

Anti-Totalitarian Sexual Revolutions in Orwell's Nineteen-Eighty-Four and Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale

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Abstract

Citizens of Dystopia are typically denied freedom of individual choice. They are unanimously victimized by an omnipotent totalitarian hierarchy that practice brainwashing by means of propaganda and constant manipulation of collective memory and language. Dystopian fiction also features a totalitarian regime manipulating human sexual desire by channeling it toward maintaining its dictatorial power. Under dystopian totalitarian rule, sexual pleasure for its sake is forbidden: citizens are denied the freedom of gratifying their desire in marital relations and their offspring is consecrated to the state. This paper aims at studying the course of two anti-totalitarian sexual revolutions—in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Margret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*—with the hypothesis of the variation of their endings between optimism and pessimism according to their authors' philosophical variant stances.

Key words: Dystopia; Totalitarianism; Sexual Revolution; Rebellion

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The dramatization of human struggle against an oppressive power that denies individuals their essential potentialities is one of the main thematic features in dystopian fictional imagination. The mechanisms enacted in such tyrannical de-individualization scheme involve the obliteration of privacy, personal identity, and individual property. Concomitantly, the denial of freedom of choice and expression; the constant brainwashing propaganda of an omnipotent hierarchy; and the manipulations of human memory and language in persistent falsification of reality are unanimously typical practices in dystopian totalitarianism. Dystopian fiction usually features the manipulation of the basic right of satisfying human desire by totalitarianism for the sole purpose of maintaining its power. This paper aims at studying the course of two anti-totalitarian sexual revolutions—in Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Margret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*—with the hypothesis of the variation of their endings between optimism and pessimism according to their authors’ philosophical variant stances.

An exact definition of the dystopian genre is, nonetheless, elusive due to the nature of the blurred lines denoting the difference between utopia and dystopia. Utopias envision the human future with hope and sometimes with alarm. Dystopias, in contrast, send speculative warning messages against the dire consequences of the present time’s real developments. In reference to Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Huxley’s *Brave*

New World—the two classic masterpieces that feature typical dystopian elements—Gregory Clays writes in “The Origins of Dystopia. Wells, Huxley and Orwell,” that dystopian imagination is usually opted for to “describe a fictional portrayal of a society in which evil, or negative social and political developments, have the upper hand, or as a satire of utopian aspirations which attempts to show [its] fallacies” (107). Likewise, M. Keith Brooker explains in *Critical Insights: Dystopia* that dystopia as a literary genre is motivated by an attempt to send satirical warning messages in order to help in preventing the speculated fears against the present. This is essentially related to the idea that dystopia

Spurred by events such as two world wars, the Nazi Holocaust, the failed attempt to build socialism in the Soviet Union, and the growing control of consumer capitalism over the lives of ordinary individuals in the west, the dystopian genre expressed a widespread social anxiety. (vii)

In “Orwell and Me” Margret Atwood acknowledges George Orwell’s effect on her interest in the precursory nature of dystopian imagination that came to full understanding as she had come of age. Margret read *Animal Farm* when she was nine, and though she became “forever grateful to Orwell for alerting [her] early to the danger flags [she has] tried to watch out for.” Nonetheless, Atwood’s ideological stance developed *in lieu* of the

desponding pessimism of Orwell's male-dominant dystopias. Atwood wanted to "try a dystopia from the female point of view—the world according to Julia, as it were." Still, does this deem *The Handmaid's Tale* a feminist dystopia?

Though Atwood has bluntly stated that her novel is not a feminist dystopia except for "giving a woman a voice and an inner life," Peter G. Stillman and S. Anne Johnson write in "Identity, Complicity, and Resistance in the *Handmaid's Tale*" that Atwood "Joins the ranks of writers of specifically feminist utopias and dystopias" (70). Likewise, Amin Malak explicates in "Margret Atwood's "*The Handmaid's Tale*" and the Dystopian Tradition" that what distinguishes "Margaret Atwood's novel from other classic dystopias is its "obvious feminist focus" (11). Atwood presents a dystopian misogynistic world in which the handmaid's situation "lucidly illustrate Simon de Beauvoir's assertion in *The Second Sex* about man defining woman not as an autonomous being but simply what he decrees to be relative to him: "[f]or him she is sex—about sex, no less." (11).

It is essentially important to relate Atwood's liberal feminist attitude to the appreciation of sex politics in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Atwood opposed the concept of antagonism between the two sexes, and supported social equality for women. In this novel, Atwood ironically criticizes the radical antagonism of The Second Wave Feminism against men and how it leads to anti-feminist and anti-woman backlashes. Atwood is more a proponent of Liberal

Feminism—the ideological basis of the First Wave Feminism—than an exponent of the Second Wave Feminism for its radicalism. The main criticism against liberal feminism in its First Wave—mostly adopted by upper-middle class women—was its oblivion of women of the working classes and the minorities. The Second wave Feminism, also known as the Women’s Liberation Movement, comes as a reaction against the surreal stance of The First wave Feminism as it is ideologically addressed to affect radical change in gender politics between the male superordinate and the female subordinate. That radicalism resulted in feminist subgroups such as cultural feminism, separatism, materialist feminism and radical feminism. Cultural feminism advocates for the creation of a gynocentric culture. Feminist separatism calls for exclusion of men in female-only spaces. Materialist feminism has a strong foundation in socialist class struggle. Radical feminism focuses on the radical annihilation of sex roles.

In *The Handmaid’s Tale* Atwood depicts a speculative dystopian image of modern America (henceforth “The Republic of Gilead”) under a “literal-minded theocratic dictatorship...built on a foundation of the seventeenth-century Puritan roots” (Atwood, x). So, “the catastrophe” we are told took place when “they shot the president and machine-gunned the congress and the army declared a state of emergency....Newspapers were censored and some were closed down....the Pornomarts were shut” (183). Same as in other dystopias, citizens, especially women, under the

rule of the Republic of Gilead are victims of totalitarian oppression and lack of freedom. Thus, under the rule of the new theocratic regime, women are dismissed from their jobs; their bank accounts are frozen; and they “can’t hold property any more” (187). Women under such oppressive rule are degraded to the mere biological role of reproduction slaves in a dystopian re-enactment of the Old Testament story of Rachel and her handmaid, Bilhah. Thus, females capable of reproduction are abducted by the theocratic militia of the regime, brainwashed, and forced to combat a massive fertile crisis. Women under this oppressive theocratic oligarchy are “two-legged wombs, that’s all: sacred vessels. Ambulatory chalices” (146).

Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* contextualize typical dystopian features. Thus, same as Gilead’s oppressive puritan theocracy, Oceania’s militant communist regime uses totalitarian measures to control people under its rule through manipulating their language, falsifying their history, and denying them personal freedom and individual identity. Intimate relations between individuals under the oppressive totalitarian regimes in both novels are not allowed; instead, citizens are intimidated into dedicating their passion solely to the totalitarian state. Sexual relations between members of such dystopian polities are only allowed for the reproduction of new members of the regime, whose loyalty is mandatorily consecrated to the state. Hence, sex in these dystopias is mainly

intended to generate loyal offspring rather than to involve in sex relations that consummate intimacy.

Oppressive totalitarian powers in these dystopian regimes prohibit individuals under its sway from experiencing emotional attachment that comes to full expression in the enactment of sex. To explain further, Michel Foucault explicates in *The History of Sexuality* the relationship between tyrannical power systems—whether patriarchal theocracy or political dictatorship—and their prohibition of sex as a means of oppression:

To deal with sex, power employs nothing more than a law of prohibition. Its objective: that sex renounces itself. Its instrument: the threat of a punishment that is nothing other than the suppression of sex. Renounce yourself or suffer the penalty of being suppressed; do not appear if you do not want to disappear. (84)

The main characters in the novels of Atwood and Orwell are coerced, by the oppressive regimes that completely control their lives, to suppress their emotional attachment and to channel their sexual desires through prescribed routines or social arrangements. Illicit sex practiced by the main characters in both novels defies the taboo codes of the oppressive totalitarian powers—patriarchal theocracy in *The Handmaid's Tale* and communist dictatorship in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Respectively, a sexual relation is only allowed as a duty toward the state and any deviation from

fulfilling this duty is deemed by the state as an act of disloyal revolt punishable by severe torture and even death.

These oppressive measures result in tumultuous psychological disturbance on part of the members of the state who dare to challenge the prohibitive rules. This, in fact, is due to the binary oppositions created by the dystopian paradigm, which, as Malak explicates, results in the dramatization of an inner conflict within the individual who “resent[s] the replacement of his private volition by compulsory uniformitarian decisions made by an impersonal bureaucratic machinery” (10). Both of Winston Smith in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Offred in *The Handmaid’s Tale* have illicit lovers—respectively, Julia and Nick. These secret lovers jeopardize their comfort and safety—in conforming to the subjugated majority—when they decide to practice their most basic human right of having emotional and physical gratification through the sexual act. In this manner, sex for those rebels, is an act of revolt on different levels according to each member’s perception. For instance, full of sarcasm Winston Smith tells his sex partner Julia that she is “only a rebel from the waist downwards” (127). Nonetheless, Julia can see through the “Party’s sexual Puritanism” more than he does. In fact, Julia argues philosophically against this oppressive power’s prohibition of the most basic human right:

It was not merely that the sex instinct created a world of its own which was outside the Party’s control and

which therefore had to be destroyed if possible. What was more important was that sexual privation induced hysteria, which was desirable because it could be transformed into war-fever and leader-worship. (109)

Similarly, in *The Handmaid's Tale* Offred recognizes the danger of breaking the law on the prohibition of sexual intercourse for pleasure in Gilead. Rebel women are punished either by death or deportation to regions contaminated with nuclear waste. The rule for a handmaid is to be impregnated by her commander while her body is laid between the open legs of his wife. In such a pervert arrangement, ironically named in the novel "The Ceremony", sexual intercourse is void of any emotional or physical satisfaction. The handmaid Offred must surrender herself to this *ménage a trios* on regular basis—and only in her ovulation period—in the hope of getting impregnated. In this theocratic misogynistic dystopia, handmaids who fail to get pregnant are deemed barren and, upon which, sentenced to be outcast to remote nuclear contaminated zones. Similarly, Winston Smith is apprehensively aware of the dire consequences of being discovered by Oceania's regime for having an illicit pleasurable sexual relation with any female member of the Party. Ironically, however, he gets arrested and tortured in the "Ministry of Love" for "Thought-crime"—not for the transgression of sex rules in Oceania. In Room 101 Smith faces his most dreaded fears. His

revolutionary soul is crushed as he screams pleadingly, “Do it to Julia! Do it to Julia! Not me! Julia!” (227).

Offred, in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, also feels intimidated when she breaks the austere sex rules of Gilead, as she goes to meet the commander secretly in his office upon his request. She knows that it is “illegal” and “forbidden” to be alone with the commander because handmaids in Gilead are only for breeding purposes. Offred says, “there is supposed to be nothing entertaining about us, no room is to be permitted for the flowering of secret lusts, no special favors are to be wheedled, by them or us, there are to be no toeholds for love” (146).

Love relations, or any other emotional attachment, either on the individual or collective levels, are the antithesis of what the Party in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Gilead in *The Handmaid’s Tale* stand for. In both totalitarian dystopias, the family bonds are severed clean by the ruling systems either by force or intimidation. Melancholically, Winston Smith remembers his family “in a time when there were still privacy, love and friendship, and when the members of a family stood by one another without needing to know the reason” (28). In Oceania, the rule is that loyal dedication of emotional attachment should be exclusively toward the Party’s iconic figure the “Big Brother.” Therefore, in the “Ministry of Love,” O’Brain’s main job is to correct Winston Smith’s emotional deviation out the romantic affair with Julia and to reestablish his emotional allegiance to Big

Brother. According to ideology of the party in Oceania, the function of Big Brother 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” (167). Therefore, O’Brain dictates that “there will be no loyalty, except loyalty toward the party. There will be no love, except the love of Big Brother.” O’Brain, in addition, reminds Winston that in Oceania there is no place for the old-fashioned love or instinctual trust between parents and children. Thus, in this dystopian polity, “[n]o one dares trust a wife or a child or a friend any longer. But in the future, there will be no wives and no friends...There will be no loyalty, except loyalty toward the Party” (212).

In Oceania, the children learn to be faithful solely to the state and its iconic figure the Big Brother who is watching on every citizen. Children are considered the property of the state and they are taught to be the members of its secret intelligence the “Junior Spies.” They could spy on their parents and report to the state officials any blemish of unfaithful thought or even the slightest unconscious slip of the tongue against the state—as in the case of Winston’s neighbor Parsons whose daughter reports him to the police. Winston, however, is amazed how Parsons takes “doleful” pride in his daughter who eavesdrops on him. Parsons says, “[it] shows I brought her up in the right spirit anyway” (185). The “right spirit” here means blind faithfulness to

the state. No wonder then, how Winston writes that Mrs. Parsons must be terrified by her own children because

hardly a week passed in which the *Times* did not carry a paragraph describing how some eavesdropping little sneak—‘child hero’ was the phrase usually used—had overheard some compromising remark and denounced his parents to the Thought Police. (23)

In fact, Orwell’s dystopian imagination is based on real philosophical debates and sociological hypotheses concerning children in Soviet Russia that were proposed by members of the Communist regime. Becky L. Glass and Margaret K. Stolee explain in “Family Law in Soviet Russia, 1917-1945.” that after the Bolsheviks seized power, there were four major decrees with legal definitions of “family structure, marital and parental relationships, sexual behavior and women’s position,” which some analysts interpreted as the ““Russian Experiment” to abolish the family” (893). One of the ideological perspectives concerning the role of family in raising children was to “nationalize” them as Zlata Lilina, the director of the Petrograd Schools once said, “[W]e ought to register them; frankly we should nationalize them. From the first days of their lives they will be under the influence of Kindergartens and communist schools...There they will become true communists. [Sokoloff, 1921]” (894).

In the same rut, handmaids in Gilead are only kept in the commanders' houses just for the purpose of procreation. The lucky ones are those who get impregnated in order to deliver babies to the sterile ruling regime; thus, they escape being labeled "unwoman". After delivery, however, these women's relation with the newborns is severed clean. They get transferred to other commanders waiting for their turn in order to beget more children to the new Gileadean society. Offred—kidnapped, intimidated and imprisoned—surrenders herself to the commander and his wife with the only hope of getting pregnant in order not to be sent to the colonies, though she knows that the commander's wife "would be the one to raise [her] child, should [she] be able to have one after all" (170). Likewise, Janine, another handmaid just like Offred, delivers a baby to her commander and his wife on the awkward "Birthing Stool," with its "double seat, the back one raised like a throne behind the other" (127). It is, in fact, a grotesque image of the commander's wife unifying her body with that of her handmaid in order to receive a baby through her. The handmaid, however, is only allowed to nurse the child for some time, after which the baby is taken by the wife and she is sent to another house to repeat the course:

She'll be allowed to nurse the baby, for a few months, they believe in mother's milk. After that she'll be transferred, to see if she can do it again, with someone else who needs a turn. But she'll

never be sent to the Colonies, she'll never be declared Unwoman. That is her reward. (137)

Offred, also has been used by a previous commander before the one she is with at the time of story. Sarcastically, she compares this commander, who smells of mothballs as an “improvement,” to the other who “smelled like a church cloakroom in the rain; like your mouth when the dentist starts picking at your teeth; like a nostril” (106).

These draconian measures against the enjoyment of sex and emotional attachment, and the forced confiscation of offspring to the state, result in different attitudes on part of women in Oceania and Gilead. For instance, in *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, Winston's wife Katharine, whom he says, “can't get rid of,” (98) is in Oceania's “Newspeak” a “*goodthinkful*” person, which means she is “naturally orthodox, incapable of thinking a bad thought.” Katharine calls sex between her and her husband “our duty to the party.” Although she has never enjoyed the act, Katharine used to force Winston to go through “the frigid little ceremony...on the same night every week...nothing would make her stop.” In fact, Katharine is a typical female citizen of Oceania whose sex education begins at school according to the moral code of the Party as Julia says, “I've been at school too, dear. Sex talks once a month for the over-sixteens. And in the Youth Movement. They rub it into you for years” (108). Remarkably, both Orwell and

Atwood refer to the sexual act in their novels as the “ceremony,” which highlights the abnormality of sexual intercourse when forced by totalitarianism.

Thomas Horan writes in “Revolutions from the Waist Downwards: Desire as Rebellion in Yevgeny Zamarin’s *We*, George Orwell’s *1984*, and Aldous Huxley *Brave New World*” that “the limitation of language” in dystopian fiction by and large in Orwell’s *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* and other seminal dystopian works, is used as a “tool for manipulating the citizenry,” and consequently, rebellious and/or nonconformist “heretical thoughts are controlled not simply through censorship, but through the eradication of potentially subversive words from the spoken language itself” (328). It is remarkable how language manipulation is one of the typical means of oppression in both novels by Orwell and Atwood. In Oceania, citizens’ freedom of expression is very limited because the ruling party is “destroying words,” and “cutting the language to the bone” (43). The regime is inventing a new language “Newspeak,” with the aim of narrowing thought, and eventually, “Thoughtcrime” will be impossible because “there will be no words in which to express it” (44).

Thus, while in Orwell’s Oceania women complying with the political regime are called “*goodthinkful*,” a barren female rebel in Atwood’s dystopian polity is labeled “*Unwoman*.” Kidnapped women are brainwashed by a group of elderly women

who make them watch “Unwoman documentary” movies about women whom they claim were mistreated and misused in the pre-Gileadian era in comparison to the sublime purpose set for them by the present state. Under the oppressive patriarchal rule in Gilead maintaining a minimal level of semiological communication, such as indicative colors, signs and uniforms, is essential in circumscribing women’s roles and social identities. Therefore, in Gilead the names of shops are “painted out,” as Offred says, because the new regime decided that “even the names of the shops were too much temptation for [them]. Now, places are known by their signs alone” (35). Women’s social roles are defined in Gilead by their distinctive dresses and names of their occupation. Thus, as Offred goes on her routine shopping errand, she gives a brief description of women in the street, “some in the dull green of the Marthas, some in the striped dresses, red and blue and green and cheap and skimpy, that mark the women of the poorer men. Econowives, they’re called” (34).

Uniforms and colors also play a definite role in designating the occupational roles of party members in Oceania. Winston wears blue overalls just like all men and women indistinctively do—a deliberate means of desexualizing the party members. Ostensibly, the same uniforms for men and women are intended to give a sense of equality, but in actual fact to enforce the idea that sex—like all other human rights—is not for pleasure but for a certain purpose: procreation. Julia, for instance, wears a red sash

around her waist—a form of propaganda—in order to distinguish herself as a member of the “Anti-Sex League” (100). Remarkably, it is the aim of the party, as Winston recounts, to “kill sex instinct,” or to “remove all pleasure from the sexual act” (55). Winston finds it almost impossible—“extraordinarily embarrassing, and after a while horrible” (56)—to have sex with his wife Kathrine, who “winced and stiffened as soon as he touched her.” Winston remembers embracing her like embracing a “jointed wooden image”: her body was frozen by the “hypnotic power of the Party” (57).

In this dystopian world, the basic human feeling of love, or even bodily desire, is a forbidden “thought crime.” Women in Oceania were all brainwashed by the Party’s propaganda against sex, and the idea of chastity was ingrained in them as “Party loyalty” (57). In fact, the sole recognized purpose of marriage in Oceania was to beget loyal children to the Party: neither love nor desire was allowed:

Sexual intercourse was to be looked on as a slightly disgusting minor operation, like having an enema....There were even organizations such as the Junior Anti-Sex League, which advocated complete celibacy for both sexes. All children were to be begotten by artificial insemination (*artsem*, it was called in Newspeak) and brought up in public institutions. (55)

Similarly, handmaids in Gilead are not supposed to experience love, or any other feelings, as the awkward sex trio with the commanders and their wives is solely intended for their impregnation. It is, however, a dystopian re-enactment of the Biblical story in which Rachel fails to bear children so she brings her handmaid Bilhah to her husband Jacob in order to bear children for them. In Genesis 30:3, Rachel tells Jacob, “[h]ere’s Bilhah, my maidservant. Sleep with her so that she can bear children for me and that through her I can have a family” (50). Ironically, in Gilead, the *ménage a trios* is called the “ceremony” in reference to its de facto strictness and routine. “Kissing is forbidden between us,” Offred says. In the act, the Commander, his wife and the handmaid are fully dressed, with Offred’s skirt only “hitched up to [her] waist” (104). In the *maladotri*ness of this *ménage* Offred cannot feel any excitement, as it is a mere mechanical act that “has nothing to do with passion or love or any romance” (105). In fact, Offred’s description of the sexual act is loathsome and degradingly against women’s inclination. Offred in this scene is objectified as a “usable body” (172) to be controlled and used by the Commander and his wife for a certain purpose:

Above me, towards the head of the bed, Serena Joy is arranged, outspread. Her legs are apart, I lie between them, my head on her stomach, her pubic bone under the base of my skull, her thighs on either

side of me. She too is fully clothed. My arms are raised, she holds my hands, each of mine in each of hers. This is supposed to signify that we are one flesh, one being. What it really means is that she is in control, of the process and thus of the product.(104)

Linda Myrsiades explains further in “Law, Medicine, and the Sex Slave in Margret Atwood’s “The Handmaid’s Tale,” that under such a totalitarian regime, a reproductive woman is not conceptualized in terms of her individual identity but in “terms of [her] heterogeneity as part of a social network. Here the social unit rather than the unitary body is the touchstone for personhood. Reproduction is figured as a social rather than a personal experience” (223). In this sense, women under this totalitarianism become machine-like mothers whose function is the means of producing a product.

Offred, after being kidnapped and misused, is emotionally disturbed. She feels neither empathy nor apathy towards the commander who de facto rapes her on regular basis. She says that she ought to feel “hatred for this man,” but it isn’t what she feels; what she feels is “more complicated than that. [She doesn’t] know what to call it. It isn’t love” (68). In fact, love is impermissibly outlawed in Gilead because it means freedom of choice of emotional dedication. The aunts teach the handmaids that “*Love* is not the point” (232), and that freedom is freedom from choice not

freedom to choose. So, handmaids are taught that in “the days of anarchy,” it was women’s freedom to decide for themselves with their jobs and money, but in Gilead it is their “freedom from” having any choices. Same as in any other totalitarian regime, the individual is denied his freedom of expression, dress, job and emotional attachment. The commander tells Offred that in Gilead old women are sent “off to the colonies right away, but the young fertile ones they try to convert, and when they succeed, [they] renounce their celibacy, sacrifice it to the common good” (232).

It is worthy of note how breaking the taboo on the regulation of the codified sexual desire threatens the totalitarian power structures in both of Oceania and Gilead. In fact, both novels involve contrastive plots of the development of erotic and illicit relations that come as a means of subversion against totalitarian oppression. The main characters’ involvement in unlawful relations means the development of their political awareness and an expression of their conscious and/or subconscious revolt against the oppressive regimes that hegemonies their individuality. It is remarkable however, that the beginning of a relationship identically means in both cases the beginning of the end of the stories, though the endings are quite different according to the variant perspectives of each author.

A totalitarian regime might control its citizen’s language, uniform outfit, prescribed identity and occupation for the purpose of maintaining its absolute power. Still, in both novels, the

dystopian writers emphasize the concept that individual sexual desire is beyond the absolute control of the totalitarian regimes. Moreover, though the end results of the main characters' revolutions differ, the rebelliousness of the sexual desire is basically the same in awakening the individual's political awareness in the form of giving free rein to his/her sexual instinct.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari argue in "Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia" that human desire is revolutionary in its essence, and no matter how oppressive a social hierarchy or a political totalitarianism is it can never be curbed:

Desire is revolutionary in its essence....No society can tolerate a position of real desire without its structures of exploitation, servitude, and hierarchy being compromised...sexuality and love...cause strange flows to circulate that do not let themselves be stocked within an established order. Desire does not want revolution, it is revolutionary in its own right. (116)

This perfectly explains how totalitarian dystopias in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *The Handmaid's Tale* depend greatly on suppressing human desire and channeling it for the sole purpose of preserving its power. The uncontrollable nature of human lust threatens the totalitarian establishment due to the fact it is based on cold logical calculation while lust is rebelliously heated by its

illogicality. This also explains how the ruling party in Oceania sought to eliminate sexual desire, and to maintain a direct, intimate connection between chastity and political orthodoxy. Julia could see through the party's manipulative measures as she says:

‘when you make love you’re using up energy; afterwards you feel happy and don’t give a damn for anything....If you’re happy inside yourself, why should you get excited about Big Brother and the Three-Year Plans and the Two Minutes Hate and all the rest of their bloody rot?’ (109)

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, sex is regulated by a ruling theocratic totalitarianism. However, rebellion erupts within the executive ruling members of this polity: the commanders seek illicit frivolous sex liaisons at the secret brothel-like hotel Jezebel's where they make use of the “unwomen.” Riley Thomas comments in *Rebel Women and Counterspaces in Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale and Moore and Llyod's V for Vendetta*, that Jezebel's represents a space of sexual revolt against prescribed social roles for both men and women in Gilead, and therefore it is geographically outside it:

Geographically, Jezebel's is outside the city space, and it is, therefore, subject to strict regulations on sex for its sex workers. The men coerce the women at Jezebel's to be dancers and prostitutes to entertain

the prominent males who are “taking a break” from the self-imposed regulations that the men are required to follow within the city limit. (14)

The commanders coerce women at Jezebel’s to role play their concubines in an attempt to retrieve their past libidinal prowess. Atwood is sending a warning message that Women in Gilead would be either walking wombs or prostitutes: a dystopian imagination of what would become of women in case the religious rightist politicians come to power and women loose all their social rights.

However, the Commander and Offred had broken the taboo on their relation before they went to Jezebel’s. Offred was asked by the Commander to meet him secretly in his office. The meetings were not for practicing sex, which was done on regular basis in the presence of his wife. The illicit meetings were late-night rendezvous for the satisfaction of the Commander’s selfish whims at having a heterosexual interactivity by dubbing forbidden things for women in Gilead such as reading old-time fashion magazines, playing scrabble and using hand lotion. The significance of these illicit meetings is in their subservience of the power dynamics in Gilead as the barriers of objectivity between Offred and the Commander are demolished. Offred’s feelings are greatly disturbed as the role she is supposed to play as the Commander’s handmaid is exchanged for his mistress. She says, “the fact is that I’m his mistress...I am the outside woman. It’s

my job to provide what is otherwise lacking. Even the scabble....And for him. To him I'm no longer a usable body" (172).

Nevertheless, the Commander's revolt against the self-imposed rules on sexual relations in Gilead is doomed to fail. The Commander's decision to take Offred to Jezebel's stems from his desire to have sex with her in a place away from the self-imposed puritanical sexual regulations at the city center. Jezebel's is supposed to be a place where the Commanders of Gilead can enjoy a variety of the women; nevertheless, the Commander admits his, and his totalitarian regime's double standards as he tells Offred, "everyone's human....It means you can't cheat Nature....Nature demands variety, for men. It stands to reason, it's part of the procreational strategy" (248-249). And although Offred is supposed to hold a different function at jezebel's than that of the handmaid in Gilead, she is unable to role play the Commander's mistress as she lies "there like a dead bird" because she found that she "can't be, with him, any different from the way [she] usually [is] with him. Usually [she's] inert" (267).

In fact, Offred's revolution breaks out when she decides to rejoice in her illicit sexual relation with the Commander's chauffeur, Nick. When Offred decides to dedicate her emotions to the illicit lover, her eventual escape from the nightmarish Gilead is accomplished. Serena Joy, the Commander's wife arranges a secret rendezvous for Offred and Nick in order to give her

handmaid a chance to get pregnant, and hopfully that would spare her and her husband a social stigma. Still, that one time rendezvous is secretly repeated and Offred begins to develop emotional attachment toward Nick as she becomes pregnant. She says, “The fact is that I no longer want to leave, escape, cross the border to freedom. I want to be here, with Nick, where I can get at him” (283). In fact, this illicit sexual liaison achieves deep fulfillment for Offred who believes “it’s lack of love we die from” (103). Later, however, it turns out that Nick belongs to an underground organization, “the Mayday,” that captures the Commander and releases Offred. The smoothness of this final release from the grip of Gilead is indicative of Offred’s passivity, which shows in her coincidental escape. She has always been an ineptly objectified entity and her escape is motivated by the instinctual self-preservation rather than the desire to affect revolutionary social change.

On the other hand, under the totalitarian regime in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Winston and Julia suffer from both political and sexual repression. In fact, the sexual relationship between them assumes a pivotal importance in the novel due to its subversive infringement of the most important rule of controlling the passions of members of the Party. The sexual life of the Party member is regulated by concepts embedded in his/her political awareness by a comprehensive propaganda and entirely regulated by the new language Newspeak. Thus, sexual activity according

to the rules of party is “*goodsex*,” which means chastity and loyal political orthodoxy. Sex outside the regulations of the party is devious sexual immorality; rather, a “*sexcrime*”. The sex crime covers all “sexual misdeeds whatever” if they meant deviation from emotional dedication to the Party as we read in the postscript on Newspeak:

It covered fornication, adultery, homosexuality, and other perversions, and, in addition normal intercourse practiced for its own sake. There was no need to enumerate them separately, since they were all equally culpable, and, in principle, all punishable by death. (242)

Both Winston and Julia commit their crime of dedicating their pleasure to one another through sexual intercourse—a crime punishable at least by death—as a rebellious gratification of their human desire in defiance of the repressive totalitarian regime. Horan, however, argues “as much as totalitarian regimes need to control the flow of desire, they can never do so absolutely. Sexual hunger always reemerges as the catalyst for their rebellious tendencies” (322). Still, the sexual rebellion of Winston and Julia assumes different meanings according to their variant revolutionary attitudes. As a subservient adherent to the rules of the Party, Winston is an orthodox “chaste” member, who knows that pleasurable sex between the Party members, which might result in emotional attachment, is a criminalized rebellion:

The aim of the Party was not merely to prevent men and women from forming loyalties which it might not be able to control. It's real, undeclared purpose was to remove all pleasure from the sexual act. Not love so much as eroticism was the enemy, inside marriage as well as outside it. (55)

Actually, Winston used to gratify his sexual desire in "filthy scuffles at intervals of years" (57) with local prostitutes who are not Party member. Winston understands that the Party does not concern itself with prostitution, but may encourage mere debauchery as an outlet for instincts that cannot be altogether controlled. The Party is not disturbed with such base sexual practice as long as "it [is] furtive and joyless, and only involve[s] the women of a submerged and despised class" (55). The problem is not sex for its own sake, but rather pleasurable sex with the women of the party.

Winston knows that a "real love affair [is] an almost unthinkable event" because the women of the Party are impregnably chaste in their loyalty to the Party. It is a matter of a façade of unconquerable virtue, and what Winston wants "more even than to be loved, [is] to break down that wall of virtue." Therefore, for Winston, "the sexual act, successfully performed, [is] rebellion" (57).

It is, in fact, this wall of virtue and impregnable chastity in all of the Party Women that triggers conflicting love-hate feelings

in Winston against Julia who poses herself at the beginning as unattainable voluptuous seductress. This shows clearly in the way Winston transfers his hatred during the Two-Minutes Hate from the face of the enemy of the Party to Julia. In this situation, Winston's feelings are a tumultuous conflict between the desire for the Party's forbidden fruit as personified in Julia's seductiveness and hatred for the impregnable virtue she stands for as a female member of the Party:

He would ravish her and cut her throat at the moment of climax.... He hated her because she was young and pretty and sexless, because he wanted to go to bed with her and would never do so, because around her sweet supple waist, which seemed to ask you encircle it with you arm, there was only the odious scarlet sash, aggressive symbol of chastity.
(15-16)

Winston, however, becomes emotionally attached to Julia immediately on their first sexual intercourse because she assumes the essential role of the revolutionary partner, who would accomplish his dream in overthrowing the oppressive totalitarianism. For Winston, breaking the taboo of having pleasurable sex with one of the women of the party is a revolution in itself. Therefore, seeing Julia—in a dream that later turned into reality—getting naked by a deft swing of her clothes off of her body, Winston thinks this means “to annihilate a whole culture, a

whole system of thought as Big Brother and the Party and the Thought Police could be all swept into nothingness by single splendid movement of the arm” (28). Winston truly believes that his sexual relation with Julia is a revolutionary act that will overthrow the Party: “their embrace [is] a battle, the climax a victory. It [is] a blow struck against the Party. It was a political act” (104).

Nevertheless, Julia’s attitude towards the rebellion against the Party is totally different from that of Winston’s. For Julia, sex is merely a mischievous resistance against the austere suppressing rules of the totalitarian regime. Julia believes in the futility of any attempt to rebel against the totalitarian power. She thinks that “Any kind of organized revolt against the Party, which was bound to be a failure, struck her as stupid. The clever thing was to break the rules and stay alive all the same.” Julia’s attitude is simply maintaining a false show of adherence to the Party while seizing any opportunity to achieve self-satisfaction provided that she is not discovered. So, Julia has always kept pretence that she is an active member of the Party’s “Junior Anti-Sex League. Volunteering three evenings every week and spending hours “pasting their bloody rot all over London” (100). It is her belief that “[if] you can [keep] the small rules, you [can] break the big ones” (106).

After their first intercourse in the woods, Winston asks Julia if she has ever done this before. Her answer “hundreds of

times,” (100) with the Party members fills him with “wild hope” (101). Winston thinks that anything that hints at corruption among the Party members, especially having pleasurable promiscuous relations, would subvert its totalitarian power. Thus, Winston thinks, “not merely the love of one person, but the animal instinct, the simple undifferentiated desire: that was the force that would tear the Party to pieces” (101). Julia, on the other hand, seeks mere gratification of her personal sexual desire *in lieu* of Winston’s revolutionary ideas on a collective scale. Winston dreams of “little knots of resistance...small groups of people banding themselves together,” who will inspire the next generations. Julia, on the contrary, is only interested in their sexual pleasure without being discovered by the party. This explains why Winston tells her, “[y]ou’re only a rebel from the waist downwards” (127).

Sexual revolutions in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *The Handmaid’s Tale* allow the main characters to feel human in spite of the oppressive totalitarian regimes they live under. However, Orwell’s revolutionary characters are eventually crushed by totalitarianism whereas Atwood’s character is given a chance to escape its tyrannical grip. In fact, the end results of the sexual revolutions in each novel go astray due to the discrepant attitudes of each fictional creator.

On one hand, Margret Atwood sends a warning message from a feminist stance against the rise of the political rightist

groups in modern America and the subsequent undermining of women's civil rights. In Riley Thomas' words, *The Handmaid's Tale* is "a dystopian novel that introduces the reader to Gilead, a totalitarian and theocratic state that emerged as a consequence of a Christian fundamentalist rule of the United States of America" (12). In this novel, Atwood objurgates lack of female solidarity in the pre-Gilead era as well as under the Gileadian dystopian control. Though women assume multiple occupational roles prescribed by the patriarchal theocracy of Gilead they never unite against oppression. Women in this dystopian polity become the oppressors of other women. Psychologically speaking, women such as the Aunts and the Wives project their suppressed fear and anger unto lesser women in the class order. Gayle Moody writes in "The Quest for Selfhood: Women in the Novels of Margret Atwood" that in this novel Atwood examines how women in the dystopian class system are used to oppress other women in order to maintain the established power of the patriarchal society:

The situation in which the handmaids find themselves reflect the situation of the women in our society in the 1990s. The patriarchy has instilled a sense of competition in women, and it uses that trait as a tool to control women, effectively preventing women from uniting and working to better the situation of women as a class. (100-101)

The handmaid Offred is saved by the secret organization Mayday, and though her later whereabouts or what happens to her are not revealed to the reader, there is a glimpse of hope as understood from the epilogue of the novel. At the end of the novel, in apparently a post-Gileadian time, some scholarly investigation of tape recordings left by Offred wonders:

Did our narrator reach the outside world safely and build a new life for herself? Or was she discovered in her attic hiding place, arrested, sent to the Colonies or to Jezebel's, or even executed? Our document, though in its own way eloquent is on these subjects mute. (324)

Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* makes use of the same metatextual narrative technique of the epilogue. The importance of this technique lies in the indication that both of the totalitarian regimes in these dystopias come to an end. Both epilogues are scripts of academic investigation of the past times of Oceania and Gilead. Theo Finigan further explains in "“Into the Memory Hole”: Totalitarianism and Mal d’Archive in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the *Handmaid’s Tale*”:

Both texts would appear to imply that on some level, these scholarly figures’ “recovery” of the past in suppressed archival fragments is instrumental to the dismantling of the dystopian political formations

that have hitherto dominated Oceania and Gilead.
(436)

Comparatively, the two novels' epilogues indicate the end of the totalitarian systems; nevertheless, the endings of the main characters' stories of oppression vary according to their author's perspectives.

Masochism best defines Orwell's main character. Winston suppresses his rebellious feelings against the Party; still, he is only capable of imagining himself expressing those feelings in his diary. Winston knows that "the Thought Police would get him just the same," whether he has really written in his diary "DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER," or not. He is certain that some day he would be incriminated for "thoughtcrime" (18). Ironically, when Winston is captured by the totalitarian regime and severely tortured in its "Ministry of Love," an overt masochist pleasure overtakes him. Winston's feelings of humiliation and pain are overwhelmingly dominated by an eerily sado-masochist love of his torturer, O'Brien. After being driven in mental and physical torture to "the edge of lunacy" he says "it made no difference. In some sense that went deeper than friendship, they were intimates...He had never loved him so deeply as at this moment" (200). Likewise, O'Brien's conversations with Winston grossly reveal sadistic sexual connotation as he tells him, "[w]e shall squeeze you empty, and then we shall fill you with ourselves" (203). In "Psychoanalytic Study of the Novels of George Orwell,"

Gerald L. Fiderer goes further in his hypothesis to hint at Winston's homosexual masochism:

The secret aim which informs his every defiant act is to arrive at the lovingly punishing hand of O'Brien; but he does so by denying the homosexual impulse up until the last page of the novel....The pseudo-revolts which constitute the action and plot are simultaneously the means of denying the erotic impulse (according to the paranoiac formula: I love him= I hate him=he hates me), and fulfilling it.(181)

Winston's masochism lies in his abnormal behavior in seeking pleasure in inflicting pain unto himself instead of avoiding it. So unlike Julia who seeks pleasure in breaking the Party's taboo on sex without being caught, Winston is driven by his masochism in provoking the punishment of the Party upon himself. During his torture in the Ministry of Love, Winston blames his tormentor O'Brien for reducing him to a subhuman state and the latter replies, "[t]his is what you accepted when you set yourself up against the Part. It was all contained in the first act. Nothing has happened that you did not foresee" (217).

Comparatively, the end of *The Handmaid's Tale* reveals a glimmer of hope in the post-Gilead future. This optimism is closely related to Atwood's attitude as writer of dystopia. Unlike the seminal *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Atwood's novel does not end with elaborate detailed description of the main characters'

crushing defeat by totalitarianism. Atwood resisted this classical closure and allowed her readers and the protagonists to hope as Raffaella Baccolini explains in *“The Persistence of Hope in Dystopian Science Fiction”*. Baccolini argues that the open ending at the end of the story asserts a “utopian impulse” in the novel because the rejection of the traditional eventual subjugation of the individual “opens a space of contestation and opposition for those groups—women and the other ex-centric subjects whose subject position is not contemplated by hegemonic discourse—for whom subject status has yet to be obtained” (520). In fact, Atwood expresses her premonitory attitude explicitly against the “rise and scorn for the democratic institutions” after the rise of extremism in American politics. Atwood’s warning message is against the loss of the long-fought-for basic civil rights, especially “many of the rights for women won over the past decades indeed the past centuries” (xv).

In conclusion, the two anti-totalitarian sex revolutions, the subject of this study, come as natural antithesis of the dystopian hypothesis that totalitarianism can totally control human desire for the purpose of maintaining its power. Though the two narratives end with meta-textual devices that suggest the eventual end of totalitarianism, the stories of revolutionary characters come to different conclusions. Orwell’s pessimism is disclosed in the sado-masochist crushing his main character at the hands of unbeatable totalitarian power. Atwood’s optimistic attitude allows

her main character to escape totalitarianism with hopeful anticipation for a future democratic utopia.

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ملخص

يعانى افراد خيال الدستوبيا (العالم الخرب) على نحو نمطى من حرمانهم من حرية الاختيار الفردية. أنهم جميعاً ضحايا النظام السلطوى الشمولى الذى يمارس ضدهم غسل الأدمغة بواسطة البروباغندا و التلاعب باللغة و الذاكرة الجمعية. و يصور خيال الدستوبيا نظاماً شمولياً يتحكم فى الرغبة الجنسية للإنسان عن طريق وضعها فى مسارات تضمن له الحفاظ على سلطته الدكتاتورية. أصبحت المتعة الجسدية فى حد ذاتها تحت وطئة هذا النظام الشمولى فى خيال الدستوبيا مُحرمة. فأفراد هذا المجتمع محرومون من حرية اشباع رغباتهم الجنسية فى العلاقات الزوجية و أبنائهم مكرسون للدولة. يهدف هذا البحث الى دراسة مسار ثورتين جنسيتين ضد الأنظمة الشمولية فى رواية جورج أرويل ١٩٨٤ و رواية مارجريت أتوود قصة الخادمة تحت فرضية تباين نهايات تلك الثورات مابين نزعة التشائم و التفاؤل حسب الموقف الفلسفى المتباين لكل مؤلف .

كلمات رئيسة: الدستوبيا (العالم الخرب) : الشمولية : الثورة الجنسية : العصيان