

Archiving the Resistance: Memory and Oppositional Recordkeeping in Dystopian Fiction

Direnışı Arşivlemek: Distopya Yazınında Hafıza ve Muhalif Kayıtlar

Burcu Kayışcı Akkoyun*
Boğaziçi University

Abstract

As imaginary good places located elsewhere and/or in another time, literary utopias may articulate nostalgic yearnings for an irretrievable past, but more significantly, they express socio-political discontent with the present and anticipations for the future. The role of memory is thus central in utopian configurations since they present better alternatives primarily by “remembering” and evaluating specific historical conjunctures. In line with the increasing prominence of dystopian fiction starting from the early twentieth century, issues concerning the preservation and destruction of memory have become more relevant. Authors portray how totalitarian regimes and corporations reshape or sever the links between the past, the present, and the future while defiant characters resist political oppression by forming alternative narratives. The struggle to construct personal and collective archives against the obliteration of past and present records makes recordkeeping a common theme and trope in many dystopian narratives. This paper examines the various forms of what I call “oppositional recordkeeping” in the selected major examples of the genre through theories of dystopia, memory, and the archive. The paper will conclude that authors of dystopian fiction preserve the possibility of utopian change by imagining various oppositional recordkeeping practices without overlooking the problems entailed in authority and authorship.

Keywords: Archive, memory, utopia, dystopia, recordkeeping

Öz

Edebi ütopyalar başka yer ve zamanlarda konumlanan hayali iyi yerler olarak geri getirilemez bir geçmişe duyulan özlemi dile getirebilir. Ancak daha da önemlisi, şimdiden duyulan sosyopolitik hoşnutsuzlukları ve geleceğe dair görüşleri ifade eder. Ütopya tahayyülleri belirli tarihsel konjonktürleri değerlendirerek daha iyi alternatifler sunduğundan işleyişlerinde hafızanın temel bir yeri vardır. Yirminci yüzyılın ilk dönemlerinden itibaren distopya yazınının yükselişiyile, hafızanın korunması ya da tahrip edilmesi ile ilgili meseleler ön plana çıkmıştır. Yazarlar, totaliter düzenlerin geçmiş, şimdi ve gelecek arasındaki bağları nasıl yeniden şekillendirdiğini ya da kopardığını, bu düzenlere karşı duran karakterlerin alternatif anlatılar üreterek politik baskılara nasıl karşı geldiğini hikayelemiştir. Geçmiş ve şimdije ait kayıtların yok edilmesine karşılık kişisel ve toplumsal arşivler oluşturma mücadelesi pek çok distopik eserin ortak temasını oluşturur. Bu çalışma, türün belli başlı örneklerine değinerek “muhalif kayıt tutma” adını verdiğim izleği, distopya yazını, hafıza ve arşiv ile ilgili teorik okumalar ışığında ele almaktadır. Çalışma, yazarların eserlerinde yazarlık ve otoriteye dair sorunları göz ardı etmeksizin tahayyül ettikleri muhalif kayıtlar aracılığıyla ütopyik değişim olasılığını koruduğu sonucuna varır.

Anahtar kelimeler: arşiv, hafıza, ütopya, distopya, kayıt tutma

Cankaya University *CUJHSS* (ISSN 1309-6761), June 2023; 17/1:62-79

<https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/cankujhss>. DOI: 10.47777/cankujhss.

Submitted: Dec 19, 2023; Accepted: May 1, 2023 © 2023 authors (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

*Asst. Prof. Dr., Dept of Western Languages and Literatures, Boğaziçi University

ORCID# 0000-0001-6752-8676; burcu.akkoyun@boun.edu.tr

Introduction

The growing scholarship that examines the relationship between utopianism and memory demonstrates their thought-provoking interaction. Geoghegan engaged with the subject as early as 1990 by asking: “Can memory have a Utopian function?” (p. 53). He underlines the relevance of hopes and anticipations to “the invention, distortion, selection, and framing, of memory;” even if the present lacks what is desired, it can be found in “present in a controllable, if, in varying degrees, mythic, past” (p. 54). This is why, he concludes, memory may have “a built-in Utopian function” for most people (p. 54). In his detailed survey of themes and critical problems concerning utopia and cultural memory, da Silva (2020) similarly states that “utopianism begins in memory” (p. 316). He explains that from Moses’s recollection of the Garden of Eden to John’s remembrance of his apocalyptic visions; from Plato’s emphasis on *anamnesis* in his contemplation of the Good in the *Republic* to Hythloday’s memories of the Utopians in Thomas More’s *Utopia*, memory, in its both authentic and fabricated manifestations, plays a central role in utopianism. Da Silva also points out that Utopians themselves commemorate their King Utopus who has founded the existing order on the island as conveyed by Hythloday’s anamnestic account (pp. 316-317).

Hanson’s grounding assumption in his monograph on memory and utopian agency that “memory is fundamental to and constitutive of utopianism” (2020, p. xvi) resonates with Geoghegan’s and da Silva’s observations as well as with the departure point of this paper. The chapter titled “The Memory Crisis,” in which Hanson examines a key passage - a journal entry, thus a record- from Kim Stanley Robinson’s utopian novel *Pacific Edge* (1990), inquires the (a)historicity of the Morean models of utopia that are located in faraway lands. Tom Barnard, the writer of the entry, rants:

What a cheat utopias are, no wonder people hate them. Engineer some fresh start, an island, a new continent, dispossess them, give them a new planet sure! So they don’t have to deal with our history. Ever since More they’ve been doing it: rupture, clean cut, fresh start. So the utopias in books are pocket utopias too. Ahistorical, static, why should we read them? (as cited in Hanson, 2020, p. 20).

Hanson succinctly identifies the issue critiqued above by Robinson through Barnard: “the problem of utopias being sequestered from history is a problem of memory” (p. 20). The inhabitants of island utopias are not haunted by history like the readers themselves; the dialectical formations and historical negotiations are usually absent from utopian representations. Reminiscent of Adorno’s “negative dialectics” (1966/2007), they are nevertheless valuable in their “negative function” according to Hanson: “we could say that the lack of attention to historical process so readily apparent in literary utopias underscores our own inability to remember the processes of capital” (p. 25).

The critique that utopias fail to register collective memory is only partially valid in the sense that some utopian configurations are much more multi-layered, and

the genre itself has transformed considerably since the previous representations of isolated locations. Moylan's formulation of "critical utopia" highlights this transformation by elaborating on the self-reflexive qualities and historical consciousness of some utopias produced in the 1970s. These works "focus on the continuing presence of difference and imperfection within utopian society itself and thus render more recognizable and dynamic alternatives" (1986, p. 11). It is, however, with the rise of dystopian fiction that preservation, manipulation, and destruction of historical memory, archival politics, and the possibility of resistance through recordkeeping come to the foreground in line with the atrocities afflicting the twentieth century. Authors portray how totalitarian regimes and corporations reshape or altogether sever the links between the past, the present, and the future while insurgent individuals and social collectives strive to resist political oppression and manipulation, constructing "a narrative of the hegemonic order and a counter-narrative of resistance" in Baccolini and Moylan's terms (2003, p. 5). Since characters imprisoned in the nightmarish order often struggle to form their own archives in response to the obliteration of past and present records, recordkeeping is a recurrent theme and trope in many dystopian narratives.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the various oral and written forms of what I call "oppositional recordkeeping" in the selected major examples of the genre. The works to be examined are George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), and Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993). These novels all depict the protagonists' attempts to resist socio-political control as they endeavour to remember the past and/ or "dismember" the present in order to survive and change their reality. Focusing on the symbolic valence of diary and journal keeping, books, and oral testimony, my discussion aims to present nuanced readings of the authors' diverse yet interlinked thematic and generic orientations. Derridean and Ricoeurian perspectives on memory and the archive along with Baccolini's and Moylan's critical work on dystopia are particularly relevant to the scope of my discussion. I will conclude that imagining recordkeeping practices within the closure of the oppressive order enables the authors of dystopian fiction to keep the prospect of utopian change alive for both their characters and the readers. As the authors consider innovative ways of disrupting the system, they simultaneously call attention to the complicated power dynamics that permeate the issues of individual and collective memory, (archival) authority, and authorship.

Archival Oppression and Discursive Manipulation of Memory

Fictional dystopian regimes, like their real/historical counterparts, deprive individuals of identity and political agency. The acts of the citizens are constantly monitored by advanced surveillance systems to prevent any exercise of free will and eradicate the possibility of rebellion. Discursive practices such as creating and sharing of information are under strict control of the totalitarian states, hence the constant manipulation of language, history, and memory. While the reliability of memory is by definition questionable due to the human propensity

for selective remembering and forgetting, this concern increases in literary dystopias since the rulers deliberately withhold historical knowledge and distort reality to consolidate their own power. Records, as Eric Ketelaar (2005) observes, “have power and are a power... as instruments of authority and control: for effecting knowledge-power, control, surveillance and discipline - in too many cases for enforcing oppression as well” (p. 297). Production, protection, operation, and interpretation of records thus compose the narrative core of many dystopian plots, and archival dynamics determine the course of action for both the perpetrators of dystopian regimes and dissident characters.

In his pivotal work on the (Freudian) politics of the archive, Derrida (1996) explains that the word “archive” is derived from the Greek *arkheion*: “initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the archons, those who commanded” (p. 2). Similar to Ketelaar’s remark, Derrida’s etymological investigation reveals that archives, both as the physical places where records are kept and as symbolic locations of privilege, signify the power to control public access to historical documents. This is why, Derrida adds, “[t]here is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation” (p. 4). In dystopian narratives, democratization is halted as either members of the society do not have access to archives or they are misled through tampered records. Derrida refers to what Freud names the “death drive” (and he notes that the latter uses the term interchangeably with “aggression drive” and “destruction drive”) in his compelling delineation of *le mal d’archive*, the “archive fever” (pp. 10-12). The archive fever, as the manifestation of the death drive, “works to destroy the archive” (p. 10); it is “anarchivic” or “archiviolithic”¹ (p. 10). This “anarchivic” power operates to the detriment of memory and generates forgetfulness, which, for the same reason, has the potential of destroying not only the archives but also the archons. Although many dystopian narratives lack details concerning the collapse of the totalitarian systems, it could be assumed that oppositional records that reject enforced forgetfulness may contribute to the downfall of the archons.

As contested sites permeated with conflicts about privilege, authority, and democratization, archives matter in establishing or challenging ideological narratives. It is thus important to inquire how they are populated in the first place. Ricoeur (2004) emphasizes the selectiveness that governs the narrative and remarks that

the ideologizing of memory is made possible by the resources of variation offered by the work of narrative configuration. The strategies of forgetting are directly grafted upon this work of configuration: one can always recount differently, by eliminating, by shifting the emphasis, by recasting the protagonists of the action in a different light along with the outlines of the action. (p. 448)

¹ Emphasis in original in all quotations.

This is why the records of official history should be approached and interpreted with utmost vigilance. “When higher powers take over this emplotment and impose a canonical narrative by means of intimidation or seduction, fear or flattery,” the emancipatory potential of the narrative that depends on both memory and forgetting is foreclosed (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 448). However, as Ricoeur also reminds us, the oral testimony precedes the written archive, which in turn solidifies into official history. Testimonies help understand the dialectical relationship between the past and the present as “the trace of the past in the present” (p. 170). Authors of dystopias utilize fictional testimonies since their own narratives have a similar function, albeit with a temporal shift. Literary dystopias are usually, if not always, extrapolations of the political trends, or in Hanson’s expression, “the proleptic diegesis of given historical vectors” (2020, p. 10). In other words, they are speculative narratives that depict nightmarish orders in the future to demonstrate the possible consequences of the failure to address crises at the right time, which is the “now” of the readers. Through oppositional recordkeeping devices, the authors also ensure that these orders stay in the past for the next generations, if not for the protagonists present in the “now” of the story. Similarly, it is implied for the readers that the dystopia portrayed is simply one version of the future, which could be averted. Dystopian narratives thus become records of a future past themselves including “instruments of empowerment and liberation, salvation and freedom” as well as of oppression and manipulation (Ketelaar, 2005, p. 287).

Oppositional Recordkeeping in Dystopian Fiction

The power struggle revolving around records and archives in dystopian narratives is primarily the struggle to control language. Referring to examples ranging from Zamyatin’s *We* (1924) and Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) to Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and Le Guin’s *The Telling* (2000), Baccolini and Moylan (2003) state that “the dystopian protagonist’s resistance often begins with a verbal confrontation and the reappropriation of language, since s/he is generally prohibited from using language” (p. 6). In opposition to the one-sided, dogmatic documents and publications controlled by the totalitarian order, diaries and journals usually appear in stories as the most prominent discursive spaces for the characters to question, challenge, and even rebel against oppression and injustice. These narrative devices are essential to the development of the dystopian plot as also identified by Keith Elphick (2014). He indicates the importance of epistolary, first person narrative for utopian and dystopian authors and suggests that journal entries and memoirs (testimonies could also be added) produce an equally powerful effect “[b]y providing this direct insight into a character’s psyche and inherent suffering” and evoking a sense of urgency in the text (p. 177). In no other work is this clash between the suffering individual voice that struggles to understand through remembrance, and the regime that demands total obedience more evident than in Orwell’s *Nineteen-Eighty Four*. As the emblematic of classical dystopian fiction (next to Huxley’s 1932 *Brave New World*), the novel has been generating significant critical discussion regarding both its potential for political opposition and its failure to envision collective resistance since its publication.

The protagonist Winston Smith lives in the nuclear war-afflicted London of the dystopian Oceania and works in the Records Department (Recdep) of the Ministry of Truth with the task of “rectifying” every kind of documentation, statistics, and literature. The department eliminates potentially subversive figures or activities against the ruling IngSoc Party and alters the records by fabricating celebratory news about military victories and economic improvements within the society. In Oceania, history has no stable point of reference or collective archive to such an extent that it has actually “stopped. Nothing exists except an endless present in which the Party is always right” (Orwell, 1949/1977, p.155). The constantly mutating, endless present does not allow the residents of Oceania to remember anything but what they are given by the Party insofar as all historical and contemporary documents are simply the altered, so called “rectified,” versions of the reality. The original copies are destroyed in hidden “*archiviolithic*” furnaces, to recall Derrida. The famous slogan imposed by the rulers encapsulates their operational logic: “Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past” (p. 35). The past must be controlled through the present because only in this way can average Party members or the working-class people called the Proles accept the current situation rather than rebelling against it. When there is no stable ground for comparison with the life before IngSoc or the individuals in other countries, there can also be no collective political consciousness to instigate positive action through rebellion. The totalitarian enactment of what Ricoeur (2004) would call “destructive forgetting” would eventually damage the “*sensus communis*” since “deceitful practices undercut the basis of confidence in language” and thus the possibility of communication (pp. 166, 442). This is particularly obvious in the fictional language “Newspeak” devised by the Party to “narrow the range of thought” and eventually make “thoughtcrime” impossible in the future (Orwell, 1949/1977, p. 52).

Throughout the novel, Winston struggles but fails to remember neither his own past nor life before IngSoc despite brief moments of clarity. He is even unsure about the exact year he is in when the novel opens. While he works for the perpetuation of the system, which controls the society through the panoptical fear instilled by the posters of the mysterious Big Brother and ubiquitous telescreens, he simultaneously engages with perhaps the most serious “thoughtcrime:” writing in his own diary. Although Winston is aware from the very beginning that this is a self-defeating act, which will certainly be punished by the Party, “the diary functions as a repository of [his] scattered memories and, thus, as the sign of the Party’s not entirely successful control of the individual archive” (Cristofaro, 2020, p. 59). His perspective thus oscillates between despair and a dim hope as revealed in his personal records. Once, he wonders for whom he writes the diary: “For the future, for the unborn ... For the first time the magnitude of what he had undertaken came home to him. How could you communicate with the future? It was of its nature impossible” (Orwell, 1949/1977, p.7). Later in the story, Orwell portrays Winston as considering the same question again and concluding that he might be writing “for an age that might be imaginary ... The diary would be reduced to ashes and himself to

vapour” (p. 27). The annihilating “archive fever” of the Party in Derrida’s terms renders his endeavour impossible, but as Elphick (2014) explains similarly to Cristofaro, “one’s own written text, even if not destined for any particular reader, becomes a politicized act discrediting an authority’s attempt to force all citizens to conform to its ideology” (p. 177). Due to its inherent political value then, Winston continues with his impossible undertaking at the expense of his life:

To the future or to the past, to a time when thought is free, when men are different from one another and do not live alone - to a time when truth exists and what is done cannot be undone:

From the age of uniformity, from the age of solitude, from the age of Big Brother, from the age of doublethink- greetings!²

He was already dead, he reflected. (Orwell, 1949/1977, p. 28).

Winston is proven right about the Party’s retaliation when his oppositional recordkeeping activity as well as his subversive affair with Julia is discovered by the Inner Party through O’Brien. O’Brien is the powerful antagonist whom Winston regards as a fellow rebel at first when the former secretly gives him and Julia a book titled *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*. Initially represented as written by Emmanuel Goldstein, the enemy of the Party, the book explicates the ideological manipulations and procedures of Ingsoc. The discovery of a hidden manuscript or referring to other books within the book is another common trope in dystopian fiction, and it may also be considered oppositional. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, however, Orwell imagines a political dead-end by revealing that it is actually O’Brien who composes the book to ensnare Winston. In an emblematic final confrontation between the two, O’Brien confirms Winston’s worst fears: “It is impossible to see reality except by looking through the eyes of the Party ... It needs an act of self-destruction, an effort of the will” (p. 249). Whether Winston destroys himself to submit fully to the Party remains to be known at the end, and yet the readers witness how his willpower is broken through intense torture at the ironically called Ministry of Love. It thus seems more an indication of the Party’s atrocities than the character’s intentional self-destruction.

Orwell has been criticized for depriving his protagonist of an opportunity to “escape such a pessimistic future” unlike the readers outside the text, who could consider “dystopia as a warning” (Baccolini, 2000, p. 18), failing to “empower Winston” or “elicit any public reaction” (Elphick, 2014, p. 179), and situating “personal anamnesis as the only utopian faculty” (Hanson, 2020, p. 44). The readers could nevertheless assume that searching for infinite power, either the Party has inevitably destroyed itself too, or hopefully a better regime defeats and replaces Ingsoc. The Appendix on the principles of Newspeak attached to the main body of the narrative testifies to the downfall of Ingsoc as it is written in the past tense and mentions a “Winston Smith” who worked in the Records Department. To revisit Hanson’s earlier comment on the lack of dialectical

² Format and emphasis in original.

formations and historical negotiations in some utopias, it is equally possible to suggest that Orwell retains the negative function of dystopias through their cautionary potential. It is implied that the linguist who discusses the principles of Newspeak might have access to Winston's writings in addition to other historical documents about the fall of the Party. His vision about the future as he explains Julia is thus relevant here: "one can imagine little knots of resistance springing up here and there—small groups of people banding themselves together, and gradually growing, and even leaving a few records behind, so that the next generations can carry on where we leave off" (Orwell, 1949/1977, p.155). Although *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a dystopian narrative imbued with terror and despair, Orwell seems to suggest that there are still things to be done "together," and that the readers can still refuse to succumb to this despair.

Guy Montag, the protagonist of Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953/2008) responds to Winston's call as he gradually awakens to the dystopian reality around him and joins a collective to contribute to the formation of a better future. If *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is the expression of the conflict between the individual and the totalitarian state, *Fahrenheit 451* engages with cultural numbness and inertia of a society crippled with state propaganda and corporate surveillance. 451°F is the temperature at which paper catches fire and burns, and Montag works as a firefighter, whose duty entails burning books and houses in which they are illegally stored. Bradbury's novel materializes the notion of "archive fever" delineated by Derrida considering that libraries are in fact cultural archives. Even when dystopian narratives contain no explicit examples of oppositional recordkeeping such as diaries, journals, and testimonies, that books are either hidden and destroyed or reproduced through censorship in almost every fictional dystopian state demonstrates their symbolic power for the society. They are the links between the past, the present, and the future: they not only "preserve and memorialize those who have lived before" (Wood, 2008, p. 48), but by orienting the readers within a temporal continuum, also make them see their context differently, question the status quo, and perhaps imagine solutions to existing socio-political problems. In his introduction to the edited collection on *Fahrenheit 451*, Harold Bloom (2008) states that the stereotypes (particularly about women, it should be noted) and simplifications of the novel could be overlooked due to "its prophetic hope that memory (and memorization!)³ is the answer." The novel matters because it reminds its readers that "if you cannot read Shakespeare and his peers, then you will forfeit memory, and if you cannot remember, then you will not be able to think" (p. 2). Bloom's statement is reminiscent of Halbwachs's understanding of memory as a collective formation in which "a person remembers only by situating himself within the viewpoint of one or several groups and one or several currents of collective thought" (1992, p. 33). Books can maintain various currents of thought originating from the common cultural repository of humanity.

Bradbury actually resorted to his own archive to finalize *Fahrenheit 451*. The novel is an expansion and adaptation of the themes he explored in his previous

³ Emphasis in original.

short stories such as “Bonfire” and “The Exiles” as well as the novella titled *The Fireman*. In the 1993 foreword included in the collection edited by Bloom, the author explains why he keeps returning to “hyperbole, metaphor, and similes about fire, print, and papyrus:” “There was Hitler torching books in Germany in 1934; rumors of Stalin and his match people and tinderboxes. Plus, long ago, the witch hunts in Salem in 1680, where my ten-times-great-grandmother Mary Bradbury was tried but escaped the burning” (2008, p. 58). By contextualizing his work in reference to worldwide crimes against humanity along with the changing cultural climate in post-war (and Cold War) America, he evokes a sense of historical continuity and consciousness within the minds of his readers. The society he depicts would actually be familiar to a twenty-first century audience as well since mass media in the form of continuous visual and audio broadcasting dominates the social sphere, immersing people in a different version of an “endless present” described by Orwell. They live in houses with enormous “parlour walls” that show interactive series, and can communicate according to a given script with the fictional characters they call their “family” or “relatives.” They also wear “Seashell ear thimbles,” which constantly stream music, advertisements, and war news. Montag’s wife Mildred lives similarly, building “an ersatz intimacy with the ‘family’ on the screen which contrasts markedly with her relation to Montag” (Seed, 1994, p. 229). Bradbury portrays this disintegration and desensitization in the couple’s failure to remember where they met.

As Joseph Hurtgen (2016) keenly observes, *Fahrenheit 451* “maps both the shift from the reliance on the written word to the emergence of the televisual archive as the primary site of a society’s archive, and that archive’s relationship to corporate and state powers seeking maximum control” (p. 45). Books become redundant more than they are dangerous, and Montag’s initial satisfaction with his job and the violence of the official ideology are encapsulated in the opening sentence of the novel: “It was a pleasure to burn” (Bradbury, 1953/2008, p. 7). However, thanks to a seventeen-year-old neighbour Clarisse, a peculiar girl “who think[s] too many things” (p. 16), and a woman who chooses to burn herself alive with her books rather than witnessing their destruction, his own transformation begins. The charismatic antagonist Captain Beatty, similar to Orwell’s O’Brien, gives deceitful yet thought-provoking answers to his questions, which propels the readers to think further about cultural deterioration. As he explains, books are cut shorter first turning into “one-page digests” (p. 72), then films are sped up, and politics become “[o]ne column, two sentences, a headline! Then, in mid-air, all vanishes!” (p. 73). Only few students remain interested in philosophy, history, or languages: “[l]ife is immediate, the job counts, pleasure lies all about after work” (p. 73). This societal collapse is not initiated or imposed by the government, as Beatty explains Montag: “There was no dictum, no declaration, no censorship, to start with, no! Technology, mass exploitation, and minority pressure carried the trick” (p. 76). The government uses a misleading discourse as a pretext to implement new laws and surveillance methods while burning everything, including people:

Coloured people don't like Little Black Sambo. Burn it. White people don't feel good about Uncle Tom's Cabin. Burn it. Someone's written a book on tobacco and cancer of the lungs? The cigarette people are weeping? Bum the book. ... Take your fight outside. Better yet, into the incinerator. Funerals are unhappy and pagan? Eliminate them, too. Five minutes after a person is dead he's on his way to the Big Flue, the Incinerators serviced by helicopters all over the country. ... Forget them. Burn them all, burn everything. Fire is bright and fire is clean. (p. 78)

Bradbury symbolically juxtaposes the destructive “archive fever” of the state with Montag’s “fever” for meaning and purpose when the latter literally becomes sick after hearing Beatty’s controversial responses. He finds the retired English professor whom he met earlier to quench his thirst for knowledge and imagine an exit from the system. Professor Faber has his own conflicts about failing to take action at the right time, and he calls himself a “coward” (p. 106) for saying nothing as things gradually exacerbate, hence Bradbury’s “proleptic” gesture towards his contemporary moment to warn his readers about where the society might be heading.

Despite his initial reluctance, Faber decides to help Montag upon seeing the latter’s passion, and his remarks are more nuanced and insightful than Beatty’s. He tells Montag that books are hated because “[t]hey show the pores in the face of life. The comfortable people want only wax moon faces, poreless, hairless, expressionless” (p. 108). However, it is equally problematic to fetishize them as what humanity needs is a communicative environment in which diverse views on the past, the present, and the future can be nurtured; books would simply be their logical outcome. Montag discovers a unique combination of the two when he encounters a group of people, mainly engineering, social sciences, and humanities professors, who have been waiting in the wilderness for the end of the bombings to establish a better future order through past works of humanity. They have each memorized an essential book that has contributed to the collective cultural and intellectual heritage. Selected examples include works from Swift, Darwin, Schopenhauer, Einstein, Aristophanes, Gandhi, Confucius, and Plato as well as the Old and the New Testament. Granger, one of these “Book People,” pertinently refers to the myth of Phoenix to describe how they also hope to rise from their ashes and begin again. Yet, this endeavour has to be based on remembrance of how they have arrived at this point in the first place; “they are precautionary about the new society so that they will not make the same mistake” (Atasoy, 2015, p. 410). Bradbury is careful to convey to his readers that the memorized books, or the oppositional records against the amnesia of the dystopian system, would be written down again to be able to start anew from a common archive. The novel closes as the Book People walk towards the city with Montag, and the uncertainty of the future simultaneously contains the seeds of hope. They echo Faber in his earlier words to Montag: “Don't ask for guarantees. And don't look to be saved in any one thing, person, machine, or library. Do your own bit of saving, and if you drown, at least die knowing you were headed for shore” (Bradbury, 1953/2008, p. 112).

Nineteen-Eighty Four and *Fahrenheit 451* have been read together with Atwood's acclaimed *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) in various interpretive contexts related to reading and recordkeeping. Finigan (2011) points out that Winston and Offred (Atwood's protagonist) are similar since both "are, or were once, professional archivists" (p. 445). Winston, as also explained above, works in the Records Department whereas the latter used to be a librarian before the theocratic Republic of Gilead takes over. Wood (2008) observes that both in *Fahrenheit 451* and in *The Handmaid's Tale*, "books represent important artifacts of the past and the act of reading becomes a heroic gesture" (p. 49). Atwood (2011) herself explains many times in her essays and interviews that Orwell "became a direct model" for her "somewhat different dystopia:" "By that time I was forty-four, and I'd learned enough about real despotisms—through the reading of history, through travel, and through my membership in Amnesty International—that I didn't need to rely on Orwell alone" (p. 145). This difference is mainly due to her explicit feminist agenda and her "use, re-vision, and appropriation of generic fiction that constitute an oppositional writing practice and an opening for utopian elements in dystopian science fiction" (Baccolini, 2000, p. 13). Whereas female characters are represented as passive and subsidiary in classical (male-oriented) dystopias such as Huxley's, Orwell's, and Bradbury's novels, Atwood situates a woman's, Offred's story at the centre of her narrative. Offred is a "handmaid" in the misogynistic Gilead, which commands that the fertile women of the country be assigned to men whose wives are unable to give birth in order to reverse the declining birth rates. Although her real name is implied to be "June" in a few instances, it is not verified throughout the story. She is simply "of (Commander) Fred," his handmaid, similar to other women whose names are replaced by the name of the ruling commanders in the genitive form, if they have been assigned to these high-ranking officers.

The Republic of Gilead is founded after the "Sons of Jacob Think Tank" have overthrown the previous democratic government and nullified the Constitution at the beginning of the twenty-first century. They derive their authority from their literal interpretation of the Bible evident in their enforcement of such verses as "*Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth*"⁴ (Atwood, 1985/1998, p. 89). In Gilead, all second marriages and nonmarital relationships are condemned as adulterous. The female partners are arrested for immorality, and their children are confiscated by the government. This policy is later extended to the first marriages that are not contracted within the state church. While the ruling elite wield the right to read and write, these acts are forbidden for the rest of the society. Even the Aunts, who are responsible for the indoctrination of the Handmaids to ensure their total conformity, rarely read or write. The Commanders at times read to their household biblical stories to consolidate women's inferior position in society as simple "two-legged wombs," "sacred vessels," and ambulatory chalices (p. 130). Oral communication is also truncated and desiccated in this totalitarian system insofar as the Handmaids

⁴ Emphasis in original.

are allowed to communicate only in Gilead's fabricated language. During the limited hours the Handmaids could stay outside for shopping, they walk in pairs and use expressions derived from the Bible: "Praise be" and "Blessed be the fruit" are the general forms of greeting, and they say "Under His Eye" for farewell. They are indeed literally under the "eyes" of the eponymous secret police that work together with the Angels (regular army troops) and Guardians of the Faith (paramilitary security force). In addition to these typical dystopian motifs, the women in Gilead wear special long gowns colour-coded according to their social position. They are thus deprived of the means by which they can constitute their own identity. In this respect, Offred's struggle to resist Gilead's oppression and make her voice heard through her account becomes the ultimate oppositional act.

Offred secretly records her story to a tape, cherishing the dynamic complexity of language she is forbidden to use. She combines the details of her daily life with those concerning the operation of Gileadean politics by referring to her past memories. She also talks about the times she spends with the Commander and her illicit affair with Nick, the Commander's driver and one of the Guardians, who is in fact a member of a subversive organization called Mayday. The part in which Offred strives to claim the ownership of her story as well as her life and imagine an empowering audience for herself is worth quoting at length:

I would like to believe this is a story I am telling. I need to believe it. I must believe it. Those who can believe that such stories are only stories have a better chance.

If it's a story I'm telling, then I have control over the ending. Then there will be an ending, to the story, and real life will come after it. I can pick up where I left off.

It isn't a story I'm telling.

It's also a story I'm telling, in my head, as I go along.

Tell, rather than write, because I have nothing to write with and writing is in any case forbidden. But if it's a story, even in my head, I must be telling it to someone. You don't tell a story only to yourself. There's always someone else.

Even when there is no one. (pp. 39-40)

Storytelling is Offred's survival mechanism, and "in process of reconstructing herself as an individual, Offred becomes the most important historian of Gilead" (Howells, 1996, p. 127). Elphick's earlier comment on the political potential of Winston's writing equally pertains to Offred's oral testimony, or recordkeeping, in the sense that it similarly reveals Gilead's fallibility and the possibility of change both in the fictional and in the real world. By the end of the novel, the readers recognize that Gilead is over as they read the "Historical Notes" section attached similarly to the "Appendix" of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Nevertheless, Atwood insinuates that the socio-political problems that may give rise to dystopian systems could be too deep-seated to be solved even when a totalitarian government such as Gilead is overthrown.

The “Historical Notes” presented are the partial transcript of the proceedings of a symposium on Gileadean Studies held in 2195, which include Professor Piexioto’s keynote speech titled “Problems of Authentication in Reference to The Handmaid’s Tale.” Piexioto and another male professor have compiled thirty fragments of Offred’s tape recordings and undertaken the work of transcription. The Professor’s problematic, if not outright misogynistic, approach to Offred’s story is evident in his disappointment with the content of Offred’s recordings. As he shares details concerning the Gilead regime and speculates on the true identity of the Commander, he also resents that Offred “could have told us much about the workings of the Gileadean Empire had she had the instincts of a reporter or a spy.” (Atwood, 1985/1998, p. 310). He states that the researchers would rather discover “even twenty pages or so of print-out from [Fred] Waterford’s private computer” than Offred’s “limping and mutilated story” (pp. 310, 268). “However,” he adds sarcastically, “we must be grateful for any crumbs the Goddess of History has deigned to vouchsafe us” (p. 310). These remarks demonstrate that although Gilead’s religious fundamentalism that imprisons women is a thing of the past, the readers should not overinvest in “an easily consolatory notion of utopia ...: this future is still imperfect because sexism is present and scholars still believe that certain stories are better than others” (Baccolini, 2000, p. 24). Finigan (2011) argues that the metatextual framing devices at the end of both Orwell’s and Atwood’s novels “undermine their simultaneous (and rather utopian) yoking of the archive to the possibility of ideological critique” insofar as they reveal that “the scholarly gesture of archival ‘recovery’ has the potential to produce its own troubling effects of domination” (p. 436). It is, however, equally possible to claim the opposite: these gestures do not undermine but strengthen the authors’ ideological critique. The critical value of telling and authorizing one’s own story, which would pave the way for building a collective memory, is further highlighted by the discrepancy between Offred’s oppositional record and its “official” version.

Unlike Offred, Lauren Oya Olamina, the African-American protagonist in *Parable of the Sower*, is able to both write and (co)authorize her own narrative while imagining a collective, open-ended utopian mission to overcome the detrimental impact of capitalist corporatism and the bankruptcy of social, political, and legal institutions. The title of the novel is derived from the eponymous parable in the Gospel of Luke, (8: 5-8)⁵ which is about the dissemination of God’s words and messages allegorized as seeds, depending on people’s receptiveness to them. Set in the near future, the story covers the inception of Lauren’s semi-religious belief system she calls the “Earthseed” along with her physical journey. It opens in California in 2024 as the fifteen-year-old Lauren portrays the ostensibly safe life within Robledo, a walled community, and the lawlessness that prevails outside the walls. This is a society of scarcity; water, sanitation, food, and gasoline are available for the rich only. While the police protect the privileged ones, the rest live under the continuous threat of theft, rape, and murder. The warming climate and earthquakes exacerbate the situation and highlight the widening gap

⁵ Authorized King James Version.

between the haves and have-nots. There is no typically totalitarian governing body in the novel since it has limited to no authority as the puppet of multinational corporations. In contrast to the dystopian regimes discussed earlier, it is not the archons, those who wield the power, but commoners who destroy past records and accumulations in a different manifestation of the Derridean “archive fever.” The widespread use of a drug called Pyro causes some people to set fires and burn in their anger and helplessness the houses of those they consider more fortunate. Reminiscent of Bradbury’s fictional world in which burning books gives pleasure, the quality of education has deteriorated and books have become obsolete. As in the former, illiteracy rates are high, but unlike it, this stems mainly from the priority and predicaments of day-to-day survival.

Lauren has been aware that their walled community is not exempt from the impending destruction and thus turns to the written records, that is, the books her parents own and the notes she takes on those books, to increase her resilience. Earlier in the story, she asks a friend to use her imagination and check the bookshelves at home for “[a]ny kind of survival information from encyclopedias, biographies, anything that helps you learn to live off the land and defend ourselves. Even some fiction might be useful.” She is, however, equally aware that much as books are valuable, they cannot be saviours in themselves. As she tells her friend, “[n]othing is going to save us. If we don’t save ourselves, we’re dead” (Butler, 1993/2007, p. 59). She nevertheless persists in carrying a few remaining books during her journey to the North after the houses in Robledo, including her own, have been burned down and plundered by the vagrants. Books are essential for “shaping collective and speculative memories, enabling Lauren to develop Earthseed in the first place” (Guerrero, 2021, p. 39), and like Winston’s diary, her notebooks are indispensable for her sanity and constructive imagination. Even before the disaster that befalls on her community, she has decided to gather her verses into a volume, which she hopes to put to “better use” when people start to pay more attention to what she says than how old she is. This better use, as she explains, is “to pry [her] verses loose from the rotting past, and maybe push them into saving themselves and building a future that makes sense” (Butler, 1993/2007, p. 79). However, even if the “rotting” past, representing the “proleptic” positioning of dystopian fiction as described by Hanson (2020, p. 10), is imbued with pain, peril, and deprivation, the remembrance of upsetting memories is the first step in contemplating a meaningful future.

Lauren chooses “The Books of the Living” as the title to her oppositional verses, which reinforces the admonition of the novel for the still “living” reader. Referring to the myth of Phoenix like the Book People in *Fahrenheit 451*, she writes in her notebooks to find consolation and forge hope out of disaster: “In order to rise / From its own ashes / A phoenix / First / Must/ Burn” (Butler, 1993/2007, p. 153). She blends the knowledge she has acquired from the books and her own past with her unique philosophy and composes the Earthseed verses as the socio-ethical basis of a new utopian community she establishes with the help of other survivors. Since *Parable* itself is actually a collection of her

diary entries and the verses, recordkeeping operates both as a stylistic and as a thematic fulcrum. As Baccolini (2000) points out, “Lauren's critical awareness and empowerment originate in her writing, hence in the very form of the novel, which is a science fiction diary/autobiographical slave narrative/critical dystopia” (p. 25). Like Offred's storytelling, writing is Lauren's survival mechanism that allows her to cope with the losses she experiences and provides her with a sense of direction amidst chaos and violence: “I have to write. There's nothing familiar left to me but the writing” (Butler, 1993/2007, p. 158). Her own “archive fever,” or “persistent, positive obsession,”⁶ that desires to remember and rebuild denounces the destructive power of the dystopian authority. As she shares her writing with the people joining her (post-) apocalyptic march along the way, her philosophy “has developed through the feedback of questions, doubts, and insights that the new members bring to the discussion” (Moylan, 2000, p. 235). She thus feels empowered to resist and imagine a better alternative to the capitalist hegemony without mimicking the oppressive closure of dystopian archons and archives.

Lauren's companions are all from the peripheries of society, representing the traumatizing histories and exploited lives of ethnic minorities. As the Earthseed verses advocate, they must “Embrace diversity. / Unite ... Or be destroyed” (Butler, 1993/2007, p. 198). Butler is careful to underline that Earthseed advocates, but does not dictate, hence its difference from rigid, fundamentalist patterns. While considering the values and priorities of her belief system, Lauren focuses on the necessity of flexibility and acknowledges that Earthseed “[c]ast on new ground / Must first perceive / That it knows nothing” (p. 179). Her openness to change as well as the ongoing discussions within the community renders Earthseed a self-reflexive set of principles rather than yet another dogma or what Ricoeur (2004) would call “a devious form of forgetting” that strips “the social actors of their original power to recount their actions themselves” (p. 448). The novel closes with the group arriving at an empty land owned by one of the members as they communally decide to build what they call the “Acorn” community and imagine cultivating the land, growing their own crops, and protecting and educating their kids together. Its overall textual dynamics and open-ended form make *Parable* a remarkable example of a critical dystopia as delineated by Moylan and Baccolini (2003). Critical dystopias “maintain the utopian impulse” for both the readers and the characters “by rejecting the traditional subjugation of the individual at the end of the novel” and opening “a space of contestation and opposition for those collective ‘ex-centric’ subjects whose class, gender, race, sexuality, and other positions are not empowered by hegemonic rule” (p. 7). Similar to the earlier examples of dystopian fiction, this “space of contestation and opposition” metonymically operates through practices of reading and writing in Butler's novel, but its

⁶ These words are from the epigraph of the novel, which Butler presents as a quote from Lauren's *Earthseed: The Books of the Living*: “Prodigy is, at its essence, adaptability and persistent, positive obsession. Without persistence, what remains is an enthusiasm of the moment. Without adaptability, what remains may be channeled into destructive fanaticism. Without positive obsession, there is nothing at all.”

collective configuration marks a stylistic and semantic shift that invites the readers to delve into the books of and on the living, and envision the possible aftermaths of dystopia.

Conclusion

Despite the predominance of dystopian fiction that portrays nightmarish worlds and oppression of people in them, the relationship between memory and utopianism could still be vividly observed in dystopias. Dystopian politics are entangled with discursive manipulations of language and memory as well as domination of the archives, as cogently encapsulated by Derrida's notion of the "archive fever" and Ricoeur's caveat against the selectiveness of official records. In fictional dystopias, democratic rights are curtailed; individuals are under constant surveillance, and they are deprived of the tools that may initiate their political awakening. The authors of the genre, however, keep the possibility of resistance and utopian transformation alive in their novels by imagining various instances of what I have termed "oppositional recordkeeping" above. In order to identify oral and written forms of oppositional recordkeeping, I have examined the major examples of dystopian fiction: Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), and Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993). The protagonists in these novels all endeavour to rebuild the severed link between the past and the present to address and, if possible, to transform their future for the better. Their "counter-narratives of resistance," to recall Baccolini and Moylan's informative phrase (2003, p. 5), originate in both personal and collective grounds and include recordkeeping devices that range from oral testimony, diary, and journals to books as embodiments of cultural memory. While the authors imagine these narrative devices organized around reading and writing as tools of subversion, they also draw the readers' attention to the complicated power dynamics that govern the issues of (archival) authority and authorship to reinforce their critical engagement with the operation of memory.

In his seminar on the archive fever in South Africa, Derrida (2002) revisits his earlier work and states that the archive is "not simply a recording of the past, but also something which is shaped by a certain ... selective power, and shaped by the future, by the future anterior" (p. 40). As demonstrated by the examples discussed in this paper, the archival process could be construed both as totalitarian foreclosure and as an open-ended utopian horizon to be shaped by transformative collective action. Derrida's following observation concerning the inexhaustibility of archival materials gestures towards this utopian potential: "It's always possible to re-interpret an archive. And this future-oriented structure of the archive is precisely what confronts us with a responsibility, an ethical and political responsibility" (2002, p. 46). The proliferating debates that refer to the works of Orwell, Bradbury, Atwood, and Butler upon the rise of far-right politics and environmental crises around the world testify to the impossibility of closing the archive. Similarly, the list of dystopian works that contain examples of oppositional recordkeeping is by no means exhaustive as could be seen in the sequel novels written by Butler and Atwood themselves

along with many others that contribute to the reinterpretation of the archive.⁷ Responding to Derrida's observation, the authors of dystopian fiction imagine myriad visions of the future to confront their readers with an ethical and political responsibility. The diverse expressions of opposition recorded as cautionary remainders function as utopian reminders of the possibility of building an emancipatory and egalitarian archive.

Works Cited

- Adorno, T. W. (2007). *Negative dialectics* (E.B. Ashton, Trans.). Continuum. (Original work published in 1966).
- Atasoy, E. (2015). Impediment to knowledge and imagination in Ray Bradbury's dystopian novel, *Fahrenheit 451*. *Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Dergisi* 55(1), 399-414.
- Atwood, M. (1998). *The handmaid's tale*. Anchor Books. (Original work published in 1985).
- Atwood, M. (2011). *In other worlds: SF and the human imagination*. Anchor Books.
- Baccolini, R. and Moylan, T. (2003). Introduction: Dystopias and histories. In R. Baccolini & T. Moylan (Eds.), *Dark horizons: Science fiction and the dystopian imagination* (pp. 1-12). Routledge.
- Baccolini, R. (2000). Gender and genre in the feminist critical dystopias of Katharine Burdekin, Margaret Atwood, and Octavia Butler. In M. S.Barr (Ed.), *Future females, the next generation: New voices and velocities in feminist science fiction criticism* (pp. 13-34). Rowman & Littlefield.
- Bloom, H. (2008). Introduction. In Harold Bloom (ed.), *Bloom's modern critical interpretations: Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451* (pp. 1-2). Infobase Publishing.
- Bradbury, R. (2008). *Fahrenheit 451*. Harper Voyager. (Original work published in 1953).
- Bradbury, R. (2008). Burning bright. In Harold Bloom (ed.), *Bloom's modern critical interpretations: Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451* (pp. 55-61). Infobase Publishing.
- Butler, O. (2007). *Parable of the sower*. Grand Central Publishing. (Original work published in 1993).
- Cristofaro, D. D. (2020). The politics of the archive in *nineteen eighty-four*. In N. Waddell (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to nineteen eighty-four* (pp. 51-63). Cambridge University Press. doi.org/10.1017/9781108887090.004.
- Da Silva J. B. (2020). Utopia and cultural memory: A survey of themes and critical problems. *Utopian Studies* (31), 314-324. doi.org/10.5325/utopianstudies.31.2.0314
- Derrida, J. (1996). *Archive fever: A Freudian impression* (E. Prenowitz, Trans.). University of Chicago Press.
- Derrida, J. (2002). Archive fever in South Africa. In C. Hamilton et al. (Eds), *Refiguring the archive* (pp. 38-60). Academic Publishers.

⁷ These sequels, which I had to exclude from my analysis due to space limitations, are *Parable of Talents* (1998) and *The Testaments* (2019) respectively.

- Elphick, K. (2014). *Discursive transgressions and ideological negotiations: from Orwell's 1984 to Butler's parable of the sower*. In S. M. Bernardo, D. E. Palumbo & C.W. Sullivan III (Eds.), *Environments in science fiction: Essays on alternative spaces* (pp. 171-190). McFarland.
- Finigan, T. (2011). Into the memory hole: Totalitarianism and mal d'Archive in *nineteen eighty-four* and *the handmaid's tale*. *Science Fiction Studies* 38 (3), 435-459. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5621/sciefictstud.38.3.0435>.
- Geoghegan, V. (1990). Remembering the future. *Utopian Studies*, 1(2), 52-68. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20719000>.
- Guerrero, P. B. (2021). Post-apocalyptic memory sites: Damaged space, nostalgia, and refuge in Octavia Butler's *parable of the sower*." *Science Fiction Studies* 48(1), 29-45. 10.1353/sfs.2021.0012.
- Halbwachs, M. (1992). *On collective memory*. (L. A. Coser, Trans.). University of Chicago Press.
- Hanson, C. F. (2020). *Memory and utopian agency in utopian/dystopian literature: Memory of the future*. Routledge.
- Howells, C. A. (1996). *Modern novelists: Margaret Atwood*. Macmillan Education.
- Hurtgen, J. (2016). Archival domination in *Fahrenheit 451*. *Journal of Science Fiction* 1(2), 3-46.
- Ketelaar, E. (2005). Recordkeeping and societal power. In S McKemmish, M. Piggott, B. Reed & F Upward (Eds.), *Archives: Recordkeeping in society* (pp. 277-298). Chandos Publishing.
- Moylan, T. (1986). *Demand the impossible: Science fiction and the utopian imagination*. Methuen.
- Moylan, T. (2000). *Scraps of the untainted sky: Science fiction, utopia, dystopia*. Westview Press.
- Orwell, G. (1977). *Nineteen eighty- four*. New American Library. (Original work published in 1949).
- Ricoeur, P. (2004). *Memory, history, forgetting* (K. Blamey & D. Pellauer, Trans.). University of Chicago Press.
- Seed, D. (1994). The flight from the good life: *Fahrenheit 451* in the context of postwar American dystopias. *Journal of American Studies*, 28(2), 225-240. doi:10.1017/S0021875800025470.
- Wood, D. (2008). Bradbury and Atwood: Exile as rational decision. In Harold Bloom (ed.), *Bloom's modern critical interpretations: Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451* (pp. 43-54). Infobase Publishing.