

**Feminist Dystopia: A Study of the 2019 Ballet Adaptation of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985)**

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**ABSTRACT**

Dystopian narrative has come to be the focus of academic studies in the 20th century mirroring hunger, terror, violence, and repression. It gradually eliminated the fictive utopian imagination by showing the long-neglected side of the coin. People's constant need to live in a perfect utopian world is best manifested in Thomas More's description of this world in his masterpiece *Utopia*. Since More's *Utopia*, fictitious countries- mostly islands- have been dreamt of and created in literature. The construction of a utopian world is thoroughly affected by the current events in societies, aiming at changing the circumstances for the better by pinpointing them.

In fact, this study attempts to examine the ballet adaptation of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). The ballet was performed in 2019 and presented by Ecole De Dance Anick Macconnel at Fever International Dance Championships. The paper adopts a feminist dystopia perspective and attempts to highlight the significant inevitable changes that occur when adapting a novel to a ballet performance – a six-minute-performance in this case. Furthermore, the study capitalizes on the amount of dehumanization female figures had to undergo with much attention given to Offred who is the main protagonist of the novel as well as in the adaptation. The adaptation is going to be tackled in the study through pointing out the significance of the medium specific features of the selected ballet performance such as the significance of ballet movements, the choice of music, and lights displaying the ramification of brutal authoritative governments and attempts of resistance. This is going to be analysed in light of feminist dystopian fiction.

*I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own*

(Audre Lord)

Dystopian narrative has come to be the focus of academic studies in the 20th century, mirroring hunger, terror, violence, and repression. It gradually eliminated the fictive utopian imagination by showing the long-neglected side of the coin. People's constant need to live in a perfect utopian world is best manifested in Thomas More's description of this world in his masterpiece *Utopia* (1516). Since More's *Utopia*, fictitious countries- mostly islands- have been dreamt of and created in literature. The construction

of a utopian world is thoroughly affected by the current events in societies, aiming at changing the circumstances for the better by pinpointing them.

According to Henry Lewis in 1747, the term “dystopia” has been coined and spelt “dustopia”. In fact, the term has been used as well in John Stuart Mill’s 1868 speech in parliament. Gregory Claeys states that the word “dystopia” has been derived from two Greek words, *dus* and *topos*, which denotes an ailing, a deficient or a faulty place. In *Dystopia: An Earlier Eighteenth Century Use*, the term “dystopia” that was coined by Henry Lewis in 1747, was defined as “an unhappy country”. It probably appeared in the mid-eighteenth century, but the usage of the word “dystopia” has taken a different-more meaningful turn in the late 20th century basically in literature. Since “dystopia” has been lately related to literature, Sargent defines it in his *In Defense of Utopia* (2006), as “a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which the reader lived” (15).

Tom Moylan (2000) encapsulates the backdrops against which this type of narrative was written maintaining that

[D]ystopian narrative is largely the product of the terrors of the twentieth century. A hundred years of exploitation, repression, state violence, war, genocide, disease, famine, ecocide, depression, debt, and the steady depletion of humanity through the buying and selling of everyday life provided more than enough fertile ground for this fictive underside of the utopian imagination (12).

In light of that argument, it can be implied that dystopia predicts a fearful future and emerges from a set of problems. This refers to the fact that a dystopian text is characterized by some features which cannot be overlooked such as the militarized or war-centered societies, tyranny, slavery, extreme brutality, beating as a punishment of disobedience to authority, and diseased spaces. Furthermore, sexuality usually looms large in the incidents of a dystopian text. It is a taboo that is linked to disobeying God and is considered the epitome of sin. However, a glimpse of hope takes place in the text when the crowd decides to revolt and to act against the oppressive authorities.

Since this century has been a time of growing doubts, increasing uncertainty, alarming incidences, and looming crises, it became triggering to document this pessimistic state in literature. Apocalyptic literature has made this possible by reflecting the awaited prophetic destruction of the world. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2010), the word apocalypse is translated from Greek and means “uncovering” and in religious contexts it usually refers to something hidden. Hence, one comes to understand that apocalypse is considered a feature of dystopian discourse, as it highlights the prophecies

related to demolition and chaos. In an apocalyptic patriarchal society, it seems to be normal that the dystopian genre has been dominated by male writers, and which has triggered female writers to document the possible amount of transgressions and humility faced by women in the coming future. Sarah Lefanu asserts that the dystopian genre is not only identified by “a male bias” but is also reinforced by “a cultural and political male hegemony” (187). As a result, female writers have aimed at opposing and undermining the dominant ideology which has been long outlined by men. Lefanu adds that such literature, created by women is usually “subversive, satirical and iconoclastic” (187). Furthermore, the amount of inequality witnessed by women – and projected in feminist dystopias has been expressed by Simone De Beauvoir (1949):

Now, woman has always been man's dependent, if not his slave; the two sexes have never shared the world in equality. And even today woman is heavily handicapped, though her situation is beginning to change. Almost nowhere is her legal status the same as man's, and frequently it is much to her disadvantage...In the economic sphere men and women can almost be said to make up two castes; other things being equal, the former hold the better jobs, get higher wages, and have more opportunity for success than their new competitors. In industry and politics men have a great many more positions and they monopolize the most important posts. (680)

Hence, it can be understood that the features of feminist dystopia are dedicated to bringing justice to women by highlighting the atrocities faced by them and neglected by most male writers.

As a matter of fact, this concept of feminist dystopia has been manifested variously in different mediums of narratives are being susceptible to a study of the adaptation theory. According to Harvey R. Greenberg (1998), adaptation is “repetition, but repetition without replication. And there are manifestly many different possible intentions behind the act of adaptation: the urge to consume and erase the memory of the adapted text or to call it into question is as likely as the desire to pay tribute by copying” (115). Arguably, adaptation as a phenomenon can be defined by relying on three definite but interrelated interpretations. In Linda Hutcheon’s *A Theory of Adaptation*, she stated that one way of defining “adaptation” is by regarding it as formal entity or product; it is a substantial transposition of a specific work or works. The process of adaptation would, definitely, involve an action of “transcoding” that may include a shift of medium – a short story to a film or performance- or genre generally resulting in a context narrating the exact story but from a different perspective. According to Mbye Cham, adaptation is a process of creation as it always involves “both (re-) interpretation and then (re-) creation; this has been called both

appropriation and salvaging, depending on your perspective” (300). Moreover, Hutcheon regards adaptation as a process of reception explaining that it is a form of intertextuality, saying that “we experience adaptations (as adaptations) as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation” (8).

Since adaptation can involve a shift of medium, it is essential to highlight performance theory as a possible transposition of an adapted text. In Herman Rapaport’s *The Literary Theory Toolkit: A Compendium of Concepts and Methods*, he stated that “[p]erformance has become a field of study that is interdisciplinary in scope, including anthropology, sociology, psychology, philosophy, communication studies, literary study, visual art, and the performing arts (theatre, music, dance)” (135). This understanding of performance studies has also been agreed upon by Richard Schechner – who is recognized as the pioneer in this field- as he has asserted that this field must be constructed and regarded as a “broad spectrum” of human actions fluctuating from different genres and arts (15). It can be advocated that this field has a massive appetite for inviting and inventing recent kinds of performance. On this regard, Richard Schechner - one of the main founders of performance theory - asserted that “[a]s a field, performance studies is sympathetic to the avant-garde, the marginal, the offbeat, the minoritarian, the subversive, the twisted, the queer, people of color, and the formerly colonized” (17). It is worth noting that this history of performance studies will be studied in detail below with a special reference to the examined Ballet performance.

In fact, this study attempts to examine the ballet adaptation of Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985). The ballet was performed in 2019 and presented by Ecole De Dance Anick Macconnel at Fever International Dance Championships. The paper adopts a feminist dystopia perspective and attempts to highlight the significant inevitable changes that occur when adapting a novel to a ballet performance – a six-minute-performance in this case. Furthermore, the study capitalizes on the amount of dehumanization female figures had to undergo with much attention given to Offred who is the main protagonist of the novel as well as in the adaptation. The adaptation is going to be tackled in the study through pointing out the significance of the medium specific features of the selected ballet performance such as the significance of ballet movements, the choice of music, and lights displaying the ramification of brutal authoritative governments and attempts of resistance. This is going to be analysed in light of feminist dystopian fiction.

In fact, one can strongly argue that Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* portrayed a dystopian society where the dominant minority has enslaved the subservient majority. Freedom is only enjoyed by men whereas women have been burdened with roles in the society that they cannot deviate from. Arguably, freedom -and the lack of it- is one of the predominant features in dystopian discourses which can easily be found in most of them. Typically as a dystopian text, human beings were underprivileged by depriving them

of their individualism and conditioning them to behave as per their social status. *The Handmaid's Tale* dealt with several issues of positioning women in society and their sexual equality which mainly stem from the second wave of feminism. Struggles and obstacles women had to undergo were highlighted to underline the fact that they should remain steadfast and fight for their freedom. *The Handmaids' Tale* is still open to infinite interpretations and female identity will always be put in question.

Performance studies and dance studies have been utilized as modern methods of expression that serve a higher purpose. Movement is considered an expressive and a functional form of language leading to coding messages in performances with an attempt to involve spectators in the act of decoding them. The spectators are expected to scrutinize movements, facial expressions, and costumes to apprehend the main plot and the climax that eventually unravel layers of meanings in the performance. Performance studies' roots were in theatre and have evolved thereof. In fact, the rise of performance studies is profoundly indebted to the work and efforts of Richard Schechner. However, defining performance studies is problematic as it is subjected to multiple and on-going alternations. Schechner argues that “[t]his area/field/discipline often plays at what it is not, tricking those who want to fix it, alarming some, amusing others, astounding a few as it side-winds its way across the deserts of academia” (357).

Consequently, it can be argued that performance symbolizes identities, reshapes minds, and tells stories. According to Marvin Carlson's *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, performance can be understood as “a central metaphor and critical tool for a bewildering variety of studies, covering almost every aspect of human activity. Performance discourse and its close theoretical partner, ‘performativity’, today dominate critical discourse” (9). Having clear-cut definitions and distinctions between the notions of “performance” and “performativity” is unattained; however terminologically, performativity underlines the idea of executing, and by far accomplishing an action. This performativity occurs to all actions whether verbal, physical, or even written. In her book *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler elaborates on the same subject, saying that performativity can be acknowledged as “the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (2), which sheds intensive light on the capacity of language and expressive actions to function as types of social action or to have reformative functions. Thus, it can be stated that though performance establishes performativity itself as the object of inquiry, pinning the terms down is extremely challenging.

The physical embodiment of written texts reflected in the utilization of choreography that has effaced the misconception of the existence of dichotomy between written discourses and kinesthetic ones. Choreography cannot be defined directly for its complex connotations. As a term, it appeared in the 1950s and has been long defined as the formation of movements in various times and spaces. However, the

definition goes beyond such a simple notion. Based on Jonathan Burrows' *A Choreographer's Handbook*, "Choreography is about making a choice, including the choice to make no choice" (40), choices that include having a recurrent movement in the performance, or wanting some degree of spontaneity. This physical embodiment of texts can be reflected in dance performances which eventually suggest depending on ethnography as a methodology of research.

As stated by Theresa Jill Buckland in her essay "Dance, History, and Ethnography", ethnography helps in investigating "the customary dance practices of an aggregate of people, such as an ethnic or cultural group" (16). However, there is "no consensus about the meaning of the term "ethnography," even within its home disciplinary bases of the social sciences" (17). Based on this, it can be argued that observing and highlighting human interactions in dance performances allows insights into social settings in which these performances take place. Along with this comes the usage of praxeology to facilitate the understanding of human conducts. It can be claimed that there is an interrelation between knowledge of various occurrences in society and actions done towards them. As explained by Clare Rigg, praxeology is the theory of practical knowledge where knowledge "should serve practice and a core value that the point of understanding a situation is to change it" (2). One cannot help but notice that values and ethics as well are being molded by the society, and thus comes the benefit of praxeology. Setting the foundation to this, one then denotes that rationalizing dance movements can happen within the scope of feminist theories as layers of misogyny and patriarchy may be detected.

In general, dance can be described as being a mirror to the ideologies and beliefs societies embody. In other words, the gender-divisions established by societies can be traced in it. In his essay "Dance, Gender, and Culture", Ted Polhemus states, "[w]hen I was a teenager growing up in an American suburb in the late 1950s and early 1960s, I was taught to dance at school, against my will, I might add. Whether 'slow' or 'fast' these dance steps and the macho behavioural activities which framed dance movement per se had one thing in common: the male led" (12). This emphasizes the fact that male domination has even reached arts. When examining ballet performances as a type of dance that mirrors societies, it can be denoted that gender differences find fertile soil in it. It has been contended that ballet could strongly be regarded as misogynistic in nature.

Resting on Ann Daly's article "The Balanchine Woman: Of Hummingbirds and Channel Swimmers", it can be stated that ballerinas are being portrayed in an angelic way, setting unfeasible standards for women. Daly argues that ballet provides "a powerful but regressive model in a social milieu where women are struggling to claim their own voices" (9). Additionally, one can indicate that in ballet women are usually physically maneuvered by the men and are positioned in an attempt to be subjected to

and analyzed by the male gazes. On stage, men are perceived as the physically muscular, and more balanced of the two. On the other hand, women are physically fragile, and need the aid of the male dancers to finish movement. Hence, leading roles are given to male dancers, while female ones perform the roles decided upon by males. Conceivably, such performances have been set up by male choreographers and, thus, women bodies have been objectified, controlled, and seen through males' perspectives. Daly asserts that “[n]o matter what the specific steps, no matter when the choreographic style, the interaction structure, pointe work (Pointe work is a part of classical ballet technique resulting from a desire for female ballet dancers to appear weightless and light footed), and movement style of classical ballet portrays women as objects of male desire rather than as agents of their own desire” (17). Being provocative in nature, dance and feminism have collided to challenge authority and, in turn, innovative choreography has opted to give voice to the silenced. It could be noted that the socially constructed barriers which women must abide by have been greatly questioned by dance, though not completely abolished. In context, where speech is largely forbidden, body language comes into service.

Exploring the representations of women on stage is one of the fundamental concerns of dance studies when collided with feminism. In her *In the Margins: Dance Studies, Feminist Theories and the Public Performance of Identity* (1999), Julia Zdrojewski states, “the use of feminist theories in dance studies can be seen specifically during early American Modern Dance and the 1920s and 30s” (33). This proves that the objectification of women on stage didn't go unnoticed. Several physical features were imposed on female dancers which can be claimed as being part of the objectification. The size of their bodies dictates the proper level of femininity a female dancer should have and generally a female in such a patriarchal society. Arguably, diminutive figures indicate expected submissiveness and fragile nature. Such demands in dance – ballet in particular- are mere reflection of cultural and social standards about women. In Jennifer Clement's *Reforming Dance Pedagogy: A Feminist Perspective on the Art of Performance and Dance Education*, it has been postulated that

Dancers are not born, they are made. Movements are performed in a manner that reaffirms patriarchal notions about women's and men's positions in the world and dance classes actually construct the desired bodies that are considered appropriate based on an individual's anatomy. Women adhere to strict regimes, which minimize overall size, builds [*sic*] flexibility and leg strength while men build stamina and speed (24).

In ballet, male and female dancers' relationship often depends on “support”, male dancers are frequently encouraged to strengthen their arms and legs' muscles to support the female dancers when they lift them. However, since feminism – the second wave in particular- has been characterized by combating

gender inequality, challenging authorities has been the ultimate aim of feminist choreographers. Those feminist choreographers, who are all women, have taken the responsibility of awakening the minds of their spectators by creating performances that include movements which transcend and empower female dancers. As maintained by Hannah McCarthy in *Women on the Floor: A Study of Feminism in Modern Dance History*, “the early 1960s brought a period of unrest in the dance sphere as well as the political. It was a time of great experimentation and rebellion from the “technical” modern dance to which Graham, Humphrey, and many others had contributed. This is the movement now referred to as “post-modern dance” (22). Hence, this signifies that efforts have been exerted by feminists to alter the misrepresentation of women on stage.

Due to all the aforementioned techniques of ballet performance and its being an entirely different medium of familiar narrative, putting a magnifying glass on the performance in quest is an essential need when trying to unravel the threads and knots in it, supported by a set of movements, colours, and music. As mentioned above, the ballet adaptation of Margaret Atwood’s text has been presented in 2019 by Ecole De Dance Anick Macconnell at Fever International Dance Championships. Fever IDC is a Canadian dance competition covering various locations across Ontario and Quebec and it is directed by Jerome Bobb. The ballet performance presented here is a sort of a non-verbal contemporary adaptation to the text written by Atwood and it tackles the same issues through classical ballet movements set as infrastructures to the whole performance. Scrutinizing *The Handmaid’s Tale* ballet performance will be based on the assumptions that codes are sent to the audience by resorting to physical movements. In six minutes and twenty-six seconds – which is the duration of the performance- multiple methods have been utilized to defend the rights of the dehumanized women presented in Atwood’s text.

The examined ballet performance has been chosen particularly depending on the fact that ballet – as an art empowers women. In an interview with Prof. Nevine El-Kilany – the Dean of The Higher Institute of Art Criticism in Cairo- she has strongly refuted the on-going misconceptions that ballet demeans and degrades women. Moreover, El-Kilany continues to assert that most ballet performances are led by ballerinas while having male dancers as their supporters; they lead, and male dancers follow. Consequently, one can infer from El-Kilany’s words that claims such as those being set by Jennifer Clement in her *Reforming Dance Pedagogy: A Feminist Perspective on the Art of Performance and Dance Education* are mere accusations that need to be addressed through on-stage pro-feminism performances. Clement states that “movements are performed in a manner that reaffirms patriarchal notions about women’s and men’s positions in the world and dance classes actually construct the desired bodies that are considered appropriate based on an individual’s anatomy” (24).



Veering from that, the choreography created in this adaptation is meant to help the audience question the aim behind the whole performance. For instance, one finds that the performance is initiated by utterances and quotes from the text. In fact, it is supported by several extracts. Introducing the setting and the main protagonist to the audience has been done through a few words, “a chair, a table, a lamp, and a window with white curtains, and a glass that is shatterproof. But it isn’t running away they’re afraid of; a handmaid wouldn’t get far. My name is Offred, I had another name, but it is forbidden now, so many things are forbidden now.” Those are several extracts mainly collected and combined from chapter two in the written text. It is worth mentioning that the narrator has been replaced by the voiceover in this ballet performance, indicating a literal adaptation of the text itself. The voiceover has probably been inserted to create and communicate a range of sensations. It usually helps in delivering messages that resonate with the audience. To clarify, some of the messages that could be understood here are: women are not only captivated by men but by their own gender as well, women shouldn’t throw up their hands in defeat, and that fighting back is essential when dealing with a misogynistic society.



Figure 1.1 The Handmaid’s Tale performance at Fever IDC, 0:29

Since the ballet performance adaptation is a different medium of narrative where all traditional narrative techniques are re-contextualized, it’s noticeable that oppression is manifested in the movements of the performers. For instance, the ballet movement known as Frappé which is described by Lee Winston Campbell in his *Recognizing Classical Ballet Steps Using Phase Space Constrains* as “raising the working foot vertically by bending the knee and hip until the hip makes a 45\* angle, then rapidly straightening the knee and ankle to kick to the side” (15) along with the circulation of the ballerina’s hand – who plays the central role in the performance- around her neck could be indicative of an attempt on the choreographers’ part to draw an image in the minds of a female being suffocated after a rope has been tied.

Moreover, the performance aims to reflect the different types of oppression witnessed by women as being presented in the text. One infers that not only the government oppresses women but also women themselves are complicit in such actions; the wives and the aunts act as jailers. One finds that Aunt Lydia in various scenes correlates with the patriarchal government in threatening and tying down fundamental freedoms of women. To elaborate, Aunt Lydia has taken the protagonist by the neck as a means of preventing her from escaping this so-called “holy” mission. In addition, she has used a whip as a way of punishing the handmaid after her attempt to escape. This gives a vivid and unsubtle notion of the amount of physical and emotional suffering women must endure (Figure 1.2).



Figure 1.2 Fever IDC, 1:14

It can be argued that emotional suffering is by far greater than the physical one. Being dehumanized by one’s own gender and not having any support from those who presumably should share and be acquainted with one’s pain is a kind of an embedded defeat. Feeling betrayed and stabbed in the back leave scars more than a whip can ever leave.

Furthermore, ranks even among women were preserved and the mobility between the categories established by the government were forbidden. The wives were subjugated by the patriarchy and though presented as powerless trophies; they still manifest their slight control by projecting their authority over the handmaids. In the performance, plié, described by Performing Arts Special Interest Group in 1998 as “a bend of the knees while the torso is held upright. The action relies on varying degrees of hip and knee flexion, with ankle and MTP dorsiflexion, depending on whether the plié is demi- or grand” (5), has been used as a transition movement to shift our gazes from the unjust practices done by the aunts to those of the

wives. The bending of their bodies could indicate a hierarchical doctrine where the fertile breeding women - the handmaids- are submissive to the barren ones.



Figure 1.3 Fever IDC, 0:52

To shed more light on the atrocities of the wives, it is glaring that a state of apocalypse overshadows the whole performance as one cannot hide his shock when seeing children being ripped away from their birth mothers. Blatant as it could be part of Gilead's terror stems from usurping women from their rights to nurture their own children, the wives take part in implementing this to serve their own agendas.



Figure 1.4 Fever IDC, 5:06

Since forced obedience is often resisted, one infers that -unlike Atwood's text- the protagonist in the performance tries to combat the oppression practiced upon her by almost all segments of society. The protagonist's resistance is an epitome of the rest of the handmaids' desired resistance who share the same miseries and aspirations. In figure 1.5 below, the handmaids' facial expressions reflect the suffering and horror they must tolerate to bypass being hung on the walls. In the aforementioned interview with Prof. El-

Kilany on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June 2021, she strongly highlighted that when attempting to analyze performers' movements, one should put in mind their facial expressions as they have fundamental implications that are expected not to be neglected by the audience. In this respect, one can decode the performers' expressions by inferring that the witnessed resistance has been lacking from the text and glorified in the performance.



Figure 1.5 Fever IDC, 4:57

Thus, it can be claimed that the choreography in the ballet adaptation has conveyed the handmaids' feelings of distress and agony into movements. The brutal treatment practiced upon women by both genders and the misogynistic attitudes of men have been exuded through the male dancers. It can be affirmed that the ballet movements have given the same patriarchal nature of the setting found in Atwood's text.

Concerning the other techniques used in the ballet adaptation, colours and lighting were used to reflect the state of apocalypse the handmaids are living in. In Heinrich Zollinger's *Color: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, he has strongly asserted that there is a direct connection between colour and human consciousness, frequently they "give visual representation of the message" (163) needed to be delivered to the audience. In addition to this, every colour chosen in an art has "a specific purpose, religious or otherwise. The main aim would be to give the observer an impression of intense luminosity" (163). In fact, Atwood has classified women in her text to mirror the hierarchal society they're trapped in through attires. Likewise, the ballet adaptation has covered this fundamental aspect by classifying dancers/ ballerinas through their coloured costumes. Red and blue are the most dominant colours in the performance as being worn by the handmaids and the wives respectively. The use of both colours could significantly be anticipated as a means to engrave definite depictions in the minds. Zollinger states that "red" is frequently used in various forms of arts to present luminosity and brightness, "most probably because of its relationship to the brilliance of fire" (163). Presumably, Atwood has tried to show the distinction in attitudes and treatments of the handmaids and wives through their clothes' colours. To further emphasize this, Zollinger has stated that red and blue are two opposites as they are usually being utilized to "draw a distinction

between light and darkness” (164). Resting on this, the lighting in the performance is probably used to add more depth to the apocalyptic setting. Accordingly, one can realize that the merging of darkness and brightness from the first scene is meant for a reason. The lighting has prepared the audience to witness violence and legalized rape reformed to appear as heroic actions. Hence, it can be claimed that colours and lighting were main assets in the performance for creating an intense mood and atmosphere for the audience to enhance the understanding of the handmaids’ suffering as shown in the below figure.



Figure 1.6 Fever IDC, 0:02

Colours and lighting are not the only integral parts of ballet performances as music plays a great role in delivering meaning to the spectator and filling in some gaps that were not fully covered by the ballet movements or colours or lights. Music also helps in the reinforcement of meaning. Music theatre is essential in ballet performances as it can help in reflecting social issues and acts as a hook that attempts to play on the feelings of the audience, moving those feelings to be in favor of the protagonist of the show. In Ryan Thomas Green’s *Music Theatre: Concepts, Theories, and Practices*, he asserted that “music theatre can be used as an umbrella term to describe any theatre driven by music such as opera, musicals, ballet, cabaret and some contemporary music” (5). Resting on this, one could assume that implementing music in *The Handmaid’s Tale* ballet adaptation has to do with setting an apocalyptic mood aligning it with the dystopian theme of the performance. Since the theme of the performance determines the tempo used in it, the soundtrack *Dance For Me Wallis* was chosen to mirror the conflicting emotions present in the plot. The soundtrack was composed by Abel Korzeniowski for Madonna’s 2011 movie *W.E.* The reason behind choosing this soundtrack suggests the prevailing sense of puzzlement in the original movie itself, which by

far the exact intensified emotions in the adaptation. The tempo of the soundtrack starts with a slow pace and then it speeds up, the lack of fixation could be interpreted as an echo to the erratic incidents of the text which were preserved in the adaptation as well. Moreover, the manifestation of the combating trials from the side of the handmaids has been vivid in the ballet performance through *This Woman's Work* song. This suggests that the lyrics of the song embody empowering words to women and an insight to their feelings which they were forced to conceal. In the performance, the song has been played from the minute 4 min till the minute 5:35 min in an attempt to provoke the feelings of the audience and strongly play on their subconscious minds. Kate Bush's 1989 released song was written by her with a melody that opted for creating feelings of crises and struggles being encountered. The song invites feelings of resilience and resistance to tyrannical practices of men, "I know you have a little life in you yet, I know you have a lot of strength left" (4:30). It can be argued that in the written text the presence of the narrator is equivalent to the presence of music in the performance as both play on the feelings. One can easily share the painful feelings and thoughts of the narrator through reading and can easily acknowledge the same suffering through listening to the embedded music. Thus, defying the monolithic attempts of male figures has been accomplished in the performance by using soundtracks and music.

To conclude, one can argue that the existence of hidden/unsaid language in art has played a vital role in exploring long-neglected female issues. Performance and dance studies have proven to be essential modern methods of expression employed to narrate stories. Written texts were re-created and physically embodied through choreography. It was also proven that ethnography and praxeology are -more or less- integral parts of the scrutinization of performances. It can be detected that social settings and human actions are both found in the background of dance performances to serve as justifications for actions that have been performed. To further clarify this, one can state that choreographers have designed several ballet performances to support marginalized females and unravel much suffering they are experiencing. The ballet adaptation of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* performed by Ecole De Dance Anick Macconnell has helped in the incarnation of females' agony present in the written text. As a form of a dystopian narrative, the examined ballet performance reflected extreme measures of horror, violence, oppression, and resistance. It becomes clear that utopia is an unattainable aspiration and thus, due to the restriction of establishing it, critical utopia has emerged thereof. Having witnessed several imperfections embedded in any so-called utopian society, a critical dystopia has stood on equal footing with it but includes a pessimistic outlook on life. Through critical dystopia, multiple warnings have been given to defy conspicuous destruction. As explained above, the ballet adaptation represents the second wave of feminism when challenging the patriarchal and inhumane practices against women. Moreover, the storyline in the

performance tracks the humiliation of women such as lack of personal freedom and being oppressed by both genders. The ballet performance fully reflected the suffering and agony witnessed by the handmaids; the ballerinas' facial expressions and body language were nonverbal signals to establish direct connections with the spectators. Feelings of puzzlement and fear were expressed by Offred in the performance through tempo where the soundtracks start with slow pace and then they rapidly speed up as stated above.

Finally, the previously mentioned findings can be refuted, subjected to more scrutiny using different approaches, and can also suggest a future digging into women's rights in general. The recommended research could be done specifically on the aptness of utilizing varied mediums of narrative to reflect the sufferings of women and the harmful practices that can later cause traumas. Regarding recommended further research in the same topic, it could be conducted on the representations of femininities and masculinities in digital media, the politics of masculinity and femininity, agency, the intersection of gender, race and social class and its influence on identity expression.



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