powerful as a united group: "A collective murmur goes up from us. The crimes of others are a secret language among us.

Through them we show ourselves what we might be capable of, after all" (*THT*, 422). Unfortunately, the individuals of the group seem unable to work together in order the reverse their conditions, and Offred never tries to take advantage of that group strength, in spite of being aware of it. Moreover, she passively gets involved in the murder of other women: "[…] then placed my hand on my heart to show my unity with the salvagers and my consent, and my complicity in the death of this woman. […] I don't want to see it any more. I look at the grass instead. I describe the rope" (*THT*, 424). One can notice Offred's guilt about this implicit consent and inaction in such an appalling situation. The women "salvaged" are publicly hanged, and their assumed crimes are silenced, so that no one can follow their example. This forced participation is actually just another means of oppression from the regime to subject the Handmaids to its authority. Eventually, during a "Particicution", which is another ritual imposed on them by this totalitarian society, and when an alleged rapist is about the be beaten up to death, Offred reveals:

> "despite myself I feel my hands clench. It is too much, this violation. The baby too, after what we go through. It's true, there is a bloodlust; I want to tear, gouge, rend. We jostle forward, our heads turn from side to side, our nostrils flare, sniffing death, we look at one another, seeing the hatred" (*THT*, 428).

She finally speaks out her rage at the sight of the rapist, but once again she acts just as she is supposed to, and she never transgresses the rules. She follows the group dynamic but does not get too close to the man; she keeps herself apart from the group's surge, as Wagner-Lawlor equally argues: "For much of the novel she's felt like a spectator, passive, with no responsibility for action. In the surprise Particicution […], when she is asked to shift from passive spectator to agent of communal affirmation, Offred is torn" (2002, 123). She represses her anger because she imagines that the man could be Luke, or Nick. It is worth noting that her fate could have been much different if she had ever dared to cross boundaries and directed her anger towards the real offenders and oppressors (Weiss, 2009, 134).

In this aspect, the series differs to a great extent from the way Offred relates to women as a group in the novel. Of course, there is a palpable fear of betrayal between the Handmaids as well, as the audience can notice right from to beginning of the series, when Offred says that "There are no friends here. Can't be. The truth is we're watching each other" and that Ofglen is "her spy" and that she is "hers"[29]. However, the female characters rapidly become aware that this is the system's purpose to establish an atmosphere of mistrust among them, as it can be

[29] "Offred." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 1, Hulu, 2017. 12'13".

deduced from Ofglen's reflection towards the end of the first episode: "They do that very well. Make us distrust each other"[30]. The TV series enables the audience to witness how different her fate is when Offred chooses to trust her fellows, establishes relations of friendship, and when she acts her rage out against the oppressor. Actually, the screen adaptation transforms her into a leading figure that unites the group in her resistance against the system.

The first contrast between Offred's attitude in the novel and the series appears during the "Particicution" [31] scene. She indeed takes advantage of this collective activity to ask news about other Handmaids and connects with her fellows, while she hardly interacts with them in the novel. She smiles and jokes with Alma about their "posting" and seems truly relieved to communicate with someone familiar. She is then told by Janine that her friend Moira is dead – which is not true. Therefore, she externalizes her rage during that sequence, because of her revulsion against the system, and it is even Offred who strikes the first blow to the presumed rapist. The way the scene was shot is also significant. There is an alternation between the slow-motion of the scene, so that we can observe the characters' movements and expressions more attentively, and regular speed. The speed of the image is thus manipulated through slow-motion, which accentuates and "aestheticizes" the violence and the emotional intensity of the moment, since this is a time of "catharsis", as underlined by Ketterer (1989, 211), one of the rare occasions during which the Handmaids are free to express their contained feelings of anger and frustration against the repressive system. The aerial shot enhances the circle formed by the Handmaids as well as their fierceness. It emphasizes the contrast of colors, as the red shapes of the handmaids stick out on the ground as a drop of blood. It gives the general impression that they are forming a powerful group, like a single body, which enhances this moment of extreme brutality. Offred's rage is quite noticeable thanks to the close-ups on her face, and her expressions outwardly show all her frustration, whereas she never truly achieves that emotional release in the novel. One can observe that, in that collective fury during which the whole group is transformed into a lethal weapon, Offred fully takes part in that mutual act of – controlled – freedom. Of course, she actually behaves the way Gilead wants her to, in a dehumanized way, directing her rage towards an enemy of the regime. But still, she already empowers a rebellious figure that all the Handmaids follow. She will gradually fulfill that role as a leading figure, soon empowering women as a unified group against the patriarchy itself.

[30] "Offred." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 1, Hulu, 2017. 51'10".
[31] Idem. 42'00".



Season 1, episode 3, 46'41"



Season 1, episode 1, 46'43"

The second group activity during which Offred shows a greater sense of solidarity than in the novel is during the "Birth Day" [32] ceremony. She goes to see Janine and supports her, telling her she is "doing great"[33]. Companionship is much more developed in the series, as the Handmaids all hug in compassion for Janine when her baby is taken away from her. They act as a unified group in a moment of pain and powerlessness and draw strength from feminine solidarity. Offred shows a real sense of devotion towards her fellows, although she is not really close to Janine at first, who can be lunatic sometimes. She is capable of profound empathy and seems aware that they have to support each other as much as they can, in spite of their differences. Being capable of such a sense of solidarity is a form of strength and resistance in itself under that stifling and manipulative power.



Season 1, episode 2, 26'27"



Season 1, episode 2, 26'00"

One can notice that, just as for the preceding "Particicution" scene, the areal shot emphasizes the power of the group, the only difference being that they do not use violently that power against someone, but as a means of support and solidarity. Offred is the one who first initiated that outpouring of compassion, by taking Janine in her arms. She thus managed to

[32] "Birth Day." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 2, Hulu, 2017. 14'25".
[33] Idem. 14'36".

transform that group strength into female bonding as a means of protection against the oppressor, and therefore understood how they could take advantage of that shared power.

That sense of solidarity between the Handmaids further appears in a flashback scene of the Red Centre when, after Offred got tortured because of her escape attempt and that she is unable to walk out of her bed, all the Handmaids bring her scraps of food so that she can eat something. Hope seems to crop up even after the psychological and physical persecution Offred endured. This flashback is intertwined with moments of her present time, in which she is finally allowed to go out of the house again after having been locked up for days. During that scene – previously described – Offred walks in the street followed by her fellows, emphasizing the group's power. Thanks to the superposition of those two scenes, the fourth episode's final minutes reveal how solidarity and fellowship can help resist a confining power, as it ends with the emblematic sentence: "We are Handmaids. Nolite te bastardes carborundorum, bitches"[34]; as well as with a meaningful background music: "It may not be much, but at the Red Centre, where isolation breeds indoctrination, any community is meaningful – and any small act of friendship is an act of rebellion. It's all too fitting, then, that Penguin Café Orchestra's Perpetuum Movile is the score for this moving moment" (Dray, 2018). Dray indeed mentions the fact that the Penguin Café Orchestra's formation is as well a story of hope and belief. The founder imagined the Penguin Café as a place where "randomness, spontaneity, surprise, unexpectedness and irrationality" could happen freely because "There is an acceptance there that has to do with living the present with no fear in ourselves" (Simon Jeffes qtd. in Dray, 2018). For Dray, this story echoes Offred's own struggle, since it is "another reminder to hold onto our autonomy, to rebel against conformity, and to cherish those spontaneous little moments of joy" (2018). One can thus note the producers' wish to subtly remind the audience that hope can appear at any moment, even in the worst moments of despair, and that we should all benefit from small joys. Offred's smile when she realizes the extent of this tiny but meaningful act of solidarity, a most genuine demonstration of fellowship and courage, is enhanced on screen thanks to that musical choice. Hope is definitely rising and Offred's leading role becomes gradually more striking, as she draws her strength from the group and empowers women through her resistance.

[34] "Nolite Te Bastardes Carborundorum." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 4, Hulu, 2017. 50'45".



Season 1, episode 4, 50'36"



Season 1, episode 4, 50'45"

Offred's sense of friendship then shows up again when, as Janine is posted to another house, she asks Aunt Lydia if she seems "alright"[35], implying the fact that she might be mentally unstable because her child has just been taken away from her. There is a collective murmur of confusion and anxiety among the Handmaids, because Offred dared to raise her voice and called Aunt Lydia's attention, which is considered as an act of defiance under Gilead's regime. Moreover, by pointing out the fact that Janine might not be able to cope with the situation, she actually queries Aunt Lydia's authority, since Janine is under her responsibility. Just as she did for Ofglen, Offred defies authority to protect her friend, in an upsurge of solidarity. After that, she tells another Handmaid, Alma, that she wants to help "Mayday" and get fully involved in the resistance movement. Seeing her friend Janine's sufferings perhaps made her feel the urge to act, so that all of them will not have to endure the same fate. Feminine solidarity and friendship clearly foster her will to resist. A bit further in the same episode, when Janine threatens to jump off a bridge with her baby, Offred is called to try to reason her. What Offred tells Janine at that moment is very significant: "It's a wonder we're not all crazy. In this place, you know. Janine, change is coming. There is hope. All of this, it's all gonna be over one day. And everything is gonna be back to normal"[36]. Offred seems more determined than ever, almost foretelling what will actually happen next, that is, her active and effective rebellion against Gilead. Her words are loaded with hope and both characters show a strong bond in that scene, imagining the fanciful good moments they could have together, partying with their fellow Handmaids just as in normal life, after Gilead. However, being much less optimistic, Janine asks Offred to jump off with her, saying it will probably be quick and that then they will be finally free. Offred seems to consider it for a second, but then she answers Janine she cannot, because of her daughter. She never loses sight of what really matters to her, and her faith that she will be able to escape grows stronger in each episode.

[35] "The Bridge." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 9, Hulu, 2017. 4'50".
[36] Idem. 38'10".

Eventually, as regards female bonding, the last episode of the series is the most meaningful. During the tenth episode, Offred's willpower and toughness truly stand out, as she asserts right from the beginning: "It's their own fault. They should have never given us uniforms if they didn't want us to be an army"[37]. She claims that in a voice-over, proudly coming back home with the clandestine package for the Resistance in her shopping bag. Her preeminent role as a rebellious figure among the Handmaids becomes striking, and she genuinely gains power over the regime. She then decides to hide the package in her bathroom for a while. But after Serena's threats and manipulations, she seems defeated, gradually losing faith in her chances to find a better life back, with her family around. This is the reason why she decides to unwrap the secret package, probably in order to find back the strength to keep on fighting. And she could not have hoped for a better way to comfort herself, as she discovers the letters of dozens of other women, living in the same harsh conditions as her. They rapidly jotted down a few words on scrap paper in order to tell their stories and not to be forgotten. All the voices of the victims mingle and resonate in the air around Offred, as she reads every one of the papers with the stories of other survivors like her. As they share the victims' stories, these letters are a strong symbol of survival and resistance. Offred discovers those testimonies with intense emotion, as she identifies with all those women and realizes she is not alone in her struggle, no matter how hard it is to resist the oppression. Offred then passes on the package to Rita – the Martha of the household – to be sure that those messages, and the women's stories, will be heard outside of Gilead. Those testimonies indeed are "a weapon of another kind: the words of women caught, enslaved, and silenced within Gilead" and, therefore, this an act "[P]otentially devastating to Gilead" (Howell, 2019, 8). Those messages create a strong sense of hope for the future as well as a means of resistance, since Offred discovers there are many more women suffering under that suffocating society's grip, still trying to resist by sharing their own tale, as Hoge highlights as well: "Offred is smiling through her tears, suddenly flooded with a sense of solidarity and purpose. Thanks to the written word, she no longer feels alone. For the first time in a long time, she has hope for the future" (2018). This sense of unity in misery and grief is actually a trigger right from the beginning for Offred's rebellion, as she draws her strength from sisterhood and female bonding.

[37] "Night." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 10, Hulu, 2017. 6'05".



Season 1, episode 10, 35'28"



Season 1, episode 10, 35'55"

This inner strength and resilience reach its climax in the final "Salvaging" scene, during which the Handmaids realize with dismay that they are supposed to stone to death one of their own, namely Janine, because she committed the sin of "endangering a child"[38]. Just as for the "Particicution", Aunt Lydia asks them to take off their wings, a symbolic gesture which allows them a glimpse of freedom, as the white tunnels that usually narrow their perspective disappear. This is emphasized through a shot in slow-motion. Aunt Lydia talks to them as to children, saying "don't be picky," "there is enough for everyone,"[39] which emphasizes the irony and absurdity of the whole scene. Then, surprisingly enough, when Janine appears, it is the least rebellious, Offred's new shopping partner, who intervenes in protest, yelling "this is insane"[40] and refusing to take part in the stoning. Therefore, in a burst of courage, in spite of the fact that her partner has been hit by a guard for her outcry and of Aunt Lydia's protests, Offred moves forward as well, detaching herself from the circled group. She is aimed at by a guard with a shotgun, telling her to go "back in line,"[41] but she valiantly holds still. She then slowly and defiantly drops her stone, looking at Aunt Lydia straight in the eyes, saying "I'm sorry, Aunt Lydia"[42]. All the Handmaids then follow her example, her friend Alma first, uttering the exact same words in solidarity for Janine. Offred triumphantly smiles and one can feel her overwhelming power at that moment, becoming a genuine figure of resistance and rebellion.

[38] "Night." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 10, Hulu, 2017. 45'18".
[39] Idem. 44'32".
[40] Idem. 46'30".
[41] Idem. 48'04"
[42] Idem. 48'47".



Season 1, episode 10, 48'05



Season 1, episode 10, 48'37"



Season 1, episode 10, 48'40"



Season 1, episode 10, 48'47"

Moreover, the fact that the group often stands in circle is very significant and meaningfully rendered on screen, since the circular shape is a determining symbol in the novel as well. Cataldo indeed argues that "Atwood's skillful use of the circle/enclosure symbolism" (2013, 172) is an essential feature because stepping out of that circle would mean breaking the dystopian circle of oppression:

> "Offred's hope is to survive, […] but also to escape, to step outside the circle that encloses her, and to re-appropriate her own life. Thus every little thing that seems to set a crack in the dystopian circle represents to her some reason for hope […]" (2013, 163).

As Offred stands out of that circle, the audience can thus observe her rebellion against the system that encloses her. Therefore, the screen adaptation deliberately puts emphasis on Offred's surge against the totalitarian society and the fact that she breaks the boundaries imposed by those in power. Again, the close-ups on her face reveal her confident smile, which underlines how well she uses ironic expressions as a means of rebellion. The irony also lies in the fact that she apologizes to Aunt Lydia, just as she learned to do at the Red Centre when she did not behave well. Here, she uses those words against the authority itself, as a means of defiance. Therefore, she uses those collective gatherings to connect with other Handmaids and eventually to take the lead. She transforms those public events, supposed to strengthen Gilead's stifling community, into a real site of resistance. She outwardly refuses to stone her friend, and her attitude towards her fellows, especially Janine, Ofglen (Emily), and Alma is much different

in the series and the novel. In the screen adaptation, the bond between the Handmaids is really strong and grows more powerful throughout the episodes.

After that uprising, Aunt Lydia tells them that "there will be consequences"[43]. However, Offred seems relatively serene about the outcome of her mutiny. There is a very symbolic sequence at the end of the episode, during which all the Handmaids head back home in line, two by two, Offred leading the way and walking confidently at the front of the group, as though she was actually leading her army – just as she suggested earlier.



Season 1, episode 10, 51'39"

The background music is also highly significant, as the audience can hear Nina Simone's emblematic song *Feeling Good*, a song about freedom and triumphant change. Throughout the TV series, the music choices have been carefully made, so that it fills the unsaid and helps the audience guessing the characters' emotions, as Philip Cosores indicates:

> "[…] the music choices are ambitious in their own way, […] to speak directly to the themes and character developments. By speaking through the music, *The Handmaid's Tale* cracks open the window just a little further on a story that's ready to kick right through the glass" (2017).

Nina Simone's words are indeed perfectly suited to Offred's – and the Handmaids as a group – rebellion, which reveals Gilead's flaws and failure to completely subject them. It is the dawn of renewed hope and optimism for change:

"It's a new dawn
It's a new day
It's a new life
For me
And I'm feeling good"[44]

[43] "Night." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 10, Hulu, 2017. 50'00".
[44] Nina Simone. "Feeling Good." I Put A Spell On You, Philips Records, 1965.

The entire scene is a moment of transition for the Handmaids, as they outwardly turn against authority, which is emphasized thanks to the song's lyrics, as Kayleigh Dray mentions as well:

> "But, more importantly, it's a new dawn, it's a new day, it's a new life for these women: no longer do they stand alone. No longer do they stare at one another with terror in their eyes. Instead, they march together – and the smell of resistance is already in the air. Nina Simone's song is, without a doubt, the perfect score for this iconic moment: it smacks of freedom, of change, of rising up and living life the way you choose it. It is the ultimate ballad for rebellion" (2018).

Finally, the audience can witness Offred's braveness until the very end. She suggests that she does not want her daughter to grow up in a world of injustice, which represses women and violates their fundamental human rights. She is depicted as a political activist who wants change for the next generations, and she envisions the future with hope, as she believes that her resistance will have an impact on the society she lives in:

> "We said no. We refused to do our duty. To kill Janine. And for that sin we will be punished. […] I ought to be terrified. But I feel serene. And there is a kind of hope, it seems, even in futility. I tried to make things better for Hanna. Change the world, even just a little bit"[45].

As they collectively resisted, saying "no" to the oppressor, the Handmaids achieved a tiny but substantial accomplishment, which is only the beginning of an intense struggle against the regime. As Howell argues as well: "[…] it is a ritual collective submission remade as a new ritual of collective rebellion, voicing civil defiance" (2019, 11).

Bruce Miller's screen adaptation thus proves that female bonding as well as a strong sense of community, especially between women who are deprived of all their most intrinsic rights and free will, is an essential element in one's struggle against an unjust and tyrannical power. Feminine solidarity is a fundamental aspect in any struggle against a patriarchy which undertakes to divide women to gain more control over them, as Manoj Jacob summarizes:

> "Without solidarity, without sisterhood, women are not united. If women are disunited they have little hope of making the lasting revolutionary changes they see as necessary for social improvement. Unwittingly, then, they become agents of the oppressive social order they which to escape" (2015, 89).

Hope can only shine through in togetherness and fellowship, when women decide to speak out collectively as a means of resistance, which is something Offred regrettably seems to forget in the novel, as she isolates herself in despair, powerlessness and enforced silence.

[45] "Night." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 10, Hulu, 2017. 53'25".

2.2.2 Figures of Power

> "There is a stubbornness about me that never can bear to be frightened at the will of others. My courage always rises at every attempt to intimidate me."
> — Jane Austen (1813, 190)

2.2.2.1 Serena's Eye

In the novel as in the series, Serena is a figure of power for Offred, and their relationship is therefore quite oppositional. Wives and Handmaids can indeed hardly be allies under such circumstances: "The Handmaids are personal affronts to the Wives; they are continual reminders of the Wives' failures to conceive" (Manoj Jacob, 87). The relationship between Serena and Offred is a struggle for power, especially in the series. Serena wants to exercise her control over Offred, as the household is basically the only place where she still has some of it. The regime stifles her as well, and, therefore: "Controlling Offred is the only outlet through which Serena can express her frustration with a system she once supported" (Manoj Jacob, 2015, 87). Serena thus nurtures "women's hatred of women" as she is a figure of oppression within the matriarchal system (Manoj Jacob, 2015, 85). In the novel, Offred is rather compliant with Serena and she never dares to confront her, although she internally rebels against her. She constantly looks for Serena's sympathy and approbation, even when Serena uses her in her schemes to get her pregnant: "[…] for this moment at least we are cronies, this could be a kitchen table, it could be a date we're discussing, some girlish stratagem of ploys and flirtation" (*THT*, 315). Hence, Offred needs approbation from the figures in power, as she wants Serena to be on her side instead of defying her. In the series, during that scene in which they secretly conspire in the Commander's back, Serena is cutting roses and Offred imagines how she could kill her with the garden shears. Indeed, she frequently defies Serena in the series, and a game for power between them appears more vigorously throughout the episodes.

One of the first important moments both in the novel and the series is their first encounter. In the series, this flashback depicts Offred seated, and Serena stands, looking down at her. The camera zooms on Offred through a close-up as she is looking at the floor, her white wings keeping her from looking at Serena, which emphasizes her repressed status as a Handmaid. This scene indeed manifestly depicts her restrained position. At first, as the audience can observe Offred's facial expressions, one can notice her trying to smile politely as an attempt to look amiable and maybe gain Serena's sympathy. But as Serena talks to her, her face gradually changes and she only looks down, with a neutral expression, since Serena's attitude is obviously quite hostile. It differs in some ways from the novel, in which Serena is also seated and Offred states: "Now her face was on a level with mine" (*THT*, 23). This is an important

difference since, as McFarlane argues: “The placement of the figures in the frame in relation to each other makes clear, in purely cinematic terms, how things stand between them at this moment” (1996, 58). This particular aspect, namely “postural distinctions”, gives the audience some hints about the nature of the characters’ relationship and relations of subordination. In this case, as Serena Joy is standing while Offred is sitting, the burdensome power Serena has on her seems obvious, and she demonstrates quite evidently who is in command by adopting that stance as well as through her severe expression and tone of voice.



Season 1, episode1, 6’24”



Season 1, episode1, 6’39”



Season 1, episode1, 7’27”

However, then, when Offred meets the commander for the first time as well, she already commits a daring act responding to him and looking at him recklessly. When he enters, the commander tells Offred: “Nice to meet you”; and she answers: “You too,”[46] looking up towards him. It can be noticed that Offred starts breaking the rules and Serena Joy is annoyed by her behavior at that moment, although it seems quite a tiny act of disobedience.

Moreover, the over the shoulder shot puts forwards the confrontational situation between the two characters, as this camera’s angle is showing Offred facing off Serena. Offred becomes a threat to Serena and she clearly warns her about reprisals if she does not comply

[46] “Offred.” *The Handmaids’ Tale*, season 1, episode 1, Hulu, 2017. 7’15”.

with the rules. When Serena eventually leaves the room, Offred squeezes her fist, which makes the audience feel her frustration, although she keeps looking downwards and only looks up at Serena when she turns her back. Those reactions are quite useful hints as they give the audience some feedback about interpersonal relationships between the characters and their emotions during interactions. As Robert Stam argues: "[…] filmic characters not only act, they also react and listen; they register surprise or boredom or curiosity, something usually left unspecified in a novel but absolutely crucial in film" (2005, 22). This scene illustrates a slight and imperceptible moment of resistance that the audience can perceive thanks to those clues, which are much more visible on screen than on paper. These are small and subtle acts of rebelliousness but already, during the first episode of the series, Offred seems more assertive than in the novel. In the novel, during this interaction, rather than expressing the same contained frustration, she expresses her wish to have a good relationship with Serena and actually feels disappointed to realize that the commander's wife does not want any kind of amiable contact with her: "I was disappointed. I wanted, then, to turn her into an older sister, a motherly figure, someone who could understand and protect me" (*THT*, 24). She compares her voice to the one of a doll as well and feels like a child when she talks to her, which depicts her passive compliance in the face of powerful figures. It can thus be noted that the series already emphasizes Offred's daring acts right from the beginning, as compared to the novel.

This struggle for power is noticeable as well during the second episode of the series. Offred goes to another Wife's house for the "Birth Day" ceremony. At some point, Serena asks her to join her with the other Wives. One of the other Wives proposes her to have a cookie, and Serena takes advantage of that moment to display the control she has over Offred. She gives her the cookie as to a well-trained pet, and then tells her to go away. Offred is treated like a disobedient child to whom Serena does a favour out of generosity. The Wives do not even wait for Offred to be out of the room, and start making humiliating comments about the Handmaids, since, as Manoj Jacob mentions: "The domestic hierarchy, which falls under the jurisdiction of the Wives, operates on mutual dislike. The Wives consider the Handmaids distasteful" (Manoj Jacob, 2015, 86). In the novel, Offred imagines exactly the same scene, but with Janine instead of herself. Janine naively accepts the cookie and then is slandered by the Wives: "And after she's gone: Little whores, all of them, but still, you can't be choosy" (*THT*, 177). She then imagines Janine going back to her room, licking her lips, silently enjoying this act of deceitful benevolence. She describes purposely that displeasing scene, to bear witness to the grudge that the Wives hold against the Handmaids. But yet she does not imagine any rebellious act in

protest of this appalling situation, nor a more disobedient Janine. She describes the Handmaids as powerless and fully submitted to the despising Wives. On the contrary, in the series, Offred then goes quietly to the bathroom and spits the cookie out in the sink, smiling at herself in the mirror. This mirror-shot in meaningful as, looking at her own reflection, Offred stares at her inner and rebellious self, which grows more powerful. This is a small act of rebellion as well, and the audience can clearly guess Offred's aversion towards Serena and her will to resist. These tiny moments of defiance will keep on growing as the character develops in the series, since Offred "lives from one micro-mutiny to another, collecting them like precious stones" (Raeside, 2017). For that reason, their relationship will become more confrontational throughout the series' first season, and Offred will clearly oppose the Wives' dominance over the Handmaids.



Season 1, episode 2, 19'58"



Season 1, episode 2, 20'28"



Season 1, episode 2, 20'18"

Furthermore, one of Offred's most defiant acts towards Serena is her illicit relationship with the Commander, as she secretly takes Serena's place and betrays her, becoming the "other woman". In the novel, Offred is fully aware that this is a form of power over Serena, and she relishes that small victory: "Also: I now had power over her, of a kind, although she didn't know it. And I enjoyed that. Why pretend? I enjoyed it a lot" (*THT*, 249). Nevertheless, in the

novel, Offred never really shows Serena the power she has gained thanks to her relationship with him, and she never confronts her in any way, seemingly feeling even guilty about it: "I still hated her", "Partly I was jealous of her", "But I also felt guilty about her" (*THT*, 248). She compares herself to an "intruder" and she feels she is "taking something away from her" (*THT*, 248), because of her relationship with the commander. She obviously has mixed feelings towards Serena, but still she never explicitly shows her any sort of emotion, out of fear of what Serena could do to her.

On the contrary, in the series, she explicitly and frequently defies her. The most notable example of game power between Serena and Offred in the series is when Serena decides to lock her up out of anger because she realizes Offred is not pregnant as she hoped. Offred is thus forced to remain within her dark room's four walls, deprived of any contact with the outside world, and is profoundly affected by that enforced isolation. She explicitly evokes Serena's burdensome control over her, saying: "My door is unlocked. It doesn't even close all the way. A constant reminder of who's in control"[47]. Something as seemingly insignificant as a door which does not close entirely is a reminder of who is in command, and of that situation of submission to Serena. Offred then hopelessly begs Serena to be allowed to go out again, inefficiently. Therefore, faced with that unyielding oppressor, she finds some strength and will to fight back at some point. Offred's strategy to retake control lies in her manipulation of the Commander, as will be further illustrated in the next chapter. Thanks to her manipulations, as she knows the Commander's weaknesses and how to please him, he agrees to negotiate her way out. The scene is very representative of Offred's hostile takeover. She leaves the house, raising her head in pride and self-satisfaction as she walks in the alley with the Penguin Café Orchestra's song in the background, a purposely made music choice, as already mentioned. Serena then scowls at her through a window, herself now enclosed within the four walls of her house, and the audience can feel Offred's obvious satisfaction about that personal victory and reversal of situation, as well as her bitterness against Serena.

[47] "Nolite Te Bastardes Carborundorum." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 4, Hulu, 2017. 02'04".



Season 1, episode 4, 50'01"



Season 1, episode 4, 50'05"

A bit further in the series, when a trade delegation from Mexico is about to come, Serena informs Offred that she expects her to behave well. When Serena tells her to "speak wisely", Offred replies "I will try to… speak wisely Mrs. Waterford"[48] but yet, one can feel the irony in her voice. The next shot emphasizes Offred's increasing boldness with Serena. There is a mirror-shot, during which Offred lingers a few seconds in Serena's room after she told her to go, which subtly reveals that: "Offred is getting bold, always knowing just how far to push her insolence" (Raeside, 2017). The shot suggests that Offred's distorted shadow is constantly lurking around, defying and unsettling Serena. Through the mirror, Offred stares at her frankly, without batting an eyelid. The shot actually emphasizes Offred's boldness since "complex mirror shots actively raise our attention to the reflected object or event" (Hanich, 2017, 131). In the novel, Offred never even looks directly at Serena, as she states: "I look up at her. She looks down. It's the first time we've looked into each other's eyes in a long time. Since we met" (*THT*, 314), whereas, in the series, Offred often gives daring looks at Serena, being outwardly defiant.



Season 1, episode 6, 05'15"

[48] "A Woman's Place." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 6, Hulu, 2017. 4'45".

Later on, Serena decides to make a present to Offred, but it is hard to guess whether this should be considered as an act of peace or as another chance for her to assert her power over Offred. She indeed offers her a music box with a ballerina inside. Offred, surprised, opens it and the audience can see her glance at Serena through the mirror in the lid of the box, another mirror-shot which suggests that Offred herself is trapped in that box. However, her sneaky look when she thanks Serena proves otherwise. Back in her bedroom, she then muses quite sarcastically: "The perfect gift. A girl trapped in a box. She only dances when someone else opens the lid. When someone else winds her up"[49]. This makes her even more determined to fight, as she then asserts: "I will not be that girl in the box"[50]; which is another evidence of her relentless resistance against Serena.



Season 1, episode 8, 45'12"

Eventually, the series' last episode emphasizes Offred and Serena's confrontational relationship to a great extent. During that episode, and just as in the novel, Serena finds out about Offred's betrayal with the Commander. In the novel, when Serena discovers their illicit excursion to Jezebels and confronts Offred, she says:

> "I look away from her face, down at the ground; at her feet, the tip of her cane. […] Still I don't look up at her. Guilt pervades me, I've been found out, but for what? For which of my many sins am I accused? The only way to find out is to keep silent" (*THT*, 441-442).

Offred's reaction is the one of a victim, as she does not even dare to reply although she is not entirely responsible for the Commander's manipulations. Once more, she chooses silence over a bold reaction. She silently suffers both the Commander's machination and then Serena's anger, even faintly feeling guilty about it. By contrast, in the series, when Serena bursts into her room furiously, slaps her in the face and forces her to take a pregnancy test, Offred's

[49] "Jezebels." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 8, Hulu, 2017. 44'30".
[50] Idem. 46'24".

reaction is neither guilt nor compliance. When Serena, showing her the positive test revealing that she is pregnant, tells her "He has answered our prayers," Offred replies sarcastically "You think I prayed for this? You think I prayed to bring a baby into this house?"[51]. This bold response is a personal affront to Serena, suggesting that it would be unhealthy for a child to grow up in her house, perfectly knowing that nurturing a child is Serena's deepest wish. Serena then takes Offred to the place where her daughter is, making her understand that she will have to stay quiet if she wants her to stay safe. At that moment, when she realizes that Serena threatens her to ensure her docile compliance, telling her "As long as my baby is safe, so is yours"[52], Offred literally acts her rage out, insulting Serena and calling her by her name. She uses language as a weapon against her, which is the only tool she has because of her impotency during that scene. The forbidden words she uses at that moment are indeed the only liberating source of power she can get. In the novel, Serena manipulates her as well in some ways with the picture of her daughter, but Offred, although internally holding animosity to Serena, never speaks it out:

> "The bitch, not to tell me, bring me news, any news at all. Not even to let on. She's made of wood, or iron, she can't imagine. But I can't say this, I can't lose sight, even of so small a thing. I can't let go of this hope. I can't speak" (*THT*, 317).

She does not rebel against Serena when she is shown the picture of her daughter, in an effort of survival and hope, as silence is her own way of surviving.

2.2.2.2 The Male Game

> "The history of men's opposition to women's emancipation is more interesting perhaps than the story of that emancipation itself."
> ― Virginia Woolf (1929, 41)

The relationship between Offred and male characters is a central element of her resistance. Under Gilead's regime and the circumstances that led to it, men benefit from a situation of great power over women, since they decide on their role in society and conditions of life. As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, the crushing patriarchy Offred lives in is one of the most essential factors for her rebellion. Men in Gilead are thus a figure of oppression that Offred tries to resist as they embody the repressive patriarchy she endures, and since, in such a regime:

[51] "Night." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 10, Hulu, 2017. 10'40".
[52] Idem. 25'40".

“Manhood […] has always been linked to active and dominant attributes, roles and behaviors, to the idea that men are in charge of society, while women’s identity is strictly connected with domesticity, maternity, and submission” (Minico, 2019, 12). Men thus have great control over Offred’s identity and free-will, and they are responsible for the seclusion imposed on women. In that patriarchal society that entraps and silences women, Offred must struggle to recreate a sense of selfness and to connect with her fellows, since it establishes an atmosphere of enclosure and disunion between women: “After all, Atwood's narrative focuses specifically on men's domination of women by means of other women, and more generally portrays women's physical and mental imprisonment within a particularly sinister male regime” (Hammer, 1990, 39). Male figures in *The Handmaid’s Tale* are thus mostly responsible for that stifling sense of isolation Offred intends to escape from.

Furthermore, although both in the novel and series some of the male figures – such as Nick or Luke – do not seem openly hostile to Offred, all men surrounding her are involved in the repression she suffers, directly or indirectly:

> “In fact, they are often more outwardly sympathetic to the women of Gilead than the women are to each other. Yet underneath the surface of their sympathy lies a simmering cauldron of male privilege. The men are at best completely ignorant of women's oppression, and at worst deeply complicit in it.” (Dickson, 2017)

To begin with, in both media, the Commander is an important figure in Offred’s repression, since he is an active participant in the regime and one of its leading members. Although the Commander feigns to have kind intentions with Offred, he is the source of that repressive dehumanizing system and embodies a genuine figure of oppression, as Dickson mentions: “The Commander is genteel and kind to Offred, soliciting her affection with Scrabble games and glasses of Scotch. Yet despite his kindness, the Commander is still deeply and inextricably complicit in a system that oppresses women” (2017). His misogynist view about women is well hidden behind his apparent affability and good manners, but still, he remains a figure Offred wishes to oppose, although she undertakes her revolt against that patriarchal figure in a different way in the novel and the series.

In the novel, during their first meeting, she can barely answer to the Commander, and she appears to be fearful and impotent when she is forced to kiss him in the end, making her fantasize about the way she could murder him:

> "I think about the blood coming out of him, hot as soup, sexual, over my hands. In fact I don't think about anything of the kind. I put it only afterwards. Maybe I should have thought about that, at the time, but I didn't" (*THT*, 218).

She thus imagines his death, but then admits she added that fancy afterwards. As she tells her story, she acknowledges that perhaps she should have acted and done something bolder and more audacious, but she did not. Just as with Serena, she represses her rage and eagerness to rebel, while in the series she lets it take over. Moreover, Offred actually seems quite satisfied with her secret meetings with the Commander, because it occupies her and fills her time, as Adelina Cataldo notes as well:

> "When Offred starts her affair with the Commander, she knows it is not love, but she feels that at least she now has something to do, something to think about, as with the "pig balls" she remembers being used for pigs who were fattened in pens" (2013, 169).

Offred is trapped in a grim reality which is so overwhelming that every chance to vary her routine is a form of getaway for her. She is aware that the Commander uses her and that this is just another form of submission and humiliation, since being the Commander's mistress is not a privileged position, she is not even the first one. But still, she feels grateful to gain some sense of freedom back, although under false appearances:

> "I am the outside woman. It's my job to provide what is otherwise lacking. Even the Scrabble. It's an absurd as well as an ignominious position. […] But even so, and stupidly enough, I'm happier than I was before. It's something to do for one thing. Something to fill the time, at night, instead of sitting alone in my room. It's something else to think about. I don't love the commander or anything like it, but he's of interest to me, he occupies space […]" (*THT*, 251).

Her constant loneliness is crushing and, for that reason, those nights with the Commander and his companionship – although misleading – become a form of comfort for her, albeit a poor one. These secret meetings during which she can use her wits and show herself as an educated woman are relishing for her, and, just as with Serena, she constantly seeks approbation, as a child would do with any figure of authority. She actually seems to feel secure with the Commander, comparing him to Luke, as though he was a perfectly decent man, and showing deliberate complicity:

> "The Commander likes it when I distinguish myself, show precocity, like an attentive pet, prick-eared and eager to perform. His approbation laps me like a warm bath. I sense in him none of the animosity I used to sense in men, even in Luke sometimes. […] In fact he is positively daddyish. He likes to think I am being entertained; and I am, I am" (*THT*, 285).

As Hansot argues as well, Offred tends to show the Commander under a much better light than who he actually is, avoiding to consider the fact that he is her greater oppressor in this society: "The temptation is to invent a humanity for the Commander: of candor, or

boyishness, or sadness […] Such humanity, once constructed, brings with it the further temptation (and perhaps necessity) to forgive […]" (1994, 62). Playing scrabble, casually discussing with the Commander and not being a docile Handmaid once in a while is a way for her to temporarily forget what her reality actually is. These moments of illicit intimacy gives her mental liberty and are a delighting game for her, as, in the novel, her only way out is through her mind: "From the first, being with the commander in a kind of intellectual game that activates Offred's imagination" (Freibert, 1988, 287). When they are playing scrabble, she takes pleasure in manipulating words and letters, stimulating her intellect, and proving herself as a savvy woman: "This is freedom, an eyeblink of it. *Limp*, I spell. *Gorge*. What a luxury. The counters are like candies, made of peppermint, cool like that" (*THT*, 216). However, in this cheerful game she is hardly the victorious one, as Freibert further indicates:

> "Her education and love of word games find a kind of fulfillment with the commander, but in an illicit relation that makes her more vulnerable—not only to date rape but to manipulation by the Commander, his wife, or his enemies" (1988).

In the novel, even though these meetings give her some sort of power, as she enthralls and pleases the Commander behind Serena's back, and grant her a few hours of furtive freedom, she never takes advantage of the situation nor uses the Commander's weaknesses and vulnerable position against him. After a few meetings, in the novel, the only thing she dares to claim is some trivial hand lotion, and she vulnerably beseeches for it: "On the third night I asked him for some hand lotion. I didn't want to sound begging, but I wanted what I could get" (*THT*, 243); and he replies: "I think I could get some of that, he said, as if indulging a child's wish for bubble gum" (244). Far for being an act of rebellion or a step towards emancipation, Offred's requests seem frivolous and pointless, as Freibert asserts as well: "Offred manipulates him to get the hand lotion, the magazines, etc. She boasts of that power and admits enjoying it and trading on it, all the time realizing the emptiness of her gains" (1988, 287-288). A bit further, when Offred is comfortable enough with the Commander, she asks him what happened to her predecessor, the "previous Offred". He answers that she committed suicide, and she then realizes that he organizes those meetings partly to avoid this "inconvenience" to happen a second time:

> "'You want my life to be bearable to me,' I say. It comes out not as a question but as a flat statement; flat and without dimension. If my life is bearable, maybe what they're doing is all right after all […] Things have changed. I have something on him, now. What I have on him is the possibility of my own death. What I have on him is his guilt. At last" (*THT*, 292).

Offred becomes fully aware that she could manipulate the Commander with that argument, by trying, for instance, to ask for information that could help the Resistance or help her change her own condition a great deal. But still, she does not even seem convinced by her own control, saying later that it is an "equivocal kind" of power (*THT*, 323). She decides not to use that power for the resistant cause, whether out of dread, cowardice or simple disinvestment, as Hammer further argues: "Even more surprisingly, Offred refuses to take advantage of her relationship with the commander, who clearly likes her and who, strangely enough, looks to her not for erotic pleasure, but primarily for companionship and for some kind of moral reassurance" (1990, 42). Offred finally lamentably tries to gather information about the regime, saying: "'I would like to know.' It sounds indecisive, stupid even, I say it without thinking" (*THT*, 292). She does not even try to sound convincing nor assertive, and she regrettably fails to seize an opportunity to use the scant but valuable power she had on him at that moment. Furthermore, her will to resist seems to gradually fade away, as she is reproducing the same behaviour as in the time before, ignoring the weight of Gilead's regime, even on her own life: "Maybe I don't really want to know what's going on. Maybe I'd rather not know. Maybe I couldn't bear to know. The Fall was from innocence to knowledge" (*THT*, 301). Once again, instead of taking actions and opposing herself to injustice, Offred chooses to ignore "what's going on", and repeats the exact same pattern that led to Gilead's inhuman and ruthless social order.

When the Commander then proposes her to take her "for a night out", she agrees to follow him and to take risks, not for a purpose that goes beyond her own self, but rather for her entertainment: "I know without being told that what he's proposing is risky, for him but especially for me; but I want to go anyway. I want anything that breaks the monotony, subverts the perceived respectable order of things" (*THT*, 357). She lives some kind of quiet rebellion through the Commander, and never acts on her own as she is fully dependent on him and his moods, which she seems aware of: "All you have to do, I tell myself, is keep your mouth shut and look stupid. It shouldn't be that hard" (*THT*, 365). Even when their little secret escape seems to become boring, she still chooses compliance over revolt: "I am getting fed up with him. […] But I can't afford that and I know it. Whatever it is, it's still an evening out" (*THT*, 367). This "night out" is actually a strong disappointment, because the initial game between Offred and the Commander appears to be a vicious one, and she eventually becomes an object being shown off like a pathetic prize, as Gulick indicates:

> "It is at this moment that her feelings towards the Commander change, now that she has finally gotten a good look at what she has become. […] [S]he is nothing more than property. She may have thought herself important or invaluable to the Commander, […] but […] she gets a clear picture of how little she is valued" (1991, 80).

She is not entertained anymore, and her former complicity with the Commander vanishes when she realizes she is just a "whim" for him (*THT*, 245). She becomes complicit in the patriarchal machinations she wittingly submitted to. She takes a look at herself in the mirror of the hotel room where the Commander has brought her, and thinks: "I'm a wreck. […] I am a travesty, in bad makeup and someone else's clothes, used glitz" (*THT*, 393). This mirror makes her grasp the horrid truth, that she is no more than an objectified person, absurdly dressed for the occasion to charm the Commander, which brings her back to the bleak reality (Gulick, 1991, 80). As mentioned earlier, the mirror-shots depict Offred as a rebellious figure in the series, whereas she sees herself as a lost soul, a powerless and naïve figure in the novel through that mirror.

Contrastively, in the series, she takes advantage of those meetings to manipulate the Commander and relates to him in a completely distinct way. To begin with, during their first meeting, she seems much more assertive in the way she talks to him than in the novel. Although she feels anxious before going to his office, she says "I guess there may be something he wants from me. To want is to have a weakness. That gives me hope"[53]. She sees that meeting as an opportunity to "see her way clear" in the novel as well, eager to discover the Commander's flaws, but then her confidence seems to vanish as she panics: "The fact is I'm terrified […] I think I will cry" (*THT*, 213). Whereas she appears as fragile and hesitant before the Commander in the novel, she already demonstrates her assertiveness in the series at that moment. When he says he would like to see her again, to have a scrabble rematch, Offred replies sarcastically: "I'll check my schedule"[54], looking up straight at him. Whereas she can barely talk directly to him in the novel, she already shows ironic wits in the series. She then asks him where he is going for the weekend, trying to gather useful pieces of information for the Resistance, as her Commander is high up in the hierarchy. From then, Offred will wisely use her power over the Commander throughout the series.

Indeed, during the fourth episode, when Offred goes to the Commander's office for another clandestine meeting, she decides to negotiate her right to go out of the house again and to defy Serena's clout. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, after a quarrel with

[53] "Birth Day." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 2, Hulu, 2017. 34'00".
[54] Idem. 39'50".

Serena, she is determined to manipulate the Commander in order to regain control over her situation. This game of manipulation with him is worth a thorough analysis since it reveals how Offred manages to keep a sense of control in spite of the continual oppression she experiences, not only from Serena, but also from the Commander. First, she asks him "how was his trip"[55], probably in order to collect more information about his schemes and to show herself as an attentive ear, which is her way to manipulate him. She then asks him to translate the Latin phrase "*Nolite te bastardes carborundorum*"[56] and understands that her predecessor shared those illicit nights with him as well. In this case, she does not only ask what happened to her out of curiosity, but rather wonders:

> "Has she been here? My predecessor. Knower of Latin. Scratcher of words. Am I not the first he has invited to this room? What happened? Did she say the wrong thing? Did she displease him, the divine emperor of this house? And what price did she pay for her insolence?"[57].

One can notice she is aware of the danger it might constitute if she "displeases" him or gets too "insolent". She sounds defiantly sarcastic about his power, although she is aware of the potential risks. She knows that she should remain careful, but she seems more confident than ever, as the audience can discern by observing the way she straightforwardly looks at him.



Season 1, episode 4, 42'40"

Her assertiveness truly shows when, further, just as in the novel, she says: "You want my life to be bearable"[58]. But the major and central difference with the novel lies in the fact that she then actively uses that argument against the commander and takes advantage of his guilt to subtly manipulate him, as she continues, saying:

> "It has been so hard. Being alone in that room all the time. I Know Mrs. Waterford is trying to teach me a lesson. I know. I know she's right. I have so many flaws. But it has been so long. I'm afraid I'm starting to give up. I certainly wouldn't want to give up. Like my friend"[59].

[55] "Nolite Te Bastardes Carborundorum." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 4, Hulu, 2017. 40'26".
[56] Idem. 45'40".
[57] Idem. 42'16".
[58] Idem. 47'44".
[59] Idem. 48'06".



Season 1, episode 4, 48'07"



Season 1, episode 4, 47'59"



Season 1, episode 4, 48'16"

She boldly takes the risk to exploit his flaws in order to get what she wants. It is another small victory for Offred, as she convinces him to give her some freedom back, brazenly using the possibility of her own suicide as a potential threat. She thinks about that possibility in the novel as well, but never dares to take the plunge. This new game of manipulation and reversal of power thus clearly appears on screen, as the Commander listens to her his head bowed, looking guiltily and powerlessly at the ground, while she stares at him, confidently asserting her will. The Commander seems to have lost all his credibility and potency, and Offred is gradually crushing the "divine emperor of the house" down. Moreover, as in the other shots previously analyzed, Offred's change of facial expression exhibits her rebellious attempts. She indeed smiles when the Commander says he would prefer her life to be bearable, and then takes a worried expression when she tells him how hard it has been for her to live in those conditions. The actors' role play clearly helps the audience to grasp the characters' innermost thoughts more accurately, as well as the leverage they exert over each other. This "mise-en-scène" highlights much more ostensibly than in the novel the fact that Offred is willing to fight to improve her condition and to struggle to keep her individuality untouched, since, as Robert Stam asserts:

> "The cinema, […] is remarkably adept at the mise-en-scène of actual speech situations, at the visual and aural contextualization of speech. It can render those phenomena that lie on the border of the verbal and the non-verbal, the spoken and the non-spoken" (2005, 19).

In this case, the audience can interpret the non-verbal cues provided by both characters, just as in other previously described scenes, and thus feel the gradual change of dominance that is appearing between them. Offred indeed concedes some facts saying that she knows that Serena is right, but still she makes her case heard, building a strong argument that puts the Commander in a weak position.

Hence, Offred truly learns how to behave with the Commander and what kind of stance she must adopt with him. They both play a double game, as one can guess through the way they talk to each other:

> "*Waterford*: Maybe you're just learning my weaknesses.
> *Offred*: Maybe.
> *Waterford*: I'll have to be more careful.
> *Offred*: What's the fun in that?
>
> *Voice-over:* What have I learned, after 34 games? I've learned that he likes it when I flirt. And I like it when he lets me win"[60].

The way they chatter about the Scrabble game ostensibly reflects the struggle for control that is established between them. Offred accepts to play the seducing and devoted woman, knowing just how far to push her wits and sense of humor to please him, in order to benefit from the Commander's favours and good will as she transgresses boundaries. Nevertheless, it is a constant effort for Offred, as she must remain responsive and pretend to care about him, which can be challenging. During the sixth episode, when she is in the Commander's office, she cannot help thinking about Nick, and does not pay sufficient attention to the Commander, who asks her "Am I boring you?"[61], seemingly annoyed. He reminds her it is a privilege to spend those nights with him. She thus has to apologize and begs him to stay, because she does not want to lose her dominant position, whatever it might cost her. She must take it upon herself and create a mask with the commander, which can be arduous to preserve at some point. Her relationship with the Commander is a constant struggle for Offred, but she never loses sight of her main purpose, that is, staying close to her enemies to have leverage on them in order to efficiently lead her rebellion against the figures of authority when the time comes.

Moreover, she manipulates him a second time to go back to Jezebels and get a secret package for the Resistance. She goes on her own initiative to his office, which surprises the Commander. He tells her "You shouldn't be out of your room, not now,"[62] and she replies he is right and that "It can wait," feigning to leave as she knows she must let him a semblance of control in order to manipulate him thoroughly. Her strategy actually works perfectly, and she confidently pulls the strings to achieve her ends. Although she feels clear disgust towards him, she still does her best to feign desire and complicity in order to serve a greater purpose, that is, the Handmaids' active rebellion. She flirts with the Commander, smiling and casting complicit

[60] "Faithful." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 5, Hulu, 2017. 1'20".
[61] "A Woman's Place." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 6, Hulu, 2017. 20'23".
[62] "The Bridge." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 9, Hulu, 2017. 11'36".

glances to charm him. The minute she goes out of his office, her attitude changes totally, as she has to take a deep breath, seemingly sickened by her efforts to please the Commander. But she then composes herself and appears on screen as more determined than ever. Of course, the Commander is fully aware of her manipulations, telling her during the last episode "You do that so well,"[63] alluding to her lies to seduce him. He agrees tacitly to that tricky game, because he thinks he remains the one in control. But Offred is wise enough to carefully let him believe so. In the series, this "night out" is not simply a break through monotony, but a chance for her to get a package from Mayday – which her friend Alma told her to find – whereas she remains passive and compliant in the novel. In the series, after the Commander deliberately used her, she thus takes advantage of the situation in turn, and chooses not to suffer it passively. In a nutshell, she outwardly manipulates the Commander for her rebellion, first against Serena and then for the Resistance, while the situation appears under a much gloomier light in the novel, as she remains subject to the Commander's plots and whims and never manages to turn that game of seduction against him.

Furthermore, Nick is another key male figure that has a significant influence on Offred's resistance in the series and the novel. However, her relationship with him takes another dimension in the series, as she embodies a much more self-sufficient woman, in contrast with the novel.

In the novel, as she falls in love with Nick, she indeed gradually loses her will to resist, although she was only a passive agent of her rebellion. To some extent, she escapes through love, which is a "subversive" force (Cataldo, 2013, 165), as Atwood likewise argues: "[…] if the regime forbids love affairs, then one of the rebellious things that you can do is *have* one" (qtd. in Weiss, 2009, 122-123). Since the kind of relationship she experiences with Nick is strictly forbidden to the Handmaids, whose only purpose is passionless and ritualized procreation, the act of love becomes a means of resistance. But, as their relationship evolves and Offred grows fonder of Nick, love appears to be a deceptive force as well, and Offred gradually becomes dependent on him, as one can observe through her own words towards the end of the novel: "The fact is that I no longer want to leave, escape, cross the border to freedom. I want to be here, with Nick, where I can get at him" (*THT*, 415). Offred eventually fully relies on this relationship, since she envisions it as an escape gate, although it seems delusional, as she is herself aware of: "Being here with him is safety; it's a cave, where we huddle together

[63] "Night." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 10, Hulu, 2017. 34'11".

while the storm goes on outside. This is a delusion, of course. This room is one of the most dangerous places I could be" (*THT*, 413). Moreover, Offred knows that falling in love can be a weakness is some ways: "Falling in love, we said; I fell for him. We were falling women. We believed in it, this downward motion: so lovely, like flying, and yet at the same time so dire, so extreme, so unlikely" (*THT*, 347). This is the beginning of her fall indeed, especially in her position, that is, under a patriarchal regime that stifles her. Nick has a great influence over her as he undermines her former determination and actually makes her give up her internal rebellion, as Minner argues: "[…] after Offred begins her affair with Nick, she loses all interest in Mayday and in the possibility of escape. […] Whatever political commitment Offred might be capable of making vanishes in light of her commitment to romance" (1991, 162). Paradoxically enough, because of that bond which helps her to find some relief from the harsh conditions she lives in, she says she does not want to get free anymore. As Stillman and Johnson further indicate, "[H]er romanticization with Nick paralyzes her" (1994, 78) since she no longer imagines a future in which she could escape and find her freedom and family back.

Eventually, she even seems to accept her life in Gilead, as Stillman and Johnson note as well: "Instead, she comforts herself with the idea that she has 'made a life' for herself in Gilead" (1994, 78). She completely discarded her will to resist the regime as she is now fully living in the present time, which she said previously was a dangerous thing to do, because it would mean surrendering. Offred appears to bemoan her own exposure and vulnerability with Nick, and admits she made rash decisions because of her naivety: "I tell him my real name, and I feel that therefore I am known. I act like a dunce. I should know better. I make of him an idol, a cardboard cutout" (*THT*, 414). She relies on him to such an extent that she forgets her own self and fails in her attempt to resist as an independent individual:

> "Whatever form her feelings for Nick take towards the narrative's end […] they seem particularly incapable of leading to resistance or identity: for Nick, Offred reduces herself to body, ignores Ofglen's requests for information on the Commander and her urgings at the Particicution, […] and eventually hands her body, her self, and her destiny over to Nick" (Stillman & Johnson, 1994, 76).

Therefore, as Weiss concludes, their relationship does not foster Offred's rebelliousness nor make a significant change for her destiny: "While the act in itself may be subversive, it does not involve or lead to any real challenge to the State" (2009, 135). Besides, in the novel, when Offred suggests she might be pregnant, Nick's reaction is cold and distant:

> "He'll love you to death, he says. So will she.
> But it's yours, I say. It will be yours, really. I want it to be.

We don't pursue this, however" (*THT*, 415)

Her relationship with Nick lessens her defiance and her fate seems inflexible, as she loses herself and surrenders to her fantasies: "Because Offred so much wants to believe in the fairy tale, she closes off other plot options: what would happen if she were to work with Ofglen, to spy on the Commander and communicate his secrets to Mayday?" (Minner, 1991, 166-167). This is exactly what the TV series offers to its audience; the possibility of a new plot through a different perspective, thanks to Offred's change of temperament. This pregnancy, contrastively, becomes a real strength in the series, as they are both determined to support each other in a society that represses and undervalues people like them. Nick's reaction is utterly different when he is told that Offred is pregnant with his child, and hope seems to arise on screen when he touches Offred's belly with affection, under Serena's worried expression, only announcing the struggle that will follow.

In the series, one can notice that Nick exerts only a scant influence on Offred's intentions. Although he warns her not to get closer to Ofglen, whom he suspects to be part of the Resistance, she becomes her ally, regardless of his opinion. She suspects him to be an Eye, spying on her to better betray her later, but still, she does not hesitate to act recklessly. Later on, when she enquires about what happened to Ofglen, he warns her about her rebellious attitude, saying: "You need to remember a few things. You can't change anything about this, it's gonna end the same no matter what you do. So there's no point trying to be tough or brave. Brave isn't part of any of this"[64]. However, she makes no case for his warnings and fatalistic predictions. Just after that, as she is interrogated by an Eye and Aunt Lydia about her relationship with Ofglen – a scene previously described – she dauntlessly stands for her friend. In spite of Nick's advice, she chooses to take the risk of resistance over security and complacency. She thus indubitably appears as a strong figure who is not influenced in any way by male figures. It seems that it is rather Offred who influences Nick, who gradually takes bolder initiatives, as Raeside highlights: "As the household stands ready for their Mexican visitors, Offred and Nick smirk at each other, remembering their unfettered romp. He risks a dangerous, 'You look pretty,' which seems like madness. Anyone could hear" (2017).

A bit further in the series, Offred asks him anew if he is an Eye and if he knows what happened to Ofglen. She is determined to find out the truth about Nick, while in the novel she

[64] "Late." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 3, Hulu, 2017. 21'18".

prefers to ignore the fact that he might be an Eye and never asks him who he really is, although she is aware of the potential danger he represents. She overlooks real facts in order to preserve herself from choice and actions, whereas in the series, she asserts her right to know the truth and straightforwardly rejects Nick's patronizing attitude:

> "*Offred*: Do you know what they did to Ofglen?
> *Nick*: Yes.
> *Offred*: Do you know because you are one of them?
> *Nick*: You shouldn't be down here.
> *Offred*: Don't tell me where to go.
> *Nick*: You listen to me. It's not safe.
> *Offred*: Please don't tell me what to do"[65].

Furthermore, after she met the Mexican trade delegation and its female ambassador, who asked her if she was happy, Offred is overwhelmed with guilt because she replied she was. She then bursts into Nick's room and lets her suppressed rage take over in front of him. She goes frankly and straight to his room, without bothering to ask nor to knock, as she does in the novel:

> "Then I would knock softly, a beggar's knock. Each time I would expect him to be gone; or worse, I would expect him to say I could not come in. […] Or even worse, tell me he was no longer interested. […] I told you it was bad" (*THT*, 411).

In the series, she moves around relatively freely, and she does not hesitate to reveal herself as she truly is, always willing to take risks, in spite of Nick's reluctance to fight the oppressor. She trusts him in a way she does not in the novel, and when she tells him her real name for the first time, the audience can feel it creates a strong bond between them. She does not make an idol of him, but she rather shows him her rebellious facet, making him understand the drive that pushes her to resist, as she is confident enough to face danger and uncertainty.

Finally, Offred is the one who tries to open Nick's eyes to their bleak reality:

> "I don't know who you are. Jesus, Nick. Fuck, is this it? Is this enough for you, this bullshit life? Is this what you want? You want to polish his car and, once in a while, just try to get a Handmaid pregnant? Is that enough for you?"[66].

Nick replies that their relationship is too dangerous and that they could both end up on the Wall. But Offred remains hopeful and resilient, claiming: "But at least someone will remember me. In this place. At least someone will care when I'm gone. That's something"[67]. She makes him understand that love, friendship and kindness are the only purposes worth surviving for. He

[65] "Faithful." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 5, Hulu, 2017. 36'20".
[66] "Jezebels." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 8, Hulu, 2017. 41'55".
[67] Idem. 42'58".

then tells her his name and where he comes from and, therefore, establishes a new hope for the audience. Offred managed to trigger Nick's emancipation from that grim society. Finally, Offred puts him straight back to his place, ruthlessly replying: "Well under his eye, guardian Blaine"[68]. She makes him understand that words are not enough, and she expects him to fight with the same determination as hers. Just as with Moira, her wake-up call enables hope to shine through, as she raises awareness and involves in her resistance people around her when they were about to surrender to the oppression. She takes the lead, decides of her fate, and she does not rely on Nick – or anyone else – nor turns a blind eye on her condition out of love. In the series, she uses love as a strength and trigger that makes her all the more willing to fight, and does not use that comforting relationship as a "save cave" where she can hide. She does not choose the apparent security Nick proposes her, but rather takes the risk to shape her future on her own regardless of his commitment or not, whereas, in the novel, because of their relationship, Offred finally "accepts Gilead's protective embrace" (Weiss, 133, 2009).

Therefore, in the series, Offred is the one in control of their relationship, while Nick seems to be the one learning from her strength. The classic and unequal relationship between male and female figures, that is, the dialectical conflict of domination and submission, is reversed as Offred becomes the real hero who subverts the patriarchy which tries to silence her. While Nick does not believe in change and has no hope for their future, she proves him otherwise. Offred is not in awe nor dependent on Nick as in the novel. Instead, she leaves him no other choice but to take her side and support her in her fight in a society that seeks to subject women. At the end of the novel as well as in the series, Nick appears as Offred's savior, telling her not to worry when the Eyes come to get her. But while she passively accepts to trust Nick in the novel, saying she had little choice – "But I snatch at it this offer. It's all I'm left with" (*THT*, 451) –, she leaves the house with a last daring act in the series, passing on furtively the secret package for the Resistance to Rita. This tiny act of hope suggests that, even though she might be heading towards her own death, she will at least have made this small achievement. The ambiguity and uncertainty of the Offred's outcome are palpable in both media, but whereas her only hope depends on Nick's reliability in the novel, she leaves as a victorious and triumphant woman in the series, having achieved her mission for the Resistance.

[68] "Jezebels." *The Handmaids' Tale*, season 1, episode 8, Hulu, 2017. 43'55".

Finally, Luke – her husband in the time before and the father of her daughter –, is the last central male character in Offred's struggle for freedom. He indeed embodies a figure to which she clings in her memories to give her the strength to keep on fighting for everything she has lost. In the novel, she is waiting and hoping for a sign from him, which never comes. She believes he might be involved in the Resistance:

> "He made contact with the others, there must be a resistance, a government in exile. Someone must be out there, taking care of things. I believe in the resistance as I believe there can be no light without shadow; or rather, no shadow unless there is also light" (*THT*, 163).

However, although Offred tries to resist through her internal struggle, she never manages to let the utopian light prevail over the shadow of this dystopian society. Just as with the other male figures, Offred fully relies on Luke and others' potential actions, and never takes her fate into her own hands: "Early in the novel, Offred expresses her faith that Luke will perform as her fairy-tale savior […] but Luke never makes a showing. So Offred makes do with what is available, and falls in love with Nick." (Madonne Miner, 1991, 161). Even in the time before, when she could have fought to preserve her rights, she chose to remain dependent on her husband and willingly accepted Luke's protective attitude and paternalism: "I didn't go to 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" (*THT*, 278). On the contrary, as previously mentioned, she is depicted as an activist and participates in the first riots in the series, although Luke is not fostering Offred's resistance in any way, as Brooks evokes as well: "He wasn't painted as a key member of the resistance; instead, when the world was falling apart, he attempted to quell June's fears with the standard motto of masculinity: 'I'll take care of you.'" (2017).

Moreover, in the series, she makes a bold attempt asking the Mexican trade delegation for help, disclosing all the bad treatments she endures. She fails in the enterprise, but still catches the attention of the ambassador's assistant, who proposes her to send a note to Luke. Thanks to her resilience and recklessness, she is thus the one who creates a significant contact with the "outside world", and this illicit message opens the possibility of resistance, as Raeside asserts: "As the stranger hands her a piece of paper, urging her to write him a message, it's like he's given her a loaded gun" (2017). Through the note she rapidly jots down, she does not even ask for Luke's rescue, but rather for him to save their daughter. Here again, she proves her braveness and pulls the strings of her resistance, involving her relatives in her attempts to rebel against her oppressors. Miller's screen adaptation finally leaves scope for some more optimistic

perspectives at the most critical moment. Hope indeed seems to reign, because, thanks to this tiny contact between Luke and June, the possibility of escape remains viable. The music choice made by the producers when Luke gets Offred's note is highly significant as well, as Dray points out:

> "*Nothing's Gonna Hurt You Baby* is, in this episode, a momentous ode to hope. Now that Luke and Offred/June know they have someone to fight for, they're going to do so all the harder. Even if they are never reunited, they will know there is someone out there who is rooting for them, willing them to succeed, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with them in battle" (2018).

Offred's previous words to Nick when she told him that, through her fight, at least she will be remembered, seem to resonate more than ever at that moment. The song's lyrics indeed reflect that in adversity, there is an ineffable bond between Offred and her relatives, which she never loses sight of: "Nothing's gonna hurt you baby, nothing's gonna take you from my side"[69]. Whereas, in the novel, her memories seem to fade away as she gradually surrenders to the regime and lets it overwhelm her, erasing her identity, she keeps her individuality untouched in the series thanks to that close connection with Luke and the people she relates to: "And, while they may strip away her human rights and identity, they can never take Luke from her: their memories, their hopes for the future, everything that makes them who they are, is locked away inside her mind" (Dray, 2018).

In conclusion, both in the series and the novel, men do not encourage Offred's resistance, and she must pull herself away from their grip to some extent as a means of emancipation. The commander seems kind but he is the worst complicit in the system, fully aware of what women must endure under Gilead's yoke, including his wife. His compassion for Offred is limited and is far from being pure altruism. Nick does not much support Offred in the novel either, since he simply lends an ear to her and brings her some sort of affection, without getting too involved in their relationship. In the series, although he seems more devoted to Offred, he still tries to convince her not to rebel against the regime and he is passively complicit in that patriarchal society, being a member of the Eyes and executing every order of the Waterfords. Finally, Luke never gives a sign of life in the novel, discourages Offred from getting involved in the protest marches in the time before Gilead, and does not seem to understand the weight of the loss of independence for women which affected Offred. In the series, he does not really worry about women's gradual loss of rights either, and although he is still alive and does some research in Canada to know whether Offred has survived or not, he

[69] Cigarettes After Sex. "Nothing's Gonna Hurt You Baby." L, Partisan, 2012.

does not actively try to find her back nor get involved in any resistance movement. Eventually, as Dickson argues, all men around Offred are complicit, one way or another, in her oppression:

> "The Commander represents the extreme end of the spectrum, a man who has no compunction about perpetuating patriarchal values at the expense of others. Yet the other men in the series, while ostensibly more aligned with the resistance, are still either wholly ignorant of women's struggles or directly profiting off them" (2017).

Whereas in the novel, Offred consciously relies too much on those male figures, who do not try in any way to help her to resist, she embodies a strong and independent woman in the series, using them for her own purposes. She manipulates the Commander, remains careful and sensible in her relationship with Nick, and establishes contact with Luke. She is not dependent on any of those men and takes the lead to shape her own future.

Important moments of resistance in the series are thus linked to the way she relates to people, whether out of friendship or manipulation. When she seems overwhelmed with hopelessness, she draws strength from solidarity to find the courage to show assertiveness and feed the fire of her rebellion against patriarchy. Regarding the way she behaves with dominant characters, one can observe that there is a special dynamic in the series, as she constantly seems compliant at first, but then chooses to resist and takes bold actions. Her internal struggle is externalized and gives body to that innermost strength. In the novel, she never succeeds to fulfill that transition, as she remains trapped in her fear to act and speak out. Indeed, whereas Offred really takes advantage of the various relationships she creates in the series, she fails to sustain most of them in the novel, and she is crushed down by the figures of authority around her. Of course, although she only entertains precarious bonds of friendship and love in the novel, they still reflect a form of resistance, as Hansot argues: "And because ordinary life is allowed so little purchase in dystopias, no common acts of friendship and love remain just that—They become transgressions, potential sites of rebellion" (1994, 67). But the fact is that, as compared to the series, Offred never successfully achieves her rebellion against the system in the novel, and those potential means of resistance are not fully exploited.

3. Conclusion: Is There Hope?

"'Hope' is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -"
— Emily Dickinson (1999)

As can be deduced from this comparison of Atwood's novel and its recent series adaptation, both media's portrayal of the protagonist is quite contrasting and dissimilar in many aspects: "While the television adaptation brings Atwood's characters to life, the space Miller creates for hope and resistance greatly differs from that within the 1985 novel" (Hershman, 2018, 57). Miller's adaptation indeed tends to leave greater scope for hope to emerge through its characters and their unrelenting resistance. Offred's final subversive act in the last episode, as she passes on the secret package for the Resistance fulfilling her role as a member of Mayday, contrasts with her lack of volition at the end of the novel: "Her final step into the Eyes' black van can hardly be called a brave or political act, in as much as she has no real choice […]" (Wagner-Lawlor, 2002, 83). Besides, in Miller's rewriting of the novel, Offred's emotions are acted out and her rage is directed towards the regime, while Atwood tends to silence and internalize her character's anger. Nonetheless, while both media illustrate that story of struggle for survival in distinct ways, this does not imply that hope does not appear in the novel's narration. Although they might be quite different, Offred's narratives still convey the prospects for a better future in both cases, and hope arises in the novel many times as "possibilities, tiny peepholes" (*THT*, 34). Of course, that utopian aspiration takes different forms in each medium.

This research paper has demonstrated that, in the novel, Offred never fully commits herself to the Resistance, but not because she is not eager to react. She does protest, although internally, as her silent revolt and storytelling are her own ways of survival. She proves that, in spite of Gilead's will to transform her in a mere commodity, she still has the ability to feel, share and remember. Offred might have been deprived of her basic human rights, but she remained full of humanity, with her failures and regrets, in such conditions. She undertakes many efforts to preserve her self-awareness and autonomy and, although she eventually fails at the attempt, she still weaves a genuinely human tale. Therefore, in the novel, the readers can identify with Offred as her past and present passivity is a warning for them to stay aware that their rights might be endangered if they do not react.

In the series, she manages to use that inner strength as a real trigger for feminine and human resistance in the face of a repressive and unjust regime. She becomes an example of resilience, determination and faith, as she never stops hoping for a better outcome. She grows increasingly heroic in the series' next season, almost considered as a pure example of feminine resilience and fearlessness. She embodies a heroic figure to inspire the audience to act and become active agents of political change. Offred never stops fighting and demonstrates that every victory, even tiny, is a step further towards a real change.

For that reason, both media convey utopian hope as they aim at raising awareness among the readers and audience. Through Offred's testimony, the novel and the series intent to demonstrate how easily human rights and privileges can be wiped out and, therefore, that one should never take his rights as guaranteed and immutable. While Atwood's novel ends in uncertainty as regards to Offred's fate, it still proves that her story made it through and that the worst might be avoided if one learns from Offred's experience and failures. The series' first season, in turn, ends in an equally ambiguous way, but the following two seasons illustrate Offred's indefectible grit and hope which eventually always prevail.

3.1 Historical Notes

In Atwood's novel, Offred's narrative brutally comes to an end when she steps into the black van that comes to take her away. Whether those people are members of the Resistance, coming to rescue her, or Eyes leading her to her death, there is no clue. But a distinction is then made between the novel and the series. Indeed, whereas the series extends Offred's story with two other seasons, Atwood added an epilogue to that ambiguous ending, namely the "Historical Notes". In this last chapter, the readers understand that Offred's narration was actually a record collected on tapes: "Finally, there is the possibility of escape. Within the tale itself, Offred's end is uncertain, yet the very existence of the tapes suggests that, aided by Nick, she did elude the rule of Gilead" (VanSpanckeren & Castro, 1988, 116). This renewal of hope, related to the fact that Offred's story has eventually been heard, is soon shadowed by the way her testimony is interpreted. Those tapes, and therefore Offred's storytelling, are analyzed by a group of academics during a conference in 2195, years after her tale. The conferees indeed fail to fathom Offred's narrative, because they are so concerned with facts and objectivity that they overlook the human scale of her testimony: "As Atwood's epilogue suggests, the political voice of women that breaks from its earlier silenced state can be appropriated by men, thus threatening

women again with silence. Women's voices must not only be expressed, but must also be received" (Hogsette, 1997, 276).

However, Offred's storytelling is still her greater act of resistance, and although it is misinterpreted, hope lies in the fact that the readers can grasp the authentic human aspect of her storytelling and learn from it:

> "[…] Offred's reconstructed message delivered nearly two hundred years later ensures the survival of her voice and her version of Gileadean history. Professor Pieixoto from his male historian's perspective may dispute the authoritativeness of her cultural history […], but as readers we are left with Offred's narrative which challenges us to make connections between her vanished world and our own […]" (Howells, 2018, 14).

Atwood's novel illustrates what happens when people neglect their involvement in their society, and passively witness the dismantlement of their rights and freedom. As the readers are faced with an imperfect protagonist, whose many failures and inaction led her to her loss, the novel works as a call for reflection and self-examination: "But the novel is more than a warning […] Offred exemplifies what not to do before Gilead consolidated its power" (Stillman & Johnson, 81, 1994). Atwood might not give an easy answer nor any solution, but Offred's uncertain fate serves one particular purpose, that is, fostering debate about her compliance, in order to raise awareness about the impact one's tiny action or inaction might have in society. Although Offred is no heroic figure, the act of telling her story and revealing her true and flawed self is an act of bravery. She does not tell a story about any bold rebellious actions, but rather one of human scale:

> "She knows well that she was no heroine during her time in Gilead. She is honest about her quietism, particularly as she compares herself to her mother, with Moira, and with the first Ofglen. Her narrative is full of self-criticism and retrospective irony […]" (Wagner-Lawlor, 2003, 91).

She acknowledges her failures, such as her lack of commitment and cowardice, but this recognition in itself is courageous, as she reveals remorse regarding her docile inertia: "I would like to be without shame. I would like to be shameless. I would like to be ignorant. Then I would not know how ignorant I was" (*THT*, 406). There is obviously no going back possible for Offred, but there is still a chance for the readers to create an after in which freedom, equality and justice would be preserved as unequivocal values. For that specific reason, Offred's story leaves room for resistance and hope: "But there's a literary form I haven't mentioned yet: the literature of witness. Offred records her story as best she can; then she hides it, trusting that it may be discovered later, by someone who is free to understand it and share it. This is an act of hope" (Atwood, 2018).

3.2 Second Season

As mentioned earlier, the serial adaptation moves beyond Offred's original narrative, and concretizes the possibility of escape, as Offred manages to break away from Gilead's yoke thanks to the underground movement during the second season. Besides, female bonding seems to have no limits anymore, as Serena and Offred will work together to uphold their rights, wishing to overthrow Gilead's patriarchal control which represses them both. Offred also receives help from the Marthas to get her baby out of Gilead. The protagonist's rebellion becomes a real woman's struggle, as feminine characters from all classes stick together for a common purpose. Offred becomes bolder as well, since, towards the end of the second season, she decides to stay in Gilead although she could escape. She chooses to fight for the Resistance and her daughter, both of which are more important than her own survival:

> "The second season of Hulu's The Handmaid's Tale ended on a familiar image: June's face, in extreme closeup, her eyes burning with anger, pain, and fierce determination as they bore into the camera. Five hours into season 3, another episode echoes that ending. The camera swoops in from above and pulls tight on June (Elisabeth Moss) […] as she seethes with rage and vows, once again, not to let the bastards grind her down" (Baldwin, 2019).

Eventually, in the series, Offred embodies a figure of active political disobedience as she grows fiercer and more confident in each episode. She even inspires political militants among the audience to follow her example, especially because she epitomizes hope for change. Through her struggle, June demonstrates the positive impact of resilience, determination and solidarity: "Of importance […] is the way HULU's adaptation draws parallels between the current day and its dystopic imaginary, especially through its focus on voice and silence, highlighted in the characterization June/Offred" (Howell, 2019, 12). The series indeed develops what is only suggested in the novel, that is, the dialectic of Offred's internal struggle and external rebellion. The character's inner struggle is translated into a striking outer one, which creates a brand new stance: "timelines were altered, some details were changed, while partial sentences were extrapolated from the text to create entire scenes and stories" (Mulkerrins, 2018). Therefore, the serial adaptation makes its character grow to a new level of hope and resilience:

> "Ultimately, Miller gives each character an ending with far more finality, but also uses their stories to promote resilience, grit, and hope. While Atwood leaves many endings up for discussion, Miller's adaptation inspires audience members to resists the unjust and remain hopeful that the future can change for the better" (Hershman, 2018, 58)

However, as the series' third season has now been released (June 2019), and that the fourth has already been announced, some critics argue that Offred's narrative might become a bit redundant and that her struggle for freedom appears to be running out of steam:

> "Having exhausted Margaret Atwood's source material by its 10th episode, *The Handmaid's Tale* went off book with confidence in season 2 […] The writers chose to keep June in her prison, and now they seem to have run out of new things to say about her life there" (Baldwin, 2019).

Besides, although her depiction seems defiantly hopeful, June appears to become a figure with whom the audience could eventually have difficulties to identify. As Miller's adaption keeps extending Offred's narration, her heroism reaches a peak which moves away from the original purpose of the novel:

> "[…] as "The Handmaid's Tale" strays further from its origins, it also strays further from one of its significant ideas: that June (Elisabeth Moss) is ordinary. It's one of the haunting essentials of the book, where she's only ever called Offred […]" (Lyons, 2018).

Nevertheless, the series has undeniably succeeded in its attempt to engage the audience and the hope that Offred conveys through her resilience keeps shining brighter in each episode. This might suggest that, because of the current political atmosphere, there is an urge to believe in better prospects and resilient human beings who lead the way towards change: "But as aware as I am of those flaws, I still can't look away. Not yet, not when these characters, and by extension, those of us watching, are still so desperate to taste some form of justice" (Chaney, 2019). As Atwood herself argues, talking about the success of the series adaptation in an interview: "I guess the response has been sort of surrealistically positive. You don't get that kind of response to something, and I'm sure it's because of the political climate" (YouTube, q on cbc, 2017). Gilead's resonance with society's current issues and concerns is undisputable, and the audience tends to interpret Offred's "Ustopian" storytelling in multiple ways. As much in the series as in the novel, this form of narrative indeed helps to envision a society in which voicing defiance is a demonstration of utopian hope and is needed in order to "keep us from taking our freedom to speak for granted, to urge the need for continuing the fight, and to highlight the courage and beauty of those who break silences" (Falk Jones, 1991, 11).

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