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**THE RISE AND FALL OF GILEAD:  
AN ANALYSIS THROUGH THE CHARACTER OF AUNT LYDIA  
IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S *THE HANDMAID'S TALE* AND *THE  
TESTAMENTS***

**BA thesis**

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## Abstract

There are many crucial and large-scale problems in the world and the society we live in today. This thesis analyses two novels, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*, by Margaret Atwood, who has tackled some of these problems in a frighteningly accurate way. Both of these novels should be read with attention and a purpose of heeding to the warnings they present us with. History has given us wars, hunger and so many other devastating events, but humans rarely stop to think about where the future might lead, if they do not learn from their mistakes. This is exactly why Atwood's novels should be handled as warning stories and something to think about – all that has happened in the past might very well happen again. The following thesis that is based on their analysis emphasises the necessity of contemplating these problems.

In the introduction, this thesis will give a concise overview of the two novels as well as the method that has been used to discuss them. The literature review will briefly cover the important articles and research papers that have dealt with either the novels themselves or characters from said novels, with a goal similar to this thesis. The empirical part, divided into three main sections and several sub-sections, will analyse the rise, perpetuation and fall of a fictional totalitarian regime in the Republic of Gilead, the main setting where the story of the two novels takes place, through the character of Aunt Lydia. The conclusion summarises the main findings of the thesis.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	2
Introduction .....	4
Literature Review .....	7
The Rise and Fall of Gilead.....	14
The Rise .....	14
The Role of the Bible and Fundamental Religion.....	14
Faith in the System for the Purpose of Survival .....	16
Knowledge is Power .....	18
The Perpetuation .....	20
Moulding the Next Generation .....	20
Upholding of the Faith .....	22
Tool of the Regime .....	23
The Fall .....	26
The Expansion of Freedom and Losing the Faith .....	26
Rules are Meant to be Broken.....	28
Cracks in the Facade and Undermining it from the Inside .....	29
Breaking Point and Vengeance.....	31
Conclusion.....	32
References .....	34
Resümee .....	36

## Introduction

The award-winning Canadian writer Margaret Atwood has said that like the Victorian novelists, she firmly believes “that a novel isn’t just for private expression, but that it also exists for social examination” (An Interview with Margaret Atwood 1997: 2). *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) as well as *The Testaments* (2019) are two of the many dystopian novels written by Atwood. These two works open our eyes to the problems and issues in today’s society, revealing a sort of prediction as to what might happen if we choose to ignore the signs of nearing disaster. The two novels were published with a gap of 35 years between them. Our society as well as the issues that come along with it have changed noticeably, since the first edition of *The Handmaid’s Tale* came out, thus revealing Atwood’s skill to masterfully bind the everyday events and social issues into her novels.

*The Handmaid’s Tale* was a very controversial novel at the time of its publication, just as it is now, acting as a dystopian warning story. Depicting a country that has just gone through a coup d’état, Atwood reveals a world of the totalitarian Republic of Gilead, a fictional place in America, that is governed by patriarchy and religious fundamentalism. The main characters that I will be speaking of in this thesis as well, are divided into groups – the Handmaids, the Aunts, the Commanders, the Eyes and others, who will not be mentioned here but are of no less importance. The main character in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Offred, is a Handmaid, supposed to be of service to the country by existing for the sole purpose of bearing children to the Commander of her household. As the story progresses, we see her struggling with her identity as well as her sense of freedom, and doubting the role she has been assigned to. Among the characters, we can also find Aunt Lydia, whom this thesis deals with. She is the ‘mastermind’ behind training the young girls of Gilead to be good Handmaids. She is the link that connects the two books, for when *The Testaments* came out in the late 2019, it gave us her perspective of the rise and fall of Gilead, which is also the topic of this paper. Aunt

Lydia, along with two other main characters, tell their story in *The Testaments* as a series of testimonies, revealing what really happened inside of Gilead and how the regime kept itself afloat, as well as give us an idea what the outside world thought of Gilead's oppressive rule. Other characters that will be mentioned in this paper besides Offred and Aunt Lydia are Commander Judd, the main leader of the new regime inside Gilead, and some girls that were trained to be Handmaids or Aunts.

Since the publishing of *The Handmaid's Tale* in 1985, there have been many papers written on Offred and her viewpoints, by the likes of Hilde Staels (1995), Coral Ann Howells (2005, 2006) and Karen Stein (1996), to name a few. Offred will be mentioned in this paper as well; however, the focus will be on Aunt Lydia as the tool of the system, as well as the one who orchestrated its downfall. As *The Testaments* came out only recently, in September 2019, there are not many studies published on the topic. This paper will give a new perspective to the character of Aunt Lydia, portraying her not just as the cruel and authoritative figure designed to follow the rules of the regime, but also as the puppeteer or the system. It was her who had all the knowledge and power to bring it to its knees – it was just a matter of when, how and if. This paper will analyse Aunt Lydia's footsteps from the start, when she submitted to being a tool of the system, following through the path of keeping her faith in the system, up until the moment she helped to conquer the oppressive rule from the inside. As mentioned above, the character of Offred has been thoroughly researched, unlike Aunt Lydia, which is why this paper gives new perspectives and information, linking the two Atwood novels and revealing the complexity of her character.

The thesis seeks to explore the rise and fall of a fictional country that is the Republic of Gilead. The main purpose of this paper is to determine which circumstances enabled Gilead to rise, how it perpetuated and in what way it finally fell, all through the eyes of the character of Aunt Lydia. I will start the literature review by dissecting the word 'dystopia' and

totalitarian regime in regard to dystopia, for we cannot analyse the two novels without knowing, what these terms mean. This will be supported by many works of others, who have already attempted to analyze the *The Handmaid's Tale* in a similar fashion. Moving forward to the empirical study, the paper will explore the rise, perpetuation and finally, the fall of Gilead. This will be achieved by analyzing the two novels mentioned, as well as literature that was obtained on the topic. Referring to Atwood's previously mentioned quote, this thesis as well, examines the society of Gilead, in a way. Through the eyes of Aunt Lydia we will learn, what might push a person to act like she did in the society that she herself helped to create and how the totalitarian country of Gilead was never meant to last in the first place.

## Literature Review

According to the *Cambridge Dictionary* (Dystopia), “dystopia” is “a very bad or unfair society in which there is a lot of suffering, especially an imaginary society in the future, after something terrible has happened”. Dystopian fiction is frequently described as stories written to warn against something, be it to bring out a political or a social problem or to predict an apocalyptic event. The genre itself is the ‘evil twin’ of utopia – another side of the same coin. According to Sharon R. Wilson (2013: 1), “Dystopia involves utopia’s opposite: a nightmare, the ultimate flawed world, or ‘a society worse than the existing one’” (Moylan 1986: 9 quoted in Wilson 2013: 1). Both genres give a glimpse into the writer’s own mind. They may even give us ideas for a new model for the future, and very often they criticize the present day politics or society, condemning the behaviour and warning us of the consequences of said behaviour (Howells 1998: 50).

There is no single definition of dystopia, but its formulations across many sources share similar features. Hilde Staels (1995: 157) points out that a dystopia “projects the culmination of certain ominous tendencies of our present-day social, political and technological order in the nearby future.” It is true that dystopias commonly predict the future, and mostly, how it is bleak, if we continue on the same path. They take place in settings where the time to take action has long passed and it is futile to even try and fight against the new order (Dopp 1994: 5). Dystopia is almost always described as a genre that asks us to consider how today’s society might affect the future badly and dystopian fictions “are self-consciously warnings” (Howells 2006: 161). It is hard to categorise dystopia and decide whether it falls under science fiction or speculative fiction. As Wilson (2013: 1) notes, “little agreement exists about distinctions among science fiction, fantasy, speculative fiction, utopia and dystopia”. However, Margaret Atwood (2004: 515) has said that “Speculative fiction may be used as the tree, for which science fiction, science fiction fantasy, and fantasy

are the branches” but as she continues to list works that are not “novels proper”, she includes utopias as well as dystopias. It is true that dystopias (and utopias) have features that other works of fiction do not necessarily have. Again, as the Canadian writer has pointed out, they can very graphically explore changes in societies and show what life in them can be like (Atwood 2004: 515). Other features that are frequently mentioned when describing dystopias, are a totalitarian regime and war, which is also the case with *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Testaments*. Amin Malak (1987: 10-11) notes that other than these two topics, there is also the presence of binary oppositions, characterization, change and time, and the dream-nightmare concept. Similarly to this, Coral Ann Howells (2006: 161-162) also mentions the shifts between time frames (past, present and future) and in addition, the “failed utopian visions, counter-narratives of resistance to a new prevailing order, survivors’ stories and open endings.” All of this points to the fact that dystopias, as a whole, are not worlds we would like to live in (unlike utopias) and that they are definitely warning us of something, therefore we might consider them as speculative fiction, just as Atwood herself does.

Atwood has written many dystopias, from *The Edible Woman* (1969) to *The Year of the Flood* (2009), among them are *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) and its so-called sequel *The Testaments* (2019), the two novels analyzed in this paper. There is no doubt that Margaret Atwood has contributed to the dystopian genre, as well as made her mark on it. She has managed to swerve from the characteristics of science fiction, declaring her works to be rather ‘speculative fiction’ that predict the future based on what has already happened in the past (Howells 2006: 162). She cunningly projects historical themes to the not so faraway future, in order to compose a very real and ominous prediction, related to real evidence. In *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Testaments*, the main link is the Bible and the totalitarian themes of historical countries like the Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. According to Gina Wisker (2010: 27), the idea to make the Republic of Gilead in *The Handmaid’s Tale* a place where

the oppression consists of patriarchy and religious fundamentalism partly comes from history, from the time of the first wave of immigration to America from Europe as settlers. Those people wanted to escape from the oppression in their home countries and to establish communities in the new world, on the basis of their own religious beliefs, yet, ironically, they created communities that were often the most controlling and rigid of them all (Wisker 2010: 27-28). Wisker (2010: 28) further argues that “Atwood is influenced by Puritanism and other religion-driven regimes in her tale of oppression founded in the brainwashing of strongly held beliefs covering identity, behaviour, sexuality and rights, and based on divisiveness and hierarchies which reinforce conventional divisions”. Because of the novelty of Atwood’s approach and the topicality of the issues she has raised in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, the story of Offred has been thoroughly researched. The reception of the novel includes views ranging from the protagonist and the novel representing feminism and women’s empowerment, alongside with their critique (Tomc 1993) to the totalitarian regime and patriarchy having made her the victim, not the heroine of the story (Dopp 1994). *The Testaments*, however, being a very recent work of Atwood, has not yet been studied that comprehensively, which is why this thesis focuses on the character of Aunt Lydia. Another reason for focusing on Aunt Lydia is that while she is the character rarely written about in the scholarship on *The Handmaid’s Tale*, she is the puppeteer in the totalitarian country of Gilead. Thus, it is through her character that the workings of the regime can be best explored.

In order to understand the rise and fall of Gilead, we must first understand how totalitarian countries are formed and in turn, how they make their downfall. Atwood has used many main features of a totalitarian regime, to make the fictional country of Gilead in accord with historical totalitarian countries. First and foremost, we must look at the political factor and the ideology behind the regime. In Gilead’s case, as argued by Christou (2016: 415), it can be called a ‘sacrificial politics’, because the whole system, the foundation of which are

the Handmaids, relies on sacrificing people for the greater good. As the government of Gilead presents its ideology as one of sacrifice, this also allows it to impose an oppressive rule and a political agenda, disguised as something that makes the country a better place – in other words, it allows self-praise for Gilead (Christou 2016: 415). Drawing a parallel to Nazi Germany, we can see that there are certain similarities, such as the praise of the Aryan race and antisemitism. This in turn allows for the rule of men in Gilead – patriarchy. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the men are in charge and sit higher on the hierarchy pyramid than women. Women have been offered only one view of the world, to see only what they are supposed to and to act only how they are supposed to, “marked and delimited by their social status” (Stein 1996: 57). Stein (1996: 64) also draws a parallel to *A Modest Proposal* (1729) by Jonathan Swift, claiming that both the Proposer and the rule in Gilead wish to suppress women's sexuality, moulding it to their own desire and in turn, making the children of Handmaids into a mere product. Atwood's decision to deal with the issue of strict beliefs about women's sexuality was influenced by her visit to Iran in the late 1970s (Wisker 2010: 28). There, the Taliban insisted on one of the most extreme versions of Islam, where women were said to be protected by the male community, but were not given the choice to educate themselves, nor were they allowed to reveal their faces in public. This, in turn, made the women wear the hijab and cover their faces voluntarily, believing it to be their choice of freedom in order to be spared from being sexual objects of men. (Wisker 2010: 28-29) We can see from *The Handmaid's Tale* that Offred, too, thinks that she had some kind of freedom over herself, being able to think her own thoughts without getting punished. However, as Wisker (2010: 29) notes, “in the regimes of the fundamentalists where the veil is not a matter of choice and education is banned for women, there is no freedom.” Gilead has made sure that even if there is a certain freedom, it is of a kind that benefits this new rule. As Aunt Lydia puts it, “There is more than one kind of freedom /.../ Freedom to and freedom from. In the days on anarchy, it

was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don't underrate it." (Atwood 2010: 34).

In order for a totalitarian country to truly succeed, it has to have other components besides ideology, and Atwood has made it so, that in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*, it is religious fundamentalism. It can be said that the Bible is the foundation of the regime in these two novels. Howells (2005: 97) describes the fundamentalism as follows: "Gilead has adopted a peculiarly American version of religious fundamentalism which leans heavily on the country's Puritan inheritance". Other scholars have also noted this as a very powerful feature in the country's propaganda. The Bible can also be seen as taking on multiple functions in the story, for example, as a means of suppression as well as subversion (Christou 2016: 411). Furthermore, as Karen Stein (1996: 61) states, Gilead interprets the Bible in the most literal sense, taking it as the guidelines that allow them to perform sexual acts on women without actual consent in order to procreate. Atwood has cleverly intertwined historical events and places in this aspect as well, revealing that the choice of the setting for *The Handmaid's Tale* was indeed deliberate (Wisker 2010: 28). The novel's events take place in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the place where Harvard, that takes the title of an international place for learning and free thinking, lies. This makes it quite ironical in contrast to the storyline of the book. Moreover, it is also close to the site of the witch trials of Salem, where religious fundamentalism took centre stage in the prosecutions and deaths. (Wisker 2010: 28)

For a totalitarian country to rise and remain standing, it must have another key factor – fear. Fear can be instilled both physically and mentally. Physical abuse is not uncommon, when dealing with such regimes, but it is the mental suppression that makes the people believe in and obey the system, even if at first they see compliance as a wrongdoing. It can be done visually, like in *The Handmaid's Tale*, when the 'traitors' are hanged from the wall, for everyone to see. As Stein (1996: 65) notes, "with bags over their heads, they are anonymous,

featureless”, and she calls it ‘dehumanization’. Indeed, for when you take away the traits that make us ‘human’, there is nothing left and our own identity falls under question. Another reason why this display is so fearful is the fact that the people in Gilead are always being watched by the Eyes, much like the Security Forces of the State (KGB) in the Soviet Union. In both cases, a punishment would follow for all wrongdoers. Another way of engendering this fear is the mind control that those in power exercise over those who are not. In *The Handmaid’s Tale* as well as in *The Testaments*, there are the Aunts – women in charge of teaching the new generation their duties and places in the society. Just as other totalitarian countries in history have exercised the ‘fear politics’ and ‘mind control’ so is it in Gilead. The Aunts imprint the ideas of obedience on the minds of young girls, who will be the future Handmaids or Aunts. Aunt Lydia, one of the elite, is ironically the polar opposite to what she could be – instead of being the protector of these young girls, she encourages them to strip themselves of all human value and become as invisible as possible (Malak 1987: 12). She, we can say, is the tool of this system that so efficiently moulds new ‘tools’ in return, to worship and obey the new rule.

Making the people see that the regime is actually good for them can be hard, but not impossible, as we can see from history. This mostly succeeds, because the powerful new government can twist the words into something that they are not, but do it so that people believe them. Terms like ‘freedom’ and ‘choice’ acquire a whole new meaning, and without even noticing, the regime is forcing them to act like it is the new normality. It comes down to the point where, as Malak (1987: 13) notes, “choices become so severely constrained that /.../ life turns into a painfully prolonged prison term.” In order to gain anything from this, there are people who choose to collaborate with the new government, in hopes that somehow it will spare them from a horrid destiny. In *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Testaments*, almost everyone is in collaboration of some kind with someone. In a sense, dystopias emphasize the

inner conflict of the characters – the choice between what they want for themselves and what is socially acceptable (Malak 1987: 10). The biggest collaborators are the Aunts, serving multiple purposes to the country and in turn, they are praised by the new rule. Here, however, lies the problem of from which perspective we are looking at the problem at hand. In *The Handmaid's Tale* Aunt Lydia, as Howells (2005: 98) points out, “with her coyly feminine manner” seemed like “the most sadistic character in the novel”. In *The Testaments*, however, it is revealed just why she ‘chose’ to be the tool of the regime. Was she really just using other people to get what she wanted, or was there another agenda to her collaboration with the government?

## **The Rise and Fall of Gilead**

### **The Rise**

In order to fully understand, how the Republic of Gilead rose, perpetuated and fell, we must first take a look inside the mind of a character that was there for all of those parts. This thesis is focused on the character of Aunt Lydia; for she was the main culprit in shaping the next generations of Handmaids and Aunts, therefore she had the ability and possibility to change the course of future. As it has been mentioned before, Aunt Lydia is not the most analyzed character, nor are there many academic texts regarding *The Testaments*, for it was published in the early September of 2019. This is the main reason, why she is the focus of this work, since the main viewpoint of research papers have mostly been of Offred's and because *The Testaments* give us a glimpse of what was really going on inside the calm and collected, cruel and enslaved mind of Aunt Lydia.

To look at her life in the span across these two books, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*, we can note that in the first one mentioned she is portrayed as not the kindest of people. She is to be the tool of the system, carrying out their acts of cruelty, painting them to be for the benefit of all, especially the women. How cruel it truly is, to suppress the women of the society with the help of other women. In *The Testaments*, we get an insight into her life, how she came to be the way she is and how Aunt Lydia helped to mould the country she planned to destroy.

### **The Role of the Bible and Fundamental Religion**

The rise of Gilead, first and foremost, demanded the birth of a new faith. To believe in the new world order, or in this case, in the new regime is the anchor, which is to hold down the whole structure. It is easier to twist something that is already there to our own benefit, rather than to invent a whole new perspective. That is why, in these two books, the main ideology

goes hand in hand with fundamental religion. Most of what the Aunts are teaching at these so-called schools (for example The Rachel and Leah Centre, also known as The Red Centre) is the twisted version of the Bible. It would seem that the Gileadean people firmly believe in God, so it was but a matter of changing the angle of the belief. Referring back to Stein (1996: 61), Gilead literally takes a passage from a biblical text and recontextualizes it, for example, the ritual of The Ceremony. To justify the act of rape for the purposes of procreating, the passage from Genesis 30: 1-3 has been adapted in order to make the wish for offspring by Rachel seem like a new normality, in order to allow the Commander perform a sexual act on the Handmaid, while the Wife is present (Stein 1996: 61). Luckily for the revolutionaries, that organized the coup d'état, the younger generation already grown under this new regime did not know any better. So it was to be that these Bible studies were made to fit the new principles – that men were, in fact, superior and that women were always in the wrong, when it came to following the rules and taking responsibility for breaking them. Aunt Lydia was the one to oversee that the young girls of Gilead were taught in the right way, for she was the most important character in The Red Centre, the re-education facility for Handmaids. The main rule for women is that men will always be tempted by women, but it is up to them to set the boundaries, for when a man will advance them, it will be the women's fault, for making themselves so desirable. In *The Handmaid's Tale* Offred is walking with their driver, Nick, and is reflecting on what Aunt Lydia once said to her, when she was still a girl, in The Red Centre: "They can't help it, she said, God made them that way but He did not make you that way. He made you different. It's up to you to set the boundaries. Later you will be thanked." (Atwood 2010: 55). We can see that Aunt Lydia is trying not to justify the acts of men, but rather tries to root the idea of women being modest, invisible and for that they will be thanked and themselves be thankful.

In *The Testaments* there are many snippets of stories that the Aunts tell the girls, straight from the Bible as it were, only the stories are fitted so that the women in them are always the ones to be blamed and so must the future Handmaids be, should they overstep. For example, the story of the concubine, who deserved her horrible fate, because she was not “content with her lot and rebelled against it” (Atwood 2019: 78-79). Similarly to the passage from Genesis, so is this passage from the Book of Judges taken out of context and retold to the convenience of the Aunts. Another account in the novel, that proves how women could seemingly not speak of any harm that had fallen unto them, was that of a young girl called Becka and her father, who was a dentist. Not only did he abuse his own daughter, but also used his position as a way to take advantage of little girls who had come to his appointments, and no one could say a word, because the man was never to blame – they would accuse the female for tempting the man into action. The belief they had was the only thing that made sense to the people and so no one doubted it – for it had always been this way. Of course, people like Aunt Lydia knew this not to be true.

### **Faith in the System for the Purpose of Survival**

When we go back to the beginning of the regime, when all was still in its infancy, Aunt Lydia was but a simple teacher and a family court judge. This, for her and for so many other women in the country, determined her position in the new regime. People like her were considered to be of value; they were considered to be the key factors in keeping the regime functioning. At first, when she was ‘recruited’ she was given a choice – live in the new world and be a tool of the system or die. Aunt Lydia, like so many other women, were taken captive, tortured and their spirits crushed in the cruellest ways possible, in order to break them. People always think that they would rather die than betray their beliefs, up until the moment they have to face the choice, and so it was for Aunt Lydia. As she tells her story, she mentions how she had always believed in democracy, liberty, all that was taught in law school. However,

already in the beginning, we see she has a shift in belief or rather she starts to think in facts, in order to find a way out. While they are being held captive, waiting for their fate to interfere, she insists on staying alive. She had “been in tight corners before” (Atwood 2019: 117) and had come out victorious. She did not intend to consider any other option. Aunt Lydia was very determined on getting what she wanted, even then, and at the early stages of the regime, that was to be formed, she knew she would do anything to stay alive and that is what made her ruthless and possibly saved her life. Although she mentions that it was easier to already imagine yourself to be dead, because then the endgame would be easier to accept, she did survive. Aunt Lydia was human, above all, so she did surrender to the brutality physically, but she had been plotting revenge from the start and that is what kept her sane. She imagined she had a ‘third eye’ with which she did not weep, but saw – and behind that eye, someone that was not herself entirely was planning for the long road ahead of her, with one goal on her mind, and that was to get back at the people who had broken her (Atwood 2019: 149). Aunt Lydia tells herself, that she must endure; she must fake her belief, be smart and cunning. She does all this, for she knows there are only two roads she could choose from, and takes “the one most travelled by.” It is not without a cost, because as she explains, “it was littered with corpses, as such roads are” (Atwood 2019: 66). However, Lydia reminds the reader, that her own is not one of them.

Aunt Lydia was indeed smart, from the beginning to the end. As the regime took off, she demanded the separate sphere for women to be truly separate, so that women will ‘rule’ over it themselves – in short, they would answer to men, but they will not be commanded by men, if only in extreme need (Atwood 2019: 176). She was already trying to pave the way to her goal of destroying her captors one day, knowingly or not, but along that road she lost herself to the regime. She became more of a tool than she intended and at some point, she must have believed in the system, just like the rest of them. She “numbered” herself “among the faithful

for the same reason that many in Gilead did: because it was less dangerous” (Atwood 2019: 178).

### **Knowledge is Power**

Aunt Lydia is aware that knowledge is power, “especially discreditable knowledge” (Atwood 2019: 35). She goes around the regime, faithfully carrying out its orders, but not blindly. She is aware of everything and has information that is very useful in the endgame – when she will try and bring down the men that have wronged her. However, she has taken her time. She had a vast amount of information that could have been used against the men in charge, especially Commander Judd (the one in charge in Gilead), but she had not used it. We might ask, why? It comes down to the one question – how far gone is she in the system? If having knowledge is power, then surely she must have accustomed to it. Just like any other human being, she feels the responsibility and control that comes with it, making her stand above others. She admits she enjoys the power and at some point in time, she surely questions her own motives in this role she has been assigned to. As Howells (1998: 69) puts it, the fact that there is still a place for women (Aunts) to ‘rule’ in the ranks of men, does not yet guarantee that there will be a mutual understanding or even a ‘sisterhood’ between them, because just like some men, there are women who have a tendency for malevolence. While the Aunts are forced to work under patriarchy, they have a choice whether or not to use the power given to them over other women and they choose to act on it (Johnson 2004: 70).

Aunt Lydia does not question the regime or herself in the early stages of it, she is not yet that far come. At first, she believed she would have her revenge, later she believed in the system. When she stops believing in herself, or rather starts doubting her motives, she realizes what her true purpose is. In order to keep herself safe, Lydia has gained the status of a very valuable asset to the rule in Gilead, as well as someone, who has to be kept an eye on –

specifically because of the vast information she holds from the early stages of the country as well as the later stages. With the information she had, Aunt Lydia had a choice to make – whether to use it for something good or to use it to gain more power. In the end, she made the choice that defined the fate of Gilead for everyone.

## **The Perpetuation**

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Aunt Lydia sees the future for the country – at least that is what she imposes on the Handmaids ‘in training’. As she tutors the youngsters, she may have forgotten why she obeyed Commander Judd in the first place, taking her position as one of the most important figures of the new regime. In between trying to stay alive and plotting revenge, she firmly believed in the system, there is no doubt about it. Even if she did not, she did a very good job at keeping it from others. To the Handmaids, she gave words of comfort in the sense that they need not worry about what the future would hold, because it would surely be better than what it once was. “Some day, when times improve, /.../” she said to them, speaking of a future where the regime still upholds and furthermore, improves their life even more so (Atwood 2010: 54). However, a way of proving that Aunt Lydia was not so sympathetic towards the girls that were supposed to become these “worthy vessels” (Atwood 2010: 75), as Aunt Lydia would put it, was the fact that she firmly believed in not dwelling on the past. This is what she passed on to the girls as well, “Why bash your head, /.../, against a wall?” (Atwood 2010: 74) – an expression, simply put, to stress that there was no point in crying after the times the people had lost, because they would never return. Better to think of them as gone, dead, so there would be no hope left, for if there is no hope, there is no disappointment in the end.

## **Moulding the Next Generation**

There is no doubt that Aunt Lydia, along with all the other Aunts seemed cruel, and they certainly were, either deliberately or by default. They humiliated the girls who had done wrong in the past, mainly to do with luring men into sinful acts. When a young girl, Janine, was mocked in front of the classroom for being raped, it was a cruel act not just from the girls

in the classroom, but of the Aunts who encouraged it. They blamed her, for luring the men into using her and the Aunts stressed that God allowed it, if only to teach her a lesson. Later on, the girl admitted she was indeed in fault of her own misery that befell on her, and Aunt Lydia praised her – “Very good, Janine, /.../. You are an example.” (Atwood 2010: 82). Aunt Lydia knows very well, what happens when girls might cross the line and at that moment, she truly believes they deserve their fate, should they disobey the rules. For a woman to let another woman suffer in such a way is indeed the cruellest act of all, especially when we are dealing with patriarchy. Essentially, the Aunts teach the girls, that rape is admissible and Janine’s story, as Johnson (2004: 72) notes, is “a pivotal element in teaching the Handmaids that ritualistic rape at the hands of their Commanders will not only be tolerated but also encouraged.”

Aunt Lydia is the main character in forming a new generation and this helps to hold the regime, for the young girls to be raised mostly as Handmaids would have to uphold the sacred traditions and follow the rules. As she first starts to mould the next set of Handmaids as well as Aunts, she is nothing short of faithful. She knows the weight that will be put on the shoulders of these young women and she warns them to act as the strict regime has foreseen. She also emphasizes how the girls should be thankful that they have been given this opportunity to ‘serve’ their country and that they should feel content with the fact that all has been decided for them – they are being protected, after all. “Think of it as being in the army, /.../” is what Aunt Lydia said to Offred in *The Handmaid’s Tale* (Atwood 2010: 17-18). Indeed, they are being trained for something and the accommodations draw a parallel to that of barracks for soldiers, with nothing but a bed and a closet to hold your clothes. Offred muses how she knows why “there is no glass” covering the painting on the wall and how the “window opens only partly and why the glass in it is shatterproof” (Atwood 2010: 17). Even though Handmaids are taught that they will be content with the life given to them, that it is

what every woman would want, the Aunts know how some might think of death as a way out. Not running away, because that is not an option (not while the Eyes are ever-watchful), but dying. However we look at it, Aunt Lydia is indeed the tool of the regime, but even she knows the ways of the mind and cannot deny that death would seem a sweet escape for some, who are not so faithful to the regime.

*The Handmaid's Tale* brings out this side of Aunt Lydia the most, making the readers think of her as the most important and at the same time, hypocritical character of all. She is a woman, training young girls to be just like her – untrusting of her female companions and always bowing down to men (although later we learn that she did not, in fact, think of herself as lesser than men). She had the choice to be the guiding light, a mother figure, to these young girls. Instead, she acted just like the regime expected her to – ruthless and unforgiving, should you fail to follow the rules. In a sense, that is what made her superior – she knew how to work the angles in her favour. Aunt Lydia was indeed a firm believer of the regime, at first. She thought of the fallen country as something that was withering away, however they would have tried to uphold it. As she put it, “We were a society dying, /.../, of too much choice” (Atwood 2010: 35). The new society gave no choice – or it did, but not for the women to choose from. Men would choose for them and then the responsible women would choose for the ones below them and so on. Leaving the Handmaids with only one actual choice – to obey or to not, and suffer the consequences. Normally, there were very few who chose the latter.

### **Upholding of the Faith**

We get a glimpse of scenes where it might be doubtful, if Aunt Lydia believed in what she was doing, or if she was doing it willingly anymore. All love power and get lost in it, but there is a cost to that. Aunt Lydia had seen inside herself, when she had picked up that gun at the stadium (Atwood 2019: 172), proving her loyalty to the regime (although her rifle held a blank, as the Commander Judd later revealed). She saw her darkest corners and what she

would be willing to do, to survive. However, she displays weakness from time to time, be it just for show or be it truth, but she does. Offred describes her standing before them, speaking of how she is doing all of this for the sake of them, the Handmaids, so they could have a better future. “I’m trying to give you the best chance you can have” she says to them, tearing up, and she mentioned, how this is not “easy for her either”, making the reader doubt in her belief in the system, or even in what she has been set out to do (Atwood 2010: 65). This is also a small indication to self-justification – she is clearly aware of the horrid things she has done and will probably do in the future, so she seeks to justify her actions, pressing the Handmaids to believe that it is all for them and that it is not without sacrifice from Aunt Lydia. With all of this she is trying to convince herself that her faith into the regime is still present.

Aunt Lydia, along with the other Aunts selected to make the new rules and laws of the regime, is proud of how much they “managed to accomplish, despite the limitations”(Atwood 2019: 178). She might not have liked the country they were building, but she did take pride in her work and on some level, she believed in all she had done. The human mind works in mysterious ways – drill something into it long enough and we will start to believe it. This was the case with Aunt Lydia, who might have known in the back of her mind that she was paving a way to something horrendous, but such was her fate. We can see how she thinks, how she still tries to control what is happening to her, but at the same time she is losing herself to the system: “For a time I almost believed what I understood I was supposed to believe” (Atwood 2019: 178).

### **Tool of the Regime**

In contrast to the Commanders, Aunts had many more duties and responsibilities, despite the fact that the Commanders were the higher power in Gilead. Not only were the Aunts responsible for the education of Handmaids in the Rachel and Leah Centre, but also for

the supervision of other women in the country, for example the Jezebels (prostitutes) at the 'clubs' for Commanders. Aunt Lydia was also the one who oversaw the Salvagings and Particutions, both rituals meant to punish the female as well as male wrongdoers. The Commanders mainly oversaw the arranged marriages, read the Bible to their household and were responsible for impregnating the Handmaids. It is clear that even though Aunts were supposedly of lower status than the Commanders, they had a lot more responsibilities and harsher ones. This in turn suggests that they were being used as tools to carry out the more complicated assignments, with which the Commanders would not want to bother themselves with. Aunt Lydia did this with great devotion and that much is clear. In the end, it is the Aunts that enforce the rules and laws of the new totalitarian regime onto the women of the country (Kormali 1996: 75). With the generation of Offred in *The Handmaid's Tale* Aunt Lydia was perhaps a bit more gentle than with the ones in *The Testaments* because Offred's generation remembered the time before the new regime and this made the transition that much harder. However, this did not mean that Aunt Lydia would pardon them from the cruel forms of moulding them into the Handmaids – even as she acknowledged their pains and sacrifices, she noted that “For the ones who come after you, it will be easier. They will accept their duties with willing hearts” (Atwood 2010: 127). This gives us an idea of how she really worked for the regime – with her words she was supposed to give comfort, but the meaning behind them echoed ‘Do not disobey, because the regime will uphold even without you, but you will not survive without the regime’. There was always the next generation and then the next that the Aunts could craft to their own image and that was the most evident proof of how they were the tools of the system, carrying out its will in almost blind faith.

Another key factor that showed how the Aunts carried out orders of the country was how they used the Handmaids to their advantage. Aunt Lydia knew that she needed people she could depend on; not trust, but who would want to be in her favours so much that they

would be willing to betray their own sisters, so to speak. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Aunt Lydia asks for Janine to be her spy amongst the other girls, training to be Handmaids, after another girl called Moira has managed to escape The Red Centre (Atwood 2010: 140-142). Offred knew of this, because Janine had herself told this to another girl and so the news travelled, but that did not mean she would not betray them, if need be. The Aunts knew how to manipulate the girls, Aunt Lydia was the master of it, and in order to get 'on her good side' every other girl would have done the same. This proves even further, that the Aunts were mainly responsible for turning the women against each other. In the beginning, Aunt Lydia was just like everyone else – fulfilling her duty and placing herself first. At that time and place, they all had to, even if in secret. However, as we see from the next generation in *The Testaments*, Aunt Lydia has started to use this to her advantage – she had spies everywhere, but not just for the sole purpose of punishing those who oppose the regime (it was still a motive, but not the priority), but for the purpose of finding information that could help to destroy the regime. Indeed, Aunt Lydia was faithful to the regime, only as long as she found something concrete to bring it down with and that is where the organization of Mayday comes in – a group of resistance that is created to bring down Gilead from the inside and Aunt Lydia uses it to her advantage.

## **The Fall**

Gilead, like other totalitarian countries that we recognize from history, was never meant to last. The rule of this fictional country was first of all rigid and based on religious fundamentalism as well as patriarchy, but it was also oppressive of women's sexuality. All of the named qualities are a set of rules made to create a new mass culture, but these regimes rarely work out. The fact that it was Aunt Lydia, who was the main 'culprit' in helping the regime rise, was the first and most important mistake, if it can be called as such. When dealing with patriarchy, it should be expected that a woman with beliefs such as Aunt Lydia held, would eventually turn its back on the regime. The fall of Gilead was written even before the new rule began, because the Commanders, with Commander Judd as the leader, underestimated the power of an intelligent woman. As Aunt Lydia, knowing she was powerful, would say: "A law degree and a uterus: a lethal combination" (Atwood 2019: 144).

## **The Expansion of Freedom and Losing the Faith**

As Aunt Lydia's perspectives of the system change, so do the ones of freedom. She knows that freedom is expanding. It has always been a matter of perspective, one can interpret freedom differently, but she is aware that the scales are tipping to the advantage of cracking the facade of the regime. To us it would seem that women had no freedom inside Gilead. In fact, as the Aunts said, it is a freedom in its own, that everything is dictated to the women – that way they will not fall to the wrong path and are safe from the outside world and its sins. Aunt Lydia believes in freedom of choice – the first time she mentions it, she talks about death. She still has a choice – "Not whether to die, but when and how" and thus she questions, "Isn't that a freedom of a sort?" (Atwood 2019: 32). She is not only witnessing the change in perspective of the people of Gilead but in herself as well. By taking away the freedom of will, people start to look for freedom inside their

own minds – their thoughts are their own and they cannot be taken from them; that is their freedom – to think (but never to say out loud). Lydia notes that no matter how much their actions are restricted, and when death is certain, it is still in their power to decide, how they shall leave this world. That is as powerful as actual freedom, because it gives hope that all is not yet lost. Even Offred points out, that when the tourists in Gilead seem underdressed to them, because for them it is foreign, she still remembered how they used to have the choice to dress just the same – “That was freedom” (Atwood 2010: 38).

Circling back to the belief Aunt Lydia supposedly had in the system, we can see that she is battling with herself. She gives us an insight of what the republic of Gilead is believed to be, what the men in power make it out to be – the corrupt ways of the past have to be forced to a halt in order to create a new, pure and clean generation that was to come. Just after she had made this revelation, she continues to state that “Such is the theory” (Atwood 2019: 4). She knows it by heart, is aware of what the regime expects of it all, of her, but she is in doubt of those words. The theory is only as good as the practice and for Aunt Lydia, the practice has been entirely in her hands. She was able to manipulate the rules and ways to her liking. In the end, the theory was just a theory. The practice turned out to be close to the cause at first and then, never survived because the men had made the mistake of underestimating women and the will of freedom.

Another little insight into her disbelief in the system is the Ardua Hall’s special Spring Equinox Grace in *The Testaments*– Aunt Lydia has concocted a clever motto, where ‘Ardua’ can stand for ‘difficulty’ as well as ‘female progenerative labour’ and Estrus might have something to do with hormones but might also hint at pagan rites of spring. The wordplay that she herself has created testifies that she is not a firm believer; furthermore, Aunt Lydia mocks the system, even though no one else can understand it, for “they are repeating the right words in the right order, and thus are safe”. (Atwood 2019: 33)

### **Rules are Meant to be Broken**

Although the regime was upheld by a strong rule of patriarchy and they tried to enforce these hard rules on the people, it would never have worked – there is always someone who thinks they are above these rules and here we start with the Commanders. As the most powerful forces in Gilead, they enforced and approved of the rules but do not themselves obey them. For example, being untrue to one's wife is illegal – meaning mistresses are illegal. Still, the Handmaids have to engage in sexual acts with the Commanders (while the Wife is present) in order to carry a baby. Not to mention the so-called 'clubs' which were in truth, brothels, where the Jezebels served to entertain the Commanders. This speaks against their own rules. As does owning things that are forbidden in Gilead – like old magazines, for example. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Offred's household Wife smokes cigarettes obtained from the black market, while the Commander shows Offred a colourful magazine from the time before the new rule – revealing again, that the rules are not followed. This cracks the system, making people believe, that maybe they, too, can have some freedom from these rules, loopholes as it were, and get away with it. "Forbidden things are open to the imagination" (Atwood 2019: 15), as Aunt Lydia puts it, revealing once again that she knows perfectly of the flaws of the system and has planned to use them.

Another thing that can be seen as something created to uphold the peace, but may backfire, are the ceremonies of Salvaging and Particutions. The first is a public execution for women (or men) that have committed a crime against the country; women were usually hanged in front of the other women of the society (Atwood 2010: 278-288). The second was a more gruesome ceremony – a male accused of a crime (usually rape) was being executed by the Handmaids; Since they were not allowed weapons, they used their hands and were allowed to kill the person as they pleased (Atwood 2010: 290-292).

Both give the Handmaids an outlet to the rage as well as grief over their lost freedom, which is why they were created in the first place by the Commanders, in order to prevent uprisings. This, however, has a tendency to backfire. Lorraine M. York (1990: 13) sums it up perfectly, indicating to the attempts at creating a 'mass culture' and why it would be doomed from the start: "Nevertheless, such attempts to forge a mass culture are bound to fail, Atwood suggests, because of the radical possibilities for subversion contained within these rituals and their assumptions."

### **Cracks in the Facade and Undermining it from the Inside**

Aunt Lydia had the power to shape the new generation of Handmaids and she knows very well, what kind of power she holds. Once she is certain of her role in this regime, once she is truly committed to her cause, Aunt Lydia starts to shape the next generation into someone, who could finally help her take down the vicious and merciless regime. With the help of Mayday, she is able to recruit people to carry out her orders, with the goal of taking down the government of Gilead. Aunt Lydia managed to connect the outside of Gilead to the inside, letting her spies in the resistance find 'Baby Nicole', whose disappearance she herself orchestrated. 'Baby Nicole', or as she is known in the testaments, Daisy, was a daughter of an unknown Handmaid (though later in the book, a researcher speculates her to be the daughter of Nick and Offred), who managed to smuggle her into Canada. The whole ordeal was engineered by Aunt Lydia, later we might understand this as a gesture to show that betrayal can happen anywhere, even in the pure country of Gilead. Later, Aunt Lydia manages to recruit Daisy, as well as her half-sister Agnes, who is training to be an Aunt under Lydia. Therefore, she had all the necessary means – the information as well as the people to carry her orders out – to break the iron rule of Gilead. Thanks to Aunt Lydia's carefully devised plan, the information about Gilead's true face travels to the outside world along with Daisy and Agnes. She had

always wanted to show the corrupted ways of the country she had helped to make, but she knew from the start that she could not do it alone. Daisy had an essential role in her plan, for she “bears witness to the possibility of betrayal within Gilead and to the deviousness and cunning of the Handmaids, who can never be trusted” (Atwood 2019: 33).

As Aunt Lydia describes the downward spiral of the “vanished” country of hers (Atwood 2019: 66), she mentions how the infrastructure had fallen, making way to all these new problems, that the upcoming regime sought to solve. There is an interesting parallel to the way she describes how Gilead itself was later on falling. People grew restless, asking questions no one knew the answer to and that in turn meant the new regime had its faults, which made it two-faced, just like Aunt Lydia herself was. Aunt Lydia stated that although the country tried to portray the outer image of purity and perfection, beneath it all “Gilead was rotting” (Atwood 2019: 308). She was well aware that inside this country of theirs, everything was far from perfection. As she points out, “/.../ accidents happen frequently. Someone has already written my funeral eulogy, it goes without saying” (Atwood 2019: 62), which demonstrates yet again the amount of information she possessed. Aunt Lydia is the person even the top Commanders trusted their secrets to, and she kept them, with the promise of her own safety. She kept many secrets and not only that, she was smart to never pass away any information – useful or not. Aunt Lydia knew perfectly well that her enemies might become useful to her one day. As she notes, “Keep your friends close but your enemies closer. Having no friends, I must make do with enemies” (Atwood 2019: 181).

Aunt Lydia most probably knows that when she will put her plan into action, one that will destroy this regime, she will not be making it out alive. Seemingly, it is self-sacrificial and noble, even, of her to make peace with it as she hopes that there is still time for her plan to work: “It’s not yet the midnight of my life; the bell has not yet tolled, and

Mephistopheles has not yet turned up to collect the price I must pay for out bargain” (Atwood 2019: 173). She just hopes that she can set it all in motion, before her time comes, because as she mentions frequently, it is coming: “Time, I plead to the air, just a little more time. That’s all I need” (Atwood 2019: 62).

### **Breaking Point and Vengeance**

Aunt Lydia has spun her web from the beginning, be it intentionally or unknowingly, but as we approach the end of her story, we realize that she had always tried to be true to herself. This includes admitting actually believing that Gilead would survive and how she willingly offers that she is not all that good of a person – everyone has their darker side, much like dystopia is the darker side of utopia. Aunt Lydia did what most people would have done in her situation – she gave up her free will to survive, because none of us wish to die. However, understanding her motives and agendas, we know that she was not as evil and cruel as depicted in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, but a cunning woman, who truly believed that before her time comes, she might have the ‘last laugh’ so to speak, and would be able to avenge the ones on her ‘list’ (Atwood 2019: 32) while simultaneously dragging Gilead, that made her into what she was, down with her. The men in charge, starting with Commander Judd, would not and probably did not even expect it, although the Commander did not take Aunt Lydia for a fool; after all, as Aunt Lydia herself put it: “You don’t believe the sky is falling until a chunk of it falls on you” (Atwood 2019: 66).

## Conclusion

Setting out to understand the mechanics behind the rise as well as the fall of a regime such as Gilead's, we know now that there are certain aspects and notions that need to be carried out by certain people. These people are the tools of the system, without them there would be no regime. In Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*, we see the dystopian Republic of Gilead, its cruel politics and rule of men. In order to let something like that become a reality, there have to be people willing to help it rise. Aunt Lydia was a complex character, first and foremost portrayed as the puppeteer of the system, who helped carry out its will in the faith that it was truly something worth fighting for. As we have come to see, there was more to her than *The Handmaid's Tale* made her out to be – Aunt Lydia was to be the person to help corrupt the regime and ruin (or rather, save) the future of Gilead.

Starting out, she had faith in what she was doing – the new laws and rules created were of her as well as the other Aunts' doing. It helped, that the people of Gilead were already firm believers, in which case the fundamental religion was easier to implement. She knew how much power she had and intended to keep it that way – so she herself would be safe of harm's way (but as we have come to know, no-one is truly safe in a totalitarian regime). Over the course of these two books, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*, she discovered a lot about herself and what she might be capable of. The fact that she was a woman, training other women to be the tools of the system, made her out to be the cruellest character at first. As her character developed, she started to use this to her advantage, in order for the next generation to be free of the oppressive rule. Gradually Aunt Lydia corrupted the regime, spinning her web cunningly and carefully, recruiting young girls from the inside, in hopes that there would be a better future for them.

Lydia believed in herself, in the end, more than she did in the system, that she had helped form. Due to this, she was able to see past the fears and terrors of stepping up to a

regime that demoted and humiliated women. Aunt Lydia was a smart woman, she knew how to work the angles in her favour – she enjoyed power just as the next person, but in the end, she stayed true to her beliefs, once she figured out that her goal was to have vengeance on the people who had made her this puppeteer. All this only proves that without firm believers, there would not be a rise of a totalitarian country, such as Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union or the fictional Republic of Gilead. Just as they, the first chosen people who would be the most important and loyal tools of the system, are needed to create a new regime, they are the ones that will eventually turn out to be the ‘nails in the regime’s coffin’.

Margaret Atwood has said that “there isn’t anything in the book [*The Handmaid’s Tale*] not based on something that has already happened in history or in another country, or for which actually supporting documentation is not already available”(An Interview with Margaret Atwood 1997: 2). She has repeated this statement many times over the course of hundreds of interviews, concerning not just *The Handmaid’s Tale*, but every one of her dystopian novels which is why, as we have come to realize, she does not like to categorize them as pure science fiction. This is what makes her novels and their plots intriguing as well as terrifying – the prospect of these horrors in her dystopian novels taking place some day in the future, because they have already happened (in some form) in the past, is truly frightening. The problems in today’s society are talked of but the ‘red flags’ are not necessarily heeded. The story of Gilead, its rise and fall and the story of Aunt Lydia as the main culprit in both aspects broaden our mind into thinking further from what is just under our noses. It may well all become a reality, not just fiction, thus novels like these should always be thoroughly analysed, for they have so much more to offer than just the pleasures of reading.

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## Resümee

TARTU ÜLIKOOL  
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

**Johanna Rehelem**

**The Rise and Fall of Gilead: an Analysis through the Character of Aunt Lydia in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments***

**Gileadi tõus ja langus: analüüs läbi Aunt Lydia tegelaskuju Margaret Atwoodi teostes "Teenijanna lugu" ja "Testamendid"**

Bakalaureusetöö

2020

Lehekülgede arv: 36

Tänapäeva maailmas ja ühiskonnas, milles elame on mitmeid olulisi ning laiaulatuslikke probleeme. Käesolev bakalaureusetöö analüüsib kahte Margaret Atwoodi teost, "Teenijanna lugu" ning "Testamendid", andes aimu, kui nutikalt ning kui hirmuäratava täpsusega on see kuulus Kanada autor neid probleeme lahanud. Mõlemad raamatud on teosed, mida peab lugema mõttega ning eesmärgiga pöörata seal olevatele hoiatustele tähelepanu. Ajaloos on toimunud mitmeid sõdu, oleme näinud nälga, katku ja palju muid kohutavaid sündmusi, kuid inimkond peatub harva, et mõelda tulevikule ning mis saab siis, kui me oma vigadest ei õpi. Just seetõttu peaks Atwoodi teoseid võtma kui hoiatuslugusid – kõik mis on juhtunud minevikus, kaasa arvatud kohutavad sündmused, võivad juhtuda ka tulevikus. Nii aitab käesolev bakalaureusetöö teadvustada, et nende probleemide üle tuleks sügavamalt mõelda.

Bakalaureusetöö sissejuhatus tutvustab kahte mainitud teost lühidalt, samuti antakse ülevaade meetodist, millega neid analüüsiti. Kirjanduse ülevaates märgitakse ära mõningad bakalaureusetöö valmimise jaoks tähtsaks osutunud akadeemilised artiklid ja analüüsid, mis puudutavaid kas teoseid endid või nende tegelaskujusid, ning mille eesmärk oli antud tööga kooskõlas. Empiiriline osa, mis on jaotatud kolmeks suuremaks peatükiks ning mitmeks alapeatükiks, lahkab fiktsionaalse totalitaarse režiimi tõusu, püsimist ja langust Gileadi Vabariigis, kus leiab peamiselt aset teoste sündmustik, tehes seda läbi Tädi Lydia silmade. Kokkuvõtte esitab uurimistöö peamised tulemused, tuues välja kõige olulisemad aspektid Gileadi Vabariigi kujunemisel ja langusel, võttes aluseks ka ajaloost tuntud totalitaarsed ühiskonnad. Peamine aspekt selliste ühiskondade kujunemisel on ideoloogia, Gileadi puhul oli see käsikäes fundamentaalse religiooniga. Totalitaarsed režiimid aga leiavad oma languse samade käte läbi, kes enamasti aitasid neid ehitada – nende teoste ning Gileadi puhul oli tegu Tädi Lydiaga, mistõttu oli ka tema perspektiiv selle bakalaureusetöö fookuseks.

Märksõnad:

Kanada kirjandus, düstopia, Margaret Atwood, totalitaarne režiim, Tädi Lydia

## **Lihtlitsents**

### **Lihtlitsents lõputöö reprodutseerimiseks ja lõputöö üldsusele kättesaadavaks tegemiseks**

Mina, Johanna Rehelem,

1. annan Tartu Ülikoolile tasuta loa (lihtlitsentsi) enda loodud teose

The Rise and Fall of Gilead: an Analysis through the Character of Aunt Lydia in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*,  
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