FEMALE PERSPECTIVES IN THE
DYSTOPIAN NOVEL

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"In the face of a hostile world, retreat, escape, or simply a compensatory fantasy to cheer yourself up may be reasonable and humanly valuable responses. Holding up a critical mirror to the present to expose its negative characteristics and effects is also important, and indeed a necessary precursor to developing and pursuing positive alternatives. But it is not enough". (Levitas 14) In this letter to Lucy Sargisson in July 2001, Ruth Levitas speaks of "the possible role of Utopia in the contemporary world", and what the reasons for her pessimism concerning its potential are. (14) According to her, utopias are characterised by two functions which both have their merits, namely "compensation (or retreat or escapism) and critique". (14) Although Levitas speaks exclusively of utopias in the context of her letter, this dissertation aims at examining anti-utopian or dystopian narratives in which the critical function of the utopia is taken to its extreme. The turn of utopian to dystopian literature was already detectable from the last decade of the nineteenth century onwards, due to various social, political and ideological changes such as "the Marxist critique of capitalism", the decline of "the unlimited faith in the power of science", and "Darwin's theory of evolution" which knocked man off his pedestal and undermined the theory of God's "divine plan" for him. (Booker 1994b, 5-7) The explosion of great dystopian fictions, however, is generally situated over the course of the following century, examples of which are Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1924), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) and Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* (1962).

Since the dystopian novel partly emerged as a critique of utopian constructions which often turned a blind eye to the depressing reality of the world, I have dedicated the first chapter of this dissertation to the genre of the utopia and the specific features of its language use. In the second chapter, I turn to the evolution of utopian towards dystopian literature due to, for example, radical changes with regard to science and technology and the innovating
theories by Sigmund Freud and Friedrich Nietzsche. In this respect, I will also examine the four influential dystopias I mentioned above in order to take a closer look at the language which is used in it and the purposes which this language use serves.

In contrast to these four famous dystopias, the three novels I chose for my case studies are not merely dystopian but are all written by women and, in addition, they belong to the category of the 'feminist critical dystopia' (which are two aspects which do not automatically coincide). Dystopias are almost inevitably characterised by a critique on the social and political realities of their day and age, and it seems that more recent dystopian works have picked up on the growing interest in the position of women in society from the 1960s and 1970s onwards. In this period, the second wave of feminism "solidified into a political movement" and women fought against inequality with regard to, for example, sexuality and reproduction, whereas first-wave feminists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had campaigned mainly to obtain voting and property rights for women. (Hodgson-Wright 3) In other words, what was at stake in the latter half of the twentieth century was control over women's bodies and not so much rights for women in the legal sphere anymore.

Due to my investigation concerning the New Woman and marriage for my bachelorpaper, I was already familiar with the fact that women during the nineteenth century had been discouraged to pursue higher education or a literary career because eminent men such as Henry Maudsley believed that "it would be difficult for women to combine self-development or a career with successfully giving birth to and raising children". (Desmet 9) In addition, feminist activists often expressed their beliefs through writing, as a result of which some male opponents of the New Woman might have seen the act of writing as threatening. (Desmet 7) Because of this, I considered that language could function as an important instrument in the attempt to gain control over women and their bodies. This desire to control women surfaces on numerous occasions in feminist dystopias and the three novels which I
have chosen to analyse are Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). Due to my findings on the New Woman and writing, I decided to examine not only how women are represented in these novels but also how language is used to keep women in their subordinated position. However, as will become clear in the actual analysis of these case studies, suppressed individuals can use language to their advantage just as much as oppressors can. In sum, this dissertation aims at answering the following questions: "How are women represented in feminist dystopias and, with regard to these female characters, how is language used as an instrument of oppression or liberation in these works?".

In order to come to a better understanding of the framework that supports the feminist critical dystopian novel, I dedicated the part preceding the three case studies to the problem of female authorship in a patriarchal society and, in addition, in a literary genre – the dystopian one – which has been dominated by men for a very long time. In this respect, the work of feminist philosophers such as Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva has been of a considerable importance. Cixous' writings on 'l'écriture feminine', as well as Irigaray's and Kristeva's findings on the relationship between women and language structures form an interesting backdrop for the analysis of the novels and therefore I will briefly discuss their theories in the third chapter. By combining this framework with a thorough examination of three literary works, I intend to gain a greater insight into the role of women and language use in these dystopian novels.
1. Utopia, dystopia's ancestor

1.1 The utopian project

"We asked him many questions concerning all these things, to which he answered very willingly; we made no inquiries after monsters, than which nothing is more common; for everywhere one may hear of ravenous dogs and wolves, and cruel man-eaters, but it is not so easy to find states that are well and wisely governed". (More 10) When *Utopia* was published in 1516, many contemporary readers assumed that Thomas More had gathered up all his thoughts on a perfect society and had poured them into this work, originally written in Latin. However, the fact that 'utopia' can be read both as 'eu-topia' which means 'the good place' and as 'ou-topia', meaning 'no-place', suggests that More saw this ideal society as non-existent and even as unattainable. (Levitas 2) In fact, it would rather seem that he aimed at emphasising the contrast between the political chaos in his own day and age and the ideas on politics of the Utopians, thus constructing a "platform from which to discuss social issues in Europe". (Cassel vii)

The mere description of a blissful, perfect existence actually antedates More's *Utopia* by many years. Folk images of the land of Cockaigne, the 'lost city of gold' called El Dorado and the biblical Garden of Eden are just a few examples of utopian fantasy worlds which seem to have been pervasively present at all times and in all societies. (Kumar 17) According to More's more restricted definition, however, these fictional places are not to be seen as utopias. At a certain point they seem to lose touch with reality, whereas the utopia as it has been understood and practised in the last five hundred years in the West desires to stay "within the realm of the possible". (Kumar 18) By respecting "human and social materials at hand", these more recent utopian ideas often succeed in establishing in the reader the illusion of attainability which adds to its strength and attractiveness. (Kumar 18) This modern 'realistic' concept of the utopia is in fact founded upon the Enlightenment belief in the
eighteenth century that "the judicious application of reason and rationality could result in the essentially unlimited improvement of human society". (Booker 1994a, 4) This kind of reasoning – which placed high faith in science – bears a resemblance to the theories which would later be expounded by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the mid-nineteenth century. Marx' socialism was utopian up to a certain point – although this was strongly denied by its followers –, because it supported precisely those energies which would lead to a change in society, in contrast with ideologies which aim at preserving "the existing order of things". (Booker 1994a, 3-4)

But even utopian narratives in this 'realistic' sense of the word have known a considerable evolution since the publication of *Utopia* in the sixteenth century. In 1623, Sir Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* was published, describing the mythical island of Bensalem which was "sanctified to God, politically stable, socially conservative, morally pure and dedicated to the pursuit of science". (Bierman 492) Similarly, Johann Valentin Andreae created an ideal community in the form of Christianopolis on the island of Capharsalama, where he had been washed ashore after a shipwreck. In *City of the Sun* (1623), Tommasso Campanella depicts his – in this case theocratic – version of a utopian society where all goods, women and children are held in common. Just like *Utopia* was constructed as a response to the hierarchical, old-fashioned society of the early modern period, these works "relate implicitly or explicitly critically to the contemporary societal situation within which they are produced". (Vosskamp 264) As time progressed these writers functioned as exemplars for authors who wished to write in the utopian tradition, even if they actually intended to satirise these works of literature – as is the case with Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). (Kumar 18) The first target of ridicule Swift chose for this novel is humankind itself and he attacked it by making the protagonist 6 inches high and subsequently 72 feet tall. The other element he sought to satirise was a literary genre, namely that of the 'traveller's tale'. The
satirical intent of this last novel seems to indicate a significant turn in the evolution of the utopian genre. I intend to take a brief look at older works of a utopian kind and investigate how this genre evolved through time – eventually leading up to the creation of anti-utopian or dystopian works of literature –, but first I will examine one particular element of the utopian novel, namely its language, to find out what makes this fictional form unique and worth studying.

1.2 Utopia and the use of language

According to Wilhelm Vosskamp, a defining quality of the utopian genre is that it is both "narrative and imagistic". (264) For a utopian project to be realistic – a subtype which constitutes our focus of interest here –, it needs to establish a certain interplay with the realities familiar to the reader. In other words, it "consists of a specific textual mobilisation of images of a satirically described reality and the sketching of conceptually counterfactual oppositional images". (264) Because of this, it is important to realise that utopias are "more directly connected with historical contexts than other texts". (264) Vosskamp argues further that utopias show three central ideal-typological characteristics, which refer both to textual strategies and semantic potential. I quote them literally:

They have to do with an impulse of negation (in the sense of the utopian conceptions' critical difference in contrast to their respective societal realities); with the literary construction of anticipation (in the sense of anticipating the future); and with a dichotomisation of the conjunctive and indicative, in the sense of a category of possibility ('If there is a sense to reality, there must also be a sense to the possible.'.). (265)
The most important of these three principles is the one that involves negation. Because they are constructed as reactions to their "respective pre-existing realities", literary utopias are based upon a "negational operation" of these. (Vosskamp 265)

In this respect, the work of Darko Suvin on the poetics of the science fiction genre in general has been of some significance. He argues that utopia is "the socio-political subgenre of science fiction" and that science fiction is characterised by either radically different characters or a radically different context of the story, as a result of which it maintains a close relationship with other literary sub-genres such as the "Greek and Hellenistic 'blessed island' stories, the 'fabulous voyage' from Antiquity, the Renaissance and Baroque 'utopia'" and even "anti-utopias". (1979, 61; 1972, 372) In other words, utopia, dystopia and science fiction are all characterised by the presentation of otherness and therefore they show a certain discontinuity from 'realism'. (Williams 196) As for language, according to Suvin "the hope of finding in the unknown the ideal environment, tribe, state, intelligence or other aspect of the Supreme Good" gives birth to "the possibility of other strange, co-variant coordinate systems and semantic fields". (1972, 374) However, what characterises both the non-fictional and non-factual form of the "localized daydream" or utopia – examples of which are respectively Colombus' letter on the Eden beyond the Orinoco mouth and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* – is that the events are reported in a factual way. This factual reporting leads to the confrontation of an established set of norms with a possible new set of norms, which is known in literary theory as "the attitude of estrangement". It implies that although the reader or viewer recognises the subject, at the same time it seems unfamiliar to him or her. (Suvin 1972, 374)

In other words, familiar language is used to guide the reader to accept a new, possibly controversial setting. This aspect is also considered to be inherent to the dystopian novel, which I will discuss in more detail later on.
2. Dystopia, a future nightmare

2.1 From utopia to dystopia

Since the very beginning, the invention of these utopian worlds or states as a political project has been received quite critically. Aristotle already commented on his teacher Plato's *The Republic* around 380 BC, attacking amongst other things the sacrifice of "values of individual self-fulfillment in order to achieve the values of group cohesion" in this ideal city-state. (Richter 5) This does not immediately imply that Aristotle rejected all utopian views. He expressed his own thoughts on an ideal society in *Politics*, although the considerations he made concerning Plato's work somewhat constrained his ideas. (Richter 5)

The word 'dystopia' was coined by John Stuart Mill in 1868 and it is derived from the Greek 'dis topos', meaning 'a bad place'. (Milner 827) In the light of this dissertation, then, I think it is first of all important to determine what we take to mean by the concept of 'the dystopian novel'. The definition as given by Anne Cranny-Francis is, in my opinion, the most suitable and straightforward one: she describes it as "the textual representation of a society apparently worse than the writer/reader's own". (125) In this respect, the loss of privacy, diversity and change in such utopian models as Plato's as a result of the emphasis on "community, identity and stability" has been feared by many authors, especially during the latter half of the twentieth century. As Guy Baeten has suggested, it is generally agreed that the literary genre of the utopia has been particularly influential during the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, whereas the period following the 1950s is rather marked by the rise of the dystopian genre. (141)

One very famous account of an imaginary dystopian society characterised by dehumanisation and collectivisation is described in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, published in 1932. Huxley situates his technologically perfect world seven centuries in the future, at a time when man has finally "succeeded in eliminating disease, aggression, war,
anxiety, suffering, guilt, envy and grief". (Kass 312) What turns this story into an undisputed dystopia, however, is that all of this has been achieved at the expense of literature and art forms, religious beliefs and even friendship and family relationships. Seeing as how these elements are what separate us from animals, they are of crucial importance in the lives of human beings. The inhabitants of this world do not even realise what they have lost and, contenting themselves with "psycho-active drugs" and "high-tech amusements", have become completely dehumanised. (Kass 312)

Huxley was by no means the first to express such fears about the future in works of a dystopian kind. In fact, he was strongly influenced by the Russian Yevgeny Zamyatin who was the author of the satirical novel *We*, published 8 years earlier than *Brave New World*. In this work we encounter a similar dehumanisation as a result of complete collectivisation and a strong limitation of "freedom of thought, action and imagination". (Richter 6) Although in most cases the reader would expect a victory of reason – characteristic of this novel – to be the foundation for a utopian narrative, this work has been constructed as a protest against the destruction of freedom and individuality by "rational but heartless fanatics". (Richter 6)

Because both Zamyatin's and Huxley's novel have often been considered as representative of the dystopian genre I will discuss them in more detail later on, together with George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*.

In 1999, Russell Jacoby claimed in his *The End of Utopia* that the "utopian spirit – a sense that the future could transcend the present – has vanished". (xi) With the growing importance of the dystopia from the 1960s onwards, we are indeed inclined to say that utopian dreams are not articulated anymore. However, it should not be forgotten that, by showing us how terrible the future could actually be, the hope for an ideal society still lies hidden beneath the gloomy exteriors of dystopian narratives. This means that utopias are in fact still present in our culture, albeit "in the disguise of dystopias". (Mohr 3) This means that the dystopian
genre is indirectly built upon utopian narratives – more particularly by trying to formulate an alternative to these sometimes rather naive ideas –, but it is in many ways very different from its utopian counterpart. In what follows I will investigate the historical and political factors which have contributed to the rise of the dystopian genre and take a closer look at some of its most famous examples.

2.2. The rise of the dystopian novel

2.2.1 Historical and political context

2.2.1.1 Science and technology

According to Walter L. Fogg, the role of science and technology has been quite significant in the evolution from the construction of utopian worlds to more satirical utopian narratives and eventually to dystopian novels. (60) With the rise of modern science in the seventeenth century, the belief that the accumulation of knowledge could lead to a better world both socially and morally became more and more accepted. Although this faith in technological progress seems to have many correspondences with a typically utopian point of view, it does not desire the stability which characterises an idealised vision of utopia. On top of that, it has been suggested that utopias show "an atavistic desire to return to what is perceived as an earlier better time in history or in one's own life" – while scientific progress is only oriented towards the future. (Booker 1994a, 5) Nevertheless, science does seem to have played an important role in the development of utopian ideas and its eventual turn to dystopian visions.

Plato felt that the specialisation of skills and division of labour contributed to the advancement of society and civilisation, but even he already realised that these developing skills and man's inventions could effectuate great social changes. It is, however, important to distinguish science in Ancient Greece from what was understood by this term in the
Renaissance and in our own day and age. For Plato, the purpose of science was the theoretical understanding of the order of nature. With the rise of modern science in the Renaissance, by contrast, the emphasis lies on the utility of knowledge, obtained by scientific research. (Fogg 59-61) In Bacon's *New Atlantis*, for example, the application of advanced technologies does not only serve very practical ends, but it also adds "a sense of purpose and direction" to society. (Booker 1994a, 5) While Bacon still seems to have a very optimistic attitude towards technology and social progress, contemporary dystopias and science fiction seem to support the idea that "technology is not only beyond the control of society but that man is still largely unconscious of the profound revolution he is bringing about". (Fogg 60) This tendency was already rising in the nineteenth century, when the industrial revolution in Western Europe led to the exploitation of millions of workmen who were suddenly completely dependent on machinery and the process of mechanisation. The growing tension between the advantages and disadvantages of the pursuit of science clearly shows in various nineteenth-century utopian visions. In Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward: 2000-1887*, published in 1888, the protagonist suddenly finds himself in a socialist utopia brought about in the year 2000. In this work, mechanisation is seen as inducing positive changes and as contributing to "industrial efficiency". (Booker 1994a, 6) Samuel Butler, by contrast, created in *Erewhon* (1872) a fictional country – which was supposedly a critique of Victorian society – where machinery is entirely absent because this is looked upon as potentially dangerous. Butler had actually conceived this idea after having read Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*. By applying the concept of Darwinian evolution to mechanical instead of biological entities, he introduced the possibility that machines could develop a consciousness and therefore could become a threat to the human race. (Mudford 14) In sum, as technology was on the rise during the nineteenth century contradictory opinions were accumulating and many began to see the dangers of scientific process along with the benefits of it.
2.2.1.2. The influence of Nietzsche's and Freud's theories

It has been suggested that not only developments in the field of technology but also new ideas in the ideological and philosophical domain – amongst other about this technological progress – have contributed to the modern turn towards skepticism and dystopian thinking. When we take a look at the theories of Friedrich Nietzsche and (more importantly) of Sigmund Freud, we find many correspondences with contemporary dystopian ideas. (Booker 1994a, 7) In what follows I will briefly discuss the importance of their work with regard to the subject of this dissertation.

Already at the very beginning of The Birth of Tragedy, written in 1871, Nietzsche articulates his concerns about the place that science was occupying in the life of man and his mistrust of scientific pursuits in general:

Indeed, what does all scientific enquiry in general mean considered as a symptom of life? What is the point of all that science and, even more serious, where did it come from? What about that? Is scientific scholarship perhaps only a fear and an excuse in the face of pessimism, a delicate self-defence against -- the Truth? And speaking morally, something like cowardice and falsehood? Speaking unmorally, a clever trick? (6)

Further on, he reacts against the growing influence of technology which seems to have become a sort of God to man and he warns against man's impulse to achieve complete knowledge and establish final truths, arguing that

It places an earthy consonance in place of a metaphysical consolation, indeed a particular deus ex machina, the god of machines and crucibles, that is, the force of nature, recognized and used in the service of a higher egoism; it believes in correcting the world through knowledge, a life led by scientific knowledge, and thus is really in a position to confine the individual man in the
narrowest circle of problems which can be solved, inside which he can
cheerfully say to life: "I want you. You are worth knowing." (209-210)

By striking out against "the growing mechanisation of life" and even the promotion of science
as "a new form of religion", Nietzsche anticipates dystopian novels such as Huxley's *Brave New World* which is also characterised by a complete mechanisation of human life. (Booker 1994a, 7) He goes on to argue that the connection between science and religion is actually a very close one, due to the fact that both strive for a univocal truth. This drive for general verities could be seen as a general desire for "mastery and dominance", therefore making totalitarian regimes possible. (Booker 1994a, 8) In my opinion, Nietzsche does make a significant point here: if we compare the regime dominated by science and mechanisation in *Brave New World* with the totalitarian theocracy described in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, we see that both of these power structures are based upon the attempt to press a definite, invariable truth upon its subjects. Atwood's novel is one of the three works which I will investigate in the final part of my dissertation.

As I have already mentioned, Nietzsche felt that this obsession with finding the truth through science "confine[s] the individual man in the narrowest circle of problems which can be solved". (210) However, to cope with this confinement he felt that art could serve as a weapon of resistance. Martin Heidegger later suggested something very similar in his "The Question Concerning Technology", putting a strong emphasis on poetry in particular:

> Once there was a time when the bringing-forth of the true into the beautiful was called *technē*. The *poiēsis* of the fine arts was also called *technē*. (…) Why did art bear the modest name *technē*? Because it was a revealing that brought forth and made present, and therefore belonged within *poiēsis*. (…) The poetical thoroughly pervades every art, every revealing of presence into the beautiful. (…) Essential reflection upon technology and decisive confrontation within it must happen in a
realm that is, on the one hand, akin to the essence of technology and, on the other, fundamentally different from it. Such a realm is art. (113)

This idea that art – and more specifically the poetical – can make a stand against and offer an alternative for the mechanical processes of technology, will be of significant importance in the discussion of *The Handmaid's Tale* in which the protagonist manages to regain a part of her own identity through the use of poetic language.

The ideas of the Jewish-Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud seem to have been important in the evolution towards dystopian skepticism as well. His pessimistic view of the future and the skeptical description of human society in *Civilization and its Discontents*, published in 1930, in many ways remind us of the dystopian range of ideas. He argues that it is natural for humankind to pursue happiness but that this can never be achieved because "civilization is by its very nature antagonistic to certain basic human impulses and therefore fundamentally a source not of happiness, but of unhappiness". (Booker 1994a, 9-10)

Civilisation, and particularly government, aims at limiting individual liberty and because anarchy and primitivism are seen by Freud as even worse, he emphasises that an ideal society does not and cannot exist. (Booker 1994a, 10) He goes on to claim that man by nature has a number of primitive instincts – such as incest, cannibalism and killing – which civilisation has successfully been able to suppress, but that many of man's "rebellious and destructive tendencies" still remain unchecked. (Quinodoz 229) In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud explains that "The existence of this inclination to aggression, which we can detect in ourselves and justly presume to be present in others, is the factor which disturbs our relations with our neighbor and which forces civilization into such a high expenditure [of energy]." (112)
Similarly to Nietzsche, Freud felt that it is religion that restrains man's freedom in the most vigorous way in order to maintain this civilisation. In "Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices" (1907), he calls religion a "universal obsessional neurosis" which is based on the need for illusion which, according to Freud, all human beings are subject to. (127) Men are still affected by the infant's sense of helplessness and the longing for a parental figure which they see as both protective and frightening. (Quinodoz 230) Thus, to fulfil these needs religious beliefs find an entrance in human life and totalitarian leaders such as Hitler and Stalin – who are both admired and feared – rather easily find acceptance with the public. Freud's rejection of religion is most clearly exposed in Civilization and its Discontents, in which he associates "dystopian governments of fiction and the totalitarian governments of modern reality" with the mass-delusion brought about by religion. (Booker 1994a, 11) The "monologic demand for conformity" that, according to Freud, is required by religious beliefs will be a point of particular interest in my analysis of Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale. (Booker 1994a, 11)

Freud's theory differs substantially from Nietzsche's ideas in that Freud sees science as the one thing that could help human beings evolve towards a greater maturity, claiming that "our science is no illusion". (1927, 71) Here we detect a sort of optimism – which is rather rare in Freud's works –, in the form of a belief that a more rational existence in the future could be possible after all, through an unwavering faith in science.

The ideas of Freud and Nietzsche appear to have been of significant importance in the turn towards a more dystopian frame of mind, and in many cases we can still find hints of their theories in contemporary dystopian novels. This is, amongst others, the case for the novels by Piercy, Carter and Atwood which I will examine in more detail at the end of this dissertation; but first I would like to take a look at some famous dystopian novels which have preceded them.
2.2.2 Famous dystopias

2.2.2.1 We, Yevgeny Zamyatin (1924)

As many dystopian works, Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* shows a close connection with the political events at the time when it was written, in 1924. The Russian Provisional Government had been overthrown in the October Revolution five years earlier, as a result of which power now came to lie with the local soviets or Bolsheviks. (Suny 31) It was Zamyatin's opinion that certain aspects of the ideology of the Revolution endangered the new socialist state, more particularly "the canonization of Bolshevik Communism as the sole Truth" which could easily develop into totalitarianism. (Shane 22) As a reaction to the strong emphasis put on science, technology and rationality by Soviet leaders such as Lenin, *We* expresses a fear of dehumanisation and an ill-considered application of overly rational solutions to every problem. (Booker 1994b, 292) The story is situated in the twenty-ninth century, in a society called the 'One State' which is completely dominated by scientific and rational principles. (Rosenshield 51) As a result, its inhabitants have been dehumanised and this is most clearly exemplified by the fact that they do not have a name, but a number. Women are designated by an even number preceded by a vowel, whereas men are marked by a consonant and an odd number. Their freedom of action is very limited and activities are determined by "the principles of effective industrial management". (Booker 1994b, 292) In order to monitor these activities, buildings are constructed out of glass and the city is completely surrounded by a 'Green Wall' which keeps the untamed, primitive nature separated from the inhabitants.

The critique which Aristotle had already formulated about Plato's *The Republic*, namely the sacrifice of values of individual self-fulfilment in order to achieve the values of group cohesion, resurfaces in *We*.\(^1\) Conformity is of major concern in the One State and to suppress every impulse towards individuality everyone has to march in step and is dressed

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\(^1\) c.f. Chapter 2.1. From utopia to dystopia
identically. It would seem that what the leaders of this society fear most is emotion, which they intend to check by, for example, strictly regulating sex by the official bureaucracy. Given that art and poetry are equally seen as engendering 'subversive' feelings, they are also regulated by stringent rules and are deprived from any form of personal improvisation. Music is composed on the basis of mathematical principles and poetry has been reduced to a mere didactical instrument to honour the One State. (Booker 1994b, 293) Above all, poetry is designed to be useful:

How could it have happened, I wondered, that the ancients did not immediately see how completely idiotic their literature and poetry was. The immense majestic power of the artistic word was squandered for absolutely nothing. It's simply ridiculous – everybody wrote about whatever popped into his head. (...) Poetry today is not some impudent nightingale's piping – poetry is government service, poetry is usefulness. (Zamyatin 66-67)

It is significant that art forms are often the first victims of repression in dystopian narratives. They are the most subjective expression of individuality and are therefore seen as a threat in societies whose stability is built upon the principle of conformity. It is my firm opinion that language – as an intrinsic part of art forms such as poetry – plays an important role in this expression of individuality and that, consequently, it can also function as liberating for any human being. Leaders of totalitarian regimes in many cases understand the power of language and discourse and intend to turn it to their advantage. This is the reason why language can be potentially subversive but can also be employed as a repressive instrument, as is the case in many dystopian constructs. This will prove to be a very important aspect in Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* and Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, and therefore discourse and language constitutes a point of special interest in my discussion of these novels.
The novel is constructed as a diary of the story's protagonist, called D-503. His task in the One State consists in supervising the construction of a spaceship, the Integral, to spread the ideology of "happiness without freedom" around the universe. (Rosenshield 51) The power which is assigned to language already becomes obvious in the very first pages of the diary, in which D-503 explains that language will be the State's first tool in this project: "it will be our duty to compel them to be happy. But before resorting to arms, we shall try the power of words". (Booker 1994b, 294) D-503 appears to be a model citizen at first, but soon he finds himself experiencing a number of irrational desires when he decides to write a praise poem about the Integral. The emotional and imaginative forces that are condemned by the policy of the State seem to have found an entrance in his mind and he describes his feelings as follows: "I write this and I feel my cheeks on fire. This is probably similar to what a woman experiences when she first senses within herself the pulse of a new, still tiny, blind human being. It is I, and at the same time, it is not I". (Zamyatin 4) He begins to develop ideas that are at odds with the State's devotion to rationalism and his budding doubts are further fomented when he falls in love with a subversive woman called I-330. Eventually, she persuades him to join the 'Mephis', an underground revolutionary organisation plotting against the One State. (Booker 1994b, 294-295)

Although *We*'s pessimism indicates that this work is in many aspects a dystopian narrative, the subversion of D-503 through poetry and his sexual relationship with I-330 suggests that this world is not completely devoid of hope. It seems that imaginative forces and interhuman relationships are controlled by the One State only with great difficulty and eventually they even cause the system to break down. The Green Wall is destroyed by an explosion and a true revolution appears to be on its way, but the leaders of the One State intervene by ordering a lobotomisation for all its citizens in order to remove their imagination. Even though we do not know if the revolution ever truly comes to an end, the novel ends with
a very pessimistic scene in which D-503 absent-mindedly watches the public torturing and execution of I-330. (Booker 1994b, 295) The circle seems to be completed again when D-503 resumes his defense of the One State: "And I hope we shall be victorious. What is more, I am sure that we shall be. Because reason must prevail". (Zamyatin 225)

The shift in the protagonist's frame of mind is most discernible in the use of language which gradually changes as we read on in his diary. (Rosenshield 53) Whereas his style is clearly marked by mathematical principles in the beginning, describing objects and humans as geometric shapes, it becomes more and more permeated with emotional, metaphorical and poetic elements (Rosenshield 54): "everything was suffused with elasticity, with pearl, gold, rose, red. The whole world – a single unencompassable woman, and we, in its very womb, still unborn, are joyfully ripening. And it is clear to me, perfectly clear: all this is for me: the sun, the fog, the rose, the gold – for me". (Zamyatin 71) The poet in D-503 clearly starts to overrule his identity as a mathematician and he is overwhelmed by the language of his senses, instead of his mind. An example of this can be found in the scene where he undergoes a peculiar experience of synaesthesia: "Isn't it strange: the dying rays of the sun fall at the very same angle as the rays of the rising sun, and yet everything is completely different; the rose is different – now it is quiet, slightly bitterish, and in the morning – it will again be resonant and sizzling". (Zamyatin 100) Through his relationship with I-330, D-503 discovers love and the liberating force of poetic language, although this is just as easily taken away when he is stripped of his imagination by the government of the One State. When he rereads the emotional outbursts in his diary, he recognises them as his own but at the same time considers them to be alien to himself. In one of the last entries of the diary, he says that "The handwriting is mine; in fact, it's the very same handwriting, but fortunately, only the handwriting. No delirium, no absurd metaphors, no feelings; only facts. Because I am well. I am completely, absolutely well!". (Zamyatin 224) Nevertheless, during a certain interval of
time D-503 discovered the power of language and used it not as a sterile instrument to define reality, but as an expression of his most personal, subjective identity.

2.2.2 Brave New World, Aldous Huxley (1932)

Another important work in the dystopian genre was written by Aldous Huxley in 1932. The main idea behind *Brave New World* can best be summarised by a statement which Huxley himself pronounced more than twenty-five years after the publication of this novel: "In the field of mass communication as in almost every other field of enterprise, technological process has hurt the Little Man and helped the Big Man." (Kedzie 209) The rise of technology plays a very important role in this work and it seems that Huxley sees this progress as a turn for the worse. The most obvious example is the fact that reproduction in his fictional society has become completely artificial: the mother's eggs are fertilised and the babies grow in bottles instead of in the womb. (Astrachan 9) The process of making children is in fact technologically extremely advanced, seeing that each child can be conditioned – from its very first life stages on – to like and to be apt at the work they will be assigned to do. At their conception children are divided into one of five classes which range from the most intelligent class of the Alpha's to the lowest group of the Epsilons, who are bred to do the dirty jobs. (Astrachan 9) In other words, citizens of this society are not bred to be individuals but representatives of their class and there is no room for personal development. This mechanical breeding process also entails that love or intimacy have no part in the producing of children and sex is only used as an instrument to pursue pleasures. Everything in the society of *Brave New World* actually seems to be dedicated to the bringing of happiness – such as drugs and popular culture –, but their real purpose is to suppress any subversive ideas citizens might have and to "divert attention from social problems". (Booker 1994b, 171) This drive for pleasure is publically encouraged because it leads people to buy things and this keeps the
economy going. In fact, *Brave New World's* consumer society appears to be based on "an exaggerated version of capitalism in which new products must be constantly developed and marketed to stimulate both production and consumption". (Booker 1994b, 171) In order to reduce the risk of a revolt to the absolute minimum, the government provides the inhabitants with a drug called 'soma' which induces a state of bliss but does not cause a hang-over as alcohol would. The drug is described in the work to have "[a]ll the advantages of Christianity and alcohol; none of their defects". (Huxley 42) The citizens are indoctrinated to reject all forms of religion in order to increase their feeling of contentment with the present situation and in school they are taught that "History is bunk". This rejection of the past is supposed to guarantee that individuals do not start comparing the present with older ways of living since that could lead to rebellion. (Booker 1994b, 173)

As in Zamyatin's *We*, the leaders of *Brave New World's* community above all seem to strive for conformity but one or more individuals are not willing to resign without a struggle. The Alpha intellectual Bernard Marx, for example, is seen by his friends as an ill-adjusted specimen who received too much alcohol as a foetus and as a result has a number of strange, individual ideas. He longs to establish a permanent sexual relationship with Lenina Crowne, something which is frowned upon in this society where "everyone belongs to everyone else". (Watts 76) On a visit to an Indian reservation, Lenina and Bernard meet 'John the Savage', who represents everything which could be possibly disruptive. While Bernard is not a conscious rebel because he does not manage to fit in even though he really wants to, John has always lived outside the strictures of the World State and therefore has not been conditioned like Bernard. (Booker 1994b, 173) This 'savage' man owns the complete works of Shakespeare, which have been banned in Bernard's community and contrast starkly with the popular culture there. However, John is taken aback to such an extent by the discrepancy between Bernard's world and the expectations he had built up from reading Shakespeare's
works, that he completely withdraws into himself. Instead of becoming a rebellious force who is determined to induce change in this sterile, mechanised world, he experiences strong feelings of alienation and in the end he is driven to suicide. (Booker 1994b, 174-175)

The reader is thus left with a very bleak vision of 'the brave new world', where technology has reached unseen heights but in the end only serves to enslave instead of liberate human beings. The pursuit of happiness in this work through sex, drugs and popular culture might lead us to consider the society in this work as a hedonistic utopia at first, but very soon it becomes clear that its inhabitants are only happy in the most superficial way because they have never learnt what individual liberty feels like. All of this fits in with the mood which appears to reign in many dystopias, namely one of gloom and bleakness. One of George Orwell's most famous works *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the subject of the next section, appears to be no exception.

2.2.2.3 Nineteen Eighty-Four, George Orwell (1949)

Contrary to *Brave New World*, the use of technology in George Orwell's dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* does not claim to improve life for human beings. After the world has been divided into three superstates as a result of a global war – Eurasia, Eastasia and Oceania –, a political group called the Party takes control of Oceania which was formerly known as England or Britain. The protagonist, Winston Smith, lives in the largest province called Airstrip One where everything is supervised by 'Big Brother', the party leader. From Winston's description of this character in the novel we can assume that he has much in common with what we call a dictator, one who above all desires to be considered a deity:

> At the apex of the pyramid comes Big Brother. Big Brother is infallible and all-powerful. Every success, every achievement, every victory, every scientific discovery, all knowledge, all wisdom, all happiness, all virtue, are held to issue
directly from his leadership and inspiration. (...) His function is to act as a focusing point for love, fear, and reverence, emotions which are more easily felt towards an individual than towards an organization. (Orwell 257-258)

In order to maintain his superior status, Big Brother constantly bombards the population with propaganda. In this process, Winston plays an important role because he revises history records at the 'Minitrue' – the Ministry of Truth – to make every decision the Party has ever made the correct one. Technology is put to its best use for propaganda as well, through huge television screens which monitor the inhabitants' activities and at the same time are used to indoctrinate viewers with the Party's policy. Religion is molded to suit the Party's interest, art and culture are used to express ideas only authorised by the government and sexuality is strictly regulated to avoid personal attachment. (Booker 1994b, 208-209) Just as in Brave New World, it seems that the oppressor's greatest enemy is emotion and that it is therefore necessary to keep its subjects in a constant state of intellectual sedation. Nonetheless, as the story progresses it becomes clear that not all individuals can be kept under control. Winston Smith takes up an illicit sexual relationship with a woman named Julia, because he feels that "[t]he sexual act, successfully performed, was rebellion" and that "[d]esire was thoughtcrime". (Orwell 87) However, in tune with the pessimistic overtone of the novel, their subversive behaviour eventually leads to nothing. Both of them are brainwashed by the authorities and the novel ends with the assertion that Winston "had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother". (Orwell 371)

It is significant that once again, language is used as one of the most important instruments of oppression and indoctrination. In Nineteen Eighty-Four this is taken to extremes with the invention of a new language called 'Newspeak'. In the appendix of the novel, Newspeak is described as "the official language of Oceania (...) devised to meet the ideological needs of Ingsoc, or English Socialism". (Orwell 372) In his essay "Politics and the
English language", Orwell already indicates his belief that language can and is often used as an instrument of social control. It is marked by the interests of the speaker and can therefore never be completely 'neutral'. (Lutz ix) One is inevitably influenced by the kind of language one hears and employs, something which the leaders of Oceania eagerly make use of. As Lutz has suggested, in the case of Newspeak "the thoughts, inspirations, and ideas that could lead to disorder are controlled, even eliminated, through the control of language". (17) In other words, for the inhabitants of Oceania to see the world as the Party does, the most effective way is to make them speak like the Party does. In the novel, Winston Smith's torturer puts it as follows: "Reality exists in the human mind, and nowhere else. Not in the individual mind, which can make mistakes, and in any case soon perishes; only in the mind of the Party, which is collective and immortal. Whatever the Party holds to be the truth is truth. It is impossible to see reality except by looking through the eyes of the Party". (Lutz 17) To express this reality as the Party sees it, Newspeak has been stripped of all undesirable words and the unorthodox meaning of the ones that remain has been eliminated. The function of Newspeak, then, is above all to accommodate such mental processes which are described in the novel as 'doublethink' (Lutz 17):

   In Oldspeak it is called, quite frankly, 'reality control'. (...) DOUBLETHINK means the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them. The Party intellectual knows in which direction his memories must be altered; he therefore knows that he is playing tricks with reality; but by the exercise of DOUBLETHINK he also satisfies himself that reality is not violated. (Orwell 264)

We can conclude from this example that language in this dystopian society is used as an extreme measure to achieve the most vigorous kind of mind control.
It becomes increasingly clear that in each of these famous dystopian novels language and discourse have their significance in one way or the other, whether they are used as an instrument of oppression by the ruling party or as a liberating device which signals a state of individual rebellion. This once more underpins, because of its seemingly overwhelming importance in the genre of the dystopian novel, my choice to focus on language use in my discussion of *Woman on the Edge of Time*, *The Passion of New Eve* and *The Handmaid's Tale*.

### 2.2.2.4 A Clockwork Orange, *Anthony Burgess (1962)*

An example of a more recent, rather well-known dystopian narrative was written by Anthony Burgess in 1962. *A Clockwork Orange* tells the story of Alex, leader of a teenage gang settled in London, who fill their days with stealing, beating and raping innocent citizens. In the beginning of the novel, Alex seems to be running the town together with his mates Dim, Pete and Georgie, scaring everyone to death with their violent acts. However, at a certain point they plan to break into an old woman's house, but fail miserably. Alex's friends end up betraying him, leaving him to take the blame for the woman's death. He is sentenced to fourteen years of imprisonment and during his stay in jail he takes up an interest in the Bible, as a result of which the prison's chaplain takes Alex under his wing. In spite of appearances, Alex has not lost his old ways because while reading the Bible he keeps entertaining violent fantasies. When Alex gets wind of an experimental procedure which is performed on detainees and which allows them to reintegrate in society, he immediately signs up. The process, known by the name of 'Ludovico's Technique', is based on brainwashing and eliminates the subject's power to choose. The doctors who lead the experiment strap Alex to a chair and force him to watch violent films, while injecting him with fluids which induce physical illness. By force of association, Alex feels the same illness every time he sees a
violent act or hears the classical music which accompanied the images. He is released from prison, as human proof that the technique is successful and as a walking billboard for the government who is trying to reduce crime in the city. However, opponents of the authorities get their hands on Alex and they use his sensitivity to classical music and violence in an attempt to make him commit suicide, which would be very bad publicity for the government. To prevent this from happening, Alex is taken to hospital and doctors reverse the effects of Ludovico's Technique in his sleep. (Boscaljon 771-772) He no longer feels nausea at the sight of violence or when he hears classical music, but he finds that it simply does not interest him anymore. He wants to find a wife and have children, just like his friend Pete has, and he concludes that he has just outgrown his violent past. In the last chapter, he contemplates on the effects of youth on men:

But youth is only being in a way like it might be an animal. No, it is not just being an animal so much as being like one of those malenky toys you viddy being sold in the streets, like little chellovecks made out of tin and with a spring inside and then a winding handle on the outside and you wind it up grrrr grrr grrr and off it itties, like walking, O my brothers. But it itties in a straight line and bangs straight into things bang bang and it cannot help what it is doing. Being young is like being like one of these malenky machines. (Burgess 217)

Although he tries to explain this to his son when he gets older, he understands that it is a phase that the teenager will go through just like his father. In sum, the world will go round as it always has, like a big orange being turned and turned again in God's hands.

The reason that I included *A Clockwork Orange* here is that its language use has been a vexed topic in the discussion of this novel. Alex and his gang members have developed a dialect called 'nadsat' which only they can speak and which is characterised by Russian roots.
Contrary to *Nineteen Eighty-Four's* Newspeak, this new language is not used as an instrument of oppression by the authorities, but rather as a form of rebellion for the 'nadsats' who speak it. (Booker 1994b, 95) It is significant that Burgess chose to incorporate Russian in this novel because it might function as "a parody of Western paranoia over the potential influence of Communist infiltration on the hearts and minds of capitalist youths". He adds that it enhances the dystopian feel because Russia is often – perhaps subconsciously – associated by British and American readers with oppression. (Booker 1994b, 95) The use of this uncommon kind of language does not only "further a sense of solidarity among the nadsats", but "the plural sources of this language invest it with a heteroglossia that powerfully opposes any attempt at the imposition of monological ideas". On top of this, Alex is in the advantage because he can speak both nadsat and the 'official' language, shifting effortlessly in and out of it. (Booker 1994b, 96) It has been suggested that this slang is used by Alex to shift the attention away from the violence when he narrates his nighttime's actions. In the scene where the gang beats up a writer, he describes the face of the victim as a "litso [face] all purple and dripping away like some very special sort of a juicy fruit". (Seed 187) As the novel progresses, it becomes clear that the protagonist is in fact a skilled narrator who is gifted with a great imagination and that 'nadsat' is a language permeated with creativity.

With regard to this dissertation, the observations of the feminist literary critic Elaine Showalter prove to be of great use. As Booker has suggested, her ideas about the search for an alternative feminine language could also be applied to *A Clockwork Orange*. Since this feminine language is necessarily conceived within the "matrix of conventional masculine-oriented language", it would have to be "double-voiced". (Showalter 1982, 34) This implies that marginalised groups, although they use the language of the dominant group, are able to express themselves in a genuine way because "the dominance is never complete". (Booker 1994b, 96) An example of this is to be found in Alex's narration of the meeting with his Post-
Corrective Adviser by reason of his absence at school: "A rather intolerable pain in the head, brother, sir,' I said in my gentleman's [voice]. 'I think it should be clear by this afternoon". (emphasis added) (Burgess 37)

I hope that, through the discussion of these four novels, I have made clear what a substantial role language can play in works of the dystopian genre. The focal point of this dissertation, however, does not simply lie with the use of language but with the expression of the female voice in particular. In addition, I intend to narrow down my field of investigation to dystopian works written by female authors. Keeping this in mind, I think it would be useful to take a look at the evolution of the feminist critical dystopia in the next chapter.

2.3 The feminist critical dystopian novel

While reviewing some of the most well-known dystopias of the past century, it becomes clear that female authors have carried little weight when it comes to the dystopian genre. And indeed, as Sarah Lefanu has suggested, the dystopian genre is not only characterised by "a male bias" but is also underpinned by "a cultural and political male hegemony". (187) Precisely this fact makes the domain of the dystopia such an interesting and attractive genre for female writers: it presents them with the opportunity to oppose and undermine the dominant ideology outlined by men. Lefanu adds that, as a result, this literature written by women is often "subversive, satirical and iconoclastic". (187) This corresponds with the general aim of utopian and dystopian literature – as I have explained earlier² – which consists in conveying a sense of otherness and which includes a deviation of the realities familiar to the reader. Because of this seemingly overwhelming dominance of male writers, I consciously chose to investigate dystopian works written by female authors in order to investigate the representation of women as well as by women in the dystopian genre.

² c.f. Chapter 1.2 Utopia and the use of language
If we want to tackle the subject of 'feminist critical dystopia', the first important question we should ask ourselves is: what does the term 'feminist' mean exactly? And more importantly, what does it mean in the context of the dystopian novel, which became particularly influential from the 1950s – 1960s onwards? It is important to realise that the term 'feminism' has come to stand for different things as time progressed, as results were achieved and as life conditions for women gradually changed. Whereas the first-wave feminists of the nineteenth and early twentieth century mainly focused on winning ground for women in the legal sphere in the form of – for example – suffrage and property rights, second-wave feminists grappled with problems of inequality in terms of sexuality, the family, the workplace and reproductive rights, mainly during the 1960s and 1970s. (Hodgson-Wright 3) Lefanu argues that these second-wave feminists were also mainly concerned with the issue of "gender and sexuality as social constructs, thus posing a challenge to notions of a natural law regulating feminine behaviour and an innate femaleness that describes and circumscribes 'woman'". (187) This preoccupation with the social construction of what is 'feminine' is taken to extremes in Angela Carter’s *The Passion of New Eve* (1977). Carter topples the traditional gender divisions by introducing a male protagonist who goes by the name of Evelyn and who is forced to undergo a surgical operation which transforms him – at least physically – into the paragon of femininity. Evelyn becomes a man trapped in a woman’s body and he teaches himself how to behave as women do, a situation which runs counter to the idea of innate femaleness. *The Passion of New Eve* is a highly unusual work and, therefore, it is most definitely worthy of its place amongst the novels I will discuss in more detail.

As for the 'feminist' part of feminist critical dystopias, it would seem that these works do not live up to this denomination in any structural way. In recent years, the tendency to label women’s narratives as 'feminist' has been transcended by feminist literary critics
Desmet 33

themselves. (Cavalcanti 47) The breeding ground for this earlier inclination can be elucidated with a quote by Rita Felski:

The emergence of a second wave of feminism in the late 1960s justifies the analysis of women's literature as a separate category, not because of automatic and unambiguous differences between the writings of women and men, but because of the recent cultural phenomenon of women's explicit self-identification as an oppressed group, which is in turn articulated in literary texts in the exploration of gender-specific concerns centered around the problem of female identity. (1)

The works which fall into this category seem to have at least one element in common: they all express a certain type of gender oppression – albeit perhaps to a different degree. Therefore 'feminist' still seems to be an adequate description for this type of works, although we have to be careful not to assume that feminist dystopias are automatically written by women or that all dystopias by female authors are feminist in this sense of the word.

The term 'critical' appears to be an obvious choice, because dystopias inherently involve a certain critique of the world the writer lives in. Nonetheless, if one considers 'critical' in the way Tom Moylan does in his *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (1986), the adding of this term is not superfluous. Ildney Cavalcanti argues that the feminist critical dystopia is not only constructed as a reaction against social and political realities, but that it also involves an element of self-criticism. (48) She has summarised Moylan’s theory in a clear way and applied it to the feminist critical dystopia, incorporating the three interrelated factors which the term 'critical' – in Moylan’s opinion – refers to. In order not to detract from her clarity of reasoning, I quote her explanation of these three elements in its entirety:
the negative critique (of patriarchy3 as well as certain trends in feminist praxis and theory) brought into effect by the dystopian principle; the textual self-awareness in generic terms with regard to a utopian tradition and concerning its own narrative constructions of utopian "elsewheres"; and "in the nuclear sense of the critical mass required to make the necessary explosive reaction" ([Moylan] 10), in the sense that the feminist dystopias may have a crucial effect in the formation and/or consolidation of a critical-feminist public readership. (48)

I have already mentioned that, at first sight, the dystopian genre seems to be largely dominated by men, but in fact the dystopia with a feminist twist has been around for much longer than one might think. The oldest example of this type of novel is The Last Man by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley and was published as early as 1826. In this work Shelly depicts a nightmarish future world which is infested with a plague. (McWhir xviii) In 1927 – more than a century after the publication of The Last Man –, Charlotte Haldane wrote her Man's World. Ten years later, Swastika Night by Katharine Burdekin appeared on the bookshelves. (Cavalcanti 49) These last two novels both describe a dystopian society ruled by men, in which women are reduced to their biological function. In Haldane's fictional world women's only option is to be purely feminine, whereas Burdekin relegates the female characters to 'unwomen'. What is striking in either case, is that these women never make an attempt to escape from their degraded positions. They have adopted men's view on them as their social identity and they exist only insofar as the men 'create' them to satisfy their sexual needs.

3 "The term 'patriarchy' refers to power relations in which women's interests are subordinated to the interests of men. These power relations take on many forms, from the sexual division of labour and the social organisation of procreation to the internalised norms of femininity by which we live. Patriarchal power rests on social meaning given to biological sexual difference". (Weedon 2) 'Matriarchy', by contrast, implies that women have most of the authority and power or that property belongs to women and is given to children by women rather than men. (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary)
Consequently, these minor female characters are not given a proper voice and can therefore never develop into 'full' human beings. (Russell 15)

The actual explosion of dystopian works written by women came only in the late 1960s, prior to the speculative literature generated by second-wave feminists. Cavalcanti refers to the year 1967, which saw the publication of both Anna Kavan's *Ice* and Kate Wilhelm's "Baby You Were Great". (49) Two years later, again a number of novels appeared which depict future worlds where women generally come off worst, such as *Heroes and Villains* by Angela Carter, *The Day of the Women* by Pamela Kettle and *The Ship Who Sang* by Anne McCaffrey. (Cavalcanti 49) These novels express a consciousness which is still slightly different from the ones that would be published in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, and therefore it might be safer to call them 'proto-feminist' in relation to later feminist critical dystopias. (Cavalcanti 49) The three novels I will be discussing later on belong this last category: two of them were published in the mid-1970s, the last one appeared in the mid-1980s.
3. The use of language in feminist dystopian fiction

3.1 Female authors of the nineteenth century and beyond

"Women have a history of reading and writing in the interstices of masculine culture, moving between the use of the dominant language or form of expression and specific versions of experience based on their marginality". (Kaplan 187) Since the beginning of the 1970s, an interest started to grow amongst Anglo-American literary critics for the work of women writers as a group. The previous quote by Caren Kaplan suggests that literature written by female authors is characterised by a particular element, namely the use of a dominant discourse to express a different, highly personal point of view. On the one hand, this statement might make readers wrongly assume that all women writers write alike, or, as Elaine Showalter puts it, that they "display stylistic resemblances distinctively feminine". (1971, 859) On the other hand – although we have to be very careful making this kind of generalisations –, some feminist critics of the late 1970s have suggested that women do have "a different literary perception of the world". (Moi 52) Ellen Moers' Literary Women (1976), Elaine Showalter's A Literature of Their Own (1977) and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's The Madwoman in the Attic (1979) have been of significant importance with regard to this subject. In each of these works, a strong emphasis is put on the belief that women have a different literary point of view not because of biological reasons, but because of the influence of society. (Moi 51-52)

Particularly interesting is Showalter's distinction between three stages in the historical development of the female literary subculture, which she calls 'Feminine', 'Feminist' and 'Female'. The first phase is characterised by "imitation of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and internalization of its standards of art and its views on social roles". The Feminist stage is one of "protest against these standards and values, and advocacy of minority rights and values, including a demand for autonomy". In the last stage, which
Showalter calls Female, a self-discovery occurs, "a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity". (1986, 13) She adds that these phases overlap and that no rigid distinction can be made between them. In spite of this, she classifies the appearance of male pseudonyms in the 1840s until the death of George Eliot in 1880 as the Feminine phase, the period between 1880 and 1920 as the Feminist phase and everything after that as the Female phase, although she adds that a new stage of self-awareness arose in the 1960s. (1986, 13) If we consider this division a plausible one, then the second half of the twentieth century, in which the dystopian novel became more influential, would be a Female phase characterised by a search for identity. In my opinion, Showalter was not far off the mark with this suggestion because the problem of the female identity clearly surfaces in works as The Handmaid's Tale and The Passion of New Eve. What is more, the issue of self-discovery can also be found in dystopian novels by male authors as, for example, Zamyatin's We and Huxley's Brave New World. In both novels the protagonist uncovers an aspect of himself which is not approved of by mainstream society, but which he feels he needs to develop further in order to become a complete and individual human being. In We this self-assertion is brought about mainly through the use of poetic language. This already suggests that language and discourse play a very important role in the search for an identity, which has become a crucial issue in postmodern fiction.

In the chapter on the feminist critical dystopia, I mentioned that many of these works aim at opposing and undermining the dominant ideology outlined by men. Keeping this in mind, Gilbert and Gubar make some suggestions in their The Madwoman in the Attic which appear to be useful in the discussion of this topic. They argue that "in the nineteenth century (as still today) the dominant patriarchal ideology presents artistic creativity as a fundamentally male quality". (Moi 56) Gilbert and Gubar leave very little to the imagination
in stating that "In patriarchal Western culture, therefore, the text's author is a father, a progenitor, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis". (6) The question they pose is then of course: "If the pen is a metaphorical penis, with what organ can females generate texts?". (7) Indeed, these ideologies of the nineteenth century left very little room for literary women to assert their creativity in any way. Gilbert and Gubar add that "women exist only to be acted on by men, both as literary and as sensual objects". (8) On top of women's struggle to be considered a subject rather than an object, there is also the problem of the medium they are to express themselves in. This takes us back to the quote by Kaplan at the beginning of this chapter: which form of expression is appropriate for a woman writer in a patriarchal society where language is permeated by a male-oriented ideology? Gilbert and Gubar manage to formulate their concerns about this in a very striking way: "Since his is the chief voice she hears, does the Queen try to sound like the King, imitating his tone, his inflections, his phrasing, his point of view? Or does she 'talk back' to him in her own vocabulary, her own timbre, insisting on her own viewpoint?". (46) Their answer to this question is similar to what Kaplan would suggest eight years after the publication of The Madwoman in the Attic. Although achieving "true female literary authority" is a very difficult task, Gilbert and Gubar argue that writers such as Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, Emily Brönte and Emily Dickinson succeeded "by simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal literary standards". (73) In this respect, I feel that the duality of the female literary voice ties in wonderfully with the dystopian genre. In general, authors of dystopian works use features of the reader and/or writer's society and realities which are familiar to them, but only to expose its limitations and thereby to undermine its authority. This often means that they also use the dominant language which the reader is familiar with, but in many cases this language proves to be insufficient and has to be replaced by a more personal form of expression for the protagonist to be liberated. However, since one
of the main characteristics of the dystopian genre is its bleak overtone, the protagonist is usually forced out of his new-found, liberating position again by the ruling authorities. Despite of the 'unhappy' ending characteristic of many dystopias, the fact that language contains such great power and is able to alter reality seems to be a recurring element in these works, worthy of a more profound investigation.

3.2 Feminist literary theory: the work of Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva

If we want to examine the use of language in feminist dystopian fiction, it might be useful to consider the writing of women in general first. This issue of women's own language was a hot topic in the 1980s and 1990s, but it seems that nothing much has been written about it since then. Therefore, I would like to take a closer look at the work of three important feminist philosophers, namely Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. Whereas Cixous is particularly interesting for her writings on *l'écriture feminine*, Irigaray and Kristeva have focussed on the relationship between women and language structures in particular. In what follows I intend to expound their ideas in a concise manner, for which I acknowledge my debt to Toril Moi and her exceptional work entitled *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985).

Although Cixous herself rejects the term 'feminine' – because it receives its meaning through a binary opposition with 'masculine' and therefore has no significance whatsoever on its own –, it was she who started the debate concerning feminine writing in the 1970s in France. She, however, prefers to call it 'writing said to be feminine' to avoid putting a definite label on a text on the basis of the author's sex. (Moi 100; 106) Indeed, it is possible for men to produce feminine writing, which – according to Cixous – is exemplified by certain works by Kleist and Joyce. She further argues that it is in fact not the body itself but "the cultural experience of the body (...) that brings women closer to femininity than are men".
Dominant society placed authors such as Joyce and Kleist on the side of femininity, because they occupied "a marginal and unstable relation to the system through which social relations are construed and constructed". (Sargisson 122) If we carry this idea further, it also implies that it is possible for female writers to construct a 'masculine' text. Cixous comments on this in her essay "Le sexe ou la tête?" (1976, translated as "Castration or decapitation?" (1981)):

Most women are like this: they do someone else's – man's – writing, and in their innocence sustain it and give it voice, and end up producing writing that's in effect masculine. Great care must be taken in working on feminine writing not to get trapped by names: to be signed with a woman's name doesn't necessarily make a piece of writing feminine. (52)

This complex relationship between feminine and masculine is something to consider when we examine Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve*, which tells the story of a male protagonist but is written by a female author.

All of this leaves us with the question: what, then, is feminine writing exactly? Can it be recognised by an attentive reader, when one does not know the sex of the author? Cixous argues in "The Laugh of the Medusa" that there is no answer to this question:

It is impossible to define a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded – which doesn't mean that it doesn't exist. But it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallocentric system (...). It will be conceived of only by subjects who are breakers of automatisms, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate. (883)

In my opinion, this description suggests that the author of a piece of feminine writing will always be a rebel, someone who challenges the existing codes of writing and goes beyond
them. Although one might consider the following idea slightly far-fetched, I do see a
correspondence with many protagonists of novels of the dystopian type. The principal
character is more often than not a disruptive element, an individual who pushes boundaries
and who seeks to exist outside of the dominant system. In any case we are dealing with an
opposition of the existing order (patriarchal or otherwise), which seems to me characteristic of
both feminine writing and of the dystopian novel.

Similarly to Cixous, the Belgian psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray has taken an interest in
the way language is used by women, albeit more in the oral than in the written form. It was
Irigaray who asserted the notion of 'womanspeak', which she – like Cixous and her feminine
writing – seems incapable to find an adequate definition for. In Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un
(translated as This sex which is not one), she argues that "one speaks [womanspeak], it cannot
be meta-spoken" (141) and she can only affirm that women who speak together fall back
spontaneously on womanspeak, but cease to do so when a man enters the scene. (Moi 144) As
a consequence, if one wants to study the particular way in which women employ language,
Irigaray's notion of womanspeak is of little help. What is interesting, though, is that she does
have a particular view of what a woman's style is characterised by:

This 'style' does not privilege the gaze but takes all figures back to their tactile
birth. There she re-touches herself without ever constituting herself, or
constituting herself in another kind of unity. Simultaneity would be her
'property'. A property that never fixes itself in the possible identity of the self
to another form. Always fluid without forgetting the characteristics of fluids
which are so difficult to idealize: this friction between two infinitely
neighbouring forces that creates their dynamics. Her 'style' resists and explodes
all firmly established forms, figures, ideas, concepts. (76)
In this respect, I would like to emphasise that the predominance of the sense of touch and of fluidity in women's language plays an extremely important role in the recuperation of the protagonist's identity in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. In the discussion of this work I will expand on how Offred, the main character, appeals to the language of the senses as an act of rebellion in the oppressive, patriarchal society she lives in.

Thirdly and lastly, I will briefly discuss some of Julia Kristeva's ideas on women and the use of language. It appears that, if we want to come to a deeper understanding of her ideas, we must first of all determine what she means exactly by the term 'language'. She argues that the focus of linguists on the Saussurian concept of 'langue' leads them to see language as a "monolithic" and "homogeneous structure". (Moi 151) Kristeva, by contrast, demands a renewed interest for the 'speaking subject' and consequently defines language as a "signifying process" instead of a "monolithic system". (Moi 152) According to her, linguists would come to this understanding by themselves if only they would spend more time on studying poetry rather than prose. (Moi 152) Secondly, Kristeva believes that to examine language the object of study should be a complete text – the whole of the utterance – in relation "with society, with the psyche and – not least – with other texts". (Moi 155) In other words, she feels that 'poetic language' should be at the centre of linguists' attention. (Moi 155) In "The ethics of linguistics" she explains what this 'poetry' she speaks of means to her:

> What is implied is that language, and thus sociability, are defined by boundaries admitting of upheaval, dissolution and transformation. Situating our discourse near such boundaries might enable us to endow it with a current ethical impact. In short, the ethics of a linguistic discovery may be gauged in proportion to the poetry that it presupposes. (25)
In this respect, Clare Cavanagh makes some interesting observations in her study of Kristeva's work concerning poetic language, entitled "Pseudo-Revolution in Poetic Language: Julia Kristeva and the Russian Avant-Garde" (1993). She foregrounds the fact that Kristeva, similarly to the futurists and the formalists, emphasises the *materiality* of poetic language, "its opacity, its refusal to let socially imposed meanings remain self-evident". (289) It can therefore be considered as a sort of linguistic revolution, because it "challenges the 'rational', apparently natural social codes that govern our everyday speech" and therefore also "continuously questions the socially imposed boundaries that separate sound from sense, significance from nonsense, the social body from the suppressed, presocial, physical being that the poet taps through his work". (289) This is why Kristeva in "Word, Dialogue and Novel" also asserted that "The poetic word (…) fully comes into being only in the margins of recognized culture". (36) My observation is, then: are these margins not often associated with femininity, with the social position of women in general? It seems to me that in many cases – although surely not in all of them – a peculiar bond between poetic language and the female voice can indeed be detected. Irigaray, as I have mentioned before, attaches fluidity and sense of touch to a woman's style – properties which I would attribute to a more poetical genre of writing. Cixous' emphasis on the entanglement of *l'écriture feminine* and the voice of the Mother, and consequently an increased interest in the Imaginary\(^4\) with regard to women's writing, strikes me as a rather poetical conception as well. I mention all of this in order to draw attention to the relationship between women writers and poetic language as a recurring element, which I will be taking into account in the discussion of my case studies.

\(^4\) The concept of the Imaginary Order was coined by the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and refers to the pre-Oedipal stage in a child's life during which it believes to be part of the mother and does not conceive that there is a difference between itself and the world. The Imaginary is best seen in relation to the Symbolic Order, which the child enters when it goes through the Oedipal crisis. At this point the father enforces a separation of mother and child, after which the acquisition of language takes place. (Althusser 60)
3.3 The female voice in dystopian novels

Before finally turning to the analysis of three dystopian novels written by women, I would like to consider two essays which caught my attention while doing my research. The first is written by Judy Greenway and deals with a technique of 'distancing' in the utopian novel, and in the second essay Raffaella Baccolini discusses the genre of science fiction as a rejection of reigning ideologies and conventions.

In "No Place for Women? Anti-Utopianism and the Utopian Politics of the 1890s" (2002), Judy Greenway investigates how women at the end of the nineteenth century related to the utopian genre. After the discussion of four novels of that period – namely *A Girl Among the Anarchists* by Isabel Meredith, *Attainment* by Edith Lees, *The Image Breakers* by Gertrude Dix and *Whiteway* by Nellie Shaw –, she comes to the conclusion that these women writers do not consider utopia as a place for real women. Although they do recreate such a space in their novels, the ending usually consists of a return from utopia and the protagonist is left only with some ideas which might possibly be of use in the 'real' world. This entails that the utopian experience is there but is always viewed from a distance by the protagonist and consequently often by the reader as well. More specifically, the utopian space is "structured in accordance with rigid masculine principles" and is subsequently put in contrast with "a real world in which the women protagonists can negotiate a place for the feminine qualities of passion and pragmatism". (Greenway 208) Greenway adds, however, that "how this might work in practice is excluded from the imaginative space of the text". (Greenway 208) What is of interest to us here, is her assertion that female authors contribute to this distancing by using "imagery, humour and narrative techniques that make it all too easy to keep utopia at an ever-receding distance". (206)

My question is then, of course: do these observations about women and the utopian genre also apply to the dystopian novel? Do women writers of dystopian works use
techniques that can be called specifically female and if so, what do these consist of? Is there a
certain type of language use that appears as a recurring element in dystopias written by
women? To all of these questions I intend to formulate an answer and I wish to illustrate them
with examples from the works of Piercy, Carter and Atwood.

As Raffaella Baccolini has argued in her essay "The Persistence of Hope in Dystopian
Science Fiction" (2004), in recent years feminist scholars have shown a particular interest in
works of science fiction – the genre which utopias and dystopias are considered to be part of –
as "a subversive and oppositional strategy against hegemonic ideology". (Baccolini 519)
Often this has been connected with the question of how gender enters into the genre
construction of science fiction. Raffaella Baccolini has argued that science fiction has been
chosen by many female authors as the ideal form of political resistance, and that consequently
women’s science fiction novels have contributed to the exploration and
subsequent breakdown of certainties and universalist assumptions – those
damaging stereotypes – about gendered identities by addressing, in a
dialectical engagement with tradition, themes such as the representation of
women and their bodies, reproduction and sexuality, and language and its
relation to identity. (520)
She adds that these dystopian texts can become a vehicle of resistance because they often use
conventions that belong to different genres, and consequently they create a work that is
characterised by hybridity. This tendency came into being as a result of "feminist criticism of
universalist assumptions, singularity, and neutral and objective knowledge" and the
acknowledgement of "the importance of difference, multiplicity, complexity, situated
knowledges, and hybridity", which appears to have shaped many recent dystopian works
written by women. (520) It seems inevitable that this "blending of different genre
conventions” has an influence on the kind of language which is used in these novels. (520) Baccolini gives the example of *He, She and It* by Marge Piercy, in which we find a combination of a tale which has its origins in sixteenth-century Prague and an account of a future society. In this way Piercy creates a work that belongs to the science fiction genre, but at the same time contains elements of the historical novel. (520) Baccolini's research on this type of works also applies to Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. Since Atwood's novel has been constructed as a compilation of a number of cassettes and since the nature of the protagonist's confessions are highly personal and direct, Baccolini has suggested that this work is a cross between an epistolary novel and a diary. (520) This blending of genre conventions is an art which Atwood masters in an exceptional way and it is one of the reasons why her work is so interesting as study matter.

3.4 Three case studies

3.4.1 Woman on the Edge of Time, *Marge Piercy (1976)*

The first novel I will analyse is entitled *Woman on the Edge of Time* and was written by Marge Piercy in 1976. It is a rather unusual type of dystopian novel to start off with, because it in fact combines a utopian fictional world with two dystopian ones. Before I inquire into the representation of women and their language use, I will briefly go through the narrative of this work so as to clarify my analysis of several fragments of it.

Our woman 'on the edge of time' is the 37-year-old Consuelo – Connie – Ramos, who is originally from Mexico. At the beginning of the novel we learn how she is locked up in a mental institution for hitting her niece's pimp, Geraldo, over the head with a wine bottle. Later the reader finds out that this is not her first admission to a psychiatric hospital. Two years earlier, she had been labelled as 'aggressive' and placed under restraint for having broken her daughter Angelina's wrist, who was then four years old. The child was taken from her and
Connie is still overwhelmed by guilt because of what she did in a moment of despair. In the years between her admissions to the mental institution, a case worker follows up her situation from very close by. Connie struggles to make both ends meet because no one will hire her due to her troubled past. In addition, when on several occasions she has the experience of being able to see and talk to a man called Luciente, she is starting to believe that she actually is mentally deranged. The opposite turns out to be true: Connie seems to have a special ability for what in the novel is called 'catching'. Luciente is a time-traveller from the future and thanks to Connie's open mind, he is able to connect with her and to be summoned in her time – which is the past for him. At her second admission to the psychiatric facility, Connie is put in a padded cell and in her depressed state, she allows Luciente to appear and take her back to his own time, a hundred years in the future. To her utter amazement, she discovers that Luciente is in fact a woman. It is not exceptionally strange that Connie made this mistake in the first place, because in Mouth-of-Mattapoisett – the village where Luciente lives – all citizens have rather androgynous appearances. From this point on, the reader becomes acquainted with the utopian narrative which is incorporated in Woman on the Edge of Time.

Mattapoisett is a small community of roughly six hundred people, just like any other city. Big cities do not exist anymore in Luciente's world, because, so she says, "they didn't work". (Piercy 68) Consequently, everything has a rather rural feel to it and it soon becomes clear that the connection with nature in this society is a very close one. Nearly all energy is generated through natural resources, garbage is recycled to be put to a new use and the inhabitants have a great respect towards every living creature. What is most surprising, is that this environment-minded attitude appears to come very naturally to the citizens of Mattapoisett. When Connie asks Luciente if nothing is thrown away in her time, she answers: "Thrown away where? The world is round". (Piercy 240)
Although Connie sees the progress these people have made in comparison with her own time, she is horrified when she discovers how children are brought into the world in this society. 'Live births' do not exist anymore, but instead embryos are bred in a 'brooder' as mere combinations of genetic material. As a result, no child has an actual mother or father, but is raised by three 'comothers' or 'coms'. After a number of years, the child goes on a week-long journey all by itself, during which it can choose a new name and thus becomes completely independent from its coms. All of this still somewhat makes sense to Connie, because she can see that the people of Mattapoisett share a great love for their children. What she cannot approve of, however, is the fact that children are raised and suckled by men as well as by women. Such a parent-child relationship seems very unnatural to her and she keeps wondering: "How can men be mothers! How can some kid who isn't related to you be your child?". (Piercy 105) Although their way of living has had many positive consequences, such as the eradication of racism, Connie takes a great aversion towards their ideas on child-rearing: "She hated them, the bland bottleborn monsters of the future, born without pain, multicolored like a litter of puppies without the stigmata of race and sex". (Piercy 106) Her anger and confusion reaches its height when she actually sees a man breast-feeding a child. The inhabitants of Mattapoisett believe that they have realised absolute equality between men and women but Connie cannot resign herself to this view: "These women thought they had won, but they had abandoned to men the last refuge of women. What was special about being a woman here? They had given it all up, they had let men steal from them the last remnants of ancient power, those sealed in blood and milk". (Piercy 134) However, Connie regains some of her confidence in the future society when she sees how happy Luciente's daughter is, who shows a striking resemblance to Angelina. In "Feminist Epistemology in Piercy's Woman on the Edge of Time", Billie Maciunas has linked this idea of men mothering children to the feminist postmodernist "object-relations theory", which "proposes that men's preoccupation
with objectivity stems from infantile separation from the mother". (253) She argues that "men dominate and/or repress others in order to retain (...) individual identity". (253) To counter this tendency, "[m]othering (caring work), then, must be incorporated as a human experience and located at the centre of culture, rather than remaining at the margins of culture as 'women's work', undervalued and/or sentimentalized". (253) And indeed, the citizens in Mattapoisett seem to live by the principles of this theory, which has contributed to the elimination of gender discrimination in their society.

The episodes in which Connie is transported to the future are interwoven with fragments from her own dystopian existence in the mental institution. She is continuously punished for 'bad patient behaviour' and her family refuses to help her regain her freedom. At a certain point, Connie discovers that the doctors intend to make her a guinea pig for an experiment with electrodes which are implanted in the brain. When she sees how the same procedure has turned her friend Alice into a puppet which can be controlled at all times, she devises a plan to escape from the facility and succeeds. Unfortunately, after two days the police catches her at a bus station and sends her back to the clinic, where she is shot up with tranquilisers. Connie desperately makes contact with Luciente and at this point, she finally discovers why the inhabitants of Mattapoisett chose her to visit the future. It is explained to her that they "must fight to come to exist, to remain in existence, to be the future that happens". (Piercy 197-198). In order to secure the life as they know it, Connie's era is of extreme importance: "at certain cruxes of history... forces are in conflict. Technology is imbalanced. Too few have too much power. Alternate futures are equally or almost equally probable... and that affects the... shape of time". (Piercy 197) Therefore Connie must keep struggling against those who are trying to control her, so that those of her time do not "fail to understand us [those who live in the future world] or (...) to struggle together". (Piercy 197)
After having understood the importance of her actions, Connie tries her very best to prevent the doctors from carrying out the procedure on her. Unfortunately, this time she fails to escape and the electrodes are planted in her brain. After the operation, she feels anxious to speak to Luciente and tries to connect with her, but instead she finds herself in one of the alternative futures which threaten the existence of Mattapoisett. This is the second dystopian reality which we encounter in the novel.

This nightmarish world is situated in New York, many years in the future. The more prosperous population groups (the 'richies') live suspended up in the sky, on space platforms, whereas the poorer 'duds' are forced to live in secluded areas down on earth where they cannot go outside because of the polluted air. Gildina, the woman whom Connie accidentally 'caught', explains that she is under a contract: this means that she is bought by a man to fulfil his sexual desires. Gildina calls a spade a spade and tells Connie that "it means you agree to put out for so long for so much". (Piercy 289) She makes it very clear that women are treated as commodities which are rated according to their appearance, because they frequently undergo plastic surgery to appear as desirable as possible. In order to nip desires for friendship, love relationships, etc. in the bud, all inhabitants have a variety of drugs at their disposal: "You want a Rapture? Or whatever you float on. (...) Risers, soothers, sleepers, wakers, euphors, passion pills, the whole works. What's your poison?". (Piercy 292) Nothing appears to be natural in this society, not even the food they eat. Gildina does not know what ham or vegetables are and she cannot imagine eating raw foods: "I know the richies eat queer things, sort of... raw. Stuff from, you know, live things. They practically eat them alive. I can't suppose that's good for you (...)". (Piercy 296) The harmonious relationship between humans and nature which Connie has learned to appreciate in Mattapoisett is obviously not part of this artificial, shallow world. Before a 'supercop' gets the chance to arrest her, Connie manages to return back to her own time. After this dreadful experience, it begins to dawn on her that she
must do everything in her power to ensure the future existence of Mattapoissett. In this respect, I would like to refer to an essay written by Marcia Bundy Seabury, in which she makes a useful observation about Connie's desire to be – above all – a useful human being to others: "Connie sees that in Mattapoissett, unlike in her world, she could be useful (214) and would have the respect and self-respect she lacks. Luciente of Mattapoissett has scope to act, whereas her dystopian counterpart Gildina contributes only to sex". (135)

By soft-soaping the staff in the mental institution, Connie succeeds in getting a permission for leave to spend Thanksgiving with her brother Luis and his family. At the end of her stay Luis makes her work in his nursery for a day, where Connie steals a bottle of highly poisonous insecticide. She puts it in her pocket and smuggles it back to the psychiatric facility. When Connie is interviewed by the doctors in order to assess the possibilities for a new operation on her, she understands that it is high time to undertake action. During an unsupervised moment she slips the poison in the staff's coffee machine. At the very end of the novel, the reader is let in for the very last time on Connie's thoughts: "I murdered them dead. Because they are violence-prone. Theirs is the money and the power, theirs the poisons that slow the mind and dull the heart. Theirs are the powers of life and death. I killed them. Because it is war". (Piercy 375)

First of all, I will take a look at the various ways in which women are represented in this novel and if these can be considered as empowering or rather suppressive. Afterwards, the focus of my attention will be on the language use in Mattapoissett and I will examine how the idea of equality between men and women is reflected in the discourse of its inhabitants.

Aside from Connie Ramos herself, one of the most important female characters is her niece, Dolly. Initially, she is portrayed as a representative of the oppressed female sex, because she comes to her aunt bleeding and crying after her husband/pimp Geraldo beat her
up. Connie constantly urges her to leave him, but Dolly never finds the courage to do so. She even ends up betraying her aunt by letting her father place Connie under restraint in the mental institution. Later on, Dolly seems to have found a new pimp who treats her slightly better, but now she is completely addicted to speed. So far, the fate of the women in this novel is rather depressing: one of them is forbidden to leave a psychiatric facility because her brother thinks she is crazy and the other one is a prostitute, addicted to hard drugs.

One might think that part of Connie and Dolly's problems are caused by the fact that they belong to the poorer classes of society. However, one of the richer women in the novel, namely Luis's wife Adele, does not seem to live a happy life either. She represents the stereotype of the bored, spoiled society wife who treats everyone as if they are beneath her. Connie is not a family member to Adele but a maid and consequently, she comes across as quite superficial to the reader:

Adele blinked from her serene, faintly smiling cocoon. Connie watched her sideways, sure she was on something. No wonder Adele got on so well with Luis. She was hardly ever in the same room with him, no more than his fancy guppies swimming behind glass. (...) She could not help speculating what Adele was on. Adele might just be incredibly stoned, but Connie didn't think so: she was too far off. Downers, most likely. (Piercy 357)

In addition, she is Luis's third wife and it seems that even Connie considers her as something disposable, which could be substituted by 'more of the same':

Adele blurred into Shirley, Luis's second and Italian wife, responsible for getting him into her family's nursery business. (...) Shirley had dark brown hair and a full pouting mouth and a full-blown temper. She had lasted as long as she had because of the business. Yet she had sat there many years saying um hum, oh dear, uh huh, mmm. And Carmel before her. All Luis's wives came to
sound the same, nodding at him, but each one was fancier and had a higher polish. (Piercy 353)

This interpretation of women as commodities reappears in the dystopian future world in which Connie meets Gildina. Women in her society are not only considered as interchangeable but they can also be molded in order to become as physically perfect as possible. At a single glance, Connie can tell that Gildina has undergone plastic surgery and she later finds out that women in general undergo these operations to please the eye of the man they are under contract with. Consequently, Gildina does not look like a real woman and instead "her body seemed like a cartoon of femininity, with a tiny waist, enormous sharp breasts that stuck out like the brassieres Connie herself had worn in the fifties – but the woman was not wearing a brassiere. Her stomach was flat but her hips and buttocks were oversized and audaciously curved". (Piercy 288) The image that is conveyed here is that of an alterable and artificial femininity, which shows many resemblances with a stereotype that women – even today – are often expected to live up to.

Contrary to this New York of the future, in Mattapoisett women are considered to be equal to men. It is quite an optimistic view of womanhood, although it seems that femininity and masculinity in Mattapoisett have merged together into something androgynous rather than that they each maintain their distinct characteristics. This explains why Connie mistook Luciente for a man when she first met her:

'You're a woman! No, one of those sex-change operations.' (...) She stared at Luciente. Now she could begin to see him/her as a woman. Smooth hairless cheeks, shoulderlength thick black hair, and the same gentle Indian face. With a touch of sarcasm she said, 'You're well muscled for a woman.' (...) A dyke, of course. (...) 'I'm not unusually strong.' Luciente's face was screwed up with confusion. (...) 'About middling. We do more physical work than most people
did in your time, I believe. It's healthier, and of course your lugs [sic] were burning up all those fossil fuels. ... You seem surprised that I am female?’

Feeling like a fool, Connie did not choose to reply. (Piercy 67)

As we can deduce from this extract, men and women are considered capable of doing the same jobs in Mattapoisett. This feeling of equality is intensified by the fact that the female sex no longer has the privilege of giving birth. Children are conceived in brooders and men can 'mother' them just as women do, breast-feeding included. To Connie all of this seems highly unnatural, because she feels that the one thing that made women unique – bearing children – has been taken away from them. However, the women of Mattapoisett believe that they have received much in exchange for this sacrifice:

'It was part of women's long revolution. When we were breaking all the old hierarchies. Finally there was that one thing we had to give up too, the only power we ever had, in return for no more power for anyone. The original production: the power to give birth. Cause as long as we were biologically enchained, we'd never be equal. And males never would be humanized to be loving and tender. So we all became mothers. Every child has three. To break the nuclear bonding.’ (Piercy 105)

The feeling of equality is so deeply rooted in the minds of the people of Mattapoisett that they have carried it through in their language. It is a rather interesting phenomenon, because it shows us how changes in discourse can maintain and even strengthen a certain ideological outlook. In this respect, I refer to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which states that "our thinking is determined by language" and that "people who speak different languages perceive and think about the world quite differently". (Chandler 16) In the language of Mattapoisett, the personal pronouns 'he' and 'she' have been replaced by a gender-neutral
pronoun 'person'. Correspondingly, the possessive pronouns 'his' and 'her' have been replaced by 'per'. I quote the following passage to illustrate the use of these new forms: "'Magdalena? Ah, person is coming. Magdalena is unusual. Person does not switch jobs but is permanent head of this house of children. It is per calling.'" (Piercy 137) The same term is also used for what we would call 'someone': "Person must not do what person cannot do – you have heard us say this a hundred times; but likewise, person must do what person has to do.'" (Piercy 137) In this utopian existence there is no specific discourse which is preserved for women, but instead all differences have been effaced by eliminating gender indications from language. The inhabitants of Mattapoisett made alterations to their language because they believed it would enhance equality between the sexes and in this way we could consider it to be a device of liberation for women. It is clear that oppression – of men or women – is not part of this utopian world and this fact is adequately reflected in the discourse that is used in it.

It is significant that women can speak on equal terms as men in Mattapoisett, which was constructed as a narrative utopia countering the dystopian present of Connie Ramos and Gildina's future in New York. Gradually, it becomes clear that the women who inhabit these last two worlds have been muted by both men and women who occupy a higher position in the power structure. Both Connie and Gildina are confined to a closed space where they are monitored at all times and they are deprived of one of the most important components of an individual's identity: the right to a personal voice.

3.4.2 The Passion of New Eve, Angela Carter (1977)

Eight years after the publication of her post-apocalyptic novel Heroes and Villains, Angela Carter created a dystopian work which could be called unconventional at the very least. The Passion of New Eve tells the story of a male university professor named Evelyn, who arrives in New York after having been offered a position there. The city, however, has
fallen into complete decay and is terrorised by rebellious movements. One of these groups is called the Women, whose logo is a ♀ with a set of bared teeth inside it. From this point on, the image of the 'angry woman' temporarily moves to the centre of attention of the novel.

When Evelyn falls in love with an African-American girl named Leilah, it becomes clear that he is deeply rooted in a patriarchal culture which objectifies women. He has very possessive feelings towards her and uses her to satisfy his own sexual needs: "As soon as I saw her, I was determined to have her". (Carter 19) When Leilah becomes pregnant with his child, however, he abandons her and flees into the desert. There he is taken prisoner by a sect which consists entirely of women and which lives in a place hidden beneath the sand, called Beulah. If Evelyn at this point still fostered illusions of male superiority, he is immediately deprived of them by the woman who captured him in the desert. She drags him to Beulah with his face in the sand and he describes how "I arrived unceremoniously in the woman's town and when, fathoms deep, I came to rest at last, I was blubbering helplessly, like a third former". (Carter 48) He is locked up in a room where he undergoes a process of humiliation and is subjected to a voice which continuously chants slogans such as "except a man die and be born again he may not enter the kingdom of heaven". (Carter 51) When Evelyn meets the leader of the sect and discovers that she is called the Great Parricide, the Grand Emasculator or the Castratrix of the Phallocentric Universe, it becomes clear that she has something terrible in store for him. Mother – as she is called by the other members of the sect – is described in the novel as an extremely large woman with a fake beard and four breasts, which her 'daughters' gave her as a sign of respect. Subsequently the protagonist is raped by Mother, after which she accuses him of having abused women, "with this delicate instrument that should have been used for nothing but pleasure. You made a weapon of it!". (Carter 66) Evelyn's semen is stored away because, as the reader discovers later on, Evelyn is supposed to be inseminated with his own sperm. For this to be possible, of course, he needs to be
transformed into a woman. He is given hormones to make him look feminine and through a surgical operation he is provided with all female body parts. The transformation is more than a success and Evelyn describes himself as "the Playboy center fold" when he sees himself in the mirror. (Carter 75) Oddly, Evelyn's transformation into a stunning beauty does not come across as a feminist attempt to regain dominance for women, but instead it seems to reaffirm the existing patriarchal requirements of the female appearance. In this respect, I would like to refer to a striking observation made by Hope Jennings, who asserts that "Carter explicitly parodies matriarchal myths in order to examine how these do not necessarily guarantee a different symbolic order but often end up reiterating phallocentric representations of women's bodies". (1) At a certain point during his training as the New Eve, whose child is supposed to "rejuvenate the world", Evelyn escapes from Beulah before Mother has the chance to impregnate him. (Carter 77)

Unfortunately, back in the desert Evelyn is captured again, this time by a man – called Zero the poet – and his harem. If we consider Beulah as an extreme type of matriarchy, then Zero and his seven wives represent an existence which is founded upon the most rigid of patriarchal ideas. Zero continuously humiliates his wives and he uses them to satisfy his sexual needs. However, these women never express any indignation about their infrahuman conditions of life but worship Zero as their god instead. I include the following passage because I feel it explains quite clearly how the relationship between Zero and his wives functions:

In whispers, they told me how Zero believed women were fashioned of a different soul substance from men, a more primitive, animal stuff, and so did not need the paraphernalia of civilised society such as cutlery, meat, soap, shoes, etc., though, of course, he did. However, they seemed grateful to him because, out of his generosity, he allowed them the sophistication of cups and
plates although these dishes were of the commonest kind and badly cracked and chipped. Their seven faces had the unused and blinded look of nuns, all postulants in the church of Zero. (Carter 87)

Although the wives welcome Eve(lyn) in a rather friendly manner at first, they are overcome by jealousy when Zero makes him his eighth wife and they attack him in an attempt to deprive him of his beauty.

None of his wives have conceived a child from Zero's sperm because he is, in fact, sterile. Oddly enough, Zero believes that the reason of his infertility is incarnated in Tristessa de St. Ange, a movie actress who has supposedly "performed a spiritual vasectomy on him". (Carter 92) As a consequence, Zero goes out hunting every day to find and kill Tristessa in order to restore his manhood. Three months after the arrival of Evelyn, he actually tracks down Tristessa's place of residence and he takes all the women down to her house. To Evelyn's utter amazement, they discover that the person who had been described as "the most beautiful woman in the world" in the beginning of the novel, is actually a man. (Carter 5) In a strange and cruel ritual, Zero 'marries' Evelyn and Tristessa and he forces them to copulate. The both of them, however, manage to escape from the house – killing Zero and his following in the process. They flee into the desert together and Evelyn discovers female sexual pleasure for the first time, as Tristessa finds a renewed masculinity by the agency of his companion. Once again, this act reaffirms Carter's deconstruction of the traditional divisions between masculinity and femininity, or, as Anja Müller puts it: "In mirroring each other’s sexual ambiguity, they point to the arbitrariness of gender categories". (34)

The next part of the novel is initiated by the murder of Tristessa, who is shot by a military gang which they encounter in the desert. The group exists of some seventy boys, "not one of them (...) a day older than thirteen". (Carter 154) Their leader, the Colonel, believes that he is Jesus Christ and is taking his soldiers to the civil war which is going on back in the
city. As much as the Colonel would like to portray himself as a powerful male leader, it becomes clear that he is still only a little boy when he comes to Evelyn at night crying and searching for a mother's consolation. For the third time in the novel, Evelyn escapes from his captors and then returns to the 'civilized' world. The houses he comes across are deserted or its owners have died as a result of the civil war. Eventually he decides to head for Los Angeles where he reencounters Leilah, who has now become the leader of a rebellious gang and goes by the name of Lilith. She eventually leads him to a cave on the beach, which he must enter in order to see Mother again. The cave consists of a maze of corridors and eventually turns out to symbolise the womb through which Evelyn is reborn:

    The rock had softened or changed its substance; the textures under my enquiring fingers were soft and yielding. Time no longer passed. Now the dew felt like slime; this slime coated me. The walls of passage shuddered and sighed at first almost imperceptibly, so that I mistook it for my own breathing. But their pulsations exert greater and greater pressure on me, draw me inward. (...) I'm not so scared as once I would have been, to go worming my way through the warm meat of the insides of the earth, for I know, now, that Mother is a figure of speech and has retired to a cave beyond consciousness. Everything takes place more slowly than you can believe possible. I have been subdued to the leisurely pace of Eocene time. (Carter 184)

After this experience Evelyn leaves the cave as a reborn human being. The novel ends with him launching himself into the ocean with these final words: "Ocean, ocean, mother of mysteries, bear me to the place of birth". (Carter 191)

After this introduction on the narrative of The Passion of New Eve, I would like to turn to the representation of women in this novel. Subsequently, I will consider if Angela Carter
has linked these women with a specific kind of discourse. While I was examining the novel in more depth, I found that many different aspects of women – and more specifically of femininity – are put forward in different sections of the narrative. In what follows I will discuss seven distinct representations of femininity and illustrate them with examples from the text.

First of all, the image of the 'angry woman' receives quite a great deal of attention at a certain point in the novel (as I have mentioned before). One of the rebellious groups which terrorises the city of New York is called the Women and it is clear that our protagonist fears them: "Women are angry. Beware Women! Goodness me!" (Carter 11) Further on, they are described in a language which appears to belong to the domain of armed militia and even of terrorist attacks:

As the summer grew yet more intolerable, the Women also furthered their depredations. Female sharp-shooters took to sniping from concealed windows at men who lingered too long in front of posters outside blue movie theatres. They were supposed to have infiltrated the hookers who paraded round Times Square in their uniforms of white boots and mini-skirts; there were rumours of a kamikaze squad of syphilitic whores who donated spirotechal enlightenment for free to their customers out of dedication to the cause. They blew up wedding shops and scoured the newspapers for marriage announcements so that they could send brides gifts of well-honed razors. (...) the Women practised humiliation at random and bruised machismo takes longer to heal than a broken head. (Carter 17)

In this passage it becomes clear that these Women do not only use conventional weapons but also deploy their sexuality to take their revenge on the male sex. Other examples of angry women are the members of the sect of Beulah. They live in a matriarchal society which
fosters a great animosity towards men. Whereas the symbol of the Women is a ♀ with a set of
bared teeth inside it, the sign of Beulah consists of the same ideogram but with a broken
phallus in the middle. This symbol is also represented in life-size in the desert and it is the
first thing Evelyn encounters before he enters the hidden city of Beulah:

It was a pompous structure, chipped out of granite dragged from god knows
where, it was twenty or thirty feel tall. (...) upon a classic pediment, it
represented a stone cock with testicles, all complete, in a state of massive
tumescence. But the cock was broken off clean in the middle (...). The top half
of the cock, ten feet of it, lay in the sand at my feet but it did not look as if it
had fallen accidentally. (Carter 47-48)

The reader could interpret this as an omen of what will happen to Evelyn in order for him to
become a member of the matriarchal sect. It seems to me, that every action and every spoken
word in Beulah is dominated by the objective of replacing patriarchy with a matriarchal
structure. When Mother meets Evelyn for the first time, she explains to him her belief that
"Woman has been the antithesis in the dialectic of creation quite long enough", and that she is
"about to make a start on the feminisation of Father Time". (Carter 67) Sophia, the woman
who captured Evelyn in the desert, expresses in similar terms her aversion of the long-lasting
domination of man. She asks him if he was ever happy when he was a man, "since you left the
womb, unless you were trying to get back into it?", but she also asserts that he will not be
happy as a woman either – "not until we all live in a happy world". (Carter 76) Mother's
objective is to make women entirely self-sufficient and she intends to put this process in
motion by making Evelyn conceive a child out of her own semen. If she succeeds, man will
have become obsolete and women will be truly independent for the very first time.5

5 I would like to add an observation on my part to this: I wondered how the members of Beulah would react if
Evelyn – suppose that she had not escaped – had given birth to a male child. One option is to subject it to the
same procedure that Evelyn has gone through and impregnate it again with its own semen. But what if the child
turns out to be a girl? How would they then procreate? Or would they continue 'stealing' men from the outside
A second representation we encounter in this novel is that of femininity as an infectious disease. After having abandoned Leilah to an abortion, Evelyn contemplates his feelings towards her while he is heading for the desert:

I said to myself: her slow, sweet flesh has suffused my own with its corrupt languor. The sickness of the ghetto and the slow delirious sickness of femininity, its passivity, its narcissism, have infected me because of her. She has been doubly degraded, through her race and through her sex; this affliction she has given me is therefore twice as virulent, I might die of it. (Carter 37-38)

Femininity is here described by means of medical language ('sickness, infected, affliction, virulent'). Evelyn thinks of it as a degraded condition and he does not only appear to have sexist ideas but also expresses racist thoughts by considering her as "doubly degraded" because she is African-American as well as female.

One of the most important representations of femininity as it appears in this novel – mostly with regard to Evelyn and Tristessa de St. Ange – is that of woman as an artificial construct. On his last night in London, Evelyn goes to see a film starring Tristessa who is described as "the most beautiful woman in the world". (Carter 5, emphasis added) In the city of Beulah, the protagonist is once more confronted with Tristessa while he is recovering from his surgery. He is shown various moving pictures of her and Evelyn already appears to realise that Tristessa's identity as a woman is in fact artificial:

I don't know if the movies were selected on purpose, as part of the ritual attrition of my change in ontological status: this is what you've made of women! And now you yourself become what you've made... Certainly the films that spun out a thread of illusory reality before my dazed eyes showed me all the pain of womanhood. Tristessa, your solitude, your melancholy – Our world? These are just a few questions which came to mind while I was reading the novel and which are, of course, a matter of interpretation.
Lady of the Sorrows, Tristessa; you came to me in seven veils of celluloid and demonstrated, in your incomparable tears, every kitsch excess of the mode of femininity. (Carter 71)

However, her role as the paragon of womanhood and femininity proves to be nothing but an illusion when Evelyn discovers that she is in fact a man. I include the following passage to illustrate how Tristessa came into being as a mental creation more than anything else:

"You had turned yourself into an object as lucid as the objects you made from glass; and this object was, itself, an idea. You were your own portrait, tragic and self-contradictory. Tristessa had no function in this world except as an idea of himself; no ontological status, only an iconographic one." (Carter 129)

Aside from Tristessa who in fact *posed* as a woman for all those years, women as artificial constructs are most clearly exemplified in this novel through Evelyn himself. Although he has the outward appearance of a female after his transformation – and a physically perfect one at that –, he remains a male on the inside. This strange situation could, in my opinion, even be interpreted as a new twist to the nature versus nurture debate. As can be expected his identity will be affected by his physical change as well, a process which Edward J. Ahearn describes as "a mutilation and expansion of self that is both threatening and fascinating". (460) It gradually becomes clear that Evelyn is torn between his female exterior – and the way this influences the behaviour he is supposed to display – and his male interior, which is determined by his genetic structure. After Evelyn's operation, Sophia attempts to teach him how to behave as a woman, with fairly little success at first:

Sophia taught me how to make water in the way a woman does and the right way to perform one or two other biologically determined acts, how to comb my hair and plait it, to wash between my legs and under my arms and so forth

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6The nature versus nurture dispute is concerned with the influence of genetic factors (nature) and environmental factors (nurture) on human behaviour. (Rutter vi) For further reading, I refer to Michael Rutter's Genes and Behavior: Nature – Nurture Interplay Explained (2006).
but she gave me worried looks, sometimes, for I was the clumsiest of pupils –
you'll have to put in more work on the programming techniques, Sophia: it
takes more than identifying with Raphael's Madonna to make a real woman!

(Carter 80)

Despite of this last comment, the idea that feminine behaviour is not merely genetically
inherent but can be taught as well gains more and more acceptance as the story progresses.
During his stay in the ranch-house with Zero and his wives, the protagonist assumes a way of
moving and speaking that is almost too feminine. Zero gets suspicious of him and Evelyn
comments that "the result of my apprenticeship as a woman was, of course, that my manner
became a little too emphatically feminine. I roused Zero's suspicions because I began to
behave too much like a woman and he started to watch me warily for signs of the tribade".
(Carter 101) I conclude my discussion of Evelyn's artificial womanhood with a statement by
the protagonist himself, when he and Tristessa are about to make love in the desert: "Here we
were at the beginning or end of the world and I, in my sumptuous flesh, was in myself the
fruit of the tree of knowledge; knowledge had made me, I was a man-made masterpiece of
skin and bone, the technological Eve in person". (Carter 146, emphasis added)

The appearance of women as a creation of the mind is not only linked with Tristessa
and Evelyn in this novel, but also with Leilah. When our main character meets Leilah again,
now in the guise of Lilith, he realises that the image he had constructed of her was only a
figment of his own imagination. Leilah was merely something he had created in his mind to
suit his own needs: "Leilah, Lilith: now I see you are your mother's daughter, that immobility,
that vast and sentient repose – what's become of the slut of Harlem, my girl of bile and ebony!
She can never have objectively existed, all the time mostly the projection of lusts and greed
and self-loathing of a young man called Evelyn, who does not exist, either". (Carter 175)
Fourthly, femininity is represented in this novel as closely related to motherhood. After Evelyn's physical transformation into a woman, Sophia explains to him that he will experience motherhood in the very near future. He exclaims that he is not ready to become a mother, but at the same time has a strange sensation of a dual personality, of being "in two minds". (Carter 77) He describes the part of himself that is now known as Eve as "an amnesiac, a stranger in the world as she was in her own body", but also asserts that "it wasn't that she'd forgotten everything, no. Rather, she had nothing to remember. Nothing at all but many Virgins with many Children, a mother vixen batting its cub affectionately about the ear with a maternal paw (...)". (Carter 78) In addition, Evelyn is treated as a mother in various instances because of his physical appearance. The leader of the militant gang of young boys is scared of the dark and he comes to Evelyn in the middle of the night: "(...) the Colonel, poor child, (...) was frightened of so much darkness in his little tent and had come to me for comfort, had climbed into the sleeping bag with me and now buried his head in my breasts, where he sobbed out his fears as if he were much younger than fourteen and I truly was his mother". (Carter 161-162) Evelyn's mothering instincts are, however, not something which Mother could implant simultaneously with his female organs and the first chance he gets, Evelyn escapes from the Colonel and his gang.

In the fifth place we find a type of femininity which is portrayed as inferior to masculinity. This is most clearly exemplified by Zero the poet and his wives, since their cohabitation seems to be built upon the premises of patriarchy. The women in this situation take up a subordinated position, a fact which Zero reminds them of on a daily basis: "Sometimes, to illustrate the humility he demanded of his wives, he would smear his own excrement and that of the dog upon their breasts". (Carter 85) In addition, he has convinced his wives that they need to have sexual intercourse with him to maintain their health and
strength. In this way, he manages to keep his power over them and safeguard his superior position.

In this respect, it is particularly interesting how Tristessa defines a woman's being not only as inferior but as "negativity. Passivity, the absence of being. To be everything and nothing. To be a pane the sun shines through". (Carter 137) This statement could be fitted in with Toril Moi's discussion of Luce Irigaray's theory on the feminine: "(...) Irigaray claims that patriarchal discourse situates woman outside representation: she is absence, negativity, the dark continent, or at best a lesser man. In patriarchal culture the feminine as such (...) is repressed; it returns only in its 'acceptable form' as man's specularized Other". (Moi 133) Such an approach would imply that femininity is not only inferior to masculinity, but in fact does not even exist and can therefore, perhaps, not be defined.

This brings me to the sixth representation of femininity in The Passion of New Eve. Even though Evelyn has experienced both masculinity and femininity, it still remains unclear to him what these two concepts actually stand for. It seems only natural that his transformation left him completely bewildered and I find that the following passage expresses his confusion quite clearly:

Masculine and feminine are correlatives which involve one another. I am sure of that – the quality and its negation are locked in necessity. But what the nature of masculine and the nature of feminine might be, whether they involve male and female, if they have anything to do with Tristessa's so long neglected apparatus or my own factory fresh incision and engine-turned breasts, that I do not know. Though I have been both man and woman, still I do not know the answer to these questions. (Carter 151)

In the fragment above, Evelyn questions the relationship between male and female, masculine and feminine and the sexual organs of men and women. However, in the seventh and final
place femininity is represented as determined by its biological functions and therefore the
sexual organs play an important part in the 'making' of man or woman. Evelyn may be 'taught'
how to behave as a woman by Sophia, but it appears that he only became a woman after his
introduction into Zero's harem:

I had spent three months as a wife of Zero. (...) if Mother had selected me, however arbitrarily, to atone for the sins of my first sex vis-à-vis my second sex via my sex itself, I would say that, by the time the chaste and delirious spring awakened all manner of plants that love dry places from the sand and began to warm the nights a little, I had become almost the thing I was. The mediation of Zero turned me into a woman. More. His peremptory prick turned me into a savage woman. (Carter 107-108)

While I was doing my research on this novel, I looked very carefully for instances of specific language use by women. In my opinion, Carter has not employed any kind of discourse which could be linked exclusively to female characters, but Evelyn's hybrid nature has produced some interesting elements in terms of language. I have already mentioned that Evelyn feels "in two minds" after his transformation which he considers to be "both perfect and imperfect". (Carter 77) In the fragment that follows this statement, he asserts that "All of New Eve's experience came through two channels of sensation, her own fleshly ones and his mental ones". (Carter 77-78) I feel that this sense of duality is also reflected in his language use. To illustrate this, I repeat a fragment which I have already used in my discussion of femininity's relationship with motherhood. When Evelyn speaks of Eve – and thus of himself – as "a creature without memory", he uses quite objective, clear-cut terminology: "(...) she was an amnesiac, a stranger in the world as she was in her own body – but it wasn't that she'd forgotten everything, no. Rather, she had nothing to remember". (Carter 78) In the following
lines, however, it seems as if Eve takes over from Evelyn and he expresses his thoughts in rather poetical terms which appeal to the imagination: "Nothing at all but many Virgins with many Children, a mother vixen batting its cub affectionately about the ear with the maternal paw and brownish stills from old movies, any numbers of them, ghost of a face folded in sorrow. ('Solitude and reverie,' said Tristessa. 'That's a woman's life.')". (Carter 78) It is not my intention to generalise from this example and label objective, neutral discourse as masculine and a more poetical language as feminine. I merely wish to illustrate that, in my opinion, language is a powerful medium which can be used to express one's individuality and I feel that Evelyn's language use in this fragment truly complements his hybrid identity after his transformation.

To conclude my analysis of Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve*, I would like to briefly examine the use of language in the harem of Zero the poet. In my discussion of four famous dystopian novels, I have tried to emphasise that the power of language is not to be underestimated. It seems that even Zero the poet recognises the dangers of language, because he forbids his wives to speak and only addresses them in animal-like grunts. He tries to speak as little as possible himself because apparently, "he'd grown disgusted with words and their ineradicable human content long ago and now all his poems were howled and danced". (Carter 85) Zero wants the women to live by his rules and consequently they are not to speak in 'human language' either:

He would bark, or grunt, or squeak, or mew at us because he only used the language of the animals towards his wives unless there was a very exceptional emergency and we had to answer in kind. (...) So our first words every morning were spoken in a language we ourselves could not understand; but he could. Or so he claimed, and, because he ruled the roost and his word was law,
it came to the same thing. So he regulated our understanding of him and also our understanding of ourselves in relation to him. (Carter 96-97)

Zero's ban on speaking appears to be yet another way to assert his power over the women and it appears to be highly effective. Once more, it affirms the power of language as an instrument of oppression and it shows us how, in this case, even the absence of it can function as a backbone for patriarchal power structures.

3.4.3 The Handmaid's Tale, Margaret Atwood (1985)

The last novel I will examine in the light of the representation of women and their language use, is Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* which was published in 1985. In my opinion, the message of this dystopian work can best be summarised in one sentence, which Atwood herself once used in an interview: "Hell is often what you get when you try to impose heaven". (Dodson 103) *The Handmaid's Tale* is perhaps the most famous of my three case studies, but nevertheless I will briefly discuss the events in this novel before moving on to a more specific analysis of women and discourse.

In the epilogue of *The Handmaid's Tale* we discover that the material we were confronted with is actually a compilation of various cassettes which were found and transcribed by Professor Pieixoto and Professor Wade, shortly after what was called the Gileadean period. It tells the story of a woman named Offred – which is not her official name, but only an attentive reader will discover what her real name must have been. She narrates her experiences in the Republic of Gilead (formerly the United States of America), where a religious fundamentalist party has managed to come into power. Due to the effects of pollution, many women in this society have become sterile and so the ruling authorities have come up with a hierarchical system to ensure procreation. The name Offred is a derivation of 'Of Fred', the higher-rank 'Commander' whose children our protagonist – as a fertile 'handmaid'
– is supposed to bear. However, the important men whom the handmaids work for are married to women of the same higher class, the 'Wives'. The handmaids are often despised by the Wives because they are entitled to have sexual intercourse with the Commanders, and consequently, they are generally treated as nothing more than prostitutes. In this rigid system there are also other classes of women: the servants who are employed by the Wives are called the 'Marthas', the 'Aunts' are those women who educate and instruct the handmaids and the 'Jezebels' are the official prostitutes for men of higher classes. The 'Econowives' of the lower classes do not have servants and so they have to take up the role of both Wife and Martha. Lastly, there is a group of older and/or rebellious 'Unwomen', who are not fit to bear children and who are used as 'disposable workers' to clear the colonies of toxic waste.

The fact that the handmaids are reduced to specimens of their class, is reflected in the way they are expected to look and behave. Each of them is dressed in red – "the colour of blood, which defines us" – and they have a white hood with wings which "are to keep us from seeing, but also from being seen". (Atwood 18) The activities of the citizens of Gilead are strictly monitored and controlled, but at a certain point the Commander does something he is not allowed to. He passes a message to Offred that he would like to see her alone, in his office. It is the beginning of a series of nights filled with innocent amusement such as Scrabble at first, but eventually he takes her to a party organised for Commanders and Jezebels. There she meets her old friend Moira who escaped from the indoctrination centre where they were trained as handmaids. Apparently, Moira now works as a Jezebel and, through her, Offred discovers that her mother has been exiled to the colonies as an Unwoman:

    Thank God, I said.
    Why, thank God? said Moira.
    I thought she was dead.
    She might as well be, said Moira. You should wish it for her. (Atwood 264)
The Commander's nightly meetings with Offred are not the only 'illegal' activities which take place in Gilead. At one of their trips to the grocery store, Offred's shopping partner Ofglen unmask herself as an opponent of the regime:

"I thought you were a true believer," Ofglen says.

"I thought you were," I say.

"You were always so stinking pious."

"So were you," I reply. I want to laugh, shout, hug her.

"You can join us," she says.

"Us?" I say. There is an us then, there's a we. I knew it.

"You didn't think I was the only one," she says.

I didn't think that. It occurs to me that she may be a spy, a plant, set to trap me; such is the soil in which we grow. But I can't believe it; hope is rising in me, like sap in a tree. Blood in a wound. We have made an opening. (Atwood 178)

There even exist a number of safe places for non-conforming citizens to escape to, which are known as part of the 'Underground Femaleroad'. Since the cassettes on which Offred recorded her story were found in one of these places, the reader can afterwards assume that she eventually managed to escape the regime of Gilead.

Even the Commander's Wife, Serena Joy, does not always follow the Gileadean rules. The handmaids suffer because they have to have sex with the Commanders, but it must equally be torture for the Wives to have to allow and witness this 'Ceremony' over and over again. If Offred would become pregnant, Serena Joy would be spared of this for at least a while and so she arranges for Offred and one of the Commander's 'Guardians', Nick, to sleep together. Offred actually starts to enjoy her meetings with him, because it is the first true human contact she has experienced in a very long time. After a while they start seeing each
other in secrecy and they build up a relationship which, for Offred, brings back painful memories of her life in freedom with her husband Luke.

Unfortunately, at a certain point Offred finds out that Ofglen's non-conformity has been discovered and that she has hanged herself to avoid torture and public execution. Almost simultaneously, Serena Joy confronts Offred with her secret arrangements with the Commander, and the Guardians – including Nick – come to the house to take Offred away. Offred immediately assumes that Nick is in fact an 'Eye', a spy for the government, but he comes up to her room and tells her that it is safe to go with the Guardians. The reader inevitably wonders what happened to Offred and Atwood concludes her story with the answer hanging in mid-air: "And so I step up, into the darkness within; or else the light". (Atwood 307)

First of all, I would like to refer back to the similarity between science and religion pointed out by Nietzsche, who felt that both of these systems thrive on imposing a univocal truth on its followers. Since Gilead is a totalitarian theocracy, it represents the ideal case in order to put this theory to the test. Indeed, it seems that the leaders of this regime desire a high level of conformity of its subjects. This is most clearly exemplified by the handmaids, who are all dressed identically in a red dress, red gloves and shoes and a white hood with wings. However, not only their outward appearance identifies them as members of a particular group. In public, they are obliged to greet each other and communicate in fixed religious phrases: "'Blessed be the fruit,' she says to me, the accepted greeting among us. 'May the Lord open,' I answer, the accepted response". (Atwood 29) These standard dialogues are not only a measure imposed by the authorities to limit the amount of personal information being passed between the handmaids, but they also allow the handmaids themselves to check whether their partner is

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7 c.f. Chapter 2.2.1.2. The influence of Nietzsche's and Freud's theories
a conforming member of Gilead. Offred makes it very clear that, for this reason, no one is to be trusted: "During these walks she has never said anything that was not strictly orthodox, but then, neither have I. She may be a real believer, a Handmaid in more than name. I can't take the risk". (Atwood 29) Nevertheless, language serves as an instrument not only of control but also of rebellion, as was the case in Zamyatin's *We* as well. The rebellious formation, of which Ofglen – and later on Offred herself – is a member, has developed a secret code to recognise fellow 'non-believers'. They test whom they encounter by dropping the word 'Mayday' as a sign of rebellion:

"There's a password," she says.

"A password?" I ask. "What for?"

"So you can tell," she says. "Who is and who isn't."

Although I can't see what use it is for me to know, I ask, "What is it then?"

"Mayday," she says. "I tried it on you once."


"Don't use it unless you have to," say [sic] Ofglen. "It isn't good for us to know about too many of the others, in the network. In case you get caught." (Atwood 212)

In my opinion, the strength of this work by Margaret Atwood lies in the fact that the world which is depicted in it, although it deals with a nightmarish regime which we never have been – and hopefully never will be – subjected to, comes across as very familiar to the reader. Catharine R. Stimpson formulates her findings concerning this – what I think we can justly call – 'verisimilitude' quite strikingly in *The Nation*: "Of course, her [Offred's] story is not true. It is, though, imaginatively plausible". (767) Especially the episodes where Offred reflects on her past with Luke and her daughter – which one can imagine as being very similar
to how many readers live today – create a feeling of sympathy, and I dare even say empathy, towards the protagonist. This, of course, once more draws upon one of the premises of the dystopian genre: the author must create a familiar reality in order for the reader to understand which horrible turns it might take in the future. Consequently, these narratives are to be situated somewhere in between of what is familiar and what is unfamiliar and as a result, a sense of duality is often a salient feature of this type of works.

With regard to this duality, I would also like to refer back to Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*, and Kaplan's quote on women's history of reading and writing. Through the recording of these cassettes, Offred intends to convey her own version of the truth as a kind of counteroffensive to the official version of what happened. This action turns Offred into an author and as a consequence she – like any other woman writer – is confronted with the problem of "true female literary authority". (Gilbert and Gubar 73) This fact is most clearly exemplified in the epilogue of the novel, in which the two male professors who imposed an order on Offred's story present their findings to an audience. These "pompous, sniggering academics" do not hesitate to make the best of their chance to ridicule Offred's situation (Stimpson 766):

The superscription "The Handmaid's Tale" was appended to it by Professor Wade, partly in homage to the great Geoffrey Chaucer; but those of you who know Professor Wade informally, as I do, will understand when I say that I am sure all puns were intentional, particularly that having to do with the archaic vulgar signification of the word *tail*, that being, to some extent, the bone, as it were, of contention, in that phase of Gileadean society of which our saga treats. (*Laughter, applause.*) (Atwood 313)

Gilbert and Gubar suggested that female authors can only overcome their literary inferior position "by simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal literary standards", and
– despite the professors' snide remarks – I feel that this is exactly what Offred has achieved. To use Kaplan's words, she has succeeded to operate "in the interstices of masculine culture". (187) As a handmaid, she has become very skilfull in posing as a conforming member of Gilead, but simultaneously she is fighting the system from within by teaming up with Ofglen's rebellious movement, with the Commander, with Nick the Guardian and even with Serena Joy.

What is particularly interesting, then, is the rebellious act which Offred brings about on a very personal level, namely through language. If we accept Elaine Showalter's temporal division of the female literary subculture in three stages, then *The Handmaid's Tale* falls under the category of the Female phase. In Offred's case this classification is quite plausible, since this stage is characterised by a self-discovery, "a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity". (1986, 13) Offred is not merely in search for an identity but instead she seeks to retrieve the identity of her life in freedom with her family. To this end, poetic language is foregrounded in Atwood's novel as an instrument of liberation. Despite the suffocating conditions she is subjected to, our protagonist tries to reconnect with her former female identity through poetical language, which is above all based upon touch, sense and smell:

There is something subversive about this garden of Serena's, a sense of buried things bursting upwards, wordlessly, into the light, as if to point out, to say: Whatever is silenced will clamour to be heard, though silently. A Tennyson garden, heavy with scent, languid; the return of the word swoon. (…) The willow is in full plumage and is no help, with its insinuating whispers. *Rendezvous*, it says, *terraces*; the sibilants run up my spine, a shiver as in fever. The summer dress rustles against the flesh of my thighs, the grass grows underfoot, at the edges of my eyes there are movements, in the branches;
feathers, flittings, grace notes, tree into bird, metamorphosis run wild.

Goddesses are possible now and the air suffuses with desire. (Atwood 161-162)

In this way, Atwood confirms Julia Kristeva's view of poetic language as a linguistic revolution because of "its opacity, its refusal to let socially imposed meanings remain self-evident". (Cavanagh 289) Kristeva links this type of language use with the "semiotic", which she describes as "a poetic-maternal linguistic practice that disrupts the symbolic, understood as culturally intelligible rule-governed speech". (Butler 104) In addition, her assertion that "The poetic word (...) fully comes into being only in the margins of recognized culture" (1986, 36) appears to be perfectly applicable to Offred, who has been pushed to the edges of society and has been reduced to a "two-legged womb", a "sacred vessel", an "ambulatory chalice". (Atwood 146) In sum, what I wished to convey with the analysis of this novel is that language can be used not only in favour of the ruling authorities – an example of which are the fixed phrases the handmaids are supposed to use –, but that it can also serve to unite suppressed individuals ("Mayday") or help one of them to rediscover a lost aspect of their personal identity.

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8 For reasons of clarity, I include an explanation of the terms 'semiotic' and symbolic' as suggested by Judith Butler: "According to Lacan, the paternal law structures all linguistic signification, termed 'the symbolic', and so becomes a universal organizing principle of culture itself. This law creates the possibility of meaningful language and, hence, meaningful experience, through the repression of primary libidinal drives, including the radical dependency of the child on the maternal body. Hence, the symbolic becomes possible by repudiating the primary relationship to the maternal body. (...) Kristeva (...) argues that the 'semiotic' is a dimension of language occasioned by that primary maternal body which not only refutes Lacan's primary premise, but which serves as a perpetual source of subversion within the symbolic. For Kristeva, the semiotic expresses that original libidinal multiplicity within the very terms of culture, more precisely, within poetic language in which multiple meanings and semantic non-closure prevail." (104-105)
Conclusion

During the last five hundred years, many writers have attempted to formulate their ideas on how to create a better future in works which we would now consider 'realistic utopias'. Due to the fact that these narratives thrive on a critique of existing social, political and ethical problems, they often tend to stay within the realm of the possible. Such a close connection with historical contexts is exactly what has eventually led to the creation of anti-utopian or dystopian works, the genre which has been the general focal point of this dissertation.

Already in the nineteenth century, the industrial revolution in Western Europe created doubts concerning whether technological and scientific progress actually was a change for the better. Later on, scathing criticism on man's adoration of science, the growing mechanisation of life, civilisation's strain on man's liberty and the dogmatic precepts of religion by important thinkers such as Nietzsche and Freud contributed to a more pessimistic frame of mind with regard to the future. The growing number of dystopian works during the twentieth century could be considered as an indication that the strength of faith in unlimited progress was – and perhaps still is – steadily declining. Works such as those by Zamyatin, Huxley, Orwell and Burgess sketch grim pictures of futures "dominated by a tyrannical idea, which violates the rules of traditional social development, as well as the moral and psychological norms of individual behaviour". (Olshanskaya 426) What is striking, is that in each of these novels language is used as the instrument *par excellence* to control and indoctrinate human beings. As I was doing my research, it became increasingly clear that language is a highly powerful medium which, however, can be used not only by the leaders of oppressive regimes but also by subversive individuals. It seems that, in many cases, the use of language can be interpreted as a particular kind of revolution against dominant ideologies.
This last consideration has been of crucial importance for the actual subject of my investigation, namely the female voice in feminist critical dystopian novels. Because male authors have had the ascendancy in the dystopian genre during the last century, women writers who want to produce works in the same field do not exactly find themselves in a favourable position to start with. As a result, female authors of dystopias are not only concerned with criticising the more general problems of their day and age such as the growing importance of technology and the strain of civilisation on individual liberty, but also with confronting the problematic position of women in a patriarchal society – both on a literary and on a societal level. In order to be able to operate in a culture and a genre which are characterised by a male bias, they are forced to express themselves in the dominant language but at the same time they try to convey their personal, often subversive point of view.

Much has been written about the difficulties women writers have to face and several feminist literary critics and philosophers have made some very useful observations concerning this subject. Elaine Showalter asserts that women writers since the 1920s have come to a phase in which a self-discovery and a search for a proper identity prevails, and Gilbert and Gubar reflect on the way female authors are supposed to obtain a genuine female literary identity in a patriarchal society where language is mainly male-oriented. Hélène Cixous, then, puts forward that despite the similarity of the problems all female authors are confronted with, there is no single definition for 'feminine writing'. Although Luce Irigaray similarly cannot provide a clear-cut description of her notion of 'womanspeak', she does claim that women's style is almost invariably characterised by fluidity and a sense of touch. According to Kristeva, these elements – which show quite a substantial similarity with the components of poetic language – function as part of a linguistic revolution through which "the 'rational', apparently natural social codes that govern our everyday speech" are challenged. (289) All of
these ideas have formed the theoretical framework which I wanted to put to the test through the analysis of my three case studies.

The female protagonists in Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* can all be classified as members of the oppressed sex. In fact, it seems that none of the representations of women in these novels can be considered as empowering in any way. Connie and Offred are dominated and controlled in an environment they desperately seek to escape from, and Evelyn repeatedly finds himself in degrading conditions due to the fact that he is now a woman in the eyes of others. The only positive view we receive of a woman in any of these works is that of Luciente, the time-traveller in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, but I do not wish to take her into consideration because, technically, she belongs to a utopian and not a dystopian narrative. Although one might put forward that it seems only logical that these women are depicted in poor living conditions because dystopias are typically of a bleak and gloomy nature, it is hard to ignore that the female characters in these novels are still worse off than the male characters. Evelyn, for example, had abused women before his transformation, but was subjected to the same fate the very moment he became a woman himself. Also in *The Handmaid's Tale*, we find that all women are put in a subordinated position to the Commanders, whether they are Handmaids, Marthas or Wives.

In all three of these novels, supporters of patriarchal power structures appear to make use of language to keep women in their subordinated position. As in Zamyatin's *We* and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the only language which the suppressed individuals are allowed to use is one that is molded by the oppressors. The Handmaids are expected to communicate in fixed phrases and Zero the poet has forbidden Evelyn to speak at all, unless she uses his primitive animal language. It would thus seem that, in the process of subjugation, the first element these three protagonists have been deprived of is the right to a personal
voice. However, it would be wrong to assume that the authors have not left even a grain of hope for their female characters. Each one of them makes it clear that a revolution is possible and that language can be one of the means in their struggle to achieve it. Whereas Atwood uses poetic language to make Offred reconnect with her former female identity, Piercy whisks Connie away to a future where language is presented as proof that true gender equality has been achieved and will be maintained. These examples are, in my opinion, once more an affirmation of the idea that language can be employed as an instrument not only of oppression but also of liberation.

By giving these characters a voice, it seems to me that the authors of these novels have confronted Connie, Evelyn and Offred with the same difficulties of female literary authority which Gilbert and Gubar have pointed out in their discussion of nineteenth-century literature, namely those concerning the assertion of creativity as a male quality and the confrontation with a fundamentally male-oriented language. (6; 46) Offred records her story on cassettes to offer resistance to the official version of Gilead, but once in the hands of 'sniggering academics' her narrative is trivialised and even ridiculed. Evelyn's story is essentially a narrative conceived by a man but because of his appearance as a woman, he is silenced several times in the novel. Connie tries to explain her situation to social workers and physicians on numerous occasions, but at the end of the novel her story is reduced to an accumulation of medical reports which describe her as "a socially disorganized individual". (Piercy 377) The question is, then: is the lack of power which Piercy, Carter and Atwood ultimately associated their characters with in their visions of the future, an indication that women writers still struggle for existence in a literary climate that is – to this day – male-oriented? I would like to conclude this dissertation with a reflection on how women have grappled with this feeling of inferiority for more than two centuries now, as formulated by Gilbert and Gubar in their "Infection in the Sentence":

Desmet 80
The masculine authority with which they [women writers] construct their literary personae, as well as the fierce power struggles in which they engage in their efforts of self-creation, seem to the woman writer directly to contradict the terms of her own gender definition. Thus the 'anxiety of influence' that a male poet experiences is felt by a female poet as an even more primary 'anxiety of authorship' – a radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become a 'precursor' the act of writing will isolate or destroy her. (49)

It appears to me that the success of the three novels I discussed and the literary attention they have received is an indication that women writers today have come closer to their goal of being considered on equal terms as male authors, but perhaps their sense of inferiority as suggested by the quote above is still – at least not entirely – a thing of the past.


