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Homosexuality and Oppression in Dystopian Writing
Bachelor’s Diploma Thesis

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I declare that I have worked on this thesis independently, using only the primary and secondary sources listed in the bibliography.

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Author’s signature
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Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to examine the way homosexuality and homosexual characters are regarded in the genre of dystopian fiction.

While a lot has been written in terms of sex and identity in dystopian (and eutopian) literature, such as Lyman Tower Sargent and Lucy Sarginson’s article “Sex in Utopia: Eutopian and Dystopian Sexual Relations”, it seems that authors do not focus much of their attention on the treatment of LGBT characters and rather just either mention homosexuality briefly or discuss dystopian works that feature societies consisting of individuals of only one gender (all-male or all-female) or societies devoid of gender – societies where queer relationships must, therefore, be the norm. The focus of this thesis, in contrast, are gay characters living in mixed-gender societies similar to ours and the way their differences and their sexuality are treated in such societies.

The thesis will consist of three chapters that will be organized as follows: In the first chapter, I will provide some contextual information about the genre of dystopia and its history, as well as about the history of LGBT representation in literature. The second chapter will be dealing with societies as depicted in dystopian literature – with the distinction between a fascist dystopian society, fundamentally religious dystopian society and dystopian society created as a result of an environmental crisis – and the degree of oppression, repression and control in these societies. Among the discussed works in this chapter will be Margaret Atwood’s novel The Handmaid’s Tale and Alan Moore and David Lloyd’s graphic novel V for Vendetta, as well as Jeanette Winterson’s novel The Stone Gods. Where applicable, I will compare the treatment of homosexuality in these novels with the treatment gay people have been subjected to in a totalitarian regime in the real world. The first two mentioned novels will also be discussed and
analyzed in the third chapter, which will consist of an analysis of two gay characters in these novels – in particular the character of Moira in *The Handmaid’s Tale* and Valerie in *V for Vendetta* – their treatment, and their role and function in these pieces of writing.
1 Contextual information

1.1 Utopian and dystopian writing

In order to talk about dystopia and dystopian writing, it is necessary to first talk, at least to some extent, about its predecessor – utopian writing. Utopia is a neologism, a term that was coined by Sir Thomas More (first used in his 1516 work *Utopia*) – the word is of Greek origin, its literal translation being “no place”. The term ‘utopia’ has become widely used in reference to the literary genre which More’s *Utopia* has practically created, as well as in reference to such societies themselves. In fact, in his book *Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction*, Lyman Tower Sargent sums up the complexity of what utopianism incorporates as “the three faces of utopianism – the literary utopia, utopian practice, and utopian social theory” (5). What is the definition of a utopia then?

There seem to be many, often somewhat contradictory definitions coming from various scholars. For instance, in *Utopia and the ideal society* J. C. Davis cites Nell Eurich’s concept of utopias as “a man’s dream of a better world” (qtd. in Davis 12), but criticizes its vagueness, pointing out that it is easy to think of a better world, for example for those people who have experienced the horrors of war (12–13). He proposes to use the word ‘perfect’ instead of ‘better’, remarking that “[m]ost men can think of a better world; surprisingly few make the effort to visualise their perfect world and set their vision down on paper” (Davis 13–14). Darko Suvin on the other hand argues that there is no reason for “insisting on absolute perfection, but only on a state radically better or based on a more perfect principle than that prevailing in the author’s community” (26). He offers his own definition of the literary genre:
The verbal construction of a particular quasi-human community where sociopolitical institutions, norms and individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author's community, this construction being based on estrangement arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis. (Suvin 30)

While Suvin’s original paper from 1973 proposed this definition in regard to the concept of utopia, when it was later included in his book of essays entitled Defined by a hollow, Suvin has added a footnote stating that he has since updated the definition in order for it to reflect the differentiation existing between the terms ‘utopia’ and ‘eutopia’, as the former is sometimes used as sort of an umbrella term, in which case it is merely “radically different,” while “only eutopia is radically more perfect” (30). The word ‘eutopia’ is also of Greek origin and its literal meaning is "good place".

Sargent also proposes a definition of utopias of his own – one that is not quite that different from Suvin’s definitions above, and that also reflects the differentiation between the terms ‘utopia’ and ‘eutopia.’ According to Sargent, the literary utopia can be defined as

[a] non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space. In standard usage utopia is used both as defined here and as an equivalent for eutopia or a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which that reader lived. ("Utopianism" 6)

After More’s Utopia, the genre grew and continued well into the twentieth century, with famous works such as Tommaso Campanella’s The City of the Sun (1602), Francis Bacon’s New Atlantis (1626), Edward Bellamy’s Looking Backward (1888), H.
G. Wells’s *A Modern Utopia* (1905), Marge Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) or Aldous Huxley’s *Island* (1962) to name a few.

Though it was More who has given a name to the emerging genre of utopian literature, Sargent points out that what can be thought of as utopian ideas had been around long before the publication of *Utopia* (“Utopianism” 10). Among others he mentions the works of the Greek philosopher Plato – *Republic* (circa 380 BC) and *Laws* (Sargent 17–18).

Davis talks about four models of ideal societies that can be seen as alternatives to utopias: The Land of Cockaygne, with an abundance of resources and satisfaction for those who have struggled (20–21); the arcadia, with “a harmony between man and nature” and “a harmony between men of moderation” (22); the perfect moral commonwealth, with a society “made harmonic by the moral reformation of every individual in society” (27) and the millennium, with a society made harmonic by divine intervention (36). Davis argues that utopias, in contrast, “[do] not assume drastic changes in nature or man,” and “crime, instability, poverty, rioting, war, exploitation and vice … [do not] evaporate in utopias,” but rather are “controlled and where possible eliminated” (37). “[The] prime aim is not happiness, that private mystery, but order, that social necessity” (Davis 38).

Every person is a unique individual and that, combined with social differences such as those in class, race, ethnicity or gender results in countless different and often effectively contradictory views on what “better” or “perfect” means in terms of society. Sargent touches upon this contradictory nature of utopias: “There are socialist, capitalist, monarchical, democratic, anarchist, ecological, feminist, patriarchal, egalitarian, hierarchical, racist, left-wing, right-wing, reformist, free love, nuclear family, extended family, gay, lesbian, and many more utopias” (“Utopianism” 21).
What, for instance, a person who is homophobic might consider utopian would seem at the same time dystopian in nature to a homosexual person – and vice versa. The lines between utopia (eutopia, if we are to take into consideration the differentiation between the two terms) and dystopia can be somewhat blurry – they are two sides of the same coin. As Suvin articulates it: “one man’s perfection is another man’s (or class’s) horror” – it is therefore important to look at any utopian text in the context of the author’s community (42).

As the utopian literary genre eventually started to decline over the course of the twentieth century – safe for the so called “critical utopia” of the 1970s represented by authors such as Ursula K. Le Guin or Marge Piercy (Baccolini and Moylan 2) – more and more dystopias stared to emerge, which was influenced to a great extent by the global political climate – it was after all the century that had seen not one but two world wars. Perhaps the most well known dystopian stories include titles such as the previously mentioned novel Brave New World (1932) by Aldous Huxley, George Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four (1949), Ray Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451 (1953), Anthony Burgess’s A Clockwork Orange (1962), Margaret Atwood’s The Handmaid’s Tale (1985), or, if one wants to look into the more recent development, the hit young adult trilogy written by Suzanne Collins called The Hunger Games (2008, 2009, 2010). The emergence of dystopian writing is also tied to some extent to the genre of science fiction (to which utopian writing, after all, is also close), with authors like H. G. Wells and Philip K. Dick or the cyberpunk subgenre of sci-fi. In Scraps Of The Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia, Thomas Moylan calls the dystopian stories that science fiction authors were creating in mid-century “the new maps of hell” (xi). Suvin remarks that science fiction, “for all its adventure, romance, popularization, and
wondrousness … can finally be written only between the utopian and the dystopian horizons” (43).

Lyman Tower Sargent defines dystopia as “[a] non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived” (“Definitions”). If eutopia is generally considered the dream, then dystopia is the nightmare. The word “dystopia” was coined in 1868 by J. S. Mill (by substituting the u- or rather eu- with the prefix dys-) (Suvin 407) and means “a bad place”. There are a few other words that are used sometimes interchangeably with dystopia – anti-utopia, cacotopia or kakotopia. Some scholars, such as Sargent and Suvin, differentiate between ‘dystopia’ and ‘anti-utopia’ – with the latter being reserved for works that are, according to Sargent, “intended … as a criticism of utopianism” (“Definitions”). Suvin similarly characterizes anti-utopia as a “pretent eutopia – a community whose hegemonic principles pretend to its being more perfectly organized than any thinkable alternative, while our representative ‘camera-eye’ and value-monger finds out it is significantly less perfect, a polemic nightmare. Thus, it finally also turns out to be a dystopia” (385). In Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination Baccolini and Moylan go as far as to call anti-utopia the “nemesis” of dystopia (4). Suvin additionally uses the term ‘simple’ dystopia for “a straightforward dystopia … which is not also an anti-utopia” (Suvin 385). These definitions and distinctions will be useful in later chapters of this thesis.
1.2 Tragic endings for homosexual characters

When it comes to homosexual characters in fiction, there has been an unfortunate tradition of unhappy and outright tragic fates for the characters – which originally served as propaganda aimed against positive representation of the minority. The representation of lesbian characters in particular serves as a good example of this phenomenon.

For a long time, lesbian and bisexual characters in media have been dying. Lesbian pulp fiction was a popular genre of literature in the 1950s and 60s and there was little similar content available beyond that at the time. A rule was implemented for this sort of literature – there could not be a positive portrayal of homosexuality, which resulted in the lesbian or bisexual women depicted in it rarely receiving a happy ending. In the introduction to the 2004 revised edition of the novel *Spring Fire* – a book that was first published in 1952 and which is generally considered to be one of the first in the lesbian pulp genre – its author Marijane Meaker, who was then writing under the pseudonym Vin Packer, reflects on her conversation with her editor about the book’s content. She was told that due to the fact that their books were subject to government censorship, she would only be published under the condition that the book’s ending would emphasize the immorality of homosexuality (Packer VI). Other books in the genre followed the same path, ending with the characters realizing they were in fact heterosexual, suffering, going crazy or dying. This trend would soon appear in film and television as well and it continues until present day.

By mentioning this, I do not want to imply that the authors of the novels I am writing about in this thesis had any malicious intentions when they denied their gay characters happy endings – their writing highlights the suffering of minorities including gay people under oppressive regimes, not in a way that condones this suffering, but in a
way that denounces it. Still, they are a part of the tradition of the gay tragic endings, which I think is worth noting.
2 Dystopian societies and oppression

In this chapter, I will take a closer look at the societies depicted in three dystopian novels I have chosen. These include Alan Moore and David Lloyd’s graphic novel *V for Vendetta*, Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* and Jeanette Winterson’s *The Stone Gods*. The third novel was chosen to pose a contrast to the other two – I explore how the defining features of each of the dystopian societies affect the way its people are treated and what are the ways in which they are mistreated and oppressed, with a focus on the persecution and oppression of homosexual people. Where applicable, I parallel the oppressive regimes in the novels with notes about real oppressive regimes.

I will be discussing a Fascist dystopian society as depicted in *V for Vendetta*, a Christian fundamentalist dystopian society as depicted in *The Handmaid’s Tale* and a dystopian society created as a result of environmental crisis as depicted in *The Stone Gods*. I do not claim that this distinction is not perfect; there are overlapping elements in the novels and some of the aspects that have contributed to the creation of these dystopian societies are present in all of them. Still, each of these dystopias has a dominant defining feature.
2.1 Fascist dystopia

The story of *V for Vendetta* takes place in London, in the late 1990s. As the reader learns early on, the world has been destroyed by a nuclear war, which happened in the late 1980s, while the Labour Party was in power in Britain. Moore states that he and Lloyd have worked with “the assumption that the Conservatives would obviously lose the 1983 elections” which would result in the Labour Party “removing all American missiles from British soil and thus preventing Britain from becoming a major target in the event of a nuclear war” (Moore et al. 272). There are mentions of what has happened to some other parts of the world.

Nobody knew if Britain would get bombed or not. I remember mum saying ‘Africa’s not there anymore’. … But Britain didn’t get bombed. Not that it made much difference. All the bombs and things had done something to the weather. Something bad. … The weather had destroyed all the crops, see? And there was no food coming from Europe, because Europe had gone. Like Africa. (Moore et al. 27)

After these events occur, the fascist regime which is the defining feature of Moore and Lloyd’s dystopia begins. As one of the main characters, Evey Hammond, recalls at the beginning of the story, “there wasn’t any government anymore. … It was all the fascist groups, the right-wingers. They’d all got together with some of the big corporations that had survived. ‘Norsefire’ they called themselves” (Moore et al. 28). Soon after Norsefire seizes power, they begin with the persecution of those they deem unwanted. “[T]hey started taking people away… All the black people and the Pakistanis… White people, too. All the radicals and the men who, you know, liked other men. The homosexuals. I don’t know what they did with them all” (Moore et al. 28). What they did with them, as the reader finds out just a few pages later, is that they
put them in concentration camps, or as they referred to them – “resettlement camps” (Moore et al. 32).

It seems that homosexuals are one of the main focus groups here, since they are mentioned multiple times throughout the novel as being among those who were persecuted. When V sings the song “Vicious Cabaret” in book two of the story (which as a whole is also entitled “Vicious Cabaret”), he ends the song with the words: “There's thrills and chills and girls galore, there’s sing-songs and surprises! There's something here for everyone, reserve your seat today! There's mischief and malarkies… but no queers… or Yids… or darkies…” (Moore et al. 92-93). The word choice here suggests that under Norsefire, there is total extermination of the above mentioned groups. The character of Prothero mentions homosexual men being among the unwanted groups as well, calling them “the nancy boys” (Moore et al. 33). Richard Plant, in his book The Pink Triangle: The Nazi War Against Homosexuals, writes that in Nazi concentration camps, homosexual men made up only a small portion of the prisoners compared to other groups: “Homosexuals constituted a very small minority, perhaps one of the smallest; only the categories of ‘emigrants,’ ‘race defilers,’ and ‘armed forces transfers’ contained fewer men” (ch. 5). The possible reason Moore and Lloyd’s dystopia seems to put more focus on the group might be the fact that since the story takes place in the 1980s and 1990s gay people are perhaps simply more visible than they have been in Nazi occupied Europe, which therefore also makes them more of a threat in the eyes of the persecutors.

This unreasonable fear factor is also emphasized in the story to some extent – early on, in the scene where V confronts Prothero about his involvement in Larkhill resettlement camp, Prothero, while terrified to the bone, argues: “Look, you know as well as I do… We had to do what we did. All the darkies, the nancy boys, the
beatniks… it was us or them. Us or them. Don’t you understand?” (Moore et al. 33). The character of Valerie also touches upon this – in her letter, written while she is imprisoned at Larkhill for being gay as she is slowly dying, she ponders: “Why are they so frightened of us?” (Moore et al. 159).

The homophobia does not stay in only the actions of the people in power here; it is also reflected in their language. On a couple of occasions throughout the story, gay people are referred to through the use derogatory terms – “nancy boys” (Moore et al. 33) and “queers” (Moore et al. 92), as previously mentioned. Although the latter one is used sarcastically by V, given both V’s quest for vendetta and the nature of the song he is singing, it is reasonable to assume that he only uses the pejorative terms for the persecuted groups to mirror the way the persecutors speak about them. The term “queer” has also been largely reclaimed by gay people and does not necessarily carry such negative connotations anymore, however, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, this process of reclaiming the term has not started until “the late 1980s” so considering that *V for Vendetta* came into being in the early 1980s, it is safe to say that the intended meaning here is indeed derogatory. Prothero additionally refers to V as having “a damn queer sense of humour” (Moore et al. 32), although in this case, he most likely uses the term in its original sense of “strange” or “odd”. Of course, the pejorative terms are not only reserved for the gay people here – the reader will notice the use of “darkies” (Moore et al. 33, 93) for people of color and “Yids” (Moore et al. 93) for Jewish people as well.

The usage of pejorative terms only feeds into the dehumanization of these groups, which is emphasized in the story as well. First, when V confronts Prothero and destroys his beloved doll collection at an imitation of the Larkhill resettlement camp, he questions his reaction with the words “How you can show so much concern for
porcelain and plastic... and show so little for flesh and blood” (Moore et al. 33). The reader learns shortly after that at Larkhill, Prothero used to be in charge of “the ovens” (Moore et al. 34). If Prothero did not see the prisoners at Larkhill as people, he was not the only one. The character of Dr. Delia Surridge, who is described by another character as a “good woman” who “care[s] about people” (Moore et al. 78) describes the Larkhill prisoners in the following way: “They’re so weak and pathetic you find yourself hating them. They don’t fight or struggle against death. They just stare at you with weak eyes. They make me want to be sick, physically. They’re hardly human” (Moore et al. 80). V is further dehumanized when those in power who are trying to uncover his identity find out he used to be one of the Larkhill prisoners and therefore belongs to one the undesirable groups – and also that he is the one who has managed to blow up Larkhill and escape. “I still don’t know who Codename ‘V’ is. But I think I know what he is” (Moore et al. 79). Later, as V’s actions further escalate, the character of Mr. Finch yells out: “When are you going to stop treating this bastard as if he was human?” (Moore et al. 121). While these two instances of V’s dehumanization in particular do happen only after V has become a terrorist undertaking his vendetta, he has been dehumanized long before that as one of the prisoners. In his book about the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, Richard Plant also talks about dehumanization in the concentration camps:

The entire process of dehumanisation on entering the camp – the stripping, in some cases the shaving of all, even the pubic, hair, the loss of name and personhood, caused profound trauma. The jolt was accompanied not only by the enduring sensation of powerlessness; the victim, under daily assault in one way or the other, also began to realise that nothing he had achieved, done, or owned counted here. It has been said that in the inferno all are equal. (Plant, ch. 5)
This is not unlike the torture that the prisoners at Larkhill must have endured. When V simulates the treatment he was subjected to with Evey, she is abducted (Moore et al. 147), put into a cell in a prison clothing (Moore et al. 148), her hair is shaven and her body is violated through an “examination” (Moore et al. 153) and her head is repeatedly held under water while she is being interrogated (Moore et al. 155). The treatment of the lesbian character Valerie, as she describes it in her letter, is very similar, with the guards additionally also mocking her and promising to burn the films in which she has starred before her imprisonment (Moore et al. 159). Her partner, Ruth, is burned with cigarettes while they interrogate her to coerce her into signing a false statement (Moore et al. 159). I explore and analyze the character of Valerie and how she is treated in more detail in chapter three of this thesis. Apart from the physical and verbal abuse that the prisoners face, V mentions that they are also “half dead with starvation and dysentery” (Moore et al. 33).

While being held at the Larkhill resettlement camp, both V and Valerie also belong to the so-called medical compound, which according to V, Prothero mockingly refers to as “the funny farm” (Moore et al. 33-34). There, Dr. Surridge, mentioned earlier, performs medical experiments on forty eight prisoners chosen by Prothero (Moore et al. 80). Surridge writes in her diary: “Very excited about it so far. Hormone research is almost useless when rats or rabbits are used, and this is a heaven-sent opportunity to learn something positive” (Moore et al. 80). Surridge’s hormonal experiments have fatal effects on the test subjects. The numbers of those who are still alive dwindle rapidly – within four days upon receiving a shot of the tested substance, “over seventy-five percent are dead” (Moore et al. 80). The subjects develop extra body parts while losing others – Surridge states that one black man “has started to develop four extra nipples, and his generative organs have atrophied” while “the skin on
[another woman’s] face and neck was like polythene” (Moore et al. 80, 81). She also reports that “Rita Boyd, the lesbian, died … During the autopsy we found four tiny vestigial fingers forming within the calf of her leg” (Moore et al. 80). In The Pink Triangle, Plant also writes about medical experiments in concentration camps. While it cannot be concluded how many gay people were subjected to them at Larkhill, we do know that it was at least two prisoners out of forty-eight – Valerie and Rita. According to Plant, in the real concentration camps “the number of homosexuals used for these pseudomedical undertakings was disproportionately large” (ch. 5). Plant describes one of the applied methods as “brutally simple: castrate several homosexuals, inject them with huge doses of male hormones, then wait to see whether they would begin to exhibit signs of interest in the opposite sex” (ch. 5). Just like the experiments depicted in V for Vendetta, the real medical experiments done by Nazis “brought illness and death to the subjects and had no scientific value” (Plant, ch. 5). An important thing to note here though is that while in V for Vendetta lesbians were put in camps and subjected to these experiments as well, according to Plant, in reality in the Nazi regime lesbians were not persecuted as severely as gay men and therefore “[m]ost lesbians managed to survive unscathed” (ch. 4).
2.2 Religious Dystopia

In Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, the American society takes a dystopian turn after a violent overthrow of the government known as “the President’s Day Massacre” that has been orchestrated by an organization called “the Sons of Jacob” (Atwood 319). The Sons of Jacob are said to be a secret think tank, or a series of think tanks (Atwood 318), which according to Merriam-Webster is “an institute, corporation, or group organized to study a particular subject (such as a policy issue or a scientific problem) and provide information, ideas, and advice”. In the novel, The Sons of Jacob designed “the philosophy and social structure of Gilead” (Atwood 318) – which is heavily inspired by some aspects of the Bible – and then set the whole thing in motion when, according to the main character Offred, “they shot the President and machine-gunned the Congress and the army declared a state of emergency. They blamed it on the Islamic fanatics, at the time” (Atwood 183). After getting rid of the government, things gradually progressed towards an oppressive regime that would become known as Gileadean – they “suspended the Constitution”, imposed censorship on the press, closed up roads and implemented “Identipasses” – all for security reasons, allegedly (Atwood 183). Afterwards, women lost the right to own money or hold property (Atwood 187). As Peter G. Stillman and S. Anne Johnson sum it up in “Identity, Complicity, and Resistance in The Handmaid's Tale”, “Facing plagues and ecological disasters that caused widespread sterility, the founders of Gilead generated a right-wing fundamentalist reading of the Bible, grafted it onto patriarchal attitudes, and imposed it throughout society. … Gilead’s power over its subjects is extensive and intense” (71).

Adhering to their reading of the Bible, those who come to power in Gilead decide who is desirable and who is not based on what they consider a moral ground. The reader learns that that is how they have chosen the women to become the Handmaids. The
handmaids are essentially serving as human incubators; they are being held captive, raped and forced to bear children. They have been recruited by those in power when they have “declared all second marriages and non-marital liaisons adulterous, arresting the female partners” and the practice has been later “extended to cover all marriages not contracted within the state church” (Atwood 316). I am not going to talk about the concept of the Handmaids in detail here, since there has already been written a lot about it – instead I want to focus on other manifestations of the oppression that is so present in Gilead.

Old women and infertile women are a liability in Gilead, and thus undesirable (Atwood 260). Not all of them are discarded though – there are some who have joined the oppressors instead – it is stated that “there were many women willing to serve as Aunts, either because of a genuine belief in what they called ‘traditional values,’ or for the benefits they might thereby acquire” (Atwood 320). The so-called traditional values likely include homophobia – and gays are another persecuted group. In the novel they are represented by Moira, who is a lesbian. She is also an activist and those who resist the regime are unwanted too – in the early days “the police, or the army, or whoever they were, would open fire [at protesters] almost as soon as any of the marches even started” (Atwood 189). Another persecuted group consists of people of religions different to those in power – as Moira mentions, for a while you would be safe “[a]s long as you said you were some sort of a Christian and you were married” but later there would be “sectarian roundups” as well, putting Quakers and such on the line too (Atwood 259) – along with Jesuits and Jehovah's Witnesses (Atwood 211). Jewish people do get an exception – Offred mentions that because of their connection to the biblical story of the Sons of Jacob, they are “given a choice. They could convert or emigrate to Israel” to save their lives – but those who refuse or whose conversion is
found to not be genuine are punished for “their perfidy and ungratefulness” and subsequently executed (Atwood 211). Additionally, in the epilogue, Professor Pieixoto refers to the Gileadean society as “Caucasian” which implies that people of color are another target of persecution (Atwood 316). And doctors, who have provided abortions and contraception before the regime, are regarded as “war criminals” deserving death (Atwood 42-43).

The novel mentions various ways of persecution and punishment for these groups of people and with each, there is at least a mention of homosexuals. When women lose their rights to money and property, it naturally affects all of them – but it is especially bad for lesbians. Moira informs Offred about the reason she can no longer withdraw any money from her account: “They’ve frozen them, she said. Mine too. The collective’s too. Any account with an F on it instead of an M” (Atwood 187). Who can operate with a woman’s money is her “[h]usband or male next of kin” (Atwood 188), which for many lesbians means that they are completely cut off, unless they have male relatives willing to help, which Moira does not, but she does find a solution – “I’ll go underground … Some of the gays can take over our numbers and buy us things we need” (Atwood 188).

Then, later, as the regime progresses, the aforementioned practice of forcing the women chosen as the Handmaids to bear children starts. By that time, there is also the Wall – for hangings. Offred describes it as follows: “There are the red bricks, there are the searchlights, there’s the barbed wire, there are the hooks. Somehow the Wall is even more foreboding when it’s empty … When there’s someone hanging on it at least you know the worst. But vacant, it is also potential, like a storm approaching” (Atwood 174). Offred talks about the Wall repeatedly in the novel – when it is not empty, too: “There are three new bodies on the Wall. One is a priest, still wearing the black cassock.
… The two others have purple placards hung around their necks: Gender Treachery. Their bodies still wear the Guardian uniforms. Caught together, they must have been, but where? A barracks, a shower? It’s hard to say” (Atwood 53). Gender Treachery, of course, refers to homosexuality. Gays are branded with purple placards – reminiscent of the way homosexual men were branded by Nazis in concentration camps with pink triangles (Plant, Introduction). The symbols that those hanging from the Wall are branded with are all they are reduced to – their crimes against the regime. Their heads are covered with bags, their identity stripped off of them. “It makes the men look like dolls on which faces have not yet been painted; like scarecrows, which in a way is what they are, since they are meant to scare” (Atwood 42).

Another way of dealing with the aforementioned unwanted groups is to send them to the Colonies. The Colonies are essentially labor camps with almost no chance of survival.

In the Colonies, they spend their time cleaning up. … Sometimes it’s just bodies, after a battle. … 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 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)

The Colonies are where the old and the infertile women usually end up (Atwood 260). But it is not just them, it is the homosexual men as well – according to Moira “it’s about a quarter men in the Colonies, too. Not all of those Gender Traitors end up on the Wall” (Atwood 261). This, again, is similar to the treatment Nazis gave to the prisoners
of concentration camps, including homosexuals, as Plant describes it in his book. “Two of the worst assignments the camps forced on homosexual inmates were the special labour details in the quarries … and the medical experiments carried out in various institutions” (ch.5). He also states though, that unlike in the Colonies, in the Nazi camps “the percentage of homosexuals shipped to the quarries … was larger than that of any other group” (Plant, ch. 5).

And lastly, there is Jezebel’s, which is a brothel for the Commanders – the same Commanders that have built and run Gilead as a fundamentalist Christian society. The name is, like most things in Gilead, a biblical reference, but according to Merriam-Webster, the word Jezebel is also used with the meaning “an impudent, shameless, or morally unrestrained woman”, which is kind of ironic in an incredibly cruel way, because it is it the work of the Commanders, for the Commanders, yet it is again the women who are, in a sense, blamed here – even though they do not have much of a choice in the matter and once they end up there, “nobody gets out … except in a black van” (Atwood 255). At the same time, the immoral aspect possibly also refers to the fact that at least a portion of the women at Jezebel’s are lesbians like Moira, so those who have any power in Gilead either exploit them or just do not care (Atwood 262). I talk more about Jezebel’s and homosexuality in chapter three, when I analyze Moira’s character arc.
2.3 Eco-dystopia

The third novel that I am going to talk about in this chapter is *The Stone Gods*, written by Jeanette Winterson. It is also a dystopian novel, and while it has a lot in common with the previous two discussed novels, it wildly differs from them in the way it portrays oppression. It is a novel about history repeating itself – the storytelling is non-linear, scattered and confusing; the storylines end abruptly and way too soon. They offer enough to engage the reader, but little enough that it feels like they are unfinished. This is one of the reasons I am only going to discuss this novel briefly.

The first storyline, entitled “Planet Blue” takes place on a planet not unlike ours, in what seems to be distant future, with technology so advanced that even space colonization is no longer just a fantasy. At first glance, this world seems almost eutopian. But the eutopian façade is just that – a façade.

We have limited natural resources at our disposal, and a rising population that is by no means in agreement as to how our world as a whole should share out these remaining resources. Conflict is likely. A new planet means that we can begin to redistribute ourselves. It will mean a better quality of life for everyone – the ones who leave, and the ones who stay. (Winterson 5)

Without the sugar-coating, what these words mean is that the old planet, called Orbus, is nearing the end of its life, and it is its people who have destroyed it. “Orbus is not dying. Orbus is evolving in a way that is hostile to human life”, says the character of Manfred, to which Billie, the story’s protagonist, retorts: “OK, so it’s the planet’s fault. We didn’t do anything, did we? Just fucked it to death and kicked it when it wouldn’t get up” (Winterson 8). With the help of the super advanced technology, the society has been able to correct some of its ways and try to prevent more damage. “We have slowed global warming. We have stabilized emissions. We have drained rising sea levels, we
have replanted forests ... we have neutralized acid rain, we have permanent refrigeration around the ice-caps, we no longer use oil, gasoline or petroleum derivatives” (Winterson 38). But it is not enough – the planet has “collapsing ice-caps, encroaching desert, no virgin forest and no eco-species left” (Winterson 68). There are frequent “red-alert pollution warning[s]” and people have to wear “pollution filters” (Winterson 37, 44). This environmental aspect is the defining feature of this dystopia.

Of course, there are other aspects too – with the advanced technology, the government has total control over its people. They have to wear “data-chip implant[s]” and there is a practice called “Identity Closure”, where the government can erase your data and then for all formal purposes “you no longer exist” (Winterson 30-31). The Central Power claims to be a democracy, but it is run by corporation called MORE. “It’s a corporate country” (Winterson 71).

MORE’s use of the technology for shallow causes has also corrupted the society’s morals. Everyone undergoes a practice called “Genetic Reversal” (Winterson 71). Everyone has been “enhanced, genetically modified and DNA-screened” (Winterson 77). Everyone looks perfect: “Jaws are square, skin is tanned, muscles are toned and no one gets turned on” (Winterson 23). People have to artificially stop their aging – they become Fixed and look youg forever, but this causes a problem – pedophilia is on the rise. “Now that everyone is young and beautiful, a lot of men are chasing girls who are just kids. They want something different when everything has become the same” (Winterson 21).

While the story is dystopian, like the previous two, and people are facing an all-controlling government similarly to the previous stories, something is still very different here. Homosexuality is perfectly legal and accepted (Winterson 25). There are multiple characters that are gay – one of them is Manfred. “[G]ay toyboys adore Manfred. His
boyfriend has designed a robot that looks like him” (Winterson 11). Who is more important than Manfred though is Billie, the main character, who also describes herself as “not exactly [straight]” (Winterson 24). She is attracted to another character, Spike, whom she describes as “incredibly sexy” “[g]orgeous” and “absurdly beautiful” (Winterson 6, 18, 33). But while homosexuality presents no problem, Billie’s attraction to Spike is still illegal – because Spike is an android, a “Robo sapiens” (Winterson 6) and “[i]nter-species sex is punishable by death” (Winterson 18). By the time their romance starts though, they are free from the threat of being persecuted for it, because they are on a mission to the new planet, far from Orbus, and while inter-species relationship would be illegal back in the Central Power, “on another planet it isn’t … in space it isn’t” (Winterson 34). They still do not get a happy ending – the mission eventually fails and the last time the reader sees the two, they are slowly dying on an uninhabited planet: “Close your eyes and sleep. Close your eyes and dream. This is one story. There will be another” (Winterson 113).

While the second storyline takes place far in the past and is not really important for the purposes of this thesis, the third storyline, consisting of the chapters “Tech City” and “Wreck City” takes the reader to near-future England, to an era known as “Post-3 War” (Winterson 158). Like in the first storyline, the main characters are named Billie and Spike. And like in the first storyline, the country is run by MORE, a corporation that rebuilt it after the war (Winterson 159). “Government was finished. ‘No MORE War’ became the new slogan for a new kind of global company” (Winterson 162).

MORE is, again, heavily involved in every aspect of people’s lives. They have abolished money and implemented special “jetons” to trade for goods and services (Winterson 166). “Capitalism has gone back to its roots in paternalism, and forward into its destiny – complete control of everything and everyone, and with our consent. This is
the new world. This is Tech City” (Winterson 167). It is not clear what are the politics concerning things like homosexuality in Tech City, but what the reader learns is that “feelings are out of fashion Post-3 War” (Winterson 171) – which is also why MORE has created Spike; an AI who is supposed to make completely rational decisions about the future as to prevent any more Wars (Winterson 169).

When the main character, Billie, takes Spike on a walk, the reader also learns that there is an “alternative community” (Winterson 206) living not far from Tech City – in Wreck City, “where you want to live when you don’t want to live anywhere else … can’t live anywhere else” (Winterson 179). This alternative community is founded by Alaska and Nebraska, a pair of lesbians who “were some of the first in Wreck City” after the war, and before it, they were “escaping from the expectations of their families”, which implies that at least in the time right before the war, homophobia was still present. But Wreck City is the home for a plethora of different people who do not belong in Tech City, not just lesbians.

As shown in this sub-chapter, Winterson’s dystopia does include some degree of oppression, but with the focus placed firmly on the environmental and technological aspects of the bleak future worlds, persecution of people based on things such as sexuality ceases. The oppression of the people is mostly about individuals being forced to adhere to beauty standards and not about specific groups being targeted and systematically erased – the only such group is the mutants which are revealed at the end of the last story and which MORE keeps a secret because they would be a blemish on their perfect eutopian illusion (Winterson 232-234). I have chosen to include The Stone Gods as sort of a contrast point to V for Vendetta and The Handmaid’s Tale, because it is a dystopian novel with gay main characters, featuring gay love stories, and yet with minimal homophobia involved. Granted, the stories still do not end well
for any of them – the unfortunate tradition of tragic endings for gay characters still prevails. But there might be a shift coming to the role of gay characters in dystopian writing. Dystopian stories are always cautionary tales influenced by the times in which they came into being – and Winterson’s dystopia is separated from the other two by a good two decades, as it was published in 2007. Some of the fears and attitudes in our society have changed in the meantime. The future of LGBT representation in dystopian writing might depend on whether our society will be more afraid of the possibility that we will lose our freedoms to totalitarian regimes again, or the possibility that we destroy our planet.

Since this thesis is mostly focused on the cruel treatment of homosexuals and homosexuality in dystopian writing, I will not talk further about *The Stone Gods* in the third chapter, and instead focus on the characters from *V for Vendetta* and *The Handmaid’s Tale* again.
3 Character analysis

3.1 About Moira

The first of the characters that will be closely examined in this thesis is the character of Moira from Atwood’s novel *The Handmaid’s Tale*. She is not the protagonist of the story; though if she was, it would surely be no less interesting – as she is one of the more bold and memorable characters to be found in the novel – and it would certainly provide the reader with an even more raw image of Atwood’s dystopia then it does as it is. But even the little space Moira has in the novel as a side character uncovers a lot about the world in which the story takes place and about how this world treats people like her.

At the very end of the novel, from the “historical notes” section, the reader learns that the name “Moira” as well as the names “Luke”, “Nick” and “Janine” are most likely not the actual, real names of the characters, but rather just “pseudonyms”, which the narrator uses in her retelling of the events in order to “protect these individuals should the tapes [through which the story is told] be discovered” (Atwood 318). Moira is one of the few people that Offred, the narrator, considers to be her loved ones, her family – she realizes that if her oppressors were to threaten to hurt these people in front of her, she “would not be able to stand it,” admitting: “I’ll say anything they like, I’ll incriminate anyone. It’s true, the first scream, whimper even, and I’ll turn to jelly, I’ll confess to any crime, I’ll end up hanging from a hook on the Wall” (Atwood 297). She refers to Moira as her “oldest friend” (Atwood 181) – they met in college and have been best friends ever since. Offred indulges in recollections of their times together multiple times throughout the novel, bringing up several little anecdotes which date from their school days up to the start of the Gileadean regime, and which provide the reader with
both a prime example of female friendship – a concept that is no longer allowed in Gilead – and a picture of the kind of person that Moira is (or was, up until a certain point in the story).

Moira is a lesbian and her attraction to women is something she and Offred often talk, even bicker about, in a friendly manner. Offred mentions Moira’s coming out to her and her reaction to it: “There was a time when we didn’t hug, after she’d told me about being gay; but then she said I didn’t turn her on, reassuring me, and we’d gone back to it. We could fight and wrangle and name-call, but it didn’t change anything underneath” (Atwood 181). Offred also provides the reader with a bit of an insight on Moira’s attitude towards men when she tells Moira that “if [she] thought she could create Utopia by shutting herself up in a women-only enclave she was sadly mistaken. Men were not just going to go away,” adding that she “couldn’t just ignore them,” – to which Moira wittily retorts: “That’s like saying you should go out and catch syphilis merely because it exists” (Atwood 181). Offred would bring up Moira’s sexuality when Moira criticized her relationship with Luke, who was a married man at the time they started seeing each other, pointing out that Moira “had no scruples about stealing [women] or borrowing them when she felt like it,” to which Moira responded that “it was different, because the balance of power was equal between women so sex was an even-steven transaction” (Atwood 180). This talk about power and agency is fairly representative of Moira’s opinions and her personal ideology – she is shown to be an outspoken feminist and, in the days before the Gileadean regime begun, she also used to be an activist with a focus on women’s rights. Though it is not said what it was that she studied in college, Offred mentions that she did write a paper about date rape at some point (Atwood 47) and that she later went on to work “for a women’s collective, the
publishing division,” where they would “put out books on birth control and rape and things like that” (Atwood 187).

Both through the anecdotes she tells and through the thoughts she decides to share with those who will listen to her recordings, Offred consistently depicts Moira as eccentric, sarcastic, determined and extraordinarily smart. She recalls her appearance at one occasion: “Moira, sitting on the edge of my bed, legs crossed, ankle on knee, in her purple overalls, one dangly earring, the gold fingernail she wore to be eccentric, a cigarette between her stubby yellow-ended fingers” (Atwood 47). On a different occasion, when Moira is first brought into the Red Centre by the Aunts, Offred notes that Moira is wearing her hair cut short, remarking that she has “defied fashion as usual” (Atwood 80-81).

She has a sarcastic, deadpan and somewhat dark sense of humor; she does not care about coming through as polite when she speaks – perhaps as a way to further her eccentricity and show that she could not care any less about adhering to social norms. She also seems to use this kind of humor in difficult times, as a coping mechanism or as a means to ease the situation to some degree. When she talks to Offred for the first time after she has been captured and brought to the Red Centre, the very first sentence to come out of her mouth is “This is a loony bin” (Atwood 81), rather than an expression of relief over being able to talk to her best friend after being quite literally kidnapped and imprisoned. When they meet in the bathroom to be able to talk some more, Offred expresses this kind of relief for the second time, while Moira just replies with: “God, do I need a cigarette” (Atwood 83). At yet another, later meeting in the bathroom, when Offred asks if Moira is there, she whispers back to her: “Large as life and twice as ugly” (Atwood 100). At this point in the story, this brand of humorous, sarcastic reactions in
the face of danger and oppression shows that Moira is not losing her resolution – that she is not giving up just yet.

Her remarkable wits are obvious not only through her blunt humor though – she is shown, time and time again, to be very observant, cunning and highly resourceful. When the Gileadean totalitarian regime was at its beginning, after they had suspended the Constitution, Moira was quick to put two and two together – she realized where the situation was heading way before Offred did:

Look out, said Moira to me, over the phone. Here it comes.

Here what comes? I said.

You wait, she said. They’ve been building up to this. It’s you and me against the wall, baby. She was quoting an expression of my mother’s, but she wasn’t intending to be funny. (Atwood 183)

And when women were banned from working and owning property, “[s]he was not stunned, the way [Offred] was. In some strange way she was gleeful, as if [it] was what she’d been expecting for some time and … she’d been proven right. She even looked more energetic, more determined” (Atwood 188). According to Offred’s commentary when Moira was first brought to the Red Centre, Offred “must have been there three weeks when Moira came” (Atwood 80), meaning she was able to avoid being found out and getting arrested for at least three weeks (and probably even more – since the reader does not know how long exactly it took for Offred to be brought there). She is also said to have rather decent technical skills, as Offred mentions that “Moira had mechanical ability, she used to fix her own car, the minor things” (Atwood 141), and later further talks about how much more skillful and resourceful Moira is in comparison to her: “If I were Moira, I’d know how to take [an electric fan] apart, reduce it to its cutting edges. I have no screwdriver, but if I were Moira I could do it without a
screwdriver. I’m not Moira” (Atwood 180). Mechanical ability would, in the pre-Gileadean era, surely grant Moira a greater independence from men, so it is no surprise that someone like her would invest their time in learning these kinds of things.

However, the scenes in which the readers can best witness her resourcefulness and cunning nature for themselves – as well as her determination – are the scenes of her two escape attempts from the Red Centre. Her first attempt occurs shortly after she is brought into the Red Centre. She informs Offred about her plan to flee the facility before she does so. “I’ve got to get out of here, I’m going bats” (Atwood 100). When Offred pleads with her not to take such a huge risk by herself, she does not listen and instead continues, “I’ll fake sick. They send an ambulance, I’ve seen it” (Atwood 100) – her observant nature comes to the view here. Upon Offred’s argument that she will not get far, not past the hospital, Moira does not seem too worried about that, noting that even if they do catch her, “[a]t least it’ll be a change” and then reveals that it would not be the first time she has carried out something like that: “Not to worry, I’m good at it. When I was a kid in high school I cut out vitamin C, I got scurvy. In the early stages they can’t diagnose it. Then you just start it again and you’re fine. I’ll hide my vitamin pills” (Atwood 100). Not even Offred’s warning that she might get sexually assaulted – which is something that Moira was very well aware of and was fighting against as an activist – is enough to stop her. Offred later sees her getting transported into an ambulance, apparently running a fever. “Appendicitis, they say” (Atwood 101). The fact that even as a teenager, she was dedicated enough to develop a disease just to get out of school for a bit says a lot about both her determination and her cleverness, as well as her knowledge of human biology and/or medicine.

What the reader will find perhaps more interesting here than Moira’s characterization and the way she manages to fool her captors for a bit is the way she is
treated when they find out what she has done – an example of how a person will be
treated in Gilead if they dare to resist. “They hauled Moira out, dragged her in through
the gate and up the front steps, holding her under the armpits, one on each side. She was
having trouble walking” (Atwood 102). She must have been already punished to some
extend at this point, since she cannot walk properly, but the punishment does not end
there.

They took her into a room that used to be the Science Lab. It was a room where
none of us ever went willingly. Afterwards she could not walk for a week, her feet
would not fit into her shoes, they were too swollen. It was the feet they’d do, for a
first offense. They used steel cables, frayed at the ends. After that the hands. They
didn’t care what they did to your feet and hands, even if it was permanent.
Remember, said Aunt Lydia. For our purposes, your feet and your hands are not
essential. (Atwood 102)

She has been severely tortured – not just in order to prevent her from trying
anything else, but in order to prevent anyone else from trying anything similar. “Moira
lay on her bed, an example. She shouldn’t have tried it, not with the Angels … We had
to carry her to classes” (Atwood 102). Her mutilation is intended to be memorable;
while the others cannot feel the pain of the torture or its aftermath, they can see it in the
marks left on Moira’s body. They should keep seeing it; Offred does. “I am still praying
but what I am seeing is Moira’s feet, the way they looked after they’d brought her back.
Her feet did not look like feet at all. They looked like drowned feet, swollen and
boneless, except for the colour. They looked like lungs” (Atwood 102).

But although it seems that all of this is happening solely because of Moira’s
attempt to escape the Red Centre, it is not quite the whole truth. Yes, the reason her
oppressors deem her deserving of punishment is her resistance, but Moira’s resistance is
more severe than just her trying to break free; she is a lesbian. If she were a man, her homosexuality would have been enough of an offence to grant her to an execution or, at the very least, being sent to the Colonies. She could have been just another body on the Wall. Her oppressors probably know this thing about her from the start; for the purpose of creating the Handmaids, they would recruit women they saw as being “morally unfit” (Atwood 316), which in Moira’s case was likely not because of Moira being married a second time, like Luke was with Offred, but because of her sexuality and activism. And Moira realizes this – whether they have vocalized it while torturing her or not, she knows her sexual orientation is a factor in her punishment. When Moira later describes her second attempt to get out, she thinks back on the torture from the first one, carried out on her by “Aunt Lydia and her steel cable” (Atwood 260). Apparently, it was her who did the punishing. “She enjoyed that, you know. She pretended to do all that love-the-sinner, hate-the-sin stuff, but she enjoyed it” (Atwood 260). While the “sin” could just be referring to the escape, the love-the-sinner, hate-the-sin argument is often used in real life by homophobic people whose homophobia is based on their religious beliefs to excuse and justify that homophobia. They claim not to hate the people who are homosexual but only their homosexuality, which leads to justifying practices such as reparative therapy – pseudo-scientific practices through which gay people are supposed to unlearn homosexuality. Aunt Lydia was not genuine about the love-the-sinner part, at least, and took the opportunity to show it to Moira when she gave her an excuse by rebelling against her and against the system.

Moira’s second attempt at breaking free is a bit more successful than the first one. This time she does get out of the facility for real. She has been planning it for some time, as Offred notes when Janine has a breakdown and Moira instructs Offred with that to do in case “[s]he does that again and [Moira is] not [there]” (Atwood 229). Moira’s
escape starts with her going to the bathroom. The reader is given a retelling of the story by Aunt Lydia: “After a moment Moira called to Aunt Elizabeth: the toilet was overflowing, could Aunt Elizabeth come and fix it? … Aunt Elizabeth, suspecting no harm, went into the washroom” (Atwood 140). As she was dealing with the broken toilet, she “felt something hard and sharp and possibly metallic jab into her ribs from behind. Don’t move, said Moira, or I’ll stick it all the way in, I know where, I’ll puncture your lung” (Atwood 140). With her mechanical skills, Moira has “dismantled the inside of one of the toilets and taken out the long thin pointed lever” (Atwood 140), which she then used as a provisory weapon to get Aunt Elizabeth to do what she wanted her to. She switched clothes with her and “[t]he veil she tore into strips, and tied Aunt Elizabeth up with them, in behind the furnace. She stuffed some of the cloth into her mouth and tied it in place with another strip. She tied a strip around Aunt Elizabeth’s neck and tied the other end to her feet, behind” (Atwood 141). After that, “Moira stood up straight and looked firmly ahead. … [S]he marched straight out the front door, with the bearing of a person who knew where she was going” (Atwood 142). Not only does this part describe the way Moira manages to escape, it also does a rather good job at capturing Moira’s spirit. In the words of Stillman and Johnson: “She is a powerful woman and a powerful idea because she both possesses and represents an energetic, persistent striving for freedom, a resistance to accept control and definition by others” (80).

After she manages to successfully fool the guards at several checkpoints, Moira questions where to go next. She remembers the mailing list from her old women’s collective. “We’d destroyed it, of course, early on; or we didn’t destroy it, we divided it up among us and each one of us memorized a section, and then we destroyed it” (Atwood 257). She chooses what she remembers as a Quaker family, “because they
were a married couple, and those were safer than anyone single and especially anyone gay” (Atwood 257). They help her and later she gets into one of the safe houses on the so called Underground Femaleroad (Atwood 258) – a movement focused on hiding and smuggling out women – a clear reference to the Underground Railroad which used to smuggle out slaves in the United States during the slavery period. “I was underground it must have been eight or nine months. I was taken from one safe house to another … I almost made it out” (Atwood 259).

Almost, but then she gets caught. She dreads going back to the Red Centre, thinking about the torture she expects as a punishment (Atwood 260). “We didn’t end up at the Centre though, we went somewhere else. I won’t go into what happened after that. I’d rather not talk about it. All I can say is they didn’t leave any marks” (Atwood 260). They do not need to leave marks this time, like they did the first time when they mutilated her feet – that was intentional; it was a warning for the other Handmaids. Now there are no other Handmaids who could see her. “[T]hey said I was too dangerous to be allowed the privilege of returning to the Red Centre. They said I would be a corrupting influence” (Atwood 261). The reader does not get to find out what is Moira’s punishment this time around, what kind of torture she has to face. Likely, it is psychological; maybe sexual as well. One of the things they use for interrogation purposes are electrodes; that much Moira mentions. “I made up a lot of stuff. You do that, when they use the electrodes and the other things. You don’t care what you say” (Atwood 256). “When [the torture] was over they showed me a movie. Know what it was about? It was about life in the Colonies” (Atwood 260). “I had my choice, they said, [Jezebel’s] or the Colonies. Well, shit, nobody but a nun would pick the Colonies. I mean, I’m not a martyr” (Atwood 261). And so Moira ends up in Jezebel’s – a brothel for the Commanders – working as a prostitute.
There is one more aspect to Moira’s personality that comes to light when the reader hears about the way she managed to get away from captivity for the second time – and that is her humanity. The fact that, if she wanted to, she could have hurt or even killed Aunt Elizabeth – and if she chose to do so, it would not have been entirely unjustified, when one takes into consideration the torture Moira had to endure at the hands of the Aunts after her first attempt to escape had failed (not to mention that she was being held captive in a facility where they prepared her to be raped on the regular in order to bear children, treating her no better than a breeding animal, which alone would probably be enough for many people to take revenge in the form of a violent act if they were given the chance). But she did not harm Aunt Elizabeth in any way. When Offred retells the story as Aunt Lydia has told it to Janine, she stresses the fact, stating that Moira “was not overly cruel to Aunt Elizabeth, she allowed her to put on her own red dress” (Atwood 141). She later added:

I could kill you, you know, said Moira, when Aunt Elizabeth was safely stowed out of sight behind the furnace. I could injure you badly so you would never feel good in your body again. I could zap you with this, or stick this thing into your eye. Just remember I didn’t, if it ever comes to that. Aunt Lydia didn’t repeat any of this part to Janine, but I expect Moira said something like it. In any case she didn’t kill or mutilate Aunt Elizabeth[.] (Atwood 141-142)

These little snippets of dialogue that Offred occasionally fills in through her imagination might not be entirely authentic, but they are believable enough; Offred was, after all, one of the people (if not the single person) who knew Moira best. These lines still offer a good picture of what Moira was like, of how she could be expected to act in the given situation. And while Moira does not repeat what exactly she has said when she is telling Offred the story of her escape during their final meeting at Jezebel’s, she
confirms that although she showed mercy to Aunt Elizabeth and decided not to kill her, a part of her wanted to do it: “I wanted to kill her, I really felt like it, but now I’m just as glad I didn’t or things would be a lot worse for me” (Atwood 256). If she had not shown mercy, how much worse could they have treated her? How much worse than breaking her as a person?

Because that is what happens to Moira in the end; she is broken. Although Skillman and Johnson claim that though Moira is “defeated” still “Gilead is not within her” (80), I disagree. Yes, she preserved her sense of humor, but through torture, Gilead has gotten to Moira – and made her resign to the very thing she had been always fighting against. Moira, who used to write papers about date rape, who used to be an activist, who used to work for a women’s collective. Moira, who used to be cunning and determined and dangerous. The same Moira talks to her best friend at Jezebel’s, with no fight left in her, and tries to persuade her to join her in working there. “They even give you face cream. You should figure out some way of getting in here. You'd have three or four good years before your snatch wears out and they send you to the bone-yard. The food's not bad and there's drink and drugs, if you want it, and we only work nights” (Atwood 261). Offred cannot believe what has become of Moira. “She is frightening me now, because what I hear in her is indifference, a lack of volition. Have they really done it to her then, taken away something – what? – that used to be so central to her? … I want gallantry from her, swashbuckling, heroism, single-handed combat” (Atwood 261). Moira senses Offred’s feelings and tries to reassure her that she is still herself. “Anyway, look at it this way: it’s not so bad, there’s lots of women around. Butch paradise, you might call it” (Atwood 261). Upon asking, Offred learns that not only is lesbian activity allowed at Jezebel’s, it is encouraged, because “[t]he Aunts figure [they]’re all damned anyway” and “women on women sort of turns [the Commanders]
on” (Atwood 262). Sure, Moira might have some freedoms now, but as Offred has said earlier in the novel, “[a] rat in a maze is free to go anywhere, as long as it stays inside the maze” (Atwood 174). The old Moira – who once compared men to syphilis – would have hated the thought of performing her sexuality for the sake of men with burning passion, but now it seems that there is even some degree of comfort to her there. Moira might not have died physically, but a great deal of her spirit was killed anyway. And Offred, whether she is aware of it or she does it subconsciously, ultimately thinks about Moira in that manner too, when she mentions that while retelling Moira’s story, she “trie[s] to make it sound as much like her as [she] can. It’s a way of keeping her alive” (Atwood 256).
3.2 About Valerie

The second of the characters I want to focus on in this thesis is the character of Valerie from Alan Moore’s graphic novel *V for Vendetta*. Unlike Atwood’s Moira, Valerie is not actually present during the events of the story – she is already dead by the time most of the story, safe for flashbacks, takes place. The reader gets to know her in chapter eleven, aptly titled “Valerie” – a chapter that is all about her, a chapter in which she tells her own story. After that, the reader only gets a few occasional mentions of her from V and Evey. As the case is with Moira, the reader finds out a little bit about her life before the world she had lived in took a dystopian turn, as well as bits and pieces of information about what was happening as the regime was starting. Unlike Moira though, there is not much to learn about her life after that. The chapter containing Valerie’s story is extraordinary within the novel, because it represents sort of an emotional climax of the story – a turning point for both V and Evey, as well as, presumably, the reader. Valerie’s words are powerful by themselves, but the whole segment is additionally paralleled with the torture that Evey is subjected to, so the reader takes in both Valerie’s narrative and Evey’s visual as some of the text overlays illustrations of Evey’s suffering.

Valerie’s story unveils through a letter she has written in Larkhill, in a cell that she was being held in before she died; a letter that she has pushed through a hole in the prison wall into the adjacent cell where V was being held (Moore et al. 175).

I don’t know who you are. Please believe. There is no way I can convince you that this is not one of their tricks but I don’t care. I am me, and I don’t know who you are but I love you. I have a pencil, a little one they did not find. I am a woman. I hid it inside me. Perhaps I won’t be able to write again, so this is a long letter
about my life. It is the only autobiography I will ever write and oh God I’m writing it on toilet paper. (Moore et al. 154)

Valerie was a successful actress, born in 1957. She talks about how she has been dealing with homophobia ever since she was a young teenager – when she was fifteen years old, attending and all-girl school, she met a girl named Sara, who was one year younger than her in one of her classes and the girls fell in love, but they presumably got caught or found out and were subsequently lectured by one of the teachers: “I sat in biology class, staring at the pickled rabbit foetus in its jar, listening while Mr. Hird said it was an adolescent phase that people outgrew” (Moore et al. 156). And while, according to Valerie, her girlfriend did get over her attraction to girls, Valerie did not – she “stopped pretending” and came out to her parents in 1976, by bringing home another girl, named Christine (Moore et al. 156). Her parents did not take the news well – the panel illustrating this part of Valerie’s narrative shows her father looking angry and her mother upset, wiping away tears. Valerie left her home in Nottingham the following week: “I moved to London, enrolling at drama college. My mother said I broke her heart… but it was my integrity that was important” (Moore et al. 156). This is the first instance of Valerie mentioning how important her own integrity is to her. “[I]t’s all we have left in this place. It is the very last inch of us… but within that inch we are free” (Moore et al. 156).

Valerie’s life in London did not last long but it was all about her integrity; there she lived the life she wanted to live. “London: I was happy in London” (Moore et al. 158). She had wanted to become an actress since she was a child (Moore et al. 156) and now that ambition was becoming reality for her. Additionally, she was no longer keeping her sexual orientation a secret and was now free to explore it and explore the gay scene that existed in London. And she did, mentioning that she would “go to
Gateways or one of the other clubs” – the Gateways Club was a real lesbian nightclub in London – though she remarks that it was “lonely” and she did not feel comfortable with the night life, stating she was “stand-offish and didn’t mix easily” (Moore et al. 158). She attributes the reason for her feelings of discomfort to her impression that “[s]o many of [the people there] just wanted to be gay. It was their life, their ambition, all they talked about. And [Valerie] wanted more than that” (Moore et al. 158). What she wanted was love – and she found it when she starred in an award-winning film, which, as can be seen in the illustrations, featured a lesbian romance. She and her co-star Ruth fell in love. “We loved each other. We lived together, and on Valentine’s Day she sent me roses, and oh God, we had so much. Those were the best three years of my life. In 1988 there was the war… and after that there were no more roses. Not for anybody” (Moore et al. 158). Ruth got eventually captured as a part of the regime’s initiative to do away with homosexuals and they tortured her until she gave up information about Valerie. “They burned her with cigarette ends and made her give them my name. She signed a statement saying I’d seduced her” (Moore et al. 159). Although Valerie did not put any blame on Ruth for turning her in because she still loved her, Ruth could not stand the guilt she felt and decided to take her own life: “She killed herself in her cell. She couldn’t live with betraying me, with giving up that last inch” (Moore et al. 159). The inch here, again, represents integrity, this time Ruth’s, but also her love of and life with Valerie. It can be assumed here that Ruth was tortured in more ways than just being burned with cigarettes, as it is clear from both the depictions of both Valerie’s and Evey’s torture that they used other techniques too – i.e. using water. When Valerie was captured after Ruth’s confessions, she was tortured both physically and mentally, she was mocked, to wear her down faster: “[T]hey told me that all my films would be burned. They shaved off my hair. They held my head down a toilet bowl and told jokes
about lesbians. They brought me here and gave me drugs. I can’t feel my tongue anymore. I can’t speak” (Moore et al. 159). By shaving off her hair and erasing her from her art, they attempted to strip Valerie off of her identity. And although they seemingly stripped her of her voice too by making her physically incapable of speaking, she retained this voice through her letter – along with her identity, because that, too, is now documented in the letter.

By the end of the letter, Valerie ponders about her life and her inevitable, approaching death in her prison cell. She seems to have somewhat come to terms with the fact that her life is over and that it is ending in an awful way, but she does not lose herself in the cell even though her captors and tormentors have tried to erase her. “Every inch of me shall perish… except one” (Moore et al. 159). She stresses the importance of the inch, and expresses hope that the world will be one day free again from the horrors she has had to experience (Moore et al. 160). Though her letter and her story are heartbreaking, they are also inspiring and powerful – more so than she knows.
3.3 Homosexual characters as tragic heroes and a symbol of resistance

Like countless homosexual characters in both literature and film, Moira and Valerie both meet a tragic ending. They are both captured and tormented by the authorities in a totalitarian regime for the crime of being different from what is in their respective regime considered desirable and acceptable, and both – in a way – die. Valerie dies physically, but retains her inch, her integrity; Moira survives physically, but after all gives up her own metaphorical inch. But both Moira and Valerie also become in their own way a symbol of resistance and hope for others who are in a similar situation although with a different background – Moira for the Handmaids, Valerie for V and Evey.

Moira lives her whole life as a part of resistance, one way or another. It is a part of her personality. She symbolizes resistance and rebellion for Offred, who has known Moira for years. When she first attempts to escape, Offred thinks about her in relation to the motto *Nolite te bastardes carborundorum*. “I pray silently: *Nolite te bastardes carborundorum* … The scratched writing on my cupboard wall floats before me, left by an unknown woman, with the face of Moira. I saw her go out, to the ambulance, on a stretcher, carried by two Angels” (Atwood 101). The reader later discovers that though the Latin is not correct and the motto was created as a joke, the meaning of the motto is “Don’t let the bastards grind you down” (Atwood 197). Although Offred does not know what it means when she thinks of it in connection to Moira, the motto does fit Moira rather well – it does sound like something that could as well come out of Moira’s mouth. Additionally to being Offred’s symbol of resistance, Moira also becomes a symbol of resistance and hope for the other Handmaids in the Red Centre as well upon her second time escaping. She reminds them that it is possible to become free again and that they do still have some power left – or, that they can have it once again. And,
perhaps even more importantly, she shows them that the power of their oppressors is not infinite.

Moira had power now, she’d been set loose, she’d set herself loose. She was now a loose woman. I think we found this frightening. Moira was like an elevator with open sides. She made us dizzy. … Nevertheless Moira was our fantasy. We hugged her to us, she was with us in secret, a giggle; she was lava beneath the crust of daily life. In the light of Moira, the Aunts were less fearsome and more absurd. Their power had a flaw to it. They could be shanghaied in toilets. The audacity was what we liked. (Atwood 143)

When Offred finds out how Moira’s daring escape ended and how she has changed, a part of the hope that Moira personified vanishes – the bastards have managed to grind Moira down. But even then, Offred still states that she wishes she could finish telling Moira’s story with “something daring and spectacular, some outrage, something that would befit her” (Atwood 262), though she cannot because she does not know how Moira’s story really ends – still, there is a speck of hope in that uncertainty.

Valerie functions as a symbol of resistance on a vastly different scale compared to Moira. Valerie’s story is only really known to two people – V and Evey – but through them, she effectively sparks a revolution.

An inch. It’s small and it’s fragile and it’s the only thing in the world worth having. We must never lose it, or sell it, or give it away. We must never let them take it from us. I don’t know who you are, or whether you’re a man or woman. I may never see you. I will never hug you or cry with you or get drunk with you. But I love you. I hope that you escape this place. I hope that the world turns and
that things get better, and that one day people have roses again. I wish I could kiss you. Valerie. (Moore et al. 160)

These final words are those that really change everything. They change V – when he reassures Evey that the letter is authentic, he says: “The words you wept over were those that transformed me” (Moore et al. 175). What is interesting though, is that V literally transforms into the inch. He becomes the personification of integrity – Merriam-Webster defines integrity as a “firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values” and that is exactly what V embodies, with both the moral and the artistic aspect of it. He adopts the name V – V being the Roman numeral five, the number of his cell in Larkhill (Moore et al. 83), but also the first letter of Valerie’s name. He latches himself onto Valerie’s wishes – he escapes Larkhill (Moore et al. 83), he gives the world roses – in particular, he gives roses to those responsible for the atrocities committed in Larkhill before killing them (Moore et al. 74-75, 176). By starting the revolution, he literally does turn the world. Inspired by Valerie’s words, he transforms from a person into an idea. There are multiple occasions on which V’s identity is questioned – for instance: “He wanted us to know the story. But… and here’s the funny thing… he didn’t want us to know all of it. When we found the diary, some of the pages had been torn out. … What was on the missing pages, eh? His name? His age? Whether he was Jewish, or homosexual, or black or white?” (Moore et al. 85). The point is, V might have been all of those things, all of those people. He became all of those people, technically – the essence of them. Valerie’s story is touching and personal, but it is at the same time not at all a unique one. They were many other people who had lives and hopes and dream and who were robbed of all of that and murdered at Larkhill – whether those people were homosexuals, or black, or Jewish. There were millions upon millions of real people, among them many homosexuals, who were lost to totalitarian regimes in
the real world. Although the reader can see her face in V’s gallery, when Valerie’s story unfolds, the illustrations never show her face. In every panel, she is facing away from the reader, because her face is not the important part of that story (Moore et al. 156-160). And neither is V’s face – thus the mask he wears. As Evey remarks after V dies: “If I take off that mask, something will go away forever, be diminished because whoever you are isn’t as big as the idea of you” (Moore et al. 250). That is when Evey, too, finally understands the full extent of V’s change and does what V has told her to do after he shared Valerie’s letter with her – “Become transfixed… become transfigured” (Moore et al. 172). Valerie’s words have a great impact on her right away though – while in her cell, she reads the letter again and again (Moore et al. 155) and is pictured kissing the letter as she finishes reading it – a silent answer to Valerie’s last words, “I wish I could kiss you” (Moore et al. 160). She is seen clutching the letter later, even as she thinks it was just one of V’s tricks, saying that she “believed in [Valerie], without seeing her, [she] almost loved her” (Moore et al. 174). Evey becomes the new vigilante known as V after the man who has embodied him first dies, to finish what he has started (Moore et al. 251) – to make sure that Valerie’s wishes come true, and the world will be better again and perhaps there will be roses again, this time in the sense that Valerie wanted them, not just as a tool for vengeance.
4 Conclusion

In this thesis, I have explored dystopian societies in three novels – a Fascist dystopia in *V for Vendetta*, a Christian fundamentalist dystopia in *The Handmaid’s Tale* and an eco-dystopia in *The Stone Gods*. I have analyzed the degree of oppression in each of these societies and then paid special attention to the treatment of homosexuality and homosexual characters. The analysis shows that not only are homosexuals treated horribly in both *V for Vendetta* and *The Handmaid’s Tale*, parallels can be drawn between the treatment of homosexuals in the two novels, and the treatment of homosexuals in Nazi concentration camps. *The Stone Gods* provides a contrast point for the previous two novels, since in spite of there being gay characters, there is no homophobia or persecution of homosexuals presented in the novel.

Through a closer analysis of Moira from *The Handmaid’s Tale* and Valerie from *V for Vendetta*, I have shown that they are both tragic figures, who are dealing with homophobia and are both treated in an incredibly cruel way, at least to some extent because of their sexual orientation. Both are imprisoned and tortured; neither of them gets a happy ending, which is sadly often the case with gay characters. Although tragic endings for gay characters used to be the result of a homophobic agenda, that is not the case here.

Additionally, I have proven that both Moira and Valerie function as a symbol of resistance for other characters, although on a very different scale – while Moira does so only for a few women who know her by escaping their shared prison, Valerie indirectly sparks a revolution when her deeply personal and emotional letter inspires both V and Evey to overthrow a Fascist regime.
5 Works Cited


6 Resumé

The thesis focuses on the concept homosexuality within dystopian writing. The aim of the thesis is to be an exploration of the oppression in societies portrayed in dystopian writing, as well as the consequential treatment of homosexuality and the persecution of homosexual characters in these dystopian societies.

The first chapter serves as an introduction to the closely related genres of utopia and dystopia and provides a brief history of the genres. It also mentions a tradition of mistreatment of homosexual characters in writing.

The second chapter consists of an analysis of three dystopian novels, the different types of dystopian societies depicted in these novels, the degree of oppression, and the attitude towards and treatment of homosexuality and homosexual characters in these societies. It draws parallels between the ways gay people are treated in the novels and the ways they have been treated by a real totalitarian regime in the past. The chapter also shows contrasting attitudes towards homosexuality in different dystopian societies depending on what are the defining features of each of these societies.

The third chapter consists of analyses of two homosexual characters, their personalities and character arc, and the oppression and persecution they face. This chapter explores their role as tragic characters and as a symbol of resistance.
Tato bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na koncept homosexuality v kontextu dystopické literatury. Cílem práce je zkoumat společenský útlak vykreslený v dystopické literatuře, a zároveň to, jak je v těchto dystopických společnostech zacházeno s homosexuálními postavami. Práce analyzuje tři dystopická díla.

První kapitola slouží jako úvod do úzce propojených literárních žánrů utopie a dystopie a nabízí stručnou historii těchto žánrů. Zároveň poukazuje na tradičně špatné zacházení s homosexuálními postavami v literatuře.

Druhou kapitolu tvoří analýza tří děl dystopické literatury, různých typů dystopických společností vykreslených v těchto dílech, míry útlaku, a zacházení s homosexuálními postavami v těchto společnostech. Tato kapitola též poukazuje na podobnosti mezi tím, jak je s homosexuály zacházeno v těchto fiktivních dystopických společnostech a tím, jak bylo v minulosti s homosexuály zacházeno v skutečném totalitním režimu. Hovoří tedy o kontrastu v tom, do jaké míry dystopické společnosti tolerují nebo netolerují homosexuality v závislosti na tom, jaké jsou hlavní črty tékonkrétní dystopické společnosti.

Třetí kapitola obsahuje analýzy dvou homosexuálních postav, jejich osobností a toho, jaký byl jejich příběh, a jaké míře útlaku čelily. Vykresluje je jako tragické postavy a stejně tak jako symbol vzdoru.