The Edinburgh Companion to the New European Humanities

Edited by
Rosi Braidotti,
Hiltraud Casper-Hehne,
Marjan Ivković and
Daan F. Oostveen

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Transmedia Science Fiction and New Social Imaginaries

Raffaella Baccolini, Giuliana Benvenuti, Chiara Elefante and Rita Monticelli

Introduction

One of the crucial aspects of the so-called 'digital revolution' is undoubtedly an impressive mutation of communication forms and modes of cultural circulation and consumption. For some decades now, we have been witnessing a change that involves production strategies as well as the fruition, increasingly linked to networking, of literary, artistic, cinematographic, television, theatrical works and productions, and so on. The multiple mutations of the 'cultural industries', the social and cultural transformations confuse, merge and hybridise the digital and the 'real': technology, society and culture are linked by relationships of mutual co-determination and co-evolution. Culture is thus seen today as a network of re-shapings, re-creations, quotations, repetitions and transcoding of artefacts where the usual and disused separation between different media opens up reflections that imply interdependency rather than comparison (see Bolter and Grusin 1999; Jenkins 2006, 2014). We are, one might say, faced with a turning point that has implications comparable to those that other technological turning points have had in the history of culture, let us think, to give just one recent example, of the consequences – which Walter Benjamin (2008) highlighted in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* – determined by the loss of the 'aura' of the work of art and the crisis of the very concept of the original. Changes of such extent affect, with all evidence, not only all the categories with which we used to describe and interpret artistic or entertainment products (author, text, reader/user), but also the morphology of the narration, which also, in many cases, changes radically. By virtue of the growing interconnection of the imaginaries, these changes also affect the relationship between artistic production and the public sphere (for example, the creation of diasporic public spheres; Appadurai 1996), leading to the construction of an increasingly transnational imaginary, giving rise to new ways of comparison, even of values, as well as tastes and preferences. This allows us to experiment with original practices of aggregation and collaboration inside and outside the Web. The process of media radical transformation has meant that social media are progressively taking precedence over the mass media in the domain of discursive practices. Similarly, we can see the orientation of many productions towards a multi-channel exploitation of a successful artefact and 'concept'. Moreover, the strength of the emotional bond that is created between a text and its users, then grows exponentially when the text becomes a plurality of texts, gives rise to a process of world building (for instance typical of science fiction), in other words, turns into a transmedia 'narrativity'. We can therefore consider the creation of transmedial narratives as part of this general mutation of expressive and

representative forms, which implies, more deeply, a change in individual relations with reality and in the forms of socialisation and construction of him-/herself and the world, but also a significant alteration of cultural hierarchies (cf. Hills 2002; Jenkins et al. 2013). Moreover, we have long known that texts contain potential meanings that audiences activate in contexts saturated with other discourses and within complex intertextual networks. In this light, the challenge of the Digital Humanities therefore concerns also the capacity to elaborate and transmit knowledge and interact in critical and innovative ways with cultural productions, also through the exploration of the imaginary in times of crisis. The development and circulation of literary works and visual products in diverse areas that involve readerships and audiences beyond their geographical origins and belonging have completely innovated not only the content of the cultural productions but also their reception, and have changed the classical view of literary and visual genres, overturning in drastic ways the relationship between the so called high and low culture through a shared imaginary (although enacted and received in many diverse ways according to the contexts and audiences). If we think of the status of the novel today, the development and circulation of novels in diverse areas that involve readerships beyond their geographical origins and belonging have completely innovated not only the content of the novels but also their forms and changed the classical view of literary genres. Their circulation from the nation to a global market, and their global changes also through migration and translation, have renewed themes and forms also through their reception. This case study will borrow, re-contextualising them, some crucial questions addressed by Nancy Armstrong concerning the global novel and global culture:

> how do various contemporary novels transform generic prototypes that once enabled readers to imagine belonging to a coherent national community, the historical origins of that community, the social bonds needed to hold it together, what had to be kept out, how it perpetuated itself, and thus its possible futures. To what forces do various genres attribute this transformation? What sensory, cognitive, and/or affective equipment is needed to negotiate the altered world of these novels? What political possibilities do these novels open up or close down? (Armstrong and Dainotto 2018)

The critical debate on literature concerns the relationship that literature has with other media in the era of the 'visual turning point' and interrogates its fate in a historical phase in which it contaminates itself with other forms of expression, in ways that transcend the mere adaptation. Both transmedia narratives and global novels involve a new ecosystem of reading, circulation and reception, and are open to forms of reuse, decontextualisation, reappropriation. The digital revolution has enlarged global culture in many directions, transforming the status of the novel, also through translations, narrative adaptations, remediation, rewritings, intertexts, graphic novels, television series and cinema interactive adaptations. With the development of digital technologies, the world of translation has changed, and has benefited greatly from technologies, in particular for the necessary work of documentation and for the creation of translation memories (to be understood both in the technical sense, as databases functional to translation in specific sectors, and in the broad sense, as traces that the translation process leaves in the translated text, providing space to the translator's voice and subject position). In recent decades, thanks to a successful interaction between gender studies and translation studies, translation has been interpreted as a committed activity, in which (female) translators can weave feminist intertexts through the use of translation itself, while leaving traces of a linguistic, cultural and anthropolog-

ical mediation capable of respecting gender differences (cf. Sardin 2009; Von Flotow and Farahzad 2016; Castro and Ergün 2017). We should not limit ourselves to the analysis of translated texts considered as finished texts but examine also the paratexts that accompany the translations (introductions, translation notes or notes within the translation). These are often claimed by female translators as acts of speaking that bring out the dialogical and unfinished nature of the translation process: 'en investissant au féminin ces lieux-frontières, la traductrice rend compte des multiples voix qui tissent un texte traduit: celles de l'auteure et de ses sources, celles de la traduction et de ses sources. De plus, parce qu'elles établissent une filiation entre écrivantes et ré-écrivantes, les notes de la traductrice entrent dans la composition de l'intertexte féministe' (De Lotbinière-Harwood 1991: 46).[1] Translation, therefore, is a political tool, a very subjective endeavour where the translator marks with her/his convictions and interpretations the recreative writing process. The recent attention paid by translation studies to how translators have appropriated paratextual spaces and made them a place of freedom and assertion of the word has also raised an interesting debate: on the one hand, on the concept of appropriation and, on the other, whether or not there is a limit that separates the rewriting and the legitimate creative character of the translation from the assertion of the subjectivity of the writer of the source text.[2]

Two fundamental aspects that characterise feminist translation theory and that are reflected in translation practice are on the one hand the appropriation and manipulation of the text, and on the other the textual and paratextual visibility claimed by the feminist translator. In both cases some fundamental concepts such as identity, authorship and authority are called into question. Sherry Simon (1996) elaborates a concept of fidelity not towards the author nor the reader but towards the project of writing and therefore of translation. In this new view of fidelity, text manipulation becomes creation and is positively reassessed:[3] 'il n'y a pas de corps plus actif, plus agissant, dans la pratique langagière, qu'un corps traduisant. A la fois corps lisant, corps écoutant et corps ré-écrivant, il circule sans arrêt dans les mots du texte à traduire, il parcourt les dictionnaires et l'intertexte, fouille son propre imaginaire, interroge l'auteure, se penche vers les lectrices . . . En mouvement perpétuel, le corps traduisant performe le passage entre le sens de départ à décoder et le sens d'arrivée à encoder, toujours en tenant compte du rapport d'adresse, de la relation à l'autre – comme sur une scene' (De Lotbinière-Harwood 1991).[4]

Translation studies and feminist thinking have in common the perceived need and the desire to affirm and transform language as a place where difference is expressed and represented. Language and translation are thus commonly conceived as tools of social construction that can subvert or reinforce certain views and stereotypes. Therefore, as such, translation has also acquired a central role in the dissemination of feminism.

Many cases today can be discussed in their global circulation in connection with their translations, trans-media-formations, transformations and adaptations, offering ways to rethink the ways in which these transformations and circulations have affected and still affect critical thinking and the political arenas in which these narratives are produced and disseminated. These 'multi-layered products' re-propose one crucial question: What is culture today and what is its significance in the global, digitalised world? And above all, what is its impact on society, the political arena and in the life of (all) people?

Science Fiction as Transmediality

The case study we have decided to analyse, *The Handmaid's Tale* (from the novel by Margaret Atwood published in 1985), investigates how the media revolution in its diverse

forms and applications will affect gender equality and equity but also how the very notion of gender is re-discussed and transmitted. Within this perspective, the very notions of identity and subjectivity, politics of the body, memory and solidarity as political tools, are open to further epistemological investigations, starting from the condition of precarity and vulnerability shared in the common state of trauma or living condition as exemplified in critical dystopia. This study also involves the ways in which Digital Humanities can promote knowledge within a gender and women's perspective, with special attention to languages and discourses on women and gender themselves. A further step concerns the analysis of how the digital revolution and the visual turn (in all its diverse aspects) is affecting not only the notions of gender and favour (or disadvantage) diversity and inclusion, but also the notions of freedom, justice and solidarity. Issues related to women, gender, ethnicity and class will interrogate the new humanities and transmedia studies as possible spaces of empowerment or/and exclusion, empowerment or appropriation and homologation.

The case study chosen implies a premise concerning both the status of science fiction (with specific reference to women authors) and a discussion on utopian and dystopian science fiction as genres especially capable of challenging and rearticulating the socio-cultural-political imaginary, both in the popular culture and in the academia, while, hopefully, asking for a drastic critique of the symbolic order. Science fiction, in itself a structural challenge to 'realism', has shaped itself as the representation of multimedia devices already within literary texts. We can talk of science fiction as a narrative technique already including complex forms of 'multimedia adaptations'. Science fiction has configured the interaction between different media as a significant production that, from its very beginning, interacts with policies and counter policies, with social and cultural contexts, producing different stories that, in turn, induce different emotive and cultural responses. By offering multiple interpretative (im)possibilities of the real transcending the necessity of mimetic transparency, science fiction is an exploration of the possible laterals of experience. Consumers and producers of science fiction are aware of the discrepancy between the virtual scene and the real world, and such awareness is an important part of the experience, because it unveils the real as a construct, and reveals its ideological, political, social and cultural assumptions, searching for a cultural ecology of the present, aiming for concrete, future actions. In their transformation of the original text, adaptation and remediation also transform the 'original' into its future receptions. Remediation in science fiction could also be the attempt of repairing what is irreparable in reality in order to inspire concrete action in the present. In science fiction, the accent placed on the body as a space for remediation and experimentation shows, yet again, to what extent cultural processes are always joined to the media informing them: that is how technological media, to quote Bolter and Grusin (1999), acquire their cultural meaning in their very interaction, in their paying homage to or challenging previous media such as painting, photography, film, television. Literature, in this process involving new media, is still today a crucial space for re-signification, elaboration and (re)mediation. In this direction, adaptation, in this case from novel to film, TV series, performances and social appropriations, becomes, to quote Linda Hutcheon (2006, 2013), remediation, translation and inter-semiotic transposition between different systems. Although Bolter and Grusin's work refers to remediation as the main feature of the new digital media, their analysis is applicable to *The Handmaid's Tale* (the novel by Atwood and its many visual productions) because here it is exactly a case of repurposing: 'to take a "property" from one medium and reuse it in another' (Bolter and Grusin 1999: 45–50), showing that science fiction is in itself a reusing, repurposing, bor-

rowing and refashioning of media. As far as our case study is concerned, we can also infer that the ways in which literary science fiction has been translated, adapted and remediated globally, shows transmediality as its main feature *today*. Science fiction thematises the inseparability of mediality and reality, thus re-signifying reality through those very media. Science fiction is textual and political re-form: in its global re-adaptation, remediation, reuses and appropriations it challenges and unveils the real: 'all mediation remediates the real' (Bolter and Grusin 1999: 59; see Monticelli 2019).

Always characterised by a description of an imaginary world and a critique of the present, utopian and dystopian science fiction (sf) is a particularly timely genre that speaks to the concerns of our times. In the first half of the twentieth century, dystopian narratives of worse places than the ones in which we live have flourished. Works such as Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1924), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) came to represent the classical form of dystopia. To a greater or lesser extent, the dystopian imagination has served as a warning that certain socio-political tendencies could, if continued, turn our world into the terrible and dramatic societies portrayed by these writers.

Against this dystopian trend, Tom Moylan saw in the emerging oppositional culture of the late 1960s and early 1970s the basis for a revival of utopian writing. 'Utopian writing in the 1970s was saved by its own destruction and transformation into the "critical utopia"', where by 'critical' he means – in the Enlightenment sense of *critique* – the expressions of oppositional thought with regard to the genre and the historical situation and – in the nuclear sense – the 'critical mass required to make the necessary explosive reaction' (Moylan 2014: 10). This revival was actually a transformation which had to pass through the destruction of utopian writing as it was known until then in order to preserve it. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, this utopian trend came to an end. With the growing strengthening of neoliberal economics and politics, the intensification of fundamentalism, right-wing politics, and of commodification, sf writers recovered and reformulated the dystopian genre.

The key text of this dystopian turn was Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), which, together with novels by sf writers such as Octavia E. Butler, Kim Stanley Robinson, Marge Piercy and Ursula K. Le Guin, renovated dystopia as a critical narrative form that worked against the grain of the grim economic, political and cultural climate (cf. Baccolini and Moylan 2003). The kind of dystopian writing, critical and ambiguous, mostly produced by feminist sf writers, has become an expression of a new site of struggle and resistance. The new genre that emerged negated the notions of utopia and dystopia as mutually exclusive terms to describe a future alternate society. Thus, sf novels by some women writers contain instead both elements at once. While describing a mostly dystopian, future society they also portray surviving and imperfect utopian enclaves within the larger dystopian world. But most of all, in these feminist sf works, the utopian impulse is maintained at the level of form. Traditionally a bleak, depressing genre with no space for hope within the story, utopian hope is maintained in dystopia only *outside* the story: it is only when we consider dystopia as a warning that we as readers can hope to escape such a pessimistic future. This option is not granted to the protagonists of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* or Huxley's *Brave New World*. Winston Smith, Julia, John the Savage and Lenina are all crushed by the totalitarian society; there is no learning, no escape for them. Conversely, novels such as Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* allow readers *and* protagonists to hope by resisting closure: the ambiguous, open endings of these novels maintain the utopian impulse *within* the work. In fact, by rejecting the traditional subjugation of the

individual at the end of the novel, the critical dystopia opens a space of contestation and opposition for those groups (women and other 'eccentric' subjects whose subject position is not contemplated by hegemonic discourse) for whom subjectivity has yet to be attained.

Another factor that makes these novels sites of resistance and oppositional texts is their blending of different genre conventions. The attack, in recent years, against universalist assumptions, fixity and singularity, and pure, neutral and objective knowledge in favour of the recognition of differences, multiplicity and complexity, partial and situated knowledges, as well as hybridity and fluidity has contributed, among other things, to the deconstruction of genre purity. Besides open-ended dystopias, Atwood and other writers create sf novels that borrow specific conventions from other genres. In particular, Atwood employs the conventions of the diary, the epistolary novel and the testimony to narrate the life of her protagonist. It is the very notion of an *impure* sf genre, with permeable borders which allow contamination from other genres, that represents resistance to hegemonic ideology and renovates the resisting nature of sf and makes the new sf genre also *multi*-oppositional (see Baccolini 2000a).

The Handmaid's Tale as a Transmedial Artefact

Taking into consideration the above-mentioned critical direction, *The Handmaid's Tale* (the novel, its translations, films, TV series, graphic novel, performances, social movements, popular and political appropriations) can be studied as interdependent – yet controversial – imaginative counter-discourses: a unitary system, albeit a heterogeneous one, and developed through different forms and media. However, what is also interesting and at the same time questionable and discussed (see the debate started by Jenkins's perspective, 2006 and 2011) is the belief that the creation of networked communities is a viaticum for the creation of new forms of cultural and political aggregation and participation, for new forms of citizenship education in the global age. At the same time, the narrative is the object of a fidelity sought by the producers, while the appropriation by the users makes it the object of discussion, growth of awareness and knowledge through the sharing of opinions and points of view within a community that discusses, analyses, interprets, recreates. This product, according to some, can be accused of acting on our customs (ways of dressing, speaking, establishing interpersonal relationships), without intervening on our opinions and without being able to change our point of view on things. Conversely, the critical, educational, relational and civic potential would be, according to others, stimulated and enhanced by the discussion of communities.

The novel takes place in a not-so-distant future, at the end of the twentieth century (the novel was published in 1985), in what was once the United States and is now called the Republic of Gilead. After a paramilitary coup by right-wing Christian fundamentalists as a reaction to social unrest, toxic waste, nuclear accidents, the AIDS epidemic, abortion and birth-rate decline, the new regime has created a repressive theocracy where reproduction is compulsory. The result is a tragic and grotesque society which takes the Book of Genesis at its word, with terrible consequences for everybody – and women, in particular. The story is told from Offred's perspective, one of the unfortunate Handmaids who, under the new regime, is exploited as a surrogate mother. The new patriarchal and misogynist society is rigidly structured: women, with the exception of the most dangerous and subversive, have to 'choose' among the limited options they are given – certain death in the Colonies or the role the regime has assigned them according to their age, class and fertility. Women find themselves relegated to one of seven categories: they are

either 'Wives' of the Commanders, those in charge; 'Marthas', the housekeepers who are too old for reproduction; 'Handmaids', women who are divorced and are still fertile; 'Econowives', the lower-class version of the three roles; 'Aunts', who indoctrinate women at the Re-education Centres; all the women who are not willing to cooperate with the system are considered 'Unwomen' and are sent to clean toxic dumps and radiation spills in the Colonies; finally, there are unlabelled women, hidden from public knowledge, who live in a brothel for Commanders and visiting businessmen. Similarly, men are divided into 'Commanders'; 'Eyes', who are spies; 'Angels', or soldiers; and 'Guardians', or menials. To each household, made up of an officially barren Wife and a Commander (who is likely to be equally sterile, but officially only women can be fruitful or barren), is given a Handmaid. The days and lives of Gilead's citizens are governed by a series of grotesque rituals: 'Birth Days', when all Wives and Handmaids participate in one of the Handmaids' delivery; 'Ceremonies', when a Commander has sex, for reproduction, with a Handmaid in the presence of his Wife; Women's and Men's 'Prayvaganzas', for group weddings and military victories, respectively; 'Salvagings', that is the public execution of traitors; and 'Particicution', when Handmaids take part in the execution of a traitor. Some of these rituals have been recently employed, subverted and reversed in women's public manifestations against current repressive policies.

Offred's narrative is fragmentary and tells of her life and of those who have been important in her life: her feminist mother; Moira, her lesbian friend; her companion Luke; her lost daughter; but also her Commander, his Wife, Serena Joy, and his driver, Nick; other Handmaids, such as the rebellious Ofglen or the emotional Janine. By narrating her present and past life and others' life-stories she offers a description of the life and culture of Gilead. The story's ending is ambiguously open: it remains unclear whether the heroine survives and escapes to Canada or whether she is captured and sentenced to death. The novel ends with the 'Historical Notes', a partial reproduction of the proceedings of a conference on Gilead.

At once a dystopia and a work of speculative fiction, *The Handmaid's Tale* is a powerful feminist critique of state definitions of womanhood. In the novel Atwood demonstrates that passivity and silence, women's 'natural' state in most classic dystopias, are not innate qualities, but they are forced upon the women of Gilead. Through Offred's perspective, which continuously juxtaposes flashbacks with her present state in Gilead, Atwood joins the political and social elements to the personal and private anguish of the protagonist. Like most dystopias, also Atwood's theocratic regime depends on ignorance and repression: women are indoctrinated at Re-education Centres and the new society is rigidly hierarchical. Women and men are assigned new roles according to a strict classification based on gender, age, class, race, sexual as well as religious and political orientation. The theocracy depicted in the novel is an oppressive regime in which women are considered the state's and men's property; they cannot work nor have possessions; reproduction is compulsory; language – reading, writing or speaking – is forbidden, with the exception of empty and trite religious phrases. Women are completely disempowered: reduced to their biological function, they possess no proper name, no identity besides that defined by the state, no language, no freedom. Women's new names illustrate their new condition: they are forced to take a patronymic composed of the possessive preposition 'of' and the first names of the Commanders who own them. Ironic distance allows the protagonist to describe herself as a 'container' and 'a two-legged womb'. But, elsewhere and more poignantly, her self-descriptions emphasise the loss of identity: she is a 'missing person' and a 'refugee from the past' (Baccolini 2000a).

The state's notion of femininity is enforced in Re-education Centres by the Aunts, who teach the Handmaids to be perfect breeders. These women embody a 'reversal' of feminism whose idea of freedom is actually freedom from choice, power and knowledge. Retreat and disengagement from any political involvement is the state's response (through Aunt Lydia) to the previous unrest. Women's freedom is fundamentally their invisibility and silence. Conversely, Offred's voice tries to enact resistance and self-definition while performing her role. This self-construction is undertaken at night, when she is alone, through memory, imagination and the reappropriation of language: at night she can express her voice, her story and her thoughts; her night-time helps her survive the daytime when she can hardly speak. The novel articulates, in fact, different strategies and degrees of resistance. In Gilead, where communication among women is not allowed, Handmaids exchange information through gossip, which becomes a first type of opposition – a secretive and forbidden alternative discourse to that enforced upon them in their public life. Gossip is, firstly, an underground network of information acquisition and dissemination about political resistance and, secondly, a social contact that provides an emotional support to women.

Characters offer different models of opposition: in the totalitarian regime, mimicry has become a way of life and all those who are unable or unwilling to play their roles are considered dangerous traitors and are sentenced to death. Women like Offred who accept their role as a role and remain ironically distanced while performing it, can instead survive in the hostile and misogynist society. Offred's feminist mother, Moira, and Ofglen represent different models of active resistance both in the pre-Gilead and Gilead society. The mother and Moira are rebellious, impertinent women who refuse to collaborate with the system; neither, however, is very successful. Offred's mother presumably ends up in the Colonies, while Moira becomes one of the prostitutes in the secret brothel. Ofglen joins the secret underground rebellion while playing her role as Handmaid, but she also disappears when discovered. Unlike them, Offred is not heroic: she lacks courage, she tends to compromise, she contradicts herself and is selfishly afraid. However, Offred's space at night, her reflections on her past and on her lack of future prospects constitute a site of resistance and struggle against the obliteration of individuality the regime enforces. Offred's journey, through memory, into the past is a means of survival and of self-creation. It is a subversive act as she reappropriates the word denied to women; her narrative allows her to be the speaking subject of stories where she 'has control over the ending'; it becomes a means of survival which allows her to deconstruct the patriarchal regime and reconstruct her fragmented self, thus creating alternatives for herself and for the protagonists of her stories. Memory, imagination and language provide Offred with a utopian impulse and a source of empowerment and freedom. By narrating the past to herself, but also by creating and imagining different versions of it, Offred breaks the hold of the static, unitary past enforced upon her by the totalitarian regime. Her storytelling provides escape, resistance and awareness. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why her storytelling has been appropriated to signify and to represent women's contemporary narrations of their oppression and resistance. Although she is painfully aware that any reconstruction of the past is a fiction, she is also aware of the importance of language and of her storytelling. Offred becomes a twentieth-century Scheherazade who tells a tale where memory and utopian imagination mix in order to survive, but also to critique and destabilise the regime. The narrative structure of Atwood's novel plays an important part in her critical project. The juxtaposition of Offred's narrative with the 'Historical Notes' problematises the Gileadean notion that there is a truth, a single version of reality. If, on the one hand, the epilogue provides

a sense of relief through its account of the end of Gilead and the Handmaid's survival, it also warns the reader against rejoicing in an easily consolatory notion of utopia as the new state's name, Nunavit/None of it, would suggest.[5] Atwood's complex and compelling dystopia encourages readers to read critically and value Offred's personal history, and to see in her personal and private anguish the product of social, political and economic forces (Baccolini 2000b).

The Handmaid's Tale and its Translations

The analysis of the French (1987) and Italian (1988) translations of Margaret Atwood's novel adopts a non-prescriptive but descriptive approach based in particular on some socio-cultural and gender aspects that influence the translation process and especially its reception. At the same time, it allows us to advance some hypotheses on the publishing policies and the contexts of reception that influence the translations. Both translations were published almost at the same time by publishing houses which, in the publishing field (cf. Bourdieu 1991), are among the generalist presses aimed at the general public without a particularly marked cultural manifesto. Mondadori chose for the Italian edition the translator and poet Camillo Pennati (1931–2016) while Les Éditions' Robert Laffont commissioned Sylviane Rué to transpose the novel into French, indicating on the title page of the text that hers is a translation from the Canadian English variant. This last element denotes a greater sensitivity, grounded also on historical reasons and on the colonial past, compared to the diatopic linguistic variants. It also gives the translator the ability to recognise and render in his/her own language differences that are sometimes minimal but that can in some way contribute to make the translation unique.

The two publishing houses released Atwood's novel two and three years after its publication in the original language, boldly investing in a work and an author who was not yet fully recognised at the time.[6] The publishing context and the literary polysystem of the time both in France and in Italy make it possible to explain many of the translation choices made that seem today, in a completely justified way, a little outdated and fully traceable to the socio-cultural era in which they were made, confirming the assumption that the translation is above all an historical and historicisable operation that is strongly conditioned by the context of the reception.[7]

As already mentioned, Atwood's language is strongly characterised by creativity and inventiveness as well as by a metalinguistic reflection on words accompanied by irony. Linguistic subversion stands for a metonymy of the will to subvert the world and an expression of the desire to break down linguistic phallocentrism without forgetting the alternation between playful, sarcastic, ironic and dramatic tone. Naturally, these traits make the operation of translation particularly complex, as the following example shows:

I sit in the chair and think about the word *chair*. It can also mean the leader of a meeting. It can also mean a mode of execution. It is the first syllable in *charity*. It is the French word for flesh. None of these facts has any connection with the others. These are	Je m'assieds sur la chaise et pense au mot *Chaise*. *Chaire*. On dit "le professeur est en chaire". La chaise, c'est aussi un moyen d'exécution capitale. En français, on peut confondre chaire et chair. Et les premières lettres sont celles de charité. Aucun de	Mi siedo sulla sedia. Sedia, *chair*. *Chair* serve anche a indicare chi presiede una riunione. *Chair* è anche un modo per eseguire la pena capitale. È la prima sillaba della parola *charity*. *Chair* in francese vuol dire carne. Nessuna di queste parole ha un nesso con

the kinds of litanies I use, to compose myself. (110)	ces faits n'a de rapport avec les autres. Voilà le genre de litanies dont je me sers, pour me rasseoir l'esprit. (pos. 1791)	le altre, sono le litanie che recito da sola. (146)

The creative trait present in the two translations is not accompanied, in the Italian edition, by the resistance trait that the appropriation of one language instead of another is acquired by the narrator also in relation to the coercive and censorious context of the totalitarian regime. In other words, in the Italian edition, the aspect of (self-)creation that the word in its infinite meanings and associations allows is undervalued. In the French version the reflective form 'me rasseoir l'esprit', which translates as the English 'to compose myself', reinforcing it with the lexical choice 'esprit' – a polysemantic term imbued with connotations given to the term by French philosophical and cultural history – emphasises the theme of resistance and of self-determination associated with language. The Italian translation, with the choice of the verb 'recito' accompanied by 'da sola' insists instead on rituality, on repetition, thus removing from the passage the oppositional force present in the source text.

Atwood's writing is particularly rich and capable of creating by itself a sort of complicity pact between the multiple narrative voices and the presence of several receptive instances that reflect the desire for a broad readership. The dialogical tone at times reproduces what seems to be an oral performance that makes the familiar and slang register the dominant feature:

The other woman obligingly moves over, and Moira and I sit down. The first thing we do is take off our shoes. "What the hell are you doing here?" Moira says then. "Not that it isn't great to see you. But it's not so great for you. What'd you do wrong? Laugh at his dick?" I look up at the ceiling. "Is it bugged?" I say. I wipe around my eyes, gingerly, with my fingertips. Black come off. "Probably," says Moira. "You want a cig?" "I'd love one," I say. "Here," she says to the woman next to her. "Lend me one, will you?" (243)	L'autre femme se pousse complaisamment et Moira et moi nous asseyons. La première chose que nous faisons est ôter nos chaussures. "Que diable fais-tu ici? demande alors Moira. Pas que ce ne soit pas formidable de te voir. Mais ce n'est pas tellement formidable pour toi. Qu'est-ce que tu as fait de mal? Tu as ri de son zizi?" Je lève les yeux au plafond. "Est-ce qu'il y a des micros? Je m'essuie le tour des yeux avec précaution, du bout des doigts. Du noir déteint. "Probablement, dit Moira. Tu veux une clope?" "J'adorerais." "Hé, dit-elle à sa voisine. Prête-m'en une, tu veux?" (pos. 4021–2)	L'altra donna si sposta, rispettosamente, e io e Moira ci mettiamo a sedere. Prima di tutto ci togliamo le scarpe. "Che diavolo fai qui?" dice Moira. "Non che non sia felice di vederti, ma per te non è una bella cosa. Che hai fatto mai di male? Hai riso del suo pisello?" Alzo gli occhi al soffitto. "Ci sono delle microspie?" chiedo. Mi passo le dita attorno agli occhi, con cautela, e mi si sporcano tutte di nero. "È probabile" risponde Moira. "Vuoi una sigaretta?" "Oh sì, la gradirei moltissimo." "Ehi" dice Moira alla donna che le sta seduta accanto, "me ne impresti una?" (317)

Although both translations move away from the orality of the source text, the departure from the standard language is more pronounced in French than in Italian. The French translator chooses words and expressions from argot and in the very construction of the sentences she prefers a non-standard order of the words, while the Italian translator follows a high lexical register which flattens this passage and makes it more aged. The fact that a translation ages and poses the question of a possible retranslation is, however, inherent in the historical nature of the translated text, a fact that critical translation studies have often overlooked.

The power relations between women and men in the Republic of Gilead are played out on and through language: the forbidden Scrabble matches as well as the conversations between Offred and the Commander are metonymic of the opposition between the two genders for the appropriation and mastery of language itself. Linguistic creation and the metalinguistic reflection on it thus become forms of resistance, of struggle against violence for the conquest of freedom. Hence the importance of finding the right word (how not to think in this case about the analogy with the act of translating and the complexity that this entails) and the power attributed to the act of naming. In responding to the tension towards the right word typical of the masculine/feminine linguistic antagonism, the translation would be called upon to multiply itself, rising to the square in a continuous forward flight that at the same time leads the narrative to deepen following a spiral movement:

We play two games. *Larynx*, I spell. *Valance*. *Quince*. *Zygote*. I hold the glossy counters with their smooth edges, finger the letters. The feeling is voluptuous. This is freedom, an eyeblink of it. *Limp*, I spell. *Gorge*. What a luxury. (139)	Nous faisons deux parties. J'épelle, *larynx*, *valence*, *coing*, *zygote*. Je manipule les jetons luisants, aux bords lisses, je tripote les lettres. Cette sensation est voluptueuse. C'est la liberté, un aperçu de liberté. J'épelle *Flasque*, *Gorge*. Quel luxe! (pos. 2327–8)	Giochiamo due partite. Compongo le prime parole. *Laringe*. *Drappeggio*. *Cotogna*. *Zigote*. Tengo in mano le lucide tessere dai bordi lisci, palpo le lettere. La sensazione è voluttuosa. Questa è la libertà, uno sprazzo di libertà. *Floscio*, sillabo. *Gola*. Che lusso. (185)
[. . .]	[. . .]	[. . .]
I print the phrase carefully, copying it down from inside my head, from inside my closet. *Nolite te bastardes carborundorum*. Here, in this context, it's neither prayer nor command, but a sad graffiti, scrawled once, abandoned. The pen between my fingers is sensuous, alive almost, I can feel its power, the power of the words it contains. Pen Is Envy, Aunt Lydia would say, quoting another Center motto, warning us away from such objects. And they were right, it is envy. Just holding it is envy. I envy the Commander his pen. It's one more thing I would like to steal. (186)	J'inscris la phrase soigneusement, en la recopiant à partir de l'intérieur de ma tête, du fond de mon placard. *Nolite te salopardes exterminorum*. Ici, dans ce contexte, ce n'est plus une prière, ni un ordre, mais un triste graffiti, jadis griffonné, puis abandonné. Le stylo entre mes doigts est sensuel, presque vivant. Je sens son pouvoir, le pouvoir des mots qu'il contient. Stylo = Pénis = Envie (du), disait Tante Lydia, citant un autre slogan du Centre, qui nous mettait en garde contre de tels objets. Et c'était vrai, c'est bien de l'envie. Le seul fait de	Scrivo con attenzione la frase in stampatello, così come mi è rimasta impressa nella testa, da quando l'ho letta, nell'armadio. *Nolite te bastardes carborundorum*. Qui, in questo contesto, non è né preghiera, né comando, ma un triste graffito, scarabocchiato tempo addietro, abbandonato. La penna tra le mie dita si anima, diventa quasi viva, ne sento la forza, sento la forza delle parole che contiene. La penna è invidia, diceva Zia Lydia, citando il motto di un altro Centro, per ammonirci a stare lontane da simili oggetti. E aveva ragione, è invidia. Il solo tenerla in mano è invidia. Invidio al Comandante la sua

[. . .]
"There," he says, pointing, and in the margin I see it, written in the same ink as the hair on the Venus. *Nolite te bastardes carborundorum*.
"It's sort of hard to explain why it's funny unless you know Latin," he says. "We used to write all kinds of things like that. I don't know where we got them, from older boys perhaps." Forgetful of me and of himself, he's turning the pages. "Look at this," he says. The picture is called *The Sabine Women*, and in the margin is scrawled: pit, *pimp pis pimus pistis pants*.
"There was another one," he says. "C*im, cis, cit* . . ." He stops, returning to the present, embarrassed. (187)

le tenir est de l'envie. J'envie son stylo au Commandant. C'est encore une des choses que je voudrais voler. (pos. 3090–1)
[. . .]
"Voilà", dit-il en me désignant un endroit, et dans la marge je vois, tracé de la même encre que celle qui a dessiné les poils de la Vénus: *Nolite te salopardes exterminorum*.
"C'est un peu difficile d'expliquer ce que cela a de drôle si vous ne savez pas le latin, dit-il. Nous avions l'habitude d'écrire toutes sortes de phrases comme celle-là. Je ne sais pas d'où nous les tenions, des élèves plus âgés, probablement." Oublieux de moi et de lui-même, il s'est mis à tourner les pages. "Regardez ceci", dit-il. L'illustration a pour titre "Les Sabines", et dans la marge on a griffonné: *pim pis pit, pimus pistis pants*. "Il y en avait un autre: *cim cis cit* . . ." Il s'interrompt, revient au présent, honteux. (pos. 3105–6)

penna. È un'altra cosa in più che mi piacerebbe rubare. (245)
[. . .]
"Ecco" ripete il Comandante. In margine vedo la scritta, con la stessa penna che è servita a truccare la Venere, *Nolite te bastardes carborundorum*.
"È un po' difficile spiegare che cosa c'è di divertente, a meno che non si sappia il latino" dice il Comandante. "Noi scrivevamo sempre questo genere di cose. Non so dove le sentivamo, da ragazzi più grandi di noi, forse". Ha dimenticato me e se stesso, sfoglia le pagine. "Guarda questa" dice. L'illustrazione si intitola *Le donne sabine*, e sul bordo c'è scarabocchiato: *pim pis pit, pimus pistis pants*.* "Ce n'era un'altra" dice. C*im, cis cit* . . .* S'interrompe, imbarazzato.
* Mutande
* La coniugazione presumibilmente finirebbe, come l'altra, con un "cunts"; "cunt" sta per organo sessuale femminile. (246–7)

In order to maintain the fidelity to language as a source of creation of reality, translation must adopt different translation strategies in different languages so that the audience can grasp the deep meaning of the text. Both translators try to render the sense of inventiveness and the strong symbolic value that is associated with linguistic research. Rué goes so far as to 'manipulate' the Latin inscription, cleverly modifying 'bastardes' into 'salopardes', an argotic term particularly marked in French. In the passages where Latin reveals a play on words with English and sexual *double entendre*, Rué and Pennati adopt very different strategies. The French translator remains in the textual space leaving to the reader the task of autonomously discovering and interpreting the double meaning, following also the rhythm of the passage that, as already said, follows a spiral deepening movement. The Italian translator instead places in the peritestual space of the footnote the explanation of the puns, of which the first is obvious, while the second is not revealed in an open way in the original text. This is what Antoine Berman has defined as the deforming tendency of 'clarification', which deprives the reader of the pleasure of inferring the meaning of a sentence played on several linguistic levels (Berman 1999: 54–5).[8]

In its metanarrativity, *The Handmaid's Tale* addresses directly an ideal audience to whom the narrator expresses the meaning of its narration and the importance of memory and storytelling as forms of resistance. The very different translations in French and Italian testify to the important task of translation to engage the reader's commitment:

I would like to believe this is a story I'm telling. I need to believe it. I must believe it. Those who can believe that such stories are only stories have a better chance.
If it's a story I'm telling, then I have control over the ending. Then there will be an ending, to the story, and real life will come after it. I can pick up where I left off. *It isn't a story I'm telling.*
It's also a story I'm telling, in my head, as I go along.
Tell, rather than write, because I have nothing to write with and writing is in any case forbidden. But if it's a story, even in my head, I must be telling it to someone. You don't tell a story only to yourself. There's always someone else.
Even where there is no one.
A story is like a letter. *Dear you*, I'll say. Just *you*, without a name. Attaching a name attaches *you* to the world of fact. Which is riskier, more hazardous: who knows what the chances are out there, of survival, yours? I will say *you*, *you*, like an old love song. *You* can mean more than one. You can mean thousands.
I'm not in any immediate danger, I'll say to you.
I'll pretend you can hear me. But it's no good, because I know you can't. (39–40)
[. . .]
But I keep on going with this sad and hungry and sordid, this limping and mutilated

J'aimerais croire que ceci est une histoire que je raconte. J'ai besoin de le croire. Il faut que je le croie. Celles qui peuvent croire que pareilles histoires ne sont que des histoires ont de meilleures chances.
Si c'est une histoire que je raconte, je peux choisir son dénouement. Donc il y aura un dénouement, à cette histoire, et la vraie vie viendra après. Je pourrai reprendre là où je me suis arrêtée.
Ce n'est pas une histoire que je raconte.
C'est aussi une histoire que je raconte, dans ma tête, au fur et à mesure.
Raconter, plutôt qu'écrire, parce que je n'ai pas de quoi écrire et que de toute façon il est interdit d'écrire, mais si c'est une histoire, même dans ma tête, il faut que je la raconte à quelqu'un. On ne se raconte pas une histoire seulement à soi-même. Il y a toujours un autre.
Même quand il n'y a personne.
Une histoire est comme une lettre. Je dirai: *Cher Toi*.
Juste Toi, sans nom. Ajouter un nom rattache ce "toi" au monde réel, qui est plus hasardeux, plus périlleux: qui sait quelles sont les chances de survie, là-bas, pour toi?
Je dirai "Toi, toi", comme dans une vieille chanson d'amour. *Toi* peut représenter plus d'une personne. *Toi* peut signifier des milliers de gens.

Mi piacerebbe credere che sto raccontando una storia. Ho bisogno di crederci devo crederci. Coloro che possono crederlo hanno migliori possibilità.
Se è una storia che sto raccontando, posso scegliere il finale. Ci sarà un finale, alla storia, e poi seguirà la vita vera. Posso continuare da dove ho smesso.
Non è una storia che sto raccontando.
È anche una storia che ripeto nella mia testa.
Non la scrivo perché non ho nulla con cui scrivere e lo scrivere è comunque proibito. Ma se è una storia, anche solo nella mia testa, dovrò pur raccontarla a qualcuno. Non racconti una storia solo a te stesso. C'è sempre qualcun altro. Anche quando non c'è nessuno.
Una storia è come una lettera. *A voi*, dirò. Comincerà così, semplicemente, senza nomi.
Un nome crea un collegamento col mondo fattuale, che è più rischioso, più azzardato: chi sa quali sono, fuori, le possibilità di sopravvivenza? Le vostre? Dirò *a voi*, *a voi*, come una vecchia canzone, *voi* significa più d'uno. *Voi* può significare migliaia.
Non mi trovo in nessun pericolo immediato, dirò. Farò finta che voi mi possiate udire.
Ma non serve, perché so che non potete. (58–9)
[. . .]
Ma continuerò questa triste, arida, squallida storia, zoppicante e mutilata, perché voglio che

story, because after all I want you to hear it, as I will hear yours too if I ever get the chance, if I meet you or if you escape, in the future or in heaven or in prison or underground, some other place [. . .] By telling you anything at all I'm at least believing in you, I believe you're there, I believe you into being. Because I'm telling you this story I will your existence. I tell, therefore you are. (267–8)	Je te dirai: je ne cours aucun danger immédiat. Je ferai semblant que tu peux m'entendre. Mais cela ne sert à rien, car je sais que c'est impossible. (pos. 793–808) [. . .] Mais je continue à dévider cette histoire triste, affamée et sordide, cette histoire boiteuse et mutilée, parce que après tout je veux que vous l'entendiez, comme j'écouterai la vôtre si jamais j'en ai l'occasion, si je vous rencontre ou si vous vous sauvez, dans l'avenir ou au Paradis ou en prison ou dans la clandestinité, ailleurs [. . .] Du seul fait de vous raconter quelque chose, au moins je crois en vous, je crois que vous êtes là, ma croyance vous fait exister. Parce que je vous raconte cette histoire, je vous donne vie. Je raconte, donc vous êtes. (pos. 4348)	tu la senta, come sentirei la tua se mai ne avessi l'occasione, se ti incontrassi mentre fuggi nel futuro o in cielo o in prigione o sottoterra, ovunque. Raccontarti qualcosa significa credere in te, credere che esisti. Se ti sto raccontando questa storia è perché voglio che esista. Racconto, dunque tu esisti. (346)

The 'you' that Offred is addressing is translated in reversed ways in French and Italian. This, we believe, does not only testify to a diverse translation policy, but it can also refer to a different context of creation and reception: it is a call to action and to active participation. The English pronoun 'you' can be translated, in Italian and French, both with the second person singular and plural. In the first excerpt the second person singular is chosen in French and the second person plural in Italian, while in the second the choice is reversed by both translators. The reading of the two passages in Italian and French (especially if out loud) is proof of how different translation strategies can have significant repercussions also on the interpretation of the text. The English 'you', so effective in rendering in the source language a multiplicity of interlocutors, narrating voices, possible readers and witnesses of the subversive message of the text, requires a choice from the two translators: by varying their solutions in the second excerpt, both probably aimed at compensating for what they felt they had lost in the first passage, hoping to save both dimensions, that of a 'you' that is closer and more intimate to the narrating voice, and that of an expanded 'you', to be extended to all future readers of the novel. Translation always involves, and foremost of all, a mediation, a complex and accurate work of adjustment and proximity – by approximation – to the multiple dimensions of the text that is translated.

Both translations reveal their historical character, they are strongly influenced by the editorial and cultural contexts in which they were created and by the literary polysys-

tems within which they were placed. Margaret Atwood's text would today require a re-translation in both Italian and French. This in no way denies the value of these first translations, which have contributed to making Atwood and her writing popular in Italy and France. *The Testaments* has indeed been translated by two other translators, who have adapted their voices to Atwood's, sometimes making bold choices and breaking with the first translations. The fact that much has been written on Atwood, thus enriching the reception of Atwood's work in the two countries, would make the re-translation work even more aware of the multiple dimensions of the novel and its innovative force.

The contribution that gender studies have made to translation studies would most likely make those who were about to re-translate Atwood's novel more aware of the importance of the novel also in relation to women's history and its feminist message. Translation, in fact, is always related to the audience that receives it, thus demonstrating that translation is linked and recalls different and sometimes targeted reception contexts, as is the case with translations of feminist texts or those that express gender issues. The Italian and French literary polysystems are today undoubtedly better prepared to (re)accept Atwood's novel as a classic – therefore suited to be read and reread, always discovering new dimensions. The publishing context and the market remain to be evaluated: if Atwood's recognition and success make the novel's re-translation appealing for big publishing houses, it is possible that such cultural operation may also appeal to independent publishing houses, characterised by a literary manifesto more oriented to a type of writing that makes the subversion of clichés and stereotypes one of its strong points.

The Handmaid's Tale and its Adaptations and Appropriations

We are witnessing today an appropriation and a commodification of dystopia. Since the success of Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games* trilogy (2008–10) and its film adaptations, dystopian fiction has become trendy and mainstream. These co-optations and the proliferation of dystopian and post-apocalyptic TV series (cf., for example, the success of *Black Mirror* and many others) seem to have both a cathartic function and a possible reduction of the power of dystopia to challenge the present. Dystopia, as we will see, is being commercialised, trivialised and appropriated by some at the same time that others, women in particular, discover its radical subversive power. In the current dystopian climate, *The Handmaid's Tale* has undergone an exceptional rediscovery, and has enjoyed a second life especially thanks to the huge success of its TV adaptations. *The Handmaid's Tale* has in fact been adapted in different genres, including the film directed by Volker Schlöndorff which was distributed in 1990, with the screenplay by Harold Pinter; an opera adaptation in 2000, with a libretto by Paul Bentley and music by Poul Rouders; the ballet choreographed by Lila York in 2013; a theatrical adaptation directed by Brian Isaac Phillips in 2011; the graphic novel illustrated by Renee Nault in 2019, and especially the award-winning TV series already mentioned and aired on the network Hulu, which to date has released five seasons, from 2017 to 2022. The series was created by Bruce Miller, with different directors, and Atwood was a consulting producer and had a short cameo. What is certain is that the protagonist Offred – Elizabeth Moss in the TV series – has struck the collective imaginary and the Handmaids have become a significant part of it. Offred as a Handmaid has become the symbol of female oppression, but also of rebellion. It is possible to argue that the function of dystopia, that of inspiring concrete action by extending catharsis into practice, has worked at least in the case of the first season of the TV series, which is the focus of the present section, while the following ones have generated controversies.

The first season relaunched the success of the book, making the figures of the Handmaids iconic, an interesting phenomenon that has received much attention.

The Hulu production, a US joint venture since 2008 that involves Fox, Disney and NBC Universal Television Group, was born as Advertising-supported Video On Demand (AVOD), i.e., a reality with free access including advertising interruptions, and in time has become a hybrid between AVOD and Subscription Video On Demand (SVOD), a production that, for a monthly fee, reduced advertising and included more targeted commercials. In 2015 it inaugurated a form of subscription completely without advertisements. The online streaming services, with a broad offer and earlier programming with respect to non-pay televisions, transformed at first the means of fruition and then, with the production of original content, the creative and operational approaches. Hulu is mainly addressed to the American audience. To date, its products are not exported independently, as is the case for example of Netflix and Amazon Video. The international dimension of Hulu and of its products is mainly linked to certain figures connected to it, such as the novelist Stephen King, since Hulu prefers to go straight to the series, without going through the test of the pilot episode, especially when it comes to series created by high-level showrunners and authors, for which there is a lot of competition.

Some of the themes mentioned in the book have become central in the TV series and in other adaptations for their socio-political function. For example, racial and ethnic issues have been emphasised in the TV series, while they are barely mentioned in the novel: both Moira and Offred's companion, Luke, are black, and the transposition of the LGBTQ+ themes are linked to more characters, while, for instance, in the novel Moira's lesbianism is not central. In Gilead, challenges to heteronormativity make one a 'Gender Traitor', punishable with the death sentence, while lesbianism is tolerated in Jezabel's secret brothel. In the series, even more than Moira, Ofglen, Offred's Handmaid companion, embodies the LGBTQ+ demands (see, for example, https://wordpress.org/openverse/image/fcdb9ec8-f9cf-471d-adde-631c54c3b6cd).

These transpositions and re-adaptations already signal that the appropriation had a political and cultural approach. On the other hand, the figure of the mother, symbol of second-wave feminism, is almost completely erased, thus diminishing the importance of the genealogical transmission of feminisms. In the seventh episode, the character of the intermediary (a new figure), who helps the protagonist's and her family's attempted escape, says that he is grateful to Offred's mother for having performed a clandestine vasectomy on him in the past. Therefore, the activist role of the feminist mother within the novel is not maintained in the TV series. The current adaptations of the novel, even if yielding some rebellious attitudes to Offred and to some Handmaids, nevertheless do not give importance to the transgenerational feminist conquests as a force of resistance. However, also by virtue of this greater emphasis on resistance and rebellion, the TV series has had a huge impact on younger generations.

Receptions and Appropriations

The Handmaid's Tale as a global product has become the source of innumerable critical comments, appropriations, diverse scholarly and popular reactions. The figure of the Handmaid – especially her iconic red robe and white bonnet – has become a recurrent symbol for many social movements and political aggregations, or conversely it has been trivialised showing how such appropriations become dangerous when we let go of dystopia and commercialise hope. The timing is telling. The series was announced in April 2016.

Many of the events that would accompany it were yet to take place: by this date the two major candidates – Democratic and Republican – for the US presidential election had not yet been officially nominated. The nomination of Hillary Rodham Clinton and Donald J. Trump were at the centre of an election campaign that was anomalous in terms of tone and centrality of some issues, among them, the issue of women, especially in light of the sexist and misogynistic claims of the Republican candidate. Another significant element that contributes to the audience success of the series is the wider historical context that permeates the Hulu project, that is the post-9/11 era. If the disorientation following the attacks of 2001 was partly overcome, some of their effects are firmly incorporated in everyday life and in the collective imaginary: freedom seemed to have abdicated in favour of greater – supposedly – security and safety. In this context, dystopias become narrative and visual spaces where it is possible to work through the trauma and elaborate it.

As Atwood herself pointed out, the filming of the series began two months before Donald Trump's election and at that point both the writer and the production realised that the series would be perceived in a completely different way. And so it was, as the demonstrations against Trump in Washington and many other US cities, Europe and Asia just twenty-four hours after his inaugural speech demonstrate. The Washington march, for example,

> was an idea of Teresa Shook, a grandmother from Hawaii who was frustrated at Trump's sexism. She launched the idea of going down to Washington wearing pink berets. America started knitting and yesterday, in Washington, it wasn't just women wearing the symbolic cap. Men, children, Muslims with pink caps under the hijab, African Americans, Latinx, Asians. A gathering in the name of diversity with a common message: we won't be silenced for the next four years and we won't let Trump ignore us. An ocean of pink 'pussy hats' meant to reproach Trump for the use of that offensive word he used to talk about the liberties he takes with women. It was not conceived as a protest march, but as a way to affirm one's role in the US society. 'Women's rights are civil rights', read hundreds of signs waved by the crowd. (*La Repubblica* 2017, our translation; see, for example, https://wordpress.org/openverse/image/8d7dad11-695f-4e95-bdc4-8fc942a84863)

Millions of people showed up on 21 January 2017 during the 'Women's March' to show their dissent, making the demonstration the largest protest in the entire history of the US. It also spread to Australia, New Zealand and Italy, particularly in Milan. The event was transgenerational and saw the participation of very young women next to notable feminists such as Gloria Steinem, pop feminists such as Madonna (who was censored by US networks for her alleged verbal excesses), actresses Charlize Theron and Scarlett Johansson and the director Michael Moore. Among the signs, some explicitly mentioned the TV show and also the novel: 'Make Margaret Atwood fiction again' (the photograph was later tweeted by Margaret Atwood); 'The Handmaid's Tale wasn't meant to be a how-to manual'. And 'Thanks for standing, speaking & marching for our values @womensmarch', tweeted Hillary Clinton.

In June 2017, in Washington, but also in other American cities, women dressed as Handmaids participated in a demonstration against public health and abortion laws. On 6 July 2017, Razem, a Polish left-wing political party, organised a protest during Trump's visit to Poland. Protesters dressed as Handmaids as a symbol of women's rights being threatened in both countries. In June 2017, *Funny Or Die* released a parodical Trump/Moss mashup

(cf. Funny Or Die 2017a), *Trump's The Handmaid's Tale*, that confirmed the Handmaids' symbolism in a satirical mode. A second production, *They Finally Made a Handmaid's Tale for Men* confirmed its status as a cult series (cf. Funny Or Die 2017b). *The Handmaid's Tale* is part of those narratives that remain entwined in the news. Since then, thousands of 'Handmaids' came out of the screen and took to the streets in support of feminist initiatives such as the #MeToo movement (which made the news in October 2017 because of the Harvey Weinstein case), the Spanish #Cuentalo, the Irish #HomeToVote, the Italian events on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the promulgation of the abortion law.

Inspired by these movements, Ryan Murphy, while dedicating the seventh season of his *American Horror Story* (2011-in-progress; with particular reference to AHS: Cult, 2016) to the extremely controversial presidential campaign (there was talk of Election Stress Disorder among the population), has highlighted the strength of female rebellion, making his character, Bebe Babbitt, say: 'We are sitting on the biggest bomb the universe has ever seen [. . .] female rage. The patriarchy has dammed it up for millennia. And Donald J. Trump is the first world leader to start hammering away at that dam. With every tweet, every eye roll, every pussy grab, he is slowly releasing the fury' (TV Fanatic 2017; Gilbert 2017).

While in Argentina, in 2018, the referendum (supported by Atwood) for the liberalisation of abortion failed (Serhan 2018; see, for example, https://wordpress.org/openverse/image/46564266-1885-4011-b12f-6f78037112cb) and Poland is still trying to further tighten the law on abortion (which is already one of the strictest in Europe; Walker 2020), in 2018 in Brazil Jair Bolsonaro won the presidential elections, despite having shocked the world in 2014 for saying about a member of the Parliament that she was 'Too ugly to be raped [. . .] I wouldn't rape her because she doesn't deserve it' (*Il Messaggero* 2014, our translation). In May 2018, a number of Rohingya women, who had been raped the year before by the Burmese military, began to give birth to their babies (Savage 2018). In February 2018, Ahmet Altan, a journalist and writer in Recep T. Erdoğan's Turkey, was sentenced to life imprisonment (Seacombe 2019). In this scenario, everywhere Handmaids strengthen their symbolic image. The most aware audiences wear the Handmaids' red uniforms in order to support women's causes around the world.

Online responses join those of the performative audiences: this is how many *Handmaid's Tale*-themed memes are born, ironically commenting on the American scene. These are jokes that do not only convey critical political opinions, but also emphasise and amplify their messages, especially on social networks. Many and diverse are the situations portrayed: from the commentary on the presidential election results to the Christmas decorations in the White House (see, for example, Nick Jack Pappas's Tweet on 26 November 2018 'Bold choice going with decorations inspired by the Handmaid's Tale' @Pappiness), to the approval of the American Health Care Act; from Trump's supporters represented with the face of the Commander's wife, Serena, to the First Lady Melania, who as a 'trophy wife' is named Ofdonald, up to President Trump himself, at once portrayed as the Commander and a Handmaid himself with the new name OfPutin (see, for example, Mz Emma's Tweet on 14 July 2018 'Love the Brits. Tell it like it is. #OfPutin #TrumpProtest #TrumpVisitUK' @Hey_MzEmma). Such public and critical success – also proved by the many awards won by the Hulu TV series at the Primetime Emmy Awards in 2017 (even though the entire edition showed the difficult climate between the Trump presidency and the artistic world) – could not fail to attract other industries besides the entertainment business.

While the first season of the TV series has been generally praised, the second has been criticised for revelling in excessive violence, so much so that the show has been dubbed

as being 'torture porn' (cf. Sturges 2018, and Mahdawi 2019), giving rise to some controversies, on blogs and magazines, which can be summarised as follows: the Emmy winning Hulu series killed the ambiguity that makes the original novel a compelling and nuanced reading; in the second season misogyny and violence against women increased so much that many women stopped watching after a few episodes – feeling that it had abandoned the moral universe of the book and had lapsed into pornography and meaningless torture. *The New York Times* called the second season 'dutifully brutal, complete with ample torture, rapes, executions and murders', and complained that it 'gave in to every one of the show's most tedious instincts' (Lyons 2018). Atwood's dystopia seems to have multiplied itself and given voice to the fears regarding safety, climate change, technologies, migration and loss of civil rights, but also to the spectre of poverty, and the fears about the unequal distribution of wealth that sees the privileged few defending themselves against multitudes of poor people.

However, there are also more problematic appropriations and trivialisations, representative of today's climate of dystopia commodification. 'Rather than a wake-up call', sums up Margaret Lyons, *The Handmaid's Tale* as a product is

> part hair shirt, part commodification. We're gutted by the show's savagery, and then sold wine based on the show's characters – it took a fierce backlash for MGM, the producing studio, to realize Offred Pinot Noir was a bad idea, and abandon it – and T-shirts at Hot Topic that bear the 'nolite te bastardes carborundorum' motto. I saw dogs dressed up as handmaids for Halloween. This isn't a feminist rallying cry or a cathartic airing of grievances, it's just a fandom. It's also not the #resistance. It's the same repackaging and commercialization of women's ideas and women's suffering as everything else, just another story we've heard before. (Lyons 2018)

At the beginning of June 2019, Kylie Jenner, an American media personality, influencer and socialite of the Jenner-Kardashian business family, organised and hosted a *Handmaid's Tale*-themed party for one of her friends.[9] Guests were greeted with conventional Gilead sayings ('Praise be, Ladies. Welcome to Gilead') and were invited to wear the Handmaids' traditional red gowns and white bonnets, while sipping 'Praise be vodka' and 'Under his eyes tequila' cocktails (Mahdawi 2019).[10] The event was obviously shared on social media (see Kylie Jenner's Instagram profiles, @kyliesnapchat). Although it prompted a backlash, it went viral and should be considered successful in terms of the publicity it afforded Kylie Jenner (Wright 2019). Another instance of dystopia commodification has recently taken place at the presentation of Margaret Atwood's much expected sequel to *The Handmaid's Tale*, *The Testaments*. During an interview with Atwood at the Mantua Literature Festival on 5 September 2019, members of the attending public were given the white bonnets to wear (De Santis 2019; Baccolini 2020).

In a different and yet equally problematic way, the world of the fashion industry has appropriated, once again, Atwood's imaginary. Gilead's clothing and uniforms are the centre of attention. And it is clearly the fashion business that has exploited them like no others. In 2017, a young, independent New York label called Vaquera showed a collection sponsored by Hulu and inspired by its hit TV series. Although the designers claimed that the collection – which was not available for sale – was conceived to 'reflect themes of oppression and empowerment', they also stated that the collection played with the notions of being 'sexy', showing and concealing one's body, as if that were a choice in the world of Gilead (Safronova 2017). The collection, which is completely symbolic, has

however relaunched so-called modest fashion, which has appeared in numerous fashion magazines (cf. https://www.vaquera.nyc/pages/the-handmaids-tale; Baccolini 2020). In 2018, the lingerie company Lunya 'announced that the red shade of one of its "washable silk" sets would be dubbed "Offred" after the protagonist' of the novel and TV series.[11] And on Facebook and Instagram they advertised their product as follows: 'Praise be! Meet our limited-edition silk set. Join the resistance just in time for #handmaidstale season 2' (Wanshel 2018).

As with the now withdrawn Halloween 'Sexy Handmaid' costume,[12] these examples represent a form of appropriation, where something transgressive and radical is taken, tamed, co-opted, neutralised and commodified. Kylie Jenner's trivialisation of *The Handmaid's Tale* is pretty obvious, as she and her guests transformed the anguished cry about the violent subjugation of women of the novel and series into an out-of-context co-optation of dystopia's critical message. As Jennifer Wright wrote, 'once you start portraying dystopia as cute or sexy, you're opening the door to a world where repressing women's reproductive rights is *fine*; appealing, even [. . .] The notion of Kylie treating a dystopia as someplace she might casually visit, party in, and then emerge from unscathed is jarring' (2019). It is precisely Kylie Jenner's privilege that allowed her to transform the dystopia's warning about the potential outcomes of reproductive restrictions into a fun and glamorous experience. Although the Vaquera Collective's appropriation is slightly different, it is still problematic. Though it was welcomed by the show's costume designer as 'a way for people to bring attention to a symbol of oppression and to reclaim it as well, making it less potent' (Safronova 2017), their reinterpretation gave rise to a new trend called 'modest fashion' that was picked up by other designers (Gowans-Eglinton 2017). Unlike Jenner, Vaquera appropriated the rebelliousness of *The Handmaid's Tale* and still capitalised on it by making a name for themselves and commercialising with others the modest fashion (Baccolini 2020).

However, the use of the Handmaid's symbols continues with the same strength and power of resistance. The Handmaid's costume continues to be used in a number of protest demonstrations: in Poland, on 26 July 2020, for example, women took to the streets in protest against the government's decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention of the Council of Europe (against violence towards women and for the protection of victims of gender violence); in Italy, in Perugia, on 22 June 2020, for instance, women dressed as Handmaids protested against the local government's decision to impede women's requests for pharmacological abortion (cf. Pasolini 2020).

Handmaids continued to regularly 'welcome' the US President in the various destinations of his official visits and spur the protests of transversal feminist groups, such as Ni una menos. Far from being TV series heroines around which an affective community that identifies with an aesthetic-social ideal gathers, Offred and the Handmaids have formed a resilient and fighting affective community. Here, identification has been able to sustain political movements and struggles in support of the common vulnerabilities caused by oppression and reactionary forces, including those of totalitarian regimes or those disguised as false democracies. The success of *The Handmaid's Tale* phenomenon, including the commercial and 'radical-chic' fashion success and the influencers' appropriation, has not belittled its ethical value as a cultural creation that spans generations and national borders globally.

Conclusion

The taming of dystopia destroys the recognition of precarity and vulnerability, which are constituents of the genre, by reassuring its audience and by moving these features into security zones of middle- and high-class conformism and consumerism. We have commercial, mainstream dystopias with a tendency to close the stories with 'happy' endings, where hope is not maintained ambiguously but is substituted by a conformist happiness. But dystopias can and do more than this. As we have seen, the appropriations of feminist movements and social organisations have given voice and vital strength to the core issues of the novel and its transmedial adaptations. The feminist communities gathered around *The Handmaid's Tale* not only represent a fidelisation to the multimedial product, but they also testify to the force of critical dystopia to inspire concrete actions and forms of resistance. There are still dystopias that invite readers to mobilise against the present and the risks of its possible outcomes. In this perspective, precarity and vulnerability become a common human condition that foster solidarity to overcome oppression and trauma. *The Handmaid's Tale*'s reception shows that literature can be a tool to decolonise the imaginary and to develop critical thinking and solidarity. Dystopian science fiction helps to critically read and deconstruct the present and recognise oppression while refusing cultural and political conditioning. At the same time, critical dystopian science fiction envisages solidarity and interculturality as its ultimate goals and promotes radical changes of/in the socio-symbolic order. The impact of *The Handmaid's Tale* revalues the role of the new humanities in (post-)traumatic contexts. Global traumas in fact must be assessed within an intercultural frame, recognising that minority groups, women and marginalised people experience trauma differently, but also acknowledging the global consequences of contemporary traumas. The plethora of protests, movements and artistic products that stemmed from *The Handmaid's Tale* demonstrate how transmedia cultural practices are able to build artistic and social competencies for active citizenship. In the digital and global era, art affects culture and society in new modalities, intertwining different media in the construction of common narratives. Thinking in narrative ways is a powerful tool that is able to reach an enormous number of consumers, to create sites of activity for shared interaction, and to build new forms of sociality by sharing common values, with an ethical and political impact. Transmedia narrations are a means of negotiation in a transcultural and intertemporal perspective. Since culture is a dynamic, open and transformative phenomenon, in the global era the construction of a transnational imaginary produces narratives that generate debates by audiences on the future of humanity to overcome and cope with (post-)conflicts and inspire those same audiences into complicity towards concrete collective actions. The many translations of *The Handmaid's Tale* highlight the role of translation as a linguistic and socio-intercultural tool, in diverse media and semiotic systems. Translation requires linguistic and socio-intercultural skills, revealing not only the subject position of the translator but also the socio-cultural exchange between the countries involved (from novel to graphic novel, from novel to audiovisual product). Translation promotes global exchanges and inter-comprehension, giving accessibility to a variety of texts and voices otherwise neglected. In this light, translation can be seen as an ethical and political act. Deeply influenced by the historical, social, cultural and editorial contexts in which it develops, translation is never a neutral act, but it is always characterised from an ethical and political point of view, particularly with regard to certain elements. The translation strategies always negotiate with the historical period, the cultural context, as well as the editorial policies. Finally, the role of transmedia and digital

narratives are central to rethink the role of humanities, in order to awaken ethical awareness also among different generations, as a way to change social paradigms and to address global challenges.

This collective chapter has engaged in a challenge to Jeffrey Schnapp's thought who suggests to rethink the Digital Humanities as *Knowledge Design*, describing the situation in the contemporary humanities as a setting in which neither the methods that produce humanistic knowledge nor the *forms* and *genres* into which such knowledge is shaped are [already] givens (Schnapp 2014: 5–8). This would mean to broaden and remap 'fields of inquiry and knowledge; to increase their rigor, depth, and social impact; to re-position them with respect to contemporary society; to expand the audience for advanced cultural and knowledge forms and, therefore, further long-term processes of cultural democratization that remain one of the great legacies of the 19th and 20th centuries' (Schnapp 2014: 6). The challenge therefore concerns the ability to manage and interact critically and innovatively with the vast amounts of cultural productions and to rethink their transformation into representations and narratives capable of producing meaning. The digital therefore opens up spaces to rethink knowledge and cognition, and to give space not only to awareness, but also to dreams and desires.

Notes

1. By investing these borderlands with femininity, the translator gives an account of the multiple voices that weave a translated text: those of the author and her sources, those of the translation and its sources. Moreover, because they establish a filiation between writers and re-writers, the translator's notes are part of the composition of the feminist intertext (our translation).
2. If it is true that recent reflections on translation have highlighted translation as an oriented discursive practice in which the translator necessarily and legitimately leaves a trace of his or her own word without having to justify or explain in an almost didactic way to the reader the reason for certain choices, it is also true that a debate has developed on the practice of translation and on text manipulation strategies that are always linked to the recognised legitimacy of the writer, and the relationship with the publisher.
3. The translator therefore breaks with her supposed neutrality and indivisibility. But the translator's visibility can also be questioned in light of the centre/periphery binomial: How much does the translator, putting herself at the centre of her translation project and appropriating the text to be translated, risk neglecting important aspects such as the intended marginality of the person who wrote it?
4. There is no more active, more acting body in language practice than a translating body. At the same time a reading body, a listening body and a rewriting body, it circulates non-stop in the words of the text to be translated, it browses dictionaries and intertext, searches its own imagination, questions the author, leans towards the readers . . . In perpetual movement, the translating body performs the passage between the initial meaning to be decoded and the final meaning to be encoded, always taking into account the relationship of address, the relationship to the other – as on a stage (our translation).
5. The juxtaposition of different authors in the text – Offred, who narrates her tale, and Professor Pieixoto, the scholar who, in the 2190s, assembles Offred's oral narrative by transforming her taped story into a written text – encourages readers to go beyond simplified and consolatory interpretations. The main portion of the novel, Offred's text, is a reconstruction of the scholar, whose distanced and detached reading neutralises once again Offred's situation and perpetuates, to some extent, Gilead's misogyny. His preference for official history and dismissal of Offred's personal stories reflect a conventional view of history, an acceptance of hierarchy, and the search for a neutral, complete understanding – values that need to be questioned and that

merely make Gilead an exaggerated, horrifying version of pre-Gilead and Nunavit societies. Atwood deconstructs the epilogue and its values by juxtaposing them with the power of words of a gifted storyteller such as Offred.

6. The Governor General's Award for the novel in 1986 was probably an incentive for translation and a stimulus for the Italian publishing house to assign it to a translator already endowed with a habitus based on experience, while for the French one, it was probably an incentive to focus on a young translator, Sylviane Rué, who would later dedicate herself to giving voice in particular to the novels of Toni Morrison. Mondadori chose Camillo Pennati, who lived in London between 1958 and 1970, and was appointed in 1973 by Italo Calvino as literary editor for Anglo-American fiction and poetry at the Giulio Einaudi publishing house in Turin; the choice probably depends on the possible affinities perceived between Atwood's linguistic inventiveness and that of the poet Pennati and on the almost playful style that accompanies so many of his linguistic games. The sequel to the novel, *The Testaments* (2019), was again assigned in Italian to a male translator, Guido Calza, while in French to the translator Michèle Albaret-Maatsch. Both chose to modify the translation of some proper names: Calza returning to the English diction (Gilead), Albaret-Maatsch with an opposite choice, transforming the English name into Galaad.
7. The French title, *La Servante écarlate*, evokes Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Scarlett Letter*.
8. It is however difficult to be certain that it is Pennati's entirely autonomous choice. If it is true that in the 1980s many translators still used footnotes in the name of some puns' 'untranslatability', it is also true that often this practice was required by the publishers or editors of the publishing houses. The insertion of footnotes also historicises the Italian translation by linking it to a precise editorial context and to reading practices considered outdated today.
9. According to the Internet she is one of the most followed people, with over 129 million followers on Instagram, and the world's youngest billionaire.
10. Short videos of the party can be viewed on Kylie Jenner's *Instagram* profile (cf. @kyliesnapchat 2019b).
11. For the image, see: https://www.bodyandsoul.com.au/style/the-handmaids-tale-lingerie-exists-and-oh-no-thats-a-very-bad-idea/news-story/90da9903842263a51a8ed13a2b800d1e
12. This is the statement released by the online retailer Yandy: 'Over the last few hours, it has become obvious that [the costume] is being seen as a symbol of women's oppression, rather than empowerment. This is unfortunate as it was not our intention on any level. Our initial inspiration to create the piece was through witnessing its use in recent months as a powerful protest image. Given the sincere, heartfelt response, supported by numerous personal stories we've received, we are removing the costume from our site' (Perrigo 2018).

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