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THE ORIGINALITY OF *THE HANDMAID'S TALE* & *THE CHILDREN OF MEN*: RELIGION, JUSTICE, AND FEMINISM IN DYSTOPIAN FICTION

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to analyze the theoretical challenges and the approach through which *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Children of Men* describe a world which is destroying itself in a society where human rights do not matter. The main objective is to discuss the role of women in these narrative universes. A space will also be created to consider how the female condition is perceived as a threat to a totalitarian society. In doing so, we will undertake this research with a multidisciplinary approach which takes into consideration the novels and the on-screen adaptations of these two stories. The end of the world is described and portrayed with a peculiar research of details that can convey this general idea of hopelessness. This paper wants to explore and create a detailed socio-cultural perspective on these two novels and movies with the support of a series of academic references to gender and dystopian studies.

Keywords: dystopia, feminism, adaptation, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *The Children of Men*.

The common ground that exists between P.D James and Margaret Atwood is their shared purpose of creating awareness of a possible dystopian future. My essay will create a comparative analysis of Atwood's and James's novels and on-screen adaptations *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Children of Men* with the purpose of

highlighting and discussing how these two stories share and explore themes of justice, politics, feminism, gender, hope, infertility, human rights and dignity in dystopian fiction. I will begin this analysis by defining dystopia as a "futuristic, imagined universe in which oppressive societal control and the illusion of a perfect society are maintained through corporate, bureaucratic, technological, moral, or totalitarian control" (Read Write Think). This specific narrative form enables writers to depict a scenario where the new norm is represented by an oppressive and extremist new reality. Dystopic scenarios are commonly used to criticize current trends, societal norms, or political systems. In their novels, Atwood and P.D. James managed to describe literary universes in which people are stripped of their basic human rights. If *The Handmaid's Tale* is defined as a dystopian novel, what also has to be taken into consideration is Atwood's vision of her own literary work. In an interview, she clearly stated her narrative objective: "One of my rules was that I would not put any events into the book that had not already happened... nor any technology not already available. No imaginary gizmos, no imaginary laws, no imaginary atrocities. God is in the details, they say. So is the Devil" (Atwood BR1). The writer does not want to let the reader think that the world she created is very different from the real world. She seems to believe that we are not paying attention to the slow changes and all the rights we are secretly deprived of. As a result, the term "dystopia" does not fully represent her vision. It is however still clear that the world she created shares the same literary objectives with dystopian worlds.

Pieixoto and the implications of the political system in *The Handmaid's Tale*

Let's start the analysis with *The Handmaid's Tale's* political vision. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood builds a new political system that is called Gilead. This government is not a result of a democratic election, but is instead strictly oligarchic. Atwood's choice here is driven by her interest in building and delineating how society changes in June's near future. The reader partially becomes acquainted with this political system from June's point of view: the beginning of the novel does not offer any specific details on who controls this armed regime that obliges girls to be prisoners, firstly in educational centers and then in strategically chosen habitations. The narrator only projects us inside a fully-formed and working system. Aunt Lydia is one of the first political figures to appear: she takes care, often

violently, of all the handmaids that are waiting for a house. At first, her role is not fully explained: the reader does not know how high her rank is within this society and why she chose to follow the “education” of these girls. Her commitment to the cause will be explored in the second part of the novel. Details about this system emerge as the story is explored further until its climax in the final pages. Atwood decides to use a narrative technique here in order to make the reader aware of the historical background from an external point of view:

Our author, then, was one of many, and must be seen within the broad outlines of the moment in history of which she was a part. But what else do we know about her, apart from her age, some physical characteristics that could be anyone’s, and her place of residence? Not very much. She appears to have been an educated woman, insofar as a graduate of any North American college of the time may be said to have been educated. (Laughter, some groans) (...)She does not see fit to supply us with her original name, and indeed all official records of it would have been destroyed upon her entry into the Rachel and Leah Re-education Centre. “Offred” gives no clue, like “Ofglen” and “Ofwarren” (...)The other names in the document are equally useless for the purpose of identification and authentication. “Luke” and “Nick” drew blanks, as did “Moira” and “Janine”. (Atwood 317)

As this extract highlights, Professor Pieixoto is Atwood’s narrator who finds the recordings and retells the story. This narrative technique is not original or particularly new: it has been used in many historical novels with manuscripts such as Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe* or Manzoni’s *I promessi sposi*, but Atwood ventures beyond the standard technique and conceives her own peculiar version of it. Pieixoto speaks at a conference that takes place 150 years in the future. There is a subtle irony in the description of Gilead’s events and this point of view, being both external and critical, enables a more direct and concrete depiction of the social, cultural and political environment. The ending of the novel summarizes all these aspects:

As all historians know, the past is a great darkness, and filled with echoes. Voices may reach us from it, but what they say to us is imbued with the obscurity of the matrix out of which they come; and try as we may, we cannot always decipher them precisely in the clearer light of our own day. (Atwood 324)

The satirical style disappears to reveal a clear picture of Atwood's vision of history and change. The figure of Pieixoto can be considered as controversial. A subtle sexism can also be identified in Pieixoto's words: his irony towards June and the handmaid's situation reveals his sense of superiority not only as a future inhabitant of the earth who has a different perspective on past events, but also as an arrogant professor who derides his colleague. The narrative feature of flashbacks is one of the key-elements in this exploration of the story's political background which is part of the theoretical challenges that Atwood proposes. June's life with Luke and her daughter clashes with her present state of suffering and oppression. Margaret Atwood decides to portray the rise of Gilead as a gradual process of change. The extremist religious turn of events acquires more and more power with a series of oppressive acts in which characters are deprived of their human rights. All of these acts are directed towards minorities with a specific gendered vision. As June must stop working and transfer her money into Luke's bank account, we start to understand how this political change will affect the social division between man and women, middle class, and higher class.

Dystopian constructions: Atwood's and James's personal contribution

Specific traits of Atwood's dystopic world lead to a comparison with previous dystopian fiction. When comparing *The Handmaid's Tale* to Orwell's *1984*, similarities and differences can be highlighted between Atwood's and Orwell's approach to dystopia. The former creates a narrative universe that is unveiled gradually due to flashbacks and to a closing chapter set in the future. In *1984*, the narration presents a fixed and clear state of events; an approach that has become a common feature of dystopian novels. Digressions are also a key element in both of these dystopian books: the reader is offered a complete and clear picture of all the subtle mechanisms and nonsensical political choices of the government. Gilead has a more peculiar and direct approach towards society and politics: Atwood presents this political situation starting from the particular case of June and arriving at the general situation. The reader is not given a lot of information on foreign countries with the exception of Ontario, which has become a safe heaven. A perspective that fully analyzes and considers the characters' situation is provided. Orwell, however, supplies the reader with a more stranded and bleaker vision of the reality he is

shaping. The differences that divide these two novels are exemplary of the various narrative forms that a dystopian novel can assume. In order to fully understand this distinction, what must be considered is how dystopia is entangled with utopia. As Dunja M. Mohr explains in her critical analysis “World Apart?”, different examples of utopia and dystopia have emerged in the past centuries, with each of the two choosing a diametrically different approach. While utopia “uplifts the reader”, “dystopia holds up a hellish mirror and describes the worst possible futures” (Mohr 27). Not only do the approaches differ, but the effect of each of these two narrative worlds has a distinct and clear resonance. While utopia shows the reader how the world could be different by creating a sense of hope, dystopia has the opposite effect, creating a sense of dismay. Mohr separates this evolution of dystopia into two phases: the first one being classical dystopia and the second one being feminist dystopia. *1984* is clearly an example of classical former, while *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Children of Men* can be considered feminist dystopias. In these two dystopian worlds, the Canadian writer differs from the British because she does not back down from making extreme and cruel narrative choices. This can be connected to Catholicism, which plays an important role inside the narration as both novels contain shades of religious extremism.

Having defined *The Handmaid’s Tale* as a feminist dystopia, I shall now proceed to analyze how Margaret Atwood represents this specific social and cultural wave in her novel. Offred is the central figure who views from a feminist perspective. Her story delves into the evolution of feminist waves as Atwood uses her as a reminder to respect women’s rights. As Gina Wisker explains:

So we must and do trust Offred’s tale but we also need to contextualize it. Offred’s mother, a second wave feminist, was involved in ‘Take Back the Night’ marches and other activities. She burned pornography and invited Offred, as a child to do the same. Her mother represented the energies of women in the 1980s who sought to argue for and achieve political, personal and economic equality while Offred and her generation reaped the benefits with their own jobs, bank accounts, and equal rights, at least ostensibly. (Wisker 34)

There are several elements of feminine dystopia that can be identified in the novel. The first of these elements is the focus on a single woman, Offred, and her

experiences in a dystopian reality. Moreover, the novel gives form to a dissident that tries to create a testimony for all women who are obliged to suffer physical and psychological the novel.

Yet the critical debate behind the possible identification of these novels as representing this specific type of dystopia has not been unanimously agreed upon by critics. In “Feminism's Phantoms”, Barbara Ehrenreich explains how *The Handmaid's Tale* could be considered a warning against the repressive tendencies of feminism. In her *New Republic* article, she describes Offred as a “sappy stand-in for Winston Smith. Even her friend Moira characterized her as a «wimp»” (Ehrenreich 34). The main character, who is also the narrator of the story, has been praised but also criticized for her passivity. In her article “Choice of Evils”, Greene refuses to describe the protagonist as a hero. Moylan and Baccolini in *Dark Horizons* present a contemporary view of dystopia “as texts that maintain a utopian impulse” (Moylan 3). In the current debates on this genre, their vision of the field creates a distinction based on the message that derives from different dystopian stories. In Orwell's *1984* Winston Smith and Julia are both “crushed by the authoritarian society; there is no learning, no escape for them” (Moylan 3). The ending corresponds to the subjugation of the individual. Both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Children of Men* differ from *1984* in their ambiguous conclusions as their open endings respect the so-called critical dystopia that attempts to blur “the received boundaries of the dystopian form and thereby expand its creative potential for critical expression” (Moylan 4). Atwood and James seem to go against the normative sense of closure imposed by the genre, and in doing so, they revolutionize the narrative message at its core with a sense of complex and ambiguous incompleteness. In Wilson's *Women's Utopian and Dystopian Fiction*, Cataldo expands this vision of *The Handmaid's Tale* as a critical dystopia and scrutinizes Atwood's writing process: “Atwood intentionally blends different genres into the dystopian skeleton, such as fairy tale – as is clearly detectable even in the title – the history, the autobiography, the realistic narrative and even the epistolary novel, although Offred never writes, since writing is forbidden in Gilead” (Cataldo 158). Classifying these two complex novels into one limited genre is extremely difficult. It is clear that Atwood's and James's choice of presenting an incomplete or open-end conclusion represents their “resistance to closure” (Cataldo 163) and therefore their message of hope.

A Symbolic Exploration of the Female Condition

In Atwood's and James's stories, hope always seems to be connected with women. If we explore the female condition, we have to consider how it suffers the consequences of a patriarchal system which gains more power and is influenced by the social plague of a diminishing birthrate. Having children becomes a privilege of the upper classes and all the handmaids become victims of an urgency of procreation. The same bleak condition can be traced in James's *The Children of Men*. In the society described by James, the birth rate has collapsed and humanity's survival is at stake. The only figure that embodies hope is Julian. She assumes a key symbolic role in the story.

From this depiction of difficult human conditions derives two themes: infertility and hope. These are explored by both Atwood and James with a heavy use of symbolism and allegory. Examples of this use of symbolism and allegory are all the elements that tie the novel with religion. Along with biblical references, this theme is clearly a common ground that challenges these two writers and creates complexity. The incipit of *The Handmaid's Tale* includes a *Genesis*' reference: "And she said, Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her" (Genesis 30:1-3). In a theocracy like Gilead, the Bible becomes an instrument that can justify all the extreme and oppressive actions of the government. In James's *The Children of Men*, references to the Bible are made in association with characters that retain allusive symbolic value. The last woman alive is carrying the only baby conceived in 25 years. She is carrying humanity's salvation, she is a newly raised Virgin Mary. The role of Joseph is assumed by Theo, who tries to protect her from all dangers. The title itself is a derivative of a biblical psalm: "Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men" (Genesis 30:1-3). This clear and direct connection partially explains James's use of symbols and allegories: her novel revolves around this "lack of faith in the world and the over-reliance on science to solve and cure people's problems" (Cummings 104). Human race has created its own dystopia in the story, but at the same time, mankind has become infertile without getting to know the reasons behind this change. In this hopeless world, people have started to believe in new religions. Even if James and Atwood both deal with these themes of faith and religion, they differ in their approaches: the British writer seems to be focused on an exploration of the true meaning of religious belief. In portraying this unexpected newly raised holy family,

James is willing to point out the difference between false myths and real miracles. Julian is pregnant after 25 years of infertility: she has been chosen by some outer entity and must be protected. The only one who comes to rescue her is Theo, who does not represent any religious or political figure within society. He is an ordinary man who feels the urgency to protect the only hope for humanity's survival.

Hopelessness and Doom

The ending revolves around Theo and Julian and this hope for humanity's future, but the conclusion is full of complex aspects. In *The Children of Men's* final pages, there is a sort of resolution for James which does not offer the reader a satisfying and comforting ending: "The detective novel affirms our belief in a rational universe because, at the end, the mystery is solved. In 'The Children of Men' there is no such comforting resolution" (James *The New York Times*). In the following passage, James conveys a vision of doom and despair:

On the whole I'm glad; you can't mourn for unborn grandchildren when there never was a hope of them. This planet is doomed anyway. Eventually the sun will explode or cool and one small insignificant particle of the universe will disappear with only a tremble. If man is doomed to perish, then universal infertility is as painless a way as any. And there are, after all, personal compensations. For the last sixty years, we have sycophantically pandered to the most ignorant, the most criminal and the most selfish section of society. Now, for the rest of our lives, we're going to be spared the intrusive barbarism of the young, their noise, their pounding, repetitive, computer-produced so-called music, their violence, their egotism disguised as idealism. My God, we might even succeed in getting rid of Christmas, that annual celebration of parental guilt and juvenile greed. I intend that my life shall be comfortable, and, when it no longer is, then I shall wash down my final pill with a bottle of claret. (James 45)

Likewise the British writer, Margaret Atwood creates a hopeless planet, shaping an oppressive society. The writer seems to convey a sensation of doom that she is making the reader perceive: "Atwood apocalyptically foresees the failure of humanism, liberalism, individualism, feminism, and capitalism" (Kauffman 222).

A gendered perspective

Another approach through which we can compare these novels revolves around gender studies. The role of women is central. Offred, Ofglen, Aunt Lydia or Janine all reveal a specific aspect or particular ideologies of society. Atwood's heroines are always the messengers of the ideology she wishes to convey through her novel. If we focus on the character of Offred, there are many aspects of her personality and her background that can be linked to a wider discussion. For example, there is the issue of the use of language. Offred does not want to surrender to the Gilead's rules, which aim to impose a controlled and politically correct language. Through Offred's soliloquies, the reader perceives her fierce rebellion and in this case, how language is used as a weapon. As Mohr emphasizes:

Like other Atwoodian heroines, for instance, such as Laura in *The Blind Assassin* whose deviant behavior partially stems from taking words and saying quite literally, Offred examines words and given definitions, where Gileadean use of language limits women and «fence in the self (Finnell, 209) ». Challenging a uniform society with a uniformizing language, Offred unearths the multiple meaning of words and the multiplicity of language. (Mohr 265)

Language is a key-element of the story and Offred's voice can be analyzed from various points of view. She embodies the narrative voice that tells a story through various tapes, and she is the voice of the rebellion because she does not want to surrender to Gilead's impositions and instead helps May Day. As was previously stated, even her own voice has some rebellious characteristics. Firstly, June refuses to forget that she has a voice and even if she is aware of the appalling risks that she is undertaking, she speaks loudly. Her actions are driven by a need for empowerment and self-assertion. She carries the flag of the feminist figure in a world where feminism has been forbidden and censored. Considering Atwood's vision in the novel, the presence of feminism can be associated with the concept of gender and identity. In a totalitarian system based on religion, the patriarchal government imposes specific regulations on gender norms and even sexuality. Homosexuality is not accepted, and women are forced to serve men in every scenario. A specific dynamic can be derived from the imposition of a hetero-normative oppressive vision

which establishes the role that each member of the hierarchical socio-economic society must play. As Judith Butler explains in *Bodies that Matter*, homophobia plays a part in the crucial connection between sexuality and gender:

Although forms of sexuality do not unilaterally determine gender, a non-casual and non-reductive connection between sexuality and gender is nevertheless crucial to maintain. Precisely because homophobia often operates through the attribution of a damaged, failed, or otherwise abject gender to homosexuals [...] and because the homophobic terror over performing homosexual acts, where it exists, is often also a terror over losing proper gender. (Butler 238)

In the television series adaptation, Ofglen is called a “gender traitor” and she is genitally mutilated because in a homophobic world she dared to have an affair with another woman and she lost her own gender’s goal: reproduction. She does not respect their hetero-normative vision, so she must endure the loss of her own gender identity. As Butler points out in *Gender Trouble*, feminism plays a crucial role in the analysis of the complexity of gender as “any feminist theory that restricts the meaning of gender in the presuppositions of its own practice sets up exclusionary gender norms within feminism, often with homophobic consequences” (Butler 3). Indeed, gender cannot be reduced to a dualism between masculinity and femininity because this depiction does not give space to other possibilities. In respecting the social rules imposed in *The Handmaid’s Tale*’s universe, its depiction of sexuality, gender and identity corresponds to Butler’s vision of gender as an act that “requires a performance that is *repeated*” (Butler 114). Offred and Ofglen repetitively interpret a role and when they stop performing their parts, they are severely punished.

Xan and *The Children of Men*’s political system

If we continue our comparative analytic approach to these two novels we can highlight how in both *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Children of Men*, there is a similar duplicity in the narrative construction: these two novels share the alternation of an internal point of view and an external narration in the flux of the story. In the former, various perspectives on the events of June’s story are offered and in the latter James interchanges a first and a third person narration: the reader has Theo’s point of view through his notes on his personal diary and an omniscient narrator. In *The*

Children of Men, there is no character like Pieixoto who ironically but accurately comments on the events that have taken place one hundred and fifty years earlier, but the reader is otherwise projected inside the protagonist's inner self and internal perception of his own history. The political system is centralized on few figures. The parliament has lost its relevance and it has been reduced to an advisory role. Power is controlled by the Council of England, which consists of five people. The head of the country is the Warden of England, Xan Lyppiatt. Xan is also Theo's cousin and therefore derives a series of ramifications that can add various interesting elements to the present analysis: the main tyrannical figure of the story has the same blood of the hero or savior. With this specific choice of a blood tie between the two, James continues to delve into biblical references. Representing Cain and Abel, Xan and Theo have a final showdown that coincides with the death of the tyrant. The political system in *The Handmaid's Tale* uses the Bible and religious references to create an ideology. The system in *The Children of Men*, however, does not need religious references to justify narrative developments: characters are the embodiment of biblical allusions and stories. Xan and the council of England are described in Theon's diary:

What possible interest can there be in the journal of Theodore Faron, Doctor of Philosophy, Fellow of Merton College in the University of Oxford, historian of the Victorian age, divorced, childless, solitary, whose only claim to notice is that he is cousin to Xan Lyppiatt, the dictator and Warden of England. (James 4)

Despite the fact that they do not share the same political goals and repressive policies, these two governments share an oligarchy system. While James does not provide many details of the events that lead to the destitution of the President, Parliament and so on, Atwood offers specific details on the violent assassination of the US president which is an anniversary in this narrative future: "It was after the catastrophe, when they shot the president and machine-gunned the Congress and the army declared a state of emergency. They blamed it on the Islamic fanatics, at the time. (...) The entire government, gone like that. How did that happen?" (Atwood 182-183).

The importance of justice

While living in a bleak dystopian world, and dealing with unexpected political events, characters in *The Children of Men* and *The Handmaid's Tale* always have to deal with the disappearance and murder of friends, family members, and acquaintances. A trend that can be traced in James' novels is a focus on what it means to have a sense of justice and how relevant the theme of death is in society nowadays. As a writer of detective novels, she has developed a specific ideology over time. A common characteristic of her literary works is presented by the concrete and perpetual belief that crimes will have consequences which can be worse than the crimes themselves. As Norma Siebenheller summarizes:

Death is a terrible price paid by the victim in every murder mystery. But a major theme of P.D. James's work is not just this admitted tragedy, but the dreadful cost of crime to others. (...) When the law, or its representatives, must intrude upon the lives of decent people because chance has put them in the way of a crime, they may cause disruption, suspicion, fear, deceit, and a spate of other unpleasant results. (Siebenheller 97)

This critic's words refer to James' literary works, but these words can easily illustrate one of the main events of *The Children of Men*. The death of the last man born on Earth is one of the main occurrences of the story because it is a symbol of the state of events and puts pressure on the birthrate. Another relevant event is the death of Luke which helps build up the final climax. His death also clearly has many consequences on the lives of the people around him. All these events influence the narration and give a clear direction to the novel.

James' and Atwood's novels as screen adaptations: Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Children of Men*

A comparative analysis of *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Children of Men* can also be constructed from the perspective of screen adaptations; a feature that is common to both novels. Adapting a novel to a cinematic work presents many challenges. Not only do the screenwriter and director have to decide if they want to accurately transpose the story or not, but among other tasks, they must choose costumes details and select the perfect actors that will portray the characters.

Adaptation is a creative process that also raises various questions about the importance of fidelity, the legal and practical procedures that are involved in this process of transcoding, and the relationship between the original source and the evolution of the work of art. In her critical analysis *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon creates an overview of this phenomenon, developing a detailed account of all the forms that adaptations can assume and all the consequences of this transformation. In the present analysis, emphasis will be placed on the question of how audiences enjoy and engage with the “oscillation between [the adapted work] and the new adaptation we are experiencing” (Hutcheon XVII). In creating a comparison between Atwood’s and James’ novels and their respective cinematic renditions, this section will proceed to explore how the changes made during this process of adaptation influence the political and sociological ideologies and narrative developments of the adapted works, as well as how they leave open a wide range of new narrative possibilities. Yet as Hutcheon explains, in the end the most important question is “why”. Why has the film adapter decided to transform a work of art into a new form, taking into account all the possible accusations, positive or negative responses that derive from the complexity of the matter:

But adaptation teaches that if we cannot talk about the creative process, we cannot fully understand the urge to adapt and therefore perhaps the very process of adaptation. We need to know “why”. [...] Any answer to the question, “Why adapt?”, needs to take into account the range of responses provided by adapters themselves. (Hutcheon 111)

The answer to this crucial question is connected to another academic field, namely, transmedia studies. Transmedia storytelling tells a single story across various platforms and formats using current digital technologies and it is an evolution of the traditional cross-platform process of adaptation. With a global vision of adaptation and transmedia studies, Leitch’s *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies* introduces the contemporary debate that considers adaptation studies in relation “to its impact and influence in performance studies, music, political activity, and numerous other social and cultural platforms” (Leitch 32). Considering all the transformations that the society has endured, there has been an expansion of the boundaries of adaptation studies in order to include the “appropriation of texts and

images by readers and viewers who inhabit the intervals between materials and texts” (Leitch 32). The viewer has the power of envisioning and capturing the message. As a result, the transformation of the term mediation into the term “remediation” must also be discussed. Defined by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin in their book *Remediation: Understanding New Media* as “the formal logic by which new media technologies refashion prior media forms” (Bolter 273), this concept describes how new media in American society refashions the cultural background of earlier media. A contemporary analysis of the two adaptations must be aware of all these sociological factors involved in watching an adaptation in the form of a movie or a television series.

A screen adaptation must animate and transform everything from the text into dramatic elements such as dialogue and action in a visual form. The two cinematic adaptations under analysis here are Cuarón’s *Children of Men* and Miller’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*. Both of these on-screen works obtained critical acclaim and approval from Atwood and James. On the one hand, Margaret Atwood not only followed the development of Hulu’s TV series, but she also appeared in a cameo in the first episode. In a literary visual inception, she slaps Offred when she refuses to condemn Janine because she is a victim of rape. The writer has always been involved in this project and she seemed to love the idea of transposing her book to the entertainment world. There are many aspects that were faithfully adapted, but nevertheless there were some additions and differences. From a thematic point of analysis, the theme of hope is broadened in the TV show: the viewer knows that Luke survived and Moira got to Ontario safe and sound. The novelistic version of Moira does not have a clear destiny as June does not come back to Jezebel. In one of the last episodes of season one, Offred receives a note from her husband which causes her to gain even more motivation for her silent and fierce rebellion. Atwood’s novel does not explore what could have happened to Offred after the ending. The viewer is only presented with a few hypothetical scenarios described by Pieixoto. From an aesthetic perspective, if the costumes and all the characteristics of the protagonists are considered, the colour red is visually persistent and can therefore be identified as one of the central elements of the cinematography. The costume director decided not to use veils for the handmaids, which represents one of the few changes made in the screen adaptation. In *The New York Times* interview, Margaret Atwood confirmed how relevant her characters are clothed within her fictional world: “Organizing

people according to what they're wearing (...) is a very, very, very, very old tradition. (...) It dates back to the first known legal code, the code of Hammurabi" (Atwood BR1). Each detail of these characters' clothes has a purpose, and the decision to use only bonnets instead of veils creates a more direct focus on the facial expression of the characters. Hulu renewed the show for a second season, so it is certain that the story will go beyond Atwood's novel.

Both Atwood and James praised the on-screen rendition of their works. In fact, in an interview, P.D. James blessed Cuarón's adaptation of her book. Unlike Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale*, the screenplay in *Children of Men* differs a lot from its source material. A pertinent question that arises is why did the Mexican director decide to change some narrative outcomes from James's story? The main difference lies in the character of Kee. The director and screenwriter Cuarón decided to switch infertility from male to female and he assigns the role of the embodiment of hope to a young refugee that has arrived illegally in Britain. An interesting feature that can be pointed out here is how Cuarón's changes are still connected to Biblical references, and in a certain way, they amplify James' imagery. The decision to choose an African woman not only follows the line of immigration (a new dimension which the director added to the story), but it is also connected to the history of humanity itself. Cuarón explained his choices in an interview with the magazine *The Stranger*: "There are many different reasons—one is, that as far as we know, human life sprang out of Africa. There is the notion that the future of humanity resides on the dispossessed—the lumpen of the lumpenproletariat on that continent" (James *The Stranger*). Kee's background and his relationship with Theo both explore and widen the theme of hope that can be traced in the novel. While in James's novel, this specific feeling is embodied by Theo who kills Xan and possibly saves the future of humanity, in the cinematic adaptation of *Children of Men*, the ending diverges. Theo still represents the savior, but he is shot and he will probably die on the boat where he is escorting Kee who decides to call her baby Dylan, in memory of Julian and Theo's son. There is also a literary reference in the closing titles: the director uses *The Waste Land's* ending "Shantih, Shantih, Shantih" (Eliot 83) which are words said by Jasper when he meets the two fugitives. Hope collides with peace, but the ending is left open for interpretations. Both the novel and the movie do not depict a clear close-ended story, but they assign the reader/viewer the role of deciding how bleak or how hopeful the future of these protagonists will be. The consumer of these entertainment products

has the role of continuing the story, of expanding what he has just read/watched. This role can be compared to what Bolter and Grusin described as “the Self” in *Remediation*. The book explores how the presence of new media in our society affects individuals' perceptions of their own identities. In relation to both of these adaptations, the viewer's identity is influenced by the possibility of reaching beyond the original narration as the immediacy of the story and its visually cruel subtext create a remediation of the notion of self and community.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Children of Men* present many theoretical challenges as they build and shape an original and peculiar narrative world where their use of dystopia can be analyzed from a series of different perspectives. In comparing Atwood's and James' characters, what can be traced in both the novels is the fact that all the characteristics that belong to dystopian fiction are projected onto characters who are oppressed and frustrated. In *The Children of Men*, all its protagonists connect in a moment of isolation and alienation. As Gidez explains: “Confronted by grinding disappointments or frustrated by unhappy relationships or tormented by blighted hopes, James's men and women find themselves increasingly lonely, isolated, even alienated” (Gidez 132). Julian and Theo start to create a bond after they went through their own slow process of isolation. In a similar way, this sense of loneliness can also be found in Atwood's book. Offred and Ofglen meet and start to bond when they are ready to risk their own safety. Their main talking point is May Day, the rebellious organization. This similarity highlights how both novels have much in common from a thematic point of view. Both Atwood and James share the intention of pointing out how fertility could shape the future of humanity and how the role of women will be important in the grand scheme of events. Religion is another key factor that plays a major role in James's and Atwood's narrative world: the political and clerical system is rendered as an oppressive tool through which tyrants will impose their control, but hidden and spontaneous faith is a powerful weapon in the fight for survival.

In closing this analysis, it is worth emphasizing the fact that there are numerous factors that constitute the originality of these two writers. In 1985 and 1992, Atwood and James anticipated some of the contemporary social issues that

deal with gender, social control, xenophobia, and homophobia: “Keep calm, they said on television. Everything is under control. I was stunned. Everyone was, I know that. It was hard to believe. The entire government, gone like that. How did they get in, how did it happen?” (Atwood 183). This is the crucial question that Margaret Atwood wants to share with the reader: how did it happen? Why are we dealing with the consequences of terribly oppressive actions that were accepted by people as they were normal? Atwood uses *The Handmaid’s Tale* as a warning for the reader, as James uses *The Children of Men* with the purpose of raising awareness of the self-destructive human trajectory. This is an inherent feature which is vital to the role of dystopian novels, but the originality of these two writers emerges not only in the actualization and prediction of the current political outcomes, but also in the clear representation of the oppressive, gendered and hidden forces that undermine justice and equality.

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