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Dystopian Dissymmetry

Koning, Faye

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Dystopian Dissymmetry

Faye Koning

Dr Newton and Dr van Leeuwen

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Introduction

Nineteen-Eighty-Four was published in 1948, and has become one of the most influential texts of the twentieth century. It is a key text in the dystopian genre, and its lasting impact on contemporary culture and politics is unlike that of any other dystopian texts written in the last century. George Orwell could not have known that his *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* would inspire Bowie to write one of his most renowned works, *Diamond Dogs*: ‘Cut off from contact with the outer world, and with the past, the citizen of Oceania is like a man in interstellar space, who has no way of knowing which direction is up, and which is down’ (207).

Similarly to Orwell’s *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, many dystopian texts are interested in the practice of revising history and popular culture. Popular culture is often used by the dystopian totalitarian regime to keep its citizens subdued. Popular culture often revises itself, and this is essential for the dystopian regime as well in order to keep its citizens in check. What better way to study the interaction of dystopian fiction with popular culture by highlighting a narrative that combines the two? Throughout his career David Bowie has been interested in pushing boundaries and exploring the unknown. He has taken on the voice of the outsider, a narrator who takes his listeners by the hand and introduces them to new worlds and new ways of thinking and listening. His Berlin years and his glam rock years have been largely covered in biographies and academic writing, but Bowie explores the dark sides of our world in all of his albums. In Bowie’s musical legacy, his lyrics, I have uncovered the narrative for my thesis. My thesis research will revolve around the following thesis question: Does Bowie’s use of intertextuality, performance and spatiality allow him to depict a dystopian reality in his lyrics?

In order to research this thesis question, I will focus on the following sub-questions:

- How does David Bowie use intertextuality and performance in his album *Diamond Dogs* to shape his dystopia?
- How are Booker's themes of individuality, spatiality and modernity reflected in the lyrics in Bowie's musical oeuvre?
- How are Booker's themes of identity and sexuality reflected in the lyrics in Bowie's musical oeuvre?

Keith M Booker provides a framework for my analysis in his book *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature*. In the introduction, he states that his discussion of key dystopian texts will be based on his analysis of four common themes in dystopian texts. He mentions love, the loss of it, the loss of language, the progress of science and the loss of humanity, and the loss of connection between past-present-future. I will discuss these qualities by looking at the overall theme of the individual song. Subsequently, I will use close-reading to analyse specific lyrics. This will allow me to see how the common themes, such as language, love, time, and science are portrayed in Bowie's songs.

In the first chapter I will study the album *Diamond Dogs*, the way it has used certain elements of dystopian fiction, and how performance in the album has translated into the lyrics. Moreover, I will discuss the intertextual presence of Orwell's text in *Diamond Dogs*, and how Bowie has referenced the text and the theatrical to create his dystopian world. I will first link the album to the book, then I will discuss the presence of performance and theatricality in the album. I will discuss the links between literary text and album, and then highlight similar themes used by Bowie in his dystopian world. I will look at the performative and theatrical elements found on the album and also consider these qualities present in the

lyrics. In the first chapter I will set up the discussion for the second and third chapter, by discussing the dystopian qualities in the overarching structure and themes found in *Diamond Dogs*.

In the second chapter I will discuss the dystopian qualities Keith Booker discusses in his book and use this varying set of qualities to highlight the fact that Bowie's dystopia draws from present-day events to offer criticism, and to emphasize that the world we are living in is dystopian. In 2.1 I will discuss the outsider in the public and private sphere, taking note of how the outsider behaves by himself and around others. In 2.2 I will discuss the setting of these public places, the desolate places which offer further exclusion from society. The desolate places found in Bowie's songs. I will continue this discussion of city and outsider in 2.3, in which I will look at Bowie positioning himself in world cities. Furthermore, I will look at his descriptions of cities. To conclude the discussion in relation to the dystopian setting, in 2.4. In 2.4 I will focus on how technological advancements might or might not affect the creation of these places, and how technological advancement in general helps create a dystopian setting for Bowie, in which to alienate his outsiders. In 2.5 I will discuss the political climates found in Bowie's works. In 2.6 I will discuss the ambition of man found in Bowie's albums, by looking at how Bowie interacts with the idea of popular culture and fame, and how he portrays the (inevitable) downfall of these ambitious men. 2.5 and 2.6 will tie in with the discussion found in the first four sub-chapters, as I expand on the regime and the ambition which might lead to dystopian behaviour, and how dystopian behaviour is found in present-day reality. I will conclude by discussing three further topics. In 2.7 I will discuss Bowie's depiction of the past and the younger generations. I will continue by looking to the future as Bowie does in his depictions of the future.

Finally, in the third chapter I will consider the relationship between identity and the dystopian in Bowie's albums. In 3.1 I will look at the perception and construction of identity

in Bowie's albums. In 3.2 I will look at Bowie's depiction of love. I will also discuss gender identity in this chapter. In 3.3 I will consider both his depiction of love and lust, and the depiction and performance of gender in his albums.

Current research into David Bowie

In *On Bowie* (2016) Simon Critchley has included several chapters in which he discusses the dystopian vision Bowie has for the planet, in "Future Legend" and the triad "Sweet Thing/Candidate/Sweet Thing Reprise" on the album *Diamond Dogs* (1974). He introduces his chapter "Dystopia—Get it here, thing" with an anecdote regarding "Oh! You Pretty Things", and further highlights the dystopian vision Bowie has of the earth, in his brief discussion of "Five Years". In his book *Outlaw*, Alex Sharpe discusses five themes: difference, authenticity, ethics, art and love. In *David Bowie: Critical Perspectives*, Bowie's work is discussed from the sociological, psychological, philosophical perspective. *David Bowie and Film*, *David Bowie and the Moving Image* and *David Bowie and the Art of Music Video* are two books that focus Bowie as an actor and a performer in his music videos. Fandom studies has published two works on Bowie's lasting impact on fans and popular culture: *Everyone Says "Hi"* and *David Bowie and Transmedia Stardom*. However, there has been little to no focus on a literary perspective of Bowie's work. In *Blackstar Theory*, Leah Kardos discusses Bowie's later oeuvre, a time period which often gets overlooked. She is among the few to discuss multiple albums in connection to one another, and provides a musical analysis of songs from albums such as *The Next Day* and *Blackstar*. In *David Bowie and Romanticism* the discussion centres on the romanticism found in David Bowie's work. Despite this specific reading of Bowie's work, there seems to be little attention given to Bowie's lyrics, attention rather going to the personal history of his career, performance on screen and on stage and his continuing legacy.

A brief discography

David Bowie published his first album in 1967, then released his second album in 1969. He continued to release albums annually until 1977, in which year he released two albums, similarly to 1973, when he released the cover album *Pin Ups* and *Aladdin Sane*. Bowie rose to fame with his album *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* in 1972, and was a key figure in the scene of glam rock. *Diamond Dogs* was released by RCA in 1974. In 1977, Bowie moved to Berlin and recorded both *Low* and *Heroes*. He toured for a year and then released *Lodger* in 1979, followed by *Scary Monsters (and Super Creeps)* in 1980. He disappeared for three years, then released *Let's Dance* in 1983, which became a huge commercial success, and in 1984 the album *Tonight* was released. In 1987, Bowie released *Never Let Me Down*. His releases became more sporadic and less successful, both critically and commercially. In 2002 he returned with *Heathen*, followed by *Reality* in 2003. He had a heart attack while performing the *Reality Tour*, and disappeared for the next decade. In 2013, he released, unannounced, *The Next Day*, which garnered positive critique, wrote and produced a musical titled *Lazarus* in 2015, based on old work and new work, and released his last album, *Blackstar*, on his birthday in 2016, only to die two days later on the tenth of January.¹

Dystopian Dissymmetry is my response and analysis of Bowie's oeuvre from a dystopian perspective. Simon Critchley states that while Bowie presents a dystopian world at times, his work is utopian. Critchley considers the best of Bowie's oeuvre. I did not agree with this. What springs to mind when I listen to Bowie is the dystopian quality present in many of his songs. While Critchley believes in 'divine symmetry' as Bowie sings in "Quicksand", I

¹ Both "Blackstar" and *Blackstar* will be referred to as "★" and ★ hereafter. Bowie used this star to denote his album, and the similarly-titled first song on the album.

choose to present a different reading and analysis of Bowie's oeuvre, a dystopian dissymmetry. In this thesis I hope to show that Bowie lends itself to the dystopian.

Chapter 1

The dystopian intertextuality and the theatrical present in *Diamond Dogs*.

In his *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature*, M Keith Booker discusses the concept of parenthood, more specifically motherhood, and its (absent) role in dystopian works such as *We* by Yevgeny Zamyatin, *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, and *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* by George Orwell. He discusses that sex in the first two titles is regulated by the government, and is used to keep people happy and to keep from combining the sexual act, lust, with love. The governmental institutions spurn love, as love makes people do strange things. In *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, the outlook on sex is more traditional. However, the family unit is as strange as the family unit is absent in *We* and *Brave New World*. In *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, except for the fact that the family unit exists, there is no familial bond between the members. The government urges those closest to you, the family unit, to keep an eye on everything you do behind closed doors. In this manner, the government is always able to follow and arrest you for any misdoings. The mother is largely absent, the government in *Brave New World*, for example, having taken over the birthing and rearing of children. Children are not sent out into the world until they have been fully indoctrinated by the state in these novels. Dystopian regimes have no use for love, as it is a dissenting factor (as is often shown in the main characters' deviation from societal values when the female object is introduced, for example in *We*, *Brave New World*, *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* or *Fahrenheit 451*).

Booker also argues the importance of language in dystopian texts, the way these are written, or the way in which language itself is utilized. Language is always contradictory and easy to use in such a manner that people will identify their thoughts, feelings and ideals through specific regime-approved phrases. He notes the miscommunication between John Savage and Lenina Crowne in *Brave New World*. This is brought on by John's use of archaic phrases, he is citing Shakespeare, and unapproved English, and the very small (emotional)

vocabulary of Lenina, which is mainly the result of watching “Feelies”. In *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* there is the renowned explanation of “Double-Speak” and Orwell does his best to present a new grammatical system. Not only do these novels introduce new terms which we have started to use to discuss dystopian elements present in our everyday lives, as Booker argues, but in the novels, language and the lack of it, play a vital role for the formation of a dystopian regime.

Moreover, Booker discusses the notion of the religious regime, and how dystopian worlds often mimic these regimes but simultaneously ban religion in order to be able to wield power. Furthermore, Booker stresses the importance of technological advancements in dystopian texts. These not only help the regime enforce power over its people, but simultaneously also highlight the shortcomings of machines over people. Finally, Booker shows that dystopian texts feature a fear of the future, the notion that the past does not exist, or should be forgotten in order to keep from asking questions about the present, and the developing future. Booker states that often the present is the future in dystopian texts. In spite of the technological evolution, there will always be a stopping point, brought about either by the end of man's scientific prowess, or by a universe that stunts technological advancements. Technology is both the incursion to new frontiers and their downfall. I will discuss the concepts raised by Booker in my discussion of *Diamond Dogs*.

1.1 ‘Beware the savage jaw’ The (intertextual) dystopian world in *Diamond Dogs*

On the theme of love, Booker states that in novels like *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, or *Brave New World*, that the absence of love paves the way for lust. The confused love-lust dynamics and the strict taboo on the formation of meaningful relationships that do not result in childbirth are central to the narratives. The sexual act has become strictly taboo, or it has become nothing more than a primitive urge, an instrument used by the government to control its people. Furthermore, Booker argues that parents play no role in dystopian fiction. Society

is not created biologically. There is no real mother, no real womb. The sexual act is not for procreation, but for pleasure only.

At the start of the album *Diamond Dogs*, in “Future Legend”, Bowie sets the scene, the prologue to his dystopian city, Hunger City. There is a street called “Love-Me Avenue”, a red-light district. There is sex for the sake of lust and pleasure, not for the sake of procreation. Bowie shows that people are created, not borne. The remaining citizens are operated upon, and a sub-human species is created. ‘As they pulled you out of the oxygen tent’ (0:26-30). Children are unnatural and in “Rebel Rebel”, Bowie reveals this unnaturalness by speaking of humans who have been created in a lab. Booker argues too that in all successful dystopian fiction, the indoctrination of societal values starts immediately after birth, or in Bowie’s case, re-birth. Bowie shows that this is no different. ‘You ask for the latest party’ (0:31-34). A subtle reference to *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, in which Oceania is continuously at war with other countries, but these reports are at war with one another continuously. In the world of “Diamond Dogs” traditional parenthood and birth are non-existent. In Bowie’s Hunger City, the latest party looks down on love and promotes the sexual act over the amorous act, but simultaneously looks down on the act of sex altogether. Bowie’s latest party prefers scientific re-creation over the natural act of creation, and dislikes natural acts which result in pleasure. ‘I keep my friends serene (will they come?)’ an innuendo towards sexual gratification, but it is not specified what Bowie uses to keep his friends serene, although in line with his scientific society, it could very well be the drugs used by the hot tramp in “Rebel Rebel”, perhaps similar to *soma* in *Brave New World* (1:01-5). The narrator is omniscient, however, and knows of times before the establishment of Hunger City. ‘Sweetly reminiscent, something mother used to bake’ (1:58-2:01). The narrator remembers his mother, a traditional mother. Booker’s notion of (the absence of) parenthood in dystopian fiction is interesting, as Bowie shows in “Diamond Dogs” that there is no birthmother, nor do there seem to be parents.

However, he contradicts himself in the song “Rebel Rebel”. The song shows that there is no such thing as love. The song is about lust and the use of sex to rebel against the systems in place. Sexual liberation as a form of protest. Moreover, the main character might be a rebel but they appear to be in a constant state of flux. ‘You've got your mother in a whirl / not sure if you're a boy or a girl’ (0:31-37). This is a song about a rebel but at its heart it is about anyone who differs, who embraces the underground culture, the natural tendency of the young to rebel against the older generations.

Ultimately the sexual act can be about power. Winston showcases this amalgamation of dominance and lust when he fantasizes about sexually assaulting Julia. Following, or rebelling against, a totalitarian regime is similarly about power and domination. There is a variety of characters in the book that show different power structures at play in the society of Big Brother. Importantly, it is about eschewed power structures. Acting out against a regime is about the negating of the existing power, and refusing to acknowledge it by acknowledging a different power. There is large emphasis on the power children wield within the household, their parents terrified of children who might tell on them to the government. This emphasizes the power the younger and future generations wield by acting out against the past, be it in accordance or rebellion, as is shown in “Rebel Rebel” and also in “Future Legend” as the past and older generations are either eradicated or medically mutated. Winston describes an encounter with an old sex worker as he walks through the outskirts of the city of London. He describes his disgust once he realizes she is an old woman, but then has sexual relations with her anyway. Presumably Big Brother allows these sex workers as they are old, and no longer fertile, to stymie those unable to pledge a vow of celibacy, like much of the youth has done². Big Brother disapproves of sex, but does allow sex workers, and more importantly, Winston

² Comrade Oglivy for example, the fake deceased hero Winston created.

knows that Big Brother produces pornography.³ The old man Winston talks to later on, confides in Winston that he has not desired women or the act of sex in the past thirty years of his life. Whether sex is only for those of a fertile age, or whether Big Brother has been successful in their candidacy for celibacy, is unclear. Bowie addresses certain celibate archetypes in his lyrics, showing that those in power are in his world of Hunger City, quite celibate, unlike those not in powerful positions.⁴ Julia sees sex as a way of acting out against the Party, of proving that most of them are deprived enough to desire the sexual act. She considers every sexual encounter she has had, as a victory against the Party.

In “Diamond Dogs”, a rhythmic clapping and galloping is heard in the background, reminiscent of people marching. The song begins with an introduction of a new regime, which is loudly applauded by an invisible audience. This interaction between crowd and the subject of their focus is strongly reminiscent of Winston’s description of the “Two Minutes Hate” in the first chapter of the book by Orwell. It evokes the image of a leader speaking to his followers and successfully evoking their adoration. Bowie presents the song by presenting this new world through a publicly announced statement, which allows for a reading in which Bowie is the leader, newly elected, or forcefully instated to office, and holds total power over Hunger City.

“Sweet Thing/Candidate/Sweet Thing Reprise” can be considered the summary of the three parts of which *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* consists. “Sweet Thing” summarizes Winston’s personal (and sexual) memories in the first part of the book. It depicts Winston’s outlook on

³ ‘There was even [...] to look at.’ (Orwell, 46)

⁴ ‘‘Til the sun drips blood on the seedy young knights / Who press you on the ground while shaking in fright’. Arguably this could be a double entendre and the shaking signifies a loss of virginity, contrasting the idea of the chivalrous and most importantly, virtuous knight. Bowie, David. “Candidate.” *Diamond Dogs*, RCA, 1974. ‘Locator for the virgin king’, another contrast as the king would have to have sex in order to conceive an heir and keep power within the family. It could also be a play on Britain’s Virgin Queen, Elizabeth I. It is Bowie addressing the celibate Big Brother. If they do not procreate, their immediate line will die out, however, because Big Brother is made up of several men, this would not be an immediate problem. Bowie, David. “Big Brother.” *Diamond Dogs*, RCA, 1974. In the first chapter of Goldstein’s book, “Ignorance is Strength”, Goldstein argues that as long as the Party can appoint new willing members, there is no need for the Party to bear children.

the regime of Big Brother. “Candidate” details the meeting between Julia and Winston in the second part. There are several references to secrets Julia has disclosed to Winston. Although Julia admits that she is not literary, she knows who works in the Fiction Department with her.

⁵ ‘I’m having so much fun with the poisonous people / Spreading rumours and lies and stories they made up / Some make you sing and some make you scream’ (1:03-15). Furthermore, there is a reference to the shop they walk past during the parade when they attempt to have a first encounter outside of work, when Julia admits to being incredibly sexually experienced.⁶

‘Tres butch little number whines / “Hey dirty, I want you, I need you / When it’s good, it’s really good, and when it’s bad, I go to pieces”’ (1:42-49). Finally Bowie references the number of locations Julia and Winston have frequented during their encounters. In the song “Candidate” Bowie’s line ‘seedy young knights’ is reminiscent of Julia’s speech about ‘the Party’s sexual puritanism’ (Orwell, 139).⁷ As Julia argues, the ‘seedy young knights’ are simply men who are energized by their sexual frustration.⁸

‘Someone scrawled on the wall “I smell the blood of “Les Tricoteuses”’, is another reference to the women in *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* (0:57-1:00). Historically, ‘les tricoteuses’, were a group of women that was politically active during the Jacobine revolutions in France.⁹ The story goes that these women would knit next to the guillotine. Moreover, it is also a way of Bowie foreshadowing the climax in Orwell’s book, when Winston and Julia meet up with O’Brien, to become spies against the regime, only to be betrayed by the very same man.

This example acknowledges the dystopian qualities of history. Bowie actively utilizes this part of history to create an alienated group of rebellious outsiders, while simultaneously

⁵ Bowie, David. “Candidate.” *Diamond Dogs*, RCA, 1974.

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ *Ibid*

⁸ Although the knights apart from Party members do not make a physical appearance in the novel, in the final chapter of the book, Winston is playing chess and holds his white knights as he ponders about the great white (right) ness of Big Brother.

⁹ *Ibid*

acknowledging that these rebellious groups could be as ruthless as the members of the regime they were protesting against. The women were ferocious and willing to go to extreme lengths to see their rebellion succeed. Similarly, O'Brien asks Winston and Julia to what lengths they are prepared to go in order to bring about the fall of the Party. By purposefully using the uncommon historical term ('Les Tricoteuses') Bowie creates mystique when referencing history. This is common in dystopian fiction, to draw from historical examples to create and enforce a dystopian regime. George Orwell does this similarly when Winston discusses the notion of freedom before the war(s) and Revolution with an old man in a pub. The old man argues that there is more freedom in present days, and illustrates his answer by drawing on examples of the class system present during Edwardian times. The conversation does not provide Winston with a good answer, as he has no reliable knowledge of the times before the Revolution. In "Sweet Thing Reprise" the story has started anew, but this time the narrator has learned from his past mistakes, similarly to Winston's 'victory over himself', as he has come to accept and love the regime.¹⁰ 'Is it nice in your snow storm, freezing your brain?' (0:35-42). Bowie speaks of the stagnation of the mind, of the indoctrination that makes it impossible to think of anything but what has been taught. Oceania declares it has always been at war with Eastasia, although there had actually been different enemies over the past five years. This declaration results in a massive rewriting of the history of Oceania during these years.¹¹ Orwell describes that the office was filled with so many pieces of rewritten history that it looked like a flurry. The rewriting of history is a menial, almost mindless task, Orwell argues. This line also references Winston's encounter with O'Brien. Winston at one point feels like his brain is frozen. Musically, the ending of "Sweet thing Reprise" mimics the description of the final torture tier which Winston experiences at the hands of O'Brien.¹² Ironically, this

¹⁰ (Orwell, 310)

¹¹ '[...] like a snow-drift, [...]' (Orwell, 190)

¹² 'At this moment, [...], of his brain.' (Orwell, 269)

treatment fails and “Sweet Thing Reprise” is followed by “Rebel Rebel”, as Winston is still one at heart. Moreover, Winston hears the “Hate Song” again, and Winston’s earlier description of its melody is what makes up the introduction to “Rebel Rebel”.¹³ Bowie summarizes the story neatly in “Sweet Thing/Candidate/Sweet Thing Reprise”. These three songs also mimic O’Brien’s plans for Winston’s re-integration.¹⁴ Bowie mimics this in the chorus of “Sweet Thing” and summarizes the ordeal in the wry repetition of half the chorus in “Sweet Thing Reprise”.^{15 16} He also references that Winston has been starved and has grown unrecognizable to himself, and in the novel O’Brien asks Winston what he thinks of his face, after having been starved and subjugated to torture for weeks.¹⁷ In “We Are the Dead” Bowie shows the loss of identity people may experience under a totalitarian regime, and highlights how not one person thinks alike. There is no synonymous identity. The days of those who rebel against the regime are numbered from the moment they think about it—Thoughtcrime. Bowie concludes in the presumed voice of O’Brien ‘Do you think that your face looks the same?’ (0:44-47). Bowie is voicing O’Brien in “Sweet Thing”, most of “Candidate” and “Sweet Thing Reprise”.

Circling back to the notion of love in dystopian texts and *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, the totalitarian regime in *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* heavily relies on voyeurism and therefor lacks exhibitionism, as people are punished, at times fatally, for exhibiting emotions and thoughts. Although Winston is still aware of being under constant surveillance, he has accepted it. Winston can be considered a voyeur, and he entertains a male gaze when it comes to Julia. Winston’s violent rape fantasy is ultimately about enforcing power as someone who is largely powerless. When he is not fantasizing about her, he watches her, specifically objectifying her

¹³ Described as: ‘It had a savage barking rhythm, [...], it was terrifying.’ (Orwell, 155)

¹⁴ ‘There is learning, there is understanding, and there is acceptance.’ (Orwell, 273)

¹⁵ “‘Boys, Boys, it’s a sweet thing / Boys, Boys, it’s a sweet thing, sweet thing / If you want it, Boys, get it here, thing / ’Cause hope, Boys, is a cheap thing, cheap thing’”.

¹⁶ “‘If you want it, boys, get it here, thing / ’Cause hope, boys, is a cheap thing, cheap thing’”.

¹⁷ ‘[...] What do you think of your own face?’” (Orwell, 284)

in manner of dress and expression. There is one instance, however, when Winston is perceived through the male gaze himself. He believes Julia to be a spy, but when she confesses her love for him, the roles are reversed. Julia has similarly been objectifying Winston, who does not like this. At first, Winston's initial impotency proves a metaphor for the relationship. The only love shared is that of their mutual desire of going against the Party, their shared ecstasy is more of mind than of body. In the second part of *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, it becomes clear that Bowie's 'hot tramp' from "Rebel Rebel" is Julia, and she does as much as she can to undermine the Party, while adhering still adhering to their rules. She chooses to rebel wisely, working rather between the rules than against them. "Rock 'n' Roll with Me" is easily defined as Winston and Julia's blossoming relationship. Bowie deviates from the text by describing the relationship as doomed but successful, as the relationship itself equals rebellion. Winston is obsessed with the corruption of the Party's morals that Julia's confessions symbolize and Bowie too, is largely focused on those who do not fit in. Bowie's 'little hussy' refers to Julia yet again. Julia utilizes sex as a way of enforcing power not over her body, but over the bodies of her lovers. Bowie attempts to portray such a character in "Rebel Rebel" but is unsuccessful. Rather, Bowie sexualizes Julia's immorality, in the same way Winston gets aroused at the thought of her impurity. At first, it seems that Orwell's notion of Julia's sexuality is very emancipated, this is undermined when he states that her body is a political tool, and the pleasure found in the act itself has come to serve as a political statement, rather than for the sake of pleasure.¹⁸ In this manner, Julia's sexual perversity—or freedom, is no different than Katherine's idea of "Our duty to the Party" (Orwell, 139). In the chorus of "Rebel Rebel" Bowie also summarizes the meeting between O'Brien and Winston and Julia, and the ending of the second part of the novel. 'Not sure if you're a boy or a girl' refers to the way Julia is

¹⁸ 'Their embrace had been a battle, the climax a victory. It was a blow struck against the Party. It was a political act.' (Orwell, 133)

dressed, and that she feels unlike a woman until she decides to wear the dress for Winston.¹⁹ However, the song continues with ‘your face is a mess’ and ‘you tore your dress’, ‘how could they know?’²⁰ O’Brien discusses the lengths Julia and Winston might have to go to for the underground group, maybe even undergo plastic surgery. O’Brien states, when Julia is unwilling to hypothetically part from Winston, that although her loyalty to Winston is admirable, it is futile. O’Brien argues that Winston might not even be Winston anymore. Shortly after they left the meeting with O’Brien, they return to the room. They are discovered. Julia is hit across the face, her dress a mess, and the second reference to the lyrics presents itself: Julia and Winston wonder, ‘how could they know?’. “Rock ‘n’ Roll with Me” refers to several scenes in the book, among them the room rented from Mr Charrington, the cell Winston is in, and then Room 101. “Rock ‘n’ Roll with Me” is narrated from Winston’s perspective. ‘I’m in tears, I’m in tears’ could refer to the time Winston wakes up from a nightmare, having dreamt about his mother and the death of his sister, but can also refer to Winston’s traumatic experience in the cell and Room 101 (3:32-37).

“We Are the Dead” is the first time Bowie cites the book. First, as Winston pledges his loyalty to O’Brien’s secret group²¹. Secondly, when O’Brien shows Winston what it means to be dead while still alive, as he forces Winston to look at his skeletal figure. Julia and Winston earlier discussed their stances on the party and Winston states that they are the dead, but Julia answers that they are not dead yet.²² In “We Are the Dead” Bowie discusses the passing of ideas from one generation to the other, ‘For we’re breaking in the new boys, deceive your next kin’ (Bowie). When Winston is confronted with O’Brien’s influence in Winston’s life, he wonders why. The phrase ‘we are the dead’ is explained. The Party does not

¹⁹ Its political meaning is discussed in 2.5, its depiction of the young rebel in 2.7, and its importance in the depiction and performance of gender in 3.2.

²⁰ ‘[...] and still with a smear of rouge on either cheek; and that was the last he saw of her.’ (Orwell, 232)

²¹ (Orwell, 183)

²² (Orwell, 142)

allow people to die believing in anything other than the regime of the Party. They are kept alive until they forcefully succumb to the regime of Big Brother. They are plucked off the streets and indoctrinated, the living dead, as they lose all individual identity. By not allowing the younger generations to develop their own identity nor ideas, communal consciousness of The “Rebel Rebel” is futile, it may have a voice, but it will never fruitfully be allowed to voice its ideas. Later, they repeat the conversation but Julia concurs that they are the dead.²³ As in the book, the line becomes a call-and-response, and Bowie ends the song similarly, performing the act of Party indoctrination, re-creating the idea that he is the dictator that spoke in “Diamond Dogs”. The final verse summarizes not only the conclusion of the second part of the book, but also the slow deterioration of Winston in the cell:

Oh caress yourself, my juicy

For my hands have all but withered

Oh dress yourself my urchin one, for I hear them on the stairs

Because of all we’ve seen, because of all we’ve said

We are the dead

We are the dead

We are the dead. (4:00-40)

It also highlights the disconnect between Julia and Winston. Their ages make them approach the world differently, and ultimately, they do not see it the same way. Julia is less ignorant than Winston is about propaganda, but although Winston is more gullible, he can rely on his memories of a time before the Revolution, and can therefore not ignore the historical inconsistencies and inaccuracies of the Party. Julia is briefly mentioned one final time in the

²³ “‘We are the dead,’ [...], echoed Julia dutifully’ (Orwell, 230).

lyrics: ‘You’re just an ally of the leecher / Locator for the virgin King, but I love you in your fuck-me pumps’ (1:42-52). Julia’s sexual history has been useful to the Party in order to arrest dissenters, and although she does not sleep with these men to have them arrested, her rebellion results in their downfall nonetheless. After the second sexual meeting between Winston and Julia, Winston confesses to loving Julia. She admits to having felt joy at the discovery that one of the Party members committed suicide after feeling guilt at having slept with her.

In “1984” Bowie summarizes the dystopian regime of *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* by remarking on the secret plot O’Brien reveals to Winston. O’Brien had Winston watched for seven years. ‘Beware the savage jaw’ refers to the rats that cause Winston’s breakdown, and ultimately to his (mental) betrayal of Julia. Julia did not care about the betrayal of information, as long as Winston would not betray his feelings for her. The torture in Room 101 ends with Winston wishing Julia was in his place instead. After he has lived through his encounter with the rats, he no longer cares about individuality or being the ‘last man’, he has fully embraced Big Brother (Orwell, 285). ‘Beware the savage jaw’ also refers to the jaws of the diamond dogs (0:37-40). The bark and bite of Big Brother. Winston turns his back on the past, and the preservation of the human race. Bowie is particularly concerned with this loss, as I will show in 2.7. Bowie shows this blind acceptance of the future in the lyrics of “Big Brother”. He discusses the mindset of those living before the Revolution. Bowie has given those living under Big Brother a voice, and it appears that he is also doing this from Winston’s perspective who, at this point in the book, has successfully accepted Big Brother. The lyrics summarize the final chapter in the novel.

Finally, “Chant of the Ever Circling Skeletal Family” is reminiscent of the descriptions of both the Two Minutes Hate at the start of the novel and the repeated mention of the Hate

Song. Both songs ends with a repeated 'B-B', similar to Orwell's writings, and Bowie ends his album in the same manner (1:35-57).

It is known that Bowie utilized Burroughs' "Cut-Up Method" which consists of cutting existing stories into pieces, and re-arranging them. This process can be continued ad infinitum and does not require a linear narrative. However, Burroughs says that it is not necessary to create a new narrative with the pieces you have. If desired, one can always try to tell the same story but in a different way. Burroughs argues that his method mostly stems from the desire to have an organic way of processing, writing and thinking about words. To dissuade from this method, means the death of words and stories. His notion is that language is ever-changing, and should not grow stagnant. In a way, Burroughs's way of looking at narration is utopian, as he is against the notion that words cannot change meaning, cannot be used in such a way that they do or do not make sense. *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* is greatly concerned with the power of language, and has a vested interest in making language as practical as possible, Newspeak gets rids of synonyms, antonyms and tries to comprise the lexicon to down to a few hundred words, for maximum communicative efficiency. In dystopian texts language is solely used as a way of communicating needs, there is no room for frivolity, or superlatives. While Burroughs' reasoning behind the use of the "Cut-Up Method" is sound and proves a transcending of grammatical and language barriers, his continuous utilization of this method to write all of his works, confines it and it does not evolve anymore. Bowie has stated that he has used the "Cut-Up Method" not only to write *Diamond Dogs* but also to compose other albums. Turning the "Cut-Up Method" into a standardised practice, makes it dystopian in the sense that it no longer changes, the method of cutting and reworking existing narratives (be they novels or original work) the sole way of narrating. The method becomes as standardized and practical as regular writing once was.

I have discussed the narrative of both the album and the book, and how Bowie has tried to implement elements of Orwell's novel into his album, his use of intertextuality. The next paragraph will focus on an analysis of the same songs from the perspective of performance and the theatrical in *Diamond Dogs*.

1.2 'My set is amazing it even smells like a street' Performance and the theatrical in *Diamond Dogs*

References to popular culture stand out in the second song of the album, "Diamond Dogs".²⁴ However, the song makes references to more than just Hollywood directors and (cult-)films of the 1930s.²⁵

This becomes apparent from lines such as 'Mannequins with kill appeal' (0:57-58). Mannequins are considered lifeless, non-sentient beings, and by stating that these "diamond dogs" are mannequins, it means that they are nothing but set décor. Moreover, they could be considered as set characters. The idea of the archetype is present in the make-up of the album *Diamond Dogs*, firstly because it is, at its heart, an adaptation, and secondly because it features the dystopian characters commonly found in dystopian texts. There is the government, those actively involved against the government, those who mindlessly follow the rules and then on a smaller scale, the (heroic) outsider and the catalyst, usually in the shape of a rebellious woman, all of whom drive the story of most dystopian texts. These mannequins represent the character of the mindless followers, who are merely ordered to kill. Mannequins in stores are used to sample clothing to entice the customer. These mannequins are the direct

²⁴ 'Dressed like a priest he was, Tod Browning streak he was'. Tod Browning was a movie director who directed the cult-film *Freaks* (1932), a film Bowie would also reference in "Scary Monsters and Super Creeps" as according to Adam Steiner in his book *Silhouettes and Shadows: The Secret History of David Bowie's Scary Monsters (and Super Creeps)*, Backbeat, 2023.

²⁵ 'The elevator's broke, so he slides down a rope/Onto the street below, oh Tarzie, go man go'. A reference to *Tarzan's New York Adventure*, directed by Richard Thorpe, Metro Goldwyn Mayer, 1942. On page 91 of *1984*, Winston has entered a pub and the owner refers to the primate origins of mankind. "'When you were a young man we were all living in the treetops,'" (Orwell). Tarzan was raised by primates.

mouthpieces of the government in *Diamond Dogs*, and they are present to sell the ideas of the government, and in this situation, Bowie equates the morally grey, patriotic soldier, with a sentient but braindead mannequin. Essentially, mannequins are puppets, and this enforces the idea that the world Bowie creates in “Future Legend” is not real either. It is made up of actors *and* mannequins, props, as it were. Mannequins have been used in many films to pass for real people when the main character was on his own. In *The Time Machine* the main character forms a bond with the mannequin standing in the shopwindow of a dress shop, and learns about the passing of time by watching how the mannequin's clothes change whenever he stops.²⁶ In *The Omega Man* the main character, portrayed by Charlton Heston, forms a bond with the mannequins in a store he frequents.²⁷ When he finally meets another person, he first mistakes her for a mannequin. Mannequins are most often found in shops, and the implication is that you are always being watched. The notion of an ever-present watchdog is of course a reference to Big Brother, but Bowie references the set props and clothing accessories to imply this same surveillance present in his city.

In “Diamond Dogs” the line ‘Her face is sans feature, but she wears a Dalí brooch’ also refers to this idea (1:54-58). The woman's face is sans feature, much like the faces of the mannequins, implying her face is expressionless. It could also suggest she is a nobody, not an actress, as feature could also have been used to suggest a film feature. The “Eye of Time” by Dalí is a brooch which consists of an eye, the iris holds a watch, from the corner of the eye a teardrop appears. The woman wearing this brooch is looking without truly seeing. It is a blank stare, but a stare nonetheless. In theatre, clothes and accessories are always important as they provide more information about the character wearing them. As the brooch weeps, it

²⁶ *The Time Machine*. Directed by George Pal, Metro Goldwyn Mayer, 1960.

²⁷ *The Omega Man*, directed by Boris Sagal, Warner Bros. 1971. The film features a post-apocalyptic world, in which no-one excepting the main character has survived a mysterious illness. Those who fell ill became genetically mutated, and can only come out at night, an extreme kind of sun-allergy.

expresses the emotion the wearer might be experiencing, coming back to the idea that there are archetypal characters in this play.

The performativity of *Diamond Dogs* is not limited to the concept of a dystopian world or to the non-existent city. In “Sweet Thing” Bowie refers to the narrator's need for an (emotional) release. In William Burroughs’ *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs addresses someone as “Sweet Thing”, and all of *Naked Lunch* is about sexual and emotional release. Much of *Naked Lunch* is about gender and performance inasmuch as it is about the eventual, essential release of the characters taking part in bacchanalia. Burroughs’ characters switch genders, take off, insert, and put on genitals of all shapes and sizes and engage in many orgies.

In “Sweet Thing” the line ‘And isn't it me, putting pain in a stranger? / Like a portrait in flesh, who trails on a leash’ seems to refer to this idea of performance (0:54-1:05). Booker discusses that one of the key elements in a dystopian world is the sexual act, as discussed in the introduction of this chapter. However, what makes this lyric of note when discussing performativity, or rather, performance, it is the oblique reference to both a sado-masochistic sexual act and a religious act. Booker states that religion is often largely absent in dystopian texts, as the totalitarian regime has become the new religion. In Orwell’s *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* this seems to be no different. However, those living on the outskirts are not as much a part of the totalitarian regime as those living closer to Big Brother's headquarters. Winston even remarks in the text that if the proletariat had shown an inclination towards a required religion, Big Brother would have granted that desire. The act of BDSM is considered a performance, however, this line from “Sweet Thing” could refer to the act of sado-masochistic sex or to the more religious act of self-flagellation. Self-flagellation can be considered a performance.

In “Candidate”, Bowie emphasizes the theatricality of *Diamond Dogs*, the recurring theme in the song is that the main character and the addressee are pretending, that the world

around them is fake. As Bowie states that ‘my set is amazing, it even smells like a street’, he refers both to the stage and to his failed plans to adapt *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* into a musical (0:48-52). He references a shop selling ‘bullet-proof faces’ made with papier-mâché’ (1-18-27). In Orwell’s novel, papier-mâché faces of the Party’s leader are sold in preparation for Hate Week.

“Rebel Rebel” discusses the performance of the outsider at large, of the rebel, but also of the performance of gender. The performance of gender becomes dystopian in the manner that it does not adhere to the binary standards for presenting gender. At the time, Bowie performed in a multitude of costumes, which all deviated from the gendered standard. The narrator in “Rebel, Rebel” cannot tell what the rebel is trying to convey about themselves by their dress, apart from deviation from the social standard. ‘Hot tramp, I love you so’ is ambiguous in its address: does it address an immoral woman, or someone living on the streets, or both (1:21-24)? ²⁸ Is Bowie addressing a sex worker? In the world of *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, sex work is outlawed, even though Winston visits sex workers in secret. The act of having sex outside of marriage is a form of rebellion. Both the sexual act and sex work become a performance. The mannequins mentioned in “Diamond Dogs” could be sex workers stationed in the ‘glass fronts of Love-Me Avenue’.²⁹ Next to the deviating performance of gender, the addressee in “Rebel Rebel” is also still young. The young in *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* are not really children, as they do not rebel against the older generations. The rebel in the song, however, showcases teenage rebellion. Moreover, the rebel is part of the entertainment scene, and is a performer of sorts. ³⁰ In theatre the performance of gender is often fluid. Big Brother allows the shooting and distribution of pornographic material, and perhaps the young

²⁸ ‘Meet his little hussy with his ghost town approach’ an earlier reference to an immoral woman, but it is open to interpretation if the ‘Hot tramp’ is one and the same person. Bowie, David. “Diamond Dogs.” *Diamond Dogs*, RCA, 1974.

²⁹ Bowie, David. “Future Legend.” *Diamond Dogs*, RCA, 1974.

³⁰ ‘You’ve got your transmission and your live wire / You got your cue line and a handful of ludes’

performer in “Rebel Rebel” is someone performing sex work on film. Not only could the ‘Hot tramp’ be a sex worker, Bowie hints that they could be working in the porn industry, ‘*Pornosec*’³¹, as Winston states in the book, is pornography.³² The porn industry is a definite example of the industrialization of the sexual act, and the best example when discussing the idea of performance, and (performed) gender. Interestingly, by embracing these fluid gender norms in his performances and his lyrics, Bowie rebels against the conceived notions of gender in *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*.³³ In the book, after Winston stated ““We are the dead””, Julia and Winston meet up and Julia brings with her a set of clothes deemed unfit by the Party (Orwell, 142). Julia wants to wear the dress to reclaim her femininity, instead of being, as Bowie puts it, a ‘Tres butch little number’. She wants to use clothes to highlight her essential gender. Bowie, on the other hand, uses the dress in his performance as a way of stepping out of that binary, showing that clothes do not make the man—or the woman. Bowie mixes up Orwell’s narrative in order to provide an overall character profile of Julia. Orwell allows her to adhere to more conservative standards, feminine dress code, as an act of rebellion. For Bowie the traditional dress code is anything but rebellious. Bowie uses “We Are the Dead” to capture the feeling of disconnect between Julia and Winston. The introduction in “Rebel Rebel” could be Bowie’s reference to the scene in which a woman is singing as she is hanging up baby diapers on a line, as Orwell states that the woman is singing a song written by a machine with a simple melody. Winston detests the song but remarks that the woman almost makes it tuneful. Bowie’s notion of gender in his adaptation of *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, does not fit with the dystopian notion of gender. Orwell tries to present a unisex world, which is arguably utopian, but because it restricts the people from choosing to dress this way, he makes

³¹ (Orwell, 46)

³² (Orwell, 46)

³³ This could also be because of Bowie’s interest in Burroughs’ works. In “We Are the Dead” Bowie sings that he is ‘defecating ecstasy’ and in *Naked Lunch* there are many detailed descriptions of both drug use and illustrious orgies in which genitals are both removable and interchangeable. In the Rolling Stone interview with the author and the singer, it is said that they discuss among many things, the gay erotic film industry.

it dystopian. It is conservative in the way that Julia wants to dress traditionally feminine to express her identity, instead of wearing any kind of clothing. She reclaims that gendered binary of dressing up. In *Diamond Dogs* Bowie does not present this restriction, instead he uses the character in “Rebel Rebel” to show that self-expression and gender-performance are neither binary nor unisex. They are fluid.

In *Exterminator!* by William Burroughs the character of the “Lemon Kid” is introduced, a boy half wolf, with bright red hair, shapeshift. He is sexually promiscuous and is called before court to explain his sexual promiscuity. Looking at Bowie’s persona ‘Halloween Jack’ mentioned in “Diamond Dogs”, it is hard not take note of the similarities. Bowie has bright red hair, walks about in a fluid costume, his eyepatch, commonly associated with pirates, signifies his promiscuity. ‘That Halloween Jack is a real cool cat’ (1:34-38). Although a wolf is not a cat, and this expression is merely a colloquialism, Bowie’s representation of Halloween Jack on the cover of *Diamond Dogs* is canine, and most would consider dogs to be domesticated wolves. ‘Bow-wow / Woof-woof’, Bowie sings, becoming the persona on the cover of the album (4:21-24). The first design of the album’s cover included Bowie’s genitals, but they were airbrushed. However, knowing this, it is hard not to read Bowie’s dystopian vision as a rally for sexual freedom, between anyone and everyone, even between species.

In “1984” Bowie refers to ‘we played out an-night movie role’, and of note is that Bowie designed a full show for his album and a tv adaptation of *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* (1:15-19). These plans were abandoned because of costs. There are stills of his plans for *Diamond Dogs*, and the tv adaptation of *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, but apart from photos of the American leg of the tour there is little to remark on the performativity and the theatrical of “1984”. O’Brien states that Winston’s betrayal was staged seven years earlier, and that Winston has merely acted accordingly in a script he did not know he was part of.

1.3 ‘*We’ll be living from sin / then we can really begin*’ Jean Genet’s *Le Balcon* in *Diamond Dogs*.

It is no secret that David Bowie was a fan of Jean Genet. Although, it cannot be verified that Bowie read *Le Balcon* before he wrote *Diamond Dogs*, it is hard to ignore the similarities between Jean Genet’s play and Bowie’s music and lyrics.

To briefly summarize the play: it takes place in a brothel, the Grand Balcony, located in a city under siege by rebels. The brothel consists of many buildings—studios, and the sex workers fulfil any desire. They are the only business in the city still open and free. The hypocrisy of those in power is presented through the lens of these sex workers, and it is also satirized in the performances between visitors and sex workers. They offer scenarios involving among others a bishop, a judge and a general. The chief of police was once the lover of one of the women working at the Grand Balcony. He desires to become the people’s hero and he will do whatever it takes. As the women hold no other identity than that of fulfilling people’s desires, they succeed in becoming a new body of monarchical government, and install themselves in the seats of power. Their lack of identity allows for every identity. Towards the end of the play the regime falls, but as they have instituted a building in which all are trapped, even a mausoleum in which they all lay to rest, their reign becomes inescapable. At the end of the play the owner of the Grand Balcony proclaims that everyone must start over, that the studios must be rearranged the way they were at the beginning of the play, and that everyone should start over. She calls her brothel not a brothel, but a ‘house of illusions’ (Genet, 34).

Bowie’s Love-Me Avenue can be considered the street in which the Grand Balcony is located. Bowie sings in “Sweet Thing”:

It’s safe in the city to love in a

doorway

To wrangle some screams from the

dawn

And isn't me, putting pain in a

stranger?

Like a portrait in flesh, who trails on

a leash

Will you see that I'm scared and I'm

lonely?

So I'll break up my room, and yawn

and I

Run to center of things

Where the knowing one says:

"Boys, Boys, its a sweet thing

Boys, Boys, its a sweet thing, sweet

thing

If you want it, Boys, get it here,

thing

'Cause hope, Boys, is a cheap thing,

cheap thing”. (0:38-1:55)

Bowie’s sardonic falsetto heard in the chorus can be constructed as Bowie performing the role of Irma (the owner of the brothel), backed up by the chorus performing the role of the other sex workers. Irma is wry, and in the second half of the chorus Bowie emanates this in his voice.

The bishop in his lyrics is not a bishop at all, but merely a man who play-acts at absolving sins with a sex worker: ‘Dressed like a priest he was / Tod Browning streak he was’ (0:40-43).³⁴ What is more, the would-be bishop desires to be a real bishop. ‘If this trade is a curse, then I’ll bless you’ (2:21-25).³⁵ He can only be a bishop because of the tricks of the prostitute’s trade, and although the sexual act highlights the hypocrisy of an ambitious religious man, his performance with the woman allows him to perform the function of a bishop.

The judge, who is not a judge at all, has tied up a girl and threatens to whip her, if she refuses to confess. Although she tries to dominate him at first, he asks her for her submission in order to fulfil his dreams. ‘And isn’t it me, putting pain in a stranger?’ The judge wishes to whip her, ‘a portrait in flesh’. The judge is accompanied by a gigolo performing the part of the executioner. Together the three of them form a kinky tableau reminiscent of portraits in which a loose woman or a thief is condemned by a court. The judge refers to himself as Minos, and calls his executioner Cerberus. In “Diamond Dogs” Bowie can be heard howling during 2:58-3:10. The executioner responds by saying bow-wow. Bowie’s performance of Halloween Jack, at the end of “Diamond Dogs” is that of the barking of a dog. ‘Bow-wow / Woof-woof’ (4:21-24). The general, who is not a general, wants his performance to include the sex worker

³⁴ Bowie, David. “Diamond Dogs.” *Diamond Dogs*, RCA, 1974.

³⁵ Bowie, David. “Sweet Thing.” *Diamond Dogs*, RCA, 1974.

taking on the part of his noble steed. In “Diamond Dogs” the sound of the drums mimic that of a horse’s hooves, marching into battle.

The sex workers even have a performance in which the gigolo fakes his death and is buried alive. ‘Don’t talk of dust and roses / or should we powder our noses?’ (0:26-35) A corpse is made presentable by morticians, but in this case the gigolo is made over by the other sex workers, feigning death, while bringing someone else to *le petit mort*, the little death, the orgasm. In “Big Brother” Bowie details the desire to become a saviour. The chief of police in Genet’s play is equally desirous of becoming the people’s saviour. He realizes that the brothel is the best way to rise to power, as it has become the last place standing in a city in ruins. ‘Someone to shame us / some brave Apollo / Someone to fool us, someone like you’ (1:26-36). The shame could refer to the earlier performances in the play in which the men are ridiculed. The chief of police similarly puts people to shame, looks down on the visitors of the brothel, but at the same time, uses the same brothel for his ascent to power. He desires to drown these people in the pool of his magnificence. ‘He’ll build a better whirlpool’ (0:59-1:02). The people who follow him blindly, will be drowned in following him, and he will bury them in the mausoleum. Irma crowns herself queen, and although the rebels know these people are not the real government, they willingly allow themselves to be fooled, granting the sex workers and the chief of police a successful rise to power.

At the end of the play the fallen queen proclaims that everyone should take their places, thus return to the beginning of the play, the studios should be put to right, and despite her downfall, Irma will rise to power again, as the play repeats itself over and over again.

You’ve torn your dress, your face is a mess

You can’t get enough, but enough ain’t the test

You’ve got your transmission and your live wire

You got your cue line and a handful of ludes. (3:11-24)

The lyrics of “We Are the Dead” can also be linked to Genet’s *Le Balcon*:

We’re today’s scrambled creatures, locked in tomorrow’s double feature

Heaven’s on the pillow, its silence competes with hell

It’s a twenty-four hour service, guaranteed to make you tell

And the streets are full of press men

Bent on getting hung and buried

And the legendary curtains are drawn ‘round

Baby Bankrupt

Who sucks you while you’re sleeping

It’s the theatre of financiers

Count them, fifty ‘round a table

White and dressed to kill

Oh caress yourself, my juice

For my hands have all but withered

Oh dress yourself my urchin one, for I hear them

on the stairs

Because of all we’ve seen, because of all we’ve said

We are the dead. (3:14-4:37)

In 'locked in tomorrow's double feature' there is a reference to repetition, but also to the tableaux performed by the sex workers, they can become women, men, animals.

'Heaven's on the pillow, its silence competes with hell' the owner and an employee at the brothel proclaim that in hell, their brothel is heaven to all. Irma even states that she does not consider herself successful until an important man has accidentally spilled military information or states secrets while entangled with her. They are open all days of the week, all hours of the day. The curtains are drawn, but the employer and employees can still see and hear one another through trick mirrors. 'It's the theatre of financiers' shows that their work largely caters to influential clientele. It costs the men quite a lot of money over the years. The city is in ruins, but these women are still making lots of money. 'Baby Bankrupt / who sucks you while you're sleeping' refers to the fact that these men go home to their families, but dream of visiting the brothel, as Irma claims. The sex workers know too much about matters of state and army, this information allows them a successful ascending to the throne of a new regime, the road paved for them by rebels.

At times Bowie even takes inspiration from the stage directions given by Genet. The sound of horse's hooves mentioned earlier is heard in "Diamond Dogs", the singing towards the end of the play is heard in the final song on the album.

1.4 '*This Ain't Rock an' Roll*' Bowie's dystopian world

In Bowie's Hunger City everyone is desirous of something—power, sexual release, and blind devotion. In Hunger City all these appetites are fed, the hunger stilled.

It cannot be concluded that Bowie used Burroughs's Lemon Kid as an inspiration for his Halloween Jack character, but the similarities can not be ignored. Lemon Kid advocates for sexual freedom, even between species. Bowie's dystopian world is populated by the human race and the sub-human race, the diamond dogs. Burroughs writes of violent sexual

encounters between species, and Bowie touches on this too. ‘For you’re dancing where the dogs decay, defecating ecstasy’ (1:36-42).³⁶ Simon Critchley argues that in Bowie’s dystopian world, society has deteriorated so badly that government officials rape people in the streets. ‘Til the sun drips blood on the seedy young knights / Who press you on the ground while shaking in fright’ (2:17-26).³⁷ Here Bowie echoes Winston’s fantasy and the violent fantasies Burroughs writes about in most of his works. Primal urges are laid bare. Bowie shows this disintegration of civilisation in the way he portrays the seedy young knights. If the sexual act is considered merely the fulfilling of a primal urge, as Booker argues most of the dystopian societies have successfully done, rape does not exist. It is the fulfilling of a primal urge. Bowie shows this too, in his dystopian world. Of course, the knights work for the government, the virgin king, but knights are considered noble and chivalrous, despite their gross misconduct. By portraying them as knights, what they are doing to the people in the streets is not wrong, it is merely a combination of sexual liberty and a primal urge—a call of the wild. Bowie states this juxtaposition by claiming that the knights are seedy. People are portrayed like dogs in heat, in particular the diamond dogs that push people down. The Lemon Kid also behaves this way. Bowie’s use of a monarchical government echoes the hierarchy of a religious group, the church and nobility are often aligned in the way they perceive and wield power. Booker states that totalitarian regimes oppose religion, but rather convert religious worship to reverence of the totalitarian leader. In “Big Brother” Bowie shows this too, in the prayer-like refrain:

Please saviour, saviour, show us

Hear me, I’m graphically yours

³⁶ “We Are the Dead.”

³⁷ “Candidate.”

Someone to claim us, someone to follow

Someone to shame us, some brave Apollo

Someone to fool us, someone like you

We want you, Big Brother, Big Brother. (1:09-42)

The desire to belong to someone, to follow blindly, and through this reverence be rewarded and saved. Although Bowie might not directly speak of God, but a god, he shows his western Christian background in the proclamation: ‘Lord, I’d take an overdose if you knew what’s going down’ (2:22-27). Although Bowie’s dystopian government has moved away from Christianity, in times of crisis the narrator of *Diamond Dogs* still turns to the old canonized religion, rather than to the classical Roman or Greek religion implied by ‘some brave Apollo’. Bowie begins with ‘don’t talk of dust and roses / or should we powder our noses’, a reference to the funeral service found in the Book of Common Prayer, used by the Anglican church (0:26-36). By referencing the Anglican church, Bowie has already referenced a dystopian religion, as the Anglican church is not acknowledged by the Roman-Catholic Church, Bowie’s reference to Apollo seems in line then, with his earlier mention of a non-Catholic church. This mix-and-match mention of different religions seems to suggest for Bowie that it is all the same: a strict leader with a devoted following. Moreover, through this cross-referencing, Bowie’s dystopian world incorporates the themes Booker has highlighted in dystopian texts.

1.5 ‘Just another future song’ Conclusion

In the first part of the chapter I have discussed how Bowie has presented his dystopian world through intertextual use of George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Textually you would not find support for the Cut-Up method in David Bowie’s *Diamond Dogs*, but intertextually Bowie has cut and compiled a number of dystopian texts to create the world of *Diamond*

Dogs. Next to many literary references, Bowie uses traditional themes and ideas to create his dystopian world. In the next chapters I want to analyse the larger oeuvre of Bowie and show that his work has many dystopian qualities.

Chapter 2

David Bowie's dystopian realities

2.1 *'Blue, blue, electric blue/that's the colour of my room'* The outsider in the public and private sphere.

A blurred dichotomy exists between the public and private sphere in many dystopian texts. The outsider, or the narrator, often finds himself observed in the private sphere and in the public sphere when surrounded by others with whom he does not fit in. However, there is often one room that provides complete shelter from ever-watchful eyes. Bowie often situates himself in a room from which he cannot or does not want to escape, or on the street, misbehaving under cover of the night. Bowie does not only sing from the comfort of his room, but also from an outsider perspective, desiring the person in the room to come out. Bowie succinctly summarizes Bartók's opera *Bluebeard's Castle* in the line 'opened strange doors that we'd never close again' (0:41-46). I will also take a look at the people in Bowie's rooms, and, like Judith who opened the locked doors against Bluebeard's advice, discuss what is found inside.³⁸

In "Eight-Line Poem" we are presented with the narrative of a man who is looking around an empty room, presumably a nursery, and he observes the world outside. He is in the company of a dog, and lives with his family in the city. The setting is peaceful, the family unit is complete. There is some conservative pondering whether all the cacti will find a home, implying that other families will live there in the future.³⁹ The narrator talks to the baby in its crib. He also discusses the perspective of the inanimate cactus, which has no use for the shops on West Side. To the cactus, the only important thing is sunlight, to which it has no access

³⁸ Bowie, David. "Scary Monsters and Super Creeps." *Scary Monsters (and Super Creeps)*, RCA, 1980.

³⁹ 'Will all the cacti find a home' (1:45-51).

inside the flat.⁴⁰ Here we are presented with two outsiders: the man, who is living comfortably with his family, and the cactus, cut off from the natural world, situated in a new prairie, deprived of sunshine. While the narrator is free to leave the room, the cactus, the dog and the baby lack this agency. “Eight-Line Poem” is singular in its portrayal of the private sphere, as for the narrator, it is a sphere he can decide to leave. For the other sentient beings, the room is a space in which they are trapped, unless the narrator decides to move them. The narrator is often controlling and restless in Bowie’s songs, finding no comfort in the space he is in, or finding no comfort in himself. “Eight-Line Poem” is the only instance in which he is voluntarily at ease with his surroundings and in control of his surroundings.

In “Sound and Vision” the narrator lacks this control. He cannot escape from the blue room nor does he desire to do so. ‘I will sit right down / waiting for the gift of sound and vision’ (2:15-22). The narrator is an outsider, he does not know what happens outside of the room. His brain is empty, but for the song he is singing, as there is ‘nothing to read / nothing to say’ (2:03-6). The only thing he knows is that something, someone, will come and fill his head with ideas. In a way, this is reminiscent of Samuel Beckett’s play *Waiting for Godot*, waiting for the expected unexpected, but it is unclear when this will happen. This scene also encapsulates the feeling present in Beckett’s *Endgame*, in which the audience is presented with two trash bins standing in an otherwise empty room. The main characters are waiting for the end, with nothing to do but stare at the walls and nothing (new) to say. Arguably, the narrator in “Sound and Vision” could also have been locked away in an isolation cell, with nothing but the song in his mind to keep him company. ‘Drifting into my solitude / over my head’ (2:32-37). The outsider could be waiting to rejoin society. This outsider is not in control

⁴⁰ ‘But the key to the city / Is in the sun that pins the branches to the sky’ (1:54-2:07).

of his surroundings and his confinement, but he is in control of his mind, and in his mind there is sound and vision, the processing of his surroundings and the song he sings.

In “Breaking Glass” the outsider is restless, and acts out. He desires to be observed, to be heard. He is wilfully making a statement. It is clear too, that he is not in his own room and he wants to get out. He wrecks the contents of the room in order to gain control over the situation, to combat boredom. He cannot get out, despite the urge to leave. ‘I’ll never touch you’ at first comes across as a promise, implying a trustworthy narrator, but as the song comes to a close, it becomes ominous, the repetition suggesting the instability of the narrator’s mind (1:16-19).⁴¹ He will never touch you, but he wants to. He does not specify his intentions, but presumably, they are no good.

The narrator in “What in the World”. is conversing with the outsider, locked away in her room. The narrator wants her to come out. On the album *Low* “Breaking Glass” is followed by “What in the World”, and this is a dialogue between the outsider and the narrator, presenting perspectives from both sides of the door.⁴² ‘What you gonna say / what you gonna do? / What you gonna be?’ (1:35-46). The narrator wonders how the outsider will interact with him if she steps outside. ‘So deep in your room / you never leave your room’, the girl inside is much desired by the narrator, but he cannot get to her (0:23-27). It seems that she is a popular figure in the outside world, but she refuses to join this world. It seems he has no incentives to make her come out. ‘I’m just a little bit afraid of you / cause love won’t make you cry’ (0:55-59). She is not interested in his ‘mood for your love’ (0:39-46). Basically, the narrator is powerless ‘what in the world can I do’, he wonders (1:21-26).⁴³ He urges her to come out, but arguably, he is so interested in her, that perhaps he will not allow her to come

⁴¹ Bowie, David, Murray, George, and Davis, Dennis. “Breaking Glass.” *Low*, RCA, 1977.

⁴² The track list of *Low*, is “Breaking Glass”, “What in the World” and “Sound and Vision”. It could be argued that the three form the story of two frustrated individuals on two sides of a door. Both confined by the other.

⁴³ Bowie, David. “What in the World.” *Low*, RCA, 1977.

out, if he cannot come in. Apparently, he is not the only one who desires her. ‘Wait until the crowd cries’ (0:12-15). He can be perceived as the captor. The public intruding on the private. The outside world encroaching on the comfort of the private sphere.

In “Heroes” Bowie speaks of a similar crossing of the private and public spheres. The narrator is outside, he has found his comfort in the person accompanying him and the wall separates him from those who wish to harm him and his companion. The wall provides the comfort usually found in the private sphere, but as this comfort is found outside, publicly, it will doom the outsider. He cannot be safe outside, as he has no place to hide away in. The fathoming of a private sphere outside provides him with some final comfort.

In “Joe the Lion” the narrator describes the outsider, his reckless behaviour. Joe the Lion is caught in a rut. He acts out publicly because his home provides him with no comfort. It is in waking reality that he enacts his dreams: ‘YOU GET UP AND SLEEP’ (1:15-17). His public behaviour makes him dangerous, but he acts out because he does not realize he is awake. His drunken stupor is acknowledged by all, the entertainment for a simple evening. The people are familiar with Joe, and they enable his bad behaviour. Joe is safe in public, unlike the narrator in “Heroes”. However, Joe is not safe at home, he finds neither rest nor comfort there. In “Beauty and the Beast” the narrator is on the move. ‘Weaving down a byroad / sing The Song / That’s my kind of Highroad, Gone Wrong’ (0:33-41). The narrator has come to realize that it is in public that he can act out, he is on the move for the entirety of the song, driving in his car, a private sphere arguably. This interaction of private and public sphere suggest to him that he can act out however he desires. He is on a mission to misbehave. It is in “Heroes” that Bowie shows the consequences of misbehaving in broad daylight. As long as the narrator perceives himself to be alone, he reveals his true self. Whether he chooses to act out is solely his decision to make, it is optional. When observed, as shown in “Breaking Glass”, he acts out, solely because he feels that he has to. In “Sound and

Vision” and in “Eight-Line Poem” the narrator feels at ease with his surroundings and has no desire to act out: he is alone and in control of the situation. Once control over private or public sphere is lost, the narrators act out, even at great personal costs.

2.2 ‘*Sand in my eyes*’ The desolate landscape in Bowie’s albums

Bowie travels around the world and takes his audience along in most of his songs. Setting is always important to Bowie, but it is only in songs such as “The Secret Life of Arabia” that the location becomes a character in the song. In “The Secret Life of Arabia” the narrator finds himself stranded in the unforgiving desert. It is not his mindset which impacts him, rather it is the desolate landscape. Just like ‘the prairie of your room’ in “Eight-Line Poem”, these surroundings are not nurturing, except for those few who know how to survive. The narrator does not expect to survive. ‘Secret secrets never seen / Secret secrets ever green’ (0:19-28). It is this barren location that makes him acknowledge that he has secrets, but he will never speak them. The landscape destroys him. In “Space Oddity” Major Tom finds himself stranded in space, the unforgiving cold infinite nothing. He is stranded just like the narrator in “The Secret Life of Arabia”, his shuttle will be the end of him, running out of oxygen or provisions. Similarly, he will never be able to disclose his discoveries, they will remain his secrets.

In “Space Oddity” and “The Secret Life of Arabia”, the alien landscape proves fatal, but Bowie’s lyrics show us that people can turn a cities into desolate landscapes, and thus people also become a destructive force. In “Future Legend” the city has become a barren wasteland. In Hunger City there are only mutants, who have murdered all of humankind. The windowfronts are broken and ‘ten thousand peoploids’ are instituted in different parts of the city.⁴⁴ Bowie uses wastelands to highlight the dangers of a lawless society, and to emphasize

⁴⁴ Bowie, David. “Future Legend.” *Diamond Dogs*, RCA, 1974.

that society can be as dangerous as desolate landscapes can be. The landscape might be untouched, but it will touch you, and affect you, as you might affect it in turn.

2.3 ‘Now she's stupid in the streets’ Bowie in the big city

For his lyrics, Bowie has also used contemporary history to shape his dystopian cities in the likeness of present day cities. In “Panic in Detroit” Bowie looks to Detroit during the race riots. He sings from the perspective of someone who uses the chaos of the riots in the city to steal and plunder, he remarks that he is afraid and would like to call someone for help. In “Where Are We Now?” Bowie wanders through the city of Berlin, a city which has seen its fair share of dystopian refurbishments and regimes, from the Weimar republic during which the city became a metropolis, to its destruction during the Second World War, and the rise and fall of the Berlin Wall. He sings of the restrictions of the communist regime in “Heroes”, and is heavily inspired by German culture. In 2013 Bowie published a list with hundred book titles, among them *Berlin Alexanderplatz* by Alfred Döblin, which chronicles the late Weimar Republic years and the growing unrest leading up to the rise of Hitler and Nazism.⁴⁵ In “Where Are We Now?”, Bowie has returned to the city, but this time not as a heroic narrator. He is alone, and as he is walking through the 2013 city, he is also revisiting his memories of that same city. ‘Just walking the dead’ (0:39-41).⁴⁶ He finds himself in the unique position of looking at the city through the eyes of his past self, his present self, and from the perspective of his past self as his future self. Things have changed beyond recognition. In “Diamond Dogs” Bowie presents a dystopian outlook of Hamburg. Bowie draws on the infrastructure of the city, taking inspiration from its red light district, to present ‘Love-Me Avenue’ in “Future Legend”. The city is also known for its newspapers, and Bowie sings its dubious praise in

⁴⁵ Döblin, Alfred. *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, S. Fischer Verlag, 1929.

⁴⁶ Bowie, David. “Where Are We Now?” *The Next Day*, Nipple Music, 2013.

“Candidate”: ‘I am having so much fun with the poisonous people / Spreading rumours and lies and stories they made up’ (1:04-11).

In general Bowie is interested in big cities, in “Suffragette City” he describes the city at night, re-creating the idea that at night, the public sphere becomes different, it allows more space to act out and accommodates the outsider. Even in his earliest work Bowie is interested in the chemistry of big cities. In “We Are Hungry Men” he opens with a public announcement that the world is in danger of being overpopulated, particularly the cities. Moreover, Bowie has created his own society to experiment on, to see if he can cull the population. He proposes firm restrictions and limitations, such as contraceptive pill and free abortions for those who are deemed unfit, echoing Hitler’s belief of the Lebensraum. In “Scary Monsters and Super Creeps” Bowie depicts the city scape. He shows that the streets are not dangerous, but the people in the street are the ones to be wary of, in particular the people you pick up on the street. In the song the narrator picks up a woman, ‘she could have been a killer’, but it turns out that he is the dangerous stranger (0:34-35). Cities are where public and private spheres interact and which generally brings out the worst in mankind.

The public sphere interferes with the private sphere, situates itself in the girl’s room and refuses to leave. Not only does he mistreat the woman to the point that she cannot discuss what has happened to her, he also robs her of her room. The public sphere interferes with the private sphere, situates itself in the girl’s room and refuses to leave. Although the chorus of the song suggests that the narrator is acting in fear, too afraid to remain on the streets, he is pushed to the brink of decency and mistreats and robs a woman of her room, just to get off the streets. Alternatively, the woman’s home is filled with ‘an horror of rooms, she was tired, you can’t hide beat / When I looked in her eyes, they were blue but nobody home’ (0:21-32). The narrator entrances the listless woman, and makes her open doors to rooms which mentally she will never leave, and always inhabit. In this song, Bowie depicts the horrors in the private

sphere, creating the idea that the private sphere is not safe, as he also suggested in “Sound and Vision”, and the inhabitants determine whether the private sphere is as unsafe as the public sphere is, in “Eight-Line Poem”. In the song “Repetition” Bowie hints at domestic violence, furthering the idea that the private sphere is not always a safe haven.

2.4 ‘Oh my TVC-15’ Technological advancements

In “We Are Hungry Men” Bowie wants to introduce a new medicine, birth control, to cull the population. The problem of overpopulation is also discussed by Kurt Vonnegut in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. In a way, the song seems to take inspiration from the novel:

I propose to give the pill
 Free of charge to those that feel
 That they are not infertile
 the crops of few, the cattle gun. (0:52-1:05)

This idea of sterilizing those unsuitable, survival of the fittest, is not a new concept. Darwinism was concerned with this, and Hitler used it in combination with the notion of Lebensraum. Bowie parodies these concepts in “We Are Hungry Men”. He has drawn up a plan to keep birthrates low. In “Five Years” the narrator is concerned about the state of the world, after the news announces the world will come to an end in less than five years. In an interview with Burroughs in *The Rolling Stone*, Bowie discusses the idea he had for “Five Years”. The song is about the irreversible exploitation of the earth by technological progress, industrialization and overpopulation. In “Space Oddity” the dangers of technology take centre stage. Major Tom is sent into space, and the audience is taken along with him. In 1968, “Space Oddity” was played on the radio during the moon landing. Historically, the song has been used to celebrate scientific progress, even though Bowie sings about the failure of this

progress, resulting in the death of Major Tom. Bowie's lyrics switch from space travel to domestic gadgets. In "TVC15" the television has become so large, an all-enveloping centrepiece in the living room, that has engulfed the narrator's girlfriend. She has been sucked into the television, and the narrator does not know how to get her out. The size of the screen is reminiscent of the screens in *Fahrenheit 451*, because of which the viewer is able to actually take part in the movies, albeit scripted. *Brave New World* also features screens for the audience to watch and vicariously experience the "Feelies". The woman trapped in the television set is similarly scripted to appear, she is the narrator's main feature. He contemplates joining her in his desperation. The idea of 'Transition/Transmission' is also discussed in *The Fly* (1958), in which a man accidentally combines his own DNA with that of a fly's and becomes a hybrid creature. Bowie calls his girlfriend his 'dream test baby' (1:15-16). Perhaps "TVC15" is about a scientist who tried to teleport his female test subject, but failed and now tries futilely to retrieve her. In "It's No Game (Pt. 2)" Bowie remarks on the inhumanity of a globalized market, on the destruction consumerism leaves in its wake:

Children 'round the world

Wipe camel shit on the walls

Making carpets on treadmills

Or garbage sorting. (3:14-31)

He speaks of the inhumane conditions and the child labour used and needed for the production of consumer goods. The cost of living, but for whom? He questions whether we really need these things.

Bowie's lyrics show that he is concerned about the world at large, and, just like most dystopian texts, wonders whether the unrestricted progress of science and machinery is not

something which will, eventually, only bring harm to mankind, and not better their lives, as is commonly believed.

2.5 '*Do you remember?*' The political climate in Bowie's albums

On his albums, Bowie addresses the current political climate, but he also sings about non-existent dystopian regimes and nationalism. He draws his inspiration from current and historical events, and at times turns to literary sources to make his position clear, or to provide his listeners with a better example of a regime.

In "Fashion" Bowie readdresses and corrects his earlier stance on fascism. In his younger years, Bowie had claimed England would benefit from a fascist leader, later he responded to this stance by claiming that he ought not be held accountable for things he had said while nearly overdosing on coke, and for the things he had long since forgotten. Sadly for Bowie, the press had not forgotten such an egregious claim. In "Fashion" Bowie officially makes his stance on fascism known, and in "It's No Game (Pt. 1)" he states 'to be insulted by these fascists / Is so degrading' (3:45-51). In "Fashion" he continues to comment on political climates, and he describes the political climate as a trend to be followed, those who do not think for themselves, do not question, will fall in line and keep up with the latest (fascist) trends.

In "Young Americans" Bowie sketches the idyllic American Republican way of living. He taunts the American audience with 'Do you remember / Your president Nixon?' (2:27-32). In the song he criticizes the way the government deploys soldiers but then does not care about the returning veterans. He criticizes the way African-American people are treated, something he would remark on during shows done during his Soul Tour. He responds to the American car industry, makes fun of the conservative lifestyle, and even criticizes the 'New Deal'. There is clearly an imbalance between the woman able to afford a Ford Mustang, and the

tramp she passes. Most of all, he satirizes the way Americans lived before the seventies, and criticizes the way American society has deteriorated and shot itself in the foot, by not allowing for change and inclusion.

In “1984” Bowie considers the way a regime can become totalitarian, and how this totalitarian regime is immensely harmful to its citizens. ‘Someday they won’t let you, now you must agree / The times they are a-telling, and the changing isn’t free / you’ve read it in the tea leaves, and the tracks are on TV’ (0:25-37). ‘The times they are a-telling, and the changing isn’t free’ is a reference to Bob Dylan’s “The Times They Are A-Changin’”. This protest song has come and gone, nothing has been accomplished in its wake. Bowie argues that Dylan has used his voice for monetary gain. Moreover, Bowie states that freedom of speech should not be taken for granted. The signs of times changing can no longer be ignored. There will come a time when the regime is horrible, and you can no longer ignore its shortcomings. In “Big Brother” Bowie details a society in dire need of a firm reigning hand. By positioning the saviour as Apollo, the new regime will take on mythic proportions. Apollo was a god of many things, and this can be considered a nod at the regime the song is named after.

In “Quicksand” Bowie turns his gaze to the past, and religions outside of Christendom. He turns to silent films and propaganda. He criticizes the medium of film and propaganda, by i.e. referencing Crowley and the Golden Dawn, philosophies that are not acknowledged by official institutions. He argues that the only truth is to be found in death. Bowie speaks of Nietzsche’s Übermensch, a superman, and argues that faith in any shape or form is meaningless, given meaning only by those in power, or those who have conceived it. ‘Don’t belief in yourself / Don’t deceive with belief / Knowledge comes with death’s release’ (2:22-35). Only when everything is over, will you be master of your own life. Only in death will the truth be revealed. In “Life on Mars?”, Bowie speaks of the way governments abuse their

power to exert control over their citizens. The old regime has become corrupted, and this is what the people are stuck with. “Girl Loves Me” proves that Bowie’s newer work still lends itself to his adaptation of dystopian texts. An intertextual interpretation of the lyrics proves this:

I’m sitting in the chestnut tree

Who the fuck’s gonna mess

With me? [...]

You viddy at the cheena

Choodesny with the red rot. (0:42-1:54)

Although Bowie utilizes Polari slang in this song, slang spoken by the queer scene in the sixties, not everything is part of that lexicon. ‘The chestnut tree’ refers to the Chestnut Tree Café in which Winston Smith in Orwell’s *1984*, has seen old anarchists, those opposing the Party. Winston does not like going in there, as it has an infamous reputation. However, he has visited the Chestnut Tree Café at least once to find out what it is like. Winston had hoped to meet like-minded intellectuals opposed to the regime of Big Brother. By situating himself in this café, Bowie is stating his political opinion, be it real or dystopian. Leah Kardos argues that “★” is filled with rhetoric found in far-right and extremist political speeches. In interviews Bowie has stated that “★” is about the feeling of giving in to such rhetoric, the lure of believing such rhetoric. For the music video of “★”, the dancers repeat the dance performance from the “Fashion” music video in which Bowie publicly stated his political views, in an attempt to rectify earlier positive remarks made about fascism. Bowie reframes and recalls his political standpoint by re-using his own work, to fit the political climate of the 21st century. Furthermore, “Girl Loves Me” also references *A Clockwork Orange*. By utilizing

the slang Anthony Burgess created for his novel Bowie comments on the political climate of present day England. Bowie has made references to *A Clockwork Orange* before, in “Suffragette City” on the album *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*. ‘Droogie don’t crash here’ (1:10-12).⁴⁷

The concept of playing a political role as discussed in “Big Brother”, “1984”, “Quicksand” and “Life on Mars?” lends thought to the idea that a politician is nothing but a performer. In “Please Mr Gravedigger”, Bowie comments on the aftermath of the Second World War, on disillusioned postwar-Britain. The gravedigger in the song does nothing but dig graves all day and smoke cigarettes. His disappointment with the government has left him disillusioned with the church as well, and has forced him to turn his back on most of society.

Even on his final album “★”, Bowie is still concerned with adapting dystopian works and even using this intertextuality to revisit past perspectives. By combining this with contemporary examples he creates a dystopian vision in his lyrics that exudes warnings for present-day reality and the future.

2.6 ‘*Makes a man takes things over*’ Fame, popular culture and the downfall of man's ambition

Before Bowie experienced his own ‘Hollywood highs’ he was wary of fame, of the limelight, and made note of the extreme lengths people might be driven to in order to achieve what they desire. Bowie wrote a lengthy album bringing this topic to light, the album *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*. Bowie was an actor before he got into music, and he never discarded the theatrical performance. He starred in some iconic roles, but

⁴⁷ Bowie, David. “Suffragette City.” *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*, RCA, 1972.

also in quite a few flops, or now considered cult-classics. Like the actor in “Cracked Actor”, Bowie became addicted to multiple substances:

Crack, baby, crack

Show me you’re real

Smack, baby, smack

Is that all that you feel? (0:38-46)

He sings about this downside of fame in “Cracked Actor”, “Rock ’n’ Roll Suicide”, “Ziggy Stardust”, and “Golden Years”. He stresses that if the opportunity of a rise to fame presents itself, it should be taken, but he warns that in taking the opportunity, you will lose yourself in the process. You will become the roles you play, but you will lose the real you.

Man’s ambition is not just limited to acting or politics, science could provide another claim to fame, at great cost. In “Space Oddity” mankind has mastered the art of space flight, or so we are led to believe. Major Tom is sent into space, the pinnacle of man’s ambition, but still he fails. There was a glitch and Major Tom is stuck in space, doomed to die, because he veered too close to the moon. Man’s prowess comes at a cost.

In “Fame” Bowie shares the perspective of the person sitting in the limo. ‘Its mine, its mine—is just his line / to bind your time—it drives you to crime’ (1:51-58). The person in the limo cares little about where he is going to end, as long as he will get there fashionably. Once the person in the limo has had a taste of fame, Bowie argues, no price is too steep. They will stop at nothing to hold onto that fame, it is theirs and theirs alone. ‘Puts you there, where things are hollow’ (0:55-59). As in “Fame”, in “Cracked Actor” there is nothing real about the limelight, it is an illusion, for a ‘sack full of checks’ and Bowie warns against the pursuit of fame (1:18-20). The actors are has-beens and the screen is no longer the image of man’s

greatest invention since the wheel. In “Life on Mars?” Bowie sings: ‘And she’s hooked to the silver screen / But the film is a saddening bore / For she’s lived it ten times or more’ (0:30-40). This could be another reference to the “Feelies” in *Brave New World* or the features in *Fahrenheit 451*, and the line ‘As she walks through her sunken dream’ is even reminiscent of the scattered storytelling parallel universe with Montana Wild in *Slaughterhouse-Five* (0:22-24). The screen is no longer enticing, and promises nothing but the ordinary. Moreover, it also ties in with the idea that everything in life is scripted, it is predestined. Once you realize this, life becomes strange, alien.

In “Andy Warhol” Bowie continues the idea of the imagined replacing reality. Specifically, Bowie toys with the price of art. How much should it take to produce art? What do we call art, and why is it art? Bowie ridicules Andy Warhol. He considers him pretentious and fake. This stressed by providing an intimate, and imperfect, recording, at the beginning of this track. He purposefully presents a false start, and the real character of David Bowie, before he starts the performance of the singer. This introduction allows Bowie to present a different kind of art, situated in reality, rather than a pretend fantasy on the silver screen. In “Jean Genie” Bowie reflects on the peculiar behaviour of stars, and how the fans accept their peculiarities. The idea of films taking over reality is also discussed in “The Prettiest Star”:

Staying back in your memories

are the movies of the past

How she moves is all it takes

To sing a song of when I loved

The Prettiest Star. (0:50-1:10)

A specific reality and/or fantasy is captured on screen, it is immutable. You will age, but the screen never will. Once captured in film, you will always be remembered as you once were, and as it once was.

Bowie's lyrics highlight the dangers of man's aspirations to fame and his scientific ambitions. "★" not only presents its listeners with an extreme political figure, but also with the star that is larger than life, all-consuming and enchanting. People will follow him in spite of themselves. Similarly, the protagonist in "The Man Who Sold the World" seems like a regular guy, yet this man enchanted the world and sold it to achieve great personal gain. Bowie warns against blind adoration, and urges people to question why they should follow these leaders, these stars, these artists? What did it cost them to get there, and what will it cost us to follow their lead? In a sense Bowie presents his listeners with a Faustian perspective on fame and ambition: have these people sold their souls?

2.7 *'In Quaaludes and red wine'* The past, the future and the younger generations in Bowie's albums

In dystopian texts children are vital, or fodder, or both. They drive the furthering of the new regime, but in dystopian texts children are often out of touch with the past. At the same time the main character often experiences a loss of childhood memories, ergo his past is forgotten or fabricated. Bowie too, concerns himself with the past. He utilizes the child as a bridge between the past and the future. In "Oh! You Pretty Things" Bowie argues that the new generation has made the preceding one obsolete. This new generation is unfathomable with their new religions, and they will not attempt to bridge the gap between them and their parent:

Look out at your children

See their faces in the golden rays

Don't kid yourself they belong to you

They're the start of the coming race. (1:48-59)

Bowie argues here that the coming race is on a mission, and it is best if the older generations do not hinder them or hold them back—there is no holding them back. As a post-war baby, this would have been of particular interest to Bowie. His albums repeatedly introduced a new order, and his lifestyle was impossible to fathom for older generations. He is the pretty thing, and in turn so are his followers. The song uses the parent perspective, similar to “Eight-Line Poem” and “Kooks”. He grooms these children as loving parents for the future, but fails to understand that every generation should make way for new ideas. In “Starman” the narrator warns the child not to tell their parents of his coming, out of fear that the parents will misunderstand, and will respond without understanding. Bowie argues that the past and the future deserve understanding, and if this fails, things will go wrong. In “Changes”, Bowie argues that those who do not grow, and therefore do not interact with time, will not stay true to themselves, moreover, they will lose touch with themselves. ‘Time may change me / But I can't trace time’ (1:12-17). Change is part of the passage of time:

I watch the ripples change their size

But never leave the stream

Of warm impermanence

So the days flow thru my eyes

But the days still seem the same. (1:29-45)

Change, ultimately, is a permanent thing, and because of its impermanence it is always rooted in the past. It will always move away from the past, or move back to the past. Change is always rooted in the past to create a new future. Bowie also attacks the parents of the post-war babies. ‘Where's your shame / You've left us up to our necks in it’ (2:18-21). It is the youthful

voice expressing its anger at the past generations, and the future they have left their children. “Rebel Rebel” is about an adolescent, acting out against the traditional family unit, the typical storm und drang shown, and similarly “Rebel Rebel” is a rebel without a cause, but it is vital that children rebel against their parents, that they develop new ideas. A rebel does not have to lead a revolution, but rebellion starts with personal expression, and this is precisely what the rebel does. Through this form of self-expression, which has taken the shape of the glam-rockers of the seventies, inspired by the likes of Marc Bolan and David Bowie, the rebel expresses himself.

Although it is a good thing that a society keeps evolving, the change into the future can be hazardous. The parents in “Starman”, “Rebel Rebel”, and “Oh! You Pretty Things” are not amiss in their wariness of the future. Sometimes the future is hostile, and resistance is futile. In “Moonage Daydream”, the space invader paints a Dionysian picture for the future, and draws on the past by doing so. Thus he challenges the past, the family unit, and the conservative way of living.

In “Future Legend” Bowie paints a bleak picture of future societies. At its heart he places the city, which will always be a symbol of change and modernity, and depicts it barren, invaded by a sub-human species. The future is when the unruly come out to play and exert power over those who are all too willing to listen, but also over those who are steadfast, averse to change. In “Cygnets Committee” Bowie presents us with a younger generation adrift from the past:

So much has gone and little is new

And as the sunrise stream

Flickers on me

My friends talk

Of glory, untold dream, where all is God and God is just a word. (3:48-4:26)

The narrator expresses melancholy rather than nostalgia. The future always holds promise, but will it always be realized? The narrator tells his listeners that sometimes the future is nothing more than a fantasy, a pipe dream, something to cling on to when trying to keep going.

In “An Occasional Dream” Bowie concerns himself with the past as a dream—not a memory. It has become so inaccessible that it no longer feels like a past reality.⁴⁸ According to the funeral rites we shall return to ashes as we once were. Bowie concerns himself with this idea in “An Occasional Dream”, “Please, Mr Gravedigger”, and “Ashes to Ashes”. Once all has gone, and everyone has been buried, what have we become, what is left of us?

Due to inescapable change, sometimes the past is irretrievable as voiced in “Where Are We Now?” and “Dollar Days”. These lyrics show his longing for the country of the olden days. ‘If I never see the English ever-greens I’m running to’ (0:56-1:02). Bowie also links these English evergreens to the waning importance of the British Empire in “Life on Mars?”. ‘Rule Britannia is out of bounds’ (2:06-9). A regime so rooted in its past, the world passed by, and it was caught unaware and unprepared. Bowie can be nostalgic at times.

In “Memory of a Free Festival” he presents us with a memory filled with biblical references, and most of all the illusion of a care-free adolescence. He is not ready to part with his adolescence. ‘And Peter tried to climb aboard but the Captain shook his head / And away they soared / Climbing through the ivory vibrant cloud’ (2:30-45). The reference to *Peter Pan* by J. M. Barrie is intended to signify Bowie’s youth and the mourning for its loss. It shows two generations: the child and the adult going on a journey together. ‘The children of the summer’s end’ signifies the end of young adulthood, the middle-age years nearing (0:52-55).

⁴⁸ ‘In our madness / We burnt one hundred days, / Time takes time to pass / And I still hold some ashes to me, / An Occasional Dream’.

These people have grown up, and Bowie mourns that loss. Bowie's 'sun machine coming down' is the opposite of Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*, Bowie both celebrating and mourning the aging of his peers, the natural passage of time. His memory of the event is hazy, owing to his drug habit, which in a way mimics the fuzzy quality often accompanying the trip down memory lane. Bowie took drugs to wilfully forget, yet mourns the loss of his memories, an adolescent forced to face the consequences of his youthful follies.

"It's No Game (Pt. 1)" argues that all, specifically the older generations, should be held accountable for their actions, for their participation in creating the future—the present. 'Draw the blinds on yesterday / And it's all so much scarier' (2:32-42). This line was initially part of the demo "Port of Amsterdam", a song Bowie wrote back in the early seventies, but it is still relevant in this context: by ignoring what was said in the past, you cannot predict the future, as stated in "It's No Game (Pt. 1)":

Silhouettes and shadows

Watch the revolution

No more free steps to heaven

It's no game. (0:40-1:04)

Those who do not change with time, will not be part of the future.

In "Time", time is a cruel mistress that has gotten the upper hand. The man not only feels that there is not enough time, but also that he has run out of time. He tries to pass the days spent in a drug-addled daze, or drunken oblivion. "Time" discusses the period between past and future: the present. Bowie has never been much concerned with the present, but in "Time" he presents the difficulty of being in the present. You are running behind, and running ahead of things at the same time:

Time—He's waiting in the wings

He speaks of senseless things

His script is you and me, boy. (0:13-25)

Not only is the experiencing of time a fluid concept in “Time”, Bowie also argues that life is scripted, something he repeats throughout his work ‘Well I look at my watch it says 9:25 and I think “Oh God I’m still alive” / We should be on by now’ (1:10-29). Bowie has always been interested in the field of tension created by the passing of time, and his lyrics reflect the myriad of time and its impact on a forever shapeshifting world and society.

Chapter 3

Dystopian relationships in relation to the self and others in Bowie's albums

Alex Sharpe argues that Bowie's allure lies in the way in which he is both human and other. Bowie is a monster, and the monster is at heart human. Bowie acts out his monstrosity by playing with his identity. It is ever-changing, and never (entirely) conforming to persona or gender. Sharpe states that love for Bowie has always been about religion, transcendence, and the rejection of love. It is the love for the world, not an individual, of which Bowie speaks.

3.1 *'But I've never caught a glimpse'* The construction and perception of identity in Bowie's albums

Bowie has always been concerned with his identity, or the identity of his music, and identity as a concept in his albums. He is particularly concerned with the way the world shapes the individual. In "Kooks" we see the new parents, and while they sketch a lovely, lovers' story, the nurturing is detailed. Bowie speaks of the identity of both the new parent and the newborn. The way these are intertwined in shaping identity. Once the child has grown older, they might rebel against these ideas. "Rebel Rebel" shows the formation of the individual identity, as an integral part of growing up. However, "Rebel Rebel" also focuses on the influence of the outside world—the (popular) culture which influences the way we see things. In "We Are the Dead" the confrontation between regime and individual, parent and child, older and younger generations is central to the song. One has to go against the other to establish and form an own identity. Totalitarian regimes only allow a communal identity. As culture becomes more popular, the shaping of minds becomes easier and therefore less perceptible.

The opening lines of “Andy Warhol” allow Bowie to play with the concept of identity. He uses his voice to put on a performance as the artist Andy Warhol. He breaks character when he misses his cue ‘are you ready?’ and then switches back to the identity of the singer David Bowie (0:46). Bowie is also interested in the depiction of identity in film and music, the shaping of this medium in every-day life. He references film and filming many times in his albums, especially in *Hunky Dory*. “Song for Bob Dylan” shows his interest in the legacy of pop stars, and its impact on the shaping of identity for generations of listeners:

You gave your soul to every bedsit room

At least a picture on my wall

Sat behind a million pair of eyes

And told them why they saw

Then we lost your train of thought

The paintings are all your own

While troubles are rising

We’d rather be scared

Together than alone. (1:14-41)

Leah Kardos discusses the influence of pop stars, the way people consume their products—art, music, novels. Bob Dylan wrote protest songs, and his songs shaped the way a generation looked at the world. When Bob Dylan started changing his musical style, people did not appreciate it. Bowie also experienced this when he announced that Ziggy Stardust was dead. Bowie is interested in the way culture, community and age(-ing) shape people’s identities. Cultural movements shape people’s identity, but simultaneously also make people

lose their individual identities. In “Join the Gang”, Bowie presents a cultural movement in which people have joined a community, but in doing so they lost their individuality, just like the people in “Memory of a Free Festival”: ‘the children of summer’s end’ (0:52-55). They are defined by one common denominator, the narrative of the event provided by Bowie. Yet, there is no trace of individuality or identity in the song. Presenting the song as accessible to all. In his albums, Bowie often discusses loss of identity, and the communal identity, but although he continuously creates new identities both for himself and his music, his musical legacy and his legacy as an artist, a star, has grown stagnant. Bowie has been captured in history, and after his death, is no longer capable of affecting it or changing it.

3.2 ‘*Sometimes you get so lonely*’ The depiction of love and lust in Bowie’s albums

Many dystopian texts feature doomed love affairs, and entertain the idea that love will overcome the regime. Love will always be stronger than loyalty to a regime. Julia entertains this idea in *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*. In a dystopian regime love is often replaced by the simple sexual affair—lust. In interviews Bowie has often made his stance on love clear. It was not for him, until his great love affair with his second wife. Bowie never outright identified himself as anything but straight, but flirted with the physical relationship and the performance of queerness.

In “Love You Till Tuesday” Bowie introduces the laissez-faire affair, differentiating between flirting and courting. Only if the girl in question is remarkable enough, he will love her till Wednesday. In “Letter to Hermione”, Bowie writes to his ex-lover and wonders if the memory of their love still exists, as the physical and spiritual memory of their love still pains him. He writes to her ‘a treasured dream’ in which he paints her a picture of their love. A similar concept is discussed in “An Occasional Dream”. Bowie remains in love with the memory of her.

In “Rock ’n’ Roll with Me” and “Word on a Wing” the lover requests space to grow together, to come together, but in “Rock ’n’ Roll with Me” Bowie knows the relationship is doomed. In “Heroes” the relationship is similarly doomed—but the song presents the great dystopian (doomed) love affair. Their relationship will not save them, nor topple the regime, though they pretend for a moment that it will. The thought of a future in which they can just be, is enough to betray a belief system implemented by the government.

In “Be My Wife” Bowie discusses the solitude he experiences, and what might lead him to marry, companionship rather than love. Bowie is decisive in separating love and lust, affection and affectation. In “Station to Station” he ponders the matter of love. ‘It’s not the side-effects of the cocaine / I’m thinking that it must be love’ (8:27-34). His body has experienced a rush, and he argues that this is not drug-related, but rather the result of being with his lover, and a boost in love hormones. In the same song he describes a torrid love affair, ‘Making sure white stains’ (5:13-15). This is a reference to Alistair Crowley’s poems, most of which are about a physical affair between two men. He thinks his relationship with the man is love—not lust, but at the same time he negates this by stating that he has been taking drugs. In “Queen Bitch” Bowie lusts after a woman, and regrets not having a chance to act on his desire for her. “Queen Bitch” could refer to a drag queen, and if this is true, it can be considered another example of Bowie’s focus on lust rather than love in queer love affairs. This perspective makes his outlook on queer relationships rather dystopian. Bowie presents a conservative narrative of queer relationships, while similarly claiming that only in specific situations, life-and-death situations, (straight) love affairs are possible, because they are finite, short-lived. In “Be My Wife” when confronted with a enduring love, Bowie considers the platonic side: ‘Sometimes you get so lonely’ (0:10-12). This too, fits in with the idea of love in the dystopian family unit, its sole purpose is procreation, not love. In “Soul Love” Bowie

discusses different kinds of love, but concludes that it is loyalty which binds people together: the love for a country, a child, a friend, or a partner.

In “Modern Love” Bowie speaks of the (religious) conventions underpinning love. He considers love non-existent. Rather it is compulsory, or compulsive, heterosexuality that brings people together, not only in matrimony but also in life in general. Bowie argues that if there were no religious consequences or a religious agenda (promoting procreation), there would be no love in society. In his chapter on love in Bowie’s works, Sharpe argues that “Word on A Wing”, “Five Years” and “Station to Station” are about mankind’s relationship with church and love. Love does not exist without the church, it is not the love for a person which drives people, but rather the love for the church. In “Moonage Daydream”, Bowie sings: ‘The church of man, love, such a holy place to be’ (1:05-11). As the world moves away from religion, what truly brings people together? If there is no regime to rebel against, what drives people to come together? Is love but lust, Bowie wonders.

3.3 ‘*When you're a*’ The dystopian aspects of gender performance in Bowie's albums

Bowie is well known for his performance of gender, and how he challenges gender stereotypes, but does his performance of gender also translate to his albums? From the onset of his career, Bowie has challenged binary stereotypes. In “She’s Got Medals”, Bowie presents a butch, a tomboy soldier who acts like a man, but is in fact not a man, and is clever enough to know when to stop fighting. To join the fight she performed traditional masculine traits, but when she leaves, resorts to traditional feminine traits in order to go unprosecuted. In “She’s Got Medals” we see a woman traversing the gender binary to suit her needs and interests. This is not the first time Bowie considers the woman as a fierce thing to behold, nor the last time Bowie traverses the gendered binary and uses his fluidity, or androgyny, to put up a combined human, both man and woman. He particularly draws on this unity when portraying the family unit. In “Moonage Daydream” the space invader proclaims he will be a

‘mama-papa comin’ for you’, he will be the ultimate guardian, who will be capable of seeing and tending to all of your needs (0:04-6). Before singing about the ultimate guardian, he already performed him. “Eight-Line Poem” shows a man who spends his day at home, quite comfortable with his child and his dog. After the birth of his son, Bowie often wore a dress while going for a stroll with the pram. This challenges the notion of the stay-at home mother, and questions the performance of the father in raising a child. Simultaneously, Bowie also suggests, to refer back to 2.1, that the narrator in “Eight-Line Poem” is a gentle dictator, who holds all the power.

Before Bowie portrayed the gender-fluid glam-rocker in “Rebel Rebel”, he wrote about the dominant woman in “Queen Bitch”. Presently, a queen could also refer to a drag queen, and this new meaning pulls the song into the 21st century. Bowie initially might have sung about quite the woman to behold, in present-day he would be singing about a drag queen, queer-ifying the perspective of the narrator too. If the woman is traversing those lawless streets, to draw on 2.3, what will the narrator be doing there? Is he then not part of the same scene? In “Girl Loves Me” Bowie utilizes specific slang, Polari, which dates back even to the 19th century, and was largely used by theatre groups, actors, and experienced a resurgence during the sixties when it became part of the underground gay scene in London. which he must have picked up at the time, to show that he is part of the in-crowd. By acknowledging this part of his past, it allows for a new reading of songs such as “Queen Bitch” as well.

Bowie provides a distinctive narrative about women and the queer community, but does not lend a sympathetic ear to women and those part of the queer community, he also scrutinizes the male point of view. He is not much impressed by his own sex, and challenges the gender essentialist views of many at the time. The music video “Boys Keep Swinging” provides a good example of this. He dresses up like a male to sing the verses, exclaiming,

satirically, how great it is to be a man, while singing the chorus of the song dressed up as three women. At the end of the song, he reveals that he is his own back-up singers, begging the question: what is a man? What should he look like in order to be labelled a man? Moreover, why do men have all these opportunities? Bowie takes things a step further by providing examples that go back until the creation of the earth:

Heaven loves ya

The clouds part for ya

Nothing stands in your way

When you're a boy'. (0:04-18)

God is deemed a man, and he created Adam in his own likeness. The man is the archetype, the only human. Woman was taken from Adam's rib, and on this too, Bowie remarks; 'They'll never clone ya' (1:19-21). Man is singular, like God. However, this perspective is satirized in the music video. By performing the song as both a man and a woman, Bowie shows fluidity between the genders, and ultimately that unity between the two.

In "Repetition" Bowie presents a male perspective reminiscent of that American conservative gaze discussed in 2.5, and takes things a step further by presenting only the man's perspective. The song is aptly titled, as the speaker's monologue, a man, is repetitive in nature. The woman is not allowed to respond and thus change his speech patterns. Bowie starts the song from a distance, then crawls into the skin of this Johnny. In this sense, Bowie renounces his own beliefs on gender. By not providing the audience with the woman's perspective, there is only room for pity on her behalf, and anger on the man's behalf. It is reminiscent of the interactions between male and female protagonist in the play *Look Back in Anger* by John Osborne. Despite offering critique of Johnny by satirizing him, Johnny does not hold himself accountable for the way his life worked out. Bowie seems to distance himself

from the situation, not truly invested in his narrative. He positions his audience on the sideline, unable to interfere.

There are multiple instances in which the woman in Bowie's songs is a fair maiden somehow to be rescued, think of "Unwashed and Somewhat Slightly Dazed" in which he presents the narrator as looking up at a woman in a tower, in "Repetition" he presents the homemaker who has no voice, which he also does in "She'll Drive the Big Car", and "Golden Years". He positions the woman as lust object or saving grace in songs such as "Suffragette City", "Lady Stardust", "China Girl", "Scary Monsters and Super Creeps" and "Blackout". It is only in his later career that these female archetypes start to change in songs like "You Will Set The World (On Fire)" and "Sue (In Season of a Crime)". Even though the women in these lyrics are more refined, and more fleshed out, Bowie never truly moves away from the *Irma la Douce* woman, who wants to be a homemaker, but society does not let her. Bowie does not allow this to the women in his songs either. Despite the steps he has taken, he is at times still very conservative in his representation of women, which fits in with the dystopian idea, that nothing can change once things have been put into specific places. In a way, he even absorbs the mother, taking her away altogether by presenting himself as the ultimate parent. He is still, ultimately, a man.

'Where Are We Now?' Conclusion

In this thesis I have tried to provide an answer to the question whether Bowie's use of intertextuality, performance, spatiality and modernity has allowed him to depict a dystopian reality. I have provided multiple examples across many of his albums in which Bowie does use concepts and themes commonly found in dystopian texts in order to create a dystopian critique of society. In my thesis I have assessed Bowie's lyrics through a literary lens, and tried to steer clear from using Bowie's personal history to analyse his works. This division is important as I hope to have shown the importance of Bowie's works, but also to show that lyrics should be analysed from a literary perspective.

I assessed Bowie's lyrics in two ways. I looked at the intertextuality present in *Diamond Dogs* and considered the dystopian world Bowie created for *Diamond Dogs*. I furthered my research by taking the characteristics of the dystopian text mentioned by Booker, which I discussed in the first chapter, and tried to provide a reading and assessment of other dystopian characteristics found in other songs, to present Bowie's dystopian realities, rooted in the domesticity of our daily lives.

In chapter one I considered the question 'how does David Bowie use intertextuality and performance in his album *Diamond Dogs* to shape his dystopia?' I did this by providing an intertextual analysis of the album, and by considering the dystopian qualities Booker uses to discern dystopian texts. In the second chapter I have looked at how Booker's themes of individuality, spatiality and modernity were reflected in the lyrics in Bowie's musical oeuvre, by discussing Bowie's depiction of the narrator in the public sphere and the private sphere and how the difference between the two allows for different kinds of (mis-)behaviour. Then I considered Bowie's depiction of cities and his presence in world cities respectively. I moved from the focus on individuality and the city, to discussing modernity by looking at scientific and technological progress made, discussing how Bowie used his music to speak out about

political matters, then concluded with a discussion of Bowie through space and time—nostalgia and hope. In the third chapter I discussed how Bowie depicts sexuality and gender through performance and how he explores identity, sexual identity and gender identity in performance.

Finally, Bowie's musical oeuvre is large and versatile. I hope to have shown in this thesis that Bowie's lyrical capabilities should be considered from a literary perspective, using the analysis of his literary devices and themes, and intertextuality to garner new insight into his works. In this thesis I have mostly separated the art from the artist in order to show that it is possible, but moreover to stress that for future research not just on Bowie but on music, lyrics should be specifically considered and analysed. Furthermore, further research into Bowie's lyrics might provide one not only with a dystopian reading, but also that fabled utopian reading Critchley mentions. For further research I recommend using intertextuality to discuss Bowie's work, not the reliance on his personal history.

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