

Mary Lorenzo

Dr. Hoberek

English 4995

20 April 2016

The Effects of Politically Manipulated Borders: Atwood, Lepucki and St. John Mandel

Although they often go unnoticed, borders are a part of every community; that is, the borders are silent reminders that someone is entering another territory. On a local level, this can be seen as the boundaries separating select neighborhoods, counties and states, as there is no identification needed to cross these different lines or enter these locations. Often, a population sign is the only indication that a person has entered into a new environment. In contrast, international borders are exceptionally pronounced because of the identification needed to cross into the new territory. Despite security measures and the processes to inspect passports, these borders are not meant to entrap communities within their bounds; instead, people can travel freely—given the proper identification—from one place to the next. As such, boundaries at every level are political creations that are manufactured by a country's government. Although some borders are marked by geographical features that prohibit the ease of travel, such as a river or mountain range, the border nevertheless does not exist without a government's enforcement of a boundary. Because a reasonable government would not allocate funds and resources toward the enforcement of a border if there were no capital to be gained, the concept of a border becomes a symbol that represents governmental power.

Throughout history, borders have been artificially created by nation-states in part to serve a community through political measures; the southwestern border separating the United States from Mexico, for example, reduced the likelihood of smugglers illegally entering each territory, particularly as it relates to the drug cartels. In turn, this created a more stable economy and

arguably safer conditions in each location, allowing both governments to justify the funds and resources necessary to unwaveringly and forcefully defend the border. Although in this instance the border serves the greater good for the mass public, it also serves an altogether more important governmental interest: power over the people. Indeed, people often overlook the political power gained by controlling the borders and instead focus on the added benefits they receive, such as safety, protection and comfort. In this oversight of power, though, many people fail to acknowledge the inherent argument that a border represents: there must be a method of controlling the geographic distribution of a group of people. In other words, people are often oblivious to the government's ability to create a divide between *our* land and *their* land, and that is because the rationales provided to the public as to why these borders are necessary in the first place are not focused on the rhetoric of division. Thus, by creating a defined border, a government creates homogeneous communities through an act of segregation. This ultimately equates to the isolation of specific societies, as enforcement of the border prohibits the society from communicating with or depending on others.

The obvious attention placed on borders in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, Edan Lepucki's *California* and Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* is the result of political manipulations by each novel's respective governing body. In these novels, the manipulations by the government are seen as extreme or exaggerated by today's standards, particularly because of the ways in which each governing body justifies the needs for borders. Because the novels are all set in post-apocalyptic worlds, the governments are able to rationalize borders in an effort to form close-knit communities that must rely on one another. Many consider these settings science fiction, but Atwood suggests there is something realistic about these settings and labels the novels' genres in a different manner:

But in *The Handmaid's Tale*, nothing happens that the human race has not already done at some time in the past, or that it is not doing now, perhaps in other countries, or for which it has not yet developed the technology. We've done it, or we're doing it, or we could start doing it tomorrow. Nothing inconceivable takes place, and the projected trends on which my future society is based are already in motion. So I think of *The Handmaid's Tale* not as science fiction but as speculative fiction; and, more particularly, as that negative form of Utopian fiction that has come to be known as the Dystopia. (*Writing with Intent: Essays, Reviews, Personal Prose: 1983-2005* 92-3)

Although Atwood is merely commenting on her own novel, her argument is true of *California* and *Station Eleven*, too. As speculative fiction, these novels use current events and politics as a way to comment on the possible consequences of an unrestricted government, one that does everything in its power to maintain control. As such, it is important to understand that the future societies in each novel are modeled after the current events from the era in which each author is writing. Atwood, for example, is primarily influenced by events dating from the late 1970s and early 1980s, whereas both Lepucki and St. John Mandel are predisposed to events from the 2000s. This influence allows the reader to make the distinction between science fiction and speculative fiction. That is to say, the authors rely on current events to describe their societies because otherwise the settings seem outlandish and become classified as science fiction. But, labeled as speculative fiction, these novels' settings transform from unbelievable worlds that cannot occur to entirely possible worlds that are manipulated and corrupted by the government. In choosing to push these current events to the extremes, the authors present multiple scenarios in which the government holds total power over the borders and, consequently, the people living within those borders, a possibility all too real for the readership.

Thus, the enforced borders in each novel create isolated communities that have little communication with the outside world; this isolation—though created by the government to gain political capital—is, in turn, justified as a means to enhance safety and protective measures. The authors draw on similar landscapes to establish this remoteness; that is, the novels share geographically isolated communities, including tight security measures surrounding the communities as well as the natural disasters that entrap the societies within strict bounds. Yet, these methods of isolation are all politically manufactured to justify the very remoteness that the government creates. Essentially, the borders are fictionalized in that they cannot protect the people from various harms, such as invasion, disease or devastation. Yet, the people accept living within these confined walls because the government propagandizes notions of safety and protection by having these enforced borders. Because the government can rationalize the need for borders in times of hardship and danger, they go unquestioned. As a result, the government gains political capital by controlling people's movements and entrapping them within the nation's borders, a result that has a historical and speculative basis. As will be discussed, Atwood, Lepucki and St. John Mandel all use borders as a way to discuss similar political manipulation, despite the fact that their novels were published about 30 years apart; ultimately these commonalities will reveal how government-controlled borders are still problematic in current-day society regardless of the changing political and cultural context.

Inside borders

The governing bodies in each text politically manufacture and manipulate their borders, ultimately allowing the government to control its society's movements and entrap the populace within the community boundaries. Throughout Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, the borders are strictly enforced to prohibit Gileadeans from leaving the premises. Although the word "detainees" might not quite describe the Gileadean citizens, they are nevertheless trapped

within the premises because of the rigid security system on the outskirts of this Salem-based town. Living in Berlin in the 1980s, Atwood admits to being influenced by the Berlin Wall, which was designed to segregate East Germany from the West in a time of heightened tensions during the Cold War (“Haunted by the Handmaid’s Tale”). The 11.8-foot cement wall was menacing because of the “electrified and alarm-rigged fencing, barbed wire, armed guards in watchtowers, guard dogs, trenches, [and] tank obstacles,” and these elements effectively deterred East Germans from entering West Berlin (Zuchora-Walske 8). This border separating the communists from Western Europe was then further enforced with more security checkpoints, which were often guarded by armed men. Atwood uses this experience as a reference and basis for *The Handmaid’s Tale*, which allows her work to transform from science fiction to speculative fiction, where the realities presented in her novel become actual possibilities for current-day society. But instead of portraying the Berlin Wall exactly as it occurred, Atwood draws upon and stretches these regulations to become more secure and governmentally controlled throughout her novel.

When Offred and her family try to escape from Gilead at the start of the regime, she is met with tight security and extreme violence, which was likely influenced by the minimum of 138 deaths that took place at the Berlin Wall (Alfred). As will be shown, the guards are relentless in pursuing Offred and her family during their attempted escape; this is because the appearance of strict, effective security measures is crucial to the public accepting the propagandized ideas of safety and protection in the form of a border. As such, the extent to which the guards pursue Offred is important, and her stream-of-consciousness passages best portray the government’s ruthlessness in maintaining its power over borders and citizens alike. The tight security measures are implemented as the family drives toward the outskirts of the city and toward the border: “Outside the city we pass the first checkpoint. All they want is a look at the license, Luke does it

well. The license matches the passport: we thought of that” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 85). The poor grammatical constructions here reflect Offred’s nervous state; the misplaced commas that divide fragments indicates that Offred cannot speak in complete thoughts because she is afraid for the consequences should her family be detained at a checkpoint. Furthermore, she repeats the information to herself several times: “When we get to the border we’ll pretend we’re just going over on a day trip; the fake visas are for a day” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 85). The way Offred tends to reiterate this information to herself reveals her nervous state, as though she is afraid she will forget the alibi in a frantic and frenzied state when questioned by a guard. These armed borders, then, act to deter people from illegally trying to access Canada; they are meant to detain Gileadeans within the regime and force them to partake in the strict and domineering society emerging from the civil war. And, the government controls this enforcement of borders, as the military guards stationed at the watch posts are a division of the country’s national security; thus, it is the government who is actively detaining the Gileadean citizens and limiting their movements to within the nation.

Moreover, when Offred and her family fail to cross the border, they attempt to flee on foot. Here, Offred becomes frantic in her narrative when describing their attempted escape:

I’m running, with her, holding her hand, pulling, dragging her through the bracken, she’s only half awake because of the pill I gave her, so she wouldn’t cry or say anything that would give us away, she doesn’t know where she is. The ground is uneven, rocks, dead branches, the smell of damp earth, old leaves, she can’t run fast enough, by myself I could run faster, I’m a good runner. Now she’s crying, she’s frightened, I want to carry her but she would be too heavy. I have my hiking boots on and I think, when we reach the water I’ll have to kick them off, will it be too cold, will she be able to swim that far, what about the current,

we weren't expecting this. *Quiet*, I say to her angrily. I think about her drowning and this thought slows me. Then the shots come behind us, not loud, not like firecrackers, but sharp and crisp like a dry branch snapping. It sounds wrong, nothing ever sounds the way you think it will, and I hear the voice, *Down*, is it a real voice or a voice inside my head or my own voice, out loud? (*The Handmaid's Tale* 74-5).

The syntax here is extremely lengthy, mimicking the running Offred herself does throughout this passage; the length of the sentences with seemingly few periods suggests that Offred herself has little time to pause, as pausing would result in her capture and possibly death. Furthermore, the excessive use of commas suggests how Offred is panicking throughout this stream-of-consciousness passage, as the misplaced commas imply a sense of breathlessness. The rapidity of thought, too, is frequent, as she lingers on one thought until the sound of gunshots possesses her thoughts. The drifting thought process ultimately creates a scattered portrayal of what happens, as the thoughts rarely address the path upon which they are fleeing; rather, the thoughts tend to focus on *what if* situations, indicating that Offred's immense fear is pushing her mind into worst case scenarios rather than rooting her in reality. Regardless, the syntax abruptly changes toward the end of this passage, which is demarcated by the initial use of italics. Here, the language transforms to one based primarily on sound, where sharp and violent sounds are emphasized. The shots are "sharp and crisp," and the simile that follows reinforces the sound; both the /sh/ and /k/ sounds are cutting and are meant to create harsh tones that reflect the heightened tension present in the situation. Finally, the passage culminates in a succinct line of questioning that completes the transformation from Offred's feelings of panic to hopelessness. In her questioning, she realizes the impossibility of escaping Gilead, marked particularly by the despair in her voice, as well as the lack of answer. But moreover, the persistent pursuit of Offred reinforces this idea of

entrapment: the guards' relentless chase suggests that the security measures must remain in tact at all costs. In this way, the government gains total control over the border and, consequently, the people by controlling who can and cannot gain access to each territory.

The borders are also closely monitored from within Gilead, too, effectively restricting the movement within the community itself. In scene after scene, Offred is seen at security checkpoints with armed men who check identification papers: "We line up to get processed through the checkpoint, standing in our twos and twos and twos, like a private girls' school that went for a walk and stayed out too long. ... We are checked through, in our twos, and continue walking" (*The Handmaid's Tale* 213). This identification process is orderly and reminiscent of military procedures; the strictness and rigidity of this process ensures that only particular people are allowed through the checkpoints to access certain areas of Gilead. The Identipasses are stamped each time someone passes through a checkpoint as though they are passports, and it is through this documentation that Gilead is stricter in monitoring borders than the soldiers stationed at the Berlin Wall, as the handmaids must use their Identipasses to access each part of town, including the village where the shops are located, the home where the housemaids work, the doctor's office, the Red Center and the nightclub that Offred visits with her commander. The fact that Gilead is divided through these many security checkpoints suggests that the borders are extraordinarily enforced as a means to keep Gileadeans detained and outsiders away. Therefore, drawing upon the high-grade military equipment and strict security measures—in the forms of watch towers and proper identification—that were implemented at the Berlin Wall, Atwood creates an even more rigid society where the borders are profusely controlled (Zuchora-Walske 8); yet, Atwood complicates this argument by including scenes where the Identipasses go unchecked, signifying how the security measures are flawed and ineffective. When Offred goes to the nightclub with the commander, the guards do not check her identification because she is

disguised as a Wife, which is a high-ranking position (*The Handmaid's Tale* 232). But, this process is inherently flawed and reveals how the security is upheld for the public appearance only; security measures are not undertaken with the high-ranking officials because they largely work directly for the government that is manipulating the borders to gain political capital. As a result, Offred is smuggled through the checkpoints and ushered into the nightclub without incident. Thus, the security checkpoints are physical representations of security that are meant to ease the public's notions of fear of the outside world. These processes, then, come to embody notions of safety and protection, as propagandized by the government, but the processes themselves are flawed, suggesting how the border acts more as a mechanism of control by the governing body than its ascribed purpose of maintaining order within the society.

Just as the control over the Berlin Wall was flawed in that East Germans could viably enter West Berlin, so, too, the border control in *The Handmaid's Tale* is flawed. Before the collapse of the Berlin Wall, for example, "men, women and children snuck through checkpoints, hid in vehicles and tunneled under the concrete," which relates almost directly to the process Offred undergoes to escape Gilead (Alfred). Just as the Berlin Wall was difficult, though not impossible to circumvent, so is Offred's journey to freedom with the resistance group, Mayday. Because of the rigid security systems, Offred has to travel northeast to Maine where she can "get across the border there; not by car or truck, that was already too difficult, but by boat, up the coast" (*The Handmaid's Tale* 247). But to do so, she is transported with a chicken coop, effectively allowing her to go unnoticed at the security checkpoints. In this way, the security checkpoints are instead illusions of safety rather than guaranteed forms of protection, as the security checkpoints do not actually prohibit all people from entering different territories or crossing the borders. Rather, these means of security are created by the government to give the appearance of safety and protection by keeping dangerous outsiders from entering Gilead and

vice versa. But, the apparent flaws in this system reveal that the security measures are actually ineffective, suggesting instead that the governmental body is using these ideas of increased safety and protection to justify the need for a border. In this way, the governmental body gains control over its people by maintaining the appearance of rigid security systems that ultimately deter Gileadeans from trying to escape the regime. The flaws in the security system are emphasized when the Japanese tourists come to Gilead:

A group of people is coming towards us. They're tourists, from Japan it looks like, a trade delegation perhaps, on a tour of the historic landmarks or out for local color. ... It's been a long time since I've seen skirts that short on women. The skirts reach just below the knee and the legs come out from beneath them, nearly naked in their thin stockings, blatant, the high-heeled shoes with their straps attached to the feet like delicate instruments of torture. The women teeter on their spiked feet as if on stilts, but off balance; their backs arch at the waist, thrusting the buttocks out. Their heads are uncovered and their hair too is exposed, in all its darkness and sexuality. They wear lipstick, red, outlining the damp cavities of their mouths, like scrawls on a washroom wall, of the time before. (*The Handmaid's Tale* 27-8)

Here, the Japanese tourists come to embody the deeply hazardous and feared outside world. Within Gilead, the citizens are taught to dress modestly, where people of all roles have uniforms that show hardly any skin. In particular, the handmaids have ankle-length skirts, sleeved shirts, gloves and a head covering that surrounds their faces as to prohibit any peripheral vision. The Gileadeans' dress policy is in deep contrast with the description of the Japanese, whose appearance is altogether threatening to the Gileadean society's lifestyle. Concluding the passage reminiscing on "the time before" alludes to how the Gileadean society would react: they would

miss the freedom to dress as they choose—without administered uniforms. Here, freedom is an essential word, as the contrast between each society's clothing options points to the fundamental lack of freedom within Gilead. Thus, the Japanese tourists pose a threat to the inner-workings of the Gileadean society, which might help to explain why the government typically opts to enforce the borders so heavily. Because the outside world represents threats to the government's agenda to entrap the citizens within Gilead, the government actively chooses to monitor the borders. And, the people are accepting of these borders because of the institutionalized belief to fear the outside world; to the people, the borders represent mechanisms of safety and protection. Yet, as mentioned, these flaws in the border control suggest that the implementation of the border is merely a method of governmental control.

Whereas the Berlin Wall primarily influences Atwood in constructing the borders surrounding Gilead, both Lepucki and St. John Mandel draw largely on modern immigration laws and the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks when creating the borders in their respective novels. First, the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 created guidelines for the United States in regards to enforcing the borders; the act, which tried to control and deter illegal immigrants from entering the United States was altogether unsuccessful: "There was just one problem — the 1986 reform didn't work. The law was supposed to put a stop to illegal immigration into the United States once and for all. Instead, the exact opposite happened" (Plumer). Because of "flimsy enforcement measures," illegal immigrants continually entered the United States at higher rates now than before the legislation was imposed (Plumer). Second, the attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Centers during the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks amplified security levels, calling for "increased surveillance and reduced privacy protections, and vastly expanded resources to those sections of the military and paramilitary police involved in 'homeland' security" (McCulloch 87). In both historical events, the United

States government took an active role in attempting to control the borders for safety and security reasons, though the execution of these policies was not always without error. In 2014, the United States ranked 35 out of 162 countries on the Global Terrorism Index, averaging about 19 terrorist attacks in a given year, ultimately determining that the United States is a country troubled by terrorism (“Global Terrorism Index 2015: Measuring and Understanding the Impact of Terrorism” 10). This seems to imply that though the United States government has created additional security measures, nevertheless security is an issue that continuously proves problematic for the country, with security measures ultimately falling short in crucial moments.

Although the society in Atwood’s text contains rigid security measures—at least superficially—the security in Edan Lepucki’s and Emily St. John Mandel’s societies are far less strict but nevertheless prone to error. It is here that Lepucki and St. John Mandel not only draw upon these historical events but also respond to them—the authors demonstrate the flaws in security measures and the societal consequences of such flaws. In Edan Lepucki’s *California*, the borders are obviously marked geographically and physically, though not always enforced. The Forms, which are the giant spikes surrounding the Land, are described:

They were at least fifteen feet tall, sometimes twenty or thirty, and each one was unique. They seemed to be made of metal, or at least pieces of them were, because they reflected the sunlight. They glinted in some places, maybe even sparkled. Some curved over like dying flowers, while others shot straight out of the ground—Frida had no idea how they were supported. They weren’t smooth, as she had first thought, but bulky, uneven, and rough. She thought of the word *corrugated*. (Lepucki 115-6).

The language here seems to be in awe of this mighty border; the bordering Forms announce themselves in height and intimidation factors alone, but the sheer detail transforms them into

power. More specifically, the Forms represent governmental power, as they are not natural creations; instead, they are manmade, and thus, they must fulfill a political purpose. The pieces of metal coupled with the rough edges that make up the Forms are intimidating and dangerous, and people who physically touch a Form could receive injury from the sharp spikes. This idea is mirrored in the curved Forms that are welting like flowers, implying the ultimate consequence of a stranger making the trek through the Forms: death. It is intriguing, then, that these manmade constructions, created and enforced by the governing body, are suggestive of violence. The government, then, propagandizes notions of safety and protection by having a distinctive and threatening border, and it also advocates that by staying within the confines of the Land, the people are best able to remain safe and protected from the outside world. Also, the Forms are placed in a maze and are difficult to navigate without a guide; only those taught the route are able to make the journey through the Forms. To make this path, too, is exceedingly difficult because of the pieces of glass protruding “from the dirt and grass. . . . These pieces of glass, which he and Frida tiptoed warily around, had clearly been placed for the same purpose: to slice people’s feet, to maim them or, at least, wreck their last pair of shoes” (Lepucki 124). The violence alluded to here is an active threat to insiders and outsiders alike: if unwelcome visitors attempt to gain access to the Land or if unauthorized residents attempt to leave the Land, death will result. Theoretically, then, these borders are heavily and strictly enforced.

Yet, the effectiveness of these borders is called into question when outsiders gain access to the Land and residents are seen entering the forest. When Cal and Frida attempt to navigate through the Forms, a guard from the nearby watchtower meets them and tries to threaten them away. However, when Frida says her name, “it was as if she’d said, *Open sesame*,” as the couple is immediately helped through the Forms and given entry to the Land (Lepucki 121). This failure to abide by the strict security measures suggests that, often, the rules are broken and bended so

that others can receive the same exceptions. In fact, despite leader Micah's resistance, Bo and Sandy leave the Land together and live in the forest; Peter visits the Millers several times in the forest; August routinely travels through the forest to make trade agreements; and Micah, himself, travels to Pines, one of the nearby communities. In reality, then, the borders are an illusion because they are only moderately enforced; when it works to the governmental body's benefit, the rules are disregarded for another option. But, when there is political capital to be achieved—particularly, the detainment of a large California population in exchange for power over their movements—the rules are to be adamantly followed. In this way, the Forms are fictionalized borders that are created by the government for the government, and these monitored borders are achieved as the result of the government's propaganda in regards to safety and protection.

Similarly, in Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven*, the Traveling Symphony requires permission from the guards when leaving St. Deborah by the Water. Despite the security checkpoints, “everyone here, of course, is free to go as they please,” suggesting that the security checkpoints are merely a formality and not enforced as a means of entrapment (St. John Mandel 61). Yet, for those who choose to leave without gaining the prophet's permission, “funerals [are held] for them and ... markers [are erected] in the graveyard, because to us they are dead,” implying that those who leave are unwelcome to return without facing their graves (St. John Mandel 62). Thus, the border that seemed to be merely a formality by means of allowing residents the option to leave is actually enforced via the implied punishment that results; that is, the severe and deadly consequence for leaving St. Deborah by the Water is solely psychological, as the consequence forces the residents' continued entrapment within the community despite the supposed freedom they have to leave. This, too, is a politically constructed border. The prophet, who leads the community, believes that the residents of St. Deborah by the Water are the holiest of people and can survive future disasters, as will be

discussed in further detail later. Because of his belief, the prophet has created borders that do not actually exist—there is no geographical or physical marker of the border with the exception of the security guard stationed at the outpost. Rather, the prophet refers to his people as “the light,” ultimately using this analogy to propagandize notions of safety and protection (St. John Mandel 60). In religious terms, the light represents being one with God; and, if one is devout and pious, God will preside over the community and maintain its health. Once people leave the light, they no longer walk with God, and, therefore, they no longer are protected under His watch; instead, they align with the darkness or Satan, and, as a result, their souls will not be saved, and they are no longer welcome in St. Deborah by the Water. Here, the prophet’s words are the psychological factors that establish the borders, and his verbal propaganda guarantees that his community will feel safe and protected, if not by the government’s power then instead by God’s will. By using this religious analogy, the prophet ensures that his politically manufactured border will keep residents within the community so that he can gain power over them, almost playing God in itself.

Despite the differing time periods in which each author writes her novel, the subject matter is the same: the borders exist as a way for the government to control the internal population. However, the function of a border is not only to keep something in but to also keep something out, though this, too, presents similarly flawed ideologies that will be discussed in greater detail.

Outside borders

Borders are also created in the novels through geographical means, effectively splintering the communities from the rest of civilization. Although the communities in each novel are all geographically isolated, the disasters that create these boundaries are different in their own ways; that is, Margaret Atwood specifically looks toward manmade disasters while Edan Lepucki and

Emily St. John Mandel both draw from natural disasters. Again, the authors pull from historical events, and the concerns present at the time of writing influence how these geographical boundaries are created; thus, the differing historical events each author alludes to explain the variation in type of disaster—manmade versus natural—that ultimately creates the boundary between civilizations. Yet, these boundaries are political creations, as they come to signify the propagandized notions of safety and protection. But, these borders cannot protect each community's inhabitants from disaster, as disasters—regardless of type—cross boundaries and impact entire populations. Here, the governmental bodies effectively capitalize on the public notions of fear by manifesting ideas of safety within the secure community walls; in doing so, these ruling parties gain control over the people's movements and ensure the people will remain trapped within these strict bounds.

Geographical borders in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* are imposed as the result of several manmade disasters that strike the continental United States. Atwood draws from the Three Mile Island incident, which occurred in July 1980 (roughly five years before publication of her novel) and was arguably the biggest large-scale disaster to strike the United States during that time period. When part of the nuclear reactor melted down near Middletown, Pennsylvania, radioactive gases were released into the environment. This posed a safety threat to nearby communities as exposure to radioactivity can lead to severe health consequences such as cancer. As such, the government organization managing the facility advised "pregnant women and pre-school-age children within a five-mile radius of the plant to leave the area," essentially creating a border between the plant and the rest of society ("Backgrounder on the Three Mile Island Accident"). By encouraging people to evacuate the area, the government effectively entrapped the facility within a five-mile border and ensured all people outside of the border

remained there; this, in turn, defined the land belonging to the facility and the land belonging to the people, thus creating a border as defined by the facility's outskirts.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood creates the isolated Gileadean society with geographical boundaries in mind. With little mentioning of the outside world, Atwood enforces the idea that the United States might have been destroyed via manmade disaster. Capitalizing on the consequences of a severe radioactive contamination, Atwood writes:

Stillbirths, miscarriages, and genetic deformities were widespread and on the increase, and this trend has been linked to the various nuclear-plant accidents, shutdowns, and incidents of sabotage that characterized the period, as well as to leakages from chemical- and biological-warfare stockpiles and toxic-waste disposal sites, of which there were many thousands, both legal and illegal — in some instances these materials were simply dumped into the sewage system — and to the uncontrolled use of chemical insecticides, herbicides, and other sprays.

(The Handmaid's Tale 304)

Here, Atwood takes the general idea of radioactive contamination and pushes it to an extreme where these severe health consequences can occur. She effectively paints a dire picture of society through this list, with each comma enforcing the multitude of penalties that can occur as the result of a manmade disaster. Although Atwood does not focus solely on nuclear disasters but also includes issues of the human condition and chemical warfare, she nevertheless uses the Three Mile Island accident as a way to exploit these anthropogenic problems; she uses the accident as a starting frame that she then transforms to embody various manmade problems in the world, to then contrast with the environment in the town. To make that contrast, Atwood draws again upon manmade conflicts to reinforce the borders of Gilead, in particular referencing Agent Orange, which are herbicides used during the Vietnam War. Already, the similarities

between fiction and history are apparent, as “the uncontrolled use of chemical insecticides, herbicides, and other sprays” might refer directly back to the Vietnam War. Exposure to these herbicides and dioxides can lead to several types of cancers including prostate and respiratory cancers, as well as various diseases such as diabetes and Parkinson’s disease (“Veterans’ Diseases Associated with Agent Orange”). Furthermore, these health conditions are what ultimately encourage the Gileadean leaders to create a heavily bordered society where they can monitor the health of the community. With strict and enforced borders, Gilead is able to remove its population from the disease-ridden, contaminated world and ensure a thriving population in the future. However, it is important to note that one of the diseases the Gileadeans are attempting to protect their society against—radiation sickness—is not contagious like a bacteria or a virus would be. So, by focusing on the border as a way to stop the movement of people, these leaders are playing to society’s fear of disease in a situation in which the movement of people would not actually spread disease. The borders, then, are created as the result of several manmade disasters, and they are meant to separate Gilead from the rest of the ailing world. In doing so, the geographical boundary of Gilead comes to represent a symbolic division of health, where Gilead is presumably healthy via no means of radioactive contamination, and the rest of the world poses a threat to this lifestyle.

Yet, the political propaganda here is exceptionally pronounced, with political leaders using the disaster and consequent devastation to justify the need for borders. In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, the political leaders believe the pure and clean landscape will remain untouched with borders in place; however, this logic is far from correct, as societies cannot build borders against disease. Rather, disease is pervasive and intrudes where any populations exist. Yet, the political leaders ignore this hindsight and instead use outside devastation as a type of leverage to help isolate their community from potential harm. Thus, the political leaders propagandize the ideas

of safety and security by having a visible border; and, the border can be justified to the public because it symbolizes protection in a time of danger. In capitalizing on the natural disasters, then, the political leaders gain total control over the people's movements by enforcing where they can and cannot go while simultaneously entrapping them within the Gileadean borders.

Moreover, the Three Mile Island accident and the use of hazardous Agent Orange herbicides led to many changes within the United States that attempted to create safer living conditions. After the nuclear accident, however, "public fear and distrust increased, NRC's regulations and oversight became broader and more robust, and management of the plants was scrutinized more carefully" ("Backgrounder on the Three Mile Island Accident"). This alludes to tighter scrutiny over these facilities to remove the possibility of manmade disasters from occurring again; yet, Atwood effectively manipulates this argument by focusing her attention on extreme circumstances. Rather than having her Gileadean society more closely monitor the possibility of a manmade disaster happening, she instead creates a society where the consequences of a disaster physically cannot be felt, as she instead enforces the borders with more scrutiny:

We reach the first barrier, which is like the barriers blocking off roadworks, or dug-up sewers: a wooden crisscross painted in yellow and black stripes, a red hexagon which means Stop. Near the gateway there are some lanterns, not lit because it isn't night. Above us, I know, there are floodlights, attached to the telephone poles, for use in emergencies, and there are men with machine guns in the pillboxes on either side of the road. (*The Handmaid's Tale* 20)

There is a sense of over-preparedness in this setting, where the guards ensure they are well equipped and organized under any circumstances. The weapons and machinery they have available at any instant indicates how severely these guards monitor the border; the machine

guns are threatening and signify that nobody can enter or exit the Gileadean society without required permission. Yet, this Gileadean society is still operating under the mindset that disease and infection cannot cross borders. Although the society might be over-prepared in the event of a disaster, nevertheless the radioactive contamination can traverse the borders, as can environmental woe in the forms of earthquakes and tsunamis. Having more men stationed with higher-grade military equipment is essentially useless because, regardless, borders do not protect the people against disaster. But, the troops and the weaponry are propagandized to symbolize an increased level of protection and safety, which is how the government effectively gains control over its people; the government can rationalize and justify the need for stricter borders because of the public fear of impending disasters. And, with the highly scrutinized and monitored borders, the government is able to gain control of its citizenry and limit its movements.

As mentioned, the conflict in Vietnam influenced Atwood's perception and creation of borders throughout *The Handmaid's Tale*. Herbicides aside, the war addressed a need for strong national security. Atwood was able to witness firsthand the consequences of destructive international relations, as World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War all occurred during her lifetime. This violence, coupled with destructive manmade disasters, is what pushed Atwood to create the Gileadean society that is isolated from all other communities. Alluding to nearby wars fought with other societies, Atwood writes: "Ever since Central America was lost to the Libertheos, oranges have been hard to get: sometimes they are there, sometimes not. The war interferes with the oranges from California, and even Florida isn't dependable, when there are roadblocks or when the train tracks have been blown up" (*The Handmaid's Tale* 25). This brings several ideas to light regarding how borders are created and implemented throughout the text. First, this passage identifies that Central America, and even presumably Florida and California, are not part of Gilead. Although the boundaries are not clearly defined and the reader must guess

what geographical region is included as part of Gilead, all mentions are located in the northeast continental United States, primarily in Salem, Massachusetts. The reader can deduce that parts of Maine and Canada are too northbound to be included within the regime, as Offred is seen escaping to that region with Mayday. Likewise, the westernmost and easternmost state identified throughout the text is Massachusetts and Maine, respectively—disregarding the brief discussion of oranges in California and Florida—and this suggests that perhaps the rest of the continental United States was made uninhabitable by manmade conflict or disaster. This geographical boundary, then, limits Gilead's scope of reach to a northeastern sliver of the United States, bordered to the east by the Atlantic Ocean, to the north by the free country of Canada, and to the southwest by possible destruction.

Indeed, the manmade conflict, as described via roadblocks and explosions, suggests the close proximity to war and explains why Gilead needs enforced borders (in addition to the health risks already mentioned). With the possibility of danger so close to Gilead's borders, the government rationalizes that it perhaps *needs* to enclose its population as a safety precaution. According to the government, the borders, thus, are increasingly enforced to keep the inhabitants safe: "This is the heart of Gilead, where the war cannot intrude except on television. Where the edges are we aren't sure, they vary, according to the attacks and counterattacks; but this is the center, where nothing moves" (*The Handmaid's Tale* 23). This, in turn, insinuates two more ideas regarding Gilead's borders. First, the moving borderlines might explain why Offred never explicitly states Gilead's boundaries. Although much information can be deduced regarding her location within Gilead, the rest of the continental United States must be decided based primarily on implications and assumptions. It is likely, then, that the changing borderlines continually narrow and widen as the surrounding conflicts change in proximity and severity. And secondly, the blatant confession that the war cannot intrude within Gilead's borders implies the strength of

the regime. Because the borders are so heavily enforced via the roadblocks and machine guns available, as well as the guards stationed at various watch posts on the outskirts of the society, it is foreseeably impossible for outsiders to enter without permission.

However, here, too, the government seems to effectively propagandize this information for political capital. There are very few mentions of the outside world throughout the novel, so perhaps the government is claiming there is outside destruction via world wars as another reason to enforce the borders. The government effectively points toward this manmade conflict as another way to justify the need for borders, as only the borders offer some form of protection against outside weaponry. Yet, it is permissible that any outside forces engaged in warfare could attack Gilead, too. In this way, the borders are an illusion of protection and safety, but not something that can realistically be enforced in the case of disaster, as the borders likely will be pervaded in that event. Instead, these borders merely represent something the government uses to obtain total power over freedoms and movements while simultaneously detaining its citizenry within its walls.

Despite the 30-year difference between the three novels' publications and despite the changing political and cultural contexts that influence each novel, Lepucki and St. John Mandel arrive at similar conclusions to Atwood: that political capital can be gained when creating borders in the name of safety and protection from natural disasters. But unlike Atwood, who focuses primarily on manmade disasters, both Lepucki and St. John Mandel instead focus on natural disasters that destroy the continental United States and, presumably, the rest of the world. In Edan Lepucki's *California*, the borders are created and enforced to ensure an element of protection over the community; however, these claims are again propagated through the voices of political leaders who ask their communities to accept the belief for the sake of safety. In fact, the borders surrounding the Land are created to sever the population from the rest of civilization.

The Forms are meant to keep outsiders from gaining access to the community and are a new addition to the Land after several Pirate attacks: “Soon after we arrived on the Land, just a week or so, two of our men were killed. When we found them, they were naked, their bodies...they’d been mutilated, sliced up. They were covered in blood, just covered in it” (Lepucki 226). With dangerous threats lurking nearby, the borders surrounding the Land need to be constructed to protect the community. In fact, the threat of Pirate attacks is what encourages the community to build more Forms as a means of protection; now, the creation of borders transforms from a natural one caused by the multitude of catastrophes to one of social convenience, as the borders are now constructed with a goal in mind: safety. The urging to build more Forms is a means for the political leaders—in particular, Micah—to influence community members. Micah propagandizes the information in the same way that the prophet secludes St. Deborah by the Water for the sake of religious purity. By claiming the community will be further protected from Pirate attacks with the increase of Forms, Micah is able to justify creating an entrapped society that falls victim to his power. The Forms, then, are a means to isolate the community with a justified rationale—safety. Yet, the flaws to this security system are obvious, as outsiders can nevertheless gain entrance to the Land by navigating the maze. In this way, the border is a fictionalized symbol of security rather than one that accurately eliminates the threats to safety. Micah is able to persuade the community to build more Forms to enhance the security and safety of the population against Pirate attacks, but the borders are fictionalized mechanisms of control that instead allow Micah to entrap the population and monitor their movements.

In the greater expanse of geographical boundaries, Lepucki creates a nation that is isolated as the result of several subsequent environmental disasters that are modeled after historical events. Given the multitude of recent, devastating natural disasters, it is difficult to determine which would have influenced Lepucki. However, the following natural disasters are

the most well known ones dating from the early 21st century: the Boxing Day Tsunami in 2004 that killed nearly 300,000 people in 14 countries; Hurricane Katrina in 2005 that impacted upwards of 600,000 people; and, the 7.0-magnitude earthquake of 2010 in Haiti that killed almost 250,000 people. In fact, the number of natural disasters has been increasing worldwide since the 1970s: “the first decade of the 21st century saw 3,496 disasters from floods, storms, droughts and heat waves. That was nearly five times as many disasters as the 743 catastrophes reported during the 1970s” (Goldenberg). Arguably, a discrepancy might be in the reporting; that is, perhaps in the 1970s, fewer people or news agencies were reporting instances of natural disasters. Yet, the numerical data nevertheless reveals a worldwide trend, and the upshot is that “natural disasters are occurring nearly five times as often as they were in the 1970s,” sometimes with more devastating and lasting impacts (Goldenberg). Thus, Lepucki in particular uses this information to create her boundaries, attempting to showcase a politically manipulated society that believes it is more protected from these catastrophes through its seclusion and isolation but in reality is just as susceptible to devastation as the Gileadeans.

In *California*, the pervasiveness and devastation of the natural disasters allows the community leaders two things: political capital and a justification for the enforcement of stricter borders. Lepucki writes about the swiftness and vastness of the natural disasters:

He'd told her there was a better world beyond than the one they knew. It was untouched; it had to be. A year before they left, another flu epidemic had hit the Northeast, and the population had been cut in half. (At least there was an upside of the oil crisis, people said; disease couldn't afford to travel very far anymore.) The storm that killed his parents in Ohio had been followed by bigger and worse ones, and before the Internet went dead entirely, Cal read that only a third of the population in the Midwest and the South remained. (Lepucki 74)

Within this passage, the parenthetical information serves as a type of border separating the diction from the remainder of the paragraph. This segregated sentence is also crucial for understanding because of its implications. First, stating that disease cannot travel far implies that disease *can* travel. Here, Lepucki actually acknowledges that disease can physically travel across borderlines, thus, confirming that a border merely represents the ideas of safety and protection but does not actually enhance either of them in the event of disaster. And, by inserting a type of border into her writing, Lepucki effectively mimics the politically manufactured borders present within her society. Second, if disease cannot travel far, it is because the natural disasters severely dwindled the populations in other places of the world; that is, no other populations are discussed in detail throughout the novel with the exception of the brief mention of their existences found in this passage. Moreover, the multitude of catastrophes strikes the United States consequentially, allowing minimal time for recovery between the disasters. As a result, a natural border is created because the effected areas have been destroyed. Essentially, the border is the byproduct of the natural disasters, as these catastrophes have condensed the population into one specific area: California. Although the populations in California, too, have been depleted, the close groupings of communities within California nevertheless illustrate the short distance disease needs to travel to reach other populations; thus, the leaders use the fear of transmitting and being impacted by disease as leverage that explains the need for borders. But, just as illness and warfare can transcend borders in *The Handmaid's Tale*, so natural disasters can cross multiple territories and regions in *California*. By this, it becomes apparent that not just one region can be affected by any natural disaster, as both the Midwest and East coasts are affected here; furthermore, each region is usually aligned with a particular type of disaster, with California most known for its horrendous earthquakes. Yet, the earthquakes are never mentioned throughout *California*, again allowing the political leaders to capitalize on the disasters of other areas. Here, the mutually

beneficial relationship endorsed by the Land and Pine leaders highlight the belief that living in communities close to one another best allow for survival in the chance of another crisis (Lepucki 252); yet, they simultaneously ignore the impending earthquakes that could devastate the remaining population in California. Although safety is still not guaranteed in this region, the political leaders propagandize the idea and effectively create and monitor the borders by instilling these notions of safety within the communities.

Station Eleven, in comparison, takes a rather distinctive approach that separates it from the other novels, and this peculiarity is seen most notably through St. John Mandel's discussion—or lack thereof—about international borders. Opening the novel in Toronto and then masterfully centering the majority of the plotline in northern Michigan, St. John Mandel effectively ignores and dismisses the national boundaries separating the province of Canada from the United States. In fact, the nonchalant tone used when describing the Traveling Symphony's route emphasizes the minimal level of attention given to crossing the borders: "Twenty years after the collapse they were still in motion, traveling back and forth along the shores of Lakes Huron and Michigan, west as far as Traverse City, east and north over the 49th parallel to Kincardine. They followed the St. Clair River south to the fishing towns of Marine City and Algonac and back again" (St. John Mandel 37). All of these cities are located in Michigan, with the exception of Kincardine, which is located in Ontario, Canada. This essentially indicates that the Traveling Symphony's route is circular shaped, spanning the width of Michigan and the southern width of the province of Ontario. Yet, the discussion effectively ends there: St. John Mandel includes no descriptions throughout her novel about the act of actually *crossing* a national boundary. Instead, St. John Mandel's tone throughout this passage asserts how commonplace crossing the national border actually is. St. John Mandel's avoidance of acknowledging the national border suggests that the borders are fictionalized—there is no

security to enforce the border, so the border essentially ceases to exist. In this way, the lack of security indicates how any person can cross at any time—there is no security stationed there to make traveling between nations a process.

Yet, only the Traveling Symphony is seen crossing international borders, moreover suggesting how the borders in St. Deborah by the Water are psychological and political to ensure the community remains entrapped within a certain area. The Traveling Symphony, which is the main society discussed throughout *Station Eleven*, has excessive freedom compared to any of the communities because it is traveling, effectively contrasting its definitions of borders with that of the communities'. Although the symphony has a leader—the conductor—who makes the governing decisions for the group, there are no borders for the conductor to manipulate, and there is no political capital to be gained. Because the symphony constantly travels from one location to the next, borders physically cannot exist except when visiting a specific town, where the symphony must abide by the town's definitions of borders. For that reason, this discussion is focused on the borders in St. Deborah by the Water, whose borders exist to entrap the citizens and control their movements in return for protection against future pandemics.

The political manipulation used to quarantine people within a community's borders is seen most evidently in the discussion surrounding natural disasters. Specifically throughout *Station Eleven*, St. John Mandel alludes to a pandemic that occurs worldwide and essentially destroys a majority of the population, perhaps modeling it after the H1N1 case of swine flu from April 2009. Although there are several different pandemics that St. John Mandel could have referenced while writing *Station Eleven*, swine flu was characterized by quick incubation rates that are similar to the descriptions in the novel: "By June, 18,000 cases of H1N1 had been reported in the United States. A total of 74 countries were affected by the pandemic. ... By November 2009, 48 states had reported cases of H1N1, mostly in young people" ("Pandemic Flu

History”). This data reveals how quickly the infection spread, causing worldwide fear and disease. Moreover, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated that between April 2009 and April 2010, 43 to 89 million people contracted the disease and, as a result, up to nearly 18,500 people died (“Pandemic Flu History”). Although most people survived the pandemic, nevertheless the number who contracted the disease is alarming. Here, St. John Mandel uses this context and pushes it to an extreme, perhaps envisioning a future where most people do contract the disease and consequently die. Hua, a doctor at the hospital at the onset of the infection, describes the pandemic:

It’s the fastest incubation period I’ve ever seen. I just saw a patient, she works as an orderly here at the hospital, on duty when the first patients started coming in this morning. She started feeling sick a few hours into her shift, went home early, her boyfriend drove her back in two hours ago and now she’s on a ventilator. You get exposed to this, you’re sick within hours. (St. John Mandel 20)

This description indicates just how swiftly and severely the pandemic takes hold: within a matter of hours, a person can seemingly transform from being perfectly healthy to being dead. The swiftness and consuming nature of the pandemic, in turn, helps to explain why the borders in St. Deborah by the Water are created and enforced: to guarantee a healthy and sustainable population that can recreate a prosperous world. As discussed previously, the prophet refers to his community as the light, suggesting how God presides over St. Deborah by the Water and maintains its health. Thus, the borders come to represent not only God’s watch, but also His protection over the populace; as such, anyone who leaves St. Deborah by the Water has effectively denied God and turned toward Satan. And, of course these infidels pose a threat to the society in much the same way that the Japanese threatened the Gileadean lifestyle. In this way,

borders in St. Deborah by the Water are propagandized—though in religious terms—to represent safety, protection and purity from the harmful outside world.

Yet, diseases cannot be detained via the creation of or use of borders, as disease travels through all communities worldwide via the transmission of viruses and bacteria; any place with a populace can be affected by the spread of disease. It is through these means that the political propaganda takes hold throughout *Station Eleven*, as the population is instead led to believe that the borders will protect them from undue harm via the spread of disease. In St. Deborah by the Water, for example, the prophet propagates to his community how the borders are enforced to keep its citizens safely within and protected from harm:

“The flu,” the prophet said, “the great cleansing that we suffered twenty years ago, that flu was our flood. The light we carry within us is the ark that carried Noah and his people over the face of the terrible waters, and I submit that we were saved”—his voice was rising—“not only to bring the light, to spread the light, but to *be* the light. We were saved because we *are* the light. We are the pure.” (St. John Mandel 60)

This declaration, embedded with religious connotations, reinforces how residents of St. Deborah by the Water are exempt from the pandemic because of God’s righteousness. The border separating St. Deborah by the Water from the rest of Michigan, then, is the defining line between health and death. The prophet’s strict enforcement of this border implies that another pandemic can possibly occur, and when the time comes, only those within the border will be saved because of God’s will. In this way, the prophet also references the First Passover when creating his borders: “And the blood on the houses where you are staying shall be a sign for you: when I see the blood I will pass over you, so that no plague will destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt” (*The Jewish Study Bible*, Exodus 12:13). Here, the borders in St. Deborah by the Water

function in the same way that the blood marking the houses does: it ensures safety to the inhabitants. When the pandemic—or the “plague,” as the Bible refers to it—arrives, these people will be saved because they are within the defined border. Thus, in enforcing the borders at St. Deborah by the Water, the prophet claims he is effectively maintaining the health of his people by keeping only the purest within the borders and rejecting all others. In doing so, the community feels more protected from a future containing further devastation, as these people will be saved in the case of another pandemic according to the biblical story of the First Passover. Yet, the prophet’s argument is significantly flawed in the fact that he neglects to acknowledge how disease and devastation spreads. Although his people might be pure of heart, scientifically they will nevertheless be affected by disease should another pandemic strike. Because diseases are transmitted via viruses and bacteria in human contact, it is extremely unlikely that his entire community would be immune to these pathogens. Rather, the prophet uses this religious language to propagandize the subject and persuade his people to remain within the boundaries. The prophet can justify having and maintaining borders when explaining the need for them in terms of safety; in his explanation, he uses the fear of natural disasters—of another pandemic taking place—to justify the need for an entrapped community that is powerless and motionless, and the religious language offers comfort and reassurance to the people when they accept the entrapment.

Across all three texts, then, the flawed ideology remains the same: the political leaders use natural disasters as leverage to justify the need for borders. Yet, in all three calculations, the leaders are mistaken in that disasters can transcend borders; that is, the border does not prevent devastation from spreading. In this way, the governmental bodies effectively propagandize notions of enhanced security and safety with no added benefit for the public. Rather, the

government is the only benefiting party, as it gains power over the community by limiting its movements and trapping it within.

Conclusion

Overall, the governing bodies in each novel create a geographical border surrounding the communities, though in different formats. Within the communities, the borders are constructed using tight security measures, such as the high-grade military equipment that propagandizes enhanced safety and protection from the harmful outside world. In turn, the governmental leaders gain political capital: by detaining their populations within the borders, they effectively control the population's movements. Outside the communities, too, the borders are constructed with safety and protection in mind. However, here, the political leaders rely on natural disasters—regardless of whether it is a manmade or environmental disaster—as leverage that justifies the need for a border. Because the societies are prone to attack via warfare or disease, the leaders construct borders to ensure the communities will remain safe. Yet, this is a logical fallacy, as borders cannot feasibly prevent an attack or the spread of disease and infection; rather, these threats to the society's livelihoods can transcend borders and impact the populations regardless. But, because the borders come to symbolize enhanced safety and protection, the community members accept these rationales and live confined within the community walls, and the government in turn receives total control over the population through this quarantine.

Of course, Margaret Atwood, Edan Lepucki and Emily St. John Mandel all pull from differing historical events that influence their novels. But, despite the 30-year gap in publication dates, the authors all reach similar conclusions: that political capital can be gained from constructing borders and secluding a population. In fact, throughout history, this trend can be seen. For example, both the United States and Mexico receive a type of political capital through their shared border, as mentioned before. The United States ensures American workers rather

than illegal immigrants will fill American jobs, thus helping the country's economy; also, the United States benefits as the result of fewer recreational drugs entering the country. And Mexico benefits, too, as there are fewer illegal American immigrants crossing the border attempting to escape criminal charges, thus making Mexico a safer country. However, the same trends discussed in the novels are discussed here, as well, where the borders are flawed: people of both nationalities still find ways to cross the border via underground sewage pipes, though it is illegal. In this way, the borders symbolize increased safety and protection, though they are not always effective in guaranteeing those outcomes. Historically, then, there is always some type of political capital to be gained from the enforcement of borders, a fact that each author relies on when writing their respective novels.

Indeed, it is this historical reference that allows each novel to be classified under Atwood's genre of speculative fiction. Because history has shown several examples where borders not only segregate communities but also allow governments to gain more power over its people, the events in the novel—though fictionalized—are representations of real events. As Atwood says, "Dystopias [are] a lot easier to believe in than Utopias: Utopias we can only imagine; Dystopias we've already had" (*Writing with Intent: Essays, Reviews, Personal Prose: 1983-2005* 95). As such, the dystopia is the product of something familiar to the readership; that is, all of these settings in *The Handmaid's Tale*, *California* and *Station Eleven* are believable to the readership because they are modeled after history. But the authors take each novel a step further by pushing history to the extremes and showing the worst-case scenario of border control and its destructive consequences on an entrapped society. In doing so, the authors all focus on the question, *what if?* And although the settings and circumstances vary in each novel, the same question can be reached: "What if it *can* happen here? What kind of 'it' would it be? ... Or *what if* you wanted to take over the United States and set up a totalitarian government, the lust for

power being what it is? How would you go about it?" (*Writing with Intent: Essays, Reviews, Personal Prose: 1983-2005* 98). In each novel, the conclusion is the same: with catastrophic events occurring worldwide, perhaps the political leaders pose the greatest threat to society, as each detained community is isolated in the name of gaining political power. In this setting, the answer to that *what if* is obvious: political manipulation can be detrimental to people's most basic freedoms, a scenario that proves to be all too possible for the readership.

Works Cited

- Alfred, Charlotte. "10 Great Escapes Across the Berlin Wall." *The Huffington Post*. The Huffington Post Media Group, 7 November 2014. Web. 15 April 2016.
- Atwood, Margaret. *Writing with Intent: Essays, Reviews, Personal Prose: 1983-2005*. New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2005. Print.
- Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid's Tale*. New York: Anchor Books, 1998. Print.
- Atwood, Margaret. "Haunted by the Handmaid's Tale." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 20 January 2012. Web. 15 April 2016.
- "Backgrounder on the Three Mile Island Accident." *U.S. NRC*. United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission, 12 December 2014. Web. 29 February 2016.
- "Global Terrorism Index 2015: Measuring and Understanding the Impact of Terrorism." *Institute for Economics and Peace*. PDF file.
- Goldenberg, Suzanne. "Eight ways climate change is making the world more dangerous." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 14 July 2014. Web. 26 February 2016.
- Lepucki, Edan. *California*. New York: Back Bay Books, 2014. Print.
- McCulloch, Jude. "War at Home: National Security Arrangements Post 11 September 2001." *Alternative Law Journal* 27.1 (2002): 87-90. Web. 12 February 2016.
- "Pandemic Flu History." *Flu.gov*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d. Web. 26 February 2016.
- Plumer, Brad. "Congress tried to fix immigration back in 1986. Why did it fail?" *The Washington Post*. WP Express Publications LLC, 30 January 2013. Web. 12 February 2016.
- St. John Mandel, Emily. *Station Eleven*. New York: Vintage Books, 2015. Print.

The Jewish Study Bible. Ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

“Veterans’ Diseases Associated with Agent Orange.” *U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 3 June 2015. Web. 29 February 2016.

Zuchora-Walske, Christine. *The Berlin Wall*. North Mankato: Abdo Publishing, 2014. Print.