

MYTHS OF WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY DYSTOPIAN NOVELS: LOUISE
O'NEILL'S *ONLY EVER YOURS*, CHRISTINA DALCHER'S *VOX*, AND LENI
ZUMAS'S *RED CLOCKS*



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BY

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PLAGIARISM

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ABSTRACT

The present Master's thesis aims to develop a better understanding of how patriarchal myths of femininity have affected female characters in contemporary feminist dystopian literature. The term "Dystopia" was first used in the late 19th century in opposition to Utopia. Eventually, dystopian as well as utopian novels began to be written by female writers, and their aim was not only to challenge utopian literature but to voice concerns regarding women's issues. The first of these novels was arguably Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), which went on to have an important impact on feminist dystopian literature. In this context, this thesis will focus on three contemporary novels, *Only Ever Yours* (2014), *Red Clocks* (2018) and *Vox* (2018), which will be analysed from a feminist perspective, based primarily, although not exclusively, on Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949).

Key words: feminist dystopia, feminist theory, myths of women, contemporary literature, revolutionary

ÖZET

Bu tez, günümüz feminist distopya edebiyatı kadın karakterlerin ataerkil mitlerden nasıl etkilendikleriyle ilgili daha iyi bir anlayış geliştirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. “Distopya” terimi ilk olarak 19. yüzyılda ütopyanın karşıtı olarak kullanılmıştır. Kadın yazarlar zamanla ütopya romanları gibi distopya romanları da yazmaya başlamış, bununla birlikte yalnızca ütopya edebiyatına meydan okumayı değil, aynı zamanda kadınlarla ilgili konularda ses getirmeyi de amaçlamışlardır. Bu romanlardan ilki tartışmasız olarak feminist distopya edebiyatında da önemli bir etki yaratan Margaret Atwood’un “Damızlık Kızın Öyküsü” (1985) romanıdır. Bu bağlamda, bu tez, *Only Ever Yours* (2014), *Red Clocks* (2018) ve *Vox* (2018) isimli günümüz romanlarını tek olmasa da öncelikli olarak Simone de Beauvoir’ın “İkinci cins” (1949) adlı kitabına dayanan feminist bakış açısıyla inceleyecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler; feminist distopya, feminist kuram, kadın mitleri, çağdaş edebiyat, devrimsel

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INTRODUCTION

Utopia and dystopia are two well-known literary genres that are, effectively, inseparable. As Claeys (2010) declares, the word utopia was a neologism that underwent several changes before being used in the context of literature. After being used and interpreted differently by several authors, the meaning of utopia became more clearly defined (p. 3). While exploring the origins of utopia as a literary genre, two works are key: first, Plato's *Republic* (BC 375), a Socratic dialogue which arguably founded political philosophy and second, Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516). Plato attempts to define the just city in the *Republic*. His categorization of the population into three social classes, each of which represents a part of the soul, had an important impact on the depiction of society in later utopian and dystopian novels. The *Republic* is valuable in several ways. Allott (2011), for instance, regards the dialogues as "timeless", in that, notably, they have provoked, and continue to provoke, considerable philosophical commentary. He also sees the book as a guide to understanding both the human and natural worlds and, in its focus on three allied elements – the individual, society, and the universe- it emphasises hierarchy and morality (p. 1169). The *Republic* describes a utopia where justice is important for both the individual and society. What he means by 'just' includes several different words like fair, honest, legally right, lawful, and righteous. The state is responsible for its inhabitants' basic needs, their safety, and happiness which affects their productivity. Women are treated like men, they can also work or become guardians. New born babies are the state's property, and are raised by the state. Years later, Thomas More developed and elucidated the term utopia in his book *Utopia* (1516). In this book, he describes how a perfect place should be in terms of its society, political system and culture. In *Utopia*, More describes an island where people hold common values and are tolerant of each other's beliefs. While both More's

Utopia and Plato's *Republic* can be read as depictions of ideal societies, they differ considerably in the details. Staintrager (1969), for instance, noted that, although both books are written as dialogues, they have widely different purposes and contexts. Plato and More have different approaches towards, for example, warfare, political regimes, sexual behaviour, education, philosophy, and family (p. 357). Staintrager explains some of these difference in the following excerpt:

Precisely by retaining the family, by subordinating (in some sense) philosophy to natural theology and by numerous other devices, More indicates the area of his deepest disagreement with Plato... More is compelled to consider much more than Plato the potential threats to his prosperous but virtuous republic. He must devote more serious attention to the problems of war and international relations (Steintrager, 1969, pp. 371-372).

Despite these differences, however, More's book can be considered a response to Plato to a certain extent.

Furthermore, identifying the common themes and elements of utopia is vital for comprehending dystopian fiction. The Oxford dictionary defines dystopia as "an imaginary place or state in which everything is extremely bad or unpleasant" (Dystopia, n.d.). The term was first coined by British philosopher and politician John Stuart Mill with the addition of the Greek prefix 'dys' to the root "topia", or place, in 1868. Since the early 20th century, dystopia has become one of the salient literary genres, and has been used by writers who wish to critique and interrogate current global issues by using extreme themes and plots. Dystopian fiction is, then, an effective way of recording and reflecting on the current situation or problems of a particular time. In this context, dystopian novels mainly aim to describe the moral injury suffered by people living in unusual, frequently nightmarish, circumstances.

However, dystopia is, in fact, intricately connected to utopia. Preslar (2008) clarifies the relation between utopia and dystopia in the following excerpt:

Utopian thinking steps away from our world in space or time to explore what might make it better, sometimes looking back to an idealized past... Utopian thinking also looks forward to the best of what humanity might achieve, given its intellectual, philosophical, and technological potential... Just as negative results in an experiment are vital to a scientist, negative results in utopian experiments – that is, dystopias – are essential to any consideration of how to achieve utopia (p. 34).

In literary history, dystopian novels were arguably created in response to utopias, and, indeed, their political and social structures are influenced by those depicted in utopian works. Published in 1924, Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1924) is considered the first dystopian novel. The Russian writer's work can, on one level, be understood as a protest against totalitarianism in the USSR. He describes a futuristic place called the "One State" where a collective consciousness is created through mind control. The state is ruled by the Benefactor who believes real happiness occurs only when human feelings are reduced. People in the One State are forced to live like robots in an attempt to prevent the failure of the system. As Jarada (2019) clarifies, "Happiness is a concept that is unassociated with freedom according to One State's totalitarian regime. For this reason, all the citizens are deprived from their freedom which means the regime has a total control over their lives" (p. 40). Throughout this novel, then, Zamyatin underlines the significance of individual freedom and happiness. Following *We*, George Orwell wrote *1984* (1949) and Aldous Huxley wrote *Brave New World* (1932). Nicol (2007) explains that Huxley "had not read *We* before he published *Brave New World*" and states that "most critics shared Well's, not Zamyatin's, reaction to the book" (p. 44).

As shared by Nicol (2007) in the same article, some critics “dismissed Huxley’s dystopia as nonsense” like Gerald Bullett, Wyndham Lewis, Henry Hazlitt, or G.K. Chesterton while Joseph Needham finds the book “remarkable” but that “only biologists or philosophers will really appreciate” it (p. 45). Written after *Brave New World*, Orwell’s *1984*, directly influenced by *We*, has remarkable connections with World War II since it is set in a totalitarian regime which arguably resembles both Stalin’s USSR and Nazi Germany. Besides *We*, these novels are also key in the development of the dystopian genre. While there are, of course, considerable differences between these novels, all these dystopias involve governmental control over people’s freedom through the use of different types of propaganda and technology. Moreover, resistance towards the government is a key element of all of these works, although this resistance generally fails:

Dystopias are stories that contrast the failure of the main character with the unstoppable advance of society towards totalitarianism. The loss of the self is the character’s final acknowledgement of, and ultimate contribution to, society’s being definitely victorious...Dystopias present “shrinking” worlds where nothing escapes the “hallucinatorily” intense force of attraction of the center...(Mihailescu, 1991, pp. 215,217).

Therefore, the main characters in dystopian novels represent the themes of revolution and survival. They usually resist the totalitarian system regardless of harsh circumstances in an attempt to change the system into a better, fairer one. In contemporary dystopian literature, the focus has broadened to touch upon such issues as consumerism, gender equality, the (mis) use of technology, social media, and global warming. In this context, the protagonists of contemporary dystopias often see their freedom threatened by technology.

From the 1970s to the 1990s in particular, dystopian fiction increasingly began to deal with feminist themes. Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) is considered to be the first dystopian novel focusing on women's lives in a dystopian society; its themes are arguably feminist ones in that the novel consists mainly of female characters and touches on the absence of women's rights in the theocratic state of Gilead. For instance, in *The Handmaid's Tale*, women are forbidden to hold a job, while 'wrongdoer' women of reproductive age are forced to become handmaids, tasked with producing children with prominent married males. *The Handmaid's Tale* has since influenced many other predominantly female writers of feminist dystopian novels, although Pigman (2018), for instance, claims that the term 'feminist dystopian fiction' has not been accepted as a genre yet (p. 44). Despite this, these novels will frequently be referred to as feminist dystopian novels, as a useful heuristic, throughout the thesis. On this basis, this study aims to explore the myths of women in three contemporary dystopian novels: Christina Dalcher's *Vox*, Leni Zumas's *Red Clocks*, and Louise O'Neill's *Only Ever Yours*. The three novels are connected by their focus on feminist themes, such as women's rights, freedom and motherhood. Somehow, each of them draws attention to the issue of gender equality in several areas of life. The novels are thus explored from a feminist perspective including (among others) Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Gilbert and Gubar's *Madwoman in the Attic*, and Luce Irigaray's *This Sex Which Is Not One*. In particular, the focus is on (patriarchal) myths of womanhood as depicted in the novels; woman as silent and obedient, woman as mother and wife and woman as a beautiful object.

Women, even in the 21st century, are still frequently faced with these kinds of myths and stereotypes. As Adichie notes:

We teach girls to shrink themselves, to make themselves smaller. We say to girls, ‘You can have ambition, but not too much. You should aim to be successful but not too successful, otherwise you will threaten the man. Because I am female, I’m expected to aspire to marriage. I am expected to make my life choices always keeping in mind that marriage is the most important...We teach females that in relationships, compromise is what a woman is more likely to do. We raise girls to see each other as competitors – not for jobs or accomplishments, which in my opinion can be a good thing, but for the attention of men. We teach girls that they cannot be sexual beings in the way boys are (Adichie, 2014, pp. 11-12).

As mentioned above, these myths, or misconceptions, continue to persecute women and prevent them from building their lives as they wish. Though women’s rights have increased with better educational prospects, many women are still ‘othered’, and frequently silenced, whether in their business, social or private lives. In *The Second Sex* (1949), Simone de Beauvoir explains this depiction of women as the other from historical, psychological, and biological perspectives. In spite of the great advances that have taken place in women’s rights since Beauvoir’s work was published, many of her arguments are still valid today. Therefore, while it benefits from later feminist work such as that of Irigaray and Gilbert and Gubar, the theoretical approach in this thesis is centered around *The Second Sex*, which still remains one of the most important feminist theoretical works.

Moreover, the three novels will also be examined from the broader perspective of utopian and dystopian literature. In this context, starting from Plato’s *Republic* and More’s *Utopia*, the first chapter will include an analysis of these genres, focusing on

classic dystopian novels such as *We*, *Brave New World*, 1984, and *The Handmaid's Tale*.

The second chapter focuses on *Vox* (2018). The novel describes a dystopian United States where women get electric shocks if they use more than a hundred words per day. Women's freedom of speech is, then, the primary theme of the novel, which connects it with the broader question of women's rights. Dalcher explains the importance of talking as "one major thing that separates us from the rest of the animal kingdom". As she explains, "It's language that allows us not only to share our thoughts and ideas and stories with others, but also allows us to process information" (Dalcher, 2018). Dalcher's thoughts and opinions on this subject help shed light on her motivation to write the novel. In the novel, when the Pure Movement is elected, women are sent back to their homes to cook, clean, take care of their children and satisfy their husbands' needs. Working, travelling abroad, using sign language, writing, and having a premarital or an extramarital relationship are all forbidden for women. Jean McClellan, the (female) protagonist, is a married neurolinguist with four children. The government wants her to go back to work to attempt to cure the president's brother who, following a skiing accident, suffers from Wernicke's aphasia. However, Jean and the rest of the team later figure out that the president also has more sinister motives for desiring the cure. As expected from a dystopian novel, the book doesn't end happily. It also arguably includes some of the most important themes of dystopian fiction such as hopelessness, loss of individualism, and religious and government control over women's rights. The story is told in the present tense from the first person narrative point of view. The author uses the chronological narrative technique in the novel. The reader is allowed to know what Jean (the protagonist) really thinks and feels inside as her speech is limited to a hundred words daily. Her voice provides remarkable information about The Pure

Movement, the totalitarian state in the novel, and she uses different metaphors, similes and colloquialisms to draw a better and more realistic picture in the reader's mind. Some biblical and historical allusions are provided for a better understanding of the state. For example, on page 12, the word "Feminazi" refers to the Nazis, and is used to label women as "militant feminists" (Feminazi, n.d.). Besides, the novel has several flashbacks about the kind of place the U.S. was before the new regime, and the protagonist's language partly includes verbal irony such as when she says a woman does not need a voice to run a household (p. 3).

The third chapter focuses on Leni Zumas's *Red Clocks* (2018), which was published seven months before *Vox*. It can be categorized either as feminist dystopian fiction or as speculative fiction, defined as fiction that "could really happen" (Atwood M., 2016), as the themes, setting, and problems described in the book are realistic. Zumas, in an interview, admits that one of the characters named Ro, otherwise called The Biographer, represents the author's own struggle with infertility (Zumas, 2018). The plot centers on the intertwined stories of five women characters. These five characters, Eivor, Ro, Susan, Ginny, and Mattie, express and experience a variety of viewpoints and situations faced by many women in the real world. Eivor, a polar hydrologist in the 19th century who aims to write and publish a book, represents the difficulties faced by women writers in the past. Ro is a high-school history teacher in her forties who is writing a biography of Eivor Minervudottir. She also struggles with infertility, and tries several ways to get pregnant; her story reflects the author's real-life experiences with infertility. Susan represents women with an unhappy marriage, she has two children and is responsible for the housework and her family's needs. Her story is that of a woman who wants to escape these bonds and live her own life. Ginny, aka The Mender, is a herbalist who tries to cure people with her herbs, and later gets into

trouble by attempting to carry out abortions, which is forbidden in the country. She speaks for women who do not stop fighting for justice, equality and choice. In this sense, her story reflects women's struggle for rights throughout history. Finally, Mattie is a fifteen-year-old talented high school student who gets pregnant. She does not want the baby and seeks to have an abortion, which is against the law. Her story represents that of real women who aren't allowed control over their bodies. The novel thus describes what would happen if abortion were illegal in the United States. The book is written from the third person- omniscient narrative point of view. There are five different heroines and their stories are connected to each other. Leni Zumas uses a framing (story within story) narrative device to describe the system in the novel. There are some literary allusions to Greek myths such as Polyphonte, Aphrodite and Artemis (p. 316), Zeus and Helen (p. 146). There is repetition of some sentences like "We are the dinosaurs" (p. 134), which can be referred to as anaphora, and different sounds are included such as "plip,plip,plip", "Meuf", "Nnnnnhhhh" (p. 137), "WANH, WANH" (p. 146) referred as onomatopoeia. In addition, there are a lot of other themes in the novel which are important from a feminist perspective.

The fourth chapter focuses on Louise O'Neill's *Only Ever Yours* (2014), another contemporary dystopian novel which deals with feminist themes. Compared with the previous two books, this book is much closer to the dystopian literary approach rather than speculative fiction as it depicts a futuristic state that is unlikely to come about in reality; however some of the novel's themes, such as the focus on beauty and marriage, do reflect real-life issues to an extent. The story is set after a natural disaster following which girls are no longer born naturally. In consequence, under the new regime, girls started to be produced scientifically in laboratories in order to sustain the state's population in the long term. However, due to the misogynist outlook of the government,

these girls have no freedom. They are kept at school until they are sixteen years old, the age when they are selected to be companions, chastities, or concubines. Moreover, the education in that school encourages the girls to focus obsessively on their looks, while depriving them of a sense of individual identity, and inflicting sexual and psychological violence on them. The story is told from the first person narrative (freida's) perspective and several interior monologues are provided in terms of telling what she thinks or feels. Since the reader is allowed to see things only from freida's perspective, and is free to think of other characters, the voice is unreliable. The book also includes historical allusions as the boy characters' names are chosen from those of historical philosophers and prophets, such as Socrates, Darwin, Abraham and Albert. Notably, the girls' names are written with lowercase in the book, while the male names begin with a capital letter, highlighting the subjugation of women in the novel. In this sense, the book has significant connections with *The Handmaid's Tale*, while it also borrows from other classic dystopian novels, especially *Brave New World*.

CHAPTER 1: Utopia and Dystopia

1.1 PLATO'S *REPUBLIC*

Utopia is defined as “a place of ideal perfection especially in laws, government, and social conditions” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). When we look at early works such as Plato's *Republic* (BC 375) or Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), the societies depicted arguably represent an ideal world from the authors' perspective, and the constitution of this world whether it is a country, city or state is, supposedly, perfectly designed. Of course this is arguable as a utopian society may indeed be dystopian from a different perspective. However, the main purpose and features of utopia will be explored with the help of Plato and Thomas More in this chapter.

Plato, in his work the *Republic* which was written in approximately 375 BCE, puts forward his ideas about how an ideal state should be. His main purpose was to focus on the importance of justice both in the individual psyche and in a political community. The *Republic* is an extremely influential work which has affected the world philosophically, historically, and politically. At the beginning of the book, Socrates tries to find the meaning of justice by asking various people to define it, and he claims that it is more advantageous to be just than being unjust. In the first part of the book, he seeks to define justice using several words like fair, honest, legally right, lawful, and righteous (Plato & Cornford, 1945, p. 1). At the same time, he argues that is the first systematic attempt to explain what an ideal society consists of. For him, explaining the ideal is necessary because he believes that, without knowing what is ideal or just, the person could be blind or aimless. The work is written in the form of an imaginary dialogue between Plato's teacher Socrates and various characters from different layers of society. In the first book, the participants discuss the meaning of justice and the

conversation ends with a deadlock where there is no specific answer. While discussing the “just state”, the characters talk about several moral values that, in their view, are an integral part of an ideal society.

Firstly, a rich old man named Cephalus explains how to be a respected person and notes the advantage of being wealthy.

All these troubles, Socrates, including the complaints about not being respected, have only one cause; and that is not old age, but a man's character. If you have a contented mind at peace with itself, age is no intolerable burden; without that, Socrates, age, and youth will be equally painful (Plato & Cornford, 1945, p. 5).

For him, then, old age is valuable when the person has a good character, otherwise, it can be torture. Later on, he focuses on the importance of being honest, which, at least for the right-thinking man, is facilitated by wealth.

Now in this, as I believe, lies the chief value of wealth, not for everyone, perhaps, but for the right-thinking man. It can do much to save us from going to that other world in fear of having cheated or deceived anyone even unintentionally or of being in debt to some god for sacrifice or to some man for money (Plato & Cornford, 1945, p. 7).

The conversation between Socrates and Cephalus at the beginning of the book makes it clear that, in forming a utopia or an ideal city, it is important to start from the construction of the individual personalities of its inhabitants because a community consists of a group of individuals. This conversation between Socrates and Cephalus provides further evidence of the importance of the inhabitants' personalities since a community consists of different types of individuals. Later, Cephalus, Polemarchus, Thrasymachus and Glaucon describe justice from their various points of view. The

elderly and wealthy Cephalus thinks justice is being an honest person and repaying debts (Plato & Cornford, 1945, p. 8). Polemarchus, in contrast, considers that justice is related to harming one's foes while helping one's friends:

(Socrates and Polemarchus are talking)

S: I see, said I; to repay money entrusted to one is not to render what is due, if the two parties are friends and the repayment proves harmful to the lender. That is what you say Simonides meant?

P: Yes, certainly.

S: And what about enemies? Are we to render whatever is their due to them?

P: Yes certainly, what really is due to them; which means, I suppose, what is appropriate to an enemy-some sort of injury... If we are to follow those analogies. Socrates, justice would be rendering services or injuries to friends or enemies (Plato & Cornford, 1945, p. 9).

After him, Thrasymachus, the Sophist, claims that he has a better definition for justice which is the interest of the stronger.

(Socrates and Thrasymachus are talking)

T: Don't you know, then, that a state may be ruled by a despot, or a democracy, or an aristocracy?...

S: Of course.

T: And that the ruling element is always the strongest?

S: Yes.

T: Well then, in every case the laws are made by the ruling party in its own interest; a democracy makes democratic laws, a despot autocratic ones, and so on. By making these laws they define as 'right' for their subjects whatever is for

their own interest, and they call anyone who breaks them a 'wrongdoer' and punish him accordingly. That is what I mean: in all states alike 'right' has the same meaning, namely what is for the interest of the party established in power, and that is the strongest. So the sound conclusion is that what is 'right' is the same everywhere: the interest of the stronger party (Plato & Cornford, 1945, p. 18).

Finally, in the following passage, Glaucon defines justice as a forced compact between those with more and less power:

So justice is accepted as a compromise, and valued, not as good in itself, but for lack of power to do wrong; no man worthy of the name, who had that power, would ever enter into such a compact with anyone; he would be mad if he did (Plato & Cornford, 1945, p. 44).

In short, various people share their differing opinions about justice, which proves that justice is an ambiguous concept. In the second book, after talking about what injustice is, Socrates is asked by the others to define justice:

I will tell you. We think of justice as a quality that may exist in a whole community as well as in an individual, and the community is the bigger of the two. Possibly, 'then, we may find justice there in larger proportions, easier to make out. So I suggest that we should begin by inquiring what justice means in a state. Then we can go on to look for its counterpart on a smaller scale in the individual (Plato & Cornford, 1945, p. 55).

For Socrates, then, justice and injustice must be discerned first at the larger level of the state, then at the level of the individual. After that has been explored, one may figure out whether a just person is happier than an unjust one.

On the same page, Socrates says, "My notion is... that a state comes into existence because no individual is self-sufficing; we all have many needs" (p. 55). Thus, in his

view, communities exist to facilitate mutual help among their inhabitants; therefore, as people get used to helping each other, collaboration will occur in such a society. “So, having all these needs, we call in one another's help to satisfy our various requirements; and when we have collected some helpers and associates to live together in one place, we call that settlement a state” (p. 56). Later on, Socrates starts building his imaginary state and this state will provide each of its citizens with their basic needs like food, housing, and clothing. Then he asks how these inhabitants will fulfil their basic needs. Here, he argues that everyone should follow their abilities and do a job related to them; in other words, there should be a division of labor.

And there is another point: work may be ruined if you let the right time go by. The workman must wait upon the work; it will not wait upon his leisure and allow itself to be done in a spare moment. So the conclusion is that more things will be produced and the work is more easily and better done when every man is set free from all other occupations to do, at the right time, the one thing for which he is naturally fitted (Plato & Cornford, 1945, p. 57).

In Plato's *Republic*, then, everyone works in a job where they can make full use of their talents. Thus, as in many utopias, job satisfaction is connected to an individual's happiness and productivity, which can also be connected to the peace of the country. Plato, then, believes that a state's ability to meet its basic needs is important, as it avoids its dependence on other states. Therefore, a sufficient number of farmers and craftsmen is needed. In connection with this, Socrates describes how an ideal state should be protected. In Plato's ideal society there are three classes: Guardians, Auxiliaries, and Craftsmen. Guardians, the highest and the most important group for Plato, are the leaders of the state and are well- educated kings or philosophers. He thinks that the guardians should be educated carefully to enable them to better protect the citizens'

lives and laws. They should put the state before everything and they should be the most knowledgeable about the system. At this point, he compares a guardian with a dog, in that both guard dogs and the Guardians of the state protect those in their charge.

So the nature required to make a noble Guardian of our commonwealth will be swift and strong, spirited, and philosophic... Given those natural qualities, then, how are these Guardians to be brought up and educated? First, will the answer to that question help the purpose of our whole inquiry, which is to make out how justice and injustice grow up in a state? (Plato & Cornford, 1945, p. 66).

The second class, called Auxiliaries, is that of the city's soldiers; these are supposed to help the guardians protect the state. The last class, which consists of farmers and craftsmen, is also very important because in the Republic they are very necessary for fulfilling the needs of the city regarding food and other resources.

In the third book, Plato partly focuses on the place of poetry in the Republic, which he views as a field of art. On the one hand, he believes that good art can motivate people, but he is opposed to poetry in some ways, seeing it as a potentially pernicious influence, in that it could overstimulate the emotional, or spirited, part of the soul. According to Partridge (1970), "Certainly, Plato loved beauty, and especially the beauty of poetry. Nevertheless, poetry, as beautiful language, had to be banished from the well-run state for its ethical as well as for its intellectual dangers" (p. 221).

In the fourth book, Socrates continues to put forward his opinions about the just state. For Plato, there are three main elements in the state; these are wisdom, courage, and temperance. These reflect the three parts of the soul; reason, the spirited part of the soul, and the appetitive part of the soul, represented by the guardians, the auxiliaries and the masses respectively. To be wise is important for the guardians who are, effectively, lawgivers. If they rule the state wisely, this will affect all its systems.

Courage is necessary for soldiers, who are responsible for protecting the state; they should be aware of what to fear and what not to fear. Therefore, they should be educated both bodily and mentally. And the last one, temperance, is described by Plato as follows:

Temperance surely means a kind of orderliness, a control of certain pleasures and appetites. Temperance is not like courage and wisdom which made the state-wise and brave by residing each in one particular part. Temperance works differently; it extends throughout the whole gamut of the state, producing a consonance of all its elements from the weakest to the strongest as measured by any standard you like to take wisdom, bodily strength, numbers, or wealth. So we are entirely justified in identifying with temperance this unanimity or harmonious agreement between the naturally superior and inferior elements on the question which of the two should govern, whether in the state or in the individual (Plato & Cornford, 1945, p. 126).

After explaining these three main elements in his ideal state, Plato finally defines justice. “Justice is produced in the soul, like health in the body, by establishing the elements concerned in their natural relations of control and subordination, whereas injustice is like a disease that its natural order is inverted” (p. 143). He defines the just and unjust man and describes which one is more profitable. He says, “and if the good and just man is so far superior to the bad and unjust in point of pleasure, there is no saying by how much more his life will surpass the other’s in grace, nobility, and virtue” (p. 315).

Notably, guardianship is open to both sexes. In the fifth book, Plato refers to guardian women and what happens when they give birth to a child. Generally, in the *Republic*, Plato thinks everyone should work in the job which they were born to, and for him, it

doesn't matter whether the guardian is male or a female as long as they have the talent and training for the ruling. Olugbade (1989) explains this situation in the following:

It is at the beginning of Book V that Plato offers his radical proposal for the inclusion of women in the guardian class of his just city. Here (Book V), he returns to an examination of impediments to justice. In it, he has Socrates make proposals for reform so radical in content that they must provoke criticism... The first proposal calls for the equality of men and women; the second would abolish marriage and private property among the rulers of society. The third proposal (which is not our concern in this essay) deals with the nature of rule: either philosophers must become kings, or kings must become philosophers (p. 505).

In this context, for Olugbade (1989);

Plato should be read as a critic rather than as a mirror or glorifier of Greek opinion in general and the politics of virility in particular. Whatever his negative views about women, Plato was a radical of his time who was more interested in improving the lots of women and emancipate them from societal subjugation. As far as women's 'liberation' goes, Plato was certainly shoulders higher than most of his contemporaries and even those that came after him (p. 516).

Books six and seven focus on philosophers, their behavior, how they should rule the state, and the importance of education for raising philosopher kings. Plato defines which subjects they should study to later govern the state to utopian standards. In book eight, Plato mentions five regimes: Aristocracy, Timocracy, Oligarchy, Democracy, and Tyranny. He explains each of them, exemplifying them with individuals characteristic of each regime. His utopian Republic is governed by Aristocracy, the best of the regimes for Plato, because there should be a well-educated philosopher-king at

the top. The least desirable regime, characterized by chaos, murder and lawlessness, is called Tyranny. Plato connects such a regime with a tyrannical individual in the ninth book and explains what kind of a person may become a tyrant or what a tyrant does to a society. For him, tyrants are enslaved unhappy people who cannot cooperate with others and build friendships. They thus tend to destroy order and create chaos (p. 332). In the tenth and final book, he goes back to the topic of poetry and shares his opinions about poets. He believes poets act like they know everything, as they are good friends with words they “speak very well- such is the sweet influence which melody and rhythm by nature have” (p. 314) they know how to use their power. Plato, however, does not trust poets as they may affect people’s emotions and create an imbalance in the state; he even banishes them from the state, although later he changes his mind (p. 320).

1.2 THOMAS MORE’S *UTOPIA*

Years later, in 1516, Sir Thomas More wrote a book called *Utopia*, and he is considered to be the first person to coin the word Utopia, which, significantly, is a combination of *eutopia* (good place) and *outopia* (no place). In More’s *Utopia*, an explorer, Raphael Hythloday, recounts his visit to the island of Utopia, which contains fifty-four cities. On this island, everyone speaks the same language and there is no class distinction. No one blames or belittles the other for their religion and no one tries to be superior to anyone else. No wars or fights are allowed, everyone has a job and they live peacefully with each other. Related to Caudle (1970), “most of the book was written while More was in the Netherlands on commission for the London wool merchants” (p. 163). She later gives the following information about the book:

The work is divided into two parts. Book One is a dialogue between More and the scholar-adventurer, Raphael Hythloday, who is the chief interlocutor. The two analyze the evils of European society; and Hythloday tells More of the Island of Utopia which possesses admirable institutions, and where the population lives in perfect harmony and security. Book Two is a description of Utopia which depicts its geographical features and its socioeconomic, political, and religious organization (Caudle, 1970, p. 163).

There are both similarities and differences between the *Republic* and *Utopia*. Both books describe their author's ideal state and both are written as a criticism of the era they lived in. As Claeys explains in the following:

In the above-mentioned poem, the island of Utopia points out its affiliation to Plato's city; the quality of this attachment is clearly defined: both Plato and More imagined alternative ways of organizing society. What is common to both authors, then, is the fact that they resorted to fiction to discuss other options. They differed, however, in the way they presented that fiction; and it could not have been otherwise, as More created the word utopia because he needed to designate something new, which included the narrative scheme he invented. Despite that, the word is used nowadays to refer to texts that were written before More's time, as well as to allude to a tradition of thought that is founded on the consideration, by means of fantasy, of alternative solutions to reality (Claeys, 2010, p. 5).

As mentioned above, both writers used fiction to express their opinions and thoughts about society; their differences lie only in the presentation of this fiction. Although they refer to a similar idea, their narrative techniques are different. However, both, implicitly or explicitly, criticize the society and/or the government of their times. For Weisgerber (1940), there are obvious similarities and differences between the works; he focuses

especially on the themes of “communism” as the superior regime, “the apparent advocacy of divorce” and “religious toleration” in his thesis (p. 4).

Apart from these, there are some other important works of utopian fiction following More’s *Utopia* (1516) such as Tommaso Campanella’s *City of the Sun* (1602) or Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis* (1627), both of which were written in the Renaissance period. The differences between early and later utopias are explained in short below:

In most Renaissance utopias the attainment of utopia is attributed to a great individual leader like Utopos in More's *Utopia* or King Salomon in Bacon's *New Atlantis*. This is somewhat similar to Plato's philosopher-king in *The Republic* or to a great legislator like Lycurgos in Plutarch's *Life of Lycurgos*. In the later utopias, utopia is attained through the long historical process inspired and directed by some mysterious principles in the universe, such as, the principle of progress. This is especially the case in evolutionary utopias. Another group of utopian writings see no way to the attainment of utopia except the violent revolution. Millenarian movements, apocalyptic expectations, and many Marxist or Anarchists movements believe in no efficient way to realize utopia save that of revolutionary violence (Sadeq, Shalabi, & Alkurdi, 2011, p. 132).

While, in recent decades, utopian fiction seems to have declined with the popularity of dystopian novels, important utopias continued to be written throughout the 20th century, including, for instance, Huxley’s *Island* (1962), H. G. Wells’s *Men Like Gods* (1923), Ursula K. Le Guin’s *Always Coming Home* (1985) or Alexander Moszkowski’s *The Island of Wisdom* (1922). As mentioned above, revolution and the collapse of the regime tend to be prominent themes in modern utopias, providing an important link

with dystopian fiction. In this context, writers of feminist utopias present their vision of an ideal world through a female perspective. Indeed, as Gubar (1986) points out;

In their common insistence on a world without dominance or conflict, the feminist utopianists in *Daring to Dream* frequently present nowhere as a place of such forbearance, harmony, service, peace, and community that any reader suffering from what Edgar Allan Poe called the “imp of the perverse” longs for the somewhere of intolerance, discord, egotism, violence, individualism, and-most of all-adventure (p. 82).

This is also supported by modern feminist utopias, in revolution and rebellion form the basis of a society run by women. For example, Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland* (1915), a novel depicting a society composed entirely of women, criticizes male superiority. The development of this society is explained in the quote below:

What they call Motherhood was like this:

They began with a really high degree of social development, something like that of Ancient Egypt or Greece. Then they suffered the loss of everything masculine, and supposed at first that all human power and safety had gone too. Then they developed this virgin birth capacity. Then, since the prosperity of their children depended on it, the fullest and subtlest coordination began to be practised (Gilman, 2008).

As mentioned above, in Gilman’s feminist utopia, women reproduce via parthenogenesis, thus eliminating the ‘need of a man to reproduce’, and ultimately distinguishing sexuality from femininity.

1.3 DYSTOPIAN FICTION

The Oxford dictionary defines dystopia as “an imaginary place or state in which everything is extremely bad or unpleasant” (Dystopia, n.d.), in contrast to a utopia is an imaginary place where everything is perfect and well-designed. First, Jeremy Bentham coined the word ‘kakotopia’ or ‘cacotopia’ to explain the concept of an anti-utopia. Later, the term dystopia was used by the British philosopher and politician J. S Mill in 1868, with the addition of the Greek prefix 'dys' to the root ‘-topia’. However, it is likely that Mill did not consider his term would be connected to a new genre in literature; years later, though, dystopia has become one of the prominent literary genres. Dystopia is used to show wounded humanity with extreme examples in literature and it is used to record the current situation of a particular regime. We have discussed why authors write utopian fiction above; it is also worth asking why writers write dystopian novels. There is, however, more than one category of dystopian novels; Claeys (2017), for instance, divides dystopia into three subgenres.

This indicates three main, if often interrelated, forms of the concept: the political dystopia; the environmental dystopia; and finally, the technological dystopia, where science and technology ultimately threaten to dominate or destroy humanity. Amongst these types, it is totalitarian political dystopia which is chiefly associated with the failure of utopian aspirations, and which has received the greatest historical attention (p. 5).

Each form mentioned above, then, maybe motivated by a different purpose. When we look at the overall picture, authors write dystopias for several reasons which depend on their personal opinions and thoughts about the political and social conditions of the world which they inhabit.

With its capacity to frighten and warn, dystopian writing engages with pressing global concerns: liberty and self-determination, environmental destruction and looming catastrophe, questions of identity, and the increasingly fragile boundaries between technology and the self. When directed at young readers, who are trying to understand the world and their place in it, these dystopian warnings are distilled into exciting adventures with gripping plots and accessible messages that may have the potential to motivate a generation on the cusp of adulthood (Basu, Broad, & Hintz, 2013).

There are, then, both similarities and differences between the genres of Utopia and Dystopia. Both are often set in a future, in imaginary societies, and imply criticism of the author's own society. As mentioned above, the word Utopia combines the meanings of Outopia, meaning "no land", and Eutopia meaning a good place. This, then, implies a perfect world, but also a world which is just a fantasy. In a utopia, there is a perfect society, at least from the perspective of its author, that provides, for instance, equality, healthcare, and employment opportunities for all its citizens. In contrast, in a dystopia, the community is dehumanized. However, both utopias and dystopias may include strict governmental control. Even in utopias, there may be a huge gap between the poor and the rich, and a strict class (or even caste) division. While in many dystopias books and poetry are banned, this is also true of Plato's *Republic*, for instance. Dystopias are imaginary places, although they are often extrapolations of real tendencies, and they help people to think about the consequences of wrong decisions. Dystopias, then, like utopias, criticize and aim to raise awareness about contemporary social and political problems. Therefore, dystopian novels are important because they show what might happen when people stop fighting for a better regime or country. Conversely, they may frequently be mistaken utopias; some examples from the real world could include

Stalinism or Nazism. Emphasizing the overlap between utopias and dystopias, Atwood coined a word called *ustopia* to refer to a combination of utopia and dystopia. “Ustopia is a word I made up by combining utopia and dystopia – the imagined perfect society and the opposite – because, in my view, each contains a latent version of the other” (Atwood, 2015, p. 66).

Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We* (1924) is considered to be the first dystopian novel ever written. The book is set in the One State, which is placed in the middle of a jungle, constituted by a collective consciousness that is ruled by brain control. Zamyatin’s book influenced a later book that became a classic of dystopian literature: Orwell’s *1984*. Another classic dystopian novel, Huxley’s *Brave New World*, was possibly not directly influenced by *We*, despite some similarities between the two novels. In any case, given *We*’s importance to the development of the genre, a brief discussion of the novel is necessary here:

Written between 1920 and 1922 and first published in New York in 1924..., Zamyatin’s novel foretells with uncanny accuracy the realities of Stalinist Russia now revealed by Solzhenitsyn, Nadezhda Mandelstam, Sinyavsky, and other Soviet dissidents in their accounts of “thoughtcrime” (in Orwell’s phrase) and vaporization into non-persons, of regimentation and conformity within a society that seems remarkably similar to Zamyatin’s totalitarian One State that is governed by its despotic and malevolent Benefactor. Yet retrospective assessments of the novel—including analyses of it as an acknowledged source for *1984* and a possible influence on *Brave New World* often sever Zamyatin’s novel from the context of its times and thus neglect or overlook its incisive commentary on the leading artistic and intellectual movements within the Soviet Union in the years immediately following the Revolutions (Hutchings, 1981-1982, p. 81).

In other words, it is important to note that Zamyatin's novel can be read as a critique of the social and political context of his times. Secondly, the quote above shows the extent to which *We* influenced other dystopian writers. In *We*, Zamyatin depicted a nightmarish, oppressive world dominated by technology and science. In connection to this, Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *1984* also explore the use of science and technology for oppressive ends. While Orwell and Huxley's novels were similar in some respects, they differed widely in others, notably in the way the government control the citizens. Claeys (2017) for instance, describes *1984* as follows:

People sacrifice themselves for the sake of fragmentary communities-nation, race, creed, class- and only become aware that they are not individuals in the very moment when they are facing bullets. A very slight increase of consciousness, and their sense of loyalty could be transferred to humanity itself, which is not an abstraction (p. 445).

He also describes *Brave New World*, and helps us to distinguish the differences between the two novels; notably Huxley's novel, in contrast to Orwell's, can be read as a critique of 'post-totalitarianism'. As Claeys explains:

It defines the generic dystopian definition used here insofar as both literary and real dystopias are typically dominated by fear...Fear is present in Huxley's tale, but not in the usual combinations of cruelty, pain, mass murder, and slave labor. Most of these would have been superseded scientifically...The book is not, as such, a critique of totalitarianism. It represents instead a form of post- or 'perfected' totalitarian analysis in which technological modernity and psychological manipulation are the key targets (Claeys, 2017, p. 389).

In all of these dystopias, however, ‘fear’ is one form or other is a dominant emotion, although its precise nature may vary according to the societies depicted.

Dystopian novels written in the 1950s and 60s, such as Anthony Burgess' *Clockwork Orange*, Vonnegut's *Player Piano*, Harry Harrison's *Make Room! Make Room!* also depict totalitarian societies, and explore the potential results of uncontrolled technology. For example, *A Clockwork Orange* “satirizes extreme political systems that are based on the perfectibility or incorrigibility of humanity” (Lowne, 2020). Thus, such novels emphasize that it is not only the regime or the way the society is controlled which is important but also the psychological effects of such a decomposed society on its inhabitants.

1.4. FEMINIST DYSTOPIAN FICTION

Between the 1970s- 1990s, the themes of dystopian fiction were broadened. Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) is an example of this development since it focuses on gender discrimination at an extreme level. It describes a theocratic totalitarian state, Gilead, which is located in the current United States of America. In Gilead, women are forbidden to hold a job and have a social life, and, due to low reproduction rates, many women of reproductive age are forced to become handmaids, assigned to bear children without building any emotional communication with the male of the family. The themes of the book, then, include religious fundamentalism, sexism, racism, pollution, nuclear war and political chaos. According to Reesman (1991), it emphasizes these topics in a “national or traditional context through its feminist dialogic” (p. 6). Atwood's novel, on one level, is a critique of the rise of neo-conservatism in the 1980s' USA; on this basis, it represents a nightmarish, ultra-conservative America, where religion and traditional gender roles are taken to an

extreme. In contrast with earlier dystopias like *1984* or *Brave New World*, Atwood chooses a female protagonist named Offred to narrate the story, set in a society where women are horribly oppressed. However, when Atwood was asked in the Los Angeles Times Book Festival whether *The Handmaid's Tale* was a feminist book or not, she replied that she needed to know the precise meaning behind the word 'feminism' to answer this question. She is aware that the term feminism is elastic and can cause misunderstandings. However, when we look at the main character's situation in the novel, it seems like Offred's life demonstrates the oppression of women in that society. Atwood, however, also depicts a situation where women do not support each other and treat each other as enemies. Hansot (1994) summarizes Offred's situation as follows:

Offred is a Caucasian woman in her mid-thirties. Middle class, married with an eight year old daughter, she had a prosperous and rather unexceptional existence until the political troubles that culminated in the creation of Gilead. In Gilead, a society devoted to the elimination of sexuality beyond what is required for procreation, Offred is separated from her husband and daughter. Despite widespread ecological and nuclear contamination, her age and child indicate that she may still be fertile. She and similarly chosen handmaids are assigned to the homes of party dignitaries with whom they engage (in the presence of the latter's' infertile wives) in emotionless sexual intercourse once a month in the consuming effort to procreate (p. 57).

Thus, like many women in the society, the novel's main character Offred has a hard life, very little freedom, and is not respected by others in the state of Gilead.

Today's dystopian fiction, which is frequently aimed at a young adult readership, often reflects contemporary issues, such as consumerism, gender (in)equality, the (ab)use of

technology and social media or environmental questions such as global warming. Characters in such dystopian novels often face a struggle for their freedom in the face of oppressive technological developments. *Severance* by Ling Ma, *Blackfish City* by Sam J. Miller, *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro, and *Zone One* by Colson Whitehead are just a few notable examples of contemporary dystopian novels.

The novels that will be focused on in this study are also contemporary. Christina Dalcher's *Vox*, published in 2018, is a dystopian novel in which women are silenced by the government. In this context, the reader witnesses a woman's struggle to save herself and her six-year-old daughter. In this sense, it can be referred to as a feminist dystopian novel. However, Dalcher herself defines her novel in broader terms. In an interview, she says "It's a little bit women's fiction, it's a little bit political, and it's a lot thriller, it's a little bit dystopia and a little science fiction" (Dalcher, 2018). The second book to be studied is *Red Clocks* written by Leni Zumas and published in 2018. Set in a society where women's fertility is strictly controlled, it can be considered as an adult novel, since the protagonist is a woman in her forties who wants to have a child. On the other hand, the book also includes some other female characters like an unhappy married mother and a high school student who gets pregnant and wants an abortion. The third book to be examined, *Only Ever Yours*, by Louise O'Neill, was published in 2014 as a young adult book. It is a dystopian novel about teenage girls who, in school, are separated into different categories and treated as angels or devils according to their beauty. They are brainwashed and, at 16, told which role they are destined to play in life. As O'Neill explains, the book was intended to have a strong feminist theme:

I thought, by the time I write it and get it to an agent, this is going to be at least two years down the line and the market's going to be so saturated with dystopian fiction, there's just no point. When I came home to Ireland, I just couldn't stop

thinking about it. I really couldn't. I was dreaming about it. And I realized that no, my book is more about feminism. The dystopian setting is more the backdrop (O'Neill, 2015).

These three novels, then, deal with similar topics, in that all of them discuss the position of women in dystopian settings where they are oppressed. In this context, the following chapters proceed to analyze these contemporary dystopian novels from a feminist perspective.



CHAPTER 2: Representations of Woman as the Other in *Vox*

The position of women in Christina Dalcher's 2018 dystopian novel *Vox*, in which they are expected to be silent, obedient mothers and wives, will be analyzed from a feminist perspective, drawing primarily but not exclusively from the work of Simone de Beauvoir, in this chapter. In her novel, Dalcher creates a world where women are controlled by being silenced. As a linguist, she explains her motivation and reason for writing the book as follows:

I think many readers will conclude that I wrote *Vox* as a thought-piece about silencing women, but, frankly, that wasn't the case at all. It came afterwards. The original idea was to work with the concept of language scrambling, of humans finding themselves unable to do something that's so normal and ubiquitous and essential to our species, we rarely even think about it. In a way, *Vox* is an experiment born from Ray Bradbury's advice. It celebrates something I love (language) and tears down something I hate (the stifling of language). It was a terrifying theme to explore, given that language is the single element that defines us as human, and what separates us from the rest of the animal kingdom (Dalcher, 2018).

Everything starts when a new government takes power in the United States. The new president curtails women's freedom to speak, limiting them to a maximum of one hundred words daily; if they exceed this, the metal bracelet they are forced to wear delivers an electric shock. In the opening lines of the novel, the narrator and protagonist, Jean McClellan, introduces the reader to the dystopian world of the novel as follows:

If anyone told me I could bring down the president, and the Pure Movement, and that incompetent little shit Morgan LeBron in a week, I wouldn't believe them.

But I wouldn't argue. I wouldn't say a thing. I've become a woman of few words
(Dalcher, 2018, p. 1).

Jean is a well-known neurolinguist and mother of four children. However, soon after the election, her life changes swiftly. The new government, The Pure Movement, wants women to be housewives and controls their lives by limiting their social rights, which they think will bring peace to the community. In Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), the totalitarian Republic of Gilead plays a similar role. Some of the women in Atwood's book- those of childbearing age deemed to be 'sinful' - are educated as handmaids to expand the population of Gilead. Thus, both novels depict patriarchal societies in which women are oppressed. In *Vox* (2018), Jean is forced to quit her job and, like other women, her daily communication is limited to one hundred words. This is the reason why, in the citation above, she speaks angrily and dreams about bringing down the president, the Pure Movement, and Morgan LeBron. Moreover, the silencing of women applies not only to adult women but to female children too. If a baby is born female, that is enough to render her a victim, the same metal bracelet will be put on her wrist; in this way, the child is conditioned from infancy to speak a maximum of one hundred words daily. Jean explains her little daughter Sonia's situation in the following lines:

"How is her vocabulary?" Patrick asks, knocking his chin my way. He rephrases. "Is she learning?" I shrug. By six, Sonia should have an army of ten thousand lexemes, individual troops that assemble and come to attention and obey the orders her small, still-plastic brain issues. Should have, if the three R's weren't now reduced to one: simple arithmetic. After all, one day my daughter will be expected to shop and to run a household, to be a devoted and dutiful wife. You

need math for that, but not spelling. Not literature. Not a voice (Dalcher, 2018, pp. 2-3).

Thus, this society is arguably a dystopia only for its female inhabitants, both adults and children. More generally, the silencing of women is one of the basic problems in a patriarchal society. To an extent, it doesn't matter whether a woman is silenced by her husband or the country's president; from the patriarchal perspective a silent woman is better than a talkative one. However, silence here shouldn't be defined only as being unable to speak or answer. The decision to remain silent can convey several messages. Therefore, understanding the psychological background of the individual's silence is important; notably, it is important to ask why silent women are mostly preferred in patriarchal societies. As Gal (1989) explains:

First, and most generally, the example of silence suggests a close link between gender, the use of speech (or silence) and the exercise of power. But it also shows that the link is not direct. On the contrary, it appears that silence, like any linguistic form, gains different meanings and has different material effects within specific institutional and cultural contexts. Silence and inarticulateness are not, in themselves, necessarily signs of powerlessness (p. 2).

Therefore, while analyzing a novel in terms of the theme of silence, it is important to understand the cause of the silencing. Women tend to be silenced in patriarchal societies since they are not accepted as full human beings. The silencing of women, then, indicates their lack of acceptance in the society; in de Beauvoir's terms, she is considered Other. Indeed, all of the women in the dystopian society of the novel can be considered Others. As de Beauvoir points out:

And she is nothing other than what man decides; she is thus called "the sex," meaning that the male sees her essentially as a sexed being; for him, she is sex,

so she is it in the absolute. She is determined and differentiated to man, while he is not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other (Beauvoir, 1949/2010, p. 26).

On this basis, the new system depicted in the novel is almost an enemy of women, it limits their rights and silences them. However, Jean, the protagonist, is also the narrative voice in the novel. As Jones (1991) points out, there is an important link between the theme of silencing and the genre of dystopia in this regard:

Thus the voices of women in dystopias are doubly powerful, as they rebound from negative silencing into clamorous sound. Perhaps today, when progress seems to be moving us closer to utopian futures, the construct of dystopia is needed to draw attention to the fragility and newness of women's voices, to keep us from taking our freedom to speak for granted, to urge the need for continuing the fight, and to highlight the courage and beauty of those who break silences (p. 6).

While *Vox* emphasizes the silencing of women, silencing is arguably a feature of dystopian societies more generally, as repressive regimes seek to silence critical voices. Thus, not only speaking but also reading is also restricted.

In *Vox*, however, the dystopian society is one which persecutes women in particular. The Pure Movement does not want women to become intellectual so that books and online sources are forbidden. Education for girls is limited to teaching them how to behave according to the rules of the new society.

Thus, we realize that women are not only silenced but also banned from travelling, working and writing. Indeed, any type of communication is forbidden to them:

I learned other things a year ago. I learned how difficult it is to write a letter to my congressman without a pen or to mail a letter without a stamp. I learned how

easy it is for the man at the office supply store to say, “I’m sorry, ma’am. I can’t sell you that,” or for the postal worker to shake his head when anyone without a Y chromosome asks for stamps. I learned how quickly a cell phone account can be cancelled, and how efficient young enlisted men can be at installing cameras (Dalcher, 2018, p. 26).

The last time women were forbidden to write was maybe in the early nineteenth century. Beauvoir criticizes this situation by giving the example of Adler because he thinks a woman only writes, paints, and joins politics “just to be equal” with men, not because she likes it (p. 85). She gives this example to draw attention to one of the reasons for this situation, which is the way men think about women. Moreover, she notes that, even when women have been able to express themselves in writing, this privilege has largely been limited to upper-class women:

Culture has never been the privilege of any but the feminine elite, never of the masses; and masculine geniuses often come from the masses; even privileged women encountered obstacles that barred their access to the heights. Nothing stopped the ascent of a Saint Teresa, a Catherine of Russia, but a thousand circumstances conspired against the woman writer (Beauvoir, 1949/2010, p. 151).

After she explains the difficulty that women face as writers, she mentions Virginia Woolf and her book *A Room of One’s Own*, considered to be “a landmark in feminist literature” and “the first major work in feminist criticism” (Kaur, 2017, p. 285). On the same page, she refers to Woolf’s imaginary character Judith Shakespeare, Shakespeare’s sister, who, despite sharing her brother’s talent, is ultimately prevented from developing her literary gifts due to her gender, and is eventually driven to suicide. More generally, *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) focuses on women and writing.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf develops the theory of the relation between gender and writing. She examines the exclusion of women from educational institutions and the relations between this exclusion and the unequal distribution of wealth. Her fictional narrator Mary Beton experienced this exclusion when she was in Oxbridge where she was prevented from entering the library of all men's college. In this work, Mrs. Woolf faced and experienced male dominance and she was forced by this dominance to raise the feminist goal of changing society or the world to a place where the male and the female voices may have been equally valued (Kaur, 2017, p. 285).

After mentioning Woolf, Beauvoir continues by giving further examples, including, for instance, the late seventeenth-century author Lady Winchilsea. "At the end of the seventeenth century, Lady Winchilsea, a childless noblewoman, attempts the feat of writing; some passages of her work show she had a sensitive and poetic nature; but she was consumed by hatred, anger, and fear" (Beauvoir, 1949/2010, p. 151).

Scholz (2001), discusses Beauvoir's thoughts about women writers and emphasizes that women's oppression is not conducive to creative writing:

If the project is writing, perhaps one of the clearest ways an individual participates in the creation of meaning and discloses the world, then that writing is necessarily going to reflect women's circumscribed freedom. The social structure of a woman's daily lived experience does not accord with intense creative efforts. According to Beauvoir, women's oppression keeps them from striving and as a result, they fail to learn from their faults and mistakes (p. 336).

Therefore, the prohibition of writing is another aspect of women's silencing in the novel. When we look at other dystopian novels, the prohibition of writing also plays an important role in the government's control over women. For example, in *The*

Handmaid's Tale (1985) reading and writing were also entirely forbidden. Offred, unable to write, resorts to recording her voice; in this extract, she recounts how she discovered the fake Latin phrase *Nolite te bastardes carborundorum* (Don't let the bastards get you down) scrawled, presumably by a previous Handmaid, on the wall of her room:

Tell, rather than write, because I have nothing to write with and writing is in any case forbidden. But if it's a story, even in my head, I must be telling it to someone. You don't tell a story only to yourself. There's always someone else...I didn't know what it meant, or even what language it was in. I thought it might be Latin, but I didn't know any Latin. Still, it was a message, and it was in writing, forbidden by that very fact, and it hadn't yet been discovered. Except by me, for whom it was intended. It was intended for whoever came next (Atwood, 1985, pp. 44, 54).

Secondly, in patriarchal societies, a woman is frequently depicted as a monster or an angel, stereotypes which the female writer must challenge.

The images on the surface of the glass, with, that is, those mythic masks male artists have fastened over her human face both to lessen their dread of her "inconstancy" and — by identifying her with the "eternal types" they have themselves invented — to possess her more thoroughly. Specifically, as we will try to show here, a woman writer must examine, assimilate, and transcend the extreme images of "angel" and "monster" which male authors have generated for her (Gilbert & Gubar, 1979, p. 17).

If a woman obeys every social rule, she is an angel for the society; if she doesn't, she may be accused of anything. For instance, in *Vox*, premarital intercourse is illegal, and when Jean's eldest son Steven has a sexual affair with his girlfriend Julia, it is Julia, but

not Stephen, who ends up being punished. Julia is described as a teenage girl who is just growing up and discovering her sexuality. She is the daughter of Jean's neighbors Evan and Olivia and goes to the same school as her seventeen-year-old son Steven. An inexperienced teenager, Julia wants to kiss him and it ends with intercourse. Steven, because he has been taught so, blames Julia for this. That night, he asks his mom whether or not he should rat on someone he loves because she did a bad thing (p. 174). Moreover, we learn this is the reason why he wants to marry Julia. Students in high school are forced to take a course named Fundamentals of Modern Christian Philosophy, which teaches the laws of the new America. Right after Steven tells everything to his teachers, Julia is taken away to a place where no woman can speak, not even a word.

Thus, this episode indicates that premarital sexual intercourse is viewed as the woman's fault in patriarchal societies. A woman is always to blame for her biological being. Moreover, she can't even defend or explain herself about it, because she is forbidden to speak.

They mean Julia, who hasn't said a word. Not yet. When she turns under the wan glow of the porch light, her face is a complete blank. Around her left wrist is a wide metallic cuff. Julia is about to join the supermarket women, and Jackie, and god only knows how many others in their twisted version of solitary confinement. *Zero words per day, girlyies. Let's see how long it takes you to fall in* (Dalcher, 2018, p. 181).

Jean, a grown-up married woman, also has extramarital sexual intercourse with a man named Lorenzo, who is in the same team gathered together to cure Wernicke's aphasia, a condition where the ability to grasp the meaning of spoken words and sentences is impaired, while the ease of producing connected speech is not very affected

(Wernicke's Aphasia, 2020). Choosing Wernicke's aphasia creates an irony with the book's main theme of silence since it is about grasping the meaning of spoken language. Even the president's brother can talk however he wants without any restriction, although he is not able to understand the meaning of the words. Lorenzo, Jean's illegitimate lover, is, like Jean herself, from Italy and a university lecturer. Despite the Pure's prohibition of such affairs, however, the regime's double standards are emphasized by the existence of secret brothels, which provide an outlet for sexually frustrated men and employment for single women. A similar scenario is depicted by Atwood in *The Handmaid's Tale*: Jezebel's club. Women who do not obey the rules are punished by being sent to work there as sex workers.

Let, hell, they encourage it. Know what they call this place among themselves? Jezebel's. The Aunts figure we're all damned anyway, they've given upon us, so it doesn't matter what sort of vice we get up to, and the Commanders don't give a piss what we do in our off time. Anyway, women on women sort of turns them on (Atwood, 1985, p. 225).

The only difference between the two novels in this respect is that, in *Vox*, you don't have to be rebellious to work in the private clubs (cathouses). If you are a single woman, you are faced with a choice between working there or marrying someone.

I knew all about the double standard, the private clubs that had cropped up in cities and towns where single men of certain means could go to unload their stress and sperm on professional ladies of the entertaining sort... Prostitution, they say, is the oldest profession. And you can't kill anything that old. Also, the gays had been taken care of in their prison camps; the adulteresses like Annie Wilson were working farms in North Dakota or the grain belt of the Midwest. The Pure had to do something about single women who had no families to take them in- they

couldn't very well live on their own with no words and no income. They were given a choice: marry or move to a cathouse (Dalcher, 2018, p. 147).

This, then, contrasts with the government's position that; "Officially, premarital and extramarital sex were illegal. They'd always been illegal in most states, a holdover from the days of pre-Middle Ages sodomy laws that forbade even a married couple from engaging in anything other than vaginal intercourse" (p. 145). On the same page, Jean points out that birth control is also prohibited; she mentions the shelves in the pharmacy that used to hold condoms are now, perhaps logically, stocked with baby food and diapers. According to the Pure Movement rules, then, Jean, as well as Julia, should be punished. Therefore, in a feminist dystopia, a woman should obey rules that separate her from her own being. Although a woman is the only person responsible for her own body, she can't defend herself if she disobeys the laws. Moreover, in patriarchal societies, women are taught to be ashamed of their bodies and their sexuality. Beauvoir illustrates this situation by giving an example from a young girl's psychological change during the adolescence period.

For example, a young girl is said to be "ashamed" of urinating in a squatting position, with her bottom exposed; but what is shame? Likewise, before asking if the male is proud because he has a penis or if his penis is the expression of his pride, we need to know what pride is and how the subject's aspirations can be embodied in an object. Sexuality must not be taken as an irreducible given; the existent possesses a more primary "quest for being"; sexuality is only one of these aspects (Beauvoir, 1949/2010, p. 80).

Sexuality, in any case, is controlled by the government in *Vox*, as has been noted. More generally, suppression of sexuality is a very important theme in dystopian novels, and the reason for it may vary according to the dystopian society in question. For example

in 1984, sexuality is suppressed for the benefit of Big Brother, the supreme ruler of the totalitarian state called Oceania. The slogan 'Big Brother is watching you' refers to the dictatorship that controls the people's lives both inside their homes and outside, and it reminds them to always be obedient to the laws. In 1984, the regime makes people think sexual intercourse is unpleasant and unnecessary; instead, it aims to refocus their pent-up sexual energy towards support for the state (Orwell, 1949, p. 83). This suppression of sexuality is described by Orwell in more detail in the following extract:

Sexual intercourse was to be looked on as a slightly disgusting minor operation, like having an enema. This again was never put into plain words, but in an indirect way it was rubbed into every Party member from childhood onwards. There were even organizations such as the Junior Anti-Sex League, which advocated complete celibacy for both sexes. All children were to be begotten by artificial insemination (ARTSEM, it was called in Newspeak) and brought up in public institutions. This, Winston was aware, was not meant altogether seriously, but somehow it fitted in with the general ideology of the Party. The Party was trying to kill the sex instinct, or, if it could not be killed, then to distort it and dirty it (Orwell, 1949, p. 84).

On the contrary, while in *Brave New World*, sexuality and reproduction are also controlled by the state, the attitude is very different. The World State supports sexual intercourse and one night stands but forbids pregnancy, and runs several abortion centres. As the government does not want women to get pregnant, they also discourage romantic relationships between the sexes by supporting the idea that everyone belongs to everyone else. Thus, to be successful in creating a generation obedient for their purposes, the World State teach students the following at school, often using the technique of hypnopaedia or sleep-learning:

Mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters. But there were also husbands, wives, lovers. There were also monogamy and romance.

“Though you probably don’t know what those are,” said Mustapha Mond.

They shook their heads. Family, monogamy, romance. Everywhere exclusiveness, a narrow channelling of impulse and energy.

“But every one belongs to every one else,” he concluded, citing the hypnopædic proverb. The students nodded, emphatically agreeing with a statement which upwards of sixty-two thousand repetitions in the dark had made them accept, not merely as true, but as axiomatic, self-evident, utterly indisputable (Huxley, 1932/2004, p. 42).

As explained above, the suppression of sexuality appears in different forms related to the kind of regime described in the dystopian novel. Feminist dystopias, then, tend to build on patriarchal views of women and sexuality. From this perspective, women are regarded as monsters or angels according to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s argument on the depiction of women. According to their famous work *The Madwoman in the Attic*, women are categorized as angels or monsters, according to their conformity with the sexuality rules of the society; this, ultimately, determines how they are treated in the dystopian society (Gilbert & Gubar, 1979). In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, women are also classified according to their sexuality and fertility. After the revolution, women become less than second-class citizens in Gilead, and they are only considered important according to their relations to men. Notably, fertile women like Offred who had previously committed ‘sins’ such as divorce, infidelity, having children outside etc. are assigned to commanders as handmaids, and given the task of providing the commander with offspring.

Another factor underlying the classification of women as angels or monsters is motherhood. Naturally, if a woman gives birth, she is called a 'mother' and the male that impregnated her is referred to as a 'father'. However, in reality, these terms have also been differentiated in meaning. Calling someone mother or father sounds equal, however, the perception of their roles in society creates a huge gap between the two sexes in this regard. This is because, when a woman becomes a mother, she acquires lots of duties and responsibilities to the point of changing her destiny. However, for Beauvoir, the duties connected to motherhood are, ultimately, repetitive and unfulfilling:

So the woman who gives birth does not take pride in her creation; she feels like the passive plaything of obscure forces, and painful childbirth a useless and even bothersome accident. Later, more value was attached to children. But in any case, to give birth and to breast-feed are not activities but natural functions; they do not involve a project, which is why the woman finds no motive there to claim a higher meaning for her existence; she passively submits to her biological destiny. Because housework alone is compatible with the duties of motherhood, she is condemned to domestic labor, which locks her into repetition and immanence; day after day it repeats itself in identical form from century to century; it produces nothing new. Man's case is radically different. He does not provide for the group in the way worker bees do, by a simple vital process, but rather by acts that transcend his animal condition (Beauvoir, 1949/2010, p. 98).

In *Vox*, apart from being a neurolinguist, Jean is a mother of four and she thus has to complete some chores like cooking, cleaning, ironing etc. After the election of the Pure Movement, however, women are forced to give up their accomplishments and stay at home. Jean's son Steven, for instance, takes a course at school named *Fundamentals of*

Modern Christian Philosophy; a chapter from the coursebook, “In Search of a Natural Order in the Modern Family”, explains the preferred structure of family and the situation of women in the society. Further along, chapter twenty-seven began with this nugget from the book of Titus: “Be teachers of good things; teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands” (p. 42). The gist of the text was a call to arms of sorts, a reaching out to older generations of women.

As mentioned above, the Pure Movement wants a country where women’s rights are basically non-existent. The theme of motherhood can, then, be understood in this context. As pointed out above, being a mother in a patriarchal society means most of the housework is being done by a woman with hardly any help from her husband and children. In *Vox*, moreover, she is not given a chance to change the rules at home since she cannot complain, having even lost her ability to speak. This situation is psychologically detrimental for women. In this sense, Beauvoir claims that marriage does not bring happiness to women; to the contrary, a woman’s life is effectively over once she gets married:

The drama of marriage is not that it does not guarantee the wife the promised happiness—there is no guarantee of happiness—it is that it mutilates her; it dooms her to repetition and routine. The first twenty years of a woman’s life are extraordinarily rich; she experiences menstruation, sexuality, marriage, and motherhood; she discovers the world and her destiny. She is mistress of a home at twenty, linked from then on to one man, a child in her arms, now her life is finished forever. Real activity, real work, are the privilege of man: her only occupations are sometimes exhausting but never fulfil her (Beauvoir, 1949/2010, p. 587).

Moreover, it is worth recalling that, in patriarchal societies, women's rights are restricted not just at home but are limited at the political and social levels too.

Women are excluded from access to state resources and power as part of a patriarchal system. This is only partly due to women being relatively excluded from a direct presence in the state, but also, more significantly, as a result of their lack of power within the gendered political forces brought to bear on the state... More importantly, women do not have as much power to bring to bear on the state as men. Similar considerations apply to the various branches of the state, such as the judiciary, police and legal system, where not only are women not represented as well as men in the decision-making positions, but they do not have as much power to bring to bear on the resolution of issues in their favor (Walby, 1989, p. 224).

Since premarital and extramarital sex is illegal in societies such as that in *Vox*, the baby resulting from illegal intercourse will also be rejected. In connection to this, to prevent people from having illegal intercourse, birth control is also forbidden. As women are naturally able to give birth, in male-dominated societies women are not allowed to take birth control pills or have abortions. However, in some dystopian novels, women are not restricted in this respect. For example, in *Brave New World*, abortion is entirely legal; it is supported by the state (Huxley, 1932/2004, p. 129). Indeed, the government provides an abortion centre where women do not hesitate to go. This attitude towards motherhood affects both women and the family structure in The World State. A woman named Linda, after sexual intercourse with the Director, finds herself in a place called the Reservation; being pregnant makes her feel desperate and ashamed, and she is unable to return to the World State. As her son John relates:

Linda and he—Linda was his mother (the word made Lenina look uncomfortable)—were strangers in the Reservation. Linda had come from the Other Place long ago, before he was born, with a man who was his father. (Bernard pricked up his ears.) She had gone walking alone in those mountains over there to the North, had fallen down a steep place and hurt her head. (“Go on, go on,” said Bernard excitedly.) Some hunters from Malpais had found her and brought her to the pueblo (Huxley, 1932/2004, p. 126).

In *Brave New World*, then, motherhood is discouraged and women are taught to be ashamed of their natural ability to give birth. In the *Republic*, Plato’s attitude towards women varies. In Book V, for instance, his attitude towards women appears to be quite positive. When the treatment of women in ancient Greek society are considered, it can be very surprising to read Plato’s thoughts on women’s equality; “Men and women, therefore, also have the same nature with respect to guarding a city, except insofar as the one is weaker and the other stronger” (Plato, 1968, p. 134). In the *Republic*, then, Plato thinks all women should belong to all men and the children should belong to the state, so that the children will not know their mothers and fathers (Plato, 1968, p. 136). Children are seen as the property of the state, raised to serve and defend their country. This situation, then, is reminiscent of Huxley’s *Brave New World*.

Another example of the restriction of productive rights is seen in *The Handmaid’s Tale*. For example, at age fourteen, after being gang-raped, Janine had an abortion and she is punished by Gilead for that. Moreover, she internalises this negative attitude towards women; she says she deserves that punishment because it was she who led the rapists on (Atwood, 1985, p. 70). Beauvoir also touches upon the issue of abortion as follows:

There are few subjects on which bourgeois society exhibits more hypocrisy: abortion is a repugnant crime to which it is indecent to make an allusion. For an author to describe the joys and suffering of a woman giving birth is perfectly fine; if he talks about a woman who has had an abortion, he is accused of wallowing in filth and describing humanity in an abject light: meanwhile, in France every year there are as many abortions as births. It is such a widespread phenomenon that it has to be considered one of the risks normally involved in the feminine condition (Beauvoir, 1949/2010, p. 597).

Therefore, in *Vox*, women's rights are restricted in many ways including their access to birth control and abortion. When all these themes are gathered together, it becomes possible to classify the novel as a feminist dystopia. As a neurolinguist, Jean's serum, which she develops to cure Wernicke's aphasia, gives her more opportunities than other women in the country, since the brother of the new American president was diagnosed with that illness after an accident. After the election of the new government, Jean slowly becomes more aware of herself and the importance of her freedom as a woman. Because she is being separated from her own will, she feels hatred towards the men around her, men who frequently do not stand up against the new government and who accept the new *status quo*. Her feelings towards her husband, for instance, are described in the following extract:

Patrick snores beside me; he's always been one to sleep heavily, and his schedule for the past month has run him into the ground. So snore, snore, snore. My sympathy has already expired. Let them work twelve-hour days to pick up the inevitable slack that cancelling almost half of the workforce brought about. Let them bury themselves in paperwork and administrative nonsense and then limp home only to sleep like the dead and get up and do it all over again. What did

they expect? It isn't Patrick's fault. I know this in my heart and in my mind. With four kids, we need the income his job brings in. Still, I'm all dry on sympathy (p. 31).

Her relationship with Lorenzo also has an impact on her marriage. For example, at the beginning of the book, she dreams about Lorenzo during intercourse with her husband (p. 28). Patrick (who works for the president) accepts the situation and obeys the new government's laws because he is afraid of being killed like his friend Jimbo (p. 281). Although Jean knows this, she dislikes her husband in any case. However, Jean's lover portrays a different role. He tries not to obey the rules and tries to save Jean from America by helping her to escape from the country with his dead wife's passport. Before things get worse, Jean gets pregnant by Lorenzo and Patrick learns about her relationship with him. On page 285, Patrick tells Jean to leave the country with Sonia and tells her he will figure out something with boys. Jean, however, doesn't tell him that she is pregnant. Meanwhile, Jean and the Gold team realize the president's plan of developing the aphasia serum, which is basically reverse engineering. They make a plan to take down the system from the inside. At the end of the book, Jean kills Morgan LeBron, who is the leader of the Wernicke's project (p. 365). Patrick dies after most of the government's plans went wrong (pp. 377, 380). Finally, Jean thinks she should leave with all the kids and does so after Patrick's funeral; she moves to Canada with her four kids and Lorenzo (p. 385).

To sum up, some common themes can be noted in this feminist dystopia, including the silencing of women in terms of talking, reading and writing; judging women as monsters or angels, limiting their sexuality and reproductive rights, and placing restrictions on their social and economic activity. As is argued in the following chapter, these themes are shared by another feminist dystopian novel, *Red Clocks*.

CHAPTER 3: Representations of Woman as the Other in *Red Clocks*

When compared with *Vox*, published in the same year, Leni Zumas' *Red Clocks* (2018) focuses on similar themes regarding women, and introduces the readers to a totalitarian society which aims to control women through limiting their reproductive rights. After the book was published, the author gave several interviews in which she explains her motivation for writing it by giving examples from her own life experiences. In one of the interviews, Zumas says she started to write *Red Clocks* in 2010, and her influential work is partially based on the change of government in the U.S. at the time (Zumas, 2019). She developed five women characters, and the main idea of the novel can perhaps be summed up by the question which is written on the cover page; "What is a woman for?". Through these five women's perspectives, she draws attention to their rights (or lack of them) and portrays the hardships they face. More specifically, the theme of women's reproductive rights, including abortion and motherhood, plays a very important role in the novel. Zumas admits that her ideas in the book represent both reality and possibility. Therefore, it can also be called speculative fiction, to use Atwood's term. In an interview, Atwood defines speculative fiction as fiction that "could really happen" (Atwood, 2016). This is also supported by Zumas in the lines below:

There are so many states in the U.S. where it's nearly impossible for women to get good health care, especially if they're poor. I look at that in a very different way than I did even when the book came out. It came out about a year into the Trump presidency. Like many of my fellow citizens, the horror was growing, but it has kept growing in a way that is hard to metabolize. Because aside from books like Orwell's 1984 and other well-known dystopias, there's not many road maps or precedents for how to understand the political situation here (Zumas, 2019).

In this context, she explains how she developed the idea of combining the themes of motherhood and abortion in a dystopian society as follows:

I saw it was one coin. On one side it was restricting abortion, on the other side, it was making (in-vitro fertilization) illegal. That really hit me hard. I was thinking about these two opposing things: starting a pregnancy or ending a pregnancy and in both cases it had to do with who was choosing when and how that would happen and what's the relationship between a woman's interior, so to speak, and government legislation (Zumas, 2019).

After being asked, she finds the comparison between *Red Clocks* and *The Handmaid's Tale* interesting because she had not thought about *The Handmaid's Tale* while writing her book. She does not categorize *Red Clocks* either as dystopian fiction or as a feminist dystopia, just like Atwood does not consider *The Handmaid's Tale* to be a feminist dystopian novel, which has also been mentioned in the first chapter. At the end of the interview, Zumas finds the increase in the number and prominence of women writers hopeful and thinks that *Red Clocks* is one of the novels which speaks to the Me Too movement and reproductive rights (Zumas, 2019). The Me Too movement is a movement which criticizes sexual abuse and harassment, especially in the workplace, and was first used in 2006 by the female activist Tarana Burke. Burke first used the term on her Myspace account. Later, it turned into a movement, as people started to tell their stories under this hashtag. In an interview, Burke explains her feelings on seeing that the tag has reached a lot of people online.

I was glad and happy that people had recognized my work. I was initially inundated with texts and messages from friends who told me, "Wait, I'm seeing #MeToo everywhere, but I'm not seeing your name attached to it. What's going

on?” So it was so great that people knew my work, supported my work and wanted to make sure it was properly credited (Burke, 2017).

Red Clocks (2018), then, contains five female characters in different situations. The stories of each woman are told in separate chapters, although they eventually intertwine. This creates a polyphony of different points of views in the book. Mikhail Bakhtin, one of the most prominent philosophers and literary critics of the twentieth-century, associates the term polyphony with the novel. He describes it as follows:

A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels. What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 6).

In this context, the chapters in Zumas' novel are narrated in turn from the perspective of a different female character. These five women are; the polar explorer, the biographer, the mender, the daughter and the wife. Except for the polar explorer, the other four women's stories are set in the same town (Oregon town) and the same year (perhaps an alternative present or a near future). However, the polar explorer's story takes place in the 19th century in the Faroe Islands. Zumas explains the connections between each character and her own life in the following:

My longing to have a child—and my fear that I wouldn't—went into writing the Biographer. My ambivalence about the mother role went into writing the Wife. My personal obsession with Arctic expeditions and maritime disaster gave rise to the Polar Explorer; and I reached back into my high school memories to create

the Daughter, a pregnant 15-year-old who doesn't want to stay pregnant. From my enduring interest in witches arose The Mender, a reclusive herbalist who secretly provides healthcare to those in need (Zumas, 2018).

Although each woman has a name, they also given specific titles which refer to their roles in the book. Eivor Minervudottir, then, is referred to as the polar explorer, Ro as the biographer, Gin as the mender, Mattie as the daughter and Susan as the wife. The book starts with the birth of the first character Eivor in 1841 in the Faroe Islands and continues with Ro, the biographer's, life. She is a history teacher and a writer of Eivor Minervudottir's biography. She is a forty-two-year-old woman who uses fertility medicine in an attempt to get pregnant through Intrauterine Insemination. With Ro, Zumas is telling her own story of pregnancy as she explains in one of the interviews:

Red Clocks is rooted in my experience of trying to have a baby on my own, via artificial insemination. I bought strangers' sperm on the internet and fielded warnings from friends and family about how hard it would be to raise a child alone. I thought I would get pregnant easily, but I didn't. I started to question why I wanted so badly to have a baby in the first place. Several years later, I had a son with my partner. Even as a mother I feel a kinship with women who aren't, either by choice or circumstance, and I remain ambivalent about the ways in which the mother role is framed as an imperative (moral, emotional, social, existential) at the expense of other roles and identities. This ambivalence, I think, is part of the reason I gave the five characters such different relationships to motherhood (Zumas, 2018).

Therefore, the theme of reproduction, firstly from Ro's perspective, will be explained in this chapter. Several questions will be explored in this regard: Why does she want to

have a child at the age of forty-two? Is this a natural physical instinct or an outcome of social rules and psychological pressure? What is the government's attitude towards vitro-fertilization and abortion? These questions are important in order to understand women's situation in this book, and an attempt will be made to answer them in the light of feminist theory.

In *Red Clocks*, the reader gains access to Ro's inner voice, which, of course, helps to understand her emotional state. In the beginning, the reader is informed about Ro's decision to undergo fertility treatment. Throughout the book, Ro questions her decision, and, via her inner voice, we can know what she thinks and how she feels. In fact, in an attempt to play 'devil's advocate', she writes a list of possible criticisms of her decision;

She starts a new one: *Accusations from the world.*

1. You are too old.
2. If you can't have a child the natural way, you shouldn't have one at all.
3. Every child needs two parents.
4. Children raised by single mothers are more liable to rape/murder/drug-take/score low on standardized tests.
5. You are too old.
6. You should've thought of this earlier.
7. You're selfish.
8. You're doing something unnatural.
9. How is that child going to feel when she finds out her father is an anonymous masturbator?
10. Your body is a grizzled husk.
11. You are too old, sad spinster!

12. Are you only doing this because you're lonely? (Zumas, 2018, pp. 8-9).

On this basis, it can be said that her inner feelings are complicated and she is not sure about the treatment although she has already started it. The society that Ro imagines here, and that described in the book more generally, is judgmental of breaks with tradition. In this society, if a woman is judged to be a 'spinster', therefore single and too old to marry, she should not attempt to have a child. As a single woman at 42, Ro feels like she is an old person, or it would be more true to say she realizes that she is considered to be old by society. In this regard, Beauvoir describes the ageing process of women, as viewed by society, in comparison with that of men in the following passage:

Every period of woman's life is fixed and monotonous: but the passages from one stage to another are dangerously abrupt; they reveal themselves in far more decisive crises than those of the male: puberty, sexual initiation, menopause. While the male grows older continuously, the woman is brusquely stripped of her femininity; still young, she loses sexual attraction and fertility, from which, in society's and her own eyes, she derives the justification of her existence and her chances of happiness: bereft of all future, she has approximately half of her adult life still to live (Beauvoir, 1949/2010, p. 702).

Later, Beauvoir explains how a man and a woman's change happen during this period. She describes the change of a woman's attitude and personality in the following extract:

Her discoveries sometimes draw her into paths of action: she throws herself into schemes, undertakings, and adventures whose idea is whispered to her by some adviser or inner voices. Sometimes, she simply deems herself the holder of the truth and absolute wisdom. Whether she is active or contemplative, her attitude

is accompanied by feverish exaltation. The crisis of menopause brutally cuts feminine life into two: it is this discontinuity that gives woman the illusion of a “new life”; it is an *other* time opening before her: she approaches it with the fervor of a convert; she is converted to love, life, God, art, and humanity: she loses and magnifies herself in these entities (Beauvoir, 1949/2010, p. 708).

Ro, then, tries literally to build a ‘new life’ by seeking to have a baby at an age where it is difficult to get pregnant naturally. However, while dealing with the psychology of her age, she might not be aware of the fact that having a child and being a mother may not bring her the happiness she expects. In the essay “The Laugh of the Medusa”, writers emphasize that having a child should not be a decision that women undertake as a result of social expectations; instead it should be a matter of choice, as each woman’s body is different:

There are thousands of ways of living one's pregnancy; to have or not to have with that still invisible other a relationship of another intensity. And if you don't have that particular yearning, it doesn't mean that you're in any way lacking. Each body distributes in its own special way, without model or norm, the nonfinite and changing totality of its desires. Decide for yourself on your position in the arena of contradictions, where pleasure and reality embrace. Bring the other to life. Women know how to live detachment; giving birth is neither losing nor increasing. It's adding to life an other (Cixous, Cohen, & Cohen, 1976).

There may be several reasons behind Ro’s desire for a baby. She might be feeling alone or she might be feeling the pressure of the ‘biological clock’, pushing her to want to have a child before she loses her ability. Whatever the reason could be, society’s attitude towards Ro’s decision would remain negative due to her (lack of) marital status. This situation is criticized by Beauvoir in the following lines:

Though only a secular institution, marriage nevertheless has great social importance, and the conjugal family, though stripped of religious signification, is very alive on a human level. Even within groups where great sexual freedom is found, it is considered conventional for a woman who brings a child into the world to be married; alone with an offspring, she cannot constitute an autonomous group; and her brother's religious protection does not suffice; a husband's presence is required (Beauvoir, 1949/2010, pp. 106-107).

Even though in-vitro fertilization is banned by the government, Ro keeps trying until the end, spending a lot of money on several operations and examinations. Meanwhile, in search of a new life, she devotes herself to the arts, in the form of her book about Eivor Minervudottir. Also, she decides to help her student Mattie (another character in the novel character called The Daughter). She does not seek consolation from God, however, since she is an atheist, and picks the least Christian dating website when she attempts to find someone (p. 35). Later she chooses a donor very quickly (pp. 35-36). She isn't emotional while selecting such characteristics like race, eye colour, education and height. Besides, she questions whether the concepts of beautiful and ugly are necessary for one's life. Deciding what is important for her, she chooses a donor with good health and a good brain. Because of that, her therapist asks if she feels undeserving of a romantic partner but she does not answer clearly (p. 37). She could be feeling that it's too late for her to find a partner, or she may think that there is no-one who would understand her. In brief, these reasons may also explain why Ro wants a child.

So far, the analysis has been mainly focused on depicting a personal portrait of Ro; however, she is, like other women in the society, affected by the change in the law. Ro explains the new law as follows:

Two years ago the United States ratified the Personhood Amendment, which gives the constitutional right to life, liberty, and property to a fertilized egg at the moment of conception. Abortion is now illegal in all fifty states. Abortion providers can be charged with second-degree murder, abortion seekers with conspiracy to commit a murder. In vitro-fertilization, too, is federally banned, because the amendment outlaws the transfer of embryos from laboratory to uterus (Zumas, 2018, p. 31).

While explaining the change in the law, Zumas also points out the importance of using one's voting rights when there is an election; Ro, for instance, did not vote for the new government. As Zumas explains below, her novel began to feel less like a satirical fantasy following the election of Donald Trump as US President in 2016:

After Trump's election, I felt so jolted, so deeply sad. The stakes of writing a novel about reproductive rights felt suddenly much higher. For instance, the scene in an underground health clinic—when I first wrote it, my approach was a lot broader, more satirical. But then I started thinking about the fact that this kind of place might be necessary in the actual world (Zumas, 2018).

Ro gives some more information in the following about the adoption of the new laws on new reproduction laws:

Then the new president moved into the White House.

The Personhood Amendment happened.

One of the ripples in its wake: Public Law 116-72.

On January fifteenth -in less than three months- this law, also known as Every Child Needs Two, takes effect. Its mission: *to restore dignity, strength, and prosperity to American families*. Unmarried person will be legally prohibited from adopting children. In addition to valid marriage licences, all adoptions will

require approval through a federally regulated agency, rendering private transactions criminal (Zumas, 2018, pp. 31-32).

This type of government, which tries to limit the freedom of citizens in the name of 'morality', is a common theme in many dystopian novels. Regarding the last two quotes, while child adoption is prohibited for both sexes, the prohibition of abortion specifically limits the rights of women. A woman who does not want to be a mother does not have the option to say no. Otherwise, both the abortion provider and seeker will be punished harshly. There are both similarities and differences in this regard when compared with *The Handmaid's Tale*. In Gilead, women's body rights were controlled on religious grounds by the theocratic government. Doctors who provided abortion before the Gilead regime, for instance, were executed, as described in the following excerpt:

The men wear white coats, like those worn by doctors or scientists. Doctors and scientists aren't the only ones, there are others, but they must have had a run on them this morning. Each has a placard hung around his neck to show why he has been executed: a drawing of a human fetus. They were doctors, then, in the time before, when such things were legal... These men, we've been told, are like war criminals. It's no excuse that what they did was legal at the time: their crimes are retroactive... No woman in her right mind, these days, would seek to prevent a birth, should she be so lucky as to conceive (Atwood, 1985, p. 39).

Also, it is implied that abortion is not something to feel good about even if the person got pregnant after being raped. "It's Janine, telling about how she was gang-raped at fourteen and had an abortion. She told the same story last week. She seemed almost proud of it, while she was telling" (Atwood, 1985, p. 70).

In *Red Clocks*, the theme of abortion is introduced when the stories of Mattie and Gin begin. Mattie, a student of Ro, is a teenaged high school girl who gets pregnant by a boy named Ephraim and later seeks to have an abortion. Another character, Gin, also called The Mender, also tries to help Ro get pregnant by providing her with a herbal remedy. These two characters have their own life stories, but they are both connected to the theme of abortion as one of them is the seeker, and the other is the provider. After Mattie (Mathilda) has intercourse with Ephraim out of curiosity, she realizes that, as her period is seven weeks late, she is very possibly pregnant:

A tuft of cells inside her, multiplying. Half Ephraim, half her.

You can't be sure.

She carries the test around unopened in her satchel.

If she is-

She might not be. Her body feels pretty much like it always does.

But if she is, what the hell is she going to do?

Don't borrow worry. – Mom

Stay in your lane. – Dad.

After all, she might not be (Zumas, 2018, p. 73).

Abortion is illegal in both *Red Clocks* and *The Handmaid's Tale*. The difference is Janine got pregnant after being raped before the Gilead regime and was later retrospectively punished for her 'crime'. Mattie, in contrast, consented to sexual intercourse with Ephraim, and later sought an abortion. However, the problem is still basically the same; abortion is illegal in both novels. Mattie gets scared of being pregnant due to her young age, the reactions of her lover Ephraim and her parents, and she fears her pregnancy will destroy her dreams for the future.

Thus, *Red Clocks* can perhaps be compared to *Vox* and *The Handmaid's Tale* in terms of its treatment of women's reproductive rights. Furthermore, in *The Handmaid's Tale*, a group of women (those able to reproduce and who were retrospectively found guilty of sins by the Gilead regime) are used as reproductive slaves. Thus, all three novels share a common theme in this sense. However, there are also important differences in this regard. For example, it appears that the government in *Red Clocks* does not prohibit birth unless the child has only a single parent. In *Vox*, the circumstances under which birth is allowed are not certain, and, thus, what happens in various particular situations isn't as clear as in *Red Clocks*.

Nevertheless, all three novels stress government control over women's reproduction, meaning that they all touch upon feminist themes. The theme of abortion and motherhood has already been discussed from Beauvoir's perspective in the previous chapter. Besides, Luce Irigaray, for instance, stresses the importance of contraception and abortion in terms of women's identity and social status:

Today, not only her entrance into the circuits of production, but also-even more so?-the widespread availability of contraception and abortion are returning her to that impossible role: being a woman. And if contraception and abortion are spoken of most often as possible ways of controlling, or even "mastering," the birth rate, of being a mother "by choice," the fact remains that they imply the possibility of *modifying women's social status*, and thus of modifying the modes of social relations between men and women (Irigaray, 1985, pp. 83-84).

In these lines, from her 1985 book *This Sex Which Is Not One*, then, Irigaray underlines how the ability to control reproduction allows women to choose whether to become mothers or not. From this perspective, a woman should be responsible for her own

decisions rather than having them imposed on her by a man or a government, as is also stressed in the following passage;

Begetting a child doesn't mean that the woman or the man must fall ineluctably into patterns or must recharge the circuit of reproduction. If there's a risk there's not an inevitable trap: may women be spared the pressure, under the guise of consciousness-raising, of a supplement of interdictions. Either you want a kid or you don't-*that's your business*. Let nobody threaten you; in satisfying your desire, let not the fear of becoming the accomplice to a sociality succeed the old-time fear of being "taken" (Cixous, Cohen, & Cohen, p. 890).

Mattie in *Red Clocks* feels unable to raise her baby due to her young age and her incomplete education. While she is unable to obtain a legal abortion in the US, however, The Pink Wall remains an option for her. The Pink Wall represents the border between the U.S. and Canada. Similarly, Canada plays a role as a land of freedom, a destination for potential refugees in most Dystopian novels set in the US. For example, in *Vox*, at the end of the novel, Jean escapes from the United States with her lover's dead wife's passport and her baby, even though the border was closed for women. Going back to *The Handmaid's Tale*, Offred frequently mentions a country where normal life continues, which refers to Canada. Atwood's sequel to *The Handmaid's Tale*, *The Testaments*, is partly set in Toronto and the book focuses on a girl who was smuggled out of Gilead to Canada as a baby. Similarly, in Sinclair Lewis' 1935 dystopian novel *It Can't Happen Here*, the dissident New Underground group helps opponents of the fascist leader Windrip escape to Canada.

In many other dystopian novels, too, a space of (relative) freedom surrounds or lies outside the dystopian society. In Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*, for instance, the idea of revolution is represented by the Green Wall and the destruction of the wall represents

the reunion. Similarly, the Savage Reservation in *Brave New World* is the only place which lies outside the control of the World State, and where earlier customs (such as family ties) persist. In *Red Clocks*, the idea of the Pink Wall first appears on page 73, while it was still open for abortion seekers. Later in the novel, however, American women are prevented from crossing the Pink Wall by their government:

American intelligence agencies must have some nice dirt on the Canadian prime minister. Otherwise, why agree to the Pink Wall? The border control can detain any woman or girl they “reasonably” suspect of crossing into Canada for the purpose of ending a pregnancy. Seekers are returned (by police escort) to their state of residence, where the district attorney can prosecute them for attempting a termination. Healthcare providers in Canada are also barred from offering vitro fertilization to U.S. citizens (Zumas, 2018, p. 87).

Due to this change, Mattie misses the chance of going to Canada to terminate her pregnancy. Moreover, she no longer has the option of going to Gin Percival’s (The Mender) house since she has been imprisoned for carrying out illegal abortions. Mattie’s inner voice, reflecting her dilemma, says, “I’m too scared to go to Canada because of the Pink Wall but the witch went to jail and I need a plan and I don’t have a plan and what would you do if you were me?” (p. 195). Eventually, it is Ro, her teacher, who tries to help her after learning that Mattie is pregnant, Ro, in her desire for a baby, also thinks about eventually adopting Mattie’s child (p. 206). Mattie tries to go to Canada before her passport expires, but following a one-minute pregnancy test, police detect the real reason behind her trip and do not allow her to proceed (p. 244). Then she again questions whether to keep the baby or not, considering her situation as an adopted child who is curious about her real mother.

Following this, Ro, unable to ask Mattie to give her the baby, attempts to help Mattie to try to find a different place to end her pregnancy in Oregon, even though she knows both can get arrested (p. 301). After Mattie's abortion, she gets closer to her teacher Ro, and they become like mother and daughter. At the end of the book, Mattie joins the Math Academy and Ro, unable to have a child, finds her lost brother.

Another important character in the novel is Eivor Minervudottir. Ro tries to create a book about her before she is forgotten by history. Eivor is a polar explorer who loses her father at an early age. At age six, her mother teaches her how to hold a knife to kill a lamb and how to cook (p. 57). Her mother educates her, in other words, how to "become a woman" in Beauvoir's terms. As Beauvoir explains, gender identity is largely a social construct:

One is not born, but rather becomes, woman. No biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine. Only the mediation of another can constitute an individual as an *Other* (Beauvoir, 1949/2010, p. 330).

As Eivor grows, she isn't asked whether she wants to get married; instead, at age nineteen, she is informed of her imminent marriage with a widowed salmoner aged fifty-two (p. 111). In other words, she is treated as a commodity with exchange value, to use Marx' term. Related to this, Irigaray (1985) says, "*As commodities, women are thus two things at once: utilitarian objects and bearers of value.*" (p. 175). Explaining that women in patriarchal societies are allotted one of three roles, the virgin, the mother or the prostitute, she adds that:

The virginal woman, on the other hand, is pure exchange value. She is nothing but the possibility, the place, the sign of relations among men. In and of herself,

she does not exist: she is a simple envelope veiling what is really at stake in social exchange. In this sense, her natural body disappears into its representative function (Irigaray, 1985, p. 186).

In this regard, Irigaray compares the subjugation of women to the domestication of nature:

-just as nature has to be subjected to man in order to become a commodity, so, it appears, does "the development of a normal woman." A development that amounts, for the feminine, to subordination to the forms and laws of masculine activity (Irigaray, 1985, p. 187).

After eighteen months, however, she loses her husband and goes to Aberdeen, where she works as a mangler and a maid in the shipyard's laundry. She goes back to London and works in a ship named *Oreus* as a hydrologist and writes a book in the meantime called "On the Contours and Tendencies of Arctic Sea". However, when she claims to be the author she is widely disbelieved due to her sex. In the 19th century, many female authors published under male pen-names, as Woolf explains in her book *A Room of One's Own* (1929). She emphasizes some female writers who willingly or unwillingly used the male pen names in the following extract, in which she explains the 19th-century attitude to women authors:

To have lived a free life in London in the sixteenth century would have meant for a woman who was poet and playwright a nervous stress and dilemma which might well have killed her. Had she survived, whatever she had written would have been twisted and deformed, issuing from a strained and morbid imagination. And undoubtedly, I thought, looking at the shelf where there are no plays by women, her work would have gone unsigned. That refuge she would have sought certainly. It was the relic of the sense of chastity that dictated anonymity to

women even so late as the nineteenth century. Currer Bell, George Eliot, George Sand, all the victims of inner strife as their writings prove, sought ineffectively to veil themselves by using the name of a man (Woolf, 1929, p. 42).

From this perspective, then, Zumas perhaps explains the historical situation of female writers in her depiction of Eivor in the novel. Just as Woolf explained above, Eivor faces discrimination as an author; when she asks for help from her former director in Aberdeen, he later steals the book and publishes it with his name (p. 307). After she dies in the second ship she worked on, she is eaten by sharks; thus the local people, who ate these sharks, were also eating her (p. 347). This may be an ironic way of describing Eivor's life. Although she couldn't leave anything behind her (her book), her soul was perhaps kept alive in those who ingested her body. This perhaps reminds us that, while she was alive, she was also metaphorically devoured by a shark, in the form of her former director who published her book under his name. In an online article about the book, Zumas explains the importance of Eivor Minervudottir in an interview:

One of the most pleasurable things for me about writing the book was imagining Eivor's story and her importance for Ro, who is interested in unveiling buried histories. I had this idea of being in conversation with women in the past, because I think a lot about my debt to other writers and artists and activists who have made possible the opportunities we have today (Zumas, 2017).

Another important character in the book is The Wife (Susan). She is a thirty-seven year old mother of two kids named John and Bex. She has given up her legal career to become a full-time mother and wife to her husband Didier. However, they come to realize that they are not happy together. The last conversation between them in the first chapter explains Didier's attitude towards Susan, which is important from a feminist perspective. "There were twelve, by the way, he says. I know you have stuff to do, I'm

not saying you don't, but could you maybe wash the toilet once in a while? Twelve hairs" (p. 27). These sentences display his expectations, as a male, from his wife. Rather than cleaning the toilet himself, he tells to Susan to clean it, implying that it is woman's work. An example of her daily routine is given in the following lines:

Spray table.

Wipe down table.

Rinse cups and bowls.

Place cups and bowls in dishwasher.

Open bill for plumber, who did not even fix the dripping tap.

Open overdue notice for John's trip to the ER, where all they did was give him an anti-nausea pill yet somehow it cost six hundred dollars.

Write check for dentist co-pay because it's only \$49.84.

Slide plumber and hospital into folder labelled PAY NEXT MONTH.

Start a list on the back of an envelope: *Why should we go to counselling.*

Think of what to put first-not the strongest reason, nor the weakest (p. 76).

Indeed, a study suggests that, while men have increased their propensity to do housework regardless of their marital status, women are still responsible for the bulk of domestic tasks. Thus, for this increase to continue, cultural change is necessary; if men continue to change their mind about the idea of "woman's work", they will perhaps eventually take part in housework on an equal basis with women (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000).

According to this extract, Susan's life seems to revolve around doing chores and arranging financial payments. This leaves her frustrated, and unhappy with her husband. In the previous chapter, Jean's situation at home was also similar to Susan's. However, unlike Jean, Susan is not prevented by the government from working or

completing her education. In both examples, however, women do most of the chores. This prompts some questions; do chores have a gender? Can gender equality be established comp in housework too? Beauvoir, in the extract below, describes housework as a Sisyphean task:

Even in the most privileged cases, this victory is never final. Few tasks are more similar to the torment of Sisyphus than those of the housewife; day after day, one must wash dishes, dust furniture, mend clothes that will be dirty, dusty, and torn again. The housewife wears herself out running on the spot; she does nothing; she only perpetuates the present; she never gains the sense that she is conquering a positive Good, but struggles indefinitely against Evil... Washing, ironing, sweeping, routing out tufts of dust in the dark places behind the wardrobe, this is holding away death but also refusing life: for in one movement time is created and destroyed; the housewife only grasps the negative aspect of it (Beauvoir, 1949/2010, pp. 539,541).

In this example, Beauvoir explains women's condition and criticizes the male dominance that forced women to live in this way. She also supports the idea that women should act to improve their condition.

It is the male who opens up the future toward which she also transcends; in reality women have never pitted female values against male ones: it is men wanting to maintain masculine prerogatives who invented this division; they wanted to create a feminine domain—a rule of life, of immanence—only to lock woman in it. But it is above and beyond all sexual specification that the existent seeks self-justification in the movement of his transcendence: the very submission of women proves this. Today what women claim is to be recognized as existents just

like men, and not to subordinate existence to life or the man to his animality (Beauvoir, 1949/2010, p. 100).

Susan tries to take action to improve her marriage; unhappy with her husband, she wants to go a couple of counselling with him. When she suggests this to Didier, he rejects it by saying, “Honestly, Susan? Things aren’t that bad. I mean, yes, some things could be better. But I’m not gonna drive ninety miles to talk about how I should’ve bought you better present on your birthday” (p. 108). He isn’t willing to go see a therapist, then, and expresses this to Susan in a rather hurtful way; indeed it almost seems that the goal of therapy is to make individual feel worse (p. 109). Another dialogue between Didier and Susan is given below, to give a clearer understanding of their relationship and Didier’s attitude to her.

“Your shift now.” she says “I’m going for a walk.”

“What about lunch?”

“I ate with the kids in town.”

“But I haven’t eaten.”

“So-eat.”

“I was waiting for you,” he says. “There’s nothing in the house.”

“Untrue.”

“What am I supposed to have, then?”

The wife starts for the kitchen, then stops. “Actually, it’s not my job to figure out what you’re having for lunch.”

“Could you at least make a suggestion? There’s like absolutely *rien* in the fridge”

(Zumas, 2018, p. 165).

This dialogue is interesting in the way that it shows how a male became bound to his wife in a way that he cannot even pick something to eat. This may perhaps be explained

from the perspective of Hegel's master-slave dialectic. This type of self-consciousness occurs as a result of being independent and dependent at the same time; in this sense, the master eventually becomes dependent on his slave (Aching, 2012, p. 912). In the example taken from the novel, then, while men appear to be dominant at home, in situations like the one described above, as they are unable to care for their basic needs they become tied to their wives.

Susan, in turn, thinks about what she could do if she ends her marriage (p. 167). Their relationship indeed ends at the end of the novel and Susan says bye to those that made her lose her own identity (p. 326). She finally tells Didier that she wants to separate from him to recover that identity. Susan, in her role as The Wife, then, represents the situation of some women in society who have children and an unhappy marriage. As they devote themselves to their children and husbands, they lose touch with their personality and identity. From this perspective woman, when she is not in an equal situation with man, lives a tiring life.

In the following chapter, another dystopian fiction, *Only Ever Yours* by Louise O'Neill will be examined from the perspective of feminist theory. The book was published in 2014 and categorized as dystopian fiction. Contextually and theoretically similar to the previous two novels, it also includes feminist themes and elements. Just as in *Red Clocks*, a new social order comes about. However, it does not happen right after an election but after a natural change in a society where women are no longer born naturally. Both books, however, emphasize the issue of women's reproductive rights; both novels explore how women are controlled through their bodies. This time, however, the women who are controlled by the new system are very young and they are created in laboratories, which make the novel particularly interesting to explore.

CHAPTER 4: Representations of Woman as the Other in *Only Ever Yours*

Published on June 30, 2014, *Only Ever Yours* is a dystopian novel that takes place in a futuristic society where women are no longer born naturally and are, instead, genetically produced in special laboratories. The book is generally intended for young adults. The interest in dystopian literature has increased among young adults and teenagers from around the beginning of the 21st century. A study suggests that the Millennial Generation is far more interested in the future than in current events. Moreover, their age requires them to explore their own identity as individuals while, in addition, they usually look for an outlet for their emotions. Another reason may be constant exposure to news; “Teens are now entrenched in the culture of the 24-hour news networks and connected to social media, which constantly expose them to depictions of terror, extremism, and violence” (Ames, 2013, p. 8). Also, some of the well-known dystopian novels have been adapted into films, which has also sparked interest in them among young people.

The protagonists of *Only Ever Yours* are girls (called eves), who are made in laboratories and, at the age of four, are taken to a strict school to be educated by teachers called chastities. Until they are sixteen, they are educated in these schools where they are taught how to be attractive, fit, and compliant. Depending on their success in this school and on their behavior, they prepare for a competition in which they will be selected by young males as companions or concubines. Those who aren't chosen will remain living in the school after sixteen as chastities; these girls will thus become the teachers of the new generation. The chastities are bald-headed and not allowed to have any type of relationship with the opposite sex. In this sense, they are perhaps similar to the aunts in *The Handmaid's Tale*, who are responsible for the training of women in Gilead. *The Handmaid's Tale's* Aunt Lydia and *Only Ever Yours's* chastity-ruth are the

main representatives of the teachers in these two novels; both are important characters who instruct, or perhaps indoctrinate, the protagonists.

The girls in *Only Ever Yours* who are chosen as companions are considered as the luckiest; they become a wife for the male who selects them. If they are chosen as a concubine, which may be defined as a sex-slave or prostitute, they will be responsible for fulfilling men's biological desires. Either way, they will be bounded to men and they are raised for the pleasure of men. Until the competition day, each has their room covered with mirrors so that they can customize their appearance. In this context, then, the novel is mainly about the relationships of these girls with each other and with their teachers. Also, it includes information about eating disorders like anorexia and bulimia. Just like the author of *Red Clocks*, Louise O'Neill, author of *Only Ever Yours*, explains that the novel was influenced by her own thoughts and experiences. In an online published interview, she mentions the books that inspired her:

When I was a teenager, I instinctively knew that I felt uncomfortable with certain attitudes and behaviour that I saw around me but I didn't understand that discomfort. It was only when I started reading feminist literature from *The Handmaid's Tale* to *The Beauty Myth* and *Backlash* that I realized that it wasn't just my imagination. Those books helped me to develop the necessary vocabulary to articulate my discomfort and I think that's the power of books that explore feminism (O'Neill, 2015).

In another interview, she explains her own experience about eating disorders which is one of the subjects dealt with in the book.

Of course, my own battle with anorexia and bulimia shadows the story as the girls are obsessed with weight and their calorie intake, and that was a deliberate

decision. I went to an all-girls boarding school, so I'm very familiar with the environment of a single-sex education. However, I found it interesting re-reading my novel as I could see different threads running through it that had also been inspired by my own personal experience, but I hadn't consciously realized that while I was writing *Only Ever Yours* (O'Neill, 2014).

Therefore, these interviews clarify the factors which led to the feminist themes of the book. In the book, one of the strictest controls over the girls is that over the specific level of calorie intake needed to maintain their weight. To meet the beauty standards, each girl has to be careful about what they eat and how they look; a girl should learn what to include in her diet and how to control her desire to eat. Meanwhile, she should have a perfect taste in fashion so that she can be admired by her environment. These rules are established to create an illusion of order to control women physically and psychologically. This, then, is reminiscent of Foucault's biopolitics; biopolitics can be understood in the context of an attempt to "rationalize the problems posed to governmental practice by phenomena characteristic of a set of living beings forming a population: health, hygiene, birthrate, life expectancy, race..." (Foucault, 2008, p. 317) In *Only Ever Yours*, then, the regime controls the whole system via biopolitics and biopower; as Foucault (1995) notes, schools resemble prisons and vice versa in this context:

Is it surprising that the cellular prison, with its regular chronologies, forced labour, its authorities of surveillance and registration, its experts in normality, who continue and multiply the functions of the judge, should have become the modern instrument of penalty? Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?" (p. 228).

The regime also causes identity loss and confusion among the girls in *Only Ever Yours* since they are not able to make their own decisions over their lives. Their main duty is considered to “become a woman” and to always be beautiful. Beauvoir argues that conceptions of women’s beauty are closely linked to their perception as passive objects:

The ideal of feminine beauty is variable; but some requirements remain constant; one of them is that since woman is destined to be possessed, her body has to provide the inert and passive qualities of an object. Virile beauty is the body’s adaptation to active functions such as strength, agility, flexibility, and the manifestation of a transcendence animating a flesh that must never collapse into itself (Beauvoir, 1949/2010, p. 211).

She thus criticizes the idea that a woman becomes a ‘true’ woman when she meets the beauty standards of society. *The Beauty Myth* (1990), one of the books which influenced O’Neill, critiques the same idea. Wolf (1991) thinks that beauty standards remain a limitation on women despite increasing legal and professional equality; in fact, for Wolf “The more legal and material hindrances women have broken through, the more strictly and heavily and cruelly images of female beauty have come to weigh upon us” (p. 10). Similarly to Beauvoir, Wolf also criticizes the objectification of the female body through the context of beauty. Thus, Wolf (1991) thinks the increasing attention women pay to their beauty is a reflection of something deeper and more sinister:

More women have more money and power and scope and legal recognition than we have ever had before; but in terms of how we feel about ourselves *physically*, we may actually be worse off than our unliberated grandmothers. Recent research consistently shows that inside the majority of the West’s controlled, attractive, successful working women, there is a secret “underlife” poisoning our freedom;

infused with notions of beauty, it is a dark vein of self-hatred, physical obsessions, terror of aging, and dread of lost control (p. 10).

Thus, in *Only Ever Yours*, girls are taught to treat their bodies as potential foci of disgust; they are ashamed of their menstrual blood, for instance.

And I screamed, and screamed, and screamed. I never could sleep without meds after that. chastity-ruth hung the tainted sheets outside my cubicle for the five-days told that I bled as a sign that I was unclean. We knew then. We knew this was our curse. We knew it had to be hidden (O'Neill, 2014, pp. 195-196).

When their period starts, in fact, they take pills to stop bleeding to be clean and not disgusting. They are the other when they have their period and are not seen as an ideal woman, even though bleeding monthly is not their own choice, just a biological process. Beauvoir criticizes the idea of seeing menstrual blood as dirty in the following quote, arguing that it stems from an exaggerated idealization of the female body:

Wonder at the feminine body and disgust for menstrual blood are apprehensions of a concrete reality. There is nothing mythical in the experience of discovering the voluptuous qualities of feminine flesh, and expressing these qualities by comparisons to flowers or pebbles does not turn them into myth (Beauvoir, 1949/2010, p. 317).

Wolf (1991) also comments on this subject in a similar vein, arguing that “fat days” today psychologically affect women in a similar manner:

Women feel similarly diminished and excluded by the “fat days” phase of their weight cycle, which serves the same purpose by characterizing women even to themselves as morally weak, tainted, and sexually unworthy. Where the menstrual taboo kept women out of public life, today women hide *themselves* away (p. 97).

Therefore, while the theme of beauty is used to represent the female as other on the one hand, women's very biological being is also used to other them. In *Only Ever Yours*, if the girls do not obey the rules of beauty in the school, they are punished in several ways by their teachers, the chastities. "As you know, girls, there is always room for improvement. With every year since your design date, you are getting older, losing your bloom, depreciating in value. Standards, girls! Standards must be upheld" (O'Neill, 2014, p. 58). These lines from the novel show how the female body is objectified. Thus, the message is that a woman should always look young, she should always take care of her body. A similar idea is also seen in the previous novel, *Red Clocks*, where Ro was struggling with the idea of getting old and losing the ability to give birth. Because of being othered by society, the attitude of a woman changes in the later years of her life. She starts to take care of herself again, wears perfume and make-up to have a new beginning in her life (Beauvoir, 1949/2010, p. 704).

In the first lines of the book, the reader is introduced to the internal voice of the main character and the protagonist named freida. In the book, no female name starts with a capital letter to emphasize the loss of female identity or to underline that their freedom has been taken away. freida wakes up on a day when there are only ten months left before the competition; she says to herself "I am a good girl. I'm pretty. I am always happy-go-lucky" (p. 4). The girls, then, are indoctrinated with these phrases as they sleep. This is an allusion to *Brave New World* where children are also taught who they are and which class they belong to while sleeping. It is implied that they are educated intellectually, or rather indoctrinated, through the process of hypnopaedia, which plays an important role in the World State: "The principle of sleep-teaching, or hypnopædia, had been discovered." The D.H.C. made an impressive pause." (Huxley, 1932/2004, p.

26). This supplements the sensory associations which the children are exposed to from infancy;

Roses and electric shocks, the khaki of Deltas and a whiff of asafoetida—wedded indissolubly before the child can speak. But wordless conditioning is crude and wholesale; cannot bring home the finer distinctions, cannot inculcate the more complex courses of behaviour. For that there must be words, but words without reason. In brief, hypnopædia (Huxley, 1932/2004, pp. 29-30).

In *Only Ever Yours*, in an attempt to be accepted by authority, freida and some other girls ignore their instincts and their conceptions of morality, which makes them contrarian. They are brought up to be companions, concubines or teachers maintaining the state's mission. Thus, their values are already chosen, their behaviors are already determined, and their futures already created by the dystopian regime in the novel. In an attempt to release this psychological pressure, they insult each other's appearance. For example, isabel, frieda's best friend, is introduced as a fat girl who never gets in trouble even if she misbehaves in the school. She used to be the most beautiful girl in the school and was rated as number one before she put on weight, which caused her to be mocked by the other girls.

'I don't know why she is even bothering to use ipecac,' megan says. 'It's not working. She must have gained at least twenty pounds.' She stares at me intently.

'What do you think, freida? How much weight has she gained?' She reaches out to touch my hand and I want to pull away. If I pull away, will she be insulted? 'It must be so difficult for you, freida, watching a friend degrade herself like that. I mean, she's eating *pasta*.' She grimaces. 'Has she said anything to you? What was her weigh-in like today? She wasn't in gym so she must be on probation, right?' (O'Neill, 2014, p. 31)

In this example, Megan makes fun of Isabel because of her weight. In other words, Megan tries to satisfy her ego by insulting girls who don't look similar to her. It can be said that what Megan does to improve her physical beauty to be selected as the most beautiful; the aim is ultimately to please another. In this vein, the study cited below argues that it is difficult to determine whether a woman who takes care of her body via exercise, for instance, is doing it for herself or to please others:

Perhaps it would be accurate to say that a woman's participation in a program of physical exercise is narcissistic when she undertakes it not for the purpose of defining her own goal but in order to please the Other, to coincide with an externally originated measure that she has internalized. It is, of course, a problem to determine in a given situation whether a woman is exercising for herself or in response to an Other, and requires deciphering the jumble of cultural messages and psychic codes that affect, if not determine, being-in-the-world (Slagter, 1982, p. 158).

In this context, Isabel becomes alienated because of the beauty standards imposed on her by society, here represented by Megan. These girls are controlled through their emotions too. "We have Organized Recreation daily and it's always the final class of the day. It was devised to combat female hysteria syndrome: any hysterical, overemotional girl behavior is deliberately induced in a controlled environment until the urges dissipate (p. 43). With this class they learn how to be stable mentally depending on the idea that a woman shouldn't overreact, she should be cold-blooded. "All eyes must manage their behavior and conduct themselves in a manner that is ladylike at all times. Emotional behavior can be off-putting to men and must be controlled" (p. 275). Hysteria was originally described as a psychoneurotic disorder, although it is no longer recognised as such. In Irigaray's *This Sex Which Is Not One*,

she comments on hysteria from a feminist perspective after describing Freud's Oedipus theory about the disorder.

Speaking (as) woman and speaking (as) hysteric?

I should like to ask what it means "to speak (as) hysteric." Does the hysteric speak? Isn't hysteria a privileged place for preserving-but "in latency," "in suffering"- that which does not speak? And, in particular (even according to Freud...), that which is not expressed in woman's relation to her mother, to herself, to other women? Those aspects of women's earliest desires that find themselves reduced to silence in terms of culture that does not allow them to be expressed. A powerlessness to "say," upon which the Oedipus complex them superimposes the requirement of silence (Irigaray, 1985, p. 136).

Moreover, to control their so-called hysteria, the girls receive electroconvulsive treatment which is also known as electroshock therapy (p. 50). However, right after the sessions, they deal with the side effects, which are harmful to their health.

Another rule that the girls are supposed to obey is the prohibition against having sexual intercourse before marriage. Frieda, however, breaks this rule when, in an attempt to be selected as a companion, she has sexual intercourse with Darwin, a boy who is popular because of his father's position (Judge Goldsmith). After the other girls learn about it, they start talking behind Frieda's back:

'Disgusting... Has she no self-control?'

'I couldn't believe it when I saw the report on the Daily Tale. They said this girl is threatening the very foundations of our society.'

‘The Daily Tale said that she’s not even that good-looking. I mean, she was designed perfectly, of course, but I heard reports she was over target weight at the start of the year.’

‘Oh, I thought the Daily Tale said she was too skinny.’

‘We all went through the School system and we obeyed the rules. Who does this girl think she is?’

‘Poor Darwin. He must have felt so manipulated. The eves are supposed to be trained properly and behave themselves’ (O'Neill, 2014, p. 337).

These lines show that the entire blame is placed on the woman even though Darwin also has sexual intercourse before marriage. However, because he is aggrandized as a male and as a son of the Father, Darwin is seen as innocent. One study focusing on sexual double standards in adolescent life claims that sexual promiscuity in boys is better accepted by peers than in girls:

The sex-status association might also be reciprocal: unpopular girls may seek high status male sexual partners and simultaneously lose status among other girls, whereas high status boys may use their popularity to have sex with many females without fear of jeopardizing their places in popular mixed-gender adolescent cliques... (Kreager & Staff, 2009).

As explained above, after having sexual intercourse with Darwin, who is popular as he is the son of the Father, Frieda loses her popularity in the school and, as discussed further below, she is punished at the end of the novel for breaking the rules. All this indicates and reflects, that women are exposed to double standards in terms of sexual relations.

In *Vox*, too, Julia is also punished because of having sexual intercourse before marriage; her punishment was being prohibited from talking, zero words per day. As has already been touched upon in this thesis, sexual behavior is frequently regulated in dystopian novels, and not only in those with obviously feminist themes. In *1984*, for instance, sexual instincts, at least outside marriage were forbidden; sexual desire was supposed to be sublimated into the love of the party. Sexual intercourse was, then, considered as a subversive activity. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, extramarital sexual intercourse is only allowed under strictly controlled conditions for the handmaids to get pregnant. In *We*, sexual life is controlled by the One State, a citizen has sexual intercourse when allowed by the authorities. However, in *Brave New World*, sexual intercourse is allowed if it is not part of a romantic relationship and the government provides abortion centers for women. As indicated in the citation from *Brave New World* below, an *indecorous* relationship in this context is one in which the sexual partners develop romantic feelings for each other:

At the sound of his voice the Director started into a guilty realization of where he was; shot a glance at Bernard, and averting his eyes, blushed darkly; looked at him again with sudden suspicion and, angrily on his dignity, "Don't imagine," he said, "that I'd had any indecorous relation with the girl. Nothing emotional, nothing long-drawn. It was all perfectly healthy and normal" (Huxley, 1932/2004, p. 103).

In any case, in feminist dystopias especially, government control of women's sexuality goes against their free will over their own body.

The concept of marriage plays an important role in *Only Ever Yours*, too. On page 214, it is said that a companion should always be willing, as a woman should always be willing to have a son for the progression of the Zone. This is reminiscent of Irigaray's

argument regarding the commodification of women. As she says, “*As commodities women are thus two things at once; utilitarian objects and bearers of value*” (p. 175). She also thinks that a woman becomes valuable only when she is seen as a man’s labor. In *Only Ever Yours*, the girls are arguably tricked regarding this concept of marriage; they are taught that, through marriage, they can be divinely happy under the influence of a male, and the main impetus for the competition comes from the idea.

O’Neill, then, successfully integrates the genre of dystopian fiction with feminist elements. As mentioned above, the idea of being a perfect lady caused the objectification of the girls’ bodies. They are taught that their beauty is their power; they use it in their relationships with each other and to be selected by a male at the end of the year. The boarding school, which the girls are not allowed to leave, arguably acts as a microcosm of the totalitarian regime. A similar example is *The Handmaid’s Tale’s* Rachel and Leah Center (Red Center), a school to re-educate and train women strictly as handmaids in the Republic of Gilead. It is ruled by the Aunts and the only way to leave the school is to become a Handmaid for a Commander (Atwood, p. 92). Those who escape from the center, for example, Moira, who represents courage and rebellion, are punished strictly. She is caught after her first attempt, which ends with her being brutally punished:

They took her into the room that used to be the Science Lab. It was a room where none of us ever went willingly. Afterwards she could not walk for a week, her feet would not fit into her shoes, they were too swollen. It was the feet they’d do, for a first offense. They used steel cables, frayed at the ends. After that the hands. They didn’t care what they did to your feet or your hands, even if it was permanent (Atwood M. , 1985, pp. 87-88).

Moira's second attempt is successful; however, she ends up getting caught and starts working in a club, or rather a brothel, called Jezebel's. Thus, women who try to escape from their educational institution are punished; in this sense, such schools can be likened to prisons where they are controlled and tamed, made to conform to the standards of society.

In *Only Ever Yours*, as has been noted, the women are created in laboratories; this evokes another dystopian novel, *Brave New World*, where babies are also developed in a laboratory, the Hatchery. Thus, like in *Red Clocks*, women's fertility is strictly controlled in *Brave New World*. In the World State, many women are fertile, and fertile women are forbidden to get pregnant, as their eggs will, instead, be used for laboratory reproduction. However, women who want to experience pregnancy are allowed to undergo a three months Pregnancy Substitute, a series of pills and injections which makes them feel the same as a pregnant woman (pp. 40-41). In the book, women wear a Malthusian Belt to prevent pregnancy during sexual intercourse (pp. 216-217). Therefore, women's fertility is controlled in these three novels, *Red Clocks*, where abortion is illegal, *Only Ever Yours*, where girls are forbidden to have sexual intercourse before marriage, and *Brave New World*, where women are forbidden from getting pregnant.

In *Brave New World*, people are separated into five social classes; Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta and Epsilon; Bokanovsky's process was applied to the Gamma, Delta, and Epsilons, which is described in the following extract:

"Bokanovsky's Process," repeated the Director, and the students underlined the words in their little notebooks. One egg, one embryo, one adult-normality. But a bokanovskified egg will bud, will proliferate, will divide. From eight to ninety-

six buds, and every bud will grow into a perfectly formed embryo, and every embryo into a full-sized adult. Making ninety-six human beings grow where only one grew before. Progress (Huxley, 1932/2004, pp. 4-5).

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, by contrast, women are born naturally. They are not created in laboratories; however, as in *Brave New World*, people are categorized and labelled, which undermines their identities. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, for instance, women are classified as Handmaids, Wives, Marthas, Aunts, Econowives, and Unwomen. The functions of the Handmaids, Wives and Aunts have been briefly described earlier in this thesis; regarding the other groups, Marthas are infertile women who are responsible for housework and are notorious for gossiping about events which happen in the houses where they work (p. 17). Econowives, described as the “women of poorer man” are responsible for all duties at home, as well as reproducing (p. 31). Unwomen, including the group of Jezebels, are women who work for the needs of men or who are sent to the colonies (pp. 62, 111).

As in *Only Ever Yours*, in *The Handmaid's Tale*, the Gilead regime also comes to power partly as a result of excessive pollution and climate change which negatively affects women's fertility. The following excerpt explains the scale of the disaster:

The chances are one in four, we learned that at the Center. The air got too full, once, of chemicals, rays, radiation, the water swarmed with toxic molecules, all of that takes years to clean up, and meanwhile they creep into your body, camp out in your fatty cells... Women took medicines, pills, men sprayed trees, cows ate grass, all that souped-up piss flowed into the rivers. Not to mention the exploding atomic power plants, along the San Andreas fault, nobody's fault, during the earthquakes, and the mutant strain of syphilis no mold could touch (Atwood, 1985, p. 105).

In *Only Ever Yours*, the girls are taught in their classes about the environmental disaster that preceded the foundation of their society, by which ‘humankind was saved from extinction’. This is explained in the following extract:

The only nature they show us in class is in authorized *Destruction* series. The ice melting, the seas reconciling their differences and drowning the doomed low-lying countries, never to be seen again. There was a relief at first, the hope that they found an organic solution to the population crisis, but that soon turned to fear. The remaining people moving inward and inward and inward, until the Zones were formed to protect the remaining few from the scalding sun and the rising waters. The Noah Project. Two by Two the humans entered, all marching forward to create a new world. They got rid of anything we would not need, like animals, and organized religion. They got rid of anything that would weigh us down (O'Neill, 2014, pp. 47-48).

As explained above, environmental destruction is the main reason behind the reconstruction of the states in these novels. In other dystopian novels, the dystopian regime is established after a revolution, as in *1984*, or a war, such as the Nine Years' War which ushers in the World State.

Another element that *Only Ever Yours* shares with *Brave New World* is the use of, and dependence on, medication. In *Brave New World*, citizens use a free drug named Soma to make the characters feel good, although an overdose use of Soma causes hallucinations and a feeling of senselessness (Huxley, 1932/2004, p. 57). In *Only Ever Yours*, a medication named SleepSound is used by those girls who cannot sleep well, because in the book sleep is seen as necessary for beauty. However, the main character freida usually wants to have more SleepSound to escape from her problems. In both

novels, then, medication is used to escape from reality, from the realities of the dystopian worlds in which the characters are caught.

Another important element in *Only Ever Yours* is the figure of the 'Father'. These lines are recited by the chastities in the school:

I give myself up for the good of the Euro-Zone. I give myself up for the good of the Father. I give myself up for the good of my fellow chastities. I give myself up for the good of the School. What little I am, I give myself up. What little I am, I give myself up. What little I am, I give myself up (p. 374).

They recite these words four times a day; it becomes a kind of prayer for them. They believe in the figure of the Father, who marries with Isabel at the end of the novel; worship of the Father can be seen as a replacement for the worship of God in the novel. Indeed, most dystopian societies have a totalitarian leader in the style of the Father. In *1984*, for instance, the leader of Oceania is known as Big Brother; the slogan 'Big Brother is Watching You' implies that he has all the power to control the state, including surveillance of its inhabitants. In *Brave New World*, Mustapha Mond is the top person of the World State and is known for reading Shakespeare and the Bible, 'luxuries' which are not permitted to the ordinary inhabitants of the World State. In *We's One State*, similarly, the ruler is the Benefactor.

The novel has an interesting end. On Election Day, Freida thought she would not be chosen by anyone and would continue her life as a chastity. Some of the girls do not even know by whom they have been selected: "Whose Inheritant am I again?", "Leonardo's?" (p. 368); this is, of course, ironic as some girls have been living for the day that they will be chosen as companions.

However, Frieda learns the real story behind Isabel and her behaviors at the end of the novel, which makes her feel ashamed of what she thought before. Until that time, Frieda blamed Isabel for ending their friendship. However, she learns that when she had sexual intercourse with Darwin, it was Isabel who attempted to save her life. Besides, she learns that the Father chose Isabel as a companion. Later, Isabel kills herself as a result of her marriage to the Father (p. 385). Because of that, the Father no longer saw it necessary to protect Frieda, and she is sent to the Underground where she is to be punished by being put into a capsule and used for experiments. The girls are frightened of being sent to there if they misbehave and break the rules, although they are unsure of what exactly goes on there: *"You know what we do with girls who break the rules, don't you? We send them Underground. Do you want to go Underground, #630? Do you?"* (p. 390). When Frieda is sent Underground, she realizes that her fate is to be used in the experiment as if she were an object:

"I've been expecting you." A man approaches me. He's wearing white cloak of Engineers, a white mask covering his face. Thick furry eyebrows are knitted together over pale brown eyes. "#630, isn't it?"

I can't move.

"Now, stop wasting time, girl. This is important." I stare at him blankly. "You want to help me with my research, don't you? Don't you want to be of some use?" (O'Neill, 2014, p. 389).

This is perhaps reminiscent of the experimentation on Jews in the notorious prison camps in what was arguably a real-life dystopian regime, that of Nazi Germany. Here, inmates were used in various types of experiments; children were chosen for psychiatric experiments, twin children were used for studies of infectious diseases and women were

subjected to sterilization and fertility experiments (Weindling, Villiez, Loewenau, & Farron, 2016).

In brief, then, *Only Ever Yours* is a book in which the female characters are strictly controlled and face serious limitations. The dystopian genre of the novel allows O'Neill to explore important feminist themes like manipulation, otherness, silencing and control over the female body which, albeit to a lesser extent, are still prevalent in the real world today. Thus, books like *Only Ever Yours*, *Red Clocks*, and *Vox*, while obviously fictional, can facilitate a broader discussion of women's rights, and perhaps act as a warning of what could happen if some current social and political trends are taken to the extreme. In this context, the thesis will conclude with a brief comparison of the three novels.

CONCLUSION

As explained in the first chapter, the development of utopian fiction later contributed to the creation of dystopian novels. Plato's description of an ideal state undeniably influenced Thomas More to write the book *Utopia* (1516). Although both writers attempt to clarify their ideal places, "cries of inconsistency have been raised on all sides" (Weisgerber, 1940, p. 4). In turn, the publishing and proliferation of More's ideas in *Utopia* affected many later philosophers and writers.

Most importantly for the purposes of this study, such discussions on the nature of the ideal state later gave rise to dystopian fiction. Notably, Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1924) created a dystopia "by the satirization of elements of the imagined society which the author intends to be seen as *manifestations* of its dysfunction rather than the sources" (Mikesell & Suggs, 1982, p. 89). Thus, the dystopian novel is used to express the writer's disapproval of a particular system or government.

The genre of dystopian fiction expanded with the publication of two more books: Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and George Orwell's *1984* (1949). These novels, in turn, have had a strong influence on contemporary dystopian fiction, as has been touched upon in this thesis. Besides, the contemporary dystopian novels explored in this study which touch on feminist issues are, in turn, influenced by Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), arguably the first dystopian (or utopian) novel to focus mainly on women.

A comparison of *The Handmaid's Tale* with the abovementioned contemporary novels, then, reveals some shared features. For example, the states mentioned in these books are totalitarian dictatorships. Their inhabitants are, consequently, placed under physical and psychological pressure, and their moral values and individuality are

threatened in the new social order. In this context, all these novels wish to convey a political message, indeed, a warning to the reader. Although the main theme in these three books is similar, they differ remarkably in the details, as has been touched upon in the first chapter. However, all three can be understood as heirs of Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. On this basis, these novels have been explored from a feminist perspective based on the theories of leading feminist thinkers and writers such as Beauvoir, Irigaray and Gilbert and Gubar. Besides, having been published in the 21st century, these novels not only make a connection with previous dystopian novels, they also help us to consider women's position today in comparison with the past. Thus, it is possible to say that the changes which have been made to women's rights today, while perhaps an improvement on women's earlier situation, are not very satisfying. Today, some women still have to choose whether to stay home or to keep working when they deliver a child, while abortion is still limited in some countries whether in connection to religion or population rate. Furthermore, most women are still trying to reach almost impossible beauty standards which have been created and imposed by celebrities or in Hollywood. Some of them even lose their lives seeking for the easy way to such standards. In short, there remarkable situations taking place in these novels help us to understand today's world better.

Vox (2018) presents a dystopian country where women's freedom to speak and write, their freedom to communicate is severely curtailed. The novel emphasizes that silencing adult women as a way of controlling their actions fails since, while it causes serious emotional disturbance, it doesn't change how they think. The situation may be different for girls brought up in such a society, however. Jean's six-year-old daughter Sonia, for instance, cannot properly develop her linguistic abilities due to these restrictions. Generally, the metal word-counter bracelet which women are forced to

wear symbolizes their restricted rights and the government's misogynist attitude. The broader message of the novel may be that women are silenced when they aren't accepted and seen as fully human in a patriarchal society. Therefore, women in *Vox*, represent 'the other' in terms of Beauvoir's feminist theory. Besides, these women are not allowed to work or have a social life. They are supposed to take care of the chores at home and are responsible for the needs of their family members. However, while women are restricted in several areas, men are not, and can even go to clubs to fulfil their sexual needs. However, having an extramarital or premarital relationship is forbidden for a woman, and may result in her being sentenced to endless silence (not being allowed to speak even a hundred words a day). Regarding all these themes, the novel successfully explains the psychological and emotional outcomes of being a woman, mother, and wife in such an extremely patriarchal society.

Red Clocks (2018) refers to similar themes as *Vox*. However, while it can be considered dystopian fiction, it can also be labelled as speculative fiction, as the events and characters evoke real-life issues. Unlike *Vox*, the novel consists of five different sub-plots based around five women characters. The themes of the novel are apparent in the depiction of these women's lives. Notably, there is a special emphasis on the theme of women's reproductive rights. While one of the characters tries to get pregnant in ways that are illegal in that society, another character seeks for abortion and faces with strict government rules. In this way, Zumas helps the reader to evaluate reproductive rights from two different points of views, because both abortion and in-vitro fertilization are forbidden in *Red Clocks*. These themes are reflected in the characters of Mattie and Ro respectively. Similarly, in other dystopian novels, even those without explicitly feminist themes, government regulation of reproduction, as well as sex and/or marriage, are widespread. However, attitudes to reproductive issues vary considerably

from novel to novel. In *Brave New World*, for instance, abortion is allowed and even encouraged by the World State; in *The Handmaid's Tale*, for instance, it is prohibited by the Gilead regime.

Beauvoir describes the troubles women have faced in this regard in general in patriarchal societies in the following excerpt:

There is no way to directly oblige a woman to give birth: all that can be done is to enclose her in situations where motherhood is her only option: laws or customs impose marriage on her, anticonception measures and abortion are banned, divorce is forbidden (Beauvoir, 1949/2010, p. 92).

Beauvoir's ideas are supported by other feminist writers, such as Cixous, who also argue that giving birth should depend on a woman's choice, it shouldn't be connected to society's expectations (Cixous, Cohen, & Cohen, 1976). Such limitations on women's reproductive rights, however, continue to affect women in many parts of the world even today.

Another important theme in the novel is that of woman not only as mother but also as wife, a theme that can be observed through the character of Susan, aka 'The Wife', in the novel. Unhappily married, Susan wants to take a break, however, the fact that she has two children proves an obstacle. Susan is a traditional wife in that, having sacrificed her education, she takes care of the home, children and her husband. Growing increasingly frustrated, however, Susan first tries to save her marriage by suggesting couple therapy, which her husband refuses. Susan then gives up saving the marriage and changes her attitude towards her husband, leading to the end of their marriage. Regarding this, by supporting women's freedom to divorce, Beauvoir says "a woman can at any moment demand restitution by a sudden divorce, which puts man at her

mercy” (p. 129). However, even today, in some regions, divorce is seen as a shame and, especially, a divorced woman is perceived and treated differently from a divorced man. Beauvoir also depicts the frustrations of women trapped in a traditional domestic role; their duties at home are endless and monotonous (p. 541). This can also be seen in *Vox*, where women are expected to take care of their homes while men are only responsible for the family income. In patriarchal societies, however, a woman is trapped in her marriage even if she is unhappy because marriage is seen as divine, and women are expected to be devoted to their husbands, even if their husbands are not devoted to them. The novel also depicts rebellious women through the character named Gin Percival aka The Mender, a herbalist who tries to cure women. As the writer admits, her story refers to (supposed) witches in history who were strictly punished because of not following the religious rules. In this sense, her trial in court may refer to historical witch trials. Therefore, The Mender’s story suggests a society which, in terms of women’s rights, has regressed to the early modern period. The novel also focuses on women writer’s problems with the character Eivor Minervudottir. Generally, then, the novel refers to different types of problems faced by women. Published only two years ago, the novel seems to assert that women are still dealing with patriarchal myths of femininity.

Compared with the other two novels, *Only Ever Yours* (2014) has a different structure and is perhaps better classified as dystopian than speculative fiction. In the novel, girls are produced biologically in laboratories which reminds us of *Brave New World*. Since the girls are seen as tools to maintain the population, they are encouraged to aspire to marriage. The school where they have to stay until they are selected as companions, concubines or chastities is a strict one, where the girls are indoctrinated into patriarchal attitudes towards womanhood. In this context, the novel connects with the beauty myth

which negatively affects the girls' relationships with each other. Their duty is to be loved, liked, and found agreeable by the others; the girls are therefore objectified through their bodies. Also, as Freida's story shows, having pre-marital sexual intercourse is strictly punished in *Only Ever Yours*, but only for women. This shows that women do not have freedom over their own bodies and they are misled about their looks; already in the 1940s Beauvoir writes that "the more the traits and proportions of a woman seemed contrived, the more she delighted the heart of the man because she seemed to escape the metamorphosis of natural things" (p. 213).

Throughout the study, then, several themes and characters have been analyzed to explain the effects of patriarchal myths of femininity – woman as silent, as mother and wife, and as beautiful object – on women's lives in these dystopian novels. Through these dystopian novels, these authors probably intended to raise awareness of these issues among women or, indeed, society at large. Each passing day, the rise in the number of dystopian novels dealing with women rights make it more possible to establish "feminist dystopia" as a genre in the future. Besides, several analyses carried out on these themes from a feminist perspective remind us of an important question: "What is a woman for?". For Beauvoir, "one is not born, but rather becomes, woman" (p. 331). And on the same page she supports the idea that "no biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society" (p. 331). Therefore, a woman is a human being, and she needs to exist as a human in society. Her biological being should not be used against her. She should not be limited according to the traditional and patriarchal expectations, rather, she needs to live her humanity and womanhood in harmony because she is the absolute, she is the essential. It is neither patriarchy, nor matriarchy, it is the humanity, feminism and equality that will take this world one step forward. In my opinion, then, through showing the worst scenario

regarding women's rights in these novels, these authors want to encourage women to continue to fight for their rights, and not to take them for granted. In this sense, *Vox*, *Red Clocks*, and *Only Ever Yours* give the same message; women shouldn't be othered or seen as monsters or angels, they are, rather, fully human beings.



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