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Environmental discourse and the body in some dystopian novels

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ENVIRONMENTAL DISCOURSE AND THE BODY IN SOME DYSTOPIAN NOVELS.

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Environmental Discourse and the Body in some Dystopian Novels

INTRODUCTION

Science fiction is a literary genre that has gained recognition over the last two centuries, and that is now part of our everyday culture. Moviemakers have created masterpieces of science fiction that are classics of the western world. Literature also had its share of masterpieces that have become topics for class studies, like Shelly's *Frankenstein* or H.G. Wells' *Time Machine*. In an essay on Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* a cinema study teacher, David Desser, writes that science fiction appeals to the "lowest common denominator"¹ in audiences, which means that the genre deals with the most common interests among the population. Authors try to appeal to everyone, by portraying stories that everybody can understand and get involved in. For years, science fiction has been rejected by academic studies. It has been a few decades now since the genre has found its place in the hearts of scholars and academics. It may be due to the politicization of science fiction itself, which uses its success and large audience to tackle today's most important issues: science, technology, environment, politics, and consumerism, with a background of space battles or alien invasion. Space exploration has grown from entertaining space battles, like the classic *Star Wars* or super heroes from the outer world, like *Superman*, to

¹ Judith Kerman and David Desser, "Race, Space and Class: The Politics of SF Films from *Metropolis* to *Blade Runner*." *Retrofitting Blade Runner: Issues in Ridley Scott's Blade Runner and Philip K. Dick's Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State U Popular, 1991) 110.

stories about how human can survive in uncharted cosmos, making us aware of the smallness of one individual to the universe. These are stories of the most recent science fiction blockbusters: *Gravity*, *The Martian* or *Interstellar*. Science fiction has improved its quality, by using its futuristic dimension to tell stories of the future of humanity, or of what the world could become. Lawrence Buell, a professor at Harvard University and a famous ecocritic, deals with the issues of science fiction in his book *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*, and admits that:

Science fiction has taken a long time to win much respect from academic critics, including ecocritics. Many still think of it as pop stuff, not serious stuff. Recently, the situation has started to change [...] for a series of other reasons. These include literary studies' increasing interest in popular culture, science fiction's increasingly brain assimilation of the findings of leading-edge technologies like cybernetics, artificial intelligence, genetics, and body-machine hybridization generally, and –perhaps most decisively- an attendant turn toward experimental narrative modes: its montages with magical realism, the emergence of cyberpunk fiction and film.²

According to Buell, science fiction has adapted its contents to gain consideration from academic critics. Many science fiction authors now reject non-realistic elements, and base their novels on scientific facts and discoveries of our world. The goal is to overcome the negative connotations of science fiction as “not serious stuff”. Many authors now do researches and ask specialists before creating their fictional world: this is what Buell calls magic realism. Alain Damasio's *The Horde of Counterwind* has been primed for its poetic beauty but also for its magic realism: in a world in which the wind never ceases to blow, landscapes are different, fields are grown on slopes and trees have a different shape and curve. Even the NASA has launched itself into writing scientifically sound science fiction called ‘NASA-Inspired Works of Fiction’³, the first of which

² Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2005) 56.

³ Alexander Alter, “NASA Tries to Rewrite the Book on Science Fiction”. *The Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 10, 2014. Web. Accessed Jan. 17, 2016.

is Forstchen's *Pillar to the Sky*. For many scholars now, science fiction has become as relevant as any other literary genre: it is the writing of one possible future.

Science fiction, with its large pool of readers and its serious tone is relevant to academic studies. The writing of our future world provides reflective thoughts about our own society. The presence of today's world issues in those novels proves the authors' will to warn against a problem, to reveal some hidden truth about our society, or provide solutions for a better world. According to Desser, if a genre that was once mere entertainment becomes now political and polemical, it is worth a second look from academics: "The lack of politics being the rule in SF, the presence of politics becomes significant; the presence of an overtly questioning politics, a politics of controversy, becomes doubly significant." (Desser, 110) It becomes even more relevant when an issue fits so well into the genre, that it is now part of its gospel and can be found in many a novel: the environment.

Stories of apocalypse, of the Earth rebelling against human pollution, of humans going into space because the Earth has become uninhabitable, or of humans sickened by the pollution overflowing the Earth, have become part of the core of science fiction story-telling. These stories have reached even the most popular levels of culture, with Pixar's *Wall-E* or Netflix's *The 100*. About science-fiction, Buell concedes that "no genre potentially matches up with a planetary level of thinking "environment" better than science fiction does", and then adds: "for half a century science fiction has taken a keen, if not a consistent interest in ecology, in planetary endangerment, in environmental ethics, in humankind's relation to the nonhuman world." (Buell, 57) The literature of science fiction is the perfect literature for environment reasoning and to think the future of our environment. John Dean, a science fiction specialist, goes as far as claiming that the environment thinking of science fiction ennobled the genre. In the ninth volume

of *Science Fiction Studies*, he writes: “wilderness is another means which the literature of SF uses to bridge the 20th-century gap between the ‘high’ and the ‘low’ novel, the novel of intellect and the novel of action.”⁴ It shows the osmosis between the environment and science fiction; the environment is as important for science fiction as science fiction is important for the environment.

There is one type of science fiction that most takes advantage of this osmosis: dystopian novels. They are famous novels of science fiction that gave birth to the most classic science fiction books of the last century, with Orwell’s *1984* or Huxley’s *Brave New World*. Cinema also has its share of dystopian movies, with *Blade Runner*, *Metropolis*, or *Sin City*. Dystopian novels are still booming today, with the success of teen-literature dystopias: *The Hunger Games* or *Divergent* to list the most famous ones. In his *Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research Guide*, M. Keith Booker, an English teacher at the University of Arkansas who has developed a keen interest in science fiction studies, defines the dystopian genre as “literature that is the opposite of utopianism and warns against the negative consequences of utopian thoughts.”⁵ Huxley’s *Brave New World* advocates the dangers of Fordism and scientism, while Orwell’s *1984* addresses the issue of the utopian vision of communism. More recent teenage literature, like Scott Westerfeld’s *Uglies*, warns against the utopian city of Prettytown, a town in which everyone is pretty. Dystopian novels are novels that tackle social and political issues. Like a scientific experiment, they take an element of our society and focus on the consequences if the said element were too much on the rise; for example, beauty in *Uglies*, violence in Burgess’s *A Clockwork Orange*, or sexuality in Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*.

⁴ John Dean, “The Use of Wilderness in American Science Fiction.” *Science Fiction Studies* 9.1 (March 1982) 70.

⁵ M. Keith Booker, *Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research Guide* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1994) 3.

When it comes to the environment, dystopian novels introduce us to a world in which today's problems have taken over the Earth: pollution, technology or the extinction of species. The goal is to make its pool of readers realize what would happen in a few decades of keeping up with their daily habits. Dystopian novels have a prophetic dimension; they are birds of bad omen. There are two types of dystopian novels: the ones with a utopian setting, the closest to Booker's definition, which present a utopian world going wrong, and the despairing ones, which portray a hellish world. In both worlds, nature is often absent from the living place of the inhabitants: the city is the true icon of dystopian novels, and it is often a technological place to which wilderness does not belong. If nature exists in the city, it is artificially made. Tally, the protagonist of the *Uglies* saga, compares the naturalness of the forest with that of the city: "The forest to either side was a black void full of wild and ancient trees, nothing like the generic carbon-dioxide suckers that decorated the city."⁶ If there is no city, then the dystopian novel is set in an apocalyptic world, in which nature is nothing but darkness and rot, as in McCarthy's *The Road*, or a dangerous wild place, as in Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*.

The main environment in dystopian novels is the city. If nature exists, it is a remote place, either too wild for people to survive or without interest for anyone. For example, the savage reservations in *Brave New World* are areas of the world that were too expensive and difficult to civilize so that they became reservations for savages, in which they are left alone to live on their own, and people of the city come visit it like a safari. The focus of dystopian novels is not on these areas. At best, nature is an adjuvant to the story, at worst, it is an uncharted place in which man gets lost. In Lowry's *The Giver*, Jonas escapes the town in the unknown wilderness, not knowing what will happen next. However, there is a close link between pristine nature and the

⁶ Scott Westerfeld, *Uglies* (Simon Pulse: NY, 2009) 33.

city, since both places are always important for the protagonist of the story. They both play a great role in the making of a character. John the savage, in *Brave New World*, realizes he prefers to live unhappy in the reservation than happy but desensitized in the city:

The Savage nodded, frowning. "You got rid of them. Yes, that's just like you. Getting rid of everything unpleasant instead of learning to put up with it. Whether 'tis better in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing end them... But you don't do either. Neither suffer nor oppose. You just abolish the slings and arrows. It's too easy."⁷

We will see later why the wild seems more attractive to characters in dystopian novels than the city they live in, but, as John claims, life in the city is too dull, too idle, and does not seem natural for him. There is more to human life than mere idleness, and in John we can see the seeds of rebellion and violence that are of tantamount importance for dystopian main characters. Choosing the wild over the city is commonplace in these novels, for the characters and for the readers. The city of Panem in *Hunger Games* seems much less attractive than the eerie woods of District 12, untouched and uncorrupted. The forest of *Fahrenheit 451* is far less dangerous and more peaceful than the dystopian city. Dystopian novels engage us environmentally by making us side with an environment over another one.

When we start jotting down passages of dystopian novels that deal with nature, we first notice that the description of nature comes from the character's perspective. There are but few dystopian novels that do not describe the outside world through the eyes or the experience of their main character. Young adult dystopian novels, which always have a strong symbolic main character, always describe the world through their eyes. When Tally in *Uglies* describes the trees of the forests in the above-mentioned quote, it comes from her point of view and her experience

⁷ Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (New York: Perennial Classics, 1998) 191.

of the trees. Katniss in *Hunger Games* also experiences the city of Panem with her own eyes and her own experience of the world:

I try to imagine assembling this meal myself back home. Chickens are too expensive, but I could make do with a wild turkey. I'd need to shoot a second turkey to trade for an orange. Goat's milk would have to substitute for cream. We can grow peas in the garden. I'd have to get wild onions from the woods. I don't recognize the grain, our own tesserae [sic] ration cooks down to an unattractive brown mush. Fancy rolls would mean another trade with the baker, perhaps for two or three squirrels. As for the pudding, I can't even guess what's in it. Days of hunting and gathering for this one meal and even then it would be a poor substitution for the Capitol version⁸.

Here, she compares the meal she is offered in the city to what it would cost in District 12 and how many hunting hours it would take her. The quote shows several important points for our essay: Katniss has a stronger bond with the natural world than other people, as she knows how much natural resources it takes to make such a meal; she is also a stranger in a new environment, for she can only compare it with the forest she just left. The experience of food and wealth is seen through the eyes of a poor famished girl, and thus a simple meal takes great proportions and makes the readers realize things they take for granted are not as simple as it looks.

The experience of the environment is personal in these novels. It is not what we should experience, but what the character, to which we identify, experiences. The experience goes with the character's feeling towards an environment. Katniss feels homesick and out-of-place in the city. Winston in *1984*, feels healthy and strong when escaping in the clearing and then in his apartment above the antique dealer shop. The experience of the environment is both moral and physical. The reaction of the body to elements of the environment is at the core of the character's feelings towards their environment. For example, Winston's reaction to the food the Party gives him hints us about his feelings for the government set by the Party: "always in your stomach and

⁸ Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games* (New York: Scholastic, 2008) 75.

your skin there was some sort of protest, a feeling that you had been cheated of something that you had a right to.” (Orwell, 62) Because Winston’s body feels cheated, he knows there is something wrong with the world he lives in. It is proof that body memory cannot be manipulated. This feeling that something is wrong will get him to rebel against it and break the laws of the Party, in order to change the world.

The reason why Winston feels cheated seems to be because he is given artificial food to eat. His body cannot bear the artificial, and assimilates it with difficulty. It should remind Winston that his body is natural, biological, and thus has to be fed with natural products. Everything artificially-made seems synonymous with sickness. In the technological city of dystopian novels, the body is often the last remaining natural entity left, in a world replaced by machinery and gears. In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* animals have almost entirely disappeared replaced by androids. The last remaining beings on Earth are humans, all about to disappear. Because its environment has been deprived of natural elements, the body has to cope with artificial and man-made elements, which all the time results in a character suffering from sickness, starvation, bad appearance and overall unhealthiness. Figuratively, the city is responsible for the body afflictions in dystopian novels. Opposed to the city is pristine, wild nature, in which the body rejuvenates. Katniss’s strong connection with the woods saved her: by escaping the District and finding shelter in the forest, she managed to survive and become healthier as she claims in the following quote:

The woods became our savior, and each day I went a bit farther into its arms. It was slow-going at first, but I was determined to feed us. I stole eggs from nests, caught fish in nets, sometimes managed to shoot a squirrel or rabbit for stew, and gathered the various plants that sprung up beneath my feet. Plants are tricky. Many are edible, but one false mouthful and you're dead. I checked and double-checked the plants I harvested with my father's pictures. I kept us alive. (Collins, 62)

There are two areas in dystopian novels: pristine nature, which provides the characters with what they need, and the city, which, on the contrary, is responsible for their afflictions.

The villain of dystopian novels is above all the city itself. It is the malevolent predator looming over the frail bodies of the human race. Environmentally speaking, by showing the effects of technology on the body, dystopian authors argue for a return of humans to the natural world, away from the comfort of the city and technology. The in-depth problem is however not that we, as humans, are victims of the technological city. The problem is that we are oblivious to it, and we need strong leaders to make us realize it and put us back on tracks. The mission of main characters in green dystopian stories might very well be this, to make the reader identify with them and follow their path. If teenage girls subscribe more and more to archery lessons after seeing *The Hunger Games*⁹, then such strong symbolic characters can efficiently induce environmental consciousness in the mind of their readers and spectators.

The complete disconnection from the natural world in favor of comfort and technology is the great doom of today's society. By showing a severed bond between the natural world and us, dystopian novels make us realize the disastrous consequences of human hubris on the human body integrity. As long as humans believe themselves as entities which can separate themselves from their biological dimensions, they will most likely provoke the end of the human race, and the end of the world. Consequently, dystopian novels raise the question of where to put the limits between men as victim or men as executioner when it comes to environmental issues. It raises the question of who is the real villain of the story.

⁹ An entire article about the success of archery lessons for girls in the United States can be found here : <http://www.npr.org/2013/11/27/247379498/more-girls-target-archery-inspired-by-the-hunger-games> (Accessed April 4, 2016.)

By turning green, dystopian novels share a common focus on the human body itself. The description of the pain and suffering inflicted to the human bodies by a malevolent government and city puts humans as the victims of technology. However, dystopian novels depict characters who are barely aware of their connection with nature, and it often takes an experience within the natural world to remind them that they are responsible for their own ordeal. In the end, who is truly responsible for environmental problems, the machines of the city, or human hubris? Are humans victims of ecological disasters, or their own executioners? What side do dystopian novels take? Are they entirely technophobic or do they convey a more nuanced message to help the environmental cause?

This essay will try to give an answer to the questions about the true meaning of the environmental messages conveyed by dystopian novels. In order to have the best possible answer, it will focus on the role played by the body and sexuality of a character to describe the relation man has with nature and the city. The goal of this essay is to draw conclusions about human responsibility towards the environment and human body issues. As a consequence, the first part will deal with the dystopian focus on the body itself, since the tension between the character's body and dystopian novels must be shown. The amount of physical descriptions of dystopian novels, as well as the changes occurring to the body in a given environment, are used to engage the reader ecologically. Through the eyes of their characters, authors try to involve the reader emotionally and physically to the environmental cause, by showing the effects of said environment on the character's body integrity.

The second part then focuses on the environment responsible for the degradation of the body in dystopian novels: the city. By presenting the body as the last remaining element of the natural world in the city, it becomes a battlefield between two forces: the wild and the

technological. Technology, the great villain of dystopian novels, tries to control, invade, and replace the human body with machinery and gears, to eliminate the uncertain -the wild- and create a world in which everything is controllable. In dystopian novels, the bond between nature and mankind has been severed, and the goal of the characters is to find it back.

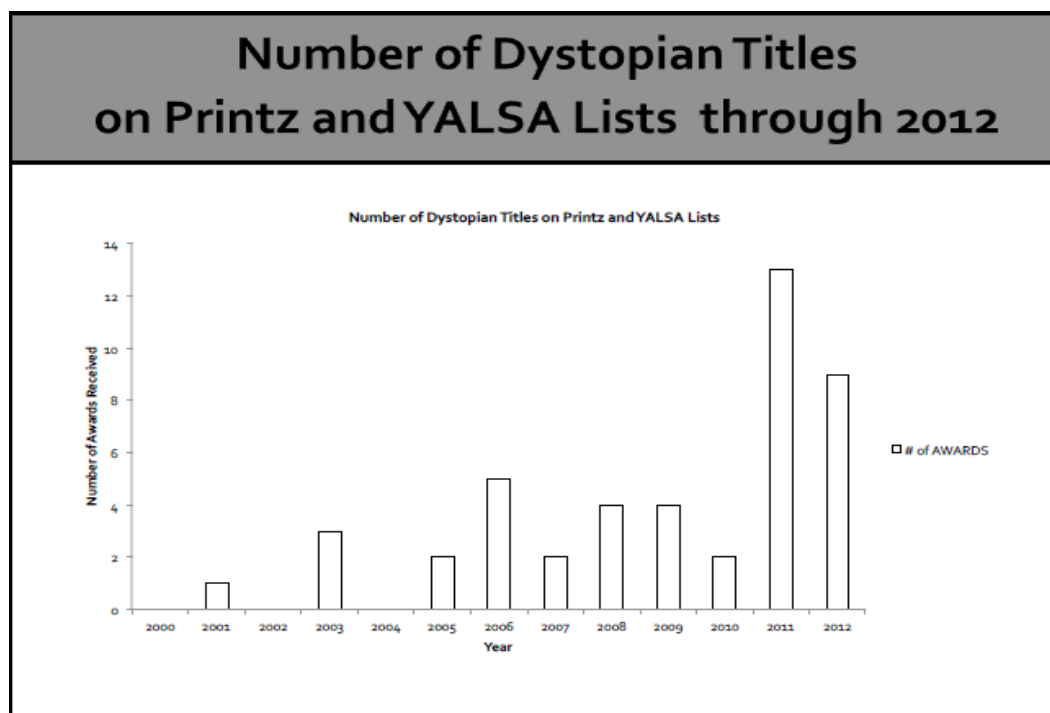
The third part deals with the character's return to nature. The experience of the natural world is a mandatory step in dystopian novels, as it forges their rebelling behavior. The comparison between the effects of the natural world on their bodies and those of the city makes them realize that something is wrong about their living conditions. The natural world is but an adjuvant of the story. Wild nature is a sanctuary for men, not a place for men to stay. It welcomes them, helps them find back what the city has deprived them of, and sends them off with a mission: to defeat the technological city. In nature, man finds transcendence, and a new meaning for his life.

Finally, the conclusion will try to give an answer to the true meaning of the green dystopian novel. By focusing on the effects of the environment on the body, dystopian novels make us aware of the effects of the city on ourselves. However, it only takes our own will to change how things are going. By running away from our comfortable lives and fighting to reintroduce the natural world in our environment, we may be able to escape the path towards doom we previously chose. The real goal is not to show that technology is the malevolent force responsible for our doom, but to take responsibilities and adapt a line of conduct in accordance with the natural world. We must not forget we only are natural beings.

1 DYSTOPIA TURNS GREEN: A FOCUS ON HUMAN BODY IN RELATION TO THE ENVIRONMENT.

1.1 DYSTOPIA: A GOOD CANDIDATE FOR CONVEYING GREEN MESSAGES.

Dystopian novels are the booming genre of the 21st century. The immense successes of classics like *1984* or *Brave New World* back in the 20th century have given birth to several offspring, mostly in the young adult section. This graph taken from Linda Gann and Karen Gavigan's introduction to young adult dystopian novels¹⁰ gives an indication to understand the increasing number of young adult dystopian novels for the past ten years.



¹⁰ The support for their conference can be found online at:
http://www.ala.org/aasl/sites/ala.org.aasl/files/content/conferencesandevents/ecollab/resources/aasl13_Other_Side.pdf
(Accessed April 17, 2016.)

The graph shows the number of dystopian novels on the lists for two awards given to young adult literature. The booming of the dystopian genre aimed at a younger audience started in 2006 and has been increasingly developing for the last ten years. Collins's work *The Hunger Games* has become a milestone of the genre, which sold more than fifty million copies. Even though dystopian novels have only recently found their way into the hearts of their readers, the success of the genre is older than what the graph claims. The story of Winston in *1984* is renowned and is a recurring figure in our culture. Huxley's *Brave New World*, a century old novel, is becoming more and more a prophetic book as we are heading towards the same kind of society it depicts. A society in which technology reigns, in which people take drugs to forget the harshness of life and in which babies are created in laboratories. Cautionary tales are part of the western culture, and their prophetic dimension appeals to everyone. Dystopian novels are well-fit to convey environmental messages. By appealing to a large audience about what the future could become, their environmental messages have an even greater impact than that of other green stories. Even more so if the stories appeal to a younger audience, for they are the builders of our future.

1.1.1 A hope for our future.

The notable difference between the two types of dystopian novels, the ones for young adult readers and the ones for an older audience is in the ending. To say that dystopian novels targeting an older audience are more violent is a misconception. On the contrary, it seems that dystopian novels for young adults are equally violent. Collins does not hesitate to kill little children in her novel. Violence is not avoided, and the world in which the young protagonist lives might be even darker. However, as Laura Miller says in an article about dystopian novels in *The*

New Yorker, “the grownup ones are grimmer.”¹¹ First, because sexuality is almost never mentioned in the young adult ones, while grownup ones use it a lot. In *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood describes a world ruled by sex and violence. The pornography teenagers see every day pushes the limits of violence and of political correctness. Pedophilia, extreme orgies and rape have become the norm on the web, and also in real life. Additionally, the second difference is a hopeful ending. The hero defeats the dystopian government, and sets a new one in which everyone lives at peace, away from the control of the city, as in *The Hunger Games* or *Divergent*. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss brings down President Snow’s oppressive government. As a result, the games are over, and she raises her children in a peaceful world. Hughes, in an article about young adult dystopian fiction, declares that “you may lead a child to darkness, but you can’t turn off the light.”¹² It is not possible to tell to our future generation that they cannot change the world. For the environmental agenda, telling them that our world is doomed would have the opposite effect of what is intended. Jim Dwyer, in *Where the Wild Books are*, makes the distinction between “true” and “false” cautionary tales, and claims that “in dystopian fiction, if we are all on the verge of extinction anyway, why should we change our behavior?”¹³ He asserts that dystopian fictions cannot be too despairing if they want to have an environmental impact on the readers. Young adult fictions, with their hopeful ending, thus become perfect candidates for conveying environmental messages, and they should not be underestimated.

¹¹ Laura Miller, “Fresh Hell.” *The New Yorker* (June 14th, 2010) 132.

¹² Monica Hughes, “The Struggle between Utopia and Dystopia in Writing for Children and Young Adults,” *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults* (New York: Routledge, 2003) 156.

¹³ Jim Dwyer, *Where the Wild Books Are: A Field Guide to Ecofiction* (Reno: U of Nevada, 2010) 63.

1.1.2 Fear of the apocalypse and environmental agenda.

The despairing tone of dystopian novels is conveyed by the setting. In most dystopian novels, it is bleak, oppressive and gloomy, with a futuristic background. McCarthy's masterpiece *The Road* offers us a vision of what a depressing post-apocalyptic dystopian world looks like:

The land was gullied and eroded and barren. The bones of dead creatures sprawled in the washes. Middens of anonymous trash. Farmhouses in the fields scoured of their paint and the clapboards spooned and sprung from the wallstuds. All of it shadowless and without feature. The road descended through a jungle of dead kudzu. A marsh where the dead reeds lay over the water. Beyond the edge of the fields the sullen haze hung over earth and sky alike. By late afternoon it had begun to snow and they went on with the tarp over them and the wet snow hissing on the plastic.¹⁴

In the novel, the land is cluttered with dead bodies and human waste. Nature has left the fields barren, houses are dilapidated, and everything has lost its shape and its magnificence. The use of strongly connoted adjectives and verbs like “dead”, “sullen”, “gullied”, “barren” and “shadowless” makes the setting depressing, and almost monstrous. There is no life left. *The Road* is an awe-striking novel mostly because of its setting. A good dystopian novel is a novel capable of setting a world so depressing that it induces despair and gloom in the minds of its readers. April Spisak, a journalist for *The Horn Book*, a web magazine for young adult literature, writes that one of the key ingredient to dystopian novels is “a setting so vividly and clearly described that it becomes almost a character in itself.”¹⁵ The goal of the setting is to strike fear in the mind of the audience. Repulsion is at the core of cautionary tales. True cautionary tales are stories that make the reader be repulsed by what the future they are describing implies. The goal is to make

¹⁴ Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006) 189.

¹⁵ April Spisak, “What Makes a Good YA Dystopian Novel?” *The Horn Book* (April 27, 2012) 4th paragraph. Web. (Accessed April 17, 2016.)

the audience fear for their destiny, to make them not want to live the same life as described in the books. The setting is an important tool for dystopian novels, and thus, it can also become an important tool for the environmental agenda.

Environmentalists play along with the fear-inducing dimension of dystopian novels. Cautionary tales introduce us to two different kinds of settings: the despairing one, as in *The Road*, and the utopian one, as in *Brave New World*. While both settings have their flaws and can be fear-inducing, the first one, with its post-apocalyptic tone, has been used over and over by environmental activists. Lawrence Buell claims that “apocalypse is the single most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal,”¹⁶ which proves the importance of dystopian novels and science fiction for environmental discourse. By using the most powerful metaphor that the environmental imagination has, the novels fit into the environmental agenda.

1.1.3 Making an example out of the protagonist.

Their large audience and their apocalyptic setting make dystopian novels great candidates for environmentalism. In addition to these, a symbolic main character is also great for conveying environmental messages. According to Spisak, one of the other four elements that should be in dystopian novels is the presence of “protagonists who are shaped by their environment and situations.” (Spisak, 4th paragraph) It should be added that dystopian novels also have emblematic main characters who are indeed shaped by their environment and situation. The story of dystopian novels revolves around the main characters’ reactions when they discover that the society they live in is but a lie. Then, they either choose to escape the city, or fight against it. In

¹⁶ Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap of Harvard UP, 1995) 285.

any case, the story follows the development of a character, from a mere inhabitant of the city to a rebel trying to find a way out. What is important to understand is that this character is a regular person. He has no superpowers, no superior intelligence and no super strength. The only thing that seems to differentiate him from the others is the discovery that something is wrong with his environment. The illusion that the city has tried to cast in his mind fades, and he faces reality. Laura Miller in her article perfectly sums up that process in dystopian novels:

Then somebody new, a misfit, turns up, or the hero stumbles on an incongruity. A crack opens in the façade. If the society is a false utopia, the hero discovers the lie at its very foundation: The Pretties are lobotomized when they receive their plastic surgery; the residents of Jona's community have been drained of all passion. If the society is frankly miserable or oppressive, the hero will learn that, contrary to what he's been told, there may be an alternative out there, somewhere. Conditions at home become more and more unbearable until finally the hero, alone or with a companion, decides to make a break for it, heading out across dangerous terrain. (Miller, 134)

It is important to remember that the hero is a random person. By choosing a character that could be the reader, once brainwashed by the society, then rebelling against the city, authors make an example out of him. If a character who thinks and looks like a regular person can achieve such a feat, so can the reader. That is the reason why Katniss has had so much impact on teenage girls; she has her flaws, she is not pretty, but she still manages to change her society. She is like everyone else, yet, she can change the world. For environmental purpose, if a character in a dystopian novel becomes an example to follow, it is easier to instill eco-friendly habits and ideals in the audience. Authors just need to turn their characters into ecologically conscious models.

As a conclusion, dystopian novels are great candidates for green stories due to several of their elements: their futuristic tone and their setting, a strong character as an example to follow, and a large audience. These novels are almost guaranteed to have a strong impact if they manage

to touch on a large pool of readers. As a result, they become important for the environmental cause, as they can convey the environmental agenda among a large population, from children to adults.

1.2 THE BODY AS A FOCAL POINT IN DYSTOPIAN NOVELS.

The hero of dystopian novels is a regular person who is shaped by his environment and his situation. Since he serves as an example to follow and to identify with, the description of his body is important: it often helps with the process of identification.

1.2.1 Degradation of the appearance.

Without an idea of the appearance of a character, it is harder to picture them, and to identify with them. Moreover, the more regular a body looks, with its flaws, its scars and its disproportions, the easier it becomes to identify with it. Heroes in dystopian novels are regular persons, with a regular body: they are neither exceptional nor beautiful. Winston is a middle-aged man with health issues and a slim, shapeless body. In *Uglies*, Tally is a girl who finds herself ugly compared to the beauty standards of the society. Every natural flaw on her body is a mark of her ugliness that should be corrected by science. After missing the surgery, the frustration she feels for her natural ugliness is at its climax:

She had been an ugly for four years, but a few extra days had brought home to her exactly what the word really meant. Tally peered into her mirror all day, noting every flaw, every deformity. Her thin lips pursed with unhappiness. Her hair grew even frizzier because she kept running her hands through it in frustration. A trio of zits exploded across her forehead, as if marking the days since her sixteenth birthday. Her watery, too-small eyes glared back at her, full of anger. (Westerfeld, 116)

Every feature of her body that is not as perfect as those in the magazines are utter flaws for Tally, to the extent that she becomes angry, and unhappy with the way she looks. Tally has a regular look, and that brings her closer to her audience. Any teenage girl that does not look like the girls in magazines can understand some of Tally's frustration. A bond is then created between the young reader and the hero.

Tally is not a unique case. Dystopian main characters are often angry with the way they look, and attach great importance to their appearance and to what their body has become. Some of them are even surprised by the sudden and radical changes their body underwent: surgery in Tally's case, or changes due to the stress and pressure the body is put under. The surprise they feel can also be explained by the quasi absence of mirrors in dystopian novels, to the extent that these characters cannot but feel outraged at their new appearance. The only exception might be *Uglies*, considering the novel is about controlling people with beauty standards. Tris, the hero of *The Divergent Series*, explains that she is only allowed to look at herself in a mirror once a month. This measure is to stop people from developing a conceited view of themselves: "there is one mirror in my house. It is behind a sliding panel in the hallway upstairs. Our faction allows me to stand in front of it on the second day of every third month, the day my mother cuts my hair."¹⁷ Later in the novel, Tris finds another mirror, and she finally can look at herself after months. The shocking realization comes out as follow: "I look at my reflection in the small mirror on the back wall and see a stranger. She is blond like me, with a narrow face like mine, but that's where the similarities stop. I do not have a black eye, and a split lip, and a bruised jaw. I am not as pale as a sheet. She can't possibly be me, though she moves when I move." (Roth, 119) The changes her body underwent during the few months she spent in an extremely stressful environment are huge,

¹⁷ Veronica Roth, *The Divergent Series* (New York: Harper Collins, 2013) 1.

and Tris does not seem to have realized the impact of the Dauntless training on her. It is only when she finally looks at herself that she becomes aware of her condition. She is worse off than she thought she was, she is bruised and disfigured so much that she does not even recognize herself. While these changes are a good thing for Tris in the series for it means that she is becoming a warrior, with her bruises and her scars, the sudden and shocking realization she suffers from is a recurring event in these novels. She is oblivious to what is happening to her until she sees herself in a mirror.

The idea that she cannot recognize herself also means she has lost her identity, which is a common element in many dystopian novels. These two quotes taken respectively from *The Hunger Games* and *1984* show that aspect of these novels: Katniss claims that “I can hardly recognize myself in the cracked mirror that leans against the wall.” (Collins, 17) In Orwell’s book, when O’Brien asks Winston to look at himself in the mirror to see what he, the “guardian of the human spirit” (Orwell, 283), really looks like, he cannot believe what he has become either: “he had stopped because he was frightened. A bowed, grey-coloured, skeleton-like thing was coming towards him. Its actual appearance was frightening, and not merely the fact that he knew it to be himself [...] At a guess, he would have said that it was the body of a man of sixty, suffering from some malignant disease.” (Orwell, 284) Under the pressure these characters are put through in the dystopian city, their bodies change until they cannot recognize them any longer. The environment and the conditions they live in have shaped them in a certain way they would not have expected. In their minds, they wallow in the illusion that everything is fine, until they see what they look like. Winston believes himself strong in his mind until the mirror scene, in which he sees that he is only a strong mind in a weak body, and that this weak body will break him: “before he knew what he was doing he had collapsed onto a small stool that stood beside the

bed and burst into tears. He was aware of his ugliness, his gracelessness, a bundle of bones in filthy underclothes sitting weeping in the harsh white light: but he could not stop himself.” (Orwell, 285) The sudden shock of seeing his body reminds him that there is nothing he can do to halt the Party, and the despair induced by his appearance makes him give up. The mirror scene is the last torture before the rat scene, in which Winston’s body and mind finally breaks down and he loses to the Party.

It seems that after suffering physical and mental torture, the thing that finally breaks Winston is the look at his appearance, and the realization of his ugliness and weakness. He was strong until he spent minutes looking at his frail body, made useless by months of pressure. In *Uglies*, the thing that pushes Tally into escaping the city is when she sees herself in the mirror, after she was refused the surgery, as seen in the above-mentioned quote. The frustration created by the way she looks is responsible for a change in her behavior. If the appearance of a character has such a strong impact on the story, then the lack of mirrors is just another way of controlling the population. By preventing them from looking at themselves and from seeing the changes on their bodies, the dystopian government avoids the realization process. That way, characters cannot be aware of the degradation of their appearance and they keep thinking that everything is going fine. To stop these characters from rebelling, the dystopian government does not allow them to have the shocking experience of the mirror. In *1984*, Winston was not allowed to look at himself, and it was O’Brien’s plan to use the shocking experience of the mirror to break his willpower. Dystopian novels use the mirror and the appearance of the characters to control them. For example, the presence of mirrors in *Uglies* makes people feel good about themselves and makes teenagers feel bad about being ugly. As a consequence, the only thing they long for is the surgery, during which the government lobotomizes them.

1.2.2 An overall temporal degradation of the body in dystopian novels.

If there are few mirrors in dystopian novels, it is due to the overall degradation of the body everyone suffers from. The effects of an unhealthy environment are carved onto the body. Characters are not aware of the way they live until they can put their hands on a mirror and see it themselves. Thus, dystopian governments have to control that aspect of the novel. Orwell's novel, and *Uglies*, both depict the way the city influences how its inhabitants see themselves. In Orwell's London, the Party sets an ideal of beauty that does not correspond to the reality. Winston made a remark on that matter: "how easy it was, thought Winston, if you did not look about you, to believe that the physical type set up by the Party as an ideal -tall muscular youths and deep-bosomed maidens, blond-haired, vital, sunburnt, carefree- existed and even predominated." (Orwell, 63) The additional remark "if you did not look about you" is of tantamount importance to understand that the Party wants to make them feel that everything is right in society. Even if one individual looks ugly, the rest of London looks handsome. As long as the inhabitants of London do not look at themselves in the mirror, they can indulge in thinking that under the Party, beautiful men and women are created. But if anyone has a closer look, they can see that reality is different. Winston then adds: "People in Airstrip were small, dark and ill-flavored. Beetle-like. Little dumpy men, growing stout very early, short legs, fat inscrutable faces with very small eyes. That type seemed to flourish best under the dominion of the Party." (Orwell, 63) Here, we can see how different men look in the Party's ads and in reality. Dark and ill-flavored are opposed to vital and blond-haired, tall and muscular to little dumpy men, beauty is opposed to ugliness. Thus, unlike what the Party is trying to make people believe, the

oppression of the government has a great impact on the characters' appearances. The more pressured they are, the uglier they become.

The changes to the body of the characters are an interesting focus to understand the effects and consequences of the environment. Snowman in *Oryx and Crake*, like every main character in these novels, is anxious about the way his body looks, but there is nothing he can do about it. At the beginning of the novel, we read this description of Snowman: "he looks down at his body with dismay: the grimy, bug-bitten skin, the salt-and-pepper tufts of hair, the thickening yellow toenails."¹⁸ Snowman is dismayed by what he can see of his body, and even more so when he finds a mirror half past the novel. Snowman's body is the result of his living conditions: the weird colors, the bug-bitten skin, the worn out look, and there is nothing he can do to change it. The feeling of hopelessness is shared with characters like Winston, when he thinks: "I am not even able to prevent the decay of my own body." (Orwell, 276) The idea that there is nothing they can do to change their environment is at the core of dystopian novels. However, main characters distinguish themselves from other characters because they understand that there is a way out of this situation. They are characters who find a way out of the government and use it to escape or to act. In Winston's case, this line appears at the end of the novel, and it shows Winston's delusion; he is powerless. Orwell's novel is depressing to the point that his hero gets stomped by the force of the Party, which has become way too powerful for a single human being to be able to rebel. But at one point of the novel, Winston thought it was possible to oppose the Party, and that made him a hero.

1.2.3 Health issues and environment.

¹⁸ Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (London: Virago, 2013) 11.

The effects of the environment on the body in dystopian novels are not solely on the appearance of the characters: their health is also at stake. Health problems due to bad living conditions are the key problems characters are facing in these novels, and they are the reason why they rebel against the government. The entire plot of *The Handmaid's Tale* revolves around the pollution of the Earth that has turned most humans sterile. The oppression of the women in the novel is only due to environmental problems. Stephen King's novel, *The Running Man*¹⁹, has the same kind of plot. Pollution is overflowing the Earth, and everyone is suffering from lung cancer. Poor people who cannot pay for an oxygen mask participate in TV shows to earn money, putting their lives at risk. Ben Richards, the main character, participates in a famous TV show called 'The Running Man' in which he has to escape the police forces with a kill on sight order for thirty days. He accepts to participate in it to earn money to save his little daughter who has an early tuberculosis. In *1984*, Winston's living conditions make him sick. He often has fits of coughing and suffers from back problems. During the Physical Jerks, Winston is unable to do the exercise properly: "Winston loathed this exercise, which sent shooting pains all the way from his heels to his buttocks and often ended by bringing on another coughing fit." (Orwell, 38) The oppression of the government set by the Party weakens Winston's body, making him not physically strong enough to rebel.

These novels introduce us with a concept that we are well-aware of, the fact that the environment influences our health. The character's health cannot thrive in these oppressive, gloomy, depressing worlds. The characters living in a despairing, polluted environment, all suffer from health problems, from sterility to cancers. On the other hand, those who live in a fake utopia never get sick. Thomas Kerns, in an encyclopedia about the negative effects of environment on

¹⁹ Richard Bachman, *The Running Man* (New York, NY: Signet) 1999.

human health, claims that the “WHO [World Health Organization] has concluded that at least 80% of all cancer is attributable to environmental influences.”²⁰ If we compare the health issues of characters in oppressing dystopian novels with that of characters in fake utopian novels, the result is clear: the environment is responsible for the well-being of the characters. To be cured, characters need to either escape their environment, or to improve it.

1.3 DEALING WITH ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS: A FIRST STEP TOWARDS POPULATION CONTROL.

The environment is responsible for body afflictions. In addition, the living place in dystopian novels is the city. Man does not live in the wild, or in the countryside: he is a city-dweller. There are two types of cities: the dark oppressing one, and the technologically-advanced utopia.

1.3.1 Science and technology to control the body in fake utopias.

In utopian settings, inhabitants are healthy and beautiful. The living conditions in the city make for strong, healthy and good-looking characters. There is no external threat to the body: no pollution, no diseases. As a result, the health and beauty of the characters is at its climax. Because technology and science are advanced, they help make the body look better and healthier. However, in these cities, everything is artificially made. For example, beauty is constructed. People use medicine and cosmetic surgery to remove every flaw on the body. The novel *Uglies* shows the use of cosmetic surgery to create an artificial beauty, and to remove the traces of the effects of the environment on the body. At the beginning of the novel, after her friend underwent

²⁰ Thomas A. Kerns, *Environmentally Induced Illnesses: Ethics, Risks, Assessment, and Human Rights* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011) 29.

his surgery, Tally notices: “of course Perris didn’t have the scar anymore. The two of them had only used a penknife when they’d cut themselves and held hands. The doctors used much sharper and bigger knives in the operation.” (Westerfeld, 24) Science and technology are used to remove any physical flaw on the body. The scar, a proof that both kids might have lived in a dangerous environment, has been concealed. These types of dystopian novels do not indulge in the past, but only look forward. What has happened to one’s body is not a problem, and should not become one. These dystopian cities hide the truth of what is really happening to the body of the characters. For example, in *Brave New World*, death is treated the same way. When John’s mother Linda is dying, she is put in a strange hospital and drugged with *soma*: “every quarter of an hour the prevailing perfume of the room was automatically changed. “We try,” explained the nurse, who had taken charge of the Savage at the door, “we try to create a thoroughly pleasant atmosphere here—something between a first-class hotel and a feely-palace, if you take my meaning.” (Huxley, 174) The smell of death is hidden by the perfume, and children are in the room to be desensitized to death. It is no more a problem, because even in death, inhabitants are happy, drugged with *soma* and they associate death with holidays. These dystopias use technology and science to conceal the effects of the city on the character’s body, to prevent them from rebelling. If death, health issues, and body appearance are no longer problems, characters have no reason to take arms against the city, and the realization that something is wrong with the way they live also never happens.

1.3.2 Body inequality in dystopian novels.

On the other hand, the despairing dystopian novels do not hide the body problems caused by the city. At best, they remove the mirrors. At worst, characters just have to bear with it and hope it will not get worse. They are worse off depending on their social conditions. While

equality seems to exist in the utopian settings, inequality is preponderant in the despairing ones. The body represents the discrimination between poor and rich in the novels: the fatter and the stronger, the richer. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss remarks about the tributes that many of them “have never been fed properly. You can see it in their bones, their skins, the hollow look in their eyes.” (Collins, 108) Because the tributes come from the districts, they have been raised in poor living conditions, and thus, most of them are weak and ill-fed. Seemingly, if we compare Winston’s body in *1984* with that of O’Brien, the difference of social status is more than obvious. Winston has “a smallish, frail figure, the meagerness of his body merely emphasized by the blue overalls which were the uniforms of the party” (Orwell, 3) while O’Brien is “a large, burly man with a thick neck and a coarse, humorous, brutal face. In spite of his formidable appearance he had a certain charm of manner.” (Orwell, 12) O’Brien’s description should have hinted Winston about O’Brien’s real identity. In a world in which everyone is famished, people who look strong and healthy are better off. It was obvious from the start that O’Brien ate better than Winston, who is scrawny. Thus, the poorer they are, the uglier and weaker they become. Characters are famished to the point that one look at their figure is enough to see the impact of the environment on them.

1.3.3 Losing one’s physical identity.

Additionally, these settings also make the characters dirty-looking. The lack of hygiene is something only these novels will show, characters living in a fake utopia are not unhygienic. Lack of hygiene is also a way of controlling and discriminating poor people in the city. Katniss cannot be beautiful in *The Hunger Games* because her body is covered with mud and dirt from the forest. Once she gets rid of it, she actually looks pretty. The physical transformation she undergoes in the city of Panem takes several steps to turn her from an unhygienic savage to a

presentable girl: “this has included scrubbing down my body with a gritty foam that has removed not only dirt but at least three layers of skin, turning my nails into uniform shapes, and primarily, ridding my body of hair.” (Collins, 71) Before going to Panem, Katniss did not look like a woman, but more like an animal. She was hairy, dirty, and her nails might have looked like claws according to the description.

The lack of hygiene turns human into animal-like entities. If we focus on the character of Snowman in *Oryx and Crake*, Snowman lost his identity after surviving a few years alone in the wild. Because he looks terrifying, with his long fuzzy beard and his dirty skin, Crakers -Crake’s creation to replace humanity- call him Snowman in reference to the Abominable Snowman, or the Yeti. Winston is also a good example of this loss of humanity due to the lack of hygiene, when O’Brien mocks the way he looks: “look at the condition you are in!” he said. ‘Look at this filthy grime all over your body. Look at the dirt between your toes [...] you’re rotting away, you’re falling to pieces. You’re a bag of filth. You’re the last man. You’re humanity.’ (Orwell, 285) Winston did not have a shower for months, and the “grime”, the “dirt”, the rot are all proves that Winston cannot be the last man, because he is no longer one. The lack of hygiene is another way the environment influences the appearance, and makes the characters lose track of their identities.

Thus, the environment the characters live in has a great impact on their appearance, their health, and their well-being. The pressure of the dystopian government, whether set in a utopian world or a despairing one, physically changes the characters. If the body were a white canvas, the environment would be the painter, shaping humans the way it wants to. The body is a point of tension in these novels and is also a point of control. It is through their bodies that the dystopian government manages to control the population. Lack of mirrors, lack of hygiene, body and health

problems, these are all means to control the population. By making the body weak, the government prevents the individual from rebelling. Controlling the body is of tantamount importance for the villain of dystopian novels, and this control is all the novels present in this essay, from *1984* to *A Clockwork Orange*. The abundance of means used to control the population and the body proves one thing: body control is the main goal of dystopian government. Man is feared, and man needs to be tamed into a controllable and predictable being. Only then, can the technological city, the true villain in dystopian novels, assert its dominion over men and over nature.

2 TECHNOLOGY, THE OPPRESSOR OF THE BODY.

2.1 TECHNOLOGY AND THE CONTROL OF THE BODY.

The degradation of the environment is mirrored on the body itself. The worse an environment gets, the worse the health and the appearance of the character becomes. By focusing on these changes, dystopian novels make the threat of the environment look real. Environmental changes can only be seen virtually, as Cronon admits in the introduction of *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*: “global warming is the ultimate example of a virtual crisis in virtual nature –which is far from saying that it is unreal. Instead, it is proof that the virtual and the natural can converge in surprising ways.”²¹ But as it happens, the virtual crisis does converge with the natural, since the environment has a physical effect on our bodies. To some extent, by seeing how the body is affected by the environment, it makes us realize that environmental issues are real, even though they are invisible. Dystopian novels however not only do make us realize such important facts, but they also seem to point out a culprit: the technological city.

2.1.1 Nemesis of the natural world.

In the western culture, since the birth of environmental thinking with the Transcendentalists, technology has always been seen as the great oppressor of nature. Thoreau writes in *Walden* that men are so focused on technology that they do not care about the natural world anymore: “Our inventions are wont to be pretty toys, which distract our attention from serious things. They are but improved means to an unimproved end. [...] We are in great haste to

²¹ William Cronon, *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 1996) 48.

construct a magnetic telegraph from Maine to Texas; but Maine and Texas, it may be, have nothing important to communicate.”²²

The canons of environmental thinking often put technology as the reason why men do not respect nature anymore. Technology is seen as this rampaging force that destroys everything in its passage. It is a well-fitting villain for green story-telling. Several examples of dystopian novels use technology as the great oppressor of both humans and the natural world. For example, Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, whose main story is about killing off the androids while finding the last remnants of the late natural world. The story of Chatam’s *Other World* also perfectly describes this malevolent rampaging force with the entity of Ggl, a kind of giant grey mist made of radio waves, pollution and dust from machines and electricity. McCarthy’s *The Road* describes a world so completely destroyed by pollution that the few human beings left strive for survival. Miller’s *A Canticle for Leibowitz* describes an apocalyptic world completely ravaged by technology warfare. As we can see, technology is an active force that disrupts the passive peacefulness of nature. The image of the violent, loud, steel-framed entity invading the harmonious and idle natural areas is a classic symbol of environmental thinking. Leo Marx, in his essay *The Machine in the Garden*, writes about the disruptive dimension of technology and its invasion of the natural world. He writes: “most important is the sense of the machine as a sudden, shocking intruder upon a fantasy or idyllic satisfaction. It invariably is associated with crude, masculine aggressiveness in contrast with the tender, feminine, and submissive attitudes traditionally attached to the landscape”²³ There are many examples of the aggressiveness of technology in the natural world in dystopian novels. In *Hunger Games*, a novel that does not have a huge technophobic streak, we can still read: “The hovercraft appeared out of nowhere,” I

²² Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (New York: Time, 1962) 62.

²³ Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford, UP., 1964) 29.

continue to Peeta. “I mean, one moment the sky was empty and the next it was there. It didn’t make a sound, but they saw it. [...] Then it was gone, the hovercraft. Vanished into thin air. And the birds began to sing again, as if nothing had happened.” (Collins, 95) The hovercraft, which allows the government of Panem to intervene rapidly in the Districts, is an invader. When the hovercraft is here, birds stop singing. Even if the machine is silent in this case, it still impacts the life in the wild, for a short period of time.

Technology in dystopian novels is not an entity that stays confined within the limits of the city. While the forest in which Katniss hunts appears as a complete wild land, it is still affected by technology. As a result, everything made in the city will affect the natural world, even though we cannot see it. On the same line, pollution generated in the city will have consequences outside the limits of that city. There is no limit to the intrusive force of technology. Marx adds on this point: “Technological power, a power that does not remain confined to the traditional boundaries of the city. It is a centrifugal force that threatens to break down, once and for all, the conventional contrast between these two styles of life.” (Marx, 32). According to him, technology is so powerful that it is not only disruptive, but also destructive. The force is so great it does not respect the conventional limits between the two worlds, and corrupt the wild, turning it into a technological place. This disruptive force can be seen in *Hunger Games* with the trackerjackers. Trackerjackers are genetically modified wasps used to control the districts and prevent people from leaving their districts. They nest in the forests and disrupt the balance of nature due to their powerful stings that turn them into fearsome predators. They invade and destroy wild places, turning them into places in which no living being can survive. A less threatening but all the more disrupting example are the white orchids in *Uglies*. To obtain a world without ugliness, laboratories created an orchid to be the most beautiful flower in the world. The orchid ends up rampaging the Earth, smothering everything on its passage as it does not have any predator that

feeds on it. “She thought of the orchids spreading across the plains below, chocking the life out of other plants, out of the soil itself, selfish and unstoppable.” (Westerfeld, 236) The destructive power of the orchids is so great it just completely removes nature from the land, leaving the fields barren. In the novel, technology has become so advanced that nature is powerless against it. Once again, technology is both disruptive to the balance of the natural world, and also a tearing force that smothers everything.

Both areas are interdependent. What happens in one will affect the other. The overuse of technology in the city has an effect on the natural world. As a consequence, technology becomes the villain of green thinking and green writing, a villain that tries to invade, conquer and overcome Nature.

2.1.2 The human body as the last remnant of nature in the city.

In the city, the place in which technology was born, the natural does not exist anymore. Only few natural things remain, as a reminder that once the place used to be natural. For example in *1984*, at the end, when Winston loses to the Party the environment is described as a “vile, biting day in March, when the earth was like iron and all the grass seemed dead and there was not a bud anywhere except a few crocuses which had pushed themselves up to be dismembered by the wind” or “dirty-looking crocuses”, and he and Julia meet in a “clump of ragged leafless shrubs.” (Orwell, 304) It is interesting to see that Nature always tries to come back and fails. The crocuses in the city are blown away by the too powerful wind, as Winston’s rebellious spirit has been annihilated by the Party. If dystopian novels are the mirrors of our society, there is a parallel between the city in dystopian novels and ours: to some extent, our cities are also almost completely deprived of green areas. The city in dystopian novels is just an extension of our own

environment. In *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, a keystone to ecocriticism, Glotfelty remarks that:

Except for lawns, which are fertilized and purified to an eery shade of green, and a smoky sky, and a potted plant or two, everything the reader sees all day has been made by human beings. Only the body itself stubbornly upholds the claims of biology, and even this biological datum our reader treats with chemicals designed to improve or delay the workings of nature.²⁴

The claim that the body is the last remaining biological thing in the human environment is of tantamount importance for our essay, as it is indeed the last remaining biological thing in dystopian novels. We can read in *The Handmaid's Tale* "everybody shits, as Moira would say."²⁵ It reassures Offred that they are still all human beings, and despite the oppressing environment they live in, some bodily functions remain the same. Since technology's goal is to invade, conquer and overcome the biological in dystopian novels, the body becomes the tension point of these stories. Human bodies are the last ramparts of nature in the city, as a result, they are subjected to the attacks of the villain; technology. By controlling human bodies, technology defeats the natural. By defeating the natural, technology removes uncertainty from the world. The natural cannot be controlled and is unpredictable. The crocuses always come back; the Party, despite its efforts, cannot completely remove the rebelling streak of people like Julia or Winston, or other Party members, as Julia claims when Winston asks her:

- "Have you done this before?"
"Of course. Hundreds of times – well scores of times anyway."
"With Party members?"
"Yes, always with Party members" (Orwell, 131)

²⁴ Shewry, Glotfelty and Fromm, *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (Athens: U of Georgia, 1996) 193.

²⁵ Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986) 263.

As much as the Party tries to control humans, their biological needs -here, sexuality- is always rebelling against oppression. The limit to the control of the Party stops when sexuality begins. As much as the Party wants to control every single aspect of the lives of its members, it cannot completely control natural instinct. In *Uncommon Ground*, Cronon gives the example of the snails in his garden to show the limit of the control of nature in real life: “the snails in my Irvine garden become small gruesome symbols of the limits of human control.” (Cronon, 50) The body is the limit of technology control in the city. As a result, to prevent humans from rebelling against the control of technology, their bodies and natural functions must be controlled. The body becomes a battlefield between two worlds: technology and nature. Once the human body has been invaded by technology itself, and its remaining biological needs have been annihilated, then technology wins. The goal is to dehumanize and to turn man into a machine. In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* androids are not men anymore: Deckard uses a test to differentiate humans from androids, a test based on feelings. Androids are not considered humans since they cannot pass the test.

2.1.3 Controlling the human body through work and torture.

Before invading it, technology tries to control the body in dystopian novels. Technology uses several tools to control the body from both the outside and the inside: work, torture and drugs.

Population control through work is the most obvious control in those novels. The control of the mass by industrious work is predominant, as it is but an extension of what is happening in our society. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, outcasts of the Gilead society are discarded in the colonies to do the work no one wants to do. They are considered as useless, so they are only used for their

bodies. Once they die, they are replaced. The description of what happens to them in the colonies is appalling:

This bunch doesn't like dead bodies lying around, they're afraid of a plague or something. So the women in the Colonies there do the burning. The other colonies are worse, though, the toxic dumps and the radiation spills. They figure you've got three years maximum, at those, before your nose falls off and your skin pulls away like rubber gloves. They don't bother to feed you much, or give you protective clothing or anything, it's cheaper not to. Anyway, they're mostly people they want to get rid of. (Atwood, 260)

For population control's sake, human lives are discarded and treated like cattle. The dreadful description of what happens to the outcasts of the society is fear-inducing for the inhabitants of Gilead. Mostly, the consequences on the body of toxic dumps and radiation spills are awe-striking: the awful environment in which these women are sent is repulsive. Thus, inhabitants of the Gilead society accept the oppression, lest they would be sent to the colonies. Another example would be the Party's use of sports, work and festivities to prevent the population from thinking too much about their living conditions in 1984. Physical Jerks every day, Hate Week, socials after work, anti-sex league, all of these are used to keep the population busy. Cronon thinks modern work is responsible for our unconsciousness about the environment: "It is supposedly modern work, and not work itself, that has made us into dangerous monsters." (Cronon, 178) Technology and science have turned us into unconscious beings, and are slowly turning us into real monsters with disfigured bodies. In this battlefield between nature and technology, work to control the human body is one of the city's weapons of control.

Torture is the second important weapon of dystopian novels. It is used when work does not prevent the character from seeking rebellion. Here the body is used to repress the rebellious mind. The idea of matter over mind is the great doom of mankind: human body is the weakness against technological force. There is so much one man can do until his body breaks. This is what

Harold Fromm, a scholar and member of the University of Arizona's Institute of Environment, calls the "myth of voluntary omnipotence". In his book, *The Nature of Being Human: From Environmentalism to Consciousness*, he writes: "This has given people a sense that they mentally and voluntarily determine the ground of their own existence and that the body is almost a dispensable adjunct of their being. This is modern humanity's own peculiar mythology: the myth of voluntary omnipotence."²⁶ Characters from dystopian novels suffer from this voluntary omnipotence. Winston thinks he can outsmart the Party until he finds out that the torture inflicted to his body makes him surrender completely. *1984* may remind us that whatever we do, we cannot separate from our bodies and from our biological needs. Overall, our society's problem is to think that the human does not need the natural, while it does. Dystopian novels break the "myth of voluntary omnipotence."

As a result, torture is used to break the willpower of human beings in dystopian novels. It is an easy tool used by the powerful head of the technological city. Torture is present in almost every single dystopian novel. Pain inflicted to the body is used to make the population do what some higher power wants them to do. The fear of being hurt results from torture and is used as a deterrent force. To some extent, the fear that something happens to the integrity of one's body is a universal fear that drives the survival instinct of the characters of dystopian novels. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss gets burned and almost faints at the sight of her scarred body: "I almost faint at the sight of my calf. The flesh is a brilliant red covered with blisters." (Collins, 179) It is the only painful wound she suffers from in the book, as she strives the entire book to prevent something like this from happening again. In Collins's book, the games are used as a deterrent

²⁶ Harold Fromm, *The Nature of Being Human: From Environmentalism to Consciousness* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 2009) 43.

force against the districts' rebellions. By torturing children and choosing them randomly, they induce fear in the districts' inhabitants and keep them under control.

As we said, torture is used to make people do something against their will to please the higher force. Winston ends up loving Big Brother and admitting unreal things after suffering days and days of beating, starvation and electric torture:

"You are a slow learner, Winston."

"How can I help it? How can I help but see what is in front of my eyes? Two and two are four."

"Sometimes, Winston. Sometimes they are five. Sometimes they are three. Sometimes they are all of them at once. You must try harder. It is not easy to become sane." (Orwell, 263)

Torture is used as a cleansing tool. Because the city's goal is to remove hazard and the uncontrollable from the city, rebellious minds are seen as a plague. They are the grains of sand that stick themselves in the gears of the machine and break it. It is interesting to see that, in O'Brien's mind, he is not torturing Winston, he is simply purifying him from his unhealthy thoughts that could put the system at risk. Torture is just the means to an end. In Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*, to face the violence that has plagued society, the government tries to find a way to avoid that they reoffend. By submitting Alex's body to torture, he ends up assimilating violence with nausea. Every violent thought or violent act makes him retch and dizzy. Here is another example of how the torture of the body is used to make one's mind bend, by using the body as its own repellent. Again, we find the idea of "curing" instead of "torturing" in Burgess's novel: "You had a very positive response. Tomorrow, of course, there'll be two sessions, morning and afternoon, and I should imagine that you'll be feeling a bit limp at the end of the day. But we have to be hard on you, you have to be cured."²⁷ What is interesting though, is what the character is being cured of. Violence, survival instinct and sexuality are all human, natural instincts. The

²⁷ Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange* (New York: Norton, 1986) 118.

government in dystopian novels, by using torture, try to cure humans from their natural instincts, those which bring them closer to animality. Once again, nature, the unpredictable, is the enemy, the disease humans should be cured of to create a better world.

2.1.4 Controlling the human body with drugs and nano-technologies.

Torture is often used in dystopian novels set in a post-apocalyptic world, or in a repressive society, like *1984* or *The Hunger Games*. However, in dystopian novels with a utopic setting, violence is not the solution. In these technologically-advanced societies, torture is not used to repress the animal instinct, violence is not used against violence. Scientifically-advanced drugs are the most used tools to control the human body and mind. There is a parallel between these dystopian worlds and ours: torture is forbidden in our western world, however, chemicals used to improve our capabilities or “delay the workings of nature” (Glotfelty, 193) are everywhere. Drugs, pills, chemicals became the best ways to control a population, not by inducing fear, but by inducing happiness and well-being. The greatest example of these drugs is the *soma* in *Brave New World*, a drug taken by the inhabitants of the technological city of the novel to prevent them from feeling pain, despair or anything unhealthy and to make them feel happy about their lives:

Five-stepping with the other four hundred round and round Westminster Abbey, Lenina and Henry were yet dancing in another world—the warm, the richly coloured, the infinitely friendly world of *soma*-holiday. How kind, how good-looking, how delightfully amusing every one [sic] was! "Bottle of mine, it's you I've always wanted..." But Lenina and Henry had what they wanted... They were inside, here and now-safely inside with the fine weather, the perennially blue sky. (Huxley, 66)

The effects of *soma* are clearly described in this quote. People are brought in “another world”, that is not reality. They go on a vacation to a world in which everything and everyone is beautiful and happy. There is no more pain, it is a safe and unchanging world. *Soma* brings people in a world deprived of dangers, of the unexpected and of problems. The idea of “inside” is compelling

to understand the kind of effects *soma* has: it puts people in a bubble, making them oblivious to the reality of the outside, and to the problems of the city. It cuts the off from their physical body. Quotes about the *soma* and its effects on the population abound in *Brave New World*. For example *soma* has “all the advantages of Christianity and alcohol; none of their defects.” (Huxley, 218) By putting drugs at the same level with religion, it shows the predominance of drug-consumption in their society: drugs are the new religion. Since drugs have all the advantages of Christianity, they seem harmless and can be taken without risks. Technology often relies on religion to have its way. The Machine in “The Machine Stops” becomes a new religion and it allows The Machine to have complete control over humans. Huxley wanted to warn about drugs consumption and its negative effects on human consciousness. When under the influence of chemicals, one cannot face reality and be aware that he is unhappy and controlled. Ironically, Huxley himself fell into drug-addiction and had episodes with psychedelic drugs and LSD. He drew his last breath under the influence of LSD.

Drugs as a tool of control can take on several shapes. In Veronica Roth’s *Divergent*, soldiers are injected with drugs that affect the brain and allow a remote control of the mind by the government. Their bodies are controlled to do the government’s will without them being aware. Drugs, like torture, are used to sedate the rebellious minds. Drugs can also be more nuanced and only act on some specific human characteristic. In *The Giver*, the population takes drugs that sedates the sexual instinct, to prevent unwanted babies and sexual frustration: “The next morning, for the first time, Jonas did not take his pill. Something within him, something that had grown there through the memories, told him to throw the pill away”²⁸ The interesting thing about this example is that it shows how, through the use of drugs, science tries to annihilate the natural

²⁸ Lois Lowry, *The Giver* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993) 177.

instincts of men, like torture and work. There are different tools, yet they all have the same end: getting rid of the unpredictable, of the natural in men and in the city. The “something” that grows in the memories of Jonas might be nature trying to fight back against the sedative and controlling effects of science and technology, but it fails. Drugs, torture, work are all tools used by the villain of dystopian novels to control and reduce the natural instinct of men into something more controllable. Control is the main goal of the city. If we picture the city as a giant machine, human instinct is the small pebble that lodges itself in its gears and breaks it. To reduce the chances of the machine breaking (like in Forster’s *The Machine Stops*), technology must get rid of nature. Controlling it is not enough, as it seems that the natural always find a way to fight back. The bond between nature and humans must be severed, and the body invaded by machines.

2.2 SEVERING THE BOND BETWEEN NATURE AND MEN.

Controlling the human body is not enough. Like the crocuses in *1984*, humans always find a way to rebel and fight against the city they live in. To secure the city and assure a hundred percent control, nature must be eradicated from the city: the biological functions of the body must be replaced, and man should become a machine.

2.2.1 Controlling the natural sexual instinct.

The great torment of the technological city is its need for human procreation. The city needs its humans to survive and to operate it, until it can replace them. Thus, as much as there is a need to replace the natural by the mechanical in the city, a paradox is created. The city tries to annihilate the natural, but still wants to preserve it to survive. To end this paradox, technology needs to overcome the natural procreating device. Sexuality and procreation as life forces are the

main targets of technology's control, and as long as they exist, technology cannot win over the natural.

Focusing on sexuality first, we must understand that the threat of sexuality is double in dystopian novels. Sexuality brings to life both the animal instinct and the unpredictable that the city tries to get rid of. Human sexuality is also responsible for birth. With sexuality, the goal is to control the sexual instinct while keeping the human birth going. In dystopian novels whose city has not reached the advanced level of creating humans by themselves, the control of sexuality becomes tricky and is not always successful. In *1984*, the Party tries to deprive women of their sexual appetite by teaching them that they should hate it. By controlling women's sexuality, they control men's, even though men are allowed to pay for prostitutes.

Mere debauchery did not matter as long as it involved women of despised classes [...] The aim of the Party was not merely to prevent men and women from forming loyalties which it might not be able to control. Its real, undeclared purpose was to remove all pleasure from the sexual act. [...] Sexual intercourse was to be looked on as a slightly minor operation, like having an enema [...] The Party was trying to kill the sex instinct, or, if it could not be killed, then to distort it and dirty it. [...] What was more important was that sexual privation induced hysteria, which was desirable because it could be transformed into a war-fever and leader-worship.” (Orwell, 69)

Couples however have to try to procreate every few months, but procreation is seen as an ordeal and no parts take pleasure in it. The narrator clearly states the role of the Party: to kill the natural instinct of men. It even goes further than that, since the Party does not want to suppress the sexual instinct, but wants to use it for war hysteria. Like the mirror scene, the Party in *1984* is good at turning its weaknesses into weapons. In Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, to control the population and to finally annihilate the human race, Crake develops a pill that allows people to have unlimited sex and that increases their thirst for sexual acts. As in *Brave New World* with the orgy porgies, the goal is both to remove the association between love and sexual pleasure, and to

control the population by making them busy with sexual acts. Whatever the means, the goal is the same: to remove the natural feelings for the person one makes love to, and thus to prevent rebellion out of love and jealousy. However it does not work all the time. Julia in *1984*, a high member of the Party's Anti-Sex League, has had sexual intercourse with scores of Party members for pleasure, and every main character in dystopian novels seems to react against the sexual repression in their worlds.

2.2.2 Controlling birth to control human population.

Sexual repression is only a means to an end: the real goal is to control procreation. Birth control is nowadays the goal of ecology, as the too big human population is deemed responsible for environmental problems. In his famous essay about population control, Malthus writes: "Population will always increase to the point where 'misery and vice' halt it, so even the most egalitarian utopia must eventually revert to conflict and competition for scarce resources. Population and food are supposed to remain in permanent competition, rather than building to a dramatic crisis."²⁹ Malthus a few decades ago already claimed for population control. According to him, it would be better to reduce the population by giving less resources to people rather than trying to please everyone by producing too much. Malthus thought that utopists would bring the end of the world. More recently, Garrard has stated that environmentalism is about non-coercive population control: the more educated women are, the fewer children they have. Reducing the population is our goal, to reach worldwide average of 2,1 children per woman: "Non-coercive population control is a priority both for economic development and environmental sustainability, proposing that education and primary healthcare, especially for women, were the most effective

²⁹ Thomas R. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (NY: Norton, 1976) 77-78.

means available.”³⁰ Garrard, like Malthus, thinks that we should avoid overpopulation at all cost. Population control is actually an aspect on which both environmentalists and dystopian novels agree: the utopist future cannot work in today’s world.

The city in dystopian novels adopts the same line of conduct towards birth control. In *Divergent* and *The Giver*, each couple has the right to have two children. No more, no less. By doing so, the governments can divide the resources equally and keep a sustainable system that allows autarchy. There is something ecological about the city in a way, as it tries to create a system that does not rely on anything else but itself. However, in cities underpopulated, like Gilead in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, birth control is seen as a sin: “Some women believed there would be no future: they said there was no sense in breeding. They were lazy women, they were sluts.” (Atwood, 123) Birth control is of tantamount importance in any dystopian novel: the survival of the city and of the human race depends on it. And for technology, depending on the natural is unconceivable, as it gives power to the humans and to nature.

Controlling birth means controlling women’s bodies. The control of women because of their procreating capabilities is present in some dystopian novels, like *1984* or *The Giver*. However, Atwood’s novel, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, focuses on this particular aspect. In the society of Gilead, women are classified according to their capabilities. Red women are women whose sole purpose is to give birth and to continue the human race. Red women are women who are completely determined by their procreating abilities, and Offred says “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.” (Atwood, 73) In the society of Gilead, the city, the survival of these women depends on their capability to accomplish their

³⁰ Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2004) 98.

roles. Thus, Offred is right when she says that her body defines her. Her life, her role and her identity rely entirely on her ability to give birth, on the fertility of her womb. One of the novel's strongest lines is: "Give me children or else I die." (Atwood, 71) Because these women carry the fate of the city and the fate of mankind on their shoulders, failure to carry on their women duties means death for all. This line is taken from the Genesis 30:1, in which Rachel becomes jealous of her sister for bearing a child while she did not. She then pleads Jacob to give her a child, and Jacob becomes angry at her for trying to defy God's law. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Offred is jealous of another red woman who bears a child, and she is desperate enough to call on religion to give her a child. The difference is however that in Offred's case, she really will die if she does not have a child. The pressure inflicted on these women is due to the city's despair for new human bodies. If the human race ends, so does the city. If mankind cannot give birth naturally anymore, the city is doomed. Had the Gilead society managed to replace natural birth by man-made birth, it would have survived.

The city becomes entirely technological once science has taken over the female body. Reproduction is the last human asset that allows women to have some liberty. Once reproduction is defeated, humans become part of the gears of the giant machinery that is the city. Introducing us to a world in which babies are made in test-tubes, *Brave New World* is a perfect example of human lives as just another piece of gears. Babies are forged with the help of science and machines, and created depending on the city's needs. If it needs workers, they will be Deltas. If they die, they are discarded and another human is created. Human beings becomes replaceable entities. "One egg, one embryo, one adult-normality. But a bokanovskified egg will bud, will proliferate, and will divide. From eight to ninety-six buds, and every bud will grow into a perfectly formed embryo, and every embryo into a full-sized adult. Making ninety-six human

beings grow where only one grew before. Progress.” (Huxley, 3) Fordism is applied to creating human bodies. We can see the beauty of assembly line applied to human creation. The beauty of human creation by science is reflected by the rhythm and musicality of this paragraph. It sounds almost magical, like a magic formula with lines such as “will bud, will proliferate, and will divide”. Also, the repetition of the terms “buds” and “embryos” and “eggs” rhymes the paragraph, turning it into some kind of hymn to the glory of technology. In *Brave New World*, the control of the city is complete, as men have managed to overcome the laws of Nature. Creating babies in laboratories is the final proof of the success of technology and its ascendance over nature. It has replaced the workings of nature.

Once the technological city gets a hold on human bodies, it turns them into mere tools. The city practices ‘social cannibalism’ which is the use and discard of human beings in function of their capabilities. Most dystopian novels are about social cannibalism: humans that are deemed useless or dangerous are gotten rid of; in *1984* they are “vanished”, which means their existence is denied; in *Brave New World* they disappear, in *The Handmaid’s Tale* they are sent to colonies: “its old women, I bet you’ve been wondering why you haven’t seen too many of those around anymore.” (Atwood, 260) Women are sent to the colonies once they become sterile or ill because they are of no use for the Gilead society anymore: “Discard all of us. They’re sterile, of course.” (Atwood, 260-261) About social cannibalism, in a thesis about *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Julia Pei-Hsuan Hsieh writes as a conclusion about food and diets in the novel “In short, the abundant images of food in *The Handmaid’s Tale* first indicate how the female body can be controlled by the regulation of diet and hence correlated with Atwood’s concern of social cannibalism.”³¹ (Pei-Hsuan Hsieh, 14) The images of food in the novel are symbols for the female body. For example,

³¹ Julia Pei-Hsuan Hsieh, “The Handmaid’s Tale – The Female Body as a Site of Resistance” (Electronically published on the Fu Jen University Department of English Language and Literature, unknown date) 14. <http://english.fju.edu.tw/lctd/word/Handmaid.pdf> (Accessed April 22, 2016.)

at the beginning of the novel, Offred complains about how hard it is to get oranges in the Gilead society: “oranges have been hard to get: sometimes they are there, sometimes not.” (Atwood, 35) Orange, due to their round shape, are a symbol for the pregnant belly. Indeed, it is hard for women to be pregnant in the novel. Other examples are the comparison between Offred’s body and a dog-bone: “I enjoy the power of dog bone, passive but there” (Atwood, 32) as well as the comparison between the chicken and Offred’s body: “The thigh of a chicken, overcooked. It’s better than bloody, which is the other way she does it [...] You have to get your vitamins and minerals, said Aunt Lydia coyly. You must be a worthy vessel.” (Atwood, 75) In both cases, Offred is nothing but food for society. Food for men, in the dog-bone example, to clench their sexual appetite. A vessel to carry an egg, in the chicken one. The Gilead society would rather see Offred overcooked than bloody. The blood here is a reference to women’s menstruation. If she is bloody, Offred is not pregnant. On this matter, Julia Pei-Hsuan Hsieh writes:

Through Offred’s narration, in Gilead society, women’s bodies are very often compared to food. Hence, the food connected with the female body further reinforces the fact that the female body is materialized. Not only is the female body conditioned and kept in fixed positions in society, but women’s diet is strictly controlled. Women’s pregnant bodies collage with images of foods such as pears, eggs, oranges and lunch. Offred herself treats her body as food: she sways her body like a dog-bone to seduce the Guards and the Angels as if they are dogs longing for food. Similarly, she compares herself as “a ripe melon” when she uses her body to imagine manipulating man. (Pei-Hsuan Hsieh, 14)

The materialization of the female body allows society to use them like objects. If there is nothing more to them than just a working uterus, women can easily be discarded when it no longer works.

Social cannibalism is the end goal of the technological city, once the body has been controlled or replaced by technology or an oppressive government. The city uses humans to make itself work, discards them once they become useless mouths to feed, and creates new ones to

replace them. Social cannibalism also helps to keep the balance of a population, to maintain the population at a certain number. In the end, by controlling the reproductive system, technology gets a hold on life and death itself.

2.2.3 Invading the human body with technology.

The problem technology faces with human beings is that even if they are completely controlled, they remain biological beings. Biology and nature always seem to find a way to adapt and rebel against whatever control is imposed on them. Bernard Marx, an Alpha in *Brave New World* does not fit in the city he lives in. He is different from the others, and does not indulge in the city's rules and social system:

Bernard's physique was hardly better than that of the average Gamma. He stood eight centimeters short of the standard Alpha height and was slender in proportion. Contact with members of the lower castes always reminded him painfully of this physical inadequacy. "I am I, and wish I wasn't"; his self-consciousness was acute and stressing." (Huxley, 55)

Bernard suffers from a complex of inferiority due to his physical inadequacy, a complex that stirs the hatred he has for his world. He hates *soma*, he loves nature and would love to trek around the world. His love for nature brings him to visit the reservation as the lives of the savages seem more thrilling than his. Even though he has been created by machines, he still is a biological being, a natural entity, whose needs cannot be fulfilled by the artificial life in the city. In Forster's *The Machine Stops*, humans do not travel anymore, because there is no need to:

Few travelled in these days, for, thanks to the advance of science, the earth was exactly alike all over. Rapid intercourse, from which the previous civilization had hoped so much, had ended by defeating itself. What was the good of going to Peking when it was just like Shrewsbury? Why

return to Shrewsbury when it would all be like Peking? Men seldom moved their bodies; all unrest was concentrated in the soul.³²

However, Kudo, the main character, feels the need to move his body and to go on Earth to experience it without the breathing device. Like every main character in dystopian novels, Kudo represents the attraction for nature and towards rebellion that the city and the machine cannot control, as much as they want to. To prevent Nature from coming back, science and technology need to invade the human body, and turn it into a machine.

One of the greatest fears of mankind is the invasion of the human body by some alien force that will destroy them from the inside. Controlling human conception is one thing, invading the body and corrupting it is another. About body invasion, Caballero claims that horror movies have been using that fear to create great masterpieces of the horror genre: “Horror films such as *Leviathan*, *The Fly*, *Alien* and *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* articulate the fear of reproduction in relation to the theme of bodily invasion. They stress that bodies can be violated and contaminated at all times, and that conception and birth are always (at least potentially) synonymous with the breeding of monsters.”³³ The fear of breeding monsters acts with birth control in dystopian novels. *The Handmaid’s Tale* plays along with this idea of breeding monsters as Offred is afraid that she will give birth to a baby with a “pinhead of a snout’s like a dog’s, or two bodies, or a hole in its heart, or no arms, or webbed hands and feet.” (Atwood, 122) In this quote, Offred is afraid of the effects of technology on the human body, to the extent that she visualizes monstrous babies with deformed bodies. The baby becomes her nightmare, an animal-like figure in some cases (the dog, the webbed hands) or simply a monster. Offred is so afraid of the effects of technology and pollution on her body and her posterity that it haunts her

³² E.M. Forster, *The Machine Stops* (London: Penguin, 2011) 12.

³³ Dani Caballero, *Cyberpunk and Cyberculture: Science Fiction and the Work of William Gibson* (London: Athlone, 2000) 116.

nights. The invasion of technology turns humans into monsters. The horrific vision of the consequences of body invasion contradicts Offred's need for a baby. She wants a child to survive, but she fears this child, because she knows she will give birth to a monstrosity, and she refuses it. The fear of giving birth to an inhuman being plays against mankind in the novel, which shows a society struggling to keep the race alive. The pollution made by modern work is responsible for the slow death of the human race.

The intrusion of the body by technology to control and defeat humans takes on several aspects. The first one is indirect intrusion by pollution. The alien force that invades our body and corrupts is the invisible thing in the air we inhale. Pollution comes from the Latin word *polluere* which means to sully, to dirt. As a consequence, pollution means to defile one's body. Pollution is omnipresent in dystopian novels as a consequence of an overly technological society which did not care to save the world. In Atwood's novel, the invasion of the female body by pollution, and if we extend it, by technology, makes humans sterile and unable to reproduce.

The chances are one in four. The air got too full, once, of chemicals rays and radiation, the water swarmed with toxic molecules. They creep into our body, camp out in your fatty cells. Your very flesh may be polluted, dirty as an oily beach, sure death to shore birds and unborn babies. Maybe a vulture would die of eating you. (Atwood, 122)

Pollution is responsible for the breeding of monsters and it turns humans in *The Handmaid's Tale* into some kind of poisoned entities. Once again, we can see how Offred considers herself as food, food for vultures this time. She is but an entity made of flesh, and the consequences of the pollution affects the only thing that defines her: her body. Pollution is responsible for poisoning the only thing that keeps her alive. In *Ecocriticism*, Garrard defines pollution as "an ecological problem because it does not name a substance or class of substances, but rather represents an implicit normative claim that too much of something is present in the environment, usually in the

wrong place.” (Garrard, 6) In dystopian novels, pollution is just a sign that there is too much technology inside their bodies, and it sickens them and destroys them from the inside.

The second type of invasion is direct invasion of the body, with the birthing of entities that are half-man half-machines. Before creating human beings out of steel, as in Dick’s novel, the bodies of characters in dystopian novels underwent surgery to place machines within their bodies. The most common examples are ‘trackers’, which are put under the skin to follow a character’s every move. Trackerjackers in *The Hunger Games* use this technology to hunt down their prey. However, nano-technologies inside the body can be much more advanced. Westerfeld’s *Uglies* uses nano-technology a lot to improve the body, and to control it. The society of the novel is divided in three classes: Ugliers, Pretties and Specials. The latter, as their names hint, are a special class of human beings who have been improved by technology: “they were superhumanly fast and strong. The Special operation had given them more than just terrible faces.” (Westerfeld, 278) The technology inside their bodies allows them to be better than humans. However, it gave them terrible faces; it turned them into monsters. In a world in which beauty defines you as a true human being, having a terrible face separates you from humanity. They do not fit in the society of Prettytown anymore, because they are no longer beautiful humans. We see it more clearly in the following books of the saga in which Tally becomes a Special and gains her own set of special abilities, but also can no longer live the life of Pretties in Prettytown. Once again, technology turns human into monsters, depriving them of their integrity.

2.2.4 Turning the body into a machine.

As a result, the invasion of the body by technology is the best solution possible for a total control of human nature. The transformation of the human body into a machine is called

mecanomorphism. It seems to be a direct translation of the French word “mécanomorphisme” which according to the French dictionary is the tendency to attribute a machine’s characteristics to an animal or human. The worst thing that could happen to a character in dystopian novels, is the tampering of his body integrity by a machine. Turning into a machine means dehumanization, loss of identity, loss of feelings. Mecanomorphism is the confusion of human behavior with the movements of the machine, but in our case, it is the transformation of the natural body into a machine-like entity. In his study of technology in dystopian novels, Beauchamp, a scholar, reaches the conclusion that:

The greatest threat posed by technology, these dystopists suggest, is not that man’s mechanical creations will come to rule over man like some alien power but rather that he will so completely introject the ethos of technology that his highest aspiration will be to become a machine himself. Then the machine, like Hell for Milton’s Satan, will be inside him. The dystopian’s technophobia [sic] takes perhaps its most horrific form in this vision.³⁴

The threat of technology in dystopian novels is more than just control, it is invasion. Dystopian novels warn against the goal of technology and science: to invade the human body to have complete control over human nature.

In a sense, dystopian novels warn against mecanomorphism as the utmost doom of men. Those who underwent mecanomorphism are fallen human beings. The technophobia of those novels can be seen in their hatred towards the mecanomorphic streak of technology, to the point that men are not men anymore. Huxley, in an essay about Descartes and his view on man as a machine, writes: “If some great power would agree to make me always think what is true and do what is right, on condition of being turned into a sort of clock and wound up every morning before I got out of bed, I should instantly close with the offer.”³⁵ Huxley seems profoundly

³⁴ Gorman Beauchamp, “Technology in the Dystopian Novel,” *Modern Fiction Studies*, 32.1 (1986) 62.

³⁵ R.H. Hutton, “Professor Huxley as a Machine,” *The Spectator* (April 30, 1870.) Web. (Accessed March 16, 2016.)

technophobic. Humans should never accept to become machines even though they are told to do so. Huxley here warns against mecanomorphism as something to be avoided at all cost. This mecanomorphism is present in some other dystopian novels. For example, Philip K. Dick's novel is about a bounty hunter sent to kill "fallen" humans, whose bodies are made out of steel and wires. Body integrity should be cherished, and the greatest threat of technology is the invasion of the body.

As a conclusion, technology is a threat to human body integrity; it is not a mere tool used by humans to improve their comforts, in dystopian novels; technology is that great devourer with immense force that annihilates what is left of humanity and turn humans into mere machines. As Beauchamp writes, technology is "not a neutral tool misused by totalitarian rulers but as intrinsically totalitarian in itself, a futuristic Frankenstein's monster." (Beauchamp, 55) Humans should not accept to become monsters, half-nature half-technology.

2.2.5 Forgetting one's true nature.

Technology's goal is to invade the body, but only a few novels actually show the success of this feat. Most of the time, human bodies are just controlled. This part of the essay shows that technology tries to get rid of the natural in the city, and that controlling bodies is just one way of doing it. To remove the natural human instinct, men should also forget that they are indeed natural, and that they do not need nature to survive. By severing the bond between men and nature, technology makes the task of invading human bodies much easier. It is easy to give up on one's naturalness when one is not aware of it. Controlling human bodies and invading them are facts of the future; severing the bond with the natural world is something that is happening now. Ecology today is about making people realize they are part of nature and they need to protect and

respect it. Environmentally speaking, dystopian novels fall within an ecological agenda by portraying this severed bond with the natural world, and its consequences: the surrendering of humans to technology.

Dystopian novels introduce us to civilizations completely surrounded by technology, living in a city in which nature does not have a place. Inhabitants of these places do not know life in the wild, they only know the comfort of the city and would not give it away for anything in the world. In the *The Hunger Games*, no inhabitants of Panem would give up their lives in the rich city to live in the Districts. In *The Machine Stops*, this remark from Kudo sets the general message this short story tries to convey about technology:

“We created the Machine, to do our will, but we cannot make it do our will now. It has robbed us of the sense of space and of the sense of touch, it has blurred every human relation and narrowed down love to a carnal act, it has paralyzed our bodies and our wills, and now it compels us to worship it. The Machine develops, but not on our lines” (Forster, 28)

The Machine here has trapped humans in a world that it can completely control, and deprived them of what made them humans: their feelings, their senses, their bodies. Humans lost their bearings, and thus are compelled to worship The Machine, which is the only choice left they have. While the Machine has not invaded the interior of the human body, yet in this story it is only a matter of time before it does. However, the control of the Machine on the human body is total, and the relation that man has with nature and his own body has disappeared. People do not move anymore, everything they need is provided by The Machine, and not nature.

If the city provides what the human needs, then there is a relation of dependence that is created between humans and the technological city. Dependence develops to the extent that man

does not know how to live without the city, and the return to wilderness is impossible. If the city fulfills man's every need, there is no point for him to care or understand nature. Neither the inhabitants of *Brave New World* nor those of *The Machine Stops* take a trip to visit nature, because they do not feel the need to. If they do, it is out of curiosity. By replacing the providing role of nature, the bond between man and nature is completely severed, to the point that man cannot survive alone in the natural world without help. After spending a day in the reservation, Lenina, who accompanied Bernard, could not bear the atrocity of living in the wild, with savages, and drugs herself to sleep:

Lenina felt herself entitled, after this day of queerness and horror, to a complete and absolute holiday. As soon as they got back to the rest-house, she swallowed six half-gramme tablets of *soma*, lay down on her bed, and within ten minutes had embarked for lunar eternity. It would be eighteen hours at the least before she was in time again. (Huxley, 122)

When Lenina visits the reservation, she stays hours outside the city. For someone whose needs are provided by technology, as time passes, a lack emerges: Lenina misses the city, and nature cannot provide her with what she needs. The queerness and horror of the nature she is facing is due more to her increasing body cravings than to what she is witnessing. The most striking example is found a chapter before, when Lenina needs to reminisce the city to be able to endure the public beating she is seeing:

Shutting her eyes she abandoned herself to their soft repeated thunder, allowed it to invade her consciousness more and more completely, till at last there was nothing left in the world but that one deep pulse of sound. It reminded her reassuringly of the synthetic noises made at Solidarity Services and Ford's Day celebrations. "Orgy-porgy," she whispered to herself. These drums beat out just the same rhythms. (Huxley, 97)

The city has made Lenina so dependent that she is only able to survive the reservation when she manages to think about it. Here, the city is her spiritual salvation: she uses the sounds of the

drums to picture the orgy porgy and to escape the appalling scene she is witnessing. The more Lenina stays in the reservation, the more the lack of technology and comfort hits her. It hits her so hard that when she gets back to her room, she takes too much of it, as a way to compensate for the craving. Lenina cannot survive without what the city provides her with.

In *Uglies*, Tally faces immense dangers and is about to die before being rescued by the inhabitants of the forest. She manages to survive solely because of the technology she took with her from the city, but left on her own, she would have died. In other words, because the city deprived man of the experience of nature, he does not have the necessary skills to survive in the natural world.

2.2.6 Technophobia and today's ecology.

Dystopian novels present us with characters incapable of surviving in the wild, because they are too used to the comfort of their urban lives. The disconnection with nature does not end here. When Katniss is comparing her meal in Panem to the hours of hunting it would take to recreate the meal, it shows that she is the only one in the room who has a true experience of nature, and she knows that this meal comes from hours of works and lots of resources. To some extent, by living in the city, man becomes oblivious to the biological dimension of what he is eating, breathing, smelling. In some of the dystopian novels studied by this essay, *Uglies*, *The Hunger Games*, or *The Machine Stops*, people only need to press a button to get ready-cooked meals, clothes, or a hot bath.

There were buttons and switches everywhere - buttons to call for food for music, for clothing. There was the hot-bath button, by pressure of which a basin of (imitation) marble rose out of the floor, filled to the brim with a warm deodorized liquid. There was the cold-bath button. There was the button that produced literature. And there were of course the buttons by which she

communicated with her friends. The room, though it contained nothing, was in touch with all that she cared for in the world. (Forster, 3)

Every single need is provided by pushing a button. It looks almost magical, as if The Machine was some kind of great entity which, with a single push on a button, can make appear anything it wants. Technology here has seized nature's provider role. The Machine has made the illusion that it could create anything it wants, making nature useless for men. The link between the effort and the reward has been blurred by technology, so that man believes technology is the provider of all his needs, when technology is but an intermediary. In *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Glotfelty writes:

As more and more of these basic materials are rendered unusable by man, it becomes apparent that man has failed to see that now, as in the past, the roots of his being are in the earth; and he has failed to see this because Nature, whose effects on man were formerly immediate, is now mediated by technology so that it appears that technology and not Nature is actually responsible for everything. (Glotfelty, 35)

The Ecocriticism Reader is not about science-fiction, it is about today's world. Now there is a proven link about ecology in dystopian novels, and ecology in the real world: technology has mediated the direct link between nature and man's needs to the extent that man has become careless. Because he cannot see the link between him and nature, he cannot see the harm done to the natural world, and holds technology responsible for all his unfulfilled needs. Ecology today is about being aware of one's connection with nature, experiencing it in order to start caring about it. The aim is not to be blinded by technology around us, which makes us believe it can provide us with everything we need, when it is just an intermediary.

Everything the reader of green dystopias sees all day has been made by technology. Experiencing nature is different from reading it. When reading, we use light made by nuclear

power factories, which use dams to produce it. The natural world is a great mystery for many a city-dweller. In *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Glotfelty argues on this particular matter and claims that:

To the average child of the United States in the present day Nature is indeed a great mystery, not insofar as it is incomprehensible but insofar as it is virtually nonexistent to his perceptions. Not only do most children obtain without delay the nurturing commodities for a satisfied bodily life, but they are rarely in a position to experience a connection between the commodity that fills their need and its natural source. (Glotfelty, 33)

Our obliviousness to the connection between a natural commodity and where it really comes from makes us careless towards nature. Because we are not in direct contact with it, but as we said, we use technology as a mediator, we cannot see the harm done to the world. Cronon rejoins Glotfelty on that point, and he argues: “The lights on the screen need electricity, and this particular electricity comes from dams on the Skagit or Columbia [...] Nature, altered and changed, in this room. But this is masked. I type, I kill nothing. I touch no living thing. I seem to alter nothing but the screen [...] my separation is an illusion.” (Cronon, 184) Cronon wants us to realize that we are always in interaction with the natural world. We are responsible for what is happening outside our home, and our supposed innocence is just an illusion created by the comfortable lives we made for ourselves.

As a consequence, ecology today is about making men aware that their actions have consequences on the natural world. Ecology today is about making man accept that he is a biological being and that he depends on nature, as much as nature depends on him. For Cronon, this is the most important argument and the mission of environmentalists:

On the one hand, one of my own most important environmental ethics is that people should always be conscious that they are part of the natural world, inextricably tied to the ecological systems that sustain their lives. Any way of looking at nature that encourages us to believe we are

separate from nature -as wilderness tends to do- is likely to reinforce environmentally irresponsible behavior. (Cronon, 87)

What is common to all schools of ecology is this idea of man's realization of his naturalness. His body is natural, and his biological needs cannot be fulfilled by his own inventions, it needs nature. The human hubris makes him believe that he is superior to the non-human world, while he completely depends on it. Man needs to accept that he cannot overcome his biological body. In his essay, Jim Dwyer quotes Elizabeth Englehardt's definition of the environment which starts with: "humans are part of nature and not separate from or superior to it." (Dwyer, 6) This claim is at the center of today's environmentalism. Dystopian novels defend this claim and base their story on it.

Dystopian novels fall within an environmental discourse by using the same kind of messages. Man has become oblivious to the workings of nature. When Lenina sees an old savage, she cannot but feel astonished at the savage's looks, as she has never seen something alike in her city. Mustafa explains to her that science in the city has hidden the natural process of aging, so that the inhabitants do not even notice the aging process and the decrepitude of their bodies. He explains:

That's because we don't allow them to be like that. We preserve them from diseases. We keep their internal secretions artificially balanced at a youthful equilibrium. We don't permit their magnesium-calcium ratio to fall below what it was at thirty. We give them transfusion of young blood. We keep their metabolism permanently stimulated. So, of course, they don't look like that. (Huxley, 95)

Technology in *Brave New World* interferes with the workings of nature. People do not grow old anymore, the degradation of the body due to the old age does not happen. Appearance is no

longer a problem for the people, they will always stay the same. They cannot see the effects of nature on them, because they are hidden by technology. Thus, they have no reminder that they are natural beings, if nothing made them notice. They see the same face every morning, they are in the same health state every day. Nature does not have any effect on them, only the city does. The disconnection is a success.

Dystopian novels are novels that may have a technophobic streak in appearance, as they portray technology as the great villain responsible for this disconnection, but they describe a futuristic society in which technology has taken over mankind. In our society, the environmental agenda transpires in making us realize that, while technology has not yet reached this level, it is on its way there, and we are gladly falling in our own traps. By showing the consequences of what the world may become if we continue, they make us aware that the process is already on the move. It is our choice to stop it and to adopt a more nature-friendly attitude, for our own sake, and our bodies'. Man needs to accept his interdependency with the natural world, and the only way to do so is to experience nature more, letting nature back into our lives smothered by technological advances.

3 EXPERIENCING THE NATURAL WORLD: FINDING BACK ONE'S HUMANITY IN NATURE.

3.1 LIFTING THE CONTROL OF THE CITY ON THE BODY

The dystopian novels' environmental agenda claims that man should experience nature to create his own environmental consciousness. By going outside the limits of his city, by discovering the beauty of the natural world, man rebounds with nature and understands what is truly at stake. The protection and care for the natural world can only be possible if man is aware of his dependence on nature. As long as nature is but an unknown remote place for him, he cannot be expected to care for it. The general goal of dystopian green stories is to make man interested in nature and in experiencing it by himself.

3.1.1 Going outside the limits of the city.

The inhabitants of dystopian novels live in the city, whose limits are never trespassed. Going outside the city means going into the wild, the dangerous area. The comfort and security provided by technology in the city is enough to stop them from wanting to leave it. Plus, the wild is often described as a dangerous place. In *Uglies*, Tally and Shae misbehave by recklessly going to the ruins outside the perimeter of the city. Another example are Katniss's woods, which are fenced in to stop inhabitants from escaping and predators from invading the districts. Like Tally and Shae, Katniss breaks the rules by going into the woods through a hole in the electrified fence. More than once, she has been threatened by a predator: "We do well. The predators ignore us on a day when easier, tastier prey abounds." (Collins, 12) In the woods, Katniss is both the hunter and the prey. The district offers her protection against the harshness of life in the wild in exchange for a life of misery and starvation. The idea that the city is safer than the wild is

mocked by Katniss a few pages before, as she mutters: “In the autumn, a few brave souls sneak into the woods to harvest apples. But always in sight of the meadow. Always close enough to run back to the safety of the District 12. District 12. Where you can starve to death in safety.” (Collins, 6) By choosing to stay confined in the civilized district, inhabitants are subjugated to the control of the technological city of Panem. The price to pay is starvation, and incapacity to defend themselves against the harsh laws imposed by the dystopian government. The inhabitants of District 12 are afraid of the wild and stay within the safety of civilization, which is mocked by Katniss, who has the guts to go into the forest and ends up better off than them. Here, she ridicules the idea that civilization is better than wilderness; in the first one, the city controls you and you starve; in wilderness, you live happy and free.

Novels like *The Hunger Games* or *Uglies* sketch a pattern found in many dystopian novels: the attraction to the wild. Kudo, Katniss, Winston, Tally, Bernard, Jonas, Tris or Montag: The common characteristic of all these main characters is their will to escape the city and discover the wild. This crave to go to places no one cares about, or is afraid of, proves that main characters in dystopian novels may have a stronger consciousness about the environment. When they do not, events make them experience it anyway, like Montag who has to run into the forest to escape the mechanic hounds sent by the city:

He was three hundred yards downstream when the Hound reached the river. Overhead the great racketing fans of the helicopters hovered. A storm of light fell upon the river and Montag dived under the great illumination as if the sun had broken the clouds. He felt the river pull him further on its way, into darkness. Then the lights switched back to the land, the helicopters swerved over the city again, as if they had picked up another trail. They were gone. The Hound was gone. Now

there was only the cold river and Montag floating in a sudden peacefulness, away from the city and the lights and the chase, away from everything.³⁶

In *Fahrenheit 451*, technology cannot trespass into the forest. There is no reason for the hounds and the helicopters to stop following Montag in the forest. It seems that a greater force made them turn back and quit the chase. Either the forest is too wild for technology to dare enter it, which brings us back to the idea that wilderness is a dangerous place, or the forest is some kind of a sanctuary, a sacred place, in which technology cannot enter. The idea of nature as a sanctuary for men is proven with the use of the expression “great illumination”, which gives a religious dimension to the forest. By finding shelter in the forest, Montag seems to call for divine intervention, represented by the image of the sun breaking the clouds. The novel associates nature with heaven, wilderness with the land of God. As a result, by escaping the demonic city and running back to nature, characters find their own heaven. Technology and science are false gods, only in nature can man reach transcendence.

3.1.2 Transcendence in the natural world.

We must consider the trip to nature as a life-changing experience for the characters. By embarking on a journey in the natural world and out of his comfort zone, the main character discovers or rediscovers things he has previously lost. He discovers a world unknown to him, that teaches him more about life and the human condition than the city does. It is in the clearing that Winston discovers what it feels like to be alive and experiences things he has never experienced before, like the need for him to rebel against The Party. In *Uglies* Tally experiences what life without comfort really is, a life not mediated by technology:

³⁶ Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967) 133.

Life was much more intense than in the city. She bathed in a river so cold that she had to jump in screaming, and she ate food pulled from the fire hot enough to burn her tongue, which city food never did. Of course, she missed shampoo that didn't sting her eyes, and flush toilets (she'd learned to her horror what "latrines" were), and mostly medspray. (Westerfeld, 223)

Life in the wild is harder than that of the city. In the wild, Tally loses the comfort she has been used to in Prettytown. Living in the forest hurts her body, and like Lenina, she starts missing the comfort of the city, where everything is provided for. Medspray could almost be assimilated to *soma*, and it is science and medicine that Tally misses the most. It takes her some time to get used to life in the forest and for her craving for comfort to recede, before starting to enjoy it. By going into the wild, her knowledge of life is shattered. What she thinks was right turned wrong, since she has no places beforehand to compare the city to. Once she compares the life in the city with that of the wild, the need for a change grows in Tally's body and mind, and she starts to rebel.

The comparison between two environments is beneficial to environmental discourse. By trapping people in, the city prevents them from comparing their lives with that of another place, and it allows for a propaganda about how good life in the city is. The propaganda of the Party in *1984* is the most speaking example of a society of make-believe:

Not a word of it could ever be proved or disproved. The Party claimed, for example, that today 40 per cent of adult proles were literate: before the Revolution, it was said, the number had only been 15 per cent. The Party claimed that the infant mortality rate was now only 160 per thousand, whereas before the Revolution it had been 300 – and so it went on. It was like a single equation with two unknowns. (Orwell, 77-78)

Even though Winston knows about the propaganda, other inhabitants of London do not know anything but what the Party serves them. Winston thinks he knows better, but even himself undergoes a life-changing experience after going into the forest with Julia. By being enclosed behind four walls, it is impossible to become aware of one's living conditions. Everything that is

happening to the body does not seem unnatural anymore, it seems normal, and the pressure technology has on one's body does not seem to exist. It is only once the characters escape the city that they become aware of everything they have been enduring. For example, it is by going outside without technology that Kudo, in *The Machine Stops*, discovers that the Machine has been controlling and trapping them.

This need to experience life away from the city and the need to undergo a life-changing experience is fundamental to environmentalism. Back in the 19th century, the Transcendentalists called for a return to the natural world, to experience life away from the polluted and depressing atmosphere of the city. Today, this issue is still at stake. In *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics and Pedagogy*, Cinder Hypki, an environmental activist, claims that the city inhabitants need the experience of nature to develop an environmental consciousness: "that is one of the big things about traditional environmentalists - they feel as though folks in the city do not respect the environment. But, they do respect the environment once we can help educate them that, in fact, the environment really exists."³⁷ City-dwellers face the same problem characters in dystopian novels face: they do not know that a better, healthier world exists. By having no other world to compare their living environment to, consciousness about the environment declines, and the things that are happening to our bodies, our health problems, our bad living conditions, start to become the norm.

The Transcendentalists are defined by their idea of transcendence in the natural world. Transcendence is the process of discovering something beyond experience, something beyond the knowledgeable. It also means to become superior, and, in the Transcendentalist's view, to find

³⁷ Adamson, Mei Mei and Sten, *The Environmental Justice Reader: Poetics & Pedagogy* (Tucson, AZ: U of Arizona, 2002) 290.

God in nature. In his chapter called 'Solitude', Thoreau writes about his newborn sensibility to the natural world:

In the midst of a gentle rain while these thoughts prevailed, I was suddenly sensible of such sweet and beneficent society in Nature, in the very pattering of the drops, and in every sound and sight around my house, an infinite and unaccountable friendliness all at once like an atmosphere sustaining me, as made the fancied advantage of human neighborhood insignificant. (Solitude, 4)

Thoreau becomes sensitive to things he had never noticed before, when he was too busy with life in the city. He uses his newly-found sensibility in *Walden* to convey a message that men should look into nature to find their heaven. By going into the natural world, the characters of dystopian novels, like Thoreau, experience things no one else experiences. They become more knowledgeable, and in the manner of Thoreau, they assume a prophetic mission: to bring light to civilization, to make them care about nature. Tally or Bernard Marx, for example, use their knowledge of nature to gain fame and power in their society, and become leaders. Experiencing nature creates characters that not only do assume a responsibility towards nature, but also become smarter, better men.

3.1.3 Finding back one's lost femininity and masculinity.

Apart from being more knowledgeable, almost prophetic, characters experiencing the natural world also find back what technology has deprived them of: their identity. The control of technology deprives men and women of their sexual instinct, and tries to replace their bodies with machines. Social cannibalism turns human bodies into mere tools that are expendable. The loss of identity is just a consequence of humans being used as tools by the city.

The link between masculinity and nature is a classic symbol of western culture. When Adam was sent down from heaven, he had to conquer the virgin land, the wilderness, and tame it

into a garden, to recreate the Garden of Eden. The association between virility and wilderness has survived until now. Vera L. Norwood, in an essay in the *Ecocriticism Reader*, declares that:

The myth of the masculine hero conquering the virginal landscape is a primary source of male ambivalence. Masculine culture in America characteristically sees wilderness as a place for defining virility, for playing out aggressive, adventure-seeking, sometimes violent impulses. Survival in a hostile natural environment is an exo-gratifying achievement and feeds the achievement-oriented male psyche, enabling men to return to civilization and improve their culture. Thus, Nature is preserved because it is useful to culture” (Glotfelty, 323)

Last century, President Roosevelt himself asked for a return to nature to test one’s virility. The association between real men, those who fought the wild, and the others, those who stayed in the comfort of the city, still exists today and is relevant to our culture. By experiencing nature, men find back their virility, in the body and in the mind, which they have been deprived of by the comfort of technology.

If we apply this myth to dystopian novels, some male characters do find back the virility they have been deprived of. Bernard Marx, who did not enjoy any of the orgies and cannot satisfy women in *Brave New World*, ends up taking advantage of his success after bringing back the savage from the reservation and gets lots of women all the time: “and I had six girls last week,” he confided to Helmholtz Watson. “One on Monday, two on Tuesday, two more on Friday and one on Saturday. And if I’d had the time or the inclination, there were at least a dozen more who were only too anxious...” (Huxley, 136) It seems that his trip into the wild also made him superior to other men. It made him manlier, to the extent that now, women are attracted to him. The complex of inferiority he suffered from at the beginning of the novel has been solved by his trip to the wild. Winston in *1984* also benefits from his trip to the clearing, as he is finally able to make love to a woman younger than him without paying her or feeling ashamed. It is even more relevant in this novel as we can follow the process of masculinity coming back to Winston. At

first, Winston has no physical desire for Julia: “but the truth was that he had no physical sensation, except that of mere contact. It was too soon, her youth and prettiness had frightened him, he was too much used to living without women.” (Orwell, 126) which is due to the overall strain that the Party has put on Winston’s body and mind about sexuality. His sexual inhibition starts to falter when he understands that Julia is corrupted, and so is the Party: “scores of times she had done it: he wished it had been hundreds- thousands. Anything that hinted at corruption always filled him with a wild hope.” (Orwell, 131) The more Julia talks, the more the pressure of the city is lifted from Winston’s body and sexuality, until finally it collapses: “that was above all what he wanted to hear. Not merely the animal instinct, the simple undifferentiated desire: that was the force that would tear the Party to pieces. He pressed her down upon the grass, among the fallen bluebells. This time there was no difficulty.” (Orwell, 132) Virility is often associated with sexuality in those novels. Since the city deprived characters of their animal instinct, it seems natural that the symbol of the return of the wild in man should appear through sexual encounters. Sexuality means power here, as long as men are sexual, they are powerful enough to act against the city.

Finding back femininity is more difficult for women in these novels. The technological city tries to replace the female reproductive body to have a control over life itself. Finding back one’s femininity means defeating the invasion of the body by technology. It also means taking back the control over life, sexuality, and mankind itself.

Women in dystopian novels suffer from social cannibalism the most. While men are used as tools to do the dirty work, women are usually reduced to their uteruses, as in *The Handmaid’s Tale*. Life seems always worse for women in dystopian novels than for men, and the association between weakness and woman comes in handy. Lenina in *Brave New World* cannot bear the sight

of the reservation and almost faints while Bernard stays calm. In *The Hunger Games*, once Katniss's father dies, her family cannot survive or support itself and are left to starve. The harshness of life in the dystopian city for women creates a feeling of uneasiness towards the female body. As the uneasiness grows, women reject more and more what nature gave them, and want to become men. As a result, the female hero rejects her female body because she refuses to be considered weak, and wants to become stronger, more masculine. Katniss Everdeen is the most striking example of female body rejection.

Katniss is a character that embodies the tomboyish attitude of warrior female characters of dystopian novels. To some extent, Tally in *Uglies* and every single female character that has been inspired by Katniss in young adult dystopian fiction also embody it. Katniss's rejection of her body is complete once she eats Peeta's bread, a symbol of masculinity, and takes on her father's provider role. She wears her father's clothes, her father's bow, and goes hunting in the wild forest. Katniss's rejection of her own body can mostly be seen through her inner fears: she cannot see a naked body, neither hers, and she is afraid of having kids, to the extent that she refuses her sexuality. Her uneasiness towards nakedness and sexuality is expressed when she finds herself alone with Peeta in a cavern: "maybe the idea of him being naked makes me uncomfortable. That's another thing about my mother and Prim. Nakedness has no effect on them." (Collins, 300) Katniss is the only female character who has difficulty with seeing a body naked, because she is the only female of the novel who has difficulty with her own sexuality. She does not know where to stand and her gender issues make her uncomfortable with nakedness. Moreover, the beginning of the novel already introduced us with a Katniss who has difficulties with her female conditions, with lines like "I never want to have kids" or "there's never been anything romantic between Gale and me. When we met I was a skinny twelve-year-old, and although he was only

two years older, he already looked like a man.” (Collins, 11) It is interesting to see that Katniss does not define herself as a little girl, but only as a twelve-year-old, and cannot figure herself romantically in love with a “man”. Later, we read “I let her towel-dry it and braid it up on my head. I can hardly recognize myself in the cracked mirror that leans against the wall” (Collins, 17), which proves that Katniss does not recognize herself when she looks like a girl, with braided hair and a dress, and does not like it. Katniss represents the ultimate rejection of femininity due to its association with weakness. Katniss spends the novel trying to protect little girls, like Rue or Prim, embodying the big brother she is not, and the male she would like to be. In the novel, she embodies masculinity more than any other character.

Not as strong a female character as Katniss, Offred suffers her own body rejection. In a previous quote, Offred does not want to look down at her naked body because she hates that it defines her completely, which is a characteristic she shares with Katniss. However, the strong rejection of her femininity appears in a passage about the Commander’s pen:

The pen between my fingers is sensuous, alive almost, I can feel its power, the power of the words it contains. Pen Is Envy, Aunt Lydia would say, quoting another Center motto, warning us away from such objects. And they were right, it is envy. Just holding it is envy. I envy the Commander his pen. It's one more thing I would like to steal. (Atwood, 196)

The pen with its phallic figure is just a metaphor for power. The Commander has the pen, he has the power; Offred does not have the pen, she has no power. She envies the Commander his masculinity. In her essay, Julia Pei-Hsuan Hsieh comments on this passage and writes: “I would like to simply say that Atwood’s witty word-play is a sarcastic comment on man power [sic] whose absoluteness has been supported by not only Gilead but also Freud. As the word-play games show Offred’s imagination and sensitivity to language, the puns related to body also disclose her rebellion in a way.” (Pei-Hsuan Hsieh, 18) There is indeed a small rebellion of

Offred's body, but it seems to be a rebellion against her own condition, and as a consequence, about her condition as a powerless female trapped inside a fertile body.

By going into nature, women may become at peace with their bodies and their sexualities. In Julia's case, Winston's love affair, it is in the clearing that she expresses her sexuality. She is not the rebellious kind, like Winston, she gets turned on by braving the forbidden and engaging in promiscuous relationships with other Party members. She is not interested in defeating the Party, she just wants to be free, and she can only be free in these remote places. Women subjugated to a dystopian tyranny often look at nature to find solace and peace. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, it is in the garden that Serena spends her days, mourning the loss of her fertility and thus, of her utility:

I go out by the back door, into the garden, which is large and tidy: a lawn in the middle, a willow, weeping catkins, around the edges, the flower borders, in which the daffodils are now fading and the tulips are opening their cups, spilling out color. The tulips are red, a darker crimson towards the stem, as if they have been cut and are beginning to heal there. This garden is the domain of the Commander's Wife. (Atwood, 22)

In this garden is symbolized Serena's sexuality. The daffodils, symbol of renewal and beauty, are dying, and the red tulips are "spilling" their colors. Red tulips represent Offred's sexuality, and they spill their colors at a time Offred is able to conceive a child, while daffodils represent Serena's beauty, forever gone. Weeping catkins and a willow tree are also present, a symbol for Serena's mourning. Serena Joy mourns the loss of her femininity and tries to find it back in nature, in a garden she herself created, as if growing flowers would make her woman again. Offred mocks Serena Joy and her will to be biologically active again when she snaps: "even at her age she still feels the urge to wreath herself in flowers. No use for you, I think at her, my face unmoving, you can't use them anymore, you're withered." (Atwood, 91) Offred's sexuality however works in harmony with the tulips and the flowers: it is the presence of the garden, the

scent of the flowers that make her sexually active. The bond between nature and femininity is undeniable in those stories, as it appears to be the only remedy to face the loss of femininity and sexuality, consequence of the oppressive technological city. By going into the natural world, men and women alike find back their identities. Nature removes the strain on their bodies and triggers their natural body functions, like sexuality and birthing.

As a conclusion, experiencing the natural world helps finding back what the city deprived them of: humanity. By repressing the natural in man, the city also repressed what makes him human: feelings, sexuality and violence. In technologically advanced dystopian novels like *Oryx and Crake*, *Uglies* or *Brave New World*, city-dwellers are turned into idle beings too busy to enjoy life to care about anything else, and even less about the environment. The dehumanization of mankind is the consequence of the city's control over the wild in men. By finding back their masculinity and femininity, they also find back their natural instincts. Violence and sexuality are two of the instincts that bring them closer to their nature, but also closer to humanity. The Voigt-Kampff test, in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, is an allegory for this fear humans have of being dehumanized. The test serves as a means to differentiate an android from a human. The test asks questions about animals being killed. If the subject shows signs of empathy, he is considered human, if not, he is killed off. The novel is an allegory for the fear of mecanomorphism inherent to dystopian novels which dehumanizes humans. Nature, animals, they all prevent machines from taking away humanity. By taking a trip to nature, the characters of dystopian novels rediscover what it feels like to be human, and alive.

3.2 SURVIVAL AND THE EXPERIENCE OF THE NATURAL WORLD

3.2.1 Body adaptation to the life in the wild.

Life is more thrilling in the wild than in the city. As a result, Tally chooses life in the wild over that of the city, Winston experiences things he has never experienced before and finds back his masculinity. Bernard Marx finds out that savages have a more thrilling life than him. Going into the wild means finding a life in which one feels more alive. But going into nature is also a means to survive. Without the experience of the wild, some of these dystopian characters would never have survived, or would have lived a life without flavor. Winston was destined to be killed, going into the clearing allowed him to have a glimpse of real life before dying. Without the experience of the forest Katniss would never have survived during the Hunger Games. She uses the experience of the wild to survive and win the games. For example, she knows how to climb a tree, which saves her life: “Gale always says I remind him of a squirrel the way I can scurry up even the slenderest limbs. Part of it’s my weight, but part of it’s practice. You have to know where to place your hands and feet.” (Collins, 213) Because she hunted the woods for years, her body has adapted to the environment, and the skills she got from it allow her to survive the Capitol. To survive in dystopian novels, to be better than the others, one needs the experience of nature.

Katniss has the experience of the forest, but what really saves her is the way she adapts in the woods. Her body has been forged by her life in the wild, as much as the body of Rue, another character of the novel, has been forged by her works in the orchards. The body adapts to its environment, and thus, by going from one environment to another, one’s physical capabilities become useful, or useless. Abigail Mann, in an essay that tries to understand the psychology behind *The Hunger Games*, explains the Darwinian theory of body variations to the environment: “More simply, we might say that the variations have to be useful for the environment in which

the individual finds himself or herself. If the environment changes, so does the fitness of an individual.”³⁸ In Katniss’s case, she is well fit for the woods, however she is ill-fit for the city, unlike Peeta who thrives in it thanks to his looks and his eloquence. By going into the wild, the body adapts to its environment, so that it becomes impossible for the character to live in the city anymore. Consciousness about the environment is raised when the body needs and craves for it. Once a person gets used to it, there is no going back. As a consequence, when Lenina goes back from the reservation in *Brave New World*, she has to take all her *soma* to go to sleep and forget about what she saw. The wild was too overwhelming for her. *Soma* can be seen as a medicine against the effects of nature on the body. By drugging herself to sleep, she tries to cure the natural she felt growing back inside of her, as well as her craving for medicine and technology.

Katniss’s body is adapted to survive in the wild, while others are not. Her skills and nimbleness allows her to survive the whole war. The body of a character in dystopian novels adapts to its environment: if the environment is too comfortable and idle, the body becomes weak and idle. On the contrary, the wild makes the body stronger. Winston gets physically stronger and healthier after his trip with Julia. Katniss is stronger than the other tributes because of her hunting sessions. In Forster’s short story *The Machine Stops*, the inhabitants cannot have an athletic body: “by these days it was a demerit to be muscular. Each infant was examined at birth, and all who promised undue strength were destroyed. Humanitarians may protest, but it would have been no true kindness to let an athlete live; he would never have been happy in that state of life...” (Forster, 21) This quote is of tantamount importance for several reasons. The first one is that the city -the Machine- destroys every human who has undue strength, lest it would threaten its balance. Also, living in a city in which everything is provided for makes the human body weak.

³⁸ Abigail Mann, “Competition and Kindness,” *The Hunger Games and Philosophy, a Critique of Pure Treason* (Hoboken: NJ, Wiley, 2012) 107.

The inhabitants of *The Machine Stops* are unable to make any effort and they sit all day long. Their body has become useless for physical activities. Because he wants to get out of The Machine, Kudo spends weeks training his arms to grow back some muscles and to be able to climb up the ladder (“and so I exercised my arms. Day after day I went through ridiculous movements, until my flesh ached, and I could hang by my hands and hold the pillow of my bed outstretched for many minutes.” (Forster, 23), which shows how weakened the body is when subjugated to the dominion of technology. Strength becomes useless as the Machine is the provider of every need and thus, it is removed. Going into nature also means becoming physically stronger. Nature provides humans with the necessary strength to escape technology.

What is common to all characters in dystopian novels is their stubbornness, or bravery, to go beyond the limits of the city. Since we dealt with the fitness to an environment, it seems that, to begin with, the main characters are not fit for their original environment. They are all rebels, and they all find that something is wrong in the city. For the city, they are all mistakes. They are not like the others, because there is too much wild inside of them. Tris in *The Divergent Series* is a ‘Divergent’, which means that she is different from the others, more human; Alex in *A Clockwork Orange* shows extreme violence and thus is chosen first by the government to be a test-subject; Jonas in *The Giver* becomes the leader of his town because there is something different about him. None of these characters fit inside their city. Too curious, too wild, too different, or in other words, not affected enough by the control of the city, they are dangerous, and thus, become the leaders of a movement anti-dystopian city. They become eco-warriors.

3.2.2 Growing the seeds of rebellion.

Experiencing the natural world makes for better, more knowledgeable, stronger human beings. By rediscovering a nature that they have lost, and by being more in accordance with nature, they also feel better. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss claims that being in the woods makes her feel better, less oppressed. “Funny though, I don’t feel too bad. The days of gorging myself have paid off. I’ve got staying power even though I’m short on sleep. Being in the woods is rejuvenating.” (Collins, 177) By stepping inside the woods, Katniss’s body is rejuvenating and healing; the wood has some kind of power on her that helps her survive. Thus, being outside the woods siphons her strength. Only in the woods does she feel secured and beyond the grasp of the city: “I’m glad for the solitude, even though it’s an illusion, because I’m probably on screen right now.” (Collins, 177) Even though she knows she is being filmed, within the woods, it is not so hard to bear with it. Being in her chosen environment makes her feel better, at peace. Montag experiences the same kind of rejuvenation when he enters the woods to save his life. Peace and quiet helped him get back on his feet and appreciate his life outside the city. Those characters feel better in the pristine nature, and feel worse when they are in the city. If a character feels better in the woods than in the city, it means that there is a problem with the urban environment. The comparison between how one feels in the city and one feels in nature creates a feeling of dissatisfaction with civilization, and calls for activism against the technological city.

The comparison between two environments is the powerhouse of environmental thinking in today’s ecology, and in dystopian novels. As long as man does not know anything but his living place, he cannot develop an environmental consciousness. Going out of the city and visiting pristine places make characters in dystopian novels and today’s city-dwellers more knowledgeable, and we will see how they use this knowledge for environmental actions.

When they acquire the knowledge of the natural world, characters of dystopian novels become able to compare their living place with another. If the wild is more livable than the civilized city, then there is a problem. Dystopian novels make a great case in comparing two worlds, the dull, dangerous city and the green, peaceful natural land. In *1984*, the city is described as “a world of steel and concrete of monstrous machines and terrifying weapons” (Orwell, 77) while the clearing, the ‘Golden Country’, is described as follow:

An old, close-bitten pasture, with a footpath wandering across it and a molehill here and there. In the ragged hedge on the opposite side the boughs of the elm trees swayed just perceptibly in the breeze, and their leaves stirred faintly in dense masses like women’s hair. Surely somewhere nearby, but out of sight, there must be a stream with green pools where dace were swimming? (Orwell, 129)

The first environment is described with adjectives associated with technology such as “monstrous” and “terrifying”. The Golden County looks like a dream, in which everything is subtle: “swayed just perceptibly in the breeze”, “stirred faintly”. Here, the aggressiveness of technology is compared to the passiveness of nature. However, Winston is not able to realize it before going into the clearing. It is only upon entering the clearing that he has the sudden realization that there is something wrong with the way he has lived until then.

Upon entering the clearing, we can read: “[a]lready on the walk from the station the May sunshine had made him feel dirty and etiolated, a creature of indoors, with the sooty dust of London in the pores of his skin.” (Orwell, 125) Being subjugated by the beauty of the pristine nature, he cannot but feel out of place. As long as he was in London, his looks almost did not matter, but now that he is surrounded by beauty, he feels ashamed. He then adds “It occurred to him that till now she had probably never seen him in broad daylight in the open.” (Orwell, 125) All these realizations come from the journey to the clearing. If he had not been subjugated by

another environment, Winston would never have thought something was wrong with his appearance, because this kind of appearance is expected in the city. Nevertheless, the shame Winston feels about his appearance when he trespasses the limits of the clearing is the powerhouse of his rebellion. The shame about the way the city has turned him into is necessary to understand the negative effects of technology on the body and the mind.

The comparison between two environments seems necessary to make people realize the environmental problems of their living places. However, saying that the characters of dystopian novels were oblivious to the degradation of their environment before discovering nature might be presumptuous. Katniss does not need to go into the forest to understand that she is living a hard life. Nature is just her savior, and she went into the forest out of despair. Montag, in *Fahrenheit 451* never stepped foot in the forest until the end, but that did not prevent him from rebelling against the city. The feeling that something is not right in the city exists before the trip to the wild. In some way, it is one of the reasons the character may be attracted to the outside of the city, to find the answers to their uneasiness. Winston remarks about the food of London: “[a]lways in your stomach and your skin there was some sort of protest, a feeling that you had been cheated of something that you had a right to.” (Orwell, 62) Winston’s body feels cheated, and it creates a feeling that something is wrong. The idea that he deserves something else than what he is being given stirs him into rebelling. It is this feeling that pushed Winston to go into the clearing, but he was never oblivious to the degradation of his environment.

In *1984*, Winston remains passive against the degradation of his environment because the city made him too weak to rebel. Nevertheless, there is a moment in the novel that have stirred him into taking actions against the Party. This is where Winston’s greatest fear comes at play: the rat. Winston remarks that rats have been invading the city of London. While it might be a

metaphor for the members of the Party, it also is a symbol for the insalubrity of London. More rats means that the city is becoming less and less healthy. Winston is afraid of the rats not because the animal is scary -even though they do eat human alive in the novel- but because they are a symbol of what is happening to his city:

“‘Rats!’ murmured Winston. ‘In this room!’

‘They’re all over the place,’ said Julia indifferently as she lay down again. ‘We’ve even got them in the kitchen of the hostel. Some parts of London are swarming with them. Did you know they attack children? Yes they do. In some streets a woman daren’t leave a baby alone for two minutes. It’s the huge brown ones that do it. And nasty thing is that the brutes always – ‘

‘Don’t go on!’ said Winston, with his eyes tightly shut.

‘Dearest! You’ve gone quite pale. What’s the matter? Do they make you feel sick?’

‘Of all the horrors in the world – a rat!’” (Orwell, 151)

Here, in his room in which he thought he would be safe, there is a rat. The rat represents the Party: the invasion of the room by the rat means that the Party was watching them, but it also shows that Winston is not even safe in his room. This degradation seems to be the worst of “all the horrors in the world”, showing that Winston is deeply affected by what has become of London. The pollution, the degradation of the environment affects him even in his little room he thought was safe. There is no escape for him, he cannot run away. This scene appears right before Winston decides to ask O’Brien for Goldstein’s book, in other words, right before he decided to rebel and act against the Party. About this rat, Amy Cartwright, a specialist of science-fiction and gothic literature, reaches the same conclusion: “[t]he symbol of the threat to his bodily unity, to

the coherence of what is held together underneath the skin, is the rat in the cage.”³⁹ The rat does represent the invasion of the Party within Winston’s body. Winston’s greatest fear is that the Party, the city, the rat, would eat him from the inside. As a consequence, Winston perfectly symbolizes the dystopian fear of the invasion of the body by the city. Thus, when he sees the rat invading his safe place, he decides that it is high time that he should take actions to protect his body integrity.

We may wonder how come Winston, before his trip to Nature, is sensitive to environmental changes. He has always lived in the city; as a consequence, the way of life should seem normal to him. However, the answer is simple. Like Offred in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Winston has known a better world. Some characters in dystopian novels have only known their present lives, thus they can only look for a better future, while Winston, Offred, or even Snowman in *Oryx and Crake*, linger in the past. This connection with their past lives, introduced by the several flashbacks and the character’s own contemplation of his lost life, allow them to know that something is going wrong. One of the many early examples in *The Handmaid’s Tale* of Offred lingering in the past would be:

We used to talk about buying a house like one of these, an old big house, fixing it up. We would have a garden, swings for the children. We would have children. Although we knew it wasn't too likely we could ever afford it, it was something to talk about, a game for Sundays. Such freedom now seems almost weightless. (Atwood, 33)

We can notice how the narrator starts the sentence with “used to”, and continues with “would”, both marks of habits in the past. Characters like Offred or Winston are not oblivious to the changes of their environment, because they have another world to compare it to: the one in their past. Memories however are things that cannot be changed. It seems that these characters accept

³⁹ Amy Cartwright, *The Future is Gothic: Elements of Gothic in Dystopian Noels* (PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 2007) 11.

that their past is their past, and there is nothing they can do about it, unless the situation becomes too unbearable, or unless their lives are at stake. It is however the force that may push them to find back what they have lost, and that pushes them into experiencing nature. Characters who do not have such a strong link and nostalgia with their past lives do not look for an escape route: Montag in *Fahrenheit 451*, for example, only escapes in the forest because he does not have a choice, but if we consider that the forest has been within his reach the whole novel, then he never showed any interest to experience it, because the only thing he ever knew was the city.

3.2.3 Hierarchy of environments.

The problem with the comparison between two environments, a dystopian one and a pristine one, is that it creates a hierarchy of environments. The city is described as an unwholesome place, while the pristine nature is described as a kind of heaven on Earth. Before going on further on the experience of nature, a parenthesis is needed on this dualism conveyed by these novels.

The place in which characters escape is often a virgin, remote nature, untouched by the city. We can think of the forest in *Fahrenheit 451*, inaccessible for the mechanical hound, or the clearing in *1984* that Julia chooses because no one can spy on them there. The problem with the virgin land, is that once it is being invaded by technology, it is no longer considered pure. Pollan, in *Second Nature: a Gardener's Education*, deals with this question of virgin and fallen land and writes: "Americans have done an admirable job of drawing lines around certain sacred areas... and a terrible job of managing the rest of the land.... Once a landscape is no longer 'virgin' it is typically written off as fallen, lost to nature, irredeemable."⁴⁰ Let us apply this to the novel *Uglies*. In it, the city artificially made an orchid that is more beautiful than any other flower, but that is now rampaging the Earth. Every single place the orchid touches is burnt to the ground by machines in the novel. To some extent, the invasion of the orchid makes a virgin land go fallen, and allows for the intervention of technology on that land. When Tally, oblivious to the problem, asks why people burn the land, the ranger answers that "the orchids eventually die out, victims of their own success, leaving a wasteland behind. Biological zero. We rangers try to keep them from spreading. We've tried poison, engineered diseases, predators to target the hummingbirds... But

⁴⁰ Michael Pollan, *Second Nature: A Gardener's Education* (New York: Dell, 1991) 223.

fire is the only thing that really works.” (Westerfeld, 174) The orchids corrupt the land, and on a fallen land, men allow themselves to tamper with the eco-system. The technology of the city in *Uglies* is advanced, to the extent that they can profoundly change the ecosystem and the natural order of the land. However in the novel, pristine forests are not touched by technology. The city does not trespass on the forest, until it is proven the land is fallen. For example, the government of Prettytown only invests the forest once it discovers where the rebels hide, making the forest no longer untouched and pure, and thus, fallen. In any case, by using fire, the city purifies the fallen land. Can it be a symbol for the city trying to redeem itself, by purifying its own creation? Inhabitants of Prettytown seem to have a strong consciousness towards pristine nature, and try to preserve it. Everything touched by the errors of the city must be purified, while pure nature must be protected.

Pristine nature is characterized by its purity, but also by its remoteness. The dystopian genre has a strong fascination for far-off lands. In these novels, natural places are left untouched by the city and as a result, must be far from it. The use of transportations to access these places is needed. Airplanes, helicopters, trains, buses, hover boards, or simply long treks are all it takes to reach it. Cronon writes about the fascination for remote places, like the Amazonian forest, as it represents the human ideal of the El Dorado: “the convergence of wilderness values with concerns about biological diversity and endangered species has helped produce a deep fascination for remote ecosystems, where it is easier to imagine that nature might somehow be ‘left alone’ to flourish by its own pristine devices.” (Cronon, 85) The farther we escape from the city, the higher the chances to find a pure land. In dystopian novels, nature can be seen as some kind of El Dorado, some kind of idyllic, utopian place. After all, the goal that every character pursues is to change or escape the dystopian city, to find or create a better place. Far from the city, remote

nature represents this heaven on Earth that characters are looking for. Too close a natural land is by default corrupted by the city. As a proof, it seems that the clearing in *1984*, was indeed bugged since the beginning.

If the remote pristine nature is the heaven they have been looking for, we could wonder why they do not remain in it. The trip pattern in dystopian novels is a round-trip: from city to nature, and then, back to the city. The escape is followed by the return of the hero, with a few exceptions when the hero has no possibility to come back (*Fahrenheit 451*, *The Road*, and *The Giver*). But if the opportunity of coming back exists, they will take it. We may have several explanations for it. The first one concerns the healing power of nature that transforms men into prophets. By finding back their masculinity, femininity, humanity, and by acquiring the knowledge they need, they are better suited to face technology and the city, and to redeem and save mankind. The second reason falls within the environmental agenda. Since those novels create a hierarchy between pristine, untouched nature and corrupted city, nature should be left untouched. Like the Amazonian forest in our world, remote nature should stay beyond man's grasp. In *Uncommon Ground*, Cronon claims that "wilderness most salient characteristic is its lack of utility. It's a place where man remains a visitor." (Cronon, 117) Dystopian novels break with this claim. Wilderness grants consciousness to one's living conditions and one's connection with nature. It is not a landscape just here to be pretty and left untouched. However, characters in dystopian novels respect the need to let the wild be wild. As a result, pristine nature becomes a sanctuary. Characters look for protection and answers, they enter the sanctuary, reach transcendence, and leave it unchanged, with a new mission: to bring down the dystopian city and claim nature's triumph.

3.2.4 The dystopian crusade against technology.

Nature as a sanctuary, a place to find answers, brings a new dimension to its effects on the characters: it turns them into rebels, fighting for the cause they believe in, like crusaders trying to take back the city from the control of technology. Political resistance is created in those wild untouched places. They cannot stay in this sanctuary, as they are but “intruders” (Cronon, 287), as Cronon adds later in his book. They have to go back to the city, but it is now impossible for them to live the way they used to. They have to become an active force against the control of technology on humans. Nature becomes a site of political resistance and of rebellion. Tally, Katniss and Winston are three of the most speaking examples of characters who develop a political consciousness after journeying in the wilderness. In Tally’s case, she even becomes a true eco-warrior.

In *The Hunger Games Series*, ‘The Hanging Tree’ is the anthem of the revolutionaries. It is a song that comes several times in the novels, taught to Katniss by her father. The song is about a murderer asking his lover to meet him at the hanging tree. The song has four stanzas, which are all the same but for one sentence. The first one gives the model for the rest of the song:

Are you, are you
Coming to the tree
Where they strung up a man they say murdered three.
Strange things did happen here
No stranger would it be
If we met up at midnight in the hanging tree.⁴¹

Then, the third verse is the only thing that changes. In the second stanza, it is: “[w]here the dead man called out for his love to flee.” The third one sings “[w]here I told you to run so we’d both be free” and the last one sings: “[w]ear a necklace of rope, side by side with me.” This song is forbidden by the government in the series, and thus is used by the revolutionaries to fight against

⁴¹ Suzanne Collins, *Mockinjay* (New York, NY: Scholastic, 2010) 138.

the rules of Panem. The first time Katniss sings this song, it is in the forest in *Mockingjay*, in a pristine setting, filmed by her crew. Katniss is even angry at the crew trespassing in the woods: “I straggle behind the film crew and the bodyguards, feeling their presence to be a violation of my beloved woods.” (135) She sings near a lake, in response to a mockingjay’s twit. Thus, the song is born from the wild. It seems to ask people to give up their freedom, their lives, and rally the murderer –who is a revolutionary- in his fight, and in his death. But for Katniss, this seems to be an air that belongs to the woods, sung by the mockingjay. It is the anthem of the wild forbidden by the city, demanding that men abandon their current lives and come back to the trees. Katniss truly becomes the mockingjay, the singing bird, after singing this song, her aria. It is at that moment that she embodies the wild, and becomes a true eco-warrior.

Let us also take the example of *Uglies* and Tally to see the political impact of pristine nature. Tally is a character who goes from a teenager whose only dream is to become pretty, brainwashed by the government of Prettytown, to a warrior fighting to end the control of technology on the human body. Tally represents what this essay has been developing so far: the fear of the invasion of the body by technology and the fight between nature and the city. Her development follows the steps of this essay, from comparison to realization to rebellion. The story focuses on the body and the body image of the character. It shows how by controlling the body, technology controls mankind. At the end of the trilogy, Tally’s transformation is beyond control. Craig Hill, in a chapter called “Creating an Eco-Warrior” of his book about young adult literature, describes it as follow:

Tally suddenly and intensely identifies with what was once abstract to her: the notion of endangered species. Her immersion in the wild has stripped away any trace of domestication at this point. Tally has gone feral and now realizes that this immersion has made the wild her own- it

is her home and she is the animal in it. She has become a vital part of the ecosystem. She needs it and it needs her⁴².

Tally becomes the opposite of what the city of Prettytown wants humans to become: she is uncontrollable. She becomes invaded by the wild and nature inside her body and is a threat to the balance of the city. Thus, she should be eliminated. Tally follows the path of biocentrism, with the idea that every single species on Earth matters, and that humans are just plain destroyers of the beauty of the world. Tally does not want to save the city, she wants to save nature. Even though Tally does not fall within the environmental agenda most dystopian novels defend, she however is a great example of the impact that the wild has on the human body. She symbolizes the fight between nature and technology, and proves that, being invaded by technology is to be feared, but so is being invaded by nature. Technology might not be the real enemy of dystopian novels. Indeed, Prettytown is an eco-friendly city with an environmental agenda. As Craig Hill writes:

On one hand, they are completely insular constructs that are indeed ecologically sustainable, that respect their ecological footprint in the world. Everyone is provided for. [...] In order to maintain the wild, he implies, we must surgically modify people in order to escape the desire to consume resources outside the city. Additionally, by keeping people ignorant of the wild, the desire to explore it, to remain in it, is the only way to preserve it. The wild is 'out there', it is an 'other' to be revered, but also to be feared. (Hill, 129)

Prettytown is not the enemy here. The government wants to preserve pristine nature and stops humans from destroying it. However, the solution they have found may be too radical and in the end, it plays against them. Some dystopian novels may try to find a better path to make technology and nature live in harmony, to create a better future, and the failures of utopian town like Prettytown may help us not repeat the same mistakes as they did, for nature's defense. To

⁴² Craig Hill, *The Critical Merits of Young Adult Literature: Coming of Age* (Routledge: NY, 2014) 107.

some extent, it seems that Tally is not an example to follow, she is the consequences of bad decisions made to protect the environment.

To conclude on this part, the experience of nature is described in almost every dystopian novel. To experience the effects of nature on the body allows the characters in these novels to create their own consciousness for the environment, and to rebel against their living conditions in the city. Nature becomes an adjuvant of the story, a sanctuary that heals men and women alike, makes them better human beings and sends them on a crusade against the city. While many dystopian novels appear at first to claim for a complete return to nature, with a strong technophobic streak, the ecological message conveyed is more subtle than this. The city might be responsible for our health and body problems, for the invasion of our bodies, but human hubris is responsible for this situation. It is possible to follow the path the main characters of dystopian novels take and create a better world for ourselves, in which technology and nature live in harmony.

4 CONCLUSION.

This essay has tried to prove how important dystopian novels are to raise awareness of environmental dangers. The focus on the body and the sexuality of the characters allows for an understanding of the consequences of the environment on our own physical integrity. The impact of a bad environment on the health and the lives of the main characters makes the reader realize that it could also happen to him. However, dystopian novels are set in a near future, which still gives us time to react and change our gruesome destiny. These novels are cautionary tales, they try to warn of an imminent danger that is still avoidable. It is up to us to take the necessary measures for the dystopia to stay a work of fiction, and not to become the reality.

These novels give us a pattern to follow. The main character is always a regular male or female; he could be anyone, he could be the reader. They do not stick out of the crowd because of their appearance or their power, they become important because of what they do. What makes them different is their awareness and their curiosity. They are curious of what lies beyond the limits of their city, out of their comfort zone. They are aware of what is happening to them, of the degradation of their environment, of the fact that something is not right. These two qualities are what make them exceptional, and these are qualities that everyone can have. The goal of these stories is to arouse the curiosity and the awareness of its pool of readers, to make them follow the steps of these iconic characters, and to give them the tools to change their living conditions.

Following the path the main characters set is a three-step process. First, the character becomes aware that something is wrong in the dystopian world he lives in. Out of curiosity, he

finds out something that reveals a truth he was not aware of before. That truth puts him on a quest for answers. Then, the protagonist finds another world way better than his current one. By comparing the two worlds, he understands what is wrong with the city. At last, carrying the truth, the hero comes back to his world and tries to change it. He becomes a rebel, a warrior, siding with the environment against the technological city and the dystopian government.

During the first step, the hero becomes aware that something is wrong with his environment. At one point of the story, the control of the city becomes so unbearable that he or she breaks down. In Winston's case, the artificial food he is given, or the rats that are invading the town and eating babies are too much for him to turn a blind eye on his way of life. In Tally's case, the pressure of beauty standards as well as her own depreciation of her appearance might have pushed her into misbehaving and escaping. Katniss in *The Hunger Games* was on the verge of dying before deciding to trespass into the woods and to hunt for a living. In Montag's case, in *Fahrenheit 451*, the death of the old lady trying to protect her books makes him aware that what he is doing might be wrong. In Offred's case, the visit to the brothel makes her realize that, unlike her belief that women were in charge, Gilead's society was but another patriarchal society trying to control women and women's bodies. The realization that something is not right will lead them into taking reckless actions that put them all in danger of dying.

All these characters fight for their lives, trying to escape and to find the answers to their newly-developed interrogations. Jonas in *The Giver* wonders what is out there, outside the city, and cannot bear the way the city functions any longer. Tris in *Divergent* tries to find the answers to her nature as a divergent. To do so, she needs to go beyond the wall that surrounds Chicago. In *The Machine Stops*, Kudo wants to know what is outside the Machine, to find the truth about the real state of the Earth. Bernard Marx in *Brave New World* is fascinated by the savage's way of

life and wants to understand why he does not find his life fulfilling. These interrogations will stir them into taking reckless actions, and to see beyond the truth the city imposes on them.

In their escape, they almost all the time chance upon a wild place, a place untouched by the control of the city. Stepping into the wild, the characters find out that they feel better in their wild haven than they ever felt in the city. Katniss claims several times she feels better in the woods than in any other place. The changes Winston undergoes in the clearing make him healthier and give him an overall sense of fullness and well-being. Tally finds life better in the forest than she ever did in the city. Once the control of the city has been lifted, life finally becomes enjoyable.

By comparing the two environments, they spot the problems with the dystopian government. Their health, their appearances, their sexualities, and overall their feelings are great indicators of these problems. The Party in *1984* controls men by tiring them with work and physical jerks, frustrates them by depriving them of their sexual life, makes them weak and unable to rebel by keeping them in a state of starvation and poverty. It results in people being sick, pale, weak, thin and tired-looking. Inhabitants under the dominion of Panem in *The Hunger Games* are in the same state. On the other hands, dystopian novels with a utopian setting show people in a perfect health and physical appearance, but who have lost what make them humans: feelings. In these novels, they cannot feel anything but pure fictive joy, whether produced by drugs, brain-surgery or virtual reality.

The wild place is an adjuvant of the story, it is only here to provide the answers the main character is looking for. In this pristine nature that is not affected by the control of the city, they find peace and transcendence. No harm comes to them in this sanctuary, and the knowledge they acquire during the time they stay makes them anew. They become the carriers of light, the

prophets that will bring down technology and save the human race from the claws of the city. Tally, with the knowledge she acquired about real life and about the surgery, becomes herself the leader of the rebellion against Prettytown, trying to cure its inhabitants from the unwanted brain-surgery. Bernard Marx in *Brave New World* uses the knowledge of the reservation and the celebrity he gains by bringing back John to fulfill his needs. Bernard fails at changing the city because he is an egoist. He uses the knowledge he acquired for his own self. John the Savage, by comparing his previous life in the wild with his new life in the city, makes a choice and decides to leave both places to live by himself, away from civilization. In his case, he actually tried to change the city, but flees when he finds himself unable to do so. This novel seems to show the failure of two characters who could not fulfill their prophetic roles, maybe because the city has become too strong, or maybe because none of them experienced the wild: they experienced a reservation, a place tamed by humans. Winston uses his experience of the clearing and tries to bring an end to the Party's lies. He however gets halted when rallying people to his cause, those willing to bring the corruption of the Party into light. Katniss uses her experience of the forest to survive *The Hunger Games* and to defeat President Snow's attempt at killing her. Her nimbleness, her hunting skills, her knowledge of the living conditions in District 12, allow her to become the icon of the rebellion and to rally people to her cause, putting an end to the dystopian government. A last example would be Kido, in Forster's novel, who uses the experience of the ground to understand that the Machine has been lying to them. Kido fails at telling the truth, getting imprisoned, but as the Machine collapses, he understands that the only thing that matters is man's connection to the natural world, man's life in the wild. "The sin against the body -it was for that they wept in chief; the centuries of wrong against the muscles and the nerves." (Forster, 74) By enclosing themselves under the ground, at the mercy of The Machine, they doomed themselves: their bodies became weak, and they were unable to fight for survival. It is now to the

men living on Earth, with the strong bodies and the capability to survive in the wild, to continue the human race.

The wild gave them a mission, to bring down the city and claim nature's triumph. These characters take actions to try and change their world, but they all mostly fail. Dystopian novels might actually be despair-inducing. It seems that whatever happens, the city will win, and the individual will fail. The problem they are facing is the immense power and control the city has. It has developed so many weapons to control humans, like drugs, surgery, propaganda or torture, that the situation has reached a point of non-return. The reader of green stories however does not live in a dystopia. The world has not yet reach this level of despair, it is still time to seriously think and take actions to change it. Nonetheless, some of these characters succeed (Katniss, Tally, Offred) in their mission, the others do not because it is too late.

Dystopian novels are concerned about what the future can become, and they warn against it. The failure of these characters should be seen as a warning. However, the three-step process is still relevant for the environmental discourse: man needs to be aware that something is wrong with the way he lives, and then must experience the life away from the city to create his own environmental consciousness. Finally, once he experiences nature, it is his mission to use his knowledge to protect it, to take actions and to convey the environmental agenda. A final aspect to understand is that this three-step pattern is not present in every dystopian novels, only those which take on environmental issues. For example, it is not present in Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*, even though the novel is interesting to see the control of the city on the human body.

The green dystopia offers a three-step process that is not far from what the environmentalists call for. The environmental agenda of dystopian novels falls along the line of today's ecology. They ask men to get away from the comfort of their lives, to experience nature

and create their own consciousness, to change their habits and bring the environment back into their lives. Glotfelty's *Ecocriticism Reader* deals a lot with the idea that man is completely disconnected from the natural world, because technology has mediated its relationship with it. Glotfelty writes about the irony of green stories:

Of course, readers have always been willing to pull on their mental boots and journey to places in books they would never think of visiting in the flesh. Millions have read *Walden* and *Life on the Mississippi*, yet how many have built a hut in the woods or rafted down a river? [...] The boxes that shut us off from nature have become more perfect, more powerful, from all-electric mansions in the suburbs to glass towers in the city, from space shuttles to shopping malls. (Glotfelty, 192)

Glotfelty sums up exactly what dystopian novels are trying to prove. The boxes that shut us off from nature -the city and technology-, are becoming more powerful to the point that they mediate our every need. It is now difficult for men to go back to the wild, to build a hut in the woods. Life is harder, less comfortable than the life the city offers. Dystopian novels are not real green stories in the sense that they do not make us dream about wild, pristine nature. They are green stories in the sense that they make us realize we are subjugated to the comfort of technology, and that we know nothing of nature. A clearing could be within our reach and easily accessible and we would not even set foot inside. The goal of these stories is to make us curious about what is outside our boxes. If we take the example of the first dystopian short story, *The Machine Stops*, the only experience of nature the inhabitants have is mediated by technology: they see nature on screens, and if they really want to visit nature, they can go outside in a shuttle for a few hours. Kudo is the only one who dares to go outside without the consent of The Machine and without any technological support. He becomes the only character who understands that The Machine is a lie and nature is the only thing they should care about. Nature is within our reach, but we do not do any effort to experience it fully, without the help of technology.

Dystopian novels, like ecology today, demand that men experience nature. Without the experience of nature, it is impossible to raise the consciousness for the environment. Indeed, as long as man stays confined in the city, with no connection to the natural world whatsoever, he cannot be aware of what is happening outside. Some city-dwellers never had the chance to experience nature, and thus cannot be aware that their actions have consequences on the environment. According to Cronon, false ideas of nature provoke irresponsible environmental behavior: “any way of looking at nature that encourages us to believe we are separate from nature –as wilderness tends to do- is likely to reinforce environmentally irresponsible behavior.” (Cronon, 87) The city encourages us to believe that we do not need nature to survive. We can go to a supermarket to get food, we open the tap to get hot water. For those who have no idea what the environment is, it is impossible to develop an environmental consciousness. We protect the environment because we want to save nature for our own sake, we become environmentally conscious because we know that we cannot live without nature. As long as people do not truly understand that the environment is mandatory for our survival, the only thing worth saving will be their living place, which in most cases is the city. Today, the problems surrounding pollution and the environment cannot be overlooked. As we are heading more and more towards the premises of an environmental disaster, man needs to rediscover his bond with nature and needs to start caring about the environment and his destructive way of consuming. Ulrich Beck in a book called *Ecological Politic in an Age of Risk*, claims that the society we live in today is a ‘risk society’, that “forces one to rediscover human beings as natural entities.”⁴³ (Beck, 50) It is urgent that man should see himself as a natural entity again. Thus, dystopian novels, like environmentalists today, try to make man aware of his deep connection with nature, a connection not mediated by the city, to make him care more about the consequences of his actions.

⁴³ Ulrich Beck, *Ecological Politic in an Age of Risk* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995) 50.

Dystopian novels target the city, and seem to make it the villain of the story. The pristine, wild nature the characters find is left untouched. The city is the one that undergoes massive changes. Even though these novels commonly share a Manichean vision of the city and of technology, the main characters seem to focus their eco-actions not on protecting pristine land, but on changing the icon of science fiction. The goal is to make changes in the city, not to abandon it. Dystopian novels consider the city as an environment that is worth saving, and thus fall within the environmental justice agenda. Environmental justice's role is to consider the city as man's living place, and to turn this technological, nature-phobic place into some kind of garden. The goal is to bring nature in the city, so that man can acquire an environmental consciousness without the need to visit the wild. Environmental justice activists want to create harmony between nature and technology, and to improve man's living conditions in the urban area. They are fully aware of the health problems linked with urban pollution, and try to raise awareness of the effects of a bad living place on the body and the health. The seventieth and last principle of the environmental justice doctrine reads: "environmental justice requires that we, as individuals, make personal and consumer choices to consume as little as Mother Earth's resources and to produce as little waste as possible: and make the conscious decision to challenge and reprioritize our life-styles to insure the health of the natural world for present and future generations."⁴⁴ The city is not the problem, we are the problem, and it is up to us to change the way we live, and to change our cities.

Dystopian novels criticize and moralize human behavior towards nature. As long as they believe that nature is not important for them, they are dooming themselves. In other words, as long as humans think they are above nature, every path will lead to a dystopian or a post-

⁴⁴ The seventeen principles of environmental justice can be found on their official website: <http://www.ejnet.org/ej/principles.html> (Accessed April 21st, 2016.)

apocalyptic world. To tame nature is to control the unpredictable, to overcome the laws of nature and to become invincible. O'Brien is a perfect representative of the human pride and the consequences on nature. Before the mirror scene, he snaps at Winston: "We control Life. You are imagining that there is something called Nature which will be outraged by what we do and will turn against us. But we create human nature." (Orwell, 282) Despite what O'Brien claims, the Party may control life, but the dystopian government cannot be in a worst shape: food is lacking, men are frailer and uglier, population is decreasing and the country is constantly at war. The hubris of the Party seems oblivious to those changes, and even though keeping people in a state of poverty might be a way to control them, no one in the book seems to have great living conditions, since there is no leader to the Party. It is a cluster of equal men who control the country, and despite being one of them, O'Brien still looks old and ugly: 'You have thought sometimes,' said O'Brien, 'that my face — the face of a member of the Inner Party — looks old and worn.'" (Orwell, 282) O'Brien is driven by his passion for the Party's doctrine, to the extent that he cannot even see the disastrous consequences of the Party's hubris. For the sake of controlling nature and the laws of nature, the Party is dooming itself, and takes humanity with it in its fall.

Human hubris is criticized in many other dystopian novels. If we look at the two novels with a utopian setting, *Brave New World* and *Uglies*, hubris has been the powerhouse for the creation of their society. In *Brave New World*, humans have managed to defeat the laws of nature. While in *1984*, O'Brien's claim that they control the laws of nature and they make human nature is but a delusion, the society of *Brave New World* does control life and create human nature. Hubris is criticized by John the savage himself, when he claims that out of pride, the government removed everything that makes them humans, and that he would rather suffer in the reservation than live idly in the city. The price to pay for human hubris here is a complete dehumanization. In

Uglies, Prettytown was created after a virus infected the world's oil, crippling the society: "Oil infected by this bacterium was just as unstable as phosphoryus. It exploded on contact with oxygen. And as it burned the spores were released in the smoke and spread on the wind. Until the spores got to the next car, or air-plane, or oil well, and started growing again." (Westerfeld, 346) David then goes on explaining to Tally that the oil made the world notice that it has one weakness: its dependency to the environment. Then, society built a better world with "renewable energy, sustainable resources, a fixed population." (Westerfeld, 346) In *Uglies*'s case, the utopian society is a consequence of the failure of the human hubris. What the novel tells us is that human hubris is the sole responsible for environmental disasters and thus its failure is the only way to create a better world. Human pride is the powerhouse for the creation of dystopian governments and post-apocalyptic worlds.

As a conclusion, man is a victim of the city's control. The oppression of the city has great consequences on the body, health and the appearance of a person. Man's disconnection to the natural world helps the city assert its domination on him, fulfilling his every need, becoming vital for him. However, human hubris is responsible for the situation. Dystopian novels show a world in which the self-destructive human hubris has reached its climax. To control the laws of nature, to spread his dominion on the natural world, man has used his best weapon: technology. In the seventeenth century, the great philosopher of the western world Francis Bacon was already requesting that man took over creation, over nature. He asserts that "man by the fall, fell at the same time from his state of innocence and from his dominion over creation. Both of these losses can in his life be in some part repaired; the former by religion and faith; the latter by arts and science."⁴⁵ The problem is by using science to control creation, man is the creator of his own doom. If the city controls the human body, and is an entity in itself in dystopian novels, man has

⁴⁵ Francis Bacon, *The New Organon* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960) 267.

built it and given it its power. Dystopian novels are a warning: their purpose is to make humans take responsibilities towards the environment and their own lives, by being curious about what is out there, away from the limits of the city; by creating their own consciousness about the environment and finding back their lost connection with nature. It is still in our power to change the way we live, and to change the way our city functions. It is not too late to create our utopia, instead of running blindly towards a dystopian world. Man's mind is responsible for today's environmental situation, man's body is the victim of the world he created. This duality makes man both the oppressor, and the victim of environmental disasters.

5 EPILOGUE: WHAT FUTURE FOR THE BODY?

This essay focused on the state of man's body in the future, if the future becomes dark and gloomy. It is the main victim of the environment man has created for himself. It is the battlefield between nature and technology. It is also the last entity that keeps man alive and the species going, and thus should not be neglected. For the body is the point of tension between the city and nature, if man were to create a harmonious world, a living place where nature and technology cohabit, we can wonder about what will become of his body. On the other end, if man is unable to build a utopian society, what future lies ahead for the human body if man wants to survive? These are two questions that science fiction may give an answer to.

If the future of the human race is not a complete disappearance from the Earth, the body will need to adapt in case the dystopian fiction becomes a reality. The fear that the machine will invade the human body is a major fear in dystopian fiction, but at one point, the invasion of the body might be mandatory for us to survive. If the air is poisoned, the food is lacking, the water is polluted, and there is no going back, man will have to find a solution to survive in such a hostile world. In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* and *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, the main solution is to escape in a spaceship. Leaving the Earth to find another livable place, in hope that one day man will come back to the ground is seen as the final solution, a last resort. Today's scientists are trying to find another livable planet, but the chances are low. As a result, man must resort to the other solution: to let technology invade him. Only if man becomes a machine can he survive in a world without nature.

One of the major figures of science fiction monsters are cyborgs and androids. Cyborgs are entities half-human, half-machine. Androids are machines shaped like humans. To survive in an apocalyptic world, man needs to accept the invasion of the machine. Donna Haraway, in her famous essay *A Cyborg Manifesto*, which defends the cyborg as a new gender, claims that: “cyborg writing is about the power to survive.”⁴⁶ (Haraway, 22) She also asserts that cyborgs are scary because they do not cope well with the idea of birthing, but with the idea of regeneration, which goes against the laws of nature for humans. She writes: “I would suggest that cyborgs have more to do with regeneration and are suspicious of the reproductive matrix and of most birthing.” (Haraway, 176) If man becomes a machine, he will have to give up on what makes him human: his birth, his senses and his feelings. The natural cycle of human life is broken, man is neither born, nor dead. Novels of science fiction like *Neuromancer*, Gibson’s award-winning cyber fiction, or Wolfe’s *Limbo* introduce us to a world so difficult to live in that humans had to replace their body parts with machines. For the sake of surviving, society has to adapt and evolve.

Cyborgs are but a consequence of economic and environmental issues the human race had to deal with. Dani Cavallaro, in his book about cyberpunk and cyberculture, supports this idea and claims that “technological transformations of the body are dictated by ideological and economic imperatives.” (Cavallaro, 92) In technologically-advanced dystopian novels, the economic and ideological imperatives are dictated by the creation of a utopian city. In science fiction in general, utopia is defined by the advent of modern science. Science and technology have managed to save the world and have created a better place for humans. The ideology behind modern science is to offer the best life possible, and to give man the power to improve himself. Haraway agrees with Cavallaro on the matter and writes: “furthermore, communications sciences

⁴⁶ Donna Jeanne Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto,” *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991) 171.

and modern biologies are constructed by a common move – the translation of the world into a problem of coding, a search for a common language in which all resistance to instrumental control disappears and all heterogeneity can be submitted to disassembly, reassembly, investment, and exchange.” (Haraway, 153) The ideology behind modern science is to turn the world into something controllable, something in which the unexpected does not have its place, to provide men with a life without the fear of the unknown. Technological changes to the body are but a means to this end. Dystopian novels criticize the idea of control, by showing how modern science dehumanize people. It is true that these novels address the issue of control by the technology, but we can wonder if they are truly technophobic.

At first glance, dystopian novels seem completely technophobic. The villain of the story is modern science and technology. This essay concluded on human hubris being responsible for giving too much power to the city, which diminishes the pessimistic vision of technology. Technology is but a tool in the hands of men, who, following their ideology, turn the world into a controllable place. If we focus back on *1984*, Beauchamp alleges that *1984* is an exception to the other dystopian novels, since “although Orwell had a pronounced technophobic streak [...] still he depicts the technology of Oceania as clearly the servant and not the master of the Party.” (Beauchamp, 55) According to the novel, had technology been used for the greater good, it would have ended “hunger, over-work, dirt, illiteracy and disease... Within a few generations.” (Orwell, 155) In *1984*, technology and modern science are not the enemy. They could have been the solution to end the problems humans are facing, but keeping Oceania in a technologically primitive society, a society in which modern science is used to wage war, allows the Party to settle his dominion over men.

Technophobia in dystopian novels exists only because men turn technology into a fearsome force. The dread of technology is not at the core of dystopia. Technology can be used

for the greater good. In *The Hunger Games*, science created medicine that can heal every single wound. While science and technology are used to repress and control humans in the trilogy, it still brings some good. As a consequence, when it comes to the body, technology and science can improve its condition. There is a way for technology and nature to live harmoniously within the body, and that may be the future towards which we are heading. If we take the example of the novel *Uglies*, only a small part of technology and science are used against humans. Most of the technological advances serve to improve the living conditions of the inhabitants. When it comes to the body, technology is used to improve the appearance of the characters, the physical strength of the Specials, the health and the well-being of the inhabitants, their senses, their speed, their balance and their nimbleness. In *Brave New World*, technology is used to overall improve the living conditions of the characters, to keep them in a constant state of fullness and happiness.

Is this our future? Science already set us on the path towards physical improvements and body transformations. Cosmetic surgery is improving every day, giving new faces to the unlucky ones, changing the body parts we are not satisfied with. Mechanic arms and nano-technologies are invading the medical market, allowing disabled people to overcome their handicap and live like any other person. The environment has become a great concern for scientists and population in general. They try to find new ways to interact with nature without destroying it. Some also try to create self-sustainable cities, or new ways to bring the environment in the city to make our lives better. For example, on the renowned TV show TED talk, specialists often come to bring new ideas and breakthroughs about the way we deal with the environments. The video called “The art of the eco-mindshift”⁴⁷ posted seven years ago by Natalie Jeremijenko deals with new ideas to make nature cohabit with our urban lives. One of them was to plant flower-beds near

⁴⁷ The twenty-minute video can be found online on the TED website at: https://www.ted.com/talks/natalie_jeremijenko_the_art_of_the_eco_mindshift (Accessed April 21, 2016.)

water hydrants to absorb the stagnant water that pollutes the city. These, among other ideas, are proof that we may have understood the warning of dystopian fictions and that we are naturally building a better future for ourselves. Let us not fall into the traps laid by human hubris, let us remember that we are part of nature and that we need the environment to survive. Only then, we can build our own utopia.

To conclude, science fiction is the genre that deals with our future. Science fiction novels are fictive tales, but who is to say they cannot become true? Thus, science fiction shines best when it gives us new ways to deal with our environment. Authors use their imagination and understanding of our world to introduce us to a possible future one. Environmentally speaking, science fiction can help us find new ways to deal with nature. Post-apocalyptic novels are novels that deal with the idea of destruction and cleansing. Once the world is made anew, it asks the question of how man will recreate a society with new rules to live by and a new way to consider the environment. The poetics of destruction and reconstruction of the Earth can become great imaginary tools to invent our future with nature. Thus, science fiction authors, environmentalists and scientists can work hand to hand to reinvent our destiny, and save us from a predictable dystopian future.

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When you go to the library, have you ever stopped at the science fiction shelf only to peek at the numerous books with the obscure titles and the colorful cover pages? You might want to read them yourself, but you know you will never have the time for it. You tell yourself that it is not a big deal, all you see are books for children and teenagers, nothing too serious, nothing too important. But what if you are wrong? What if these childish books, these presumably innocent and naive books, have a greater impact than what meets the eye? And what if yourself have been influenced by these futuristic stories without being aware? This essay will give you the answers to the questions you never thought of, and will make you realize how science fiction is much more real than you first believed.

Lors de vos voyages chez le libraire, ne vous êtes-vous donc jamais arrêtés au rayon science-fiction seulement pour contempler la multitude de livres aux couvertures chatoyantes et aux titres obscurs ? Peut-être que l'envie vous a pris même d'en lire un ou deux, mais vous y avez renoncé par manque de temps. Vous vous dites que de toute façon, ce ne sont que des livres pour enfants, sans importance et profondeur. Et si vous aviez tort ? Et si ces livres pour enfants, qu'on présume si innocents et naïfs, avaient une bien plus forte incidence sur le monde qu'on ne leur en accorde ? Et si on vous disait que vous-même avez été influencés par ces histoires du futur sans même vous en rendre compte, qu'en penseriez-vous ? Dans ce mémoire, vous trouverez les réponses à des questions qui ne vous seraient même pas venues à l'esprit, et peut-être réaliserez-vous que la science-fiction est bien moins fiction que ce

This essay deals with notions such as:
mecanomorphism, social cannibalism,
environmentalism, transcendentalism,
technophobia, utopia, dystopia.

Ce mémoire contient des notions tels que: le
mécanomorphisme, le cannibalisme social, le
transcendantalisme, la technophobie, l'utopie, la
dystopie.