

Shine Bright LLCE Cycle Terminal

File 3 Brave new women

The truth about Sophia the robot p. 45

Sophia the robot has become a cultural icon.

The animatronic robot has made its way across late-night stages, graced the cover of magazines, headlined major tech conferences and even delivered a speech to the United Nations. [...]

[...] “You know, there is this fantasy behind creation that is embedding in the practice of engineering and robotics and AI¹,” said Kathleen Richardson, professor of ethics and culture of robotics and AI at De Montfort University.

“I don’t think these people go into the office or to their labs and think, ‘I’m carrying out work that’s going to be interesting to humanity.’ I think many of them have a God complex in fact, and they actually see themselves as creators.”

“I think it’s sort of a disappointment that with our advances in technology we have decided to develop this kind of robust robot with many functions and emotions, and yet when we shape her, she doesn’t look too unlike the models we see on magazines and the actresses we see in Hollywood,” said Kim Jenkins, lecturer at Parsons School of Design.

And Sophia’s looks haven’t gone unnoticed. Sophia has been dubbed² “sexy” and “hot.” According to Sophia’s developer, it’s been Hanson’s most popular model yet.

Jaden Urbi and MacKenzie Signalos, *cnbc.com*, 2018

1. Artificial Intelligence 2. called

Shakespeare's sister p. 46

A Room of One's Own is an extended essay by English writer Virginia Woolf. It is seen as a feminist text in which Woolf examines the educational, social and financial disadvantages that women have experienced throughout history.

Let me imagine, since facts are so hard to come by, what would have happened had Shakespeare had a wonderfully gifted sister, called Judith, let us say. Shakespeare himself went, very probably—his mother was an heiress¹—to the grammar school, where he may have learnt Latin—Ovid, Virgil and Horace— and the elements of grammar and logic. [...] He had, it seemed, a taste for the theatre; he began by holding horses at the stage door. Very soon he got work in the theatre, became a successful actor, and lived at the hub² of the universe, meeting everybody, knowing everybody, practising his art on the boards, exercising his wits in the streets, and even getting access to the palace of the queen. Meanwhile his extraordinarily gifted sister, let us suppose, remained at home. She was as adventurous, as imaginative, as agog³ to see the world as he was. But she was not sent to school. She had no chance of learning grammar and logic, let alone of reading Horace and Virgil. She picked up a book now and then, one of her brother's perhaps, and read a few pages. But then her parents came in and told her to mend the stockings or mind the stew and not moon about with books and papers. [...] She made up a small parcel of her belongings, let herself down by a rope one summer's night and took the road to London. She was not seventeen. The birds that sang in the hedge were not more musical than she was. She had the quickest fancy, a gift like her brother's, for the tune of words. Like him, she had a taste for the theatre. She stood at the stage door; she wanted to act, she said. Men laughed in her face. The manager—a fat, loose-lipped man—guffawed⁴. He bellowed something about poodles dancing and women acting—no woman, he said, could possibly be an actress. [...] At last [...] Nick Greene the actor-manager took pity on her; she found herself with child by that gentleman and so—who shall measure the heat and violence of the poet's heart when caught and tangled in a woman's body?—killed herself one winter's night and lies buried at some cross-roads where the omnibuses now stop outside the Elephant and Castle⁵.

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 1929

1. /'ɛəri/ héritière 2. centre 3. impatient, eager 4. laughed loudly 5. a London underground station

A women of few words p. 47

Vox is set in an America where half the population has been silenced. In this scene, Dr Jean McLellan is at the dinner table with her family.

I've become a woman of few words.

Tonight at supper, before I speak my final syllables of the day, Patrick reaches over and taps the silver-toned device around my left wrist. It's a light touch, as if he were sharing the pain, or perhaps reminding me to stay quiet until the counter resets itself at midnight. This magic will happen while I sleep, and I'll begin Tuesday with a virgin slate. My daughter, Sonia's, counter will do the same.

My boys do not wear word counters.

Over dinner, they are all engaged in the usual chatter about school.

Sonia also attends school, although she never wastes words discussing her days. At supper, between bites of a simple stew I made from memory, Patrick questions her about her progress in home economics, physical fitness, and a new course titled Simple Accounting for Households. Is she obeying the teachers? Will she earn high marks this term? He knows exactly the type of questions to ask: closed-ended, requiring only a nod or a shake of the head.

I watch and listen, my nails carving half-moons into the flesh of my palms. Sonia nods when appropriate, wrinkles her nose when my young twins, not understanding the importance of yes/no interrogatives and finite answer sets, ask their sister to tell them what the teachers are like, how the classes are, which subject she likes best. So many open-ended questions. I refuse to think they do understand, that they're baiting¹ her, teasing out words. But at eleven, they're old enough to know. And they've seen what happens when we overuse words. [...]

I could tell them what they want to know: All men at the front of the classrooms now. One-way system. Teachers talk. Students listen. It would cost me sixteen words.

I have five left.

1. torment

Writing a dystopia p. 48

In the spring of 1984 I began to write a novel that was not initially called “The Handmaid’s Tale.” [...]

If I was to create an imaginary garden I wanted the toads¹ in it to be real. One of my rules was that I would not put any events into the book that had not already happened in what James Joyce called the “nightmare” of history, nor any technology not already available.

In the novel the population is shrinking due to a toxic environment, and the ability to have viable babies is at a premium. (In today’s real world, studies are now showing a sharp fertility decline in Chinese men.) Under totalitarianisms — or indeed in any sharply hierarchical society — the ruling class monopolizes valuable things, so the elite of the regime arrange to have fertile females assigned to them as Handmaids. [...]

Is “The Handmaid’s Tale” a prediction? That is the question I’m asked — increasingly, as forces within American society seize power and enact decrees that embody what they were saying they wanted to do, even back in 1984, when I was writing the novel. No, it isn’t a prediction, because predicting the future isn’t really possible.

Let’s say it’s an antiprediction: If this future can be described in detail, maybe it won’t happen. But such wishful thinking cannot be depended on either. [...]

In the wake of the recent American election, fears and anxieties proliferate. Basic civil liberties are seen as endangered, along with many of the rights for women won over the past decades, and indeed the past centuries. In this divisive climate, in which hate for many groups seems on the rise and scorn² for democratic institutions is being expressed by extremists of all stripes³, it is a certainty that someone, somewhere — many, I would guess — are writing down what is happening as they themselves are experiencing it. Or they will remember, and record later, if they can.

Margaret Atwood, Introduction to the 2017 edition of *The Handmaid’s Tale*, 2017

1. *crapauds* 2. disdain 3. of all sorts

Demonstration head to the Capitol p. 49

The red robes and white bonnets that highlight the heaviness of the Hulu drama *The Handmaid's Tale* have officially entered the national health-care debate.

Dozens of people [...] walked two-by-two outside the U.S. Capitol on Tuesday, as Senators battle over GOP¹ lawmakers' proposed health-care bill. [...]

It wasn't the first time the show, based on a feminist novel by Margaret Atwood, was drawn into the political fray². The show's first trailers sparked a political discussion over whether it was a predictor of a Trumpian dystopia or anti-Trump propaganda.

If you haven't seen it, the show features a society in which enslaved women are sorted into wives, housekeepers and breeders³ known as "handmaids."

The group seems to be using the show as a way to highlight the effects of the bill, which would leave 22 million Americans without insurance by 2026. It also affects abortion coverage, insurance subsidies⁴ and cuts funding to Planned Parenthood for one year.

One of the protestors told *The Hill*⁵, "Dressing up as a handmaid gives a clear message to our administration and the Senate about how seriously we take their decisions and how radically it can affect our lives."

Sean Rossman, *USA TODAY*, 2017

1. The Republican Party ('The Grand Old Party'). 2. battle 3. producers of children
4. *subventions* 5. political website

Turning the tables p. 50

The Power is set in today's world. Girls discover they have a strange new power. When they start using it, the results are electrifying.

To start with, there were the confident faces on the TV, spokespeople from the CDC¹ saying it was a virus, not very severe, most of the people recovered fine, and it just looked like young girls were electrocuting people with their hands. [...]

They'd separated the boys from the girls on the fifth day; it seemed obvious, when they worked out the girls were doing it. Already there are parents telling their boys not to go out alone, not to stray too far. "Once you've seen it happen," says a grey-faced woman on TV, [...] "no mom would let her boys out of her sight."

Things couldn't stay closed forever, they reorganized. Boys-only buses took them safely to boys-only schools. They fell into it easily. You only had to see a few videos online for the fear to hit you in the throat.

But for the girls it has not been so simple. You cannot keep them from each other. Some of them are angry and some of them are mean, and now the thing is out in the open some are vying² to prove their strength and skill. There have been injuries and accidents; one girl has been struck blind by another. The teachers are afraid. Television pundits are saying: "Lock them all up, maximum security." It is, as far as anyone can tell, all of the girls of about fifteen years old. As near to all as makes no difference. They can't lock them all up, it makes no sense. Still, people are asking for it.

Naomi Alderman, *The Power*, 2016

1. Center for Disease Control (US) 2. *se disputer*

The Testaments p. 52-53

The Testaments is the sequel to *The Handmaid's Tale* (see p. 48), set more than 15 years later. Agnes, is the elder daughter of Offred (the protagonist of *The Handmaid's Tale*). She was adopted by Commander Kyle, one of Gilead's leaders, and his wife Tabitha, without knowing about her true origins. She attends an elite school where they are raised to become good future wives.

Transcript of Witness Testimony¹ 396A

You have asked me to tell you what it was like for me when I was growing up within Gilead. You say it will be helpful, and I do wish to be helpful. I imagine you expect nothing but horrors, but the reality is that many children were loved and cherished, in Gilead as elsewhere, and many adults were kind though fallible² in Gilead as elsewhere. [...]

The pink, the white, and the plum dresses were the rule for special girls like us. Ordinary girls from Econofamilies wore the same thing all the time –those ugly multicoloured stripes and grey cloaks, like the clothes of their mothers. They did not even learn petit-point embroidery³ or crochet work, just plain sewing and the making of paper flowers and other such chores. They were not pre-chosen to be married to the very best men – to the Sons of Jacob and the other Commanders or their sons – not like us; although they might get to be chosen once they were older if they were pretty enough.

Nobody said that. You were not supposed to preen yourself⁴ on your good looks, it was not modest, or take any notice of the good looks of other people. Though we girls knew the truth: that it was better to be pretty than ugly. Even the Aunts⁵ paid more attention to the pretty ones. But if you were already pre-chosen, pretty didn't matter so much. (...)

But though I was not especially pretty, I was very, very chosen. Doubly chosen: not only pre-chosen to marry a Commander but chosen in the first place by Tabitha, who was my mother.

That is what Tabitha used to tell me: “I went for a walk in the forest,” she would say, “and then I came to an enchanted castle, and there were a lot of little girls locked inside, and none of them had any mothers, and they were under the spell of the wicked witches. I had a magic ring that unlocked the castle, but I could only rescue one little girl. So I looked at them all very carefully, and then, out of the whole crowd, I chose you!”

“What happened to the others?” I would ask. “The other little girls?”

“Different mothers rescued them,” she would say.

“Did they have magic rings too?”

“Of course, my darling. In order to be a mother, you need to have a magic ring.”

“Where’s the magic ring?” I would ask. “Where is it now?”

“It’s right here on my finger,” she would say, indicating the third finger of her left hand. The heart finger, she said it was. “But my ring had only one wish in it, and I used that one up on you. So now it’s an ordinary, everyday mother ring.”

At this point I was allowed to try on the ring, which was gold, with three diamonds in it: a big one, and a smaller one on either side. It did look as if it might have been magic once.

“Did you lift me up and carry me?” I would ask. “Out of the forest?” I knew the story off by heart, but I liked to hear it repeated.

“No, my dearest, you were already too big for that. If I had carried you I would have coughed⁶, and then the witches would have heard us.” I could see this was true: she did cough quite a lot. “So I took you by the hand, and we crept out of the castle so the witches wouldn’t hear us. We both said Shh, shh” – here she would hold her finger up to her lips, and I would hold my finger up too and say Shh, shh delightedly – “and then we had to run very fast through the forest, to get away from the wicked witches, because one of them had seen us going out the door. We ran, and then we hid in a hollow tree. It was very dangerous!”

I did have a hazy memory of running through a forest with someone holding my hand. Had I hidden in a hollow tree? It seemed to me that I had hidden somewhere. So maybe it was true.

“And then what happened?” I would ask.

“And then I brought you to this beautiful house. Aren’t you happy here? You are so cherished, by all of us! Aren’t we both lucky that I chose you?”

I would be nestled⁷ close to her, with her arm around me and my head against her thin body, through which I could feel her bumpy ribs. My ear would be pressed to her chest, and I could hear her heart hammering away⁸ inside her – faster and faster, it seemed to me, as she waited for me to say something. I knew my answer had power: I could make her smile, or not.

What could I say but yes and yes? Yes, I was happy. Yes, I was lucky. Anyway it was true.

The Testaments, Margaret Atwood, 2019

1. *témoignage* 2. could make mistakes or be wrong 3. *broderie fine* 4. appear vain
5. the Aunts are the disciplinary women in Gilead 6. *tousser* 7. *se pelotonner* 8. beat fast