

Elements of the Patriarchy and how Women in Literature Fight Back

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Introduction

In *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë and in *The Handmaid's Tale* and its sequel *The Testaments* by Margaret Atwood we find examples of what a religious patriarchy looks like. The women in these novels are forced to submit to the men in their lives out of fear of what will happen if they do not. In *Jane Eyre*, Jane is constantly trying to escape patriarchal rule, only to find herself continuously trapped in it, and is seemingly punished for her attempts at escape. Meanwhile, the protagonists in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* struggle to cope with the oppressive religious patriarchy that controls their everyday lives. In all the novels, one of the tactics used to oppress these women is the strict religious confines that they are bound by. This allows for the men in all three novels to treat the women in them like they are property and belong to them. These women are treated as if they are commodities and are manipulated, sexually assaulted, and are left to die by the various patriarchal figures all who justify their actions by using religion.

My project will explore the ways men use religion and other tactics such as manipulation and violence to oppress women. I will also look at how these systems affect their relationships with the other women. Throughout these novels, the women will betray each other for the approval of the patriarchal figure. I will discuss the ways women handle living in a heavily patriarchal society and how many women are even tricked into believing that these types of systems are best. Many of the women in these novels do not know a life outside of these systems, so they are easily manipulated into believing that a patriarchal society is what is best. For example, in *Jane Eyre*, Jane shames the other women who she views as a threat to her relationship with Rochester. Similarly, in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*, the women

of Gilead, especially the Handmaids, are made to feel lesser than the men and are taught to hate each other. The men in these novels play a key role in these beliefs. I will discuss the relationships between these men also in order to understand their behavior and actions better.

In the novels *Jane Eyre*, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* the women have very limited rights, and sometimes have none at all. All of them are treated like commodities and are seen as the property of the men in their lives. While many of these women try to resist the system, they often struggle. It is hard for these women to resist a system when it is all they have ever known. Also, rebellion has its risks. This is because of the various social norms, laws and religious aspects in place that make it hard to be successfully rebellious. The women in each novel all suffer in various different ways under these systems

Chapter 1:

Key features of Religion in the Patriarchy

In this chapter I examine the key features of religion in the patriarchy in three sections on Mr. Brocklehurst and the role he plays in forcing Jane into submission in *Jane Eyre*, the consequences of Aunt Vidala's telling of the biblical story of the concubine cut into twelve pieces, and the work done by the Red Room and the Thank Tank in forcing Jane and Aunt Lydia to submit but only momentarily.

Mr. Brocklehurst as the Oppressive Religious Patriarch

In Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre*, Jane moves through various prison-like situations. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar tell their readers that Jane's journey is one "every woman in a patriarchal society must meet and overcome" (Gilbert and Gubar 339). When Jane is a child, she begs her Aunt Reed to allow her to attend Lowood School to escape the abuse she faces at her hands. Lowood is a school for orphaned and poor young girls. Not long after she arrives there, she meets Mr. Brocklehurst, the Headmaster who is a religious zealot. He mocks the students, and even forces one girl to have her hair cut off, because it is curly. He enjoys humiliating the girls and controlling the women around him. Brocklehurst uses religion, fear, and his powerful title to emotionally damage the girls at Lowood. According to Maria Lamonaca, in her article, "Jane's Crown of Thorns: Feminism and Christianity in *Jane Eyre*," Brocklehurst's teachings of Christianity is "letter, or law" (Lamonaca 253). The truth about Brocklehurst is that he is not a good man, and does not try to be. Fully believing he is just, he embarrasses Jane and forces her to stand in front of her pupils and mocks her for accidentally breaking a plate. He uses God and fear to make her look and feel bad. Knowing her situation, Brocklehurst intentionally singles out

Jane to embarrass her on that day, because he believes she was disrespectful to her Aunt. He targets Jane specifically because he believes she deserves it. In addition to Jane, he is cruel to the students and teachers at Lowood, all of whom are women and young girls. Brocklehurst mainly cares about just the money he can make off the poor students at Lowood. Since everyone at Lowood already knows this they sympathize with Jane after he embarrasses her in front of all of them.

Brocklehurst is an example of an overbearing patriarchal figurehead and Jane suffers because of this. When Brocklehurst shamed Jane, Miss Temple had told her she would “not be punished” (*Jane Eyre* 65). However, she is punished after she is given this assurance. Her shame and punishment involves Brocklehurst having someone force her onto a stool. The embarrassment, however, only gets worse as Brocklehurst puts her on display for everyone in the school to stare at. While this is happening, her teachers and peers feel bad for her. All of them understand what kind of man Brocklehurst is. This pity they feel does not bring comfort to young Jane. She is brought up “within a yard” of him so he can intimidate her (*Jane Eyre* 66). He makes Jane out to be a freak, and puts her on display for the school to see. While she is on this shameful display, she could feel “their eyes directed like burning glasses against my [Jane’s] scorched skin” (*Jane Eyre* 66). With everyone watching her being publicly humiliated makes Jane feel as if she is under a microscope under the sun. This act of cruelty is not because of a broken plate. It is as if he is telling the others that this will happen to them too, if they are not quiet and obedient. As far as Jane is concerned, Brocklehurst puts Jane under heavy scrutiny and singles her out because she does not fit his idea of a good child. Later, Helen tells Jane that no one likes Brocklehurst anyway, and that no one will think any less of her because of what had happened.

It is important to notice that Brocklehurst uses his religious beliefs to further Jane's humiliation. He points out how "she possesses the ordinary form of childhood" but that "The Evil One had already found a servant and agent in her" (*Jane Eyre* 66). He believes that he must "warn" everyone that Jane is "not a member of the true flock" meaning that she defies Christianity and Brocklehurst's moral beliefs (*Jane Eyre* 66). Many times, the Church will refer to its followers as lambs. Brocklehurst does not see Jane as one of these "lambs" of God. He calls her "an interloper and an alien" and encourages other girls to single her out and exclude her (*Jane Eyre* 66). This causes Jane to believe that everyone will hate her. The humiliation goes on, and the teachers are told to "watch her" and to "scrutinize her actions" as if she is something other than human (*Jane Eyre* 66). He believes that this sort of punishment will "save her soul" and make her a better Christian (*Jane Eyre*, 66). As he is finishing up, he calls her "worse than many a little heathen" (*Jane Eyre* 66). Brocklehurst also compares Lowood to the pool of Bethesda, a source of healing water in the Bible. He follows this comparison by addressing the teachers and by telling them "not to allow the water to stagnate around her" (*Jane Eyre* 67). Stagnated water is poisonous, so by saying this he is telling them that Jane would corrupt and damage the other girls, and that she cannot be saved. By saying this he means that he believes she is somehow one with the devil. He is aware that she is a new student to Lowood, and still only a child and chooses to punish her in this embarrassing way anyway. This treatment is cruel and there is no real justification for it.

Brocklehurst's foil is Miss Temple. Gilbert and Gubar claim that Miss Temple is "a beautiful set of marble columns designed to balance that bad pillar Mr. Brocklehurst" (Gilbert Gubar, 345). Miss Temple shows Jane and the other girl's kindness and compassion, unlike Brocklehurst who treats them as if they are subhuman. Although Miss Temple had promised

Jane there would be no punishment because it was an accident, Brocklehurst punishes her anyway. Obviously, this is out of Miss Temple's control, since Brocklehurst is the man in charge he is allowed to do as he pleases. The power he has over the girls at Lowood is strictly held through the fear of God he instills in them. The women are powerless to stop him; all they can do is sit and watch. At one point Jane begins to "feel that the Rubicon was passed" meaning Brocklehurst's tirade was taking off in earnest (*Jane Eyre* 66). The phrase refers to a war fought between Julius Cesar and the Roman state. The passing of the Rubicon in this case refers to Brocklehurst's commitment to toughness as far as Jane is concerned even when he has no real need to be.

Already, Jane is familiar with cruelty and punishment. When Jane was younger, she had been punished by her Aunt for getting emotional and upset. She was then locked in the Red Room, where her uncle had died, for example. This experience helped her develop the strength she needs now. Before arriving at Lowood, Jane tells readers about her Aunt Reed who mistreats her. Because of this, Brontë writes young Jane to display a great amount of resolve through her time at Lowood. She does not cry while Brocklehurst intimidates her. Jane is able to stay strong in the face of adversity. When she had been told she was not going to get in trouble, she knew she would. Describing Miss Temple's words to be "like a dagger" young Jane was already very familiar with unjust punishment so had an idea as to what was about to happen to her (*Jane Eyre* 65). Although she was afraid, she did not let anyone see her fear. She would not give Brocklehurst the satisfaction of seeing her cry or feeling hurt. Jane's stubbornness and unbending will is consistent throughout the novel. Although Jane is still just a child when this happens to her, she knows enough to not get emotional when Brocklehurst bullies her. Once the initial shaming was over, Brocklehurst had paused before he would start again. Giving Jane time to be

in “perfect possession of my [Jane’s] wits” to observe the Brocklehurst family (*Jane Eyre* 66). All of the Brocklehurst women appear appalled by her and not the cruelty that their father and husband subjected a young girl to. They are shocked by her and the evil that he told them possesses her, but not by him.

Brocklehurst preaches Christianity to Jane and the other girls, but he does not follow these ideals himself. Brocklehurst is written as a hypocrite to show that the religious patriarchy is a hypocritical system. Life at Lowood is “where orphan girls are starved and frozen into proper Christian submission” (Gilbert and Gubar 344). Brocklehurst refers to Jane as an “it” and “a liar”; this is a way for Brocklehurst to dehumanize Jane in front of her peers (*Jane Eyre* 66). It is as if he wants the girls and teachers to hate her as she fears they might. By calling her a liar he is attempting to discredit anything she says to anyone at Lowood from that point on. To make it all worse, he tells everyone at Lowood that her Aunt had to “separate her from her young ones” due to her bad behavior (*Jane Eyre* 67). This is not true and her Aunt had been abusing her. He claims she was sent to Lowood “to be healed” when in all reality her Aunt did not want to send her to Lowood for her education in the first place (*Jane Eyre* 67). He then makes her sit on the stool for a half hour after he is done, for everyone to watch her. Putting her on display like that to make an example out of her, shows the girls how he can scare them into submission.

The intense Christian message is pushed on Jane mostly at Lowood. While the teachers stress the importance of God and being a good woman, Brocklehurst takes it the furthest with the students. Jan De Mayer in his article “Beyond The Feminization Thesis: Gendering the History of Christianity in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. Gender and Christianity in Modern Europe: Beyond the Feminization Thesis” argues that Brocklehurst pushes a masculine form of Christianity onto these girls, whereas the women’s Christianity represents God as “less of a god

of fear and wrath and more as loving and caring” one (De Maeyer 10). On account of Brocklehurst’s masculine and oppressive form of Christianity as well as limited money, the conditions at the school are bad, and when the teachers ask Brocklehurst for better he responds by claiming that better conditions would spoil the girls and not allow them into heaven. The humiliation he puts Jane through gets worse as he goes on. Brocklehurst does not hold anything back while shaming young Jane. She remains unmoved when it matters however, and not once does she show him how much it hurts her. Jane is a strong-willed young girl, something Brocklehurst and the patriarchy would love to destroy, but they cannot. Jane is not broken down, she is hurt and scared, but not broken.

Religious Consequences and the Concubine Cut into Twelve

In Margaret Atwood’s newest novel, *The Testaments*, Agnes recalls her childhood and gives the reader insight as to what everyday life is like for young girls in Gilead. Similarly, to Jane’s narration, Agnes is looking back on her life. Agnes recalls one day, when Aunt Vidala tells them the biblical story of “The Concubine Cut into Twelve Pieces.” In her recount of this, she talks about her classmate and friend, Becka, who was very upset by the violent tale. This is because Becka’s ‘father’ is a pedophile and had been molesting her. The story of the concubine triggered Becka and forced her to think of how the women of Gilead are all treated as property and are objectified by the men around them. Finally, this incident bonds Agnes and Becka whose friendship becomes important in the novel. Agnes and Becka continuously support each other during their time together, and Becka is even monumentalized by Agnes in the end. This story primarily shows the level of violence Gilead is willing to accept if it is in the name of God. Also, it allows some insight into Becka’s early life.

Aunt Vidala tells the girls the story of the concubine cut into twelve because it “was a message from God especially for girls and women” (*The Testaments* 78). The story is about a woman who runs away from “her owner” (*The Testaments* 78). The purpose of telling this story is to scare the young girls into obedience, and to further reiterate the idea that men own women. The concubine is described as “disobedient” because of her decision to run away and we are told that her father was “disappointed” in her (*The Testaments* 78). She is given back to the man by her father because he knew “the rules” that governed her life (*The Testaments* 78). Her father and the man she ran away from even “had dinner to celebrate their accord” once he gave her back (*The Testaments* 78). The two men treat this as a business transaction. Most cruelly, her father gave her back when she needed his protection; by the end she was killed by “many men doing lustful things” meaning she was gang raped, like Janine in *The Handmaid’s Tale* (*The Testaments* 78). Aunt Vidala claimed that “she deserved it” as is typically the message given about those who are raped (*The Testaments* 78). Becka, who is in a sexually abusive situation, becomes upset by this outcome. Aunt Vidala’s point in telling this story to the girls to remind them that they should “be content with their lot and not rebel against it” as they too would be punished if they were to run away (*The Testaments* 79). This causes Becka to break down in fear in front of the other and in order to calm Becka down, Aunt Estée tells her that the concubine’s death was a “sacrifice” as she “wanted to make amends” for running away (*The Testaments* 79). Aunt Estée makes it out to seem that the concubine owed the man who purchased her. The tragic fact is that the concubine in the story is objectified and treated like property and no one sees a problem with any of it, much like the Handmaids. This message is pushed on young girls in Gilead to scare them into submission and complacency.

Becka's father's status as the best dentist in Gilead also plays a crucial role here. Since Becka's father is the best dentist, Becka is allowed to study at Aunt Vidala's school, and the other girls are aware of her lesser social standing. After this incident ends Shunammite calls Becka a "baby" and makes fun of her for being upset (*The Testaments* 80). Shunammite continuously bullies Becka during their childhood because of her lower social standing. Becka is in a very vulnerable position as a poorer student as well as being molested by her father figure. Shunammite is much more powerful on account of her family and later her husband. She claims to "already know" the story Aunt Vidala tells (*The Testaments* 78). Much of the time Shunammite spends with Agnes and Becka is spent acting like she is smarter and better than both of them. By the end of the novel, Shunammite seems to find her punishment as we see that she becomes very sick while Agnes and Becka are training to be Aunts. This is a triumph for Becka who starts off the novel as a very fragile character who has suffered greatly at the hands of the man, she thinks is her father. Also, having been bullied for her social status and her emotional fragility made her an easy target. However, Becka's ability to empathize and understand helps her develop into a smart and kind young woman.

Even though this moment is filled with fear, shame and self-hatred for Becka, she is lucky enough that Agnes is able to physically comfort her despite the fact that the girls "were encouraged to pray for each other but not to touch one another" (*The Testaments* 79). The girls are not allowed to have autonomy over their own bodies and are typically not allowed to hug each other. Much like the Handmaids, the Aunts do not want these young girls to form real friendships and connections with each other. When Becka is visibly upset Agnes has to ask Aunt Vidala if she can "give her a hug" and is allowed to, which is surprising (*The Testaments* 79). Aunt Vidala allows it but is unhappy as allowing the girls to comfort each other would be a

symbol and expression of friendship. Agnes and Becka have, however, known each other for a longtime before this happened. Despite the Aunts' efforts to prevent friendship, the girls have managed to befriend and love each other. At the time that the girls are told this story, Becka "inched her hand over to mine [Agnes'] beneath the desktop" (*The Testaments* 78). Becka is able to return comfort to Agnes later in the novel when she whispers to Agnes saying that not everyone has to get married, such as the Aunts and Marthas (*The Testaments* 80). Neither Agnes nor Becka end up getting married and both become Aunts, bonding them further. While Becka begins her training first she helps Agnes through it, just like Agnes had helped Becka when they were younger.

Significantly, the girls are told the story of the concubine story in school as a part of their religious education. Much like in Lowood in *Jane Eyre*, these young girls are subjected to oppressive religious practices in their education and are taught to be afraid of what would happen if they did not follow the enforced narratives of humility and modesty. Similar to Mr. Brocklehurst, Aunt Vidala uses a scare tactic to subdue women and young girls by reminding them what would happen to them if they had disobeyed the men. Further, the girls are meant to believe that bad things men may do to them are their fault because "God is always made the punishment fit the crime" (*The Testaments* 78). Since the concubine did not honor "the man in charge" and ran away "this was the result" (*The Testaments* 79). Aunt Vidala's intention to scare the girls into submission worked all too well on Becka and forced her to relive her trauma.

Through the example of this story, we see that the Aunts manipulate young girls and women into believing stories such as this so they do not question the men in charge. When Aunt Estée comes to comfort Becka, she tells her that "Aunt Vidala didn't mean to frighten" her, but Agnes claims that "was not exactly true" (*The Testaments* 79). In Agnes's account of the

situation she understands that the Aunts intended to upset the girls enough to scare them into submission. Agnes describes Aunt Vidala's account of the story as "gruesome" and she tells readers that it "made a deep impression" on her (*The Testaments* 75). Gilead is no stranger to violence against those who do not abide by its rules, especially for the women who are rebellious. The Aunts are the most powerful women in Gilead; Aunt Lydia, Aunt Elizabeth, Aunt Vidala and Aunt Helena are known as "the Founders" among the citizens of Gilead, meaning that they are the women who helped the Commanders the most in the beginning (*The Testaments* 75). Their pictures are kept at the front of the classroom to remind the girls that they are always being watched by these women. Shunammite even points out to Agnes that it felt like "the eyes of the Aunt Lydia picture could follow you around the room" (*The Testaments* 75). Aunt Vidala also "liked to have a good view" of the girls when she taught them (*The Testaments* 75). Their presence is a constant reminder to the girls that they are always under the watchful eye of the Aunts and the rest of Gilead as well. The Aunts claim to keep the women of Gilead safe but they also keep them oppressed and use various forms of manipulation and psychological abuse.

The scare tactics the Aunts have used, such as telling the girls the story of the concubine and having the Handmaids take part in Testifying, have worked on the women and girls of Gilead since they started using them. In Gilead, as in the world of *Jane Eyre*, overbearing Christian beliefs as well as the possibility of violent punishment are used as propaganda to enforce a gender norm. The Aunts try to make the women and girls of Gilead feel as if what is happening to them is the way of God, and hide their manipulation with kindness when Becka is more upset than the others. These girls are meant to feel afraid of what could happen to them if they were to rebel and not conform to the norms of the world around them.

Comparison: The Red Room and the Thank Tank

In *Jane Eyre* and *The Testaments* both Jane and Aunt Lydia are held in solitary confinement as a punishment. Jane is locked in the Red Room by her Aunt Reed when she is a child early in the novel. The time Jane spends in the Red Room foreshadows Bertha's imprisonment in Rochester's attic. Like Bertha, Jane is dehumanized by her Aunt who is supposed to protect her. The red-room is a turning point for Jane, and she is no longer willing to stay at Gateshead. This is what sets Jane up to go to Lowood school, and eventually she ends up working for Rochester. In *The Testaments* Aunt Lydia and many women are rounded up and treated like animals. Eventually, Aunt Lydia is locked in the Thank Tank by Commander Judd so he can break her spirit and get her to join him. Commander Judd holds her in inhumane conditions long enough to break her. However, this action has unintended consequences for Commander Judd. Aunt Lydia remembers her time in the Thank Tank and uses her memories to remind herself why she has to take down Gilead and Commander Judd. We also see that in the Thank Tank and the Red Room, both Jane and Aunt Lydia change. Although they are physically let out of their respective prisons, a part of them always feel trapped there until they are able to regain their freedom from the societal norms that have been placed on them.

Jane's punishment in the Red Room positions her as an outsider just like Bertha. John Hagan in his article "Enemies of Freedom in *Jane Eyre*" argues that Jane is locked in the red room by her Aunt Reed because she "defies the tyrannical authority of John Reed" (Hagan 354). John hits Jane, and Aunt Reed punishes her for this by imprisoning her in the Red Room. Aunt Reed feels that Jane is ungrateful and deserves to be punished for fighting with her son. The Red Room has a history: Mr. Reed, Jane's uncle, had "breathed his last" in the Red Room nine years prior (*Jane Eyre* 14). Because of this, the room is "seldom entered" and often very cold (*Jane Eyre* 14). Young Jane is afraid of the red room because it is far away from everything, dark, and

in her young mind, haunted. Aunt Reed locks Jane in there so she could “think over your [Jane’s] wickedness” (*Jane Eyre* 12). After a few hours, once “daylight begins to forsake the red-room” Jane begins to fear she is going to die there (*Jane Eyre* 16). The embers in the fireplace are damp from the rain, and Jane “grew... as cold as a stone” (*Jane Eyre* 16). Jane begins to panic while locked in, and Bessie becomes concerned for Jane after she hears her “wild involuntary cry” and lets her out (*Jane Eyre* 17). Jane’s time in the red-room foreshadows Rochester’s imprisonment of Bertha. According to Gilbert and Gubar, “Brontë quite consciously intended the incident of the red-room to serve as a paradigm for the larger plot of her novel” (Gilbert and Gubar 341). Like Jane in the red-room, Bertha is kept in the attic and dehumanized because she is “like some strange wild animal” (*Jane Eyre* 293). Rochester is ashamed of his insane wife and tries to keep her locked up so he can forget about her, similarly to how Aunt Reed does not want to take care of the orphan Jane. Bertha is kept as Rochester’s “disgusting secret” due to her madness and Jane is shamed for being upset when her cousin John injures her (*Jane Eyre* 292). Both Jane and Bertha are framed as outsiders by the novel because of their extreme circumstances; Jane is a misplaced orphan and Bertha is very mentally ill. Jane and Bertha are both wrongfully kept prisoner by those who should be taking care of them and keeping them safe.

In *The Testaments*, Aunt Lydia is also locked away as a method of control. Commander Judd and the others round up all the highly educated women and force them to live like animals in a stadium. The women are woken up at 6:00 am to have “bread and water for breakfast” and then are lined up to go to use the “foul toilets” (*The Testaments* 142). Oftentimes these toilets are clogged, and there is no toilet paper. They would have to wipe with their hands and would have to try to wash their “sullied fingers under the dribble of water that sometimes came out of the taps and sometimes did not” (*The Testaments* 142). Aunt Lydia is “sure they arranged that on

purpose” when it came to the faulty sinks (*The Testaments* 142). These women are forced to live like animals and are dehumanized by the men in charge so they would be less likely to fight back when they are taken and told to shoot another woman. Soon, they are all forced to watch as some of the women shoot at those who were not willing to comply. When it comes time for Aunt Lydia to shoot, Commander Judd locks her in the Thank Tank beforehand. Commander Judd tells her that he does not think she is “thankful enough to cooperate” with them (*The Testaments* 147). The Thank Tank “was a repurposed police station isolation cell” that Commander Judd imprisons her in (*The Testaments* 147). In this cell, Judd treats Aunt Lydia like a prisoner because she has a “law degree and a uterus” making her a threat to his cause (*The Testaments* 144). The cell Judd locks her in is inhumane. Aunt Lydia is given a bed with “no mattress” and “bucket... for human by product” that still had “some of those in it” and the cell had no light (*The Testaments* 147). Aunt Lydia is locked in a small, dark, and smelly cell for an unknown amount of time. While she is locked away, she hears disembodied “shrieks” and “sometimes a series of grunts and breathy gasps that sounded sexual” (*The Testaments* 148). After some time, she had “no way of knowing whether or not these noises were real or merely recordings” and eventually she “lost track of... the plotline of my [Aunt Lydia’s] resolve” (*The Testaments* 148). She did not, however, lose track of her desire for revenge and she vows vengeance not caring “how long it takes” (*The Testaments* 149). Soon after Aunt Lydia is let out and taken to a hotel where she is treated well and is given the clothes “worn by the female shooters”; she chooses to submit to Judd by putting them on (*The Testaments* 150). Aunt Lydia may seem to have lost her resolve because of the trauma from the Thank Tank, but she has not lost her anger or desire for revenge and she is eventually successful in bringing down Gilead. Readers know that Gilead falls even before they read *The Testaments*, because of the historical notes at the end of *The*

Handmaid's Tale. This is discussed in “*The Handmaid's Tale: ‘Historical Notes’ and Documentary Subversion*” where we are told that the historical notes give us a futuristic society “much like our own pre-Gileadean society” that takes place 200 years after the events of the novel (Dominick 484). While the historical notes do not specifically credit Aunt Lydia for the downfall of Gilead, the downfall itself gives readers hope.

These moments in the Red Room and the Thank Tank serve as turning points for both Aunt Lydia and Jane. Both were locked in cold dark rooms for an indiscriminate amount of time and were both treated like animals by those who locked them away. Jane is dehumanized because she is said to be “like a mad cat” (*Jane Eyre* 12). As a result of this blatant cruelty, Jane can no longer bring herself to stay with the Reeds. The others try to convince her to “try to make yourself [Jane] agreeable” to the Reeds because they had taken her in (*Jane Eyre* 13). Jane cannot do this, especially after she is locked in the Red Room and she ends up at Lowood. Similarly, Aunt Lydia is no longer able to be the person she had been before; she has to adapt in order to get her revenge on Commander Judd. Aunt Lydia uses the memory of her dehumanization experienced in the Thank Tank to climb to the top and become Commander Judd’s most trusted Aunt. Once she has this status, she is able to use her power and privilege against him. Aunt Lydia and Jane are falsely imprisoned to break their spirits, and it works, but only momentarily.

Both Jane and Aunt Lydia are strong women who are unrelenting forces. Neither of them is willing to back down. After the Red Room Jane begs her Aunt to allow her to go to school, and she eventually agrees. Jane struggles at Lowood in the beginning but eventually is able to learn and grow into the smart and brave woman she becomes. Aunt Lydia, on the other hand, is able to gain power over Commander Judd after he locks her in the thank tank, because she is

willing to cooperate for the time being and has effectively tricked him into trusting her. Luckily for the women of Gilead, Aunt Lydia comes out on top in the end. These women are locked away and punished for not fitting into the social standard of a “good” woman. Both Jane and Lydia share a rebellious nature and Aunt Reed and Commander Judd attempt to stomp that out but cannot.

Chapter 2

The Women

In this chapter I examine the relationship between the women in the worlds of the three novels I read. Over two sections that discuss fearmongering, slut shaming, and testifying as well as the breakdown of the sisterhood in these novels, I discuss the systems and strategies in place that contaminate the relationship between women and I also locate moments when the women form supportive relationships with each other in defiance of these systems and strategies.

Fearmongering, Slut Shaming, and Testifying

In Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* we see victim blaming taken to a high pitch of emotional and psychological violence. Generally speaking, victim blaming is a tool used by the patriarchy to keep victims of sexual assault quiet. While most victim blaming is perpetrated by men, women will also participate in it. Most of the time, when people discuss rape prevention it is always advice for women to avoid being raped as if it is the woman's job to make sure no one rapes her. In Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, the Handmaids talk about their past experiences with sexual assault with each other. After they share their stories, they are forced to mock each other after disclosing their experiences. This mockery is perpetrated by Aunt Helena and Aunt Lydia, who want the Handmaids to distrust each other. Offred describes how the Aunts and other Handmaids shame Janine for being raped as a teenager. This is an important moment in the novel, and it is also shown in the 2017 Hulu adaptation. The centralizing sexuality in these events is cruel and is incomprehensible given Handmaids' whole lives are organized around them being raped repeatedly for procreation. In the official narrative of Gilead, they are repeatedly taught that sex for pleasure is sinful.

The victim blaming and mockery happens during episodes when the Handmaids testify. Testifying is a mass shaming among the Handmaids, structured by the Aunts to keep them from caring about each other. When Janine tells the other Handmaids about how she had been “gang raped at fourteen” and that she “had to have an abortion” they do not listen to her with any respect (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 71). This mark of so-called illegitimate sexuality marks Janine despite the fact that throughout the novel she does whatever she can to please the Aunts, including betraying the other Handmaids. Aunt Helena and Aunt Lydia guide the Handmaids in mocking her. Aunt Lydia is the most powerful out of all of the Aunts, and her presence is threatening to the Handmaids. Aunt Helena asks Janine “whose fault” it was, and the other Handmaids are cued to respond, “her fault... in unison” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 72). Janine is surrounded by other women who collectively shame her for her assault. Aunt Helena implies that Janine “led them on” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 72). Janine’s shaming is not a one-off event. The Aunts have the Handmaids do this regularly. Offred even describes Aunt Helena as being “good at Testifying” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 71). The first time this happens, Janine had “burst into tears” and Aunt Helena punished her. She had to “kneel at the front of the classroom” with her “hands behind her back” where the others “could all see her” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 72). Offred notes that she had “the lost eyelashes of someone who’s been in a fire” and that she “looked disgusting” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 72). All of the Handmaids “knew what was being done to her,” yet they “despised her” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 72). This hatred of Janine remains consistent throughout the novel. This moment damages Janine’s ability to make relationships with the other Handmaids, making her an outcast amongst them, exactly how the Aunts had hoped would happen. At this moment, Janine resembles Jane at Lowood School. Unlike Jane, however, Janine is not destined to carry the burden of resistance.

Janine assimilates into the gender norms put in place in Gilead by the Aunts. The Aunts want the Handmaids to not trust each other and want to keep them feeling separated from each other; Janine suffers to the fullest extent from this systematic oppression. Led by the Aunts the Handmaid's begin to mock Janine. They call her a "crybaby" and Offred tells us that they "meant it" (*The Handmaid's Tale* 72). Offred feels guilty about this and says that meaning is what makes it "the bad part" (*The Handmaid's Tale* 72). Meanwhile, the humiliation Janine faces forces her to relive her trauma. Having a large group of women shame her is just like being gang raped all over again. This is one of the many factors that separate Janine from the others.

A major part of the Aunts' jobs is to make the Handmaids distrust each other. The Aunts have and keep all the power. They do not allow any of the women to form relationships with each other and do not allow them to read. When Janine is done blaming herself, Aunt Lydia praises her by telling her she did "very good" and is an "example" (*The Handmaid's Tale* 72). Once Janine gives Aunt Lydia what she wants, she rewards her but when she resists she is punished. Aunt Lydia makes an example out of Janine to the other women, to show how it is easier for them to do what they are told. When the Handmaids begin to shame Janine the first time Aunt Helena is "pleased" with them (*The Handmaid's Tale* 72). Had they resisted, they too would have faced scrutiny among the Aunts, and would likely be physically injured. The Aunts' strategy seems to work. By the time the next Testifying happens, Janine has adapted. Before the others could "jeer" her, she told them it was her "own fault" (*The Handmaid's Tale* 72). She claims that she "led them on" and that she "deserved the pain" (*The Handmaid's Tale* 72). Having to relive her trauma through public humiliation terrified Janine and this caused her to not trust the others and hate them along with herself. Offred was unsure about the truth of Janine's story at first because "At Testifying, it's safer to make things up than to say you have nothing"

however, she does believe that “it’s probably more or less true” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 71). This damages Janine’s ability to form relationships with the other Handmaids and is why she is so willing to tell on them to the Aunts, and does exactly what they want her to.

The 2017 Hulu adoption also shows this pivotal moment for Janine. In the first episode titled *Offred* viewers watch as the Handmaids shun Janine. Before this happens, she is defiant towards the Aunt’s in the Rachel and Leah center and they punish her by pulling her right eye out. As she tells her story, Janine still has the bandage covering her newly missing eye. While this does not happen in the novel, it provides a disturbing visual. She tells the others that she knew most of the boys who had raped her, and that she was in shock that it was happening to her. She is very clearly uncomfortable and scared while telling her story. Aunt Lydia asks her whose fault it was, and she responds saying she did not know whose fault it was, all while Aunt Lydia gets closer and closer to Janine. In the television adaptation, Janine is seated in the middle of a circle, surrounded by the other Handmaids. Then, they all begin to tell Janine that it was her fault, except Offred who hesitates at first. One of the Aunts slaps her and makes her join. Many of the Handmaids cannot look at Janine while they do this and Offred even mumbles. This scene is contrasted later in the episode when Offred sees Janine pregnant at the Salvaging, where the Handmaids kick a rapist to death. None of them have a problem with this. Janine nods in agreement with Aunt Lydia when she tells the women what they must do to the man, but does not join in on killing him with the others, as she is pregnant and does not want to risk hurting her unborn baby. The Handmaids take off their wings and force the man to look at them as they kill him. Similar to Janine in the Red Center, they surround him and begin to tear him apart. The scene is a scene of absolute chaos, the Handmaids scream as they mutilate him. Janine rubs her

very pregnant belly and laughs as the others kill the man. This shows the audience that Janine has conformed to the new world and its customs, and even appears to thrive in it.

Testifying is a tool used by the Aunts as a way to break down the Handmaids emotionally in order to make them distrust each other. Offred only tells Janine's story, and no one else's in order to single her out. It is the moment that separates her from the others for the rest of the novel; Offred and the others view her as an outsider, and Offred is almost always annoyed with her. Janine is a victim of the worst aspects of the patriarchy such as victim blaming, slut shaming, and is left without the possibility of female solidarity. The methods the Aunts use to break down trust between the Handmaids are most effective on Janine. One of the methods the Aunts use is to keep the Handmaids in the Red Center to prepare them before they are given to a Commander. The women are kept away from the outside world in order to 'correct' them, so they fit the ideals of Gilead. It is where women learn to become citizens of Gilead, by conforming to rigid gender roles. Both the Red Room and the Red Center are controlled by powerful women who want to make others feel inferior. The Red Center keeps the Handmaids separate from the outside world, and what the Aunts do to the Handmaids while they are there keeps them separate from each other.

The Breakdown of the Sisterhood

An important element to any patriarchal society is its ability to pit women against each other. Typically, they are set up to be in competition for a man's attention. According to Bell Hooks in "Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women," in a patriarchal society women are "taught that women are 'natural' enemies, that solidarity will never exist between us because we cannot, should not, and do not bond with one another" (Hooks 127). This is consistent in *The Handmaid's Tale*, *The Testaments*, and *Jane Eyre*. In all three novels, women are compared to

each other and forced to “compete” with each other to satisfy the men in the novels; this makes female bonding almost impossible. For example, in *Jane Eyre* Jane has no problem making fun of Blanche Ingram because she is more feminine than Jane is and shares the same love interest. By the end of the novel, Jane gives into Rochester and marries him despite his tendency to deceive her. Most of the women in *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Testaments* shame each other for the ways they survive the oppressive society of Gilead. Handmaids, in particular, are subject to abuse; they are called immoral because they have had sex prior to marriage in their lives before Gilead. However, they are the backbone of Gilead due to their childbearing abilities. Despite this, there are moments in each novel where women do come together and support each other. While the patriarchal societies through which these novels operate are oppressive and pit women against each other, there are shining moments of hope throughout.

To take the case of *Jane Eyre* first, the women in the novel are under the influence of Rochester and are manipulated by him into betraying each other. For example, when Jane first learns of Blanche Ingram, she thinks that Rochester is intending to marry her. Jane is very upset by this and is very angry with herself for falling in love with Rochester. She calls herself a “poor stupid dupe” and Jane even looks down on herself when it comes to how she feels about Rochester (*Jane Eyre* 161). When Blanche comes to Thornfield for a party, Jane “regarded her... with special interest” (*Jane Eyre* 172). Blanche is very pretty and this makes Jane unable to “tell whether Miss Ingram was a genius” meaning she thinks she is stupid, because of her hyper femininity (*Jane Eyre* 172). The Ingram women do not like Jane just as much as she does not like them. John G. Peters argues that it is unclear as to why Blanche Ingram feels so strongly towards Jane, whether it be “because she senses Rochester’s interest in Jane, because of her opinion of governesses in general or because of class snobbery” (Peters 61). Blanche’s mother

claims that governesses are “all incubi ” (*Jane Eyre* 177). Like the Handmaids, governesses had “received strikingly conflicting messages” because it was unclear if they were to be considered members of the family or a servant (Gilbert and Gubar 349). When Jane overhears Blanche and her mother making fun of her, she does not yet know that Rochester does not intend to marry Blanche but that he is using her to make Jane jealous. We see Rochester consistently uses other women to trick Jane. This causes the sisterhood to break down when Jane enters the relationship with him. At this point she is unaware he has a wife, Bertha. Several of the other women in the house are fully aware of this, and none of them tell her. The other women in the house keep secrets from Jane because they obey Rochester’s orders regarding Bertha and their secrecy puts Jane in danger. The women she meets at Thornfield all serve as “important negative ‘role-models’ for Jane” (Gilbert and Gubar 350). Jane trusts these women and they lie to her about Bertha and this puts her in danger. Later, once Jane finds out Rochester is married, she is more hurt that she cannot marry him and not so much that he is tethered to a sick wife whom he keeps incarcerated in his house. She is angry that Rochester “nearly made me [Jane] his mistress” (*Jane Eyre* 300). After Bertha dies, Jane has no problem marrying Rochester, despite all the times he had lied to her. It is important to remember that *Jane Eyre* tells the story of a woman just trying to get by in an oppressive patriarchal society. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak makes a strong point about the purpose of dehumanization in Brontë’s novel. According to Spivak, Bertha exists in the novel “to intermediate the boundary between human and animal” (Spivak, 249). The novel, frequently through Rochester, dehumanizes Bertha by imposing animalistic descriptions on her. This tendency of the novel compromises its claim to feminism. We see that while this novel tells of Jane’s progress and triumph making it a feminist novel, it operates under a white feminism because Jane is only able to attain what she wants through the death and dehumanization of

Bertha, a woman from the West Indies. The novel itself ends up betraying the sisterhood in the end.

Going into *The Handmaid's Tale*, we see that the government of Gilead relies on a broken sisterhood to operate. Handmaids spy on each other for the Aunts in order to gain favors with them, and the Aunts inform the Commanders and the Eyes as to who is rebellious or has broken a rule. We see the breakdown of the sisterhood in the example of the Ceremony. After the Ceremony, Serena Joy kicks Offred out of the bedroom after the Commander is done. Offred can sense “loathing in her voice” because she had just watched another woman get “fucked” by her husband (*The Handmaid's Tale* 94). Serena Joy’s anger at Offred is misplaced. Serena Joy is angry at Offred for something that is out of her control, instead of being angry with her husband who took part in creating this system. Offred is understanding of Serena Joy’s animosity towards her and if anything she seems to understand and even wonders who it is “worse” for (*The Handmaid's Tale* 95). This is because Aunt Lydia had instilled a fear of the Commander’s Wives in the Handmaid’s while they were in the Red Center. While Offred was having intercourse with Commander Fred, Serena Joy had “begun to cry” (*The Handmaid's Tale* 90).

The women routinely betray one another because that is how the Gileadean system works. Serena Joy likely feels betrayed by her husband, Offred, and her own body. While it is necessary for procreation for Commander Fred and Offred to copulate, Serena Joy does not feel happy about it. We see that she is as much of a victim of Gileadean society as Offred is. They are both victims and outsiders. Mara E. Donaldson, in her article “Kinship Theory in the Patriarchal Narratives: The Case of the Barren Wife” explains proper biblical marriages that would describe women like Offred as “foreign” and “not legitimate” but necessary due to their fertility (Donaldson 85). The necessity of Offred, however, renders Serena Joy an outsider in her own

home. Effectively, all women in Gilead are outsiders. Offred and Jane are similar because they are the “other woman” and are also the “preferred” woman. Offred is preferred because she is still fertile while Serena Joy is not. In comparison, Jane is able to comfort and be an affectionate and caring wife for Rochester unlike Bertha who is insane. Offred is even able to admit that she is jealous of Serena Joy, though she is unsure why she is jealous of “a woman so obviously dried up and unhappy” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 161). Referring to her as “dried up” is sexist, because it implies that women are no longer useful once they have gone through menopause (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 161). Offred tries to not give in to the anti-woman culture that plagues Gilead, but often struggles with it. For example, Offred hates Janine and constantly shames her throughout the novel. Offred is very clearly jealous of Janine while she is pregnant and it brings out her internalized misogyny. Before Janine gives birth, Offred refers to her as a “whiny bitch” despite the fact that she is also excited for a new baby (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 115). The women in *The Handmaid’s Tale* have to be willing to shame other women in order to cope with the system they have been forced into.

The women in Gilead are systematically brainwashed into betraying each other. Shunammite in *The Testaments* is a perfect example of a girl who has been brainwashed by the social norms in Gilead. She is “rude to many other girls, especially Becka” because her father is not a Commander (*The Testaments* 25). Shunammite uses the other girls to feel more important than she actually is. When Agnes is recounting her childhood she mentions that Commander Kyle, her father figure, was more important than Shunammite’s and that is why “she wanted me [Agnes] as her best friend” (*The Testaments* 25). Shunammite thrives in her young life in Gilead because of how willing she is to betray her gender, but it is also her downfall. A current pop-cultural term for the way Shunammite acts throughout the novels would be to call her a “pick

me.” A “pick me” is a woman or girl who is willing to tear down another woman or girl to impress a man. This is typical with teenage girls who struggle with internalized misogyny. Shunammite struggles with her internalized misogyny more than Agnes and Becka do. She says that the Handmaid's are “all sluts” (*The Testaments* 81). She also claims that Becka’s suicide attempt was her “just trying to get attention” and does not realize the severity of Becka’s situation (*The Testaments* 221). When the girls start going to Rubies Premarital Preparatory, Shunammite tells Agnes her preferred husband would be “a widower of about forty who hadn’t loved his first Wife all that much, and had no children, and was high ranking” (*The Testaments* 161). Sadly for her, she gets her wish. Once Agnes decides to become an Aunt after she is propositioned by Commander Judd, Shunammite marries Commander Judd instead. This marriage, however, causes her to suffer the consequences of her willingness to comply with the patriarchy. She is surprised that Agnes is not angry that she “stole your [Agnes] husband” (*The Testaments* 295). Although Shunammite worries that Agnes might be mad at her for marrying Commander Judd, she is excited to do so because of his social status. She feels that stealing her life-long friend's husband is wrong, but she is more interested in the power she will seemingly gain from the marriage. Unfortunately for Shunammite, Commander Judd’s “Wives have a habit of dying” and she is in danger of becoming one of his victims (*The Testaments* 63). Being complacent in this world is all she has ever known, and it destroys her. Shunammite’s demise is unfortunate but serves as a warning for women who are willing to betray the sisterhood for a man.

In this scenario of gender betrayal, Aunt Lydia is the most complex and interesting character. She evokes the most emotions out of readers in both *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Testaments*. In the first novel, Offred knows nothing about Aunt Lydia or her past and cannot

give us enough information about her to sympathize. Cynthia Burack, in her article “Bringing Women's Studies into Political Science: *The Handmaid's Tale* in the Classroom,” points out that although Offred understands the weight of the situation she is in she “does not omnisciently know the most sophisticated details of the political life of her time” (Burack 276). Because of this, Aunt Lydia appears as a pick me, like Shunammite. It is easy to loathe Aunt Lydia in *The Handmaid's Tale* because of her constant betrayal of the sisterhood. Nancy Hewitt, in her article “Sisterhood in International Perspective: Thoughts on Teaching Comparative Women's History,” argues that there are various versions of sisterhood that exist to oppress women who are not powerful, such as the Aunts. The Aunts are an example of “forms of sisterhood that empowered some women [and] may have impoverished others” (Hewitt 24). It is very hard to understand Aunt Lydia, and the other Aunts as well, because of what they put the Handmaids through at the Red Center. Unlike Aunt Lydia, Offred cannot fully explain what had happened as, according to Grace M. Dominick, “she is not experiencing events but recounting them” (Dominick 485). Aunt Lydia tries to convince the women that the Red Center “is not a prison but a privilege” (*The Handmaid's Tale* 8). She even tells the Handmaids to not talk to the Commanders' Wives “unless they asked you [the Handmaids] a direct question” as an attempt to keep women from finding solidarity (*The Handmaid's Tale*, 14). Aunt Lydia's character in *The Handmaid's Tale* provokes fear in readers because of her power. She is able to manipulate the Handmaids into submitting to their Commanders. She tells Offred that “it's not the husbands you have to watch out for... it's the Wives... they will resent you” to create a rift between the women who live under the same roof (*The Handmaid's Tale* 46). Aunt Lydia understands how the Commanders' Wives feel and wants the Handmaids to understand as well, so they disregard their own feelings about the situation. Atwood tries to let readers know that Aunt Lydia does not enjoy her position

when she tells Offred not to “think it's easy” for her (*The Handmaid's Tale* 56). Also, when Janine is giving birth, Aunt Lydia seems to sympathize with the Handmaids by telling them that she knows “the sacrifices you [the Handmaids] are being expected to make” (*The Handmaid's Tale* 117). Aunt Lydia is not a monster, as much as Offred and the other Handmaids may think that she is.

Aunt Lydia is the most powerful woman in Gilead, and she is Commander Judd's most trusted Aunt. However, in order to gain this position, Aunt Lydia had to abandon her former beliefs. In *The Testaments* Aunt Lydia tells about her past life as a judge, and also gives an insight as to how the government of Gilead operates. According to Peter G. Stillman and S. Anne Johnson's article “Identity, Complicity, and Resistance in *The Handmaid's Tale*,” Gilead is as a “hierarchical society with highly different roles, status rankings, and activities” and Aunt Lydia's narration proves this (Stillman and Johnson 71). As we see in *The Testaments*, she is aware that what the Aunts do is a “betrayal of everything we'd [the Aunts] been taught in our former lives” but at the same time feels weirdly “proud of what we [the Aunts] managed to accomplish, despite the limitations” (*The Testaments* 178). It takes years, but Aunt Lydia is able to regain her power and ability to help women. The first instance where readers see Aunt Lydia help someone is when Becka becomes an Aunt after her suicide attempt. She decides to give Becka “six months and see if she [Becka] can learn” because Becka kept refusing to get married (*The Testaments* 215). Aunt Lydia promises Becka she “will be safe” at Audra Hall, as an attempt to get Becka to open up about her sexual assault, but Becka refuses (*The Testaments* 217). Eventually, after Becka accepts her offer, Aunt Lydia refers to Becka as a “damaged houseplant” and she knows that if she is “properly cared for she would bloom” (*The Testaments* 217). She recognizes that Becka is a smart driven young girl who would be a great addition to Audra Hall.

Aunt Lydia's transcript, her manipulation of Judd, her escape plan for Nicole and Agnes, and her death redeem her.

Despite the systematic attacks on the sisterhood, there are moments in all three novels where women share in moments of solidarity. A strong sisterhood is key to taking down a patriarchal system as Hewitt reminds us that "studies of women's rights movements suggest that bonds of sisterhood were essential to their emergence" (Hewitt 28). For example, Jane's friendship with Helen Burns helps her rough start in Lowood school. She reminds Jane that "Brocklehurst is not god" after he embarrasses Jane and the two of them hug and share a tender sisterly moment (*Jane Eyre* 69). After this, Miss Temple comes to Jane in solidarity and tries to comfort her as well. Helen and Miss Temple support Jane when it comes to Brocklehurst's oppressive patriarchal presence. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, we see that Moira and Offred have a similar relationship. Moira helps Offred and the other women stay strong while in the Red Center. When Moira is injured, they all come together to help her by stealing "extra paper packets of sugar for her" (*The Handmaid's Tale* 91). Although she "probably didn't need the sugar," they wanted to give it to her as a way of showing her that they care (*The Handmaid's Tale* 91). Moira is a lesbian surrounded by heterosexual women who are supporting her despite the fact that she seems to be different from them. The sisterhood "forces forging bonds of womanhood throughout the world" bringing women of all races, sexualities, and economic backgrounds together (Hewitt 23). Lastly, Becka and Agnes support each other throughout *The Testaments*. The friendship and love they share is the shining beacon of hope for female solidarity. Despite their class differences, they form a strong bond at a young age. When Aunt Lydia overhears Becka confide in Agnes about her 'father' she mentions the "vows of eternal friendship" and how it "almost melted" her heart (*The Testaments* 253). Aunt Lydia sees the love

that these girls have for each other and it inspires her despite all she has been through. In this moment, readers witness a strong sisterly bond. After this, Aunt Lydia is able to convince Aunt Elizabeth to frame Dr. Grove for rape and they have him killed by the Handmaids. These women all find ways to work together even when the system is rigged against them. The patriarchy is dependent on women who are willing to betray the sisterhood, but fortunately the women in these novels have moments of support that give hope to readers.

When women begin to treat each other the way men invite them to do, the patriarchy has won. Jane objectifies Blanche because she is jealous of her. Jane and Blanche disliking each other is what Rochester wants. Serena Joy feels similarly about Offred as Blanche feels about Jane. Serena Joy and the other Wives in Gilead think of and treat the Handmaids as if they are subhuman because they are forced to procreate with their husbands. While in *Jane Eyre*, the Ingram women openly mock governesses in front of Jane to make her feel insecure. Women typically turn against each other due to internalized misogyny; Shunammite in *The Testaments* is an example of this as she slut shames the Handmaids and treats the other girls like commodities. Shunammite is willing to do whatever it takes to have the most powerful husband, and when she gets him, he ruins her life. Unfortunately for Shunammite, giving into the patriarchy did not improve her life as she had hoped, but destroyed it instead. Interestingly, in *The Handmaid's Tale* Aunt Lydia seems to be the one who betrays the sisterhood the most. However, in *The Testaments* readers get to know Aunt Lydia and she is able to redeem herself. It is likely that Aunt Lydia has passed away by the end of the novel. Our clue to this is that in the beginning of the novel she mentions how only dead people have statues, yet she has one while she is still alive. While it is easy to hate Aunt Lydia in *The Handmaid's Tale*, readers are able to root for her in *The Testaments*. By the end of the novel, readers like Aunt Lydia and it is sad that she

might not have made it out of Gilead. Both Aunt Lydia and Bertha lose their lives for the sake of a happy ending to their respective novels. Aunt Lydia's redemption is not the only instance of women standing up for other women, though. This happens in all three novels and it is the only defense against a patriarchal society that depends on women disliking each other.

Chapter 3 The Men

In this chapter I discuss the role of the men in the novel as they enforce their power. In three sections on the men in charge, Rochester and the debacle of his wedding to Jane, and the sexual abuse perpetrated by doctors and dentists in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*, I argue that the men force women into submission but the women eventually escape.

The Men in Charge: a Comparison

Every patriarchal society has a central male who is in charge. Typically, these men use religion and fear mongering to control the women in their lives. Men treating women like commodities has been common practice for centuries because, as Donaldson argues, there are “alliances between men which depend on the exchange of women” (Donaldson 79). Brocklehurst, Commander Judd, and Dr. Grove use their societal power to control little girls. Brocklehurst embarrasses Jane in front of her peers, while Judd and Grove are pedophiles. These three men prey on little girls because they are vulnerable and cannot defend themselves. On the other hand, Commander Fred and Rochester engage in inappropriate relationships with the women in their houses, due to the strained relationships they have with their wives. Rochester is Jane’s employer, giving him power over her, yet he marries her. When Rochester asks Jane to marry him, she is not in a position where she can decline. Similarly, while the Commanders are not supposed to interact with their Handmaids outside of the Ceremony, Commander Fred routinely breaks several rules by just spending time with Offred in his office. When he asks her to join him in his office, Offred is afraid to refuse him. Although he does not do anything sexual to her while they are in his office, it is still against the rules for the Handmaids, or any women to enter the men’s territory. It is easy to look past the power dynamic that exists when Rochester

and Commander Fred approach these women in a seemingly friendly manner but it is important not to look past the dynamic and to examine the way in which patriarchal power asserts itself in these relationships. Their charismatic approaches make them somewhat likeable, and it is easy for readers to make excuses for them but an informed reader should resist that temptation. While Brocklehurst, Judd, and Grove are more direct about their feelings towards women than Commander Fred and Rochester are, all of these men exhibit predatory behavior by using their power to control the women and girls around them.

Mr. Brocklehurst and Commander Judd are both very powerful men. Brocklehurst has control over everything at Lowood school, and Commander Judd is at the top of the government in Gilead. Both of these men like to prey on young girls and use God to justify their actions. Brocklehurst tells the girls that they are “not to conform to nature” and orders Miss Temple to cut a girl's hair off because it is curly (*Jane Eyre* 64). He wants to control the bodily autonomy of these girls as a way to control them. Then, when Jane breaks the plate, Brocklehurst humiliates her in front of her peers. He refers to her as “an interloper and alien” (*Jane Eyre* 66). Brocklehurst is dehumanizing Jane as he punishes her. In *The Testaments*, Commander Judd also treats little girls as if they are subhuman. When Aunt Lydia goes to visit Commander Judd, a very sick Shunammite opens the door. Aunt Lydia tells us that she “lasted comparatively long for a Judd wife” and had even “produced a baby, Unbaby though it had been” (*The Testaments* 315). Her ability to get pregnant shows how lucky she had been, but the fact that it was an Unbaby lets readers know that her luck is about to run out. After this visit, when Aunt Lydia enters his office, she points out the painting he has of a “barely nubile girl without any clothes on. Dragonfly wings have been added to make her into a fairy” (*The Testaments* 315). She feels this is fitting because “that’s what Judd likes-- young girls who can be viewed as not fully human” (*The*

Testaments 315). Judd dehumanizes young girls so he is able to routinely rape and kill them without feeling remorse. Both Judd and Brocklehurst dehumanize young girls for their own self amusement, though Judd's reasoning is sexual while Brocklehurst's is not.

In *Jane Eyre* and *The Handmaid's Tale* Rochester and Commander Fred have a lot in common. Both Rochester and Commander Fred show their privilege constantly and use their power to get what they want from the women in their lives. Also, both of these men have multiple women acting as wives since monogamy is impossible due to their extreme circumstances. From the beginning, readers are aware that Rochester is not perfect, because as Gilbert and Gubar point out the "fairytale meeting" that he and Jane share quickly turns sour when "the prince's [Rochester's] first action is to fall on the ice" (Gilbert and Gubar 351). We go on to see that Rochester has Bertha as his legal wife, and attempts to make Jane his mistress, almost like a Handmaid. By doing this, he objectifies both women. Rochester views Bertha as a burden and does not respect her. Peters argues that Bertha gets especially dehumanized by Rochester as he "constantly uses this method to rid himself" of her and pretend like she is not his problem (Peters 62). This is because Rochester does not respect her. Rochester also has various women who take care of things in his home, such as Mrs. Fairfax and Grace Poole. While Commander Fred has Serena Joy as his Wife and Offred as his Handmaid, he also has various Marthas who cook and clean for him. These men both rely on women but do not respect them. In *Jane Eyre*, Rochester's situation is a very tough one because he is clearly unhappy in his marriage. It is very possible for readers of *Jane Eyre* to sympathize with Rochester. This is because Jane's sympathetic narration of Rochester attempts to excuse his actions. Though Jane might excuse Rochester, a rigorously feminist reader should not excuse him and should be mindful that Jane is not at Thornfield long before Rochester begins to proposition her. This is

very inappropriate as he is her employer and is in his thirties while she is barely eighteen. Even when *Jane Eyre* was first written this “struck many Victorian readers as totally inappropriate, coming from a dissipated older man to a virginal young governess” (Gilbert and Gubar 352). While their relationship may be legal because Jane is an adult, it is undeniably inappropriate on account of the age gap. Jane admits she had “never spoken” to a handsome man before meeting Rochester (*Jane Eyre* 113). Jane is young and impressionable, and Rochester takes advantage of this. Similarly, Commander Fred also acts inappropriately with Offred when he invites her unchaperoned into his office. It is important to remember that it is only inappropriate because of the societal norms of Gilead. Women, especially Handmaids, are not allowed to be in the men's space. Like Jane, Offred is not able to say no to him because of the gendered power dynamic. Commander Fred furthers the risk on Offred's life as it is also illegal for women to read, but he plays Scrabble with her. This shows his privilege because he knows the rules, but is unafraid to break them. These seemingly mundane things are only viewed as inappropriate in Gilead because men and women are treated as if they are different species. Similarly, Jane is hired as a governess by Rochester, and since she lives and works in his home he has control over her. Both Rochester and Commander Fred seem to want the same thing from these women: companionship that their wives do not or cannot provide. Bertha cannot be a loving wife due to her mental illness, and Serena Joy is unhappy with her life and has grown distant from her husband. These men cling to the other women in their lives because of this, even though it is inappropriate.

Lastly, Commander Judd and Dr. Grove in *The Testaments* have the most in common out of these men. Both of them are pedophiles who are in positions of power. Gilead thrives off pedophilia. Girls are typically married off before they are eighteen and are seen as “dried goods” if they are not (*The Testaments* 162). In this world, Commander Judd is one of the founders of

The Sons of Jacob making him “exceptionally godly” (*The Testaments* 222). Dr. Grove, on the other hand is “the best dentist,” therefore, he is allowed privileges, such as being given a Handmaid and his ‘daughter’ is allowed to attend Aunt Vidala’s school (*The Testaments* 98). These two men are seen as the best in their field, and this enables them to prey on little girls and allows them to get away with it. Commander Judd, for example, is allowed to have a series of wives. Agnes had been Commander Judd’s first choice after he had killed his last wife. Agnes was afraid when she was shown her options in husbands. She felt as if she “would be dead” if she had gotten married (*The Testaments* 223). This is completely true, because Aunt Lydia confesses about Commander Judd’s tendency to kill his wives, and Shunammite becomes very ill after a few years into her marriage to Judd. Becka had been even more afraid of marriage than Agnes because of her childhood trauma. To avoid marriage after she was assigned a husband, Becka attempted to kill herself. After years of being molested by her father figure, “she really did believe that marriage would obliterate her” (*The Testaments* 163). Becka’s fear was pushed aside by her assigned “mother” who said that her biological mother was a “slut of a Handmaid” who “hadn’t had such fears” when it came to having sex with men. We also discover that Becka’s real mother had slept with a man who was not Dr. Grove in order to get pregnant (*The Testaments* 163). Dr. Grove was given a Handmaid because of his position as the best dentist. He was also allowed to get away with assaulting underaged patients despite the suspicion around him. Since he had this power, girls like Agnes and Becka did not report, because when girls did report other men for similar actions many of them were either not believed or were punished. Dr. Grove and Commander Judd both take advantage of their positions of power to sexually abuse young girls. They are both able to get away with such acts because of their power. Commander Judd is even able to convince others that what he is doing is just through law and religion. However, since Dr.

Grove is not as important as Commander Judd, his actions do catch up with him. Dr. Grove's victims, Agnes and Becka, are able to rise above their trauma and grow into independent women. Unfortunately the same cannot be said for Shunammite or any of Judd's dead wives. Judd is only able to get away with this because he is the most powerful man in Gilead, and at the end of the day Dr. Grove was just a dentist.

Misogyny shows itself in many different forms throughout the novels. These men have varying motivations that drive their actions. Brocklehurst, Commander Judd, and Dr. Grove all enjoy dehumanizing and humiliating young girls, this clearly perpetuates violence. These girls are unable to defend themselves from this dehumanization and mistreatment. These men are more blatantly misogynistic than Rochester and Commander Fred. Rochester and Commander Fred are very lonely and look for companionship in inappropriate ways. Although Rochester and Commander Fred do not physically harm Offred or Jane, they do not respect them. Since Rochester and Commander Fred are not mean to them, it is hard to see how their actions perpetuate violence. But since neither woman is able to say no to them due to their status, it puts them in dangerous situations where they have no choice. Jane and Offred cannot speak up or say no to these men because they are already seen as lesser. This causes Rochester and Commander Fred's actions to have similar results to those of Judd, Dr. Grove and Brocklehurst. These actions result in an unsafe world for women and girls where women are silenced and face misogyny

Rochester and the Unwedding

Rochester is set up as the archetypal patriarchal male and in Bronte's novel. Since Bertha is diagnosed with madness, he is shown to dehumanize her. We can understand why Bertha attacks Rochester whenever she is given the opportunity because he keeps her locked away and far from her home and family. We also see Rochester attempts to trap Jane in marriage.

However, this would make Jane his mistress. These events lead to Jane having to symbolically undo their vows. Jane says that she does not want to be the other woman because it is against her Christian beliefs, yet it takes Rochester some time before he takes Jane's no as an answer, even after she undoes their vows. Rochester tries to guilt, seduce, and even threaten Jane when she does not give him what he wants. Throughout this, Rochester is never shown to consider Bertha or Jane's feelings. Significantly, even though Jane the narrator represents him sympathetically – for the most part – she is not able to grant him sympathy for the women he marries.

Rochester is shown to treat Bertha and Jane as if they are his property. Once Jane learns of Bertha Mason, Rochester's wife, she refuses to marry him because, as she says, bigamy is against God. This causes Rochester to become upset and angry with Jane. Since Rochester is shown to be a patriarchal figure, he struggles to accept Jane's unwillingness to submit to him. Though Jane says she loves Rochester, she has to resist him. Standing up to him is hard for Jane to do, but it was what dealing with other patriarchal men like Brocklehurst and John Reed had prepared her to do. At first, it is hard for Jane as she does not "want to leave him" and even feels as if she "cannot leave him" but eventually is strong enough to do so (*Jane Eyre* 299). When Jane decides to leave Rochester after she learns of his wife, she does not allow him to touch her because it is "now forbidden" (*Jane Eyre* 299). This angers Rochester, and his anger grows every time Jane tells him "no" (*Jane Eyre* 301). Rochester even takes it upon himself to talk for Jane. He claims that she has a "strange opinion" of him and gives her no time to respond and claims that he can see she "can say nothing" effectively silencing her, as common practice amongst patriarchal men (*Jane Eyre* 299). Since Jane does not want to marry Rochester, he attempts to make her feel like she is nothing; this is not uncommon because, as Hewitt argues, "male supremacist ideology encourages women to believe we are valueless and obtain value only by

relating to or bonding with men” (Hewitt 127). Rochester’s position as the oppressive patriarchal male is evident at this moment. He accuses Jane of “scheming to destroy” him, because she is no longer interested (*Jane Eyre* 299). We see Rochester treat the women in his life like he owns them. Since Bertha is inconvenient and a “fearful hag” Rochester locks her away (*Jane Eyre* 300). Spivak argues that Rochester is “a victim of the patriarchal inheritance law” because his parents left him with nothing, forcing him to marry the mad Bertha for money (Spivak 251). This claim means that men suffer from the patriarchy too, only differently than women do. Parama Roy, in her article “Unaccommodated Woman and the Poetics of Property in *Jane Eyre*,” argues that Bertha and Rochester’s marriage is “a symbol of all that is diseased, limiting, and hateful” (Roy 719). Since there was no real choice for either of them, the marriage was doomed from the start. Bertha’s mental health is already poor when they marry, and only worsens as their marriage continues, and it eventually leads to her death. When it comes to Jane, however, Rochester tries to force her into staying with him and claims that she is “to share [his] solitude” and threatens to “try violence” when Jane does not submit to him (*Jane Eyre* 300). Rochester does not respect Jane’s wishes and her rights. Rochester is also willing to abandon Adele because she is “a French dancer’s bastard” and does not care about her (*Jane Eyre* 300). Rochester, clearly, is meant to symbolize a misogynistic figure because he treats the women in his life like commodities as if they are expendable.

Rochester and Jane have a symbolic undoing of their vows after Jane learns about Bertha. Rochester has a hard time accepting this and tries to pressure Jane into staying with him. He tells Jane to “promise” that she “will be” his (*Jane Eyre* 316). Jane replies that she “will not be” his wife (*Jane Eyre* 316). When Jane tells Rochester “I do” it is because he is asking her if she wants to leave him (*Jane Eyre*, 316). Jane’s “I do” in this situation acts as a reversal of their aborted

wedding earlier (*Jane Eyre* 316). Rochester begins to kiss Jane's "forehead and cheek" without her consent, as she denies him (*Jane Eyre* 316). Jane also refers to Rochester's embrace as a "restraint" (*Jane Eyre* 316). Rochester already has his wife trapped physically, and he tries to trap Jane emotionally. He tries to guilt her by calling her refusal to be with him both "bitter" and "wicked" (*Jane Eyre* 316). He becomes sexually aggressive with Jane because he wants to be the one who will "initiate her [Jane] into the mysteries of the flesh" meaning he had been planning on seducing/ taking advantage of her the whole time (Gilbert and Gubar 355). However, Jane knows it would be immoral to "obey" him (*Jane Eyre* 316).

Rochester's attempted explanation for his behavior comes when he shows Jane what he truly feels about his wife. Rochester explains that when he had originally met Bertha, he "seldom saw her alone" (*Jane Eyre* 305). Rochester's claim is that he did not know Bertha on a personal level before they had been married. He says that he had known her through family business and that her family believed him to be "of a good race" (*Jane Eyre* 305). He also explains that Bertha's mother is in a "lunatic asylum" and that he "had never seen" her as he was told that she had died (*Jane Eyre* 305). Rochester says that he "found her [Bertha's] nature wholly alien" compared to his, likely due to their culturally different upbringings (*Jane Eyre* 306). When talking about their marriage, Rochester claims that he "had once been her [Bertha's] husband" meaning that he did not have an intimate relationship with her and he no longer views their marriage as legitimate due to her mental illness (*Jane Eyre* 307). While insanity is a reason for divorce, the two were still legally together when Rochester attempted to marry Jane. We see that Rochester used Bertha for her family's money and once she became inconvenient to him, he hid her away.

Jane's narration of Rochester paints him as a blatant misogynist who mistreats his wife and attempts to manipulate Jane. In the novel, he has little to no respect for any of the women in his life, but especially not Bertha. Bertha is what prevents Rochester and Jane from being together. Jane undoing her vows with Rochester is not out of respect for Bertha, but out of Jane's fear of God. At the end of the novel, when Jane is informed that Bertha had died she seeks Rochester out immediately. Since Bertha is no longer a factor, Jane marries Rochester. Bertha seems to be an inconvenience to Rochester and to Jane and once she is gone they are able to get what they want. Bertha's death is of major importance to the ability for the two to marry, however it is only briefly mentioned in Jane's narration before she and Rochester end up together thus furthering the lack of respect either of them have for her.

Why we Hate Going to the Doctor/Dentist

In both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* male doctors take advantage of their female patients and put them in dangerous situations. When Offred's doctor informs her that she is not pregnant he tells her he could get her pregnant if she wanted him to. Although the doctor proposes something dangerous, he is confident in making the suggestion. This is something that happens often and is potentially beneficial to Offred in a world where she is only valued as a walking womb. Later, in *The Testaments*, Agnes is sexually assaulted by her dentist. While Offred is not assaulted, the proposition the doctor makes puts her in a very dangerous situation as she is not supposed to deviate from her affiliation with her Commander. It is, however, not uncommon for Handmaids to have children with men who are not their Commanders, out of desperation. Readers even see cases of this in both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*. The doctor only sees Offred's body as a vehicle to create a baby. He does not want to have sex with her for his own selfish reasons unlike Dr. Grove in *The Testaments*. When Dr. Grove takes

advantage of Agnes in *The Testaments*, many of the Marthas seem concerned about her well-being once she returns home. It is important that the Marthas care about Agnes's wellbeing because it shows that there are still some people who care about sexual trauma. Yet, they pressure her into staying quiet. Doctors are supposed to keep people healthy and safe. These two do the opposite and put their patients in danger. Both of these events foreshadow important parts in their respective novels. While Agnes's experience is more overtly sexual, the doctor in Offred's case breaks her trust by offering her an opportunity which he believes will improve her status and life. However, neither women speak up about these experiences because rape culture and sexual assault are the norm in Gilead, and women are often punished for it.

To take the case of *The Handmaid's Tale* first, we see that Offred's doctor tells her he could impregnate her. He offers to "help" her (*The Handmaid's Tale* 60). He claims that she does not "have a lot of time left" (*The Handmaid's Tale* 61). At first, Offred thinks he may "know something" or might have "seen Luke" (*The Handmaid's Tale*, 60). Offred still holds onto hope that her husband is still alive. Unfortunately, that is not the kind of help that he was trying to give her. He informs her that he has "helped others" (*The Handmaid's Tale* 60). He touches her leg as he tries to persuade her, saying that "they'll never know it isn't his" (*The Handmaid's Tale* 60). The doctor even touches her without her consent by putting his hands "in between my [Offred's] legs" (*The Handmaid's Tale* 61). At this moment, as Burack argues, "Atwood's heroine is forced to recognize her body and her being as politically significant" because of her lack of ownership of her own body, however, she is able to say no unlike during the Ceremony (Burack 276). He then tells her that Commander Fred could be "sterile" which is shocking to Offred because "there is no such thing as a sterile man anymore, not officially" (*The Handmaid's Tale* 61). This is because the culture in Gilead is tipped against women, everything wrong in the world is their

fault. Women carry all the burden, while men can do no wrong. He then goes on to tell her that “lots of women do it” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 61). Many men try to convince women into doing things they might not want to do with phrases such as this. Later in the novel, Offred finds out that Janine had been given a similar opportunity and had taken it. Also, in *The Testaments* Aunt Lydia confirms this is a frequent occurrence and is fully aware of it. Another case of this exists in *The Testaments* where we see that Dr. Grove’s Handmaid does this in order to get pregnant with Becka. She does this because Dr. Grove cannot copulate with an adult woman because he is a pedophile. These women take the risk because they are more afraid of what will happen to them if they do not have children. However, it is still very dangerous and the doctor knows this. The doctor offering this option to Offred puts both of them in very serious danger. He even expresses concern for her saying that he “hates to see what they put you [Offred] through” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 61). When Handmaids do not end up having children they are sent to the colonies and are declared Unwomen. Offred turns the doctor down because “the penalty is death,” however, she can only be punished if she is caught as the rule is that “they have to catch you in the act, with two witnesses” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 61). Offred is not willing to take that risk at this time, however she does change her mind later with Nick, but only because she gets to know Nick and feels comfortable with him. Offred does not feel that having sex with Nick is degrading because she actually likes him, and he respects her for more than just her childbearing abilities.

In Atwood's sequel, *The Testaments*, once Agnes’s family’s Handmaid gets pregnant, her step mother Paula makes her go to the dentist without a Martha as the Marthas are busy with the pregnant Handmaid. The dentist, Dr. Grove, is Agnes’s friend Becka’s father. Going to see Dr. Grove without a Martha made Agnes feel “very grown” and is excited about this (*The*

Testaments 85). Paula feels justified in sending her without one of the Marthas because it would be a “waste of time” due to the preparations for the new baby (*The Testaments* 95). At first, the examination is normal and goes on “as usual” (*The Testaments* 95). He then comments on her “perfect teeth” and says that she's “getting to be a big girl” (*The Testaments* 96). This language is objectifying towards her. Dr. Grove has the prepubescent Agnes alone, and makes her worst fear come true; he begins to touch her. Throughout her whole life Agnes had been warned of men and “their urges” and now she is experiencing them and she is unable to defend herself, because the culture in Gilead has taught her not to (*The Testaments* 18). This is the very first time that young Agnes is alone with a man and he assaults her. She feels “horribly embarrassed” as he does this and gets through it by pretending “it wasn't happening” (*The Testaments* 96). Oftentimes victims of sexual assault will freeze up and feel that they are unable to react to what is happening to them. Agnes is like one of those victims who freeze up as a survival strategy. Agnes describes having him pinch her nipple like “having a thumbtack stuck into” her (*The Testaments* 96). It is a violent and disturbing act. Agnes struggles to escape but he pushes her in and then pulls out his “appendage” (*The Testaments*, 96). Agnes does not go into detail about what he does because she does not have the language to describe it. After this experience, Agnes becomes very afraid of men and becomes an Aunt. We have to imagine this incident as having value in helping her reach her decision. This horrible moment also sets Agnes up to be able to escape Gilead and help Aunt Lydia bring it down. This moment is awful and traumatic, but it is a turning point in the novel and makes Agnes into a Christ-like figure. Once her innocence is sacrificed by Dr. Grove, Agnes is strong enough to stand up to the oppressive system that had been treating women like commodities for years.

Although these moments in both novels are very different, they serve the same purpose. These doctors give Offred and Agnes the means to be rebellious. Offred is first given the idea of sleeping with another man to be able to have a baby when her doctor brings it up to her. This is a scandalous act because Handmaids are only supposed to copulate with their assigned Commanders. In *The Testaments*, Agnes is traumatized by Dr. Grove and asks Aunt Lydia to help her become an Aunt instead of getting married. A young girl not getting married is the most rebellious thing a girl in Gilead could do. Both of these moments act as a vehicle for Aunt Lydia's larger rebellion. When Offred sleeps with Nick she becomes pregnant and is able to sneak out her baby, who becomes the famous Baby Nicole. Since Aunt Lydia knows Agnes' mother is Offred and her sister is Baby Nicole, she is able to use this as an opportunity to destroy Commander Judd and Gilead from the inside. Aunt Lydia is able to give Agnes the opportunity to help in the destruction of Gilead by bringing her and her sister together. All three of these women, Agnes, Aunt Lydia, and Offred are victims of the patriarchal societies they are living in but they also enable the destruction of these societies. The unethical doctors unknowingly give them the inspiration they need to destroy the system. Offred becoming pregnant with Nick's baby gave her the chance to sneak her out into Canada. Aunt Lydia is able to convince Agnes to become an Aunt after she is traumatized by Dr. Grove. These two moments serve as a gateway for Offred and Agnes to see that the world is not as simple as they are told it is. These little rebellions are used by Aunt Lydia so she can bring about the destruction of Gilead with the greatest rebellion of them all: speaking up about her experiences. All of these women turn from victims of the patriarchy to heroes because they are inspired to rebel and take part in the destruction of the system that hurt them.

Conclusion

Women's rights are explicitly undermined and ignored in a patriarchy. This is shown to readers in the *Jane Eyre*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *The Testaments*. However, readers are also shown how women deal with the oppression they face under these types of systems. Many women submit out of fear of repercussions. The men in these novels all hold positions of power over the women in them. They are able to use their power to keep these women from demanding their rights and by keeping them submissive. These systems are put in place to keep these men in power so they can continue to suppress the women. One way these men are able to oppress women is through religion. Religion and Christianity are key factors in these societies. Men such as Brocklehurst in *Jane Eyre* and the Commanders in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* use religion as a fear tactic to subdue young girls and women.

The women in these novels also fall into the trap of hating each other, making the patriarchy stronger. In *Jane Eyre* Jane only dislikes Blanche Ingram when she first meets her because she thinks she is Rochester's love interest. However, once Jane realizes she is not, Blanche's character becomes irrelevant. Also, the women in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testament's* are continuously forced to judge each other and treat each other poorly in order to survive. Women like Serena Joy in *The Handmaid's Tale* and Shunammite in *The Testaments* both give into these systems as well believing that their compliance will make things better for them. However, both Serena Joy and Shunammite both suffer horribly under the patriarchy as well, despite their willingness to comply.

Various tactics are used in these novels to keep the women in them submissive. However, hope is not lost, because these women do find ways to reclaim their lives and rebel against the systems that oppress them. For example, Jane stands up for herself constantly throughout *Jane*

Eyre, even when she knows she will be punished for it. Also, while Jane still ends up married to Rochester, she refuses to do so unless it is on her terms even when he tries to pressure her. A different form of rebellion is in *The Handmaid's Tale*, is when Offred forms a bond with another Handmaid, Ofglen, and learns about Mayday, the rebels who help her escape. The final act of rebellion is taken by Aunt Lydia, who writes her experiences in *The Testaments*, and sneaks out Agnes and Nicole, thus playing an active role in the destruction of Gilead. These rebellious women take back their lives and do whatever they can to regain their freedom from the patriarchy, giving readers hope for a better and more equal future for women.

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