Before Utopia:
The Function of Sacrifice in Dystopian Narratives

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to illustrate the ways in which the practice and logic of sacrifice in dystopian narratives is anti-utopian. There is a dearth of research on the dystopian fiction, very little which investigates ethical issues and none which consider sacrificial ethics. In the first half of the thesis, the concept of dystopia is delineated against definitions of utopia, concrete utopia and utopian literature. In the second theoretical chapter, major and minor theories of sacrifice are examined for their normative bias in order to question their function in practice. Two important literary examples are read in light of a cross section of sacrifice and utopia: the influential story of Isaac's near sacrifice by Abraham in Genesis 22, and Ursule Molinaro's *The New Moon with the Old Moon in her Arms*, a literary depiction of the ancient Greek sacrificial ritual of the 'pharmakos'. The works chosen are canonical examples of the genre and in each a different aspect of sacrifice is foregrounded. In George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the structure of sacrifice and the rigid hierarchy it imposes engenders perpetual violence. In Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, women's sacrifice of reproductive freedom renders them commodities which cannot sustain friendships. In Octavia Butler's *Kindred*, the scapegoating of women slaves prevents vertical relationships as a result of the severing of mothers from their offspring. In the final chapter, Ursule Le Guin's 'The Ones who Walk Away from Omelas' and Lois Lowry's *The Giver* foreground the cost of utopia based on a sacrificial ethics and problematises the relationship between self and community. The questions of genre, gender, and ethics intersect at the anti-utopian function sacrifice performs in the totalitarian societies foregrounded in the various manifestations of dystopian fictional worlds.

The inferno of the living is not something that will be; if there is one, it is what is already here, the inferno where we live every day, that we form by being together...seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space.

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

A man must dream a long time in order to act with grandeur, and dreaming is nursed in darkness.

Jean Genet

I *rebel* – therefore we *exist*.

Albert Camus, *The Rebel*

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Introduction

Utopia, Dystopia, Sacrifice

The title *Before Utopia,* designates both the spatial and temporal aspects of the conceptualisation of this research project. It is motivated by the question of how one proceeds to utopia, from the vantage point of dystopia, or how one proceeds towards the future, from the present. At the same time, faced with the anticipation of utopia and the reality of dystopia, it asks how can one proceed in one's own time, to seek out utopian spaces which will relieve, inspire and motivate a change in the specificity of our geographical place. In short, these are questions of perception, of locating and understanding what, in the here and now, is dystopian so that in the search for utopian spaces, we can avoid, deliberately and critically, those structures, practices and ideas that inevitably return us to dystopia. In the conjecture between utopia and dystopia lies the concept, or perhaps, force of anti-utopia which draws utopia and dystopia together into a process where the two spatio-temporal concepts overlap, and sometimes merge, leaving the reader to apprehend utopian choices in dystopian spaces. As a compass that directs us towards utopia, dystopian fiction provides a useful medium through which anti-utopian forces can be identified by the reader and examined for their power in the struggle for utopia. The process of journeying toward utopia via dystopian fiction takes the reader, like its protagonists, through a minefield where the struggle between utopian and anti-utopian forces is a struggle between life and death, hope and despair, desire and fear. At times, the evidence presented en route is in the form of the texts which at times focus on the content, and always involve the function of certain motifs. Levitas has called 'archaeological'[1] that utopian method which is 'based on a mixture of evidence, deduction, and imagination, representing as whole something of which only fragments exist. With the help of the coordinates suggested in the subtitle - *the function of sacrifice in dystopian narratives* - rather

[1] Ruth Levitas, 'The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society: Utopia as Method', in Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini, (eds.) *Utopia, Theory, Method: The Use Value of Social Dreaming* (Oxford & New York: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 61, pp. 47-68. Two doctoral theses which approach the utopian function of dystopian fiction from the opposite direction are Ildney Fatima De Souza Cavalcanti's *Articulating the Elsewhere: Utopia in Contemporary Feminist Dystopias* (University of Strathclyde, 1999) and Elizabeth Mahoney's *Writing so to Speak: The Feminist Dystopia* (University of Glasgow, 1994).

than searching for utopian signposts in the narrative's form or content, this work will approach the search for utopia via a different course, that of the function of sacrifice.

By examining different aspects of sacrifice in dystopian narratives, this thesis will follow the trajectory of the anti-utopian forces impacting upon the protagonists of the novels. Related to the main question 'what is the function of sacrifice in dystopian narratives?' there are four other questions. First, what are the generic conventions which foreground aspects of sacrifice in the novels? All the novels portray totalitarian societies where sacrifice is a dominant motif. It is in these types of dystopias where sacrifice is at the forefront of the narrative as a structure, logic and practice. Second, what difference does gender make in terms of its impact on women's sacrifices? Following Orwell's example, the novels focus on the female point of view to illuminate the variety of sacrifices women are subject to. Third, how does the scapegoating of female slaves contribute to the understanding of sacrifice in the context of the master – slave relationship in terms of complicity, genealogy and maternity? Fourth, what is the 'cost' of utopia, when the terms of exchange posit that for the benefit of the majority, the sacrifice of at least one individual is the necessary foundation? In this case, while utilizing many of the usual conventions of dystopian fiction, the desire for totality in seemingly good societies veers dangerously close to the totalitarianism of classic dystopian narratives.

A unifying thread in the novels is the perspective of the disaffected protagonist who is also the voice of the potential sacrificial victim. Presented as less alienated than other characters, the novels dramatize their protagonists' effort to resist, change and/or escape from their oppressive societies, whether to another place or another time. The narratives commence as their protagonists experience an existential crisis: having perceived the oppressive reality of the society they inhabit, they find it impossible to continue existing in good faith under such conditions of self-alienation and alienation from others. Knowing that any resistance leads to death, they nevertheless choose to risk their lives rather than continue making the sacrifices demanded of them. However, this puts them at risk of becoming sacrificial victims in the absolute sense, i.e., physical and not merely psychic death. In short, in their persistence to avoid victimization on one level, they risk becoming victims on another, though the risk they take is deemed preferable to the living death they have endured thus far.

Jean-François Lyotard differentiates between 'victim' and 'plaintiff' when he uses the term 'differend' to foreground the difference in discourse between the two.[2] A victim is constituted when the damage which has been done to them is accompanied by the 'loss of the means to prove the damage'.[3] These 'means' include basic liberties, the freedom to speak in public and the right to testify to the damage done or, if made public, this testimony is deprived of its authority. This loss of authority is due to the fact that if one is constituted as victim then one cannot, consequently, testify as such because 'it is in the nature of the victim not to be able to prove that one has been done a wrong'.[4] The victim, then, is voiceless whereas the plaintiff resists becoming a victim by virtue of the fact that he/she possesses the means to prove his complaint when speaking: 'I would like to call a *differend* the case where the plaintiff is divested of the means to argue and becomes for that reason a victim [...] A case of differend between two parties takes place when the "regulation" of the conflict that opposes them is done in the idiom of one of the parties while the wrong suffered by the other is not signified in that idiom'.[5] Since the inability to prove one has been wronged is in the nature of the victim, Lyotard argues that the plaintiff will inevitably become a victim if there is no one to uphold his/her claims for damage suffered. Finally, if the plaintiff insists on invoking damages, then he/she is labelled mad by the addressor.[6]

Likewise, the protagonists of the novels risk their lives in their determination to avoid victimization. Their struggle to avoid their total silencing by succumbing to sacrificial violence is manifested in multifarious ways but always orientated toward the desire to live with integrity toward themselves and others. In this way, they embody a utopian point of reference for what it may mean to render the present time and place less dystopian. The use value of their actions mirrors the use value of dystopian fiction, no matter how pessimistic its orientation. As Ruth Levitas explains, 'utopia is the expression of what is missing, of the experience of lack in any given society or culture, understanding the utopian aspirations generated by any society is an

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[2] Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, tr. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University Minnesota Press, 1988, orig. 1983). In the Glossary, the term 'differend' is translated as 'dispute, conflict, disagreement, difference of opinion, quarrel, or dissension', pp. 193-4. The book itself discusses this concept in relation to the testimonies of Holocaust survivors.

[3] Ibid., p. 5.

[4] Ibid., p. 8.

[5] Ibid., p. 9.

[6] Ibid., p. 8.

important part of understanding that society itself'.[7] As a heuristic device for perceiving what is desired in a good society, the hopes and dreams of the protagonists of dystopias provide a useful fictional device for orienting the reader as to the ills of his/her own society.

In the novels chosen, the potential sacrificial victims engage in direct contact with their masters/oppressors and take part in a dialogue on the very nature of their dystopian society. As a result, the hegemonic powers reveal their intentions and desires, but also their material benefits from the perpetuation of the status quo. From the master's point of view, the desires of the oppressed are deemed untenable. In effect, they represent what Mannheim calls an 'ideological viewpoint': 'The representatives of a given order will label as utopian all conceptions of existence which from their point of view can in principle never be realised'.[8] Counter to this is the viewpoint of the oppressed whose state of mind is utopian 'because it is incongruous with the state of reality within which it occurs'.[9] The loss of the utopian viewpoint would be catastrophic for Mannheim because 'man would lose his will to shape history and therewith his ability to understand it'.[10] In every case, the dialogue between oppressor and oppressed centres on the issue of personal sacrifices demanded of them. These include freedom (of speech, thought and feelings) affective relationships (romantic, familial and friendship), the right to personal memory and historical truth and finally bodily integrity and freedom from the threat of violence. Thus, an important aspect of the utopian viewpoint in dystopias is embedded in the questions the protagonists ask: 'what kind of self is possible' and how does one 'achieve wholeness' in this world?[11] which, in turn, leave the readers with important 'hermeneutical lessons'.[12]

These lessons constitute part of the extra-textual function of dystopian fiction to both critique and warn of the dangers in the present social structures. Irrespective of the pessimism which permeates the narrative, the reader is still able to glean the message the narrator's point

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[7] Ruth Levitas. 'For Utopia: The (Limits of the) Utopian Function in Late Capitalist Society' in (ed.) Barbara Goodwin, *The Philosophy of Utopia* (London: Frank Cass, 2001), p. 26, pp. 25-43. See also 'Beyond Bourgeois Right: Freedom, Equality and Utopia in Marx and Morris', *The European Legacy*, vol. 9, no. 5, 2004, pp. 605-618 and 'Looking for the Blue: The necessity of utopia', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 12, no. 3, October 2007, pp. 289-306.
[8] Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (New York: Harvest Books. 1936), p. 196.
[9] Mannheim, p. 192.
[10] Ibid., p. 263.
[11] Ruth Levitas, 'Utopia Matters?' in *Utopia Matters* (eds.) Fátima Vieira and Marinela Freitas (Porto: Editora da Universidade do Porto, 2005), p. 44 and 41, pp. 41-45.
[12] Lucy Sargisson, 'Utopia Matters!' in *Utopia Matters*, p. 53, pp. 51-53.

of view embodies. As Tom Moylan writes: 'the potential of a dystopian text to achieve an epical, or open expression lies in the way it negotiates the clash of the official narrative and the oppositional counter-narrative and eventually is realized in a utopian or anti-utopian stance within its own healthy negativity'.[13] An important question, therefore, is the degree to which the text articulates an anti-utopian stance and the subsequent effect on the message it communicates. This descriptive as well as prescriptive aspect illustrates an important overlap between the conventions of the dystopia and political fiction [14] which both critique, at the inter-textual level, the world from which they extrapolate their fictional universe.

This combination of critique and warning in dystopian novels has led, after Orwell's classic novel, to innovations in other genres so that the feminist dystopias of the eighties have borrowed from other genres to form new, hybrid narratives which continue to include totalitarian societies, but also reflect socio-historical changes.

For Raffaella Baccolini, genres are:

> culturally constructed and rest on the binary between what is normal and what is deviant – a notion that feminist criticism has deconstructed as it consigns feminine practice to the pole of deviation and inferiority. Feminist reappropriations of generic fiction can therefore become a radical and oppositional strategy...The intersection of gender and genre has opened up the creation of new, subversive, and oppositional literary forms.[15]

As the narratives' formal features move away from the traditional conventions of the classical dystopia, they retain thematic and structural similarities to their totalitarian predecessors. Thus, the stylistic innovations of the Neo-Slave narrative emerge as one possible evolution of the feminist dystopia which in turn refers back to the anti-fascist dystopias of the thirties and forties. Finally, by the eighties and nineties, new forms which completely blur the distinction between the good society and the bad society emerge in order to question the very possibility of imagining a utopia that would include the totality of humanity. It is at this junction that the danger of anti-utopia re-emerges and threatens to condemn all utopian projects to failure, and

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[13] Tom Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky, Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2000), p. 53.

[14] Patrick Parrinder, 'Introduction' in (ed.) Patrick Parrinder, *Learning from Other Worlds: Estrangement, Cognition and the Politics of Science Fiction and Utopia* (Durham: Duke UP, 2001), p. 3, pp. 1-11. See also, *Political Science Fiction*, (eds.) Donald M. Hassler, Clyde Wilcox (Columbia, S. Carolina: University S. Carolina, 1997).

[15] Raffaella Baccolini, 'The Persistence of Hope in Dystopian Science Fiction' *PMLA*, 19.3, May 2004, p. 519, pp. 518-521.

the return to dystopia is an inevitable result of the totalising process. In order to pinpoint anti-utopian forces within the narrative borders of the novel and differentiate them from utopian forces, an interpretative method is needed to approach each adaptation of the totalitarian dystopia. This method is essentially an ethical approach to literature which will frame the competing utopian and anti-utopian elements in the narrative around a central point of reference; my thesis argues that sacrifice as a structure, practice, and logic offers this point of reference.

Examining the function of sacrifice in a literary text has been a task common for literary critics but uncommon in the approach to utopian literature. Yet the two share common features. For Michael Eskin, 'literature is capable of *doing* things ethical in an exemplary way'.[16] The use of the word 'exemplary' points toward utopian language and the ideal projection of how one may live a good life which has been the primary concern of philosophers since classical times. Thus, literature and ethical philosophy share, amongst many preoccupations, a concern with how to 'effect a change in perception'.[17] Utopian literature, via its generic convention of defamiliarization, is the quintessential genre capable of such a change in perception. If literature 'does something ethically in excess of moral philosophy'[18] then utopian literature exhibits this excess as an integral part of its agenda.

Reading ethics and literature together, either from the perspective of the ethical import of literature or from the perspective of literature as a *better* form of ethics, is not something new, although there has been a kind of revival in the past fifteen years. According to Eskin the recent 'turn' to ethics is in part due to the perceived relativism of postmodernist writing (especially deconstruction) and partly due to the developing influence of feminist, postcolonial, multicultural and queer criticism and theory. In other words, this 'double turn' to ethics can be seen as a 'function of intra- as well as interdisciplinary developments'.[19] However, Eskin proposes that for this revival to be useful for contemporary needs, and to counter implications that 'ethics and literature' have exhausted their contribution theoretically and practically, two

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[16] Michael Eskin, 'On Literature and Ethics', *Poetics Today*, 25:4 (Winter 2004), p. 574, pp. 573-594. Eskin here is directly using J.L. Austin's terms from speech act theory.
[17] Ibid., 576.
[18] Ibid., 584. Eskin's argument on the similarities between literature and moral philosophy focuses on the concern with human affairs in all its facets and 'the thematic rapprochement between the two on discursive grounds', p. 585.
[19] Micheal Eskin, 'Introduction: The Double "Turn" to Ethics and Literature?' *Poetics Today*, 25:4 (Winter 2004), p. 558, pp. 557-572.

factors must be present: 'The rearticulation and recontextualization of an established epistemological-hermeneutic framework [...] and the displacement and refashioning [...] of that framework in light of and in response to the [...] unique cultural and sociohistorical conditions and demands of the present'.[20] In practice, this means that one must revisit, displace, and (re)inscribe existing reflections on the ethical import of literature in a language in tune with developments in philosophy, theory, culture and the socio-political developments of the present as well as the recent past.[21] By positing the relationship between ethics and literature on a 'discursive-semiotic' continuum where the two terms are not identical but mutually translatable, [22] Eskin is proposing, in fact, 'a new kind of "aesthetics" – called "ethical criticism" provisionally'.[23] As a result, the two terms will make sense only in conjunction and together they are transformed into a novel union whereby readers' engagement with literature will be 'poetic', i.e. 'signifying the fusion of the ethical and the literary'.[24]

It is precisely along these lines that this thesis will approach the dystopian narratives and the function of sacrifice – itself an important concept in ethics – in order to bring into a kind of dialogue the concepts of a good or bad society with the ideology and practice of sacrifice. Both revolve around ethical issues which question the notion of a good life and society, individual responsibility to one's own self and others, truth and living in good faith, which are all an intrinsic part of the narrative of utopian fiction. The word 'utopia' itself, conflates the concept of the 'good' society and 'non'-society, raising questions on the meaning of goodness, the good society, the good way of living and, by extension, ethical readings of the narrative.[25] Some preliminary analysis of what the terms mean in the first half of this project is necessary to inform the reader of the use they will be put to in the second half. The relatively new term 'dystopia' is only partly understood as the opposite of utopia. In fact, defining dystopia depends on a certain understanding of utopia and anti-utopia. Sacrifice, too, involves a long history of meanings articulated in a wide range of disciplines with use of disparate

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[20] Ibid, p. 260.
[21] Ibid., p. 261. Eskin's own example is the story of Genesis 22, Abraham's near sacrifice of his son, Isaac. He refers to four of the most well known exegeses, by Kierkegard (1843), Kant (1798), Levinas (1976) and Derrida (1992).
[22] Eskin, p. 564.
[23] Ibid., p. 562.
[24] Ibid., p. 563.
[25] The conflation begins with the title of Thomas More's work, *Utopia*, George M. Logen and Robert M.Adams, (eds.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, orig. 1516.

theoretical approaches and analytical tools. In particular, the major theories of sacrifice seem to converge only in so far as the sacrificial victim is absent from their formulations. Starting with Freud and ending with Irigaray, sacrifice will be delineated in relation to a discourse, if any, on the victim. At the same time, the normative tendency in these theories will be examined for its gender blindness. Thus, chapters one and two will separate, for heuristic reasons, what chapters three to six bring together, as examples of case studies, for the intersection of dystopia and sacrifice.

A Short History of Dystopia

Given dystopia's coming of age in the twentieth century, it is difficult to pinpoint its date of birth or even the archetypal text which inspired hundreds of adaptations. Tom Moylan traces its modern origins to E.M. Forster's story, published in 1909, 'The Machine Stops' because of its portrayal of a social hell which subsequent canonical examples of dystopias would emulate and develop.[26] But earlier fictional texts which magnify society's ills may have inspired the satirical approach which inspired Forster's story. Samuel Butler's *Erewhon*, published in 1872, utilizes satire and exaggeration to critique aspects of Victorian society.[27] Yet as Lyman Tower Sargent points out, it is better described as a utopian satire rather than simply a utopia or anti-utopia.[28] The novel obviously shares characteristics with both the anti-utopian novel and the dystopia. On the one hand, it utilises parody and satire and on the other, it draws attention to the institutions in Victorian England that are in need of reform. Erewhon, ('Nowhere' spelled backwards)[29] engages in a critique of what he considered attitudes to health issues, religion,

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[26] Tom Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*, pp. 111-121. Another 'proto-dystopia' for Moylan is Jack London's *The Iron Heel*. See *Jack London, Novels and Social Writings*, (New York: The Library of America, 1982), pp. 319-553. In my opinion, a short story by H.G. Wells, 'The Country of the Blind', published in 1899, foregrounds a story of sacrifice in the genre of the fantastic which may also count as a forerunner of a proto-dystopian narrative. Italo Calvino, (ed.), *Fantastic Tales*, (London: Penguin, 2001), pp. 561-586.

[27] Samuel Butler, *Erewhon* (London: Trubner and Co., 1872).

[28] Lyman Tower Sargent, 'The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited', in *Utopian Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1994, p. 8, pp. 1-37. Sargent offers a comprehensive discussion of the problem of definition within both literary and non-literary genres. The utopian satire shares with the eutopia a critique of contemporary society but the former differs from the latter in that it does not itself present a world considerably better than the reader's contemporary society.

[29] Ralph Norrman discusses the importance of relativism for Butler, as opposed to reformism, in *Samuel Butler and the Meaning of Chiasmus* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 192. See also

and education, all in need of reform. Considering the popularity of utopian fiction in the nineteenth century, it is rather surprising that it was such a popular and critical success.[30] Its sub-title, *Over the Range*, signals that is also a spatial dystopia, one from which the traveller eventually escapes in order to then publicise his experience. It is obvious in the novel that for the contemporary public the institutions under attack are a subject of great debate. Illness is considered 'immoral' (86) and judges decide that the 'infliction of pain upon the weak and sickly was the only means of preventing weakness and sickliness from spreading' (125) The use of satire places *Erewhon* outside the conventions of the twentieth-century dystopian novel, although there are common elements of what would later develop into the two distinct, dystopian and anti-utopian narrative.

The terms I will be using throughout derive from Lyman Sargent's early definitions developed in his essay 'The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited'. The key terms used for this thesis which relate to fictional works will be described as *eutopias* and *dystopias*. The former fictional epithet denotes 'a non-existent society...considerably better than the society in which the [contemporaneous] reader lived' whereas the latter denotes 'a non-existent society...considerably worse than the society in which the [contemporaneous] reader lived'.[31] A dystopia may be called a 'negative utopia' because its author intended 'a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse' this fictional society than the one in which the reader lived as opposed to anti-utopia which presents a fictional world which the author intended the reader to view as 'a criticism of utopianism or of some particular eutopia' (a literary text presenting a good society). Finally, a utopian satire presents a non-existent fictional world intended for the contemporaneous reader to view as a criticism of that society.[32] Thus, they are not terms which are opposite or opposing but terms which describe more or less accurately fictional works whose content may combine descriptions of both kinds of society for the purpose of reflecting 'critically on the utopian genre itself'.[33] The term *critical dystopia* was further developed to express this ambiguity by denoting a narrative development of dystopian

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Patrick Parrinder who considers 'secrecy' a defining convention of dystopian fiction, in 'Entering Dystopia, Entering Erewhon' *Critical Survey*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2005, p. 7, pp. 6-21.

[30] For the positive reviews it received, see pp. 38-61 in *Samuel Butler: A Chronicle and an Introduction* by R.F. Rattray, (London: Duckworth, 1935).

[31] Sargent, 'The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited', in *Utopian Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1994, p. 9, pp. 1-37.

[32] Sargent, 'The Three Faces', p. 9.

[33] Sargent, 'Three Faces', p. 8.

fiction which is both eutopian and dystopian and 'thus undermines all neat classification schemes'.[34] These works interrogate both society and their generic predecessors in a more self-conscious way than classical dystopian fiction does. In chapter one I will show that these terms are, to some degree, heuristic since they do not always, or necessarily describe fictional narratives which so neatly separate into 'better' or 'worse' societies. Therefore, the term *utopia* will serve as an umbrella term which includes both eutopian and dystopian forms of narrative. By extension, then, both dystopian and eutopian novels *can* be utopian and the former may include aspects of the latter within its textual borders but differ in the extent to which they manifest anti-utopian impulses.

Because of the frequent conflation of dystopia with anti-utopia or utopian satire, Sargent has provided a series of definitions which designate basic differences amongst the three terms at the fictional level. This demarcation is useful for many fictional works but, as the development of the modern dystopia shows, does not always apply as easily as Sargent would suggest, as he has admitted more recently: 'both eutopia and dystopia have changed and are now more complex than they used to be...the relationship of Utopia to the past and what I have begun to call *utopian energy*...the result seriously complicates my understanding of Utopia and utopianism'.[35] Thus, in the most recent conceptualisations of utopian fiction, the inclusion of history becomes a more common trope for visions of future worlds and one which I will explore in Chapter 5 in relation to sacrifice, slavery and memory.

On a conceptual level, the more general *Utopianism* denotes 'social dreaming' and includes literature as one of its manifestations whereas the more theoretical concept of *Utopia* describes cultural forces which manifest themselves driven by the desire and hope for a better world than the present, as Ruth Levitas has argued in *The Concept of Utopia*.[36] My purpose is to define dystopian literature with respect to *anti-utopian* impulses in the narratives which struggle against *utopian* forces in an attempt to prevent the *dystopian* society from becoming *eutopian*. Expanding on the nuances in the relationships amongst these terms is an essential

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[34] Ibid., p. 7.

[35] Lyman Tower Sargent, 'Choosing Utopia: Utopianism as an Essential Element in Political Thought and Action', in Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini, (eds.), *Utopia, Method, Vision, The Use Value of Social Dreaming* (Oxford and New York:Peter Lang, 2007), p. 304, pp. 301-317.

[36] Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990), p. 199.

precursor to the discussion on the role of sacrifice in dystopian narratives because of the centrality of a sacrificial structure, logic and practice in these fictions.

As for the target of criticism in a dystopia, this will depend on the socio-political context which produced the novel and will differ according to the author's position in that society. This is true of all types of utopian fiction, despite differences in approach and intention. What determines whether the novel produced is eutopian as opposed to dystopian is also dependent on the time of its production. Unsurprisingly, more dystopias have been written in the 1920s and 1930s than in any other decade this century.[37] Their conventions remained in the second half of the century along with the implicit warning against the specific future outlined in the narratives. What marks the totalitarian dystopia from other types is the predominance in the narrative of an atmosphere of fear with a concomitant lack of hope. It is fair to speculate that the fear of the narrative is matched by the fear of the author which motivated the writing of the dystopian text in the first place and manifests itself in the narrator's point of view.

Although the convention of the traveller in a strange land was either dropped entirely or exchanged in the twentieth century (in both utopias and dystopias) for plots set entirely in the future or for time travel by the protagonist, the critique of the present remained. In the 1970s, one well known example is Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time,*[38] in which the protagonist travels telepathically to a future where utopian and dystopian reality exist side by side, and the latter contains a disturbing rendition of a mechanised and corrupt microcosm in direct contrast to the parallel eutopia of the future. In Sally Gearhart's *The Wanderground*[39] the entire plot is set in the future and the reader gains glimpses into the spatial dystopia women have escaped from which is actually a reflection of the present day. In the 1980s the conventions of the feminist dystopia become even more fluid with novels such as Elizabeth

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[37] Nan Bowman Albinski,. *Women's Utopias in British and American Fiction.* London and New York: Routledge, 1988, p. 7. Specifically anti-fascist dystopias by women began to appear in 1935. All these novels are set in England and describe rule by a fascist dictator (Albinski, p. 89). On the other hand, American women write dystopias which are anti-socialist but never anti-fascist, see Albinski, p. 111.

[38] Marge Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time.* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1976).

[39] Sally Miller Gearhart, *The Wanderground* (London: The Women's Press, 1985). All further page references to this novel will be included in the text.

Baines' *The Birth Machine*[40]which is in fact set in the 1970s and describes a medical conspiracy aimed towards experimentation on the protagonist's pregnant body. In Rebecca Brown's surreal *The Terrible Girls* the protagonist's clandestine lesbian relationship to the wife (a.k.a. First Lady) of 'Lord Bountiful' is developed in a series of short stories which reveal the strict hierarchies and pervasive atmosphere of fear the characters are subject to. Evidence of the diversity of the feminist dystopia is also to be found in the post-apocalyptic type written by Angela Carter, such as *Heroes and Villains*, and later in Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass*, which juxtaposes[41] a 16th century Jewish ghetto with a 21st century high-tech society where near human cyborgs are built to protect the citizens of a utopian enclave. This last novel extrapolates from historical events and places them parallel to future society when the danger of totalitarianism reappears in order to suppress basic human rights and scapegoat minority groups.

The literary trajectory which begins with *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, continues with *The Handmaid's Tale* and Octavia Butler's *Kindred*, ends with Ursule Le Guin's 'The Ones Who Walk away from Omelas' and Lois Lowry's *The Giver*.[42] These novels foreground sacrifice in their narratives and question its function in the dystopian societies the protagonists inhabit. As the best literary examples in their genre, by portraying the ethics of dystopian fiction they point the way towards a good society by showing what it is not or what it should not be. As an analytical tool, reading the function of sacrifice in dystopias provides the reader with a compass which clarifies the difference between utopian hope and anti-utopian despair, thus showing what action before *utopia* achieves e*utopia*. Or, simply expressed, what actions, considered bad for citizens by the hegemonic order in a dystopia, are by definition necessarily good actions for citizens in search of utopia. This is *the* ethical question which the protagonists deal with when faced with what is essentially an existential dilemma of how to act, once they

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[40] Elizabeth Baines, *The Birth Machine* (London: The Women's Press, 1983). All further page references to this novel will be included in the text.

[41] Rebecca Brown, *The Terrible Girls* (London: Pan Books, 1990). Particularly revealing are the stories 'Lady Bountiful and the Underground Resistance' and 'The Ruined City'. Angela Carter, *Heroes and Villains* (London: Penguin, 1969), Marge Piercy, *Body of Glass*, original title He, She, It (London: Penguin, 1991).

[42] Octavia Butler, *Kindred* (London: The Women's Press, 1979), Ursule Le Guin 'The Ones Who Walk away from Omelas', *The Wind's Twelve Quarters*, (New York, Harper, 1973), pp. 275-284.
Lois Lowry, *The Giver* (New York: Bantam Doubleday, 1993).

have realised the true conditions of their society. And its answer depends on the narrator's point of view, the view of the potential sacrificial victim.

Protagonists, Point of View, and *Parrhesia*

The dystopian novel is arguably more consciously political than other fiction in some sense. By political, I am referring to the broadest possible definition of the term, i.e. the relation of the individual to public affairs and his /her interest in matters of the public sphere, and not in narrow sense of political party affiliations, or government alliances. As Lucy Sargisson notes 'Politics is about relations of power, which are often deeply embedded in the way that we think about and interact with the world. This includes our personal relationships, our language, and the economies of exchange that we engage in every day.[43] In the context of utopian fiction, Sargisson makes two distinctions in terms of the political. First, there are political themes which in eutopias and dystopias which function as routes contemporary debates. In the political themes they choose to foreground, their tone is critical and creative in that they tell the reader 'what is wrong with the now and how it might be improved'.[44] For example, recent utopias address current preoccupations with issues such as the degradation of the environment, race and inequality, gender, and globalization. Second, there is a political function performed by utopias in that they attempt to offer solutions. Often, different utopias from different times return to the same problem, in order to explore different ways of resolving perennial problems.[45] By 'offering radical political commentary in an accessible imaginary space' utopias perform a subversive function via the critique they practice and the consciousness raising they achieve.[46]As an analytic tool in itself, the utopian text, 'anticipates and criticizes...its unabashed and flagrant otherness gives it a power which is lacking in other analytical devices. By playing fast and loose with time and space, logic and morality...a utopia

[43] Lucy Sargisson 'The Curious Relationship between Politics and Utopia' p. 25, pp. 25-46 in Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini, (eds.), *Utopia, Method, Vision. The Use Value of Social Dreaming* (Oxford and New York:Peter Lang, 2007). She goes on to point out that 'there is no consensus on defining politics. It is variously conceived of as an activity, a set of assumptions, institutions and /or practises, and a discipline, and there is no consensus about the content of any of these. Even the parameters of the discipline are contested, For more details, see pp. 26-7.

[44] Ibid., p. 32.

[45] Ibid., p. 35.

[46] Ibid., p. 36. As Sargisson points out, this subversive function is common in the tradition of feminist critique.

asks the most awkward, most embarrassing questions.[47] Finally, as Sargent argues in 'Choosing Utopia': 'utopias depict whole or almost whole, societies with the various institutions interacting rather than focusing on...some or other sub-set of social institutions...are concerned with all human behaviour...second, utopias generally contend that *radical* change is needed, not just piecemeal reform.[48] For dystopias, this means that the critique of the protagonist is directed towards the different manifestations of totalitarianism – from Fascism to Slavery – as well as the fundamental 'flaw' on which they are based.

In particular, the feminist dystopia portrays an oppositional base which is true to some degree in all the novels which follow. Cavalcanti writes that there are three factors in feminist dystopias that link politics, form and readership by incorporating:[49]

> The negative critique of, and opposition to, patriarchy brought into effect by the dystopian principle; the textual self-awareness not only in generic terms with regard to a previous utopian literary tradition (in its feminist and non-feminist manifestations), but also concerning its own construction of utopian "elsewheres"; and the fact that the feminist dystopias are themselves highly critical cultural forms of expression (for the two reasons pointed out above), which in turn may have a crucial effect in the formation or consolidation of a specifically critic-feminist public readership.

Placed alongside Baccolini's aforementioned observations, the formal characteristics of the feminist dystopia offer new textual possibilities in the expression of this broadly defined politically anti-hegemonic stance. The two factors that make feminist dystopias 'sites of resistance' is first, the blurring different generic conventions in favour of a hybrid text which renovates dystopian fiction by making it 'politically an formally oppositional and second, its open ended ambiguity which 'rejects traditional subjugation of the individual at the end of the novel and opens a space of contestation and opposition for those groups for whom subjectivity has yet to be attained.[50] Dystopias do this by focusing on the protagonist's point of view who speaks as both plaintiff and potential victim.

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[47] Vince Geoghegan, quoted in Sargisson, p. 36.
[48] Lyman Tower Sargent, 'Choosing Utopia' p. 305, pp. 301-317, in *Utopia, Method, Vision.*
[49] Ildney Cavalacanti, 'Articulating the Elsewhere: Utopia in Contemporary Feminist Dystopias', Dissertation, University of Strathclyde, 1999, pp. 207-8.
[50] Baccolini, Raffaella, 'Finding Utopia in Dystopia: Feminism, Memory, Nostalgia, and Hope' in *Utopia, Method, Vision,* p. 166, pp. 159-189.

These questions dystopias ask, as well as their critique of society, are expressed in the point of view of the protagonist who subverts the assumptions of society by questioning its norms. Since utopian fiction stems from discontent with the present, it is embedded in what it criticizes in the same way that its protagonists are embedded in the oppression they desire to overthrow. The reader is called to empathise with the protagonist not as a malcontent, estranged individual, but as an enlightened narrator who urgently needs to communicate his/her insights to the imaginary reader. Since it is the perception of the narrator that the reader is called on to trust, belief in the former's 'ability to discern, accurately and responsively, the salient features of one's particular situation'[51] is a key element in creating a common moral ground. Subsequently, a belief in the protagonist's point of view implies a trust in his moral code. Drawing on Aristotle's ethics, Martha Nussbaum views this 'ethical perception' as a skill which cannot develop in isolation or independently of human contact. In fact, inspired by Aristotle, she points out that bonds of close friendship or love are extremely important in becoming a good perceiver.[52] The protagonists' perception of their society's ills will be more successfully conveyed, therefore, if the reader has faith in the moral character of the text's narrators. The structure of discourse that we call point of view is the medium par excellence for regulation interpersonal relationships and communicating values and attitudes.[53]

The relevance to dystopian fiction is apposite. All the narrators experience love either through romantic ties, friendship, familial relationships or student to teacher bonds. Winston Smith, Offred, Dana and Jonas all form affective ties which function as allies who reaffirm the accuracy of their subversive perception. All share a preoccupation with memory and truth which threatens to expose the dishonesty of the regime: 'the dystopian protagonist often reclaims a suppressed an subterranean memory that is forward looking in it enabling force, liberating in its deconstruction of the official story'.[54] Through these bonds their already special perception becomes heightened and moves them to take dangerous action against the status quo by risking death. The educational aspect of dystopias, therefore is aimed at fine-

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[51] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge, Essays on Philosophy and Literature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 37.
[52] Ibid., p. 44.
[53] *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction*, Susan Sniader Lanser (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 85.
[54] Raffaella Baccolini, quoted in Tom Moylan, *Dark Horizons, Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*, (Boulder Colorado: Westview Press, 2000), p. 149.

tuning the perceptual abilities of citizens/readers via identification with the narrator/protagonist and knowledge gained via their relationships.[55] Nussbaum considers this educated perception an 'ethical ability'[56] which, applied to the context of dystopian fiction, provides an important element in achieving reader empathy. In other words, emotions have a cognitive dimension[57] which functions in two ways: the perception of the protagonist in the text and the perception of the reader reading the text and who empathises with the plight of the protagonist. Thus, the ethical dimension is linked to the political on both planes, with the personal/ethical being primary, not only chronologically (before action takes place) but also in terms of degree.

One of the main stylistic devices dystopias employ which illustrate the anti-hegemonic and ultimately utopian impulse in the narratives is the stance of the protagonist in relation to the oppressive socio-political forces in their respective fictional worlds. In each of the main dystopias discussed, the refusal of the protagonist to be subsumed by the official ideology is expressed initially as an individual, private act of verbal resistance either orally or written. Winston Smith, Offred, Dana, and Jonas all initiate their counter-hegemonic resistance by engaging in what Michel Foucault calls *parrhesia* – fearless speech,[58] against the representative of the status quo in what remains a private exchange between two participants. The particular elements of the act of *parrhesia* illustrate the special characteristics the protagonists embody when they employ *parrhesia* in their desire to take a stand against the alienating and oppressive forces they wish to oppose by speaking the truth. Etymologically, the Greek term *parrhesiazesthai* means to 'say everything'- from *pan* (everything) and *rhema* (that which is said). Drawing from the meaning of the term as it is used in ancient texts, Foucault distinguishes three types of relationships implicated in its use: in the context of community life, public life and individual personal relationships.[59]The dystopias here begin with personal relationships – the ethical – and progress via their community to a critique of all aspects of public life. Part of the process, then, in the reader's identification with the narrator's point of view involves the integrity of the latter's character in speaking out against oppressors who maintain power by suppressing the truth.

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[55] Ibid., p. 103
[56] Ibid., p. 37
[57] Ibid., p. 44. This term is inspired by Plato's writings.
[58] Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, (ed.) Joseph Pearson, (Los Angeles, California: Semiotext(e), 2001), p. 11.
[59] Ibid., p. 108.

Because what he/she says differs from the majority, the act of speaking is potentially dangerous and presupposes the courage to express truths which will question the accepted orthodoxy. In fact, one may be called a *parrhesisates* 'only if there is a risk or danger for him in telling the truth'.[60] For example, a teacher telling the student his truthful opinion is not at any real risk and therefore, cannot be said to be a *parrhesiastes*. If, however, the truth is expressed to a tyrant, then the risk of punishment, including death, is very real. In other words, having the courage to risk speaking the truth in the face of such danger, 'in spite of danger' is potentially a 'game' of life or death.[61] *Parrhesia* then is a speech activity which has meaning within a web of power relations where the most powerful – a tyrant – by definition cannot express such truths since '*he* risks nothing'.[62] The more powerful of the pair, the *interlocutor*, is not merely being told any truth but a *criticism* by the less powerful or inferior. The function of criticism then is what endangers the *parrhesiastes* when he speaks against the orthodoxy of the status quo but the risk to his life is secondary when considering the alternative of self-alienation. It is because the *parrhesiastes* chooses to live in good faith in his commitment to the truth that he risks even death to leaving the truth untold. The *parrhesiastes* chooses a specific relationship to himself[63] and to the other (which threatens him) because he feels compelled to do so by a sense of duty although he is free to keep silent if he wishes.[64] In other words, he is not speaking under duress or torture but from a sense of moral duty. In summary, parrhesia is a verbal activity:

Where the speaker has a specific relation to truth through frankness, a certain relationship to his own life through danger, a certain type of relation to himself or other people through criticism (self-criticism or criticism of other people), and a specific relation to moral law through freedom and duty...in which a speaker expresses his personal relationship to truth, and risks his life because he recognizes truth-telling as a duty to improve or help other people (as well as himself).[65]

There are personal and social consequences of this dangerous truth-telling. First, inter-subjectively, because it is in this way that the narrator establishes the moral character that

[60] Ibid., p 16.
[61] Ibid., p. 16.
[62] Ibid., p. 16.
[63] Ibid., p. 17.
[64] Ibid., p. 19.
[65] Ibid., p. 19.

readers are asked to trust, and second, intra-subjectively, because it is in this way that he/she moves away from the position of the victim towards that of the plaintiff. The balance of power is thus challenged at the verbal stage before any other action takes place. This is initially an ethical stance against the oppressive regime since the protagonist/potential victim's first act of resistance involves the refusal to lie to him/herself.

The function of truth-telling protagonists is fundamentally oppositional in totalitarian dystopias where the ruling power depends on systematic lying, or hiding of the truth (past and present) in order to obtain the compliance of its citizens. As George Orwell has written, 'the organized lying practised by totalitarian states is...integral to totalitarianism, something that would still continue even if concentration camps and secret police forces had ceased to be necessary...{it} demands a disbelief in the very existence of objective truth'.[66] Orwell's main interest is in the medium of journalistic writing and imaginative (fiction) writing which he insists must be free to express the truth. The similarities to *parrhesia* here are striking: 'the imaginative writer is unfree when he has to falsify his subjective feelings, which form his point of view are facts...he cannot misrepresent the scenery of his own mind' and 'to write in plain, vigorous language one has to think fearlessly and if one thinks fearlessly one cannot be politically orthodox'. Orwell does not limit his definition of totalitarianism to a political regime, but writes of the 'totalitarian outlook' of writers who do not live in totalitarian states but are unable to write freely because of enforced orthodoxy thereby falsifying reality.[67] The main casualty is history itself which for the totalitarian viewpoint 'is something to be created rather than learned...[and] demands the continuous alteration of the past, and in the long run probably demands a disbelief in the very existence of objective truth.[68] Truth-tellers, therefore, perceive falsehoods and untruths which they must uncover, and this qualifies, once more, their status as silent victims.

The desire for truth telling manifests itself in the novels when the main protagonists confront their oppressors in an effort to criticize the regime and question its structure, methods, and above all, its morals. Winston Smith confronts O'Brien with respect to the falsification of history; Offred criticizes the efficacy of using women as breeding machines while

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[66] George Orwell, 'The Prevention of Literature' in *Books v. Cigarettes* (London: Penguin, 1947), pp. 27-8, pp. 21-41.
[67] Ibid., p. 31, 33, and pp. 33-34.
[68] Ibid., p. 28.

surreptitiously playing a game of Scrabble with her master; Dana repeatedly challenges her great-great-grandfather and slave master to her ancestors on the immorality of slavery; Jonas exposes the lies on which his society is based when he refuses to take on the role of the next 'Teller' despite the authority such a position bestows. All these protagonists engage the reader in an emotive involvement with their plight and entice an identification with their moral dilemmas while simultaneously raising questions on the intersection of morality and politics, ethical choices and political involvement. By focusing on the micro-picture of the story of one, unconventional character, dystopias raise questions in the broadest sense of the political by exposing its impact on the personal. If dystopias appear to be *more* politically aware in terms of degree, it is only because the worlds they depict are (much) *worse* than the ones the readers inhabit. And the fear invoked in the protagonist is meant to invoke fear in the reader lest his/her apathy allows the present conditions to escalate in the manner the author of the dystopia anticipates. This does not diminish the political commitment of any other genre, rather it reinforces the fact that, as Orwell wrote, 'there is no such thing as genuinely non-political literature'.[69] By speaking out against the totalitarian orthodoxy, the protagonists of these dystopian narratives pinpoint – and point out, a crucial fatal flaw in the construction of their worlds, that of the distortion of reality, the falsification of history and the suppression of truthful expression. Thus, what is sacrificed in totalitarian dystopias is not only people but also the truth, history and memory.

Conclusion

According to the Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy, totalitarianism is defined as 'the principle of government according to which all institutional and private arrangements are subject to control by the state. There are thus no autonomous, nor is there any principled or legally recognized private/public distinction.[70] This definition implies that every citizen's rights, relationships, and life are potentially at risk of being violated. In its extreme form the witnesses to violence remain silent and their story is lost; this places them at the extreme end of the sacrificial spectrum. On the other end of the spectrum, the survivors may occupy the subject

[69] Orwell, 'The Prevention of Literature', p. 31.
[70] Simon Blackburn,'Totalitarianism' in *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, Oxford: University Press, 1994), p. 379.

position of plaintiff in order to bare witness to these violations, physical and emotional. Dystopias give voice to their story by foregrounding the victim's point of view and by showing that those subject to sacrificial violence occupy a range of expression, from the silent dead to the surviving plaintiffs. Their story functions as a warning to readers that sanctified violence can encompasses not only the lives of the innocent and their relations but also of their memory, history and psychic integrity.

The warnings dystopias wish to foreground are not merely about imaginary future scenarios but nightmarish fears of the repetition of history – or worse. Moreover, these warnings in dystopias are linked to their specific 'educational goal', i.e. the wish to foreground problems which tackle issues that are overtly social, political or economic. Just as other fictional genres, the didactic impulse of dystopias seeks to effect change in the reader's psyche and, in turn, in society. Even though all the novels in this thesis project totalitarian societies, they differ terms of the form totalitarianism takes. Starting with fascism and continuing with religious theocracy and then slavery, and finally with a novel that imitates the eutopian mode in order to focus on what ails the society the author extrapolates from. Equally, the protagonist's viewpoint is first male (white), then female (feminist), then black (female) and finally ends with a child's perspective. Beginning with the least 'critical' dystopia and ending with the most ambivalent, the novels all 'linger in the terrors of the present even as they exemplify what is needed to transform it' by reasserting the 'transformative functions of language, textuality, memory and history'.[71] The more 'critical' a dystopia is, the more it adopts a 'militant stance that is informed and empowered by a utopian horizon that appears in the text or at least shimmers just beyond it pages.[72] Thus, in 1984, the utopian impulse is exists in the hope that the world of Oceania is ultimately destroyed, whereas in *The Handmaid's Tale* there is proof that eventually the counter-hegemonic resistance eventually prevailed. And whereas in *Kindred* the effort to change the course of history is only partially successful, in *The Giver* the utopian impulse manifests itself directly in the actions of the protagonist. As Moylan writes 'whatever its stance, target or outcome, however, every dystopian narrative engages in an aesthetic/epistemological encounter with its historical conjecture'.[73] The content, therefore

[71] *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*, p. 199.
[72] Ibid., p. 196.
[73] Ibid., p. 181.

of each dystopia refers to the particular socio-political axis contemporary to the writer which is both familiar and unfamiliar to the reader through the simultaneous use of verisimilitude and estrangement. The goal of this stylistic innovation is to produce texts which 'generate cognitively estranged alternative worlds that stand in a potentially critical relationship with empirical reality'.[74]

Chapter 1 examines the meaning of the term dystopia in relation to the broader conceptual and literary terms *utopia*, *anti-utopia*, and *eutopia*. I will also coin the terms *dystopian continuum* and *concrete dystopia* by drawing on the foundational works of Ernst Bloch, Ruth Levitas, Lyman Tower Sargent, and Tom Moylan. Chapter 1 will focus on the issue of generic conventions and show that neither authorial intention nor a content based categorization is sufficient in many post –nineteen-eighties examples of dystopian fiction. Chapter 2 examines the various theories of the term *sacrifice* also by juxtaposing influential writings by diverse writers from different disciplines. However, while Chapter 1 seeks to find differences amongst similar elements of utopianism, Chapter 2 seeks out the similar aspects amongst very different discourses on the term sacrifice. The term will be re-configured in order to imagine its relevance within a utopian, conceptual background and a dystopian, literary foreground. Chapter 3 begins with the classic totalitarian dystopia *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in order to show how this iconic novel is the quintessential example of the intersection of sacrificial logic and totalitarian regimes. Chapter 4 reads *The Handmaid's Tale* as *the* feminist dystopia which links the classic totalitarian novel with the newer critical dystopias by virtue of the foregrounding of women's position within the sacrificial structure. Chapter 5 examines the neo-slave narrative *Kindred* as an example of a critical dystopian text which extrapolates from the historical experience of slavery in order to project the trauma of history onto the trauma of personal memory and vice versa. Finally, in chapter 6 the newest form of dystopian narrative is examined in order to interrogate how this new generic innovation negotiates the theme of sacrifice within its textual borders.

The choice of dystopian novels which foreground the theme of sacrifice necessarily excludes other forms of the genre which may or may not grapple with such questions or if they do, it is to a lesser degree. As a result, the conclusions I reach do not assume to hold true to the

[74] Marc Angenot, 'The Absent Paradigm: An Introduction to the Semiotics of Science Fiction' *Science Fiction Studies* 6.1, March 1979, p. 10, pp. 9-20.

many different manifestations of the literary dystopia. They are meant to be indicative of the forces which dominate totalitarian dystopias and its various narrative expressions. Nor am I proposing a definitive formulation of sacrifice – even if this were possible – but focusing on those aspects which most obviously impact on the dystopian worlds of these novels. Furthermore, the purpose of bringing into dialogue these two discourses is twofold. First, to imagine a route away from dystopia and toward eutopia and second, as a result, to begin to formulate what a utopian ethics would include or exclude. This route from the negative to the positive is part of a 'utopian method' that is, 'a meta-theoretical reflection on Utopia as method'[75] which Ruth Levitas and others have begun formulating. For this thesis, the examination of the role of sacrifice is an important and neglected one in the context of utopianism where social dreaming and social nightmares intersect in the literary form of dystopia expressed in the voice of the potential sacrificial victim. My purpose is a contribution to an understanding of what a utopian ethics would appear to be, and area of scholarship neglected in the field of Utopian Studies where the vast majority of work derives from political theorists and the focus is on the eutopian form of the novel[76].

[75] Ruth Levitas, 'The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society', *Utopia, Method, Vision*, p. 51, pp. 47-68.

[76] Even literary analysis often focuses on the political aspects of the narratives. Thomas Horan, *Extrapolation*, vol. 48, no. 2. Summer 2007. 'Revolutions from the Waist Downwards: Desire as Rebellion in Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*, George Orwell's *1984* [sic], and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, p. 315, pp. 314-339. 'I have coined the term "projected political fiction" which refers to dystopian stories that are both speculative and political. Authors of projected political fiction project a political system or philosophy with which they disagree into a futuristic story...this allows writers...to explore their immediate political concerns on a grander scale without appearing to exaggerate. See also p. 336, note 2: 'while projected political fiction is certainly a kind of dystopian fiction, the specificity of this new label focuses attention on the fact that in the twentieth century, writers of dystopian fiction became increasingly concerned with the political fate of all humanity'.

Chapter One: Defining Dystopia

Introduction

According to Krishan Kumar, 'to understand where utopia stands today is to understand its past, where it comes from and what ideas it carried'.[77] The same holds true of dystopian fiction which is written from the same impulse, the desire for a better world. Yet what is implicated in the definition of both is their relation to the term 'anti-utopia' which equally is not only a conceptual category but also a generic type of fiction. There seem to be two problems associated with defining these terms generically and conceptually. As lay readers of fiction, it is becoming increasingly difficult simply to designate a novel either as a eutopia, the good place, or dystopia, the bad place. This is not merely because every reader brings his/her vision of a better world to the text but because fiction writers themselves are constantly renewing and restructuring the generic boundaries and offering visions of better or worse worlds which defy neat categorizations. Even critical approaches to utopian fiction have produced a plethora of 'sub-categories' in order to better describe texts which problematise the conventions of the well-known classic totalitarian dystopia. Amongst others, the critical dystopia and the feminist dystopia are the most significant for this thesis because of their numerical dominance in terms of production and accompanying large readership. One reviewer of a collection of essays on dystopias may well be correct in pointing out that 'the issue of critical terminology may be less a problem of the text than a problem of utopian studies in general...the definitions seem to run antithetically to the border - fluidity which the contributors argue is taking place in contemporary fictions'.[78] In particular, the most serious issues for this chapter are the conflation of the generic term dystopia with anti-utopia and the general lack of a conceptual framework for the term Dystopia[79]. The problem of defining dystopia is twofold. First, it is necessary to unravel the terminology used by scholars who write

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[77] Krishan Kumar, 'Aspects of the Western Utopian Tradition'. *History of the Human Sciences*. 16:1, 2003, p. 71, pp. 63-77.
[78] Graham J. Murphy, 'Kick at the Darkness Till it Bleeds Daylight', *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 32, part 1, 2005, p. 194, pp. 188-195.
[79] Unfortunately, Kumar also uses the term 'dystopia' interchangeably with 'anti-utopia'. See 'Aspects of the Western Utopian Tradition', *History of the Human Sciences*, vol. 16 no. 1, 2003, pp. 71-72, pp. 63-77.

critically within utopian studies and second, to examine both at the level of content and function, for example, what dystopias 'do' which make them markedly different from eutopias. For both these tasks, the starting point will be a short summary of the major critical works in the field of utopian studies whose authors mainly concern themselves with defining the concepts of utopia and anti-utopia. This will be followed by a more detailed discussion of the relationship of concrete utopia to what I will call concrete dystopia and finally, dystopian literature will be analysed in terms of its content and function. As Kumar notes: 'the anti-utopia does not emerge out of nothing. It draws its energies to a good extent, from the strength of utopia...it is impossible for the anti-utopia to thrive without the stimulus of utopia. *Its life blood is its utopian antagonist*'[80] (my emphasis). Although he uses the terms 'anti-utopia' instead of 'dystopia' and 'utopia' instead of 'eutopia' for textual manifestations of Utopia, his point is that defining dystopia requires not only an understanding of the reality (past or present) it refers to and desires to prevent in the future, but also an understanding of its relationship to utopia and *its* history.

In an attempt to bring together modern definitions of utopia as well as the work of those early writers who have influenced both lay and academic understandings of the term, Ruth Levitas touches on a key element which contributes to a better understanding of the sometimes contradictory and thus confusing use of this term. The 'problem' seems to have begun with Thomas More's *Utopia*, because much common usage of the term he first punned focuses on the perceived impossibility of a utopian *place* since the implicit perfection of such a society is deemed wishful thinking and escapist fantasy at best, or totalitarian nightmare at worst. Likewise, to attempt a realization of such a society is perceived as an equally hopeless task since 'blueprints' of a perfect society can only be all-inclusive if enforced by violent means. So, the 'good' place which is 'no' place is transformed into the 'good' place which *can be* 'no' place, and which in seeking a place, becomes its opposite, dystopia[81]. What Levitas has highlighted is a criticism, in fact, of anti-utopian thought which insists on perfection as a key element of a definition of utopia in order to reject any attempts at its realization.

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[80] Kumar, 'Utopia and Anti-Utopia in the Twentieth Century' in Roland Schaer, Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent, (eds.), *Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World*. New York & Oxford: NY Public Library, p. 256, pp. 251-267, 2000.

[81] Ruth Levitas, p. 3, 'The Elusive Idea of Utopia' in *History of the Human Sciences*, vol. 16.no. 1, 2003, pp. 1-10.

A case in point is John Carey's Introduction to *The Faber Book of Utopias*:

> The aim of all utopias, to a greater or lesser extent, is to eliminate real people. Even if it is not a real aim, it is an inevitable result of their good intentions. In a utopia real people cannot exist, for the very obvious reason that real people are what constitute the world that we know, and it is that world that every utopia is designed to replace.[82]

Carey does not consider his anti-utopian reading of utopias problematic since all the 'undesirables' of the world would disappear: tyrants, torturers, terrorists and criminals. But the elimination of 'undesirables' is precisely what dystopias desire and achieve within their narrative borders, and according to this view, there would be no distinction between eutopias and dystopias because all utopias for Carey entail violence, discrimination and exclusion. The problem here is not only the definition of a utopian text but also the very definition of the concept of utopia which is seen as inherently anti-humanist and totalitarian. So for those writers who consider Utopia a vision of a perfect, unrealisable society the conceptual basis of the term implies the danger of an overlap with dystopia as the only real future possibility. But to collapse dystopia with utopia is an anti-utopian impulse which either misunderstands the impulse which fuels both types of narrative or lacks an understanding of this impulse. Carey's reading focuses too much on the content of utopian fiction without taking into account, on the one hand, the function of the utopian genre in general and on the other hand, the difference between dystopian and eutopian narrative conventions.

For some writers, this fear of utopia turning into dystopia can be minimised, if not dispelled, if the idea of perfection is replaced by a more fluid, process based, definition. This is precisely what has happened in modern usage, at least in academic circles. Influenced by Ernst Bloch's *Principle of Hope*, the term Utopia is no longer understood as a prescriptive one but as a signifier of the desire for a better world. In turn, this definition of Utopia has been reflected in fiction writers' visions of utopia[83]. Levitas, however, finds this notion of Utopia taken to its limits because it focuses on fleeting moments of happiness and risks becoming not only

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[82] John Carey, *The Faber Book of Utopias*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), p. xii.
[83] Lucy Sargisson in *Contemporary Feminist Utopianisms* (London: Routledge, 1996) focuses on the notion of 'utopia as process' based on her readings of feminist utopian fiction, p. 230.

'partial' but also 'fragmentary and temporary'.[84] No longer interested in describing or imagining a future better world, however imperfect, it focuses on the 'interstitial spaces' in the here and now (16). While this approach to Utopia tackles the accusations posed by anti-utopians and their projections of inevitable dystopian spaces, it leaves itself open to accusations of fragmentation and unrealisability.

In a published dialogue between Levitas and Sargisson the two attempt to find common ground in their preoccupation with defining utopia. Their problematic touches on utopia's conflation with dystopia when utopianism is seen as a blueprint for an alternative world. Levitas argues that utopia is 'totalizing in that it requires looking at social, economic, political, and spatial processes in a holistic way' and that to argue that this is tantamount to totalitarianism is 'an intellectual mistake'[85] which often stems from a desire to invalidate any opposition to capitalism.[86] What is required from any utopian vision is an alternative structure which may also be transformative in terms of cognitive processes and agency.[87] Sargisson responds that the totalising aspect of utopianism is always an imminent danger because 'utopia is dangerous' and 'atrocities are enacted daily and globally in the name of various utopias'.[88] Her proposal to counteract such dangers focuses on changing our thinking patterns and our relationship to others.[89] This 'utopianism of process' also focuses on transformation in the present in order to explore alternatives to ways of being which entrench and perpetuate those structures that need changing, such as 'alienation, duality, polarizations, competition, separation and oppositional thinking'.[90] Although Sargisson has more faith in the political potential of change at the micro level, both seem to agree that 'the elision of Utopia and totalitarianism is an anti-utopian fallacy that closes off all futures, paralyses us imaginatively and politically' in order to discourage the hope for changes at the macro-level.[91]

An important addition to the debate has been David Harvey's *Spaces of Hope*. Harvey takes up these two potential dangers of totalitarianism/authoritarianism on the one hand and

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[84] Levitas, 'The Elusive Idea of Utopia', p. 16.
[85] Ruth Levitas and Lucy Sargisson. 'Utopia in Dark Times: Optimism/Pessimism and Utopia/Dystopia', *Dark Horizons, Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), p.18, pp. 13-27.
[86] Ibid., p. 15.
[87] Ibid., p. 19.
[88] Ibid., p. 25.
[89] Ibid., p. 16.
[90] Ibid., p. 17.
[91] Ibid., p. 26.

fragmentation on the other in order to develop his theory of a 'dialectical utopianism'. He separates what he sees as two dominant strands in the history of utopian thinking. There is the utopia of 'spatial form' or 'materialised utopias' and the utopia of 'social process' or 'temporal form'.[92] These two social forces have usually been structured around an 'either-or' binary which treats them as mutually exclusive. On the one hand, the 'presupposed closure' of the utopia of spatial form has led to accusations of authoritarianism.[93] The trajectory a materialised utopia follows begins with the exclusion of certain options and ends with the attempt to control those very processes which enabled the creation of a utopian space. On the other hand, Utopias of temporal process never manage to obtain a concrete spatial form and remain lost in the 'romanticism of endlessly open projects'.[94] Harvey's example takes up the case of 'free-market utopianism' and what Marx dreamt of as the economic activities of men in the 'context of perfect markets'.[95] Inevitably, 'the utopianism of process runs afoul of the spatial framings and the particularities of place construction necessary to their materialization'; whatever the ideal character of these utopias, they must necessarily compromise and negotiate with 'spatiality'.[96] It is this contradiction between, for example, the rhetoric of freedom and the reality of 'coerced collaborations'[97] which compromises for Harvey the ideal character of the utopianism of social process. What begins with a belief in democracy, equality and freedom, ends with an ever-increasing inequality and authoritarianism.[98] The solution Harvey offers to this either/or binary is to turn to a 'both-and' dialectic which a spatiotemporal utopianism offers. In the first instance, it will deal with the 'closure' inherent in the spatial form of utopias which, however temporary, remains authoritarian in character.[99] Then, it must find a way to interact with the social processes which mobilized its creation, without distorting or being subsumed by them. Finally, it must find a way to deal with the material and authoritarian act which closure invariably involves. This stronger form of utopianism is 'rooted in our present possibilities' and simultaneously 'points toward different trajectories' for humanity's development. Harvey's dialectical utopianism is an attempt to provide an alternative which will successfully

[92] David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 173.
[93] p. 175.
[94] p. 174.
[95] pp. 177 and 175.
[96] p. 179.
[97] p. 181.
[98] Ibid., p. 180.
[99] Ibid., p. 182 and 183.

deal with the problems inherent in what he sees as the mutually exclusive visions of a utopia of 'static spatial form' or 'perfected emancipatory process'.[100]

One of the criticisms directed at Harvey's concept of a 'dialectical utopianism' is that it underdevelops the relationship of the social, and social structures to his temporal spatial definition of utopia. Levitas argues that social processes are collapsed into the spatial or geographical as a result of Harvey's overstating the 'centrality of spatial form' to 'non-processual utopias'.[101] And this overstatement results from his conventional view of utopianism as 'systemic, static, ostensibly perfect, and actually authoritarian'[102] and relies on a very selective reading of literary utopias, mainly early modern texts which focused on spatial form. What Harvey sees as the authoritarian act of 'closure' is actually, in the case of literature, the 'authoritarianism inherent in the act of description which, as Levitas points out, is not the same as 'authoritarianism' in the substance of what is described'.[103] Otherwise, most eutopian texts would be rightly described as dystopian, as for example, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*[104] which is isolated in space and quite static as far as its social structures are concerned. What Harvey understates is the social structures and how they impact and the rigidity of spatial forms.[105] What is needed is not only a study of the relationship between space and time but of both to sociology or social structures, which would create, in Levitas's terms a 'trialectic' which is 'socio-spatio-temporal'.[106] Thus, the inclusion of the social within his argument would have ramifications for his concept of a new category of 'dialectical utopianism' especially with regards to the 'closure' he accuses spatial utopias of exhibiting.

Equally, Harvey's discussion of utopias of process is also problematic. What he fails to clarify is the different meaning of process in relation to utopia. For Levitas, there are two types implied in Harvey: process to utopia (the historical transition to), and process as utopia (in itself). Although Harvey focuses on the latter, as in his discussion of the free market, it is the former that concerns him most, as witnessed by his pre-occupation with questions of

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[100] Ibid., 196.
[101] Ruth Levitas, 'On Dialectical Utopianism' in *History of Human Sciences*, p. 142, pp. 137-150.
[102] Ibid., p. 143.
[103] Ibid., p. 144.
[104] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland*. (London, The Women's Press, 1979, orig. 1915).
[105] Levitas, 'On Dialectical Utopianism', p. 146.
[106] Ibid., pp. 149-150.

agency and transition.[107] Again, however, it is Harvey's choice of literary texts which delimits the borders of his categories. For as Levitas points out, another sense of utopian processuality can refer to change within utopia or 'process in utopia'.[108] Many modern novels address the question of change within utopia – that is, the content of these novels is not taken for granted but engages with social change as an important aspect of its vision of a better society. This results in a more dynamic, flexible and non-authoritarian utopian vision which resists closure by including process within its vision. This shift from space to process leads to a redefinition of the concept of utopia. Crucial to this new conceptualisation is yet another understanding of process which does not depend on any one description of an ideal society. Instead, it is the actual process of imagining Utopia which is what defines the concept. In fact, an important point of divergence between the two types (eutopian and dystopian) of narrative is that the structure of dystopias insists on closure by resisting process. It is to this type of narrative that I now turn.

The Critical History of Dystopia

One of the earliest and most well-argued attempts at categorizing a dystopian narrative in relation to eutopian texts is contained in Raymond Williams's *Problems in Materialism and Culture*. He, too, begins with the eutopias of the early modern age, such as More's *Utopia* to develop a theory of subcategories of the genre. He divides utopian fiction into four types and from these types derives four equivalent types of dystopian fiction. He does so in order to clarify the overlap between the four 'utopian' (by which he means eutopian) categories while admitting that even the 'negative of each type' suffers from the same conceptual overlap. The types, which are content based, depend on early modern and Victorian texts and as such emphasize spatial aspects of these narratives:[109]

> [...] a/the hell, in which a more wretched kind of life is described as existing elsewhere ; b/ the externally altered

[107] Ibid., pp. 146-147.
[108] Ibid., p. 147.
[109] Raymond Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, (London: Verso, 1980), p. 196; Thomas More, *Utopia*. eds. George M. Logen and Robert M. Adams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, orig. 1516).

> world, in which a new but less happy kind of life has been brought about by an unlooked for or uncontrollable natural event; c/ the willed transformation, in which a new but less happy kind of life has been brought about by social degeneration, by the emergence or re-emergence of harmful kinds of social order or by the unforeseen yet disastrous consequences of *an effort at social improvement*; d/ the technological transformation, in which the conditions of life have been worsened by technical development. (my emphasis)

Williams goes on to identify a 'dystopian function' strongest in categories c/ and d/ because in these two cases 'the element of transformation rather than the more general element of otherness may be crucial'.[110] So for Williams, in literary terms, utopia and dystopia are mirror images of each other because they both depend on human agency and/or technological progress and not a natural disaster. Like eutopias, dystopias are most potently realised not by an accidental landing in another space better or worse than our own but by the actions of men and women in our own world, whether future or present. But herein lies the danger of anti-utopia expressed in the 'effort at social improvement,' which Williams does not develop further; nor does he untangle the knots in the potential overlap between different types of dystopias and their potential relationship to anti-utopian literature. What Williams crucially does is to single out at the level of content that the 'effort at social improvement' results in a much worse, hellish existence and 'harmful kinds of social order'. This is a good starting point for the analysis of dystopian content as opposed to eutopian content.

Fredric Jameson also cautions against the 'facile' opposition between eutopian and dystopian texts (Utopia and dystopia for him).[111] For Jameson, dystopian narratives distinguish themselves precisely because they are narratives involving 'subject positions' as opposed to utopias (meaning eutopias). Dystopias are 'near-future' novels which tell the story of 'an imminent disaster, ecology, overpopulation, plague, drought the stray comet or nuclear accident...fast forwarded in the time of the novel'.[112] Contra Williams, Jameson ignores the element of human intervention on a social level while at the same time focusing on narrative conventions to emphasise the dystopian narrative's non-static plot development. In *Archaeologies of the Future*, he posits the theory (with which Moylan concurs) that the utopian

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[110] Williams, p. 197.
[111] Fredric Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), p. 55.
[112] Ibid., p. 56.

genre as a whole interiorizes 'differences which generally remain implicit in literary history' and thus remain external to the literary texts themselves.[113] What follows from this is Jameson's conviction that the most significant aspect of a utopian text is what it reveals about the author's subject positions, that is, his or her own limitations in imagining a world radically other to his/her own. Writers of utopias do little more than imagine worlds that are 'projections of our own social moment and historical or subjective situation'.[114] Even more pessimistic about the function of Utopia is his belief that 'at best utopias can serve the negative purpose of making us more aware of our mental and ideological imprisonment...the best Utopias are those that fail the most comprehensively'.[115] Though this may, arguably, compromise the transformative aspect of eutopias, it is in fact essential to the reading of dystopias which consciously and deliberately extrapolate from the material, social and class subject positions their creators seek to transform.

In *The Concept of Utopia*, Levitas identifies hope as the pre-requisite of change: 'The transformation of reality and the realisation of utopia depend on hope, upon not only wishful thinking but wilful action...the dream becomes vision only when hope is invested in an agency capable of transformation.[116] Levitas's purpose is to propose a definition which will encompass 'utopian aspects of a wide range of cultural forms and behaviours'.[117] To do this she designates the essential element in utopia as desire, and following this hope, because the desire for a better life precedes the hope that such a future is realisable. This definition allows for the interaction of form-content-function which at the same time does not limit the cultural manifestations of utopia either in terms of its portrayal of a realisable future or in terms of the scope of what one may dream of rectifying in the present. Following this formulation, dystopia expresses for the writer, reader and narrator that which is not desired.[118] For the text itself, only the main protagonist and his/her 'accomplice' express a desire for a better future and act in rebellion in the hope that it may be realised. To translate this formulation further into one for a definition of

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[113] Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future* (London: Verso, 2007, orig. 2005), p. 143.
[114] Ibid., p. 211.
[115] Ibid., p. xiii. Jameson has been developing this theory at least since the early eighties. See the essays in the second half of *Archaeologies of the Future,* especially 'Progress versus Utopia, or, Can We Imagine the Future?' (orig. 1982), pp 281-295. See also Peter Fitting's 'The Concept of Utopia in the Work of Fredric Jameson, *Utopians Studies*, vol. 9:2, 1998, pp. 98-17.
[116] Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (Syracuse: UP), p. 199.
[117] Ibid., p. 192.
[118] Ibid., p. 191

dystopia, the distinction between hope and desire remains a crucial one. From the point of view of hope it is the subordinated groups of the dystopian (con)text who must not hope for a better future and this loss of hope serves to perpetuate the established conditions. Without hope, there can be no motivation for change or at least, for effective change. At the same time, those who do possess power inhabit the 'utopia' they had hoped for since they have acted on decisions made of their own free will. Every loss of freedom in the rest of society and the violence utilised to ensure it is motivated by a desire to eliminate hope and with it resistance. What then is the opposite of desire and hope?

Tom Moylan deals with these issues in his groundbreaking book, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*. For Moylan, the function of dystopian fiction is to trigger in the reader an opportunity to 'reflect upon the cause of such social evil as systemic'. By expressing a 'simple refusal of modern society' dystopia guides its readers towards a perception of the modern world as less than acceptable or tolerable and hopefully leads them to a reflection on those evils, such as institutionalised violence, whose impact, hereto, remained 'unseen' and 'unexamined'.[119] It is only via the use of this hyperbolic narrative technique that the totalitarian dystopian text achieves a high impact effect on the perception of the reader. In its classic form, the totalitarian dystopia illustrates, to the most extreme degree, what dystopian texts normally reflect by nature of their critical stance toward contemporary society. But not all dystopias are totalitarian and it is the development of new, hybrid forms of dystopian narrative that Moylan attempts to unravel in order to foreground the oppositional and transformative character of the genre.

Moylan succeeds in clarifying the old terms and posits a set of new terms which are much more accurate and functional. As he notes, one of the main problems in academic publications is the tendency to conflate many dystopian and anti-utopian texts under the heading anti-utopian. Furthermore, utopia and anti-utopia are discussed within a single simple 'binary opposition' which effaces the much more complex relationship, or 'continuum' as he perceives it, between these two categories. As far as dystopian texts are concerned, this means that first, both utopian and anti-utopian dystopias belong under the same category and second, even the darkest totalitarian dystopia may exhibit a utopian impulse not merely external to the

[119] Tom Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* (Boulder Colorado: Westview Press, 2000), pp. xii.

text (i.e. the author's intention) but primarily internal to the text, by the narrator or the eventual textual outcomes. Therefore, the categorization he proposes supplants and supersedes the terms hitherto used by developing a theory of poetics which includes the social and political forces which impact on the textual manifestations of utopian literature.

For Moylan, the dystopia as a modern twentieth-century genre distinct from science fiction developed in several directions since one of its earliest examples appeared in 1909 with the publication of 'The Machine Stops' by E.M. Forster'.[120] The 'typical dystopian text' is an exercise in a politically-charged form of hybrid textuality' because it draws on both eutopian and anti-utopian 'historical antinomies and their textual manifestations'.[121] Because of its commitment to critique the socio-political conditions of its time, dystopian writing has targeted all the major socio-political events of our times: from fascism and the authoritarian state to global capitalism.[122] What dystopian writing shares with eutopias is in showing readers that choices in the present will have far-reaching consequences in the future. Dystopias illustrate why and how things are as such, and possibly, how readers can take action to change these conditions before they take a turn for the worse.

Having identified the problem in academic work which conflates dystopia with anti-utopia, he draws up a three-layered chart which: a. differentiates the utopian impulse from its textual expression (whether eutopian or dystopian), communes or social theories, b. provides a clearly formal separation of dystopia from anti-utopia and c. allows for the political separation of the two which allows for a dystopian text to be either eutopian or anti-utopian in its outlook. Moylan points out that many classic dystopias would tend to be anti-utopian because they fail to challenge the status quo or at least allow for the possibility of collective and/or oppositional action. These texts favour a 'linear plot' and 'choose not to challenge the ideological and epistemological limits of the actually existing society'.[123] So the issue shifts from whether a classic text like *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a dystopia or anti-utopia to the question of whether it is an anti-utopian dystopia or a utopian dystopia. Moylan provides a table where the range of

[120] Ibid., p. 121.
[121] Ibid., pp. 147and 156.
[122] Ibid., p. 180.
[123] Ibid., p. 156.

textual possibilities is laid out in relation to the historical antinomies of Utopia and Anti-Utopia:[124]

Historical Antinomies

Utopia	**Anti-Utopia**
Literary Forms	
utopia/eutopia	**anti-utopia**
(radical hope)	(cynicism, despair)
dystopia	**pseudo-dystopia**
(militant pessimism)	(resigned, pessimism)
(epic, open)	(myth, closed)

What dystopias share is that they confront the historical contradictions and conflicts of the century[125] and position themselves within a continuum between utopia and anti-utopian positions. The difference at the two extremes is between texts that are 'emancipatory, militant and open' and those which are 'compensatory and resigned'.[126] Here Moylan concurs with Sargent's definition of an anti-utopia as an opposition to either a particular vision of utopia or the notion of Utopianism itself. What is certain is that the 'historical antinomies' of Utopia and Anti-Utopia are negotiated in more 'contentious' ways than in eutopian or anti-utopian literary texts.[127]

For Moylan, an anti-utopian dystopia is one which 'fails (or chooses not) to challenge the ideological and epistemological limits of the actually existing society'.[128] It is unclear whether this refers to the action or inaction of the protagonist narrator or whether it also includes the failed attempt of the protagonist to deliver a blow to the hegemonic power in the text. For example, in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, both protagonists attempt to challenge the regime's alteration of historical facts but their trust in one of the party members results in their imprisonment and torture. Similarly, we are unsure as to whether the protagonist in *The Handmaid's Tale* succeeds in escaping from Gilead or whether the underground resistance group which aids her achieves any serious undermining of the dictatorship. If the anti-utopia

[124] Ibid., pp. 156 and 157.
[125] Ibid., p. 180.
[126] Ibid., 188.
[127] Ibid., 147.
[128] Ibid., p. 156.

hinges on what Moylan charts as cynicism and resigned despair as opposed to the 'radical hope' and the 'militant pessimism' of the utopian dystopia, then both these texts are anti-utopian in their messages. But anti-utopianism within a text's boundaries can also be a personal and political stance which upholds the status quo and enlists various mechanisms which sustain the hegemonic power in place. In a literary text, the anti-utopian impulse is what the narrator/protagonist rebels against. So even though the conclusion may imply anti-utopian pessimism, the narrator/protagonist's rejection of the status quo and (failed) attempt at oppositional action does not necessarily mean that the dystopian novel is characterised by anti-utopian pessimism.

Concrete Utopia and Concrete Dystopia

It is in dystopian fiction that the reader may see what elements of reality the writer deems significant enough to extrapolate from in order to warn the reader of future, potentially catastrophic developments. For example, in writing *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell expresses this fear: 'I believe . . . that totalitarianism, if not fought against, could triumph anywhere';[129] and in *The Handmaid's Tale*, the religious fundamentalism of the 'Republic of Gilead' is for Atwood not wholly imaginary: 'There's nothing in it that we as a species haven't done, aren't doing now or don't have the technological capacity to do'.[130] In both novels, the experience of this 'present' dystopian reality gives rise to reflection on the processes of history and the relationship between past, present, and future. Even more explicitly, novels such as Octavia Butler's *Kindred* have taken up the issue of slavery. Butler has stated that for her slavery is not an event of the past but a reality in the present both in the American South and in her native California: 'frankly, there isn't anything in there that can't happen if we keep going as we have been . . . It's already happening. I'm talking about people who can't even leave. If they try

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[129] Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, (eds.), *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*. Vol. IV. *In Front of Your Nose, 1945-1950*. (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968), p. 502. For a comprehensive overview of Orwell's place in post-war British politics as well as the canon of dystopian post-war writing see Christopher Norris, *Inside the Myth: Orwell: Views from the Left*, (London: Lawrence and Wishhart), 1984.

[130] Earl G. Ingersoll, (ed.), *Margaret Atwood Conversations*, (Princeton, NJ: Ontario University Press, 1990), p. 129. Quoted in Coral Ann Howells, *Margaret Atwood* (London: Macmillan, 1996).

they're beaten or killed'.[131] These novels effect not only what Fredric Jameson calls an apprehension of 'the present as history'[132] but also the past as present and the present as future. In Atwood's text, this reflection leads, as Baccolini has argued, not to a nostalgic desire for a better future along similar parameters with the past, but to a critique of the past and its continuing legacy in the present.[133] As a result, the experience of oppression and its effects on the present is reformulated in order to be understood not merely as a historical event but also as a living present. In short, the relationship that dystopian fiction has to reality is a dialectical one in which historical events provoke artistic expression that in turn may provoke historical change.

The dystopian novel (like the utopian novel) can be said to be more consciously political in this sense than other fiction. For Kumar the classic dystopias 'have been so dependent on actual contemporary societies as sometimes to run the danger of merely seeming descriptions of them'.[134] The warnings dystopias wish to foreground are not merely imaginary future scenarios but nightmarish fears of the repetition of history – or worse. More than other fiction, the didactic impulse of dystopias seeks to effect change in the reader's psyche and, in turn, in society. Moreover, unlike other fiction, it does not attempt to suppress this 'educational' goal but tackles head on issues that are overtly political.

Furthermore, it is clear that with such an approach to the interpretation of reality, a mimetic theory of art in relation to dystopian fiction is insufficient. Dystopias cannot be expected to adhere to a Platonic concept of *mimesis* since, first of all, the world they are depicting does not exist as such in the present time of writing.[135] Moreover, the mimetic approach to art also relies on a stable, recognisable reality as well as an interpretation of that reality which assumes a direct correspondence between the two. Instead, a more useful – and appropriate – hermeneutic is what Andrew Bowie emphasises in the potential of literature to

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[131], Jim Miller, 'Post-Apocalyptic Hoping: Octavia Butler's Dystopian/Utopian Vision'. *Science Fiction Studies*. Vol. 25, 1998, p. 352, pp. 336-360.

[132] Jameson, p. 246.

[133] Raffaella Baccolini, 'Journeying through the Dystopian Genre: Memory and Imagination in Burdekin, Orwell, Atwood and Piercy', *Viaggi in Utopia*. eds. Baccollini et al. (Ravena: Longo, 1996), p. 346, pp. 343-357.

[134] Kumar uses the term 'anti-utopia' here with reference to *We, Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Brave New World* (1991), p. 66.

[135] In *The Republic*, Plato's main worry is over the possible pernicious effects of representation. In any case, fiction for Plato distorts reality and conveys 'untruths', pp. 363-364.

'disclose' the world by making connections where previously none were visible and to 'reveal the world in ways that would not be possible without the existence of art itself'.[136] In this respect, utopian fiction is the quintessential art form for a hermeneutics of 'disclosure' because of its self-conscious effort to select elements of the present material world in order to transform them into a narrative that illuminates their latent potential for evolving into a better or worse future. Utopian fiction performs an 'education' of perception whereby certain truths are disclosed via defamiliarisation since at the level of plot, language, and character the reader is made to 'see' the world in radically different ways. In short, the reading of utopian fiction accomplishes what Percy Shelley claimed for the effect of reading poetry in his 'A Defence of Poetry': 'It creates anew the universe, after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration'.[137]

In their common purpose to 'warn', these texts perform at the level of narrative the function of what J. L. Austin calls, in *How to do Things with Words*, an illocutionary speech act, i.e. an utterance which achieves a 'certain force' by virtue of its saying something.[138] At the same time, Austin asserts that 'unless a certain effect is achieved, the illocutionary act will not have been happily, successfully performed'.[139] Todorov takes up Austin's theory in order to argue that 'all genres stem from speech acts', though not all speech acts produce literary genres for the identity of the genre is entirely determined by that of the speech act, which does not mean that the two are one and the same.[140] What do dystopias do, beyond the telling of a story? If one takes this analogy further and accepts Todorov's argument that like all other speech acts genre arises from the codification of discursive properties through what he calls a series of transformations or amplifications,[141] what remains is to ascertain which speech acts are being enlisted beyond the telling, on which all novels are based. The first level of transformation is based on 'narrativization' or 'the embedding of the verbal act' of informing,

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[136] Andrew Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory: The Philosophy of German Literary Theory*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 18.
[137] Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry', in Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers, (eds.), *Shelley's Poetry and Prose: Authoritative Texts Criticism* (New York: Norton, 1977), pp. 505-6, pp. 480-508.
[138] J. C. Austin, J.C. *How to Do Things with Words*. eds. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà. (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1962), p. 121.
[139] Ibid., p. 116.
[140] Tzvetan Todorov, *Genres in Discourse*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: UP,1990, orig. 1978), pp. 19 and 25.
[141] Ibid., 21.

warning, frightening in the verbal act of telling; in place of the warning, we have the narrative of a warning. The same external transformation applies to other speech acts embedded in the original: informing, frightening and inciting to action.[142] Why is it important to stress this 'performative' aspect of the dystopian narrative? In order to a) distinguish and to some extent distance it from the science fiction genre, b) distinguish it from other committed literary genres, and c) posit the historical primacy of the utopian narratives over science fiction. As a type of committed narrative, dystopias betray an intent beyond the telling of a story. They are interested in communicating a particular message to the reader.

By analogy to speech act theory, authorial intention and reader response are brought together in a three way understanding of how dystopian narratives differ from other science fiction or utopian texts. A reader's expectation in reading a dystopian text is not the same as approaching science fiction or political fiction. Because of this difference, readers function as 'horizons of expectation' and models of writing[143] for authors. Equally, authors are aware of the tradition they are writing within and whether they are situating themselves within the new science fiction or the older utopian fiction (at least since More in the West, if not Plato). It is this institutionalization of a genre that makes its message comprehensible to readers or as Todorov states 'like any other institution, genres bring to light the constitutive features of the society to which they belong'[144] and, I would add, its fear and hopes. Accordingly, in the literary tradition of the West, it is clear why one of the periods during which dystopias proliferated was the post-WWII years. Dystopias produced in other cultures would retain the narrativization of the speech act of warning but the content to which it would refer and its basis in reality would be expressed with different literary conventions. So the identity of the genre is entirely determined by that of the speech act, which does not mean that the two are one and the same.[145] What remains important is that 'the identity of the genre comes from the speech act that is at its root, telling one's own story, however, this initial contact is not prevented from undergoing numerous transformations in order to become a literary genre.[146]

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[142] Ibid., 22.
[143] Ibid., 18.
[144] Ibid., 19.
[145] Ibid., 25.
[146] Ibid., pp. 25-26.

The relationship of dystopian fiction to the reality it refers to and is inspired by is a key issue in the delineation of concrete dystopia. In order to delineate what constitutes 'concrete dystopia' it is first necessary to look to another, related term, Ernst Bloch's 'concrete utopia'. For Bloch, this term points to a perception of reality in process, i.e. with 'real historical possibilities and tendencies in the Not-Yet'.[147] Though it refers to the present, it is also anticipatory because it brings together past, present, and future by realising the latent utopian forces in society because of its focus on change in the future.[148] In *The Principle of Hope*, Bloch elaborates on the implications of concrete utopia:

> Reality without real possibility is not complete, the world without future-laden properties does not deserve a glance. [. . .] concrete utopia stands on the horizon of every reality, real possibility surrounds the open dialectical tendencies and latencies to the very last. (223)[149]

Bloch's utopian hermeneutic forms a bridge between art and reality that is otherwise absent from classical literary criticism. Reality for Bloch is not a fixed, unchanging object of human enquiry but as Levitas points out, it 'includes what is becoming and might become' and as such is 'in a state of process' which incorporates future possibilities.[150] Utopia, then, is not merely escapist fantasy but a positive force in the present that enables the expression of the hope that, ultimately, happiness and fulfilment (including the absence of violence, fear, and alienation) will be tenable by all. Looking to the negative, therefore, if dystopian texts extrapolate from real events, then manifestations of concrete dystopia form the material basis through which literature, as a carrier of utopian hope, may convey its intention to critique and warn. Moreover, on a conceptual level, it expresses connotations both parallel and opposite to those of concrete dystopia.

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[147] See also Cavalcanti on the relevance of Bloch's utopianism in the context of the feminist utopia/dystopia. Ildney de Fátima Souza. 'Articulating the Elsewhere: Utopia in Contemporary Feminist Dystopias'. Dissertation. University of Strathclyde, 1999.

[148] Ernst Bloch, *On Karl Marx*, trans. John Maxwell (New York: Herder & Herder, 1990), p. 72.

[149] *The Principle of Hope*, trans. Neville Plaice, Steven Plaice and Paul Knight (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 223.

[150] Ruth Levitas, 'Educated Hope: Ernst Bloch on Abstract and Concrete Utopia', in Jamie Owen Daniel and Tom Moylan, (eds.), *Not Yet: Reconsidering Ernst Bloch* (London and New York: Verso, 1997), p. 77, pp. 65-79. Levitas makes this point in the context of arguing against the ultimately untenable distinction between abstract and concrete utopia, pp. 65-79.

What concrete utopia shares with concrete dystopia is an emphasis on the real, material conditions of society that manifest themselves as a result of humanity's desire for a better world. For both, reality is not fixed but fluid, pregnant with both positive and negative potential for the future. This implies that present and past conditions are dystopian in their function and effects because of the ever-present need for change and improvement. If concrete utopia brings together the present and future by pulling 'the present forward', as Moylan writes in *Demand the Impossible*,[151] then concrete dystopia brings together the past and present, creating thus a continuum in time whereby historical reality is dystopian, possibly punctuated by utopian ruptures in the form of literature, art, and other cultural manifestations. For Bloch, utopia can be detected in every art form, from literature and music to architecture and painting, and is central to ethics, religion, and philosophy.[152] It follows then that any forces that attempt or have attempted to crush the expression of hope by means of physical or psychological violence or to displace desire by means of a propaganda machine form the basis from which fear becomes institutionalised in order to establish a new 'reality' defined by hierarchy and stasis, censorship and lack of freedom. Such forces include, but are not limited to, all forms of slavery, genocide and political dictatorships. Their manifestation is not the prerogative of any one time or society but a potential reality in any time and space in which alienation has been imposed, hope replaced with despair and desire with fear.

In opposition to concrete utopia, concrete dystopia designates those moments, events, institutions, and systems that embody and realise organised forces of violence and oppression. Where concrete utopia envisions freedom from violence, inequality and domination, concrete dystopia expresses coercion (physical and psychological), fear, despair, and alienation. Whereas concrete utopia is a manifestation of desire and hope for a better world and an 'unalienated order' that upsets the status quo, concrete dystopia expresses the crushing of hope and the displacement of desire for the purpose of upholding that status quo.[153] So although utopian literature, both eutopian and dystopian, is an expression of utopian hope because of its revolutionary potential, only dystopian literature expresses the warning that what once happened, or took place to a limited degree, may happen again. Concrete dystopias are those

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[151] Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (London & New York: Methuen, 1986), p. 22.
[152] Bloch, *Principle of Hope*, p. 683.
[153] Ibid., 624.

events that form the *material* basis for the content of dystopian fiction which have *inspired* the writer to warn of the potential for history to repeat itself. To summarise, the terms 'concrete utopia' and 'concrete dystopia' share a common *space* in their referral to conditions that manifest themselves in the real world, but stand in opposition in terms of *time*, the former being forward-looking, the latter backward-looking. Both however, retain a common space-time in the possibility of realization in the present.

Dystopian narratives may manifest themselves in both fictional/literary and non-fictional/theoretical contexts. Just as Utopianism includes a wide range of phenomena, the term Dystopia may also include a whole range of fiction and/or concrete realities. What constitutes a dystopian narrative irrespective of literary conventions would include a similarity in structural features as well as reader response. A concept of Dystopia can be developed to apply to disparate forms: literary, social and political. This would encompass a range of fictional and non-fictional texts including slavery (and slave narratives) as well as totalitarian systems such as Nazi Germany or any dictatorship as examples of 'concrete dystopias'. This term is a paraphrase of Ernst Bloch's 'concrete utopia', which for him signifies the establishment of utopian possibilities in the material world. It brings together past, present and future by realising the latency of utopian possibilities inherent in society.[154] A concrete dystopia then is the realisation in the past or present of the kind of anti-utopian impulses that equally drive the world of a literary dystopia. Whereas 'dystopia' describes a literary genre, a world created markedly worse than the one 'we' readers in the western world inhabit, Dystopia can describe other phenomena in the actual world which provide the raw material for literary inspiration. Of all the forms of the literary dystopia inspired by real world events, it is the totalitarian dystopia which provides the most illuminating and fascinating material for a formulation of a concept of Dystopia.

The concrete dystopia shares with its literary counterpart content-based characteristics as well as a similarity of function for its subjects. In both, ideology is employed to ensure willing compliance. Though this functions as a warning to the reader and as Sargent has pointed out 'a warning implies that choice and therefore hope, are still possible'[155] this holds true only in the extra-textual world of the reader. More often than not, the dystopian world is

[154] Bloch, *On Karl Marx*, p. 72.
[155] Sargent, 'The Three Faces of Utopianism', p. 26.

characterised by lack of hope and the question of whether one 'can one make correct choices'[156] remains an unanswered one for the protagonists.

The Literary History of Dystopia: Introduction

Another difficulty in defining the dystopia as a genre lies in the literary output in the genre. Dystopia as a literary genre is only a little over a hundred years old thus making it much younger than the utopian novel. It has also been far outnumbered by the utopias written both in this century and the previous one.[157] The greater literary production presumably is because as a genre, the utopian novel seems to be the preferred mode of expressing a critique of present socio-political conditions. Certainly, the output varies according to which decade one is referring to since the twenties, thirties and post-WWII years were the most prolific in terms of dystopian writing.[158] At a critical level, it generally receives at best a chapter in a book on utopian literature, and at worst, a few pages or even a few lines.[159] Moylan's *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*[160] cites the accumulation of horrors of the twentieth century as a fertile ground for the move from eutopian to dystopian literary production: state violence, war, genocide, famine, disease and depression are but a few of the terrible conditions that humanity sustained in under a hundred years. Part of the complication derives from the use of the term utopianism that includes both utopian and dystopian literature. Since the 'utopia' was a depiction of the 'good place' then the anti-utopia was considered an appropriate term for the opposite literary word.[161] As the dystopia developed its generic conventions, it began to differentiate itself from the anti-utopia, which focuses on satire as a mode of expression. As seen in the case of Kumar,

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[156] Ibid. p. 26.

[157] Between 1516 and 1895 four hundred utopias were written in English and approximately 320 of these appeared in the 19th century. See Nan Bowman Albinski, *Women's Utopias in British and American Fiction* (London and NY: Routledge, 1988). However, from 1975 the numbers are reversed for male writers: 23 eutopias were written as opposed to 65 dystopias. See footnote no.1, p. 182 in Albinski. The numbers are quoted from Lyman Tower Sargent's *British and American Utopian Literature 1516-1975 An Annotated Bibliography* (Boston: GK Hall, 1977). At conferences, less than 10 per cent of papers presented are on dystopian fiction. For example, at the Utopian Studies Society conference in Plymouth (2007), out of approximately ninety papers, only eight mentioned dystopia and of those, five were on film and three were on Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

[158] Albinski, p. 11

[159] See for example, Krishan Kumar, *Utopianism* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991). There are six pages which refer to dystopias out of one hundred and twenty-two.

[160] Moylan, *Scraps,* p. xi.

[161] A recent example is Fredric Jameson in *Archaeologies of the Future*, pp. 176-177, 'one of the classic anti-Utopias, Zamyatin's *We*, turns out also to be an example of the Utopian genre itself'. On page 21, he calls *We* 'both Utopia and dystopia all at once'.

these terms are still used interchangeably[162] even though Sargent's work in the seventies has long severed these two generic types. For example, is Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* (1872) anti-utopian or dystopian? The satire suggests it is the former even though the discussion of disease as a form of punishment points to a critique of nineteenth- century attitudes in English society.[163] Yet critics have used both terms to discuss this nineteenth-century novel. Because the dystopia is a new genre, it has relied on many, more established genres to express its concerns and convey its message. These include, but are not limited to: the eutopia, the fantastic, the heroic saga, the quest novel, the travel novel, science fiction and politically committed fiction.

How do readers know when a text is a dystopia? Because of the range of visions, it is clear that one writer's eutopia is another writer's dystopia, an issue that remains problematic in the history of interpretation from Plato's *The Republic* to modern day utopias. Sargent defines dystopian fiction as texts showing 'a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which the reader lived'.[164] He suggests examining the author's intentions for 'the limited purpose of determining whether the work can be classified more easily'.[165] Though he admits that this is not always possible, he insists that it remains necessary. The author's intention may be easily discerned by a researcher but not for a reader who has no ready access to sources that will enable him/her to determine whether or not a text is a dystopia. Though he admits that this is not always possible, he insists that it remains necessary. This may be easy enough when the question is asked by a researcher but not if the reader has no access to sources that will provide a definitive answer. What is needed is a text-based definition that the reader takes an active part in generating since it is the reader's

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[162] For example in Jean Pfaelzer's *The Utopian Novel in American 1886-1896 The Politics of Form* (Pittsbugh: The University of Pittsburgh Press, 1984). His discussion of dystopian fiction is actually more appropriately applied to anti-utopias: 'Using this two modes, parody and satire, dystopias not only attacked the goals of reformers and mocked sentiments of...but also challenged the very experience of hope itself', p. 78, and 'The real subject matter of dystopia is the phenomenon of utopianism itself...', p. 94. In Kumar, see p. 27.

[163] Darko Suvin, however, considers satire an inextricable part of dystopian literary history. See 'Theses on Dystopia' p. 188, in Moylan, 2003, pp.187-2001.

[164] Sargent, 'Three Faces', p. 9.

[165] Lyman Tower Sargent, 'The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited', *Utopian Studies*, 15, 1, 1994, p. 13, pp. 1-37.

understanding of the narrator's message that will establish the distinction between what constitutes a 'good' or 'bad' future world.

It follows that it would be more useful if this determination, rather than being based on authorial intention, were to focus on the identification the reader is invited to make with the protagonist/narrator. Since it is the protagonist who experiences his/her society as dystopian (to a greater degree at least than the others), one criterion then should take this positioning into account. It is also the main protagonist who attempts to answer the question 'which world is this and what place do I occupy within it?' This is a useful distinction to make for the genre since it is the perception of the protagonist that the reader is asked to accept as a valid representation of his/her dystopian experience. It is usually the protagonist who also desires and hopes for a better present/future that distinguishes him/her from the rest of the population and additionally brings him/her into conflict with the dystopian establishment. Unlike eutopian fiction where there seems to be an agreement of principles amongst all the citizens, the multiplicity of voices in dystopian fiction renders it necessary for the reader to accept the narrator's point of view as the most reliable; there would otherwise be no exposure of the dystopia in question. The protagonist must – to some degree - be accepted as a reliable narrator without whom there would be no exposure of the dystopia in question. For example, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Winston Smith compares himself to his neighbours and colleagues and asks: 'Was he alone in the possession of a memory?'(62). The reader is then called on to identify and sympathise with this protagonist, to agree with him that this particular world is dystopian. If a work was originally intended as a eutopia in its time though we may now read it as a dystopia, it should still be possible to ascertain this on the basis of this text-based criterion.[166]

The narrator's perception is an important sign in the genre for signalling and documenting the discrepancy between the world as he/she experiences it and the world he/she desires. The reader is then drawn into the dystopian world via a series of formal devices utilised for the purpose of identification with the narrator's point of view. Without a successful process of identification the reader will not be convinced of the narrator's critique of the

[166] I agree with Sargent that this is the case with some novels, see p. xii, 'Introduction' in *British and American Utopian Literature, 1516-1985 An Annotated, Chronological Bibliography*.

present and the utopian impulse implicit in the dystopian narrative will have failed in its purpose to warn of future, potentially catastrophic, developments. For the purpose then of ensuring that identification is successfully developed, formal strategies must be employed that function independently of the author's actual intentions, which are inaccessible to the reader. Narrative point of view to some degree constitutes the dystopia as a genre more so than genres; a literary world is dystopian because the narrator believes it to be so, and not because of what other characters believe.

In terms of content, eutopian and dystopian literature share many similar concerns, deal with common themes and are motivated by the same impulses. A straightforward opposition between the two overlooks the common impulses that motivate not only the creation of the literary texts but also those behind historical realities. Both as a concept and as a literary text, eutopias and dystopias occupy two ends of the same continuum, with an overlap in a middle common space. For example, the feminist dystopia of the 80s shares with the utopias of the same decade characteristics such as a 'questioning of generic conventions' and 'the resistance to closure' which make it 'one of the preferred sites of resistance'.[167] A definition then would have to take into account this common space as well as the two poles at the end.

The main stylistic strategy employed to express this discrepancy is that of 'defamiliarisation'.[168] This term, coined by the Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky, denotes a technique necessary (for him, to all literature) for the purpose of 'renewing perception':

> [. . .] art exists that one may recover the sensation of life. It exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony. The *purpose of art* is to impart the sensation of things *as they are perceived and not as they are known.* The technique of art is to make objects *unfamiliar*, to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of *perception* [. . .]' (18, my emphasis).

In this passage, the emphasis on 'perception' in relation to 'the purpose of art' points to two key concerns of the utopian genre. In the process of 'making things unfamiliar', of

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[167] Raffaella Baccolini, 'Gender and Genre in the Feminist Critical Dystopia of Katharine Burdekin, Margaret Atwood, and Octavia Butler' in Marleen S. Barr, (ed.), *Future Females, The Next Generation: New Voices and Velocities in Feminist Science Fiction Criticism* (Boston: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), p. 18.

[168] Another strategy is the juxtaposition between memory of the past and desire for a better future; see Baccolini, 'Journeying', pp. 343-357.

defamiliarizing objects of reality, dystopian fiction invites the reader to observe the dystopian world as the narrator observes it, not merely to sympathise but also to judge. Via *this* perception of reality, the reader must empathise with the narrator/protagonist in order to condemn, as the narrator/protagonist does, those aspects of society that constitute the narrator's oppression. In fact, defamiliarization is the key strategy all utopian literature employs to some degree for the explicit purpose of social critique via renewed perception. Applied to dystopian fiction, defamiliarization makes us see the world anew, not as it is but as it *could* be; it shows the world in sharp focus in order to bring out conditions that exist already but which, as a result of our dulled perception, we can no longer see. In this sense, dystopian fiction acts as our eyes onto the world, creating clues that we can become aware of if only we 'tuned into' the right frequency. Reality becomes a site of interpretation, and the reader is asked to partake in this interpretation in order to elicit the exact parameters of the warning conveyed in any given dystopian text. Through the devices that "make strange" our perception of the world, dystopian texts continually demand readerly attention to our relationship to the real world in order to ask whether we are making, as Sargent points out, the 'correct choices'.[169]

In *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, Darko Suvin amends Shklovsky's term as in the case of science fiction utopia to be a formal property called 'cognitive estrangement' in order to delineate a 'creative approach toward a dynamic transformation rather than toward a static mirroring of the author's environment'.[170] His emphasis on interpretation rather than reflection points to the critical work of an author in his/her purpose to present the reader with a perception of reality that critiques accepted views of the world. In utopian writing, the real world is made to appear 'strange' in order to challenge the reader's complacency towards accepted views of history and awaken, through the 'truth' of fiction, a new perception of the connections between history and the present world. The device of defamiliarisation in dystopian fiction may serve as a formal strategy that creates a bridge between certain elements of reality and fiction, the historical and the synchronic, on the one hand, the ahistorical and the diachronic on the other. This makes it possible to draw parallels between disparate historical events far removed from each other in both space and time as well as to make connections

[169] Sargent,'Three Faces', p. 24.
[170] Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*, (London and New Haven: Yale UP, 1979), p. 9.

between similar events placed in disparate contexts. Through the comparisons across time - future, present and past - on the one hand and across space on the other, the author encourages the reader to critique the historical process and to assess what similarities and differences can be drawn. However then one translates Shklovsky's term, it remains a device that is used for, as Suvin states, 'a reflection *on* reality as well as *of* reality'.[171]

By achieving the suppression of desire, dystopian worlds effect what is most characteristic of the genre's characters and/or narrator: that of both inter-subjective and intra-subjective alienation. Whereas utopias utilise the technique of defamiliarisation for a change of consciousness in the reader - a way of seeing the world as if for the first time and recognising its forms - dystopias effect a double defamiliarisation: between reader and narrator and within the narrator's psychic world. The first kind is positive and performs a transforming effect on the reader. The second is more appropriately called alienation. It is always accompanied by the narrator's cognition that the 'official' language of the world he/she inhabits does not express experience; rather, it becomes an instrument of psychological manipulation and further alienation. Although all dystopias foreground the narrator's alienated subjectivity to some degree, it is the totalitarian narrative which emphasizes its effects on the narrator and his/her personal relationships. Even within the sub-genres of dystopian fiction, there exists a depiction of a totalitarian world which impacts on everyone within that narrative world. It is within totalitarian worlds that alienation is most extreme and as such reveals the most significant element in the genre's content.

Totalitarian Dystopias

In this type of dystopia the reader is shown a world in which the evils the writer is attempting to expose and criticise are presented in sharp relief. They portray both how totalitarian power structures function and their effects on subjectivity and human relationships. In the *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 'dystopia' is defined as 'a place where instead of all being well, all is not well'. This definition seems to imply the point of view of the narrator since as far as the rulers in dystopias are concerned, all *is* well. A more illuminating definition is found in the

[171] Ibid., p, 9. Suvin prefers to translate 'ostranenie' into estrangement rather than defamiliarisation, see page 6, note 2. For Suvin, it is 'cognition' which performs this critical stance towards reality, p.10.

entry for *Totalitarianism*: 'the principle of government according to which all institutional and private arrangements are subject to control by the state'.[172] This definition, however, is inadequate for some dystopian novels, such as 'post-apocalyptic utopias' where the prevailing reality is that of chaos, rather than order.[173] At first glance, what characteristics these other dystopias share with totalitarian dystopias cannot be sought at the level of content alone although it is worth noting some of the most salient features they share. The literary texts which are considered the best examples of a classic totalitarian dystopia are Katherine Burdekin's *Swastika Night*, Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1924), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), George Orwell's *Nineteeen Eighty-Four* (1949) as well as more contemporary re-workings, such as Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). All share the depiction of a world where total control is the purpose of the governing powers.

The concerns of dystopias as well as the techniques employed to highlight them coincide with those of utopias from the writer's point of view. Some of these include: the function of language in society, estrangement or defamiliarisation of the present conditions under critique, a discourse on the meaning of love, desire, freedom, equality and power, the relationship to oneself and to others. What markedly distinguishes the former from the latter is the absence of happiness, freedom, equality and love for the majority and instead, the presence of violence, suffering and injustice. Because of the range of visions, it is clear that one individual's Utopia is another's Dystopia and perhaps this is one reason why Utopia itself has been considered totalitarian.[174] This is not only a historical problem but also one internal to the literary text. For Amin Malak, a content-based approach reveals the 'salient dystopian features'.[175] These six features are: a. power, totalitarianism, war, b. dream-nightmare, c. binary oppositions, d. characterisation e. change and time, f. roman a thèse. However, many of these features are also prominent in utopian fiction, for example, the foregrounding of a roman à these, i.e., the development of an ideological position. His approach not only neglects the

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[172] p.113 and p. 379 respectively in *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: University Press, 1994).
[173] Angela Carter *Heroes and Villains* (London: Penguin, 1969). Even within this novel there is a mini totalitarian state ruled by a tyrant in the guise of a 'Doctor'.
[174] Barbara Goodwin discusses the political theorists who consider utopias totalitarian and provides a defence in chapter 4, 'Utopia's Enemies' in Barbara Goodwin and Keith Taylor, (eds.), *The Politics of Utopia: A Study in Theory and Practice* (London: Hutchinson, 1982).
[175] Amin Malak 'Margaret Atwood's "*The Handmaid's Tale*" and the Dystopian Tradition', *Canadian Literature*, no. 112, spring 1987, pp. 9-16.

overlap in content between utopias and dystopias but also does not apply to the range of dystopian literature itself but only to totalitarian dystopias. Like utopias, as Raffaella Baccolini has written, dystopias 'share the convention of the journey through memory [...] to a better past and desire for a better future'.[176] In agreement with Tom Moylan's writings on the 'critical utopia' Baccolini considers both the utopias of the 1960s and 1970s and the dystopias of the 80s and 90s negating 'static ideals...for the creation instead of a space where opposition can be articulated'.[177] This opposition takes place as a result of the communication between writer and reader. But whereas for the reader dystopias perform a similar function to utopias, one of critique, for the protagonists of the text a content-based definition will not suffice because the reader of the text does not occupy the same 'space' as the characters in a dystopia.

In terms of content, they share the same lack of freedom and the right to say 'no' with impunity. At the same time, both seem to function on the basis of violence as a means for all ends. Compliance is achieved not only by physical violence but also psychological violence. Ideological interpolation is employed to ensure what torture and death do not. Yet it is as difficult to define 'real' totalitarian systems as fictional ones. Barbara Goodwin has rightly pointed out that descriptions of totalitarian states are largely dependent on a collection of political methods, mistaking them for political goals. This gives no insight to the actual intentions of this system and says nothing about what constitutes 'totalitarian ideology'[178]- if in fact there is such a thing. However, even if there is no 'totalitarian' political theory there is a mutual space in which depictions of both fictional and non-fictional totalitarian states overlap and this is to be found in the function of alienation and its effect on one's relationship to oneself and to others.

In order to bring together the relevance of alienation in fictional works with the alienation experienced in concrete dystopias Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* is a useful text. Arendt discusses both Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia to illuminate the

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[176] Raffaella Baccolini 'Journeying through the dystopian Genre: Memory and Imagination in Burdekin, Orwell, Atwood and Piercy', in Baccollini et al, (eds.), *Viaggi in Utopia* (Ravena: Longo, 1996), p. 354, pp. 343-357. Baccolini however points out the difference between male and female writers' attitude to the past is an important one for the genre. See p. 346.

[177] Baccolini, 'Journeying', p. 6. For Tom Moylan on 'the critical utopia' see *Demand the Impossible Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (London & New York: Methuen, 1986).

[178] Barbara Goodwin, *Using Political Ideas* (NY: John Wiley & Sons, 1982), p. 155, pp. 152-169.

role of ideology in the way alienation functions on the level of the individual. In totalitarian states, 'mutual mistrust...permeates all social relationships...and creates an all pervasive atmosphere even outside the special view of the secret police'.[179] The parallels are clear: we read in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* that the children of Winston's neighbours have no reservations in betraying their parents for 'thoughtcrime'. The ties between friends, relatives and loved ones are all subject to psychological erosion for the common purpose of allegiance to the state. Arendt emphasises the role of 'terror' in effecting this alienation which is both inter-subjective and intra-subjective.

She continues to say that the ideological goal in totalitarian regimes is to create the 'ideal subject' i.e. subjects who have thoroughly 'lost contact with their fellow men as well as the reality around them'. This discrepancy between fact and fiction contributes to their alienation and finally makes them incapable of action: 'terror can rule absolutely only over men who are isolated against each other...isolation may be the beginning of terror, it certainly is its most fertile ground, it always is its result [....] its hallmark is impotence [...] the fundamental inability to act at all'.[180]

We see an example of this in *Swastika Night*, where the women are so resigned to their fate that they no longer hear what is being said to them. In the very beginning they are told to produce more strong girls yet after hundreds of years of the devaluation of female babies and women they do not notice this change and refuse to believe it when the oldest woman, Marta insists: 'He never said that–*never*. We only thought it. He said we were to have *sons*. Of course, Sons. *Sons*. Marta, do you hear?' (16). As these women have lived under Hitlerism for seven hundred years, any solidarity between them has been severed and their isolation has rendered them socially and politically impotent.

In order to achieve this total control states must employ what Louis Althusser calls 'Repressive State Apparatuses'[181]- the Army, the Police, the Courts, the Prisons etc.

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[179] Arendt, p. 430. For an analysis of Arendt's view and a review of totalitarianism as a political phenomenon see Barbara Goodwin, 'Totalitarianism' in *Using Political Ideas*, pp. 153-163.

[180] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1958, orig. 1951), p. 474. Bringing about the isolation of men from each other, Arendt adds, is both pre-totalitarian as well as the result of totalitarian terror.

[181] Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' (Notes Towards an Investigation), in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), p.145, pp. 127-186.

Althusser's analysis focuses on a critique of capitalism and the institutions which support it. Though dystopias do not pretend to be democratic, they do exemplify an image of the world if these measures are taken to their logical extreme. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 'The Ministry of Love' is the designated space for torture and in *The Handmaid's Tale* the public hangings and 'Salvagings' enforce violent punishment to those suspected of treason. The possibility of physical torture and death keeps a rein on any attempt at resistance. But fear of violence is not sufficient, as desire itself is impossible to eradicate. To this purpose the role played by ideology is crucial since in totalitarian dystopias rebellion in all its forms must be eradicated. What is needed for willing compliance is the enforcement of further 'Ideological State Apparatuses' i.e. - religious, educational, legal, political, cultural and of course, the family and communications.[182] The aim is to make people believe that everything in their society is already perfect, so that there will be no desire for change. Without the dream of a better future the totalitarian powers can ensure that resistance is minimised. Language manipulation is one of the means by which all institutions are realised, or to use Louis Althusser's thesis on the materiality of the State's ideological apparatuses, in totalitarian dystopias language is the means by which the ideology of the State becomes material.[183] In *We* the word freedom means 'disorganised wilderness' (13) in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 'Freedom' is 'Slavery' (6) and in *The Handmaid's Tale* it is forbidden to use the word freedom in public altogether because it is considered 'too dangerous' (p. 64). By taking the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign to its extreme, the hierarchy of the totalitarian state is first realised, then maintained by those who seize political power and thus control linguistic meaning. The manipulation of meaning is of primary importance because it constitutes the pre-requisite for the success of all other endeavours. The role then of ideology is highlighted and its workings made visible in the most transparent way possible because of the extremity of the situations described. So whereas the writer of eutopias or dystopias is motivated by similar ideological concerns, (critique of present reality) the protagonist in the former text is not likely to question the ideology of their (narrative) worldview in the same way the latter would.

[182] Altusser, p. 143.
[183] Ibid., p. 166.

The most important characteristic of totalitarian worlds is that of effecting both inter-subjective and intra-subjective alienation. Whereas eutopias utilise the technique of defamiliarization for a change of consciousness in the reader, a way of seeing the world as if for the first time, and as a result recognising its forms,[184] dystopias effect a double defamiliarization: between reader and narrator and within the narrator's psychic world. The first kind - between narrator and reader - is positive and performs a transgressive function on the reader. The second kind - within the protagonist - is more appropriately called alienation. It is always accompanied by the narrator's cognition that the 'official' language of the world they inhabit does not express their experience, rather it becomes an instrument of psychological manipulation and further alienation. What Althusser calls the 'imaginary relationship of individuals to the real relations in which they live'[185] is taken to its extreme in the totalitarian dystopia so that the reference to some reality is cancelled and the illusion/imaginary becomes the only reality. This constitutes the individual in a totalitarian dystopia as the most alienated of all other subjects of dystopias since in this case the individual is not merely a reflection of a dystopic reality but a metonymic representation of it. If characters are made to believe they inhabit the best possible present then any resistance is redundant. This factor is particularly true of women's position in the feminist dystopias written from the seventies onwards.

Feminist Dystopias

Cavalcanti traces a turn to feminism in dystopian fiction from at least 1927 with the publication of Charlotte Haldane's *Man's World* and especially in 1937 with Katherine Burdekin's *Swastika Night*. As this sub-genre developed, it too borrowed from other, more established genres: the modern fairy tale, romance, heroic sagas, thrillers and science fiction in order to evolve into a 'hybrid mode' which resists any 'conclusive mappings'.[186] But what feminist dystopias share, despite generic differences, is an anxiety with natality, reproduction and motherhood which is largely absent from male authored texts. Nan Bowman Albinksi has

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[184] Victor Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique', pp. 48-56, in Rick Rylance, (ed.), *Debating Texts: A Reader in Twentieth Century Literary Theory and Method* (Open University Press: Milton Keynes, 1987), pp. 49 & 52.
[185] Althusser., p. 11.
[186] Cavalcanti, 'Articulating the Elswhere', p. 65, f. 1.

written that the central concern in women's utopian writing from the 1920s to the 1940s is reproductive and sexual freedom and, particularly for dystopias, the absence of control over their own bodies, whether it involves the freedom to bear children or to avoid a compulsion to do so.[187] Likewise, Sarah Lefanu states that women's dystopias show women 'trapped by their sex, by their femaleness, and reduced from subjecthood to function'.[188] From the classic feminist dystopia in the first half of the twentieth century, to the seventies' 'golden age' of production, to the eighties and the critical dystopia and finally to the twenty-first century of cyborgs and cloning (as in Marge Piercy's *He, She, It*), and despite its generic mutation, the feminist dystopia has continued to warn of the 'concrete' reality of the persistent exploitation of their bodies.

A brief look at the feminist dystopia will reveal the parallels between the fictional and concrete dystopia. A feminist dystopia is characterized by 'the suppression of female desire [...] and the institution of gender inflected oppressive orders'.[189] It is not surprising that the form this 'control' often takes is over a woman's body and specifically her reproductive rights. Total effacement of desire is not the only effective route. Where possible, female desire is directed into acceptable channels so that the motive for the transformation of present reality also disappears. If women are made to believe they inhabit the best possible present then the feminist movement is redundant. To achieve such compliance the forces of power enlist a range of practices that attempt to sublimate desire and eradicate hope via the violent methods of Althusser's 'Repressive State Apparatuses'. But fear of violence is not always sufficient as desire for freedom is impossible to eradicate. To this purpose then are put further the religious, educational, legal, political and cultural means of the 'Ideological State Apparatuses'. If women are made to believe that everything in their society is as it should be and unchangeable, then there will be no desire for change or revolt. In dystopias this 'belief' that change is futile leads many to accept the given reality and their place within it though unsurprisingly, in both it is the narrator who resists such complacency and refuses the displacement of desire and the loss of hope.

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[187] Albinski, p. 79.
[188] Sarah Lefanu, *In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism and Science Fiction* (London: Women's Press, 1988), p. 71.
[189] Cavalcanti, 'The Writing of Utopia and the Feminist Critical Dystopia: Suzy McKee Charnas's Holdfast Series' in Moylan, *Dark Horizons*, p. 45, pp. 47-67.

The fear expressed by writers for the state's potential to reduce women to 'breeding machines' resurfaces in *The Handmaid's Tale* thus emphasising the ongoing concern for reproductive rights in the latter half of the twentieth century. By applying this to the context of the women's movement in the 1980s and the general climate towards women's reproductive rights in North America, the reader is warned that the lack of solidarity amongst women can become a factor that makes them complicit in their own exploitation and oppression. From *Swastika Night* to *The Handmaid's Tale* women's sexual difference is reduced to mere reproductive potential and must be in the hands, and for the benefit, of others. Since women must stay alive in order to reproduce they are not so easily sacrificed as men. Their bodies become the site where alienation is negotiated and played out.

Marx's theory of alienating labour is a useful term insofar as women's bodies become a commodity with an exchange value in the dystopian context. The discourse through which this alienation is effectively produced in the feminist dystopias here is that of religion. It is not accidental in *The Handmaid's Tale* which part of the Bible is quoted: in Genesis 3:16 Eve's punishment is '...great labour in childbearing; with labour (you) will bear children' (*Revised English Bible*). Women's alienation from the product of their labour, from themselves and from other women is inextricably tied up with the sacrifice of their reproductive and sexual freedom. In Gilead women's bodies become the site of production (of exploited relations) as well as their reproduction (of the means of exploitation). A woman's body in effect becomes a commodity with an exchange value, but she is not the 'owner' of this commodity but instead the 'labourer' who must provide the 'goods' to those who will benefit directly from them. Following the Marxist argument that 'labour becomes an object, an *external* existence',[190] Offred's body becomes a force she and other Handmaids must reckon with, an entity split from the whole which severs their sense of integrity. For example, here the language of fulfilment is juxtaposed to the experience of alienation:

> What we prayed for was emptiness, so we would be worthy to be filled: with grace, with love, with self-denial, semen and babies.

[190] Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Dirk J. Struik (London: Laurence & HighArt, 1970), p. 108.

> Oh God, obliterate me. Make me fruitful. Mortify my flesh,
> that I may be multiplied. Let me be fulfilled. (240)

If the State's ideological apparatuses 'promote class oppression and guarantee the conditions of exploitation and its reproduction'[191] then the enforced motherhood of Gilead constitutes the Handmaids as the most exploited class and thus the most alienated. So whereas male-authored texts are preoccupied with freedom (in general) female-authored dystopias' desire for freedom encompasses reproductive freedom.

Dystopias are humourless places. Humour implies critique and critique in dystopias is strictly forbidden. According to Freud, 'Humour is not resigned, it is rebellious'.[192] It is in denial of the gravity of a situation by asserting the right to derive pleasure even in distressing circumstances. The power of humour to upset social structures is made explicit in a story repeated by Hélène Cixous in her 'Castration or Decapitation'.[193] In this story women dare to disobey an order by their master and instead fall about laughing and chatting. As punishment and to instil fear, the master beheads the two women commanders. This reduced the rest of the women to silent obedience. The point here is not that laughter in itself is subversive, but that it is perceived to be and can be used as a means to undermine power. Humour then is fearless and it is this fearlessness which the status quo fears of its subjects. Fear prevents action because of punishment and the inaction provokes despair and with it the loss of hope. If hope forms the basis of utopia, then fear lies at the heart of dystopia.

Though fear is not the opposite of desire and despair is not the opposite of hope both fear and despair conspire in the destruction of hope and with it the possibility of action. Where desire cannot be sublimated, as in *Brave New World* and *The Handmaid's Tale* it is suppressed as in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Swastika Night*. What matters in dystopian worldviews is not so much the particular political/social system under criticism, i.e., right wing or left, capitalism or communism, socialism or patriarchy, but the threat inherent in any system to abuse its power and to enlist in this abuse any methods of control and intimidation. Institutionalised fear is

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[191] Althusser, p. 15.
[192] 'Humour', in Sigmund Freud, *Art and Literature* (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 428, pp. 425-433.
[193] Hélène Cixous, 'Castration or Decapitation' in *Signs, Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1987, pp. 42-43, pp. 41-55.

what buttresses totalitarian systems and therefore the first step in the service of resistance is to resist fear itself.

Within these parameters, it is possible to conceive of the real world as existing in a dystopian continuum in which not only do extreme forms of oppression and alienation co-exist with lesser forms, but also one's place on the continuum is subject to unpredictable change. It is thus possible to include phenomena from the past as concrete dystopias, since the connections between reality and fiction that these novels make betray how easily one can move from one point on the continuum to another across the time-space axis. A dystopian continuum brings together the history of the world on a space-time axis where both diachronically and synchronically extreme forms of alienation exist in concrete dystopias. Not only slavery but also genocide, dictatorship, and any configuration that uses institutionalised fear evoked by physical and/or psychological violence to establish a new reality characterized by hierarchy and stasis, censorship, and terror for those who resist can be defined as concrete dystopias. Every dystopian narrative chooses which instances of 'concrete dystopia' needs foregrounding and examining in order to reveal in a literary form the urgency of its message.

Conclusion

Defining dystopia encompasses a two-stage process. The first focuses on the concept and is formulated in relationship to the concept of utopia and anti-utopia. The second focuses on dystopian literature and it too depends in part on related literatures, namely the eutopia but also what have become sub-genres of the dystopian novel: the classic totalitarian dystopia and the critical dystopia. The problems encountered during the former question revolve around the issue of totality and totalizing processes which may elide the borders between utopia and dystopia, endangering often a tautology which relegates both to anti-utopia. Similarly, the latter is often categorised generically as anti-utopia making it difficult to differentiate between dystopian and anti-utopian novels.

While Levitas clearly and succinctly summarizes the dimensions of defining utopia, Moylan painstakingly sieves through the generic categorizations hitherto used in order to trace dystopia's relationship to anti-utopia. Moylan's work has helped clarify generic categories on the basis of functional characteristics rather than merely content. As a result, both generic

categories and conceptual abstractions are not only clarified but also more usefully utilized by readers and scholars of the field. Another important contribution to the discussion of defining utopia and its potential relationship to totalizing forces is Harvey's coinage of the term 'dialectical utopianism' which approaches the problem of definition from a geographer's viewpoint to remind scholars that the space/time continuum need not and should not be an 'either/or' solution but instead approached with a 'both/and dialectic' which takes on the totalizing process of closure and its opposite impulse, fragmentation.

I have also argued in the first part of this chapter that the events that inspire the writing of dystopian fiction could be entitled 'concrete dystopias', following Bloch's term 'concrete utopia' which designates instances of utopian hope within the fabric of one's material existence. Concrete dystopia by extension designates those systemic evils which materialize in the fabric of society and to aim stamp out hope by instilling fear and finally, political resignation. However, despite the committed nature of dystopian fiction, a simple mimetic theory of representation is not adequate. Rather, dystopian fiction affects a disclosure of reality in its purpose to warn readers of not only evils which may materialise at a future time but also of present-day evils taking place in the reader's own world or in other, contemporaneous societies. Dystopias then, do not simply tell a story; they 'perform' a speech act which through a series of creative elaborations conveys a warning to readers of the potential dangers that surround them and others.

In the second part of the chapter the focus was on the generic conventions of dystopias in relation to both content and function. Starting with classic examples of the genre, both totalitarian and the later feminist dystopias are constituted by a depiction of a world which is both familiar and unfamiliar. The 'defamiliarization' that the narrator and by extension the reader experience in any utopian novel is actually presented in its negative formulation, that of alienation. In fact, the narrator's alienation is the most significant indication of whether the narrative is dystopian, (utopian or anti-utopian). The reader's identification with the narrator-protagonist determines both the genre of the text and its sub-genre. In other words, a dystopia is totalitarian if the narrator is characterised by a high degree of alienation, whereas it is a feminist dystopia if women's alienation is at the forefront of the narrative. Through identification with the narrator/protagonist, dystopias attempt to represent a space/time

continuum which links the problems of the real, material world of the present with other, similar instances in the past in order to establish connections between historical processes and future possibilities. By involving readers in issues of agency, they present the ideal texts for the exploration of answers to Sargent's aforementioned question: 'How can we make correct choices?'

Chapter Two: Redefining Sacrifice

The purpose of this chapter is to outline a definition of sacrifice against the background of utopian theory and, in particular, within the parameters of a utopian versus an anti-utopian discourse. If the concept of utopia is determined by the desire for a better world and the hope that this change is possible, then the anti-utopian impulse suppresses, rejects, displaces or ignores the hope for a better, future world. Furthermore, within the context of a dystopian continuum discussed in the previous chapter – which functions across space and time, the real and the fictional – the degree to which sacrifice is prominent in dystopian texts implies its complicity with one of these forces. In short, scholarship on sacrifice is placed under a microscope which will reveal with which end of the utopian/anti-utopian spectrum these texts align themselves – either directly, by reinforcing those structures which support the hegemonic forces, or indirectly, by giving a positive value to the meaning of sacrifice which benefits those representatives of hegemonic power. The dialogue between sacrifice and utopia is one which has not hitherto been attempted but will yield new insights into an understanding of the workings of sacrifice and its symbolism.

This chapter will focus on the theories of the most influential theorists of sacrifice outside a narrow understanding of religion by isolating what they have to say on the choice of victim. This may often require 'reading between the lines' to determine the gaps in their theories which reveal assumptions that create normative conclusions. The theories of Sigmund Freud, Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, and René Girard will be shown to be making universalist claims about the function of sacrifice which, although mention the victim, necessarily downplay aspects of the victim's status in order to formulate a coherent theory. Next, I will follow with modern theorists who take a more critical view of the function of sacrifice in part by revealing what the previous writers neglect. Bruce Lincoln, Nancy Jay and Luce Irigaray formulate theories which focus on aspects of the sacrificial ritual that question the normative conclusions of the previous writers by bringing to the foreground elements of the ideology or logic of sacrifice and the potentially subversive role of the victim. Unlike the former writers who doubly victimize the victim by sacrificing his/her story for the sake of their theories' coherence, the latter writers express nuances of the victim's position in the sacrificial

structure which question the ritual's function from a wholly different perspective. In the third part of the chapter, the story of Isaac's 'sacrifice' in Genesis 22, arguably the most often commented on, will be read for the sake of comparative analysis. The story of the 'near' sacrifice of Isaac by his father, Abraham, provides an important reference to a parallel history of writings on sacrifice which disclose the inherent ambivalence of interpretations that either condemn or condone the practice. This story also exposes the biases which fuel understandings of sacrificial ritual but at the same time point to possible ruptures in traditional interpretations, which may lead to the continuing relevance for today's readings of this seminal text. One such literary attempt to present a reading of Genesis 22 is Jenny Diski's novel, *After These Things*, which endeavours to fill in the gaps of the biblical narrative by imagining Issac's response to his near death experience. When Isaac speaks of this experience, the meaning of his 'near' sacrifice shifts the focus of the drama to the traumatic effects of sacrifice on its victims rather than its perpetrators. Read alongside the original text, the novel undertakes to present to readers a different point of view of sacrifice, where the bible remains silent. Likewise, what the comparison of these texts offers is the filling in of the gaps in the scholarly writings which, like biblical interpreters, highlight the drama of the main actors of sacrifice and delegate the victims to silence, thus ignoring potentially subversive interpretations.

In contrast, my critique of the traditional sacrificial ritual is predicated on the role of the victim. There are two issues to be considered. First, by bringing to the foreground the role of the victim and illuminating aspects of his use value, 'choice' of action and apparent willingness, I will assess the victim's role (and voice, where there is one) as a determining function of the ritual when viewed within a utopian or anti-utopian parameter. Second, by examining the arguments of the most influential theorists, either in relation to the ritual or the victim himself, what will be revealed is a bias which is only possible because of the exclusion of the victim. This exclusion also involves women and the role of gender, since the sacrificers themselves are either men, or stand in for the community as a whole. Consequently, the sacrificial victims are provided a space within which the reader may imagine the expression of their traumatic experience of violence and (near) death.

Before attempting to interpret sacrifice within the context of utopianism, some preliminary remarks on the etymology and the variety of meanings of the term is necessary.

The roots of the term reflect to some degree the range of meanings intrinsic to the ritual. For Cathryn McClymond sacrifice is 'nearly universal' yet 'nearly impossible to define' because, whether in the context of religion or used broadly in the popular imagination, it can incorporate 'thousands of individual and community acts'.[194] Trying to find a common element that distinguishes sacrifice from all other acts from the perspective of both academic and popular audiences makes the task of definition even more difficult.

Looking at the etymology only reinforces the appearance of lack of cohesion. Jeffrey Carter compares the roots of several Indo-European languages as an example of the variety of meanings. The Latin word *sacrificium*, derived from *sacer*, 'holy', and *facere*, 'to make', is the etymological basis for the English work 'sacrifice'. These roots imply that sacrifice is in fact 'a process of sanctification, a means by which to consecrate something...but still sacrifice cannot be equated with "religious action" because clearly there exist other such acts (other "rituals") that we would not include in the category of "sacrifice."'[195] The Sanskrit word for Vedic sacrifice (*yajña*) is derived from *yaj* meaning 'to offer' and the German *Opfer* (sacrifice, offering) is most likely derived from the Latin *offerre*, meaning 'to offer' or 'to present'. Carter explains that: 'These roots provide another clue to how sacrifice is often defined; it refers to gift giving...the transference of that something to another party or being'. Yet this element of 'oblation' (an offering) is prominent in classification of rituals that can include what may be deemed non-sacrificial phenomena. Thus, Carter concludes, relying solely on the etymological roots of the word can only be of indirect assistance in the process of defining the term because it is based only on one aspect of the ritual.[196]

Apart from the Latin and Vedic etymological hints, a different aspect involved in the delineation of the term derives from another culture rich in descriptions of sacrificial ritual. The Greek word *thuein* means 'to burn so as to provide smoke'. By the classical period *thusia* and *thuein* referred to blood sacrifice, in which the victim was eaten, in opposition to *sphagia*, *sphazein*, and *enagizein*, in which the victim was not consumed.[197] In fact, as *The Oxford*

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[194] Kathryn McClymond, *Beyond Sacred Violence, A Comparative Study of Sacrifice* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), p. 1.
[195] Jeffrey Carter, 'Introduction', (ed.), *Understanding Religious Sacrifice, A Reader* (London and New York: Continuum, 2003), pp. 2-3, pp. 1-11.
[196] Ibid., p. 3.
[197] Helen P. Foley, *Ritual Irony, Poetry and Sacrifice in Euripides* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 26.

Dictionary of Classical Myth and Religion explains, there is no single Greek equivalent to the English word 'sacrifice'. The practices brought together under this heading were described by a series of overlapping terms conveying ideas such as 'killing', 'destroying', 'burning', 'cutting', 'consecrating', 'performing sacred acts', 'giving', 'presenting'.[198] Thus, if one were to search for a defining element which would characterise all sacrificial ritual it is not to be found in the linguistic roots of the terms used because each term relies solely on one element of the ritual.

This indicates a need to look beyond mere etymology to another type of classification, that of function. Depending on the purpose of the ritual, there is: propitiation, expiation, atonement, communion, alimentation, thanksgiving, expulsion, prevention, and consecration or a combination of two or more. According to Carter, these constitute the motives behind the practice of sacrifice and stress the 'intentionality of the event, the reasons subjects give for sacrificing'.[199] On the basis of these motives 'it becomes possible to describe sacrifice as a communication between cosmic realms, as a material expression of supplicatory impulses, or as a bargain between human and higher beings. Sacrifice is accordingly, what sacrifice does'.[200] Yet function is not the only approach used in understanding the meaning of sacrifice. Other approaches have focused on choosing organizing principles which explain activities integral to sacrificial ritual or external in order to imagine the origins of such activities. Still, this does not yield any overriding consensus in scholars because the inclusion of some elements inevitably involves the exclusion of others.

Even the attempt to organize the criteria on which scholars have based their classification of different theories of sacrifice is not straightforward and produces an overlap in eventual results. For example, the separation of sacrificial rituals may be based on: a. the participants involved and the nature of their relationships, b. the purpose sacrifice serves within society and its effects, and c. the means used to achieve these results. Consequently, Freud's theory can be classified as concerned with origins, subjectivity or violence and thus may be grouped, accordingly, with, respectively, either Walter Burkert, William Beers or René

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[198] Simon Price and Emily Kearns, (eds.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Classical Myth and Religion* (Oxford: University Press, 2003), p. 486. McClymond makes a similar point for Jewish sacrifices where a series of terms designate sacrificial practices based on the intended effect, the procedures involved and the offering substance used, p. 39. More details on these different elements will follow in the section on Isaac's 'binding'.

[199] Carter, p. 6.

[200] Ibid., p. 6.

Girard's theories of the meaning of sacrifice.[201] Yet another grouping may focus on the methodology or critical theory employed by the scholar, as in the case of feminist theory by Nancy Jay or the sociological approach of Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss. Vastly different theorizations may result by focusing on any one element of the ritual itself, its function in society or within religion on the one hand or, on the other hand, by focusing on the interpretive approach and framework of the observers outside the ritual.

Another broad framework within which to interpret sacrifice is to separate theories into two 'trends', although these, too, are not mutually exclusive. Many early scholars who influenced subsequent research tended to fall into one of these two categories. There are those theorists concerned with the origin of the ritual which they believe provides important clues for its meaning because of their evolutionary approach. These include William Robertson Smith, James G. Frazer, Walter Burkett and Sigmund Freud. Their theories 'place sacrifice at or near the beginning of a chronological scheme'[202] where a primordial event, a killing, takes place. Part of the purpose of this historical approach is to explain the 'widespread diversity, yet degree of commonality, of phenomena known today.[203] Conversely, there are those theorists who tend to emphasize the social use value of sacrifice by delineating a 'grammar' of sacrifice which could be applied effectively across cultures. In this group we have Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss and René Girard (although Girard also makes claims about the origins of sacrificial ritual). These theories are more interested in the social function of sacrifice, whether within a religious context or not, rather than the description of a subjective experience and its effect on the psyche.

McClymond suggests that sacrifice is 'a complex matrix of varied and interrelated procedures'... instead of defining it, we should focus on identifying basic activities that characterize sacrificial events while at the same time 'setting aside any expectation of finding a single essential or defining quality'.[204] This is not an admission of defeat since 'the power and presence of sacrifice lie precisely in the fact that it cannot be reduced to a single

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[201] The comparison may be extended to many others. See Carter for extracts from Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans*, pp. 212-238, René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 242-275, and William Beers, 'Women and Sacrifice: Male Narcissism and he Psychology of Religion,' pp. 385-394.
[202] Carter, p. 8.
[203] Ibid., p. 8.
[204] McClymond, p. 2.

phenomenon'.[205] Thus, the sheer range of activities involved in ritual sacrifice is what confounds many efforts to pin-down 'the' definition of the term regardless of the aspect in focus. Thus, we should view some rituals as more or less sacrificial than others...[and] forgo the need to identify essential or defining characteristics'.[206] She re-imagines sacrifice as 'a dynamic matrix of activity' so as to underscore the fact that no single activity is 'inherently sacrificial' but that their interactions may make them so.[207] This is an important point in my argument since the sacrificial elements foregrounded in the dystopian narratives which Dystopias treat sacrifice as ritual and symbol, i.e., a real practice with social use value and an ideology which makes the practice both possible and effective.

McClymond isolates six 'building blocks' involved in the description of offerings in sacrifice which combine in various ways and to some degree in order to generate sacrificial ritual. These are: 'selection', 'association', 'identification', 'killing', 'heating', 'apportionment', and 'consumption'.[208] Since offerings may include the animal, liquid, or vegetable, for human victims 'killling' is usually considered the defining aspect of sacrifice, although it is killing taking place in a specific space for a specific purpose. McClymond points out that all killing does not always function as sacrifice but acquires meaning in relation to other events which may or may not include 'destruction or violence'.[209] The theories presented in this chapter focus on killing because their victims are animal or human and thus their use value is significant because it is always destroyed violently. Dystopian narratives suggest that all sacrifice involves killing and violence – or the threat of either –and that the ritual legitimizes what would otherwise be considered murder. Thus, the death of the victim is an essential component of re-defining sacrifice not in isolation but in terms of who kills, and for what purpose.

In terms of the participants involved and their relationship to each other, sacrifice-phenomena involve 'three entities, three beings, objects, personifications, or domains–two,

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[205] McClymond, p. 3. However, Carter points out that 'popular use of the word "sacrifice," as one might encounter in mass media publications, revolves around the notion of renouncement or specifically the "giving up" of something valuable. While related to gift giving, in this sense, there is an emphasis on the deprivation resulting from the act of sacrifice...almost anything unpleasant that one voluntarily endures can be considered a sacrifice', p. 3.
[206] McClymond, p. 25.
[207] Ibid., p. 27.
[208] Ibid., p. 29.
[209] Ibid., p. 31.

between which the giving or exchange takes place, and a third that which *is* given or exchanged.[210] The victim has attracted the interest of theories in an effort to understand what he/she/it stands for and symbolizes. Since sacrifice cannot takes place without a victim, the selection process is seen as key to understanding the ritual as a whole. Furthermore, the symbolic character of the victim lends itself to interpretations which consider substitution the fundamental illuminating factor.[211] I will hold that substitution is meaningless in the context of dystopia because the death of the victim is intended literally for him/her and not as a symbol for another being or idea. More important is the question: who stands to benefit from this killing and who else can become the next victim? By focusing on the choice of victim (male or female), the process by which he/she is victimized and the eventual effects on those victims who escape death my intention is to establish an 'organizing principle'[212] of sacrifice which will clarify the relationship of the victim to society and the function of his ritual death within its borders.

My own approach is twofold. First, by bringing to the foreground the role of the victim and illuminating aspects of his use value, choice and apparent willingness. I will determine that the victim's role is a determining factor when the ritual is viewed within the utopian or anti-utopian spectrum. Second, by examining the language of most influential theorists, either in relation to the ritual or the victim himself, what is revealed is normative bias towards the function of sacrifice which is only possible because of the exclusion of the victim's role. This exclusion also involves women and gender, since the sacrificers themselves are either men, or stand in for the community as a whole. The triad of my perspective involves the choice of victim, the manner of its destruction and its effects on society. It will reveal the power relations which act on potential victims and the personal and inter-personal consequences of their death or near-death. Just as other understandings of sacrifice have done, I will isolate and emphasized what are significant elements and stipulate the boundaries-specific context of my interpretation.[213]

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[210] Carter, p. 4.
[211] Ibid., p. 5. There are also concerns over how the victim is changed or whether it is eaten, p. 6.
[212] Jonathan Klawans, 'Pure Violence: Sacrifice and Defilement in Ancient Israel', in *HRT*, 94:2 (2001), p. 139, pp. 133-155.
[213] Carter remarks that the controversy surrounding understandings of sacrifice derive from four reasons. First, the sheer data available from which to choose criteria is not a simple

By shifting the attention to the 'micro-element' of the nature of the victim and his/her relationships to both sacrificers and community, sacrifice will reveal itself to be much less normative than its theorists would imagine it to be, it is much more complicit in the maintenance of the status quo through intimidation by violence. Sacrifice from the sacrificer's point of view aligns itself with hegemonic powers because it is their means of sustaining themselves. Furthermore, what is perhaps most worrying is that beside the actual (voiceless) victim, there are many other 'potential victims' which the violence of sacrifice affects, and these too are an essential part of the ritual. Far from being objective, innocent bystanders, they are often implicated in the rewards or damages of sacrifice, either by means of the complicity, in the former case, or as secondary victims. In all the novels examined, though in varying degrees, the unknown, unheard discoursed are revealed for their role in the successful function of sacrifice. Whether they are unconsciously buttressing the status quo (as in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*) or consciously turning a blind eye (*The Giver*), they are equally embroiled in the logic of sacrifice – either as victims or as victors. Thus, each individual's position in the sacrificial structure is what makes the ritual feasible or impossible. In this respect, there are no absolutely 'innocent victims' except for those who remain silent via their death.

Freud and Others: Reading between the Lines

For Jill Robbins the meaning of sacrifice remains 'enigmatic...as if it were the sign of something, the explanation of which has been lost'.[214]As partial response to this enigma, I juxtapose Christian Duverger's description of traditional sacrifice with particular emphasis on the part the victim's role in the ritual:

> On a more practical level, presacrificial games were a way of ensuring the *compliance* of those who were destined to die. For the treatment inflicted on the victims generally left them dazed, in a sort of secondary state where bodily weakness outweighed panic. It was only at this price that the victims could climb onto the sacrificial altar with *apparent resignation*...To make sure that the system of

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process. Second, researchers de-emphasize certain aspects in order to produce more general understandings. Third, 'different contexts for interpretation can lead to differences in understandings of cultural phenomena'. Fourth, different understandings of the nature of religion lead to different understandings of the role of ritual. See pages 449-450.

[214] Jill Robbins, 'Sacrifice', *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, (ed.), M. Taylor (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), p. 285, pp. 285-297.

> sacrifice, which was the *basis of a particular social order*, would not be publicly repudiated by a captive resisting the knife of the sacrificial priest, adequate precautions had to be taken.[215](my emphasis)

If Robbins is searching for the answer to the origins of sacrifice, perhaps the answer will remain an enigma. If, however, the function of the ritual is at state then already, the perspective of the apparently willing victim and a social order based on violence provides distinct perspective on a logic of sacrifice which relies on deceit to achieve the smooth functioning of its activities. Placing a theological umbrella over the proceedings occludes the forces which act on the victim by forcing the interpreter of sacrifice to side with the perspective of the benefactors of sacrifice. Robbins may be searching for a functional interpretation of sacrificial ritual, but she is not looking at the victim's perspective, and like many others, attempting an understanding based on the other, more powerful, participants.

Perhaps this is one reason why so many theorists from such a wide range of disciplines have grappled with the problem of defining sacrifice: religion, anthropology, philosophy, psychoanalysis, ethics and sociology. Yet, despite the differences in background and theoretical approach, there are two obvious omissions which link these writers in their assumptions and which constitute two equally important problems in an attempt to define sacrifice. First, their disregard for the chose of the victim and second, an equally obvious indifference for the role of women in the sacrificial ritual. These two seemingly unrelated omissions lead the writers to form conclusions on the meaning of sacrifice which belie a utopian function of this ritual's role in society. This chapter will also attempt a definition of sacrifice without claiming to reach a definitive resolution to a persistent enigma but instead attempts to bring to the forefront the victim's experience and how this experience re-configures the usual formulations on sacrifice. By shifting the emphasis to the sacrificial victim and by including what has hitherto been excluded, the workings of sacrifice will be exposed and subsequently defined in terms which are anti-utopian. Finally, the chapter will end with a reading of Genesis 22, the story of Abraham's attempted sacrifice of his son Isaac, a text which has preoccupied many of the early as well as the later theorists of sacrifice.

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[215]Christian Duverger, 'The Meaning of Sacrifice' in Michel Feher, Ramona Naddaff, Nadia Tazi, (eds.), *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, Part 3 (Cambridge Ma. and London: MIT Press) 1989, p. 375, pp. 367-385.

In 'Totem and Taboo', Freud proposes a theory of sacrifice which brings together social history with individual human development for the purpose of explaining 'the nucleus of perhaps every psychoneurosis'.[216] The route he follows begins with the anthropologist William Robertson Smith and continues with J. G. Frazer and like them, Freud concerns himself with the question of how the two main characteristics of primitive religion - the totemic meal (blood sacrifice) and exogamy (prohibition against incest) - are related to each other and to totemic religion in general. By comparing the psychology of primitive peoples with that of childhood he reaches the conclusion that the 'totemic system... was a product of the conditions involved in the Oedipus complex'.[217] From that point onwards the analogy he develops culminates in a rationalisation of how 'civilisation' itself came into existence. By his own admission, this civilisation i.e. social organisation based on religious laws, is patriarchal since at its root is 'a longing for the father'.[218] As Juliet Mitchell points out, what Freud is attempting in 'Totem and Taboo' should be read as 'mythology', that is the story with which mankind conceptualises their history.[219] Sacrifice appears to be, in Freud's formulation, not only at the origins of religion, but society itself and this society is assumed to be at its origins patriarchal.

Nevertheless, the 'story' of the development of patriarchal religion Freud proposes provides a useful index for tracing the place of all women in patriarchal culture. As Mitchell concludes:

> Differences of class, historical epoch, specific social situations alter the expression of femininity; but in relation to the law of the father, women's position across the board is a comparable one...The social reality that he (Freud) is concerned with elucidating is the mental representation of the reality of society.[220]

This mental representation consists, in the first instance, of the acceptance of an 'original sin' committed by a rebellious mob of brothers of the same primordial horde against their father/leader. Motivated by the desire to partake in their share of the horde's women, the brothers killed and subsequently devoured their father, thus putting an end to the

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[216] 'Totem and Taboo' in Angela Richards and Albert Dickson, (eds.), *The Pelican Freud Library*, vol. 13, *The Origins of Religion*, (London: Penguin, 1985), p.192.
[217] Ibid., p. 193.
[218] Ibid., p. 210.
[219] Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (London: Penguin, 1990, orig. 1974), p. 366.
[220] Ibid., p. 406.

patriarchal horde as an organising structure; in its place the fraternal clan took shape. The resultant sense of guilt as well as the coexisting feelings of triumph is what lead to the establishment of the totemic meal as well as the injunction against incest. The function of the totemic meal is then a symbolic re-enactment and celebration of the original violence that brought the brothers together as well as a reminder of their common identity. As a festival, it not only commemorates but also inaugurates, according to Freud, 'social organization, moral restrictions and religion'.[221] As for the injunction against incest Freud does not accept that there is a natural aversion to it[222] but that in fact it is because of the primal wish for the mother - as expressed in the Oedipus complex - that a rule must be made against sexual relations within the same clan. If 'the totem is nothing other than a surrogate of the father'[223] and whose murder is atoned for by blood sacrificial rituals then the women for whom the murder was committed must also atone for the act by being completely 'renounced' by the male members of the same clan.[224] Thus the two prohibitions of the totemism coincide with the two repressed wishes of the child: to kill your father and have sexual relations with your mother.[225] The problem, according to Mitchell is that within such a structure, adult men learn to become 'heirs to the law of culture' whereas women must contend to learn 'the art of love and conciliation' since her place within the Oedipal structure excludes her from the traditional markers of 'culture'.[226]As a theory of origins, Freud's understanding of sacrifice places men at the beginning, centre and end of a drama in which women function only by virtue of their absence. This is a story of the severing of ties between fathers and sons and its re-enactment offers 'satisfaction to the father for the outrage inflicted on him in the same act in which that deed is commemorated'[227] while at the same time assuaging the guilt felt by the son for his murder. The communion between fathers and sons repeated in sacrifice

[221] Freud in 'Totem and Taboo', p. 203.
[222] Ibid., p. 184.
[223] Ibid., pp. 209-210.
[224] Ibid., p. 216.
[225] Ibid., p. 192.
[226] Mitchell p. 405.
[227] Ibid., p. 212.

established ties which extend to the creation of a male god which consequently excludes women from positions of power in both the human and divine spheres.[228]

Contrary to Freud's motivation, Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss state from the very beginning of *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function* that the purpose of their study is not to trace, as others have, the 'history and genesis of sacrifice'[229] but on the basis of Sanskrit and Biblical documents to construct a 'system of sacrifice'[230] with some unity so as to be applicable on a universal basis. They attempt to do this by disentangling 'the simple and elementary forms of an institution' and by focusing on writings that belong to a definite era rather than ethnography or theological commentators.[231] Despite the differences in aim and results, what provides the unity in the various practises is the common mechanism, or 'the continuity between the forms of sacrifice'.[232] They begin then with a definition of sacrifice as, 'a religious act which, through the consecration of a victim, modifies the condition of the moral person who accomplishes it or that of certain objects with which he is concerned'.[233] From this very general definition Hubert and Mauss proceed to outline the scheme of sacrifice and then to list its functions and how the scheme varies according to the differences in function. In the above definition where they speak of 'moral person' they employ the word 'sacrifier' who is later defined as 'the subject to whom the benefits of sacrifice accrue...or who undergoes its effect'.[234] He is the patron of the sacrifice, the one for whose benefit the ritual takes place. The 'sacrificer' is akin to a priest in that he performs the ritual but does not necessarily accrue the benefits of his act. Hubert and Mauss do not limit the social function of sacrifice and include: oblation, consecration, curative and expiatory sacrifice, abnegation, communion, libation and immolation. Most importantly,

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[228] Ibid., p. 210. However, Freud does allow for the possibility of 'the great mother-goddesses, who may perhaps in general have preceded the father –gods'. How and why these goddesses were sacrificed, however, does not alter his theory.
[229] Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*, trans. W.D. Halls (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964, orig. 1898), p.8. They are referring to Robinson Smith and Frazer.
[230] Ibid., p. 7. See also the foreword by E.E. Evans-Pritchard, pp. vii-viii. It is Pritchard who uses the word 'grammar' to describe this study.
[231] Ibid., pp. 7-8 passim.
[232] Ibid., p. 18.
[233] Ibid., p. 13.
[234] Ibid., p. 10. In French the word is 'sacrifiant' which, according to the translator, 'has no exact English equivalent, see p. ix. The sacrifier may also be a group, e.g. family, tribe, nation, etc. see p. 10.

the victim – via its death – imparts on the patron 'new qualities it has acquire by the action of sacrifice[235] thus belying a 'power' which, in fact, belongs to the patron alone.

Although these words clearly involve religious practises and rituals that the authors are aware of, they are more interested in how sacrifice functions in society and how it affects social matters.[236] According to Hubert and Mauss the unity which characterises the diverse forms of sacrificial rituals can be found in the fact that they involve 'the one same procedure, which may be used for the most widely differing purposes'.[237] They go on to define this procedure as one which establishes communication between the profane world of the here and now and the spiritual, sacred world beyond death via the destruction of a sacrificial victim.[238] Their choice of a structuralist approach is one consciously made in order to establish the scientific aspect of their methodology without which claims to universality would be impossible.

From the point of view of the victim Hubert and Mauss emphasise the importance of its willing participation as the (religious) forces which are unleashed must be placated in order to be propitiously directed towards the sacrifier. This is effected via language, that is, the ritualistic language, used during the ceremony:

> [...] Above all it must be persuaded to allow itself to be sacrificed peaceably, for the welfare of men, and not to take vengeance once it is dead...there is in the victim a spirit which it is the very aim of the sacrifice to liberate. This spirit must therefore be conciliated, for otherwise it might become dangerous when freed; hence the flattery and preliminary apologies.[239]

What the victim needs to be persuaded of is not only to give up its body but to do so without later causing retribution from another of its kind. Since the spirit must be 'liberated' as part of the 'gift' the sacrifier offers to the gods, the victim undergoes a process in which it is 'progressively made divine' and eventually persuaded of the necessity of its death. As a representative of the sacrifier's sin, its death enables the latter's regeneration and newly found

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[235] Ibid., p. 39.
[236] Ibid., p. 102
[237] Hubert and Mauss *Sacrifice, Its Nature and Function*, p. 97.
[238] Ibid.
[239] p. 30. Hubert and Mauss include some examples in the footnotes, esp. no. 172, p. 124, where human sacrifice takes place.

'pure' state. The victim then is the means by which the sacrifier redeems himself.[240] As aforementioned, the benefit again is attributed to the sacrifier in keeping with the unequal terms of the sacrificial contract.

During the post-mortem of the sacrifice all remains of the victim must be disposed of while the sacrifier enjoys not only a resurgence of power in this life but also the 'non-death' of the soul.[241] So while nothing remains of the physical state of the victim, the sacrifier's increased social and spiritual status is dependent upon the other's total annihilation. For the former, the ends justifies the means while the latter experiences the fear of certain death and the dubious glory of sacralization. Even the 'equilibrium' Hubert and Mauss refer to is the effect of a society adverse to change as sacrifice's function is to 'reproduce the rhythms of human life and nature'.[242]There seems to be an effort here to occlude the entrenched power inequalities in society by referring to them as natural while at the same time assuming these inequalities are a part of human nature.

Despite this 'scientific' approach, Hubert and Mauss's study does not discuss gender as a factor in their scheme though they do mention women in passing when they discuss the pre-requisites to sacrifice, one of which is having a 'certain degree of relationship with the god' which necessarily excluded 'slaves and courtesans'.[243] A hierarchy is already set up between groups which may communicate with deities and those which should not. Apart from the sacrifier, one of the distinctive characteristics of sacrifice is consecration of the thing being sacrificed. Consecration must first take place before it comes into contact with God because of the profane nature of things not divine. It is also necessary because this 'victim' acts as an intermediary between the sacrifier and the divinity addressed[244] since the (religious) powers unleashed during the ritual are too strong for an unconsecrated object to withstand. There is a ritual of consecration for the sacrifier also so that his 'temporal' nature will undergo 'purification' and be 'reborn' in a god-like form.[245] Once purified, he must fast and have no

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[240] 'There is no sacrifice into which some idea of redemption does not enter', p. 98.
[241] Ibid, p. 64.
[242] Ibid., p. 103.
[243] Ibid., p.22, footnote no.72: 'The cases of the expulsion of women from the ceremonies are very numerous'. In footnote no.70 there are more examples of groups that are excluded but as with footnote no. 72, no discussion of the reasons.
[244] Ibid., p. 11. It is only the oblation which is wholly destroyed via consecration which reserves the name of sacrifice, p. 12.
[245] Ibid., p. 20.

contact with women and lower caste men. Since contact with women is polluting, for a woman to become a sacrifier is a contradiction in terms. Consecration then is limited only to the top of society's hierarchy and for women there is too much 'space' between them and the divinities for ritual consecration to be possible. It is in the description of a Vedic ritual, for example, that Hubert and Mauss provide the wholly negative images of rebirth, of a 'foetus' walking around the hearth as within the womb with 'fists clenched'.[246] Even in this short reference, the role of women, especially childbearing women is described in terms antithetical to those applied to the act of consecration which sacrificial ritual enacts. In fact, they state that 'the victim had to be without defect, sickness or infirmity...a certain colour, age and sex.'[247]

Yet the contractual element pertains principally to those participants that do not suffer the violence firsthand, i.e., the sacrifier, the sacrificer and the gods. Specifically, in expiatory sacrifices, the sacrifier benefits directly since 'he has eradicated the evil to which he was a prey'.[248] This benefit is immanent and real whereas from the point of view of the victim it can only be transcendent - as a sacred object it has the honour of consecration bestowed upon it and is then the figure which makes the sacrifice possible. In fact, without a victim to 'communicate' between the sacred world and the profane the sacrifier could not enjoy the 'regeneration' brought about by the expulsion of evil.[249] Though the spirit released by the sacrifice of the victim is thought to have powers which must be directed and controlled,[250] it is really the sacrifier who will increase his powers as a consequence of the sacrifice. Thus the participant who will suffer the least during the ritual is also the one who will benefit the most. It is an unequal contract in terms of benefits accrued which mirrors the hierarchy of the players taking part in the ritual.

Equally the 'almost universal presence of symbols of birth and death'[251] is not found problematic by Victor Turner since the presence of blood provides a link between birth and

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[246] Ibid., p. 21. Purification rites are not limited to the Hindus. In the Semitic, Greek and Roman world similar purifications are employed to prepare the 'profane participant for the sacred act', p. 22.
[247] Ibid., p. 29.
[248] Ibid., p. 62.
[249] Ibid. This regeneration is made possible because of the religious context of the sacrifice where the belief in a spirit world is thought to have an effect on the affairs of this world.
[250] Ibid., p. 34
[251] Victor Turner, 'Sacrifice as Quintessential Process: Propylaxis or Abandonment?' *History of Religions*, February 1977, Vol. 16, number 3, p. 213, pp. 189-215.

death which gives sacrifice a 'rebirth as well as life-terminating quality'.[252] Turner accepts the notion of 'polluting forces' and considers sacrifice a means of restoring not only the balance within society but also of 'restoring the flow' (literally of blood) which has been blocked by 'selfish or sectional interests which are put above the great circulation of thoughts, feelings and goods'.[253] His support of sacrifice as a cleansing process takes on utopian overtones when he states that 'Sacrifice is [...] regarded as a *limen* or entry into the domain of communities where all that is and ever has been human and the forces that have caused humanity to be are joined in a circulation of mutual love and trust.[254] This description of the breaking down of boundaries in a space without the constraints usually present in society conveniently ignores the exclusive character of sacrificial rituals with regards to its participants. It further neglects to question the connection between the preponderance of female imagery when actual women are prevented from communicating with the divine. Turner's 'utopian space' is rather dystopian from a female viewpoint since the inequalities which exist outside the sacrificial space are reflected within it and continue undisturbed despite these cleansing rituals. Not only real women but the feminine principle itself is excluded or usurped for the purpose of further entrenching the status quo.

In 'Sacrifice as Remedy for Having Been Born of Woman', Nancy Jay attempts to answer this very question concerning the 'opposition between sacrificial purity and the pollution of childbirth and a rule that only males may perform sacrificial ritual'.[255] Jay is also concerned with the sociological implications of sacrificial rituals and draws attention to the gender specific nature of blood sacrifices in tribal societies.[256] She points out that it is only in patrilineal societies that blood sacrifice is found because it is sacrifice and not childbirth which 'maintains lineage continuity' for its members.[257] She interprets the ubiquitous metaphors of childbirth within the context of a male-dominated society which can only counterbalance the power of giving birth with the power to kill:

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[252] Ibid., p. 202.
[253] Ibid., p. 207.
[254] Ibid., p. 213.
[255] Nancy Jay, 'Sacrifice as Remedy for Having Been Born of Woman', p. 283, pp. 283-309 in Clarissa W. Atkinson, Constance H. Buchanan, and Margaret R. Miles, (eds.), *Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987, orig. 1985). Jay links in the final part of the essay blood sacrifice with the Christian Eucharist in a common purpose of excluding women from participation.
[256] Ibid., p. 285.
[257] Ibid., p. 292.

> [...] Unlike childbirth, sacrificial killing is deliberate, purposeful, 'rational' action, under perfect control. Both birth and killing are acts of power but sacrificial ideology commonly construes childbirth as the quintesssence of vulnerability, passivity and powerless suffering.[258]

It is the blood then of sacrifice which is the positive 'purifying force' as opposed to the negative 'polluting' one of childbirth, or more specifically childbearing women. Where the first transcends mortality by establishing father – son continuity the latter bounds women to the mortal and thus 'profane' sphere which Herbert and Mauss repeatedly state must not come into direct contact with the divine sphere without first submitting to the process of sacralisation. As childbearing women are *a priori* tainted they can never become sacrifiers or priests mediating the sacrifice. Via the process of sacrifice then two goals are simultaneously accomplished which benefit male-domination and patrilineage: first, women are excluded from centres of power since sacrifice is seen as connecting the earthly forces with the divine and second, the main marker of their sexual difference having excluded them from power is subsequently usurped by men in order to aid them in the expression of the sacrificial process. What is a negative capability of women is turned into a positive metaphor for men, and as Nancy Jay posits, it is 'birth done better, on purpose and on a more spiritual, more exalted level than mothers do it'.[259] It is sacrifice which gives men the exalted position in society which they desire in order to surpass the value given to women via childbirth. Again, it is not only the exclusion of real women that points to their powerlessness – after all, what they are being excluded from is the right to kill. It is the simultaneous exclusion of the feminine principle, of natality which has less value than killing and withholds from women a potential source of empowerment.

Following in the scientific footsteps of previous theorists, René Girard, in *Violence and the Sacred* sets out to provide a theory of sacrifice which not only supersedes previous writings on the subject but also supplies a thesis which – for him - explains all cultural phenomena: from religious rituals in primitive societies and the cathartic value of ancient Greek tragedy to present day manifestations of sacrificial structures or logic. His title then discloses at least one of his main premises, and that is the interchangeability of these two

[258] Ibid., p. 294.
[259] Ibid., p. 294.

phenomena, i.e., that 'the operations of violence and the sacred are ultimately the same process'.[260] By this he means that all religious rituals, festivals and sacrifices are dependent on and cannot exist without the expression of violence. At the same time, the expression of violence is accepted as an inescapable part of life which is controlled and channelled within the confines of the sacred, i.e. of religion. Since religion and violence are an integral part of all societies, he argues that the key to understanding all cultural phenomena lies in the institution of sacrifice which itself 'functions' according to certain principles. Like writers before him, his believes his comparative, objective methodology explains the role of sacrifices across cultural differences in time and space.

However, from the very start he differentiates himself from previous writers on sacrifice. For example, he states that Henri Hubert's and Marcel Mauss's focus on structure in their account in *Essay on the Nature and Function of Sacrifice* failed to illuminate both the nature and the function of sacrificial ritual, and that, unlike them,[261] his theory achieves both tasks – and more. What Girard proposes his theory accomplishes is a description of the origin of all cultural manifestations, which is based on sacrifice. At the same time, what starts off as a description of an institution becomes almost prescriptive when Girard describes its function. Unfortunately, like his forbears, his conclusions lead him to a definition of sacrifice which, far from being merely utopian in description, is presented in tone, as well as content, as a utopian prescription.

Girard's theory views sacrifice as consisting of three fundamental characteristics: violence, misapprehension and a scapegoat or surrogate victim. In *Violence and the Sacred,* the importance of these elements is highlighted via the examples of primitive societies and classical drama in order to explain the relevance of sacrifice even in today's more secular societies. These three interdependent elements function together so as to achieve what Girard views as the beneficial role of sacrifice in maintaining cultural order. What he perceives as contemporary ethnologists', anthropologists' and others' inability to grasp the real function of sacrifice is due to their *a priori* secular standpoint or tendency to underestimate the role of

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[260] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* trans. Patrick Gregory (London: The Athlone Press, 1995; originally published in French 1972), p. 258. See p. 262 on his linguistic argument for the 'interchangeability' of the two terms.

[261] Ibid., p. 90. Yet Girard credits them for providing an accurate description of the sacrificial *process*, despite their relegating it to 'some kind of technique'.

religion in structuring all cultural forms. Thus, they fail to comprehend the relationship of these elements both to each other and to their role in society. However, like Hubert and Mauss, and more recently Turner, his analysis gives voice to the sacrificers but not the victim. Like them, he stresses the essential function of the scapegoat, whether animal or human but does not allow it (sic) a voice. In the case of human victims, he provides what he considers ample justification for the violent fate that befalls them. For the sacrificers, the sacrificial ritual may indeed have a positive function but it cannot be the same or as similarly beneficial for the victim.

While the two elements of sacrifice – the role and aim of violence and a surrogate victim – are elaborately theorised, there is relatively little on misapprehension. In fact, to take Girard's view of the role of misapprehension or delusion to its limits would be to undermine his thesis on the necessary and positive value of the role of sacrifice. By shifting the emphasis to the victims of sacrifice and to the delusion of the community as to the necessity of their death, the voice of the sacrificial victim may express what has hitherto been silenced. There is a tendency in Girard toward utopian rhetoric and at the same time a deterministic attitude which constantly shifts Girard's goal of a description of culture to a prescription of inevitable forces and structures.

In order to investigate the grounds of Girard's claim to the universality of his thesis it is necessary to first foreground these principles and then ask if Girard's 'neutrality' is not yet another example of androcentrism where his use of the term 'culture' stands in for patriarchal culture, and androcentric values and practices. If so, then what is the role of women within this sacrificial culture? Already in Hubert and Mauss, the exclusion of women from sacred rituals has been well documented but this exclusion was not justified. Girard makes an attempt in this direction but leaves the question unanswered and open to further discussion as it lies beyond the limits of his project.[262] What he does reveal about women however, opens up a space from which one may undermine his definition of culture as well as his positive evaluation of the role of sacrifice.

Girard's thesis focuses on: a. the benefits he attributes of sacrifice to society, b. the role – or rather lack of role – of women in sacrificial ritual, and c. his reinterpretation of Freud's views on identification and his own supplementary thesis on mimetic desire. This last

[262] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 142.

section is important because it explains how mimetic desire leads to a sacrificial crisis which can only be countered with more sacrifices. Finally, it is his argument on the necessity of misapprehension and its workings that undermines the utopian tendency of his theory of culture.

For Girard, the primary function of sacrifice - and therefore religion - is to control violence, and specifically, put an end to reciprocal violence. A dichotomy is set up between good and bad violence, where 'good' violence is expressed within sacrificial ritual. All other violence is bad because of its ability to spiral out of control, to become, as Girard characterises it, 'reciprocal'. The specific violence that sacrifice suppresses is internal, i.e. 'all the dissensions, rivalries, jealousies, and quarrels within the community'.[263] To put an end to reciprocal violence sacrificial ritual is necessary and a scapegoat is 'recruited' which will achieve the transformation of bad violence into good.

Sacrifice then, is a social act with real social benefits and material effects. As such, the institution of sacrifice in primitive societies fulfils the same function as our modern judiciary system. In fact, Girard sees sacrifice as the second stage of a process designed to 'forestall a series of reprisals'. He sees the modern judiciary system as the most effective form developed for this purpose though fundamentally identical to sacrifice in its function. The performative function of sacrifice effects an end to violent eruptions within a community but as it is 'performed' within the confines of religion its true function seems obscure to the modern mind.

What differs however in sacrificial ritual is the necessity of enlisting a third party, a victim who - by virtue of his sacrifice - will put an end to internal strife by uniting society against him. This shift from 'reciprocal', pernicious violence to 'unanimous', beneficial violence positions the victim as a kind of 'catalyst'.[264] This 'ability' of the victims to bring about harmony is achieved by virtue of the fact that the chosen victims are ones whose death could not provoke further reprisals because of their outsider status: 'Prisoners of war, slaves, small children, unmarried adolescents, and the handicapped'.[265] As Girard states, these individuals are considered 'incapable of establishing or sharing the social bonds that link the

[263] Ibid., p. 8.
[264] Ibid., p. 86.
[265] Ibid., p. 12.

rest of the inhabitants'.[266] If women are among the non-sacrificable it is because as the property of their husbands their deaths may provoke vengeance from their parents' clan.[267]

Notwithstanding the obvious fact that these 'categories' of people are not outsiders to society there is also the array of 'benefits' which their death engenders. Here Girard differentiates between an original scapegoat and a later 'copy', the surrogate victim, employed in sacrificial rituals.[268] The latter's role is essentially the same as the former: 'to imitate the generative violence as faithfully as possible'.[269] If the ritual succeeds in this respect, then the benefits accrued by the death of the original victim will be successfully re-produced, namely, the end of internal strife and the restoration of order and tranquillity.

It is when Girard elaborates on these social benefits of sacrifice that his style becomes overtly utopian. Not only is an escalation of violence averted, but ritual violence is 'creative and protective in nature'.[270] He asserts that: 'Sacrifice is the boon worthy above all others of being preserved, celebrated and memorialised, revisited and re-enacted in a thousand different forms'.[271] That violence is prevented via the employment of more violence is not conceived of as problematic, since 'good' violence is a lesser evil employed to avert 'bad' violence. As with the choice of victim, the demarcation of 'good' from bad' evil is also arbitrary: it is by virtue of its consecration that the victim is believed to transform good from evil or pure from impure. As Girard puts it: 'sacrificial violence can, in the proper circumstances, serve as an agent of purification'.[272] The ritual is effective because it channels a community's aggression onto a single victim and in the process unites them against the particular evil that has beset them.

Essential to the success of the ritual is a certain 'misapprehension as to the workings of the scapegoat mechanism, i.e., the fact that the victim is arbitrarily chosen.[273] Yet Girard does not see the arbitrariness of the choice of victim problematic. It is those priests, shamans etc. in charge of religious rituals that effect this misapprehension and attribute the powers of sacrificial rites to a divinity. The rest of the community must believe that this is the only way peace and harmony will be achieved. Equally, the chosen victim, if human, must also be

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[266] Ibid., p. 12.
[267] Ibid., p. 13.
[268] Ibid., pp. 269 and 102.
[269] Ibid., p. 273.
[270] Ibid., p. 144.
[271] Ibid., p. 124.
[272] Ibid., p. 40.
[273] Ibid., p. 104.

convinced of the necessity of its death. Were the victim to doubt the positive effect of its death or to refuse to acquiesce, the whole system of sacrifice – and its beneficiaries - would be thrown into disorder. The role of this third party then is crucial in the maintenance of the hierarchy of a given society.

Girard imposes an additional deterministic claim by stating that 'men are only capable of reconciling their differences at the expense of a third party'.[274] In effect, he is saying that it is not only the presence of a victim that is necessary but that violence is done to it. He abandons even the possibility of prefiguration when he claims that violence itself is arbitrary in nature, i.e., 'evil and violent measures taken to combat evil are essentially the same'.[275] So long as violence is contained and channelled within the confines of ritual it may have beneficial 'purifying' effects,[276] otherwise a perpetual cycle of violence set into motion which could lead to the community's disintegration. By making violence the only method by which violence is put to an end he is signalling the failure of speech, of verbal communication to resolve conflicts.

For Luce Irigaray the main focus in her critique of Girard is summarised in the question: 'Why did speech fail? What was missing?...And isn't it possible to analyse why speech was so inadequate that such an act became necessary?' Her own partial answer seems to point in the direction of 'a lack of harmony between words acts and bodies'.[277] Girard does not perceive a discrepancy between acts and words since for him the acts replace whatever words might be spoken. And since words cannot successfully resolve conflicts, only violence remains. In any case, for Girard this in not a state of affairs to lament. Because sacrificial ritual commemorates an original act of unanimous violence which engendered culture itself, it should be a cause for celebration:[278]

> All religious rituals spring from the surrogate victim, and all the great institutions of mankind, both secular and religious, spring from ritual [...] political power, legal institutions, medicine, the theatre, philosophy and anthropology itself [...] all man's religious familial,

[274] Ibid., p. 259.
[275] Ibid., p. 37.
[276] Ibid., p.40.
[277] Luce Irigaray, 'Women, the Sacred and Money' in *Paragraph*, vol. 8, p. 7, pp. 6-18.
[278] Ibid., p. 306.

> economic and social institutions grew out of the body of the original victim.

Sacrificial violence then is good, and what springs from this violence is even better, it is everything in fact. Conveniently, there is no contribution by women or relationships of men to women as Toril Moi has pointed out in her review of *Violence and the Sacred.*[279]

What Girard is attempting here is to answer the question of patriarchal origins. He sees the sacrifice of the original victim as generating a particular society with its specific rituals, prohibitions, 'the matrix of *all* ritual and mythological significations'.[280] For example, one of these 'cultural' results, are the various marital-sexual prohibitions that prevent 'promiscuity' from causing chaos. It is invariably the death of the surrogate victim which sets off this creative process of cultural formation: 'There is no life on the communal level that does not originate in death'.[281] By making death the origin of life and sacrificial substitution based on delusion the ideal expression of this myth of origins Girard is describing androcentric culture as a kind of death cult that cannot admit to the role of women in the generative act. That by culture he is clearly designating a society of men is unambiguous. In his discussion of the role of women in the Dionysiac cult he admits that 'a mythological substitution of women for men in regard to violence' must have take place since it is actually male violence which is constantly threatening to erupt and must be controlled. Because of his grounding of culture in male social bonds, Girard sees gender relations as a given which need not be questioned. As Nancy Jay remarks, 'women exist [...] only as passive objects of desire and [...] relations with women are the opposite of social order'.[282] Whereas (male) culture is subject to change, women's role remains – and must remain, a constant.[283] Therefore when Girard posits the

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[279] Toril Moi,'The Missing Mother: The Oedipal Rivalries of René Girard', in *Diacritics*, vol. 2, summer 1982.

[280] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 113.

[281] Ibid., p. 255. For Irigaray however, the original murder was the death of the mother, see p. 11 in *Sexes and Genealogies,* trans. Gillian Gill (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1993, orig. 1987). See also the interview 'Language, Persephone and Sacrifice', trans. Heather Jon Maroney, in *Borderlines*, 1985-6, 4, winter, pp. 30-32.

[282] Nancy Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Descent and Religion* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 130.

[283] It is this 'relatively stable commodity that women and their reproductive powers provide which', as Irigaray contends, 'make a sacrificial economy possible'. See p. 14 in 'Women, the Sacred and Money', *Paragraph,* vol. 8, pp. 6-18. Cf. Elizabeth Grosz's discussion of Irigaray and Girard in *Sexual Subversions* (Australia: Allen & Unwin) 1989, Ch. 5, pp. 140- 184. Grosz explains that for Irigaray, 'the human/masculine is projected onto the natural and cosmic orders in religious discourses and practices', p. 150.

necessity and even desirability of violence (of sacrifice) he is assuming a fundamental association of violence to masculinity or more specifically male desire. This is no more true than in his development of a theory of mimetic violence based on 'mimetic desire'.

In the chapters where he re-reads Freud's work on 'Identification' and the Oedipus Complex this male bias becomes clearly evident. The central premise to this theory of mimetic violence is that 'desire itself is essentially mimetic'.[284] In the course of development the child expresses the same desires as his father as a result of his initial identification with him. The violent denial of these desires by the father is a model repeated amongst adults where the attraction to the same object of desire inevitably leads to violence. The three elements of mimetic desire, identification, choice of object and rivalry are inseparable[285] and forge a link in the (male) subject between desire and violence where the presence of one inevitably provokes the emergence of the other.[286] When male desire focuses on the same object and violence, the effect is an erasing of differences which Girard terms a 'sacrificial crisis'.

Sacrificial violence can be described, therefore as expressing a crisis of distinctions - that is, a crisis affecting the cultural order.[287] In order for 'order, peace and fecundity' to prosper cultural distinctions are necessary. It is distinctions that give men their identity and their position in society. In other words, what man may desire depends upon his relationship of difference to other members of the society. To desire the same 'object' automatically signals an attempt to change one's status, to attempt 'equality' which cannot but lead to violence. Girard is clearly against such an attempt at equality since 'any change, however slight, in the hierarchical classification of living creatures risks undermining the whole sacrificial structure'.[288]

Again, the model for such a loss of distinctions is between brothers and fathers.[289] However, since repetition invariably includes some change, he concludes that the modern age, in which the father's authority had weakened is manifesting yet another sacrificial crisis. Yet in

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[284] Girard, p. 146.
[285] Ibid., p. 180.
[286] Ibid., p. 148. I disagree at this point with Toril Moi's review where she concludes that mimetic desire should construct all male subjects as heterosexual and all females as homosexual because of the original desire for the mother. Girard does not restrict himself to sexual desire. See pp. 145-8 and 170-75.
[287] Girard, p. 49.
[288] Ibid., pp. 39 and 51.
[289] Ibid., p. 63.

this case Girard does not see an impending destruction of society, only 'the son, who looks everywhere for the law - and finds no lawgiver'.[290] Since relationships between women are inconsequential, the failure of sacrifice to uphold male community is seen as a tragedy. Sacrifice can no longer perform its 'utopian' function of perpetuating male descent, power and 'culture'. Seen from the point of view of women this is not only a tragedy but reason for celebration.

The concern with the sacrificial status of women runs throughout Irigaray's work as early as *This Sex which is not One* to *Sexes and Genealogies* and *To Be Two*.[291] By sacrificial Irigaray is referring to a range of related phenomena: the sacrifice of the mother/daughter and woman/woman relationship, the sacrifice of women's sexuality to a phallic economy and the sacrifice of women's identity for a male/masculine defined society and culture. For Irigaray these phenomena are interconnected not only on a psychic and interpersonal level but also on a philosophical and an institutional level. To deal with these interdependent, at basis manifestations of the same problem, she utilises a range of approaches: psychoanalytic, Marxist and philosophical in order to expose the problem and to suggest a possible remedy. To reflect the different levels that Irigaray believes sacrifice to be operating on therefore I too, in this section will trace the various expressions of a sacrificial condition not diachronically (i.e. as they appear in her work), but thematically and as they interlink with each other. To counteract this exclusion Irigaray urges women not to repeat the killing of the mother who was immolated at the birth of our culture and instead to give life back 'to that mother, to the mother who lives within us and among us'.[292] This means an imperative that women's speech, desire and passion is not 'swallowed up in the law of the father'.[293] If modern feminism is seen as one such attempt at equality that may provoke a sacrificial crisis, it is not coincidental that it is the hierarchy of masculinist culture which is threatened.

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[290] Ibid., p. 189.

[291] *This Sex which is not One*, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1985, orig. 1977); *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. Gillian Gill (New York: Columbia UP, 1993, orig. 1987); *To Be Two*, trans. Monique M. Rhodes and Marco F. Cocito-Monoc (London: The Athlone Press, 2000). See also *Why Different* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2000).

[292] *Sexes and Genealogies*, p. 18.

[293] Ibid., p. 18.

In *Speculum of the Other Woman* she states that 'theoretically, woman does not yet exist'.[294] By this she means several things. First, that a woman does not exist 'for/by herself'[295] in present day androcentric society. In this society men know and act on their own desires and women are positioned as objects of these desires without access to full subjectivity; women can only be incomplete beings, neither knowing their own desires nor consequently capable of satisfying them. Woman remains an'unrealised potentiality'[296] in terms of her sexed identity, her femininity, and her relationships to others, especially to women. In this socio-economic structure, a woman can only take up the various 'roles' assigned to her: she is either virgin, mother or prostitute.[297]

At the same time, this 'primordial sacrifice' is linked to the sacrifice of 'natural fertility' in which both women and the earth's resources are subject to male control and exploitation.[298] This is no more apparent than in ancient Greek myth, in the story of Demeter and her daughter Persephone. Briefly, when Persephone is kidnapped by Hades and taken to the underworld, Demeter in her grief, does not allow the earth to grow and be fertile. It is only when she regains her daughter that life in all forms is possible again. In an early interview,[299] Irigaray states that although mother daughter relationships are fraught with difficulties today, in ancient cultures they were deified. This myth epitomises a time when ties between women had not been severed and were still valued and honoured within society. It also illustrates the point where the connection between mother and daughter was sacrificed for the creation of male dominated society and the primacy of relationships to men; that is, this story illustrates the shift from matrilineal to patrilineal relations, to the law of men amongst themselves.[300]

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[294] This is not an essentialist claim: Irigaray is not promoting an unveiling which will display the real woman from under the masquerade, p. 166. See the chapter entitled 'How to conceive (of) a girl', pp. 160-167 in *Speculum of the Other Woman.* On the question of why Irigaray's claims have been read as such (mainly by American Feminist theorists) see Margaret Whitford's comments in the Introduction, esp. pp. 1-3 in *The Irigaray Reader* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1991). In the section entitled 'Volume-Fluidity' of *Speculum* Irigaray repeats this point, see pp. 227 and 232.

[295] Ibid., p.165.

[296] Ibid., p.165.

[297] *Speculum,* p. 165.

[298] Ibid., p. 10.

[299] Irigaray, 'Language, Persephone and Sacrifice' in *Borderlines*, winter 1985-6, p. 31, pp. 30-32. See also 'Women, the Sacred and Money', pp. 9-11.

[300] Irigaray, 'The Forgotten Mystery of Female Ancestry', in *Thinking the Difference For a Peaceful Revolution,* trans. Karin Montin (London: The Athlone Press, 1994), p. 99.

In order for Zeus to consolidate his power two things must be sacrificed:[301] Persephone's virginity and the female line of mother to daughter genealogy. In other words, she must become the possession of a man (symbolised in her eating of the seeds of the underworld) thereby losing possession of herself. It is not accidental that Persephone is presented as silent. As a result both mothers and daughters are without a sense of identity because their relationship has been undervalued and severed in order to establish the priority of relations with men.[302] This loss of identity ensures a self-alienation for both that is perpetuated from generation to generation.

Both Jay and Irigaray propose an understanding of sacrifice which take into consideration the ideological function of sacrifice with regard to what and whom it excludes. Like Klawan's concept of an organizing principle, the logic of sacrifice for these two theorists is to be found in exclusion of both women and the feminine. For them, victims are not only those who 'give' their lives but those who suffer the powerlessness their exclusion entails. In addition, they view the origins of sacrificial ritual as the origins of patriarchy itself which further enforces women's marginalization. Bruce Lincoln has identified the presence of this ideological viewpoint in both the practice of the ritual and its symbolism:

> Sacrifice is most fundamentally a logic, language, and practice of transformative negation, in which one entity – a plant, or animal , a bodily part, some portion of a person's life, energy, property, or even the life itself – is given up for the benefit of some other species, group, god, or principle that is understood to be higher or more deserving in one fashion or another. By this logic, animals are regularly sacrificed for humans (in research as in rituals), humans for gods (including such gods as 'freedom,' 'higher profits,' and 'the national interest'), perjurers for kings (subversives for the state), breasts for arms (butter for guns), and the moist for the dry (fat for muscle, 'no pain, no gain').[303]

This emphasis on the hierarchy of sacrificial structure and the inequality of its power relations is the most important factor in the understanding of sacrifice in the context of utopianism because those who define themselves as 'higher' beings produce and reproduce their power via

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[301] Ibid., p. 103.
[302] Ibid., p. 111.
[303] Bruce Lincoln, in Carter, p. 366, pp. 359-369.

the sacrifice imposed on 'lower beings' and utilize the fear of sacrifice to sustain the 'radical asymmetry that exists between the sacricer and the sacriced'.[304]Where the theorists analysed earlier celebrated the maintenance of 'social order', Lincoln's formulation understands sacrifice as a discourse and ritual which legitimates a particular power structure by rewarding some and oppressing or destroying others.[305]The hierarchy and inequality reinforces and reproduces existing inequalities which, in Carter's term, produce 'secondary victims', that is, 'those exploited by the social hierarchy...[because] they too, in addition to the actual victim, suffer as a result'.[306]As will become evident in the second half of the thesis, the victims of sacrifice may occupy this secondary position with regard to other – than death – losses which are equally important and serve to oppress and terrorize them into submission.

In conclusion, sacrifice will be understood to mean an act of sanctified violence in terms of its method and justification. It involves a structure, logic and perspective which viewed from the victim's point of view questions this 'killing made special'. Following Hubert and Mauss, it requires a structure based on a rigid hierarchy of participants; following Freud, sacrifice describes the basis of patriarchal society; following Girard, the victim must be an outcast whose death will not be avenged and whose apparent willingness is known to be false by the community of bystanders who endorse its death. The inclusion of the feminist perspective reveals that sacrificers who perform and patrons who benefit from this ritual exclude women and the feminine in order to relegate them to the powerlessness of a slave by suppressing basic freedoms and bestowing upon them the status of secondary victim. What remains to be defined is the function of sacrifice within a utopian/anti-utopian continuum and its effects on those who survive its violent destruction.

[304] Ibid., p. 366.
[305] Carter, p. 358.
[306] Ibid., p. 358.

'If Isaac Could Speak...'

Whether one reads Genesis 22[307] as history, myth or story, it is difficult not to be emotionally drawn in by the events that take place. Having fathered a son at an advanced age, Abraham is asked to take him away and offer him up as a 'burnt offering' (='olah'). He responds dutifully and on a three day journey during which Isaac carries the wood for his sacrifice, he does not once question God's command to give up 'his only son' 'whom he loves'. Isaac himself utters only one sentence: a question as to where the sacrificial animal will be found. Abraham responds that 'God will provide' and at the crucial moment before his knife carries through with the act onto the bound Isaac, an angel prevents him from doing so and a lamb appears as a substitute victim. In a short space, this passage describing a near sacrifice of a boy by his father demands an emotional response that is not easily rationalised in ethical terms. Apart from the necessity of a victim who/which will act as mediator between the human and the divine by being partly or entirely destroyed there is little agreement on the nature, purpose or function of sacrifice. The dialogue between method (violence), perspective (victim) and ethical value will form the parameters within which my inquiry will proceed. As a result, the effects of sacrifice on the victim will illuminate features of sacrificial logic normally neglected in academic formulations.

This section then, revolves around a thought experiment and alternative questioning: if Isaac could speak, what would he say? My purpose is to elicit the ethical questions which arise by virtue of the reader's empathy with the victim's plight. Although far removed in time and space, by engaging in such an exercise, readers will be made to ask themselves what parallels could be drawn from such an identification. My purpose is less to understand Abraham's ordeal, and more to focus on Isaac's trial as the defining moment in the text. Finally, as a result of the reader's identification with victim rather than victor, a different valuation of the sacrificial process will be put forward in order to destabilise the entrenched status of existing interpretative traditions which are based on his exclusion.

Kierkegaard's reading of Genesis 22 focuses almost entirely on the relationship between Abraham and God and goes so far as to support a 'teleological suspension of the

[307] *The Holy Bible*, New Revised Standard Version (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

ethical'[308] in his desire to crown Abraham a 'knight of faith'. In fact, his reading constitutes a defence and exaltation of Abraham's resolve to carry out God's command. The voice of the sacrificial victim is either silent or silenced. What is well documented is the voice of the sacrificer, or the community which benefits as a result. In the case of Abraham and Isaac, it is not the experience of the receptor of violence which has concerned historians and theologians alike, but the nature of God's command or Abraham's trial.[309] The victim's voice remains, in the event of its survival, not only silent but also irrelevant.[310] Academic discourse mimics the emphasis in the text by concerning itself with the dominant voice in the narrative, that of the priest or sacrificer while at the same time insisting on the illusion of rational objectivity. Sacrifice then, is initially a story told by the 'victors' — those who stand to gain from the violence they themselves inflict on others. Retold by historians/anthropologists/theologians with an emphasis on the beneficiaries of sacrifice, the victim's voice becomes doubly silenced. This complicity of academic discourse in reproducing and prescribing the value judgements of these dominant voices has implications not only for a political order based on 'inclusion and exclusion' but also, for the ethics of the interpretative process itself.

It is noteworthy that despite the story being known as the 'binding' or 'sacrifice of Isaac', most commentators have struggled with the character of Abraham's decision and with the character of a God that would make such a demand on a father.[311] Yet, Yvonne Sherwood has written on ancient Judaic responses to the text which more than any other commentators 'press the question of what the effect would be' – of Isaac's death on his mother Sarah or brother, Ishmael. It explores the wounds of traumatic experience and 'post-traumatic salve and

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[308] Søren, Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Alastair Hannay (Middlesex: Penguin, 1985), p. 85.

[309]This includes biblical scholars whose methods and purpose may otherwise vary entirely. Compare J.P. Fokkelman's close literary reading in Robert Alter & Frank Kermode, (eds.), *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press,1990), where he sees a parallel between linguistic and semantic paradox (pp. 49-50) and Howard Moltz in 'God and Abraham in the Binding of Isaac', pp. 59-69 where he fills in the psychological gaps he sees in the relationship between Abraham and God.

[310] David A. Pailin discusses seventeenth and eighteenth century readings from Jewish theologians to Kant. See 'Abraham and Isaac: A Hermeneutical Problem before Kierkegaard', pp. 8-36. Compare Louis Jacabs 'The Problem of the Akedah in Jewish Thought' pp. 1-7, both in Robert L. Perkins, *Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling* (1981).

[311] Shalom Spiegal, *The Last Trial On the Legends and Lore of the Command of Abraham to Offer Isaac as a Sacrifice: The Akedah*, trans. Judah Goldin (New York: Pantheon, 1967), p. 59.

care'.[312] She explains that 'two ethical stumbling blocks' stand in the way of a positive interpretation. First, that neither Abraham nor God live in a vacuum where 'the hero can deal directly with God without inflicting damage on others in the process and the fact that this is not a narrative about martyrdom but about *martyrdom at one remove*'.[313]In other words, is Isaac willingly subjecting himself to the violence of sacrifice as demanded in the traditional ritual or does his silence mask a stance wholly, or partially unwilling?

What Genesis Rabbah introduces in relation to the ethical import of the story is the contentious and fundamental factor of Isaac's willingness to sacrifice himself. This commentary constitutes one of the few instances where Isaac's acquiescence is questioned. In *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*,[314] the entry for 'Aqedah' accepts as part of the interpretative tradition Isaac's knowing acceptance of his death, in contradiction to the implication of ignorance — and therefore rejection — Isaac's question further supports. In other words, either Isaac knows of his impending sacrifice and his willingness exonerates Abraham from any wrongdoing or Isaac is truly ignorant – and therefore trusting of his father's intentions – but implicates Abraham in the sin of deceit, at the very least. Levenson is one commentator who regards Isaac as part of the same test of faith Abraham is subjected to on the basis of Isaac's age. If Isaac were a child, then his question simply betrayed his ignorance of what is to ensue and Abraham was acting mercifully. But if Isaac is a grown man then he knows and accepts his sacrifice and it is this knowledge that places him on a par, morally, with his father. Levenson prefers Isaac as a knowledgeable adult but such an interpretation of Isaac's question seems to benefit Abraham once again since it absolves him of the crime of concealing the truth from his son. Abraham's answer 'God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son' (Gen. 22: 8) is both equivocal with regards his own intentions towards Isaac as well as his faith in God's intentions. To read acquiescence in Isaac's question seems to

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[312] Yvonne Sherwood, in 'Binding – Unbinding: Divided Responses of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam to the "Sacrifice" of Abraham's Beloved Son' in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, December 2004, vol. 72, no. 4, p. 846, pp. 821-861.

[313] Yvonne Sherwood, 'Textual Carcasses and Isaac's Scar, or What Jewish Interpretation makes of the violence that almost takes place on Mt Moriah', in Jonneke Bekkenkamp and Yvonne Sherwood, (eds.), *Sanctified Aggession: Violent Legacies of Biblical and Post-Biblical Vocabularies of Violence* (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 39, pp. 22-43.

[314] Philip, S. Alexander, "Aqedah", in R. J. Coggins and J.L. Houlder, (eds), *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (London: SCM Press, 1990), pp. 44-47. Jon Douglas Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Yale University Press, 1993).

betray as much a desire on the part of commentators to exonerate Abraham of any wrongdoing as a desire to exalt Isaac with equal heroic status.[315]

In other words, the vast majority of victims are not only silent but also nameless and thus, undocumented in history. Rather than a means to an end, the victim of the sacrificial ritual is revealed as a tragic victim of circumstances beyond their control. Were the victim to doubt the positive effect of its death or to refuse to acquiesce, the whole system of sacrifice — and its beneficiaries — would be thrown into disorder. The role of this third party then is crucial in the maintenance of the hierarchy of a given society. The meaning of sacrifice is therefore incomplete without the victim's willing 'contribution'. A means of convincing the victim of the necessity of his co-operation must be found and put into place. This may be the promise of a reward in the afterlife, the belief in the effect on the greater good or simply for the purpose of ending violence. The fact that Isaac's words remain documented testifies to his special place in the biblical canon, i.e., as Abraham's son and upholder of the covenant established between his father and God.[316] Yet, given the choice, Abraham decides to obey God and invalidate the covenant and Isaac must follow him in obedience. In other words, the choice between sacrifice and obedience dissolves into the obedience to (self)sacrifice.

But Isaac neither accepts nor objects, he merely questions and this creates the suspicion that he is not aware of what his father has planned. What then can be made of Isaac's question: 'Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?' (Gen. 22: 7). As a direct question, grammatically, there are several possibilities raised in relation to its meaning in the context of biblical poetics. But there is also the semantic value of the question to consider and finally, the relationship between the two. Beginning with an analysis of the poetics of the biblical text and continuing with a modern, fictional re-writing of the story, what will be revealed is the fundamental undecidability of Isaac's utterance and the ethical dilemma it communicates to the reader.

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[315] Derrida also concerns himself with the nature of Abraham's response to Isaac's question. See Jacques Derrida, "Whom to Give to (Knowing not to Know)" in David Jopling, Tina Peppin and Ronald Schleifer, (eds.), *The Postmodern Bible Reader* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001), pp. 333-352.

[316] Seth Kunin argues that Isaac was in fact sacrificed – symbolically. Kunin, Seth Daniel, *The Logic of Incest: A Structuralist Analysis of Hebrew Mythology* (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1995).

Since speech expressing inner emotions without the benefit of an audience is rare (unless it is an inner thought) it is often intended to convey a certain emotion or attitude to the one it is addressed to.[317] For Bar-Efrat it seems Isaac's valid question expresses an ignorance of what is about to ensue while at the same time betraying a certain fear by virtue of the fact that there is no sacrificial victim in sight. It appears as a simple request for information motivated by a fear of the unknown.

Furthermore, speech is also capable of indirect characterization by illuminating aspects of the person addressed.[318] So, when Abraham answers 'The Lord will provide the lamb for burnt offering' (Gen. 22:8) he is responding to the uncertainty in his son's question. It is possible that Isaac understood that he was meant to be the 'burnt offering' because his ensuing silence indicates that he has received all the information he had asked for. But it may equally mean that, knowing his father's love for his son, the wood he has carried cannot be meant for himself. And as Abraham has not informed him accurately, Isaac's passivity cannot be taken as unproblematic acquiescence. This makes the story of Isaac's near sacrifice both typical and atypical, revealing and yet 'mysterious' as Auerbach has noted.[319] In fact, Isaac's speechlessness may be equally due to ignorance of his father's plan, or knowledge of his fate. In the latter case, he would only be able to express disbelief – in the form of silence - that his father would rather obey God's demands than save the life of his son. To have Isaac speak again rather than express wonder would mean that he questions his father's ethical stand and that of God. As a result, this potential sacrifice would be merely murder, since the acquiescence of the victim is the cornerstone of the sacrificial ritual.

For Berlin direct speech is the 'most dramatic way of conveying the characters' psychological and ideological points of view'.[320] If Isaac is seeking re-assurance from his father that a sacrificial victim other than himself will be provided, then his father's answer is at best ironic:

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[317] Shimon, Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1984), p. 70.
[318] Ibid., p. 65.
[319] David Jasper, 'Literary Readings of the Bible: Trends in Modern Criticism' in David Jasper & Stephen Prickett, (eds), *The Bible and Literature: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 121, pp. 44-64.
[320] Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1994), p. 64.

> [A]lthough Abraham speaks from his point of view and means one thing, the reader interprets it from a different point of view ... the irony is double: Abraham himself is being ironic, because he means the phrase one way but knows that Isaac will understand it another way. And the reader ... knows that Abraham himself did not properly understand the full meaning of what he said.[321]

If the reader 'knows' Abraham is being ironic, what can he 'know' about Isaac? The answer must be sought at the affective level, one which reserves as much sympathy – if not more – for Isaac as for Abraham. For if Abraham's response confirms Isaac's fear then his subsequent silence is merely an effect of his terror and disbelief irrespective of age. For Berlin, biblical characters are described in order to enable the reader to situate them in terms of their place in society or their particular situation or some outstanding traits.[322] It is pointless then to speculate on Isaac's age — what is important it that he is Abraham's son (though not his only son). Significantly, Isaac repeats the word 'father' to emphasize the familial tie that binds them. The repetition of both 'son' and 'father' indicates that theirs is a close relationship and one which will be tried by God's command. Rather than focus merely on Abraham's trial as a personal one, that is, on the tension between his conflicting desires or on the tension between his desires and God's commands, the reader could place the emotional centre of the story on the relationship between father and son. By identifying with Isaac's fear as a son and the effect this violence would have on their familial relationship, the reader comes to an understanding of sacrificial violence which stands in contrast to the accepted utilitarian ideology, i.e., that the (sacrificial) ends justifies the means. What remains unanswered is an unequivocal resolution of Isaac's perceived willingness in relation to his self-sacrifice which hinges on his knowledge or ignorance of imminent death.

It seems that part of the undecidability of the meaning of Isaac's question is due to a potential discrepancy between the question's 'grammar' (structure) and 'purpose' (intention). Because of this discrepancy, the question may have both a 'literal' and 'figurative' meaning at odds with each other and the context may or may not clarify which of the two is intended.[323] On the grammatical level, asking 'Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?' appears as a

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[321] Berlin, p. 52.
[322] Berlin, p. 36.
[323] Paul de Man, 'Semiology and Rhetoric', in Robert Con Davis, (ed.), *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Modernism through Post-Structuralism* (New York and London: Longman, 1986), pp. 473, 477, pp. 468-479.

request for information. This would signal that his 'willing' behaviour simply belies passivity based on ignorance. In this case, the grammatical and rhetorical aspects of the question coincide and there is no doubt that Isaac is being 'misled' to his death deliberately. But in terms of intention, if Isaac suspects that he is the intended victim he could be asking for reassurance, or pleading for mercy or even signalling his unwillingness (and thus informing his father of his rejection of self-sacrifice). All these assume a level of knowledge which would place the grammatical meaning of his question at odds with its intended purpose. At this extreme, Isaac's question may even be rhetorical in that he is expressing his despair at his fate and does not expect a 'real' answer from his father. According to Paul de Man, the inability of deciding which meaning prevails in a question – grammatical or figural – results in 'the grammatical model of the question' becoming 'rhetorical'. Indeed, Abraham does not provide an answer and it is here that readers must resist allying themselves with Abraham's viewpoint. Only by remaining in a state of identification with Isaac can the reader share the frustration of not knowing with certainty Abraham's intentions and as a result develop empathy with the victim of violence rather than the perpetrator. In an effort to fill in the gaps/silences of the text, the reader inevitably supplements the grammatical meaning of the question with knowledge that only Isaac has access to and as a result, ends up in a state of 'suspended uncertainty' which mirrors the figural meaning of the question. In short, what Isaac's question 'says' is different from what it 'does': the effect on the reader is one of confusion, frustration, uncertainty and fear. In not knowing what Isaac knows, the reader must interpret events as they unfold, in the same disposition of passivity Isaac displays.

Interpreting Genesis 22 from the margins necessarily begins with a hermeneutic of rejection. If Isaac had resisted his imminent sacrifice, how would the story have unfolded? Were the victim to reject self-sacrifice, the workings of power would be revealed and Abraham's 'faith' exposed as one part of the contractual agreement. By bringing to light the nature of this contribution, the larger story of sacrifice can be de-mythologized and exposed as a sanctified form of murder for the benefit of the perpetrator(s). As an initial step in the rejection of sacrificial violence, the marginal voices must be brought to the centre, not in order to supplant the centre but in order to examine those structures, ideologies, and hermeneutics

which sustain the opposition between the two imparts confer a privileged position to the centre in relation to the margins.

Furthermore, the structure of sacrifice reveals a hierarchy, which must be adhered to in order for ritualised violence/sanctioned murder to function efficiently within society. Both the sacrificer and that party for whose benefit the sacrifice takes place (Abraham and God, respectively) agree on the terms of the 'exchange' without recourse to the will of the victim. As Isaac's example illustrates, acquiescence suffices on the part of the victim even at its most superficial manifestation. It is not necessary for the victim to believe in the efficacy of the exchange, as it is powerless in the process and does not benefit directly from the result. It is only necessary that the parties who exercise power to have faith in its desired effects. The 'superficial' acceptance of self-sacrifice on the part of the victim reveals the ideological construction of sacrifice as legitimised violence only from the viewpoint of the perpetrators. The victims need not have 'faith' in the necessity of their death for the greater good, they must merely accept its inevitability. For even as the victim 'accepts' its sacrifice, it is only as a result of the discursive power of the sacrificers to impose such an acceptance. As Maurice Bloch argues in *Prey into Hunter*[324] depending on the individual society's political-economic circumstances the logic of sacrificial violence can be used to legitimise expansionist practices. Rather than suggesting that 'one could understand nothing about sacrifice if one only looked at it in terms of the individual victim' this essay suggests that, on the contrary, focussing on the victim's point of view both questions and deconstructs the official story of sacrifice. It deconstructs it by revealing the workings of power that set it into motion and it questions its validity by refusing to glorify the sanctified violence as a positive force in society. The victim's viewpoint demythologises sacrifice because it questions the sacrificer's motives and discloses the real impetus behind the utilitarian ethics of violence in the name of the 'greater good'.

In an attempt to supply a different commentary to those who have interpreted his silence, Yvonne Sherwood has composed an imaginary 'letter' to his father expressing what had previously been suppressed. Adopting the voice of Isaac who responds to the multitude of

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[324] Maurice Bloch, *Prey into Hunter The Politics of Religious Experience* (Cambridge:UP, 1992), p. 98.

interpretations, both religious and secular, of his near death, she includes the whole spectrum of interpretive possibilities, including the unavoidable question of his willingness:

> I've come to suspect my role is to be a question-mark, the zone of ambiguity between object and subject of the phrase 'The sacrifice of Isaac,' so that no-one knows *for certain* whether I am a willing martyr or passive victim-lamb...what matters about my matter-less, voiceless state is precisely that no-one will ever know for sure whether to interpret me as a piece of 'collateral damage'....or a perfectly complicit extension of the will of the fathers – as if the son were the mere limb of them, as close to them as their own hands.[325]

This ambiguity is a reminder that sacrifice is a story of a drama between the powerful and the powerless since anything other than the silence of the victim risks exposing sacrifice as murder as well as the complicity of those who refuse to speak. Perhaps the very reason Isaac escapes death is because of the lack of witnesses who would testify to its proper execution. Furthermore, in spite of the evasion of sacrifice the memory of the traumatic event remains as one that should not have taken place yet did in a way, in order to return to haunt its survivors. The task of constructing a meaningful narrative based on this paradoxical story of terror and trauma is a near impossible task for religious commentators. But reading the Bible as literature is an endeavour better suited to fiction writers who have more freedom to imagine a meaningful supplement to the story of Isaac's near death experience.

It is this fear and terror, which are given expression in Jenny Diski's *After These Things* as well as the attempt make sense of the experience of victimhood which persists even after survival. Isaac's story is a testament to the psychic wounds that (even being threatened with) sacrifice inflicts upon its victims; the memory of a perpetual present where they are doomed to relive the traumatic event of the past in order to make sense of it. Cathy Caruth summarizes the central problem at the heart of trauma and memory in the question: 'Is the trauma the encounter with death, or the ongoing experience of having survived it?'[326] And she partly answers this question by stating that:

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[325] Yvonne Sherwood, 'Isaac to Abraham' in Philip R. Davis, (ed.), *Yours Faithfully: Virtual Letters from the Bible* (London: Equinox, 2004), p. 11, pp. 5-22.
[326] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 7.

> The story of trauma, then, as the narrative of a belated experience, far from telling of an escape from reality – the escape from death...rather attests to its endless impact on life...{and} the oscillation between the story of the unbearable nature of the event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival.[327]

Readers are asked to listen to the traumatic effects of Isaac's near death as a testament of the sacrificial victim who escaped death only to suffer from the effects of its memory. But 'listening from the site of trauma'[328] opens up possibilities of understanding sacrifice outside the traditional interpretations based on the victor's point of view and provides potentially subversive ruptures in the official version of narrative. For what Genesis does not provide is an adequate explanation of the effect this journey has had on the victim, Isaac. Instead, there is silence again, on Isaac's behalf. It is fitting then, that the novel looks to an older Isaac consciously trying to make sense of his survival since the element of 'latency' is fundamental to traumatic experiences. It is only after the event that one realises his near death experience and as a result, suffers the anxiety of survival.[329]

The story in this novel starts off where the previous one, *Only Human*,[330] ended — Isaac's near sacrifice. Whereas *Only Human* depicts Genesis 22 mainly from God's point of view, it nevertheless indicates a reason for Isaac's passivity:

> He knew the weight he had in their lives, had been told all his years how he was a child of promise, the son who had come along after all hope had gone. If a certain passivity resulted from his wish to live up to his promise, not to disappoint, it was understandable.

The rationalisation of passivity, made in retrospect, points to an Isaac who defines himself primarily as Abraham's son and as such, his desire to obey takes precedence over all other desires. Nevertheless, the focus in *Only Human* is on Abraham and on God as narrator of biblical stories. Perhaps the knowledge that Isaac is the chosen son leads him to a false sense of security which makes the shock of his experience even more traumatic.

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[327] Ibid., p. 7.
[328] Ibid., p. 56.
[329] Ibid., p. 17.
[330] Jenny Diski, *Only Human* (London: Virago, 2000), p. 211; Jenny Diski, *After These Things, A Novel*, (London: Little, Brown, 2004).

In *After These Things*, the viewpoint is entirely Isaac's and we learn that his near death experience continues to haunt him as a traumatic memory: 'Once he had discovered [...] that death was just an instant away, he was unable to learn anything else' (7). As a result, he becomes focused on physical experiences in order to obliterate the image of what was intended by his father. His unavoidable painful repetitions of the memory indicate an 'inability to give the experience any psychic meaning'[331] which would not also implicate his father as willing murderer. Thus, he is doomed to relive this internal conflict because, in trauma, 'the outside has gone inside without any mediation'.[332]

Although the novel does not reveal whether Isaac believed his father's response, it does provide a psychological explanation for his own passivity (16):

> Once, in that first encounter with death, he might have run for it, but he didn't. He walked on, step by step toward death without protest. A stupefied boy. A stupid boy. Not to protest at going to his own execution. Obedient, paralysed, disbelieving, suicidal. Whatever his state, it was unforgivable, he now saw, to volunteer himself for death. And death had been with him ever since.

This belated response to his near death experience is a symptom of the latency inherent in a shocking event which has not yet been fully comprehended. Not having experienced the event 'in time' because of his disbelief, 'the survivor is forced to continually confront it over and over again. For consciousness, then, the act of survival, as the experience of trauma, is the repeated confrontation with the necessity and impossibility of grasping the threat to one's own life.[333] Part of the anxiety produced by this 'impossible' repetition is the effort to return to the past to the time before the event, in order to prevent its taking place. As a result of this betrayal by the father, the psychic wound inflicted on Isaac testifies not only to his self-alienation but also to his separation from his father and other familial ties.

What Diski's narrative suggests is that, far from a being a willing martyr, Isaac has been unable to reconcile himself to his father's intended action. Sacrifice, it seems, even when it has been evaded, severs the ties between sacrificer and victim, replacing them with self-alienation and horror. It is the silence of ineffable horror of the effects of sacrificial violence on

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[331] Caruth, p. 59.
[332] Ibid.,, p. 59.
[333] Ibid., p. 62.

familial relationships and, by extension, on communal and societal ties. History itself is revealed as a series of 'endless repetitions of previous violence'.[334] Finally, Isaac realizes that he has been — like all sacrificial victims — the innocent mediator between two forces struggling for authority while he remains self-alienated:

> He was not his father. How could he be? His father killed him. The Lord had killed him. He was nothing. Just a term between 2 powerful wills. A negotiating point. Between them he had been negated (57). Though he had conceived himself as a special, chosen son before his binding, Isaac's sense of identity is now transformed to that of 'a means to an end'.

Those who benefit ultimately may be his father and God and the covenant they have established but the price exacted for his own obedience is the loss of his own identity and his faith in familial relationships.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are several points to be made on the basis of the scant evidence of the victim's perspective in the surveyed theoretical writing on sacrifice. First, the story of sacrifice is incomplete without the victim's contribution; this in itself needs to be rectified by scholars. Second, by bringing to light the 'small' (or marginalized) story of the sacrificial victim, the 'large' (or 'official') story of sacrifice is de-mythologized and the power relations it supports are exposed. Finally, as an ideologically justified murder of the innocent for the benefit of the perpetrator, sacrifice is exposed as the violent basis for the covenant between men. By focusing on the marginal and silenced voice of the victim of sacrifice, the centre becomes more clear in its ethical and, by extension, political workings. Far from being the implicitly justified story of 'one' victim in relation to the 'many' benefactors, sacrificial logic is supported by a multitude of discourses in which the ideology of exclusion, violence and, ultimately, death is sanctified.

By shifting the attention to the 'micro-element' of the nature of the victim and his/her relationships to both sacrificers and community, sacrifice will reveal itself to be much less normative than its theorists imagine and much more complicit in the maintenance of the status quo via the fear of violence. However, alongside the actual (voiceless) victim, there are many

[334] Ibid., p. 63.

other 'potential victims' which the violence of sacrifice affects, and these, too, are an essential part of sacrificial logic. Far from being objective, innocent bystanders, they are often implicated in the rewards or damages of sacrifice, either by means of the complicity or as secondary victims. For example, Winston Smith witnesses his co-workers 'sacrifice' themselves for crimes they haven't committed; Offred learns that her walking companion commits suicide before she is found 'guilty' of being a member of a resistance movement; Dana is helpless to prevent her great-ancestor's hanging of herself in despair; Jonas is shown a video of his predecessor opting for death rather than condoning enforced euthanasia. These, 'other' sacrifices illuminate the role of the protagonist as witness to violence which serves the purpose of instilling fear in the whole community, lest he/she become the next victim. Less prominently in the first novel examined, and most by the end, these other voices are implicated for their role in the successful function of sacrifice. Whether they are unconsciously buttressing the status quo (as in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*) or consciously turning a blind eye (as in *The Giver*) they are equally embroiled in the logic of sacrifice – either as victims or as victors. Thus, each individual's position in the sacrificial structure is what makes the ritual possible (functional) or impossible. In this respect, there are no absolutely 'innocent victims' except for those who remain silent via their death. Everyone, however, is a potential sacrificial victim since they are also always potentially 'guilty' and in danger of suffering sanctified violence.

To doubt the voices of the survivors is to repeat the initial violence by siding with the sacrificer's point of view. To listen to survivors is to de-stabilise the structure of the official story of justified violence and to question the power relations that support that view. In the service of present day reparations and future generations, the responsibility towards the survivors' stories is part of the process of an anti-sacrificial logic whereby the 'sins' of the past are not repeated for the sake of further entrenching of boundaries. Furthermore, the effects of sacrificial violence – terror, silencing, alienation and severing of relationships – must be admitted before any absolution can begin. As with Abraham and Isaac, this is a process that must begin with the acceptance of the victim's voice and continue with the relationship between victims and beneficiaries, whereby the latter acknowledge the charges levied against them by the former. Finally, rather than perpetuate the 'validity' of the stories of the perpetrators, the admission of guilt is an imperative part of the process of an anti-sacrificial

ethics. In the case of genocides, if the victors' stories are to be supplanted by a view of history which assigns responsibility for genocide, this can only take place if the stories of the victims are accepted as true and valid representations of the past. In short, this inclusive view of history does not posit a greater value on the victors' sense of identity but values the identity of those voices which have been pushed to the margins. This approach must be accompanied by a hermeneutics of both 'imagination' and 'transformation' in order to 'generate utopian visions' of a better world informed by a transformed religious vision.[335] As with all of Fiorenza's work, this approach to biblical interpretation necessarily enlists the feminist struggle against the silencing of marginal voices and its commitment to challenging androcentric interpretations of biblical texts in order to restore an egalitarian and, ultimately, ethical consideration of biblical readings. Biblical texts can be read in order to identify the 'languages of hate and death-dealing', on the one hand, and 'values and visions', on the other hand, which contribute to a 'radical understanding of society and religion'.[336] For Genesis 22, both readings are possible and necessary if biblical interpretations are to practise an 'ethics of accountability' for the theoretical interpretative models employed.

A first step then towards a new, non-violent covenant is to listen to the voice of the victims and reject the practice of sacrifice and the values it embodies. For the reader who identifies with the victim rather than the perpetrator, complicity with the viewpoint of the latter is no longer possible. Indeed, sharing in the burden of the effects of sacrificial violence aids in the realisation of the true workings of a sacrificial logic. A different kind of sociality would then become necessary, one without the shedding of blood. As Irigaray proposes: 'the meeting (of individuals) itself would constitute a rite, with its greetings and with the joy of seeing each other again'.[337] In this communion without sacrifice there is no need for hierarchies, for the either/or of life-giving or life taking, nor for aggression. Instead of the rite of violence there would be speech. Instead of silence and exclusion, there would be dialogue and inclusion. Most importantly, it would be 'a communion [...] which does not *depend* on exclusion'.[338] Crucially, it would be a covenant which would not depend on a sacrificial victim for its binding.

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[335] Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), p. 52.
[336] Ibid., p. 10.
[337] Luce Irigaray, 'Women, The Sacred and Money', p. 7.
[338] Ibid., p. 16.

Chapter Three

Classical Dystopias: George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Within the short literary history of dystopian fiction, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*[339] is considered a 'classical dystopia' not simply because it was written over sixty years ago, or because it has been so widely translated and read. It is also classical because of its narrative focus on a world which is presented in its totality as subjected to a regime which is all encompassing and monolithic in its suppression of freedom. In classical dystopias, the presentation of a totalitarian world permeated by an omniscient darkness and despair is partly what makes them both oppressive and pessimistic. There is no 'outside' Oceania, there is no better world to escape to and as a result of a ubiquitous system of surveillance, there is little hope of evading detection, were there a possibility of an alternative way of being. As a 'bad place', it portrays a near future that terrifies and is terrifying for its attempt to suppress virtually every aspect of life, every freedom. In classical dystopias in particular, 'the citizens [...] are gripped in a social formation so powerful, a web of control so densely woven, that at worst they do not even know they are free; at best, they might attempt a rebellion, but it will be mercilessly crushed'.[340] Despite its strong similarities to other classical dystopias like Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* and Katherine Burdekin's *Swastika Night, Nineteen Eighty-Four* remains one of the most referred to dystopias, and not merely, as Daphne Patai suggests, because of some 'catchy names, such as Newspeak and doublethink [...] invented for familiar phenomena'.[341] Notwithstanding Orwell's coinage of new terms which have become part of the novel's enduring legacy, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* owes some of its influence to its anti-fascist emphasis. The phenomena Patai refers to no doubt relate to the backdrop of fascism in reaction to which *Nineteen Eighty-*

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[339] George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, (London: Penguin, 1989); originally published 1949. Hereafter *NEF*. Orwell had considered the alternative title *The Last Man in Europe*. Malcolm Pittock in 'The Last Man and Nineteen Eighty-Four' (sic) makes a case for Orwell's influence by the novel *The Last Man* (1940) by Alfred Noyes although there is no evidence that he had read it. *English Language Notes*, 35 no. 3, March 1998, pp. 67-73. A more likely candidate seems to be Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, orig. 1826).

[340] Naomi Jacobs, 'Posthuman Bodies and Agency in Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis*' in Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan (eds.), *Dark Horizons Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), p. 92, pp. 91-111.

[341] Daphne Patai, *The Orwell Mystique A Study in Male Ideology* (Amherst, Ma: University Massachusetts Press, 1984), p. 257. Patai's book presents one of the best analysis of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* despite her obvious dislike of its author and, to some degree, the book itself.

Four was written. As a result, the most immediate impact on the dystopian generic form has been in relation to anti-fascist literature written in the post WWII years. In fact, to some degree, the anti-fascist dystopia has become the quintessential example of a 'classical' dystopia, due to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and its presentation of a totalitarian society with all the characteristics that this entails. Some form of totalitarianism continues to appear in some (shorter or limited) form in contemporary literary dystopias.

However, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s legacy is not limited to literary history. Phillip Wegner argues that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* prefigures one of the most debated issues of our own present, that of the relationship between nationalism and globalization, especially concerning the hegemony of the U.S.A., media technologies, consumerism, corporate and cultural domination. On a more individual level, Orwell's work continues to resonate for another reason. Wegner situates Orwell's fears concerning the future of the nation-state within 'a broader set of anxieties about the threat posed to a linked set of autonomies – the subject, the critical intellect, literacy, the private sphere, and the aesthetic – that similarly have been central features of the cultures of modernity'.[342] As a response to the multi-layered crises it developed from, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is the pessimistic expression of the social disintegration its author fears will ensue. The novel may be set in a future England, but its vision expands to encompass a global perspective which incorporates both western and eastern nations, the northern and southern hemisphere. In fact, both its literary and socio-political legacy reaches beyond the confines of the English nation to encompass both European and global concerns over the consequences of totalitarianism in any of its manifestations.[343]

In order to explain such all-encompassing pessimism, critics have often resorted, in George Orwell's case, to real life experiences, perhaps to an excessive degree.[344] However,

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[342] Phillip E. Wegner, *Imaginary Communities: Utopia, the Nation, and the Spatial Histories of Modernity* (University California Press: Berkeley, Ca. and London, 2002), p. 184. Wegner wants to emphasise, in particular, the history of the English nation. He concludes this argument by stating that: 'Orwell's imaginary solution to this crisis involves delinking those things he valued in modernity from the processes of modernization that had given rise to them in the first place', p. 185.

[343] Like many critics, John Brannigan, in *Orwell to the Present: Literature in England, 1949-2000* (New York: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2003), sets the novel in the context of 'the imagination and revision of ideas of England and Englishness in literature written since 1945', p. 5.

[344] For example, Abbot Gleason argues that 'the end of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has a deeper autobiographical dimension than is often realized, that the atmosphere of defeat and despair was quite personal, that it reflects Orwell's belief that the chosen underpinnings of his worldview would be unable to sustain the proactive individual self in the new era into which

whether one considers the auto/biographical and historical context or conducts a text-based reading of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* according to the conventions of a literary dystopia, the narrative's pessimism in relation to its utopian function is a key question. Furthermore, whether it is a classical or other type of dystopia generically does not automatically signify whether it is *utopian* or *anti-utopian* in tone. Tom Moylan argues that certain characteristics designate a dystopia as anti-utopian in outlook. Apart from the linear plot, the most important feature is the suppression and final destruction of any attempt at oppositional action.[345] Moylan writes that 'Orwell's dystopia is [...] an eloquent example of one that leans toward an anti-utopian pessimism [...] in a seemingly endless present rather than offering an open-ended parable [...] with a utopian horizon that might provoke political awareness or effort'.[346] Moylan's point concerning the anti-utopian stance in the novel relates in part to the novel's ending where Winston's defeat signals the physical and symbolic end of hope and any possibility of a better, eutopian, future. But it also refers to the static nature of this particular totalitarian world in which the status quo strives to prevent any potentially threatening change. While this may be true at the level of official narrative, there is also a 'counter-narrative' which, according to Moylan's framework may provide a space of resistance, hope and criticism, even if it is eventually silenced within the narrative. Finally, there is the question of reception, which Moylan states may transform a text wholly pessimistic in outlook into one of potential utopian hope. The readers, in this case, may find 'in the very closure of a certain text a chilling view of the present that counterfactually produces hope rather than the capitulation the text itself invites'.[347] This is an important issue for *Nineteen Eighty-Four* because the degree to which it projects utopian or anti-utopian pessimism will depend on the discourse foregrounded in the text's counter-narrative despite the failed rebellion of its protagonists. In other words, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* may be anti-utopian in its outlook not (merely) because of Orwell's physical or mental state of mind but because of the prevalent worldview it

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the world was moving', in 'Puritanism and Power Politics during the Cold War: George Orwell and Historical Objectivity', in Gleason, Abbot et al, *On Nineteen Eighty Four, Orwell and our Future*, p. 85, pp. 73-85.

[345] Tom Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*, p. 156.

[346] Ibid. pp. 162-3.

[347] Ibid., p. 158. In other words, despite the foregrounded anti-utopian pessimism, readers may still react with utopian hope against the vision in the narrative that threatens to become reality.

foregrounds. Such a totalising vision of reality, however, will inevitably result in a literary vision of despondency and despair.

Notwithstanding the question of its biographical influence, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was not created in a void, either literary or socio-political. Orwell himself actively took part in the political issues of his time and his literature reflected this commitment as did the work of many of his contemporaries.[348] In 'Worlds Without End Foisted Upon The Future - Some Antecedents of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*', Andy Croft reads *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as both political novel and dystopia[349] in order to place it within a tradition of British anti-fascist literature produced in the thirties and forties. He questions its critical and commercial success by reference to numerous novels which preceded it and also focused on the dangers of a fascist regime. He proposes that 'rather than being the *most* nightmarish of *all* fictional prophecies *ever* written, it was only the tail-end of a more original and important literary and political development in this country in the late 1930s and 1940s'.[350] His reference to the controversy the novel caused among political rivals in Britain in the forties and fifties goes hand in hand with the literary assessment he confers. He argues it is because of this controversy that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has been judged so favourably compared to similar novels published at that time, especially anti-fascist novels.[351] Croft overemphasises the biographical and compares

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[348] 'The 1930s and 1940s in Britain - the peak of Orwell's career - are conceived as a period notable for the sustained intersection of politics and art, for the pursuit of political commitment through literature [...] George Orwell [...] seeks to reconcile literary concerns and civic engagement', in Janine Utell, 'Why We (Still) Read Orwell', *College Literature*, 33.4 (Fall 2006), pp. 198-9, pp. 198-203.

[349] Andy Croft 'Worlds Without End Foisted Upon The Future - Some Antecedents of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*', in Christopher Norris, (ed.), *Inside the Myth: Orwell: Views From the Left* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1984), p. 4, pp. 183-216. Perhaps because of Croft's emphasis on the political import of the novel and its categorization as anti-fascist, the dystopian elements of the narrative are underemphasized.

[350] Ibid., p. 186. He goes so far as to say that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is no longer worth fighting over, at least not in the *political* terms that have defined the arguments so far', p. 185. As in the case of Patai's exegesis of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Croft's reading is also one of the most insightful, despite his (very obvious) dislike of George Orwell and his novel.

[351] This controversy is apparent in the reviews the novel received. See Jeffrey Meyers, (ed.), *George Orwell, The Critical Heritage* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975). Compare for instance:

'*Nineteen Eighty-Four* is merely one weapon in the war of the many fronts that has been waged against the progressive movement and the Soviet Union since 1945 and before. Its success, its sales, are a measure of the success of cold war propaganda [...] Books like *Nineteen Eighty-Four* thrive on hatred and disgust, and on the disillusion of the working class in socialism brought about by the policies of the right-wing Labour leaders', p. 293. Review by James Walsh, *Marxism Quarterly*, January 1956, pp. 25-39 in original.

And: '...We are being warned against the extremes to which the contemporary totalitarian spirit can carry us, not only so that we will be warned against Russia but also so

the novel's merits in relation to other anti-fascist novels of the time in order to explain *Nineteen Eighty-Four's* endurance as one of the most often read in our time.

Croft analyses, in turn, different aspects that, once read within their literary context, will diminish the novel's value for contemporary readers. First, he cites the thirties as a period in British fiction particularly rich in 'utopian and dystopian writing' (186) because of 'the fear of another war [...] the enduring economic crisis and long-term unemployment, the increasing [...] polarisation of European politics, the seizure of power by fascism in so many continental countries, the developing size and influence of the communist parties' (187). In reaction to these socio-politico-economic factors, a large number of novels were produced 'on the left' because it was anti-fascism that primarily inspired the majority of non-realist fiction in the middle and late 1930s (190). Croft's use of the term 'non-realist' is justified because most of these writers had little personal experience of the events they were describing and thus could not adequately express their concerns in realist form (196). This is not the case for *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as Orwell's personal experience in the Spanish civil war has often been cited as a determining factor in his literary output.[352] Yet Croft bypasses this point to emphasise the general trend at the time, possibly in order to diminish the novel's special characteristics and enduring popularity.[353]

Croft goes on to say that anti- fascist writers chose to write about possible futures rather than their own present because it allowed them to 'introduce comic or thriller elements to their work which otherwise would have been inappropriate considering the real struggles against fascism in Europe' (200-1). They were also interested in satirising what they considered to be the elements of latent fascism in British society (206) and thus make connections to political events in Europe. Finally, and perhaps most relevant for *Nineteen*

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that we will understand the ultimate dangers involved wherever power moves under the guise of order and rationality', p. 261. Review by Diana Trilling, *The Nation* 25 June 1949, pp. 716-17 in original.

[352] Apart from referencing his political views, Orwell's personal life has also been frequently cited as an important inspiration, if not a direct influence on his work. For example, see Blu Tirohl, in '*We are the dead...you are the dead'. An examination of sexuality as a weapon of revolt in Orwell's* Nineteen Eighty-Four' (sic), *Journal of Gender Studies*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2000, pp.55-61. Tirohl argues that there are contradictions in Orwell's novel that can only be explained by biography: 'It seems [...] more probable that his restricted experience of women limited his ability to offer a rounded description of them on the printed page', p. 61.

[353] A glance at the entry '*Nineteen Eighty-Four*' in Wikipedia lists the following categories of media referencing this term, each followed by a long list of titles: Film, Radio, TV, Opera, Video Games, Comics, and other novels. Read 2-09-09.

Eighty-Four, Croft claims that anti-fascist writers place their novels' plot in a future time in order to examine fascism's long-term appeal as a form of government as well as its 'political content' (208). Croft argues that although Orwell was not influenced by these writers since he had not read their novels, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is not as important a contribution to the dystopian tradition when compared to them (210). Therefore, for Croft, if it were not for the exclusive focus on *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by many literary critics, our imaginative understanding of tyranny would not be so limited (212).

In his attempt to prove that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was a much less original novel than it may seem to readers today by comparing it to other anti-fascist literature, Croft overstates the case for the political events Orwell transposed to the literary text without giving due acknowledgement to the relationship dystopian fiction has to the reality which inspires it. Dystopias are neither prophecies nor predictions, and the degree to which they extrapolate from biographical facts is no more or less important than in other literary genres. It would be more accurate to say, as J. R. Hammond does, that:

> Orwell takes a number of aspects of life in the 40s – rationing, food shortages, the black market, stereotyped meals, uniformity, patriotic propaganda, rocket bombs – and extrapolates them...then superimposes a political framework derived from his experience in Spain: the one-party state, the denial of objective truth...the manipulation of the past, imprisonment without trial, torture, indifference to human suffering.[354]

The personal, political and literary merge in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to present the image of a dystopian continuum between (fascist) fact and (totalitarian) fiction, past and present, which demands that the reader perceive reality through the alternative world of a dystopian future. The combination of critique and extrapolation makes *Nineteen Eighty-Four* innovative enough for the reader to accept the improbability of such a future becoming a reality while at the same time recognising the plausibility of such a possibility and perhaps affirming, what David Brin asks, that is, whether the fear of such a dystopian nightmare is a greater motivator and

[354] J.R. Hammond, *A George Orwell Companion, A Guide to the Novels, Documentaries and Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 172-3, passim.

effectuator of change than the promise of a utopian future.[355] As aforementioned, a dystopia may be utopian in its function, despite the focus on the most abhorrent or deplorable aspects of the author's contemporary society.

Croft may have a point in trying to excise the reaction to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* from its literary merits, but he makes the same error as the reviewers he cites, in part by condemning Orwell for his antipathy for the anti-fascist movement itself.[356] The essay does not actually examine the literary merits of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in their own right and although *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has been read as a political novel, it is not merely a novel loaded with political messages. Rather than categorizing *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a political novel which utilizes the dystopian genre to present the author's agenda, its actual utopian agenda would be better served if it were read as a dystopia which borrows from political fiction and other genres in order to convey its warnings more successfully.[357] Nor should the novel be read as a series of failed predictions that many critics feel compelled to make judgements on.[358] As a piece of speculative fiction, it follows its own conventions and should only be thus judged.

In any case, its perceived uniqueness may not lie in what preceded it but its impact on what followed. As a novel that has been widely read, its subsequent influence on later dystopian fiction is what marks it from the rest of its antecedents, and elements of the 'totalitarian' world it depicts continue to affect both literary and other writers. For Nussbaum, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* continues to be relevant in relation to five themes: how fiction offers an understanding of social events, the relevance of truth in politics, the tyranny of technology, the

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[355]David Brin, 'The Self-Preventing Prophecy; or, How a Dose of Nightmare Can Help Tame Tomorrow's Perils', in Gleason, Abbot et al, *On Nineteen Eighty Four, Orwell and our Future*, p. 230, pp. 222-230.

[356] Croft, p. 211.

[357] *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has been read as partaking in other generic types. Compare, for example, Cass R. Sunstein, in 'Sexual Freedom and Political Freedom', in Gleason, Abbot et al, *On Nineteen Eighty Four, Orwell and our Future*, pp. 233-241: '*Nineteen Eighty-Four* [...] belongs as much to the genre of horror as to that of science fiction', p. 236. Anna Vaninskaya, in 'Janus-Faced Fictions: Socialism as Utopia and Dystopia in William Morris and George Orwell', *Utopian Studies*, 14.2 (2003), pp. 83-98:'Morris and Orwell are intimately related to each other precisely because they approach, to a greater degree than most writers who may be classified as socialist, the ideal "romantic' limit"', p.86. Richard A. Posner, *Philosophy and Literature*, vol. 24, no. 1, April 2000, pp. 1-33, who compares the novel to *Brave New World* , calls both novels 'satires', p. 1.

[358] For example, see Richard A. Epstein, '...he utterly fails to explain the durability or success of any totalitarian regime', in 'Does Literature Work as Social Science? The Case of George Orwell' in Gleason, Abbot et al, *On Nineteen Eighty Four, Orwell and our Future*, p. 66, pp. 49 – 69.

effects of torture and ideology on thought and, finally, sexual passion and its relation to political rebellion.[359] For new readers of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* some knowledge of events in the forties is not necessary to appreciate the novel's themes, symbolism or message. As a dystopia, the warning and critique embedded in the narrative and extrapolated from contemporary events is sufficient to convey the drama of the conditions the protagonists are forced to struggle with. This combination of present social critique and future warning may well be what attracted Orwell to this type of fiction, having read and reviewed other dystopias, whether or not he was simply inspired or 'borrowed' certain elements from these novels to write his own. [360]

As an analytic tool, in order to bring together the question of the narrative's defeatism and pessimism with its utopian or anti-utopian outlook, the dialogue between the text's main protagonists will be foregrounded. The conversation between the novel's main character, a representative of the totalitarian regime, and the potential rebel(s), forms a common convention of the utopian genre. According to Raffaella Baccolini, 'dystopias...while also centering on the dialogue, seem to be built around the construction of a narrative and a counter-narrative'.[361] Each protagonist represents one of the narratives which are in conflict with each other and struggle for prevalence. As the representative voice of the regime struggles to oppress the representative of the counter-narrative, the latter struggles to resist. The focus of this dialogue

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[359] Nussbaum, 2005, p. 2.

[360] Peter Davison states that *We* was a direct influence and, indirectly, so were Wells's utopian novels, p. xviii, 'A Note on the Text' in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1989), pp..xviii-xi. Orwell himself, in a review of *We* considers 'that Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* must be partly derived from it' p. 73, although *We* is judged as having more political awareness. Orwell's description, however, of the similarities between the two novels also illuminates several important similarities to his own novel. Most striking for this chapter is Orwell's assessment of the public ritual executions of the victims as a 'human sacrifice', p. 74. His more positive assessment of *We* relies on what he sees as Zamyatin's understanding of the link between sacrifice, totalitarianism and Leader worship, p. 75. Finally, Orwell's own interest in the critique of 'industrial civilisation', p. 75 is reflected in Zamyatin's novel. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, (eds.), *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, vol. IV, *In Front of Your Nose*, 1945-1950 (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968), pp. 72-75. Croft, Patai, and others have compared *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to *Swastika Night* in relation to women's place in dystopias. See also Isaac Deutscher, '1984 – The Mysticism of Cruelty' in Raymond Williams, (ed.), *George Orwell: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1974), pp 119-132: 'Orwell's imagination lacks width, suppleness, and originality. Illustrated in the fact that Orwell borrowed the idea of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the plot, the chief characters, the symbols, and the whole climate of his story from [...] *We*', p. 120.

[361] Raffella Baccolini, '"It's not in the Womb the Damage is Done"': Memory, Desire and the Construction of Gender in Katharine Burdekin's *Swastika Night*' in E. Siciliani, A. Cecere, V. Intonti, A.Sportelli, (eds.), *Le Trasformazioni del Narrare*, (Fasano di Brindisi: Schena, 1995), p. 293, pp. 293-309.

in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* centres on the role of sacrifice in the perpetuation of power and whether its function is *anti-utopian*. Consequently, the function and effects of sacrifice in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* will be addressed with regard to the main (potential) sacrificial victim, Winston Smith, and the effects it has on his personal relationships, his sense of self and his value system. Reading *Nineteen Eighty-Four* with a thematic emphasis on sacrifice will also provide a kind of compass for reading subsequent dystopias whether they have been influenced by Orwell's novel or not.[362] To this purpose, the role of sacrifice in the story's narrative and its effects on the protagonists need to be addressed as a central theme.

Sacrifice, Language, Violence

As discussed in the second chapter, the constitutive elements of sacrifice revolve first around a rigid hierarchy, where every participant plays a specific role which is not normally interchangeable. There is a notion of exchange, where an innocent victim is deemed guilty by way of a scapegoating process. The original innocence of the victim must be transformed in the mind of the victim into a belief in his guilt or at the very least, the necessity of his sacrifice. The process by which this is accomplished is through the necessary violence which begins at a linguistic level, continues with physical violence and ends with the death of the victim. Whereas ostensibly the victim's death is meant to perform a certain function in relation to the sacred, in fact, by way of willed delusion, a sacrificial victim is offered for the purpose of perpetuating the status quo. What appears to be a ritual conducted for the sake of the divine, is simply murder for the perpetuation of power. The blood of the innocent victim nourishes the regime which is able to retain its power by virtue of this sacrificial 'mechanism'.[363] By utilizing the bare structure common to sacrificial practice, it will become clear how the dystopia of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* depends on such a structure in order to continue operating as

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[362] According to Martha Nussbaum, since its publication, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 'has been continuously in print in English from that day to this and has been translated into virtually every European and Asian language', 'Introduction', p. 1, in Abbot Gleason et al, *On Nineteen Eighty Four, Orwell and our Future*, pp. 1-10. Thus, the probability of an inter-textual relationship to subsequent dystopian novels is high and usually evident in the texts analysed. The next chapter, on Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, will begin with a brief comparison of the two novels.

[363] 'There is a continuity between the forms of sacrifice [...] They are all the same essence, and it is this which constitutes their unity. There are the outer coverings of one single *mechanism* (my emphasis). Hubert and Mauss, *Sacrifice, Its Nature and Function*, p. 18.

a totalitarian world in the tradition of fascist regimes, which ranges from the sacrifice of small, everyday 'luxuries' to the sacrifice of affective relationships, freedom of thought and action.

A brief synopsis of the plot of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* merits some attention because of its particular thematic arrangement. Set in 1984 in a future London, the capital of Oceania, it focuses on the life of two of its citizens, Winston Smith and Julia. It tells the story of their affair, attempted revolt against the regime, eventual failure, and torture by O'Brien, a member of the Inner Party. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is divided into three large sections with an additional short appendix discussing Newspeak, i.e., the grammatical and semantic description of a new, more concise and accurate language for Oceania, the dystopian world the main protagonists inhabit. In section one, Winston Smith, a member of the Outer Party, describes the material conditions of his life which include his daily rituals, the censorship he is subjected to, his feelings towards his colleagues, work, women food, history, reality, truth and especially the regime's ideology and its leader, Big Brother. It is a section which sets the scene and introduces all the major and minor characters in the novel. In the second section, Winston's relationship to Julia is foregrounded and includes not only a description of her character, their affair and their mutual effort to escape detention, but also their thoughts on government and the possibility of revolution. In this section, Winston has been given 'The Book' to read – ostensibly authored by the revolutionary Goldstein - and before he finishes reading it, they are betrayed and, as a result, captured by Oceania's secret services led by O'Brien himself. This section differs markedly from the first in its introduction of an element of hope that the pair will somehow manage to experience their own, private 'eutopia' without detection. The third section is almost exclusively focused on Smith's and O'Brien's relationship during the process of the former's torture by the latter at the Ministry of Love. Among the subjects discussed under such duress are the nature of power and resistance, reality and truth, history and memory, and the possibility of Utopia. Once Smith is deemed to be completely 're-educated' he is set free and given a new, less responsible job at the Ministry of Truth. It is on the last page of this section that Winston expects to die, having first met Julia, who is also psychologically broken. This section is even grimmer than the first and exposes the extent of the brutality of Oceania's regime.

Finally, in the appendix, Newspeak is described as if written at a time far beyond the world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four.* As a work in progress written in the past tense, its completion was expected as late as 2050, which suggests that perhaps it was not, in fact, completed. It includes not only detailed descriptions of how the vocabulary of the new language will be greatly reduced but also, because of this, the difficulties of translating literature and its overall efficacy in totalitarian societies. The justification for such a reduction in vocabulary is reminiscent of the Sapir-Whorf theory that language determines thought;[364] the aim of Newspeak is to eventually be able to control the thought processes and thus actions of Oceania's citizens for the sole purpose of preventing any heretical thoughts: 'The purpose of Newspeak was ...to make all other modes of thought impossible [...] a heretical thought [...] should be literally unthinkable, at least so far as thought is dependent on words' (312). As a result, the new language would not only block potentially revolutionary thought, it would also limit the range of meanings normally emanating from words: 'The greatest difficulty [...] was not to invent new words, but [...] to make sure what they meant: to make sure [...] what ranges of words they cancelled by their existence' (318). The obsessive preoccupation with limiting linguistic meanings indicates a need to sacrifice variety, accuracy and ambiguity in language *use* in the hope of controlling language *users.* Linguistic control reinforces what the regime in Oceania enforces in all other aspects of life as well, that is, the perpetuation of the status quo through violence. The lack of freedom in linguistic expression runs parallel to the lack of freedom in every other aspect of life in society. By imposing such a violent suppression of expression, Oceania utilizes language as another important aspect of the sacrificial structure. Linguistic control of meaning is only one of the violent modes which effect reality control. As such, it constitutes a precursor to sacrificial violence and a necessary step toward indoctrinating the potential victims in the belief of their own guilt.

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[364] Dale Spender is probably the most well-known feminist linguist who has adapted the Sapir - Worf theory: 'It is language which determines the limits of our world, which constructs our reality', p.139. See *Man Made Language,* Chapter 5, 'Language and Reality: Who Made the World?' (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980). Orwell makes a similar point briefly, albeit without any awareness of gender differentiation or socio-linguistic theory, but uses an organic metaphor in order to focus mainly on vocabulary and its usage in political speech. In his essay 'Politics and the English Language', he writes that: '...if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought' (137) and '...the present political chaos is connected with the decay of language' (139). In conclusion, Orwell considers bad usage a form of violence in itself: 'Political language [...] is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable' (139), in *The Collected Essays,* pp. 127-140.

A strict and inflexible hierarchy is also what distinguishes totalitarian dystopias from other dystopias. In the Oceania of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Big Brother is at the top of the hierarchy, a god-like figure that must be revered and whose image dominates the landscape of Oceania. The ruling class consists of the Inner Party whose members enjoy many material privileges and control the four Ministries. Most importantly, they monopolise the 'right of death and power over life' as far as the rest of the citizens of Oceania are concerned.[365] Below is the Outer Party to which Winston belongs and who leads a meagre existence working for one of the Ministries. Members of the Outer Party are constantly under observation by the Thought Police who function as detectives for the Inner Party. Once a member is suspected guilty of betraying the Party, he/she must suffer the violence and eventual death which is the punishment in these cases. Last, there are the masses, the Proles, who are not under surveillance because they are not considered dangerous to the established hierarchy of the state. Occupying eighty-five percent of the population of Oceania, the Proles, are considered too unaware of the social conditions of their existence to pose any real threat to the regime. As a result, the members of the Inner Party are the most scrutinized.[366]

The purpose of this strict hierarchy is spelled out very clearly when, in section two, Winston reads parts of the 'Book' aloud to Julia. The power inequality of the structure to some extent is one based on class but it is a class structure based on, and buttressed by, a logic of sacrifice. Ironically, it is a book co-written by O'Brien and, as such, a vehicle for the presentation of the novel's master narrative.

> It is true that our society is stratified, and very rigidly stratified, on what at first sight appear to be hereditary lines (217) [...] There is far less to-and-fro movement between the different groups than happened under capitalism or even in the pre-industrial ages (218) [...] The Party is not concerned with perpetuating its blood but with perpetuating itself. *Who* wields power is not important,

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[365] Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Volume 1 (London: Penguin, 1978), pp. 135-6. In this sense, totalitarian dystopias portray power in the 'ancient and absolute form' (136) Foucault discusses as well as in the modern sense: 'the right which was formulated as the "power of life and death" was in reality the right to *take* life or *let* live', p. 136.

[366] Orwell, commenting in 1944 on Jack London's use of the word, observed that 'few readers knew it (proles) had originally meant people who were valuable to the state only as the rearers of offspring', in William Steinhoff, *The Road to Nineteen Eighty-Four* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975), p. 13. Orwell is referring to London's *Iron Heel*, a novel which was also an early influence, according to Krishan Kumar in *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*, quoted in Moylan, *Scraps of the* Untainted Sky, p. 307, note 2.

> provided that the hierarchical structure remains always the same (original emphasis, 218) [...] the object of the war is not to make or prevent conquests of territory, but to keep the structure of society intact' (207).[367]

O'Brien himself later tells Winston: 'The object of power is power' (276), thereby underlying the interdependence between structure, hierarchy and power.

The lack of movement is necessary in order to continue recruiting scapegoats solely from one class, otherwise the balance would be disturbed and the structure is in danger of collapsing unto itself. As Hannah Arendt defines power (as opposed to strength, force or authority): 'power corresponds to the human ability not just to act, but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together.[368] It is not, therefore, O'Brien himself who is a powerful man, but the whole of the Inner Party from which he draws his strength and for whose benefit he must ensure its cohesion remains intact. As he explains to Winston, in sacrificial (religious) terms: 'We are the priests of power [...] The first thing you must realise is that power is collective. The individual only has power in so far as he ceases to be an individual' (276-7). Winston is aware of the structure and his place in it as a potential victim of sacrificial violence just as he is aware that once caught, he will accept the guilt of his actions and be made to accept the consequences. He is guilty of thoughtcrime not only for conducting an unauthorised affair and keeping a diary, but primarily for even thinking of committing these acts: 'in the eyes of the Party there was no distinction between the thought and the deed' (255). For the rules of the master narrative, all thoughts constitute action as if thoughts are speech acts, i.e., to think a heretical thought is to also at the same time to perform it. Opposed is Winston's counter narrative in which he has, in effect, 'forgotten' his place in the sacrificial structure by attempting to act out freedoms which are forbidden to him. Winston is structurally positioned as a scapegoat who must be sacrificed to maintain the status quo of Oceania's regime.

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[367] Excluded from this scheme are prisoners of war 'for the slave populations of the equatorial lands, who pass constantly from conqueror to conqueror, are not a permanent or necessary part of the structure' (217) [...] 'By their labour the slave populations allow the tempo of continuous warfare to be speeded up But if they did not exist, the structure of world society, and the process by which it maintains itself, would not be essentially different' (196).

[368] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York and London: A Harvest Book, Harcourt, 1970), p. 44.

The 'Book' makes a clear connection between a structured hierarchy and the perpetuation of power. Whichever group is in power must remain there and its members form the top of a pyramid whereby a small elite may rule the vast majority of the population. The need for continual warfare demands a perpetual provision of human life which draws its life force from the masses who have no hope of improving their life's conditions. In fact, the author(s) of the 'Book' admit that the 'war is waged by each ruling group against its own subjects' (207). This important distinction is what would constitute, according to Arendt's formulation, Oceania's regime as one of 'totalitarian domination, based on terror' rather than other 'tyrannies and dictatorships, established by violence'.[369] When a historical explanation of this societal inequality is put forth, it is to reinforce the sacrificial structure it is based on and reveals the importance of inequality:

> 'Throughout recorded time, and probably since the end of the Neolithic Age, there have been three kinds of people in the world, the High, the Middle and the Low [...] the essential structure of society has never altered' (209) [...] from the point of view of the Low, no historic change has ever meant much more than a change in the name of their masters' (210).

In short, hierarchy, inequality and power come together under a common logic of sacrifice in the form of endless wars. In sacrificial terms, the members of the Inner Party represent the group for whose benefit the sacrifice is performed. The Thought Police are the 'priests' who ensure the sacrifice is properly administered and the members of the Outer Party are the potential victims. As a group deemed incapable of betrayal, the Proles remain outside the sacrificial scheme as mere observers. Thus, the violence of war is mirrored by the internal violence administered by the Inner Party towards whoever poses a threat to this structure.[370]
One of most important sacrifices the living must endure as a consequence is conditions of extreme scarcity. It is impossible for Winston to find such essentials as shoelaces or razor

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[369] Arendt goes on to explain that 'the former turns not only against its enemies but against its friends and supporters as well, being afraid of all power, even the power of its friends. The climax of terror is reached when the police state begins to devour its own children, when yesterday's executioner become today's victim', *On Violence*, p. 55.
[370] This stratification is reinforced in the sphere of cultural production where a different set of newspapers, novel, films, etc. is produced for the different classes; for example, Julia works for Pornosec, a sub-section of the Fiction Department which produced pornographic booklets solely for the Proles, p. 137.

blades on the market (8), electricity is cut off during the day in order to save for Hate Week (3), chocolate is rare (28) and clothing is rationed (33), wool or buttons are occasionally found (51) but lemons are unheard of (153). As Winston himself remembers:

> 'there had never been quite enough to eat, one had never had socks or underclothes that were not full of holes, furniture had always been battered and rickety, rooms underheated [...] tea a rarity, coffee filthy-tasting, cigarettes insufficient-nothing cheap and plentiful except synthetic gin' (62-63).

The cause of such suffering is explained in the 'Book' to be not one of real scarcity – a by-product of constant warfare - but in fact a conscious goal of the ruling class to remain in power: 'In the long run, a hierarchical society was only possible on a basis of poverty and ignorance' (198). Furthermore, it constitutes another method of reinforcing the gap between classes: 'because a general state of scarcity increases the importance of small privileges and thus magnifies the distinction between one group and another' (199). Only members of the Inner Party were allowed some luxuries in order to cultivate a morale appropriate for the administration of war (200).

The apparent willingness of the sacrificial victim is also a necessary element in Oceania's regime so as not to appear to be murdering innocent citizens but persons who are truly guilty of some 'thoughtcrime' at least, or treason, at worst. Winston's death would not be sufficient, he must also be persuaded of the necessity of his admission of guilt. The act for which he has been found guilty is his affair with Julia, yet the thoughtcrime he must be believe he has committed is that of treason against Oceania.

Winston's belief in his own guilt is what transforms the act of his eventual murder into sacrifice. To willingly accept the necessity of his death absolves his torturers, and the members of the status quo who benefit, from the responsibility of his blood on their hands. What remains, and must be accomplished through torture, is that he convince himself of the impossible: that two and two make five; that is, to accept a cognitive untruth as proof of his lack of heretical thoughts. By accomplishing such mental disintegration that mathematical laws

or other laws of nature are distorted, and denied, O'Brien's torture ensures that any real threat of future rebellion is eradicated.[371]

The rationale behind the most serious act of heresy Winston is found guilty of, his love affair with Julia, is that it is one that threatens the authority of Oceania's leaders. Amongst all the sacrifices members of the outer party must accept, the forfeiture of affective relationships is the most necessary: '...a real love affair was an almost unthinkable event [...] The sexual act, successfully performed, was rebellion. Desire was thoughtcrime' (71). Winston has already explained that the sexual act must be perfunctory and without feeling, when he described his marriage (68). Bringing desire into the equation is already a heretic act. But to take it to its ultimate expression, to love another person is a betrayal that the leaders of Oceania cannot tolerate, not least because the main and only loyalty is to their authority. Once Winston refuses to sacrifice his love for Julia, his torturer's main goal is to destroy this commitment utterly. Before he is taken to room 101, where 'the worst thing in the world' takes place (296), he relies on the last remnant of proof in his own authenticity, the fact that he had not betrayed his feelings for Julia (287). However, once this tie is broken, so too is Winston: 'there were things, your own acts, from which you could not recover. Something was killed in your breast: burnt out, cauterised out' (303-4). The sacrifice of the only affective relationship that tied Winston to his sense of integrity signals the sacrifice of his sanity and the complete commitment to Oceania's regime. What Winston considers his greatest strength becomes a failure in the eyes of O'Brien, a failure which, according to Lyotard is both the 'most valued and the most useful for the regime's masters' and a necessary part of the master's narrative.[372]

O'Brien reinforces the necessity of Winston's 'voluntary' capitulation for epistemological reasons: to deflect from the act of murder being committed to, instead, an act of sacrifice. He tells Winston that 'in this place there are no martyrdoms [...] all the

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[371] Richard J. Voorhees, argues that because of this section *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 'is a combination of tale of terror and political treatise', and Orwell had included it 'in order to imagine himself the victim of totalitarianism' pp. 60 and 88 in *The Paradox of George Orwell* (Ahland, OH: Purdue University, 1961).

[372] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern explained to Children: Correspondence, 1982-1985*, tr. Julian Pefanis and Morgan Thomas (London: Turnaround, 1992): 'By "giving" [...] the object of love up to Big Brother, the lover betrays not only what both of them are but what they are not, what they lack, their failing. An admission of weakness is the most prized of denunciations. It supplies the master with information and the means for obtaining it', p. 108-9.

confessions that are uttered here are true. We make them true (265-266). At the same time, by erasing Winston's existence from history and Oceania's records, the status quo avoids bestowing heroic status on it victims. This accomplishes two purposes simultaneously: first, it succeeds in absolving itself of responsibility for its victim's death, then it removes any possibility of a positive interpretation of their annihilation. In other words, the act of sacrifice is accomplished replete with the benefits accorded to the sacrificers, without at the same time according the recognition which would make this act a possible source of emulation. As O'Brien informs Winston: '(in the past) [...] the glory belonged to the victim and the shame to the Inquisitor [...] when finally you surrender to us, it must be of your own free will' (266-7). What distinguishes the regime of Oceania from other totalitarian states is that the positive values given to sacrifice in the past become nullified because of the complete convergence of the victim's belief in his own guilt whereas in the past, the victim remained 'unrepentant' (266). Therefore, it is the continued belief in one's innocence that, according to the master's narrative, conveys a positive value upon the victim and qualifies any benefits that can be accrued for the regime.

Like all sacrificial practices, both physical and psychological violence are employed before the final act of death. When Winston's torturer O'Brien informs him of the 'mistakes' previous totalitarian regimes committed by unwittingly producing martyrs and Oceania's determination not to repeat these mistakes, it is because the status quo in Oceania seeks to maintain perpetual power by eliminating potential future revolutionaries: 'We are not content with negative obedience, nor even with the most abject submission. When finally you surrender to us, it must be of your own free will. We do not destroy the heretic [...] we convert him, we capture his inner mind, we reshape him. We burn all evil and all illusion out of him' (267). Oceania's regime utilizes the function of sacrifice to maintain the status quo but reverses its symbolism while at the same time retaining its inner logic. The victim must not only appear to be guilty of the said crime, he must also believe in his guilt. The violence, therefore he is subjected to is for the purpose of alienating him from his most treasured but also most basic beliefs, feelings and commitments.

Sacrifice, Alienation, Value

What appears to be Winston's expression of alienation from other human beings in section one, gradually evolves into self-alienation. He feels alienated from his neighbours, from women (especially his wife), from his colleagues and other members of the Outer Party. He has no children, nor does he desire them because they too cannot be trusted and often betray their own parents. His decision to keep a journal where he can express his true thoughts about the regime ultimately is used against him when he is captured. Thus, a key utopian moment in the plot is eliminated and the reader does not know if the journal is saved.

> He was alone. The past was dead, the future unimaginable. What certainty had he that a single human creature now living was on his side? (28-9) [...] The family had become in effect an extension of the Thought Police (54) [...] Nearly all children nowadays were horrible (26) [...] .All their ferocity was turned outwards, against the enemies of the State, against foreigners, traitors, saboteurs, thought criminals. It was almost normal for people over thirty to be frightened of their own children (26-7).

Whereas Winston's inner trajectory begins with greater self-awareness and ends with total self-alienation, his awareness in relation to others begins with alienation and ends (before his torture) in awareness. For example, he imagines Julia is an enemy and O'Brien an ally. He soon realises that O'Brien is the enemy and Julia an ally. It is this sense of isolation that makes him feel like 'the last man'.[373]

According to the master's narrative, the need to alienate potential sacrificial victims from affective relationships goes hand in hand with the necessity of self-alienation. It follows that the more self-alienated one is, the less emphasis he/she will place on emotional ties and, as a result, will lack the desire for (or even understanding of) rebelling against the regime. O'Brien tells Winston right before he is taken to room 101 that he must not only obey Big Brother, he must love him (295). It is only by focusing all one's energy toward the symbolic head of state that a citizen of Oceania may avoid execution. But Winston proves to be 'a difficult case' (287) because of his reduced sense of self-alienation and, of course, his relationship to Julia.

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[373]Raymond Williams explains this use of the original title 'has a bleak honesty, but it reveals a point at which the political contradictions, and the isolation and abstraction involved in them, combined with the lack of any independent social identity to produce a genuine terror'. *Orwell* (London: Pantana/Collins, 1971), p. 93.

Unlike other victims - his colleagues – Winston is removed to room 101 because the effort to extort a belief in his guilt is much greater than theirs. For example, when Parsons is apprehended for muttering 'Down with Big Brother' in his sleep (245), he immediately admits to Winston his guilt in committing Thoughtcrime: 'You don't think the Party would arrest an innocent man, would you?' (245). The belief in one's guilt here depends on the degree of alienation experienced by each prisoner. Parsons is alienated to such a degree that it is only a small step to the acceptance of his guilt. In fact, he is so alienated that a belief in his guilt is present even before any torture begins. This explains why his betrayal by his own daughter elicits gratitude rather than anger: 'I don't bear her any grudge for it. In fact, I'm proud of her. It shows I brought her up in the right spirit, anyway' (245). He is so grateful that he plans to thank the tribunal for saving him before it was too late (245). This is a world which functions according to a moral code of consequentialism, where 'the people of Oceania have come to lack [...] any sense of any human being as an end'.[374] In effect, familial relationships are sacrificed in accordance to the sacrificial moral code which posits, 'that one must be prepared to sacrifice anything and anyone at any moment [...] by requiring that all attachments be held provisionally and instrumentally, held only in so far as useful to the state, Oceania uproots deep love and the possibility of grief'.[375] Accordingly, Parsons is happy with his daughter's action and proud that she, too, places loyalty to Big Brother above her father.

Unlike Winston, he has internalised the ideology of the master's narrative to such a degree that the concepts of innocence and guilt have become conflated. For Winston, whose effort is to retain some semblance of good faith, there is a collapse between the two concepts of innocence: lack of knowledge in wrongdoing and lack of actual wrongdoing. He knows that he has committed a crime, i.e., in the legal sense, but at the same time he does not believe his action to be a crime – in the ethical sense. This epistemological break with the master's narrative is what fuels Winston's belief in his own superiority, not only towards his colleagues but also to other members of the outer party. Unfortunately, Winston's greater self-awareness is also the source of his and Julia's downfall. Yet, they are not completely unalienated and this is evident in their internalization of the master narrative's ethics of sacrifice.

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[374] Martha C. Nussbaum, 'The Death of Pity: Orwell and American Political Life' in Gleason, Abbot et al, *On Nineteen Eighty Four, Orwell and our Future*, p. 285, pp. 279-299.
[375] Ibid., p. 286.

Shortly before Winston and Julia are arrested, a key statement concerning the lengths the couple is prepared to go to in order to destroy the regime of Oceania is made to O'Brien who then records it in order to implicate the couple in Thoughtcrime. To all the questions O'Brien asks, the couple answers in the affirmative, except for the last:

> You are prepared to give your lives? [...] You are prepared to commit murder? [...] To commit acts of sabotage which *may cause the deaths of hundreds of innocent people*? [...] To betray your country to foreign powers? [...] You are prepared to cheat, to forge, to blackmail, *to corrupt the minds of children*, to distribute habit-forming drugs, to encourage prostitution, to disseminate venereal disease - to do anything which is likely to cause demoralisation and weaken the power of the Party? [...] If, for example, it would somehow serve our interest *to throw sulphuric acid in a child's face* – are you prepared to do that? [...] You are prepared to *lose your identity* and live out the rest of you life as a waiter or a dock-worker? [...] You are prepared *to commit suicide*, if and when we order you to do so? You are prepared, the two of you, to separate and never see on another again? (my emphasis, 179-180).

Winston and Julia accept the moral value of sacrifice in their desire to overthrow Oceania's regime because, as potential victims, they cannot envision any other mode of action. Their alienation is a result of their position in the sacrificial structure of Oceania and their pledge to commit any abhorrent act is for them indicative of their hatred for Oceania. They are caught in the vicious circle of sacrificial exchange whereby the belief in the death of innocent people and suicide will incur a revolutionary meaning.

The moral code O'Brien puts forward for Winston and Julia to subscribe to lies in the long tradition of 'consequentialism', whereby the ends justifies the means. It is a system where prefiguration is absent and atrocities are committed in the quest for utopia. What actions Winston and Julia are prepared to commit in the name of revolution appear to be no different from the actions of the regime they are fighting against. In particular, their willingness to subject innocent adults and children to torture and death is extreme and unjustifiable. They even accept the possibility of self-sacrifice, were this to aid their cause. This statement has led Daphne Patai to enquire into the nature of Winston's and O'Brien's relationship in order to illustrate the extent to which the two men are enmeshed in the same moral universe and as a consequence are equally guilty of maintaining the status quo. In answering her own question as

to why Winston is so willing to act as O'Brien asks, she states that 'what is clear is that he cannot be seen merely as O'Brien's innocent victim'.[376] Again, the issues of innocence, knowledge and guilt are implicated in the rhetoric of sacrifice, for a sacrificial victim is already innocent and if not, he/she must be 'made' innocent before their death. To imply his/her complicity in the mechanism of sacrifice is to bestow a guilt upon them which mitigates against the murder the sacrificer commits.

Yet, Patai focuses on this 'connection' between torturer and victim precisely in order to prove that the two men are caught up in a hom(m)osocial web of their own making, where the rules of male-dominated game playing take precedence over all other relationships. In Winston's case, her point is to prove that Winston – like Orwell – cannot function outside the parameters of these rules and as a result is destroyed by them. In the same vein as other readers before her, she interprets the pessimism of Winston the narrator as a reflection of Orwell's own pessimism regarding the state of his own society and its political intersections. The only way she can explain Winston/Orwell's fascination with O'Brien and by extension, Big Brother, is to argue for the misogyny of each and their shared common values: '*Nineteen Eighty-Four* is specifically the story of two men committed to shared ideas of what it means to be a man, and [...] dependent on each other's recognition'.[377]Although she is right as far as Winston is concerned, it merely proves that Oceania is a patriarchal society and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a portrayal of a patriarchal dystopia.

In addition, apart from the desire to 'prove' Orwell's misogyny, Patai also wants to interpret *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s lack of hope as a direct result of Orwell's own moral-political lack of self-awareness. His known commitment to social justice and frustration at the British political conditions of his time are found to clash with his own prejudices toward women which are an intrinsic part of his admiration for a masculinist society. She interprets the focus on the Winston-O'Brien torture episode and its intimacy as one between players in a game where the values are accepted by others and the only question is one of when and how the pre-ordained victim will lose the battle with his chosen opponent. What is problematic here is not that Winston and O'Brien share a value system, but that their respective position in the structure of the game is radically different. Winston's initial trust in O'Brien is not merely a

[376] Patai, p. 231.
[377] Ibid., p. 238.

need for recognition by another man. It is a result of the unequal power relation between the two which O'Brien manipulates linguistically, knowing that Winston has no criteria with which to judge their exchanges.[378] The same holds true for his initial distrust of Julia. His suspicion that she may be a member of the Thought Police is a result of the alienated relationships and lack of reliable criteria on which to base accurate judgements.[379]

Patai argues that the belief in the same (im)moral system proves Winston is complicit in accepting the rules of the game that O'Brien adheres to: 'At the heart of their apparent struggle is an agreement about values, despite their disagreement about the nature of reality, and this agreement is the corruption at the core of Winston's rebellion'.[380] What Patai mentions, but fails to develop, is the perversion of conditions in dystopias. Although she admits that it is a perversion of a game the two characters are involved in, she does not allow this to affect her analysis or the conclusion she reaches. The game can only be a perversion after all, because it takes place within the confines of a dystopian narrative – everything is perverted in the final analysis since the purpose of the narrative is to exaggerate and extrapolate from present conditions. Relations between family members, romantic relationships and friendships are all perversions within a dystopia and cannot be taken as normative.

In the end, the struggle between Winston and O'Brien is not simply between two men seeking recognition of each other's common value system but a struggle between two narratives, two different moral systems and two visions of utopia. O'Brien represents and upholds a sacrificial logic which cannot be tampered with if he is to remain in power. On the

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[378] Isabel Ermida, 'Linguistic Mechanisms of Power in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: Applying Politeness Theory to Orwell's World', *Journal of Pragmatics*, 38 (2006), pp. 842-862. Ermida analyses the exchanges between the two to show the 'asymmetric nature of power-laden relationships and the discursive mechanisms that shape them', p. 843. She goes on to explain that O'Brien's initial politeness was a ruse to attract and deceive Winston, p. 845; and as they become more 'intimate' (in room 101), O'Brien becomes more brutal: '...being polite can serve quite different functions, namely domination and deception [...] politeness can be ill-intentioned and aggressive –and as seen in O'Brien' manipulation of Winston can be aimed at enhancing power and control [...] politeness between Orwell's characters is not necessarily a sign of deference but a means to establish distance and maintain authority and power', p. 860. Another, much more positive reading of the dialogue between the two is developed by Homi K. Bhabha in 'Doublespeak and the Minority of One', in Gleason, Abbot et al, *On Nineteen Eighty Four, Orwell and our Future*, pp. 29-37. Bhabha argues that Winston's desire for recognition should be read within the context of 'the underlying conditions of social utterance or enunciation [...] It is the dialogical process that O'Brien so desperately wants to stamp out; it is the dialogical principle that Winston equally desperately will not relinquish,' p. 34.

[379] Patai considers this 'incredibly poor judgement of character', failing once again to take the dystopian context into consideration, p. 231.

[380] Patai, *The Orwell Mystique*, p. 234

other hand, Winston and Julia's counter-narrative presents an effort at a utopian rejection of complete sacrifice. By refusing to separate/denounce their relationship they are making the first and most basic dent in the fortress of Oceania's regime. By refusing to sacrifice their relationship, they are proposing affective relationships as the first act of resistance. All other sacrifices follow from this one and it is because O'Brien knows this that he later insists on its destruction. If they had renounced their feelings from the start and had found their sacrifice necessary, this would have been an indication of the degree of their alienation; yet such an easy renunciation would suggest they may have never been tempted to begin their affair in the first place. Furthermore, they would have never made a conscious choice to rebel against the regime and their 'trial' would have been unnecessary. Winston's betrayal of Julia and vice versa is not only significant because it is the only sacrifice he refused to make, it is significant because with it comes a final acceptance of his position in the sacrificial structure. As a victim, he is not allowed to either construct or maintain affective relationships so as to avoid not only retaliation but also the possibility of someone to mourn or remember him. As O'Brien reminds Winston: 'Nothing will remain of you; not a name in a register, not a memory in a living brain. You will be annihilated in the past as well as the future. You will never have existed' (266-7). Loving Big Brother is the only acceptable 'affective' relationship because 'he' is the ultimate beneficiary of sacrifice. Winston's and Julia's deaths would merely function as a gift to the perpetuation of the regime. All other relationships must be sacrificed.

The totalitarian dystopia therefore relies on the regular sacrifice not only of lives but also of basic human rights to ensure the existence of a static society 'founded upon hatred' (279). Its structure not only parallels that of the sacrificial process but is dependent on it. Once the sacrifice is stripped of its religious discourse it is exposed as an instrument in the establishment of an elite which regularly accrues benefits at the cost of lives and basic freedoms. The combination of a rigid social hierarchy whose existence depends on a sacrificial system, the benefits the sacrificial system bestows on the few and the resulting alienated relationships constitute the elements of the master narrative which is always attempting to force itself on the counter narrative. Winston's desire to write his own counter narrative is doomed to failure because he, like Julia and others in his designated position in the sacrificial structure, cannot see outside the framework. His memories of a time when there was meaning

in language and the nature of relationships were otherwise too few and faint to constitute an anchor in a non-alienated reality. If Julia is part of this counter-narrative, it is not merely as a romantic interlude[381] but as another anchor of potential authenticity in the perverse world of Oceania. Neither is her 'misogynistic' portrayal as determined as Patai presents it to be. In fact, on many occasions, Julia is shown to be less alienated than Winston, despite her lack of memories of a different world. This bestows upon her a utopian function unparalleled in the story's narrative and one of potential identification with readers.

Conclusion

Nineteen Eighty-Four can be considered the quintessential classical dystopia for its portrayal of fascist oppression, totalitarian regimes and its omniscient pessimism with regards to any escape or resistance. Its global –and not merely English –outlook across space and time make it a text which has been referred to, emulated, widely read and interpreted by critics and non-critics. Its influence on many forms of dystopian narrative since its publication includes the emphasis on linguistic manipulation, pervasive violence and hierarchical structures of power. In terms of popular culture, the term 'Orwellian' is understood as describing not only 'the worst dictatorships but [...] political lying, techno-jargon, public relations, electronic spying, and mass indoctrination –in short, everywhere language is used to obscure and falsify (or simply 'spin') what is actually happening'.[382] The warning it projects as a dystopian narrative is global in its vision and can be applied to the mechanisms of the global market and capitalist societies beyond European borders.

In terms of critical responses to the text, the consistent trend has been to enlist important biographical details from Orwell's personal experiences, political views and anti-war activism. Croft and Patai, amongst others, present a more sophisticated reading along these lines but still underrate the literary aspects of the narrative in order to read *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a political tract in relation to other dystopian novels written in the forties. However, despite their serious criticisms of the text's shortcomings, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* continues to

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[381] Patai, p. 239.

[382] At the same time, Morris Dickstein considers the adjective 'Orwellian' overused and applied 'promiscuously', p. 134. Morris Dickstein, *A Mirror in the Roadway: Literature and the Real World* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp 126-136.

elicit readings which continue to identify the warnings of the narrative in our present situation. As Lyotard concludes: 'It is commonplace to say that our situation [...] is not the one Orwell foresaw. But such a denial is hasty [...] we can see that the threats [...] are essentially akin to the threats described by Orwell'.[383]

My reading has been structured on the juxtaposition between the ideology of the master's narrative expressed by O'Brien and the 'Book', on the one hand, and the ideologically resistant counter narrative expressed by Winston and Julia, on the other. Each presents their own utopian ideal but whereas O'Brien's is based on a sacrificial logic, Winston's and Julia's reject complete sacrifice by refusing to denounce their relationship. Whereas the master's narrative utilizes sacrificial terms such as priests, martyrdom, power, death, and victim the counter-narrative foregrounds love as a non-negotiable reality which illustrates that they are not wholly alienated by the sacrificial structure of Oceania's regime. Consequently, the narrative's pessimism can be read as a response of the potential victims against the overwhelming forces of totalitarian violence they are subjected to. Sacrifice is used as an anti-utopian force because the master narrative depends on it to sustain its power. In order to perpetuate its power, a steady stream of victims supply the necessary 'gift'. The provision of human life in exchange for the maintenance of Oceania's world order is its lifeline, without which it risks instability and ultimately destruction. Perhaps it is because of this terrifying vision of a society so lacking in (utopian) hope and freedom that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* continues to be read and interpreted in ways that have made it a relevant text decade after decade since it was published in 1949. The answer to the question at the beginning of this chapter, whether *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is anti-utopian in outlook, is a qualified yes. It is anti-utopian because the potential victims are sacrificed in the end. At the same time, if the reader is moved to reject the anti-utopian sacrificial logic of the master narrative, then *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has succeeded in imbuing hope in the extra-textual world of response to the novel, and this is unqualifiably utopian.

[383] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained to Children*, p. 110.

Chapter Four

Feminist Dystopias: Katherine Burdekin's *Swastika Night* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

In the previous chapter, Julia's character disappears from the text of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* for almost a third of the book, only to reappear at the end without any apparent differentiation to Winston in terms of her sacrificial status. Yet, she is said to have succumbed to the duress of torture much sooner, and more easily than Winston and more importantly, to have apparently betrayed him more readily (271). The reader cannot be certain of how she was broken, only that it was equally absolute, despite her many great differences to Winston throughout the narrative. In spite of the lengthy discourse in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in relation to the prohibition on romantic love and desire, sexual pleasure and marriage there is nevertheless no differentiation with regards to gender of the effects of sacrifice on Julia. She is shown as a victim of equal standing with Winston, even though her contribution to the counter narrative is significantly different and crucial to the stand they both took against Big Brother and O'Brien. Nevertheless, the difference that gender makes in Oceania is ignored and subsumed under Winston's point of view as an all encompassing 'male neutral' viewpoint.[384]

Unlike *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *The Handmaid's Tale* sets women's viewpoints at the centre of the narrative and female voices are those which interpret the dystopian world they find themselves living in. But the novel can be called a feminist dystopia only in part because of women's viewpoints in the counter-narrative which opposes the master narrative expounded not only by most male voices but also many female characters. By placing women's sacrifice at the centre of a woman's narrative, however, *The Handmaid's Tale* accomplishes what *Nineteen Eighty-Four* omitted, that is, the exposition of the mechanics, effects and consequences of sacrifice on female subjectivity, agency and relationships. Moreover, the centrality of the role of sacrifice in the master narrative reveals not only the degree of totalitarianism in this dystopia but also the degree to which the counter narrative is feminist. The gendered character of the sacrifices taking place demonstrates the degree to which the

[384] Perhaps Winston needed to be seen as 'either Orwell's representative or as a symbol for Everyman' as James Connors argues, in "'Do it to Julia": Thoughts on Orwell's *1984*' *MFS*, Volume XVI, Number 4, Winter, 1970-1971, p. 465, pp. 463-474. As a result, the female point of view becomes irrelevant.

world of *The Handmaid's Tale* is a patriarchal totalitarian world and not 'male-neutral' totalitarian, as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* purports to be only by omission. Feminism and dystopia combine to create a narrative which exposes the workings of sacrifice in its gendered aspects and well as the complexity of the processes that render both men and women victims, albeit in disparate ways.

Situating Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*[385] within the tradition of the literary dystopia is not altogether straightforward. Moylan considers it as one of the last classical dystopias because of its 'overall structure and tone' but an 'ambiguous dystopia' because of its reluctant stance toward 'radical political engagement' which would guide the reader toward some utopian horizon.[386] What it shares with the classical dystopia is the portrayal of hierarchies in their most extreme and rigid form and the methods employed in the maintenance of these hierarchies and power inequalities. As such, it shares many common features with *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in portraying both how totalitarian power structures function and their alienating effects on human relationships and subjectivity. Atwood herself admits to an interest in 'totalitarian systems'[387] but she deliberately foregrounds the intersection of power and gender, an issue Orwell seemed neither aware of nor interested in.[388] At the same time, *The Handmaid's Tale* moves beyond the conventional features of the classical dystopia by foregrounding gender issues which the critical dystopias later in the nineteen eighties would soon develop. It is the feminist perspective which is both key and most controversial in various readings of this dystopia. The controversy concerning the novel's feminist credentials is one Atwood herself is aware of, but does not completely resolve when she states that:

> 'because I wanted to try a dystopia from the female point of view...this does not make *The Handmaid's Tale* a

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[385] Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (London: Virago, 1987, orig. 1985). All further page references to the novel will be included in the text as *The Handmaid's Tale.*

[386] Tom Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky,* p. 163. As a result, 'the counter-narrative becomes a tale of anti-utopian triumph, as the resistance is crushed and the Christian state prevails'. Still, *The Handmaid's Tale* is more consciously hopeful than Orwell's novel by placing narrative hints at the possibility of utopian moments of resistance against the authority of the master's narrative.

[387] Interview with Geoff Hancock, 'Tightrope – Walking Over Niagara Falls', in Earl Ge. Ingersoll, (eds.), *Conversations* (Princeton, New Jersey: Ontario Univ. Press, 1986), p. 216, pp. 191-220. orig. published in *Canadian Writers at Work* (Oxford Univ. Press)

[388] For a critique of Orwell's representation of women, see Deirde Beddoe, 'Hindrances and Help-Meets (sic): Women in the Writings of George Orwell', in Norris, (ed.), *Inside the Myth Orwell Views from the Left,* pp. 139-154 .

> 'feminist dystopia', except insofar as giving a woman a voice and an inner life will always be considered 'feminist' by those who think women ought not to have these things.[389]

For Atwood then, her novel may be termed a feminist dystopia only in the most basic sense, and insofar as the lowest common denominator applies. However, the text betrays a much more sophisticated and deep-rooted feminist stance in its counter-narrative, even despite the main female protagonist's ambivalence on many standard feminist issues, expressed by the many different female voices. Despite the frequent dissociation from feminism or utopianism in academic readings, *The Handmaid's Tale* is best approached under the common framework of feminism and utopianism because although it may be a critique of feminism it is a double-edged one which rejects binary oppositions, just as the narrator's double vision allows her to evaluate both the dystopian society she finds herself inhabiting which is a worse version than her own, problematic, late twentieth-century America.[390] The problem perhaps lies in the narrow definition applied by Atwood and others to feminist issues as well as the specific historical moment's response to the feminist movement.

The question of the novel's degree of feminist commitment, whether within the context of utopianism or not, continues to concern academic writing. Fiona Tolan's essay, published in 2005 argues that the novel's chief objections are against second wave feminism and the paradoxical satisfaction of feminist demands by some groups of the totalitarian society depicted in the novel. She argues that *The Handmaid's Tale* addresses the 'limiting and prescriptive nature of its [feminism's] utopian beginnings' which resulted in losses of

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[389] Margaret Atwood, '*The Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake* in Context' *PMLA, 19.3,* May 2004, p. 516, pp. 513-517. She also discusses the novel's status in relation to science fiction by explaining that that it is best termed 'speculative fiction' – of which the utopia and dystopia are branches of a large tree - because it explores potential changes in the organisation of societies, by showing their effects on their citizens, p. 515. But she has also called it a 'classic dystopia' mainly because of her indebtedness to Orwell's novel, p. 516. She rejects science fiction as a suitable category, which 'from its very genesis,...was a gender battleground', according to Eric Leif Davin, 'Partners in Wonder, The Birth of Science Fiction, 1926-1965' in *Feminist Futures* (Lanham, Boulder, NY and Oxford: Lexington Books, Roman and Littlefield, 2006), p. 235.

[390] Coral Ann Howells is one of the few who combines the two perspectives. Her reading focuses on Atwood's 'innovative use of dystopian paradigms and the ideological significance of her generic revisions' p. 131, see 'MA's Dystopian Visions: *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake*' pp. 161-175 in Coral Anne Howels, (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to MA* (Cambridge University Press, 2006). She is wrong, however to say that Atwood 'manages to twist the masculine genre of dystopia into a feminine romance plot by falling in love', since the romance plot is an essential ingredient of classical dystopias, p. 169.

intellectual freedom.[391] The reason Tolan sees common ground between the utopian vision of second wave feminism and totalitarianism is because of the apparent 'encroachment on individual liberties' that both discourses support. It is because she believes that *The Handmaid's Tale* supports this antifeminist view that 'the persistent *utopianism* of feminism perpetually endangers feminist liberalism (my emphasis).[392] For Shirley Newman it is the protagonist, Offred, who 'is a fictional product of 1970s feminism, and she finds herself in a situation that is a fictional realization of the backlash against women's rights that gathered force during the early 1980s'.[393] Yet, despite the fact that many reviewers called the novel a 'feminist *1984*'[394] *The Handmaid's Tale* is often read as foregrounding a common repressive tendency between 'feminist essentialists' and the traditional values of the religious right.[395] At the other end of the spectrum is the assertion that '*The Handmaid's Tale* is not a feminist text in the political, counter-hegemonic sense' and is furthermore complicit with some of the values it sets out to expose as oppressive.[396] Thus, the novel is seen to be blaming second wave feminism for a portion of the responsibility in provoking a backlash by the New Right 'whose values it at the same time is trying to critique'.[397]

This chapter will argue that *The Handmaid's Tale*'s achievement is to both continue and redefine the classic (totalitarian) dystopian tradition from a feminist perspective by focusing on gender in a way that had been completely ignored by most early writers of the classical dystopian tradition with the exception of Katherine Burdekin's *Swastika Night*

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[391] Fiona Tolan, 'Feminist Utopias and Questions of Liberty: Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* as critique of Second Wave Feminism', *Women: A Cultural Review*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2005, p. 18-19, pp. 18-30. Tolan decides that the novel is a 'critical dystopia' following Moylan's delineation, yet contradicting his own assessment, p. 20.

[392] Ibid., p. 21 and 25.

[393] p. 858, Shirley Neuman, 'Just a Backlash': Margaret Atwood, Feminism, and *The Handmaid's Tale*', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, vol. 75, no. 3, summer 2006, pp. 857-868. Newman's essay includes a long list of feminist readings of the novel (p. 858) as well as reviewers who did not find it a depiction of a plausible future (p. 865). Like *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the question of a dystopia' realisation is an important one.

[394] p. 83, Lois Feuer, 'The Calculus of Love and Nightmare: *The Handmaid's Tale* and the Dystopian Tradition' *Critique*, Winter 1997, vol. 38, no. 2. pp. 83-95, note 1.

[395] Ibid,, p. 88.

[396] Maria Lauret, *Liberating Literature, Feminist Fiction in America* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 176-177. Lauret considers Atwood's feminist politics 'confused', p. 177. But her real criticism concerns the novel's projection of the middle class white woman as *the* symbol of victimhood thus prioritising gender over racial oppression, p. 182.

[397] Ibid., p. 180

(published well before *Nineteen Eighty-Four*).[398] It will also examine the use of dystopian fiction's conventional dependence on a sacrificial structure and logic in order to foreground the common ground it shares with the classic dystopia rather that the critical dystopias it would later inspire. Beginning with *Swastika Night* where the results of women's oppression have resulted in their total subjugation and continuing with *The Handmaid's Tale* this chapter will focus on the function of sacrifice in relation to female subjects and determine to what degree the logic of sacrifice differentiates itself in relation to sexual difference. Using Marx's theory of alienated labour and continuing with Irigaray's reinterpretation of Marx on alienated women's labour, I will argue that the primary sacrifice women are forced to make is in relation to reproductive freedom and control over their bodies. As both prerequisite and consequent sacrifices reveal, the dependence on women's reproductive freedom is an organising principle in this dystopia. Both novels exhibit how the structure, logic and effects of sacrifice centred on the control of women's fertility determine the patriarchal nature of these dystopias. In both narratives however, the demand that sacrifices be made is essential to the maintenance of the totalitarian state.[399]

Katherine Burdekin's *Swastika Night*[400]

Katherine Burdekin's novel is set in a future where the Third Reich has established world domination for seven hundred years. However, in *Swastika Night*, women have been subjugated for so long that they are essentially voiceless and the narrators are two men in privileged positions within their own society, English and German. In the twenty sixth century, an Englishman, Alfred, travels to Germany on a pilgrimage to visit his friend, Hermann. In the course of discussing the history of 'Hitlerdom', the truth about Nazi Germany and Hitler's life is exposed via a secret book which Alfred, before he is murdered by the SS, passes on to his

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[398] All further page references to Katherine Burdekin's *Swastika Night* (London: Left Book Club, 1940, orig. 1937) will be included in the text as *SN*.

[399] Ibid., p. 86. To some degree, influence by Orwell's novel is inevitable on the basis of both novels focusing on totalitarian societies. Feuer discusses the many similarities but concludes that: 'differences in style...amount to differences in substance...the feminism of *The Handmaid's Tale* is more subtle and complex than an be indicated by merely noting the change in the protagonist's gender'.

[400] As an anti-fascist dystopia, there are many similarities to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* at the level of ideological critique. At the same time, *Swastika Night*'s awareness of how fascism affects women makes it a precursor of *The Handmaid's Tale* which in turn has many similarities in content and form with Orwell's novel, as Atwood herself admits. See footnote 6, in Feuer.

son. The bulk of the novel is a kind of 'future history' where the falsification of history is slowly revealed and exposes the fact that Hitler was not a god, as well as the reasons why Christians were marginalized, Jews exterminated, and women oppressed. In the course of their conversations, women's oppression is at the forefront because of the shortage of girls being born and the need to convince women to reproduce. But so long as women are kept in cages and reminded that they are little more than animals in the service of producing male offspring, they will never doubt the superiority of their male leaders. There is a clear correlation between 'hypotrophied masculinity on the one hand and its Reduction of Women on the other'.[401] The problem arises as a result of a shortage of girls born and the women are suddenly required to produce female babies.

Marx's theory of alienation and alienating labour is a useful term insofar as women's bodies become a commodity with an exchange value. In fact, Marx himself calls 'labour in which man alienates himself... a labour of self-sacrifice' because of its forced nature[402]. There are three levels of alienation at work for the worker: from the product of his labour, from himself and from his fellow man.[403] The discourse through which this alienation is effectively produced in the feminist dystopias here is that of religion. Women's alienation from the product of their labour (their children), from themselves and from other women is inextricably tied up with the sacrifice of their reproductive and sexual freedom. This lack of freedom constitutes women's labour as alienating in dystopias because their bodies are commodities which are valued in so far as they are fertile.

In order to indoctrinate women to the necessity of sacrificing their sexual and reproductive freedom both ritual practices and systematic propaganda are employed in both worlds. The first step in the control of access to information is to forbid women to read or write. This has already become an established fact in Hitlerdom for all women and lower class men (*SN*, 17). It follows that history also has been altered to suit the version of the male elite.

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[401] Daphne Patai, p. 97, 'Orwell's Despair, Burdekin's Hope: Gender and Power in Dystopia' in *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 7. No. 2. 1984, pp. 85-95. According to Daphne Patai Orwell was not aware of Burdekin's novel (who published under the pseudonym Constantine Murray) although there are many similarities between the two. Patai points out that Orwell condemns abuses of power without noting that 'these abuses are simply a further point along the male continuum of a sexually polarised society' (p. 93). See also the review by Robert Crossley, 'Dystopian Nights' in *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 14, 1987, pp. 93-98.

[402] Karl Marx, p. 111, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1970), trans. Martin Milligan, (ed.) Dirk J Struik, pp. 106-119.

[403] Struik, Introduction to Marx, pp. 46-47.

In *SN* a Hitler Bible, hymns to Hitler and to the Sacred Manhood and the belief in Hitler as God have all become a part of the official history which demands and justifies total female subordination (*SN*, 13). True to linguistic manipulation in dystopian fiction words take on a performative function so that after hundreds of years of being told that 'a woman has no soul and therefore can have no sorrow...her tears are a sham and a deceit' (*SN*, 11) the majority of men have come to accept this as true. In *SN*, the master and counter narrative are vocalized by Alfred and Hermann as a result of their friendship, whereas real women remain victims with no voice, freedom or history.

A strict hierarchy of course, is a defining feature of any totalitarian dystopia[404] yet women's place at the bottom is most evident in Burdekin's *Swastika Night* where after seven hundred years of subjection to the 'masculine principle' exemplified by 'Lord Hitler' women have stopped reproducing female babies. As the story is set in Germany where the demand for male children - particularly for the male elite, the Knights - has been a constant ideal, women who only produced female babies are considered only 'half a step higher...than the woman who bore no children at all' (*SN*, 140). The only group further down the hierarchy are the Christians who, like the proles in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, are left on the margins of society to act in relative freedom. Once the son is born, he is taken away at eighteen months while the girls are allowed to live with their mothers. In the year of the 'Lord Hitler' seven hundred and twenty, the imbalance between boys and girls is so great as to warrant 'endless secret conferences' (*SN*, 14) for the purpose of rectifying the situation. In Hitlerdom women are denigrated and despised both for their physical appearance and what is perceived as their natural inferiority.

> Women like these. Hairless, with naked shaven scalps, the wretched ill-balance of their feminine forms outlined by their tight bifurcated clothes - that horrible meek bowed way they had of walking and standing, heads low, stomach out, buttocks bulging behind - no grace, no beauty, no uprightness, all those were male qualities. If a woman dared stand like a man she would be beaten. (*SN*, 12).

[404] Raffaella Baccolini argues that on the basis of many similarities between Burdekin's and Orwell's novel, it is more likely that the former has established the conventions of the traditional literary dystopia rather then simply following in a tradition set forth by the latter, p. 19 in 'Gender and Genre in the Feminist Critical Dystopias of Katherine Burdekin, Margaret Atwood, and Octavia Butler' in Marleen Barr, (ed.), *Future Females, The Next Generation: New Voices in Feminist Science Fiction* (Boston: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000) pp. 13-34.

What is presented initially as a sacrifice of reproductive freedom is revealed also as a sacrifice of sexual desire or any pleasure. In Hitlerdom women live in separate 'Quarters' (*SN*, 8) away from men lest they 'contaminate' them with their presence. The lack of memory of any other time for women prevents them from becoming 'plaintiffs' demanding equal human rights and reduces them to voiceless 'victims' of the sacrificial structure they have endured for hundreds of years. Their ignorance of historical memory is so complete that 'they are denied any hope of subverting the system'.[405] Illiterate and ignorant, their only hope of liberation is via a male plaintiff.

Burdekin establishes 'an explicit correlation between the construction of a totalitarian regime and the degradation of the female race'[406] by reducing women solely to their reproductive function. Rather than attempt to stamp out all desire, as in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the only desire women are allowed in these dystopias is for constant reproduction. In Hitlerdom women are allowed to keep their daughters despite the constant suffering they endure for the removal of their infant sons (*SN*, 10). Accordingly, there is no such crime as rape in Hitlerdom since 'rape implies will and choice and a spirit of rejection on the part of women' (*SN*, 13). As a result of this self-hatred, women's inability to give birth to girls is ironically, the only subversive act they are capable of striking, albeit without full awareness, against the regime.

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

The Handmaid's Tale is divided into fifteen chapters and an appendix entitled 'Historical Notes' which is set in 2195, two hundred years after the events of these chapters and provides a short 'interpretation' by members of an academic conference. The chapters themselves have been ordered by one of these academics on the basis of thirty tapes found at a site in North

[405] Raffaella Baccolini, 'Journeying through the Dystopian Genre: Memory and Imagination in Burdekin, Orwell, Atwood and Piercy' in Raffaella Baccolini, Vita Fortunati, and Nadia Minerva, (eds.), *Viaggi in Utopia* (Ravenna: Longo, 1996), p. 348, pp. 343-357.
[406] Raffaella Baccolini, '"It's not in the Womb the Damage is Done": Memory, Desire and the Construction of Gender in Katharine Burdekin's *Swastika Night*' E. Siciliani, A. Cecere, V. Intonti, A. Sportelli, (eds.), *Le Trasformazioni del Narrare*, (Fasano de Brindisi: Scena, 1995), p. 296, pp. 293-309.

America.[407] The novel narrates the events before and after the Unites States have been taken over by a group of religious fundamentalists called 'Brothers of Jacobs' who decided to provide a 'solution' to the main social problems of their time, namely, the fall in birth rates due to a heavily polluted environment. The drop in white population growth is the overt reason for the creation of the Republic of Gilead in a very rural environment.[408] As there is also a rise in the number of sterile men (a word forbidden in the Republic) the remaining fertile women are called on to redress the balance. Since many of the women captured for this purpose already have families, it is clear that only the elite should be reproducing themselves. A heavily religious rhetoric is then employed to ensure the indoctrination of the Handmaids as to the importance and necessity of their role and they are closely monitored in case of any dissidence. Any women unable to procreate are assigned other 'useful' roles, or sent to the Colonies where their death is certain. The narrator, a woman in her mid-thirties who has already given birth to a daughter, is assigned to a high ranking Commander but because of the delay in her impregnation, she is encouraged to illicitly begin an affair with the household's chauffeur, Nick. Once she determines she is pregnant, Nick, who is in fact a dissident, plans her escape to a secret location. The narrative in present time is punctuated by many flashbacks which function as both critique and anchor in reality: 'Atwood's view that imagining the future is

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[407] David Ketterer, 'Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*: A Contextual Dystopia' in *Science Fiction Studies*, no. 16, vol. 2, p. 214-215, pp. 209-217. David Ketterer has coined the term 'contextual dystopia' to describe Atwood's novel because of the 'Historical Notes' that end the book. Ketterer sees the presentation of both a discontinuous past and future in the novel as a device which makes this dystopia even more fatalistic than the 'traditional dystopias' where time is linear and not cyclical. But he admits that a cyclical conception of history is not necessarily conservative since Atwood may in fact be further reiterating a feminist agenda via this technique. For a critique of Ketterer, and in particular for the way in which the term 'contextual dystopia' serves to discount 'the feminist thematics' of Atwood's novel (p. 31) see Patrick D. Murphy, 'Reducing the Dystopian Distance: Pseudo-Documentary Framing in Near-Future Fiction' in *Science Fiction Studies*, no. 17, pp. 25-40. Murphy suggests (p. 36) that Atwood's pseudo-documentary framing within the book - but not the narrative - reduces the distance between present and future (both sexist and male dominated) thus making its purpose as a dystopia more effective. The feminism of this novel is not limited to its content but also to its form.

[408] Lyman Tower Sargent, 'Eutopias and Dystopias of Science' in (eds.) Andrew Milner, Mathew Ryan, Robert Savage *Imagining the Future, Utopia, Dystopia* (Melbourne, Australia: Arena Publications, 2006), p. 373, pp. 357-374: 'Much of 20th century dystopianism is explicitly anti-science, beginning with one of the classic dystopias, *We*...This phenomenon reflects the ambivalence to technology and...the recurring American belief that the best life if the simple life in contact with nature'.

retrospective and archaeological in direction relies upon an ontological truth: that almost nothing exists except in memory'.[409]

The process of sacrifice begins during the pre-totalitarian period when women are the first to suffer a series of losses in the name of the new regime. Women lose their jobs and their bank accounts, and they are not allowed to own property (185-187). Violence is widespread and out of fear 'nobody wanted to be reported, for disloyalty' (189). When Offred and her family decide to escape to Canada, her husband must kill their cat so that the neighbours do not realize their departure: 'That's one of the things they do. They force you to kill, within yourself' (202). Violence accompanies the loss of basic freedoms and contributes to the self-alienation which becomes normative once the totalitarian regime is established.

In *The Handmaid's Tale* women who live in the Republic of Gilead have been divided into classes depending on their function/usefulness to the state. There are the Handmaids, who are the only remaining fertile women, the Aunts, who supervise the Handmaids and preach the official doctrine, the Marthas, who are housekeepers and Econowives, who are lower class, childless women. The female elite constitute the fifth group and are married to the men in power, the Commanders, but either they or their husbands are unable to reproduce. Women who have refused any of the above positions are exiled to nuclear waste dumps called Colonies and are called Unwomen making them the sixth official category. There are also the unofficial class of Jezebels, prostitutes whose existence only the elite know of. Jezebels are the only women allowed to wear make-up and dress up in clothes which are a parody of femininity.

As in many dystopias, language is formulated to both express and distort the new reality and the first step in this direction is the giving of new names to the Handmaids. The new names express their relation to the men they are meant to procreate for. For example, there is Ofwarren and Ofglen and the woman who narrates the story is called Offred[410] where the prefix 'of' denotes a simultaneous interchangeable identity of women on the one hand, and an identity dependent on the respective men on the other hand. Each private function is signified

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[409] Toby Widdicombe, p. 298, 'Margaret Atwood, Doughnut Holes and the Paradox of Imagining' in (ed.) Andrew Milner, Mathew Ryan, and Robert Savage, *Imagining the Future, Utopia and Dystopia* (Melbourne, Australia: Arena Publications, 2006), pp. 295-318.

[410] Jessie Givner discusses the difficulty of 'locating any one system of naming' in *The Handmaid's Tale* in '"Names, Faces and Signatures in Margaret Atwood's "*Cat's Eye*" and "*The Handmaid's Tale*"', pp. 58-59 in *Journal of Canadian Literature* no. 133, summer, 1992, pp. 56-78

in public by the colours the women wear and in the case of Handmaids 'everything is red, the colour of blood' (18) which defines them: 'Everything except the wings around my face are red...The skirt is ankle length, full, gathered to a flat yoke that extends over the breasts, the sleeves are full. The white wings too are prescribed issue; they are to keep us from seeing, but also from being seen' (18). But red is an ambivalent colour, standing both for life and death, birth and sacrifice. The symbolism is not accidental, since the Handmaids are those women closest to both liminal experiences and their passage from one condition to the other can be dramatic and life-threatening. When Ofwarren becomes pregnant, she requires special security because 'now that she's the carrier of life, she is closer to death' (36). Their bodies are 'objectified and described in terms of parts rather than as wholes'[411] and 'the animal references suggest the debased, denatured, dismembered human body as mere flesh'.[412] This kind of 'identification of Nature with Woman keeps surfacing as a metaphor all over Canadian literature' according to Atwood, albeit not necessarily within the same generic parameters.[413] What *The Handmaid's Tale* does is reveal the perversion of this identification and its alienating affects.

But the rigid structures of Gilead do not apply only to women. Men, too, are divided into categories within a strict hierarchy which is manifest not only in relation to their respective power, but specifically with regard to their access to women. Thus, the Commanders are entitled to Handmaids who will bear their children and the Angels, war heroes who qualify for wives eventually. As for the Guardians, who are the police force, the Eyes who are the secret service and the doctors there is no mention of their official rights over fertile women. Thus, the structure in *The Handmaid's Tale* is more totalising than in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as there is no part of the population untouched by the regime.[414]

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[411] p. 103, Roberta Rubenstein, 'Nature and Nurture in Dystopia, *The Handmaid's Tale*'in Kathryn Van Spanckeren and Jan Garden Castro, (eds.), *Margaret Atwood: Vision and Form* (Carbondale" Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), p. 101-112

[412] Ibidl., p. 107

[413] Margaret Atwood, *Survival, A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1966) p. 200.

[414] Amin Malak compares *The Handmaid's Tale* to Zamyatin's *We*, Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *NEF* to establish six common features within the classic, literary dystopian tradition: power, totalitarianism and war; Dream-nightmare: Fantasy: Reality; Binary Opposition; Characterization; Change and Time; Roman à thèse, pp. 10-11. 'Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale" and the Dystopian Tradition', *Canadian Literature*, no. 112, Spring 1987, pp. 9-16.

Despite the glorification of maternity, the social organisation in Gilead is most obviously patriarchal in its inception because of the use value women are subject to, while the main beneficiaries remain a few men at the top of the pyramid. The system of exchange and limited beneficiaries is part of a logic of sacrifice in which the potential victims sacrifice all their freedoms in exchange for their lives. Gayle Rubin asks, in 'The Traffic in Women': 'What then are these relationships by which a female becomes an oppressed woman?' Her answer is to develop a theory based on women 'as raw materials', which are then domesticated and fashioned as 'products'. In an argument which echoes Irigaray's, written almost a decade later, Rubin takes up Levi-Strauss's and Freud's theories of kinship to adapt them to a feminist interpretation of social organisation she calls the 'sex/gender system'.[415] This man-made system constructs relations whereby women are exchanged amongst men, but women are unable to benefit from their circulation. Women are constructed as 'gifts' which men dispose of and as such, have nothing to give away themselves. Far from being a biological fact, the foundation of women's oppression is an artificial edifice.[416] The form kinship systems and marriage take are 'always parts of total social systems, and are always tied to economic and political arrangements'.[417]

By restricting women's identity to their ability to procreate, their relation to their bodies becomes alienated. Women's bodies in Gilead are most clearly parallel to that of a labourer in relation to the ritual act of fornication performed for the purpose of conceiving. During the 'Ceremony', the Handmaid lies, half naked, on top of the Commander's wife while he does his 'duty' for the Republic. The scene is set so that there is no 'real' pleasure involved for any of the participants. While it is true that they have all 'signed up for' this ritual, (105) the particularly forced nature of the Handmaid's 'choice' is not without its long reaching effects: 'My arms are raised; she holds my hands, each of mine in hers. This is supposed to signify we are one flesh, one being. What it really means is that she is in control, of the process and thus of the product. If any' (104). And in the bath she thinks her 'nakedness is strange to

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[415] p. 158, Gayle Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex' in Rayna R. Reiter, (ed.), *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), pp. 157-210. Irigaray's theory of the commodification of women is in 'Women on the Market' in *This Sex Which is not One* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 170-191.
[416] Rubin, pp. 174-5.
[417] Ibid., p. 207.

me already. My body seems outdated...I avoid looking down at my body...because I don't want to see it. I don't want to look at something that determines me so completely (72-73). The self-alienation is a result of the use value her body provides for subjects other than herself, despite her 'consent'.

The enforced 'willingness' of the Handmaid is one of the necessary components of a sacrificial logic in which, in this case, victims must volunteer the sacrifice of their freedom in exchange for their lives. The desired fertility of women, which is constantly monitored, shapes gender inequality in Gilead which ironically generates its own 'sadistic drama of the female body dehumanized through social rituals and representations which inscribe it...as public property'.[418] The most public form of this 'willingness' is during public executions, or 'Salvagings', when the victims are given injections or pills 'so they won't make a fuss' (285) thus signalling the coercive nature of self-sacrifice.

When Offred begins to visit her Commander at night at his request, he eventually reveals the ideology of sacrifice at the centre of the Gilead's master narrative, pointing to a 'utopian' vision based on privileging the few:

> You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs...We thought we could do better...Better never means better for everyone...it always means worse, for some. (222)...We've given more than we've taken away. Think of the trouble they had before...This way they're protected, they can fulfil their biological destinies in peace (231).

What is exchanged in return for control of women's bodies is, in fact, too high a price to pay, as the effects of this sacrifice is on all affective relationships. Offred responds that 'they forgot about love' (231-2) and in particular romantic love. The 'some' the Commander refers to involves men in high positions who, like the beneficiaries of sacrificial rituals, depend on the sacrifice of freedoms, lives and relationships in order to uphold their power. Young, fertile nuns are forced to renounce their celibacy for the 'common good' (232), and Offred's friend, Moira, must choose between certain death in the Colonies or prostitution because of her escape from the Handmaids' centre. The fact that she is gay is irrelevant in Gilead, only her infertility is decisive in the use value she can have under the regime. Even Wives, whose authority does

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[418] Pamela Cooper, 'Sexual Surveillance and Medical Authority in Two Versions of *The Handmaid's Tale*', *Journal of Popular Culture* 28, no. 4 (1995), p. 56, pp. 49-66.

not extend beyond domestic space, may find themselves executed if they dare to threaten the Commanders' power. As for the men and women who are publicly executed, these include men accused of 'gender treachery' (53), cheating wives, political dissidents and men who may or may not be rapists. Most public ritual violence is centred around the betrayal of the founding myth in Gilead which pertains to the control of women's reproductive ability. Far from being a separate issue, women's control of their fertility is an important theme in feminist dystopias.[419] If the cornerstone of the feminist totalitarian dystopia is female sacrifice then the practice of sacrifice is anti-utopian because it buttresses the master's narrative.

The Marxist discourse of labour, commodity and exchange value is useful here for the elucidation of this effect of alienation. Because of the extremity of the dystopian context where any other decision for Offred have cost her life, the effects of this ritual are more alienating for her than the others. Her body in effect becomes a commodity with an exchange value; the difference here is that she is not the 'owner' of this commodity but instead the 'labourer' who must provide the 'goods' to those who will benefit directly from her services. The babies produced are immediately handed over to the Commanders' wives and after a period of breast feeding, the real mothers never see them again. This 'labour becomes an object with an external existence',[420] and Offred's body becomes a force she and other Handmaids must manipulate so that others may benefit. The Handmaids, having internalised the master's narrative, pray for 'semen, babies and self-denial' in order to 'be fulfilled' (240). The forced nature of this childbearing, at the price of their own lives, reinforces their self-alienation when using their reproductive abilities 'as a means to satisfy needs external'[421] to them, i.e. the supply of a genealogical line to the wives of the commanders who cannot conceive themselves. Since the punishment for failing to reproduce is shipment to the toxic wasteland, the loss of freedom is the price Handmaids must pay: 'Give me children or else I die' (71) is a phrase

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[419] Janet J. Montelaro argues that:'The dystopian future of the novel often distracts critical attention from reading this text as a commentary on contemporary feminist issues, specifically the precarious status of women's reproductive rights', 'Maternity and the Ideology of Sexual Difference in *The Handmaid's Tale*', *LIT*, Vol. 6, p. 233 and p. 247, respectively, pp. 233-256. Montelaro also sees the potential for revolution by the Handmaids but this is an overoptimistic evaluation of the degree of agency they display: 'Superficially, the Handmaid seems to become just another function of the circulation of women among men, but *The Handmaid's Tale* suggests that the commodification of women through institutionalised maternity has the potential to subvert paternalistic dominance'. p.244.

[420] Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, p. 108.

[421] Marx, p. 111

literally true when a woman has failed to produce a healthy child after attempting with three different Commanders.[422]

True to the dystopian context which negotiates its contradiction at the level of the master narrative, this is not perceived 'officially' as a loss of freedom but one gained in the form of 'protection'. As Aunt Lydia says: 'There is more than one kind of freedom...Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to...Now you are being given freedom from. Don't underrate it' (34). As part of the ideological discourse the Aunts work at indoctrinating, songs containing the word 'free' are banned in public and even lyrics that talk about love are considered 'dangerous', because they belong to 'outlawed sects' thus pointing to one of the most dangerous 'free' acts one could commit (64). If the State's ideological apparatuses 'promote class oppression and guarantee the conditions of exploitation and its reproduction'[423] then the enforced motherhood of Gilead constitutes the Handmaids as the most exploited class and thus the most alienated: 'the relationship between mind and body is stressed constantly so that fractured or disrupted psyches result in alienated bodies that become sinister enemies even to their inhabitants'.[424] Regular speeches are given in both narratives on the necessity of sacrifice and in the Republic of Gilead the Bible is read out with similar injunctions to obedience, in particular during the Prayvaganzas, arranged, group weddings:

> Let the woman learn in silence with *all* subjection...But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence...Notwithstanding she shall be saved by childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety. (original emphasis, *HT*, 233).

Offred may 'tune out through the speech about victory and sacrifice' (230) but as a result of the constant effort at indoctrination by Aunt Lydia on the 'honour' of childbearing (23, 123-124, 127), she too, begins to accept the inevitability of her situation. As in Hitlerdom, in Gilead the

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[422] Mark Evans, 'Versions of History: *The Handmaid's Tale* and its Dedicatees' in Colin Nicholson, (ed.), *Margaret Atwood: Writing and Subjectivity: New Critical Essays* (London: Macmillan and New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), pp. 177-188. Evans discusses historical precedents in seventeenth century Puritan New England, especially theological discourse for events and ideologies presented in novel, p. 184 for the 'Midwife stool' vs 'birthing stool, (135). See also Rosemary Sullivan for examples of the paper clippings Atwood collected during her research of real events, 'What if? Writing *The Handmaid's Tale*', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, vol. 75, no. 3 summer 2006, pp. 850-856.

[423] Althusser, p. 15

[424] Madeleine Davies, p. 58, 'Margaret Atwood's female bodies', in Howells (2001), pp. 58-71.

ideology of the master narrative is expounded by the Aunts in the hope of indoctrinating women who still possess memories of their past.[425]

But it is not only in relation to her own body or the process of procreation that Offred is alienated. As Marx stresses in his argument on estranged labour,[426] this alienation affects inter-personal relationships. Evidence of this abounds in totalitarian dystopias where there can be no friendships since there can be no trust. Any disclosures in Gilead between members of any group may be taken as treachery and often cost the lives of the parties involved. Since women's bodies are treated as reproductive machines and each woman judges another according to how well this 'machine' works they are in competition with each with respect to how 'well' her job is done. Thus, when Ofwarren utters the password of the underground resistance 'Mayday' to her new shopping companion she is issued a warning to 'clear your mind of such...Echoes' (296) since her previous companion paid for this involvement with her life. Even more distrust permeates the relationship of the Handmaids to the Wives since the latter resent them for their procreative abilities: When the 'Ceremony' is over, Offred is told to 'Get up and get out...there is loathing in her voice, as if the touch of my flesh sickens and contaminates her' (106). Because women are treated as commodities and not subjects in their own right, they cannot form trusting friendships. Luce Irigaray uses the same vocabulary of commodities in her essay 'This Sex Which is not One' where she discusses woman's desire in relation to motherhood and its exchange value:

> For woman is traditionally a use value for man, an exchange value among men; in other words, a commodity. As such, she remains the guardian of material substance whose price will be established, in terms of the standard of their work and of their need/desire, by subjects:...consumers. [427]

By 'subjects' Irigaray is referring to those whose needs/desires are satisfied, and in the context of dystopia the male elite's desire for power constitutes them as the only subjects. Because women are constituted as objects and not subjects, their relationships to other women are

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[425] Pamela Cooper, 'Sexual Surveillance and Medical Authority in Two Versions of The Handmaid's Tale', pp. 49-66, *Journal of Popular Culture* 28, no. 4 (1995), pp. 49-66.
[426] Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, p. 114
[427] Luce Irigaray, p. 31, *This Sex Which is not One*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985, 1972).

characterised by mistrust, rivalry and even hatred. Offred is constantly lamenting the fact that she cannot maintain her old friendship to Moira, nor bond with other women: 'It's hard to imagine now, having a friend (36)...Friendships were suspicious, we knew it, we avoided each other during mealtime lineups (81)...We aren't supposed to form friendships, loyalties, among one another' (295). Offred notes that there is no corresponding word for fraternize, and that the word 'sororize' does not exist (21). This is not merely a linguistic point. On the same page, Offred decides not to smile to another Handmaid because 'why tempt her to friendship?' thus indicating, by the use of the word 'tempt' the potentially subversive nature of female friendship in the context of a regime that promotes female rivalry through inequality.

Irigaray re-articulates Marx's theory of estranged labour and commodities within an economic, social and cultural order defined by the exchange of women and their exploitation within a ho(m)mo-sexual monopoly of male consumers. Ho(m)mo-sexuality is a process of 'social mediation' whereby patriarchal society functions in a mode of 'semblance'. This makes women an 'unknown infrastructure' that facilitates social and cultural life by virtue of their circulation and consumption. As a result, women suffer the alienation of commodities while men -as producers- are exempt as subjects.[428] As evidenced in the use of the word 'sterile' which cannot be used in relation to men, women are either 'fruitful' or 'barren', and the burden of producing offspring who will perpetuate one day the regime is solely laid on the Handmaids.

As for the value women's bodies possess, it is determined not by some properties but by an abstraction that constitutes the 'material support of that price'. In fact, their exchange value is not based on their identification as women but on some common feature which has use value for a third party. In this case, it is fertility which provides the utility of women in Gilead and it is mainly women who bear this value who are exchanged. Their self-alienation presents itself with imagery of dissolution and self reduction to a uterus: 'I am a cloud, congealed around a central object, the shape of a pear, which is hard and more real than I am' (84). As for the other categories of women, they too have become extracted to a common use value the teachers, the prostitutes, the Housewives and the Unwomen who die in toxic dumps.[429] The value that fertility is endowed with is what Irigaray calls 'plus-value' which is added to the

[428] Irigaray, *This Sex which is not One*, p. 171.
[429] Ibid., pp. 174-175.

body of the commodity.[430] When Aunt Lydia shows the Handmaids pornographic films from the eighties, she tells them that 'a thing is valued...only if it is rare and hard to get. We want you to be valued girls (123-124)...To be seen...is to be...penetrated, what you must be, girls, is impenetrable (39). The focus on visibility is an allusion to the many 'Eyes' of the regime which form the law enforcement category of men who support the Commanders' power structure. The hierarchical relation between 'rational' maleness and 'irrational' femaleness reinforces the superiority of the androcentrism as the foundation of society. Both in abstract (institutional) and concrete (individual) expression, the omniscience of authority of the clinical Eye becomes the 'literal embodiment of totalitarianism'.[431]

As a result, a woman/commodity is 'divided into two irreconcilable 'bodies': her natural body and her socially valued exchangeable body. Fertility has a social function which has been measured, controlled and utilized. It is only via this value that women can be exchanged and without which men are unable to 'establish relationships with each other'.[432] Thus the category of women makes the category of men possible. The most fertile women will belong to the most powerful men to be used as they may benefit. As the Commander tells Offred during one of their secret meetings:

> The main problem was with men...There was nothing left for them any more...There was nothing left for them to do...there was nothing left for them to do with women...the sex was too easy...There was nothing to work for, nothing to fight for...Inability to feel. Men were turning off on sex, even. They were turning off on marriage. (221-2).

As with sacrificial victims who assume the responsibility of a burden which is not their own, the Handmaids must remedy the social problems of their time, while at the same time, being excluded from the benefits. As Irigaray points out, 'their responsibility is to maintain the social order without intervening so as to change it.[433] The innocent are enforced to pay the price of the 'crimes' which were not of their own making, while those who cured will reap the rewards for their position in the sacrificial structure. For women, 'their non-access to

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[430] Ibid., p. 177.
[431] Cooper, 'Sexual Surveillance', p. 54.
[432] Irigaray., p. 183.
[433] Ibid,, p. 180.

the symbolic is what has established the social order'.[434] Without the women of Gilead acquiescing to their assigned roles, the regime would implode and thus friendship amongst women is potentially threatening.

As a result, Irigaray argues, women can 'no longer relate to each other except in terms of what they represent in man's desire and the 'forms' that this imposes upon them. That schism is experienced by women without any possible profit to them and without any way for them to transcend it. Most importantly, women cannot form friendships as commodities because of the endemic rivalry which characterises their position.[435] In an ongoing contradiction between the ideology of the master narrative and the reality of life for Handmaids, friendship amongst women is held up as an ideal of Gilead which one day will unite all women. As Aunt Lydia informs the Handmaids:

> You are a transitional generation...We know the sacrifices you are being expected to make...(127) For the generations that come after...it will be so much better. The women will live in harmony together, all in one family...There can be bonds of real affection...women united for a common end! Helping one another in their daily chores as they walk the path of life together, each performing her appointed task...(171-172)...What we're aiming for...is a spirit of camaraderie among women. We must all pull together...(234).

Yet, there is also resentment towards Handmaids in spite of their appointed task to save Gilead from dissolution. The Econowives scowl and spit on the sidewalk when they encounter them (54) and they are called 'spoiled' (99) for enjoying an 'easy' life while constant war rages beyond the borders. The Aunts are shown to take pleasure in this privileging of the maternal and are even more faithful to the new regime than many men. Irigaray calls this complicity a symptom of the privileging of the maternal over the feminine.[436]

The relationship between fertile and non-fertile women is the most fraught with difficulties. The Commanders' wives despise the Handmaids because of their dependency on their fertility and call them 'whores' (125) This kind of maternal economy is 'closed in upon the

[434] Ibid., pp. 188-189.
[435] Ibid., p. 176.
[436] Ibid., p. 31

jealous obsession of its valued product'.[437] Irigaray substitutes the terms so that it is female/feminine sacrifice that the whole system of patriarchal power is dependent on. In Gilead women's bodies become the site of production (of exploited relations) as well as their reproduction (of the means of exploitation). The wife of Offred's Commander doesn't speak to her, 'unless she can't avoid it. I am a reproach to her; a necessity' (23). But when she does speak, it is to remind her that 'this is a business transaction (25). No one is completely 'free' though there are degrees of slavery and it is the Wives who retain the power over all domestic matters.

Atwood's text makes a self-conscious connection between language, desire and power[438] by pointing out that it is the male elite who control 'the word' whereas apolitical women like herself 'squandered it' (88). Once in a totalitarian regime, the only voices which matter are of the male elite.[439] As a dystopian text then, Atwood's is not only more self-conscious of sexual difference then the earlier male authored dystopias. And it is this gendered linguistic manipulation that is ideologically useful for the purposes of Gilead in its aim of control over the maternal body despite the ostensible attempt to create a 'woman's culture'. Not only is there no female bonding in Gilead but one woman is pitted against another just as effectively as in Hitlerdom where women are equally compliant despite the denigration of motherhood. Unfortunately, the degree of knowledge expressed by various Handmaids does form a very successful precondition for action or resistance. The political inertia of women in the context of 1980s rhetoric expounded by the religious right in America and in particular the debate over reproductive rights is expressed in *The Handmaid's Tale,* without offering an obvious solution. Yet, 'Gilead is a society in which the contradictions are more pervasive and closer to the surface than in many of the dystopian accounts of authoritarian states'.[440] As a result, the reader may draw his/her own conclusions on how it was eventually dissolved and what forces helped to destroy the totalitarian structures of the regime. Perhaps the

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[437] Ibid., p. 30

[438] Harriet F. Bergmann sees this connection as a textual hint towards 'a right reading' of the novel, p. 850, '"Teaching Them to Read"; A Fishing Expedition in *The Handmaid's Tale*', in *College English*, vol. 51, no. 8, pp. 847-54, 1989.

[439] p. 51, Margaret Atwood: 'The aim of absolute power is to silence the voice, to abolish the words, so that the only voices and words left are those of the ones in power', quoted in Pilar Somacarrera, 'Power Politics: Power and Identity', pp. 43-57 in Coral Ann Howels, (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[440] Moylan, *Scraps*, p. 164.

foregrounding of these contradictions provides in itself a utopian, extra-textual response to readers by presenting the problems in both the pre- and post – Gileadian world and ending with an ambiguous exit by Offred who steps 'into the darkness within, or else the light' (307).

Though it is not known how The Republic of Gilead was overturned, Hitlerdom we are told will topple because of women's refusal to bear children. The main text is followed by the post-script 'Historical Notes' set two hundred years after the narrative. It provides a kind of 'metahistory' of patriarchy in which[441] Offred is the historian who provides a 'herstory' version of the female victims of Gilead.[442] Despite the fact that the content of the main story is a chronicle of Offred's and other women's victimisation, the fact that she has recreated her story testifies to her escape and subsequent effort to give voice where it had previously been denied. The text itself is an expression of what Atwood characterises the move to the fourth position in her chart of basic victim positions, i.e., by writing of her victimisation Offred is occupying the position of creative non-victim.[443] It offers thus a ray of hope within what is presented as a hopeless situation. It is a moment of 'concrete utopia' amidst a dystopian continuum since the commentators are still more interested in the lives of the men and women in power and find it important to not 'judge' (314) their actions while at the same time not realising that they are passing judgement on Offred's story for not providing them with the kind of information they are interested in (323).

In conclusion, *The Handmaid's Tale* presents a world based on a sacrificial structure which alienates women from a sense of bodily integrity and from other women and imposes a kind of structure which precludes, like other totalitarian dystopias, the formation of affective relationships. When Offred says 'It's lack of love we die from. There's nobody here I can love, all the people I could love are dead or elsewhere (113) she is signalling her position as a sacrificial victim who is socially alienated and must exchange all freedoms for the security of a

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[441] Arnold E. Davidson, 'Future Tense, Making History in *The Handmaid's Tale*', in Kathryn Van Spanckeren and Jan Garden Castro, (eds.), *Margaret Atwood: Vision and Form* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988) pp. 113-121. 'What Atwood has written is not just a history of patriarchy but a metahistory, an analysis of how patriarchal imperatives are encoded within the various intellectual methods we bring to bear on history', p. 20.

[442] Coral Ann Howells, 'Writing by Women' in Eva-Marie Kroller, (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature* (Cambridge: University Press, 2004), p. 205, pp. 194-215. Offred's 'storytelling is her most transgressive survival tactic, and her voice survives...making Offred the most important historian of the republic', p. 205.

[443] p. 36-9, Margaret Atwood, *Survival*, pp. 29-43.

slave. The complicity of the potential victim who must find strategies to remain alive will be the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter Five: Octavia Butler's *Kindred* and Ursule Molinaro's *The New Moon with the Old Moon in Her Arms*

In both *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *The Handmaid's Tale*, slavery as a metaphor and reality is employed to illustrate important aspects of these dystopian worlds. For example, in Oceania, a children's history textbook states that before the Revolution 'the capitalists owned everything in the world, and everyone else was their slave' (76) but the new regime is equally dependent on slave labour: 'slave populations are needed for continual warfare' (196), the other super-states maintain 'coloured slaves' (204), and the world pre-Oceania used 'war prisoners as slaves' (213). Finally, O'Brien informs Winston of the hopelessness of resistance by stating, 'perhaps you have returned to your old idea that the proletarians or the slaves will arise and overthrow us. Put it out of your mind. They are helpless, like the animals' (282). In Gilead, the resistance operates the 'Underground Femaleroad' for escapees on their way to Canada, in direct reference to the African-American slaves who escaped to the northern states (258). The unofficial category of the prostitute is named after the Biblical character 'Jezebel', a well-known carnal image of women slaves.[444] On the formal level, *The Handmaid's Tale* 'borrows' conventions from the classic slave narrative.[445] Women are treated as property and separated from their spouses and children while their 'masters' enjoy sexual freedoms prohibited to their spouses. At the same time, these worlds are often represented as quasi-slave societies in order to provide not only the content but also often a stylistic framework within which to develop the themes of oppression, freedom, and liberation.[446] Slavery is, in fact, an example of concrete

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[444]. Deborah Gray White argues this image was useful as a counter-image of the asexual and religious mother figure, the mammy and explains the ideological importance of the Jezebel/Mammy figures, in *Ain't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: Norton, 1985), pp. 27-29, p. 46.

[445]For a positive reaction to Atwood's use of slave narrative conventions see Heidi Slettedahl Macpherson, *Women's Movement: Escape as Transgression in North American Feminist Fiction* (Amesterdam: Rodopi, 2000), pp. 179-191. For a negative response, see Lauret, Liberating Literature, pp. 176-183. Lauret's accusation of Atwood's 'disingenuousness' is misguided in my opinion as there cannot be a patent on generic conventions. For genre 'blurring' as oppositional, see Baccolini, 'Gender and Genre'. Among borrowed elements from slave narratives, the practice of re-naming and other rituals of indoctrination, especially for new 'slaves', is illustrated in *The Handmaid's Tale* when Handmaids are so named after the master of the household. On rituals of indoctrination, see Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge, Ma. and London: Harvard University Press, 1982).

[446] In Angela Carter's The Passion of New Eve, there is a micro-slave society where the female (though previously male) protagonist/narrator is captured by its tyrant, Zero, and becomes a member of his harem where she is repeatedly raped and forbidden to speak. In Ursule Le

dystopia from which authors extrapolate in order to create their fictional worlds which embody both warning and critique. For Butler, as with Orwell and Atwood, slavery exists in a space-time continuum where reality and fiction meet to produce dystopian narratives based on a sacrificial structure, logic and scapegoating to perpetuate the power of the status quo. But facets of slavery (both literal and literary) remain unexamined in scholarly work on dystopias due to the study of slavery –in the main –as a historical phenomenon or within the fictional borders of historical novels and, more recently, neo-slave narratives.[447] In fact, the depiction of slavery as a kind of totalitarian society renders the narrative dystopian by its very presence. Because slavery is depicted as an element of future totalitarianism in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the *Handmaid's Tale*, these novels problematize its status as a system of oppression and exploitation located exclusively in the past.[448]

While retaining many of the conventions of the early slave narratives, certain neo-slave narratives develop issues and themes common to those of the twentieth century 'totalitarian' type dystopian novel. As a result of the African-American slave experience, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have seen the production of a plethora of autobiographical texts that provide a unique insight into the institution of slavery. These texts in turn have inspired the creation of the twentieth century neo-slave narrative and provided, according to the editors of *The Slave's Narrative*, the determining influence for what is now an African American literary tradition.[449]

As a system of domination, there are many content and function based similarities between slavery and the totalitarian worlds depicted in classical dystopian narratives. One of the most important common points, especially from a woman narrator's point of view, is the victimization of women in a sacrificial system which impacts them in ways that male characters are free from. The lack of freedom itself is the most obvious theme but the many

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Guin's *Four Ways to Forgiveness* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), slaves are an integral part of the community.

[447] One notable example is Jewell Parker Rhodes, 'Toni Morrison's Beloved: Ironies of a "Sweet Home Utopia" in a Dystopian Slave Society', *Utopian Studies*, 1.1, 1990, pp. 72-92. See also Baccolini, 'Gender and Genre', 13-24.

[448] On the relationship between dystopian fiction and modern history, see Keith M. Booker. The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature: Fiction as Social Criticism (Wesport: Greenwood, 1994). For a useful review, see Peter Fitting 'Impulse or Genre or Neither?' Science Fiction Studies 22.2, 1995, pp. 272-181.

[449] Charles Davis and Henry Louis Gates, *The Slave's Narrative* (New York: Oxford UP, 1985), p. xxxiii.

other similarities are used to underline one of the central purposes of dystopian fiction, which is to critique and warn; in this case, of the persistence of the effects of slavery in the present as well as the prevalence of modern slavery itself, despite the obvious discrepancy between the time/space parameters of each.[450] As a Neo-Slave narrative, Octavia Butler's *Kindred* foregrounds these similarities by using the time travel motif common in science fiction novels in order to highlight the spatial-temporal common ground between slavery as historical fact and fictional representation. This chapter will begin with a discussion of the generic conventions in Harriet Jacobs' classical slave narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) and continue with Butler's Neo-Slave narrative/dystopia, *Kindred* (1979) in order to show how these fictional conventions and themes manifest themselves in a dystopian narrative. It will then proceed with a reading of *Kindred* which focuses on the time-travel aspects of the novel in order to foreground the effects of the traumatic experience of slavery on the subjectivity of its protagonist. In particular, the trauma of the violence of slavery will focus on its women victims and its effects on the mother- daughter relationship. The trajectory of the protagonist's memory is inextricably tied up with the trope of time travel and the use of the dystopian narrative ideally supplies the context within which both personal memory and official history converge to create a new, inclusive of temporality, sense of self for the protagonist.

Slavery has been documented in history as an institution that has constituted an integral part of most societies' economic and cultural make-up. In fact, Orlando Patterson argues in *Slavery and Social Death* that there has never been a society that has not practised slavery to some degree.[451] On the other hand, dystopian fiction belongs to the realm of the 'fantastic' and 'speculative', i.e., describing events that typically, have not taken place, indeed may never take place. Across space and time then, the reality of slavery, on the one hand, and the dream of a better future, on the other, provide one framework for a cultural common denominator.

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[450] Lisa A. Long. 'A Relative Pain: The Rape of History in Octavia Butler's *Kindred* and Phyllis Alesia Perry's *Stigmata*', *College English*, vol. 64, no. 4, March, 2002, pp. 459-483, p. 465: 'historical "rapes" are not isolated incidents of sexual imagery, but are indelibly linked to contemporary examinations of the violence inherent in American heterosexuality and race [...] slavery may have ended, but the sexual exploitation of African American women has not.

[451] Orlando Patterson, *Slavery*, p. vii.

Though the many different themes are developed in classic and neo-slave narratives as well as dystopian narratives, one common thread that unites them is the preoccupation with obtaining freedom. I will draw common parameters between the fictional account of the institution of slavery – its constitutive elements, its function and effects - and dystopian fiction, a particularly twentieth century phenomenon (with ancient, however, antecedents). As a result, both the terms of slavery and dystopia will expand to include a plethora of cultural manifestations which will reveal the outlines of a 'dystopian continuum' that: a) is one that spans the time/space axis, b) links fact and fiction in a non-representational mode and c) expands the generic category of dystopian fiction while re-framing the historical novel of the Afro-American slave experience in terms of a utopian impulse, a process of hope and resistance to oppression.

Yet, defining slavery is not an altogether uncomplicated issue. For Orlando Patterson, to define slavery as a relation of domination –a relation defined by inequality, violence, and lack of freedom rather than a relation defined by property, makes a crucial difference. The former definition is for Patterson more fitting than the latter because it can be accurately applied to the institution of slavery irrespective of its particular existence in time and place. But just as significant is the fact that it is drawn from the point of view of the slaves themselves and the effects on *their* condition rather than being an expression of their masters' point of view.[452] It is the relative power between the parties concerned that differentiates the slave-master relationship from any other since the slave master's power over the slave's life is total. Furthermore, unlike people exploited in other types of labour relations 'only slaves entered into the relationship as a substitute for death'.[453] The constant threat of violence, then, and the ultimate powerlessness of the slave barring the power to choose suicide –is a definition both

[452] See pp. 20-27, 334. In *Slavery and Social Death* Patterson argues for a third crucial difference between slaves and non-slaves who are nonetheless saleable against their will: 'Alienation from all ties of natality', p. 26. For his argument against the definition of slavery as property, see p. 1. For other definitions of slavery, see Peter Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), who focuses on the notion of property, p. 1; D.B. Davis, who compares various societies' definitions, pp. 47-49; M.I. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (London: Chatto, 1980) for his distinctions, pp. 67-68; and Kevin Bales, *Disposable People: New Slavery in the New Economy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) for a modern definition set by international conventions, pp. 275-278.

[453] Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, p. 26.

narrow and flexible enough to accommodate past as well as present manifestations of slavery. Finally, this definition is supported by the evidence in the narratives of the slaves themselves.

In its classic form, the slave narrative achieves its effects on the reader as a form of autobiography with well-defined formal conventions as well as thematic ones. But as the essays in Sekora and Turner's *The Art of the Slave Narrative* illustrate,[454] it also utilises conventions distinct from other autobiographical narratives that overlap with those of dystopian narratives. From a formal point of view, the most obvious similarity of the slave narrative with that of the dystopian is the focus on the subjective point of view of the narrator with whom the reader can identify and sympathize.[455] As with all autobiographies, first person narration is a necessary means of expressing the immediacy of experience as well as its authenticity. But in the case of the slave narrative, the emphasis on first person point of view serves an additional purpose, that of critique and education. It is with these two functions that the slave narrative shares a common purpose with dystopian fiction.

But how do these functions manifest themselves in both slave narratives and dystopias *vis-à-vis* the institution of slavery? There are two important common points of reference here. Slave narratives were written 'to persuade the reader of [slavery's] evils',[456] and were thus used as one of the vehicles the abolitionist movement enlisted to convince its audience of the need to end the institution of slavery. These narratives share a commitment to social critique that the dystopian text, as with all utopian fiction, practises implicitly if not explicitly. In *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,* for example, Jacobs states from the beginning:

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[454] For discussions on other aspects of the generic conventions as well as innovations of the slave narrative, see the essays in John Sekora and Darwin T. Turner, (eds.), *The Art of the Slave Narrative, Original Essays in Criticism and Theory* (Macomb: Western Illinois UP, 1982), esp. Raymond Hedin, 'Strategies of Form in the American Slave Narrative', pp. 25-35; Martha K. Cobb, 'The Slave Narrative and the Black Literary Tradition', pp. 36-44; Annette Niemtzow, 'The Problematic Self in Autobiography: The Example of the Slave Narrative', pp. 96-109; and Lillie Butler Jugurtha, 'Point of View in the African-American Slave Narratives: A Study of Narratives by Douglass and Pennington', pp. 110-119.

[455] In his study of four novels, Ashraf H. Rushdy adds that: 'the author undermines the coherent subject of narration by developing a series of other voices which sometimes supplement and sometimes subvert the voices of the "original" narrator [...] the narrating subject is not an autonomous individual but part of a communal, collective whole', *New-Slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of A Literary Form* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 231.

[456] Yuval Taylor lists five distinct functions of the slave narrative: to 'impart religious inspiration; to affirm the narrator's personhood; to redefine what it means to be black; to earn money; and [...] to delight or fascinate the reader,' p. xvii; see 'Introduction' in I was Born a Slave: An Anthology of Classic Slave Narratives, Vol. 1, 1772-1849 (Edinburgh: Payback, 1999), p. xvii.

> But I do earnestly desire to arouse the women of the North to a realising sense of the condition of two millions [sic] of women of the south, still in bondage, suffering what I suffered, and most of them far worse. I want to add my testimony to that of abler pens to convince the people of the Free states what Slavery really is (6).

Since social critique is not a convention of historical/autobiographical novels as such, nor of science fiction in general, in this instance two completely different genres meet at the point of extra-textual function, i.e., in the author's desire to educate the reader and warn of certain evils inherent in particular institutions. The dystopian novel contributes to a further understanding of slavery despite its conventional placement in a future time and place in documenting the conditions of slavery[457] thus performing the education of perception that is also characteristic of utopian fiction in general. Thematically, all slave narratives describe the violence inflicted on slaves and the ritual debasement they are subjected to throughout their lives, acts officially justified as a form of punishment ideologically supported by religious rhetoric in favour of the institution of slavery. But slave narratives describe these events not merely to shock but also to reveal both the double standards and hypocrisy practised by the slave masters as well as their cruelty.[458] The violence of slavery is crucially extended to the forced separation of families, where children are sold away from their mothers, and to the surreptitious rape of slave women by their masters. The constant threat to slave women of being forced to bear children by their masters and the subsequent threat of being separated from their offspring through their sale is the dominant fear expressed in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl.* As Jacobs poignantly laments: 'Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women, superadded to the burden common to all they have wrongs and sufferings and mortifications peculiarly their own' (119). The educational force of slave narratives by women thus extends beyond the documentation of injustices to expose the gendered nature of oppression produced by the institution of slavery.[459]

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[457] Taylor, p. xvii.

[458] For a comprehensive list of slave narrative conventions, see James Olney, '"I was born": Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature' in Davis and Gates, *The Slave's Narrative*, pp. 148-75.

[459] This is not to say that male authored texts ignore the condition of women, merely that the focus of their text is more 'male neutral' and less preoccupied with choices concerning sexuality and reproduction. See Frederick Douglass's autobiography. For 'solutions' to the 'problem' of motherhood in utopias, see Susan H. Lees, 'Motherhood in Feminist Utopias', in

The roles that women were assigned in slavery thus adhere to strict sexual functions that benefited the masters without regard for the women's own desires. Within these limited parameters, each woman may or may not practise a kind of precarious 'freedom' within which to negotiate for her desires, but without, however, the threat of violence ever receding from view. As a form of resistance, for example, Jacobs 'chooses' to become the mistress of another white man rather than the mistress of her master for the purpose of avoiding his absolute power over her and her children (85) and justifies this 'choice' on the corrupting influence of slavery on one's morals (86). Despite the differences in time, women's vulnerability towards sexual slavery expresses itself in both genres as a danger inherent in the condition of womanhood in patriarchal institutions that must be fought and guarded against for themselves as well as for their daughters. The focus in traditional and neo-slave narratives is on the vertical separation of women from their ancestors and descendents that functions as an anti-utopian force which prevents women from fighting their masters' power.

The forced separation of women from their children as well as other family members corresponds to what Patterson has termed 'natal alienation,' i.e., 'the loss of ties of birth in both ascending and descending generations'.[460] This does not mean, however, that there were no social ties, but rather that they were neither legally nor morally binding. As Jacobs expresses: 'Always I was in dread that by some accident, or some contrivance, slavery would succeed in snatching my children from me' (277) and 'my mistress, like many other, seemed to think that slaves had no right to one's family ties of their own' (59). This regime placed slave women in the unique position of involuntary complicity since they were unlikely to attempt to escape without their children and any attempt to do so was more likely to fail. More often than not, as shown in these texts, women complied with their fate. However, this 'ethic of compromise' completely eradicated the desire for freedom.[461] As a result of this constant threat of separation, women chose, unsurprisingly, to avoid attempts at escape in return for the possibility of retaining familial relationships, however precarious they were. In dystopias as much as in slave narratives, this belief that change is futile leads many to accept the given reality and their place within it though unsurprisingly, in both it is the narrator who resists such

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Ruby Rohrlich and Elaine Hoffman Baruch, (eds.), *Women in Search of Utopia: Mavericks and Mythmakers* (New York: Schocken, 1984), pp. 219-32.

[460] Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, p. 7.

[461] For more on this 'ethic of compromise' see Baccolini, 'Gender and Genre', p. 32.

complacency and refuses the displacement of desire and the loss of hope. In both, the narrating protagonist resists their subjection as a sacrificial scapegoat and searches for paths away from alienation towards freedom and integrity.

In slave plantations, as in feminist dystopias, women's bodies become the site of production of exploited relations as well as their reproduction (of the means of exploitation). A woman's body, in effect, becomes a commodity with an exchange value as the woman is not the 'owner' of this commodity but instead the 'labourer' who must provide the 'goods' to those who will benefit directly from her 'services'. Like the Handmaids, the commodification of women's bodies renders women doubly alienated and perverts relations to others, both on a horizontal and a vertical scale. Yet because of this over-emphasis on reproduction, female desire takes second place to maternity, since it is the latter that will determine a woman's 'value' and the 'quality' of her life: 'Whatever slavery might do to me, it could not shackle my children. If I feel a sacrifice, my little ones were saved' (Jacobs, 166). Because of this double exploitation (as slave and woman) in Jacob's story, the narrator chooses to become the mistress of another white man rather than her master, for the purpose of avoiding his absolute power over them. Indeed, until she escapes to freedom, she can never be certain of her children belonging to her alone and this justifies her continual efforts to outsmart her master: 'For, according to Southern laws, a slave, *being* property, could *hold* no property [...] Still, looking back calmly on the events of my life, I feel that a slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standards as others' (13, 86, emphasis original). Jacobs makes the point repeatedly that it is not her plight alone that her children and her own body do not belong to her, but a reality for all slave women. Indeed, it constitutes a woman *as* slave. The similarities to the subjection of the Handmaids to patriarchal violence are striking and add an extra quality to maternal alienation: that of woman *as* slave.

Kindred as Dystopia and Neo-Slave Narrative

In *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature* under the entry for 'Neo-Slave Narrative', Ashraf H. Rushdy maintains that despite variations within the genre, what unifies these works is that 'they represent slavery as a historical phenomenon that has lasting

cultural meaning and enduring social consequences'.[462] Slavery in these texts is not seen solely as a historical event but as a living present, influencing the consciousness of every individual within the community, often in a destructive manner. In the category *Kindred* belongs to, 'the palimpsest narrative',[463] slavery is depicted as having an ongoing effect in the present for current relations between the descendants of masters and their slaves. Implicit in this definition is a relationship between history and fiction which translates real past events into fictional narratives which, in turn, place historical events in a fictional context that emphasises the interpretation of these events from a present perspective.[464] What complicates *Kindred* as a narrative is the use of personal memory and the immediacy of the protagonist's experiences of the past. The use of time travel brings historical events into the present, whereas the present is an unknown future subject to change. But Butler further complicates matters when she states that in the novel, 'there's absolutely no science involved, not even time travel'.[465] This repudiation of time-travel in a novel that blurs the boundaries between science fiction and neo-slave narrative conventions points to a self-reflexivity and ambiguity characteristic of critical dystopias.[466] At the same time, taken from protagonist's point of view, it signals another, more personal and subjective understanding of time through memory. Atwood has stated that 'any time you are remembering, it is in the present; it is what is happening to you at the present time' and that past and present are not wholly isolable from each other.[467] One of the prisms through which memory is experienced most intensely as a present reality is through the violence of trauma. Seen from this perspective, *Kindred* is a story of an African American woman's effort to overcome past collective trauma through the experience of personal trauma and vice versa. What is at stake in this palimpsest narrative is the psychic integrity of the protagonist in her journey through her ancestors' experience of victimization and survival.

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[462] Rushdy, in William L. Andrews, Francis Smith Forster, and Trudier Harris, (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature* (New York: Oxford UP, 1997), pp. 533-535.

[463] Ibid., p. 535.

464 Richard King. 'The Discipline of Fact/The Freedom of Fiction?' *Journal of American Studies*, vol. 25, no. 2, August, 1991, pp. 171-188. 'Some contexts ask that the resemblances between history and fiction be emphasized; others demand that their differences be stressed. It all depends on what one wants to do', p. 180.

465 Randall Keenan, 'An Interview with Octavia E. Butler' *Callaloo*, vol. 14 no. 2 1991, pp. 495-504, p. 496. Cited in Baccolini, 'Gender and Genre', p. 27.

[466] Moylan, p. 199. However, within the confines of a critical dystopia, slavery remains a type of concrete dystopia from which a totalitarian type of dystopian narrative is represented.

[467] p. 52, Interview in Christopher Bigsby, (ed.), *Writers in Conversation* (University of East Anglia, Norwich: EAS Publishing, 2000).

Thus, 'the past should be, even must be, retained and manipulated in order to formulate a cohesive identity in the present.'[468]

Set in the California of the 1970s, Dana realises that 'the comfort and security' (9) she has experienced all her life is dependent on her ignorance of the effect of slavery on her present life. The judgements this ignorance leads to are challenged when she is forced to relive, literally, the experience of slavery first-hand in order to understand its ongoing legacy. Dana discovers she is being transported from 1976 Los Angeles to an early nineteenth century Maryland plantation every time her ancestor Rufus (her great-grandmother's father as well as son of the plantation owner) finds himself in life threatening danger. In her efforts to save him, and herself, she discovers first hand the constraints that determined the choices slave women were forced to make in order to survive, and, as a result, she reaches an understanding of her own responsibility in the legacy of this past and a new understanding of her identity in the present. Every time Dana returns to her present life, she is physically and psychically scarred as every return marks another stage in the level of comprehension of the events that marked the lives of her ancestors, quite unlike the media representations she has become accustomed to.[469] From the outset, it is clear that the weight of history becomes heavier, not lighter, as one tries to forget its reality.[470] The novel is a recording of the process of both recalling the traumatic memories of her past and of the effort to make sense of them in the specificity of her own life. The mythical, allegorical motifs which the chapter titles allude to constitute an additional feature in the novel's engagement with the temporal quality of slavery[471] and the narrative ends at the same point it begins, with Dana in the aftermath of her traumatic experience in the form of a circular narrative.

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[468] Sarah Eden Schiff, 'Recovering (from) the Double: Fiction as Historical Revision in Octavia E. Butler's Kindred', *Arizona Quarterly*, Vol. 65, no. 1, Spring 2009, pp. 107-136, p. 118.

[469] Lisa Yaszek, '"A Grim Fantasy": Remaking American History in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 28, no. 4, 2003, pp. 1053-1066. Butler uses the science fiction device of time travel to problematize the production of historical memory, especially in its commercialised form, pp. 1058-1059.

[470] Lisa A. Long, 'A Relative Pain', p. 473.

[471] Jim Miller, 'Post-Apocalyptic Hoping: Octavia Butler's Dystopian/Utopian Vision, *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 25, 1998, pp. 336-360: 'Butler's places her novel within the tradition of feminist utopian writing [...] .in order to challenge not only patriarchal myths, but also capitalist myths, racist myths and feminist utopian myths', p. 337.

The chapters entitled 'The River', 'The Fall', 'The Fight', 'The Storm', 'The Rope'[472] describe the events where Dana's great-great grandfather Rufus, is in danger of dying, that is, events which are traumatic in his own life's trajectory. Framed by the master's narrative, Dana is a secondary character whose timely appearance is merely to ensure Rufus's existence. It also signals the outline of official history, of those events that are considered important only by the white slaveholder's standards. In danger of losing her own self in his life's narrative, Dana is constituted as merely another 'nigger' whose life's story only gains significance in so far as it buttresses her master's. But in keeping with allegorical conventions, which seek to make the invisible, visible, there is another narrative to be read in the spaces between the lines of the master's fight with death. The titles also signal Dana's story, in so far as they also involve a fight with death, for her own life is at stake if her ancestor loses his prematurely, and at the same time, they signpost her unwilling complicity in sustaining the life of her ancestor's oppressor. These two parameters, the struggle for life against overwhelming violence and the necessary compromises involved in that struggle also form the titles of her story which threaten to disrupt the unity of the white master's narrative. For if Dana's existence depends on Rufus's survival, Rufus's survival also depend of Dana's existence. The interpendency of their life stories constitutes part of the traumatic events Dana is forced to understand in her visits to the past and this impacts on her present identity.[473] Both collective past trauma and personal, individual trauma can be understood in the context of the sacrifice of the slave's freedom for the perpetuation of the slaveholder's power and privileges.

Patterson understands the collective trauma of the terrorization of African-Americans as a communal act of human sacrifice.[474] He employs the influential theory by Hubert and Mauss

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[472] In the chapter 'The Fight', Dana saves Rufus from a struggle with Isaac, Alice's husband. The man is named, not coincidently, after the most famous biblical sacrificial victim.

[473] Diana R. Paulin, 'De-Essentializing Interracial Representations: Black and White Border-Crossings in Spike Lee's "*Jungle Fever*" and Octavia Butler's "*Kindred*"', *Cultural Critique*, no. 36, Spring, 1997, pp. 165-193: Dana's contradictory identities, which embody both black and white constructions of a black female, destabilize all of the fixed and static definitions that keep the hierarchical slave system intact, p. 183. See also Nancy Jesser. 'Blood, Genes and Gender in Octavia Butler's *Kindred* and *Dawn*', *Extrapolation*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2002, pp. 36-61. Jesser argues against the 'enslaved female body' and for 'a powerful [...] intersubjective body' p. 61.

[474] Orlando Patterson. *Rituals of Blood: Consequences of Slavery in Two American Centuries* (New York: Basic Civitas, 1998), pp. 172-173. Specifically, he is referring to the category of lynchings which took place from the end of the Civil War to 1968. During this period of forced 'total transition' imposed on the 'Old South' after its defeat lies the social justification of the

to explain various aspects of these systematic murders such as the presence of a priest, the communal character of the killings and the not so tacit concurrence by the Euro-American contingent which presided. He sees important evidence in support of his claim that 'a significant minority of these thousands of killings were sacrificial murders, possessing all the ritual, communal and in many cases, religious characteristics of classic human sacrifice'.[475] In particular, he isolates six important features which he then applies to the victimization of former slaves. These are, a. the ritualised aspect of the act, b. the choice of a sacred place, c. the use of fire, d. the stake the victim was tied to, e. certain ideas held about the victim, f. the communal 'sharing' of the victim's body, originally performed as cannibalism but here a symbolic consumption was enacted.[476] But there is also an important function that these ritual killings performed. They created a 'compact of fellowship among the sacrificers themselves' and a compact between the sacrificers and their god.[477] Though much of the chapter focuses on the dramatic (performative) aspect of the killings, the function of the sacrifice which 'reinforced the most strongly held values of the group' is most useful here because it expands Hubert and Mauss's formulation on the benefits accrued to the sacrificers so that it includes the community of witnesses or bystanders, thus conveying upon them all the status of patron or benefactors of sacrifices.[478]

Dana becomes an unwilling accomplice in the sacrifice of her own great-great grandmother, Alice's oppression and enforced mating with Rufus when she realises that this is the only way to ensure her own eventual birth. Despite her efforts to console Alice and to educate Rufus, when he misleads Alice, as a method of intimidation, into believing that he has sold her children away, Alice hangs herself (178). Since Alice had already been separated from

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scapegoating of Afro-Americans 'who paid the expiatory and propitiatory price of the South's transition', p.185.

[475] Patterson, *Rituals*, p. 173.

[476] Patterson, *Rituals*, pp. 182-183.

[477] Patterson, *Rituals*, p. 183. One of the most important 'unifying' ideas was the belief in the ex-slaves as a 'domestic enemy' which made them the 'perfect scapegoats, the ultimate sacrificial victims', p.192.

[478] Patterson, *Rituals*, p. 183. At the same time, Patterson neglects the importance of the patrons of the sacrifice, i.e., those who benefit most from the sacrificial killings, in terms of power and influence. Unfortunately, his argument is most applicable in the context of slavery when the death of a slave would achieve, through fear, the compliance of other slaves, although the death of a slave also meant the loss of property and future revenue. In the context of post-slavery, there is no slaveholder who would directly benefit although the complicity of the community of witnesses is an important and undervalued constituent of the sacrificial ritual. This community of onlookers accrue other, overlooked benefits – not merely sadistic pleasure - which Patterson's analysis forefronts.

the man of her choice, her only meaningful point of reference were her children and her 'choice' of death constitutes a tragic non-choice. As in dystopias, a corrupt system can only foster alienated relations as a result of constant compromises. The emphasis here is on the severance of vertical relationships between women and their children and the effect on the former's sense of self[479] when the latter offer the only point of reference for meaningful identity. What immediately follows Alice's suicide is the attempt by Rufus to rape Dana, who bears a striking similarity to her ancestor and is often confused with her, although she is constantly accused of acting like a white woman.[480] Rufus himself tells her, during his attack: 'You were one woman [...] two halves of a whole' (257). The question is whether Dana's most damaging traumatic experience is her ancestor's suicide or Rufus's attempted rape, in other words, which of the two is what leaves the most severe physical loss upon her final return to the present, i.e., the lost of her left arm from the elbow to her fingers. In order to escape her own victimization, Alice must kill Rufus or be raped. Rather than seeing this murder, in self-defence as a kind of healing, reparative action or as offering a fantasy of healing,[481] I will interpret it as part of the traumatized victim's attempt at overcoming, by mastering, the original violence of trauma. Far from being the price paid in the search for wholeness, or the cost of remembering the past,[482] the loss of her limb points to an essential part of the construction of

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[479] Verticality is a important aspect for feminine identity in Irigaray's writings. See *Je, Tu, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference*, tr. Alison Martin (NY & London: Routledge, 1993) and in Adriana Cavarero, tr. Serena Anderlini – D' Onofrio and Áine O'Healy, *In Spite of Plato: A Feminist Rewriting of Ancient Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

[480] On the doubling of Dana with Alice, see Sarah Eden Schiff, 'Recovering (from) the Double: Fiction as Historical Revision in Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred*', Arizona Quarterly, Vol. 65, no. 1, Spring 2009, pp. 107-136. Schiff argues that 'by attending to the spatial, temporal, and psychic doublings,' her essay makes sense of Butler's 'simultaneously fictional and metafictional attempt to make history and memory productively creative – to serve as both a recovery *of* repressed historical narratives and a recover *from* repressed traumatic memories', p. 108. For the implications of race relations in the present, see Guy Mark Foster. "'Do I look like someone you can come home to from where you may be going?": Re-Mapping Interracial Anxiety in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*', *African American Review*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2007, pp. 143-164.

[481] Schiff, p. 111.

[482] In one of the most well argued essays, Ashraf H. Rushdy concludes that 'the path toward integrity, ironically, requires as a toll exposing one's self (and being) to possible mutilation', p. 138. But he reaches this conclusion as a result of his reading of *Kindred* as the remembrance of social trauma. As a sign of the 'brutalized' slave's body this holds as a metaphor, but Butler's text insists on the real loss of a limb. He supports this metaphor by saying that Dana's physical loss signifies that 'to flesh out the past means to leave part of one's being there'. On the contrary, an allegorical reading insists on the loss of a limb in the present; the body's limb is not left in the past, rather, the past lives on in the present – the point of both dystopias and neo-slave narratives – so that it constitutes a constant reminder of that past. Ashraf, H. Rushdy.

her sense of self which includes this amputation. Dana's maimed body is the psychical manifestation of her psychic trauma, made visible. In other words, if killing Rufus and the subsequent loss of her arm were curative, her body would manifest some form of integrity rather than loss. A short description of Freud's theory of trauma will illustrate the timelessness of the traumatic event and the subject's struggle to make sense of the experience. My aim is to counter the claim that Dana's 'physical and psychic losses are sacrifices made in her successful attempt to alter the past [...] thereby ending the demands of the past on her present'.[483] In fact, Dana fails to change history, but this is a necessary failure, as her repeated trips to Rufus's estate show; in order to heal, knowledge of the past is insufficient, she must reconstruct her own narrative within theirs and understand her (and their) actions within this narrative.[484]

Freud defines the experience of traumatic events, as those that the subject is compelled to repeat in the present with the same intensity as they were experienced in the past, and not merely as the remembrance of that past. Several important aspects are related to this compulsion. First, the inability of the recollection points to the intensity of the original event.[485] Second, in the process of forcing itself to consciousness, these repressed events are never enjoyable, and they override any 'pleasure principle' which dictates the subject's normal conscious life.[486] Third, the subject is compelled to repeat the traumatic experience until they are able to assimilate it successfully, i.e., to overcome it.[487] Finally, traumatic experiences are

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'Families of Orphans: Relation and Disrelation in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*', *College English*, vol. 55, no. 2, February 1993, pp. 135-157.

[483] Rushdy, 'Families of Orphans', p. 143.

[484] Anne Donadey. 'African American and Francophone Postcolonial Memory: Octavia Butler's *Kindred* and Assia Djebar's *La femme sans Sepulture*', *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 39, no. 3, Fall, 2008, pp. 65-81. Donadey interprets this loss allegorically: 'Dana's severed arm can also be interpreted as a reference to limbs that were broken off family trees through the discontinuities caused by slavery, both because of the silences of history and around the prevalence of white male rape of enslaved black women and because black family members were purposefully severed from one another through being sold to different owners', p. 72.

[485] Sigmund Freud. 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', *On Metapsychology* (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 275-335: 'The patient cannot remember the whole of what is repressed in him, and what he cannot remember may be precisely the essential part of it [...] He is obliged to repeat the repressed material as contemporary experience instead of [...] remembering it as something belonging to the past', p. 288.

[486] Freud, 'In order to understand this "compulsion to repeat" [...] we must rid of the mistake...that what we are dealing with in our struggle against resistances is on the part of the *unconscious*', p. 288.

[487] Freud, p 291.

timeless so that the passage of 'time does not change them in any way'.[488] Although a psychical trauma cannot be fully assimilated, it remains present in the mind 'like an intruder or a ghost'. As a result, physical symptoms are 'enigmatic signposts pointing to traumatic memories hidden away in the psyche'.[489] Hence, 'the individual is doomed to relive the event until another means of repairing the wound has been found.[490] The question which remains is as enigmatic as the 'solution' the text of *Kindred* provides: 'Can we separate memory from what we desire to remember?'[491]

Dana's desire to reconstruct her personal and collective past uncovers a paternal white ancestor who repeatedly raped her maternal ancestor until, faced with the loss of her children, she commits suicide. Not only is Dana unable to prevent this event but she is witness to its immediate aftermath. So long as she has retained the line of descent, she is powerless to alter the course of history in any way, but is this the purpose of her 'compulsion to repeat'? Rufus' continually 'calling' to the past expresses the desire of the past for recognition 'for every image of the past that is not recognized in the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably'.[492] But these images belong to the master's narrative, and Dana's ancestor's counter narrative threatens to disappear. The master slaveholder, like the hegemonic powers in dystopias, desires not only acknowledgement, but also love, loyalty and obedience. Alice is forced to bear Rufus's children, but he also demands that she love him. The past has a claim on the present, and as Benjamin writes, 'it cannot be settled cheaply'.[493] Dana is able to reconstruct her lineage, but only at the price of bodily harm and emotional scarring, as the loss of her arm is simply the last wound she is marked with after sustaining burns, whippings and beatings. Why then, is this recovering of the past important, if on the one hand, it plays into the narrative of the oppressor, and on the other hand, withholds that necessary mastery of the

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[488] Freud, 'Unconscious mental processes are "timeless" [...] they are not ordered temporally, p. 299.
[489] Roger Luckhurst. 'Mixing memory and desire: psychoanalysis, psychology, and trauma theory' in Patricia Waugh, (ed.), *Literary Theory and Criticism, An Oxford Guide* (Oxford: University Press, 2006), p. 499, pp. 497-507.
[490] Luckhurst, p. 500.
[491] Luckhurst, 'Trauma is a crux, speaking to the undecidability of representation and the limits of knowledge', p. 501.
[492] Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in Hannah Arendt, (ed.), tr. Harry Zorn, *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 245, pp. 145-155.
[493] Benjamin, pp. 252-253.

original trauma and merely offers the position of the silent witness/victim? Benjamin writes that

> to articulate that past historically...means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger...The danger affects both the content of the tradition and it receivers. The same threat hand over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes.[494]

The answer lies both in the articulation of Dana's personal story and the severing of her ancestor's. The true trauma lies in the severing of maternal ties in slavery, a severing of familial ties common in dystopias and necessary for the oppression of the sacrificial victim. With no blood ties to rely on – no kindred – the sacrifice of the female slave is a story that has not been told and cannot fully be told. Trauma, by definition, cannot be fully understood without destroying the psyche, hence, to be raped by Rufus would mean her own self-destruction. In a kind of poetic justice, the hand of the master that would destroy her becomes the hand that Dana loses when she kills him. The sacrifice of her arm is what she pays to become the subject of her story and not merely subject to historical forces beyond her control. The loss of her arm is evidence of that past and its absence the sign of the past's claim on her. Only the memory of the event remains, which leaves the self in a state of mourning. When Irigaray writes from the point of view of the daughter, the severing from the mother is experienced as a psychic as well as a physical loss:

> I received from you only your obliviousness of self, while my presence allowed you to forget this oblivion. So that with my tangible appearance I redoubled the lack of your presence...here you are...facing a mourning with no remembrance. Invested with an emptiness that evokes no memories.[495]

The image of the lost relationship between mothers and daughters is simultaneously the loss of subjectivity outside the maternal. Having no other point of reference, Alice kills herself rather

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[494] Benjamin, p. 247.

[495] Luce Irigaray, 'And the One Doesn't Stir without the Other', *Signs, Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1981, orig. 1979, p. 65, pp. 60-67: 'Trapped in a single function, mothering', p. 66. See also her *To Be Two*, tr. Monique M. Rhodes & Marco F. Cocito-Monoc (London & New Brunswick, NJ: The Athlone Press, 2000) where she writes that 'the first relation is with the mother's body', p. 30.

than live without her children. Yet, as a slave, she never 'owned' them. Dana too, has lost her female ancestry and is in danger of losing herself in a slave society which sacrifices vertical affective relationships in order to ensure compliance. The slave's story is lost and, in its place, only the master narrative leaves traces of its passing. When Dana goes in search of material evidence of her ancestors' existence, she finds no mention of Alice's children, just as the Bible with her family tree contains no mention of Rufus. Yet, Dana's desire to know the past remains. Cavarero writes that 'the maternal continuum delineates the feminine root of every human being' and that the 'masculine – universal – neutral' worldview has 'turned its gaze away from the place of birth, measuring existence on an end point which bears no memory of its beginning.[496] Dana has gone in search of her roots in order to rewrite her story as one which originates in her ancestor's life and not death. Rather than measuring herself against the meaning of Alice's sacrificial death – the master's narrative - she has understood her genealogy as the story of the triumph of survival.

Far from achieving wholeness, she is forever maimed. But this is preferable to the state of ignorance she previously inhabited and in place of her lost arm she has gained the 'narrative' wholeness. As a result, she is unable to write of her experiences while they are taking place because the story of her subjective past can only be written once its trauma is overcome. What Dana desires is that in giving back to Alice the story of her life, she will remain alive in memory even if official history has forgotten her.[497] Dana achieves a mastery of this traumatic history by incorporating it into her own story and by giving her story a unity, she has finally been able to become, as Cavarero writes, '*that which she already was*' (original emphasis). The self is thus able to recuperate the relational identity from which the story itself resulted.[498] The desire for one's story to relate the uniqueness and unity of its subject cannot be disregarded. Cavarero writes that:

> The desire for one's story orients itself on the *here and now* [...] to hear one's own story *in life* [...] every human being, without even wanting to know it, is aware of being a *narratable self* – immersed in the spontaneous auto-narration of memory [...] above all, the unity, in the form

[496] Cavarero, *In Spite of Plato*, pp. 60 and 69.
[497] Irigaray, 'And the One', p. 67; this is a paraphrase of the original final sentence: 'what I wanted from you, Mother, was this: that in giving me life, you still remain alive'.
[498] Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, p. 36.

> of a story, which the tale confers to identity. A story is what is desired[499].

Dana's return to her slave past brings together the personal and social history of her identity. She gains a knowledge of that past but also an understanding which confers a unity to her own personal sense of self. The social history of slavery cannot be changed, and the sacrifice of lives cannot be undone. But understanding the complicity her ancestors were forced to endure in order to survive and the compromises they made in order that she may live is an essential part of her story and her severed arm is a constant reminder of that legacy. The final killing of Rufus is not a destruction of the part of the past that has harmed her ancestors but the death of the guilt which accompanied its effects on the present – her present. She has killed the part of the past which maintained a negative hold over her in her repressed unconscious by refusing to also become a victim, like Alice. By conferring the unity of a narratable self on her ancestors and herself, Dana has moved to occupy the position of the plaintiff who can bestow narrative wholeness onto her identity. Dana's husband points out that Rufus's death has freed them to live out their future, but more importantly, it is a future that can acknowledge the role of that past in the present.

When Dana is forced to destroy a history book her thoughts lead her to compare this act to Nazi book burning not only because of the physical violence but also because 'repressive societies always seemed to understand the danger of 'wrong ideas' (141). She also realises the importance of the effect of psychic violence as well as physical on agency when she draws parallels between the oppression of slavery and that of twentieth century racism in South Africa: 'They lived in ease and comfort supported by huge numbers of blacks whom they kept in poverty and held in contempt'. (196) As a form of racial oppression then, slavery lives on in the present, in other spaces. Having experienced the effect of institutionalised slavery, Dana discovers that she is safer not because of her temporal distance from oppression but because of a *spatial* distance while others, at the same moment in time, are less fortunate. It is this persistence of slavery, albeit in a different form, that Butler draws attention to in her fiction through the convention of time-travel in order to warn the reader against any complacency in the present. By comparing aspects of slavery with Nazi Germany and the South African regime

[499] Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, pp. 33 and 37.

she realises the omnipresence of oppression and the nature of her own freedom. As a consequence of her time travel she comes to an understanding of the means, the consequences, and the physical and psychic effects of a system of domination and violent inequality as one unrestricted by time or space but merely different in terms of degree of severity.[500] They are part of the history and the present time of humanity and as such, run the real danger of recurring in the future. As with other examples of concrete dystopia, slavery's effect on its victims is to constitute them as powerless as possible in a system that functions by physical and psychological intimidation. For women this constitutes an ever present danger to their reproductive choices and physical integrity. The ensuing result of psychic alienation is due to constant compromise (97, 145, 178) which inevitably distorts all relations. As a system characterised by inequality, violence, and the domination of one community by another slavery cultivates self-alienation, and a 'slow process of dulling' (183).

In critical dystopias which enlist the conventions of neo-slave narratives the formal innovations shed new light on the thematic concerns of the classic slave narratives while adding an extra dimension to traditional dystopian novels that emphasise resistance and hope for a better future. The first person narrative voice that emphasises personal experience illuminates the plight inherent to enslaved motherhood.[501] At the end of *Kindred*, and despite having lost her old sense of security, Dana is reborn through her understanding of the past with a sense of hope and 'political renewal'[502] since, if her ancestors survived through the horrors of slavery, then she too can struggle for a better world. As Hayden White argues, far from being opposite, Utopia is revealed as History's Other:

> [...] in the sense of being an expression of a memory of a repressed desire, in this case, a desire for the future or rather a future against the claims of a social system which

[500] For a discussion of Butler's view on violence see Christina Braid, 'Contemplating and Contesting Violence in Dystopia: Violence in Octavia Butler's XENOGENESIS Trilogy' *Contemporary Justice Review, Issues in Criminal, Social, and Restorative Justice*, vol. 9, no. 1, March 2006, pp. 47-65. For the attention in gender in feminist dystopias produced in the seventies, see Dennis M. Lensing, 'The fecund androgyne: Gender and the utopian/dystopian imagination of the 1970s', *Socialism and Democracy*, vol. 20, no. 3, November 2006, pp. 87-103.

[501] *Elizabeth, Ann Beaulieu,* Black Women Writers and the American Neo-Slave Narrative: Femininity Unfettered *(Westport: Greenwood, 1999) p. 129.*

[502] *Jane Donawerth, 'The Feminist Dystopia of the 1990s: Record of Failure, Midwife of Hope', in Marleen S. Barr, (ed.),* Future Females, The Next Generation: New Voices and Velocities in Feminist Science Fiction *(Lanham: Rowan, 2000), pp. 49-66, p. 62.*

> forbids us both to want a future different from our present and at the same time urges us to see in the present social dispensation the future which has already arrived and of which we ought not to want better.[503]

Utopia and history meet at the crossroads of neo-slave narratives and critical dystopias in order to expose the legacy of slavery in the present and the sacrificial violence modern scapegoats are made to endure. In the enduring trauma of slavery, Butler's assertion that there is no time-travel in the novel is a warning that slavery is not dead in the past, but alive and in the present. Thus, generic ambiguity is of strategic ideological significance:

> By blurring the boundaries between science fiction and other genres [...] these new generic texts oppose the essentialist principles of hegemonic ideology. By creating texts that resist easy classification [...] they deconstruct the confine between official history and personal stories and question the supremacy of the former over the latter.[504]

Furthermore, as Baccolini points out, the privileging of personal narrative over official history constitutes a revolutionary strategy that reveals how 'our present – and our future – depend on our past'.[505]An important contribution by a woman writer who enlists formal innovations in order to highlight the centrality of sacrifice in culture and women's particular relationship to sacrificial structures and logic is Ursule Molinaro's *The New Moon with the Old Moon in Her Arms*. This novel challenges the patriarchal version of official history by postulating an intimate understanding of sacrifice expressed by the potential woman victim and like *Kindred* foregrounds the effects of sacrificial violence on subjectivity, relationships and community.

Ursule Molinaro's *The New Moon with the Old Moon in Her Arms*

In Chapter 2 I explored the anthropological, sociological and biblical perspectives on sacrificial ritual, ending with Diski's literary 'supplement' to the Genesis story of Isaac's near sacrifice. Molinaro provides another such 'supplement' only this time from the point of view of a female speaking subject who, in her trajectory from plaintiff to victim, reveals the cost of the sacrifice

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[503] Hayden White, 'The Future of Utopian History', *Historein, A Review of the Past and Other Stories*: History and Utopia, vol. 7, 2007, pp. 11-19, p. 13.
[504] Baccolini, 'Gender and Genre', p. 30.
[505] Baccolini, 'Gender and Genre' p. 30. See also her 'Finding Utopia in Dystopia: Feminism, Memory, Nostalgia and Hope' in *Utopia, Theory, Method*, pp. 159-189.

of the feminine in culture. By interrogating the case of women as 'willing sacrificial vicitim' the official interpretations of sacrifice are subverted and shown to be complicit with the sacrificer's account of history.

This section of the chapter will illustrate how, from the victim's viewpoint, the 'gods' to which sacrifices are made are representatives of the hegemonic order. It is also an example of the centrality of sacrifice in western culture which has its roots in Ancient Greece. Finally, it provides yet another myth of origin where, like Doris Lessings's *The Cleft*,[506] the primary sacrifice is that of woman and it is upon her death that 'civilization' has been built.

Ursule Molinaro's *The New Moon with the Old Moon in her Arms*[507] takes place in Athens between 294 BC and 293 BC and its social critique is aimed at Western history and culture as a whole, including its path of development from ancient Greece to the present. Narrated from the point of view of an unnamed thirty-year old poetess, it includes a plethora of digressions on the nature of linguistic change, religious practices, and the role of key figures in ancient Greek myth, such as the witch/goddess Circe and the Homeric hero Ulysses. It is also experimental in style and written in a way that highlights fragmentation: narrative interruptions with historical information, separation of words within sentences with large gaps, continual repetition. Most important are the ironic inflections in the historical passages, by which she questions the truth-value of history as it has been recorded through time by gender-blind scholars of religious rituals.

Key to understanding the text is the narrative's discourse on sacrifice, and in particular, the ancient Greek sacrificial ritual of the *pharmakos*, as it is experienced from the point of view of the victim. By presenting the ritual of sacrifice from the point of view of a woman poet, Molinaro is attempting not only to re-insert the silenced voice of the woman writer into history but also, by doing so, to provide an alternative reading of the past. By setting the story in ancient Greece, she is further attempting –through displacement – to voice a

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[506]Dorris Lessing, *The Cleft* (London, NY: Harper, 2007). An early short story which exemplifies the alienation of the victim necessary for the apparent willingness of death is D. H. Lawrence's 'The Woman Who Rode Away' in Dieter Mehl and Christa Jonsohn (eds.), *The Woman Who Rode Away and Other Stories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, orig. 1924), pp. 39-71.

[507] Ursule Molinaro, *The New Moon with the Old Moon in her Arms; A True Story Assembled from Scholarly Hearsay* (New York: McPherson & Co, 1990). All further references to the novel will be to this edition, given in parenthesis in the main text. The novel's title will be referred to by the abbreviated form 'New Moon/Old Moon'.

reminder to present day women writers of the continuing difficulties of being both an artist and a woman.

In *New Moon/Old Moon* the battle being waged concerns women's history and in particular, women poets' history. The book's subtitle hints at the book's agenda by stating that the text that follows is 'A True Story Based on Scholarly Hearsay'. Here, the personal history of a female poet is presented as true, whereas the objective account of history is questioned. Molinaro has chosen, for example the real historical figure of the philosopher, Hippobotus, 'author of at least 2 known historico-philosophical treatises' as the poets' father (21) and Erinna, 'an Athenian poetess (around 275 BC), who died at the age of 19' (11) as the young girl of twelve who the narrator meets and befriends in 293 BC. Their presence in the novel lends gravity to the 'true story' narrated via their relationship to a fictional character. They provide a genealogy for the narrator and a historical framework within which the story unfolds: i.e., she is the daughter of a well-known philosopher but also the mentor of a poet in the making. Furthermore, her relationship to her father is shown to be a crucial prompt for the writing of her first poem, 'Hate Freeze or Hate Frieze' written as an expression of her 'rage' against her father' (78). At the same time, Erinna is inspired to write her first poem in an attempt to gain the poet's forgiveness for hitting her with a stone (77-78). Comparing writing efforts and familial ties, the poet identifies a pattern that binds them: 'I recognize another teenage daughter trapped in the myth of her father's infallibility' (14). The narrator's sacrifice is deemed more significant because of her family's status and her own youth, beauty and education. And by giving an imaginary context to real figures, whose names are the only surviving evidence of their existence, Molinaro fills in the gaps of existing historical data, thereby adding a private and personal aspect around their public persons. In the interactions between fictional narrator and historical figures, the first becomes more real, and the latter more fictional, indeed the lines themselves between real and fictional are blurred. By implicating the bias of historical figures in the original dissemination of literary texts, Molinaro draws attention to the fact that only partial interpretations can be made on what texts remain. If the scholars are providing interpretations based on a dearth of facts, then Molinaro, too, can create her own interpretations of literary history, no less true or false than her predecessors' versions.

To this purpose, she draws on a plethora of sources to reveal the forgotten importance of the moon as a symbol of female power and by extension, the moon goddess Circe, close relative of Zeus himself. We learn of the changing value of the moon as an archetype of renewed life, of women (both human and divine) plants, animals and minerals allied to its elements (68-70; 79-80) and of its gradual dethroning by the sun, because 'men feared that, if the lunar power was worshipped as a goddess, wives would be absolute masters of husbands' (70). Finally, this reminder of the moon's lost significance is linked to the present largely forgotten roots of the spring celebration of Easter, still a lunar dependent festival (71). As Patricia Waugh writes, 'the quest for the basis of a female "unity" [...] led to an exploration of myth, symbol, and archetype' which later writers have developed in more radical ways 'in order to explore the role of symbolic systems and unconscious factors in the construction of subjectivity'.[508] Molinaro's choice to focus on a young woman poet in the fourth century BC Athens foregrounds the personal drama of a poet whose name and writing have been omitted from history.

At the same time, this poet is also a volunteer sacrificial victim whose own death she believes will help redress the imbalance between the male/masculine and female/feminine poles of life. As scapegoat, then, and as poet, the narrator has been doubly silenced by the historical process and it is these voices that Molinaro seeks. In the process of writing the poet's story and re-writing the history of sacrifice, Molinaro brings together the personal and political, the unofficial and the official, the female and the male versions of cultural history. Like her narrator, she is attempting to redress the imbalance in accounts of the past, in order to form a sense of continuity with the present. Molinaro's agenda is thus set firmly within the aims of the second wave of feminism: to both re-evaluate history from a female perspective and to re-insert women writers within that history.

The relationship between content and style, i.e., the sacrifice of a woman poet juxtaposed with scholarly writing on the function of ritual in society is what makes Molinaro's text belong to the kind of postmodernist writing Linda Hutcheon calls 'historigraphical metafiction' because of its self-reflexivity on the one hand, and its questioning of historical knowledge, on the other. In particular, Molinaro raises issues concerning 'the nature of identity

[508] Patricia Waugh, *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 24.

and subjectivity [...] ideological implications of writing about history [...] the status of historical documents' and what one may consider as 'facts'.[509] She does so by juxtaposing, without attempting to assimilate, the two 'stories' side by side in the text and signalling their separation with the use of double lines before and after each historical section. Though the issue of contradictory facts is raised, it is not resolved, but remains a question the reader must consider. No one and nothing is spared in the novel: Circe (28-29) and Odysseus (58-60) in particular are subjected to this revision, but also the history of philosophy, women's changing status (both professional and domestic) in society, medical remedies, and the 'value' of menstruation. Most importantly, the last six thousand or so years of Western history to the present day are summarized in a historical section which explains the 'birth' of patriarchal culture in terms of a 'big bang' theory: 'The seed of global destruction, currently feared in the form of a nuclear blow-up, was planted during the 4th millennium BC [...] when militarism abruptly replaced egalitarianism' (3). By placing the grand narrative of male-defined culture against the small narrative of a woman poet's life, in other words, by 'imposing a [textual] order on the past' Molinaro creates a dialogue involving the 'losers as well as the winners [...] the unsung many as well as the much sung few' of history and thus highlights the process of 'turning events into facts [...] through their interpretation'.[510] Molinaro, of course, chooses those events she deems worthy of the fictional process which she, in turn, converts into meaningful 'facts'.

One of the most salient examples of history-making processes in *New Moon/Old Moon* is the issue of the scapegoat's sex, and we are told that: 'Allegedly, women & female deities were replaced by gods. – But this allegation is denied by the blatant sacrifice of Iphigeneia' (9). After considering the various versions of Iphigeneia's sacrifice she concludes that: 'There seems to be a conspiracy of reluctance by poets, historians, scholars to soil the cradle of western civilization (sic) with detailed accounts of human sacrifice in ancient Greece' (10). In fact, Molinaro's novel gives such a 'detailed account' of sacrifice from the victim's point of

[509] Linda Hutcheon, '"The Past of Past Time:" Fiction, History, Historiographic Metafiction', in M. Perloff, (ed.), *Postmodern Genres* (Norman and London: Oklahoma University Press, 1988), pp. 54-74. Hutcheon's list of characteristics of such fiction is more extensive; I single out the ones relevant to Molinaro's novel.

[510] Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 57, 66-67.

view, in contrast to accounts that focus solely on the role of sacrifice in society.[511] In opposition to historical 'fact', Molinaro proposes instead a truth gained from fiction, in this case Euripides' eponymous tragedy, without however providing any further explanation as to the nature of this contradiction. Though a possible explanation is offered within the historical section, a final decision cannot be made and the reader is left to draw his/her own conclusions. Thus, by installing and then blurring the lines between 'fact' and 'fiction' –between 'the true story' of an anonymous poet and 'historical hearsay' –Molinaro opens up the past to the present and invites a new interpretation of the relationship between the two on the part of the reader. Hutcheon points out that such a re-writing of history has continuing relevance for the present, preventing interpretations of the past from becoming 'conclusive and teleological'.[512] This intense self-reflexivity is used throughout the text and constantly reminds the reader of the meaning of the book's subtitle, which is that both historians and novelists engage in similar projects of constructing 'meaning through representation'.[513]

The style further works in conjunction with the plot in order to foreground the crisis that brought about the narrator's decision to sacrifice herself on Expulsion day. The reader learns that the narrator, though still unmarried at thirty, is more concerned with the lack of audience for women poets, even amongst women, than with finding a husband. In a flashback sequence we are told that she suddenly decides to leave her parents' home and offer herself up as a sacrificial victim, a *pharmakon* (medicine and poison), on the Spring festival of Thargelia (from 27 May), when the citizens of Athens banish all their ailments, sins, fears and calamities by stoning to death the designated scapegoat. She is primarily motivated by altruistic reasons, 'hoping to throw out the growing prejudice against professional women in general & (sic) against writing women in particular' (2). Furthermore, she is guided in her choice by Circe, who has appointed herself patron of women by virtue of her role as moon goddess and the feminine principle in nature. As the ritual is normally reserved for a poor or disabled man, her decision is an extraordinary one that leaves her parents, who are 'too modern' (1) to believe in

[511] For instance, Lévi-Strauss, Frazer, Freud, Hubert and Mauss, Bataille. As a whole, they are gender-blind where women's role in sacrificial ritual is concerned. For a relevant critique on Greek sacrifice see Nancy Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion and Paternity* (University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 21-23. Jay points out that due to the polluting force that childbirth entailed to the ancient Greeks, it was only mothers who were exempt from sacrifice –all other women were not.
[512] Hutcheon, The *Politics of Postmodernism*, pp. 59, 62.
[513] Ibid, p. 87.

the power of such rituals, disapproving and ashamed. For a whole year however, before their death, *pharmakoi* are afforded a life of luxury, provided they do not try to escape, and it is in the last month of this year that events take an unexpected turn, when the narrator befriends a twelve year old girl who had prematurely thrown a stone at her face, and subsequently falls in love with the girl's father, a sponge diver. From this moment, she faces crippling indecision which ironically mirrors the degenerations of the rite itself, whose victims, since the end of the sixth century BC 'were recruited among deficient slaves [...] or destitute hapless persons – often with flawed faces &/or bodies' (9). No longer seeing herself as the special volunteer whose death will instigate a shift in cultural values and afford a place for her poetry in literary history, she faces instead a crisis of identity and authority that she is unable to resolve since she admits her sense of satisfaction in that 'commanding the attention of one's fellow citizens is a gratifying experience' and one that she is loathe to renounce for the sake of a married life in obscurity (37). By the end of the novel, she no longer believes in the purpose of her sacrifice and Circe's authority over her but, unable to escape, she is sacrificed, as scheduled, on Thargelion 6, 293 BC.[514]

The roots of the personal crisis go back to a time when, as a pre-pubescent child of the philosopher Hippobotus and his wife Chlema, her need for parental attention was either thwarted or ignored. The friendship she forms with the young girl Errina and her father, Hymeneaeus, exposes her to a familial relationship which is diametrically opposed to the poet's own relationship to her parents, and brings back painful memories of neglect and antagonism. Neglect on the part of her father, who is more interested in the seduction of his pupils (73) and antagonism on the part of her mother who uses her as a pawn in her perpetual warfare with her husband. It was from the age of twelve that her 'sole intimacy was with the written word' (76) and she produced her first poem 'Hate Freeze/Frieze' (78). Having lived in virtual isolation since this break in familial ties she has become accustomed to a loveless –and audience-less –life. Because of her new relationship to the sponge diver and his daughter the narrator begins to enjoy life again and discovers a renewed desire to go on living, while her

[514] Molinaro's account of the annual expulsion rite called Thargelia and its two victims, the pharmakoi, follows to the letter accounts in well-known anthropological works. See, for example, J.G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (London: Papermac, 1995), pp. 571-575; on the function of the pharmakos, see Martin P. Nilsson, *A History of Greek Religion*, trans. F.J. Fieldon (New York: Norton, 1964), pp. 86-87.

desire for self-sacrifice accordingly falters: 'I hesitate to give up a life I have just begun to enjoy' (50). In addition, for the first time in eighteen years the narrator not only has an audience for her poetry (64), but an adoring audience of two who try to persuade her to escape with them into the obscurity of family life beyond Athens (89). Having fallen in love, she continues to write, only this time poetry is a celebration of life and not a substitute for living. When she once again feels threatened by loss at the end of the novel, this goes some way towards explaining the original abandonment which she sought to assuage by writing. However, what was first an expression of self-sufficiency has now become an acceptance of her isolation.

What the narrator realises is that the decision to sacrifice herself stems more from the cumulative effects of an unhappy life, lacking in personal ties and professional recognition, from which writing had become a refuge. Her sacrifice is thus a martyr's compensation 'for passions she had never tasted' (90). It is not only her choices that she begins to question but also Circe's authority over them. The role of the goddess Circe is key then to understanding not only the narrator's motivations but also the relationship between her story and history, the woman poets' inscription in the story of fourth century Athens. Motivated by the three thousand year process of women's enslavement to men, Circe decides that her intervention is necessary to 'expel the current pre-dominance of mortal men' and 'restore the balance of the universe and the good housekeeping of earlier, pre-militaristic, pre-hierarchical, pre-agricultural millenia' (5-6). Circe insists she is interested in balance and not in establishing a matriarchal order that would replace the patriarchal one. The Circe of *New Moon/Old Moon* is in fact subjected to a revision which not only re-reads the past in favour of the image of a woman-friendly goddess, but also establishes a link to the present by virtue of the negative readings through time of female mythological characters by male scholars. The emphasis on bringing to light Circe's 'true' character is only one part, albeit the most important, of the text's concern with feminist readings of history, myth and artistic production. In an attempt to reverse the increasing imbalance between 'the two poles of life' (5), Circe is employed as the figure who has taken matters into her own hands for the purpose of reinstating female deities, female (medicinal) knowledge and female creativity, all under threat in the known world of the third century.

Molinaro places the beginning of this imbalance at three thousand years before the time of the story to emphasise the gradual loss of female power, both human and divine and to stress the crucial urgency of Circe's intervention. To prove her point, she presents the contradictory versions available on Circe's life and reputation. In the first historical section devoted to Circe, the image is classically Homeric.[515] Here she is presented as a construct of male fantasy and idealized as an eternally youthful, beautiful thirty-year old woman (23-24). In the very next section however, the reader is told that this Homeric Circe –now Odysseus' rescuer, a witch who turns men into pigs –originated in a story written by the princess Nausicaa (116), but was subsequently 'rewritten to accommodate the present' and to 'validate our new male way of thinking by obliterating the accomplishments of women' (25). In her 'original' incarnation as a benevolent sorceress Circe is then linked in the historical extracts to the modern day white witch who has been persecuted as a threat to patriarchal power. The purpose of this change in the Homeric version is posited as aiding the image of the 'new man', Odysseus, who can now outsmart Circe with his wits and prove himself to be a real hero. But despite Molinaro's attempt to reinstate Circe's good reputation in the various historical sections, the moon goddess's behaviour in the fictional sections –especially the arguments she presents in order to persuade the narrator to sacrifice herself –undermines the image presented in the revised history and subverts her supposed loyalty to women.

What then convinces the narrator to volunteer? Circe's argument draws an explicit connection between altruism and self-interest. If the narrator does not care about the moon or the goddess's plight, she tells her, then surely she cares about her own writing and the readership she will finally obtain by dying heroically (21). Thus by linking self-interest with self-sacrifice, she not only provides a personal investment for the narrator to focus on (posthumous readership) but also a place in history, as the sacrifice of an exceptional woman is so powerful an act that it will redress the balance of the universe and counteract the seemingly inevitable loss of female power. It is a tempting proposition, especially for this poet who, with a single act, will achieve both what she desires most: an audience for her poems as well as a

[515] Because of Circe's image as both good witch/bad witch in the Odyssey, she has inspired writers throughout the ages from Virgil and Ovid to Spencer, Pound and Joyce. In one of her contemporary, feminist incarnations, Olga Broumas's poem, 'Circe', in *Beginning with O* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 15, she remains a powerful figure, but the men have cast their own spell, behaving like pigs, and going 'wild' in her presence.

special reputation in Athenian culture as the woman whose sacrifice changed the course of history (and *her*story). For the 'small' price then of losing one's life, the narrator is convinced that the ensuing personal and public rewards are enough justification for what she sees as her only worthy course of action. The narrator will become, in other words, a hero, like Ulysses, but more so since he was not courageous enough to offer himself up as a sacrificial victim.

At this point in the narrative, the motivation behind Circe's ostensible choice becomes clear: only a poet of high standing in society is suitable for the task of saving the female principle from oblivion. Circe tells the narrator that she is the only possible choice in this instance because of her special understanding of 'the interdependence of all forms of life & need to balance their respective evolutions, involutions & revolutions' (18). On the other hand, unlike the Romantic poet, it is not an aesthetic action that she is called on to perform to counter cultural destruction but her own annihilation.[516] Both personally and politically then, it is impossible for the narrator to refuse, as to do so would consign her to certain oblivion both as a poet and as a woman (115). Thus, Circe concludes, the only way to go on living is to end living, to achieve a meaningful death and with it, immortality.

But Circe's behaviour throughout the narrator's existential crisis belies other, less noble motives. What Circe's self-contradictory behaviour prompts the reader to ask is whether her loyalties truly lie with the narrator and the plight of women poets. There are two important observations to be made, one concerning the mother-daughter relationship, the other concerning the function of sacrifice. First, when the narrator expresses her joy at her mother's letter imploring her to reconsider her sacrifice (40), Circe retorts with disgust that she had never listened to her mother before (40). Yet the narrator is moved by the arrival of the letter as much as its contents since she and her mother 'had so rarely communicated while in each other's presence' (37). Even though her mother tells her that 'her sacrifice was not going to gain her a posthumous audience' and that no one 'cared to hear a 30-year old-woman complain about being a woman. Not even if she looked exquisite as a corpse, & her collected works were found in her cleavage' (39), her motives are nevertheless genuine; she does not want her daughter to suffer. The narrator is moved by the sentiment behind these words and the fact that

[516] Patricia Waugh, Practicing Postmodernism, Reading Modernism (London: Edward Arnold, 1992), claims that postmodern fiction retains the Romantic idea of the aesthetic as 'the only possible means of redemption' but modifies it significantly (15).

her mother offers her the use of hemlock in place of a painful stoning to death, in the event of her insisting on sacrifice. In contrast, Circe continues reminding her that her death will prompt the gratitude of future women, which is more important than either her love for the sponge diver or her familial relationships. This is a surprising comment not only because this Circe is meant to be caring and wise but also because her cause is a feminist one. Is a woman's relationship to her own mother not sufficient cause for support by a goddess? Contrary to expectation, it is the narrator's own parents who remind her of the importance of kinship by telling her that she is pursuing her sacrifice 'with the selfishness of martyrs whose dedication to a cause completely blinds them to the feelings and needs of their close kin' (66). Whereas Circe shows herself to be concerned with the political before the personal, the narrator's mother reveals herself to be concerned primarily with her daughter's life, that is, the personal before the political. Thus a struggle is set up within the plot between the representative of 'History' and 'history'.

In Circe's case, behind the rhetoric advocating societal balance lies another, selfish motivation: that of her own diminishing power, as she herself admits (28). Perhaps the most damning evidence emerges in another historical section, where the goddess Athena is condemned for siding with Orestes in his act of matricide: 'women siding with men in the belittling of women became common practice after the rape of their wisdom' (53). This is precisely how Circe acts, despite her protests. She shows herself to be more concerned with defending her own status than by the severed mother-daughter relation. This indifference reveals Circe to be like a patriarchal god with the same interest in perpetuating inequality and domination as the male gods she avowedly opposes.

Without the mother-daughter bond, however, there can be no real basis for equality in society. As Luce Irigaray has pointed out, there are, in fact, myths that emphasise the mother-daughter bond, such as Demeter and Persephone, and it is these that point the way towards the formation of female subjectivity and community as a result of the female line of descent being re-instated.[517] For Irigaray, the sacrifice of the mother-daughter bond serves to establish male

[517] Luce Irigaray, *Thinking the Difference: For a Peaceful Revolution*, trans. Karin Montin (London: The Athlone Press, 1994), p. 101. Irigaray believes that history as expressed in myth is more closely related to female, matrilineal traditions.

power and represents the primordial sacrifice upon which patriarchal culture is built.[518] Where the mother-daughter relationship is primary as witnessed here in the narrator's reactions, its continued suppression –and that of any other relational aspects of subjectivity –becomes a buttress in the perpetuation of male dominated cultures.[519] Like other patriarchal gods, the sacrifice Circe demands is for her own personal benefit, at the cost of female relationships.

In this way, the mother-daughter relationship is linked to the second issue: that of the required sacrifice. What is presented as the narrator's dream of achieving change from within, via sacrificial violence, is actually an involuntary (and unconscious) complicity with the powers that maintain inequality, hierarchy and male domination. As the anthropologist Nancy Jay has pointed out, sacrifice functions across agricultural societies as the means for disempowering women and maintaining male dominations, since it is women's exclusion from partaking in the rites –as human beings polluted by childbearing –that establishes their value in society.[520] To go to her death willingly, the narrator believes, is not an act of murder (or suicide), but of heroic sacrifice, much like the men before her. It seems that the only way to inscribe herself into history as a woman is to act like a man, or rather, to show that she is as capable of the same courageous deeds as men. As it is an authorial figure who demands this sacrifice, the narrator feels compelled to obey, and this is her tragedy. By offering herself as a sacrificial victim, she is not actually re-dressing the balance between men and women but feeding the power hungry goddess whose struggle for eminence amongst the gods is foremost in her concerns. Narrator and goddess alike have become victims of their own desire rather than its 'masters', since they are unable to see beyond the sacrificial logic that guides them. But whereas Circe continues to believe, understandably, in the usefulness of sacrifice, the narrator finally comes to a realization of its futility.

In her final act of power, Circe paints a picture of an alternative future that will never be, but this serves as little comfort to the already defeated narrator. Unsurprisingly, it is a depressing image of a life of hardship, where she is reduced to living the frugal life of a sponge diver's wife, bearing children and of course having no time to write poetry. Eventually, Circe insists, she would have been abandoned, become bitter and contributed to the eventual death of

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[518] Ibid, p. 103.
[519] Jane Flax, *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 232.
[520] Jay, *Throughout your Generations*, p. 150.

the earth and the moon. (117-118). Circe urges her to abandon herself to the goddess's rule and reassures her that she 'was better off incurring the gratitude of future generations of women not to mention the moon' (115) than by escaping into an uncertain future of domestic bliss. The narrator's final thoughts evoke the original trauma of separation and abandonment: 'I shrug. Even if I did want it exile-frugality-discomfort-motherhood-abandonment after my successful escape, I cannot have it. Not any more than I can have my mother's mercifully offered/mercilessly withheld hemlock' (118-119). By then, the narrator's co-operation is assured: she may no longer believe in the meaningfulness of her sacrifice, but nor has she anything left to live for.

In the final pages of the novel, the narrator has suffered a complete loss of faith in the effectiveness of her death. She realizes that before falling in love (with life) she had nothing to lose and perhaps something to gain by dying. As she herself explains: 'I would have remained an unloved thirty-year old virgin. Who would be going to her shabby martyr's death without having known the experience of fulfilled desire. Compensating with martyrdom for passions she never tasted' (90). As it has become clear by the end of the novel, the narrator's lack of civic affiliation and close familial ties is what lead her to easily fall prey to the demands of Circe. As an already alienated individual, from kinship ties and a writer's community, the narrator is in a vulnerable position vis-à-vis the 'divine' rhetoric of one as powerful as Circe. In her desire for acknowledgement as a female poet, the narrator fallaciously 'chooses' to inscribe herself into official history by narrating a different story altogether from the ones she originally intended and expressed only a year earlier. Rather than the eponymous poet who dies for the sake of other women, she remains the anonymous poet whose death, like so many others, is wasted. It is in her initial unquestioning acceptance of Circe's motivations that the narrator reveals her Achilles' heel: in her need for acknowledgment as a poet she has fallen prey to an authorial figure whose agenda is diametrically opposed to her own desires.

By telling her story in flashback, i.e., in the last week of her life, the narrator is given the opportunity of self-reflection, self-critique and self-revelation. She has created what Cavarero calls a '*narratable self*'[521] which is dependent on one's memory of self and the need to construct a meaningful narrative around the events that structure that memory. This narrator's

[521] Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 33.

personal story is one of the trauma of deceit and betrayal by the very person who gave her a reason to live, only to reveal it as spurious. The narrator confesses that 'the sole tangible result of my sacrifice will be my parents' embarrassment [...] which gives me no sense of triumph' (114). When she finally denounces Circe's authority, the goddess can only reply with 'an ugly laugh' (113) and then reveal her true colours by reminding her that 'people rarely question an authority that coddles them' (123). The narrator's choice to abandon herself to the *pharmakos* sacrificial ritual after all is itself subject to critique till the very end. In spite of her acquiescence, her death symbolizes her failure to negotiate her integration into society and culture's failure to imagine her existence apart from marriage. By the end, the narrator's only concern is to minimize the pain of her death and she relinquishes all power to the goddess.

The emphasis by second wave feminist critics, on the changing boundaries between the personal and political are re-iterated here in order to stress the continuity of women artists' precarious position in society and the perpetual threat to their freedom of expression. It is important to re-iterate that although this is a novel about the relationship between a personal, female 'unofficial' history and impersonal, male 'official' history, it is also an experimental text that highlights the vulnerability of women's desire and the danger of its displacement. The poet's desire for a meaningful existence, an audience for her poetry and inclusion in a community of female artists, a family and acceptance within wider society, exist in a fragmented state which becomes easily directed into a course of action that serves forces of society with altogether different objectives. The narrator's desire to formulate a meaningful 'I' leads her to a destruction of the 'I' and the end of its self-narration. Although this ending implies pessimism towards the possibility of female subjectivity as well as effective resistance to power, it nevertheless displays a tendency in postmodern narratives to 'examine an ideology by embodying it'.[522] In this case, the narrator comes to a realization of self-sacrifice as a futile fantasy of male heroism. Rather than seeking solace in the solitude of the poet who writes outside community, she realizes the necessity of relationship. Her trajectory is of liberation from a male-identified mode of existence to a renewed sense of a self in relation, ironically, via the patriarchal ritual of sacrifice. This realization is made possible only when the narrator inhabits the subject position of the scapegoat. By desiring to change the course of history, she

[522] Waugh, *Practicising Postmodernism*, p. 59.

realizes that history has already changed, and that her sacrifice is an empty ritual. Whereas the narrator in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* asserts: 'I tell, therefore you are',[523] the narrator in *New Moon/Old Moon* tells but cannot *be*. The new moon –ushered in by her sacrificial death – is revealed to be no different from the old one.

Just as slavery and its effects continues to exists – albeit in different forms – in the present day, so do other forms of enslavement based on sacrifice continue to endanger society with discourses which sanctify violence and produce scapegoats. A knowledge of the repetition of the past will safeguard the future from even worse manifestations of sacrificial violence, provided they are not subsumed by official hegemonic oppression. And this struggle against sacrifice is utopian.

[523] Margaret Atwood, The Handmaid's Tale (London: Virago, 1985), p. 279.

Chapter Six

'Flawed' Utopias: Ursule Le Guin's 'The Ones who Walk away from Omelas' and Lois Lowry's *The Giver*

According to Lyman Sargent, the flawed utopia refers to a work that presents what appears to be a good society until the readers learn of some flaw that raises questions about the basis for its claim to be a good society, or even turns it into a dystopia.[524] Though this 'title' does not necessarily constitute a sub-genre, it does seem that such works are appearing with more and more frequency, especially in film, if not literature. For example, *The Village*, *Minority Report*, *The Truman Show* and even *Logan's Run*[525] from the seventies illustrate the main characteristics of this sub-category. The narrative begins by illustrating all the different ways the society it depicts is eutopian. For example, there is no violence, crime or unemployment. Childcare is not longer an issue and women enjoy the same rights and privileges as men. As a result, its citizens are happy and fulfilled and the reader is unable to find a single fault, in itself a problem, as the definition of utopia does not depend on the notion of perfection. Invariably, the narrative introduces a serious problem, thus beginning a process whereby the society depicted is shown to be not only imperfect but also in possession of a serious 'flaw' which questions its initial reading as an eutopia. Whether it can be termed dystopian is a question the text asks of the reader, thereby questioning the very terms and conditions used in the construction of a good society. In fact, the texts themselves are often ambiguous as to the status of their own, possible anti-utopianism. Again, in order to clarify these issues, the role of sacrifice in the text will be employed to first assess the genre and then to consider to what degree the narrative expressed utopian hope or anti-utopian despair.

Ursule Le Guin's 'The Ones who Walk away from Omelas':

Flawed Utopia or Ambiguous Dystopia?

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524 Lyman Tower Sargent, 'The Problem of the "Flawed Utopia": A Note on the Costs of Eutopia', in Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan, (eds.), *Dark Horizons*, pp. 225-231. Lyman mentions here an early example of this type of dystopa, *Aldous Huxley's Island* (New York: Harper and Row/Bantam Books, 1971, orig. 1962).

525 Logan's Run, Dir. Michael Anderson, 1976; *Minority Report*, Dir. Steven Spielberg, 2002; *The Truman Show*, Dir. Peter Weir, 1998; *The Village*, Dir. M. Night, Shyamalan, 2004.

One of the most well known writers of science fiction and utopia, Ursule Le Guin, has also written a now classic story, published originally in 1973, which serves as a useful early reference point for key issues in the generic designation of dystopian fiction which are still relevant. There are several motivations for re-visiting the thirty year old text of 'The Ones who walk away from Omelas.[526] First, it presents certain textual contradictions which have not been satisfactorily been dealt with in hitherto interpretations.[527] Second, it illuminates facets of eutopian and dystopian fiction which have not been fully studied. Third, it remains an important early contribution to and influence on the debate about utopianism, as witnessed by its resurgence in contemporary film. What this chapter will focus on is the first of these two issues whereby the former will point toward possible resolutions of the latter. That is to say, in the textual contradictions 'The Ones who Walk away from Omelas' (hereafter *Omelas*) displays, two key elements of the sub-category of flawed utopias will be analyzed, namely those of knowledge and agency.

These two issues constitute an underdeveloped area in utopian studies which instead has focused on the 'big picture' i.e., what politics or economics any given utopia describes. Equally, the secondary literature focuses on the 'macro level' of how society works. As far as the 'little picture' is concerned, the 'micro level,' one, of two assumptions is usually made: the society depicted is either eutopian or dystopian and its inhabitants' behaviour to one another corresponds accordingly. For example, in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* the women's behaviour is exemplary, but in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* most characters behave badly, no matter whose point of view one adopts.[528] There seems to be a missing stage between these two

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526 'The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas', in *The Wind's Twelve Quarters* (New York, Harper, 1973), pp. 275-284.

527 For example, the essays in Utopian Studies, 1991, vol. 2:1/2 are concerned with the ethics of the story but also with questions of genre. Kenneth M. Roemer, in 'The Talking Porcupine Liberates Utopia: Le Guin's "Omelas" as Pretext to the Dance', pp. 6-18, finds the ones who remain in Omelas to be more courageous than those who leave, p. 14. Elizabeth Cummins disagrees, in "'Praise Creation Unfinished": Responses to Kenneth M. Roemer', pp. 19-23. Peter Fitting, in 'Reader and Responsibility: A Reply to Roemer', pp. 24-29, finds that the story conceals the question of responsibility, p. 27, but in the end is anti-utopian in its stance. Carol D. Stevens in 'A Response to Roemer', pp. 31-32, appears to agree with Fitting, Lee Cullen Khanna, in 'Beyond Omelas: Utopia and Gender', pp. 48-58, sees the 'tensions inherent in the utopian genre', p. 48. Rebecca Adams, in 'Narrative Voice and Unimaginability of the Utopian "Feminine" in Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* and 'The Ones Who Walk away from Omelas', pp. 35-47, calls the story a myth of sacrifice', p. 40. Heinz T. Schachler, in 'Forgetting Dostoevsky; or The Political Unconscious of Ursule K. Le Guin', pp. 63-76, finds the story both reactionary and progressive, p. 73.

528 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Herland, (London, The Women's Press, 1979; orig. pub. 1915).

extremes. The question here is how the bad behaviour of characters in dystopian literature becomes good in eutopias. Since Aristotle's *Ethics*, politics and ethics were intrinsically linked and in fact, it is the former that determines the latter.[529] A good society would inevitably produce citizens who behaved ethically and a bad society (totalitarian, fascist, or oligarchic) was expected to produce non-ethical behaviour. But rather than focus on the politics of the societies – the macro level – this chapter will approach the issue of agency from the opposite direction: what if it is the ethical system which could influence the political system – what would the consequences be for literary genre and the text's projected ethical system?

Although it is the exceptional protagonist(s) of dystopias who behave differently by rebelling and resisting the status quo which makes them 'good' in a 'bad' world, the protagonists in 'flawed utopias' initially appear 'good' and subsequently become 'bad'. At this point, the two genres of eutopia and dystopia intersect. In both, protagonists decide that their society is dystopian and it is this knowledge that creates their desire to abandon or escape their society. Since the knowledge of their lack of freedom has made life insufferable they see no other solution but to leave. This is also true of 'Omelas'. The missing stage between dystopian and eutopian ethics can be found in flawed utopias because it illustrates the trajectory the protagonist follows in order to reach the decision of escape and/or abandonment. At the same time, in both genres this escape functions not only as a neat end to the plot of the novel, story or film but also, determines whether the text is utopian or anti-utopian in outlook. By determining whether the characters' actions are morally good or bad, the reader is then able to also make a decision on the nature of the society depicted. This is the micro level of the text influencing the macro level, the ethics determining the politics. Inevitably, there is some genre blurring which challenges the simple designation of the narrative as either eutopian or dystopian. In short, the role of the potential victim is again key in determining both the genre and the function of the narrative because of the centrality of sacrifice.[530]

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529 Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, tr. J.A.K. Thomson (London, Penguin, 2004).
530 Shoshana Knapp, 'The Morality of Creation: Dostoevsky and William James in Le Guin's "Omelas"', *Journal of Narrative Technique*, vol. 15, no. 1, winter 1985, pp. 75-81. Knapp argues that the real subject of the story is the proper morality of art itself, p. 75. On the other hand, Gérard Klein, in 'Le Guin's 'Aberrant' Opus: Escaping the Trap of Discontent', tr. Richard Astle, in *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 4, no. 13, part 3, Nov. 1977, pp. 287-295, argues that the story introduces social relativism into the science fiction genre, p. 288. Finally, in the same volume, David C. Porter in 'The Politics of Le Guin's Opus', pp. 243-248, finds moral failure at the centre of the story, p. 244.

The plot of *Omelas* is superficially simple. *Omelas* describes a place where happiness reigns. The citizens want for nothing and enjoy the simple life without at the same time indulging in 'excess', that is to say, technological advances (central heating, subways, trains, washing machines). The inhabitants' philosophy of life is summed up as follows: 'Happiness is based on a just discrimination of what is necessary, what is neither necessary nor destructive, and what is destructive' (278). It is significant to note that there are no slaves or kings, no clergy or soldiers. However, by the middle of the story (of which there are fewer than ten pages) the narrator introduces a figure which questions the apparent 'perfection' of Omelas. Known to all its citizens, there is a child kept underground and in the dark, in squalid conditions and in a state of perpetual fear and hunger. Each citizen is taken to see this prisoner at the age of eight or twelve and then led away. There is no attempt to rescue the child and this is one question the reader inevitably asks. Equally – and this is a question explicitly asked in the text – why are there only a few who 'walk away' from such a wonderful world having seen this child. Despite the child's position as a scapegoat, an innocent figure on which society's ills are deposited, the majority of the citizens ignore its presence and continue their lives as if it does not exist. However, the small minority who simply choose to leave Omelas and never return are silent. Their knowledge or feelings lead them to act in ways that the ones who remain in Omelas lack.

First, in relation to the children's feelings, the ones who walk away most obviously are refusing a utilitarian ethic since by remaining they would be complicit in the suffering of a child. Yet as the narrator makes clear, all the children initially react with abhorrence. That the majority choose to stay and accept the terms of this sacrificial contract is what prompts the reader to further question the nature of this utopian society. What convinces them to stay – which seems irrational - when knowing what is right should prompt one to right action? One indication lies in the fact that for the ones who walk away, there is no lapse of time between perception and action: that is, they do not ponder on the right course of action for long:

> At times, one of the adolescent girls or boys who gets to see the child does not go home to weep or rage, does not, in fact, go home at all. Sometimes also a man or woman much older falls silent for a day or two, and then leaves home...they leave Omelas, they walk ahead into the darkness, and they do not come back (283-284).

On the other hand, the ones who remain begin with the same emotions of 'anger, outrage, impotence' and share a 'shock' at the sight of such suffering. Yet they do not leave, despite their desire to 'do something for the child' (282). They return to their homes and continue to live as is this knowledge makes no difference to their lives. Clearly then, since the same knowledge is shared by everyone the issue that the text leaves unclear is why this majority goes on to accept such a cruel contract, despite its initial abhorrence. These children's point of view is that of the master narrative, which in dystopias represents the voice of the status quo, of authority and power. So it is ambivalence on the part of the narrator when justification follows the decision of the majority's indifference:[531]

> If the child were brought up into the sunlight out of that vile place...that would be a good thing, indeed; but if it were done, in that day and hour all the prosperity and delight of Omelas would wither and be destroyed...to throw away the happiness of thousands for the chance of happiness of one: that would be to let guilt within the walls indeed (282)...They know that they, like the child, are not free. They know compassion (Omelas, 283).

This extract brings together problematic statements concerning the motivations behind those who remain in Omelas. In particular, the words *happiness, freedom, guilt, compassion* are emphasized. What the ones who remain know is *happiness* and *compassion* but they do not know *freedom* and *guilt*. At the same time, if the ones who do walk away inhabit the opposite poles of experience and emotion (i.e., they know freedom and guilt but not happiness and compassion) then their choice of action is somewhat understandable, indeed it is necessary. Yet, happiness is not the opposite of freedom and guilt is not the opposite of compassion. What seems to constitute an *aporia* at the intersection of knowledge and action is in fact, a sleight of the narrator's hand, a barely noticeable detail in the narrative: what separates and explains the difference in the two groups' interpretation of their experience is *time*, i.e., as children they *all* initially knew compassion, guilt as well as the threat to their happiness (based on ignorance)

531 Linda Simon writes argues that the decision to remain in Omelas is one justified on the basis of pragmatism. As for the ones who leave, they 'do not make a morally defensible decision', p. 101. She bases her reading on the fact that Le Guin has stated her influence by William James's philosophy in his essay 'The Moral Philosophy and the Moral Life'. See 'William James's Lost Souls in Ursule Le Guin's Utopia', *Philosophy and Literature*, 28, 2004, pp. 89-102.

and their exposure to fear (of freedom outside the security of Omelas). In time, however, the ones who remain displace their compassion onto acts of creativity (music, architecture) and suppress their guilt of the knowledge of the consequences of their inaction. What they first knew to be an innocent victim is replaced by the knowledge of the 'reality principle'[532] of what is necessary to retain their quality of life. Their initial compassion is replaced by pity and finally, lost to their desire for guilt-free happiness. In other words, they become convinced of the utility of the child's unhappiness in the maintenance of their own 'quality of life' - what Sargent describes as 'the cost we are willing to pay, or require others to pay to achieve a good life'.[533]

By absolving themselves of responsibility the ones who remain succeed in convincing themselves of their own innocence. This is the self-delusion which leads the citizens of Omelas to a state of self-alienation. In any case, it is an ontological issue that constitutes, for them, a radically different identity in relation to those who walk away and indeed, to their former younger selves. When faced with the same existential dilemma, the ones who walk away choose to put their knowledge to an entirely different use. Rather than suppress their compassion they take on the responsibility their complicity entails. Rather than deny the reality of the 'cost' of their happiness they refuse to rationalize the 'necessity' of the continued suffering of an innocent child. And, rather than displace their guilt, the ones who walk away know that true compassion is, as Sponville writes 'a horizontal feeling...it makes sense only among equals' because sharing in another's suffering means a 'refusal to regard any living being as a thing'.[534] As such, knowledge based or nourished by compassion would 'open ourselves up to all living, suffering'.[535] It is compassion in this sense which makes the ones who leave 'good' and the ones who remain 'bad'.

Furthermore, compassion pre-supposes the kind of attention to reality and a suppression of the self, i.e. one's selfish desires, which Iris Murdoch describes as a 'just and

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[532] See Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', in Angela Richards and Albert Dickson, (eds.), *The Pelican Freud Library*, vol. 11, *On Metapsychology; The Theory of Psychoanalysis* (London, Penguin, 1991), pp. 275-335.
[533] Sargent in Baccolini and Moylan, *Dark Horizons*, p. 226.
[534] Sponville, André Comte, *A Short Treatise on the Great Virtues; The Uses of Philosophy in Everyday Life* (London, William Heinemann, 1996, 2002), p. 115. Sponville believes that compassion is a more realistic path to ethical action than love. See pp. 103-117
[535] Ibid., p. 111.

loving gaze directed upon an individual reality'.[536] What the ones who walk away know is not the pragmatic values of a sacrificial logic which requires a scapegoat but the utopian value of imagining a better world based on an emotional contract of compassion. The 'realism of compassion' goes hand in hand with the 'freedom from fantasy' which accurate attention to reality occasions.[537] Unlike the ones who remain in Omelas, the ones who leave accept the burden of guilt which accompanies the knowledge of suffering and prefer the uncertainty of freedom from self-delusion to the security of the happiness of self-delusion. Having resisted the consolations of fantasy, displacement and sublimation, the ones who walk away have also re-directed the selfish impulse to the moral imperative to act with justice and care. In doing so, they have acted in 'good faith' in relation to the values they uphold and the knowledge they know to be true. Good faith here connotes an agreement of acts and words with one's inner life and of one's inner life with itself.[538] It is a refusal to lie to oneself and an attempt to right one's relationship to others. They may not be acting according to the ideals of pragmatism their fellow citizens follow but they are acting according to ideals which can pave the way to an anti-sacrificial utopia.

To have remained in Omelas would have been an act of bad faith within an anti-sacrificial paradigm. For those who remain, they have chosen to value themselves more than the truth and to value their security and comfort more than the value of justice and care. They have become, in a sense, 'self-enslaved' and it is in this sense that they are not free. The comfortable life they secure as a result of this loss of freedom depends not only on the sacrifice of a child in a dungeon, but also on the sacrifice of compassion in themselves. As adults, they will continue to support a sacrificial logic which leads to self-alienation and a perpetuation of violence.[539] What has happened to their sense of self is what Yeats asserts in his poem 'Easter 1916': that 'too

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[536] Iris Murdoch (1989), *The Sovereignty of Good* (London, Routledge, 1970), p. 34.
[537] p. 66; Murdoch is elaborating here on the relationship between freedom, love and ethical action. To act morally is to direct one's attention away from one's own self which for Murdoch is a source of 'blinding self-centred aims and images' (67). Freedom then, consists in directing one's attention outwards. This attention to reality is inspired by love and results in true ethical action.
[538] Sponville, p. 195.
[539] Fredric Jameson finds that Le Guin in her early fiction rejects 'institutionalised violence rather than violence itself', in 'World Reduction in Le Guin: The Emergence of the Utopian Narrative', *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 4, no. 13, Nov. 1977. pp. 221-230, p. 226.

long a sacrifice can make a stone of the heart'.[540] In choosing to act against what they know, they have betrayed not only the child in the dungeon, but also themselves.

In conclusion, this re-reading of Le Guin's story 'Omelas' has revealed its relevance for utopianism in the twenty-first century and for the literary utopian genre. As a genre which overlaps with both eutopian and dystopian literature it provides the missing link on the road from dystopia to utopia by illustrating the tension between knowledge and action and by justifying the protagonist's decision to escape as an ethically sound one. For utopianism, reading 'flawed utopias' for what they reveal of the consequences of a pragmatic, utilitarian ethics points towards the formulation of a utopian ethics which is anti-sacrificial. By extension, another bridge – beyond the literary - may be formed between ethics and politics with foundations in the former, the 'micro' level. Even though the term 'flawed utopia' is insufficient in conveying the real issue at the heart of this narrative, it does draw attention to the central defining characteristic of utopias which resist the ideal of perfection. But is it insufficient in conveying the key imperfection which determines whether it is eutopian or dystopian, utopian or anti-utopian? What this 'sub-category' reaffirms is the centrality of the role of sacrifice for both the function and the origin of any utopian world. In fact, as Le Guin further writes, those who walk away from Omelas form the founding members of the eutopian society of *The Dispossessed*.[541] And it is in this sense that *Omelas* constitutes a utopian myth of origins – which at its foundation is anti-sacrificial.

Lois Lowry's *The Giver:* Utopian or Anti-Utopian Dystopia?

Published in 1993, *The Giver*[542] is the winner of many literary awards, including 'An American Library Association Best Book for Young Adults'.[543] It defies any straightforward

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[540] William Butler Yeats, 'Easter, 1916', J. Finneran, (ed.), *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats* (London, Macmillan, 1991).

[541] Ursule Le Guin, *The Dispossessed* (St. Alban's Herts. England, Panther, 1975). See also her short story, 'Before the Revolution' in Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent, (eds.), *The Utopia Reader*' (New York and London: New York University Press, 1999), pp. 407-420.

[542] Lois Lowry. *The Giver* (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Books, 1993).

[543] Michael M. Levy, 'Lois Lowry's The Giver: Interrupted *Bildungsroman* or Ambiguous Dystopia?' Foundation 70 (Summer, 1997), pp. 50-57. Levy points out that *The Giver* is the first work of science fiction to win the Newbery Award for best young adult fiction, p. 50. However, he later calls it a 'fantasy' (53) and argues for tropes that are common in the *Bildungsroman*. Although he is aware of the difficulty of categorizing this text ('ambiguous utopia or ambiguous dystopia?', p. 51) he does not find them significant enough to develop in his reading. In fact, this neglect seems to be based on his

categorization because of important generic differentiations from other dystopias nor does it seem to borrow features from feminist dystopias or critical dystopias as *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Kindred* do. Instead, the blurring of genres is between eutopia and dystopia itself, just as Le Guin's short story, twenty years earlier presented. Unlike the previous novels discussed, it defies the usual dystopian setting in terms of tone and atmosphere. Its characters are not unhappy or despairing, in fact, the focus of the community is to provide the best possible personal and professional fulfilment for each of its members. Yet it retains many important features of dystopias which question important conceptual as well as generic issues. In fact, the blurring of the two utopian conventions functions as a destabilising force which threatens to elide differences between eutopian and dystopian narratives and present the reader not with the question of whether it is a eutopia or dystopia but whether these two categories are obsolete because their merging can only suggest the anti-utopian claim that all utopias are doomed to become dystopias. The term, therefore 'flawed utopia' is unsatisfactory because this novel seems to support the view that all utopias are flawed and that, inevitably, they are revealed to be dystopias on the basis of the cost exacted for their successful functioning. In short, the question is: Does *The Giver*, blur the distinction between eutopia and dystopia in order to prove the anti-utopian thesis of utopia's supposed totalitarian nature[544] or is this blurring a heuristic method through which the reader is forced to consider those elements in utopias which endanger eutopias and render them dystopian? My argument in this section will support the second view and justify the blurring of utopian conventions into one narrative in order to show, as in 'Omelas' that the revolutionary, utopian actions of the single potential 'victim' in the novel are motivated by the knowledge he accrues and his resistance to the alleged, necessary sacrifice is inextricable from the affective bonds he forms. Thus, by examining the similarities with other, classic, totalitarian narratives through the perception of the sacrificial victim, the final part of this final chapter will illustrate that even the sacrifice of a single

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assertion that 'utopias are static, virtually by definition' (53) and shows a more serious neglect of the majority of eutopias which are decidedly not static. His final rejection of the bildunsroman genre is based on the protagonist's escape from the community (56), a convention which is typically dystopian.

[544] Frédéric Rouvillois, 'Utopia and Totalitarianism' in Roland Schaer, Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent, (eds.), *Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World* (NY & Oxford: New York Public Library, 2000), pp. 316-332. Rouvillois states that 'utopia and totalitarianism share a similar conception of man, nature and history', p. 331.

individual is anti-utopian because it entails many other sacrifices which then result in a society, which is clearly dystopian.

The story begins in December and ends in the same month the following year because of an important ceremony in this community which lacks both spatial and temporal coordinates. Whereas previous dystopias utilized an 'everyman' or 'everywoman' central character, here the society could be anywhere or anytime. Its vague setting is not accidental, it mirrors the static, unchanging nature of the society where everything is perfectly ordered, planned and controlled. On the other hand, the central character, Jonas, very soon is revealed as a special eleven year old, with abilities and skills which rarely present themselves. In his case, another special individual, a girl called Rosemary, revealed similar talents ten years earlier. He himself has pale eyes and until his 'Assignment' at the age of twelve, felt no special affinity for any of the professional categories children are trained for. Initially, Jonas realises that he perceives an apple differently (24), then the faces in the audience (64), without owning the cognitive and linguistic tools which would interpret these changes. His special qualities are only revealed to him when he turns twelve, at the ceremony designated for assigning each child's future profession. There is no slave labour because the focus is in on justice and equality and the lack of poverty pervading all aspects of life.[545]

The description of the community's organisation is utopian insofar as it appears to have resolved all the serious personal and professional problems which have plagued humanity. Until the age of twelve, all children follow a strict regime based on their age. For example, when they turn one, there is a Ceremony of Naming (11), when they turn nine, they each receive a bicycle (13), and when they turn eight, they must choose where to devote time doing volunteer work, as this will help determine their natural inclinations and future professional training (26). A group of Elders carefully observe each child and decide, after four years, which direction their work life will take. Based on personality and aptitude, jobs include the traditional 'Doctors', 'Engineers', 'Security Guards' and 'Law and Justice'. But also included are more specialised categories, such as, 'Nurturers', like Jonas's father, who care for all children until the age of one, 'Birthmothers', who are only obliged to produce three children, and then become 'Laborers' for the rest of their lives, and 'Caretakers of the Old'

[545] Carter F. Hanson considers it clearly a dystopia, p. 45 in 'The Utopian Function of Memory in Lois Lowry's *The Giver*', *Extrapolation*, vol. 50, no. 1, Spring 2009, pp. 45-60.

who work in the 'House of the Old' for retired individuals. It is obviously a very attractive world where gender discrimination does not exist in the work place. Even marriages are arranged on the basis of personality and observed compatibility and decided by the Committee of Elders which could take years to make a Match: 'all the factors – disposition, energy level, intelligence and interests –had to correspond and interact perfectly' (48). Once the match is made, the couple must wait three years before applying for children and if their application is approved, everyone is entitled to two children, one girl and one boy. Thus, only very few individuals are left without a family, for example some members of the night crew at the Nurturing Centre where Jonas's father works have not been given spouses 'because they lacked, somehow, the essential capacity to connect *with others, which was required* for the creation of a family unit' (8). Nevertheless, there are indications that the price for the existence of this well-ordered society is may be too high.

It is soon revealed that there are no hills, no seasons and no sunshine (85). The external environment is controlled for the sake of the greater good and the sacrifice of diversity is seen as a necessary loss: 'Snow made growing food difficult, limited the agricultural periods. And unpredictable weather made transportation almost impossible at times. It wasn't a practical thing, so it became obsolete when we went to Sameness' (83-4).[546] This special perception is not easily comprehended as there is no need for the word 'colour' in a colourless landscape. There are also no animals but the word remains in use to describe someone 'uneducated or clumsy, someone who didn't fit in' (5). As a consequence of the reduction of the external world, the reduction of language is shown as a small price to pay for perennial abundance in the food supply and the loss of the warmth of the sun is balanced by the greater loss of the pain of sunburn (86). Although the sacrifice of environmental beauty may not seem catastrophic in view of the alternative, there are other, more substantial sacrifices which reveal a more dystopian tone.

An early sign is Jonas's mother's judgement that 'there is no honour' (21) in being chosen as a Birthmother which was 'an important job, if lacking in prestige' (53). Because of the separation of the child nurturing and childbearing functions, biological mothers, in an echo

[546] Susan G. Lea, 'Seeing Beyond Sameness: Using *The Giver*, to Challenge Colorblind Ideology', *Children's Literature in Education*, vol. 37, no. 1, March 2006, pp. 51-67. Lea states that community has sacrificed an sense of aesthetic education, p. 52.

of *The Handmaid's Tale*, are seen as vessels which, having performed their duty, are forever separated from their offspring. Because population control is strictly observed, when a woman is expecting twins, only one will be kept, while the smaller one will be Released – a euphemism for euthanasia. The reader learns that all older citizens are also one day Released and all citizens, despite their limited choices, do enjoy the right to ask for release: 'if you don't fit in, you can apply for Elsewhere and be released' (48). Release is also the punishment for one serious offence or for three minor offences.[547] When the father of Jonas's friend is released, 'no one ever mentioned it, the disgrace was unspeakable' (9). In an echo of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, a Speaker announces – without naming the offender – any crimes or misdemeanours and the accompanying reprimands, which may include Release. Even children are not exempt. When Jonas's father brings a baby home who has trouble sleeping, the reader learns that 'normally such a Newchild would be labeled inadequate and Released from the community' (42). In a conscious breaking of an official rule, the family names the baby Gabriel, in the hope that he will adjust soon and become integrated with children his age. There is a clear purpose in the forbidding of naming before the age of one and all family members were required to sign a pledge not to become attached to their temporary guest and would relinquish him 'without protest or appeal' when he was assigned a family unit (42). Behind the orderly adherence to the rules of the community, these are indications of a totalitarian society at work, which functions on a utilitarian basis and sacrifices all that is not useful: there is no celebration of Christmas, no grandparents, in fact, no love (123). What begins with the sacrifice of diversity in the external environment, continues with the sacrifice of affective ties and ends with the sacrifice of 'real' emotions.

The Giver places at its basis of community what previous dystopian novels attempted, but failed to completely destroy. In a daily ritual, all members of the family share their feelings and previous night's dreams. What appears, again, to be an occasion for the expression of feelings, is actually an aspect of the controlling forces of the community.[548] Its purpose is to detect any heretic thoughts or feelings which can then be eliminated before they become

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[547] Don Latham, 'Discipline and Its Discontents: A Foucauldian Reading of *The Giver*', *Children's Literature*, 32, 2004, pp. 134-151. Latham states that 'a criminal in this society, then, is anyone who cannot be completely integrated into the power structure of the community', p. 142.

[548] Susan Louise Stewart, 'A Return to Normal: Lois Lowry's *The Giver*', *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 31, 2007, pp. 21-35. Stewart finds that the novel 'reinforces cultural norms', p. 23.

heretic action. As with other dystopias, the family is the first source of control and potential betrayal. When Jonas describes a dream where he has intense feelings of desire towards his friend Fiona (36) his parents inform him that these are the first signs of Stirrings and a daily pill (much like *Brave New World*) for the rest of his life will suppress these intense feelings. He himself remembers an entry in the Book of Rules and an occasional announcement by the Speaker: 'ATTENTION. A REMINDER THAT STIRRINGS MUST BE REPORTED IN ORDER FOR TREATMENT TO TAKE PLACE' (37). Feelings of sexual desire, thus are as a kind of disease that must be contained in order for the smooth running of society. Like the previous dystopias discussed, sexual desire can lead to romantic love, and love of any kind is a potentially dangerous emotion for the disruption of the static structure of society.

But neither Jonas nor the rest of the population know what they lack because the most severe sacrifice they have made is that of history and memory. When Jonas is finally given his Assignment last at the Ceremony of the Twelve, he learns that he was selected because of his Intelligence, Integrity, Courage, and Wisdom and particularly because he has the 'Capacity to See Beyond' (63). He will be the new Receiver of all the memories the community has stored in the mind of one person: a single Elder named the Receiver who will transfer them to Jonas before he is released. In this special function, he is known as the Giver (87) and when he has transmitted all his memories to Jonas through a kind of telepathy, his final duty towards the community will be satisfied. Like the women of *Swastika Night* who have no memories, the citizens of this community have chosen a predictable, safe environment where the limited range of choices offer them security and stability. As with the previous dystopian texts, a series of exchanges between the Giver and Jonas, reveal the true ideals of the community. Jonas asks:

> 'Why did colors disappear?'
> 'Our people made...the choice to go to Sameness...We relinquished color when we relinquished sunshine and did away with differences...We gained control of many things. But we had to let go of others'
> 'We shouldn't have!' Jonas said fiercely (95).

As Levy points out,[549] 'increasingly uncomfortable with his dual role of joint-scapegoat and, in effect, society's ordained persecutor of the new scapegoat', the Giver as first tries to ease

[549] Levy, p. 55.

Jonas's pain by giving him more good memories than bad and then begins to develop a plan designed to end Jonas's suffering as well as society's dysfunction.

Jonas soon realises that having the freedom to make your own choices entails the risk of making mistakes: 'What if they were allowed to choose their own mate? And chose *wrong*? (original emphasis)...We really have to protect people from wrong choices' (98). The purpose of the Giver is to draw on these memories in difficult times when knowledge from the past may help with problems in the present. But as the ideal is Sameness, the citizens prefer not to suffer the pain of memories and deposit all history in one individual. It is a job with the highest honour but also the highest burden to bear. As a scapegoat of special standing, the Giver is not allowed to request Release, as this would allow all the painful, frightening memories of past wars, famine and unhappiness to escape into the community where the burden of this knowledge will be shared. As in Omelas, his continued existence, therefore, is made possible by the majority consensus, who prefer that one individual suffers from all past knowledge so that they may enjoy a pain-free existence.

Most of all, Jonas must bear the burden of physical pain and emotional loss, as he is the only one who feels real emotions and understands what 'love' means: 'I liked the feeling of love...I wish we still had that...I do understand that it wouldn't work very well...I can see that it was a *dangerous* way to live (126, original emphasis). It is not only romantic love that Jonas begins to understand but also familial love and friendship. When he asks his parents if they love him, he is admonished for not using precise language. As with other words which have fallen from use, they inform him that 'love' is 'a very generalized word, so meaningless that it's become almost obsolete' (127). As his memories increase and his knowledge of how things were expand, Jonas's isolation from his peers and family intensifies: 'He felt such love for his friends Asher and Fiona. But they could not feel it back, without the memories. And he could not give them those. Jonas knew with certainty that he could change nothing' (135). One of the emotions he experiences which other citizens cannot is that of compassion. When he learns that the previous Receiver, Rosemary, was actually the Giver's daughter, and that she asked for Release rather than bear the burden of poverty, hunger, terror, loneliness and loss alone (142) he understands the burden of bearing all the community's memories. For Nussbaum, the 'recognition of one's own related vulnerability' is 'an indispensable epistemological

requirement for compassion in human beings'.[550] Furthermore, the concern for the well-being of another is 'motivated or supported by the thought that one might oneself be, one day, in that person's position'.[551] Jonas is already in this position and fears for the fate of a young child who also has pale eyes.

Yet, he only realises that Release means death when he watches a tape of his father 'releasing' the smaller of the identical twins born: 'Jonas felt a ripping sensation inside himself, the feeling of terrible pain clawing its way forward to emerge in a cry' (151). His horror at the sight of the dead baby is the final straw for him to refuse to be complicit in the killing of innocent people.

In this state of heightened awareness, Jonas begins to feel increasingly alienated, like the typical protagonist of dystopias, from the world around him and this final knowledge is more than he can sustain. Whereas Rosemary's suicide had constituted her as a fully silenced sacrificial victim who 'volunteers' to die burdened with guilt that is not her own, Jonas refuses to be a scapegoat because this would make him complicit in the death of more innocent victims. His compassion for his fellow citizens, and his knowledge of emotions they are unable to feel, move him to reject the position of scapegoat for his community's painful memories. After weeks of refusing to take his daily pill, his emotional maturity at this moment of awareness finally moves him to seek from the Giver advice on how to change his society's founding principle. As the Giver states: 'the worst part of holding the memories is not the pain. It's the loneliness of it. Memories need to be shared...for years I felt that they should, but it seemed so hopeless' (154-155). Like other alienated protagonists of dystopias, he seeks to destabilize the status quo not on his own but with the only person he has developed an affective relationship with, the Giver. As with the existential choices other protagonists have made, the moment of choice is one of clarity. He knew that if the plan failed, he would be killed, but 'if he stayed, his life was no longer worth living' (155). The decision the Giver makes to stay behind in order to help the community deal with all the memories released with Jonas's departure is again based on compassion and his desire to protect them from overwhelming pain and suffering. When Jonas suggests that the citizens should be left alone, without their help,

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[550] Martha C. Nussbaum *Upheavals of Thought, The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: University Press, 2001), p. 319.
[551] Nussbaum, *Upheavals*, p. 342.

the Giver responds in accordance with the lesson Jonas has learnt 'Of course they needed to care, it was the meaning of everything' (157).

In *The Giver*, what was only hinted at in 'Omelas', becomes foregrounded. The cost of a life of prosperity is founded on the sacrifice of the innocent who, once isolated, can have no allies in the burden they are designated to carry. Whether they are denigrated as creatures to be pitied or special beings to be admired, the scapegoats of these societies call into question the nature of the utopian community which perpetuates their suffering. At the same time, the ambiguity on the part of the narrator leaves the reader unsure as to whether these narratives are anti-utopian in general, or against a particular type of utopian vision which depends on sacrifice. What seems clear is that if a community's existence is based on sacrifice then this cannot support a desirable utopia. Where 'Omelas' is silent on the motivation behind the community's tacit agreement on the terms of this exchange, Jonas's community admits that they were unable to bear the burden of unpleasant memories. Yet, once this burden is shared, its weight becomes lighter and there is no need for a single individual to suffer the unhappiness alone. Furthermore, it is not merely the sacrifice of one individual's happiness that maintains the majority's well-being. The whole structure of their lives entails important sacrifices and contains more similarities to dystopias than utopias.

In his final flight from home, Jonas leaves a day early because the baby boy's release has been decided. Gabriel has not been officially named and he only seems to sleep soundly with the help of Jonas's happy memories. Yet, unprepared and having to care for a baby on a difficult journey seems reckless. Why does Jonas not leave the child behind? Again in keeping with dystopian conventions, it is love for another which motivates the protagonist's rebellion and desire for escape. Whereas romantic love is the standard mode for the male protagonist's flight from dystopia, female protagonists have expanded this to include friendship and maternal love. Here, Jonas is still a boy himself and travelling with a baby signifies the future, thus bringing the circle of possible affective relationships in dystopias to a close.

At the same time, *The Giver* brings together several important issues in relation to utopian/dystopian ethics. In all the previous novels, the desire for freedom motivated all the protagonists to act in counter-hegemonic ways. In each case, the presence of love complicated their lives, either by placing them at greater risk and/or by forcing them to make compromises

they would otherwise be unwilling to agree to. On one level, there seems to be an obvious gender differentiation: male protagonists prefer freedom to love and women protagonists relinquish freedom for love. The existence of two different ethical systems guides the protagonist to act in ways which he/she believes to be in good faith, given the fear of death. But the desire for freedom and desire to sustain affective relationships must be judged equally important within the context of an anti-sacrificial vision of utopia. Neither should they form a binary opposition which privileges one above the other along gendered lines.

There are several ways to include both in a utopian ethical mode and this is evidenced most clearly with Jonas. First, even though the desire for freedom seems greater in men, it only truly is put into action when it is matched to the freedom to love. Second, although women protagonists desire freedom, they often relinquish it for the sake of affective relationships. Yet, by choosing relationships with the risk of death, they too are acting in subversive ways since the command against forming affective bonds is the most severe of all. Finally, the values of freedom and love are not at all at odds with each other but inter-dependent. What all the protagonists have shown is that both values are equally important to them. Winston and Julia refuse to sacrifice their relationship but also desire freedom from oppression. Offred is reluctant to leave Nick but she also forms bonds with women who are in the Resistance or outlawed altogether. Dana and her ancestor Alice both fight for freedom and for the right to love freely. Finally, Jonas takes baby Gabriel with him because he finally knows that without love, freedom is meaningless and without freedom, love is impossible. The love of freedom and the freedom to love constitute the coordinates of the same value system which motivates the protagonists of dystopias to challenge the status quo by refusing to sacrifice either.

However, the open-endedness of Jonas's escape with the baby Gabriel, his hope that he will find another community which will accept them and the sound of music from afar points to a reading which is more utopian in its tone and more hopeful than classical dystopias:

> He could see lights...He knew they were shining through the windows of rooms, that they were red, blue, and yellow lights that twinkled from trees in places where families created and kept memories, where they celebrated love (179).
> Suddenly, he was aware with certainty and joy that below, ahead, they were waiting for him; and that they were waiting, too, for the baby...he heard people singing (180).

Like the dystopias discussed so far, the sacrifice of affective relationships is presented as the most serious loss on the part of the counter-narrative and the most potentially dangerous on the part of the master narrative. This is a convention which owes as much to an intertextual understanding amongst dystopian fiction written since *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as to the common concern with the dominance of sacrifice in these narratives. It is only because the sacrificial victim is constituted as lacking social, familial and affective ties that the sacrifice of life, freedom and happiness is possible. Sacrifice, thus, is anti-utopian in its logic, practice and consequences.

Conclusion

This thesis began with a title heading which suggested a spatial-temporal perspective on dystopian fiction. It suggested that a dystopian reality is possible in the here and now, and not only in the future and/or elsewhere. Whether any given dystopia, real or fictional, is oriented towards utopia involves a multitude of factors, without fixed coordinates which can provide unchanging signposts. One of these factors, the function of sacrifice, signals, by virtue of its visibility in dystopian narratives, one such beacon. In articulating a definition of dystopia, the related terms of utopia and anti-utopia were found useful for designating the parameters between the utopian and anti-utopian dystopia. Sacrifice itself was found to embody many meanings from many different disciplines. In focusing on the most influential – Hubert and Maus, Freud and Girard – and followed by feminist and other critiques, these theories were examined for their gender blindness and normative stance. Rather than purporting to be descriptive analyses of a pervasive form of ritual violence, they often resorted to either myths of origin to justify the persistence of sacrifice in modern times or to beliefs in human nature which inevitably structure experience in sacrificial terms. Nancy Jay and Luce Irigaray both offer alternative theories which incorporate gender while criticizing the male-neutral bias from different perspectives. For the former, the problem with sacrifice lies in the exclusion of women from participating in the ritual as sacrificers and therefore from reaping the benefits. Because sacrifice is interpreted primarily as a social practice which brings together men by excluding women, there is no place in the social hierarchy of the ritual for women. In confluence with Jay, Irigaray assumes the exclusion of women from the practice and benefits of sacrifice only to reject it altogether in a desire to form inclusive communities which do not require the shedding of blood and would be bound by other ties. As a literary example of the foundational nature of sacrificial myths, the near sacrifice of Isaac by his father Abraham in Genesis 22, was read from the viewpoint of Isaac against the grain of most interpretations which focus on Abraham or the role of God. As a result, the victim's silence revealed the inhumanity of the violence inflicted on the innocent and the subsequent mental trauma. In a second literary example which questions the ethics behind the power structures which sustain the hierarchy and inequality of the sacrificial structure. The re-working of Genesis 22 by Diski's *After These Things*, in contradistinction to the socio-religious theories of sacrifice

which preceded, interprets sacrifice from the victim's viewpoint in order to question the normative value it has been bestowed and to reveal the true use value of its continuing practice. It also gives voice to Isaac's silence by illustrating the traumatic effects not only of his 'near' death experience but also by questioning the apparent willingness of victims to sacrifice themselves.

In the second half of the thesis, the various aspects of sacrificial practice were discussed in the context of different manifestations of the totalitarian dystopia.. Chronologically and generically, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* set the standard with which the subsequent dystopias engaged intertextually. *The Handmaid's Tale* situates itself at the end of a tradition of classical dystopias and the beginning of critical dystopias. It was assessed against feminist criteria and found to provide a sharp critique of patriarchal values which constitute women as commodities unable to form horizontal relationships/friendships. *Kindred* goes further in developing the form of the critical dystopia by combining the formal conventions of the neo-slave narrative and the totalitarian dystopia. Molinaro's novel of the Greek 'pharmakos' ritual illustrated both the degree to which sacrifice is a foundational concept in western culture but also how the gods to which sacrifices are made are in actuality representatives of the hegemonic order which required human lives to sustain their power. Thus, the repetition of a traumatic sacrificial history in dystopias has its origin in the sacrifice of woman and the feminine divine principle. Finally, *The Giver* and 'The Ones Who Walk away from Omelas' take the formal characteristics of the dystopia even further by presenting narratives which almost conflated the conventions of the utopia and dystopia only to crucially reveal the ambiguous stance toward the concept of utopia. In addressing the first of the five overall questions posed in the Introduction, the generic features of dystopia were considered and the utopian and anti-utopian stance they expressed. The question of gender was important in showing the special sacrifices women were called to make in relation to reproduction, sexual freedom, maternity and friendship. Fourth, the question of the scapegoat was examined in relation to the sacrifice of memory and history while taking into consideration the compromises the slave makes in order to survive. The issue of memory and history resurfaces in discussion of the ethics of dystopian fiction. The complicity of the community in demanding

the sacrifice of the individual for the sake of the majority showed how the question of totality risks becoming a problem of totalising power.

Because of the orientation from the victim's viewpoint, the master's narrative, expressed by representatives of the hegemonic order, is shown to be buttressed by a logic, practice and ethics of sacrifice. Opposing this discourse is the counter-narrative which the potential victim expresses which is anti-sacrificial. The narratives were shown to be built on a sacrificial structure which used ritual and linguistic violence to control its potential victims, hierarchy and inequality to ensure the steady supply of scapegoats and alienated relationships to self and other which prevented most potential victims from moving to the position of the plaintiff. In terms of affective relationships, sacrificial victims were prevented from forming ties which involved any form of love: romantic, maternal, familial and friendship, for the purpose of perpetuating alienated identities. On a more conceptual level, with important, however practical consequences, the sacrifice of collective history and personal memory for the purpose of severing genealogies and preventing revolutionary action was dominant in all the narratives. The relationship between self and community was shown to be one of complicity on the part of the community, for even the members who were aware of the sacrificial contract which bound certain individuals to a life without freedom contributed to the perpetuation of the status quo. In this way, however, the initial structuring between sacrificer/victor and sacrificed/victim expands to include a variety of individuals who not only are not innocent bystanders but through their tacit agreement of the terms of exchange reveal themselves to be equally guilty and equally rewarded by the sacrificial system. The blurring of the lines between innocent and guilty brings to the forefront the ethics of dystopian worlds and the value of sacrifice within their borders. For if sacrifice is the underlying value as well as the structure, the logic as well as the means of maintaining these totalitarian societies, then it is an anti-utopian force which should be recognised and fought against. Far from binding a community together, as Girard insists, sacrificial violence fragments it and bestows its benefits on the basis of inequality. In other words, an anti-sacrificial vision of utopia would be the first step toward countering both the injustices of the society we inhabit and the fear which prevents us from rebelling against the benefactors of its practice. The degree that a dystopia relies on sacrifice is the degree to which it is totalitarian and vice versa: the most extreme forms of

totalitarian worlds rely on sacrifice to enforce their terror. In seeking the 'blue' of Utopia, as Levitas calls it, it is first necessary to identify the 'red' of dystopia. From the Ancient Greek novel to contemporary films, utopian narratives continue to foreground sacrifice as a structure, logic and impulse. The reader is called to identify the anti-utopian forces in these narratives and to reject the sacrifice(s) on which they depend. This is the importance of the education of perception, and it requires vigilance against those who would ask us to sacrifice, and be sacrificed, so that others may benefit from our loss: whether it be freedom, love or life.[552]

[552] My thanks to Dr. Evy Varsamopoulou for alerting me to the utopian aspects of the Hellenistic novel. Heliodorus, *Ethiopian Story*, trans. Sir Walter Lamb (London: Everyman, 1997, 1961). For similar conventions to the 'flawed utopia' see *The Village*, dir. M. Night Shyamalan, 2004.

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