

Jalop Pewu
Ms. Pahomov
College English
September 30, 2024

The Ballad of Gilead

Song 1: Offred Losing Parts of Her Memories (I'm Not Gonna Miss You: By Glen Campbell)

I'm Not Gonna Miss You made by Glen Campbell and The Wrecking Crew in 1970, the song is about a man slowly losing time as he slowly succumbs to his Alzheimer's. Loving a woman but knowing that as more time passes he won't remember her. This is the perfect song to represent Offred's loss of memories and time. One of the main driving plots in *The Handmaid's Tale* is Offred's stream of consciousness. Jumping between the past (the before times) and the present day Gilead. She stays within her head as she tries her hardest to remember. Offred uses those memories to keep her sanity as they are the only things that hold her to the present. "I would like to believe this is a story I'm telling. I need to believe it...if it's a story I'm telling, then I have control over the ending...and real life will come after it. I can pick up where I left off" (39). Much like the line from the song, "I'm still here, but yet I'm gone I don't play guitar or sing my songs They never defined who I am". Within both, they have the understanding that things are not what they seem or what they used to be. They cannot rely on one thing that holds them together, for Glen Campbell it is his music as he won't be able to play once his mind is gone, and for Offred, it is her memories as it is the only thing she has.

Song 2: The World of Gilead (Condemnation: By Depeche Mode)

This song portrays the human need to hold on to the things they hold dear, as well as what society thinks. Depeche Mode uses *Condemnation* as a way to talk about the disapproval of society. The dictionary definition of *condemnation* is "the expression of very strong disapproval; censure." which directly fits within the world of Gilead. Within Gilead, many rules restrict the people's freedom. But the song also highlights human resistance as even when faced with the punishments they still go on with the actions that get them in trouble: "Here on the stand with the book in my hand Truth on my side Accusations, lies Hand me my sentence, I'll show no repentance I'll suffer with pride". *The Handmaid's Tale* shows this in the scene with the Men's Salvaging, where men are hung for their crimes. "It's the bags over the heads that are the worst...since they are meant to scare...The men wear white coats, like those worn by doctors...Each has a placard hung around his neck to show why he has been executed" (32). When the reader views these two together, they conclude that like *Condemnation*, the men had a sense of pride when they performed these acts. In Gilead, to perform abortions is illegal which is why they were hung. Yet they still did it knowing the

risks. There has to be some sense of power over the law and that at times can be seen as pride. Because of that Gilead showed those men condemnation.

Song 3: Women of Gilead and Serena Joy (Walking in My Shoes: By Depeche Mode)

Walking in My Shoes is about a person who has done some wrong in the past and gives the stage for others to walk in their shoes before they cast their judgment onto him. The reader can use this song to analyze the dynamic between the different classes of women in Gilead: commander wives and everyone else, zooming into how Serena Joy represents that dynamic. “She wasn’t singing anymore by then, she was making speeches...Her speeches were about the sanctity of the home, and about how women should stay home. Serena Joy didn’t do this herself, she made speeches instead, but she presented this failure of hers as a sacrifice she was making for the good of all.” (45). Serena Joy was famous in the past. She was a singer which meant she had a large audience that she spoke to about her beliefs. In the song *Walking in My Shoes*, Depeche Mode says “You’ll stumble in my footsteps...If you try walking in my shoes”. This line is very important in highlighting why this is the perfect song for Serena Joy when comparing her to the other women of Gilead. She tried walking in their shoes and throughout the book, we see her struggle to live up to the expectations she set for other women. “She doesn’t make speeches anymore. She has become speechless. She stays in her home, but it doesn’t seem to agree with her.” (46). Proving the song right, that she shouldn’t cast that stone until she walked in the shoes of those women.

Song 4: Offred missing physical touch (Sex with a Ghost: By: Teddy Hyde)

This song is about a girl that the singer Teddy Hyde could not get enough of until the point he starts seeing her as a ghost and sleeps with her. This song represents the lust of humans and the inability to release it. Many times within the book Offred lets the reader know of her sexual frustrations and sexuality. This was done when she walked past two younger gradians and thought about turning them on. Another time the reader is shown this is in the quote when Offred lifts the mattress and sees stains left by what she calls old love, “...the evidence left by two people, of love or something like it, desire at least...I wanted to feel Luke lying beside me.” (52). There’s a longing that she feels for her old lover. She feels that emptiness almost like Luke is a ghost to her. This is what *Sex with a Ghost* is highlighting that longing for someone isn’t physically there with you but still seeing them: “And when I miss, you come and kiss me with a smile”

Song 5: Marth’s Song (It’s My Life: By Bon Jovi)

“It’s my life It’s now or never I ain’t gonna live forever I just want to live while I’m alive”. *It’s My Life* is a song about going for it and living your life. Martha is the one to make it out of Gilead’s grasp. “...Moira had power now, she’d been set loose, she’d set herself loose” (133).

Moria took it upon herself to be free, she didn't wait for anyone. She set forth a new wave of initiatives within the handmaids. She gave them a start, she showed them it was possible to take your life into your hands. The handmaids of Gilead now had someone to look up to, "Nevertheless Moria was our fantasy" (133). What she did was much like the message of the song, encouraging others to take charge of their futures without waiting for someone else to set them free.