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**“I tell, therefore you are”:
Identity in *The Handmaid’s Tale*.
A comparison between the novel and the series.**

Abstract: This article compares the narrative representation, and more specifically the identity (de-) construction, of the main character in the novel *The Handmaid’s Tale* and in the first season of the eponymous series. To do so, I draw on the concepts of transmedial narratology as elaborated by Thon (2015, 2016) and Ryan (2014), that stresses that some narratological concepts originally applied to literary texts (as for example storyworlds, characters, the distinction story/discourse) are useful to analyze narrative representations in other media as well. One of the principal means in literature to represent the inner world of a character is the interior monologue. How is the interior monologue used in both the novel and the series? How does this use influence the plot in both media? And does the medium in any way determine the use of the interior monologue? Furthermore, I connect the narrative representation of the main character to the principle of remediation and demonstrate that her portrayal is inextricably linked to the medium in both series and novel.

Keywords: Transmedial Narratology, Remediation, Metanarrative Comments, Interior Monologue, Identity.

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CROSSING NARRATIVE BOUNDARIES
BETWEEN CINEMA AND OTHER MEDIA
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Introduction

Margaret Atwood wrote the best seller *The Handmaid’s Tale* in 1985. It turned out to be a story that is extremely suitable for adaptation to different media. In the past decades it was transformed into an opera, several theater performances, radio plays, a film, a graphic novel and a television series as well. As J. Hillis Miller points out, the need for the same stories to be told over and over can be seen as “one of the most powerful, perhaps the most

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powerful, of ways to reassert the basic ideology of our culture" (72). Similarly, James Naremore suggests that adaptations can support the creation of cultural and national myths (14). Miller's and Naremore's thesis could explain why *The Handmaid's Tale* is told time and again: The story deals with the decline of ideology as we know it. Maybe it is told repeatedly in different forms to counteract that decline. In this article I focus on Atwood's novel and on the first season of the series of *The Handmaid's Tale* and analyze which narrative techniques are used to thematize the identity (de-) construction of the main character.

On April 26 2017, *The Handmaid's Tale* premiered on Hulu. In no time, the series became incredibly popular and the fourth season is already in the making in 2019. What is more, the positive attention once again threw the spotlight on the book that inspired the first season of the series. The novel stages a society in which religious and conservative ideas – strongly inspired by seventeenth-century Puritan views – have the upper hand. Environmental disasters, nuclear pollution which resulted in widespread infertility, but also wars and crimes had affected existing forms of society to such an extent that a favorable climate was created for religious extremists to take over power. The new society is baptized Gilead, following Biblical example. In Gilead, women are deprived of all their rights. The elder women are called Marthas and are responsible for the household. Young, fertile women are trained by Aunts to become maidservants or "handmaids", property of wealthy men called Commanders and their barren wives. To underline the status of the handmaids, they are called after their Commander: Offred, the main character's name, refers to "of commander Fred."¹ During their fertile period, handmaids are ritually raped by their commander while lying between his wife's legs. They get their inspiration for this from the Bible: "[a]nd when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children or else I die. And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel: and he said, Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb? And she said, Behold my maid Billhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children." (Genesis, 30:1-3). In this way, they hope to be able to ensure offspring. The days on which this "ritual" takes place are called "ceremony days." Every social contact is made impossible for the handmaids. When they go out – mostly to buy groceries –, they carry "wings", which keep them from seeing, but also from being seen (cf. 2, 2).² Handmaids aren't allowed to go out except in pairs. This would be for their own safety, but the truth is "that she is my spy, as I am hers" (4, 2), they have to watch each other. Women who do not comply with the new rules are classified as "Unwomen" and are shipped off to the Colonies, where they are forced to clean up nuclear waste and eventually die as a result. Men fulfill different roles as well. There are the Commanders, who are in charge in Gilead, armed Guards are everywhere to keep order and there are Eyes, spies who extradite women and men who want to upset the established order or who try to escape to Canada. Those who do not want to assimilate or people who commit crimes (or have

committed crimes in their former life) are hung on what used to be the Harvard wall. Their bodies are left hanging for a few days, as a warning.

In this article, I take a closer look at the identity (de-)construction of the main character in the novel and the series. As my analysis will show, we can observe an opposite movement in the way the main character is depicted in both media. While Offred increasingly conforms to the rules and views in Gilead in the course of the story, June's (inner) resistance grows in every episode.³ One of the main means to represent this evolution is the interior monologue, which will be central to my discussion. In the first part of this text, I will briefly elaborate on the theoretical framework to analyze and compare the identity (de-)construction in the following two parts.

1. Transmedial narratology, intermediality and interior monologue

To analyze the narrative representation of the identity of Offred and June, I draw on the theory of transmedial narratology as elaborated by Jan Noël-Thon (2015, 2016) and Marie-Laure Ryan (2014). Transmedial narratology stresses that some core concepts which originate in literary theory, as for example the concept of storyworlds, characters and the distinction between story and discourse, are not bound to literature, but are applicable in other media and other representations as well. The kind of transmedial narratology that Thon develops then allows for "the analysis of transmedial strategies of narrative representation and their realization within the specific mediality of contemporary films, comics, and video games" ("Introduction", 3),⁴ literary texts, theatre and other (popular) media. In this article, I focus on the intermedial representation of the main character, and more specific on the intermedial narrative techniques that are used in both novel and series to construct her identity. Without going into too much detail on the semantics, it is helpful to clarify the concepts of transmedial narratology, transmediality and the differences with mediality and intermediality in order to explain why "transmedial narratology" is relevant for this discussion. As Thon summarizes it very well, Irina Rajewsky proposed to describe the relation between mediality, intermediality and transmediality as follows: "The term (intra)mediality refers to phenomena that only involve a single medium, the term intermediality refers to a variety of phenomena that transcend medial boundaries and involve at least two media, and the term transmediality refers to medially unspecified phenomena that are not connected to a given medium or its mediality and can, hence, be realized by means of a large number of different media" (Thon "Narratives across Media" 440. Cf. as well Rajewsky 2002, 2005). Concerning intermediality, Rajewsky distinguishes between "medial transposition" (of which the adaptation of the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* into the series is an example), "media combination" (which includes multimedia phenomena such as film, opera, comics etc.) and "intermedial references" (for example references in a literary text to a film through the specific qualities of the medium, for instance, "the evocation or imitation

of certain filmic techniques in a literary text such as zoom shots, fades, dissolves, and montage editing)" (Rajewsky "Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation" 52). For this analysis, especially the concepts of medial transposition and intermedial references are of importance.

The main intermedial narrative means which represents the identity process of Offred/June is the interior monologue. An interior monologue is one "of the hallmarks of modernist style, interior monologue affords a prime opportunity for studying how writers ranging from James Joyce and Dorothy Richardson to Italo Svevo and Alfred Döblin innovated on conventions for speech and thought presentation to create effects of psychological immediacy" (Herman 2017). Since the last quarter of the 19th century, it has become the pre-eminent stylistic tool of psychologizing narratives, interested in depicting a stream of consciousness of the character: a flow of successive and merging moods, feelings, thoughts, memories, drives, etc. The interior monologue in literature was strongly promoted by the rise of psychology (cf. a. o. William James, brother of the American-English novelist Henry James). This gave the author the opportunity to draw his characters from the inside and to show their inner thoughts and conscious or unconscious motives to the reader. In France, where this stylistic device originates, it was successfully applied by, among others, E. Dujardin and later by, among others, M. Proust and V. Larbaud. The novel *Les lauriers sont coupés* (1887) by Dujardin is considered a formal example par excellence (Bork *et al.* 2012). Traditionally, a division is made between the direct interior monologue, by which the mediating instance completely disappears in the background, and the indirect interior monologue, where the narrator or a character announces the stream of consciousness. In *Transparent Minds* (1978), Dorrit Cohn proposes a more detailed classification, which is more in line with the possible contemporary transmedial use of the interior monologue. She distinguishes between: a) psycho-narration, "encompassing all varieties of narrator's discourse about a character's consciousness that relies entirely on his or her own words" (14), b) narrated interior monologue, a "character's mental discourse in the guise of the narrator's discourse" (14), c) quoted interior monologue, "mediated (quoted explicitly or implicitly) by a narrative voice that refers to monologist by third person pronoun in the surrogating text" (15), and e) autonomous interior monologue, an unmediated and apparently self-generated form, constituting "an autonomous first person form which it would be best to regard as a variant of first-person narration" (15) (cf. Thon *Transmedial Narratology* 6 and 36-37 as well). As the analysis will reveal, especially the fourth form is of importance here. It is a bridge too far to define "interior monologue" as a fixed concept of transmedial narratology as media which rely on a non-verbal semiotic system (such as paintings, sculptures, installations, music) cannot use the technique in the way literary texts do. For the analysis of the novel and the series *The Handmaid's Tale*, the interior monologue could, however, be considered an intermedial means of narrative representation to construct the identity of the main character and as such its analysis

contributes to the insights and conceptualization of a transmedial narratology. Of importance for the discussion in this article are the questions: "What changes does the interior monologue undergo during the medial transposition from novel to series?" and "Do we notice any differences in its use between the novel and the series and, more importantly, what implications do they have?". As my analysis will reveal, the medium determines how the interior monologue can be employed and it could be argued that it even affects the plot. This determination becomes – partly – clear when we consider how the novel and the series enter into dialogue with each other. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin explain in their book *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (2000) that each new medium absorbs older media, a phenomenon they call remediation and which can be applied to the dialogue that unfolds between the series and the novel. Remediation, thus, is the incorporation or representation of one medium in another medium (Bolter and Grusin 45). It is derived from intertextuality but is applied to different media rather than only texts. Bolter and Grusin summarize that "media are continually commenting on, reproducing, and replacing each other, and this process is integral to media at all" (55). They distinguish between hypermediacy, by which the medium is emphasized, and transparent immediacy, by which one tries to hide the medium and the process of mediation in order to enhance immersion in the diegetic world. Their insights are not (totally) new. Marshall McLuhan's "the medium is the message" (1964) already highlighted the characteristics of the medium rather than its content. Rajewsky's intermedial references could be considered a subcategory within remediation – though she herself does not define this category as such. As we will see, both the novel's and the series' mediation and remediation are crucial for the development of the plot. Since the use of other media and texts in Atwood's novel has been deemed circumstantial, I will not elaborate on this. For a detailed discussion of this theme, I refer to MacFarlane (1998), Korte (1990) and Filipczak (1995). In part 4 of this article, I will, however, take a closer look at the remediation in the series and especially at the way in which the series enters into dialogue with its "ur-text" and the implications this has for the series.

2. "I had another name, but it's forbidden now"

Offred

In the introduction written by Atwood in the publication of *The Handmaid's Tale* in 2017, we read that the working title was originally *Offred*, named after the main character's pseudonym. Gradually, however, the title *Offred* changed to *The Handmaid's Tale*, a tribute to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and to fairy tales and legends: "[t]he story told by the central character partakes – for later or remote listeners – of the unbelievable, the fantastic, as do the stories told by those who have survived earth-shattering events" (Atwood 2). At the same time, the anonymity implied in the title *The Canterbury Tales* and therefore also in *The Handmaid's Tale* is more in line with the content of the story than a name, even though "Offred" is primarily

an indication of property. The anonymity contained in the titles *The Canterbury Tales* and *The Handmaid's Tale*, which refer to a story, but not to its narrator(s), thus already hints at one of the central themes of the novel: *The Handmaid's Tale* is not only a dystopian novel that sketches a jet-black picture of the future, but it is also a young woman's search for her identity, which was brutally taken away from her by the ruling class in Gilead. The anonymity, however, already suggests that Offred's search is doomed to fail.

One of the main narrative techniques to represent the search for her identity is the interior monologue. Atwood shapes it in a way that is specific to the novel: there are little ungrammaticalities, it is written in an associative but coherent mode and it more or less follows the general structure of the novel. The novel is narrated by an (intradiegetic homodiegetic) I-narrator, the main character. The narrator sometimes reports about life and events in Gilead, sometimes she gives us insight in her thoughts via an autonomous interior monologue. Especially in the chapters entitled "Night", Offred gives free rein to her thoughts. As she suggests herself: "The night is mine, my own time, to do with as I will, as long as I am quiet. [...] But the night is my time out, where should I go? Somewhere good. Moira, sitting on the edge of my bed, legs crossed, ankle on knee." (7, 1). Though we also witness what she thinks in the other chapters, the Night-chapters indeed are her own time. In the other chapters, events in Gilead give rise to reflections while in the Night-chapters she recalls her past life associatively. Her current life does not act as an anchor in those chapters. Chapters in which she has time of her own are significantly a minority. Concerning the structure of the novel, the interior monologue thus especially serves the distinction between reflections on what happens in Gilead and "her own time," in which she escapes to the past – and later on in the novel to Nick.

In the beginning of the novel, Offred distances herself from the life and customs in Gilead: "I can smell the polish. There's a rug on the floor, oval, of braided rags. This is the kind of touch **they** like: folk art, archaic, made by women, in their spare time, from things that have no other use. A return to traditional values" (2, 1, my emphasis). She does not feel like being part of the Gileadean society and is not able – and does not want to – use the first-person plural: we. Later on, when talking about the room she sleeps in, she states "[t]he door of the room – not *my* room, I refuse to say *my*" (2, 4). In her head, Offred tries to resist the domination in Gilead. Very soon, however, we start to notice cracks in her resistance. After she sees the commander hanging around upstairs, she thinks: "Was he invading? Was he in my room? I called it *mine*" (8, 7).

The present tense often used in the novel seems to suggest that thinking and acting coincide and that narrated and experiencing time are one: the reader follows Offred via her thoughts while she lives her life in Gilead. Yet there are several passages that invalidate that suggestion. Offred regularly states that her story is a reconstruction: "This is a reconstruction. All of it is a reconstruction. It's a reconstruction **now, in my head**, as I lie flat on my single bed rehearsing what I should or shouldn't have

said, what I should or shouldn't have done, how I should have played it. If I ever get out of here –" (23, 1, my emphasis). The "now, in my head" suggests that there is a difference between the I who tells – now – and the experiencing I. On the other hand, the deictic "here" in the phrase "if I ever get out of here" gives the impression that the telling I is in the same situation as the experiencing I. We read another example when Offred tells how Serena Joy forced her to go to bed with Nick, hoping that he could conceive a child with her. Different versions of that event are displayed:

I open the kitchen door, step out, wait a moment for a vision. It's so long I've been outside, alone, at night. Now there's thunder, the storm's moving closer. [...] His mouth is on me, his hands, I can't wait and he's moving, already, love, it's been so long, I'm alive in my skin, again, arms around him, falling and water softly, everywhere, never-ending. I knew it might only be once. I made that up. It didn't happen that way. Here is what happened. [...]

And so it goes. And so. I knew it might only be once. Goodbye, I thought, even at the time, goodbye. There wasn't any thunder though, I added that in. To cover up the sounds, which I am ashamed of making.

It didn't happen that way either. I'm not sure how it happened; not exactly. All I can hope for is a reconstruction: the way love feels is always only approximate. (40, 3)

Such metanarrative passages that thematize Offred's telling serve a twofold purpose in the novel. First of all, they underscore that her story is told *post factum* and that she is indeed reconstructing what once happened – as turns out in the chapter "Historical Notes". In addition, exactly because they emphasize the subjectivity of her story, the metanarrative accounts also emphasize that Offred does not solely want to bear witness to what is happening around her (or has happened); her telling also serves a higher purpose. Her story not only becomes a tradition, but also a way of surviving. Like Scheherazade, she tells and keeps on telling to save her life, to ensure her own existence and her own identity, which is of no importance anymore in the Gilead-regime. The identity of the handmaids is replaced by a function: they are nothing but "two-legged wombs, that's all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices" (23, 2). Their fertility is their only valuable characteristic. That a woman as an individual is no longer important, is aptly illustrated by the fact that women are no longer allowed to use their real name. Though the reader does not know what Offred's name is, she does tell Nick her name, and feels that therefore she is known (41, 3). An identity of one's own plays a crucial role in the (inner) revolt against Gilead. Telling her story gives Offred a sense of control and, what is more important, she hopes to regain her identity by telling her story:

I would like to believe this is a story I'm telling. I need to believe it. I must believe it. Those who can believe that such stories are only stories have a better chance. If it's a story I'm telling, then I have control over the ending.

Then there will be an ending to the story, and real life will come after it. I can pick up where I left off. It isn't a story I'm telling. It's also a story I'm telling, in my head, as I go along. Tell, rather than write, because I have nothing to write with and writing is in any case forbidden. But if it's a story, even in my head, I must be telling it to someone. You don't tell a story only to yourself. There's always someone else. Even when there is no one. (7, 3)

The certainty that someone listens to her story gives Offred an identity, a new *raison d'être*: "By telling you anything at all I'm at least believing in you, I believe you're there, I believe you into being. Because I'm telling you this story, I will your existence. I tell, therefore you are" (41, 1). By believing "you into being," Offred believes herself into being as well, which is implied in Offred's counterpart of the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum*: "I tell, therefore you are." Only because of the other, you exist yourself. By telling her story, Offred thus hopes to create a "you," a listener, who must confirm her own identity. Gradually, however, it becomes clear that Offred is not retrieving her identity. As time goes by, we discover that the indoctrination of Gileadan thought is bearing fruit, a fact we can detract from her interior monologues. It seems as if Offred no longer rebels against religious and dehumanizing ideas, quite the contrary, she appropriates them. She behaves more passively as time progresses. When Ofglen suggests that the underground women's rebel movement could get her out of Gilead when she is in danger, we read: "The fact is that I no longer want to leave, escape, cross the border to freedom" (41, 4). As Offred herself indicates, this is partly due to Nick. Yet we also witness this stream of thoughts: "Some days, I was more rational. [...] I said, I have made a life for myself, here, of a sort. That must have been what the settler's wives thought, and women who survived wars, if they still had a man. Humanity is so adaptable, my mother would say. Truly amazing what people can get used to, as long as there are a few compensations." (41, 4). At the end of the book, after hearing that Ofglen has been killed, she feels no anger, she is only relieved and it seems as if she is surrendering to the regime at that time:

Dear God, I think, I will do anything you like. Now that you've let me off, I'll obliterate myself, if that's what you really want; I'll empty myself, truly, become a chalice. I'll give up Nick, I'll forget about the others, I'll stop complaining. I'll accept my lot. I'll sacrifice. I'll repent. I'll abdicate. I'll renounce. I know this can't be right but I think it anyway. Everything they taught at the Red Centre, everything I've resisted, comes flooding in. I don't want pain. I don't want to be a dancer, my feet in the air, my head a faceless oblong of white cloth. I don't want to be a doll hung up on the Wall, I don't want to be a wingless angel. I want to keep on living, in any form. I resign my body freely, to the uses of others. They can do what they like with me. I am abject. I feel, for the first time, their true power. (45, 1)

The use of the word "chalice" is an unmistakable reference to her criticism at the beginning of the novel: "We are two-legged wombs, that's all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices" (23, 2). At that time, she was still determined to resist. The repetition of the same term in a context of acceptance indicates the evolution she goes through. Her line of thought, which we follow via the interior monologues, shows that Offred is slowly but surely indoctrinated by the ideas that she was initially opposed to. Also her subsequent "escape" – or arrest?⁴ – is only a passive experience of what comes her way: "The van waits in the driveway, its double doors stand open. The two of them, one on either side now, take me by the elbows to help me in. Whether this is my end or a new beginning I have no way of knowing: I have given myself over into the hands of strangers, because it can't be helped. And so I step up, into the darkness within; or else the light." (46, 4). It seems as if Offred in the end gives up her resistance and accepts her fate, "because it can't be helped." The indoctrination and the passive acceptance of her fate equal the deconstruction of her identity. At the start of the novel, her interior monologues were the only means to put into words the fight that Offred wanted to wage against the regime. Slowly, however, it becomes clear that Offred's "old" awareness of standards is starting to fade. This process of change is precisely defined by Aunt Lydia: "Ordinary, said Aunt Lydia, is what you are used to. This may not seem ordinary to you now, but after a time it will. It will become ordinary." (6, 4). It is precisely this line of thought that is expressed in the changing interior monologue of the main character in the novel.

Although Atwood refers to the "Historical Notes", the final chapter of the book that takes place during a conference on Gilead in 2195, as a sign of her positive attitude, several researchers have rightly pointed out that the treatment of Offred's account during that conference completely contradicts her aim to find her – or an – identity (a. o. Staels [1995], Grace [1998], Samira Haghi *et al.* [2016]). During that conference it becomes (completely) clear to the reader that the story of Offred was not written down, but recorded. Researchers later found the tapes, tried to reconstruct them as accurately as possible and now propose that exact reconstruction during a conference. The fact that the regime is overthrown does indeed show that Atwood does not completely ruin society as it is in 1984/1985. The anonymity with which the story of Offred is treated – who Offred was, is not important for the scientists, only a reconstruction of the precise facts counts –, the desire for facts and the search for the one and only truth completely ignores the goal of Offred: She wanted to create a listener who could confirm her own identity, but the way her account is treated during the conference reveals that she did not find that kind of listener, only scientists interested in objective details. The conference thus makes it painfully clear that she has not succeeded in her goal. As Staels summarizes: "They [the researchers] express more concern for the historical author of the tale and for the position assigned to her above ground, rather than for the unique narrating voice of 'someone' who speaks from within the periphery, and who draws strength from her marginalized

position" (464). The scientist's longing for facts – "What would we not give, now, for even twenty pages or so of printout from Waterford's private computer! However, we must be grateful for any crumbs the Goddess of History has designed to vouchsafe us" (Historical Notes, 9) – brings another theme to the fore: there is no unequivocal truth, even history is a subjective interpretation of actions and emotions, never an objective truthful story, which Offred clearly emphasizes by displaying different versions of one event and then announcing that she no longer remembers the precise facts (cf. among others, 40, 3-4). Some scholars point out that the fact that Offred tells her story, that it is handed down, as the "Historical Notes" prove, and that she stages her escape in the end (though it remains unclear whether she really escapes) underline her active behavior (cf. Tom Henthorne 111-12). As such, Offred would be recovering her identity. However, I do not agree with that interpretation. An evolution can be observed in the philosophy of Offred: as the novel progresses, she behaves more passive and becomes imbued with the prevailing ideas. The way her person and her story are treated during the conference only confirms that her identity was and is of no importance.

The interior monologue in the novel thus mainly has two functions. On the one hand, it represents Offred's resistance, and more important, the collapse of her resistance. On the other hand, her interior monologues are often a metanarrative reflection on her story, which stresses the medium – and the mediality – and as such her search for her identity as well.

June

In the series, the interior monologue is used in a similar way to the novel, though we do notice some differences, which are partly due to the particularities of the medium. The story in the novel is mediated by an overt I-narrator, in the series it is more difficult to decide if the story is narrated and, if so, who narrates it. If we assume that June acts as a covert I-narrator, then she openly takes the floor during her interior monologues, which we label "autonomous" then (as in the novel). However, if we assume that the series is mediated by a covert third person narrator, then the interior monologues can be labeled as "quoted interior monologues". Although the discussion about the possible difference in narrator between novel and series can entail very interesting insights, this article does not offer any room to delve deeper into that question.⁶ For the further analysis, it is not crucial to identify the interior monologues in the series as autonomous or quoted. During her interior monologues, June is obviously reporting. There is thus a similar distribution of reporting and representation of inner thoughts as in the novel: during the majority of time, reports are made about the life and events in Gilead, through the interior monologue we witness what June really thinks. The first scene in Gilead in the series is the same as the first Gilead-scene in the novel: June (though we don't know her name then) sits in her room in front of her window, her back turned to the light⁷, and names the objects around her. Via her interior monologue – shown in italic subtitles⁸ – the viewer

witnesses what she is thinking: "*A chair, a table, a lamp. There's a window with white curtains, and the glass is shatterproof. But it isn't running away they're afraid of. A handmaid wouldn't get far. It's those other escapes. The ones you can open in yourself given a cutting edge. Or a twisted sheet and a chandelier. I try not to think about those escapes. It's harder on ceremony days, but thinking can hurt your chances. My name is Offred. I had another name, but it's forbidden now.*" ("Offred", episode 1). The first representation of what June thinks immediately outlines some crucial features of Gilead: the handmaids are prisoners, the only way out is an escape from life itself, there is something like a "ceremony day" and their former identities no longer matter. The tone is set.

Early in the first episode it becomes clear that June's interior monologue reveals a gap between her thinking and doing. Furthermore, it is striking that her stream of thoughts is often characterized by a slight irony, not only in the first episode, but throughout the first season. For example, the following conversation between Nick and June takes place during the first episode:

Offred: *He's the commander's driver. Lives over the garage. Low status. Hasn't even been issued a woman.*

Nick: Going shopping?

Offred: *No, Nick, I'm gonna knock back a few at the Oyster House Bar. You wanna come along? Yes.*⁹ ("Offred", episode 1)

When June meets her shopping partner Ofglen a few minutes later, they exchange the following words:

Ofglen: Blessed be the fruit.

Offred: May the Lord open.

Ofglen: Offred? Are you okay?

Offred: Yes. *Pious little shit.* Very well, thank you. ("Offred", episode 1)

The irony causes the viewer to believe that June can distance herself from her life in Gilead. June's interior monologue not only contains contemplative thoughts, but thematizes, like in the beginning of the novel, her inner resistance to the regime. The irony and the implicit sharp comments on the people around her ensure that she is portrayed as a strong character. The specific possibilities that the use of the interior monologue on the screen offers, ensures that her strength can be emphasized: the medium series is – unlike a novel – able to create a simultaneity between viewing and hearing or between thinking and doing. Because we see June smiling friendly when she thinks "pious little shit", we recognize her irony and attribute with her solidity. The possibility of creating a simultaneity between what one hears and what one sees is absent in written language. In the novel, the interior monologue thus could underline Offred's original resistance, but it could never expose the gap between what she thinks and does in a similar way. Though interior monologues thus can be used in different media, they take on the specific modalities of each medium during their transmedial interchange.

Although the function of the interior monologue remains similar throughout the first season, in the course of the episodes it appears to be a less central means to thematize June's resistance. While in the novel, the way in which Offred's thoughts are portrayed gives us long-term doubts about her resistance, June becomes stronger and more rebellious in every episode. Especially in relation to a number of characters, we see that June, in contrast to Offred, is the stronger one. For example, June is called in when Janine tries to jump off a bridge with her baby on the assumption that she will bring Janine to reason ("The Bridge", episode 9). But especially in the relationship with Moira, we see that June is not characterized in the same way as in the novel. While in June's flashbacks Moira always acts more extroverted than June, we see a reversal in Gilead. Although Moira is the one who manages to escape while June remains petrified on the platform ("Nolite Te Bastardes Carborundorum", episode 4), it is June who has to urge Moira during their second meeting in Jezebel's to "keep your fucking shit together" ("The Bridge", episode 9). This phrase is an unmistakable reference to the first episode, where Moira is still the stronger character and incites June to "keep your fucking shit together" if she wants to see her daughter again. After the first ceremony night, June relives this moment via a flashback. After the flashback, we see June, sitting on her bed, while this phrase crosses her mind: "*Keep your fucking shit together*" ("Offred", episode 1). The repetition of that expression in episode 9, now spoken by June, is thus by no means a coincidence. It indicates that their roles have been reserved.

More than in the novel, June starts to oppose the regime not only with words or thoughts, but with actions as well and as such underscores that she (for the time being) does not merit the regime. This evolution implies that the identity of June in comparison with that of Offred is not completely deconstructed. Naming turns out to be a key concept in keeping her identity, which already comes to the foreground at the end of the first episode.¹⁰ It closes with June, sitting in front of her window again, her back turned to the light. While in the opening scene her face remained covered by shadow, we now clearly see the contours of her face. Her stream of thought ends with: "*My name is June*" ("Offred", episode 1). In contrast to Offred, who remains nameless throughout the novel, the main character in the series appropriates her name and her identity at the end of the first episode. Her "*My name is June*" is a statement that her determination not to surrender to the regime underscores. Also during the second meeting between Moira and June in Jezebel's it becomes clear how important names are in the series. June tries to persuade Moira not to passively accept the current state of affairs. Moira, however, sees no other possibilities and therefore replicates, when June addresses Moira with her real name: "It's Ruby now" ("Jezebels", episode 8). With that expression she accepts her destiny and shakes off her old identity. However, the conversation with June has more influence than expected. In "The Bridge" (episode 9), Moira finally escapes from the hotel and delivers June a package she asked for. The package comes with a note: "Praised be, bitch. Here's your damn

package." Signed: "Moira." Her escape ensures that she can re-identify with whom she once was and therefore also can take back her old name. The package contains letters from handmaids that must be smuggled from Gilead and delivered to fled friends and relatives. Each letter starts with the statement "my name is ...". On the one hand, the letters in which the handmaids unmistakably identify themselves underline the importance of identity in resisting the regime. On the other hand, the amount of letters makes it clear that it is not so much the individual struggle which matters, but the collective resistance. Heather Hendershot comes to a similar conclusion, stating: "Gradually, she [June] finds herself by finding other women with whom to connect and by resisting a system that depends upon women's distrusting other women" (15-16). Partly due to the importance of the collective, June's individual search for identity is less elaborated in the series. At the end of season 1, the handmaids, as a group, refuse to stone Janine,¹¹ an explicit victory for the collective. June summarizes laconically: "*If they did not want us to behave like an army, they should not give us uniforms*" ("Night", episode 10).

That the collective takes precedence over the individual is elaborated, among other things, through the concept of extended storytelling. This term is used in the context of transmedia storytelling and refers to the possibility of expanding the scope and meaning of a narrative by using a range of different media. Some critics emphasize the specific possibilities of particular media and analyze how medial representations influence the narration (cf. Straumann 2015). Henry Jenkins gives the example of a game, which can develop ideas and aspects that do not fit within the duration of a standard film (8-9). Though the singular "tale" – in contrast to Chaucer's "tales" – is preserved, the medium of the series has the specific possibility to effectively tell multiple tales. In the novel, it was almost impossible to tell extensively the life stories of Moira, Janine and Nick. That is why we only learn about them via Offred. In the series, however, their life stories, told via flashbacks of the characters themselves, become an important part of the series. Furthermore, by using the concept of extended storytelling, the series adds new stories to the plot, as for example the one of the handmaid Ofglen/ Emily. During flashbacks about their former lives, the characters in the series do get a voice and – much more than in the book – a personal identity. This underlines that June, however still the main character, is not the only one of interest for the series, which puts the importance of her identity for the plotline in perspective. Through the concept of extended storytelling, Offred's identity search gets, in contrast with the novel, another dimension: it is not so much that Offred, by telling her story to an anonymous listener, gives herself an identity, the identity of the collective and the collective resistance seem to be more important to be able to resist the regime in Gilead.

Whereas in the novel the interior monologue was the main means to portray the collapsing of Offred's identity, there is a different dynamic in the series. June's representation of thoughts shows us that she becomes stronger every episode and

that she is able to retrieve her identity. Naming and the collective resistance, which is elaborated on by the concept of extended storytelling, turn out to be crucial in this process.

3. Remediation

As explained in the Introduction, a dialogue and interaction with other media are clearly present both in the novel and in the series. Because the intertextuality in the novel has been discussed by large, I'll only go into the mediation in the series, which is constitutive for the plot. For example, during the end credits of an episode, the music, and especially the lyrics, are often still part of the episode itself, or at least they support the action. As mentioned earlier, the first episode ("Offred") ends with June's statement "*My name is June*", which makes it clear that she will not simply surrender to the regime and is more than the property of a Commander. Immediately after this statement we hear "You don't own me" from John Medora and David White (1963), which explicitly reflects June's message: "You don't own me / I'm not just one of your many toys / You don't own me / Don't say I can't go with other boys / Don't tell me what to do / And don't tell me what to say." Also at the end of "Birth Day" (episode 2) the music during the end credits is part of the plot. The song "Don't you" (Simple Minds 1985) starts when June walks to the gate, on her way to go buy groceries with Ofglen. As she opens the gate, we hear the phrase "don't you recognize me." Ofglen turns around and Offred stares in the face of a stranger. The music stops, right before the chorus, and Offred realizes that the "old" Ofglen has disappeared. The episode ends with an inner "*fuck*" from June, after which the song "Don't you" immediately starts again and continues to the chorus now: "Don't you forget about me."

More important however, is the way in which the series refers to its "source". Two very characteristic aspects of the series are the color palette and the use of light. Reed Morano directed the first three episodes and set the aesthetic parameters: "[t]he shallow focus, extreme overhead shots, and tightly circumscribed color palette" (Hendershot 13) which were inspired by the American painter Andrew Wyeth. However, the light in the series also reminds us of older painters. For example, the sunlight, which often appears from behind the characters, leaving them partly in the dusk, irrevocably reminds us of Johannes Vermeer.¹² Furthermore, it is remarkable how often Vermeer paints his women in front of a window. As stated earlier, Offred silhouetted by the windowsill is a visual motif throughout the first season. The last shot of episode 1 ("Offred"), for example, where June is sitting on the window sill, seems to have been painted by the Dutch grandmaster himself (cf. figures 1 and 2).

The physical characteristics of the handmaids are also reminiscent of the women Vermeer brought to the painting canvas: their garb displays obvious similarities, especially the white cap on the head. Particularly the similarities with Vermeer's painting "Milkmaid" are noticeable. It is striking that Offred in the novel refers to the

Figure 1. "Offred" (episode 1)

Figure 2. Johannes Vermeer, Girl reading a letter at the open window

resemblance to Dutch milkmaids herself:

Late afternoon, the sky hazy, **the sunlight diffuse but heavy and everywhere, like bronze dust**. I glide with Ofglen along the sidewalk; the pair of us, and in front of us another pair, and across the street another. We must look good from a distance: picturesque, like **Dutch milkmaids** on a wallpaper frieze, like a shelf full of period-costume ceramic salt and pepper shakers, like a flotilla of swans or anything that repeats itself with at least minimum grace and without variation. (33, 1, my emphasis)

The incidence of light and the appearance of the handmaids in the series recalling Vermeer can, therefore, be seen as a form of remediation: the series represents another medium, namely painting. At the same time, the attention to the light and the resemblance to Vermeer is also an absorption of the novel and therefore an intertextual – or intermedial, to use Rajewsky's terminology – reference: the references exploit the technical possibilities of the new medium – the visualization of the incidence of light – to elaborate on a statement of Offred in the novel in a way that the novel cannot do.

The overhead shots and the use of light are characteristic of the series, but are at the same time an allusion, a continuation and perhaps even a tribute to the novel.

As stated before, Offred refers sporadically to the medium of her story. We read: "It isn't a story I am telling. It's also a story I am telling, in my head, as I go along. Tell, rather than write, because I have nothing to write with and writing is in any case forbidden." (7, 3). Yet it is only in the last chapter that the reader understands that what he/she is reading is not Offred's written record, but a transcription of her oral (recorded) account. At the end of the novel, it appears that the mediation of Offred's story is crucial for the plot. The cassette tapes were found by scientists more than 100 years after their creation and the story was reconstructed and written out as well as possible. On the one hand, the medium contributes to one of the central questions in the story about the (possibility of) objectivity of historiography – the story of Offred as the reader reads it is also a subjective interpretation of the scientists. On the other hand, the medium also determines the plot: Offred did not write her story during her imprisonment but recorded it afterwards. That implies that she managed to escape at some point. As mentioned earlier, Atwood notes in the preface that the "Historical Notes" betray her positive attitude, but on closer inspection it is much more the fictitious medium that does that than the last chapter – which totally ignores the identity of Offred, as discussed earlier. Telling is in line with the oral tradition, in which stories were passed on to others to be able to remember them. Telling implied listeners, which also confirmed the identity and existence of the storytellers. So it doesn't seem illogical that Atwood chose this medium above writing, which is a solitary act in itself. On the other hand, it must of course be recognized that the novel creates a dialogue between telling and writing. Exactly because it remains unclear for a long time that Offred does not write, but tells, it is true that all metanarrative passages about telling are actually about writing as well and in a certain sense refer to the writer of *The Handmaid's Tale* herself.

The series also refers to its medium at one specific moment. In "Jezebels" (episode 8), June receives an old music box from Mrs. Waterford. That episode ends with June, who execrates the gift: "*The perfect gift. A girl trapped in a box. She only dances when someone else opens the lid, when someone else winds her up.*" ("Jezebels", episode 8). In the last shot of the episode, we see June, sitting on the floor in her built-in wardrobe, saying to herself: "*I will not be that girl in the box*" (cf. figure 3). The frame of her closet, however, ensures that she looks exactly like a girl in a box, which underlines her state of mind at that time. The last shot of that episode is an obvious example of hypermediacy: the frame of the wardrobe runs parallel to the frame of the (television) screen, making it almost impossible not to see the allusion to the medium. The wardrobe provides a frame in the diegetic world, but the frame of the medium – that is part of "reality" – remains, making June a girl in a box anyhow. Such a scene can be considered a counterpart to the many metanarrative passages in the novel and provides a metadialogue between novel and series.

Figure 3, "Jezebels" (episode 8)

The most obvious example of this metadialogue occurs when the series refers to the medium of its source. The story told by June is not recorded on tape (at least, that is what we think for now), nevertheless, it refers unmistakably to this medium when June states: *"If this is a story I am telling, I must be telling it to someone, there is always someone, even when there is no one"* ("Jezebels", episode 8). This expression echoes what Offred thinks in the novel: *"But if it's a story, even in my head, I must be telling it to someone"* (7, 3). In the novel, Offred provides a detailed description of the "someone": *"Dear you, I'll say. Just you, without a name. [...] I will say you, you, like an old love song. You can mean more than one."* (7, 3). In the series, however, June does not further describe the "someone else". While Offred in the novel tries to (re)gain her identity by telling her story to someone, by (trying to) create "someone" in this way, the "someone" in the series is unconditionally there. The (re-)construction of June's identity does indeed not take place via the creation of another in the narrative process, but via implicit criticism and joint protest. The (de-)construction of identity is therefore inextricably linked to the medium both in the series and in the novel.

4. Conclusions

In this article, I have analyzed the narrative representation of the main character in the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* and in the first season of the eponymous series on the basis of transmedial narratology as elaborated by Thon and Ryan. One of the principal means to represent the inner world of the main character is the interior monologue. As my analysis revealed, the interior monologue appears both in the novel and the series as an autonomous interior monologue and it has a similar function in both media as well. Nevertheless, we can observe an opposite movement in the evolution of the character. Furthermore, the interior monologue gets some characteristic aspects, depending on the medium. The interior monologue in the novel mainly has two functions. On the one hand, it represents Offred's resistance,

and more important, the collapse of her resistance. On the other hand, her interior monologue is often a metanarrative reflection on her story, which stresses the medium – and the mediality – of her story. By telling her story she tries to create a listener who could confirm her own existence, her own identity. Because the medium of her story is inextricably linked to her identity search, the metanarrative passages emphasize her search for her identity as well. In the series, we notice another dynamic. June's thoughts represent her inner resistance as well, but unlike Offred, she becomes stronger at every episode that passes. Her strength is particularly displayed by the gap between thinking and doing, which the interior monologues reveal. The medium of the series, that can create a simultaneity between thinking and doing (or for the viewer: between listening and watching), makes this use of the interior monologue possible. Not only the interior monologue is important in the identity construction of June. Naming and the collective resistance, which is elaborated on by the concept of extended storytelling, turn out to be crucial in this process as well. There are fewer metanarrative passages in the series, yet the series enters into dialogue with other media and also with its own source via the principle of remediation. In that dialogue between novel and series, it becomes clear that the "you", who gets so much attention in the novel, is much less important in the series. The series does not copy the original medium from the novel – the audio tapes – precisely because June's identity construction in the series does not depend on "the other". The (de-)construction of identity is therefore inextricably linked to the medium both in the series and in the novel.

End Notes

1. 'Offred' is chosen strategically because it also refers to the fact that she, as a woman, is offered to the new society.
2. The citations stem from the e-book 2017. The brackets first show the chapter and then the page number. In the e-book, page numbering restarts in each chapter.
3. Several commentators concluded that the name of the main character in the novel is June. Her name, however, is nowhere explicitly mentioned, so it is not sure how she is called. Therefore, I make the distinction between Offred in the novel and June in the series.
4. The citations stem from the e-book 2016. The brackets first show the chapter and then the page number. In the e-book, page numbering restarts in each chapter.
5. The fact that this scene is described in a chapter entitled "Night" cautiously gives the impression that Offred can/will indeed escape from Gilead. As stated in the beginning of this text, the "night is her time out." What she describes during the night usually is indeed something that belongs to her. Moreover, there seems to be a reversal in the symbolism of light and dark: often the incident light predicts little good, while darkness is characteristic of more positive moments. That her arrest is described in a Night-chapter could thus predict a positive ending.
6. For a detailed discussion about narrators on the screen, I refer to Fludernik (2000) and Griem (2002).
7. This shot – Offred silhouetted by the windowsill – regularly returns and becomes a visual motif in the series.

8. It is interesting that an italic font is used, while the novel makes no distinction in typography between the representation of Offred's thoughts and the representation of other expressions (e. g. direct reason). Even those who watch the series without subtitles will not get that extra information. Nevertheless, the program makers found this distinction to be appropriate. So watching the series without subtitling (listening) is the closest thing to the mediation of the book – which also corresponds to the intradiegetic reality: the story of Offred was transcribed by the researchers who found her tapes.
9. Like in the series, I will indicate the difference between interior monologue and (i.c.) direct reason by using an italic font for the interior monologue.
10. Henthorne comes to a similar conclusion in respect to the novel: "Names and naming are a very important function within *The Handmaid's Tale*: they represent a means of preserving identities the State hopes to obliterate and a way for people to connect and even conspire" (108). Though naming in the novel is indeed a crucial aspect, it is elaborated even more in the series.
11. The handmaids are regularly convened for a so-called "Participation". At such a meeting, they are forced to kill a sinner. In the novel, a rapist – who, according to Ofglen, is a political prisoner – is murdered (cf. 43, 3-5). In the series, however, it is Janine who is on trial.
12. The use of the chiaroscuro technique is important in the series as well. Very often both light and shadow are strategically used and support the narrative development in the series. As already mentioned in endnote 4, there seems to be a reversal in the symbolism of light and darkness: often the key light predicts little good, while darkness is characteristic of more positive moments. This is elaborated on in the novel and in the series, but within the scope of this article there is no room for further discussion.

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