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摘要

關鍵詞： 艾特伍德， *侍女故事*， 女性烏托邦

本計畫試圖探討加拿大女作家艾特伍德 1985 年的作品《*侍女故事*》所呈現的跨界努力。《*侍女故事*》向被稱為「女性主義的 *1984*」，且評家多由反烏托邦的觀點探討之。然則《*侍女故事*》實跨越了經典反烏托邦小說的傳統疆界。《*1984*》與《美麗新世界》皆服膺寫實主義的寫作技巧，《*侍女故事*》則是一後設文本，深具開放特質。其敘事架構透過說故事技巧的經營和框架的運用等，呈現不定性和動態感。

由性別政治的角度觀之，《*侍女故事*》亦呈現跨界特質。由女性主義的角度檢視之，《*侍女故事*》對於女性議題的探討確乎不容置疑。然則，艾特伍德對於此類議題又刻意採行「反諷」、「曖昧」的敘事策略， 似乎刻意與各種女性主義主張保持若即若離的關係。其作為一女性主義文本顯有許多弔詭之處。

Abstract

Keyword: Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, feminist dystopia

This project attempts to investigate the Canadian writer Margaret Atwood's feminist dystopia *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) as an exercise at border crossing. Initially hailed as "a feminist *1984*" and commonly examined from the perspective of dystopia, *The Handmaid's Tale* in fact transgresses the boundary of traditional dystopia in various ways. While *1984* and *Brave New World* are marked by adherence to realism, *The Handmaid's Tale* is an open-ended, metafictional text.. Its narrative structure is characterized by intricate manipulation of the techniques of story telling and framing, shattering any illusion of stasis.

In terms of its gender politics, *The Handmaid's Tale* also exemplifies border-crossing features in its deliberate attempt to be ambiguous, paradoxical, and ironic. The text, on the one hand, appears overtly "feminist" and probes into issues such as sexuality and power and female subjectivity. On the other hand, however, a careful examination of the work would thwart any outright assertion of its feminist stance and render ambivalent its allegedly feminist content. It would seem that, textually as well as ideologically, Atwood chooses rather to remain a threshold figure.

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Ⅰ、 報告內容

Border Crossing: A study of *The Handmaid's Tale*

In a 1994 interview Margaret Atwood indicated her interest in the depiction of the ability to "move beyond borders" (Dodson 4). Significantly, the spirit of mobility characterizes many of her works, pinpointing her desire to revolt against stagnant dogmas and orthodox tenets. Her much celebrated *The Handmaid's Tale* may be a case in point. Initially hailed as "a feminist *1984*" (Davidson 24-26) and commonly examined from the perspective of dystopia[1], *The Handmaid's Tale* in fact transgresses the boundary of traditional dystopias in various ways. What is more, though *The Handmaid's Tale* appears overtly "feminist" and is often a cherished text for feminist readers, nevertheless a careful examination of the work would thwart any outright assertion of its feminist stance and render ambivalent its allegedly feminist content. In this paper I would try to read *The Handmaid's Tale* in such a way as to pinpoint its difference from canonical dystopias and to unravel the ambivalence in terms of its gender politics.

The veil—demarcating boundaries—is a dominant image[2] in *The Handmaid's Tale*. The white wings of the hoods that the handmaids have to wear on their heads are their "blinders," to the effect that "it's hard to look up, hard to get the full view, of the sky, of anything" (*Handmaid* 40).[3] Again, the room that the narrator Offred lives in has a window with two white curtains, which "only opens partly" (*Handmaid* 9). These veils, symbolic of a walled-in world, suggest the kind of closure and stagnation that characterize Offred's world. And indeed in this dystopia symbolic veils are everywhere: the checkpoints on the streets, the Wall with the electronic alarm system, and even the Us—Canadian border. Interestingly, as the story unfolds, we see not only the transgressing of all these boundaries, but also the text itself attempting to break away from the

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[1] Ever since its first appearance, *The Handmaid's Tale* has attracted much discussion along the line of dystopia. Examples are numerous, ranging from the early "Margaret Atwood's 'The Handmaid's Tale' and the Dystopian Tradition," by Amin Malak, to the more recent "The Calculus of Love and Nightmare: *The Handmaid's Tale* and the Dystopian Tradition," by Lois Feuer. Chris Ferns's discussion of dystopia in Chapter Four of his *Narrating Utopia* is quite typical, which indicates that among the dystopias there is a "family resemblance" (118).

[2] David Coad has a rather interesting discussion of Atwood's employment of the veil as a deconstructive textual strategy. See his "Hymens, Lips and Masks: The Veil in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*."

[3] The title *The Handmaid's Tale* is abbreviated as *Handmaid*. All references to the work are from the 1986 Fawcett Crest edition.

dystopian tradition of *Brave New World* and *1984*. If the story of Offred's effort to cross the national border and regain freedom for herself is enticing, Atwood's effort in trespassing on the terrain of dystopia and crossing the textual border is alike enlightening.

Atwood's departure from the "'classical' or canonical form of this inverted subgenre of utopia" (Moylan 121) is first of all a breaking away from realism and a shattering of the illusion of stasis inherent in classical dystopias. While both *Brave New World* and *1984* are matter-of-fact presentations of nightmarish and even hellish worlds, *The Handmaid's Tale* foregrounds storytelling, unraveling a world of indeterminacy and undecidability. For example, with regard to her affair with Nick, Offred tells the reader two versions of the story, but then afterwards both versions are denied of their authenticity. After the first version she admits, "I made that up. It didn't happen that way. Here is what happened" (*Handmaid* 338). After the second version she again apologizes, "It didn't happen that way either. I'm not sure how it happened; not exactly" (*Handmaid* 340).

In another case Offred's storytelling adopts a drastically different direction, embracing all versions as true. This has to do with her account of the whereabouts of her former husband, Luke. First she says that Luke was already dead:

> Here is what I believe.
>
> I believe Luke is lying face down in a thicket, a tangle of bracken, the brown fronds from last year under the green ones just unrolled, or ground hemlock perhaps, although it's too early for the red berries. (*Handmaid* 132)

A page later, however, Offred offers another possibility:

> I also believe that Luke is sitting up, in a rectangle somewhere, gray cement, on a ledge or the edge of something, a bed or chair. God knows what he's wearing. God knows what they've put him in. (*Handmaid* 133)

A third possibility, the most optimistic one, is offered still later:

> I also believe that they didn't catch him or catch up with him after all, that he made it, reached the bank, swam the river, crossed the border, dragged himself up on the far shore, an island, teeth chattering; found his way to a nearby farmhouse, was allowed in, with suspicion at first, but then when they understood who he was, they were friendly, not the sort who

would turn him in . . . . (*Handmaid* 134)

This section is then concluded by the following statement of Offred, "The things I believe can't all be true, though one of them must be. But I believe in all of them, all three versions of Luke, at one and the same time" (*Handmaid* 135). Alice M. Palumbo refers to this wistfulness on the part of Offred as exemplifying "the recuperative power of storytelling" (79) or, more in line with Atwood's Canadian background, "the importance of storytelling as a survival tool" (81). While one may or may not endorse this interpretation, it is beyond doubt that storytelling does unravel a fictional world far removed from any illusion of mimesis.

In her desire to bid farewell to realism, Atwood also leans heavily on the fantastic. The text, a medley of heterogeneous narratives ranging from factual account of the present, memory of the past, dreams, discussion of semantics, to, appended at the end, the proceedings of an international conference, endorses a perspective drastically different from that held by realist narratives. Through what Lucie Armitt terms the "ghosting strategy"[4] (4) in her discussion of contemporary women's fiction and the fantastic, Atwood is able to conjure up embedded narratives to counter and subvert the main text. Her haunting memories of the past, which constantly surge up in the text and disrupt the narrative flow of her account of the present, is an apt example of the textual subversion at work. Interestingly, in one of her mental excursions to the past she really encounters a ghost-like figure—her daughter:

> I step into the water, lie down, let it hold me. The water is soft as hands. I close my eyes, and **she's there with me, suddenly, without warning**, it must be the smell of the soap. I put my face against the soft hair at the back of her neck and breathe her in, baby powder and child's washed flesh and shampoo, with an undertone, the faint scent of urine. This is the age she is when I'm in the bath. She comes back to me at different ages. This is how I know she's not really a ghost. If she were a ghost she would be the same age always. (*Handmaid* 82) (emphasis mine)

Then, one page later, we are told that "[s]he fades, I can't keep her here with me, she's gone now. Maybe I do think of here as a ghost, the ghost

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[4] Lucie Armitt employs the term "ghosting strategy" to designate the disruptive potential of an embedded text within a main text. The embedded text, the "phantom," would "erupt from within the main body of the text, articulating its subversions . . . from within an apparently orthodox structure" (4).

of a dead girl, a little girl who died when she was five" (*Handmaid* 83). Here, through the intrusion of the past into the present, or rather the fantastic into the realistic, the narrative stasis of the text has been shattered, uncovering a cacophony the extent of which can only be matched by the chaos initiated by the Republic of Gilead.

The cacophony of *The Handmaid's Tale* is, furthermore, enhanced by the metafictional quality of the text. Indeed one may even read *The Handmaid's Tale* as a metafiction. Prevalent in the text, first of all, are self-conscious comments on the story and the way the story is unfolding. In the beginning of Chapter 41, for example, before Offred proceeds with her story, she utters her opinion regarding the story and even makes apologies for the way the story proceeds:

> I wish this story were different. I wish it were more civilized. 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. . . . (*Handmaid* 343)
>
> I'm sorry there is so much pain in this story. I'm sorry it's in fragments, like a body caught in crossfire or pulled apart by force. But there is nothing I can do to change it. (*Handmaid* 343-344)

Here we can also see that the narrator's role has been accentuated. In fact, in this metafictional work all those elements that have traditionally been relegated to the background in a realist novel have been foregrounded, with the result that the text becomes rather dynamic and interactive. Besides the narrator, the reader is also given recognition as may be seen in the following passage where the reader is directly addressed by the narrator:

> But I keep going with this sad and hungry and sordid, this limping and mutilated story, because after all I want **you** to hear it, as I will hear **yours** too if I ever get the chance, if I meet **you** or if **you** escape, in the future or in heaven or in prison or underground, some other places. . . . By telling **you** anything at all I'm at least believing in **you**. I believe **you**'re there, I believe you into being. Because I'm telling **you** this story I will **your** existence. I tell, therefore **you** are. So I will go on. (*Handmaid* 344) (emphasis mine)

In this passage what is interesting, moreover, is the precarious state of the text, which seems to depend for its existence solely on the tacit agreement

between the narrator and the reader. If the bonding is broken, it seems, the text would be no more. Once again, then, the spirit of indeterminacy and the tenet of undecidability are unraveled, pinpointing the great distance of Atwood's fictional world from that of Huxley's or Orwell's.

Besides being a self-conscious text, *The Handmaid's Tale* is also very much "open-ended," showing a world that is not finished yet and everything is just "in the process." Chapter 38 is a case in point. Here Offred encounters her old friend Moira unexpectedly and is anxious to know what has happened to her. Offred then tries her best to give a faithful account of Moira's story to the reader:

> This is what she says, whispers, more or less. **I can't remember exactly**, because I had no way of writing it down. I've filled it out for her as much as I can: we didn't have much time so she just gave the outlines. **I've tried to make it sound as much like her as I can**. It's a way of keeping her alive.
>
> *** * *** (*Handmaid* 316) (emphasis mine)

After the three asterisks then the narrative is taken over by Moira, telling us her own story in her own voice. Offred's anxiety over her inability to "remember her exactly," her desperate effort to render the story as fully as possible, and the eventual submission of her narrative role to Moira, all suggest the urgency of the storytelling and the immediacy of the story. The story, in other words, is still "in the process" of being finished. The open-ended nature of the work is further accentuated when, at the end of this chapter, Offred again assumes the role of the narrator and comments on Moira's story:

> Here is what I'd like to tell. I'd like to tell a story about how Moira escaped, for good this time. Or if I couldn't tell that, I'd like to say she blew up Jezebel's with fifty Commanders inside it. I'd like her to end with something daring and spectacular, some outrage, something that would befit her. But as far as I know that didn't happen. I don't know how she ended, or even if she did, because I never saw her again. (*Handmaid* 325)

The many possibilities speculated are in fact efforts against any fixity of meaning, "deliberately cultivat[ing] uncertainty, blurring, ambiguity, flux—all threats to perfect regularity and normativity" (Dvorak 75-76). Formalistically, then, *The Handmaid's Tale* has taken a different path, departing drastically from canonical dystopias. Indeed, as Celia Florén indicates, in *The Handmaid's Tale* "the form is so much part of the

content that the content would vary if the form changed" (253).

Some critics hold that Atwood's choice of a female narrator is also a significant gesture of transgression. Coral Ann Howells, for example, argues that, since "dystopia is a dominantly masculine genre," Atwood's female narrator "turns the traditional dystopia upside down" (141). Sharon R. Wilson indicates that "[a]lthough a few dystopias (e.g. Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*) have been invented by women, *The Handmaid's Tale* is unusual in being told primarily from the point of view of a woman who knows very little about the operation of the society" (127). Wilson therefore comes up with the conclusion that "*The Handmaid's Tale* is a metadystopian novel in challenging and critiquing the whole dystopian tradition" (127). One may wonder, nevertheless, whether Offred can sustain the expectation of female agency habitually discovered in a feminist heroine. Throughout the novel, in fact, what strikes the reader is the passivity of the female narrator, who would "turn to jelly" (*Handmaid* 366) under the slightest of pressure. Early in the story, when a doctor offers to inseminate her illegally, Offred already tells us that "[i]t's the choice that terrifies me" (*Handmaid* 80). Later, witnessing a man on the street suddenly grabbed by two "Eyes," Offred says, "What I feel is relief. It wasn't me" (*Handmaid* 220). Indeed the spirit of resignation is what constantly surges up in her narrative, characterized by statements such as "[w]hy fight? That will never do" (*Handmaid* 290) and "[g]ive in, go along" (*Handmaid* 324). Her passivity reaches its climax when another handmaid Ofglen wants to help her to escape but she declines the offer. She explains, "The fact is that I no longer want to leave, escape, cross the border to freedom. I want to be here, with Nick, where I can get at him" (*Handmaid* 348). Yet her love for Nick, her Commander's chauffeur, can hardly stand any test at all. After learning the news of Ofglen's death Offred is completely shattered. She prays:

> Dear God, I think, I will do anything you like. Now that you've let me off, I'll obliterate myself, if that's what you really want; I'll empty myself, truly become a chalice. **I'll give up Nick**, I'll forget about the others, I'll stop complaining. I'll accept my lot. I'll sacrifice. I'll repent. I'll abdicate. I'll renounce. (*Handmaid* 367-368) (emphasis mine)

Given the passivity of Offred, one may wonder whether she is the right kind of heroine to carry out the mission of subverting the male dystopian

tradition. Atwood herself, in a speech entitled "*The Handmaid's Tale*: A Feminist Dystopia? "given on November 17 1998 in Rennes, France in front of 450 students, attempts to address this issue:

> Is the protagonist a feminist heroine? I don't think so. I think she is an ordinary sort of person caught up in extraordinary circumstances. She proposes no solutions beyond escape. You can't think of her as a person who given the chance, would set up a planned society of her own—that is, would set up her own attempt at utopia. She's somebody who wants to just live her life. (24)

From another perspective, however, the ambivalence of Offred as a feminist heroine does point out something unique about the gender politics of *The Handmaid's Tale*. Gender is surely among the primary concerns of the work. One may readily detect many themes that *The Handmaid's Tale* shares with other feminist novels. The tie between sexuality and power, for example, is a dominant issue in the work. The control of women's reproductive power by the state, the obligatory division of women into various roles (including the category "Unwomen" for those who cannot fulfill any of the roles), and the subversive undercurrents represented by the various liaisons threatening to disrupt the status quo all provide insight into the intricate relationship between sexuality and power. Again, the issue of female subjectivity and identity is also conspicuous in the work. It tends to contrast sharply the past with the present to pinpoint the repression of women in the Republic of Gilead. For example, in one of her monthly visits to a doctor, Offred is shocked because the doctor uses the term "sterile" to designate the Commanders. Offred describes her own response as follows:

> I almost gasp; he's said a forbidden word. *Sterile*. There is no such thing as a sterile man anymore, not officially. There are only women who are fruitful and women who are barren, that's the law. (*Handmaid* 79)

In this highly stratified world, then, woman is only an object, a commodity to be exchanged. It's not possible for her to quest for female subjectivity, and she is even denied of her own identity.[5] In this regard the work's discourse on the female body is quite interesting. Again Offred contrasts the past with the present:

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[5] In Chapter 14 Offred says, "My name isn't Offred, I have another name, which nobody uses now because it's forbidden" (*Handmaid* 108).

> I used to think of my body as an instrument, of pleasure, or a means of transportation, or an implement for the accomplishment of my will. I could use it to run, push buttons of one sort or another, make things happen. . . .
>
> Now the flesh arranges itself differently. I'm a cloud, congealed around a central object, the shape of a pear, which is hard and more real than I am and glows red within its translucent wrapping. (*Handmaid* 95)

It is this reduction of her identity to her reproductive function merely that makes her want to avoid her own body. In another passage about her taking a bath there is therefore the following description:

> My nakedness is strange to me already. My body seems outdated. . . . I avoid looking down at my body, not so much because it's shameful or immodest but because I don't want to see it. I don't want to look at **something that determines me so completely**. (*Handmaid* 82) (emphasis mine)

This keen awareness of the female body as restrictive, however, is rendered suspect when juxtaposed with another passage focusing on the slogan of feminists in the past, one of whom is Offred's mother:

> Behind this sign there are other signs, and the camera notices them briefly: FREEDOM TO CHOOSE. EVERY BABY A WANTED BABY. **RECAPTURE OUR BODIES**. DO YOU BELIEVE A WOMAN'S PLACE IS ON THE KITCHEN TABLE? Under the last sign there's a line drawing of a woman's body, lying on a table, blood dripping out of it. (*Handmaid* 154) (emphasis mine)

Here then the irony is explicit: the effort of a whole generation of feminists amounts to nothing. Even worse: the call for recapturing the female body leads to the imprisonment of women. The female body has become a prison for the new generation. It is clear, then, that what Atwood attempts to do in *The Handmaid's Tale* is not so much offering some more feminist tenets but rather a reconsideration and reexamination of feminist issues. She chooses to remain ambiguous, paradoxical, and ironic in her work. She deliberately inserts disturbing elements into her text, thwarting any outright assertion of her feminist stance and render ambivalent her allegedly feminist content.

Some critics have gone so far as to deny Atwood's feminism. Sandra Tomc, for example, is quite suspicious of Atwood's feminism. She

argues:

> For a novel so overtly offered as a piece of feminist doctrine, *The Handmaid's Tale* delivers a curiously, and, for Atwood, an unwontedly, conservative interpretation of women's exemplary social actions, advocating what looks more like traditional femininity than an insurgent feminism. (82)

Tomc further points out that "what concerns her [Atwood] is not a feminist politics of emancipation, but the nationalist politics of self-protective autonomy which . . . eventually translates into an advocacy of traditional femininity" (82). This interpretation, however, is not convincing. If, according to Tomc, "[i]n Atwood's career-long promotion of Canada's cultural autonomy from the United States, national and gender issues have had for her a commensurate and almost interchangeable status" (82), Atwood nevertheless does not endorse any "politics of self-protective autonomy," be it national or gender. *The Handmaid's Tale* is in fact a critique of essentialism. The advocacy for a women's culture by 70s separatist feminists, among whom Offred's mother has been a prominent one, ironically materializes in a brothel in the Republic of Gilead. The brothel was a hotel in the past, but now "it's full of women" (*Handmaid* 305) who used to be sociologists, lawyers, business executives, etc. (*Handmaid* 309). Again, Atwood's critique of any essentialist conception of women's sphere is shown in one of Offred's comments on her lesbian friend Moira:

> I said there was more than one way of living with your head in the sand and that 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. (*Handmaid* 223)

The self-protective autonomy, in other words, remains ephemeral. Atwood, it would seem, chooses rather to remain ambivalent. There are many evidences in the novel pointing to her ironic awareness of the limitation of any gender discourse.

In what may be termed her demythologizing of feminist assertions, Atwood first of all resorts to the technique of parody. The ideal of a woman's space, culminating in Woolf's "a room of one's own," is realized in a distorted way in the room that Offred occupies. As she describes it in the beginning of Chapter 2:

> A Chair, a table, a lamp. Above, on the white ceiling, a relief

> ornament in the shape of a wreath, and in the center of it a blank space, plastered over, like the place in a face where the eye has been taken out. (*Handmaid* 9)

This room, exclusively belonging to Offred, seems to be the room that Woolf hankers for. Yet in fact the room is a mere parody of Woolf's. The description immediately following belies the treacherous nature of the room: "There must have been a chandelier, once. They've removed anything you could tie a rope to" (*Handmaid* 9). The room is a prison even, though Offred tries to tell herself to think otherwise:

> But a chair, sunlight, flowers: these are not to be dismissed. I am alive, I live, I breathe, I put my hand out, unfolded, into the sunlight. Where I am is not a **prison** but a **privilege**, as Aunt Lydia said, who was in love with either/or. (*Handmaid* 10) (emphasis mine)

This play on words—prison/privilege—further unravels the parodic nature of the text. Indeed parody is significant in the work, and may account for the appearance of the mirror image. On example may suffice. Describing the hallway adjacent to the room, Offred says:

> There remains a mirror, on the hall wall. If I turn my head so that the white wings framing my face direct my vision toward it, I can see it as I go down the stairs, round, convex, a pier glass, like the eye of a fish, and myself in it like a distorted shadow, a parody of something, some fairy-tale figure in a red cloak, descending towards a moment of carelessness that is the same as danger. A sister, dipped in blood. (*Handmaid* 11)

Here Offred describes herself in the mirror as "dipping in blood." This shift from the "red" color of her cloak to "blood" signifies the distortion of her status and the suffering she has undergone. The reduction of "redness" to "blood" is furthermore a *reductio ad absurdum* of the quest for a female space, as the "space" now shrinks to the space inside the womb, and Offred's fate is dictated by the blood there. As Offred describes:

> I'm a cloud, congealed around a central object, the shape of a pear. . . . Inside it is a **space**, huge as the sky at night and dark and curved like that, though black-red rather than black. (*Handmaid* 95) (emphasis mine)

This space ironically does not allow any female autonomy but rather is a symbol of confinement. The description of a sister dipping in blood,

moreover, is ominous as it unravels the cruel reality about female bonding in the Republic of Gilead and further contributes to the demythologizing of feminist assertions that Atwood is conducting.

Atwood in *The Handmaid's Tale* in fact attempts to lay bare the vulnerability of "utopian" concepts such as "sisterhood" and "female bonding." As her text makes it clear, the kind of sisterhood and bonding that many feminist works celebrate[6] is often an imposed harmony ignoring the underlying conflict due to differences in class. Through the relationships between the Aunts (instructors imposing discipline) and Handmaids, the Marthas (kitchen maids) and Handmaids, and Commanders' Wives and Handmaids, Atwood poignantly portrays how the discourse on Woman may have ignored the real plight of women, and that in many aspects women are not a transcendental category but rather are divided by conflicting interests. In the very beginning of the work, the demythologizing of women as a unified entity is focused on the Handmaids' difference from the Aunts. While the Handmaids huddled together in a gym, losing their freedom, "Aunt Sara and Aunt Elizabeth patrolled; they had electric cattle prods slung on thongs from their leather belts" (*Handmaid* 4). Or consider the unforgettable Aunt Lydia who, "in her khaki dress, a pointer in her hand" (*Handmaid* 144), is always full of moral lessons to teach the Handmaids: "Her voice is pious, condescending, the voice of those whose duty it is to tell us unpleasant things for our own good. I would like to strangle her" (*Handmaid* 145). The last sentence clearly reveals the deep antagonism between the Aunts and Handmaids. Again, Offred tells us, "The Marthas are not supposed to fraternize with us" (*Handmaid* 15), and she proceeds to probe into the meaning of the term "fraternize":

> *Fraternize* means to behave like a brother. Luke told me that. He said there was no corresponding word that meant *to behave like a sister*. *Sororize*, it would have to be, he said. From the Latin. (*Handmaid* 15)

This etymological study does foretell a world in which sisterhood is hardly possible. This bleak fate of sisterhood—the awareness that class is a factor impeding the beautiful dream of sisterhood—is further portrayed in the relationship between Serena Joy, the wife of Commander Fred, and Offred. Their difference is symbolically articulated in terms of their

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[6] The 70s feminist utopian novels, especially those oriented toward separatism, may be a case in point. See, for example, Sally Miller Gearhart's 1979 *The Wanderground*.

different locales:

> This garden is the domain of the Commander's Wife. Looking out through my shatterproof window I've often seen her in it, her knees on a cushion, a light blue veil thrown over her wide gardening hat, a basket at her side with shears in it and pieces of string for tying the flowers into place. . . . Many of the Wives have such gardens, it's something for them to order and maintain and care for. (*Handmaid* 16)

While the shatterproof window symbolizes the gap between the two, Offred nevertheless remembers that in the past she once had a garden: "I can remember the smell of the turned earth, the plump shapes of bulbs held in the hands, fullness, the dry rustle of seeds through the fingers" (*Handmaid* 16-17). This pastoral charm thus leads her to a beautiful dream of sisterhood:

> I wanted, then, to turn her into an older sister, a motherly figure, someone who would understand and protect me. . . . I wanted to think I would have liked her, in another time and place, another life. (*Handmaid* 21)

Of course the dream remains a mere dream: "But I could see already that I wouldn't have liked her, nor she me" (*Handmaid* 21). It is clear that by these examples Atwood is commenting on the illusive nature of the idea of female bonding. Through poignant stories of these women characters she attempts to lay bare the vulnerability of celebrated concepts of feminism.

Atwood, furthermore, has something unique to say about the issue of feminism and science/technology. The feminist critique of science has pointed out that "[t]he politics of science have included woman within the gaze of science but have excluded her from the practice of science" (Tuana vii). Marge Piercy's *Woman of the Edge of Time*, for example, describes how a poor Chicano woman is victimized by the medical institution and how the male doctors dominates and objectifies her. Atwood, however, gives an ironic turn to this critique. In the Republic of Gilead, we are told, as tradition is respected in every sphere of life, giving birth is no longer aided by technology or supervised by doctors. Even though sterility rate is high and the percentage of abnormality in babies is one in four due to environmental pollution, still no technological aid is allowed. As Offred comments:

> What will Ofwarren give birth to? A baby, as we all hope? Or

> something else, an Unbaby, with a pinhead or a snout like a dog's, or two bodies, or a hole in its heart or no arms, or webbed hands and feet? There's no telling. **They could tell once, with machines, but that is now outlawed**. What would be the point of knowing, anyway? You can't have them taken out; whatever it is must be carried to term. (*Handmaid* 143) (emphasis mine)

In the special occasion of the Handmaid Ofwarren's delivery, male doctors are still summoned, but they are left idle outside—"they're only allowed in if it can't be helped" (*Handmaid* 146). Offred thus recalls the old days when doctors were "in charge":

> It used to be different, they used to be in charge. A shame it was, said Aunt Lydia. Shameful. What she'd just showed us was a film, made in an olden-days hospital: a pregnant woman, wired up to a machine, electrodes coming out of her every which way so that she looked like a broken robot, an intravenous drip feeding into her arm. Some man with a searchlight looking up between her legs, where she's been shaved, a mere beardless girl, a trayful of bright sterilized knives, everyone with masks on. A cooperative patient. Once they drugged women, induced labor, cut them open, sewed them up. (*Handmaid* 146)

This account can be very aptly inserted into any feminist work critiquing male science. However, Atwood would rather like to remain ambivalent, since the irony is that the alternative may even be worse. After the passage quoted above there is the following quotation from the Bible: "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children" (*Handmaid* 146). What, then, may the feminist critique of science lead to? Can that in fact mean more suffering for women? Here then we see Atwood once again refuses to be pinned down by any theory and chooses rather to remain a threshold figure.

To recapitulate, *The Handmaid's Tale* is an eloquent example of Atwood's effort at border crossing. Textually as well as ideologically, *The Handmaid's Tale* exemplifies features that are transgressive and disruptive. The phrase—a feminist *1984*—can never be an adequate label for *The Handmaid's Tale* as it departs significantly from the track of canonical dystopias on the one hand and remains ambivalent in terms of

its gender politics on the other. Atwood’s revolt against stagnant dogmas and orthodox tenets indeed greatly contributes to her uniqueness as a contemporary writer.

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III、計畫成果自評

在研究計畫的「背景與目的」中，本人曾強調艾特伍德《侍女故事》的研究，可以見證傳統反烏托邦論述的侷限。在研究計畫的「重要性」中，本人亦特別指出《侍女故事》是對於經典反烏托邦文學的改寫。本人所寫就的英文論文"Border Crossing: A Study of *The Handmaid's Tale*" 即試圖探討《*侍女故事*》所呈現的跨界努力。該文由文本和性別政治二個角度，指出《*侍女故事*》和經典反烏托邦小說截然不同的風貌。故研究內容與原計畫甚相符。論文並將投稿至學術期刊，以期能與學界進一步對話