

# The Conundrum of Language: Controlling Reality through Language in Dystopian Novels

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## Introduction

On 13 May 2019 *The New Yorker* published a cartoon by Joe Dator, picturing a librarian replacing dystopian novels such as *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Fahrenheit 451* from the fiction shelves to the non-fiction shelves. This recent cartoon exemplifies the interest in dystopian fiction in the non-academic world, which is mirrored in academic research. The numerous articles<sup>1</sup> and essays regarding dystopian novels focus on an astounding variety of angles, from climate change to surrogate motherhood, from future medicine to gender equality. This thesis will explore three dystopian novels, George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), from an internal, rather than external, point of view by exploring the manipulation of language by powerful parties within the novels, in order to analyse how language is exploited to control society and to control society's sense of reality, as well as keeping that perception of reality in place. Chapter 1 will discuss the dystopian novel as a genre. It will also introduce key concepts from structuralist and formalist approaches to literature, such as the arbitrariness of language, approaches of exclusion through language and defamiliarization, which will serve to analyse the methods of manipulating language. The subsequent chapters will present the insights provided by these tools for each of the three novels, revealing the different and yet similar approaches to control over language and reality.

Firstly, the chapter on *The Handmaid's Tale* will show that the only hope against a totalitarian attempt on a monopoly in space of language is dialogism, which is achieved through defamiliarization and vocalization of divergent thoughts. Gilead employs approaches that suppress any dissimilar discourses to ensure full control over reality through language. Secondly, the analysis of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* will demonstrate how the Party manipulates

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<sup>1</sup> See Beauchamp "Technology in the Dystopian Novel", Nourbakhsh "The Coming Robot Dystopia", Pelawi "Juvenile Delinquency in Novel Clockwork Orange", Claeys "The Origins of Dystopia: Wells, Huxley and Orwell", Lahl "Surrogacy, the Handmaid's Tale, and Reproductive Ethics", and Fitting "Utopia, Dystopia and Science Fiction."

people into a position of submission through language by developing Newspeak, which enables them to limit thinking processes, allowing little to no space for independent thought. This constituted system is reinforced through Foucault's three approaches of exclusion. It reveals that the relationship between heteroglossia, monologism and dialogism is of great importance in this dystopian novel. Lastly, the analysis of *Fahrenheit 451* reveals that a utopia can be achieved when negative consequences of that society's form have been negated or normalized, as its protagonist escapes that ideal. *Fahrenheit 451* demonstrates that freedom can only exist when divergent thoughts and discussion are allowed to be part of a discourse. The conclusion will discuss the manipulation of language in dystopian novels as a genre based on the discussions of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*.

## 1. Dystopia, Structuralism, and Tools

This chapter will explore tools from structuralist and formalist approaches to language that are useful in the analysis of language-use in dystopian novels. Insights into the power of language from both fields will show that Offred in *The Handmaid's Tale* aims to escape the theocratic discourse through defamiliarization, how language in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is actively reconstructed and reinforced through surveillance, and how language is wilfully hollowed out in *Fahrenheit 451*. Before discussing the theories that will serve as tools in the analyses, I will firstly define dystopia as a literary genre. In this discussion, I will focus on the emergence of the genre and critical definitions. In the second part, I will critically explore several theories from structuralism and formalism by discussing the central ideas about the perception of language as developed within these fields. The last section of this chapter will discuss the consequences of the application of these tools in the interpretation of dystopian novels.

### Dystopia as a Literary Genre

In her book *In Other Worlds*, a collection of short essays on science fiction and imagination in writing, Margaret Atwood discusses the development of the genres of utopia and dystopia. Rather than differentiating between the two genres, she takes them together, coining the word “ustopia,” indicating “the imagined society and its opposite – because, in my view, each contains a latent version of the other” (66). Atwood’s recent interpretation of the utopia/dystopia dichotomy stands in a long tradition of attempting to describe the position and boundaries of utopia and dystopia as genres. This section will explore further the history of dystopia and define the genre.

The history of dystopia as a genre is often explained alongside the genre of utopia, the birth of which Fitting and Godin equate with the publication of Thomas More’s *Utopia*, in 1516. These two scholars describe utopian novels as ideal societies, in essence the opposite of a dystopia. But even More’s *Utopia* contained elements of satire: “to teach virtue by an attack on

vice through a *via diversa*” (Heiserman 174), suggesting that the perfect world is a chimera. In an influential early essay on the matter Raymond Williams also stressed that each positive Utopia contained within itself a negative of its type, “which is now commonly expressed as ‘dystopia’” (52). The *Literary Encyclopedia* defines a dystopia as “a radically dysfunctional society in which the lives of the inhabitants are significantly impaired, damaged, or otherwise undesirable,” which reads like a sound definition; and yet, much debate remains in literary criticism over this opposition between the two genres. Baccolini and Moylan define Dystopia as “the darkside of Utopia” (1). Like Atwood, they stress the interrelatedness of the two genres by claiming that “the dystopian genre has always worked along a contested continuum between utopian and anti-utopian positions” (8).

The first “proper” dystopian novels – in the modern sense of the term – were published during the early twentieth century, as a reaction to, Claeys and Fitting assume, the loss of optimism after the First World War (1914-1918) and the atom bomb on Japan in 1945. The shift between utopia and dystopia is very clear when one looks at the works published before the twentieth century. Peter Fitting, who like Atwood reads utopias and dystopias as one genre, claims that “prior to the twentieth century, the positive utopia was the prevailing manifestation of the genre until the first half of the century when these bleaker forms came to dominate” (139). Aldous Huxley prefaced his famous *Brave New World* with a quote from the Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev: “Utopias seem very much more realizable than we had formerly supposed. Now we find ourselves facing a question which is painful in a new kind of way: how to avoid their actual realization” (n.p.). Huxley is aware of the difference between utopia and dystopia and the underlying connection between the genres. The combination of the challenge of realizing a utopia and the horrors of the first half of the twentieth century produced discouraging views of the future, which were reflected on in literature. This history explains where the perception of utopia and dystopia as the opposite ends of a scale comes from.

Atwood's decision to conflate the two concepts in to the single generic marker *ustopia* has the consequence that it is no longer possible to differentiate between the two. To view them as opposite sides of the scale is the most extreme critical reaction against the notion of the genres as binary oppositions. And yet, there is much to say for the argument that scholars need to be aware of the intimate relationship between the two genres and to see that rather than the opposite, a dystopia is underway to become a utopia when all the negative consequences of that society's form have been negated or normalized. Whether a novel is a dystopia or utopia depends on its position on that scale, which is the position taken in this thesis. Despite their intimate development, the two genres should be perceived as separates on a scale, with the novel's contents as tool to position it on that scale. The protagonist functions as a good indicator of that position, as we will discuss below. Although it can be argued that the reader's role in deciding this position is substantial, a structuralist reading does not allow any interpretation beyond the boundaries of the text, such as author's background or the audience, and will therefore not be included in this analysis.

This discussion raises the question what features define a dystopian novel. As mentioned above, Peter Fitting suggests that dystopias take place in both another spatial place and another time (136). By setting a novel in the future, another time is easily realised. To create another realistic spatial place, the reader's reality may be altered through a change of place names or different customs. By defamiliarizing space, the author enables his audience to review both their own and the story's reality. Clear examples can be found in Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1924), where familiar places are given new names, making them both realistic – what after all is in a name – and yet distanced as no one has heard of “State One” as a location in today's world. In the dystopian young-adult trilogy *The Hunger Games* (2008, 2009, 2010), North America is renamed Panem, and in *Brave New World* Huxley portrays a global government,

calling earth World State. Both names refer to the ideals their societies aim for; Panem refers to the Roman approach to peace through “Panem et circenses” or “Bread and Games” to keep the unhappy people entertained. The name of the country refers to both an ancient method of peace, as well as the games to the death in the story. The name World State connotes ideas of world government or a United Nations, which helps form a realistic spatial place.

A second important characteristic of dystopia is the journey the protagonist makes in opposing their oppressor, which requires awareness of negative reality in which the protagonist lives. For a dystopian protagonist’s life to be changed – for better or for worse – they must be aware of the negativity of their situation. This awareness may be innate in the protagonist, like Offred in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, as they are aware of the change from the reader’s reality to their own and thus able to distinguish between what the reader deems to be normal and what is “wrong.” Another option for the protagonist to become aware of “negative reality” is as the result of a personal shift from ignorance towards awareness as the plot unfolds as seen in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*’s Winston. A third option would be through contact with a rebelling individual, as in *Fahrenheit 451*, in which “protagonist Montag serves as a functionary in a regime devoted to maintaining social order through media distraction” (Seed 79); but through contact with a dissident neighbour, Clarisse, “Montag’s consciousness fractures into rival voices and even his body feels to divide in two” (Seed 79), as a becomes aware of other possibilities of life.

Thirdly, the idea of ever-present surveillance, introduced in Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), is of much importance in dystopian society (see Seed). Societies are controlled through people, machines or other mysterious forms of surveillance that continually check on people, their activities and their communication. This central



dystopian trope reflects Michel Foucault's application of Bentham's Panopticon prison-theory to the way in which societies discipline themselves, which will be discussed in more detail below.

### Critical methods for the study of Language-use in Dystopian Fiction

Structuralism is a theory that developed in the early twentieth century throughout Europe and is known from names such as the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, as well as a second wave, which emerged during the sixties comprised of literary critics and philosophers like Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes. Its use within several academic fields – from anthropology to literary criticism – has resulted in a broad interpretation of the theory of structuralism. According to structuralists, the world is constituted by systems that can be found in any place and at any time. Philosopher Simon Blackburn adds that “behind local variations in the surface phenomena there are constant laws of abstract structure” (353). This notion exposes the claim made by many structuralist thinkers that everything in our universe exists within a system and the only way to fully understand life is to understand the systems that function within it: “In effect, structuralism deals with everything. It deals with philosophy; it deals with advertising; it deals with cinema; it deals with psychoanalysis; it deals with works of art; and so on” (Foucault 534). Structuralism can function as an approach to an ecological system, comprising of elements like water, earth, plants and sunlight. These form a system that keeps the earth in a good condition for new plants, which is one way of looking at it. At the same time, the tree from the example is also part of other systems, like the oxygen-production cycle in which it interacts with other elements to form a structure on another level. When discussing the tree as a subject, structuralists will try to encompass all the interrelations between the tree and all elements surrounding it in their discussion of its meaning and significance. The theory, it must be noted, always implies an ideal, which is best summarized as a complete understanding of all structures in existence.

Linguistic and literary structuralist theorists used these ideas on more abstract parts of life. One of the more abstract structuralist ideas about language was Saussure's theory of signs. He claimed that "if we are to discover the true nature of language we must learn what it has in common with all other semiological systems" (Saussure 17). Following Saussure's ideas about language, Vladimir Propp, Michael Bakhtin and Roland Barthes changed the focus from linguistic to literary objects, studying narration and the systems behind texts as a whole. Propp developed his influential structuralist theory of folktales (English translation 1958), which has been used in the analysis of many popular genres, most notably fantasy literature. Barthes unearthed the mythical structures that determined meanings in a diverse set of modern texts and Bakhtin produced influential essays on the interrelation between text and context, form and content. Below I will critically explore significant ideas from structuralism and formalism, followed by their ramifications for literature, and dystopian novels in particular, that result from these theoretical perspectives.

### Linguistic Structuralism

As the author of *Course in General Linguistics*, Saussure is considered the father of linguistic structuralism. Having studied historical linguistics, his interest in language and its workings has been prevalent throughout his life. The notes compiled in this work give a clear insight in the linguistic take on structuralism. He defined the scope of linguistics to be:

- a) to describe and trace the history of all observable languages, which amounts to tracing the history of families of languages and reconstructing as far as possible the mother language of each family;
- b) to determine the forces that are permanently and universally at work in all languages, and to deduce the general laws to which all specific historical phenomena can be reduced; and
- c) to delimit and define itself. (Saussure 6)

Without specifying a language, Saussure defines rules that assist scholars in structuring, or rather discovering, the structure behind language within the boundaries of their field of expertise. It is important to take note of three core arguments that are essential to a structuralist understanding of language. They consist of the difference between signified and signifier, the arbitrariness of language, and the relational nature of language. Although these are basic structuralist ideas, it is very important to be aware of these ideas before turning to literary structuralism.

The first of Saussure's core arguments is the connection between a word and an object, such as "horse." This word can be interpreted to refer to an animal, but is also the word itself, consisting of phonemes /hɔ:s/. The image connected to the word is a mental associative bond of which Saussure is trying to make one aware, saying that "the linguistic unit is a double entity, one formed by the associating of two terms" (65). The communication of such entities is a mental translation from concept to sound-image, which is an intimate unification. To distinguish between all parts of a linguistic *sign* [*signe*], that is a word combining concept and sound-image, Saussure proposes to call the concept the *signified* [*signifié*] and the sound-image the *signifier* [*signifiant*] (Saussure 67). In case of the word horse (the *sign*), the animal itself would be the *signified* and the word "horse" or /hɔ:s/ the *signifier*.

The second core argument is that the linguistic sign is arbitrary, or more elaborately: the signifier is in no way connected to the signified. We may just give the animal we know as horse another name entirely, without changing what the form or context of that being is. The signifier is no more than an arbitrary rule that a language, and thus their user, adheres to. With exception of the onomatopoeia and interjections, which according to Saussure are no more than "fortuitous result[s] of phonetic evolution" (sic) (Saussure 69), the arbitrariness of the signifier is a logical development in the evolution of language:

Signs that are wholly arbitrary realize better than the others the ideal of the semiological process; that is why language, the most complex and universal of all systems of expression, is also the most characteristic; in this sense linguistics can become the master-pattern for all branches of semiology although language is only one particular semiological system. (Saussure 68)

By claiming that by fathoming language's structure one can make all semiotic systems tangible and even understandable, Saussure lays the foundation for the branching of structuralism in boundless directions.

The last core claim "boils down to this: in language there are only differences" (Saussure 120). The meaning of a sign is determined by knowing what it is not. A horse is defined by saying that it is not a cow or a sheep, or, in short, by defining its differences from the signs surrounding it. Moreover, "any conceptual difference perceived by the mind seeks to find expression through a distinct signifier, and two ideas that are no longer distinct in the mind tend to merge into the same signifier" (Saussure 121), which means signs do not merely need difference but opposition, or paired alternatives to be defined.

It is clear from Saussure's three core claims that the system and interaction between the various levels within a semiotic system are very important. Polanyi describes it as follows: "When we comprehend a particular set of items or parts of a whole, the focus of our attention is shifted from the hitherto uncomprehended particular to the understanding of their joint meaning" (29). In his discussion of literary structuralism, Barry summarizes Saussure's impact on the world of semiotic thinking as follows:

Saussure's thinking stressed the way language is arbitrary, relational, and constitutive, and this way of thinking about language greatly influenced the structuralists, because it gave them a model of a system which is self-contained,

in which individual items relate to other items and thus create larger structures.

(43)

This model of a system prepared a way of understanding the world as a system in which we function, rather than a tool to communicate. Saussure's way of thinking makes people aware of the fact that "wherever we look, we see language constituting the world in this way, not just reflecting it" (Barry 42).

### Structuralist and Formalist Tools in Literary Analysis

This section will address useful tools for literary analysis from structuralism and formalism. In order to explore how language constitutes the world, we need to step away from linguistic structuralist analysis. As Barthes argues: "just as linguistics stops at the sentence, the analysis of narrative stops at the analysis of discourse" (265). As inductive theories have never produced clear flawless theories on the structure of language, Barthes proposes literary critics to apply a deductive method, like linguistics. Like Propp, known for *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928), Barthes aims to establish the structure for narrative as a whole. In *Morphology*, Propp successfully structures fairy tales into 31 functions filled by seven basic characters, thus resolving the question of the structure of that genre. Barthes aims to do the same for narrative as Propp did for fairy tales. Rather than focusing on the context in which the text was produced, structuralist scholars conduct "analyses of language and style, and the formal structure of literary works" (Klarer 102).

In order not to lose sight of the connection between linguistic and literary structuralism, we will shortly compare the aims of literary structuralism to the linguistic aims as Saussure defined them (see "Linguistic Structuralism"). His first aim was "to describe and trace the history of all observable languages" (6), which in literary criticism equals the history of narrative and literature, rather than languages. By exploring literature to find the structures

underlying a genre or text type as a whole, literary structuralism does exactly what Saussure describes. Saussure's second aim was "to determine the forces that are permanently and universally at work in all languages, and to deduce the general laws," which, again, is true for the structuralist approach to literature. The last aim Saussure describes is for the field of specialization, literature in this case, "to delimit and define itself," which has proven harder to do for literature compared to linguistics. Linguistics, as Barthes explains, ends at the end of a sentence. That is the start of the realm of literature, but the outside boundaries are less clear. Discourse as a description of literary focus is a vague term, as it can point to use of reasoning, the tread of an argument, or the treatment of a specific subject ("discourse, n." *OED*). If literature itself would be the focus, the question what literature is would be a major problem. In short, this question remains unanswered. Within his paper, the boundaries of the research material are set by the dystopian novels.

### Consequences of Structuralism for the Interpretation of Dystopian Novels

As becomes clear from the discussion above, structuralism is multidimensional, causing its application to reflect in various directions and specializations. Structuralism as a general approach to language assumes the existence of a structure in any system one can think of including language. Yet, language is more than a mere tool people use to communicate. It is also part of how people perceive other systems, such as cultures. This perception is not merely a reflection, because "wherever we look, we see language constituting the world in this way, not just reflecting it" (Barry 42). The way in which people use language constitutes a reality, which we share with other individuals, who in turn may be influenced by a constituted perception of that reality.

Saussure defined rules that help structuring, or rather discovering, the structure behind language. To understand the ability to influence a perception of reality through language, it is essential to understand Saussure's core concepts of the arbitrariness of language and relational

nature of language. Far more than the difference between signified and signifier, awareness of these two concepts may help to understand how people and/or organisations in power may manipulate the use and perception of language. The arbitrariness of language implies that there is nothing that binds the signified and signifier, which in turn means that the choice to use any other word instead is only opposed by the existence of the former signifier. For example, if the word “horse” would be banned, another word would gradually take its place and have the same signified. A subtle, gradual change, or a forceful application of another system, may be a realistic way of replacing a word in society. A reality, especially in today’s globalized world, is often reflected in a society. By changing language, or the deeper structure underneath, one can change society and reality.

Three literary tools from text-oriented approaches that are useful in the discussion of the deeper structure underneath language are “connotation,” “defamiliarization,” and “normalization.” The concept of “connotation” is the “linguistic term used for the associations which may be usually evoked by the word, or which may be evoked by a specific context” (*Literary Encyclopedia*), reflecting the structuralist idea that every word is connected in a structure of association (see also Barthes’ *Elements of Semiology*). By changing the connotation of an object, the perception of that object is strongly influenced too.

Defamiliarization severs the ties between a word and its main association by drawing it out of context. It “counteracts the reader’s familiarity with everyday language and non-literary discourse” (Klarer 106). The Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky (1893 – 1984) called it a “process of revitalizing” of language (Free 69). He argued that “we see that as perception becomes habitual, it becomes automatic” (11) and claimed that “habituation devours works, clothes, furniture, one’s wife, and the fear of war” (12), whilst “art exists that one may recover the sense of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony” (12). Although Shklovsky discussed it in context with all literary language, it is especially interesting in the

discussion of dystopian novels as they draw attention to the power of language to construct lived experience and assist the exploration of the potentially pernicious power of language.

Normalization is a subject Barthes discusses in his *Mythologies*, exploring how events or habits in society have become normalized in a discourse based on ideology. This ideology, or myth as Barthes calls it, “has no value, truth is no guarantee for it” (*Mythology* 123), but as long as practice of the dominant myth is normalized it will remain in place. Normalization can be explored in the analysis of dystopian novels to find out how it can be used as a tool to impose or defy a dominant myth or ideology.

In addition to defamiliarization, literary structuralism leads to more notions that are relevant for the study of language-use in dystopian novels. Mikhail Bakhtin, author of *The Dialogic Imagination* (written in the 1930s and only published in 1981), introduced his theory of dialogism in “The Order of Discourse.” Bakhtin’s theory aims for dialogism, which is acceptance through discussion between two or more discourses. Any discourse is based on active exclusion of people. In his theory, Bakhtin describes three forms of exclusion that together ensure control over language: “forbidden speech, the division of madness, and the will to truth” (“Order of Discourse” 55). The first focusses on taboos and subjects an oppressing force would not like subjects to discuss. By making them into taboos, they are socially undesirable or even illegal, and thus a limited area of discourse. In today’s society this is reflected in subjects relating to prostitution or other sex-related subjects. It must be emphasized, therefore, that forbidden speech is not merely part of oppressive language systems. Bakhtin’s second point, the division of madness refers to individuals whose opinion is dismissed due to mental disability. Which brings us to the last argument, which is the will to truth. Structuralism acknowledges the lack of one absolute truth as every structure emphasises another part of truth and the combination of truths attempt to form a consensus which is always a compromise. By excluding divergent ideas through forbidden speech and harnessing the authority of the society



versus the mentally disabled, one can define the compromised truth to be closer to their preferred truth. These three approaches to a unified discourse must be taken into consideration when discussing language and power in dystopian novels.

This unity discourse leads to three other useful terms that show how language is not merely a tool for communication, but also for as reflector of different opinions and voices. Heteroglossia, or other-tongue as derived from Greek, emphasizes the plurality and acceptance of existing voices. A heteroglossia in society denotes space for various tongues and ideas and it “is a centrifugal force which functions by accepting discursive variety” (Valentine 24). The opposite of heteroglossia is monologism, which aims to suppress other voices in order to “impose themselves as an ‘authoritarian discourse’” (Valentine 24). It relies on the rejection of anything other than itself, which may be achieved through Bakhtin’s suggestions in his theory dialogism. This idea of interplay between monologism and heteroglossia forms an interesting approach to the analysis of language use in dystopian novels.

This chapter’s last two paragraphs regarding language in dystopian novels concern the structuralist definition of a character and the idea of the panopticon as restrictive tool. Firstly, structuralists “define a character by his participation in a sphere of actions” (Barthes 258). I propose that within the dystopian novel, protagonists will always be defined by the comparable actions as they must always take part in rebelling against the system they partake in. Their position within the plot, within the system of dystopian novels, is defined by insurgence against the structure of society and its head. Although the approaches to rebellion, as well as the form thereof, may differ per novel, the protagonist is defined by their sphere of actions. These actions are the result of a different way of thinking from the constructed form of society, and must therefore be a different voice. The following chapters will explore whether the protagonist’s sphere of actions is reflected in dialogistic behaviour.

Lastly, as discussed in the section on dystopian novels the dystopian societies often contain a controlling system resembling Bentham's Panopticon which was originally designed as a circular prison with a guard's centre at the core of the building. This centre would then be see-through only one way, which ensures that the prisoners could always be watched, at any time of day, without them knowing whether they are actually being watched. Foucault applied this idea to society, which does not merely reflect on issues of privacy but does also have "major repercussions on the space of language, as freely flowing, unguarded conversation is no longer possible" (Lewis 32). It is, therefore, of great importance to analyse the role of the panopticon-like surveillance within the dystopian societies.

This chapter has shown that language must be understood as a system that combines what people see and what they name it in a perception that is reality. By manipulating the naming of concepts, that is a discourse, one can manipulate the perception of reality, which provides power. Once a discourse is dominant, the ultimate aim is to establish a monologism. In order to keep that monologism in place, one can employ exclusion methods as discussed by Foucault, Panopticon-like language surveillance, or literary tools such as connotation, defamiliarization, and normalization. The subsequent chapters will discuss these theories in the dystopian novels by Atwood, Orwell, and Bradbury.

## 2. Fighting the Suppression of Autonomy in *The Handmaid's Tale*

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) has been at the centre of various articles on topics such as surrogate motherhood (Busby 2010, Lahl 2017), politics (Beauchamp 2009), and reproductive politics in popular culture (Latimer 2009). This chapter will argue that Offred is subjected to a theocratic discourse that suppresses women's autonomy through exclusion of women in all positions. The forceful control over language in Gilead does not only change the reality surrounding the women, but the women themselves too, by giving them roles and names that reinforce that role. Using a hegemonial discourse, Gilead reforms society to fit their Christian extremist ideals. Offred's awareness of her situation enables her to critically examine the language use of people around her and to employ defamiliarization in an attempt to escape monologism.

*The Handmaid's Tale* is set in America after a revolution during which Christian extremists slowly take over the country and rename it the Republic of Gilead. They reduce women's autonomy and put a system in place control the fertility rate, which has drastically lowered due to the combination of an extensive and highly disruptive ecological crisis and radiation. In order to do so, the male elite, called the Commanders, are given Handmaids. The Handmaids are trained fertile women who must become pregnant in order to present the Commanders and their infertile Wives with a child. As in the biblical story of Leah and Rachel (Genesis 30), during which both women give their handmaids to their shared husband in order to receive more children from God, the Wives expect their children to come to them through the Handmaids.

The first-person narrative in *The Handmaid's Tale* is an edited manuscript based on a reconstruction of cassette tapes recorded by Offred, a Handmaid who has been assigned to a Commander and his Wife, Serena Joy. Through flashbacks in the narrative, the reader learns of her past. Offred reflects on her marriage to Luke, conversations with her mother and her best

friend Moira. She also contemplates how her life changed from being a fully autonomous individual to becoming a Handmaid.

The first limitations after the revolution consist of Offred's loss of her job as well as access to her bank account. When it becomes clear that the government of Gilead considers Offred's marriage to Luke invalid – he was a divorcee when they wedded – they decide to flee to Canada. They are intercepted and Offred is taken to the Leah and Rachel Centre, or the Red Centre, where she is trained by government-instructed Aunts to become a Handmaid. From this moment onward she is excluded from any kind of reading, as instructed by Gileadean law.

During their instruction, the Handmaids are taught to avoid all forms of temptation in order to stay pure. Offred explains that “At the Centre, temptation was anything much more than eating and sleeping. Knowing was a temptation. What you don't know won't tempt you, Aunt Lydia used to say” (201). As reading is a form of gaining knowledge, the Handmaids are denied the possibility to do so, in any form. Instead, they are taught a special sort of unemotional speech, almost a censored language, consisting of phrases like “Blessed be the fruit” which Offred explains, is “the accepted greeting among us [Handmaids]” (25), to which the other answers, “May the Lord open.” The first phrase is a reference to Deuteronomy 28:4 and the answer a blessing, thus reinforcing the theocracy that the Christian extremists have built. They choose a biblical discourse, which is bound to remind people of its authoritative position throughout time. Rather than placing importance and truth on a new discourse, the extremist Christians employ a discourse of which the position has already been affirmed in churches for centuries.

And yet, even the Bible is kept out of the Handmaids' hands. Offred cynically comments: “The Bible is kept locked up, the way people once kept tea locked up, so the servants wouldn't steal it. It is an incendiary device: who knows what we'd make of it, if we ever got our hands on it?” (94). Even though she is sarcastic about the dangers a book could pose, she is very much

aware of the danger the regime in Gilead poses when she would choose to disobey the ban on reading. When her Commander invites Offred to play Scrabble with him she is excited, but even more scared. Not merely of the punishment that might follow but because of the emotion now connected to the desire for reading: “Now it’s forbidden, for us. Now it’s dangerous. Now it’s indecent” (45). Today indecency is often associated with nakedness or sexuality, but for Offred reading is now part of what one should not talk about or even consider. The position of written text in Gileadean society has become something for men’s eyes only.

This shift from autonomous individual to restricted Handmaid in regard to language is part of a process, of which Aunt Lydia, one of the teachers at the Red Centre, is very much aware. The process in question involves normalization of language and society’s habits. As Offred lived in the pre-revolution society, she is very aware of the restrictions that have been placed upon her, as well as the other changes in society. During her lessons she is taught that, “Ordinary, said Aunt Lydia, is what you are used to. This may not seem ordinary to you now, but after a time it will. It will become ordinary” (39). As mentioned in Chapter 1, in order for a dystopia to become a utopia, the negative experience of the reformed society must be either negated or normalized as a utopia denotes the experience of complete perfection. The Gileadean government is very aware of this notion as Aunt Lydia expresses:

You are a transitional generation, said Aunt Lydia. It is the hardest for you. We know the sacrifices you are being expected to make ... For the ones who come after you, it will be easier. They will accept their duties with willing hearts. She did not say: Because they will have no memories, of any other way. She said: Because they won’t want things they can’t have. (123)

As the subsequent generations of Handmaids will not be aware of any other reality and will be unable to read and write, they will be less able to object to their position in society. Gina Wisker claims that “removal of reading and writing removes the freedom of representation,

communication, and so of forms of thought and of power” (20). Not only are their ability to read and write taken away, but all forms of communication that might otherwise have been used to oppose the society that deliberately enforces that strategy. By indoctrinating the first generation of Handmaids with normalized language, Gilead will have full control of the following generations, which lack both the memories of pre-revolution America, and the tools to object to any form of suppression. In doing so, Gilead takes full control of a group in society that has been described as a “national resource” (71).

Offred, as part of that part of the national resource, has an important role in society, but too important to leave her and the other Handmaids autonomous. As a Handmaid, Offred is positioned above the Marthas, who serve as cooks and maids, but subject to the Commander and his Wife. She is subjected to the system without any form of self-management. As she lived both an autonomous and subjected life, she is fully aware of her situation and the active repression of her former autonomy, which makes her an interesting character when discussing her position as protagonist. It leaves the question whether all protagonists in dystopian novels are part of the repressed or controlled group in society, and whether or not they are aware of that. This question will be addressed further in the discussion below.

As a character’s speech reflects their thoughts and actions, this section considers the language use of several characters as part of their sphere of actions. Offred voices her thoughts and narrates both her own and other people’s conversation throughout the novel, which is the product of the professors’ interpretation of the order. This is of little consequence in the analysis of Offred’s use of language. Her identity within the structure of society is mostly decided by her role as Handmaid. Her name depends on the Commander she serves; she serves Fred and is, therefore, Offred, as another serves Commander Glen and is thus called Ofglen. To identify herself, Offred has a pass with her name and a registered number, which is tattooed on her ankle as well. Offred dislikes seeing that tattoo, “I cannot avoid seeing, now, the small tattoo on my

ankle. Four digits and an eye, a passport in reverse. It's supposed to guarantee that I will never be able to fade, finally, into another landscape. I am too important, too scarce, for that. I am a national resource" (71). Her passport in reverse binds her to her role in society and as such is her identity, rather than her autonomous choices. Before the revolution, Offred identified herself with her body and the choices she could make with it:

I used to think of my body as an instrument, of pleasure, or a means of transportation, or an implement for the accomplishment of my will. I could use it to run, push buttons, of one sort or the other, make things happen. There were limits but my body was nevertheless lithe, single, solid, one with me. Now the flesh arranges itself differently. I'm a cloud, congealed around a central object, the shape of a pear, which is hard and more real than I am and glows red white in its translucent wrapping. (80)

In the ideal Gileadean structure of society, Offred is no more than a walking vessel, "sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices" (142), but Offred, due to her knowledge of the past, knows she may also be viewed as an individual, rather than an object.

She rebels against the role, and additional restrictions, Gileadean society has placed on her through language. Ideally, Offred would only see the Commander during the Ceremony, but due to his occasional invitations to come to his study, both step past the set boundaries and develop a relationship that upsets the hierarchy that governs Commanders and Handmaids. Rather than addressing the Commander humbly from subjection, she reacts incredulously when he states something obvious: "How long did it take you to find that out? I [Offred] said. You can see from the way I was speaking to him that we were already on different terms" (167). By speaking out of place, she reasserts her own identity and shows that she is not a mere cog in a wheel. Her conversations and games of Scrabble with the Commander put both parties at danger, but also confirm her denial of the identity Gilead has assigned her.

In addition to Offred, two other characters who are strongly defined by their speech are Moira, Offred's friend, and the Handmaid Ofglen. In Offred's flashbacks, Moira is portrayed as a rebellious and sarcastic character who does not like to conform to set limitations. During their shared time at the Red Centre, Moira curses another Handmaid, saying "Jesus God ... That's enough. She'll be here in one minute, I promise you. So put your goddamn clothes on and shut up" (225), and uses more inappropriate language when talking about Aunt Lydia: "Camaraderie, shit, says Moira through the hole in the toilet cubicle. Right fucking on, Aunt Lydia, as they used to say" (230). Moira goes on imagining what lewd acts Aunt Lydia performed on the girls in her office. In using obscene and blasphemous language, she acts against every principle set by the theocracy and the Aunts' restrictive training at the Centre. After her escape from the Red Centre, Moira's language and behaviour strengthens the rebellious feelings in the other Handmaids: "Moira was our fantasy. We hugged her to us, she was with us in secret, a giggle; she was lava beneath the crust of daily life. In the light of Moira, the Aunts were less fearsome and more absurd. Their power had a flaw to it" (139). Moira's use of language undermines the rhetoric and restrictions of the Aunts, thus relativizing the Handmaids' feelings of reference towards their teachers. This forms a perfect example of Barry's claim that language constitutes reality, as Moira's language functions relativizing in the Handmaids perception of reality.

Ofglen adheres to the Red Centre teachings to make sure she is not apprehended by the Eyes, Gilead's secret police, for treason, until she attempts to find out how sincere Offred is in her adherence to Gileadean rules. During their walk through the city they encounter a shop where people can buy prayers from a machine, which in metallic voice prays it too: "At last Ofglen speaks. 'Do you think God listens,' she says, 'to these machines?' She is whispering: our habit at the Centre. In the past this would have been a trivial remark, a kind of scholarly speculation. Right now it's treason" (173). More than mere crude language, Ofglen questions



the basic assumptions that function as the foundation of Gileadean ideals. By questioning postulated notions, such as the existence of God, or the assumption that Gileadean ways of worship are fully correct, she digs at the foundation that underlays the whole utopia the Gileadean government attempts to realise. Rather than rebelling against a negative perception of the results of Gileadean society's ideals, Ofglen attacks the ideas behind these ideals.

These women must be acknowledged for their influence on the protagonist through language as Bakhtin describes in his theory on dialogism. Gilead has been designed to work in a structure that requires certain discourse, such as the standard phrases between Handmaids and their restricted access to reading and writing. In this way Gilead aims to create a monopoly on discourse, which is balanced out by opposing discourse as long as the negative results of Gileadean ideals are not negated or normalized. The opposing discourse, or heteroglossia, in *The Handmaid's Tale* is represented by Moira and Ofglen and received by protagonist Offred. If Ofglen had not told her about the resistance movement Mayday, Offred may have adhered to Gileadean ideals and conformed to its discourse, providing Gilead with a successful attempt at monologism. Instead, monologism is averted by opposing discourses that break Gileadean values, thus creating a dialogism that provides Offred with hope of survival.

Although language restrictions for women are one strong measure of controlling reality through aiming for a monopoly on discourse, it is not the only way the inhabitants of Gilead are influenced through language. Another measure taken fits in with Fitting's suggestion that dystopias take place in another spatial place (136). Rather than alien planets, Peter Fitting thinks of places that are recognizable, and yet strange, to the audience. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the place is described as Gilead, even though it was known as America before the revolution. In renaming the country, the values of that place are more easily dismissed and a new set of ideals can be installed. The organizers of the revolution must have been aware of the arbitrary nature of names and realised that changing them eases change of habits and rules. Before the revolution

Gilead was Massachusetts, the seat of enlightenment. In overthrowing and renaming it, the extremists put Puritan thoughts and theocracy in a strong position. They reinforce this reminder of puritan times by renaming training centre for the Handmaids as the Leah and Rachel Centre, referring to the biblical story their job is derived from. It becomes more than just a spatial place. As soon as someone mentions it, the people are reminded of its function and inhabitants. Incorporating verbal reminders in society strengthens Gilead's aims of reinforcing the theocracy. In addition, as mentioned above, all Handmaid's are given new names as a tool for taking away their identity and autonomy. This does not work at once, as Offred, despite losing her original name, keeps hope for an underground group to resist Gilead, nor does Gilead need to take their original name away forcefully to be successful, as one of the Handmaids, Janine, is known by her original name, while functioning perfectly within the system. Removing names, disconnecting signified from signifier, are used as a tool to ease change during the reformation of a society.

Not only are the names of places and people changed in Gilead, as it also aims to change the perception of certain concepts, such as feasts or freedom. During Offred's time at the centre, Aunt Lydia teaches the Handmaids that rather thinking of their restrictions as restrictions, they should see them as 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" (30). She teaches another approach to reality, to not perceive it as the women did before the revolution, but in a new light. This shift in perception of freedom is strongly connected to the society the language is fitted to, thus matching perfectly within the patriarchal theocracy of Gilead. As do the occasional activities, reminiscent of TV evangelism in the 1980s, which used media to influence perception and experience. The Prayvaganzas function as mass weddings, but moreover, also as mass hysteria outlets. The Salvagings, which ought to be about rehabilitation and healing, are used to destroy people. So

Gilead does not only rename places and people, but adjust the meaning of existing notions to reconstitute the world through language.

Looking at Gileadean society, Foucault's theory of how discourse in society can function as a force of control similar to Bentham's Panopticon is clearly visible in Offred's fear of voicing divergent ideas. In his essay on reduction of the space of language in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Jonathan Lewis shows that through restriction of heteroglossia, the ruling class controls the space of language, cutting people off from each other, not by restricting to one language but by dividing people through language, which is equally true in *The Handmaid's Tale*. As soon as Offred is caught saying something against Gileadean ideals, she will be marked a traitor and dealt with accordingly. She has no opportunity to escape as she has no property, nor do any other women, as they are all headed by men. The Eyes make any form of Offred divergence dangerous, as they could be anywhere, in any position within society. Lastly, the handmaids may be betrayed by the women around them, as no one knows who believes Gilead's ideology because nobody dares talk about it. By speaking out of term they open up themselves to punishment by execution on the wall, by hanging, or by being sent to the colonies to die due to radiation poisoning. The idea of the panopticon, a system in which you never know when you are being monitored, makes for an anxious life when you do not conform to society's ideas from free will. In case of a language Panopticon, it is as much about being observed as about being heard, which proves Lewis' point about dividing people using language. Voicing your thoughts has become very dangerous.

In the novel, Offred's awareness of Gilead's control over the space of language<sup>2</sup> is clear in a few instances throughout the novel. Firstly, she comments on the first time she felt it necessary to be careful of her use of language. After the revolution, "I [Offred] didn't know

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<sup>2</sup> The "Space of Language" is a notion which Lewis describes as "a system operating within the mental space of the individual, and as a socio-geographical space wherein discourse may, or indeed may not, take place" (28). The notion focusses on what is and is not possible to voice within either mental or geographical space, looking at restrictions imposed on the individual.

many of the neighbours, and when we met, outside on the street, we were careful to exchange nothing more than the ordinary greetings. Nobody wanted to be reported, for disloyalty” (185). Even though there are no immediate threats to stop her from saying what she wants, she is careful.

As time progresses, the punishments on illegitimate language use become more severe. Offred describes her time with the Commander, when he says, “I’d like you to play Scrabble with me,” he says. I hold myself absolutely rigid. I keep my face unmoving. .... Now of course it’s something different” (144). By allowing her to play Scrabble, the Commander does not only let her actively use it, but play with language and explore options. In doing so, the Commander opposes everything Gilead aims to achieve, which is a complete lack of autonomous use of language for women in order to be able to subdue them throughout their life. This rebellious act may indicate either a recalcitrant attitude or a lack of understanding of Gileadean principles which reflect Foucault’s description of forbidden language. The aim of forbidden language is to impose silence on certain discourses, thus ensuring these discourses cannot be passed on to younger generations. In allowing Offred to defy the rules, the commander, knowingly or unknowingly, provides the possibility to further those forbidden discourses.

Within the house, Offred is safe as long as no one in the household betrays her, but when she is out for groceries and talks to Ofglen about the existence of God, she at once becomes very anxious when she sees a van belonging to the Eyes. “I freeze, cold travels through me, down my feet. There must have been microphones, they’ve heard us after all” (174). Even the name of the secret police, Eyes, reminds of what they represent; an ever watchful eye resembling Bentham’s Panopticon and the restrictions on language that accompany it. From these measures, it becomes clear that the Republic of Gilead is not a republic at all, but a totalitarian state in full control.

The ban on reading and writing for women in Gilead is reinforced through the three approaches Foucault names in “Order of Discourse”: “Forbidden speech, the division of madness, and the will to truth” (55). Firstly, Offred tells that certain songs are not allowed anymore because they contain the word *free*: “They are considered too dangerous. They belong to the outlawed sects” (60). In essence words do not belong to anyone and are free to be used, and yet Offred is not allowed to say *free*, because Gilead has banned the word to the discourse of outlaws. Freedom and sexual assault are not openly discussed anymore. During their lessons at the Red Centre, Aunt Lydia calls sexual violation *things*. “A successful life for her was one that avoided things, excluded things. Such things do not happen to nice women.” Another patriarchy-reinforcing taboo is the idea that women are to blame for infertility. During a doctor’s appointment, Offred tells, “He’s said a *forbidden word*. Sterile. There is no such thing as a sterile man any more, not officially. Here are only women who are fruitful and women who are barren, that’s the law.” (66-67, my emphasis). Not only is the word *sterile* a forbidden word, or taboo. It is a will to truth reminiscent of Carline Merchant’s discussion of the male bias of scientific rationalist discourse, where she argues that “subjugation of nature as female [is] integral to the scientific method as power over nature” (515). By making a notion about the fallibility of men illegal, Gilead enables the subjugation of women in society. Moreover, rather than explaining a man’s sexual assault on a women as a male flaw, Gileadean truth is based on the division of madness. In case of rape, the women are guilty for leading men on and perverting them. Anyone who claims it was the man’s fault is mentally unwell and will be punished for lying to reinforce either fear of going against Gileadean truth and to show that expressing divergent thoughts will be punished.

The same ideal is clear from Gilead’s definition of a traitor: “A traitor is anyone who with free speech who speaks against the regime, or anyone who does not or cannot fit into its strict rules” (Wisker 16). As the whole regime is founded on ideals that are based in language,

a monopoly on discourse, or a monologism as Bakhtin calls it, is the ultimate goal for Gilead. Their aim is best achieved using tools that mirror Foucault's description of forbidden speech, division of madness, and, the will to truth, which helps to build and sustain Gileadean ideals. Gilead's control over the space of language in *The Handmaid's Tale* seems extensive and yet it does not control everyone, as is clear from Moira and Ofglen's use of language. Offred herself also occasionally practices to escape Gilead's control over language by playing with it in her mind. Throughout the novel, she defamiliarizes words she encounters during the day:

In front of us, to the right, is the store where we order dresses. Some people call them *habits*, a good word for them. Habits are hard to break. (30)

The difference between lie and lay. Lay is always passive. Even men used to say, I'd like to get laid. Though sometimes they said, I'd like to lay her. All this is pure speculation. I don't really know what men used to say. (43)

I wait, for the household to assemble. Household: that is what we are. The Commander is the head of the household. The house is what he holds. To have and to hold, till death do us part. The hold of a ship. Hollow. (87)

Defamiliarization helps her to break from the discourse set by Gilead and discover how language may be used to influence her perspective of reality. Her defamiliarization of *household*, a word reminiscent of family, home, or something to be part of, and yet, Offred ends her reflection with the simple word *hollow*, empty like the connotation of the word *household* now. Offred even goes as far as to defamiliarize the Ceremony, during which the Commander attempts to impregnate her:

My red skirt is hitched up to my waist, though no higher. Below it the Commander is fucking. What he is fucking is the lower part of my body. I do

not say making love, because this is not what he's doing. Copulating too would be inaccurate, because it would imply two people and only one is involved. Nor does rape cover it: nothing is going on here that I haven't signed up for. (100-101)

The name Ceremony seems to justify the acts, but in defamiliarizing the process, Offred demystifies it and brings about space for discussion regarding Gilead's discourses. Offred's ability to defamiliarize, in combination with other discourses like Moira's and Ofglen's, substantiates, against Gilead's wishes, the possibility of dialogism in Gileadean society. The most important factor in the process is hope, which Offred finds when Ofglen asks about God: "It occurs to me she [Ofglen] may be a spy, a plant, set to trap me; such is the soil in which we grown. But I can't believe it; hope is rising in me, like sap in a tree. Blood in a wound. We have made an opening" (174). Thus it is clear that within Gilead, the only hope against a totalitarian attempt on a monopoly in space of language, the opening to standing up against a regime, is dialogism.

### 3. Escaping Monologism in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is well-known for the phrase "Big Brother is watching you" (4), as well as terms such as *Newspeak* and *doublethink*. In this dystopian novel, Winston breaks under the language-based yoke placed on him by the Party. In order to explore the variety of ways in which language is used to control reality in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, this section will firstly discuss how the protagonist, Winston Smith, is manipulated in a position of submission through the system of society and its constitution through language. This constituted system is reinforced through the three great systems of exclusion, which forge discourse, as developed by Foucault: "Forbidden speech, the division of madness, and the will to truth" ("Order of Discourse" 55). Lastly, this chapter will show that the relationship between heteroglossia, monologism and dialogism is of great importance in this dystopian novel.

Winston Smith works as writer for the Ministry of Truth and lives alone in an apartment in a flat. Besides work, he attends to activities and exercises with other people via the telescreen in his apartment. Winston drinks Victory Gin and smokes Victory cigarettes but is not able to enjoy it, much like Guy Montag's inability to enjoy everyday life in *Fahrenheit 451*. Winston's living standards are deplorable. Razor blades and laces are hard to come by and he only owns one set of clothes. He does not enjoy his life much and is painfully aware of this. When he finds the notebook in Mr Charrington's shop (a black market shop in the prole quarters), he buys it immediately, fully aware of the danger inherent to this decision. His decision to write down his thoughts ensures the inevitability of capture and subsequent punishment, because the Party is aware of the danger of the first-person narration in the diary. By writing down his thoughts, he is able to clear his mind and think more freely, which is the exact opposite of what the Party desires. Although he is part of the system created by the Party, Winston is not fully subjected to it at the beginning of the novel. When thinking about his childhood, "he could not remember: nothing remained of his childhood except a series of bright-lit tableaux, occurring against no



background and mostly unintelligible” (5). He does realize, however, that “Everything had been different then. Even the names of countries, and their shapes on the map, had been different” (34). Being thirty-nine years old, he can just remember events and experiences from before the revolution, but only very few and rather vaguely.

Julia, who is younger than Winston, has been raised without any memories of a differently structured society and is politically barely aware of how Big Brother and the Party came to power. Julia

had only the dimmest idea of who Goldstein was and what doctrines he was supposed to represent. She had grown up since the Revolution and was too young to remember the ideological battles of the ‘fifties and ‘sixties. Such a thing as an independent political movement was outside her imagination and in any case the Party was invincible. (160)

Winston’s awareness of his position within society contrasts strongly with Julia’s due to his awareness of the changes and opposition the Party has had to deal with to gain their seemingly invincible position. Despite her lesser awareness, Julia is able to resist the Party doctrines and silently rebels by engaging in a sexual relationship with Winston. Although the major part of their crimes play out physically, both Winston and Julia start their rebellion against the Party by engaging in writing. For Winston, it is the notebook which he writes down his thoughts and phrases such as “DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER” (20), whereas Julia secretly hands Winston a note saying “I love you” (113), thus not only passing unseen information, but disobeying the Party’s unwritten law that love does not exist, let alone is practiced in any way.

In addition to age, a character’s class in society, too, seems to influence one’s use of language and access to it. When Winston is imprisoned, he shares his cell with petty thieves, who are most likely proles. They talk to each other, scream at the guards and telescreens, but do not talk to the *polits*, political prisoners, who “seemed terrified of speaking to anybody”

(240). Having been within reach of telescreens, Winston and the other *polits* have learned to use language with the greatest care and dread to use language at all while imprisoned. This notion will be discussed further below in the discussion of the Panopticon-like influence on language use in social environments.

Before turning to the idea of language surveillance, this section will first analyse the way in which this reality is constructed through language and how this construct is kept in place. As discussed in Chapter 1, Saussure's theories regarding language conclude that language is "a system of conventional signs that organizes the world" (Culler 58), which in the case of Oceania is achieved through a new notion of epistemology, based on government information rather than empirical evidence, and the introduction and application of a new language, Newspeak. In order to understand Oceania's approach to epistemology, or the study of human knowledge, one must first understand the term *doublethink*. It is a technique to enable to opposing truths to exist next to each other, to believe either, or one if so required, and full-heartedly believing that is the only truth. Winston describes it as winning from your own consciousness: "Only in his own consciousness, which in any case must soon be annihilated...It was quite simple. All that was needed was an unending series of victories over your own memory. 'Reality control,' they called it: in Newspeak, 'doublethink'" (37). Once trained in this technique, a citizen is able to hold a belief system in their minds that will fit any agenda from the Party. Epistemology, or the knowledge that follows from it, is no longer the result of empirical research and evidence, but based on the information provided and rewritten by the Ministries to fit their aim. Through use of doublethink one can see one truth, but ignore the empirical evidence as soon as it conflicts with the information provided by the Party. Winston realizes, "The terrible thing the Party had done was to persuade you that mere impulses, mere feelings, were of no account, while at the same time robbing you of all power over the material world" (172). By taking away the autonomy over both truth and material goods, Oceania's inhabitants are forcefully subjected to

the Party doctrine. The need for doctrine shows a weakness in the system: the existence of divergent ideas. The propagation of a doctrine is an attempt at normalizing in order to ensure that the doctrine that becomes the standard. The fact that Winston needs to realize that he has fallen victim to doctrines shows how far the process of normalization has advanced.

To abnegate the dangers of divergent thoughts and ideas, the Party develops Newspeak, a language “not designed to extend but to diminish the range of thought” (Orwell 313). Through simplification of words and grammar, in combination with simple abbreviations and compounds, linguists are “cutting language down to the bone” (54). One of the writers of the Newspeak dictionaries is called Syme, of whom Winston is apprehensive as he understands the system of Newspeak and the aims for creating it too well. This puts Syme in a dangerous position as the Party may see him as a threat to their system. Syme enjoys the beauty of cutting language and how much one can take away from it, saying to Winston, “You don’t grasp the beauty of the destruction of words” (55). Syme is perfectly aware of the aims of Newspeak:

Don’t you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought?

In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it. Every concept that can ever be needed will be expressed by exactly one word, with its meaning rigidly defined and all its subsidiary meanings rubbed out and forgotten. (55)

Despite his clear understanding of the Party’s aim with the language, Syme cannot see the danger in it, as he fully accepts the Party doctrines. Moreover, he is glad that language can be used to reduce intellectual, and in turn psychological, freedom.

In order to reduce freedom through language, Newspeak is developed to contain only three categories of words: A vocabulary contains words needed for the business of everyday life. B vocabulary consists of compound words “which had been deliberately constructed for political purposes ... intended to impose a desirable mental attitude upon the person using them”

(316), and C consisting of scientific and technical terms, that are connected to specialties but barely used outside of that. By deleting words such as “great,” “fantastic,” and “bad” from the language, and replacing them with “plusgood,” “doubleplusgood,” and “ungood” (315), the language is greatly simplified. These decisions are of enormous consequence as a whole range of nuance and connotation is lost. The same approach is true for the abbreviated names of places or people, such as the Minipax (Ministry of Peace i.e. Ministry of War) or Nazi (National Socialism): “It was perceived that in thus abbreviating a name one narrowed and subtly altered its meaning, by cutting out most of the associations that would otherwise cling to it” (320). With a population dependent on the government to tell what is right and wrong, comparable changes in language form a considerable danger to intellectual and psychological freedom as the lack of nuance will result in the loss of concepts that one will not be able to employ anymore. The Appendix gives the following example:

A person growing up with Newsspeak as his sole language would no more know that *equal* had once had the secondary meaning of ‘politically equal’, or that *free* had once meant ‘intellectually free’, than for instance, a person who had never heard of chess would be aware of the secondary meanings attaching *queen* to *rook*. There would be many crimes and errors which it would be beyond his power to commit, simply because they were nameless and therefore unimaginable. (324)

Through the manipulation of language, the Party attempts to ensure that over time people lose the ability to stand up against them by taking away the language that is essential to any concept that opposes their ideals. Buchowsky emphasizes the importance of understanding Saussure’s notion of relational language for the interpretation and analysis of language in this novel, saying that influencing words results in changing concepts (571).

The last way in which the Party controls reality is through the full control over any form of documentation: “‘Who controls the past,’ ran the Party slogan, ‘controls the future: who controls the present controls the past’” (37). Winston works for the Ministry of Truth, where he rewrites “articles or news-items which for one reason or another it was thought necessary to alter, or, as the official phrase has it, to rectify” (41) in order to fit the present:

As soon as all the corrections which happened to be necessary in any particular number of the *Times* had been assembled and collated, that number would be reprinted, the original copy destroyed, and the corrected copy placed on the files in its stead. (42)

Once there is no evidence of something it may be assumed it, or they, have never existed. When Syme does not come to work anymore and his name disappears from a list it used to be on, Winston can only conclude, “Syme had ceased to exist: he had never existed” (154). The combination of doublethink and Newspeak present the citizens of Oceania with a reality they will accept as true, because their ability to believe double truths enables them to do so if they want to. The Party eases this desire through the “Two Minutes Hate” and “Hate Week” during which the people can express their common hatred of Big Brother’s nemesis Emmanuel Goldstein. In stimulating such events, the Party encourages people to copy those surrounding them and discourages people any form of divergent thought.

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Newspeak has not been developed as far as to achieve full control and complete deletion of undesirable concepts, so the Party needs the people who do not automatically apply it, to train their *crimestop*. Winston trains himself after he has been released, trying to perfect his ability of “stopping short, as though by instinct, at the threshold of any dangerous thought” (220). It is a form of “protective stupidity” (221) employed by people themselves, which also means that one can choose not to use

it. In doing so, one acts against the Party's doctrines and is able to voice heteroglossia, or divergent thought. In order to keep control of the language-based societal construct of Oceania, it is reinforced and controlled through the three tools discussed in Foucault's "Order of Discourse": forbidden speech, division of madness, and will to truth.

Reading *Nineteen Eighty-Four* through a Foucauldian lens, it becomes clear that forbidden speech does also function strongly in dystopian realities. Although Foucault describes forbidden speech mostly as concerning secrets ("Order of Discourse" 62), the novel takes it a step further as the speech, or thoughts – which are a mental form of speech – are not checked by external forces, such as police, but firstly bound to one's awareness of the Party's doctrines. Of course, secondly, as long as Newspeak has not been perfected to exclude any form of dissent, the Thought Police functions as backup, as discussed below. Rather than taboos or secrets, Oceania's citizens are free to speak of any idea as long as it conforms with Newspeak and the Party's doctrines. During the process of writing in the diary, Winston realizes that committing "*Thoughtcrime does not entail death: Thoughtcrime IS death*" (30). Breaching the boundaries of forbidden speech inevitably results in one's own death, which will help refrain those considering to do so. Thus forbidden speech is one way to keep Oceania's people bound to the doctrines of the Party.

Those who do choose to breach the boundaries set by the Party are placed into a group that is not taken seriously by the rest of society: the mad. The division of madness excludes partakers from the discourse of that particular society. Throughout the novel, Winston fears loneliness rather than the idea that he is mad; "He might be *alone* in holding that belief, and if alone, then a lunatic" (83). His lonely position makes him an outcast from society and as soon as he acts on his thoughts, he is in danger because "to do anything that suggested a taste for solitude, even to go for a walk by yourself, was always slightly dangerous. There even was a

word for it in Newspeak: *ownlife*" (85). The Party prefers unity, not merely in thought, but in deeds, too. During the interrogation, O'Brien tells Winston

You know perfectly well what is the matter with you. You have known it for years, though you have fought against the knowledge. You are mentally deranged. You suffer from a defective memory. You are unable to remember real events, and you persuade yourself that you remember other events which never happened... you are clinging to your disease under the impression that it is a virtue. (258)

By demeaning Winston's virtue to a disease, O'Brien actively places Winston and his divergent ideas outside the discourse of society. In doing so, he detaches Winston from the people around him, which places Winston in a vulnerable position, as well as making sure that any individual in contact with Winston will not heed anything he says, thus protecting them from his deviant ideas.

As mentioned above, the Party attempts to gain full control over what people think through forbidden speech and a division of madness. The will to truth "attempts to assimilate the others, both in order to modify them and to provide them with a foundation" ("Order of Discourse" 56), which shows the interconnectedness of the approaches. The Party's will to truth, their aim to define reality in one single truth, is achieved through the exclusion of divergent thoughts and ideas. Yet, the assimilation of forbidden speech and the division of madness are not complete, and the Party's will to truth can still be seen as a separate approach to "extinguish[ing] once and for all the possibility of independent thought" (201). One of the clearest examples of the will to truth lies in the exclusive use of English and Newspeak in Oceania. *The book* reads: "Except that English is its chief lingua franca and Newspeak its official language, it [Oceania] is not centralised in any way" (217), showing that the whole state is kept together by language, and language alone. To keep in control of English, as the use of

Newspeak is already under the full control of the Party, forbidden speech is employed. This, however, is not enough for the Party. In addition to prohibiting certain uses of language, the Party fully forbids any knowledge of foreign languages, so “it is absolutely necessary to their structure that there should be no contact with foreigners” (204). Through exclusion of ideas though prohibition of certain notions, people and foreign languages, the Party aims to gain full control and power over both the mental and the socio-geographical space of language within Oceania.

As long as this dystopian society has not become a utopia for the Party, which is to say, as long as Newspeak has not been perfected, the rules and laws must be overseen by an executive power. In Oceania, this power lies with the Thought Police, who function as Big Brother’s omniscient eyes in society. They work for the Party who use the motto, “BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU” (3), which is recurrent everywhere. Winston feels Big Brothers eyes on him everywhere:

On coins, on stamps, on the covers of books, on banners, on posters and on the wrapping of a cigarette packet – everywhere. Always the eyes watching you and the voice enveloping you. Asleep or awake, working or eating, indoors or out of doors, in the bath or in bed – no escape. Nothing was your own except the few cubic centimetres inside your skull. (29)

Analysing the influence of being watched all the time on the use of language, Lewis argues that once a person is aware of being watched, they are limited in how they can express themselves. He even claims that “the vitality of human thought freely expressed through language is the level of life that Newspeak seeks to decimate” (43). Constantly reminding the people in Oceania of Big Brother’s ubiquitous gaze is not enough, however. The intrusion into privacy goes a step further in the use of the telescreens.



In every house and office are telescreens that are used for news, exercise and for keeping an eye and ear on everyone. They are always on, both receiving and transmitting sound and image. “Any sounds that Winston made, about the level of a very low whisper, would be picked up by it...There was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment”(4 – 5). In order to convince everybody, Julia says, “I always look cheerful and I never shirk anything. Always yell with the crowd, that’s what I say. It’s the only way to be safe” (128). To escape from the telescreens is very hard to do within the city, where they have telescreens everywhere. Winston and Julia are clearly aware of these screens, because when they act illegally they hide either just out of sight of the telescreen or go out of the city into a meadow, where they spend time together. During the time spent in the Prole quarter, they expect to be safe as well. This appears to be miscalculation as all their trespasses against the Party are seen and, moreover, heard through a telescreen hidden behind a painting in the room. Even in prison, Winston is constantly watched by telescreens. The petty thieves do not seem to have any respect for them and yell abuse at them, but Winston, as result of years of reckoning with the screens, moves and talks as little as he can.

The real danger behind the ubiquitous eyes of Big Brother and the telescreens remains with the people behind them: the Thought Police. Rather than focussing on language as a spoken medium, they detect crimes in thoughts. These can show either in spoken words or in facial expression. The Thought Police use the telescreens to invade in each and every part of life. Winston’s neighbour is imprisoned for whispering “Down with Big Brother” (245) in his sleep, indicating that even during sleep, the Thought Police watch people. Yet, the people do not seem to mind, or even be aware of being watched. Moreover, Mr Parsons is thankful for having been intercepted before he acted on his unconscious thoughts. Winston, however, feels the danger of being seen and heard all the time. Even in a crowd, it is important not to reflect your thoughts in facial expression:

“It was terribly dangerous to let your thoughts wander when you were in any public place or within range of a telescreen. The smallest thing could give you away ... in any case, to wear an improper expression on your face ... was itself a punishable offence. There was even a word for it in Newspeak: *facecrime*” (65)

Rather than preventing divergent thought through prohibition, the Thought Police actively eliminates any threat, either by brainwashing or death penalty. The regular reminders of “Big Brother is Watching You” in combination with the telescreens and Thought Police function as a Panopticon prison, because the people never know whether they are being watched. The actions of the Thought Police underline the consequences of transgressions against the Party, thus a result people like Winston will behave more carefully.

Before rounding off the discussion of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* with the discussion of the role of dialogism, this section will read *Nineteen Eighty-Four* from a Saussurian perspective, exploring how the ideas of the arbitrariness of language and relational nature the novel provide new insights into the manipulation of language. Chapter 1 discussed how the arbitrariness of language and the relational nature of language may function as a tool for language change. Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* goes a step further by saying that not merely words are arbitrary, but concepts and connotations are as well. Using doublethink, any individual in Oceania is able to deny and believe any form of knowledge at once. It is clear that Winston grew up with empirical epistemology as he has trouble accepting that the laws of gravity may not be true as the party claims. He keeps referring back to the evidence of his own eyes and eventually decides that some evidence cannot be denied:

It struck him as curious that you could create dead men but not living ones.

Comrade Ogilvy, who had never existed in the present, now existed in the past, and when once the acts of forgery was forgotten, he would exist just as authentically, and upon the same evidence, as Charlemagne or Julius Caesar. (50)

By declaring Winston mentally dysfunctional, the Party member O'Brien rejects the validity of Winston's empirical thought process. As they do not match with the Party's ideas nor Newspeak, Winston's thoughts are contaminated with deficient ideas from which he must be purged. O'Brien attempts to correct Winston's thought processes to match Newspeak and train him to doublethink. Once Winston is corrected, he is able to accept Newspeak and the usage principles much better, resulting in his use of words and language that has been defined "rigidly and strip[ped] of undesirable meanings" (322), as well as undesirable connotations. The ability of Party scientists to reconstruct language in such a thorough manner reflects the arbitrariness and relational nature of language. Rather than reflecting the world, language in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is used to constitute the world and to manipulate reality and lived experience at will through clever rhetoric.

Newspeak employs defamiliarization in order to make certain concepts more acceptable to its speakers, as is clear from its B vocabulary, which the Appendix discusses as political language characterized by compound words. These compounds often consist of euphemisms that influence the perception of the sign referred to. The linguists in Oceania had concluded that "in thus abbreviating a name one narrowed and subtly altered its meaning, but cutting out most of the associations that would otherwise cling to it" (320), which enables the Party to change a word like "labour camp" into "joycamp." It is also seen in the names for the four ministries that rule Oceania;

The Ministry of Truth, which concerned itself with news, entertainment, education and the fine arts. The Ministry of Peace, which concerned itself with war. The Ministry of Love, which maintained law and order. And the Ministry of Plenty, which was responsible for economic affairs. Their names, in Newspeak: Minitrue, Minipax, Miniluv and Miniplenty. (6)

Orwell uses defamiliarization to show that the arbitrariness of language allows for reversals in interpretation, especially when looking at the three party slogans, which leads to the topic of normalization. Even though Winston is aware of the fear the ministries inspire, he does not grasp the manipulative rhetoric that might help him deconstruct their names. They have been normalized so much for Winston that he is unable to defamiliarize them or appropriate them ironically.

Chapter 1 claimed that a dystopia is underway to become a utopia when all the negative consequences of that society's form have been negated or normalized. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* normalization is characterized by orthodoxy. As soon as individuals stop thinking about what they are told or have to do, they fit within the Party's ideal society. One of the ways in which they communize every individual is by cutting out gendered pronouns from daily use; "'Mrs' was a word somewhat discountenanced by the Party – you were supposed to call everyone 'comrade'" (22). Another, more extreme, example of normalization is the Party's attempt to equate opposites, both through a philosophy and doublethink. The three Party slogans are:

WAR IS PEACE

FREEDOM IS SLAVERY

IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH (6)

Philosophically, each of these slogans can be argued to be true from the elitist point of view of the Inner Party members. The middleclass citizens, like Winston, may need to employ doublethink to accept such claims, whereas some individuals accept them with greatest ease. During an announcement from the Ministry of Plenty at the office the reception of the announcement differs per person. Winston does not do much with the information, neither accepting nor protesting, while a well-indoctrinated man "swallowed it fanatically" (62) and his colleague Syme employs doublethink to "swallow" the news. Winston, Syme and the indoctrinated man resemble three different stages of normalization. It is not merely the

normalization of a way of speaking, but a way of taking in information and knowledge. The Party prefers Oceania to simply accept their messages, like orthodoxy; “Orthodoxy means not thinking – not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconsciousness” (56). Oceania allows little to no space for independent thought and leaves the illusion of space, like Charrington’s attic, for diverging individuals, only to catch them red-handed, thus ensuring full control of independent thinkers.

From the discussion above, it is clear that the aim of the Party’s politics is to establish full control over Oceania’s inhabitants by reducing their ability to use language freely. Moreover, they do not merely influence spoken and written language, but thought language as well. Lewis describes their attempt as a “process of dehumanization” which uses “the systematic destruction of language so as to ensure Party orthodoxy by reducing the capacity to think” (28). In this claim he touches on a point of major importance, that is, the capacity to think. When Winston writes in the diary, he notices that “he was doing so a totally different memory had clarified itself in his mind, to the point where he almost felt equal to writing it down” (11). Writing enables him to clear his mind, to make up his own ideas, which may diverge from the Party doctrines. Lewis concludes that “*The Principles of Newspeak* envisage a world where the link between language and thought is severed completely” (46), which is the exact opposite of what Winston achieves during writing. It is for that exact reason that the Party is very strict about divergent behaviours, or *ownlife*, and new ideas. If given the choice, the Party would never allow heteroglossia to exist, as dialogism between new ideas and the Party doctrines would only be a threat to the Party’s ideology. It must also be said that even though the Party appears to have much influence on society’s use of language, there may be hope buried in the novel. Throughout the narrative, Winston claims that “If there is hope...it lies in the proles” (72), as the proles are free to use language. They are the lowest class in society and therefore not to be feared according to *the book*; “They were beneath suspicion” (75). Winston’s

hope that the Proles will rebel is supported by the Appendix, which suggests that, despite the Party's effort, Newspeak did fully succeeded. As long as the dystopian features have not been overcome and are still seen as such in society, there exists hope.

#### 4. The Emptiness of Language in *Fahrenheit 451*

This section will argue that the constitution of reality, the position of the protagonist Montag, and the awareness of that position in society are all strongly connected to the lack of meaning of words in *Fahrenheit 451*. Using Foucault's theories on exclusion from discourse, this section will focus on the use of language to constitute reality, the protagonist's perception of that reality, as well as the rather unusual form of panopticon-resembling surveillance present in *Fahrenheit 451*. Furthermore, this section will explore the arbitrary nature and defamiliarization are employed in *Fahrenheit 451* to to reinforce a hedonistic discourse that is empty of meaning.

The perception of the world in *Fahrenheit 451* strongly depends on the protagonist's perception of reality. He is the vocalizer for a major part of the third-person narration. Throughout the plot, Guy Montag realizes more and more much the world is constituted through empty language and how little aware people are of its consequences. The perception of reality in *Fahrenheit 451* can be divided in three segments: the state's ideal, Montag's realization of the forcedness of that ideal, and Montag's escape from that reality.

The ultimate intention within the unnamed city in which *Fahrenheit 451* is set is to attain infinitive happiness. This hedonist aim is mainly achieved through mindless entertainment, mostly through screens set up in parlours, to keep people distracted from reality. Montag's wife, Mildred, is obsessed with the screens. She has upgraded her parlour into a room with three screens, rather than one, as well as pay extra for the upgrade that has the programmes she watches address her by her name. The content of the programmes are mostly dramas with little to no content value. When Montag asks his wife what a script is about, she can only name the characters and tell that she can now perform the lines of one character in the play, foregrounding role playing over authenticity. The content is of no interest to her. The parlour functions as a second family, where Mildred is familiar with all the people in it. When she is not occupied

with the “parlour family,” or friends who join her in the parlour, she listens to programmes via earpieces called Seashells, even during the night, constantly drowning her in input. Yet, Mildred seems little concerned with lack of silence.

As a fireman, Montag is charged with the destruction of censored books by burning them and the houses they are located in. Before realizing what the consequences of these actions are, he does not see any negative sides to it. He tells himself that “You weren’t hurting anyone, you were hurting only *things*! And since things couldn’t be hurt, since things felt nothing, and things don’t scream or whimper...there was nothing to tease your conscience later. You were simply cleaning up. Janitorial work, essentially” (34). Only when a woman prefers to burn with her books rather than leave them behind, does Montag doubt his devotion to the firemen. More and more he realizes that the language constituting society is empty. Nothing available has value to people anymore, except for the availability of entertainment on screens presented to them.

After a conversation with Clarisse McClellan, an eccentric seventeen-year-old neighbour, Montag starts to wonder why he is not really happy. He thought he was for years, never questioning its truth, and now, after a simple conversation, he doubts everything. He realises he has grown numb to everything and everybody, even Mildred. The same is true for society. When Mildred attempts suicide with sleeping pills, the men who save her are not personally affected by her plight, but just do their duty. They call her a case who “jumped off the cap of a pillbox” (13), like nine or ten other cases per night. Through a euphemism, the seriousness of Mildred’s disparity is downplayed as routine business.

The following morning, Mildred does not remember and denies ever attempting suicide. When discussing their relationship, Montag finds out he cannot think of when and where he and Mildred met or how their relationship began and it bothers him. She seems little bothered by it, however, and goes on with her life. When she is having friends over in her parlour, Montag



enters and reads lines from “Dover Beach” (1867) by Matthew Arnold, a lyric poem on (the lack of) potential for human happiness in a world “in a time bereft of faith” (Schow 26). He is shocked to see how affected Mrs. Phelps is by the poem; she sobs uncontrollably. Mrs. Bowles loudly protests, saying, “I’ve always said, poetry and tears, poetry and suicide and crying, and awful feelings, poetry and sickness; *all that mush!*” (97). She believes that literature ought to be illegal and this ideal is supported by her friend’s reaction. Mildred consoles Mrs. Phelps saying, “Come on, let’s be cheery, you turn the ‘family’ on, now. Go ahead. Let’s laugh and be happy, now stop crying, we’ll have a party!” (97), which shows exactly how society in *Fahrenheit 451* deals with emotions. *Fahrenheit 451* suggests literary language has the power to move people as it has meaningful language that has not yet lost its connotation and subsequent emotions. Yet, it is outlawed as the society seeks only to satisfy superficial desires, rather than deeply-felt lived experience. Literary language, as opposed to the kind of informative language sanctioned by the state, is potentially subversive.

The state in *Fahrenheit 451* relies for its stability on a demure attitude from individuals in society when it comes to the gratification of their desires. They need to accept the roles they are offered, both professionally and in play, through the interactive entertainments on the screens. Captain Beatty argues that in society “We must all be alike. Not everyone born free and equal. As the Constitution says, but everyone *made* equal. Each man the image of every other” (55), which is achieved through the availability of entertainment which does not touch on any subject that might cause trouble, as “You must understand that our civilization is so vast that we can’t have our minorities upset and stirred” (56). Rather than having people think for themselves, everything that would divide society is removed by fire. Even the memories of the dead are actively forgotten, about which Beatty says: “Let’s not quibble over individuals with memoriams. Forget them. Burn all, burn everything. Fire is bright and fire is clean” (57). Beatty

views his job as a way of making people happy, telling Guy to “Stick with the firemen, Montag. All else is dreary chaos!” (103)

What makes Montag stand up against the state’s ideals is his curiosity, sparked by “a kind of gentle hunger that touched over everything with a tireless curiosity” (3) on Clarisse’s face. Her questions make him more attentive to the numbness of the state’s version of reality and make him ask questions himself. After Clarisse’s fatal car accident, Montag goes to find Faber,<sup>3</sup> whom he met in the park years earlier. As soon as he convinces Faber he is to be trusted, they discuss how the hatred of books could ever grow so much that the majority of society accepts the ban on books. Faber explains that as the world became crowded, books became less of an elitist form of entertainment and they “levelled down to a sort of past pudding norm” (51). When the nineteenth century sped up everything, writings got shorter until they simply disappeared. “One column, two sentences, a headline! Then, in mid-air, all vanishes! Whirl man’s mind around about so fast under the pumping hands of publishers, exploiters, broadcasters that the centrifuge flings off all unnecessary, time-wasting thought!” (52). The shift from complex language to language as propaganda is reflected in education as well as “School is shortened, discipline relaxed, philosophies, histories, languages dropped, English and spelling gradually neglected, finally almost completely ignored” (53). The most interesting part of this change is that it was not instructed by an elite or government or any form of powerful group. Faber explains:

There was no dictum, no declaration, no censorship, to start with, no!

Technology, mass exploitation, and minority pressure carried the trick, thank

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<sup>3</sup> Faber’s name alludes to the influential publishing house Faber & Faber who have published some of the most renowned and influential authors of the twentieth century, including T. S. Eliot, Ted Hughes, Harold Pinter, Sylvia Plath, William Golding, Samuel Beckett, and Seamus Heaney.

God. Today, thanks to them, you can stay happy all the time, you are allowed to read comics, the good old confessions, or trade journals. (55)

The slacking attitude towards language has enabled people to step closer to the ultimate goal of the state: happiness for everyone. To attain happiness, however, the state has decided that any impurity that might stand in the way of happiness is to be expelled from society. Faber compares it to pores on a face, asking “So now do you see why books are hated and feared? They show the pores in the face of life. The comfortable people want only wax moon faces, poreless, hairless, expressionless” (79). This approach to life is one with enormous consequences, as Montag realises it has caused him to become numb to life. All the empty words in entertainment are like sand in a sieve, reminding Montag of a scene from his childhood:

Once as a child he had sat upon a yellow dune by the sea in the middle of the blue and hot summer day, trying to fill a sieve with sand, because a cruel cousin had said, “Fill this sieve and you’ll get a dime!” And the faster he poured, the faster it sifted through with a hot whispering. His hand were tired, the sand was boiling, the sieve was empty. (74)

The same is true for the people around Montag. It does not matter what he says to Mildred, because she will hear it, nod, and go on with her life without changing a thing. He complains about this to Faber saying “Nobody listens to me any more. I can’t talk to the walls because they’re yelling at *me*. I can’t talk to my wife; she listens to the *walls*. I just want someone to hear what I have to say” (78). The emptiness of words and the resistivity against meaningful words are of great impact on the interconnectedness of individuals in society. Despite being husband and wife, Mildred and Montag have no emotional connection. Words are manipulated by society itself to become meaningless in order to establish bliss for the masses, not unlike Barthes description of “Ornamental

Cookery” (*Mythologies* 78-80). He shows that the glaze on cakes in magazines presents the reader with the notion that they can achieve the same perfect consumption through glaze, not unlike the use of empty language can help achieve perfect bliss.

The firemen have a double function in society. Firstly, they ensure that the majority of people can live the blissful life that they desire by making sure that the rebels are scared of losing their books and their homes to fires. More importantly, the firemen function as part of the entertainment: “You firemen provide a circus now and then at which buildings are set off and crowds gather for the pretty blaze, but it is a small sideshow indeed, and hardly necessary to keep things in line. So few want to be rebels anymore” (83). Rather than only functioning as a force of a panopticon-like surveillance of society, the firemen are part of the entertaining side of society.

The more aware Montag becomes of how society functions and how its emptiness is constructed with empty language, the more he wants to escape that reality. After burning Captain Beatty and the other firemen alive as revenge for having to burn his own home, he says farewell to Faber and flees to the river. The only way to escape the Hound, a mechanical dog, is to float downstream. In fleeing the city and ending up in a forest, Montag not merely escapes a physical place, but escapes a reality that is constructed through hollowed out language. As soon as he wanders around in the forest, he remembers much more from his past, such as his awareness of his surroundings. He used to be “so fully aware of the world that he would be afraid” (136), which he now has to learn again. Rather than using his eyes and ears, the main focus of the emptied-out parlour screens and the Seashells, he has to reconnect to the senses of smell and touch, as well as the emotions that accompany those senses. The clearest example can be found in his perception of fire when he arrives at the campfire of the hiding intellectuals; “That small motion, the white and red color, a strange fire because it meant a different thing to him. It was not burning, it was *warming*” (139). Rather than seeing the fire as entertainment in

an entertainment-focussed society, Montag experiences the warmth it provides, the people surrounding it. Being away from the city, Montag is introduced to a discourse that allows for proliferation of meaning, which would be categorised as madness in the city. A broader discourse results in new insights in reality, thus *Fahrenheit 451* forms a clear example of restrictive influence of language on our perception of reality.

It must be emphasized that reality is not merely formed through our surroundings, environment, or society, but is also how people perceive themselves, the idea of individuality. This idea strongly connects to Montag's awareness of the existence of realities and discourses existing in parallel. When he has escaped the city and the Hound, Montag questions what use it is to leave an empty reality. Nobody in the city will miss him, Mildred is gone, and his house is burned to the ground. The intellectual Granger presents Montag with an insight he had when his grandfather had passed: "when he died, I suddenly realized I wasn't crying for him at all, but for all the things he did...He was individual. He was an important man...He shaped the world. He *did* things to the world." (149). He values a person's life by looking at their mark on the world. In the city, there are no individuals. Everybody is easily replaced, the parlour screens keep people happy and entertained and no one ever influences reality as long as hedonism is the ultimate goal and the accompanying discourse is held high. When Montag decided not to, he broke that discourse and made a difference. This idea is also relevant when it comes to books. In his discussion on the appreciation of books, Faber argues the need for three things: "number one, as I said, quality of information. Number two: leisure to digest it. And number three: the right to carry out actions based on what we learn from the interaction of the first two." (81). Thinking and acting on that thinking are the exact opposite of the city's hedonist ideals and are therefore undesirable in society. The hatred of informative books in *Fahrenheit 451* is thus based on the fear of individuality and its effects on society as a whole.

The normalization in discourse in *Fahrenheit 451* is approached differently compared to either *The Handmaid's Tale* or *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Rather than adding new phrases and ideals to replace earlier ideas, the discourse in Bradbury's novel excludes the need for any discourse that might cross the ideal of bliss. The changes in discourse become most evident in the phrases Montag learns from reading books. As soon as he has read one, they will not leave his mind. In public transport he is constantly bothered by the phrases "Consider the lilies of the field" and "They toil not —" (75), both taken from Matthew 6:28, and when he utters the words "Once upon a time" at work, his boss says, "'Once upon a time!' Beatty said. 'What kind of talk is that?' Fool, Montag thought to himself, you'll give it away. At the last fire, a book of fairy tales, he'd glanced at a single line" (31). The ease with which book-related phrases return to a discourse that has slowly excluded them is indicative of the power that remains with these phrases.

Bradbury does not indicate in what year *Fahrenheit 451* takes place and does not write about any catastrophe that might cause memory loss, so it must be assumed that the phrases above have been lost over time. However, they are not the only memory to be lost. Thinking about his relationship with Mildred, Montag realizes that he does not remember where they met. When he asks her, she does not think it important that neither remembers something that happened only 10 years earlier. The availability of entertainment around the clock, including during the night, appears to disable the formation of new memories. The only way to regain these memories presents itself to Montag when he is in the forest and lies down on the ground. He calls out, "I remember. Montag clung to the earth. I remember. Chicago. Chicago a long time ago. Millie and I. *That's* where we met! I remember now. Chicago. A long time ago." (153). Alongside books and the memories connected to familiar phrases, nature seems a useful tool against the normalization of this hedonist society, as it enables the revaluation of perception of reality and the regaining of lost memory. In the city, where nature is of no consequence, the

lack of memory flattens out the language, causing people to use euphemisms for rather emotional and serious events, such as Mildred's suicide, which is only described as a "case" who "jumped off the cap of a pillbox" (13). Using euphemisms for negative events enables even the caretakers to lead a relatively happy life outside of work. Euphemisms are normalized in order for people to see negative emotions as trivial happenings by making use of less emotive language.

The discussion of normalized language in *Fahrenheit 451* also calls attention to the notions of arbitrariness of language as well as its relational nature. Rather than a discourse being forced on the inhabitants of the city by a group of elitists, the discourse in Bradbury's novel is formed by the people themselves and their wish for blissful happiness. The relational nature of language comes back in the phrases from a fairy tale book and the bible, as discussed above. In being brought back to the language by Montag, they attract certain ideas. A phrase as "once upon a time" can never again be seen apart from the genre of tales it belongs to. On the other hand, the connotations of the word "intellectual" have changed remarkably; "the word 'intellectual' of course, became the swear word it deserved to be" (55). As science and knowledge are the opposites of ignorance and bliss, they are considered bad. A well-read individual is seen as a criminal: "So! A book is a loaded gun in the house next door. Burn it. Take the shot from the weapon. Breach man's mind. Who knows who might be the target of the well-read man?" (56). Even though the word itself does not change, the arbitrary nature of language allows the connotations to change drastically. This instance emphasizes how the meaning of any word in today's world, both in and outside of fiction, relies on the ideals of society to give it meaning. The more the state constricts the proliferation of meaning, the less freedom of thought and the duller reality becomes in its sameness, thus achieving a monologism based on empty language.

From the fact that *Fahrenheit 451*'s society is not headed by a totalitarian regime does not automatically follow it is not a totalitarian regime at all. Rather than denying people certain ideas, society makes sure that there is no room for ideas that might stand in the way of society's happiness. Clarisse says, "They run us to ragged by the end of the day we can't do anything but go to bed or head for a Fun Park" (27), which is not a bad way to be kept from thinking too much. On the other hand, even a society ruled by hedonist ideals for everyone needs exclusion of certain ideas and discourses to function properly. *Fahrenheit 451*'s society is a totalitarian state that is kept in place by the majority in society: the people themselves. Society as a whole functions as a panopticon prison, as everybody is seen by the people surrounding them. Inadvertently they all spy on each other without the intention of doing so. Montag is first confronted by this idea when Captain Beatty tells him that, in addition to Mildred's friends, Mildred herself reported him to be in possession of forbidden books. When Montag is on the run, the police employs the entertainment channels to use the citizens to find him, telling their audience, "The fugitive cannot escape if everyone in the next minute looks from his house. Ready!...Everyone up, everyone out. He couldn't be missed! The only man running alone in the night city" (132). After escaping the city, Montag realizes that "He was moving from an unreality that was frightening into a reality that was unreal because it was new" (133). And in this unreal reality he meets the intellectuals who hide from the police because they protect knowledge by memorizing books. Faber had claimed that "There aren't many of them, and I guess the government's never considered them a great enough danger to go in and track them down" (126), which is affirmed by Granger's explanation:

the city has never cared so much about us to bother with an elaborate chase like this to find us. A few crackpots with verses in their heads can't touch them, and they know it and we know it; everyone knows it. So long as the cast population doesn't wander about quoting the Magna Carta and the Constitution, it's all right.



The firemen were enough to check that, now and then. No, the cities don't bother us. (147)

The intellectual confirms that they are not hunted as long as they do not influence attempts to reach people with their knowledge from books. This decision strongly reflects the claim above, saying that rather than denying people certain ideas, society makes sure that there is no room for ideas that might stand in the way of society's happiness. By entertaining the people and excluding those who actively protest the ideals, society controls the factors that might distract society from happiness as ultimate goal.

Having established that *Fahrenheit 451* resembles a totalitarian state, it is also expected to reflect the three approaches Foucault describes in his essay on discourses as discussed in Chapter 1. The following paragraphs will shortly touch upon each of these, first of which is forbidden speech. It has become clear from denying ideas is an essential part of maintaining an attempt at general happiness in society, which results in a lack of bans except for being alone and taking time to think and maul books or divergent ideas over. Society prefers to talk about nothing, as Clarisse tells Montag, "People don't talk about anything." "Oh, they must!" "No, not anything." (28). Emptiness in words and entertainment must be maintained, Faber explains; "The bigger your market, Montag, the less you handle controversy" (55) as controversy could lead to thought and thought must be kept in order to achieve bliss. Asking questions leads to suspicion as is clear from Beatty's description of Clarisse: "The girl? She was a time bomb...She didn't want to know *how* a thing was done but *why*." (57). Like her family, Clarisse is not involved much with society. They prefer to spend their time together, talking and laughing until late in the night, unlike the majority of society, which brings us to the topic of the division of madness.

Clarisse, who enjoys doing the exact opposite of what the rest of society does, is marked as a special case, which too she enjoys, telling Montag "I'm seventeen and I'm crazy. My uncle

says the two always go together.” (5). She is sent to the psychiatrist, where they attempt to cure her from thinking, but she will have none of it. She goes on to say, “I rarely watch the ‘parlor walls’ or go to races or Fun Parks. So I’ve lots of time for crazy thoughts, I guess.” (7). Only a day after Montag talks to her, she is killed in a car crash. Although the novel never explicitly claims it, there are indications this was not an accident after all. It might have been an execution. Her ability to diverge from the *status quo* forms a danger to society’s wish for stability and happiness, resulting in the removal of any person who might stand against that ideal. After burning a woman alive, Montag starts to doubt whether books might be good after all. He tells Mildred, “You don’t stay for nothing.” “She was simple-minded.” “She was as rational as you and I, more so perhaps, and we burned her” (48). Mildred’s assumption that the woman was mad enables her to deal with divergence in a way standard to society, as the words and actions of a mentally unstable individual are not worth consideration. Beatty takes it further by turning it around: “Any man’s insane who thinks he can fool the government and us” (31), which results in the conclusion that the words of any individual that speaks against the majority are mad and thus to be ignored. As soon as Montag starts to show divergent thought, Beatty warns him with words by John Donne: “Who are little wise, the best fools be” (101), using the only weapon Montag had against society, literature, against Montag himself. No, rather than accepting divergence, Beatty prefers to deal with it directly:

We know how to nip most of them in the bud, early. You can’t build a house without nails and wood. If you don’t want a house built, hide the nails and wood. If you don’t want a man unhappy politically, don’t give him two sides to a question to worry him; give him one. Better yet, give him none... Cram them full of non-combustible data. (58)

This last claim immediately validates Beatty’s will to truth, as a mind filled with non-combustible data enables society to dictate truth when it is needed. Rather than having people

think about relevant issues, Beatty prefers people to follow the majority, arguing that, “We [firemen] stand against the small tide of those who want to make everyone unhappy with conflicting theory and thought” (59). When talking with Montag about his decision to stay with the firemen or to leave, Faber only says “I want it to be your decision, not mine, not the Captain’s. But remember that the Captain belongs to the most dangerous enemy to truth and freedom, the solid unmoving cattle of the majority” (104). In saying this, Faber does two extraordinary things. Firstly, he presents Montag, who always follows orders, with a choice, and secondly, he warns against the majority. Faber is fully aware of the power of an unknowing mass and warns Montag against it. He is fully aware of his inability to stand up against society, as even “with all my knowledge and scepticism, I have never been able to argue with a one-hundred-piece symphony orchestra” (80). Montag is also made aware of the fallibility of the system, however, when he watches the police pursuit together with the intellectuals. When they lose his scent on the riverbank, they make up a new story, a new truth, to function as entertainment. One of the scientists exclaims:

They’re faking. You threw them off at the river. They can’t admit it. They know they can hold their audience only so long. The show’s got to have a snap ending quick! If they started searching the whole damn river it might take all night. So they’re sniffing for a scapegoat to end things with a bang. Watch. They’ll catch Montag in the next five minutes! (141)

And he is right, as minutes later “an announcer on the dark screen [says], “The search is over, Montag is dead; a crime against society has been avenged” (142), which is a lie. The television makers made sure the man they caught in Montag’s stead was not recognizable at all, thus convincing everyone he had been caught and killed. Society, and mostly those in control of entertainment, make sure to exclude any divergent voices by creating truth themselves and denouncing everyone who shares his disagreement in

society to be mentally unstable. Analysing *Fahrenheit 451* through the lens of Foucauldian discourse shows that the three approaches (forbidden speech, the division of madness, and the will to truth) to exclusion from a discourse are also true for totalitarian states that are not ruled through terror, but hedonism.

Before turning to the roles of heteroglossia and monologism, these paragraphs will focus on the use of defamiliarization in *Fahrenheit 451* and the role of books in a discussion of language by focussing on the role the intellectuals have assigned themselves. Throughout the novel, Bradbury used very few newly invented words. He does, however, change the definition of a fair few, as discussed in the section of language arbitrariness. Firstly, the novel plays with the idea of living and dead and the grey area that is left between the two. The clearest example is the mechanical Hound used by the firemen. The first encounter with the machine as “the dead beast, the living beast.” (22). It is designed to track the chemical composition of people and to sting his targets with a paralyzing venom. The Hound is no more than a machine, and yet, their inability to control it makes Montag wonder he should be scared of it. When the Hound attacks him he burns it with a fire thrower and watches “the dead-living thing fiddle the air and die.” (114). By playing on the line between life and death in a machine, the novel also reflects on the line between life and death for the human characters. Montag describes Mildred as “a body displayed on the lid of a tomb, her eyes fixed to the ceiling by invisible threads of steel, immovable” (10), not unlike a lifeless body. Being absorbed by the entertainment, Mildred barely has any life to her, anymore. Through the discussion of a machine as alive, the novel questions whether being alive equals living using Mildred as example.

A second form of defamiliarization centres around the hatred society has towards books as a medium. The complete novel focusses on the illegality of book, but the reason why is never explicitly named. Rather than explaining that it is not the words, but the ideas portrayed in the books, the firemen burn everything that might trigger divergent ideas as long as there are books

on site to prove the crime. The intellectuals hiding in the forest take a different approach to books by understanding their function and limitations. One of the intellectuals introduces Montag to the men present at the fire, saying:

And this other fellow is Charles Darwin, and this one is Schopenhauer, and this one is Einstein, and this one here at my elbow is Mr. Albert Schweitzer, a very kind philosopher indeed. Here we all are, Montag. Aristophanes and Mahatma Gandhi and Gautama Buddha and Confucius and Thomas Love Peacock and Thomas Jefferson and Mr. Lincoln, if you please. We are also Matthew, Marc, Luke and John. (145)

Rather than seeing themselves as intellectuals, they see themselves as book covers. They understand that books are not merely the products of printers, but the ideas captured in them. By looking at books from this angle, Bradbury defamiliarizes the simple notion of “book” into a concept of knowledge to be relied on and shared through the ages.

The intellectuals’ aim is to “keep the knowledge we think we will need, intact and safe. We’re not out to incite or anger anyone yet” (145). They realize that it is not a fight between firemen and individuals in possession of books, but between ideals of hedonism and the freedom of thought. They emphasize that “The most important single thing we had to pound into ourselves is that we were not important, we mustn’t be pendants; we were not to feel superior to anyone else in the world. We’re nothing more than dust jackets for books, of no significance otherwise.” (146). Items as simple as books are brought to life through memorization, which is a useful way to think about books and the knowledge they contain. Ray Bradbury clearly employs defamiliarization in an unusual manner to ensure that the readers will have to reevaluate notions such as living and items as simple as books.

The dialogism in *Fahrenheit 451* consists of a clash between an ardent desire for happiness in the form of bliss for all people in society and people’s curiosity for discourse that

is lost. The heteroglossia in *Fahrenheit 451* is formed by thought rather than written discourse or divergence. Society would rather have people just being entertained by screens or fun parks or other amusement. Curiosity is a big part of being able to think freely. Clarisse and her family are marked as strange because they think, converse, and take the time to do so as Faber describes quality of text and leisure to think about it, as well as acting on it as freedom. His description of meaningful reading gives an insight in language, showing that freedom can only exist when divergent thoughts and discussion are allowed to be part of a discourse.

*Fahrenheit 451* is the perfect example of reality control through language without the need of a police state or suppression of the masses. The surveillance is self-imposed by society and maintained by society. In addition, the approach to language control is unique compared to *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, as language is not limited through rules and regulations but hollowed out with entertainment. This novel shows the relevance of literary language, by discussing its redeeming qualities and presenting people as book covers that wait for the masses to need books again. Books themselves are not of much value. It is the thoughts in these publications that are of paramount importance in the revival of meaningful language in *Fahrenheit 451*.

## Conclusion

The structuralist and formalist concepts discussed in Chapter 1 and developed as critical tools with which to analyse the dystopian novels, have resulted in significant conclusions throughout the analyses of the three dystopian novels above. The analyses reveal that despite the various focusses and ideals in the dystopian novels, they contain a multitude of similarities that, from a structuralist perspective indicate some strong starting points for structuring dystopian novels as a genre, as Propp did for fairy-tales. Firstly, the protagonist is subject to the ideology ruling society. The plot requires the protagonist's awareness of the situation and the negativity before it is negated or normalized. The analyses show that awareness may have always been there, as

in case with Offred, or it may only come to the protagonist during the plot like Guy Montag. All dystopian protagonists explore divergence in language, either supported by other deviating individuals such as Julia for Winston, Moira for Offred, and Clarisse for Montag, or through tools such as defamiliarization and refuting Foucault's principles of exclusion of language. The protagonist must rebel against monologism that oppresses any form of heteroglossia. This leads to the conclusion that no matter the ideology of the dystopia, the objective is achieved through totalitarianism, which can take the form of a police state as found in Orwell and Atwood's novels or through bliss as written by Bradbury.

The hegemonial power over society is achieved through knowledge of the system called language, which shows the arbitrary and relational nature of nature, and through exclusion of diverging discourses by changing them into forbidden speech, invalidating ideas by marking them as madness, or by redefining reality through a will to truth. All three dystopian novels analysed show these approaches in different ways. Society in *The Handmaid's Tale* relies on a redefinition of reality through a full change of discourse and limitations on the use of language for women, whereas society in *Fahrenheit 451* is drowned in empty language, thus drowning out any discourse that might threaten a chance at bliss.

This fight between discourses in dystopian novels supports the idea that language is at the centre of dystopian novels and indicative of their position on the utopia/dystopia scale. Within a dystopia, the protagonist will always fight the hegemonic discourse that results from an ideology, – knowingly or unknowingly – aiming for the availability of heteroglossia, or the freedom to think for oneself. Once a monologism takes over completely, both in discourse and mentally, it is a mere matter of time before the negative perception of an ideology is negated or normalized, resulting in the ideology-based utopia. A dystopian plot, however, relies on the rebellion against that ideal, thus portraying the hope that remains; divergent thoughts are very difficult to remove from society.

These insights are of value for academics in various fields due to the broad application of structuralism, as well as for the interest in the dystopian genre. The analyses of the novels above form a starting point for a structuralist analysis of the dystopian genre, which may yield a deeper understanding of their structure and the meaning in the layers between discourse and plot. In her analysis of *The Handmaid's Tale*, Wisker uses the words 'doublespeak' and 'thought police' (17) to address events in a different way. Yet, she shows awareness of similar processes taking place in both novels. Not only have such novel-related terms evolved into accepted notions in academics. They also have a profound influence on society, causing female protesters in women's marches to dress like Handmaids or resulting in criticism towards politicians for using doublespeak to influence, and even the *Guardian&Mail* warning for the dangers of "tweetspeak" as the newest form of newspeak (Mann). Indeed, the terms have become so popular, they will even be used to describe politics in popular television series such as *The Blacklist* (2013–) (see S5E17 5:30). Taking today's interest in dystopian novels and their relevance for today's society together, it may be time to take Joe Dator's cartoon more seriously. Because if we need to replace the dystopian novels from the fiction to the non-fiction shelves, it may well prove worth to further research a deeper understanding of manipulation of reality through language.

Despite the rather dissimilar stories, all three novels have proven much alike in their use of language. The tools discussed in Chapter 1 have provided the insights that the structures underneath dystopian novels is more present than one would expect at first sight. Although *Fahrenheit 451* provided less controversial uses of language or methods of restriction, it gave a clear insight in less obvious approaches to language manipulation, which are perhaps more relevant to today's society. *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* have shown that language can be manipulated in many ways to gain power, but also, that with the correct tools, such as defamiliarization, one can escape these manipulative approaches.



Having extensively explored language manipulation in these novels, this essay leaves open the question how other dystopian novels treat the subject of language and power. As these three novels are all from the late twentieth century, it may be interesting to explore dystopian novels from the twenty-first century to see whether their themes or approaches to reality manipulation through language have changed, or maybe even have a completely new approach. As language is never static it is to be expected that literary language will change with it, providing new insights into manipulation in every new dystopian novel.

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