



**UNIVERSIDADE ESTADUAL DA PARAÍBA
CAMPUS I
CENTRO DE EDUCAÇÃO
DEPARTAMENTO DE LETRAS E ARTES
CURSO DE LICENCIATURA EM LÍNGUA INGLESA**

MICHELLE GOMES BORGES

**DYSTOPIAS IN GEORGE ORWELL'S *1984* AND MARGARET
ATWOOD'S *THE HANDMAID'S TALE*: A COMPARATIVE
STUDY**

**CAMPINA GRANDE
2022**

MICHELLE GOMES BORGES

**DYSTOPIAS IN GEORGE ORWELL'S *1984* AND MARGARET
ATWOOD'S *THE HANDMAID'S TALE*: A COMPARATIVE
STUDY**

Trabalho de Conclusão de
Curso apresentado ao
Departamento de Letras e Artes
da Universidade Estadual da
Paraíba, como requisito parcial
à obtenção do título de
Licenciatura em Letras - Inglês.

Área de concentração:
Literatura
Orientador: Prof. Dr. Valécio
Irineu Barros.

**CAMPINA GRANDE
2022**

É expressamente proibido a comercialização deste documento, tanto na forma impressa como eletrônica. Sua reprodução total ou parcial é permitida exclusivamente para fins acadêmicos e científicos, desde que na reprodução figure a identificação do autor, título, instituição e ano do

B732d Borges, Michelle Gomes.

Dystopias in George Orwell's 1984 and Margaret Atwood's
The handmaid's tale [manuscrito] : a comparative study /
Michelle Gomes Borges. - 2022.

20 p.

Digitado.

Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso (Graduação em Letras
Inglês) - Universidade Estadual da Paraíba, Centro de
Educação, 2022.

"Orientação : Prof. Dr. Valécio Irineu Barros ,
Departamento de Letras e Artes - CEDUC."

1. Distopias. 2. Narrativas distópicas. 3. O conto da aia. 4.
1984. I. Título

21. ed. CDD 800

MICHELLE GOMES BORGES

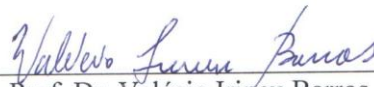
DYSTOPIAS IN GEORGE ORWELL'S *1984* AND MARGARET ATWOOD'S
THE HANDMAID'S TALE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso
apresentado ao Departamento de Letras e
Artes da Universidade Estadual da
Paraíba, como requisito parcial à
obtenção do título de Licenciatura em
Letras Inglês.

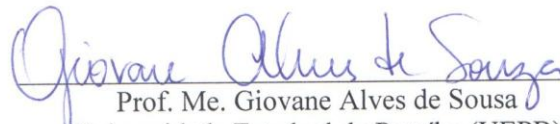
Área de concentração: Literatura Inglesa
e Norte-Americana

Aprovada em: 30/11/2022.

BANCA EXAMINADORA



Prof. Dr. Valécio Irineu Barros.
Universidade Estadual da Paraíba (UEPB)



Prof. Me. Giovane Alves de Sousa
Universidade Estadual da Paraíba (UEPB)



Prof. Me. Joselito Porto de Lucena
Universidade Estadual da Paraíba (UEPB)

Média: 20,0

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION	5
2 METHODOLOGY	6
3 LITERATURE REVIEW	6
3.1 Utopia	6
3.2 Dystopia	7
3.2.1 Dystopia in Orwell’s 1984	8
3.2.2 Dystopia in Atwood’s <i>The Handmaids Tale</i>	10
3.2.3 The Feminist Critical Dystopia	11
4 COMPARING THE TWO NOVELS	12
5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS	16
REFERENCES	17

**DYSTOPIAS IN GEORGE ORWELL'S *1984* AND MARGARET
ATWOOD'S *THE HANDMAID'S TALE*: A COMPARATIVE STUDY**

Michelle Gomes Borges

RESUMO

As obras distópicas apresentam realidades imaginárias sobre um futuro ameaçador. O estudo desse gênero é importante para reflexão e problematização de inúmeras questões de nossa realidade, visto que, existem diversos aspectos distópicos em nossa sociedade. Sendo assim, este artigo é uma pesquisa bibliográfica e descritiva que tem como objetivo comparar o conceito de distopia em dois romances: *The Handmaids Tale* de Margaret Atwood, e *1984*, de George Orwell. Após analisar e comparar as duas narrativas distópicas, concluiu-se que, apesar *The Handmaids Tale* apresenta críticas mais atreladas ao patriarcado e à opressão de gênero e *1984* ter mais foco em aspectos ideológicos e políticos, as duas obras apresentam características distópicas muito parecidas como controle total, vigilância e manipulação. Nesta pesquisa foram utilizados diversos teóricos como Margaret Atwood, George Orwell, Baccolini, Claeys e outros autores que ajudaram na definição dos conceitos de dystopia .

Palavras-chave: Distopia. 1984. *The Handmaid's Tale*.

ABSTRACT

Dystopian works present imaginary realities about a threatening future. The study of this genre is important for reflection and problematization of numerous issues of our reality, as there are several dystopian aspects in our society. Therefore, this article is a bibliographical and descriptive research that aims to compare the concept of dystopia in two novels: *The Handmaids Tale* by Margaret Atwood and *1984* by George Orwell. After analyzing and comparing the two dystopian narratives, it was concluded that, although *The Handmaids Tale* presents criticisms more linked to patriarchy and gender oppression and *1984* has more focus on ideological and political aspects, both works present very similar dystopian characteristics such as total control, surveillance and manipulation. In this research, several theorists were used, such as Margaret Atwood, George Orwell, Baccolini, Claeys and other authors who helped define the concepts of dystopia.

Keywords: Dystopia. 1984. *The Handmaid's Tale*.

1 INTRODUCTION

Humanity has always faced countless challenges in its process of survival and development. Yet, the recent events in contemporary history — the rise of fundamentalism and terrorism, wars, hunger, ecological disasters and the worldwide spread of diseases like COVID-19 — have made the factor that threaten human existence even more pressing and disquieting.

In this context, the study and understanding of literary works that represents these social issues is fundamental for the building and improvement of our capacity for critical reflection on our present reality. The literary genres utopia and dystopia emerged precisely with the purpose of making us reflect about and criticize our society through the creation of alternative imaginary worlds.

Thomas More ([1516], 2017), when idealizing a society considered perfect, took into account aspects such as peace and freedom of expression, with the common good being considered the basis of this society, in which people fully respect each other, including aspects related to religion. *Utopia* deals with environmental speculation and portrays an imaginary society with the purpose of questioning, debating, understanding and relating these aspects to elements present in the author's real society. In short, when creating his seminal novel, Thomas Mores criticized the society in which he lived (SARGENT, 2010).

Although imbued with the same purpose — criticize society so as to improve it or rescue it from a path of self-destruction — the concept of dystopia can be understood as the opposite of utopia, so that dystopia can basically be defined as a bad utopia, and generally involves imaginary societies in which the conditions of survival are more degrading and in which the absence of basic rights is evident. In such societies, authoritarianism and totalitarianism prevail and are more constant and ubiquitous than in real societies. Yet, as Berriel (2005) points out, we can say that utopia and dystopia are intertwined, since a distorted utopia ends up becoming a dystopia.

It is important to emphasize the intrinsic relationship between utopia and dystopia, as both take on a role of social criticism, that is, from the creation of a fictitious setting, in which there is a questioning of the current reality and dissatisfaction in relation to (or with) some of its aspects. Utopia is born from this feeling and proposes a more just society, with the presence of an ideal state and ideals of freedom (BERRIEL, 2005).

Claeys (2017) adds that the relationship between utopia and dystopia is intimate, and elements considered dystopian can be found within utopias. The author explains that many times, in utopia, the idealization of a virtuous society takes place, and from that, the determination of a behavior considered acceptable to maintain that society in this state of perfection occurs. Therefore, it is common to find constant observation of people, hard work, prohibition of bars, brothels, hiding places, that is, a system of regulation and surveillance is established, the restraints of which go beyond normal regulations and limits.

Bearing this inextricable relationship in mind, this research aims at discussing and comparing two dystopian literary works, *1984* by George Orwell and *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood, and has the following leading question: How is the concept of dystopia embodied or presented in both narratives? In order to attain this goal, it will depart from definitions of dystopia, so as to establish the similarities and differences of dystopian aspects present in each novel.

As dystopian works have to do with obeying certain standards or are generally related to the society in which they originated, and as each society has different cultural and behavioral characteristics and problems, dystopias can have many variations and their concept can be modified over time. It is the case of novels we have chosen as the object of this study, produced in different periods and historical contexts, Orwell's narrative dealing with issues related to post-World War II England and Atwood's dealing with the concerns of a 21st- century feminist Canadian novelist (Cf. FERNS, 1999; CLAEYS, 2010; MORE, 2017).

In witnessing the recent and disturbing events and aspects of our contemporary globalized world, such as: the seizure of power in Afghanistan by the Islamic State, the rise of religious extremism by segments of the far-right in the USA and in Brazil, especially the denial of scientific authority by the Brazilian government during the pandemic crisis, the threat of Russian imperialism and the war in Ukraine, the huge increase in deforestation in the Amazon rainforest between 2019 and 2020, or the repression and killing of women by "morality police" in Iran; we can see that the importance of dystopian works such as *1984* and *The Handmaid's Tale* as means of envisioning if not a brighter, at least a less somber future.

2 METHODOLOGIES

As the objective of this study is to identify and describe dystopian aspects in the novels mentioned above, it may be classified as descriptive research, and it is based upon a bibliographic approach. According to Gil (2002) "The bibliographic research is developed in material already prepared, which consists mainly of books and scientific articles". In order to develop this study in particular, we shall adopt the following procedures: presentation of some definitions of dystopia according to different authors, and selection of passages from George Orwell's novel *1984* that may be related to the aspects proposed in these definitions. The same procedure will be applied to Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. Finally, we shall adopt the comparative method to analyze and discuss the main dystopian aspects contained in both works.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Utopia

Utopia is a Greek word meaning "nowhere" and was the title of the work of the writer Thomas More. The work was first published in 1516 and represented an ideal society. However, Thomas More considered the work as a way of criticizing the society in which he lived. It could also be called *eutopia*, a Greek word that means a place of happiness. However, the author did not intend to build any ideal state model that would serve as a basis for countries and nations. According to Sargent (2010), the author of the novel *Utopia* was aware that the reality presented in the work was practically impossible to attain. Since aspects such as: full freedom, equality, coexistence in perfect harmony, work performed as pleasure, total sharing of material goods are principles of common well-being presented in the work and which are far from reality.

Thomas More (1478–1535) was an English diplomat and wrote *Utopia* in May 1515. Although the story in the book takes place on an imaginary island, it presents actual passages from negotiations that took place in Flanders. The author used the work to criticize King Henry VIII. In addition, he presented criticism to other European states such as France. It is important to note that Thomas More had serious conflicts with King Henry VIII and when taking a stand against his divorce from Queen Catherine of Aragon, he was accused of high treason and beheaded in 1535.

According to Sargent (2010), utopias are created with the purpose of making us question and reflect on the present and on how it could be improved. Often a utopia serves to make us compare our reality with the reality presented in it. According to the same author, utopia as a literary genre can be shown both as a simple fantasy and to describe a society considered desirable. In addition, it can present alternatives to our reality by presenting a new model of society to be achieved.

The imaginary island presented in *Utopia* is perfect in the political sense. Citizens have the state running at maximum efficiency. The religion presented also shows an ideal of treatment among people. On the other hand, in the author's reality there was still colonization and imposition of the Christian religion. This shows the relationship between the author's reality and the content of his work.

3.2 Dystopia

Claeys (2017) defines dystopia as the junction of two Greek words, they are “*dus*” and “*topos*”, which present the meaning of a sick, bad, defective or terrible place. When we analyze these dystopian worlds, according to this author, we have to take into account an imaginary place that can be materialized as a continent, world, country, state, region, island, among others, which is extremely unfavorable and hostile for a given group, so that it is continually threatened and that oppression is always present, including the threat to existence itself. Basically, it includes a political regime that preaches hatred and fosters fear and mistrust among people.

However, the theorist still suggests that we think more broadly and see the concept of dystopia as a psychological state, which would lead us to conceive it as the starting point of humanity: the transition from fears of a natural character, such as monsters and gods that are characteristic of primitive societies, in which religious and mythological aspects prevailed, to a society transformed by technological advances, but also plagued by totalitarianism, terrorism and xenophobia. This new aspect, Sargent (2010) points out, enables the broadening and reformulation of the original concept of dystopia.

Another important feature of dystopian societies, according to Berriel (2005), is that they are characterized by constant control and, consequently, the absence of freedom. Generally, the state is strong and powerful to the point of exerting a high degree of control over people and the individual is rendered impotent in view of the magnitude of the state's machine and its repressive apparatuses.

Claeys (2017) states that there are three types of dystopia: political dystopia, environmental dystopia, and technological dystopia, which are often interrelated.

Technological dystopia is characterized by the presence of science and technology being used as a threat of domination and destruction of humanity. *Political dystopia* contains totalitarian aspects, usually associated with the failure of utopias. Generally, such type of dystopia contains regimes with coercive and dominating characteristics; there is a high degree of contrast in inequalities, arbitrary imprisonment, exploitation, and slavery.

Environmental dystopias are narratives that focus on environmental degradation with its catastrophic outcomes, such as widespread pollution, extinction of plants and animals, global warming, food and water shortage, epidemics etc. It is the case, for example, of novels like Ursula Le Guin's *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971) and John Brunner's *The Sheep Look Up* (1972), which depict a future world, where the water is badly polluted with lead and plastic by-products, arsenic, and insecticides; a world in which lakes and seas are dead or dying, many food sources are depleted, the air is thick and poisonous, and oxygen is sold from machines. A world that faces overpopulation, crime waves, wars etc. (Cf. CLAEYS, 2017, *passim*)

According to Claeys (2017), dystopia has a very strong connection with religion and usually uses the feeling of guilt as a basis for repression. Sexuality, for example, is seen as something dirty and is related to disobedience to the Divine as well as an expression of human weakness. Therefore, it is very common to see in dystopian works the presence of extremist religious groups.

Claeys (2017) also affirms that religious groups are driven by the certainty of connection with eternity and a deep sense of belonging, as well as extreme conformity to the rules and habits of the group and extreme enmity towards outsiders. Religion often creates a unit of belief that tends to expel those considered internal enemies, that is, people contrary to a certain belief and often demands the conversion or else the extermination of those considered infidels and unbelievers. Many times, they even kill moved by certain principles, so that they usually condemn and punish those people who commit what they consider heresy or apostasy.

3.2.1 Dystopia in Orwell's 1984

The novel *1984* was written by the British journalist, essayist and novelist George Orwell, and published in 1949. According to Claeys (2017), *1984* can be defined as a work whose main objective was to satirize totalitarianism and present criticisms of some aspects of modernity. In the dystopia of *1984*, it is possible to see a tyrannical government that in addition to controlling politics also exerts coercive dominion over the minds, bodies and even souls of citizens.

According to Claeys (2017) *1984* was a work commonly interpreted as an anti-Stalinist treatise. Orwell sought to combine themes such as antimodernism and anticapitalism with harsh critiques of fascism. The work presents a brutally controlling and totalitarian government that destroys all other political organizations and dominates using the ideology called Ingsoc. The government forces the population to obey and worship the figure of Big Brother and there was no legal guarantee for rights and freedom. The philosophy and ideology of the government demands from people absolute loyalty to the party and the state.

After an atomic war, the dystopia takes place in the superstate of Oceania and there

are constant wars among states in order to distract the population. People live in unremitting fear of being arrested, killed or forced to confess to crimes they didn't commit. The surveillance of private life is strong and steadfast with the use of telescreens, thought police and Anti-Sex Youth. Arrests were constantly taking place without any cause and without trials, there was not even a record of arrests (ORWELL, 2021).

The Party had as its main enemy Goldstein who defended freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly and freedom of thought. Therefore, the Party implemented the "two minutes of hate", a sort of daily ritual whereby people are forced to show their hatred for Goldstein. This moment functions as a kind of hypnosis and total rapture where people went into a kind of trance filled with hate (ORWELL, 2021).

People who presented revolutionary ideas and activities were condemned to death. The Party had slogans that inverted reality, such as "War is Peace", "Freedom is Slavery" and "Ignorance is Strength". The telescreens had the function of capturing and transmitting any whisper and every sound produced was heard. In the following passage, it is possible to notice that the physical conditions were precarious. The environment was dirty and always attentive to surveillance, services such as elevators were not available as the energy was cut off for the population.

The hallway smelt of boiled cabbage and old rag mats. At one end of it a colored poster, too large for indoor display, had been tacked to the wall. It depicted simply an enormous face, more than a meter wide: the face of a man of about forty-five, with a heavy black moustache and ruggedly handsome features. Winston made for the stairs. It was no use trying the lift. Even at the best of times it was seldom working, and at present the electric current was cut off during daylight hours (ORWELL, 2003, p. 01).

The people of this society cannot even remember a time when their country was not at war. Huge portraits of Big Brother are scattered throughout with the ominous phrase "The Big Brother is watching you" (ORWELL, 2021, p. 16).

Collective memory was annihilated, historical documents were erased and modified, and past newspapers rewritten. This work was done by the ironically named Ministry of Truth and the Records Department in which Winston, the main character of the novel, worked and had the function of rewriting countless books, newspapers and other documents that had been destroyed. In other words, documents considered contrary to the Party's ideology were destroyed by the Department of Records, as we can see in the following excerpt:

The largest section of the Records Department, far larger than the one on which Winston worked, consisted simply of persons whose duty it was to track down and collect all copies of books, newspapers, and other documents which had been superseded and were due for destruction (ORWELL, 2021, p. 51).

It can be concluded, based on the concepts presented by Claeys (2017) that *1984* is a work that presents a government with totalitarian characteristics embodied in the figure of Big Brother as a representative of any political leader who should not be contradicted. The Party has absolute control over the police, the economy, culture and information. Furthermore, it is seen as a religious and spiritual unit. Technology and power are centralized in the hands of the Party and used to monitor and control the population. The presence of a large number of enemies of the regime and the willingness of the regime to

pursue them as well as the use of terror for intimidation only confirms that the government portrayed in *1984* fits the mold of totalitarianism (CLAEYS, 2017).

3.2.2 Dystopia in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood was published in 1985 and the story takes place in the near future in which the United States of America suffers a coup and becomes a theocratic state based on evangelical beliefs and is renamed the Republic of Gilead. The main character of the dystopian work is June, narrator of the book, who had her life completely changed. She becomes just a kind of reproductive object for the State. The first part of the work portrays June's narratives and memories in her condition as a handmaid, whereas the second part takes place in the year 2195 at an academic symposium of history on Gileadean Studies where June's narratives are studied from a historical perspective (BACCOLINI, 2003; ATWOOD, 2017).

The Handmaid's Tale presents the dystopian reality of a theocratic and totalitarian state that is portrayed in a world devastated by radiation and the effects on the war that still goes on, so that most women who lived in what was the United States cannot have children. As a result, women are separated from their families and become government property. June belongs to the Republic of Gilead and belongs to the class of women who can still bear children. Her life, job, husband and daughters were left behind. She can no longer have contact with anything of her past life (ATWOOD, 2017).

Handmaids are only allowed to go to the market once a day, they can no longer read, so the signs were replaced by drawings. She is only free to pray locked in her room following the precepts of the Old Testament. If they don't live up to expectations, the handmaids can become what the tale calls non-women. In this category would be lesbians, widows, adulteresses and feminists who are condemned to forced labor in the colonies. Besides that, if the handmaids break the rules, they can be shot and exposed on the wall to serve as an example to the population (ATWOOD, 2017).

In the Republic of Gilead, women are divided into different social categories, being, in terms of hierarchy, the Aunts, the Wives, the Marthas, the Econowives, the Handmaids and the Non-Women. Thus, Handmaids are assigned to one of the Commanders, who are the holders of power in Gilead, and have an obligation to generate healthy children for society through a kind of ceremony that is a rape performed on their fertile day (ATWOOD, 2017).

Dystopian aspects such as totalitarianism, oppression, struggle for survival, loss of individuality, social inequality, restriction of access to information, deprivations, propaganda used as a form of control, loss of physical and intellectual freedom, constant surveillance, injustice, and a hostile scenario can be observed within the work, with regard to women, especially the Handmaids. They even lose the right to their own name, being called by the addition of the preposition "of" to the name of the Commander to whom they are assigned which means that they are now their objects (ATWOOD, 2017).

The totalitarian atmosphere affects all interpersonal relationships between the characters, since constant fear does not favor the establishment of bonds of trust and, therefore, it is also impossible to have real affection. In addition, social inequality is evident in the face of the social division established by the State, where men and women

are divided into castes with very specific functions and privileges and, thus, only a few hold power (ATWOOD, 2017).

Despite the dystopian characteristics such as hostile setting, fear and constant surveillance, which affect all lower categories, regardless of gender, it can be said that, in Atwood's novel, gender is a decisive factor in establishing social importance, as even the Wives (women of higher classes) suffer more than most men. Therefore, as they belong to one of the lower classes, the Handmaids end up being the best representatives of this state of dystopia, as they are the ones who suffer the most repression (ATWOOD, 2017).

Another important factor to highlight is the social division established in Gilead, which favors men over women. The functions of each of the categories aimed at women show the stereotype directed at the gender. Some women had to choose between being sent to the colonies or prostituting themselves for the Commanders in a club. This was the case with June's friend Moira.

In terms of work, women are reduced to domestic activities, placed in subordinate positions, and deprived of any kind of independence an aspect that is the more worrying when we consider the throwback in women's rights, in present day America, like the loss of the right of abortion enforced by a far-right majority in the that country's Supreme Court, a majority enabled during Donald Trump's term as president.

The Marthas category represents the social ideal that women should be responsible for domestic tasks. The category of Wives, on the other hand, is seen as an honor and purity in Gilead. In other words, being the wife of a commander is seen as a privilege and they are placed as if they were in a higher category than other women. The Econowives were women married to husbands who were subordinate to the Commanders. Their husbands would not have the right to a handmaid or a Martha to help with the housework (ATWOOD, 2017).

Thus, the woman's role is to be a daughter, wife and mother. Finally, the greatest social obligation falls on the figure of the Handmaid: the obligation to generate children. In her narration, June, in her role as Handmaid, confirms the feeling of losing her subjectivity and individuality so that she is just a human receptacle. This is evident in her speech:

We are for breeding purposes: we aren't concubines, geisha girls, courtesans. On the contrary: everything possible has been done to remove us from that category. 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 footholds for love. We are two-legged wombs, that's all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices (ATWOOD, 1986, p. 40).

While handmaids are perpetuated as a kind of extensions of the wives' bodies, they are often detested by them. Such rivalry is probably caused by a feeling of jealousy and impotence on the part of the Wife, and a certain envy on the part of the Handmaid; since the Wife is obliged to share her husband with another woman, so that other female fulfills a duty that theoretically should be hers, and the handmaid does not have the freedom, even if reduced, that the Wife enjoys. According to the color symbolism of the novel, the Wives of the commanders wear the blue of purity, while the handmaids, fertile women who are used for reproduction, wear a red related to childbirth. (ATWOOD, 2017)

3.2.3 The Feminist Critical Dystopia

Feminist critical dystopia aims at addressing gender inequalities and oppression. Therefore, issues related to women's roles are posed in an extremely oppressive way. Aspects such as: misogyny, violence against women, reproduction, and patriarchy are

emphasized in this type of dystopia.

According to Baccolini (2003), feminist critical dystopia can be classified as a subgenre of science fiction and has become a means of expressing women's feelings. This type of dystopia came about through the identification of women as an oppressed group. In feminist dystopias, for instance, we can see manifestations of the oppression that women still suffer in our society, since themes such as rape, control of female bodies, compulsory reproduction and imposition of behaviors considered feminine are brought into focus in these dystopian works. According to Baccolini (2003), the 1960s witnessed the publication of many dystopias written by women that accompanied the second wave feminism. That is, it was from the twentieth century that the category of gender came to be understood as a valid epistemological field.

Margaret Atwood creates this dystopian reality in *The Handmaids Tale* in order to raise issues such as female oppression in all aspects: economic, social, reproductive, cultural, biological, sexual and ideological. In other words, *The Handmaids Tale* is one of the greatest examples of feminist critical dystopia in contemporary literature. (BACCOLINI, 2003; ATWOOD, 2017)

4 COMPARING THE TWO NOVELS

When analyzing and comparing the dystopias in George Orwell's *1984* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, it was possible to identify the following aspects:

In George Orwell's novel *1984*, Oceania creates an official language, Newspeak, in which words are abbreviated and people are controlled through this language in order to cause some confusion in communication. When communication between people is impaired, it becomes easier to exercise control over them. It is possible to see this process in this first excerpt below, when Syme describes to Winston the development of the eleventh edition of the Newspeak dictionary and explains that the purpose is to abbreviate language more and more and to destroy words. Verbs, adjectives and nouns were being dropped.

We're getting the language into its final shape—the shape it's going to have when nobody speaks anything else. When we've finished with it, people like you will have to learn it all over again. You think, I dare say, that our chief job is inventing new words. But not a bit of it! We're destroying words—scores of them, hundreds of them, every day. We're cutting the language down to the bone. The Eleventh Edition won't contain a single word that will become obsolete before the year 2050. (ORWELL, 1949, p.65)

Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it. Every concept that can ever be needed, will be expressed by exactly one word, with its meaning rigidly defined and all its subsidiary meanings rubbed out and forgotten (ORWELL, 1949, p. 67).

Notice that the second excerpt makes it clear that the purpose of Newspeak is precisely to limit thinking and make it impossible to think differently, which is considered a crime by the Party, as thoughtcrime is the act of expressing thoughts that go against its political ideology.

In the case of *The Handmaid's Tale*, the lines are directed at religion. The control of speech and thought is done a little differently. Although there is no creation of a new

language, Handmaids, for example, have their conversations monitored, and if there is a breached rule, they are punished. In the handmaids' speeches when greeting each other, they use phrases such as: "*blessed be the fruit; may the Lord open; may God make me truly useful.*" In other words, being "truly useful" comes down to sexual reproduction (ATWOOD, 2017, p. 29).

Another example of phrases and codes related to religion and fertility used in the handmaids' communication can be seen in this passage:

"Under His Eye," she says. The right farewell. "Under His Eye," I reply, and she gives a little nod. She hesitates, as if to say something more, but then she turns away and walks down the street. I watch her. She's like my own reflection, in a mirror from which I am moving away (ATWOOD, 1986, p. 15).

As seen in the excerpt above, Ofglen^[1] greets June using the expression "*Under His Eye*" which is used to greet and say goodbye. Notice that it is possible to perceive the interference of the State and of religious extremism in the use of language even in informal contexts. "*Under His Eye*" is a biblical term that refers to the eyes of God. In this case it is used as a form of control since the system itself strictly monitors all people.

In George Orwell's *1984* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* there is an emphasis on the repugnance of the sexual act. Sex is seen as something dirty and should be avoided and in *The Handmaid's Tale* it is used only for reproductive purposes. As for *1984*, we are informed that:

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" (ORWELL, 1949, p. 84).

In the case George Orwell's *1984*, sexual intercourse is avoided by all means and the Party controls all unions and marriages. Love and eroticism are seen as enemies and the only reason for marriage is to produce children for the Party:

The aim of the Party was not merely to prevent men and women from forming loyalties which it might not be able to control. Its 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. All marriages between Party members had to be approved by a committee appointed for the purpose, and—though the principle was never clearly stated—permission was always refused if the couple concerned gave the impression of being physically attracted to one another (ORWELL, 1949, p. 83)

In *The Handmaid's Tale* the "ceremony" clearly represents the use of the sexual act for reproductive purposes only. The commander's wife participates in the act with the handmaid. The two are fully dressed and the handmaid herself makes the following statement:

[1] Ofglen - another Handmaid who is June's shopping partner and a member of the subversive "Mayday" underground. At the end of the novel, Ofglen is found out, and she hangs herself rather than face torture and reveal the names of her co-conspirators.

What's going on in this room, under Serena Joy's silvery canopy, is not exciting. It has nothing to do with passion or love or romance or any of those other notions we used to titillate ourselves with. It has nothing to do with sexual desire, at least for me, and certainly would be a symptom of frivolity merely, like jazz garters or beauty spots: superfluous distractions for the light-minded. Outdated. (ATWOOD, 1986, p. 29)

In the excerpt above, it becomes one more time evident that sex in the Republic of Gilead is just a means for reproduction.

Both dystopias present their established governments as a kind of brainwashing machine for the people. In other words, people start to defend the imposed and distorted ideals preached by the State. In the novel *1984*, this brainwashing is done through the use of ideology. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, it is religion that contributes to this collective blindness.

It is possible to observe the brainwashing in *The Handmaid's Tale* when the behavior of the women becomes totally focused on monitoring each other and when religion begins to dominate their minds. But, June, the main character makes it clear that she is immersed in the ideology of the system when in the sexual act with the Commander she claims that she is not being raped. She claims she formally agreed to do the deed. However, when analyzing the context, the act can be characterized as rape, because in a way the system forces her to do it. Despite demonstrating in her narrative negative feelings towards the regime, in this particular statement it is evident that even those who do not agree with the system can be brainwashed, even if only partially (ATWOOD, 2017).

In the case of George Orwell's *1984*, brainwashing only happens after Winston is captured and tortured. He is returned to society and starts to believe in the system he fought so hard against. Before being tortured in Room 101, O'Brien explains to Winston that there are three stages to reintegration: learning, understanding and acceptance. From there, Winston undergoes terrible physical and psychological torture and accepts the atrocities of the totalitarian system (ORWELL, 2021).

In George Orwell's novel, we have the figure of Big Brother as the representative of the government and the highest authority of the party. As for the Republic of Gilead, there are no photos and posters with the figure of a maximum leader as in *1984*:

On each landing, opposite the lift-shaft, the poster with the enormous face gazed from the wall. It was one of those pictures which are so contrived that the eyes follow you about when you move. BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU, the caption beneath it ran (ORWELL, 1949, p. 3).

The two dystopias present regimes that have control over information, promote loss of individuality, elimination of historical facts and manipulation of the media. In George Orwell's *1984*, The Party's intention is to manipulate and censor public opinion. The Records Department in which Winston works was a branch of the ironically named Ministry of Truth. In this department, there were workshops to falsify photographs, book listings and discarded periodicals. Basically, they chose which fragments of the past would be falsified or erased. (ORWELL, 2021).

The Republic of Gilead in *The Handmaid's Tale* also had a custom of erasing their records. According to historians of Gileadean studies present in the tale's symposium, the regime had a habit of shutting down its own computers and destroying the printed lists afterwards. However, the difference is that the novel *1984* presents constant surveillance

through the use of Telescreens, i.e., televisions which have sensors that capture any movement, whereas in the Republic of Gilead, surveillance takes place through people spying on each other (ATWOOD, 2017; ORWELL).

In both works it is possible to perceive arbitrary arrests, deaths and exposure of deaths as a form of correction.

There are three new bodies on the Wall. One is a priest, still wearing the black cassock. That's been put on him, for the trial, even though they gave up wearing those years ago, when the sect wars first began; cassocks made them too conspicuous. The two others have purple placards hung around their necks: Gender Treachery (ATWOOD, 1986, p.15).

In the Republic of Gilead homosexuality is treated as a form of gender betrayal, and so it is cruelly rejected. For this reason, dead bodies are exposed in a banal way in order to frighten and repress.

In George Orwell's *1984*, arrests and deaths are also exposed to the population. As we can see in the following snippet:

‘Did you go and see the prisoners hanged yesterday?’ said Syme. ‘I was working,’ said Winston indifferently. ‘I shall see it on the flicks, I suppose.’ ‘A very inadequate substitute,’ said Syme. His mocking eyes roved over Winston’s face. ‘I know you,’ the eyes seemed to say, ‘I see through you. I know very well why you didn’t go to see those prisoners hanged.’ In an intellectual way, Syme was venomously orthodox. He would talk with a disagreeable gloating satisfaction of helicopter raids on enemy villages, and trials and confessions of thought-criminals, the executions in the cellars of the Ministry of Love (ATWOOD, 1986, p.63).

In this above conversation between Syme and Winston, Syme naturally asks Winston to witness the arrest and death of enemies of the Party by the cynically named Ministry of Love. Notice that executions are considered normal and viewed with coolness and naturalness.

In both works there are classes of people who are completely abandoned by the state. In the case of *The Handmaids Tale*, the un-women are those condemned to work in the colonies and exposed to a very high level of radiation. In the excerpt below, Moira tells June who these people were:

When that was over they showed me a movie. Know what it was about? It was about life in the Colonies. In the Colonies, they spend their time cleaning up. They're very clean-minded these days. Sometimes it's just bodies, after a battle. The ones in city ghettos are the worst, they're left around longer, they get rottener. This bunch doesn't like dead bodies lying round, they're afraid of a plague or something. So the women in the Colonies there do the burning. (ATWOOD, 2017, p.295).

It's old women — I bet you've been wondering why you haven't seen too many of those around anymore — and Handmaids who've screwed up their three chances, and incorrigibles like me. Discards, all of us. They're sterile, of course. If they aren't that way to begin with, they are after they've been there for a while. When they're unsure, they'll do a little operation on you, so there won't be any mistakes. I'd say it's about a quarter men in the Colonies, too. (ATWOOD, 2017, p.295)

In the excerpts above it is clear that some people were seen as disposable. Old

people, homosexuals, transsexuals, Handmaids who are no longer considered useful to the Republic and people who were not fertile were thrown to hard and deadly work in places with high levels of radiation.

In the case of *1984*, abandoned people were called proles. In the two excerpts below Winston explains how these people lived and says that most of the population belongs to this class.

In reality very little was known about the proles. It was not necessary to know much. So long as they continued to work and breed, their other activities were without importance. Left to themselves, like cattle turned loose upon the plains of Argentina, they had reverted to a style of life that appeared to be natural to them, a sort of ancestral pattern (ORWELL, 1949, p.99)

To keep them in control was not difficult. A few agents of the Thought Police moved always among them, spreading false rumors and marking down and eliminating the few individuals who were judged capable of becoming dangerous; but no attempt was made to indoctrinate them with the ideology of the Party. It was not desirable that the proles should have strong political feelings. All that was required of them was a primitive patriotism which could be appealed to whenever it was necessary to make them accept longer working-hours or shorter rations. (ORWELL, 1949, p.99)

The people of the proles were easily manipulated because they did not have access to knowledge or important information. These people just did the heavy lifting and were given food and compared to animals. They were allowed to have sex, get married and have distractions like movies, football and beer. This was the strategy to try to keep them distracted and away from political matters.

The main difference between the two dystopias is the oppression of the female gender that is most evident in *The Handmaid's Tale*. In this dystopia, women have their lives completely subjected to cruel norms dictated only by biological factors. Having a uterus, being fertile or not being fertile determines a woman's destiny in this novel.

Another characteristic that differentiates the two works is the religious extremism which is present in *The Handmaid's Tale*, where the existing laws of the Republic of Gilead are based on distorted and radical interpretations of the Bible. Finally, the criticism present in Atwood's novel is more focused on patriarchy and gender oppression, whereas, in the case of *1984*, the ideological and political criticism is more evident. In Atwood's novel, the favoring of men over women is more visible. In the most diverse areas, women are oppressed to a high degree. They are dehumanized and objectified.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Despite presenting some different dystopian aspects in their narratives, *1984* and *The Handmaid's Tale* serve to analyze existing problems and even imagine possible improvements in our present reality. The study and comparison of these two works stimulate critical and reflective thinking. It is known that *1984* and *The Handmaid's Tale* were written at very different times. Furthermore, *The Handmaid's Tale* belongs to the Critical Feminist Dystopia genre. However, despite the differences, the works have many similarities in their dystopian characteristics. Both regimes are extremely oppressive and cruel. In both works it is possible to perceive the total loss of freedom, control of thoughts, control of speech, manipulation, surveillance, and control of sexual and private life.

In both works we can see the wars as a way to distract the population from the government's problems. In *The Handmaid's Tale* we see the nuclear disaster and

radioactivity and the establishment of an extremist religious regime making the environment even more hostile, mainly for women.

While *1984* criticizes the use of technological devices as a form of surveillance, addresses totalitarianism and the corruption of government systems. Based on this, it can be said that *The Handmaids Tale* is an environmental, feminist and political dystopia; whereas *1984* is a political and technological dystopia.

Finally, *1984* is a novel that has a very large ideological and political charge and through it we can reflect on our government and even identify attacks against our democracy. As for the novel *The Handmaids Tale*, in addition to presenting a controlling, cruel and oppressive system, it also deals with aspects more focused on the female gender and serves as a way of raising women's awareness of their condition.

REFERENCES

- ATWOOD, Margaret. **The Handmaid's Tale**. New York: O.w. Toad, Ltd, 1986.
- ATWOOD, Margaret. **O conto da Aia**. (Trad.) Ana Lúcia Deiró. Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 2017.
- BACCOLINI, Raffaella, and TOM Moylan. **Dark horizons: science fiction and the dystopian imagination**. New York: Routledge, 2003
- BERRIEL C. E. Editorial da Morus. Revista Morus – Utopia e Renascimento - **Utopia e Renascimento 2**, p. 4-10, 2005.
- BOOKER, M. Keith. **Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research Guide**. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1994.
- CLAEYS, Gregory. **The Origins of Dystopia: Wells, Huxley and Orwell**. In: CLAEYS, Gregory. (ed.). **The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- CLAEYS, Gregory. **Dystopia: a natural history - a study of modern despotism, its antecedents, and its literary diffractions**. London: Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- FERNS, Chris. **Narrating Utopia: Ideology, Gender, Form in Utopian Literature**. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999.
- MORE, Thomas. **A Utopia**. (Trad.) Ciro Mioranza. São Paulo: Editora Lafonte, 2017. ORWELL, George. **1984**. 1a ed., Rio de Janeiro: Biblioteca Azul, 2021.
- ORWELL, George. (1949) 1950. **1984**. New York: Signet Classics.
- ORWELL, George. **Nineteen Eighty-four**. Centennial Edition. (Eds.) Thomas Pynchon, and Erich Fromm. New York: Plume, 2003.
- SARGENT, Lyman Tower. **Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.