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LITERATURE AND AUDIOVISUAL: MARGARET ATWOOD'S *THE HANDMAID'S TALE* AND THE ADAPTATION AND PERMANENCE OF DYSTOPIAN ELEMENTS IN THE TELEVISION SERIES

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LITERATURE AND AUDIOVISUAL: MARGARET ATWOOD'S *THE HANDMAID'S TALE* AND THE ADAPTATION AND PERMANENCE OF DYSTOPIAN ELEMENTS IN THE TELEVISION SERIES

Daniella Kimberly Baia Moreira[1]

ABSTRACT: This study analyzes the transition of Margaret Atwood's (1985) *The Handmaid's Tale* from literature to television, with an emphasis on the continuity of dystopian aspects in the series. Based on adaptation theory and analyses of dystopia, the study evaluates how main themes, such as authoritarian control, gender oppression, surveillance, and resistance, are maintained, altered, or expanded in the series. Through a comparison of the narrative, character development, and visual techniques, the research seeks to understand how the series updates and intensifies the warnings present in the original work for a current audience. The analysis takes into account the sociopolitical context of both the book's release in 1985 and the adaptation's premiere, showing the continued importance of dystopian fiction at different historical moments. The results indicate that despite the introduction of new plots and symbolic visual elements, the series preserves the dystopian core present in the novel, reinforcing its critiques of power, patriarchy, and institutional violence. Thus, it is concluded that the adaptation is not limited to reproducing the original text, but reinterprets and re-signifies its dystopian aspects, ensuring its relevance and presence in contemporary audiovisual culture.

Keywords: Adaptation, Dystopia, Audiovisual Media, Biopolitics, Gender, Surveillance.

RESUMO: Este estudo analisa a transição de O Conto da Aia, escrito por Margaret Atwood (1985), da literatura para o meio televisivo, com ênfase na continuidade dos aspectos distópicos na série. Baseado na teoria da adaptação e nas análises sobre distopia, o estudo avalia como temas principais, como controle autoritário, opressão de gênero, vigilância e resistência, são mantidos, alterados ou expandidos na série. Através de uma comparação entre a narrativa, o desenvolvimento de personagens e as técnicas visuais, a pesquisa busca entender como a série atualiza e intensifica os alertas presentes na obra original para um público atual. A análise leva em conta o contexto sociopolítico tanto do lançamento do livro, em 1985, quanto da estreia da adaptação, mostrando a continuidade da importância da ficção distópica em diferentes momentos históricos. Os resultados indicam que apesar da introdução de novas tramas e elementos simbólicos visuais, a série preserva o núcleo distópico presente no romance, reforçando suas críticas ao poder, ao patriarcado e à violência institucional. Assim, se conclui que a adaptação não se limita a reproduzir o texto original, mas reinterpreta e ressignificar seus aspectos distópicos, assegurando sua relevância e presença na cultura audiovisual contemporânea.

Palavras-chave: Adaptação, Distopia, Audiovisual, Biopolítica, Gênero, Vigilância.

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INTRODUCTION

The relationship between literature and audiovisual media has played a central role in current comparative research, especially with regard to adaptations. For many years, adaptations were often judged by their fidelity, being seen as a loss, simplification, or betrayal of the literary work. However, newer theories, such as those proposed by Linda Hutcheon (2006) and Robert Stam (2005), change this view by seeing adaptation as an act of aesthetic recreation, critical analysis, and intersemiotic transformation. From this perspective, the adapted text is not considered an inferior copy, but rather an independent creation that interacts with both the original work and the cultural and historical context in which it is found.

This theoretical framework is the basis for this research, which focuses on the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), written by Margaret Atwood, and its television adaptation of the same name, created by Bruce Miller and released in 2017. The literary work elaborates a theocratic dystopia characterized by severe mechanisms of surveillance and control of female bodies, while the series translates this environment into an audiovisual format, expanding characters, intensifying symbolic elements, and updating certain political and social tensions.

Given this, this study aims to examine how the television adaptation preserves and, at the same time, alters the dystopian and biopolitical core of the literary work, based on the idea that the series does not imply a diminution of the original text, but rather a new interpretation that maintains its critical function by transposing the symbolic mechanisms contained in the novel into the visual and performative realm. To achieve this goal, a qualitative comparative approach is employed, based on the principles of Comparative Literature and Adaptation Studies. The analysis focuses on the episodes "*Offred*", "*Faithful*", and "*Night*", from the first season of the series, as they bring together the main themes of the novel: surveillance, disciplinary control, narrative ambiguity, and resistance.

The theoretical dialogue connects Hutcheon's (2006) and Stam's (2005) reflections on the adaptation process to Michel Foucault's (2014) ideas on methods of discipline and biopolitics, as well as Zygmunt Bauman's (2001) observations on modern life, which is marked by uncertainty and social insecurity. Thus, by analyzing the narrative, visual, and symbolic tactics used by the series, this research argues that the adaptation of *The Handmaid's*

Tale reaffirms the relevance of Atwood's dystopian project, showing that the transition between different media can function as a space for critical continuity and aesthetic innovation, maintaining the political function of the original work while redesigning it in the current cultural landscape.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY OF *THE HANDMAID'S TALE* ADAPTATION

This chapter aims to present the main theoretical foundations that underpin contemporary adaptation studies. It shows that concern for fidelity to the original text has been left behind, and that there is now a broader approach that understands and includes other aspects of adaptation as a complex, creative, and intertextual process. In this sense, it is understood that adapting does not mean changing a story from one format to another, but rather, understand it and adapt it according to the characteristics of the new medium (Hutcheon, 2006). but interpreting, reinterpreting, and updating it according to the material, cultural, and ideological specificities of the new medium in which it circulates. This perspective is essential to theoretically ground the analysis proposed in this work.

For a long time, adaptation studies moved away from the notion that their sole concern was faithfulness to the original, and it is now understood that adaptation is something more complex, which functions in several ways at the same time as a result, as a process, and as a way of receiving and interpreting things. Hutcheon (2006) reports these changes and proposes a dual definition of adaptation, one being the declared transposition and the other a creative and interpretive act of recovery and extensive intertextual engagement, in which audiences engage with the new version while drawing on their memory of the original work.

This broader view does not define adaptation as simple reproduction, but as repetition without replication. As Hutcheon explains:

> "Adaptation is repetition, but repetition without replication. And there are manifestly many different possible intentions behind the act of adaptation: the urge to consume and erase the memory of the adapted text or to call it into question is as likely as the desire to pay tribute by copying." (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 7).

Thus, adaptation is not a mere copy of a text, but a complex process involving creation, reinterpretation, and memory. This perspective problematizes the critique of strict adherence to the original text, the traditional tendency to evaluate adaptations according to

their proximity to an original text, and highlights the agency of the adapter and the material particularities of the target medium and the role of the audience in constructing meaning through memory and expectation (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 6-8). For a long time, adaptations were almost always evaluated according to their adherence to the original work, a critical tendency that later scholars would challenge for covering up the creative and mediating essence of the adaptation process.

Robert Stam (2005) challenges the traditional view of adaptations and questions evaluative models that privilege the source text as a normative standard, which he considers fundamentally problematic and limited. Thus, this evaluative discourse is based on moralistic metaphors such as "betrayal," "violation," or "distortion," which create an incorrect hierarchy between literature and cinema, placing the literary text in a position of symbolic superiority over the audiovisual work. As Robert Stam explains:

> "The notion of "fidelity" does, admittedly, contain its grain of truth. When we say an adaptation has been "unfaithful" to the original, the very violence of the term gives expression to the intense disappointment we feel when a film adaptation fails to capture what we see as the fundamental narrative, thematic, and aesthetic features of its literary source." (Stam, 2005, p. 3).

From this perspective, adaptation should not be understood as a secondary reproduction, but rather as a creative reinterpretation involving structural and meaningful transformations. These changes are not the result of artistic limitations, but rather of the fact that literature and cinema operate through distinct semiotic systems (Stam, 2005, p. 4). From an intertextual perspective, adaptation can be understood as a process in which each adapted work establishes a dialogue with previous texts. Thus, the adapted film does not replace or nullify the source text, but coexists with it, generating new readings and interpretations of the original material (Stam, 2005, p. 5). These reflections are directly related to the transformations that have taken place in comparative literature as a field of study, which is no longer understood simply as the practice of juxtaposing works from different countries or traditions.

As Susan Bassnett (1993) explains, contemporary comparativism involves the study of texts in dialogue with different cultures.

> "Comparative literature involves the study of texts across cultures, that it is interdisciplinary and that it is concerned with patterns of connection in

> literatures across both time and space." (Bassnett, 1993, p. 1).

Thus, comparative literature goes beyond the limits of national literature and considers various processes such as circulation, influence, translation, and adaptation as central elements of its analysis. This expanded conception finds strong support in the work of Sandra Nitrini (2010), for whom comparative literature should be understood as a true "dialogue between texts and cultures."

This perspective implies recognizing that literary works do not exist in isolation (Nitrini, p. 159).

> "The literary word, that is, the smallest unit of literary structure, does not freeze at a single point or in a fixed meaning; on the contrary, it constitutes a crossroads of textual surfaces, a dialogue between different writings: that of the writer, the recipient (or character), and the current or previous context." (Nitrini, 2010, p. 159).

Thus, comparative literature takes on a relational and dialogical character, where each work is the result of previous readings and a starting point for new interpretations (Nitrini, p. 161). This formulation shifts the idea of absolute originality and allows us to understand literary creation as a continuous process of assimilation, transformation, and re-signification. This view is also linked to the concept of *Weltliteratur*[2], proposed by Goethe in 1827 and later developed by David Damrosch (2003) according to which literature should be thought of as part of a constantly changing global network, constituted by the transnational circulation of works.

According to David Damrosch (2003), literature should be understood as part of a constantly changing global network constituted by the circulation of texts across cultures. As the author explains:

> "World literature is not an infinite, ungraspable canon of works but rather a mode of circulation and of reading, a mode that is as applicable to individual works as to bodies of material, available for reading established classics and new discoveries alike." (Damrosch, 2003, p. 5).

[2] The term *Weltliteratur* was coined by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in 1827 during conversations with Johann Peter Eckermann. It gained wider circulation after the posthumous publication of Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens (1835). The concept refers to a literary and cultural perspective that emphasizes the transnational circulation of works and the emergence of a global literary consciousness, anticipating what Goethe described as a new stage of cultural modernity.

For Damrosch (2003), a work becomes part of so-called world literature when it circulates beyond its culture of origin, being read, translated, and reinterpreted in other contexts (Damrosch, 2003, p. 6). However, this process does not occur in a neutral manner, as it involves cultural mediations, power relations, and inevitable reinterpretations (Damrosch, 2003, p. 5; 24). By replacing the search for supposed loyalty to the original text with an analysis of the operations of transposition, displacement, and reinterpretation, comparativism broadens its field of investigation and recognizes the validity of studies involving different languages and media, such as literature and audiovisual media.

The very notion of reception, widely discussed by Nitrini, reinforces this perspective by shifting the focus from the text itself to the dynamic relationship between author, work, and audience.

> "From then on, the possibility arises that the concept of reception will replace those of influence and fortune, encompassing them in a broader perspective." (Nitrini, 2010, p. 168).

Thus, each adaptation can be seen as a new way of receiving the work and, at the same time, as a creative response to the previous text, guided by a new set of expectations (Nitrini, p. 168–171). Hutcheon organizes adaptation around three dimensions. First, as a product, an adaptation is a recognized transposition presented as derived from a previous text with which it has a relationship of dependence (Hutcheon, 2006, pp. 7–9).

Second, as a creative process, adaptation involves interpretation and recreation, where the adapter is both the interpreter and the author, making aesthetic and ideological choices that may honor or challenge the source (Hutcheon, 2006, pp. 8–18) and thirdly as a process of reception, adaptation functions intertextually, where the audience reads the new work through the memory of the adapted text, perceiving the palimpsestic echoes that inform pleasure, disappointment, and criticism (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 8).

These three aspects together justify the study of adaptations as autonomous aesthetic objects, while also addressing their dialogical relationship with their sources. In Hutcheon's approach, there is a crucial implication that emphasizes that cinema and television can portray interiority through audiovisual elements, thus challenging simplistic claims that only prose is capable of representing inner life (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 52–58). This point is relevant to the

comparative work on *The Handmaid's Tale*, as adapters working for television must transcode the novel's narrative techniques into visual and auditory strategies that preserve or reconstruct the novel's thematic core, while exploring the audiovisual means of immersion.

Hutcheon's (2006) taxonomy of telling, showing, and interacting helps to map these changes and assess which elements of the story are amplified, reduced, or recognized in the adaptation. Hutcheon (2006) emphasizes that adaptation often transfers elements of the story, but does so through transcoding, and because the media privileges different semiotic modes, adapters often perform acts of selection that result in losses and gains (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 9-12, 16-19). The adapter's decisions are conditioned by technical constraints, aesthetic goals, and ideological commitments; they are not errors of adherence to the original text, but deliberate rearticulations of meaning. Hutcheon's (2006) attention to modality also clarifies why adaptations for television series with extended narrative time can expand various aspects of a novel that a feature film would compress. These differences are one reason why a television adaptation of Atwood's (1985) novel preserves dystopian elements and elaborates new ones for contemporary audiences.

A fundamental theoretical move in Hutcheon (2006) is to repudiate source-based evaluation as the primary lens for judgment. Instead of measuring an adaptation against its source, scholars should analyze how the adaptation functions within its own medium-specific grammar and how it participates in intertextual dialogue (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 6-8). Hutcheon proposes that attention be paid to the interpretive acts of the adapter and the palimpsestic reception of the audience. This reorientation legitimizes comparative studies that focus on transformation, expansion, and re-signification, rather than a reductive dichotomy of faithful and unfaithful (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 6-7).

The issue of genre in adaptation is a concern raised by Stam (2005), when a literary work is adapted for a film or television series, the genre may remain stable, but it may also transform or merge with other genres (Stam, 2005, p. 5-6). According to Stam, adaptations often exist in a process of generic negotiation, where literary genres meet cinematic genres, generating new hybrid forms (Stam, 2005, p. 6). This point of view is relevant to the analysis of contemporary television adaptations, as television has developed its own narrative structures and subgenres that do not always correspond to traditional literary classifications.

Therefore, analyzing an adaptation requires not only attention to the genre of the original text, but also to the way in which the audiovisual medium reshapes and reinterprets that genre, which means that cinema is not an "inferior" version of literature, but a medium

that operates with its own type of realism and produces a different, but equally meaningful version of reality. Moving from literature to cinema, Stam (2005) points out that cinema has unique resources, such as camera movement, lighting, editing, and sound design, that allow it to inhabit a space between realism and fantasy.

What may seem symbolic or abstract on the page can be transformed into a concrete visual experience on the screen (Stam, 2005, p. 10-12). This ability makes cinema a powerful medium, especially when the original work contains elements that challenge social, political, and psychological boundaries. Stam suggests that visual representation is not a limitation, as it allows a narrative expansion. The viewer is not only reading or imagining, but directly experiencing a world constructed by images and sounds. In this way, adaptation does not diminish the original work, but it relocates it in a new aesthetic dimension (Stam, 2005, p. 13).

In his discussion of multicultural diegesis, Stam (2005) emphasizes that adaptations are not isolated artifacts; they are produced within specific cultural, historical, and political contexts. When a text is adapted, it is repositioned in another time, country, or ideological environment, which influences how the story is told and interpreted (Stam, 2005, p. 15). The adapted work speaks not only to the original context of the novel, but also to contemporary audiences and issues. The film or series becomes a space where cultural tensions, identities, and power relations can be redefined or questioned.

This is particularly relevant in dystopian adaptations, where fictional societies often reflect or critique real social structures. Through adaptation, the original narrative can gain new political meanings and relevance for different audiences. He also criticizes simplistic comparative approaches that merely list differences and similarities between the novel and the film and then suggests a methodology that considers the complex networks of meaning, discourse, and ideology involved in the adaptation process (Stam, 2005, p. 17).

He recommends that scholars analyze the formal structures of the texts, the ideological changes between versions, the historical and cultural contexts of production, and the specific possibilities and limitations of each medium. These methodological guidelines go beyond superficial comparison and encourage critical engagement with adaptation as a creative and political act. Adaptations are not secondary versions, but rather autonomous works that interact with previous texts while generating new meanings (Stam, 2005, pp. 17-18).

Understanding the concept of comparative literature involves understanding the question that has accompanied the field since its inception: what is its object of study? According to one of the most widely accepted definitions, comparative literature “involves the

study of texts across cultures, that it is interdisciplinary and that it is concerned with patterns of connection in literatures across both time and space" (Bassnett, 1993, p. 1). This construction points to three aspects: its intercultural character, interdisciplinary nature, and interest in relationships that cross historical and geographical boundaries.

Thus, the discipline no longer focuses solely on comparing works, but rather on how texts circulate, interact, transform, and take on new meanings in different contexts. For this reason, entering the field of comparative literature is not usually the first step in literary studies. As Bassnett (1993) points out "most people do not start with comparative literature, they end up with it in some way or other, travelling towards it from different points of departure" (Bassnett, 1993, p. 1), driven by the need to transcend the limits of a single national tradition or a single discipline. This observation is particularly relevant to this research, which proposes a comparative analysis between a literary novel and its adaptation for a television series.

Comparative literature also refers to the concept of *Weltliteratur* (world literature), developed by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in the nineteenth century (1827). For him, the notion of "national literature" was becoming increasingly restricted in the face of cultural circulation, affirming that the "era of world literature" was underway (Damrosch, 2003, p. 1). David Damrosch (2003) takes up this concept when he states that world literature should not be understood as a fixed set of works, but as a constantly changing network structured through the transnational circulation of texts, ideas, and discourses (Damrosch, 2003, p. 2).

Thus, a work becomes part of world literature when it circulates beyond its context of origin, being read, translated, and reinterpreted in other cultural environments (Damrosch, 2003, pp. 4–6). However, this process of circulation does not happen in a neutral way, and Damrosch warns of the risk of superficial and ethnocentric readings, where the reader projects their own values onto the foreign work, a phenomenon known as "literary ecotourism" (Damrosch, 2003, p. 5). This reading style considers diversity in literature as something to be consumed, giving more importance to ease of understanding and the reader's comfort rather than promoting a critical interaction with what is different. Furthermore, these textual shifts are immersed in power relations, where certain cultures impose their models as if they were universal, configuring a form of cultural hegemony (Damrosch, 2003, p. 19). Even so, he argues that the circulation, translation, and reinterpretation of works create legitimate and inevitable processes in the global literary scene, requiring a careful reading of the macrostructural dynamics and specificities of each text (Damrosch, 2003, p. 26).

This shift in focus from the text to a broader understanding of relationships in literature also reflects the changes in the ideas presented by Sandra Nitrini (2010). In traditional comparative literature, considerable attention was given to the concept of influence, which was organized by Cionarescu, as discussed by Nitrini (2010). According to Nitrini (2010), influence can be understood both as contact between authors and literary systems and as an independent artistic result that arises from this contact (Nitrini, 2010, p. 127).

Unlike imitation, influence acts at a deeper level, potentially leading to a change in the way of thinking and in the artistic and ideological vision of those who receive this influence (Nitrini, 2010, p. 127). Even so, Nitrini (2010) points out that such concepts have historically been marked by ambiguities, mainly due to a misinterpretation of the notions of originality, often naively associated with the idea of absolute creation (Nitrini, 2010, p. 135). To problematize this understanding, Nitrini (2010) draws on reflections such as those of Paul Valéry, for whom originality is not the absence of influence, but the result of a process of assimilation.

Similarly, as mentioned by Nitrini (2010), Anna Balakian distinguishes between the "original linked to the origin" and the "original linked to the new," emphasizing that innovation can arise precisely from the ability to transform and reorganize existing materials (Nitrini, 2010, p. 141-143). Thus, literary creativity begins to be understood as a dynamic action on what has already been said, consolidating the principle that every work is constructed in relation to others. It is in this context that the concept of intertextuality emerges, based on the ideas of Bakhtin and later developed by Julia Kristeva, as presented by Nitrini (2010).

According to this perspective, the literary word constitutes a "crossing of textual surfaces," traversed by multiple voices and discourses (Nitrini, 2010, p. 159). This conception breaks with the idea of isolated text and inaugurates a relational view of literature, in which meaning is always constructed in the dialogue between works, contexts, and readers. This concept breaks with the idea of isolated texts and introduces a relational view of literature, in which meaning is always constructed in the dialogue between works, contexts, and readers. As discussed by Nitrini (2010), Laurent Jenny complements this notion by arguing that intertextuality is not merely the sum of references, but a process of transformation driven by a new text, which reorganizes and re-signifies the previous ones (Nitrini, 2010, p. 163).

Such theoretical transformations are further intensified with the incorporation of Reception Aesthetics, mainly based on the works of Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, as

discussed by Nitrini (2010). In this model, the work is no longer seen as a closed object and its meaning is constructed in the dynamic relationship between text and reader, based on the so called horizon of expectations (Nitrini, 2010, p. 168-171). Each era, culture, and audience brings new interpretations, so the meaning of a work is never fixed, but is always changing and being reconstructed. Thus, the way people receive a literary or audiovisual work is considered a creative process that takes place within a historical context. When a text moves from one medium to another, such as from a book to an audiovisual production, it comes to be understood in a new cultural, political, ideological, and aesthetic setting.

Current studies on adaptation are based on a theoretical model that considers it an intricate phenomenon, encompassing simultaneously the outcome, creation, and reception. Based on the contributions of Linda Hutcheon (2006), adaptation is understood as a complex phenomenon that can be understood as a product, creative process, and reception process, where the adapter acts as an interpreter and the audience as a co-author of meanings because of their expectations and intertextual memory. In this context, adaptation is no longer seen as a copy of the original. It is recognized as a creative practice, marked by historically situated aesthetic, ideological, and cultural choices.

Robert Stam's (2005) reflections complement this perspective by questioning the traditional hierarchy between literature and cinema, demonstrating that different media operate with their own semiotic systems, which makes the transformations that occur during the transposition process inevitable and legitimate. By favoring an approach based on intertextuality perspective, Stam allows us to understand adaptation as a creative recreation that engages with various texts, discourses, and contexts, rather than being judged solely by a limited logic of loyalty or betrayal. In this scenario, loyalty to the original work ceases to be the main focus; on the contrary, adaptations are seen as independent creations that reinterpret and modify the original material, establishing their own esthetic and narrative value. This perspective broadens the opportunities for analysis and validates the study of adaptations as autonomous artistic works, with their own meaning.

In addition, contributions to comparative literature from Susan Bassnett (1993) David Damrosch (2003), and Sandra Nitrini (2010) reinforce the importance of thinking about literary works in constant dialogue with other productions, cultures, and media. Concepts such as circulation, influence, intertextuality, reception, and world literature show that no text exists in isolation, but it is part of a large network of relationships that crosses linguistic, geographical, and temporal boundaries. Thus, adaptation is understood as one of the most

significant forms of manifestation of this dialogue between texts and cultures, allowing for new readings and reinterpretations of the original work in different contexts.

This chapter presents the theoretical foundations that are essential for comparative analysis to be conducted in this work, understanding adaptation not as an inferior version, but as an interpretive, creative act embedded in a cultural context. Based on these theoretical principles, this study focuses on *The Handmaid's Tale*, a television series that originated from the eponymous novel by Margaret Atwood (1985). The choice of this work is justified by its relevance in the current dystopian discourse and by the complexity of its adaptation process, which provides a particularly rich example for examining the narrative, esthetic, and ideological changes present in the conversion of a literary text to the audiovisual format.

2. DYSTOPIA, POWER AND THE POLITICS OF THE BODY

Dystopian narratives have been created throughout history as forms of social, political, and cultural criticism, imagining potential futures characterized by increasing mechanisms of control, surveillance, and normalization of bodies. Far from being mere exercises in pessimistic imagination, dystopias function as critical analyses of the present, exposing hidden trends that, when intensified, reveal the forces that structure life in society. As a literary genre, dystopia represents societies affected by authoritarian governments, social decline, and widespread oppression, amplifying current sociopolitical structures to show their possible consequences (Tariq, 2025).

From this perspective, dystopia can be understood as "the bad place" that highlights and criticizes contemporary issues through fictional scenarios of oppression and environmental or institutional collapse (Thuta, 2024). Rather than anticipating what is to come, dystopian literature acts as a political metaphor and social warning, promoting a critical analysis of the diminishing of freedoms, the strengthening of control, and the distortion of reality (Tariq, 2025; Reetika, 2025). In this sense, dystopia does not emerge as a break with historical reality, but as an intensified logical extension that acts as a narrative tool that highlights the dangers associated with certain existing forms of social, political, and moral organization.

As a narrative genre and critical strategy, dystopia is characterized by the representation of societies in which control over life, bodies, and subjectivities is intensified through institutional, symbolic, and everyday devices. In this way, dystopia becomes a

privileged analytical field for understanding modern and contemporary forms of exercising power, especially with regard to surveillance, discipline, and the management of life, central dimensions of what Michel Foucault (2014) conceptualizes as biopolitics. In the context of modern audiovisual productions, dystopia acquires an extra layer of complexity, as it combines verbal, visual, and auditory language to create fictional worlds that are intensely influenced by certain regimes of visibility.

Control in these universes is revealed not only through explicit authoritarian institutions, but also through everyday practices, diffuse surveillance devices, and ways of seeing that regulate behaviors, bodies, and identities. The choice of *The Handmaid's Tale* as an object of analysis is justified by its importance in the context of current dystopian production and its ability to express social control, surveillance, and gender oppression in a particularly clear manner. The Gilead regime is structured around the biopolitical management of reproduction, showing how authority directly affects existence, transforming it into an element of control, organization, and discipline.

In this sense, the series narratively and visually represents historical and social events that are widely debated in the humanities. The adaptation of a dystopia from literature to the audiovisual medium is not limited to transferring plots and characters, but also involves the reinterpretation of its symbolic elements, especially with regard to how power and the body are represented. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, this reinterpretation is strikingly evident through its visual aesthetics, such as the repetition of colors in the costumes, the closed camera angles, the predominance of the gaze, and the constant feeling of surveillance, which help to concretize, on a sensory level, what Foucault (2014) characterized as a disciplinary society, where power is exercised incessantly, meticulously, and diffusely over bodies.

The audiovisual medium thus intensifies the experience of control by making it visible and perceptible to the viewer. In addition, the series' narrative dialogues with Zygmunt Bauman's (2001) reflections on liquid modernity, especially with regard to the production of insecurity as a central mechanism of social control. The Gilead regime is sustained by the spread of fear, permanent instability, and the replacement of trust with systematic practices of surveillance and punishment. The dystopia represented in *The Handmaid's Tale* provides a space for articulating the feminist reflections of Simone de Beauvoir (2019) and Judith Butler (2018), highlighting how the female body becomes a central field of political dispute.

The reduction of women to their reproductive function, the imposition of fixed identities, and the permanent surveillance of their bodies and behaviors make explicit the

social construction of gender as an instrument of domination. Thus, the analysis of dystopia in relation to *The Handmaid's Tale* allows us to understand how surveillance, power, and oppression are articulated in the production of disciplined and visually controlled subjectivities, offering the theoretical basis necessary for the investigation of the narrative and aesthetic strategies mobilized by audiovisual media in the current representation of social control.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault (2014) proposes a study of the origins of contemporary forms of authority, breaking with traditional ideas that saw it only as repression, immediate violence, or centralized control by the state. By shifting the focus to discreet, permanent, and daily methods of discipline, the author reveals that modern authority spreads in subtle ways, infiltrating bodies, environments, and social interactions. This type of power goes beyond simply prohibiting or punishing; it performs a productive function by shaping individuals who meet the political, economic, and moral demands of a certain social structure. As Foucault (2014) explains:

> "The exercise of discipline presupposes a device that coerces through the gaze; an apparatus in which the techniques that enable seeing induce effects of power, and in which, conversely, the means of coercion make clearly visible those over whom they are exercised." (Foucault, 2014, p. 170).

For Foucault (2014), disciplinary power aims to produce docile, useful, and obedient bodies. These bodies are shaped through meticulous techniques that regulate gestures, postures, movements, behaviors, and the very organization of time. "Discipline manufactures submissive and trained bodies, docile bodies." (Foucault, 2014, p. 164). In this sense, the body becomes both an object and a tool of power, being subjected to standardization processes that seek to make it efficient and predictable. Contrary to an oppressive view of power, Foucault (2014) emphasizes its productive character. This means understanding that individuals do not precede power relations, but they are shaped by them. The rules that guide behaviors and attitudes do not come from outside, but are gradually incorporated, leading people to govern themselves according to established guidelines.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the management of women's fertility and bodies constitutes the foundation of the Gilead regime, highlighting the radicalization of the biopolitical mechanisms described by Foucault (2014). One of the main concepts in this analysis is panopticism, formulated from the architectural model of the Panopticon, conceived by Jeremy

Bentham. In this system, surveillance operates continuously, unevenly, and internalized, so that the individual is permanently visible, without ever knowing if they are, in fact, being observed. This uncertainty produces a decisive disciplinary effect, as it induces subjects to regulate their own behavior, as if obedience were the result of an individual choice.

As Foucault (2014) states, panopticism aims to "induce in the inmate a conscious and permanent state of visibility that ensures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault, 2014, p. 224). In this sense, constant visibility becomes a fundamental instrument of control, since power no longer depends on direct coercion and begins to operate through self-surveillance, configuring what the author summarizes by stating that "visibility is a trap" (Foucault, 2014, p. 224). In contemporary dystopian narratives, especially in audiovisual productions, this panoptic logic takes on an expanded and intensified dimension. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, control is not only exercised through easily recognizable repressive institutions, but also through widespread surveillance that permeates both public and private spaces.

The gaze of the state, the aunts, the commanders, and the citizens themselves functions as a panoptic mechanism that induces the characters to regulate their gestures, speech, and thoughts. Even in the absence of immediate punishment, the possibility of being observed produces disciplined and self-controlled subjects. In this context, the female body becomes the main target of biopolitical discipline. It is strictly classified, controlled, and subject to specific regimes of visibility, being limited to its reproductive function. The organization of clothing colors, the standardization of gestures, and the limitation of movements demonstrate the attempt to eliminate the individuality of bodies in favor of a functional order. The audiovisual device itself reinforces this logic of surveillance through closed frames, long shots, and an emphasis on the protagonist's face, reflecting aesthetic terms.

While Michel Foucault (2014) focuses on analyzing the historical formation of disciplinary and biopolitical devices, Zygmunt Bauman (2001), in Liquid Modernity, directs his reflection toward contemporary changes in forms of power and control marked by fluidity, instability, and the fragility of social ties. For Bauman (2001), Liquid Modernity is defined by the disintegration of the solid structures that once organized life in society, such as lasting institutions, firm identities, and predictable trajectories. In this context, people come to live in a continuous state of uncertainty, where the future appears unstable and threatening. In this context, insecurity plays a central role in the organization of contemporary social experience, functioning as one of the most effective mechanisms of control. As Zygmunt Bauman (2001) analyzes, liquid modernity is characterized by the dissolution of the solid structures that

previously guaranteed stability, predictability, and belonging, causing individuals to live under permanent conditions of uncertainty and vulnerability (Bauman, 2001, p. 183-185). This situation of collective insecurity is no longer rare and has become the norm in today's society, where the future is perceived as volatile and risky. Unlike traditional methods of control, which are based on direct coercion and rigid institutions, social monitoring now focuses on individual accountability.

Bauman (2001) points out that people are constantly called upon to manage their own risks, paths, and defeats, assimilating the demands of the system as if they were personal and autonomous decisions. (Bauman, 2001, p. 187–189).

> "The task of coping with the uncertainties of life has been privatized and individualized. It is now left to individuals to find their own solutions to socially produced problems, bearing the consequences of success or failure largely on their own." (Bauman, 2001, p. 183).

The fear of being excluded, living in precarious conditions, and becoming irrelevant in society acts as a disciplinary mechanism, leading people to adopt conformist and adaptable behaviors without clear impositions. Unlike traditional methods of control, which are based on direct coercion and rigid institutions, social control in this scenario shifts to individual accountability. Bauman (2001) points out that individuals are constantly challenged to manage their own risks, paths, and failures, causing the demands of the system to be internalized as if they were personal and autonomous decisions (Bauman, 2001, p. 187–189). In this sense, the author demonstrates that contemporary power is becoming increasingly diffuse, less visible, and more deeply internalized, operating through self-surveillance and permanent risk management (Bauman, 2001, p. 191–193). In dialogue with Foucault (2014), this interpretation helps to understand how social control intensifies, especially when it is no longer seen as direct repression, but rather operates within individuals themselves.

As in Foucault's (2014) investigation of disciplinary power, supervision does not need to be carried out continuously by an external authority, as it is assimilated as a daily habit and insecurity acts as a tool of power that connects discipline and biopolitics, generating individuals who self-regulate and constantly adapt to the demands of a social order characterized by structural instability. This connection between control, biopolitics, surveillance, and insecurity establishes an essential theoretical basis for the study of current visual dystopias. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, these dynamics not only structure the narrative but are visually translated, showing how the control of bodies, life and visibility constitutes one of the central axes of modern and contemporary forms of power.

At this point, Zygmunt Bauman's (2001) reflection adds to and updates Foucault's (2014) analysis by demonstrating that, today, methods of social control are not manifested primarily through immediate coercion or explicit institutional repression, but rather through the attribution of personal responsibility and the assimilation of social norms. In Liquid Modernity, Bauman (2001) portrays a scenario in which the firm foundations that once structured social interactions are beginning to crumble, giving rise to a way of life marked by fluidity, precariousness, and permanent uncertainty. In this context, individuals are often called upon to manage their own existence, their bodies, and their appearance, as if these choices were exclusively individual, unrelated to social influences.

For Bauman (2001), this logic produces a specific form of domination in which control is exercised through fear of exclusion, failure, and social invisibility. Lack of security is no longer a consequence of the system, but it rather becomes its organizational basis. As the author states, insecurity is the existential situation of human beings today (Bauman, 2001, p. 184), functioning as an effective mechanism for regulating behavior. Individuals who fear becoming irrelevant begin to regulate themselves, constantly adjusting to society's expectations and assimilating rules as if they were personal and free choices. Thus, authority becomes more diffuse, less apparent, and more deeply rooted, functioning through self-surveillance and continuous risk management.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, although the Gilead regime presents itself as an explicit authoritarian structure, sustained by institutional violence and severe punishments, this logic of insecurity described by Bauman (2001) is also present. In this way, surveillance is not based solely on the physical presence of power, but on the assimilation of its possibility. The analysis of social control becomes more complex when linked to the study of the oppression of women, as female bodies, throughout history, have been one of the main focuses of normalization and control tactics. In The Second Sex, Simone de Beauvoir (2019) demonstrates that the subordination of women does not stem from a biological or natural essence, but from a historical, social, and cultural process that constitutes them as "Other" in relation to men.

The famous statement that "no one is born a woman: one becomes a woman" (Beauvoir, 2019, p. 296) summarizes this understanding, highlighting that gender is formed by repeated social practices that influence both the body and the identity of women. For Beauvoir (2019), the female body is symbolically associated with immobility, repetition, and passivity, while the male body is associated with overcoming, action, and reason. This

opposition sustains a symbolic hierarchy that legitimizes male domination and limits women's options for existence.

> "As Beauvoir argues, "Humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential." (Beauvoir, 2019, p. 6).

The female body becomes a privileged space for social control, regulated by moral, religious, and behavioral norms that define what is acceptable, desirable, or reprehensible.

This control is not limited to the public sphere, but extends to intimacy, sexuality, and reproduction, establishing a regime of constant surveillance. This reading speaks directly to the dystopia of *The Handmaid's Tale*, where the female body is radically reduced to its reproductive function and transformed into the property of the State. The Handmaids have their names, clothing, gestures, and movements strictly regulated, evidencing the systematic inscription of power on their bodies. Just as Beauvoir (2019) shows that female oppression is sustained by the naturalization of inequalities, the series reveals how gender domination is maintained by the internalization of norms and constant surveillance, exercised both by institutions and by other women. Control is not only imposed from the top down, but circulates among the subjects themselves, reproducing itself in everyday life.

Judith Butler (2018) deepens and radicalizes this discussion by questioning the very notion of gender identity. In Gender Trouble, the author states that gender is not a natural essence, but a performative effect produced by the regulated repetition of social norms (Butler, 2018, p. 59).

> "As Butler explains, "Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being." (Butler, 2018, p. 45).

The recognition that identities are constantly created and sustained by discursive and bodily actions implies a profound understanding. In a direct conversation with Michel Foucault (2014), Butler (2018) argues that legal, discursive, and institutional systems not only reflect individuals that already exist, but also play an active role in their formation, defining which bodies are seen as understandable and which are pushed into marginalization.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, this gender performativity is rigidly codified through visual aesthetics and social organization. Handmaids, wives, and aunts embody strictly defined gender roles, whose constant repetition sustains the illusion of a natural and inevitable order.

The standardization of female bodies' appearances acts as a mechanism of domination that silences individuality and creates identities that are only perceived within the logic of Gilead. In this way, Butler (2018) expands on Beauvoir (2019)'s analysis by showing how gender functions as a tool of power that controls not only behavior, but also visibility and even the very chance to live in society. The translation of dystopia into audiovisual media reinforces and intensifies this dynamic by making visual control a structural element of the narrative. Unlike literature, which operates through the mediation of verbal language and the reader's imagination, audiovisual media acts directly on the gaze, mobilizing framing, lighting, costumes, and camera movements to produce specific regimes of visibility.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the red of the Handmaids, the blue of the Wives, and the green of the Marthas function as symbolic devices that classify, hierarchize, and make immediately legible the social position of each female body. By insisting on close-ups and controlled exposure of bodies, the camera acts as an extension of Foucauldian panopticism, making the viewer a participant in the surveillance device. Methodologically, the analysis developed in this research is based on the articulation between Margaret Atwood's (1985) novel *The Handmaid's Tale* and its television adaptation of the same name, with an emphasis on episodes 1, 5, and 10 of the first season.

These episodes were chosen because they concentrate key moments in the consolidation of the Gilead regime, the presentation of its control norms, and the visualization of the disciplinary and biopolitical devices that affect the female body. The investigation focuses on both narrative components and artistic tools, understanding the audiovisual as an important space for the creation, expansion, and execution of power. The purpose of this chapter was to establish the theoretical framework that underpins the analysis of dystopia in audiovisual media, based on the articulation between different theoretical traditions that allow us to understand the mechanisms of power, control, and normalization that permeate contemporary societies.

By drawing on the contributions of Michel Foucault (2014), Zygmunt Bauman (2001), Simone de Beauvoir (2019), and Judith Butler (2018), we sought to construct an analytical basis capable of supporting the reading of dystopia not only as a narrative genre, but as a critical form of interpretation of ongoing social, political, and cultural dynamics. Based on Foucault's (2014) ideas, it was possible to understand how contemporary power manifests itself through a system of practices and mechanisms that act constantly, in a detailed and comprehensive manner, on bodies and behaviors. The concepts of discipline, surveillance, and

biopolitics proved essential for the analysis of dystopian stories insofar as they highlight that social control does not happen only through immediate repression, but through the assimilation of rules and the production of individuals who regulate themselves.

In this respect, dystopia highlights the intensification of these systems, revealing forms of control that tend to act naturally and almost imperceptibly in everyday life. Zygmunt Bauman's (2001) ideas expanded this analysis by situating social control within the context of liquid modernity, which is marked by the instability of relationships, the fragility of collective structures, and the predominance of insecurity as an organizational factor in social life. Unlike traditional forms of domination that are linked to rigid and hierarchical institutions, current power is characterized by its fluidity and diffusion, acting through individual accountability and the constant possibility of exclusion.

From a literary perspective, dystopia has established itself as a genre that critically amplifies existing sociopolitical structures, exposing how mechanisms of domination become institutionalized and normalized in society (Tariq, 2025). As Thuta (2024) mentions, by creating the representation of an imaginary negative space, dystopian fiction not only portrays oppression, but also aggravates current control regimes to expose their latent logic. Thus, dystopian stories show how discourses on order, security, and stability can be used to justify increased surveillance and the limitation of rights under the guise of protection (Tariq, 2025; Reetika, 2025).

In relation to gender issues, the analyses of Simone de Beauvoir (2019) and Judith Butler (2018) have made it possible to understand how social control impacts female bodies in different ways. Based on Beauvoir's (2019) thinking, it became clear that women's subservience is not based on biological determinism, but on historical and symbolic constructions that associate the feminine with passivity, immediacy, and reproductive function. Butler (2018), in discussing the idea of gender identity, helped us understand gender as a product of performative norms that regulate the intelligibility of bodies and restrict opportunities for social existence. In this way, gender control becomes inseparable from control over the body and visibility, especially with regard to women.

The combination of these theoretical references made it possible to view dystopia as a relevant space for analyzing the intersection between power, body, and gender. In some dystopian narratives, particularly those centered on gender relations, the female body becomes a central site of surveillance and regulation, as it becomes subjected to mechanisms that regulate appearance, sexuality, and social roles. These narratives demonstrate the continuity

and intensification of historical methods of control, while also showing their adaptation to contemporary forms of authority. In the audiovisual sphere, these phenomena acquire a particular dimension, as control is not limited to narrative structures but is also expressed visually. The importance of the gaze, visual composition, and framing transforms surveillance into an integral element of audiovisual language itself, bringing it closer to the panoptic logic described by Foucault (2014).

Thus, the audiovisual not only portrays dystopia, but the staging visually organizes bodies and environments according to norms of power that guide the viewers' perception (Foucault, 2014). Therefore, this chapter has established the theoretical principles necessary to understand dystopia as a critical tool that enables the analysis of contemporary forms of social control (Bauman, 2001), especially with regard to the surveillance of the body and the standardization of gender identities (Beauvoir, 2019; Butler, 2018). With this foundation, it is feasible, in the next chapter, to investigate in more detail how *The Handmaid's Tale* visually translates these mechanisms, analyzing how the narrative, aesthetics, and visual resources of the series shape the concepts discussed here. Thus, dystopia is confirmed as an essential analytical resource for a critical reading of the power structures that permeate contemporary society, functioning as a literary form that exaggerates and exposes authoritarian rationalities, surveillance systems, and institutionalized oppression in order to critique contemporary social and political conditions (Thuta, 2024; Tariq, 2025; Reetika, 2025).

2.1 The concept of dystopia in literary studies

The concept of dystopia has gained importance in literary analysis, especially in debates that explore the connection between literature, politics, and social structures. Although dystopian stories are fictional, they are closely linked to real historical and social contexts, acting as symbolic representations of collective fears and political conflicts. Thus, dystopia should not be seen only as a narrative setting, but as a literary approach through which writers critically reflect on existing social structures and their possible consequences. In literary studies, dystopian narratives typically stand out for their depiction of oppressive societies dominated by authoritarian regimes, severe social control, and restrictions on personal freedoms.

According to Sarmento-Pantoja (2017), dystopian fiction often illustrates social systems where governmental power dictates the rules of individual life, limiting individuals to

roles within inflexible hierarchies of power. According to Tariq (2025), dystopian literature often serves as a type of political allegory, reflecting current social crises and highlighting the dangers related to authoritarian regimes and the diminution of individual freedoms. Similarly, Thuta (2024) argues that dystopian stories expose the methods that political power uses to establish its authority and limit critical thinking.

As the author mentions, dystopia can be seen as the representation of a "bad place," where oppressive social structures and systems of control become evident (Thuta, 2024, p. 66). Dystopian literature generally presents speculative societies marked by extreme levels of inequality, social control, and political centralization. These societies are often organized through authoritarian systems that centralize power in a select group, limiting the freedom of most people. In this scenario, dystopian literature reveals the risks of governments that inhibit personal action and establish strict social rules (Sarmento-Pantoja, 2017).

These fictional worlds are often constructed by amplifying trends already present in contemporary societies, allowing authors to imagine the possible consequences of phenomena such as political corruption, ideological extremism, or technological domination when taken to their limits.

> "Many dystopian narratives focus on gender and identity as tools of oppression, analyzing patriarchal dominance and systemic discrimination. Novels such as The Handmaid's Tale depict societies in which women are reduced to reproductive roles. Similarly, The Power by Naomi Alderman reverses gender dynamics to highlight the dangers of absolute authority. These works critique the ways in which gender roles are enforced in order to maintain rigid social hierarchies. " (Tariq, 2025, p. 166).

In this way, dystopian narratives function as mirrors of reality, reflecting concrete social concerns and encouraging readers to question the power structures that organize political and social life (Tariq, 2025). Dystopian narratives frequently expose the dangers of authoritarian regimes that regulate and manipulate women's bodies as instruments of power. Through the representation of oppressive systems, these works highlight the fragility of democratic rights and gender equality. As Tariq observes, such narratives:

> “expose the dangers of authoritarian regimes that commodify and manipulate women's bodies. Their dystopian settings function as cautionary tales about the erosion of rights and freedoms” (Tariq, 2025, p. 163).

Another relevant point addressed by dystopian fiction is the relationship between power and knowledge. Authoritarian regimes portrayed in these narratives generally preserve their dominance by distorting information, censoring ideas, and supervising educational and cultural practices. This management of knowledge helps establish another fundamental aspect of dystopian literature: the restriction of critical thinking. By controlling data and limiting access to knowledge, these systems make it difficult for people to question the validity of the existing social hierarchy, thereby strengthening the foundations of oppression (Sarmento-Pantoja, 2017).

By hindering access to knowledge and discouraging critical thinking, these regimes aim to shape common perception and prevent people from questioning the validity of the existing social order. Within this scenario, dystopian literature reveals how the regulation of information becomes an essential tool for preserving political domination. As Thuta (2024) points out, dystopian societies often restrict freedom of thought to strengthen power hierarchies and ensure the continuity of authoritarian systems.

In addition to information control, dystopian societies are also marked by rigid hierarchical systems that accentuate social inequalities and different forms of stratification.In various dystopian narratives, people are limited to established social roles, which helps promote depersonalization and diminished identity. According to Sarmento-Pantoja (2017), dystopian societies generally cause individuals to become mere tools of social organizations, solidifying systems of control that deny uniqueness and personal freedom. In these fictional narratives, there is often a small elite in power that holds both political control and financial resources, while the majority of the population is subject to exploitation, surveillance, and social exclusion. These representations often reflect concerns that are present in today's societies, such as the centralization of power, social divisions, and growing economic inequalities (Tariq, 2025).

Another common feature in dystopian narratives is the systematic elimination of truth and personal autonomy. As Thuta (2024) observes:

> “Dystopian fiction primarily focuses on the exploration of ruling authoritarian governments and how these regimes oppress their populations. The most prominent characteristics of dystopias include the creation of cultures of fear and hatred, the suppression of truth and freedom, and the deprivation of basic necessities required for human flourishing.” (Thuta, 2024, p. 66).

According to Thuta (2024), authoritarian governments often use tactics such as propaganda, widespread surveillance, and ideological indoctrination to maintain social control. These methods create an environment of fear and mistrust that discourages critical thinking and makes it more difficult to form collective resistance. As a result, people tend to become socially isolated, which helps preserve the stability of oppressive political regimes.

Dystopian fiction also often depicts societies marked by scarcity of resources and deprivation of social opportunities.In these contexts, people often have to put survival first, leaving reflection aside, which helps to sustain oppressive political systems. The constant presence of fear, insecurity, and uncertainty creates a social climate where hope becomes weak or even non-existent.In many narratives, the population is deliberately kept in conditions of poverty, economic instability, or limited access to essential goods. This deprivation plays an important political role, as individuals struggling to meet their basic needs tend to be less able to question or challenge the power structures that govern their lives.

Thus, dystopian societies often present contexts in which survival becomes the main concern of individuals, reducing the possibilities for critical reflection and organized resistance (Thuta, 2024). As the author observes, dystopian societies are often organized through rigid hierarchical structures that legitimize the oppression of the lower classes and encourage mistrust among the dominated groups themselves, contributing to the maintenance of authoritarian systems. In this sense, Thuta points out that such systems establish “strict hierarchical roles that allow one to justify the oppression of lower classes as well as sow mistrust and conflict between oppressed classes to maintain a perpetual state of tyranny” (Thuta, 2024, p. 66).

Although there is a focus on oppression and social control, dystopian narratives also address the continuity of resistance. Although oppressive circumstances characterize dystopian societies, these stories often emphasize acts of resistance by people who oppose authoritarian

regimes. As Sarmento-Pantoja (2017) mentions, the manifestation of resistance in dystopian literature exposes conflicts between methods of control and the continuity of human action. Characters inhabiting these fictional universes often confront authoritarian governments through acts of intellectual, emotional, or symbolic rebellion. These forms of resistance may include preserving historical memory, challenging official narratives, cultivating forbidden relationships, or recovering forms of personal expression that have been stifled by the regime. Through these moments of resistance, dystopian literature highlights the capacity for human action, even in extremely restrictive social environments (Thuta, 2024).

Dystopian literature, therefore, plays a dual role in the literary and cultural sphere. On the one hand, it reveals the methods by which political authority can be misused and social freedoms can be progressively limited. On the other hand, it emphasizes the relevance of critical awareness and the struggle against oppressive systems. By showing fictional societies in which political power reaches extreme levels of control, dystopian stories encourage readers to think about the social and political structures that shape current reality (Tariq, 2025; Thuta, 2024). Within this literary tradition, several works have become essential to the study of dystopia.

Among them are stories that investigate the regulation of bodies and identities in authoritarian contexts. These narratives highlight how dystopian societies often manipulate not only political institutions, but also individual identities and social roles, especially with regard to gender. Among these works, Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale stands out as one of the most significant dystopian narratives of today, mainly due to its exploration of the relationships between gender, religion, and political control. The novel illustrates an imaginary world where female bodies become a focal point of political regulation, showing how patriarchal structures can function in authoritarian systems. Thus, the following section analyzes how The Handmaid’s Tale demonstrates dystopian mechanisms of power and how these elements are reinterpreted in its television version.

3. ANALYSIS OF *THE HANDMAID’S TALE*: LITERARY TEXT, AUDIOVISUAL ADAPTATION, AND COMPARATIVE READING

This chapter focuses on the analysis of *The Handmaid's Tale*, taking into account both

Margaret Atwood's (1985) work and the television adaptation created by Bruce Miller. To achieve the goals of this research, the chapter is divided into three connected parts: the analysis of the book, the analysis of the audiovisual adaptation, and a comparison between the two works. The choice to address the analyses in a single chapter is due to the comparative nature of the study, which allows for a more harmonious connection between theory and the material analyzed.

Instead of dispersing the discussion across different chapters, this organization makes it possible to perceive the interaction between literary and audiovisual languages in a progressive manner, moving from the analysis of each work as an independent text to a direct comparison between them. The first section focuses on the literary analysis of *The Handmaid's Tale* (Atwood, 1985), exploring the creation of dystopia through strategies of control, biopolitics, rituals, and the structuring of female castes. This section establishes the thematic basis and symbols of the narrative using the theoretical contributions of Foucault (2014), Bauman (2001), Beauvoir (2019) and Butler (2018) to understand the regulation of bodies, gender oppression, and the power dynamics present in Gilead.

The second section focuses on the analysis of the television adaptation, considering the series as an independent audiovisual work. Attention is directed to visual language, costumes, lighting, and color choices, as well as the expansion and new interpretation of characters and themes. This approach is in line with adaptation studies, especially the views of Hutcheon and Stam, who understand adaptation as a creative and interactive process rather than just a matter of loyalty. Finally, the third section provides a comparative analysis, where literary and audiovisual components are evaluated in relation to each other.

Based on the principles of Comparative Literature, as discussed by Bassnett (1993), Damrosch (2003), and Nitrini (2010), this section explores the aspects of continuity, change, and new interpretation between the book and the series, focusing especially on the symbolism of colors as a form of comparison. By combining suggestions from the text and visual manifestations, the analysis aims to show how the adaptation expands meanings present in the literary work, reinforcing the series as an artistic recreation that engages the current audience.

By organizing the chapter in this way, the study maintains the uniqueness of each format while enabling a careful comparative analysis. This methodological choice ensures clear understanding and theoretical consistency, allowing the research to highlight how *The Handmaid's Tale* is reinterpreted in different forms of language, without one expression dominating the other.

Published in 1985, *The Handmaid's Tale* presents a dystopia set in the Republic of Gilead, a theocratic and totalitarian regime that establishes itself in the former United States after a crisis of mass infertility. In this new system, women have their civil rights revoked and are strictly categorized based on their social function. The narrative is driven by Offred, a "Handmaid" assigned to sexually serve a Commander with the goal of bearing children for him and his wife. Deprived of her identity, her name, and her ability to act, Offred recalls parts of her existence prior to the regime when she had a husband, a daughter, and freedom, while struggling to resist the physical and emotional violations imposed by Gilead.

Alternating between memory and the present, the novel constructs a scathing critique of authoritarianism, religious fundamentalism, and the control of women's bodies. At the same time, it reveals that even in extreme contexts of repression, resistance can emerge through memory, language, and small gestures of insubordination. The premiere episode ("Offred") introduces the Republic of Gilead, a theocratic regime that replaced the United States after a crisis of infertility and political instability. In this system, fertile women are turned into "Handmaids" and forced to bear children for the ruling elite. The narrative follows Offred, assigned to the home of Commander Fred Waterford and his wife Serena Joy. Subjected to strict social rules, constant surveillance, and religious rituals that legitimize oppression, Offred tries to adapt to her new reality while recalling fragments of her previous life when she had a husband, daughter, and freedom.

The episode oscillates between the present and the past to reveal how the government was established and how women's rights were gradually eliminated. At the same time, it already presents subtle acts of internal rebellion by the main character, highlighting that even in the face of severe control, her individuality still remains. In the fifth episode (Faithful), psychological tension rises inside the Waterford household. Offred begins to notice cracks in Gilead's rigid structure, especially in the dynamic between Commander Fred Waterford and Serena Joy. Serena, pressured by her inability to conceive, displays even greater frustration and rigidity. Meanwhile, the Commander begins to interact with Offred in an informal and forbidden way, secretly calling her to nighttime meetings in his office. During these encounters, he shows signs of insecurity and a search for approval, revealing the inconsistencies of the very system he helped establish.

The episode also delves deeper into Offred's flashbacks, showing the transition period to totalitarian rule and how women were progressively deprived of financial and civil autonomy. “Faithful” shows the dynamics of control within the home and highlights one of the main themes of the series: even in a system that attempts to maintain total control, individual desire and human frailties create cracks in the structure of oppression.

In the final episode (Night) of the first season, the tension reaches its peak. Offred faces the consequences of her actions after her secret relationship with the Commander and her closeness to Nick. At the same time, internal resistance against the regime becomes more visible. Serena Joy discovers the forbidden connection between Offred and the Commander, which deeply shakes the dynamics of the house. Serena's emotional fragility reveals the contradictions of a woman who helped build the regime but also suffers under its own rules. At the same time, Offred is involved in a collective act of disobedience during a public execution (Salvaging), when the Handmaids refuse to comply with an order imposed by the State. This moment represents an important change, as female solidarity emerges as a form of resistance.

In the end, Offred is taken from the house by men who could be either agents of the regime or members of the resistance. Not knowing where she is going, she enters the van uncertainly, not as a submissive person, but as someone who, even though afraid, decides to move forward with hope. The episode ends the season with uncertainty and tension, reinforcing the central theme of the series: even in extreme contexts of oppression, resistance can exist, albeit silent, fragmented, and risky. Having contextualized both the literary work and the selected episodes of the television adaptation, the analysis now turns to the specific narrative, thematic, and visual strategies that structure the dystopian universe of *The Handmaid’s Tale*.

3.1 Dystopia, Gender, and Biopolitics in Margaret Atwood's Novel

The Republic of Gilead is organized as a religious, authoritarian, and oppressive government, where authority is maintained through constant supervision and regulation of individual behavior. In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, surveillance is revealed not only through explicit punishments, but also through subtle disciplinary mechanisms that induce obedience and internalize fear. The presence of the so-called “Eyes” exemplifies this broad and constant

control, where anyone can become an instrument of power, as the narrator suggests when she states: “Perhaps he is an Eye” (Atwood, 1985, p. 24).

This approach aligns with the ideas of Michel Foucault (2014), who believes that disciplinary power becomes effective when “surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action” (Foucault, 2014, p. 315). In Gilead, people assimilate this idea, adjusting their behavior as if they were constantly under surveillance. Surveillance is further intensified by the regime's encouragement of mutual monitoring among the Handmaids themselves. Offred realizes that they are forced to walk in pairs under the pretext of protection, when in fact one acts as a spy on the other, with both being held responsible in the event of any transgression (Atwood, 1985, p. 25).

This system reinforces the disciplinary nature in which control is maintained less through explicit violence and more through self-censorship and constant suspicion. This dynamic echoes Zygmunt Bauman's (2001) analysis of Liquid Modernity, where insecurity and fear weaken social bonds, encouraging mistrust and mutual surveillance among individuals (Bauman, 2001). In Gilead, control is maintained not only by institutional force, but also by the weakening of human relationships. In addition to surveillance, the regime's power operates directly in the management of life itself.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, surveillance is closely linked to the control of bodies, functioning as a technology of power that regulates existence. The female body, especially the fertile body, is transformed into a political resource of the state, governed by laws, rituals, and rigid social norms. Fertility not only defines the value of the Handmaids, it also limits their identity to a reproductive function, reducing them to instruments of collective survival. This logic is explicitly articulated by the narrator when she states: “We are two-legged wombs, that’s all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices” (Atwood, 1985, p. 176).

This condition corresponds to what Foucault (2014) conceptualizes as biopolitics, which is a form of power that targets life itself, functioning through the control of bodies, reproduction, and population. As the author argues, it is a mode of power in which “the body is also directly immersed in a political field” (Foucault, 2014, p. 9), becoming the object of regulation in the name of social order. In Gilead, declining birth rates serve as an ideological reason for establishing control over women, whose biological capacities are managed by the government not only through repression, but also through the regulation of daily life.

The erasure of individual identity further reinforces this system of domination. The Handmaids are renamed according to the men to whom they are assigned, a symbolic gesture

that aims to eliminate their subjectivity, personal history and autonomy. Offred clearly accepts this loss when she declares, “My name isn’t Offred, I have another name, which nobody uses now because it’s forbidden” (Atwood, 1985, p. 108). This dispossession of the self is unfolded in a climate of constant insecurity that weakens resistance and encourages conformity, once again relating to Bauman's reflections on the precariousness of social existence in liquid modernity (Bauman, 2001).

The regulation of the body and the control of language sustain the dystopian order of Gilead, simultaneously disciplining both the body and subjectivity. This system is not based solely on administrative or symbolic mechanisms and is deeply legitimized by religious discourse, which confers a moral and absolute character on the regime. In Atwood's dystopia, religion presents itself as one of the main instruments through which political power is justified. The theocratic regime selectively appropriates biblical narratives to naturalize social inequalities and legitimize systemic violence, particularly against women's bodies.

By presenting its laws as if they were divine orders, the state transfers authority from the political sphere to the moral and religious sphere, transforming obedience into both a legal and ethical obligation. This logic aligns with Foucault's understanding of discipline as a process that produces docile and useful subjects. As the author states, disciplinary power seeks to “train in order to demand and extort more and better” (Foucault, 2014, p. 275), making individuals predictable, controllable, and functionally subordinate to the social order. In Gilead, this discipline directly targets life, making reproduction an object of state management.

Domination is sustained not only by direct coercion, but by a permanent environment of surveillance and insecurity, as well as fear and instability that weaken social ties and reinforce conformity. Atwood's (1985) dystopia once again dialogues with Bauman's analysis of liquid modernity, marked by instability and precariousness in human relations, and how contemporary life is permeated by a constant feeling of uncertainty (Bauman, 2001). In Gilead, the fear of punishment, denunciation, and social exclusion produces subjects who internalize control and self-regulate, linking external surveillance to self-surveillance in a disciplinary system in the Foucauldian sense.

One of the most explicit manifestations of biopower in the novel is the Ceremony, which combines discipline, ritual, and symbolic violence. Presented as a sacred act, the ritual completely removes the Handmaid's autonomy, limiting her to a reproductive function. This reduction reflects Simone de Beauvoir's analysis of women's historical association with their

bodies and biological roles. As Beauvoir argues, “one is not born a woman: one becomes a woman” (Beauvoir, 2019, p. 296). In Gilead, this “becoming” is imposed through strict norms and repetitive rituals.

Judith Butler's (2018) theory further clarifies this process, showing that gender is produced by repeated practices that create the illusion of naturalness. According to Butler, gender does not result in a stable identity, but “in an identity tenuously constituted over time, instituted in an external space through a stylized repetition of acts” (Butler, 2018, p. 184). The Ceremony not only controls the female body, but produces a submissive gender identity, reinforcing the dystopian order by inscribing power directly into women's corporeality and subjectivity. Offred's linguistic choices expose the dissonance between the religious justification of the ceremony and its coercive reality.

By describing the act as devoid of desire or intimacy, she reveals the reduction of the female body to a biological function: "This is not recreation, even for the Commander. This is serious business. The Commander, too, is doing his duty" (Atwood, 1985, p. 122). Formal, ritualized language neutralizes violence, transforming domination into a moral obligation sanctioned by faith and law. Beyond the ceremony, Gilead's power structure is reinforced through the ritualization of everyday practices, such as standardized greetings, mandatory clothing, and strictly prescribed public behavior.

Expressions such as “Blessed be the fruit” and “May the Lord open” (Atwood, 1985, p. 25) show how religious discourse infiltrates daily communication, turning language into a constant act of ideological reaffirmation. Through the practice of repetition, violence becomes normalized and invisible. Institutionalized religion as a political tool functions as an apparatus of surveillance and control rather than a source of ethical reflection. Offred's observation that “The Bible is kept locked up, the way people once kept tea locked up, so the servants wouldn’t steal it” (Atwood, 1985, p. 112) reveals how access to sacred discourse is monopolized by power. This dynamic highlights Foucault's notion of the production of truth through discourse, in which certain statements are legitimized while others are silenced (Foucault, 2014).

The oppression of women in Gilead is further structured through a rigid caste system that assigns distinct roles to Handmaids, Wives, Marthas, Aunts, and Econoмes. This separation goes beyond social hierarchy, functioning as a tool of control that divides women and hinders the formation of solidarity among them. By classifying women into groups with different interests and varying levels of privilege, the regime promotes mistrust, competition, and mutual surveillance. Offred recognizes this logic when she states: “We are for breeding

purposes" (Atwood, 1985, p. 176), highlighting the absence of emotional ties and collective resistance. This organization reflects Foucault's concept of panopticism, where power functions most efficiently when individuals internalize surveillance and behave as if they are constantly being observed.

As Foucault explains, this condition "ensures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault, 2014, p. 315). In Gilead, the caste system intensifies this effect, making all women subjects and agents of control. Regulated clothing, ceremonial language, and rigidly imposed behaviors force women to continually perform the social roles assigned to them, reinforcing normative expectations. Butler's theory further clarifies this process, as gender roles in Gilead do not arise as natural expressions, but as the result of compulsory repetition. Similarly, Beauvoir's notion of women as the "Other" is taken to the extreme, as women are defined exclusively by their biological or domestic functions within a male-dominated structure.

In this context of strict control, symbolic elements take on a crucial role. Language, expression, and communication are heavily supervised, making visual symbolism an alternative mode of meaning creation. Clothing, particularly the red robes worn by the Handmaids, functions as a visual marker of political and biological value. Officially associated with fertility and life, the color also evokes blood, danger, sexuality, and vulnerability. While erasing individuality, red makes women hypervisible in public space, marking their bodies as property of the state.

Offred demonstrates awareness of this paradox when she reflects on the meaning of her clothes: "Everything except the wings around my face is red: the color of blood, which defines us" (Atwood, 1985, p. 11). The female body is thus both hidden and exposed, reinforcing the biopolitical logic that regulates the system. Along with visual symbolism, the first-person narrative constructs a subtle and persistent form of resistance. By recounting her experiences, Offred preserves an intimacy that the regime seeks to eradicate. Memories, irony, and narrative fragmentation function as mental defenses, allowing the narrator to preserve her identity in the face of the physical and symbolic oppression that surrounds her and for subjectivity to endure despite systemic oppression.

The fragmented structure of the narrative reinforces this aspect of resistance, challenging Gilead's attempt to impose a singular and totalizing reality. Irony destabilizes the official narrative, creating a distance between the language of the regime and the narrator's perception, gradually undermining theocratic authority from within the narrative. In this way, clothing and narration function as interconnected strategies of resistance. Although Gilead

exercises extensive control over bodies and speech, it cannot fully dominate memory, perception, or the construction of meaning.

This analysis demonstrates that *The Handmaid's Tale* constructs a dystopian society through an articulated network of power mechanisms that act on the body, identity, and social relations. Surveillance, reproductive control, ritualized violence, and hierarchical division function as elements of a cohesive disciplinary system based on Foucauldian logic. The female body emerges as a central site of domination, where fertility is transformed into a political resource and identity is systematically erased. Religion plays a decisive legitimizing role by covering up structural violence with a moral and sacred discourse, transferring authority from the political sphere to the ethical-religious sphere.

However, despite the comprehensiveness of this system, Atwood's narrative reveals its limits through subtle forms of resistance embedded in symbolism, memory, and narrative. This understanding of Gilead's dystopian structure provides the necessary basis for analyzing the television adaptation. While the novel articulates power and resistance primarily through language, internal narration, and symbolic suggestion, the series expands and re-signifies these dynamics through visual, chromatic, and narrative strategies specific to audiovisual media. Recognizing the mechanisms at work in the literary text is therefore essential to assessing how the adaptation preserves, transforms, and reinterprets Atwood's critique in a different medium.

3.2 Audiovisual Analysis - The Television Adaptation

In the television adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale*, the construction of Gilead is deeply marked by visual strategies that play a central role in the dystopian narrative. Unlike Margaret Atwood's book, where oppression is mainly conveyed through Offred's internal perspective, the series uses audiovisual language to visually represent the dynamics of power, supervision, and domination that form the basis of the theocratic system, highlighting the adaptation's capacity as an aesthetic recreation and interpretation (Hutcheon, 2006; Stam, 2005; Paulino, 2023). Thus, elements such as set design, framing, and lighting cease to function as mere aesthetic components and begin to act as narrative elements that shape the viewer's experience.

The scenography of Gilead is made up of severe, inflexible, and very well-structured locations, where a design characterized by symmetry and uniformity stands out, and controlled interiors, long corridors, and bare environments visually communicate the regime's obsession

with order, discipline, and hierarchy.

Figure 1 - Symmetrical Composition and Disciplinary Space in Gilead (S1E10).

Source: The Handmaid's Tale. Created by Bruce Miller. Hulu/MGM Television, 2017.

These environments restrict people's movement and eliminate uniqueness, converting physical space into a tool of control. Thus, the scenic space not only reflects Gilead's ideology, but also actively acts to maintain social control in line with Michel Foucault's considerations regarding methods of control and the use of space as a means of supervision and standardization of bodies (Foucault, 2014).

The framing reinforces this logic of subjugation by constantly placing the female body under observation. The series makes recurrent use of close-ups on Offred's face, restricting the viewer's field of vision and creating a sense of confinement that reflects the character's limited autonomy. In addition, high-angle shots and rigid compositions suggest the constant presence of a controlling gaze, evoking the permanent surveillance exercised by the regime.

Figure 2 - Close-up of Offred (S1E1).

Source: The Handmaid's Tale. Created by Bruce Miller. Hulu/MGM Television, 2017.

By limiting what can be seen, the camera visually reproduces the experience of oppression experienced by the Handmaids, bringing the viewer closer to their condition of submission. The lighting contributes decisively to the construction of the dystopian atmosphere.

The presence of low, scattered lighting in cool colors establishes a dark and suffocating

atmosphere, increasing the emotional charge of the story. Shadows often conceal faces and spaces, suggesting secrecy, fear, and the impossibility of transparency in Gilead.

Figure 3 - Interior scene demonstrating the use of lateral lighting and shadow to create an atmosphere of surveillance and confinement (S1E5).

Source: The Handmaid's Tale. Created by Bruce Miller. Hulu/MGM Television, 2017.

This striking use of lighting intensifies the impression of constant danger and shows how domination encompasses not only the bodies, but also the feelings and subjectivity of the characters, as Paulino (2023). Together, set design, framing, and lighting function as visual mechanisms of power that translate into sensory terms the abstract concepts of surveillance, discipline, and biopolitics discussed by Foucault (2014). The visual construction of Gilead, therefore, examines the plot and conversations, reinforcing the dystopian logic of the series through its aesthetics.

By carefully manipulating the environment, camera, and lighting, the TV adaptation not only reflects the regime's ideology but intensifies the audience's emotional connection, making control and domination visually inevitable. In the television adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale*, color forms an organized set of meanings that goes beyond aesthetics and functions as a form of organized visual communication. The use of colors in clothing instantly defines social functions, hierarchies, and behavioral norms, allowing the power dynamics in Gilead to be visually identified without the need for verbal explanations.

In this way, the costumes function as a narrative device that materializes the disciplinary logic of the regime, operating as a mechanism for the visual classification and normalization of bodies (Foucault, 2014), as can be seen in the visual layout of the series, which employs the use of colors as a narrative technique to distinguish social roles and emphasize gender hierarchies. The red used by the Handmaids is the most emblematic element of this chromatic system.

Figure 4 - Handmaids gathered in a public space, wearing red cloaks and white bonnets, visually highlighting the chromatic codification that defines their social function within the regime of Gilead (S1E10).

Source: The Handmaid's Tale. Created by Bruce Miller. Hulu/MGM Television, 2017.

Traditionally associated with blood, fertility, sin, and danger, red reinforces the reduction of these women to their reproductive function, central to the maintenance of the theocratic state. At the same time, it is a highly visible color that highlights the bodies of the Handmaids in public space, highlighting the paradox of control in Gilead: although deprived of identity and autonomy, these women are constantly exposed as property of the regime. The constant presence of red turns the Handmaid's body into a social marker, which facilitates supervision and instant identification of non-standard behavior, highlighting the biopolitical perspective of control over reproduction (Foucault, 2014).

In contrast, the blue worn by the Wives symbolically evokes purity, serenity, and emotional restraint. This color choice visually reinforces the social expectations imposed on these women, associated with passivity, self control, and submission within the domestic sphere.

Figure 5 - Serena Joy and Offred, contrasting spatial positioning and lighting: Serena is framed near the illuminated window, while Offred remains in the darker interior space, visually reinforcing the hierarchy and the symbolic serenity associated with the Wife's role.(S1E05).

Source: The Handmaid's Tale. Created by Bruce Miller. Hulu/MGM Television, 2017.

Although they occupy a hierarchically superior position to the Handmaids, the Wives are also imprisoned by rigid norms of behavior, which shows that power in Gilead operates

differently, but equally restrictively, on the various female roles. Blue, with its symbolic coldness, indicates a femininity that is maintained and shaped by repeated habits, relating to the idea of gender as a normative creation (Butler, 2001; Oliveira, 2019). The green costumes of the Marthas, in turn, symbolize work, functionality, and invisibility. Associated with domestic tasks and the maintenance of daily life, the color green places these women in a practical role that helps keep the system running without giving them prominence or power.

The discreet tones contribute to visual erasure, reinforcing their marginalization in the social structure of Gilead and showing how reproductive and caregiving roles in the home are seen as normal and socially devalued. Together, these chromatic distinctions form a social code that disciplines bodies and regulates behavior. By assigning fixed colors to specific functions, the regime transforms visual appearance into a mechanism of permanent surveillance where any deviation becomes immediately noticeable. This chromatic system exemplifies how power acts through classification and visual normalization (Foucault, 2014).

Thus, the use of color in the series is not limited to aesthetic composition, but constitutes a central narrative strategy for organizing gender, work, and power, reinforcing the dystopian logic of Gilead through constant visual control. In the television adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale*, character development is one of the most significant processes of narrative expansion in relation to Margaret Atwood's novel. Instead of limiting itself to replicating the literary description, the series delves deeper into psychological aspects, explores ethical uncertainties, and expands the story arcs, aligning itself with the idea that adaptation is a creative and interpretive act, not just an exact copy (Hutcheon, 2006; Stam, 2005; Paulino, 2023).

This process allows not only for greater complexity of the main characters, but also for the expansion of alternative interpretations of the dystopia of Gilead. Serena Joy exemplifies this movement of expansion in an expressive way. In the novel, the character is presented in a relatively static way, mostly occupying the position of antagonist within Offred's narrative. In the adaptation, however, Serena is constructed as a psychologically complex figure, endowed with greater narrative agency and emotional depth. As Silva (2018) observes, the series transforms Serena Joy into a character marked by contradictions, whose actions oscillate between active complicity with the regime and moments of fragility, frustration, and suffering.

This duality highlights the pressures that arise from her situation in Gilead, showing how the regime also establishes strict restrictions even for women who, at first glance, appear to benefit from it. The expansion of the protagonist Offred (identified as June Osborne in the

series) occurs through a reconfiguration of her narrative expression. In Margaret Atwood's novel, the narrator's identity is never officially confirmed. "Offred" functions merely as a patronymic meaning "of Fred," reinforcing the erasure imposed by the Gilead regime and reducing the character to a reproductive function.

Although subtle textual clues suggest that her name may be June, this possibility remains unvalidated within the literary narrative. By explicitly naming her June Osborne, the television adaptation performs a significant narrative expansion. The series grants the protagonist a stable and recognizable identity, enhancing her psychological depth and narrative agency. This decision not only contributes to televisual coherence but also operates as a symbolic act of resistance: the restoration of her name reaffirms individuality within a regime structured around systematic erasure.

In this sense, the adaptation materializes what in the novel remains suggestive, transforming latent identity into explicit affirmation. While the novel privileges interiority through first-person narration, the audiovisual adaptation externalizes subjectivity through visual and performative strategies. Facial expressions, prolonged silences, restrained gestures, and the recurring use of direct gaze into the camera function as mechanisms that translate resistance, fear, and critical awareness into televisual language (Paulino, 2023).

In this way, the series preserves Offred's reflective dimension while translating it into a language compatible with the television medium. More human and complex characters do not lead to the ease of moral dilemmas, but it increases their depth. By portraying women simultaneously as victims and agents within the Gilead system, the series challenges binary readings of oppression and resistance. The characters are presented as subjects with limited choices, ethical negotiations, and survival strategies that reveal the structural brutality of the regime. By expanding its characters, the television adaptation deepens the social criticism initiated by Atwood, highlighting how authoritarian systems fragment subjectivities and produce deep internal conflicts in individuals.

In the television adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale*, the Ceremony is not presented merely as a specific narrative event, it is constructed as an audiovisual ritual that explicitly materializes the power relations that structure Gilead. Through careful arrangement of silence, visual composition, and sound design, the series converts the act into a sensory experience of control that needs no words to be understood, imposing itself through repetition and structure.

Silence plays a central role in the representation of the Ceremony; the almost total absence of dialogue intensifies the atmosphere of control and repression, reinforcing the suppression of subjectivity and emotional expression of the characters involved.

By limiting verbal language, the series emphasizes the normalization of institutional violence, suggesting that what is not said carries as much symbolic weight as what is shown. Silence, in this context, operates as an instrument of power, forcing passivity and eliminating any chance of contestation. The framing contributes to the ritualization of the act by organizing the bodies in a rigid and hierarchical manner.

Figure 6 - The Ceremony scene, illustrating the rigid spatial arrangement of bodies and the hierarchical positioning that reinforces institutionalized control (S1E1).

Source: The Handmaid's Tale. Created by Bruce Miller. Hulu/MGM Television, 2017.

The visual compositions reinforce the immobility of the characters, highlighting the absence of agency and the submission of female bodies to the norms of the regime. The repetition of these images throughout the series consolidates the ceremony as a mechanical and institutionalized procedure, closer to a protocol than to human interaction, which accentuates the dehumanization implied in the ritual. The sound design further intensifies this experience of domination.

The emphasis on bodily sounds, such as breathing, the friction of fabrics, and ambient noises, replaces traditional dramatic music and anchors the scene in a disturbing physical materiality. This sound choice reinforces the cold, controlled, and procedural nature of the ceremony, denying any possibility of catharsis or romanticization of the act. The viewer is then confronted with violence in its most concrete and banalized dimension. Through these audiovisual strategies, the ceremony functions as a biopolitical ritual, in Michel Foucault's terms, by regulating bodies and female reproduction while reaffirming the hierarchical authority of the regime (Foucault, 2014).

The repetition and formalization of the act transform violence into routine, ensuring its acceptance as a necessary function of Gilead's social order. Thus, the audiovisual construction

of the ceremony intensifies the dystopian experience by transforming power into a sensory and embodied phenomenon, highlighting the processes by which domination is naturalized and maintained. An analysis of the television adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale* shows that the series develops its dystopian critique not only through the plot or dialogue, but mainly through a refined articulation of audiovisual language. Elements such as spatial organization, expressive use of the camera, chromatic coding of costumes, psychological expansion of characters, and ritualization of institutional practices work together as narrative mechanisms of power.

These resources make the processes of surveillance, discipline, and control that structure Gilead visible and sensory, allowing the viewer to experience oppression in an embodied and emotionally intense way. In this sense, the series does not limit itself to illustrating the universe created by Margaret Atwood (1985). The series expands and reinterprets it according to the potentialities of the television medium. By translating concepts such as biopolitics, normalization, and domination into images, sounds, and bodily performances, the adaptation deepens the social criticism present in the novel and updates it for a contemporary audience. Thus, the audiovisual construction of Gilead reinforces the dystopian logic of the narrative by showing how authoritarian regimes act simultaneously on bodies, spaces, and subjectivities, paving the way for a comparative analysis between the literary work and the series, which will allow us to understand how these strategies communicate, change, or intensify during the adaptation process.

3.3 Preserving and Transforming Gilead: A Comparative Analysis of Text and Screen

The analysis initiated in this section consists of the development of a comparative study focused on episodes 1 ("*Offred*"), 5 ("*Faithful*"), and 10 ("*Night*") of the first season of the series *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017), in direct dialogue with Margaret Atwood's book of the same name (1985). The delimitation of this corpus is based on the structural function that these episodes perform in the audiovisual narrative, taking into account the adaptation as an aesthetic and interpretative reorganization of the literary work into a new format (Hutcheon, 2006; Stam, 2005). The first episode presents and establishes the principles of the dystopian regime of Gilead, making visible its mechanisms of surveillance, discipline, and control of the female body, fundamental elements of the dystopia created by Margaret Atwood and directly linked to the ideas of disciplinary control and biopolitics (Foucault, 2014).

In the novel, Offred reflects “I avoid looking down at my body, not so much because it’s shameful or immodest but because I don’t want to see it. I don’t want to look at something that determines me so completely” (Atwood, 1985, p. 82). This passage reveals how the body ceases to function as a site of subjectivity and becomes instead the very mechanism of control. The series intensifies this perception through close-up shots and restrictive framing, visually translating the character’s alienation from her own physicality.

Literary text	**Television Adaptation**
“I avoid looking down at my body, not so much because it’s shameful or immodest but because I don’t want to see it. I don’t want to look at something that determines me so completely.” (Atwood, 1985, p. 82)	

As a literary genre, dystopia is characterized by the representation of oppressive social systems that amplify prevailing political and ideological trends to highlight their risks (Thuta, 2024; Tariq, 2025). In this sense, Gilead operates as a political allegory, reflecting contemporary anxieties about authoritarianism, gender control, and the erosion of civil rights, reinforcing dystopian literature’s function as a critical lens through which modern societies are examined (Tariq, 2025). Moreover, as Reetika (2025) argues, *The Handmaid’s Tale* exemplifies how dystopian narratives foreground systems of gendered power and institutionalized domination, making the regulation of women’s bodies central to the maintenance of the regime.

The middle episode deepens gender and power relations through the expansion of the character Serena Joy, highlighting the internal contradictions of the patriarchal system and emphasizing that the situation of women is a social construct reinforced by rules and actions (Beauvoir, 1985; Butler, 2018). In the novel, Offred reflects on Serena’s silencing within the very system she once defended “She doesn’t make speeches anymore. She has become speechless. She stays in her home, but it doesn’t seem to agree with her. How furious she must be, now that she’s been taken at her word” (Atwood, 1985, p. 61). The passage exposes the paradox of patriarchal ideology, the woman who helped construct the discourse of domestic

confinement becomes its captive. In the television adaptation, this contradiction is intensified through visual emphasis on Serena's spatial isolation and emotional repression, transforming her into both agent and victim of the regime.

Literary text	**Television Adaptation**
"She doesn't make speeches anymore. She has become speechless. She stays in her home, but it doesn't seem to agree with her. How furious she must be, now that she's been taken at her word" (Atwood, 1985, p. 61).	

The final episode revisits the ambiguity and narrative suspension that mark the end of the novel, rejecting conclusive solutions and reinforcing the instability typical of dystopia, a common feature in stories that portray situations of instability, doubt, and vulnerability in social organizations (Bauman, 2001). In this context, dystopian narratives are structured around systems of domination that regulate everyday life and expose the fragility of institutional arrangements (Tariq, 2025), which makes the refusal of narrative closure consistent with the genre's critical purpose.

Thus, the three episodes function as analytical axes that allow for a coordinated observation of the presentation, deepening, and problematization of Atwood's dystopian project in the television adaptation. Grounded in the principles of comparative literature, as proposed by Bassnett (1993) and Damrosch (2003), this study understands the relationship between novel and series as a dynamic exchange and reinterpretation of meanings across different languages and cultural contexts. Rather than simply repeating the novel as a new interpretation (Hutcheon, 2006; Stam, 2005).

The series brings dystopian oppression to life through specific visual methods. In the novel, Offred frames her experience as an act of storytelling "I would like to believe this is a story I'm telling. I need to believe it. I must believe it. Those who can believe that such stories are only stories have a better chance" (Atwood, 1985, p. 52). The insistence on narrativization as a survival mechanism underscores the metafictional awareness of the text and reinforces

dystopia's warning function. In the series, this narrative consciousness is translated into claustrophobic framing, frequent close-ups, and limited depth of field, which confine Offred within restricted visual environments. The camera remains uncomfortably close to her face, transforming interior monologue into embodied tension and converting literary introspection into cinematic immediacy.

Literary text	**Television Adaptation**
"I would like to believe this is a story I'm telling. I need to believe it. I must believe it. Those who can believe that such stories are only stories have a better chance" (Atwood, 1985, p. 52).	

Color also plays an essential role in creating meaning. The rigid symmetry of interior spaces and ceremonial scenes manifests the regime's obsession with order and hierarchy, visually reflecting structures of discipline and biopolitical control (Foucault, 2014). In the novel, this spatial regulation is metaphorically expressed when Offred observes "Now and again we vary the route; there's nothing against it, as long as we stay within the barriers. A rat in a maze is free to go anywhere, as long as it stays inside the maze." (Atwood, 1985, p. 113). The metaphor reveals the illusion of autonomy within a strictly regulated system. This dynamic is visually reinforced in the series through symmetrical framing and the architectural dominance imposed over individual bodies.

Literary text	**Television Adaptation**
"Now and again we vary the route; there's nothing against it, as long as we stay within the barriers. A rat in a maze is free to go anywhere, as long as it stays inside the	

maze.” (Atwood, 1985, p. 113).	

In addition to architectural control, the regime also operates through interpersonal surveillance. The Handmaids are forced to walk in pairs, under the justification of protection, but in reality as a mechanism of mutual monitoring “We aren't allowed to go there except in twos. This is supposed to be for our protection, though the notion is absurd: we are well protected already. The truth is that she is my spy, as I am hers. If either of us slips through the net because of something that happens on one of our daily walks, the other will be accountable.” (Atwood, 1985, p. 25). This passage reveals how control in Gilead is internalized and redistributed among the subjects themselves, transforming relationships into instruments of discipline. The series translates this logic through visual compositions in which the Handmaids move in synchronized steps, reinforcing the idea that surveillance is not only imposed from above, but embedded within daily interactions, consolidating the regime’s network of power (Foucault, 2014).

Literary text	**Television Adaptation**
“We aren't allowed to go there except in twos. This is supposed to be for our protection, though the notion is absurd: we are well protected already. The truth is that she is my spy, as I am hers. If either of us slips through the net because of something that happens on one of our daily walks, the other will be accountable.” (Atwood, 1985, p. 25).	

The metaphor reveals the illusion of autonomy within a strictly regulated system. This dynamic is visually reinforced in the series through symmetrical framing and the architectural dominance imposed over individual bodies. Lighting and spatial composition further accentuate the instability characteristic of the dystopian genre (Bauman, 2001; Tariq, 2025).

Shadows frequently obscure parts of the scene, suggesting secrecy and constant threat. Open shots diminish individual presence in relation to monumental structures, placing subjects in a position subservient to institutional power, a visual configuration that echoes the authoritarian and surveillance-based dynamics typical of dystopian societies (Thuta, 2024; Tariq, 2025).

In moments of narrative suspension, silence, long shots, and the reduced use of dialogue create ambiguity, avoiding emotional closure and emphasizing the vulnerability that marks dystopian worlds (Bauman, 2001). In this way, the adaptation not only translates the novel's themes but reorganizes them through cinematic language, converting abstract ideas such as oppression, discipline, and gender control into a visual and sensory experience. The selected episodes maintain the dystopian foundations of the novel while transforming and expanding them through narrative and aesthetic strategies specific to audiovisual language, reaffirming the work's critical relevance in a new medium and historical context (Hutcheon, 2006; Stam, 2005).

In "*Offred*", the dystopian order of Gilead is progressively unveiled, allowing the viewer to grasp the mechanisms that sustain the regime, acting as a fundamental part similar to the first chapters of the novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, considering the adaptation as an aesthetic and narrative reconfiguration of a literary work in a different format (Hutcheon, 2006; Stam, 2005). In both the literary work and the television adaptation, the regime is marked by constant surveillance, disciplining of bodies, and the imposition of a rigid order, central elements of Margaret Atwood's dystopian critique and directly related to notions of disciplinary power and social control (Foucault, 2014).

In the novel, this reasoning is presented in the opening pages, when Offred recalls the old gymnasium transformed into a re-education space: "We slept in what had once been the gymnasium." (Atwood, 1985, p. 3). The apparent simplicity of the sentence succinctly shows the transformation of a collective, everyday space into a means of institutional surveillance, foreshadowing the authoritarian reorganization of social life in Gilead, a recurring feature of modern dystopias (Bauman, 2001). According to Foucault (2014), this place can be understood as a tool of discipline, where bodies are structured, monitored, and standardized through systematic methods of control.

Literary text	**Television Adaptation**

“We slept in what had once been the gymnasium.” (Atwood, 1985, p. 3).	

The re-education center is not limited to being a physical space of detention, but it itself also functions as a symbolic mechanism for erasing individuality, preparing women to internalize the norms of the regime, in accordance with the functioning of the disciplinary technologies described by Foucault (2014). The series visually represents this logic in the first episode through symmetrical framing, limited camera movements, and a carefully chosen color palette that reinforce the feeling of imposed control and lack of freedom, exploring resources specific to audiovisual language to convey relationships of power and surveillance (Hutcheon, 2006; Stam, 2005).

Unlike the book, where surveillance is presented through Offred's inner narration, in the audiovisual adaptation it becomes apparent and sensory, increasing its oppressive nature and influence on the viewer by making visible what in the literary text operates subjectively (Foucault, 2014). This visibility of control goes beyond physical space and is revealed in a striking way in the control of women's bodies. In the novel, Offred expresses this reduction of identity in blunt terms: “We are two-legged wombs, that’s all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices.” (Atwood, 1985). The fragmentation of the female subject into a purely reproductive function exposes the biopolitical logic of Gilead, in which women are not individuals but instruments of state continuity.

While the book articulates this condition through ironic and reflective narration, the series materializes it visually, emphasizing costumes, posture, silence, and ritualized positioning, transforming the body itself into a visible site of discipline and control. In Gilead, the female body is reduced to its reproductive function, becoming the main focus of state biopolitics (Foucault, 2014). The episode “*Offred*” makes this logic evident through various ritualized practices, from the way of walking to the style of dressing that govern the movements and behaviors of the Handmaids, reinforcing the naturalization of discipline in everyday life (Foucault, 2014).

According to Beauvoir (2014), the female condition is not something natural, but rather something that has been constructed throughout history, and in Gilead this construction is at its

highest level of institutionalization. Butler (2018) suggests that by viewing gender as a constant performance, we can see how these recurring actions create a female identity that is obedient and advantageous to the system. In this scenario, visual symbols play a crucial role in maintaining social order, and the red costumes of the Handmaids are one of the most significant symbolic elements of the episode, functioning as visual markers of hierarchy, discipline, and control (Foucault, 2014).

Literary text	**Television Adaptation**
"My name isn't Offred, I have another name, which nobody uses now because it's forbidden" (Atwood, 1985, p. 108).	

According to Chevalier and Gheerbrant (2019), red presents a duality, being linked to both life and blood and sacrifice. This ambiguous symbolism interacts directly with the role assigned to the Handmaids in Gilead: their bodies are celebrated as sources of life, but at the same time, they are subjected to ritualized violence and the erasure of their individuality, in accordance with the biopolitical logic of supervising existence and reproduction (Foucault, 2014). The series makes this symbolic interpretation clear by visually equating the Handmaids, removing any sign of singularity and transforming them into almost replaceable figures in the urban landscape, a process that highlights the normalization and standardization of female bodies as a disciplinary strategy (Foucault, 2014).

The repetition of the color red in contrast to the neutrals of the urban environment highlights the idea of constant surveillance and public exposure of female bodies, visually intensifying the control and permanent supervision exercised by the regime (Foucault, 2014). As they walk through the streets of Gilead, June and the other Handmaids not only occupy space, but are shown as visible symbols of the order established by the regime, converting the female body into a visual support for state authority (Foucault, 2014). This visual approach increases the symbolic role of color, which ceases to be merely a metaphorical figure, as in the novel, to become a real mechanism of social categorization and control, according to the principles of classification and surveillance characteristic of modern disciplinary systems

(Foucault, 2014).

The ceremony, which appears in the episode “Offred”, is one of the main elements of comparison between the book and the series. In the literary work, Offred narrates the ritual with an almost clinical tone, showing how sexual violence is normalized by religious discourse: “This is supposed to signify that we are one flesh, one being” (Atwood, 1985, p. 121). This phrase reveals the reappropriation of biblical language, which transforms coercion into a moral duty and silences the experience of the woman involved. At the same time, the narration abruptly shifts to a mechanical and impersonal register: “My red skirt is hitched up to my waist, though no higher. Below it the Commander is fucking. What he is fucking is the lower part of my body.” (Atwood, 1985, p. 121). The fragmentation of the body in this description reinforces the reduction of the female subject to a reproductive function, exposing the material violence that religious discourse attempts to conceal.

Literary text	**Television Adaptation**
“My red skirt is hitched up to my waist, though no higher. Below it the Commander is fucking. What he is fucking is the lower part of my body.” (Atwood, 1985, p. 121).	

According to Oliveira (2019), the ritualization of violence in dystopian narratives acts as a way of normalizing abuse, transforming oppression into a social practice that is accepted and institutionally validated. The series preserves this critical aspect by staging the ceremony in a silent, slow, and rigidly choreographed manner, exploiting specific characteristics of audiovisual language to increase the impact of control and submission (Hutcheon, 2006; Stam, 2005). The absence of dialogue, the use of close-ups, and the emotional restraint of the characters reinforce the feeling of inevitability and emptying of female subjectivity, aligning with the mechanisms of discipline and surveillance characteristic of authoritarian regimes (Foucault, 2014).

Instead of an explicit representation of violence, the adaptation chooses to emphasize its symbolic and structural dimension, making the viewer's discomfort a result of the normalization of the act and not its dramatization, as pointed out by analyses of the

aestheticization of oppression in dystopian contexts (Oliveira, 2019). Thus, the episode "Offred" clearly establishes the main pillars of the dystopia of *The Handmaid's Tale*: surveillance, discipline, and symbolic and biopolitical control of the female body (Foucault, 2014). In the novel, this hierarchy is concisely expressed in the statement: "I wait, for the household to assemble. Household: that is what we are. The Commander is the head of the household. The house is what he holds. To have and to hold, until death do us part." (Atwood, 1985, p. 104).

The wordplay reinforces the association between authority and possession, suggesting that power in Gilead is structured through ownership, not only of property, but of women's bodies and reproductive capacities. By translating the mechanisms of oppression suggested by the novel's internal narration into audiovisual language, the series preserves the critical core of Atwood's work, while amplifying its sensory and visual power, confirming the interpretive and recreational nature of the adaptation process (Hutcheon, 2006).

Literary text	**Television Adaptation**
"I wait, for the household to assemble. Household: that is what we are. The Commander is the head of the household. The house is what he holds. To have and to hold, until death do us part." (Atwood, 1985, p. 104).	

The first episode, therefore, not only introduces the universe of Gilead, but also initiates an aesthetic experience that puts the viewer in direct contact with the authoritarian logic of the regime, setting the stage for the narrative and thematic development of the season (Stam, 2005). The episode "*Faithful*" plays a crucial role in the first season of *The Handmaid's Tale*, shifting the focus to the character of Serena Joy and allowing for a detailed analysis of the gender and authority relations that sustain the Gilead regime (Hutcheon, 2006). Unlike the opening episode, which reveals the structural aspects of the dystopia, "*Faithful*" delves deeper into its internal contradictions, showing the ambiguous role of women who, despite their high social status, remain subordinate to the patriarchal system, highlighting the persistence of gender hierarchies in authoritarian regimes (Beauvoir, 2019).

In this sense, the episode serves as a milestone in the plot, questioning the notion of

female power in a fundamentally male authoritarian system, in which authority remains concentrated in patriarchal structures (Foucault, 2014). In Margaret Atwood's novel, Serena Joy is portrayed primarily as an authoritarian and distant figure, representing the patriarchal ideology she embraces. Her perspective is mediated by Offred's narration, which helps to characterize her as a fixed character, linked to dissatisfaction and hostility, an effect produced by the limitations of the literary narrative point of view (Stam, 2005). As Offred observes early in the story: "She doesn't speak to me, unless she can't avoid it. I am a reproach to her; and a necessity" (Atwood, 1985, p. 17), a description that encapsulates Serena Joy's complex position as both powerful and constrained within the patriarchal hierarchy.

Literary text	**Television Adaptation**
"She doesn't speak to me, unless she can't avoid it. I am a reproach to her; and a necessity." (Atwood, 1985, p. 17).	

However, the television adaptation provides a significant expansion of this character, resulting from the displacement of narrative strategies specific to the audiovisual medium (Hutcheon, 2006). As Silva (2018) and Paulino (2020) show, the series offers Serena greater psychological depth by addressing her internal contradictions, her emotional struggles, and her active contribution to supporting the regime. This expansion not only makes the character more complex, but also alters her role in the narrative, making her a critical element of the adaptation by highlighting the tensions between gender, power, and female complicity in the Gilead system (Foucault, 2014). Silva (2018) argues that Serena in the series presents herself as an extremely complex figure, being both a partner and a target of the system she helped build.

This ambiguity is crucial in "*Faithful*," an episode highlighting internal contradictions common in representations of women in authoritarian systems (Beauvoir, 1985). Visually, Serena is often shown isolated in large indoor spaces, characterized by silence and a rigid aesthetic, exploiting specific audiovisual language resources to express power relations and

symbolic confinement (Hutcheon, 2006; Stam, 2005). These frames create an important contrast between her social position and her lack of real power, suggesting that her authority is largely symbolic and limited to the domestic sphere, in line with the mechanisms of power distribution and restriction in patriarchal systems (Foucault, 2014).

Paulino (2020) adds that this expansion of the character is related to a contemporary debate about the role of women in maintaining oppressive systems. Serena Joy's body language emphasizes this tension: her posture is inflexible, her gestures are moderate, and her movements seem to be intentionally planned and controlled, as if they were always under supervision. Even in the domestic environment that she theoretically runs, she seems to monitor herself, reflecting the internalization of discipline that characterizes the logic of control discussed by Foucault (2014). Thus, Serena is not only an agent of the system, but also a person influenced by its methods of surveillance, showing how power acts not only through external force, but also through self-control and mastery that are incorporated into the body itself.

With the introduction of Serena as a woman who embraces and reproduces patriarchal logic, the series moves dystopian criticism beyond the simplistic view of the oppressors and the oppressed, highlighting diffuse forms of power and complicity in sustaining the regime (Foucault, 2014). "*Faithful*" shows that the maintenance of the Gilead regime depends not only on direct male violence, but also on the active participation of women who seek to preserve their relative privileges, contributing to the perpetuation of collective oppression, as discussed in debates on gender, power, and the historical responsibility of women in patriarchal structures (Beauvoir, 2019).

In light of Beauvoir's ideas (2019), Serena Joy can be seen as an example of a woman who, despite being part of the patriarchal structure, is limited by it. Her condition reveals the inconsistency of a system that promises security and recognition to women who follow the rules, but in reality deprives them of true autonomy and capacity for action, showing the continuity of gender disparities in established patriarchal systems (Beauvoir, 2019). In the episode "*Faithful*," this contradiction becomes evident in Serena's frustration with her sterility and lack of power outside the restrictions imposed by the regime, revealing the limits imposed on women's actions in authoritarian systems (Foucault, 2014).

The episode demonstrates that even when occupying a high position in the female hierarchy, women are still excluded from central political decisions, confirming the concentration of power in male authorities (Foucault, 2014). This analysis can be further

explored with Butler's (2018) concepts, who argues that gender is a construction achieved through repeated practices and social norms. Serena rigorously plays the expected role of a faithful, restrained, and morally superior Wife, but this performance does not give her freedom, it only reaffirms her submission to a predefined identity, produced and maintained by regulatory gender norms (Butler, 2018). The episode "*Faithful*," therefore, reveals the performative aspect of female power in Gilead: a power that is evident in appearance but is emptied in the face of institutionalized male authority, sustained by the regime's disciplinary and hierarchical devices (Foucault, 2014).

From the perspective of adaptation studies, this new character configuration validates Hutcheon's (2006) idea that adaptation is an act of artistic recreation. In developing Serena Joy, the series does not betray the original work, but updates and deepens an existing tension in the literary text, taking advantage of its critical potential through the resources of audiovisual language, as advocated by approaches that understand adaptation as interpretation and aesthetic recontextualization (Hutcheon, 2006; Stam, 2005). The deepening of the character allows Atwood's dystopia to connect more directly with current issues of gender, power, and historical responsibility, reinforcing the importance of the work in a different cultural context (Beauvoir, 2019; Butler, 2018).

Thus, the episode "*Faithful*" demonstrates that oppression in *The Handmaid's Tale* manifests itself not only through explicit coercion, but also through the symbolic and emotional adherence of individuals who, within the system, find limited forms of belonging, highlighting the diffusion and internalization of power in authoritarian regimes (Foucault, 2014). By centering Serena Joy in the plot, the series enriches dystopian criticism and reveals the complexity of the power dynamics that sustain Gilead, promoting a more subtle and modern interpretation of Margaret Atwood's work, in line with current interpretations of gender and involvement in oppressive structures (Silva, 2018; Paulino, 2020).

The last episode of the first season, "*Night*", creates a direct and fundamental connection with the conclusion of the book *The Handmaid's Tale*, characterized by ambiguity and suspension of meaning as its main narrative strategies, a recurring feature in dystopian narratives that refuse conclusive solutions (Hutcheon, 2006). As in the literary work, the episode does not seek to provide clear answers about the protagonist's future, keeping the audience in a state of doubt that intensifies the critique of dystopia. In the novel, Offred ends her story by saying, "And so I step up, into the darkness within; or else the light" (Atwood, 1985, p. 378), a phrase that summarizes the refusal to close the narrative and the impossibility

of a clear distinction between salvation and punishment.

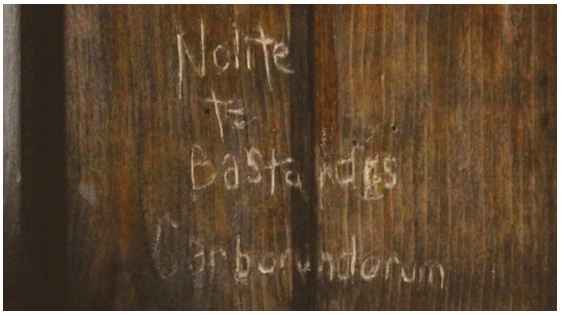
Literary text	**Television Adaptation**
“And so I step up, into the darkness within; or else the light” (Atwood, 1985, p. 378)	

This uncertainty is one of the most striking aspects of Atwood's work, as it shifts the focus from resolution to the subjective experience of oppression, a central feature of contemporary dystopias (Hutcheon, 2006). The television adaptation maintains this structure by creating an ending that is also undefined, reaffirming the interpretive nature of the adaptation process (Stam, 2005). In the episode “*Night*”, June is captured by government agents, but the episode deliberately does not clarify whether this is an arrest or a chance to escape. The scene is characterized by a lack of explanation and restrained narrative, which accentuates the feeling of uncertainty and reinforces the viewer's experience of instability (Stam, 2005).

In light of Stam (2005), this choice can be seen as an aesthetic approach that favors intertextual dialogue with the book, rejecting the logic of closure common in conventional audiovisual productions. Instead of offering a conclusive climax, the series chooses to sustain ambiguity as a principle of its structure, reaffirming its critical and non-literal loyalty to the original text, as proposed by Hutcheon (2006). In addition to maintaining ambiguity in the narrative, the episode “Night” deepens the aspect of resistance by shifting its representation of discourse to bodily expression, emphasizing nonverbal forms of opposition in contexts of extreme control (Foucault, 2014).

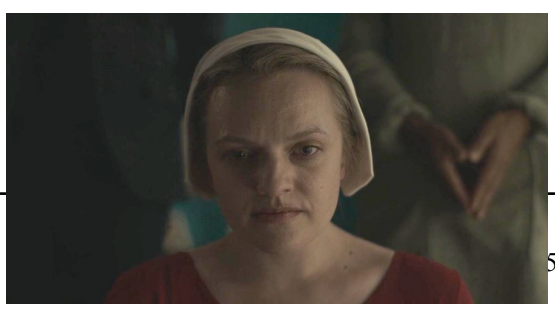
This displacement from spoken narration to embodied resistance echoes moments in the novel when meaning is materially inscribed rather than openly declared. When Offred discovers the hidden message “Nolite te bastardes carborundorum. I can’t see it in the dark but I trace the tiny scratched writing with the ends of my fingers, as if it’s a code in Braille.” (Atwood, 1985, p. 190), resistance appears not as a public act, but as a tactile and intimate

experience. The gesture of tracing the words transforms language into a physical contact, reinforcing the idea that, under regimes of surveillance, resistance survives in fragments, in silence, and in the body itself.

Literary text	**Television Adaptation**
“Nolite te bastardes carborundorum. I can’t see it in the dark but I trace the tiny scratched writing with the ends of my fingers, as if it’s a code in Braille.” (Atwood, 1985, p. 190)	

Unlike previous parts of the series, where narration acts as a continuation of the novel's inner voice, the final episode uses this resource in a very reduced way, opting for expressive strategies specific to audiovisual language (Hutcheon, 2006; Stam, 2005). In the novel, Offred repeatedly emphasizes the constructed nature of her own identity, as when she reflects: “I compose myself. My self is a thing I must now compose, as one composes a speech. What I must present is a made thing, not something born.” (Atwood, 1985, p. 86). The passage highlights the self as performance, something deliberately assembled in order to survive within a regime of control.

In the adaptation, this process of composition is no longer articulated through internal narration but embodied visually. June's resistance is conveyed through bodily performance, subtle gestures, gaze, and silence, shifting the narrative axis from words to the body (Foucault, 2014). What in the novel appears as linguistic self-construction becomes, in the series, a physical enactment of identity, reinforcing the idea that subjectivity under authoritarian regimes must be carefully staged in order to persist.

Literary text	**Television Adaptation**
“I compose myself. My self is a thing I must now compose, as one composes a speech. What I must present is a made thing, not something born.” (Atwood, 1985, p. 86)	

This choice transfers to the character's body the expressive role that was previously exercised by spoken language, accentuating the sensory impact of oppression and resistance, according to the specific possibilities of the audiovisual medium (Hutcheon, 2006). This transformation directly dialogues with the adaptive process described by Hutcheon (2006), according to which adaptation does not replicate the original text, but recreates it based on the possibilities of the new medium. In "*Night*", Offred's interiority, which is constructed through language in the book, is transformed into an audiovisual experience through acting and staging, reinforcing the sensory dimension of the narrative (Stam, 2005).

The absence of explanatory dialogue requires the viewer to interpret the visual and emotional signs presented, actively participating in the creation of meaning, just as the reader does when reading the novel (Hutcheon, 2006). According to Butler (1990), this centrality to the body reinforces the idea that resistance can be a performance. Even under a system that controls her gestures, words, and movements, June reframes her body as a space for action, albeit limited, highlighting forms of agency produced within normative regimes (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 2014).

In "*Night*", resistance does not appear as an open revolt, but as a silent persistence, a discreet refusal to completely lose one's subjectivity, characteristic of contexts of surveillance and continuous control (Foucault, 2014). This subtle and ambiguous form of resistance fits with the dystopian logic of Gilead, where any direct opposition is quickly stifled. The suspension in the episode's narrative can be seen through Bauman's (2001) perspective, which links liquid modernity to instability, insecurity, and the absence of guarantees, amplifying the sense of uncertainty that permeates both the characters' and the viewer's experience (Bauman, 2001).

In "*Night*", there is no guarantee of salvation or confirmation of punishment; what lies ahead is uncertain. Dystopia, in this way, reflects current fears linked to the vulnerability of rights, the uncertainty of freedom, and the lack of predictability of the individual future in authoritarian contexts, dialoguing with contemporary diagnoses of social instability and the fragility of individual guarantees (Bauman, 2001). By opting for an open ending, the series maintains the critical tension of the narrative and prevents the viewer from becoming complacent, rejecting the logic of closure typical of conventional audiovisual narratives (Stam, 2005). Thus, the episode "*Night*" reaffirms the power of ambiguity as an aesthetic and political

tool.

By maintaining the narrative suspension of the book and translating it into an audiovisual form, the adaptation strengthens Atwood's dystopian critique and highlights that in Gilead, there is no room for certainties or conclusive solutions, preserving the critical function of the literary text in the new medium (Hutcheon, 2006). Therefore, the final episode ends the season not by offering answers, but rather with provocations, consolidating the adaptation as an aesthetic recreation that respects and expands the critical project of the literary text (Hutcheon, 2006).

A comparison of the episodes "*Offred*", "*Faithful*", and "*Night*" shows that the television version of *The Handmaid's Tale* maintains the fundamentals of the dystopia created by Margaret Atwood, such as surveillance, discipline, control of the female body, gender oppression, and uncertainty in the narrative, while adapting them through tools characteristic of audiovisual language (Foucault, 2014) . When analyzing these episodes together, one notices a narrative and symbolic advancement that accompanies both the protagonist's journey and that of the Gilead regime, from the initial imposition of disciplinary order, through the revelation of its contradictions, to the final suspension of meaning, highlighting the progressive functioning of dystopian power (Foucault, 2014; Bauman, 2001).

Conclusion

Adaptation is not limited to a simple reuse of the plot but it is configured as a process of interpretation and aesthetics, as suggested by Hutcheon (2006). In the episode "*Offred*", the maintenance of the dystopian core is evident mainly in the representation of the mechanisms of surveillance and discipline presented in the book (Foucault, 2014). The series transforms the methods described by Atwood into visual representations that embody what is perceived in the narrator's mind in the written narrative. Environments, movements, and tones become tools of tangible control, emphasizing what Foucault (2014) defines as the internalization of discipline.

In "*Faithful*", this transformation becomes clearer through the deepening of Serena Joy's character. By giving her a more subjective and ambiguous perspective, the series shifts the critique of oppression from an exclusively male-centered structure to a broader analysis of women's participation in sustaining authoritarian regimes, as discussed by Silva (2018) and Paulino (2020). This expansion does not contradict the novel; rather, it reveals tensions that

were previously implicit, demonstrating the critical potential of adaptation as reinterpretation.

The episode "*Night*" summarizes, in turn the connection between conservation and change by reintroducing the ambiguity that characterizes the end of the book and translating it into audiovisual format. The narrative suspension in both works rejects definitive resolutions and prevents the fixation of meaning, reaffirming dystopia as a space of continuous uncertainty. This choice relates directly to Stam (2005), demonstrating that the true fidelity of the adaptation is not found in the repetition of events, but rather in the preservation of the aesthetic and political function of the original text. By transferring the resistance of language to the body and performance, the series transforms literary depth into a sensory experience without diminishing its critical content.

Colors, camera angles, silences, and body language function throughout the three episodes as essential comparative elements between literature and audiovisual media. As Chevalier and Gheerbrant (2019), symbols take on particular meaning depending on the cultural context in which they are inserted in the series, chromatic coding transforms literary symbolism into visual tools for classification and surveillance. This process intensifies the mechanism that amplifies the perception of social hierarchy and the erasure of individuality, aligning itself with the biopolitical critique present in the novel. At the same time, the adaptation reinscribes these strategies in a contemporary reality where, as Bauman (2001) points out, uncertainty and insecurity become central elements of social experience.

Thus, by focusing on the episodes "*Offred*", "*Faithful*", and "*Night*", this analysis demonstrates that the television adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale* maintains the ideological and critical core of Atwood's work, while expanding and updating it through visual, narrative, and performative strategies. Thus, the series establishes itself as an aesthetic recreation that actively interacts with the literary text, adaptation theory, and contemporary discussions about gender, power, and authoritarianism. Far from being seen as a loss or betrayal of the original, the adaptation favors the continuity and innovation of Atwood's dystopian project, reaffirming its critical importance in the current cultural context.

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