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Beyond a Feminist Dystopia:

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

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In 1984, the year that saw particular interest in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Margaret Atwood set foot in the dystopian genre, publishing her dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. This novel has been widely regarded as a 'feminist *Nineteen Eighty-Four*', but this recognition does not conform to Atwood's usual practice of transcending boundaries. The present thesis is an attempt to examine to what extent this epithet is an accurate description of her novel.

Based on T.S. Eliot's claim that literary progression is a matter of fitting in and going beyond, the present thesis uses two of the most prominent dystopian novels in the twentieth century, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, as the medium of comparison to examine *The Handmaid's Tale* against the tradition of the dystopian genre. It argues that *The Handmaid's Tale* is a kind of re-reading of the twentieth-century dystopian novel genre. With distinctive differences in terms of writing styles and patterns of social criticism, the novel fits in and moves on, going beyond a feminist dystopia as defined before its arrival.

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