Napoleon Schmidt is Dead:
A Hystopian Novel

IRIS FEINDT

PhD 2021

Napoleon Schmidt is Dead:
A Hystopian Novel

IRIS FEINDT

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Manchester Metropolitan University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The Manchester Writing School

Department of English

Manchester Metropolitan University

2021

Table of Contents

Abstract

This dissertation consists of two sections: a novel, *Napoleon Schmidt is Dead*, and a critical commentary. The novel is set against the backdrop of East Berlin in the 1980s and tells the story of fifteen-year-old Anna, who starts to question the world she lives in. Strange notes and potatoes form a mysterious trail that Anna hopes will lead her to the truth. The price she pays is her freedom. Although the historical context is real, the novel draws on tropes of dystopian fiction to engender an atmosphere of paranoia. The novel is aimed at a teen audience and is a story of female friendship, rebellion and coming-of-age at a time when the status quo demands uniformity and punishes individuality. It articulates the sense of powerlessness experienced by teenagers within family structures, which is amplified through the restrictions of growing up under an oppressive regime.

The critical commentary is divided into five sections, each of which takes as its focus a specific author of dystopian fiction, tracing the ways in which these writers respond to each other's work. The commentary further investigates the origins and evolution of dystopian fiction, and considers its generic next-of-kin in that context.

The original contribution to knowledge lies in the development of the 'Feindt Principle', a proposal of a new sub-genre, 'hystopia', a new piece of hystopian fiction and the induction of Anna Burns' novel *Milkman* (2018) into the canon of hystopian fiction.

Napoleon Schmidt is Dead

Part One

Chapter 1

It was a coincidence, no more than that. There was a set of snowy footprints in the tiled atrium of my apartment building, fresh, obviously, as they had not yet started to melt. I followed them up the staircase, which led to the upstairs flats, for once not resenting the fact I had to tramp up three flights of stairs to get home. From somewhere above me, I could hear a doorbell ringing. At my feet, the snow crunched beneath my boots. The ringing stopped and I could hear someone pacing. On the second floor I encountered the postman. Snow still clung in patches to his boots. When he saw me, he made for the stairs, but I didn't get out of his way.

'Did you ring twice?' I asked.

'What? Yes. Do you know Frau Schmidt?'

I'd seen her outside, just a few minutes ago. That was what I told him.

'I don't have time to wait,' he said. His words echoed around the stairwell.

'You can't just put it through the letterbox?'

'It's a telegram. Needs a signature.'

'I'll sign for it.'

He looked unsure. 'How old are you?'

'Eighteen.' Fifteen, actually.

'And you live here?'

'On the third floor. With my mother.'

'Her name?'

'Ellen Peters.'

He considered this. He looked at his watch and sighed. ‘Fine. You make sure Frau Schmidt gets it.’ He held out a pen and pad.

‘Of course.’ I took the pen and looked at the piece of paper, at the other names on the page.

‘I don’t have all day,’ he said.

I scribbled my name quickly and returned the pen and pad. I once read that honest people didn’t avoid eye contact because they had nothing to hide, so, in order to reassure the postman that there was nothing wrong here, I stared at him.

He looked up at me. ‘Is there something on my face?’

‘No.’

He shook his head. ‘You’ll be held accountable if Frau Schmidt doesn’t get it,’ he said, and set off down the concrete stairs.

At about three o’clock, Frau Schmidt returned. I was hovering on the landing, outside my flat and could hear her unmelodic whistling as she shuffled across the entrance hall. I peered over the railing and there, on the floor below, I saw a hand holding onto the bannister, sliding upwards. I crept back into my flat and pulled the door to, staring at the keys hanging from the hooks next to the front door: one was labelled ‘attic’, another ‘Weber’, yet another ‘Schmidt’. Some of our neighbours had deemed us trustworthy – or at least Mutti. And then I waited. I’d considered steaming Frau Schmidt’s telegram open from the second the postman handed it over. But that wouldn’t have made me any better than them. And the idea I was in any way like them made me uncomfortable, like seeing Mutti cry or catching the boys at school staring at my breasts.

Eventually, I knocked on Frau Schmidt’s door. The radio was playing inside her flat, and I could hear clattering, probably of pots. I knocked again and heard

footsteps coming towards me. The door opened just enough to see her, but little else.

‘Anna?’ Frau Schmidt said. Her pale blue eyes studied me. ‘Everything alright?’

‘This came for you.’ I handed her the telegram.

‘Today?’

‘A couple of hours ago.’

‘I was buying flowers. It’s Napoleon’s birthday today.’ Her voice cracked.

I didn’t know what to say. His funeral was months ago.

‘Thank you for this,’ she said, brandishing the telegram. She was about to say something else when her phone rang. ‘Lovely to see you,’ she added and hastily shut the door.

Frau Schmidt answered the phone on the third ring.

‘Hello,’ she said. ‘Cemetery Pankow. Tomorrow? Six o’clock? I’ll bring flowers. We’ll go for cake after.’

I heard her ring off. There was something in her tone that made my pulse thump.

Back upstairs, I sat down and ordered my thoughts. I needed to speak to Knut. I wanted to call him there and then and tell him everything, but I knew better than that. Phones couldn’t be trusted. And you didn’t know who might be lingering outside your door, listening in. But a telegram and a phone call, and all on her husband’s late birthday. It was too big a coincidence.

It would have to wait until later, when I was going to his to watch a film. *The Sorrows of Young Werther.* To say that Knut was obsessed with the book would have been an understatement. I didn’t really care for it. As long as I didn’t have to read it again. Knut always said I shouldn’t be so dismissive of the classics. Seriously though, what could these old men possibly teach me about myself or the world I lived

in? He'd usually shake his head at that. He'd said to come over at five o'clock and asked me to bring four bottles of Karena. To which I'd said I wasn't a packhorse. That had made him laugh.

I wondered if he'd be able to tell from looking at me that I had important news. He noticed everything. Actually, that wasn't true. Knut tended to spot detail you didn't think anybody would. But if I turned up with green hair one day, he'd probably talk about music and not acknowledge my makeover. Not because he didn't want to; because it was the kind of thing that would simply escape him.

I was in the middle of scribbling a note for Mutti when I heard her unlock the door.

'Anna!' she called, from the hallway.

'In here!' I shouted, ripping up the note. I had hoped to leave without having to explain myself to her. It was all I seemed to do. 'I'm meeting Knut.'

'Have you eaten something?' she said.

'Not hungry.' I pushed past her.

'Anna?' She looked at me, eyebrows raised.

'Ellen?' She hated it when I called her by her first name.

'You don't bother brushing your hair?' She parted my hair with her fingers.

'I forgot, OK?'

'You forgot to brush your hair?'

'Yes?'

'Your hair's wild.'

'Stop parting it,' I protested.

'You're lazy.'

'Thanks, that's really sweet of you, Ellen.'

‘Who’s too lazy to brush their own hair?’ She looked at me and got a hairgrip out of her pocket, pulling a strand of my hair into position before fixing it into place with the grip. The grip caught my skin and it hurt. I batted her hand away.

‘Mutti, what are you doing to me?’

She smiled and marched me to the mirror in the hall. ‘Look how nice your hair can look.’

I rolled my eyes at my reflection. ‘The only thing hairgrips are good for is picking locks.’

‘Anna!’ Mutti said.

‘I’m going,’ I said, breaking eye contact with my mirror image.

‘Put this on,’ Mutti said, handing me a thick woollen hat.

‘Not happy with the hair job after all?’ The hat was midnight blue and the material felt soft in my hands, as soft as steam. ‘Thank you,’ I whispered and grabbed my keys.

‘Say hello to Knut for me.’

I walked down the concrete stairs and before I’d even reached Frau Schmidt’s floor I’d already pulled the stupid hairgrip out and put it my pocket. Once outside, a crumpled piece of yellowish paper on the ground caught my eye. The telegram. I reached down and put it in my coat pocket, not wanting to look at it there and then. There were eyes everywhere.

I caught the tram two streets away and managed to get a seat. Walking would have been the other option but it was cold and, as Mutti had pointed out, I was lazy. There was something comforting about sitting in a stuffy, dimly lit compartment, clattering over the tracks, past old buildings and the river Panke.

Four stops later, I got off. Even though Knut didn't live far from me, this part of town had been transformed into a barren landscape over the years. The streets were much wider here, and the trees that once lined them had been felled, giving way to concrete tower blocks as far as the eye could see. The only splatters of colour came from the traffic lights, flashing green or red.

It was only a short walk to Knut's, which took me past the Späti, my last chance to get the bottles of Karena. There was no harm in being accommodating just this once, I thought, and turned into the small shop. But the queue was long. The fizzy drinks would have to wait for another day, and I left the Späti emptyhanded.

Knut lived in one of a cluster of tower blocks, each as high as they were grey, the kind of grey that made them disappear in heavy rain. But this evening, against the setting sun, the grey smouldered invitingly. I reached the entrance to Knut's block and scanned the tags next to the call buttons. No new names.

'Lift's broken,' Knut said over the intercom as he buzzed me in.

That would be me walking up eighteen flights of stairs, without a single postman to distract me. I was glad I hadn't bought the drinks.

Knut, was waiting outside his flat by the time I reached the ninth floor. He pointed at his wrist.

'That took you some time,' he said.

'It's eighteen flights.'

'Still, not like you're an old woman.'

I stopped right in front of him. 'Shut up.'

'Got the Karena?'

'No.'

'Anna!'

‘Are you not going to ask me inside?’

‘No,’ he laughed.

‘Out of my way.’ I pushed him inside, which wasn’t that difficult despite the fact he was considerably taller than me.

He held his side, pretending to be injured. ‘You’re quite strong, you know.’

‘Am I?’

‘Yeah, for a girl.’ He smiled.

I took a few deep breaths, then I looked at him, trying to ignore the busy orange wallpaper.

‘Why does it always smell of boiled vegetables in here?’

‘Because,’ he said, ‘Ilse boils a lot of vegetables.’

‘That would explain it.’

‘Ilse loves vegetables.’

‘Why do you call her Ilse?’

‘That’s her name.’

‘She’s your mother, though.’

‘Do you always refer to your Mutti as Mutti or do you call her by her name?’ Knut asked.

‘Only to annoy her,’ I said.

‘You’re horrible.’

We’d reached the kitchen where the wallpaper was no less busy. Orange sunflowers framed by lemon diamonds. I’d commented on it countless times. I wasn’t going to put him through it today. I looked at Knut then and wondered if he could tell.

‘What?’ he said. ‘Why are you staring at me?’

I looked into his brown eyes. They were so familiar, like the small birthmark on my thumb or the crack in the bathroom mirror. ‘Can you tell?’

He studied me then. Carefully, not rushing it. I could hear the radio playing from his bedroom. Classical music. It was mainly classical with Knut. He stepped closer and smelled my hair. ‘You have news for me,’ he concluded.

‘Wow,’ I said. ‘How do you do it?’

‘Skills.’

‘I’m impressed.’

‘Tell me your news.’

‘Pour me a drink first.’

‘What do you want?’

‘Schnapps.’

‘Ilse locks the liquor cabinet.’

‘She’s so uptight.’ We laughed. Knut poured me a glass of water instead, which I downed and then put on the kitchen counter. ‘Are you ready?’ I asked.

‘I’m always ready,’ he said.

‘Tell me honestly. How old do I look?’

Knut threw up his hands. ‘Not that again.’

‘No, no. It’s not that again at all. I promise.’

‘Have you done something with your hair?’ He studied me.

‘Oh shut up,’ I said.

Knut ushered me towards his room, where he threw himself onto the bed, his hands covering his face. The good thing about his room was that the wallpaper was less distracting. The walls were mainly decorated with drawings of composers

because we could never get proper posters. I mean, who'd put a poster of Rachmaninoff on their wall? Knut, that's who.

'All I said to Rosa was that you looked youthful for your age.'

'I don't care about what you said to Rosa. Who is she even?'

'You don't know who Rosa is?' He faked outrage.

'You know what I mean.'

I sat down next to Knut on the bed. 'Today I passed for 18.'

'You're joking.'

'No.' I savoured the moment, before I filled him in on the rest.

'That's sneaky,' he said, shaking his head. 'You State Security?'

'You calling me Stasi?'

'Sorry,' he said. 'But you've got to admit: you're spying on that poor widow.'

'It gets worse.'

'Worse?'

'Yes.'

'How exactly?'

I reached into my pocket and pulled out the crumpled up telegram. I unfolded the flimsy paper.

'You stole the telegram?'

'I found it,' I said.

'I'm sure that's an actual crime.'

'Don't shit your pants,' I said, and looked at the message.

'Stop,' Knut warned. 'You can't unsee it.'

I ignored him and read the telegram out loud. 'Congratulations.'

'What?'

‘That’s what it says: Congratulations.’

‘Anna, I can’t unhear it. I can’t unknow it.’

‘This makes you my accomplice.’ I smiled.

He shook his head.

‘Congratulations,’ I repeated. ‘What do you think it means?’

‘I don’t want any part of this.’

‘Too late. You are part of this. Will you come to the cemetery with me tomorrow?’ It wasn’t an actual question. More of an assumption.

‘No.’

‘Why not?’

‘FDJ meeting,’ he said.

‘There’s nothing free about the German youth,’ I said. ‘We’ll go after the meeting.’

Knut got up and switched on the TV. ‘Ready for tonight’s feature film?’

‘Don’t change the subject.’

‘The film is the subject. The film is why you are here.’

I adjusted my position, determined not to enjoy the film. Stuff Young Werther’s sorrows. What about mine?

END OF NOVEL EXTRACT

Critical Commentary

Introduction

Writing this commentary has been like unstacking a set of Russian dolls. To begin with, it looked as though I had only one doll: Margaret Atwood and her novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), hereafter referred to by *THT.*[1] I was already aware of Atwood's non-fiction, specifically her collection of essays, *On Writers and Writing* (2002), in which she reflects on both her own work and that of other writers.[2] Reading these essays was liberating. Atwood strikes a fine balance between academic literary criticism and reflections on her practice – she discusses a wide range of subjects, including the origins of her own writing, her experiences as a young reader, and the difficulties of genre categorisation. I was particularly interested in Atwood's writing on 'ustopia', a term she coined to more accurately describe the genre of *THT*.[3] This encouraged me to investigate the intersection between history and dystopia regarding my own novel, *Napoleon Schmidt is Dead*, hereafter referred to by *NSID*. As a result of the research undertaken for this doctoral project, which will be detailed in this critical commentary, I propose the creation of a new hybrid genre: hystopia.

A hystopian narrative must fulfil the following conditions:

1. It must depict a particular period of history.
2. Cultural and historical references must be coded and distorted.

[1] Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (London: Vintage, 1996)
[2] Margaret Atwood, *On Writers and Writing* (London: Virago Press, 2015)
[3] Margaret Atwood, *In Other Worlds* (London: Virago Press, 2014), p.75

3. The emphasis must be on communicating the atmosphere and mood of the era depicted.

These conditions, which might be referred to as the Feindt-Principle, make clear that the focus of a hystopian narrative is the production of a veiled depiction of the past, of history.

A note on the spelling. It is not my intention to use a spelling that suggests a gendered reading, either by reading to history as 'his-story' or by encouraging an association with the oppression of women by invoking 'hysteria'. In addition, there already exists a research group called Histopia attached to the Autonomous University of Madrid. The group focusses on utopia and its alternatives, and its impact on modern societies as a tool 'for the construction of possibilities' with regards to experimentation, implying that speculation plays a significant role in their research.[4] This is explicitly avoided in hystopian narratives. The spelling of 'hystopia' refers back to the late Middle English spelling of 'history' and incorporates the transformation it underwent from the 1500s ('hystorye') to the 1600s ('hystorie'). It is appropriate – it is *correct* – according to the conditions of the Feindt-Principle that the genre should turn to the past for the spelling of its name.

Atwood's influence on this critical commentary is not limited to her writings on 'ustopia'. It was through her non-fiction works – essays, reviews, and lectures – that I discovered the babushkas hidden inside my original Russian doll.[5]

---

[4] 'Histopia', in *UTOPIA: Transatlantic Network of Utopian Studies*, para. 6 of 6, <https://utopia.hypotheses.org/histopia>, [last accessed 21st February 2022]

[5] Margaret Atwood's non-fiction has been collected in numerous works, including: Margaret Atwood, *Writing with Intent* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2005); Margaret Atwood, *Curious Pursuits* (London: Virago Press, 2006).

There is a longstanding history of dystopian writers responding to each other's work. Orwell inverted Huxley's technicolour dystopia into a concrete-grey vision of hell. Soviet author Yevgeny Zamyatin's dystopia *We* (English translation, 1924)[6] was significant not only for Orwell and Huxley, but also for Atwood, whose protagonist in *THT* was inspired by Zamyatin's 'subversive femme fatale'.[7] Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932)[8], hereafter referred to by *BNW*, started life as a satire of H.G. Wells' *Men Like Gods* (1923)[9] before becoming its own beast.[10] Orwell has written extensively on Wells and singles out the theme of 'trying to restore a disorderly past'[11] – a theme that is also explored in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), hereafter referred to by *NEF*.[12] Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726)[13], influential for Huxley and Orwell, was praised by Orwell as one of the 'English masterpieces of the eighteenth century'[14], while Huxley, in a letter to G. Wilson Knight in 1931, refers to *BNW* as: 'a Swiftian novel about the Future'.[15]

Atwood outlines the influence Orwell and Huxley had on *THT* in her essays 'George Orwell: Some Personal Connections' as well as 'Brave New World by Aldous Huxley'.[16] This discovery encouraged me to explore the work of George

---

[6] Yevgeny Zamyatin, *We* (London: Penguin Classics Science Fiction, 2020)
[7] Atwood, *In Other Worlds*, 2014, p.146
[8] Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (London: Vintage, 2007)
[9] H.G. Wells, *Men Like God* (London: Penguin Books, 1987)
[10] Adam Roberts, *H G Wells: A Literary Life* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019)
[11] George Orwell, *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell Volume II My Country Right or Left 1940–1943,* ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (London: Penguin Books, 1970), p.169
[12] George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000)
[13] Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (London: Penguin English Library, 2012)
[14] George Orwell, *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell Volume III As I Please 1943–1945,* ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (London: Penguin Books, 1970), p.210
[15] Aldous Huxley, *Letters of Aldous Huxley*, ed. Grover Smith (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1969), p.353
[16] Atwood, *In Other Worlds*, 2014, pp.141-149; pp.184-193

Orwell and Aldous Huxley more closely. Atwood first read *Animal Farm* (1945)[17], hereafter referred to by *AF*, in primary school and, even though she did not pick up on the historical or political context, she got a very distinct sense that the pigs in the fable were acting unjustly, which outraged her.[18] I was slightly older when I first encountered *AF,* perhaps fourteen or fifteen, though this, too, was in school, and what stuck with me more than anything else was Boxer's death. However, much like Atwood, rereading *AF* as an adult unveiled a range of political and historical issues that I had not fully understood aged fourteen. What piqued my interest as an adult reader was the fable's retelling of the Russian Revolution (1917 – 1923) and the notion of rewriting history, a theme that runs through Orwell's non-fiction like a red thread. This can be seen in his essay 'Politics vs. Literature: An Examination of "Gulliver's Travels"' (1946)[19] and also in a broadcast for the BBC in 1941, 'Literature and Totalitarianism'.[20] The subjectivity of recorded history is one of Orwell's major concerns. Though *NEF* is set 35 years in the future, Orwell was addressing contemporary issues and examining the novel's treatment of history, the question of who gets to narrate it, edit it and erase it.

Huxley shares this sensibility and it is through an examination of *BNW* that the similarities between his work and that of Orwell and Atwood become obvious. In his later work *Brave New World Revisited* (1958), Huxley reflects on the main themes of his novel, omitting any discussion of feminism, focussing on themes of overpopulation and consumerism instead.[21] It is Atwood who assumes the mantle of

---

[17] George Orwell, *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story* (London: Penguin, 2013)
[18] Atwood, *In Other Worlds*, 2014, p.141
[19] George Orwell, *All Art is Propaganda: Critical Essays,* compiled by George Packer, (New York: Mariner Books, 2009), pp.292-315
[20] Orwell, *The Collected Essays, Volume II*, 1970, pp. 161-164
[21] Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited* (London: Chatto & Windus Ltd., 1959)

discussing feminism and female bodies in *THT* and also in her 2007 introduction to Huxley's novel, a conversation continued by Anna Burns in her novel *Milkman* (2018).[22] And it is Anna Burns whom I seek to introduce into the canon of hystopian literature.

Anna Burns' *Milkman* is a veiled exploration of The Troubles set in Belfast during the 1970s. The omission of exact dates, geographical locations, and references to political or religious orientation from a depiction of an oppressive society allows the reader to experience the novel through a distinctly dystopian lens. It also renders the story universal. The question that interests me is whether a novel can be universal while also being firmly anchored in history and whether this constitutes a new genre. This is something I explore through my own creative practice. My novel, *NSID,* is set in the German Democratic Republic during the 1980s. Intended for a young adult audience, I deliberately omit dates and names. For example, the only political party, the SED (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands), is referred to as 'the Party', because to do otherwise would limit the scope of the novel historically but also in terms of its universality. Like Burns, I look to the past in order to create a fresh narrative, one grounded in history, which utilises dystopian tropes and does not give way to speculation. Where Huxley, Orwell and Atwood projected their narratives onto a future, Burns and I distort the past in the creation of our hystopias.

On reading Huxley, Orwell, Atwood and Burns, works published between 1932 and 2018, it is apparent that these writers share certain common themes. The loss of individual freedom and individuality, the prohibition of love, and the fragility of recorded history form the basis of any dystopian society, alongside emerging

[22] Anna Burns, *Milkman* (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 2018)

subthemes such as feminism, and critiques of the Soviet Union, consumerism and overpopulation.

This commentary will discuss what I have taken from these authors and applied to my own creative work.

Aldous Huxley

> 'The Will to Order is admirable in matters involving the handling of symbols; in dealing with human beings, it can, when pushed too far, become tyranny.'[1]

Aldous Huxley understood the interplay between satire, utopia and dystopia, and it is no surprise that his most famous dystopia, *BNW*, blurs the lines between these genres so effortlessly.[2] This section of the commentary investigates this fluidity by examining Aldous Huxley's *BNW* alongside his non-fiction book *Brave New World Revisited* and giving due consideration to his influences.

Margaret Atwood asserts that *BNW* poses a conundrum: is Huxley painting a vision of a utopia or a dystopia, and does it depend on your point of view?[3] Since Thomas More's publication of *Utopia* (1551, English translation)[4] the word has become associated with the idea of paradise, an ideal society.[5] However, the quest for perfection is a slippery slope and, if pursued too rigidly, this quest often defines dystopias.[6] The title of More's novel is a play on words: eutopia meaning 'good place', and utopia meaning 'no place'.[7] The suggestion of the no place implies, ultimately, that utopia cannot exist: it is 'unrealistic and unattainable'.[8] The word is used in the latter context in the German language. If someone was to express an unrealistic wish, for example, wanting to holiday on Mars with Marilyn Monroe, you

---

[1] Huxley,1969, pp.847-848
[2] Gregory Claeys, *Dystopia: A Natural History: A Study of Modern Despotism, Its Antecedents, and Its Literary Diffractions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p.361
[3] Atwood, 'Introduction' in *Brave New World*, 2007, p.ix
[4] Thomas More, *Utopia*, trans. by Paul Turner (London: The Folio Society, 1965)
[5] Claeys, 2020, p.53
[6] Ibid., p.18
[7] Ibid., p.53
[8] Ibid.

might well proclaim their desire to be 'utopisch'.[9] On the surface, *BNW* appears utopian: its population is secure, healthy and beautiful.[10] But are they happy?

Gregory Claeys notes that a dystopia could be described as a 'satire of utopian aspirations'.[11] One of the questions central to this section is whether *BNW* depicts a utopia or a dystopia, or perhaps, as Claeys suggests, a satire of utopian values, which would turn the novel into a dystopia. Huxley was considered a satirist throughout his career and *BNW* very clearly follows in that tradition. According to Atwood, the novel satirises, among other things, the Victorians' attitude to sex and their obsession with the word 'mother'.[12] Here is an example to illustrate Atwood's observation:

> '"And 'parent'?" questioned the DHC.
>
> There was an uneasy silence. Several of the boys blushed. They had not yet learned to draw the significant but often very fine distinction between smut and pure science. One, at last, had the courage to raise a hand.
>
> "Human beings used to be…" he hesitated; the blood rushed to his cheeks. "Well, they used to be viviparous."'[13]

---

[9] 'Utopisch' in *Duden Online* <https://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/utopisch> [last accessed 30 Jan 2020]
Utopisch: nur in der Vorstellung, Fantasie möglich; mit der Wirklichkeit nicht vereinbar, [noch] nicht durchführbar; fantastisch (my translation: only possible in the imagination or fantasy; not compatible with reality, not {yet} feasible)

[10] Atwood, 'Introduction' in *Brave New World,* 2007, p.ix

[11] Gregory Claeys, 'The origins of dystopia: Wells, Huxley and Orwell' in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature,* ed. by Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.107

[12] Margaret Atwood, 'Introduction by Margaret Atwood' in *Brave New World* (London: Vintage, 2007), p.xii

[13] Huxley, 2007, p.19

Huxley highlights the attitudes towards family by subverting such ideas: 'parent' has turned into a scientific word, but one that makes the boys blush – they are clearly uncomfortable with the concept, and unsure whether or not it is rude, something that does not mirror the reader's experience. What the reader would consider to be indecent, for example, is a society that encourages 'erotic play between children', something that is deemed completely normal, progressive even, in *BNW*. Such moments illuminate the satirical tones of the novel.[14]

According to David Bradshaw, Huxley satirises the attitudes towards Britain's economic problems in the aftermath of the Great Depression of 1929, which were apparently caused by 'under-consumption'.[15] The DHC of *BNW* states:

> '"The problem was to find an economically sounder reason for consuming transport than a mere affection for primroses and landscapes. It was duly found.
>
> "We condition the masses to hate the country," concluded the Director. "But simultaneously we condition them to love all country sports. At the same time, we see to it that all country sports shall entail the use of elaborate apparatus. So that they consume manufactured articles as well as transport."'[16]

This double-consumption is humorous. Being conditioned to hate the countryside while simultaneously being conditioned to love all country sports in order that transport and equipment are still consumed seems extreme, but it is, perhaps, this exaggeration that makes the satire so successful.

In a letter to G. Wilson Knight in 1931, Huxley describes *BNW* as:

---

[14] Ibid., p.27
[15] David Bradshaw, 'Introduction by David Bradshaw' in *Brave New World* (London: Vintage, 2007), p.xxiii
[16] Huxley, 2007, pp.18-19

> ‘a Swiftian novel about the Future, showing the horrors of Utopia and the strange and appalling effects on feeling, “instinct” and general *weltanschauung* of the application of psychological, physiological and mechanical knowledge to the fundamentals of human life. It is a comic book – but seriously comic.’[17]

It is interesting to note that Huxley understood utopias to be just as awful as dystopias, with reference to ‘the horrors’ in his letter. Indeed, as Atwood herself notes, the Third Reich as well as Communist Russia ‘both began as utopian visions.’[18]

The *OED* defines satire as: ‘A poem or (in later use) a novel, film, or other work of art which uses humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize prevailing immorality or foolishness, esp. as a form of social or political commentary.’[19] Considering this definition, it is apparent that Huxley knew he was writing a political novel, one aimed at exposing and ridiculing political and social injustices, much like Jonathan Swift, whose *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726), as Orwell suggested, can be read as ‘an attack on England’.[20]

Huxley understood that satire and utopia and dystopia are bound together: each explores the politics of an imagined society, or, as Anthony Burgess suggests: ‘Perhaps every dystopian vision is a figure of the present, with certain features sharpened and exaggerated to point a moral and a warning.’[21] What Burgess states

---

[17] Huxley,1969, p.353
[18] Atwood, ‘Introduction’ in *Brave New World*, 2007, p. x
[19] ‘Satire, n.’ in *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, September 2021) <www.oed.com/view/Entry/171207> [last accessed 14 July 2021]
[20] Orwell, 2009, p.294
[21] Anthony Burgess, *The Novel Now: A Student’s Guide to Contemporary Fiction* (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1967), p.45

here about dystopias is probably equally true of satires and it leads on to what Orwell said about Swift's ability to 'magnify' a truth to the point of distortion: 'Swift did not possess ordinary wisdom, but he did possess a terrible intensity of vision, capable of picking out a single hidden truth and then magnifying it and distorting it.'[22] If we consider *BNW* in this context, what is obvious is that Huxley, like Swift, draws on contemporary political and social issues in his dystopia, magnifying underlying issues and distorting them by setting them in another world, the future. That is to say that the reader struggles to identify their place in a futuristic, dystopian world, one which is far removed from the economic and political instability experienced throughout Europe.

The political instability across Europe in the aftermath of the First World War may have unnerved Huxley. The state motto in *BNW* ('COMMUNITY, IDENTITY, STABILITY') can be read as a direct reflection of this instability.[23] American consumerism of the 1920s would have been rocked by the Great Depression, which lasted from 1929–39, causing a great deal of instability. This would have shone a light on material inequality, something David Bradshaw discusses in his 1993 introduction to *BNW.*[24] Medical advances, such as the discovery of penicillin in 1928, meant that people were living longer, but the birth rate showed no sign of slowing. Consumerism and overpopulation, along with the end of individualism and individual freedom associated with such concerns, become the focus of *BNW.*

Huxley believed that overpopulation would lead to totalitarianism.[25] According to Huxley, as poverty increases, the world becomes unstable. It is this disequilibrium

[22] Orwell, 2009, p.315
[23] Huxley, 2007, p.1
[24] Bradshaw, 'Introduction' in *Brave New World*, 2007, p.xxiii
[25] Huxley,1959, p.19

that is regarded as a road to totalitarianism and, perhaps, planted the seed for *BNW*. It is a central theme of the text and one that is key to understanding the novel. But the trigger for the novel, it seems, is to be found elsewhere.

Bearing in mind Huxley's deep-rooted sensibilities as a satirist and comic writer, it comes as no great surprise that *BNW* was originally intended as a parody of H.G. Wells' *Men Like Gods* (1923).[26] In Wells' novel, the population decreases from over two billion to only a quarter of a million people. The future setting resembles a utopia in which science is harnessed for the benefit of all – not only the elite. H.G. Wells took issue with Huxley's depiction of science in *BNW,* referring to it as a 'bitter satire on progressive ideas': a betrayal.[27]

These two ideas, the use of science and the threat of overpopulation, form the basis of *BNW* and an investigation into Huxley's treatment of these themes will help us understand why Wells was so offended.

BNW is set in World State, a London of the far future – 'in this year of stability, A.F. 632'.[28] The World State's motto, 'Community, Identity, Stability'[29], sets the ambiguous tone: the motto seems rather tame and wholesome but, according to David Bradshaw, it is a direct comment on Britain's economic instability after the Great Depression of 1929.[30]

In the opening pages of the novel we learn about the hatcheries, which are part of a state-controlled breeding programme, and the importance of 'social stability', a concept dependent on the 'Bokanovsky Process', which involves the

---

[26] Roberts, 2019, p.316
[27] H.G. Wells, *The Correspondence of H. G. Wells,* Vol. 4, ed. David C. Smith (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998), p.35
[28] Huxley, 2007, p.2
[29] Ibid., p.5
[30] Bradshaw, 'Introduction' in *Brave New World*, 2007, p.xxi

sorting of fertilized embryos into different castes: Alphas, Betas, Gammas, Deltas and Epsilons.[31] Huxley presents the reader with a factory-like setting, where babies are genetically engineered, each 'caste' fulfilling a particular duty or role in society, and therefore maintaining existing social structures and managing population size.

The Epsilons, for example, are 'conditioned' to thrive in heat.[32] As the Director explains, 'that is the secret of happiness and virtue – liking what you've *got* to do. All conditioning aims at that: making people like their inescapable social destiny.'[33] According to the Director, the population loves 'servitude', and it is through this acceptance that social stability is maintained.[34]

This raises the issue of social engineering. The World State breeds different types of humans – those who are more intelligent, for example, or those who thrive in the heat, who are created, bred, to perform more physically demanding tasks.[35] The idea of course is that in order to guarantee the stability of World State, all categories of people are needed. Nicholas Murray in his biography of Huxley, noted that Huxley was alert to the dangers of eugenics: 'If the eugenists are in too much of an enthusiastic hurry to improve the race, they will only succeed in destroying it.'[36] However, Huxley discusses the potential links between the 'tradition' of 'individual liberty' and the 'effective practice of dysgenics' in *Brave New World Revisited.*[37] Huxley also refers to it as an 'ethical dilemma'.[38] With that in mind, it is interesting to note the political discussion surrounding eugenics in the 1920s and 1930s. The

---

[31] Huxley, 2007, pp.1-3
[32] Ibid., p.12
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid., p.xlviii
[35] Huxley, 1959, p.27
[36] Aldous Huxley quoted in Murray, *Aldous Huxley*, 2002, p.207
[37] Huxley,1959, p.29
[38] Ibid.

eugenics movement rose to prominence in Britain during the first half of the twentieth century.[39] In the United States, a growing interest in eugenics coincided with the rise of white supremacy, with the Ku Klux Klan drawing 50,000 demonstrators onto the streets of Washington in 1925.[40]

The concept of moral conditioning in the novel, using science to control the population, ensures the social stability of the community, or as the Director puts it: 'social destiny.'[41] Each individual is only considered in relation to the greater good, the collective, which forms the basis of a utilitarian utopia, or at least the principle on which utopian societies are built. Their lives are predestined, their freedom of choice removed. Huxley acknowledges that 'individual freedom' will be the price we pay if the problem of overpopulation remains unsolved.[42] He adds, writing in 1958, that it is not an acute threat but something that could very well endanger the 'personal freedom' of the American population.[43]

What Huxley omits from his reflections is the notion that the state has taken over control of women's bodies, depriving them of the freedom to make individual choices about family life and fertility, something he perhaps borrowed from the time before the first wave of feminism fought such patriarchal control. This is further illustrated through a conversation between Fanny and Lenina in *BNW*:

---

[39] Donald MacKenzie, 'Eugenics in Britain' in *Social Studies of Science*, Vol. 6, No. 3/4 (September 1976), p.499 <www.jstor.org/stable/284693> [accessed 23 August 2021]
[40] Martin Austermuhle, 'A Brief History Of White Supremacist Rallies In D.C.' in *Local News*, 9 August 2018, para. 3 of 18 <https://wamu.org/story/18/08/09/brief-history-white-supremacist-rallies-d-c/> [accessed 3rd August 2020]
[41] Huxley, 2007, p.12
[42] Huxley, 1959, p.19
[43] Ibid., p.23

> '"I've been feeling rather out of sorts lately," Fanny explained. "Dr Wells advised me to have a Pregnancy Substitute."
>
> "But, my dear, you're only nineteen. The first Pregnancy Substitute isn't compulsory till twenty-one."'[44]

The purpose of the Pregnancy Substitute is to allow, or force, women to go through the hormonal changes of pregnancy without actually being pregnant, a procedure that becomes mandatory when women reach the age of twenty-one. Atwood asserts, if women no longer carry babies, 'sex has become a recreation'.[45] Atwood inverts this idea in *THT,* where sex for recreation and procreation have been separated: the handmaids replace the hatcheries but sex is only to be had in order to procreate, not for recreational purposes. Huxley's 'freemartins'[46] in *BNW* become 'unwomen'[47] in Atwood's *THT:* these women are sterile. As Mr Foster outlines in *BNW*: '"…in the vast majority of cases, fertility is merely a nuisance. […] So we allow as many as thirty percent of the female embryos to develop normally"', implying that the vast majority are manipulated to be sterile.[48] As he assures his students: 'Guaranteed sterile.'[49] What Atwood is perhaps responding to is the patriarchy portrayed in *BNW*, a world in which women's bodies have become pure pleasure machines. However, it must also be noted that Huxley's depiction of hatcheries is the precursor to what is now known as IVF treatment. If the idea was to be entertained that Huxley was in fact not a feminist, it could be said that his satire critiques such

---

[44] Huxley, 2007, p.32
[45] Atwood, 'Introduction' in *Brave New World,* 2007, p.xiii
[46] Huxley, 2007, p.10
[47] Atwood,1996, p.71
[48] Huxley, 2007, p.10
[49] Ibid.

scientific advances. But the real issue in both novels is the lack of choice for women over their own bodies, in worlds ruled by men.

In his 1946 foreword to *BNW,* Huxley explains that the theme of the novel is not the 'advancement of science' but the progression of science 'as it affects human individuals.'[50] The use of the word 'affects' implies that his concern for humanity is reflected in the above statement – he does not say science *advances* the human individual but *affects.* Huxley expands on this thought when he revisits the theme of systematically practised eugenics in his essays.[51] Here, Huxley clearly states that the end result does not justify the means.[52] However, he outlines how science affects the individual human being by extrapolating that it might be all well and good that the 'quick death by malaria' is a thing of the past, but what has replaced it, as a direct result of scientific advancements, is 'a slow death by outright starvation'.[53] What he is actually criticising here, I believe, is the disjointed relationship between science and ethics, and the lack of social responsibility taken by scientists. If you enable people to live longer, you have a moral obligation to ensure that they are able to do so humanely. The consequence of not fulfilling your moral obligation might be a state-controlled breeding programme, a totalitarian future as portrayed in *BNW*.

The next theme, which is closely intertwined with Huxley's concern about overpopulation, and highlighted by the state-controlled breeding in *BNW,* is that of the family. The portrayal of individual human attachment, or lack of, guarantees social stability within Huxley's fictional world. It is a theme that recurs in Orwell's

[50] Huxley, 2007, p.xliv
[51] Huxley, 1959, p.27
[52] Ibid., p.29
[53] Ibid.

NEF, Margaret Atwood's *THT*, and Anna Burns' *Milkman*, as well as in my own novel, *NSID.*

The World State of *BNW* encourages its inhabitants to be non-monogamous. In fact, when Fanny suspects Lenina of becoming too attached to Henry, she urges her 'to be a little more promiscuous'.[54] She quickly underpins this sentiment by quoting one of the state's proverbs, 'everyone belongs to everyone else', highlighting to the reader that this is not simply two friends talking, but systemic practice.[55] This systemic abolition of traditional values might at first seem to reflect human fantasy – a world where monogamy has been eradicated and where free love is the norm, where the state imposes orgies on its citizens – and the reader might wonder, 'Are we in fact in utopia?' One set of norms has been replaced with another. With wit and humour, Huxley praises Sigmund Freud in the novel, crediting him as the first person to expose the evils of 'family life'.[56] However, he stretches this idea to the extreme, voiding the concept of any meaningful relationships: 'Mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters. But there were also husbands, wives, lovers. There were also monogamy and romance.'[57] This quotation lists the range of individual relationships humans previously had, indicated by Huxley's use of the past tense. The lack of individual love enslaves the individual; the only meaningful relationship an individual can have is to the state. John Atkins discusses individual love when he writes about Orwell but I believe the quotation is as applicable to Huxley's work: 'The condition of love is isolation from the rest of the world.'[58] Individual love has no place in a world

[54] Huxley, 2007, p.36
[55] Ibid., p.37
[56] Ibid., p.33
[57] Ibid., p.34
[58] John Atkins, *George Orwell: A Literary Study,* (London: John Calder (Publishers) Limited, 1954), p.248

where one exists to serve the collective and those who choose individual love pay the ultimate price.

Controlling love is a means to secure power within totalitarian regimes. It is a powerful vehicle, astutely analysed by Huxley, who compares *BNW* to Orwell's *NEF.* Huxley's fable encourages sexual activity; Orwell's prevents it.[59] Even though the regimes operate in opposing ways, they share the same aim – total control over the population and maintaining existing power structures. One offers the release of sexual tension without meaningful emotional attachment; the other controls both.[60] By controlling sexuality and love, the rulers of *NEF* guarantee a permanent state of tension among their subjects, which serves their perpetual state of war.[61] By eliminating the family unit in *BNW* and enforcing sexual freedom, Huxley rids his fable of any kind of 'destructive (or creative) emotional tension'.[62] It is the regime that decides how it will control its people: through science, technology, through rules and laws regulating relationships. It is irrelevant how love is controlled by the state, only that it is controlled. As Huxley concludes, the systemic infliction of pain in *NEF* is as brutal as the infliction of pleasure in *BNW.*[63] And, ultimately, both methods, both means, come to the same end: the end of individual freedom, which is the foundation of any dystopia. These methods are at the core of all 'collectivist regimes.'[64]

One text that predates both Huxley's *BNW* and Orwell's *NEF*, and which was a notable influence on both writers, is Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*. It was Orwell's belief

[59] Ibid., p.42
[60] Huxley,1959, p.42
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Claeys, 2018, p.370

that Huxley was deeply influenced by Zamyatin's novel.[65] I agree with Orwell, to a point. Zamyatin's 'mathematically infallible happiness' has an echo of Huxley's state-prescribed Soma conditioning people to be happy in *BNW*.[66] The novels also share very similar attitudes towards sex. 'Any Number has the right of access to any other Number as sexual product'[67] in *We,* while in *BNW* 'everyone belongs to everyone else'.[68] In his 1946 review of *We*, Orwell compares the similarities in 'atmosphere' and notes the 'rebellion' against reason in a 'painless world' in both novels, but suggests that Huxley's novel is not as politically alert as *We* and seems to be 'influenced by recent biological and psychological theories', such as psychoanalysis.[69] I contend that this is a harsh criticism to make. The texts share a deep concern about the loss of 'individuality'.[70] Take for example, the naming of characters. In *We*, the characters are referred to by numbers, or even titles, like the 'Benefactor'.[71] The Benefactor rules 'OneState'[72], much like Huxley's 'Director', who presides over the 'World State'.[73]

The most interesting crossover, however, is in the concept of 'the savage'. Zamyatin uses 'savage' to refer to the reader's ancestors and illustrates this through use of a jacket: 'I'm sure a savage would look at a "jacket" and think, "What's that for? Just something else to carry."'[74] Zamyatin, here, implies that the savage is

---

[65] George Orwell, *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell Volume IV In Front of Your Nose 1945–1950,* ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (London: Martin Secker & Warburg Limited, 1968), p.72
[66] Zamyatin, 2020, p.3
[67] Ibid., p.26
[68] Huxley, 2007, p.34
[69] Orwell, *Volume IV,* 1968, p.73
[70] Ibid., p.73
[71] Zamyatin, 2020, p.3
[72] Ibid.
[73] Huxley, 2007, p.1
[74] Zamyatin, 2020, p.13

primitive. Huxley, on the other hand, uses the word to relate to his readers, rather than their ancestors. The difference being is an ironical one as Huxley's readers would have had access to high art, unlike the 'progressive' citizens of *BNW*. The 'Savage' of Huxley's novel is John, a man who has access to high art, much like the reader, and who renounces the Brave New World in favour of individual freedom.

As readers, we are aware of the cultural vacuum in every character except John, who grew up reading Shakespeare and poetry. In a world in which everyone is happy, John, who belongs to a different, archaic, simpler world and has been brought into the Brave New World as an experiment, claims his right to be unhappy.[75] What gives the Savage access to such privilege is his status as an outsider and his knowledge of the old world. It is through this deeper understanding of the world that he is able to access unhappiness and thus remain an individual. Choosing unhappiness is a subversive act. In a utopia, or failed utopia, like the GDR, the role of the outsider is of great importance. In my own novel, *NSID*, in which Anna, the protagonist, unravels the web of lies surrounding her by assuming the role of the outsider and, like the outsiders in *BNW*, is punished by being interned to a notorious youth delinquency facility.

The Savage, 'the ultra-individualist John', is the true non-conformist of the story: he is a tourist in *BNW*, not a citizen.[76] Because he has not been artificially bred, because he grew up with a mother on a Reservation, where he was exposed to religion, high art and a different system of values, perhaps much closer to those of the reader, he feels alien in the superficial world to which he has been transported. The Controller acknowledges that if one has not been bred to accept happiness

[75] Ibid., pp.211-212
[76] Claeys, 2018, p.373

without questioning it, it is much harder to accept than truth.[77] Because of this, he offers the Savage the choice of two futures. 'The most serious defect in the story', according to Huxley.[78] The Savage is offered the choice between 'an insane life in Utopia' or 'the life of a primitive' on a Reservation.[79] Huxley reflects that giving the character 'free will' to decide between a life of 'insanity' or 'lunacy' was a great source of amusement and one he thought accurately reflected the human condition at the time.[80] John's attachment to the old world, here characterised through his love of Shakespeare and poetry and religion, emotionally prevents John from becoming a citizen in the Brave New World. He refuses the state-prescribed drug Soma or any of the other numbing substances and chooses to be alone. He commits suicide after failing to find solace in his hermitage. Huxley notes that the Savage's act of suicide means that he reasserts his own authority over himself – accessing his individual freedom – but has ultimately been driven to depart from 'sanity'.[81] Writing in 1946, Huxley admits that if he was to rewrite the book, he would give the Savage a third choice.[82] Huxley would have given the Savage the chance of 'sanity', an option that would have technically existed with the Brave New World in a 'community of exiles and refugees'.[83] John, like Winston Smith in Orwell's *NEF*, pays the ultimate price for his freedom. As Huxley concludes in his essay, 'without freedom, human beings cannot become fully human and that freedom is therefore supremely valuable.'[84]

---

[77] Huxley, 2007, p.200
[78] Ibid., p.xlii
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid., p.xliii
[83] Ibid.
[84] Huxley, 1959, p.164

Huxley's novel situates itself at the generic intersection of utopia, dystopia and satire, and uses historical events and trends to draw an image of the future in which the freedom of the individual is threatened. This is the overarching theme of all the texts discussed in subsequent chapters.

George Orwell

> 'I know it is the fashion to say that most of recorded history is lies anyway. I am willing to believe that history is for the most part inaccurate and biased, but what is peculiar to our own age is the abandonment of the idea that history *could* be truthfully written.'[1]

George Orwell is one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century, and it is doubtful that Margaret Atwood's *THT* and Anna Burns' *Milkman* would exist without *NEF.* Orwell was influenced by writers such as Jonathan Swift, Yevgeny Zamyatin, Aldous Huxley, and H.G. Wells, and this chapter will trace these connections through an examination of two of Orwell's most famous novels: *AF* and *NEF.* Orwell's concern with the deterioration of the English language and the subjectivity of recorded history will also be discussed. These concerns underpin a significant portion of Orwell's work and have also seeped into the pages of *THT* and *Milkman*. The accuracy of recorded history and use of language colour these novels and Orwell's bearing on them is evident.

We can trace the origins of both *AF* and *NEF* back to Swift's *Gulliver's Travels,* a world that predates totalitarianism as we now know it.[2] Orwell connects certain themes in the text, such as 'war hysteria' and reading 'people's secret thoughts' through their faeces, with Swift's interest in the 'truthfulness of recorded history'.[3] Both *AF* and *NEF* draw on these ideas. Orwell's 'Thought Police' is perhaps

[1] Orwell*, Volume II*, 1970, p.296
[2] Orwell, 2009, p.302
[3] Ibid., p.302; p.300

a more efficient, less scatological version of what Swift had in mind when writing about secret thoughts.

The blurb of the 1988 Penguin Books paperback edition of *AF* makes the following claim:

> 'If this Swiftian satire has a moral, it is a bleakly ironic one […] the animals' Utopia disintegrates into an oppressive, despotic regime, manipulated by the pigs' accomplished propaganda, until the slogans that heralded the new freedom are perverted into blatant contradiction.'[4]

The blurb emphasises the 'Swiftian' elements of *AF.* Like *Gulliver's Travels,* which is a satire of England in 1726, *AF* is a satire of the Russian Revolution (1917 – 1923).[5] It is a disguised retelling, an allegory, of the Russian Revolution, depicted through a cast of animals, which investigates how history is produced, distorted and revised.[6]

It is important to note that Orwell was not afraid of revealing the historical events that inspired *AF.* In his preface to the 1947 Ukrainian translation, Orwell stresses two points: firstly, that several occurrences in the fable were taken from 'actual history of the Russian Revolution', but that these episodes were dealt with anachronistically, and, secondly, that the fable does not end with any form of 'reconciliation' but in 'discord'.[7] In fact, Orwell goes as far as to say that the ending of the novel was inspired by the Tehran Conference of 1943, in which the allied forces

---

[4] George Orwell, *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story* (London: Penguin Books, 1988), back cover
[5] Orwell, 2009, p.294
[6] *The Cambridge Introduction to George Orwell,* ed. by John Rodden and John Rossi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p.82
[7] Orwell, *Volume III*, 1970, p.459

of the U.S and Great Britain established an alliance with their former enemy, the Soviet Union.[8] This maps onto Orwell's ending, which shows former adversaries, the farmers and the pigs, drinking to 'the prosperity of Manor Farm'.[9]

The issues Orwell portrays in *AF* might, at first glance, seem to be historical concerns, but they can be viewed outside of any historical context. Or, as Burgess puts it, *AF* 'is the story of the Russian Revolution; it is the story of any revolution.'[10] Atwood read the fable when she was nine years old and, though she did not make 'any connection with historical events', she still experienced a strong sense that the 'pigs were so unjust', which shows the fable's accessibility.[11] *AF,* like *Gulliver's Travels*, offers various levels of entry for both young readers and more informed adult readers, and this is something I have sought to achieve in my own novel through use of a teenage protagonist.

AF was written at a time when Britain and the Soviet Union were allies, fighting alongside the United States against the Axis powers of Germany, Italy and Japan. Even under the cloak of allegory, the political implications of the novel were not popular. The Ministry of Information advised against the publication of the fable so as not to upset their Soviet allies, as Orwell writes in *The Tribune*.[12] Writing about recent political events under the distortion of allegory or through some other filter – be it dystopian or historical – is something Orwell greatly admired in Swift, who, he writes, was 'capable of picking out a single hidden truth and then magnifying it and

[8] Orwell, *Volume III*, 1970, p.459
[9] Orwell, 2013, p.102
[10] Burgess, 1967, p.43
[11] Atwood, 2014, p.141
[12] Bernard Crick, *George Orwell: A Life* (London: Penguin Books, 1982), p.457

distorting it.'[13] It is also a technique deployed by Atwood and Burns, whose use of distortion I will discuss in subsequent chapters.

In his biography *George Orwell: A Life* (1980), Bernard Crick outlines the difficulty Orwell had in finding a publisher.[14] Given that the fable was considered 'not OK politically', many publishers refused to touch it.[15] Orwell's struggle to get *AF* published, must have, in some way, reminded him of the British press reporting on the Spanish Civil War: 'Yet, after all, *some* kind of history will be written, and after those who actually remember the war are dead, it will be universally accepted. So for all political purpose the lie will have become truth.'[16] Here, Orwell draws attention to the artificiality and subjectivity of recorded history, a theme he revisits in *NEF,* and the drowning out of any opposing or questioning voices. In brief, Orwell must have felt silenced by the Ministry of Information's interference.

The novel was eventually published in 1945. Having agreed to publish, it took Secker & Warburg a further year to actually print it due to paper shortage during the war.[17] By the time *AF* reached bookshops, the war was over and political allegiances were changing. As Orwell outlines in his preface to the Ukrainian edition: 'I personally did not believe that such good relations would last long; and, as events have shown, I wasn't far wrong…'[18] He certainly was not.

Atkins notes in his literary study, *George Orwell* (1954), that *AF* is a 'Socialist's mockery at the expense of Soviet Russia' and, because of that, melts comfortably into the form of 'political satire'.[19] The fable deals with life under an

[13] Orwell, 2009, p.315
[14] Crick,1982, pp.452-460
[15] Orwell, *Volume III*, 1970, p.119
[16] Ibid., p.296
[17] Crick,1982, pp.454-461
[18] Orwell, *Volume III*, 1970, p.459
[19] Atkins, 1954, pp.221-222

oppressive, totalitarian regime. As such, it can be read as a failed utopia. Crick notes the 'intellectual continuity' between *AF* and *NEF* and suggests that *NEF* picks up where *AF* left off, depicting what happens after the revolution.[20] Thematically, there can be no doubt that *NEF* is a continuation of *AF* and it is necessary to chart the evolution of these themes.

Let us consider *AF* as a failed utopia. Greenblatt argues that the animals are trying to create their very own 'utopian community'.[21] The blurb of the 1951 edition supports this view. The animals began the revolution with the best intentions. They wanted a better life. They wanted equality. This is evidenced by the seven commandments:

> '1. Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy.
>
> 2. Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings, is a friend.
>
> 3. No animal shall wear clothes.
>
> 4. No animal shall sleep in a bed.
>
> 5. No animal shall drink alcohol.
>
> 6. No animal shall kill any other animal.
>
> 7. All animals are equal.'[22]

It is important to note that the commandments ensure equal treatment for all animals, while also creating a clear distinction between animals (proletariat) and humans (bourgeoisie), and, as we have discovered, 'equality' is the cornerstone of

[20] Crick, 1982, p.450
[21] S. J. Greenblatt, *Three Modern Satirists* (Yale: New Haven, 1965), p.63
[22] Orwell, 2013, p.17

any utopian society.[23] It should also be noted that this allegory points to a Marxist view of history.

As the novel progresses, allegiances change. The concept of the common, invisible enemy is a constant theme here, much like the 'war hysteria' in Swift.[24] Old Major proclaims at the beginning of the fable: 'Is it not crystal clear, then, comrades, that all the evils of this life of ours spring from the tyranny of human beings?'[25] Initially, Mr Jones is the enemy.[26] This is then generalised to encompass anyone on 'two legs'.[27] Whenever the other animals question the pigs about why they do not share the milk and the apples, the pigs chant, 'Jones would come back!' and so the animals are locked in a cycle of war hysteria, with constant rumours of Jones planning to 'recapture the farm'.[28] This hysteria is later fuelled by the plight of Snowball, who, after building a windmill, is labelled a villain and blamed for everything that goes wrong on the farm.[29]

Thought control in *AF* is not exercised through the investigation of any of the animals' excrement, but through the systematic control of who learns to read and write. Of course, it is only the pigs who can do it 'perfectly'.[30] A consequence of this is that none of the other animals are sure what the seven commandments originally said, making it possible for the pigs to whittle them down to just one:

> 'All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others.'[31]

---

[23] Claeys, 2020, p.59
[24] Orwell, 2009, p.302
[25] Orwell, 2013, p.5
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid., p.24
[28] Ibid., p.25; p.29
[29] Ibid., p.57
[30] Ibid., p.23
[31] Ibid., p.97

In this single sentence we can see the foundations of Newspeak or doublethink, and its elegance shows off Orwell's excellent, self-reflective use of language, illustrating how language becomes the basis of all power. By definition, something that is equal (to something else) is no better or worse than its companion. It is not possible for something to be 'more equal'. 'More equal', then, is not a comparative or superlative version of 'equal' but its opposite, and ultimately highlights the oppression of individual freedom. 'More equal' is to *AF* what '2 + 2 = 5' is to *NEF.*[32]

The slogans in *AF* provide the overarching source of satire, in my opinion, whereas the slogans in *NEF* operate on a different level. The contradictions these slogans express – 'War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, Ignorance is Strength' – are not amusing because of their bleak execution within the novel.[33] They are true, and their brutal reinforcement does not carry the same level of absurdity as those in *AF.* But, of course, they both reflect Orwell's concern about the simplification of the English language, a simplification that remains prominent in politics today. In his essay 'Politics and the English Language', Orwell discusses the idea that 'political language […] is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable'[34] – something he dramatises to great effect in both novels.

Orwell's use of language underscores his concern with the rewriting and editing – the distortion – of history, and the contradiction that lies within this process. We, the readers, can turn back the pages and see for ourselves that once upon a time there were seven commandments. The animals in the story lack such solid

[32] Orwell, 2000, p.303
[33] Ibid., p.6
[34] Orwell, 2009, p.285

proof. The rewriting of history, then, only functions within the novel and it is the reader's job to bear witness to it. Orwell attempted to do just this outside of his fictional writings. In 1946, he, along with H.G. Wells and other prominent writers, put his name to an open letter to the British press, in which they called for 'an investigation aimed at the establishment of historical truth'.[35] The letter, though widely circulated, was only published in *Forward*, and no such investigation was undertaken. Of course, this also resonates with Swift's concern about the accuracy and honesty of 'recorded history'[36] , which is also relevant to Atwood's *THT* and Anna Burns' *Milkman,* as well as my own novel, *NSID*.

Orwell understood the relationship between history and language, and it is through Winston Smith in *NEF* that he explores this relationship in more detail. Winston Smith works in the Records Department of the Ministry of Truth, where it is his job to rewrite the news in order to demonstrate to the people that Big Brother is always right.[37] A modern reader might say that Winston Smith is employed in the production of fake news. The real concern, here, is the 'mutability of the past', which applies to the entire history of Airstrip One but also to Winston's own life.[38] Even Winston's childhood is lost to him: 'he could not remember: nothing remained of his childhood except a series of bright-lit tableaux, occurring against no background and mostly unintelligible.'[39] This has an impact on one's sense of self: 'If both the past and the external world exist only in the mind and if the mind itself is controllable – what then?'[40] This implies that one's own past is as controllable as that of an entire

[35] Orwell, *Volume IV*, 1968, p.115
[36] Orwell, 2009, p.300
[37] Orwell, 2000, p.5
[38] Ibid., p.163
[39] Ibid., p.5
[40] Ibid., p.84

nation and it seems that solid objects are the only true bearers of history. Take, for example, the paperweight Winston admires:

> 'It was as though the surface of the glass had been the arch of the sky, enclosing a tiny world with its atmosphere complete. He had the feeling that he could get inside it, along with the mahogany bed and the gate-leg table, and the clock and the steel engraving and the paperweight itself. The paperweight was the room he was in, and the coral was Julia's life and his own, fixed in a sort of eternity at the heart of the crystal.'[41]

Winston has the capacity to fantasise, to dream-up a better life, to imagine a world in which only he and Julia exist, a world outside of and separate from the regime. Orwell does not portray this through the telescreens or any other technology in the novel, but through a paperweight, an old-fashioned, nostalgic object. The object is solid; it cannot be altered. As Winston points out, 'Do you realise that the past, starting from yesterday, has been actually abolished? If it survives anywhere, it's in a few solid objects with no words attached to them, like that lump of glass there.'[42] It is interesting that the paperweight is described as 'transparent' – it is a vehicle for hope, for reflecting. If we think back to Swift's definition of satire, employing the image of a glass (probably a mirror) for his analogy, it is even more interesting to consider Orwell's choice of object. Yes, Winston regards the paperweight and, in so doing, sees himself, but not as he is in that moment. What Winston sees is a fantasy, a form of escapism that provides him, and the reader, with a modicum of comfort. It can also be read as a metaphor for the past: past

[41] Ibid., p.154
[42] Ibid., p.162

events are unalterable; they are solid. Only the meaning and narrative we attach to them can be controlled.

In a later scene, O'Brien tells Winston, '"'Who controls the present controls the past'"'[43] and it is under this umbrella that the two men discuss the notion of reality and its existence. This raises questions about the control of memory but the answers, to the alert reader, seem obvious: the oligarchy controls the news and controls history, and so controls the people. By determining what is true, they can enforce the belief that '2 + 2 = 5', which is the epitome of living under an oppressive regime – it externalises the psychology of systematic oppression.[44] In my chapter on Margaret Atwood, I will consider how memories of the past in *THT* offer the reader brief periods of respite, while the erasing, supressing and repressing of memories, will be discussed more fully when I come to Anna Burns, who uses the concept of 'jamais vu' in her novel *Milkman*.

The world of *NEF* is one, as Burgess remarks, 'in which the individual has lost all his rights of moral choice', which implies a loss of freedom.[45] Orwell discusses this idea in his broadcast 'Literature and Totalitarianism', using as an example the quickly changing political allegiances in the lead up to the Second World War.[46] The 'emotional life' of the Germans under Hitler's rule was subject to 'violent change': in one moment they were expected to hate the Bolsheviks, in the next they were ordered to love them.[47] The obedience demanded of the German

[43] Ibid., p.260
[44] Ibid., p.303
[45] Anthony Burgess, *1985* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2013), p.8
[46] Orwell,*Volume II*, 1970, pp.161-164
[47] Ibid., p.163

army is also demanded of the citizens of Oceania, who, though they are always at war, are faced with a rapidly changing enemy.[48]

The example of the Germans is interesting. Orwell spent much of the war writing about his disillusionment with 'the intellectuals who for ten dreadful years have kept it up that [Hitler] is merely a figure out of a comic opera,' and it is in this same broadcast from 1941 that Orwell criticises his favourite boyhood author, H.G. Wells, for exactly that kind of thinking.[49] When the broadcast was later reprinted in the *Listener,* Orwell received an '[a]busive letter from H.G. Wells', in which he addresses him as '"you shit", among other things.'[50] This particular argument aside, Roberts claims that Orwell was indebted to H.G. Wells' *The Holy Terror* (1939)[51], in which a 'global war continues' throughout the narrative.[52] This, of course, echoes the plot to *NEF*. The other comparison Roberts draws between the novels is the use of language, more specifically the 'simplified English' used in Wells' novel, which Orwell later develops into Newspeak.[53]

Like Huxley, Orwell was concerned with the loss of individual freedom above all else.[54] In a 1941 BBC broadcast, Orwell discusses the ways in which totalitarianism 'isolates you from the outside world' and how it controls the 'thoughts and emotions' of its citizens.[55] There seems to be only one other agent as powerful as totalitarianism when it comes to cutting individuals off from society, which Atkins, writing about Orwell, identifies thus: 'The condition of love is isolation from the rest of

---

[48] Orwell, 2000, p.189
[49] Orwell, *Volume II*, 1970, p.168; Orwell, *Volume IV*, 1968, p.344
[50] Orwell, *Volume II*, 1970, p.469
A prelude to the exchange is detailed in Crick, *George Orwell*, 1980, pp.427-431
[51] H. G. Wells, *The Holy Terror* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1939)
[52] Roberts, 2019, p.405
[53] Ibid.
[54] Atwood, 2014, p.146
[55] Orwell*, Volume II*, 1970, p.162

the world.'[56] The connection between the loss of individuality and the right to individual love is something Orwell notes when discussing Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), in which the Houyhnhnms have 'no word for "love,"' and 'their marriages are arranged'.[57] These themes are not only familiar to us from Huxley's *BNW,* they are also deeply engrained in Orwell's work. Orwell read Swift when he was eight years old, in much the same way Atwood read *AF* when she was in primary school.[58] Zamyatin, too, writes about the links between love and power in *We*: 'Love and hunger rule the world.'[59] Orwell must have been deeply influenced by Zamyatin's novel, which he reviewed in 1946, comparing it to Huxley's *BNW.*[60] In 1944, Orwell wrote to Gleb Struve, thanking him for a volume of '*25 Years of Soviet Russian Literature'* and mentioning his particular interest in Zamyatin's novel.[61] Orwell writes, 'I am interested in that kind of book, and even keep making notes for one myself'.[62] The similarities between *We* and *NEF* are striking and Orwell's novel could be read as a response to the other*,* specifically with respect to the ending, which Orwell subverts. This, I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter.

In a letter from 1948, Orwell criticised a draft blurb of the English edition of the novel, which, he believed, made *NEF* sound too much like a 'thriller mixed up with a love story'.[63] This is interesting given that, in the novel, love is controlled*,* sex is prohibited, and any marriage must be authorised and arranged by the Party.[64] Where Huxley depicted a society in which promiscuity is heavily encouraged but the family

---

[56] Atkins,1954, p.248
[57] Orwell, 2009, p.309
[58] Orwell, 2009, p.311; Atwood, 2014, p.141
[59] Zamyatin, 2020, p.25
[60] Orwell*, Volume IV*, 1968, p.72
[61] Orwell, *Volume III*, 1970, p.118
[62] Ibid.
[63] Orwell, *Volume IV*, 1968, p.460
[64] Orwell, 2000, pp.68-69

unit abandoned, Orwell creates a world in which feelings can change in an instant.[65] It is important to bear in mind that, as Huxley points out, the aim for these regimes is total control over the population in order to maintain existing power structures. In order to achieve this, Orwell outlaws the release of sexual tension.[66] By controlling sexuality and love, the rulers of *NEF* guarantee a permanent state of tension among their subjects, which serves their perpetual state of war.[67]

The love interest in *NEF,* Julia, passes Winston Smith a note, which says 'I love you'.[68] Atkins says of Julia that she represents the 'weakness of love; its isolation' and that love is 'individual in its action'.[69] What this means, then, from the point of view of the oligarchy in *NEF,* is that love must be avoided – prohibited, even – at all costs, because the success of the regime depends on total obedience and loyalty from its citizens.[70] The character of Julia seems to be inspired by Zamyatin's femme fatale, I-330, who, like Julia, initiates the love affair, even though this is prohibited by the state, and is punished for it.[71] D-503 later betrays I-330, in much the same way Winston betrays Julia.[72] Winston and Julia's love seems to be based on political ideas rather than real feelings: for Winston, his love for Julia is a weapon 'to challenge the Party'; for Julia, it is an excuse to break the rules, through the act of making love.[73] Burgess wonders if having sex is Julia's idea of freedom as well as the only way she knows to express love.[74] Whether their love is real or imagined, it

[65] Burgess, 2013, p.84
[66] Huxley, 1959, p.42
[67] Ibid.
[68] Orwell, 2000, p.113
[69] Atkins, 1954, p.248
[70] Burgess, 2013, p.84
[71] Orwell, *Volume IV*, 1968, p.74
[72] Zamyatin, 2020, p.257
[73] Atkins, 1954, p.248
[74] Burgess, 2013, p.85

also serves another purpose. When Julia and Winston are caught, they betray one another:

> '"I betrayed you," she said baldly.
>
> "I betrayed you," he said.
>
> She gave him another quick look of dislike.'[75]

In the same way he betrayed Julia over his fear of rats, Winston also betrayed his mother over a bar of chocolate when he was a child:

> 'Tragedy, he perceived, belonged to the ancient time, to a time when there was still privacy, love and friendship, and when the members of a family stood by one another without needing to know the reason. His mother's memory tore at his heart because she had died loving him, when he was too young and selfish to love her in return, and because somehow, he did not remember how, she had sacrificed herself to a conception of loyalty that was private and unalterable.'[76]

What this suggests is that, even at a time when love existed, Winston was incapable of loving. By his own admission, he was too 'selfish' to love his mother. Perhaps in the same way, he is incapable of loving Julia and, instead, uses her as a vehicle to express his apparent disillusionment with the Party.

Burgess believes Winston's incapacity for love is Orwell's own 'testimony of despair.'[77] Burgess asserts that, towards the end of his life, Orwell had lost hope in

---

[75] Orwell, 2000, p.305
[76] Ibid., p.32
[77] Burgess, 2013, p.88

the working classes and with this loss of hope came an inability to love.[78] Winston's affirmation that he loves Big Brother and his subsequent death, Burgess concludes, confirm 'the death of freedom'.[79] This also implies that love is a symbol for the death of individuality because the love Winston proclaims for Big Brother absorbs him into the regime, into the collective. Once Winston succumbs to loving Big Brother, he ceases to be an individual. However, Burgess' conclusion might be overly pessimistic.

Orwell's appendix, 'Principles of Newspeak', though perhaps much misunderstood, offers a genuine source of hope. Margaret Atwood and Andrew Milner have both noted that the appendix historicises the novel. Yes, Winston Smith has been consumed by the regime. As Orwell writes: 'He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother.'[80] This last line is followed by the words 'The End'. It might be true that this is the end for Winston, but, as is the case with dystopias, this is a novel about ideas. So the questions posed by the novel relate to a wider world, not simply one individual. The fact that Winston does not witness the fall of the regime is irrelevant. The appendix is written in 'standard English', the 'third person', and in the 'past tense', all of which suggest a collapsed regime.[81] Orwell subverts the ending of Zamyatin's *We* in *NEF*. In *We*, D-503 challenges the regime, much like Winston Smith in *NEF*, and the regime seemingly collapses in what appears to be the final chapter, 'Record 39, The End'.[82] However, Zamyatin includes another chapter, 'Record 40, Facts, The Bell, I Am Certain'[83], in which the reader learns that

[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid., p.89
[80] Orwell, 2000, p.311
[81] Andrew Milner, 'Introduction' in *Tenses of Imagination: Raymond Williams on Science Fiction, Utopia and Dystopia,* ed. by Andrew Milner (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), p.6
[82] Zamyatin, 2020, p.249
[83] Ibid., p.256

not only has the regime survived but D-503 has been operated on and now fully supports the regime.[84] D-503, like Winston, has been consumed by the state. However, in *NEF*, though Winston dies, the reader witnesses the fall of Big Brother, whereas Zamyatin ends his final chapter with D-503's affirmation to the regime, to the Benefactor, because 'reason has to win.'[85] The impact of the report or appendix cannot be overstated: it provides relief to the reader, an assurance that everything will be fine in the end. It also shows that Orwell was not, as Burgess supposed, without hope and, as Atwood points out, believed in the 'resilience of the human spirit'.[86] Atwood's decision to include 'Historical Notes' in *THT* was inspired by *NEF* and their inclusion has the same effect as Orwell's appendix.[87] Burns' use of retrospectivity in *Milkman* and my own use of the postcard in *NSID* fulfil an equally optimistic function: they signal to the reader that there is hope beyond the narrative.

Each of these post-narrative codas serves to historicise the events of their respective novels. Presenting a constructed, dystopian novel as an historical artefact has a further, dual function: it operates as an act of creating a history, while simultaneously commenting on the fact that history is created.

[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid., p.258
[86] Atwood, 2014, p.145
[87] Atwood, 2005, p.292

Margaret Atwood

'I suppose that's what happens to ustopian societies when they die: they don't go to Heaven, they become thesis topics.'[1]

Margaret Atwood has written extensively on the concepts of utopia and dystopia and her work is very much in conversation with that of George Orwell and Aldous Huxley. Atwood describes *NEF* and *BNW* as two presentations of 'man-made Hell': one a brutal totalitarian state, the other a state-regulated idyll.[2] In the same way Huxley and Orwell responded to Swift, H.G. Wells, and Zamyatin, Atwood acknowledges the influence Orwell and Huxley, have had on her writing, both of whom she read when she was young.[3] By being in dialogue with these writers, Atwood has progressed the genre of dystopian fiction and arrived at her own terminology: ustopia. In the same way that Wells' '"scientific romances"' were 'pioneer[s] of science fiction', Atwood is a pioneer of speculative fiction.[4] Burgess states that, 'Wells is perhaps the only "progressive" writer of the early modern age to have been both absorbed and reacted against.'[5] Orwell and Huxley are indebted to H.G. Wells, though both had tumultuous relationships with him, the latter being described by Burgess as 'the greatest anti-Wellsian of them all'.[6] Their reactions against 'Wellsian Utopia' in *NEF* and *BNW* are woven into *THT.*[7] Atwood acknowledges that '"Science Fiction" as a

[1] Atwood, 2014, p.91
[2] Ibid., p.148
[3] Ibid., p.143
[4] H. G. Wells, The *Time Machine* (London: Penguin Classics, 2005), p.xvi; Burgess,1967, p.38
[5] Burgess,1967, p.38
[6] Ibid., p.39
[7] Orwell*, Volume II*, 1970, p.170

term was unknown to Wells', the term only being coined in the United States in the 1930s.[8] This is also true of Atwood and ustopia, the difference being that Atwood coined the term herself. This chapter will trace the origins of Atwood's ustopia and consider why she felt the need to coin her own term through an exploration of her relationship with the genre of science fiction, and the importance of setting when it comes to ustopian narratives through a close reading of *THT*.

Given Atwood's status as a genre pioneer, it is important to start with a consideration of her relationship with the genre of science fiction. Reviewing Atwood's 2009 novel, *The Year of the Flood*[9] in the *Guardian*, Ursula K. Le Guin takes aim at Atwood for claiming not to be a writer of science fiction.[10] Le Guin asserts that Atwood's non-realist novels, *THT, Oryx and Crake* (2003)[11] and *The Year of the Flood*, bear the hallmarks of science fiction, drawing 'imaginatively from current trends and events to a near-future that's half prediction, half satire.'[12] Warner describes H.G. Wells' technique when writing scientific romances as inverting 'the usual far-fetched material of fantasy into seemingly "near-fetched" observations.'[13] The two definitions overlap: both incorporate the idea of 'current trends', or a 'near-fetchedness', essentially something that can be explained, or as Warner asserts, a 'scientific truth' when it comes to H.G. Wells.[14] Atwood, however, has developed her own definition of what science fiction is: it is fiction in which things happen that are

[8] Atwood, 2005, p.390
[9] Margaret Atwood, *The Year of the Flood* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009)
[10] Ursula K. Le Guin, 'The Year of the Flood by Margaret Atwood' in *Guardian,* 29 Aug 2009, para. 1 of 14 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/aug/29/margaret-atwood-year-of-flood> [last accessed 14 April 2020]
[11] Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003)
[12] Le Guin, 2009, para. 1 of 14
[13] Wells, 2005, p.xix
[14] Ibid., p.xvi

impossible.[15] Atwood's implication is that even though things like time travel can be explained through science, they are, ultimately, impossible. Take, for example, H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895), in which technology is used to travel through time. Atwood asserts that if the term science implies 'the known and possible', then Wells was paying 'little attention to those boundaries.'[16] Wells wrote during a period of what Warner describes as 'unsurpassed scientific discovery'[17] and uses science to, in his own words, '*domesticate* the impossible'.[18] But the fact remains, the advances he depicts are the stuff of fiction; they are impossible.

Atwood, on the other hand, is adamant that nothing impossible happens in her non-realist novels. There is a basis, a foundation, for everything: what happens has already happened somewhere in the world or is within the parameters of happening.[19] This implies a degree of realism, which forms the basis for what Gregory Claeys terms the 'Atwood principle'.[20]

Le Guin and Atwood settled their dispute in a public discussion as part of the Portland Arts and Lectures series in 2010, agreeing to disagree. Though they are describing the same qualities, they deploy different labels: what is speculative fiction to Atwood is science fiction to Le Guin, and what is science fiction to Atwood is fantasy to Le Guin.[21] Atwood concludes: 'When it comes to genres, the borders are increasingly undefended, and things slip back and forth across them with insouciance.'[22]

---

[15] Atwood, 2005, p.92
[16] Ibid., p.390
[17] Wells, 2005, p.xx
[18] H. G. Wells, *Seven Famous Novels* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1934), p.viii
[19] Atwood, 2005, p.92
[20] Claeys, 2018, p. 287
[21] Atwood, 2014, p.7
[22] Ibid.

Much of Atwood's exploratory writing around genre focuses on the intersection between utopias and dystopias.[23] As discussed in my chapter on Huxley, there is a clear overlap between satire and dystopia, in particular that they are political in nature. Darko Suvin suggests that the 'dramatic strategies' deployed in utopias often conflict with 'the reader's presumption of normality.'[24] This is also true of dystopias. Dystopia, however, depends heavily on point-of-view.

From 1961 until 1989, East Berlin was separated from West Berlin, and the rest of West Germany, by a wall. One side socialist, the other capitalist. Depending on which side of the wall you found yourself, you might have thought of the wall as keeping you safe or penning you in. Gregory Claeys uses the analogy of the wall in relation to utopian and dystopian societies in *Dystopia: A Natural History* (2017), measuring a society's level of utopianism and dystopianism by the stated purpose of the wall.[25] If a wall was erected to keep others out, its purpose is most definitely utopian. However, if it was built to keep its citizens in, it is a dystopian society.

Atwood recognises the similarities between utopias and dystopias, in that both are based on exclusion as much as they are on inclusion. This is, of course, especially interesting if we consider the roles of the John 'the Savage' in *BNW* and Winston Smith in *NEF*: in both cases the outsider is punished and dies. In both cases the hero is considered, to use Burgess' term, 'eccentric'.[26] Most utopias regarded from the perspective of the people who don't fit in could easily be referred

[23] Atwood, 2014, pp.2-7
[24] Darko Suvin paraphrased in David Seed, *Science Fiction: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.73
[25] Claeys, 2018, p.8
[26] Burgess,1967, p.45

to as dystopias.[27] So it is not simply a case of utopia equals good, dystopia equals bad; it depends on one's perspective.[28]

Atwood uses as an example the seventeenth-century Puritan New Englanders. From utopian beginnings, the Puritans set out to build a better society, and the first things they built were a prison and a scaffold.[29] The creation of a prison and a platform for public executions embodies the concept of punishment and so acknowledges the existence of resistance and transgression within a utopian society. Atwood points towards Thomas More, stating: 'As for the utopias, from Thomas More onwards, there is always provision made for the renegades, those who don't or won't follow the rules: prison, enslavement, exile, exclusion or execution.'[30] Considering Atwood's assertion, it is apparent that all societies – be they utopian or dystopian – anticipate some form of resistance. The notion that every utopia contains the seeds of a dystopia is one of the defining features of Atwood's ustopia.

In her spat with Le Guin, Atwood uses the term 'speculative fiction' rather than ustopia. This is because her argument with Le Guin predates her coining of the term. In her lecture 'Writing Utopia' (1989), later collected in *Writing With Intent* (2005), Atwood outlines the process of writing *THT*, and for much of the essay she refers to the novel as a 'Utopia-Dystopia'.[31] In order to create ustopia, Atwood merged the concepts of utopia and dystopia: '*Ustopia* is a word I made up by combining utopia and dystopia—the imagined perfect society and its opposite—because, in my view, each contains a latent version of the other.'[32] There is almost always an element of

[27] Atwood, 2014, pp. 66-67
[28] Atwood, 2005, p. 93
[29] Atwood, 2014, p.83
[30] Ibid., p.86
[31] Atwood, 2005, p.93
[32] Atwood, 2014, p.66, Atwood's italics

utopia within dystopias, with many dystopias, like the GDR, starting as imagined utopias. In her essay 'Dire Cartographies: The Road to Ustopia', Atwood discusses utopias and their origins.[33] This essay traces utopia's journey from unexplored islands, to increasingly remote islands, and, eventually, to the edges of the map.[34]

As maps became more detailed, the scope for hitherto undiscovered places narrowed, and writers and myth-makers were forced to take their stories underground, where they remained until advances in Geology.[35] New settings were sought in time, rather than space, and the future replaced the unknown island.[36] This creates other worlds.[37] Though they depict another place or time, these kinds of narratives, as Burgess suggests, are about the here and now.[38]

A knock-on effect of the future-setting is that it opened up the possibility of setting utopian and dystopian stories in the past. Parallel universes gave way to a past so long ago that all textual traces of it had disappeared.[39] The past, like the future, has the power to engender a sense of estrangement, of alienation. This is pertinent to my discussion of *THT,* but also to Anna Burns' *Milkman* and my own novel, *NSID,* both of which are set in the past.

It is important to begin a discussion of *THT* – in light of our understanding of ustopias – with an exploration of the novel's conception and its setting. Atwood started writing the novel while in West Berlin during the early 1980s.[40] A visit to East

---

[33] Atwood, 2014, pp. 66-96
This lecture was part of the Richard Ellmann Lectures in Modern Literature, delivered by Atwood in October 2010. It is likely that this is the first time she used the term 'ustopia'.
[34] Ibid., p.67
[35] Ibid., pp.68-69
[36] Ibid., pp.70-73
[37] Ibid., p.24
[38] Burgess,1967, p.45
[39] Atwood, 2014, p.70
[40] Atwood, 2014, p.86

Berlin gave her access to ‘a totalitarian – but supposedly utopian – regime’ and an insight into life under such conditions.[41] It is no coincidence, then, that there are fragments of the GDR in the Republic of Gilead. There are references to ‘real coffee’, the ‘black market’ and ‘the Wall’.[42] Fruits, like oranges, are not always available in Gilead, which, I believe, is a reference to the GDR’s deal with Cuba to supply them with oranges in exchange for cement factories.[43] There are also the ‘Eyes’, whose job it is to spy on the citizens of Gilead, much like the Stasi operatives in the GDR.[44]

Gilead and the GDR are both situated within countries they once belonged to before becoming ideologically and geographically isolated. Progress – both economic and technological – slowed in these countries, if it did not halt altogether, and as a consequence, they feel oddly old-fashioned, a window onto the past.

The old-fashioned, period feel of *THT* can be attributed in part to Atwood’s costume choices, but also to the makeup, infrastructure and texture of the world she depicts. As Atwood explains, the handmaid’s distinctive costume ‘was inspired by the figure on the Old Dutch Cleanser boxes of my childhood, but they are also simply old.’[45] This brand of cleanser depicts a woman in traditional Dutch costume, wearing a bonnet, reminiscent of the description Atwood chose for the handmaids: the ankle-length skirt, the gloves and the wings that frame the face.[46]

The handmaid’s costume, given its real-world influence, will carry the weight of recognition for readers of a certain age, grounding the narrative in a known reality. This recognition can be extended to the novel’s setting. Rather than opening with the

---

[41] Ibid., p.87
[42] Atwood, 1996, p.20; p.24; p.41
[43] Ibid., p.35; ‘Die Kuba-Orange: "Fidels Rache"’ in *MDR Zeitreise,* para. 4 of 7 <https://www.mdr.de/zeitreise/kuba-orangen-in-der-ddr100.html> [last accessed 15 May 2021]
[44] Atwood, 1996, p.28
[45] Atwood, 2014, pp.88-89
[46] Atwood, 1996, p.18

clocks striking thirteen (Orwell) or a description of a London high-rise hatchery (Huxley), Atwood invites us into a repurposed gymnasium, where an as-yet-unnamed protagonist muses about the teenagers who would have passed through it.[47] The protagonist leads the reader through different time periods, mentioning 'mini-skirts' and 'spiky green-streaked hair'.[48] Atwood, via her protagonist, guides the reader from the 1960s through to the 1980s. This is the element of realism Gregory Claeys meant when discussing Atwood's style. But slowly, she reveals more about the world of the novel. The 'army-issue blankets, old ones that still said U.S.' signify to the reader that, yes, this is a world that is familiar but also different.[49] Something strange is going on. It appears, from this first page, that the United States, as the reader knows it, no longer exists. In this version of the United States there are 'the Aunts' and there are 'the Angels', and there are five names: 'Alma. Janine. Dolores. Moira. June.'[50] Atwood grounds the narrative in the familiar. Only once she has established that her world looks very much like our own, once she has anchored it, does she begin to distort it. It is our world, but in the near-future. The version of the United States the reader might be familiar with is referred to as 'the time before'.[51]

This reference to a past within the world of the novel offers a further means of distinguishing the novel's setting from the world we know. Atwood utilises three narrative timeframes: the narrator's past (the reader's present), the narrator's present (the reader's future that feels like a past long ago) and the future (in the form of the 'Historical Notes', an appendix to the novel). The use of different timeframes will be explored in greater depth when I discuss Anna Burns, who manipulates the

[47] Ibid., p.13
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid., p.14
[51] Ibid., p.20

narrative in a similar way. In ustopian narratives, these timeframes allow for transition between utopias and dystopias in a way reminiscent of the 'yin and yang pattern' Atwood describes.[52] Offred's past, the reader's present, gives the character, but also the reader, access to relief, to utopia. This timeframe functions in much the same way as Winston Smith's moment with the paperweight: it provides hope but it also links in with Atwood's idea of literary landscapes as states of mind – both Winston and Offred visit these utopias in their minds, through memories and imaginings. These places do not physically exist. This is a particularly telling distinction, given that the word utopia, far from meaning 'perfect' place, in fact, means 'no place'.[53] Though these nowhere places do not exist in any tangible sense, Offred has full control over when and how she accesses them: 'But the night is my time out. Where should I go? Somewhere good.'[54]

Soma, the state prescribed drug in *BNW,* also fits the criteria. Though what Huxley's characters experience and feel while under the influence of Soma is artificially produced, it is difficult to assess for the reader if Offred's memories are real or imagined. However, the important aspect to note is that these moments, these retreats, bring the characters and, by extension, the reader, relief. They function as utopian landscapes and, as Atwood demonstrates, access to these landscapes is a matter of personal choice for Offred, in a similar way to the inhabitants of WorldState, who willingly consume Soma.

Though physical setting is an important part of an ustopian narrative, for Atwood, ustopia is just as much a state of mind.[55] In fact, according to Atwood, a

[52] Atwood, 2014, p.85
[53] Atwood, 2005, p.93
[54] Atwood, 1996, p.47
[55] Atwood, 2014, p.75

literary landscape and a character's state of mind are linked.[56] Characters can access a utopian or dystopian space through memories (the past) or imaginings (the future): the 'state of mind' is linked to temporal spaces.[57] The state of mind is the gateway to utopia.

In *THT,* Atwood buries the utopian landscapes in two places: 'one is in the past—the past that is our own present. The second is placed in a future beyond the main story by the Afterword at the end of the book'.[58] The future is represented by Atwood's 'Historical Notes on *The Handmaid's Tale*', which functions similarly to Orwell's 'Appendix'. It signifies a hopeful ending: though we are not certain of Offred's fate, the historical notes indicate that Gilead, like IngSoc in *NEF*, has fallen.[59] It implies that, in the end, even though the novels' individuals have died, 'individuality' has triumphed over collectivism.[60] This furnishes the narrative – be it in *THT* or *NEF* – with an element of utopia, harking back to the account of the time traveller/reporter, which was made popular by Thomas More's *Utopia*.[61] It also, of course, historicises the novel. By comparison, WorldState does not collapse at the end of *BNW.* John the Savage, the true individual, the traveller, commits suicide and the regime continues. This is also true of Zamyatin's *We*: D-503 who is operated on and consumed by the regime.

What the protagonists of all these novels desire is the freedom of individualism. Early on in *THT,* Offred remembers the freedom she used to enjoy in the time before. The freedom to walk the streets with her husband and dream about

---

[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid., p.91
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid., p.147
[60] Ibid., p.146
[61] Seed, 2011, p.73

the future. She is aware that this freedom is a thing of the past. It now belongs to the no-place.[62] There is, however, another kind 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.'[63] Of the two types of freedom, one is a utopian kind, the other a dystopian freedom that carries with it all manner of restrictions, depending whose point of view one implores: 'Freedom from', in the context of *THT*, from Offred's perspective, is a euphemism for enslavement. It is a phrase out of Newspeak's B vocabulary:

> 'No word in the B vocabulary was ideologically neutral. A great many were euphemisms. Such words, for instance, as *joycamp* (forced-labour camp) or *Minipax* (Ministry of Peace, i.e. Ministry of War) meant the exact opposite of what they appeared to mean.'[64]

Atwood discusses this very idea when she writes about the rise of state surveillance in the aftermath of 9/11: 'For the sake of freedom, freedom must be renounced. […] It's a concept worthy of doublethink.'[65]

The manipulation of language as a tool for oppression is closely associated with the manipulation of history, which, inevitably, leads to disenfranchisement. *THT* deals with the disenfranchisement of women. While out walking with another handmaid, Offred passes a small church and looks at the old gravestones in the churchyard: 'They haven't fiddled with the gravestones, or the church either. It's only

---

[62] Atwood, 1996, p.33
[63] Ibid., p.34
[64] Orwell, 2000, pp.321-322
[65] Atwood, 2014, p.149

more recent history that offends them.'[66] The recent history in question is likely to relate to the emancipation of women and developments in birth control and abortion legislation, which Huxley took to another extreme in *BNW*, that is the societal reinforcement of such drugs and procedures. The dead bodies, which Offred sees hanging from the Wall, were once doctors who performed abortions, now treated like 'war criminals.'[67] Attitudes towards the terminations of pregnancies have changed, however, and, given that this is a world where most women struggle to conceive, few women would opt for such a procedure.[68] Because of this, Offred says, these dead bodies are 'time travellers, anachronisms. They've come here from the past.'[69]

The fertile women are assigned to powerful men, whose households they serve as handmaids. Atwood asserts: 'The pigs in *Animal Farm* get the milk and the apples, the élite of *The Handmaid's Tale* get the fertile women.'[70] *THT* has close literary links with *BNW*, in which sex has been turned into 'recreation' rather than 'procreation'.[71] In many ways, *THT* is a subversion of Huxley's tale, yet the underlying idea is the same: women's lack of power over their own bodies. The sterile women, or, 'freemartins', of *BNW* are deemed desirable.[72] Atwood, however, sends her 'Unwomen' to the Colonies, further stressing their undesirability in Gilead law: 'There are only women who are fruitful and women who are barren'.[73] Whereas women's bodies have become solely a source of pleasure in *BNW*, they have become breeding machines in *THT.* Abortions are encouraged in *BNW*; in *THT* they

[66] Atwood,1996, p.41
[67] Atwood,1996, p.43
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Atwood, 2006, p.338
[71] Huxley, 2007, p.xiii
[72] Ibid., p.10
[73] Atwood,1996, p.71

are forbidden.[74] Atwood's account of writing the novel shows a clear awareness of the oppression of her female characters. In contrast, Huxley's silence on the same issue in *Brave New World Revisited* is deafening. It may be, then, that *THT* is a direct response to that silence. The women in *THT* do not, as Huxley put it, 'love their servitude', despite being conditioned to do so, and it is because of this that the oppression of women is openly voiced.[75]

Atwood focuses on the oppression of women through the lens of an extremist religious regime derived from the Puritans.[76] Atwood wrote the novel during the 1980s in the aftermath of second wave feminism and at the tail end of the Cold War. She wondered what would need to happen in order to force women back into the home, and her model for these conditions was the nineteenth-century, when women were not allowed to vote.[77] Having stripped women of their independence, of their voice, Atwood took environmental aspects into account and asked what would happen if child-bearing became more and more difficult, if radiation, for example, caused higher rates of infertility, something Atwood says was already happening at the time of writing the novel.[78] The world Atwood creates in *THT* is the result of these conditions: all women have been deprived of their rights, with only a few able to bear children.

The oppressive regimes depicted in each of the texts discussed so far have explored the prospect of state-regulated relationships. Atwood's novel is no exception. The concept of love, of any romantic or meaningful relationship, is abolished in *THT,* as is indicated by Offred's musings on friendship: 'It's hard to

[74] Ibid., p.43
[75] Huxley, 2007, p.xlvii
[76] Atwood, 2005, p.99
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid., p.98

imagine now, having a friend.'[79] Relationships fulfil a function and, as in *NEF,* the only relationship of significance is that between the individual and the regime. Offred considers these constraints as she walks past the Guardians of Gilead:

> 'If they think of a kiss, they must then think immediately of the floodlights going on, the rifle shots. They think instead of doing their duty and of promotion to the Angels, and of being allowed to possibly marry, and then, if they are able to gain enough power and live to be old enough, of being allotted a Handmaid of their own.'[80]

The kiss symbolises sexual desire and, as Offred knows, sexual desire and acting on such desire is outlawed. This aspect of Atwood's world mirrors that of *NEF*, where '[l]ove is banned' and sexual desire must be repressed.[81] This links back to John Atkins' idea that the 'condition of love is isolation from the rest of the world', a theme that recurs in Anna Burns' *Milkman.*[82]

A lack of any meaningful or intimate relationships in the present of the narrative, means that Offred drifts between timeframes, sliding out of dystopia and into utopia: 'I want to be held and told my name. I want to be valued in ways that I am not; I want to be more than valuable. I repeat my former name, remind myself of what I once could do, how others saw me.'[83] This quotation underpins the need for personal relationships in which Offred is 'valued' as an individual, in which she retains her name. She is reminded, of a time when she had access to individual freedom. She rejects the society in which she is only a commodity, valuable, not

[79] Atwood,1996, p.35
[80] Ibid., p.32
[81] Atkins,1954, p.245
[82] Ibid., p.248
[83] Atwood,1996, p.108

valued. These private thoughts show the reader that Offred does not accept her servitude. She is conscious of the oppression she suffers, and it is this, a story told from a female point-of-view, that distinguishes *THT* from other dystopian narratives. This is 'the world according to Julia', with Offred operating as a response to Zamyatin's 'subversive femme fatale', I-330.[84] The treatment of women in Atwood's novel speaks not only to feminists of the 1980s but, in the light of the #MeToo movement, to a modern audience as well.[85]

In writing *THT,* Atwood helped to evolve the genre of dystopian fiction by drawing on the past, on events that have already happened somewhere, grounding the narrative in a world that is at once recognisable and yet unfamiliar, and, in so doing, created a new subgenre: ustopia.

[84] Atwood, 2014, p.146

[85] In 2017, after allegations of sexual harassment were made against Harvey Weinstein, the actor Alyssa Milano called for women who had had similar experiences to respond to her tweet with the phrase 'Me too'. Huge numbers of women from around the world, working in different industries, responded.
Nadia Khomami, '#MeToo: how a hashtag became a rallying cry against sexual harassment' in *Guardian*, 20 October 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/20/women-worldwide-use-hashtag-metoo-against-sexual-harassment> [accessed 25 August 2021]

Anna Burns

'…thing was, these were paranoid times.'[1]

Each of the texts so far explored in this commentary have a relationship with history: they use the past and the concerns of the time to comment on society's relationship with history and politics. Though these narratives have been set in the future, they are, as Burgess suggests, 'a figure of the present'.[2] However, the past as setting can also create other worlds in much the same way as the future. It is with this in mind that I seek to induct Anna Burns' *Milkman* (2018) into my new proposed genre, hystopia. Burns utilises themes and conventions, particular to dystopian fiction, including elements of satire, in her novel *Milkman,* and, at the same time, subverts the tropes of historical fiction in order to create a universal tale of oppression.

Milkman has been described in reviews as an 'unconventional historical novel', among other things.[3] The narrative, which takes place in 1970s Northern Ireland, is told retrospectively from the point of view of an unnamed first person narrator. This narrative point-of-view alone subverts the conventions of historical fiction.[4] Other reviews have, rightly, picked up on this unconventionality, with the adjective 'dystopian' often used as a qualifier.[5] It is true that there are some distinctly

---

[1] Burns, 2018, p.27
[2] Burgess,1967, p.45
[3] Maddie Crum, 'Anna Burns's Booker Prize–Winning *Milkman* Offers Some Hope But No Change' in *Vulture,* 4 December 2018, para. 2 of 14 <https://www.vulture.com/2018/12/review-of-anna-burnss-booker-prizewinning-novel-milkman.html> [accessed 12 September 2020]
[4] Crum, 2018, para. 1 of 14
[5] Marisol Morales-Ladrón, 'Milkman by Anna Burns: silence as an architectural form of containment' in *The Irish Times*, 19 August 2019, para.11 of 22, <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/milkman-by-anna-burns-silence-as-an-architectural-form-of-containment-1.3988554> [accessed 12 September 2020]

dystopian elements in the novel. Burns depicts an unnamed, oppressive regime, a claustrophobic society and a patriarchy that shares more in common with *THT* than it does with, for example, Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* (2009).[6] Above all else, Burns' characters remain nameless, referred to only by titles, and the setting and time period remain vague, hinted at but never explicitly stated. This distortion of setting, the omission of bird's-eye-view specifics, adds a dystopian filter to our reading of *Milkman.* This is a complex novel, one hailed as 'difficult' on publication, and its tendencies towards dystopia go beyond the tropes mentioned above.

Before examining *Milkman* in any detail, it is worth considering how historical fiction functions. In his book *The Historical Novel* (2010), Jerome de Groot argues that history casts a long shadow over the present and that this shadow influences the way we, as readers, experience our lives and, most importantly, how we view ourselves.[7] Historical fiction, like early utopias and dystopias, occurs in the margins, in the factual gaps that open themselves up to filling in and invention.[8] The past furnishes us with documents and statistics about wars and plagues and laws, facts that writers of historical fiction can use to develop stories. Nothing is known about the future. All we have are predictions and projections. In order to create a plausible vision of the future, writers of science fiction and dystopias must look to the past and the present to produce their narratives, as can be seen in *BNW, NEF* and *THT.* Historical fiction relies to some extent on the reader's knowledge of relevant history.[9] The historical novel is concerned with truth and authenticity, a claim it shares with

[6] Hilary Mantel, *Wolf Hall* (London: Fourth Estate, 2009)
[7] Jerome de Groot, *The Historical Novel* (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), p.27
[8] Ibid., p.10
[9] Ibid., p.8

realism.[10] However, there is also a push against this idea of absolute truth and authenticity, questioning the ways in which history has been constructed by the elite, something Orwell was concerned with throughout his writing life. The author's note, which often prefaces historical novels, often details the research undertaken and primary material used in the process of writing the story.[11] Given the amount of research required, the depiction of real events, and the telling of perhaps lesser known stories implies that historical fiction attains a certain educational merit.[12] What is remarkable about *Milkman* is that Anna Burns makes no claims in that direction. In fact, Burns' novel falls into a whole other category as she bends the rules of historical fiction, pulling the genre out of shape, in the pursuit of a feeling of estrangement.

Burns makes a deliberate choice not to limit the point-of-view of *Milkman* to that of the protagonist in the present of the narrative. It is not simply a case of the novel having been written in the past tense, but that the narrator is able to comment on the events of the novel from some undefined future. This retrospectivity operates as a kind of Pause button, allowing Middle-Sister's future self to intrude on the narrative, commenting from a position of hindsight. To illustrate this point, I will discuss a short passage from the text. After having listed a long list of antagonists, Middle-Sister concludes:

---

[10] See 'realism, n.' in *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, September 2021) <www.oed.com/view/Entry/158931> [accessed 8 May 2020]
'Esp. in reference to art, film, and literature: close resemblance to what is real; fidelity of representation, rendering the precise details of the real thing or scene. Also: an instance or example of this. Cf. (by contrast) idealism n. 2, surrealism n.'

[11] de Groot, 2010, p.7

[12] Ibid.

> ‘Of course you did not say this. Which was why, eighteen years old, I didn’t talk about the renouncers, was unwilling to reflect upon them, pulled down shutters against the topic of them. It was that I wanted to stay as sane in my mind as I thought then I was. This too, was why maybe-boyfriend, at least when with me, also didn’t talk about the renouncers, also perhaps why he was into cars in the way some people were mad on their music. This didn’t mean we weren’t aware, just that we didn’t know how to not be partisan. […] That was me then, age eighteen.’[13]

Here, we can see how Middle-Sister’s future self intrudes on her own past. Similar to *THT,* Burn’s novel employs three planes of narration. Firstly, there is the present of the narrative, Belfast in the 1970s. This plane doubles up as the reader’s past. Then we have the past within the narrative, for example, Middle-Sister’s childhood. This in turn has the same functionality for the reader – it takes us further into the past. The third mode intersects Middle-Sister’s future with the reader’s present. This is the mode I would like to discuss further.

Intermittently, as in the passage above, future Middle-Sister announces herself to the reader, commenting on what is happening in the story, breaking the fourth wall. It is as if Middle-Sister is returning to this moment in her past, revisiting and re-narrating. Middle-Sister is traversing the past. The moments of return are signalled by Burns’ narration, when she uses constructions such as: ‘It was that I wanted to stay as sane in my mind as I thought then I was.’ The key to this formation is the word ‘then’. The past becomes a destination, a literary ‘state of mind’, as Atwood would refer to it. Burns ends the passage with ‘That was me then, age

[13] Burns, 2018, pp. 114-115

eighteen', implying that this is told from the point of view of another 'me', older than eighteen, a 'me' in the future.

The question is whether this narrative intrusion fulfils the same function as the 'Appendix' in *NEF,* the 'Historical Notes' in *THT,* and the postcard in *NSID*. The narrative retrospectivity tells the reader that Middle-Sister will survive and gain perspective on what has happened, making it a hopeful novel. Thomas More's future utopian narrative is presented as a report from a traveller.[14] The same device is used by Swift in *Gulliver's Travels* and, arguably, in *BNW* through the character of John the Savage. In his 1895 novel *The Time Machine,* H.G. Wells destabilises and unhinges preconceived notions that humans could only move through time in a linear way, that is from the past to the future.[15] '"Scientific people," proceeded the Time Traveller, after the pause required for the proper assimilation of this, "know very well that Time is only a kind of Space."'[16] Burns' decision to allow her narrator to draw the reader's attention to particular parts of the narrative and point to the narrative's retrospectivity allows the narrator to highlight the artificial nature of the text, which is particularly interesting when the characters discuss history, for example when Middle-Sister thinks about her 'wee sisters', and their Joan of Arc phase. Middle-Sister makes some astute points about her view of history: 'because of the usual legacy of history and of the power of history that had been built up and passed down and reshaped and elaborated upon'.[17]

Here, Burns comments on the accuracy and artificiality of history itself, acknowledging that history is essentially unknowable. That history is shown to be

[14] Seed, 2011, p.73
[15] de Groot, 2010, p.44
[16] Wells, 2005, p.5
[17] Burns, 2018, p.149

malleable, something retold, and ultimately changed to serve the ruling classes, is a clear nod to *NEF, BNW,* and *THT,* and a major theme of dystopian fiction. The quotation reads like Winston Smith's job description in the Ministry of Truth, a reference to Orwell's idea of 'the mutability of the past'.[18] In *Milkman,* Burns uses the concept of 'jamais vu':

> 'Constantly we were having memory lapses, episodes of a kind of *jamais vu.* We couldn't remember that we'd remembered, and would have to remind each other of our forgetfulness and of how closeness didn't work for us given the state our maybe-relationship was in.'[19]

Jamais vu is the opposite of deja-vu, meaning 'never seen', and encapsulates the idea of repressing and forgetting. It becomes a coping strategy, a mode of unseeing, of escaping. It supresses any kind of familiarity and renders the forming of meaningful relationships with other people impossible. This, as we have seen, is the first sign that individualism is being stifled in the name of collectivism.[20]

There is no room for real, individual love in *Milkman,* which places the novel alongside the works of Huxley, Orwell, and Atwood that I have so far discussed:

> 'Of course there was the big one, the biggest reason for not marrying the right spouse. If you married *that* one, the one you loved and desired and who loved and

[18] Orwell, 2000, p.28
[19] Burns, 2018, p.43
[20] Collectivism does not always carry negative connotations. One might argue that the collectivist rhetoric underpinning the roll-out of the Covid-19 vaccination in the UK – 'nobody is safe until everyone is safe' – is driven by altruistic ideals. The high uptake suggests that a collectivist seam runs through us all. However, when the UK Government wanted to implement mandatory vaccinations for health care staff – that is to say, flex their authoritarian muscles – people protested and the scheme was dropped.

> desired you back, with the union proving true and good and replete with the most fulfilling happiness, well, what if this wonderful spouse didn't fall out of love with you, or you with them, and neither of you either, got killed in the political problems? […] That was why marrying in doubt, marrying in guilt, marrying in regret, in fear, in despair, in blame, also in terrible self-sacrifice was pretty much the unspoken matrimonial requisite here.'[21]

Middle-Sister describes the way in which relationships are regulated and controlled by 'the community', which really is an extension of the state.[22] Meaningful and intimate relationships are not the norm in this world. If anything, they are feared and should be avoided because the threat of loss is too great. This idea strengthens the argument that *Milkman* depicts a dystopian world, but one that is firmly anchored in our own history, in Northern Ireland of the 1970s. In *BNW,* monogamy is abolished. In *NEF,* sexual relationships are controlled and marriages arranged by the Party. In *THT,* relationships are controlled by the state and women are assigned to men without their consent. Being afraid of individual love, as portrayed in *Milkman,* and therefore never truly attaching oneself to another human being, perpetuates existing power structures. Individuals do not belong to each other, but to the state. This fear, fuelled by the community, is the reason Middle-Sister sticks to 'maybe-relationships'.[23] This is a portrayal of the ultimate death of love.

The characters in *Milkman* are nameless, referred to only by their titles. This has caused some critics to brand the novel experimental.[24] However, the nameless

---

[21] Burns, 2018, p.256
[22] Ibid., p.12
[23] Ibid., p.256
[24] Alex Marshall, 'The New Booker Prize Winner Who May Never Write Again' in *New York Times,* 29 November 2018, para. 8 of 30 <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/29/books/anna-

character is a longstanding trope of dystopian and utopian fiction. For example, in Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We,* the characters are referred to by their numbers, which indicates that they do not matter as individuals, that their significance lies in their being part of a larger system.[25] Even before Zamyatin, this device was deployed by H.G. Wells in *The Time Machine,* who refers to his characters as 'Time Traveller', 'Psychologist', and 'Provincial Mayor'.[26] More recently, we have *THT*, whose protagonist is referred to as Offred, not her name, but an indication of her status, of Fred. *Milkman* follows in the Wellsian tradition – Burns' novel is populated by 'Milkman', 'Somebody McSomebody', 'First Brother-in-Law', and 'Elder Sister'.[27] Characters are reduced to their function, the roles they fulfil in relation to the world Middle-Sister occupies, and this anonymity, this distortion, adds to the novel's feeling of estrangement. It also adds a layer of artificiality, stripping the characters of their individuality.

Burns illustrates the experience of living under an oppressive regime in the scene involving the sunset. Teacher makes the Middle-Sister and the rest of her French class look at the sunset and describe the colours:

> Of course we knew really that the sky could be more than blue, two more, but why should any of us admit to that? I myself have never admitted it. Not even the week before when I experienced my first sunset with maybe-boyfriend did I admit it. Even then, even though there were more colours than the acceptable three in the sky – blue (the day sky), black (the night sky) and white (clouds) – that evening still I kept

---

burns-interview-booker-prize-milkman-no-bones.html?auth=login-email&login=email> [accessed 29 September 2020]

[25] Seed, 2011, p.80

[26] Wells, 2005, pp.3-4

[27] Burns, 2018, p.1

> my mouth shut. And now the others in the class – all older than me, some as old as thirty – also weren't admitting it. It was the convention not to admit it, not to accept detail for this type of detail would mean choice and choice would mean responsibility and what if we failed in our responsibility? […]
>
> So no. After generation upon generation, fathers upon forefathers, mothers upon foremothers, centuries and millennia of being one colour officially and three colours unofficially, a colourful sky, just like that, could not be allowed to be.'[28]

George Orwell said of Jonathan Swift that he was skilled in describing a 'single truth' by first 'magnifying' and then 'distorting it'.[29] The same can be said of Burns, who here uses hyperbole to achieve the desired satirical effect. The reader knows that the sky can be many colours – the characters not being able to see the different colours, flatly refusing to name the colours they can see, functions in a similar way to Swift's *A Modest Proposal* (1729), in which he suggests feeding the children of the poor to the rich.[30] The exaggeration employed by Swift and Burns, the outlandishness and absurdity, creates humour, which draws attention to the failures of the systems on which they are commenting. Limiting how one can describe the sky or a sunset is symptomatic of living under an oppressive regime: it reveals the finer workings of the psychology of oppression. Not being able to see colour is a dramatic way of showing oppression as individual experience is ignored in favour of a collective response.

Burns' use of satire underlines the loss of individuality and of individual freedom, since not only does Middle-Sister claim that the sky can only be blue but

---

[28] Burns, 2018, pp.70-73
[29] Orwell, 2009, p.315
[30] Jonathan Swift, 'A Modest Proposal' in *A Tale of a Tub and other satires*, ed. Kathleen Williams (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1975), pp.255-264

the entire class. Here, the nameless characters show us why they are nameless: they are functionaries of the state. This scene also serves to alienate the reader, who likely lives in a world where the sky has many colours. It also stresses the split between the public, 'the sky is blue', and the private, in which, Middle-Sister admits, at least to herself, to not admitting that there are other colours, which, in effect, confirms the opposite. Again, the spectre of Orwell's doublethink rears its head. Middle-Sister comments on the legacy and cycle of oppression, and the reshaping of history, with reference to the generations of people who have described the sky as being only one colour. Not being able to see the different colours in the sky is like Winston Smith believing that 2 + 2 = 5. It signifies the ultimate loss of individual liberty.

It is worth taking a moment to consider the classroom in which the students are asked to look at the sunset:

> 'Then, as the sunset was not most visible from this window, she marched us out of our classroom and along the corridor into the *littérateurs'* classroom. […] Here teacher bade us look at the sky from this brand new perspective, where the sun – enormous and of the most gigantic orange-red colour – in a sky too, with no blue in it – was going down behind buildings in a section of windowpane.'[31]

Teacher does not march her students to the history or science classroom; she takes them to the literature classroom. Burns is commenting on literature's role in enlightening readers, in offering fresh perspectives and expressing universal truths. It is only once the class have entered the literature classroom that Middle-Sister

[31] Burns, 2018, pp.70-73

allows herself to admit, if only to herself, that of the many colours in the sky, none are blue. Though she has now recognised that the sky is not simply blue or black or white, Middle-Sister remains, for the time being, a part of the collective. That the sunset is visible through 'a section of windowpane' suggests that she remains slightly removed from this symbol of individuality. However, by acknowledging the other colours, Middle-Sister is able to stake a claim on individuality: this is the epitome of what Atwood refers to when discussing literary landscapes as states of mind.[32] It is a brief flicker of utopia within an oppressive narrative, an indication to the reader that Middle-Sister is the outsider, the individual.

In his review of *Milkman* in the *London Review of Books*, Christopher Tayler notes that the clues to the period in which the novel is set are submerged within the narrative, with reference made to songs, for example, *Only Women Bleed* (1977), and the actress Sigourney Weaver in the film *Alien* (1979).[33] The references are oblique, coded, and, importantly, rely on the reader's (prior) knowledge, not unlike historical fiction. Burns deploys this technique to obscure when and where the novel is set. Tayler asserts that this is all part of Burns' conception, to reimagine the Troubles without recourse to terms such as 'the Troubles', 'Britain', 'Ireland', 'the IRA', and so on.[34] This vagueness enables Burns to create another world in the same vein as *THT* or *NEF.*

There are two elements, here, that are at odds with our understanding of historical fiction. Firstly, the lack of specificity where the wider setting is concerned

---

[32] Atwood, 2014, p.75

[33] Christopher Tayler 'The Psychologicals' in *London Review of Books,* Vol. 40, No. 20 (25 October 2018), para. 2 of 14 <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v40/n20/christopher-tayler/the-psychologicals>
[accessed 14 August 2020]

[34] Tayler, 2018, para. 6 of 14

and, secondly, the exchange of one set of euphemisms, for example, ‘The Troubles’, for another:

> ‘I knew it had happened this time because of the milkman and his involvement, and by “involvement” I mean connected, and by “connected” I mean active rebellion, and by “active rebellion” I mean state-enemy renouncer owing to the political problems that existed in this place.’[35]

This chain of euphemisms, each one as coded as the last, leads the reader to what the protagonist actually wants to express. However, Middle-Sister never achieves clarity: ‘political problems’ could refer to a whole range of issues, and it is this use of language, this layering of euphemisms, along with the obscured setting, that makes *Milkman* universal. The layering of euphemisms also seems to be a play on Orwell’s Newspeak, in which ‘the suppression of definitely heretical words’ was designed to ‘diminish’ the types of thoughts people had.[36] *Milkman* is responding to Orwell’s concept of Newspeak, to his idea of doublethink. Of course, the use of euphemisms also functions as an indicator of choice between different registers, implying that freedom of thought has not been completely eradicated.

The depiction of setting in *Milkman* has contributed to its being labelled a dystopia. Burns does something incredibly disorientating, which is to show the reader very specific detail in extreme close-up without situating these details in relation to anything else. It is like pinpointing a location on a map, without revealing in which country or city the location is. Burns is a master at blurring the edges of what she chooses to show us – like blurring the background during a Zoom meeting.

---

[35] Burns, 2018, p.7
[36] Orwell, 2000, p.313

For example, Burns describes Middle-Sister's sister's toenails being painted in different colours, tells the reader exactly what her sister is drinking ('Bushmills in one hand and a glass of Bacardi in the other'), and yet refuses to zoom out, refuses to show the reader where the house is or how Middle-Sister got there.[37] Middle-Sister moves through the setting via a series of specifically non-specific landmarks: the 'parks & reservoirs', the 'dot dot dot places', and 'the ten minute area'.[38] Places are 'over the road' or even 'over the water'.[39] This creates a feeling of claustrophobia, adding to the atmosphere of the world of the novel. Burns focuses on the object in front of the lens and does not expose what lies beyond. It is as if the reader, like Middle-Sister, is walking around, their head in a book.

In order to escape the 'twentieth century', Middle-Sister reads nineteenth-century books, while she walks.[40] This is a wilful act of disengagement, of non-participation, and, ultimately, of hope, since only fiction can provide Middle-Sister with the kind of escape she seeks. Because Middle-Sister reads while walking, she effectively removes herself from the setting of the novel to a place where the political problems of home do not exist. By accessing actual literary landscapes, Middle-Sister can inhabit a utopian state of mind. In the same way that John the Savage's love of art and literature contributes to his downfall in *BNW*, Middle-Sister's escape into literature – a symbol of her individuality – is similarly punished. She is pursued and sexually harassed by the milkman.

Milkman, like *THT,* focuses on the oppression of women. In the opening sentence, Middle-Sister is threatened, a gun pressed against her breast, by

[37] Burns, 2018, p.15
[38] Ibid., p.13; p.47; p.81
[39] Ibid. p.24
[40] Ibid., p.5

Somebody McSomebody. Middle-Sister goes on to explain about a rumour, likely started by first brother-in-law, 'that I had been having an affair with this milkman and that I was eighteen and he was forty-one.'[41] She then clarifies: 'It had been my fault too, it seemed, this affair with the milkman. But I had not been having an affair with the milkman. I did not like the milkman and had been frightened and confused by his pursuing and attempting an affair with me.'[42] First-brother-in-law, it transpires, has always invented things about Middle-Sister's 'sexlife' and he, a much older man, has made inappropriate remarks to her: 'his predatory nature pushed me into frozenness every time'.[43] In the space of a single page, we learn about three men who have threatened, sexually harassed, or been sexually inappropriate towards Middle-Sister. These men represent the judicative, legislative and executive arms of the system she inhabits. But what is most interesting is that Middle-Sister is being blamed for the affair, which implies that misogyny is deeply rooted and internalised by both men and women in the community Burns portrays in *Milkman.* The fact that there is no affair, that Middle-Sister is the victim, is irrelevant. Her being 'pushed into frozenness' by these unwanted advances speaks to generations of women who have been silenced by the patriarchy, by a system that stacks the odds against them. This idea is underpinned by the 'renouncers' who, in order to appease the 'beyond-the-pale women' in light of 'the sexes now being equal', came up 'with the invention of rape in subsections – meaning that in our district there could now be full rape, three-quarters rape, half-rape or one-quarter rape – which our renouncers said was better than rape divided by two – as in 'rape' and 'not rape'.[44] Needless to say, the renouncers are

[41] Ibid., p.1
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid., pp.1-2
[44] Ibid., p.311

men and ‘rape in subsections’ is their idea of gender equality. Here, language is used to make light of the seriousness of sexual assault, and the quotation draws attention to the role language plays in regards to consent, which is the key measure through which sexual assault is assessed. Even though the oppression is set in Northern Ireland in the late 1970s, it is a tale about the oppression of women now: ‘I hope this novel will help people think about #MeToo,’ the chairman of the judges for the Booker Prize said when *Milkman* won.[45] The intersection between the historical and the contemporary illuminates the bearing the present has on historical truth and how we often retreat into the past to examine the present. Burns’ depiction of a particular period of history, her coded cultural and historical references, and the emphasis she places on the communication of atmosphere and mood, as opposed to relying on facts, positions *Milkman* firmly within the generic boundaries of hystopia.

[45] Parul Sehgal, ‘#MeToo Is All Too Real. But to Better Understand It, Turn to Fiction’ in *New York Times*, 1 May 2019, para 5 of 8 <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/01/books/novels-me-too-movement.html> [accessed 5 September 2021]

Iris Feindt

‘Writing is always an act of hope.’[1]

NSID straddles the generic boundaries of historical fiction and dystopia. Everything in my novel is based on things that have happened, as I will outline in this chapter. However, possibly because I did not want to overwhelm the reader with copious historical detail, but also because the novels I discuss in this commentary deal with universal themes, it would have felt limiting to write straightforward historical fiction. On the other hand, it would have felt just as limiting or restrictive to write a pure dystopian novel. It was important to me to communicate a sense of the oppression and powerlessness Anna, my protagonist, experiences. I am more interested in capturing the atmosphere of a time and place than in describing political structures. As a result, I have been thinking about my own genre.

My work, a blend of historical fiction and dystopia, is best described under the umbrella of this new genre: hystopia*.* A novel of the same name, written by David Means, was published in 2016 and speculates how history might have changed had JFK not been assassinated. When I think about the genre hystopia, I do not think about alternate versions of history, but of coded and distorted forms of history, featuring characters attempting to navigate this landscape. I would consider Anna Burns’ *Milkman*, which is a masterclass in euphemisms, codes, and the use of the

[1] Margaret Atwood quoted in Erica Wagner, ‘“Writing is always an act of hope”: Margaret Atwood on The Testaments’ in New Statesman, 18 September 2019, para. 18 of 20 <https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2019/09/writing-is-always-an-act-of-hope-margaret-atwood-on-the-testaments> [accessed 19 August 2021]

distorting lens, to be an hystopian novel. In order for a text to be hystopian, then, it has to fulfil the following conditions, which we might refer to as the ‘Feindt Principle’.

1. It must depict a particular period of history.
2. Cultural and historical references must be coded and distorted.
3. The emphasis must be on communicating the atmosphere and mood of the era depicted.
4. All hystopias are equal but some hystopias are more equal than others.

My interest in history sparked by the fall of the Berlin Wall, which happened a couple of months before my eighth birthday. I recall my parents explaining in very simple terms that there had been a wall, which had been separating families across the country. As I was prone to homesickness, I remember feeling quite distressed by that, but I took great comfort from the knowledge that I had not suffered the same fate.

My next encounter with the GDR was in 1990, when my mother’s friend’s niece, Janine, visited. Even though she was five years older than me, I was tasked with entertaining her. We went to the cinema, which at the time cost 9 DM (Deutschmark) per ticket. I still remember Janine telling me the following things: cinema tickets cost the equivalent of half a DM (50 Pfennig) where she was from, she had never seen a Barbie doll and when I walked her back to her aunt’s house, pushing my bike so I could ride it home after dropping her off, she insisted I rode my bike because she was fine running alongside me. I had never met anyone, especially someone older than me, who did not know what a Barbie was. I did not know anyone who enjoyed running and would have been hard-pressed to imagine any of my

friends suggesting they jog alongside while I was cycling. But the idea that the price of one cinema ticket in Hamburg would buy me eighteen in whatever utopia she came from seemed too good to be true.

Aged nine, I had no real understanding of what the GDR was or had been but I understood that wherever Janine was from, it was a place of great contradictions: cheap cinema, no Barbies. I would not have understood that Barbies were western and therefore capitalist and banned, or that the cinema was cheap because the majority of the films shown perpetuated socialist propaganda.

I can trace my curiosity about the GDR back to my encounter with Janine, David Hasselhoff singing on the Berlin Wall and my mother addressing mail to the BRD (Bundesrepublik Deutschland), as opposed to the DDR (Deutsche Demokratische Republik), and underlining the three letters several times on each envelope. These were the very early seeds of my novel, *Napoleon Schmidt is Dead.* (unpublished).

NSID is set in late 1980s East Berlin. It tells the story of 15-year-old Anna Peters, who plays a dangerous game of cat-and-mouse with the Stasi. I originally conceived of the novel as straightforward historical fiction set in the German Democratic Republic. That is until I read an interview with former Children's Laureate Malorie Blackman. Blackman had planned to write a novel about slavery and its legacy. However, mixed reactions from friends, led her to turn the story into a dystopian series for teenagers, *Noughts and Crosses* (2001), in which Blackman subverts racial history.[2] Though I do not subvert history, I do use it as a solid framework for my creative practice.

[2] Malorie Blackman, 'Noughts and Crosses Q&A' on author's website, para. 1 of 12 <https://www.malorieblackman.co.uk/noughts-and-crosses-qa/> [accessed 17 February 2021]

Planning, researching and writing the novel felt like working on a patchwork quilt. A variety of sources, all adding new textures and layers to my novel, informed my writing. I will retrace my research journey below, focussing on the key texts and moments that inspired and shaped my novel.

The character of Anna Peters first appeared in my short story *The White Line,* which was published in an anthology of YA fiction by staff and students of Manchester Metropolitan University.[3] The basic outline of *The White Line* is that Anna's sister, having escaped into West Germany through a tunnel, sends Anna a coded postcard and a copy of *AF* to lead her to freedom.

Some of these elements remain in *NSID*. However, when I first thought about the novel, I was unsure about the plot. My initial outline from September 2015 reflects this uncertainty:

> *NSID* tells the story of two teenagers, Anna and Ben, who investigate the death of their teacher, Napoleon Schmidt. The investigation leads them to uncover the secrecy, surveillance and deceit that have resulted from the construction of the Berlin Wall. Set in East Berlin, during the GDR, this story focuses on the differing perspectives of Anna and Ben with regard to the Wall.

Even though I did not know what would happen in the novel, I knew I wanted to take Anna on a journey, with a clear progression, a meaningful revelation, and a coming-of-age at the end. Anne Lamott quotes E.L. Doctorow in her book on writing, *Bird by Bird* (1995): 'Writing a novel is like driving a car at night. You can only see as

[3] Iris Feindt, 'The White Line' in *Timelines: Tales from the Past by Writers of the Present and the Future*, ed. by Sherry Ashworth, Iris Feindt and Livi Michael (Manchester: Manchester Metropolitan University, 2013), pp.168-178

far as your headlights, but you can make the whole trip that way.'[4] Even though I did not know every story beat, every twist and turn of the narrative, I knew enough to take it 'bird by bird', one scene at a time.[5]

My research into the GDR helped me to plan my novel. However, the history of the GDR spans 41 years. Enough history to fill several novels, enough information to overwhelm any researcher, historian or writer. As part of my research, I have read books, both fiction and non-fiction, watched films and documentaries, and carried out fieldtrips. Often one text would lead to another; the process developed quite organically.

Firstly, I familiarised myself with the genesis and chronology of the GDR by reading non-fiction, such as Geo Epoche's specialist magazine for history, *Die DDR* (The GDR).[6] This special edition brings together documents, photographs, a general timeline, and articles about specific individuals, such as 18-year-old Hermann Joseph Flade, who was arrested and sentenced to death for distributing anti-GDR leaflets.[7] Even though I refer to it as a magazine, it functioned more like an archive and brought the history of the GDR to life. I cannot stress enough how invaluable this document was – the photographs and articles really captured life in the GDR. There was a focus on 'everyday life' within the state, rather than simply a whistle-stop tour of historical highlights and facts. The magazine depicts the struggle of the individual and provided me with many ideas for my novel, such as the yellow cloth, which was used to capture the scent of suspect GDR citizens.[8] I have already mentioned

---

[4] Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1995), p.18
[5] Ibid., p.19
[6] *Geo Epoche: Die DDR*, ed. by Gesa Gottschalk and Fabian Klabunde (Hamburg: Gruner und Jahr, Nr.64)
[7] Ibid., p.43
[8] Gottschalk and Klabunde, p.17

Hermann Joseph Flade. It was his run-in with the Volkspolizei that inspired Christa's run-in with the police over tearing down a Party sign in my novel.[9] One of the images in the magazine shows graffiti daubed on the Wall, 'Wir Fordern Freiheit', and this, too, worked its way into my novel.[10] The idea of an escape through a tunnel from Friedhof Pankow was sparked by an article about a similar escape.[11] The illustrated timeline and details about anti-GDR demonstrations within the GDR, as well as the freedom trains from Prague to West Germany, helped me decide how to end my novel.[12] To return to Doctorow's night-driving analogy, the magazine was the bulbs in my headlights. It helped form a solid historical foundation for my novel, but offered enough gaps so as to not feel as though I was transcribing a textbook. As discussed in my chapter on Burns, historical fiction happens in the margins, in the factual gaps that open themselves up to invention.[13]

When researching a specific period as a writer, you do not do this through non-fiction alone. The second part of my novel is set in Torgau, at the Geschlossener Jugendwerkhof Torgau to be exact. I first learned about this youth delinquency facility when I watched the German film *Barbara* (2012).[14] In brief, Barbara is a physician sent to work in the countryside as a punishment for not always being true to the state. In the hospital where she works, she encounters Stella, a teenage girl, who keeps running away from Torgau, a notorious facility for delinquent youths. Stella is a minor character but her storyline formed the foundation for the second part of my novel: I decided that Anna would be sent to Torgau and

[9] Ibid., p.43
[10] Ibid., p.42
[11] Ibid., p.90
[12] Ibid., pp.138–154
[13] de Groot, 2010, p.10
[14] *Barbara*, dir. by Christian Petzold (The Match Factory, 2012)

would try to escape. I guess it is not that unusual, when working on a novel or film, to be inspired by other works of fiction. One of my favourite films is Billy Wilder's *The Apartment* (1960).[15] While watching David Lean's *Brief Encounter* (1945)[16], Wilder wondered about one of the minor characters, the friend who allows Trevor Howard's character to borrow his apartment to meet with Celia Johnson's character.[17] Fifteen years later, Wilder wrote and directed *The Apartment,* a film whose premise deals with that very subplot. Atwood, too, has written about how Julia in Orwell's *NEF* became the inspiration for Offred in *THT.*[18] Writers inspire other writers: they are in dialogue, in conversation. The creation of stories is a perpetual exchanging of ideas.

Having decided to write about Torgau, I was lucky enough to visit the small town of Torgau by the river Elbe and its namesake, the correctional facility, now a museum, in the summer of 2017. It was interesting to walk the corridors and look at the exhibition, entitled "Ich bin als Mensch geboren und will als Mensch hier raus – Der Geschlossene Jugendwerkhof Torgau im Erziehungssystem der DDR".[19] This roughly translates as, 'I was born a human and I want to return a human - Der Geschlossene Jugendwerkhof Torgau as part of the Education System of the GDR'. The accompanying publication, *Auf Biegen und Brechen: Geschlossene Heimunterbringung im Kontext sozialistischer Erziehung in der DDR* (2006), which is a collection of essays and articles on the subject was helpful in writing the Torgau

[15] *The Apartment*, dir. by Billy Wilder (United Artists, 1960)
[16] *Brief Encounter*, dir. by David Lean (Eagle-Lion Films, 1945)
[17] Cameron Crowe, 'Billy and me: why I love The Apartment' in *Guardian,* 3 December 1999, para. 10 of 25 <https://www.theguardian.com/film/1999/dec/03/culture.features> [accessed 15 March 2021]
[18] Atwood, 2014, p.146
[19] http://www.jugendwerkhof-torgau.de/Ausstellungen/Dauerausstellung/446/ , para. 1 of 5, [last accessed 15 March 2021]

section. It includes several photographs of the facility and the essays were very informative.

The title of the exhibition is based on a photograph of one of the rooms in Torgau. Written across the wall in black lettering are the words, 'I was born a human, I want to return a human'.[20] My character Anna discovers these words when she wakes up in her room in Torgau. On the one hand it is based on the real writing of someone who stayed there, but the emotions Anna feels when reading the words over and over, are supposed to echo those of Atwood's character Offred in *THT* when she discovers the Latin writing in her room, '*Nolite te bastardes carborundorum*.'[21] The writing supports the idea that the characters are not alone in their suffering but also highlights the legacy of suffering. Shortly before discovering the writing, Offred is determined not to think of the room as her room, until she does: 'Was he in my room? I called it *mine*.'[22] I respond to Atwood's scene in chapter 18 of my novel: 'The second night. I was lying on the bench in my tiny room. Not my room. My room was at home, with Mutti. I was lying on the bench in the tiny room they'd given me.' This is an excellent example of how a blend of research helped me write these specific scenes (chapters 16 and 18).

The essay, 'Der Geschlossene Jugendwerkhof Torgau. Geschichte und Struktur', on the history and structure of the facility provided me with plenty of information about life in Torgau.[23] A good amount of what I have learned from the

[20] *Auf Biegen und Brechen: Geschlossene Heimunterbringung im Kontext sozialistischer Erziehung in der DDR*, ed. by Gabiele Beyler and Bettina Klein (Torgau: Initiativgruppe Geschlossener Jugendwerkhof Torgau e.V., 2006), p.24
[21] Atwood,1996, p.62
[22] Ibid., p.59, Atwood's italics
[23] Beyler and Klein, p.53

essay is reflected in what the director, Herr Franken, tells Anna about the facility in chapter 19, from what time she has to get up to doing everything as a collective.[24]

Torgau's website served as another source of information, and their section on 'Special Incidents' (Besondere Vorkommnisse) details escape attempts and fires at the facility, among other events. The incident that intrigued me the most, however, sounded so macabre that it almost did not seem possible. In 1989 a group of boys planned to flee Torgau. In order to create a distraction, one boy volunteered for the others to kill him and dangle him in front of the window.[25] I use this set-up in my novel (chapter 28), with the difference being that my character, Nina, does not volunteer for the others to kill her, but uses her skills as a gymnast to make it seem as though she has hanged herself. The other suicide mentioned in my novel (chapter 26) is also based on a real suicide in Torgau in 1988. A boy called Steve B. hanged himself with his shirt while in isolation.[26]

I knew that I needed to include the Stasi in my novel, as the State Security represents perhaps the most oppressive part of the GDR. Again, I was able to visit the Stasi Museum in Berlin in 2017. The Stasi Museum is located in the old Stasi Headquarters. The exhibition 'Staatssicherheit in der SED-Diktatur' (State Security in the SED Dictatorship) was invaluable in helping me understand more about the Stasi's methods, as was walking the corridors and seeing the old offices.[27] Since the GDR was a heavily surveilled state, I knew that the Stasi would play an important role in my novel.

---

[24] Ibid., pp.53-60

[25] See 'Besondere Vorkommnisse', para 6 of 7 <https://www.jugendwerkhof-torgau.de/Historie/Besondere-Vorkommnisse/455/> [accessed 20 March 2021]

[26] Ibid., para 1 of 7

[27] See 'Exhibition' in <https://www.stasimuseum.de/en/enausstellung.htm>, [last accessed 19 March 2021]

Having grown up in West Germany, the Stasi was a part of my consciousness for a long time, and there were quite a few things I already knew. I knew they tapped people's phones, took pictures of them, and listened through radios and plants. While at the Stasi Museum I obtained several museum publications, such as *Der Stacheldraht* (2016), which taught me much more. For instance, the GDR's 'spinning' of the existence of the Wall as an 'antifaschistischer Schutzwall' (protective anti-fascist barrier), which made its way into my novel in the form of Anna's thoughts about the Wall in one of two instances of satire (chapter10).[28]

The next edition of *Der Stacheldraht* featured an article on the type of surveillance citizens faced if they requested a permit to leave the GDR and the kind of torture and psychological terror deployed when interrogating suspects.[29] Some of this informed my scene in which Anna is interrogated (chapter 4), though she is not tortured. This scene, which also includes the yellow cloth, pays homage to the film *Das Leben der Anderen* (2006), in my opinion the best film made about the GDR.[30] It is such a powerful portrayal because it focusses on the fate of only three characters to illustrate the wider machinations of the state. Blurring the lines of good and bad, it is a masterclass in making history immersive and engaging, as well as moving.

Another publication obtained at the Stasi Museum was *Die DDR-Staatssicherheit: Schild und Schwert der Partei*.[31] With a focus on the Department for State Security, the publication contains documents and images, as well as a

[28] Martha Wedra 'Republikflucht' in *Der Stacheldraht* (Nr.4, 2016), p.4
[29] Theo R. Payk 'Zersplitterung, Lähmung und Isolation' in *Der Stacheldraht* (Nr.5, 2016), pp.8-10
[30] *Das Leben der Anderen*, dir. by Florian Henckel von Donnersmark (Cineuropa, 2006)
[31] Die DDR-Staatssicherheit: Schild und Schwert der Partei (Berlin: Bundeszentrale für politsche Bildung, 2011), edited by Jens Gieske.

timeline of the Stasi, which I found very helpful, and underpinned my research into the Stasi's methods.

Part of the exhibition included photographs of former Stasi informants, one of them GDR athlete Udo Beyer. At the time, I did not know who he was. The friend who had accompanied me to the exhibition told me about a documentary she had seen, in which he denied any involvement with the Stasi. The documentary, *Einzelkämpfer* (2013), is about athletes in the GDR.[32] What fascinated me was the systemic doping of both adult and child athletes. A large portion of the documentary focusses on swimming and swimmers and it is this aspect that I used for Christa's backstory (chapter 9). Christa's refusal to swim and, essentially, going on strike results in her expulsion from the Sportschule. This is based on a very similar incident, which I learned about from *Einzelkämpfer*.

By now, enough of the road illuminated. But getting started I found very difficult. Anne Lamott says, 'All good writing begins with terrible first efforts.'[33] My work was no exception.

I started writing my novel in March 2016. The difficulty with researching a topic, maybe even specifically a historical period, is to know what should be included. Having recently re-read a chapter breakdown I wrote in 2016, I had forgotten about some of the twists and turns I had originally intended for the narrative. The breakdown details that before Anna gets thrown into Torgau, she is sought out by a mysterious man who indoctrinates her into the freedom movement. She is given a mission: to get her best friend Knut out of East Berlin into the West, as part of 'Operation Travel Agent', a real operation in which lookalikes were used to

[32] *Einzelkämpfer*, dir. by Sandra Kaudelka (Farbfilm-Verleih, 2013)
[33] Lamott, 1995, p.25

extract people from the GDR. This plotline seemed an exciting idea on paper but the issue, when it came to writing it, was that it did not feel like Anna's story – it felt like everyone else's. I decided to abandon the idea of 'Operation Travel Agent', even though the possibilities appealed to me.

Anna is a teenager and, in early drafts of the novel, she has an idyllic, conflict-free relationship with her mother. They never fight and Anna willingly shares details about her life with her mother. That relationship did not reflect the relationship I had with my mother as a teenager at all, but it was not until I watched Greta Gerwig's coming-of-age film *Lady Bird* (2017), which brilliantly captures a tumultuous mother-daughter relationship, that I realised I had to rethink the relationship between Anna and her mother.[34] I think the reason Anna and her mother originally got along so well was because I had not fully developed the friendship between Anna and Knut. So, instead of showing Anna with her best friend, I transplanted that relationship onto her mother. The reality of a mother-daughter relationship is now evident from the first chapter, in which Anna and Mutti argue about her hair.

I was concerned with historical accuracy and, initially, I kept moving the timeline from the 1960s to the 1980s until I realised that anachronisms should not be feared but embraced. I was writing the novel as though it was set in 1989. However, the Maria Liedtcke grave stopped being used as an escape route in the early 1960s, shortly after the Wall was built. The freedom trains from Prague contributed to the fall of the GDR in 1989. The music video that inspires the sewing of the miniskirts, Nena's *Nur Geträumt,* was released in 1983 and the yellow scent cloths were not used by the Stasi until the 1980s. This is one of the ways in which my novel moves away from historical fiction and towards hystopia.

---

[34] *Lady Bird*, dir. by Greta Gerwig (Universal Pictures, 2017)

History functions as a narrative anchor in the novels discussed in my commentary. The ways in which these writers draw attention to the artificiality and subjectivity of history, and how history is a filter through which the contemporary is discussed, has acted as a formal example to me when writing *NSID.* My novel uses history as a vehicle and follows in the footsteps of the works discussed in previous chapters. What my novel does differently, however, is to shed the cloak of speculation that dystopian fiction usually wears.

Huxley, Orwell and Atwood set their novels in either the far future (Huxley) or the near future (Atwood and Orwell). As Atwood notes, 'the future' established itself as a setting, and, with that, another space was created in which to write about contemporary concerns.[35] Anna Burns sets her novel in the recent past, as I do, because the past, like the future, is ultimately unknowable.

Other than in the postcard after the end of the narrative, I never explicitly state when my novel is set. I make references to a 'telegram', a 'cassette', a 'music video' (chapters, 1, 10, and 14). These references imply that the setting is not contemporary. I add to this by avoiding direct references to pop culture, turning instead to classical composers, such as 'Rachmaninoff' and even 'Bernard Herrmann' (chapters 1and 3). When I mention literature, I discuss classic texts, such as Goethe's *Young Werther's Sorrows* (1774) (chapter 1) or Brecht's *Galileo* (1940) (chapter 10). Where setting is concerned, I am very specific, using a similar technique to Anna Burns in *Milkman*. I mention 'Friedhof Pankow', the river 'Panke', and 'Prenzlauer Berg', but deliberately omit to mention that these are situated in East Berlin (chapter 2). In this way, my novel differs from *Milkman*, which avoids the use of actual street names and places. Where Burns is writing for adults, I am writing for

[35] Atwood, 2014, p.72

a younger audience who might not be familiar with the history of the GDR. I ground the narrative in a degree of realism, in so far as the places I refer to are real: there is a cemetery in Pankow, there is a part of Berlin called Prenzlauer Berg, and Torgau was a real facility. However, unless the imagined teenage reader has a good knowledge of Berlin or East Germany, it is unlikely that they will know that the novel is set first in East Berlin, then in the small town of Torgau, in the final year of life behind the iron curtain.

I applied the same method to the politics and political system in my novel, with the exception of the FDJ (Freie Deutsche Jugend) and the Stasi. I decided against inventing policing bodies, such as Atwood's 'Guardians' or 'Angels', or even Orwell with his 'Thought Police', because I wanted to ground the narrative in an historical framework, but also because I thought that my intended readership might not be familiar with either. I do not explicitly mention the SED (Sozialistiche Einheitspartei Deutschlands) but refer to them as 'the Party', as Orwell does in *NEF,* and changed any mention of socialism to 'politics' or 'ideology' (chapter 21). I do not name any politicians of the period – other than Margot Honecker, the National Minister for Education of the GDR. However, I only refer to her by her first name and I do not state her position. She could be anyone from a celebrity to a cult leader, with murals and paintings of her adorning the world Anna inhabits. She is a Big Brother figure: '"Margot's watching you," a teacher at school once said. "Behave, Margot's watching you"' (chapter 2), and because there is a sense of always being watched, Anna, like Offred, retreats into memories when she is in Torgau. For example, when Anna recalls a funny conversation with Knut (chapter 21), this memory is a utopia embedded within the dystopia of the narrative, a scene very much in dialogue with Atwood's concept of ustopia.

The reason for using history as a narrative framework, rather than treating it as doctrine, is that it helps to universalise the portrayed oppression. It opens the narrative up to different interpretations and invites the reader to draw parallels between what they are reading and their own experiences. Atwood articulates the effect of allegory when recalling her first encounter with *AF* and admits that the political content of the book completely escaped her.[36] She did not link the narrative in the book to the Russian Revolution or any other historical events, but that did not mean that she did not understand the sentiment of the fable.[37] She understood that 'the pigs were *unjust*' and that 'horrified' her.[38] In fact, Atwood's encounter with *AF* does not differ greatly from my encounter with the niece from the GDR. I did not understand the politics but I understood the sentiment.

It is true, then, to say that *AF*, *Milkman* and *NSID* operate on two levels: on the one hand these texts can be read through their historical context, but on the other, they function on a more emotionally engaging level, because they do not simply deal with ideas and systems, like many dystopias do, but with characters operating within these systems.

Anna rejects the literature of Goethe and other classics, saying 'what could these old men possibly teach me about myself or the world I live in?' (chapter 1). This rejection of a past presided over by dead white men is a comment on contemporary society. Anna does not reject history but the patriarchal structures through which her place in the world is being drawn.

In a later chapter, Anna has a conversation with an old man in a bookshop, which is in many ways inspired by Winston Smith's interaction with the old man in

---

[36] Atwood, 2014, p.141
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., Atwood's italics

the shop in *NEF.* The function of the old men is to provide access to the past: in Winston's case, this is achieved through the paperweight. In Anna's case, it is through Bertholt Brecht's poetry and play, *Galileo* (1940) (chapter10). The conversation Anna has with the old man appears to be a discussion about the play, which is set during the Italian Renaissance. They discuss the power of the church and the way it operated, which is to say in a way not unlike a totalitarian regime. This, again, is implied. Some readers might be aware that Brecht was writing his play about the Third Reich, but the play's concerns can be mapped onto Anna's life behind the iron curtain. So even if Anna rejects many of the classics, she realises that there are events in history that can give her a deeper understanding of her life now and that she can still learn from the past. This is underlined by the fact that Anna buys another of Brecht's books, significantly, as a gift for her mother.

The role of literature and poetry is important. It grants Anna and the reader a greater understanding of the world they live in, considering the recent rise of populism. Of course, literature and art were censored in the GDR and it is lucky for Anna that the regime compromised with Brecht and granted him some creative freedom in return for taking credit for his fame.[39] In a later chapter, Anna raids her neighbours' empty flat and discovers Orwell's *AF* (chapter 13). This is a forbidden book, yet it is through a code in this book that Anna finds an escape route out of East Berlin. Anna Burns uses nineteenth century literature as escapism in *Milkman.* Her protagonist buries herself, reading while walking, in literature of the past because it is free of contemporary politics and therefore safe. It is this non-political retreat into the

[39] Mark Clark, 'Brecht and the German Democratic Republic' *Bertolt Brecht in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp.97–104 <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/bertolt-brecht-in-context/brecht-and-the-german-democratic-republic/B1D3F13EA771ECBB29510AFF2892AC28> [accessed 14 August 2021]

past that marks Middle-Sister out as an individual and one of the reasons her community starts to gossip about her. In this regard, Burns' use of literature is comparable to the Savage's love of Shakespeare in *BNW.* Here, too, literature creates a link to the past, to history, and it is this link that ultimately identifies the Savage as a non-conformist who is destined to die. The act of reading is also an act of transgression in *THT*.[40] Orwell's Winston Smith fears for his life when he puts pen to paper.[41] My heroine, Anna, engages with ideas that reveal her to be a non-conformist and it is because of this that she is captured by the regime and placed in an institution for delinquent youths (chapter 15). Not unlike Winston Smith, Anna's downfall is precipitated by her engagement with a forbidden book – the code she deciphers in *AF* leads her to an escape route into the West and, though she does not immediately attempt to flee, it is the knowledge of such a route that signals her downfall.

Individual love is regulated by the state in one way or another and this is also the case in my novel. Anna lives with her mother (chapter 1). We are led to believe that her father is deceased, but it later turns out that he fled the republic and now lives in Hamburg (chapter 30). As discussed in my chapter on Huxley, individual love isolates you from the rest of the world, and so to ensure the survival of a totalitarian regime, total loyalty is demanded.[42] In my novel, fear has torn Anna's parents apart: through clues, such as the list of initials Anna finds in the Schmidts' flat, the reader can piece together that Anna, her mother and her father were all supposed to flee to the West together (chapter 13). However, this did not happen, and Anna and her mother remained in the GDR. As Anna's relationship with her mother gradually

[40] Atwood, 1996, p.35
[41] Orwell, 2000, p.10
[42] Atkins, 1954, p.248

improves, Anna is taken away to Torgau. Anna is also in the process of repairing her friendship with her best friend, Knut, when she is chased and captured by the Stasi (chapter 15). As Anna seeks to mend her personal relationships, which are representative of individualism and individual love, she is punished. There is hope for Anna, though. At the end of the novel, Anna and her friends have escaped the facility. Anna has forgiven Christa and now realises that she is in love with her, as depicted through the kiss. What is important to note here is that Anna kisses Christa (chapter 34). She actively chooses individual love at the moment she is free of state control. However, we do not see Anna reunited with her father, or reconciling with her mother. There remain unresolved elements, which mirrors the ending of *THT,* in which Offred is picked up by two men, not certain if they belong to the resistance group 'Mayday' or if they are 'Eyes', employed by the state:

> 'Whether this is my end or a new beginning I have no way of knowing: I have given myself over into the hands of strangers, because it can't be helped.
>
> And so I step up, into the darkness within; or else the light.'[43]

We do not see Offred reunited with her daughter or her husband. We are as unsure of her fate as she is. However, we can take solace from the fact that Gilead has fallen, as shown through the 'Historical Notes' at the end of the novel. Solace can be found at the end of *NSID* in the form of the postcard, sent by Anna to her mother, the day before the fall of the Wall, and at least the hope of an end to the oppression.

[43] Atwood, 1996, p.307

On the subjects of endings, my critical reading was quite useful. When studying *NEF,* I read Raymond Williams, who has written extensively on Orwell. It was not until I read Andrew Milner's introduction to a collection of Williams' essays that my interest was really piqued. Milner asserts that Williams misunderstood *NEF*'s ending.[44] It is Milner's belief that the Appendix is an important part of the novel and indicates that the regime eventually collapses. Atwood supports this reading and even modelled the ending of *THT* on it.[45] What I found so encouraging was that Williams got it wrong – and I fully agree with Milner and Atwood on this point – and that Orwell's intention might never have been to integrate the Appendix into the body of the novel, as Williams suggested.[46] It underpins how open to interpretation texts are and I thoroughly enjoyed reading these differing viewpoints.

Gregory Claeys has been my main source of critical reading for dystopias and utopias. I found his book *Dystopia: A Natural History* especially useful as it gave a detailed and thorough history of the genres with an entire section on totalitarian dystopias, which included readings of Huxley and Orwell. His assertions on Atwood were eye-opening. He discusses the 'Atwood principle', which relies on a certain level of 'realism' and draws a very concrete line between science fiction and dystopias.[47] Margaret Atwood's critical writing was also hugely important to me, in particular her coining of an entire new genre: ustopia. This inspired me to do the same. What Atwood touches on here is fascinating: writers will often feel that their work has been mislabelled, miscategorised, in order to fit certain moulds or sections of a bookshop. Even though there are no sections in any bookshop I have recently

[44] Andrew Milner, 2010, p.6
[45] Atwood, 2005, p.292
[46] Raymond Williams, *Orwell,* (London: Fontana Press, 1991), p.97
[47] Claeys, 2018, p.287

visited that advertise ‘ustopia’, Atwood raised the issue that categorising one’s work is actually difficult and that reclaiming your work as a writer in the ways she has done is empowering.

This project has made me realise that there remain new frontiers to be discovered. It has allowed me to explore how porous the boundaries between genre are and to what extent writers respond to each other through their work. I can very easily see myself writing more hystopian fiction. It might be a sequel to *NSID* or a novel set in the former Yugoslavia, where my mother was born, and which has a rich, dark history. I am excited to finish this project but I doubt I will ever stop thinking about the legacy of these writers.

Conclusion

‘Love and hunger rule the world.’[1]

Yevgeny Zamyatin understood the inner workings of totalitarian societies like no other and his novel *We* showcases this understanding. The novel is not directed at any one country but, as Orwell suggests, at ‘the implied aims of industrial civilisation.’[2] The themes raised in Zamyatin’s novel are universal, they predate Stalinism and Nazi Germany, and they encapsulate the very essence of what it is that makes us human. We need personal relationships and we need food, and these needs distinguish us from machines. Zamyatin’s novel, as with all novels discussed in this commentary, asks the question: what does it mean to be human? Orwell’s quotation about Zamyatin’s novel implies what happens when humans strive for utopia (industrial civilisation) and how likely it is that they will find themselves in dystopia. As Atwood asserts: ‘should we try too hard to enforce Utopia, Dystopia rapidly follows’.[3] Perfection is a slippery slope.

This central question is discussed in Huxley, Orwell, Atwood, Burns and my own novel. A common sub-theme that feeds into this overarching question is the individual’s access to love, to personal relationships and family, and therefore to a future. The depiction of power structures regulating an individual’s relationships, controlling their thoughts and feelings through oppressive systems and laws, underpins how the oligarchy in the texts discussed have understood that by controlling love, they control individuals, and by controlling the individual, they control

[1] Zamyatin, 2020, p.25
[2] Orwell, *Volume IV*, 1968, p.75
[3] Atwood, 2005, p.95

their commitment to the collective. It seems, then, that emotionally isolating the individual is one of the principal ways to create a dystopian society, in which individual liberty is a thing of the past, as encapsulated by Offred's distinction in *THT* between 'freedom to' and 'freedom from'. Dystopias are always built on 'freedom from'. In this way, literary dystopias are related to real life totalitarian states, which were often built on utopian principles. This is to say, there are close links to history.

Oppression and the threat to freedom are themes that were as relevant in *Gulliver's Travels* in 1726 as in *Milkman* in 2018 and, of course, in my own work, *NSID.* Having the 'outsider' fight against such structures becomes the bread and butter of the genre: John the Savage pushes against the vapid society in *BNW,* Winston Smith betrays IngSoc in *NEF,* Offred joins Mayday in *THT,* Burns' reading-while-walking heroine uses nineteenth-century literature as means of disengaging with the political debate around her in *Milkman,* and my protagonist, Anna, interrogates things she once thought of as true. Through their use of the outsider, these texts have an interrogative relationship to history. As Orwell's extensive writing on the subject suggests, recorded history is ultimately another form of fiction, which raises questions about the nature of historical fiction, a form of fiction that makes claims to authenticity and truth. If history is simply another form of fiction, does this not render the entire genre meaningless, or at least satirical?

What is at the core of the texts discussed is an examination of the accuracy and truth of recorded history. Orwell demonstrates through Winston Smith that history in *NEF* is erased, edited and rewritten in a way that mirrors his own experience of the reporting of the Spanish Civil War. In his essay 'Looking Back on the Spanish War', Orwell writes: 'I know it is the fashion to say that most recorded

history is lies anyway.'[4] Huxley grapples with similar ideas, even misquoting Henry Ford in *BNW*, telling his readers that 'history is bunk', and monogamy, families, religion, high art, and Shakespeare – all things of the past – are extinct.[5] Atwood, too, takes aim at the subjectivity of history, describing a church in *THT*, telling the reader that though the church has been restored, it is more recent history that the oligarchy opposes, hinting at feminism. Burns discusses ideas of 'reshaping' and 'elaborating' on history throughout the generations, which implies a struggle to accept the existence of an objective account of history.[6] This collective history extends to the personal histories that are artificially created. In *NSID,* Anna grows up believing that her father is dead, only to discover that he has fled the GDR and started a new life in the West. In a state where the most important relationship is to the regime, private histories are as controlled as those of the entire nation. Everything is considered a political act. This also implies, as Burgess observed, that these dystopias, even though drawing on the past, are commenting on the contemporary.[7] This is done under the guise of a futuristic setting or thorough the creation of another world, and it is this 'other world' that functions as the 'glass' Swift described in his definition of satire, 'wherein beholders do generally discover everybody's face but their own.'[8]

---

[4] Orwell, *Volume II*, 1970, p.296

[5] Huxley, 2007, p.29
Industrialist Henry Ford, in a three-part interview with the *Chicago Tribune* in 1916, said: 'History is more or less bunk. It is tradition. We don't want tradition. We want to live in the present and the only history that is worth a tinker's dam is the history we make today.' Roger Butterfield, 'Henry Ford, the Wayside Inn, and the Problem of "History Is Bunk"' in *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, Third Series, Vol. 77 (Massachusetts Historical Society, 1965), pp. 53–66 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25080601> [accessed 4 September 2021]

[6] Burns, 2018, p.149

[7] Burgess, 2013, p.ix

[8] Jonathan Swift quoted in *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 1999, p.780

We are locked in an endless cycle of repeating history, but do not seem to be aware of the fact: Orwell writes about the oppressive regime of the Soviet Union in *NEF* in 1949 through a depiction of post-war London. Anna Burns writes about the oppression of women and the #MeToo movement via Northern Ireland in the 1970s. Even though these novels are very firmly anchored in history, the oppressive societies they portray feel universal and current. The uses of the 'Appendix' in Orwell, the 'Historical Notes' in Atwood, Burns' use of retrospective narration, and the postcard in *NSID* historicise their respective narratives, creating out of a constructed, dystopian novel a history. This act of creation is itself a comment on the fact that history is created and recreated.

These narratives communicate with each other via their use of politicised language. From the use of the state motto in Zamyatin's *We,* Huxley's *BNW* and Orwell's *AF* and *NEF*, they understand the power of language. *THT* and *Milkman* both adopt versions of Orwell's 'Newspeak': Atwood draws a comparison between 'freedom to' and 'freedom from', concluding that 'freedom from' has little to do with freedom at all, while Burns layers euphemism upon euphemism, uncovering the violence such language can mask. Both writers are responding to Orwell through their use of language, translating Orwell's 'Newspeak' into their own creative practice.

Generic conventions will always be a point of discussion. What is the distinction between dystopia and science fiction? Can a work of dystopian fiction also be satirical? What role does history play in dystopian writing? Atwood asserts: 'When it comes to genres, the borders are increasingly undefended, and things slip back and forth across them with insouciance.'[9] Atwood captures this 'insouciance' by

[9] Atwood, 2014, p.7

blending utopia and dystopia, thus creating her own genre: ustopia. Satires and dystopias share political concerns, often at the expense of the ruling elite. Huxley blends these genres masterfully in *BNW*, achieving what Claeys refers to as a 'satire of utopian aspirations'.[10] Above all else though, these texts share concerns about the state of the world. Burgess asserts that, 'Huxley more than anyone helped to equip the contemporary novel with a brain.'[11] This sentiment is also true of Orwell, Atwood and Burns – their novels are about more than the fate of one individual: they are concerned with power structures and the threat of unchecked power. What these novels also share is a concern for the world and time in which they were created. To turn again to Burgess: 'only the present is worth satirizing [*sic*].'[12]

Dystopian fictions are becoming increasingly popular and the reason for this might be the times we are living through. With the era of Trump recently ended in the United States, a global pandemic that brought with it a new way of life through state-imposed restrictions, the rise of populism across Europe and the Taliban occupation of Afghanistan, and, overshadowing all of this, the realities of global warming, it is no surprise that writers and readers alike have turned to dystopian fictions. Online publications have also picked up on the trend. In 2020, 'The Conversation' published an article, titled, 'Are we living in a dystopia?'[13] The *Guardian* offered its readers '[a] dystopian reading list: books to enjoy while in quarantine' in March 2020.[14]

---

[10] Claeys, 2010, p.107

[11] Burgess, *Ninety-nine Novels: The Best in English since 1939* (London: Allison & Busby Limited, 1984), p.85

[12] Burgess,1967, p.46

[13] Amy Atchinson and Shauna Shames, 'Are we living in a dystopia?' in *The Conversation*, 29 April 2020 <https://theconversation.com/are-we-living-in-a-dystopia-136908> [accessed 21 August 2021]

[14] Lois Beckett, 'A dystopian reading list: books to enjoy while in quarantine' in *Guardian*, 16 March 2020 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/mar/15/books-to-read-while-quarantined-coronavirus> [accessed 20 August 2021]

Movements such as Black Lives Matter, Extinction Rebellion and #MeToo have encouraged people to think more critically about the world they live in and to interrogate supposedly historical issues such as racism and sexism. These are ideal subject matter for hystopian narratives. Perhaps dystopias are more popular now because of their capacity to reflect the state of the world. There is a growing strand of dystopian fiction that confronts the climate crisis, as Claire Armitstead points out in her article 'Stories to save the world: the new wave of climate fiction' in the *Guardian*.[15] It seems that dystopias are the only genre equipped with the necessary tools to examine and work through the issues that scare us. I hope that my work advances this trend and that we will see more hystopian fiction emerging in years to come.

[15] Claire Armitstead, 'Stories to save the world: the new wave of climate fiction' in *Guardian*, 26 June 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/jun/26/stories-to-save-the-world-the-new-wave-of-climate-fiction> [accessed 15 September 2021]

Bibliography

Books and Articles

Armitstead, Claire, 'Stories to save the world: the new wave of climate fiction' in *Guardian*, 26 June 2021 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/jun/26/stories-to-save-the-world-the-new-wave-of-climate-fiction>

Atchinson, Amy, and Shames, Shauna, 'Are We Living in a Dystopia?' in *The Conversation*, 29 April 2020 <https://theconversation.com/are-we-living-in-a-dystopia-136908>

Atkins, John, *Aldous Huxley: A Literary Study: New and Revised Edition* (London: Calder and Boyars Ltd., 1957)

Atkins, John, *George Orwell: A Literary Study* (London: John Calder (Publishers) Limited, 1954)

Atwood, Margaret, *The Handmaid's Tale* (London: Vintage, 1996)

Atwood, Margaret, *On Writers and Writing* (London: Virago Press, 2015)

Atwood, Margaret, *Writing with Intent: Essays, Reviews, Personal Prose: 1983–2005* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2005)

Atwood, Margaret, *Curious Pursuits: Occasional Writing 1970–2005* (London: Virago Press, 2006)

Atwood, Margaret, *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination* (London: Virago Press, 2014)

Atwood, Margaret, *The Year of the Flood* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009)

Atwood, Margaret, *Oryx and Crake* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003)

Austermuhle, Martin, 'A Brief of History of White Supremacist Rallies in D.C.' in *Local News,* 9th August, 2018 <https://wamu.org/story/18/08/09/brief-history-white-supremacist-rallies-d-c/>

Beckett, Lois, 'A dystopian reading list: books to enjoy while in quarantine' in *Guardian,* 16 March 2020 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/mar/15/books-to-read-while-quarantined-coronavirus>

Biswell, Andrew, 'The Context of *Obscenity & the Arts*' in *Obscenity & the Arts* (Manchester: Piriah Press, 2018), pp.1–30

Blackman, Malorie, 'Noughts and Crosses Q&A' on Author's Website <https://www.malorieblackman.co.uk/noughts-and-crosses-qa/>

Burgess, Anthony, *1985* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2013)

Burgess, Anthony, *The Novel Now: Student's Guide to Cotemporary Fiction* (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1967)

Burgess, Anthony, *Ninety-nine Novels: The Best in English since 1939* (London: Allison & Busby Limited, 1984)

Burns, Anna, *Milkman* (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 2018)

Butterfield, Roger, 'Henry Ford, the Wayside Inn, and the Problem of "History is Bunk"' in *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 3rd series, vol.77, (Massachusetts Historical Society, 1965) <http://www.jstore.org/stable/25080601>

Claeys, Gregory, *Dystopia: A Natural History: A Study of Modern Despotism, Its Antecedents, and Its Literary Diffractions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018)

Claeys, Gregory, 'The origins of dystopia: Wells, Huxley and Orwell' in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, ed. by Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp.107–131

Claeys, Gregory, *Utopia: The History of an Idea* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2020)

Clark, Mark, 'Brecht and the German Democratic Republic' in *Bertholt Brecht in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp.97–104 <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/berthold-brecht-in-context/brecht-and-the-german-democratic-republic/B1D3F13EA771ECBB29510AFF2892AC28>

Crick, Bernard, *George Orwell: A Life* (London: Penguin Books, 1982)

Crowe, Cameron, 'Billy and me: why I love The Apartment' in *Guardian*, 3 December 1999, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/1999/dec/03/culture.features>

Crum, Maddie, 'Anna Burns's Booker Prize-Winning *Milkman* Offers Some Hope But No Change' in *Vulture*, 4th December 2018, <https://www.vulture.com/2018/12/review-of-anna-burnss-booker-prizewinning-novel-milkman.html>

de Groot, Jerome, *The Historical Novel* (Oxon: Routledge, 2010)

Feinstein, Elaine, 'After feminism had to stop' in *The Times*, 13 March 1986, p.15, accessed via *The Times* digital archive, <link.gale.com/apps/doc/IF0500032474/TTDA?u=mclib&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=854891d4.>

Greenblatt, S. J., *Three Modern Satirists* (Yale: New Haven, 1965)

Huxley, Aldous, *Brave New World* (London: Vintage, 2007)

Huxley, Aldous, *Brave New World Revisited* (London: Chatto & Windus Ltd., 1959)

Huxley, Aldous, *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell* (London: Vintage, 2004)

Huxley, Aldous, *Island: A Novel* (London: Penguin Books, 1971)

Huxley, Aldous, *Letters of Aldous Huxley*, ed. by Grover Smith (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1969)

Kay Mejia, Tehlor, *We Set the Dark on Fire*, (London: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 2020)

Khomami, Nadia, '#MeToo: how a hashtag became a rallying cry against sexual harassment' in *Guardian*, 20 October 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/20/women-worldwide-use-hashtag-metoo-against-sexual-harassment>

Lamott, Anne, *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1995)

Le Guin, Ursula K., 'The Year of the Flood by Margaret Atwood' in *Guardian,* 29 August 2009 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/aug/29/margaret-atwood-year-of-flood>

MacKenzie, Donald, 'Eugenics in Britain' in *Social Studies of Science*, Vol.6, No. 3/4, (September 1976), pp.499–532 <www.jstore.org/stable/284693>

McCarthy, Mary, 'Book Review' in *New York Times*, 9 February 1986, <http://movies2.nytimes.com/books/00/03/26/specials/mccarthy-atwood.html>

Mantel, Hilary, *Wolf Hall* (London: Fourth Estate, 2009)

Marshall, Alex, 'The New Booker Prize Winner Who May Never Write Again' in *New York Times*, 29 November 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/29/books/anna-burns-interview-booker-prize-milkman-no-bones.html?auth=login-email&login=email>

Morales-Ladrón, Marisol, ‘Milkman by Anna Burns: silence as an architectural form of containment’ in *The Irish Times*, 19 August 2019, <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/milkman-by-anna-burns-silence-as-an-architectural-form-of-containment-1.3988554>

More, Thomas, *Utopia,* trans. by Paul Turner (London: The Folio Society, 1965)

Murray, Nicholas, *Aldous Huxley: An English Intellectual* (London: Little, Brown, 2002)

Orwell, George, *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell Volume II My Country Right or Left 1940 – 1943*, ed. by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (London: Penguin Books, 1970)

Orwell, George, *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell Volume III As I Please 1943 – 1945*, ed. by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (London: Penguin Books, 1970)

Orwell, George, *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell Volume IV In Front of Your Nose 1945 – 1950*, ed. by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (London: Martin Secker & Warburg Limited, 1968)

George Orwell, *All Art is Propaganda*: *Critical Essays*, compiled by George Packer (New York: Mariner Books, 2009)

Orwell, George, *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story*, (London: Penguin Books, 1988)

Orwell, George, *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story*, (London: Penguin Books, 2013)

Orwell, George, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000)

Payk, Theo R., ‘Zersplitterung, Lähmung und Isolation’ in *Der Stacheldraht* (Nr.5, 2016), pp.8-10

Roberts, Adam, *H G Wells: A Literary Life* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019)

The Cambridge Introduction to George Orwell, ed. by John Rodden and John Rossi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012)

Seed, David, *Science Fiction: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011)

Sehgal, Parul, ‘#MeToo Is All Too Real. But To Better Understand It, Turn To Fiction’ in *New York Times,* 1 May 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/01/books/novels-me-too-movement.html>

Swift, Jonathan, ‘A Modest Proposal’ in *A Tale of a Tub and other satires,* ed. by Kathleen Williams (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1975), pp.255–264

Swift, Jonathan, *Gulliver's Travels* (London: Penguin English Library, 2012)

Tayler, Christopher, 'The Psychologicals' in *London Review of Books*, Vol.40, no.20, 25 October 2018, <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v40/n20/christopher-tayler/the-psychologicals>

Wagner, Erica, '"Writing is always an act of hope": Margaret Atwood on The Testaments' in *New Statesman*, 18 September 2019, <https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2019/09/writing-is-always-an-act-of-hope-margaret-atwood-on-the-testaments>

Wedra, Martha, 'Republikflucht' in *Der Stacheldraht* (Nr.4, 2016), p.4

Wells, H. G., *The Correspondence of H. G. Wells, Vol.4*, ed. by David. C. Smith (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998)

Warner, Marina, 'Stepford revisted' in *Guardian*, 20 March 1986, <https://www.proquest./docview/186697842/6358A851C5114EECPQ/1?accountid=12507>

Wells, H. G., *Men Like Gods* (London: Penguin Books, 1987)

Wells, H. G., *Seven Famous Novels* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1934)

Wells, H. G., *The Holy Terror* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1939)

Wells, H. G., *The Time Machine* (London: Penguin Classics, 2005)

Williams, Raymond, *Orwell* (London: Fontana Press, 1991)

Tenses of Imagination: Raymond Williams on Science Fiction, Utopia and Dystopia, ed. by Andrew Milner (New York: Peter Lang, 2010)

Zamyatin, Yevgeny, *We*, trans. Clarence Brown (London: Penguin Classics Science Fiction, 2020)

Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory ed. by J. A. Cuddon, rev. by C. E. Preston (London: Penguin Books, 1999)

Duden Online <https://www.duden.de>

OED Online (Oxford: Oxford University Press) <https://www.oed.com>

'Die Kuba-Orange: "Fiedels Rache"' in *MDR Zeitreise*, <https://www.mdr.de/zeitreise/kuba-orange-in-der-ddr100.html>

Auf Biegen und Brechen: Geschlossene Heimunterbringung im Kontext sozialistischer Erziehung in der DDR, ed. by Gabiele Beyler and Bettina Klein (Torgau: Initiativgruppe Geschlossener Jugendwerkhof Torgau e.V., 2006)

Geschlossener Jugendwerkhof Torgau: <http://www.jugendwerkhof-torgau.de/Ausstellungen/Dauerausstellung/446/>

Stasimuseum: <https://www.stasimuseum.de/en/enausstellung.htm>

Die DDR-Staatssicherheit: Schild und Schwert der Partei, ed. by Jens Gieske (Berlin: Bundeszentrale für politsche Bildung, 2011)

Feindt, Iris, 'The White Line' in *Timelines: Tales from the Past by Writers of the Present and the Future*, ed. by Sherry Ashworth, Iris Feindt and Livi Michael (Manchester: Manchester Metropolitan University, 2013)

Geo Epoche: Die DDR, ed. by Gesa Gottschalk and Fabian Klabunde (Hamburg: Gruner und Jahr, Nr.64)

Films

The Apartment, dir. by Billy Wilder (United Artists, 1960)

Barbara, dir. by Christian Petzhold (The Match Factory, 2012)

Brief Encounter, dir. by David Lean (Eagle-Lion Films, 1945)

Lady Bird, dir. by Greta Gerwig (Universal Picture, 2017)

Das Leben der Anderen, dir. by Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2006)

Einzelkämpfer, dir. by Sandra Kaudelka (Farbfilm-Verleih, 2013)

Verräter – Tod am Meer, dir. by Franziska Meletzky (Odeon Fiction GMBH, 2017)

Goodbye, Lenin!, dir. by Wolfgang Becker (X Verleih AG, 2003)

Sonnenallee, dir. by Leander Haußmann (DCM Film Distribution GMBH, 1999)

Background Reading

Atwood, Margaret, *The Testaments* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2019)

Bauman, Zygmunt, and Lyon, David, *Liquid Surveillance: A Conversation* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2013)

Bedford, Sybille, *Aldous Huxley: A Biography* (London: Papermac, 1993)

Birzer, Bradley J., 'Viva Margaret Atwood! The author of *The Handmaid's Tale* is no ideologue.' in *The American Conservative*, November/December 2016, pp.38–41

Boothroyd, Basil, ‘New Paperbacks’ in *The Times*, 6 June 1987, p. 21, *The Times* digital archive <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/IF0501715868/TTDA?u=mclib&sid=TTDA&xid=07af7209>

Blum, Martin, ‘Remaking the East German Past: Ostalgie, Identity, and Material Culture’ in *Journal of Popular Culture*XXXIV.3, 2000, pp. 229-53

Brecht, Bertholt, *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1963)

Brecht, Bertholt, *Furcht und Elend des Dritten Reiches*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970)

Brecht, Bertholt, *Das Leben des Galilei* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1991)

Clarke, I. F., *The Pattern of Expectation 1644–2001* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1979)

Cockshut, A. O. J., *The Achievement of Walter Scott*, (London: Collins, 1969)

Collins, Suzanne, *The Hunger Games* (London: Scholastic Children’s Books, 2014)

Delistraty, Cody, ‘Welcome to Dystopian Realism’ in *Vulture*, 8 Jan. 2019, *Gale General OneFile*, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A568753966/ITOF?u=mmucal5&sid=ITOF&xid=ce8af853>

Dowswell, Paul, *Sektion 20* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011)

Funder, Anna, *Stasiland: Stories from Behind the Berlin Wall* (London: Granta Books, 2011)

Fyvel, T. R., *George Orwell: a personal memoir* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982)

Gerny, Rebecca, ‘From fiction to nonfiction: Margaret Atwood's portrayal of a dystopia’ in *UWIRE Text*, 3 Oct. 2019, p. 1. *Gale Academic OneFile* <https://link-gale/com.mmu.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/A601613407/AONE?u=mmucal5&sid=AONE&xid=fddb8348.

Hamilton, Paul, *Historicism: The New Critical Idiom: Second Edition* (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2002)

Hillenbrand, Tom, *Drohnen-Land: Kriminalroman* (Köln: Verlag Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2014)

Ishiguro, Kazu, *Never Let Me Go* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006)

Johnson, Catherine, *The Curious Tale of the Lady Caraboo* (London: Corgi Books, 2015)

Kaysen, Susanna, *Girl, Interrupted* (London: Virago Press, 2000)

Kumar, Krishan, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1987)

Le Carré, John, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1994)

Levitas, Ruth, *The Concept of Utopia* (Great Britain: Peter Lang Ltd, 2011)

Lukács, Georg, *The Historical Novel*, trans. by Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (London: the Merlin Press Ltd., 1989)

Lynskey, Dorian, *The Ministry of Truth: A Biography of George Orwell's 1984* (London: Picador, 2019)

McCaughrean, Geraldine, *Where the World Ends* (London: Usborne Publishing, Ltd., 2018)

Meyers, Jeffrey, *A Reader's Guide to George Orwell* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1984)

Millwood Hargrave, *The Girl of Ink & Stars* (Great Britain: Chicken House, 2016)

Nash, Cristopher, *World Postmodern Fiction: a guide* (Harlow: Longman Group UK Limited, 1993)

Ness, Patrick, *The Knife of Never Letting Go* (London: Walker Books, 2008)

Ness, Patrick, *A Monster Calls* (London: Walker Books, 2015)

Ness, Patrick, *More Than This* (London: Walker Books, 2013)

Orwell, George, *Pages from a Scullion's Diary: An Extract from 'Down and Out in Paris and London'* (London: Penguin Books, 1995)

Orwell, George, *Decline of the English Murder and other essays* (London: Penguin Books in association with Martin Secker & Warburg, 1977)

Pullman, Philip, *His Dark Materials: Northern Lights* (London: Scholastic Children's Books, 2011)

Sepetys, Ruta, *Between Shades of Gray* (London: Penguin, 2011)

Waller, Alison, *Constructing Adolescence in Fantastic Realism* (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2010)

Teeman, Tim. "'I'm no icon. Icons attract iconoclasm'" in Saturday Review, *Times*, 30 Aug. 2014, p. 10, *The Times* digital archive

<https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/BYMWEV194405802/TTDA?u=mclib&sid=TTDA&xid=d57699a9>

Andrews, Mary, 'Books to give you hope: The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood' in *Guardian*, 29 Aug. 2016 https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2016/aug/29/books-to-give-you-hope-the-handmaids-tale-by-margaret-atwood>

Tolentino, Jia. 'All Aunt Lydia's Children. in *The New Yorker*, 16 Sept. 2019, p. 56. *Gale Academic OneFile* <https://link-gale com.mmu.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/A600491058/AONE?u=mmucal5&sid=AONE&xid=7ec47197>

Wagner, Erica, '"Writing is always an act of hope"' in *New Statesman*, 20–26 September 2019, pp.86–89

Williams, Keira, 'Nolite Te Bastardes Carborundorum: On the Literature of Witness in Margaret Atwood's 'the Testaments'' in *PopMatters*, Oct 04, 2019*, ProQuest*, <https://www.proquest.com/magazines/nolite-te-bastardes-carborundorum-on-literature/docview/2301356504/se-2?accountid=12507.>

Wolf, Christa, *Lesen und Schreiben: Neue Sammlung: Essays, Aufsätze, Reden* (Darmstadt: Hermann Luchterhand Verlag, 1982)

Wolf, Christa, *Der Geteilte Himmel* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp BasisBibliothek 87, 2008)

'For God and Gilead' in *Guardian*, 22 March 2003 <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2003/mar/22/classicalmusicandopera.fiction>

New World Orders in Contemporary Children's Literature: Utopian Transformations, ed. by Clare Bradford, Kerry Mallan, John Stephens & Robyn McCallum (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011)

Twentieth Century Interpretations of 1984: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. by Samuel Hynes (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1971)

Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults, ed. by Carrie Hintz and Elaine Ostry (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2009)

Stillman, Peter G. and Johnson, Anne S., 'Identity, Complicity, and Resistance in The Handmaid's Tale' in *Utopian Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1994), pp. 70-86, Penn State University Press <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20719314>