

Female Power Shaped by Dystopias
*in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Catching Fire**

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Abstract

This thesis aims to answer the question of how the dystopian genre influences the development of female power in the main female characters from the following two contemporary dystopian novels; *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) by Margaret Atwood and *Catching Fire* (2009) by Suzanne Collins. The analyses will be conducted through a close-reading of the selected novels. Keith Booker's definition of dystopian literature and the characteristics of dystopian literature provided by Erika Gottlieb, will provide a basis for these analyses. Lastly, the aspect of gender is used to determine the distinction between sex and gender and how this influences the development of the main characters' female power. Dystopian literature is a genre used for both highbrow and young adult dystopian novels. It has remained a popular genre throughout the years because it offers criticism on society in the non-fictional world and this world is ever changing. Even though Margaret Atwood's work is from 1985, it still resonates in today's culture, since the fictional world created in the novel seems to resemble the non-fictional world President Trump is creating today. The analyses showed that the main character in *The Handmaid's Tale* has a female power that is manifested in the form of speech and that this is an internalised power. Whereas the main character of *Catching Fire* has an externalised political power, she is also able to project her caring, but rebellious nature onto the population. Both of their powers are heavily influenced by the dystopian world they reside in.

Key words: dystopian literature, female power, dystopia, utopia, gender, performativity, Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, Suzanne Collins, *Catching Fire*

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Abstract	3
Table of Contents	4
Introduction	5
Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework	8
Chapter 2: Female Power in <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i>	13
Chapter 3: Female Power in <i>Catching Fire</i>	20
Conclusion	28
Bibliography	31

Introduction

“The 19th Amendment is what gave women the vote. So there are Trump supporters who want to take the vote away from women. ‘The Handmaid’s Tale,’ unfolding in front of your very eyes” (Higgins par. 6).

Some of the most famous novels published between the 1930s and the 1950s were dystopian works; *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley (1932), *Animal Farm* by George Orwell (1945), *1984* by George Orwell (1949), *Fahrenheit 541* by Ray Bradbury (1953) and *Lord of The Flies* by William Golding (1954) to name a few. These classic dystopian works have remained popular throughout the years, but “in the past ten years, the dystopian subsection of young adult fiction has [also] exploded in popularity” (Mootz 208), which is evident by the popularity of Suzanne Collins’ trilogy *The Hunger Games* (2008) and Veronica Roth’s *Divergent* series (2011). Even though young adult dystopian fiction is a different genre than ‘highbrow’ dystopian fiction, or could be considered a subgenre, both genres explore similar themes. Here highbrow means that it is an academically acclaimed work. The genres showcase a dystopian society and are used to provide criticism on the non-fictional world. The main difference between the two is that young adult dystopian fiction is mainly geared towards a younger, not necessarily highly educated public. Whereas ‘highbrow’ dystopian fiction is geared towards an academic audience. Dystopian literature is a genre that stayed popular throughout the years, from *1984* by George Orwell to Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*. Especially the latter has shown it is a relevant plot even now, since the fictional society described in the 1985 work is a society that can be seen when looking at America under Trump’s rule (Higgins par. 5). Women’s rights were taken away in Atwood’s novel, specifically in relation to childbirth and now President Trump has signed a form against abortion; taking away the women’s right to choose. This shows that the issues in the novel regarding women’s rights are ongoing and because of that, novels such as *The Handmaid’s Tale* have increased in popularity. As Margaret Atwood has stated: “it was largely worries about women's issues after the U.S. election that made her book "The Handmaid's Tale" the latest dystopian novel to shoot back up bestseller lists” (qtd. in Marsh).

As mentioned, dystopian fiction is a genre that lends itself for social criticism. An example of this is George Orwell’s classic *1984*, which warns people for a totalitarian government. Orwell also showed this same idea in his novel *Animal Farm*, which he utilizes to criticise the rise of the Soviet Union. Feminist dystopian fiction is widely used by feminist writers to challenge gender roles and write about how women are portrayed in novels and

society. Female empowerment is a recurring theme in dystopian literature and is used to show criticism towards female representation in the non-fictional world and in literature. The focus of this thesis will be on how the main characters find their female power and how this is portrayed in dystopian literature, as well as analyse how this power manifests itself and how the dystopian setting influences this manifestation. Previous research on dystopian literature mainly consists of case studies of specific writers or novels, instead of focussing on the genre as a whole. Especially when combined with female empowerment and feminist criticism. An example of a case study which will be used in this thesis is Karen Stein's work "Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*: Scheherazade in Dystopia" which analyses Margaret Atwood's work and the protagonist's resistance as a "Scheherazade of the future" (269). This thesis will also provide case studies instead of focussing on the entire genre of dystopian literature, to add to the ongoing research on dystopian literature and be able to really focus on the works with an overarching theme of female power. It will focus on the female main characters of the novels, in order to analyse the use of the genre as an influence on the development of female power in the characters. The question that this thesis will therefore answer is: in what way does the dystopian genre influence the development of female power in the main female characters of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and Suzanne Collins' *Catching Fire* (2009)?

The preliminary hypothesis is that both novels present a manifestation of female power, and that they highlight a different form of female power. *The Handmaid's Tale* sheds light on the power of language and *Catching Fire* shows political power. The reason for choosing these two novels, is that this allows for an in-depth analysis of both novels in the appointed word limit. In order to answer this thesis' research question, this thesis will include a close reading of both dystopian novels. The novels have a similar setting, because in both novels, the main female characters are oppressed by a ruling governmental power; both main female characters come from a lower class and both find a form of female power within themselves as the storyline progresses. The close reading of the novels will build on Keith Booker's work on dystopian literature and combines it with gender theory, which will be discussed in more detail in chapter 1.

Chapter one of this thesis will provide a theoretical base for the analyses, which will go into detail about dystopian literature as well as the concept of gender and performativity. Chapter two will contain a close reading of *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood. This chapter will also analyse which form of female power is manifested in the

novel, as well as, analyse how this is influenced by the dystopian genre. The process applied in chapter two will be repeated in chapter three but then on *Catching Fire* by Suzanne Collins. Lastly, the conclusion will compare both novels, as well as, draw a conclusion on how the dystopian genre lends itself for the representation of female power.

Chapter 1

The following chapter will provide a theoretical framework for this thesis. In doing so it will give a possible explanation for the lack of sources on dystopian theory and give a definition of the term dystopia and dystopian literature as well as look at its relation to utopian literature, since without utopia, there is no dystopia. Other than that it will discuss the overarching genre of science fiction and dystopian literature's place in it. Lastly, it will also provide insight into the concept of gender construction to provide a basis for the analysis of female empowerment in the novels discussed in this thesis.

Dystopian theory is not a subject that has been widely discussed yet by academics, the research that does exist on it is not very recent. In *Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research Guide* (1994), Keith Booker acknowledges this and states that “there seem to have been no book-length studies devoted exclusively to dystopian fiction since [Mark] Hillegas's in 1967” (8). This is possibly due to dystopian literature being a fairly new genre. Unlike utopian literature, where the ‘ideal’ world is created, dystopian literature shows the opposite of a utopian world; a utopian world gone wrong. As Booker states: “in the course of the nineteenth century – in which technological utopianism reached its peak – [...] dystopian literature becomes an important and identifiable cultural force” (5). However, in “The origins of Dystopia: Wells, Huxley and Orwell” (2010), Gregory Claeys discusses that the rise of dystopian literature came in the twentieth century after the “grotesque slaughter of the First World War” (107). Booker and Claeys have similar ideas about the origin of dystopian thought; according to Booker “the rise of science as a discourse of authority in the Enlightenment directly inspired both an explosion in utopian thought and a corresponding wave of dystopian reactions” (5) and Claeys states that the optimism of the Enlightenment towards scientific progress was now “displaced by a sense of the incapacity of humanity to restrain its newly created destructive powers” (107). This led to a more negative portrayal of ideal worlds and societies, resulting in dystopian instead of utopian views (107). So, although Booker and Claeys both mention a different century that spiked the rise of dystopian thought, they both agree that it was a response to developments in science after the Enlightenment.

Although the century in which the dystopian movement gained popularity is debatable, the term ‘dystopia’ itself is also ambiguous. Since there is no one explanation for the term, it is important to look at the different definitions that are given by multiple researchers. Booker describes that dystopian literature “critically examine[s] both existing conditions and the potential abuses that might result from the institution of supposedly utopian alternatives” (3).

So he sees dystopian literature as a form of social criticism, specifically in response to utopian thought. Booker himself summarizes dystopian literature as follows:

Dystopian literature is specifically that literature which situates itself in direct opposition to utopian thought, warning against the potential negative consequences of arrant utopianism. At the same time, dystopian literature generally also constitutes of a critique of existing social conditions or political systems, either through the critical examination of the utopian premises upon which those conditions and systems are based or through the imaginative extension of those conditions and systems into different contexts that more clearly reveal their flaws and contradictions. (3)

In his work “Utopia, Dystopia and Science Fiction” (2010), Fitting discusses the fact that science fiction has been very significant in the development of utopian and dystopian literature (135). He does state that, like the society in science fiction, a “utopia is ‘a non-existent society described in considerable detail’”. (qtd. in Fitting 135). However, a utopian society is “normally located in time and space” (qtd. in Fitting 135), whereas in science fiction society is usually located in a non-existent time and space, for instance on a different planet. Like utopian fiction, dystopian fiction also portrays a non-existent society set in a world like our own. Although it does show a worst-case scenario, while also providing social criticism. This is also what sets it apart from the genre of science fiction, because Fitting uses Darko Suvin’s concept of ‘cognitive estrangement’ to try and define science fiction. In science fiction, there is an element of something new, unknown to man, whether it is a new technological device or space travel (135); it creates a world that is not fully relatable. Utopian and dystopian literature on the other hand, sketch a world that is different from the reality the readers live in, but contextualises it in a way that makes it seem like a non-fictional world. So even though science fiction and utopian/dystopian literature are connected and have similar characteristics, utopian and dystopian literature are subgenres of science fiction (136). In short, Fitting describes dystopian literature to show a worst-case scenario of a utopian world.

Sharon Wilson describes dystopia in her work *Women’s Utopian and Dystopian Fiction* (2013) as that it “involves utopia’s opposite: a nightmare, the ultimate flawed world, or ‘a society worse than the existing one’” (1). She states that “utopia and dystopia create new worlds, establish genre, and critique gender roles, traditions, and values” (2). Claeys on the other hand states that the term ‘dystopia’ can be interchanged with ‘anti-utopia’ or ‘negative utopia’ (107). According to him, dystopian literature is used “to describe a fictional portrayal

of a society in which evil, or negative social and political developments, have the upper hand, or as a satire of utopian aspirations” (107). The fact that it is used as a criticism on utopian literature or utopian thought resonates throughout the definitions. In contrast with Claeys views on ‘dystopia’, ‘anti-utopia’ and ‘negative utopia’ being interchangeable terms, Tom Moylan, author of *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia* (2000), argues that “dystopias negotiate the social terrain of Utopia and Anti-Utopia in a less stable and more contentious fashion than many of their eutopian and anti-utopian counterparts” (147). Moylan specifically talks about dystopian literature as “an exercise in a politically charged form of hybrid textuality” (147), with which he means that there can be a form of “genre blurring” (qtd. in Moylan 147). His idea of dystopian literature is in line with those of the previously mentioned, except that Moylan adds another aspect. He describes a dystopia to be able to “offer a detailed and pessimistic presentation of the very worst of social alternatives,” (147) but notes that in turn they can also include utopian ideas by showing that there is still hope (147). Moylan’s interpretation of dystopian literature is important because “it is precisely that capacity for narrative that creates the possibility for social critique and utopian anticipation in the dystopian text” (147).

It becomes clear from these definitions that one of the main goals of a dystopia and dystopian literature is to provide social criticism, and as Moylan discusses, the genre lends itself for the blending of genres. During the analyses, the thesis will mainly focus on Booker’s description of dystopian literature, where it is seen as the exact opposite of utopian literature and provides criticism on society.

In her work *Dystopian Fiction East and West: Universe of Terror and Trial* (2001), Erika Gottlieb discusses a number of dystopian works and relates it to dystopian characteristics. Although this thesis will not look at the difference between Eastern and Western dystopian fiction, this book provides the main characteristics of a dystopian society and what is generally seen in dystopian literature. The first characteristic of a dystopia is that it contains “seeds of a utopian dream” (8), which links back to the relation between dystopia and utopia. Furthermore, in dystopian literature there is usually a “conflict between the elite’s original utopian promise to establish a just, lawful society and its subsequent deliberate miscarriage of justice” (10), meaning that the way the ruling power in a dystopia reaches its ‘ideal’ state is often achieved in an unjust way. This often results in a “nightmare atmosphere typical of dystopia” (10). A dystopia often also has a barbaric state religion “that practices the ritual of human sacrifice” for the greater good (10, 11). Although this human sacrifice can be

done in a multitude of ways, for instance when looking at *Catching Fire*, this is done through the annual Hunger Games where people are forced to fight and slaughter each other. Another characteristic is that the characters' private world is destroyed (11); they are no longer in control of their own life. Lastly, there is a "vital importance of a record of the past" (12), meaning that in the novels there are usually flashbacks, or events that remind the main characters of a world before dystopia.

Since the main focus of this thesis lies on the manifestation of female power in the chosen dystopian works, a brief explanation on gender theory is necessary in order to grasp the difference between 'gender' and 'sex'. As discussed in the introduction of this thesis, dystopian literature in combination with gender is often used for feminist critiques and challenging gender roles. Although the characters that this thesis focusses on are all female it is important to note the difference between 'sex' and 'gender', because this influences the way their power is manifested. The following quote is by Simone de Beauvoir from her book *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949), which implies that gender is a construct instead of something that is set in stone: One is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one. (qtd. in Butler *Gender Trouble* 11)

In her work *Gender Trouble* (2007), Judith Butler discusses and questions the difference between 'sex' and 'gender', while also incorporating De Beauvoir's ideas, and as a basis differentiates between 'sex' as being a biological fact; a person is born either male or female, and 'gender' as being a cultural construct. Whereas De Beauvoir sees 'sex' and 'gender' as two different concepts, Butler argues that the term 'sex' can also be a construct because "there is no recourse to a body that has not always already been interpreted by cultural meanings" (11). Following this interpretation "sex, by definition, will be shown to have been gender all along," (11) since they are both cultural constructs. For the analyses of this thesis however, De Beauvoir's idea of gender and sex being two different concepts will be applied, since the characters that are analysed are biologically female, but can have deviant genders or gender characteristics. Deviant genders, being genders that differ from the norm. Looking at gender as a social construct means that a female person can have masculine characteristics and vice versa. Consequently, gender can change, which will be a focus point when analysing how the female characters find their own female power.

Taking *Catching Fire* by Suzanne Collins as an example; the main character, Katniss, is biologically female. However, she displays characteristics and personal traits that are conceived as masculine in our contemporary society, but also shows feminine traits. As Janet

T. Spence and Robert L. Helmreich state in their work *Masculinity and Femininity: Their Psychological Dimensions, Correlates, & Antecedents* (1978):

“Sex-role differentiation is universal among human societies: women and men are assigned different tasks, rights and privileges and are likely to be subject to different rules of conduct, particularly in interaction with each other. Reflecting this division of roles along sexual lines, men and women are typically assumed to possess different temperamental characteristics and abilities – distinctive sets of attributes whose existence is used to justify the perpetuation of the society’s role structure or whose inculcation is believed to be necessary if members of each sex are to fulfill their assigned functions” (4).

The concrete analyses and manifestation of these traits, and the subsequent conflict between Katniss’ biological sex and her proneness towards a combination of feminine and masculine gender, will be discussed in detail in chapter four. As mentioned in the introduction, the preliminary hypothesis is that both novels have a main female character who finds her own female power. Gender will be used for the analyses to conclude whether the main female characters have feminine or masculine genders and how this is influenced by the society they live in; it is a cultural construct.

To conclude, for the analyses that follow in the next two chapters, Keith Booker definition of dystopian literature will be the basis for the analysis. Other than that, it will also incorporate De Beauvoir’s idea of gender being a cultural construct, in order to analyse how living in a dystopian society affects the characters’ gender development and how their female power is manifested. This thesis will also look at the novel in its entirety and how the dystopian genre influences the development of the characters’ female power.

Chapter 2: Female Power in *The Handmaid's Tale*

The following chapter will provide a close reading of the dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood. As mentioned before, dystopian literature is a genre that allows writers to provide criticism on society by creating a new non-existent society, often showing a utopia gone wrong. This is also what Margaret Atwood has done in her 1985 novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, which is not just a dystopian novel but also a feminist dystopian novel. Atwood's novel focusses on the role of women in society and how they are suppressed by their ruling government and by doing so provides criticism on women's roles in the non-fictional world. The main focus of this analysis will be on the rebellious behaviour of the novel's main character Offred and how this leads to the development of her female power. Additionally, the dystopian elements in the novel will be analysed in terms of how they influence this development, as well as Atwood's feminist criticism on the non-fictional world. Ultimately this chapter will argue what type of female power Offred develops throughout the novel in a society that oppresses women as well as female identity and whether this is externalised or internalised power.

The Handmaid's Tale is set in a future republic called Gilead where almost all women have become infertile. A new, religion based patriarchal totalitarian government has taken over and has divided the population of Gilead into different categories based on their sex. Although the men are also split into categories, it is the women who suffer from this categorization, which is based on their function in society and their ability to produce offspring. This division into categories shows one of the feminist aspects of the dystopian novel. The main character of the novel is a Handmaid, meaning that she is one of the few women who can bear children and because of this is assigned to a wealthy household, to provide them with a baby. The Handmaids are seen as nothing more than "sexual surrogates" (Booker 79); they only function as a body to create babies and are merely seen as vessels instead of actual people. Other than Handmaids, the women are categorized into Wives, Aunts, Marthas, Jezebels and Unwomen. The Wives take care of the household and are partners to their husbands and the Aunts train the Handmaids, enforcing the rules set by the government into their minds until they cannot think any other way and brainwash them by forcing them to watch pornography and other films that show women being abused, cut up and raped. The following quote taken from chapter twenty of the novel shows an example of this: "Once we had to watch a woman being slowly cut into pieces, her fingers and breasts snipped off with garden shears, her stomach slit open and her intestines pulled out" (Atwood

128). These horrifying images are shown to the Handmaids as a warning of what used to be and what could happen again if they do not succumb to the rules of the Republic of Gilead. “The Aunts’ speech consists of platitudes, admonitions, and iterations of codes of behaviour such as ‘modesty is invisibility,’ ‘pen is envy’ [and] they script the authorized speech of the Handmaids, ‘testifying,’ a kind of brainwashing in which women are required to revise the narratives of their past lives” (Stein 271). The novel’s government further categorizes the women into Marthas who are domestic servants, Econowives, who fulfil the roles of Wives, Marthas and Handmaids in their household, but then for the lower class men. Other than that there are also Jezebels, who are prostitutes “used to service foreign dignitaries and important government officials” (Booker 79) and Unwomen, which are the women who will not fulfil any of these roles and are shipped off to the colonies, “where they are used for hazardous duties like cleaning up toxic waste” (79). These women all serve a different purpose in society, while still being under the oppression of men (79).

In the Republic of Gilead, the women who are not infertile and not married are taken and put into the Women’s Center where they are re-educated to become Handmaids. This links multiple elements of a dystopian society together; there are definitely “seeds of a utopian dream” (Gottlieb 8), since the society the patriarchal government is trying to create is a utopia in their eyes, although this dream is only a utopia to the men in society. Next to that, the utopian idea that the government is trying to reach, namely that the wealthy families can still have babies, is a classist utopian dream that is unfair to the rest of the population. It is only profitable for the elitist part of the population, whereas the rest of the population’s rights are disregarded. The religious government of Gilead has taken away women’s rights, linking to the opening quote of this thesis, where Margaret Atwood herself discusses that America under Trump’s rule is reminiscent of the society she created in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, showing that the anti-feminist ideas of the Republic of Gilead are still present in today’s society. Trump’s ban on abortion is parallel to the way the Republic of Gilead controls the act of giving birth because the women are no longer in control of their own body. This shows that the criticism Atwood wanted to give on issues in the non-fictional world of 1985 is still relevant in today’s culture, since the same issues are still present in today’s society. Taking away women’s rights and forcing them to make and have babies for someone else is a “miscarriage of justice” (10) and can in a way also be seen as human sacrifice, because the lives and bodies of these Handmaids are being sacrificed (10, 11). The term sacrifice does not always mean a bodily sacrifice, which results in death, but also to sacrificing personal

identities and rights to better others, which is exactly what happens in this novel. Although the lives of the Unwomen could be said to literally be sacrificed, since they are exiled to a place that will most likely result in their death. This shows that the novel uses classical dystopian elements to form its setting for the storyline. Other than that, the fact that Offred lives in a dystopian society is what in a way forces her to find her inner female power, without the oppression this would not have been necessary, as will be shown later in this chapter.

Although the entire society is dominated and ruled by men, the fact that the women are divided into categories brings in another form of oppression, namely women being oppressed by women. As Cavalcanti discusses in “*Utopias of/f Language in Contemporary Feminist Literary Dystopias*” (2000): The Aunts work together with the male population to train the Handmaids “into fitting their assigned social slots” (166) and are therefore have power over them. The Wives are in control of the Marthas because they are in service to the Wives and their husbands. The Handmaids are also under the control of the Wives, which is very notable from the instance where the so-called Ceremony takes place:

Above me, towards the head of the bed, Serena Joy is arranged, outspread. Her legs are apart, I lie between them, my head on her stomach, her pubic bone under the base of my skull, her thigh on either side of me. She too is fully clothed, My arms are raised; she holds my hands, each of mine in each of hers. This is supposed to signify that we are one flesh, one being. What it really means is that she is in control, of the process and thus of the product. If any. The rings of her left hand cut into my fingers. It may or may not be revenge (Atwood 104).

This scene shows that during the ceremony, the Wife is in full control of Offred’s body. In the novel there is another instance where this image is repeated, when one of the Handmaids is giving birth: “The Commander’s Wife hurries in, [...]. She scrambles onto the Birthing Stool, sits on the seat behind and above Janine, so that Janine is framed by her” (135). Again, just as in the previous scene, the Handmaid is sitting in between the legs of the Wife, as if they are one person. In this scene, the unimportance of the Handmaid as a person is also shown, because immediately after she gives birth the baby is taken away and put in the arms of the Wife where “the Commander’s Wife looks down at the baby as if it’s a bouquet of flowers: something she’s won, a tribute”(136). The gift of motherhood is taken away from the biological mother and given to the Wife, where the baby is immediately compared to an object, showing that the objectification is not only towards Handmaids.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Simone de Beauvoir's notion of gender as a cultural construct, mentioned in the theoretical chapter, is taken away as a result of the government's categorization of its population. This is a result of the fact that the novel does not distinguish between genders, but only between sexes. Remembering a time where the way of thinking was that women were only brought to this earth to provide offspring for men. Adding to that, "sexuality is a principal focus for the exercise of religious totalitarianism in Gilead" (78); the women are categorized based on their status and bodily functions and there is no room for personal identities. "Among the upper classes, women function principally either as wives [...], domestic servants [...], or Handmaids [...]" (78, 79). Whereas in the lower classes all their functions combined are performed by one person: the "Econowife", which in its name alone already says that she is not worthy of a higher class. By doing this, De Beauvoir's notion of gender being a cultural construct becomes superfluous, because there is no room for personal identity. Gender can therefore be said not to be present, because every form of uniqueness that a person can have, which influences their gender, is taken away. The reader is constantly reminded of this lack of gender and tying in with that, a lack of identity. From the start of the novel it becomes clear that the Handmaids are not seen as real people, they are objects or vessels, which only exist to produce babies for those who cannot conceive babies themselves. Amplifying the objectification of the Handmaids. This idea is voiced multiple times in the novel, in order to remind the reader of the insignificance of the characters' identities. One aspect that shows this is the fact that all the Handmaids are dressed exactly the same; they are meant to be invisible. Offred's explanation of their clothing shows this: "The skirt is ankle-length, full, gathered to a flat yoke that extends over the breasts, the sleeves are full. The white wings too are prescribed issue; they are to keep us from seeing, but also from being seen" (Atwood 18). Although their clothing is designed for them to be invisible, the colour of the clothing prevents this, because "dressed in their red robes and white wimples, they are highly visible" (Stein 271). Their outfit on the one hand makes them invisible, but visible at the same time. The fact that they are so highly visible, while they are supposed to be invisible can be seen as another form of oppression. This due to the fact that the entire population can see that they are Handmaids, but they are not seen as individuals. Their categorization is exemplified by their wardrobe: "Colour-coded in this way, the Handmaids become interchangeable, identified only by their biological function, child-bearing" (271); they are stripped of everything that makes them unique and because of this, they are invisible as individuals. This resonates with the dystopian characteristic of losing one's personal

identity and loss of control over one's life. Their categorization and depersonalization are further exemplified on page 75 of Atwood's novel when Offred is climbing out of the bath:

I cannot avoid seeing it now, the small tattoo on my ankle. Four digits and an eye, a passport in reverse. It's supposed to guarantee that I will never be able to fade, finally, into another landscape. I am too important, too scarce, for that. I am a national resource.

The Handmaids are branded for life, by the means of a tattoo, so that they will never forget their duty in life. They are numbered like a piece of cattle, signifying their loss of identity. They are no longer seen as people; they are a number on a list. This is exemplified by the fact that if they are not able to produce a baby, they will be declared Unwomen and sent off to the Colonies. They are shipped off, as if they are worthless, like a broken machine thrown away on a dumping ground. In the novel the Handmaids are objectified, which adds to their depersonalization and loss of identity. Their body is not seen as a body but as a machine that has to produce a baby, which is vocalized by Offred in chapter twenty-three when she goes downstairs for her secret meeting with the Commander:

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 favours are to be wheedled, by them or us, there are to be no toeholds for love. We are two-legged wombs, that's all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices (146).

This objectification of the Handmaids can be seen as a critique on the objectification of women in general in the non-fictional world, linking to the novel being a feminist dystopia. This objectification can be seen throughout the entire novel which will be shown in the following paragraphs. Also the fact that Offred refers to herself as being regarded a national resource adds to her objectification and lack of personal identity. This disregard of identity and uniqueness is what leads to Offred's female power, which will be discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs.

At one point in the novel, Offred's Commander wants to form a relationship with her outside of the scheduled intercourse they must have during the so-called 'Ceremony'. During her secret visits to the Commander's office they mainly play Scrabble, which seems to be a harmless act. However, seeing that reading is prohibited in the Republic of Gilead as it

promotes literacy, playing Scrabble is also forbidden. The Commander in a way gives Offred some of her power back as well as her freedom, because not only does he let her play word games, he also gives her magazines to read and he even lets her put on different clothes to take her out of the house and visit a brothel. Being able to wear different clothes than the prescribed handmaid outfit she is forced to wear, gives her back some of her identity, because she is seen as an individual and is also dressed as one. Although Offred regains some power here, she is still under the oppression of the Commander, since everything happens on his terms and the reason for taking her out of the house is so that he can have intercourse with her “outside the bounds of the impersonal handmaid ceremony. [Offred] submits not out of private loyalty or feeling, but merely out of her firm understanding of the workings of power that are involved” (Booker 80). This shows that even when more luxuries are allowed, the oppression of the patriarchal government is constantly felt.

Although the society Offred lives in does everything in its power to strip her of her identity, “through her storytelling, she grows more politically aware and self-conscious [...] and thereby construct[s] a self” (Stein 270), which goes directly against one of the characteristics of dystopian literature: losing one’s private self. Although her private life is taken away from her, in her mind and through her stories she creates a safe space for herself and her thoughts. The narrative’s perspective reflects the rebellious nature of Offred. Handmaids are not supposed to talk freely, to have an opinion or to even put themselves in the spotlight, but this novel is about her telling her story and gives her a voice through the first-person perspective. This means that the novel in its entirety can be seen as a rebellion, because the narrative is told from a first-person perspective, showing the main character’s story, who is a Handmaid and Handmaids are supposed to be speechless and invisible, because “to speak, to write, is to assert one’s personhood, inscribe one’s subjectivity” (270). As Karen F. Stein discusses in her work “Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*: Scheherazade in Dystopia” (1992) “her narrative itself is a criminal act, performed in secret and lost for many years” (269). This means that her rebellion is not vocally expressed towards the government, but it is done inside of her. Therefore, it can be said to be an internalised rebellion. Seeing that the story is told from a first-person perspective, the entire novel shows the main character’s resistance against the society she lives in. Not only telling the story is a rebellion, but also the way she does it. By showing her “dexterity with language” (Booker 83), Offred shows that she is literate and that the ban on literacy will not keep her from using language. In turn, holding on to her literacy means that she is able to maintain her identity,

because she reminds herself of who she was before she became a Handmaid. This is where the reader can see Offred's female power take shape, because she does everything that she can to keep her own identity and hold on to her own uniqueness. One of the ways she does this is by holding on to her name. The Handmaids are no longer their own person and are not allowed to use their real names, tying in with the previous paragraph, where it showed that the Handmaids are looked at as a number rather than as individuals. The name they are given refers to the man who owns them. The main character is referred to as Offred, because she is of Fred. Her real name is never mentioned in the novel, so the reader never learns her actual name. As Offred states in chapter fourteen, "my name isn't Offred, I have another name, which nobody uses now because it's forbidden. I tell myself it doesn't matter, your name is like your telephone number, useful only to others; but what I tell myself is wrong, it does matter" (Atwood 94). Here, she realizes that having a name means she has an identity, holding on to her name is holding on to herself as an individual. This is important if she ever wants to be free again and be her own person. It becomes clear that she uses language as a means to hold onto her identity and not succumb to the depersonalization of the Republic of Gilead and in language she finds her inner power.

Returning to the original question this thesis tries to answer, it slowly becomes clear that Offred's female power can be found in language. It is the power of speech and language that keeps her from losing her identity and succumbing to the oppression of the patriarchal Republic of Gilead. Her storytelling is a rebellion in and of itself, since she is not allowed to speak or write. Other than that, it is what keeps her sane in her new way of living, because it reminds her of how she used to think before the patriarchal government took over. Her power is an internalised power, because she has these stories in her head. It is also a power that helps her be her own individual as she herself states in the novel, knowing her name but keeping it to herself also gives her power and keeps her hoping for a better future. As long as her individuality remains inside of her, she will never fully succumb to the mindless servant life of a handmaid. The preliminary hypothesis of this thesis was that Offred's power also consisted of bodily power, but the analysis shows that having power over her body is one of the things she does not have, since she is forced to use it as a vessel for creating babies. The part that the dystopian setting of the novel plays in the development can be found in the fact that there would have been no need for Offred's rebellion through the use of language if she did not live in a dystopian society where gender no longer played a part and all her rights, including her literary rights, were taken away from her.

Chapter 3: Female Power in *Catching Fire*

The previous chapter discussed how the dystopian genre influences the development of female power in Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* set in a society where women's rights no longer exist and the concept of gender is absent. Unlike the previous novel, the oppression of the population in *The Hunger Games* trilogy by Suzanne Collins is not sex based, as the society has a hierarchical structure based on class. This chapter will examine the second novel of the trilogy: *Catching Fire* and how the main character, Katniss develops her female power in a class based society and analyses the distinction between 'sex' and 'gender'.

Catching Fire is the second novel in Collins' trilogy *The Hunger Games*, which is set in a future world called Panem. Panem consists of a wealthy Capitol, ruled by President Snow and is surrounded by twelve districts living in poverty. Panem's ideology is based on a fascist utopian idea which presents a "limited appeal for humanity as a whole, since it is not only an elitist utopia designed exclusively for a master race but also a dream envisaging the elimination or domination of 'inferior races' – the larger portion of humanity" (Gottlieb 9). To reach this domination, the Capitol hosts an annual Hunger Games, a televised game where one boy and one girl from each district must fight until there is only one survivor. The last boy or girl standing is pronounced the victor and will receive a lifetime of riches and food provided by the Capitol, as well as live in the Victor's Village which is a village specially built for the victor in their respective district. As Guy Risko discusses in "Katniss Everdeen's Liminal Choices and the Foundations of Revolutionary Ethics" (2012):

The Games are presented as a reality show for those privileged enough to live in the luxury of the Capitol, distanced enough from the carnage to bet and gossip on the dying children, and as a horror show for those forced to live in the various districts (81).

This quote also shows that Panem contains within its ideology "seeds of a utopian dream" (Gottlieb 8), which is one of the characteristics of dystopian literature. The novel shows a utopian dream that has gone wrong, as the utopian ideals set by President Snow are only profitable and enjoyable for himself and the residents in his Capitol. For the rest of Panem, Snow's ideas for his society are disastrous. The Hunger Games started as a form of punishment for a rebellion which was started by the districts years ago – led by District 13, which was completely obliterated as a result and thus has become wasteland - and continued through the years as a demonstration of the Capitol's power over the districts, as a way of

warning against new rebellious movements. The following is a scene from *Catching Fire* where a Peacekeeper is whipping one of District 12's residents for breaking the law:

Gale's wrists are bound to a wooden post. The wild turkey he shot earlier hangs above him, the nail driven through its neck. His jacket's been cast aside on the ground, his shirt torn away. He slumps unconscious on his knees, held up only by the ropes at his wrists. What used to be his back is a raw, bloody slab of meat (Collins 127).

As the passage shows, Gale, a resident of District 12 and a friend of Katniss, has been whipped until his entire back is covered in blood. The rest of the scene shows that the Peacekeeper had no intention of stopping there, but was ultimately stopped by Katniss, Peeta and Haymitch. The fact that they are called Peacekeepers is contradictory, since the name suggests that they are there to keep the peace and protect the people, while they are actually doing this by terrorising and suppressing the people in the districts. The Peacekeepers can be seen as a direct representation of the Capitol, because this is exactly how the Capitol upholds the oppression of Panem, by using fear and punishments. This links back to one of the characteristics of dystopian literature, because it creates a "conflict between the elite's original utopian promise to establish a just, lawful society and its subsequent deliberate miscarriage of justice" (Gottlieb 10). It shows a paradox between utopia and dystopia, showing an 'ideal' world according to its ruling power, but using inhumane methods to achieve this. Also, important to note is that this 'ideal' world is only ideal for the people living in the riches of the Capitol and its ruling power President Snow. Another dystopian characteristic within *Catching Fire* is that of human sacrifice, as Panem ensures that the tributes of the annual Hunger Games will slaughter each other until the strongest survives. The lives of the poor people from the districts are thus sacrificed for the entertainment of the rich from Panem. This shows that the novel and the trilogy as a whole, has classic dystopian elements.

The government categorizes its population based on sex, wealth and line of work, where the poorest are in District 12, furthest from the Capitol. District 12 is also where Katniss, the main character lives. The population of Panem is divided into these categories in order to sustain peace and prevent rebellion and they are separated from each other by electrical fences, prohibiting all interaction between different districts. The only instance where the population can see a glimpse of the other districts is when the annual Hunger Games take place and they can watch the televised slaughtering that happens in the Games. As Tom Henthorne states in his work *Approaching the Hunger Games Trilogy: A Literary*

and Cultural Analysis (2012): complete separation prevents the people from “identifying with those from other districts, from sympathizing with their plights and possibly making a common cause with them” (47). As a result, “a national rebellion becomes all but impossible” (47), ensuring the government’s rule stays intact. The novel thus visualises the results of oppression on a population; by keeping people separated from one another and limiting the amount of knowledge of other people’s situation, the chances of them bonding and standing up against the government are minimalized. The main distinction between the districts is made based on the industry they work in and their wealth. District 1 for example is the wealthiest district and is responsible for creating luxury items for the Capitol, whereas District 12 works in mining and is also the poorest district. The other districts provide food, weapons and other luxury items for the Capitol.

Although the division of the districts is based on these employments and their wealth, the roles that people have within the districts are categorized by their biological function. Men are supposed to work, while the women are supposed to stay at home and become mothers. This shows that the totalitarian government of Panem is also a sexist patriarchal government. The only time these roles change is when the father of the house dies, which is what happens in Katniss’ home, who is the main character of the story. She in result takes on the role of provider for her family and learns how to hunt and trade, taking on traits commonly seen as masculine. In the first novel of the trilogy, Katniss becomes a tribute in the games together with Peeta, the male tribute from her district. In the novel, there is a constant heteronormativity which is strengthened by the sexist categorization of the population. Before the Games begin, her coach Haymitch tries to explain to her that she should fake being in love with Peeta in order to gain sympathy from the viewers. He does so because he understands that that is what the people want to see and it can help her stay alive and possibly win the Games. As Haymitch’ advice shows, this heteronormativity is also present in Katniss’ storyline, since it is her faked relationship with her fellow competitor Peeta that keeps her alive during her first Hunger Games. Even after winning the Hunger Games, “patriarchy constructs a heteronormative narrative for her” (49) and she must keep living according to this narrative if she wants to stay alive. Heterosexual relationships are seen as the only acceptable form of relationship in Panem and people fitting the norm are rewarded for it when participating in the Games. At the beginning of the Games Katniss refuses to pretend that she is in love with Peeta, because she does not want to conform to the norm and she continues to refuse this until she has no other choice left. This means that “through her experiences in [...]

Panem [...] [she learns] that both masculinity and femininity are performances and that they can be performed in different ways depending on one's needs and desires" (45). She learns that pretending to conform to the social norms gives her power. Seeing that Peeta does not know that Katniss is faking her love for him, exemplifies her desire for survival and also shows that her female power is developing, because she takes control of her own survival. As Judith Butler states in her work "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" (1988) that:

When Simone de Beauvoir claims, 'one is not born, but, rather, becomes a woman,' she is appropriating and reinterpreting this doctrine of constituting acts from the phenomenological tradition. In this sense, gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self (519).

She explains the concept of gender identity with the help of performativity theory, meaning that gender is something that is performed. This is exactly what Katniss does; she performs her gender in a way that helps her achieve her goals, whether that is gaining sympathy from the people viewing the Hunger Games in order to receive medicine or other aids while in the Games, or later in the trilogy to inspire the population to rebel. Although the above mentioned heterosexual narrative is created for Katniss, she never actually voices wanting to be in a relationship with a man or anybody in general. She is more focused on surviving than anything else. Katniss does not fit the norm she is expected to live up to, she pretends to do so for her survival, but the fact that she takes over the role of provider in her household already breaks with the norm. Also, "by giving Katniss a gender neutral name and Gale, [the other man interested in having a relationship with her], an androgynous one" (Henthorne 48), Collins goes against gender norms and "subtly destabilizes the male/female opposition" (48). Katniss rebellion against the Capitol is possible because she does not fit the gender norm and "accordingly she can be regarded as a radical figure, one that challenges the ideological foundation of Panem itself" (45). As mentioned in the theoretical chapter, dystopian literature is a genre that lends itself for feminist criticism and is a platform for writers to showcase women as leaders and role models, because "utopia and dystopia create new worlds, establish genre, and critique gender roles, traditions, and values" (Wilson 2). This is also what happens

in *Catching Fire*. Katniss has, traditionally considered, masculine and feminine traits, because the gender she identifies with has a feminine side, the caring side, but also has a masculine side, since she is a hunter and knows how to fight. Other than that, she is also the primary breadwinner in her household; she hunts so that her family can survive. As stated by Janet T. Spence and Robert L. Helmreich: "In the modal society, whether preliterate or post-industrial, women are given primary responsibility for caring for children and the family dwelling, while men are given the primary responsibility for providing for the family's economic well-being" (4). This means that Katniss takes on both, according to general thought, male and female gender aspects. Her survival instinct is what helped her win the Hunger Games the first time, because she learned how to adapt to the desires of the people in the Capitol and gave them what they wanted to see. This instinct and deviant from the norm gender is something that is influenced by the dystopian society she resides in, since it is her living conditions and the death of her father, who died while working in the mines, that forces her to become a hunter and provider for her family. Had she not lived in a world with a totalitarian government, this would not have been necessary, since her family would not have been deprived of food by their oppression. The totalitarian government forces her to develop both masculine and feminine traits from a young age.

Catching Fire begins a few months after Katniss' and Peeta's victory in the Hunger Games, when they must get ready for their Victory Tour across the districts. The Victory Tour is held on the halfway mark between the annual Hunger Games and on this tour the victors travel through all 12 districts and end in the Capitol. Big parties are held to celebrate their survival, but it also serves as a reminder for the population that the Capitol is in control of the victors and all of Panem. Before the start of their Victory Tour, President Snow pays Katniss a visit. His visit is meant as a warning and a threat, because the reason he is there is that there have been uprisings in the other districts as a result of Katniss acts against him in the first novel. This is where she first realises that her intentions to save Peeta and herself mean much more than she initially anticipated. President Snow warns Katniss to prove to the districts that she and Peeta are really in love, because otherwise the people of the Capitol would know that Katniss tricked them and by doing so showing the people that live in the districts that there is hope and that a rebellion against Snow is not impossible. As Snow states: otherwise "the entire system would collapse" (Collins 25). The following passage is taken from chapter two of *Catching Fire*, showing her unawareness of the consequences of her actions in the first novel.

All I was doing was trying to keep Peeta and myself alive. Any act of rebellion was purely coincidental. But when the Capitol decrees that only one tribute can live and you have the audacity to challenge it, I guess that's a rebellion in itself (Collins 22).

This passage shows that her rebellion against the Capitol is subconscious, she never meant to be rebellious against the Capitol; she was merely trying to survive. The development of her female power is therefore a result of the oppression of Panem, because she is driven into the position she eventually finds herself in due to her will to survive. Although her rebellion was coincidental in the first novel, throughout *Catching Fire* Katniss grows more and more aware of the influence she has on the citizens of Panem and what her role is in the rebellion that is waiting to happen. She realizes that “while [she] live[s], the revolution lives” (466).

One of the characteristics of dystopian literature is that there is a “vital importance of a record of the past” (Gottlieb 12) to remind the population of what happened before. This element plays an important part in *Catching Fire*, as a record of the past serves two different purposes in the narrative, which counteract each other. On the one hand, the Capitol utilises carefully selected images from Panem's history in order to indoctrinate the minds of the people to warn them not to rebel as they have in the past. These images also reinstate the reason for the Capitol to have the annual Hunger Games and thus to give a moral reason to its population, especially the citizens of the districts, to kill dozens of children each year. On the other hand, this image of the past is what reminds the people of how life could be without the Capitol and President Snow at its head. A clear example of such indoctrination is the annual presentation of footage containing the destruction and resulting wasteland of District 13. This is a district that used to exist but was completely “blown off the map” (Collins 169) because of the rebellion. By doing so, the population of Panem is reminded every year of its oppression by the Capitol and by using fear the Capitol succeeds in keeping them oppressed. However, on the footage, a mockingjay can be seen; “just a glimpse of it as it flies by. The same one every time” (176). This shows that the Capitol is reusing old footage, though edited, since mockingjays are believed to have gone extinct since the destruction of District 13, therefore the presence of a new mockingjay every year is highly unlikely. This creates doubt in Katniss about what actually happened to District 13 and in turn gives her hope that they will be able to help with a rebellion against the Capitol. Mockingjays were created by accident; it is a hybrid between a mockingbird and a jabberjay. A mockingbird is a song bird and a jabberjay is a creation of the Capitol that was used to spy on District 13 before their rebellion. Mockingbirds and jabberjays mated and thus created the mockingjay. The fact that

Katniss becomes the face of the rebellion also happens on accident drawing a parallel between the two. Hence why Katniss is also referred to as the mockingjay. Other than this footage, the Hunger Games themselves also serve as a means of reminding the population of Panem of the past. Everything surrounding the Hunger Games is a reminder of President Snow's oppression, from the Victory Tour mentioned before, to the Quarter Quell, which is mentioned in the following paragraph and shows that even after winning the Hunger Games, the oppression does not stop.

Other than the oppression on the population in its entirety, the novel also shows individual oppression from President Snow on Katniss as a result of her rebellious act in the Hunger Games. As a result of her behaviour, uprisings have started to happen in the other districts, at the displeasure of Snow. As mentioned before, Snow forces Katniss to continue her romance with Peeta to try and help settle the minds of the other districts. This shows that the Games have destroyed her private world (Gottlieb 11), because ever since she has participated in the Hunger Games, she no longer has control over her own life. Everything is decided for her and she is now under the power of the Capitol, and specifically that of President Snow. As *Catching Fire* progresses, more and more uprisings spread throughout the districts, and eventually, Katniss aspires to start an uprising in District 12 as well. This shows that she has become more aware of the power she has in Panem and that she wants to rebel against the system. These plans, however, soon get trampled, as the announcement of the 75th annual hunger games (known as the Quarter Quell) promises another backlash for Katniss and Peeta, for failing to prove that their love was real. As President Snow reads: "as a reminder to the rebels that even the strongest among them cannot overcome the power of the Capitol, the male and female tributes will be reaped from their existing pool of victors" (Collins 208). By doing so, Snow shows that rebellion will not go unpunished, but also that no one is safe from his oppression; not even the existing victors of the Hunger Games, who were promised a lifetime of riches and are now thrown back in as a punishment. Going back to the previous mentioned point about the importance of a record of the past to retain power over Panem, it is also what ultimately leads to the start of the rebellion. This first of all happens, because the doubt that there is about the footage from District 13 being old, reused footage gives the people of Panem hope, that there are still people living in District 13 and that they might be able to help rebel against the Capitol. Secondly, throwing old victors back into the Hunger Games to prove a point, actually makes the victors stand together and show their disapproval. Ultimately this also leads to Katniss destroying the arena the Hunger Games are held, which

sets the reader up for the third novel, where the rebellion breaks loose and President Snow is ultimately killed.

Following this analysis, it becomes clear that her power is a political power; she fights against the government. What is apparent though, is that this power is heavily influenced by the dystopian society she lives in and she is a way forced to become this political power by her surroundings. This is strengthened by the fact that her rebellious acts started as something subconscious, she was merely acting on instinct. However, would she not have been placed in such a totalitarian government and would she not have been forced to participate in the Hunger Games, there would have been no need for this political power. That she becomes the face of the rebellion and that the pin she wears of a mockingjay are turned into the symbol for the rebellion is not her doing. It is the people of Panem who want to start a revolution that put her in this position. She does, however, have a very strong survival instinct and her subconscious rebellion is what inspired the population of Panem to see her as the face of the rebellion, therefore it can be argued that her power is an externalised power. It is externalised because her power is projected onto Panem.

Conclusion

This thesis examined the influence of the dystopian genre on the development of female power in two contemporary dystopian novels. The analysis was done on Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Suzanne Collins' *Catching Fire*. The main focus of the analysis was on the development of power in a society that is oppressed by its government. This thesis aimed to contribute to dystopian literature research in relation to gender studies. The analysis used Keith Booker's definition of dystopian literature as a base and combined it with Simone de Beauvoir's idea that gender is a social construct. Additionally, Judith Butler's performativity theory was used to analyse the development of gender in both novels.

As the first chapter described, dystopian literature is a commonly used genre for portraying criticism on society. Through the years it has also become a genre used by feminist writers to specifically critique gender norms and the portrayal of women in society. This is achieved by creating a non-existing world where these gender norms are far from ideal, reflecting on how they are in the non-fictional world or could become. As Booker described, dystopian literature portrays a utopia gone wrong and aims to provide criticism on society and for the analysis this idea was combined with Simone de Beauvoir's explanation of the difference between the concepts of 'sex' and 'gender'; 'sex' being biologically determined and 'gender' being a social and cultural construct. Finally, Butler's performativity explained how gender is something that is performed.

Both novels are set in a dystopian world, ruled by a totalitarian government and in both novels the female main character is oppressed. Atwood creates a patriarchal society, where the main focus lies on the oppression of women in *The Handmaid's Tale*, whereas *Catching Fire* shows a society where the oppression is felt by everyone apart from the people living in the Capitol. Although Collins' novel also shows a sexist division of its population; women are meant to stay home and be mothers, while the men work and provide for their families, the main categorization is based on line of work and wealth. In contrast, the population in Atwood's novel is categorized on the basis of biological sex.

What became clear from the analyses is that the oppression from the government, in both cases, heavily influenced the development of female power in both main characters. Neither of the characters would have had to develop this power if they were not in a state of oppression. The type of female power they developed was also a result of this oppression. Offred's female power is based on language and the power of speech, as a result of the ban on

literacy for women in the Republic of Gilead. However, it is not only the ban on literacy that influences her female power, but also the fact that their personal identity is oppressed. Offred learns that the only way of retaining her personal identity is by holding onto to her real name and telling her story to remind her of her old self. Katniss' female power manifested itself as political power and as became clear during the analysis, her part in the political rebellion was not something that she chose herself. She was placed in that position by the population of Panem as a result of the oppression by President Snow. Ultimately, the development of her female power would not have been necessary if she was not living in a society dictated by a totalitarian government, showing that her political power is a direct result from her government's oppression. This in turn shows the influence of the dystopian genre on the development of female power in the novels, since the setting and the created fictional worlds are based on the characteristics of dystopian literature that are mentioned in the theoretical chapter.

Looking at the dystopian characteristic of a record of the past, it becomes clear that this is an important element in both novels. In *The Handmaid's Tale* it is used as a means of oppressing the Handmaids, by reminding them of how bad life was before the new government took over by showing them horrifying videos from the past. It is however also used as an anchor for Offred, to hold onto her old life, name and personal identity. She often thinks back on the times before she became a Handmaid and this helps her keep her sanity and individuality in a society that suppresses every unique element a woman can have. Similarly, the record of the past also serves two different purposes in *Catching Fire*. Firstly, it serves as a reminder of the horrible rebellion that has happened before and as to why the Hunger Games were created. Secondly, it is also this record of the past that gives the people of Panem hope for a better future.

When analysing whether their female power is externalised or internalised, Atwood's novel presented an internalised power. Offred's power is internalised because her form of rebellion, storytelling, is something she does in her mind. It is not a vocalized power towards her government. In contrast, Collins' novel showed an externalised female power. Katniss power is projected onto the entire population of Panem and ultimately leads to an active rebellion against President Snow.

When it comes to further research on this topic, there are many options. One of the suggestions would be to analyse Katniss' sexuality further in *The Hunger Games*, since even though she goes against the heteronormativity in the novel and never expresses wanting to be

in a relationship, she ultimately ends up marrying Peeta and having his children in the third novel. Tom Henthorne also touches on this subject in *Approaching the Hunger Games Trilogy: A Literary and Cultural Analysis* but further research on this could show important elements of gender critique by Suzanne Collins. It would also be interesting to analyse feminist dystopian works of different time periods, to see how the representation of female power in dystopian literature has changed through the years. Additionally, this thesis could be expanded by analysing more dystopian works that showcase different forms of female power and see if their manifestation is also heavily influenced by the dystopian genre.

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