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Women in dystopian literature: "The handmaid's tale" and "The hunger games" and the questioning of stereotypical gender roles

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Mémoire

Présenté pour l'obtention du Grade de

MASTER

“Métiers de l'Enseignement, de l'Education et de la Formation”

Mention 2nd degré, Professeur des Lycées et Collèges,

Women in dystopian literature

The Handmaid's Tale and *The Hunger Games* and the questioning of
stereotypical gender roles

Présenté par

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(UFR Lettres, INSPE de Franche-Comté)

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Je soussigné.e, PILLET Alice déclare que ce mémoire est le fruit d'un travail de recherche personnel et que personne d'autre que moi ne peut s'en approprier tout ou partie.

J'ai conscience que les propos empruntés à d'autres auteurs ou autrices doivent être obligatoirement cités, figurer entre guillemets, et être référencés dans une note de bas de page.

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A Vesoul, le 22 mai 2021

PILLET Alice

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Première partie

Introduction

“I want to be valued, in ways that I am not; I want to be more than valuable. I repeat my former name; remind myself of what I once could do, how others saw me.”¹

In fiction as in real life, women are subject to gender stereotypes and often reduced to them; but over the last decades, literature has portrayed more and more female characters challenging these traditional representations. I have chosen to analyse the way they are depicted, focusing on dystopian fiction. Dystopias usually portray societies in which people are oppressed and their rights are reduced: it appeared interesting to me to question what the roles held by women in these kinds of fictions are.

My analysis of this subject will be focused on two literary works. First, the dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, written by the Canadian author Margaret Atwood, and published in 1985. And then the trilogy *The Hunger Games*², written by the American author Suzanne Collins, and published between 2008 and 2010. (*The Hunger Games* in 2008; *Catching Fire* in 2009; *Mockingjay* in 2010.) This trilogy is a dystopia for young adults.

I will study and analyse these two texts using the following angle of approach: to what extent do these novels question stereotypical gender roles? At first glance, my two chosen novels may appear as rather different. First, they were not published at precisely the same period: with more than twenty years between, the historic and sociological contexts necessarily diverge. Moreover, the readerships of these books are different too, since *The Hunger Games* is a trilogy that was written with teenagers or young adults in mind – which is not the case for *The Handmaid's Tale*: its target is for adults and it is not popular fiction. But both belong to the same literary genre, since they portray dystopian societies, taking place in an imaginary future North America. These two dark visions of the future share a lot of common features, and also elements which are treated in different ways. It is precisely for this

¹ Atwood, Margaret. (1985). *The Handmaid's Tale* (New Ed, 2000). London. Vintage Edition, p.104

² Collins, Suzanne. (2008). *The Hunger Games* (Scholastic Ltd). London. Scholastic Ltd.

Collins, Suzanne. (2009). *The Hunger Games : Catching Fire*. London. Scholastic Ltd.

Collins, Suzanne (2010). *The Hunger Games : Mockingjay*. London. Scholastic Ltd.

reason that I have chosen *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Hunger Games* in order to explore this subject: they are in accordance on the one hand, and yet complementary on the other.

One of the main similarities they have – and which is why I selected them for my analysis – is the fact that they both have a woman as a main character and narrator: Katniss Everdeen in *The Hunger Games*, and Offred in *The Handmaid's Tale*. In both narratives, the reader discovers a dystopian society through the eyes and the subjective experience of a woman. Furthermore, some other female characters also play important roles in the two novels. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss' family is only composed of women: her father died and she lives with her mother and her younger sister. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the character of Moira – Offred's best friend – is presented as a strong woman, fighting for her freedom, and I thought that she could add more depth to my analysis. Moreover, Margaret Atwood's novel explores a society in which women's status have changed a lot: thus, their representation can be questioned, not only through the main characters presented, but also through womanhood as a social category.

The roles played by women in these two works of dystopian fiction are all the more significant when set against the backdrop of the rise of feminism, and the challenging of gender stereotypes that have been witnessed over the last half century. Each of these novels engages with the feminism and invites the reader to question some of its values. *The Handmaid's Tale* was written during the second wave of feminism, which occurred in the seventies and eighties. Different aspects of this movement appear in Margaret Atwood's novel: first, liberal feminism, which fought for equality of opportunity and rights between men and women – such as the equality of salary. Then, radical feminism conveyed a message centred on a complete transformation of society:

[...] radical feminism aimed to reshape society and restructure its institutions, which they saw as inherently patriarchal. [...] radicals argued that women's subservient role in society was too closely woven into the social fabric to be unravelled without a revolutionary revamping of society itself.³

And finally, cultural feminism celebrated women's intrinsic differences:

[...] cultural or “difference” feminism, the last of the three currents, rejected the notion that men and women are intrinsically the same and advocated celebrating the qualities they associated with women, such as their greater concern for affective relationships and their nurturing preoccupation with others.⁴

³ Encyclopedia Britannica, « The second wave of feminism ». <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism/The-second-wave-of-feminism> (accessed 22.05.2021)

⁴ Ibid.

Meanwhile, *The Hunger Games* was written in the wake of third wave feminism which took off in the nineties. The emphasis was then on the plurality of women's experience and identity:

Third-wavers want their own version of feminism that addresses their different societal contexts and the particular set of challenges they face. For example, young women today face a world colonized by the mass media and information technology, and they see themselves as more sophisticated and media savvy than feminists from their mothers' generation.⁵

In both novels, and depending on the time they were written, these different elements included in feminism can be found: they appear more or less obviously in the text, and I will develop them more in detail in my analysis.

Through the following pages, I will study how female characters are represented in the two dystopias, according to the following outline:

I- Women in dystopian fiction

1. Two works of dystopian fiction
2. Women's status in these dystopian societies
3. Are these societies feminist dystopias?

II- Characters challenging gender roles

1. Their features and personality
2. Are they heroines?

III- Their roles as women, through their relation to the others

1. Family schemes and motherhood
2. Offred and Nick's relationship
3. Katniss' relationships: a more contemporary view?

I- Women in dystopian fiction

1. Two works of dystopian fiction

First of all, *The Hunger Games* and *The Handmaid's Tale* are both examples of dystopian fiction; thus, the term "dystopia" must be defined. This word was invented as an antonym of "utopia", using the prefix "dys". A utopia designates an idealised world. The concept was imagined and invented by Thomas More, who published

⁵ Snyder, R. Claire. *What is third-wave feminism? A new direction essay*. Autumn 2008, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Autumn 2008). pp. 175-196 p. 178.

his now-famous book *Utopia* in 1516, in which an ideal and flawless model of society is presented. Its goal is to portray what the best way for humans to live together would be. Then, in opposition to utopia, dystopias appeared starting from the end of the nineteenth century: they are generally understood as depicting the flaws and the decline of a society, typically in a (more or less) near future. George Orwell's *1984* (published in 1949) or Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (published in 1932) are examples of particularly popular dystopian fiction, which inspired many other authors in the decades that followed. The Cambridge Dictionary gives the following definition of a dystopia: "a very bad or unfair society in which there is a lot of suffering, especially an imaginary society in the future, after something terrible has happened [...]"⁶ A good example of a dystopia which brings together many of these elements is Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*: in this story, people are classified in an arbitrary social hierarchy, and huge scientific advancements are presented in reproduction – which is not natural anymore but artificially made up – and also in technology, among other things.

Dystopias are thus usually used to show the imaginary future of a society. The period in which the story happens can be more or less precise, with details and elements about an approximate date or a decade, or not – meaning it is often up to the reader to imagine it as something very distant or closer to the date it was actually written. But dystopias are also closely linked to the present. Indeed, they are often characterised by several recurring elements: totalitarian and tyrannical governments, the dehumanization of people, the loss of freedom and rights, an environmental collapse, or even disasters caused by scientific or technological progress. These elements can sometimes be completely invented, but they are often inspired from already existing systems, concepts or technological devices, and developed in their most extreme forms. Totalitarian governments are thus known to be recurrent in dystopian fiction, and they are generally inspired by a past or present historical reality:

In both history and literature, 'dystopia' has been most frequently identified with the colossal tragedies of twentieth-century despotism. [...] A vast and complex literature has arisen to try to explain how mankind went so far wrong, and to avoid such calamities in the future.⁷

In this way, dystopias can even be used in order to offer a criticism of the present-day society. Thus, the dangers or the absurdity of current elements are underlined: for instance, *The Hunger Games*, which I will develop later, can be considered as a criticism of reality television

⁶ Cambridge Dictionary.

⁷ Claeys, Gregory (2016). *Dystopia – A Natural History. A Study of Modern Despotism, Its Antecedents, and Its Literary Diffractions*. Oxford University Press., p.113.

programs, even if they are exaggerated. Consequently, even if dystopias might appear to be describing purely imaginary, invented worlds, it is actually not the case: they are more realistic and linked to the present than we could first imagine, and they encourage people to have reflections about societal topics.

Dystopia thus describes negative pasts and places we reject as deeply inhuman and oppressive, and projects negative futures we do not want but may get anyway. In so doing it raises perennial problems of human identity. Shall we be monsters, humans, or machines? Shall we be enslaved or free? Can we be 'free' or only conditioned in varying degrees? Shall we preserve our individuality or be swallowed by the collective?⁸

The genre has become popular not only in literature but also in cinema or televised series through the last decades – for instance the series *Black Mirror*, anticipating technological advancements, which has become very popular since it was first released in 2011. This growing interest for dystopian fiction was analysed by Syreeta McFadden in an article published in *The Guardian* in 2015:

They are reminders, despite reflecting a dire present, that it's never too late for us, that we're not that far gone and can reverse the machinery that makes our nightmares real. Maybe they are a kind of litany for survival, that humanity will continue despite our best efforts to destroy ourselves.⁹

Indeed, even if some people consider dystopias as terrifying scenarios for the future, others see them as examples of what life could become if humanity went in the wrong direction; in this sense dystopias can be said to represent a warning addressed to people, in order to make them choose the right path in life and avoid many mistakes which could have terrible consequences. Dystopias' criticisms of the present-day societies are a way to make people realise their potential dangers.

Moreover, it must be noticed that the most famous dystopian works of the twentieth century portrayed male protagonists; one of the particularities of the two literary works I have chosen is that their main character *and* narrator are both women.

Now that the literary genre of the subject is defined, let us start with a summary of each story I will analyse in my study, and explain why they belong to the genre of dystopia.

The Handmaid's Tale

⁸ Claes, Gregory (2016). *Dystopia – A Natural History. A Study of Modern Despotism, Its Antecedents, and Its Literary Diffractions*. Op. cit. p.498.

⁹ McFadden, Syreeta (2015, 26 October). Dystopian stories used to reflect our anxieties. Now they reflect our reality. *The Guardian*.

The first work I will study is Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. The story is set in a future North America, which has become a theocratic dictatorship called the Republic of Gilead: "Her [Margaret Atwood's] Gileadean government maintains its power by means of surveillance, suppression of information, 're-education' centres, and totalitarian violence."¹⁰ Human rights have been drastically reduced, and particularly women's rights: they are not allowed to read, write or own money or property. They are separated into several social classes: among them, the Handmaids are women who have been chosen to give children to the Commanders – the ruling class of men. The Handmaids are the women who are still able to give birth – since diseases and pollution have provoked a decline of fertility, the few women who can still become pregnant are assigned to the house of a Commander and his (infertile) Wife. Henceforth, a Handmaid has no control over her own body anymore: her reproductive functions are used in the service of duty, and she must have sex once a month with the Commander in order to try to procreate. This sanctified event, which takes place in presence of his Wife, is called the Ceremony. A Handmaid cannot even raise her progeny herself, at least not further than the breastfeeding phase: the child is then kept by the Commander and his Wife, and the Handmaid is sent to another house in order to fulfil the same task...

Margaret Atwood's novel is narrated by Offred. This is not her real name, but an appellation which designates her allegiance to her Commander called Fred: "Of-Fred". This point can be related to the present-day system, with women generally changing their patronym when they get married. However, in Gilead, the Handmaids do not only take their Commander's name: they lose their patronym *and* their first name. Actually, they completely lose their own identity.

Thus, Offred is a Handmaid, and her tale is composed of "present-day" parts in which she relates her everyday life in the Commander's house, and other sections which take the form of external analepsis, in which she remembers her life as it was before the creation of the Republic of Gilead, or moments she spent when she was being trained to become a Handmaid. Most of the time, these flashbacks are about Offred's family – her husband, daughter, and mother – or about her friend Moira. They clearly set out to create a contrast between the life Offred – and other women – used to have, and their status now: the narrator, oppressed and stuck in a place she has not chosen, remembers her past liberty and free will. They contribute to making the reader realise the horror of this society, and also to understand better the

¹⁰ Neuman, Shirley (2006). "Just a Backlash': Margaret Atwood, Feminism, and The Handmaid's Tale". *University of Toronto Quarterly*. 75 (3): p.857.

protagonist's feelings. It brings less distance between the readers and the world they are discovering throughout the novel: we can feel closer to Offred when we have this complete access to her story, her thoughts, her memories and the emotions linked to them.

The choice of the word “tale” (instead of “story”, for instance) in the title of the novel is no coincidence. A tale is defined as “a story, especially one that might be invented or difficult to believe”¹¹. This word emphasises the absurd aspect of Gilead's society, as if it was almost impossible to believe it. It might echo Offred's thoughts: the narrator herself does not truly realise what she is experiencing, because it is so painful and unbelievable, even for her.

In *The Guardian*, Margaret Atwood explained where her inspiration came from when she created this universe:

Three things that had long been of interest to me came together during the writing of the book. The first was my interest in dystopian literature [...] The second was my study of 17th and 18th-century America [...] The third was my fascination with dictatorships and how they function, not unusual in a person who was born in 1939, three months after the outbreak of the second world war.¹²

Indeed, the author explained that she did not invent anything, and only took her inspiration from already existing concepts and ideas:

[...] with *The Handmaid's Tale*, I didn't put in anything that we haven't already done, we're not already doing, we're seriously trying to do, coupled with trends that are already in progress... So all of those things are real, and therefore the amount of pure invention is close to nil.¹³

It makes her story even more striking, and, paradoxically, more realistic. Among its various references, *The Handmaid's Tale* can be considered as a satirical view of the United States of America in the 1980's, a point which I will be developing later.

The Hunger Games

The second work of my study, the trilogy *The Hunger Games*, is also set in a future North America, in a nation called Panem, run by a totalitarian government. The country is composed of the Capitol, a region centralizing wealth and politic power, and twelve districts in varying states of poverty. As a punishment for a past rebellion (which occurred seventy-four years before the plot of the first book), the Capitol implemented the Hunger Games: they consist in an annual televised show, in which twenty-four young people from each district are locked up in an arena. These young people, called “tributes”, have to fight for their lives – only one can

¹¹ Cambridge Dictionary.

¹² Atwood, Margaret (2012, 20 January). Haunted by the Handmaid's Tale. *The Guardian*.

¹³ Godard, John. 'Lady Oracle.' *Books in Canada*. 14:8 (November 1985), 6-10.

survive, win the game and go back to his or her district, covered with wealth and glory. Every year, the tributes are selected by lottery: one boy and one girl, between twelve and eighteen years old, from each district. Young people also have the right to volunteer if they wish to represent their district in the game.

The first book of the trilogy starts a short time before the seventy-fourth Hunger Games, and the story is related through the eyes of Katniss Everdeen, a sixteen-year-old girl from District Twelve, the poorest district of Panem. Katniss volunteers for the game when her younger sister is selected at random: she wants to spare her from a certain death, by joining the game in place of her. This first volume follows the adventures and survival of Katniss in the Hunger Games. Through the trilogy, Katniss' character evolves a lot as she is overtaken by events; she becomes, almost despite of herself, the symbol of a new revolution in the districts of Panem.

The author Suzanne Collins found much of her inspiration for this universe in Greek mythology and Ancient Rome, but she also engages with contemporary issues: reality television programs inspired her for the format of the Hunger Games. In order to understand better the genesis of such a violent 'game', we can focus on an interview in which the author explained the moment that inspired the concept of the trilogy:

That deals with our fascination now with reality television [...] I was just sort of channel surfing on television. And I was going through, flipping through image of reality television, where there were these young people competing for a million dollars or a bachelor or whatever. And then I was flipping and I was seeing footage from the Iraq war. And these two things began to sort of fuse together in a very unsettling way.¹⁴

Suzanne Collins chose to invent a reality television show, inspired by already existing ones but put to an extreme way, with children or teenagers forced to be violent and to kill each other, as if they were at war. This mix of elements denounces reality television programs, and probably the fact that they continue to push their concept further and further.

2. Women's status in these dystopian societies

As I explained in the introduction, what I will focus on in this paper is the place occupied by women in the dystopian societies of Gilead and Panem.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the choice of a female narrator can be seen as a form of emancipation from already existing codes in fiction.

¹⁴ | Read YA (2009, 18 August) *Suzanne Collins Part 2 - Contemporary Inspiration*. [YouTube Video]

[...] the characters are caught between two poles, neither victims nor agents of their fates. For the writers who depict such lives, the problem is not so much lack of authority as a heightened awareness of women's historic lack of agency and voice. This new self-consciousness leads to disobedience, a necessary and conscious act of will that is required for the retelling of a traditional tale in a new voice that not only acknowledges the differences in gender roles but also refuses to privilege men's experiences over women's. ¹⁵

It is interesting to mention that authors who brought up female narrators in their works offered a whole new point of view; and this is the case for Margaret Atwood's novel, relating the life of a woman through her own vision and experience.

Several references allowed me to approach the role of women in the Republic of Gilead more precisely: these include some elements brought by Margaret Atwood who explained, in a documentary centred on her life, how the desire to create a dystopia seen from the point of view of women appeared:

I had always wanted to write a dystopia. But most of those existing were written through men's point of view. So I thought it would be interesting to take a dystopian society, to be a game-changer and to describe it from the perspective of a woman. ¹⁶

Indeed, it is this focus on the representation of women and the female perspective that contributes largely to making *The Handmaid's Tale* so rich and interesting. In my opinion, what is immediately striking about the situation of women in this story is their dehumanisation. In the society of Gilead, they are classified depending on their ability to procreate, that is to say reduced to their biological function. They do not have the right to own anything, or have a job. This situation is depicted in the following flashback in the novel, which consists in a conversation between Offred and her friend Moira after the protagonist lost her job. In this extract, the reader can feel how brutal and unexpected the change was:

When I'd finished, she said, Tried getting anything on your Compucard today?
Yes, I said. I told her about that too.
They've frozen them, she said. Mine too. The collective's too. Any account with an F on it instead of an M. All they needed to do is push a few buttons. We're cut off.
But I've got over two thousand dollars in the bank, I said, as if my own account was the only one that mattered.
Women can't hold property any more, she said. It's a new law. ¹⁷

¹⁵ Drum, Alice. (1998). *Revising Voice: Women Writers and the Challenge to Traditional Narrative Form*, in *College Literature*. Johns-Hopkins University Press. Spring, 1998, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Spring, 1998), pp. 175-181.

¹⁶ Translated from the french voice-over : « J'ai toujours voulu écrire une dystopie. La plupart de celles qui existaient reflétaient le point de vue des hommes. Alors je me suis dit que ce serait intéressant de prendre une société dystopique, de changer la donne et de la décrire depuis la perspective d'une femme ». Lang, Nancy and Raymont, Peter (2019). *Margaret Atwood : De la force des mots*. Arte documentaires [31'15 to 31'34].

¹⁷ Atwood, Margaret. (1985). *The Handmaid's Tale*, op. cit., p.183

This conversation explains how it happened, how women were “cut off” from society, losing their jobs and the access to their own money. We understand that it was very quick and irreversible. Offred’s focus on her personal situation emphasizes how disarmed she felt at this moment. The restrictions for women are presented as a “new law”, which reinforces their irrevocable aspect: no one can do anything against this legislation. Moreover, Moira’s words, “an F instead of an M” increases the idea that women are considered as lower than men: as if the letter “M” was the right one, and the “F” was a mistake. It almost feels as if it were their own fault. In another extract, Offred dives into a reflection about women’s lives when they used to work:

It’s strange, now, to think about having a job. *Job*. It’s a funny word. [...] All those women having jobs: hard to imagine, now, but thousands of them had jobs, millions. It was considered the normal thing. Now it’s like remembering the paper money, when they still had that.¹⁸

The way Offred expresses it makes the reader feel how strange it has become to imagine women working; even for herself, who used to have a job. The use of some adjectives such as “strange”, “hard to imagine”, or “funny word” immerses the reader in a society in which it is not normal *at all* for women to have jobs. “The normal thing”, the norm, is now the opposite, as Offred explains. A comparison with paper money, which does not exist anymore in Gilead, reinforces how distant and almost unbelievable this memory is. It is almost as if Offred herself struggled to remember her past life, as if it was tremendously blurred, since the difference with her present life is so huge.

If all women are dehumanised in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, it is even worse for those who have been designated as Handmaids. First, their appellation is reductive and representative of their situation. The definition of a handmaid is “(archaic): a female servant”¹⁹: in the novel, these women really have the life of a servant, since they dedicate all their days and activities to the service of someone else. Deprived of their rights and freedom, they are reduced to satisfy the need of a Commander and his Wife. Moreover, the fact that the word used is considered archaic gives the idea of a move backwards: the society, instead of progressing, has actually regressed to an old, outdated situation.

Handmaid’s bodies are used like animals’ in order to procreate, they are separated from their babies who are given to a Commander’s Wife, and their function is the only thing that determines them. They also lose their name and take their Commander’s, which accentuates the

¹⁸ *The Handmaid’s Tale*, op.cit., p.178

¹⁹ Oxford English Dictionary.

fact that they belong to a man: they are nothing but their property, and not individual human beings anymore. The real name of Offred is never mentioned, even if she is the main character and narrator of the story: it feels like her identity has been completely erased. The Handmaids are also dressed with a symbolic red dress which allows everyone to notice who they are; they also wear heavy white bonnets, which Offred mockingly calls “wings”: but if wings suggest flight and escape, these ones actually reduce their peripheral vision and hide their faces from the rest of the world, which is rather ironical.

Since the Handmaids are all dressed the same way and their faces cannot be seen, they all look identical, which is even more dehumanising: they are a category, and not individuals. This feeling can be found in a sentence in which Offred highlights her resemblance with another Handmaid: “I watch her. She’s like my own reflection, in a mirror from which I am moving away.”²⁰ Another striking quotation from Offred is how she feels about her own body: “I avoid looking down at my body, not so much because it’s shameful or immodest but because I don’t want to see it. I don’t want to look at something that determines me so completely.”²¹ This very personal thought highlights how the Handmaids are reduced to their body’s reproductive capacity, and nothing more. Offred is considered as a fertile body and not as a human being: she acknowledges the fact that her body “determines [her] completely”, and looking down at it becomes hurtful. This idea supposes a loss of selfhood for the main character: her body, which used to belong to her, is not really hers anymore. She cannot decide how to use it what to do with it.

Moreover, in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, the Handmaids are manipulated even before they actually begin their duties: the Aunts, who coach them for their role, try to make them accept their situation and believe it is for the best. Here are two examples of brainwashing of the Handmaids: first, in a flashback, Offred remembers when Aunt Lydia would show them movies, at the time she used to train the Handmaids. The movies shown were supposed to demonstrate how women were treated before Gilead, for example with violent pornographic movies:

Sometimes the movie she showed would be an old porno film, from the seventies or eighties. Women kneeling, sucking penises or guns, women tied up or chained or with dog collars around their necks, women hanging from trees, or upside-down, naked, with their legs apart, women being raped, beaten up, killed. Once we had to watch a woman being slowly cut into pieces, her fingers and breasts snipped off with garden shears, her stomach slit open and her intestines pulled out.

Consider the alternatives, said Aunt Lydia. You see what things used to be like? That was

²⁰ *The Handmaid’s Tale op. cit.*, p.50

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.68-69

what they thought of women, then. Her voice trembled with indignation. Moira said later that it wasn't real, it was done with models; but it was hard to tell.²²

As Moira notices, these movies are not realistic, or at least they are not representative of the real lives of ordinary women in a normal situation in North America in the twentieth century. But in this extract, Aunt Lydia's goal is to make the future Handmaids believe that they would really have been treated this way if they had not had the chance to live in Gilead. This violent representation of women is made so that the Handmaids can put things into perspective and consider that their situation is not as bad as they thought. This manipulation of these women also protects the authority from a possible rebellion: the Handmaids will not revolt if they consider themselves as almost lucky.

Another example of brainwashing is also in a flashback of the same period, more precisely during a speech pronounced by Aunt Lydia: "The women will live in harmony together, all in one family; [...] Women united for a common end!"²³ This is one more manipulation from the Aunts in order to make the Handmaids believe that their current situation is for the best, and also aimed to build a greater future for the next generations. They create a false idea of unity between all women in Gilead (perhaps something we could call sorority), but it is based on an oppressive and reductive situation, in which a specific category of women is used to serve the others' objectives.

To draw a comparison with *The Hunger Games*, the dystopian society of Panem is not a particularly patriarchal system: women are not treated worse than men because of their gender. The citizen's roles or jobs do not necessarily depend on their gender, whether it is in the Capitol or in the twelve districts. Moreover, in the arena of the Hunger Games, there is strict equality between men and women: a kind of parity is respected even if it is in a horrible, violent situation. The young tributes competing are always one boy and one girl from each district, and they follow the same rules with no distinction on their gender. In the books, the boys competing in the game are not represented as stronger than the girls who are with them: the survivors and winners can be girls, as often as boys. Katniss is a perfect example, since she survives the Hunger Games in the first book, thanks to her skills, intelligence and determination. This equality between men and women is detailed in a study contrasting their representation in *The Hunger Games*, compared to the features traditionally assigned to their genders.

²² *Ibid.*, p.124.

²³ *The Handmaid's Tale*, *op.cit.*, p.167.

[...] men and women work alongside each other in the mines of District 12, and that males and females are selected to represent the districts in the Hunger Games [...]
Furthermore, in the Capitol, men and women dye their hair, wear make-up, and sport tattoos, all of which seems to suggest that they are held to equivalent standards of beauty.²⁴

These representations of men and women do not make of *The Hunger Games* a dystopia in which women would be treated as inferior, contrary to *The Handmaid's Tale*. Now, through these two different representations of women's status in dystopian societies, another point must be developed: do these dystopias convey a feminist message?

3. Are these societies feminist dystopias?

The Handmaid's Tale is often considered as a feminist dystopia, since it denounces a patriarchal system in which women, deprived of their rights, are classified into categories depending on their bodies' abilities. As I argued earlier, Margaret Atwood put into her novel some elements of the second-wave feminism. First, liberal feminism: "Its goal was to integrate women more thoroughly into the power structure and to give women equal access to positions men had traditionally dominated."²⁵ These rights obviously do not exist in the society depicted in *The Handmaid's Tale*. The date it was written contributed to allow the readers to strongly feel the injustice of Gilead's system, precisely because the value of gender equality is now accepted. Radical feminism, with the will to completely reshape the system, seems to be embodied by the character of Moira and her rebellious character, which I will develop later. And finally cultural feminism: this branch of feminism celebrates women's difference, and of course, motherhood is one of the things that are generally supported. *The Handmaid's Tale*, through Gilead's system with the Handmaids, could be seen as a criticism of this celebration of maternity.

But despite these strong links with feminism of the seventies and eighties, Margaret Atwood does not qualify her novel as feminist.

In a feminist dystopia pure and simple, all of the men would have greater rights than all of the women. It would be two-layered in structure: top layer men, bottom layer women. But Gilead is the usual kind of dictatorship: shaped like a pyramid, with the powerful of both sexes at the apex [...]; then descending levels of power and status with men and women in each, all the way down to the bottom, where the unmarried men must serve in the ranks [...]²⁶

²⁴ Connors, Sean P. (2014). I try to remember who I am and who I am not: The subjugation of nature and women in *The Hunger Games*. In S.P. Connors (Ed.), *The politics of Panem: Challenging Genres*. p.148

²⁵ Encyclopedia Britannica, « The second wave of feminism ».

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism/The-second-wave-of-feminism>

²⁶ Haunted by the Handmaid's Tale". *op.cit.*

Men's status in Gilead has also been analysed in the review *Revue française d'éthique appliquée*:

If women's position in the society has deteriorated, this also applies to men. The soldiers, guardians, servants are deprived of the chance to build relationships with women, and of other privileges (food, hobbies) just like women. Most of them are constrained to carry out their duty – or be subject to being sentenced or executed. Only Commanders seem to have a more enviable life [...] ²⁷

Thus, the opinions about *The Handmaid's Tale* being feminist or not are divergent. As detailed in the previous part, the society of Gilead is sexist since women are considered inferior; but it is not a really feminist dystopia, since many men in Gilead are powerless and oppressed too: women are not the only one to suffer. However, a feminist consciousness is not only defined by the relations between the sexes, but also relations of power and class discrimination, which is the case in *The Handmaid's Tale*: even if both men and women are defined by their new, arbitrary 'social class', it is still the women who suffer the most, because of the fact they are defined and classified by their bodies.

In my opinion, one of the main differences that must be taken into account is the fact that women are used for their reproductive functions, whereas men are not classified depending on whether they are fertile or not. In fact, it seems that the responsibility of the drop in birth rate only lies with women: men's ability to procreate is never put in doubt. The possibility of men being sterile is never mentioned, and nobody knows if all the Commanders are actually able to procreate or not. This system reinforces the misogynistic aspect of Gilead's system.

There is also another way of considering women and the roles they hold in this society. In "Amours et désamours en dystopie", Taïna Tuhkunen-Couzić focuses on women's reaction to this patriarchal system:

Offred certainly stays, until the end, fascinated by some aspects of the patriarchal thought until the end, but there is a difference between fascination and seduction, temptation and capitulation. [...] The Aunts and other perverted women [...] simply remind us that the monstrosity of human beings is not a matter of sex or gender. [...] it is now possible to make a distinction between the "charmed" woman, or one who is simply "interested" in the machinery of a symbolic system of which her own body, fertile or sterile, is a (more or less) integral part. ²⁸

²⁷ Translated from the French : « si la position des femmes dans la société est dégradée, il en va de même aussi pour les hommes. Les soldats, gardiens, domestiques sont privés de la possibilité de nouer des relations avec des femmes et d'autres privilèges (alimentation, loisirs) comme les femmes. La plupart sont astreints à faire leur devoir — sous peine d'être condamnés ou exécutés. Seuls les commandants semblent avoir une vie plus enviable [...] » - Zuppinger, Thibaud. (2018). De la fonction de la dystopie dans l'univers contemporain – Réflexions autour de *La Servante Ecarlate*. *Revue française d'éthique appliquée*. p.139.

²⁸ Translated from the french : « Offred reste, certes et jusqu'au bout, fascinée par certains aspects de la pensée patriarcale, mais il y a une différence entre fascination et séduction, tentation et capitulation. [...] Les « Aunts » et autres femmes perverses [...] nous rappellent simplement que la monstruosité de l'être humain n'est pas une question de sexe ni de genre. » / « il est désormais possible de faire une distinction entre la

Some women, such as the Aunts who trained the Handmaids, can be just as perverted by the system as men: they take part in the oppression of the Handmaids. Other women can simply use their situation to take advantage of it the more they can. According to the author, the frontier between men and women is not so distinct, and the dichotomy separating genders is not completely true in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

But even if the place of feminism's in the novel can be debated, the theme is nevertheless explicitly mentioned in the novel: before the rise of Gilead, Offred's mother used to be a women's rights activist in the sixties and seventies ²⁹ and she is presented as a feminist character. For instance, before the birth of her daughter, she marched in feminist rallies. She also decided not to get married even if she wanted to be a mother, and chose to raise her daughter by herself, which is a striking action of independence.

[...] I don't want a man around, what use are they except for ten seconds' worth of half babies. A man is just a woman's strategy for making other women. Not that your father wasn't a nice guy and all, be he wasn't up to fatherhood. ³⁰

Her activism is a subject of dissension between her and Offred, who does not share the same views; their conversations are regularly recalled in the novel, thanks to Offred's flashbacks, and they illustrate the narrator's feelings.

[...] things between us were never easy. She expected too much from me, I felt. She expected me to vindicate her life for her, and the choices she'd made. I didn't want to live my life on her terms. I didn't want to be the model offspring, the incarnation of her ideas. We used to fight about that. I am not your justification for existence, I said to her once. ³¹

They were talking too much, and too loudly. They ignored me, and I resented them. My mother and her rowdy friends. I didn't see why she had to dress that way, in overalls, as if she were young; or to swear so much. [...]

She would say this a little regretfully, as though I hadn't turned out entirely as she'd expected. No mother is ever, completely, a child's idea of what a mother should be, and I suppose it works the other way around as well. ³²

In this part, we could almost guess regrets from Offred. As if when she was younger, she did not think feminism had any interest, and she even rejected it and was ashamed of it. But now

femme « charmée » et simplement « intéressée » par les rouages d'un système symbolique dont son propre corps fertile ou stérile fait partie (plus ou moins) intégrante.» - Tuhkunen-Couzig, Taïna, sous la dir. de Drovak, Marta. (1999). "Amours et désamours en dystopie : *The Handmaid's Tale*". *The Handmaid's Tale : Lire Margaret Atwood*. Presses universitaires de Rennes. Paragraph 20.

²⁹ Tuhkunen-Couzig, Taïna, sous la dir. de Drovak, Marta. (1999). "*The Handmaid's Tale* : a feminist dystopia ?". *The Handmaid's Tale : Lire Margaret Atwood*. Presses universitaires de Rennes.

³⁰ *The Handmaid's Tale*, op.cit., pp.126-127.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.128.

³² *Ibid.*, p.186.

that women's status has become worse than before, she thinks a lot about her mother who used to defend their rights – and maybe she understands better what her mother used to fight for.

For *The Hunger Games*, there is no question of Panem being a feminist dystopia or not: Panem's society does not separate men and women as *The Handmaid's Tale* does, and gender roles are not a subject explicitly approached in the books. The question is not asked or even implied in the trilogy. Rather as I argued earlier, it is noteworthy that men and women are strictly equal in Panem: this is not necessarily the case in other dystopias or fictions in general, and this might show a more modern and open-minded approach on the part of the author Suzanne Collins. Moreover, most of the characters of the books do not strictly follow the specificities usually assigned to their gender: the two main characters, Katniss and Peeta, almost invert the traditional roles sometimes – Peeta is softer and more sensitive than Katniss who is tougher and with a stronger personality. It is also important to mention that Suzanne Collins wrote a story in which men can wear make-up and dye their hair as well as women, Katniss' stylist is a man, and most of the characters' personalities are not developed following the traditional gender roles.

I could not find any source explaining Suzanne Collins' intentions or not to portray a more modern vision of gender roles. However, even if women's status is not a subject treated in the trilogy, it cannot be denied that the author's creation is much more modern and feminist than many other dystopia fictions before. This can be linked to its relation with the third-wave feminism, insisting on the plurality of women's experience and identity: race, class, but also the fluidity of gender roles, and the importance of the media.

[...] third-wavers depict their version of feminism as more inclusive and racially diverse than the second wave. In fact, Heywood defines third wave feminism as “a form of inclusiveness” (2006a, xx). Third-wave feminism “respects not only differences between women based on race, ethnicity, religion, and economic standing but also makes allowance for different identities within a single person” (xx). It also “allows for identities that previously may have been seen to clash with feminism” (xx); you can now be religiously devout or into sports or beauty culture, and still be a feminist, for example.³³

Traditional gender roles are challenged in *The Hunger Games*, as well as the question of social class, and the power of the media which are both key themes in the trilogy.

II- Characters challenging gender roles

³³ Snyder, R. Claire. What is third-wave feminism? A new direction essay. Autumn 2008, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Autumn 2008), pp. 175-196. Published by: The University of Chicago Press.

1. Their features and personality

I will now develop the theme of gender roles in greater detail, focusing on the main female protagonists of *The Hunger Games* and *The Handmaid's Tale*: the question is not only about their status in society, but also how they behave and how their personalities and features are represented in both stories. Do these characters respond or not to feminine stereotypes?

First, I will develop this question with the character of Katniss Everdeen in *The Hunger Games* trilogy: my sense is that she is a female protagonist who does not respond to gender stereotypes. As I mentioned in the previous part, her and Peeta Mellark (who is with her in the Hunger Games' arena) almost look like they have inverted traditional gender norms. Katniss is an independent young woman with a strong personality, she does not let herself be pushed around. More precisely, her character merges both features traditionally assigned to women *and* men. Kristine Loobeek's paper in *Concordia Journal of Communication Research*, centred on *The Hunger Games* movies (which were realised between 2012 and 2015), explains well how "feminine" the protagonist of the trilogy is:

Everdeen is "feminine" in that she; is family centered/selfless; does not have a drive to advance professionally; is nurturing and assumes the role of care-giver in multiple situations; is modest; and kills only in self-defence.³⁴

These features are the same in the books as in the movie adaptation. But her more "masculine" characteristics are, in my opinion, even more striking since it is unusual to find them represented in a teenage girl. First of all, Katniss is the main protagonist of the story. The role she holds in her family is close to what could be assigned to a paternal figure: she hunts in order to feed her family (that is to say her mother and her sister). She risks her life almost every day going hunting as the inhabitants of the District 12 are not allowed to go in the forest. She is skilled with a bow and arrows, and she is in good physical shape thanks to the meat she is able to eat from her hunting. Moreover, from the very first chapters of the novel, Katniss is represented as a brave, heroic character: she volunteers as a tribute for the Hunger Games, in order to avoid her little sister from being killed in the arena. This means that she decides to take part in a battle in which only one person can survive – and she knows that some other tributes have trained hard for this. The volunteering scene occurs in the first book, second chapter: it already highlights Katniss' bravery and determination.

The other kids make way immediately, allowing me a straight path to the stage. I reach her just as she is about to mount the steps. With one sweep of my arm, I push her behind me.

³⁴ Loobeek, Kristine. (2014). "A Feminist Analysis of the Film "The Hunger Games", *Concordia Journal of Communication Research*: Vol.1, Article 3.

“I volunteer!” I gasp. “I volunteer as a tribute!”

There’s some confusion on the stage. District 12 hasn’t had a volunteer in decades and the protocol has become rusty. [...] In some districts, in which winning the reaping is such a great honour, people are eager to risk their lives, and the volunteering is complicated. But in District 12, where the word *tribute* is pretty much synonymous with the word *corpse*, volunteers are all but extinct.³⁵

This passage demonstrates Katniss’ bravery. Her reaction is completely spontaneous, she has no hesitation. The use of the present simple tense in the narrative contributes to making the scene very vivid: generally, traditional narration uses a past tense which creates a temporal distance between the readers and the events described. But here, the readers are almost as one with the narrator, as if they truly accompany Katniss. Moreover, the remarkable aspect of Katniss’ action is emphasized thanks to the comparison with the other districts: District 12 is not known to have any volunteers, and it is very improbable that any of their tributes could survive in the arena. This contrast shows to the reader that throughout the trilogy, they will deal with a brave and determined female protagonist. Moreover, in the last sentence, Katniss seems to be addressing the reader: she takes the control of the narrative. Volunteers are supposed to be “extinct” in her district, but she turns the tables and becomes the first volunteer for decades. This is a symbol of her empowerment, and of the control she takes over the story – the Hunger Games becomes *her* own story.

To go back to features which are generally assigned to female characters, another one is the objectification of their bodies – and I think that contrary to many main female characters in literature or on screen, Katniss’ body is not considered as an object. She is not determined by her physical appearance, or presented as particularly pretty in order to be perceived as “attractive”. Actually, in the books, she is not even considered as a pretty girl. It is of no interest for her, as she explains in the first volume of *The Hunger Games* : “We don’t have much cause to look nice in District Twelve.”³⁶ When she goes to the Capitol for the promotion campaign for the Hunger Games, a few stylists have to get her dressed for her first public appearance, and their goal is to make her look attractive. They make jokes about her physical appearance and her body, so the reader understands that Katniss does not fit in the standards of beauty of the society she lives in. Even when the stylists try to be kind and encourage her, they cannot be anything but ironical and clumsy.

You almost look like a human being now! says Flavius, and they all laugh. [...] now that we’ve gotten rid of all the hair and filth, you’re not horrible at all! says Flavius encouragingly.¹⁸

³⁵ *The Hunger Games op.cit.*, pp.25-26

³⁶ *The Hunger Games op.cit.*, p.72

The euphemism “not horrible at all” expresses how unattractive she first appeared to her stylists, and how hard they had to try in order to make her fit the standards.

In the course of my research, I discovered that critics were not unanimous about the representation of Katniss. Some articles describe her as a cliché of a traditional female character, contrary to what I had personally analysed: they perceive her as an attractive, hypersexualised young woman. Sometimes, these descriptions are biased because they are not only based on the books but also on the movie adaptations, in which Katniss is played by Jennifer Lawrence, who is a young actress corresponding far more to the beauty standards of today – moreover, the actress chosen does not look like the description of the protagonist made by Suzanne Collins: different body type, eye colour, skin tone... Katniss is also supposed to be extremely skinny because people in District 12 can barely eat enough.

According to the article ‘*The Hunger Games is sexist*’, says Professor, which deals with feminism and sexism in young adult novels, *The Hunger Games* portrays a heroine who is a thin, young, white, heterosexual girl; and the author of the article underlines that it can only reinforce stereotypes about female characters, since all these features are typically non inclusive.

“A thin, white attractive woman” is the new normal in YA [*young adults*] novels [...] “I would encourage you to do a Google search on fat” and see the dominance of “heterosexual love” in YA novels.³⁷

Even if it is true that Katniss corresponds to the stereotypes regarding sexual orientation, ethnic group or even size, it must be underlined that she lives in very poor conditions, with a lack of decent food and necessary equipment – so regarding social class, she belongs to what can be called a minority, just as contemporary society’s underclass: a part of society which is very rarely represented. Furthermore, I personally think that Katniss is only sexualised when she has no choice, and she does not even decide what she will look like. In the Capitol, where she is nothing more than a prey, she has to appear attractive for the Hunger Games promotion, consisting on televised interviews and parades. This female stereotype of physical attractiveness, portraying women through their bodies, can also be used to dehumanise them, just as Offred in dehumanised in *The Handmaid’s Tale* through the objectification of her body. Moreover, this situation is the same for all the tributes, whether they are boys or girls: it is not their personal choice to smarten themselves up, since they are all just toys for the Capitol and they are put in the hands of stylists for a few days. In the third book, *Mockingjay*, Katniss is

³⁷ Irvine, Spencer. (2016). *The Hunger Games is Sexist, says Professor*.

also sexualised – with a lot of make-up and skin-tight clothes – when she shoots video clips of propaganda, in which she is the Mockingjay: the symbol of the revolution. Once again, this is not her personal choice to be dressed up that way. The leaders of the revolution use her in order to film striking images of promotion, and they only show what they want about her. For them, it is better to show a pretty girl on screen instead of a young woman who is considered as unremarkable. In the following extract, Katniss does not even recognise herself in one of those videos:

They play back the last few minutes of taping and I watch the woman on the screen. Her body seems larger in stature, more imposing than mine. Her face smudged but sexy. Her brows black and drawn in an angle of defiance. Wisps of smoke – suggesting that she has either just been extinguished or is about to burst into flames – rise from her clothes. I do not know who this person is.³⁸

The use of the pronouns “she/her” when she is actually talking about herself emphasizes how unusual it is for her to see herself as a sexually attractive woman (her face is told to be “sexy”). Because when she is not forced to, Katniss is not a hypersexualised young woman at all. In fact, she does not really care about her physical appearance, and the “fake” beauty – excessive makeup, tight clothes... – which is imposed on her makes her feel weird and uncomfortable. Here we can perceive a message from the author, addressed to her young female readership: is Suzanne Collins saying that being sexualised is not necessarily a good thing, especially when it is imposed by someone else? Even though I have not found references confirming this theory, it seems plausible to think that the author is passing on a message that a woman’s value is not defined by her physical appearance; and that being defined by her body can even be painful.

These views about Katniss Everdeen’s representation are nuanced in the study “Discourses of Masculinity and Femininity in *The Hunger Games*: ‘Scarred,’ ‘Bloody,’ and ‘Stunning.’”, published in the *International Journal of Social Science Studies*: “Katniss demonstrates a complex mix of masculine and feminine characteristics [...]”. “She is independent, unafraid, and skilled.”³⁹ According to the author, Katniss is not a stereotypically female character, because she presents the masculine features I mentioned above, and it creates a balance. However, according to this study, those features are not portrayed as natural: it is

³⁸ *The Hunger Games : Mockingjay, op.cit., p.79*

³⁹ Woloshyn, Vera, et al. (2013, February) “Discourses of Masculinity and Femininity in *The Hunger Games*: ‘Scarred,’ ‘Bloody,’ and ‘Stunning.’” *International Journal of Social Science Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1., Redfame Publishing. p.155.

explained that Katniss was forced to develop those abilities because of the absence of a man in the Everdeen family.

[...] while female characters may take on masculine tasks and roles, they often only do so in exceptional circumstances usually involving the absence of a father figure, reinforcing the idea that this behaviour is not normative ²¹

The Politics of Panem: Challenging Genres also underlines this point:

Katniss does exhibit qualities that are typically drawn as masculine in popular culture texts. She is a skilled hunter who is adept at using a bow and arrow, and after her father is killed in a mining accident she assumes his role by providing for her family. ⁴⁰

According to the following extract from *International Journal of Social Science Studies*, female heroines are not always as strong and unconventional as they might first appear to be. “Many female characters, who initially may appear to be strong role models, often remain constrained by patriarchal norms of emphasized femininity [...]” ⁴¹ Indeed, even if Katniss plays a protective role in her family, it might not be so revolutionary: the absence of her father could explain why she got these features and masculine qualities. It could be considered that if her father had not died, she would not have had the need to develop this strength and personality. Maybe, consciously or not, she tries to replace the paternal figure of the family.

But, to add nuance to that, it can be underlined that Katniss does not just adopt these qualities: she also is successful with them. In general, the society considers these features as unconventional for a woman, but Katniss manages to take care of her family for years in difficult living conditions. And most of all she survives in the Hunger Games, defeating other boys and girls, some of whom are much more trained than she is; some of them even chase her and try to kill her, but she finally wins the Games. Her masculine qualities are not only shown, but they are developed and they appear to be useful and effective.

Now, I will briefly discuss the representation of female characters in *The Handmaid's Tale*, through the angle of gender roles. In my opinion, Offred is represented in a more traditional way than Katniss Everdeen: she does not seem to really challenge gender roles by embodying qualities that are traditionally assigned to men. However, she is not a clichéd female character either: before the oppression of Gilead, she led a rather normal life and had a job, and she was not the stereotype of a soft, submissive and weak woman. This is necessarily different

⁴⁰ Connors, Sean P. (2014). I try to remember who I am and who I am not: The subjugation of nature and women in The Hunger Games. In S.P. Connors (Ed.), *The politics of Panem: Challenging Genres*. p.148

⁴¹ Woloshyn, Vera, et al. (2013, February) “Discourses of Masculinity and Femininity in The Hunger Games: ‘Scarred,’ ‘Bloody,’ and ‘Stunning.’” *International Journal of Social Science Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1. p.151

in Gilead's system, because of the oppression of women: she does not really have the choice about being submissive, because of her status. Indeed, the breaking of stereotypes is less obvious on her side. Nevertheless, Moira, Offred's best friend before the start of Gilead's government, is far more challenging of gender roles. She is portrayed with qualities such as bravery, strength, and self-confidence. She also does not respond to gender stereotypes since it is mentioned that she is able to fix her own car, as if it were very improbable for a woman to have this specific skill: "[...] Moira had mechanical ability, she used to fix her own car, the minor things."⁴² Moreover, Moira is homosexual: before Gilead's oppression, Moira's character was not defined by her sexual attractiveness in the eyes of men. This fact is learnt in a flashback describing a normal conversation between her and Offred: "I said she didn't have that problem herself any more, since she'd decided to prefer women [...]"⁴³ There is no great announcement about her sexual orientation: Moira's homosexuality is just mentioned as something completely normal and accepted, and not as anything that could make her feel abnormal or different from what is expected from her. I must highlight the fact that she is the only known homosexual character of my corpus: it emphasises the unusual aspect of it, and Moira's representation as opposed to traditional gender roles.

Moira also escapes from the place where they are trained to become Handmaids: it makes her appear as a heroic character, in comparison with the protagonist, and this idea will be developed in the next part.

2. Are they heroines?

In this subpart, I will question whether the female characters of *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Hunger Games* are heroines or not. The definitions of a "heroine" given by the Oxford's dictionary are the following ones:

Heroine

1. a girl or woman who is admired by many for doing something brave or good.
2. the main female character in a story, novel, film, etc.
3. a woman that you admire because of a particular quality or skill that she has⁴⁴

I personally think that Katniss Everdeen is presented as a heroine, since she is not only the main protagonist of the books, but she really is a brave and combative character and she is

⁴² *The Handmaid's Tale*, *op.cit.*, pp.136-137

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.176.

⁴⁴ Oxford Dictionary.

portrayed with a large panel of admirable and rare skills, such as hunting and being particularly precise with her bow and arrows. As I argued earlier, the extract about her volunteering for the games points out her bravery from the very beginning of the story, so the reader instantly knows this trait of her personality. And indeed, throughout the whole trilogy, Katniss gradually becomes the symbol of a revolution for all the districts of Panem. It happens because she defies the rules of the games at the end of the first book; then people start to consider her as a symbol of hope starting from *Catching Fire*; she survives two consecutive editions of the Hunger Games despite her traumas and the strength of her opponents, which is a real achievement; and finally, in *Mockingjay*, her image becomes the allegory of the revolution of the Districts against the Capitol: she is admired by many people. Thus, she is not only a heroine because she is the main character of the story, but her character is also considered as heroic by her fellow citizens and they admire her. Katniss' nicknames, which follow her all along the story, are symbols of the strength and power she represents for many people. "The girl on fire" is the first nickname given to her in the whole trilogy, thanks to her striking first appearance on television: "I want the audience to recognize you when you're in the arena," says Cinna dreamily. "Katniss, the girl who was on fire".⁴⁵ In the last book of the trilogy, she becomes the "Mockingjay", the nickname given to the leader of the revolution. The fact that she is called by these nicknames by almost a whole nation is a good example of the impact she had over everyone in Panem, and how her actions disrupted the whole of society.

Now I will focus on *The Handmaid's Tale*. For this part, I studied *The Handmaid's Tale: Lire Margaret Atwood*, which included one chapter written by Margaret Atwood herself. She describes the protagonist she has created thus: "Is the protagonist a feminist heroine? I don't think so. I think she is an ordinary sort of person caught up in extraordinary circumstances. She proposes no solutions beyond escape."⁴⁶ This quotation joins the idea expressed earlier in my analysis, that Gilead is not really a feminist dystopia; and the main character of the story is not a feminist heroine either. One particularly interesting element about Offred is the fact that Margaret Atwood stresses that she is *normal* – "an ordinary sort of person" –, leading us to think that any other Handmaid living the same oppressions could have been the protagonist of the novel, and would have related a similar story. The main character of this tale is not particularly skilled, heroic or braver than the others. Moreover, it can be highlighted that she has "no solutions" about her situation: contrary to Katniss in *The Hunger Games*, Offred does

⁴⁵ *The Hunger Games op.cit.*, p.77.

⁴⁶ Atwood, Margaret, sous la dir. de Drovak, Marta. (1999). "The Handmaid's Tale : a feminist dystopia ? ". *The Handmaid's Tale : Lire Margaret Atwood. op.cit.*, pp.17-30

not turn upside down the rules of the system, nor engage any deep change in her society. She does not fight against the government in place nor represent a particularly valiant or strong figure, and in this sense, she is not the kind of character who can be called a heroine. But perhaps Margaret Atwood created a regular character on purpose: it allows the readers, and more specifically female readers, to identify with Offred. It is easier to do so with a character like her, compared for instance with Katniss' character, who has extraordinary qualities. Offred, as a narrator, also offers the reader a narrative style very close to what a real person could have written in a diary, and that makes the universe and situations more familiar and credible. It is also easier for the reader to relate with the protagonist and to understand her feelings.

The ordinary aspect of Offred's personality and actions is also developed in *Utopian Studies* by Peter G. Stillman and S. Anne Johnson, in which she is described as a passive character:

Offred's accommodation of herself and her life to the misogyny of the contemporary United States, her acceptance of such conditions as ordinary and usual, is mirrored by her gradual succumbing to the conditions of Gilead.⁴⁷

In comparison with Katniss in *The Hunger Games*, Offred might appear as a submissive female character: she is not a resistant, nor a rebel, she does not fight against the oppressive government in place; she follows the rules with no opposition, even if they are a source of suffering for her. However, it may also be argued that as the plot develops, the protagonist takes more and more risks and increasingly disobeys the rules. Her nights spent with the Commander playing and reading are completely prohibited, just like the night they spend out in the secret club of Jezebels; these are followed by Offred's forbidden love affair with the chauffeur, Nick, and finally her escape with the resistance of Gilead, which are many actions requiring courage and exposing her to potentially serious consequences. All these elements make me think that even if Offred does not really embody the definition of a heroine, she is not as submissive as she is sometimes portrayed in certain of the scholarly studies I mentioned. Moreover, she is a character who changes, as any human being: her views and her determination evolve throughout her story. The flashbacks of her past life also help the reader understand the course of her thoughts and the evolution of her personality. In this way, it can be considered that the novel is also a story of her awakening.

⁴⁷ Stillman, Peter G. and Johnson, S. Anne (1994). "Identity, Complicity, and Resistance in *The Handmaid's Tale*", *Utopian Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2, p.78.

Of course, there is another character in *The Handmaid's Tale* who represents more directly the idea of the strong and brave heroine: as mentioned in the previous subpart, this is Moira, her best friend. In *Utopian Studies*, this woman and her strength are highlighted: in comparison with Offred, Moira is presented as a fighter.

Moira refuses to succumb to the despairing sense of security that complacency offers. She is a powerful woman and a powerful idea because she both possesses and represents an energetic, persistent striving for freedom, a resistance to accept control and definition by others.⁴⁸

Moira becomes a symbol of freedom for the Handmaids when she escapes from their training centre, defying all the laws and rules. In this chapter, the determination with which she undertakes the flight is underscored with details such as her posture (“Moira stood up straight and looked firmly ahead.”), her skills (“They found out afterwards that she’s dismantled the inside of one of the toilets and taken out the long thin pointed lever [...]”), and the sangfroid and self-confidence conveyed by her curt reposts (“Don’t move, said Moira, or I’ll stick it all the way in, I know where, I’ll puncture your lung”.)⁴⁹ This chapter of the story also highlights how the other Handmaids felt after this act of bravery:

Nevertheless, Moira was our fantasy. We hugged her to us, she was with us in secret, a giggle; she was lava beneath the crust of daily life. In the light of Moira, the Aunts were less fearsome and more absurd. Their power had a flaw to it. They could be shanghaied in toilet. The audacity was what we liked.⁵⁰

The metaphors of “lava” and “light” point out the impact Moira’s escape had on the other Handmaids: she let a warm, bright feeling of optimism into her mates’ hearts. The words “flaw”, “less fearsome” and “absurd” are used to refer to the Aunts, and this is a sign of a true change in the Handmaids inner vision of their superiors; a change operated by Moira: thanks to her, the other women might feel less impressed by the ones who have control over them. Her role in that story is the one of a heroine, inspiring the others and being admired for what she did. She defied oppression and danger, risked her life for freedom, and managed to survive at last. Her strength and determination are what makes her inspiring and admirable for the other Handmaids.

The figure represented by Moira can be linked to a relevant point of radical feminism of the second wave: consciousness-raising.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p.80.

⁴⁹ *The Handmaid's Tale*, *op. cit.*, pp.136-137.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p.139

[...] classic second-wave feminism argues that in patriarchal society women share common experiences, and through a sharing of their experiences with one another in consciousness-raising (CR) groups, they can generate knowledge about their own oppression. Once they realize that what they thought were personal problems (e.g., uneven division of household labor, male-centered sexual practices, domestic violence, etc.) are widely shared, they can see the ways in which the patriarchal structure of society produces such problems, and the personal becomes political.⁵¹

This consciousness-raising seems to be what happens among the Handmaids, thanks to Moira's rebellion: the fact that one of them strongly affirms her disagreement, allows the others to realise the horror of this system, and to know that they are not alone – they understand that they can be against it and not accept it. In addition, it could be interesting to question Margaret Atwood's intention by making one character so much more heroic than the other. In my opinion, a true heroine was needed in this story, in order to bring hope – for the other characters, but also for the reader. But giving these qualities to the narrator would have made her story less realistic; as I already argued, Offred's simplicity allows the reader to feel closer to her experience and her emotions. It was necessary to give the most heroic side to someone else, and who would be a better choice than the protagonist's best friend? Moira's rebellion had an impact on the other Handmaids, but her impact on Offred specifically is probably the most powerful.

III- Their roles as women, through their relation to the others

1. Family schemes and motherhood

In both fiction and in real life, women are also frequently represented through the prism of their family and love relationships. It is common to discover a female character presented as “the girlfriend or wife of” a male protagonist; and even a woman who is the main character of her story is often reduced to her couple status, or to the traditional role of the mother, dedicated to her children. This part will analyse Katniss and Offred's representation from this particular angle, in both novels.

One interesting point about Offred is that she is not just a woman: she is also a mother. It can be considered that she corresponds to the stereotype of a traditional female character and her place in her family, because before Gilead, Offred had a husband and a child, and she led a rather traditional life of wife and mother. But actually, this is not so simple and reductive as it

⁵¹ Snyder, R. Claire. *What is third-wave feminism? A new direction essay*. Autumn 2008, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Autumn 2008), pp. 175-196. Published by: The University of Chicago Press.

might first appear. This idea and the representation of Offred's role as a mother is explored in interviews with Margaret Atwood published in *The Handmaid's Tale: Lire Margaret Atwood*. According to the author, Offred was made as a mother because this is what the dystopia is about: women being used in order to procreate for the ones who do not have this ability. Giving birth to children is a theme at the centre of this dystopia.

[...] why is the main character in the story a woman, and why is it not just any woman but a mother, and why is it not just any mother but the mother of a daughter ? [...] Not just anyone but a mother, because it's the mothers who are valuable in this society. We envisage a future in which reproduction rates have gone down due to... well actually, they're going down now. [...] So the narrator is a mother, because it's evident that she has reproductive potential.⁵²

Motherhood is part of the foundation of Gilead's system, since a significant part of women's categorisation depends on the fact that some of them are fertile and must bear children for the Commanders they are assigned to. One particularly striking scene that highlights this point is the childbirth scene, in chapter twenty-one. Offred, who is attending the birth with the other Handmaids and Wives, relates the proceedings of the event, for example reporting the words chanted by the Handmaids at specific moments of the process in order to support the one who is giving birth: "‘Breathe, breathe,’ we chant, as we have been taught. ‘Hold, hold. Expel, expel, expel’. We chant to the count of five. Five in, hold for five, out for five."⁵³ Offred also describes the intensity of the emotions they all feel, and it depicts the importance of such an event in their society: "We smile too, we are one smile, tears run down our cheeks, we are so happy."⁵⁴ "Nevertheless we are jubilant, it's a victory, for all of us. We've done it."⁵⁵ In *The Handmaid's Tale*, giving birth to children is one of the most important and valuable things. This is the only moment when a woman, and specifically a Handmaid, can feel powerful: despite their submissive position in society, they are the only ones who can reproduce and perpetuate humanity. Consequently, giving birth is an achievement and a proof of their vital and essential usefulness. The other Handmaids, attending the birth, all share this feeling of expression of power, as if they were one.

Furthermore, it could be argued that the fact of Offred being a mother is not making her a stereotype of some representation of womanhood, but rather subsumes her to the plot: this role is necessary because of the subject of the novel. If she had not had the ability to procreate,

⁵² Tuhkunen-Couzig, Taïna, sous la dir. de Drovak, Marta. (1999). "The Handmaid's Tale : a feminist dystopia ?". *The Handmaid's Tale : Lire Margaret Atwood. Presses universitaires de Rennes*.

⁵³ *The Handmaid's Tale*, op. cit., p.129

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.132.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.133.

she would not have become a Handmaid in Gilead, and would not have related this story. The fact that she already had a daughter before confirms this ability, and it contributes to add a stronger emotional dimension: the separation with her child is painful, and she thinks a lot about her. Moreover, in my opinion, it is noteworthy that Offred is the mother of a girl, and not a boy. Because of women's status in Gilead, there is even more reasons to worry about this child, whom no one knows where she is gone. If Offred had had a boy, he would have been less in danger than a girl: everyone knows that a daughter could end being exploited too, when she grows up, just as her mother was. The stakes are then even higher: the reader does not just worry for the protagonist, but also for her daughter, and for the other women who were close to them. The choices of Offred's family composition helps understand the dangers and horror of this dystopian society, by allowing the reader to feel the anxiety of the narrator.

Another interesting point about family schemes, now in *The Hunger Games*, is the fact that Katniss' family is only composed of women and Katniss has to assume the "father" role, as mentioned earlier. Just like Offred, Katniss' character is not reduced to a traditional role in the family. Actually, since the father's death, the Everdeen family has not been composed the traditional way: the mother raises her two daughters alone, but Katniss does not really have the role of a daughter.

"If we didn't have so many kids," he adds quickly.

They're not our kids, of course. But they might as well be. Gale's two little brothers and a sister. Prim. And you may as well throw in our mothers, too, because how would they live without us? Who would fill those mouths that are always asking for more?⁵⁶

The protagonist takes care and protects her young sister, but also her mother, by providing them with food, and taking important decisions for the family. Since their mother, portrayed as depressed and fragile, struggles to take care of them, Katniss almost holds the role of a parent even if she is only sixteen years old; this status in the family does not correspond to what might could have been expected from her. Moreover, Katniss says that she does not want to have children.

"I never want to have kids," I say.

"I might. If I didn't live here," says Gale.

"But you do," I say irritated.⁵⁷

This is mostly because of the society she lives in and the horror of the Hunger Games, which she does not want to impose to her descendants. But it is rare enough to discover a young female character to be certain of not wanting to become a mother, and to be at ease with this

⁵⁶ *The Hunger Games, op. cit.*, p.10.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.11.

position. However, at the very end of the trilogy, in the epilogue that occurs twenty years after the defeat of the Capitol, the reader learns that Katniss has finally become a mother. This choice has been criticised, because an unconventional heroine like Katniss finally ends up following a traditional way of life, with a husband and two children (a girl and a boy), which is not the end imagined by some readers. In my opinion, it is true that Katniss played an unconventional role throughout the whole story, and defied what could have been expected from a young woman: it is thus surprising to see her years later with an almost fairy-tale ending. But does she really live happily ever after, with the wounds of her past and the loss of many loved ones, such as her sister Prim? This epilogue is not really a cliché of a happy ending; in two pages only, it is easy to understand that Katniss carries too many emotional scars, and that she became a mother mostly because her husband wanted her to.

It took me five, ten, fifteen years for me to agree. But Peeta wanted them so badly. When I first felt her stirring inside of me, I was consumed with a terror that felt as old as life itself.

[...]

But one day I'll have to explain about my nightmares. Why they came. Why they won't ever really go away.

I'll tell them how I survive it. I'll tell them that on bad mornings, it feels impossible to take pleasure in anything because I'm afraid it could be taken away.⁵⁸

Katniss' new family is not really a happy ending for her, so it does not follow the stereotype of a female character filled with happiness thanks to her motherhood. Even in this situation, Katniss is still different from the traditional representation of female protagonists. However, the fact that she complies with her husband's wishes is rather conventional; but from another perspective, it is also unusual to portray a man wanting children, more than his wife does.

To conclude, I personally think that in both stories, the female protagonists' families do not follow patterns that reduce them to the traditional mother or daughter role; even when they play this role, they do it differently. That makes their representation even more interesting and off the beaten track.

2. Offred and Nick's relationship

In addition to the family, the question of love and sexual relationships with men is a major point to analyse concerning female protagonists. In literature or in cinema, many female characters have no real interest beyond the fact that they create a romantic or sexual distraction for the

⁵⁸ *Mockingjay*, *op. cit.*, pp.437-438.

hero. Even when a woman is the main character of the story, she is often reduced to her romantic feelings or attractiveness for men; which can be very limiting, implying that women would not be able to have their own story without living for or through a man. So, do the female protagonists of *The Hunger Games* and *The Handmaid's Tale* follow traditional love plots?

I will start this part of the analysis with *The Handmaid's Tale*: in the novel, the theme of relationships between men and women is clearly important. In Gilead, the Handmaids are forced to have sex once a month with their Commander in order to procreate, but they are not allowed to have a sexual life or love relationships for themselves, and this situation reduces them to objects. But in the course of the story she narrates, Offred starts an illicit love affair with Nick, the chauffeur at the Commander's house. They have to hide when they want to have sex or spend time together, because they are not allowed to do so, and the risks taken could end up with severe consequences for both of them. Near the end of the story, Offred even becomes pregnant with Nick's child.

In *The Handmaid's Tale: Lire Margaret Atwood*, Taïna Tuhkunen-Couzic develops the analysis of relationships between men and women in Gilead, and the notion of "Resurrected love"⁵⁹ in which the forbidden affair between Offred and Nick is discussed. She underlines the conventional aspect of their relationship – the female protagonist ends up falling in love with a man – but also how it can be seen as Offred's emancipation.

[...] *The Handmaid's Tale* does not offer a Hollywood-like outcome, not more than a return to submissive sexuality. If the verb "fall" remains, it is because it has been subverted and readjusted by the body from which comes the voice of the subject "in whom there is some feminine", who dares to insert into spaces not yet explored ("I sink down into my body as into a swamp, fenland, where only I know the footing.")⁶⁰

This relationship is a form of rebellion against the system, since Offred finally decides who she wants to have sex with, and also ends up having romantic feelings towards him. She takes her own decisions despite the risks, and she emancipates herself from the plans of Gilead. But even if this relationship is a kind of rebellion, the plotline itself is actually rather

⁵⁹ Translated from the French « L'amour réssuscité » - Tuhkunen-Couzic, Taïna, sous la dir. de Drovak, Marta. (1999). "Amours et désamours en dystopie : *The Handmaid's Tale*". *The Handmaid's Tale : Lire Margaret Atwood*. Presses universitaires de Rennes.

⁶⁰ Translated from the French : « The Handmaid's Tale ne propose pas un dénouement hollywoodien, pas plus qu'un retour à la sexualité de soumission. Si le verbe « fall » persiste, c'est parce qu'il a été subverti et réapproprié par le corps d'où émane la voix du sujet « en qui il y a du féminin » qui ose s'introduire dans des espaces pas encore explorés (« I sink down into my body as into a swamp, fenland, where only I know the footing. ») - Tuhkunen-Couzic, Taïna, sous la dir. de Drovak, Marta. (1999). "Amours et désamours en dystopie : *The Handmaid's Tale*". *The Handmaid's Tale : Lire Margaret Atwood*. Presses universitaires de Rennes.

conventional: in order to rebel, Offred needs to go through a relationship with a man, instead of being the initiator of her own emancipation. Would not a true rebellion involve not needing a man at all?

3. Katniss' relationships: a more contemporary view?

In *The Hunger Games*, love also has an important role to play, since Katniss is involved in a love triangle throughout the whole trilogy. She is torn between Gale, her closest friend, and Peeta, the boy competing with her in the games, who are both in love with her. In the first volume of the trilogy, Katniss is not really interested in relationships (“There’s never been anything romantic between Gale and me”⁶¹ she declares, and after Peeta announced on television that he loved her: “”You had no right! No right to go saying those things about me!” I shout at him.”⁶². She tells the reader: “I had this whole speech worked out, about how I didn’t want a boyfriend and never planned on marrying [...]”⁶³), but in the following books, she starts having feelings for both of them. There is much to be said about this triangle and its interest in the story.

On the one hand, this situation can be seen as corresponding to a stereotypical pattern in young adult fiction, and fiction more broadly too: the female protagonist is reduced to her attractiveness and the desire she provokes in boys. It is frequent to encounter, in young adult novels, movies or televised series, this plot of one girl torn between two boys, and a big part of a story goes around this complexity and the character’s feelings. This is the case for example in *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer, or in *Vampire Diaries* by L.J. Smith. So once more with *The Hunger Games*, two boys love the main character and they both try to appeal to her...

But on the other hand, in the trilogy, these love stories are not brought to the forefront; actually they are almost secondary. The love plots are not the most developed elements of the novels, and before anything else they do not reduce Katniss to the desire she arouses in men. The protagonist’s character and personality are never reduced to her romantic issues, since she does not need men to be portrayed as a forceful heroine.

Moreover, in the first and second books, Katniss’ interest for Peeta is only forced by the needs of the game. Since the Hunger Games consist of a reality television program, she sometimes has to play a role in front of the camera. In the first book, she pretends to love Peeta

⁶¹ *The Hunger Games*, *op. cit.*, p.11.

⁶² *Ibid*, p.157.

⁶³ *Catching Fire*, *op. cit.*, p.33.

when they are in the arena, in order to move the audience, which starts to become attached to them: this is how they are able to get sponsors, consisting in items sent to them depending on what they need. The more they are liked by the viewers, the more they can receive food, weapons or medicine during the Games. In the second novel, *Catching Fire*, Katniss and Peeta continue this fake love story on television in order to maintain this image of “star-crossed lovers from District Twelve”, as they are called by the audience. But in private, she makes clear the fact that their relationship is fake: “*This is it. This is where I have to convince everybody how in love I am with Peeta, I think.*”⁶⁴

In the two first volumes, Katniss pushes Peeta away when the cameras are not shooting; she expresses with vehemence her annoyance, even if she is conscious that this trick will help her surviving.

“But we’re not star-crossed lovers!” I say.

Haymitch grabs my shoulders and pins me against the wall. “Who cares? It’s all a big show.

It’s all how you’re perceived.”

[...]

But now Peeta has made me an object of love. Not just his. To hear him tell it, I have many admirers. And if the audience really thinks we’re in love... I remember how strongly they responded to his confession. Star-crossed lovers. Haymitch is right, they eat that stuff up in the Capitol.⁶⁵

Even if she ends up sincerely loving Peeta afterwards, Katniss’ goals are primarily pragmatic rather than romantic. She pretends to be in love in order to survive, which is not an ordinary start for a love story. This scheme is very different from what could be expected in a piece of young adult fiction, and far from the traditional plotlines of fictional love stories. Her relationship with Gale is much more traditional since they are two childhood friends falling in love when they grow up, which makes it less relevant in my view. The evolution of their relationship is very conventional, just as the way they act with one another: Gale is very protective towards Katniss, but does she really need a man to protect her? This traditional side of the relationship is emphasized by Gale being jealous and possessive, and wanting Katniss just for himself. Katniss’ feelings towards Peeta are thus more complex and interesting to discover, because of their unusual aspect.

Near the end of the story, as in many other examples of young adult fictions, Katniss ends up “choosing” one of her suitors. In the epilogue to the last book, she is married to Peeta and they have two children. As mentioned earlier, it can be seen as very traditional and even stereotypical

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p.71.

⁶⁵ *The Hunger Games op. cit.*, pp.158-159

for a female protagonist to end her story by marrying and starting a family, even if Katniss' situation is more complex. But anyway it is interesting to notice that she did not chose Gale, the boy with whom her relationship appeared as the most conventional: she married Peeta, with whom her relationship had a chaotic and unusual start, based on acting and pretending. The evolution of their couple was much more complex throughout the trilogy, and it makes their relationship deeper and more interesting.

Conclusion

As examples of dystopian fiction *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Hunger Games* both depict totalitarian societies of a future North America, and both offer a different vision of women's roles. Each of these works contains several elements which can be linked to their historical and social context, and particularly feminism: the second wave for Margaret Atwood's novel, and the third wave for Suzanne Collins'.

On the one hand, women's rights in Gilead have been reduced, and some of them, like the narrator Offred, are used for the ability of their body to procreate. This is one of the most important elements of this dystopian system. On the other hand, in Panem, the dystopian society is totalitarian and tyrannical, but it is not oppressive on women more than on men. The equality between genders is balanced, and this can be seen as a proof a modern view of society on the part of the author. Thus, both novels, in different ways, can be considered as feminist for the ideas and values they convey: through the criticism of a patriarchal system like Gilead, or on the opposite, through the portraying of a strictly equal system between genders. Moreover, both novels include elements of feminism's movements from the time they were written.

The representation of female characters in these novels is also interesting: on the one hand, Katniss is portrayed as an almost superhuman heroine, with personality features traditionally assigned to men, such as an extraordinary strength and bravery. On the other hand, Offred is represented as more passive; but her evolution throughout the novel is a representation of her awakening and progressive emancipation from the system. In addition, Moira embodies qualities that are similar to Katniss': just as *The Hunger Games*' protagonist, she becomes a symbol of rebellion for others, and she inspires them.

Another point about women's representation is how they are portrayed through their relation to the others, particularly their roles in a family and a couple. In both novels, some plotlines are rather conventional. This is true for the family – Offred's situation before Gilead,

and Katniss' life in the epilogue: both characters are represented as wives and mothers, in the past for Offred, and in the future for Katniss. This conventional view is also true about their relationships with men: Katniss' stereotypical love triangle, and Offred's love affair with Nick. But in both novels, these situations can also be seen as challenging the traditional women's roles, even if it is implicit. It is particularly true in *The Hunger Games*, in which Katniss plays a paternal role in her family, and she has a relationship with a boy for her own interest – consisting on her survival.

Both stories bring different points of view and angles of approach about women's roles; and in their own ways, they contribute to challenging gender roles' stereotypes, and to offer new, positive representations of female protagonists.

Seconde partie – Présentation d'un projet pédagogique

Introduction

Cette seconde partie de mon mémoire, rédigée en français, sera dédiée à la présentation d'un projet pédagogique en lien avec le sujet que j'ai choisi, dans le but de rendre exploitable le thème défini avec des élèves du second degré.

J'ai choisi d'inscrire ce projet dans le cadre d'une séquence pédagogique dédiée à une classe de première LLCE. J'enseigne actuellement en collège et j'aurais souhaité pouvoir imaginer une séquence dédiée à l'une de mes classes actuelles, afin de la mettre en pratique et en faire un bilan réflexif ; cependant, le thème de mon mémoire ne me semble pas approprié pour des classes de collèges, et cela me paraît plus évident de mettre mon projet en lien avec les programmes de lycée. En effet, la thématique de la dystopie requiert de la part des élèves une certaine maturité ; le thème des personnages féminin dans cette littérature nécessite également une sensibilisation préalable aux inégalités de genre et au féminisme. De mon point de vue, seuls des élèves de lycée auraient la maturité et les connaissances nécessaires pour pouvoir envisager un projet autour de ces thématiques. De plus les œuvres choisies, particulièrement *The Handmaid's Tale*, présentent une certaine complexité, tant dans le contenu abordé que dans la difficulté linguistique : il ne serait pas réaliste d'étudier d'authentiques extraits de cette œuvre avec des élèves de collège, ayant un niveau A1 ou A2 en anglais.

Cette séquence, de part son thème et sa mise en œuvre, s'inscrit dans plusieurs domaines du socle commun de connaissances, de compétences et de culture. Tout d'abord, le domaine 1 : « Les langages pour penser et communiquer », et plus particulièrement dans le cadre de l'apprentissage de la langue anglaise : « Comprendre, s'exprimer en utilisant une langue étrangère », mais aussi « Comprendre, s'exprimer en utilisant les langages des arts et du corps » au travers de l'enseignement de la littérature, ainsi que l'analyse d'extraits d'œuvres cinématographiques ou télévisées. La séquence correspond également au domaine 2, « Les méthodes et outils pour apprendre » dans la mesure où elle permet l'acquisition d'outils méthodologiques transférables à d'autres disciplines (analyse, rédaction, organisation du travail personnel) ; ainsi que le domaine 3 : « la formation de la personne et du citoyen » :

Ce domaine fait appel :

- à l'apprentissage et à l'expérience des principes qui garantissent la liberté de tous, comme la liberté de conscience et d'expression, la tolérance réciproque, l'égalité, notamment entre les hommes et les femmes, le refus des discriminations, l'affirmation de la capacité à juger et agir par soi-même.⁶⁶

La thématique de la dystopie permet d'éveiller les élèves à certaines de ces questions, qu'il s'agisse de l'égalité des genres, ou le refus des discriminations – des valeurs mises à mal dans les sociétés décrites par les fictions dystopiques.

I – Présentation générale de la séquence

J'ai choisi d'aborder ce sujet à travers la thématique de la dystopie. Ce choix laisse de côté la réflexion sur les stéréotypes de genre dans les œuvres choisies, ou du moins il la fait passer au second plan. En effet, aborder cette question, en plus d'étudier la dystopie en tant que genre littéraire, rendrait la séquence trop dense et complexe, même pour des élèves de lycée. Il m'a donc fallu opter pour un aspect de mon sujet plutôt que l'autre, et j'ai préféré l'étude de la dystopie, qui correspond précisément au programme de lycée, plus particulièrement à celui du cycle terminal option LLCE (langues, littératures et cultures étrangères).

Mon projet pédagogique s'inscrit donc dans le cadre d'un enseignement en classe de première LLCE :

Ce programme vise une exploration approfondie et une mise en perspective des langues, littératures et cultures des quatre aires linguistiques considérées ainsi qu'un enrichissement de la compréhension par les élèves de leur rapport aux autres et de leurs représentations du monde.⁶⁷

La séquence que je vais proposer s'inscrit dans la thématique « Imaginaires » du programme de première LLCE, qui vise à explorer la fiction à travers différents genres, et éveiller les élèves à l'imagination : « À travers des genres comme la science-fiction, l'utopie et la dystopie, l'imagination offre en outre un miroir au réel qu'elle prolonge et déforme pour mieux le penser ». La thématique « Imaginaires » se décline en trois axes d'études ; mon projet sera focalisé, assez logiquement, sur l'axe « Utopies et dystopies », qui propose cette vision : « pour évoquer un reflet déformé du réel et mettre en garde le présent contre les dérives potentielles, dans une perspective critique et politique ». Cet axe est celui qui me semblait le plus approprié, étant donné son lien direct avec le thème que j'ai choisi, et puisque les œuvres

⁶⁶ "Socle commun de connaissances, de compétences et de culture", Bulletin officiel n°17 du 23 avril 2015.

www.education.gouv.fr

⁶⁷ Programme de langues, littératures et cultures étrangères - anglais - de première Générale.

de mon sujet, *The Handmaid's Tale* et *The Hunger Games*, présentent toutes deux des sociétés dystopiques.

L'entrée culturelle de mon projet est donc la dystopie, en tant que genre, étudié à travers des œuvres littéraires mais aussi cinématographiques représentatives du genre : parmi elles, les œuvres de mon corpus, mais aussi d'autres célèbres dystopies, comme *1984*. La thématique du droit des femmes serait elle aussi brièvement évoquée, notamment par le biais de *The Handmaid's Tale*, dont c'est l'une des thématiques principales. Cette thématique serait abordée tout en s'affranchissant des codes des habituelles séquences centrées sur le féminisme actuel (notamment avec le mouvement « #MeToo ») et en ouvrant cette perspective à d'autres horizons. Ainsi, le choix d'entrée culturelle permet d'aborder le thème de mes recherches tout en le rendant accessible à des élèves du secondaire.

Un objectif culturel essentiel ressort donc de ce choix de séquence : celui de la découverte d'un genre littéraire particulièrement important et populaire depuis des dizaines d'années dans la littérature anglo-saxonne, mais aussi dans la culture populaire (notamment pour *The Hunger Games*, qui est une œuvre de littérature jeunesse, et ses adaptations cinématographiques ayant rendu l'œuvre accessible au plus grand nombre). Un objectif citoyen – bien que secondaire dans la mesure où il ne constitue pas le fil rouge de la séquence, et n'est pas imposé pour la réalisation de la tâche finale – est celui de la sensibilisation à l'égalité des genres et la mise en valeur des personnages de fictions féminins.

J'ai opté pour l'ajout d'extraits des adaptations audiovisuelles des œuvres de mon corpus, en plus des extraits des œuvres littéraires. Ces adaptations (en série télévisée pour *The Handmaid's Tale*, et en une saga de films pour *The Hunger Games*) permettent à la fois de rendre le contenu plus accessible et attrayant pour les élèves ; mais aussi de proposer des activités de compréhension orale afin que cette séquence ne soit pas exclusivement centrée sur de l'écrit, malgré la réalisation d'une tâche finale écrite.

II – Objectifs

Dans cette partie, je vais détailler la tâche finale proposée pour cette séquence, ainsi qu'une tâche intermédiaire, et enfin la liste des objectifs attendus.

- **Tâche finale** : Expression écrite. « As part of a literary competition, write an incipit for a dystopian fiction. »

Cette tâche finale vise à mettre en œuvre les compétences des élèves en expression écrite ; rédiger l'incipit d'une œuvre dystopique permettra aux élèves à la fois de mettre en œuvre leurs connaissances linguistiques, mais aussi de réutiliser les codes d'un genre littéraire précis, et de laisser parler leur imagination dans la mesure où ils pourront inventer la dystopie de leur choix.

En première LLCE, un niveau B2 est attendu, tant en réception qu'en production. Pour l'expression écrite, le niveau B2 du CECRL ⁶⁸ correspond à : « Peut écrire des textes clairs et détaillés sur une gamme étendue de sujets relatifs à son domaine d'intérêt en faisant la synthèse et l'évaluation d'informations et d'arguments empruntés à des sources diverses. » / « Peut écrire des descriptions élaborées d'événements et d'expériences réels ou imaginaires en indiquant la relation entre les idées dans un texte articulé et en respectant les règles du genre en question. »

- **Tâche intermédiaire** : en expression orale en continu, les élèves devront présenter une œuvre dystopique déjà existante au choix, en justifiant pourquoi il s'agit d'une dystopie, et en explicitant ses éléments essentiels.

Je vais maintenant détailler les différents objectifs de la séquence, qui permettront la réalisation de la tâche finale.

- **Objectifs culturels.**

Les objectifs culturels de cette séquence sont donc la littérature dystopique et l'étude d'œuvres précises telles que *The Handmaid's Tale*, *The Hunger Games* et *1984*.

- **Objectifs citoyens.**

Les objectifs citoyens sont l'éveil aux questions d'égalité des genres, et aux discriminations. Comme pour l'objectif culturel, je ne développerai pas davantage puisque j'ai déjà détaillé ces points dans la précédente partie.

- **Objectifs lexicaux.**

Pour le lexique de la séquence, différents champs lexicaux devront être étudiés. Tout d'abord, tout ce qui se rapporte à la surveillance et à l'oppression (*surveillance*, *survey*, *oppression*, *inequality* ...). Ensuite, le vocabulaire lié aux sentiments et émotions, généralement négatifs,

⁶⁸ Cadre Européen commun de référence pour les langues – Apprendre, enseigner, évaluer. "Les descripteurs en un coup d'oeil", p.11.

générés par la vie dans un système dystopique (*dismay, outrageous, terror, to be scared, injustice...*). Et enfin, en lien notamment avec un extrait de *The Handmaid's Tale* que j'ai choisi d'inclure à cette séquence : le champ lexical du monde du travail (*fire, hire, work, job, director...*)

- Objectif phonologiques.

Dans la mesure où la tâche finale de cette séquence est une production écrite, les objectifs phonologiques ne sont pas aussi primordiaux que si elle avait consisté en une production orale. Cependant je pense qu'il serait pertinent de travailler sur la diphtongue /aɪ/, qui est présente dans de nombreux éléments mentionnés dans le lexique, mais aussi dans les titres des œuvres choisies. L'accentuation des mots porteurs de sens semble également pertinente, notamment en vue de la réalisation de la tâche intermédiaire.

- Objectifs grammaticaux.

La voix passive me semble être l'objectif grammatical le plus essentiel à une séquence centrée sur la dystopie (*are forced to, are oppressed by...*) : la structure passive est très utilisée dans le contexte d'un régime totalitaire où les citoyens subissent des actions, restrictions, et obligations. Les temps de la narration (preterit simple, preterit en BE + -ing) auront aussi leur importance pour la rédaction de la tâche finale. La modalité radicale est également un objectif essentiel (utilisation de *must, can, shall*) pour exprimer l'obligation ou l'interdiction ; une fois encore, dans le cadre d'un système dystopique, il est important de pouvoir exprimer ce que les citoyens doivent ou ne doivent pas faire.

- Objectifs pragmatiques.

La méthodologie de rédaction d'un incipit fait partie des objectifs de cette séquence, avec entre autres l'organisation des idées en paragraphes, l'utilisation de connecteurs logiques, et plus généralement l'apprentissage des codes de ce genre de texte. Le travail de groupe sera également développé au fil de la séquence : la collaboration, qui est une compétence transversale, sera notamment nécessaire pour la réalisation de la tâche intermédiaire, mais elle sera également mise en place lors de plusieurs activités.

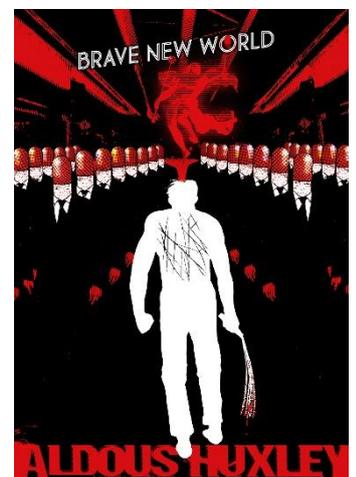
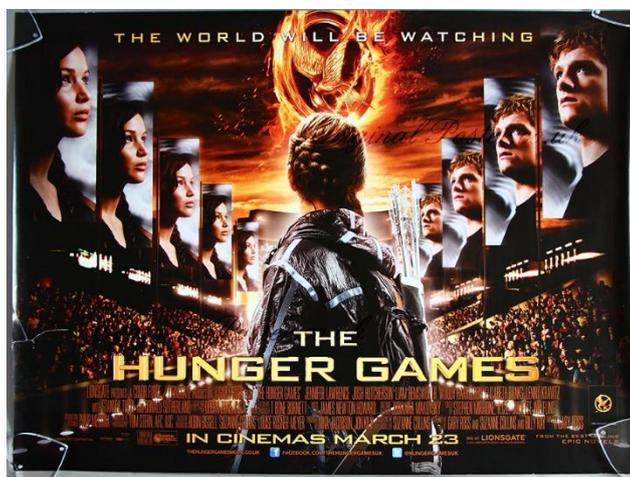
III – Plan de séquence et documents exploités

Cette dernière partie présente le déroulé global de la séquence, avec ses principales étapes.

Étape 1. Pour commencer, on proposera aux élèves une activité d'introduction au thème de la séquence. En imaginant le déroulé de ce projet dans un établissement équipé de tablettes pour les élèves, on proposera une activité numérique créée grâce à l'application « Learning App ». Ce site permet de créer des exercices interactifs en ligne contenant texte, image, audio, ou vidéo. Les exercices sont variés (mots croisés, questions/réponses, QCM, assembler une image ou un mot à une définition...). Simple d'usage, il peut être utilisé en classe sans problème.

L'activité visera donc à associer, sur l'écran, des noms de genres littéraires à la définition qui correspond à chacun. Les élèves devront retrouver les définitions de chacun des genres suivants : *dystopia*, *fantasy*, *fairy tale*, *gothic*, *detective story*, *science-fiction*, et *historical*. La définition de dystopia sera la même qu'évoquée dans la première partie de mon mémoire, c'est-à-dire celle issue du Cambridge Dictionary : “a very bad or unfair society in which there is a lot of suffering, especially an imaginary society in the future, after something terrible has happened [...]”⁶⁹

Dans un second temps, on pourra projeter au tableau – et rendre accessible aux élèves sur les tablettes – des affiches, posters et première de couverture d'œuvres dystopiques (quelques exemples ci-après) :



Les élèves décriront ce qu'ils voient sur les images. Ils identifieront également le message véhiculé par ces affiches : à l'aide de guidages avec des questions comme *What is the atmosphere like? How does that make you feel?* ils pourront identifier les émotions des personnages, et les messages portés par les inscriptions ou slogans comme « *Big Brother is watching you* » et « *The world will be watching* ». Suite à cette description, les élèves

⁶⁹ Cambridge Dictionary.

formuleront des hypothèses pour essayer de deviner de quel genre littéraire il s'agit, parmi tous ceux évoqués lors de l'activité de Learning App. (*I think it is dystopia, because I can see... / because the atmosphere is...*).

La description des images pourra permettre l'injection de nouveau lexique, qui sera noté dans les cahiers sous forme de carte mentale incluant plusieurs champs lexicaux. Avec une mise en commun en classe entière, il sera clairement identifié que chaque image correspond à une œuvre dystopique, et la rédaction de quelques phrases dans le cahier en trace écrite permettra aux élèves de reformuler leurs justifications. La présence d'affiches de films dans cette activité permettra également d'aborder le fait que la dystopie ne concerne pas seulement la littérature, mais qu'elle s'est aussi imposée sur le petit et le grand écran.

Etape 2.

Cette étape aura pour objectif de développer les caractéristiques inhérentes au genre dystopique, afin de ne pas se contenter d'une définition trop succincte, mais de s'ouvrir plus largement aux codes du genre. Ce sera également l'occasion de mentionner plusieurs œuvres connues.

L'activité consistera en une compréhension orale, à partir de la vidéo « Comment identifier une dystopie », de la chaîne Youtube TED-Ed.⁷⁰ L'intérêt de ce document est qu'il apporte une définition riche et détaillée de la dystopie, et donne des nombreux exemples d'œuvres célèbres, mais aussi de caractéristiques propres au genre, ou encore de changements historiques ou progrès scientifiques qui ont pu influencer les auteurs de ces œuvres. Un obstacle de cette vidéo est qu'elle est très longue pour une compréhension orale en classe (5 minutes et 55 secondes). Toujours dans l'optique où les élèves peuvent être équipés de tablettes, on pourra proposer un travail de groupes :

La vidéo sera d'abord visionnée une fois en entier pour tout le monde, et un guidage sera proposé pour la compréhension globale afin d'identifier le sens général du document. Ensuite, la vidéo sera divisée en plusieurs parties de durées similaires. Les élèves seront répartis en groupe, et chaque groupe aura un seul extrait de la vidéo à analyser (chacun pourra regarder et écouter sa vidéo de manière autonome, avec sa tablette et des écouteurs). Un guidage sera proposé aux élèves pour leur permettre une compréhension détaillée de leur partie du document.

⁷⁰ Gendler, Alex. "Comment identifier une dystopie", TED-Ed channel [Youtube video]
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6a6kbU88wu0>

Enfin, une mise en commun en classe entière visera à lister les codes de la dystopie, et citer des œuvres ou auteurs phares.

Suite à cette activité, les élèves resteront en groupes pour rédiger leur propre trace écrite. Ils devront formuler leur propre définition de la dystopie, en s'appuyant sur ce qu'ils auront appris pendant cette séance – en somme, une sorte de courte synthèse. Cette partie de l'activité permettra un travail collaboratif ; de plus, reformuler une définition avec leurs propres mots et des exemples concrets, permettra aux élèves de mieux s'appropriier le concept.

Enfin, des occurrences de structure passives dans la vidéo, pourront permettre de se focaliser sur une réflexion sur la langue. Des activités de repérages, puis de manipulations, permettront aux élèves de comprendre et s'appropriier cette structure, qu'ils auront besoin d'utiliser tout au long de la séquence.

Etape 3. Cette étape permettra de proposer aux élèves un exemple concret et détaillé d'un système dystopique en particulier. J'ai choisi pour cela un extrait de la première scène du film *The Hunger Games*⁷¹. Cette scène explique tout d'abord clairement en quoi consistent les Hunger Games, à l'aide d'une définition écrite qui défile à l'écran :

« From the Treaty of the Treason : In penance for their uprising, each district shall offer up a male and female between 12 and 18 at a public « Reaping ». These Tributes shall be delivered to the custody of The Capitol. And then transferred to a public arena where they will Fight to the Death, until a lone victor remains. »

Ensuite, quelques secondes de la scène montrent un présentateur de télévision qui interview l'organisateur des jeux – le tout se déroule dans un décor coloré, et les deux hommes ont des caractéristiques physiques particulières telles que des cheveux, ou des formes dessinées dans la barbe.

Et enfin, on aperçoit brièvement le District 12 où vit l'héroïne de l'histoire : un lieu très pauvre et peu accueillant. Dans cette scène, Katniss tient dans ses bras et rassure sa jeune sœur, qui vient de faire un cauchemar : celui d'avoir été sélectionnée pour participer aux Hunger Games.

⁷¹ Ross, Gary. (2012). *The Hunger Games*. 00'00 to 01'26
(the extract of the movie can be found here: "The Hunger Games First Scene HD", Youtube video : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v_weY7t6kq0) (accessed 12.04.2021)

La présentation d'un extrait vidéo peut être avantageux dans la mesure où la dimension visuelle apporte une aide non négligeable à la compréhension, grâce aux images, au ton sur lequel parlent les personnages, ainsi que l'atmosphère générale. Ces éléments, pour un premier exemple de dystopie, peuvent rendre le concept plus accessible aux élèves qu'un extrait de roman.

Cet extrait du film ne présente pas de difficulté linguistique particulière, mais le cadre extralinguistique peut poser problème, notamment par le fait que Katniss et sa sœur parlent à voix très basse. Le texte d'introduction, bien qu'à priori compréhensible pour les élèves, peut néanmoins représenter une difficulté dans la mesure où il défile assez rapidement à l'écran. Ainsi, après un premier visionnage de la vidéo, on peut envisager de proposer aux élèves des captures d'écrans du dit texte, afin qu'ils puissent le lire à leur rythme. Un élément facilitateur sur lequel les élèves pourront s'appuyer est notamment l'accentuation de mots porteurs de sens, en particulier lors de l'interview : *rebellion, together, to pay*.

Cette compréhension orale permettra aux élèves de mettre cette œuvre en relation avec la définition de la dystopie. Une compréhension globale visera à identifier qu'il s'agit d'un extrait d'œuvre dystopique, et que les règles de cet univers y sont présentées. Ensuite, la compréhension détaillée permettra aux élèves d'identifier tout d'abord en quoi consistent ces jeux. Dans le texte explicatif, de nombreux mots spécifiques à la situation sont écrits avec une majuscule : *Treaty, Reaping, Tributes, Capitol, Fight to Death*. On pourra proposer aux élèves des synonymes ou définitions en anglais, qu'ils devront associer au terme correspondant afin d'en saisir le sens. Ils pourront également identifier de quoi les jeunes filles discutent, et de quoi la plus jeune d'entre elles a peur. On emmènera également les élèves à comparer et opposer les deux parties de la scène : mettre en lumière les différences entre le district très pauvre, avec des personnages habillés simplement, et le plateau télévisé où les deux hommes sont maquillés, en costume, et avec des coiffures sophistiquées.

Ainsi, en guise de synthèse, les élèves pourront expliquer en quoi cette société est une société dystopique. (Exemples de production possible : *This is a dystopian society because children/teenagers are forced to take part in a game, in which they can die. / Only one of them can survive.*) Afin de manipuler la voix passive abordée précédemment, les élèves seront amenés à utiliser ces structures pour la réalisation de la trace écrite.

Une autre réflexion sur la langue peut être abordée suite à cette activité : cette fois-ci, elle portera sur les modaux. *Shall* apparaît plusieurs fois dans le texte explicatif. Si on peut

supposer que des élèves de premières sont déjà à l'aise avec *can* et *must*, il est possible que *shall* leur soit inconnu ; ainsi, une activité de repérage, de manipulation mais aussi de mise en perspective avec les autres modaux connus, est envisageable.

Etape 4. Réalisation de la tâche intermédiaire, déjà définie dans la partie précédente. On pourra proposer aux élèves une séance de *webquest* sur les tablettes, afin qu'ils fassent des recherches sur une œuvre dystopique de leur choix, en binôme. Ils finiront leur travail en *homework*, puis présenteront leur œuvre en classe à l'oral, et expliqueront en quoi elle est une dystopie. Cette tâche intermédiaire permet une nouvelle fois de développer le travail collaboratif mais aussi d'évaluer les compétences des élèves en expression orale en continu. Elle permet également aux élèves de se familiariser avec le concept de la dystopie ; ils auront besoin de connaissances pour réaliser leur tâche finale, et se focaliser sur une œuvre en particulier peut leur permettre d'étudier plus en détails les différents codes et éléments essentiels à une dystopie.

Par précaution, on demandera aux élèves de ne choisir aucune des œuvres étudiées dans la séquence : *The Hunger Games* qui aura déjà été abordé, mais aussi *The Handmaid's Tale* et *1984* qui seront étudiés ensuite. Si des élèves présentaient cette œuvre à l'oral, elles en révéleraient trop sur les prochains documents étudiés.

Etape 5. Si la première partie de cette séquence était axée avant tout sur la compréhension des codes de la dystopie, facilitée par des documents audiovisuels, il semble important maintenant de se focaliser sur des œuvres de littérature. J'ai donc choisi un extrait de *The Handmaid's Tale* : un flashback où Offred se remémore le jour où elle et ses autres collègues femmes ont perdu leur travail, avant que la protagoniste ne devienne une *Handmaid*. (Extrait : [Annexe 1](#)⁷²). Afin de ne pas aborder ce document de manière trop abrupte, on peut proposer une anticipation à partir de l'image suivante, issue de l'adaptation télévisée :



⁷² *The Handmaid's Tale*, pp.181-182.

Elle représente les *Handmaids*, vêtues de leur tenue caractéristique rouge vif, et portant le couvre-chef cachant leur visage. A partir de cette image, les élèves seront amenés à formuler des hypothèses quant au contexte et à la situation. Il sera important de relever que les personnages sont uniquement des femmes : cet indice sera d'une aide précieuse pour la compréhension du texte.

Pour ce qui est de la compréhension écrite de l'extrait du roman, les principaux obstacles sont certains mots de vocabulaire qui devront être étayés, en proposant des synonymes. Certains mots relatifs au monde du travail (notamment *fire*) sont nécessaires à la compréhension du document. Ensuite, un obstacle majeur est l'absence de ponctuation du dialogue. Les élèves peuvent être rapidement perdus entre la narration et le discours direct, ce qui peut freiner la compréhension du document. De plus, l'absence de contexte peut poser problème, tout comme l'absence de définition claire de l'identité des personnages : aucun prénom n'est donné. La narratrice n'est que « I / me », le directeur est mentionné une seule fois sous le nom « the director », puis il devient « he » pour tout le reste de l'extrait. Les collègues de la narratrice sont définies par « someone », ou « the woman who sat next to me ».

Certains éléments faciliteront néanmoins la compréhension du document. Les phrases sont généralement courtes, les modaux sont déjà connus des élèves, et on retrouve de nombreuses répétitions. De plus, certains élèves pourront potentiellement déjà avoir une idée du thème du texte, étant donné que *The Handmaid's Tale* est adapté en une série télévisée du même nom, diffusée actuellement et dont on peut voir beaucoup de publicités sur internet. Ceux qui auront déjà vu la série ou en auront entendu parler, pourront aider leurs camarades à décrypter le sens du document.

Pour la compréhension globale, les élèves seront guidés pour réussir à comprendre qu'il s'agit d'une scène de licenciement. Ils devront aussi comprendre la raison de ce licenciement, qu'il s'agit d'une loi et que c'est obligatoire ; avec notamment, vers la fin de l'extrait, la mention de personnes armées qui attendent à l'extérieur. Il n'est pas explicite que cette situation concerne uniquement les femmes : faire un parallèle avec l'image d'anticipation aidera les élèves à comprendre ce point.

Pour la compréhension détaillée, on demandera tout d'abord aux élèves de repérer le discours direct, qui n'est pas délimité par de la ponctuation. Ils pourront par exemple surligner ou souligner ce qui appartient au dialogue : visuellement, cela sera plus clair pour nombre

d'entre eux. Ils devront ensuite être capables d'identifier différentes informations selon les catégories suivantes : *people, place, time, action*.

Étape 6. En prévision de la tâche finale, où les élèves devront inventer les bases de leur propre univers dystopique, il serait intéressant de proposer la vidéo de l'interview de Suzanne Collins expliquant ses inspirations contemporaines pour *The Hunger Games*.⁷³ Ce document servirait, à l'aide d'une activité de compréhension orale, à faire comprendre aux élèves comment les inspirations ont été trouvées pour créer un tel univers. Il est intéressant de faire remarquer que les auteurs de dystopies s'inspirent d'éléments déjà existants pour créer les bases de leur histoire. Cela peut donner des idées aux élèves pour leur tâche finale : tirer ses idées de la réalité, tout en poussant certains éléments à l'extrême et dans leurs retranchements les plus négatifs.

Étape 7. Afin de pouvoir rédiger un incipit de fiction dystopique pour la tâche finale, il faudra que les élèves en étudient un exemple concret, et j'ai choisi l'incipit de *1984* ([Annexe 2](#)⁷⁴). Ce document permettra non seulement une compréhension écrite mais aussi un point de méthodologie pour la rédaction. L'intérêt majeur de ce document est qu'il pose les bases d'un univers dystopique. Il introduit un système sans pour autant rentrer dans les détails de la vie des personnages principaux. C'est ce qui est attendu des élèves pour la tâche finale : non pas raconter l'histoire personnelle d'un personnage, mais bien poser les bases d'un univers dystopique, et présenter les fondements de la société présentée.

Dans cet extrait, on découvre plusieurs éléments propres à une société dystopique : un slogan érigé par le régime totalitaire (*Big Brother is watching you*), des obligations clairement exprimées, une police spécifique (*Thought Police*), des outils technologiques futuristes (*telescreens*).

Pour la compréhension, certains mots de lexique un peu plus complexes devront être étayés, en donnant des images ou des synonymes.

Étape 8. Réalisation de la tâche finale : rédaction de l'incipit en classe.

Les élèves auront préparé un brouillon en amont, sous forme de notes ou de carte mentale. Les élèves ne devront pas apporter un brouillon consistant en un texte déjà rédigé, entièrement ou en partie, car le risque est qu'ils se soient aidés d'un outil de traduction (qui ne sont pas toujours fiables) ou bien d'une tierce personne, ce qui fausserait l'évaluation des compétences de l'élève

⁷³ I Read YA (2009, 18 August) Suzanne Collins Part 2 - Contemporary Inspiration. [YouTube Video]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zUTPQCYVZEO>

⁷⁴ Orwell, George. 1984.

en expression écrite. Lors de la rédaction en classe, les élèves pourront avoir accès à un dictionnaire s'ils en ont besoin. Les critères d'évaluation de cette tâche finale seront les suivants :

- Contenu (respect des codes de la dystopie, présence de plusieurs éléments relatifs à une société dystopique) : **5 points**
- Méthodologie (rédaction d'un incipit) : **3 points**
- Grammaire (avec notamment utilisation de structures passives, de temps de la narration et de modaux pour exprimer l'obligation/l'interdiction) : **5 points**
- Richesse et pertinence du lexique utilisé : **4 points**
- Orthographe : **3 points**

Autres précisions

En plus des tâches intermédiaire et finale, qui évalueront certaines compétences des élèves, il conviendra également de faire des évaluations de connaissances, notamment pour la grammaire et le lexique abordés pendant la séquence. En amont, des activités de Learning App pourront être proposées, en classe ou en *homework*, pour s'entraîner à utiliser le lexique au fur et à mesure de la séquence.

Annexe 1⁷⁵

About two o'clock, after lunch, the director came in to the discing room.

I have something to tell you, he said. He looked terrible; his hair was untidy, his eyes were pink and wobbling, as though he'd been drinking.

We all looked up, turned off our machines. There must have been eight or ten of us in the room.

I'm sorry, he said, but it's the law. I really am sorry.

For what ? somebody said.

I have to let you go, he said. It's the law, I have to. I have to let you all go. He said this almost gently, as if we were wild animals, frogs he's caught, in a jar, as if he were being humane.

We're being fired ? I said. I stood up. But why ?

Not fired, he said. Let go. You can't work here any more, it's the law. He ran his hands through his hair and I thought, he's gone crazy. The strain has been too much for him and he's blown his wiring.

You can't just *do* that, said the woman who sat next to me. This sounded false, improbable, like something you would say on television.

It isn't me, he said. You don't understand. Please go, now. His voice was rising. I don't want any trouble. If there's trouble the books might be lost, things will get broken... He looked over his shoulder. They're outside, he said, in my office. If you don't go now they'll come in themselves. They gave me ten minutes. By now he sounded crazier than ever.

He's loopy, someone said out loud; which we must all have thought.

But I could see out into the corridor, and there were two men standing there, in uniforms, with machine guns. This was too theatrical to be true, yet there they were : sudden apparitions, like Martians. There was a dreamlike quality to them; they were too vivid, too at odds with their surroundings.

Just leave the machines, he said while we were getting our things together, filing out. As if we could have taken them.

We stood in a cluster, on the steps outside the library. We didn't know what to say to one another. Since none of us understood what happened, there was nothing much we could say.

We looked at one another's faces and saw dismay, and a certain shame, as if we'd been caught doing something we shouldn't.

⁷⁵ *The Handmaid's Tale*, pp.181-182.

It's outrageous, one woman said, but without relief. What was it about this that made us feel we deserved it?

Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 1985. Pp. 181-182.

Annexe 2⁷⁶

It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen. Winston Smith, his chin nuzzled into his breast in an effort to escape the vile wind, slipped quickly through the glass doors of Victory Mansions, though not quickly enough to prevent a swirl of gritty dust from entering along with him.

The hallway smelt of boiled cabbage and old rag mats. At one end of it a coloured poster, too large for indoor display, had been tacked to the wall. It depicted simply an enormous face, more than a metre wide: the face of a man of about forty-five, with a heavy black moustache and ruggedly handsome features. Winston made for the stairs. It was no use trying the lift. Even at the best of times it was seldom working, and at present the electric current was cut off during daylight hours. It was part of the economy drive in preparation for Hate Week. The flat was seven flights up, and Winston, who was thirty-nine and had a varicose ulcer above his right ankle, went slowly, resting several times on the way. On each landing, opposite the lift-shaft, the poster with the enormous face gazed from the wall. It was one of those pictures which are so contrived that the eyes follow you about when you move. BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU, the caption beneath it ran.

Inside the flat a fruity voice was reading out a list of figures which had something to do with the production of pig-iron. The voice came from an oblong metal plaque like a dulled mirror which formed part of the surface of the right-hand wall. Winston turned a switch and the voice sank somewhat, though the words were still distinguishable. The instrument (the telescreen, it was called) could be dimmed, but there was no way of shutting it off completely. He moved over to the window: a smallish, frail figure, the meagreness of his body merely emphasized by the blue overalls which were the uniform of the party. His hair was very fair, his face naturally sanguine, his skin roughened by coarse soap and blunt razor blades and the cold of the winter that had just ended.

Outside, even through the shut window-pane, the world looked cold. Down in the street little eddies of wind were whirling dust and torn paper into spirals, and though the sun was shining and the sky a harsh blue, there seemed to be no colour in anything, except the posters that were plastered everywhere. The black moustachio'd face gazed down from every commanding corner. There was one on the house-front immediately opposite. BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU, the caption said, while the dark eyes looked deep into Winston's own.

⁷⁶ Orwell, George. 1984.

Down at street level another poster, torn at one corner, flapped fitfully in the wind, alternately covering and uncovering the single word INGSOC. In the far distance a helicopter skimmed down between the roofs, hovered for an instant like a bluebottle, and darted away again with a curving flight. It was the police patrol, snooping into people's windows. The patrols did not matter, however. Only the Thought Police mattered.

George Orwell, *1984*. 1949.

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Résumé

A travers l'étude des romans *The Handmaid's Tale* de Margaret Atwood, et *The Hunger Games* de Suzanne Collins, ce mémoire explore les questions de stéréotypes de genres et la représentation des personnages féminins dans les oeuvres littéraires de dystopie.

Mots-clés:

Atwood, Collins, women, gender roles, dystopia, feminism.