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The Handmaid's Tale: An Intertextual Transformation through Storytelling

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes how Offred, the protagonist of *The Handmaid's Tale*, reconstructs her fragmented self through storytelling in a dialogic thought process that is connected to the intertextual references. She recollects her memories and engages in a parodic critique of Gileadean propagandistic discourse. This implies a process of transformation that involves both her body and her mind and critically deconstructs the role the regime has assigned to her. The readers are invited to take a stand if this is not the world they want to live in. The novel challenges the narrative of Gilead in an attempt to rewrite it from a female point of view. This process is connected to the disruptive and heterogeneous disposition of the novel, which Kristeva calls semiotic and links to the maternal *chora*. The dichotomous view is therefore denied at the root and a multifaceted perspective is proposed.

KEYWORDS

intertextuality; abuse; transformation; propaganda; renewal

There is no either/or.
However.

Margaret Atwood, 'Spelling,' *True Stories*, 1981

You could not believe I was more than your echo.

Margaret Atwood, 'Orpheus (1)', *Interlunar*, 1984

In Offred's struggle to survive, the dialogic thought and intertextual references which are related to her memories and to the Gileadean propagandistic discourse generate a creative reconstruction of her fragmented self. It is a process of transformation for the protagonist in Margaret Atwood's (1985) novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1996) that allows Offred's survival in the oppressive theocratic Republic of Gilead. Her language is disciplined, her voice is silenced, and her body is used as a commodity to procreate in a disturbing dystopian society which emerged from a utopic religious experiment. Nevertheless, she survives, resisting, adapting, and finally opposing Gilead's rules, playing between the gaps of apparent outward acceptance of her role and secret transgression. She manages to create her own role eventually, one different from the one the society assigned her, in a relentless operation of remembering the past and rewriting her life in

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Gilead. She survives in spite of the violence that surrounds her and the risks she takes in transgressing the rules of Gilead. She not only exposes the contradictions, abuse, and atrocities she witnesses in parodic and ironic discourses (Howells 2003, 6), she also revises Gileadean narratives through a complex network of allusions and intertextual references. At the same time, the novel presents these brutalities as they are and encourages Offred's future reader to engage with them critically and to deconstruct them as well as to take a stand. In this article, I argue that the novel exposes, through the intertextual dialogue, the contradictions and abuses of Gileadean discourse and proposes alternative readings of traditional narratives within its polyphonic context.

The novel challenges the narratives of the Gileadean dystopic regime in an attempt to rewrite them from a female point of view, as Atwood remarks in her essay "George Orwell: Some Personal Connections" (Atwood 2014, 146). She adds that "this does not make *The Handmaid's Tale* a 'feminist dystopia'" and emphasizes the different perspective of the novel compared with dystopian classics; above all, she refers to her direct model, that is, to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (146). She not only started to write *The Handmaid's Tale* in 1984 but also mentions Orwell's essay on Newspeak, which she connects to the "Historical Notes." According to Atwood, this connection reveals a positive view embedded both in Orwell's essay and in the "Historical Notes." In fact, "the essay is written in standard English, in the third person, and in the past tense, which can only mean that the regime has fallen, and that language and individuality have survived" (Atwood 2014, 145–146). In a similar way, the "Historical Notes" reveal that the Gilead regime is over and that it is now the object of academic study. This connection also emphasizes the importance of language in Atwood's novel, which is connected to the intertextual dialogue and to the disruptive function and polyphonic quality of the novel. Kristeva remarks that:

> '[P]oetic language' . . . is an unsettling process – when not an outright destruction – of the identity of meaning and speaking subject, and consequently, of transcendence or, by derivation of 'religious sensibility.' (Kristeva 1980, 124-125)

Kristeva calls this disruptive and heterogeneous disposition semiotic and links it to the maternal *chora*, which is anterior to naming and to the father's law (133). The narratives that Offred develops in the novel unsettle the constraints of Gilead, suggesting a multifaceted and polyphonic vision. Offred's identity is shattered, dissolved by the regime, and this allows her the possibility of a renewal, which is accomplished through the intertextual dialogue and through language. The exploration of the world around her through her senses allows her survival and a different perspective that questions, challenges, and opposes the Gileadean narratives. This alternative perspective proposes a different way of being human, a new ontological view that is linked to the intertextual dialogue. It pulverizes the subject, a subject-in-process, as Kristeva remarks (135), and renews it through the maternal *chora*, which is linked to *écriture féminine*. This alternative vision is opposed to the propaganda of Gilead, which is exposed and challenged in the novel through the intertextual references. It is a disruptive, multifaceted vision that is always in flux and opposed to the dichotomous view of Gilead, where the intertextual references are manipulated, misquoted, and mutilated in order to validate the regime's policy. The regime's discourse does not have a referent but is mere propaganda used to control and exploit the subjects. In a similar way, Newspeak means changing people's way of thinking; it rewrites the language, eliminating words that are related to the *oldspeak*,

such as freedom. It is a constructed language with political purposes that controls people's thoughts; that is, the main source of dissent. In Gilead, this control is exerted through the narratives, especially through the biblical discourse. Differently from Newspeak, in which the vocabulary is reduced to a minimum in order to lessen ambiguity and the possibility of expressing dissent, Gilead manipulates biblical, literary, and mythical narratives, emptying them of their meaning and using them to promote the regime. In this way, they maintain their power without being concerned about possible linguistic or textual contradictions and ambiguities. It goes without saying that their power is also maintained through threats to and the oppression and execution of dissenters and transgressors. Nevertheless, these ambiguities already exist at the origin of the traditional discourses, as will be seen in the intertextual analysis in this article—for example in the biblical references. The Gileadean dichotomous view is, therefore, denied at the root and a multifaceted perspective is proposed in the novel.

The crucial intertexts for my argument are some passages from the Bible, myths and fairy tales (such as "Cinderella," "Little Red Cap",[1] and Orpheus and Eurydice's myth), Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (specifically "The Wife of Bath's Tale" and its Prologue, "The Clerk's Tale" [which also refers to Boccaccio's and Petrarch's versions of the same story] and "The Second Nun's Tale"), and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

The Bible as a Tool of Propaganda

Intertextual quotations and intentional misquotations from the Bible underline the manipulative, deceitful, and oppressive quality of Gilead, to which Offred opposes her narrative of attentive observation and exploration of the world through the senses in an attempt to survive. Her polyphonic, multifaceted vision deconstructs the dichotomous view of Gilead, proposes different visions, and opposes them to the empty and propagandistic view of the regime. The dichotomous view is repeatedly deconstructed in the novel, exposing the contradictions inherent in the narratives of Gilead and in the use and abuse of the biblical discourse. The ancestors of Gilead are identified as the Puritan Founding Fathers who landed in New England in the first half of the 17th century (Atwood 1996, 41). This idea is also present in the dedication of the book to Atwood's ancestor Mary Webster and to Professor Perry Miller (Howells 2003, 13; Nicholson 1994, 182). In an interview with Bonnie Lyons, Atwood also states that "the mind-set of Gilead is really close to that of the seventeenth-century Puritans" (Atwood 1992, 223). In this way, Atwood intends to connect the story to a past that has a precise historical context but which is also reflected in the present, specifically in her concern about a far-right religious revival in the 1980s in the United States (Howells 2003, 71, 2005, 94; Dvorak 1999, 14; Bouson 1993, 133; Bloom 2001, 2). The historical context refers to the Puritans who followed the religious teachings of John Calvin and established their communities in the American colonies. They were against the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church and intended to "purify" the Church of England as well (Chipley Slavicek 2001, 9). Similarly to those living in Gilead, the Puritans lived in separated communities; they wanted to build "a city upon a hill," a model for the Old World, where the Scriptures were the only source of authority and only one interpretation was permitted (Chipley Slavicek 2001, 24). John Cotton, in his sermon "Christ the Fountain of Life" (Delbanco 2001, 113),[2] delineated the importance of "diligence in worldly business, and

yet deadness to the world." This concept was subsequently neglected by the following generations and confused with mere success in this world (Delbanco 2001, 258).[3] As Malcolm Gaskill remarks, probably "most of them were seeking economic opportunity rather than religious liberty in the new world" (Gaskill 2021, 22). In Offred's narratives, this notion of purity is exposed and criticized in the intertextual dialogue, which challenges the Commander's claim that the regime meant to improve and "return things to Nature's norm" (Atwood 1996, 232); that is, a "return to traditional values" (17).

The parallels with the context of Gilead are manifest at a religious level and in relation to media propaganda. In Gilead, the Commander's wife is a singer who used to perform on television and who supported the fundamentalist Christian sect that eventually gained power through her performances and speeches. Offred states that she must be furious "now that she's been taken at her word" (Atwood 1996, 56). The sect claims to support traditional moral values based on the Bible and its governance in Gilead is reinforced by images and performative acts such as the birth and impregnation ceremonies, Salvaging and Particicution. These rituals have a propagandistic side as well as a disturbing and horrific one. The Commander's wife is now a victim, like all women, of the regime; she is voiceless and bored. The novel's critique and exposure of Puritan beliefs, which have been debased in modern society, and the reference to the Christian Right movement, are on both a fictional and a historical level in the intertextual discourse of the novel. In fact, via Atwood's use of biblical intertexts in Offred's narrative, the novel suggests that the quotations and misquotations from the Bible are void of meaning, mere propaganda in Gilead. Religious fundamentalism, reflected in the consumerist society, creates the horrors of oppression in an attempt to attain "perfection;" being human, however, needs a wider perspective in which different contradictory sides coexist. Quoting Wallace Stevens, Atwood states that "the imperfect is our paradise" (Dvorak 1999, 24). Therefore, perfection contradicts itself and chaos emerges from rational order. In addition, there is implicit criticism of the radicalized religious background of the United States, as opposed to the religious background of Canada; the latter includes a more diversified kind of immigration, with a strong Catholic presence in Quebec, and still did not include any radical religious group at the time of writing (Atwood 1982, xxxi).

The amputated, manipulated, and fragmented biblical intertextual references sustain the rules of the oppressive regime; nonetheless, they have ambiguous, sometimes reversed, implications, which simultaneously contradict them and which are already present in the Bible. This is obvious in the name Gilead, whose etymological meaning refers to a rocky region east of the Jordan but also to a cairn representing Laban's and Jacob's testimony in Genesis 31:

> So he fled with all that he had; and he rose up, and passed over the river, and set his face toward the mount Gilead. And it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob was fled. And he took his brethren with him, and pursued after him seven days' journey; and they overtook him in the mount Gilead. (*The Holy Bible* 1974, Genesis 31. 21-23)

Laban and Jacob built a landmark with stones to seal their agreement after Jacob fled to Gilead with Laban's daughters, Leah and Rachel, with the goods Rachel stole from her father and a significant number of goats that Jacob bred, cheating Laban.

> Except, the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty. God hath seen my affliction and the labour of my hands, and rebuked thee yesternight. And Laban answered and said unto Jacob, These daughters are my daughters, and these children are my children, and these cattle are my cattle, and all that thou seest is mine: and what can I do this day unto these my daughters, or unto their children which they have born? Now therefore come thou, let us make a covenant, I and thou: and let it be for a witness, between me and thee. And Jacob took a stone, and set it up for a pillar. And Jacob said unto his brethren, Gather stones; and they took stones, and made a heap: and they did eat there upon the heap. And Laban called it Jegarsahadutha: but Jacob called it Galeed. And Laban said, this heap is a witness between me and thee this day. Therefore was the name of it called Galeed. (*The Holy Bible* 1974, Genesis 31. 42-48)

In the context of the novel, the intertextual reference highlights the ambiguity of the toponym and consequently of Laban's and Jacob's story. It is a story of business competition where the shrewdest wins and the heap of stones is called as a witness, God's witness, between Jacob's and Laban's marking of their territories and of their promise to watch over Laban's daughters (*The Holy Bible* 1974, Genesis 31). Eventually, Jacob is the winner because he finds refuge in Gilead, where his fortune is safe; it consists of his wives and children, cattle and goods. According to Laban, Jacob stole his assets, even though he had worked for Laban for 14 years to gain his wives. Nevertheless, he eventually fled and cheated Laban (who had exploited him for 20 years). Before leaving, Jacob makes white sheep breed so that they have spotted and colored lambs, which, according to his deal with Laban, would be his wage for the years he had worked for Laban without being paid. Jacob uses magic of sorts, that is, peeled rods, to encourage the sheep to have spotted lambs. This is interestingly interpreted by Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* as a way of taking interest for the years Jacob worked for free for Laban—"a way to thrive, and he was blest, /And thrift is blessing if men steal it not" (Shakespeare 1980, I. 3. 86–87). It is therefore linked to the business-like mentality of the consumerist society of Gilead and to the merging of spiritual and financial success in the late Puritan community as well as in the Christian Right movement. Gilead is the ambiguous territory where the successful businessman, Jacob, starts his new patriarchal life and where the Twelve Tribes of Israel were born. The intertextual reference therefore points to the hybridity of biblical narratives that allow different interpretations and deny the Gileadean dichotomous good/evil perspectives stated by the regime.

Gilead is also a region of "evildoers, marked by a trail of blood," according to the prophet Hosea (*The Holy Bible* 1974, Hosea 6:8), which gives an additional layer of meaning to the name. Gilead is a witness, a beacon city on the hill, but it is also corrupted by business and stained by blood. These multiple meanings are already present in the Scriptures. The novel exposes these incongruities in the intertextual references that are developed at both ontological and historical levels. Therefore, there is not one interpretation and the Bible itself is not "holy" in the sense of "pure;" the characters of its stories are not always "perfect" but can be stained with blood and may have greedy and ambiguous traits. The power of the biblical narrative is therefore confirmed and simultaneously exposed as contradictory at its root. Consequently, multifaceted readings are present in the Scriptures as well as in the verb "esse" (Atwood 1996, 196–197). In fact, the Latin verb "esse" (to be) is presented in three versions in the novel: the original version (*sum es est, sumus estis sunt*), the subversive version (*pimp is pit, pimus pistis pants*) and the invented version (*Cim, cis, cit* . . .) in the Commander's discourse (Lacroix and Leclaire 1998, 88),

which points to its ambiguity and the coexistence of multiple interpretations that are significantly connected to the essence of being (the verb "to be"); that is, to identity and to the self as a construction. This seems to suggest that "to be" has, therefore, at least three faces that simultaneously coexist and are linked to one other. Thus, the intertextual references invite the reader to deconstruct Gileadean narratives which pretend to be "pure" but are revealed as corrupted; they are merely propaganda that sustains the regime. The disruptive, polyphonic function of the novel is therefore confirmed through the intertextual dialogue that challenges the narratives of the dominant society and proposes a change, a different vision that gives space to different interpretations.

The parodic use of the title of the hymn "There is a Balm in Gilead," which is an African American spiritual from the late 19th century, and the allusion to Jeremiah 8:22, "Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?," point out again the distorted and propagandistic use of biblical references in Gilead. In the above quote from the Bible, there is a rhetorical question at the end of the chapter underlining the core of Jeremiah's prophecy: the corruption of the kingdom of Israel will be the cause of its destruction by the Assyrian army, which will inevitably happen if the Israelites do not follow God's laws. Whoever finds refuge in God will be saved, but the sinners' punishment will be their own sins. Therefore, not even the healing balm produced in Gilead, the mound of testimony and the land of fertility where Jacob fled and thrived, can heal the sinners[4]; it cannot "make the wounded whole." In the biblical context of the Old Testament, the balm is useless because of the Israelites' refusal to obey God's rules. The daughters of Israel will be left alone and unhealed, which is similar to what happens to the handmaids. In Chapter 34, the context is the Prayvaganza, where young brides are married to the Angels of the regime. The marriages are arranged, which anticipates the conversation between the Commander and Offred that follows, where she points out that what is missing in Gilead is love, "[f]alling in love" (Atwood 1996, 231–232). Moira's subversive interpretation of the words of the hymn is therefore justified: "There is a bomb in Gilead" (230) emphasizes the revolutionary potential triggered by the oppressive regime that imposes constraining rules and suffocates basic human needs such as falling in love. The bomb will explode and provoke the fall of the regime. The Gileadean rulers will be punished in a way similar to how the Assyrian army carried out the punishment in Israel, because of their corruption and the enforced rules they imposed on their citizens. Thus, the sacred and messianic message of the Bible is not only parodied in Moira's words but also acquires sinister characteristics. The citizens of Gilead have been forced into obedience by false teachers who manipulated the biblical text, and they are also an example of "the patriarchal abuse embedded in the biblical text" (Filipczak 1993, 183) whenever it is forced on people and emptied of its messianic meaning (179). In the Gileadean propagandistic discourse, God is a "natural resource," a commodity to use and trade. The conditions of women in this patriarchal society are emphasized even more by the reference to Timothy 2. 5–8 in the chapter about the Prayvaganza. Women are mentally and physically abused and their life is at risk if they do not follow the roles assigned to them and the rules they must obey or if they fail to accomplish the tasks they are set, such as getting pregnant (Atwood 1996, 233). As the Commander claims at the Prayvaganza, women can be saved only by childbearing. Therefore, "*Love* is not the point" (232, emphasis in the original), as Aunt Lydia remarks, again denying basic human needs.

Therefore, the "beacon on the hill" is inevitably intermingled with worldly profits that are already present in the contradictions that exist in the Bible itself. The either/or dichotomy of the Puritans is an ontological utopia, a no-place that is not only eventually inhuman but absent in the Scriptures, which do not allow a literal and radical interpretation of the term but instead indicate multiple meanings. The novel suggests that good and evil are shifting concepts that mix with and mirror each other and merge at different levels, contrary to what the Gileadean regime claims. In this way, Atwood challenges patriarchal claims of absolute authority proposing a diverse vision.

The central point in the use of biblical intertextual reference is the impregnation ceremony, during which the reading from Genesis 30.1–3 is interpreted as a right to rape in the business-like world of Gilead where people are used as commodities:

> And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die. And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel: and he said, Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb? And she said, Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her. (*The Holy Bible* 1974, Genesis 31. 1-3)

The quotation is fundamental as it is mentioned at the beginning of the book as well, but it is understated as "the usual story" by Offred. In the competition between Rachel and Leah, ambiguous elements of jealousy and manipulation are already present in the Scriptures (Wilson 1993, 275); they become frightening in the "purified" regime of Gilead. The use of human beings as objects the regime can manipulate, use, and dispose of is the extreme point of Gilead's dangerous and abusive project. Using the excuse that Gilead is improving the human condition by eliminating humans' "evil" side, human beings are stripped of their vital part. Furthermore, the Bible itself, reputed to be the only source of authority, is reduced to a commodity—to slogans and a means of propaganda—emptying it of any authority and shifting its meanings. The use of intertexts and allusions creates a multi-layered meaning with a parodic intent that questions and challenges Gileadean grand narratives and reduces them to mere brainwashing whose only aim is to control and profit from its subjects. Through Offred's dialogic intertextual discourse, the novel suggests a critical revision of the biblical narrative that acknowledges its ambiguities. They are present at the origin of the biblical discourse and point to a non-dichotomous view. The story also underlines the tendency of the Gileadean society to use God and the Bible as mere publicity to attain its aims of profit and power.

In Offred's story, her intellectual awareness of the artificial and manipulative quality of the Gileadean regime, to which she never completely surrenders, culminates in the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6.9–13):

> I pray where I am, sitting by the window, looking out through the curtain at the empty garden. I don't even close my eyes. Out there or inside my head, it's an equal darkness. Or light.
>
> My God. Who Art in the Kingdom of Heaven, which is within.
>
> I wish you would tell me Your Name, the real one I mean. But You will do as well as anything.
>
> I wish I knew what You were up to. But whatever it is, help me to get through it, please. Though maybe it's not Your doing; I don't believe for an instant that what's going on out there is what You meant.

> I have enough daily bread, so I won't waste time on that. It isn't the main problem. The problem is getting it down without choking on it.
>
> Now we come to forgiveness. Don't worry about forgiving me right now. There are more important things. For instance: keep the others safe, if they are safe. Don't let them suffer too much. If they have to die, let it be fast. You might even provide a Heaven for them. We need You for that. Hell we can make for ourselves.
>
> I suppose I should say I forgive whoever I did this, and Whatever they're doing now. I'll try, but it isn't easy.
>
> Temptation comes next. At the centre, temptation was anything much more than eating and sleeping. Knowing was a temptation. What you don't know won't tempt you, Aunt Lydia used to say. (Atwood 1996, 204-205)

It is a dialogue within herself or with an audience that she creates in her mind that is functional to her story—"I tell, therefore you are" (279)—in a dialogic thought that shapes the self and creates alternative interpretations. This is also connected to women's writing and to *écriture féminine*, that is, a weaving of stories that occurs in limited spaces, similarly to Penelope's and Arachne's work, in the enclosed space of her body—within her *chora*. In Offred's case, the conversation that encompasses her own body and mind challenges and questions Descartes' *Cogito ergo sum* as insufficient to define the self. As Bakhtin remarks, discourse is formed in the dialogue with the Other, which is a never-ending process. In "The Dialogic Imagination," Bakhtin remarks: "The word, directed toward its objects, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgements and accents, . . . and all this may crucially shape discourse. The utterance arises out of this dialogue" (Morris 1994, 75). Language is therefore composed and uttered in a dialogue that encompasses different social discourses, which Bakhtin calls heteroglossia. They are in a dialogic relationship and their meaning is in process. According to Bakhtin, this also implies a response that is an active and effectual understanding and that "establishes a series of complex interrelationships, consonances and dissonances with the word and enriches it with new elements" (76). The orientation is toward a listener in a dialogue that "introduces totally new elements into his discourse" (76). Readers therefore have an "active relationship with the text" and "[o]ur personalities are formed and transformed by what we have comprehended" (Cutchins 2017, 6, 7). Thus, meaning is produced in the constant dialogue between texts where the subject and the Other interact.

Offred, the storyteller, is therefore in dialogue with the *Dear reader* in an intertextual interaction that weaves the story and proposes disruptive alternative interpretations of the narratives of the regime. These interpretations' aim is survival; she reassembles her shattered self in a recollection of her memories and in the hope of a future reader who grants her survival. In the Lord's Prayer, God seems to be the Other that Offred is in conversation with—the *Dear reader* who will hopefully listen to her story and will perhaps take a stand against abuse and oppression. Therefore, although God is called for help, he does not seem to be involved in the atrocities. According to Howells, Offred, in the Lord's Prayer, "speaks out her anguish in her own ironic version, deliberately confusing the literal and symbolic meanings of the words" (Howells 2003, 40). She links them to the contingency of her situation, which is desperate, and she feels suicidal—her situation always requires renewed emotional motivations to carry on living. The intertextual rewriting of

the Lord's Prayer underlines a request for help and a reference to the kingdom of heaven, which are both interiorized; that is, they do not refer to a transcendental entity. It is a personal exploration that she endures physically and emotionally and that looks for a renewed hope. It is also a dialogue with a supposed audience "*In Hope*" that her story might survive. Significantly, in the Lord's Prayer, knowledge is pointed to as a temptation, her temptation, and the cause of the original Fall, and therefore the impossibility of a total absence of evil is made clear. In fact, the phrase "Deliver us from evil" is not commented on by Offred.

Atwood remythologizes the stories, preserving some of the original narrative but restructuring it and acknowledging the power of the intertext while at the same time underlining the journey of transformation, which is a never-ending progression that does not reach a final point (Lauter 1984, 74); it is a process of becoming (Grace 1978, 76). This dynamic tension between confirmation and renewal not only connects with the post-modern perspective but also engages the reader in a possibly different ontological vision, an alternative way of being human compared to the constricting roles of the oppressive regime. Through the parodic use of intertexts and allusions, the novel criticizes, comments and remythologizes, or restructures, traditional narratives in an attempt to change them from within.

A New Model: The Female Perspective

In Chapter 1, Offred gives "Her own image of a palimpsest . . . where the past gives depth to the present" (Howells 2003, 87); it is an image of progression that points to tenacious survival and hope. Moreover, occasional philological explorations of different layers of meaning in words express in an ironic way the constraints of language as well as its ambiguity and power. Possible different meanings coexist and, therefore, confirm the ambiguity of the sign, as Kristeva remarks. This opens up the meaning to multiple interpretations and to change. As Marta Dvorak states, "the narrative strategy [consists] in cultivating ambiguity and dis-order so as to challenge a system of values, a certain vision of the world" (Dvorak 1999, 80). For example, the tapes on which Offred recorded her story are not numbered, as Pieixoto remarks in the "Historical Notes," and Offred gives different versions of the same event simultaneously, such as her meeting with Nick and her husband's destiny. Moreover, her narratives are fragmented with flashbacks and flashforwards. Consequently, the subversion of the narratives of Gilead function at many levels of language and storytelling, addressing "the dominant culture from within all the while signalling a position of difference," of resistance that grants Offred emotional and physical survival (Dvorak 1999, 81). This links to the subversive polyphonic essence of the novel, as highlighted by Kristeva and Bakhtin. It is a process of deconstruction and provisional reconstruction of Offred's shattered self through storytelling, to which the reader is invited to contribute and take a stand.

The close analysis of intertexts and allusions in the novel confirms the tendencies highlighted by the various critics who emphasize the reconstruction of Offred's identity through language. This implies a "dialogic thought" (Cutchins 2017, 2) that opens up to multiple readings and at the same time engages the reader in a critical view of the narratives of the main text, the intertexts, and the society they refer to, insisting "on the existence of a historical reality that exists beyond the words of the text" (Bouson 1993,

151). At the end of the novel, Offred "opens to all risks and possibilities" (Howells 2005, 107), which is different from what Winston Smith does in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. This again emphasizes her dialogue with the Other, which creates multi-layered meanings that are always open to interpretation and that define her storytelling as polyphonic, destabilizing, and in continuous progress (Cutchins 2017, 8). These meanings encourage the reader to deconstruct Gileadean narratives and take a stand against the abuse inflicted by dictatorships and oppressive regimes that are present in the novel and in the real world.

Hence, in the oppressive world of Gilead, Offred rewrites herself as a palimpsest (Atwood 1996, 13), layering her fragmented story to reconstruct her shattered self that has been disassembled by the regime. She reconstructs her story from scratch, assembling and superimposing keen observations of her everyday life, recollecting her memories and giving different versions of the same events. She also explores her body, which becomes one of the means to understand herself and the world around her. Her moments of reflection and remembrance occur at night, a dark dimension in space and time (Atwood 1996, 203). As she remarks, "the night is mine, my own time" (47). At night she is "[o]ut of time;" it is her "time out," an empty space she fills with her memories, a space of dialogue with the *Dear reader* where she can reassemble her shattered self (113). Significantly, the last chapter of the novel, before the "Historical Notes," is set at night, which emphasizes openness and an uncertain quality of the ending. We do not know what Offred's destiny will be after she steps into the van, as *The Handmaid's Tale* ends with an uncertain future. The novel was not designed with a sequel in mind, which only comes 34 years later, with *The Testaments* (2019).

Howells remarks that the most important intertexts and allusions in the novel refer to passages in the Bible (especially those from the Book of Genesis), *The Canterbury Tales*, and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Howells 2003, 9). As we have seen in this article, storytelling—that is, language and Offred's memories—is the private space that she cuts out and explores in the oppressive world of Gilead in order to survive. She refuses to believe in Gilead and to submit to its narratives and forget her past, and therefore she resists the role of the handmaid the regime is imposing on her (Howells 2005, 99). This goes hand in hand with the exploration of her body, "her own dark inner space." Thus, her history is not only the memory of her past events and the witnessing of the horrors of her everyday life but also a "personal history of physical sensations" (Howells 2003, 57). The process of the exploration of her body goes from considering her body as being an "unknown continent which she is trying to map, and later to imagining it as a cosmic wilderness"' where the womb "expands until it assumes cosmic proportions" (Howells 2003, 57–58). It is both ethereal and immanent, a product of her imagination and physical at the same time. It is a place she inhabits and something on which her emotional survival depends (76). In this sense, Howells connects Offred's storytelling with Cixous' *écriture féminine*, where Offred rediscovers "the marvellous text of herself" (77). She defies the "grand narratives" of Gilead with her little narratives of everyday life, domesticity, memories and bodily sensations, expressing curiosity, accurate descriptions, and witty observations (66). Offred relegates the grand narratives to the margin (Howells 2005, 93). Her voice resists and eventually survives "beyond the ending" and beyond Gileadean narratives.

Her strategies for understanding merge minute observation, rigorous intellectual deduction, and self-control and involve all her senses. This does not allow her a total final victory—which is an illusion, as demonstrated by her mother's, Ofglen's, and Moira's stories, though she considers them her heroes—but grants her a personal transformation and survival. There is no transcendence in Offred's view, though—everything happens in this world, a "reality" that she witnesses. Her recovery is partial and occurs through her narratives, a self-reflexive kind of narrative of her everyday life that she often acknowledges to be a partial reconstruction. As Pieixoto points out in the "Historical Notes," Offred's account is composed of everyday little narratives presented from a woman's perspective, which he considers narrow and limited; he would have preferred the rulers' point of view, the grand narratives of Gileadean Commanders. Consequently, Offred is "off-read" (misread) by the misogynistic Pieixoto and is "of-fred" by Atwood to the reader as a warning (Bouson 1993, 138). Thus, the reader is invited to criticize the narratives of Gilead through the intertextual references, take a stand against oppressions and injustices, and give space to "alternative truths;" to a female perspective. This is a different perspective from that which appears in previous dystopian novels. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is the most relevant dystopian intertextual reference in *The Handmaid's Tale* (*The Handmaid's Tale* is a revision of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*; see Howells 2003, 68). It connects to the story at different levels rather than there being just sporadic allusions to it, as, for example, the reference to the dress color codes and divisions among castes in *Brave New World*. These connections appear in the pervading sense of power that tears "human minds to pieces and [puts] them together again" (Orwell 1954, 211). There are also similar references to torture, which are described in detail by Orwell's narrator (190–191) but are only briefly related in Atwood's novel (Atwood 1996, 49, 102, 260). Besides, sex in both novels is "a political act" (Orwell 1954, 104). Significantly, Atwood wrote *The Handmaid's Tale* in 1984 while she was living in West Berlin.

Similar to Winston Smith, Offred is disillusioned about the possibility of fighting and winning against the regime. Furthermore, she is also very cautious. Because she is a woman, she has experienced Gileadean terrible power that breaks and reassembles the body. She is not in a relatively privileged position, as is Winston, who is a member of the regime, though power operates on him just as it does on Offred. They are both vulnerable but Offred's condition is more dangerous than Winston's and she has less freedom than he. She has been physically and mentally abused repeatedly and she often witnesses abuse and executions. She feels "abject" (Atwood 1996, 298) and surrenders to the regime's power as there is no other way. Above all, she is not pure; she is complicit in some of the horrors of the regime, for example when she takes part in the execution of the three women in Chapter 42 and in the Particicution (290), as well as in the reference to Nazi concentration camps. She has a realistic rather than an idealistic view because of her marginalized position; that is, because of her vision from below. She has learned from experience that to survive she has to develop her senses, adapt to the environment, and surrender to her instincts but also be self-controlled and refine the observation and analysis of what occurs around her.

> What the Commander said is true. One and one and one and one doesn't equal four. Each one remains unique, there is no way of joining them together. They cannot be exchanged, one for the other. They cannot replace each other. Nick for Luke or Luke for Nick. *Should* does not apply.

> You can't help what you feel, Moira said once, but you can help how you behave.
>
> Which is all very well.
>
> Context is all; or is it ripeness? One or the other (Atwood 1996, 201-202).

'How many fingers, Winston?'

> 'Four! Four! What else can I say? Four!'
>
> The needle must have risen again, but he did not look at it. The heavy, stern face and the four fingers filled his vision. The fingers stood up before his eyes like pillars, enormous, blurry, and seeming to vibrate, but unmistakably four.
>
> 'How many fingers, Winston?'
>
> 'Four! Stop it, stop it! How can you go on? Four! Four!'
>
> 'How many fingers, Winston?'
>
> 'Five! Five! Five!'
>
> 'No, Winston, that is no use. You are lying. You still think there are four. How many fingers, please?'
>
> 'Four! Five! Four! Anything you like. Only stop it, stop the pain!' (Orwell 1954, 198-199)

For Offred, "What the Commander said is true. One and one and one and one doesn't equal four." This echoes what Winston says above, reversing Winston's stubborn, heroic claim that four fingers make four and cannot be five. This is because "[e]ach one remains unique," adds Offred, and "there is no way of joining them together. They cannot be exchanged, one for the other." In his idealistic audacious vision, Winston opposes inadequate strategies to the regime in his need to rely on something or someone "real" (O'Brien, or the fingers he sees) and in his insufficient instinct for survival, which is overcome by his death drive. Winston never surrenders to the body, even in his apparently satisfying relationship with Julia. He wants more; he wants to be a hero, a martyr in his inevitable, and predictable, rush toward death. But his epic vision is doomed. Winston is incapable of rebirth and transformation and ends his days emptied and suicidal. On the contrary, Offred's capacity to be open to the unknown, to alternative diverse "truths," to the cavity of her belly, and to the underworld mean that she surrenders to her body and resigns "it freely, to the uses of others" (Atwood 1996, 298), and this grants her rebirth and a hopeful, though temporary, survival. She wants "to keep living, in any form" (298), metamorphosing herself and adopting strategies that do not fail and allow her to carry on and record her story as she courageously witnesses the horror of the regime in an appeal to future readers. Atwood rewrites the dystopian story from a woman's perspective where there is no place for purity or perfection, where "each one remains unique" and where there are no heroes, not in the traditional male sense of sacrifice. The heroine is alive and lively at the end; in spite of all her excruciating sufferings and her precarious situation, she has acquired knowledge and power and has reassembled her fragmented self, though provisionally. The witty heterosexual woman who cares about men and about mother-daughter relationships survives

(Howells 2005, 98). In addition, the reference to Shakespeare's *King Lear* (V. 2. 11) highlights Offred's wish to endure at all costs and, at the same time, her attention to "context;" that is, she wants to understand what occurs around her in order to refine her strategies for survival. Hence, through intertextual references the stories are deconstructed and rewritten from a female point of view. They invite the reader to rethink their position in the narratives of the dominant society and in the world in a general sense.

Reinterpreting Past Narratives

Professor Pieixoto in the "Historical Notes" mentions the reference to *The Canterbury Tales* in the choice of the title of Offred's story (Atwood 1996, 313). The three stories linked to Offred's tale—"The Wife of Bath's Tale," "The Clerk's Tale," and "The Second Nun's Tale"—reveal examples of women's behaviors that work as a referent model for Offred and are reinterpreted, parodied, and rewritten in the narration. Chaucer himself rewrote and commented on part of the stories he took from different sources.[5] The main female figures—the wife of Bath, Grisildis, or Griselda, and Saint Cecilia—are all present in Offred, connecting her with the mythological Triple Goddess. They are trivialized in the world of Gilead and renewed in Offred's vision. The novel therefore suggests a new model, an alternative interpretation that allows Offred survival as well as a certain amount of power and autonomy.

Her desire alludes to the personality of the wife of Bath; her hushed discourse refers to the story of the silenced woman's writing (Chaucer 1978, 176); and her condition of handmaid in Gilead points to the story of the rape in the tale itself. The story of Saint Cecilia can only be read in an ironic key in the world of Gilead, where faith is a threadbare embroidery on a faded cushion. The spiritual motivation of the first Apostolic community, or of the Founding Fathers, is emptied of any meaning and is manipulated by the regime. St. Cecilia provides the ideal example of Christian life because of her total devotion to God to the point of martyrdom and her perseverance in chastity until the end of her life (Jankowski 2001, 138). Chaucer's interpretation of her name underlines these characteristics; she is a "hevenes lilie" (lily of Heavens), "the wey to blynde" (path to the blind) and "Wantynge of blyndenesse" (wanting in blindness), qualities that are testified to by her standing up and fighting for the Christian faith in relentless "bisynesse" (Chaucer 1978, 479–480). She defies and opposes the Roman authority with her combativeness, "rhetorical acuity and physical endurance" (Staley Johnson 1992, 321), proposing "a new ordering of hierarchies" (322). She is a figure of authority whose strength is based on her intellectual and physical capacities. Her body and her mind work in unison to attain success. Though there might be connections with Offred's defiant attitude toward the Gileadean regime, Offred never openly attacks the regime and is not looking for martyrdom; on the contrary, she wishes to survive at all costs. Besides, Offred is skeptical and criticizes Gilead's Christian propaganda in her parodic subversive discourse. On the other hand, the legend of St. Cecilia points out the true faith and devotion of the primitive Christian Church and questions the Church's authority in Chaucer's time (317). In this way, the legend of St. Cecilia highlights the contrast between the true faith and the threadbare faith of the Gileadean regime, where God is absent.

The female figure that mainly interweaves with Offred is Griselda, the faithful, meek wife and the poor peasant girl who marries the rich and powerful Walter, or Gualtieri, marquis of Saluzzo. There are several versions of the story. One is in Boccaccio's *Decameron* (1977) (Day 10, Story 10), which is the last story of the collection. It was translated into Latin by Petrarch in a letter to Boccaccio, published in *Seniles* (Petrarca 1869, XVII, 3), in which he praises the story for its emphasis on woman's virtue and says that Boccaccio kept the best one for the end, which fitted with rhetorical rules. The Latin version spread all over Europe and is Chaucer's main source. Nevertheless, Petrarch omits Boccaccio's ironic comments and emphasizes Griselda's patience. Chaucer (1978), instead, comments on the story in the Envoy, inciting wives not to follow Griselda's example but to answer back to insults and abuses. In addition, the intertextual reference, linking to the fairy tale about Cinderella, highlights some subtleties of and strategies for survival that are present in Offred's narratives. Similarly to Griselda, Offred presents a meek and patient outward attitude though she never surrenders to Gilead within herself.[6] She is "orderly and calm" (Atwood 1996, 299) outwardly and maintains this attitude even when Serena verbally abuses her. Offred's attentive observations and witty comments keep her alert but this happens in her mind or in the reconstruction she records after the escape, presumably. In the narration, she only takes one risk, which is when she tries to find out what happened to Ofglen (296); otherwise, she keeps her head down, well aware that daring too much would mean worsening her condition, deportation or even death.

The patient Griselda endures her husband's "crazy brutality"[7] and his cruel tests[8]; she never answers back but counters her husband's ruthless behavior with her wisdom and remarkable self-control.[9] In Boccaccio's story, her behavior is set against the madness and ruthlessness of the aristocrat; she represents the new emerging class that will subvert the feudal order, in this case showing dignity and virtue in spite of her humble condition and of the abuse. At the end of the story, Gualtieri reveals the reasons for his behavior: his fear of marriage, that is, of women. The conclusion is ambiguous because the narrator, Dineo, suggests that Griselda should have paid back her inhuman husband by taking another lover. This is what Offred does via her love affair with Nick; she changes the ending of the story, rewriting it as Petrarch and Chaucer did, though in a different way, by referring to Boccaccio's suggestion. She cannot answer back or rebel against Gileadean rules, as Chaucer states in the Envoy, because she would be deported or executed, but she can take her "little" revenge. Offred's tactics are winning strategies in the oppressive regime of Gilead; they allow her a provisional survival and escape, which are denied to other apparently more courageous and bold heroines such as her mother, Ofglen, and Moira. Through her creative storytelling, Offred is capable of reconstructing her fragmented self with practices of attentive observation and accurate deductions, which imply a parodic intertextual dialogue that challenges and partially defeats the surveillance of Gilead. Her storytelling is the evidence and result of these practices; it grants her knowledge and a new identity and, consequently, power. Hence, the intertextual reference deconstructs the stories and invites the reader to formulate a different interpretation that questions the origins of the narratives and suggests new strategies. It is a female interpretation that points to survival. This view allows a polyphonic, multifaceted reading that challenges traditional discourses and opens up the narrative to different voices.

The figure of Griselda is connected to "Cinderella;" that tale and "Little Red Cap" are the two main intertextual fairy tales of the novel. The references to Cinderella's story are in Offred's subjected position of a handmaid who is "chosen" by a "prince" and in the direct links present in the narrative, for example when she needs to be back home by midnight. In the degrading situation of the brothel, where she is finally clearly playing the part of a prostitute, Offred is capable of ironizing, saying, "I must be back at the house before midnight; otherwise I'll turn into a pumpkin, or was that the coach?" (Atwood 1996, 266), which reveals the parodic and absurd narrative of the fairy tale in the context of Gilead. Serena is the wicked stepmother but also the fairy godmother who waits for her at midnight and offers her the opportunity of an "alternative" prince. She actually means only to exploit her, as normally happens in Gilead, where people are objectified bodies the regime uses and abuses. Differently from Griselda's and Cinderella's stories, in Gilead the husband-prince is an elderly man with gray hair and a sad "little belly. Wisps of hair" (266), and their relationship is not a romance—quite the contrary. The context of the ball is totally debased as well; it is parodied and ridiculed in the description of the prostitutes' costumes and in the degraded environment of the brothel, where Offred feels "lurid" (245). The obsolete and artificial quality of the fairy tale is exposed and the story is also rewritten in part as Offred decides to meet Nick again after the first time, choosing her own prince in a bodily involvement that makes her recuperate her sense of touch and makes her temporarily whole. This renewal is also implicit in the reference to Little Red Cap, where the repeatedly raped Offred is born again from the wolf's belly (Wilson 1993, 273, 277), not thanks to the help of a woodcutter figure but to her own developed ability to improve her condition through an increased acquisition of knowledge and, consequently, of power. In the course of the narrative, Offred becomes a shrewd Griselda, a liberated Cinderella and an experienced Little Red Cap. The stories need to be rewritten, which the novel does in a parodic key that exposes their anachronisms but reaffirms their power and value in a world of power language and intertextual relations that threaten people's lives. In the process of acquiring knowledge through language and through her "bodily sight," Offred develops new strategies that grant her survival even in the oppressive world of Gilead.

Thus, in Gilead, the Triple Goddess figure is reduced to and trivialized as a subjugated wife, a raped girl, and a suicidal woman. The last-mentioned figure is linked not only to Ofglen, to Offred's predecessor, and to Offred's own suicidal fantasies, but it is also clear that there is a reference to the myth of Eurydice in the "Historical Notes." This is the story of an attempted rape, according to Virgil's version, as Eurydice was bitten by a snake she did not see while fleeing from Aristaeus, who was chasing her (Virgil 1999, 251–257). It is also an attempt at resurrection from the underworld, which the faithful and beautiful wife is doomed to go back to because of Orpheus' forgetfulness, or fear, which is true for Gualtieri too, or possibly for his wish to obliterate her completely. The reference to Eurydice at the end of the novel is significant as we do not know whether Offred has ended her life free, as Pieixoto remarks (Atwood 1996, 324). From what we understand from the narrative and because of her recorded messages, she was probably rescued by the Mayday organization and recorded the tapes in some hiding place, but there is nothing in the novel that guarantees her final liberation. She may have been found by the Eyes, deported to the colonies, or executed. The reference to Eurydice also suggests man's wish to obliterate a woman's story, to send it back into the underworld and to

annihilate her life with his gaze for fear of losing his control over her. This is also hinted at in Pieixoto's sexist puns (Howells 2003, 54; Van Spanckeren and Garden Castro 1988, 116, 119), which show that although Gilead is part of history, men's diminishing attitudes toward and fears of women have not completely changed.[10] This is not Gilead anymore, but it is not an equal world for women either.

Interestingly, Atwood comments on and reinterprets the myth in three poems in her collection *Interlunar*, "Orpheus (1)," "Eurydice," and "Orpheus (2)" (Atwood 1984, 58, 60, 78). They underline the silenced woman's voice and man's manipulative and physically domineering will that shapes her and keeps her under control until he finally loses her. There is a warning at the end of the poem "Eurydice": "it is not through him/you will get your freedom." Eurydice does not seem to wish to go back to the "real" world and to the relationship with her husband Orpheus, either in "Eurydice" or in "Orpheus (1);" she would rather stay in the underworld because it frees her from the constricted role of faithful and loved wife. Therefore, death and silence can mean freedom and survival in a world of language where opposites coexist; Kristeva (1980) states that it occurs in the subversive narrative of poetic language or literature where the intertextual dialogue promotes a change and suggests new interpretations and different social relationships.

Similarly to Eurydice in the myth, Offred risks being sent back to the underworld to be silenced once more despite all her patience and endurance; she might be reduced to an echo of Orpheus' discourse. Pieixoto's reference to Offred, who, like Eurydice, "slips from our grasp and flees" (Atwood 1996, 324), reflects the disruptive narrative of the protagonist, the open-ended conclusion, and her process of becoming. The final sentence of the novel, which comes in the form of a question directed to the reader, is not only an invitation to take a stance against oppressive regimes and a consumerist, radically religious world that reduces people to objects, manipulates their bodies and souls, and tortures them; or against violence and fundamentalist dichotomous utopias and environmental risks. It is also and above all an appeal to speak the unspoken, to witness and to let marginalized "truths" have a voice in a necessarily multiple-voiced world. According to Howells, the final question, "Are there any questions?" (324), is "a challenge to its reader in the present" (Howells 2003, 13; Wilson, Friedman, and Hengen 1996, 2). Dominick Grace states that the "Historical Notes" "invite us to question rather than accept" and "undercut our faith in reliability" as Offred's narrative is "a transcription edited by male scholars." Therefore, there is a "suspension of judgment" and a subversion of the devices of verisimilitude (Bloom 2001, 158, 160, 162, 166). Brooks Bouson remarks that the final question is a "textual space for our questions and speculations," which can be diverse, and points out the collaboration between reader and writer in the novel both in the process of "assembling the text" and in the "self-reflexive discussions." She adds that the novel also discomforts "the reader as it immerses them in a regressive—and voyeuristic—sadomasochistic fantasy" (Bouson 1993, 137, 150; Wilson 1993, 293). Thus, the reader is involved in a dialogue with the text and the intertexts that interrogates the narratives of the regime and engenders critical thinking.

Offred's survival and victory are therefore temporary and uncertain, though present in the story. She steps into the dark but it might become light and full of hope again. Maybe she is pregnant and therefore open and ready to accept what will come, confident in her own ability to understand and experience life.

Conclusion

Offred's story offers different suggestions in the course of the narrative. The intertextual reading highlights the necessity of rewriting obsolete discourses, which are never absolute, in a dialogue that negates dichotomous views and emphasizes multiple perspectives that need to include different "alternative truths" that are open to marginalized groups. Offred's strategy of merging exploration through the senses and intellectual understanding makes her acquire power and knowledge; this means that she is winning and survives. She witnesses what occurs around her and is alert to backlashes that aim to negate women's voices: "Denay Nunavit," that is, deny none of it, as stated at the end of the story in the "Historical Notes." The novel invites the reader to rethink critically the narratives of the regime through intertextual references. They expose in a parodic way the incongruities of Gileadean narratives that are already present in the origins of the intertexts and question the absolute validity of the regime's views, thereby suggesting that changes ought to be made to them. Offred's polyphonic fragmented narrative offers alternatives and implies that it is time that Eurydice came back from the underworld into the light to make her voice heard. Therefore, the novel suggests an investigation of the alleged wholeness proposed by society that is revealed to be propagandistic and based on profit and is created through the control of the individual.

Notes

1. There are several versions of the "Little Red Cap" story. The first written version is "Little Red Riding Hood" by Charles Perrault (Perrault, 1901 [1697]), which has sexual undertones and in which the girl is eaten by the lusty wolf and is not rescued by the hunter. The Brothers Grimm's version (1992 [1812]), "Rotkäppchen" (Little Red Cap), in part desexualizes the story and adds the final rescue. I will consider the Brothers Grimm's version as it is the most popular and as Atwood often refers to Grimm Brothers' fairy tales.
2. References to the importance of work in the Bible (1974) can be found in 1 Thess 5.10; 2 Thess 3. 6–15; 2 Thess 3.11; 1 Thess 4.11.
3. According to the author, the commitment to conversion and reform is a peculiar characteristic that permeates the Puritan mentality and which ought to be continually reinvented throughout a person's Christian life.
4. The allusion is also present in "The Raven" by Edgar Allan Poe (1981), published in 1845, where the balm should be the cure to the protagonist's suffering after his beloved died. Similarly, in the biblical context, the balm cannot heal as the raven's voice reiterates, repeating the word "Nevermore."
5. The source of "The Wife of Bath's Tale" and prologue is the *Roman de la Rose* by Guillaume de Lorris and by Jean de Meun (1864). "The Clerk's Tale" refers mainly to Petrarch's version of the story, which was also translated into French by Philippe de Mézierès, and to Boccaccio's version. The story of Saint Cecilia is in Jacobus De Voragine, 1931 [1900], a very popular book at the time.
6. We do not know Griselda's point of view in Petrarch's, Boccaccio's, and Chaucer's stories.
7. *Matta bestialità*. Boccaccio (1977, 566). My translation.
8. He takes her two children away, saying they will be killed, but instead they are brought up by his sister in Bologna. This is another trait that links Offred to Griselda, because if a handmaid has a child, it will be taken away from her, and maybe killed in the case of a "shredder."
9. Boccaccio repeatedly uses the words *senza mutar viso* (without changing her facial expression; my translation). This term denotes Griselda's self-control Boccaccio (1977, 568–569). This also appears in Chaucer, where Griselda does not change her "countenance" or tone of voice because she seems "nat agreved" (1978, 236).

10. The vulgar distortion of the word "tail" referred to in Offred's story reflects Pieixoto's malicious attempt to discredit and eventually obliterate her voice.

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