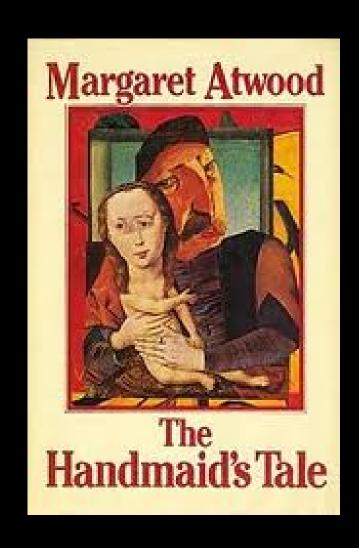
## The Handmaid's Tale (1985)





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## Background: the Title



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# Background: Biblical allusion



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The Genesis story of Jacob (Abraham's grandson) and his wives Leah & Rachel



#### Background: Biblical allusion

- The Genesis story of Jacob (Abraham's grandson) and his wives Leah & Rachel
- Rachel begs Jacob to impregnate her handmaid Bilhah ("she shall bear upon my knees") – Gen 30:3







Actual place near Jordan river



- Actual place near Jordan river
- According to Genesis,
   Jacob lived near there



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- According to Genesis,
   Jacob lived near there
- The prophet Elijah was from there



- Actual place near Jordan river
- According to Genesis,
   Jacob lived near there
- The prophet Elijah was from there
- In more recent times, it's become confused with heaven



Opposite of Utopian



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- Utopia = creation of paradise; dystopia = creation of a nightmare



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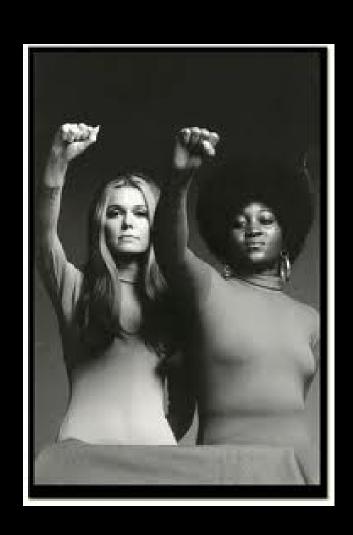
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- Brave New World –Aldous Huxley
- <u>1984</u> George Orwell



# Underlying allusion: Feminist/Conservative war on porn (strange bedfellows?)









What does the use of biblical allusion bring to the story?



- What does the use of biblical allusion bring to the story?
- What point is made about the role of women in such a society?

The forbidden affair: why does Offred take such pleasure in it?



- The forbidden affair: why does Offred take such pleasure in it?
- What is the message here about us in general?





Is there anything about Gilead society that is good?



- Is there anything about Gilead society that is good?
- What trade-offs are made for the good in Gilead?



- Is there anything about Gilead society that is good?
- What trade-offs are made for the good in Gilead?
- What's the concept of "freedom to" vs. "freedom from"?

The novel has been called "a cautionary tale." What is it cautioning us against?



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- Gilead is fictional, but societies like it do exist.
- Are we (the U.S.) headed toward it or away from it?



- Gilead is fictional, but societies like it do exist.
- Are we (the U.S.) headed toward it or away from it?
- What evidence do you see in either case?



#### Theme(s)



What would you say are some of the primary themes in the book?

#### Theme(s)



- What would you say are some of the primary themes in the book?
- How can you prove them?