

## Interrogating Historical Reality through the Dystopian Lens of *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*

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### ABSTRACT

Throughout history, oppressive regimes, theocratic governments, and extreme patriarchal control have shaped societies like those usually depicted in dystopian fiction. The Puritan theocracy in early America, the Islamic Revolution in Iran, and the persecution of women worldwide serve as real-life parallels to the imagined horrors reflected in *The Handmaid's Tale*. The novel explores the future scenario of prevailing societal trends if they are extended to their ultimate consequences. Margaret Atwood examines the historical precedents through satire and parody to critique the selective and constructed nature of history, revealing how narratives are shaped, manipulated, and preserved to serve dominant ideologies. This paper seeks to analyse incidents rooted in history that have shaped the narratives of the novels, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*, examining how they are depicted, what techniques are employed to record and reinterpret history, and how they reinforce the notion that dystopias are extensions of historical realities rather than being merely speculative fiction.

**Keywords:** *Dystopia, History, Reality, Oppression, Margaret Atwood.*

### Introduction

*We find Dystopias a lot easier to believe in than Utopias: Utopias we can only imagine; Dystopias we've already had.*

(Atwood, "Writing Utopia" 95)

Dystopia is described as "an imaginary place or condition in which everything is as bad as possible" ("Dystopia", *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* 785). The term gained further interpretations after being linked with novels such as *1984* and *Brave New World*. These novels

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Received: 10 April. 2025. Accepted: 15 June. 2025. Available online: 25 June. 2025.

Published by SAFE. (Society for Academic Facilitation and Extension)

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portray futuristic societies full of oppression, surveillance, torture, and control. Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* also share these features. Both her novels are set in some future time when the Republic of Gilead, the imaginary totalitarian state that overpowers America, takes everything under its control and generates havoc and suffering in the name of creating a better world. However, the features like totalitarian rule, suppression of freedom of expression and choice, destruction of individual rights, and the pervasive fear of surveillance and control are not merely characteristics of an imaginary dystopia but are also deeply embedded in historical reality. It doesn't appear difficult for a sensitive writer to imagine a totalitarian regime when history has already witnessed the horrendous extremities of Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union. Neither would it be difficult to imagine the suppression of women in different forms when history itself has been a testament to their systematic oppression. What is more challenging is crafting narratives that not only connect with the past but also compel us to confront its echoes in contemporary society. The narratives of dystopia undertake the task of intertwining history with a speculative twist that blurs the boundaries between the imagined and the real and refuses to let history be forgotten. Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* presents one such narrative which draws upon historical events ranging from Puritan theocracy to 20th-century totalitarian rule. The foundation of Gilead doesn't emerge from the fictional arenas of imagination but finds its roots in the human history of oppression and religious extremism. In one of her essays, "Margaret Atwood on What *The Handmaid's Tale* Means in the Age of Trump", Atwood clearly mentions that all the incidents described in the novel have happened to someone or the other somewhere in the world. There is nothing imaginary about them. She writes:

I would not put any events into the book that had not already happened in what James Joyce called the nightmare of history, nor any technology not already available: no imaginary gizmos, no imaginary laws, no imaginary atrocities. God is in the details, they say. So is the Devil. (Atwood, "Margaret Atwood on What *The Handmaid's Tale* Means in the Age of Trump")

Also, while working on the draft, Atwood collected some newspaper articles on various historical incidents, such as the Romanian law of reproductive rights, chemicals affecting infertility, etc., therefore, drawing parallels to the dystopia depicted in the novel. This strengthens the notion that dystopias are extensions of historical realities and are not mere speculative fiction. The paper identifies and studies the past that have shaped the narratives of Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and its sequel *The Testaments*. It examines the techniques employed by the writer to record and reinterpret the historical incidents and highlights how the

author represents and critiques historical events through a dystopian lens reminding us of the constrained nature of history writing.

### **Historical Backdrop**

*The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and *The Testaments* (2019), though set in the same fictional world of Gilead, are shaped by markedly different socio-political contexts. The former was written against the backdrop of second-wave feminism and a climate of political conservatism, while the latter was influenced by contemporary movements, such as # MeToo and Abortion Ban Politics. The shifting landscapes of the novels influence the tone and narrative and shape the portrayal of resistance and complicity within Gilead. The genesis of the imaginary Gilead lies in the contemporary Western history along with its older historical precedents. The Puritan theocratic government in 17th-century Massachusetts and the persecution of women during the Salem Witch Trials are two of the major incidents that inspired the formation of Gilead. The Puritans came to America with a vision of creating a utopia grounded in strict adherence to the word of God. In pursuit of this goal, they established theocracy, “a unique system of government in which God would rule directly and immediately over his saints in both church and state” (Zakai, “Puritan Millennialism and Theocracy” 310). Their intense desire to make a perfect society ultimately created a harsh, oppressive environment, especially for women. The societal expectations rooted in the Puritan utopian vision escalated the pressure on women to bear children continuously. Their roles were confined to farm work, gardening, housekeeping and breeding. Gilead's formation shares a similar aim of creating a ‘perfect world’ shaped by divine law. In order to justify the actions, the founders selectively interpret biblical verses and use scriptures as a tool to legitimise oppression and enforce rigid societal roles. Women's role in Gilead is reduced to nothing more than a vessel for childbirth, with motherhood becoming the sole purpose of their lives. What Atwood attempts to show in her portrayal of the theocratic government is the danger of combining religious absolutism with political power. The manipulation of the religious texts and enforcement of what they call ‘divine law’ serve as effective instruments for sustaining authoritarian control where faith is no longer a matter of personal conviction. The manipulation or rewriting becomes essential for the totalitarian regime to prevent citizens from knowing the ‘truth’ of the past and to justify their actions as morally correct and best for society. The regime's agenda is clear: “... the corrupt and blood-smeared fingerprints of the past must be wiped away to create a clean space for the morally pure generation that is surely about to arrive” (Atwood, *The Testaments* 4).

Disguised as initiatives to maintain power structures or build a morally improved society, woman's oppression is ubiquitously present in various forms throughout history. What occurs in Atwood's dystopia is not much different from that. Among the many historical parallels, the Salem Witch Trials executed by the religiously rigid and superstitious Puritans stand as striking examples of the persecution of women. "From the early decades of the 14th century until 1650", according to Nachman Ben-Yehuda, "continental Europeans executed between 200,000 and 500,000 witches, 85% or more of whom were women" ("The European Witch Craze of the 14th to 17th Centuries: A Sociologist's Perspective" 1). These trials deeply influenced Margaret Atwood in writing the novels. The inspiration hits even closer to home as she is a descendent of Mary Webster who was accused of witchcraft and was lynched by the villagers in 1683. In the 17th century New England, women who were independent, spoke out against injustice, and didn't fit into the expected roles of Puritan society were often the ones most likely to be accused of being witches. In Gilead, those who rebel are often targeted with false accusations and are severely punished. For example, Ofglen, who was secretly part of the resistance group 'Mayday', was eventually caught and later replaced by another Handmaid. She was said to have taken her own life by hanging. Likewise, Moira, Offred's lesbian friend, was forcefully turned into a prostitute as punishment when she repeatedly tried to run away from Aunt Lydia's authority. Again, the atrocities perpetrated on third gender (LGBTQ+) find place in the form of the execution and torture of gays and lesbians in the novel. Men and women who are found homosexual, infertile, or those who refuse to conform to Gilead's strict social order are removed from the society, either by killing or sending them to the colonies to clean up toxic waste. Atwood not only draws the parallels but also presents them in a manner that replicates the hypocrisy inherited in the patriarchal society. Gilead presents itself as the saviour of women, claiming to protect them from sexual violence and assaults through the practice of 'participation'—portmanteau of the words 'participation' and 'execution'—where handmaids take part in the execution of a supposed rapist or traitor. However, the regime does not consider forcing fertile women to bear children for the elite class as crime; instead, it describes it as a religious duty. It uses the cunning argument of protection of women from sexual violence and the supposed chaos of the pre-Gilead era to justify control. Aunt Lydia repeatedly reminds the handmaids, "In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* 30). Looked at more closely, the regime ironically becomes the very source of systematic violence against women, stripping them of their identities, rights, and autonomy, and uses 'protection' as a justification for oppression. The opposite practices of

punishing men accused of rape and forcing women into sexual servitude show the moral hypocrisy of the state and exemplifies how the system can showcase itself as morally righteous while perpetuating injustices in more insidious ways.

Atwood travelled to Afghanistan with her family in 1978, and her dystopian vision is also influenced by her firsthand experience of the socio-political situation of Afghanistan defaced by invasions, civil wars, and insurgencies to make it an Islamic country. Her fears turned into reality when the Taliban took control of Afghanistan in September 1996 and imposed several restrictions on women. Under the Taliban rule women were not allowed to appear in the streets alone without a burqa. There was complete ban on women's work outside the home. As a result, female teachers, doctors, engineers, bureaucrats, and other professionals became unemployed and useless. Also, women were not supposed to speak loudly in public places. Similarly, the Morality Police of Iran (established in 2005) monitors women's behaviour in public and ensures that they wear modest dress including Hijab. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Gilead has also imposed similar restrictions on women. Girls and women were denied the right to read and write. They were forbidden from working and earning money, and were excluded from participating in official meetings. The very first thing Gilead did after coming into power was the seizing of women's bank accounts and expelling them from their jobs. It systematically stripped women off all the political, economic, and social power. For example, Aunt Lydia, who was a family court judge, contemplates on her situation after she was arrested, just like other professional women, by the Gilead authority:

I was a family court judge, a position I'd gained through decades of hardscrabble work and arduous professional climbing, and I had been performing that function as equitably as I could. I'd acted for the betterment of the world as I saw that betterment, within the practical limits of my profession. I'd contributed to charities, I'd voted in elections both federal and municipal, I'd held worthy opinions. I'd assumed I was living virtuously; I'd assumed my virtue would be moderately applauded.

Though I realised how very wrong I had been about this, and about many other things, on the day I was arrested. (Atwood, *The Testaments* 36)

Instead of recognising her knowledge and valuing her work, the misogynistic authority of Gilead insulted her, beat her, and forced her to accept its terms and conditions if she wanted to survive.

Gilead's agenda was to keep women away from books and knowledge. The study room of the house was reserved only for the male members as Agnes describes, "What my father was doing in there was said to be very important—the important things that men did, too important for

females to meddle with because they had smaller brains that were incapable of thinking large thoughts, according to Aunt Vidala, who taught us Religion” (Atwood, *The Testaments* 15). They were excluded from receiving formal education in the school and were trained in domestic duties and childbearing, reinforcing their roles as homemakers and reproductive vessels. This also mirrors the 19th-century Cult of Domesticity or the idea of “True Womanhood” which emphasised four major principles of women’s lives: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. Education for women, if allowed at all, was intended to enhance their roles as wives and mothers rather than for intellectual development. The dressing style was also strictly regulated in Gilead when it comes to women’s clothing: “Arms covered, hair covered, skirts down to the knee before you were five and no more than two inches above the ankle after that, because the urges of men were terrible things and those urges needed to be curbed” (Atwood, *The Testaments* 11).

Rather than challenging the male gaze or behaviour, the responsibility of maintaining moral standards is placed on women. They have been assigned specific colours of clothing that represent their position. For example, Marthas wear grey, commanders’ wives wear blue, handmaids are assigned the red colour, and the aunts wear brown. Each colour symbolises a more profound meaning connected to the role of the women who wear it. For example, Offred said, “Everything except the wings around my face is red: the colour of blood which defines us” (Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale* 14). The red colour represents menstrual blood and emphasizes handmaids’ primary role as reproductive vessels. Ironically, the red colour (red lipstick) was used as a symbol of self-assertion, independence, and celebration of femininity by the women suffragettes in the early 20th century feminist protests.

This reversal of the symbolic significance of the red colour in the novels strikes like a warning to the readers that in the hands of a totalitarian regime, the best cherished notions can be manipulated and turned upside down. Interestingly, the handmaids’ red costume emerges out as a potent symbol of women’s rights in the contemporary times. In the recent protests against the abortion ban politics, women protesters came out in the streets wearing Handmaid’s red cloaks and white bonnets. What functions as a symbol of submission within the fictional world of Gilead is turned into a powerful symbol of protest in the real world.

Some of the historical events that find parallels in Atwood's novels are given in the table below.

Historical Events	Parallels in the Novels
The Puritan Theocracy of Massachusetts of 17 <sup>th</sup> Century	The Theocratic Society of the Republic of Gilead
The Salem Witch Trials	Public torture and killing of men and women for their rebellious behaviour and non-conformity with the state ideology
The Nazi Germany and its concentration camps	The Guardian Angels, secret eyes, forced reproduction, sexual violence, selective deportation of people to nuclear-waste colonies
The manipulation of history during Stalin era	The reconstruction of history according to the Gilead regime
The Islamic Revolution of Iran	Several restrictions on women (ban on education, strict dress codes, etc)
Decree 770 (The Romanian Law of Reproductive Rights)	Forced reproduction
Second Wave Feminism	Feminist movements in the pre-Gilead era

In Atwood's dystopia, history seems to repeat itself, though not in identical ways. The events and systems echo the past, but they are reshaped into versions that are more difficult to be recognised or confronted as 'history'. The blurring boundaries between history and fiction reflect how the past continues to influence and shape the present in ways that are often unacknowledged and distorted. Through her unique narrative style and techniques, Atwood satirises the mechanisms of power and control using female voices to unravel the inherent absurdities and contradictions of the oppressive system people are trapped into.

### Gilead through 'Her' Eyes

The reader ventures into Gilead through Offred's eyes whose fragmented narrative not only divulges the oppressive rules and mechanisms of the regime but also captures the inner turmoil and struggles of a woman to keep her identity alive in a society that tries to erase it. Although the story is told as a first-person narrative, it records the accounts of innumerable women whose voices have been suppressed by the totalitarian regime. Her narrative becomes the mouthpiece



of all the subdued women voices as is reflected in the beginning of the novel when Offred said, “We yearned for the future” (Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale* 9). However, the true identity Offred was struggling to preserve was never disclosed as the actual names were erased by the government. All handmaids carry the names of the commanders whom they are assigned to—Offred means ‘belonging to Fred’, Ofwarren means ‘belonging to Warren’, Ofglen means ‘belonging to Glen’, etc. etc. Even the story that Offred tells is filtered, subjective, and fragmented as she confesses, “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. If it’s a story I’m telling, then I have control over the ending” (Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale* 45). Her narration is riddled with uncertainties, edits, and conflicting accounts of events, all of which illustrate the impossibility of maintaining an objective, coherent account of truth in an oppressive regime. Atwood’s use of ‘Historical Notes’ gives further impetus to the ambiguity prevailing in the authenticity of Offred’s account. The handmaid’s story was found in the collection of cassettes that Professor Pieixoto transcribes to the audience in a symposium held in 2195. Instead of giving direct access to Offred’s account to the audience, it was transcribed by a male professor, which again raises questions related to the validation of the account. Twice removed from reality—first recorded by the protagonist on the cassette and then transcribed by the professor who interprets it through his own academic lens—the tale emphasises the unreliability and fragility of historical memory.

Offred’s account weaves together the past and present as she recalls moments shared with her family and friends in the pre-Gilead era alongside her lived experiences in the present-day Gilead. Through the use of stream of consciousness and fragmented narrative technique, she reconstructs the historical events and provides an inside view of life in Gilead, reflected in the first paragraph that sets the tone of the story:

We slept in what had once been the gymnasium. The floor was of varnished wood, with stripes and circles painted on it, for the games that were formerly played there; the hoops for the basketball nets were still in place, though the nets were gone. A balcony ran around the room, for the spectators, and I thought I could smell, faintly like an afterimage, the pungent scent of sweat, shot through with the sweet taint of chewing gum and perfume from the watching girls, felt skirted as I knew from pictures, later in mini-skirts, then pants, then in one earring, spiky green-streaked hair. Dances would have been held there; the music lingered, a palimpsest of unheard sound, style upon style, an undercurrent of drums, a forlorn wail, garlands made of tissue-paper flowers, cardboard devils, a revolving ball of mirrors, powdering the dancers with a snow of light. (Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale* 9)



Offred's mind creates a complex mental landscape as she moves fluidly between the present location of the converted gymnasium and the strong, emotional recollections of its previous existence full of music, perfume, and carefree youth. Even though the remnants of the past have faded, she still tries to recall the sensory experiences—the smell of sweat, chewing gum, and perfume—and the visuals of changing fashion of girls from 'felt skirt' to 'spiky green-streaked hair'. It reflects a world where individuals once had freedom to express themselves and that has now reduced to distant, fragmented memories. The reconstruction of the past has been the core feature of the novel which further corroborated by the inclusion of the term 'palimpsest', which refers to something that carries multiple layers of meaning or history with traces of earlier forms still visible beneath the newer ones. Atwood illustrates the act of reconstructing the past as a way to preserve identity and resist erasure. She also reveals how memory, although unstable and incomplete, becomes a vital tool for survival in a regime that rewrites history and silences individual truths.

The normalisation of violence serves as a crucial instrument for authoritarian governments to uphold power, suppress dissent, and alter social norms in dystopia. Margaret Atwood skilfully demonstrates how systematic violence permeates daily existence to the point where it is no longer questioned but simply accepted as the norm. Whether it is the act of sexual violence, or a ceremony mandated by the government as a religious duty of women to chant "be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* 95), or the process of Man's Salvaging executed not just as punishment but to instil fear and warning, cruelty becomes a public spectacle and punishments are necessary rituals required to maintain the morality of society. Devoid of any mutual love and feelings, sexual act between the handmaid and the commander is ritualistically performed after the reading of Rachel and Leah story from the Old Testament, "Give me children, or else I die. Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb? Behold my maid Bilhah. She shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* 95). With the aim of justifying a coercive act—kidnapping fertile women and imposing upon them the role of handmaids against their will—religion serves as an ideological foundation on which Gilead builds its practices of oppression. Offred's narration is highly shaped by the extreme pain and suffering she endured within the state, and is often reflected in her use of clashing imagery and symbols. The comparison of the red face of the dead people with the red tulip when she says, "the red of the smile is the same as the red of the tulips in Serena Joy's Garden" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's*

*Tale* 39), does not come out of nowhere. It is rather born from the trauma, repression, and desperate need to make sense of a cruel world.

### Voices of Rebellion

The 15-year gap between *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* is not a chronological distance merely. It is a reflection of how the mode of resistance has transformed with the changing socio-political scenario. The narrative-shifts between the two novels seem to be both a deliberate move of Atwood and a response to the changing landscapes. While Offred's story is deeply rooted in an introspective, melancholic, and fragmented world, the sequel unfolds through multiple perspectives marked by rebellion and resilience. *The Testaments* discloses through the voices of three women: Aunt Lydia, who played an active role in maintaining the rules of the regime and has the position of power; Agnes Jemima, the first daughter of Offred brought up in Gilead; and Daisy or Baby Nicole, who was transported out of Gilead years prior and brought up in Canada. With their diverse experiences and perspectives on Gilead, the narrators reveal how the system operates on propaganda, fear, and rigid control, and how, even in such a strict environment, resistance begins to grow both from within and outside.

The influence of religion is deeply felt in *The Handmaid's Tale* where sacred texts are twisted and reinterpreted to justify a system built for a particular section of society. The title, *The Testaments*, stirs up the thoughts of religious scriptures like the Old and New Testaments at first glance, highlighting the foundation on which Gilead is built. Atwood may have chosen the title to evoke a strict sense of sacredness, originality, and historical relevance of the text. However, the sacredness is redefined in this world through the voices of women. 'Testaments' are not the laws handed down by the authorities but the personal testimonies of the women of the state who brought down the regime through their resilience and resistance. Aunt Lydia, a former family court judge in the pre-Gilead era, managed to get a powerful position in the state after enduring the brutal tactics Gilead used to break her spirit and to remove any form of rebellion. She attributed her political longevity to three reasons: she was needed to control women; she knew the secrets of the leaders; and she used those secrets to blackmail them in order to secure her safety. Her rebellious nature was brought into sharper focus when she began documenting Gilead's secrets in her writing. Agnes Jemima and Daisy have been brought up in different environments after the establishment of Gilead. Agnes grows up in a wealthy household, surrounded by comfort and receiving genuine love and affection from her adopted

mother. She has been told different stories throughout her childhood which she begins to question as time passes. There is an innocent as well as satiric tone in her narration when she says, “I agree with you that Gilead ought to fade away—there is too much wrong in it, too much that is false, and too much that is surely contrary to what God intended—but you must permit me some space to mourn the good that will be lost” (Atwood, *The Testaments* 9). Her doubts about the philosophy of Gilead increased when she began to learn about the condition of women, including the brutal death of her family’s handmaid during childbirth. Daisy, on the other hand, was raised in Canada by a couple, Neil and Melanie, who run a store called The Clothes Hound. She learned the truth of her true identity as Baby Nicole, the lost child of Gilead, on her sixteenth birthday. While struggling to grapple with her new identity, shifting from a Canadian girl to the iconic Baby Nicole of Gilead, Daisy found herself caught between confusion, fear, and a growing sense of purpose. Despite living what appeared to be a free life in Canada, her upbringing was closely controlled. As the missing child of Gilead, her adoptive parents knew that Gilead was actively searching for her. The seed of resistance was sown each time she was denied the autonomy to pursue her desires.

The narratives of all three narrators are infused with the erosion of truth, exposing the profound rifts in individual and societal comprehension under an authoritarian government. In Aunt Lydia’s account, the truth is cloaked in ambiguity. Her secret writings expose the contradictions between her public role as a ruthless enforcer of Gilead’s laws and her private intentions of subverting the regime. In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, she is portrayed as tyrannical figure who enforces strict control over the handmaids while constantly reinforcing the idea that everything they endure, no matter how harsh or cruel, is ultimately for their own good, as she says, “You are getting the best, you know” (Atwood 95). Her role shifts from being merely an enforcer to a quiet, defiant resistor in *The Testaments* who records Gilead’s crimes against humanity and gathers evidences, ultimately becoming a key-force behind its downfall. Aunt Lydia’s duality presents her as a complex and strong character. Her narration raises questions about the authenticity of her narration and sincerity of her intention. Whether she is confessing, justifying, or rewriting her legacy is difficult to claim. The same applies to Agnes’s narration of the story as she has been brought up in an environment where everything is forged and manipulated in favour of the regime. Her truth has been entirely shaped by and confined within the strict boundaries of Gilead’s ideology. From a very young age, she is taught to accept religious doctrine and patriarchal norms as absolute. Daisy also grapples with different

identities and truths from the moment of her birth. Raised outside of Gilead, she grows up in a world where the oppressive nature of the Gilead regime was only a distant news.

Atwood's inclusion of the metafictional 'Historical Notes' gives further impetus to the erosion of truth prevailed in dystopia. It contains Professor Pieixoto's analysis of the testimonies, recovered after the fall of Gilead, presented in the Thirteenth Symposium held in Passamaquoddy in 2197. The first testimony, titled "The Ardua Hall Holograph", was found inside Cardinal Newman's book *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*. Prof Pieixoto expresses skepticism about the authenticity of the manuscript. He argues that it might be a 'forgery' and speculates that it could have been written by Aunt Elizabeth or Aunt Vidala out of jealousy. He even shows disbelief in the originality of the testimonies of Daisy and Agnes. Atwood shows how hard it is to uncover truth, especially in a place like Gilead, where everything is controlled, censored, and twisted to serve those in power. Her treatment of history reminds us of Stalin's era when "Russian history was rewritten to conform to the political demands of an increasingly controlling regime" (Trigos, *The Decembrists Myth in Russian Culture* 121). Carl Sagan, in his famous book *The Demon-Haunted World*, excellently summarises the rewriting of Soviet history during the Stalin era.

Soon after Stalin took power, pictures of his rival Leon Trotsky—a monumental figure in the 1905 and 1917 revolutions—began to disappear. Heroic and wholly anhistoric paintings of Stalin and Lenin together directing the Bolshevik Revolution took their place, with Trotsky, the founder of the Red Army, nowhere in evidence. These images became icons of the state. You could see them in every office building, on outdoor advertising signs sometimes ten storeys high, in museums, on postage stamps. New generations grew up believing that was their history. (414)

The individuals who opposed the Stalin regime were often persecuted and erased from official records, photographs, and historical accounts. It is not that disinformation is a matter of the past only. In the present times, disinformation campaign has taken a frightening shape with AI technology as its helping hand. Whether it is about winning elections, shaping public opinion, or fuelling social and cultural divide, it is easier now to manipulate data and create and spread fake news among millions of people within seconds throughout the world.

With the inclusion of the historical notes at the end of both of the novels, Atwood warns us about the nature of historical accounts and invites us at the same time to contemplate upon how history is written, who get to tell it, and whether their voices should even be trusted.

## Conclusion

Observed closely, it can be concluded that Margaret Atwood drew inspiration from historical events like the Salem Witch Trials, the Puritan Theocracy of 17th-century America, the persecution of women under the Taliban's rule of Afghanistan, etc. to create the dystopian world of the Republic of Gilead. This reaffirms her claim that oppression, violence, surveillance, and control, especially when justified through religion or tradition, is neither new nor imaginary. Instead, it is a reflection of the lived experiences of many people. She blurs the boundaries between fiction and reality by establishing her dystopian societies in real-life events, such as forced childbearing, religious extremism, and surveillance and control. This reinforces the idea that speculative fiction, though based on imagination, is deeply rooted in history. The novels also show how accounts of the past have been altered and reconstructed over time to serve those in power. Atwood gives voice to those women who have been silenced by the patriarchal regime and allows them to speak for themselves. Offred's narrative presents an intimate and emotional account of a survivor while exposing the insidious and hidden cruelties of Gilead. She allows readers to enter the depths of her thoughts, emotions, and past experiences. In contrast, the multi-perspective structure of *The Testaments* offers a broader and more varied view of Gilead and presents different experiences—Aunt Lydia's powerful but conflicted role, Agnes's life inside Gilead, and Nicole's outsider eyes. Offred's recordings and Aunt Lydia's, Agnes's, and Nicole's testimonies show how history is filtered through memory, emotion, fear, and survival, and that it is not a fixed truth, but a fluid and often manipulated construct.

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