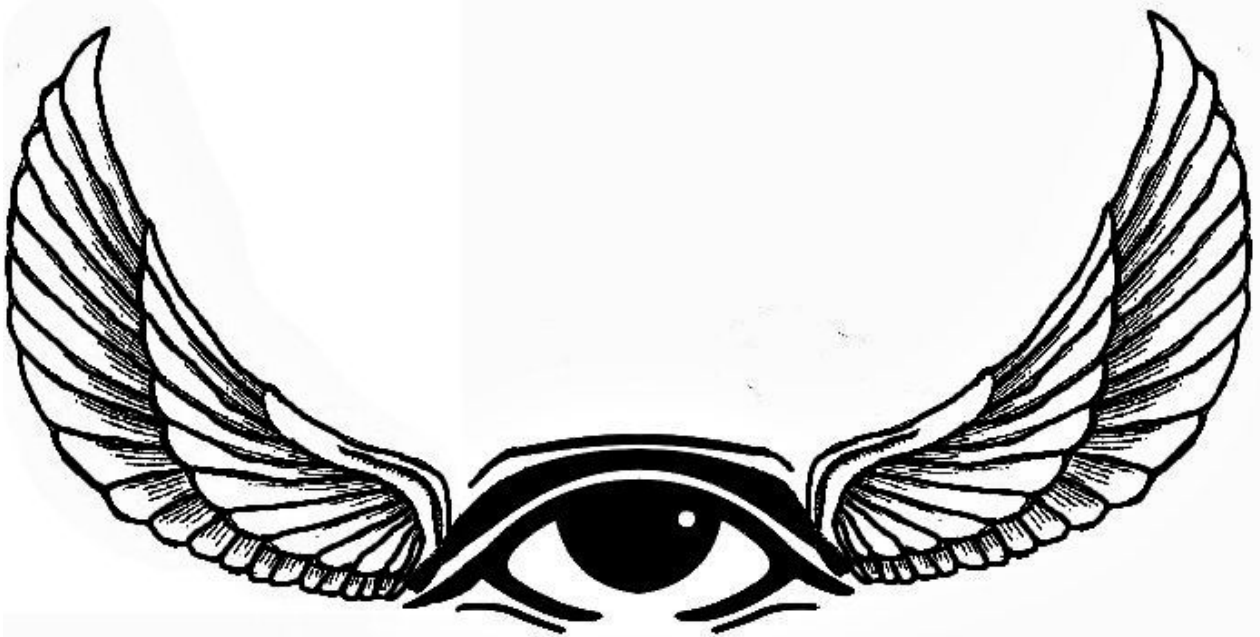


Context of Handmaid's Tale



American 17th Century Puritanism, theocracy and attitudes towards women, Salem witch trials.

PART 1:

American 17th Century Puritanism, theocracy and attitudes towards women.

- Women and children were treated harshly in the Puritan commonwealth. Women were viewed as instruments of Satan. Children were regarded as the property of their parents. If any child was disobedient to his parents, any magistrate could punish him with a maximum of ten lashes for each offense.

LOVE AND MARRIAGE

- In Puritan society, the average age of marriage was higher than any other group of immigrants. Average for men being 26 and for women it was 23.

- There was a strong importance to marry and those who didn't were excluded and looked down upon.

- Puritan women married for love and no arranged marriage was done.

- Courtship practices (the period of time that potential mates spend getting to know one another before agreeing to establish a formal relationship, such as a marriage) were strict and weddings were simple affairs.

- First cousin marriages were forbidden and second cousin marriages were discouraged.

- A woman was to love, obey and further the interests and will of her husband. If she was a good mate, she had fulfilled her God-given duty.

FAMILY LIFE

- Families were larger among the Puritans than any other group.

- They did not approve of doing anything to prevent pregnancy.

- Ninety percent of all Puritan children had Biblical names. The most common names for boys were John, Joseph, Samuel and Josiah; the most common for girls were Mary, Elizabeth, Sarah, and Hannah. These were all names of Biblical persons of great virtue. The hope was that the child would follow in the footsteps of their namesake.

- The Puritans were strict parents. They loved their children but believed their wills had to be broken - this was achieved by strict and rigorous supervision. They tried to use mental discipline and love, but if it did not work, they were quick to use physical constraints. The Puritans practiced the custom of sending out, in which children were sent to live with other families for training, discipline, or apprenticeship.

LEGAL RIGHTS

- Women, of course, were lower in rank than men.
- Married women were not allowed to possess property, sign contracts, or conduct business. Their husbands owned everything, including the couple's children. Only widows who did not remarry could own property and run their own businesses.
- Women had to dress modestly, covering their hair and arms. Women found guilty of immodest dress could be stripped to the waist and whipped until their backs were bloody. Public humiliation could include confessing one's sins in front of the whole church congregation.
- Women could divorce their husbands in certain circumstances — adultery, willful desertion, and physical cruelty. Sex was supposed to be confined to marriage, and offenders were punished severely.

RELIGION

- They needed faith to explain a world they did not fully understand and to give them fortitude to survive adversity, with the hope of a life after death. Anyone foolish enough to voice their doubts about the existence of God risked terrible punishment.
- The church congregation of each town selected its own minister. The clustering in towns was ideal for having the minister and his aides keep watch on all the inhabitants. The congregation was ruled by its council of elders.
- One Puritan moral imperative was strict observance of the Sabbath. The General Court was shocked to learn, in the late 1650s, that some people persisted in “uncivily walking in the streets and fields” on Sunday, and even traveling from town to town and drinking at inns. The General Court passed a law prohibiting these crimes on Sunday.
- If the criminals could not pay the fine imposed, they were to be whipped. To enforce the regulations and prevent the crimes, the gates of the towns were closed on Sunday, and no one was permitted to leave. Kissing one's wife in public on a Sunday was also outlawed.
- The Puritans believed in predestination — that God had already chosen who would be in heaven or hell, and each believer had no way of knowing which group they were in. One's status did not necessarily correlate with good works or moral behavior on earth. It was not uncommon for Puritans to experience intense anxiety about their spiritual condition.



SALEM WITCH TRIALS

- The Witch Trials occurred in Salem Village, Massachusetts.
 - The trials started in February 1692 and ended in May 1693.
 - It all started when 9 year old Elizabeth Parris and 11 year old Abigail Williams began to have fits, including violent contortions and uncontrollable outburst of screaming. A local doctor diagnosed them as bewitched.
 - Other young girls in the community of Salem began to exhibit similar symptoms.
 - In late February, arrest warrants were issued for the Parris' Caribbean slave, Tituba, along with two other women—the homeless beggar Sarah Good and the poor, elderly Sarah Osborn—whom the girls accused of bewitching them.
 - Witches were considered to be followers of Satan who had traded their souls for his assistance. It was believed that they employed demons to accomplish magical deeds, and that they rode through the air at night to secret meetings.
 - A special court was convened in Salem to hear the cases about the witchcraft.
 - Bridget Bishop was the first convicted witch and she was executed, by hanging, in June 1692.
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1980'S Conservative Politics

Conservatism; commitment to traditional values and ideas with opposition to change or innovation. the holding of political views that favour free enterprise, private ownership, and socially conservative ideas.

- Through the 1970s an era of free love and many progressive new ideas such as freedom of abortion rights, a much more relaxed attitude towards drugs, relationships.
- Many marches and campaigns for rights across different denominations who had been previously oppressed were put into motion around this time.
- In the 1980s there was a surge back towards a more conservative style of politics, as people became more nervous about the dramatic changes which were being seen.
- The results of this move backwards to conservative politics, was seen in both the UK and the USA,
- Conservatives generally lean towards not liking the idea of the government being involved in their personal lives
- During the 1980s in America generally there is a higher proportion of conservative aligned views coming from people who are of the white, wealthier,

and Catholic demographic. Obviously this is a generalization and a person's political views cannot be identified by just looking at them, but this was the noticeable trend.

Ronald Reagan (US);

- Ronald Reagan was elected in 1981 and his term ran through the entire 1980s until 1989 when he did not try and re-contest his presidency, after two terms.
- After the free love era of 1970s this tumultuous time period, began to scare people, so when the time for re-election of government after the 70s, Reagan appealed to people with a conservative and more traditional view of politics
- Reagan was quite old when he was sworn in which obviously has a great impact on his perspective.
- Reagan actually didn't agree with the 1970s changes to abortion, despite cases of rape, and other extreme cases which involve life and death decisions.
- Reagan's slogan was "Let's Make America Great Again" which looked back to a golden age, which demonstrates the political swing back to more traditional concepts.
- Reagan sought to create a government which put the people first, through ideas of lowered taxes etc.

Margaret Thatcher (USA):

- Margaret Thatcher (1925-2013), the United Kingdom's first female prime minister, served from 1979 until 1990.
 - Durings Margarets time as primintister she:
 - she reduced the influence of trade unions
 - privatized certain industries
 - scaled back public benefits and changed the terms of political debate, much like her friend and ideological ally, U.S. President Ronald Reagan, with whom she was close enough to deliver his eulogy.
 - Thatcher was known as the iron lady and had very strong political views, she was less inclined to support social programs. This earnt her the nickname 'Thatcher, the milk snatcher,' as she removed the milk from school system.
 - Thatcher's politics were controversial and mean that she was left with the legacy of being one of Britain's most hated prime ministers.
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1980'S Christian Conservatism

- One of the reasons for the rise of conservatism was the threat of communism. It caused many Americans to begin defining themselves and their beliefs in opposition to those of the communists.
- The Christian Right are conservative Christian political factions that are characterized by their strong support of socially conservative policies.
- American conservatism is a broad system of political beliefs in the United States that is characterized by respect for American traditions
- Conservative is or means to averse to change or innovation and holding traditional values
- the Christian Right drew support from politically conservative Catholics, Jews and Mormons,
- the New Right favored tough measures against crime, strong national defense, a constitutional amendment to permit prayer in public schools, opposition to abortion and defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment for women.
- Ronald Reagan was the person who brought back conservative politics
- Reagan's campaign, appealing to conservatives of all stripes, promised of big tax cuts and a smaller government.
- the changes he tried to make slipped out of his control and, over the next several years, the government collapsed.
- Reagan's policies created record budget deficits: In his eight years in office, the federal government accumulated more debt than it had in its entire history.
- Christian Right changed how we talked about race
- He solidified conservative Republican strength with tax cuts increase defense spending deregulation a policy of rolling back communism rather than containing it
- Jerry Falwell formed Moral Majority, the premier organization for the new Christian Right
- Christian Right made opposition to abortion—which until the Supreme Court decided *Roe v. Wade* in 1973 had been a Catholic issue—into an evangelical and Republican cause.
- Even if Reagan failed to deliver on social conservatives' legislative agenda, the Christian Right achieved political prominence during his presidency, and it did so partly because of his actions.
- the relationship between Reagan and the Christian Right was based on a broader array of shared values than most people realized, and it benefited conservative Christians as much as it did the president
- But although Reagan eventually became a hero to the Christian Right, he did not begin his political career by kowtowing to social conservatives

- Reagan, who realized the appeal that a socially conservative message had for many Americans, used an interview with an evangelical talk show host in the summer of 1976 to proclaim his devotion to traditional morality
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Utopian and Dystopian Fiction

- Utopian fiction is a genre of fiction concerning a perfect society. The word is derived from ou-topos meaning 'no place' or 'nowhere'. But this was a pun - the almost identical Greek word eu-topos means a good place.
- Started with Thomas More's '*Utopia*'.
- Greek Philosopher Plato and philosopher Socrates ,c. 380 B.C.E, conversed on the topic of a perfect society. Both contributed the multi - layered thoughts of how a society would be perfect if it were divided into two groups who were then sub - divided.
- Mores's *Utopia* was about an independant island in the area of America, where a communist society 'flourished'. 'It depicted a place where everyone eats in dining halls, each family has two slaves, priests can marry, and pre-marital sex is punished by a lifetime of celibacy. '
- Other examples include:
 - Sir Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*, where everyone is generous of spirit and grad students have infinite funding.
 - Voltaire's *Candide* and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, for instance, portray societies that *claim* to have everything all figured out. In practice, though, these fantasy lands are just as much of a hot, petty mess as anywhere else.
- 'Swift famously said that he wrote his book "to vex the world rather than divert it," which is certainly kin to the sentiment of most dystopia writers.'
- Utopias were more based on discovery of far - away lands until the 1800's when Edward Bellamy wrote '*Looking backwards*'.
- Published in 1895, H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* was one of the first notable examples of this new, scary-utopia genre. In Wells' book, a guy builds a time machine and goes forward in time to find that humanity has formed a seemingly perfect society... which soon turns out to be horrific and full of monsters.
- After two world wars and all the oppression and corruption, people realised that society was never going to be perfect and they started embracing and further exploring dystopias.
- Dystopian novels allow us an outlet to examine our values, or fears, and our desires to fight back against injustice. They allow us to vent our frustrations at having inherited a ravaged planet and an increasingly corrupted government.

Dystopias are also the grimmer, sexier descendants of Thomas More and the other satirists who wanted to point out the flaws in their own society by imagining a fictional one. "Utopia" was never meant to be an aspiration, after all. "Utopia" was meant to be "No Place;" an impossibility.

- "Dystopia" means "Bad Place;" upsetting, yet distinctly possible.
- In the 19th and 20th centuries, dystopian literature had started to develop from the utopian texts that were already available. The Utopian literature started to develop satirical themes which then made the utopian text into dystopian text.
- Dystopias are a way in which authors share their concerns about society and humanity. They also serve to warn members of a society to pay attention to the society in which they live and to be aware of how things can go from bad to worse without anyone realizing what has happened.
- Dystopian narratives show all of what is not perfect in the world and often emphasize on the issues in the world into the writing.

Characteristics:

Utopias have characteristics such as:

- Peaceful government
- Equality for citizens
- Access to education, healthcare, employment, and so forth
- A safe environment

In contrast, dystopias have characteristics such as these:

- Usually a controlling, oppressive government or no government
- Either extreme poverty for everyone or a huge income gap between the richest characters and the poorest characters
- Propaganda controlling people's minds
- Free thinking and independent thought is banned

The Feminist Movement of the 1960's and 1970's

- Also known as "Second Wave Feminism", it was a time of feminist activity lasting for around 2 decades, with the themes of sexual and reproductive rights

and equality in the workplace and education system at the crux of the movement.

- There are two forms of feminism that are in discussion in this time period; Radical Feminism and Liberal Feminism
 - Liberal Feminism is more of an individual form of feminist theory where they focus on women's ability to uphold equality through their actions and beliefs, this form of feminism does not necessarily oppose other societal groups but instead embraces their own nature and attributes
 - Radical feminism is a more of a political form of feminist theory in which they barrack for the reordering of society where the male dominated hierarchy should be in all social and economic contexts. They see society as male dominated and women being ill-treated
 - The publication of “The Feminine Mystique” written by Betty Friedan and published in 1963 is one of the decisive triggers of the movement.
 - In the book, Friedan used the term “feminine mystique” to describe the “societal assumption that women could find fulfillment through housework, marriage, sexual passivity, and child rearing alone.”
-<https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Feminine-Mystique>, something which she observed was not the case as many housewives of the era were unsatisfied with their place in society.
 - Friedan describes in her book the incompatibility women felt between marriage and raising a family, and growth as an individual, with the resulting clash leaving many unfulfilled. She also speaks of functionalism, a concept that strips women to their biological capacity as mothers alone.
 - Betty Friedan also gathered many activists to form one of the most well-known feminist groups still to this day, the National Organization for Women (NOW)
 - Many groups like the ‘Consciousness Raising Groups’ and the ‘New York Radical Women’ and ‘Redstockings’ were the first of many organizations conducted in order to encourage women to have a voice and a support network and to be recognised in the media
 - Another characterising work of the Second Wave Feminist movement is “The Female Eunuch,” released in 1970 and written by Australian-born author Germaine Greer. In her work, Greer criticises the archetype of the American “nuclear” family, which she views as suppressive of female sexuality, in the fact that it forces women to conform to the standards erected by society. As such, she challenges women to reject these roles and question the power of those who traditionally held power in society and think independently.
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The 'Sexual Revolution': 1960s - 1980s

- Change in social and moral attitudes towards sexual activities after the development of conception, this caused people to have more casual sex.
- As a result of the sexual liberation, Playboy magazine and Playboy clubs were established, as sexual activities became popular.
- As a result of casual sexual activities, there was a rise in STIs (syphilis and gonorrhoea among other STDs) often from having multiple sex partners. The unwanted pregnancy rate among women in their 20's increased significantly.
- In the 1960's, the highest number of divorces with marriage rates decreased, particularly the younger generation preferred to have an uncommitted relationship, free to have sexual activities even though they weren't married.
- During 1969 there was a movement for gay liberation and LGBT rights, this has had a massive impact as it is becoming increasingly accepted in today's world.
- 'The Pill' otherwise known as the oral contraceptive pill became more prevalent and used with people of the 60s - 80s especially as more people were wanting to engage in premarital sex with still being 'conservative.'
- Morals and values of this time changed drastically as younger people of the time questioned authority and rejected values of their parents.
- Feminist empowerment began in this era. This came as a result of women bringing up issues about the double standard of single men able to engage in sexual activity but the idea of the young women behaving in the same way was majorly frowned upon.
- Despite the conservative movement the values of virginity and marriage were replaced more and more with the celebration of single life and sexual exploration.
- Free love began being more widely recognised, not necessarily accepted, and more people began supporting this movement.

