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The handmaid's tale chapter 16 analysis

After the prayers and Bible reading, the Ceremony continues as usual. In the bedroom, Offred lies on her back between Serena's legs, her head resting on Serena's pubic bone. Serena's rings dig into Offred's skirt is hiked up and her underwear is off. The two women hold hands, and Serena's rings dig into Offred's skirt is hiked up and her underwear is off. The two women hold hands, and Serena's rings dig into Offred's skirt is hiked up and her underwear is off. sex with Offred in a brisk, impersonal fashion, then zips himself up and leaves the room promptly. Serena orders Offred to leave, even though Offred is safely alone in her bedroom, she removes the butter from her shoe and uses it as lotion for her skin, because lotion and beauty products are forbidden to the Handmaids. Offred cannot sleep, so she decides to steal something. She sneaks downstairs and leave it for the next Handmaid to find. As she stands in the sitting room, she senses the presence of someone behind her in the room. It is Nick. Neither of them is supposed to be downstairs. Wordlessly, they kiss, and she longs to have sex with him right there. She thinks of Luke, telling him he would understand, then thinking he wouldn't. Sex is too dangerous, and Nick and Offred separate. Nick whispers that the Commander sent him to find her. The Commander wants to see her in his office tomorrow. Summary: Chapter 18 After returning to her room, Offred lies in her bed, remembering making love to Luke while her baby kicked inside her womb. She imagines that he is in prison. She also imagines that he made it safely across the border and that one day a message from him will come to her in some unexpected way. She believes in these three scenarios simultaneously, so that nothing will surprise her. Summary: Chapter 19 Offred dreams of catching her daughter in a hug, but a wave of sorrow overtakes her because she knows that she is dreaming. She dreams of waking up to her mother carrying in a tray of food and taking care of her. At breakfast, Offred contemplates the beauty of a boiled egg in sunlight. The sound of sirens interrupt her breakfast; it is a Birthmobile, coming to collect Offred and take her to a birth. Janine, now known as Ofwarren, is about to have her baby. During the ride to Commander Warren's house, Offred wonders if Janine will give birth to a child with birth defects, which leads to these birth defects in their children. She recalls Aunt Lydia saying that women who did not want to have babies poisoned their own bodies or got their tubes tied. She calls these women Jezebels, scorners of God's gifts. In an old classroom, Aunt Lydia showed them a graph of how the birthrate had fallen over the course of history, eventually falling below the "line of replacement." Aunt Lydia said that women who did not want to breed were lazy sluts. She explains how much better childbirth is in Gilead in contrast to the old days, because it is better for the baby, and because God wants women to suffer during childbirth. The Birthmobile arrives at the home of Ofwarren's Commander, and the Handmaids file in. Then another Birthmobile pulls up, the one that carries the Wives. Offred imagines the Wives sitting about how unclean they are. Summary: Chapter 20 While Ofwarren gives birth, the Wife lies in the sitting room as if she is giving birth. Janine lies in the master bedroom, and the Handmaids gather around the bed to watch. Offred remembers how the Aunts used to show the Handmaids pornographic movies in which men practiced violent sex on women. Aunt Lydia said that was how men thought of women in the old days. One movie was about "Unwomen," feminists from the days before Gilead. The Aunts did not play the soundtrack, because they did not want the Handmaids to hear what the women said. In one of these movies, Offred and her mother as a young woman, marching in a feminist rally. Her mother gave birth to Offred in her late thirties and chose to be a single mother. Offred and her mother used to fight, because her mother thought Offred did not appreciate the sacrifices early feminists made in order to help Janine give birth. One Handmaid asks Offred describes Moira, and the woman tells are to help Janine give birth. One Handmaid asks Offred describes Moira, and the woman tells are to help Janine give birth. her she will keep an eye out for a woman of that description. The woman is looking for someone named Alma. She asks Offred what her real name is, but before the child is born, Janine (Ofwarren) and the Wife of Warren sit on the Birthing Stool together. The Wife announces she will name the baby is given to her. T for a few months, and then she will transfer to a new Commander. Since she has produced a child, she will never be declared an Unwoman and sent to the colonies. Analysis: Chapters 16-21 Offred's description of the Ceremony is supposed to be ironic, horrifying, and funny at the same time. For all the elaborate ceremonial preparations and the symbolic positioning of the bodies of Serena and Offred, the mechanical act itself makes the solemnity seem ridiculous. Offred, searching for the best word, defines the Ceremony as "fucking" rather than sex. The harshness of that word contrasts with other possibilities, like "making love," which would imply that she enjoyed or took part in the act. And she cannot call it rape, she says, because she was given a choice and she chose to be a Handmaid. Read more about how Offred became a Handmaid. The Commander has sex as if performing a slightly boring duty; Offred must grit her teeth and detach herself from the situation; an angry Serena Joy grips Offred so hard that her rings cut into Offred's hand. Sex in the Ceremony is mandated, scripted, formal, and pleasureless. Offred says sex is simply for the purpose of reproduction now, and nothing more. Read more about the role of Handmaids in Gilead. The hustle and bustle surrounding Ofwarren's labor reinforces the importance of pregnancy in Gilead. Birth, now a rare event, has become a joyful community gathering for the women. However, this joy is tempered by the fear of giving birth to an infant with visible differences—a frequent outcome as a result of widespread pollution. These infants are called "Unbabies," a name that suggests society does not consider them humans. Those who do not fit into the Gileadean worldview are considered not merely dangerous or evil but actually non-human. Significantly, the "un" prefix is also attached to former feminists, called "Unwomen," who are sent to Gilead's feared Colonies. Atwood associates Gileadeans with Joseph Stalin and Hitler, who dehumanized middle-class peasants and Jews in order to justify killing them. Language, in a totalitarian state, is a useful tool of oppression. Read more about language as an oppressive tool. Aunt Lydia demonstrates how the patriarchal structure of Gilead borrows from and perverts the ideas of the women's movement. She tells the women of their terrible plight in the old world, when men thought of women as sex objects or as potential victims of sexual violence. Some feminists do oppose pornographic films on these grounds, saying that the films objectify women and glorify violence against women. They say pornographic films, like domestic and sexual violence of all kinds, stem from the legacy of patriarchal oppression. Aunt Lydia and Gilead agree with this condemnation of sexual violence against women, but, in contrast to the feminists, they think a patriarchal society can effectively protect women from violence. From one perspective, they have succeeded: in Gilead, but they are not judged by their bodies, catcalled, or attacked. But this safety comes at a price. Women may not be raped by strangers in Gilead, but they must submit to state-sanctioned rape by the Commanders. Sexual love and romantic love do not exist for them. And the price of this safety is the total forfeit of control over their bodies. Read more about the similarities between reactionary and feminist ideologies. 18th June 2017 by Aimee Wright If you haven't read the past chapters, do that now: 1-3; 4-5; 6-8; 9-11; 12-13; 14-15. Chapter 16: 'The Ceremony goes as usual.' says Offred to open the chapter. She lies on her back, still fully clothed 'except for the healthy white cotton underdrawers' that she has to wear during the day. Offred talks about what she would be able to see if she opened her eyes during the Ceremony, including Serena Joy's 'four-poster bed', but would not see the carpet, or the 'sprigged curtains'. Serena Joy sits behind Offred during the Ceremony, as though she is the one who is having sex with the Commander, and not Offred during the Ceremony, as though she is the one who is having sex with the Commander, and not Offred during the Ceremony, as though she is the one who is having sex with the Commander, and not Offred during the Ceremony, as though she is the one who is having sex with the Commander, and not Offred during the Ceremony, as though she is the one who is having sex with the Commander, and not Offred during the Ceremony, as though she is the one who is having sex with the Commander, and not Offred during the Ceremony, as though she is the one who is having sex with the Commander, and not Offred during the Ceremony, as though she is the one who is having sex with the Commander, and not Offred during the Ceremony, as though she is the one who is having sex with the Ceremony, as though she is the one who is having sex with the Ceremony, as though she is the one who is having sex with the Ceremony, as though she is the one who is having sex with the Ceremony, as though she is the one who is having sex with the Ceremony, as though she is the one who is having sex with the Ceremony sex wit the one who is "going through" the intercourse, and the one who will go through the pregnancy. The idea that Offred says: 'This is supposed to signify that we are one flesh, one being. What it really means is that she is in control,' (p.104). The way that Serena Joy and Offred are 'one flesh, one being' portrays that they are becoming one fertile human during the Ceremony. But, Atwood implies that it is Offred's fertility moulding into Serena Joy 'is in control'. Offred calls the Ceremony 'fucking' because she cannot call it 'making love' because there is no 'love' between she and the Commander, and she says 'copulating' would be a term that is 'inaccurate', and 'rape' is also not an accurate term because 'nothing is going on here that [Offred hasn't] signed up for.' Therefore, the vulgarity and colloquialism of 'fucking' represents the lack of emotion, but similarly, the consensual relationship that they have. Offred reinforces the lack connections between she and the Commander by saying that he was 'humming; like a man who has other things on his mind.' Subsequently, Offred says that the Ceremony has 'nothing to do with passion or love or romance or any of those notions we used to titillate [them]selves with.' This reinforces the emotionless relationship that the Commander and the Handmaid are forced to have. CONTEXTUAL LINK: As mentioned in this chapter. There is not proven connection between Atwood and this poem or the Romantics, but a quotation links to the Albatross hanging around the Mariner's neck like a burden in this chapter. Offred says: 'If I were to open my eyes a slit, I would be able to see him, his not-unpleasant face hanging over my torso,' (p.105). The way that the Commander is 'hanging over' Offred's 'torso' is reflective of the Albatross' burden hanging around the Mariner's neck. This implies that Offred thinks of the Commander as a burden on herself. However, the Mariner gets the Albatross' death, which gives him the burden. Does this imply that Offred thinks that she is the cause of the burden 'hanging over [her] torso'? Offred says that '[k]issing is forbidden' between she and the Commander, and this is what makes the Ceremony bearable. And then Offred says: 'One detaches oneself. One describes.' (p.106). These declarative sentences are fairly simple, which is representative of the simple connection between the Commander and Offred. The way that Offred speaks of herself as 'one' implies that she feels as though she has lost her own identity, and has 'detached' herself from herself during the Ceremony. Perhaps she feels as though she can accept the Ceremony more if she is not emotionally there herself, but instead just there with her 'torso'. The Commander has finally finished with the intercourse, and he leaves almost immediately, just after he 'rests a moment, withdraws, recedes, rezippers.' This asyndetic list shows the speed at which the Commander wants to escape the room. Serena Joy uses imperatives to Offred saying '"Get up and get out."' This represents how Serena Joy has been effected by the Ceremony, because the Handmaid and the Wife are supposed to have 'a time of silent meditation', but she does not want to do this. The reader then begins to feel both extreme sympathy and extreme sympathy for, as though Offred is giving the reader, in a direct mode of address, an ultimatum of whose "side" we should be on. Chapter 17: Offred begins this chapter by saying 'This is what I do when I'm back in my room:' and follows this with a list asyndetic list of "chores": 'I take off my clothes and put on my nightgown.../ I look for the pat of butter, in the toe of my right shoe.../ I rub the butter on my face...' (p.107). The 'butter' represents the domesticity that the Handmaids are bound to, as they are not allowed normal moisturiser for their facial health. Offred goes onto say that Handmaids 'are containers, it's only the insides of [their] bodies that are important.' The way that they are seen as 'containers' rather that people dehumanises them to a mineral state. However, we must note that this is only Offred's point of the narrative, does not have any reason to disbelieve Offred. Offred says that she learnt the "butter trick" in the Red Centre, and says that as long as the Handmaids continue to do this, they have hope that '[they] will some day get out, that [they] will be touched again, in love or desire.' (p.107). This implies that this is not a technique that they use just to spite their superiors, but they do it because they are desperate for hope of escaping. Offred says that she 'lie[s] on her single bed, flat, like a piece of toast.' which reinforces the inanimate objectification that the Handmaids get given. She fantasises about Luke, wishing she had him with her, and she wants to be more than valuable.' (p.108). The way that she says this in the middle of a fantasy about her husband implies that Luke used to see her as 'more than valuable' but now, she has depreciated into "less than valuable". After speaking of value, Offred says that the wants to steal something. So, she goes out of her room into the hall, where there is a 'nightlight' to guide her, and she says that '[t]his is entirely illegal.' Offred sees her body in a fisheye on the wall and she says she has a 'white shape, of tented body, hair down [her] back like a mane, [her] eyes gleaming.' (p.108). It is difficult to decipher the tone of this description because is 'hair down her back like a mane, [her] eyes gleaming.' (p.108). It is difficult to decipher the tone of this description because is 'hair down her back like a mane, [her] eyes gleaming.' (p.108). It is difficult to decipher the tone of this description because is 'hair down her back like a mane, [her] eyes gleaming.' wandering through the house on her own, as it gives her a sense of freedom. Offred asks herself what she should take, and decides that it should be something 'that will not be missed.' This way, she will not be missed.' This way, she will not be missed arrangement.' (p.109). CONTEXTUAL LINK: An ongoing debate about Nature is that Nature could be a good thing or a bad thing, and this paradox is seen in the latter quotation. Offred is going to steal, which is evidently a negative and bad move, but when this is connected with the natural imagery of the 'daffodil', it begs the question whether Nature is a good thing. The act of stealing, if it rose from Nature, implies that Nature is an immoral spirit, but the 'daffodil' is a part of Nature that, when in blossom, is beautiful. But, the way that Atwood says that the daffodil is 'withered' reinforces that the debate is leaning towards the immorality of Nature rather than the "natural" qualities of Nature. Offred is heard by someone, and Offred says that wearing white was a bad choice of colour to sneak around in as she is 'snow in moonlight, even in the dark'. A voice sounds, and it is Nick's voice telling her not to scream. Nick asks her what she is doing, but she does not answer because he is 'illegal'. Offred is regretting her idea of coming to steal something as she says there is '[t]oo much trust, too much risk, too much already.' In addition, Offred evidently has a sexual attraction to Nick as she goes on to say: 'I want to reach up, taste his skin, he makes me hungry.' (p.109). The metaphor for sex, used through the double entendre of 'hungry', implies that Offred is so deprived of passionate "love" that she is becoming greedy and 'hungry' for Nick. The sense of 'taste' is very significant here to reinforce the innuendo that Offred uses. But, Offred begins to think that the person in front of her is Luke, in Nick's body, and this is the reason for her sexual attraction to him. However, we can speculate that this is a lie to herself so that she can persuade herself that she is not cheating on Luke or anything of the sort, but she actually is attracted to Nick for him and not for the idea that it "could be Luke". Nick then informs Offred that the Commander wants to see her in his office the following day, alone, which is forbidden. Offred that the Commander wants to see her in his office the following day, alone, which is forbidden. Offred that the Commander wants to see her in his office the following day, alone, which is forbidden. says 'I find the door, turn the knob, fingers on cool porcelain, open. It's all I can do.' (p.110). Chapter 18: We are now into a new 'night' section, and Offred is in bed 'trembling' about her run in with Nick. She talks about the sound that a glass would make when you 'wet the rim of a glass and run your finger around the rim', and Offred says she 'feels like' the sound of the glass, and subsequently feels like the word 'shatter'. Offred remembers a time when she and Luke were in bed together when she was pregnant. Offred says that her daughter inside her belly was being kept awake by the thunderstorm outside, as though foetuses are born before birth. Atwood uses a hyperbole about sex as has Offred say 'If I thought this would never happen again I would die.' and this is contradictory of her existence in the present day, because she is aware now that it will never happen again, yet she is not dead. She goes onto say: 'nobody dies from a lack of sex. It's lack of love we die from.' (p.113). The certain tone of 'nobody' that Atwood uses implies that Offred is sure that she will die from the 'lack of love' she is feeling. If she was not having sex in Gilead, but was in love, it could be argued that she would not die. However, Offred has not been in love with anyone connectively since Luke, and it has been a long time since seeing him. Therefore, we could speculate that Offred's theory is wrong because if you die from 'lack of love', she would be dead by now, but she is not. Offred then goes onto question: 'Can I be blamed for wanting a real body, to put my arms around? Without it I too am disembodied.' (p.113). With the interrogative sentence used here, as well as a declarative sentence, we can see that Offred is trying to find answers for her loneliness, and lack of identity and possession. The use of the predicative 'disembodied' illustrates Offred's disassociation with herself and people around her. She needs another 'body', and she is currently 'disembodied' without love or without Luke. Atwood now uses a semantic field of belief. The section begins with Offred saying 'Here is what I believe' and leads onto multiple paragraphs about what Offred believes. For instance: 'I believe Luke is lying face down in a thicket, a tangle of braken, the brown fronds from last year under the green ones unrolled, or ground hemlock perhaps, although it is too early for red berries...I pray that the hole, or two or three, there was more than one shot, they were close together, I pray that at least one hole is neatly, quickly, and finally through the skull...dull I hope, like the word thud, only the one and then silence.' (p.114). This belief is written in a stream of consciousness, and we can detect this by unpicking which parts are irrelevant to the point, such as 'although it is too early for red berries' and the parenthesis 'they were close together'. In addition, the onomatopoeic 'thud' is indicative of how 'dull' Offred finds her own thoughts, and perhaps she does actually 'believe' all of this. However, the next 'belief' that she feels is different: 'I also believe that Luke is sitting up, in a rectangle somewhere, grey cement, on a ledge or the edge of something, a bed or chair. God knows what he's wearing. God knows what they've put him in...they'd cut the beard too. You'd think.' (p.114). This belief is the opposite of the first belief, as this time he is 'sitting up' and not 'lying face down'. But, the similarities between both environments and beliefs is that they are both negative. Either way, Offred believes that Luke is unsafe, either in a 'thicket' or in a 'grey cement'. Atwood uses a lot of description that is simply Offred pondering what has happened to Luke, and this is what this chapter consists of. There is another belief that Offred expresses about Luke, which in one way is happier than the first two, but also has a similar negative tone: 'I also believe that they didn't catch him or catch up with him after all, that he made it, reached the bank, swam the river, crossed the border, dragged himself up on the far shore, an island, teeth chattering, found his way to a nearby farmhouse, was allowed in, with suspicion at first, but then when they understood who he was, they were friendly, not the sort who would turn him in...I believe in the resistance as I believe there can be no light.' (p.115). The negative imagery, first of all, is seen through Luke's "journey" - 'swam the river, crossed the border, dragged himself' - and this represents that Luke has been suffering, just as he would have been if he was caught. However, we can now perceive that Offred is completely lost in fantasy about Luke's safety, and the metaphor of the 'shadow' and 'light' represents the juxtaposition between fantasy about Luke's safety, and the metaphor of the 'shadow' and 'light' represents the juxtaposition between fantasy about Luke's safety, and the metaphor of the 'shadow' and 'light' represents the juxtaposition between fantasy about Luke's safety, and the metaphor of the 'shadow' and 'light' represents the juxtaposition between fantasy about Luke's safety, and the metaphor of the 'shadow' and 'light' represents the juxtaposition between fantasy about Luke's safety, and the metaphor of the 'shadow' and 'light' represents the juxtaposition between fantasy about Luke's safety, and the metaphor of the 'shadow' and 'light' represents the juxtaposition between fantasy about Luke's safety, and the metaphor of the 'shadow' and 'light' represents the juxtaposition between fantasy about Luke's safety, and the metaphor of the 'shadow' and 'light' represents the juxtaposition between fantasy about Luke's safety, and the metaphor of the 'shadow' and 'light' represents the juxtaposition between fantasy about Luke's safety, and the metaphor of the 'shadow' and 'light' represents the juxtaposition between fantasy about Luke's safety and 'light' represents the juxtaposition between fantasy about Luke's safety and 'light' represents the juxtaposition between fantasy and 'light' represents the juxtaposition between fantasy about Luke's safety and 'light' represents the juxtaposition between fantasy about Luke's safety and 'light' represents the juxtaposition between fantasy about Luke's safety and 'light' represents the juxtaposition between fantasy about Luke's safety and 'light' represents the juxtaposition between fantasy about Luke's safety and 'light' represents a safety about the juxtaposition between fantasy about the juxtaposition between fantasy about the juxtapo cannot exist without 'reality', so does Offred believe in this fantasy because it is "based on" reality? But, is it really based on reality? But, is it really based on reality? Offred then admits that not all of her believe in this fantasy because it is "based on" reality? But, is it really based on reality? Offred then admits that not all of her believe in this fantasy because it is "based on" reality? But, is it really based on reality? Offred then admits that not all of her believe.' Offred is full of 'hope' and leaves the chapter wondering if Luke hopes, and this lasting idea makes the reader also wonder whether he hopes, and whether he hopes, and whether he hopes, and this lasting idea makes the reader also wonder whether he hopes, and whether he hopes, and this lasting idea makes the reader also wonder whether he hopes, and this lasting idea makes the reader does not have a reason to disbelieve Offred, but now, because of all these different stories, we now have reason to disbelieve her. Atwood, M. (1985). The Handmaid's Tale. London: Vintage Random House.

