

Gilead Revisited:

A Contemporary Tale of Censorship in America

Melanie Cattrell
Dr. Jayne Moneysmith
Women in Film and Literature
16 December 2000

Table of Contents

E-Mail Message from Mollie Albright to Sarah Walker
“All About Me!”

E-Mail Message from Mollie Albright to Sarah Walker
“Hey You!”

“Going Beyond Literature: Using Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* to Discuss Social and Political Issues in the Language Arts Classroom”

by Allison Johnson

Ms. Johnson’s Creative Assignment Sheet for *The Handmaid’s Tale*

E-Mail Message from Mollie Albright to Sarah Walker
“Your Reading Pleasure”

Mollie’s Creative Assignment
“Penalty for Perversion”
“Two Kinds of Freedom”

E-Mail Message from Mollie Albright to Sarah Walker
“Big Problem”

Elmhurst Public Library form for reconsideration of a work

Letter from Reverend Albright to Ms. Johnson

Letter from Ms. Johnson to Reverend Albright

Letters to the Editor

The Elmhurst Epistle

Letters to the Editor

“One Step Closer to Gilead: The Religious Right in America Today”
by Bianca Montgomery

Letter from the Director of the Elmhurst Library to Rev. Albright

E-Mail Message from Mollie Albright to Sarah Walker
“New School”

sarah!!

i'm so sorry i haven't e-mailed you lately! the past couple of days have been so busy...unpacking, going to a new school...i've barely had time to breathe! i miss you and the gang so much! today was my first day at elmhurst high. i'm taking about the same classes i was taking at lakewood – english, government, physics, trig...and 3 study halls! i guess senior year is the same no matter where you go. i was scared to death when i went to school this morning, but things weren't as bad as i thought. most of the people seemed really nice, actually. there were a couple of kids from church there – sami and becca, you would like them...becca wears her hair like you do, sarah...anyway, we all have the same lunch period, so i didn't have to eat alone! (that was my biggest fear!) anyway, those girls are sweet, but they seemed like they were acting a little too perfect in front of me, since i'm the new pastor's kid and all. for a second, i thought they were going to ask me to say grace for our macaroni and cheese, right in the middle of the cafeteria. boy, if they knew about some of the crap we used to do in lakewood, they wouldn't have been so uptight!

my dad seems to be getting along pretty good here. i think it was good for him to get away from lakewood – too many memories of my mom there, i guess. i sometimes feel like we are trying too hard to forget her, and that's not what i want to do. can you believe she died two whole years ago, sarah? and we've only been to our new church twice, but i know some of the ladies in the church already have their eyes on my dad – eligible good christian man that he is, ha ha. i don't even want to think about him going on a date! that's just...ew, i can't even think about it!!!!

well i'd better go....would you believe those teachers gave me homework on the first day? the nerve!!

missing you!

mollie

sarah –

remember how i said i was bored out of my mind because i had three study halls? anyway, yesterday my english teacher, ms. johnson, asked me today to be her student aide. that just means that instead of going to study hall, i get to hang out in her classroom and run errands for her and all that. some of the other aides grade tests and stuff, but ms. johnson doesn't believe in tests, which might be why everyone likes her so much. she says that tests don't allow you to be creative or to think for yourself, and she is all about creativity and free thinking, she says. you would like her a lot, sarah. of course, i don't mention how ms. johnson thinks to my dad. something tells me he would say, "if i wanted you to be creative, i'd send you to art class! i'm sending you to school to learn!!" and i think we all know my dad isn't about free thinking!

missing you!

mollie

Going Beyond Literature: Using Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* to Discuss Social and Political Issues in the Language Arts Classroom

Allison Johnson

As English teachers and lovers of the art of literature, we are often so focused on teaching our students the basic elements of fiction and poetry, we forget that many works of literature cannot be easily categorized into our standard perimeters of *plot/summary/character/conflict/resolution*. Many literary works demand that we go beyond our discipline and discuss political and social issues in our classrooms. As a 12th grade Language Arts teacher, I am always searching for novels that are not only examples of excellent literature, but also that will make my students more aware of the society around them. I believe that, as educators, we are obligated to teach our students to think critically about the world that they are living in. By teaching Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* in my 12th grade Language Arts class, I am not only exposing my students to a beautifully crafted novel, I am giving them the opportunity to examine numerous issues that were prevalent in the 1980's, when Atwood's novel was written, and still exist in our society today.

THE DYSTOPIAN NOVEL

The Handmaid's Tale is often likened to Orwell's *1984*, the novel that many of my colleagues use to introduce students to the dystopian form of literature. I find that the dystopian form is powerful because through the dystopic lens, issues of freedom, choice, and control all become startlingly clear. I choose to use Atwood's work instead of Orwell's primarily because Atwood touches on many contemporary social issues, such as

feminism and homophobia, that are not found in Orwell's work.

CONTEXULIZING ISSUES IN ATWOOD'S NOVEL

The Handmaid's Tale is set in the Republic of Gilead, a theocratic dystopian society established in America's near future. As a result of a nuclear catastrophe, the majority of the residents of Gilead are sterile. Consequently, fertile women – including Offred, our narrator – are forced to become handmaids, women for whom their sole function in society is to bear children.

The Handmaid's Tale is a complex novel that is, in part, a reaction to the political atmosphere in America in the 1980's. Most of my students were born in the early eighties; they are too young to remember the political forces that were at work during that decade. Therefore, I begin the unit on *The Handmaid's Tale* by bringing in newspaper clippings and news footage from the eighties. Furthermore, when students enter my classroom, they are often only vaguely familiar with the principles of the women's movement, or with the history of women in America at all. Therefore, as a prelude to our reading of *The Handmaid's Tale*, we spend about a week discussing various women's issues. After we discuss the position of women in America today, we spend a couple of days focusing the other minorities that exist in America. We discuss discrimination based upon economic status (is there a class system in America? If so, how do we know what class a person is in? Is our class system rigid, or does it have there

mobility?), race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

ENGAGING THE STUDENTS WITH THE TEXT

In order for Atwood's novel to impact my students, they must believe that a society such as Gilead could be possible. Atwood asserts that "there isn't anything in the book not based on something that has already happened in history or in another country, or for which actual supporting documentation is not already available" (317). To reinforce Atwood's claim, as we are reading *The Handmaid's Tale*, we make a list on the board of the different contemporary issues that are raised in the text. The issues mentioned vary from class to class; the ones that always appear are: Abortion (former abortion doctors are hung in Gilead); homosexuality (referred to in Gilead as "Gender Treachery"); Feminism (Offred's mother is extremely active in the women's movement of the 1980's); environmental contamination (the sterility of the citizens of Gilead is a direct result of a nuclear disaster); and, of course, religion. Recognizing that the citizens of Gilead wrestle with the same issues that appear on the editorial pages of their daily newspapers brings Gilead closer to home for my students, and dispels the notion that Atwood's work could be dismissed as pure fantasy. After we have finished reading the book, I encourage my students to take on the persona of one or more of the characters in the text and to write poems, letters, or journal entries in the voice of their chosen character. I urge them to think about what social issues each character was forced to deal with and to incorporate these issues, into their writings.

DEALING WITH POSSIBLE CLASSROOM OBJECTIONS TO ISSUES IN THE HANDMAID'S TALE

Some of my students are from conservative Christian backgrounds and have objected to my use of *The Handmaid's Tale* in the classroom. Most are uncomfortable because they feel the novel portrays Christianity in

an unflattering – even mocking – light. While I can understand their apprehension, I firmly believe that Atwood's work is not against Christianity per se, but it is rather a warning that freedom cannot exist in a theocracy. As reviewer Stephen McCabe argued in 1986, "the novel's warning is not an indictment of the rising fundamentalist right as much as it is a warning to treat any repressive, regressive movement with truth and firm opposition early on. Acquiescence is our worst enemy." It is the acquiescence that McCabe speaks of that I am trying to combat by encouraging my students to become more aware of the issues that are prevalent in America today.

LITERATURE AS A SOCIAL FORCE

Literary texts such as *The Handmaid's Tale* are powerful not only because they serve as examples of excellent writing but also because they give us the opportunity to discuss issues in our English classes that are usually reserved for history or government classes. In order for our students to successfully integrate ideas and develop articulate and informed arguments, it is imperative that we, as English teachers, address social and political issues in our classrooms. By addressing numerous contemporary topics in one volume, Atwood's text gives us the perfect opportunity to do so.

Works Cited

Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid's Tale*. Anchor: New York, 1986.

McCabe, Stephen. "A Novel for the Complacent." Rev. of *The Handmaid's Tale*, by Margaret Atwood. *Humanist* Sept. – Oct. 1986: 31-32.

Allison Johnson teaches English at Elmhurst High School in Elmhurst, Ohio. She also serves as the advisor for Emerging Voices, the school literary arts magazine.

Senior Language Arts
Assignment #12
Ms. Johnson
14 February 2000

The Handmaid's Tale Creative Assignment

For our next assignment, we're going to try something a little different. You're going to step inside the mind of one of the characters in *The Handmaid's Tale* and write a poem, letter, diary entry, editorial, or essay from his or her point of view. If you want, you can write two different pieces from the same character, or the same type of piece from two very different characters. For example, you might want to write both an editorial and a diary entry from the Commander, showing that his internal beliefs are different from those that he shares with society. Or, you might want to write two poems by two very different characters in the book, like Moira and Aunt Lydia.

For this assignment, you must carefully analyze your chosen character/s. You may want to start by asking yourself questions about the character/s that you have selected. For example, if you were writing in Moira's voice, you might ask yourself the following questions: What type of language does she use? What is her attitude to those around her? How does she react when she is in danger? What motivates her? How is she different from Offred, or from Aunt Lydia?

I understand that some of you may have not done much – or any – creative writing before. Don't fret - I'm not expecting award-winning poetry here! I simply want you to produce a work that shows me you understand a specific character and his/her purpose in the novel.

E-mail me your idea no later than **Friday, the 18th**. If all goes according to plan, we'll workshop your rough drafts in class on **Wednesday, the 23rd**, and your final project will be due **Monday, the 28th**. As a celebration of our completed projects, we'll begin watching the film on the 28th! I'll bring popcorn with lots of butter!

As always, if you have any questions or problems with your assignment, come talk to me or e-mail me as soon as possible!

sarah –

guess what? i'm in the middle of writing poems for my english class. i'll attach them so you can read them and tell me if they are good – since you're a much better poet than i am! just so you know, the poems aren't my thoughts – they are supposed to be written by characters in this book we're reading called _the handmaid's tale_. i don't know if you've heard of it or not....i hadn't until ms. johnson made us read it. when i started reading it, i thought it was a little strange, but now i just love it. if you get a chance, you should read it – it's by margaret atwood. i know, i know, you prefer danielle steele and mary higgins clark....but really, it's a cool book. it's pretty popular, i think, so they probably have it at the library. if you start to read it and you don't understand something, just let me know. it's ms. johnson's favorite book, so she knows all about it. she said she even wrote an article on it once and it got published in some magazine for english teachers. she's really smart, sarah. anyway, i have to go finish my poems...i send them to you when i'm done!

mollie

Penalty for Perversion

...God gave them over to their shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust with one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the penalty for their perversion.
Romans 1:26-27

Then:

Scared and waiting
We knew something was about to happen,
There were too many people against us –
Too many people thumping their Bibles
And telling us we weren't natural.
But we never dreamed it would go this far.

Now:

Banished from breeder school
And trapped in this fucking funhouse
They created for girls like me
I got nowhere else to go

So, I just close my eyes and let them fuck me
Night after night
Sometimes, if their skin is soft enough,
I can close my eyes and pretend they are women

When it gets unbearable,
I just remind myself that
If I was a man,
I'd be hanging from a town square wall

Or in the colonies, wearing a gray dress
And shoveling nuclear death shit -
Compared with that, letting all these
Guys screw me ain't so bad, you know?

Two Kinds of Freedom

...teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. They can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.

Titus 2:3-5

These girls today don't understand
What we are trying to do
We are saving them

I was like them once
A stupid young thing who believed
I was free just because I

Dated any punk who asked me out
And went anywhere I wanted
Anytime I wanted

Thought I was making choices
And no one could stop me
I was asking for it, I was

Then I learned
Rules are made for a reason
You break them, you pay the price

The problem was with the women
Not with the men
We were messing with nature back then

We didn't want to admit we were different
We wanted to be like men
We thought they were just like us

We walked around half-naked
Practically inviting them to touch us
But cried rape when they did

What were we thinking, teasing
Them like that? We should have known
They couldn't handle it

But now we know better
And I won't let these girls
Make the same mistakes I made.

sarah –

my dad has lost it. i'm in deep trouble.

remember those poems i sent you a couple of weeks ago...the ones that i wrote pretending to be characters in _the handmaid's tale_? my dad found them, sarah!! and he totally freaked out when he read the one in moira's voice. as soon as he found them he started yelling at me. when he finally calmed down a little, i tried to explain to him that it wasn't *me* talking in the poems, it was a character in a book, but he didn't want to hear it. so, i showed him the assignment sheet that ms. johnson handed out to us...in it, she says we should make sure our poems sound like the characters in the novel. i tried to explain to him that i *had* to write my poem that way because moira talks that way. she's had a rough life, after all. i mean, she's a lesbian who is being forced to sleep with men...and if she doesn't do it, she'll be shipped off to die. and her language is pretty crude - it's not the way i usually talk - but if i didn't talk that way, ms. johnson might have thought that i didn't really understand moira, and i did. she was my favorite character in the book! i tried to explain that to my dad, but he just couldn't understand why i was trying to write like a "foul-mouthed lesbian prostitute."

and he was really upset that i put bible verses in my poems. he said that the way i used the verses made it seem like i was "mocking the Word of God"! i would never do that, sarah!

and this is the worst part...he said that ms. johnson should be fired for making us read books like _the handmaid's tale_. he said that he's heard of it before and that it's nothing but left-wing feminist propaganda. he said she's using it to brainwash us, sarah. i tried to tell him that ms. johnson is wonderful - she's the best teacher i've ever had!! but he wouldn't listen...he said he's going to demand that she stop teaching the book...and that if she doesn't, she'll be fired!

i'm so embarrassed and scared. i don't know what my dad is going to do next. and how am i going to face ms. johnson tomorrow?

Mollie

Elmhurst Public Library

120 Main St.
Elmhurst, Ohio 44719
555-3623

Citizen's Request for Reconsideration of a Work

Author Margaret Atwood
Paperback x Hardcover _____
Title The Handmaid's Tale
Publisher (if known) Bantam Doubleday
Request initiated by Reverend John Albright
Telephone 555-3424 (work phone)
Address 308 Main St. N.W.
City Elmhurst
Zip Code 44719

Complainant represents

x Himself/Herself
x (Name organization) Elmhurst Community Church
____ (Identify other group) _____

1. Have you been able to discuss this work with the teacher or librarian who ordered it or who used it?

____ Yes x No

2. What do you understand to be the general purpose for using this work?

a. Provide support for a unit in the curriculum?
____ Yes x No

b. Provide a learning experience for the reader in one kind of literature?
x Yes ____ No

c. Other

d. Did the general purpose for the use of the work, as described by the teacher or librarian, seem a suitable one to you?

____ Yes x No

If not, please explain.

The novel contains sexual situations that are not appropriate for young teenagers to read. There are many novels that would be more suitable for the classrooms and the libraries of young people.

4. What do you think is the general purpose of the author in this book?

To promote a left-wing feminist agenda.

5. In what ways do you think a work of this nature is not suitable for the use the teacher or librarian wishes to carry out?

The book presents a distorted picture of American life - it is anti-Christian, anti-American, and anti-family! It is pure liberal propaganda, and it does not belong in the hands of impressionable young people!

6. Have you been able to learn what is the students' response to this work?

x Yes _____ No _____

7. What response did the students make?

Because of this book, my daughter wrote a poem that was filled with profanity and sexual content. This book planted ideas in the mind of my child that would not have been there if she had not been exposed to this filthy novel!

8. Have you been able to learn from your school library what book reviewers or other students of literature have written about this work?

Yes x No _____

9. Would you like the teacher or librarian to give you a written summary of what book reviewers and other students have written about this book or film?

Yes x No _____

10. Do you have negative reviews of the book?

Yes No

11. Where were they published?

12. Would you be willing to provide summaries of the reviews you have collected?

Yes No

13. What would you like your library/school to do about this work?

Do not assign/lend it to my child.

Return it to the staff selection committee/department for reevaluation.

Other--Please explain

I demand that this novel be removed from the library _____
immediately! _____

14. In its place, what work would you recommend that would convey as valuable a picture and perspective of the subject treated?

Orwell's 1984. It is a clear example of the dystopian form of literature, without the mindless feminist propaganda that fills the pages of Atwood's novel. _____

Signature Reverend John Albright
Date March 20, 2000

Elmhurst Community Church

310 Main Street N.W.
Elmhurst, Ohio 44719
555-3424

March 20, 2000

Ms. Allison Johnson
Elmhurst High School
320 State Street
Elmhurst, Ohio 44719

Ms. Johnson:

I am writing this letter out of the deepest concern for my daughter Mollie, as well as for her fellow classmates. I am extremely offended that you have chosen Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* as a required text for your 12th grade Language Arts class. Not only is the novel filled with sex, violence, and filthy language, it also repeatedly mocks and distorts the Christian religion. As a minister of the Christian faith, I cannot stand idly by and let the children of Elmhurst High School be subjected to such a novel.

Furthermore, not only do I object to the material that you are exposing the children of our community to, I object to the teaching methods that you are using in your classroom to engage the students in the novel. Upon reviewing my daughter's homework, I discovered that your last assignment was to have the students write poems from the perspective of a character in *The Handmaid's Tale*. In order to fulfill your assignment, my daughter wrote a poem that contained crude and profane language. When I discovered the poem and asked her why she used such profanity in a homework assignment, she explained to me that she was attempting to make her poem sound as though it were written by Moira, a character in the novel. When I asked her to describe the character of Moira to me, she explained to me that Moira was a rough-talking lesbian prostitute. I am shocked, Mrs. Johnson, that you would encourage your students to want to get inside the minds of such degenerate characters!

As a concerned parent, I simply cannot let such filth be encouraged in our school system. I have already petitioned the Elmhurst Public Library to remove *The Handmaid's Tale* from their shelves, and I strongly urge you to remove it from your classroom as well. If you refuse, I will be forced to speak to the school board regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

Rev. John Albright

Elmhurst High School
320 State Street
Elmhurst, Ohio 44719
555-7632

March 22, 2000

Reverend John Albright
Elmhurst Community Church
310 Main Street N.W.
Elmhurst, Ohio 44719

Reverend Albright:

First and foremost, I would like to commend you for taking the time to write to me about Mollie's homework. It is obvious that you are concerned about the quality of the education that your daughter is receiving, and I applaud your concern. I hope to put your fears at rest by offering you a brief explanation of why I – and many of my fellow colleagues – believe that *The Handmaid's Tale* belongs in the language arts curriculum here at Elmhurst High School.

The Handmaid's Tale is taught in high school and college classrooms throughout the country. It is highly regarded as a compelling novel that not only teaches students about the dystopian form of literature, but also encourages them to examine and critique the society in which they live. I use the novel in my classroom not only because it is a genre of literature that many of the students have not yet been exposed to, but also because it raises many important issues about history, government, literature, and a variety of other disciplines. The novel is so rich that almost all of my students are able to connect with it on some level, and are then able to relate it to their own personal interests and ideas.

While *The Handmaid's Tale* does contain certain situations which, taken out of context, appear to be sexual in nature, the book does not glorify or encourage sexual acts of any kind. Because most of my students are mature young adults, they were able to approach these portions of the book with tact and sensitivity. Furthermore, while the book does make numerous references to the Bible, Christianity itself is not being mocked in the novel; rather, the book is simply warning readers of the dangers of misinterpreting and misappropriating Scripture.

The Handmaid's Tale is a demanding and challenging book, yet Mollie and her fellow classmates handled the material well and exceeded my expectations. The students in her class – as well as Mollie herself – were all interested and engaged in the novel; many said that it was the most interesting book that we read all year.

Your letter also stated that you were concerned about the creative work that I assigned the students. Yes, I encouraged them to speak in the voice of characters in the novel, realizing that – depending on their character choices – such an assignment may require them to use language that is different from their everyday speech. However, the students were free to choose which character they wanted to speak; it was Mollie's choice to write in the voice of Moira. While I was surprised that Mollie chose to write from the point of view of someone who is so different from herself, I was impressed

by the quality of her work. Her assignment was well written and convinced me that she understood the motivations of the character of Moira.

I hope I have put some of your fears about Mollie's assignment to rest. If you would like to discuss this matter with me further, please feel free to call me at school (555-3946 ext. 435) or at home (555-9731). If you would like to talk in person, just let me know, and we will schedule an appointment at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Ms. Allison Johnson

cc: Angela Williams, principal
 Frank Sloane, school board president

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Thank You, A&P!

I'd just like to thank the folks down at the Elmhurst A & P for always being patient with me! I'm 93 years old, but the folks at the A&P ever seem to mind. Why, as soon as I walk through those front doors, all the cashiers smile and say "Hi Bertha," and the young men never hesitate to carry out my groceries, even when I only get something small like a can of tuna. Everyone is so friendly at the A&P, they almost make me feel like I'm back home in Whistle Stop!

Bertha Mason
Elmhurst

Downtown Parking Problem

While attempting to take my children to Story Hour at the Elmhurst Library last Saturday, I had to drive around the block 5 times to find a parking space! As a result, my children almost missed the beginning of Miss Sue's reading of the new Harry Potter book!

The problem is simple: the library has no parking space of its own. Instead, it shares a lot with the Bill's Hardware Store, the Baker's Dozen Mall, and Cozy's Diner! At this time of year, when everyone is out and about doing their Christmas shopping, there isn't an empty parking space to be found in all of downtown Elmhurst!

We must solve this problem soon, or someone is going to have to explain to my children why they can't go to Story Hour anymore!

Jane Rochester
Elmhurst

Pornographic Literature Taught at EHS

Parents, I'm here to warn you about a serious problem here in Elmhurst. Some of our own children are being forced to read and study pornography, right here in our tax supported high school. I'm referring to the novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, which is required reading for many of our Elmhurst seniors, including my daughter Mollie. In case you are unfamiliar with the novel, I will briefly explain it for you: *The Handmaid's Tale* is a futuristic tale of a woman who is forced to live with a family and bear their children, as the woman of the house is infertile.

The novel is filled with various immoral sexual scenes, such as graphic description of two women in bed with a man at the same time. Furthermore, the book also discusses transvestitism and glorifies lesbianism. Issues such as rape and abortion are also mentioned.

The book is not only sexually explicit, it is a thinly veiled attack on Christianity and the religious right. It has often been referred to as a “feminist *1984*,” and it is amoral feminist propaganda at its worst – or best, depending on your point of view. As a concerned parent and a Christian, I refuse to let my daughter be subjected to such filth, and I hope you make the same decision. Please contact our school immediately and ask them to remove this immoral novel from their curriculum! Let them know you care about our children!

Reverend John Albright
Elmhurst Community Church

The Elmhurst Epistle

*Elmhurst Community Church
310 Main Street N.W.
555-3424*

Vol. 59 No. 13

Sunday, March 26

Welcome Visitors!

We greet you in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! Thank you for choosing to spend the Lord's Day with us! It is our sincere prayer that you will be brought closer to God through our worship service today!

As today is the first day of the Spring Quarter, several new Sunday School classes will begin this morning. We encourage you to stay after our worship service and visit one of the following:

Personal Evangelism: Seeking the Lost

Richard Smith, Room 9

A Study of I John

Andrew Jacobson, Room 11

Being the Man God Wants Me to Be

Pastor John, Room 13

Creation vs. Evolution

Michael Morrison, Room, 15

College/Young Adults

Earl Rayburn, Room 17

Ladies Bible Class: Women of the Bible

Margaret Thompson, Room 19

Teen Corner

Don't let anyone look down upon you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. I Timothy 4:12

Teens,

I hope all of you read Pastor John's column this week with a prayerful, open heart. We understand that most of you attend the public school system, and are faced daily with temptations and peer pressure. Your faith is often challenged not only by your friends, but often by your teachers. You are growing up in a society in which those who stand up for God are often seen as closed minded – even bigoted! But God's people cannot stand by silently and let other people lead us away from the will of our Father. We encourage you to always follow your conscience and to speak up for what is right, no matter where you are!

Pastor Rick

Don't forget: there will be a teen get-together at Emily Morrison's home on Friday evening! As always, girls bring the cookies, boys bring the pop!

Elmhurst Community Church
310 Main Street
Elmhurst, Ohio 44719

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We in Elmhurst have a crisis on our hands. Perhaps you have already read my letter to the editor of *Elmhurst Daily News* regarding this matter. For those of you who did not, I will briefly describe the current situation as I know it.

As most of you know, my daughter Mollie is a senior at Elmhurst High School. A few weeks ago, Mollie was forced to read the novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, by Margaret Atwood, in her English class. This novel is filled with characters that use profane language and participate in deviant sexual acts. Furthermore, the novel repeatedly misinterprets and misappropriates various Scriptures. Upon my brief reading of the novel, I found it to be intellectually weak and filled with nothing more than anti-Christian feminist propaganda.

When I discovered that Mollie was given no choice but to read this blasphemous novel, I immediately contacted her teacher, Ms. Allison Johnson, about this matter. Ms. Johnson promptly responded to me and attempted to convince me that the novel was valuable. She also stated that she has no plans to remove it from her curriculum. Upon her reply, I immediately contacted the school board and demanded her resignation. There will be a school board meeting this Tuesday night at 7 p.m. to discuss this matter.

Upon further investigation, I discovered that the Elmhurst Public Library also owns a copy of Atwood's novel. Any library cardholder – regardless of age – is eligible to check out this pornographic material. I immediately filed a complaint against the library, demanding that this novel be removed from circulation immediately. The library board has formed a committee to research my challenge.

My friends, we are not the only community facing this situation. People across the country are fighting to have this novel removed from their schools and libraries because they refuse to stand by and allow their tax dollars to pay for materials that malign the Word of God.

Perhaps you do not feel that you should become involved in this matter because you personally do not have school age children. Please, dismiss this thought immediately! Can you live with your conscience if you don't speak up and protest when teachers in your community attempt to fill the minds of your children with filth? As Christians, we have an obligation to not only our children, but to our Lord, to speak out against immorality.

I implore you to call Frank Sloane, the president of the Elmhurst School Board, at 555-7632, as soon as possible, regarding the dismissal of Ms. Johnson. Also, I urge you contact Eliza Winthrop, director of the Elmhurst Public Library, at 555-3623, and encourage her to remove *The Handmaid's Tale* from her shelves. If she appears to be unreceptive, then go to the library and fill out a detailed request form to have the book removed from the library. It is not necessary that you read the book to fill out this request; simply contact me and I will give you page numbers and descriptions of the offensive portions of the book.

I hope to see all of you at the school board meeting this Tuesday night. You owe it to our children to be there.

In Christ,
Pastor John

News and Notes

Hospitalized:

Bertha Mason entered the hospital today. She will be having her hip replaced tomorrow, and then sent home to recuperate. Please keep in her your prayers.

Youth:

Pastor Rick has many youth events planned in the upcoming weeks. See the Teen Bulletin Board in the East Wing for full details

Church Dinner:

Next Sunday, there will be a covered dish dinner in the fellowship hall following the A.M. service. A sign-up sheet is on the bulletin board in the West Wing.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Thank you for your concern!

I'd just like to thank everyone who visited me in the hospital when I was having my hip replaced. I would especially like to thank my next door neighbor, Velma Hayes, who stopped by everyday with her famous tuna noodle casserole. I would also like to thank my pastor, Rev. John Albright, for his numerous visits. Also, I can't forget to thank The Elmhurst Community Church Ladies Sewing Group for the beautiful lap robe. Your cards, prayers, and support have meant so much to me! I'm so lucky to live among such caring folks!

Bertha Mason
Elmhurst

Don't tolerate porn in Elmhurst!

I have just received news that Acme Adult Bookstores, Inc. is considering opening a new store on Rt. 17 just outside of Elmhurst. The store will be selling pornographic books, magazines, and videos. It is expected to open in mid - July.

We cannot continue to allow women to be denigrated and objectified by the porn industry. We must take a stand on this issue! Join us tonight at Elmhurst Community College for our annual Take Back the Night. At this event we will be circulating petitions against the Rt. 17 porn store. If we work together, we can keep porn out of Elmhurst!

Annie Kenyon
Elmhurst

Censorship at Elmhurst High School

As a senior at Elmhurst High School, I was appalled when I read Reverend John Albright's letter regarding *The Handmaid's Tale*, a novel that I had just finished studying in my English class. His accusations against the book were taken completely out of context.

From his letter, it is apparent that he does not understand the novel at all – perhaps he has not even read the entire book.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, author Margaret Atwood speaks of a society that is controlled by a fundamentalist religious group. The group controls the movements of all the citizens, including what materials – if any – they are permitted to read. While such a scenario seems far-fetched at first glance, I am writing to tell you Reverend Albright's actions prove that the same mentality that exists in Atwood's fictional

Gilead is alive and well here in Elmhurst.

As Americans, our forefathers fought hard so that we could live in a free society. We cannot stand by and let anyone tell us what we should or should not be allowed to read. This country is filled with religious fanatics like Reverend Albright who spend their time imposing their moral standards on those around them.

Please contact the school immediately in support of the novel and of Ms. Allison Johnson, our English teacher. If we don't stand up and fight for our freedoms, we will lose them.

Bianca Montgomery
Elmhurst

Bianca Montgomery

Ms. Johnson

Language Arts

28 February 2000

One Step Closer to Gilead: The Religious Right in America Today

Published in 1986 as a reaction to alarming trends in American society, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* served as a cautionary reminder of the possible chaos that could occur in our society if it were to become a theocracy. Atwood wrote *The Handmaid's Tale* at a time when the Republican Party was ruling the White House and society as a whole appeared to be focused on "Family Values." As politics and attitudes have changed significantly in the past fifteen years, one may assume that there is no longer a threat that America could become a fundamentalist theocracy such as Gilead, the society Atwood creates in her novel. However, after closely examining various fundamentalist Christian movements, both in politics and society as a whole, it is obvious that the Religious Right has gained power in many forms in the past fifteen years, and that not only is *The Handmaid's Tale* still relevant today, it may be even closer to becoming a reality.

In Gilead, as in America today, the Religious Right used both social movements and ideals, and political movements and ideals to shape the beliefs of the people. Atwood's Gilead is a society based on the most extreme teachings of the fundamentalist Christian Right. It is a society that kills abortion doctors and banishes homosexuals from mainstream society, a society that requires women to stay at home and to be subservient

to their husbands. Although many refuse to believe that such as society could happen today, the strong influence of the Religious Right - both through politics and through social movements - show that women and homosexuals are still in danger of losing the freedoms that they have worked to gain. Many would argue that not only does the fundamentalist Christian Right in America today want to take away the rights that women and homosexuals have earned, it wishes to change America into a country which practices fundamentalist Christianity only. It hopes to accomplish this goal by electing fundamentalist Christians to office, working to change policy to destroy the work of the women's movement and the gay rights movement, as many believe that gays and feminists are the standing between our society and a theocratic state:

The Right is desperate because we – queers and feminists – represent the most serious obstacle to its efforts to achieve a theocratic state. We are an obstacle because we stand for a different set of values than they do...Our values are rooted in a respect for religious freedom and individual freedom, a commitment for all and freedom of choice. (Vaid 72)

Freedom and choice are spoken about in Gilead as evil, destructive forces. In the eyes of the leaders of Gilead, the freedom that existed in America was a form of anarchy: “In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given from” (Atwood 24). In a similar vein, the leaders of Gilead contend that the former society was “a society dying, said Aunt Lydia, of too much choice” (Atwood 25). Such attitudes show that Gilead is a society in which a powerful few were given the power to determine the laws for all, especially when these laws are based upon one strict interpretation of a single religion.

The most obvious loss of power and choice in Gilead is felt by the women, who lose the right to work, own property, or have money (Atwood 176-178). When this occurs, the women become dependant on their husbands to provide for them, and the society reverts to complete patriarchal control. Offred becomes dependent on her husband for money, and immediately feels subservient to him. She begins “doing more housework, more baking” (Atwood 180). However, she is unhappy and unsatisfied in her new role. She feels trapped and dependant on Luke, who insists that he will take care of her, and seems to slightly enjoy that Offred is now in a lesser position. It is this compliance that allowed Gilead, a society in which all women are completely dependant, to develop.

In order for such strong governmental rules to have any effect, they must be supported by the majority society in some way. Not only did Gilead develop because of the compliance of men; it developed because women supported it as well. This support is illustrated in Serena Joy, a former fundamental religious advocate who publicly spoke about “the sanctity of the home, about how women should stay home. Serena Joy didn’t do this herself, she made speeches instead, but she presented this failure of hers as a sacrifice she was making for the good of all” (Atwood 45). Offred notes that Serena Joy is unhappy in Gilead, and “she stays in her home, but it doesn’t seem to agree with her. How furious she must be, now that she has been taken at her word” (Atwood 46). Through Serena Joy, Atwood addresses the irony that many of the people who spend the most time fighting to abolish equal rights for women are women themselves. Although such women preach that women should stay at home and focus solely on their families, these women do not practice this philosophy themselves.

There are many prominent women in the Religious Right today who are strikingly similar to Serena Joy:

Beverly LaHaye of Concerned Women for America, Phyllis Schlafly of the Eagle Forum, and others speak enthusiastically of women's destiny as wives and mothers centered in the home, even as they pursue lives as speakers, reformers and politicians. (Urofsky and May xiv)

LaHaye and Schlafly are two of the most well known and active female antifeminists in America today. However, while Schlafly's power has declined in the past decade, LaHaye has become even more powerful. She is founder of Concerned Women for America, a group which is both politically and socially active, the author of numerous religious books, and the host of her own radio show. In many ways, she is eerily similar to Serena Joy.

LaHaye and CWA firmly promote the idea that Christianity should play an important role in American politics. LaHaye argues that "Politicians who don't use the Bible to guide their public and private lives do not belong in office" (Burkett 165). LaHaye's Concerned Women of America web site espouses the same views:

The mission of CWA is to protect and promote Biblical values among all citizens – first through prayer, then education, and finally by influencing society – thereby reversing the decline in moral values in our nation.

Such statements imply that CWA firmly believes the only way America can only be a moral country if it is based upon Biblical teachings. Therefore, they plan to use their power to influence society to create such a nation. Although this sounds dangerously like

the creation of a theocracy, a legislator for CWA denies such claims: “I laugh when people say an organization like ours wants to set up a theocracy. We are just trying to help families”(Burkett 165).

Like women, homosexuals in Gilead have lost all of the rights and freedoms that they have earned. In Gilead, homosexuals are referred to as “gender traitors,” and are persecuted in a variety of ways. Male homosexuals are either killed and hung on the Wall as a reminder that homosexuality is no longer tolerated, or forced to live in the Colonies and are forced to wear dresses as they work amid nuclear waste. Lesbians – because they have the capacity to bear children – are given the “opportunity” to become handmaids. Should they revolt, as Moira does, they are forced to work in either the colonies or in the brothels.

Although the gay community has made a great deal of progress both in society and in the political realm, the Religious Right is ardently fighting to halt any further progress of the gay rights movement, and to destroy any rights that homosexuals have. In her revealing book, *Not By Politics Alone: The Enduring Influence of the Christian Right*, author Sara Diamond explains that, “during the 1990’s, the Christian Right’s vilification of homosexuals reached an all-time high” (156). As with women’s rights, the Religious Right is using many different strategies to fight the battle for gay rights.

Just as there are women in the Religious Right who fight against feminism, there are former homosexuals who fight against gay rights. The foundation Exodus International claims that homosexuals can be “saved” from their lifestyle through Christianity. Such claims have been well publicized by many in the Christian community, especially by the extremely popular Focus on the Family founder Dr. James

Dobson. Such publicity demeans the gay community by portraying it as a “sinful lifestyle” that one can be redeemed from (Diamond 164-165).

However, Exodus International is not the only ammunition that the Religious Right uses against the gay community. Organizations such as the Christian Coalition and Concerned Women for Americans lobby against any law that they feel would give “special rights” to homosexuals. The Religious Right considers “special rights” to be any law that would let homosexuals marry, that would protect them from discrimination, or in any other way allow them to be classified legally as a minority group (Diamond 158-163).

Although the attacks that the Christian Right wars against feminism, abortion, gay rights, and other such issues are the fights that are most publicized, these fights are clearly about more than issues. The Religious Right firmly believes that all social problems are due to the lack of God in America today.

Members of the religious right see the ills of society – crime, drugs, homelessness...and especially the disintegration of the American family – as all due to the abandonment of God and religious values...what is wrong with society today is that it has lost God. (Urofsky and May xi)

In response to such a belief, many powerful organizations in the Religious Right, including the Christian Coalition, have plans to “reconstruct” America into a country that dismisses all other religions and beliefs and promotes Christianity only. According to Urofsky and May, the Christian Coalition wants to reorder the nation’s political structure under the authority of a ‘Christian’ government. The leaders subscribe to a philosophy called ‘Christian Reconstruction’, or ‘Dominion Theology’...its adherents believe any

sort of pluralism is wrong, be it racial, ethnic, or religious” (Urofsky and May xvi)

Such a government sounds remarkably like the government of Gilead, a theocracy based upon the strict religious teachings of one group of people.

In conclusion, the Religious Right is a very prominent force in society and in politics today. If the ideals that it espouses were to become implemented into our government, America could become a place similar to Gilead – a place where women and homosexuals have no power, and where every law is based on one strict interpretation of Christianity. The strength and power that the Religious Right wields in America today shows that Atwood’s novel is as chilling and as pertinent to our society today as it was when it was first published

Works Cited

Atwood, Margaret. The Handmaid's Tale. New York: Doubleday, 1986.

Burkett, Elinor. The Right Women : A Journey Through the Heart of Conservative America. New York: Scribner, 1998.

Concerned Women for America. 9 December 1999. Concerned Women for America.

<<http://www.cwfa.org>>

Diamond, Sara. Not By Politics Alone: The Enduring Influence of the Christian Right. New York: Guilford, 1998.

Urofsky, Melvin I., and Martha May, eds. The New Christian Right. New York: Garland, 1996.

Vaid, Urvashi. “Playing the ex-gay games: the Right is desperate because we – queers

and feminists – represent the most serious obstacles to its efforts to achieve a theocratic state". The Advocate. 15 Sept. 1998: 72.

Elmhurst Public Library

120 Main St.
Elmhurst, Ohio 44719
555-3623

April 17, 2000

Reverend John Albright
Elmhurst Community Church
310 Main Street N.W.
Elmhurst, Ohio 44719

Reverend Albright:

Immediately following your request for reconsideration of Margaret Atwood's novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*, we formed a committee to review the novel. The committee was composed of myself and five other librarians or trustees of the library. Each of us carefully read *The Handmaid's Tale* and we discussed the work at great length. We also searched our archives for reviews of the novel and read those as a group. We met on three different occasions to discuss this situation.

Upon our careful consideration of *The Handmaid's Tale*, we have decided to keep the book on our shelves. While the book does contain some portions that we admit could be offensive to some of our patrons, we do not consider the book to be pornographic or gratuitous in nature. Our research shows that our colleagues agree with us, as *Library Journal*, one of the foremost publications in our discipline, proclaimed that *The Handmaid's Tale* is "highly recommended for most libraries." We are confident that we have made the right decision in this matter.

Thank you for your interest in the collection of The Elmhurst Public Library. If you have any questions or would like to examine the minutes from our meetings about this matter, you are more than welcome to meet with me regarding our decision.

Sincerely,

Eliza Winthrop
Elmhurst Library Director

sarah -

today was my first day at elmhurst christian academy. it's so weird to be in a new school again - especially when i was just getting used to elmhurst high. i wish i could have stayed graduated from there, but my dad just wouldn't back down. after the board ruled for ms. johnson, he swore that i would never go back there.

everyone was really nice to me today, but i miss ms. johnson. i learned so much from her, and i never even got to tell her goodbye. maybe someday, after this all settles down, i can e-mail her and let her know how much i learned from her.

back to my homework. . .

mollie

References

All of my works in my MVA are based on research. While most of my references are “traditional” sources, – books and periodicals – I also gained information for my MVA from “non-traditional” sources, such as internet references, interviews, and personal experiences. Because my different genres overlap with one another, it was difficult to list all of the sources that influenced each work. I have attempted to list the most important references under the proper heading, and, when appropriate, list other references parenthetically.. All of the sources that I refer to are listed on my bibliography page.

1. E-Mail Messages

While the e-mail messages that appear throughout the paper are included primarily to explain the setting, introduce the characters of the MVA, and to provide transitions, they also are based upon the research and personal experience. For example, because I was raised in a conservative Christian environment, the character of Mollie reacts and speaks much as I would have in high school. Her descriptions of her father's behavior are based not only on my personal experiences with similar individuals, but also upon the research that I did on the motivations of censors, including an interview with a librarian (see #6, #8, and #9 for more information). The final e-mail message, in which the reader learns that *The Handmaid's Tale* was retained, is based on information from reported challenges of the novel (see #6).

2. Going Beyond Literature: Using Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* to Discuss Social and Political Issues in the Language Arts Classroom

The idea to write an article about teaching *The Handmaid's Tale*, and the essay that developed from the idea, are based upon essays in the book *Approaches to Teaching Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale** (Wilson, et al). While many of the articles in the book were useful, I was particularly influenced by J. Brooks Bouson's, “A Feminist and Psychoanalytic Approach in a Women's College” (122-127). In this essay, Bouson focuses teaching on *The Handmaid's*

Tale to an all female classroom, and discovers that “Atwood’s novel has the power to make women readers anxious. . .it also brings home the truth of the dictum that for women ‘the personal is political.’” (122). Bouson speaks of making The Handmaid’s Tale more believable for students by exploring the “conservative backlash against feminism and the political agenda of the New Right fundamentalists” (122). After students were made aware of these social and political movements, they “found it difficult to dismiss the book” (122).

The tone and format of “Going Beyond Literature. . .” was also influenced by an article that appeared in English Journal in 1994. The article, “Literature Out of the Closet: Bringing Gay and Lesbian Texts and Subtexts Out in High School English,” by high school English teacher Vicky Greenbaum, explored various approaches to teaching literature containing gay themes.

3. Assignment Sheet

The assignment sheet, which focuses on analyzing characters from Atwood’s The Handmaid’s Tale, is a combination of my ideas and information from a survey of teachers conducted by two of the editors of Approaches to Teaching Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale and Other Works*. In their research, Friedman and Hengen discovered that many teachers use creative methods to help their students engage with Atwood’s text, such as “copying Atwood’s style; writing alternative endings or movie scripts; creating a male dystopia; taking on, in creative writing or skits, the persona of the Commander or other Atwoodian figures; scrambling lines of poetry to consider resolution” (Wilson, et al. 10).

4. Poem #1: “Penalty for Perversion”

The poem, a response to the assignment sheet, is written from the perspective of Moira, a lesbian prostitute in The Handmaid’s Tale. In part, this poem was inspired by Moira’s actions in Jezebel’s (Atwood 234-250). While Moira is portrayed as strong and rebellious throughout most of the novel, in Jezebel’s her rebelliousness is gone and she is resigned to the position society has cast her in.

On a larger scale, the poem explores the consequences of condemnation of homosexuality for religious reasons – a debate that is being argued daily by many in America’s religious right today. My poem was also inspired by the research that I did while writing the paper “One Step Closer to Gilead: The Religious Right in America Today,” especially Urvashi Vaid’s article “Playing the ex-gay games: the Right is desperate because we – queers and feminists – represent the most serious obstacles to its efforts to achieve a theocratic state,” which focuses on the tension between the religious right and the gay community in America today.

5. Poem #2: “Two Kinds of Freedom”

This poem, written from the perspective of Aunt Lydia – another character in The Handmaid’s Tale – works in direct opposition to Moira’s poem. It is based on Aunt Lydia’s philosophy that “there is more than one kind of freedom . . . freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from” (Atwood 24). Aunt Lydia is an interesting character because, unlike Moira – who loses all of her power by fighting against the patriarchal structure of Gilead – Aunt Lydia ironically

derives her power by oppressing other women. Burkett's The Right Women, which focuses on women who are involved in fundamentalist religions, gave me a better understanding of the possible motivations for Aunt Lydia's behavior, and helped me to write from her perspective.

6. Elmhurst Public Library Citizen's Request for a Reconsideration of a Work and the letter from Rev. Albright to Ms. Johnson

The form was copied from National Council of Teachers of English web site (www.ncte.org). My comments on the form and the content of the letter are both based on information on challenges of The Handmaid's Tale from Foerstel Banned In The USA, and YALSA's Hit List.

According to Foerstel,

in 1990, a religious leader in Rohnert Park, California criticized the fact that the leading character in The Handmaid's Tale was a woman, making it difficult for young men to relate to the character. There were also complaints that the novel, which was being used in a twelfth grade literature class, was profane, sexually explicit, and anti-Christian. One parent circulated a letter to local residents and school trustees, saying, "If you as parents do not rise up and go to your schools over issues such as these, we will continue to educate our kids for the gutter" (209).

Similarly, Foerstel reports that

In March 1992, The Handmaid's Tale and other books were challenged in the Waterloo, Iowa, schools for lack of respect for Christianity, treatment of women as sex objects, use of profanity, and themes of despair. One objector said the books "aren't the caliber of the word of God" and that he opposed any book "that takes the name of my Lord in vain." The protesters requested that the books be removed from option reading in twelfth-grade English classes and that a new textbook selection process be adopted. (209-10).

In both cases above, The Handmaid's Tale was reviewed and retained by the schools. However, it has been banned: according to YALSA, The Handmaid's Tale was "removed from the Chicopee (Mass.) High School English class reading list in 1993 because it contains profanity and sex" (57).

Also, I gained information about the reconsideration process and the

motivations of the censor from the ALA documents listed on my bibliography page, and through an interview with a librarian (see #9).

7. Ms. Johnson's Reply to Reverend Albright

This letter, a response to Rev. Albright's request to have The Handmaid's Tale removed from Ms. Johnson's classroom, is based upon the sources listed in references 2 and 3, especially Wilson's Approaches to Teaching Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale.

8. Letters to the Editor #1

"Thank you, A&P" and "Downtown Parking Problem" work together to give the reader of the MVA a picture of what kind of town Elmhurst is. Elmhurst is a small conservative town, yet not so conservative that they have banned the Harry Potter series – the frequently banned books of the decade, according to the ALA.

The tone and content of "Pornographic Literature Taught at EHS" derives from various sources, including Thomas Storck's essay, "Censorship Can Be Beneficial". Storck argues that censorship is necessary, because " it is naïve to think that we can freely read and view things that promote or portray evil deeds without sometimes feeling encouraged to commit such deeds" (18). Storck contends that, for the good of the community, some works must be censored. The letter is also based on sources listed in #6 and in #9.

Also, many book reviews, including Feuer's review, for example, refer to The Handmaid's Tale as a "feminist 1984."

9. The Elmhurst Epistle

I derived many of the ideas for content and layout of this bulletin based upon the weekly bulletin from my own church, the 38th St. Church of Christ Messenger.

The content of Rev. Albright's letter to his congregation was derived from numerous sources. When I interviewed Maureen Kilcullen, a reference librarian, about her experiences with censorship, she discussed her various challenges that she encountered while working at a library in a small, conservative Ohio town. She explained that when many people would visit the library (or call the library to complain about a specific book), often the person had never read the book. Instead, most people were alerted about "questionable" materials from their church leaders, and then encouraged to contact the library about their removal. She believed that many of the people who complained about library materials were attempting to enforce their moral standards on the rest of the community. Her interview enabled me not only to understand the motivations of those who attempt to censor library materials, but also gave me insight on the reconsideration process.

Also, Rev. Albright's letter to the congregation was based upon material mentioned in #6, #8, and #9.

10. Letters to the Editor #2

"Thank you for your concern," the second letter by Bertha Mason, was written not only give the reader a better picture of the people who live in Elmhurst, but to show that Rev. Albright is a prominent and well-respected citizen of Elmhurst.

"Don't tolerate porn in Elmhurst" was written to show that censorship can come in many forms. While many conservatives in America today favor censorship in the name of religion, many liberals today promote censorship of pornography (38-39). Atwood explores this idea in The Handmaid's Tale, as one of Offred's earliest memories is attending a burning of pornographic magazines

with her mother (38-39). Also, Take Back the Night is mentioned in the letter because at the Rachel and Leah Center, Offred watches a video of her mother taking part in a Take Back the Night march (119).

The letter “Censorship at Elmhurst High School” explores the idea that a society that allows censorship to continue could become a society similar to Gilead. This letter is based on #11, a paper about the religious right in America today.

11. One Step Closer to Gilead: The Religious Right in America Today

This paper explores the possibility that a society like Gilead could occur today by comparing the actions of the current religious right in America to those in Atwood’s fictional Gilead. The sources for the paper are listed both in the “works cited” at the end of the paper, and on the bibliography page.

12. Letter from the director of the Elmhurst Public Library to Rev.

Albright

This letter, a response to Rev. Albright’s request that *The Handmaid’s Tale* be removed from the public library, is based upon information from my interview with a reference librarian (see #9), a review of *The Handmaid’s Tale* from the *Library Journal*, and information from the American Library Association web site (www.ala.org). I chose to have the library deny Reverend Albright’s request because, as I stated in #6, in the majority of reported cases in which *The Handmaid’s Tale* was challenged, it was retained.

Works Cited

38th Street Church of Christ. The Messenger. 5 Nov. 2000.

American Library Association. Coping With Challenges: Strategies and Tips for Dealing With Challenges to Library Materials. 17 November 2000.

<http://www.ala.org/alaorg/oif/coping_inf.html>.

---. Conducting a Challenge Hearing. 17 November 2000.

<<http://www.ala.org/alaorg/oif/challengehearing.html>>.

---. The 100 Most Frequently Challenged Books of 1990-99. 17 November 2000.

<<http://www.ala.org/alaorg/oif/top100bannedbooks.html>>.

Atwood, Margaret. The Handmaid's Tale. Anchor: New York, 1986.

Bouson, J. Brooks. "A Feminist and Psychoanalytic Approach in a Women's College."

Approaches to Teaching Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Other Works. Eds.

Sharon R. Wilson, Thomas B. Friedman, and Shannon Hengen. MLA: New York, 1996. 122-127.

Burkett, Elinor. The Right Women : A Journey Through the Heart of Conservative America. New York: Scribner, 1998.

Concerned Women for America. Concerned Women for America. 9 December 1999.

<<http://www.cwfa.org>>.

Diamond, Sara. Not By Politics Alone: The Enduring Influence of the Christian Right. New York: Guilford, 1998.

Feuer, Lois. "The Calculus of Love and Nightmare: The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition." Critique 38.2 (1997): 83-96.

Fisher, Ann H. Rev. of The Handmaid's Tale, by Margaret Atwood. Library Journal 1

Feb. 1986: 91.

Foerstel, Herbert N. Banned in the USA: A Reference Guide to Book Censorship in Schools and Public Libraries. Greenwood: Westport, 1994.

Greenbaum, Vicky. "Literature Out of the Closet: Bringing Gay and Lesbian Texts and

Subtext Out in High School English." English Journal 83.5 (1994): 71-74.

Kilcullen, Maureen. Personal Interview. 15 Nov. 2000.

McCabe, Stephen. "A Novel for the Complacent." Rev. of The Handmaid's Tale, by Margaret Atwood. Humanist Sept. – Oct. 1986: 31-32.

Michael, Magali Cornier. Feminism and the Postmodern Impulse: Post World War II Fiction. State University of New York: Albany, 1996.

National Council of Teachers of English. The Students' Right to Read. 21 Nov. 2001.

<<http://www.ncte.org/censorship/right2read.shtml>>.

Storck, Thomas. "Censorship Can Be Beneficial." Censorship: Opposing Viewpoints. Ed. Stay, Byron L. Greenhaven: San Diego, 1997. 17-24.

Thompson, Lee Briscoe. Scarlet Letters: Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale. ECW: Ontario, 1997.

Urofsky, Melvin I., and Martha May, eds. The New Christian Right. New York: Garland, 1996.

Vaid, Urvashi. "Playing the ex-gay games: the Right is desperate because we – queers and feminists – represent the most serious obstacles to its efforts to achieve a theocratic state." The Advocate. 15 Sept. 1998: 72.

Wilson, Sharon R., Thomas B. Friedman and Shannon Hengen, eds. Approaches to

Teaching Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Other Works. MLA: New York, 1996.

Young Adult Library Services Association. Hit List: Frequently Challenged Books for Young Adults. American Library Association: Chicago, 1996.