

The Handmaid's Tale: The Subtlety of Gender in the Interior

Abstract:

The adaption of a favourite novel onto the small screen is often met with trepidation and excitement, none more so than Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. How can this dystopian world translate from our imaginations to resonate into a shared aesthetic interpretation of the world inhabited by the citizens of The Republic of Gilead?

The paper will focus on the representation of the interiors of Hulu's TV adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale* where a synthesis of historical interior styles create backdrops that are layered with inherent tension and meaning. The narrative occupies a peculiar and confusing time warp of a by-gone era located in the near future leaving the viewer historically disorientated. The threshold of the home as a symbol of a safe boundary is challenged through the controlled domestic world with rooms becoming holding chambers for the next ominous ritual. The interiors the women, both Handmaids and Wives, encounter represent a system of patriarchal controls and checks within the domestic and public spaces they occupy.

The hierarchy of the inhabitants of the house is represented through the decoration and furnishings of the rooms; the grandiose ornate Master bedroom in contrast to the Maid's room that is devoid of any sense of intimacy conveying the erosion of identity through the austere decor. Through an analysis of the interiors I will seek to dissect the subtlety of the room sets and their meaning through the observation of space and social relations. The rooms within the home become contested spaces and characters of contradiction manifesting in the spatial choreography and occupation, decoration, materiality and colour palettes of the interior composition.