

POWER AND LANGUAGE IN THE DYSTOPIAN NOVEL

THE PROTAGONIST'S RESPONSE TO POWER AND LANGUAGE  
IN  
THE DYSTOPIAN NOVEL

By  
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the role of the protagonist in response to power and language in the dystopian novel. I attempt to show that a novel may be classified as dystopian if it fulfills certain factors that posit language and discourse as fundamental devices of power. These three main factors are as follows: the establishment of an official, totalitarian language, evidence of opposing discourses, and the representation of the protagonist as a figure who deconstructs social reality. My primary texts are Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*.

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## Introduction

According to such critics as Alexandra Aldridge, Calin Mihailescu and Keith Booker, there is much debate regarding the classification of the dystopian novel as a genre. Particularly, the distinctions made between utopian and dystopian literature have been difficult to clarify. To emphasize the ambiguity that lies between these two terms, Booker proposes an analogy of Disneyworld in his book *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature* (1994): “Disneyworld is both the idealization of the American dream and the ideal carceral society of consumer capitalism... [T]he doubleness of Disneyworld indicates the simple fact that what one person considers an ideal dream might to another person seem a nightmare” (3). The problem, then, lies in trying to discover defining distinctions between utopian and dystopian novels that go beyond merely classifying a novel according to whether it depicts a socio-politically favourable or unfavourable society. To further confuse matters, critics have invented numerous subgenres of utopian literature, such as utopian satires, anti-scientific utopias, open-ended utopias; these constructed divisions only serve to obfuscate the defining distinctions between utopian and dystopian literature. On a related level, the distinctions that have been made tend to be more in terms of authorial intent than structure and form. Aldridge comments: “Relatively little criticism exists on the dystopian phenomenon and none at all existed until after World War II. What there is stresses purpose not form and genre terms are used carelessly”

(11). Critics cannot agree on defining features of the dystopian novel because they cannot even agree on an appropriate angle of approach.

In this thesis I approach the classification of the dystopian novel from the perspective of form and language. I believe that there is more objectivity involved in gathering evidence of defining features from within the text itself than in speculating on authorial intentions in relation to social criticism. For instance, Mark Hillegas claims that “the great anti-utopia always makes a significant comment on human life. [It] is usually a vehicle for social criticism and satire” (8). His analysis of dystopian literature, which I explore further in Chapter One, tends to be based on his subjective opinion of authorial perspective. To further construct objective standards, I rely on terminology from Michel Foucault’s and Mikhail Bakhtin’s theories of discourse and language. I divide the thesis itself into two main chapters. The first chapter is mainly theoretical; it establishes a conceptual background for the practical application of ideas in the second chapter. Chapter One begins with a chronological outline of studies on dystopian literature, an outline which provides a framework for the establishment of the dystopian novel as genre. This summary ends with a brief analysis of Keith Booker’s work; Booker, as far as I am aware, is the most recent critic of dystopian literature. Although Booker is mainly preoccupied with the exploration of specific social commentary in dystopian works, he does introduce a connection between contemporary philosophy, literary theory and the dystopian novel. For instance, he refers to the works of Foucault and Bakhtin, and he even



applies Foucault's theories on sexuality to a few specific novels. At this point in the chapter, I delve into specific aspects of these two theorists in order to establish terminology and fundamental concepts for the second chapter. I outline Foucault's theories on social discursive practices, power/knowledge and the intellectual figure; following this, I summarize the Bakhtinian concepts of unitary language, heteroglossia, dialogism and the literary fool figure.

The second chapter is a practical application of the theoretical foundation demonstrated in the preceding chapter. In the first chapter I state that dystopian novels may be seen as those novels that establish language as a primary form of power, offer evidence of opposing languages, and represent the Bakhtinian fool figure and/or Foucauldian intellectual figure. Chapter two contains analyses of Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1924), Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), according to these three main tenets. I chose these three novels because they are defined under different subgenres by various critics and they offer different aspects and depictions of social criticism. I attempt to show that these novels share common defining elements despite their different purposes; they can be classified under the broader genre of dystopian literature according to aspects of form, instead of being separated into subgenres based on aspects of social criticism. Critics like Booker have defined *We* as a "failed" or "negative" utopia "in which utopian dreams of the 'old reformers' have been realized, only to turn out to be nightmares" (*Impulse* 16). According to Booker, *We* can be

seen as a harsh commentary on the early Soviet government and on Lenin's admiration for Frederick Taylor's industrialist ideals. Angela Gulick has defined *The Handmaid's Tale* as an "open-ended utopia" because Gilead is a still developing society, it contends with conflicts arising from its new development, and it is not entirely isolated from society. Booker sees this novel as a reaction to the growing political power of the "America religious right" in the 1980s. Some critics have considered *Fahrenheit 451* both a utopian satire and an anti-utopia because it is a specific criticism on the proposed ideal of capitalism; Booker claims that the novel is a direct response to the cultural environment in America in the 1950s. Each of these novels falls under different categories in terms of the authors' views on utopian literature and in terms of social criticism. However, these novels share common elements that unite them as dystopian. I intend to reveal evidence of these formal conditions, which I believe clearly, and not subjectively, distinguish utopian from dystopian literature.

## Chapter One

Dystopia has only been, and perhaps can only be, defined in relation to the concept of utopia and utopian literature; in fact, as I mentioned in the introduction, literary critics use relative terms such as “anti-utopia” or “negative utopia” interchangeably with “dystopia”. The most recent definition of “dystopia” that I came across is published in Mary Ellen Snodgrass’ 1995 *Encyclopedia of Utopian Literature*: “A literary and / or philosophical ‘bad place,’ anti-utopia, or hell on Earth, dystopia is the negative side of the perfect world, a haven corrupted by the misapplication of principles or theories or from deliberate tyranny, power-mongering, sadism, or subversion of human rights” (179). This definition remains faithful to the term’s originating meaning. In 1868, J. S. Mill coined the term “dystopians” in an article written for a British periodical, but it was not accepted in either the literary or academic realm (Aldridge 8). According to Alexandra Aldridge, “J. Max Patrick was considered the inventor of a new word when, in his 1952 utopias anthology, he wrote in reference to an obscure early seventeenth-century work by Joseph Hall, ‘The *Mundus Alter et Idem* is utopia in the sense of *nowhere*; but it is the opposite of *eutopia*, the ideal society: it is a *dystopia*, if it is permissible to coin a word” (8). Dystopia has been mainly classified as a reaction to the concept of utopia, a classification that emphasizes the focus on social context and political response. For example, Keith Booker defines dystopia as an

“impulse” in modern literature that accords with the theories of certain contemporary cultural critics. So, although critics have not agreed upon a specific definition and classification of dystopian literature, there is a general consensus that dystopian representations reflect social and political trends of the past few decades. The commentators on dystopian literature, whose theories I will be outlining in chronological order, propose various definitions of the dystopian genre that reflect those trends in their respective times.

I will begin by framing the arguments of these critics in order to provide a background to the conception and establishment of dystopian literature as a genre. It will become apparent not only that subjectivity is usually recognized as an issue in defining the term “dystopia” but also that subjective interpretations of social and political systems significantly influence the classification of those novels that may fall into a utopian or dystopian genre. Mark Hillegas, in his book *The Future as Nightmare* (1967), uses H.G. Wells’ work as his basis for definition and classification of dystopian fiction. Although he acknowledges the term “dystopias”, and even “cacotopias”, he prefers the term “anti-utopias” “because they seem a sad, last farewell to man’s age-old dream of a planned, ideal, and perfected society, a dream which appeared so noble in Plato’s *Republic*, More’s *Utopia*, Andreae’s *Christianopolis*, and Bellamy’s *Looking Backward*” (3-4). Hillegas only mentions these four utopian works as brief, and less than significant, references. He prefers to concentrate exclusively on the Wellsian influence, a

focus which he makes clear at the beginning of chapter one: “To an extraordinary degree the great anti-utopias are both continuations of the imagination of H.G.

Wells and reactions against the imagination... [It] is doubtful that without Wells the anti-utopian phenomenon would ever have taken the shape it has” (5). Hillegas proposes fairly specific, although inevitably subjective, guidelines in an attempt to clarify his explication of anti-utopian literature; he considers anti-utopias to be science-fiction, which he sees as distinct and separate from satiric utopias.

Hillegas uses Kingsley Amis’s definition of science-fiction as a starting point for further classification: “[It] is that class of prose narrative treating of a situation that could not arise in the world we know, but which is hypothesized on the basis of some innovation in science or technology, or pseudo-science or pseudo-technology” (8). According to Hillegas, anti-utopias are “quality” science-fiction usually commenting on human life and social problems. He then sets science-fiction anti-utopias apart from satiric utopias by asserting that science-fiction presents actual possibilities, prediction and extrapolation from existing conditions, while satiric utopias offer ironic, “tongue in cheek” imaginary worlds or inversions and parodies of the real world (9).

Hillegas’ analyses of Wells’ works, as well as of the reactionary anti-utopias of other authors that he chooses to look at, centre around establishing authors’ perspectives and responses to science and technology. The foundation of Wellsian influence works in two ways: first, Wells establishes central images and

symbols of science-fiction societies through the “domestication” of impossible scientific hypotheses in such anti-utopian novels as *The Time Machine* (1895) and *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899); second, Wells’ later novels, such as *A Modern Utopia* (1905) and *Men Like Gods* (1923) offer utopian visions based on the belief that “science and technology are inherently good for man and can help to build a mighty future” (60). These later novels are the focus of attack for the intellectuals of the early twentieth century, most of whom have rejected science as progress:

The [Wellsian] hero of the first two decades of the [twentieth] century became the symbol of everything most intellectuals hated, and his vision of utopia the object of scorn. At first consciously, then unconsciously, the anti-utopians attacked this vision, and ironically, they used as a vehicle Wellsian science-fiction, at the same time borrowing numerous details from such stories as *The Time Machine*, *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, *When the Sleeper Wakes* and “A Story of Days To Come,” and *The First Men on the Moon*. (57)

Hillegas manages to discriminate theoretically between utopia and anti-utopia within the works of the same author; however, as later critics imply, these distinctions may be oversimplified and too general.

Hillegas’ analyses of twentieth-century anti-utopias, specifically Forster’s “The Machine Stops”, Zamyatin’s *We*, Huxley’s *Brave New World*, and Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, are generally respected, if not accepted, by later critics like Aldridge and Huntington; Aldridge even calls this aspect of Hillegas’ study “indispensable,” especially because he establishes *We* as the paradigmatic dystopia. This part of his analysis is justifiably respected as it is more objective

than his analysis of Wells. Hillegas treats his interpretation of Wells' works as an objective standard for classification:

In portraying mechanical superstates which take away human freedom, isolate men from nature, and destroy the past, these anti-utopias are appallingly similar, first of all because they are Wellsian science-fiction rich in anti-utopian images originated by Wells. They also represent massive attacks on the Wellsian vision of utopia... (82)

As Hillegas suggests, this reaction to Wells leads to a movement of rejecting the concept of utopia. He also attributes this rejection to a "cultural shift" caused by the catastrophe of World War I "which tended to lead men to a disillusioned and austere traditionalism, to a return to the doctrine of original sin. This caused 'progress' to become a bad word..." (83). Most critics, including Elliott whose book *The Shape of Utopia* followed Hillegas' book by three years, agree with this account.

Elliott entitles his chapter on dystopias, or as he terms them "negative utopias" or "utopias in negative," "The Fear of Utopia". His summarizing comments on utopias echo Hillegas' words: "Utopia is a bad word today not because we despair of being able to achieve it but because we fear it. Utopia itself (in a special sense of the term) has become the enemy" (89). Like Hillegas, he sees utopia as the "principle of all progress" (86); also, he agrees explicitly that disillusionment and despair arising from events during the first few decades of the twentieth century, such as both world wars, account for the disappearance of utopian literature and the rise of negative utopias. Both Hillegas and Elliott,

writing just prior to 1970, were optimistic that the prevailing negative attitudes towards utopian literature would change. Hillegas writes in his epilogue that “[a]t a time when the anti-utopia has lost its initial vitality and come to be replaced by its mutation, the apocalyptic novel, it is possible to find the first signs of a coming revival of that other Wellsian form, the utopia” (173). Elliott is more realistic and cautious in his predictions, asserting that it will take someone like Huxley who “has followed utopia into the abyss which yawns behind the Grand Inquisitor’s vision, and who has then clambered out on the other side” to “redeem utopia” and bring “new faith in human possibility” (101).

A decade later, with dystopian critics like Peter Firchow and John Huntington, this optimistic speculation disappears. Utopia and dystopia are no longer viewed as two clearly distinct, separate, and opposing genres; the classification of new subgenres and varying definitions have resulted in overlap and ambiguity. Firchow, who published *The End of Utopia* in the early 1980s, presents his views on why utopias and dystopias are so difficult to distinguish: “Utopia satisfies simultaneously our longing for a perfect place and for stasis, and horrifies us because we realize that the ideal approximation of rest and stability is death. Hence all utopias are also and always dystopias, and vice versa” (84). Huntington, who also published his study in the early 1980s, offers a definition of dystopia that merges with that of utopia, while anti-utopia is given a separate, albeit related, meaning. According to Huntington, dystopia and utopia share a



common structure: “[B]oth are exercises in imaging coherent wholes, in making an idea work, either to lure the reader towards an ideal or to drive the reader back from a nightmare. Both are the expression of a synthetic imagination, a comprehension and expression of the deep principles of happiness or unhappiness” (124). Anti-utopia is then defined as “skeptical imagining” which opposes the consistencies and convincing nature of “utopia-dystopia”. The utopian-dystopian form offers the construction of “single, foolproof structures which solve social dilemmas, [while] the anti-utopian form discovers problems, raises questions and doubts” (124). He claims that the anti-utopia is aware of conflict and opposing values while the “pure” utopia and/or dystopia is not. This argument is flawed, as my own study will show, because any novel must contain opposed forces<sup>1</sup>; a “pure” utopia and/or dystopia, according to Huntington’s definition, could be nothing more than a brochure. To complicate matters even further, Huntington does not designate these classifications on the basis of a novel as a whole. According to Huntington, one novel can fall into both forms and even move back and forth between the two. However, it is not my intention here to criticize Huntington’s argument; rather, I am attempting to illustrate the problems involved in defining a genre, specifically the dystopian novel, because its definition is at least in some way bound to the definition of utopia, in itself not an objective term.

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<sup>1</sup> I will be exploring this argument further when I outline Bakhtin’s theories of dialogism.

Unlike the earlier critics, who were primarily interested in authorial intentions and perspectives, the later critics like Huntington seem much more concerned with the readers' interpretations and even, to a degree, with how viewpoints are established and influenced within the text itself. For example, Hillegas does not seem to fully take into consideration the perspectives from within the Wellsian novel; he is more concerned with choosing images of the technology and then seeing how Wells used them to convey his attitudes towards the future. He considers *When the Sleeper Wakes* to be the "best approach [to] Wells's idea of the nightmare world of the twenty-second century" (41). According to Huntington, *When the Sleeper Wakes* is actually ambiguous in its stance towards science and technology and, thus, towards utopian ideals: "[*When the Sleeper Wakes*] assumes a remarkably important position, for it marks the point of intersection of the two genera [anti-utopia and dystopia-utopia]" (125). Huntington recognizes Graham, the protagonist, as a symbol which is meant to "allow for imaginative movement between opposed truths and goods[; however], in this potentially more specific world such a symbol becomes simply ambiguous" (126). These comments are significant in that Huntington realizes that the protagonist is a main determinant of perspective for the reader. Hillegas does not seem to concern himself with characters or textual evidence; instead he makes judgments from outside of the text, based on what he believes the authors' view to be, on the depicted society. For instance, he describes Chapter XXI, "The Under

Side,” as the “most anti-utopian” section only because it depicts unfavourable conditions for workers. There is no oppositional perspective offered within the novel as even Graham does not express sentiment that challenges the dominant social ideology; in fact, Graham fails to expose or reveal much of anything beyond what the reader can ascertain. Hillegas is too concerned with purpose and authorial intention to consider aspects of form which would determine classification less subjectively and singularly. Huntington also uses Wells’ texts as a basis for analysis of other authors; however, he is aware of conflict and varying perspectives, as expressed through characters, within the novels themselves.

Alexandra Aldridge’s *The Scientific World View in Dystopia* (1978) compares the dystopian novel to the mainstream modern novel. She accepts that dystopia is a genre issuing out of a shift in attitudes towards utopia in the twentieth century; however, she asserts that dystopia grew only “partly out of the utopic structure; its distinguishing feature lies in the dramatization of a utopic structure, the activation of utopic ideals that become dystopic when adumbrated through their effects on the individual” (65). She views the dystopian novel as dramatizing individualist, modernist themes such as alienation, isolation and spiritual and emotional emptiness (17-18). According to Aldridge, there are three main differences between the dystopian novel and the modern novel: first, the dystopian novel focuses much more specifically on the “alienating effects of science and technology” (18); second, the dystopian novel goes beyond the

experience of individual alienation to explore social consequences; third, “where the traditional modern protagonist so often settles for a passive rejection of social structures and a withdrawal into self (Gide’s Michel, Mann’s Hans Castorp, Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus), the dystopian hero makes a direct attack on existing social structures or superego institutions through revolt against the status quo ethos” (18). Aldridge initiates a move beyond viewing the definition of dystopias only in relation to utopias. Her note on *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in the Appendix addresses this issue of whether a novel that “makes no pretense of being a utopian conception” can be considered anti-utopian or dystopian<sup>2</sup>; *Nineteen Eighty-Four* depicts the “mind of totalitarianism” which claims power as its end, unlike *We* and *Brave New World*, which depict societies that claim happiness as their end goal (79).

Calin Mihailescu, who I mention here mainly as a lead into Booker’s theories, solves this discrepancy in classification by proposing subheadings to the dystopian genre. In her article “Mind the Gap: Dystopia as Fiction” (1991) she

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<sup>2</sup> Elliott briefly mentions this issue in *The Shape of Utopia* when he points out that “O’Brien’s world, at least at the stage depicted, makes no pretense of being utopian” (98). As a result, Elliott considers *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to be a “true anti-utopia, a dystopia” (97). His terminology is confusing because “anti-utopia” would seem to suggest that the novel opposes utopian values in favour of freedom. However, he uses the term “negative utopias” to define those novels that critique and oppose societies that strive for human ‘happiness’ over freedom; he uses “anti-utopia” in the sense of novels depicting societies with power, instead of either happiness or freedom, as their goal. I chose to outline Aldridge’s comments because her terminology is clearer; she questions the classification of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as an “anti-utopia” in order to stress that dystopias are not necessarily only responses or reactions to utopias.

considers novels like *We* and *Brave New World* as “Hedonistic Dystopias”, while *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and other novels such as Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* and Vladimir Voinovich’s *Moscow 2042*, are “Sadistic Dystopias” (215). The term “dystopia” is applicable to both categories because they both “present egalitarianism as mere illusion: it is a well-organized hierarchy of power that holds the world together by denying individuals their ‘natural’ freedom” (215). The more recent critics, such as Mihailescu, have moved away from an exclusive definition of dystopias as reactions to utopia. Mihailescu’s definition of dystopia is quite different than the one offered over thirty years ago by Hillegas: “Dystopias are stories that contrast the failure of the main character with the unstoppable advance of society towards totalitarianism” (215).

Keith Booker’s primary focus for his book *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature* (1994) is this emphasis on totalitarianism, its effects, its techniques, and its social implications. According to Booker, there has been no book-length study exclusively on dystopian fiction since Hillegas’s 1967 book.<sup>3</sup> It is interesting that although Booker, writing three decades later, offers a completely

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Fitting, who wrote a review entitled “Impulse or Genre or Neither?” of Booker’s book, argues that Booker’s claim is “a rather disingenuous attempt to stake out new territory – ‘dystopian literature’ – by rewriting, downgrading, and often simply ignoring previous scholarship... With respect to Booker’s claim that there is a distinctive form of dystopian fiction (separate from the utopian), it should be mentioned that studies of the utopian genre have usually linked the two, as can be seen from the title of Kumar’s *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (1987)” (272-73).

different approach from Hillegas<sup>4</sup>, he uses the same three novels for primary analysis: *We*, *Brave New World*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. These three texts seem to have been accepted by most critics as the major classic dystopian novels. His analysis of these and other less renowned novels, relies on his awareness of the relationship of dystopian fiction to literary movements like modernism and post-modernism, but he also maintains an awareness of the relationship of dystopian literature to the tradition of utopian fiction. As mentioned in the introduction, his study begins with an analogy of Disneyworld that stresses the subjective and ambiguous nature of defining the dystopian novel as a genre. However, either Booker quickly looks beyond this difficulty or his claim that “the utopian impulse has been largely replaced by dystopian projections of disastrous current trends” is meant to merge the two terms as interchangeable according to social context. His emphasis seems to be not on how to define the genre but rather on what each individual novel is criticizing: “I work on the assumption that the modern turn to dystopian fiction is largely attributable to perceived inadequacies in existing social and political systems” (20). He then divides these ‘systems’ into “bourgeois capitalism,” which he considers to be exemplified by the United States, and “Communism,” which he later refers to as “totalitarianism,” and which he

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<sup>4</sup>Booker does not even mention Wells’s name in this particular study. However, Wells is included in his other book *Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research Guide* (1994).

considers to be exemplified by the Soviet Union; this division parallels Mihailescu's two subheadings of hedonistic dystopias and sadistic dystopias.

Booker examines the depictions of science and technology, religion, sexuality, literature and culture, language, and history in each of the three main novels in an attempt to reveal the techniques of power and totalitarianism. These techniques "indicate the close kinship between the social criticism contained in dystopian fiction and that carried out by important modern social and cultural critics from Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud to Bakhtin, Adorno, and Foucault" (21). In his introduction, Booker quickly outlines appropriate aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy, such as his opposition to the mechanization of life and ideas of "final truths"(7). According to Booker, for Nietzsche, art is a forceful alternative to science. Booker also relies heavily on Sigmund Freud's observations, such as humanity's inability to move beyond limitations of the past and its relentless pursuit of "impossible" happiness; he points out that Freud views religion as a "mass-delusion" that offers protection against suffering through a delusional "remoulding of reality" (11). As well, Booker emphasizes Freud's beliefs that "the whole point to civilization (and particularly to government) is to limit individual liberty" and that since there cannot be an ideal society, attempts to establish one can only be harmful (10). He goes on to mention Freud's views of sexuality as repressive and subversive; however, Booker prefers Michel Foucault's less repression-driven theory of sexuality, which claims that society seeks to

“administer sexuality and turn sexual energies to its own advantage” (12). Booker does not really explore other aspects of Foucault’s theories, nor does he address Mikhail Bakhtin’s theories of language in his introduction; however, his book is nevertheless useful as a reference point for exploring dystopian literature and criticism<sup>5</sup>.

Booker realizes that critics can no longer treat the “literary and the social as two separate non-communicating realms” (174). He links the two realms by proposing a principal technique in dystopian fiction that he calls “defamiliarization”<sup>6</sup>: “[B]y focusing their critiques of society on spatially or temporally 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” (19). Not unlike critics in the past, Booker argues that the dystopian novel’s primary function is social criticism. Booker sees “defamiliarization” functioning on a macro level where the reader is enlightened: “[T]he main value of literature in general is its ability to make us see the world in new ways, to make us capable of entertaining new and different perspectives on reality... [D]ystopian fiction can energize the imagination and provide such fresh perspectives” (176). My argument can be seen, in a sense, as an application of

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<sup>5</sup> Again, Booker does summarize both Foucault’s and Bakhtin’s theories in slightly more detail in *Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research Guide*.



Booker's study. I will be examining the "enlightenment" of the protagonist. My study will analyze the construction of perspective within the novel rather than focus on the reader's viewpoint from outside the novel. Instead of classifying dystopian fiction with respect to a utopian tradition, or as criticism and commentary on real and/or historical political systems, I will be looking at the way in which the author portrays and represents a power struggle. Specifically, I will be examining language and discourse as the primary locus for power and control within the portrayed society. In order to reveal the perspective within the novel, I intend to focus on the role of the protagonist in response to this form of control. In a sense, I will be viewing the protagonist as a central conveyer of what Booker calls "defamiliarization." Although Booker uses the term to relate to the author's technique of exposing problems in actual societies by offering fresh perspectives through fiction, I will use it to describe the protagonist's role of exposing the totalitarian nature of the fictionalized societies through his or her adoption and expression of alternate discourses.

To further elaborate on this idea, I will be relying on specific aspects of Michel Foucault's and Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of language and power as a basis for classification. I propose that dystopian novels can be classified as those novels which establish the importance of language and discourse as control, which display

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<sup>6</sup> Booker does attribute the origins of this term to the Russian Formalist technique of defamiliarization, and more significantly, to the "alienation effect of Bertolt Brecht" (19).

evidence of opposing languages and counter-discourses, and, finally and most importantly, which depict the Bakhtinian “fool” figure and “clown” figure and the Foucauldian “intellectual” figure, figures that serve to undermine and deconstruct the world of social conventionality. These three main elements depend upon a general understanding of Foucault’s theories of power/ knowledge and discourse, which I summarize mainly from “The Order of Discourse,” and of Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism, which I derive from *The Dialogic Imagination*. I will outline these theories separately but in the following order: the establishment of language as power, a dispersed arena of opposing languages, and the “fool” and “intellectual” figures.

Foucault believes that all the knowledge that we have comes from power struggles within society. This assertion regarding power/knowledge is explained by his theories of discourse; according to these theories, power struggles are played out through discursive structures. In *Archaeology of Knowledge*, he offers “fluctuating meaning[s] of the word discourse... treating it sometimes as the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements” (80). Discourses are organized mainly around systems of exclusion; these systems are carried out by respected institutions, within society, that use exclusion as a form of control and regulation. These practices of exclusion lead to the Foucauldian notion of the “will to truth”. There are three aspects of this

practice: “forbidden speech, the division of madness, and the will to truth” (“Order of Discourse” 55). The first two systems basically comprise the foundation for the third system. Forbidden speech involves the limitations and selections around what can be said and who can say it. There are certain subjects in any society which are considered “taboo,” such as sex and death in Western Society: “[W]ithin Victorian Britain, it was very difficult to discuss sex openly and remain respectable, and sexual subjects were avoided at all costs within ‘polite’ society and mixed groups” (Mills 65); however, in other cultures, such as certain native Canadian groups, sex is discussed openly and naturally. There is nothing intrinsically “taboo” about any subjects, but societies, through their institutions, set discursive limitations in order to organize and control individuals through the regulation of particular statuses, such as class.

The second system is the division of madness. In “The Order of Discourse,” Foucault claims that “[s]ince the depths of the Middle Ages, the madman has been the one whose discourse cannot have the same currency as the others” (53). The madman, whose words are ignored, or considered meaningless, is set against rational authority figures, such as doctors, whose words are respected and valued. Out of this division comes the “will to truth”. Discourse cannot be measured against an absolute truth, because discourse itself defines and structures objects and concepts; in a sense, truth is produced by society:

Truth is of the world; it is produced there by virtue of multiple constraints... Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of

truth: that is the types of discourse it harbours and causes to function as true: the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true from false statements, the way in which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures which are valorized for obtaining truth: the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (“Truth and Power” 46)

Institutions exercise power through this production of truth; inversely, these institutions derive power because individuals in society are subjected to this production of truth. Knowledge relies on power as much as power relies on knowledge; thus, Foucault considers them to be inseparable: power/knowledge. There is no absolute power, just as there is no absolute knowledge. Although institutions and authority figures produce truth, they are not all-powerful, nor is their power repressive:

Power is more a form of action or relation between people which is negotiated in each interaction and is never fixed and stable. Whilst Foucault would not minimise the importance of the power of the State, he would suggest that power operates around and through the networks which are generated around the institutions of the State. (Mills 39)

Within every power relation is the force that may challenge or overthrow it; this force, if expressed, can be considered a “counter-discourse” as it is a “discourse against power” (*Language* 209). This idea of “counter-discourse” leads to, although is not restricted to, what Foucault calls the “intellectual”. In “Intellectuals and Power,” a written version of a conversation between Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, Foucault says: “The intellectual spoke the truth to those who had yet to see it, in the name of those who were forbidden to speak the truth: he was conscience, consciousness, and eloquence” (207). This idea of “truth” is the

awareness of how social and conventional “truths,” in the constructed and exclusionary sense, are produced as a function of power. The actions of the intellectual represent a struggle against power, “a struggle aimed at revealing and undermining power where it is most invisible and insidious” (208). The intellectual is not outside of power, but rather, he<sup>7</sup> is part of the system of power. The dominant power of the State fights against him, and what he represents; he is seen, by Foucault, as the child who points out that the emperor is not wearing any clothes. He is part of the system of power as those in control strive to repress and abolish the idea of what he represents. However, as the tale suggests, the child is outside the court. He does not declare the real “truth” in order to claim power for himself; instead, he serves only to undermine the present dominant power.

Bakhtin analyzes the use of discourse within his theory of dialogism. For Bakhtin, “discourse” may be used to “signify either a voice (as in double-voiced discourse) or a method of using words which presumes authority” (Mills 7-8). However, Bakhtin’s use of the term “language” is actually closer than his term “discourse” to Foucault’s meaning of “discourse”; for Bakhtin, “language” denotes an ideology or belief system. Languages are “specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views” (Bakhtin 291-92). The variety of languages in a social and ideological world is

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<sup>7</sup> I use the pronoun “he” because Foucault consistently refers to the intellectual as “he”; however, the intellectual figure can be represented by either a male or female.

termed, in translation, “heteroglossia”, which means “other languages”. For Bakhtin, language exists only as a field of opposed discourses. Heteroglossia is a centrifugal force which functions by accepting discursive variety. The opposing force, the centripetal force, is “unitary languages” which try to impose themselves as an “authoritative discourse” that works by attempting to repress other discourses. This official discourse demands to be completely accepted or completely rejected; its language cannot be seen as separate from the authority it holds. Authoritative discourse resists otherness and promotes oneness: “Extreme versions of official discourse are totalitarian precisely to the degree that they assume no other selves beyond the one they posit as normative” (Holquist 52). In such extreme versions, if the official discourse were successful in its goal, speech would no longer be necessary because everyone’s thoughts would be the same as everyone else’s; there would be no distinction between the individual and society: “The authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it” (Bakhtin 342). Within the novel, authoritative discourse can only be transmitted, not represented. This extreme monologism is utopian in the sense that there would be complete unity, understanding, peace, and stasis within society. Like a theoretical utopia which can never be realized, idealized official discourse is not possible. Dialogism, the existence of more than one language, is necessary for there to be a reality.

Dialogism is the struggle for power between heteroglossia and monologism. “The centrifugal tendencies of heteroglossia work to unthroned and subvert the standardising discourses of authority; and the centripetal tendencies of these unitary languages work by ‘reigning over’ other languages, ‘supplanting’ them, ‘incorporating’ them, ‘enslaving’ them even” (Jefferson 174). Such a struggle is necessary because, according to Bakhtin, something exists only if it has meaning. Dialogism emphasizes “addressivity,” which infers that existence itself is always the existence of something: “Addressivity means rather that I *am* an event, the event of constantly responding to utterances from the different worlds I pass through” (Holquist 48). In his book *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World*, Holquist uses the example of thirst to support this idea; he explains that lack of water has no meaning without the response of thirst, because thirst must actually happen to someone. Anything can exist as long as there is an actual personal response to produce meaning and perspective. The dystopian nature of a novel can exist only if there is a negative, and preferably deconstructive, response to the totalitarian regime of power; otherwise, without a personal response there is no meaning, and the concept of dystopia cannot exist. This role of addressivity in dialogism applies to the meaning of language. An utterance, which is the speech act of language, is always an answer, or response. It is always influenced by the preceding utterance, which does not have to occur as external speech immediately prior to the utterance; even if an individual is initiating a conversation, his

utterance is a response to an utterance in his own consciousness, which is probably based on a speech that he has digested from the past: “We can go so far as to say that in real life people talk most of all about what others talk about – they transmit, recall, weigh, and pass judgment on other people’s words, opinions, assertions, information; people are upset by others’ words, or agree with them, contest them, refer to them and so forth” (Bakhtin 338). There is never an originating point because every utterance is a response which anticipates a response.

Bakhtin applies his theories of heteroglot language to the novel: “The novelistic plot must organize the exposure of social languages and ideologies, the exhibiting and experiencing of such languages” (Bakhtin 365). In the Bildungsroman, the protagonist realizes himself as a result of discursive interaction: “[It] is the process of coming to know one’s own language as it is perceived in someone else’s language, coming to know one’s own belief system in someone else’s system” (Bakhtin 365). This type of discourse, or language, that alters perspectives and provokes awareness can be considered “internally persuasive discourse” (Bakhtin 345). It is opposed to authoritative discourse, which serves to limit and restrict possibilities of thought and awakens individual consciousness. Initially it is difficult to understand another person’s ideological thought in relation to one’s own, as it is a struggle between discourses, but gradually one assimilates the other’s words to create new meanings: “Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word [‘half-ours and



half someone else's'] awakens new and independent words..." (Bakhtin 345). In terms of the dystopian novel, the protagonist can be seen as being influenced in such a way by an internally persuasive "counter"-discourse prior to becoming the Foucauldian "intellectual".

However, if the protagonist does not assume the role of the intellectual, he or she may serve the same purpose of exposing social languages, or discourses, by representing the role of either the fool or the clown. Bakhtin recognizes the necessity of the fool figure: "[B]y his very uncomprehending presence he makes strange the world of social conventionality" (Bakhtin 404). Stupidity and failure to understand "defamiliarize," to use Booker's term, the conventions and ideology that constitute the depicted society; according to Bakhtin, stupidity is justified because it is the failure to understand a lie. The clown is actually a deceitful rogue who pretends that he is a fool in order to purposely "motivate distortions and shufflings of languages and labels, thus unmasking them by not understanding them" (405). The clown can speak in unacceptable languages and can at the same time distort languages that are acceptable. The final outcome of the actions of the fool and the clown, despite their differences in intentions, is the same: they unmask lies that act as truths.

The following chapter looks at the functions of power in Zamyatin's *We*, Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, and Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. In each of these novels I look at how the official language is established, and by whom it is

expressed. The establishment of a unitary language that seeks to repress heteroglossia reveals a society that is striving towards an ideal; this ideal is expressed through the official discourse, which produces social truths and a corresponding state of reality. Secondly, I analyze the representation of counter-discourse and its effects on the protagonist. The evidence of opposing languages serves to indicate that the society has not achieved an ideal monologic state; it is not utopian, or static, in its structure. Finally, I focus on the role of the protagonist and how he or she undermines the dominant ideology in society. The most significant area of analysis will be the protagonist's personal response to the existing power struggle. This response inevitably involves the deconstruction of the present state of reality; thus, it reveals the dystopian nature of the society at issue.

## Chapter Two

In Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, language is explicitly addressed as a primary locus of control and power. Newspeak, the "official language" in Oceania, is devised by the Party for the purpose of attaining pure, unopposed power; it excludes heretical words and restricts vocabulary in order to limit and control individual range of thought. The concept of Newspeak supports Edward Sapir's hypothesis that "[h]uman beings are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium or expression for their society... the 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group" (209). As an extension of this claim, Sapir's student Benjamin Lee Whorf postulated the theory of linguistic relativity, which suggests that people who have no words to express antisocial sentiments cannot think antisocially (Matter 106). Those in power can control behaviour by manipulating thought, and they can control thought by regulating language. Thus, if the Party can abolish Thoughtcrime completely by imposing a legally-enforced orthodox language, then criminal acts, or any dissent that may challenge the Party's authority, will cease to occur. According to the Appendix, Newspeak serves to control the thoughts of those citizens residing in Oceania: "It was intended that when Newspeak had been adopted once and for all and Oldspeak forgotten, a heretical thought – that is, a thought diverging from the principles of Ingsoc – should be literally unthinkable, at least so far as thought is

dependent on words” (241). Newspeak epitomizes Bakhtin’s notion of “unitary language” which works to impose itself as an official or authoritative discourse. The Party expects to attain ideal, utopian power when Newspeak supersedes Oldspeak; under such circumstances, Oceania would become a monologic culture where the individual would not be distinct from society.

Newspeak also supports Foucault’s theories on discourse and power/knowledge. The Party has the power to produce IngSoc ‘truths’ to which the citizens of Oceania are inescapably subjected. Newspeak, in its completed form, will set discursive limitations in order to enable the organization and control of individuals by the Party. For example, sexual activity is regulated by the existence of only two words to describe sexual conduct: *sexcrime* (sexual immorality) and *goodsex* (chastity): “*Sexcrime* cover[s] all sexual misdeeds whatever... [*Goodsex* is] normal intercourse between man and wife, for the sole purpose of begetting children, and without physical pleasure on the part of the woman” (246-47). If an individual’s sexual life does not conform to the definition of “goodsex”, then not only is the individual acting non-conventionally, but he is also acting criminally. To further enforce this relationship between discursive practices and societal ‘truths’, the Party ensures that Newspeak does not contain any words that support the concept of liberty. Calin Mihailescu calls this totalitarian manipulation of language, a “semiotic fracture”: “[W]hat the dystopian world does to signs is to isolate and reduce to a

minimum their semantic dimension, a phenomenon well understood and carefully expanded upon by Orwell...” (218).

The Party expresses and strongly affirms the correlation between language and power in Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by implementing Newspeak. As the novel so explicitly and clearly addresses the manipulation of language, with even an Appendix dedicated to the principles of Newspeak, I will not be investigating any further the construction and development of such a correlation in this particular novel. However, this brief explication of Newspeak may serve as an introduction to the analyses of discourse and control in novels that do not outline their discursive practices in such a straightforward manner as does *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In Zamyatin’s *We*, Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, and Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*, language and discourse are manipulated by those in control; this manipulation is an attempt to perfect the function of power, and thus, to attain an ideal society according to the controllers’ varying intentions.

Dystopian novels can perhaps be seen as novels concentrating on transition phases of power in enclosed societies. According to Angela M. Gulick, “utopia is a perfect society, and since perfection cannot be improved upon, a utopia has evolved to its fullest potential; it is simply incapable of improving itself” (2). However, Gulick does point out Naomi Jacob’s qualification that utopias cannot just be considered “perfect societies”; instead, utopias can be characterized by a lack of definite progress or movement. According to these assertions, it would seem that

making the distinction between utopias and dystopias lies in determining which stage of development a society has reached. The distinction between the two genres cannot depend upon a mere subjective judgment made on whether a society is favourable or unfavourable. Furthermore, this classification of genres should not rely on the assumed intent of the governing body. Regardless of whether a society is “sadistic” or “hedonistic,” according to Mihailescu’s terms, an ideal, or static state of perfection is the goal; for example, the Party in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* may not have utilitarian intentions, but it is in the process of attaining an ideal society based on perfected power.

Thus, the dialogism of languages within novels that establish a radical official ideology reveals the non-utopian nature of the depicted society. This dialogism, the struggle between heteroglossia and monologism, conveys the transitory state of the society at issue. The monologic discourse or unitary language is responding to the discourse(s) of the previous state of society. Dystopia has no meaning without the response of opposition. According to Bakhtin and his notion of addressivity, if it has no meaning, then it does not exist. For example, Orwell's Oceania is dystopian because the Party, still in a transition phase, has not perfected its power; the protagonist addresses and mediates between opposing forces<sup>1</sup> that confront each other within the novel. For a society to be utopian it would have to

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<sup>1</sup> When I use the term “opposing forces”, I mean it to include both the concept of heteroglossia and the definition of counter-discourse.

have reached its final stage of development where the response of its citizens is total, unblemished unity and support. However, evidence of opposing forces is not enough to classify a novel as specifically dystopian. The protagonist must explore, either intentionally or unintentionally, these opposing languages or discourses in a way that undermines the production of conventional 'truths'. To support these statements, I will be looking at *We*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *Fahrenheit 451* for evidence of a unitary or official language, displays of opposing forces, and examples of the protagonists' undermining responses to this power struggle.

### Zamyatin's *We*

Zamyatin's *We* depicts a society, the One State, which is ruled by the totalitarian force of the Benefactor. The One State bases its ideology on a rational, logical official language, where "[r]eason must prevail" (232). It adheres to an authoritative discourse based on the "principles of effective industrial management laid down by the early-twentieth-century American efficiency expert Frederick Winslow Taylor" (Beauchamp 288). The One State is close to reaching its final stage of development, which would be a society based entirely on an authoritarian discourse of excessive efficiency and rationality; however, it is not yet perfectly monologic, as D-503 reveals. In his first entry, D-503 copies an excerpt of an article from the *One State Gazette* that defines freedom as a "primitive condition" and happiness as "mathematically infallible" (1). Towards the end of this quotation, the

article states that “before resorting to arms, we shall try the power of words” (1). In a sense, this claim outlines the tactics of the One State, which initially bases its power on discursive practices. The One State relies on the premise that its citizens will accept and adopt the official language as the only language. Its reliance on force, used to perform routine lobotomies on its citizens, takes place only after the “power of words” fails to achieve the ideal end of perfect efficiency and logic.

This novel depicts the One State in transition, although it is very close to reaching the final stage where no more progress, by the controllers’ standards, can be made. Apart from the evidence of characters who represent or express opposing discourses, there is also evidence that the society is not perfectly monologic from the narration of D-503. Even in his first entry, before I-330 exposes him to her counter-discourse, he is careful to qualify his use of the word “everyone”: “But I am ready, like everyone, or almost every one of us” (2). It is not only his faithfulness to precision but also his awareness that the One State has not attained its ideal that provokes this qualification. D-503's realization that the One State is not yet perfect, or utopian, corresponds with Gulick’s distinction between utopia and dystopia. In his sixth entry, he writes about the implications of something happening: “...I must note here that even among us the process of the hardening, the crystallization of life has evidently not yet been completed; there are still some steps to be ascended before we reach the ideal. The ideal (clearly) is the condition where nothing *happens* anymore...” (24) The One State reveals its ideal of mathematical, rational



perfection through various discourses such as the medical discourse or the discourse on criminality.

D-503, from whose perspective the One State is portrayed, adheres to the official language. As the proud builder of the Integral, which is going to help to promote the One State's official ideology to other planets, he believes in the social and conventional 'truths' that are produced by this unitary language. His narration is in the form of diary entries, which D-503 intends to offer to the "unknown beings on other planets" (1). His intent is to "record... a derivative of our life" in the One State for these planetary readers; thus, his narration includes deliberate, explicit explanations of social 'truths' which are based on the fundamentals of reason. For example, in his third entry, D-503 explains the present discourse on ethics as a deliberate commentary on the past foundation for ethics. These comments serve to reveal the dialogic nature of the official language; the mathematical morality of the One State is a response of disapproval towards the humanitarian morality of the past. D-503's comments also support the authoritative language of rationality: "The state (humaneness) forbade the killing of a single individual, but not the partial killing of millions day by day... [I]t never occurred to any of the Kants to build a system of scientific ethics, i.e., ethics based on subtraction, addition, division, and multiplication" (13). Citizens of the One State inevitably regard humanitarian notions as foolish or naïve according to the dominant discourse of the One State, especially since the citizens of the One State are called "numbers" and not "humans".

The official language is prevalent in all aspects of society, including even the 'names' of individuals, which, appropriate to people being referred to as 'numbers', are numbers themselves, such as D-503 or R-13.

The One State also constructs a medical discourse in order to produce other societal 'truths' based on reason. Doctors in this society classify the imagination as an incurable disease: to have a soul is considered an illness. The doctor at the Medical Office diagnoses D-503 with having a soul, a condition which he considers to mean being "in a bad way" (89). In order to explain the concept of a soul to D-503, the doctor uses a scientific analogy: "The cold mirror reflects, throws back, but this one absorbs, and everything leaves its trace – forever" (89). The One State considers that to be "healthy" is to be like a "cold mirror" that reflects, without question, the principles of reason and logic that are presented before it. The official language implies that for a person to have a soul, to have emotions and curiosity, is to be unwell. D-503 rationalizes his behaviour based on this discourse. He finds relief and comfort in the belief that his atypical mental functions, such as dreaming, are only symptoms of an uncontrollable disease: "Sap, Buddha... what nonsense! Clearly I must be ill. I have never dreamed before. They say that with the ancients dreaming was a perfectly ordinary, normal occurrence... We, however, know that dreams are a serious psychic disease" (32). It concerns D-503 that he has become ill; however, he takes comfort in knowing that he now has an explanation for not going

to the Office of the Guardians to report the subversive I-330 who tried to convince him to disobey official regulations.

The purpose of classifying the imagination as a disease is to allow the Benefactor to dismiss the words and actions of those citizens who are diagnosed as incurable. Society still looks upon sickness as something that should be cured or contained; thus, the One State considers those who act irrationally to be in need of medical attention. Foucault explains the “division of madness” as a system of exclusion where the madman’s words are ignored or considered meaningless; those who are diagnosed with souls or imaginations in the One State are accorded the same treatment. This division between the healthy and the unhealthy, based on rationality versus the imagination, ensures the dismissal of languages that oppose the official discourse of reason; in other words, the influence and credibility of revolutionists are negated. After Unanimity Day, when thousands of people vote against the Benefactor, an article appears in the Gazette that attempts to reinstate order based on the premise of medical discourse: “The celebration was marred by a slight disturbance, caused by the enemies of happiness... It is clear to everyone that taking account of their votes would be as absurd as considering the coughs of some sick person in the audience as a part of a magnificent heroic symphony” (149). Since the official discourse is based on logic, this editorial is appropriately reassuring in its rectification of order; according to D-503, “what objection can be raised to this most crystal clear of syllogisms?” (149). However, the most significant application of this

medical discourse leads to the mandatory lobotomy of every citizen. The front page of the *Gazette* reinforces this social truth by glorifying the machine:

Machines have no imagination... And you? Blush with shame! The Guardians have noticed more and more such smiles and sighs of late... But this is not your fault – you are sick. The name of this sickness is IMAGINATION. It is a worm that gnaws out black lines on your forehead. It is a fever that drives you to escape ever farther, even if this ‘farther’ begins where happiness ends. (179-80)

Since the One State equates happiness with “unfreedom” (62), the uncontrollable imagination must be cured for the sake of “perfection” and “happiness” (180). If the official language of the One State were entirely monologic, there would not be any opposition to this Operation; all citizens would agree with the premise and logic of this article, and thus, they would actually rejoice and “hurry to the auditoriums” (180). In fact, more accurately, the Operation would be unnecessary because imagination and freedom, and any other concepts that oppose the official language, would not exist at all.

However, the One State has not achieved an ideal monologic state. The incident on Unanimity Day exposes a diversity of existing languages. Even the reaction to the Operation, which D-503 comments upon, indicates an opposition to the dominant discourse: “Over the heads – separately, in the air – a banner, words: ‘Down with the machines! Down with the Operation!’” (206). The non-utopian nature of the One State is made apparent only because of the opposing response to its attempts at attaining an ideal, monologic society. Since the narrative includes evidence of counter-discourses and dialogues of characters who speak other

languages the One State cannot be considered utopian. For the society to be defined as dystopian as opposed to non-utopian or anti-utopian, the protagonist must become a mediator between these opposing forces in a way that undermines the official discourse by means of personal, psychological development. D-503 becomes this mediating figure after he meets I-330, who expresses a discourse counter to the official language. His initial reaction to her, following their first confrontation, is that she evokes the image of a “strange, irritating X” (6). She is an unknown variable as seen through the eyes of the rational D-503; he is unable to comprehend her because she speaks another, heteroglot language.

A couple of their dialogues, where I-330 mocks D-503's rigid adherence to the official language, typify the Bakhtinian idea of parody as a dialogic construction:

“Don’t you think it’s time?” I said as politely as I could.

“And if I asked you to remain here with me?”

“Look, do you... do you know what you are saying? In ten minutes I must be at the auditorium...”

“...and all numbers must attend the prescribed courses in art and sciences,” she said in my voice. (29)

I-330 is using her language to parody D-503's language, which is the official language based on rational order. She is parodying the mechanical, automatic and expected response of an ideal, devoted “number”. Technically, this mockery is the reprocessing of his utterances according to her own opposing views. The parodic nature of her comment is made clear by D-503's observation that she used his voice; however, his subjective assertion is unnecessary because even earlier in the conversation she refers to the language of the past in order to mock D-503's belief

system: “[T]o be original is to violate equality. And that which in the language of the ancients was called “being banal” is with us merely the fulfillment of our duty” (28). At this point, D-503 is unaware that he is being mocked, and he responds to this parodic stylization as if I-330 uttered it earnestly. However, the reader does learn from D-503's narrative that I-330 derives her responses from the belief system of the language she embodies, which is not the language of D-503 or the One State.

D-503's awareness that I-330 is expressing a counter-discourse is necessary for him to begin exploring his own belief system. The fact that the protagonist comes to realize himself in the process of encountering counter-discourses indicates that the dystopian novel tends to contain aspects of the Bildungsroman. D-503 starts to question his belief system in response to I-330's influence. He begins to experience feelings such as guilt and doubt, experiences that imply his questioning of the official language, especially as the unitary language does not include such emotions. His first confrontation with guilt occurs after he does not report I-330 to the Office of the Guardians for not adhering to the Table of Hours. He begins to rationalize his feelings in an attempt to draw clarity from a logical premise: “...I suddenly realized I had said an untruth to the old woman: I-330 was not there by herself now. Perhaps it was this – that I had unwittingly lied to the old woman – that tormented me and interfered with my listening” (30) He refuses to acknowledge guilt, which he would have never experienced before, because it would mean that he has committed a criminal act. As long as he is able to rationalize his behaviour

according to the dominant belief system, he can pretend to remain unaware of counter-discourse(s).

When he is unable to explain his reactions and behaviour logically, he must confront the irrational, the unknown. The official language includes the concept of the irrational as there exists a mathematical representation: the square root of minus one is an irrational number. D-503 recalls his initial reaction to this mathematical concept: “I don’t want -1! Take -1 out of me!’ This irrational number had grown into me like something foreign, alien, terrifying. It devoured me – it was impossible to conceive, to render harmless, because it was outside ratio” (39). In a moment of clarity, after this recollection, D-503 realizes that he has succumbed to the irrational. He admits that he has been lying to himself in an attempt to avoid -1. His feeling that there is “some alien body in [his] brain” may be seen as analogous to the intrusion of a counter-discourse which opposes his logical language. I-330’s language is an internally persuasive discourse that provokes D-503’s awareness and thus affects his perspective. He is no longer “clear” about his reality because his reality has been based on the unquestioned acceptance of the official discourse. In effect, he begins to reflect upon himself as an individual: “Who am I? What am I like?” (64). His own beliefs no longer offer assurance, and this uncertainty of who he is carries over into uncertainty about everything: “I don’t know – I don’t know anything” (99). This lack of confidence is a result of being forced to look at his own language in the language of another, specifically the counter-discourse of I-330.

This struggle is particularly difficult for D-503 as I-330 intentionally manipulates his discourse in her own language for the purpose of deconstructing his reality. She mockingly expresses her belief system in a logical and mathematical manner using D-503's terminology such as his favourite word "clearly"; this strategic mocking leads him to confront her beliefs in relation to the conventional view of reality. It is after the news of the Operation that I-330 confronts D-503 about the semantic issue of "happiness": "And happiness... Well, after all, desires torment us, don't they? And, clearly, happiness is when there are no more desires, not one... What a mistake, what ridiculous prejudice it's been to have marked happiness always with a plus sign. Absolute happiness should, of course, carry a minus sign – the divine minus" (184). D-503, who had been reassured, and even excited, at the prospect of the Operation, is now torn between the two opposing discourses: "My head was splitting; two logical trains collided, climbing upon each other, crashing, splintering..." (185). These two opposing languages cannot be assimilated or fused by D-503 into a third language. D-503 does not become the intellectual figure who consciously applies I-330's counter-discourse to the present society and its official language. Instead, D-503 tries to cope with the vague awareness that his belief system is being deconstructed: "From my own experience I know that the cruelest thing is to make a person doubt his own reality, his three-dimensional – not any other – reality" (120). These doubts, which D-503 wrongly attributes to the intentions of the old woman at the Ancient House, originate with his exposure to I-330's belief



system. D-503 becomes a variant example of the fool figure who, through his failure to resolve his internal struggle, undermines social conventions.

D-503 inadvertently deconstructs his own reality, a reality based on the official language. Although he is the one to express the belief system of the One State by praising its rational foundation, D-503 unintentionally defamiliarizes this society by having to contend, albeit naively, with alternate discourses and their effects. As mentioned earlier, the objective presentation of heteroglossia is not sufficient for the One State to be considered dystopian. It is the role of the protagonist to confront the opposing discourses in a way that deliberately or involuntarily explores and deconstructs the prevailing belief systems. D-503 is not a typical fool figure who exposes the official language by failing to understand it. Instead, D-503 fails to comprehend his reactions to the official discourse, reactions which accord with the counter-discourse. His innocent words and behaviour, rather than the typical fool stupidity, result in the deconstruction of the discursive reality. D-503's excessive rationalization or desperate confusion in the face of opposing languages reveals flaws in the monologism of the official discourse. When I-330 plays the piano as an example of musical composition from the past, D-503 is struck with an instinctive, poetically inspired reaction instead of the socially expected laughter. He is relieved when he finally laughs and lapses back into the "simple" realm of official discourse where he can rationalize his unusual reaction: "The clever phono-lecturer had given us a too vivid picture of that primitive age. That was all.

With what enjoyment I listened afterward to our present music!” (18) His overwhelming need for justification indicates insecurity. Since D-503 defines himself according to the official language, he must have faith in its truths. He would rather accept the dominant belief system and consider himself a “criminal”, a “poisoned one,” than consciously undermine his constructed reality (89). However, he does have an epiphanic moment where he realizes himself apart from the dictated, unitary language; he recognizes the fragility of social reality:

It has never occurred to me before, but this is truly how it is: all of us on earth walk constantly over a seething, scarlet sea of flame, hidden below, in the belly of the earth. We never think of it. But what if the thin crust under our feet should turn into glass and we should suddenly see...

I became glass. I saw within myself.

There were two of me. The former one, D-503, number D-503, and the other... (56)

This “other” is the self that is not definable by the official language, except as a criminal. D-503 dismisses the conventional belief system and reacts according to the counter-discourse, using language from the past. He passionately seizes I-330 in a longing to possess her exclusively – a longing based on the “ancient” notion of “mine”: “And suddenly the other leaped out and yelled, ‘I won’t allow it! I want no one but me. I’ll kill anyone who...’” (57). D-503 maintains the distinction between the one self and the “other” that does not fit into the One State. It is his way of avoiding a conscious decision between the two opposing social languages.

His spontaneous reactions reveal an acceptance of counter discourse; however, he never explicitly admits any desire to oppose the Benefactor and thus the

official language. He becomes caught between two belief systems, and, as a result, his discourse fluctuates between them. For instance, when D-503 looks out through the glass wall at a beast staring back at him, he wonders about happiness: “What if he, this yellow-eyed creature, in his disordered, filthy mound of leaves, in his uncomputed life, is happier than we?” (93). This question to himself is evidence of I-330’s persuasive internal discourse. Her influence has caused D-503 to doubt his own discourse, his own reality. Immediately after entertaining such a threatening thought, D-503 resorts again to his old language in an attempt to reassure himself: “What absurdity – that he could possibly be happier than we are! Happier than I, perhaps; but I am only an exception, I am sick” (93). He is reluctant to deconstruct the reality based on the official language.

According to Bakhtin, internally persuasive discourse awakens individual consciousness, unlike authoritative discourse which restricts possibilities of thought. D-503, who has never before had to think for himself, feels threatened by this sense of responsibility; however, he is unable to suppress utterances based on the opposing belief system. He is the fool who speaks revelations without actually comprehending their implications. When he is out beyond the Green Wall with I-330, he is confused and uncertain, albeit calm; however, in a moment of intoxicating spontaneity, D-503 shouts out a deconstructed truth: ““Yes, yes, madness! And everyone must lose his mind, everyone must! The sooner the better! It is essential—I know it!”” (158). This utterance, although not explored or analyzed by D-503,

undermines the official medical discourse; madness, as defined by the authoritative language, is freedom, imagination, and love. D-503 cannot actually explain the motivation behind this impulsive utterance, but he intuitively believes this spontaneous utterance as a result of I-330's persuasive influence.

There is a certain progression for D-503, although he is still unable to understand why he seems to be challenging social and conventional norms. His words seem to become more consistent with the counter-discourse. Rather than merely exposing itself through dialogue, the opposing belief system infiltrates its way into the narrative of his diary. D-503 realizes the personal value of his diary when the Guardians come to search his room: "And then, I could not, I was no longer able to destroy this anguished – perhaps most precious – piece of myself" (166). His freedom of expression, of thought, becomes more important to him than upholding collective values. When faced with personal endangerment, D-503 is willing to deceive the enforcers of law who once brought him a sense of reassurance and security. He begins to write consciously false words of loyalty so that he will not incriminate himself: "'The Benefactor is the most perfect disinfection, essential to mankind, and therefore in the organism of the One State no peristalsis...' With a jumping pen I squeezed out this *utter nonsense*..." (166, my emphasis). These words, "utter nonsense," are the clearest indication in the novel of D-503's altered language. He has expressed, for himself and not as a verbal response for an other, the deconstructed truth of the official language. However, it becomes apparent that

D-503 does not understand the implications of this deconstruction. He confronts this issue when O approaches him about the child he has given her: “A preposterous feeling, but I know: yes, I must. Preposterous, because this duty of mine is yet another crime. Preposterous, because white cannot at the same time be black, duty and crime cannot coincide. Or is there no black or white in life, and the colour depends only on the initial logical premise?” (190). By recognizing that ‘truths,’ or reality, may be only products of prominent discourses, D-503 seems to be addressing Foucault’s theories of power/knowledge, discourse and the will to truth. He is on the brink of a fundamental epiphany that would alter irrevocably his perspective on reality: he hovers on the verge of becoming the intellectual who could undermine discursive social realities.

However, he does not achieve this status. D-503 cannot be the intellectual because he is not interested in the power struggle within the One State. His ‘revelations’ and support of counter-discourses are only relevant on a personal level. I-330’s discourse is persuasive because D-503 falls in love with her. He has no interest in deconstructing his reality beyond how it affects his relationship with her. D-503 even supports the official discourse insofar as it does not take I-330 away from him. His enthusiastic response to the news of the Operation is indicative of this attitude. He tells I-330 how remarkable he thinks it to be, and she plainly tells him that the Operation means that he will be “cured” of her, that it will be “farewell” (186). D-503 re-evaluates his response to the news: “I saw it clearly: everyone was

saved, but there was no salvation for me. *I did not want salvation...*” (186). He still believes the official language that claims that perfection and happiness mean being machine-like. Instead of countering the language used to frame the Operation, by mocking or challenging the words “salvation” and “happiness,” D-503 frames his own feelings with the same language. He can only see himself and define himself in relation to the authoritative discourse; he is still a function of power, and not a threat to it.

I-330 uses him because he is like a fool, failing to understand. The only reason that he refuses to conform to social convention, which he has never before opposed, is that he is reacting, without conscious thought, to feelings of love. When D-503 discovers that I-330 has only been exploiting him because of his position as the Builder of the Integral, D-503 does not want to write anymore. Any notion of dissent that he has expressed has solely been out of desire, a desire which D-503 does not consider to apply to anyone but himself. He does not think about the implications of this desire and how the One State denies anyone from wanting exclusivity with another. Instead, he continues consistently to believe until the end, with the one exception, that the One State is “the greatest and most rational civilization in history” (229). He bemoans the possible collapse of the One State after he discovers that the Guardian to whom he chooses to confess is actually a promoter of counter-discourse. D-503 does not want to undermine the power of the official language; he still believes in it as an ideal. His betrayals of the One State

have been based on concepts, namely love and freedom, that D-503 cannot possibly understand nor recognize for their true value. He has exposed the contrived constructions in the official language without even realizing their significance, or fully comprehending the relationship between knowledge and power. Until the Operation he had imagination, which gave him the potential to explore the realms of freedom and love; however, he believed himself to be unwell because he inherently accepted, and wanted to promote, the authoritative discourse. Perhaps if he had had more time, more support, or even a clearer explanation of an alternate language, he might have been a real revolutionary, like I-330. As it is, after the Operation, D-503 is relieved and once again certain: “I am well, I am entirely, absolutely well. I smile – I cannot help smiling: a kind of splinter was pulled out of my head, and the head feels light, empty. Or, to be more precise, not empty, but free of anything extraneous that might interfere with smiling (a smile is the normal state of a normal man)” (231). He has revealed to the reader the dystopian nature of the One State without ever being absolutely aware of it himself. He has expressed the appeal of love and freedom while exposing the restrictions of ideal reason and logic. However, D-503 does not develop beyond the status of an innocent or a fool. The novel ends with the One State taking its final step towards reaching its ideal, towards becoming a utopia in its structure, where nothing happens. However, *We* ends before offering confirmation that the One State does ever reach this ideal monologic state.

Furthermore, D-503 draws attention to and confronts the opposing forces of counter-discourses.

Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

The Republic of Gilead is the society under scrutiny in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. Gilead is constructed upon the official discourse of religious fundamentalism<sup>2</sup>. This Republic uses Christian and biblical values as the primary basis for its ideology and thus for the establishment of social norms and conventions. Eleonora Rao, in her book *Strategies for Identity*, supports this premise: “[*The Handmaid's Tale*] is a novel about power politics explored through the tyranny of the Gilead Republic, a futuristic Christian totalitarian state, where a puritanical religion functions primarily as a means of social control” (11). That this Republic is even more definitively a transitional society than the One State of *We* is suggested by the fact that Gilead was founded only three years prior to Offred's narrative. However, similar to the structure to *We*, *The Handmaid's Tale* is a collection of diary entries written by an individual who is subjected to the official discourse. The key difference between D-503 and Offred is that D-503 writes in the language of the One State, while Offred uses the language of the past. However, language of the past is

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<sup>2</sup> Beyond the emphasis on Christianity, the novel does not make it clear what specific religious domination or faith is complicit with the totalitarian regime of Gilead. In fact, several counter-discourses are expressed by those who follow different religious principles, such as Catholicism or the Quaker community.



not necessarily an opposing discourse to the new authoritative language. The official language seeks to reject and repress this alternate language; however, this language of the past was not specifically created to counter the official language because it precedes it. The official language is expressed only second hand through Offred; this expression is usually in the form of mockery or as a reconstruction of others' speech. D-503 and Offred write in different languages because their respective societies have reached different stages of development at the time of their narratives. It is implied in *We* that D-503 has always lived in the One State according to the current belief system. Offred, on the other hand, has lived most of her life according to the American democratic belief system, and then, three years before the novel opens, she is unwillingly thrust under the oppressive ruling of religious fundamentalism in Gilead. Offred's diary appears to be a more explicit deconstruction of the social and conventional norms in Gilead than D-503's deconstruction of the One State because Offred compares the present society to the previous one. Rao comments on this distinction between *The Handmaid's Tale* and other dystopian novels: "Offred's memories of her previous life render the contrast between her life prior to the regime and her present enslaved condition, vivid as well as painful... The continuities that are shown to exist between the past and the present make *The Handmaid's Tale* effectively address the faults of the present world" (27). The evidence of an official language comes from Offred's analysis and commentary on this relatively new realm. Gilead's transitional nature is addressed by those in

power as Offred records, but it is also evidenced by Offred's personal transition of acceptance and internalization of dominant discourses.

The controllers of the Republic and those in other authority positions are aware that Gilead is far from attaining an ideal monologic state. The regime of power can officially ignore or alter the past; however, human memories serve to threaten the official status of the past because, although actions can be controlled, thoughts are not yet in complete conformity with the new belief system. Aunt Lydia, who trains and disciplines the handmaids strictly according to the official language, acknowledges to them the necessity of normalizing the belief system: "Ordinary, said Aunt Lydia, is what you are used to. This may not seem ordinary to you now, but after a time it will. It will become ordinary" (32). This notion of "ordinary" is a necessary step to achieving ideal monologism, even if it is not achieved until future generations. The unitary language must be accepted as normal, or ordinary, before it can effectively reject other discourses. An official, unitary language insists on being the only language so that conformity extends to thought as well as to actions. The women of Gilead at the time of Offred's narrative, whether they are assigned to be Handmaids, Marthas, Econowives, or Jezebels, are being forced to act according to the prescribed norms. The ideal future will be when women accept these roles as natural and even honourable. Aunt Lydia acknowledges the official awareness, as the "we" would imply, that Offred's "generation" is one of transition:

You are a transitional generation, said Aunt Lydia. It is the hardest for you. We know the sacrifices you are being expected to make. It is hard

when men revile you. For the ones who come after you, it will be easier. They will accept their duties with willing hearts.

She did not say: Because they will have no memories, of any other way.

She said: Because they won't have things they can't have. (111)

Although it is not fundamental for the long term future of Gilead, the Republic expects this transitional generation to gradually accept the belief system of the Republic. Gilead seems confident that its structure will only strengthen as the society progresses because the past will no longer be a source of empowerment. In Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the Party has absolute control over the past in order to prevent the power associated with knowledge; in Foucauldian terms, knowledge is power even as power is control over knowledge. In the future, Gilead will have ultimate control over depictions of the past in order to disempower any discourses that threaten its official language. As it stands now, those in authority manipulate languages from the past for their own purposes. For example, Gileadean freedom is explained by criticizing the past concept of freedom: "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" (24). By undermining discourses of the past, those in control can strengthen and reinforce their own discourse.

As perhaps a typical example of other handmaids, Offred offers, both consciously and at times unconsciously, examples of her internalization and acceptance of the official language. She is transitional in a personal sense in that she

gradually conforms to the structure laid out for her by those in control. Even early on in her narrative<sup>3</sup>, Offred narrates events or incidents according to the premises of official discourse and thus essentially adopts the language herself. For example, she describes seeing the pregnant Ofwarren in the Milk and Honey store: “‘Show-off,’ a voice hisses, and this is true. A woman that pregnant doesn’t have to go out, doesn’t have to go shopping. The daily walk is no longer prescribed, to keep her abdominal muscles in working order. She needs only the floor exercises, the breathing drill. She could stay at her house. And it’s dangerous for her to be out...” (25). A pregnant woman who is shopping is now considered a “show-off” based on the implications of the official discourse. Offred does not even realize that her envious response implies a transitional acceptance of the fundamentalist ideology. Similarly, she responds to seeing inscriptions scratched on desks reminiscent of former times in the official language: “They appear to [her] now lavish, decadent almost; immoral like the orgies of barbarian regimes” (107). Offred represents the gradual transition of individual perspectives into a collective perspective based on the unitary discourse. Any radical authoritative discourse resists otherness and promotes oneness; the mark of attaining ideal monologism is the point where the individual is no longer distinct from the collective whole. Thus, beyond reacting according to social standards, there is also a transition from seeing oneself as an individual to

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<sup>3</sup> I am aware that the narrative is not necessarily reconstructed in the correct order as the Historical Notes point out; however, I am working under the assumption that the events are recorded chronologically.

seeing oneself as a collective entity. Offred reaches a moment when she speaks for all handmaids instead of just herself. She is asking the commander for hand lotion: “Hand lotion, I said. Or face lotion. Our skin gets very dry. For some reason I said *our* instead of *my*” (148). Her gradual conformity appears inevitable in the face of a language so tightly fused to its authority.

Those in control manipulate and occasionally forbid former language that threatens the production of new social and conventional ‘truths’. As mentioned in my analysis on *We*, the totalitarian language is usually a response to a former language. In the case of *The Handmaid’s Tale*, the religious fundamentalist discourse is a disapproving response to the liberal human rights language of the past, a language that defined pornography and abortion as legal. As in the example of Newspeak in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, language is the foundation for thoughts and thus if the Party can control language, then it can also restrict and control thought. For instance, the concept of freedom in Gilead for future generations will only exist as “freedom from”. Songs, especially those that contain the word “free”, are outlawed because they are considered too dangerous. “Freedom to”, which is freedom as we know it, will no longer exist; thus, to ensure that it will not exist even as a concept, the words “freedom to” will be strictly forbidden in future generations. More specifically, words and related topics like “infertility” are considered taboo. When Aunt Lydia is discussing the role of the Wives, she cannot bring herself to articulate that these women are unable to have children. By constructing a subject as taboo,

the institutions of Gilead can control and organize individuals by regulating statuses. The concept of infertility divides women into positions of respect, although in the case of Wives, the Republic ranks them based on positions of power. For the remaining female majority, to be assigned to positions of child bearing, such as the Econowives or Handmaids, is to be considered “privileged”: “Where I am is not a prison but a privilege, as Aunt Lydia said, who was in love with either/or” (8). Women who cannot have children are fortunate if the Republic assigns them to be Marthas; however, the majority of sterile women, called “Unwomen,” are sent to the Colonies because they are considered worthless.

The Republic of Gilead, according to Offred's narrative, is based entirely on the Christian concept of procreation. Gilead has fundamentally altered the medical discourse of the past to produce ‘truths’; this production reinforces the basic belief system and as a result, promotes power for those in command. For instance, doctors can no longer diagnose sterility because “sterile” is a forbidden word: “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” (57). Gilead places responsibility wholly on the woman to produce children. Doctors, who are assumed to be mainly men, are not even involved in the delivery of a baby unless there are complications. This current discourse removes power from the realm of medicine and health institutions: “It used to be different, they used to be in charge. A shame it was, said Aunt Lydia. Shameful... Some man with a searchlight looking up between her legs,

where she'd been shaved, a mere beardless girl..." (108). The Republic bases the official language on the bible and the Gileadean interpretation of passages concerning conception and labour. The birthing procedure is structured around the following passage from the bible: "*I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children*" (108). This passage rationalizes and reinforces the practice of handmaids enduring labour without doctors and anaesthetics. The official discourse gains strength from the use of a historically respected discourse, even if the excerpt is taken out of context. The other biblical passage that becomes a principle tenet for handmaids is taken from the Rachel and Leah story in Genesis: "*Give me children, or else I die. Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb? Behold my maid Bilhah. She shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her*" (84). The role of handmaids, of women who are assigned this position, is no more than "two-legged wombs, that's all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices" (128). Offred makes this sardonic comment according to standards and discourses of the past.

Gilead denies literacy for all women in an attempt to perpetuate its structure and hierarchy. The regime legally forbids all literature, and even replaces store signs with symbols and pictures. This law is enforced to enable those in power to have rigid control over language. No handmaids, and presumably any other women, can read or write; they can only be read to out of the bible by a Commander. Although Offred does not analyze why literacy has been denied them, she does

comment that the new signs on stores may be a result of the Commanders thinking that even such limited words are “too much temptation” (24). She does not comment further on what she thinks their intentions may be. However, it is obvious that by forbidding women to read or write, the Republic can keep women at an appropriate level of subservience. On a larger scale, the legally enforced abolition of all forms of literature ensures the repression of unnecessary forms of opposing discourses. These laws make clear that those who have control over the word have dominant power. For those who cannot read, write, or even converse unless in the orthodox language<sup>4</sup>, there is no form of communicating opposing beliefs, and no linguistic foundation for even being able to have opposing sentiments. Offred is aware of the power of words and language: “[The Commander] has something we don’t have, he has the word. How we squandered it once” (84). However, this word, the official word, provokes counter-discourse based on the knowledge of the past.

Unlike *We*, where representative characters clearly express the counter-discourse, *The Handmaid’s Tale* does not require such a definitive expression of an opposing language. Since Gilead is such a newly developing society, the discourses of the past, implicit, and at times explicit, in Offred’s narrative, carry enough opposition to undermine the official language. However, there are new languages

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<sup>4</sup> Conversations between handmaids, which are usually restricted to shopping trips, are limited to orthodox phrases regarding the weather or the war. Orthodox phrases such as “Praise be”, “Blessed be the fruit”, “May the Lord Open”, and “Under His Eye” are accepted greetings and responses; they negate the need for thought, while they promote loyal sentiment.



which are specifically created in response to the belief system of Gilead. The Mayday Operation is founded on a language that directly opposes the premises of Gilead. Although this discourse is never clearly addressed or explained, Ofglen represents its existence. Ofglen offers Offred the hope of there being a formal resistance to power, a formal counter-discourse. Ofglen has only to speak one sentence of the other language for Offred to know that she is not a believer in Gileadean values; standing outside Soul Scrolls, Ofglen poses the unorthodox question: "At last Ofglen speaks. 'Do you think God listens,' she says, 'to these machines?' She is whispering: our habit at the Centre. In the past this would have been a trivial enough remark, a kind of scholarly speculation. Right now it's treason" (157). Offred is elated at the affirmation that there is an "us", a "we", that speak a language that she supports. It is not just hope that the Republic may be overthrown one day or that escape is potentially possible. The realization that a formal counter-discourse or any opposing language exists is a confirmation of sanity; it is reassurance for Offred that her perspective is not a singular, anomalous or unfounded one.

Moira provides this same type of reassurance; she represents a general subversive language, a language that attacks specific aspects and words of the official discourse. Offred sets Moira's language against the orthodox language as a way of undermining official beliefs. For example, Offred compares Aunt Lydia's use of the word "unhygienic" to Moira's expression "crotch rot" (58). Even more

specifically subversive is the time when Offred is listening to the hymn “There is a Balm in Gilead” and she recalls Moira singing “There is a Bomb in Gilead” (205). Language is a form of power, and to attack language is to attack the authority fused to it. Moira has always spoken a subversive language even in the former times, as Offred's anecdotal reminiscing reveals: Moira is a man-hating lesbian who would have had to struggle with the conventional discourses of the past. Her influence on Offred is not related to a specific discourse but rather to an attitude. Moira expresses her subversive thoughts, while Offred is reluctant to do so. Offred narrates a conversation that they have where Moira crudely declares that Janine provides sexual favours for Aunt Lydia. At the time of the conversation, Offred reprimands Moira's slanderous comments because she believes that words don't do any good. However, now that she is recollecting the incident while sitting at the Prayvaganza, Offred realizes that Moira was right:

There is something powerful in the whispering of obscenities, about those in power. There's something delightful about it, something naughty, secretive, forbidden, thrilling. It's like a spell of sorts. It deflates them, reduces them to the common denominator where they can be dealt with. In the paint of the washroom cubicle someone unknown had scratched *Aunt Lydia sucks*. It was like a flag waved from a hilltop in rebellion. (208)

Offred's initial dismissal of Moira's display of obscenities is ironic because Offred is obviously aware of the power of words. Her only form of control lies in the personal manipulation of language which she expresses through her diary entries.

Offred consciously deconstructs the social reality around her, unlike the unaware D-503 who prefers to defend the official discourse. She is aware of the

power construction that produces knowledge – knowledge that reinforces the positions of those in power. She is somewhat of a Foucauldian intellectual figure who is aware that these rigid ‘truths’ are produced as a function of power. Her narrative becomes necessary for her sanity as it is her only form of struggle against this theocracy. For her personal sake, she derives reassurance from the belief that there is some meaning in her words, that there is someone out there that may respond one day: “But if it’s a story, even in my head, I must be telling it to someone. You don’t tell a story only to yourself. There’s always someone else.” (37). Offred tells her story because she wants to believe that it will be heard. She knows that it will only be heard outside of this particular time and place, beyond the Gileadean reign of power; thus, it is her way of believing that there will be an end to this state of reality: “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” (251). She tells so that there is a reality beyond the one constructed by the totalitarian Republic.

This form of control, limited as it may be, is based on the power of language and words. She subverts situations through her narrative; unlike Moira, who relies on obscenities to deflate authority, Offred breaks down words and manipulates language in an attempt to “reduce [authority] to the common denominator” (208). She has strict control over her own language as she is aware that she is completely without power according to the official hierarchy. She refuses to use familiar

language from the past in certain situations in an attempt to maintain separation between the past reality and the present reality. She believes that if she withholds certain words and their attached meanings she will prevent her former self from accepting and adapting to the new society. For example, she refuses to say “*my*” room when she is assigned a room in the Commander’s house. It is her way of denying the social expectations and standards. It is her way of holding on to former beliefs: the word “*my*” means privacy and personal belonging, neither of which meaning applies to the current circumstance. Conversely, Offred takes official words, such as “household” and breaks them down to a familiar level of the past: “*Household*: that is what we are. The Commander is the head of the household. The house is what he holds. To have and to hold, till death do us part. The hold of a ship. Hollow” (77). Offred alters the meanings of these official words so that they lose their formal, authoritative nature. Offred constantly analyzes the meanings and constructions of words so that she can harbour a limited amount of control over words that are intended to deprive her of power. These witty analyses are a covert form of mocking the authoritative language; she uses it to undermine Aunt Lydia’s pretensions:

We want you to be valued, girls. [Aunt Lydia] is rich in pauses, which she savours in her mouth. Think of yourselves as pearls. We sitting in our rows, eyes down, we make her salivate morality. We are hers to define, we must suffer her adjectives.

I think about pearls. Pearls are congealed oyster spit. (108)

On a theoretical level, Offred is challenging the centripetal force of the Gileadean unitary language. On a personal level, she is trying to survive both mentally and emotionally: “These are the kinds of litanies I use, to compose myself” (104).

Offred seems to recognize that what lies between knowledge and power is the issue of context. Power is held by those who create context, and context is based on the organization and regulation of knowledge. The intention of a transitional state is to normalize the new contexts that arise from the change in discourses. Offred is aware of this relationship between semantics, context and power because she has lived according to two completely different ideologies. The inevitability of adapting to a state of reality is the difficulty, if not impossibility, of separating oneself from the current contextual implications. In other words, individuals are going to have to adjust their emotional and behavioural responses according to the demands of the context or else they will lose their sanity. Janine is an example of an individual who is unable to relinquish her values and beliefs from the past. She is subject to repeated verbal abuse in the altered context of discipline, the loss of a baby in the altered context of social duty, and she becomes an accomplice to murder in the altered context of the Particicution. Unable to adapt, she lets go of her sanity. However, Janine is an exception.

Offred, who may be considered a more typical representative of humanity, reacts according to the present conditions; she lets go of standards from the past. For instance, the doctor confronts her with an offer to have sexual intercourse. In the

former state of reality, people would consider this type of proposition sexual harassment and the victim would have rights to lay charges against the harasser; the victim would normally feel violated and angry. However, according to the present context, his actions are still illegal, although only if he commits the act of intercourse; also, the law implicates the 'victim' who is also subject to punishment. Instead of feeling violated, Offred reacts according to the contextual implications; she knows that she no longer has any rights:

“Thank you,” I say. I must leave the impression that I’m not offended, that I’m open to suggestion. He takes his hand away, lazily almost, lingeringly, this is not the last word as far as he’s concerned. He could fake the tests, report me for cancer, for infertility, have me shipped off to the Colonies, with the Unwomen. None of this has been said, but the knowledge of his power hangs nevertheless in the air as he pats my thigh... (57)

The changes in context indicate changes in the allocation of power. Morality and legality have become meshed into one under the Gileadean regime of power. What may once have been considered immoral, is now considered illegal; immorality is now punishable under Gileadean law. For example, Offred's affair with the Commander is dangerous because it is illegal; however, because of the Commander's power, Offred does not have any choice but to partake in his requests: “He wanted me to play Scrabble with him, and kiss him as if I meant it. This is one of the most bizarre things that’s happened to me, ever. Context is all” (136). Offred gradually begins to adapt to the given circumstances.

Unlike D-503, who uses counter-discourse and expresses subversive tendencies because of his love for I-330, Offred ceases to express opposition towards

the Gileadean regime when she has feelings for Nick. Her affair with Nick is a subversive act; however, her attitude loses its subversive drive. She no longer wants to be the intellectual who deconstructs social and conventional 'truths'. She is no longer interested in expressing her rejection of the current state of reality. Her diary, which was once a means of maintaining sanity and control through the personal manipulation of words, becomes a love story. Offred admits that she forgoes Ofglen and the hopes of a formal counter-discourse for what is the semblance of a love affair: "The fact is that 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" (255). She rationalizes her acceptance of such an oppressive official language: "Humanity is so adaptable, my mother would say. Truly amazing what people can get used to as long as there are a few compensations" (255). Her adaptation enforces the dystopian nature of the novel. She no longer wants to explore the constructions of power because she does not care<sup>5</sup>. In a limited sense, she becomes like D-503, who is only interested in how the official language will affect his relationship with I-330. Offred accepts the official language as long as she can stay with Nick. Both protagonists have revealed the power constructions of social truths: D-503 reveals them inadvertently as he struggles to be with the subversive I-330; Offred reveals them because her awareness of the past provides an inevitable basis for the deconstruction

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<sup>5</sup> Barbara Hill Rigney, in her book *Margaret Atwood*, accuses Offred of being apathetic. She explores the possibility that victimization may be partly choice.

of the present reality. The discouraging ending of both novels lies in the failure of the protagonists to confront power. However, while the ending of *We* is ultimately pessimistic with the suggestion that the One State will attain its ideal goal, *The Handmaid's Tale* ends with Historical Notes that confirm that Gilead never achieves ideal monologism.

### Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*

The futuristic American society depicted in *Fahrenheit 451* is based on the discourses of hedonism and mass commercial consumption; both discourses work together as an official discourse for the perpetuation of mass narcissism and ignorance. Unlike the One State and Gilead, which have rigid guidelines and laws to enforce their dominant ideologies, this futuristic America seems to have a less structured, less oppressive regime of depriving its citizens of imagination, intellectualism, and genuine self-awareness. It becomes clear, through Beatty's speech, that those in control were reacting to a mass surge in population: "Once, books appealed to a few people, here, there, everywhere. They could afford to be different. The world was roomy. But then the world got full of eyes and elbows and mouths. Double, triple, quadruple population. Films and radios, magazines, books leveled down to a sort of paste pudding norm..." (49-50). Beatty, the fire chief, is the main transmitter of the official discourse. He has knowledge of the past, but he defends the present state of reality, in which he has a position of power. His speech



to Montag reveals the purpose and structure of the official language. Society now defines happiness as hedonistic behaviour; the masses must be kept 'happy':

“Ask yourself, What do we want in this country above all? People want to be happy, isn't that right? Haven't you heard it all your life? I want to be happy, people say. Well, aren't they? Don't we keep them moving, don't we give them fun? That's all we live for, isn't it? For pleasure, for titillation? And you must admit our culture provides plenty of these.” (54)

The government of this society has perverted the meaning of happiness into basic hedonism so that happiness is attainable for anyone willing to buy into the array of commercial products. This America guarantees happiness for those who are ready to become consumers of a mass commercial market. Books become a threat to this pursuit of mass happiness because they promote individual thought and anti-social behaviour, and so they are banned. Beatty explains the political purpose of this abolition of literature: “If you don't want a man unhappy politically, don't give him two sides to a question to worry him; give him one. Better yet, give him none” (55). By maintaining mass ignorance, the government ensures that individuals are unable to conceptualize revolt.

Society leads individuals to view literature, intellectualism, and imagination as the enemy according to the official language. Firemen are now employed to ensure the burning of all books. Those in power alter history in order to make it conform with the current ideology; the brief history on “Firemen of America” in the rule books confirms this manipulation of the past: “Established, 1970, to burn English-influenced books in the Colonies. First fireman: Benjamin Franklin” (32).

Firemen are the law enforcers of America where the only crime seems to be the possession and reading of books. Literature has become illegal because society sees it as encouraging intellectualism, a trend which would threaten conformity. In fact, the word “intellectual” has become a swear word. As the government of this America does not want to be seen as oppressive, instead of forbidding threatening words they degrade them by using them as obscenities. Even the word “why” is considered socially unacceptable because it implies imagination, creativity and intellectualism. For example, Beatty explains to Montag how they, the unnamed authority figures, knew that Clarisse was a threat to the system: ““She didn’t want to know *how* a thing was done, but *why*. That can be embarrassing. You ask Why to a lot of things and you wind up very unhappy indeed, if you keep at it”” (55). Again, Beatty implicitly posits happiness as the ideal, one that must be maintained on both a macro level of society, and on an individual level.

In this futuristic America the production of truth in society, in the Foucauldian sense, goes beyond the desecration of literary and intellectual terms and references. Specific discursive practices, such as the medical discourse and the familial discourse, carry out other social ‘truths’. The discourse on medicine has become less exclusionary than that of the past with regards to one specific area: the treatment of suicide. This hedonistic society treats suicide as a matter-of-fact occurrence. The government purposely does not allow for suicide to be carried into the realm of respectable M.D.s and hospitalization; this restriction enables the

government to dismiss the concept of suicide as a mere technical mishap. Instead of doctors tending to suicide attempt patients, two handymen operate a machine to pump out the poisons from the stomach and the blood. Montag witnesses his wife being resuscitated after she overdoses on sleeping pills: “The entire operation was not unlike the digging of a trench in one’s yard. The woman on the bed was no more than a hard stratum of marble they had reached” (13). Society cannot formally address the connotations of suicide because it counters the notion of permanent happiness. In fact, on an even more insidious level, society trivializes suicide as a way of denying the falsely constructed nature of the discourse on happiness. William Touponce, in his book *Ray Bradbury and the Poetics of Reverie*, claims that this discourse on commercial happiness feeds into the narcissism of people by depriving them of emotions and awareness beyond their own needs: “We are made aware by a constant ironic switching of character perspectives that the self-mastery and happiness preached by the advocates of this mode of fantasy is completely false. Their inner selves are exposed as chaotic and impulse ridden. Both Fire Chief Beatty and Mildred are deeply suicidal” (86). However, Mildred even denies to Montag that she tried to overdose, or would ever do such a thing; it is a real truth that does not fit into her concept of reality, a fragile reality that she is not willing to deconstruct.

Another ideology that contributes to the mass consumption of commercial technology is the dominant discourse on family. Although this society is

technologically progressive, the basic family structure remains faithful to the patriarchal tradition. The women, as exemplified by Millie and her friends, are housewives who stay at home and watch the parlour screens. In fact, they even call the people on the screens their “family”. This idea of the parlour characters being relatives was probably devised by those in control, as even Beatty uses the term “relatives” in reference to the voices in the parlour. By combining the concept of family with the exploitation of technology, those in control are providing a compensation for housewives whose real families are absent in both the literal and figurative sense. The parlour families keep these women occupied so that they remain unaware and unconcerned that they have no substantial or meaningful interpersonal relationships. Husbands are called away frequently to fight in ‘wars’; although even when they are not out defending their country, men would be expected to work diligently in order to provide an income sizable enough for their wives to afford the latest products of technology. The institution of education takes the children out of the home by having schools always open every day of the month. There are no bonds developed between parent and child; in fact, Mrs. Bowles has children largely for the purpose of preserving the human race: “The world must reproduce, you know, the race must go on. Besides, they sometimes look just like you, and that’s nice” (86). Her narcissistic attitude, which is highly typical, is nurtured by the prominent discursive practices in society, and, in turn, this attitude promotes and perpetuates the official discourse of so-called happiness.

However, not everyone in the country has adopted this narcissistic, hedonistic state of reality. Like the other societies of the One State and Gilead, the futuristic America is less than ideally monologic. Like the One State, it is at a very advanced level of transition; however, there are no explicit references made in the novel about this unperfected state of society. The only evidence lies in the portrayal of characters who represent opposing discourses. Clarisse is the most significant representative of counter-discourse. Her uncle has given her knowledge of the past, and so she is aware that the present reality is not the only way of life. Her meeting with Montag is similar to I-330's confrontation with D-503 in which the two 'numbers' speak completely different languages. Montag, like D-503, speaks the official language, proudly and unquestioningly; Clarisse, like the rebellious I-330, responds in an opposing language. Clarisse gently and subtly mocks Montag's strict adherence to the social and conventional norms. She questions him about things that Montag would never have considered because he has never been exposed to any language except the current official language. She asks him if he has ever read any of the books that he has burned and he immediately responds in the negative, telling her that such behaviour is against the law; his laughing response is indicative of his surprise that someone could even think such a thing. She follows this response by offering knowledge of the past in the form of a question. Her intention is to challenge Montag's language and the corresponding pretentious attitude:

“Is it true that long ago firemen put fires *out* instead of going to start them?”

“No. Houses have always been fireproof, take my word for it.”

“Strange. I heard once that a long time ago houses used to burn by accident and they needed firemen to *stop* the flames.” (7)

It is this knowledge of the past that provokes her to deconstruct social beliefs. Like Offred, and even I-330, Clarisse has the knowledge of two completely different socially-constructed realities. This awareness frees her from blindly accepting the social and conventional ‘truths’ that comprise the present state of reality.

Clarisse is a variation of the clown figure because she understands that the norms and truths in society are politically constructed; however, in front of Montag, who would have been suspicious of direct preaching out against his country, she pretends not to understand the social standards and expectations. She approaches the concept of language and its susceptibility to political context by deconstructing the standard meaning of “social”:

“I’m antisocial, they say. I don’t mix. It’s so strange. I’m very social indeed. It all depends on what you mean by social, doesn’t it? Social to me means talking to you about things like this... But I don’t think it’s social to get a bunch of people together and then not let them talk, do you? An hour of T.V. class, an hour of basketball or baseball or running... We never ask questions, or at least most don’t; they just run the answers at you, bing, bing, bing...” (27)

She compares the past meaning of “social” to the present meaning of “social” so that Montag can see how reality can be constructed through language. During their last conversation, she reveals the real truth about the social reality around them; her comments are like those of an intellectual figure in that she exposes the truth about the constructed reality: “People don’t talk about anything... They name a lot of cars

or clothes or swimming pools mostly and say how swell! But they all say the same things and nobody says anything different from anyone else” (28). Her direct undermining of socially-correct behaviour is a manifestation of counter-discourse. This evidence of existing alternate languages confirms that this futuristic America has not attained its ideal state: it is not a utopian society. Montag, who has only ever seen his country in terms of an ideal, which, in fact, he proudly enforces at his job, is now affected by Clarisse’s language.

As in *We, Fahrenheit 451* contains aspects of the Bildungsroman; Montag undergoes a personal learning experience as a result of Clarisse’s persuasive discourse. Like D-503, Montag is confronted with thoughts and beliefs that directly challenge the official language. D-503 faces the irrational, and Montag encounters the concept of unhappiness. Montag's first conversation with Clarisse ends with her asking him if he is happy. His initial, socially-programmed reaction is to dismiss such an absurd question: “Of course I’m happy. What does she think? I’m *not*?” (9) According to the dominant ideology of this America, everyone should be happy because happiness is the normal, expected state. However, Montag, affected by the conversation with Clarisse, actually takes the time to consider the question when he is going to bed; this behaviour is, in itself, outside of the official language. Montag has an epiphanic moment: “He was not happy. He was not happy. He said the words to himself. He recognized this as the true state of affairs. He wore his happiness like a mask and the girl had run off across the lawn with the mask and

there was no way of going to knock on her door and ask for it back” (10). This revelation initiates Montag's introspection and provokes an exploration of his belief system. His new awareness that alternate discourses do exist inevitably affects his perspective on reality. After only one conversation with Clarisse, Montag begins to doubt the reality around him: “Only an hour, but the world had melted down and sprung up in a new and colorless form” (15). He, who, moments before meeting Clarisse, had taken proud pleasure in his job of burning books, is now suffering with the knowledge that his reality may not be ideal, in fact, that it may have fundamental flaws. Like D-503, Montag becomes uncertain about everything; his declaration and its implications echo exactly D-503's: ““I don't know anything anymore”” (16). Montag's understanding of himself and the world around him is based entirely on his unquestioning acceptance of the official language. The recognition that there are other ways to interpret reality causes Montag to start thinking. This type of behaviour is, in itself, opposed to the ideology of this future America for the very reason that it is a threat to the official discourse.

Montag becomes a type of Bakhtinian fool figure in that he fails to understand the reality around him in a way that defamiliarizes the dominant ideology. As a representative of this role, Montag reveals real truths about the constructions of social norms. During a conversation with Clarisse, Montag's innocent comments take on significant meaning. Montag compares Clarisse to his wife in a way that places a value judgment on the discourses that they respectively



represent; he responds to the knowledge that Clarisse is just about to turn seventeen years old: “How odd. How strange. And my wife thirty and yet you seem so much older at times. I can’t get over it” (21). Later on, Montag makes a similar observation to himself about his wife’s lack of maturity: “She talked to him for what seemed like a long while and she talked about this and she talked about that and it was only words, like the words he had heard once in the nursery at a friend’s house. A two-year-old child building word patterns, talking jargon, making pretty sounds in the air” (38). Montag unintentionally exposes the real truth behind the nature of people who are constantly occupied by empty technological distractions: the majority of people have not developed beyond an infantile level. With its emphasis on self-indulgence and commercial consumption, society breeds a body of individuals that are unable to think for themselves. Those in power do not feel threatened by their subjects, who are mentally and emotionally incapable of revolt.

Montag also reveals the constructed nature of the discourse on madness. Although he is unable to understand the implications of power at this point, he deconstructs the social measure of insanity in a conversation with Beatty. He uses the language of Clarisse, a language that opposes the official discourse:

“I—I’ve been thinking. About the fire last week. About the man whose library we fixed. What happened to him?”

“They took him off screaming to the asylum.”

“He wasn’t insane.”

Beatty arranged his cards quietly. “Any man’s insane who thinks he can fool the government and us.” (31)

Beatty responds to Montag's use of counter-discourse with strictly official language. Montag realizes that an innocent man was diagnosed as insane because he did not adhere to a law that, to Montag, no longer seems to make sense. Like the One State in *We*, this regime defines insanity as behaviour that opposes and threatens the present state of reality. In accordance with Foucault's theory, an individual who does not abide by official regulations may be dismissed as insane and his actions and words looked upon as meaningless. Society classifies those people who seek to defy social norms by reading and educating themselves as insane so that those in power can lock them away in an asylum where they cannot challenge the formal ideology any further.

Up until this point in the novel, Montag is a variant of the fool figure because he is unable to understand anything, including even the implications of his words. However, Montag undergoes a transition in which he becomes more of an intellectual figure. He sets out to seek knowledge of the past so that he can learn about the functions of power. He becomes more aware of the role of power and how society constructs conventionality. Montag even deconstructs the fireman's duty and the act of burning houses filled with books: "Always at night the alarm comes. Never by day! Is it because the fire is prettier by night? More spectacle, a better show?" (36) He recognizes that the burning of books is not just to enforce the law; the official ceremony around the burning, and the spectacle of the fire itself, is the government's way of making known its power in the eyes of the public. Montag had

once carried with him such pride and feelings of authority for being a fireman; it had been such a “special pleasure” to burn things because he felt that he was preserving an ideal by “changing” dangerous books into harmless ashes (3). However, after he witnesses a woman who is unwilling to leave her burning house, he realizes that there must be something powerful about these books. He comes to a significant conclusion that night after he reflects upon why this woman would sacrifice herself for something so incontestably loathed by the majority. He realizes that a person actually writes a book, putting emotion, knowledge and effort into its composition; he understands that thinking, and the circulation of thoughts, is carried out by reading books. He discovers the answer to his earlier question about Millie: “How do you get so empty? he wondered. Who takes it out of you?” He was a fool when he posed this question, and when he realizes the answer, he is a developing intellectual. He makes the revelatory connection between the abolition of books and the emptiness of most individuals in society. Unlike D-503, Montag actually applies his revelations to a macro, societal level. Montag realizes how the implications of his discovery affect all facets of society, not only how they affect himself and his relationship with Mildred. He recognizes the parlour wall characters as a “gibbering pack of tree-apes that said nothing, nothing, nothing and said it loud, loud, loud” (40). He recognizes his wife as a split personality: one really bothered, suicidal Mildred and the external, superficial, mask-wearing Mildred. He recognizes his neighbours as depressed, lonely and ignorant women whose children “hate [their]

guts” (91). Montag does not merely accept these realities. Unlike the innocent D-503, who refuses to face the real truth behind the official language of the One State, Montag is determined to act as the revolutionary: he wants to be the true intellectual.

Faber contributes to Montag's development as a subversive figure. Faber, a failed intellectual because he made no efforts to fight the system, shifts some of the blame from the government onto the people themselves. He explains to Montag that humanity has allowed itself to be degraded and that the government is now just giving people what they want: “The public itself stopped reading of its own accord. You firemen provide a circus now and then at which buildings are set off and crowds gather for the pretty blaze, but it’s a small sideshow indeed, and hardly necessary to keep things in line... People are having *fun*” (78). Faber’s pessimism is not a deterrent for Montag. They plan subversive actions against other firemen as Montag is determined to express his opposing discourse in some form. However, Montag does not just want to be a token enforcer of a counter-discourse; he tells Faber as much: “I don’t want to change sides and just be *told* what to do. There’s no reason to change if I do that” (83). He wants to be a true intellectual who thinks for himself. Foucault describes the role of the intellectual: “[I]t is to struggle against the forms of power that transform him into its object and instrument in the sphere of ‘knowledge’, ‘truth’, ‘consciousness’, and ‘discourse’” (*Language* 208). For Montag to be the intellectual, he must be aware of power constructions; he cannot become another

“object and instrument” of a different discourse. He wants to undermine power and its functions rather than just becoming an opposing power.

Montag can be seen as a fusion of both the fool figure and the intellectual figure. He lacks the knowledge and education of a true intellectual, and he is too aware of the role of power to be a complete fool. He sees himself as a variant of this equation:

Now he knew that he was two people, that he was, above all, Montag who knew nothing, who did not even know himself a fool, but only suspected it. And he knew that he was the old man who talked to him and talked to him... He would be Montag-plus-Faber, fire plus water, and then, one day, after everything had mixed and simmered and worked away in silence, there would be neither fire nor water, but wine. Out of two separate and opposite things, a third. (92-93)

His enthusiastic naïveté combined with the wisdom and knowledge of Faber leads Montag to the destruction of monologic forces. When the firemen bring him to burn his own house, Montag burns what he sees to be representatives of the emptiness that he has lived; he wants to change everything, especially the parlour walls which he sees as a significant vacuum of nothingness. Most significantly, he burns Beatty and the Mechanical Hound. Beatty is the primary representative of the official discourse; he is interested in the game of power more than he believes in the myth of hedonistic happiness. The Hound represents the culmination of the technological destruction of dissenting humanity. Montag is like the Phoenix that Granger describes to him after his escape. Montag has burned himself up by burning all of the representations of that which he wrongly believed in and adhered to for so many years. He is reborn as

an outcast of society. Montag has released himself from being a function and object of power. Where both D-503 and Offred have failed, he has succeeded. He has challenged his society in a way that the bombs could not: he embodies the reason that this official discourse can never achieve ideal monologism.

## Conclusion

Each of these novels, Zamyatin's *We*, Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, and Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, depicts a society which establishes rigid social and conventional truths through the domination of language. The dystopian society differs from the utopian society in that it has not yet attained its ideal state, regardless of what the proposed ideal may be. The evidence of this transitional state lies in the existence of counter-discourse or heteroglot languages which oppose the official language. As I have shown, the conceptual premise for the official language is not relevant, nor is the stage at which the society has reached. It does not matter whether a society is "sadistic" like Gilead or "hedonistic" like Bradbury's America; the important factor is that power is channeled through language in an attempt to achieve an ideal society

The role of the protagonist is also fundamental to the classification of the dystopian novel as genre. The protagonist is the one character in these novels who is not merely a representation of a specific heteroglot language or a transmitter of an official language. So, even though the existence of counter-discourse reveals the totalitarian and oppressive nature of a society, this opposing language does not have any value or meaning without the response of the protagonist. Characters like I-330 and Clarisse are only one-dimensional representatives of counter-discourse; however, the protagonist serves as the point of reference in the novel through whom

the reader can gauge the significance of this language. The protagonist can become the one who deconstructs power functions because he or she is not bound to the struggle for domination of language and thus control over the state of reality. Instead, the protagonist's personal development is fused to his or her interaction with the opposing languages. Thus, it is not relevant from which position the main character expresses himself or herself. For example, D-503 writes his diary in the official language of the One State, while Offred narrates in language of the past. In all instances, including Montag's case, the protagonist develops in some way as a result of exploring the opposing discourses. The author may intend for the protagonist to represent the state of humanity: for example, D-503 may exemplify human nature as being completely and helplessly subject to the mercy of those in power; Offred may represent humanity's inevitable adjustment to any reality enforced by a regime of power; Montag may be the bearer of hope for humanity in that rebirth is possible for those willing to deconstruct politically produced truths and reality. However, regardless of what each protagonist's development signifies or implies, and despite what stage of development each society achieves by the ends of the novels, power is undermined by the words and behaviour of the protagonist as a by-product of his or her personal development and learning experience. The reader becomes aware, through the experience of the protagonist, that ideal monologism would be a nightmare because of its effects on humanity.



Therefore, the dystopian novel may be seen as that form of writing which depicts a society intent on achieving an ideal state that is expressed by a unitary language striving to repress any other language or discourse. Within this society is a character, the protagonist, who reveals the real truth, the role of power, behind the constructed myths that pose as an ideal reality.

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