

Worksheet 10 – Endings: Herstory vs. History

Review: Lecture 9

In the penultimate lecture of the unit, Dr Madeleine Davies discussed the importance of the 'Historical Notes' section at the end of the novel.

- ✓ In what ways does this section suggest that some of the issues around the treatment of women continue even after the fall of Gilead?

Recall: Lecture 10

Answer these questions after watching the video lecture to check how much you remember.

1. What is the contrast between history and herstory that Dr Davies discusses in her lecture?
2. What change to the novel does Dr Davies explain was made in the 2017 television adaptation?
 - a) Making Offred older
 - b) Removing Serena Joy as a character
 - c) Changing the location
 - d) Making the Commander younger

Bonus point: Why does Dr Davies disagree with this change?
3. At the end of her final lecture, what does Dr Davies suggest is the warning offered by *The Handmaid's Tale* to its readers?

Analysis

4. In her lecture, Dr Davies discusses how the election of Donald Trump as President in the United States reignited interest in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Why do you think this was the case?
5. Watch the two trailers below from different adaptations of *The Handmaid's Tale* in 1990 and 2017. Make notes using the following questions:
 - a) What are your initial impressions of these adaptations?
 - b) How have they presented the key characters and themes?
 - c) Is there anything that surprised or disappointed you about them?

1990 film version: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oTnhx_N7nro

2017 television adaptation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dVLiDETFx1c>

6. The final words of *The Handmaid's Tale* read: 'Are there any questions?'
 - a) What is significant about these being the final words of this text?
 - b) What questions have Dr Davies's lectures raised for you?

Evaluation

7. You are going to write an essay, bringing together your learning from this lecture series.

Choose one of the essay questions on the following page to focus on.

Follow these steps to write the essay:

- a) Mind map your initial ideas, checking back through your work from previous worksheets to help you.
- b) Create an essay plan, deciding on the order of your points and your overarching argument.

- c) Write your essay out in full, remembering to use formal language. **Challenge:** incorporate some of the vocabulary from the **Glossary** section of each worksheet into your essay.

Essay questions:

- What issues about storytelling does Atwood explore in *The Handmaid's Tale*?
- How is Offred presented as a narrator in *The Handmaid's Tale*?
- What is the significance of the theme of sight in *The Handmaid's Tale*?
- The Handmaid's Tale is set in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and most of the buildings and landmarks mentioned throughout the novel are parts of Harvard University. Why might Atwood have chosen a major university as the headquarters of this new regime? In your answer, consider the relationship between knowledge, language, and power.
- To what extent has Margaret Atwood made you think differently about the position of women in your own society? How has she done this?
- *The Handmaid's Tale* has been referred to as a 'scathing satire and a dire warning'. What elements of your own society is Atwood satirising and how does her satire work?
- Examine Atwood's reasons for including the 'Historical Notes', explaining how they take up and develop the concerns shown in the rest of the novel.

Wider reading & viewing:

- <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/jan/20/handmaids-tale-margaret-atwood> 'I made a rule for myself: I would not include anything that human beings had not already done in some other place or time, or for which the technology did not already exist.'
- <http://www.theverge.com/2014/12/20/7424951/does-the-handmaids-tale-hold-up-dystopia-feminism-fiction> 'how relevant is the handmaid's tale now'
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VMrz_ivl8jo 'I don't do prophecy', Margaret Atwood on Religion