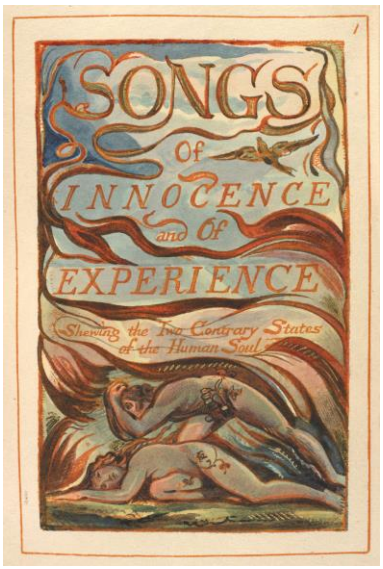
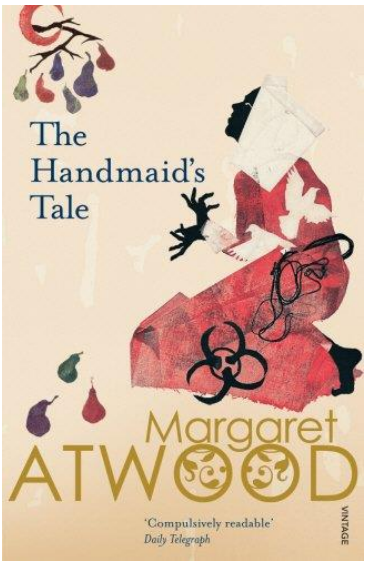
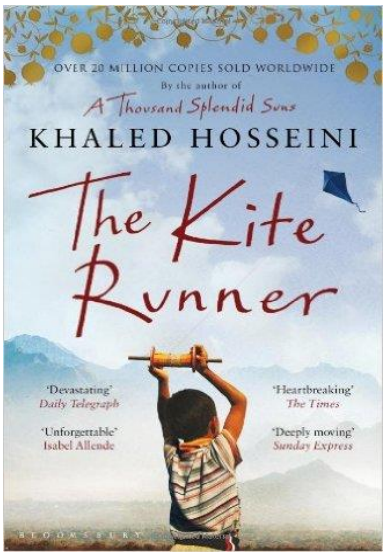
A Level English Literature

Paper 2 – Elements of Political and Social Protest Writing







Independent Study Booklet

Contents

Political and Social Protest Writing – Key Terminology

Abuse of power – The act of using a position of power in an abusive way. E.g. taking advantage of someone, gaining access to inaccessible information, manipulating someone, punishing someone if they do not comply etc.

Agenda – Underlying intentions or motives.

Anarchy – A state of disorder due to the absence of authority.

Authority – The power or right to give orders, make decisions and enforce obedience.

Autocracy – A system of government by one person with absolute power *e.g. Nazi Germany.*

Collective purpose – Working together for the same common purpose; socially interdependent on one another.

Commodification – Turn someone, or treat them, as if a commodity.

Conservative – Adverse to change or innovation; upholding traditional values.

Conspiracy – A secret plan by a group to do something unlawful or harmful; the action of plotting or conspiring.

Control – Power to influence or direct people's behaviour or the course of events.

Corruption – Dishonest or fraudulent conduct by those in power, typically involving bribery or coercion.

Defiance – Open resistance, bold disobedience.

Democracy – A system of government elected by the whole population, typically through elected representatives.

Disenchantment – A feeling of disappointment about someone/thing you previously respected or admired.

Dystopia – an imagined place or state in which everything is unpleasant, typically a totalitarian regime. 'Dys' comes from the Greek for 'bad' and 'topia' means 'place'.

Gender politics – The assumptions underlying expectations regarding gender difference in a society.

Hierarchy – A system in which members of an organisation or society are ranked according to status or authority.

Ideologies – A set of ideals or beliefs.

Legacy – Something left or handed down to a predecessor.

Monarchy – A form of government with a monarch at the head; a state that has a monarch.

Morality – Prniciples concerning the distinction between right/good and wrong/bad behaviour.

Opposition – Resistance or dissent, expressed in action or argument.

Oppression – Prolonged cruel or unjust treatment; exercise of authority.

Patriarchy – A social system in which power is held by men through cultural norms and customs that favour men and withhold opportunity from women.

Patriotism – Vigorous support for one's country.

Power – The ability or capacity to do something or act in a particular way; to direct or influence the behaviour or others; political or social control etc.

Private vs. political – concept that infers how either the political elements affect private lives, or how private decisions affect the political climate.

Radical – Characterised by departure from tradition, innovative or progressive.

Rebellion – Action or process of resisting authority, control or convention.

Satire – The use of humour, irony, exaggeration or ridicule to expose and criticise other's stupidity, particularly in the context of politics/topical issues.

Social Commentary – A spoken or written act of rebellion towards an individual or group.

Social control – a necessary component of social order. The various ways in which behaviour, thoughts and appearances are regulated by norms, rules, laws and social structures of society.

Social justice – the equal distribution of wealth, opportunities and resources

Socialism – A political/economic theory of social organisation whereby production, distribution and exchange are owned by the community as a whole.

Subjugation – The act of making something/one submissive or subservient.

Theocracy – A system of government in which priests rule in the name of God or a god. Contemporary examples include: Saudi Arabia, Iran and the Vatican.

Totalitarianism – A system of government that is centralised and dictatorial – it requires subservience to the state e.*g. Stalin in Soviet Russia.*

Tyranny – A cruel and oppressive government or rule.

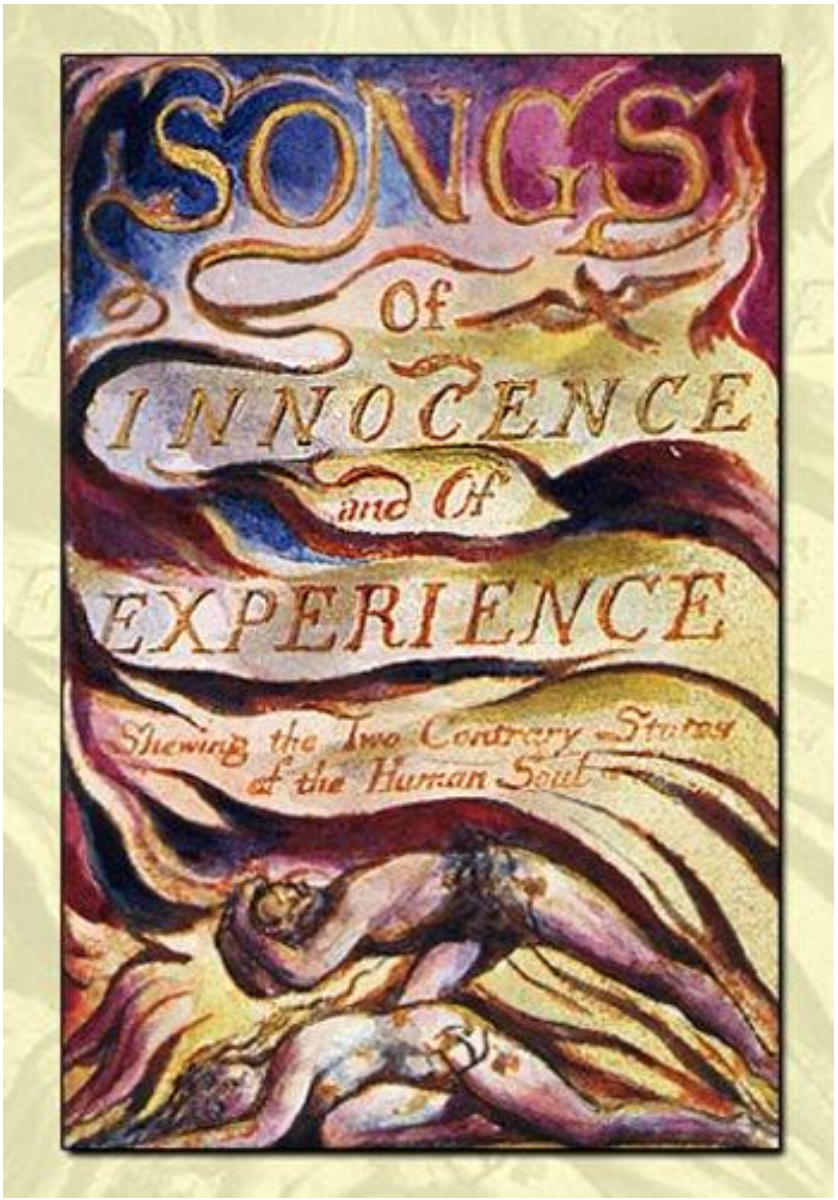
Utopia – An imagine place or state of things in which everything is perfect.

Wider Reading List for Political and Social Protest Writing:

- *1984* – George Orwell
- *A Clockwork Orange* – Anthony Burgess
- *Beloved* – Toni Morrison
- *Bleak House* – Charles Dickens
- *Brave New World* – Aldous Huxley
- *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*? – Philip K. Dick.
- *Fahrenheit 451* – Ray Bradbury
- *Invisible Man* – Ralph Ellison
- *Jane Eyre* – Charlotte Bronte
- *Middlemarch* – George Eliot
- *Odyssey; The Iliad* – Homer
- *Oryx and Crake* – Margaret Atwood
- *Paradise Lost* – John Milton
- *The Aeneid* – Virgil
- *The Bible* – Genesis; Exodus; Job; Psalms; Song of Solomon; the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Like and John; Revelation.
- *The Canterbury Tales* – Geoffrey Chaucer
- *The Chrysalids* – John Wyndham
- *The Crucible* – Arthur Miller
- *The Prelude* – William Wordsworth
- *The Road* – Cormac McCarthy
- *The Scarlet Letter* – Nathaniel Hawthorne
- *To The Lighthouse* – Virginia Woolf
- *Ulysses* – James Joyce

Section 1 – William Blake

Songs of Innocence and Experience



William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*

William Blake was an artist, poet, mystic, visionary and radical thinker. Working at a time of great social and political change, his work explores the tensions between the human passions and the repressive nature of social and political conventions. In *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, perhaps his most famous collection of poems, he investigates, as he put it in the subtitle, 'the two contrary states of the human soul'.

How was the work produced?

Songs of Innocence and of Experience is regarded as both a visual and literary work of art. Blake invented a new way of printing, designing the work in reverse with varnish on metal plates, which were then etched with acid to produce relief printing surfaces; these were printed in brown ink, and the prints were coloured by hand. Only a small number of copies were made, and sold privately to friends and collectors.

Are the *Songs* directed at children?

Though Blake stated that children could understand his work as well as, or better than, adults, this is rather a comment on how children understand things directly and without the clouded perceptions that derive from the compromises required by adult life. The songs are specifically 'of' and not 'for' innocence and experience.

How do the *Songs* relate to previous literature?

The work echoes the rhythms and forms of popular 18th-century children's poetry and ballads. However, much of the verse directed at middle-class children at this time contained simple didactic messages, and Blake deliberately avoids this type of dogmatic morality – instead many of the poems in *Songs of Innocence and Experience* contain unsettling ambiguities. Blake's very particular spiritual visions, which underlie all his mature writings, include reactions to philosophers such as Emanuel Swedenborg.

What are the *Songs* about?

Despite the simple rhythms and rhyming patterns and the images of children, animals and flowers, the *Songs* are often troubling, argumentative or satirical, and reflect Blake's deeply held political beliefs and spiritual experience. Blake's vision embraces radical subjects such as poverty, child labour and abuse, the repressive nature of state and church, as well as right of children to be treated as individuals with their own desires. Many of the poems in *Songs of Experience* respond to counterparts in *Songs of Innocence*.

https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/william-blakes-songs-of-innocence-and-experience

Summarise Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*

Blake's Theory of Contrariness

Blake's Theory of Contrariness comes from Blake's book *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* which is a series of texts that are written to imitate biblical prophecies but express Blake's own intense, Romantic and revolutionary beliefs.

The book was composed between 1790 and 1793, in the period of radical and political conflict immediately after the French Revolution. The title is an ironic reference to Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell* as Blake criticises his work throughout due to his conventional moral strictures.

I

As a new heaven is begun, and it is now thirty-three years since its advent: the Eternal Hell revives. And lo! Swedenborg is the Angel sitting at the tomb: his writings are the linen clothes folded up. Now is the dominion of Edom and the return of Adam into Paradise (see Isaiah, chapters XXXIV and XXXV)

Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence.

From these contraries spring what the religious call Good and Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy.

Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell

Outline Blake's Theory of Contrariness – what is his key message?

Apply it to a poem you have studied so far – what links can you make?

Describe how this theory links to Blake's radical views

Blake's two chimney sweepers – Linda Freedman

https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/blakes-two-chimney-sweepers

Songs of Innocence and of Experience contains two poems about young chimney sweepers: one in 'Innocence' and one in 'Experience'. Dr Linda Freedman considers how this allows for a complex, subtle engagement with the figure of the sweep.

In William Blake's London, the fate of chimney sweeps was a cruel one. Little boys as young as six were often sold by families who could not afford to feed them and apprenticed to the trade. They were sent terrified up the dangerous and dark chimneys and, if they dared refuse, they were frequently terrorised by their new masters, who threatened to return them to the life of poverty and starvation from whence they had come. As the House Report on Sweeps shows[1], the job was not only horribly frightening but also profoundly dangerous. Sweeps suffered high rates of cancer from exposure to soot, along with respiratory diseases, broken bones and stunted growth. Sweeps usually chose the chimney over starvation but whatever choice they made, their lives were haunted by a fear of death.

Blake wrote two poems about the young sweeps he saw suffering in the streets of London. He placed one in the *Songs of Innocence* and the other in the *Songs of Experience*. *The Songs of Innocence and Experience* was printed in two phases. In 1789, Blake printed the first few copies of *The Songs of Innocence* and, in 1794, he bound these together with more illuminated plates and titled the work *The Songs of Innocence and Experience: shewing two sides of the human soul*. Blake therefore declared his interest in duality on the very first page of the 1794 edition. When he took the fate of chimney sweeps as the subject for a poem in both *Innocence and Experience*, he gave us at least two ways of seeing the same social predicament.

By comparing Blake's two 'Chimney Sweeper' poems, we can get some sense of his feelings about innocence and experience as 'contrary states'. The sweep in *Innocence* doesn't understand the life in which he finds himself. He is sold 'while yet [his] tongue, / Could scarcely cry weep weep, weep weep'. 'Weep' sounds very like 'sweep'. This is a poetic strategy with which Blake suggests that as there is little difference in the way the words sound to our ears, so there is little difference in what the words mean to the child. But the child's language is not adequate to make sense of his sorrow. He does not know that he has been taught a false language, which makes him believe that sadness must be a fact of everyday life.

The little child who narrates the Song from *Innocence* is, therefore, unable to comprehend the world in which he finds himself. This makes innocence a much more frightening state than experience. The chimney sweeper of *Experience* knows his position is one of 'misery' and angrily berates society for it. Like the child of *Innocence* he cries 'weep weep' and Blake again puns on the similarity of sound between 'weep' and 'sweep'. The difference is that the child of experience knows this life has been forced upon him and he realises that he has been 'taught' the language of the sweep's sorrowful life. Unlike innocence, Blake suggests that experience is a state of knowledge and control.

The child of experience directs his anger at the organised religion of the church. In the last line of the poem, he implies that the church profits from the miserable life that he leads and therefore 'make[s] up a heaven of our misery'. This suggests that organised religion is built upon innocent pain. It also suggests that the church weaves a fiction of happiness, pretending that children like the sweep are satisfied instead of suffering. The sin of organised religion, as Blake sees it, is to prevent people from seeing things as they are by training them in the fallacy of received wisdom. So Blake implies that social problems are intimately connected with spiritual problems. Just as the child's parents fail to perceive his misery, so they fail to perceive the lack of spiritual truth in the doctrines and practices of the church.

In 'The Chimney Sweeper' of *Innocence*, the speaker's friend, little Tom Dacre, has a dream, which discloses the malicious fiction that suffering in this world is relieved by salvation in the next. Without the tools of experience, which would equip him to see this falsehood for what it is, Tom Dacre, like the innocent narrator, is little more than a ventriloquial voice for institutional control. In the last line of the poem he parrots the doctrine of oppression: 'So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm'. Like the innocent narrator, he has internalised the language of abuse and does not have the vocabulary with which to criticise it.

Blake's illuminated plates depict noticeably different kinds of figures. In *The Songs of Innocence* the small, dancing forms of children seem natural extensions of the vines and leaves and curling calligraphy. Three little figures at the top of the plate are barely distinguishable from it. All the children, here, have a light and unearthly quality, far removed from the life of the chimney sweep. The green in the foreground suggests a paradisial landscape. The adult figure in the bottom right-hand corner is reminiscent of Blake's depictions of Jesus. This is the platitudinous image of salvation, not a depiction of the real conditions of suffering.

By contrast, the plate from *The Songs of Experience* shows a child bent over, hardly able to withstand the onslaught of winter weather and hard work. His face is turned accusingly towards the viewer and turned upwards. This puts us in an uncomfortably similar position to the parents, who are 'gone up to the church to pray'. Unlike the plate from *Innocence*, where the figures are slender and free of earthly restraint, this boy is heavyset. The snow drives down and the sky is dark. The colouring of the plate is black, white and a kind of muddy brown, suggesting a winter scene where nothing can grow or thrive.

These two poems are not only about the atrocious fate of chimney sweeps in Blake's society. They are also a comment on the contrary states of innocence and experience. Innocence, here, seems a more frightening condition because the innocent have no way of understanding the world in which they live. By contrast, the child of experience is a vocal social critic. Blake entwines this social criticism with criticism of organised religion precisely because he sees both issues as manifestations of the same fundamental problem of blinkered perception. This, for Blake, is the real barrier to social progress. But only the child of experience is able to see the platitudes of church and state for what Blake believes they are: the malice that keeps little boys chained to a terrifying and dangerous life.

What other connections can you make between the two poems?

What elements of PSPW writing are apparent in both poems?

There Is No Natural Religion – William Blake

[a]

The Argument. Man has no notion of moral fitness but from Education. Naturally he is only a natural organ subject to Sense.

I. Man cannot naturally Percieve but through his natural or bodily organs.

II. Man by his reasoning power can only compare & judge of what he has already perciev'd.

III. From a perception of only 3 senses or 3 elements none could deduce a fourth or fifth.

IV. None could have other than natural or organic thoughts if he had none but organic perceptions.

V. Man's desires are limited by his perceptions; none can desire what he has not perciev'd.

VI. The desires & perceptions of man, untaught by any thing but organs of sense, must be limited to objects of sense.

There Is No Natural Religion

[b]

I. Man's perceptions are not bounded by organs of perception; he percieves more than sense (tho' ever so acute) can discover.

II. Reason, or the ratio of all we have already known, is not the same that it shall be when we know more.

[III lacking]

IV. The bounded is loathed by its possessor. The same dull round even of a universe would soon become a mill with complicated wheels.

V. If the many become the same as the few when possess'd, More! More! is the cry of a mistaken soul. Less than All cannot satisfy Man.

VI. If any could desire what he is incapable of possessing, despair must be his eternal lot.

VII. The desire of Man being Infinite, the possession is Infinite & himself Infinite.

Application. He who sees the Infinite in all things sees God. He who sees the Ratio only sees himself only.

Conclusion. If it were not for the Poetic or Prophetic character the Philosophic & Experimental would soon be at the ratio of all things, & stand still unable to do other than repeat the same dull round over again.

Therefore God becomes as we are, that we may be as he is.

1788

What does this reveal about Blake's contrary ideas regarding organised religion?

A Guide to the French Revolution – Jonah Walters

https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/07/french-revolution-bastille-day-guide-jacobins-terror-bonaparte/

Today people all over the world celebrate the 1789 storming of the Bastille Saint-Antoine — a dramatic popular rebellion that sparked the French Revolution.
But what was the French Revolution, how did it reshape Europe and the world, and what relevance does it have to the workers' movement today? Here's a short primer, lovingly compiled by *Jacobin* to mark the occasion.

What was the French Revolution?

The French Revolution was one of the most dramatic social upheavals in history. In 1856, French sociologist Alexis de Tocqueville reviewed the so-called "grievance books" — lists of demands made by the various social layers of France in anticipation of the Estates-General, the assembly that would undermine Louis XVI's reign and lead ultimately to revolution. What he discovered startled him.
"When I came to gather all the individual wishes, with a sense of terror I realized that their demands were for the *wholesale and systematic abolition of all the laws and all the current practices in the country*. Straightaway I saw that the issue here was one of the most extensive and dangerous revolutions ever observed in the world."

The revolutionary process started with open rebellion in the summer of 1789 — including the storming of the Bastille on July 14. It would before long topple the absolute monarchy of Louis XVI, divest the nobility of their hereditary power, and completely undermine the political influence of the Catholic Church.

This dramatic revision in French society unleashed a chaotic process of revolutionary advance and reactionary blowback. The forces of property were unwilling to stand idly by as their enormous privileges were threatened; they attempted to undo all the radical changes brought on by the revolution and restore the old social hierarchies even as the revolutionaries worked to cohere an entirely different kind of society based on more egalitarian ideals.

From this unstable crucible ultimately emerged Napoleon, who would construct the Bonapartist state through war and empire, ultimately leading to France's renewed subjugation by the old powers of Europe and the restoration of the monarchy.

What was France like before the Revolution?

The vast majority of people in France lived in destitution, with little chance of escaping their condition. Peasants were entirely at the mercy of the nobility, who had preserved much of the fundamental power relationship of feudalism.
As Jean Jaurès described in 1901, the economic subjugation in the countryside was profound:

There was not one action in rural life that did not require the peasants to pay a ransom… Feudal rights thus extended their clutches over every force of nature, everything that grew, moved, breathed […] even over the fire burning in the oven to bake the peasant's poor bread.

This led to near-universal poverty in the countryside. English agriculturalist Arthur Young remarked at the time:

The poor seem poor indeed; the children terribly ragged, if possible worse clad than if with no clothes at all; as to shoes and stockings they are luxuries… One third of what I have seen of this province seems uncultivated, and nearly all of it in misery. What have kings, and ministers, and parliaments, and states, to answer for their prejudices, seeing millions of hands that would be industrious, idle and starving, through the execrable maxims of despotism, or the equally detestable prejudices of a feudal nobility?

The urban population of artisans and journeymen laborers experienced similar hardship. Economic reorganizations in the kingdom threatened the apprenticeship system, jeopardizing the ability of craftsmen to control their own work. Day laborers — permitted to exist in the cities only when they could produce papers proving their employment — were stalked by royal police.

At the same time, a wave of immigration brought dramatic demographic changes to Paris. Historian Eric Hazan estimates that in 1789 immigrants numbered about two thirds of the city's population, and they each had to "request a passport in their region of origin to avoid being arrested en route as vagabonds and sent to beggars colonies."

The clergy and nobility, together comprising about 1.6 percent of the population, were doing just fine — most nobles lived in extreme opulence and inherited their positions hereditarily. The Catholic Church controlled by some estimates 8 percent of total private wealth.

But in the years immediately prior to the revolution, a new class of financiers — generally upwardly mobile craftsmen or landholding peasants — began to grow in the cities, threatening to replace the nobility as the most decadent of social layers.

Meanwhile, the kingdom was in the midst of a catastrophic financial crisis. The king was broke, and the system of accounting that had developed chaotically during the Seven Years War left the his functionaries unable to account for the kingdom's wealth until it had almost disappeared. Foreign financiers were recalling their debts, the harvest of 1788 was decimated by a drought and a series of hailstorms, and the free trade agreement brokered between France and Great Britain at the end of the Seven Years War flooded the French market with British textiles, ruining French garment production.

Things were bad. Panicked about the financial crisis, Louis XVI squeezed the people even harder, demanding increased taxes from all layers of society.

But there were rumblings of resistance, in the cities as well as the countryside. Elites like Louis-Sébastien Mercier expressed dismay at the insubordination of urban workers:

There has been visible insubordination among the people for several years now, and especially in the trades. Apprentices and lads want to display their independence; they lack respect for the masters, they form corporations [associations]; this contempt for the old rules is contrary to order… The workers transform the print shop into a real smoke den.

And peasants, still expected to sacrifice even their most basic of foodstuffs as tribute to king and church, took matters into their own hands as famine loomed. As one mayor of a rural district remarked, "It is impossible to find within half a league's radius a man prepared to drive a cartload of wheat. The populace is so enraged they would kill for a bushel." The starving peasants were unwilling to deliver flour to their feudal masters to satisfy the demands of an enormous war debt; they prefered to eat it instead.

What other solution but revolution?

What happened on July 14, 1789?

The storming of the Bastille on July 14, 1789 represents the popular revolution's inaugural moment. Encouraged by the rapid pace of reforms — and exasperated with the National Assembly's unwillingness to take a harder line with the intransigent king — masses of artisans and laborers assaulted the Bastille de Saint-Antoine, seized its gunpowder, and released the handful of prisoners held there.

By claiming the fortress on behalf of the revolution, they sent a powerful message to the forces of old wealth that still dominated the kingdom — the upheaval in France would not be a simple legislative reorganization, but rather a social revolution. From this point forward, the French revolutionary process would, in many ways, take its lead from a volatile popular insurrection that surged again each time its gains were threatened.

Hazan describes it this way: *The storming of the Bastille is the most famous event in the French Revolution, and has moreover become its symbol throughout the world. But this glory rather distorts its historical significance. It was neither a moment of miracle, nor a conclusion, nor a culminating point of the 'good' revolution before the start of the 'bad', that of 1793 and the Terror; the storming of the Bastille was one shining point on the trajectory of the Paris insurrection, which continued its upward curve…*

Foreshadowing the dramatic seizure of Tuileries by thousands of *sans-culottes* in 1792 — which would establish the insurrectional Commune and finally depose the king — the storming of the Bastille represents neither culmination nor catalyst of the French Revolution. Rather, it was a moment in which masses of oppressed Parisians thrust themselves into the process of reform already underway in France, challenging the king's absolutism as well as the authority of the overcautious legislative assemblies. In this way, they helped transform what could have been a period of cautious reform into a period of genuine revolution.

Robespierre wrote in 1794: *If the spring of popular government in time of peace is virtue, the springs of popular government in revolution are at once virtue and terror: virtue, without which terror is fatal; terror, without which virtue is powerless. Terror is nothing other than justice, prompt, severe, inflexible; it is therefore an emanation of virtue; it is not so much a special principle as it is a consequence of the general principle of democracy applied to our country's most urgent needs.*

It has been said that terror is the principle of despotic government. Does your government therefore resemble despotism? Yes, as the sword that gleams in the hands of the heroes of liberty resembles that with which the henchmen of tyranny are armed. Let the despot govern by terror his brutalized subjects; he is right, as a despot. Subdue by terror the enemies of liberty, and you will be right, as founders of the Republic. The government of the revolution is liberty's despotism against tyranny. Is force made only to protect crime? And is the thunderbolt not destined to strike the heads of the proud?

. . . Indulgence for the royalists, cry certain men, mercy for the villains! No! mercy for the innocent, mercy for the weak, mercy for the unfortunate, mercy for humanity.

One more thing seems nearly certain: sending political opponents within the ranks of the revolutionaries to the guillotine — the Dantonists, the Hebertists— was a reflection of political weakness that left Robespierre isolated and ultimately defenseless against the plots he so feared.

With the benefit of hindsight, Engels wrote in a letter to Marx in 1870 that: *These perpetual little panics of the French — which all arise from fear of the moment when they will really have to learn the truth — give one a much better idea of the Reign of Terror. We think of this as the reign of people who inspire terror; on the contrary, it is the reign of people who are themselves terrified.*

Terror consists mostly of useless cruelties perpetrated by frightened people in order to reassure themselves. I am convinced that the blame for the Reign of Terror in 1793 lies almost exclusively with the over-nervous bourgeois, demeaning himself as a patriot…

Marx himself, though certainly critical of the particulars of "revolutionary terror" as it played out in France, took a less ambiguous stance towards violence in the defense of revolution:

[T]here is only one way in which the murderous death agonies of the old society and the bloody birth throes of the new society can be shortened, simplified and concentrated, and that way is revolutionary terror.

How should we remember the French Revolution?

The French Revolution was an enormous social reorganization affecting some twenty-five million people in France and countless others in regions as geographically distant as Haiti. During the five years of push-pull between the forces of reaction and the will of the revolutionaries, common people experienced great hardship, but also the largely unprecedented opportunity to intervene in matters of national politics and disrupt the exploitative power relationships that defined their lives. As Hobsbawm reminds us:

It was not a comfortable phase to live through, for most men were hungry and many afraid; but it was phenomenon as awful and irreversible as the first nuclear explosion, and all history has been permanently changed by it. And the energy it generated was sufficient to sweep away the armies of the old regimes of Europe like straw.

Eric Hazan concludes his book with another reminder — the French Revolution, in many ways, ended in defeat. The mainstream history is the history of the victors, the forces of reaction who succeeded in cauterizing the revolution on 9

Thermidor. So our task is to excavate the history of France's great revolution, now buried under over two centuries of permanent counter-revolution.

APPLY IT – how and why was Blake influenced by the French Revolution?

APPLY IT – what elements of protest/politics are still applicable to society nowadays?

The Enlightenment – Matthew White

https://www.bl.uk/restoration-18th-century-literature/articles/the-enlightenment

The Enlightenment's emphasis on reason shaped philosophical, political and scientific discourse from the late 17th to the early 19th century. Matthew White traces the Enlightenment back to its roots in the aftermath of the Civil War, and forward to its effects on the present day.

The Enlightenment – the great 'Age of Reason' – is defined as the period of rigorous scientific, political and philosophical discourse that characterised European society during the 'long' 18th century: from the late 17th century to the ending of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815. This was a period of huge change in thought and reason, which (in the words of historian Roy Porter) was 'decisive in the making of modernity'.[1] Centuries of custom and tradition were brushed aside in favour of exploration, individualism, tolerance and scientific endeavour, which, in tandem with developments in industry and politics, witnessed the emergence of the 'modern world'.

The emergence of 'reason'

The roots of the Enlightenment can be found in the turmoil of the English Civil Wars. With the re-establishment of a largely unchanged autocratic monarchy, first with the restoration of Charles II in 1660 and then the ascendancy of James II in 1685, leading political thinkers began to reappraise how society and politics could (and should) be better structured. Movements for political change resulted in the Glorious Revolution of 1688/89, when William and Mary were installed on the throne as part of the new Protestant settlement.

The ancient civilisations of Greece and Rome were revered by enlightened thinkers, who viewed these communities as potential models for how modern society could be organised. Many commentators of the late 17th century were eager to achieve a clean break from what they saw as centuries of political tyranny, in favour of personal freedoms and happiness centred on the individual. Chief among these thinkers was philosopher and physician John Locke, whose *Two Treatises of Government* (published in 1689) advocated a separation of church and state, religious toleration, the right to property ownership and a contractual obligation on governments to recognise the innate 'rights' of the people.

Locke believed that reason and human consciousness were the gateways to contentment and liberty, and he demolished the notion that human knowledge was somehow pre-programmed and mystical. Locke's ideas reflected the earlier but equally influential works of Thomas Hobbes, which similarly advocated new social contracts between the state and civil society as the key to unlocking personal happiness for all.

Concurrent movements for political change also emerged in France during the early years of the 18th century. The writings of Denis Diderot, for example, linked reason with the maintenance of virtue and its ability to check potentially destructive human passions. Similarly, the profoundly influential works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau argued that man was born free and rational, but was enslaved by the constraints imposed on society by governments. True political sovereignty, he argued, always remained in the hands of the people if the rule of law was properly maintained by a democratically endorsed government: a radical political philosophy that came to influence revolutionary movements in France and America later in the century.

Scientific revolution

These new enlightened views of the world were also encapsulated in the explosion of scientific endeavour that occurred during the 18th century. With the rapid expansion of print culture from around 1700, and increasing levels of literacy, details of experimentation and discovery were eagerly consumed by the reading public.

This growth of 'natural philosophy' (the term 'science' was only coined later in the 18th century) was underpinned by the application of rational thought and reason to scientific enquiry; first espoused by Francis Bacon in the early 1600s, this approach built on the earlier work of Copernicus and Galileo dating from the medieval period. Scientific experimentation (with instrumentation) was used to shed new light on nature and to challenge superstitious interpretations of the living world, much of which had been deduced from uncritical readings of historical texts.

At the forefront of the scientific revolution stood Sir Isaac Newton, whose achievements in mathematics and physics revolutionised the contemporary view of the natural world. Born in 1643, Newton demonstrated a talent for mathematical theory at Trinity College, Cambridge, where his astonishingly precocious abilities led to his appointment

as professor of mathematics at the age of just 26. Among Newton's weighty catalogue of investigations were his treatises on optics, gravitational forces and mechanics (most famously encapsulated in his *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, first published in 1687), all grounded in empirical experimentation as a way to demystify the physical world.

The discoveries of Sir Isaac Newton were complemented by those of a host of equally dazzling mathematicians, astronomers, chemists and physicists (Robert Hooke and Robert Boyle, for example), many of whom were members of the Royal Society (founded in 1660, and active today). Yet it was Newton's empirical approach to science that remained particularly influential. By embarking on purely rational and mathematical investigations, Newton was able to show that the natural world was 'amenable to observations and experiment', engendering a feeling among the scientific community that 'Nature had finally been fathomed'.

The pursuit of rational scientific knowledge was never the preserve of an educated elite. As well as fertilising a huge trade in published books and pamphlets, scientific investigation created a buoyant industry in scientific instruments, many of which were relatively inexpensive to buy and therefore available to the general public. Manufacturers of telescopes, microscopes, barometers, air pumps and thermometers prospered during the 18th century, particularly after 1750 when the names of famous scientific experimenters became household names: Benjamin Franklin, Joseph Priestley, William Herschel and Sir Joseph Banks, for example.

Secularisation and the impact on religion

Religion and personal faith were also subject to the tides of reason evident during the 18th century. Personal judgements on matters of belief were actively debated during the period, leading to scepticim, if not bold atheism, among an enlightened elite.

These new views on religion led to increasing fears among the clergy that the Enlightenment was ungodly and thus harmful to the moral well-being of an increasingly secular society. With church attendance in steady decline throughout the 1700s, evidence of increasing agnosticism (the belief that true knowledge of God could never be fully gained) and a rejection of some scriptural teachings was close at hand. Distinct anti-clericalism (the criticism of church ministers and rejection of religious authority) also emerged in some circles, whipped up by the musings of 'deist' writers such as Voltaire, who argued that God's influence on the world was minimal and revealed only by one's own personal experience of nature.

Though certainly a challenge to accepted religious beliefs, the impulse of reason was considered by other contemporary observers to be a complement rather than a threat to spiritual orthodoxy: a means by which (in the words of John Locke) the true meaning of Scripture could be unlocked and 'understood in the plain, direct meaning of the words and phrases'.[4] Though difficult to measure or quantify, Locke believed that 'rational religion' based on personal experience and reflection could nevertheless still operate as a useful moral compass in the modern age. New personal freedoms within the orbit of faith were extended to the relationship between the Church and state. In England, the recognition of dissenting religions was formalised by legislation, such as the 1689 Act of Toleration which permitted freedom of worship to Nonconformists (albeit qualified by allegiances to the Crown). Later, political emancipation for Roman Catholics – who were allowed new property rights – also reflected an enlightened impulse among the political elite: such measures sometimes created violent responses from working people. In 1780, for example, London was convulsed by a week of rioting in response to further freedoms granted to Catholics: a sign, perhaps, of how the enlightened thinking of politicians could diverge sharply from the sentiments of the humble poor. Political freedoms, contracts and rights

Public debates about what qualified as the best forms of government were heavily influenced by enlightened ideals, most notably Rousseau's and Diderot's notions of egalitarian freedom and the 'social contract'. By the end of the 18th century most European nations harboured movements calling for political reform, inspired by radical enlightened ideals which advocated clean breaks from tyranny, monarchy and absolutism.

Late 18th-century radicals were especially inspired by the writings of Thomas Paine, whose influence on revolutionary politics was felt in both America and France. Born into humble beginnings in England in 1737, by the 1770s Paine had arrived in America where he began agitating for revolution. Paine's most radical works, *The Rights of Man* and later *The Age of Reason* (both successful best-sellers in Europe), drew extensively on Rousseau's notions of the social

contract. Paine reserved particular criticism for the hereditary privileges of ruling elites, whose power over the people, he believed, was only ever supported through simple historical tradition and the passive acceptance of the social order among the common people.

Similarly, German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) pointed towards the 'laziness and Cowardice' of the people to explain why 'a large part of mankind gladly remain minors all their lives', and spoke of reasoned knowledge gained from sensual experience as a means of achieving genuine freedom and equality.

Though grounded in a sense of outrage at social and economic injustice, the political revolutions of both America (1765 to 1783) and France (1789 to 1799) can thus be fairly judged to have been driven by enlightened political dogma, which criticised despotic monarchies as acutely incompatible with the ideals of democracy, equality under the rule of law and the rights to property ownership. These new movements for political reform argued in favour of protecting certain inalienable natural rights that some enlightened thinkers believed were innate in all men (though rarely in women as well): in the freedom of speech and protection from arbitrary arrest, for example, later enshrined in the American Constitution.

However, for other observers (particularly in Britain) the violent extremes of the French Revolution proved incompatible with enlightened thought. Many saw the extremes of revolution as a counterpoint to any true notion of 'reason'. British MP Edmund Burke, for example, wrote critically of the 'fury, outrage and insult' he saw embedded in events across the Channel, and urged restraint among Britain's own enlightened political radicals.[7]
Political philosopher David Hume also warned of the dangers he perceived in the headlong pursuit of liberty for all. An ill-educated and ignorant crowd, argued Hume, was in danger of running into violence and anarchy if a stable framework of government was not maintained through the consent of the people and strong rule of law. Governments, he believed, could offer a benign presence in people's lives only when moderated by popular support, and he therefore offered the extension of the franchise as a counterbalance to the strong authority of the state.

The end of the Enlightenment?

The outcomes of the Enlightenment were thus far-reaching and, indeed, revolutionary. By the early 1800s a new 'public sphere' of political debate was evident in European society, having emerged first in the culture of coffee-houses and later fuelled by an explosion of books, magazines, pamphlets and newspapers (the new 'Augustan' age of poetry and prose was coined at the same time). Secular science and invention, fertilised by a spirit of enquiry and discovery, also became the hallmark of modern society, which in turn propelled the pace of 18th-century industrialisation and economic growth.

Individualism – the personal freedoms celebrated by Locke, Hume, Adam Smith, Voltaire and Kant – became part of the web of modern society that trickled down into 19th-century notions of independence, self-help and liberalism. Representative government on behalf of the people was enshrined in new constitutional arrangements, characterised by the slow march towards universal suffrage in the 1900s.

Evidence of the Enlightenment thus remains with us today: in our notions of free speech, our secular yet religiously tolerant societies, in science, the arts and literature: all legacies of a profound movement for change that transformed the nature of society forever.

How does the Enlightenment link to not only Blake's radical views, but also his Romantic beliefs?

Romanticising Blake's politics by Shirley Dent

William Blake is often presented as a very modern anti-slavery and anti-racist campaigner. This is wishful thinking.

Seen from a different age ... Detail from Blake's illustration of The Little Black Boy

Two hundred and fifty years after his birth, William Blake has uncannily put his finger on the political pulse of both his day and ours. This month Blake and his work feature in two new exhibitions commemorating the abolition of the British slave trade. Blake is presented by both exhibitions as a very modern freedom fighter in the struggle against slavery and racism. The only problem with this is that he wasn't.

As much as his work, such as his illustrations to JG Stedman's Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam, commented on slavery, there is no record at all of Blake playing an active part in the British abolitionist struggle. We risk a muddle when we read history backwards and interpret art and literature from where we stand at the moment. Laura Cumming in her Observer review of the Hull exhibition (then touring) is absolutely right not to take the abolitionist hero claims on face value. But she also betrays very modern preoccupations when she swings the other way and wonders if Blake's The Little Black Boy is in fact racist.

Both Tate Britain's Radical Mind and the touring Mind Forg'd Madness play up what Steve Clark and Jason Whittaker recently dubbed "the Blakean brand". Whittaker/Clark argue that Blake "is immediately recognisable as a brand name... a logo for a certain intimation of visionary (or pseudo-visionary)" poetics and politics.

The Blakean brand has also been evoked across the political spectrum, from left-wing critics and artists such as EP Thompson, Billy Bragg and Mike Marqusee to current "crunchy" politicians, (such as Derek Wall, the Green Party's principal speaker), who big up Blake's anti-industrialisation credentials.

Yet there is something downright odd about all this eagerness to co-opt Blake's name. It produces some very strange bedfellows for a start. How does the Blake-inspired satanic (and very bad) verse of Aleister Crowley sit with the twee environmentalist message on a box of organic cereal quoting The Auguries of Innocence?

What makes the Blakean brand so pervasive in our uncertain political times is that it is a dream for everyman. Despite his apocryphal brushes with political thinkers such as Paine, Blake's politics are largely instinctual rather than intellectual - disgust with poverty and inequality and a fervent belief in "the human form divine". This is what allows Blake's politics to be both innocent and visionary, standing apart from the world to childishly dream of a better world.

But it would be unfair to just write off Blake as a dreamer. As scholars such as David Worrall, Keri Davies and Marsha Keith Schuchard show, Blake's works were embroiled in the social and political ferment of his times. This is where the value of understanding the historical specificity of a work comes into its own. Not because such research gives us the right reading. But because it helps us better comprehend how the societies and ideas that inform art and literature change and develop.

Take Blake in the context of our current preoccupations with slavery, race and racism. If we compare The Little Black Boy with another poem in Songs of Innocence, The Chimney-Sweep, what Blake gives us in both are the naive mutterings and dreams of innocents who have absolutely no control over the way society views them and treats them. The Chimney-Sweep puts the struggle to abolish the slave trade in a useful historical context. It shows that the slave trade was not the only emancipatory struggle of the 1780s.

1788 saw the agitation for, and eventual passing, of legislation to protect "the climbing boys". This legislation provided they should be washed once a week (many died from infected and cancerous sores caused by constantly rubbing against narrow chimneys), they should not be sent up an ignited chimney (the dangers are self-explanatory) and should not be apprenticed before the age of eight (effective child slavery).

It is as ridiculous to read contemporary notions of racism into Blake's works as it is to say that The Chimney-Sweep makes him an early champion of health and safety legislation: what a historical reading of Blake shows us is the way cheap labour degraded white child and black child alike.

Read the introduction to Post-Colonial criticism in your Critical Anthology – evaluate Dent's view and consider what links you can make with this article and Blake.

William Blake's radical politics by Andrew Lincoln

The French Revolution inspired London radicals and reformers to increase their demands for change. Others called for moderation and stability, while the government tried to suppress radical activity. Professor Andrew Lincoln describes the political environment in which William Blake was writing.

Poverty

In Blake's London, the condition of the poor and their children was beginning to receive more attention from social reformers. Improvements in hygiene and medical knowledge had led to increased life expectancy, but the rise in the population, poor harvests and war created serious hardships. Orphans and the illegitimate children of the poor could be sold into apprenticeships that offered meagre prospects; young boys were used to sweep chimneys (by scrambling up as 'climbing-boys'); prostitution and dire housing conditions were continuing problems. Some philanthropic initiatives attempted to address these issues, but asylums and charity schools were often linked to the exploitative apprenticeship system. In 1788 David Porter tried to initiate legislation to protect apprentices, but the resultant bill was drastically diluted by the House of Lords. The cause was taken up by others, including the Society for the Bettering of the Condition of the Poor. Such moves were accompanied by a new drive to improve the education of the lower orders, initiated in the 1780s by the Sunday School movement. But even as these reforming movements gathered pace, children were beginning to be sent from London workhouses to labour in northern cotton mills.

Radicalism in London

Blake's view of philanthropic responses to poverty was probably always ambivalent. The outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789 gave a new political urgency to his views. In London a range of new radical groups emerged, demanding major changes to the political system. The London Society for Constitutional Information, dormant since the 1780s, revived under the leadership of middle-class intellectuals; but many groups were formed or joined by working men. The London Corresponding Society ('LCS', formed January 1792, to provide links between radicals) drew most of its members from the artisan class. It helped to spread the influence of Paine's plain-speaking *Rights of Man* (Part I, 1791, Part II, 1792), which called for universal adult male suffrage and a redistribution of wealth through taxation. Followers of Thomas Spence, who demanded land nationalisation, were mostly journeyman and labourers. Blake was employed as an engraver by the Unitarian bookseller Joseph Johnson, who was associated with a group of prominent radicals including Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft (author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 1792), and William Godwin (author of *Political Justice*, 1793). The revolution widened the range of voices contending for change, and led some radicals to adopt, as Blake did, 'prophetic' modes to envisage a turning point in history. But unlike many of these radicals, Blake saw recourse to law as a problem in itself. The social problems he saw around him seemed to require a complete liberation from existing political systems, and a transformation of the sense of human potential.

Suppressing radical activity

The calls for radical change met vigorous opposition. Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) sounded an early alarm about the consequences of revolution. From 1791 the 'Church and King' movement ushered in a range of anti-radical campaigns, and after the publication in February 1792 of Paine's *Rights of Man* (Part II), a Royal Proclamation against Seditious Writings was issued. Radical activity was monitored by a nationwide network of informers and spies, while local voluntary organisations sprang up, such as John Reeves's Association for Preserving Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers (the 'Crown and Anchor Society', founded November 1792). LCS members who attended the radical British Convention in Edinburgh in 1793 were sentenced to 14 years transportation. In 1794 LCS members Thomas Hardy, John Thelwall and John Horne Tooke were tried for treason but acquitted. On 26 October 1795, Thelwall addressed a public meeting near Copenhagen House, attended by several thousand people, at which Richard 'Citizen' Lee sold his Handbill 'King Killing'. Three days later stones were thrown at the state carriage carrying George III to the opening of parliament. In response the government introduced the Treasonable Practices Act and the Seditious Meetings Act, designed to stifle radical activity. Among the many publishing initiatives designed to counteract the spread of radicalism, the 'Cheap Repository' tracts, published from March 1795 onwards, were particularly important. The evangelical Hannah More wrote many of these works, including simple moral tales and ballads, recommending to labouring class readers the virtues of patience, hard work, respect for social superiors and acceptance of the status quo.

Blake's Lambeth

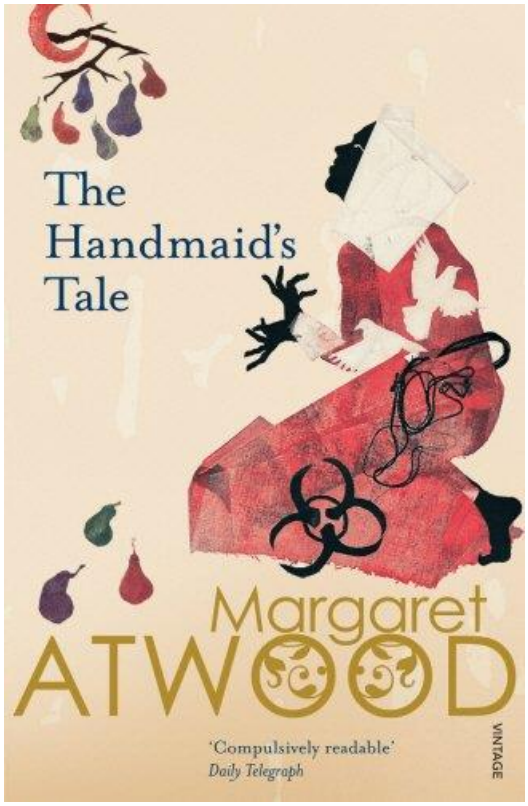
During this period of turmoil Blake moved from Poland Street in Soho to 13 Hercules Buildings, Lambeth, in autumn 1790 (he stayed until 1800). He lived in some comfort: his house was one of the largest in its row, accommodating a studio and a printing press on the ground floor. Here he received guests such as John Gabriel Stedman, author of *The Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (1796), for which he produced some illustrations. He continued to receive engraving work from Joseph Johnson (including illustrations for Mary Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories*, 1791). Other projects included a huge number of watercolour designs for an abortive edition of Edward Young's poem *Night Thoughts*. Lambeth was still partly rural, but had its share of social problems. There were alms-houses, workshops of the Philanthropic Society, and an Asylum for orphaned girls; overcrowded housing and grim factories were beginning to appear. The nearby Albion flour mill was an example of the 'dark Satanic Mills' Blake would later condemn in his poem 'Jerusalem'. In Lambeth, helped by his wife Catherine, he produced some of his most daring illuminated works, including *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, *Songs of Experience*, *America*, *Europe*, and *The Book of Urizen*. The radicalism of such works was potentially dangerous to Blake. On 10 December 1792, a Lambeth group affiliated to Reeves's Crown and Anchor Society decided to ask every local householder to sign a declaration of loyalty. Blake risked being prosecuted for sedition, with possible imprisonment and ruin. His illuminated works were produced in small numbers, and while some were apparently on sale in Joseph Johnson's bookshop in St Paul's churchyard, most were probably sold privately. The latest 'Lambeth books' are dated 1795.

What were the dangers of being a radical in 1700s Britain?

Research Paine's *Rights of Man* – what is his main argument? Which elements of PSPW are apparent?

Section 2 – Margaret Atwood

The Handmaid's Tale



Dystopian fantasy? The Handmaid's Tale is based entirely on real history

Catriona White, 2 June 2017

https://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcthree/article/c7bbe6fc-f452-4015-acdb-719ff8e5d389

Spoilers

"This will become ordinary."

These chilling words are spoken to a group of young, captive women in the first episode of 'The Handmaid's Tale', a TV adaptation of Margaret Atwood's 1984 novel. It's set in a future, dystopian America, in which the extreme religious right has imposed a violent dictatorship, and women have been stripped of all their rights.

Environmental disaster has left much of the population sterile, so the few remaining fertile women are captured and given to society's highest-ranking men as 'handmaids'. Their sole purpose is to bear the children the men's wives cannot.

If the handmaids refuse to cooperate, or fail to produce offspring, they're shipped off to 'The Colonies' to clean up toxic, radioactive waste - and face certain death.

The most appalling part of this terrifyingly plausible world is that it's all based on real events. As Atwood herself has said, "One of my rules was that I would not put any events into the book that had not already happened… nor any technology not already available. No imaginary gizmos, no imaginary laws, no imaginary atrocities. God is in the details, they say. So is the Devil."

Everything in The Handmaid's Tale has occurred in a totalitarian state, military regime or religious order. The concept of assigning fertile handmaids to the highest in society has a historical precedent dating right back to the Bible.

In Genesis 30, Jacob has two wives, Rachel and Leah. When Rachel cannot bear a child, she orders Jacob to impregnate her maid, Bilhah. The relevant passage - "And she said, Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her" - is recited as part of the 'ceremony' in The Handmaid's Tale, in which the man ritually rapes the handmaid in his wife's presence.

History has provided a rich tapestry of horror for Atwood to draw upon, with the slave trade, group executions, book burnings, polygamy in America and the sumptuary laws of the middle ages (which controlled what people ate, drank and spent money on) providing just some of her sources of inspiration.

One of her references is the Lebensborn programme of the Nazis' security and surveillance corps, the SS. In 1935, with Germany's birth rates dropping, Hitler's right-hand man Heinrich Himmler designed a breeding program to promote an 'Aryan future'. One element of the scheme involved members of the SS 'mating' with suitable German women. They also kidnapped blue-eyed, blonde-haired children to populate the Nazi 'Third Reich'.

One of several horrific scenes in The Handmaid's Tale is the 'salvaging', where a man accused of rape is ritually encircled and battered to death by a mob of handmaids. This echoes the practice of public execution, which continues in some countries to this day, including North Korea and Saudi Arabia.

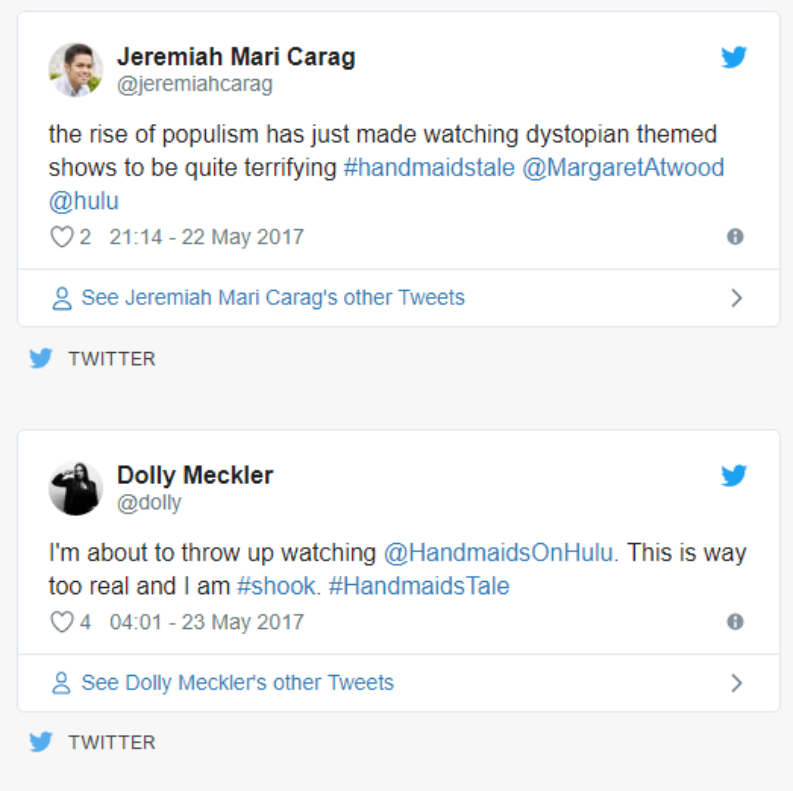
Speaking to the Times, The Saudi-American poet Majda Gama recently described being unable to sleep after watching the opening episodes of The Handmaid's Tale. For women in Saudi Arabia, she wrote, many of the events of the programme aren't distant history or a faraway future – they are their day-to-day reality.

Most Saudi Arabian women are banned from voting, driving and interacting with the opposite sex unsupervised; they can't travel or study without the permission of a male guardian (usually their father, husband or son); and they have little or no financial independence.

"It raised thoughts I literally never tell my Caucasian friends," Majda Gama said, "Because what Offred, the handmaid, lived as some cautionary tale felt very much like my lived reality. One woman's dystopia is another woman's reality."

The fact that Atwood's story draws from history is perhaps what makes it so frightening.

The TV adaptation has prompted many to wonder how much of this terrible future could become reality.



In America, women have adopted the handmaids' red and white uniform at protests against President Trump's stance on abortion.

At their miserable equivalent of a training camp, the handmaids are told, "This might not seem ordinary to you right now, but after a time it will. This will become ordinary."

That fear – that oppression and violence and horror can become normal – is what this TV adaptation has so eloquently voiced.

Praise be.

Research women's rights (or lack of) in Saudi Arabia – what connections can you make with *The Handmaid's Tale?*

Freedom or oppression? The fear of dystopia

Mike Ashley – 25 May 2016 https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/freedom-or-oppression-the-fear-of-dystopia

Mike Ashley considers how British, Russian and American writers created repressive imaginary worlds and totalitarian regimes in order to explore 20th-century political concerns.

The word most commonly used to describe the opposite of utopia is 'dystopia', though when it was coined by John Stuart Mill in a speech in the House of Commons in 1868 it was not quite in the sense we use it now. Mill was reflecting on the impossibility of establishing a utopia because the basis of its economy and social development was subject to natural laws that cannot be influenced by human will, meaning that all utopias have a built-in inevitability of failure. He thus dismissed all utopian thinkers as dystopian, because their ideas were too flawed to be practical.

It is ironical, therefore, that the word dystopia has come to represent a society in which individuals are repressed, personal freedoms lost and creativity stifled. A dystopia presents the inhumanity of the soulless state machine against the hopes and aspirations of humanity. It's something we will all recognise.

The dystopian novel can be considerably more effective than the utopian. The utopian novel, in looking at mankind's ideals and how a perfect society might be achieved, will always encounter hurdles that must be overcome in seeking how to satisfy everyone, or at least the majority. The dystopian novel, on the other hand, readily provides a graphic warning of the consequences of going in a certain social, political or technological direction, and can do so with startling imagery that resonates with the reader.

Early dystopias

The dystopia can be traced back at least as far as Émile Souvestre's *Le monde tel qu'il sera*('The World as It Will Be', 1846) which foresaw how commercialism would make humanity a slave to the corporate or political machine. Ignatius Donnelly foresaw in *Caesar's Column*(1890) how state control could easily fall into the hands of corrupt individuals. Jack London took this further in *The Iron Heel* (1907), where a capitalist oligarchy seeks to gain absolute power in America but is defeated by the socialists – both sides using similar techniques – until a form of socialist utopia prevails.

Nineteen Eighty-Four

The most famous all of dystopias is George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) which, even though the year represented by the book is now almost as far in our past as it was in Orwell's future, still conjures up images of a totally oppressive regime in which humans have no individuality. The novel is set in one of three global totalitarian super-states where the population, which must obey a strict set of codes, is constantly monitored by 'Big Brother' and the Thought Police. Even thinking outside these codes is punishable. The main character, Winston Smith, works for the state, doctoring photographs and revising the historical record. Personal relationships are forbidden, and so when Smith falls in love he is punished, forced to betray his lover and brainwashed so that he again loves Big Brother.

Russian dystopias

Orwell was inspired to write *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by Yevgenii Zamyatin's *My (We),* which had been written in 1920 and was officially banned by the Soviet Union after an abridged version was serialised in 1927. The full version was not published there until 1988. An English-language edition was published in the USA in 1924, without Zamyatin's permission, and it was this version that Orwell read. The book takes place several centuries in the future after a 200-year war has wiped out most of humanity. It is set in a highly regimented city-state encircled by the 'Green Wall', which is supposed to keep out the post-apocalyptic world. Everything in the future is state controlled, including when you eat and when you can have sex. No one is allowed to think for themselves or be creative. People are known only by numbers. D-503 falls in love with the subversive I-330 who is planning to take over a new spaceship that D has helped design. D does not report her, but the authorities discover the plan from D's diaries. He is arrested and subjected to the 'Great Operation' (like a lobotomy), after which he is able to watch I's torture and execution without concern. This end result is similar to Winston Smith's reconditioning in the dreaded Room 101 in Orwell's book.

One author who had lived through the Stalinist era and revived science fiction in Russia in the 1950s was Ivan Yefremov. He bravely contrasted utopian and dystopian imagery in order to emphasise his dangerous viewpoint. In *Tumannost' Andromedy* (1958; translated as *Andromeda*, 1959) he depicted an idyllic earth in the year 3000 with a society built on humanistic Marxist principles. It is the only convincing communist utopia. Yefremov then had second thoughts, and in the sequel, *Chas Byka* ('The Hour of the Bull', 1968; book, 1970), set two centuries later, he compared the ideal communist state with a dictatorship on another planet. Although he disguised the dictatorship by basing it on the Chinese model of communism, he was seen as criticising the Soviet Union, and the book, which had already been heavily censored, was banned. It was not republished in Russia until 1988.

City of Endless Night

The book that presaged all such totalitarian regimes was *City of Endless Night* (1920) by the American nutritionist and inventor Milo Hastings. Written towards the end of the First World War and first serialised under the title 'Children of Kultur' (1919), the novel looks a century hence with chilling prescience to a repressive, anti-Semitic and Nazi-like regime in a vast Berlin that has established itself as an impregnable dome-covered giant city on 60 levels, above and below ground, each level segregated by its class or rank. This city-state stands alone against the rest of the world which is now governed by a benign world state. In Berlin, eugenics is used to create a superior race with more men than women. Everything is tightly controlled and monitored, from each individual's doctor and barber to their diet – all food is synthetic.

The influence of Nazism

Hitler's rise to power and his growing dictatorship inspired several pre-war dystopias, such as *Land Under England* (1935) by Joseph O'Neill, with its totalitarian society living in vast subterranean caverns monitored by telepathic mind control, and *Swastika Night* (1937) by Katharine Burdekin (writing as Murray Constantine), where Germany and Japan rule a world in which women are kept in concentration camps and all Jews have been exterminated.

The prospect that Hitler's forces might have won the Second World War and that Britain and most of Europe would be under Nazi control, introduces an alternative history form of dystopia, such as *The Sound of His Horn* (1952) by Sarban (John W Wall) or, more recently, C J Sansom's *Dominion* (2012).

Probably the best known recent dystopian novel is *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) by Margaret Atwood, set a few decades hence when the United States government has been overthrown and a militaristic, racist and chauvinistic totalitarian regime has emerged. Women are segregated and have no authority. They are divided into several classes, one of which is handmaids, the equivalent of concubines. All African-Americans and Jews have been 'removed', believed exterminated. Abortions are illegal, and any deformed babies are eradicated.

Sociopaths, anarchy, disasters and cyberpunk

Dystopias do not have to be as extreme as Atwood's novel. They are just as effective when their vision is only a short but decidedly uncomfortable shift from the here-and-now. Anthony Burgess achieved this with *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), which was written because of his concern over the rise of youth culture and juvenile delinquency. He envisaged a world where youths had become sociopathic and the government had to introduce a form of behavioural engineering and mind control in order to recondition them. The breakdown of society and a shift to anarchy is also the background to Michael Moorcock's *Black Corridor* (1969), circumstances which provide the stimulus for the main character to escape from earth. The depressing scenes of social disorder had been drafted by Moorcock's then wife, Hilary Bailey, who had also written of a Nazi-dominated Britain in her first short story 'The Fall of Frenchy Steiner' (1964). The breakdown of the social order is also evident in some of the later work of J G Ballard, especially*High-Rise* (1975), where the behaviour of the occupants of a high-rise luxury block of apartments soon degenerates to our basic primal urges when small problems in the building rapidly escalate into major ones. Ballard shows that the gap between utopia and dystopia is paper thin.

Dystopian futures can take many forms, arising from any number of causes or disasters, such as overpopulation, as depicted in *Stand on Zanzibar* (1968) by John Brunner, or radiation poisoning following a nuclear war as in Philip K Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), memorably filmed as *Blade Runner* (1982). The film version depicted much of the iconography of cyberpunk, and some cyberpunk fiction itself draws on dystopian imagery. The underworld of Chiba City in William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) will be seen as distinctly dystopian by many. Authors have shown that it is easy to conjure dystopias out of any dark or disturbing possibility, demonstrating that there is more opportunity for the world to sink into a dystopian nightmare than evolve into a utopian dream.

Define 'utopia'. What is the etymology of the word? What are early known examples of utopian writing?

Define 'dystopia'. What is the etymology of the word? What are early known examples of dystopian writing?

.

Evaluate: *'There is more opportunity for the world to sink into a dystopian nightmare than evolve into a utopian dream'.* To what extent do you agree with this? Can you make links with the current political climate?

Orwell and Atwood books given away to encourage readers to 'fight back!'

Danuta Kean - https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/feb/07/orwell-and-atwood-given-away-fight-back-nineteen-eighty-four-the-handmaids-tale

A mystery benefactor in San Francisco has given away bulk copies of Nineteen Eighty-Four and The Handmaid's Tale to bolster resistance to the new US regime

George Orwell, Margaret Atwood and Erik Larson have been recruited in the resistance against US president Donald Trump by a mystery benefactor in San Francisco, who has paid for copies of the three authors' most famous dystopian works to be given away with the exhortation: "Read up! Fight back!"

According to the San Francisco Chronicle, 50 copies of the Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four were bought on Friday night from Booksmith, located in the famous hippy district Haight-Ashbury. The books were snapped up quickly after they were placed on a table with a sign that read: "Read up! Fight back! A mystery benefactor has bought these copies of '1984' for you if you need one."

Proprietor Christin Evans said that as soon as the copies were gone, the anonymous donor, who lives locally, repeated their act of generosity, this time with copies of Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale and Larson's In the Garden of Beasts.

Describing the act as a "fruitful, constructive form of resistance", the bookseller told the SF Chronicle that the random act had inspired other customers to follow suit. "This has become a way for bookstores to play a role in this political climate," Evans told the newspaper. "Bookstores believe greatly in the power of the written word to help inform, educate, inspire, and persuade."

On Twitter on Monday, Booksmith announced it had ordered another 100 copies of Nineteen Eighty-Four and said it would continue to help people "sponsor" copies to pass on to others.

Since the new president took office, Orwell's and Atwood's dystopian classics have enjoyed what Time magazine is calling a "Trump Bump"; Nineteen Eighty-Four raced up book charts on both sides of the Atlantic following the inauguration, while Atwood's 1985 bestseller toppled rightwing controversialist Milo Yiannopoulos from the No 1 spot on Amazon earlier this week. The Handmaid's Tale also benefited from promotion during the Super Bowl, with an advert for the forthcoming TV adaptation, due for release in April, airing during a commercial break during the programme, which was watched by more than 111 million people.

Set in New England in the near future, The Handmaid's Tale follows the story of Offred, a young woman chosen to bear the children of an infertile wife of a high-ranking official. In the book, the US has become a theocratic dictatorship in which women's rights are destroyed following a coup in the wake of a staged assassination of the president. The new regime suspends the constitution and moves quickly to consolidate power, reorganising society along militarised, hierarchical lines. The book has been cited recently as one of a score of speculative novels, including Sinclair Lewis's It Can't Happen Here, that predicted the rise of Trump and his administration. All have enjoyed a revival in the bestseller charts, with Lewis's 1935 novel entering the top 30 on Amazon.

Why is it so important that novels such as those discussed in this article are still read today?

.

Why The Handmaid's Tale is so relevant today

Jennifer Keishin Armstrong, 25 April 2018 - http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20180425-why-the-handmaids-tale-is-so-relevant-today

Margaret Atwood's 1985 novel drew on real-life politics but has never been more prescient, writes Jennifer Keishin Armstrong.

A white, wide-brimmed bonnet and a red cloak have come to mean one thing: women's oppression. Margaret Atwood's 1985 novel The Handmaid's Tale seared this image into our souls with its depiction of a near-future dystopia in which women are forced into reproductive slavery to bear the children of the elite – and wear this uniform to underline their subservience. For more than three decades, the image has shown up on the covers of the book around the world, on posters from the 1990 film, in ads for the 2017 TV series, and even on real women at demonstrations for reproductive rights.

The handmaid we're presumably seeing in most of these images, though we often don't know for sure, is Offred, the tale's narrator. As a handmaid in the Republic of Gilead, she must routinely submit to ritualistic sex with her commander, Fred. (Her name derives from the term "of Fred.") She's one of the still-fertile women rounded up for the job of reproduction after many women in the ruling class were rendered infertile by environmental toxins. Before a coup toppled the US government to form the new theocratic state Gilead, she was married to a man named Luke and had a young daughter.

Atwood conceived the novel as 'speculative fiction,' a work that imagines a future that could conceivably happen without any advances in technology from the present. In other words, she said, "Science fiction has monsters and spaceships; speculative fiction could really happen." Every aspect of the book was inspired by social and political events of the early 1980s, when she wrote it.

Because of this, Atwood's novel has an eerie way of always feeling of the moment, as it turns out, from its first publication through every other iteration that has followed. When it debuted in 1985, Atwood even took newspaper clips to her interviews about the book to show her plot points' real-life antecedents. The book mirrored the United States' embrace of conservatism, as evidenced by the election of Ronald Reagan as president, as well as the increasing power of the Christian right and its powerful lobbying organisations the Moral Majority, Focus on the Family and the Christian Coalition – not to mention the rise of televangelism. The character of Serena Joy in The Handmaid's Tale is a former televangelist who articulates theocratic policy suggestions that have now forced her, like all women, into a life solely at home: Atwood writes of Serena Joy, "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."

Though Atwood is Canadian and writing about a later time – Joyce Carol Oates, writing in The New York Review of Books, speculated the book was set around 2005 – she has said the commentary was aimed squarely at the United States of the 1980s, including the rising political power of Christian fundamentalists, environmental concerns, and attacks on women's reproductive rights. The backlash against abortion in the US at the time included a widely distributed propaganda video called 'The Silent Scream,' a rash of abortion clinic bombings and arson cases and a proposed law that would give foetuses civil rights protections. The Reagan administration also broke with longstanding policy and declared that the US government would fund only international women's health groups that promoted 'natural' family planning – that is, abstinence – in underdeveloped countries. As English professor SC Neuman wrote in a 2006 paper published in the University of Toronto Quarterly, "Offred, in short, is a fictional product of 1970s feminism, and she finds herself in a situation that is a fictional realisation of the backlash against women's rights that gathered force during the early 1980s."

Not everyone in the US government at the time even opposed apartheid in South Africa: future vice president Dick Cheney was against the release of Nelson Mandela from prison, while Senator John McCain voted not to divest from the South African government. Recalling the Bantustans of apartheid-era South Africa, Atwood writes in The Handmaid's Tale that African-Americans have been resettled to "National Homelands" in the Midwest.

Puritanism and public policy

The Handmaid's Tale is always discussed as a feminist warning of sorts, and has also been interpreted as a commentary on sexism in the book of Genesis. But some of what Atwood describes wasn't merely speculation about the end result of the religious right taking power in the US but was based on what was happening elsewhere. Atwood says she was inspired in part by Nicolai Ceausescu's preoccupation with boosting female birth rates in Romania, which led to the policing of pregnant women and the banning of abortion and birth control, not to mention the murders of dissidents by the Ferdinand Marcos regime in the Philippines. The idea of 'giving' the offspring of lower classes to the ruling class came from Argentina, where a military junta seized power in 1976, subsequently 'disappearing' up to 500 children and placing them with selected leaders.

But American Puritanism is undoubtedly the central reference point in Atwood's text – and she drew connections between what was happening in the US in the 1980s and the original Puritan colonists in 17th Century New England. "Nations never build apparently radical forms of government on foundations that aren't there already," Atwood wrote in The Guardian in 2012. "Thus… the USSR replaced the dreaded imperial secret police with an even more dreaded secret police, and so forth. The deep foundation of the US – so went my thinking – was not the comparatively recent 18th-Century Enlightenment structures of the republic, with their talk of equality and their separation of church and state, but the heavy-handed theocracy of 17th-Century Puritan New England, with its marked bias against women, which would need only the opportunity of a period of social chaos to reassert itself." Reagan himself referred to his dream of the US being a 'shining city on a hill,' coopting the term the Puritans had for their Massachusetts Bay colony.

Forever relevant?

Atwood's book was a hit with critics and readers, but the film adaptation four years later was a dud. The production's own difficulties showed how relevant it was: most studios wouldn't consider putting out a movie that was so heavily female, and many major actresses were afraid of the radical material. The 1990 film version is a sometimes serious, sometimes sexed-up version that squandered the talents of stars Natasha Richardson and Faye Dunaway. German director Volker Schlöndorff envisioned it as a sexual thriller, an obvious misinterpretation of the original material. Richardson as Offred, was not only stripped of her agency – the script avoided voiceover, losing the urgency of the book – she seemed more objectified than ever. Reviews were mostly dismissive, and the film failed at the box office, too, making back only $5m of its $13m budget.

Since then, The Handmaid's Tale has inspired a number of lower-profile adaptations and related works. Stage adaptations have been produced in the United States at Tufts University and for a UK tour. An opera by Poul Ruders premiered in Copenhagen in 2000, and was performed by the English National Opera in London in 2003 and by the Canadian Opera Company in 2004-05. The Royal Winnipeg Ballet offered up its interpretation of the story in 2013.

It wasn't until last year, when The Handmaid's Tale premiered on Hulu as a television series adaptation, that the work got its pop cultural due. The show's producers changed details to bring the series into the present day, including modern touchstones like Uber, Tinder, cappuccinos, and Craigslist in flashbacks to Offred's pre-handmaid life. But the series felt all the more chilling because of the massive shift in US politics with the election of Donald Trump, who was inaugurated just three months before the series premiered. Suddenly, the book and series' major flashpoints felt more possible than ever: a government declaring martial law after

an attack by Islamic extremists, a regime that systematically eliminates gay people, a society that prioritises procreation (and subjugation of women) above all else. “[H]ow eerily prescient that the Republic of Gilead was established by a coup when Christian fundamentalists, revulsed by an overly liberal, godless, and promiscuous society, assassinated the president, machine-gunned Congress, declared a national state of emergency, and laid blame to ‘Islamic fanatics,’” Joyce Carol Oates wrote in a Handmaid retrospective in 2006. “As in Orwell’s 1984, the Republic consolidates its strength by maintaining continual wars against demonised ‘enemies.’”

This all dovetailed with fears of Trump’s authoritarian tendencies and his vice president’s anti-gay and anti-abortion beliefs. Handmaid costumes even became common at protests of laws intended to limit women’s reproductive freedom. The Women’s March inspired by Trump’s inauguration mirrored the TV series’ flashback scenes of women in the streets protesting the stripping of their rights.

As The Handmaid’s Tale returns for its second season, it feels more vital than ever, even though the cultural landscape has once again shifted in a major way for women. Since the last series, the #metoo movement has taken hold, and Offred’s story is shifting with it. Without giving too much away about the second-season premiere, which goes, in some fashion, beyond the narrative in Atwood’s novel, Offred is now finding methods to take back her own power in the oppressive regime and seizing those moments in satisfying ways – not unlike women finding power in telling their own stories via #metoo and #timesup. Of course, this isn’t a coincidence; the producers of The Handmaid’s Tale series were aware of the changing women’s movement as they constructed this season.

Since the book’s release, The Handmaid’s Tale’s most quoted phrase has been the one scratched, presumably by Offred’s handmaid predecessor, in the wall of her room’s cupboard: *Nolite te bastardes carborundorum.* Don’t let the bastards grind you down. It has become such a feminist rallying cry that many women have the phrase tattooed on their bodies. “Revellers dress up as Handmaids on Hallowe'en and also for protest marches – these two uses of its costumes mirroring its doubleness,” Atwood wrote for the Guardian. “Is it entertainment or dire political prophecy? Can it be both? I did not anticipate any of this when I was writing the book.”

The Handmaid’s Tale’s messages and iconography feel more applicable than ever today. But we always seem to be saying that about Atwood’s story. Will we be doing the same if yet another adaptation appears, three decades from now?

Research Trump’s ‘authoritarian tendencies’ – what connections can you make with Gilead?

.

Puritans of New England

http://www.womenhistoryblog.com/2007/10/puritans-of-new-england.html

The Year: 1630

Early New England

Fleeing England because of religious persecution, the Puritans were relatively well-off, and their faith gave them courage and discipline. Their aim was not to make a profit, like the Virginia colonists, but to create a City on a Hill—a god-fearing community.

In 1630, a large contingent, led by John Winthrop and the Massachusetts Bay Company, and called the Great Migration, set up a republic at Boston. Their settlement expanded successfully throughout the 1640s. By 1660, with a population of 33,000, this was the most successful New England colony.

Love and Marriage

In Puritan society, the average age for marriage was higher than in any other group of immigrants—the average for men was 26, and for women age 23. There was a strong imperative to marry—those who did not were ostracized.

The Puritans married for love – there were no arranged marriages. Courtship practices were strict, and weddings were simple affairs. First cousin marriages were forbidden and second cousin marriages were discouraged.

Banns had to be published before a marriage could take place. Publication of the Banns was the public announcement by the minister during a normal church service that two people wish to marry, and an invitation to the congregation to declare any unlawful reason why they should not marry.

Puritan Women

The Puritans believed that Eve's role in original sin exemplified woman's inherent moral weakness. They feared that women were much more susceptible to temptations, and that they possessed qualities that could be exploited and become sinful. A woman was to love, obey, and further the interests and will of her husband. If she was a good helpmate, she had fulfilled her God-given duty.

Women were, of course, subordinate to men. In the new colonies, the same laws existed as in England. Married women were not allowed to possess property, sign contracts, or conduct business. Their husbands owned everything, including the couple's children. Divorce was rare, and a separation would mean loss of access to the children. Only widows who did not remarry could own property and run their own businesses. Puritan women were expected to bow to their husbands and fathers, and to obey their orders, but they supported each other. During childbirth, they excluded the men, and comforted the mother-to-be with beer as well as prayers.

Women had to dress modestly, covering their hair and arms while in public. Women found guilty of immodest dress could be stripped to waist and whipped until their backs were bloody—would that not expose their bodies? Public humiliation could include confessing one's sins in front of the whole church congregation.

In New England, women had one decided advantage—Puritanism regarded men and women as spiritual equals. The men might be the church leaders, but women were believed to be more disciplined and more moral. Though they had no official standing, women exercised a lot of informal influence. Few men, especially the religious leaders, could survive the widespread disapproval of a community's women.

Puritan Society

But men and women were not equals in Puritan society, which was tight knit and intolerant of anyone who did not conform to the rigid social norms. Family relationships were of paramount importance, but divorce was allowed in instances of adultery, fraudulent contract, willful desertion, and physical cruelty. Sex was supposed to be confined to marriage and offenders were punished severely—but the men more severely than the women.

Families were larger among the Puritans than any other group. They did not approve of doing anything to prevent pregnancy. Ninety percent of all Puritan children had Biblical names. The most common names for boys were John, Joseph, Samuel and Josiah; the most common for girls were Mary, Elizabeth, Sarah, and Hannah. These were all names of Biblical persons of great virtue. The hope was that the child would follow in the footsteps of their namesake.

Puritans were strict parents who loved their children but believed their wills needed to be broken—due to the basic depravity of human nature. This was achieved by strict and rigorous supervision. They tried to use mental discipline and love but, if it did not work, they were quick to use physical constraints. They practiced the custom of sending out, in which children were sent to live with other families for training, discipline, or apprenticeship.

Puritans had a great respect for the elderly and ranked people according to age. The elderly had the best seats in the meeting house and held the highest offices. They believed that God gave the elders long life for a purpose—to influence the younger generation to salvation.

Why is it significant that Atwood deliberate chooses to include elements within her novel that did happen in history?

How does this further the political and social protest message of the novel?

.

Am I a bad feminist?

Margaret Atwood January 15 2018

https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/am-i-a-bad-feminist/article37591823/

Margaret Atwood is the author of more than 40 books of poetry, fiction and essays, including The Handmaid's Tale.

It seems that I am a "Bad Feminist." I can add that to the other things I've been accused of since 1972, such as climbing to fame up a pyramid of decapitated men's heads (a leftie journal), of being a dominatrix bent on the subjugation of men (a rightie one, complete with an illustration of me in leather boots and a whip) and of being an awful person who can annihilate – with her magic White Witch powers – anyone critical of her at Toronto dinner tables. I'm so scary! And now, it seems, I am conducting a War on Women, like the misogynistic, rape-enabling Bad Feminist that I am.

What would a Good Feminist look like, in the eyes of my accusers?

My fundamental position is that women are human beings, with the full range of saintly and demonic behaviours this entails, including criminal ones. They're not angels, incapable of wrongdoing. If they were, we wouldn't need a legal system.

Nor do I believe that women are children, incapable of agency or of making moral decisions. If they were, we're back to the 19th century, and women should not own property, have credit cards, have access to higher education, control their own reproduction or vote. There are powerful groups in North America pushing this agenda, but they are not usually considered feminists.

Furthermore, I believe that in order to have civil and human rights for women there have to be civil and human rights, period, including the right to fundamental justice, just as for women to have the vote, there has to be a vote. Do Good Feminists believe that only women should have such rights? Surely not. That would be to flip the coin on the old state of affairs in which only men had such rights.

So let us suppose that my Good Feminist accusers, and the Bad Feminist that is me, agree on the above points. Where do we diverge? And how did I get into such hot water with the Good Feminists?

In November of 2016, I signed – as a matter of principle, as I have signed many petitions – an Open Letter called UBC Accountable, which calls for holding the University of British Columbia accountable for its failed process in its treatment of one of its former employees, Steven Galloway, the former chair of the department of creative writing, as well as its treatment of those who became ancillary complainants in the case. Specifically, several years ago, the university went public in national media before there was an inquiry, and even before the accused was allowed to know the details of the accusation. Before he could find them out, he had to sign a confidentiality agreement. The public – including me – was left with the impression that this man was a violent serial rapist, and everyone was free to attack him publicly, since under the agreement he had signed, he couldn't say anything to defend himself. A barrage of invective followed.

But then, after an inquiry by a judge that went on for months, with multiple witnesses and interviews, the judge said there had been no sexual assault, according to a statement released by Mr. Galloway through his lawyer. The employee got fired anyway. Everyone was surprised, including me. His faculty association launched a grievance, which is continuing, and until it is over, the public still cannot have access to the judge's report or her reasoning from the evidence presented. The not-guilty verdict displeased some people. They continued to attack. It was at this point that details of UBC's flawed process began to circulate, and the UBC Accountable letter came into being.

A fair-minded person would now withhold judgment as to guilt until the report and the evidence are available for us to see. We are grownups: We can make up our own minds, one way or the other. The signatories of the UBC Accountable letter have always taken this position. My critics have not, because they have already made up their minds. Are these Good Feminists fair-minded people? If not, they are just feeding into the very old narrative that holds women to be incapable of fairness or of considered judgment, and they are giving the opponents of women yet another reason to deny them positions of decision-making in the world.

A digression: Witch talk. Another point against me is that I compared the UBC proceedings to the Salem witchcraft trials, in which a person was guilty because accused, since the rules of evidence were such that you could not be found innocent. My Good Feminist accusers take exception to this comparison. They think I was comparing them to the teenaged Salem witchfinders and calling them hysterical little girls. I was alluding instead to the structure in place at the trials themselves.

There are, at present, three kinds of "witch" language. 1) Calling someone a witch, as applied lavishly to Hillary Clinton during the recent election. 2) "Witchhunt," used to imply that someone is looking for something that doesn't exist. 3) The structure of the Salem witchcraft trials, in which you were guilty because accused. I was talking about the third use.

This structure – guilty because accused – has applied in many more episodes in human history than Salem. It tends to kick in during the "Terror and Virtue" phase of revolutions – something has gone wrong, and there must be a purge, as in the French Revolution, Stalin's purges in the USSR, the Red Guard period in China, the reign of the Generals in Argentina and the early days of the Iranian Revolution. The list is long and Left and Right have both indulged. Before "Terror and Virtue" is over, a great many have fallen by the wayside. Note that I am not saying that there are no traitors or whatever the target group may be; simply that in such times, the usual rules of evidence are bypassed.

Such things are always done in the name of ushering in a better world. Sometimes they do usher one in, for a time anyway. Sometimes they are used as an excuse for new forms of oppression. As for vigilante justice – condemnation without a trial – it begins as a response to a lack of justice – either the system is corrupt, as in pre-revolutionary France, or there isn't one, as in the Wild West – so people take things into their own hands. But understandable and temporary vigilante justice can morph into a culturally solidified lynch-mob habit, in which the available mode of justice is thrown out the window, and extralegal power structures are put into place and maintained. The Cosa Nostra, for instance, began as a resistance to political tyranny.

The #MeToo moment is a symptom of a broken legal system. All too frequently, women and other sexual-abuse complainants couldn't get a fair hearing through institutions – including corporate structures – so they used a new tool: the internet. Stars fell from the skies. This has been very effective, and has been seen as a massive wake-up call. But what next? The legal system can be fixed, or our society could dispose of it. Institutions, corporations and workplaces can houseclean, or they can expect more stars to fall, and also a lot of asteroids.

If the legal system is bypassed because it is seen as ineffectual, what will take its place? Who will be the new power brokers? It won't be the Bad Feminists like me. We are acceptable neither to Right nor to Left. In times of extremes, extremists win. Their ideology becomes a religion, anyone who doesn't puppet their views is seen as an apostate, a heretic or a traitor, and moderates in the middle are annihilated. Fiction writers are particularly suspect because they write about human beings, and people are morally ambiguous. The aim of ideology is to eliminate ambiguity.

The UBC Accountable letter is also a symptom – a symptom of the failure of the University of British Columbia and its flawed process. This should have been a matter addressed by Canadian Civil Liberties or

B.C. Civil Liberties. Maybe these organizations will now put up their hands. Since the letter has now become a censorship issue – with calls being made to erase the site and the many thoughtful words of its writers – perhaps PEN Canada, PEN International, CJFE and Index on Censorship may also have a view.

The letter said from the beginning that UBC failed accused and complainants both. I would add that it failed the taxpaying public, who fund UBC to the tune of $600-million a year. We would like to know how our money was spent in this instance. Donors to UBC – and it receives billions of dollars in private donations – also have a right to know.

In this whole affair, writers have been set against one another, especially since the letter was distorted by its attackers and vilified as a War on Women. But at this time, I call upon all – both the Good Feminists and the Bad Feminists like me – to drop their unproductive squabbling, join forces and direct the spotlight where it should have been all along – at UBC. Two of the ancillary complainants have now spoken out against UBC's process in this affair. For that, they should be thanked.

Once UBC has begun an independent inquiry into its own actions – such as the one conducted recently at Wilfrid Laurier University – and has pledged to make that inquiry public, the UBC Accountable site will have served its purpose. That purpose was never to squash women. Why have accountability and transparency been framed as antithetical to women's rights?

A war among women, as opposed to a war on women, is always pleasing to those who do not wish women well. This is a very important moment. I hope it will not be squandered.

Why do you think there are still hugely negative connotations with being a feminist?

.

What point is Atwood attempting to make through this article? Why would higher powers/organisations wish for a 'war among women'?

.

Margaret Atwood: 'I am not a prophet. Science fiction is really about now.'

Lisa Allardice, Sat 20 Jan 2018

https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/jan/20/margaret-atwood-i-am-not-a-prophet-science-fiction-is-about-now

"It was not my fault!" says Margaret Atwood of 2017. But it was certainly her year. Now, just a few weeks into January, she is already making headlines with typically trenchant comments on the #MeToo movement. And, of course, the second season of *The Handmaid's Tale* returns this spring: she has read the first eight scripts and has "no fingernails left". While the world – and Gilead – show no sign of getting any cheerier, Atwood is seemingly unstoppable. In March the New Yorker crowned her "the prophet of dystopia" and the TV adaptations of *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Alias Grace* has orbited her into an international stardom seldom experienced by novelists. Atwood was a consultant on both productions, and has cameo performances in each: as one of the aunts in *The Handmaid's Tale*, slapping Elisabeth Moss's Offred round the face, and as "Disapproving Woman" (the sign on her trailer) in *Alias Grace*. She will be on set in Toronto for the second season soon, again as a consultant, but not in a nasty aunt outfit this time. "Once was enough." She has very much been cast to type. "Sometimes I pretend to be a scary old lady," she confesses over coffee. "Yes I do," she drawls menacingly. It is a complete coincidence that her near-future dystopia and her historical novel based on a real 19th-century murder have come at the same time, she says. "But they do have something in common: bonnets. So many bonnets."

"I'm not a prophet," she says. "Let's get rid of that idea right now. Prophecies are really about now. In science fiction it's always about now. What else could it be about? There is no future. There are many possibilities, but we do not know which one we are going to have." She is, however, "sorry to have been so right". But, with her high forehead and electric halo of curls, there *is*something otherworldly about Atwood. Dressed in one of her trademark jewel-coloured scarfs and a necklace of tiny skulls, she cuts a striking figure outside the cafe in Piccadilly where we are huddled.

Our chat ranges from the hermaphroditic Barramundi fish to *Game of Thrones*, to the card she is making for Diana Athill's 100 birthday. Hers is a bird-like inquisitiveness and lethal intellectual agility: magpie and falcon (she's a keen ornithologist). She talks in a distinctive low monotone, and is given to quizzical rhetorical questioning: "And why is that?" *The Handmaid's Tale* was written in 1984 in West Berlin – when else? where else? – to answer the question: if there was a totalitarian regime in the United States what kind of regime would it be?

Post Trump's election, the novel is back on the bestseller lists, placards reading "Make Atwood fiction again" appear on the streets, and women have adopted her red robes in silent protest at threatened anti-abortion legislation. Much to her amusement, *Handmaid*-influenced outfits were even sashaying down catwalks, a far cry from the unglamorous original inspiration – an illustration on the 1940s Old Dutch cleaning product for sinks. We are living in an Atwellian era, and it's not pretty.

She can't deny her timing is spookily prescient. "*Evidemment*," she replies with characteristic sang-froid. Lauded as the stand-out TV event of the year, the Hulu adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale* did not so much strike a nerve as send Taser-like shots through its viewers. The Netflix production of *Alias Grace*, her 1996 meditation on truth, memory and complicity, hinging on the veracity of a woman's testimony, landed amid the torrent of Weinstein allegations. Even the book of her 2008 lecture series, *Payback*, written in a hurry to suit her publisher's schedule, arrived bang on time for the financial crash: "Everybody thought I knew something. I thought I was writing a book about the Victorian novel."

Her new-found celebrity (she likes being in London, she confides, because she's not stopped so often for selfies) has come despite her "doing nothing", she says. "They weren't actually my accomplishments, it was all those other people, who acted, designed, wrote the shows."

During her visits on set, she was struck by the actors' total immersion in her almost unbearable world. "They did the whole thing without makeup. All of them. That's dedication!" Moss worked 14-hour days, she says. "She told me, 'Those bags under my eyes were real. The dark circles, they were real.'"

Atwood speaks equally warmly about Sarah Polley, the actor, screenwriter and producer on the nearly all-female team behind *Alias Grace*. Polley first wrote to her asking to adapt the novel when she was 17. They held off for 20 years – during which time she had two children – until she was ready to make the show. "This is going to make her career," the author predicts.

While updating Gilead to a disturbingly recognisable present day, "lattes had not been deployed in North America in 1985", the series honours Atwood's rule of not including anything that hasn't happened somewhere in the world already; the addition of modern horrors makes it all the more chillingly plausible. Female genital mutilation was taking place, she says "but if I had put it in 1985 probably people wouldn't have known what I was talking about. They do now."

We are accustomed to our dystopias being dusty ruins, and part of what makes the show so disquieting is its eerie beauty: the lushness, the hush (silenced cars, creepily amplified birdsong), the saturated colour and light. Does it look like she imagined? "It's pretty close. Of course I can't remember exactly the picture I had. But I know what the place looked like because it was a real place, Cambridge Massachusetts. It's changed somewhat since that time, but essentially those residential streets look the same."

Another question behind the novel was how, "now that the box has been opened and the butterflies are out flitting about", could you make women return to the home, as some on the Christian right in the 80s were advocating? "By what method?" Her answer: reproductive slavery.

Raising the inevitable F-word with Atwood can be risky. "It is always – 'What do you mean by the word?' For instance, some feminists have historically been against lipstick and letting transgender women into women's washrooms. Those are not positions I have agreed with." Last weekend, Atwood provoked a Twitter storm with an op-ed piece in the Canadian Globe and Mail under the headline "Am I a bad feminist?", in which she calls the #MeToo moment "a symptom of a broken system". She adds: "The choices are: fix the system; circumvent the system; or burn it down and substitute something different entirely. Sexual assault is rarer in countries with less wealth imbalance, so why not start there? While we are at it, depriving women of contraceptive information, reproductive rights, a living wage, and prenatal and maternal care – as some states in the US want to do – is practically a death sentence, and is a contravention of basic human rights. But Gilead, being totalitarian, does not respect universal human rights."

The central theme in Atwood's fiction is power, inequality or abuse of power, against women or anyone else. "I'm afraid it is all about power for a lot of people," she says. "A lot of these things don't come out of a wish for power, they come out of fear. Not to be that one. Remember Julia in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: 'Do it to Julia! Not me!'" Social mobbings on Twitter are about being "on the side of those doing it rather than on the side of those having it done to them".

Her 1988 novel *Cat's Eye*, dubbed "*Lord of the Flies* for girls" and written immediately after *The Handmaid's Tale*, is an all too realistic story of schoolgirl bullying. The power structures of boys, Atwood says now, "are fairly simple and overt … hierarchical and stable". Whereas with girls "it is much more like *Wolf Hall* by Hilary Mantel: byzantine, covert … You can never quite figure out why that person is popular and suddenly not."

Atwood recently met a young Korean woman who had been comforted by reading *Cat's Eye*after having a horrible time at her all-girls school in British Columbia. Her mother had suggested she write down four things that she wanted to do in her life and put them in an envelope until she was 21. "And one of the things was meeting you," the woman told Atwood, "and now I've done it."

Pause. "Gee," the novelist says, with tears in those terrifying blue eyes.

Although *Cat's Eye* clearly draws on Atwood's experience of moving from the Canadian wilderness to school in Toronto, memoir has never tempted her: "I'm more interested in what's going on in the world than I am in myself," she says drily. "I'm not much interested in my deep, dark psyche, fascinating though it may be."

She has written nearly the equivalent of a book a year in over six decades. Her current project is adapting her comic series *Angel Catbird* into an audiobook: there is the vexed question of feathery superhero pants. "Nobody told me not

to," she says of her own polymath super powers. "That's the secret. I was in a time and a place where there weren't any professional anythings, so people just did those things." So how does she do it? "I'm not a perfectionist. That's one clue." And she's not fussy about when or where she writes. "I'm a downhill skier. I get to the bottom. Once I've gotten to the end I do a lot of rewriting. I start rewriting from the front while I'm still writing at the back, just to remind myself what I've written."

This makes her process sound more spontaneous than it is: in fact, she plots graphs for each character from the year they are born. "I want to know how old they are exactly – so I don't mess up." For Atwood, the defining fact of her life is being born in 1939. "There's no question!" Of all the referents that informed *The Handmaid's Tale* – slavery, the Salem witch trials, the Soviet system (the list, as she says, is long) – Nazi Germany is its rotten heart: the idea that stability can be overturned overnight.

American democracy has never felt so challenged, she has said. But today she is a more chipper, or at least more contrary, Cassandra. "Why are you so shocked by it all?" she demands. "Look at their history. Come on! The real reason people expect so much of America in modern times is that it set out to be a utopia. That didn't last very long. Nathaniel Hawthorne nailed it when he said the first thing they did when they got to America was build a scaffold and a prison."

Things might be "very scary" right now, but "can we remember world wars one and two, just for a minute? And in the 50s we all thought we were going to be blown up with nuclear bombs. So there are different kinds of scary."

A committed environmentalist, Atwood blames the state of the planet for "driving social unrest, wars and revolutions. You get those things when people feel they are running out of food. Why would you not?"

As we brace ourselves for the second season of *The Handmaid's Tale*, is there hope? For Offred? For us? It's there in the book, she reminds me – in the epilogue Gilead is over. "There is always hope. Otherwise why get up in the morning?" she says. And as for human nature: "We are capable of the most amazing altruism and wonderfulness and we are also capable of the most vile atrocities and horrible acts. It's not news. We behave well when times are good."

Research into slavery, the Salem witch trials, the Soviet system. Do you agree with the idea that stability can be overturned overnight?

Alabama's abortion ban shows the chilling effect of Brett Kavanaugh's appointment

16/05/19
Jill Filipovic - https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/may/16/alabama-abortion-ban-brett-kavanaugh-supreme-court

There is a war on American women.

On Tuesday night, Alabama voted to outlaw abortion entirely. Doctors who perform the procedure could go to prison for 99 years, simply for providing healthcare that one in four American women obtains at some point in her life. The law offers no exception for rape or incest victims because, as the Republican lawmaker Clyde Chambliss said, "When God creates the miracle of life inside a woman's womb, it is not our place as human beings to extinguish that life."

This is today's "pro-life" movement: arguing that pre-teen girls who are raped and impregnated by their fathers must be legally forced to have a baby, because God wanted it that way.

Alabama isn't the only state where the same misogynist politicians who defend the right to own deadly weapons have set their crosshairs on women's bodies, and where the same people who claim to value "life" have systematically cut services for poor children, medical care for pregnant women and affordable contraception for women who are trying to plan their pregnancies.

After years of anti-abortion efforts to chip away at a woman's right to choose, the American "pro-life" movement has finally decided to go whole hog: they are introducing, and successfully passing, legislation across the country that outlaws abortion.

Many of these are "backdoor bans" on abortion, which outlaw the procedure after six weeks of pregnancy. That may sound reasonable enough – how can a woman be pregnant for six whole weeks and not realize it? – but they also prey on American ignorance about reproduction (you can thank the "pro-life" movement, and their efforts to cut sex education, for that, too).

Pregnancy isn't measured from when a pregnancy actually begins (that is, when a fertilized egg implants in the uterus). It's measured from a woman's last menstrual period. So by the time your period is a week late, you're considered five weeks pregnant. Don't realize you're late until two weeks have passed? You just missed your window for an abortion.

Bans on abortion after six weeks, also called "heartbeat bans", were signed into law in Georgia, Kentucky, Ohio and Mississippi; North Dakota and Iowa have had similar bills blocked by the courts. In Louisiana, Missouri, South Carolina and Tennessee, at least one chamber has passed a similar law; politicians have introduced other similar measures in Maryland, Minnesota, New York, Texas and West Virginia.

All of these bans are flatly unconstitutional and in direct violation of Roe v Wade, which generally guarantees American women the right to end their pregnancies. The bans, as a result, should be struck down by the courts. Part of the point of these bans is for Republican politicians to throw red meat to their base – they may not be able to actually throw women in jail for abortion, but they can credibly say they try.

But a bigger reason we're seeing so many of these bans now is that the anti-abortion movement is emboldened. They have a friend in the White House and control over a great number of state legislatures. Most importantly, after Republicans blocked Obama from appointing a supreme court justice to the seat vacated by Antonin Scalia, Trump has been able to choose – so far – two supreme court justices. He appointed men who he and his base believe are willing to overturn Roe.

For decades, the anti-abortion movement has moved relatively slowly. In 1992, the supreme court had an opportunity to overturn Roe, in a case called Planned Parenthood v Casey. They didn't, but did open the door to restrictions and limitations on abortion, allowing states to restrict the procedure so long as those restrictions didn't place an "undue burden" on a woman's right to end a pregnancy before the fetus is viable.

Anti-abortion groups followed suit, pushing and often passing a flood of restrictions. While some anti-abortion advocates did push six-week bans even a few years back, it wasn't a cornerstone of the movement's strategy, and was in fact divisive – many anti-abortion groups thought clearly doomed attempts to outlaw abortion hurt their crusade, and insisted it was best to focus on incrementalism. The plan was to chip away at the ability to access abortion, until the promise of Roe was a hollow one.

That plan has changed because of Brett Kavanaugh.

Anti-abortion groups now seem united in the belief that today's radical, activist, rightwing court will overturn Roe. And for the first time in my life, I think they're right. So does Justice Stephen Breyer, who just last week used his dissent in a different case to sound the alarm about the willy-nilly overturning of long-held precedent: "It is one thing to overrule a case when it 'def[ies] practical workability,' when 'related principles of law have so far developed as to have left the old rule no more than a remnant of abandoned doctrine,' or when 'facts have so changed, or come to be seen so differently, as to have robbed the old rule of significant application or justification'."

He wrote: "It is far more dangerous to overrule a decision only because five members of a later court come to agree with earlier dissenters on a difficult legal question. The majority has surrendered to the temptation to overrule Hall even though it is a well-reasoned decision that has caused no serious practical problems in the four decades since we decided it. Today's decision can only cause one to wonder which cases the court will overrule next."

Today's decision can only cause one to wonder which cases the court will overrule next.

Would the rightwing justices on the court take a law like Alabama's wholesale ban on abortion as an opportunity to do away with abortion rights for American women? Would they validate a law like the six-week bans, claiming to uphold the spirit of Roe? Either potentiality is, terrifyingly and suddenly, well within the realm of possibility.

Anti-abortion groups have long argued that they don't want to hurt or punish women. That is a lie, as the proposed jail sentences for abortion reveal. They have claimed that they care about life, and that pro-choice claims that they are truly motivated by misogyny – animus toward women having sex for fun, a distaste for the various freedoms and opportunities that have been created for women since the 1960s – are fearmongering and untrue. And yet their proposed laws would also, for example, outlaw insurance coverage of many forms of birth control.

Anti-abortion groups also argue that they are primarily concerned about life, which is why they favor total bans, but will also settle for six-week ones – these bans are called "heartbeat bills" because they purport to outlaw abortion once a fetal heartbeat is detected. Anti-abortion groups say that life begins the moment a sperm fertilizes an egg. But those same groups don't seem concerned about the fact that half of fertilized eggs naturally don't implant in the uterus, instead getting flushed out with a woman's normal cycle.

Sure, this is natural, but so are all kinds of reasons human beings die – and if more than half of all infants were perishing after birth from natural causes, it's safe to assume we would look into it. But when a majority of these same "babies" pro-lifers claim to care about die, it's met with a shrug – their efforts are concentrated instead on making sure women are forced to continue pregnancies against their will.

In other words: not even the staunchest of "pro-life" advocates actually believes that life begins at conception.

And if life does begin at conception, every woman should prepare to have her panties examined when she gets her period. After all, there could be a dead person in there. Did you go skiing? Have a drink at a party? Smoke a cigarette? Perhaps you're a murderer.

And what about the pregnancies of, say, undocumented immigrant women? If the conception happened in the United States, are they US citizens? One has a hard time imagining the supposedly "pro-life" Trump administration and its supporters in the Republican party extending American citizenship to embryos, but that's only the logical extension of this ridiculous position. Do fetuses get their own social security cards? Will every miscarriage be investigated as a potential murder scene? That one isn't as crazy as it sounds – where abortion is outlawed, women do indeed go to jail when they're suspected of it, even if they just lose their pregnancies.

This is not about life. If “pro-life” legislators were concerned about dying babies, they would do something about the astounding rates of infant deaths in their states. And what do you know: the same states that are most aggressively outlawing abortion – Alabama, Georgia, Ohio, Kentucky, Mississippi – have some of the highest infant mortality rates in the country. Alabama’s infant mortality rate is on par with that of Sri Lanka and Albania. Maternal mortality rates in those states are also predictably, and horrifyingly, high. Where abortion laws are the strictest, women’s health is the worst.

That’s not surprising, given that these bans are indeed motivated by animus toward women, not by valuing life. After all, if life where the issue, these legislators would address their abhorrent rates of infant and maternal deaths before they start passing legislation that makes maternal death and injury rise. We know this from the rest of the world: unsafe abortion is a leading cause of maternal death, and abortion is unsafe where it is illegal. Outlawing abortion means women are injured. It means women die.

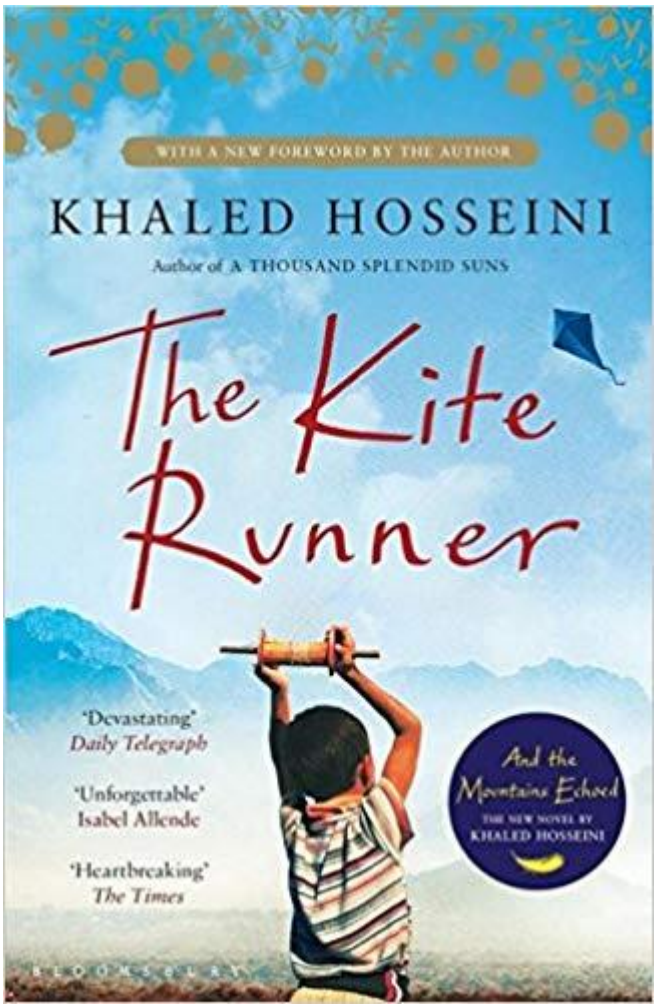
It’s not clear yet that as goes Alabama (and Georgia and Kentucky and Ohio and Mississippi and …) so goes the nation. But what is obvious is that anti-abortion forces don’t see any downside to these punitive, restrictive, barbaric laws. The most virulently anti-choice voters are motivated by their desire to narrow women’s options and circumscribe her life; the rest of the increasingly male Republican base is largely indifferent. For (again, largely male) Republican politicians, it’s a winning issue. For the conservative male justices on the supreme court, one of whom has been accused of sexual harassment and one of whom has been accused of attempted rape, it’s an opportunity to project their own misogynist politics on to American women.

And for the women who are affected, well – keeping them losing was the point all along.

Research abortion laws in Northern Ireland. How do these compare with what’s happening in the USA?

Section 3 – Khaled Hosseini

The Kite Runner



‘Kite Runner’ Author on Writing, Afghanistan, and His New Book

Khaled Hosseini never thought he would be published -- especially in English.

WAJAHAT ALI

MAY 16, 2013

Khaled Hosseini first took us on a tumultuous journey to 1970s Afghanistan in the 2003 best-seller *The Kite Runner*, and followed it up in 2007 with *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, a novel about two women in Hosseini's homeland. On May 21, his third novel, *And the Mountains Echoed*, hits store shelves. Unlike his previous works, it jumps across continents, weaving together a tale about love and loss across generations. Here, the author talks about his newest title, his view on writing, and his hopes for Afghanistan with Wajahat Ali, a writer and attorney.

Your first two novels were set mostly in Afghanistan. For your latest, the narrative, although rooted in Afghanistan, branches out across generations, time periods, and the globe: Greece, Paris, and California. What inspired you to "leave Afghanistan" and tackle a global canvas?

It was a conscious decision, and the natural flow of the book demanded it to be more global. I wanted to create a story-world that didn't necessarily begin with Kabul and end in Kandahar. I wanted to expand the geographic milieu for my characters in part because I've travelled a lot in the past 10 years and I wanted to stretch my literary legs as a writer. Many writers write boundless and wonderful books practically set in the same town for their entire career, and I admire them for that, but I wanted to go out for a breath of fresh air.

This book started so small, so small, with such a simple idea of a father and his two little children walking across the desert toward Kabul, and it just kept snowballing. And I had this particular image of this trunk of a tree with all these branches that went everywhere -- it wasn't a conscious decision to say I'm going to go France now, and then Greece, it just sort of developed organically that way. I wanted to see how far this story echoed and how many lives it could touch. I was excited to explore that.

You're also experimenting with style and structure. Each chapter shares a unique perspective from a different character but is connected to the overall mosaic. One chapter is in the form of a letter, another is a magazine interview, and most resemble short stories. Why break with traditional form and employ an unorthodox approach for this particular novel?

I was interested in looking at people and situations from different points of view. I thought the magazine interview (set in Paris) was a perfect vehicle to get inside the mind of this woman, a complicated poet, and get her idea of how she understands herself, her life, the world she was raised in and how she understands her place in it. Because we've seen her before in an earlier chapter, and she's been described through the eyes of her Afghan chauffer; she's also being described by her own daughter in the later chapters. So, we have these different accounts of a single person full of contradictions and conflicts and we get to see her from multiple angles.

This is unlike the sort of archetypal characters I wrote in *Kite Runner*. There weren't too many ways of interpreting those characters, like Hassan, who was such a lovely, angelic character. But there are different ways of interpreting this woman. That's what this shifting perspective and structure allowed me to do; see different people in different situations in different storylines from various angles.

Throughout the novel, I noticed the characters have a persistent need and search for an existing but absent love -- one that is eventually earned but often at a burdensome cost. For most characters, it seems sacrifice is necessary to truly appreciate and understand love's reality. This reoccurs in all your novels. What keeps drawing you to this theme?

You're right. It's something I'm drawn to. The very first chapter of this book, which is a fable, sets up questions that are raised throughout the book, albeit in a realistic way and not an allegorical way. It begins with the notion of "family." I'm from Afghanistan, and family is so central to Afghan life. It's the way you understand yourself, those around you, and how you perceive yourself in the world as part of this whole.

That opening fable asks what does family mean to you? To what length will you protect its unity? How far will you climb for it? How would you measure your own personal happiness or what you owe to those around you? Are you capable of inflicting a deep, resounding loss upon yourself out of love for someone else -- for the greater good? Also, I'm interested in the role of memory. In the fable, the *div* (a supernatural creature in Afghan folklore) gives the father, Baba Ayub, a potion and relieves him of the burden and pain of remembering his son, whom the *div* has captured and hidden in his fortress). This recurs at the end of the book with the character Abdullah.

Is memory how we make sense of the life that we've lived? Or is it a protector of that part of us that shine brightest? Or is it a curse that makes you re-live over and over the parts that hurt and pain you? Or is it both? These themes are raised in this relatively short fable but are revisited over and over in the novel.

You touched upon memory. What do you believe is the future of Afghan narratives and storytellers? Can it, and should it, escape the memory of 9-11 and finally move beyond discussions of the war on terror, the Taliban, and a narrative often associated with "the graveyard of empires."

As a writer living in exile, it's easier for me to do. Because my immediate reality is not living on the streets of Kabul where on *every* corner I can see a living reminder and living relic of the tragedy of the past 30 some-odd years. My reality of living in the U.S. is different and the distance affords me a compulsion to write about that is not as powerful as if I was writing from ground zero in Kabul. I think the enormity of what's happened to Afghanistan is far too powerful a black hole -- a vortex -- and a far too great a looming presence in the daily life of Afghan writers living there. Ultimately, you hope for a day when there's stories, songs, poetry coming out of Afghanistan that have nothing to do with the painful realities of the past 30 years. But, I think it's too early. I think the story is still unfolding. I think people are still licking their wounds, and there are people literally walking around still wounded, also psychologically wounded. It's far too great a reality to turn away from.

Speaking about stories, you've said that in Western media, "There are still myths about Afghanistan , such as that the country is stuck in the 12th century. There is an element of romanticism too, as well as the idea that Afghans hate the west." Your novel *Kite Runner* remains one of the most popular, mainstream narratives of Afghanistan for many Americans. There's been a criticism that your narratives have been used to promote stereotypical generalizations of Afghans and certain political agendas. What's your response?

I thought the perception of the region was more nuanced than it got credit for in The Kite Runner . The criticism is often leveled at me by older, more conservative, religious members of my community who feel the books have somehow blemished the reputation of Afghanistan in Western eyes. I don't see it that way. Most of my Western readers -- particularly Americans I've met for a better of a decade now -- never have that impression. My understanding is that the books have depicted a far different picture of Afghanistan that my accusers seems to fear it has.
Most readers have come away with a sense of empathy for Afghanistan and its people; there's been awareness of the richness of its culture, its heritage and its history. And as a result of connecting with the characters of my novels, they have achieved a more nuanced understanding of Afghanistan, and they certainly feel a sense of personal stake when they hear about an Afghan village being bombed. I've received emails and letters to this effect. So, many of these fears are unfounded. And I think by and large, I hope my novels have raised the profile of Afghanistan in a constructive and hopefully instructive way.

You say *Kite Runner* is an example of pop culture being constructive and instructive. You've also mentioned that American shows depicting Muslims and the Middle East, such as *Homeland* , need to be done in a "responsible way" and not push an agenda. What is your opinion of America's depiction of Central Asia and Muslims; if it's negative, how do you counteract it using storytelling?

I think it's transforming. In our traditional mainstream media news, I think there's far too many stories dealing with "the radicalized Muslim." We get a lot of those stories in the news media, and I do understand that -- I certainly think this is timely given what happened in Boston. Just like in Afghanistan, the story of 9-11 still looms large even more than a decade after it happened. That said, I do hope we can move away from that.
I see an opportunity for America to engage with the Muslim world. Perhaps we haven't done it to the fullest extent. For example, in Afghanistan, we're looking at a very young population -- over 60 percent of Afghans are under the age of 25. And most of them are not radicalized or have any hopes or desires of becoming radicalized. There are people with energy, vigor, entrepreneurial dreams; people who want to engage the modern world through technology and education, and I hope we move towards a form of engagement with the Muslim world that is more constructive than simply depicting large sections of a billion people under umbrellas that are pejorative.
Speaking about new narratives, I want to go back to this novel in which you seem very comfortable merging classical, Afghan folklore storytelling with modern narrative fiction. This particular novel casually references the supernatural, such as *divs* and *jinns*. Often, it seems Western fiction condescends and rejects the mystical in favor of realism. Do you think Western fiction could benefit, or learn, from Afghan storytelling?

There is room for everything. I think if you reject a certain kind of storytelling you handicap yourself and limit your options. I think current Western contemporary fiction rejects even more than the mythical, it rejects the "sentimental" story. An instinct that has any aspirations of appealing to the reader on a deep emotional level is occasionally branded as sentimental in a kind of professorial, condescending way. My background has never been in literature. I've gone to medical school. So, I don't consider myself part of "that" world. So what is said does not affect me all that much. But I do think we are seeing an enrichment of contemporary fiction in this country by the rise of new, young voices from Pakistan, India, Iran and hopefully Afghanistan. This can only add dialogue, make it more interesting and instructive as well.

Aside from your career as a novelist, you've spent considerable time and energy as a goodwill ambassador to Afghanistan. That nation has endured decades of warfare and tragedy, most recently the post 9-11 U.S. invasion. What are the grievances that Afghans have with the U.S.? Is the rift irreparable, or can the wounds be healed?

There's an abandonment complex in Afghanistan which had its origin in the wake of the Afghan-Soviet war. I'll relate the generic Afghan voice I've heard over and over again in many Afghan communities, which says that once the Afghan-Soviet war was over and Afghanistan had served its purpose by playing a major role in the downfall of the Soviet Empire and ending the Cold War, the West abandoned Afghanistan and its people. Afghanistan was then exploited by thugs, the militia men, the Taliban and so forth. That is the main grievance levelled against the U.S. and its allies by the Afghan people. That has echoes to what we're seeing in Afghanistan now.

Afghan people are a sovereign people. It's well-documented that they don't like foreigners on their soil. However, there is an anxiety, a sense of trepidation about what will happen once U.S. and NATO forces fall back in 2014. Are we going to see a repeat scenario that we witnessed after the Soviet War? Is the country going to unravel and revert back to ethnic war of the 1990's? Is there going to be mass displacement of ethnic populations? Are we going to see another Afghan refugee crisis? Are we going to see the return of power of peoples for whom democratic ideals are not a priority? These are the views of the Afghan people, and the grievances they have against the West. They want the West to assure them they won't abandon them so it reverts back to this previous state.

We should remember that a great deal of promises were made to Afghanistan after 9-11. I happen to be one of those that say that significant things have been accomplished in Afghanistan. There's been improvement in the health care sector, education sector, and personal freedoms and so on. For many Afghans, however, the reality they currently face falls short of the expectations they had after the U.S. invasion of 2001. Much of that is also levelled against the current Afghan government and its shortcomings and inability to provide for the Afghan people.

Afghanistan's problems seem so overwhelming and insurmountable. What is the proper way for Americans to "help" Afghanistan and Afghan people?

People need to understand who the Afghans are and their wishes and aspirations. There's a myth that suggests that Afghans want the U.S. and the West to just give them all the money in the world and rebuild their country for them. I think it's important for Westerners to know that's not the case and it's not a constructive way to view Afghans.

Afghans are not beggars; they are fiercely proud and extremely resourceful. They are a very determined people who want to rebuild their country. What the Afghans do want is economic and civic space to accomplish these things. It's been a challenge to deliver this to them in the past 10 years. The U.S. has done some of it but it hasn't gone that far. There are more aid organizations in Afghanistan than you can count and the rebuilding needs are *massive*.

There is a fatigue when it comes to Afghanistan. This is a particular concern of my own. The Afghan narrative, I have noticed personally, has changed a lot in the past 10 years. People seem far more receptive to the idea of "let's support Afghanistan and its people, let's invest in the country and let's rebuild," but it's very hard to get traction for that particular story.

I understand why because this war has been long and costly in all sorts of ways. As an Afghan I can't help but hope that the gains that have been made in Afghanistan - and they are significant - that those gains are not lose once more when the U.S. packs its bags and leaves.

You have had a unique journey toward becoming a storyteller. A child of immigrants, you first became a physician and then a novelist at 36. In many immigrant communities, children are told to abandon their creative ambitions to pursue the safety of the "holy trinity" of professions: doctor, engineer, and businessman. As such, many of us have become successful professionals, but we haven't produced many modern artists. What's your advice to the aspiring creatives, especially the children of immigrants, who want to pursue their artistic passions but must deal with immense family and community pressures?

This is a brilliant question and touches upon something I've experienced firsthand. I think this is something that will sort itself out. Because the reality for the next generation, for example my children, is *very, very* different from mine.

When I came to the United States with my family in 1980, there were nine of us. We lived in a small house near East San Jose. We lived on welfare. In that kind of incredibly stringent, stressful environment where day-to-day life was uncertain and you're living on government sponsored aid, the idea of nurturing artistic aspirations is esoteric at best. You develop a sense that the world is unstable and you *must* make your future solid and stable and you have to make sure you never end up in this position again. For the parents, they think "Okay, our life is gone, but for the children, we have to make sure they don't live a life like this." So, they instilled in us the idea of getting a "serious" profession and the whole idea of "the holy trinity" that you mentioned.

I already see it being different for my children. I have a 10-year-old daughter and a 12-year-old boy and I don't think I've once told them that I want them to be a doctor, engineer, or lawyer, and I don't think I do want them to be those things. They live in a completely different world than I do with far more opportunities, far more chances, far more leisure to choose exactly what it is that speaks to them so they can pursue it.

I wanted to be a writer *so badly* growing up that coming to America as a 15 year old, not speaking a word of English, it seemed outlandish that I would make a living writing stories in a language I didn't speak. I think the next generation we will see musicians and artists and poets and painters and our usual motley crew of physicians and engineers and lawyers.

Rumi, the spiritual poet of Islam, was born in Afghanistan and wrote those beautiful words in Farsi. At the same time, we see that the Taliban's interpretation of Islam has initiated a reign of religious terror for the Afghan people. As a person who has

lived in Afghanistan and frequently gone back, what role should religion play in modern Afghanistan, and can it be reclaimed from tyrants?

I wish it was quite that simple. I don't think the terrorists have necessarily co-opted the religion. I think the insurgents have conveniently and strategically tapped into an existing mindset in Afghanistan. Islam is alive in every facet of Afghan life. It dominates everything.
I am more or less a Westernized person at this point. I believe strongly in the separation of church and state. However, I'm not so naïve to think that day is coming for Afghanistan. Right there in the Afghan constitution it states that no law of the land shall contradict the principles of Islam, and that's open to all sorts of troublesome interpretations. For the time being, I see religion playing an important, dominant role in Afghan life, politics, and culture. Afghanistan is a deeply pious country. That's just the way it is.
The Taliban has taken religious principles to unacceptable extremes for the majority of the Afghan population. There is very little public support for the Taliban and polls have borne that out. But, it's not like the Taliban came and invented the *burqa* or child brides. The nucleus of those things were alive and well in the culture -- not everywhere, but certainly in the tribal provinces. There's certainly modernism in Kabul, but most of Afghanistan is rural and much of it is very, very conservative.

Your book begins with this famous English translation of a classic Rumi quote: "Out beyond of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I'll meet you there." They say in the 21st century the world is a battleground. So, where is this field and how do you think we can reach it?

The more we understand that we are connected; the more we understand that what happens in another region of the world echoes with us. The more we understand that we no longer live in a world that is insular, where the actions of other people, the fate of other people, the plight of other people who are different from us have no bearing on our life. The more that we understand those things, the more we will identify with each other. We will realize we all have common goals. It behooves us to help each other. It behooves us to come to each other's aid.
On the few occasions that people have asked me to speak at commencement ceremonies, the message I always tell this coming generation is that you cannot afford to say that you are alone. You cannot afford to pretend that what happens in Afghanistan, in Somalia, in Peru has no bearing on you. It does. The days of our living in a compartmentalized existence on this planet are dying. We have the internet; our modern life has completely changed that. It'll never go back to the way it was.
I can only hope that we can be in the field once we see how connected we are and how we are part of one giant organism. I perhaps echo your question's sentimentalism and idealism with my answer.

Your critics accuse you of sentimentality, but your sentimentalism also makes your stories beloved to the masses. If you can be self-critical and do a self-audit, what are your strengths and weaknesses as a storyteller?

I think my strength is in telling a story. That's my strength. I can keep a reader's interest. I can bring a sense of anxiety to every page; bring a sense that something's at stake in every page. Certainly that's my goal, but to what extent I've achieved it is for the reader to decide. I also write in a way that emotionally resonates with the audience. I want something to be at stake emotionally for every story I write. To some extent, the readers feel the same.
My weaknesses? I have a *long* list. I'm *well aware* of my limitations as a writer. I will never be stylish. I will never have a particularly interesting prose. When I read contemporary fiction, I recognize prose that is beyond my grasp.
I do think I have a modest but sturdy set of skills that have served me very well. They have allowed me to create stories that to readers at least, feel very authentic and connect with them on a deep human and emotional level. And that's good enough for me.

How is context intrinsically linked to PSPW texts?

Critical Perspectives on Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner

Amelia Hill:

'…the first Afghan novel to be written in English…'

'…the personal struggle of ordinary people into [is melded into] the terrible historical sweep of a devastated country in a rich and soul-searching narrative.'

'It is a history that can intimidate and exhaust an outsider's attempts to understand, but Hosseini extrudes it simply and quietly into an intimate account of love, honour, guilt, fear and redemption that needs no dry history book or atlas to grip and absorb.'

'The Kite Runner is about the price of peace, both personal and political, and what we knowingly destroy in our hope of achieving that, be it friends, democracy or ourselves.'

Luan Gaines:

'With inordinate compassion and stunning simplicity, Hosseini portrays Amir's impossible dilemma. Complications abound, but the answer lies in humanity's capacity for kindness. The grace of acceptance heals the wounds of brutality, for with forgiveness anything is possible, even the wild joy of soaring kites against a winter sky.'

Mark Flanagan:

'The Kite Runner is Afghanistani-American novelist, Khaled Hosseini's bestselling debut novel, a tale of betrayal and redemption that rises above time and place while simultaneously remaining firmly anchored against the tumultuous backdrop of modern Afghanistan.'

'…it is the story of internal strife that makes Khaled Hosseini's novel as beautiful and as terribly haunting as it is. As Amir's wife tells him, "sad stories make good books."'

Lynne de Michele:

'…I believe, we can begin to comprehend real human truths only through personal story.'

Shreya Datta:

'However, The Kite Runner falls short of being regarded as a literary masterpiece. For once, it must be admitted that after a point the turn of events become quite predictable. At times it turns a bit melodramatic and very little is left open for the reader's imagination. In a way, except in the end, there is little scope for the readers to exercise their imaginative prowess and reinterpret the story from their own perspectives.'

Maria Elena Caballero-Robb:

'The novel has an ambitious agenda: to sketch the maturation of its protagonist from a callow boy beguiled by mythical stories of heroes and to portray the political situation of contemporary Afghanistan.'

'…showcasing the way that the deeds of childhood cast their shadows into adulthood.'

'The Kite Runner focuses more on interpersonal dramas than on political ones; it is a matter of interpretation whether Amir feels responsible for the future of his birth country in the same way that he feels accountable for his nephew's fate.'

James O'Brien:

'the foremost of many triumphs in this startling first novel must be that its consideration of cultural, religious and deeply personal upheavals remains cool and considered throughout.'

‘It is this muddled, unbalanced and ultimately tragic relationship [Amir and Hassan] lies at the heart of The Kite Runner and echoes the betrayals and power shifts that begin to shape the country shortly after the story begins.’

‘When Hosseini strays from the simple narrative style he prefers, he struggles to retain credibility and, on occasion, leaves Amir soundling like Kabul’s halfbaked answer to Holden Caulfield.’

‘Amir’s grand betrayal of Hassan and his painful search for redemption across generations is told in a cool, detached voice that provides a counterpoint to the growing sense of tension which is frequently stretched to breaking point as the story unfolds.’

‘There are history lessons here; among the deepest of Afghanistan’s wounds is the fact that its past has been largely obscured by its bloody present. ‘Is any bond truly unbreakable? Can sons atone for the sins of fathers?’

Ronny Noor:

‘This lucidly written and often touching novel gives a vivid picture of not only the Russian atrocities but also those of the Northern Alliance and the Taliban. It is rightly a “soaring debut”, as the Boston Globe claims, but only if we consider it a novel of sin and redemption, a son trying to redeem his father’s sin. As far as the Afghan conflict is concerned, we get a selective, simplistic, even simple-minded picture.’

Which key themes do these critics identify within *The Kite Runner:*

What is Hosseini’s intended political and social message through writing this novel?

‘The first Afghan novel to be written in English’ – why is this so significant, especially when considering its year of publication?

How Khaled Hosseini finds hope in telling refugees' stories

Carvell Wallace 2nd Sept. 2017 https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/sep/02/how-khaled-hosseini-finds-hope-in-telling-refugees-stories

I arrive at the nondescript office in San Jose where I am to meet Khaled Hosseini in the middle of a once-in-a-lifetime solar eclipse. The Californian light has a strange quality, silvery and laden.

When Hosseini opens the door, I barely get out a formal greeting before he interrupts. “Have you seen it?” he asks. He is tall and dashing, and carries himself with a Clooney-esque, grizzled charm.

“C’mon,” he says, handing me a pair of specially made sunglasses and darting off towards the back of the building. He points to a spot in the rear courtyard. “Right there,” he says. “That’s the best spot.”

I put on the sunglasses and look up at the sky. The sun is a perfect circle, cut neatly into a crescent by the dark round shadow of the moon. It is like nothing I have ever seen. I had tried and failed to watch the eclipse from my car as I drove to the meeting, but what Hosseini shows me is many orders of magnitude more breathtaking. After a moment I take off the glasses and look in his direction. He is beaming proudly, as though seeing the sun through my eyes.

When we start the interview, the novelist is just as attentive. He peppers me with questions about who I am and where I am from long before I get a chance to turn on the recorder. There is a sense that his travels throughout the world as a goodwill ambassador for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a post he has held for more than a decade, most recently in Uganda, have given him an increased appreciation for his life and whoever is in front of him. His primary contribution has been to speak with those fleeing fighting in countries such as Afghanistan, Chad, Iraq, Jordan and Uganda and to write their stories down, much as he did for his characters Amir and Hassan in his bestselling 2003 novel The Kite Runner.

Another writer faced with such unexpected success (The Kite Runner sold more than 7m copies in the US alone) might have retreated from the world. But Hosseini, himself a fugitive from war, has instead committed himself to quietly documenting the lives of more recent refugees, in the hope his writing will spur the world to take notice of their plight.

“Everybody knows there’s a war,” he tells me, “but once you feel what that war means, I think for most people it’s unfathomable not to act on it, even if it’s in a small way. It becomes that much harder to simply dismiss or move past. It prickles your consciousness.”

In a sense, Hosseini’s entire mission as a writer has been to prickle the consciousness of the western world. His father was an Afghan diplomat working in Paris when Russia invaded his home country in 1979. His family sought asylum in the US and Hosseini arrived at 15 years old, with only a limited grasp of English. He went on to attend medical school and began practising as a doctor in California. While still working as a physician, he began writing The Kite Runner,hoping to share what life in his homeland had been like. “I expected the book to resonate with people who were interested in the region, who maybe were interested in Afghanistan specifically,” he remembers. “But the degree to which it caught on … it did take me by surprise quite a bit.”

The Kite Runner spent 110 weeks on the New York Times bestseller list. Hosseini followed it up with A Thousand Splendid Suns in 2007 and together, his first two books sold 38m worldwide. But before writing his third and most recent novel, 2013’s , he began his work with UNHCR, an experience that he says changed him as a writer. “I think my third book was a quieter book. It dealt less with archetypes, [is] a little bit more complex,” he says. “Displacement, refugees, these things are still very much with me … I think I live now, not preoccupied, but engaged in my mind with bigger issues than I was when I writing The Kite Runner.”

His latest work is a short story, Sea Prayer, which has been transformed into a virtual reality project in a collaboration with UNHCR and the Guardian. It is a terse and devastating story, told by a father who has sent his son on a boat from Syria and pleads with the vast waters to keep his child safe.

The novelist was inspired to write it after seeing the photograph of Alan Kurdi, the three-year-old Syrian refugee who drowned in 2015 after the boat he was on, destined for Europe, capsized. When his lifeless body washed ashore in Turkey, the shocking photos sparked a huge global reaction, transforming the child into a tragic symbol of the crisis in Syria. At least 8,500 more people have been lost in the Mediterranean since Kurdi died.

"The way I thought about it, when I saw the photo, was all the unseen work that goes into the raising of a child," says Hosseini. "All the private worries, the private anxieties, the making sure they have this, the making sure that they eat properly, that they're vaccinated, that their clothes fit them, they're not uncomfortable, that they sleep well, that they get their vitamins. We worry and fret over their wellbeing, and to have done all that work, and see the person that you poured all that love and all that passion and all that work into, and to see that body lying face down on the beach …" He trails off.

In the virtual reality project, Sea Prayer is transformed into an immersive painting by artist Liz Edwards, using Tilt Brush technology, to appear with flourishes and splatters of paint in time with the narration, read by Bafta-winning actor Adeel Akhtar. Alongside the visuals is a haunting score composed by musician David Coulter, working with the the Kronos Quartet, an ensemble who donated their time to score the piece.

Reading – and watching – Sea Prayer, I am struck not only by the beauty but by the futility it represents; the father pleads with the sea, but the sea either cannot or will not answer his prayers. I ask Hosseini if he remains optimistic, even after spending much of the last decade immersed in the darkest aspects of humanity.

"If I don't have faith or confidence that by doing the work that we do we make [a] difference, then I would live in a really cynical world that I don't find to be a productive way of living," he says. "There, the game is really over. At least this way there's a hope that somebody will connect with these stories."

Hosseini's hope, as tempered as it may be, is impressive. It is one thing to feel optimism when seated in a comfortable home in a country not quite at war, but quite another to travel and sit with people who have barely escaped unspeakable darkness, and still feel that a difference, no matter how small, must and can be made.

In what ways does Hosseini 'prickle' Western consciousness throughout *The Kite Runner?* In doing this, how does his political message come through?

Afghanistan: a history of occupation

Afghanistan has been repeatedly invaded for more than 2,000 years, dating back to Alexander the Great
https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/8162559/Afghanistan-a-history-of-occupation.html

- 330BC – Alexander the Great invades region including modern day **Afghanistan** and spends two years fighting and facing repeated rebellion.
- 667AD – Arab armies sweep into Afghan territory, but only partially subdue locals and face frequent revolts.
- 1220 – Genghis Khan's Mongol armies sweep through Afghanistan.
- 1722 – Birth of Ahmad Shah Durrani, first Emir of Afghanistan.
- 1839 to 1842 – First Anglo-Afghan War sees British occupy Kabul and impose puppet leader to oppose Russian influence. Ends in disastrous retreat from Kabul in which 4,500 soldiers and 12,000 camp followers are massacred, except a sole survivor and a handful of prisoners, trying to get back to India.
- 1878 to 1880 – Second Anglo-Afghan War. Britain invades Afghanistan again and fights two years of costly battles including a humiliating defeat at Maiwand. British withdraw after defeated Afghans cede control of foreign policy.
- 1919 – Third Anglo Afghan War sees Afghanistan effectively regain independence.
- 1929 – RAF uses biplanes to airlift entire expat community from Kabul after tribal uprising in eastern Afghanistan.
- 1933 – Zahir Shah becomes king and country remains a monarchy for four decades 1973 – King deposed by Mohammed Daud, who declares a republic and tries to play off Soviet Union and West.
- 1978 – Daud is overthrown and killed in a leftist coup. The coup leaders fight among each other, while conservative Islamic and ethnic leaders angered by modernising social changes begin an armed rural revolt.
- 1979 – Soviet Union sends in troops.
- 1980 onwards – America, Saudi Arabia and Gulf states provide money and arms channelled through Pakistan to the Mujahideen resistance.
- 1986 – US begins supplying sophisticated Stinger missiles allowing the Mujahideen to shoot down Soviet helicopters.
- 1989 – Last Soviet troops leave.
- 1992 – Soviet puppet Najibullah falls from power. Mujahideen take Kabul and begin squabbling. Country collapses into civil war.
- 1994 – Strict Islamic Taliban movement arises in reaction to civil anarchy.
- 1996 – Taliban take Kabul and impose strict social laws.
- 1998 – America fires cruise missiles at suspected camps of Osama bin Laden in retaliation for embassy bombings in Africa.
- 2001 – US special forces and air power help Northern Alliance topple Taliban after regime refuses to hand over Osama bin Laden for the September 11 attacks on America.
- 2003 – US-led invasion of Iraq shifts attention and resources from Afghanistan.
- 2004 – Hamid Karzai elected president.
- 2006 – British troops move to Helmand and face daily fire fights against Taliban.
- 2007 – Opium production reaches record levels.
- 2008 – Security continues to plummet. Massive jailbreak of Taliban prisoners in Kandahar. Suicide bombers target Indian embassy.

How do these events correlate with the narrative of *The Kite Runner?*

How Do Sunni and Shia Islam Differ?

https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/04/world/middleeast/q-and-a-how-do-sunni-and-shia-islam-differ.html

Saudi Arabia's execution of the Shiite cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr could escalate tensions in the Muslim world even further. In the Shiite theocracy Iran, the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, said on Sunday that Saudi Arabia, which is ruled by a Sunni monarchy, would face "divine vengeance" for the killing of the outspoken cleric, which was part of a mass execution of 47 men. Sheikh Nimr had advocated for greater political rights for Shiites in Saudi Arabia and surrounding countries. Saudi Arabia had accused him of inciting violence against the state.

Here is a primer on the basic differences between Sunni and Shia Islam.

What caused the split?

A schism emerged after the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632, and disputes arose over who should shepherd the new and rapidly growing faith.

Some believed that a new leader should be chosen by consensus; others thought that only the prophet's descendants should become caliph. The title passed to a trusted aide, Abu Bakr, though some thought it should have gone to Ali, the prophet's cousin and son-in-law. Ali eventually did become caliph after Abu Bakr's two successors were assassinated.

After Ali also was assassinated, with a poison-laced sword at the mosque in Kufa, in what is now Iraq, his sons Hasan and then Hussein claimed the title. But Hussein and many of his relatives were massacred in Karbala, Iraq, in 680. His martyrdom became a central tenet to those who believed that Ali should have succeeded the prophet. (It is mourned every year during the month of Muharram.) The followers became known as Shiites, a contraction of the phrase Shiat Ali, or followers of Ali.

The Sunnis, however, regard Ali as well as the three caliphs before him as rightly guided and themselves as the true adherents to the Sunnah, or the prophet's tradition. Sunni rulers embarked on sweeping conquests that extended the caliphate into North Africa and Europe. The last caliphate ended with the fall of the Ottoman Empire after World War I.

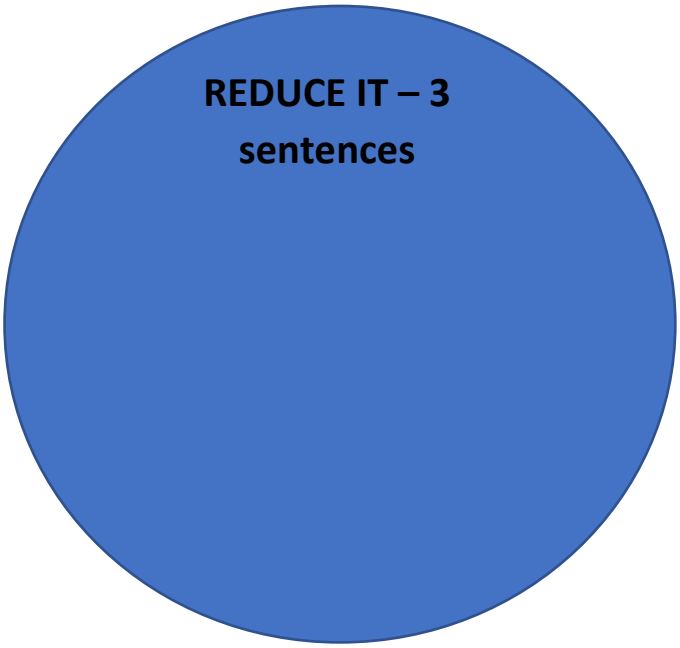
How do their beliefs differ?

The Sunni and Shiite sects of Islam encompass a wide spectrum of doctrine, opinion and schools of thought. The branches are in agreement on many aspects of Islam, but there are considerable disagreements within each. Both branches include worshipers who run the gamut from secular to fundamentalist. Shiites consider Ali and the leaders who came after him as imams. Most believe in a line of 12 imams, the last of whom, a boy, is believed to have vanished in the ninth century in Iraq after his father was murdered. Shiites known as Twelvers anticipate his return as the Mahdi, or Messiah. Because of the different paths the two sects took, Sunnis emphasize God's power in the material world, sometimes including the public and political realm, while Shiites value in martyrdom and sacrifice.

Which sect is larger, and where is each concentrated?

More than 85 percent of the world's 1.5 billion Muslims are Sunni. They live across the Arab world, as well as in countries like Turkey, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Indonesia. Iran, Iraq and Bahrain are largely Shiite. The Saudi royal family, which practices an austere and conservative strand of Sunni Islam known as Wahhabism, controls Islam's holiest shrines, Mecca and Medina. Karbala, Kufa and Najaf in Iraq are revered shrines for the Shiites.

Saudi Arabia and Iran, the dominant Sunni and Shiite powers in the Middle East, often take opposing sides in regional conflicts. In Yemen, Shiite rebels from the north, the Houthis, overthrew a Sunni-dominated government, leading to an invasion by a Saudi-led coalition. In Syria, which has a Sunni majority, the Alawite Shiite sect of President Bashar al-Assad, which has long dominated the government, clings to power amid a bloody civil war. And in Iraq, bitter resentments between the Shiite-led government and Sunni communities have contributed to victories by the Islamic State.



APPLY IT – how does this link to political issues prevalent in *The Kite Runner?*

RESEARCH IT – how does this then apply to Hazara and Pashtuns? What are the differences between these two groups?

'I couldn't even scream': survival and abuse inseparable for Kabul children

Street children are forced to brave violent sexual predators in the Afghan capital as they struggle to earn money

https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/jun/07/couldnt-even-scream-survival-abuse-inseparable-kabul-children

For 14-year-old Ahmed*, life as a kid on the streets of the Afghan capital has become synonymous with abuse.

His voice calm and unwavering, Ahmed reels off stories of the assaults he has suffered over the years. “One day, a man asked me to buy him a pack of chewing gum. I went out and bought it, and took it back to his house,” Ahmed tells me in a dimly-lit apartment he shares with his family. “He then forced me inside his home and raped me.” It happened two years ago, but his stories go back to when he was five years old.

After the first time he was sexually assaulted, Ahmed tried to be more careful, avoiding quiet areas and trying not to travel anywhere alone. But one day, when his brothers were not around to protect him, three teenage boys followed him to a Kabul backstreet, and took turns raping him. This became a regular occurrence, but he felt he couldn’t tell anyone – especially not his family. Ahmed feared his family would be ashamed of him if they knew; he didn’t want to be the one who let them down.

Kabul is heaving with street children like Ahmed, impoverished boys and girls who are sent out by their families to work or beg. They snake through the city’s congested traffic, trying to clean car windscreens or peddle trinkets. They are are often subject to abuse by male drivers, especially taxi drivers.

After nearly 40 years of conflict and is rife in Afghanistan. Since Nato-led troops ended their conflict mission four years ago, the poorly equipped Afghan forces have struggled with an and the new task of trying to contain an Islamic State insurgency.

In this environment, education is seen as secondary to earning money. Many children skip school so they can work to support their families. In central Kabul, children as young as three are dotted about the chaotic urban landscape, dwarfed by the enormous mounds of fruit for sale on their wooden crates, or polishing men’s shoes.

Lahla, 10, was forced to work on the streets after her father was killed three years ago. Wearing a long dress and plastic purple sandals that had seen better days, Lahla’s skin is burned by the sun, evidence of her long days spent on the streets.

Her father, a farmer, was killed on his way home when Taliban insurgents and Afghan government troops were locked in a bloody battle. Her meagre earnings from begging support her mother, sister and brother-in-law.

On a recent day in Kabul, Lahla sits near busy restaurants hoping passersby will give her a five or 10 Afghani note, worth about the same value in British pence. She watches as scores of schoolgirls pass by in their black and white uniforms. Lahla has never been to school.

Not long ago, a man promised to give her money if she led him behind the restaurant where she sat. Lahla agreed. There, he began kissing and groping her. She was powerless to stop it. “I was shocked, and my heart was beating so fast. I couldn’t even scream, my voice was lost because I was scared if someone saw that this guy, they would blame me,” Lalah says. “Afterwards, I felt so sick – I even got sick – but I couldn’t tell my mother why.”

Approximately 2 million children work on the streets across the country, with 1.2 million of them doing hard labour, according to the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, the Martyrs and Disabled. While the majority work in Kabul, street children also work in large cities across the country, including Herat in the west and Balkh in the north.

There are no official statistics for how many Afghan street children are abused, but anecdotal evidence and social activists suggest it is rampant.

Zabi, another 14-year-old boy who has spent half his life on the streets selling plastic bags, says he cannot think of a single street child who has not been assaulted. He says taxi drivers, shopkeepers and even male university students are perpetrators. Zabi's eyes filled with tears as he recalled how, four years ago, a group of older boys pushed him in the Kabul river and took turns raping him. Zabi went straight to the police, and the boys were arrested. When Zabi's father discovered what had happened, he blamed Zabi for shaming the family.

"Violence is an accepted form of punishment in most households, and children get used to it," said Najib Akhlaqi, head of the ministry's child protection action network. "The children don't just accept it, they expect it." He says the ministry receives phone calls from concerned passersby on a regular basis. When the network dispatches police to the scene, the children often deny they are harassed, fearful that admitting it could invite more abuse later on.

Under the Elimination of Violence Against Women law, those who abuse women and children are liable for jail terms and cash fines. The children are then taken to social care centres. But rights defenders say the law is not being fully enforced.

Akhlaqi says the government is developing a system that will enable coordination with organisations supporting children in Afghanistan. Currently, only 10 organisations work under the government's supervision.

Fayazuddin Amini, from the juvenile detention centre, says most incidents of sexual harassment are not reported. When they are, police pass the case to Afghanistan's attorney general, who ensures criminals are punished according to the Afghan penal code and the juvenile code.

Amini says there are many children under 18 who abuse, rape or sexually harass other children and get sent to juvenile detention and rehabilitation centres by the court. Once these criminals finish their term, the government doesn't keep track of them. Sometimes the Ministry of Education will enrol them back into government-run schools. Although there are no official statistics, there have been many incidences of reoffending.

According to the Ministry of Finance, more than 60 organisations, both national and international, work for children in Afghanistan. Other unregistered groups also operate.

Abdul Baqi Samandar, for example, opens his home to about 300 children to learn crafts and study with the help of 30 teachers. Samandar pays each teacher £30 a month, with donations gathered from friends abroad.

Samandar, who is in his mid-60s, says the only true way to help Afghan children is to educate them – by whatever means necessary. "I don't understand the families who do not let their children get free education," he says.

** All names of children have been changed*

Conduct some further research into 'rape culture' in Afghanistan. How is this issue dealt with? What does religion state about rape? Look into Bacha Bazi and list any relevant findings that are connected to the novel.