

HANDMAID'S TALE AND THE WAR OF THE WORLDS

CONTRASTS

- Wells criticises imperialism whilst Atwood warns against passivity in the fight for our rights.
- Revolution that brings about the totalitarian dystopia of Gilead is synonymous with the revolution described in the communist manifesto for which H.G.Wells advocates
- Arrogance in Wells' time, this was replaced by fear of humanity's place in the world in Atwood's time.
- Linearity of H.G.Wells' structure vs. Non-Linearity of Handmaid's Tale (L'écriture féminine)
- H.G.Wells' Condemnation of materialism versus Atwood's vision of consumer identity
- Instability is the foundation of a new society of Gilead, whereas invokes the destruction of Victorian society in Wars.
- Instead of a liquefaction, a rigid hierarchy, represented by the clothes determining the social status. Ironic that material things determine status – all it took was Moira to adorn the outfit to escape the Red Centre.

H.G. WELLS AUTHORIAL CONTEXT

PERSONAL LIFE

- Early specialized training in biology and taught by T.H.Huxley
- Diabetic
- The fears that Wells possessed for the world surface in his desire to frighten his reader. He had a very repressive upbringing, largely at his bigoted mother's hand

FATHER OF SCIENCE FICTION

- He wrote a critique of anthropocentrism in an article written in 1896, called "Intelligence on Mars" where he argued that Martians would not look like human beings but have different organs, possibly even different essential abilities
- Futurist
- Utopian works that foresaw the advent of aircraft, space travel, nuclear weapons and satellite television
- Described as the "Shakespeare of science fiction" – Imagined time travel, alien invasion, invisibility, and biological engineering.
- Wells's Law – instilling commonplace detail alongside a single extraordinary assumption per work e.g., setting of Woking in *The War of the Worlds* / justifications for the impossible, employing scientific ideas and theories e.g., Darwinian theory
- "New system of ideas" – Author should always strive to make the story as credible as possible, even if both the writer and author are aware of the impossibility of its conceptions, allowed the reader to accept it in the realm of possibility, today referred to as "the plausible impossible" and "suspension of belief."

POLITICAL VIEWS

- Prophetic social critic – development of a progressive vision on a global scale
- Outspoken socialist 😊 – contemporary ideas of socialism expressed by the recently formed Fabian society.
- Proponent of animal rights
- Utopian novelist
- Wells's extensive writings on equality and human rights, most notably his most influential work, *The Rights of Man* (1940), laid the groundwork for the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the United Nations shortly after his death
- Pacifist sympathizer
- Wells' early fiction takes the view that human beings need to recognise their relative insignificance in a cosmic scale from a cosmic perspective in order to proceed as a species

RELIGIOUS VIEWS

- Early in his life, H.G.Wells distanced himself from Christianity and later from theism, and finally, late in life, he was essentially atheistic – no systematic sense of religion

WAR OF THE WORLDS CONTEXT

COLONIALISM / ANTHROPOCENTRISM

- Anthropocentrism refers to the view that human beings are at the centre of meaning and Wells is very much in critique of this sentiment.
- Colonialism at the time underpinned itself with the pseudoscience of social darwinism that tended to natural grotesquely asymmetrical conflict on the grounds of evolutionary competition between races for superiority
- Effectively, social darwinism exercised the right a kind of 'evolutionary prerogative' (Peter Fitting)
- Imperialist agenda- 39 separate areas annexed between 1870 and 1900
- Wells highlights that by 1876, British settlers had casually exterminated Tasmania's indigenous population through enslavement, murder, and imported diseases like smallpox.
- Expansion of London from 1 million in 1800 to 7 million between the 19th and 20th century.
- Wells almost pre-empts Woodrow Wilson's policy of 'self-determinism', allowing peoples of the same language to be allowed to unite under one country. He advocated this most strongly in the discussions of the Treaty of Versailles.
- Reverse colonialism – Britain, global supremacy, was conquered. Wells states the case for humanity and indigenous people to inhabit any location of their choosing without the threat of external aggressors and imperial expansion
- From Darwin's theory of natural selection on the Origin of Species (1859), it had been interpreted that mankind, despite all other animals changing, mankind was moving towards perfection
- Wars of the Worlds, as a text, was very different because it envisaged a shocking reverse of what other texts were conveying that alien colonial intervention would irrevocably change home conditions on our planet. Previously, space travellers tended to conform to the Victorian Imperial adventure stereotype, emerging from the encounter with extraterrestrials with their sense of superiority triumphantly confirmed, as the aliens they meet are either not yet human or have already peaked. In Wells' novel, the martians come as conquerors of space and threaten the very imperial subject on our home planet itself.
- The emergence of a symptomatic post-colonial alien gaze in contemporary science-fiction was not exclusive to Wells, but he distinguished his text as the "perfect 19th century myth of the imaginary war"

MARXISM

- Marxist literature – Engels' thesis *The Condition of the Working Class* (1844) - an analysis of the appalling conditions of the working class in Britain during his stay in Manchester and Salford – particularly influential on H.G.Wells
- *Communist Manifesto* (1848) - "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" suggesting relations of the "oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted and, now hidden, now open fight, a fight at each time ended, wither in a revolutionary reconstruction of society at large, of in the common ruin of the contending classes."
- Perhaps the Martians are an allegory for the capitalist and parasitic imperialist upper-classes?
- Futility of religion through his portrayal of the curate, who, as an agent of organized religion (Book 1, chapter 13 and Book 2, chapter 3 and book 2, chapter 4) is symbolic of the Althusserian 'Ideological state apparatus' whereby the bourgeoisie maintain their hegemonic power using both methods of the repressive state apparatus (coercive power like the police

and army that are seen to become obsolete in *War of the Worlds* e.g., chapter 17 The 'Thunder Child') and ideological state apparatus: institutions that spread bourgeois ideology and ensure that the proletariat is in a state of false class-consciousness.

- Futility of religion under duress - "What good is religion if it collapses under calamity? Think of what earthquakes and floods, wars and volcanoes, have done before to men."
- Representation of the attitudes of the British everyman, with some form of religious belief, in the exclamation that bacteria killed the Martians: "God, in his wisdom"
- *Das Kapital* (Marx) – "fetishism of commodities", which "attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities."
- "Liquefaction of the social body" merging of the rich and poor ("merged their individuality again in a receding multitude" in chapter 16) – "city of tramps"
- Parodies of economic individualism ("The man was writhing in the dust among his scattered money, unable to rise, for the wheel had broken his back, and his lower limbs lay limp and dead.") With the Martian invasion, money and commodities become worthless. The system of exchange and monetary system is destroyed by the Martians
- At the end of the novel: "this invasion from Mars...has done much to promote the commonweal of mankind." Communistic society beginning to emerge, when the "scattered multitudes" grow hungry, "the rights of property ceased to be regarded."

WARFARE

- *War of the Worlds* is distinctly an 'invasion story.' Invasion literature emerged between 1871 and 1914 that reflected increasing feelings of anxiety and insecurity as international tensions between European Imperial powers escalated towards the outbreak of the First World War.
- Black smoke that the Martians use to defeat the artillery is a version of the poison gas that would later be used in WWI
- The text relates to the discourse of time on the future of warfare. It was thought that the machine gun (parallels to the heat ray in chapter 6 and 12), for example, would spell the end of the use of cavalry in warfare.
- Another prevalent aspect is upon restrictions of the navy. Britain was the eminent naval force in the 19th century, evidenced in the success of the *Thunder Child* in disabling two Martian machines

SCIENCE FICTION

- Mars fever was a phenomenon that gripped the public imagination in the late 19th century. *The War of the Worlds* is in a way, a response to this, prompted by a series of scientific discoveries about the telescope. Schiaparelli's map of Mars bolstered theories of fellow astronomers that there could be alien intelligence of Mars capable of creating a network of canals. In order to develop this planetary irrigation and transport system, it was assumed that martians must have long superseded terrestrial technology and had outgrown nation-states. Mars was a world government.
- Percival Lowell's observations were revolutionary for his writing considered the possibility that human beings should embrace a newfound consciousness of immaturity for change. If there was intelligent advanced life on Mars, it would place us on a new external perspective of 'cosmic humanism.' Lowell's theory, if proven correct, would administer a cosmic shock to human self esteem, perhaps even a second Copernican Revolution? This would de-center our place in the universal order of creation and demote human beings to amongst the primitives of the universe.

- Darwinism – Late 19th century produced an atheistic vision led to Darwin's, 'Origin of Species' and Nietzsche's anti-Christian philosophy incited a secular conflict created by the decline in religious faith that found full expression in realist and naturalist literature where atheism and agnosticism replaced Christianity. Theories of evolution swept aside religious explanations for human existence; the struggle for survival, to post-Darwinian philosophy, became the sole tenet of human existence.
- Model of competition apparent in human nature and to be applied to human society, associated with Herbert Spencer an economic individualist – success and wealth gives right to procreate (see Artilleryman's utopian vision of the underground movement at the end of book 2, chapter 7).
- T.H. Huxley (to whom Wells was a student) argued that humanity need not assimilate itself to nature's survival of the fittest, but rather we should have an ethical evolution which is a form of co-operation that fits as many people for survival as possible.
- In one sense, it is a war of vegetation in the fact that it's the red weed that invades the Earth and that it is the Earth, as an organic entity that defeats the Martians. Frequently, the Earth is described as Mother Earth, almost as a creature being invaded or poisoned by the Martian cylinder ("Sticking into the centre of our old planet Earth like a poisoned dart, was this cylinder. But the poison was scarcely working yet.")
- Wells is also fascinated with advanced instruments of vision, like telescopes, film cameras, and microscopes all over his early fiction; not only do they advance scientific knowledge, they change how human beings think about themselves and relations with others. The War of the Worlds elaborates on an emerging alien gaze — the ability to see yourself through new ways, enhanced by scientific instruments.
- The War of the Worlds not only invokes scientific instruments, it defamiliarises the powers of new visual media that were just being born at time of serialisation. The cinematograph had only been invented in 1895, yet Wells describes the Martian's futuristic heat ray like a film camera or projector. The heat ray was mobilised as a kind of mobile optical device, swooping around panoramically with devastating effect. It spectacularises everything in its visual field, much like cinematic gaze.
- The tripod upon which it is fixed, suggestible of a portable camera mount, as well as classically a Delphic Tripod that was essential to prophetic visions amongst the ancient Greeks. During the Martian occupation, the whole of Earthly reality is presented in a defamiliarised visual perspective; human normality and proportion is disrupted to the degree that the 'landscape, weird and lurid of another planet.' (Chapter 6)

VICTORIAN SOCIETY

- Published in 1898 – radical social criticism of Victorian society at the fin de siècle – underlines fears that Britain was degenerating back to primitivism (*see Curate in Book 2 and infantilizing language*)
- London was the seat of Western civilization (*setting*) – an unrivalled global political, financial and trading powerhouse
- Passive role allocations (chapter 28 in *Handmaid's Tale* and Chapter 3 in *War of the Worlds*) – narrator in the War of the Worlds has a sense of superiority/arrogance in the authority he is given (see end of chapter 3)
- Social inversions former a way of undercutting British pretensions – fate of the Martians may be a cautionary invocation to the capitalist class, their avarice and failure to co-operate with those that they subjugate may lead to the demise of the short-lived dominance.
- Criticism of capitalism and materialism where Wells describes the swarm that seek to preserve their possessions as they flee (*Money man in Chapter 16 – Exodus from London*)
- The year of its serialization was also the year of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee and the celebrations on the public's mind would have increased the public's shock. In this celebration

of monarchical power, he sought to emphasize the unequal distribution of wealth in images of grinding poverty and wretched conditions of the underclasses.

- Moral vice beneath the Victorian exterior walls of propriety: London sex industry involving underage girls and upper-class, gentlemen customers; scandal of the finding of homosexual brothel in West End's Cleveland Street involving telegraph boys, government representatives, and aristocracy; and the Jack the Ripper murders of Whitechapel.
- 12th August, so-called 'glorious twelfth' is the start of the traditional grouse hunting season, marked by the shotgun-toting, tweed-clad British aristocracy. A new hunting season begins with the Martians, with the humans, not the grouse at the bottom of the food chain.
- Different types of surrender typified by the reactions of the artilleryman and the curate
- Presentation of the curate undercuts classical notions of muscular Christianity that emphasised patriotic and manly duty of empire-building men who were capable of self-discipline and could export these attributes outward into the world and into the empire.

MARGARET ATWOOD'S AUTHORIAL CONTEXT

POLITICAL VIEWS

- Stated on Twitter that she is a monarchist 😞
- The Handmaid's Tale was written in 1984 while the author was living in what was then West Berlin. The Cold War was at a moment of particular intensity in the 1980s, and Berlin was a focus for the tensions between the West and the Soviet Union. This was because of the Berlin Wall, which split the city into the US-controlled 'West' and the surrounding Soviet-controlled 'East'. Having grown up during World War II, Atwood knew that established social and political orders could "vanish overnight", as she wrote in her 2017 introduction to the novel. Encircled physically by the Berlin Wall and metaphorically by the threat of Soviet attack. Atwood wrote The Handmaid's Tale as a piece of speculative fiction that examined the idea that "Change could be as fast as lightning"

FEMINISM

- Atwood is oftentimes unwilling to apply the label 'feminist' to her works, rather considering them social realism.
- In an interview to feminist theorist Elizabeth Meese, she defined feminism as a "belief in the rights of women" and averred that "if practical, hardline, anti-male feminists took over and became the government, I would resist them." – liberal feminism (?)
- Atwood focuses on the history of second-wave feminism, addressing the limiting and prescriptive nature of its utopian beginnings, and by creating an analogy to Christian fundamentalism through Gilead, points to the threat of the unacceptable loss of intellectual liberty

ENVIRONMENTALISM

- Because of her father's research in forest entomology, Atwood spent much of her childhood in the backwoods of northern Quebec.
- It was widely understood that instigating nuclear violence would inevitably lead to mutually assured destruction (MAD) - that is, to begin a nuclear war would lead to annihilation.

RELIGION

- During her degree, she studied Puritanism, which later influenced the political and religious overtones of the novel

CANADIAN IDENTITY

- In her literary work, Survival, Atwood postulates that Canadian literature, and by extension Canadian literature is characterized by the symbol of survival – omnipresent use of 'victim positions' in Canadian literature that represent a scale of self-consciousness and self-actualisation for the victim in "victor/victim" relationships.
- Survival bears the influence of Northrop Frye's theory of garrison mentality; Atwood uses Frye's concept of Canada's desire to wall itself off from outside influence as a critical tool to analyze Canadian literature.

THE HANDMAID'S TALE CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

NATURE

- Earthquakes, nuclear pollution, Agent Orange, an AIDS epidemic and a new strain of venereal disease have combined to bring about a drastic reduction in human fertility to bring about women of child-bearing age as being treated as a national resource – the Commander describes this as the reassertion of 'Nature's norm'
- 1980s – fears about declining birth rates, the dangers of nuclear power (Chernobyl 1986), and environmental degradation.
- In 1962, American biologist and conservationist Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring*, a book which exposed for the first time the adverse effects of pesticides and chemicals on the environment.

FEMINISM

- In *Survival*, Atwood argued that the standard pattern of realistic novels about 'normal women' are drawn from the fairy-tale of Rapunzel. The Rapunzel Syndrome consists of Rapunzel herself, the wicked witch or magician who has imprisoned her, the tower she is imprisoned in, and the Rescuer, a 'handsome prince of little substantiality who provides momentary escape'. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, it is very dominant.
- Though a masculine tyranny, Gilead has carefully-demarcated and well-policed areas of separatist culture and female autonomy. 'You wanted a women's culture,' thinks Offred when she is mentally browbeating her mother, a former feminist activist. 'Well, now there is one. It isn't what you meant, but it exists.'
- 1970s had seen triumphs – widespread access to contraception, legalisation of abortion, increasing political influence of female voters.
- Date rape drugs: Rohypnol, GHB and GBL – sedatives, diminish brain capacity. Market being hit by all of these new concoctions to make women vulnerable and prone to exploitation.
- Atwood leans towards a politics of recognition, which is in contradiction to the liberal notion of blind justice. Social status in the *Handmaid's Tale* is all colour-coded in a dehumanizing and limiting manner. The categories diminish the individuals by reducing them to the group.
- The difference between the two acts of censorship in the feminist burning of books (48) and Gileadean deeds (166), it is implied, is simply one of degree. At this point, Atwood questions the validity of a political or philosophical system that would limit freedom in the pursuit of its goals.
- Much of Aunt Lydia's language ironically echoes the slogans of early utopian feminism (171-2): "For the women that come after, Aunt Lydia said, it will be so much better. The women will live in harmony together... There can be bonds of real affection... Women united for a common end!" – Feminist project of communal living and shared labour.
- In restricting male liberty, the women have not achieved liberation.
- Aunt Lydia's idea of positive liberty (freedom to) is one of ungoverned liberal hedonism that results in immoral liberties. Aunt Lydia and Offred's mother, despite massive differences in their political convictions, both advocate a philosophy of positive freedom. The societies that they envision – fundamental Christian and radical feminist – both necessitate a form of governance that prescribes for its subjects.
- Atwood suggests that the persistent utopianism of feminism perpetually endanger feminist liberalism.
- The irresolution of the ambiguous ending reflects the danger of mid-1980s feminism – the novel advises its reader to err on the side of caution, and defend liberty before ideology

POWER POLITICS

- Arrogance in Wells' time, this was replaced by fear of humanity's place in the world in Atwood's time.
- In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the heroine has to wait in fear while her destiny is decided by processes she is powerless to control.
- Minute-by-minute quality of Offred's sensations, in a life reduced to a meagre sequence of small incidents and stifled and impoverished human contacts, and seen through a consciousness heightened by waiting and fear
- Published in 1986, a period of conservative revival (Reagan and Thatcher), fuelled by a strong religious movement who criticised the 'sexual revolution' of the 1960s.
- It is possible that some of the matriarchal influences came from Britain's first female prime minister.
- Atwood establishes an extreme right-wing political system, which is allegedly brought down by a 'purge' synonymous with the revolution described in the communist manifesto. Yet, Wells seems to describe right-wing London, whilst advocating, in several areas, a left-wing society.
- Atwood appropriates concepts of liberty formulated by Isaiah Berlin in her juxtaposition of themes of liberalism, feminism and totalitarianism. That of positive and negative liberty. (see pg. 34)
- *The Handmaid's Tale* depicts a dystopian society that has unconsciously and paradoxically met certain feminist demands.
- Atwood's view of utopia is similar to that given in Jean-Francois Lyotard's influential 1986 essay, 'Defining the Post-modern' which connects utopia to totalitarianism wherein Lyotard suggests that 'one can note a sort of decay in the confidence placed by the two last centuries in the idea of progress'
- Raffaella Baccolini suggests that critical dystopias 'reject the more conservative dystopian tendency to settle for the anti-utopian closure by setting up "open endings" that resist that closure and maintain "the utopian impulse within the work"'. Accordingly, *The Handmaid's Tale*, while critical of both the extraordinary utopian project and the socio-political norm, ends ambiguously with Offred's words, 'whether this is my end or a new beginning I have no way of knowing.'
- In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood envisions a society in which the institutions that guarantee just hierarchies have crumbled. Women's affinity with nature is celebrated through reproduction and the static concept of immutable rights has been opened to change.
- The utopia hangs on the belief that, given such control, human beings – both men and women would not exploit it
- The Moral Majority existed to fight what they saw as the secularisation of American society. They believed America to be a fundamentally religious nation. They fought against abortion, gay rights, pornography, and the exclusion of Christian prayer from public schools

GENRE

- Despite her distaste for literary labels, Atwood has since conceded to referring to *The Handmaid's Tale* as a work of science fiction or speculative fiction - "There's a precedent in real life for everything in the book. I decided not to put anything in that somebody somewhere hadn't already done."
- *The Handmaid's Tale*, with its metafictional narrator, has postmodern leanings; Offred survives confinement by envisioning a utopian other place to which she might escape
- Cultural relativism is parodied in the novel in the figure of Pieixoto, who lectures: '... we must be cautious about passing moral judgement upon the Gileadeans. Surely we have learned by now that such judgements are of necessity culture-specific ... Our job is not to

censure but to understand' (Atwood 1985:315). This view is commended by his audience but, by juxtaposing his remote intellectualism with the immediacy of Offred's 'I', Atwood undermines his position, demonstrating how it disregards her suffering. Accusation levied towards postmodernism, unseats the sovereignty of the Western man by means of a full-blooded cultural relativism that is powerless to defend either Western or non-Western women against degrading social practices.

- *Écriture féminine*, or "women's writing", is a term coined by French feminist and literary theorist Hélène Cixous in her 1975 essay "The Laugh of the Medusa". Cixous aimed to establish a genre of literary writing that deviates from traditional masculine styles of writing, one which examines the relationship between the cultural and psychological inscription of the female body and female difference in language and text

SETTING

- In *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), all the developments take place near Boston in the United States, now known as Gilead, while Canada is portrayed as the only hope for an escape. To some this reflects her status of being "in the vanguard of Canadian anti-Americanism of the 1960s and 1970s"
- The symbols of consumerism, "the clothes, prostitution, drugs" have become confused with symbols of liberty; "freedom of choice" has become a consumerist slogan. In Jezebel's, the women can do what they like: 'it doesn't matter what sort of vice we get up to' (262), says Moira. But they are afforded this freedom because they are not free: 'nobody gets out of here except in a black van'

KEY SECTIONS

WAR OF THE WORLDS

The Deputation/the falling of the first star – Ch 2-3 Ogilvy the man of science, press quotation, and class division.

Techniques: Narrative device (Ogilvy), dialogue, capitalisation, exclamatives

“I was very glad to do as he asked and so became one of the privileged spectators”.

The Martian emerges and uses the Heat Ray – Ch 4-5, some of 6

Techniques: irony, anthropomorphism,, fragmented sentences, sibilance, plosives, dynamic verbs, metaphor, juxtaposition – natural breakdown

“Only the fact that a hummock of heathery sand intercepted the lower part of the Heat-ray saved them” – chapter 6

“I was a battleground of fear and curiosity” – chapter 5

“Something resembling a little grey snake, about the thickness of a walking stick, coiled up out of the writhing middle, and wriggled in the air towards me” – chapter 4

The apocalypse imagery – Ch 9-10 – failure, obsolete, unserviceable, inadequacy of human military institutions

Techniques: biblical allusion, rhetorical question, parentheses,

“He turned, stared, bawled something about ‘crawling out in a thing like a dish cover’”.
– first woe is the pit in which pestilence originates

The Artilleryman as motif of disorder/order – Bk1 Ch 11 & Bk2 Ch 7

Techniques: dialogue, exclamative, tonal dichotomy, emotive language, infantilising language, subversion of Genesis

“We’d been wiped out. And the smell – Good God! Like burnt meat! I was hurt across the back by the fall of the horse, and there I had to lie until I felt better. Just like parade it had been a minute before – then stumble, bang, swish!”

Techniques: monosyllables, colloquialisms, exclamative, listing, fragments, adjective modifiers

“Cities, nations, civilisation, progress – it’s all over. That game’s up. We’re beat.”

Road narrative/meeting curate – Ch 12-13

Techniques: colloquial language, juxtaposition

“They had passed by me, and two were stopping over the frothing tumultuous ruins of their comrade.” – chapter 12

“How can God’s ministers be killed?”

The Brother – Ch 16

Techniques: change in setting (London), shift in narration (brother), biblical allusion to the story of Moses where the Israelites abandoned all of their moral codes, dynamic verbs, dialogue, asyndetic listing

“The crowded forms grew into distinctness as they rushed towards the corner, hurried past, and merged their individuality again in a receding multitude that was swallowed up at last in a cloud of dust.”

“Yet a kind of eddy of people drove into its mouth; weaklings elbowed out of the stream, who for the most part rested but a moment before plunging into it again.”

The death of the Curate – Bk2 Ch 4

Techniques: infantilising, feminising language, fragments, apostrophe, exclamative, sensory language in the cellar (compare to Offred’s narration)

“There was poverty, sorrow, the poor were trodden in the dust, and I held my peace. I preached acceptable folly – my God, what folly! – when I should have stood up, though I died for it, and called upon them to repent-repent! ... Oppressors of the poor and needy...! The wine press of God!”

Red Weed – Bk2 Ch 5-6

Techniques: gothic language, sensory language, auditory, biblical allusion, hellish metaphor

“The frond of the red weed had grown right across the hall in the wall, turning the half-light of the place into a crimson-coloured obscurity” – chapter 5

“Sheen in ruins – I found about me the landscape, weird and lurid, of another planet

Bacteria winning – Bk2 Ch 8

Techniques: ellipses, onomatopoeia, pathetic fallacy, colour imagery

“Martians – dead! – slain by the putrefactive and disease bacteria against which their systems were unprepared; slain as the red weed was being slain; slain, after all man’s devices had failed, by the humblest things that God, in his wisdom, had put upon this earth.”

The ending – Bk2 Ch 9-10! – reunites with cousin/wife, communist ‘commonweal’

Techniques: poieumenon, asyndetic listing, emotive language, diacope, pathetic fallacy

Communism!!

“The broadening of men’s views that has resulted can be scarcely exaggerated.”

THE HANDMAID’S TALE

Flashbacks to before – Night / Analepsis

Book burning *“Their faces were happy, ecstatic almost”* – pg. 48 – connection of feminist utopia to totalitarianism

“Consider the alternative said Aunt Lydia. You see what things used to be like? That was what they thought of women then. Her voice trembled with indignation” - chapter 20, pg. 128.

Chapter 28 *“I said there was more than one way of living with your head in the sand and if Moira thought she could create Utopia by shutting herself up in a women-only enclave she was sadly mistaken. Men were not just going to go away, I said. You couldn’t just ignore them”* – dissolution of the social order

Chapter 19 – nuclear disaster – *“Women took medicines, pills, men sprayed trees, cows ate grass, all that-souped up piss flowed into rivers”*.

Salvagings/participation (Ch 41-43?)

“There’s a long piece of rope which winds like a snake in front of the first row of cushions, along the second and back through the lines of chairs, bending like a very old rope, very slow river viewed from the air, down to the back. The rope is thick and brown and smells of tar. The front end runs onto the stage. It’s like a fuse, or the string of a balloon” – chapter 42

“I describe the rope” – chapter 42

Epizeuxis – *“I wish this story were different. I wish it were more civilised. I wish it showed me in a better light, if not happier, then at least more active, less hesitant, less distracted by trivia. I wish it had more shape. I wish it were about love, or about sudden realisations important to one’s life, or even about sunsets, birds, rainstorms or snow”* – chapter 42

“But there is nothing I can do to change it” - chapter 42

“Because I’m telling you this story. I will you into existence. I tell, therefore you are” – inversion of Rene Descartes, I think therefore I am – postmodern discourse of being – chapter 42

Game of Scrabble

Chapter 23 - *“We play two games. Larynx. I spell. Valance. Quince. Zygote. I hold the glossy counters with their smooth edges, finger the letters. The feeling is voluptuous. This is freedom, an eyeblink of it. Limp, I spell. Gorge. What luxury.”* Synaesthesia, sexual, scandal

Moira Ch 22

“She was now a loose woman”/ “Moira was our fantasy” / “In the light of Moira, the Aunts were less fearsome and more absurd.” – symbol of hope and defiance

Aunts/Red Centre

Chapter 13 – *“I wait, washed brushed, fed, like a prize pig”* – anthropomorphism

“This is a loony bin” – Moira – dysphemism, humour, comic, disparagement

Rape shaming, repeating *“Crybaby. Crybaby. Crybaby.”* (comparison with Artilleryman/Curate)

Doctor’s Scene

Chapter 11 – *“He deals with a torso only” / “I am poked and prodded”*

CONTEXT: One of Foucault’s most fertile insight into the workings of power at the micro-political level is his identification of the body and sexuality as the direct locus of social control.

Serena Joy’s garden

Chapter 3 – *“The garden is the domain of the Commander’s Wife.” “Wives have such gardens, it’s something for them to order and maintain and care for”* and end of chapter 6 – tulip analogy

REBELLION/RESPONSE TO ADVERSITY

THE HANDMAID'S TALE =

- Debate on Offred's heroism – valiant rebel capable of challenging the regime's oppression or a powerless victim of Gilead's oppression.

Rebel through her use of irony, language play, and insistence on retaining memories e.g., act of 'writing' the Tale is inherently subversive – means of survival and resistance, reinforcing her identity in face of those that would challenge her.

“Offred's power is her language” – chapter 7 – storytelling, past, rebellion.

“The night is mine, my own time, to do with as I will, as long as I am quiet.” – fragmentary and composed of subordinate phrases.

“But the night is my time out. Where should I go?” – rhetorical questioning

STRUCTURE: Non-linear structure, characteristic of l'écriture feminine that contrasts with War of the World's linearity.

“I would like to believe this is a story I'm telling. I need to believe it. I must believe it. Those who can believe that such stories are only stories have a better chance.” – poiooumenon, imperative

Victim in that she takes no overt action against the regime – the victim of circumstances, not an active agent capable of directing the plot of her own life; rather than rebel, her chief goal is one of physical survival – chapter 28/41

Inevitable defeat of the dystopian protagonist is a trope of the genre.

28: *“I said there was more than one way of living with your head in the sand and that if Moira thought she could create a Utopia by shutting herself in a women-only enclave she was sadly mistaken. Men were not just going to go away I said. You couldn't just ignore them.”*

Offred's passivity can be attributed to Atwood's nationalist agenda – she advocates for traditional femininity, rather than an insurgent feminism. She is not concerned with feminist politics of emancipation, but the nationalist politics of self-protective autonomy, an autonomy which eventually translates into an advocacy of traditional femininity.

“It's strange, now to think about having a job. Job. It's a funny word. It's a job for a man.”

The turn to the Gilead regime means it has yet had the opportunity to brainwash its citizens. This is a novel about power relationships of the power held by Commanders over Handmaids, or even men over women — and that Offred herself exercises power (mainly sexual) over Fred, Serena Joy.

Offred reflects Atwood's preference for passive responses to gender repression while symbolizing a nationalist resistance: Atwood's internalisation of a nationalist political paradigm produces a heroine whose sole resistance goes on inside her head, a resistance at once indistinguishable from passivity and masochism and uncomfortably synonymous with traditional stereotypes of feminine behaviour.

Potential for an argument wherein the author should not be conflated with the first-person narrator: that Offred responds passively to Gilead's fundamentalist totalitarianism does not mean Atwood endorses her position.

Participant as Offred is complicit in the creation and perpetuation of the Giladean regime – Chapter 10 (288, 189)

“We lived, as usual, by ignoring. Ignoring isn't the same as ignorance, you have to work at it” – diacope.

CONTEXT: All who "ignore" are equally guilty of the results of that complacency, a point Hannah Arendt makes in her study of totalitarianism in saying that the masses desire or are at least complicit in the establishment of such regimes

GENRE: By definition, a dystopian tale takes place in a world in which it is 'too late' to act, a world in which there is no longer a possibility of resistance. The idea is to shock the reader by the horror of what might follow if action is not taken now.

"I've leaned forward to touch the rope in front of me, in time with the others, both hands on it, the rope hairy, sticky with tar in the hot sun, then placed my hand on my heart to show my unity with the Salvagers and my consent, and my complicity in the death of this woman. I have seen the kicking feet and the two in black who now seize hold of them and drag downwards with all their weight. I don't want to see it any more. I look at the grass instead. I describe the rope."

Process of narrating is not a form of subversion but of escape: she would rather describe the rope than what she is helping to do with it.

= Atwood's intention: "an ordinary, more-or-less cowardly woman"

Do we have any right to judge her? "It would be unfair to single out Offred for blame" since so few of us would likely do any better. But that is precisely Atwood's point: totalitarian regimes arise because people are too complacent or afraid to resist them or welcome them. Our own cowardice or selfishness does not excuse Offred's; instead, her cowardice and complicity convict us all, because we share it. Atwood's point is that the individual is truly a part of the whole and shares responsibility for every aspect of the system, including the perpetration of atrocity. No one is exempt from guilt, no one is blameless, Atwood implies, when it comes to the creation of a Gilead.

Overall, Offred is guilty of complacency, complicity, and selfish concern for her own private needs and desires. She prefers freedom from pain and acceptance of comfortable paternalistic domination over dangerous political commitment. While she does not belong to the upper levels of Gilead's power hierarchy, then, she is no less responsible for its destruction of freedom, for its atrocities, and indeed for its very existence.

Moira is Offred's revolutionary alter ego, engaging in the sorts of subversive acts that Offred herself is afraid to. If Moira can overcome one of the Aunts and try to escape (140-43), presumably Offred can, too; Moira's main role in the novel may be exposing Offred's cowardice through the difference between how they behave. At the end, however, Moira is caught and forced to work at Jezebel's, where she makes her own compromises to survive and even enjoy herself.

Feminist-dialogic speech: (256) *"This is a loony bin."* – dysphemism. *"What's your paper on? I just did one on date rape."*

Feminist image antithetical to the ideal, traditionalist vision of female subservience and beauty. She is outspoken and rebellious. She is also a lesbian. *"Moira sitting on the edge of my bed, legs crossed, ankle on knee, in her purple overalls, the gold fingernail she wore to be eccentric, a cigarette between her stubby, yellow-ended fingers. Let's go for a beer."* – fragments, asyndetic listing

CONTEXT: During its writing and publication and 1984, homosexuality was just becoming normative. The first gay pride parade was in 1970 that was in tandem with the emergence of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, thereby gay rights were entering the political sphere. The crux of Moira's character is contextualized in the push for gay rights and the emergence of a new wave of feminism.

Moira becomes a "fantasy" for the other Handmaids. Because of her rebellion, the aunts are "less fearsome and more absurd," for their power is somehow flawed. (chapter 22)

"In the light of Moira, the Aunts were less fearsome and more absurd. Their power had a flaw to it... the audacity was what we liked." Religious undertone, Christ-like figure of sacrifice.

Moira ultimately loses her volition and becomes indifferent. "I don't want her [Moira] to be like me. Give in, go along, save her skin," says Offred. "I want gallantry from her, swashbuckling, heroism, single-handed combat. Something I lack." (chapter 38, 261)

= Ultimately cross-questioning the possibility of female heroism in such a regime, the narrative, while typecasting Moira as a feminist rebel, also dramatizes her defeat.

WAR OF THE WORLDS

VICTIM: The narrative affiliation with the assumed inherent goodness of the reader enables the speaker to diverge from the numerous flaws and failings of humanity. His retrospective analysis of the Martian invasion first grants a gained wisdom, evidencing a manifest sympathy for the colonized, “*such as the Tasmanians and the Dodo*” and “*The Tasmanians, in spite of their human likeness, [that] were entirely swept out of existence in a war of extermination.*” Yet, through this, H.G.Wells uncovers man as the central agent in his own downfall in the dark, hubristic history of colonization is then reversed upon Britain at the seat of Western civilization in the unimaginable position of the colonial victim, thereby rendering the contemporary Victorian society equally a participant in its undoing. Second, the first-person narration, already bequeathed the knowledge of recollection of events, attains an impersonal voice even in the collective pronoun usage of “*we men*” in parallel recognition that humans are “*at least as alien and lowly as are the monkeys to us.*” Much in the same likeness as Offred’s distanced tone, although perhaps ironically versed in Atwood’s criticism of complicity in totalitarian regimes, H.G.Wells emphasizes his narrative voice to a more didactic reason to criticize the “infinite complicity” of the wider mankind as within the naivety of the colonial position. Indeed, *The War of the Worlds* elaborates on an emerging alien gaze — the ability to see yourself through new ways, enhanced by scientific instruments. The text is designed to allow contemporary Britain to evaluate the ethics of its foreign policy from the imaginary vantage point of another species, that of a nightmare vision of the colonial other that was integral to British colonial ideology.

Key Chapters: Chapter 7

“At times I suffer from the strangest sense of detachment from myself and the world about me; I seem to watch it all from the outside, from somewhere inconceivably remote, out of time, out of space, out of the stress and tragedy of it all.”

Central technique within both novels: **poioumenon** - A unique type of metafiction in which the story is about the process of creation.

REBELLION: Rebellious spirit of the artilleryman: structural contrast between his first appearance in chapter 11/12 to his disillusioned characterization in book 2, chapter 7. As Moira is a character foil to Offred, the artilleryman is a foil to the religious weakness of the Curate.

The physical, dynamic perservance of the artilleryman, cast as a desperate figure that contrasts with the speaker’s conformity to the vision of the Victorian gentlemen even in his pointed commentary that the former was “hatless and his coat was unbuttoned.” H.G.Wells seems to even appraise the military camaraderie that the Artilleryman represents, wherein his frequent repetition of the collective pronouns, “we” and “us” establish a collectivist spirit in stringent parallel to the alienate enemy of the martians that are sharply juxtaposed in “They wiped us out – simply wiped us out.” Even structurally, his conviction to return to his regiment may be paralleled to Moira’s second rescue attempt. Perhaps, his early attitude is central to Wells’ collectivist ideology, believing that building blocks of life essentially comprised of co-operation that has always taken place as part of evolution. For instance, a part of the Martians’ superior evolution is signified by the fact they co-operate in how they mourn their fallen comrade.

It therefore becomes only more tragic that the Artilleryman makes such a disparate turn from his original convictions when he re-appears in book 2, wherein he seems to endorse and is even a parodic manifestation of Herbert Spencer’s ideology of economic individualism. His dystopian vision of the underground movement is maniacally conveyed, through fragmentary sentences and dashed sentences of an insurrectionary society, in hierarchical composition similar to the Handmaid’s Tale of “Able-bodied, clean-minded women we want also – mothers and teachers. No lackadaisical ladies – no blasted rolling eyes.” Wells perhaps seeks to highlight that when the human species is under duress, it resorts to biological anachronisms of the evolutionary order.

“Eh? You begin to see? And we form a band – able-bodied, clean-minded men. We’re not going to pick up any rubbish that drifts in. Weaklings go out again.”

RETREATISM/WITHDRAWAL: The curate seems to symbolize the total ineptitude of social institutions, like religion, to uphold order and moral stratification when under upheaval.

The Curate seems very much intended as a critique of religion. Weak-minded, whiny, and fragile; he undercuts classical notions of muscular Christianity that emphasised patriotic and manly duty of empire-building men who were capable of self-discipline and could export these attributes outward into the world and into the empire. This form of Christianity is contrived to exclude and eliminate all that is to do with effeminacy. He is a weak person, both physically and mentally in the comparison to female hysteria in 'silly woman' and the narrator even says to him, '*Be a man.*' The Martian attack drives us to ask, '*What sins have we done?*' to postulate a causal relationship between immorality and punishment, in which the Martian's are '*God's ministers.*' Indeed, this logic of retributive justice is one adopted by the Giladean Regime in the justification of rape to Janine. Infantilizing language is similarly employed as in the epizeuxis of "*Crybaby. Crybaby. Crybaby.*" Janine is a consistent victim of patriarchal instruction, even from pre-Giladean times; the dehumanizing language directed towards her is similarly minded by the narrator in his depiction of the Curate as "*one of those weak creatures, void of pride, timorous, anaemic, hateful souls, full of shifty cunning, who face neither God nor man, who face not even themselves.*" As both Offred and Wells' narrators are incorporated into the individualist ideology, requisite of survival, both, as self-referential narrators, make the pitiful attempt to claw back any sense of dignity and morality; both Atwood and Wells instruct on the terrible truth that adversity can drain us of the moral convictions that we hold dear.

Key passages: Chapter 13 in Handmaid's Tale / Chapter 13 in The War of The Worlds and book 2, chapter 3

SYMBOLISM

Symbolism within both texts: Translation of transgressive elements of a dystopian alter-reality through allusions to common-place items of everyday society.

COLOUR IMAGERY

Red –

Chapter 2 (Handmaid's Tale) – Hierarchical organization of female characters on coloration of clothes.

"Everything except the wings is red: the color of blood, which defines us."

In the totalitarian society of Gilead, the rigid hierarchical, organization of female characters is categorized by color-function. The red, nun like uniform symbolizes imprisonment in the Handmaid's role. "Everything except the wings around my face is red: the color of blood, which defines us." A domestic and sexual captive—a "Sister, dipped in blood"—she is cast in the public gaze and yet remains invisible. This symbolism recalls a number of connotations, that of fertility, blood and even a marker of violence and death. For instance, red is the colour of organic, free-flowing blood that reveals the existence of life energy: 'the life of the moon may not be on the surface, but inside,' Offred says, appropriate for their imposed role of life-giving. The sexual object for male consumption and the marginalized woman who is shunned and despised by other women, the handmaid is the good/bad woman, the saintly prostitute.

Book 2, chapter 6 (War of the Worlds) – proliferation of red weed.

"I found the landscape, weird and lurid, of another planet." (127)

"Directly this extraordinary growth encouraged water it straightaway became gigantic and of unparalleled fecundity. Its seeds were simply poured down into the water of the Wey and Thames, and its swiftly growing and Titanic water fronds speedily choked both those rivers." (128)

The red weed is symbolic of the formidable power and aggressive conquest of the Martians themselves, pointing to the potential for the delicate ecosystem of life on earth to be thrown off balance overnight. Much like the aliens, the suddenly omnipresent red weed often overwhelms the narrator, making him feel as if he's suddenly awoken to find himself on a completely unknown planet, accentuating his sense of disorientation and obscuring his connection to his native planet.

EYES

The hostile **male gaze** that objectifies and obliterates what it sees becomes figured in the omnipresent Eyes—the Eyes of God—who are agents of surveillance and oppression. The enforced invisibility of the Handmaid serves as an even more insidious threat to the self. “Modesty is invisibility. . . . To be seen—to be seen—is to be . . . penetrated. What you must be, girls, is impenetrable,” the Handmaids are taught. As the Handmaids walk in pairs, “doubled”, they are iterable objects in the eyes of the body politic. Indeed, Offred imagines that she and Ofglen look “picturesque” from a distance, “like Dutch milkmaids on a wallpaper frieze . . . or anything that repeats itself with at least minimum grace and without variation.” The Handmaid’s Tale depicts women participating in men’s desires and renouncing their own as they perform the feminine masquerade. When Offred catches sight of herself in a mirror, she appears “like a distorted shadow, a parody of something, some fairy-tale figure in a red cloak.”

Alien gaze within the War of the Worlds – Chapter 1

“No one would have believed, in the last years of the nineteenth century, that this world was being watched keenly and closely, by intelligences greater than man’s yet as mortal as his own; that as men busied themselves about their various concerns they were scrutinized and studied.”

Wells is also fascinated with advanced instruments of vision, like telescopes, film cameras, and microscopes all over his early fiction; not only do the advance scientific knowledge, they change how human beings think about theme-selves and relations with others. The War of the Worlds elaborates on an emerging alien gaze — the ability to see yourself through new ways, enhanced by scientific instruments. The text is designed to allow contemporary Britain to evaluate the ethics of its foreign policy from the imaginary vantage point of another species, that of a nightmare vision of the colonial other that was integral to British colonial ideology.

FLOWERS AND NATURE

The Handmaid’s Tale

Chapter 3 – *“A lawn in the middle, a willow, weeping catkins; around the edges, the flower borders, in which the daffodils are now fading, and the tulips are opening their cups, spilling out colour. The tulips are red, a darker crimson towards the stem, as if they have been cut and are beginning to heal there.”*

Flowers are among the few objects of the natural world whose symbolic associations have not been entirely corrupted. Offred frequently describes them in terms of color and variety and, late in her narrative, confesses that they are among the “good things” she has tried to put in her sordid story. More often, flowers and plants suggest the confining circumstances of sexuality and reproduction. Offred struggles to keep the image of crimson tulips (also the color of the nunlike robes worn by the handmaids) free from association with blood. The blossoms worn by Serena Joy (the ironic name of Offred’s Commander’s wife) are withered, like her sexuality; flowers are, Offred reminds herself, merely “the genital organs of plants.”

Handmaids are told to think of themselves as seeds; their password to each other is “Blessed be the fruit”—yet seeds and fruit are associated with manipulated, not natural, reproduction.

War of the Worlds

Book 2, chapter 5: “*The day seemed, by contrast with my recent confinement, dazzlingly bright, a sky a glowing blue. A gentle breeze kept the red weed that covered every scrap of unoccupied ground gently swaying. And oh! The sweetness of the air!*” – exclamative, adjectives, adverbials

ANTHROPOMORPHISM

The Handmaid’s Tale

Chapter 13: A number of the animal images are associated with confinement: caged rats in mazes, “held birds” or birds with wings clipped or “stopped in flight,” and the predatory relationship of spider to fly. Handmaids are both sexual “bait” and “baited,” as in the sense of “fishbait” or “throwing peanuts at elephants.” Often, the animal references suggest the debased, denatured, dismembered human body as mere flesh.

War of the Worlds

“*Resembling a little grey snake...the size perhaps of a bear...the Gorgon groups of tentacles*” - animal imagery and comparisons to humanity’s history show the Narrator’s inability to grasp the reality of the Martians’ physicality (and therefore threat/power); the humanisation of the Martians could be a comment on Imperialism and Colonialism; it could also reflect the lack of scientific knowledge of the Enlightenment.

SENSE OF THREAT

CONTEXT: Both authors’ novels are incorporated into the genre of ‘speculative fiction.’ However, Atwood makes the key differentiation in the quotation below taken from her series of essays, *In Other Worlds - SF and the Human Imagination*

“What I mean by “science fiction” is those books that descend from H. G. Wells’s *The War of the Worlds*, which treats of an invasion by tentacled, blood-sucking Martians shot to Earth in metal canisters—things that could not possibly happen—whereas, for me, “speculative fiction” means plots that descend from Jules Verne’s books about submarines and balloon travel and such—things that really could happen but just hadn’t completely happened when the authors wrote the books. I would place my own books in this second category: no Martians. Not because I don’t like Martians, I hasten to add: they just don’t fall within my skill set. Any seriously intended Martian by me would be a very clumsy Martian indeed.”

War of the Worlds – Contextual Relevance

The *War of the Worlds* was written in 1897 as a powerful manifestation of a kind of colonial vision, emerging in the science and culture of the late-Victorian period. Colonialism at the time underpinned itself with the pseudoscience of social Darwinism that tended to natural grotesquely asymmetrical conflict on the grounds of evolutionary competition between races for superiority. By adaptation of ‘invasion literature,’ hastened by international tensions that emerged between 1871-1914 as conflict between European Imperial powers escalated towards the outbreak of the First World War, yet we see that Wells is chiefly concerned with English Imperialism. He claims openly of his disdain for their hubris and deserving punishment for the ‘infinite complacency’ of men ‘serene in their assurance of their empire over matter.’ Wells understands that his work can easily be construed as unconvincing but by instilling commonplace detail (even in the geographical translation to Woking) alongside the extraordinary, it gains a semblance of speculative realism. It further gained gravitas from the contemporary phenomenon that was Mars Fever that had gripped the public imagination in the late 19th century. The *War of the Worlds* is in a way a response to this, prompted by a series of scientific discoveries about the telescope. Schiaparelli’s map of Mars, for instance, bolstered theories of fellow astronomers that there could be alien intelligence of Mars capable of creating a network of canals. The literary methodology of H.G.Wells thus lies in the intermixture of fantastic element, the strange properties that are granted existence in the fictional world, is used only to throw up and intensify our natural reactions of wonder, fear or perplexity. The thing that makes such imaginations interesting, however, is their translation into common-place terms and historical relevance and a rigid exclusion of other marvels from the story. Then it becomes human.

The Handmaid's Tale Contextual Relevance

"It is an imagined account of what happens when not uncommon pronouncements about women are taken to their logical conclusions."

The Handmaid's Tale implicitly satirizes aspects of Islam, Puritanism, Mormonism, and Christianity, particularly the contemporary fundamentalism represented by Pat Robertson. The Handmaid's Tale therefore is not simply a prophetic or cautionary tale, but of contemporary social or political practices. Amongst the continual Right-to-Life debate that rages on, urging that the constitution be amended with successful legal consequence with the repeal of Roe v. Wade (1973) even as the Old Faith of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young is practiced by ten thousand of polygamists in Utah and adjacent states. The Handmaid's tale thus makes up a speculative tale for if the practices of the past Puritanism are permitted to infect the present.

Though modernity is judged to have been a threatening force, the rulers highly esteem the values of logocentrism and materialism that typify the capitalist spirit. Everything is coded, measured and regulated to an economic value. All human qualities are instrumentalized and reduced to quantitative values of exchange. In other words, the new rulers equate the value of something and someone solely with validity, usefulness, functionality, economic profit.

Key Passages

Complacency of humanity, "Serene in their assurance" Both novels – (War of the Worlds) Chapter 1 / (Handmaid's tale) Chapter 1 – night section

TECHNIQUE: Past present tense / analepsis / reader asides = Detached tone

The mimetic impulses of both novels aim at wresting their respective imperfect presents from a horror-ridden future in the analeptic accounts of their narrators: both H.G.Wells and Margaret Atwood appeal to vigilance, and an appreciation of the mature values of tolerance, compassion, and, co-operation. Through their narrative agents, versed in retrospection, they posit polarized extremes between the decadent present, of the hubristic pursuits of imperial Britain or in the Handmaid's Tale as Aunt Lydia describes as "A society dying... of too much choice," to a totalitarian future that inhibits choice or Britain in the unimaginable position of colonial victim; the shock, horror and perversion invited by such scenes therefore invites the reader to reject an interpretative model of complacency, rather to become conscious of everyday signifiers of threat in contemporary society.

The first chapter contains an odd mixture of clarity and obscurity, hard detail and shadowy impressionism. As Atwood's narrator asyndetically tacks on modifying adjectival phrases, the language suggests both increasing action and increasing danger: the neutral "style upon style" shifts to the menacing "undercurrent of drums," then the surprising "forlorn wail," and finally the tragicomic carnival atmosphere of the death-dance suggested by the "flowers," "cardboard devils," "mirrors," and shadowy dancers powdered with "a snow of light." Indeed, from the first chapter, Atwood attempts to present the narrator as an innocent, a mere observer, a describer of her surroundings. The narrators of both novels, however, in all their detachment hold onto a lexis of contemplativeness that emphasizes the narrator's wisdom, the philosophical and emotional superiority over those around her: "We yearned for the future. How did we learn it, that talent for insatiability?" In the War of the Worlds, the immediate locality of the narrator's provincial location, 'serene in their assurance' of normality inevitably succumb to the same fate given unto others elsewhere in the globe. However, through his reportage of the 'infinite complacency of man,' the narrator can tonally condemn the hubristic pursuits of man, whilst disassociating himself from England's colonial history and affiliating himself in direct injunction to the reader by rhetorically asking, 'are we such apostles of mercy in the Martians warred in the same spirit?' (Signifier of narrative artfulness in both texts) assuring himself in the inherent goodness assumed of himself and the reader. Through their detached tones, both speakers, whilst admitting to the logic of historic complacency, they are situated in the present in advocating an attitude of cautious cognizance to threats to one's freedoms, even at the periphery.

[See context on speculative fiction above]

Cyclicity – (War of the Worlds) Book 2, Chapter 10 / (Handmaid's Tale) Historical Note

TECHNIQUE: Cyclicity

The “Historical Notes” decry the dangerous blindness of treating horrors of history, including witch burning and other sexism, fascism, homophobia, racism, and religious persecution, “objectively.” Both formally establishing and undercutting Offred’s story and its commentary as cultural artifacts, the “Notes” include readers in the communal group trying to decode the text. Atwood soberly demonstrates that when a critic or scholar (and by extension a reader) avoids, under the guise of scholarly objectivity, taking a moral or political stand about an issue of crucial magnitude such as totalitarianism, he or she will necessarily become an apologist for evil. The final sentence of the novel, “Are there any questions?” formally establish textual space for our questions and speculations, unbound by the singular ‘Word’ to which the theocratic regime of Gilead subscribes. Mirroring the self-consciousness of Offred’s narrative, these words return us to Offred’s voice and “the matrix” from which it comes. The self-reflexive narration of the War of the Worlds similarly lacks such didactic authority, rather with regret and reluctance admits to “how little I am able to contribute to the discussion of the many debatable questions which are still all unsettled.” The text is thus designed to allow contemporary Britain, wherein the rhetorical demands of readership invite a “broadening of men’s views,” that of evaluating the ethics of its foreign policy from the imaginary vantage point of another species, that of a nightmare vision of the colonial other that was integral to British colonial ideology. The very interpretative process, of caution to linguistic detail in narrative account, is what Atwood and Wells would ask us to conflate to a caution of threatening forces, either internal or external, that would rob us of the compassion and co-operation requisite for the social relations in our contemporary societies.