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College English
October 10, 2023

A Story Through Songs

Goodbye Yellow Brick Road- Elton John

I think that this song encapsulates the beginning of Offred's journey. I imagine it playing while Offred is trying to escape with her family, and then is subsequently placed in the Red Center for Handmaid training. While it is a song of triumph, it is also a song of questioning. There were a lot of unknowns when Offred set out on her journey, but she knew she wanted to leave Gilead before it was too late. This feeling is reflected in the song lyric: "Oh, I've finally decided my future lies/Beyond the yellow brick road" In the context of the book, the yellow brick road symbolizes Gilead, and its toxic system. Although the song exudes confidence, there are also undertones of hesitancy that were apparent in the book as well, and could be felt by the reader when Offred expressed nervousness before crossing the border checkpoint with Luke and her daughter. Overall, this song expresses the same conflicting emotions that Offred felt when faced with a life-altering decision.

The Hanging Tree- James Newton Howard ft. Jennifer Lawrence

There is something eerily haunting about this song that I think pairs well with the scene of Offred and Ofglen looking at the Wall of hanging bodies. The song builds as it goes on, and becomes more and more orchestral, with a chorus of voices singing the lyrics. These elements of the song reflect the almost cult-like regime that Gilead enforces, the dead bodies being a result of the government's control. As Offred describes the hanging bodies on the wall, she notes: "There must have been a Men's Salvaging early this morning. I didn't hear the bells. Perhaps I've become used to them" (pg.32) This quote reminds me of the lyric in the song: "Strange things did happen here, no stranger would it be" In the context of *The Handmaid's Tale*, these lyrics almost normalize the extreme violence represented by the Wall. The fact that such inhumane practices are tolerated in Gilead is likely the scariest thing about this scene, and is what the addition of the song amplifies.

Strange- Celeste

This song about fear of change and loss reflects the dreamlike state of Offred's flashbacks with Luke. The chorus of the song perfectly emulates their complex relationship, asking: "Isn't it strange/How people can change/From strangers to friends/Friends into lovers/And strangers again?" This part of the song emphasizes that her relationship with Luke has become more of a memory than anything else. She no longer knows whether he is dead or alive, and her belief in his whereabouts have become vague and unreliable. At one point in the book, Offred plays out various different scenarios involving Luke's whereabouts in her head, later admitting: "The things I believe can't all be true, though one of them must be." (pg. 106) She doesn't know what has happened to Luke, but these hypothetical scenarios provide the reassurance she needs to keep going. Like their relationship, this song is heartbreakingly raw, and conveys the same melancholy tone Offred uses when talking about Luke.

Never Be Like You- Flume

This song communicates the mental push and pull between Offred's desires and the law. The chorus begins with: "I'm only human, can't you see? I made, I made a mistake." This section of the song is strikingly similar to the part of the book when Luke sees Offred trying to steal a flower in the sitting room. When she and Luke kiss, she says: "It's so good, to be touched by someone, to be felt so greedily, to feel so greedy." (pg. 99) As Offred gives in to her desires, she has mixed feelings about its moral bearing. This quote draws a parallel between itself and the song, which harps on the human aspect of desire, and how some inclinations are simply too strong to be overpowered by will.

Bury a Friend- Billie Eilish

This unsettling song aligns with the part of the book when Moira escapes from the Red Center. This song exudes power and confidence with a sinister undertone, similar to how Moira acted when she put her escape plan into action. "Don't move, said Moira, or I'll stick it all the way in...I'll puncture your lung." (pg. 130) The violent way Moira went about fleeing makes the story chilling, but also that much more harrowing, seeing as security was a big priority when it came to containing the Handmaids. As Offred reflected upon the impact Moira's escape had on the rest of the Handmaids, she noted: "Moira had power now, she'd been set loose, she'd set herself loose." (pg. 133) This almost unhinged description has an uncanny similarity to the song's lyrics, which don't hold back on any of the gory details: "Step on the glass, staple your tongue" This song by Billie Eilish would pair perfectly with such a gut-wrenching scene.