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Women and Women:  
Use of Women Types as Rhetorical Techniques in Atwood's  
*Handmaid's Tale* and Tepper's *Gate to Women's Country*.

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*Abstract: In this article, I argue both Margaret Atwood in Handmaid's Tale and Sheri S. Tepper in Gate to Women's Country use the same three 'women type' characters to explore ideal female gender roles and their relationship to society. Further, I argue that both authors use these characters as part of their bigger rhetorical engagement with the American gender essentialist political movements of 1980s. In particular, I argue that Atwood's types, despite her empathy with the feminist movement, distance her from both radical second-wave separatist feminism and the American religio-political conservative movement of the 80s, and, against Dopp, that Offred does in fact offer an effective ideal female to be emulated in that, by the end of the novel, she defines and externalizes her self. On the other hand, for Tepper I argue, against Pierson, that Gate is not intrinsically anti-sexual but rather anti-romanticism, sexuality—homosexual and otherwise—only the unfortunate collateral damage, and, further, that Tepper's women types align her much closer to the essentialism of second- and third-wave feminism than Atwood.*

*Keywords: Atwood, Tepper, Gender Roles, Women, Science Fiction, Handmaid's Tale, Gate to Women's Country*

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“There are women and there are women, aren't there? There's Morgot and there's Myra, for example.”  
(Joshua in Sheri S. Tepper's *Gate to Women's Country*)

In Sheri S. Tepper's novel *Gate to Women's Country*, when Joshua says there's women and women, what he *really* means is that there's women and there's *women*. Good women and not so good women. Women with virtues beneficial to society and women with traits, well, not so much. There are saints and sluts. Yins and yangs. Nuns and succubae. Cains and Abels, except with pairs of two X chromosomes. Or so men have been saying for thousands of years.

However, today the voices speaking in regard to female gender roles are not all baritone. Two examples of feminist speculative fiction of the late 1980s—Margaret Atwood's *Handmaid's*

*Tale* (1985) and Sheri S. Tepper's *Gate to Women's Country* (1988) —are perfect examples of *women* writers using these types to explore a range of feminine gender roles. Both novels use what I call the *pathetic woman*, the *heroic woman*, and the *enlightened woman* to explore “the complex interconnection of individual and societal identity” and “women’s ability to actively construct their places in a social space—either in complicity with existing forms, or in resistance to them” (Wagner-Lawlor “Play” 114 and 117).

Dopp in “Subject-Position as Victim-Position in *The Handmaid's Tale*” notes Offred’s stagnancy in relation to victim positions across the narrative (2). Atwood’s victim positions are as follows:

Position 1 - To deny your victimization.

Position 2 - To acknowledge your victimization but attribute it to irresistible powers or Powers.

Position 3 - To acknowledge your victimization but to believe in and desire its escapability.

Position 4 - To escape victimization and use creative acts to resist it for yourself and others. (Survival 36-39)

In particular, regarding *Handmaid's Tale*, I argue against Dopp that, despite Offred’s timid stagnancy in Victim Position Two, *Handmaid's Tale* still functions as an effective feminist critique in its call for women to possess, define, and externalize their selves. And for *Gate to Women's Country*, I argue, against Pearson, that Tepper uses these women types not to reject sexuality, queer or otherwise, but women’s romanticism, as can be deduced from the women types and their relation to each other and *Women's Country* as a whole.

## A Ternion of Women Types

Though it is unlikely each was aware of the other’s novels when writing their own, both Tepper and Atwood use the same three women types as part of their respective novels’ rhetorical techniques.

First, the *enlightened woman*, the protagonist in both novels, is a woman who has become, or has always been, disillusioned regarding the artificiality of her society’s asserted gender roles. The enlightened woman understands the performativity of her external acts, her societal self, required to survive and function in society. As such, she retains a conscious second real self, as Wagner-Lawlor puts it, “a sort of ironical double consciousness,” which “thereby initiate[s] a resistance to [her] (en)forced invisibility” (“Play” 116). She is a woman who has become “keenly aware of [her] own theatricality” (“Play” 114) and thus resists the asserted roles internally, externally, or both. The dynamic and conflict between these two selves, the personal and societal, constitutes her primary internal conflict, and the final relationship between the two constitutes, in the two novels, the ideal relationship between a woman’s personal and societal self.

The *heroic woman*, however, has already made this transition, in certain ways, and in each story, the enlightened woman idolizes and respects many of her character traits and wants to emulate her, though the enlightened woman’s own timidity or rebelliousness hinders her from doing so. She is a masculinized woman, a woman with confidence, knowledge, and power. Because of this, she inevitably comes into conflict with the other masculine entities in the novels: the patriarchal, oppressive society. She both hates and is hated by it, or at least what it represents, and is singularly purposed to escape or eliminate it. She is, at least in part, juxtaposed against the pathetic woman at one end on the spectrum along which the enlightened woman transitions.

And last, directly opposite to the heroic woman, the *pathetic woman* has, unlike the enlightened woman and heroic woman, defined herself in congruence with the essentialist gender roles of the oppressive patriarchal society, roles that attribute a biologically consistent set of behaviors to women and provide a convenient means by which patriarchal society can establish male power as natural at women's expense. The pathetic woman is, as Mary Wollstonecraft terms it in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, a masquerading woman, a woman completely immersed in the artificial gender roles, an "unselfconscious woman who is unaware she is losing herself" to the oppressive society's roles and expectations. Her satisfaction and fulfillment comes singularly from fulfilling these expectations and "being chosen as an object of consumption of desire by masculine subjects" (Wollstonecraft 111). Because of this, the patriarchy approves of the pathetic woman, her fellows dislike her, the heroic woman attempts her succor, but *all* pity her. Her characterization and fate symbolize the practical results of the particular gender roles she adopts and the results of adopting essentialist gender roles as a whole. Will the Real Woman Please Stand Up? The 1970s and 80s American Battle for True Womanhood

Both novels are written in relation to several American gender-essentialist political movements between the 1960s and 80s. Around 1960, first-wave feminism birthed second-wave. Whereas first-wave feminism addressed primarily women's suffrage, labor laws, and women's place in the workplace and post-war society, second-wave, among other issues, focused mainly on women's sexuality, family, and reproductive rights. While the various feminisms within the second wave ostensibly resisted the essentialist gender roles of the post-war period, many espoused liberated roles problematic for their own essentialism. For example, in 1960, Simone de Beauvoir wrote her seminal history of the oppression of women's sexuality by men, *The Second Sex*, and, in the process, defined a radically different, but equally essentialist, set of ideal women's gender roles.

The emancipated woman... refuses to confine herself to her role as female, because she will not accept mutilation; woman is a complete individual, equal to the male, only if she too is a human being with her [liberated] sexuality (de Beauvoir 682).

Though de Beauvoir does not reject heterosexuality outright, true femininity, true womanhood, necessarily involves a liberated sexuality, a sexuality hitherto "mutilated" in the "age long sexual limitation by men" (de Beauvoir 694), a sexuality hitherto constrained to the institution of heterosexual marriage. Only when this sexuality is liberated—unshackled from the oppressive conservative institutions regulating it—does a woman realize true womanhood. In this, de Beauvoir seeks to liberate women from the largely conservative essentialist gender roles of pre-1960. But while her roles radically oppose any previous, they remain essentialist, asserting liberated sexuality as natural and a pseudo or incomplete status on any woman remaining, by choice or necessity, in a non-liberated sexual relationship. Any women who choose to remain in monogamous, heterosexual marriages are slaves and enablers of the patriarchal institutions that have repressed women for thousands of years.

In America, the urge to essentialize a liberated sexuality resulted in two decades of a hypersexualized, anti-marriage feminism, two decades of women who "wanted a sexuality of their own, disconnected from obligations of marriage and motherhood" (Krolokke and Sorenson 10). In literature, long tracts like *Against our Will*, exploring rape and sexual violence against women, were stacked in feminist bookstores next to women's ideology like *Feminine Mystique* and *The BITCH Manifesto*. In *Les Guérillères*, sexually liberated women violently destroy "the man, the enemy..., the domineering oppressors," and married woman is "a chained dog... [who] rarely taste the delights of love" (108). And in concurrence with "the personal is the political," no issue of women's sexuality was ever restricted to the individual sphere. Picket signs in the streets, bra and bikini-babe

magazine bonfires, and all-women rap groups were the flavor for the following 20 years. In the 80s, toward the end of the movement, the sex wars, battles between the sex positive (pro-pornography) and anti-porn feminists, turned feminists against one another, and radical female separatists virulently attempted to assert their own essentialist gender roles politically, forming an invasive gender-essentialist positivist political institution in their own right.

But by the mid-80s, as Susan Faludi notes, even as American women arrived closer than they had ever been to full equality, a full-scale backlash was in effect by both American conservative groups and progressive feminists. Betty Friedan took a stand against the hyper-sexualism of second-wave feminism in her book *The Second Stage*.

In the first stage, the woman's movement directed too much of its energy into sexual politics, from personal bedroom wars against men, to mass marches against rape or pornography, to "take back the night." Sexual war is a self-defeating acting out of rage. It does not change the condition of our lives (202).

Friedan called for a reorientation of political feminism away from sexuality toward women's growing social and economic concerns. As women now occupied a larger part of the workforce, now had jobs, owned—in addition to cribs and baby-bottles—cars, careers, and bank accounts, men and married women were no longer the enemy, if they ever were. Poverty and class disparity took forefront concern. In Friedan's progressive feminism, sexuality was no longer the central issue but rather economy.

But these recantations and reconsiderations were, in some aspects, too little, too late. The virulent rhetoric, extreme sexualism and essentialist roles of American separatist feminism were, in the minds of conservative Americans, the dogma of *all* feminism and *all* other modern women's liberation movements, and many male and female conservatives wanted nothing to do with it.

Parallel to this, in the late 70s Jerry Falwell saw the decay of the nation's morality and founded the Moral Majority. Other groups such as the Christian Voice, Focus on the Family and The Family Research Coalition were founded near the same time. Falwell rallied his four-million-member Moral Majority and its two million donors in an "idealized version of America, a Christian nation commissioned by God to prevail in the battle against evil" (Tenbus 7) and saw in Reagan a leader for this new religio-political institution. The Moral Majority used direct-mail campaigns, hot lines, and television and radio broadcasts to call for resistance to second-wave feminism and the whole "liberal establishment," promoting censorship of "anti-family" media, opposing the ERA and abortion, and calling for governmental evangelism. Eager to politically declare their gender ideologies, Falwell sought to "unite God and country," asserting that to support abortion, the ERA, alternative gender roles, or homosexuality was both "anti-American and blasphemous" (Tenbus 7). According to Faludi, the New Right's attack on women, a means to simultaneously stage and combat their own sense of emasculation, became the vehicle by which the Moral Majority propelled themselves to political power (237).

Intrinsic to this American conservative movement was deep-seated Christian family-centrism and the biblical essentialist gender role of woman as child bearer. Biblically, as early as Genesis 29-30, children are seen as a blessing from God to righteous women. David writes in the Psalms, the Lord "settles the barren woman her home as a happy mother of children" (Psa 113:9). Sons are a "heritage, reward, blessing, and security to a man" (Psa 127:3-5), and it is the responsibility of women to bear them for their husbands, propagating the tribe of Israel, actualizing God's promise to become a nation more numerous than the visible stars (Genesis 15:2-5). Into the New Testament, Paul, who viewed the Christian church as the continuation/actualization of the Jewish people, writes that Christian women will also be "saved by childbearing" if they continue in

the faith. Biblically, God's covenant is a covenant of children, and it is the responsibility of women to help realize it through motherhood. And feeling the pressure of second-wave separatist feminism to dismantle this scriptural set of family and gender roles, many, though not all, conservative men and women pushed strongly for a return to "traditional values." Helen Andelin's book *Fascinating Womanhood*, a book which promoted husband as leader and woman as helper, the supposed filial structure of a bygone American halcyon age, sold thousands of copies. And even many women who rejected Andelin's ideal Christianized gender roles as eerily reticent of the *Stepford Wives* feared and resisted separatist feminism's devaluing of women as homemaker and mother, roles in which many found value and satisfaction, even those who supported greater economic and social freedoms for women (Trowbridge). Harvard-educated attorney Phyllis Schlafly, for example, saw the ERA as a threat to women's right to be homemakers supported by men (Faludi 239). All in all, by the late 1980s, both American conservatism and second-wave separatist feminism had become equally politically essentialist, asserting in direct contrast to each other their own monolithic "true" female gender roles and ideal selves. And it is in relation to these two gender-essentialist movements that Atwood's and Tepper's novels and women types can be understood.

### **What's In a Name? Atwood's Use of Women Types in *Handmaid's Tale***

#### *Janine*

Janine is the pathetic woman in *Handmaid's Tale*, and she's characterized as the Moral Majority essentialist woman: woman as child bearer. As Tenbus notes, the biblical gender role of woman as child bearer is "palimpsestuous" to Gilead: "Instead of breasts, Gilead sees wombs. Objectifying women, fragmenting the Handmaid's whole being..., Gilead enacts a kind of pornographic behavior without the pictures" (258). Suppressing her pre-convulsion self as a waiter, Janine embraces these hyperbolized biblical gender roles, and *only* these roles, embracing the ceremonies and duties required by them and finding her satisfaction in their completion. St. Paul is echoed by Offred when she calls Janine "a flag on a hilltop, showing us what still can be done: we too can be saved" (26-27). Offred describes Janine during pregnancy as "glowing, rosy, ...enjoying every minute of this" (26). She throws herself into the Testifying and finds pride in telling the stories of her rape and abortion, blaming herself for them (71). She is the "classic victim figure" (Howells 98), a woman utterly ignorant of her own victimization, and remains in Atwood's Victim Position 1 throughout the novel.

Because of this, different women in the novel view Janine in different ways. The aunts and commanders' wives condescendingly objectify and baby her: "You're a reliable girl, not like some of the other girls" (129). Janine disgusts Moira, though Moira still tries to help her snap out of her stupor. Offred and the other Handmaids simultaneously loathe and envy her, but mostly loathe. At the Testifying, Offred describes her as having

A red face and a dripping nose. Her hair dull blond, her eyelashes so light they seem not there, the lost eyelashes of someone who'd been in a fire. Burned eyes. She looked disgusting: weak, squirmy, blotchy, pink, like a newborn mouse. None of us wanted to look like that, ever (Atwood 72).

Janine looks disgusting, pathetic, and traumatized. She is unappealing and has no more power than a small, pink newborn rodent. Elsewhere, Offred describes Janine as a dog kicked too many times. Janine speaks "tonelessly, in her transparent voice, her voice of a raw egg white" and feels guilty when she had done nothing wrong. Offred describes Janine as "that whiny bitch Janine" and "sucky

Janine” (Atwood 129), mentioning how Janine cries during prayer and at night, noisier than all the rest. Even the commanders’ wives pity her. “A strong girl, good muscles,” they say. “Would you like a cookie, dear?” (115) In her desperation to fulfill Gilead’s roles, Janine is seen as pitiful by every woman who relates to her, even those within Gilead’s power structure. Janine is a pathetic, whiney excuse of a woman, a woman so utterly obsessed with winning her salvation though the fulfillment of patriarchal, oppressive gender roles that she is willing to sacrifice her freedom and self to do it.

And in the end, Janine’s suppression of her old self and adoption of the roles result in a mental breakdown and non-conscious resurgence of that past self:

Moira took Janine by the shoulder and shook her. Snap out of it Janine, she said roughly...

Janine smiled. You have a nice day, now, she said.

Moira slapped her across the face, twice, back and forth. Get back here, she said. Get right back here! You can’t stay *there*, you aren’t *there* anymore. That’s all gone (216).

Janine’s pre-Gilead self has been so repressed that, when her baby dies and her Gilead self is traumatized, her past self resurfaces in a mental break. When Janine’s baby dies, her self temporarily aborts with it, leaving her without a center, causing the resurgence—not a healthy one—of her repressed past self in a mentally unstable state. And despite Moira’s attempts to help Janine, later, after the Particicution, Janine breaks completely:

There’s a smear of blood across her cheek, and more of it on the white of her headdress. She’s smiling, a bright diminutive smile. Her eyes have come loose.

“Hi there,” she says. “How are you doing?...”

“Janine,” I say. But she’s let go, totally now, she’s in free fall, she’s in withdrawal (280-81).

In this is the greatest danger of essentialist roles; namely, any woman failing or unable to fulfill the roles ceases to exist, not only as a woman but as a person as well. In Gilead, “if the woman refuses the identity ascribed, she becomes a nonperson, a nothing. [Janine] is a baby maker, procreator, womb vessel. Failing this, she is nothing in the eyes of the Gilead system” (Raschke 259). When Janine fails to fulfill Gilead’s gender roles, she ceases to be a woman, to have a self, in Gilead’s eyes and, more destructively, her own. Without a self-identity outside those asserted, she ceases to be an entity, and with her self-definition goes her ability to function. Janine’s fate shows the possible dangers of women’s suppressing their selves and adopting essentialist gender roles and is a direct attack on the particular roles associated with the American conservative movement of the 1980s.

### *Moira*

Directly opposed to Janine is Moira, the heroic woman in *Handmaid’s Tale*. If Janine is the essentialist Moral Majority woman, Moira is characterized as the essential woman of second-wave separatist feminism. Offred first remembers her, along with Offred’s own mother, in the chapter when she possesses her nights, alluding to the famous second-wave mantra “take back the night.” Moira is characterized as a badass: in Offred’s first memory, her legs are crossed, she has an earring and gold fingernails, smokes, and craves a beer (37). She repairs her own car, at least in minor ways, always means what she says (131), and calls men a social disease (172). She is a masculine entity, a woman who desires control and power over herself, a woman, according to Offred, who subverts Gilead’s power structures: “In light of Moira, the Aunts were less fearsome and more

absurd. Their power had a flaw to it” (133). Moira is the “typical feminist separatist” (Howells 98), and her choice to “prefer women” for the equal power dynamic of homosexual sex links her directly back to the Beauvoirian liberated woman:

The woman who achieves virile independence has the great privilege of carrying on her sexual life with an individual who are themselves autonomous and effective in action, who—as a rule—will not play a parasitic role in her life (Beauvoir 695).

Moira has liberated her mind, sexuality, and person from the illusion of patriarchy. She does what she wants in her sexual life, is tied down to no one sexual partner, especially male, and guards her autonomy closely. She is the essentialist woman of late second-wave separatist feminism, the Beauvoirian ideal woman.

Because of these character traits, Offred idealizes Moira, reflecting the common female attitude toward the second-wave separatist feminism in the 1970s and 80s. Offred says she feels “ridiculously happy” with Moira (73) and feels safer when she is around. Moira is always “braver” and “more logical” than Offred and, thus, throughout the book, Offred has a bad case of *What Would Moira Do?* She constantly asks herself what Moira’s course of action would be and tries to ape it, though her timidity hinders her more often than not. “Moira was our fantasy,” says Offred, implying her idolization of the cigarette smoking, lesbian, hyper-masculinized Beauvoirian ideal woman, lustful for power, sexually liberated, and free to become a, supposedly, real woman, an idolization shared by many American women at the time of *Handmaid Tale’s* publication.

But despite this idolization, Moira’s fate warns of the dangers of adopting the equally essentialist gender roles proposed by second-wave separatist feminism while simultaneously expressing Atwood’s deep sympathy for it. As Tolan notes, Jezebel’s is a concrete realization of radical feminist desires and social ideals as represented by Moira’s desires because it apes many late 1980s feminist ideals of communal living and shared labor (“Feminist” 23). Moira calls Jezebel’s “Butch paradise” (249), an all-woman community, a place where many of her separatist feminist desires are actualized. Near every juncture, Moira craves substances (37, 56, 73), a liberty hitherto denied most conservative “ladies,” and now she is allowed all she wants (249). She has successfully taken back the night, works late hours, and is afforded all the power-equal without children, marriage and obligations she wants.

But though many of Moira’s desires have become a reality at Jezebel’s, this hardly makes her free. Jezebel’s is a prison, and Moira is little more than a sex slave. Offred says Jezebel’s is “like a masquerade party” (235) and “a stage play, a musical comedy” (236). “A movie about the past is not the same as the past,” (235) Offred says, meaning that, though Jezebel’s recreates certain two-dimensional, flat “freedoms” of pre-Gilead society, it fails to recreate real freedom.

And in Moira’s capitulation to Jezebel’s, readers see Atwood’s love-hate relationship with second-wave separatist feminism. When given the choice of slavery in Jezebel’s or death in the colonies, Moira chooses slavery in Jezebel’s. In this, like Offred, readers both condemn and sympathize with her. Offred says she is “dressed absurdly” in uncomfortable, government-issued outfits she never would have chosen for herself. Offred says, “I don’t want her to be like me. Give in. Go along” (249). But when confronted about her compromises, Moira rationalizes them away, saying Jezebel’s is “not that bad,” citing the many benefits she is afforded: face cream, food, substances, and free sex. Despite Moira’s vehement desire to escape Gilead’s oppression, when all else fails, she surrenders to the oppressive regime, gives up true freedom for fake freedom, freedom that, while it affords her satisfaction in her gender roles and many surface-level desires, refuses her the ultimate freedom, freedom of self-definition and choice, her urge for liberty or death deadened by Gilead’s brutal power and softened by their gender-role allowances. Exhausted Moira sells her

true freedom for false freedom. Moira's surrender—judging by Atwood's personification of her as radical second-wave feminist—though forced, reveals essentialist movements, even second-wave separatist feminism, as movements concerned not with real freedom but only about the particular definitions asserted as “true” and “essential” and often willing to subvert this real freedom for the particulars considered to be essential to womanhood.

But simultaneously, Moira's “choice” is not a choice, and we know it. Moira's initial decision between Jezebel's and the Colonies is not really a choice: “no one but a nun would pick the Colonies,” she says (249), and Moira certainly is not pious. And as Moira herself notes, now that she is in Jezebel's, “nobody gets out of here except in a black van” (242). There is choice, but there is no choice. And so, like Offred, readers sympathize with Moira's capitulation, understanding the tragedy and brutal inevitability of selling her freedoms for the false-freedoms afforded by Jezebel's. The power of the symbolic Gilead is irresistible, hinting back to the immense power of the American conservative movement of the 1980s. And so, in Moira, readers, one, experience the brutal power of patriarchy and Atwood's prognostication of a hyper-conservative regime. And two, we see Atwood's response to second-wave separatist feminism, a movement that, despite its laudable resistance to conservative essentialist gender roles, and Atwood's sympathy with them for this, has missed the root of oppression, mistaking it for the particular gender roles rather than the essentialism behind them. Separatist feminism is not concerned with real freedom of self-definition but only with changing the roles seen as ideal. “Have they chosen it?” Offred asks about the women in Jezebel's (235), a question that could be the nutgraf of Atwood's entire novel. The question of women's freedom of self is not the particular definition, as is represented by Moira's and Janine's fates, but the choice and freedom of self-definition, the freedom explored in Offred's transition from self-internalization to self-definition and –externalization, Atwood's ideal relationship between women's personal and societal selves.

### *Offred*

As opposed to the essentialist Moira and Janine, Offred, the enlightened woman in *Handmaid's Tale*, is a hodgepodge of conservative and liberal traits. In pre-Gilead society, on the one hand, she had a job, held a bank account, smoked cigarettes, and had a college education. On the other hand, she married Nick, birthed a daughter—whom she loved dearly—read *Vogue*, used face cream, and, though she questions the rituals of Gilead, practiced spirituality. Offred “highlights the paradoxes and dilemmas of contemporary feminism” (Howells 98) in that her self comprises conservative and liberal traits, elements, and attributes, and she claims allegiance to no institution. She is a muddled, synchronistic self, a much more realistic picture of a typical 1980s young woman than Janine or Moira, not a radical feminist or good church woman but one who has incorporated elements of both, a woman caught between the poles of liberalism and conservatism, warring to define the ideal female self while she swims somewhere in between.

But when Gilead takes over, all facets of Offred's self not in congruence with the regime's essentialist definitions are suppressed. She becomes, externally, a Handmaid, a child bearer, although, unlike Janine, she never loses consciousness of her pre-Gilead self, despite all Gilead's attempts at brainwashing. Offred's “enlightenment” is her understanding of this real self, that synchronistic and muddled internal self, versus the artificial societal self she externalizes. “I compose myself,” she says. “My self is a now a thing I must compose, as one composes a speech. What I must present now is a made thing, not something born” (66). Offred's external acts are not in congruence with her real self; she knows this but must perform the acts anyway to survive. In the



past, she never looked good in red, listened at closed doors, or liked small talk, but she finds herself doing all these things as a part of Gilead's society (9-11). She sees herself as "some fairy-tale figure" (9), a caricature of womanhood. Gilead's real oppression is of Offred's self-expression, her external manifestations of her internal self. Though she must compose herself, Offred, unlike Janine, never loses the consciousness that it *is* a composed self, not a real self, an agonizing enlightenment but an important one nonetheless. This consciousness is the seed which grows into the sapling of self-expression she cultivates and nourishes through the novel.

This plant begins small, dissatisfaction resulting from Offred's enlightenment. "We yearned for the future. How did we learn it, this talent for insatiability?" (3-4). Though she says her desire is for the future, Offred's real desire is for the past, or a future reminiscent of the past, a future where she can, again, express herself. She still sees the past as "normal" and Gilead's society as abnormal and salivates for things of her life before her oppression. The smell of nail polish makes her "hungry" (29), she is "ravenous for news" (20), and she says she "hunger[s] to commit the act of touch" (11). Her palate is slaked only by experiences and freedoms from the past world, though she knows the future to be the only possible place for their return. She retains a deep dissatisfaction with her gender roles that serves as the impetus for her later self-externalization.

Initially, though, Offred is too terrified to externalize these facets of her self. "There's a lot that doesn't bear thinking about," she says. "Thinking can hurt your chances, and I intend to last" (8). Her only initial concern is survival, and she "can't take chances" (19) which may jeopardize this; thus, she continues performing. "I stand on the corner, pretending I am a tree" (19).

However, small apparent holes in Gilead's system cultivate hope for Offred and give her courage to perform small acts of subversion:

The cigarettes must have been from the black market, I thought, and this gave me hope. Even now there's no real money any more, there's still a black market. There's always a black market, there's always something that can be exchanged (14).

Small pockets of resistance reveal chinks in Gilead's system and give Offred hope for a future without it. As a result, she begins small acts of subversion. She imagines caressing the guardian's face, her hips swaying as she walks away (22). She redefines words like "egg" and "God," words and ideas central to Gilead's monolithic stranglehold on language and definitions. She begins telling stories, small ones at first, of pre-Gilead experiences, small paragraph-length memories of gardening (12), watching Serena Joy on television (16), the way men caress good cars (17), long romantic walks with Luke (23), and the "undone women" Kathryn Hepburn and Lauren Bacall (25). Each of these internal acts is an "event, a small defiance of a rule, so small as to be undetectable... possibilities, tiny peepholes" (21), peepholes into the possibility of a past-like future in the absence of Gilead. Though she is too terrified to self-externalize, these peepholes feed her dissatisfaction and increase her internal (literal) *self*-confidence, her surety of herself in regards to her pre-Gilead experiences and roles.

Soon, as Offred's confidence increases, these internal acts become longer, more subversive, and manifest externally, simultaneously feeding her internal reflections, her memories increasing in length and reflexivity, resulting in a slowly rising, self-fueling cyclone of memory, desire, and possession. "The night is mine, my own, to do with as I will," (39) she says, and just following this possession of the night, she has her first long memory, one of Moira and her own mother, the novel's two feminists. Then she possesses her room: "My room, then. There has to be some place I call my own, even in this time" (50). And her possession of this "escape route into the spaces of private memory" (Howells 99) prompts a two-page recollection of her and Luke's hotel-room trysts. "I would like to steal something from this room. I would like to take some small thing, the scrolled

ashtray, the little silver pillbox from the mantel perhaps, or a dried flower... It would make me feel like I have power” (80-81). Offred’s possessive acts feed and are fed by her internal reflections, culminating, finally, in her desiring woman’s ultimate subversive possession from her Commander:

“What would you like,” he says...

“I would like... I would like to know...”

“Know what?” he asks.

“Whatever there is to know.” (188)

Offred desires knowledge, the desire that resulted in the primal pair’s excommunication from Eden. It is the ultimate symbol of rejection of a patriarchal authority, the triumph of desire over authority. In this, she reaches near the climax of her possessiveness, the result of her turgid confidence, though she is still conflicted inside: “Maybe I don’t really want to know what’s going on. Maybe I’d rather not know. Maybe I couldn’t bear to know” (195). Following this, her memories become long, emotionally charged, and extremely reflexive. And after a long memory of Luke, she finally manifests her internal self externally through emotion:

I wipe my sleeve across my face. Once, I wouldn’t have done that, for fear of smearing, but now nothing comes off. Whatever expression is there, unseen by me, is real. (227)

Desires, memories and emotions are means by which Offred accesses and externalizes her past life, a life in which her self was self-defined and freely externalized. As the novel progresses, though she remains in Victim Position 2, slowly this externalization increases. Slowly but surely, she defines, through memory, her past self—who she was, what she believed, what she desired, and how she acted—and externalizes it through her small acts of possession in the present world, hinting toward the real essence of freedom in Atwood’s view as seen in the pre-Gilead society:

If you don’t like it, change it, we said, to each other and ourselves. And so we would change the man, for another one. Change, we were sure, was for the better always. We were revisionists; what we revised was ourselves... We were free to shape and reshape forever the ever expanding perimeter of our lives. (227)

This freedom, the freedom of self-definition and externalization—not “love,” not cigarettes, not particular gender roles—is the real freedom oppressed by Gilead, the lost ideal of pre-Gilead society. Change was not always for the better, and certainly there were better choices of self-attributes and roles than others, but women were free to choose for themselves, for the good or bad, to make a name and a self for themselves:

I want to be held and told my name. I want to be valued, in ways that I am not; I want to be more than valuable. I repeat my former name, remind myself what I could do, how others saw me (97).

Offred tells her name to Nick in the finale, culminating her self-externalization. Her name represents the myriad oppressed facets of herself, liberal and conservative, traditional and feminist, oppressed in Gilead’s reduction of her to her role as a handmaid. According to Atwood, it is her “secret sign of her own identity,” a “guarantee of her hopes of a different future” (Atwood). By telling it to Nick, she externalizes herself as a person, not just as a Handmaid, a role, a categorized childbearing mass of flesh. This act is not, as Dopp says, “just another emblem for the determination of political relations by sexual instincts” or a symbol of women’s concerns again “betrayed by women’s own insatiable duplicitous desire” (Dopp 8) but the ultimate act of Offred’s

self-externalization and resistance to Gilead or Moira's reduction of her to a single role as child bearer or "liberated" woman.

Dopp has noted, along with Atwood herself, Offred's stagnancy in relation to victim positions across the narrative: from beginning to end, she stays in position 2 (Dopp 2). Dopp, in her article "Subject Position as Victim Position," argues that for lack of ideal subversive roles models, female role models which achieve and remain in Victim Position 3, and also the lack of hints to create critical distance between Offred and the reader, *Handmaid's Tale* fails to function as an effective or satisfactory feminist critique. Because Janine, Moira, and Offred, not to mention the plethora of other women in the story, all fail in one way or another to subvert the various patriarchal institutions which oppress them, the novel ends little better than a dystopic jeremiad about women's continued oppression at the hands of patriarchal, chauvinistic institutions.

But Dopp has missed the point. Though Offred remains surely in Victim Position 2, she *does* transition—though not in Victim Position—from internalization to externalization of the self. She defines, possesses, and finally externalizes her self and in this represents Atwood's ideal relationship between society and the individual woman: an ideal society is one in which the latter is afforded and protected in her freedom of self-expression. Offred's heroic act, Atwood's critique of the 1980s essentialist institutions, is her self-expression in a society which tries to oppress it. In *Handmaid's Tale*, Offred expresses her self, not her self as defined by Gilead, not her self as defined by Moira, but her own self-defined desires and acts, her own person, her name. In this transition, Atwood not only rejects the American essentialist political institutions of second-wave feminism and the conservative majority but also calls for women to reject *any* institution which reduces them to and attempts to enforce its own externally-defined self. Offred's courage and transition emulate this, and in this, contrary to Dopp's assertion, women can find a role model in the tale to emulate.

### ***Gate to Women's Country*: Sheri S. Tepper's Passionate Polemical against Romanticism**

"The behavior of women in *Gate*, although it is not generally passive, is certainly muddle-headed when it comes to sex."

Wendy Pearson

While the behavior of Tepper's women in *Gate to Women's Country* is *certainly* muddle-headed, in Wendy Pearson's scholarly witch hunt to expose Tepper for the homophobe that she is, Pearson has, in typical feminist form, over-sexualized it. In her interpretation of *Gate To Women's Country* as "a kind of working out of the American ethos of homophobia" (220), a novel in which "there is far too much collateral damage..., and the major victim is the queer" (218), Pearson misses the least common denominator of Tepper's *real* target for extermination: the thing underlying sexuality in males *and* females, heterosexuals and homosexuals, and hyper-masculinity and hyper-femininity as well: romanticism. Contrary to what Pearson asserts, Tepper uses *Gate to Women's Country* not to reject sexuality, but to reject *romanticism*, the idealistic worldview that clings to chivalric understandings of love and war. Instead, Tepper's novel calls for both male and female self-suppression of the romantic impulse, affirming, in its place, a cold, brutal realism as practical for both personal and societal progress. This rejection and affirmation can be seen in the characterizations, transitions, and fates of the women types and their relation to Tepper's own personal philosophy.

In *Gate to Women's Country*, men and women are born with the capability for both romanticism—i.e., feeling-based seeing things how they ought to be or in their ideal form—and realism—i.e., reason-based seeing things and people honestly and realistically—but always the

biological predilection for the former. This predilection, however, manifests in different “modes of behavior,” as Pearson calls them, specific to males and females (Pearson 210). Male romanticism can be seen in the warriors and Chernon, in their hyper-masculine gender roles, in their obsession with honor and glory, resulting in violence toward each other and, more unforgivably, toward women and children. Female romanticism, on the other hand, manifests in misplaced love of these oppressors and hyper-emotionalism, resulting in seemingly illogical self-abnegation and slavery by these oppressive patriarchal authorities. And Tepper uses the characterization and fates of the novel’s three women types to reject this romanticism and affirms realism, its opposite.

### *Myra*

In *Gate to Women’s Country*, Myra is the pathetic woman, the woman who is ruled by her romanticism. Parallel to Chernon (the purely-romantic masculine character in the novel) and opposite to Morgot, Myra acts entirely on emotional impulses. From adolescence to adulthood, she is characterized by Tepper as a pathetic, emotionally volatile teenager. The narrator describes her with adjectives such as “impatient,” “mopey,” “sulky,” “rebellious,” “confused,” “angry,” and “ill-used.” Myra purposefully walks in a “slithery” way (22), talks in a “dramatically fed-up older sister voice” (37), and only cries for effect (9). Unlike Morgot and Joshua, she is uncompassionate, insensitive, abrupt, angry, and emotionally unhinged. Like Janine, she finds her joy in the fulfillment of the gender roles assigned by the patriarchal society of the novel, the warrior’s culture: “In bearing a son to a warrior, a woman earns her life” (143). Her only desire is to please Barten and bear his warrior-sons, and, when she has his first, she calls him “my little warrior’s son” (89). She is only happy when Barten is satisfied, becoming mopey and depressed after his rejection during festival (80). She quotes Barten’s opinions, rationalizes away Barten’s flaws (59), and adopts the warriors’ philosophies on returnees, servitors, Women’s Country, and the ordinances. “The rules are stupid anyhow,” she tells Morgot. “He’s out of Women’s Country, and I wish to hell I was, too” (91). But at Barten’s death, Myra is devastated, and when her son fails to resemble Barten, Myra’s dreams of motherhood are “riven into sharp-edged fragments” (88). Even after Barten’s death, she remains fickle, one moment utterly possessive of her sons, the next complaining how she “would simply enjoy getting out of the house and away from babies once and a while” (190). In the end, she rejects all societal responsibility, living “carnival to carnival,” attending the warriors’ games (179), only wanting to dance, and ultimately rejecting her Council-assigned responsibilities and Women’s Country in general. In Myra, we see Tepper’s view of women embracing their romanticism: pathetic, unconsciously enslaved, emotionally volatile, bitter, and dissatisfied women who begin and end with, in Tepper’s view, the worst possible vice: societal uselessness.

### *Morgot*

Ironically the mother of Myra but directly the opposite of her, Morgot, the heroic woman in *Gate to Women’s Country*, represents women’s ideal realism. Like Atwood’s Moira, Morgot has many traditionally masculine character traits: rational, brutally honest, pragmatic, calm, collected, and in control. She examines the gypsies in public and is brutally honest with Tally about Barten’s intentions (45-46). She is educated: medically trained (the chief medical officer of Women’s Country), historically and culturally informed, and scientifically oriented. And because of this, She is disillusioned regarding the female’s romantic self. She says that Myra is

any of us Stavvy. . . . I've had a few romantic or sentimental notions myself, from time to time. We all like to invent worlds that are better than this one, better for lovers, better for mothers. (72)

Like Moira's and Offred's pre-Gilead experiences, Morgot's old romantic trysts have enlightened her to the results of embracing romanticism. Every girl is inclined to see men how they *could* be rather than how they are, to imagine the world as a place where women and children are not oppressed, where love is true, where men are deep-down caring and tender, and where good always overcomes evil purely on the merit of principle. But looking at the world this way leads women to suffering, pain, disillusionment, bitterness, and men to egregious violence toward each other and innocent women and children. War, domestic violence, rape, abuse, and women's acceptance, all of it rooted in emotional idealism and romanticism, death and suffering caused by both women's and men's intrinsic inclination to see themselves and their oppressors as they ought to be rather than how they are.

Because of this enlightenment, Morgot holds irascibly to the ordinances, the reason-based edicts instituted by the council who "keep sentimentality and romance out of [their] deliberations" (73), despite the emotional agony and moral guilt of doing so. They are her categorical morality. Instead of a feeling-based objection, Morgot responds, "That's not allowed!" in regards to Joshua's story about the warriors' beating of the returnees (25). When Jik objects to public examinations of his prostitutes, she cites the ordinances: "You know the rules, Jik. Examinations are done in public" (45). She directly contrasts the warriors' romanticist opinions and philosophies with the ordinances, and the greatest sin Myra commits is disrespect of them by blathering on about the warriors' ideologies (89). Fighting one's emotions is difficult, and Morgot knows from experience that it hurts. But Iphigenia at Ilium, the Council ceremonies, and the desolations are all reminders of a time when romanticism influenced decisions and the results thereof, and thus Morgot, for the sake of society, Women's Country, and its inhabitants, painfully suppresses this romanticism, holds to the rational, societal self required as a Women's Country Council member, accepts the pain of following and enforcing the ordinances without compromise, and tries to teach Stavvia to do so as well:

"Half of what we do is performance. Ritual. Observances. If we are seen to be in control, the people are calm and things go smoothly... Doing nothing with the appearance of calm may be more important than doing the right thing in a frantic manner" (126).

Morgot understands the necessity of acting calmly even when she is not calm and accepts the pain and theatricality of doing so. When threatening Myra's excommunication, Morgot sounds "like she was delivering a rehearsed speech" (89) and sounds "stilted and rehearsed" when telling Stavvia why they do not disclose fathers' identities (114). She is "in considerable pain" to take pride in Joshua's sperm being used to inseminate other women—"It does not come naturally," she says but still affirms its necessity (293). When discussing the selection plan prescribed by the ordinances, "[Morgot] might have been discussing the breeding of sheep or the crossing of grain. Her voice was as unemotional as the wind on a distant ridge" (293). Despite her blatant emotional repulsion against the breeding plan, Morgot subjects her feelings to its rational necessity, suppressing romanticism and adopting the council-approved plan to exterminate romanticism in men. In this, Morgot is the ideal, rational, societally-inclined woman: Tepper's ideal woman. Her entire ethics and morality are divorced from her emotional feelings and subjected to the rational, passionless ordinances. Her adherence is categorical, uncompromising, and complete. And though her romanticism remains active and vocal in opposition, at every juncture Morgot painfully subjugates it to the ordinances.

Initially, readers side with young Stavia against Morgot's rigid and draconian adherence to the ordinances. But, as the story progresses, seeing the results of the warriors' romantic hyper-masculinity and the results of Stavia's embracing of romantic attachment to Chernon, we increasingly—or so Tepper seems to hope—empathize, understand and agree with Morgot's rejection of this emotionally-driven, romantic self, as Stavia comes to do.

### *Stavia*

Stavia, the enlightened woman in *Gate to Women's Country*, swings between the poles of Morgot and Myra, embracing her romanticism and realism intermittently as the story goes on. Like Offred, she begins her story enlightened to the theatricality of her societal self:

She reached down inside herself and gave herself a shake, waking up that other part of her, making it come forward to take over—that other Stavia who could remember lines and get up on stage without dying of embarrassment... It was the first time she could remember purposefully making her everyday self step aside, though it had happened before, in emergencies, all by itself. (13)

Stavia is conscious of her core, everyday emotional self *and* her actor self, required to function practically and interpersonally. On the one hand, her "observer" self is passive, repressed, often "bitten by the viper of indecision" (194). It is "stuttery and worried about appearing wicked or stupid on stage" (13), goes into "fits of self-consciousness," and does things "hideously gauche" in stressful and emotionally charged situations (105-06). Her actor self, on the other hand, is calm, collected, confident, and dominant. It can "get up on stage without dying of embarrassment" (13), is "capable, endowed with the extemporaneous force of grace" required to function in society (1), and makes all acts performable, regardless of their morality or ethics (194). Stavia is consciously aware of the "inevitable conflict of personal and societal desires" (217), and, like Offred in *Handmaid's Tale*, is hyper-aware of her two selves in agon.

And while her emotional, observer self wants only to express her feelings and emotions, Stavia often reasons herself to a place of calm and adroit exterior conduct, displaying her actor self despite her internal turmoil, at least initially. She tells Morgot,

"Myra doesn't have any sense at all."

"No," yawned Morgot. "None of them do. Neither did I at that age."

"I refuse to be that age."

"I wish you luck." (81)

Stavia is emotionally inexperienced. Her biggest influence is her mother. In fact, she imagines herself early in the novel as a sort of little Morgot: she sounds, looks, and even sees herself as similar. As such, she realizes the senselessness of Myra's romanticism and resulting demeanor, and therefore, initially, rationally, rejects it. Like Morgot, she rejects Myra's pathetic romanticism in favor of a callow, ideological realism. Morgot affirms her, but, remembering her own past struggles with romance, is skeptical of Stavia's continued resolve. Morgot believes both men and women biologically inclined to romanticism (72). And without experiential knowledge of its consequences, any ideological stance against it will fail.

And as Morgot predicts, Stavia's rejection does not last. Soon Stavia's romanticist impulses causes her emotional turmoil, especially in regards to Chernon. He gives her a "liquid, giddy

feeling,” causing her to feel “not at all practical.” Romantic attraction is to Stavia “a strange, indecent feeling, and she did not want to deal with or even consider it” (64-65). But despite her logical understanding of and distaste for it, Stavia’s attraction to Chernon persists. Chernon’s effect on her is so subliminal and powerful, she begins sacrificing reason and the ordinances in order to please him. Chernon’s desiring of books shows “just how stupid some of the ordinances were” (78), and she feels distant and separated from Morgot because of her mother’s categorical adherence to them. Her romanticism slowly but inevitably shifts her beliefs and actions, until, deciding to see Chernon in the best light, as an exception to the rule of warrior conduct, she gives him a book, overlooks his cruel manipulation and misogyny, and embraces her emotion:

She perceived the cold-bloodedness of it, the chill manipulation of it, but decided to ignore it. She let everything within her melt and actor Stavia was waved off into the wings.

“Oh, Chernon,” she said, opening her arms. (241-42)

Stavia desperately wants to believe Chernon is or can be different than the rest of the warriors. As a result, she waves off her rational self entirely, suspends judgment, and embraces romanticism. In this moment, she steps away from Morgot and over to Myra; in fact, her passionate swoon could easily transpose to her sister’s lovelorn pathos for Barten and not seem out of place. This surrender ultimately leads to her imprisonment and torture in the Holy Land where she sees, finally, Chernon for the chauvinistic, patriarchal, woman-oppressing monster that he is. There, Stavia’s romantic attachment is shattered, and she finally comes to terms with Chernon’s actuality:

Stavia could not believe what she was hearing. What she was hearing was not as bad as what he was seeing, however—an expression on Chernon’s face which was frankly collusive. He understood these animals. He understood them from a place inside himself which empathized with them. In that instant she comprehended much that had been unclear to her before (251).

Stavia’s romantic ideals of Chernon are destroyed; she realizes, despite her desire otherwise, he is really no less of a monster than those patriarchal men by whom they are enslaved. At this moment, she realizes the falsity of her ideals and the truth of Morgot’s rational warnings.

After her rescue and convalescence, Stavia finally understands the need to suppress her romantic self, accept her rational self, and utilize the actor self to function in society in the process of enacting the selection plan. In this approach, Stavia totally rejects Myra and becomes Morgot, or very near to her:

She felt self-conscious in [the council robes], and yet there was a kind of inevitability about their substantial weight. She remembered thinking once long ago that she was a kind of Morgot, a younger copy. Now the copy was even closer than before (309).

By becoming a Council member, Stavia becomes Morgot and assumes the cold rationalism of the Council. In reality, she has always been an incipient Morgot, her realism lying latent waiting to be enacted, only suppressed by the betrayal of her emotional self:

In that moment she realized she’d broken the ordinances for no good reason and wondered, with a surge of deep, nauseating guilt, whether Morgot would ever forgive her for it—whether she could ever forgive herself (246).

Morgot is always present in Stavia as her rational self. Stavia only needs recognize and welcome her. Stavia’s transition is complete when she, as is “inevitable,” becomes a Council member, acknowledging the ordinances and, concurrently, the selection plan, accepting the genocide of 4,000

warriors as a necessary cull of a group incurably afflicted by the romanticist “infection.” With this, she becomes one of the “Damned Few,” those “who keep things running, those who do what has to be done” (313). What they do is suppress their everyday emotional selves and eliminate, by whatever means necessary, the romanticism in men who will not suppress it for themselves. What is kept running is Women’s Country, hopes for a better future, and the means of its actualization, the selection plan.

Readers are initially appalled with Stavia’s transition, and we would dismiss Stavia and Morgot as inhuman but for the cross-cutting of the play *Iphigenia at Ilium* with the earlier narrative and the characterization it shows of the women and servitors who help them:

Stavia leaned over Joshua, putting her cheek against his own, her eyes fixed on the half-empty garrison ground, seeing in her mind the thousands who had marched away. Gone away, oh, gone away. Wetness between her face and his as he—servitor, warrior, citizen of Women’s country, father—as he wept.

Wept for them all. (315)

Stavia and Joshua agonize over the sacrifices necessary to purge Women’s Country of romanticism. They are hardly the robots and inhuman genocidal maniacs our initial emotional reaction suggests. It would be very easy, were the narrative of young Stavia, Myra, and Morgot not coupled with the later story in which they are agonized and morally distraught, to see them as unfeeling monsters. But with the play and the adult narrative surrounding it, Tepper simultaneously re-humanizes Stavia, Morgot, and all others who affirm the cruel process by which male romanticism is eliminated and justifies, through mythology, the necessity of their brutality. “Either you men kill us and are honored for it, or we women kill you and are damned for it. Dead or damned” (315). When romanticism reigns, women are forced into a lose-lose situation of death or moral damnation. Either the men kill and dominate them, or the women defend themselves and are seen as monsters for it. Thus the Council chooses, in their eyes, the lesser of two evils in hope of a future in which women will have to embrace neither. In the play *Iphigenia at Ilium*, Hecuba says, “Women don’t have to make choices like that in Hades.” and Iphigenia responds, “Hades is Women’s Country” (315). The Council dreams of a future society in which romanticism *does not* reign, where *reason* is at the center of decision-making, and where such a diametric is no longer required of women. But Women’s Country is a “painful construction” (Wilson 127), and so the Council accepts damnation and their own and our emotional repulsion as inevitable, hoping their decision will be justified by time and someday women will no longer be required to make the decision. Tepper uses the *Iphigenia* narrative to realign us with Morgot and Stavia and rationalize the need for suppression of romanticism.

While Pearson’s reading of *Gate to Women’s Country* as intrinsically homophobic is understandable, given that homosexuality *is* eliminated in Tepper’s utopia, in the end, Tepper’s women types resist Pearson’s feminist impulse to sexualize the novel—making it plain that *romanticism* is the real enemy, not sexuality in and of itself, homosexuality only the unfortunate collateral damage of Tepper’s ruthless crusade against romanticism. But though we disagree on Tepper’s target, I share in Pearson’s and Fitting’s response to Tepper’s means. “A nonviolent world cannot be built using violence,” says Fitting (44). “Can we bear,” asks Pearson, “even in fiction, to pile the bodies of any more young men on the funeral pyres of hatred, fear and bigotry”? (221) No, Mrs. Tepper, I think we cannot.



## Conclusion: Tepper vs. Atwood's Use of the Women Types in Relation to the 1970s-80s Essentialist Political Regimes

Atwood and Tepper are *both* political writers. Early in life, Atwood attended Harvard where, according to Sullivan, she learned that “writing [is] a political act, the assertion of the individual against the social structures that confine” (855). And, though she strongly resists labels, Atwood has since become, according to Sheckels, more comfortable being known as a “political writer.” She defines politics as, according to Sheckels, “who gets to do what to whom with impunity and with what level of profit,” and she writes as representative of the power-down in the world (VII-VIII). Tepper, however, is far more didactic in her political rhetoric. In his article “The Importance of Sheri S. Tepper,” Gordon notes the “outrageous anger” with which she writes, an anger that is, as he notes, largely political and manifests in “thunderous sermons” he personally never gets bored of (10). Tepper herself says of her work: “I have a feeling I would have done a better literary job if I had been able to avoid polemicizing” (“Speaking,” qtd. in Tenbus 10). Both Atwood and Tepper are itching for a political fight.

As such, both use the same women types as tools for their political commentary, commentary with very different messages. On the one hand, Atwood's distaste for essentialist gender roles—both of the conservative majority and second-wave separatist feminism—is clear. In *Handmaid's Tale*, Janine, the Moral Majority essentialist woman, is pathetic and concludes the story insane after the failure of her gender roles destroys her womanhood. Moira, the heroic woman, a character that both readers and Offred respect, vehemently resists Gilead, a nation which “mirrors all too closely American problems” (Raschke 257). Both these facts make Atwood's warning clear: the essential roles of the conservative movement are deadly to women, and, if not carefully restrained, conservatives will try to assert them politically. But, though she also simultaneously shows her sympathy with second-wave separatist feminism, Moira's inevitable surrender of her freedom of self-definition to Jezebel's also distances Atwood from separatist feminism's essentialism as well. Atwood resists strongly the idea of an “ideal woman” in general, any set of definitive attributes which make a woman ideal, even that of second-wave separatist feminism. Rather, Atwood's women types argue for the necessity of each woman to define her own ideal and for a society that affords her freedom to do so.

Tepper, on the other hand, gives little commentary on the conservative movement and patriarchy using the women types themselves (these are seen in Tepper's characterization of the Holylanders and warriors). Rather, her types can be understood purely in the context of second- and third-wave feminisms, aligning herself much more closely to second-wave separatist feminism than Atwood while still remaining distant from its hyper-sexualism. For example, whereas in the conclusion of *Handmaid's Tale*, we pity Janine to a point, no such redemption is given for Myra. She ends her life bitter, angry, and useless, with no redeeming qualities whatsoever. Little more than a caricature for all things pathetic, the reader and other female characters look at her with nothing but scorn. With Myra, Tepper outright rejects all romanticism, especially in regards to male-female romance and emotional dependency, alluding back to the relational nonattachment of Beauvoirian sexuality in which sex is seen as obligation-free and liberated from the shackles of marital covenant. Further, Morgot is *clearly* Tepper's ideal woman and remains so across the novel. Rational, sexually independent, pro-separatist, and ruthlessly purposed in her resistance to patriarchy, Moira is characterized with many attributes of the 1980s second-wave separatist feminist ideal woman. But unlike Moira, there is no fall, no surrender to oppressive powers: though she is agonized to do it, Morgot incorrigibly perseveres in her agonizing but heroic resistance to masculine romanticism.

And in the end, unlike Moira, she finishes the story as an ideal female destination for Stavia who *becomes* her in the finale, very unlike Offred who, rather than arriving at either pole of heroic woman or pathetic woman, cuts her way off of the spectrum of essential women entirely. And unless one interprets Tepper's entire message as ironic (Knowles), there is no indication that readers should read Morgot as self-critical. With her, Tepper affirms an ideal woman who is rational, anti-patriarchy, and masculinized, very near to ideal women proposed by second-wave feminism. That being said, both Stavia's and Morgot's anti-romanticism conclusions serve to distance Tepper from the hypersexualism of Beauvoir and separatist feminism's ideal woman, placing Tepper between second-wave and third-wave feminisms, embracing neither fully, but, unlike Atwood, remaining essentialist nonetheless, policing an essentialist binary between women and women.

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