

Symbolism as a Key Element in Analyzing the Characters in *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood

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Abstract

Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* employs rich symbolism to explore themes of power, oppression, and identity. This study focuses on the pivotal role of symbolism in character portrayal within Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel. The purpose is to examine how symbols such as colors, objects, and clothing convey the complex identities, beliefs, and struggles of the characters. By decoding these symbols, the writing reveals significant insights into the motivations of characters and the oppressive reality they navigate. The main idea is to show how symbolism serves as a powerful literary tool, providing deeper layers of meaning and enhancing the understanding of the human condition. Key symbols like the color red, the Eyes of the regime, makeup, eggs, and the character of Offred are scrutinized to uncover themes of authority, fertility, resistance, and identity. The conclusion drawn is that Atwood masterfully uses symbolism to illustrate the complexities of power, control, and rebellion in Gilead, ultimately offering a profound commentary on the human condition and societal structures.

Key Words: *Symbolism, character analysis, dystopian literature, identity, resistance, power, control.*

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Abstrakt

Romani i Margaret Atwood *Rrëfenja e Shërbëtores*, përdor simbolikë të pasur për të eksploruar temat e pushtetit, shtypjes dhe identitetit. Ky studim fokusohet në rolin kryesor të simbolizmit në portretizimin e personazheve brenda romanit distopian të Atwood. Qëllimi është të ekzaminohet sesi simbolet si ngjyrat, objektet dhe veshjet përcjellin identitetet, besimet dhe betejat komplekse të personazheve. Duke deshifruar këto simbole, zbulohen njohuri të rëndësishme për motivimet e personazheve dhe realitetin shtypës në të cilin ata lundrojnë. Ideja kryesore është të tregohet se si simbolika shërben si një mjet i fuqishëm letrar, duke siguruar shtresa më të thella kuptimore për të kuptuar më shumë mbi gjendjen njerëzore. Simbolet kryesore si ngjyra e kuqe, sytë e regjimit, grimi, vezët dhe karakteri i Offred shqyrtohen me kujdes për të nxjerrë në pah temat e autoritetit, pjellorisë, rezistencës dhe identitetit. Së fundmi, Atwood përdor me mjeshtëri simbolizmin për të ilustruar kompleksitetin e pushtetit, kontrollit dhe rebelimit në Galad, duke ofruar përfundimisht një koment të thellë mbi gjendjen njerëzore dhe strukturat shoqërore.

Fjalë Kyçe: Simbolizëm, letërsi distopike, identitet, rezistencë, pushtet, kontroll.

INTRODUCTION

In the dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, symbolism plays a very important role in the way the ideas, behaviors and physical appearance of the characters are transmitted. Atwood presents facts that speak about complexes about identity, beliefs and people struggles using colors, objects and clothes as symbols. Significant revelations about the character's motivations and the repressive reality they must navigate are revealed by deciphering these symbols.

Symbolism, with its ability to convey objects, actions, and even settings with deeper significance, serves as a cornerstone of literary analysis. It offers readers a glimpse into the subconscious minds of both the author and the characters, going beyond the boundaries of simple storyline and conversation. Using symbols, writers explore into existential issues, present universal truths, and shed light on the complexities of human nature. In this study, the symbolism expressed through the main characters is clearly shown by their actions and feelings expressed in different situations. The hidden layers of meaning and significance that exist beneath the surface of the story are revealed by analyzing how characters interact with the symbols that surround them.

Through a nuanced analysis of symbolism in character portrayal, the aim is to illuminate not only the textual landscape but also the human condition itself. When the symbolism is analyzed through the characters, it sheds light on the reasons for their actions in history, and in this way, the impact that the state has on society is clarified. By studying the symbolic connections between characters and people that surround them, is shown as a whole a side of humanity.

Atwood's dystopian novel skillfully shows how symbolism serves as a powerful literary tool in the history of characters. The main characters of the totalitarian country of Gilead not only lead the course of events but also serve as tools for the display of symbolic themes. Central to this exploration are key symbols such as the pervasive presence of the color red, the enigmatic eyes of the regime, the transformative nature of makeup, the symbolic significance of eggs, and the complex persona of Offred herself.

BODY

The color red has complex symbolic meaning in Gilead's totalitarian society, representing themes of authority, fertility, oppression, and revolt. The handmaid's red robes, which are required by

the state, are a continual reminder of their servitude in addition to symbolizing their designated position as reproductive vehicles.

Every month there is a moon, gigantic, round, heavy, an omen. It transits, pauses, continues on and passes out of sight, and I see despair coming towards me like famine. To feel that empty, again, again. I listen to my heart, wave upon wave, salty and red, continuing on and on, marking time.³

This has to do with Offred, and waiting for her period every month, where regardless of her desire she must complete the task of giving birth to the one who "owns" her, The Commander Fred. This is the reason why the color red, which is directly related to handmaids, symbolizes the productivity and role of handmaids in this country.

Furthermore, figures like Offred's covert acts of rebellion and resistance are closely associated with the color red. Red represents resistance, as well as the fortitude and inner strength of those who dare to stand up to the regime's attempts to restrict individual autonomy. "Don't let the bastards grind you down".⁴ This line is important because it is a message of disobedience from the former handmaid who lived in Offred's room. She is regarded as a symbol of rebellion and struggle against the harsh society and the regime.

Moreover, the significance of red in the narrative is emphasized by its relationship with power. In Gilead, where power relations are brutally upheld, red is used as a symbol of dominance and authority. Red represents society's hierarchical structures, whether it is through the Commander's privileged status shown by their crimson dress or the metaphorical power of blood in rituals and ceremonies.

By now I'm wrung out, exhausted. My breasts are painful, they're leaking a little. Fake milk, it happens this way with some of us. We sit on our benches, facing one another, as we are transported; we're without emotion now, almost without feeling, we might be bundles of red cloth. We ache. Each of us holds in her lap a phantom, a ghost baby. What confronts us, now the excitement is over, is our own failure.⁵

The moment handmaids have brought a child into their lives, they feel like they are ghosts and now even the child they have does not belong to the servants, but to The Commanders and the

³ Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (New York: Penguin, 1985), 82.

⁴ Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), 275.

⁵ Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), 129.

state of Gilead. The power is in the hands of the state and the Commanders, now they are just some servants dressed in red and who are in command of this totalitarian regime.

Another noteworthy point is the power that the environment has on fertility, which is directly related to the role of handmaids in Gilead society. "The air got too full, once, of chemicals, rays, radiation, the water swarmed with toxic molecules...your very flesh may be polluted, dirty as an oily beach, sure death to shore birds and unborn babies".⁶ This is related to the power that they have on their hand and they may not have because of what happens around them and also this is related to the possibilities they have to have a child and is related to their monthly "activity".⁷

The handmaid's clothing both in style and color symbolizes what the handmaid's stand for. Offred claims: "Everything except the wings around my face is red: the color of blood, which defines us".⁸ The color red, in fact, signifies more to them than just their attire or social standing, it represents their identity as individuals as well as their freedom of movement, speech, and diet. To bystanders, the red of their veils and skirts instantly conveys their status as handmaids and their role in society. In the same way that an orange uniform indicates a prisoner, this red acts as a uniform that indicates position. A handmaid is identifiable to all Gilead residents by her outfit, and because of this symbolic red, she is unable to flee from her identity or her mission.⁹

Furthermore, another reason for wearing red is to draw attention to a handmaid's sexual role and symbolizing her as a "fallen woman" figuratively. Red has always been associated with scandalous things, yet men who wore it were symbolically displaying their boldness or passion. The color red is also associated with the female sensuality, the perfume they use, or the lipstick, and their dresses. This is directly connected with the men and their way of being wanted by them.

They touch me with their eyes instead and I move my hips a little, feeling the full red skirt sway around me. It's like thumbing your nose from behind a fence or teasing a dog with a bone held out of reach, and I'm ashamed of myself for doing it, because none of

⁶ Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), 115.

⁷ Karla M. Roland, "The Symbolic Power of Red in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*," *East Tennessee State University: Undergraduate Honors Theses* (2013): 3.

⁸ Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), 23.

⁹ Roland, "The Symbolic Power of Red," *East Tennessee State University: Undergraduate Honors Theses* (2013): 5.

this is the fault of these men, they're too young. Then I find I'm not ashamed after all. I enjoy the power; power of a dog bone, passive but there. I hope they get hard at the sight of us and have to rub themselves against the painted barriers surreptitiously.¹⁰

This leads to the fact that red is connected to passions, to love, and not being anymore ashamed. Offred is searching for love; she is searching to be loved and to be surrounded by love.

Due to their similarity in fertility and red hue, the tulips and handmaids are parallelized in the novel. "The red of the tulips in Serena Joy's Garden, towards the base of the flowers where they are beginning to heal. Each thing is valid and really there".¹¹ The red tulips in the garden of Serena Joy are used as symbols of sex organs.¹² Offred is stating that red tulips are most closely linked to pure love, whereas tulips are associated with false love in Serena Joy. The red tulips effect highlights Offred's conception and fertility as well as her fear of giving birth to children.

Also, flowers are considered fragile, needing maximum care and attention, to be treated with tenderness and love so that they bloom. That's why women are compared to flowers, for them to bloom you have to take care of them, while women in the state of Gilead are oppressed and treated badly so that they don't move forward but live inside the cage of "ignorance".

Blood is always brought to mind by the scarlet hue of Serena's tulips. The one similarity uniting these seemingly different worlds is this red color. It connects the luxurious Serena world with the harsh handmaid reality. Because of their hue, the handmaid's subservient existence is linked to the privileged class of upper-class women.¹³ What is ironic is the fact that a woman disrespects and oppresses another woman.

Considering that the life of the handmaids is related to their reproduction, Offred directly connects the red color of the flowers with the female reproductive organ, as well as with her identity and that of all women in this totalitarian country such as Gilead and she linked this to what she is and says "they're the genital organs of plants."¹⁴ Offred sees the garden of Serena, taking also in consideration the red color of the roses, as a symbol of terribly mishandled sexuality.

¹⁰ Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), 37.

¹¹ Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), 48.

¹² Jiangwei Xie, "Symbolism of Flowers in *The Handmaid's Tale*," *Scientific Research* 8.7 (2021): 6.

¹³ Kate Walker, "Symbolism, Power and Perversion in *The Handmaid's Tale*," *Gordon Review* 2021, thegordonreview.com/2021/04/26/symbolism-power-and-perversion-in-the-handmaids-tale/, accessed May 1, 2024.

¹⁴ Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), 88.

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 clamor to be heard, though silently. A Tennyson Garden, heavy with scent, languid; the return of the word swoon. Light pours down upon it from the sun, true, but also heat rises, from the flowers themselves, you can feel it like holding your hand an inch above an arm, a shoulder. It breathes, in the warmth, breathing itself in. To walk through it in these days, of peonies, of pinks and carnations, makes my head swim.¹⁵

Since the flowers are a part of Offred's identity, they are inextricably linked to her terrifying life in Gilead. Flowers in this phrase are linked to the handmaid's desire for breaking free from the constraints of Gilead's oppressive regime.¹⁶

The opposite occurs when the blue iris is mentioned, which is related to how the handmaids and the women of the upper class were dressed. The handmaids wore red, while the wives of commanders wore blue. This comparison extends to the flowers, where Offred mentions blue irises as a reflection of society. "On the wall above the chair, a picture, framed but with no glass: a print of flowers, blue irises, water-color. Flowers are still allowed."¹⁷ The brilliant flowers that springtime brings are a testament to the beauty of nature; regardless of which flower is the most attractive in terms of color, they all contribute equally to the environment and the community in which they dwell, they contribute equally to nature and the same thing should happen to the society in which they live. Everyone should be treated equally, as both maids and upper-class women should have a respected place in society. Each of them plays a role and makes contributions to nature. At the same time, Offred tries to convey the message that women should be treated with love and respect just like flowers because they are what give beauty to society and the country they live in.

Furthermore, a writer Elizabeth Peloso, explained that the blue flowers were a symbol of a disappearing world. The blue flowers serve as a symbol of fleeting normalcy and reality in the bizarre, surrealistic world of Gilead, but the harsh realities of Offred's dystopian society soon eclipse their sentimental solace. In order to highlight the fleeting nature of comfort and optimism in the dystopian society the novel portrays, Peloso made this statement to highlight how fleeting

¹⁵ Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), 151.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Peloso, "The Flowers That Bloom in the Spring," *The Oswald Review: An International Journal of Undergraduate Research and Criticism in the Discipline of English* (2002): 6.

¹⁷ Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), 22.

this symbolism is. Offred and the other characters feel comforted and at ease by the blue flowers at first, but the terrible reality of Gilead eventually eclipses their significance. This emphasizes how widespread oppression is and heightens the depressing aspect of Offred's situation. Also, these blue blossoms stand for a world that is no longer there, a world of familiarity and freedom that Gilead corrupted. The absence of glass in the frame upsets Offred's comfort level with the flowers since it serves as a reminder that the reality she knows has been warped into a nightmare.¹⁸

Similarly, the omnipresent Eyes of the regime, symbolizing the recurring motif of surveillance, represent the ever-watchful gaze of authority and the loss of personal autonomy within Gilead. The network of secret policies maintained by Gilead, sometimes known as the Eye of God. The Eye monitors citizens and reports them for violating the law. One of Gilead's tactics of control is this ongoing observation and the threat of punishment. This leads also with the people's beliefs, and this makes people fear the punishment that may come from The Eyes of God, thus preventing them from opposing the regime.¹⁹ But the opposite happens with the leaders of the state of Gilead, who think that in the eyes of God and faith they are being morally right.

These Eyes serve as a constant reminder of the characters lack of privacy and the pervasive atmosphere of fear that governs their every move. God knows everything and this is why The Eyes symbolize God because they are watching and they know everything.

I wonder who told them. It could have been a neighbor, watching our car pull out from the driveway in the morning, acting on a hunch, tipping them off for a gold star on someone's list. It could even have been the man who got us the passports; why not get paid twice? Like them, even, to plant the passport forgers themselves, a net for the unwary. The Eyes of God run over all the earth.²⁰

This symbol is a crucial aspect of the novel, because it creates anxiety in the Gilead residents. For the people, it represents an all-powerful higher power that is always on the lookout and capable of causing immense harm.

¹⁸ Peloso, "The Flowers," *The Oswald Review: An International Journal of Undergraduate Research and Criticism in the Discipline of English* (2002): 4.

¹⁹ "The Handmaid's Tale: Themes Religion," *AQA English Literature* (2019): 14

²⁰ Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), 188.

There's also a moment in the novel, when Offred says that the handmaids are controlled all the time; they know every action the handmaid's do. She observes: "Under his eye. The right farewell."²¹ Every action that is done against the laws of Gilead, is under the control of the Eyes, who are the ones who keep people from doing wrong actions, which symbolizes the control of society which is in the hands of the totalitarian government.

The transformative power of make-up emerges as a symbol of defiance and self-expression within the confines of Gilead's rigid social hierarchy. Through the act of applying make-up, characters such as Offred reclaim a sense of identity, subverting the oppressive norms imposed upon them by the regime. There is a short explanation from Emma Baldwin about what make-up symbolizes in the novel and how make-up affects handmaid's lives, she says that makeup is a complex symbol that might stand for control, emptiness, and Offred's longing for her lost independence. In contrast, the Commander strangely gives Offred makeup to wear to the hotel, despite his belief that women should not be constrained by the need to wear makeup and should not worry about how they look. Offred makes an effort to take the best possible care of herself even if she doesn't receive any lotion or makeup.²²

Since the maids were forbidden to read books, they were also predisposed to different magazines, among which were also those that had to do with the care and appearance of women. Offred explores the Commander's office in his absence and discovers forbidden magazines hidden under a pillow. Seeing these women in the covers of the magazines, Offred wants to feel beautiful like those women in the magazines, 'bold, striding, confident, their arms flung out as if to claim space.'²³ But men know that they will always pretend to feel beautiful, so men push their feelings to control the handmaids even more. This is seen in the moment when The Commander takes the magazine from Offred's hand and at that moment she asks for hand lotion for her hands.²⁴

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, there's a striking portrayal of the handmaid's clandestine efforts to care for their skin despite the oppressive regime they live under. Atwood describes how they ingeniously acquire "a portion of butter" or margarine to keep their skin supple, highlighting

²¹ Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), 55.

²² Emma Baldwin, "The Handmaid's Tale Book Review: A Dystopian Masterpiece," *Book Analysis*, bookanalysis.com › review, accessed May 1, 2024.

²³ Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), 155.

²⁴ Sara R. Namiq, "The Hidden Truth Behind the Forms of Beauty in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*," *Chalak Ghafoor Raouf* 3.3 (August 2017): 651.

their resourcefulness amidst scarcity.²⁵ This desperate need for skincare products stems from the absence of luxuries like "hand lotion or face cream," forcing the handmaids to resort to unconventional methods to maintain their youthful appearance.²⁶ The act of Offred, rubbing butter onto her face and hands, becomes symbolic of the handmaid's enduring desire to preserve their attractiveness. It reflects their ingrained belief that maintaining physical allure is crucial for finding love and acceptance in their dystopian society. This is particularly poignant as they witness the decline of the Commander's wives, who have lost their physical beauty and connection with each other over time.

Offred's specific request for face cream or lotion for her hands highlights how important appearance is, especially when these parts of the body are visible. It represents their continuous fight against persecution to maintain a degree of socially acceptable beauty standards. All of this work is ultimately motivated by the need to win over males, since handmaids yearn for company and approval of their attractiveness.²⁷ The narrative offers a profound reflection on the commodification of women's bodies and the unrelenting pursuit of beauty standards, even in the most restrictive conditions, by highlighting the close relationship between skincare and feminine identity. The handmaid's ambitions for companionship mirror Offred's desire to be with and valued by men in a society that consistently devalues them, just as Offred is bound to the Commander. The desire of handmaids to be beautiful and to give importance to the external appearance, symbolizes the constant struggle to comply with the social standards of beauty, it also symbolizes the oppression and devaluation of women in society by not fulfilling the desire to feel beautiful for themselves but also in front of men's eyes.

Eggs, with their dual symbolism of fertility and fragility, serve as a poignant reminder of the handmaid's commodification within Gilead's patriarchal society. Against this patriarchal society eggs are considered also as symbols of resistance and renewal in the novel and that's why Offred says: "the egg is glowing now, as if it had an energy of its own. To look at the egg gives me intense pleasure."²⁸ As a result, her action of cracking opens the egg and devouring its contents represents a revitalizing or recharging of feminine vitality. Additionally, Offred

²⁵ Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), 75.

²⁶ Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), 102.

²⁷ Namiq, "The Hidden Truth Behind the Forms of Beauty in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*," *Chalak Ghafour Raouf* 3.3 (August 2017): 651.

²⁸ Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), 113.

connects the symbolism of eggs to the moon, a spherical, enigmatic figure with healing, emotional fortitude, and physical and spiritual well-being.²⁹ Eggs highlight the underlying inconsistencies and injustices of a system that respects women only for their capacity to procreate.

In front of me is a tray, and on the tray are a glass of apple juice, a vitamin pill, a spoon, a plate with three slices of brown toast on it, a small dish containing honey, and another plate with an egg-cup on it, the kind that looks like a woman's torso, in a skirt. Under the skirt is the second egg, being kept warm. The egg-cup is white China with a blue stripe.³⁰

This usage of the word egg in this phrase, shows that handmaids in the eyes of the state of Gilead are seen as "eggs" and the moment they are considered as such, they will be used for reproduction. In this way, "eggs" symbolize the continuation of life in the society of Gilead.

Furthermore, is seen shifting metaphors from the eggs to the moon in order to show Offred's spiritual state, "the life of the moon may not be on the surface, but inside."³¹ Inside the egg is a red area that represents the process that occurs inside and not outside of it; everything begins there, from the inside, and is concealed and invisible. The red color inside the egg symbolizes the continuity of life and is associated with vital reproductive organs. In this way, Offred's focus on the egg's vibrant red yolk and creative (inner) existence contrasts with the fruitless (outer) life of Gilead and her icy red attire. Her inner body is defined by the deep red blood moon, while her outside body is defined by the red sun.³²

This metaphorical shifting from the eggs to the moon is also explained by Kiyomi Sasame who says, "the way the metaphors change from eggs to the moon, then the desert, and finally God, suggests that Offred has discovered a complete world within the bright egg on a spiritual level."³³ Through this, Offred tries to explain all the barriers that Gilead has created to prevent the development of society, especially of women, and the oppression that has been done to them in a continuous and terrible way at the same time. There are also thoughts of resistance

²⁹ Ng L. Sion, "If I have an egg, what more can I want?": The Metaphorical Representations of Eggs in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*," *Journal of English Literature and Cultural Studies* (2019): 8.

³⁰ Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), 113.

³¹ Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), 113.

³² Sion, The Metaphorical Representations of Eggs in *The Handmaid's Tale*," *Journal of English Literature and Cultural Studies* (2019): 9.

³³ Kiyomi Sasame, "Foods for Survival in Margaret Atwood's Dystopian Worlds," *The Japanese Journal of American Studies* 21 (2010): 94.

in their minds against the totalitarian regime since the handmaid's physical resistance was impossible against them. Therefore, eggs can also be considered as a form of symbol of mental resistance to Gilead country.

At the heart of this writing lies the character of Offred herself, whose experiences and inner turmoil serve as a microcosm of the larger themes explored within *The Handmaid's Tale*. Through her journey, she witnessed the profound impact of these symbols on individual identity, and resistance in the face of oppressive power structures. From the moment Offred begins to narrate, it clearly shows a loss of identity not only for her but also for other women in society. Starting with her name, which is Offred, that means she is the property of her guardian, the Commander Fred. Not even having the right to one's name means that no right is respected, which means she is dealing with loss of identity that continues with the loss of her body, which is controlled by "the others". As it is said by Offred, she is "a two-legged womb", which explains her duty towards her guardian. She also claims to be someone living as a ghost, "a wraith of a red smoke".³⁴ Even though Offred rejects her new name and she doesn't accept it, she also knows that the name she had before is forbidden and her desire can't be completed to maintain her own identity. Handmaids are forced to forget and "kill" their identity, their desires and their plans for the dreamed future.³⁵

Another aspect of Offred's life is her resistance and the rebellion she has against the life she is living with the Commander and Serena Joy. She is tired of everything that surrounds her. Offred is tired of being property of a man and being oppressed all the time by not having any rights. She thinks to herself, "I'm tired of this melodrama, I'm tired of keeping silent. There's no one you can protect your life value to no one. I want it finished".³⁶ Offred decides to escape and hopes Nick will help, but she worries because he's part of The Eye. No one knows about May Day. She's unsure about Nick's help but also feels brave for standing against the regime, Serena Joy, and The Commander.³⁷ Offred wishes she had been braver earlier and stood up to the

³⁴ Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), 201.

³⁵ Zahra Sadeghi and Narges Mirzapour, "Women of Gilead as Colonized Subjects in Margaret Atwood's Novel: A Study of Postcolonial and Feminist Aspects of *The Handmaid's Tale*," *Cogent Arts & Humanities* (2020): 6.

³⁶ Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), 276.

³⁷ Maha S. Artauli Siharinggitan Sitoemerang, "Offred Resistance Against Oppression in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*," *Litera Kultura: Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies* 7.1 (2019): 8.

oppressive society when she could. By closely analyzing these essential symbols and their direct relationships with the characters of Gilead, the goal is to uncover the deeper meanings and significance present in Atwood's dystopian masterpiece. By decoding the symbolism woven in character depiction, it is better understood the complex dynamics of power, control, and resistance that shape the world of *The Handmaid's Tale*.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the exploration of symbolism as a pivotal element in character analysis within Margaret Atwood's seminal work, *The Handmaid's Tale*, unveils a tapestry of thematic intricacies and narrative depth. Through symbols such as the red color and red tulips, the omnipresent Eyes, the transformative nature of makeup, the symbolism of eggs, and the dichotomy of oppression and resistance embodied by Offred, Atwood intricately weaves layers of meaning into the fabric of her character's identities and experiences. The motif of the color red, recurring throughout the novel, serves as a reminder of both passion and danger, symbolizing the bloodshed and sacrifice endured by women within the oppressive regime of Gilead. Similarly, the red tulips serve as a symbol of the loss of individuality and the commercialization of feminine due to their luscious beauty being tarnished by society's enforced submission.

A continual sense of surveillance and paranoia permeates the story as The Eyes, symbolic of the totalitarian regime's watchful gaze that watches over everything. They remind handmaids that they have no privacy and that disobedience has repercussions, acting as a powerful emblem of control. As a means of reclaiming their bodies and identities in a culture that actively works to eradicate uniqueness and autonomy, makeup becomes a weapon of empowerment and defiance for the handmaids. In the face of persecution that dehumanizes them, characters like Offred express their humanity and recover agency through make up. The handmaid's forced reproductive enslavement is poignantly symbolized by eggs, which are related with connotations of fertility and renewal.

The handmaid's importance goes beyond simple biological necessity since they represent Gilead's monetization of women's bodies and the difficult nature of parenthood. The story revolves around Offred's journey of oppression and resistance, as she attempts to reclaim her identity and express her autonomy while navigating the perilous landscape of Gilead's dystopian

society. Offred represents the unbreakable spirit of resistance against repressive systems through her subtle acts of rebellion and inner defiance, acting as a ray of hope among the gloom of Gilead's rule.

All in all, *The Handmaid's Tale's* symbolism functions as a potent prism through which to examine and evaluate the intricacies of the character's lives as well as the more general themes of oppression, resistance, and resiliency. Through thoughtful analysis of the universal themes of power, control, and the human ability for defiance in the face of oppression, Atwood's use of symbolism makes readers go beyond the obvious surface of the novel.

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