

Lit Log #1: Readers Response

In *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood there are many things that correlate with the world we know today. Something that I found was interesting and significant to today's society would be the rules that were discussed earlier in the book for women. Atwood writes, (24) " I remember the rules, rules that were never spelled out but that every woman knew: Don't open your door to a stranger, even if he says he is the police. Make him slide his ID under the door. Don't stop on the road to help a motorist pretending to be in trouble. Keep the locks on and keep going. If anyone whistles, don't turn to look. Don't go into a laundromat, by yourself, at night. I think about laundromats." Atwood reflects on the unspoken rules women follow to protect themselves from many potential risks of their own survival. These rules were never taught but were deeply embedded in women as a part of their way to live. This resonates with me a lot because as an African American boy from Philadelphia, my background is obviously different, but the message of this passage is that we live in a society today where we have to navigate in a world full of unspoken rules in order to survive. This shows that this could happen in many different ways because Atwood speaks on this when it comes to gender based issues, but when it's put into my perspective, it also applies to managing the difficulties of living in a city where violence and racial issues play a part in our daily lives. Despite our gender differences, I believe both Offred and I understand how important it is to be aware of your surroundings in a society where anything is bound to happen.

When I read, "Don't stop on the road to help a motorist pretending to be in trouble", it reminded me of an experience I once had when walking home late at night. I then realized that it was a car rolling behind me slowly as I walked up my doorsteps. Someone started to wave at me but I ignored it. This was due to my first instinct to keep to myself and not get involved. In Philadelphia I always felt as if there was an unspoken rule of some sort to not stare at people or look them in the eye for too long because this could lead to small conflict. What makes this interesting is that I believe many people share this feeling as well so why do we as humans continue to start trouble and problems after things just like staring? I then learned that it's just better to mind your business than to get involved with someone else's.

Another line that resonated with me was when Offred talks about the control over the small things in her life. Atwood writes, (24) "What I wore to them: shorts, jeans, jogging pants. What I put into them: my own clothes, my own soap, my own money, money I had earned myself." This puts a different spin on the connection between the main character and I because this aspect is a gender expectation. In their dystopian setting of Gilead women are given "freedom from" instead of "freedom to" compared to me. Hypothetically, If I were to walk into a laundromat I'd be able to wear what I'd want to with no second thought about what could happen. Sadly for women, they are

constantly being observed by people due to the way society has advanced, which is why Atwood also writes, "If anyone whistles, don't turn to look". This could be viewed as a sexual act, it's a way for men to practically reduce women to animals or objects expecting them to react. Women are frequently told it's their responsibility to prevent being harassed or assaulted yet males are rarely held accountable for their behavior in such situations.

In conclusion, even though I am nowhere near in the same situation as Offred in the Handmaid's Tale, I understand how important it is to be safe and be alert in a world that doesn't always make that seem possible. The unspoken rules she uses to defend herself are very similar to those I learned growing up in Philadelphia. Whether it's avoiding certain circumstances I may face, or being cautious of my surroundings, both of us have had to find a method to navigate the world while minimizing risk, trouble, and conflict. I understand the need for alertness very well and it serves as a reminder of how in control we must be in order to feel safe.