

Dystopian and Totalitarian Societies in the *Handmaid's Tale*, *Fahrenheit 451*, and *1984*

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Abstract: This study examines three works of dystopian fiction that concern themselves with the rise of “disciplinary” and “control” societies from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. At the center of the three novels chosen is the question of power, or more precisely, of absolute power— power concentrated in the hands of the few or an individual. Each novel focuses on a major aspect of human existence that power wants to control absolutely. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, it is female sexuality; in *Fahrenheit 451*, the control of the free flow of information; and in *1984*, it is thought and language. In all three novels, dystopia is essentially defined as the loss of individual freedom or civil and democratic liberties, and where a system, institution or organization suppresses the many values represented by liberal humanism (i.e., individualism, freedom of speech, freedom of the flow of information, freedom to control your own body, sexuality). The paper attempts to evoke the dangers of totalitarian societies where human beings have lost all individual rights and liberties. The dystopian novels under study are famous for highlighting the various mechanisms of absolute power, how it touches one's very own body, choices, destiny, thought, and language.

Keywords: Dystopian, Fiction, Control, Disciplinary, Totalitarianism.

INTRODUCTION

While utopia has been defined more accordingly with the idea of “a good place”, “perfection” or an “ideal society”, scholars like Lyman Tower Sargent prefers to define utopia as a non-existent or imaginary space (Dillman, 2020). This is partly due to the Greek etymology of the word *utopia*, which is *ou topos* or “no place”— an idea that is not originally opposed to *dystopia* or *dis pos* which literally means “a bad place”.

For Ryan (2014), the definition of utopia as an ideal and perfect place was created because utopian societies present an “‘imaginary, yet positive’ environment in which characters are free to express themselves, share their opinions, and stand out as individuals while imagining and working toward an alternative social order” (2). As such, utopia has been historically defined by four characteristics: 1) the content of the imagined society (i.e., the identification of that society with the idea of “good place”), 2) the literary form into which the utopian imagination has been crystallized, 3) the function of utopia (i.e., the impact [t]hat it causes on its reader, urging him to take action) and 4) the desire for a better life, caused by a feeling of discontentment towards the society one lives in” (Aaderma, 2014). These definitions of utopia is in contrast with dystopia where citizens are subjected to “harshly repressive societies that constrict any free thought or individuality” (Bethune cited by Ryan, 2014). Gottlieb, (2001) further defines dystopian society as “A hell on earth, an absurd, death-bound social-political system where the elite deliberately conspires against its own people, against the most

universal principle of justice, with emphasis on nightmarish rigged trials, with make believe accusations followed by all-to-real sentences to hard labor or death” (18). This kind of system results to different kinds of repressive social control systems, a lack or total absence of individual freedoms and expressions and constant states of warfare or violence.

Dystopias often explore the concept of technology going “too far” and how humans individually and massively use technology. A dystopian society is also often characterized by mass poverty for most of its inhabitants and a large military-like police force. Because of this, it presents an “undesirable society controlled and oppressed by a totalitarian government which employs a hegemonic or coercive system upon the subjects” (Gottlieb, 2001). Novels in this particular literary genre present imagined worlds and societies that are not ideals, but instead are terrifying or restrictive. Unlike a utopian novel in which the writer aims to portray the perfect human society, a novel of negative utopia does the exact opposite: it shows the worst human society imaginable, to warn society to avoid any path that might lead toward an imagined but possible societal annihilation.

This study takes as its subject three works of dystopian fiction that concern themselves with what we can call in general the rise of “disciplinary” and “control” societies from the nineteenth to the twentieth century (discussed by Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, respectively). At the center of all the three novels chosen is the

question of power, or more precisely, of absolute power— power concentrated in the hands of the few or an individual. Each novel focuses on a major aspect of human existence that power wants to control absolutely. In *The Handmaids' Tale*, it is female sexuality; in *1984*, it is thought and language; and in *Fahrenheit 451*, it would be the control of the free flow of information (via books). In all three novels, dystopia is essentially defined as the loss of individual freedom. It is in this context that literature reveals that its implicit governing principle is the philosophy of liberal humanism. Thus, dystopia means every system, action or organization that suppresses the values represented by liberal humanism (i.e., individualism, freedom of speech, freedom of the flow of information, freedom to control your own body, sexuality).

Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* reflects a strong feminist vision of dystopia. Some of the novel's concerns seem weird today but it remains one of the most powerful recent portrayals of a totalitarian society, and one of the few dystopian novels to examine in detail the junction of politics and sexuality. The novel has worked well in its exploration of reproduction as a controversial issue on top of politics and its appurtenances (abortion, single-child policy, racism, arranged marriage, and so on).

Like Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, (1932), *1984* is one of the most famous novels of the negative utopian, or dystopian, genre. In 1949, even before the television had become a fixture in the homes and establishments, Orwell's vision and concept of dictatorship in which every individual would be monitored without end by means of the telescreen looked really terrifyingly possible. Orwell having imagined if not hypothesized such a society in the future compounded if not complicated this fear. *1984* is one of Orwell's best-crafted novels, and it remains one of the most powerful warnings ever issued against the ills and dangers of a totalitarian society.

Of course, the world that Orwell envisioned in *1984* partly materialized in countries like Stalinist Soviet Russia. *1984* remains an important novel, presumably for the alarm it creates against the foul and abusive nature of authoritarian government and for its meditative analysis on the power of human mind or psychology, including the ways language intervention and history can be used as machineries of control and repression.

Subsequent to this futuristic tradition of George Orwell's *1984*, Bradbury began writing what had become *Fahrenheit 451* on pay-by-the-hour typewriters in the University of California at Los Angeles library basement. In the spring of 1950, while living with his family in a humble home in Venice, California, He finished the first draft, a shorter version called *The Fireman*, in just nine days. (*SparkNotes Editors*, 2007).

Fahrenheit 451 was published in 1953 and became Bradbury's most popular and widely read work of fiction. He produced a stage version of the novel at the Studio Theatre Playhouse in Los Angeles. Bradbury's account of this insane world very much bears resemblance alarmingly to the present world and its implications, from the young viewpoint, is alarming if not very terrifying.

Plot Overview

The Handmaid's Tale is presented from the viewpoint of Offred who is kept as a concubine ("handmaid") for reproductive purposes by the ruling class. Offred is a handmaid in the Republic of Gilead, a totalitarian and theocratic state that has replaced the United States of America. Because of dangerously low reproduction rates, Handmaids are assigned to bear children for elite couples that have trouble conceiving. Offred serves the Commander and his wife, Serena Joy. The novel is set in the near future in the Republic of Gilead. It was founded by a theocratic-organized military coup as a response to the invasive ecological, if not physical and social squalor of the country. In the novel's epilogue, the events occur shortly after the beginning of "the Gilead period". The epilogue itself is a "transcription of a Symposium on Gileadean Studies written sometime in the distant future (2195)," and according to the "keynote speaker" Professor Pieixoto, he and "a colleague" Professor Knotly Wade discovered Offred's narrative recorded onto "thirty" unnumbered "cassette tapes," placed these tapes in a "probable order" and transcribed them, calling them collectively "the handmaid's tale" - a reference to the *Canterbury Tales* of Geoffrey Chaucer.

The protagonist in *Fahrenheit 451* is Guy Montag, a fireman who burns books in a world where firemen start fires rather than put them out. People do not read books; rather, they enjoy nature, spend time by themselves, think independently, and dwell on seemingly meaningful and entertaining conversations. Montag meets the gentle seventeen-year-old girl Clarisse McClellan. Through their

brief but substantive conversations even on unholy hours, she opens his eyes to the emptiness of his life. This she does with her innocently penetrating questions and her unusual affection for people and nature. The death of Clarisse heightens the dissatisfaction of Montag's life and he begins to search for a solution in a stash of books that he has stolen from his own fires and hidden inside an air-conditioning vent. Beatty, his fire chief, explains that it's normal for a fireman to wonder what books have to offer, and he explains through a monologue how books came to be banned. He recalls that he once came across a retired English professor, Faber, in a park. Believing that this man could help him understand what he reads, he visits him. Faber shares him the value of books along with the detailed awareness of life that books contain. The professor eventually agrees to help Montag to understand his readings, and they plot a scheme to overthrow the status quo. As the story progresses, Montag's own wife has betrayed him. Captain Beatty forces Montag to burn the house himself; and then places him under arrest. The Mechanical Hound, a monstrous machine that Beatty has set to attack Montag, injects Montag's leg with anesthetic but he manages to destroy it with his flamethrower; then he walks off and escapes with some books that were hidden in his backyard. He hides these in another fireman's house and calls in an alarm from a pay phone. The whole city watches as the chase unfolds on TV, but Montag manages to reach the river in time and disguise into Faber's clothes. He goes downstream and follows a set of railroad tracks until he meets a group of intellectuals who welcome him. They are a nationwide network of book lovers who have memorized great works of literature and philosophy. They hope to help mankind after the war that has just been declared. They assign Montag to memorize the Book of Ecclesiastes. Jets appear in the sky and completely destroy the city with bombs. Montag and his new friends move on to search for survivors and start if not spread a new civilization.

1984 is set in the nation of Oceania. Winston Smith is a member of the ruling Party in London. At the novel's opening, the protagonist Winston is despaired by the oppression and rigid control of the Party, which prohibits free thought, sex, and other forms of expression of individuality. Winston despises the party and has on account kept a diary in which he contains his criminal thoughts. He has also become fixated and deceived by a Party member named O'Brien, whom

Winston believes is a secret member of the Brotherhood—the mysterious, legendary group that works to overthrow the Party. Winston works in the Ministry of Truth, where he alters historical records to fit the needs of the Party. He is enticed by a beautiful dark-haired girl named Julia, and worries that she is an informant who will turn him in for his crime. He is troubled by the Party's control of history. Julia and Winston begin an affair. They rent a room in the prole district where Winston bought the diary. This relationship lasts for some time. As his affair with Julia continues, his hatred for the Party becomes intensified.

Winston and Julia went to see O'Brien. As a member of the powerful Inner Party (Winston belongs to the Outer Party), O'Brien leads a luxurious life in extreme contrast with what Winston fathom for his own. O'Brien confirms that, like them, he hates the Party, and says that he works against it as a member of the Brotherhood. He indoctrinates them into the Brotherhood, and gives Winston a copy of Emmanuel Goldstein's book, the manifesto of the Brotherhood. Suddenly, the soldiers barge in and seize them. Mr. Charrington, the store proprietor, turns to be a member of the Thought Police all along. Winston finds out that O'Brien, too, is a Party spy who simply pretended to be a member of the Brotherhood in order to trap Winston into committing an open act of rebellion against the Party. O'Brien spends months torturing and brainwashing Winston, who struggles to resist.

All along, O'Brien wanted Winston to give up Julia. He released Winston where he again meets Julia but he no longer feels anything for her. He completely embraces the Party and learns to love Big Brother.

Dystopia and Religion

The three novels under study display dystopian visions for their respective societies as they are also teeming with religious references.

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* extrapolates on the vision of life in the United States covering the backlash against feminism. The novel being dystopian makes people think about the world in which they live and to see how the idea of happiness can be perverted providing the society know little else. The novel takes some of the positions advocated by religious conservative and exaggerates them. For example, many conservatives, both then and now, wish to re-criminalize abortion. So in the novel, doctors who

performed abortions, even when such practices were legal, are hanged at the Wall. Conservatives also tend to oppose gay rights; in the novel, gays are hanged for "gender treachery." Political and religious dissidents, abortionists, and homosexuals are executed and hung at "The Wall" for public display. Another conservative position was that women should stay home and raise their children, so in the novel, the first thing the Gilead regime does is to ban women from possessing money or owning property and to value them either as domestic companions for powerful men (the Wives), or as producers of babies (the Handmaids). Those who do not conform to the new societal norms are pressed into service as maids and personal servants or deported to "the colonies" (regions where pollution has reached toxic levels) - if they are lucky.

Throughout *1984*, Winston imagines meeting O'Brien in "the place where there is no darkness." The words first come to him in a dream, and he ponders them for the rest of the novel. Eventually, Winston does meet O'Brien in the place where there is no darkness; instead of being the paradise Winston imagined, it is merely a prison cell in which the light is never turned off. The idea of "the place where there is no darkness" symbolizes Winston's approach to the future: possibly because of his intense fatalism (he believes that he is doomed no matter what he does), he unwisely allows himself to trust O'Brien, even though inwardly he senses that O'Brien might be a Party operative.

By deliberately weakening people's memories and flooding their minds with propaganda, the Party is able to replace individuals' memories with its own version of the truth. It becomes nearly impossible for people to question the Party's power in the present when they accept what the Party tells them about the past—that the Party arose to protect them from bloated, oppressive capitalists, and that the world was far uglier and harsher before the Party came to power. Winston vaguely understands this principle. He struggles to recover his own memories and formulate a larger picture of what has happened to the world. Winston buys a paperweight in an antique store in the prole district that comes to symbolize his attempt to reconnect with the past. Symbolically, when the Thought Police arrest Winston at last, the paperweight shatters on the floor.

The old picture of St. Clement's Church in the room that Winston rents above Mr. Charrington's

shop is another representation of the lost past. Winston associates a song with the picture that ends with the words "Here comes the chopper to chop off your head!" This is an important foreshadow, as it is the telescreen hidden behind the picture that ultimately leads the Thought Police to Winston, symbolizing the Party's corrupt control of the past.

While there is no clear explanation of why books are banned in the future, *Fahrenheit 451* suggests that many different factors could merge to create this result. These factors can be broken into two groups: factors that lead to a general lack of interest in reading and factors that make people actively hostile if not antagonistic toward books. The novel doesn't clearly distinguish these two developments. Apparently, they simply support one another.

The first group of factors includes the popularity of media forms of entertainment such as television and radio. More broadly, Bradbury thinks that the presence of fast cars, loud music, and advertisements creates a lifestyle with too much stimulation in which no one has the time to concentrate. Dystopias often explore the concept of technology going "too far" and how humans individually and en masse use technology. Also, the huge mass of published material is too overwhelming to think about, leading to a society that reads condensed books (which were very popular at the time Bradbury was writing) rather than the real thing.

The second group of factors, those that make people hostile toward books, involves envy. People don't like to feel inferior to those who have read more than they have. But the novel implies that the most important factor leading to censorship is the objections of special-interest groups and "minorities" to things in books that offend them. Bradbury is careful to refrain from referring specifically to racial minorities—Beatty mentions dog lovers and cat lovers, for instance. The reader can only try to infer which special-interest groups he really has in mind.

As the Afterword to *Fahrenheit 451* demonstrates, Bradbury is extremely sensitive to any attempts to restrict his free speech; for instance, he objects strongly to letters he has received suggesting that he revise his treatment of female or black characters. He sees such interventions as essentially hostile and intolerant—as the first step on the road to book burning.

Ironically, the fireman's duty is to destroy knowledge and promote ignorance in order to equalize the population and promote sameness. Montag's encounters with Clarisse, the old woman, and Faber ignite in him the spark of doubt about this approach. His resultant search for knowledge destroys the unquestioning ignorance he used to share with nearly everyone else, and he battles the basic beliefs of his society.

Fahrenheit 451 contains a number of religious references. Mildred's friends remind Montag of icons he once saw in a church and did not understand. The language Bradbury uses to describe the enameled, painted features of the artifacts Montag saw is similar to the language he uses to describe the firemen's permanent smiles. Faber invokes the Christian value of forgiveness: after Montag turns against society, Faber reminds him that since he was once one of the faithful, he should demonstrate pity rather than fury.

The narrative also contains references to the miracle at Cana, where Christ transformed water into wine. Faber describes himself as water and Montag as fire, asserting that the merging of the two will produce wine. In the biblical story, Jesus Christ's transformation of water into wine was one of the miracles that proved his identity and instilled faith in his role as the savior. Montag longs to confirm his own identity through a similar self-transformation.

The references to fire are more complex. In the Christian tradition, fire has several meanings: from the pagan blaze in which the golden calf was made to Moses' burning bush, it symbolizes both blatant heresy and divine presence. Fire in *Fahrenheit 451* also possesses contradictory meanings. At the beginning it is the vehicle of a restrictive society, but Montag turns it upon his oppressor, using it to burn Beatty and win his freedom.

Finally, Bradbury uses language and imagery from the Bible to resolve the novel. In the last pages, as Montag and Granger's group walk upriver to find survivors after the bombing of the city, Montag knows they will eventually talk, and he tries to remember appropriate passages from the Bible. He brings to mind Ecclesiastes 3:1, "*To everything there is a season,*" and also Revelations 22:2, "*And on either side of the river was there a tree of life . . . and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations,*" which he decides to save for when they reach the city. The verse from Revelations also speaks of the holy city of God, and the last

line of the book, "*When we reach the city,*" implies a strong symbolic connection between the atomic holocaust of Montag's world and the Apocalypse of the Bible.

Subjugation of Women and Human Sexuality

The self, like the mind, is a social emergent. This social conception of the self, George Herbert Mead, (1934) argues, entails that individual selves are the products of social interaction and not the (logical or biological) preconditions of that interaction. The self arises when the individual takes the attitude of the generalized other toward herself. The self, then, is of great value to organized society: the internalization of the conversation of significant symbols and of other interactional symbolic structures allows for "the superior co-ordination" of "society as a whole," and for the "increased efficiency of the individual as a member of the group".

Atwood, through *The Handmaid's Tale*, explores themes of women in subjugation. In the novel, a handmaid, Offred is stripped off her independence. She is no longer allowed to hold property, arrange her own affairs, read, wear make-up, or choose her clothes. This is in consonance with what the other in the society expects her to be.

Women are segregated into categories, and dressed according to their social function. Human sexuality in Gilead has come under a general social regulation that sex for pleasure is fundamentally degrading to women. Men are seen as constantly desiring sexual pleasure, but obliged to abstain for religio-social reasons. The social regulation is enforced as a law with corporal punishment inflicted by Aunts for lesser offences, and capital punishment inflicted by a group of Handmaids for greater offences (participation).

Women were in a state of regular and constant fear of physical and sexual violence in public.

Albeit the force of innocence and truth embraced by Clarisse, an adolescent, with so much love for life and nature, we see women subjugated in *Fahrenheit 451*. In the beginning of "The Hearth and the Salamander," Montag's bedroom is described first as "not empty" and then as "indeed empty," because Mildred is physically there, but her thoughts and feelings are elsewhere. Bradbury's repeated use of paradoxical statements—especially that a character or thing is dead and alive or there and not there—is frequently applied to Mildred, suggesting her empty, half-alive condition. This paradox

questions women who are apparently living but are spiritually dead. Ultimately, Mildred and the rest of her female friends in the society seem to be not much more than machines, thinking only what they are told to think. The culture of *Fahrenheit 451* is a culture of insubstantiality and unreality, and Montag desperately seeks more substantial truths in the books he hoards than in his female companions. Mildred seems to have no hope of resolving the conflicts within herself. Her suicide attempt suggests that she is in great pain and that her obsession with television is a means to avoid confronting her life. But her true feelings are buried very deep within her. She even appears to be unaware of her own suicide attempt. She is a frightening character, because the reader would expect to know the protagonist's wife very intimately, but she is completely cold, distant, and unreadable. Her betrayal of Montag is far more severe than Beatty's, since she is, after all, his wife. Bradbury portrays Mildred as a shell of a human being, devoid of any sincere emotional, intellectual, or spiritual substance. Her only attachment is to the "family" in the soap opera she watches. Bradbury uses the electronic device to reveal Mildred's corrupted insides and the thick sediment of delusion, misery, and self-hatred within her. Conversely, Bradbury explores the empty lifelessness of Mildred and the countless others like her.

The woman character Julia in *1984* is presented as a striking contrast to Winston, the protagonist. Apart from their mutual sexual desire and hatred for the Party, most of their traits are dissimilar, if not contradictory. Whereas Winston is restless, fatalistic, and concerned about large-scale social issues, Julia is sensual, pragmatic, and generally content to live in the moment and make the best of her. She appears to be a happy-go-lucky if not carefree and unconcerned figure in a seemingly restless world. She is more concerned with enjoying sex and making practical plans to avoid getting caught by the Party. Being well adapted to her chosen forms of small-scale rebellion, she claims to have had affairs with various Party members, and has no intention of terminating her pleasure seeking, or of being caught. Disturbingly, women are viewed as mere objects if not instruments for societal transformation and not prime movers if not active benefactors of possible redemption. Interestingly, the red-armed prole woman whom Winston hears singing through the window maybe seen as Winston's one legitimate hope for the long-term future: the possibility that

the proles will eventually come to recognize their plight and rebel against the Party. Only that, Winston sees the prole woman as a prime example of reproductive virility; he often imagines her giving birth to the future generations that will finally challenge the Party's authority. In this sense, women could be seen as the only hope but frustratingly, Orwell expresses in no certain terms this contribution of women in building future generation.

The Ills and Dangers of Totalitarianism

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* presents a totalitarian society. In Gilead, all power is in the hands of the male elite who call themselves Commanders. They enforce their rule through paramilitary groups known as Guardians of the Faith, and through spies and secret police known as Eyes. The Eyes are everywhere, and are equated by the theocratic Gilead regime with the Eye of God. "Under His Eye," for example, is a stock phrase used by the self *Offred* to communicate with the other handmaids to remind them that God is always watching what they say and do. There is no difference, in the ideology of Gilead, between the needs of the state and the will of God.

In totalitarian societies, the individual has no importance. Individual rights are sacrificed in favor of the goals of the ruling group, which are falsely equated with the welfare of the whole society. (*Dictionary of American Government and Politics*). Gilead takes this even further, denying the integrity not only of the self, the individual person, but of the human body. The Handmaids, for example, are valued only for their reproductive capacities. They are simply 'wombs' waiting to be fertilized. Other parts of their bodies are disposable.

One of the ways a totalitarian regime controls the populace is by restricting access to knowledge. So in Gilead, women are not allowed to read. Even the signs identifying the stores are in pictures, not words. Old books and magazines, both pornographic and otherwise, are banned and burned. The purpose of the regime is to keep people ignorant. In the Commander's household, even the Bible is kept locked up, so the regime can interpret it in any way they please. It would be dangerous for them to let the people read it freely. The elevation of ignorance to a prime purpose of the regime is ironic since the story takes place in what is probably Cambridge, Massachusetts, the home of Harvard University. Harvard is where the Prayvaganzas, the Salvagings and the Particition

take place. A bastion of learning and civilization has been turned into the seat of oppression, fanaticism and deliberately enforced ignorance.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, those who establish Gilead do so through the use of emergency laws, para-military organizations, surprise, and relative disinterest on the part of the populace. Having enacted a theocratic fascist state, the novel chronicles the ways in which the state was effective only in doing injury, not in transforming individuals to higher-minded ideals.

1984 is a political novel written with the purpose of warning readers in the West of the dangers of totalitarian government. Orwell designed *1984* to sound the alarm in Western nations still unsure how to approach the rise of communism. In 1949, the Cold War had not yet escalated, many American intellectuals supported communism.

In *1984*, Orwell portrays the perfect totalitarian society, the most extreme realization imaginable of a modern-day government with absolute power. The title of the novel indicates that the story represented a real possibility for the near future: if totalitarianism were not opposed, the title suggested, some variation of the world described in the novel could become a reality. Orwell portrays a state in which the government monitors and controls every aspect of human life to the extent that even having a disloyal thought is against the law. As the novel progresses, the timidly rebellious Winston Smith sets out to challenge the limits of the Party's power, only to discover that its ability to control and enslave its subjects dwarfs even his most paranoid conceptions of its reach. The Party uses a number of techniques to control its citizens, each of which is important. These include: psychological manipulation, physical control, control of information and history, technology, and language as mind control.

In *Fahrenheit 451*, it is believed that individuals are not as important as the collective mass of culture and history. (*SparkNotes Editors*, (2007). One can sympathize with Montag's mission as dictated by the society where he is in, but the steps he takes toward his goal often seem clumsy and misguided. Montag's faith in his profession and his society begins to decline almost immediately after the novel's opening passage. Faced with the enormity and complexity of books for the first time, he is often confused, frustrated, and overwhelmed. As a result, he has difficulty deciding what to do

independently of Beatty, Mildred, or Faber. Likewise, he is often rash, inarticulate, self-obsessed, and too easily swayed if not bewildered. At times he is not even aware of why he does things, feeling that his hands are acting by themselves. These subconscious actions can be quite horrific, such as when he finds himself setting his supervisor on fire, but they also represent his deepest desires to rebel against the status quo and find a way out, hence existential in seeking a meaningful way to live.

CONCLUSION

The three novels under study reflected on the various and changing mechanism of absolute power. Echoing Gerhard's, (2012) observation, such dystopian fictions reveal the disciplinary control employed by the state to manipulate and produce disciplined bodies through the use of a "strictly regulated routine, prescribed social functions, reproductive control, and constant surveillance" (iv). In all these scenarios, dystopia marks the reverse image of a utopianist social fantasy (Ki, 1995, ii) where protagonists struggle to resist a totalitarian system of surveillance, total subjugation of individuals, and the control of speech and free exchange of information and opinion. Unfortunately, such dystopian scenarios depicted by these novels are not just elements of pure fiction but have been part and are still part of reality and present history or experience. This paper makes a contribution to the effort to recall the real dangers of totalitarian societies where human beings have lost all individual and civil liberties. It is through the novels chosen that we are made aware once again of the various mechanisms of absolute power, how it touches one's very own body, choices, destiny, thought, and language. It is through such remembrance via fiction that we can begin to ask once more what in the end is power and how it could attain an absolute status without providing any satisfactory alibi for its existence or enforcement.

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