**TITLE**

The Handmaid’s Tale – Title

The choice of title is fictionally explained in the ‘Historical Notes’ as an editorial one concocted by ‘Professor Knotly Wade’, but it is also, of course, and primarily, Margaret Atwood’s own title for the novel. Geoffrey Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales shares with the novel the peculiarity of rarely revealing the names of its central characters. Personal identity, it is implied, is bound up with an individual’s function in society: one is neither ‘Geoffrey’ nor ‘Eleanor’ in Chaucer’s world, but a ‘Monk’ or a ‘Man of Law’; a ‘Cook’ or a ‘Franklin’. The Gilead regime represents a throwback to the Middle Ages in that people’s social functions are similarly arranged in hierarchies, though its various designations are far fewer than those of Chaucer’s England. Men can be Commanders, Eyes, Angels or Guardians (though there are obviously other social and economic roles available to them); Women can only be Wives (or Econowives), Aunts, Handmaids or Marthas. Outside the core of Gilead, in the Colonies, these elements break down into a literal ‘grey area’, since everyone there, male or female, is forced to wear a robe of that colour.

The term ‘Handmaid’ derives from the Bible: particularly the story of Bilhah and Rachel discussed below, but it also references the Virgin Mary’s designation of herself as ‘the Handmaid of the Lord’ in Luke 1:38. The story of Mary’s complete abnegation of herself in accepting her pregnancy from God is twisted by the Gilead regime into a means of justifying enforced surrogacy on behalf of the powerful.

A Doll’s House – Title

The title of A Doll's House is symbolically significant as well as highly suggestive of the message that Ibsen seems to have intended to convey through the play. There are two important aspects of the play, which the title directly points to: the doll and the house.

The doll represents Nora the central character, and the house stands for the house of Helmer where Nora lives.

If we read the play carefully and understand it critically, we feel that the word "doll" has been used in the title in a rather ironic manner. "Doll" signifies passivity, beauty, and the basically feminine nature which is seen in Nora when we look at her from outside. Indeed, from the viewpoint of Helmer, who is basically a traditionally possessive husband, Nora the doll is something like an inanimate object with which he can play and enjoy. As Nora says at the end of the play, she had been her father's doll until her marriage and she has been Helmer's doll for eight long years since her marriage. The word 'doll' suits Nora if we look at her with the traditional or uncritical eye, as Helmer or Mrs. Linde would look, or rather as they would like Nora to be. The reality is however that Nora has all the potential of being a real human being, seeking identity and dignity, and conscious of all the limitations imposed by her husband and his society's traditions. Nora is not a real doll but an apparent one. She is subservient; she is designed as per the demand and desires of Helmer, who would like to think that he makes her what he wants her to be; she is also perfect and unchanging, insentient and easy to handle like lifeless dolls, that is, in the eyes of Mr. Helmer. Her opinions and interests are fully determined and controlled by him. She is his doll, like she was her father's doll till marriage, Helmer possesses her, basically and almost only for fun. Nora has herself explained the fun that her husband obtained while their playhouse.

Brooklyn – Title

Unlike the other two texts the title of the film is simply the name of a place. It does not offer an insight into the lead character, though it does give the audience an expectation around the setting. However, it is an interesting choice exactly because it is so unremarkable. It is worth considering why the author Colm Tobin, from whose novel the film is adapted, picked it as a title. Eilis Lacey was just one of tens of thousands of Irish emigrants to America in the 1950s. Only in a fairy-tale would her name adorn a billboard. It is an appropriate title from that point of view. Added to this is the idea of what Brooklyn represents in popular culture. In modern times it is known for its lovely arts scene. The 1950s version that we see holds little such appeal. It is an unremarkable place as Eilis makes clear for those who misunderstand what she is doing in America. “I live in Brooklyn, and I work in Brooklyn, and if I go out, I go out in Brooklyn, and the skyscrapers (i.e. Manhattan) are across the river. I don’t even think about them, very often.” With this Eilis removes any pretence of a dream coming true: she moved to Brooklyn out of necessity, rather than to explore a fantasy. The director tries to get around this mundanity (dullness) with some ambiguous cinematic photography: the iconic images we see are of Staten Island (Immigration) and Manhattan (City Hall). The areas most famous piece of architecture, The Brooklyn Bridge, does not feature in this film.

Brooklyn means a variety of things for Eilis throughout her coming-of-age journey. At the beginning, it's a bizarre, foreign land. When she arrives, it's symbolic of everything that Ireland isn’t. When she arrives, it's symbolic of everything that Ireland isn't, which makes her long for home. Eventually it becomes a second homeland and then, when she returns to Ireland, she realizes that it has replaced her hometown as her real home.

Like other geographically-titled books Brooklyn is about the ways that the culture of a specific location changes a life. For Eilis, she gets thrown headfirst into the melting pot and realizes that it suits her just fine.

**Text Type / Viewpoint**

The Handmaid’s Tale – Text Type / Viewpoint

The text is a novel, which means the reader has significant influence in the presentation of the narrative; while the author will present various plot details on the page the reader can apply certain variations so as to imagine these how s/he sees fit. This represents the influence of the reader in the narrative process of the text which is not present in the drama or film; in the latter two texts the audience is shown how plot details appear and hence cannot shape these as they see fit, an opportunity which the reader in a novel is allowed.

This is apparent in various instances where the reader is clued into various plot details, such as character appearance. When the narrator details how “I am thirty-three years old. I have brown hair. I stand five seven without shoes. I have trouble remembering what I used to look like. I have viable ovaries. I have one more chance” the reader is offered the opportunity to determine her exact appearance. They can decide the shade of brown that her hair is, similar to how they can decide on the various markings on Luke’s body that the narrator describes, and whether they are extremely prevalent or fading due to the narrator’s declining memory of him near the end of the novel: “I ought to have done that with Luke, paid more attention, to the details, the moles and scars, the singular creases; I didn’t and he’s fading. Day by day, night by night he recedes, and I become more faithless.”

A Doll’s House – Text Type / viewpoint

Ibsen’s work is a drama, where the emphasis is on performance rather than reading. It is unlike the novel (where the reader can imagine what occurs) as Ibsen’s play shows us events first-hand. For example, the audience sees how characters appear, such as Nora, who often acts in an exuberant manner and is hence portrayed by a similarly youthful female actress to complement the role. In addition, the audience is shown how events occur in the play, such as the climaxing scene where Nora finally stands up to Torvald, declaring he has treated her like a doll and she needs to make sense of “self and everything”. They are shown every detail of the scene, even how loudly she slams the door when leaving her husband and her familial obligations behind.

This, like all other happenings in the play, does not need to be described as they would be in the novel, as the audience sees such events as if they were happening in real life before them. The text’s state as a drama can be located as the reason for it remaining in one room for its entirety; while in a novel or a film it would be easier to change setting this is time consuming in a drama as it would disrupt and delay the narrative experience. As a result, it is easier to retain the one setting throughout, so as for fluid and continuous viewing.

Brooklyn – Text Type / Viewpoint

Brooklyn being a film means that the camera is the omniscient narrator, it sees and knows everything. The camera influences the audience’ reaction to characters and events. We get close-up shots of Eilis’s face conveying slight nuances in expression. This shows an event from her point of view and records her struggle to deal with the challenge.

KM

John Crowley’s poignant period film ‘Brooklyn’, effectively uses the camera to reflect the inner turmoil of the emigrant Eilis while she attempts to deal with the overwhelming homesickness which threatens to engulf her. He successfully uses lighting, colour and costume to chart her growing confidence as she transitions from the old world of Ireland into her new world of America.

The desperately homesick Eilis stands still, tears glittering in her eyes while she surveys Father Flood’s Christmas dinner for his down-and-out parishioners. The camera, the omniscient narrator, records the devastating loneliness and homesickness of all, including Eilis. The camera pans the montage of shadowed faces while the song, “Casad A tSúgáin”, (The Twisting of the Rope) soars, “Oh God almighty/ what drove me to this district?” Everyone is transported back to their homeland. They are recalling past times, family and friends left behind. The desire to better oneself and the pain of leaving behind the familiar is etched on the worn faces of the men. The camera catches Eilis’s stiff body language which suggests a desperate attempt to keep emotions under control. But the camera’s close-up catches the tears glittering in her eyes, her distress spills over.

**Genre**

The Handmaid’s Tale - Genre

The text is depressing, detailing the confined living experience of the handmaids who are increasingly overpowered to the extent that they come to accept the demands of the powers that be in their world; such represents both the decline of the human spirit but also the inability to challenge more powerful and exploitative parties in one’s world, hence presenting the aforementioned as inevitable when such groups seek to consolidate totalitarian power.

Early in the novel such depressing subject matter is seen, with the description of the attempted indoctrination of the Handmaids. Such is orchestrated in a manner that the Handmaids not only lose all sense of independence and freedom but also come to pity those that are responsible for their pitiful situation: “Aunt Lydia said it was best not to speak unless they asked you a direct question. Try not to think of it from their point of view she said, her hands clasped and wrung together, her nervous pleading smile. It isn’t easy for them.” Such a section is telling as the handmaids are mentioned just once with one word, “you”, while the remainder of the sentence is focused on those controlling the Handmaids, representing the focus on such parties and warped extended attempt to create pity for these groups.

A Doll’s House - Genre

The text is told bleakly, as it focuses on characters who are selfish and not willing to openly challenge the restricted positions of females who suffer in a patriarchal society. Rather they choose to protect themselves in a cowardly manner, when they should devote their efforts to freeing such characters from this depressing existence. Torvald shows this in his reaction to the revelation of the secret loan, as Nora indicates her belief that her husband will take the blame for the loan, telling Mrs. Linde that “Something glorious is going to happen” at the end of the second act. She is convinced her husband will free her from her isolated position in which she is irreconcilably placed in a position of guilt and cannot escape punishment as it is against the law for a female to take a loan without the permission of her husband.

Nora’s belief provides an example of overbearing demands placed on the females in the play, as they are removed from any concept of a normal and fair life due to the male dominance of the world. Torvald does not do as his wife hopes he will, instead telling Nora “From now on, forget happiness. Now it’s just about saving the remains, the wreckage, the appearance”, which confirms that he only cares about his public reputation: he only refers to his societal appearance, and will prioritise this rather than coming to the aid of his wife. Elsewhere, the man who provides the illegal loan, Krogstad, causes Nora’s difficult position due to his self-centred nature. He will not accept the consequence for the illegal nature of the loan, the loss of his job, and rather seeks to make use of the patriarchal society they inhabit to safeguard his position. He henceforth attempts to blackmail Nora by promising to reveal all about the loan if he is fired as he is aware that its illegal nature will disgrace Nora and her husband Torvald, the man hoping to fire Krogstad. Once more this shows the confined position facing women in the text, as the male figures around Nora can enact complete control over her.

Brooklyn - Genre

‘Brooklyn’ is a piece of fiction rooted in a defined historical context: the fictional character of Eilis Lacey follows the familiar route of Irish Emigration to America in the 1950s. This film is a drama and a love story, though it does not carry the elements of tragedy we see in The Handmaid’s Tale where …….. And like ‘A Doll’s House’ it is a very funny text, though just like the play, the comedic moments are not enough to call it a comedy.

Brooklyn uses many of the conventions associated with a romantic drama: a girl meets a boy, they fall in love, a second boy comes between them and the girl is forced to choose which one she wants to be with. There is a great drama in Eilis’ dilemma in choosing between the men. The film uses humour to deal with the strangeness of life for a person in a new place. However, even with this humour, the film treats solemn issues (emigration,, homesickness and loss), with gravity, and so ‘Brooklyn cannot be considered a comedy.

Overall, it is safe to call Brooklyn a coming of-age- romantic drama. In the beginning, Eilis Lacey is a young, vulnerable and voiceless woman. However, her move to America challenges her in ways that help her to grow: she learns about the courtesy of working in American retail, the wit of the ex-patriate dinner table in her boarding house and the thrill of falling in love for the first time. She responds to these challenges with great courage, so that when she returns to Ireland following her sister’s death, she seems like a new person. The meek, passive girl of the film’s opening section has been replaced by an assertive, confident young woman.

**Chronology of texts**

A Doll’s house – Chronology of Texts

The text is told in a simple linear fashion, with the events occurring as we would expect them to if we viewed them in our own life. The story begins with the presentation of Nora and Torvald Helmer, and the news that Tovald is receiving a new position, managing the bank. This will give them permanent financial security, but Krogstad appears and it is revealed that Nora borrowed money from him and forged a signature to do so; now that Torvald wants to fire him, Krogstad plans to blackmail Nora by threatening to reveal this information if he is fired. As the narrative structure happens as we would expect it to in our world, Krogstad only appears because he is threatened; there is no reason for Ibsen to reveal this information, or for Nora to worry about this, until Torvald threatens Krogstad with his job.

This narrative structure, where characters react to certain events, continues as Torvald fires Krogstad despite Nora begging him not to, and Krogstad resultingly telling Nora he will blackmail her and Torvald. He places a letter revealing all in the mailbox and when Nora tells Christine of recent events she goes to Krogstad to reason with him. Nora attempts to stop Torvald opening the letter by dancing the tarantella, but this is unsuccessful and she eventually allows him to read its contents. The play ends with the same narrative structure, with events occurring in reaction to others, as Torvald forgives Nora when Krogstad says he will not blackmail them. Nora, however, is not so forgiving to her husband, realising after recent events that her life has been meaningless for years as she has only existed for the benefit of males and not for herself. She tells her husband “I have been performing tricks for you, Torvald. That’s how I’ve survived. You wanted it like that. You and Papa have done me a great wrong. It’s because of you I’ve made nothing of my life.” Nora thus decides to leave her husband, asserting that Torvald has treated her like a “doll” to be played with and admired, declaring she must “make sense of self and everything around her”. The protagonist, realising her primary duties are no longer just to her husband and her children, departs at the play’s end to devote time to identifying her wants, beliefs and desires.

The Handmaid’s Tale – Chronology of Texts

Throughout the novel there are flashbacks included which distort the linear narrative; however, these are essential to reveal information about events that occurred prior to the present moment or drama. Without awareness of such past episodes, the reader would not know the significance of the current plot and why it is occurring as it is, which presents the aforementioned distortion of the linear narrative as crucial.

The importance of such flashbacks is perhaps most evident with the narrator’s mother; she is only seen through flashbacks and hence without such movement to the past would otherwise never be seen. This allows the revelations that this woman was a hardcore feminist and protestor who was concerned primarily with women’s rights; this led to participation in demonstrative events such as the burning of born, the likes of which she eventually brought the narrator to. Her mother is presented as a rational and independent women, which arguably is designed to contrast with the narrator’s lack of freedom; such is seen when the mother’s friends are shown to have concerns about her raising a child as a sole parent, to which the mother defiantly declares “I make a decent salary. I can afford day-care.”

Brooklyn – Chronology of Text

‘Brooklyn’ follows Eilis Lacey over the course of a year as she moves from her home in Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford to Brooklyn, New York. Set in the 1950s, the storyline takes Eilis back home again to Ireland following the sudden death of her sister. Events in her personal life force her to make a choice between living in Ireland or America. As such, the film is about a physical journey, which is different to \_\_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

Similar to Offred and Nora in \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, Brooklyn is also journey of personal growth: it is the story of a young woman gaining the confidence to make her own decisions in the face of social norms and local obligations.

Letter writing has a huge role to play in how Crowley tells the story of Brooklyn. This reminds us of Atwood’s use of Offred as a narrator and Offred’s construction of her story of Gilead, as part of her memoirs on the tapes found after the collapse of Gilead. Ibsesn, in contrast, relied on stage directions to guide us through the ambiguities of his story.

When Eilis receives her first letter from home we hear her sister Rose’s voice tell her they talk about Eilis every evening: “I’m sure you’re busy, but even if your letters were two hundred pages, they wouldn’t be long enough for your mother.” Solemn, sombre music underscores the sadness of this scene for Eilis; she is clearly suffering from homesickness. This voiceover technique recurs throughout the film. Crowley uses it in conjunction with the letters between Eilis and her family at first, and between Tony and Eilis later.

At the deepest point of her indecision over her future, Eilis, now back in Ireland, receives a letter from Tony in America. In the voice over we learn that he writes plain, though sincerely poignant letters to her. But instead of opening his latest letter to her, Eilis stores it in a drawer. The camera shows us that there have been half a dozen letters from Tony, though he mentions “She’s only written back once”. Eilis is not ready to deal with this aspect of her life and Tony, movingly, remains stranded and uncertain on the other side of the Atlantic. Eventually, Eilis tries to construct a response: “Dear Tony, thank you for your letters. I want you to know that…” she writes before trailing off and saying to herself out loud: “I don’t know what I want you to know”.

The use of letters and voice overs is particularly important in Brooklyn, as Eilis has only one friend in Ireland, Nancy, and so we rarely get to hear Eilis’ thoughts or opinions. Letter writing offers her an opportunity to air both of these, and it defines the narrative as a more thoughtful and reflective piece than it would be otherwise.