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# **The Illusion of Progress: New Ways in Dystopian Fiction**

Bakalářská práce

Anglická filologie

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Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně a uvedla jsem veškeré použité podklady a literaturu.

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# 1. Introduction

This thesis will be split into two parts: theoretical and practical. In the theoretical part, the thesis will cover the history of the term dystopia and how it is used in politics and literature, primarily focusing on its literary aspects. A definition of dystopia will consequently be provided, along with the surrounding discourse around a proper description of dystopian literature. Lastly, subcategories of the genre will be introduced along with parameters as to how a work is classified under such subgenres. In the practical part, three dystopian novels will be analysed and filed under the previously established categories. The works in question are Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and *The Testaments* (2019), and Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005).

When one thinks of dystopias, one might imagine a world under constant surveillance like in Orwell's *1984* or a world of artificial happiness like in Huxley's *Brave New World*. One might imagine the worst of fictitious places, yet the Problematic aspects found in fiction can be easily found in the contemporary world. Some states of the USA from 2022 to 2023 have regressed, for example, in their rights for women and their bodies by ending rights to abortion<sup>1</sup> along with multiple public schools banning up to thousands of book titles from classrooms and libraries.<sup>2</sup> The current surveillance system in China sees everyone's every move. With recent developments, their future moves will possibly be under inspection as well. Currently, an AI program is under development that will predict possible future criminal activities based on suspicious behaviour.<sup>3</sup>

While these are some more concrete examples tied to specific countries, global threads make the contemporary world seem dystopic, the most pressing and relevant being, as Saija Isomaa puts it, the "anthropogenic climate change, which poses a fundamental threat to all life on Earth."<sup>4</sup> It is indisputable that the threats of climate change, such as the mass extinction of species and prolonged natural disasters, are a significant threat. These elements demonstrate that the fears often examined in dystopian fiction are not groundless. Sometimes, they might

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<sup>1</sup> "After Roe Fell: Abortion Laws By State," Center for Reproductive Rights, accessed November 25, 2023, <https://reproductiverights.org/maps/abortion-laws-by-state/>.

<sup>2</sup> "Banned in the USA: The Mounting Pressure to Censure," PEN America, accessed November 25, 2023, <https://pen.org/report/book-bans-pressure-to-censor/>.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Mozu, Muxi Xiao, and John Liu, "'An Invisible Cage': How China Is Policing the Future," *The New York Times*, June 25, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/25/technology/china-surveillance-police.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Saija Isomaa, Jyrki Korpua and Jouni Teittinen, "Introduction: Navigating the Many Forms of Dystopian Fiction" in *New Perspectives on Dystopian Fiction in Literature and Other Media*, ed. Saija Isomaa, Jyrki Korpua and Jouni Teittinen (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020), 4.

only reflect the author's fears. Sometimes, they reflect collective anxieties. They notice failing trends and offer solace if they do not present a solution.

This thesis aims to define the parameters of what dystopian fiction is. To do so, the history and development of this genre shall be examined. After establishing a cohesive definition, it aims to define subcategories based on recurring trends. Within these parameters, works of contemporary dystopian fiction will be analysed.

## 2. The History of Dystopia

When the term dystopia is considered, two phenomena might be described. The first is tied to the real world. In this scenario, dystopia might describe a society built on the principles of fear, oppression, totalitarianism, and despotism. As an example, one can make mention of Stalinism or Nazism. The second is tied to fictional literature, produced as a reaction and criticism of these failed societies. As a principle, both concepts are intensely interwoven together. This thesis will focus mainly on the literary meaning of dystopia and the development of dystopian literature. Through the years, dystopian literature has evolved drastically. The term first appeared in the eighteenth century, receiving the definition of “an unhappy country”.<sup>5</sup> The initial use of the word was to draw a parallel to the utopias (meaning a good place) and utopian texts.

Thomas More coined the word utopia in his work entitled the same way, *Utopia* (1516). In his work, More describes a dialogue between himself and a fictional traveller, Raphael, who has recently visited the fictitious island of Utopia. Raphael describes the customs and principles of the island’s inhabitants, considering them superior and more virtuous than those of sixteenth-century England. While the original text is considered a pure work of fiction with “no political intention”,<sup>6</sup> the term has prevailed as a descriptor for a perfect society based on human virtues and principles (such as politics, religion, commerce, and labour). These works observe the failing trends within their social structures and suggest ways of fixing them. For example, in *Utopia*, the issue of mass poverty and centralised wealth is non-existent since money has been abolished amongst the ordinary people. The only funds that do exist are the ones for war purposes. This fact reveals some of the problems of *Utopia* and subsequent utopian texts. They often opt for the following strict codes of collectivism. That is, the system values the community over the individual. They live in communal houses, jobs are assigned at birth, and all efforts of individuals are focused on bettering the community. The sacrifices made to achieve collectivism (giving up privacy and private ownership, being only some of them) are understood as necessary evils. Through their realisation, a form of social equality may be achieved.

In the twentieth century, the literary genres of utopian and dystopian fiction experienced a notable surge in popularity. Within this period, the definition of dystopia goes through various transformations. Gregory Claeys suggests that while dystopia has emerged initially as a parallel

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<sup>5</sup> Gregory Claeys, *Dystopia: A Natural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 273.

<sup>6</sup> Francisco L. Lisi, “Prefigurations” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Utopian and Dystopian Literatures*, ed. Peter Marks (Switzerland: Springer Nature Switzerland AG, 2022), 91.

to utopia, not all dystopian works can be classified as criticisms of utopian works or principles.<sup>7</sup> This issue will be further discussed in the definition of dystopia.

Utopian texts have been overwhelmed, however, by dystopian writing, with the other becoming noticeably more popular. Riven Barton argues that “the overtly utopian projections of the Enlightenment period and the subsequent industrialised and commercial cultures bred dystopian projections not only to compensate for its one sidedness, but also to acknowledge the shadow of the lived experience”.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, dystopian writing emerged as a form of scepticism towards the positivism that occurs with progress. At the beginning of the expansion of the genre, in the first half of the twentieth century, the fear of the automatisisation of war and the rise of Fascism was observable. In the second half of the twentieth century, it became the development of computer technologies.

Significant technological advancements, such as the industrialisation of work and war, marked the beginning of the twentieth century. Subsequently, these developments have also marked the development of dystopian works. During this time, two of the genre’s most influential books emerged: George Orwell’s *1984* (1949) and Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932). Claeys argues that along with these works, one can find “three of the great themes subsequently definitive of many dystopian texts: a satire on collectivist despotism and the suppression of individuality by the group; an assault on the embrace of machine-like ideals and tendencies; and a vision of the great modern dilemma as the pursuit of pleasure and happiness versus the desire for freedom.”<sup>9</sup> The foundation of these works is the fear of collectivism and the death of individuality. These fears were brought about through the fear of witnessing how the world leans more toward efficiency and productivity. These themes are explorable through even more contemporary works, as will be demonstrated in later chapters.

These early works and the establishment of significant themes have led to expansion and diversification in dystopian fiction in the second half of the twentieth century. As Claeys puts it: “After 1945, visions of Apocalypse often involved atomic weapons. Robots, surveillance, and corporate domination also loomed ever larger.”<sup>10</sup> This period was marked by their anxieties, such as fear of the Cold War and nuclear fallout, environmental destruction and robots and technology becoming central to human life. One theme which has emerged during

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<sup>7</sup> Gregory Claeys, *Dystopia: A Natural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 273-291.

<sup>8</sup> Riven Barton, “Dystopia and the Promethean Nightmare,” in *The Age of Dystopia: One Genre, Our Fears and Our Future*, ed. Louisa MacKay Demerijan (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 6.

<sup>9</sup> Gregory Claeys, “Dystopia” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Utopian and Dystopian Literatures*, ed. Peter Marks (Switzerland: Springer Nature Switzerland AG, 2022), 55.

<sup>10</sup> Claeys, *Dystopia: A Natural History*, 498.

this period is the theme of male oppression of women.<sup>11</sup> An example of this theme can be found in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). This novel, as well as its central theme, shall be analysed later.

In the twenty-first century, the dystopian genre has become a “multitude of intertwined genre traditions.”<sup>12</sup> Currently, a plethora of dystopian works with “rise in climate fiction, young adult dystopias, digital games, and film,”<sup>13</sup> further illustrating the possibilities of expression through the dystopian mode. For example, the fear of climate change as a result of human progress is exemplified by Atwood's *MadAddam* trilogy, where human advancement leads to “apocalyptic results.”<sup>14</sup> It is evident that the dystopian genre has changed markedly through history, and it can be said that the definition of dystopia changes along with the anxieties of the historical periods, making the definition of dystopia more difficult.

Given all that has been said before, it can be said that Dystopian fiction can – at the most fundamentally historical level – be separated into two categories. These are early dystopia, which serves as a criticism of utopian narratives, and modern dystopia, which focuses on criticising the actual world and failing societal trends.

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<sup>11</sup> Gregory Claeys, Gregory Claeys, “Dystopia” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Utopian and Dystopian Literatures*, ed. Peter Marks (Switzerland: Springer Nature Switzerland AG, 2022), 60.

<sup>12</sup> Saija Isomaa, Jyrki Korpua and Jouni Teittinen, “Introduction: Navigating the Many Forms of Dystopian Fiction,” in *New Perspectives on Dystopian Fiction in Literature and Other Media*, ed. Saija Isomaa, Jyrki Korpua and Jouni Teittinen (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020), 6.

<sup>13</sup> Isomaa, Korpua and Teittinen, “Introduction: Navigating the Many Forms of Dystopian Fiction,” 6.

<sup>14</sup> Patricia Stapleton, “‘The People In the Chaos Cannot Learn’: Dystopian Vision in Atwood's *MaddAddam* Trilogy,” in *The Age of Dystopia: One Genre, Our Fears and Our Future*, ed. Louisa MacKay Demerijan (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 19.

### 3. Definition of Dystopia

The definition of dystopia is a topic of not one controversy or debate, given that dystopias often do not amount to a singular genre of work. Most often, the works are interchangeable with works of science fiction. The two historical categories introduced in the previous chapter help establish a proper definition of dystopia. It has been demonstrated that an earlier concept of dystopia could be rendered as an anti-utopia, a criticism of ideas of perfect societies. This definition is, however, incomplete and not wholly accurate, given the fact that not all works of dystopian literature have utopian origins. The works explored in this thesis are primarily critical of trends that already exist within society. It is, therefore, better to think of dystopias as explorations of the collective anxieties of a generation or a population.

Barton provides the following definition of dystopias: “a futuristic, imagined universe in which oppressive societal control and the illusion of a perfect society is maintained through corporate, bureaucratic, technological, moral, or totalitarian control. Dystopias, through an exaggerated worst-case scenario, make a criticism about a current trend, societal norm, or political system.”<sup>15</sup> Although the definition effectively encapsulates the essence of dystopian fiction, it has to be further refined.

Most dystopian works such as *1984*, *Brave New World* and *The Handmaid’s Tale* are indeed set in the future. There are some exceptions, such as Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*. The book states that its setting is in the “late 1990s.”<sup>16</sup> This fact is further supported by the fact that technologies appearing within the novel are no more advanced than those of Ishiguro’s time of writing the book, which is the year 2005, the only alternation being that after “the war”, a clone-producing technology was developed. Furthermore, some works of dystopian fiction do not provide any data on when they take place, and it can only be speculated how far into the future the events of the novels are. Claeys further states that if a dystopian work is set in the future, it is expected to be in the near future. Given their notion that dystopian works are meant to work as forms of criticism of contemporary anxieties, he reasons that realistic expectations of the future are those that are to be expected of dystopian works. Furthermore, placing them in the near future avoids the confusion with the science-fiction genre.

If it is agreed that dystopias are projections of society’s anxieties, it logically follows that they are set in imagined universes. This way, the plethora of issues experienced within our

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<sup>15</sup> Riven Barton, “Dystopia and the Promethean Nightmare,” in *The Age of Dystopia: One Genre, Our Fears and Our Future*, ed. Louisa MacKay Demerijan (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 6-7.

<sup>16</sup> Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2021), 1.

world can be explored comfortably. While quite distressful, dystopian works often have a clear purpose: to draw attention to failing trends within our society through the intimate lens of a single struggling individual. Dystopian works, therefore, may be defined as explorations of collective anxieties regarding politics, society, or technology through fictitious space. This space may take on the form of altered history or the near future. The degree to which society is perceived as perfect is disputable; however, dystopias are societies that utilise oppression.

The problem of defining dystopian fiction is slightly elevated with the introduction of subcategories. According to Claeys, there are “three main, if often interrelated, forms of the concept: the political dystopia; the environmental dystopia; and the technological dystopia.”<sup>17</sup> These categories are based on the central themes of the novels in question, and the leading explored anxiety. He further argues that one thing that all dystopian works share is the fact that the question of social and political organisations is central to dystopian works.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, it can be established as the largest and the most prominent subgenre of dystopias.

It is possible to create categories for individual works of dystopian fiction, but it should be noted that no single work falls purely into one classification. Based on the categories introduced by Claeys (political, technological, environmental), these categories are understood to encapsulate the most prominent themes within the work. In general, each dystopian work has a mixture of these elements to some degree, their prominence shifting just as people’s anxieties shift as well.

### **3.1 Socio-Political dystopias**

Social trends of oppression are closely intertwined with the political. They are a significant subcategory of dystopian fiction, reflecting the author’s or the population’s anxieties. In this way, they reveal trends within their contemporary government or social structures which are failing. It can be argued that these fears are mainly tied to the fear of oppressive government or the implications of collectivism, where the needs of some or all individuals are oppressed in the name of the greater good of the community.

Each dystopian work deals with some form of oppression. This is because, as Claeys suggests, someone’s dystopia is someone else’s utopia.<sup>19</sup> Within this juxtaposition, it is understood that by oppressing one group, another one gets to flourish. Within the political

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<sup>17</sup> Gregory Claeys, *Dystopia: A Natural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 5.

<sup>18</sup> Claeys, *Dystopia: A Natural History*, 285.

<sup>19</sup> Claeys, 8.

dystopia, the primary driving force is the government. Most of the time, it takes on the form of a shadowy figure, which is to be feared. They imply rules and laws which largely restrict the lives of the individuals. The oppressive power of these restrictions is further reinforced by the inhabitants of the world, who form the social part of dystopian works.

To provide some examples, in *1984*, one of the central ways of oppression and maintenance of control is through war. It is a form of entertainment through which a cult of violence has been formed. This subsequently led to normalisation, sometimes even celebration of violence. This has been primarily achieved through mandatory viewing of war footage films, public hangings and parades dedicated to war efforts and victories. War has another oppressive function within the setting of *1984*, and that is the control of resources or the lack of them. This idea is introduced in Emanuel Goldstein's manuscript within the book "The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism."<sup>20</sup> It is later revealed that the Party itself produced this piece of writing. Therefore, it is debatable as to how relevant this statement is. Given the information in the novel and the fact that there is a consistent lack of materials such as food, clothing and consumer goods, there might be some truth to this statement.

If it is agreed that there is some truth to Goldstein's writing, despite being a forgery, another form of political oppression may be analysed through the "the last swing of the pendulum"<sup>21</sup> idea. It illustrates that lust for power is never-ending, and to maintain the position of power, oppressive measures need to be taken. Through the suppression of history and the erasure of any possible martyrs or victims of the system, the Party manages to withhold power forever. The idea of utopia in *1984* is the maintenance of power, which creates a dystopia for the oppressed.

Oppression implied through government, such as laws and war, is not the only form of oppression typically imposed in dystopian fiction. Another form often found within dystopian settings is that of a social kind, unwritten rules which have been implemented into the social structure and the lives of the citizens. The social customs are observable through a brief analysis of character tropes in these works. Characters within dystopian settings can be categorised on a plethora of different criteria. The most relevant criteria within the subcategory of socio-political dystopia are based on their attitude towards the system, ranging from enthusiastic collaborators to those who try to fight the system in any shape or form. One might begin with those who have completely adapted to the system, agree with it, and reinforce it upon other members of the social structure. In *1984*, there is the character of the enigmatic O'Brien who,

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<sup>20</sup> George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (London: Pinguin Classics, 2000), 210.

<sup>21</sup> Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 230.

to maintain the system at hand, sees it necessary to lie and torture anyone who goes against it. The second most prominent type of characters are those who pretend to agree with the system, following the rules and the customs. Julia's character might be provided as an example. She understands the system, appearing as if she collaborates with it by being part of the "Junior Anti-Sex League."<sup>22</sup> Yet when she finds a blind spot in the system, she exploits it intensely, starting an affair with Winston, the main character. Lastly, some fight the system through active acts of rebellion or breaking the system whenever possible. It could be argued that Julia and the protagonist of the novel, Winston, fit within this category because, in the setting of *1984*, just the act of thinking against the system is considered a crime. Whatever stance the characters of the works take, they form the social structure of the dystopian system.

Within *1984*, social oppression was maintained through mandatory collectivism and spy work. It is mentioned multiple times that one is expected to actively participate in social activities such as the Two Minutes Hate or war parades. Furthermore, distrust of neighbours, colleagues and even one's children is practised. Spy work of suspicious or inappropriate behaviour is encouraged and sometimes rewarded.

A similar form of oppression is practised in *The Handmaid's Tale*. It is realised through the pair system introduced in the section Shopping. Within this work, there is another form of oppression, which is observable through the women's caste system. The system itself is oppressive, given that each woman, depending on in which layer she finds herself, determines how she will be treated within it. Implied customs and prevalent stereotypes further deepen this oppression. A closer look will be provided in a chapter which will be dedicated to the novel.

Social trends of oppression are closely intertwined with the political. These trends are often incorporated into various forms of dystopian fiction. It can be said that there is no dystopian work which would not include at least some form of political or social oppression.

## 1.2 Technological dystopias

When Claeys introduces this subgenre of dystopias, he notes that they are dystopias "where science and technology ultimately threaten to dominate or destroy humanity."<sup>23</sup> This note illustrates that despite the name indicating a focus on technology as the central threat or explored theme if these threats are more scientifically centred, they also fall under this subcategory. As is the case with many things in dystopian writing, the technological part has

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<sup>22</sup> George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), 12.

<sup>23</sup> Gregory Claeys, *Dystopia: A Natural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 5.

been majorly influenced by the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century. This was taken further in the 1970s and 1980s with the technological shift towards computers, robotics, and the Internet. The concerns surrounding this era are similar to those of the early Industrial Revolution: the fear of losing humanity in the face of efficiency.

The advancement of technologies through the 20<sup>th</sup> century introduced a new anxiety: the fear of technology taking over the individual and humanity itself. This differs from the initial question of collectivism, where the concern was chiefly on the prospect of society replacing various components of humankind. In other words, technology is used as a vehicle for the oppressive groups discussed in political and social dystopias, as was illustrated in the previous chapter. Technological dystopia is more concerned with how the technology itself influences the individual or population and how it threatens their identity or restricts their freedom.

As has been touched upon in the definition of dystopia, dystopias are nearly always set in the near future. Claeys argues that this provides dystopian works with a realistic quality, differentiating works set as dystopias from science fiction.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the distinction between science fiction and dystopian fiction is obtainable through the observation of the role of technology within the work. If the technology described is central to the narrative and has no political, social, or religious purpose, it is primarily a science fiction work.

In comparison, dystopian works acknowledge the existence of technology, even highlighting it. Rather than being interested in their possibilities and function, the work is more centred on how it is used in the political spectrum. The central question is whether it is used as a form of oppression, to push destruction, or, as a whole, how it is being used as a tool of oppression.<sup>25</sup> To exemplify this statement, the novel by Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*, can be used. Within the setting of the book, reproduction has been industrialised. Individuals are no longer born traditionally. Instead, they are grown in test tubes and produced in factories. While the technology is described with great detail initially, the focus is primarily on how it influences the social structure and how it is central to collectivism and the erasure of the individual.

The collectivism within this novel is achieved through the erasure of concepts such as family, monogamy and romance. This, in part, is achieved through the conditioning, to which the clones are subjugated since their young age, through the practice of hypnosis.<sup>26</sup> For the hypnosis, machinery with recorded voice messages is used. One of the significant ways of group

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<sup>24</sup> Gregory Claeys, *Dystopia: A Natural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 285.

<sup>25</sup> Claeys, *Dystopia: A Natural History*, 286.

<sup>26</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*, (London: Flamingo Modern Classics, 1994), 24.

control is the drug *soma*. *Soma* is a drug that functions as a standard opioid, except that it has no immediate negative side effects. It has been incorporated into the everyday lives of every member of society, no matter their class. It is prescribed as the ultimate “holiday” from negative feelings, celebrated with rhymed catchphrases such as “half a gramme for a half-holiday”.<sup>27</sup> It has been incorporated into foods such as ice cream.<sup>28</sup> While this is not a technological part in the traditional sense of the word, it is still a scientific tool used for political and individual purposes.

Some key factors are observable through the observation of how *soma* is used. First, there is the fact that the drug is administered, and everyone is expected to take it and repress their negative emotions. This is observable mainly through Bernard’s character. His refusal to take the drug through the first half of the novel, when he is feeling negative emotions, provides shock and confusion from his colleagues.<sup>29</sup> Later, his refusals also threaten his well-being and job position.<sup>30</sup> Through these factors, one can see that *soma* is a vehicle of social and political repression.

A look at *soma* from the individual’s point of view can also be offered, and that is when a look at Lynnda’s character is provided. Lynnda was cut off from society as she knew it through a freak accident (or so we are told). The one thing that she describes as missing the most is the *soma*. The lack of the drug has led her into alcoholism. When she returns, all she can do is take the drug, which leads to her early death. The observation of her character indicates how the drug influences the individual. Normalisation of the drug has rendered the individual utterly useless outside of their established structures.

Looking at it from the perspective of the thought that technological dystopias come from the standpoint of the individual and how technology influences them regardless of the government is not fully observable through this novel. It could be speculated, however, that technology impacts individuals from the very point they are ‘born’. This is due to the fact that the human factor has not been removed from the production of humans as a whole. It is clone-operated machinery that brings other clones into the world. Meanwhile, there are humans still being born in the ‘standard’ way in reservation for those who do not want to give up on the concepts the system forbids. It is true that there still would be humans despite the technology. Without it, however much of the civilisation would be lost. In that way, it can be said that the world of *Brave New World* is utterly dependent on it.

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<sup>27</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*, (London: Flamingo Modern Classics, 1994), 49.

<sup>28</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 72.

<sup>29</sup> Huxley, 54.

<sup>30</sup> Huxley, 88.

It is not only the reproductive technology on which *Brave New World's* world is entirely dependent. Aside from this and the *soma*, the world seems to be wholly engulfed in recreational technology. Music, movies, and other forms of amusement have been reduced to soulless works composed mainly of fast entertainment, such as synthetic music and films with simplistic plots.<sup>31</sup> The push for entertainment as a form of suppression of expressivity and the fact that any form of feeling or authenticity is suppressed within them further points to the oppression of the individual.

The role of technology varies in dystopian works. They take on the forms of entertainment, pushing away the thoughts and feelings repressing individuality. Or it has a more background role, that of helper within the society, war machinery. Fears of technology itself taking over humanity, becoming more efficient, and causing the loss of individuality are also compelling fears.

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<sup>31</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*, (London: Flamingo Modern Classics, 1994), 152.

## 4. A Socio-Political Dystopia: Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*

### 1.1 Margaret Atwood and her contribution to dystopia

Margaret Atwood is a Canadian writer, poet and a writer of graphic novels. Her contributions to literature are significant, having won multiple prizes, including two Booker Prizes and numerous Canadian prizes.<sup>32</sup> She is a well-respected writer, her latest book having been published in March of 2023. She has established her place in the literary canon thanks to her novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, which explores themes such as women's rights, power, and dystopia.

The novel was the starting point in Atwood's body of dystopian works. Since 2000, most of her works have been dystopian,<sup>33</sup> the largest and most notable -besides *The Handmaid's Tale* - have been environmental dystopias: the *MaddAddam* trilogy: *Oryx and Crake*, *The Year of the Flood* and *MaddAdam*. Her fascination with dystopia is driven by the belief that humanity's future is dire. She further states that her sentiment must also be shared amongst her contemporaries, given the spike in the production of dystopian media.

Atwood has a particular approach to dystopias. She prefers to call them "speculative fiction" rather than science fiction because they "rehearse possible futures on the basis of historical and contemporary evidence".<sup>34</sup> Her fiction is interwoven intensely with the real world through noticing trends in history and making predictions based on those trends. The themes she most often explores within these works are the questions of women's rights and environmental issues.

In 2017, *The Handmaid's Tale* became a cultural staple, spawning a television series. Some argue that this has been primed by Donald Trump's inauguration, which happened in the same year. Consequently, in 2017, America has seen renewed interest in classical dystopia, in which Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale* found its place perfectly. In an interview with Junot Díaz, she states that the USA is heading towards the fictional world of Gilead.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Heidi Slettedahl Macpherson, *The Cambridge Introduction to Margaret Atwood* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 2.

<sup>33</sup> Coral Ann Howells, *The Cambridge Companion To Margaret Atwood*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 172.

<sup>34</sup> Howells, *The Cambridge Companion To Margaret Atwood*, 172.

<sup>35</sup> Margaret Atwood, "Make Margaret Atwood Fiction Again," by Junot Díaz, *Boston Review* (June 2017), <https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/literature-culture-margaret-atwood-junot-diaz-make-margaret-atwood-fiction-again/>.

It is therefore not surprising that she reacted to the initial leak of the overturning of abortion rights in the USA<sup>36</sup> with a picture of herself holding a mug that says “I Told You So”<sup>37</sup>. She further reinforced her opinion with an article in the Atlantic titled: “I Invented Gilead. The Supreme Court is making It Real”<sup>38</sup>. She returns to history - with which the Supreme Court shields itself against criticism - and highlights the fact that the US is regressing to an era where women have rights only through their male kins and where reproductive organs are properties of the state.<sup>39</sup>

The current American political climate gives *The Handmaid's Tale* a new sense of importance, its message becoming much more urgent. Within the contemporary world, Atwood is an author who defines an era. Her fields of interest, such as human rights and environmentalism, represent the significant anxieties of the contemporary world. Therefore, it is of great benefit to examine her works.

## **1.2 *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*: social dystopias**

As mentioned before, *The Handmaid's Tale* is one of the most influential works in Margaret Atwood's repertoire. The novel presents the USA transformed into a theocratic dictatorship: The Republic of Gilead. In this world, women have been completely stripped of their rights, divided into castes and distributed to men of high ranks. They are denied education, with reading and writing becoming outlawed activities. The state puts up strict gender segregation, where the privileged few oppress both men and women.

The sequel, *The Testaments* (2019), further develops and explores the world. In this novel, three more perspectives are offered: that of growing up female in Gilead, one of being an Aunt and a subsequent core collaborator of the system and one from the outside of Gilead, showing how the outside world denounces the totalitarian system and how it tries to fight it.

One defining theme within social dystopias is power, how it is distributed, who holds the majority, and why and how they maintain it. Within Gilead, the possession of power can be divided into several categories based on gender.

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<sup>36</sup> Tracy Weitz, “Roe v Wade Overturned: What It Means, What's Next,” by Patty Housman, *American University* (June 2022), <https://www.american.edu/cas/news/roe-v-wade-overturned-what-it-means-whats-next.cfm>.

<sup>37</sup> Margaret Atwood, “Margaret Atwood Doesn't Think We're Doomed,” by Lucy Feldman, *Time* (September 2022), <https://time.com/6213107/margaret-atwood-climate-change-roe-v-wade-interview/>.

<sup>38</sup> Margaret Atwood, “I Invented Gilead. The Supreme Court Is Making It Real,” *The Atlantic*, May 13, 2022, [https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/05/supreme-court-roe-handmaids-tale-abortion-margaret-atwood/629833/?utm\\_source=copy-link&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=share](https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/05/supreme-court-roe-handmaids-tale-abortion-margaret-atwood/629833/?utm_source=copy-link&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=share).

<sup>39</sup> “Margaret Atwood: I Created Gilead. But the Supreme court Might Make it Real,” History News Network, accessed October 10, 2023, <https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/183179>.

Observing men's relationships with women reveals the core of the power distribution and the most significant corruption. Throughout the novel, glimpses of the past are presented. These glimpses reveal that this system was based on misogynistic beliefs that weaponise feminist notions and beliefs. These revelations are delivered through the Commanders and an elite group, the Sons of Jacob, who were crucial in overthrowing the initial government and establishing the theocratic dictatorship. Their notion was to establish true equality for women, to reverse the declining birth rates and to purify the "decaying" nation of liberal values. These motivations point to a theme prevalent in dystopic literature: accepting extreme measures for the sake of efficiency.

Women in this novel are divided into a caste system, with each cast having privileges and restrictions. The first novel focuses on the Handmaids, women who are still fertile and can bear children. This trait is extremely valuable because the world is facing a global infertility crisis, with children being stillborn or being born mutated. The power structure of women can be divided into four main clusters: Aunts, Wives, Marthas, and Handmaids. These structures are based on the amount of freedom, responsibility, and power the cast can have, going from the ones with the most freedom to the ones with the least. Observing the world through the relationship of women towards women further confirms Claeys's notion that "someone else's Utopia is someone else's dystopia".<sup>40</sup> It cannot be said that any woman would thrive in this setting. Some women, however, have greater privileges than others simply on the basis that other women are suffering.

Aunts are placed on top of this power dynamic. They are in charge of women's lives, distribution, and death. Their role is firstly perceivable through the protagonist's perspective of them in *The Handmaid's Tale*, and later in *The Testaments*, a first-hand account is offered. In both novels, this cast's central character is Aunt Lydia. In the first novel, she takes on the position of a reformer, pushing the religious ideology of a pious woman, modest and passive.<sup>41</sup> This is achieved, namely through systematic shaming of sex and sexuality in any shape or form, and is taken so far as to shame rape victims.<sup>42</sup> Shaming of women is believed to be a tool for achieving some form of unity amongst women. This unity, however, only strengthens the oppressive patriarchal dictatorship. The sequel reveals that Aunts are also responsible for distributing young girls to men, alongside the Wives and Commanders, and giving them some education, where they teach skills traditionally associated with femininity, such as sewing or

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<sup>40</sup> Gregory Claeys, *Dystopia: A Natural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 285.

<sup>41</sup> Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (London: Vintage, 1996), 36.

<sup>42</sup> Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 78.

flower arranging.<sup>43</sup> Later on in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Aunt Lydia is seen as a commenter to Salvaging, a public execution of criminals held irregularly, since even this event is separated by gender and as Offered puts it: "There is less need for them, These days we are so well behaved."<sup>44</sup> The exact way as to what constitutes crime is never directly revealed. Aunts stand as the primary announcers; they are the faces of the execution. In *The Testaments*, several Aunts, primarily Aunt Lydia, had gained prominence as one of the leading figures in Gilead, at least for women. This is exemplified by them receiving tokens such as pictures "hung at the back of every classroom"<sup>45</sup> or statues. Aunts, therefore, have some rights and hold some power within the system; however, they are still considered less than some due to their gender.

On the second level of the female cast system are the Wives, women who are married to Commanders. Compared to Aunts, they hold power in the private sphere of their households and the cluster of women attached to it. This cluster is noticeably smaller, comprising one or multiple Marthas (female servants) and one Handmaid. Additionally, they hold some forms of private ownership in the form of gardens. The role of a Wife is reproductive, and her main goal should be to bear children for the Commander. Another position of a Wife is that of a representative figure. Gilead is a theocratic dictatorship, meaning the society adheres to strong religious principles. It can be assumed that a man possessing a wife is orderly and conformist to the system. The Wives also have to adhere to strict codes, namely those based on gender, being restricted to activities such as sowing, knitting and gardening.<sup>46</sup> Their range of possible outings is limited to rituals centred around birth and children. Their freedom and rights are limited, as are of every woman in Gilead.

The world of Gilead suffers from fertility issues, with children being stillborn or being born mutated. Therefore, the system introduced the lowest level of the cast, the Handmaids, women who have been reduced to "two-legged wombs."<sup>47</sup> Their only role in the system is to produce children; their only value is in their fertility. They have been ostracised by their superiors (Wives) and by society as a whole. Their only companionship is in the form of other Handmaids, and even those cannot be trusted since they are supposed to spy on one another.<sup>48</sup> Gilead is a world where fertile women have been thoroughly dehumanised.

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<sup>43</sup> Margaret Atwood, *The Testaments* (London: Vintage, 2019), 10.

<sup>44</sup> Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (London: Vintage, 1996), 281.

<sup>45</sup> Atwood, *The Testaments*, 75.

<sup>46</sup> Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 18.

<sup>47</sup> Atwood, 148.

<sup>48</sup> Atwood, 25.

By observing the facts mentioned above, one can conclude that within the social structure of Gilead, men hold the majority of power. All the significant positions of influence, such as the army (the Angels), the police (the Guardians), and the secret police (the Eyes) are held by men. At the top of the power pyramid are the Commanders, who are political and military leaders.<sup>49</sup> Subsequently, they are allowed the most freedom. They own households and their residence. Women and men are meant to serve them. The fact that not all men are equal and that there is a power imbalance even between men is revealed through the narrator, Offred, who reveals that their gardener, Nick, is of “Low status: he hasn’t been issued a women, not even one.”<sup>50</sup> This statement reveals two facts. One, ownership of women is understood as a relevant merit to the status of men within the social structure and two, even men are not equal to other men.

Through the novels, only accounts of women are received; therefore, one can only generalise when it comes to the relationship of men towards men. It can be said that men are primarily focused on war and duty, on advancing in their careers, so that one day they might have the privilege of owning a Handmaid.<sup>51</sup> Later, it is also revealed that Commanders get to break the rules, being able to visit private nightclubs, where all the restrictions of the theocratic dictatorship disappear. With this context, the social structures of men seem to be the same as the women’s, that is, the chase for power by means of oppressing others.

All these generalisations can be made based on the perspective of Offred, the protagonist and narrative voice of the novel. Another theme closely associated with social dystopias can be observed through her account: loss of individuality and perception of oneself in the face of collectivism and dictatorship. As has been mentioned before, women who end up as Handmaids go through the most dehumanisation out of all the other casts, be it by the system or by individuals. Looking at some concrete examples she provided, it can be seen that each woman in the system perceives her a little differently, but ultimately, she always ends up dehumanised. The consistent dehumanisation leads the protagonist to struggle with her own identity and her relationship with her body.

The restriction to Handmaid’s bodily autonomy is evident from the beginning, where Offred describes a gymnasium, a place turned into a facility that maintains and trains Handmaids. She notes the Angels guarding them and the fact that they could be bribed with

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<sup>49</sup> Coral Ann Howells, *The Cambridge Companion To Margaret Atwood*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 39.

<sup>50</sup> Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale* (London: Vintage, 1996), 23.

<sup>51</sup> Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, 28.

their bodies. She follows this thought with, “That was our fantasy.”<sup>52</sup> To call the ability to use one’s body as a bribe would mean having some ownership of the body and freedom to make decisions about it. As the story progresses, it becomes clear that the body (especially the Handmaid’s) is a state property. The most concrete example can be found on her ankle in the form of a tattoo: “Four digits and an eye, a passport in reverse.”<sup>53</sup>

The dehumanisation of women begins on the state level (government-issued tattoos) and continues at the private level. The Handmaid’s original name is erased; perhaps she keeps it for herself, but in the world, she receives the name of the Commander combined with the preposition “of”. This is explained in the chapter *Historical Notes on the Handmaid’s Tale*.<sup>54</sup> It is also partially hinted in a part where another woman replaces Offred’s companion, Ofglen, yet she keeps the name.<sup>55</sup> Women being the private property of a Commander, however, comes second to the fact that they are the property of a state. This is shown in the strict dress code, where women have to be completely covered, their faces hidden when they are in public. Furthermore, they must follow a strict colour code: red for Handmaids, blue for Wives and green for Marthas. This colour code is further developed with Pearl Girls in the *Testaments*, who also wear blue, the colour of loyalty in their case because they serve as missionaries outside of Gilead.<sup>56</sup> Besides the strict control over their attire, Handmaid’s diet and health are also monitored very closely. They are forbidden from consuming liquor and coffee; they are served regularly and closely monitored if they have eaten. Given all of that, Handmaids become chores for the entire household<sup>57</sup>, further damaging their humanity and perception of self.

The decay of self-identity and one’s relationship to one’s body is well observable through Offred and her inner monologues. At the beginning of the novel, Offred seems to desire some form of bodily autonomy, be it through wanting to offer her body as a bargain in the gymnasium or her fantasies of being able to seduce a couple of guards purely on the basis that she is a woman.<sup>58</sup> The continuous pressure of the world makes her resolve crumble, bit by bit. The first break in her resolve comes in the form of private ownership. It is to the reaction to the room she occupies in the Commander’s house. Initially, she refuses to call it hers,<sup>59</sup> presumably in an act of rebellion or an act of denial. Eventually, she claims it as her own, saying that even

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<sup>52</sup> Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale* (London: Vintage, 1996), 10.

<sup>53</sup> Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, 71.

<sup>54</sup> Atwood, 314.

<sup>55</sup> Atwood, 291.

<sup>56</sup> Margaret Atwood, *The Testaments* (London: Vintage, 2019), 4.

<sup>57</sup> Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, 54.

<sup>58</sup> Atwood, 28.

<sup>59</sup> Atwood, 14.

in times like these, she needs to claim some space for herself.<sup>60</sup> This is not surprising, given the fact that she does not feel like her body is hers.

Offred provides information on how she feels about her body during a scene where she takes a bath. Despite the sex scenes, this is the only scene where she appears naked, and it can be seen how she feels about her body. It seems “outdated” and “strange”<sup>61</sup> in the light of the current regime. She reminisces about how she used to view it as “an instrument, of pleasure, or a means of transportation, or an implement for the accomplishment of my will.”<sup>62</sup> Before Gilead, her body came second to her character. Now, it is something that completely defines her, something that gives her value. She further reinforces this notion by noting her period and the fear of it. Instead of viewing it as a natural phenomenon, she views it as a failure to fulfill society’s expectations.<sup>63</sup>

The struggle for bodily autonomy is prevalent in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, and it is not the only struggle Offred has to face. Her individual identity is also in jeopardy with the system. On multiple occasions, she fails to refer to herself; instead, she refers to herself in the light of the collective. For example, when she asks the Commander for a lotion in exchange for playing scribble with him, she says that their skin gets dry instead of saying that her skin gets dry. It surprised her, and she wondered why she did that.<sup>64</sup> Despite her initial reproach to the collective identity, she eventually succumbs to viewing herself as a part of a collective, losing part of her individuality. This loss has been initiated through the conditioning received in the Red Centre and furthered by societal pressure. By the novel’s end, Offred learns about the death of Ofglen, her companion, who rebelled against the system with the resistance group Mayday. At the prospect of being hanged, she comes home and prays, swearing that she will “resign her body freely, to the uses of others.”<sup>65</sup> This notion suggests that when an individual sees the full power of the system that oppresses them and sees that it is life-threatening, they are forced to give up, resign, and obey completely. Offred’s relationship with her body has been damaged in the face of collectivism. She no longer sees herself for herself but as an instrument of a larger group.

Things have not always been like this, as is revealed in the glimpses of her past, something utterly different from *1984*. Through them, a comparison of the past and the present can be drawn on what kind of principles the present of Gilead builds and how they benefit the

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<sup>60</sup> Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale* (London: Vintage, 1996), 55.

<sup>61</sup> Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, 68.

<sup>62</sup> Atwood, 80.

<sup>63</sup> Atwood, 80.

<sup>64</sup> Atwood, 164.

<sup>65</sup> Atwood, 294.

oppressive other. When Offred finds herself in the churchyard in the section *Shopping*, she points out the fact that “They haven’t fiddled with the gravestones, the church either. It’s only the more recent history that offends them.”<sup>66</sup> This quote shows how Gilead has regressed as a society, returning to the past based on religious principles. Not only that, but the past is selectively chosen to represent the values of the Sons of Jon. Illustratively, in the section *Household* Offred notes that only selected passages are read for them because reading is considered a sin. This gives the leading power more space to be selective of the information provided; it allows them to choose what from history gets passed on. History becomes a tool which pushes the agenda further.

One of the significant ways in which Gilead has changed was their rights for women, as in how women’s culture has changed and how it is presented compared with what once was. Through the stay in the Red Centre, Aunt Lydia points out the fact that women in the past had “freedom to” and that they should be grateful for now having “freedom from”<sup>67</sup>. In this way, *The Handmaid’s Tale* juxtaposes two women’s cultures: one of the past, which actively fought against the oppression of women, and one of the present, which has formed in symbiosis with the oppressive patriarchal culture.

Given what we know about the past from Offred’s accounts and through the understanding of the world through Daysi’s eyes in the *Testaments*, the world outside of Gilead and before it was not too different from the contemporary world. Therefore, “freedom to” means freedom to do things, which feminism has won for women through the years, such as freedom to vote, freedom to choose what one wants to do with her body, and freedom to do whatever she wants (within limits). This notion is also observable through memories of Offred’s mother, who was a feminist activist in the times before Gilead. She notes how the fights which had to be put forth are taken for granted now, hinting at the fact that the decaying interest in democracy and interest in fighting for human rights has been the cause for the collapse of the former system. Within the setting of Gilead, “freedom from” most likely means freedom from all of the detriments these notions held. Offred acknowledges that the current system is a freedom from cat-call culture, freedom from the fear of rape.<sup>68</sup> The Commander in charge of her later reveals that the system that was brought forth was one carefully thought of, or so they claim. One in which no woman would be left behind to starve as a single mother or be left behind simply because they are undesirable. “This way they’re protected, they can fulfil their biological

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<sup>66</sup> Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale* (London: Vintage, 1996), 37.

<sup>67</sup> Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, 30.

<sup>68</sup> Atwood, 30.

destinies in peace”<sup>69</sup> is his reasoning. The result is a culture of women (namely in the Handmaid cast) who build their sense of belonging and unity in suffering, mainly illustrated in the section *Birthday*. In this section, the birth of a baby is observed, along with all the rituals tied to it. Offred finishes this part with an inner message to her mother: “You wanted a women’s culture. Well, now there is one.”<sup>70</sup>

Ultimately, the notion is that there is some brighter prospect for women to come after them. There is a possibility of every household being a united collective of women, each helping one another to the best of her abilities. United in one household, united in the prospect of bringing the population back from the state of stagnation. This ‘utopic’ ideal can only be reached after the current generation of women is gone, along with the ‘old’ ideals of the feminist movement. These notions of selective history as well as the need to rewrite it, are prototypical of dystopian works.

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<sup>69</sup> Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale* (London: Vintage, 1996), 227.

<sup>70</sup> Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, 133.

## 5. Technological Dystopia: Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

### 5.1 Kazuo Ishiguro and his contribution to dystopia

Kazuo Ishiguro is a British author of Japanese origin with a significant body of creative work ranging from novels to screenplays to music. He studied creative writing at the University of East Anglia. He considers this his starting point in writing, moving away from his initial music ambitions. He is mainly known for his literary work, having won a Nobel Prize for Literature in 2017.

Growing up in a Japanese-speaking home and attending a British-speaking school, Ishiguro initially struggled with his identity. While he accustomed himself to the British community – which was very welcoming towards him – his link with Japan was maintained through his parents, vivid memories of his early childhood in Japan, and care packages containing various Japanese media (books, comics, textbooks)<sup>71</sup>. All these little mementoes created a world that was like Japan, yet they were far removed from what Japan looked like. Ishiguro acknowledged that he chose Japan as his subject matter in his earlier works (such as *A Pale View of Hills* and *An Artist of the Floating World*) because he was afraid of losing the Japan which had been created in his mind through those indirect links to his earlier home. This fascination with memory and how it can construct worlds like the real one, yet removed enough to be comforting, follows Ishiguro's works.

His works are best summarised by the word 'private'. Be it in the sphere of relationships or one's feelings, Ishiguro intends to start a dialogue between him and the reader. To present to them an emotional problem, perhaps one which even they have experienced, and ask, "Does it also feel this way to you too?"<sup>72</sup>

Much like his contemporaries, he fears the increasing division between ideologies, prompted by "Trump, Brexit, and the overall rise of right-winged ideologies"<sup>73</sup>. Ishiguro came from the age of optimism that followed after World War 2, where Europe has been transformed from "a place of totalitarian regimes, genocide and historically unprecedented carnage to a much-envied region of liberal democracies living near-borderless friendship."<sup>74</sup> He gives these arguments for his optimism and the fact that only lately has he noticed that the rights and values

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<sup>71</sup> Kazuo Ishiguro, *My Twentieth Century Evening and Other Small Breakthroughs* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2017), 12.

<sup>72</sup> Ishiguro, *My Twentieth Century Evening and Other Small Breakthroughs*, 23.

<sup>73</sup> Andrew Bennet, *The Cambridge Companion to Kazuo Ishiguro* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 5.

<sup>74</sup> Ishiguro, 24.

prevalent during his age are now being challenged and threatened. He brings this point up not only towards politics but also towards technology and science. He alludes to the concept of possible utopias of significant advancement which would move humanity forward. Nevertheless, he also raises the question of what it would mean to democracy and employment possibilities.<sup>75</sup>

It is not only the memory but humanity and the human condition are of great concern to him as well. He explores what it means to be human and whether humanity can be found in objects we would not (or wish not to) see as human. He brings something new to the dystopian genre: the personal and emotional level observable in subjects one would not search for humanity, such as clones in *Never Let Me Go* or androids in *Clara and The Sun*. That is why, while Ishiguro's body of dystopian works is small, he has contributed significantly to the dystopian genre.

## 5.2 *Never Let Me Go*: A technological dystopia

*Never Let Me Go* (2005) is a story of three clones: Kathy, Ruth and Tommy. The story follows them from their childhood, where they stayed at a prestigious boarding school, Hailsham, through their teen years, where they stay at a farm far removed from society, to their adulthood, where they become organ donors and 'carers'. These clones don't donate their organs for a certain period and take care of clones pre and post-surgery. Unlike the dystopias explored thus far, the world it presents is, to a certain extent, normal. Nevertheless, it gives a moral dilemma that circles back to Claeys's notion of "someone's dystopia being another's utopia." Furthermore, this novel deals with the themes of personal identity, what it means to be human, and how memory and community contribute to humanity.

*Never Let Me Go* is unique from the other dystopian novels discussed so far in many ways, the most prominent one being that the world and its functionalities are not revealed immediately. Instead, the main character and leading narrative voice, Kathy H, provides an introduction. She exposes some information about the world, such as that there is an occupation called 'carers' who help 'donors' recover from donations.<sup>76</sup> This notion is abundant quickly, and she transitions into a memory of her childhood, which she spent at Hailsham.<sup>77</sup> This appears many times in *Never Let Me Go*; instead of describing the world around the character, the focus

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<sup>75</sup> Kazuo Ishiguro, *My Twentieth Century Evening and Other Small Breakthroughs* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2017), 25.

<sup>76</sup> Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2021), 3.

<sup>77</sup> Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, 6.

is on how Kathy personally perceives it as she retrospectively recollects her memories. Despite being a highly personalised account of a character, some generalisations about the setting, which would place the novel into a scientific dystopia, can be made. One of these is how the outside world perceives and treats the clones.

The first indication that clones are perceived as undesirable or alien to ordinary people is revealed when the character Madam is introduced. Later on, it is revealed that she was part of a movement which tried to prove that clones are human and deserve to be treated like humans before they are appointed to donate their organs.<sup>78</sup> At the novel's beginning, however, she is seen as a mysterious figure who visits the school only to collect the student's art projects.<sup>79</sup> She never stays at Hailsham for long, and a theory starts circulating that she fears the students. Some of them devise a plan to "swarm her"<sup>80</sup> to see her reaction. When they approach her, she stiffens not in fear but in disgust. Kathy notes that she and the students involved in this experiment have not been the same since then because it made them acknowledge for the first time that they are the 'other' and that "...there are people out there, like Madame, who don't hate you or wish you any harm, but who nevertheless shudder at the very thought of you..."<sup>81</sup>

The fact that clones are thought of as the other that people do not want to think about is revealed at the novel's end. However, it is implied not only through the reaction of outsiders like Madam but also through the strategic placing and seclusion of the clones. It is revealed that from a young age, the clones are under strict surveillance and are not allowed to leave the school. When they get older, they are moved to different secluded places, which are old, reused facilities based on names such as 'Cottages', 'White Mansion' and 'Poplar Farm'.<sup>82</sup> These places are within walking distance of a village, and the clones have significantly more freedom than they had in their childhood, now having only one guardian, Keffers, who is more interested in the property than the clones residing there. Despite that, they rarely leave the premises of the Cottages.

A third example of seclusion via architecture can be found in the book's third part, where the characters have reached adulthood and are part of the donation program, Tommy and Ruth as donors and Kathy as a 'carer'. At this point, they have freedom of movement, yet those who are 'donors' are burdened with bad health, especially after bad or failed 'donation' (organ harvesting). It is known that 'carers' receive their apartments. 'Donors' are, however,

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<sup>78</sup> Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2021), 251.

<sup>79</sup> Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, 30.

<sup>80</sup> Ishiguro, 35.

<sup>81</sup> Ishiguro, 36.

<sup>82</sup> Ishiguro, 114.

administered in centres, which seem to be specialised and only for clones and doctors who work there as staff. Some centres are well cared for, but some hardly qualify as medical facilities. For example, the facility where Tommy is staying—Kingsfield—can be provided. Kathy notes, “there’s a general feeling they never properly finished converting the place.”<sup>83</sup> That is because the building initially served as a family holiday resort and was never fully converted into a medical centre. The fact that there is a range of how well the clones are or are not treated is explained in chapter 22, where the inner mechanics of clone-human relationships are revealed by the head guardian of Hailsham, Miss Emily.

Miss Emily is only briefly mentioned at the novel’s beginning, where she is illustrated as a frosty and strict person who highlights their importance. Why the clones or, to be more precise, clones of Hailsham were important is revealed at the end of the book. Hailsham was a project that tried to “... demonstrate to the world that if students (clones) were reared in humane, cultivated environments, it was possible for them to grow up to be as sensitive and intelligent as any ordinary human being.”<sup>84</sup> She then explains that due to a controversy surrounding genetic engineering, the movement has been dissolved, and Hailsham has been closed, which, at this point, is a well-established fact. Nevertheless, she feels accomplished with her movement and what it has achieved without considering what it means to the clones they raised. At that moment, for Kathy and Tommy, this event was soul-crushing because, in the grander scheme of things, it meant their lives, the art they made, and the losses that they had experienced were meaningless. They try to reason with Miss Emily, explaining that it might have been just some movement, but it was their whole lives for them. Miss Emily points out that they had better lives than those before them and probably those after them, then goes off to care for movers.

The concerns of the movement are thus clear: the best thing is to take care of the clones in their early stages of life, give them community, shelter, and stability and foster in them a sense of individuality so that for a short period that they get to live out they might find some sense of happiness. The individual’s loss is, however, ignored. Even Miss Emily acknowledges that the clones involved in the Hailsham project were “lucky pawns.”<sup>85</sup> There is a disconnection between the movement’s actors and its subject, showing disconnection between the two, as well as disconnection from the individual. The treatment of the clones varies, and everyone has a different approach to them. In general, they are perceived as alien entities created for organ harvesting, and once their identity as clones is revealed, they are perceived as such. It can be

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<sup>83</sup> Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2021), 214.

<sup>84</sup> Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, 256.

<sup>85</sup> Ishiguro, 261.

exemplified by how individuals treat clones and how they are always isolated from ‘normal people’ with architecture and surveillance.

Considering architecture, Hailsham as a place gains amongst clones almost a mythical narrative. It symbolises hope for those raised in harsher places, such as a clone for whom Kathy has worked as a ‘carer’, introduced briefly in Chapter 1.<sup>86</sup> It is not only Hailsham itself but also clones from there who seem unique to other clones.<sup>87</sup> To the leading trio, Hailsham symbolises a connection to a simpler, more stable time. That is why its closing is tragic, and when Kathy discusses it with another ‘carer’ from there, they are overcome with grief. The fact it closed destroyed the symbol of hope and humanity and severed their community. Nevertheless, they still have a memory of the place, something they can hold on to and form their identity around.

The novel is written from Kathy’s point of view as she retrospectively examines her life and memories. Francesca Boschetti argues that she uses this examination to assemble her own identity, which in turn gives her humanity.<sup>88</sup> Memories have a therapeutic function within the novel, being able to comfort someone in the face of donation and the dystopic fate the clones must face. It is observable through how Kathy communicates her memories to her patients when they are feeling uneasy<sup>89</sup> or recovering<sup>90</sup>, making memories a vital aspect of hope and therapy in the face of an unpleasant fate. Through Kathy’s memories, some generalisations can be made about what kind of identity clones attach to themselves in the face of the real world. A strong sense of community is fostered in the clones from a young age. From the understanding of the setting, everyone eventually has to go through the role of a ‘carer’. This is where the identity of each clone gets tested the harshest because, as Kathy herself puts it: “You grow up surrounded by crowds of people, ... and suddenly you’re a carer. You spend hour after hour, on your own ..., no one to talk to about your worries, no one to have a laugh with.” The life of a ‘carer’ is a life of crushing loneliness, with the memory of the former community being the only source of comfort.

This is a predictable outcome because clones are excluded from human society, and the most noticeable contact with them comes from guardians in Hailsham. Those relationships were strictly professional, with “...little displays of affection all the time within certain parameters.”<sup>91</sup> However, as Kathy recounts her memories, she notes on one in which Ruth and

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<sup>86</sup> Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2021), 5.

<sup>87</sup> Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, 143.

<sup>88</sup> Francesca Boschetti, “Memories in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*: A Clone’s Humanity,” *To Be Decided* 2 no. 1 (September 2017): 44, <https://tbd-journal.com/monsters-articles/boschetti>.

<sup>89</sup> Ishiguro, 5.

<sup>90</sup> Ishiguro, 16.

<sup>91</sup> Ishiguro, 57.

she had a fight about a pencil case that allegedly came from a guardian. This was uncommon because “guardians weren’t supposed to show favouritism, ...”<sup>92</sup> Kathy exerted exceptional effort to confirm that the pencil case did not come from a guardian. She confronts her when she obtains evidence that Ruth bought the pencil case herself.<sup>93</sup> This confrontation upsets Ruth, and at the same time, it also bothers Kathy. Now, observing it retrospectively, Kathy notes that? “Didn’t we all dream from time to time about one guardian or another bending the rules and doing something special for us?”<sup>94</sup> This points to another aspect of humanity within clones, wishing for close relationships within and outside of their community.

While it could be said that some clones are able to hold a strong feeling of self, some might struggle with this concept. This is exemplified by the idea of ‘possibles’. The concept of ‘possibles’ is introduced at the Cottages and is explained as “Since each of us was copied at some point from a normal person, there must be, for each of us, somewhere out there, a model getting on with his or her life.”<sup>95</sup> The ‘possibles’ are surrounded by mysticism. For some clones, being a vision of alternate self, witnessing them gives the clone in question a glimpse of their future, of who they are deep down inside.<sup>96</sup> For some, like Kathy, the ‘possibles’ are “a technical necessity for bringing us into the world, nothing more than that.”<sup>97</sup> The two camps on the thought of ‘possibles’ show diversity in identity perception. The first camp either has a weak perception of self, wishing to find their original self so they can understand themselves, or they have a strong wish to alter their future, believing that there must be something more to life than just donations and completing. The second camp presents the opposite, a strong sense of self and demonstrating a level of conformity with the organ harvesting system. Nevertheless, it is a source of excitement and curiosity when a ‘possible’ surfaces.

When Ruth’s possible surfaces, the trio and two other clones, Chrissie and Rodney, investigate her.<sup>98</sup> They find themselves in an art gallery where they are confused for art students.<sup>99</sup> When they find her, however, she does not resemble Ruth at all.<sup>100</sup> Ruth is distraught because of it, and the rest of the group tries to comfort her with the idea that ‘possibles’ are unimportant and “just a bit of fun.”<sup>101</sup> Ruth, frustrated, retorts, “We’re modelled from trash.

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<sup>92</sup> Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2021), 57.

<sup>93</sup> Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, 58.

<sup>94</sup> Ishiguro, 60.

<sup>95</sup> Ishiguro, 137.

<sup>96</sup> Ishiguro, 137.

<sup>97</sup> Ishiguro, 138.

<sup>98</sup> Ishiguro, 143.

<sup>99</sup> Ishiguro, 161.

<sup>100</sup> Ishiguro, 162.

<sup>101</sup> Ishiguro, 163.

Junkies, prostitutes, winos, tramps,”<sup>102</sup> she then notes on the woman in the art gallery: “Do you think she’d have talked to us like that if she’d known what we really were?”<sup>103</sup> This outburst exemplifies how the perception of clones from the outside world has damaged their own identity, being able to form some concept of self yet interpreting it as the worst possible version of it. There are no hints that the clones are ‘modelled’ from criminals or prostitutes, yet it makes sense in the clone’s mind. They are undesirable aspects of reality, so they must be modelled from the unwanted side of society. This damage to one’s perception of self only adds to the isolation a clone feels once they become a ‘carer’, which subsequently adds to the humanity of clones.

At the novel’s climax, Kathy and Tommy follow Madam to her house with the question of deferral (yet another rumour started in the clone community, which was not true), whether they can postpone their donations to spend time together. Before their hopes are denied, they receive exposition from Miss Emily about how clones came to be: “After the war, in the early fifties, when the great breakthroughs in science followed one after the other so rapidly, there wasn’t time to take stock, to ask the sensible questions. Suddenly there were all these new possibilities laid before us, all these ways to cure so many previously incurable conditions. This was what the world noticed the most, wanted the most.”<sup>104</sup> Her explanation illustrates the initial utopic enthusiasm that follows from great technological or scientific development. Nevertheless, it also demonstrates the dangers of such enthusiasm. As has been established before, dystopias have been created as the opposite of utopia to “not only compensate for its one-sidedness, but also to acknowledge the shadow of the lived experience.”<sup>105</sup> The shadow, in this case, is the clones. Their humanity has been established through the fact that they have a sense of self, raising the question of whether such developments are ethical and if they should be followed through.

In the setting of *Never Let Me Go*, it is too late to reconsider this question as Miss Emily explains further: “But by the time people became concerned about... about *students*, by the time they came to consider just how you were reared, whether you should have been brought into existence at all, well by then it was too late.”<sup>106</sup> Society has become too dependent on the clones as a medical supply by this point. Because of them, terminal illnesses such as cancer are curable.

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<sup>102</sup> Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2021), 164.

<sup>103</sup> Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, 164.

<sup>104</sup> Ishiguro, 257.

<sup>105</sup> Riven Barton, *The Age of Dystopia: One Genre, Our Fears and Our Future*, 6-7.

<sup>106</sup> Ishiguro, 257.

Therefore, the reversion of the process is impossible.<sup>107</sup> In this way, *Never Let Me Go* advises caution to the enthusiasm of technological and scientific development, to ask the humane and ethical questions before there is no space to ask them.

As Kathy and Tommy leave the house, Kathy asks Madam about an instant in her past, where she saw Madam crying at the site of her dancing to the song “Never Let Me Go” by Judy Bridgewater. She asks whether her reason for crying aligns with Kathy’s fantasies of the song.<sup>108</sup> Madam says that she “saw a new world coming rapidly. More scientific, efficient, yes. More cures for the old sicknesses. Very good. But a harsh, cruel world.”<sup>109</sup> It can be only speculated, but that reaction was probably prompted by the movement’s failure to secure a better future for the clones and the society’s decision to disregard the ethical question for the sake of efficiency completely. Apathy towards humanity and opting for technological solutions for the sake of efficiency is the second of the “three great themes”<sup>110</sup> mentioned in the chapter on the history of dystopia.

*Never Let Me Go* is a technological dystopia, not in a traditional sense as it was observable through *1984*, *Brave New World*, *The Handmaid’s Tale* or *The Testament*. Rather than focusing on how technology is used to manipulate societies or maintain order within them, the novel explores a group that has been victim to technology and scientific progress, the clones. It has been established that clones can foster identity and humanity. Therefore, it highlights the ethical question of how far technology can move humanity forward and whether it should. Furthermore, the novel accents how society can appoint and remove humanity, depending on the political and developmental climate.

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<sup>107</sup> Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2021), 257.

<sup>108</sup> Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, 266.

<sup>109</sup> Ishiguro, 267.

<sup>110</sup> Gregory Claeys, *The Palgrave Handbook of Utopian and Dystopian Literatures*, 55.

## 6. Conclusion

The tradition of dystopian fiction has undergone various developments, from its initial use as satire in the eighteenth century to studies of collective anxieties in the early twentieth century until today. Amongst these fears is the fear of repression of individuality for the sake of collectivism, opting for efficiency and sacrificing individuality and humanity in the process, as has been exemplified by the work of George Orwell's *1984* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. Some of the more recent anxieties are the fear of extreme inequality or the fallout of climate change. The main reason for exploring the history of the term was to exemplify that dystopias have been present far before the explosion in recent media and even before the establishment of the tradition by Orwell and Huxley. It is important to note, however, that since then, the term has been expanded upon, and its definition is now more extensive than it initially was and is no longer useable as a simple parallel to utopic texts.

Because of its origin, there is considerable discourse surrounding the definition of dystopia and dystopian fiction. This thesis has defined dystopia as an exploration of collective anxieties regarding the political, social or scientific through a fictitious setting, which is set in a not-too-distant future or is an exploration of alternate history, as was examinable in the work *Never Let Me Go*. In addition, the most prevalent kinds of dystopia, the socio-political and technological, were introduced and described. These categories were established based on recurring trends within the works of the dystopian genre. Within the socio-political realm, the recurring themes are sacrificing individuality in the face of efficiency and collectivism or the oppression of the individual through the exercise of absolute power. Within the technological dystopia, the anxiety is more centred on the fear of technology and scientific advancement and how it possibly threatens the individual or the entire population. These categories were further supported by examples from the two most prominent works that helped establish the dystopian tradition, *1984* and *Brave New World*. Subsequently, a note on the works which were analysed more thoroughly in subsequent chapters, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *The Testaments*, and *Never Let Me Go*, was provided.

*The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* by Margaret Atwood were observed within the socio-political category. The importance of these works is highlighted by the current political climate where multiple countries have regressed in their rights for women and their bodily autonomy. The social structure of these two works was analysed to illustrate how Gilead's systematic oppression is socially and politically motivated. By providing examples, namely through the lens of the leading narrative voice of the first novel, Offred, an exploration

of the themes that recur in socio-political dystopias was conducted. The result is an observation of society divided based on gender, where a selected male group holds most of the power. That is not where the power dynamic ends, and even though women are the oppressed majority within this setting, even women have the power to oppress other groups of women, as exemplified by the observation of the relationship between Aunts, Wives and Handmaids. This oppression subsequently leads to the loss of individuality in the face of a collective, as well as the loss of the perception of one's body as one's own. Furthermore, the analysis of these novels revealed another theme prevalent in socio-political dystopias: the erasure of history and the selective presentation of it.

Within the category of technological dystopias, *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro was analysed. It has been established that this novel has a more untraditional mode of expression. The dystopian themes are backgrounded, and instead of receiving a detailed account of the setting, as is traditional with dystopias, the setting is put together through the recollected memories of the protagonist, Kathy. Through these memories, one receives mainly a personal account of intimate friendships and relationships, her feelings and her struggle with identity. The inner mechanics of the world are shrouded in mystery until the end of the novel. As the story progresses, however, more themes which could be perceived as dystopian are revealed. The crucial information is that the characters whose lives the reader witnesses and follows are clones who are destined to have their organs harvested for medical purposes. Horrifying as this proposition is, one would not perceive it as such if it were not for the initial establishment of humanity and if, as is the case in the setting of the novel, they were necessary medical equipment for the treatment of terminal diseases. Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* presents an interesting moral question of how far technology and scientific progress can go before humanity becomes an oppressor of its technological creation.

The exploration of individual and their feelings towards the world is perhaps a theme which will be observable in future dystopias. *1984* and *Brave New World* reflected the fear of collectivism that was prevalent through the political climate of World War two. In the contemporary world, however, the greater fear is that of extreme individualism, far-right ideologies, and the more pressing and ever-present fear of climate change. Despite this, the recent dystopian media has been more hopeful than its predecessors.

As mentioned in the chapter on the history of dystopia, the genre has faced a significant expansion through various media, from books to video games, in recent years. Recently, the dystopic term has been enriched by post-apocalyptic narratives that envision the human struggle after society as we know it has collapsed, and a totalitarian regime has been adapted under the

premise of survival. This subgenre of dystopia is coming from the promises of climate dystopias. Compared with classical dystopia, the recent developments in the media are primarily focused on their entertainment value and enjoyability. Compared with Huxley or Orwell, who mainly focused on illustrating the potential horrors of the possible societal failures prevalent through their times, most twenty-first century media focuses primarily on telling a survival story of a rebellion with a happy ending, making the more recent dystopian genre more commercialised. This media exploration can be traced back to the late 2000 and early 2010. This boom has primarily happened in the young adult fiction section with works such as *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent* and *Maze Runner*. Contemporary dystopias, especially in the young adult genre, present a hero who struggles against the adversities of the environment and fights against any form of oppression. Unlike the heroes of the classical dystopias, they do not yield to the system, presenting a far more hopeful narrative. While this thesis has focused primarily on works that criticise the failings of society or humanity, delivering a more pessimistic outlook on humanity's future, recent dystopias indeed offer a more positive outlook, that despite all the oppression and possible catastrophes which the environmental crisis will bring, humanity will prevail and fight for better days.

## 7. Resumé

Termín dystopie se v poslední době dostal do slovníku každodenních pojmů, protože současné politické, sociální a ekologické klima stále více připomíná romány *1984* nebo *Konec civilizace: aneb Překrásný nový svět*. Cílem této práce bylo prozkoumat pojem dystopie. Pro tyto účely byla prvně prozkoumána historie tohoto pojmu. Následující kapitola se zaměřila na definici termínu spolu se subžánry, které vyplývají z trendů, které se objevují napříč literaturou tohoto typu. V rámci těchto subžánrů byla analyzována konkrétní díla novějších dystopií. Konkrétně se jedná o díla Margaret Atwoodové a Kazua Ishigury.

První polovina práce představila pojem dystopie a zasadila jej do literární perspektivy tím, že nejprve zkoumala jeho historii. Prvně se zaměřila na jeho původ, kdy byl v osmnáctém století používán jako označení pro "špatné místo". V té době byl termín silně spjat s utopickou tradicí a sloužil jako kritika přílišného optimismu těchto textů. Později se termín od utopické tradice oddělil a získal vlastní identitu. Dystopické texty začaly více komentovat reálný svět a obavy společnosti, jako byly automatizace války nebo vzestup fašismu. Během dvacátého a jednadvacátého století se kritika přesunula k tématům jako například klimatická změna, práva žen a strachy z dopadu jaderné války. Historie tohoto pojmu je uzavřena tvrzením, že dystopickou fikci lze rozdělit do dvou kategorií. Rané dystopie, které sloužily jako kritika utopických textů, a moderní dystopie, které se zaměřují na kritiku skutečného světa selhávajících společenských trendů.

V další kapitole teoretické části práce byly porovnány různé definice dystopie. Definice, která uvádí dystopie jako antiutopický text, byla zde označena za starou a nedostačující. Proto byla zvolena vymezení, které popisují dystopie jako zkoumání kolektivních úzkostí týkajících se politického, sociálního nebo vědeckého prostředí. Tato témata jsou demonstrována s pomocí fiktivního prostoru. Díla se vždy odehrávají přinejmenším v blízké budoucnosti nebo, jak bylo příkladem v knize Kazua Ishigury *Neopouštěj mě*, v alternativních dějinách. Dále byly představeny a popsány nejrozšířenější subžánry dystopií, společensko-politická a technologická. Tyto kategorie byly ustanoveny na základě témat a obav které se často opakují v dílech dystopického žánru. Jako důkaz byly uvedeny příklady ze dvou nejvýznamnějších děl, která pomohla založit moderní dystopickou tradici, *1984* a *Konec civilizace: aneb Překrásný nový svět*. Následně byla uvedena poznámka k dílům, která byla podrobněji rozebrána v dalších kapitolách. Tato díla jsou *Příběh služebnice*, *Svědectví* a *Neopouštěj mě*.

Následuje druhá, praktická část práce, která obsahuje analýzy konkrétních dystopických děl. První kapitola této části se jmenuje socio-politická a byla v ní analyzována díla *Příběh*

*Služebnice a Svědectví* od Margaret Atwoodové. Kapitola taktéž obsahuje segment o životě autorky. V tomto segmentu byla rozebrána autorčina účast v diskurzu nedávného politického dění v USA, především v kontextu ženských práv a zakazování knih ve školních knihovnách. Díky tomu její tvorba nabírá většího významu. Po této části byla další podkapitola věnována analýze dystopických prvků v románech *Příběh služebnice* a *Svědectví*. Mezi nalezené prvky práce uvedla sociální strukturu Gileadu (fiktivní totalitní stát který kdysi býval USA) jakožto hlavní složku útlaku. Jako výsledek uvedla společnost, která ve které jedna určitá skupina mužů převládá nad všemi, a to především nad ženami. Avšak se v této dynamice vyskytuje i útlak žen ženami. Tento fakt je ilustrován zavedeným kastovým systémem a analýzou vztahu mezi jednotlivými vrstvami. V neposlední řadě práce poukázala na to, jak zavedený systém ničí jedince, jeho vnímání sebe sama a jejího těla.

V rámci kategorie technologických dystopií byla analyzována kniha *Neopouštěj mě* od Kazua Ishigura. Podobně jako ve předchozí kapitole je napřed uveden krátký životopis autora, ve kterém jsou stručně představena jeho díla, postoj k momentálnímu politickému dění a přínos dystopickému žánru. Analýza jeho díla poukázala na to, že se jedná o relativně netradiční dystopii, a to v tom, že dystopické prvky, jako například zkažený a nespravedlivý systém, jsou odsunuty do pozadí. Dílo se tudíž především zaměřuje na jedince (v tomto případě se jedná o vypravěčku a protagonistku Kathy) jeho identitu a lidskost. Proto se práce nejprve zaměřila na analýzu těchto prvků, aby poté mohla ukázat na ty dystopické. Hlavní aktéři tohoto díla jsou totiž klonové, kteří jsou předurčeni k odběru orgánu. Díky tomuto faktu zároveň s analýzou lidskosti klonů poukazuje dílo na dystopický rys: útlak skupiny za účelem dosažení blaha většiny. Nadále poukazuje tato kniha na potencionální morální hrozbu, kterou by klonování mohlo přinést, pokud se nezamyslíme nad potencionální lidskostí našich výtvorů.

V neposlední řadě se práce věnovala současné dystopické fikci, jak ovlivnila tradici dystopických děl a kam se mohou posunout v budoucnosti. Práce v závěru poukázala na ten fakt, že dystopická media jsou v poslední době extrémně populární a jako příklad uvedla díla novější Young Adult dystopie: *Hunger Games*, *Divergent* a *Labyrint: Útěk*. Práce je zakončena poznámkou že na rozdíl od děl, které jsou s dystopiemi tradičně spjaty, novější díla nabízejí nějakou formu naděje v prostředí, které bylo pohlceno diktaturou a ekologickými katastrofami.

## 8. Abstract

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This bachelor thesis aims to define the parameters of what dystopian fiction is. To do so, the history and development of this genre shall be examined. After establishing a cohesive definition, it aims to define subcategories based on recurring trends. Within these parameters, works of contemporary dystopian fiction will be analysed. The works in question are Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and *The Testaments* (2019), and Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005).

## 9. Anotace

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Tato bakalářská práce si klade za cíl definovat parametry toho, co je to dystopická fikce. Za tímto účelem bude zkoumána historie a vývoj tohoto žánru. Po stanovení ucelené definice si klade za cíl vymezit subžánry na základě opakujících se trendů. V rámci těchto parametrů budou analyzována díla současné dystopické fikce. Jmenovitě se jedná se o díla Margaret Atwoodové: *Příběh služebnice* (*The Handmaid's Tale*, 1985) a *Svědectví* (*The Testaments*, 2019) a dílo Kazua Ishigura: *Neopouštěj mě* (*Never Let Me Go*, 2005).

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