

## *Surviving Dystopia: Storytelling and Subjectivity in*

### *The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood*

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#### **Abstract**

The present study analyzes the construction of female subjectivity through narration in the dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood. The patriarchal, totalitarian, theocratic system depicted in the novel objectifies and classifies women according to their ability to bear children, placing them at the bottom of the hierarchical model. Their lack of identity, autonomy and voice is disguised as necessary for “the common good.” Offred, the protagonist of the novel, has often been labeled as a victim, a damsel in distress of the patriarchal system, unable to escape the boundaries of The Republic of Gilead. Nevertheless, Offred encounters a different reality: the power that she once thought lost finds its way back to her through the narration of *herstory* and the exercising of her voice. Her identity is now defined not in terms of reproduction but in terms of her own acknowledgement of the power that lies within her mind and body. A fervent opponent to this society, she is caught inside a dystopian world that gives her little option than survival. Offred chooses to tell *herstory*, escaping her reality and discovering her authentic voice, and reconstructs her status as subject. Once she reconstructs herself as subject, she is able to challenge and triumph over the dystopian, patriarchal society in the novel.

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### **Biography**

Vanessa Pacheco Padilla holds a Master's degree in English Literature from Universidad de Costa Rica where she currently teaches language and literature. Her major literary interests are feminism, science fiction, and Gothic literature.