

CONTAGIOUS DYSTOPIA FROM *WE* TO *THE HANDMAID'S TALE*

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Published: 30/03/2024

Accepted: 18/03/2024

Received: 20/12/2023

ABSTRACT:

The research paper reads an intertextual analysis of Yevgeny Zamyatin and Margaret Atwood in dystopian fiction. In the scheme of things, the twentieth century was a time of terror and suspicion caused by human ideological fallacy to reach perfection through the premise of utopia. The outcome of leading with greed spawned heresy in a labyrinthine world that writers manifest through dystopia which has been spread burly through literature. In this vein, Zamyatin and Atwood scrutinized their cataclysmic communities in their narratives; using an imaginary setting in a distant future. This study aims to decode some parts of *We* and *The Handmaid's Tale* to affiliate these oeuvres within the anti-utopian vessel. Some literary tools assist in the findings of this paper which assert that the Russian and English selected novels veer towards the same vision of dystopia the infection of which seems inevitable. It also finds that the texts recommend a reading between the lines to realize hidden layers and references which empower the identity of the literary works. As a result, Zamyatin and Atwood remain indebted to previous works and art that helped them criticize the deemed 'perfect place' where suffering and dehumanization are its concealed founding structure.

Keywords: *Dystopia; Intertextuality; Zamyatin; Atwood; We; The Handmaid's Tale.*

Times New Roman (Titres CS) 14

1. Introduction

A dark place, nightmare, corrupted city, failed utopia or even paradise lost is quasi-bent on dystopia. In literature, it is assumed that the anti-utopian tradition takes its genes from the Russian writer Yevgeny Zamyatin who opened the debate on oppressed societies over the first decades of the past century. The genre has soon become the favorite ritual for many writers, including George Orwell, Anthony Burgess, Aldous Huxley, and Ray Bradbury. Margaret Atwood has also investigated similar topics with a feminine voice whose society is far from average or fair. In this paper, Zamyatin's *We* (1924) and Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) are used to refer to the newborn genre of dystopia. Despite their apparent differences, an intertextual link leads to the same

dystopian archetype. In short, Zamyatin and Atwood's narratives are viewed from their pessimism and tart language.

2. Intertextual References in Dystopias

Zamyatin's *We* and Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* are two literary texts that belong to the same network. In this regard, Genette explains that architextuality thematically analyses the text structure. Patterns of the genre are highlighted by this tool of analysis, yet, the potential of developing intertextual links between the narrative and the genre to which it is convenient is the duty of the reader. According to Moylan (2018):

The judgment of utopian or dystopian quality is up to the reader or critic who undoubtedly works from a particular standpoint (with particular affiliations and principles) in order to decide whether a given fictive society is better or worse than the author's or the reader/critic's. (p.4)

This assumption has been shared by Genette as well when defining his architextuality. The French theorist assumes that "a very important factor of this type is the reader's expectations, and thus their reception of the work" (Genette, 1997, p. xix). Therefore, each text has a category and a tradition that molds its ground. Although the selected literary corpus in this paper, *We* and *The Handmaid's Tale*, are not assumed identical, they can be read as an illustration for dystopian literature since both examine the same nightmare and fear of the cosmic laws produced in the early and late twentieth century. From an architextual angle, reading *Brave New World* (1931), *Anthem* (1937), *Kallocain* (1940), *Walden Two* (1948), or *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) leads to the same 'bad place' because they settle the traits of dystopian tradition in form and content. On that account, there is no doubt at all that the fictional texts of *We* and *The Handmaid's Tale* dominate, to a large extent, the dystopian cosmos. The efficacy of Genette's concept serves to classify the studied texts within the dystopian tradition.

2.1 Religious Perspectives in *We* and *The Handmaid's Tale*

The Russian novel *We*, first translated to English by Gregory Zilboorg (1924), is considered a theory in dystopian fiction that would inspire many novelists afterward. The novel is rich in references to religion, politics, and literature. The impact of the aesthetic effect in Zamyatin's classical dystopian novel *We* is deep on the reader, stimulating a play of imagery and allusions, among which the religious one constitutes a reasonable counterpart discourse.

Respectively, in the futuristic state that is deemed to be heaven on earth, Atwood portrays a society named Gilead under a theocratic rule. For critics, the intertextual references from the bible are a point of no divergence. Thus, to gauge Atwood's indebtedness to religious texts and scenes, this research paper scrutinizes many elements in *The Handmaid's Tale* in which the Canadian writer was inspired by literary works that elucidate the essence of the genre.

2.1.1 Secular Dystopia in *We*

Regarding mythic criticism of the novel, Richard A. Gregg, in his critical essay *Two Adams and Eve in the Crystal Palace: Dostoevsky, the Bible, and We*, claims that "*We* is a Janus-faced

novel" (Gregg, 1988, p.61). Common readers find that Zamyatin's secularism expels the possibility of religious and biblical features in the novel. In the realm of criticism, however, the caustic substance of the text paves the way for numerous religious and spiritual scenes.

From Gregg's point of view, there is a straightforward passage that alludes to Adam and Eve's biblical anecdote. When D-503, the novel's protagonist, had a conversation with his poet friend R-13, the legend of the Garden of Eve was their subject of conversation. In *We*, R-13 who was loyal to the OneState, thinks that:

You see, it is the ancient legend of paradise... Only think of it, think of it for a moment! There were two in paradise and the choice was offered to them: happiness without freedom, or freedom without happiness. No other choice... They, fools that they were, chose freedom...It was he, the devil, who led people to transgression, to taste pernicious freedom—he, the cunning serpent. And we came along, planted a boot on his head, and . . . squash! Done with him! Paradise again! We returned to the simple-mindedness and innocence of Adam and Eve. (Zamyatin, 1924, p.59)

R-13 claims confirm that the One State succeeds at indoctrinating its citizens with the idea that happiness and freedom cannot meet without damaging one another. Just like Adam and Eve, who were induced to taste freedom which cost them their loss of happiness and paradise.

The relationship between the protagonist and the revolutionary woman seems to be a replica of Adam and Eve. D-503 is an effective member of the OneState whose Integral is the fundamental successful future of his society. Gregg Kern argues that "For if the Biblical argument is that to be worthy of God, Adam should have resisted Eve's blandishments, the moral of *We* is that to be worthy of man the new Adam ought to succumb to them" (Kern, 1988, p.65). Just like Adam, D-503 is true to the OneState and accomplishes his duties as it should. He worships the principles of his Benefactor and works for the welfare of the community. When D-503 meets I-330, doubt intrudes on his beliefs, and the engineer starts to become skeptical about the accuracy of his authority's laws and principles. Gregg puts "The seductive charms of Eve and her first fatal bite are thus telescoped into the recurrent images of I-330... a fatal fascination for D-503; the moral fall of Adam becomes literal in *We*: "Down, down, down, as from a steep mountain" (p.63). When the mathematician meets I-330 in her apartment, she offers him a "Wonderful liqueur!" which alludes to alcohol (Zamyatin, 1924, p.53). Hence, the forbidden fruit that seduced Adam and Eve is in Zamyatin's plot: alcohol. Nevertheless, the latter is criminal and sinful in the traditional dystopian society; as D-503 utters: "Anyone who poisons himself with nicotine, and more particularly with alcohol, is severely treated by the United States" (p.52). However, with the temptation of I-330, he succumbs to her and shares the forbidden fruit with her and thus he falls "down, down, following an incalculable curve..." (p.54). If life in OneState is paradise, it is a paradise lost outside of it. Like Eve, I-330 brings our protagonist beyond the Green Wall outside the OneState, which is the irrational and illogic "lower kingdom".

Readers of *We* may notice that Zamyatin used consonants for male names "a consonant means a male Number"(Zamyatin, 1924, p.103), whereas vowels for females. Thus, an emphasis on names in the novel shows that the D of Zamyatin's protagonist is taken from the first consonant in "Adam" since it is not adequate to use the vowel "A", and I-330's vowel refers to Eve. As a fact, Jeffrey Steven Carr explains that the Russian writer who was very familiar with the English language chooses the letter "I" because it corresponds to the Russian letter "И", which sounds

phonetically like the English "E" in Eve. In this account, some translations directly highlight Zamyatin's allusion to Eve and opt for E-330 instead of I-330, like Bernard Guilbert Guerney's translation of the novel in 1960.

Biblical allusions echo Zamyatin's narrative. Hints from Genesis seem to pry on Zamyatin's description of his state's Benefactor of Well-doer. In a futuristic society, the protagonist of our dystopia asserts: "It was He, descending to us from the sky, He-the new Jehovah-in an aero, He, as wise and as lovingly cruel as the Jehovah of the ancients." (p.132). Notoriously, Zamyatin's borrowed image from religious text is revealed in his words and ideas. The new Jehovah or the Benefactor is alluding to the King James Bible verse which states, "May people know that you, whose name is Jehovah, You alone are the Highest over all the earth" (Psalm 83:18).

Nuances of Biblical overtones continue to part from the Dystopia of *We*. The integral in the novel embodies the notion of Noah's Ark. D-503 symbolizes Noah for he is the builder of the Integral (that is, the Ark or the ship). D's integral represents refuge and power to the underground revolutionary group, Mephi. By unleashing the integral, they believe that their movement will triumph against the rigid tyrant principles of the OneState. I-330, the revolution leader claims: "On the day when it first sets sail into the sky *we* shall be on board. For the Builder of the *Integral* is with us" (Zamyatin, 1924, p.146). Like the Ark that saved Noah and his followers from the deluge, the Integral would save the Mephis from tyranny and injustice.

2.1.2 Theocracy in *The Handmaid's Tale*

In a theocratic society like Gilead, finding religious context within the novel is inevitable. Readers of *The Handmaid's Tale* might focus on the feminist issues exposed during the narrative, yet, the Canadian writer set her torch alight on religious fundamentalism that is canonized as a symbol of socialist dystopia. Thus, Atwood keeps integrating images from the Judeo-Christian religion.

2.1.2.1 The Ceremony

Atwood directly quotes in her epigraph a verse from Genesis that shows from where she took the idea of her Ceremony. "Give me children, or else I die » is the state's pretext for procreation. In the Bible, Rachel could not bear any child for Jacob. The former asked her husband to make her maiden pregnant and hold a child from him while she is a witness that "she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her". This rape-like act is the basis of the Gilead, where the handmaids bear the children of the commander's barren wives. In "Margaret Atwood's Modest Proposal: *The Handmaid's Tale*", the critic Stein (1996) asserted:

Gilead turns Rachel's anguished plea for children into the pretext for instituting a new domesticity based on the sexual triangle of a man and two women. In the guise of a re-population program, Gilead reads the biblical text literally and makes it the basis for the state-sanctioned rape, the impregnation ceremony the handmaids must undergo each month. (p.61)

As Atwood is inspired by the bible, her Gilead, again, misused religious texts to harness its citizens and objectify the female gender.

2.1.2.2 Testifying

"Testifying is special", claims Atwood's protagonist Offred. From this vein, Atwood keeps echoing and referencing the bible. In the Gilead, the handmaids have a particular hour to testify their sins. Collectively, they listen to each other's previous sexual experiences with deep remorse since the aunts urge them to repent. In the narrative, Offred tells when Janine testifies that she had been gang-raped at fourteen. Without sympathy, the Aunts jeer at her and keep blaming her for she let them on. "Her fault, her fault, her fault, we chant in unison...She did. She did. She did." (Atwood, 1985, p.70), and what is more dreadful, Offred says, "We meant it, which is the bad part." (Atwood, M, p.71). Exactly as we can see, the act of Testifying is derived from the practice of Christianity when people give their testimony of how they have found their way to God: "And you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles." (Matthew 10:18).

2.1.2.3 Salvaging

Salvaging or salvation is another term that appears in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Literally, it is borrowed from the bible, but in the narrative, it is a substitute for eliminating political enemies: whoever disobeys the law is considered criminal and will be executed. "The three bodies hang there, even with the white sacks over their heads looking curiously stretched, like chickens strung up by the necks in a meat shop window... Today's Salvaging is now concluded" (Atwood, p.248).

Salvaging in the Gilead is a tool to purify society from criminals and save its regime from recalcitrant minds. This has pertinence and sense with religious salvation; however, in the bible, the latter means to rescue or save the soul from sins: "In repentance and rest is your salvation; in quietness and trust is your strength." (Isaiah 30:15). The totalitarian regime embodies this image of obedience and often echoes biblical texts with distortion. In a similar vein, Stein (1996) put, "The totalitarian government of Gilead appropriates biblical texts to institute and enforce harsh political control, to shape a political reality for its citizens" (p.61).

2.1.2.4 Gilead

The Handmaid's Tale is set in a republic called Gilead. After the murder of the president of the United States, a party under the name of "Sons of Jacob" ruled over the land. They use the bible to justify their despotism and tyranny. Atwood borrows the name of her republic from the Hebrew Bible. According to the Hebrew dictionary, Gilead is: "a mountainous region bounded on the west by the Jordan, on the north by Bashan, on the east by the Arabian plateau, and on the south by Moab and Ammon; sometimes called 'Mount Gilead' or the 'land of Gilead' or just 'Gilead'".

Perhaps, to give more accuracy to the theocratic republic, Atwood opts for the name of this region to exploit the idea of a society that is purely misusing religious context only for the sake of governmental power. One may argue that Atwood purposely featured her Gilead with a fundamentalist religious basis. In effect, *The Handmaid's Tale* triumphs over classical utopia as one of the major dystopias in the literary cosmos.

2.1.2.5 Handmaids

The Canadian dystopia is the foundation of religious fundamentalism. This aspect keeps echoing in Atwood's prose. There has always been an amount of indebtedness in biblical texts, and one cannot deliberately ignore the critical element of the narrative, that is, the Handmaid. Such a term is seldom used, especially to portray the hierarchical structure of society in which every Handmaid is underneath. In different terms, this lexicon belongs to a past millennium when a bottom class of women is assigned to a particular elite family to serve and accomplish their needs. However, Atwood's handmaids are of paramount importance for their ability to reproduce; "two-legged wombs.. sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices" (Atwood, p.128).

The term 'handmaid' is borrowed directly from Genesis' anecdote of Rachel and her maiden Bilhah. In Hebrew Genesis in chapter 30, it is put, "And Bilhah Rachel's handmaid conceived again, and bore Jacob a second son". Again, the Canadian writer derives her inspiration from Rachel's tale, also mentioned in the book's epigraph. The point might also be that Atwood wants to portray a figure of submissiveness, obedience, and a true believer who would protect the elite's lineage.

2.2 Referencing World Literature

Movements in literature can be identified through the techniques and elements used by writers to convey the aura of their epoch. In Zamyatin and Atwood's literature, there is an amount of indebtedness to convey a more plausible narrative.

2.2.1 In Zamyatin's Text

Though contemporary, Zamyatin remained faithful to his predecessors in the way that he overtly borrowed from their texts and literary figures to expand his narrative to other dimensions.

2.2.1.1 Chernyshevsky and Dostoevsky's Architecture in *We*

In a futuristic society set in the thirtieth century, the story's events take place. The supremacy of the OneState is ruled by the Benefactor, who controls every aspect of the life of its citizens. This city has uncommon architecture. Despite its isolation from the world by the Green Wall, this place is made transparent to smooth the progress of surveillance for the Guardians and monitor the activities of the citizens. In an article about Evgeny Zamyatin, Voronsky (1988) illustrated that "Everything is glassed in; everything is in plain sight and is registered. Glass sky, glass houses" (p.44). From this perspective, one is beckoned to look for the source of inspiration that Zamyatin indebted along with his narrative. The nuances and shades given in the account attract the attention of critics. The idea of glass and crystallines reflects in previous literary works. Some find that Zamyatin's United States is a replica of England's Crystal Palace, a building that symbolizes exactitude and perfection. The concept of a place made of glass raised the attention of many writers and especially Russian ones. In discussing Zamyatin's dystopia of *We*, his glass state has a symbolic meaning that can be explained through a glance at Chernyshevsky's utopia *What Is*

To Be Done? The energy to construct a glass edifice is derived from Chernyshevsky, who proffered the imagery of the Crystal Palace through his heroine's dream to become a utopian inspiration for many writers. Similar to Chernyshevsky, who used the idea of Crystal Palace to create a glass megalopolis, Zamyatin, interested in the idea, founded *We's* OneState in a transparent, glass, crystalline-like city.

The parallel image between Zamyatin's dystopian society and Chernyshevsky's illustration of the Crystal Palace is highly noticeable. However, some critics have considered the polemic between Zamyatin and Chernyshevsky and argued that *We's* dystopian architecture is derived from Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground*. Indeed, Zamyatin's text is fueled with textual references from Dostoevsky's novella of 1864. Both Russian writers used the crystal palace to criticize the ideal society based on oppression and restriction of freedom. The glass building is a tool used for control and oppression so that members are regimented and observed. This idea is highlighted in Zamyatin's *We* where citizens are ruled under a rigid regime. Dostoevsky, in his *Notes From the Underground*, is considered the first book that contains a reference to the location of a limpid building like the crystal palace. His architectural prototype that inspired Zamyatin in *We* hold a heavy meaning that Dostoevsky's underground protagonist expresses: "I am afraid of this edifice, that it is of crystal and can never be destroyed and that one cannot put one's tongue out at it even on the sly" (Dostoevsky, 1996, p. 47). Thus, Zamyatin has overtly indebted this feature of a society where everything is crystal clear, or in other terms, no one can get out of this circle except for riots.

2.2.1.2 The Tyrant Figure in *We*

The banned Russian novel *We* is canonized among the most famous literary works. Though written in Russian, a translation could not macerate its powerful language. Zamyatin's prose varies with references and allusions to other literary works.

In the dystopia of *We*, citizens are regimented by the omniscience of the Benefactor, the Well-Doer, or the "New Jehovah". Zamyatin tried to shape irony by using such a name for the head of his authoritarian state. How does it come that the ruler of a community based on dictatorship is associated with philanthropy while his policy is a misanthropic fallacy? However, critics consider Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* the epitome of Zamyatin's Benefactor. Accordingly, the ruler of the OneState derives his energy from the Grand Inquisitor: the tyrant in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880). Booker (1994) openly put "The Benefactor can, de facto, be read largely as a direct reinscription of the Grand Inquisitor, with dashes of Lenin and other figures thrown in" (p.45), while Brown (1988) in his essay "*Brave New World, 1984, and We: an Essay on Anti-Utopia* argues that "in *We*, reason is the court of highest appeal; and no area of life is left out of the benevolent government's planned scientific calculus, the purpose of which is to make men happy and secure. The Benefactor expresses this philosophy in terms which are a conscious echo of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor" (p.223). Thus, Zamyatin owes too much to Dostoevsky.

2.2.1.3 Life in OneState

The Table of Hours is the tool of remote control in Zamyatin's OneState; the heart and impulse of the state. Through the gaze of this institution, we can live and see every regimented activity imposed on its citizens, like working, walking, eating, and sleeping. Rationally, all these activities are mathematically calculated to ensure access to happiness. However, the inspiration for

this schedule has been derived from Zamyatin's former novel, *The Islanders*. Here the author seems to be referencing himself. In this respect, *We*'s regimented system is nothing but *The Islander*'s meticulous character: Vicar Dooley and his *Testament of Compulsory Salvation*. According to Brown (1982), in his book *Russian Literature Since the Revolution*:

Vicar Dooley had worked out a rational schedule for all necessary human activities. According to this schedule, which is displayed in Mr. Dooley's library, certain hours were set aside for taking food, certain days for repentance (three per week), and certain others for charitable activities, and a portion of each day was reserved for walking in the fresh air. (p.51)

In a very interesting way, we come across strong intertextual borrowing and referencing. Zamyatin adopts his character's rational schedule from the *Islanders* to reproduce his Table of Hours in *We* which organizes every aspect of life in his dystopia. This is argued by many critics including Booker (1994) who asserted "The religious schedules in Dooley's Testament foreshadow the scientific Table of Hours in *We*" (p.30). Therefore, Zamyatin seems to lampoon the efficiency of both science and religion.

2.2.1.4 Day of Unanimity

This day celebrates consensus, peace, and concord. it represents the day of the yearly election of the Benefactor. In Record twenty-four, the single state's engineer gives more details about this day in which he relates the greatness of this day to a religious feast that is Easter day. "Let me tell you about the Day of Unanimity, about that Great Day. I think it is for us what Easter was for the ancients"(p.128). The Day of Unanimity resembles the holy day of "the ancients" with a portion of politics, that is, elections. Strikingly, Zamyatin borrows the cosmos of Easter day and echoes it to his dystopian holy day. According to Christians, Easter Day is a day of the resurrection of Jesus from death. However, Zamyatin, who has always portrayed his Well-Doer as the "New Jehovah", makes a new resurrection for him by re-electing him each year, whilst suffrage is in his favor because every step in the OneState is mathematically counted: "We shall again hand over to our Well-Doer the keys to the impregnable fortress of our happiness" (Zamyatin, 1924, p.129).

2.2.1.5 Mephi

Revolution is a part of the narrative that leads to denouement in the novel. However, Zamyatin has led his rebellious movement with a small faction called MEPHI. A closer gaze at Zamyatin's use of this word introduces the reader to the image of the German mythological character Faust who sold his soul to Mephisto or Mephistopheles. According to the myth, Mephistopheles is the demon that tempts people to sell their souls to the evil spirit in exchange for whatever they desire. The Mephi's members desire freedom against their totalitarian regime in the novel. Perhaps in referencing the fictional character of Mephistopheles, Zamyatin's ironical style wants to shed light on the rigid system where the tyrants of the state are good and wise. At the same time, the rebellious individuals are irrationally evil.

By contrast, readers of *We* would presumably incline toward freedom as long as the toughness of the authoritarian regime controls them. In his critical essay "Zamyatin and the Strugatskys", Istvan Csicsery-Ronay.Jr (1988) wrote:

When we closely read Zamyatin's pronouncements, it is tempting to interpret the conflict between the One State and the Mephi as a struggle between good and evil, true freedom versus false happiness, irrational-creative-life affirming passion versus dehumanized-deathly-mechanical tyranny. (p.241)

Again, Zamyatin parallels Adam and Eve's anecdote when Satan tempts humans to revolt and eat the forbidden fruit. Similarly, Zamyatin is alluding to this scene, mainly when I-330 tempts D-503 to rebel against his alleged perfect state, whilst Satan is the Mephi.

2.2.2 In Atwood's Text

Regardless of her successful literary career, Margaret Atwood is one of the few women writers whose dystopia took two decades to gain fame. Her text as well could not be detached from former writers of classic literature.

2.2.2.1 Geoffrey Chaucer

Atwood's oeuvre notoriously displays misogynistic and sexist attitudes toward the female gender. Atwood's narrative echoes Geoffrey Chaucer's epic poem *The Wife of Bath* for many critics. In fact, in her historical notes, Atwood integrated the name of the English writer when Professor Wade praised him "in homage to the great Geoffrey Chaucer" (p.264). Atwood parallels the image of a society where women's role is divided; clothing is chosen, especially the red color intended for the handmaids, whereas Chaucer's *wife of Bath* also appears in red. In *History and the Contemporary Novel*, Cowart (1989) argued:

One finds an intertextual and broadly historical dimension to this feminism in the novel's rich Chaucerian echoes, notably those that invoke the Wife of Bath. Chaucer specifies only red hose for the Wife of Bath, but in paintings, she appears all in red. The Handmaid's uniform, also the harlot's red, seems intended to remind the reader of this convention. (p.114)

As a dystopian novel ciphered with colors and symbols, Atwood has various aspects shared with Chaucer, including the 'red' for the female in a patriarchal society. Cowart continues, "The Wife, like the Handmaid, lives in a world given over largely to men. She, too, must defend herself against the charge of technical adultery." Indeed, *The Handmaid's Tale* readers would directly link this narrative with Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.

2.2.2.2 Jonathan Swift

Beyond any shadow of doubt, Atwood frankly and directly inserts a passage from Jonathan Swift's *Modest Proposal* in her epigraph "But as to myself, having been wearied out for many years with offering vain, idle, visionary thoughts, and at length utterly despairing of success, I, fortunately, fell upon this proposal . . .". Atwood's referencing of many literary works as a guide to deciphering the hints of the tale. In an extremist totalitarian government, Atwood endeavors to criticize the ruling power of the Gilead, which never ceases to eradicate the individuality and freedom of its citizens. The strength of Atwood's text draws a parallel with Swift's static Proposal.

The latter is known for his heavy commentary on the situation of his motherland Ireland which witnessed political and economic exploitation. Stein (1994) wrote:

Swift, the brilliant Irish political satirist, and clergyman, published his "Modest Proposal" in 1729 to expose the damaging consequences of British economic policy toward Ireland. Atwood, the brilliant Canadian novelist, published her *Handmaid's Tale* in 1985 to expose the damaging consequences of patriarchal misogyny in an imagined state, which Atwood alleges is not entirely fictional. (p.62)

Indeed, the epigraphs at the beginning of the narrative support the message Atwood wants to convey: ruling under a religious fundamentalist basis (the passage from Genesis) leads to a tragic community that keeps exploiting its populace (Swift's Proposal).

2.2.2.3 The Sufi Proverb

To keep with Atwood's epigraphs, she quotes a Sufi proverb to open her narrative "In the desert there is no sign that says, Thou shalt not eat stones". However, this proverb is too enigmatic to interpret. Perhaps, Atwood's Puritanism is paralleled to the image of the Sufis, who are known for their intense spirituality and faith. Critics like Nancy V. Workman believe that Sufism is identified with the tradition of wearing clothes made of wool or suf (Workman, 1989). According to her, the fact that the handmaids are ordered to wear long garments made of wool even during the hot days of summer is related to Sufism « in my nightgown, long-sleeved even in summer, to keep us from the temptations of our own flesh” (Atwood, M, p.174). Of course, there are multiple interpretations of this proverb, and it depends on how the reader perceives the story. Perhaps, the nuclear war that damaged and transformed the United States into a barren desert ruled by a static regime is outlined in the Sufi proverb. In other terms, in the desert, people will succumb to anything to survive. Similarly, Gilead's regime would control its citizens in a desert-like society.

2.2.2.4 H.G Wells

Atwood has astutely referred to various ideologies in her novel, including communism, socialism, totalitarianism, and religious fundamentalism. In the eighth chapter, our protagonist Offred was watching Serena Joy. In describing her, Atwood integrated H.G Wells' science fiction novel published in 1933, *The Shape of Things to Come*. Offred informs: “Something like this must have happened to her, once she saw the true shape of things to come” (Atwood, p.49). Atwood did not randomly choose this book because Wells has also tackled the issue of a society where religion is abolished and eliminated.

2.2.2.5 Raymond Chandler

Atwood mentions the name of the American English writer Raymond Chandler when Offred finds novels in the commander's room "He even has novels. I've read a Raymond Chandler." (Atwood, p.169). The writer mentioned above is known as the father of detective fiction. His mysterious and criminal stories are of paramount importance in American literature. Perhaps, Atwood's integration of this writer emphasizes the idea that what Offred is doing in the commander's room defies the regime's law that abolished any reading or writing for women.

Offred's act is criminal, and her visit to the commander's library at night reminds us of the mysterious adventures of Chandler's fiction.

2.2.2.6 Charles Dickens

In a similar vein, Offred informs that she is "halfway through *Hard Times*, by Charles Dickens". It is known that Dickens' tenth novel satirizes and criticizes the system of governance. In this vein, it seems that Atwood is boosting her narrative with evidence from different references to unveil the terrible conditions of her futuristic society. Perhaps, she uses Dickens's shortest novel to use its title as a portrait of the hardship Offred, and every Handmaid is going through.

3. Conclusion

Any literary tradition borrows from its ancestors, and indeed, Zamyatin and Atwood's texts are no exception. The Russian writer developed a dystopian vacuum in his narrative that inspired most of the century's writers, including the Canadian Margaret Atwood. The political, philosophical, and social society presented by Zamyatin is a prophecy that came accurate over the twentieth century. While examining *The Handmaid's Tale*, it is noticed that Atwood expressed similar traditions covered by Zamyatin, from the notions of surveillance and routine to the subservience of body and mind and heavily drawing from religious texts and other literary works.

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