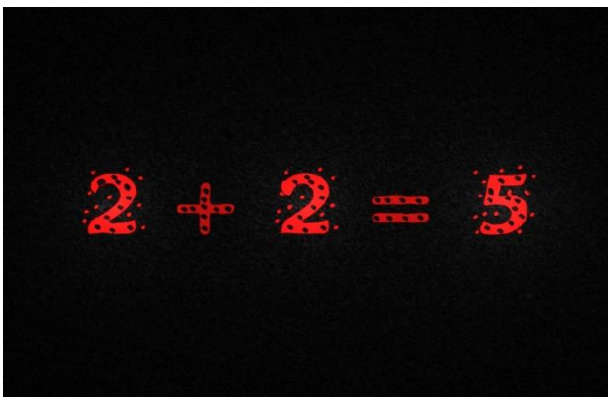




**Surveillance, Regulation and Selfhood in George Orwell's *1984* (1949) and
Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985)**

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Introduction

The dystopian futures imagined by George Orwell in *1984* and Margaret Atwood in *The Handmaid's Tale* brutally challenge any notion of independence. This dissertation will seek to uncover how the societies they depict damage individual autonomy, and consider whether there is any form of inherent, personal resistance which can overcome this public and private oppression. I will be examining the role of vision as a means of maintaining control, whilst also analysing the potential ways in which characters might retain their humanity, to determine whether there is something inalienable within the individual. A number of critics have been pertinent to this study.¹ Kimberley Verwaayen's theoretically engaged article on forms of bodily resistance in *The Handmaid's Tale* has been useful as a means of establishing Offred's attempts at escapism, and both Peter Fifield's and Elaine Scarry's explorations of pain have informed my analysis of Winston's torture in Room 101. However, this dissertation draws more heavily on the work of theorists to examine ideas of surveillance, regulation and selfhood. Michel Foucault's discussion of panopticism in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975) provides a crucial basis for understanding the structure of Orwell's totalitarian world and Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection in *Powers of Horror* (1982) in relation to identity formation is interpreted to reveal how Winston and Offred manage to preserve their sense of self. The importance of these two theorists will be explored at length.

My first chapter will be on Orwell's *1984*, establishing Foucault's framework and how it relates to this dystopian society. My analysis will then consider the way surveillance is disseminated throughout Oceania, looking at the role of collective aggression and the power of fear in the Ministry of Love. The greater part of this chapter will debate the ways in which surveillance and regulation might be avoided in order to protect identity. As a development of Kristeva's theoretical work, the idea of reverse abjection will be introduced in relation to Winston's desire to corrupt society. The body and its ability to be controlled by the Party will also be examined. The chapter will conclude with an exploration of internal and external spaces and the extent to which the Party can exercise its regulation over them.

The second chapter will explore *The Handmaid's Tale*, discussing the novel's indebtedness to Orwell's *1984* in relation to surveillance and its effect upon the individual. Attention will be paid to form and its role in revealing Gilead's regulation, which is evident at a narrative level throughout the novel. Through close analysis, the sexualisation of vision will be introduced before expanding into other forms of 'looking' and regulation. Internal and external states will be explored, with a continued emphasis on Kristeva's theories; however, the body will occupy a more central position in this chapter because of Atwood's attentiveness to the female condition. This dissertation will demonstrate that even in societies which practice total surveillance, the human is able to find a means of escape.

¹ Orwell: Peter Fifield, Roger Paden, Elaine Scarry, Marcus Smith, James A. Tyner, Erika Gottlieb; Atwood: David Coad, Pamela Cooper, Erika Gottlieb, Clare Hanson, Amin Malak, Theodore F. Sheckels, Kimberley Verwaayen; treated together: Earl Ingersoll, Jocelyn Harris. Full details of individual publications can be found in the bibliography.

Chapter One: 1984

Foucault, in writing on the Panopticon, has argued that 'Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness... Visibility is a trap'.² In *Discipline and Punish*, he discusses how the paranoia produced by constant surveillance leads to self-regulation and the destruction of independence. His ideas help to inform discussion on the theme of control in Orwell's *1984* as the tension Foucault describes between vision and the protection of shadows at a theoretical level is frighteningly realised in this fictional dystopian future. Constantly seeking a way to preserve his humanity, the novel's desperate rebel, Winston, finds himself negotiating the dark spaces in society's fabric. The Party seizes control of his dreams and infiltrates his thoughts with the promise 'We shall meet in the place where there is no darkness'.³ However, the belief that O'Brien speaks to Winston 'out of the dark' is another of the Party's deceptions.⁴ Winston's internal state is not concealed in protective darkness; O'Brien speaks to him from the penetrative glare of 'Full lighting'. Despite the extreme levels of surveillance which see him trapped in the Party's 'cruel, ingenious cage', the novel both explores the total conditioning of the individual and intimates that there is something inalienable about the human.⁵ Even with the willing surrender of Winston's mind, there is hope that 'the inner heart [will be left] inviolate'.⁶

Roger Paden has argued that in *1984* 'there is little surveillance', justifying his view by explaining 'There seems to be little in the way of data gathering or record keeping. There is no mention of any universal testing, nor of physical examinations'.⁷ Paden's assertion that surveillance must be linked with recorded observation, however, entirely underestimates the dangerous influence of subtle and pervasive forms of watching in Big Brother's society. Winston is trapped in a system where 'the perfection of power... render[s] its actual exercise unnecessary... the inmates... [are] caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers'.⁸ The collective behaviour of party members during the Two-Minutes Hate demonstrates that they are conscious of their visibility. The scene is curiously animalistic as party members, in a declaration of their love for Big Brother, begin screaming and aggressively moving their bodies. There is still something regimented about their instinctive behaviour as they leap 'up and down in their places', refusing to break their rigid formation.⁹ The Party encourages this kind of regulated mass hysteria but only within its proper, assigned place. There is also something strangely dehumanising about the Two-Minutes Hate as one anonymous party member, 'The little sandy-haired woman', stands with 'her mouth... opening and shutting like that of a landed fish'.¹⁰ Her words are not articulated; instead she operates her mouth like an automaton, the movement being mechanical like a programmed response. Through the insidious nature of surveillance there is a breakdown in individuation, brought about by a fear of difference.

Winston's torture takes place within the liminal location of the Ministry of Love: an unknown holding cell which exploits fear as a means of regulating behaviour. The novel repeatedly suggests Winston's eventual captivity because of its persistent references to being beneath ground. In his memories he mentions the air raid shelter during the bombing of Colchester and, significantly, his disturbing sexual encounter with a prole woman takes place in her basement. Although his position within the Ministry of Love is never confirmed, these prior images of burial and suppression foreshadow not only his physical location within the prison, but also his symbolic death. Everything about his environment is artificial and tightly controlled, from the sterile 'glittering white porcelain' walls to the 'wax mask' of the guard who stands expressionless, with synthetic skin.¹¹ Winston's torment is complex, veering between the dull ache in his belly, his dislocation in time and place, and a fear of future pain. As Fifield explains, pain is 'sometimes inherent and sometimes acquired, sometimes physical and sometimes psychological... plac[ing] it in a tricky no-place'.¹² The intense regulation of his surroundings,

² The Panopticon is a type of institutional building which was created so that all inmates (the design is often attributed to prisons) can be watched by a single guard, without the inmates knowing whether and when they are being watched. Foucault has used the idea of the Panopticon as a metaphor for modern society and its fixation with surveillance; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Allen Lane, 1977), p. 200.

³ George Orwell, *1984* (London: Penguin Books, 2013), p. 29.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁵ Foucault, *Discipline*, p. 205.

⁶ Orwell, *1984*, pp. 321-2.

⁷ Roger Paden, 'Surveillance and Torture: Foucault and Orwell on the Methods of Discipline', *Social Theory and Practice*, 10:3 (1984), p. 270.

⁸ Foucault, *Discipline*, p. 201.

⁹ Orwell, *1984*, p. 17.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 259, 264.

¹² Peter Fifield, 'The Body, Pain, and Violence', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Body in Literature*, ed. by David Hillman and Ulrika Maude (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 117.

a place where 'you could not feel anything, except pain and the foreknowledge of pain', therefore causes Winston a great deal of psychological anguish prior to his incarceration in Room 101.¹³

Winston's fear of rats has been widely debated, with Erika Gottlieb suggesting that his phobia 'is connected with that part of Winston's own psyche that awaits behind that horrifying "wall of darkness"... By allowing himself to be degraded to the level of the starving rats, he has become what he most abhorred'.¹⁴ Although this affiliation between Winston and the creature he most fears produces a credible psychological reading, an alternative would be to look at the method with which O'Brien makes Winston face his nightmare. By attaching the cage of rats to his head so that the 'starving brutes' leap onto his face and 'bore straight into it', perhaps attacking 'the eyes first', or 'burrow[ing] through the cheeks and devour[ing] the tongue', they will destroy his distinctive features, leading to the literal effacement of his identity.¹⁵ By threatening to attack Winston's ability to see and articulate himself, the Party undermines any notion of independence.

An inherent contradiction exists in the novel's treatment of underground spaces. Whilst the torture that occurs within the buried chamber of Room 101 demonstrates the total authority of the state, Winston's concealed and seditious sexual experience with the prole woman also takes place beneath ground. It is a contested space, supporting some form of surveillance but also home to the marginal which is supposedly free from regulation. The suggestion that there are pockets within society which are safe from the regime is very appealing to Winston. He declares 'If there is hope... it lies in the proles', but he also recognises the futility of trying to mobilise this ghettoised society.¹⁶ Perhaps through what Marcus Smith has termed 'the symbolic prole woman' it is possible to imagine a world no longer under Big Brother's dictatorship.¹⁷ In her garden, she sings uninhibited to 'the sweet summer air, very tuneful, charged with a sort of happy melancholy' and establishes a crucial dichotomy between the Party and the proles: whereas Winston and Julia are desperately seeking a means to escape their static existence, she is content to 'remain there for a thousand years, pegging out diapers and singing rubbish'.¹⁸ Winston recognises her as beautiful but it 'had never before occurred to him that the body of a woman of fifty, blown up to monstrous dimensions by childbearing, then hardened, roughened... could be beautiful'.¹⁹ She both attracts and repulses, evoking Kristeva's theory of abjection.

Kristeva's ideas reveal the abject body to be an ambiguous and permeable vessel. It finds itself in conflict with outside and inside, self and other as the boundaries between 'clean' and 'filthy', 'sought-after' and 'banished', 'fascination' and 'shame' are shown to be dangerously fragile.²⁰ In a world where 'the clean and the proper' stands for the Party, that which is filthy becomes desirable and the flimsy divide is breached.²¹ The abject represents a threat to the social order of *1984* as it provides a space for Winston to explore his identity. He experiences a kind of reverse abjection as his all-consuming desire to dismantle the Party and destroy their perfect control consciously draws him to the abject. His experience with the prole prostitute is fragmented as his memory pushes through the ordered narrative. The encounter is fused with recollections of his wife Katharine and her grotesque desire to fulfil their 'duty to the party', demonstrating how Winston's experiences with these two women are disconcertingly similar in their monstrous presentation of sexual relationships.²² The narrative becomes confused as Winston's disturbed memories flit between the women. The smell of the basement kitchen, 'an odour compounded of bugs and dirty clothes and villainous cheap scent, but nevertheless alluring, because no woman of the Party ever used scent', shows Winston returning to the dirt as he rebels against the proscribed sexual sterility of the Party.²³ Most unsettling is the depiction of the prole woman's mouth, no longer mechanical as if formed with hinges like the 'The little sandy-haired woman', but moist, sexual and all-consuming. The 'cavernous blackness' of the old mouth, jarringly illuminated by the grimy lamplight, metaphorically indicates Winston's journey to the fringes of society.²⁴ This idea of reverse abjection challenges Jocelyn Harris's belief that when Julia experiments with prole makeup 'Winston is excited by her "improvement" by cosmetics, her womanly longing for a frock'.²⁵ The crude alteration of her appearance is a show of defiance in the face of the Party's rigorous regulation, rather than a simple

¹³ Orwell, *1984*, p. 273.

¹⁴ Erika Gottlieb, *Dystopian Fiction East and West: Terror and Trial* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), p. 84.

¹⁵ Orwell, *1984*, p. 328.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

¹⁷ Marcus Smith, 'The Wall of Blackness: A Psychological Approach to *1984*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 14:4 (1968), p. 424.

¹⁸ Orwell, *1984*, p. 163.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

²⁰ Julia Kristeva, *The Portable Kristeva*, ed. by Kelly Oliver (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 235-6.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

²² Orwell, *1984*, p. 77.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

²⁵ Jocelyn Harris, 'The Handmaid's Tale as a ReVisioning of *1984*', in *Transformations of Utopia: Changing Views of the Perfect Society*, ed. by George Slusser, Paul Alkon, Roger Gaillard, and Danièle Chatelain (New York: AMS, 1999), p. 273.

desire on the part of Julia to seem more 'womanly'. And this is what truly excites Winston. It is less about eradicating her masculine image, forced to wear boyish trousers and keep her hair cropped; instead she wishes to banish her connection to the Party. Indeed she proclaims: "In this room I'm going to be a woman, *not a Party comrade*" as though the two are diametrically opposed (italics are mine).²⁶ Thus, in painting her face, Julia asserts her autonomy and a right to mark out her sexuality and individuality.

The body is a contested site in *1984*. The Party tries to seize control of it through daily exercises named The Physical Jerks but also, more worryingly, through conditioning in organisations such as the Junior Anti-Sex League, where symbolic red sashes are tied round the waists of young Party women in an archaic return to the chastity belt. They make a physical impression upon the body as, when Julia removes the sash, Winston notices 'how much softer her waist seemed to feel now that the sash was gone'.²⁷ She becomes suppler and more human in his arms, as though the sash is simply masking Julia's fleshy reality. The body is the one truth the Party cannot completely avoid. Although Winston is afflicted by illness through the persistent sore on his leg, instead of weakening him it is a reminder that he is human. Winston's torture is a direct attack upon this secure connection to the body. Scarry explains that 'World, self, and voice are lost, or nearly lost, through the intense pain of torture', and when Winston is brought to Room 101 he is alienated from his body.²⁸ The third person narration becomes distanced as Winston dissects and breaks down his body, describing in turn the 'bald scalp', 'crooked nose' and 'seamed' cheeks.²⁹ He traces his body like it is a battleground, noticing that 'under the dirt there were the red scars of wounds', locating 'near the ankle... an inflamed mass'.³⁰ O'Brien torments Winston's body to the extent that it is no longer recognisably human and the image Winston sees in the three-sided mirror is one produced and projected by the state. Foucault has established that 'systems of punishment are to be situated in a certain 'political economy' of the body... it is always the body that is at issue... power relations... invest it, mark it, train it, torture it' and during Winston's ordeal in Room 101, his body is politicised, a marked emblem of Big Brother's terrorising grip on society.³¹

The terrifying associations attached to the corridors and rooms of the Ministry of Love are evidence for the Party's control over physical space. Yet, even removed from these public, regulated areas, the notion of privacy is a ludicrous fantasy. Stanley Lukasz, in discussing Henri Lefebvre's ideas on the social production of space, has asserted that 'Marking a space... introduces distinctions between open and closed, clean and dirty, empty and full, seen and hidden, seeing and being seen'.³² In the totalitarian world of *1984*, however, the oppositions of 'open and closed', 'seen and hidden' no longer exist as private spaces become public and are watched by the Party. The gaze is in-built in the very architecture of Winston's home: Victory Mansions is a dilapidated apartment complex and the security of the domestic setting is monitored by his neighbour's child spies. Thin, crumbling walls separate him from the small tyrants next door and the permeating smell of boiled-cabbage 'common to the whole building' seeps into the rooms as a reminder that everything is shared.³³

The vulnerability of Charrington's room is indicated by the rat which tries to creep in as it foreshadows Winston's later torture in Room 101. Earl Ingersoll has elaborated on this permeability, explaining that Winston's 'room and the bedroom over Charrington's shop have never really been inner sanctums but as transparent as the glass paperweight smashed by the Thought Police'.³⁴ Winston himself associates his life with this 'little chunk of history' as he explains 'The paperweight was the room he was in, and the coral was Julia's life and his own, fixed in a sort of eternity at the heart of the crystal'.³⁵ Coral, which allows organisms to hide and feed, supports life and is a piece of the unspoilt, natural world. Instead of viewing its transparent casing as protective, the coral is trapped inside a glass prison: see-through, breakable, and completely open to scrutiny. In this way, the glass paperweight is symbolic of Julia and Winston's panoptic prison. Nevertheless, there are certain partitions and invisible limits which are tacitly recognised by Winston. From his physically isolated cubicle at work to the implicit divisions within the canteen, the Party has control over movement in these seemingly open spaces. James A. Tyner has established that 'the corporeal 'cogs' of the Party... remained partitioned... [so

²⁶ Orwell, *1984*, p. 164.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

²⁸ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 35.

²⁹ Orwell, *1984*, p. 310.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 311.

³¹ Foucault, *Discipline*, p. 25.

³² Stanley Lukasz, *Henri Lefebvre on Space: Architecture, Urban Research, and the Production of Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), p. 84.

³³ Orwell, *1984*, p. 25.

³⁴ Earl Ingersoll, 'Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale": Echoes of Orwell', *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, 5:4 (1993), p. 67.

³⁵ Orwell, *1984*, pp.168, 169.

that] no member was able to see the totality of the system', demonstrating the disparity between Big Brother's total sight, and the blindness imposed upon Party members.³⁶

Although the Party's ability to observe and control physical space is unquestionable, their access to the mind and internal states remains ambivalent. Their efforts to constrain the immediate, thinking mind through the limiting lexicon of Newspeak means that they are able to create a world where people are unable to express their rebellion. But this does not remove the will to question Big Brother; there is a deeper and less penetrable aspect to the human psyche. The Party's inability to completely eradicate history has been established by Smith; he explains 'that the past (as it operates in and through the unconscious) is independent of the rational control of either the Party or Winston himself'.³⁷ Winston's desire to seek the sanctuary of dark spaces is again significant as he tries to grasp the intangible and 'dim period of his early childhood' through memory.³⁸ His mother and sister seem to belong to this dark, other time, protected womb-like in the recesses of his mind and thus free from Big Brother's gaze. They exist 'down in some subterranean place – the bottom of a well, for instance, or a very deep grave... looking up at him through the darkening water'.³⁹ The unconscious process by which he divulges his seditious thoughts to the pages of his diary further validates Smith's assertion as the movement is beyond Winston's control. His incoherent stream of thought is written 'as though by automatic action' and the 'pen had slid voluptuously over the smooth paper' as though the exchange is a sensual, bodily impulse.⁴⁰ Winston's fight in Room 101, to guard his private self, indicates that Gottlieb's belief that totalitarianism 'leads to the irreversible disintegration of the individual's "inner heart"' is too rigid a stance.⁴¹ Despite an infinite period of torture, Winston's unconscious heart calls out to Julia on waking from a dream as, for a moment, 'She had seemed to be not merely with him, but inside him. It was as though she had got into the texture of his skin'.⁴² This inexplicable moment temporarily takes Winston outside the Party's control. Although he perceives it as a 'moment of weakness', it is instead a hopeful demonstration of human strength in this bleak, dystopian world.⁴³

³⁶ James A. Tyner, 'Self and space, resistance and discipline: a Foucauldian reading of George Orwell's *1984*', *Social and Cultural Geography*, 5:1 (2004), p. 136.

³⁷ Smith, 'Blackness', p. 424.

³⁸ Orwell, *1984*, p. 37.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁴¹ Gottlieb, *Trial*, p. 85.

⁴² Orwell, *1984*, p. 321.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 321.

Chapter Two: *The Handmaid's Tale*

Margaret Atwood has revealed that 'Orwell became a direct model for me... in the real 1984, the year in which I began writing a somewhat different dystopia'.⁴⁴ *The Handmaid's Tale* uses the framework of 1984 as a basis for Atwood's own horrifying dystopian future. The two have been treated together by critics such as Earl Ingersoll and Jocelyn Harris, yet the focus has always remained on Winston and Offred's roles as writers and on obvious thematic comparisons between the novels. This dissertation is unusual in questioning whether the human has an intrinsic ability to rise above an external, oppressive system. Arguably both novels are hesitant in providing definite answers; however, a sense of ambivalence is stronger in 1984 as Atwood explicitly draws upon the body and her female narrative as a means of escaping regulation. As Harris explains, '*The Handmaid's Tale* is a re-vision... through the lens of gender', something which has been elaborated on by feminist critic Kimberley Verwaayen.⁴⁵ Drawing upon the French feminist theorists Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, she has looked at Offred's reclamation of the body as a means of expression beyond the text. Although she makes brief reference to Kristeva in her introduction, this dissertation will place greater emphasis on her theories of abjection and the semiotic in relation to Offred's challenge to Gilead's patriarchal rule.

Ingersoll has optimistically interpreted Atwood's Historical Notes section, believing that it 'certainly offers a somewhat brighter future when Gilead and patriarchal repression for a time have come to an end'.⁴⁶ Although they indicate a time beyond Gilead, where women are allowed to be present at an academic symposium and Offred's account is indeed a piece of the past, this is by no means proof that aspects of this misogynistic society have been eradicated. Instead of indicating a 'brighter future', they are confirmation of Offred's erasure from her own narrative. The form of the novel demonstrates how Offred is continuing to be policed. Professor Pieixoto, a male academic from the world's most prestigious and leading institution, and thus a source of traditional power in this future society, openly mocks the women of Gilead. He recounts how they escaped using "The Underground Frailroad" and ridicules women's position as sexual objects: he explains that 'all puns were intentional' in naming the document "The Handmaid's Tale", 'that being, to some extent, the bone, as it were, of contention'.⁴⁷ Whilst the majority of the novel focuses on Offred's body as an object for examination, in the Historical Notes it is her voice which is dissected and debated, the recordings transcribed 'based on some guesswork'.⁴⁸ Pamela Cooper has argued that 'As a voice, [Offred] seems absolutely liberated from her flesh, escaped at once from her body and from Gilead'.⁴⁹ However, the control is simply redirected. Instead of attacking her external body, this conference challenges her internal voice which is arguably more damaging.

Aunt Lydia's assertion that 'To be seen – to be *seen* – is to be... penetrated' encapsulates Gilead's method of patriarchal regulation.⁵⁰ Surveillance becomes sexualised as the 'institutional gaze' is inherently male, carried out by a group of men aptly named 'the Eyes'.⁵¹ With the restriction of touch, vision becomes invasive and intimate. When Offred moves away from a checkpoint, she knows the Guardians are watching, 'these two men who aren't yet permitted to touch women. They touch with their eyes instead and [she] move[s] [her] hips a little' in response.⁵² This sexual exchange, although casting the male as observer, complicates the power asymmetry, with Theodore F. Sheckels even suggesting that Offred 'is a victim turning into a victimiser': she uses their gaze to empower herself.⁵³ Indeed, she even reflects the gaze, causing the Guardian to be the first 'one who turns away' when they lock eyes between her wings.⁵⁴ Her simile reveals the vulnerability of the young soldier, his 'exposed face', 'like the skin under a scab', demonstrating how Offred's look gets beneath the fragile skin, physically penetrating this protective exterior.⁵⁵ The Commander, too, betrays his isolation through watching when Offred rubs lotion into her body, as he wears an expression as if 'looking in through the

⁴⁴ Margaret Atwood, 'My hero: George Orwell by Margaret Atwood', *The Guardian* (January 2013) <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/jan/18/my-hero-george-orwell-atwood>> [accessed 2 April 2016].

⁴⁵ Harris, 'ReVisioning', p. 276.

⁴⁶ Ingersoll, 'Echoes', p. 72.

⁴⁷ Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (London: Vintage Books, 2010), p. 313.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 314.

⁴⁹ Pamela Cooper, "A body story with a vengeance": Anatomy and struggle in *The Bell Jar* and *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Women's Studies*, 26:1 (1997), p. 99.

⁵⁰ Atwood, *THT*, p. 39.

⁵¹ Kimberley Verwaayen, 'Re-examining the gaze in *The Handmaid's Tale*', *Open Letter: A Canadian Journal of Writing and Theory*, 9:4 (1995), p. 44.

⁵² Atwood, *THT*, p. 32.

⁵³ Theodore F. Sheckels, *The Political in Margaret Atwood's Fiction: The Writing on the Wall of the Tent* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 91.

⁵⁴ Atwood, *THT*, p. 31.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

bars'.⁵⁶ Both men, in these instances, are disempowered, locked within their bodies and unable to access the female beyond the detachment of a voyeur.

Women looking on themselves and each other is also a source of fascination in the novel. Frequently, Offred is shown gazing upon herself, observing her appearance through a masculine lens. A socialised, distorted image, thrust on her by Gilead's abusive conditioning, is clear in Offred's preoccupation with mirrors. They become a fixation as they are associated with surveillance; indeed, her dysmorphic behaviour is exhibited when she looks into the hallway mirror and observes her 'face, distant and white and distorted, framed in the hall mirror, which bulges outward like an eye under pressure'.⁵⁷ She describes herself as a 'distorted shadow' and 'a brief waif' in 'the eye of glass'.⁵⁸ Her descriptions position her as something insubstantial and ephemeral, as though these negative projections are disconnecting her from the reality of her body so that only an obscure outline remains. Offred becomes more critical in the hotel room at Jezebels as she analyses individual aspects of her appearance. Taking 'a good look, slow and level' in the sterile 'white light', the makeup painted on her face is jarring.⁵⁹ It has 'smudged' and 'bled' as though it does not belong on her face, and is merely a poor reminder of a distant past.⁶⁰ The Commander's nostalgia for this other sexually-liberated time destroys any authentic sense of belonging. Although Jezebels seeks to simulate this world outside regulation, the garments worn by the women, designed to play out male sexual fantasies, only serve as reminders of the artificiality of their situation. As Offred looks on the variety of costumed women about her, she recognises them not as individuals but as types. From those wearing 'baby-doll pyjamas' to 'even a few in cheerleaders' outfits', each of these faceless women represents a specific illicit desire.⁶¹ Moira's parodic outfit, a bedraggled rabbit wearing a tail that looks more 'like a sanitary pad', demonstrates the perversion of male taste in a society where women cannot exist in their natural state: they must always be performing a role.⁶² Jezebels is free from official surveillance and exists on the margins, the club allowing homosexual relations between the women, yet this is authorised by men. Verwaayen has suggested that when 'Offred appropriates jouissance in heterosexual rather than lesbian sex [as is the case at Jezebels], [this] might be especially subversive, since handmaids are forced to have sex with men but are forbidden the pleasures of lovemaking'.⁶³ Thus, while Jezebels is home to Gilead's female rebels, Offred's affair with Nick has a more destabilising effect upon sexual regulation.

Pieixoto acknowledges at the symposium 'that the best and most cost-effective way to control women for reproductive and other purposes was through women themselves' in Gilead.⁶⁴ As in *1984*, surveillance is dispersed throughout society rather than being contained purely in the upper echelons; however, in *The Handmaid's Tale*, this is distributed along gender lines. Amin Malak explains how Atwood 'refrains from convicting a gender in its entirety as a perpetrator of the nightmare that is Gilead'.⁶⁵ Whilst men possess an invisible dictating presence, daily regulation is orchestrated by those women privileged with a little power: aunts, wives and, to an extent, the handmaids. In a horrific reimagining of Orwell's *Two-Minute Hate*, the brutal Salvaging and Particution involves the collective action of the handmaids. They all hold on to the rope as the female traitors to the state are hanged, demonstrating their 'complicity in the death of th[ese] wom[en]'.⁶⁶ It is a twisted distortion of the umbilical cord, bringing about violent death instead of preserving new life, and indicates the women's perverted relationship with their maternal bodies. They encircle the accused male rapist like vicious animals, 'The bodies tense, the eyes... brighter, as if aiming'.⁶⁷ The handmaids channel their anger towards the fallen Guardian, 'red spread[ing] everywhere' in Offred's bloodlust, yet even this is partly staged.⁶⁸ Offred appreciates that 'It is a mistake to hang back too obviously' and instead wishes to entangle herself in the knot of bodies so she is involved and shielded.⁶⁹ The women are constantly observing one another, superficially to protect the patriarchal state but, in reality, to preserve themselves. The most extreme and damaging form of watching, however, presents itself during the monthly ceremony. Serena Joy is

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 168.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 59.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 19, 89.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 265.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 265.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 246, 247.

⁶² Ibid., p. 251.

⁶³ Verwaayen, 'Re-examining', p. 49.

⁶⁴ Atwood, *THT*, p. 320.

⁶⁵ Amin Malak, 'Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale" and the Dystopian Tradition (1987) <[http://cinema2.arts.ubc.ca/units/canlit/pdfs/articles/canlit112-Dystopian\(Malak\).pdf](http://cinema2.arts.ubc.ca/units/canlit/pdfs/articles/canlit112-Dystopian(Malak).pdf)> [accessed 5 April 2016], p. 12.

⁶⁶ Atwood, *THT*, p. 288.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 290.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 291.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 289.

an accessory to the copulation between her husband and surrogate, 'arranged' in the position of sexual partner, yet she is completely superfluous during the physical act.⁷⁰ She is as ineffectual as her pretentious and superficially glamorous stage name suggests, forever an outsider despite gripping Offred's hands 'as if it is she, [and not Offred], who's being fucked', 'her rings bit[ing into Offred's] flesh'.⁷¹ Offred is made to experience multiple penetrations to her person, physically through the Commander's relentless 'two-four marching stroke' and symbolically through Serena Joy's burning gaze.⁷²

David Coad argues that while Offred's bedroom 'is still a part of the Commander's house and her daily oppression... It is a feminine space/place protected and hidden'.⁷³ Although it is true that Offred's room allows her to find some temporary sanctuary, removed from direct surveillance, the suggestion that she finds protection in this supposedly 'feminine space' is misguided. Her room is a metaphor for the self as 'The door of the room... is not locked. In fact it doesn't shut properly'.⁷⁴ It must be left open, to be invaded at any point, in the same way that Offred's body is at the disposal of the Commander. Moreover, Coad suggests that 'The repeated references to the white curtains in Offred's room invite the reader to see the gauzy curtains as another veil' and with his assertion that 'Atwood's veils [are] examples of the hymen as trope', once again Offred's body is being associated with the bedroom.⁷⁵ If the curtains stand for her hymen, the window becomes not only an entry point to the room, but to her body. With Offred's insistence on claiming 'MY room, then. There has to be some space, finally, that I claim as mine', there are definite echoes of Virginia Woolf's polemical essay 'A Room of One's Own' in the belief that women must have room for creative expression and freedom.⁷⁶ Being a possession herself, branded with the symbol of an eye and her own personalised number, Offred can never expect to inhabit and own an independent space. She merely exists within the room, lying 'between the sheets, neatly as they', and finds solace beyond her physical environment by 'step[ping] sideways out of my own time'.⁷⁷

Sheckels has discussed how Offred's thoughts 'keep her from becoming totally imprisoned within the system of Gilead' and, in particular, the 'Night' chapters allow her 'to keep alive her memories of the past'.⁷⁸ Concealed within the darkness, Offred's interiority pushes through and disturbs the dominant narrative as a direct challenge to her oppression. It is a time when she recalls the past, questions her present and makes a plea for her future, desperately invoking an anonymous listener, a generic 'you', to hear her story.⁷⁹ Her room is a palimpsest, retaining memories of the past which have managed to escape the sanitising process between each new set of handmaids. The mattress, hidden beneath fresh sheets, holds signs of 'old love', the tender memories staining the fabric like delicate 'dried flower petals'.⁸⁰ The Latin words etched into Offred's wardrobe (an old schoolboy saying transformed into seditious speech) are a warning to Offred from a past which very much mirrors her present. They are presents from another time, comforting her with the knowledge that although she sits isolated in her bedroom, she is not alone.

Offred's body divides critical opinion. Whilst Cooper claims that the body restricts and entraps the female as 'a sort of blood gilded cage', Verwaayen suggests its potential as a means of breaking 'the authorizing, normative, univocal language of patriarchy'.⁸¹ The novel, however, chooses to remain ambivalent, Atwood alternating between these two poles in her presentation of the body. Kristeva's theory of abjection answers this difficulty in coming to a unified resolution. While Winston desires the abject in *1984*, through the filth of the proles and his rebellious sexual experiences, this remains external. In the case of Offred, the abject is held within her, Kristeva believing that women's bodies are 'Other' as they disrupt the regulated world. At the point of abjection, Kristeva writes, 'I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion by which "I" claim to establish *myself*'.⁸² This internal tension denies Offred the opportunity of bodily peace; as Cooper explains, she is 'uneasily split between fascination with and revulsion from [her] bod[y]'.⁸³ An entire sex is thus confined to the marginal

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 104.

⁷¹ Ibid., pp.105, 170.

⁷² Ibid., p. 105.

⁷³ David Coad, 'Hymens, lips and masks: The veil in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*', *Literature and Psychology: a journal of psychoanalytic and cultural criticism*, 47:1/2 (2001), p. 61.

⁷⁴ Atwood, *THT*, p. 18.

⁷⁵ Coad, 'Hymens', pp. 56-7, 58.

⁷⁶ Atwood, *THT*, p. 60.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 47.

⁷⁸ Sheckels, *Writing on the Wall*, p. 91.

⁷⁹ Atwood, *THT*, p. 49.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 61.

⁸¹ Cooper, 'Anatomy', p. 94; Verwaayen, 'Re-examining', p. 47.

⁸² Kristeva, *Portable Kristeva*, p. 231.

⁸³ Cooper, 'Anatomy', p. 100.

in *The Handmaid's Tale*, the unknown female body being a threat to ordered society. This conflict of the self is revealed in the ambiguity of the handmaids' red habits. Offred reveals that 'Everything except the wings around my face is red: the colour of blood, which defines us'; this has led Cooper to suggest that Offred's clothes position her 'rhetorically through a sinister synecdoche: the (reproductive) part defines the whole'.⁸⁴ These habits, which 'define' the handmaids, make external that which should be left concealed in darkness. They evoke ideas of menstruation and reproductive organs as though the abject is being paraded and confronted so that it is no longer threatening. The habits conceal and reveal at the same time. Deborah Lupton has explored reasons for the disgust response in humans, asserting that openings such as 'wounds' and 'views of internal organs' breach 'the envelope of the body'.⁸⁵ By removing something from its proper place and revealing that which should be left hidden, it becomes fearsome and disgusting. In applying this idea to Offred's status as a 'two-legged womb', clothed in the colour of her menstrual blood, Gilead's society is making her both an object of fear and disgust.⁸⁶

Despite this humiliating regulation of their external bodies, Verwaayen's assertion that Offred escapes male authority through her body still stands. Referencing Kristeva's analysis of the maternal body, Clare Hanson discusses how it 'provokes mingled fear and fascination [because] [i]t defies dominant forms of representation'.⁸⁷ During Birth Day, the force of the female body overwhelms the authoritative, contained reason of the narrative. Offred's internal yearnings spill out and escape from the 'Night' chapters as she responds to the collective power of the female bodies congregated in the birthing room. Long sentences filled with an assortment of images, produced by a succession of similes, dominate this part of the text. Offred describes how

It's coming, it's coming, *like a bugle*, a call to arms, *like a wall falling*, we can feel it *like a heavy stone moving down*, pulled down inside us, we think we will burst. We grip each other's hands, we are no longer single.⁸⁸ (Italics are mine)

Her constant use of similes strives to articulate an impenetrable experience, and combined with the repetitions and oppressive inclusion of the first person plural pronoun 'we', the language of this section mirrors Janine's, and the other handmaids', climactic bodily experience. Although their situation is engineered by the aunts, the handmaids are overtaken by a power higher than the state: they become a collection of bodies controlled by their wombs. Offred is immersed in her body, with Cooper stating that, specifically, 'she becomes engrossed in her menstrual cycle'.⁸⁹ Her exploration of the body, and its 'droolings of the flesh', is encased in a series of memories, forming a deeper layer of narrative.⁹⁰ It is a highly tactile sensory experience which recalls Kristeva's ideas of the semiotic as Offred's poetic language appears to 'ignore meaning and operates before meaning or despite it'.⁹¹ She speaks through the body in an unconscious process, calling forth distorted natural images such as a 'cloud, congealed around a central object' to describe the alienating process of her monthly cycle.⁹² These private moments are entirely juxtaposed with the projected, socially-constructed dysmorphic gaze which torments Offred every time she looks in a mirror. In this highly regulated world, only the damaged body – penetrated, abused and changeable – is able to bring any relief.

⁸⁴ Atwood, *THT*, p. 18; Cooper, 'Anatomy', p. 96.

⁸⁵ Deborah Lupton, 'The pedagogy of disgust: the ethical, moral and political implications of using disgust in public health campaigns', *Critical Public Health*, 25:1 (2014), p. 6.

⁸⁶ Atwood, *THT*, p. 146.

⁸⁷ Clare Hanson, 'The Maternal Body', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Body in Literature*, ed. by David Hillman and Ulrika Maude (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 87.

⁸⁸ Atwood, *THT*, p. 135.

⁸⁹ Cooper, 'Anatomy', p. 100.

⁹⁰ Atwood, *THT*, p. 83.

⁹¹ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. by Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 65.

⁹² Atwood, *THT*, p. 84.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have intended to show how vision induces paranoia, manipulates the individual and damages identity in the two texts under discussion. The protagonists' selfhood, in each of the novels, is constructed by both the individual and their society, yet the totalitarian worlds of *1984* and *The Handmaid's Tale* are shown to violate and compromise even the inner self which should be free from society's control. To complicate this battle between the private self and public totalitarian power, this dissertation has extended the focus of previous research to provide a detailed discussion of how Orwell and Atwood construct ambivalence in their novels. Although *1984* closes with Winston affirming 'He loved Big Brother', and Offred's narrative ends with the voice of a Cambridge academic instead of her own, more attention should be given to those parts of the novels which demonstrate the individual's resistance to the system. From Winston's attraction to the margins of society, and the resolute protection of his 'inner heart', to Offred's complex relationship with her body, both protagonists exhibit the human's ability to endure in the face of external, oppressive forms of surveillance and regulation.⁹³

The approach to my analysis has been largely metaphysical, exploring abstract ideas such as what it means to protect the inner self and whether this is achievable when challenged by a hostile regime. To further develop this dissertation, the novels' contextual backgrounds could be explored to see how this has informed Atwood and Orwell's depictions of their totalitarian societies. A wealth of research has already examined the connection between international political events of the twentieth century and Orwell's cautionary future. Abbott Gleason and Gorman Beauchamp, writing in 1984 and reflecting on the novel, observe how recent history dramatically influenced its creation, from the horrors of Nazism to the power of communism. JW Young has instead explored Orwell's creation of Newspeak and asks whether the dictatorships of the twentieth century used language in ways which are comparable to Orwell's adoption of a totalitarian language. As Irving Howe explains, 'The book appals us because its terror, far from being inherent in the "human condition," is particular to our century', firmly establishing that *1984* is a contextual dystopia.⁹⁴ *The Handmaid's Tale* was published only a year after this momentous date, and it is clear that Atwood drew on both present and recent history in her construction of Gilead. Fiona Tolan makes this connection between the two novels and focuses on Atwood's response to contemporary issues in western society as the basis for her essay. She, and other critics such as Shirley Neuman, argue for Atwood's particularly uncomfortable relationship with second wave feminism, which lasted well into the 1980s. The extent to which Atwood responds to and acknowledges Orwell's prophetic vision in her own novel is an area of interest which is open to examination in future research.

⁹³ Orwell, *1984*, p. 321.

⁹⁴ Irving Howe, 'Orwell: History as Nightmare', *The American Scholar*, 25:2 (1956), p. 193.

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