CHAPTER-V

A Linguist’s Haven
THE HANDMAID’S TALE
The Handmaid's Tale is "a cautionary tale, illustrating the consequences of refusing the lessons of Bodily Harm". Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale and Eugene Zamiatin's We are both set in futuristic dystopias, politically totalitarian regimes, in which the individual identity is obliterated under the banner of the collective good. Although more overtly political than her previous work, international best seller, which won the prestigious Governor General's Award, The Handmaid's Tale (1985) is no departure from Atwood's canon of feminism. The novel projects into future Atwood's critique of female brutalization, articulated in Bodily Harm. As Sherill E. Grace points out, Atwood's vision has not essentially changed, but has expanded and deepened. In The Handmaid's Tale, the context is essentially political, as Offred, the protagonist in the novel remarks, "Context is all." Therefore, Lucy M. Freiburt calls the novel "Political - Science Fiction." In an interview given in 1985, several months before the appearance of The Handmaid's Tale, Atwood said: "the political to me is a part of life."
It's part of everybody's life. What Atwood means by political here is—

"how people relate to a power structure and vice versa. And this is really all we mean by it. But, the first thing we mean is how is this individual in society? How do the forces of Society interact with this person?"

As a postmodern feminist novel, The Handmaid's Tale is concerned explicitly with dismantling patriarchal systems that oppress women. Six years before the publication of The Handmaid's Tale, an example of the "Speculative fiction", Atwood has commented on the writing of fiction in a way that seems to anticipate the novel. "What kind of world shall you describe for your readers? The one you can see around you, or the better one you can imagine? If only the latter, you'll be unrealistic, if only the former, despairing. But, it is by the better world we can imagine, that we judge the world we have."

In Linda Hutcheon's opinion, "In all her writing, Atwood shows herself to be the tireless explorer and exposor of cultural cliches and stereotypes in particular of those that affect women." What inspired Atwood to create a work of feminist science fiction, The Handmaid's Tale was Andrea Dworkin's analysis of the brothel model, and the farming
model, which relate to prostitution and motherhood, respectively, in her book, *Right - Wing Women*.

The *Handmaid’s Tale* is dedicated to Atwood’s favourite, and rebellious ancestor, Mary Webster and Perry Miller, her teacher whose work has given an insight into her study of cultural practices of Gilead mentioned in the novel. The dedication of *The Handmaid’s Tale* to Webster, who escaped hanging as a witch at the hands of the dystopian misogynistic puritan Massachusetts is apt, since the protagonist in the novel too escapes from Gilead, a dystopian misogynistic Society. Webster, miraculously escaped hanging, because the rope broke and thus, “the law of double Jeopardy, under which one could not be executed twice for the same offence” came to her rescue. Escaping from death, with her “unbent” and “unbroken neck”, Webster subsequently, moved to Wova, Scotia, a more liberated Society. The anecdote closes thus: “and if there’s one thing I hope I inherited society. The anecdote closes thus “and if there’s one thing I hope I’ve inherited from her, it’s her neck.” This is a cautionary not promissory version of hope by Atwood.
The novel predicts "the horrors of a culture, so frightened by normal sexuality, that it codified and proscribed all such procreation, and created hierarchies of life and death around it. It is a brutal horrifying culture . . ." Thus, The Handmaid's Tale is a cautionary and poignant tale that dramatizes a futuristic, bleak, totalitarian society, where women are denied the basic rights.

In other words, the novel depicts the social isolation of women and their separation into rigid, subservient gender role of wives, wombs, workers, whores, and the deprivation of their basic human rights such as the rights to education, Jobs, property, citizenship and even one's own name, and speech. As Howell says: "Atwood's feminist concerns are plain here, but so too are her concerns for basic human rights."16

In The Handmaid's Tale, Atwood articulates the complex, formidably paradoxical relationship between sexuality and power and argues how power dictates its law to sex. According to Michel Foucault: "To deal with sex, power employs nothing more than a law of prohibition. Its objective: that sex renounce itself. Its instrument: the threat of a punishment, that is nothing other than the suppression of sex. Renounce yourself or suffer the penalty of being suppressed; do not
appear if you do not want to disappear. Your existence will be maintained only at the cost of your nullification. Power constrains sex only through a taboo that plays on the alternative between two non existences.\textsuperscript{17}

Offred, the narrator - protagonist in The Handmaid's Tale is the victim of such a prohibition ordinance. The protagonist first person narrative in the form of a "diary" informs us about everyday life in the fundamentalist dystopian state called Gilead. This an ant-Utopia of the not-too-distant future as narrated by Offred, the Handmaid, a victim of theocracy. The Handmaid's own tale concentrates on "the fate of women in Gilead, who are seen and used as mere means of procreation."\textsuperscript{18} Offred has been appointed as a "Handmaid" to a leading official called Commander to substitute for his old and infertile wife. Thus, in the Republic of Gilead fertile women have to serve as Grandmaid's to the infertile wives of the "Commanders of the faith" and surrender their progeny to their mistresses. Handmaids are treated as "two legged wombs" or "unintelligent matter in the reproduction process which is, like everything else in this dystopia, dominated by men."\textsuperscript{19} Although based on the Old Testament Precedent, such dystopian procedures and practices also mirror male-biased scientific theory as enunciated by
Aristotle, that "the female provided only the matter, while the active principle was attributed to the male Semen ...". This theory elevates man to a parent and reduces woman to an incubator. The Handmaid's Tale makes an explicit statement on what it means to be a woman within patriarchy. As Mario Klarer says: "In Gilead, being a woman means to become pre-literate and to follow the pre-scriptions of men."21

In Survival, Atwood had "hinted", that the quotations at the beginning of each chapter have been "chosen with care", in Surfacing, the protagonist's journey towards self-discovery is hinted; and it would be no exaggeration to assert that The Handmaid's Tale is also loaded with clues. The dedication, the epigraphs and the careful selection of names and words and images are the tools in the artist's hands to convey truths, that may be otherwise unspeakable. Mary Webster a witch, whom Atwood considers her ancestor, though was found not-guilty by the Jury, yet the mob-justice as in the 'Salvagings' section, had beaten and buried her alive, which is "a form of licensed reprisal of ritualized victimization."23 With recurring pictures of witch hunting, the novel is dedicated to her and Perry Miller, Atwood's teacher who instilled in her, that the study of any written material was necessary to discover the
pattern of development of any country. Atwood presents a modern form of woman hunting that aims at subjugating woman’s power, that is her fertility. And then, the epigraph from Genesis 30:1-3 not only suggests patriarchal manipulation to instill in woman a sense of unworthiness sans motherhood, but also points out the complexity of woman in subordinating other women and advocating self effacement. The quotation from Swift prepares us for Swiftian satire, that would conceal the harsh truths of the Sufi proverb. Atwood’s strategy is made amply clear.

In The Handmaid’s Tale, Offred, the protagonist escapes from the Republic of Gilead to the underground Female road, to tell her tale of victimization as freedom of speech is a capital offence in Gilead and thus “Offred begins to extend her resisting rejections of Gileadean discourse by “reporting” them to others.” She uses “language” as a means of communication to unlock her inner feelings and bitter experiences, as well as a “Subversive-Weapon” to raise her voice against the marginalization of women. As Conboy says : “Offred explicitly connects sexuality and textuality in her tale. In course of the narration of her tale, Offred contrasts the freedom in her pre-Gilead life and the oppression of women in her present Gileadean life to highlight her
stubborn survival in the midst of heartless people of a repressive and anarchic society. She also suggests the ways and means to surmount the barriers to woman’s individuality and autonomy. She is not only rebellious against male hegemony and cruelty of the state, but also encompasses a moral vision and endorses a 'holistic', 'anti militaristic', and 'life-affirming' commitment to life.

Initially, Atwood articulates silence by carefully selecting symbolic and meaningful names of places, characters, objects and coins; new words to signify special ceremonies. 'Gilead' in Hebrew means the 'Hall of witness' and the novel is nothing, but a fiction about or witness of history. Since it is a 'tale' of the present century, it cannot be ignored or disbelieved. To comprehend the significance of Offred's tale, it is important to know the background, that has led to the establishment of the class of handmaids in the Republic of Gilead. The Republic of Gilead is governed by a Fundamentalist Christian theocracy, the so-called church-state regime. Gilead legitimizes and enforces the class of Handmaids out of the dire necessity to overcome a fertility crisis among the ruling elite. Due to AIDS, syphilis and environmental toxics, many of them are sterile, their wives barren and the children mostly
wretched mutants called "unbabies". Thus, the birth-rate, which is dangerously low among the ruling elite has led to the establishment of the class of Handmaids, whose "domestic" duties form a degraded, obscene version of the "flurry of sexual activity".

The Bible is used by the regime as authority for their laws. The polygamy of the Old Testament provides them with the sanction of Handmaids. They regard themselves as latter-day Jacobs and use their Handmaids in a similar way in this new Gilead. In this way, the Republic of Gilead Justifies its "Sexist policies with the Socio-biological theory of natural polygamy and legitimizes its racist and sexist policies as having biblical precedent. Atwood describes this dystopian project precisely in an unpublished essay, "The Handmaid's Tale: Before and After."

Offred, the narrator of The Handmaid's Tale is one of the several "Handmaids" who, because of their "viable ovaries" are to be recruited for "breeding purposes" of the "Commanders of the faith", who are childless as a result of their wives' infertility. The state reduces the Handmaids to the slavery status of being mere "breeders". As Offred
says: "...we are two-legged wombs, that's all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices". (128)

From a woman’s perspective, one of the most degrading Gileadean practices, consists in the commanders engaging in ritualistic sexual intercourse with their wives. According to Offred, the wife, who is infertile, lies down on a bed with her legs spread open. The Handmaid, one of the few fertile women in Gilead, then puts her head between the spread out legs of the wife, where upon the commander engages in sexual intercourse, not with his wife, but with her Handmaid. If the Handmaid becomes pregnant, the child she bears will be regarded as that of the commander and his wife. After the delivery, the Handmaid has to surrender the child to her mistress. So, the Handmaid must act as surrogate wife and bear a child for the aging commander with the collusion of his barren wife, by a literal enactment of the device invented by Rachel in the Bible. Carole Pateman argues, that the notion of “ownership” of one’s body can lead to a variety of “Social relations of Subordination”\textsuperscript{28}, including prostitution and surrogate motherhood. In this way, the Handmaid is desexed and dehumanized by Gilead's oppressive ideology of contract and property.
The Handmaid is proclaimed as unwoman, if she does not succeed by the end of her thirty two year posting. The dire alternative for her is the punishment of banishing to the colonies, where women clean up radioactive waste as slave labourers. Amin Malak aptly says, that "the dictates of state policy in Gilead thus relegate sex to a salable commodity, exchanged for mere minimal survival." In contrast, male sterility in Gilead is unthinkable. As Offred says, "There are only women who are fruitful and women who are barren, that's the law". So, women are judged by double standards of morality in respect of infertility. Offred and the other Handmaids are thus defined "not even by the category of gender, but quite narrowly by that of female fertility."

Moreover, the state cancels the original names of the Handmaids in order to erase their former identity and labels them according to the names of their commanders. It is metaphoric of the silencing of women by the state that has given them two names. Hence, "Offred" the narrator's relational naming is not a name, but a tag that she wears to signify, that she is the Handmaid "of Fred"; her name is a patronymic comprising the possessive preposition "of" and a man's name, "Fred". Thus, her name is an attestation of the measures of Gilead's use
and abuse of women. As Offred poignantly says: "My name isn't Offred, I have another name, which nobody uses now because it's forbidden... name is like your telephone number, useful only to others."(79-80)

Similarly, other Handmaid's names are Ofglen, Ofwayne, Ofwarren. Jessie Givner says: "Indeed, the desire of the Gilead regime to remove names is as strong as the desire to remove faces. Just as the rulers of Gilead try to eliminate mirrors, reflections of faces, so they attempt to erase names".31 They are doomed to wear the scarlet robes signifying their adultery.

In the Republic of Gilead, women are completely controlled by men and arranged in a hierarchy of functions. In addition to the Handmaids, "reproductive prostitutes", the Republic of Gilead offers its own state sponsored brand of "sex-prostitutes" called the Jezebels, whose sole function is to entertain foreign delegations. The wives of "commanders of the faith", who are called social secretaries and functionaries, aid their husbands during the insemination, known as the "ceremony". They are incharge of household discipline and are clad in blue robes resembling those of the Virgin. Marthas, "domestic slaves", who cook and clean, wear robes of dull green signifying their earthiness.
“Econo wives”, who are the wives of poor men, perform diverse roles and wear red, blue and green striped skimpy robes. The Aunts, “the thought-police of Gilead”, who are clad in paramilitary khaki, train the Handmaids. Thus, women are segregated from one another and are subjected into rigid categories based on their roles and functions.

Therefore, Offred’s The Handmaid’s Tale posits a “future culture in which such feminist dreams have been replaced by fundamentalist patriarchy, that divides women into rigid categories based on function.”

Offred, the Handmaid, in her “reduced, circumstances”, obeys “ritualized subjugation” to the ruling elite, because she knows what the statement “Give me children, or else . . . die” means. She is compelled to discharge her duties as a Handmaid, fully knowing well the consequences. Under the pressure of terrifying alternatives, Offred surrenders: “I resign my body freely, to the uses of others. They can do what they like with me. I am object”. Offred is forced into pregnancy tests every month. The doctor, who examines Offred and other Handmaids periodically for signs of pregnancy never even sees their faces. The commanders, who attempt to impregnate them once a month, are
indifferent to their appearances. As appearance is unimportant for them, the Handmaids are not given face cream. Their bath is regulated by others. Their eating of food is not chosen by them. They are fed only with what the authorities regard as healthy food. Thus, women do not even have the choice in matters of food. As Emma Parker says: "One of the main ways the system of oppression is enforced is through food." The Handmaids are permitted to consume only that, which the authorities consider will enhance their health and fertility. Their arms and legs, which are seen as inessential for reproduction, are ruthlessly chopped off for reading and writing which are punishable crimes in Gilead.

As part of their "re-education" in submission Offred and other Handmaids are made to watch old pornographic films of the seventies and eighties, in which women appear in various forms of submission, brutalization, and grotesque mutilation. To keep obedient to the regime, the Handmaids are ordered to listen and utter the prayers, which the soul scroll machines say while printing them. The Handmaids are also taught by the "Aunts", the policewomen of Gilead to walk with their heads bent down. Writing is prohibited and speech is proscribed among the Handmaids in Gilead. The Handmaids when they meet each
other, they can exchange only greetings that too as follows. Instead of "Hellow", they say. "Blessed be the fruit" and the accepted response is "May the Lord open." So silence and powerlessness go together in the lives of Offred and other Handmaids.

The predicament of Handmaids lucidly illustrates Simone de Beauvoir's assertion in The Second Sex, about man's marginalization of women. She says: "For him she is sex - absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not with reference to her; she is the incidental as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the Absolute- she is the other." According to this observation, the regime assigns roles of Handmaids, and decrees after social, religious, and cosmic concepts convenient to the interests and desires of the ruling elite. Consequently, Offred, the narrator-protagonist becomes the victim of a prohibition ordinance of sex in the Republic of Gilead. So Offred feels the indignity and terror of living under a futuristic regime, controlled by the Christian fundamentalists. She is aware of her present reality, which is oppressive denying her individuality, nurturance and autonomy. Her life turns into a painfully prolonged prison term.
In Gilead, only the ruling class have access to books. As part of the training, the Handmaids are required to recite the Biblical injunctions, which are distorted to reinforce their submissiveness. Biblical and Marxist teachings are blended and distorted in an effort to brainwash the Handmaids: “From each, says the slogan, according to her ability, to each according to his needs. We recited that, three times after dessert. It was from the Bible, or so they said St. Paul again, in Acts (III).”

According to Offred, language in the Republic of Gilead is officially forbidden, because the ruling class recognizes the power of words as weapons that can free the people from bondage. In her lecture, “An End to Audience” delivered in 1980, Atwood articulates thoughts which five years later became the central issue of The Handmaid’s Tale: “In any totalitarian takeover, whether from the left or the right, writers, singers and Journalists are the first to be suppressed . . . The aim of all such suppression is to silence the voice, abolish the words, so that the only voices and words left are those of the ones in power. Elsewhere, the word itself is thought to have power, that’s why so much trouble is taken to silence it.” Offred questions the authority of patriarchal language, which comes from the reservoir of male discourse. Women in Gilead are
denied books, paper, pens and even scrabble is a clandestine activity. Klarer says; “Women from all classes of society . . . are excluded from any kind of written discourse. These measures aim at giving the male leadership all the advantages of a highly developed text-processing culture and of using these advantages purposefully against the women who are condemned to orality.”37

The totalitarian Gilead bans the public use of written signs. The inscriptions on stores and public institutions are removed and replaced by pictographs. The shops are identified by pictures, rather than by names. Offred says: “they decided that even the names of shops were too much temptation for us.” By employing “this form of enslavement, the men of Gilead use pictographs and visual signs as a means of documenting their claims to ownership and power.”38 Words are themselves forbidden in a society governed by the word. Thus, the very structures of language and thinking are controlled by the state.

Offred attacks Biblical language, the language of patriarchy more subtly. She refers to the Bible as an “incendiary device”(82) because, like other weapons, it is available only to the ruling-class men in Gilead. Offred attempts her own version of the Lord’s prayer,
but finally concludes, "I feel as if I am talking to a wall" (183). She experiences the hollowness of the concepts of home and family in Gilead by word associations. She thinks: "The commander is the head of the household. The house is what he holds. To have and to hold, till death do us part. The hold of a ship. Hollow" (77). She regards the evening Bible-readings as her bed time stories. The ban on reading and writing in The Handmaid's Tale which is "one of the measures to prevent the "Privilege" of objectivity from getting into the hands of women"\(^3\) reflects masculine arrogance.

Offred begins to break the slavery syndrome by transgressing "the uniform of language" of Gilead. She steals into her commander's study to play the game of scrabble and thus she wears "the robes but not the thought, not the beliefs, exigible in the Gileadean desire for sameness."\(^4\) She discovers, that there can be freedom even within the prison house of language in Gilead, "where language is, for women, as illicit as unauthorized sex, scrabble is itself unspeakable."\(^5\) She thus, transgresses "the uniforms of language."\(^6\) The scrabble game, which is forbidden, functions "as a signifier of the power of language, the power of the word, as does Offred's play with language throughout the tale."\(^7\)
CHAPTER-V

Through the wooden letters of the game, literacy is literally materialized and letters can be “touched”. The game evokes memories of reading experiences which could broaden one’s horizon and make the unknown familiar.\(^44\)

Offred is able to ask the commander questions, and to criticize him. She imagines stabbing the commander, when he asks her to kiss him. She says: “I think about the blood coming out of him, hot as soup, sexual, over my hands”\(^1\)\(^3\)\(^1\)\(^2\)\(^1\). She sees the commander as an “idol, a cardboard cutout” of the regime and gives him an insight into the real living conditions and situation of the Handmaids. Later on, she is secretly presented by the commander copies of women’s magazines like Vogue, unlabelled bottle of face cream, which are forbidden to the Handmaids. These gestures show subversion of Gileadean doctrine. “Biology need not be destiny because the scripts can be rewritten, voiced over.”\(^45\) She realizes the power of the “pen”. As she says: “The pen between my fingers is sensuous, alive most, I can feel its power, the power of the words it contains . . . . Just holding it is envy. I envy the commander his pen. It’s one more thing I would like to steal.”\(^46\)
Offred, who witnesses the bloody "Salvagings", the ritual slaughter and dismemberment of women, begins to feel shock, outrage, nausea and considers them as barbarous. She is alert and realises that she is in danger. She feels that her stay in Gilead is no better than in a Jail. She lives a life of lassitude in Gilead. She feels that her body is no longer suited for pleasure and she does not wish to be a doll hung up on the wall. She occupies herself with memories of her husband and daughter, and strongly desires to escape from her present claustrophobic environment. She is not even free to die in Gilead. Ultimately, Offred decides to end up by hanging: "I could noose the bedsheet round my neck, hook myself up in the closet, throw my weight forward, choke myself off"\(^{47}\), but she considers suicide, a timid action. Offred has much patience and disbelief for rumours about possible prosecution: "I become the earth I set my ear against, for rumours of the future."\(^{48}\) The cushion on which the word, "Faith" is embroidered, is an image that reveals Offred's profound faith in her life as a woman. Although she lives in the man's tyrannical world in Gilead, she feels a sense of pride for having been born a woman. So she exclaims: "Oh God, king of the Universe, thank you for not creating me a man."\(^{49}\)
CHAPTER V

Offred mournfully remembers her love and attachment with her husband and daughter, from whom she has been so abruptly separated. "Nobody dies from lack of sex. It's lack of love we die from. There's nobody here I can love, all the people I could love are dead or else where . . . where there are or what their names are now? They might as well be nowhere, as I am for them. I too am a missing person. From time to time I can see their faces, against the dark, flickering like the images of saints . . . I can conjure them . . ."50

What sustains Offred in the darkest hours of hopelessness in the lingering memory of her family is the hope of meeting them some day; that keeps her alive.

Offred remembers her mother, an ardent feminist, who had participated in pre-Gilead times in many "anti-porno" and "pro-abortion" movements in the hope of creating a women's culture i.e., Sexual and Social freedom. She recalls better times and speaks to her mother in herself: "can you hear me? You wanted a woman's culture. Well, now there is one. It isn't what you meant, but it exists. Be thankful for small mercies."51
She expresses her anguish that sexual repression is intensifying and women's struggle for equal rights is still bleak. She feels her mother's hard-core feminism in its own way can be as repressive as the "Aunts" who represent anti-feminist forces. Therefore, she makes a proclamation: "I didn't want to live on her terms. I didn't want to be the model offspring, the incarnation of her ideas. We used to fight about that..."52

Thus, Offred is not an embodiment of her mother's radical feminism. She is "anti-militaristic", as she is neither retaliating nor compromising in her attitude towards male misogynous mentality. Gradual development of Offred's feminist consciousness towards initiating risky schemes breaks completely the slavery syndrome. As Offred says: "I'm tired of this melodrama, I'm tired of keeping silent..."53. It is through Nick, the commander's Chauffeur, Offred associates with the underground network, which shifts her from "being a helpless victim of being a sly, Subversive Survivor."54 The regimes claim to absolute authority in the state is given the lie by the presence of May day Resistance group and Offred's escape. Ultimately, Offred is rescued by Nick, the private Eye and the underground May day Resistance group,
who come in the "blackvan". Nick calls her by her real name and says: "It's May day. Go with them." Howell says: "Stubborn Survival Continually subverts the regime's claims to absolute authority, creating imaginative spaces within the system and finally the very means of Offred's escape from Gilead." Out of the four "Basic Victim positions" mentioned in Atwood's Survival Offred chooses one possible option, which is to acknowledge being "a victim" but to refuse "to accept the assumption, that the role is inevitable."

Nevertheless we cannot agree with Madame Miner, who argues that The Handmaid's Tale raises "serious questions about a man - woman axis, when this axis model itself upon patterns that restrict, rather than liberate." But, her argument is baseless and far from the fictional evidence. In her assessment of the novel, Miner looks upon Offred as a "falling woman" or "outside woman". In this way, her treatment of Offred is as bad as the churchstate regime, Gilead. Amin Malak makes an optimistic assessment, that The Handmaid's Tale condemns "male misogynous mentality, it upholds and cherishes a man-woman axis."

Atwood, like Morrison takes risk with language. She establishes a link between one's physical self and the developing psyche.
Pecola, in *The Bluest Eye* searches for spiritual beauty through physical beauty and Offred perceives the external phenomena, searches within and communicates her feelings, emotions through simple words, ironical statements, laughter, specific acts, coded messages, body, language and even through silence. The tale is often narrated by an extraordinary juxtaposing of ideas which in themselves are extremely communicative. The same problem confronts Offred. Muted economically, emotionally and literally, she must recreate herself, learn to speak afresh. The vanquisher's language insists on regimentation of emotion and speech, "we smile too, we are one smile." They are turned into 'missing persons', deserted rooms, where things once happened and now nothing does. Fortunately for the reader, the orchestra of voices rising from the recorded story defeats this nothingness.

Offred's *The Handmaid's Tale* conducts us on a miniature tour of the Republic of Gilead by her art of story telling, which is the "only possible gesture of resistance to imprisonment in silence, just as it becomes the primary means for her psychological survival. In the process of reconstructing herself into an individual, Offred becomes the most important historian of Gilead." Offred, who herself was a librarian
in pre-Gilead, has language in her mind, that enables her to survive in Gilead, who is initially silenced by Gileadean culture. The very thing that is denied Offred, the freedom to speak up, speak out, be heard becomes the medium through which she defines herself. Offred realizes the centrality of language to the process of self-realization and the struggle for equality. Language - the ability to speak, to tell one's own story is at the heart of Offred. So, language which is initially an intimidating silence for Offred is ultimately converted into a liberating phenomenon as Carol Beran observes: "Offred's power is in language." Therefore, she eventually works her way to freedom through language which is officially denied. She associates herself with the underground May day Resistance group. Ultimately, it is because of her "creativity and risk taking" Offred escapes from the Republic of Gilead to the underground Female road to tell her tale. Thus, she is "forcefully reduced to orality and to keeping her diary by speaking into a tape recorder." She tells most of her tale in the present tense, giving it the immediacy of direct experience. Offred's voice on cassette tapes serve as records of an emergence from silence. As Verwaayen comments: "She 'acts' through the power of her words, through her memory and voice, which resist the ideology of repression." Thus, she fights by breaking the imposed codes of silence and inscribing
herself into history. As Cixous says: "... an act that will be marked by woman's seizing the occasion to speak, hence her shattering into entry history, which has always been based on her suppression."\(^{65}\)

The manuscript of *The Handmaid's Tale* is a reconstruction of voice recordings of Offred. It is through "Such technologies that Offred commits her most subversive act: She reports her narrative."\(^{66}\) She uses language - a "revolutionary potential" as a "Subversive-weapon" to raise her voice against the sexual oppression of the patriarchal society and thus to demolish absolute authority of the Republic of Gilead. She condemns the Gilead for "its intolerant, prescriptive set of values that projects a tunnel vision on reality and eliminates human violation."\(^{67}\) Thus, *The Handmaid's Tale* is designed to illustrate how orality can be deliberately cultivated to question the authoritarian power structures. The subversive potential of her narration offers "the possibility of a multiple-constructed subjectivity even for those of future generations."\(^{68}\) She creates an audience simply by the act of her own reporting which takes up the struggle within the arena of the symbolic order. Thus, Offred, a "talking woman", has "the cause and will and strength and means"\(^{69}\) to articulate silence. Through Offred's tale, Atwood presents "a time-less vision of sexual politics in a fallen world."\(^{70}\)
Offred's *The Handmaid's Tale* is a challenge to traditional values. It is also a recognition of the victimized women, that the structures that cause and perpetuate women's oppression are arbitrary. Therefore, any kind of oppression is subject to change. In this way, Offred tells us in her cautionary tale something we need to know about the human capacity for survival, which is a "canonization of feminism". Offred, the Handmaid never stops "Judging her world, reading its rewritten language for fractured signs of hope."\(^7\) She triumphs as the author of her own story.

Offred's *The Handmaid's Tale* is a challenge to traditional values. It is a "Science-fiction fable" and a "futuristic feminist nightmare"\(^72\) to prevent Gilead intended becoming a reality. As a cautionary tale, it warns that "If we cease to Judge this world, we may find ourselves, very quickly in one which is infinitely worse."\(^73\)
REFERENCES


8. Atwood 100.


13. Atwood 331.


27. Margaret Atwood papers, Ms Collection 200, University of Toronto, 'The Handmaid's Tale: Before and After', November, 1986, Box 96, Folder 11.


30. Caminero - Santangelo 27.

31. Jessie Givner, Names and Signatures in Margaret Atwood's Cat's Eye and the Handmaid's Tale, Canadian Literature 133 (Summer 1992) : 58.


33. Emma Parker, You are What you Eat: The politics of Eating in the novels of Margaret Atwood, Twentieth Century Literature 41.3 (Fall 1995) : 354.


36. Margaret Atwood, An End to Audience, Second Words, 350.

37. Klarer 131.

38. Klarer 137.


41. Conboy 355

43. Verwaayen 52.

44. Klarer 134.

45. Verwaayen 45-46.


47. I bid., 274.

48. I bid., 69.

49. I bid., 182.

50. I bid., 97.

51. I bid., 120.

52. I bid., 115.

53. I bid., 275.


59. Malak 15.


61. Howells 127.


63. Klarer 132.

64. Verwaayen 46.


66. Caminero - Santangelo 33.


68. Caminero - Santangelo 33.


73. Margaret Atwood, *Witches, Second Words* 333.