

The Learning as a Form of Subjectivity in The Testaments

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Abstract

The oppression of women is a common thing that is found in all societies. As a result, women attempt to show their power and cleverness in these societies through their work and learning. So, learning is one of the most effective ways to save them. Margaret Atwood is one of the writers who talk about women's learning in her novel; *The Testaments*. The reason behind writing this paper is the importance of this subject in the life of every woman and *The Testaments* is the novel that conveys this idea to every woman and makes them believe that learning is the way to survival. So, this paper examines the learning from the psycho-feminist perspective especially Luce Irigaray, and her opinions about subjectivity. Also, this paper explains the learning as a resolve of women's problems in Gilead and the steps of survival through learning and reading, and writing in Ardua Hall.

Keywords: Learning, Survival, Subjectivity, Psycho-feminism, Luce Irigaray, Gilead, Ardua Hall, *The Testaments*.

Introduction:

Margaret Atwood's imaginary civilization of Handmaids and Generals has taken on life like ours in the current world political atmosphere. The rises of women's rights movements in recent years, as well as

political decisions about women's bodies, have caused concern about the direction of the societies. They are dangerously near to the Gileadean lifestyle when slogans like "Make Margaret Atwood Fiction Again" or "*The Handmaid's Tale* wasn't presumed to be an instruction manual" can be utilized effectively as marching chants.

The dystopian current regime of Gilead within *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) decided to carry readers to the highly traumatic domain of ritual rape, among many other things, in a published thesis by Alanna A. Callaway nearly 30 years ago, as well as the *Testaments* as just a sequel was authored in autumn 2019, trying to describe equally horrific events - some of which are almost too suitable for today's society. "Thirty-five years would be plenty of time to consider conceivable replies," says Atwood, "and the answers have developed as civilization itself has grown, and as imaginations have become realities." "With these possibilities becoming realities, as well as a transformed culture, Atwood has produced a brand-new testimonial for the trauma that is worth investigating (Women disunited: Mar omen disunited: Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* as ale as a critique of feminism 21).

The Testaments takes place fifteen years after *The Handmaid's Tale*. It has 415 pages and 71 chapters (White 1).

The Handmaid's Tale is a novella about a handmaid named Offred recording her life in the middle of the new society while *The Testaments* is the sequel that portrays three female protagonists as they navigate Gilead, the ultimate patriarchal society. The protagonists Lydia, Agnes, and Daisy are followed as they traverse the Gilead world: First, there's Agnes, the daughter of the General, and Offred who's studying to be a future Wife and would eventually be known as Aunt Victoria. Daisy, a Canadian girl, comes next, and she turns out to be Offred's abducted baby Nicole, her second child. Finally, the reader is reacquainted with Aunt Lydia, who was first introduced in *The Handmaid's Tale* (Labudová 5).

3.2 The Synopsis

The novel's synopsis is non-linear, and it is made up of three intertwined tales of women who live a suffering life as a result of Gilead's totalitarian governmental system. Aunt Lydia, the first narrator, is the same character from *The Handmaid's Tale*. Her story is told in the form of a written account explaining her role in the fall of Gilead. These Aunts are women tasked with possessing illegal information to implement the methods used to control and restrict women. Lydia has a particular place among the Sons of Jacob, as the gang that orchestrated the coup that toppled the United States and formed the Republic of Gilead, as an Aunt. Lydia worked as a judge before the coup (White 2).

Lydia is well-educated, literate, and postmenopausal. She is chosen to perform a prominent role among the Aunts, creating the techniques by which Gileadean women are dominated. For these reasons, She has sensitive information and has been entrusted with historical documents that, if exposed, would expose Gilead's cruelty to women. Lydia exploits her unique access to literacy with libraries of these illegal materials to disseminate classified government information to a large number of resistance fighters. These resistance networks, collectively known as Mayday, aim to expose the atrocities to which Gilead's women are subjected under the Sons of Jacob (3).

Agnes, a tiny girl brought into a Gileadean family led by Commander Kyle, a socio-politically powerful man, is the second storyteller. Tabitha, Agnes' dying adoptive mother, regales her with strange tales of her adoption, serving as her only link to her past life. Kyle remarries Paula after Tabitha dies, a woman who sees Agnes as both a bother and a threat. The Commander with his handmaiden, Ofkyle, produces a child through a strange Gileadean ceremony in which a woman, known as a handmaiden, is allocated a man to procreate within the sight of his wife and other women. The handmaidens assume their Commander's name and are dismissed once they have given birth to the required number of offspring (3).

Furthermore, the handmaids are not permitted to participate in the upbringing of the children. The Commander's wife and her servants are in charge of this

assignment. Commander Kyle intends to marry Agnes to Commander Judd, another powerful man, a fate that Agnes avoids by promising to become an Aunt, because "the Aunts were not wedded; they were not permitted to be." That is why they might be able to write and publish books" (Atwood, 2019, p.10). Agnes is granted access to materials detailing Gilead's corrupt and violent past once she arrives at Ardua Hall, the training institution for future Aunts. She also discovers that her real mother was indeed a handmaiden that sneaked her sister, known as Baby Nicole, to Canada to flee the government, an incident that she witnessed firsthand (4).

Daisy is the third girl in *The Testaments* to relate her story. Daisy was raised in Canada by her adoptive parents, who, unbeknownst to her, are hidden Mayday resistance fighters seeking to free women from Gilead via an underground railroad. Daisy is recruited by the organization to work as an undercover operative after her parents are killed by Gileadean terrorists attempting to destroy Mayday. She disguises herself as a Gileadean preacher known as a Pearl Girl to enter Gilead undetected and obtain documents condemning the Sons of Jacob. When she arrives in Gilead, she is introduced to Aunt Lydia, who tattoos a microchip carrying the vital documents on her arm (5).

Daisy is also shown to be Baby Nicole's sister, and Agnes is her mother. The two teenagers are charged with transporting the papers cache out of Gilead so they can reveal the horrific reality of life in Gilead to the rest of the world. After the

documents are exposed, the mission is a success, and Gilead falls. Lydia commits herself to escape being apprehended and tortured, and Daisy/Nicole, and Agnes are released to their mother (Ibid).

The novel concludes with an epilogue in the style of a lecture in which a scholar reads excerpts from a discovered document named The Ardua Hall Holograph. The manuscript is most likely the novel's content or, more specifically, the women's testaments (Ibid).

3.3 The Absence of Learning as a Form of Subjectivity in *The Testaments*:

Subjectivity, according to postmodernist theory, refers to viewing one's own experience through the eyes of one's particular self rather than through the eyes of some impartial, objective observer. The male perspective is usually the center of much of the writings on history, philosophy, and psychology, according to feminist theory. Individual women's selves and lived experiences are taken seriously in a women's history view of history, not merely as linked to masculine experience (Schutte 65).

Subjectivity examines how a woman (the "subject") experienced and perceived her role in life as a method of studying women's history. Women's experiences as humans and individuals are taken seriously by subjectivity. Subjectivity examines how women perceived their actions and positions concerning their identity and significance. Subjectivity refers to the attempt to see history through the eyes of the people who lived it, particularly ordinary women. Subjectivity necessitates

considering "women's consciousness" seriously (Beauchamp 20).

In *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974), Luce Irigaray contends that "any theory of the subject was always taken by the male." She attacks phallogentrism's predominance in literature, linguistics, even psychology from a postmodern standpoint" (133-46). Any 'Subject' paradigm has always been appropriated more by the 'Masculine,' "she asserts. Her central contention is that subjectivity is subjugated to a mental frame of gender supremacy.

In *The Testaments*, language and, more precisely, literacy are strictly regulated in Gilead. The ominously called theocratic regime The Sons of Jacob guard the capacity to read or write with zeal. Literacy is restricted to a small number of women, because either they need it to maintain the rigid and sometimes precarious political status quo, or because it is a skill they learned before the coup. Of course, Gilead's ruling class is largely made up of men. Men have the authority to determine which women are allowed to learn to read and write, how they are allowed to do so, and what literary resources they are allowed to consume or create. So they make the handmaids do the thing that makes them busy and far from thinking of the facts and thinking of their subjectivity. Agnes says, "I spent the remainder of that horrible afternoon as if I were falling asleep. We were making sets with petit-point handkerchiefs for the Aunts, featuring flowers to match their identities for Elizabeth, hyacinths or Helen, violet to Vidalia." (Atwood 79).

The aunts teach the handmaids embroidering and how to serve others, especially men, how to behave in a good way, how to clean, and especially clean the blood. as Agnes adds:

Aunt Vidalia said that drawing blood would be one of our responsibilities as Wives since we had to monitor our Marthas to ensure they did it correctly. Cleaning up things like blood as well as other liquids that flowed out of bodies as part of women's responsibility to care for others, especially young children and the elderly, according to Aunt Estée, who always saw things positively (80).

Also, Blood appears as a symbol of the loss of the women's subjectivity and it is both a sacred sacrificing giver-of-life and a repulsive, debasing aspect of corporeal womanhood. In Gilead, the value of a woman's body is the same, while blood is the novel's touchstone depiction of this. These blood metaphors run like a scarlet thread across the story, touching and uniting the female characters into the constellation of hazardous womanhood. This line and two of the more shocking cases of these references are worth looking at more deeply. Shortly after the revolution that overthrew the United States government, the Sons of Jacob started an organized drive to reduce women to the husk of their former intellectual selves. Atwood gives us a harrowing and detailed

description of the first wave of female scientists, lawyers, judges, teachers, and professionals who were imprisoned and executed. At the period of her capture and incarceration, the prospective Aunt Lydia was indeed a practicing judge. Her retelling of the event includes key references to the debasement of the body, as well as one of the novel's most prominent blood references. Lydia muses about the coup as she stands in the stadium with the "middle-aged professional ladies," warning the reader that "any forcible transfer of authority is inevitably followed by a campaign to repress the opposition." The educated are now being eliminated because they lead the resistance. You are an informed judge if you want it or not. They don't require your presence." (116).

Women in the camp have been stripped of their autonomy. They have deprived these most necessities, forcing them to live in constant physical anguish and fear. "Most of us thought we were over puberty, but we weren't, and as a result, the stink of the blood clot was mixed in with the blood and sweat the crap and puke." Lydia wrote of the circumstances at the campground. It felt nauseating to breathe" (143). The mistreatment of the women at the camp was methodical and methodical, to reduce each seized woman to a translucent shadow about herself and eliminate any potential for revolt.

In ways that harken back to Primo Levi's 1986 film "The Drowned" as well as "The Saved", each woman is robbed of her individuality and turned into an animal.

This resemblance is unlikely to just be coincidental, given Atwood a personal policy that every event in her science fiction must have occurred in the history of mankind (Atwood 418). So, while the relationship is uncomfortably uncomfortable, it is necessary. "Kicks and slaps right away, mostly in the head; an orgy of instructions screamed with actual or simulated wrath; total naked after being undressed; the cutting off of all one personal hair; the equipping in rags," Levi writes of the mistreatment of new arrivals Nazi captives (Menegotto 28). Furthermore, according to Levi, the Nazi camps' purpose was to build the "instant breakdown of one's resistance capacity" (27). Similarly, Lydia claims that the intention of the torture at the Gilead prison was to "humiliate us, break it down our resistance," (Atwood 117) and to make the women "consider ourselves subhuman" (143). These tried-and-true strategies are both violent and effective, allowing for the annihilation of the rebel will, brain ability, and humiliation. The use of the word "blood" here is effective in emphasizing how women are now being degraded to their biology. That is, despite its use, they are informed that their only valued resource — fertility — is repulsive. If they have reached menopause, their worth is diminished, and they are more likely to receive the death in a gruesome manner. If they continue to have periods, however, the blood is both repulsive and required for the new rule. Fertile women are not allowed to comprehend this value, and as a result, they are refused the necessary hygiene items to retain a semblance of physical control and dignity. Women are thus caught in a highly

embarrassing connection with their genetics, which is thought to be their sole value. The ability to search out literature and, eventually, political liberty, is utterly absent from the equation. It gets completely unimaginable (white 6).

There is a second key blood allusion when Ofkyle¹ dies during a strange Gileadean delivery ritual. To begin, many of the things linked with the handmaids, and birth in general, are crimson. The handmaids' clothes, the birth mobile, and the flaps on the medical cases worn by the doctors who attend deliveries are all crimson. The doctors are indeed female, and Agnes comments that women seem unable to become "genuine" physicians, even though they perform the same tasks as males. Women are often pressured to see themselves as blood and bodily connections. They are continuously reminded of their bodies, as well as what these carcasses are or are not able of. Agnes is also entangled with the red thread in just this book, as she got her initial period the day of Ofkyle's birth. According to Agnes, teenage girls and women who are eligible are not allowed to see birth until they have had their own. This is an effective way of reminding the reader that, while women's bodies and functions are important, they cannot be given autonomy over them. Women are oblivious of their earthy

¹Kyle is a Commander Kyle's Handmaid, who obtains following marrying Paula, who really is sterile. The only Handmaid who appears in the story is Ofkyle. So, Agnes tells her story because she is the handmaid of her foster father.

strength because they are denied the "deep red understanding" of their bodies - the ones to which they've been degraded (Atwood 102). The fact that a healthy baby boy is produced is viewed as ancillary to Ofkyle's death. When a household worker laments that Ofkyle's experience looks to have been in vain, she is informed that "it was either one or the other... they had to rip her open" (103). Ofkyle was a literal human sacrifice for the sake of a boy's life. She was sliced open and spread out over the bed for everyone to see as if she were an animal sacrificed to the glory of some vindictive ancient god. Kyle's face was white when he died, according to Agnes, and she "must have had no blood left in her" (103). Even though the regime requires her blood sacrifice, her death is viewed as a non-issue. Women are nothing more than empty vessels into which blood is poured to fill them with offspring to keep their captors alive and comfortable. They do not consider their cognitive abilities to be a part of who they are.

So, the woman in Gilead is related to blood, to tiny things. Also, the government fills their minds with very superficial things and ideas that make them begin to lose their entity and subjectivity unconsciously.

In addition, several chapters of *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974) are devoted to a criticism of intellectuals, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, as well as Hegel—as Irigaray explores paradigms wherein formal constraints of knowing highlight masculine subjectivity as fundamental to the epistemic enterprise. In

this view, the feminine eludes the idea of "subject" since language activity has embedded male experience inside of it, in a binary star of opposing actors so that feminine quiet is a requirement for (masculine) theorizing: "Woman's subjectivity is denied: undeniably, this offers financial support for every irreducible structure as an object: of depiction, of discourse, of desire." (Irigaray 33).

So, "Orality and Literacy as Gender-Supporting Structures in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*," Mario Klarer wrote in 1995, that "literate cultures have a stabilizing and inventive capacity," and "the ruling class can retain the basis of its monolithic state and maintain all others in their assigned positions" by controlling "the basic structures of language and thinking" (2). Denial of literacy entails a loss of political power. Women are resilient, thus the Sons of Jacob encourage them to think that they are naturally incapable of reading by basing all women's social values on their bodies and asserting that they are cognitively incapable of the knowledge (White 4). As Agnes illustrates "As according to Aunt Vidalia, whose taught us Religion, what my father was doing in there was very essential—the essential things that men did, very essential for females to tamper with since they had tiny brains that have been incapable of conceiving huge concepts." (19)

Furthermore, "In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the prohibition on learning to write is a means to make the "privilege" of subjectivity from ending up in the hands of women" (Yahya 5). This finding is also

valid in *The Testaments*. The girl characters are only able to tell facts about their circumstances once they learn to read. Literacy allows Gilead's girls and women to see themselves from a different perspective. Their peripheral vision is sharpened by their capacity to read, tell their own stories, know the secrets of Gilead, and have the power as a result they gain their subjectivity. So, they convince the handmaid's that the books are dangerous and that reading them leads to the imagination "Things that are forbidden are free to the imagination. Aunt Vidalia said that Eve ate the Fruit of Knowledge because she had too much imagination. As a result, it was preferable not to understand some details. Otherwise, your petals would be strewn around." (19)

But, the women can comprehend the true history of their country, their place within the greater political structure, and that system's role within global politics because of their reading. They can also make recordings that serve as a record of their experiences. In the conclusion to *The Testaments*, Atwood (2019) neatly expresses this view, writing: "first-hand testimonies from Gilead are infinitesimally uncommon – notably about the life of girls and women." It is difficult for persons who are illiterate to leave such records" (412).

Given the foregoing, just burning books or restricting access to available ephemera is insufficient. To keep the regime in check, Gileadean women should not only be denied access to and creation of literature but they must also be convinced that they are utterly incapable of doing just that. When a pilot light remains left on,

there is always the chance that women may fan the flame and discover ways to acquire banned literacy abilities.

Furthermore, Irigaray contends that the above-mentioned masculine-oriented idea of knowledge continues to dominate research into the unconscious. She realizes that the "masculine" has seized every thought of the "subject" thus far. She passionately attacks Freud as well as Lacan's psychoanalytic ideas for what she sees to be a man's prejudice. These theories, she claims, constitute an expansion of the previously described transcendental topic. "He" had proved his dominance over the object by bestowing upon himself the qualities of height and clarity, as well as his capacity for knowledge. (Irigaray 140).

To assert that the unconscious includes something indefinable, according to Irigaray, is to put the unconscious on the same side as the woman, whose otherness extends beyond articulation before the phallic rule. To put it differently, if the transcendent subject is linked to a male talking subject, and he makes the unconscious a characteristic of his language, that unconscious (together with the appropriation act) would come to stand for the woman. "Unconsciousness she is, not for herself, not from a subjectivity that would take awareness of it, acknowledge it as her own," Irigaray says of women. She is the stuff employed for the impression of shapes, certainly close to herself, but in absolute ignorance (of herself)... She is the material utilized to imprint shapes." (Irigaray 141).

The Sons of Jacob as a transcendental subject brutally highlight the

feminine bodily while de-emphasizing the female intellectual to create a scenario of absolute and abject despair for women. This duty is problematic, though, so because the Sons of Jacob comprehend the very real need for and fear of women's powers and biology at the same time. With this in view, they build a system that is obsessed with preserving the so-called lid on women's intellectual potential. Gileadean images of women are utilized, sacrificed, and then abandoned to achieve this goal. It's no surprise that Commander Judd treats his several child brides like Henry VIII did, dumping them after they've served their function for him; they're disposable. In the text, Atwood illustrates this with a succession of blood references (White 9).

3.4 Women's Quest of Subjectivity in *The Testaments*:

In terms of metaphysics, Irigaray's viewpoint on women undermines Western Secular philosophy's accepted conceptions of essence and coincidence, identity and diversity. Insofar as man is placed on the side of the same, and woman on the part of the (filched) other, her perspective indicates the ontological dominance of masculine subjectivity. She also points out that even in metaphysics, politics, and economics, the contrast between identification and distinction is such that somebody is always attributed to the same. She cites "the movement to discourse upon the 'other' in a vocabulary traditionally consolidated by same" as an example. (Irigaray 139).

In this view, "other" is a term without meaning since every meaning in reasoning and grammar is produced according to the

standards set by the "(same") economy. If the phrase "other" had any actual meaning, it would relate to the infinite, indefinable, and unknown. But, as this reasoning indicates, if the woman is part of the limitless and undefinable, does this not mean that she will always fight man's control? Only if categorization isn't any longer the most potent instrument for dominating the other. For Irigaray, the tactical female battle becomes an inversion of efficacy's force and definition's dependability. Her answer to masculine exploratory yearning is the projecting of a "recessed speculum," a particularly feminine reflection that pirouettes constantly against itself. (Irigaray 134).

In *The Testaments*, the handmaids here as an "other", begins when every aunt in the teaching lessons teaches the handmaids things that are different from things that other aunts teach them. For example, when aunt Vidalia tells the handmaids that they are oppressed creatures and unlucky because God makes them under the mercy of the man and they are created just for the man. She convinces them that the relationship between man and woman is not something easy and it is scary.

After that, the aunts notice that many handmaids and girls in the society reach the idea that committing a suicide is more suitable than marriage

"We've had another attempted suicide among the Sex before marriage Preparatory kids at Rubies," Aunt Lise stated, tucking a stray strand of hair behind her ear.... She used the secateurs to slice her wrists. The one I

use for floral arrangements.... She claims she is not terrified of death. She is opposed to living. Given the conditions.... Is it this specific politician she opposes, or marriage in general?" "In general," Aunt Lise stated. (Atwood 185)

So, the aunts hesitate about if they continue to tell the girls this lie or change it and tell them the truth . Aunt Lydia says

This is frequently the case with suicide cases of young females. Perhaps we could adjust our school curriculum to include less fear-mongering, centaur-like ravishers, and male genitalia exploding into flames, I reasoned. However, if we place too much emphasis on the conceptual pleasures of sex, we will almost surely see inquiry and experimentation, followed by moral depravity and public stonings.

So, according to the handmaids, there is confusion and asking about where their subjectivity is, where their identity is and where the rest of themes.

Another example of the confusion inside the minds of the handmaids is when the handmaid Ofkyle dies and the reason behind her death is that the nurses cut her to save the baby. Lydia says :

She stated that our service sister, Handmaid Ofkyle, having made the greatest sacrifice, died with beautiful womanly honor, and had cleansed herself from her prior life of sin, and she's a bright example to other Handmaids. (Atwood 93)

After that Agnes wonders herself:

I was not moved to tears. I'd already cried enough. The fact was that they'd sliced Crystal open to pull the baby off, and in doing so, they'd murdered her. It wasn't something she wanted to happen. Nobody noted that she hadn't chosen to die with noble womanly honor or to be a shining example. (94).

The aunts teach the handmaids many lies and these lies have a big effect on their minds and thinking. These lies make the handmaids search for their subjectivity and their beings, especially for the handmaids that they have a previous life before Gilead . Their previous ideas about their subjectivity are different from the new ones, so there is a missed circle in the middle of their subjectivity. As an example, their real parents tell them something about their lives and Gilead tells them something different. As a result, they have two ideas about their subjectivity. Many of them suffer because of that as aunt Lydia says "I hope the Wives wouldn't leave those medicines lying about for everyone to find. Those and the opioids: such a draw. Or did she attempt suicide?"(184)

So Agnes when she begins to read, says, "Reading and writing ability did not offer answers to all queries. It led to further questions, which led to more inquiries." (256). Because she wonders all the time like the others about many things that Gilead tells her about.

Also, the heroine recalls a period when she and her friends ignored news articles about women being abused as nonsense "We were the folks who weren't in the papers," she says, a little too melodramatically. We lived on the margins of the paper, in the empty white spaces. We had more freedom as a result of it. We made our home in the spaces between the stories." As she admits, these were not holes in their knowledge: "As is customary, we survived by ignoring. Ignorance is not the same as indifference; you must work at it." Humans can't breathe in the gaps since they're a vacuum. The gaps are utopia, that venerable no place. It is our lifestyle to live in a world where daily survival is built on denial fiction.

Another example is, "You may either believe there is a god or Gilead," Becka says to Agnes. "Neither" (304). Gilead is riddled with inconsistencies, misinterpretations, and outright lies because, for example, in schools, girls are taught about sex only in the framework of their marriage duties, much like sex education in the Victorian era, the 1980s, and today, and it is exceedingly vague and confusing. "The ashamed part of many cryptic names," (82) Agnes speaks about a certain bodily portion. According to Aunt Vidalia, her lectures "were supposed to teach [them] about a woman's place and responsibility in respect to her body—a married woman's role—but they were not particularly educational or reassuring" (82). They are taught about their obligations as wives as well as the fact that their spouses are accountable for them. So, females get

lost within Gilead since there is no truth, and the government teaches them what they require and what keeps Gilead going, and being tough is the only way to survive.

In addition, Gileadean girl individuals are usually reminded in *The Testaments* that females have "lower brains" and are "unable to think vast concepts" (Atwood 15). Agnes even reaches further to call her own mind "warmed-up dirt" (88). Women in Gilead have been stripped down with their most basic physiology and taught that their entire worth is in their ability to reproduce. As an example, Aunt Lydia knows about Dr. Grove that rapes many handmaids but because their witnesses are nothing in front of a doctor that the commanders know him so she says:

I had even gathered photographic proof, but I had ignored it since the testimony of young girls—if testimony could be obtained from them, which I doubted in this case—would be worth little or nothing. Even with mature women, four female eyewitnesses are comparable to one male in Gilead. (217)

They are only fragments of their original identities. After they have been dismantled, each of their components is given to the men who think they'll be most useful. Because the women have indeed been beaten to the point where they believe they are intellectually incapable of grasping the written word, their absence of availability to literacy has gone largely unchecked. It was not enough for the Sons of Jacob to deny them literacy; they also

had to try to extinguish any sliver of hope. As an example, when Lydia talks about the handmaid who commits suicide and she mentions that she was a literature professor in her previous life "She is in charge of the floral arrangements and so forth. She used to be a professor of pre-Revolutionary French literature from the eighteenth century. Teaching Rubies Sex before marriage Preparatory pupils is the closest she'll ever get to owning her salon." (186)

Irigaray also adds conscious unconscious and formatter to the earlier divides of subject-object, he she, light-dark, speaking subject silent object, and speaking subject silent object, with woman reappearing just one side of the repressed. She says that a woman's subconscious does not use self-expression tools since it is given shape by a language fashioned by male subjectivity's worries. Thus, man's consciousness prevails over a woman's subconscious; he dominates her even in her incomprehensible and gloomy world. Her psyche is whored "to an endless projections and projection of male awareness" (Irigaray 141). Irigaray's typology brings into question the legitimacy of both Freudian and Lacanian psychology insofar as they are guided by a notion of gender identity that is unconnected to women's concerns; Irigaray's paradigm brings their validity into doubt.

3.5 Finding Subjectivity Through Reading in Ardua Hall :

Ardua Hall² is where the Aunts live on the Gilead's Former University

² "Ardua" means "adversity" in Latin. "Per ardua ad Astra," or "through battle to the stars,"

Compound. After the frenzied book-burnings around Gilead, it housed Hildegard Library, one of the few surviving libraries in Gilead. Saint Hildegard of Bingen was a Middle Ages German Benedictine abbess who is credited with founding academic natural history through Germany. Inside Aunt Lydia's house is a hidden enclave. The Bloodlines Genealogical Archives, where Aunts keep information on the biological parents of children in Gilead to avoid incest and the subsequent Un babies, are housed in the library. There's also a section dedicated to Forbidden World Literature. Lydia has a personal library that includes *Jane Eyre*, *Anna Karenina*, *Tess of the Turbeville*, and *Paradise Lost* (Penguin 8).

It holds the sculptures of Gilead's four great aunts, Lydia, Elizabeth, Helena, and Vidalia. Aunt Lydia's statue was constructed nine years before the Testaments started. Guests to Ardua Hall celebrate her by laying eggs (a sign of fertility), mangoes (to depict the enlargement of pregnancy), and croissants on the statue (to symbolize the moon and hence the menstrual cycle)(9).

Unlike Irigaray, who seeks to present a unified view on subjectivity,

is the national motto of the Royal Air Forces of the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand (and the Royal Air Force of Canada until 1968). "Per Ardua Cum Estrus," Ardua Hall's own motto, roughly translates to "through battle by heat (i.e. the menstrual cycle)." "Through birthing labor with the female reproductive cycle," says the official translation. Given the Aunts' reading and writing, a prevalent adage is "Pen Is Envy." (It's a play on the word "envy")

postmodernism philosophy prefers to work with fractured and discontinuous awareness. Still, reassessing the idea of self-hood—including the various expressions that comprise its fragments—may be more valuable to feminist theory than dismissing it outright. This is an important issue that, sadly, cannot be addressed further at this time. In general, the question is: if a specific concept of self or topic has been pervasively accepted by a male bias, must the thought be dismissed as fundamentally or unavoidably masculine-defined, or is it possible to reexamine the notion from a feminist perspective? Until there is cause to believe that the idea no longer performs a significant theoretical role, Irigaray appears to be willing to study many ideas of feminine consciousness, even if she ever does not name them (120).

In *The Testaments*, it can be found that in the main female characters. Atwood combines the concepts of the flesh and the psyche. Personality is no longer detached, and the mind and body are fused to produce entire identities. Physical bodies take on the role of revolt, while simultaneously serving as a vehicle for the movement. Even if Gilead still has control, the three female protagonists' bodies and spirits can no longer be kept apart as they express their truths. With each statement, the protagonists reclaim control of their bodies and reintegrate their thoughts.

Aunt Lydia is one of the novel's three narrators and the most prominent Aunt in Gilead. She is the head of Ardua Hall, one of the Pioneers, and is one of the novel's three narrators. Lydia appears to be the epitome of Gilead's tyrannical control and

power, but her story reveals that she has been covertly plotting Gilead's destruction from the start, even while working to build its social institutions and moral rules. While Lydia is involved in some heinous murders, she has also been quietly compiling proof of heinous atrocities done at all levels of Gilead's leadership, which ultimately leads to the regime's demise. She works as an anonymous agent for the Mayday opposition, supplying evidence that aids in the smuggling of refugee women from Gilead to sanctuary in Canada. Lydia also sneaks throughout Gilead, rescuing women like Agnes as well as Becka from child brides and bringing sexual abusers like Dr. Grove to justice. Lydia informs Nicole and Ada that she has incriminating evidence that would topple Gilead as long as Mayday helps safely transport Nicole to her (Labudová 6).

Lydia, from Ardua Hall, orchestrates Nicole and Agnes' flight to Canada (just at the cost of Becka's life), giving Agnes freedom and Mayday the ultimate weapon to resist Gilead, despite Lydia becoming a martyr in the process. Lydia thus plays a perplexing and morally contradictory role: she is among the most influential and dreaded individuals in the horrible dictatorship, but she utilizes her authority and mythological image to steadily weaken and then destroy it. As a woman in a military patriarchal dictatorship, she must continually maintain a delicate balance of power, and she frequently pits both sides in a fight against one another, aiming for her covert advantage.

Also, Gilead's women stoked the torch of reading, and therefore hope. Having the ability to explain one's persecution and then convey that perspective to others in the victimized group has enormous influence. The Sons of Jacob know and fear this menace so they prevent women from entering libraries :

The priceless Bloodlines Behind the barred door were the senior Aunts' painstakingly preserved genealogical archives, Bibles, theological lectures, and hazardous books of international literature. We would be permitted access only once our thoughts had been suitably fortified. (258)

Gilead's leaders put these rules from the beginning of the establishment so they decide to prevent reading and writing because by them women can reach the reality as what happens with Agnes :

Aunt Vidala's stories were all about things girls shouldn't do and the horrible consequences if they did. I recognize now that the stories were not very great poetry, and I didn't like hearing about these unfortunate ladies who committed errors and were severely punished, if not killed; but I was happy to be able to hear anything at all (Atwood 339).

So, women in *The Testaments* find the way and the answers to all their questions through reading. So from reading, they begin their resistance as in what aunt Rifqa says to Agnes through reading in

Ardua Hall: "They want God to be only one thing," she said.

"They leave things out. It says in the Bible we're in God's image, male and female both. You'll see when the Aunts let you read it.". After that, Agnes reads the bible and reads the real story that aunt Estée told them and transforms it into another one to be the side of their benefit. She says:

I recall it vividly. I also remembered the explanation Aunt Estée has given us. She'd said that the concubine was slain because she was remorseful for being disobedient and chose to sacrifice herself rather than let her owner be violated by the evil Benjaminites. Aunt Estée had described the concubine as courageous and honorable. She'd stated that the slave had made a decision. But now I'm reading the entire narrative. I searched for the bold and noble part, as well as the option, but neither was there. The girl has just been pushed out the door and then raped to death before being hacked up like such a cow by a guy who had mistreated her like a bought animal while she was alive. It's no surprise she fled in the first place. (260)

If one continues to believe that subjectivity is greater among women, as the intellectual tradition has believed thus far, Irigaray's theory will be dismissed as ridiculous. The "feminine" would remain an "accident," a logically separate modality

from the "subject" in philosophy. The subject matter would be gender-neutral. Irigaray considers such a stance to be the ailment of modern philosophy. Neither the subject's annihilation nor the feminine's submission to a notion of an autonomous (ostensibly neutral but masculine) document expresses to be acceptable.

But, there is indeed a third alternative. In this situation, subjectivity will not be regarding gender (as Irigaray understands it), but would also be not independent of gender. As previously indicated, Irigaray's position might also be taken as implying that subjectivity has to be recreated. Subjectivity may be reinvented as part of the process of redefining gender. A revolutionary gender approach would, or at the very least, entail two prerequisites. The first is to cease reifying a female uterus as a service or good and/or sexual object for the male perspective; the other is to break away from the conventional definition of category that has defined gendered in our communities. Instead of being estranged in their existing condition, sexuality and subjectivity should be reconstructed on our terms.

In *The Testaments*, Atwood empowers women by making all of the main characters females, and they serve as both the founders and destroyers of Gilead. She responds that society should stop reifying a female uterus as a service or product and/or subject of sexual pleasure for the male gaze since she can demolish the principles that society uses to try to destroy her. So, she puts the end of Gilead at the hands of Agnes, Nicole, and Lydia.

By the words of Lydia and her writing about Gilead, it becomes stronger and by the words, files, and books that Lydia has, she destroys Gilead.

So, all women in the end find their subjectivity through learning and find answers to all questions about themselves, and the reason behind attempting Irigaray to tell women that all the speeches about their subjectivity are lies and they should believe in themselves because they can.

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