



# Le “eredi” di Virginia in classe: riflessioni e proposte

Luisanna Paggiaro

Webinar Iend Pisa, 20 dic.2022



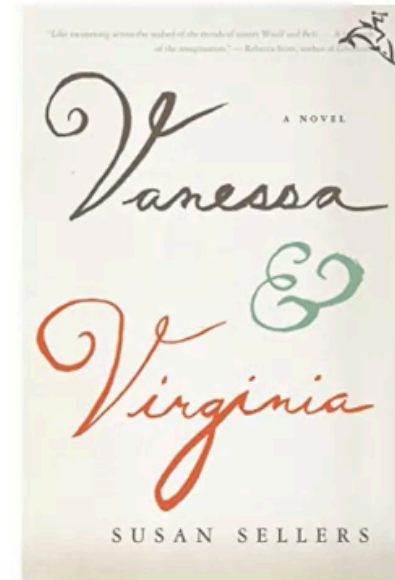
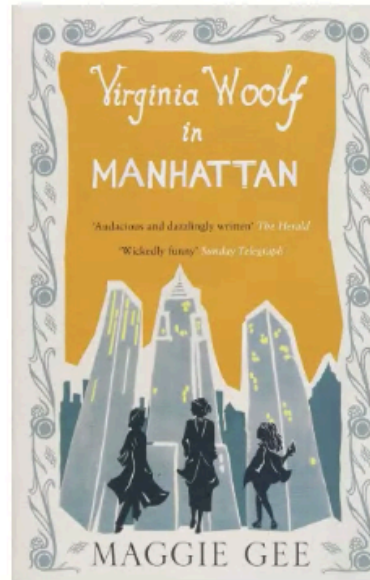
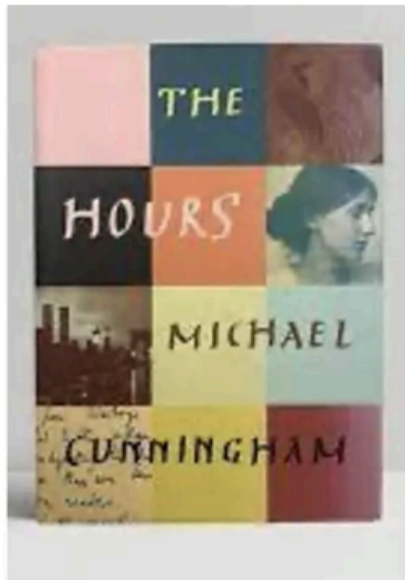
**'IT IS FOR A NEW GENERATION THAT I WRITE'**

Jeanette Winterson e l'eredità di Virginia Woolf

Elisa Bolchi, Università di Ferrara



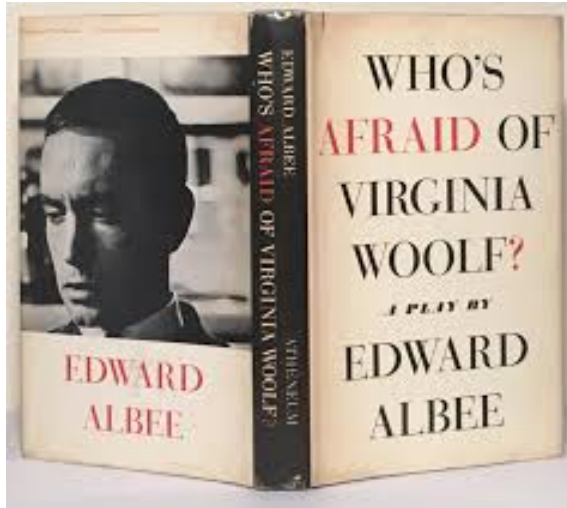
## RIUSI DI WOOLF



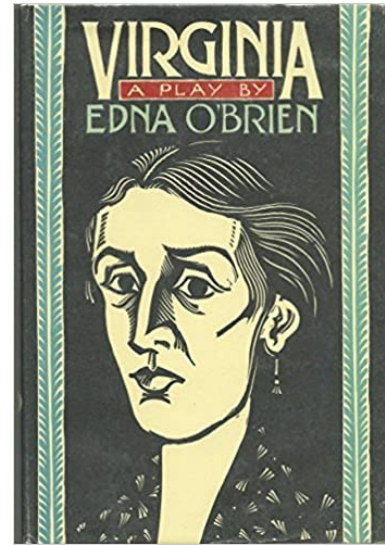
Webinar, 3 novembre 2022

“It is for a new generation that I write”. Jeanette Winterson e l'eredità di Virginia Woolf

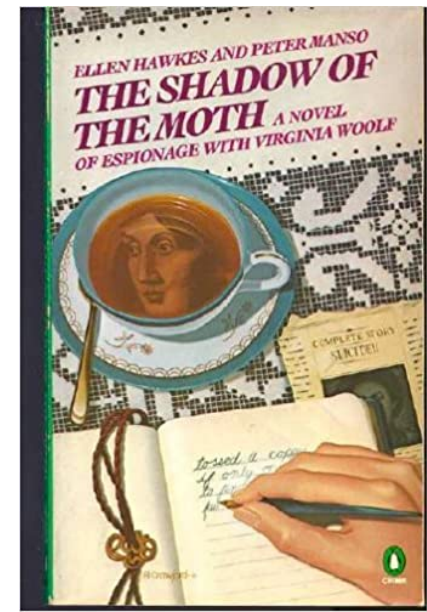
# And further on...



1962



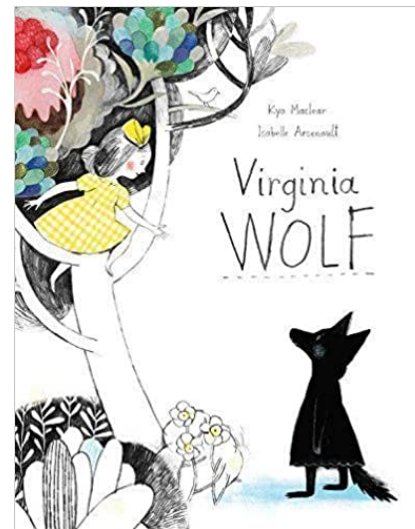
1981



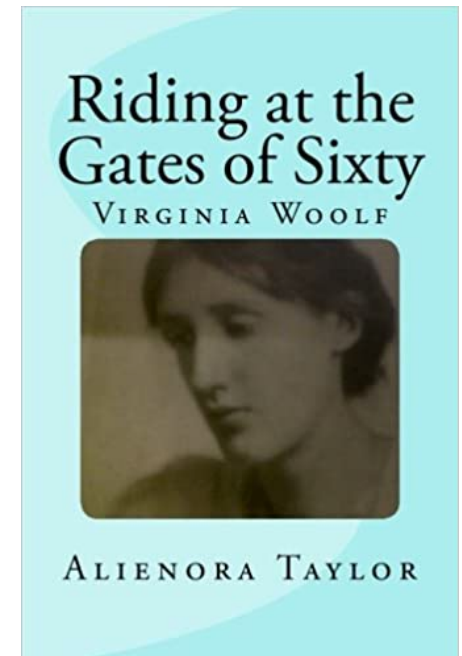
1983



The Marmoset of  
Bloomsbury (1998)



Kyo Maclear (writer)  
Isabelle Arsenault (illustrator),  
2012



2015





I told you in the course of this paper that Shakespeare had a sister; [...] Now my belief is that this poet who never wrote a word and was buried at the cross-roads still lives. She lives in you and in me. But she lives; for great poets do not die; they are continuing presences; they need only the opportunity to walk among us in the flesh. This opportunity, as I think, it is now coming within your power to give her. For my belief is that if we live another century or so [...] and have five hundred a year each of us and rooms of our own; if we have the habit of freedom and the courage to write exactly what we think; [...] if we face the fact, for it is a fact, that there is no arm to cling to, but that we go alone and that our relation is to the world of reality and not only to the world of men and women, then the opportunity will come and the dead poet who was Shakespeare's sister will put on the body which she has so often laid down. Drawing her life from the lives of the unknown who were her forerunners, as her brother did before her, she will be born. As for her coming without that preparation, without that effort on our part, without that determination that when she is born again she shall find it possible to live and write her poetry, that we cannot expect, for that would be impossible. But I maintain that she would come if we worked for her, and that so to work, even in poverty and obscurity, is worth while.

This is where I am in history.



Forma

Realtà

Identità

Tempo





“Are real people fictions? We mostly understand ourselves through an endless series of stories told to ourselves by ourselves and others. The so-called facts of our individual worlds are highly coloured and arbitrary, fact that fit whatever fiction we have chosen to believe in.”

Jeanette Winterson, *Testimony Against Gertrude Stein*

## WINTERSON SECOND CYCLE

*Lighthousekeeping*

*The Time Gap*

*Weight*

*The Stone Gods*

*Why Be Happy when You Can Be Normal?*

*Fran Kiss Stein*

*Treasure Island*  
*Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*

*The Winter's Tale*

*Atlas Myth*

*Robinson Crusoe*

*Winterson herself!*

*Frankenstein*



# Rewriting Shakespeare

In June 2013, Random House announced **the Hogarth Shakespeare series**, in which **contemporary novelists re-tell a selection of Shakespeare's plays**. Hogarth intended to release the series in **2016** to coincide with the four-hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare's death.

- *The Gap of Time* by Jeanette Winterson – a retelling of *The Winter's Tale*
- *Shylock is My Name* by Howard Jacobson – an interpretation of *The Merchant of Venice*
- *Vinegar Girl* by Anne Tyler – a retelling of *The Taming of the Shrew*
- *Hag-Seed* by Margaret Atwood– a re-imagining of *The Tempest*
- *Macbeth* by Jo Nesbø– a retelling of *Macbeth*
- *Dunbar* by Edward StAubyn – a retelling of *King Lear*
- *New Boy* by Tracy Chevalier – a re-imagining of *Othello*



## REWRITING SHAKESPEARE

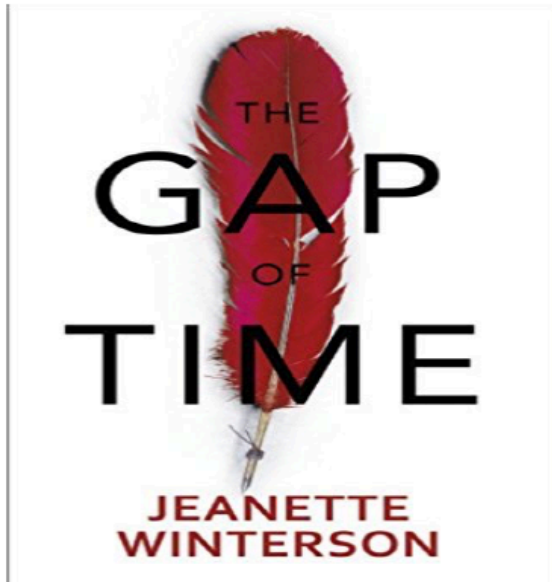
### After revenge ... forgiveness and reconciliation: *The Winter's Tale*

*The Winter's Tale* is a play where the past depends on the future as much as the future depends on the past. The past (Part One) is tragedy: Leontes, king of Sicilia, publicly accuses his wife Hermione of infidelity (with his friend Polixenes, king of Bohemia) and declares that the child she is bearing must be illegitimate. So, he orders that, once the baby, Perdita, is born, she has to be abandoned on the coast of Bohemia. The future (Part two) concerns Perdita, who was found and grown up by a shepherd in Bohemia, her life and love with Polixenes's son Florizel, prince of Bohemia.





Front cover (Hogarth 2015)



Back cover (Hogarth 2015)



In the novel *The Gap of Time* by Jeanette Winterson, a cover version of Shakespeare's play *The Winter's Tale*, jealousy and anger caused Leo to destroy his life and the lives of the others next to him. Because Leo believed his wife, MiMi, and best friend, Xeno, were having an affair, he refused to believe the daughter to whom Mimi gave birth was his. The actions he took to get revenge on Mimi and Xeno changed Leo's life forever and left him wishing that he could turn back time. In the second part of the novel Perdita, who is nineteen, and has been living in America, arrives in London with her boyfriend Zel (whose identity as Xeno's son will be discovered later on), because she wants to discover the truth about her father. She contacts Leo, who invites her to a restaurant.

In the final scene of the novel, a concert (which has been chosen also because MiMi was a singer), all characters meet, and all contrasts and misunderstandings turn out well.

It was the night of the concert.

The big space was full. Red lanterns and red lights lit the audience. The raised stage was silver-white with a big grand piano and drum kit and plenty of room for the brass section. There were a couple of local breaking bands, two performance poets, a stand-up comedian and a fire eater. (...)

A woman is standing like a statue in the light. She's wearing a simple black dress and red lipstick, her heavy hair cut short.

She doesn't move. Then she does.

"This song is for my daughter. It's called Perdita".

**Think aloud strategies**

- Why are there a "I" and "for me" in the text?

**In-depth meaning of key words**

- What feelings are evoked through the key words?

Leo stood up, went into the aisle. From somewhere in the theatre Xeno came and stood beside him. He put his arm round Leo. Leo was crying now, long tears of rain.

**That which is lost is found.**

So we leave them now, in the theater, with the music. I was sitting at the back, waiting to see what would happen, and now I'm out on the street in the summer night, the rain tracing my face.

I wrote this cover version because the play has been a private text **for me** for more than thirty years. By that I mean part of the written wor(l)d I can't live without; without, not in the sense of lack, but in the old sense of living outside of something.

It's a play about a foundling. And **I am**. It's a play about **forgiveness** and a world of possible futures – and how forgiveness and the future are tied together to both directions. **Time is reversible.**

(pp.283-284)

Perdita dressed as a shepherdess by Anthony Frederick Augustus Sandys, known as Frederick Sandys (1829 -1904), Pre-Raphaelite painter



Soon this will become our life together and we have to live in the world like everyone else. We have to go to work, have children, make homes, make dinner, make love and the world is low on goodness these days so our lives may come to nothing. We will have dreams but will they come true?

Maybe....

Love. The size of it. The scale of it. Unimaginable. Vast. Your love for me. My love for you. Our love for one another. Real. Yes. Though I find my way by flashlight in the dark, I am witness and evidence of what I know: this love.

The atom and the jot of my span.

(p. 288-89)



# The Winter's Tale

The two parts of the play are united by the speech of Time at the beginning of Act IV:

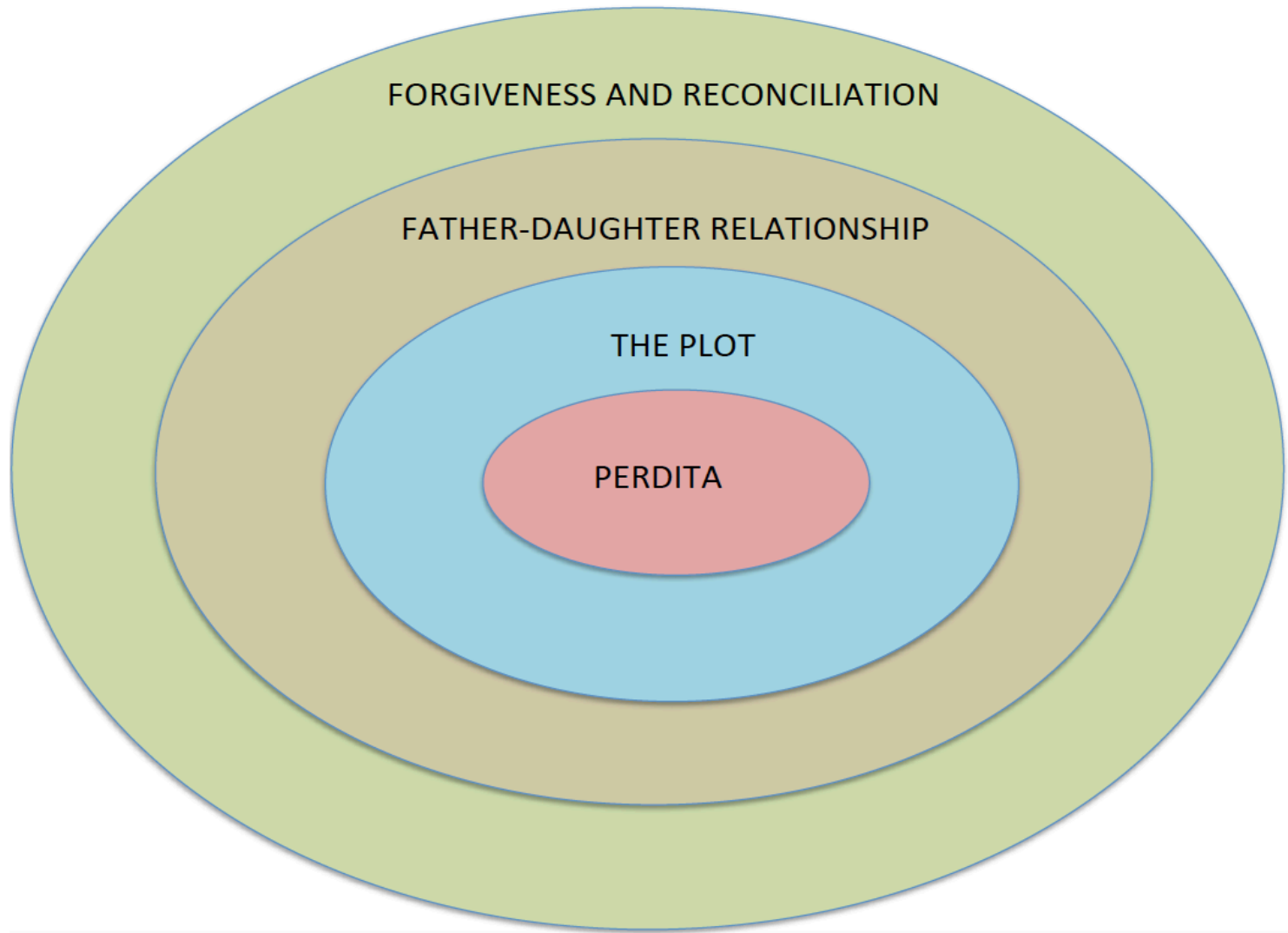
Scene I	Scena I
<p><i>Enter Time, the Chorus</i> (...) Your patience this allowing, I turn my glass, and give my scene such growing As you had slept between: Leontes leaving, Th' effects of his fond jealousies so grieving That he shuts up himself, imagine me, Gentle spectators, that I now may be In fair Bohemia, and remember well I mentioned a son o' th' king's, which Florizel I now name to you: and with speed so pace To speak of Perdita, now grown in grace Equal with wond'ring. What of her ensues I list not prophesy; but let Time's news Be known when 'tis brought forth. A shepherd's daughter, And what to her adheres, which follows after, Is th' argument of Time. Of this allow, If ever you have spent time worse ere now; If never, yet that Time himself doth say, He wishes earnestly you never may.</p>	<p><i>Entra il Tempo, a fare il Coro</i> (...) la vostra pazienza permettendo, do un giro alla clessidra, e alla mia scena un tempo come se in mezzo aveste dormito: lasciando Leonte, così afflitto dai risultati di gelosie malate che si rinchiude al mondo, immaginate, gentili spettatori, ch'io sia adesso nella bella Boemia, e ricordate come menzionai un figliolo del re, che col nome di Florizel ora vi presento; e subito passo a parlare di Perdita, cresciuta in grazia adesso, come in ammiratori. Quel che sarà di lei non voglio profetare; la cronaca del Tempo sia nota quando accade. La figlia di un pastore, e quel che la riguarda, con quel che segue poi, è il mio argomento. Se mai avete trascorso tempo peggior di questo, concedetelo; se non è stato così, consentite che il tempo stesso v'auguri di cuore di non averlo mai.</p>



## The Gap of Time

And time, that sets all limits offers our one chance at freedom from limits. We were not trapped after all. Time can be redeemed. That which is lost is found...

(p. 288)



A mindmap of the key words in *The Winter's Tale* and in *The Gap of Time*

# Storytelling and being a writer

**Storytelling teaches us to be unafraid of our imaginative power** and I think it teaches us to be unafraid of the exuberance and the unruly, untamed nature of life, of our lives. (p. 5)

I believe that **storytelling is a way of navigating our lives**, and that to read ourselves as fiction is much more liberating than to read ourselves as facts. (p. 20)



Personally I think it's unhelpful that writers are treated as celebrities; **I think it's better that we should be treated as nobodies and only the work should be on show...** you have to live in the world that you're in; there's no point in lamenting for a lost Arcadia – it won't come back. (p. 6)

*From Innocence to Experience*, Louise Tucker talks to Jeanette Winterson, P.S. in *Lighthousekeeping*





I do think that it's right to put as much into life as you can and to get out of life as you can...

People are always saying that they haven't got time for anything: **I think there is time, but it demands prioritising and it demands rethinking the way we live our lives.** (p. 13)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KYK6Tfb0snQ>  
*Is Humanity Smart Enough to Survive Itself?* | Jeanette Winterson | TED



# Virginia Woolf e Simone de Beauvoir

## Pensieri Frammentari di Pace

### La funzione pragmatica della letteratura: il 'sacred wood' femminista

Il romanzo dà voce ad un pensiero 'altro' rispetto a quello socialmente accettato. Traduce il proprio sistema di valori in un linguaggio comune e comprensibile a tutti.

'Literature of facts' e 'literature of fiction' sono identiche perché sono narrative basate sulle opinioni e il punto di vista dello scrittore (3G).

*'The spirit of freedom'*

(Woolf, 'How Should One Read a Book', 1931)

Molti dei suoi libri sono scritti sotto forma di romanzo, perché secondo lei è uno dei linguaggi più efficaci per veicolare la filosofia esistenzialista. Infatti, è in grado di esprimere nella maniera migliore sentimento, intelligenza ed emozione.



La narrativa è uno dei modi "ideali" perché c'è la dimensione umana e esistenziale, ancor prima di quella femminile

“Bisogno di parole nuove, non femminismo”

La donna è l'altro assoluto; non c'è dialettica, ma oppressione



Webinar 21 novembre 2022  
Belinda Giannessi e Rosalia Bandiera

Novel-essay (progetto originario di 3Gs)

Che cos'è una donna?

*"But to continue my story. The Angel was dead; what then remained? You may say that what remained was a simple and common object—a young woman in a bedroom with an inkpot. In other words, now that she had rid herself of falsehood, that young woman had only to be herself. Ah, but what is "herself"? I mean, what is a woman? I assure you, I do not know. I do not believe that you know. I do not believe that anybody can know until she has expressed herself in all the arts and professions open to human skill."*

(Woolf: «Professions for Women», 1931)

«Ho esitato a lungo prima di scrivere un libro sulla donna. Il soggetto è irritante, soprattutto per le donne; e non è nuovo. Il problema del femminismo ha fatto versare abbastanza inchiostro, ora è pressoché esaurito: non parliamone più.»

De Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième sexe*, 1949

# 'The unpaid-for *Education*'

Quattro insegnanti che hanno sempre accompagnato le donne e che non devono essere dimenticate e alle quali dà un nuovo e positivo significato

- Poverty
- Derision
- Chastity
- Freedom from unreal loyalties

Woolf concede una ghinea alla seconda lettera (per la ricostruzione di un college femminile) a condizione che si promuova un'istruzione 'altra', diversa da quella delle università tradizionali che hanno creato una società basata sulla prevaricazione dell'uno sull'altro. Riconosce, tuttavia, che l'istruzione universitaria sia sicuramente migliore di quella domestica (nella sfera privata non ci può essere che la ripetizione e il rafforzamento dei soliti meccanismi patriarcali, mentre quella universitaria può portare a dei cambiamenti).

Necessità di un'educazione 'altra'



## 'The unpaid-for *Profession*': moglie e madre

Necessità di un'indipendenza economica



Sottomissione atavica codificata nell'immagine della madre (espressione del codice culturale basato sulla differenza quale condizione di inferiorità e desiderio di annientare l'altro).

- Educazione dei figli (con totale annullamento di se stessa)
- Famiglia

Finché rimarranno non retribuiti non ci potrà essere indipendenza economica (cfr Engels) e quindi di opinione. Si concede una Guinea alla terza richiesta purché aiutino tutti coloro – uomini e donne e indipendentemente dal colore della loro pelle – che meritino un posto di lavoro.

# Time and memory

## Struttura temporale

“Is that how we lived *then*? But we lived as usual. Everyone does, most of the time. Whatever is going on is as usual. Even this is as usual, *now*”

- Costruzione non lineare, anacronia: continue analessi
- Continuo alternarsi e sovrapporsi di passato e presente: il mondo com'era [*the time before*] e il mondo com'è adesso [*the time now*] o, piuttosto, come *non è più* adesso
- Struttura di **utopie e distopie**: confronto tra società presente (raccontata come passata – e criticata) e in un altrove geografico o temporale, descritto in dettaglio, spesso da una guida, un viaggiatore
- Offred: come i medici impiccati al muro: “time travelers, anachronisms. They've come here from the past.”

Webinar 14 dicembre  
2022

Lucia Esposito e  
Alessandra Ruggiero  
“The Handmaid’s Tale”:  
*forme di resistenza e  
rigenerazione*

## Contro-memoria

### COUNTER-MEMORY

- a complex, fragmentary, multi-layered, alternative story
- Offred’s story as a **reconstruction from fragments**

George Lipsitz, *Time Passages*, University of Minnesota Press, 1990 :  
“Unlike historical narratives that begin with the totality of human existence and then locate specific actions and events within that totality ... counter-memory focuses on **localized experiences with oppression**, using them to reframe and refocus dominant narratives purporting to represent universal experience.”

*Her*story: little narrative, feminized private recollection  
Vs. *His*tory: heroic grand, public narrative

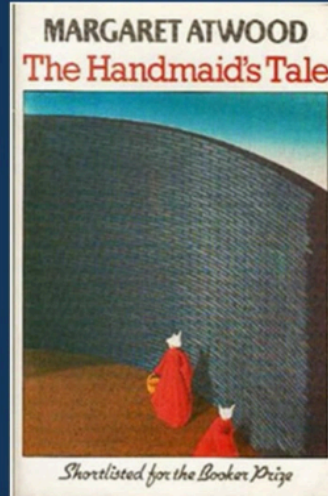


# The genre and its features

## *THT* come distopia

Scongiorare pericolo dell'involuzione politico-religiosa [epoca Reagan-Thatcher]

- **RETROTOPIA** puritana, teocrazia 'giustificata' da catastrofe ambientale; infertilità; degenerazione dei costumi
- Spersonalizzazione e sottomissione delle donne a scopo riproduttivo, patriarcato
- Sorveglianza: gli 'occhi'
- Divieto di leggere e scrivere
- Controllo di passato e memoria



## *THT* come distopia

USTOPIA:

conio per definire combinazione tra società perfetta (utopia) e il suo opposto (distopia) perché **dietro ogni utopia si nasconde sempre una distopia** e viceversa:

- «Even Orwell's *1984*, surely one of the most unrelievedly gloomy dystopias ever concocted – utopia is present, though minimally, in the form of an antique glass paperweight and a little woodland glade beside a stream. As for the utopias, from Thomas More onwards, there is always provision made for the renegades, those who don't or won't follow the rules: **prison, enslavement, exile, exclusion, or execution**»
- *THT*: piuttosto "CRITICAL" o "OPEN-ENDED DYSTOPIA"
- (Raffaella Baccolini, "Gender and Genre in the Feminist Critical Dystopias of Burdekin, Atwood, and Butler", 2000)

# Distopie

- Innumerevoli distopie politiche, tecnologiche, ambientali

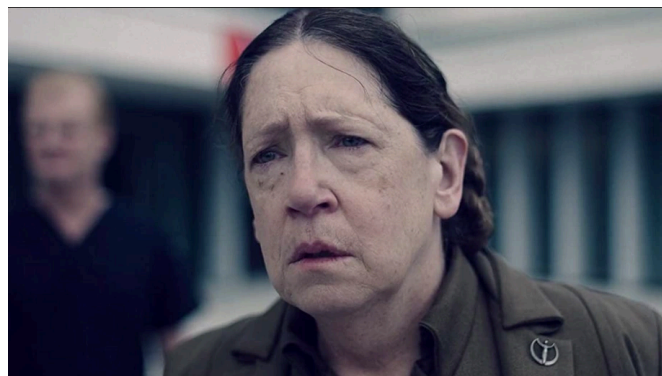


## The comparison with other dystopian novels:

- *Brave New World* (1932), Aldous Huxley
- *1984* (1949), George Orwell
- *The Circle* (2013), Dave Eggers
- *The Power* (2016), Naomi Alderman (Women's Prize for Fiction 2017)
- *The Wall* (2019), John Lanchester

## *The Testaments* (2019) as a sequel

The novel is set 15 years after the events of *The Handmaid's Tale*. It is narrated by Aunt Lydia, a character from the previous novel; Agnes, a young woman living in Gilead; and Daisy, a young woman living in Canada



I write these words in my private sanctum within **the library of Ardua Hall – one of the few libraries remaining after the enthusiastic book-burning** that have been going on across our land. [...]

If you are reading, **this manuscript at least will have survived**. Though perhaps I'm fantasizing: perhaps I will never have a reader. [...]

That's enough inscribing for today: My hand hurts, my back aches, and my nightly cup of hot milk awaits me. **I'll stash this screed in its hiding place, avoiding the surveillance cameras** - I know where they are, having placed them myself. Despite such precautions, **I'm aware of the risk I'm running: writing can be dangerous**. What betrayals, and then what denunciations, might lie in store for me? There are several within Ardua Hall who would love to get their hands on these pages.

# Reflections on The Handmaid's Tale

Since 1985, the book has never stopped selling. I suppose it's because new generations keep appearing to be terrified by it

What moved her to write the book:



The first wave was in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, its proponents were called suffragettes, and their goal was female suffrage



Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), a protest against the lack of brain proposed by the back-to-the-home spinners of the late 1940s and the 1950s

The *Handmaid's Tale* set out to answer two theoretical questions:

- If the US were to become a dictatorship or absolutist government?
- If women are now out of the home and running over the place like squirrels, how do you stuff them back into the home?



# Expressing opinions on social and political questions

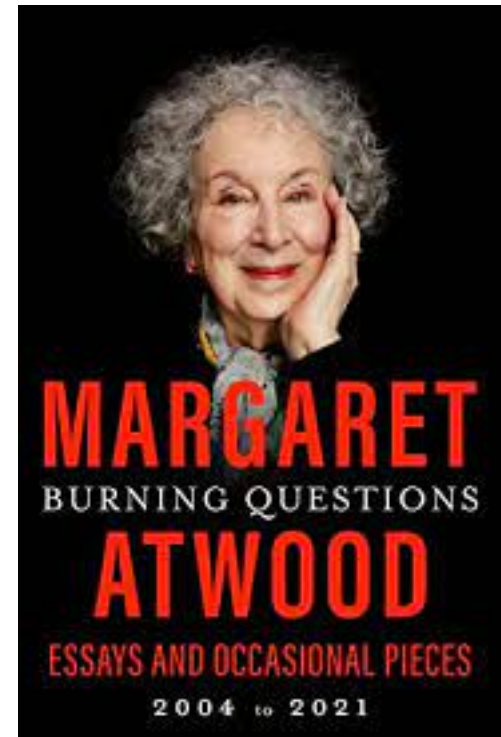
## **A Slave State?** (2018)

**Nobody likes abortion, even when safe and legal.** It's not what any woman would choose for a happy time on Saturday night. **But nobody likes women bleeding to death on the bathroom floor from illegal abortions** either. What to do?

Perhaps a different way of approaching the question would be to ask: **What kind of country do you want to live in?** One in which every individual is free to make decisions concerning his or her health and body, or one in which the population is free and the other half is enslaved? [...]

**We say that women “give birth”.** And mothers who have chosen to be mothers do give birth, and feel it as a gift. **But if they have not chosen, birth is not a gift they give;** it is an extortion from them against their wills.

pp. 361-62



## Growing Up in Quarantineland (2020)

**There are two kinds of nightmares. The first is the bad dream you've had many times before.** You find yourself in a very familiar, sinister place: the creepy cellar, the murderous hotel, the dark forests. [...]

**In the second nightmare, everything that ought to be familiar is strange.** You're lost, there are no directions, and you don't know what to do.

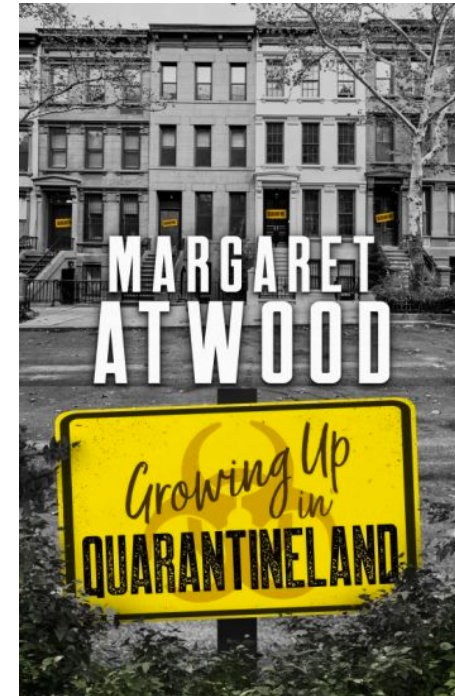
**It seems we're living through both kinds at the moment,** but which will resonate most with you will depend on your age. **The second nightmare is a good fit for the young,** who have never experienced anything like this before. [...]

**But, for old folks like me, it's the first nightmare that is plaguing our sleep** once more: we've been here before, or if not here, somewhere eerily like it. [...]

If you yourself are not ill, **the pandemic may have given you a gift! That gift is time.** Always meant to write a novel or take up clog-dancing? Now's your chance.

And take heart! **Humanity's been through it before.**

pp. 393-97



# Hag-Seed (2016)

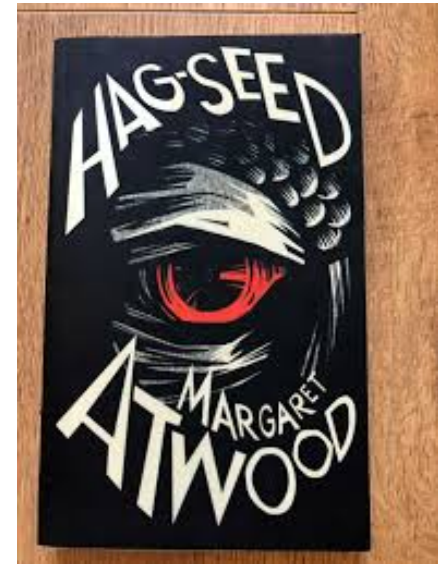
.....**But this rough magic  
I here abjure**; and, when I have requir'd  
Some heavenly music, - which even now I do, -  
To work mine end upon their senses, that  
This airy charm is for, **I'll break my staff,  
Bury it certain fadoms in the earth,  
And deeper than did ever pulmmet sound  
I'll drown my book.**  
*The Tempest, Act V, Scene I*

Felix folds up his stuffed-animal garment: take it or throw it out? On a whim he packs it into the suitcase. He'll bring it on the cruise with him, where it will add a colourful and authentic note to his presentations. The aura it once held for him is dimming, like holiday lights at noon. Soon it will be nothing but a souvenir. And there's his fox-head cane as well. It's no longer a magic staff, it's only a wooden stick. Broken. Should he bury it certain fadoms in the earth? That would be histrionic. Anyway, who'd be the audience? "Farewell," he says to it. "My so potent art."

*Hag-Seed, p. 283*



**Burying his  
magic staff**





*But release me from my bands  
With the help of your good hands:  
Gentle breath of yours my sails  
Must fill, or else my project fails,  
Which was to please. Now I want  
Spirits to enforce, Art to enchant;  
And my ending is despair,  
Unless I be reliev'd by prayer,  
Which pierces so, that it assaults  
Mercy itself, and frees all faults.  
As you from crimes would pardon'd be,  
Let your indulgence set me free.*



Miranda, John William Waterhouse (1849- 1917)

The Tempest, Act V,  
Epilogue

Setting free:  
Ariel,  
Prospero  
and  
Miranda in  
a specular  
way

He picks up the silver-framed photo of Miranda, laughing happily on her swing. There she is, three years old, lost in the past. But not so, for she's also here, watching him as he prepares to leave the full poor cell where she's been trapped with him. Already she's fading, losing substance: he can barely sense her. She's asking him a question. Is he compelling her to accompany him on the rest of his journey?

What has he been thinking – keeping her tethered to him all this time? Forcing her to do his bidding? How selfish he has been! Yes, he loves her: his dear one, his only child. But he knows what she truly wants, and what he owes her.

“To the elements be free,” he says to her.  
And, finally, she is.



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# THANKS

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<https://www.bloomingteachers.com/>