THE BOUNDARIES OF DYSTOPIAN LITERATURE: THE GENRE IN CONTEXT

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Foreword

In many aspects the world we live in is an illusion. The affluent Western world, enchanted by its wealth, has become the stage for dystopian literature which engages with disturbing global issues, from environmental destruction to technological disasters. Since little attention is paid to the consequences of technological development and ecological disasters, dystopian writing had to take on a subversive role and educate the readers of the fault in our ways, without directly challenging the social role.

This book will discuss both classic and contemporary dystopian novels that have previously not been subjected to careful critical scrutiny. By placing these novels within the genre of dystopia, comparing the social constructs which they explore and in which they were written, and considering the theme of writing in each, we hope to show that Yevgeny Zamyatin, Aldous Huxley, and George Orwell influenced contemporary dystopian authors both in terms of dystopia and the representation of society within dystopia. These authors may have written in different times and on different continents, and they may have lived in times that carried with them different social anxieties, but they all express concern with the balance between individual freedom and social cohesion and the underlying social issues that go along with social constructs and the individual's place within them.

For the purposes of this book, we have selected Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*, Veronica Roth's *Divergent*, Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies*, Pfeffer's *Life As We Knew It*, and Lauren Oliver's *Delirium* for critical assessment; it is our intent to prove that these novels are prime examples of contemporary dystopian fiction, and to defend our claims regarding the existence and significance of late twentieth century and early twenty-first century dystopian fiction through an examination of these works. We feel it is important to point out that it would have been possible for

us to consider other dystopian novels in this same light. Ink Pieper's novel, *The Last Human*, is similarly dystopian. For the time being, however, we feel a certain responsibility to constrain the scope of this examination to the focused consideration of only six contemporary texts. We do not intend to go into the details of these novels as part of this foreword, as our critical assessment of them as representatives of contemporary dystopian literature is reserved for later chapters.

This book could not have been completed without the benefit of assistance from a number of wonderful people. Special thanks go to Dr Jasmina Husanović-Pehar and Dr Damir Arsenijević, of the English Department at University of Tuzla, both for their truly expansive knowledge of the subject and reviewing of this book. Our book has benefited in numerous ways because of Mr Nerma Pezerović-Riđić's help in proof-reading, for which we thank her immensely.

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Introduction

The genre into which Zamyatin's *We* (1921), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1931), George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* (2008) fit has been called negative utopia, inverted utopia, anti-utopia and dystopia. Some critics use these terms interchangeably and indiscriminately, while others suggest that differences and/or sub-genres exist. Furthermore, definitions of and uses of the individual terms themselves vary, depending on a given critic's own slant, so that these terms, as they are defined and used, seem to depend upon critical canonical preferences of inclusion or exclusion. Critics tend to define the genre in question on the basis of the motifs of landmark works like *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* even though, for example, the term "anti-utopia" has been applied to works written in the late 19th century and earlier. Our purpose in this book will be to consider various issues of the genre and canonicity, as well as the specific history of genre issues and critical reactions to them, in order to establish a foundation for a critical perspective that is based on the context.

This book will discuss novels that have previously not been subjected to careful scrutiny and that are from different periods of time. By placing these novels within the genre of dystopia, examining the social constructs which they explore and in which they were written, considering the theme of writing in each, and examining the image systems employed, we hope to show that early dystopian novelists influenced their contemporary counterparts, both in terms of dystopia and the representation of various issues within dystopia. These authors may have written in different times and on different continents, and they may have lived in times that carried with them different social anxieties, but they all express concern with the balance between individual freedom and social cohesion and the underlying issues that go along with social constructs and the individual's place within them.

The reason why we have chosen *We*, *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as the novels that will serve as representatives of early dystopias is in part due to the fact that these are undoubtedly some of the best-known dystopian works. "*Nineteen Eighty-Four* […] has entered our cultural vernacular" in a way that few dystopian novels have; "even though many people might not know the details of this novel, anyone who has gone through a high school English program is likely familiar with the phrase 'Big Brother is watching you'" (Galtseva & Rodnyanskaya, 1991, p. 293). In addition, our choice is based on the fact that, by and large, literary critics have accepted *We*, *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as the prototypes of the genre.

Indeed, it is as if the genre of dystopian fiction had developed only up to the moment when *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was published. Ben Clarke's (2001) statements about the nature of dystopian fiction certainly seem to suggest as much. According to him, "whilst Orwell used […] aspects of *We* in the production of his own utopia, the divisions between the two novels demonstrates […] that between the periods of the novels' production, divisions which initiated developments in the form itself took place" (Clarke, 2001, p. 228). Clarke offers an extensive explanation of how such evolution occurred between the writing of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the writing of its dystopian predecessors, but does not step forward to extrapolate what new evolutions of the genre may have, and we would argue indeed have, occurred since *Nineteen Eighty-Four's* production. Rather, he concurs with what he refers to as the "position sustained by the publication of new material" about Orwell, that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is the "primary model for dystopian writing" (Clarke, 2001, p. 240). Unfortunately, he is quite right in stating that this is the position put forth by the bulk of new publications on the subject of dystopian literature. Juan Francisco Elices' examination of the evolution of the dystopian genre is similarly abortive. He provides the following argument, which seems to suggest a recognition that dystopias have changed since Orwell:

> Orwell […] arises as a kind of linking bridge between the early dystopic productions of the Russian Yevgeni Zamyatin, the British Malcolm Muggeridge, Harold Nicholson, C. P. Snow and Hilaire Belloc, and recent

> novels such as Julian Barnes' *England, England* (1998), Ben Elton's *Gridlock* (1991), Robert Harris' *Fatherland* (1992) and *Archangel* (1998), James Lovegrove's *Days* (1997) and Fay Weldon's *Darcy's Utopia* (1990), among others. (Elices, 2001, p. 199)

However, after this claim that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* serves as a midpoint along the course of dystopian evolution, he makes the amendment that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is still the "traditional dystopia" and that dystopias which have come after it represent not evolutions of the dystopian genre, but examples of genre-mixing (Elices, 2001, p. 221). As he explains of Harris' *Fatherland*, "though it adjusts to most conventions that have traditionally characterized a dystopia, [it] presents some peculiarities typical of the so-called 'alternate worlds' literature" (Elices, 2001, p. 222).

Having detailed the essentials of this book's purpose, and introduced many of the issues with which it will engage, all that remains to be established in this introduction is an account of what can be expected in this examination's layout itself. The first step towards the achievement of this book's purpose will be in the first and the second chapter respectively, with the isolation of the basic qualities of dystopian fiction and the formulation of a working definition of 'dystopia' that is separate from, and thus allows for, the inevitabilities of genre evolution due to societal change. The chapters that follow this discussion will examine the specific issues like the dystopian city and gender. By considering these elements in detail, and comparing them in each chapter to the examples presented by our prototypical texts, it will be possible to illuminate contemporary dystopian authors' conformity to the standards of definition of 'dystopia.' By demonstrating in this way that contemporary dystopian novels, though very different from classic dystopias, fulfill the requirements of the traditional definition of 'dystopia,' we intend to establish a clear argument in favor of the recognition of alternate, contemporary dystopian models.

It is our sincere hope that this endeavor will both justify and abet literary criticism's reappraisal of how dystopias are expected to appear within contemporary literary contexts, and that it will "indicate […] the need for a comprehensive reexamination of […] this genre, […as] old questions, long thought to be resolved, now seem

to require further scrutiny, old contentions take on renewed interest, and newer questions suggest themselves" (Simmons, 1998, p. 201). Any such comprehensive re-examination must ultimately begin with a re-analysis of the very foundation of the concept being considered; in this case, it is the very meaning of the term 'dystopia' which must be set down.

Strong female characters have always been present in literature; however, what has changed is the abundance they come in. It seems popular culture has become addicted to the presence of tough female characters, from TV series [*Supergirl* (2015-), *Angie Tribeca* (2016-)], films [*Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), *Suicide Squad* (2016)], but what we find particularly interesting is the correlative literary and cinematic upsurge of tough-female teens and young women in Young Adult (YA) dystopian writing. For example, adolescent protagonists such as Katniss Everdeen (portrayed by Jennifer Lawrence) in Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* (the novel was published in 2008, while the film was released in 2012), *Catching Fire* (2009, 2013), *Mockingjay* (the novel was published in 2010, while the producers decided to make a two-part split finale with two films; *Mockingjay: Part 1* released in 2014 and *Mockingjay: Part 2* in 2015) and Tris Prior (portrayed by Shailene Woodley) in Veronica Roth's *Divergent* (2011, 2014), *Insurgent* (2012, 2015) and *Allegiant* (in the same fashion, the producers decided that the last novel of the trilogy (2013) will be made into two films; *Part 1* that came out in 2016 and *Part 2*, scheduled for release in 2017) have become pervasive amongst contemporary young adult readership.

The best-selling dystopian fiction features many similar narrative components, not only the conspicuous pervasiveness of violence. The strong zealous protagonists thrive in a post-apocalyptic environment, oppose political corruption, lead the rebellious movements and succeed in directing their dystopian world into a better future. Using narrative techniques enabling the reader's identification with the protagonist, such as first-person narration, engaging dialogue, occasional diary entries, the genre is capable of motivating the young adult readership. Capacitating the readers' intellectual and emotional participation, the vicious, fictious worlds of the protagonists appeal to the young readers because they are sites of adventurous endeavour. Nevertheless, with the increasing popularity of YA dystopian literature and the female protagonists championing the apocalyptical settings, we believe it is

necessary to question the definitions of YA dystopia and the female protagonist.

Social codes are reflected in literary and cultural production; hence, the rise of the female protagonist is a signal of a change in society that allows more opportunities for women. The protagonists of the novels discussed further on represent unconventional gender behaviour and oppose notions of traditional femininity. Nevertheless, the definitiveness of the protagonists as independent subjects has to be questioned, as the patriarchal status quo is ultimately re-inscribed. Implicit and explicit construction of the female body and behaviour is performed through the protagonists' relationship with male characters in an attempt to combine romantic and dystopian genres. The two genres, though initially geared towards different audiences and having different reputations, have been intertwined to create more authentic characters and attract young adult audience.

The sixth chapter brings forth a definition of Young Adult Literature, from which YA dystopian literature is disseminated, with the appropriate attention dedicated to major preoccupations of dystopian writing: environmental disasters, reliance on technology and physical control and enslavement. The seventh chapter addresses specific issues of the YA dystopian genre, first, the correlation between YA dystopias and the Bildungsroman; reflected in the focus on coming of age and achieving adulthood, emphasising the importance of embracing the privileges of adulthood. Since YA dystopias address everyday concerns of contemporary adolescents regarding their interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships, such as plastic surgery, social networking, career choices, consumerism, as well as perceptions of femininity and masculinity, we find it is of utmost importance to address the issue of body image in YA dystopian writing. Last, we will explore the gendered image of the female protagonist through the interplay of romantic and dystopian genres.

- Chapter One -

Defining Dystopia

The genres of utopian and dystopian fiction have long contained within their ranks works that have been praised for the astute social criticism, provocative perspectives, and prescient subject matter they put forth. These novels have given us ideals to strive for, ideological monsters to fear, and numerous chances to witness the extremes of what society might become; they have opened the doors to a host of compelling critical inquiries. What is particularly fascinating, however, is that, despite how many specific utopias and dystopias literary scholars have encountered, the critical community remains only on the fringes of understanding with regard to these genres themselves. As James R. Simmons demonstrates in "Utopian Cycles: Trends in American Visions of the Alternative Society" (1998), we do not yet understand how these genres interrelate, why certain time periods produce more of one genre than the other, or why these sudden changes in publication predominance and readership popularity do not conform to any obvious changes in social environment.

Sadly, literary criticism has not risen to meet the challenges posed by such issues as effectively as, if we are to remain abreast of this genre's evolution, as it should have. Many shortcomings of our present critical

environment have held back what should be a thorough exploration of the fascinating contemporary face of a profound and incredibly socially relevant genre. The greatest of these shortcomings is the simple fact that, as a critical community, we lack a clear and precise definition of what a dystopian work of literature actually is. According to *The Oxford English Dictionary,* a dystopia is "an imaginary place or condition in which everything is as bad as possible" (*OED*, 2005). However, this is far too simplistic a definition to accurately reflect the kinds of environments that have been constructed, and are still being constructed, by dystopian authors. After all, were the settings of dystopian narratives ones in which, literally, 'everything [is] as bad as possible,' there would be no room for narrative movement and progression; everything would be restricted to the embodiment of an absolute, and therefore unchangingly terrible environment. One would think that dictionaries of literary terms would recognize the inability of such standard dictionary definitions of dystopia to properly express what literary dystopias are and how they function. Unfortunately, however, many of the definitions offered by literary dictionaries are no less insufficient.

Chris Baldick's *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (2008) simply states that dystopia is "a modern term invented as the opposite of utopia, and applied to any alarmingly unpleasant imaginary world, usually of the projected future" (p. 100). Chris Baldick takes an interesting moment for political bias in this definition when he makes a point of noting that utopias are "an imagined form of ideal or superior (thus usually Communist) human society" (p. 100). *The Harper Handbook to Literature* (1997) defines a dystopia simply as "an anti-utopia," without clarifying either in this definition or in the definition of 'utopia' in what ways the dystopia is different, and what this difference means (Frye et al., 1997, p. 164). M. Keith Booker tries to clarify the definition of dystopia by making the following claim in *Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research Guide* (1994):

> I consider the principal literary strategy of dystopian literature to be defamiliarization: by focusing their critiques of society on imaginatively distant settings, dystopian fictions provide fresh perspectives on problematic social and political practices that might

> otherwise be taken for granted or considered natural and inevitable. (Booker, 1994b, pp. 3-4)

However, this appears to be a definition equally well suited to denoting the science fiction or fantasy genres as it is to explaining dystopian literature. Erika Gottlieb (2001) points out the flaws of a similarly ambiguous definition when she remarks that "Lyman Sargent suggests that we look at dystopia as a social structure that is worse than the present social system," but then explains that this definition is useless because literary criticism has been affected by "postmodern criticism," which posits that

> any society functioning at the present time (or possibly at any other time as well) could be regarded as such a 'bad place.' [...] The postmodern critic's overly broad use of the notion of dystopia is counterproductive to a clear definition of what is unique about dystopian thought or dystopian fiction. (p. 5, Gottlieb's parenthesis)

Given the modern critical tradition of illuminating the negativities inherent in any social environment, definitions of dystopia that hinge on the overly simplistic statement that dystopias are 'bad places' say little of any value.

The definition for dystopia in Roland Schaer's *Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World* (2000) is equally unimpressive in its generalities. This work, which claims on its back cover to be "an unprecedented history of utopia in Western culture from its sources in antiquity through the end of the twentieth century," and the definitive survey of utopian scholarship, defines a dystopia as "a nonexistent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse that the society in which that reader lived (Schaer, 2000, p. 15). The first glaring problem with this definition is that its first qualifier, that a dystopia is "a nonexistent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space," applies in some degree to every work of fiction; these words do not carry a lot of weight. The second problem is that there are many ways in which a fictitious society can seem "considerably

worse" than one's own; it is our intent to argue that a dystopian 'worse' is not only bad, but bad in a very specific way.

The best one gets for a definition of 'dystopia' in *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (1998) are two simple words — "See UTOPIA." Should one indeed examine J.A. Cuddon's definition of 'utopia,' one finds that dystopias are "almost chiliastic forecasts of the doom awaiting mankind," but that this is only true "in *some* cases (p. 959, our italics). Many literary dictionaries, in fact, such as *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms* and Harry Shaw's *Dictionary of Literary Terms* (1972), do not even bother to define what a dystopia is, even though they claim in their introductions to be effective and comprehensive guides to literary terminology. Shaw, for example, holds of his book that it "defines, explains, and, where feasible, illustrates all literary terms, references, and allusions that today's general reader and student are likely to encounter (p. i). Can he truly imagine that modern general readers and students are not likely to encounter dystopian classics such as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* or *Brave New World?*

It is strange indeed that such a significant critical term remains, for the most part, insufficiently defined. It is as if 'dystopia' is such a familiar term that its meaning is assumed, and no need is felt on the critical front to clearly define it as anything more than a work of literature which portrays a setting in which one would not want to live. Incredibly, some critics freely admit to the fact that they see no reason to focus more closely on ensuring that a consensus is reached concerning the actual meaning of this term. Renata Galtseva and Irina Rodnyanskaya, in their article "The Obstacle: The Human Being, or the Twentieth Century in the Mirror of Dystopia" (1991), state that they feel "there is no need to tire readers with attempts to exhaustively define dystopia as a genre;" even though dystopian theory is the subject of their entire article, and they make use of the term 'dystopia' with the obvious intent that it should signify something very specific to their readers, they feel no need to lay this kind of standardizing theoretical groundwork beneath their claims (p. 298). Books, scholarly articles, and even literary dictionaries become marvellously evasive whenever the time comes for them to grapple with the question of the meaning of dystopia; what they are eventually able to produce, assuming they do not take the easy 'dystopia = opposite of utopia' road, can be seen from the above examples to be frequently insufficient.

One of the primary weaknesses of present definitions of dystopia, beyond the manners of shortcoming mentioned above, that has hindered current literary criticism is the terminological confusion that attempts at defining 'dystopia' have generated. In its attempts at establishing what dystopias actually are, the scholarly community has failed to come to any agreement as to what system of terms should be used when addressing this genre; definitions of dystopia regularly emerge that complicate, rather than clarify, our understanding of dystopian fiction through their multiplication of signifiers. A myriad of alternate terms have sprung from the pages of critical works both about individual dystopias and about the genre of dystopian literature as a whole. While some of these terms are interchangeable, merely varied monikers that encompass a single idea, other terms are assigned several drastically different meanings; this only serves to complicate any attempt at determining which basic qualities define a dystopia.

The most fundamental of these terminological confusions involves two terms at the very heart of any understanding of dystopian literature — 'utopia' and 'dystopia.' The origins, and originally intended meanings, of these words are not difficult to unearth. Of the first, "humankind has created fictions of social perfection at least since Plato's *Republic*. Sir Thomas More gave this thread of intellectual history a name when he called his contribution to it *Utopia,* Greek for *no place*" (Rabkin et al., 1983, p. vii, Rabkin's italics). As for the origin of the second term, 'dystopia,'

> we find it of comparatively recent coinage. In his 1946 preface to *Brave New World* Huxley still refers to the bad place as a utopia, using the term he felt stood for any speculative structure taking us to the future. It was only in 1952 that J. Max Patrick recommended the distinction between the good place as 'eutopia' and its opposite, the bad place, as 'dystopia'. (Gottlieb, 2001, p. 4)

The essential distinction between these two terms appears to be very obvious: the first represents, as did the work that carried it as a title, a positive hypothetical society, while the latter represents a negative hypothetical society. Problems have arisen, however, with critical

disagreements as to how these terms should actually be interrelated when speaking of 'dystopia' and 'utopia,' the literary genres, as opposed to 'dystopia' and 'utopia,' the general intellectual concepts. Some critics, such as M. Keith Booker (1994) and Patrick D. Murphy (1990), have used the terms 'utopia' and 'dystopia' to indicate two distinct, albeit closely interconnected, genres, the former of which deals with ideal societies while the latter envisions horrifically negative societies. Others, such as Roland Schaer (2000) and Calin Andrei Mihailescu (1991), have chosen to uphold a more archaic hierarchy of these terms, identifying a single genre, 'utopia,' and employing the terms 'eutopia' and 'dystopia' to distinguish between sub-genres into which, respectively, positive and negative fictions of 'ideal' societies fall. Critics such as Andrew Ross have even attempted to establish wholly different means of distinguishing between 'utopia' and 'dystopia' that have nothing at all to do with the representation of positive and negative societies. As Ross argues, "utopianism is based on a critique of the 'deficiencies of the present,' while dystopian thinking relies on a critique of perceived 'deficiencies in the future'" (qtd. in Booker, 1994a, p. 19).

Further terminological confusions have arisen due to the attempts contemporary critics have made to sub-categorize the literary incarnations of 'utopia' and 'dystopia' based upon degrees of thematic focus and upon particularities of tone and style. John Huntington (1982) attempts just such a parsing of the dystopian genre in his construction of the awkward distinction between dystopia and anti-utopia. As he explains it, "at the core of the anti-utopia is not simply an ideal or a nightmare, but an awareness of conflict, of deeply opposed values that pure utopia and dystopia tend to override. [...The] deep ambivalences [...and] irresolvable dilemmas of anti-utopia" are distinct from the "unambiguous horror of dystopia" (Huntington, 1982, pp. 124-127). He also tries to instate a concept of dystopian degrees, meant to represent how 'dystopian' a dystopia is. Huntington claims that, "in *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* we see an instance of Wells' and Zamyatin's futures transformed to pure dystopia," without ever properly explaining what a 'pure dystopia' or, for that matter, a regular, non anti-utopia dystopia, actually is (p. 134). Roland Schaer attempts a similar kind of definition-through-distinctions when he tries to justify, after his definitions of 'utopia'

and 'dystopia,' the necessity of two other concepts — the 'utopian satire' and, again, the 'anti-utopia.' According to Schaer, a utopian satire is "a nonexistent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as a criticism of that contemporary society," while an anti-utopia is "a nonexistent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as a criticism of utopianism or of some particular utopia" (p. 15).

What we would argue is common to all of the above attempts to define 'dystopia' through terminological distinctions is that their attention to the minutiae of dystopian types and degrees conceals the fact that, ultimately, no clear definition of the basis of dystopian literature is actually provided by such fragmentations. While these divisions can prove useful when attempting to distinguish *between* different dystopian works, such terminological schema are meaningless without a clear understanding of the genre *itself* to which they all belong. Similarly confusing distinctions of terminology have been made by those critics who attempt to define 'dystopia' merely by setting it against another, more readily understood genre; 'satire' is most frequently used as such a source of comparison. Certainly, a satire can include dystopian elements, and a dystopia can include satirical qualities, but this kind of intermixing has frequently led to a confusion of 'satire' and 'dystopia,' the thematic qualities, and 'satire' and 'dystopia,' the genres. The author of an early review of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* made just such a mistake when saying, of Orwell, that "the duty of the satirist is to go one worse than reality (Pritchett, 1982, p. 291). Certainly, such can be considered the domain of both satirists and dystopianists alike, but to confuse these terms when referring to a writer — as this author does when referring to Orwell as a 'satirist' rather than a 'utopianist' simply because he included satiric elements in his work — is to misidentify the genre in which such an author writes.

Contemporary critic Carter Kaplan (1999) similarly muddles the distinction between satire and dystopia. His attempt at establishing a definition of dystopia amounts to stating the following guide to identification: "If the work describes how bad things are, you have a satire on your hands, if the work describes how bad things could

be, you are tangling with a dystopia (Kaplan, 1999, p. 201). He follows this with a chart that separates satiric from dystopian works, including Zamyatin's *We,* Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* Huxley's *Brave New World,* and the movie *Starship Troopers* as dystopias, while Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange* and the film *Robocop* qualify as satires (Kaplan, 1999, pp. 210-211). Not only does Kaplan ignore, with this distinction, the fact that all dystopias — while they are typically set in a hypothesized future — are motivated by, and comment upon, how bad things *are* in the societies contemporary to their authors. He also never satisfactorily explains the basis of these distinctions, which his aforementioned identification guide does not fully substantiate. Again, we are left a definition that, in essence, tells us next to nothing about the genre we are trying to understand. The most we can say of definitions such as these is that they point us in the direction of a few things — such as satires — that dystopias are *not.* They fail to consider the complexities inherent in the fact that, even though dystopias can contain satiric elements, dystopias are not directly equivalent to satires, and therefore that the nature of 'dystopia' itself cannot be encompassed through such general genre comparisons.

The next weakness of prevailing definitions of 'dystopia' that afflicts our understanding of this genre is that many of these definitions disagree as to how dystopian a dystopia must be. One of the most strident of supporters for an absolutist reading of dystopias, John Huntington, insists that a work is more or less dystopian depending on how unconditional the negative environment is that is represented therein. As he sees it, the argument can be made that Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is more fully a dystopia than Zamyatin's *We* because

> 'doublethink' is D-503's psychological self-denial carried to the point at which thought itself becomes impossible. [...] All the important ambiguities of [Zamyatin's *We* go] unresolved. Therein lies the continuing possibility of thought. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* on the other hand, resolution takes place with nightmarish finality. (Huntington, 1982, pp. 134-135)

Ignoring the fact that Huntington's reading is already flawed, because his claim that in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* thought is impossible, ignores the fact that the bulk of the novel is composed of Winston's individual

thoughts, let us continue to examine his absolutist assertions. He maintains that "the art of *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* its greatness, is in the relentless denial of the possibility of change. [...] Orwell's pessimism reduces dynamic conflict to a monolithic truth," and in this we see dystopia at its best (Huntington, 1982, p. 136). Faced with the reality that many critics disagree with his extreme perspectives regarding both Orwell's novel and dystopias in general, he merely suggests that, though some of his colleagues have tried to see ambiguity in what he sees as the absolute finality of *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* such individuals are "grasping at straws" (Huntington, 1982, p. 135). Regardless of the fact that other critics have countered Huntington's argument, claiming that "the dystopian novelist [...] cannot represent the state's control as absolute, its citizens wholly utopianized, else there would be no possibility of conflict and thus no novel," the fact remains that there is nothing in prevailing definitions of dystopia which addresses this issue of degree, and deals with the contentious issue of how closely a dystopia must be to the 'worst possible world' in order to qualify as a dystopia (Beauchamp, 1977, p. 92).

The greatest problem that afflicts prevailing definitions of dystopia, however, is the simple fact that they have become so closely focused on the social critiques operating in the dystopian classics that they have taken these temporally specific aspects of classic dystopian novels as qualities that should be assumed as inherent in all dystopian fiction. Essentially, this means that many definitions of dystopias are blatantly dated. Certainly, in some regards definitions have allowed for the passage of time. As Patrick D. Murphy (1990) explains,

> one can no longer have citizens from utopia arriving by steamer, as William Dean Howells so blithely does at the outset of *A Traveler from Altruria* (1894), or have a valley utopia conveniently and vaguely 'up among the thousand tributaries and enormous hinterland of a great river' discovered by a biplane, as in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915). (p. 25, Murphy's parenthesis)

However, most definitions of dystopia ignore the implications that societal change has upon the way this genre manifests. Dystopias are defined as much by their engagement with those social anxieties

that are contemporary to their writing as they are by their kinship to past dystopias; "as time[s]...changed," Eric S. Rabkin (1983) explains, despite the fact that "each later writer [was] aware of the work of his predecessors," and hoped to emulate in their own works the dystopias of old, they could not ignore that "changing real world conditions suggest[ed] ever new causes for hope and alarm" (p. vii). It is not hard to see why the dangers of totalitarianism and Communism were explored in early dystopias. Neither is it hard to see why such ideologies overwhelmed early dystopian criticism; in the case of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* for example, the threat of totalitarianism weighed heavily not only upon Orwell's mind, but also upon the minds of his first critics and readers. It is remarkable, however, that so many modern critics assume, in their contemporary definitions of dystopia, that these same fears are our own. To imagine as much is to ignore decades of political and social motion, and the reality that "revolution[s] of historical dimensions" have hardly ceased to occur (Newsinger, 1992, p. 83). To imagine as much is to believe that Big Brothers, totalitarian regimes, police states, mechanization, Communism, and supply shortages are still our most pressing social concerns.

Unfortunately, one need not look far to discover examples of just such definitions. Consider the following statements regarding the general nature of dystopian literature, all of which were written within the last 40 years yet still assume that totalitarianism and Communism remain the greatest fears of our society:

> The 'greatest fear' that drives [...] Western dystopian fiction [is] the fear that by falling for the seductively utopian promises of a dictatorship hiding behind the mask of the Messiah, Western democracy could [...] take a turn in the direction of totalitarianism, following the precedents of historical models already established by fascist and communist dictatorships in Eastern and Central Europe. [...] Dystopian fiction looks at totalitarian dictatorship as its prototype, a society that puts its whole population continuously on trial, a society that finds its essence in concentration camps, that is, in disenfranchising and enslaving entire classes of its own citizens, a society that, by

> glorifying and justifying violence by law, preys upon itself. (Gottlieb, 2001, pp. 10-41)
>
> The genre of dystopia [...] has been linked from its genesis onwards to the real existence of totalitarian states. [...] With the fall of the Berlin Wall the last totalitarian states started disintegrating in Europe. [...] The question [...now] is whether it is at all possible to write dystopias with a sense of relevance in the absence of totalitarianism. (Smeds, 2001, p. 282)
>
> The crucial dystopian conflict is an opposition between a rigid totalitarian State which values efficiency (and thus exercises mass mind and behavior control) and an ordinary citizen who gradually awakens to his individualism and finally rebels against the State. (Foust, 1982, p. 83, Foust's parenthesis)
>
> The unity [encompassing dystopias] manifests itself [...] in a similarity of traits within an existence in unfreedom and depersonalization. (Galtseva & Rodyanskaya, 1991, p. 294)
>
> [E.M. Forster, with *The Machine Stops*] has anticipated most, if not quite all, of the themes of subsequent dystopian novels: the horrors of a society 'perfected' by technology; the totalitarian face of a regime deifying 'reason' in all its regulations; the denial of the body, the passions and the instincts, and the consequent automatization of man. (Beauchamp, 1977, p. 91)

Even explorations of dystopia written by those who acknowledge that a complicated relationship exists between the historical and ideological contexts of dystopian works of literature seem to be mired in similar presuppositions that classic dystopias highlight the same socio-political criticisms that all dystopias must embrace.

Beauchamp (1977), for example, assumes that *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* in which everything has been "simplified, regularized, stripped of all

variety, tradition, [and] richness, so that it adheres to that geometric uniformity so dear to utopian hearts" can be taken as thematically representative of all dystopian works (p. 468). Ben Clarke (2001) similarly begins by claiming that dystopias written after *Nineteen Eighty-Four* "used alternative strategies to construct dystopian narratives which resisted identification with an ideology that equated the totalitarian state with 'Communism,'" yet later states that the dystopias of "these later historical periods" are works that, though they do not "replicate [*Nineteen Eighty-Four*...], are homologous in terms of their social and political function," which is the attack of totalitarian regimes (p. 247). That such constraints have been placed upon definitions of dystopia, largely because of his best-known work, is something that Orwell himself would likely have been deeply offended by. Orwell "complained of people who tried to 'spread the idea that totalitarianism is *unavoidable*,'" and "explicitly described [his] novel as a warning and not a prediction" (qtd. in Russell and Russell, 1987, p. 159, Orwell's italics). He freely admitted that, in time, social fears would change and make relevant avenues of socio-political criticism far different from his own.

The considerable shortcomings that plague prevailing definitions of dystopia are indeed numerous. Were the spatial constraints of the present work not an issue, it would be possible to examine in detail countless other insufficient definitions that have been set forth in both reference books and critical works alike. Regrettably, such inadequate definitions have not only weakened the authority of those critical works for which they have served as a basis. Due to their dated frames of reference and their inability to provide a clear explanation of the basic elements of the dystopian novel, they have also proved detrimental to how the genre itself is understood and appreciated. In saying this, we do not mean to imply that those classic works of dystopian fiction which have long served as the cornerstones of the genre, such as Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* or Zamyatin's *We,* have fallen from critical grace. Rather, we believe that many complex and thought-provoking contemporary novels as deserving of the classification of 'dystopia' are slipping below the radar of critical attention, and receiving neither the scholarly consideration nor the respect that they deserve simply because they do not conform to the standards laid out in prevailing, dated definitions of dystopia.

Because they do not appear as 'classically' dystopian, such works have not been classified as 'dystopias' and have thus been unable to stand in defence of a genre that has received a great deal of criticism over the past few decades.

M. Keith Booker provides the following description of this shift in critical perspectives in *Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research Guide* (1994)*:*

> Many [modern] critics consider dystopian fiction as a pop culture genre roughly in the same category as science fiction; their dismissal of the genre can thus be partially attributed to an elitist rejection of popular culture. Other critics see dystopian fiction as a didactic and utilitarian category that frequently pays little attention to aesthetic form or technique. (Booker, 1994b, p. 173)

Though Booker's summary of such prevailing opinions is meant to refer to the views some critics have held of all dystopian literature, past and present, one need not go far to find clear evidence in support of Booker's reading of the critical environment as it applies to recent dystopian works. A general distrust of a great part of contemporary literature — its 'pop culture' genres — seems to lurk within the minds of many literary critics; popular speculative fiction, both its science fiction and mainstream fiction incarnations, has particularly suffered under the weight of this rather elitist reservation that certain forms of contemporary literature are unlikely to produce appreciable bodies of artistically and critically significant work. One critic denounced, for example, in 1982, that "the anti-utopian novel lacks almost all the usual advantages of fiction: it must confine itself to a rudimentary kind of characterization, it cannot provide much in the way of psychological nuance, it hardly pretends to a large accumulation of suspense" (Howe, 1982, p. 308). In that same year, another contemporary critic claimed of "all utopian literature" — here using 'utopian' to denote both utopian and dystopian literature — that "its inspiration is scarcely such as to be aesthetically productive of ultimate or positive significance; this seems to be true of Utopian writings regardless of the viewpoint from which the author approaches his theme" (Rahv, 1982, p. 311).

It is interesting to note that classic dystopias are often elevated above the reproach of such criticisms; unfortunately, this is usually accomplished by claiming that such works can somehow be held apart from their genre. As much is admitted by George Woodcock (1984) when he claims that *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* like its classic brethren, is "formally so much more than either a fantasy or an anti-utopia, because it relie[s] just as strongly on the resources of realism, romance, and satire," and implies with this statement that ordinary dystopias, here 'anti-utopias,' cannot be expected to realize such elevated qualities (p. 134).

Ultimately, this increasing lack of faith that our generation can produce many dystopian works able to live up to the literary and sociological significance of their predecessors may have profound effects on the way dystopias are now, and in the future will be, understood. Booker explains that, considering how many current definitions of dystopia, including his own, revolve around general statements of anti-utopianism and social criticism, "dystopian literature" is in danger of becoming "not so much a specific genre as a particular kind of oppositional and critical energy or spirit" (Booker, 1994b, p. 3). As Booker goes on to argue,

> any number of literary works (especially modern ones) can be seen to contain dystopian energies, and readings that emphasize these energies can reveal dystopian impulses in works that might not otherwise be considered clear examples of dystopian literature. Virtually any literary work that contains an element of social or political criticism offers the possibility of such readings. (Booker, 1994b, p. 3, Booker's parenthesis)

Booker seems comfortable, as do many other critics, with the idea that our past understanding of 'dystopia' as a specific genre might be exchanged for an acceptance of 'dystopian energies' as a potential presence in the more structured and clearly standardized true 'genres.' John Smeds encourages just such a shift in his essay, "*1984* - The End of Dystopia?" (2001). In this work, he attempts to use a cyberpunk sci-fi classic, William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984), as proof that true dystopias are no longer being written. Without the inspiration of Orwell

and his contemporaries' political and social environment, plagued as it was by the fears of imminent totalitarianism, all we are able to produce are works that half-heartedly echo the indignant, socially critical energies of the now-extinct dystopian genre. As he explains, even though *Neuromancer* seems to carry all of the hallmark traits of a dystopia, "it is hard to read *Neuromancer* as a dystopia. Dystopias are about the deprivation of the rights of individuals, about the loss of freedom. *Neuromancer* is about an abundance of freedom bordering on excess" (Smeds, 2001, p. 288). The serious flaws of Smeds' definition, particularly its equation of the loss of freedom with the essence of dystopian subject matter, are characteristic of many modern attempts to identify and interpret the presence or absence of dystopian qualities in contemporary literature. We invoke this quotation as a telling example of how dangerously quick many contemporary critics have become at dismissing recent literary works as potential dystopias based upon their lack of adherence to what is in fact not an adequate definition of dystopia, but rather the familiar shape of a few classic dystopian works.

A real possibility now seems to exist, given the statements of such critics, that a long-established genre might disappear under the weight and volume of its ideological cousins, simply because it has proven to be so difficult to accurately define. We will not accept, however, that this is because true dystopias either are not being, or simply cannot be, written anymore. Rather, we believe that the real danger to the dystopian genre is our inadequate critical understanding of it. "There are a lot of things you can do with a novel. One is to ignore it, especially if it is awkward and won't fit unequivocally into some literary or ideological slot" (Clarke, 2001, p. 1). This, we believe, is what is happening to modern works that deserve to be classified as dystopian; modern dystopian novels do indeed exist, but they cannot be so categorized until a proper definition of dystopia is established. In order to turn the tide of this unfortunate course upon which the dystopian literary genre has been set, which may go so far as to lead to the complete disappearance of 'dystopia' as a specific genre of literature, it is necessary to form a new definition for dystopia, a definition which allows for the inevitability that societal perspectives will change and recognises that no literary genre should be reliant on any one such perspective. Should such a working definition,

free of the critical weaknesses, be established, it will solidify the shaking foundations of this genre. Using this definition to identify contemporary dystopias that, in their complexity of subject and form, can actually live up to the dystopian classics that earned this genre the respect of literary critics, will strengthen the foundations of the dystopian literary genre further still.

- Chapter Two -

The Critical Response to Dystopia

I

Some of the early critical attention to dystopia as a genre, following the publication of *Brave New World* (1931) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), came from utopian scholars who were trying to account for the perceived decline of the literary utopia that seemingly accompanied the rise of dystopian or anti-utopian fiction in the twentieth century. These critics accordingly tend to define anti-utopia, usually preferring this term, as something that is a direct reaction to or is in direct opposition to utopia. One such critic is George Kateb, the title of whose book, *Utopia and its Enemies* (1963), makes his perspective clear enough. His use of the term "antiutopian" is also a telling indication of his interests, which are to defend utopia against anti-utopian attacks in order to suggest how the declining genre might sustain itself. His defensive stance against this attack on utopianism is enmeshed in his very description of this genre:

> This essay is meant to consider certain attacks — most of them modern — which have been made on utopianism. These attacks stem from the belief that

> the world some time soon (unbearably soon) will have at its disposal — if it wishes to use them — the material presuppositions of a way of life commonly described as "utopian." Such a prospect, one would have thought, would be a cause for gladness. It has not been that, at all, but rather a signal for men of various persuasions and temperaments to devote themselves strenuously and in all sincerity to exposing both the insufficiency of utopian ideals and the unacceptability of arrangements thought necessary to the realization of those ideals. (Kateb, 1963, p. 1)

This is as close as we get to Kateb's definition of "antiutopianism." Without even using the term in this instance, what he sees as an antithetical genre is described as an almost inconceivable attack on the dream of perfection.

Kateb is not alone in suggesting that the turn to dystopia is dependent upon the conceivable technological ability to create utopia. He states that anti-utopianism is "a crystallization of a number of ideas, attitudes, opinions, and sentiments that have existed for centuries," a crystallization which has been brought about by "nothing but the development of technology and the natural sciences" (Kateb, 1963, p. 3). It would seem, then, that the dream becoming reality is an alarming prospect. Furthermore, this alarm is not based upon "*scepticism* about the capacity of modern technology and natural science to execute the most vaulting ambitions of utopianism," but on the "*dread it* will" (Kateb, 1963, pp. 14-15, our emphasis). Kateb accounts for this dread on the basis of what would be lost in the realization of utopian dreams: the cost of utopia would be "the death of democratic politics" (p. 16). However, it is naive and simplistic to associate anti-utopianism only with democracy; the issue is much more complex. As a brief example of this complexity, witness *Brave New World*'s critique of American capitalism and consumption-driven economics alongside its bleak depiction of totalitarian rule.

Gorman Beauchamp, in his essay "Man as Robot: The Taylor System in *We*" (1983), also defines dystopian novels by their expression of "the fear of utopia and the fear of technology," although in a much less defensive vein than Kateb. He also more clearly illuminates *why* the realization of utopia might be such an alarming prospect:

> Utopian images […] have imagined the imposition of a rational, regimented, minutely planned schematization on the disorderly flux of history; but, because they seemed too impossible to realize, these fictive models have served more as contemplative critiques of the ills of real world societies than as literal blueprints for reforming them. If, however, […] the twentieth century is moving toward the actual realization of utopia, this shift can be attributed to the agency of modern technology. The proliferating array of techniques for social control made available by modern science, that is, poses the possibility of rectifying the venerable utopian ideations of the past; and this possibility has become increasingly problematic, the specter that haunts the dystopian novel. (Beauchamp, 1983, p. 86)

It is precisely the ways in which technology and science could bring (and have brought) about the social control necessary to implement "a rational, regimented, minutely planned schematization" that constitute the most nightmarish aspects of dystopian novels and have made the once unthreatening utopian possibilities threatening. Alexandra Aldridge, in *The Scientific World View in Dystopia* (1984), concurs, while also explaining that dystopianism is not simply anti-scientific or anti-technological, but "anti-scientistic": "dystopia always aims to critique and ridicule that [utopian] worldview for its adherence to instrumental values, its elevation of functional and collective ends over the humanistic and individual" (p. ix). Aldridge and Beauchamp focus not so much on the loss of "democratic values" that Kateb bemoaned as on the coercive means of achieving utopia.

To put it another way, Beauchamp and Aldridge point out how dystopian writers address the possible abuses of power that can accompany the implementation of utopia. Similarly, Keith M. Booker, in *Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research Guide* (1994), describes dystopias as "literary works that critically examine both existing conditions and the potential abuses that might result from the institution of supposedly utopian alternatives" (Booker, 1994b, p. 3). He goes on to say that

> dystopian literature is specifically that literature which situates itself in direct opposition to utopian thought, warning against the potential negative consequences of arrant utopianism. At the same time, dystopian literature generally also constitutes a critique of existing social conditions or political systems, either through the critical examination of the utopian premises upon which those conditions and systems are based or through the imaginative extension of those conditions and systems into different contexts that more clearly reveal their flaws and contradictions. (Booker, 1994b, p 3)

Although he uses a phrase like "direct opposition to utopian thought," which might place him strongly in the Kateb camp, notice that it is not utopianism itself that dystopian literature opposes, but "potential abuses" and "potential negative consequences" of not merely utopianism, but "arrant utopianism". Booker also points out that the critique is not restricted to utopian thought, but to existing social and political constructs. Dystopia looks not only to the future, but also to the present trends that might bring about the nightmare future. Dystopian writers provide a contemporary social critique through what Booker calls "defamiliarization": using imaginary futuristic settings to provide a fresh perspective on contemporary issues (Booker, 1994b, pp. 3-4). As Mark Hillegas says in *The Future as Nightmare: H.G Wells and the Anti-Utopians* (1976), dystopian fiction provides "one of the most revealing indexes to the anxieties of our age" (p. 3).

To return to one of the earlier critics, Chad Walsh's work *From Utopia to Nightmare* (1962) places him in a different camp entirely from his contemporary, Kateb: "My focus will be on dystopia. I shall deal with utopia only briefly, as a necessary background to its mocking rival" (p. 24). Notice the use of the term "dystopian" in this instance. Although Walsh acknowledges a rivalry between the two genres, he sees the dystopian response not as an "attack" but as a mockery, anticipating Gary Saul Morson's parodic genre theory (see Morson, 1981). Morson defines anti-utopia as an anti-genre (Morson, 1981, p. 115). In this he would seem to agree with Kateb, but Morson does not see anti-utopia as a direct assault on utopia: "The distinctiveness of

anti-genres lies in the fact that those conventions establish a *parodic* relation between the anti-generic work and the works and traditions of another genre, the target genre" (p. 115, Morson's italics). Walsh's reference to mockery anticipates the playfulness of this parodic theory. For these critics, then, dystopia is not an attack or direct assault on utopia, but there is a parodic and mocking relationship between the genres.

Walsh defines dystopia, although he sometimes uses the term "inverted utopia," as "an imaginary society presented as *inferior* to any civilised society that actually exists," (p. 26, our italics) having defined utopia as "an imaginary society presented as *superior* to any civilised society that actually exists" (p. 26, our italics). Like Booker, he acknowledges the role of the contemporary in dystopia, but Walsh highlights the *comparative* element of dystopia's critique of the present and the future. The focus on social commentary seems to be a distinguishing factor that separates dystopian scholars from utopian reactionaries like Kateb.

Walsh's definition, though, is quite vague, and his use of terminology is inconsistent. The term "inverted utopia," although it does not have the antagonistic associations of the "anti" prefix, implies that a dystopia is simply a reverse or negative utopia. This seems to have been answered by Aldridge:

> The dystopia is not merely "utopia in reverse" as it has often been called, but a singular generic category issuing out of a twentieth-century shift of attitudes toward utopia. Dystopia is composed of unique qualities of imagination and sensibility — certain historically bound shifts of the social imagination — brought together not as a fictive philosophical tract, but in the form of the novel. However, the dystopian novelist, instead of recreating some fragment of the actual world, extrapolates from his concept of actuality in order to make a holistic framework, a complete alternative (inevitably futuristic) structure. (p. ix)

Aldridge provides a useful and informative definition of dystopia. She describes dystopia's relation to utopia not as an attack or even a

mockery but as a "shift in attitudes." She alludes to the novel as the ideal form of dystopia, and seems to contrast that with the utopian "fictive philosophical tracts."

More recent utopian scholars like Chris Ferns (1999) tend not to regard dystopia as an attack on utopia or a genre that is responsible for the fall of utopia. So far the discussion has focused on ideologies and technologies. In *Narrating Utopia: Ideology, Gender, Form in Utopian Literature* (1999), Ferns focuses on narrative forms and strategies as a means of defining both utopia and dystopia and as a way of comparing the genres:

> In the case of utopian narrative, for example, there is a clear correlation between its character and that of other narrative models prevalent at the time of its emergence — and the prevalence of those models is in turn a reflection of the surrounding historical context. Thus the traveller's tale format of so many Renaissance utopias […] clearly reflects the popularity of this form during the age of exploration which constitutes part of the historical context in which they were produced. (p. 16)

This focus on the evolution of formal constructs is quite useful. Ferns argues that the apparent decline of the traditional utopia described here has to do with the "age of exploration draw[ing] to a close" so that "the traveller gives way to the rather less glamorous figure of the tourist" (p. 19). It is not necessarily that the dream of perfection is declining, but rather that some of the traditional forms that encapsulated the delivery of that dream are becoming less relevant to readers.

Ferns goes on to argue that "the emergence of the novel as the dominant form of fictional discourse" reveals the limitations of traditional utopian forms:

> compared to the novel, the traveller's tale appears linear, episodic, lacking in dramatic interaction — deficiencies which only become more obvious when, as is often the case in more recent utopian fiction,

> the writer introduces novelistic elements (attempts at individual characterization, a love interest, and so forth) in an effort to remedy the problem. (p. 20)

However, when more recent utopian writers have tried to use the novel form, they have sometimes run into problems because the "static social vision" of these utopian worlds "prove[s] problematic in terms of fictional representation" and renders narrative elements like the passage of time and the progress and development of the protagonist meaningless (Ferns, 1999, p. 20). Simply put, utopias are without time, and the movement of a novel depends upon the perceived passage of time.

Ferns accounts for the success of the dystopia based on the relationship between form and content and reader expectations that arise out of familiarity with certain forms. Dystopia did not conquer its rival, then, but appeared as a genre at the right time: "Dystopian fiction, however, originating at a time when the novel constitutes the dominant narrative model, moves much further in this direction, its typical theme of the struggle of the individual against an oppressive society lending itself readily to a more novelistic treatment" (Ferns, 1999, p. 16). In contrast to Kateb and other thinkers, Ferns asserts that form, not content (ideas, philosophies, political beliefs) accounts for the shift from utopia to dystopia. Furthermore, he also points out that utopia has not faded away, but has changed: "Where the concept of utopian stasis is also abandoned, as is the case in much recent utopian fiction, the range of possible narrative experiment is still further extended" (Ferns, 1999, p. 22). Ferns' study focuses on gender as well as narrative forms and he points to the recent "utopian dreams of freedom" written by women that contrast the earlier "utopian dreams of order" written by men (p. 27). Kateb, of course, could not have anticipated the prolific array of feminist utopias that has been produced.

Of course, it has been pointed out that the twentieth century imagination accepts more readily a pessimistic than an optimistic portrayal of the future. Brett Cooke (2002) accounts for the lack of enduring popularity of recent utopian texts compared to their dystopian counterparts by observing that "this could be due to more pessimistic forecasts of technological and social development, but

the human universals […] in *We* suggest that dystopia better suits our innate predispositions" (p. 11).

If the dystopia does focus on the negative possibilities of social control through technology in the future, that is not to say that dystopias do not have optimistic elements. The optimism inherent in any dystopia stems from its portrayal of the impossibility of achieving static and repressive social control mechanisms in reality. Dystopias show that no matter the consequences, and many dystopian protagonists do experience drastic consequences, human nature will surface and attempt to assert itself. Dystopias show that individuality cannot be completely suppressed, nor can human psychology be externally altered. Ferns supports the idea that twentieth century audiences find this aspect of dystopia reassuring because we fear the possibility that we are shaped by our social environment (p. 107).

It is important to establish that although dystopia does have a relationship with utopia, it is a genre in its own right with its own characteristics. It is as a "singular generic category" with "unique qualities of imagination and sensibilities" (Aldridge, 1984, p. ix) that is particularly suited to the modern novel form in its portrayal of a protagonist who resists a static social order (Ferns, 1999, pp. 16, 22) that we intend to examine the dystopia.

That recognition must be given to the depths in which each dystopia is entrenched in the specific socio-political context contemporary to its writing is of particular importance for literary criticism. Even though, as Beauchamp points out, "to evaluate the dystopist's ideological stance is not easy, to translate it from fictional into historical reference (as it seems insistently to demand) is harder still" (Beauchamp, 1974, p. 95), it is nevertheless essential that the temporally-specific contexts of individual dystopian novels be recognized. Erika Gottlieb explains why such attentiveness is so pertinent to contemporary criticism as part of her consideration of why dystopian scholarship has of late enjoyed a rise in popularity:

> It [is] extremely important to observe the increased interest the postmodern movement takes in the genre of dystopia, an interest most likely connected with the generally dystopic mood of such influential thinkers as Foucault, for example, who tends to see any society as a hellscape. Yet it is precisely because

> they tend to regard our entire civilization as dystopic that postmodern critics do not bother to search for the target of the particular writer's social-political criticism, which, I believe, constitutes the vital impetus for dystopian fiction. (Gottlieb, 2001, p. 283)

The 'target' of a dystopian writer's composition individualises a dystopian work of literature by fixing it, through critical contextualization, to a specific time and place in social history. This is not to say that dystopian novels, because they are so closely linked to the moments that produced them, fail to realize the manner of timeless longevity enjoyed by works of other genres, such as those of comedy, tragedy, or romance. Nor does this assertion contradict our previous claim that the dystopian genre evolves; even though each individual dystopia is firmly fixed, ideologically, to a specific time and place, and we are arguing that a single definition can encompass them all, this is not to say that a logical progression cannot be discerned which connects each novel to those that came before and after it. Rather, this simply means that readers of any era must understand the circumstances behind a dystopian work's writing before they can truly grasp the subversive elements of that text and properly fathom how it operates, both as representative of a specific genre's essential qualities and as a work segregated from its generic brethren by the specifics of its concentration.

II

Having placed so much emphasis upon the importance of distinguishing, when examining a dystopian work of literature, between those traits which define it as a member of the dystopian genre and those which are individual to it — as it stands in response to the social dangers of a specific time and place — it is only logical that the historical context and specific ideological arguments of the most representative dystopian novel of the twentieth century, Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, be examined and explored in this chapter. A brief examination of the circumstances that motivated the specific, context-based message of the novel will illuminate the fact that a clear path of social evolution can be perceived which links the anxieties presented

in the contemporary dystopian novel to those of its dystopian predecessors.

As George Woodcock explains in *Orwell's Message:* 1984 *and the Present* (1984), far from being George Orwell's first foray into the realm of social criticism, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* marked the culmination of decades of disillusioned sociological introspection:

> *Nineteen Eighty-Four* sprang out of both experience and observation, and the first seeds of that vision of a world enwrapped in tyranny can be detected in Orwell's thoughts two decades — perhaps even longer — before he actually sat down in 1946 on the island of Jura to write about it. […Orwell's was] a purpose, a vision, and a form generated out of his own experience. (Woodcock, 1984, pp. 11-12)

Orwell was a keen observer of those institutions that were becoming the perilous underpinnings of a tumultuous age, those beliefs that were imagined to offer the promise of utopian salvation to a world at war, and a Britain torn apart by desperate fears and an equally desperate rationing of supplies. His anxiety was piqued not only by his country's political condition, with its wartime mentality of exuberant patriotism, suspicion, and propagandizing, and burgeoning Socialist and Communist movements. He was also wary of his society's technological evolution, with regard to military ordinance, surveillance, and to the philosophy of production itself as it was applied to production methods and to the individual's relationship to his work.

Orwell and his contemporaries lived in an age fascinated with Fordism, with industrialism's idealized vision of "collective labor [and] streamlined conveyor forms" (Galtseva & Rodnyanskaya, 1991, p. 301). His depiction, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* of an empire fixated on production, but ever short on actual products, was a pointed response to this obsession. Orwell also reacted against his society's suddenly transformed understanding of the potentials of technology, which had been inspired in part by a "1921 […] play entitled *R.U.R.* [in which] Karel Capek gave world-wide currency to the word 'robot'" (Beauchamp, 1977, p. 92). As one critic contemporary to the first performance run of *R.U.R* remarked,

> what is new in Capek's play […] is the complex symbol of the robot, which represents not only the machine and its power to free men from toil but, at the same time, symbolizes man himself, dehumanized by his own technology. From the technological point of view, man is an inefficient instrument, whose emotional and spiritual life only impedes the drive of modern technology. Either he must give way to the machine, or he himself must become a machine. (Beauchamp, 1977, p. 92)

Orwell's age was one in which technological progress meant mechanisation and automatisation, based upon the idea that production could only increase the removal of human beings from the act of production. This technological hypothesis that human society might best be served were human beings to be supplanted by machines — expressed itself not only through research into mechanical means of improving upon production techniques but also through theorizing about whether or not the productivity of individuals might be enhanced by encouraging mechanical efficiency in organic beings. Orwell commented upon this latter issue, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* primarily through one of his most thought-provoking narrative creations, Newspeak. Consider the following description of Newspeak provided by Syme in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, "the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought" (Orwell, 1982, p. 36). How close it is to a typical description of the mechanistic impulse that inspired that age's dystopian fiction, "it move[d] to eliminate every vestige of the irrational, the spontaneous, the individual — all that it designat[ed] as 'fancy,' the quality that prevent[ed] man from being as mechanical as his machines" (Beauchamp, 1977, p. 93).

Orwell also held a number of concerns regarding his society's social ideals. He feared that a situation of "organized injustice" might result from his society's appreciation of order, propriety, and restraint (Gottlieb, 2001, p. 27). As Beauchamp explains of the kind of mentality against which Orwell responded, even though "all civilization is, of course, predicated [to some degree] upon order, regulation, regimentation and restraint — limits on man's instinctual drives" (Beauchamp, 1977, p. 92), there is with this movement an ever-present danger that these mechanisms will impose too far upon

man's necessary freedoms. Orwell worried that the end result of the "passive, unthinking careerism" he thought so permeated his society would be a hierarchy run by career-oriented intellectuals who, while well suited to handle the mental demands of leadership, would be lacking in the moral sensibility needed to accompany such power, and thus would create coldly logical, but inhumane, totalitarian regimes (Resch, 1997, p 156).

When 1984 — the actual calendar year — began, opulently garlanded with the plethora of new editions and criticisms of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* that its arrival inspired, the widespread recognition of how drastically society had changed since that novel's writing became a significant social trend. Western society seemed to breathe a collective sigh of relief at the inception of 1984, as if the year itself was somehow key to Orwell's prophecies, and revelled in the realization that modern society was not only very different from that which Orwell had endured, but also very different from that which he had envisioned. To see how radically cultural perspectives shifted in response to this perceived freedom from the admonitions and warnings of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* one need look no further than the advertising of 1984 itself.

As a 1984 advertisement for Mobile proclaimed, "the year is here at last […] so let's get on with it and let the novel rest" (Miller, 1984, p. 697). An advertisement for United Technologies similarly claimed that, "whatever merits *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has as literature, […] the book has failed as prophecy. […] Thanks to the electronic microchip and the technology that brought it into being, […] 1984 has not become *1984* (Miller, 1984, p. 697). These exuberant statements, each hailing some manner of triumph over Orwell's vision, were quite characteristic of their time. What is particularly interesting, however, as Mark Crispin Miller (1984) points out, are the terms in which this victory was couched. As he explains,

> both ads (presented above) attempt[ed] to vindicate these corporations' products — and, therefore, their own existence — by extolling the liberating effects of advanced technology: 'Orwell was wrong about technology. Technology has not enslaved us. It has freed us.' Because of the pervasiveness and accessibility of computers, each of us is freer than ever before: 'because

the chip increases our choices, it ensures individuality.'
(p. 697, our parenthesis)

From the evidence provided by advertisements such as these, it is clear that the Western society of 1984 prided itself on how far it felt it had surpassed Orwell's time, particularly with regard to technological ingenuity and the realization and protection of personal freedoms. Far from living with technology as a governmental tool of repression and surveillance, late twentieth century Westerners perceived themselves as living in an age in which technological innovations had done nothing but widen an individual's quality of life, freedom, and range of consumer options. The 1980's were the beginning of what would be a protracted period of consumer excess and opulence, with the late twentieth century bearing witness, in the Western world, to an ever-increasing empowerment of the individual-as-consumer. The Western world's emphasis, over the latter half of the twentieth century, upon the importance of social freedom and the liberating potentials of technology had drastically shifted the mentality of the populace from those institutionalised philosophies which were at the heart of Orwell's Britain and, consequently, at the heart of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

III

Renata Galtseva and Irina Rodnyanskaya remark of classic dystopias, in their article, "The Obstacle: The Human Being, or the Twentieth Century in the Mirror of Dystopia" (1991), that "these visions of the 'new world' no longer...strike our sensibilities" as they did those of their contemporary audiences (p. 294). Their explanation of this development is that older dystopian visions have in fact become the realities of today, and thus can no longer hold the nightmarish, horrific qualities of fatalistic prophecy. While we are inclined to agree with the claims of these two critics, insofar as they recognize the fact that early dystopias do not inspire the same intensity of response that they once did — as can be seen from the general tone of current, as opposed to earlier, critiques of these novels — we must argue with their reading of the rationale behind this change in reader reactions to the dystopian classics.

It is our belief that the dystopias of decades past do not strike modern readers with the same sense of urgent dread that they instilled in their contemporary readers, not because their nightmares

have become our reality, but rather because these individual dystopic visions are each entrenched in a very specific temporal context, one which we, as modern readers, can only access through a perspective of intellectual hindsight. As was discussed in the first chapter, the fact that prevailing definitions of dystopia frequently assume certain social evils — be they mechanisation, repression or, most frequently, totalitarianism — as those which *every* dystopia must address ignores this reality. Societies and, consequently, those threats that frighten them most at any one time, have changed drastically over the decades since the dystopian classics were written because of the inevitable transformations of social evolution. Certainly, it can be argued that particular anxieties are inherent in the human condition; fears of the inevitability of death, of whether one can satisfy one's biological needs for food, water, and shelter, and of whether one can protect one's loved ones are concerns which can be assumed as universal and relatively unchanging over time. Dystopias, however, focus upon fears of a very different nature. Dystopias operate through the isolation and exaggeration of a society's most pressing *ideological* fears, with each dystopian writer stressing "the particular aspects of the trends toward utopia that seem to him most dangerous" (Beauchamp, 1974, p. 465). Mark Hillegas is absolutely correct in remarking that dystopian works provide "one of the most revealing indexes to the anxieties of our age" (Hillegas, 1976, p. 3).

- Chapter Three -

From Anti-Utopia to Dystopia: The Evolution of the Genre in the Twentieth Century and Its Characteristics

I

The dystopian novel did not suddenly emerge in the twentieth century, however. It has its own predecessors that reach back to the beginnings of utopianism. In order to establish what accounts for the "shift of attitudes" and what makes modern dystopia a unique twentieth century genre, we must look at the history of anti-utopianism in general as well as the critical history of the genre more closely. Aldridge (1984) points out that "attacks on utopia or a spirit of anti-utopianism run parallel to the whole of what can loosely be called utopian thought," going back as far as the Greek comedic writers such as Aristophanes and anti-utopian myths of Hell, Hades, and the underworld (p. 5). Incidentally, Elaine Hoffman Baruch (1979) points out that gender inversion is the basis for satire in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* and *Ecclesiazusae* (p. 30). Aldridge uses three terms to suggest the evolution of the genre: utopian satire, anti-utopia, and dystopia. Utopian satire runs from those early Greek comedies until the mid-nineteenth century. Aldridge says that utopian satire "addresses itself to particular conditions in history," but does not have the futuristic

and technological elements that characterize later anti-utopian and dystopian fiction (p. 7).

Utopian satire can be set aside in order to focus on the terms anti-utopia and dystopia. Generally speaking, anti-utopian works date from about the mid to late nineteenth century and dystopian works are a twentieth century phenomenon, although many critics use the term anti-utopia when referring to dystopian fiction. Interestingly, before the 1950s and 60s, critics referred to *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as satires (Aldridge, 1984, p. 12). Walsh (1962) also provides a useful evolution of the dystopian novel. He points out that "the unambiguous dystopia seems to date from the 18th century," but "remained a minor irritant to utopia" until "conservatives became alarmed" upon the publication of Edward Bellamy's utopia *Looking Backward,* published in 1888 (Walsh, 1962, p. 74). He describes the books that were written in direct response to this novel as "anti-utopias" whose purpose is "to expose socialism and defend *Laissez-faire* capitalism" (Walsh, 1962, p. 74). This recalls to us Kateb's assertion that anti-utopianism is the result of utopia's perceived threat to democracy. Walsh uses the term "anti-utopia," in this instance, in reference to these works which he does not regard as dystopian. While he acknowledges their existence, he calls these non-dystopias "Bellamy's bastard offspring" (Walsh, 1962, p. 75) and does not include them in the canon of dystopia.

Walsh's dismissal of these late nineteenth century responses to Bellamy accords with an article of Morson's selective criteria. Morson (1981) defines anti-utopia as an anti-genre, and asserts that "an anti-generic work must parody a target genre […] not a single work. […] For example, the class I identify as anti-utopias does not include a number of works that parody the specific utopian program inferable from *Looking Backward*" (p. 116). Aldridge also notes the period of "anti-utopian" literature that followed Bellamy. She differentiates these anti-utopian works from earlier utopian satires and later dystopias. Her definition of this middle genre runs thus: "The pure anti-utopia is simple [sic] and primarily a direct attack on the concept of utopia. […] Perhaps the first and foremost examples consist of the decade of literary reaction […] against Bellamy's *Looking Backward*" (Aldridge, 1984, p. 8). Morson and Aldridge thus disagree: the former sees the "bastard offspring" as responses to a particular utopia, not an assault

on the utopian genre in general, while the latter explicitly characterizes them as responses to the utopian concept. This disagreement comes about as a result of the critics' differing use of the term "anti-utopia." The point, however, is that distinctions are being made between late nineteenth century works and what came in the following century.

These definitions of anti-utopia remind us of Kateb's definition, which uses the same term. However, Kateb was referring to twentieth century works like *We, Brave New World,* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* failing to distinguish the particular characteristics of the twentieth century dystopia. Even H.G. Wells' works *When the Sleeper Wakes* and *The Time Machine,* referred to as "anti-utopias" by Zamyatin (qtd. in Brown, 1976, p. 41), were described by Aldridge as "ambiguous" dystopias (Aldridge, 1983, p. 67) and seem to lack the sharpness and singularity of vision that Aldridge uses to define the twentieth century nightmare scenarios.

Morson defines dystopia as a sub-genre of anti-utopia, and this is where he and Aldridge seem to agree:

> If the anti-genre has more than one type, its subgenres will have their own classic texts and may also have an exemplar or exemplars. Thus, Zamyatin's *We* has been made by its successors into an exemplar of the modern "dystopia," a type of anti-utopia that discredits utopias by portraying the likely effects of their realization, in contrast to other anti-utopias which discredit the possibility of their realization or expose the folly and inadequacy of their proponents' assumptions or logic. (Morson, 1981, p. 115-116)

Thus, earlier anti-utopias of the late nineteenth century were concerned with discrediting a particular utopian vision (like Bellamy's) or pointed toward the impossibility of ever achieving utopia. It would seem then that these late nineteenth century anti-utopias were anti-socialist texts, where dystopian novels likes *We* deal with the worst possible outcome of an actual socialist utopian vision gone wrong. As Kateb asserted, modern dystopian writers do not doubt that utopias could come about; rather they are alarmed by the perceived outcome of utopia's realisation (Kateb, 1963, pp. 14-15).

Where Morson sees dystopia as a subgenre of anti-utopia, Aldridge sees dystopia as having evolved out of utopian satire and anti-utopia: "Both utopian satire and anti-utopias lack the dark or apocalyptic strain which characterizes so much dystopic writing" (Aldridge, 1984, p. 16). Both critics thus see modern dystopia as something that is unique and distinguishable from earlier anti-utopias. Aldridge indicates that the basis of this distinction is in part due to a shift in outlook. Whether socialist or capitalist, utopian or anti-utopian, nineteenth century visions had a progressive and positive strain, or at least arose out of progressive motivations.

Walsh notes an early twentieth century book by a Russian, Valerii Briusov, called *The Republic of the Southern Cross* (1907) which broke away from the late nineteenth century trend in anti-utopias. He describes it as "more than an attack of economic and social theories; it says something about *the enduring perversity of man's nature*" (Walsh, 1962, p. 76, our italics). He therefore suggests that this work paved the way for works like Zamyatin's *We.* This focus on the sinister aspects and potential of human nature and social organization is one of the defining characteristics of the modern dystopian novel. This confirms that dystopia is more than just a direct attack on utopianism. It is a vehicle for social commentary and human introspection. Modern dystopias explore the relationship between the possibilities inherent in human nature and the social constructs we have already devised or are capable of devising.

In defining dystopia we must interrogate what accounts for the twentieth century tendency towards introspective reflection on humanity's darker potential that differentiates the modern dystopia from the mere socio-political reactions of the late nineteenth century. Certainly early twentieth century historical events have played a part. Also important is the growing reality of utopian visions: "The rise of dystopian fiction […] is attributed to disillusionment with actual 'utopian' schemes in the real modern world" (Aldridge, 1984, p. ii). Scholars like George Woodcock and Eugene Weber (1950s) indicate that "both mood *and* novel emerge for the first time in the civilizational malaise generated by World War I" (paraphrased in Aldridge, 1984, p. ii).

Certainly Zamyatin was writing in the wake of both World War I and the Russian Revolution, and he was disillusioned by the possible

outcome of that particular utopian vision in Russia, one which he initially supported. Critics also point to his novel as the prototype of the modern dystopia. Woodcock (1956) pronounced Zamyatin's *We* as "the first of the significant contemporary anti-utopian novels" (qtd. in Aldridge, 1984, p. ii). Woodcock was the first to assert that "*We* is not merely the predecessor of such […] anti-Utopias as Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*; it also set the pattern which they followed" (qtd. in Aldridge, 1984, p. 12).

Perhaps establishing the twentieth century dystopia as a genre requires a discussion of its form in addition to comparison to earlier anti-utopias. Hillegas (1976) constructs his definition of dystopia without reference to utopia at all by giving a very descriptive account of its conventions and motifs. He describes dystopian societies as

> nightmare states where men are conditioned to obedience, freedom is eliminated, and individuality crushed; where the past is systematically destroyed and men are isolated from nature; where science and technology are employed, not to enrich human life, but to maintain the state's surveillance and control of its slave citizens. (Hillegas, 1976, p. 3)

He describes the characteristics of dystopia rather than any socio-political (anti-utopian) function. Hillegas has struck upon some trademark characteristics of the dystopian novel that we have not previously encountered in this discussion, like the obliteration of history and the separation of humans from nature. As useful as his motif-centred definition may be, the gender exclusive language points to some of the issues we shall be considering, such as the role of gender in dystopian works and critical traditions, whether dystopias are concerned only with men's obedience, freedom, and individuality, and whether there is room in the genre for criticism based on gender or for dystopias written by women.

More recent scholars (see Booker 1994a) consider dystopian works from the genres of science fiction, children's literature, and fantasy, recognising that postmodernism has affected the dystopian genre and challenged generic distinctions. Ralph Porzdik, writing in 2001, considers the impact of postcolonial theory on both dystopias and utopias in *The Quest for Postcolonial Utopia.* Erika Gottlieb, in

Dystopian Fiction East and West (2001), asserts that not all dystopias are futuristic and/or speculative, examining those produced within the Communist Bloc which were reflections of current realities for their writers. These recent critics have more flexible definitions and more inclusive canons than more traditional critics.

This would seem to be a good time to turn to Morson in more detail, because he answers many of the questions we have posed. What is innovative about *The Boundaries of Genre* (1981) is that it not only deals with dystopian texts, but it directly addresses the relationship between genre and canon formation as it relates to dystopia. He acknowledges that "the particularities of texts defy the generalities of classification systems, that it is in principle possible to classify texts in an indefinitely large number of ways, and that new works (or the rediscovery of old ones) inevitably render obsolete all existing or conceivable systems" (Morson, 1981, p. vii). However, he does not advocate the abandonment of genre. He acknowledges the differences in previous critics' definitions and canons, and proposes a theory that is based not on personal *preferences* or *beliefs* about the superiority of certain texts or kinds of texts, but on the *purpose* a critic may have at a certain time or within a given project:

> The key word […] is purpose. No doubt, one can classify a set of texts in any number of ways, each of which is arbitrary in the sense that there could be another. But the choice of one or another classification system is not necessarily arbitrary when there is a reason for classifying: given a particular purpose that a generic system may be expected to serve, some may serve it better or worse than others. (Morson, 1981, p. vii)

This focus on *purpose* allows for variation, new scholarship, and new discoveries. It also justifies the classification of certain texts together that previous classification systems may not have allowed for, and therefore new insights, comparisons, and contrasts are possible. It also leads us away from unaccounted dismissal and arbitrary exclusions of certain texts or subgenres, like Walsh's dismissal of fantasy and science fiction. Indeed, a canonical system based on purpose allows

for generic overlap and borderline cases, like those dystopian works that straddle the genres of science fiction or fantasy.

II

If so much can be argued as being contingent upon where and when an author writes, and what his individual experiences have been, what then can be said about the nature of the dystopian novel which is separate from these issues? What definable traits, be they stylistic or thematic, might serve to identify a dystopian novel regardless of such individual nuances? The primary foundation of this new definition must undoubtedly rest upon a clear expression of what the *purpose* of a dystopian novel actually is.

Critics have long ascribed a didactic quality to dystopian works of literature; we believe that the nature of dystopian literature is indeed didactic; what now must be asked is what it is that a dystopian novel is specifically intended to teach. Only after the 'why' of its existence is clearly laid out can the 'how' of the dystopian novel be determined. It is our contention that, at its core, the dystopian novel is a reaction to its writer's society, both a recognition of the prevailing movements through which that society imagines it can perfect itself and an exploration of how those trends, when carried to a logical conclusion, place that very society in danger. "Not progress denied but progress realized is the nightmare haunting the anti-utopian novel" (Simmons, 1998, p. 206). Through this juxtaposition of a society's idealized goals and the horrific potential future the realisation of those goals threatens to bring about, the author is able to critique the "sociomachia" of his own culture, and attempt to instruct his readers about the evils that certain prevailing aspects of their society may unwittingly bring about. "These novels," Gottlieb explains, "make us ponder how an originally utopian promise was abused, betrayed, or, ironically, fulfilled so as to create tragic consequences for humanity" (Gottlieb, 2001, p. 8). As Murphy summarises, the dystopian novel "encourages discomforting reading and social action through implicitly or explicitly commenting on the reader's contemporary predicament" (Murphy, 1990, p. 26).

Clearly, given the nature of the dystopian novel's project, the author of a dystopian novel hopes to inspire some sense of crisis, of fear, within his readers. However, it is essential that this horror be inspired by the presentation of a fictional society that, in its ideological basis, is but a

small logical step away from the society of that narrative's readers. As Howe (1982) elaborates, "the peculiar intensity of such fiction derives not so much from the horror aroused by a possible vision of the future, but from the writer's discovery that in facing the prospect of a future he had been trained to desire, he finds himself struck with horror" (Howe, 1982, p. 303). Thus, it is essential that a dystopian narrative reflect that idealised prospect accurately enough for it to be recognised for what it is. Orwell has received a great deal of well-deserved praise for the way in which he took his age's utopian ideals, and represented their perversion by following them to a logical conclusion while constructing a narrative world not so far removed from that at which he began that it would be impossible for a reader to perceive the connection between the two. As Irving Howe commends in "*1984:* History as Nightmare" (1971),

> [Orwell] understood […] the significance of what I can only call the psychology and politics of 'one more step.' From […] a decayed society in which survival is still possible to a totalitarian state in which it is hardly desirable, there may be only 'one step.' To lay bare the logic of that social regression which leads to totalitarianism Orwell had merely to allow his imagination to take […] one step. (Howe, 1971, p. 46)

It is the length, and direction, of the 'one more step' that a dystopian author takes in the construction of his narrative environment that determines how easy it will be for a reader to deduce what social ideals are being criticized at the heart of his dystopian novel.

It is not only required of a dystopian novel that it undertake this manner of didactic project; it is also necessary that this mechanism be employed in order to illuminate specific kinds of social evil — those that represent an ideological threat to the protection, preservation, and satisfaction of human nature itself. As Galtseva and Rodnyanskaya (1991) elaborate,

> the theoreticians of utopianism reassure themselves, in the manner of O'Brien, by the fact that 'the individual is infinitely malleable,' that 'we create human nature.' However, the ominous and fruitless

> practice revealed by the dystopias of the twentieth century is evidence that this is an unrealizable task: human nature remade in a preset direction is in fact already not human. The human being may be spoiled, but not remade. (Galtseva & Rodnyanskaya, 1991, p. 321)

We believe that, at its core, the dystopian novel is concerned with addressing those elements of society that endanger humanity as a whole. Dystopian novelists attempt to fight against a terrifying possibility — that human society might unwittingly doom itself through its attempts at realizing its own ideals — by trying to appeal to their readers through an exposure of the precarious positions into which humanity can be placed. After all, tearing people away from the ideals they have been raised to embrace is a very difficult prospect; by exposing so great a threat to a reader's very humanity, dystopian authors hope that this task can be achieved.

Having established the purpose of the dystopian novel, it is now possible to turn to what we contend is the first specific structural quality by which the dystopian novel can be defined: character structure. What kind of character structure, we must ask, would best serve the purpose outlined above? Given that it is intended that the reader of a dystopian novel feel as uncomfortably close to its narrative world as possible, it is our belief that a character structure that focuses upon a single protagonist is most effective. Galtseva and Rodnyanskaya explain the rationale behind such a distinction in the following manner:

> As a rule, utopias depict 'everyone's' world, appearing before the astonished gaze of an outside observer and explicated for the visitor by the 'instructor' guide. This is a world that is contemplated by the guest from a safe distance and populated by 'distant ones.' In the dystopias, a world constructed on the same premises is presented from the inside, through the feelings of its solitary inhabitant who has endured its laws and is presented to us in the capacity of the 'near one.' To put it in a language of classification, the utopia

> is sociocentric, while the dystopia is personalistic. (Galtseva & Rodnyanskaya, 1991, p. 299)

We believe that there are several ways in which this argument — that the purpose of a dystopian novel is best served through narrative focus upon a single protagonist — can be justified. First, there is the simple reality that the degree of closeness with which dystopian authors hope to draw readers into their horrific narrative worlds is best served by forging a strong link between reader and single central protagonist, as opposed to between reader and a large ensemble cast. This is not to say that the introduction of other characters should be considered as discouraged by the dystopian genre; rather, the caveat here is that one character should remain at the centre of the narrative, as the eyes, ears, and mind through which readers interact with a dystopian narrative, and in which readers are invested. This protagonist, as the primary focus of reader attention, is perfectly suited to perform a very important function, as "the reagent that measures the unnaturalness, the inversion of the milieu in which he moves" (Beauchamp, 1977, 94). The fear inspired by a dystopian narrative is enhanced through the representation of a single person — a lone representative of what its readers understand as logical — who faces off against the collective insanity of his society because, through such a narrative design, the fate of the reader's own beliefs rests on the fate of a single individual who is grossly outnumbered.

What also must be considered here, with relation to character structure, is what kind of individual is likely to make the most effective dystopian protagonist. We believe that, for a dystopian narrative to truly achieve its ends, its protagonist must embody two particular characteristics. First, he must be entirely typical of his society, an 'everyman' who appears, at first, to be properly adjusted and functional, if not happy, within his society. Second, he must be employed, be it directly or indirectly, in the propagation of those evils against which he will ultimately revolt. Why do we insist upon these characteristics? As for the first, a dystopian narrative would be far less frightening if one were able to argue that the only reason its protagonist suffered such a tragic fate was that he was considerably abnormal to begin with. Far more impact can be garnered by such a narrative when its protagonist appears to be quite typical of his society, a run-of-the-mill citizen who suffers no particular psychological,

financial, or social burdens which would pre-dispose him to rebellion or otherwise inspire his dissatisfaction. With regard to the second characteristic, the protagonist's initial degree of integration with, and acceptance of, the evils of his society is enhanced by such a direct connection to the propagation of those evils. This involvement also provides the reader with ample opportunity to both examine the inner workings of the dystopian society being considered and observe the psychology of those who are responsible for the manufacturing and maintenance of that 'system' itself.

The next trait by which we believe a dystopian novel can be identified refers to the general structure of its narrative development. As the purpose of a dystopian novel is to reveal the dehumanizing effects of a particular society's evils, by demonstrating the effects those evils have upon a single individual, the logical starting point of a dystopian novel is one that presents the protagonist as still apparently co-existing with his society; this ensures that the reader will bear witness to every stage of that individual's gradual destruction. While this protagonist is introduced as an apparently satisfied member of his society, who not only abides by his society's rules but is even involved in the preservation and propagation of that society's most insidious aspects, it quickly becomes apparent that this individual is in fact not satisfied by those ideals towards which his society strives. While it would be an exaggeration to say that this protagonist is the only unsatisfied individual one encounters over the course of the narrative, he does seem alone in being inconsolable and suffers of some deep psychological pain.

At first, the protagonist of a dystopian novel attempts to reintegrate himself in his society by establishing coping mechanisms through which he can attain some degree of satisfaction and happiness. While this desire to reintegrate may be the result of that protagonist's recognition that any manner of deviancy is not tolerated by his culture, and thus that his abnormality opens him to the risk of severe repercussions, it is just as likely that this individual, as he has not yet taken the time to consider his situation in depth, finds it easier to doubt himself rather than doubt his society. These coping mechanisms typically involve the focusing of a dystopian protagonist's energies into activities that his society has deemed to be acceptable outlets for one's energy; the depiction of these coping mechanisms not only

further illustrates the nature of the society in question to the readers of that dystopia, but also reflects upon the lengths to which an average individual will go in order to forgo an actual break with the status quo, despite how unhappy that establishment makes him.

This pain suffered by the protagonist, which is inspired both by his inability to coexist with his society and by his belief that this inability is due to some personal flaw, is ultimately impossible for the alternate coping mechanisms he attempts to establish to alleviate, because without an understanding of the underlying causes of his pain — his society's dehumanising flaws — all he is able to do in order to try and satisfy himself is re-arrange the inherently flawed components of his life. As Pettus (2000) explains this phenomenon with his examination of pain theory as it applies to the dystopian novel,

> [such] individuals can no longer identify themselves with the objects surrounding them because of the pain interfering with perception or with the performance of functions. The immediacy of [this] pain […] means [that] the images that normally represent [these] individuals in operational contingency fail. […] The individual *must* extend a self based on a different medium of perception and through a different language. (Pettus, 2000, pp. 113-114, our italics)

This "different language" is one that comes with the protagonist's formulation of a logical articulation of the ideological evils which lie behind his society's dehumanising effects. When a dystopia's protagonist comes to understand the terms of this alternate terminology, he enters into the "different medium of perception" within which he can establish a new understanding of himself, of his society, and of humanity as a whole.

How, then, does a dystopian protagonist attain this new position with relation to his society? Gottlieb suggested, with regard to *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* that "the protagonist […] experiences a quasi-mystical awakening to his true self through a woman who makes him challenge the dictatorship's strict rules about sexuality" (Gottlieb, 2001, p. 59). While this reading itself is clearly too tailored to the details of a specific narrative to be applicable to all dystopias, it does contain at its core an

accurate identification of how a dystopian protagonist's ideological awakening is initiated. The protagonist of a dystopia is so ingrained in the very society that oppresses him that he is unable to instigate his own transformation. Thus, a dystopian protagonist's journey must begin outside of himself, through the inspiration provided by certain objects and individuals that appeal to his senses of emotional and psychological need. These objects and individuals, when drawn closer to him, provide him with the means of entering into an active dialogue regarding his society's flaws; through this, he is encouraged to be an active member of anti-establishment discourse rather than a passive victim of that establishment.

Once this impetus is provided, and the dystopian protagonist discovers that certain objects inspire in him an awareness that it is his life, rather than himself, that is lacking, it is possible for him to create an alternative living situation through which he believes he can escape, and possibly even influence, the society of the majority. Regardless of whether this "quest for individual freedom has been […] a moral quest for a universal human freedom [or] an egoistic search for […] personal freedom," it is based upon the dystopian protagonist's ever-developing formulation of a coherent ideological argument against his society's flaws (Resch, 1977, p. 172). Ultimately, "the anti-utopian novel keeps returning to the choice posed by Dostoevsky's […] *The Brothers Karamazov:* the misery of the human being who must bear his burden of independence against the contentment of the human creature at rest in his obedience" to his culture's code of acceptable social mores (Howe, 1982, p. 307). The dystopian protagonist's increasing comfort with his new circumstances, however, is accompanied by an increasing recognition that his choices, while they satisfy him in ways his previous life never could, also quickly hasten the arrival of his destruction at the hands of his society. After all, empowered as he feels, he is but one individual, an individual who has taken what he knows to be a path unacceptable to the powers that be.

It is because of the protagonist of a dystopian novel's awareness of his impending doom that the business of communicating his discoveries becomes of great importance. Needless to say, this endeavour is not without its complications. As Winston Smith

confesses in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, when he reflects on his attempt to write a diary,

> how could you communicate with the future? It was of its nature impossible. Either the future would resemble the present, in which case it would not listen to him, or it would be different from it, and his predicament would be meaningless. (Orwell, 1982, 7)

Regardless of these difficulties, however, as the purpose of the dystopian novel itself is to communicate to its readers the evils of their society, so too is the protagonist of a dystopian novel's purpose not only to rebel against his society's evils, but to also attempt to propagate his own perspective. As a dystopian narrative draws closer to its conclusion, its protagonist's life becomes more and more perilous; his destruction, be it physical, psychological, or metaphysical, must be complete and final in order for the full force of that dystopia's frightening lesson to be conveyed.

Again, here we must turn to a consideration of the dystopian novel's primary purpose, by asking how a novel might best, through its conclusion, warn of the burgeoning evils within a society that threaten the basic human needs of its citizens, those evils which that society inadvertently encourages through its pursuit of perfection. In what manner can such a narrative inspire in its readers the intended sense that one's society is in crisis, and moves towards truly frightening ends? We contend that the best way in which such a goal can be achieved is through the demise of a dystopian novel's protagonist. In part, this technique serves to further unsettle the reader, by stripping away the filter through which the reader has experienced the narrative environment; "as there is no refuge for the novel's hero, neither is the hero himself a solid refuge for the novel's readers" (Miller, 1984, p. 705). It also serves to reinforce the reader's appreciation of the overwhelming power of the dystopian environment to which he or she has been introduced.

Several essential qualities that serve to further enhance a dystopian writer's purpose are inherent in the death of a dystopian protagonist. Here, it is important to remember that the purpose of the dystopian novel is, above all else, to open its readers' eyes to the dangers of their society; this project demands a very precarious balancing act between

two possible miscarriages of this purpose's realization. Should a dystopian author fail to impress upon his readers the critical nature of their situation, or fail to make it clear precisely what the novel is — social hypothesis rather than fantasy — too little impact will be made to inspire the necessary societal changes for which that author hopes. To quote Murphy's paraphrasing of Amin Malak, the intent with a dystopian novel "is neither to distort reality beyond recognition nor to provide an escapist world for the reader, but 'to allow certain tendencies in modern society to spin forward without the brake of sentiment and humaneness'" (Murphy, 1990, p. 26). However, should a dystopian author frighten and intimidate his readers too much, this will only discourage active societal change by implying that the average individual — represented by the protagonist of the dystopian novel in question — has no power when pitted against the 'machine' of his corrupt society.

The death of a dystopia's protagonist certainly helps to impress upon readers the seriousness of its narrative. What qualities of a dystopian protagonist's death, then, can help ensure that a dystopian novel does not sacrifice the encouragement of an individual reader's sense of agency through the creation of too fatalistic a narrative conclusion? One such quality is a demonstration of a protagonist's agency; through the course of the narrative, he, consciously or subconsciously, prefers his own destruction to a continued life in the society. This display of a dystopian protagonist's agency eases the otherwise overwhelmingly dismaying blow that, in order to fully realise that dystopian novel's purpose, he must be destroyed; through such a construction, the power of the average individual is not disregarded. Galtseva and Rodnyanskaya call this — the choice made by dystopian protagonists to consciously encourage their own demises rather than remain at the mercy of their flawed societies — an act of "logical suicide" (Galtseva & Rodnyanskaya, 1991, p. 307). As they further explain, even though dystopian protagonists must die in order for the dystopian project they are a part of to most fully be realized, it is entirely within their power to choose how quickly, in what way, and for what reasons their demises comes about; "as a rule, in the inescapable world of the dystopias [...] the one who is being persecuted is incapable of avoiding his fate. [...] However, the final surrender — the capitulation of the 'inner person' — remains

in his will (which itself may be lacking) (Galtseva & Rodnyanskaya, 1991, p. 320, Galtseva & Rodnyanskaya's parenthesis).

This is not to say that the protagonist of a dystopian novel need come to his literal death; this destruction can be metaphysical or psychological as opposed to strictly physical. Indeed, a metaphysical or psychological unmaking can arguably be far more traumatic, both to experience and to witness, than a literal death. Rorty (1989) explores this concept, of the trauma involved in the psychological — as opposed to physical unmaking that occurs within many dystopian narratives, through the pain theory developed by Elaine Scarry in her book, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985). As he explains of Scarry's theories, specifically those which revolve around the psychological destruction of a person through torture,

> the worst thing you can do to somebody is not to make [him] scream in agony but to use that agony in such a way that even when the agony is over, [he] cannot reconstitute [him]self. The idea is to get [him] to do or say things — and, if possible, believe and desire things, think thoughts which later [he] will be unable to cope with having done or thought. You can thereby, as Scarry puts it, 'unmake [his] world.' […] People can, their torturers hope, experience the ultimate humiliation of saying to themselves, in retrospect, 'Now that I have believed or desired this, I can never be what I hoped to be, what I thought I was. The story I have been telling myself about myself […] no longer makes sense. I no longer have a self to make sense of. There is no world in which I can picture myself as living, because there is no vocabulary in which I can tell a coherent story about myself.' (Rorty, 1985, pp. 177-179)

Scarry's representation of torture as an intellectual exercise can indeed be usefully applied to our understanding of the dynamics of the dystopian novel, particularly with regard to such a novel's conclusion; one simply needs to consider in detail the dominant society of a dystopian novel as it operates, either directly or through the individuals who serve as its implements, as the torturer of the protagonist. What

must hold true in a dystopian narrative is that, regardless of the kind of death experienced by that narrative's protagonist, this demise be both absolute and, to some extent, chosen by that protagonist as a more desirable fate than continued life within his society. These are the essential qualities of a dystopian novel's conclusion.

It is important to note that this elimination of the protagonist of a dystopian novel is not intended to be interpreted as evidence that the society that dystopian novel presents is itself absolute and insurmountable. Critics have made numerous claims to the contrary. They have argued that "the sinister and irrevocable transformation of the protagonist represents the irrevocable damnation of his society" (Gottlieb, 2001, p. 4). They have insisted that "dystopias are stories that contrast the failure of the main character with the unstoppable advance of society […]. The loss of the self is the character's final acknowledgement of, and ultimate contribution to, society's being definitively victorious" (Mihailescu, 1991, p. 215). They have even gone so far as to propose that, in dystopian novels, "there is no way out, [because] the labyrinth eventually closes in and engulfs any ray of hope for a different society or even individual expression" (Clarke, 2011, p. 14). We believe, however, that such readings go too far; their overwhelmingly pessimistic statements disregard the positive ramifications of a dystopian protagonist's life, ignoring that "in troubled times the man who can see a problem clearly, even if he cannot solve it, is valuable" (Hynes, 1971, p. 1).

Given that the examples of dystopian fiction to which some of these critics make reference are hardly as finalistic as they claim, these absolutist statements prove difficult to sustain. Beauchamp makes reference to two dystopian conclusions which are far from being unconditionally negative when he points out that a "single grace" presented in Zamyatin's *We* which challenges statements regarding

> the novel's [single-mindedly] pessimistic conclusion comes, faintly, from O-90, who, in violation of the state's 'maternal norms,' has conceived a child by D-503 and fled beyond the Wall to give it birth. Her natural primitivism — centered in the womb, in the nurturing instinct of a mother thus manages a modest victory over utopia. [...] As with the 'proles' in *1984,* whatever hope the novel holds lies with the

> primitives, with the savages beyond the Wall who have escaped the yoke of Reason. (Beauchamp, 1983, p. 70)

When the conclusions of many classic dystopias are considered in detail, it indeed proves curious that so many critics have named absolutist endings as a hallmark of dystopian literature.

In fact, quite the opposite is true; a conclusion that is at once horrifyingly final for the protagonist, yet subtly hopeful with regard to the fate of that protagonist's society, is far more effective an ending in light of the purpose of the dystopian novel. In making this claim, we reiterate that the primary goal of the dystopian novel is not simply the inspiration of fear, but rather the application of fear in strengthening a didactic position. Returning again to Murphy's paraphrasing of Amin Malak, "while dystopias may be fear-laden horror fiction […] the emphasis of the work is not on horror for its own sake, but on forewarning" (Murphy, 1990, p. 26). Were a dystopian novelist to focus upon the inspiration of terror and shock, and thus upon crafting a conclusion in which all individuals are demonstrated as being as doomed as his protagonist, that dystopian author's goal of educating his readership would be counteracted. Such an ending would discourage a reader's sense of personal empowerment by suggesting that those evils which the dystopian narrative in question draws attention to are impossible to combat once they emerge. A reader would likely take fear alone, rather than enlightenment-accompanied fear, from such a dystopian narrative.

A final issue that should be considered here, when addressing the definitive elements of the dystopian novel, is whether or not any common themes might be identified as typical of the genre. Drawing attention here to a few such themes is not meant to imply that any are absolute requirements of dystopian literature. Rather, a consideration of some themes that commonly appear in dystopian novels can aid in the identification of other such novels, while also providing commonalities through which they can be usefully compared and contrasted. Given the underlying purpose of the dystopian novel, some themes are quite obvious: the dynamics of power and control, the physical, emotional, and ideological needs of the human being, and the ways in which utopian ideals can be perverted, through their attempted realisation, into the most horrific aspects of society.

Other themes that are quite common to dystopian works, however, are less obvious. Erika Gottlieb identifies one such theme when she observes, during her examination of *We, Brave New World, Nineteen Eighty-Four, Player Piano, The Handmaid's Tale,* and *Fahrenheit 451* that "the destruction of the demarcation line between the public and the private spheres is one of the most striking common characteristics of the societies depicted by the six novels in question" (Gottlieb, 2001, p. 11).

Another theme of the dystopian novel involves matters of heredity. Given that the dystopian novel focuses upon those ideals that pervert the society under consideration, it is in fact hardly surprising that it places particular emphasis on the ways in which the society and protagonist depicted within its pages relate to their heritage. Typically, the society-at-large of a dystopian novel reflects upon its history in the following manner:

> It represents the past as its own inevitable prehistory, writing off its own contradictions and defects along the way. It projects its own indestructibility and rightness into the future, representing itself as the immutable present, only increased in quantity and power. The past is a zone of waste; the future is a zone of final achievements. (Galtseva & Rodnyanskaya, 1991, pp. 315-316).

This perspective is interestingly contrasted by the attitude with which dystopian societies tend to view the issue of personal heritage — of the significance of each individual citizen's history. While social history is perceived as another means by which the rightness of the current social structure can be demonstrated, personal history is typically understood within dystopian settings as counterproductive, inappropriate, and dangerous. The rationale for this discrepancy can be understood when one considers that, while social history can be selectively drawn upon, filtered through biased interpretations, and even altered, in order to strengthen the position of a dominant social structure, familial bonds inevitably complicate any realization of the absolute loyalty that such societies frequently demand. It is for this reason that it can be said of many dystopian novels that "while each […] has its own reasons for the break with the parental roots, the

same scheme is behind them: to begin from zero, breaking with blood tradition, tearing away organic heredity" (Galtseva & Rodnyanskaya, 1991, p. 303). It is only when such breakages are achieved that a dystopian society can hope to attain the degree of loyalty from its citizens that it requires, a degree at which one's very identity is both founded and invested in an institution rather than in a family.

Of course, despite the fact that several themes can be isolated which bond many dystopian works of literature together — linking not only novels which are contemporary to one another but also those written in periods very different from one another — the very nature of dystopian literature assures that new themes which will arise over time will play a large part in characterising the face of future dystopian works. As Simmons points out,

> two prominent dystopian themes have become popular in only the past thirty years. Fictional societies imperiled by their own technology and political decision-making processes dominated by scientists or semi-sentient machines are not new in dystopian fiction, but previously they did not make up a significant share of this market. The eco-catastrophe, with such neo-Malthusian perils as overpopulation, resource depletion, pollution, and hunger, has followed a similar pattern, although its climb to prominence has been more spectacular. I can find no example of ecological doom as the dominant motif in an American novel written in the nineteenth or early twentieth century; yet much of the continued growth of dystopian fiction in the past ten years can be directly attributed to the popularity of this theme. (Simmons, 1998, p. 211)

Useful as an understanding of the common thematic elements of dystopian literature can be, it is hardly surprising that no definitive list of such themes will ever be established.

In this section, the clarification has been made that dystopias of the twentieth century involve both textually-specific narrative elements which reflect the distinct social environment contemporary to each

work's writing, and formally definitive qualities through which each can be defined specifically *as* dystopian.

III

It could reasonably be asked, given the fact that one of our primary arguments against prevailing definitions of dystopia is that they are dated in their understanding of what qualifies as 'dystopian' subject matter, why we are so intent on reviving a term that has come to be equated with a specific historical milieu. Why is the resuscitation of an old term so important, when a statement that dystopias as we have known them are a thing of the past would leave one free to construct an entirely new genre concept specifically meant to embody modern dystopian fiction that need not, over the course of its formulation, face the complicated task of encompassing both contemporary and past dystopian works? In response to such a criticism, however, we feel no hesitation in insisting that the dystopias of today, though they are very different from the dystopias of past decades, stand only to benefit from their inclusion in our already-established dystopian canon once the actual definition of 'dystopia' is solidified. Such a unification promises to enhance contemporary criticism, both by providing contemporary dystopias with a lengthy and fascinating genre history and by enriching our understanding of older dystopian novels through the introduction of newly published approaches to dystopia, through which these dystopias of the past might be reconsidered.

It is because of this intent on our part to ensure that we do not inadvertently segregate contemporary dystopias from their dystopian predecessors, that we have decided to employ not only Zamyatin's *We*, but also Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* in our efforts at defining 'dystopia.'

- Chapter Four -

From Zamyatin's *We* to Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four:* The City in Dystopian Fiction

I

We shall now discuss briefly what are usually taken to be the three most important dystopian texts of the 20th century: Zamyatin's *We*, Huxley's *Brave New World*, and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. We will examine the methods with which their posited sociopolitical orders repress the historical consciousness of individual agents, and the relation of this repression to the urban chronotope. From these elements we shall postulate a relationship between the urban chronotope and a dystopian paradigm. Our discussion of these texts is cursory, since they are already the subject of a large body of criticism; the limitations of this study also preclude exhaustive interpretations of this criticism.

It is characteristic of dystopian narratives that they posit forms of sociopolitical organization which stop the movement of historical change. This phenomenon is accompanied by a fragmentation of the narrative agents' consciousness of historical time, of their sense of collective historical movement, into isolated, "private" forms of subjective time-perception. The development of this fragmentation in European fiction is discussed by Mikhail Bakhtin in his study of the

chronotope. This concept he defines as "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 84). The chronotope is an area of fictional space whose topology is intrinsically linked to the prevailing order of time. We shall demonstrate how the chronotope of the dystopian city reproduces in space the arrest of — and rupture in — the perception of historical time, and sometimes also suggests possibilities for its reconstruction.

Stableford notes that "our predominant image of the future has become Dystopian [sic]" (Stableford, 1979, p. 118). This in itself reveals something important about the genre's horizons. At our present historical juncture, which some call a "new world order," we are tempted to believe in "the end of history." Such a belief is an instance of what Yevgeny Zamyatin has called "the entropy of thought" (Zamyatin, 1970, p. 108). We believe the dystopia to be a useful form of narrative in which to resist this temptation: its plot is a struggle — even if precarious or futile — for historical movement away from a static order. It stresses the importance of historical consciousness in the individual age.

In this chapter, we shall also use the central metaphor of entropy. It is formulated by Zamyatin in his essay "On literature, Revolution, Entropy, and Other Matters" (1924), where it signifies the intellectual stagnation of dogmatism. Thus, "the law of revolution is not a social law, but an immeasurably greater one. It is a cosmic, universal law — like the laws of the conservation of energy and of the dissipation of energy (entropy)" (Zamyatin, 1970, pp. 107-08). "Energy" is the principle of heresy, a renewal of thought through the shattering of political, ideological, and epistemological dogmas; "entropy" is then the conservative force which arrests change and solidifies dogma.

This structure also dates back to H.G. Wells. Suvin argues that Wells' story *The Time Machine* is a basic model for "the structuring of subsequent SF" (Suvin, 1979, p. 222). This "Wellsian paradigm" informs the genre with its negative horizons. The story's model is devolutionary, a sequence of episodes in "natural history" which begins in Victorian England and ends with the dissolution of all life. Subsequent writers, "from Stapledon to Heinlein or Orwell, Pohl or Aldiss, Vonnegut or Ballard had to concentrate on filling in Wells' paradigm and varying its surface" (Suvin, 1979, p. 242). The

dystopia transfers this paradigm to political discourse. Rather than the ostensibly biological devolution of Wells' first model, the urgency of political experience and thought after 1914 led the dystopia to posit a sociopolitical devolution correlative to the "entropy of thought."

In a uniformly black dystopia, this would merely be a "filling in" of Wells' paradigm with sociohistorical variables. But the more complex narratives counter such unambiguous negativity with a potential for revolutionary energy. In fact, the degree to which these texts admit the possibility of "restarting" history corresponds to their measure of optimism, and hence to their deviation from Wells' paradigm. This factor is discernible in their urban chronotopes. Since the city's topography models the narrative agents' perception of time, an "open" chronotope includes different levels of temporal experience; such diversity can then include a new perception of historical time, the first step toward revolutionary thought or action.

Before proceeding, however, we shall cite three precursors to these major dystopian texts, bearing in mind the relation between the dystopia and the city. Our structural model, Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895), has been called the "first anti-utopia of the modern mechanical and scientific age" (Hillegas, 1967, p. 30); given the importance of the paradigm which this story establishes, we shall start with it as the most significant precursor to the 20th century dystopia. Although it does not assign a significant role to the urban setting — beyond that of the Victorian drawing-room in which the adventure begins — this story accords an important role to class conflict as the determinant of humanity's future. The dark horizons of our Wellsian paradigm are first made apparent in the futuristic opposition of the effete, upper-class Eloi to the bestial Morlocks, who, as the evolutionary horizon of the laboring classes, dwell in subterranean darkness (Suvin, 1979, pp. 222-42). The class conflict returns in *When the Sleeper Wakes* (further *WSW*, 1899) to animate the first significant dystopian city.

The city of Zamyatin's *We* is no doubt influenced by the London chronotope of *WSW* (Aldridge, 1983, p. 65), which can be called the most significant precursor to the dystopian cities of 20th century fiction. Unlike Zamyatin, however, Wells' novel makes explicit the class disparity addressed earlier in *The Time Machine*. Both of Wells' stories spatialise hierarchy. In *WSW*, the upper class controls the gigantic buildings and the airways, while the proletarians of the Labor

Company work underground. This concretisation of class conflict in the city responds to Bellamy's functionalist and technocratic utopian society, epitomised by the Boston of *Looking Backward*. However, despite Wells' accurate prognosis of European Fascism in the figure of Ostrog, this novel lacks the ideological urgency of the three 20th century novels.

This urgency appears in Jack London's work *The Iron Heel* (1907), influenced by the Russian revolt of 1905. Another important model of the urban dystopia can be found here — that in which the city is recognisable to the author's contemporaries. Unlike the other texts mentioned in this chapter, in which the city is rendered unrecognisable by technological speculation, London sets his dystopian conflict between the Socialist labourers and the titular "Iron Heel" of state oppression largely in contemporary US cities — most notably Chicago. The novel gives these cities a dystopian pall by contrasting them with the more magnificent cities built by the proletariat of the utopian future Brotherhood of Man. Such ideological topicality becomes more pertinent with the onset of World War I and the Russian Revolution, both of which immediately precede Zamyatin's novel. Although Huxley's dystopia in many ways attempts to escape their implications through nostalgia, *Brave New World* nonetheless acknowledges the importance of historical movement, e.g. in its satire of Henry Ford. With Orwell, the dystopia absorbs the shock of both World Wars. A considerable experiential gulf lies between the generation reading *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and that which had read Wells.

II

We was written in 1920-21, and first published in English in 1924 (Shane, 1968, p. 231 and p. 252). The principle which underlies this dystopia is the subsumption of politics by a rigidly limited system of mathematics. The novel's symbolic structure is thus dominated by mathematical imagery: the narrative agents have numbers rather than names, the protagonist identifies the facial features of others by analogy to geometric shapes, or to algebraic figures such as the "irritating X" of I-330 (Zamyatin, 1983, p. 6), and the One State's greatest achievement is a rocket ship called the Integral (Aldridge, 1983, p. 78).

Zamyatin expresses both the principles of entropy and energy in mathematical terms. An often-quoted passage is that in which I-330

asserts that "revolutions are infinite" just like numbers (Zamyatin, 1983, p. 174); this analogy reappears in his central essay mentioned above (Zamyatin, 1970, p. 107). The mathematical symbology is thus more than a series of clichés about "cold rationality"; the novel problematises the One State's rigid mathematical model with the square root of minus one, which belongs to the system of imaginary numbers (Shane, 1968, p. 141). But, in the narrative, the One State's rigid interpretation of mathematics prevails: as the rebellion is being contained, D-503's compatriot calculates that the universe is finite — "there is no infinity" (Zamyatin, 1983, p. 230). The entropic order creates a closed universe with a fixed number of human behavioural possibilities. It eliminates the irrational unpredictability of politics and the complexity of human relations as experienced by D-503.

With the elimination of politics comes the end of history. The "Two Hundred Years' War...between the city and the village" has ended in the defeat of the "peasants" by the city (Zamyatin, 1983, p. 21). There is something here of what Bakhtin calls the "destruction of the idyll," in which an agrarian chronotope, where time is seasonal and collectively perceived, is superseded by "a great but abstract world" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 233-34). Zamyatin's dystopia replaces collectivity with absorption into the "We" of the One State (Zamyatin, 1983, p. 2), and substitutes regulation by time-tables for the movement of history or the seasons. The Table of Hours is based on the system of Taylor, which appealed to early Soviet writers and was even praised by Lenin in 1918 (McCarthy, 1984, p. 124). For D-503, "history" is over: it is either the quaint story of his "primitive, remote ancestors," or the disturbing atavism of his hairy hands (Zamyatin, 1983, p. 22-23).

The perception of historical time is replaced by two conflicting modes of time-perception within the protagonist: the regimented time of the Table, and what Bakhtin calls the "private" time-perception of the isolated individual (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 215). The two partly overlap: the Table allows for a "Personal Hour" (Zamyatin, 1983, p. 10) as well as hours of privacy for sexual intercourse. But the perception of time as something affecting the individual in his "interior aspect" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 215) is centrally associated in the novel with "primitive" emotions, a potentially subversive frame of reference.

The novel's immediate examples of this connection are D-503's writing and his sexual relationship with I-330. The former begins as a

service to the State, a mere recording of impressions by an instrument of the entropic "We," but quickly modulates into a private activity deeply bound up with the writer's increasingly subversive feelings. His sexual activity similarly moves from the sanctioned behaviour of regulated intercourse to the "primitive" emotion of lust, copulation in transgression of the Table, and "possession" of (and by) another person. Many critics see the association of sexual desire with rebellion as characteristic of classic dystopias (see Woodcock, 1956, p. 91). Here it is also associated with subversive time: I-503 measures time in relation to his meetings with I-330 rather than to the Table. The One State's repression of passion and creativity, enforced through a denial of privacy, forces the individual to translate his "private" time-perception into the energy of rebellion.

The conflict between energy and entropy appears in the chronotopic polarity between the city and the wilderness, separated by the "Green Wall." The rival chronotopes concretise the struggle within D-503 between the temporal stasis of the One State and the budding consciousness of the agrarian past embodied in his "atavistic" traits. Thus, the city's transparent buildings not only serve to deny privacy through constant surveillance; their crystalline form also symbolizes entropy, "the condition where nothing happens any more" (Zamyatin, 1983, p. 24). The ancient seasonal time persists beyond the boundary. A last vestige of this cycle is the pollen borne by the wind over the Wall, which "interferes…with the flow of logical thought" (Zamyatin, 1983, p. 3). The focus of this conflict is the point of transition between the two chronotopes — the Ancient House.

The House is a historical relic, frozen in time by a casing of entropic glass. It stands at the boundary of the two chronotopes; elements of both the ancient cyclical time (such as the Earth Mother figure of the old woman caretaker) and the subversive "private" time of the city (such as D-503's sexual relations) inhabit it. Although the premise for the House's existence is the exposition of pre-State absurdities, Zamyatin conveniently uses it as the secret exit to the wilderness beyond the Wall. It is thus the key into history, enabling the chief narrative agent to move from a chronotope in which technology enforces stasis to one in which time is cyclical in a pre-technological sense and perceived collectively, in a manner subversive to the One State. It offers him the chance to identify with his "irrational" side.

The inhabitants of the wilderness are the "remnants" of the defeated peasantry who refused to migrate to the city (Zamyatin, 1983, p. 164). They preserve the rural, seasonal temporality, and oppose the historical stasis of the One State with a far-future version of the urban-rural class conflict discussed by Raymond Williams (see Williams, 1973). The break in the Wall might allow them to "reinstate history" (Aldridge, 1983, p. 80). But the rebellion's outcome remains unclear; the city has been sealed off by "a temporary barrier of high-voltage waves" (Zamyatin, 1983, p. 232), a wall which is no longer solid; and the pregnant O-90, another Earth Mother figure, is now safe beyond the Wall (Zamyatin, 1983, p. 201). Yet D-503, rather than learning to integrate "irrationality" into his larger world-view, has had his imagination removed by the Great Operation and has betrayed I-330 and her comrades (Zamyatin, 1983, p. 232). It is significant that the novel ends with such uncertainty: while salvation is no longer possible for D-503, the city's glass barrier has been shattered, leaving no doubt that alternate — historical — forms of temporality exist. Of the texts discussed here, Zamyatin's leaves the most room for optimism, although it lies in the future — O-90's child (Suvin, 1988, p. 82).

III

Huxley's novel *Brave New World*, written in 1931, is in some ways the polar opposite of *We*. As the author stresses throughout *Brave New World Revisited*, his dystopia is based on control through physical pleasure rather than through pain or the threat of punishment. Whereas Zamyatin's One State constricts sexual activity and forbids narcotics of any form, Huxley's World State uses both of these pleasures to enforce a regulation of human behaviour which is no less strict than that of its precursor. Whereas the latter demands conformity to a rigid "rationality," Huxley's dystopia regulates its inhabitants through a dependence on bodily pleasure based on leisure-time.

The entropic order posited in *Brave New World* is a capitalist hegemony built upon a radical regulation of genetics. This combination arrests historical movement; genetic manipulation allows only a few upper-class members to even think heretical thoughts, while the hedonism of consumption neutralises energy. Huxley's words recall Zamyatin's: "Impulse arrested spills over, and the flood is feeling, the

flood is passion, the flood is even madness…The unchecked stream flows smoothly down its appointed channels into a calm well-being." (Huxley, 1946, p. 50)

This particular "new world order" can thus glorify the famous words of its ironised messiah, Henry Ford: "History is bunk" (Huxley, 1946, p. 38). History is once again the quaint story of a "primitive" past. On the one hand, it has become indecent to mention the past; on the other, names of past giants are now mundane: Bernard Mars, Lenina Crowne, Polly Trotsky, Benito Hoover. With the entire world under its control and the classes held in place by genetic determination, the World State has achieved closure.

As in Zamyatin's novel, the void created by the absence of historical perception is filled by a fragmented "private," personal time. Privacy is again denied, although through the social pressure of scorn rather than physical violence: e.g. Lenina's reaction to Bernard's "not wanting to be a part of the social body," (Huxley, 1946, p. 106). But the "annihilation" of self which this "social body" demands is the bliss of orgasm rather than the asceticism of reason. The result is that, although privacy is taboo, a perception of time based upon a corrupt individuality — the desires of the ego — is enforced. The "time-table" guiding most of this novel's narrative agents is the organization of leisure hours. The paradox of conformity through personal pleasure generates the norm of "infantile decorum" (Huxley, 1946, p. 115): the focus upon egoistic desires prevents the agent from functioning as a thinking adult.

This enforced egoism suppresses the agent's ability to act upon the material universe. Huxley's most ingenious novum is the drug called *soma*. It is used most often to lighten one's personal mood or, in the case of the Deltas' riot, to quell unrest (Huxley, 1946, p. 256). But, taken in large quantities, *soma* can offer "holidays…from the familiar annoyances of everyday life" (Huxley, 1989, p. 114). In this case, it alters the subjective perception of time so that an eighteen-hour sleep can appear to be "lunar eternity" (Huxley, 1946, p. 167): Huxley describes the awakening from a *soma* "trip" as being back "in time" (Huxley, 1946, p. 167), or a return to "the miseries of space and time" (Huxley, 1946, p. 213). Bakhtin's "private" time-perception is here radicalised: the individual's mind is removed from the reality in which a consciousness of history could have an effect.

The novel's chronotopes oppose this segmented personal time, embodied in the city, to an agrarian collective, cyclical time appearing with the Savage Reservation. Although the contrast between London and the Reservation resembles that between Zamyatin's city and wilderness, Huxley denies the Reservation any revolutionary potential. Its boundaries are tightly controlled by the World State. And John "the Savage" conveys his dissent in a manner which is not appropriate to that chronotope: in his foreword to the novel's 1946 edition, Huxley acknowledges that "the Savage is often permitted to speak more rationally than his upbringing...would actually warrant" (Huxley, 1946, p. viii). He speaks, in fact, through Shakespeare, a misplaced figure from a lost chronotope which reaches the Reservation accidentally. As a mouthpiece for a lost European humanism in the garb of a pre-technological "Savage," John binds two anachronisms into an ill-fitting figure. More important, the contained village community is also criticised, as its rejection of John as alien becomes increasingly cruel. But the village's ritual time, although ridiculed as the bastardised religion of "Pookong and Jesus" (Huxley, 1946, p. 137), is still visibly the communal agrarian time of Bakhtin, or that which Gurvitch (1964) associates with the peasant class: "the cyclical time of nature and enduring time" (p. 91). It embodies the natural cycle in the figure of the old man, whose marks of age would have been masked in the city (Huxley, 1946, p. 129), and reveals "enduring time" in its adherence to "traditional patterns and symbols" (Gurvitch, 1964, p. 91). The Reservation thus serves partially to criticise the dystopian temporality, but, as Huxley himself admits in his foreword, it is not a realistic historical alternative to the World State: the novel only offers a choice "between insanity on the one hand and lunacy on the other" (Huxley, 1946, p. viii). Thus, while Zamyatin's D-503 could find in the wilderness the chronotopic embodiment of his own "atavistic" leanings, this novel's principal heretic, Bernard Marx, remains alienated from the Reservation, unable to find in it a revolutionary space.

The Reservation offers a critique of the city by providing a contrast between quantitative and qualitative time. This opposition belongs to a European capitalist structure of feeling emerging from the rationalisation of time arising with industrialisation. As Gurvitch explains, the industrial bourgeoisie quantifies time by limiting its

perception and measurement to the demands of "economic activities"; hence, "[t]he bourgeois awareness of time is very well expressed in the saying, 'time is money'" (Gurvitch, 1964, p. 96). Marxists such as Lukács (1971) attribute this development to capitalism's general subsumption of use-value under exchange-value: time becomes a commodity, to be considered in relation to the profit motive (p. 84). But with others, such as Bakhtin or Walter Benjamin (see 'The Storyteller,' Benjamin, 1968), the critique of quantified time easily turns into a nostalgia for pre-industrial life. Huxley's critique, leaning toward nostalgia, takes the form of satire: "[t]he hands of all the four thousand electric clocks in all the Bloomsbury Centre's four thousand rooms marked twenty-seven minutes past two" (Huxley, 1946, p. 174). The novel opens with the monolithic image of this building, a sub-chronotope of London which exemplifies the city's concretisation of rationalised, ahistorical time. Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* begins with a similar irony, with the clocks "striking thirteen" — a measurement of time which clashed with the idiom of Orwell's contemporaries.

However, Huxley's urban and agrarian chronotopes never meet. John's quaintness as a living relic soon leads to his outright rejection. As for Bernard and Helmholtz, the World State neutralizes their revolutionary potential by exiling them to remote islands. Such containment of energy is possible from a British imperial perspective, where the State has islands to spare. But John's suicide is a grim reminder that not all forms of dissent can be pacified. *Brave New World* is finally more pessimistic than *We*, though Huxley couches his pessimism in the irony of the "amused, Pyrrhonic aesthete" (Huxley, 1946, p. ix). The entropy of consumer capitalism, eroding the individual's will to rebel through hedonism, is perhaps more dangerous than that of outright despotism.

IV

Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, written in 1948, is by far the darkest of the three. It echoes the plot of *We*, which Orwell had reviewed in 1946 (see Orwell, 1968), and adds to it a greater pessimism expressed through dark irony.

The novel's entropic order is explained in Goldstein's book (which is in fact written by the Party itself); the Party's purpose is "to arrest progress and freeze history at a chosen moment" (Orwell, 1949, p.

204). And the final horizons of the entropy of thought appear in the objectives of Newspeak. Philmus uses the concept to illustrate dystopia's mutilation of language. He cites Syme's boast: "The whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought... In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it" (Orwell, 1949, p. 53). It is no longer a matter merely of solidifying dogma, but also of eliminating all cognition. Although not stated in the body of the novel, this latter objective appears in the Appendix: "[u]ltimately it was hoped to make articulate speech issue from the larynx without involving the higher brain centers at all" (Orwell, 1949, p. 311). This transfers the final dissolution at the horizon of Wells' paradigm to the sociopolitics of language.

What gives this universe the quality of a nightmare is not merely the impossibility of heretical thought, but also the ability of enforced Doublethink to equate truth—"the freedom to say that two plus two make four" (81) — with insanity: the condition of being "a lunatic, a minority of one," when one refuses to practice "the act of submission which is the price of sanity" (Orwell, 1949, p. 252). Doublethink is "the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them"; it is also the Party member's ability to know "in which direction his memories must be altered" (Orwell, 1949, p. 215). The alteration of memory renders impossible a consciousness of history. The refusal — or inability — to alter one's memories is thoughtcrime; this is ultimately punished by death, but the more immediate consequence of historical consciousness is the despair of being "*alone* in the possession of a memory" (Orwell, 1949, p. 59).

Solitude is precisely the last refuge. In this universe, the consciousness of the past — hence, of historical continuity — is necessarily a "private" perception of time, which must be hidden from the Party. As Winston realizes: "[n]othing was your own except the few cubic centimetres inside your skull" (Orwell, 1949, p. 28). The Party's ultimate victory is O'Brien's invasion of those last cubic centimetres, but in the narrative they allow Winston to be alone with his memory. His rebellion is deeply involved with this private time-perception. As with D-503, his two principal avenues of rebellion are writing and sexuality. As he begins to write, the free flow of his

thoughts leads him to fill a page with the words "DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER" (Orwell, 1949, p. 19). His writing also gives him the power to concretise his memories, something which the Party cannot allow. Finally, memory is central to his relationship with Julia. The latter is in part a refuge into the past — the history contained in Mr. Charrington's apartment and the remnant of nature in the isolated grove. Although it is primarily an affirmation of sexual energy, the relationship is also a form of intimacy allowing the sharing of memories.

The chronotope of London resembles Zamyatin's city in its denial of privacy. The telescreens allow Orwell to achieve this while preserving a landscape of decaying wood and concrete buildings which reflects this universe's spiritual penury. But Zamyatin's opposition of city and wilderness is here only a blurry dream: the "Golden Country" in which Winston and Julia first make love holds the threat of hidden microphones (Orwell, 1949, p. 124-25), and there is no longer a communal society. The novel stresses inner revolt; in this case the revolt is a historical consciousness hidden within the renegade Party member. Correspondingly, the only potential for a revolutionary temporality resides in a sub-chronotope contained within the Party-dominated city — that of the prole district, which is free from the strict regulation of greater London. Winston compares its inhabitants to animals, "cattle turned loose upon the plains of Argentina" (Orwell, 1949, p. 71); his use of animal imagery is diametrically opposite to Zamyatin's, connoting stupidity and subservience rather than bodily energy. The proles preserve a link with the past, but their possible re-starting of history is prevented by a vicious circle: "Until they become conscious they will never rebel, and until after they have rebelled they cannot become conscious" (Orwell, 1949, p. 70). As in Huxley's world, the Party successfully contains the potential for revolt.

The apartment over Mr. Charrington's shop is analogous to Zamyatin's Ancient House; once again a relic from history — as the glass paperweight found in it — it is the point of entry for the protagonist into the subversive subchronotope. It is also the spatial focus of Winston's "private" rebellion: he has bought his diary in the shop, and he uses the upper apartment for his sexual relationship and the reading of "Goldstein's" book. However, this transition-point turns out to be a Party trap, just as the entire London chronotope is

an instrument of Party rule. The Party substitutes the mass frenzy of war hysteria and the Two Minutes Hate for a collective historical consciousness, and replaces cyclical time with the dark cycle of the Chestnut Tree Café. This specific place is set aside for thought-criminals who are marked for execution. It is introduced with Winston's memory of three Party members who have fallen out of favour (Orwell, 1949, p. 75-77); at the novel's end, it is Winston's turn to sit in the café, and weep as his predecessors did at a refrain which Orwell repeats to emphasize the parallel (Orwell, 1949, p. 296). Like the prole district, Orwell's dystopia contains all energy within an unbreakable cycle of controlled growth and inevitable dissolution: the Party permits individual consciousness for a designated length of time, but never fails to punish it with death. The chronotopic reproduction of this containment is the dominance of the "pyramidal" buildings of the four Ministries over the "grimy landscape" of London (Orwell, 1949, p. 5).

V

We shall now construct a dystopian paradigm from the three overviews. In each of these seminal texts, one finds a form of political organization which "entropically" arrests the individual agents' perception of historical time. This is achieved through the absorption of their perception into the temporality of a bad collective and a corresponding fragmentation into "private" time. The exceptional protagonist then engages in "energetic" heretical thought or behaviour which potentially leads to a perception of historical cause-and-effect and continuity, admitting the possibility of revolutionary change. In a paradigmatic dystopia, this potential is not immediately fulfilled: the shattering of the bad order is either made impossible (Huxley, Orwell), or deferred to a future struggle (Zamyatin).

The dystopian novel's general structure is thus the following: the individual (either a single protagonist or several narrative agents taken individually) struggles to assert the principle of energy, through heretical thought or forbidden behaviour, against the fixed ideological universe of an entropic political order. That entropic order can falsely proclaim itself to be utopian (Zamyatin, Huxley) or can, in Orwell's extreme example, exult in its amorality. The individual is ultimately frustrated, or even mutilated or destroyed,

by the entropic order. As with the originary Wellsian paradigm, the final horizon is non-existence, though the immediate horizon is political submission. Although there is always room (as in Orwell) for novelistic psychological characterisation, the dystopia's function as a sociopolitical fiction requires it to adopt the form of a social "anatomy" (see Suvin, 1979, p. 49), a critical exposition of its posited sociopolitical order. The most stringent anatomy among our examples is that of Zamyatin.

Finally, it is possible to posit a role in this paradigm for the urban chronotope, with the qualification that one can write a dystopia which does not include cities. For those dystopias which are centred on an urban chronotope, above discussed novels indicate a common tendency: the chronotope of the city concretises the bad, entropic order of time. The extreme case is *We*, whose glass city is a signifier for entropy itself: "the crystallization of life" (Zamyatin, 1983, p. 24). The city's reproduction of entropy arises from its function as a metonymy for civilization. The city is "the heart of the body politic" (Dean, 1981, p. 64): as *polls*, it models in its spatial organization whatever principles rule its civilization (see also Fiedler, 1981, p. 113). An entropic political order will necessarily manifest itself in an entropic space: either a trap permitting no revolutionary action or a decaying environment rendering such action futile.

The revolutionary temporality is therefore situated either outside the city in a counter-chronotope, such as Zamyatin's wilderness, or in a subversive subchronotope, such as the urban slum. Bakhtin in fact characterises the slum as the "social exotic" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 245), a term which emphasises the association, in much fiction, of the lower classes with an "alien" space. But the slum still remains within the city; it is a temptingly apt symbol for a "tolerated" deviation which is contained by the greater hegemony. This is true of Orwell's prole district, whose containment resembles that of the "exotic" islands at the outskirts of Huxley's empire.

- Chapter Five -

Gendered Dystopia: The Control of Sexuality and the Representation of Gender in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

I

Many dystopian novels explore the theme of freedom versus happiness. That is to say, dystopian novels such as *We*, *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* present a society in which happiness and state protection are apparently guaranteed, but this is effected through extreme social control that limits or removes freedom. These dystopian societies contain within them attempted utopias. The dystopian novelist, however, focuses on the negative and repressive aspects of the attempt to create a perfect society. What is often revealed is that happiness and protection are not in fact guaranteed for all; personal safety is often rather tenuous because human rights have been sacrificed to ensure the efficient and controlled operations of the state. Typical control mechanisms in dystopias are constant surveillance, restriction of movement and communication, limited access to writing and the means to write, the suppression of history, control of the media, communal displays of solidarity, and public executions.

Also a common motif of the dystopian novel, and one on which we intend to focus in this chapter, is the state regulation of sexual relations, procreation, and child rearing in order to assist social control in the totalitarian or oligarchic state. The treatment of this motif differs from novel to novel: sexuality may be repressed and prescribed only under certain ceremonial conditions, or promiscuity may be encouraged, couplings even being scheduled and administered by the state. Likewise, procreation may be completely mechanized or merely restricted to a physical or social elite, and child rearing (indoctrination) may be completely within the domain of the state or again relegated to the elite. By imposing such hyper-organized systems of sexuality, the state attempts to inhibit or exclude meaningful emotional bonds or relationships between individuals, also disrupting and subverting conventional family organization (not necessarily nuclear) in order to redirect such energies to state allegiance. Thus, the sexual act, partner choice and procreation are no longer issues with elements of privacy and agency; they enter the public domain completely.

This public regulation of sex determines gender roles to a great extent within these worlds. Some dystopian societies are apparently androgynous while others are built upon deeply entrenched and seemingly inescapable gender designations. We will undertake to examine the gender politics of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* by analyzing how the author adheres to or subverts the characteristics of dystopia specifically in terms of gender representation. The text illuminates anxieties about gender issues of the writer's time. It is arguable that Atwood's concern is the perceived threat to women's rights from the growing American religious political right in the 1980s.

Although the novel has been compared with and seems to bookend George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*, and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, three widely read and representative examples of the genre, little critical attention has been given exclusively to the thematic and stylistic concerns of *The Handmaid's Tale*. *The Handmaid's Tale* is a dystopia in which strict religious dogma rules intercourse and procreation. Women's roles are divided up between Wives, Marthas (housekeepers) and Handmaids, lower-class women who are younger and presumably fertile. Econowives serve all three functions in lower-class but legal

families. Women may also serve as Aunts, those who indoctrinate the Handmaids in preparation for their service. Unwomen, infertile women who are unmarried and not fit for any other service or who are unwilling to be Handmaids, clean up toxic waste in the Colonies. The Handmaids, following the Old Testament precedent, bear children for and surrender them to infertile and childless upper-class couples. Infertility is officially blamed only on women. The sexual act between Handmaids and Commanders is ceremonial and takes place in the presence of the Wives only on prescribed occasions. Lower-class men serve either as Eyes (spies) or Angels (soldiers). Sexual freedom between lower-class men and women is prohibited, and illegal interference with a Handmaid is punishable by death. The magnitude of sexual repression in this controlled sexual system demands that any and all subversive activity be accompanied by or centred upon unorthodox and illegal sexual activity. Thus, as much as sex is central to the regime's external control or attempted obliteration of the individual's inner life, it also becomes the locus for rebellion, personal liberation, and the disruption of established power systems.

As the protagonist is initiated into a subversive movement through illegal sex acts and interaction with contraband materials that suggest all the perceived vices of twentieth century life such as lingerie, magazines, makeup, alcohol and cigarettes, the key to the dystopia's satire becomes apparent, for presumably the "ideal" society was formed as a remedy to twentieth century life. It is our contention that in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood suggests that neither enforced equality nor religious fanaticism will solve the gender and sexual inequalities of the day. Furthermore, Atwood uses socio-political satire to comment subversively on the complexities of the patriarchal social and political structures present in the societies in which she wrote, through her outright undermining of the genre of dystopia itself.

Social organization can differ greatly in dystopian novels. The form of social organisation is integral to the experience of the protagonist as he or she finds himself or herself in opposition to the state. In this chapter, we will discuss specifically the control of sexuality and the representation of gender within the specific social and political paradigms of *The Handmaid's Tale*, examining in detail where sex and gender fit within the particular ideologies, institutions, and agencies

that make up the "ideal society" of the novel. As loss of freedom often results from extreme social organisation, the theme of freedom versus happiness shall be analysed in the novel. We will then examine the system of justice that exists within Atwood's dystopia. We will also examine the conditions or milieus in which this novel is created and from which gender issues emerge by considering the specific socio--historical attempts at utopianism to which Atwood was reacting in writing her dystopia. Finally, we will examine the ways in which characters engage in sexual resistance against the state by breaking the established rules of sexual conduct in order to assert individuality and agency in the face of potentially overwhelming domination.

II

In this section, we will review representative texts of the genre along with the scholarship that has addressed gender issues in dystopian novels, showing ultimately that there is a place for this particular analysis of *The Handmaid's Tale* in the body of criticism on dystopia.

We have already alluded to the three major dystopian texts which *The Handmaid's Tale* follows: *We*, *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. These are the best known of the modern dystopian novels. Therefore, one might wonder at the decision whether it is possible to examine *The Handmaid's Tale* without in-depth exploration of Zamyatin, Huxley and Orwell. *We* has been noted as the exemplar/prototype of the modern dystopia, and Atwood's debt to Orwell has been noted by many critics. But is a strictly linear and chronological model of influence necessary for comparison? Is any debt Atwood may owe Zamyatin traceable only through Orwell or Huxley? We would like to begin to answer these questions by reviewing the comparative scholarship that exists between these four novels.

Scholars have recognized the connections between *We*, *Brave New World* and/or *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Although Huxley denied knowledge of *We* before writing his dystopia, many critics disregard this assertion (see Richards, 1962, p. 54; Seymour-Smith, 1976, p. 239). Among other features, Huxley seems to have borrowed from *We* its institutionalised promiscuity and state-controlled child-rearing, along with the apparently "ungendered" workforce that results from freedom from family responsibilities. On the other hand, other critics (see Collins, 1973, p. 41) accept Huxley's denial and look into earlier

writers who influenced both *We* and *Brave New World* such as Wells and Federov. Orwell acknowledged the influence of both Zamyatin and Huxley on his dystopia. Although the regime in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* uses sexual repression rather than shallow licentiousness to undermine personal relationships and strengthen state allegiance, the rebellious relationship between Winston and Julia mirrors that of D-503 and I-330, right down to the secret meeting-place (the Ancient House becomes the room above Charrington's shop) and use of contraband food, clothing and cosmetics. Even Winston's precarious position as a seditious journalist has its origin in D-503's initially state-commissioned poem turned journal of rebellion and discovery of subjectivity. These are only a few of many structural and thematic similarities between those three works.

Comparison on the basis of sex has also been made between these three novels. Lymon Tower Sargent, in the essay (1984) that closely predates *The Handmaid's Tale*, contrasts the differing ways that sex is used as a means of social control in the dystopias of Zamyatin, Orwell, and Huxley: "One major disagreement in the classic dystopias is over the question of sex as a means of social control. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* suggests suppression; *Brave New World* proposes promiscuity; *We* has controlled promiscuity" (p. 38). Sargent goes on to ask whether "control through pleasure [is] more effective than control through pain" (p. 38). Sargent's considerations here nicely anticipate the publication of Atwood's novel, and pave the way for a further comparison of sex as a means of social control in dystopias.

Critics have also examined the representation of gender in the dystopias of Orwell, Huxley, and Zamyatin. In "Women in Dystopia/ Utopia: *1984* and Beyond" (1984), Joyce McCarl Nielson claims that Julia functions as little more than an earth goddess, and attributes Orwell's "lack of concern about women as a class" to the failure of liberalism to concern itself with gender equality (p. 145). Baruch (1979) questions the role of women in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Brave New World* and asks whether unconventional sexual acts have the same liberating effect for women as they do for men in these novels:

> Today, rebellion consists of redefining the context of the act itself, its motions and emotions, its causes and effects, for like the Marquis de Sade we see the sexual relation as the paradigm of all power relationships,

> and recognize that what is liberation for men may be enslavement for women, something neither Huxley nor Orwell seemed to recognize. (Baruch, 1979, p. 41)

Margaret Wise Petrochenkov, in "Castration Anxiety and the Other in Zamyatin's *We*" (1998) considers how genital imagery associated with certain characters, particularly I-330, figures into D-503's castration anxiety. She explicates extensively how gender is represented in *We*, and how "sexual potency" is linked with "mental creativity" through D-503's act of writing (Petrochenkov, 1998, p. 252). On the other hand, Sona Stephan Hoisington, in "The Mismeasure of I-330" (1995), focuses on I-330's mythological rather than her psychological significance and asserts that she is not the femme fatale that other critics have made her out to be, observing that Zamyatin challenges and transcends gender stereotypes (p. 88) by having her play mythological roles that are usually reserved for men but allowing her to retain her own identity (pp. 81-82). This perspective especially calls for a comparison between this novel and *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Likewise, critics have traced the debt Atwood owes Orwell as well as her extension of his work. Larry W. Caldwell, in "Wells, Orwell, and Atwood: (EPI)Logic and Eu/Utopia" (1992), compares the function of the epilogue and the use of filtered perspectives as anti-closural devices. Earl G. Ingersoll compares the theme of writing in both dystopias in "Margaret Atwood's 'The Handmaid's Tale': Echoes of Orwell" (1993). Jocelyn Harris explicitly states that Atwood "openly invites comparison" (p. 267) and "both imitates and diverges from Orwell" (p. 268) in "The Handmaid's Tale as a Re-Visioning of *1984*" (1999). Lois Feuer, in "The Calculus of Love and Nightmare: *The Handmaid's Tale* and the Dystopian Tradition" (1997), claims that Atwood's text is not just a feminist version of Orwell's text, but she "both participates in and extends the dystopian genre" (p. 83), claiming that Atwood's focus on the individual is what makes it different.

A few critical works have undertaken a comparison of Atwood and Zamyatin. Laurence Davies compares the utopian elements of the societies presented in *We*, *Brave New World*, and *The Handmaid's Tale*, particularly as presented in the speeches of the Benefactor, the World Controller, and the Commander, in "At Play in the Fields of Our Ford: Utopian Dystopianism in Atwood, Huxley, and Zamyatin" (1999).

Robert Fulford (1985) briefly compares Atwood to Zamyatin, Huxley and Orwell in an early review of *The Handmaid's Tale*. Amin Malak, in "Margaret Atwood's 'The Handmaid's Tale' and the Dystopian Tradition" (1987), only very briefly alludes to Zamyatin, as does Feuer in the work already mentioned. Bret Cooke's recent work *Human Nature in Utopia*, *Zamyatin's We* (2002) compares Zamyatin's text to many other dystopias, including references to *The Handmaid's Tale*. Chris Ferns, in *Narrating Utopia* (1999), briefly but directly contrasts the protagonists in *We* and *The Handmaid's Tale* with protagonists in utopian works (p. 111) and contrasts the first-person narration of both texts with the third-person point of view employed in Huxley's and Orwell's texts (pp. 131-132), while in the broader context comparing and contrasting *We*, *Brave New World*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and *The Handmaid's Tale* (pp. 105-138) in his chapter on dystopia within this survey of utopian literature. He points out that the satire of Zamyatin, Huxley and Orwell upholds gender stereotypes and sexual power imbalances from their own times as more desirable than what we find in their dystopian worlds, but that Atwood breaks with this trend by offering a female protagonist and subverting many of the conventions of the genre (Ferns, 1999, p. 130).

In this chapter, we intend to contribute to this body of criticism by offering a close and explicit analysis of *The Handmaid's Tale* that goes further than the analyses that have already been made.

III

The political and social settings of a dystopian novel are very important — perhaps more important than in other fiction genres. The state itself is what the protagonist struggles against. The regime becomes a central character: the antagonist. Totalitarian rulers like the Commander in *The Handmaid's Tale* are really faces and voices for the state: they are emblematic. We must not forget that these fictional dystopian states have arisen out of utopian schemes. The architects of the states in question shaped gender into their blueprints. Some regimes attempt to gender-neutralize the population into efficient state-loyal workers who have no seeming gender differences. In part this is accomplished through state control of sexuality and the elimination of family obligations. State-directed promiscuity assures that sexual energy is expended while close familial bonds are eliminated, and

the lack of family responsibilities eliminates gender-specific roles like breadwinner and homemaker. In the state, uniform and bald heads are also meant to make everyone look similarly androgynous.

In contrast to this, gender differences form the very fabric of social organization in dystopian regimes such as that in Gilead in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Sexuality is closely controlled, but only certain individuals can participate under closely-monitored ceremonial conditions and only for the purpose of child-rearing. Certain individuals have no sexual outlet: both sexual intercourse and masturbation are forbidden. It seems, then, that built-up sexual energy is meant to be translated into fervour for the state. Families exist, but they are the domain of the elite. The state does not promote visual androgyny; rather, gender differences and roles are clearly signalled by the uniforms worn.

In Gilead, the state is centred upon sex and procreation. Because of a high sterility rate, a low birth rate, and toxic pollution, the religious right has taken over part of the eastern United States and justifies a system of sexual slavery that apparently has a precedent in the Old Testament. The fertile women have been rounded up and forced to serve as Handmaids to upper-class and infertile couples. Many families have been torn apart because the Gilead regime does not recognize many marriages from the former time, such as common-law marriages and those between divorcées. This is why the protagonist's marriage has been nullified and she is forced to become a Handmaid. Any children from such "illegal" marriages were seized and redistributed among the elite. Thus, Offred was torn away from her husband and her daughter. She does not know what happened to Luke, but she later finds out that her daughter has been adopted. Gay coupling and membership in religious orders that require vows of chastity have also become illegal. Not surprisingly, abortion is one of Gilead's most heinous crimes. Although the sexist implications of this society are obvious, it is also a society predicated upon imperialism and rigid class discrimination. Children have become a rare and desirable resource, thus the reorganisation of society has been chiefly concerned with redistributing children and viable reproductive systems among the powerful elite.

The society's political and social dogma is informed by anti-feminism. Legally speaking, men are never impotent or sterile; women

bear the blame of infertility: "I almost gasp: he's said a forbidden word. *Sterile*. There is no such thing as a sterile man any more, not officially. There are only women who are fruitful and women who are barren, that's the law" (Atwood, 1985, pp. 70-71). Women are indoctrinated to accept the double-standard that they are morally superior to men in order to justify the strictures that are being enacted against them: "All flesh is weak. […] They can't help it, [Aunt Lydia] said, God made them that way but He did not make you that way. He made you different. It's up to you to set the boundaries. Later you will be thanked [sic]" (Atwood, 1985, p. 55).

This society does not promote androgyny. In fact, gender roles have become very firmly entrenched. Women's supposed roles have been doled out to them in the form of colour-coded uniforms that clearly signify any woman's given role: the blue-clad Wives of the male elite serve as status symbols and decorative arm pieces. The green-clad Marthas serve as cooks and house-servants. The red garb of the Handmaids signifies the role of child-bearer. The so-called Econowives wear red, green and blue stripped dresses; these are the wives of lower-class men who have less money and lower status. Although they are not allowed to work outside the home and have little freedom, these women come closest to having any kind of normalcy by twentieth century standards: "There are other women with baskets, some in red, some in the dull green of the Marthas, some in the striped dresses, red and blue and green and cheap and skimpy, that mark the women of the poorer men. Econowives, they're called. These women are not divided into functions. They have to do everything, if they can" (Atwood, 1985, pp. 33-34). Any woman who either fails to fit into any of these categories or who becomes an enemy of the state is termed an "Unwoman" and forced to serve in the toxic cleanup that goes on in the Colonies. It is significant that the women and men who serve in the Colonies wear grey dresses. These non-entities are devoid of the significance of colour, and the men are wearing dresses as a visual indication that they have lost their male agency in this society. We later learn that there are unofficial brothels where women serve as prostitutes for the male elite. And we must not forget the brown-clad Aunts: those who train Handmaids in the re-education facilities for servitude.

Sex outside of marriage is strictly prohibited. In order to protect the "sanctity" of the Handmaids, measures are taken to keep the male servant class away from them. On one of her walks, Offred contemplates her possible effect on the "Guardians of the Faith" (Atwood, 1985, p. 30): "They will suffer, later, at night, in their regimented beds. They have no outlets now except themselves, and that's a sacrilege. There are no more magazines, no more films, no more substitutes; only me and my shadow, walking away from the two men, who stand at attention, stiffly, by a roadblock, watching our retreating shapes" (Atwood, 1985, p. 32).

IV

The relationship between freedom and happiness is another important theme that is explored by Atwood. Dystopian states often claim to limit freedom in order to offer happiness and protection. State propaganda often utilizes tricky semantics. *The Handmaid's Tale* contains imagery that suggests that the eradication of criminal behaviour is a return to zero, to stasis and stability. When Offred looks at the publicly displayed bodies of executed criminals, she says, "It's the obvious heaviness of the heads, their vacancy, the way gravity pulls them down and there's no life any more to hold them up. The heads are zeros" (Atwood, 1985, p. 42). Criminality in Gilead is also associated with personal freedom. Aunt Lydia uses propaganda that equates freedom with the injustices that had been committed against women before the establishment of the regime:

> every spring they had a Humphrey Bogart festival, with Lauren Bacall or Katherine Hepburn, women on their own, making up their minds. They wore blouses with buttons down the front that suggested the possibilities of the word undone. These women could be undone; or not. They seemed to be able to choose. We seemed to be able to choose, then. We were a society dying, said Aunt Lydia, of too much choice [sic]. (Atwood, 1985, p. 35)

The dogma of Gilead uses the former society's ills to justify the current brand of injustice. This is accomplished in part by suggesting that there is more than one type of freedom, and by suggesting that slavery is, in

effect, a particular kind of freedom. Negative freedom is certainly the kind that is offered by the state regimes of twentieth century dystopias and by twentieth century totalitarian governments.

Aunt Lydia's comments on freedom in *The Handmaid's Tale* seem to follow from this discussion: "There is more than one kind of freedom, said Aunt Lydia. Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don't underrate it [sic]" (Atwood, 1985, p. 34). It is a common claim of repressive societies that individuals are giving up personal freedom for their own protection and security. It is a claim being made by those who have recently sought increased governmental powers in anti-terrorism legislation in North America. To live in a state of "freedom to" apparently comes with certain risks and dangers.

Offred, instead of yearning for the protection of the state (freedom from) reminisces about the measures she once took to protect her freedom (freedom to), but neither was she a feminist nor a fighter of the regime. Atwood picks up explicitly on women's complicity in allowing themselves for so long to be "protected":

> I'm remembering my feet on these sidewalks, in the time before, and what I used to wear on them. Sometimes it was shoes for running, with cushioned soles and breathing holes, and stars of fluorescent fabric that reflected light in the darkness. Though I never ran at night, and in the daytime, only beside well-frequented roads.
>
> Women were not protected then.
>
> I remember the rules, rules that were never spelled out but that every woman knew: don't open your door to a stranger, even if he says he is the police. Make him slide his I.D. under the door. Don't stop on the road to help a motorist pretending to be in trouble. Keep the locks on and keep going. If anyone whistles, don't turn to look. Don't go into a laundromat, by yourself, at night.
>
> I think about laundromats. What I wore to them: shorts, jeans, jogging pants. What I put into them: my own clothes, my own soap, my own money,

> money I had earned myself. I think about having such control.
>
> Now we walk along the same street, in red pairs, and no man shouts obscenities at us, speaks to us, touches us. No one whistles. (Atwood, 1985, p. 34)

Offred apparently does not accept the state claim that it is offering freedom in the guise of the confinement, limitations, and circumscriptions under which she has to live. Atwood describes the particular difficulties that women have undergone in the name of protection or "freedom from." Until recently in history, and still to a large extent, women have been "free from" military service, mentally taxing professions, responsibilities outside childrearing, academic professions, the responsibilities of voting, of owning and being able to pass on property, and so on. At the same time, however, Atwood does not suggest that the conditions under which women have to live in present day society — enduring objectification, whistles, threat of attack or rape while going about everyday activities — when they are apparently living in a state of "freedom to," afford any kind of real freedom either. When Offred sees the Japanese tourists who show their hair and legs, she says, "They seemed undressed. It has taken so little time to change our minds, about things like this. Then I think: I used to dress like that. That was freedom" (Atwood, 1985, p. 38). This shows how easy it can be for a controlling government to affect social norms. What the dystopian regime banks on is that memory of "freedom to" will fade as people begin to feel the protection of "freedom from": "Already we were losing the taste for freedom, already we were finding these walls secure" (Atwood, 1985, p. 143).

V

One of the key justifications given by governments for impinging upon or ignoring civil and human rights is the need to "protect" its citizens from perceived dangers such as criminals or terrorists. What can follow this tendency in terms of justice are zero tolerance policies and the increasing of police powers. It seems, then, that the institutions of justice are inextricably linked to any society's attempt to deliver its citizens' "freedom from" and its consequential limiting

of an individual's "freedom to." In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the system of justice is crucial to controlling and indoctrinating the population.

First of all, certain vices that can conceivably cause harm to the individual are outlawed, creating the illusion that the state's protection is for the good of all. Serena Joy breaks the rules when she offers Offred an outlawed cigarette like a favor to a child. The usual vices are illegal here for the sake of the Handmaids' fertility. As Moira tells Offred when they meet at Jezebel's, "No nicotine-and-alcohol taboos here" (Atwood, 1985, p. 250) where fertility is not an issue. For the sake of their fertility, which is their sole reason for existing as far as the regime is concerned, Handmaids' diets are even strictly proscribed: "You have to get your vitamins and minerals, said Aunt Lydia coyly. You must be a worthy vessel. No coffee or tea though, no alcohol. Studies have been done [sic]" (Atwood, 1985, p. 75). Even Wives are subject to punishment if they interfere with a Handmaid's purpose: "As for the Wife, there's mostly just one thing they get salvaged for. They can do almost anything to us, but they aren't allowed to kill us, not legally. Not with knitting needles or garden shears, or knives purloined from the kitchen, and especially not when we are pregnant" (Atwood, 1985, p. 287).

However, the worst crime women have committed in Gilead's past is making themselves available sexually and making their procreational imperative subordinate to their own pleasure:

> The spectacles women used to make of themselves. Oiling themselves like roast meat on a spit, and bare backs and shoulders, on the street, in public, and legs, not even stockings on them, no wonder those things used to happen. Things, the word she used when whatever it stood for was too distasteful or filthy or horrible to pass her lips. A successful life for her was one that avoided things, excluded things. Such things do not happen to nice women. (Atwood, 1985, p. 65)

Women are being "protected" from themselves and their inclination to display themselves sexually, so they must give up the freedom to show a little skin. Also implicit in this is the antifeminist idea that women are ultimately responsible for the offences that have been committed

against them, and that they must be protected from inviting further indignities.

The punishment for even the smallest of crimes is out of all proportion to the offence in *The Handmaid's Tale*. The architects of Gilead have differentiated the punishment for crimes in creative ways: there are executions in the form of Salvagings and Particicutions, and the colonies are a slow form of toxic execution for those women and men who are guilty of being infertile, subversive, or simply marginal:

> Anyway, they're mostly people they want to get rid of. […]
>
> It's old women, I bet you've been wondering why you haven't seen too many of those around any more, and Handmaids who've screwed up their three chances, and incorrigibles like me. Discards, all of us. […] I'd say it's about a quarter men in the Colonies, too. Not all of those Gender Traitors end up on the Wall. (Atwood, 1985, pp. 260-261)

Some crimes are punishable by a simple beating, particularly where a viable womb is at stake: "It was the feet they'd do, for a first offence. They used steel cables, frayed at the ends. After that the hands. They didn't care what they did to your feet and hands, even if it was permanent. Remember, said Aunt Lydia. For our purposes your feet and your hands are not essential [sic]" (Atwood, 1985, p. 102).

In Gilead, the crime can predate the advent of the law; even "crimes" that were committed prior to the regime, such as a doctor's performing an abortion, are to be punished ruthlessly: "These men, we are told, are like war criminals. It's no excuse that what they did was legal at the time: their crimes are retroactive. They have committed atrocities, and must be made into examples, for the rest" (Atwood, 1985, p. 43). In Gilead, the crimes that deserve execution have to do with such "atrocities" against fetuses as well as homosexuality: "The two others have purple placards hung around their necks: Gender Treachery. Their bodies still wear the Guardian uniforms. Caught together, they must have been, but where? A barracks, a shower? It's hard to say" (Atwood, 1985, p. 53).

Medieval-style public executions and the public display of bodies serve to keep the society in a state of fear and the citizens ever-

mindful of the consequences of contravening laws and social mores. In Gilead, the bodies of the executed hang for days on The Wall: "We stop, together as if on signal, and stand and look at the bodies. It doesn't matter if we look. We're supposed to look: this is what they are there for, hanging on the Wall. Sometimes they'll be there for days, until there's a new batch, so as many people as possible will have the chance to see them" (Atwood, 1985, p. 42). Offred visits the bodies almost daily not to be taught a lesson but in order to glean information about what is going on. She tries to figure out to whom the bodies might belong. She is looking for clues, for Luke.

Public executions that come with much pomp and ceremony are common to *The Handmaid's Tale*. Such extreme social control necessitates not only swift punishment of subversives, but punishment within the public's eye. In Atwood's dystopia, justice is administered and witnessed according to gender. Such ceremonial segregation is meant to foster a sense of solidarity with one's gender, the kind of solidarity that Aunt Lydia hopes for. However, the social strata are evident: "We take our places in the standard order: Wives and daughters on the folding wooden chairs placed towards the back, Econowives and Marthas around the edges and on the library steps, and Handmaids at the front, where everyone can keep an eye on us. We don't sit on chairs, but kneel" (Atwood, 1985, p. 285).

However, in Gilead, the Handmaids are more than just witnesses to the hangings. Although the Aunts and Salvagers conduct the ceremony, the Handmaids' complicity in carrying out the death sentence is ensured by the rope: "There's a long piece of rope which winds like a snake in front of the first row of cushions, along the second, and back through the lines of chairs, bending like a very old, very slow river viewed from the air, down to the back. […] The front end of the rope runs up onto the stage" (Atwood, 1985, p. 285). By having the Handmaids involved in the hanging, they must feel in some part responsible for what is happening; they cannot simply blame the regime:

> I've leaned forward to touch the rope in front of me, in time with the others, both hands on it, the rope hairy, sticky with tar in the hot sun, then placed my hand on my heart to show my unity with the Salvagers and my consent, and my complicity in the death

> of this woman. I have seen the kicking feet and the two in black who now seize hold of them and drag downwards with all their weight. I don't want to see it any more. I look at the grass instead. I describe the rope. (Atwood, 1985, p. 288)

In this way, the women who are being executed are, symbolically, being executed by the entire society of women from whom they have, apparently, broken ranks by committing their crimes. Their consent is to a large degree coerced; however, Handmaids must make the conscious decision to touch the rope, and they do so in the interest of self-preservation. To do otherwise, to refuse to show unity with the Salvagers, would be to put oneself at risk.

The Particicution takes this element of participation in the execution much further. Occasionally, the Handmaids themselves are compelled to collectively execute a male offender, usually accused of rape or some such crime against women. We are witness to a Particicution of a man who has allegedly raped two Handmaids and caused one of them to miscarry. Again, not to participate in the brutality is to mark oneself: "It's a mistake to hang back too obviously in any group like this; it stamps you as lukewarm, lacking in zeal" (Atwood, 1985, p. 289). The rules are that the Handmaids will do whatever they want to the accused between blows of the whistle. The effect of this organized gang assault is that the mob instinct takes over. Mob acts usually occur when individuals within the mob feel threatened or repressed. In the Historical Notes, Professor Piexoto explains the ingenuity of this invention of justice:

> It is Judd who is credited with devising the form, as opposed to the name, of the Particicution ceremony, arguing that it was not only a particularly horrifying and effective way of ridding yourself of subversive elements, but that it would also act as a steam valve for the female elements in Gilead. Scapegoats have been notoriously useful throughout history, and it must have been most gratifying for these Handmaids, so rigidly controlled at other times, to be able to tear a man apart with their bare hands every once in a while. (Atwood, 1985, p. 320)

As the Particicution proceeds, it becomes clear that their participation is more than symbolic: "There's a surge forward, like a crowd at a rock concert in the former time, when the doors opened, that urgency coming like a wave through us. The air is bright with adrenalin, we are permitted anything and this is freedom, in my body also, I'm reeling, red spreads everywhere" (Atwood, 1985, p. 291). These women are living under extreme strictures and given the opportunity to take out their frustrations on one man who had been marked as a scapegoat. Offred's editorial perspective makes it clear that these women are not simply compelled to commit this execution against their wills: "Now there are sounds, gasps, a low noise like growling, yells, and the red bodies tumble forward and I can no longer see, he's obscured by arms, fists, feet. A high scream comes from somewhere, like a horse in terror" (Atwood, 1985, pp. 291-292). The sound imagery and animal behaviour described here ensure us that in this case the Handmaids are not simply going through the motions.

In *The Handmaid's Tale* there is the appearance that justice is administered collectively by an entire gender community. These systems support gender stereotypes of the twentieth century such as the male tendency to display strength and act individually and the female tendency to cooperate and show solidarity, even if that solidarity is coerced and manipulated.

VI

We have established in the second chapter that dystopia has a parodic relationship to utopia. Indeed, specific attempts at achieving political utopias have informed the novel here in question. Although Atwood's dystopia reflects particular anxieties concerning the right-wing religious political agenda, the effects of pollution, a declining birth-rate, and the potential for usurpation in an electronic monetary system that existed in the 1980s, it is clear that she chose her setting also because of the utopian aims inherent in the early history of the United States. The fact that Gilead is set in the eastern United States does not necessarily reveal blunt anti-Americanism; her setting has to do with the early puritan history of that region:

> Now, *The Handmaid's Tale* is set in Massachusetts; let us recall that the United States began — at least that

> part of it did — not with the 18th but with the 17th century, and with what was essentially a theocracy. These people hanged Quakers and quite a few other people. They were not interested in dissent. They did not come to the New World in search of religious tolerance. […] The Puritans we're talking about left England to set up what they thought was going to be God's kingdom on earth. (Atwood, 1995)

Even in this description of utopian ends, we see the employment of dystopian means. These earliest utopians of the Americas are exhibited in Atwood's dystopia: "The church is a small one, one of the first erected here, hundreds of years ago. It isn't used anymore, except as a museum. Inside it you can see paintings, of women in long sombre dresses, their hair covered by white caps, and of upright men, darkly clothed and unsmiling. Our ancestors. Admission is free" (Atwood, 1985, p. 41). Atwood goes on to state that these theocratic beginnings are still relevant to the current political aims in the United States: "American presidents are still quoting them. They may not be aware of the context, but they are still saying, 'A city upon a hill, a light to all nations'" (Atwood, 1995).

Clearly, then, if twentieth century dystopias are concerned with exposing the coercive means of attaining utopia, *The Handmaid's Tale* does just that. More than that, though, Atwood exposes the particular abuses to women that may accompany the attempt to attain a patriarchal utopia. The intolerant control of women and their sexuality in Gilead echoes late twentieth century states that operated under religious extremism such as in Iran (Davies, 1999, p. 206).

VII

Some would suggest that traditional utopias are almost always patriarchal. Elaine Hoffman Baruch (1979) comments on the sexist nature of utopian and dystopian visions: "Many readers feel uncomfortable with [Plato's] plan, for it is predicated on a communalization of wives, children, and property, to say nothing of a controlled system of eugenics, which turns out, it might here be said, to be characteristic of twentieth-century anti-utopias, or dystopias" (p. 31). She is, of course, referring to Plato's *Republic*, often considered to be the originating

text of the concept of political utopia. Baruch points out that gender-specific functions within the perfectly imagined society go right back to the beginnings of utopianism (Baruch, 1979, p. 38).

Baruch's study focuses on *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Brave New World* as far as the dystopia goes, but she makes some useful observations and asks some interesting rhetorical questions that can be useful to an examination of gender in other dystopias. She interrogates whether the scheme is a dream or nightmare from the perspective of gender: "[...] utopias for men are often dystopias for women. Might it then be possible that dystopias for men are utopias for women?" (Baruch, 1979, p. 38).

It then follows to examine the female dystopia and ask whether Atwood's world is a utopia for men. And if so, which men, the Commanders or the lowly Guardians? According to Aunt Lydia, Gilead is attempting to effect a women's utopia:

> For the generations that come after […] it will be so much better. The women will live in harmony together, all in one family; you will be like daughters to them, and when the population level is up to scratch again we'll no longer have to transfer you from one house to another because there will be enough to go round. There can be bonds of real affection […] under such conditions. Women united for a common end! Helping one another in their daily chores as they walk the path of life together, each performing her appointed task. Why expect one woman to carry out all the functions necessary to the serene running of a household? It isn't reasonably humane. Your daughters will have greater freedom. We are working towards the goal of a little garden for each one, each one of you. (Atwood, 1985, pp. 171-172)

What she is really describing, several women working together and running a man's household, is a men's utopia. This is what the regime is trying to create, not necessarily what has been achieved. This claim to effect a women's utopia is merely an indoctrination strategy designed to nullify resistance to the regime. Similarly, the Commander claims

that Gilead has gotten rid of all the supposed miseries of women's former lives:

> And then if they did marry, they could be left with a kid, two kids, the husband might just get fed up and take off, disappear, they'd have to go on welfare. Or else he'd stay around and beat them up. Or if they had a job, the children in daycare or left with some brutal ignorant woman, and they'd have to pay for that themselves, out of their wretched little paycheques. Money was the only measure of worth, for everyone, they got no respect as mothers. No wonder they were giving up on the whole business. This way they're protected, they can fulfil their biological destinies in peace. With full support and encouragement. (Atwood, 1985, p. 231)

The Commander focuses on the inequality of women's lives before the advent of Gilead in order to excuse their servitude, slavery, and loss of agency under present circumstances. Offred, not surprisingly, sees through this flimsy justification.

Sex, in most dystopias, is both a tool of repression and a site of resistance, the former for the state, and the latter for the subversives. Baruch's questions suggest that the answers cannot be simple. She begins to answer her own questions by looking at the role of sex and of sexual resistance within certain dystopias. She points out that differences exist in different works concerning societal norms and forms of resistance:

> When sex is a tool of the state, to be used as an opiate like soma or the feelies, as in *Brave New World*, sexual abstention becomes an act of rebellion. But when sex is a forbidden act, as in the sexually repressive society of *1984*, then following one's impulses is liberation. Or is it? A question we have to ask ourselves is whether the sexual act in relation to the culture bears the same meaning for women as it does for men. (Baruch, 1979, p. 40)

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Offred engages in sexual resistance with two individuals. However, she is a passive participant. Her illegal behaviour with the Commander is at his behest, and she feels somewhat powerless within this arrangement. In this women's dystopia where "sex is a forbidden act," even the men who are in power engage in illegal sexual activity, though it may not necessarily be rebellious. When the Commander takes Offred to Jezebel's, his contravention of the strict sexual norms results in a new form of subjugation for Offred: that of mistress. In the context of *The Handmaid's Tale*, it is apt to consider whether "what is liberation for men may be enslavement for women" (Baruch, 1979, p. 41). Neither was her affair with Nick initiated by Offred herself, but by Serena Joy. Offred does find some kind of liberation in this relationship, although she describes it in the clichés of romance and soap operas, offering several different variations of the same experience. It is interesting that the relationship between Offred and Nick results in the illegal conception of a child that would have to be surrendered to the State upon its birth. In the end, Offred might have escaped this fate.

VII

The Guardians are the police force of the Gilead, used for routine duties. Behind them operates the controlling, omniscient police organisation, the Eyes. Apart from other obligations, the Eyes make sure that the women are put under surveillance, classified according to their reproductive abilities and restricted to the domestic sphere. The Eyes drive in "a black-painted van, with the winged Eye in white on the side. The windows of the vans are dark-tinted, and the men in the front seats wear dark glasses: a double obscurity" (Atwood, 1985, p. 29). For the Handmaids, the male eye becomes the Eye; sexual attraction in the male gaze is transformed into patriarchal surveillance and political control of the women.

Every Handmaid can be sent to three different Commanders with whom she stays for two years. Should she become pregnant and give birth to a Keeper, a child that is without physical disabilities and therefore fit for keeping, the Handmaid will never be sent to the Colonies. The Handmaid who does not perform her duty during six years is sent to the Colonies. The Handmaids are sent to the doctor every month for an obligatory gynaecological test. During the doctor's

inspection of Offred's body, his actions transform from Gileadean surveillance of women into sexual harassment.

> "I could help you," he says. Whispers.
> "What?" I say.
> "Shhh," he says. "I could help you. I've helped others."
> "Help me?" I say, my voice as low as his. "How?" Does he know something, has he seen Luke, has he found, can he bring back?
> "How do you think?" he says, still barely breathing it. Is that his hand, sliding up my leg? He's taken off the glove. "The door's locked. No one will come in. They'll never know it isn't his."
> (Atwood, 1985, p. 79)

The doctor offers to impregnate Offred, just like he has done to many other Handmaids, in order to save her from suffering that she will be subjected to should she not give birth to a healthy baby for the Commander.

Abortion is an act punished by capital punishment in the Republic of Gilead. On one of the Walks, Offred and Ofglen see the "angel makers" hung on the Wall. Those are the doctors who performed abortion in pre-Gilead times who are punished retroactively. No women in the Republic of Gilead would think of having an abortion because babies have become a commodity in the society. During her gynaecological exam, Offred thinks to herself: "Give me children, or else I die" (Atwood, 195, p. 79). The decline in the birth rate has led to women being valued according to their fertility. As well, women overcome by jealousy would attack pregnant women or attempt to kidnap children. The Commanders are seen as the biblical forefathers, the Sons of Jacob, whose fertility creates a nation and signifies the supreme creative power of the Lord (Parker, 1995, p. 349). It is women who are barren, like Rachel from the Old Testament was. *Genesis 30:* 1-3 tells of Rachel's plea for a child to give to her husband, Jacob: "Give me children, or else I die".

Emma Parker claims that "the powerful are characterised by their eating and the powerless by their non-eating" (1995, p. 349). The Handmaids have no choice about what they want to eat. They can only consume what the authorities approve of; Offred is forbidden

to consume products that could jeopardise her chances of becoming pregnant and giving birth. The Totalitarian regime of Gilead, through controlling what the Handmaids eat, obtains direct control over the Handmaids' bodies. Rich claims the only aspect women had authority and control of was motherhood and it has been acquired by men (Rich, 1976, p. 67).

The concept of motherhood is extremely distorted in *The Handmaid's Tale*. The social institutions and the government manipulate and control motherhood. According to Rich, women's bodies are manipulated for male use. The Handmaids are forced to accept the maternal roles society expects them to fulfil. As surrogate mothers, the Handmaids serve as reproductive instruments. Besides that, they are sexually victimised by the Commanders within the heterosexual order of the Gilead. Offred says: "I resign my body freely, to the uses of others. They can do what they like with me. I am abject." (Atwood, 1985, p. 286)

MacKinnon claims that female sexuality is appropriated by men and exists merely for male usage (1982, p. 531). Further on, she claims that "sexual objectification is the primary process of the subjection of women. Man fucks woman, subject verb object" (Mackinnon, 1982, p. 533). The pre-Gilead society is filled with examples of sexual objectification such as pornography, incest, rape and gender-related violence, all of which have been terminated in patriarchal Gilead. "The Pornomarts were shut, though, and there were no longer any Feels on Wheels vans and Bun-Dle Buggies circling the Square" (Atwood, 1985, p. 174). In the Red Centre the Aunts play pre-Gilead pornographic films that represent sexual victimisation to the Handmaids. They are shown male rage that mutilates, dismembers and destroys the female body that is trapped in a sadomasochistic master-slave relationship which turns them into objects (Bouson, 1993, p.141). When watching pornographic films, the sound is on unlike when seeing any other educatory material when the Aunts turn off the sound from fear that the Handmaids could understand the message conveyed by the radical feminists, for example. The Aunts also control the forbidden whorehouse created to fulfil male sexuality, Jazabel's, where the Commander takes Offred one night to show her off to other Commanders. By Gileadean law, men are not allowed to have prostitutes; however, they are implicitly tolerated. As Offred

describes: "The official creed denies them, denies their very existence, yet here they are. That is at least something"(Atwood, 1985, p. 235). The prostitutes served as the "guardian of material substance" that met male sexual pleasure and desire (Irigaray, 1985, p. 31).

The pre-Gileadean society was sexually violent towards women, as Offred recalls:

> There were stories in the newspapers, of course, corpses in ditches or the woods, bludgeoned to death or mutilated, interfered with, as they used to say, but they were about other women, and the men who did such things were other men. None of them were the men we knew. (Atwood, 1985, pp. 56-57)

Moira, Offred's best friend, used to dedicate herself to volunteering for a women's collective that published propaganda concerning sexual violence and child birth. However, at the Red Centre the Aunts teach the Handmaids that the gang rape of the pre-Gileadean society was the victim's fault for being available to men, both physically and psychologically.

Rape is not a practise exclusive to pre-Gileadean times; its occurrences are abundant in patriarchal Gilead. The Handmaids are domestic prostitutes, kept in the Commanders' homes not for sexual pleasure of the master of the house (although, this practice as we discover is not unusual) but for breeding purposes. The Handmaids are manipulated by the patriarchal system into becoming sexual objects for consumption and use. By means of rape, they are exploited in their biological function. Karen Stain, analysing the insemination ceremony in *The Handmaid's Tale*, claims that "in the guise of a re-population program, Gilead reads the biblical text literally and makes it the basis for the state-sanctioned rape, the impregnation ceremony the Handmaids must undergo each month" (Stein, 1996, p. 93). Offred lies between the Wife's legs, Serena Joy's thighs are attached to Offred's thighs, Offred's head is lying on the Wife's stomach while the Commander is inseminating her. Offred describes the scene:

> My red skirt is hitched up to my waist, though no higher. Below it the Commander is fucking. What he is fucking is the lower part of my body. I do not say

> making love, because it would imply two people and only one is involved. Nor does rape cover it: nothing is going on here that I haven't signed up for. There wasn't a lot of choice but there was some, and this is what I chose. (Atwood, 1985, p. 94)

Neither Offred nor Serena Joy enjoy in the process, their sexual arousal and orgasm are not obligatory for the process to be successful. As McKinnon claims women are deprived of their sexuality because it is a social construction defined by men (1989, p. 172).

The authorities take great care to preserve the Handmaids' fertility; nevertheless, the physical appearance of the Handmaids is unimportant, only the womb is necessary. The Handmaids, all being young women, care greatly about their youthfulness and appearance, they need to feel attractive. Since all cosmetics are considered vanities and therefore are forbidden to the Handmaids, which was a decree brought by the Wives who are jealous of the Handmaids, the Handmaids put butter or margarine on their faces to keep it soft. "As long as we do this, butter our skin to keep it soft, we can believe that we will some day get out, that we will be touched again, in love or desire. We have ceremonies of our own, private ones" (Atwood, 1985, p. 125).

The Handmaid Offred "writes" her story in order to recreate her past identity and not succumb to the intentions of the patriarchal Gilead. She cannot accept that she is only a walking womb, she says: "I am alive, I live, I breathe, I put my hand out, unfolded, into the sunlight"(Atwood, 1985, p. 18). Suleiman claims that women traditionally can have only two identities, Mary or Pandora, since in the Western culture the female body can be a source of nurture and joy as well as a source of evil and destruction (Suleiman, 1985, p. 1). Offred tells the truth of the Gilead, the world that is not seen by the Japanese tourists who are fascinated by the costumes the Handmaids wear. She is confined to a narrow room where from she narrates her tale to break out the silence.

To men, a woman and her body function as an instrument for sexuality and maternity. However, for Offred, her body is the last border of the self: "Can I be blamed for wanting a real body, to put my arms around? Without it, I, too, am disembodied" (Atwood, 1985, p. 104). Offred must start to regard herself as a subject again; she must

erase all that she has been taught to believe in the Center. Re-creation of the self functions on several layers: the tale Offred narrates, the affair with Nick and the escape from the Republic of Gilead. Through words, she composes herself: "I wait. I compose myself. My self is a thing I must now compose, as one composes a speech. What I must present is a made thing, not something born" (Atwood, 1985, p. 66).

Offred's tapes are discovered in 2195 by Professor Pieixoto, an archivist from Cambridge University. On a Symposium on Gileadean Studies, he reconstructs the narration and speculates about the setting. Offred was possibly narrating her tale in a "safe house" on the Underground Femaleroad; nevertheless, it is not clear whether she survived or was captured by the Eyes. Her tale is manipulated and effaced by Piexoto's comments concerning historical relevance of the narrative. Professor Piexoto trivialises experiences of the women in Gilead. Rao claims *The Handmaid's Tale* describes the manner in which male-centred cultures marginalise and efface women's stories by privileging fixed metaphysical concepts of history, writing, truth, origin, reality and binary logic on which these concepts depend (Rao, 1993, p. 168). As well, Professor Piexoto provides justification for the actions of the men of Gilead, claiming: "What male of the Gilead period could resist the possibility of fatherhood, so redolent of status, so highly prized?" (Atwood, 1985, p. 394)

Michael claims that official history is traditionally history of the winners that is written by men about other men which aims to marginalise or erase women's versions of history (1996, p. 167). Nevertheless, the Handmaid Offred exists only through her imaginative listener who understands her: "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" (Atwood, 1985, p. 268). Offred's fictive listener must recognise her; accept her for what she is. Professor Piexoto cannot understand the horror of Offred's sufferings, in his male egocentrism he is similar to the Commander when he describes the reasons for the revolution of Gilead: "The problem wasn't only with the women… The main problem was with the men. There was nothing for them anymore" (Atwood, 1985, p. 272).

Moira, the only revolutionary character in *The Handmaid's Tale* who in the pre-Gileadean times worked in a radical feminist organisation,

escapes from the Red Centre. She is the only Handmaid who attempts to escape by stealing a uniform from one of the Aunts. Unfortunately, Moira is captured by the Eyes at the border and returned to Gilead. Confronted with the choices of going to the Colonies or becoming a prostitute, she opts for the latter. When Offred meets her at the Jezebel's, Moira says

> "Don't worry about me," she says. She must know some of what I'm thinking. "I'm still there, you can see it's me. Anyway, look at it this way: it's not so bad, there's lots of women around. Butch paradise, you might call it." (Atwood, 1985, p. 324)

Moira, being a lesbian, subverts the principles of heterosexuality that have been established by the patriarchal Gilead in order to place women in a subordinate position. In the society, male desires are satisfied by women who serve as sexual objects in heterosexual relationships. Being a homosexual, Moira understands what her place is in Jezabel's and "Commanders don't give a piss what we do in our off time. Anyway, women on women sort of turns them on" (Atwood, 1985, p. 327).

Offred misses her husband Luke, from whom she was separated after they, together with their daughter, attempted to escape from Gilead. They were separated because the state annulled all second marriages, as Offred narrates Luke was married before and she was his mistress until he left his first wife who was "barren". She fantasises of love within the heterosexual framework, seeing the Commander as her "sugar daddy" and idealising his characteristics. For the sake of love, Offred is willing to demean herself; she does it over and over again in every relationship described in the novel. Her autonomy and her sexuality are taken away by the men in her life.

The love affair with Nick is initiated by the Wife, Serena Joy, who sends Offred to him to impregnate her because the Commander is apparently sterile. Miner compares Nick and Luke, claiming that "despite the differences between the two men, the text continues to represent the love plot as something potentially dangerous to women who entangle themselves therein" (Miner, 1991, p. 161). Because of Nick, Offred loses her rationality; she says: "I no longer want to leave, escape, cross the border to freedom. I want to be here, with Nick, where

I can get at him" (Atwood, 1985, p. 271). Through falling in love with Nick, Offred deconstructs the Commander's cynical approach to love:

> What did we overlook?
> Love, I said.
> Love? said the Commander. What kind of love?
> Falling in love, I sad. The Commander looked at me with his candid boy's eyes.
> Oh yes, he said. I've read the magazines, that's what they were pushing, wasn't it? But look at the stats, my dear. Was it really worth it, falling in love? Arranged marriages have always worked out just as well, if not better. (Atwood, 1985, p. 220)

Women define themselves as sexual beings whose existence depends on men; the distinction between women is based on "having a man". Ehrenreich claims that in *The Handmaid's Tale* "the only true subversive force appears to be love" (1986, p. 34). What has been overlooked by the regime is the subversive force of love. Love is the ultimate weapon against the patriarchal Gilead, Offred escapes from the harsh circumstances of her life in Nick's arms: "The fact is that I no longer want to leave, escape, cross the border to freedom" (Atwood, 1985, p. 348). For the sake of love, the Handmaid Offred is willing to surrender herself and submit to Nick's will and his last words to her are: "Trust me." As the Eyes take her away to a place wherefrom she narrates her tale, Offred has to entrust her life to the man who is a complete stranger to her, however, who tells her to trust him thereby uttering the phrase that has become the spell for women who have grown up on romantic love script.[1] Miner believes that there is only a limited number of scripts, provided to the "reader" in magazines, romance novels and fairy tales which undermine the possibility of experiencing individual love that does not follow the script (Miner, 1991, p. 164).

1 When Nick and Offred meet for the first time, before their relationship ensues, because of the awkwardness of the situation they talk using phrases from the old movies. As Offred realises at that moment they were using the language that not even her mother used, which was a complete fabrication.

VIII

Gender is essential to the political and social settings of dystopian novels because the state takes control of family organisation, sexual activity, and gender roles. In Gilead, strict gender roles are enforced; the state organises families and sexuality is repressed. Repressed energy is meant to be translated into state service. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood demonstrates the nightmarish outcomes of governing sexuality within an extremely collectivist or extremely conservative system.

Atwood uses her dystopia to explore the theme of freedom versus happiness. In the novel, the state claims to have limited freedom in order to ensure happiness for its citizens. Of course, the irony of this claim becomes obvious with the further claim that although people may have lost "freedom to," or agency, they have been given "freedom from," or apparent protection from crime and responsibility. Atwood demonstrates that the danger here involves people's desire for this kind of protection, and she hints that it is a willing populace that allows totalitarian systems to come into being.

The regime in question takes an extreme approach to justice in order to afford this "protection." It claims to be protecting citizens from destructive vices but what is really being protected is the state against breakdown and challenges from the populace. Public torture, executions, and the display of human remains are used both to deter crime and to desensitise the population to state-inflicted terror. As well, Atwood incorporates citizen complicity into the implementation of justice.

Gilead is a fictional and speculative extension of existing conditions within the author's society. The seeds for *The Handmaid's Tale* lie in the puritan and right-wing trends that run through American history. Finally, Atwood shows that sexual and gender control will ultimately result in resistance and rebellion that is centred upon contravening sexual laws and gender roles, and it is this rebellion that ultimately drives the journey of the dystopian protagonist. As a result, *The Handmaid's Tale* addresses the limitations that are placed on women under any system.

- Chapter Six -

Young Adult Literature – The Genre Disseminated

Voices of Young Adult fantasy fiction writers have not quite been heard until recently, at least by the mainstream society. Defining Young Adult (YA) literature proves to be a very difficult task; this is a very dynamic field, reflecting on constant societal and cultural changes. YA literature has a very rich history, although the genre has in the past been marginalised. In common use since the late 1960s, YA literature refers to the realistic works of fiction addressing issues of interest to pre-teen and teen readers. Adolescents' interest in the genre is mainly ascribable to the amount of sexuality and sexual development. Adolescents play a crucial role in western culture, particularly teenage girls who are the true embodiment and the primary target of the consumer society.

The point of change for the increase in popularity of YA literature has been the somewhat unexpected popularity of the *Twilight* saga, followed by *The Hunger Games* trilogy. Nevertheless, according to Thomas, for YA there is still a great amount of work to be done in order to overcome the stigma of mere formulaic fiction as

> critics occasionally deride speculative fiction—an umbrella term used to refer to a range of genres,

> including science fiction (SF), fantasy, utopian and dystopian fiction—as genre fiction with the result being that they dismiss it as a form of superficial entertainment. The cultural expectations that have historically accompanied young adult literature—namely, that it must perform a didactic function—coupled with its status as a commodity, subject it to additional stigmas and mischaracterizations. (Thomas, 2013, p. 146)

First, we must do our best to provide a definition of YA literature. As can be expected, the definition will revolve around the name itself, as YA literature is written about and for adolescent readers. According to Stuart Hall, the founder of child and educational psychology, adolescence occurs between the ages of thirteen and twenty-four and can be defined by higher levels of attention, engagement in dangerous behaviour and great importance of establishing close friendships (Arnett, 2006, p. 186). Nevertheless, numerous scholars have stated their disagreement with the wide span of ages, especially due to the changing perception of adulthood. For example, for Arnett, adolescence represents the period between thirteen and eighteen years of age, while the period from eighteen to twenty-four years of age is indicative of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000, p. 469).

In *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism* Michael Cart weighs between the usage of different terms for identifying the audience, suggesting, amongst others teen, juvenile and adolescent in lieu of young adult. He also explains how, in the publishing industry, teen and YA readers are defined as being approximately between twelve and eighteen years old, while *new adult* signifies readers between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five (Cart, 2011, p. 3). Cole defines YA literature by the following attributes:

- the protagonist being a young adult
- the story told from the perspective of a young adult
- the story written from the perspective of a young adult
- containing issues of coming-of-age that are relevant to young adults
- the story marketed to young adults
- the story chosen by young adults to read (Cole, 2011)

Taking into consideration the long tradition of literature for children, Cart argued that the first novel deliberately targeting teenage readership in its marketing campaign was Maureen Daly's *Seventeenth Summer* (1942). He noticed how, a trend of new youth culture which emerged in the 1930s, was gaining more momentum in the 1940s when the marketers realised the teens were a new market on the rise. The prosperity of the baby-boom period brought forth more financial power in the hands of the youth (Cart, 2011, p. 11). Apart from YA literature, the new burgeoning markets were also comics and graphic novels.

YA fiction often portrays the coming-of-age plot highlighting the transformation of an individual from child to adult. Reader identification with the character is required: s/he must negotiate the emotional and mental consequences of the decisions made by the protagonists. The transformation of the protagonist, best visible in the increased self-esteem, is indicative of the process of interrogating social constructions, setting a base for the relationship between the society and individual. Young adults, especially female, will often continue to negotiate their position in society. YA novels are depicting relationships and decision making scenarios that "illustrate different viewpoints and portray characters involved in realistic problem solving" that appeal to broader audiences (Alsup, 2010, p. 13). Reader response and the transaction between reader and text surrounding issues of individual and social transformation could help teens and adults understand how their "individual experiences fit into a larger sociocultural context" (Alsup, 2010, p. 13).

According to the statistics released by the Association of American Publishers, in the first three quarters of 2014 YA literature sales increased by 22.4%, in comparison to the same period in 2013 in the United States, while the adult and non-fiction sales were down by 3.3% (in Dilworth, 2014). Interestingly, this is not to say that all the readers of YA fiction are themselves representatives of that age group. According to one survey, 80% of all the YA book sales are by adults, who discover books by browsing bookstores, hearing of upcoming film adaptations as well as through social networks (in Gilmore, 2015). Clearly, YA literature has become more important for the adult readership. The fact that the genre has shifted more towards bleak, post-apocalyptic scenarios could only have helped increase its

popularity, considering the profound change in social and political influences in the last decade.

An interesting phenomenon connected to YA literature is its serial form. A significant number of YA texts is serialised, *Twilight*, *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, *Uglies*, to name just a few of the most popular. The first novel of a series as well as the subsequent texts end on significant cliff-hangers; instead of getting a sense of resolution, the readers are compelled to wait for the publishing, buy and read the next novel in the series. By all means, serialisation is not a contemporary phenomenon, since its traces can be made to the 17th century French literature, also the Victorians were masters of periodicals. Likewise, comic books today rely on readers who will each month purchase the next issue of the series.

Young adult dystopian literature

YA dystopian and utopian literature has been produced for a variety of reasons, having a wide range of effects, from engaging the attention of readership to socio-political topics to commercial reasons. For example, YA novels, particularly dystopian, are made into movies (*Hunger Games, Host, Warm Bodies*). When audiences enjoy the movies, they seek to read more from the particular genre. Movies are not the only areas of convergence; television series, computer games (both interactive and static), fan fiction sites on the Internet, and commercial goods also operate as sites for convergence. Convergence also occurs between those who engage with the content such as in the case of this study, adults and adolescents. The surge in popularity of YA literature is not caused by increased adult readership alone.

The recent box-office successes of both the *Divergent* and *Hunger Games* series have introduced the books through other media outlets to more people[2]. The readers of YA utopian literature must contemplate issues of social organisation, they are encouraged to question the role of the individual and the meaning of freedom, while learning about

2 The first movie of the *Divergent* series had the gross profit of $150,947,895, whereas the third *Divergent: Allegiant* only $66,184,051, which left the production company in a somewhat problematic situation, as the final installation should be made, but will most likely be not as lucrative as originally expected (Box Office Mojo, 2016).

the government and contemplating the possibility of improving society. Through questioning the fictional societies, the readers are invited to examine and criticise their own society. The burden of changing society is always the responsibility of the young adults who are confronting the adult world in an attempt to prove themselves. Utopian literature encourages the readers to critically assess their society, preparing them for political action. Oftentimes, a fictional encounter with another culture urges the readers to question their own reality, a reflection that sometimes will take the form of social criticism or satire. A utopian society most likely has solved some of the problems troubling the reader's society; otherwise, it can provide the reader with the necessary teachings concerning the possible improvements of his/her society.

Hintz and Ostry notice how utopias predominate in children's literature, while the dystopias are more common in YA literature (2003, p. 9). While adolescence presents a traumatic personal and social breakthrough, childhood is a time of paradisiac experiences rarely including individual or collective suffering. Adolescents recognise the failures of their society and attempt to change the boundaries of their worlds, traditionally including the loss of childish innocence. Further on, Hintz and Ostry recognise strong ties between adolescence and dystopia; on the verge of adulthood, teenagers desire more power and authority, but are unable to attain it (2003, p. 9). In addition to the overall category of YA literature, utopian and dystopian writing teach children about social organization (Hintz and Ostry, 2003, p. 7). Moreover, "utopian literature encourages young people to view their society with a critical eye, sensitizing or predisposing them to political action" (Hintz and Ostry, 2003, p. 7). This can be easily translated to dystopian literature, even on a more intense scale. This kind of literature also enables readers to "focus on how society might change for the better" and reveals how "class systems come under much scrutiny" (Hintz and Ostry, 2003, p. 8). Worth mentioning is certainly what Hintz and Ostry (2003, p. 8) claim that, "many texts are predicated on the discovery of a society where the sufferings of some allow for the pleasure, comfort and exaltation of others". *The Hunger Games* trilogy is an epitome of such a statement. It is precisely the exposure to these types of texts that enables readers to recognize the inequality in their own communities and lead them into finer understanding of the

exploitation of developing nations by the industrialized world. Easier than it may be to explain the response YA literature is attempting to provoke, that is to be eye opening and educational.

Thus, the idea of a crumbling society is not a brand new one; it is a recurrent theme that has existed since the 18th century. Dystopia, much like utopia, is a fictional society but it is turned upside down with extremely difficult life conditions normally set some time in the future. Such is the case with *Uglies, Divergent* and *The Hunger Games*, although the exact time setting of the novels is not stated. Dystopias are frequently written as warnings, or as satires, showing current trends extrapolated to a nightmarish conclusion. Dystopian is a vision of ominous and overpowering socio-political issues of the author's time that have been presented to the reader under the disguise of a fantasy world in an attempt to criticise the ideologies that constitute the reality. By presenting the worst-case scenario, dystopian novels attempt to criticise current social trends, political systems and human follies. Nevertheless, what quite often happens with YA dystopias is that the young readers fail to grasp the irony and instead identify with the ideology the protagonists are attempting to overthrow[3].

The aim of dystopian fiction can be seen as utopian, as its ultimate task is transformation. Jameson (in Moylan 2000, p. 54-55) suggests that "even the most anti-utopian expressions are 'in reality Utopian ones', are manifestations of a political unconscious acting on its 'longing for transfigured collective relationships', despite the denial or suppression of the name Utopia in doing so". However, one must be wary of the differences between the concepts of Utopia and Dystopia[4]. Dystopias are only presented as illusory Utopias, a perfect society that is maintained through oppressive control by the government.

The necessity of dystopias lies in the fact that they provide an impetus for change. Dystopian writing provides different views of political and social practices that are in essence problematic, however, in contemporary society, are taken for granted and considered as unavoidable. Moylan (2000, p. 66) brings forward the idea that "the

3 A simple Google search can provide an abundance of examples of adolescent readers failing to grasp the criticism of the dystopian (and our) society. For example, a test which determines which faction an individual would belong to (Which 'Divergent' Faction Are You?, 2015) or a quiz which determines which Tribute you would be (Which Hunger Games Tribute Would You Be?, 2015).

4 More about this subject can be read in the first chapter.

web of dystopian writing offers specific cultural artefacts that negotiate the processes of history, perception and social change". Engaged in an attempt of societal change, dystopian literature can provide a necessary thrust to improve the vision of the future. By doing so, it transcends its escapist denotation.

Dystopian novels tend to begin *in medias res*, in a living nightmare of a society, where the dystopian citizen is confronted by or confronts the society that s/he finds limiting. A disease, war, or some other kind of disturbance has forced the rulers to reconsider their practices of controlling the society and maintaining peace and preserving power. The citizens have no or very limited knowledge of their history and are imbedded in a society where they are taught from the early onset not to question anything. All aspects of life are controlled by a totalitarian regime, not excluding education, relationships, economic structure, social classes, political activities, nor sexuality. Targeting YA readers, it is unavoidable that the protagonists of YA dystopias be young hero(in)es who rebel against the unpermissive social system. This rebellion represents both the child-parent confrontation unavoidable in the journey to adulthood as well as resistance to governmental manipulation and control.

Dystopian literature describes fictious societies presented as significantly worse than our reality. It is often born out of a reaction against national, social, environmental or technological issues, ranging between the hopeful and pessimistic, militant and pacific. Although each YA dystopian novel has its own political and aesthetic orientation, we can distinguish particular themes in the genre that reflect on the central themes and concern of the contemporary world and are transferred onto dystopian landscape. Most of the novels analysed are not one dimensional, there is an abundance of overlapping when it comes to the themes present.

One of the major preoccupations of dystopian writing is the danger of **environmental catastrophes**. Novels like *Life As We Knew It* (2006) by Susan Beth Pfeffer and *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins depict the relationship between the young protagonist and the environment and, therefore, incorporate a sufficient representation of the environment as a significant influence on the plot and characters.

Life as We Knew It, the first of the "Last Survivors" trilogy followed by *The Dead and The Gone* (2008) and *This World We Live In* (2010), is set

in North-eastern Pennsylvania and is the closest to the contemporary readers' era. When an asteroid hits the moon, an environmental disaster ensues. The only real antagonists in this narrative are nature and human passivity, as the world is waiting for a *deux ex machina* to solve their problems. The President of the United States in his address raises hope in the general public, but what follows is a great disappointment when the Planet changes within a week. The reliance on technology has to be replaced with a new way of living, as the protagonist, sixteen-year-old Miranda, witnesses her friends being sold off to slavery, embracing radical religious belief and dying of plague and starvation. The natural disaster occurring is out of human control; they can only witness their lives disappearing, they can no longer use any of the technology because of the loss of power, go to school or work or engage in any of the everyday activities. Most of the time the characters do nothing but sit and wait, trying to survive until conditions improve. The "Last Survivors" trilogy is a painful reminder of western civilisation's reliance on technology, consumer society and government infrastructure which the protagonist and her family hope can fix the planet. They do not relocate or try to make changes in their lifestyles; instead, they indifferently wait for change to happen to them.

The novel *The Hunger Games* is a portrait of a dystopian future of a world that has been ravaged by an environmental apocalypse, war and rebellion, and replaced by Panem, a country consisting of the Capitol city (the seat of power) and twelve outlying and suffering districts. The first novel of the trilogy mostly takes place within the Hunger Games, a manufactured space where sixteen-your-old Katniss Everdeen has to rely on nature to outwit the Capitol that is dependent on technology. Though in its essence a classical tale of the antagonism between the rich and the poor, as the Districts suffer in poverty while attempting to produce goods necessary for the Capitol to flourish in its glory, *The Hunger Games* trilogy is a narrative that presents a protagonist who is capable of disseminating the dystopian society she is an integral part of and, in this process, reveals the inadequacies of the reader's reality. It is a cautionary tale depicting a world where power is in the hands of a very few tyrants who take pleasure in watching children kill each other for their entertainment, while workers are forced to slave on until extinction; yet, the novels still demonstrate

capacity for empathy and heroism survives even in such horrendous conditions (Dunn et al., 2012, pp. 6-7). A sixteen-year-old girl, Katniss Everdeen, the protagonist of the trilogy, volunteers to replace her younger sister, who has been chosen to represent her District at the annual Hunger Games, a vicious spectacle for the masses that sees twenty-four teenagers fighting to death in an arena until the last one remains alive. The last tribute standing is declared the winner, and it is promised that the district he/she is representing will be rewarded with an abundance of food and resources for the whole year, along with a house in Victor's Village for the victor and his/her family.

Another common trend within YA dystopian literature is **the reliance on technology** that almost completely erases any trace of individual thoughts or behaviours. The technological advancements since the beginning of the twenty-first century have not gone unnoticed by authors of YA literature. There has been an "explosion of information" with the new technology, causing a warning to what may happen with a sole reliance on electronics and newfound knowledge and equipment. Rather than using technology for good, such as the advancement of medicine and new discoveries, technology is overused, creating a technology-dependent society that is hopeless without the latest and greatest advancements. This dystopian element is one of the most applicable with today's society and the contemporary dependence on having the next big thing or the most recent smartphone model, all of which are prevalent issues with current teenagers and adults alike.

Scott Westerfeld's series *Uglies* (2005-2007), envisions a world in which the worth and perhaps the very existence of a person depend upon physical appearance. In this society, people are "uglies" until they turn sixteen when they undergo an operation to become "pretties". The protagonist of the novels, Tally[5], at the beginning of the first novel in the series, is looking across the river from her town to New Pretty Town where she knows she will be once she is made beautiful. The school has taught her that "Everyone judged everyone based on their appearance. People who were taller got better jobs, and people even voted for politicians just because they weren't as ugly as everybody" (Westerfield, 2005, p. 43). History teachers have told them that wars

5 Tally Youngblood is the protagonist of three of the four novels in the series (*Uglies*, *Pretties* and *Specials*), making only a brief appearance in the last novel in the series, *Extra*s.

broke out and "people killed one another over stuff like having different skin color," leading to the conclusion that unfirming and perfecting everyone creates peace. In the world of *Uglies* at the age of sixteen all citizens are subjected to plastic surgery and manipulation of brain tissue in order to create compliant and beautiful subjects. Lesions are implanted into the brain to modify behaviour of the citizens, the final result of which is disappearance of individuality and submission.

The desire to be transformed into an ideal version of one's self that is beautiful, immune to the threat of disease, and spared the ravages of age, is something that many of the readers have considered. However, as desirable as it seems, the thought of one's body being physically altered is fraught with anxiety and fear that the outcome might be something not quite human, with identity and sense of self possibly altered as well. Adolescence signals a newfound concern for physical appearance and how one appears to others. In the world of *Uglies*, anxieties and fears about appearance do not arise from the inevitability of transformation into a "pretty"; they arise from the fear of being excluded from the process.

Physical control and enslavement are nothing new to mainstream dystopias; totalitarianism is one of the most commonly used elements in many staple texts from the genre, including *1984* (1949) and *Fahrenheit 451* (1953). Mind control, economic constraint, and emotional restrictions depict societies that dehumanize the citizens, creating a sense of need that keeps the inhabitants perpetually in debt for an indefinite amount of time. The restraint even goes so far as control of the minds of citizens through government-induced drugs and mind-altering substances. The idea of enslavement corresponds very well with young adults, as they often feel pressured by authorities on a daily basis.

Divergent (2011) presents a dystopian society deeply divided into factions that are the most important determiners of identity. All sixteen-year-olds must decide either to stay in their parent's faction, in the safety of their community, or, to embrace new lives and cut all ties with their families. In *Divergent*, there are no racial, class or gender roles, but each faction is defined through qualities that are stereotypically connected with masculinity or femininity. The protagonist is born into Abnegation, the faction representing qualities such as cooperation, equality, sharing, community work, that are typically classified as

feminine. Tris decides to join Dauntless, the faction that is the most masculine of all (the other three are Candor, Amity and Erudite), one that values aggression and courage above all else, and effectively serves as the militia of the post-apocalyptic Chicago the novels are set in.

Abnegation is in primary control of the government, as they are selfless. Although in theory it is logical that the selfless faction be the one placed in charge and that people be placed into factions that reflect their talents and aptitudes, the idea of one group or type of people controlling all other types of people seems fundamentally unequal nevertheless. The impetus for the creation of the societal structure in *Divergent* is articulated by a leading member of Abnegation named Marcus at Tris's Choosing Ceremony, the event at which sixteen-year-olds must choose the faction they will belong to for the rest of their lives, unless they fail that faction's Initiation and become factionless:

> Decades ago our ancestors realized that it is not political ideology, religious belief, race, or nationalism that is to blame for a warring world. Rather, they determined that it was the fault of human personality – of humankind's inclination toward evil, in whatever form that is. They divided into factions that sought to eradicate those qualities they believed responsible for the world's disarray. (Roth, 2011, p. 32)

The Maze Runner's (2009), the first of a pentalogy, perplexing opening introduces the protagonist in this way: "When the doors of the lift crank open, the only thing Thomas can remember is his first name. But he's not alone. He's surrounded by boys who welcome him to the Glade, an encampment at the centre of a bizarre and terrible maze." Dashner, 2009, p. 3). After solar flares and a widespread disease have caused a drastic change in the world, Thomas, the protagonist of the story, finds himself trapped in a metal box without any recognition of who he is or how he got there. In this new world called the Glade, Thomas is living with all males in a society where someone is sent into the mysterious maze each month to fight off monsters known as Grievers, map the layout of the maze, and attempt to find a way out. One day, Teresa shows up in the Glade, making her the first female. She begins remembering vague ideas of how the world once was and how

she got to the Glade; she shares these ideas with Thomas, marking the two as disloyal and untrusted. They band together to try and unfold the truth behind their society, and find themselves entering the maze alone, unprepared, and unsure of what the future will hold.

The increase of technology and industrialisation expand human possibility while also threatening it because of the environmental harm that comes hand-in-hand with the increase of construction and creation. The ways in which modern day communities mistreat the natural world around them lead to global warming and other hazards that cause "social, political, and economic nightmares that sensitize readers to the dangers of environmental ruin at the same time that they depict young protagonists learning to adapt and survive in altered times"(Basu, Broad and Hintz, 2013, p. 3). Teenagers reading these types of dystopian stories learn that there is a problem with the current trend of harming the world in which they live, yet they still see that there are ways in which they can continue to survive, creating a sense of hope in the worst scenarios. There are many consequences associated with the degradation of the natural world, so adolescents can take the warning from environmental dystopias, take a break from their tablets and smartphones, and advocate for changes in the dingy air around them.

- Chapter Seven -

Issues of the YA Dystopian Genre

In an article for *The New York Times*, the author of *The Uglies*, Scott Westerfeld addresses the connection between dystopia, apocalypse and young adults, through posing the question: "What is the apocalypse but an everlasting snow day? An excuse to tear up all those college applications, which suddenly aren't going to determine the rest of your life?" (2010). Standing on the threshold of maturity, the young adult can only perceive the privileges of adulthood, but not the responsibilities.

Many YA dystopian novels feature protagonists who are male adolescents successfully overcoming totalitarian governments, scientific experiments or corrupt ideologies, however, female protagonists are just as successful in the subversion of identical ideals. Nevertheless, since they live in heteronormative societies demanding strict adherence to gender roles in order to survive, they are subject to constant evaluation of their respect of appropriate behaviour which must essentially be feminine (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 140). What often happens is that the protagonist is successful at changing the dystopian society, while their attempt at subverting the gender roles proves to be highly unsuccessful.

Female characters, particularly those represented in the nineteenth and early twentieth century literary texts were often seen as "passive" and "subordinate" (Brown & St. Claire, 2002, p. 6). As Joanne Brown and Nancy St. Clair claim, even at their most spirited even resistant moments, these young women remained paragons of spotless virtue (p. 7). Though intelligent, forthright and independent, the heroines of YA literature are all aware of their marginal positions; Louisa May Alcott's theatrical and independent Jo March must embrace marriage as the only form of normative femininity, while even contemporary Bella Swan, the protagonist of the *Twilight* trilogy (2005-2008), is perpetually obsessed with her boyfriend. The YA dystopian heroines are not secondary characters, unlike *Harry Potter*'s (1997-2007) Hermione Granger, brave and bright, but only a sidekick to the protagonist. Despite different personalities and experiences, the mentioned characters seem to be aware of the limitations of their age and gender, and attempt to manipulate the male characters in order to fulfil their desires[6].

Contemporary YA dystopian novels present a new brand of a female protagonist and in turn raise a few questions we will attempt to answer. What is of great interest to us is the reason for the creation of strong female heroines unlike those encountered in *Twilight* and other contemporary YA literature. The question is whether there is something intrinsic in the setting that facilitates and fosters such characters or whether it is merely a coincidence. The dystopian novels present protagonists who desire to overcome limitations of gender and age, but who are marginalised in the society, they are objectified by the society that strips them off of their identities and assumes absolute control of their lives. These young women as well as men attempt to recreate the worlds in which they live, making them more egalitarian, progressive and free.

Adolescence is characterised by rebellion and experimenting, as the quest for identity begins. Growing up in an oppressive society, there are two possibilities for the protagonists, to be secluded from the society or to rebel. Dystopias often accentuate the social conflict arising from the differences between behaving and acting in the "normal" or

6 At numerous occasions, Bella Swan is witnessed by the readers to be manipulating men in her surroundings by presenting herself as the ultimate "damsel in distress". Through subduing her personality, she is able to persuade her boyfriend, father and best friend to fulfil her wishes.

"accepted" manner as dictated by a group in power, and rejecting those behaviours in favour of choice and difference. Dystopias can offer the audience examples of how the characters in the story negotiate their positions between the choices offered. The negotiation of the character often represents an internal transformation or understanding that leads to personal growth.

Reading the Bildungsroman in YA Dystopia

As a genre, the Bildungsroman (formation novel) focuses on achieving adulthood, emphasising the importance of exiting adolescence and embracing the privileges of maturity at the expense of young adult restrictions. Traditionally, the narrative follows the trials of a character who enters into life in a state of blissful ignorance, experiences friendships and love, struggles with the harsh realities of life and reaches maturity. The genre is defined through its didactic role; it informs and influences the reader through the trials and tribulations of the protagonist. The presumption is that through social improvement, individual improvement can also be achieved. Some of the common characteristics of the Bildungsroman include the experience of childhood, generational conflict, alienation, romance and acceptance or rejection of social norms. Born into humble surroundings, the protagonists must seek future outside their environment, perform heroic deeds and eventually come to adulthood through these trials.

The subject of Bildungsroman novels is the development of the protagonist's mind and character in the passage from childhood through varied experiences—and often through a spiritual crisis—into maturity; this process usually involves recognition of one's identity and role in the world (Abrams & Harpham, 2015, p. 225). By their very nature, YA dystopian novels enable adolescent readers to imagine the future they desire and the path towards it. Loss and pain are used as incendiaries towards self-defining of the protagonists, who must construct their identities within the deeply-rooted social regulations and alter their position in the society. Considering that the Bildungsroman was originally perceived as a genre portraying the journey into maturity of a male protagonist, developing the identity that is coherent with his responsibilities as an adult, it would be

advantageous to consider the significance of gender in YA dystopias. Brown recognises how most of the definitions of the Bildungsroman are based on the model established by Goethe, describing a narrative based on fundamental belief in the possibility of human perfectibility and in progress of the society which would enable moral, social, physical and psychological growth of an individual (1992, p. 1). With the increase in the number of YA dystopias having female protagonists, came a rise in critical attention directed at those dystopias, particularly with reference to the difference between male and female protagonists of the Bildungsroman. In YA dystopias with female protagonists, the young women must make a transition from adolescence to maturity, however, unlike their male counterparts, they require the presence of possible romantic partners, who will be both the targets of their affection and mentors in the passage to adulthood. The social rules dictate that young women must be successfully coupled up in order to respect the *status quo*.

The main goal of the Bildungsroman is the description of being a man, while the female writing is concerned with what Butler terms as becoming a woman (Butler, 1986, p. 39). The formation of men is defined by the norms of self-reliance, self-control and self-sufficiency, while becoming a woman is defined by a different set of stereotypes, including nurturing and motherhood. The ending of the *Hunger Games* trilogy brings forth one such return to femininity, where the protagonist and her partner, Peeta, are parents of two children, a baby girl and a little boy, which is in stark contrast with the characterisation of Katniss who, on numerous occasions, expressed her decision never to have children. The contrast is even more visible in the film adaptation where it is obvious that the protagonist had children immediately after the conflict ended, whereas in the novel it is explained how it took Peeta eight years to convince her to have children. Katniss's self-definition is performed through cultural signifying practises performed in order to subordinate her to Peeta, who must assume the position of dominance in the family, whereas she is degraded to a story-teller instead of performer.

All main characters in YA literature are empowered through their maturation (Brown & St. Clair, 2002, p. 26). YA protagonists "find strength by valuing positive feminine characteristics instead of striving to be as competitive, assertive, and powerful as boys, even

though societal norms tend to endorse those latter qualities" (p. 27). Female protagonists of YA dystopias create a connection between power and femininity, borrowing from patriarchal ideals the power to assert themselves. Rebellion against patriarchy is necessary for the development of the female protagonist. They are undermining gender norms and fighting against discrimination. Inness claims that "the rise of the female action heroine was a sign of the different roles available to women in real life" (2004, p. 6). From this view, YA female protagonists are discursive indicators of shifting real-world social roles.

For the mischievous female protagonists of YA dystopian texts, their journeys of political resistance simultaneously illustrate their physical and intellectual transformations. They shift from a position of political naivety and inactivity to adopting active roles in shaping their social worlds. Grenby argues that the adventure stories for a young audience usually have protagonists who are unimportant, living on the margins of the community (2008, p. 173). The protagonists of YA dystopian texts do not begin their stories in positions of socio-political power: Katniss (*Hunger Games*) is living in an impoverished and oppressed district, herself a daughter of a deceased miner and a mentally unstable mother, forced to take care of her mother and younger sister, while Tris (*Divergent*) learns in Abnegation to serve others and not to question the faction system.

Trites has connected the recurring patterns in YA literature to power, claiming that power relations are the main issue of YA writing, one which stands as the main differentiator from children's literature:

> The chief characteristic that distinguishes adolescent literature from children's literature is the issue of how social power is deployed during the course of the narrative...Children's literature often affirms the child's sense of self and her or his personal power.
>
> But in the adolescent novel, protagonists must learn about the social forces that have made them what they are. They learn to negotiate the levels of power that exist in the myriad social institutions within which they must function. (Trites, 2000, pp. 2-3)

YA dystopias teem with social issues as well as the stimulation coming from them. Set in negative futures which may be constituted by anything from openly totalitarian regimes to more subtle, disciplinary deployments of power, the dystopian setting provides its protagonists with challenges that force them to both resist and embrace power in a myriad of ways. They reinvent the coming of age trope for young adults, while addressing anxieties of the contemporary era and the roles that teens may have to play in confronting them.

Lauren Oliver's trilogy, *Delirium*, comprised of *Delirium* (2011), *Pandemonium* (2012) and *Requiem* (2013), features many of the conventions which have thus far been distinguished as common hallmarks of the YA dystopian text: set in a near-future United States, it is centred around seventeen year old female protagonist Lena as she battles against the constraints of her society, finds her place in an alternate space of resistance, and negotiates romantic relationships in the process. Unlike *The Hunger Games* trilogy or Westerfeld's series, romance impinges on all elements of the *Delirium* trilogy, largely as a result of the conditions of the dystopia. The text is set in a world where love has been classified as disease and outlawed. The population is controlled by both physical and mental means: bodies and brains are subjected to physical alteration, while indoctrination ensures that they are largely convinced that the procedure, and the accompanying power structures that pervade society in the name of protection, exist for the benefit of survival of the species. Proven to be very popular with the readership, possibly because of the focus on the romantic trope, the *Delirium* trilogy is set in Portland, Maine, in what is apparently the near future; a compulsory brain operation has been developed to render people incapable of love. Similar to *Uglies*, the surgery here is compulsory, and in this case is administered to citizens around the time of their eighteenth birthday. Much like Tally, the protagonist Lena Halloway is initially entirely respectful of her society's methods. Despite a troubled family history, including her mother's apparent suicide as a result of being forced to undergo a series of unsuccessful operations, the protagonist is initially looking forward to the operations and justifies the action. Nevertheless, it all changes when she falls in love prior to the scheduled operation.

Rather than marking her as the traditional helpless female of many romance novels, Lena's romantic relationships with Alex and Julian

instead indicate the development of her consciousness and potential as a powerful feminist character. Although Alex initially influences her choice to turn her back on the disciplinary society in which she has been raised, she learns to adapt to life in the Wilds, into which she escapes to avoid the operation, quite quickly and within six months as progressed to being an undercover spy for the resistance. Elements of the Bildungsroman abound here, with the novels charting Lena's development from an obedient, nervous child to a strong, confident woman who uses any means necessary, including physical force, to fight the regime. She acknowledges this change herself, repeatedly stating that "the old Lena is dead" (Oliver, 2012, p. 3).

Lena's romantic relationships do play a significant part in her development. However, when alone (following Alex's "death") or in control (taking the dominant role with Julian) she asserts herself as a strong woman capable of fighting the regime. She is a feminist protagonist since she rejects the prescribed social role of the "good girl", replacing it with her own voice. Her transformation is not bequeathed by the male mentor, instead, she is motivating herself to be active and celebrate her own agency and voice (Trites, 1997, pp. 7-8). Having been timid throughout her childhood, afraid to argue or be noticed, Lena develops into an active character who has found and is comfortable with her voice. This chance to claim her agency is afforded to her by the dystopian nature of the text: while traditional romance novels are characterised by passive representation of women, the dystopian genre allows for the female protagonist to overcome the traditional submissive position of the object of attention and assert her subjectivity. Trites recognises how the feminist character's recognition of her own agency can lead to a triumph over the systematic oppression, defeat of evil, or succeeding at a typically male task, in spite of the lack of belief in those surrounding her (1997, p. 7).

Lena participates in the revolt against the dystopia which has destroyed the lives of so many of her friends and family, literally breaking down the walls that separate Portland from the Wilds. Such actions serve to show the extent to which Lena has developed throughout the novels, typical of the Bildungsroman and characteristic of the political action often depicted in dystopian texts. Hintz asserts that the YA dystopias possess a didactic quality which can be visible from the interplay between political action and developmental

narrative of adolescence (2002, p. 54). Although she loves both Julian and Alex, Lena seems to understand that she does not need either of them. Her future lies in rebuilding Portland and instigating revolution in other parts of the country. Despite her strength and success, Katniss (*The Hunger Games*) is forced to embrace normative femininity, while the outcome of the protagonist of *The Delirium* trilogy has a more empowering message, reminding the reader of the importance of acting locally and thinking globally.

YA narratives generally address various life stages which may be linked to self-actualisation, often leading to the protagonist coming of age and "finding oneself" in the process. Much of the *Divergent* trilogy is concerned with the concept of identity and discovering the self. The protagonist, Tris, is forced to choose a fraction she will belong to for the rest of her existence, when she discovers she has an aptitude for more than one faction. The flexibility of Tris's identity is inescapable and provides a central theme of the trilogy. Although a tale of coming-of-age, the subject matter of the *Divergent* trilogy includes fitting in, finding oneself and dealing with profound life changes. One of the crucial elements of individual self-identity is the sense of belonging to a group and the plot of *Divergent* relies heavily on this as from birth children are raised in accordance with a set of values deemed most important to their faction. They spend their childhoods being influenced, and often attempting to mould themselves, into the perfect epitome of that value. Tris, born into Abnegation, battles with the burden of having the Abnegation identity bestowed upon her throughout her formative years.

> When I look at the Abnegation lifestyle as an outsider, I think it's beautiful. When I watch my family move in harmony; when we go to dinner parties and everyone cleans together after without having to be asked; when I see Caleb help strangers carry their groceries, I fall in love with this life all over again. It's only when I try to live it myself that I have trouble. It never feels genuine. But choosing a different faction means I forsake my family. Permanently. (Roth, 2011, p. 24)

Tris feels that subjectivity is wholly bound up in group identity, and it is only upon receiving the results of her aptitude test that she is forced to consider what this really means. The discovery that she is Divergent is troubling for Tris. Such is the level of importance placed on faction life that the groups are united only in their agreement that "faction before blood" is a sentiment which should be shared by all (Roth, 2011, p. 43). Therefore, upon joining Dauntless she is determined to appear entirely allied to her new way of life. Her shedding of the name Beatrice in favour of Tris marks her first attempt at separating herself from her Abnegation past, a statement made also by Tobias[7], her instructor and eventual boyfriend.

The dissolution of Tris's society as it exists at the beginning of the novel coincides with Tris's own shifting identity, since both begin with rigid values; ultimately that rigidity is shown to make both societal and individual identities brittle and destructible. By testing as a Divergent, unable to be categorised into just one of the factions, Tris represents a threat to this stagnant society and as such, functions as an agent of change and progress as her identity develops. Additionally, the static quality of these societies seems to be the antithesis to the Bildungsroman with its formation of a total person, by definition becoming someone different than she once was. Both Lena and Tris actively work to undermine the societies that oppress them and are willing to sacrifice their lives for the greater good.

Through this introduction to the protagonists and societies of *Delirium* and *Divergent*, the opposition between the society and individual in each novel leads to the conclusion that society is the antagonist which teaches the protagonist an important lesson of life. The controlling forces exerted upon the people in the two texts not only establish an antagonistic relationship between government and individual, but demand an examination of both sides of the conflict. Though there is indisputably one protagonist in each novel, it would be a disservice to these novels as dystopias and Bildunsgromans to neglect the societies themselves. Hence, the societies are illuminated by the ways in which they have influenced the representative protagonists. In many ways the antagonism between protagonist

7 Tobias, also a transfer from the Abnegation faction, has changed his name to Four in the Dauntless community, in an effort to separate himself from his past identity. His new name echoes the number of fears he has revealed in a simulation meant to force the faction members to confront their fears.

and society is also an antagonism towards the self, since society is instrumental in forming the foundations of its citizens.

The Bildungsroman follows an individual as he or she moves through the world and forms an identity, eventually finding a place in society. In the world of YA dystopias that presents death as preferable to not belonging to the community, both the formation of identity and the idea of belonging are put under pressure such that belonging overrides identity. Being fractionless for Tris equals death, the community gives her identity, but it simultaneously robs her of the possibility of forming her own identity. The desire to belong to a community suggests that being visible would mean not belonging, creating a relationship between the protagonist and society. These YA novels create communities that the protagonists, in order to form their identities, cannot grow used to but instead must reject – they cannot take the easy way of belonging to society's set categories, but must become uncomfortably visible and different in order to make their identities and, perhaps, new communities.

Reading the Body in YA Dystopia

YA dystopias address the day-to-day concerns of contemporary adolescents regarding their interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships, such as plastic surgery, social networking, career choices, consumerism, as well as perceptions of femininity and masculinity. Seemingly primarily concerned with issues of opposing the authorities in order to improve the conditions of living of the majority, *Uglies* in effect focuses on identity issues – in particular regarding gender roles and physical appearance. To be accepted in society, the protagonist of *Uglies*, a sixteen-year-old girl, must transform herself to attain the thin societal ideal. Similar to other YA dystopias, such as *Divergent* and *Hunger Games*, *Uglies* is preoccupied with body image, as well as the influence of physical appearance on social life, love life and work.

Increased body dissatisfaction in women, a rise in the desire for weight loss and an increase in eating disorders are to be blamed on the Westernised ideal of beauty that equates slenderness and physical attraction and the increased preference of a very slim body (Wiseman et al., 1992). Mass media is the most powerful means of transfer of

socio-cultural ideas, the fashion industry, popular culture as well as social networks successfully propagate the beauty ideal, without revealing that the individuals represented are not realistic visions, but digitally manipulated images. Tally's first glimpse of a magazine from the past is a very impressive one:

> Tally's eyes widened as Shay turned the pages, pointing and giggling. She'd never seen so many wildly different faces before. Mouths and eyes and noses of every imaginable shape, all combined insanely on people of every age. And the *bodies*. Some were grotesquely fat, or weirdly overmuscled, or uncomfortably thin, and almost all of them had wrong, ugly proportions. But instead of being ashamed of their deformities, the people were laughing and kissing and posing, as if all the pictures had been taken at some huge party. (Westerfeld, 2005, p. 189).

Tally's response is indicative of the indoctrination she has been subjected to, she screams out "Who are these freaks?" (Westerfeld, 2005, p. 189). Adolescent girls in the Western world are subject to very powerful cultural pressures to be very thin (Smolak, 2004) and many scholars agree that for young women adolescence is the period characterized by body image concerns that are the result of physical changes leading them away from a beauty ideal of thinness (Burgess et al., 2006). The protagonists of a great number of YA dystopias are adolescent young women who internalise the societal beauty ideals.

YA dystopias teach the target audience that beauty implies power, those thin and attractive will succeed while the "uglies" will be secluded and mistreated. From her childhood, Tally has been taught that she is "flawed" and is eager to become "normal". The world of *Uglies* is a society in which that what is natural is seen as pathological and only through plastic surgery can an individual become "normal", the same as everyone else[8]. A surgically produced body for Tally is a means to a

8 The last decade has seen an increase in makeover reality TV series (a trend that began with *Extreme Makeover* (2002-2007), followed by *Extreme Weight Loss* (2011-), and *The Swan* (2004-2005)) which normalise and naturalise plastic surgery and identity alterations that present the body as a sculpture that can continuously be re-modelled to meet the changing demand of societal beauty ideals. Possibly the most intriguing aspect of the makeover programmes is the fact that, ultimately, all

better life, as an "ugly" she is invisible and unacceptable. Nevertheless, Sichtermann claims that beauty rests in uniqueness, when everyone is the same, beauty will lose its meaning. She presupposes that we all desire beauty which, paradoxically, demonstrates that the essence of beauty is that it is not obtainable for everyone (Sichtermann, 1986, p. 59). If all looked identical, no one would notice the beautiful.

The society depicted is not overtly a patriarchal one, both men and women undergo plastic surgery to achieve "sameness", yet, having the narrative unfold from the perspective of the female protagonist, contributes to the presentation of the cult of femininity. Though she does not desire a plastic surgery to be more attractive to any particular man, Tally requires recognition from her best friend, Paris, who has already undergone the surgery and who, until she becomes a "pretty", deems her "invisible"[9]. She fractures her identity into two, "this Tally" and the "new Tally" (Westerfeld, 2005, pp. 38-39), where she defines herself through only her physical appearance and hopes the plastic surgery will help her achieve self-recognition. This feeling of "invisibility", characteristic of YA literature, in particular of the Bildungsroman, is a metaphor for the marginalization of adolescents in the society, one which moves away from teenage angst. The novels portray a struggle for recognition and self-definition of the young woman.

"When a woman internalizes a fragmented body image and accepts its 'flawed' identity, each part of the body becomes a site for the 'fixing' of her physical abnormality" (Balsamo, 1999, pp. 155-156), and Tally cannot contemplate delaying this "fixing" any longer. Despite her desire to become pretty, Tally's apprehension at the extensive body-modification which she is required to undergo in order to do so is evident when she is questioned by a new ugly about looking unhappy on the morning of her sixteenth birthday:

> Should she tell this new ugly that sometime this afternoon, her body was going to be opened up, the bones ground down to the right shape, some of them stretched or padded, her nose cartilage and cheekbones stripped out and replaced with programmable plastic,

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the participants resemble each other.

9 Here invisibility equates non-existence, especially relevant as the plastic procedure coincides with the 'coming of age' and 'visibility' in the legal domain.

> skin sanded off and reseeded like a soccer field in spring? That her eyes would be laser-cut for a lifetime of perfect vision, reflective implants inserted under the iris to add sparkling, gold flecks to their indifferent brown? Her muscles all trimmed up with a night of electrocize and all her baby fat sucked out for good? (Westerfeld, 2005, p. 97)

Tally is slightly uncomfortable at the thought of what the surgery entails, as evidenced also by her revulsion when Shay describes the process as one where "they grind and stretch your bones to the right shape, peel off your face and rub all your skin away, and stick in plastic cheekbones so you look like everybody else" (Westerfeld, 2005, p. 50). Nevertheless, Tally and her contemporaries enthusiastically assent to the operation. The extent of the norm's power here is evidenced by the plight of "uglies-for-life, the few people for whom the operation wouldn't work" (Westerfeld, 2005, p. 83). Tally states that uglies-for-life "were allowed in public, but most of them preferred to hide. Who wouldn't? Uglies might look goofy, but at least they were young. Old uglies were really unbelievable" (Westerfeld, 2005, p. 83). Her attitude here confirms that she is complicit in the execution of normalising judgement, and that this execution is effective in inhibiting others.

YA dystopian fiction carries a strong pedagogic load and, in the case of the *Uglies* series, perhaps at times can be unnecessarily explicit in its teachings, still in many ways it is faithful to the dystopian form, utilising cognitive estrangement to draw the reader's attention to elements in their world which may as yet have escaped their notice. For example, in an attempt to highlight the difficulties with the trend toward homogeneity, Westerfeld employs a somewhat heavy-handed metaphor. On her journey to the Smoke, Tally encounters the rangers, who spread fires across the mountains. They explain to Tally that the fires are necessary "because of phragmipedium panther" which "used to be one of the rarest plants in the world. A white tiger orchid. In rust days, a single bulb was worth more than a house" (Westerfeld, 2005, p. 181). Since then, however, the Rusties engineered the species to adapt to more varied conditions, an endeavour which was:

> Too successful. They turned into the ultimate weed. What we call a monoculture. They

> crowd out every other species, choke trees and grass ...Everything the same. After enough orchids build up in an area, there aren't enough hummingbirds to pollinate them ...So, the orchids eventually die out, victims of their own success, leaving a wasteland behind. Biological zero. (Westerfeld, 2005, pp. 181-82)

When the protagonist of the *Divergent* (2011-2013) trilogy, Tris[10], lets her hair loose and wears make-up for the first time in her life, she is not only rebelling against her parents and their life choices, but also attempting to find her own voice in the world of societal divisions. The Abnegation value frugality above all, and slim bodies are achieved through strict control of the food intake. Obesity is treated as a character flaw, personified in sloth, powerlessness and apathy. Tris is thin, non-voluptuous, but during her initiation into Dauntless, she notices her muscles developing and body shape changing (Roth, 2011, p. 72). It is a more masculine body type she is developing, but not deviant from the implications of traditional femininity. The beauty ideal promoted by the popular culture presents the aesthetic ideal that is perfected through dieting and exercise, the two practices that turn Tris into the perfect role model for adolescent girls. Additionally, she is not only very attractive but is also unaware of her good looks, constantly questioning her appearance and finding faults, "You aren't going to be able to make me pretty," she tells her friend who is helping her wear make-up for the first time (Roth, 2011, p. 86). The lack of self-esteem and unawareness of the beauty possessed is not only typical of adolescence but represents a characteristic typical of female YA fiction. The most striking example may be the most popular series of the first decade of the 21st century, the *Twilight* saga, the protagonist of which, Bella Swan, is a strikingly beautiful young woman who has very low self-esteem and is completely oblivious of the effect she has on every man she encounters.

A time of dramatic bodily changes, adolescence is also characterized by an increasing importance of interpersonal relationships. Body image is of utmost importance when it comes to self-esteem of both young men and women, who place more importance on their

10 The protagonist's name originally is Beatrice, but she opts for the shorter, more aggressive version and effectively is reborn through the act of self-naming.

appearance than adults and report significantly higher levels of body dissatisfaction (Grogan, 2008, p. 143). Adolescence is a time of learning, of trying to understand what it means to be a man/woman, and for adolescents the task of embracing and questioning the dominant cultural representations of what femininity/masculinity represents is extremely arduous. Particularly susceptible to peer pressure, adolescents tend to bond over issues of physical appearance. When first in a group of Dauntless initiates, Tess stands out, she is wearing a grey dress and her hair is long and dull, but as the first novel progresses, in order to be accepted by the others, she is making changes, effectively rejecting her previous identity and embracing her new faction.

The normal physical changes taking place in puberty coincide with the process of choosing a faction in *Divergent*, as Tess moves from Abnegation to Dauntless, she is embracing a new gender identity as well. She lets go of her unnoticeable "grey clothes, the plain hairstyle, and the unassuming demeanor" (Roth, 2011, p. 6) and replaces it with "noticeable" (Roth, 2011, p. 87), sexualized self. The main source of dissatisfaction for adolescents is their physical appearance, their reflection in the mirror. Interestingly, one of the striking rules of Abnegation is their insistence on avoiding the usage of mirrors, in order to avoid vanity or any hint of sexuality altogether.

Much of the appeal of *The Hunger Games* trilogy stems from the way it invites the reader to reflect on philosophical and moral quandaries such as questions concerning altruism, morality, authenticity and how to resist evil without succumbing to it. Hintz and Ostry (2003, p. 13) also support this notion through their belief that speculative fiction gives readers the freedom to "open the vistas of new worlds" and inspire them to change the world around them. Moreover, they (Hintz and Ostry, 2003, p. 13) claim that, as children become progressively more controlled, for instance by the media, so will the need for books that address the desire for agency increase, which is exactly what the current trend is about. Furthermore, in reality, young adults are powerless individuals of a citizenry but in YA literature, especially in dystopias they emerge as powerful leaders who alter society's course (Hintz and Ostry, 2003, p. 15).

Appearances are important because, according to Olthouse (2012, p. 47) "The power of perception is hermeneutical. And as with any

act of interpretation, the audience's perceptions can influence the real outcomes. What begins as figurative can become literal". Image is everything in the Games and it is very difficult to tell the real apart in such a surreal world. As Haymitch, a former winner of the Hunger Games and mentor to the two representatives from District 12, Peeta and Katniss, correctly states, "Who cares! It's all a big show, It's all how you're perceived" (Collins, 2008, p. 164). In addition, other characters, most notably the protagonist, are aware of this, "Having watched the tribute interviews all my life, I know there's truth to what he's saying. If you appeal to the crowd, either by being humorous or brutal or eccentric, you gain favour" (Collins, 2008, p. 141). And she knows how to appeal to the crowd, "they eat that stuff up in the Capitol" (Collins, 2008, p. 165).

The tributes are before being sent to the arena beautified at the Remake Centre where the traditional narrative of 'doing femininity' is inscribed onto Katniss's body:

> I've been in the Remake Center for more than three hours and I still haven't met my stylist. Apparently he has no interest in seeing me until Venia and the other members of my prep team have addressed some obvious problems. This has included scrubbing down my body with a gritty foam that has removed not only dirt but at least three layers of skin, turning my nails into uniform shapes, and primarily, ridding my body of hair. My legs, arms, torso, underarms, and part of my eyebrows have been stripped of the stuff, leaving me like a plucked bird, ready for roasting. (Collins, 2008, p. 61)

The tributes are mere puppets in the hands of the Capitol, they have no control over their lives. One way how power is exercised is the treatment of Katniss's body at the Remake Centre where she is objectified, turned into an item ready for consumption by the consumer-driven Capitol. The societies are constantly inventing new ways of achieving the beauty ideal, while the perpetual social erasing of undesirable physical appearance becomes the paramount element of social identity.

In addition to the beautification process, the ruling class controls the masses in other creative ways such as organising a ceremony preceding the slaughter. As Detweiler (2013) states, "When the 'Girl on Fire' enters Panem in her chariot, we see how 'bread and circuses' serve as a convenient distraction for an oppressive empire". The ceremonies are, Collins (2008, p. 82) shows, elaborately organized, "Pairs of tributes are being loaded into chariots pulled by teams of four horses. Ours are coal black. The animals are so well trained, no one even needs to guide their reins". The process is like a well-oiled machine,

> The opening music begins. It's easy to hear, blasted around the Capitol. Massive doors slide open revealing the crowdlined streets. The ride lasts about twenty minutes and ends up at the City Circle, where they will welcome us, play the anthem, and escort us into the Training Center, which will be our home/ prison until the Games begin (Collins, 2008, p. 83).

The diseases of contemporary society feature prominently throughout the various TV shows, "my stylist will dictate my look for the opening ceremonies tonight anyway. I just hope I get one who doesn't think nudity is the last word in fashion" (Collins, 2008, p. 66). Katniss notices this and is surprised by a deviant, "I'm taken aback by how normal he looks. Most of the stylists they interview on television are so dyed, stenciled, and surgically altered they're grotesque" (2008, p. 77). According to Kellner (2003, p. 7), "Fashion is historically a central domain of the spectacle, and today producers and models, as well as the actual products of the industry, constitute an enticing sector of media culture".

Collins (2008, p. 146, pp. 430-431) pays special attention to the dresses Katniss wears, "my dress is entirely covered in reflective precious gems, red and yellow and white with bits of blue that accent the tips of the flame design. The slightest movement gives the impression I am engulfed in tongues of fire" and "The sheer fabric softly glows. Even the slight movement in the air sends a ripple up my body. By comparison, the chariot costume seems garish, the interview dress too contrived. In this dress, I give the illusion of wearing candlelight".

They always seem to feature fire, and her attire for the second Games is no less fascinating,

> The costume looks deceptively simple at first, just a fitted black jumpsuit that covers me from the neck down. He places a half crown like the one I received as victor on my head, but it's made of a heavy black metal, not gold. Then he adjusts the light in the room to mimic twilight and presses a button just inside the fabric on my wrist. I look down, fascinated, as my ensemble slowly comes to life, first with a soft golden light but gradually transforming to the orange-red of burning coal. I look as if I have been coated in glowing embers — no, that I am a glowing ember straight from our fireplace. The colors rise and fall, shift and blend, in exactly the way the coals do (Collins, 2009, p. 248).

Again, the tributes use the TV shows as a part of their survival strategy. Cinna advises Katniss and Peeta, "When you're on the chariot this time, no waving, no smiling. I just want you to look straight ahead, as if the entire audience is beneath your notice (Collins, 2009, p. 249)". And they comply,

> The voice of the crowd rises into one universal scream as we roll into the fading evening light, but neither one of us reacts. I simply fix my eyes on a point far in the distance and pretend there is no audience, no hysteria. I can't help catching glimpses of us on the huge screens along the route, and we are not just beautiful, we are dark and powerful. (...) We are unforgiving. (Collins, 2009, p. 255)

Katniss gives the readers insight into this by stating,

> This is a very calculated look. Nothing Cinna designs is arbitrary. I bite my lip trying to figure out his motivation. "I thought it'd be something more . . . sophisticated looking," I say. "I thought Peeta would like this better," he answers carefully. Peeta?

> No, it's not about Peeta. It's about the Capitol and the Gamemakers and the audience (Collins, 2008, p. 431).

Furthermore, fashion is used to appeal to the audience, "'No, you aspire to design your outfit and be like me, your fashion hero,' says Cinna. He hands me a small stack of cards. 'You'll read these off camera while they're filming the clothes. Try to sound like you care" (Collins, 2009, p. 48) and, "I start bobbing around like a puppet, holding up outfits and saying meaningless things like 'Don't you love it?' The sound team records me reading from my cards in a chirpy voice so they can insert it later, then I'm tossed out of the room so they can film my/Cinna's designs in peace" (Collins, 2009, pp. 48 -49). The clothes, taken out of the context of the Capitol, are more than fashion statements. They are not only an entertainment tool but a revolutionary one too, within the society of the spectacle,

> I'm in a dress of the exact design of my wedding dress, only it's the color of coal and made of tiny feathers. Wonderingly, I lift my long, flowing sleeves into the air, and that's when I see myself on the television screen. Clothed in black except for the white patches on my sleeves. Or should I say my wings. Because Cinna has turned me into a mockingjay (Collins, 2009, pp. 303 – 304).

Detweiler (2013) reminds the readers that we are invited to see through the Capitol's façade: a façade which is made out of parades, fashion items and flairs. Hence, the ceremony itself is a spectacle within a spectacle.

Once in the hands of the Capitol's entertainment industry, both Peeta, her fellow tribute, and Katniss become objectified. She is groomed by the standards of female beauty and femininity of the Capitol, her stylist's choice of costume transforms her into 'the girl on fire', while her mentor Haymitch tries to teach how to adopt a media personality. Nevertheless, it is Peeta's public confession of his emotions for her that make Katniss palatable and desirable for the public of Panem, "there I am, blushing and confused, made beautiful by Cinna's hands, desirable by Peeta's confession, tragic by circumstance, and by all accounts, unforgettable" (Collins, 2009, p.

160). Objectified and victimized, by the Capitol in the first novel and by the rebels in ensuing works, the protagonist needs to reconstruct her personality and become a hero of her own narrative.

Reading the Romance in YA Dystopia

In *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature*, Janice Radway examines romance novel readers and observes that texts of this genre, which are generally relatively formulaic, tend to rely upon a conclusion which fulfils for its readers the "utopian promise that male-female relationships can be managed successfully" (1984, p. 74). While Lena's struggle against the restraints of her dystopian society provides the central premise of the *Delirium* trilogy, this is a series explicitly about love. The male-female relationship which Radway recognises as being central to the traditional romance novel is undeniably vital to its development, and perhaps to its success. In *Delirium*, *Pandemonium* and *Requiem*, Oliver combines traditional romance conventions with dystopian tropes that enable her to subvert these same conventions. The result is an apparent attempt to provide the YA reader with a female hero who claims agency through her negotiation of the challenges presented both by her surroundings and her inter-personal relationships.

In many YA dystopias, the fight for a better world is itself a fight for love, as dystopian forces keep teenagers from choosing their own mates. The dystopian mode provides a conductive setting within which to realise the potential of the female hero, though some authors have perhaps been more successful than others at ensuring that the romantic entanglements depicted operate as an empowering motivation for resistance, rather than as an ultimately limiting force which diminishes the protagonists' agency. Many writers of YA dystopian fiction have turned to the formula of the love triangle in their negotiation of such complexities, and Oliver is one of these. Similar to *Uglies* and *The Hunger Games*, *Delirium*'s protagonist finds herself entangled in two complex relationships: firstly with Alex, her first love and a lifelong member of the resistance, and later with Julian Fineman, son of the founder of the anti-deliria lobby group "Deliria-Free America".

In *Delirium*, the love triangle occurs as a result of Lena's belief that Alex has been captured and killed during their attempted escape from Portland into the Wilds. Lena's relationship with Alex is the nexus around which the action in the first novel in the series revolves. As a result of their relationship, she transitions from a passive, obedient girl to a young woman who is gradually coming to understand the ills of her society and is willing to risk her life to experience everything it has tried to keep from her. Lena's feelings for Alex develop steadily throughout *Delirium*, and by the end of this first novel in the series she is ready to admit to herself that she is in love:

> He swivels his head toward my voice, a grin splitting his face, spreading his arms as though to say, You knew I would come, didn't you? It reminds me of how he looked the first time I ever saw him on the balcony in the labs, all twinkle and flash, like a star winking through the darkness just for me. And in that second I'm so filled with love it's as though my body transforms into a single blazing beam of light, shooting up, up, up, beyond the room and walls and city: as though everything has dropped away behind us, and Alex and I are alone in the air, and totally free. (Oliver, 2011, p. 339)

One traditional convention of romance literature, according to Beth Younger, is that romance acts as a social catalyst helping the protagonist see herself as separate from her family. Romance helps young women achieve independence, since they are physically separated from the traditional family structure (2009, p. 74). Lena's experiences with both boys are significant in helping her to empower herself against her oppressive surroundings. Her time with Alex helps her to separate herself from her family and see her world for what it really is, while meeting Julian enables her to move on from her heartbreak, and his treatment by those in authority serves to fuel her resolve to dedicate herself to life in the resistance. Additionally, the physical nature of Lena's relationships with both young men is significant in marking her passage from child to woman. In YA literature, sexual experience is a common metaphor for maturing, hence, for many protagonists of YA literature, sexuality marks a coming-of-age helping them transition

from childhood to adulthood. Although Lena is never explicitly said to have had sex with either one of the young men, still, the physical contact presented marks the end of her childhood.

In the *Delirium* series, Lena and the two young men are left standing at the end of the final novel. Although Lena appears initially to be reuniting with Alex, who tells her: "I won't let you go again" (Oliver, 2013, p. 389), she later explains that although she loves him, "it's more complicated than that" (Oliver, 2013, p. 388). When she sees Julian, it becomes clear that she has not chosen either of them definitively, nor is she certain about what might lie ahead for the three of them. What follows is a very powerful feminist message, the protagonist realises that she does not need any of the two men, what is important for her is the revolution and rebuilding the shattered world.

The beginning of *The Hunger Games* introduces an androgynous looking protagonist who is hunting, while reflecting on the failed attempt at drowning the younger sister's cat. Katniss's behaviour can be associated with hegemonic masculinity, she is unemotional, aggressive, adventurous, direct, leadership oriented and unconcerned with her physical appearance (Connell, 1995). On numerous occasions, Katniss is shown to possess all of these traits: following Peeta's televised declaration of love, she physically assaults him (Collins, 2008, p. 163). She may be perceived as unemotional at times, showing little empathy towards her mother and finding it difficult to relate to her contemporaries or communicate her feelings. Certainly, she is adept at separating feelings from ideas. This is perhaps best exemplified by Gale's observation that her past behaviour suggests that she will coldly choose between him and Peeta, predicting that "Katniss will pick whoever she thinks she can't survive without" (Collins, 20101, p. 385). Following her father's death in a mining accident, she has taken her father's place in the family, since neither her mentally unstable mother nor younger sister could assume responsibility and throughout the trilogy she continues embracing leadership roles.

Throughout the novel Katniss is continually instructed to alter her appearance/behaviour to embrace normative femininity, before the reaping Gale tells her to wear something pretty for the ceremony (Collins, 2008, p. 17). This is later followed by Haymitch's warning that she needs to change her personality for television, because "You've got about as much charm as a dead slug" (Collins, 2008, p.

142). In dystopian societies the ruling power prescribes and sanctions normal and deviant behaviour by limiting the practices and thoughts of the population. Katniss is advised to 'improve' her personality and physical appearance by the male, masculine and patriarchal figures in her life. Embracing this is not easy for Katniss as throughout the trilogy she is depicted as finding it difficult to identify with many of the expectations inscribed on the female body.

The only male character not influencing Katniss to change her appearance is Peeta, since, like herself, he undertakes a gender performance that is in many ways contrary to traditional expectations. He exhibits many of the most common traits stereotypically associated with females: he is aware of others' feelings, tactful, gentle, quiet and neat (Connell, 1995). He is nurturing, not only in his attempts to protect Katniss, but also in his dealings with others, such as when he takes it upon himself to clean up a drunk and sick Haymitch soon after their first meeting. His hobbies are baking and decorating cakes, and has at least at one occasion saved Katniss's life by providing her with food (Collins, 2008, p. 35-39).

Not ashamed to publically declare his love for Katniss, he is also the one who wishes to marry and have children. Compared to Gale, Peeta is not masculine enough, "It's not that Peeta's soft, exactly... But there are things you don't question too much, I guess, when your home always smells like baking bread, whereas Gale questions everything" (Collins, 2008, p. 360). Having been raised in a relatively privileged family, Peeta is considered to be weaker than Gale and Katniss, and therefore less masculine.

In an effort to dismiss agency of its citizens, the Capitol regulates sexuality. Katniss is initially forced into a relationship with Peeta by Haymitch and Peeta who contrive the relationship in order to improve the chances of survival for the both of them. Nevertheless, following the establishment of the relationship, it is President Snow who propagates maintaining the charade and inflicting disciplinary actions to those surrounding Katniss to the extent that she begins to question her feelings. An independent young woman with no interest in romantic relationships, Katniss believes there is no alternative but to conform:

> I will never have a life with Gale, even if I want to.
> I will never be allowed to live alone. I will have to be

> forever in love with Peeta. The Capitol will insist on it. I'll have a few years maybe, because I'm still only sixteen, to stay with my mother and Prim. And then ...and then ...There's only one future, if I want to keep those I love alive and stay alive myself. I'll have to marry Peeta. (Collins, 2009, p. 53)

At different instances in the trilogy, Katniss shows emotions for the two young men, kissing Gale on more than one occasion and expressing grief at not having the possibility to have a romantic relationship with him. On the other hand, Katniss's true feelings for Peeta are more difficult to decipher. She is aware that she is coerced by the Capitol into this relationship, "one of the few freedoms we have in District 12 is the right to marry who we want or not to marry at all. And now even that has been taken away from me" (Collins, 2009, p. 54). Here, romance is used to regulate gender performance. The public performance of their relationship requires exaggerating and stereotyping for the pleasure of the viewer. Katniss forces herself to be tender and gentle to Peeta, kissing him, both when she knows they are being filmed as well as when she can assume they are being viewed. In a public relationship Peeta takes a more masculine role, while she is shown choosing a wedding dress in a TV fashion show, he is asserting himself through actively making decisions regarding both of them without prior agreement.

The binary opposition of gender roles (masculinity vs. femininity) is shown as influencing the protagonist's decision to choose a romantic partner. Once the revolution is over, Katniss justifies her resolution to spend her life with Peeta: "I have plenty of fire myself. What I need is the dandelion in the spring" (Collins, 2010, p. 453). She rejects the possibility of being with Gale since he is too similar to her, and the social norm dictates that the gender dichotomy be respected. *The Hunger Games* trilogy, turning away from social and political problems that have fuelled the narrative, ends in a pastoral setting of a heteronormative life; Peeta is playing with their little blond boy, while Katniss is holding in her arms an angelic-looking baby. Instead of partaking in building a new society or rejoicing in new-fangled autonomy, she returns to domesticity, embracing the roles of mother and wife.

The third series we want to analyse is *Divergent*, indeed an exception amongst YA dystopias since it does not feature a love triangle. The protagonist is involved in a highly conventional relationship, albeit set in a dystopian setting, which influences her identity formation and development as an instigator of the revolution. Tris has had almost no exposure to physical affection, having lived all her life in a faction that prohibits any individuality. However, for Tris the romantic relationship provides a catalyst for self-discovery, her developing relationship with Tobias becomes a tool for developing and understanding her identity and the power within it.

The romantic relationship represents a rejection of the Abnegation ideals; the protagonist must rebel against the value instilled in her as a child and assert herself as an individual. Despite her initial disgust at physical affection, it is Tris who initiates her relationship with Tobias: "I stare at him. I feel my heartbeat everywhere, even in my toes. I feel like doing something bold, but I could just as easily walk away. I am not sure which option is smarter, or better. I am not sure that I care. I reach out and take his hand. His fingers slide between mine. I can't breathe" (Roth, 2011, p. 274). Nevertheless, her awakening sexuality must be controlled, in a simulation it proves to be one of her fears: "I have been attacked by crows and men with grotesque faces; I have been set on fire by the boy who almost threw me off a ledge; I have almost drowned – twice–and this is what I can't cope with? This is the fear I have no solutions for – a boy I like, who wants to ... have sex with me?" (Roth, 2011, p. 395)

The author here assumes a didactic role, telling the YA readers to consider sex carefully, nevertheless, presenting the protagonist as a vulnerable young woman is successful in affirming normative femininity. Tris's inclination to regularly discourage Tobias in his advances, despite the fact that she desires him and wants to have sex, serves to weaken her depiction as a strong female protagonist. Disregarding her own wishes, here she is portrayed as controlled by her impression of what young women "should" allow themselves to enjoy. Her refusal to fully accept her developing sexual identity disrupts the image of her as a resistant figure, as well as the chronology of their relationship that is typical of romance fiction. The protagonist develops from a timid child to a brave young woman eventually

embraces her burgeoning sexuality, which coincides with her growing incentive to rebel against the regime.

Tris's maturity is indicated through an intimate experience with Tobias the night before she dies. Whether or not their relationship is consummated is a question that remained unanswered. When the author was asked that, in an interview for *The Independent*, she lamented: "I was concerned about not alienating my very young readers. I remember reading books at that age and stopping because I wasn't comfortable. I'm not trying to talk down to them. It's definitely a scene of great intimacy. That's what was important. I didn't want to have smut on the page. I don't want to titillate." (Kidd, 2014) What is indicative in the reply is the didactic cause on part of the author, while the readers are left to decide for themselves how they will interpret the scene, especially considering the *medias res* ending of the chapter. In spite of deliberate ambiguity, the majority of the YA readers have interpreted the passage as a sex scene and have taken to debate the couple's final night together on online forums.

The Abnegation faction perceives love as the ultimate self-sacrifice, echoing the Franciscan view of repressing personal desires and promoting the cult of self-sacrifice (Kaufmann, 2011, p. 164). Making the ultimate sacrifice, in an effort to save her brother's life, Tris replaces her brother who wanted to make amends for his past wrongs by risking his life to destroy the current regime. In death, the protagonist's identity is restored, the reader witnesses Tris "who knew who she was" (Roth, 2013). In *Divergent* she is not certain whether sacrificing yourself to save someone you love is enough to be forgiven for selfishness and violence, however, she is determined she will be forgiven just before she is to die in Allegiant. Tris has literally fulfilled not only a journey to finding self and identity but also her destiny to be truly selfless and courageous.

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The female protagonists featured in the series discussed are undoubtedly a welcome progression from the days when male protagonists dominated YA dystopian writing. Depicted as strong, brave women, the protagonists are resolved to oppose the tyrannical rulers and capable of using their bodies to engage in resistance against the dominant power structures which engulf them. The depictions of

successful young women are in part to account for the popularity of the genre, especially among young women. In each of these novels, the awakening occurs, however, not always influenced by the protagonist's own desires, but under the influence of a young man. In *Uglies*, *Divergent* and *The Hunger Games* the young men are depicted as having a superior understanding and knowledge of the world, and it is only when they confer this upon the female protagonist that she is awakened and begins to claim power through resistance. The YA dystopias offer criticism of patriarchy through the treatment of issues such as gender and power, female sexuality, body and identity. Many of these topics have been shown to feature in YA literature, especially the series discussed here; however, they do not always receive very explicit treatment.

The texts discussed here, consistent with the dystopian mode, do not shy away from dark and difficult material. Much of this material relates to the body and how it may be used to control the teenage subject. For the readers of contemporary YA dystopian fiction, then, these texts accomplish a number of functions. In simple terms, they firstly provide the readers with escapism, a function often derided but for the young adult in particular, useful in allowing them to safely play out real world issues in a non-threatening environment. They encourage young people to challenge the status quo, to turn the bodies which have been rendered docile into empowered entities which can challenge ruling regimes and be producers as well as subjects of power. The teenagers are provided with a vision of dystopian future and possible outcomes over which the young readers have some control. Young women are told they have the power to change the world and they should not rely on others to do it for them.

Conclusion

Dystopian novels show that individualism can often be at odds with the state apparatus in a totalitarian system. Dystopias reveal the concerns of the society in which they were written; they comment on topical concerns by projecting a speculative future scenario that is intended to alarm the reader. We have examined the milieu in which each of the novels that we discussed was written. Even though *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Divergent*, for example, were written in two very different times and places, they have much in common, as dystopian novels tend to have certain universal themes. A central concern of the dystopian novelist is the balance between private agency and collective governance. The dystopian protagonist suffers the absence or loss of privacy within the collective, and he or she embarks on a journey of resistance and discovery of individuality.

We have attempted to distinguish between terms like dystopia and anti-utopia that have not been used consistently by critics. Aldridge (1983) sees utopian satire and anti-utopia as earlier forms of the twentieth century dystopia. Walsh (1962) points out that the dystopian novels of the twentieth century make not mere political comments, but that they focus on humanity's perversity and dark vision. Morson (1981) acknowledges that canon formation is arbitrary and based canon formation on the critic's purpose. This has been a useful starting point for explicating our purposes in this project: to explore the dystopian genre in the contexts that have previously received little critical attention.

It is our sincere hope that this book has effectively established the necessity of a new definition of the dystopian genre. We believe that we have clearly demonstrated the importance of such a definition not only as a means by which we can clarify our understanding of dystopian classics, but also as a way in which to identify new dystopias and relate them usefully to these dystopias of the past. Throughout this examination, we have placed particular emphasis upon the need to establish not only that a continuity exists which connects all works

contained within the dystopian genre, but also that the evolution of this genre, as it appears in any one cultural context, reflects the changing shape of whatever society upon which it is contingent. As Miller (1984) elaborates of works of the dystopian genre, "no expression can wholly transcend the moment that produced it, nor can contiguous moments be neatly disjoined: Orwell's history is in his novel, and that history connects with ours" (Miller, 1984, p. 698).

It is important to emphasize that, even though contemporary social concerns — and thus contemporary dystopias — are very different from their predecessors, this does not make past criticisms and definitions of dystopia which were based upon assumptions of totalitarian fears in any way irrelevant to scholars who focus their attentions primarily upon modern dystopian works. This older criticism, aside from its socio-anthropological value and its value to scholars of the dystopian novel who wish to understand the progression of this genre, represents an indispensable part of the scholarly dialogue that surrounds dystopian literature in both its past and present forms. Thus, it is essential that students of the modern dystopia be introduced both to early criticisms of dystopian works and to early texts that treat the dystopian genre as a whole.

It is also essential that modern scholars remain familiar with the ideological arguments that were the driving forces behind past dystopian novels because it is impossible to say with absolute authority that a previous age's utopian ideals will never re-emerge. Should such ideals once again charm the hearts and minds of a society's majority, they will bring with them the same dystopian threats that these earlier dystopian authors had to confront. Utopian visions emerge, evolve, and are discarded constantly. As Beauchamp points out, as much has always been the case with the rise and fall of utopian ideals: "[a]s visions of systematically planned […] societies threatened to become realities, fantasies to be transformed into fact, chiliastic hope gave way to cautionary anxiety" (Beauchamp, 1974, p. 462), and then to outright distaste. That the ideals of a previous age might experience a renaissance as the ideals of a modern culture is not an impossibility. Should such a social evolution occur, it will be the responsibility of scholars to alert the general populace of the society placed in jeopardy by such resurgent dystopian hazards of the risks at which they are placing themselves through their attempt

at realizing their new utopian ideals, and that the utopian ideals they have taken up have fallen under focused scrutiny in the past, and been discarded with good reason.

It is this cycle — the constant seeking out, construction, and discarding of utopian ideologies — that is embodied in the relationship between works of utopian and dystopian fiction themselves. Utopias represent "the imaginative attempt to put together, to compose and endorse a world," while dystopias embody "the opposite attempt to see through, to dismember a world" (Huntington, 1982, p. 123); these genres can be understood as participating in a cyclical relationship in which each inspires the perpetuation of its opposite. When a utopian work of literature is published, popularised, and hailed for the insight it offers into the positive potentials of a society, it establishes itself as one possible — and, supposedly, considerably appealing — outline for the shape that society might take in the future. This model, while it naturally generates optimism, also quite naturally becomes the focus of a great deal of critical attention; readers, should they wish to embrace and make real the ideals presented in a utopian work of literature, must subject that work to a close examination in order to determine how best to realize those goals. Such close scrutiny, however, typically reveals that the utopian vision is, ultimately, idealistic to the point of being all-but impossible to realize in the actual world; it represents a pipe-dream society which, though appealing in theory, is impossible to actually incarnate in its entirety in the real world.

With this realization, critics typically begin to focus their attentions upon the potential dangers to society posed by the utopian ideal in question, and why it will not work, rather than upon the potential improvements it promises, and how it might be usefully tailored. Utopias "generate…yearning and skepticism, and that conjunction is the essence of anti-utopian thought" (Huntington, 1982, p. 124). Its parts rejected because of the impossible sum they produce, the utopian model under consideration thus becomes a source of social pessimism rather than a source, as it initially was, of social optimism. The potential dangers it entailed are recognised during its deconstruction, and become the foundations of new dystopian works, which will in turn orient attentions toward different social ideals: the ones that they, in their turning away from certain utopian models, indicate as preferable. These new utopian hopes will generate new

social fears, which in turn will inspire new dystopian visions, and so the cycle continues.

This cycle can actually be well-illustrated by Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. After this classic instilled in its readers fears of the dangers of impending totalitarianism, of an "invincible system of political terrorism, ideological manipulation, and warfare economics" (Resch, 1997, p. 156), society moved very quickly to embrace an opposing social character — liberalism with an emphasis upon the right of every individual to as much freedom as they desire. It was understood that "even the most efficient totalitarian state is unable to foresee, prevent or canalize all the spontaneous changes that may arise in the lives and minds of its members" (Lowenthal, 1982, p. 402), and thus the best means of combating the threat of totalitarianism was taken to be an encouragement of the recognition of, and encouragement of, individual diversity and personal freedoms.

As was discussed in the preceding chapters, what we are witnessing with contemporary dystopian publications is the skeptical re-consideration of Orwell's utopian dream. With the tarnishing of this individualistic ideal, we must accept that a new utopian ideal will likely not be long in replacing it, and that totalitarianism might once again be the utopian ideal waiting upon the horizon. As Richard Lowenthal (1982) explains of the environments in which totalitarian parties have been known to arise,

> totalitarian parties […] get the chance to win power owing to the failure of free — or of newly freed traditional — societies to respond adequately to the problems created by accelerated or even catastrophic social change, and to their consequent breakdown. […] Totalitarian regimes are […] not only the result of the problems created by accelerated social change — they are the creators of an alternative method of coping with these problems. (Lowenthal, 1982, p. 402)

With this, he is essentially saying that totalitarian leaders typically emerge within societies that fall into disarray under the weight of the social turmoil which arises when they prove unable to govern their citizens during periods that encourage extreme social liberalism and laissez-faire attitudes.

With the next pendulum swing from a fear of freedom to a fear of repression, from a focus upon dystopias to a revival of utopian sentiment, from the fears of the present to those of the future, it is impossible to say how long works like *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* will retain their pressing social relevance. For now, at least, they provide the invaluable service of forcing their readers to "consider the precariousness of a free society in present-day conditions" (Lowenthal, 1982, p. 398). Is it likely that these works will be interred, after their contemporary applications have been established and explored, into the canon of dystopian classics? Despite our own esteem for these novels, it is obviously impossible to answer this question. What works will become, in time, widely accepted as the 'classics' of their genre is something that can only ever be guessed at and hoped for. Dystopian literature has been slow to develop an appreciable body of works that can be deemed canonical, and slower still to incorporate new works and authors into those ranks. This may in part simply be due to the nature of the genre itself. As one writer commented in 1956, of George Orwell,

> there are some writers who live most significantly for their own age; they are writers who help redeem their time by forcing it to accept the truth about itself and thereby saving it, perhaps, from the truth about itself. Such writers, it is possible, will not survive their time, for what makes them so valuable and so endearing to their contemporaries — that mixture of desperate topicality and desperate tenderness — is not likely to be a quality conducive to the greatest art. But it should not matter to us, this possibility that in the future Silone or Orwell will not seem as important as they do for many people in our time. […] In later generations *Nineteen Eighty-Four* may have little more than 'historic interest.' If the world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* does come to pass, no one will read it except perhaps the rulers who will reflect upon its extraordinary prescience. If the world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* does not come to pass, people may well feel that this book was merely a symptom of private

> disturbance, a nightmare. But we know better: we know that the nightmare is ours. (Howe, 1982, p. 332)

What must be the responsibility of the critical community is to insure that, while we embrace an understanding of the sociological foci of the dystopian classics, this attentiveness does not detract from our constant search for new exemplars of the genre for which a position of contemporary relevance can be parlayed into one of lasting significance. We must be ever aware of the changing face of social anxiety, and of the definitive traits of dystopian narratives, in order to be able to assure that we are qualified to interact with the products and progression of the dystopian genre.

Although we cannot say whether *The Hunger Games*, for example, will be immortalised by canonization, it can at least be noted in its defense that it has already followed in the footsteps of its genre predecessor, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, by becoming a powerful part of our cultural capital. Writing of Rudyard Kipling, Orwell once said that "it needs a stroke of genius even to become a byword" (qtd. in Woodcock, 1984, p. 4). When it comes to dystopian literature, Orwell himself has become a byword. In much the same way, *The Hunger Games* has fully entrenched itself into popular culture. While the integration of *The Hunger Games* into our cultural vocabulary can likely be attributed largely to the popularity of the film bearing its name, we believe that the film has merely accelerated an inevitable series of developments for which the novel, rather than the film, can take credit. With *The Hunger Games*, the film, drawing attention to Suzanne Collins' other works and introducing this relatively new author to readers who have never encountered her fiction, we would not be at all surprised to see her other novels become similarly recognised as powerful expressions of contemporary dystopianism.

Ultimately, regardless of what the fate of these contemporary dystopian works might be, it will remain proof that we are not, as Smeds suggests, witnessing the "end of dystopia" (Smeds, 2001, p. 292). Even though "it is today increasingly difficult to describe a utopia which would contain a desirable state of affairs for everybody, and it is equally difficult to describe a dystopia which would be the opposite — one which would contain a totally undesirable state of affairs for everyone" (Smeds, 2001, p. 292), the genre of dystopian fiction is more than capable of evolving to encompass the growing complexity of

society's fears. Indeed, we believe we are witness to a truly fascinating time for dystopian literature. Our growing appreciation for the social perspectives of different cultures, and the noticeable increase in the literary output of developing countries, suggests that soon we may witness the dystopian productions of many other societies. With the continued solidification of subcultures and their gradual entry into mainstream forums of social communication, we may also soon come into contact with dystopias written from the perspectives of varied facets both of our own and of other communities.

YA dystopia presents readers with a world that combines the threat of sovereign power with an elaborate web of disciplinary techniques that operate both through overt and implicit means to create docile subjects. While the setting of the novels is in many ways far removed from that of the contemporary reader, the young adult audience at which the genre is primarily aimed will find much to identify with here. Many of today's adolescents will at some point find themselves embroiled in power struggles relating to one or more of these issues, since they play a significant role in everyday life for most people. Young women are particularly very well aware of the employment of social pressures connected to body image and femininity, as they are daily bombarded by messages from a variety of media in effort to persuade them to conform to normative femininity. Constantly confronted by advertisements encouraging them to alter their physical appearance, they are challenged to strive towards the unattainable norm proscribed by the fashion industry, achieving only bodily dissatisfaction. Inherent in this drive for physical perfection is an increasing trend toward homogeneity, an attempt to eradicate the differences that make us who we are.

The rebellious protagonists, on first sight, reject normative femininity; they are autonomous characters who rebel against the domineering social order of the dystopian worlds presented with great physical strength. However, with the help of their male counterparts they are moulded into patriarchal social structures. Demonstrating a capacity for romantic love, underpinned by sexual desire, the protagonists' bodies and their behaviours exhibit their alignment with the conventional passivity of the feminine realm. Male authority figures and love interests control the clothes they wear, presenting them as vulnerable sites of sexual awakening through their feminine

or eroticised attire. In addition, the male characters' attention remains a key focal point for the protagonists and they are often rewarded—implicitly and explicitly—for displaying feminine characteristics; these rewards encourage them to continue demonstrating the soft and hard characteristics whose combination initially drew the young men to the female protagonists.

The protagonists' involvement in the rebellious activities is usually caused by an attempt to protect or rescue a family member or friend (*The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, *Matched*, *Uglies* to name just a few), not for the improvement of the conditions in her community. Though it can be said that the rebellious protagonists of contemporary YA literature reflect on the growing autonomy of the contemporary young women, we also had to take into consideration the preoccupation with the self that is one of the main characteristics of adolescence which makes the readers particularly susceptible to this genre of fiction. The young readers tend to strongly identify with the main characters, worry over their dilemmas and participate in the choice-making process, possessing a remarkable understanding of the significance of the value the decisions made carry. A great social responsibility is implied here, hence, all the masculine and feminine characteristics of the protagonists must be carefully controlled. If not, the young female protagonists can put normative patriarchy in danger, they may decide not be embrace motherhood. At the same time, the protagonists must display a degree of independence and autonomy or risk appearing too feminine, weak in body and mind, and incapable to oppose the discriminatory regime.

The protagonists of YA dystopian novels are torn between, on one side, individuality and independence, and conformity to traditional patriarchal structures, on the other. The affiliation of genres, dystopian and romance, accomplishes the rewriting of patriarchal expectations of young adult readers. Although initially successful at improving the living conditions in dystopian societies, the majority of the protagonists are bound to return to the domesticity by the conclusion of their narratives. The only memorable exception is the protagonist of the *Divergent* trilogy, Tris, who is killed in battle, making the ultimate sacrifice in order to save her brother's life; however, her death, paradoxically, represents a very striking return to the appropriate femininity, since she proves herself to be selfless and family-oriented.

The conclusions of the narratives present a return to the nuclear family in which they become devoted partners and/or mothers. For example, the ending of *The Hunger Games* trilogy brings Katniss and Peeta back to their home, District Twelve, where they will, together with their two children, and other returnees, rebuild their homeland. In spite of her reluctance to have children throughout the trilogy, Katniss eventually assumes her feminine duties and conforms to normative femininity. In accordance with the romance genre, Katniss moves from a state of aggression and adolescence to a mature woman who ultimately accepts the patriarchal order. Her youthful idealism is replaced by the stereotypical gender role.

The endings of YA dystopian novels reflect and re-inscribe the binary codes of gender that are deeply rooted in Western culture. The protagonists' self-esteem depends on declarations of love from their partners and their eventual inclusion into the normative ideal of patriarchy. Unlike the pilgrimage of the male protagonists, whose success is based on control of the self and others, ultimately depending on physical dominance, the female protagonists' identity is defined through their union with the male romantic partner. Their understanding of the self is obtained through interpersonal relationships. The repetitiveness of the resolutions sustains a cultural norm whose main role is to persuade women to embrace normative femininity as the ultimate defender of contemporary society. Should the dystopian society (and implicitly, our own) improve, it must re-embrace the patriarchal norms that place the responsibility of its own perpetuation on women of child-bearing age. The ideal state the young female protagonists are trying to erect is, ironically, one that recreates a traditional heteronormative paradigm.

By returning the protagonists to the domestic role within the new patriarchal society, the need to prevent rebellious, unacceptable and uncontrollable, femininity from endangering the system is emphasised. The "unfeminine" female protagonists must be prevented from destabilising patriarchal social order, their sacrifice is the foundation of the "new" society, while they are denied political authority to reform and empower their own society. Young women are allowed to participate and lead the rebellion in the time of great environmental disasters, or technological catastrophes, as well as when the world is ruled by egomaniacal dictators, but once order has been restored, her

position as the ultimate subordinate will be reaffirmed, cloaked in a romantic union with her partner.

One must question the increasing popularity of the dystopian young adult female protagonist, both in literature and film. We are of the belief that the burden is on the strong marketing efforts, commercializing adolescence and celebrating girl power, as well as on the hybridity of the genre, including both the post-apocalyptic dystopian and the romantic discourses. This hybridity only accentuates the conflicting meanings of girlhood that can be revealed in the popular YA dystopian writing: the protagonist is aggressive, but her independence and strength is surpassed by the love for her romantic partner, not for herself. The YA dystopias, and overall YA literature, need to readjust the order in which the female protagonists love, instead of romantic coupling, they should focus on love for oneself and female empowerment. The trend of film adaptations has only confirmed the commercialisation of genre, acknowledging the power of "millenials". Young women have, in even greater numbers, found common interest in visual representations of empowered young women attempting to alter the boundaries of their dystopian society. The protagonists encompass disturbing gender inconsistencies, but their narratives offer an escape from the world that more and more resembles the dystopias depicted. For the young readers the delineations of post-apocalyptic worlds can aid the grasping and finding a place in a profoundly miscellaneous world.

The repetitiveness of the structure of YA dystopias is, in essence, confirmative of the fundamental social beliefs and gender roles; it perpetuates the core belief that women must prove themselves worthy of participating in the patriarchal society. The message is very simple: if the protagonist is able to harmonise her feminine and masculine sides, restore order in her life and find true love, the reader will overcome the hardships of her/his existence as well.

If we agree that one of the main purposes of dystopian literature is "to allow the reader to rediscover what he subconsciously knows but tends repeatedly to forget: that utopia is a mental place, a vision of perfection that is ideal only in the imagination" (Foust, 1982, p. 87), this increase in the variety of viewpoints from which dystopian works are composed might provide just the manner of social self-awareness and circumspection that will save us from, or at the very least alert

us of, dangers of our societies as they develop. As Anthony Burgess imagined, shortly after the publication of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, "it is possible […] that the ghastly future Orwell foretells will not come about, simply because he has foretold it" (qtd. in Chalpin, 1972, p. 84). As long as the genre of dystopian literature continues to receive the respect and attention it deserves, it can be hoped that dystopian literary works will continue to save us from fates that, thankfully, we have only to imagine.

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Index of Key Terms