Readers and Text Worlds of Dystopia

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Abstract

This thesis is an exploration of reading styles and stylistic patterning in relation to dystopian fiction. Situated within an empirical cognitive poetics, the study draws upon naturalistic reader-response data, with specific reference to Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Vonnegut's 'Harrison Bergeron', as case-studies of dystopian texts that produce a spectrum of readings. The notions of preferred and dispreferred responses are defined in cognitive linguistic and pragmatic terms, and non-normative readings of these dystopian texts are investigated. The thesis adopts a text-world theoretical description, and provides both naturalistic reader-community data as well as focused interviews and reading protocols. It was found that some readers insist on producing dispreferred readings even in the face of lack of textually-driven evidence. Such readers allow their own emotions, outlooks and dispositions to over-ride the textual patterning, in producing dispreferred and non-evidential readings. These readings are nevertheless genuinely held. This study raises questions for all text-driven models of literary reading and analysis.

Keywords

dystopia, reader-response, cognitive poetics, narratology, empirical stylistics, Atwood, Vonnegut, text world theory

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Chapter 1 Theoretical Foundations

1.0 Overview

In this introductory chapter I provide an overview of the key issues and research questions that will be discussed throughout the thesis. This chapter also looks at the definitions of dystopia (section 1.2), stylistics and cognitive poetics (section 1.3). This situates this thesis within the broad field of literary criticism and cognitive poetics, noting that the developments of these two fields meet at one point: considering the reader as vital to the construction of meaning of a text. In the reception of dystopia, cognitive poetics and reader response studies there is rarely attention given to deviant readers, 'mischievous' or dispreferred responses (Stockwell, 2013). In terms of dystopian texts, these would be the readers who find hope in a hopeless 'closed' dystopia, such as Orwell's (1949) *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, or those who do not see the utopian enclave in critical dystopias such as Atwood's (1985) *The Handmaid's Tale*. This interest in generalizable readings falls into the danger of marginalising those readings that can have a textual basis, but are cast aside in favour of the majority.

In stylistics, there is a tendency to search for the strange and complicated text as an object of study, which leads to researchers looking for texts that fit their frameworks, rather than looking at texts and using the framework that is suitable for investigation. I argue that simple texts that also stand the test of time and reach 'literary' status are worthy of stylistic investigation. Recent cognitive poetic frameworks claim to include all the cognitive aspects of readers within their analysis, but most researchers confine themselves to introspection when discussing personal history or traits that may lead to a certain interpretation of a text. This thesis therefore analyses reader traits of hope and optimism, and hypothesises that these traits are closely related to readings of dystopian texts.

This chapter therefore sets out the parameters of this work, by looking at key concepts and situating the study within the fields of cognitive poetics and dystopian literary studies. First, section 1.1 provides an overview of the key issues and research

questions of this thesis. In section 1.2, I provide some definitions of the terms dystopia and critical dystopia. In section 1.3, I situate the study within the fields of stylistics and cognitive poetics. Finally, section 1.4 provides a preview of the thesis chapters and describes the structure of this study.

1.1 Key Issues and Research Questions

The key issues that will be addressed in this thesis include the difficulty of drawing upon reader responses in Text World Theory, the importance of the inclusion of (seemingly) dispreferred or deviant responses to texts in stylistics analysis, and finally considering reader traits and experience as part of literary discourse.

First, Text World Theory is a discourse-based cognitive poetic framework that takes into consideration the role of the reader in interpretation and the building of the fictional world (Gavins, 2007; Werth, 1999). This emphasis on the inclusion of the reader is fundamental to cognitive poetics in general and particularly to Text World Theory, because it is what sets Text World Theory as a world-building framework apart from other world-building frameworks (Werth 1995a: 52; see upcoming section 2.1 for further discussion of the theory). Initially, analyses drew upon introspective readings of the researchers themselves (e.g. Al-Mansoob, 2006; Giovanelli, 2011). Subsequent research expanded to include data that provides access to interpretations other than the researcher's own, with a drive towards more 'naturalistic' data in the form of online reviews, and reading group recordings (Whiteley 2011a, 2011b; Gavins, 2013; Norledge, 2014). These readings provided the basis for a cognitive stylistic analysis, and empirical evidence for specific interpretations. This research thus follows this vein in so much as to discuss online reviews in chapters 4 and 5 as a starting point for investigating the text worlds of the texts at hand. Online responses as a dataset create many difficulties. Because of the lack of researcher intervention, the responses can vary in length, topics, and clarity of reference. The topics of online responses can range from commentary on style to characterisation or providing a simple summary of the plot. Furthermore, there is no uniformity in the time between reading and the writing of the posts online, which leads to difficulty dealing with such data due to issues such as memory retention

after reading (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2013). This is also the case in reading group recordings in which the time between reading and the meeting can vary from one participant to another. This issue has been addressed by some researchers via using read-aloud tasks or attempts at on-line responses, in which case the text is necessarily divided into paragraphs or line-by-line chunks for the readers to comment on. This method is disruptive and jarring to the natural flow of reading. Finally, these issues seem to be more prevalent when attempting to account for readers' experiences of reading novels, which usually are read in sections rather than a whole. This led to the consideration of a method that would allow for some restriction and uniformity of the timing of the responses, as well as the context of reading process, while allowing the readers to provide new readings that emerge across different participants. Semi-structured interviews are a powerful tool for investigation, which allows for uniformity of certain aspects of responses as well as enough freedom for readers to provide their own interpretations. The semi-structured interview is utilized in social studies to capture human experiences that are otherwise unquantifiable (Franklin, 2012). The reading process is an experience which can also be documented in qualitative measures, and for Text World Theory studies in particular, scholars favour the use of accessible data of online reviews and reading group recordings (Whiteley, 2011a; 2011b; Peplow, 2012). However, in a group setting, group dynamics may effect the responses of readers towards a text, for example there will tend to be agreement with a more dominant interpretation of the most outspoken member of the reading group. In this thesis, I suggest the use of semi-structured interviews to allow for more diverse interpretations to be documented as part of the reader response data.

The short story 'Harrison Bergeron' (Vonnegut, 1968) was chosen to provide a text that can be read in its entirety without disruption and allow for investigating and recording the interpretations as close to the actual reading time as possible. Using the semi-structured interviews also allowed for some uniformity of the responses of the readers towards the text as well, which also avoids the issues of online reviews which discuss many different topics. Semi-structured interviews are thus a useful tool in collecting readings that do not follow the generalised response, particularly due to the readers given the freedom to comment on their own interpretations without the social pressure of a reading group setting or the self-presentation that is

prevalent in online reviews (see Steen, 1991). I argue that semi-structured interviews can support the empirical dimension to Text World Theory analyses without sacrificing the idiosyncrasy of subjective responses to texts (this is discussed further in the methodology section 3.4).

Second, preference organisation is an important concept in CA, which is also applicable to other discourses such as literary discourse (Stockwell, 2013; preference in literary discourse is discussed in more detail in upcoming section 2.2). In reader response-based analyses using Text World Theory, deviant or strange meanings that some readers create are usually ignored in favour of focusing on generalised responses and the replicability of certain themes across large numbers of responses as evidence for certain interpretations (e.g. Gavins, 2013; Nuttall, 2015). This generalised, agreed upon meaning is usually considered as the preferred response to the text, however it would only provide a partial picture of the multitude of responses that are possible for a certain text. Although this largely stems from an attempt to systematise meanings of literary works, the very nature of the subject matter of literature allows for subjectivity and human interaction with texts that do not fit within rigid interpretations. As shown by the analyses in the following chapters (4, 6, and 7) of the seemingly dispreferred and strange responses to *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Harrison Bergeron*, these interpretations that do not follow the norm of responses are still text-driven, and controlled by the context of reading. I argue for the inclusion of multiple responses to a text within stylistic enquiry, but within certain confinements. Interpretations of literary texts are necessarily *finite* due to how text, discourse participants, and context combine in building the text worlds of these narratives. Rather than indicating that some readings are deviant or eccentric, these should be included as valid responses to the text and not marginalised because it threatens the quantitative dimension of the data.

Reader responses can also provide starting points for the text analysis, especially for texts that are deemed simple and not worthy of cognitive poetic analysis. Most stylistic and cognitive poetic studies focus on complicated and strange texts which allow for a detailed application of linguistic and cognitive frameworks (Toolan, 2014), and in the case of some science fiction or speculative fiction, the texts are not considered worth textual analysis. *Harrison Bergeron*, which is considered one of

Vonnegut's less complicated works and not subject to extensive linguistic analysis, can be analysed through drawing upon reader responses as presented by the analysis in chapters 5, 6 and 7. Thus, reader responses can be an access point for cognitive poetic analyses of seemingly simple texts, especially texts that have a closed ending like *Harrison Bergeron*. Disregarding readings which do not follow the generalised readings of texts as inferior or deviant is an attempt to systematize meanings and interpretations, however we are in danger of marginalising a large number of responses to the same texts, instead of asking whether the reader has the 'correct' interpretation, the questions asked should be how they reached these meanings from this text. By removing these responses from the body of data examined in reader response studies, we are omitting resources that may lead to new discoveries of human interpretation and interaction with texts. There should therefore be room for the discussion of what at first glance are considered as 'dispreferred' responses to a literary work in stylistics.

Finally, in my analysis, I focus on the texts of *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Harrison Bergeron* as examples of dystopian narratives (see the following section 1.2 for a discussion of the dystopian genre). Due to the emphasis of a dystopian text on the depiction of a society removed from the reader's own reference point, world-building elements in dystopia are typically foregrounded. The goal of dystopia is a warning, but the reading of a closed dystopia should lead to despair and not a possibility of hope for characters. The reading of a critical dystopia, on the other hand, has that utopian possibility at the end. It seems that every dystopia has hope inherent in it as shown by the responses, not due to the text alone but also due to the readers' own traits and interpretations.

Although Text World Theory emphasises the role of reader traits and experiences in the creation of the text worlds, reader traits are not usually included in Text World Theory analyses of reader responses, due to the difficulty of implementing such studies. In analyses of responses to media and transportation/immersion, however, there has been consideration of reader individual traits (see section 3.3), such as sticky priors and self-verification and implication in narratives (Lecky, 1945; Jeffries, 2001; Bolton and Reed, 2004; Kuiken et al., 2004), but there is a lack of consideration of such traits in depth, especially traits that are part of positive

psychology (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). As discussed within the body of this thesis(section 3.3, 6.1), this is perhaps due to the focus of psychology on pathology and the disordered mind-sets, thus mirroring the focus of stylistics on complicated texts over simplistic. In this study, reader traits of optimism and hope were chosen for investigation due to their relationship with creating multiple pathways for hypothetical future situations (Snyder et al., 1991; Scheier and Carver 1985). In the case of speculative dystopias which drive the reader to compare with their own situation through cognitive estrangement (Suvin, 1979), it seems that these traits could be a possible reason for the creation of alternate meanings to the text which allow for the utopian enclave included even in closed dystopias such as *Harrison Bergeron*. The readers are thus not misreading the text but following a world building process that very much is aligned with the goal of the dystopia as a satirical warning to readers about the dangers of totalitarian societies, thus including a utopian enclave 'even in the darkest of dystopian fiction' (Booker, 2013: vii).

The discussion of the issues above therefore situate this study within the fields of reader-response, Text World Theory and dystopian literary studies. The present research is therefore concerned with the following research questions:

1- Can semi-structured interviews be utilized in the collection of reader-response data for a Text World Theory-based analysis? And how will such responses inform cognitive poetic analyses of narrative texts?
2- Are the readers who interpret texts in a manner that deviates from the generally agreed upon interpretation providing a dispreferred response to the narrative? And are they truly dispreferred responses if the text analysis supports their interpretations?
3- Is it possible to investigate reader traits and previous reading experiences and relate them to hopeful readings of dystopian hopeless endings?

This thesis is therefore concerned with how readers create a fictional world that is text-driven, by considering the context of reading and especially the reader's contributions to the world-building process.

Text World Theory allows for the systematic analysis of the text, and for the discussion of the reader's role in the literary discourse. The two texts, *The*

Handmaid's Tale and *Harrison Bergeron*, were chosen as examples for this study because of the emphasis on world-building in dystopia. As such, it is useful to provide a definition of dystopia in this opening chapter in the following section.

1.2 Definitions of Dystopia

The definition of dystopia differs from one context to another. Some scholars view it simply as the depiction of a nightmarish state of affairs, others as the opposite of utopia. Lyman Tower Sargent (1979) makes a distinction between the dystopia, the anti-utopia and the critical dystopia. He defines the categories as follows:

> Dystopia or negative Utopia: 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.
>
> Anti-Utopia: 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 a criticism of utopianism or of some particular utopia.
>
> Critical Dystopia: 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 worse than contemporary society but that normally includes at least one [u]topian enclave or holds out hope that the dystopia can be overcome and replaced with a [u]topia.
>
> (Sargent, 1994: 9).

The beginning of the usage of the term 'dystopia' is noted in John Stuart Mill's speech in 1868 before the House of Commons (Theiss, 2013: 20), however this does not mean the concepts of dystopia were not discussed before. For example, Theiss (2013) points out that there are dystopian elements present in Aristophanes' 'The Clouds' which is a reply to Plato's utopian 'the Republic' as a precursor to dystopia (2013: 20-25). According to Booker (1994a), hints of dystopian writing can be seen in the writings during the time of the ancient Greeks and "by the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, writers like Jonathan Swift were writing works that were centrally informed by dystopian energies" (Booker, 1994a: 5) The critical work on dystopia starts from anti-utopia, with for example, Hillegas' (1967) work on H. G.

Well's influence on anti-utopias. Similarly, Kumar (1987) defines Anti-utopia in a way that resembles other critics' definitions of dystopia: 'Anti-utopia draws its material from utopia and reassembles it in a manner that denies the affirmation of utopia. It is the mirror-image of utopia – but a distorted image, seen in a cracked mirror.' (Kumar, 1987:100). Other scholars still use the term dystopia as an over-arching definition of negatively portrayed societies. For example, Booker's (1994b) *Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature* looks at dystopia as 'any imaginative view of society that is oriented toward highlighting in a critical way negative or problematic features of that society's vision of the ideal' (1994b: 22), thus bringing together aspects of both dystopia and anti-utopia in his discussion of a number of dystopian texts that are now established as canonical in the dystopian genre. Booker views dystopias as being a "critique of existing social conditions or political systems, either through critical examination of the utopian premises upon which those conditions and systems are based or through the imaginative extension of those conditions and systems into different contexts that more clearly reveal their flaws and contradictions" (Booker, 1994b: 3). Subsequent work by Moylan (2000), Baccolini and Moylan (2003) further investigates dystopia and follows how the genre develops from 'places worse than the ones we live in' (Moylan and Baccolini, 2003: 1) to 'new dystopias [that] not only critique the present triumphal system but also explores ways to transform it that go beyond compromised left-centrist solutions.' (Moylan and Baccolini, 2003: 8). In Baccolini and Moylan's *Dark Horizons* (2003), dystopia's definition becomes extremely detailed and differentiated from other types. Baccolini and Moylan articulate two main traits of dystopias—a hegemonic force that controls and limits language and a protagonist who works to restore it. Following these works, the field of dystopian literary criticism is on-going and developing as the dystopian genre continues to be popular (Theiss, 2013:25).

The distinction, however, between anti-utopia and dystopia is clearly made in one of the main founders of the journal *Utopian Studies*, Lyman Tower Sargent's (1994) work, which marks dystopian criticism as a formal area for academic study. Most dystopian studies seem to ignore the distinctions drawn by Sargent and continue to be generally about any representation of a fictional society with a negative state of affairs. The 'dystopian tendency' in literary fiction developed in the twentieth century, as a counterpart to the optimistic utopias which depict the ideal society in

which humanity triumphs, whereas in dystopia there is a marked suffering that is caused by 'humans and political evils' (Moylan, 2000:122). This turn to the depiction of nightmarish states of affairs and visions of the future became more common in the twentieth century, Booker suggests that this was a reaction to an 'air of crisis' that he recognizes in twentieth-century scholarship and culture which 'parallels the rather dark turn taken by a great deal of modern cultural criticism.' (Booker, 1994a:5). This is due to the growing scepticism towards the industrial age and age of Enlightenment. Whereas in the nineteenth century utopia was a more popular genre, with all the optimism of the promises of progress and the romanticism of the prevalence of mankind and humanism, dystopia becomes more popular as it is spurred by historical catastrophes; Booker calls this a 'widespread social anxiety' expressed by the 'dystopian genre', which is '[s]purred by events such as two world wars, the Nazi Holocaust, the failed attempt to build socialism in the Soviet Union, and the growing control of consumer capitalism over the lives of ordinary individuals in the West.'(Booker, 2013: vii). This dystopian tendency continues in the twenty-first century, suggesting that the 'air of crisis' is still inherent in the literature, and that there is 'an increasing lack of confidence that governments can deal with our mounting social, economic and environmental problems, or that heartless corporations can be prevented from colonizing every aspect of daily life in the new century' (Booker, 2013: vii). Dystopia therefore reflects the concerns of the time they were written. Sargent's definitions emphasise authorial intention as a crucial element in the creation of the dystopian genre, and focus on the audience as being part of a specific time and place; contemporaries of the author of the dystopia. Such a definition that focuses on only one side of the dystopian discourse is therefore problematic when discussing more recent responses to dystopian texts. As Knickerbocker (2010) points out, the definition of what is a dystopia and what is a utopia is actually more complicated than Sargent's demarcations, as 'one person's utopia may appear quite dystopian to another' (Knickerbocker, 2010: 347). The definition of dystopia is also complicated due to the changing landscapes of thought and sensibilities over time that lead to dystopia meaning 'different things at different times in different places' (Knickerbocker, 2010: 347; see also Theiss, 2013: 19-23). In the results of this thesis, readers of the chosen dystopian texts are able to recognise the genre even when they are not informed of the author's intention, nor the time and place of production of the text (see chapters 6 and7). This complexity is

therefore addressed by Roemer (2003), who places emphasis on the reader in the creation of utopia and dystopia, namely looking at the imagination of the reader:

> [. . .] a fairly detailed narrative description of an imaginary culture – a fiction that invites readers to experience vicariously an alternative reality that critiques this by opening cognitive and affective spaces that encourage readers to perceive the realities and potentialities of their culture in new ways. If the author or reader perceives the alternative imaginary culture as significantly better than the 'present' then the work is a eutopia [...], if significantly worse, it is dystopia.
>
> (Roemer, 2003: 20)

In this way, Roemer's definition addresses the concerns of the changing landscapes of the utopian audience, while at the same time acknowledging that the narrative itself 'invites' the reader to create the fictional world. I focus on the role of the reader in building the dystopian world, therefore this definition is more in line with the cognitive poetic angle that I wish to pursue in this study. Roemer maintains that either the author or the reader decide on the genre of the work, but for the purposes of this study, I view that the work is dystopian if the readers recognise the society depicted in the text as such, depending on their own knowledge frames and literary competence (see Culler, 1975).

The intersection of science fiction with utopian and dystopian fiction is closely related to the definition of dystopia. In dystopian studies, there is the tendency to consider science fiction and dystopia as distinctly different genres. There seems to be some stigmatisation for the genre of science fiction which prevents some writers from considering dystopia as a sub-genre of science fiction, for example Margaret Atwood, author of *The Handmaid's Tale* which is considered a canonical feminist critical dystopian text (Baccolini, 2000, 2004; Baccolini and Moylan, 2003), stresses that she is a speculative fiction writer rather than a science fiction writer. According to Atwood, science fiction proper: 'denotes books with things in them we can't yet do or begin to do, talking things we can never meet and places we can't go' whereas speculative fiction 'employs the means already more or less to hand and takes place on planet Earth.' (Atwood, 2011: 513). Although *The Handmaid's Tale* doesn't employ elements of what Atwood considers as 'proper' science fiction (there are no aliens, spaceships or interplanetary travel), it is inherently dystopian. Some scholars

share this view and maintain a distinction between the two genres. For example, Aldrige (1984) views that while power and the idea of control is dealt with in utopia/dystopia in social and political settings, science fiction 'will invariably deal with 'power relationships' though not necessarily in socio-political terms, and therefore 'not committed to a formal hierarchical system' (Aldrige, 1984: 17). She also comments that it is a mistake to group dystopia with science fiction, 'because their primary emphasis is *always* on power relationships in clear socio-political terms, because dystopian fiction, unlike much science fiction, is *always* 'committed to a formal hierarchical system' (Aldrige, 1984: 17, emphasis in original). Much like Atwood and Aldrige, Claeys also says that dystopias are usually extrapolations and he excludes science fiction from this definition because they do not depict 'feasible negative visions of social and political development, cast principally in fictional form' (Claeys, 2011: 109).

Making a direct distinction between the two genres dangerously denies the importance of science fiction for the development of dystopia. There is an undeniable close relationship between dystopias and science fiction: both are extrapolative genres and require the reader to suspend disbelief. Fitting rightly says 'despite dismissals of science fiction's significance for utopian writing, it is impossible to study utopias and dystopias of the past fifty years or more without acknowledging the central role of science fiction' (Fitting, 2011: 135). After all, the 'classical' dystopias have science fiction elements in them; for example, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* new devices such as the 'speakwrite', advanced weaponry and 'telescreens' exist, although as Roberts (2005) notes 'the regime [. . .] has no use for technology' (Roberts, 2005: 209). The sense of anxiety mentioned by Booker (1994a, 1994b) after the losses of World War I was possible to address through the use of science fiction, and this is reflected by the dystopian literature of the time as well. Science fiction in post-war Britain was thus 'a mode that allowed the inflation of this sense of loss' (Roberts, 2005: 208). Furthermore, there are many examples of well-received critical dystopias in contemporary science fiction, such as the dystopian criticism in Ursula K. Le Guin and Iain M. Banks' works (Theiss, 2013: 20). The 'nightmare worlds' of dystopia are thus depicted in science fiction, due to the ability of science fiction to transcend the current reality to create a world that is not only a 'reflection' but a transformation of that reality (Suvin, 1979). Suvin

considers utopia (and thus its counterpart dystopia) as a subgenre of science fiction: 'strictly and precisely speaking, utopia [hence dystopia] is not a genre but the socio-political subgenre of science fiction' (Suvin, 1979:12). Suvin's restricted definition of utopia is: 'the verbal construction of a particular quasi human community where socio-political institutions, norms, and individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author's community' (Suvin, 1979: 49).

Furthermore, much like science fiction, the creation of dystopia is not a purely an autonomous construction. These worlds draw upon the 'real' world politics and the issues of the contemporary world that the writers live in. Although these works do indeed draw upon their contemporaneous events and social, economic and ideological states, and are 'intended' for a specific contemporary audience (Sargent, 1994), the resulting fear and anxiety that is presented in the texts of dystopian narratives transcends that era for a reader outside of the time period. The intricacies and parallels that reveal how the contemporary world links with the dystopian is salient in these works but are not always necessary for the reader to be able to interpret the text as a dystopia. Although it may create a richer text-world if these parallels are known, a reader with no knowledge of these allusions will still be able to create the negative world of a nightmare regime. For example, Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was written in post-war Britain, where the nation was depressed and there was a general sense of loss, coupled with the real threat of the USSR under Stalin. This does not mean that only the contemporaneous reader will feel this same sense of loss and depression, but any reader due to the creation of these worlds will create a version of that loss that correlates to their own reality. It is therefore crucial to utilize Suvin's ideas of cognitive estrangement and extrapolation from science fiction and apply these ideas to dystopia in general, rather than create the division: '[Science fiction], is then a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment.' (Suvin, 1979: 6-7 emphasis in original).

The dystopian world aims to critique and provide an alternate image of society that is worse than the reader's, therefore it is necessary to create an 'alternative structure'

(Aldrige, 1984: 18) that is a 'mirror' but not; to have elements that are sufficiently recognizable to the reader so as to be a reflection of his or her own society, but also, much like Suvin's (1979:374) description of Science fiction, 'transformed' as well, in order to provide a new alternate world in which the situation is much more dire than the reader's own, and provides an incentive for the reader to reflect upon their own situation. The reading of a science fiction text requires 'creative participation' on the part of the reader, especially in visualising what is in the passage (Wendland, 1985:170). Since the 'hallmark' of science fiction is 'an imaginative framework alternative to the author's [and the reader's] empirical environment' (Suvin, 1979:9), it requires a great deal of cooperation and imagination on the part of the reader in 'co-creating, the imagined [. . .] paradigm of a society that does not exist but nevertheless supplies a cognitive map of what does exist.' (Moylan, 2000: 5). The scene is created from the 'familiar memories of a human context' (Wendland, 1985: 72), and this creates a reflection of reality in a new, fictional, form, that is transformed from its original state to focus on real issues and problems of society. The process of creating science fiction is therefore parallel to and part of the origin of dystopia.

In sum, I argue that the process of reading science fiction texts is the same process as reading a dystopia. Dystopia originates from science fiction's same background and is thus similar in its construction and reception. Dystopias depict societies that are considerably worse than the reader's own, relying on the reader's active engagement with the text regardless of their point in time of reading. This is thus a holistic view of dystopia as a discourse which requires the elements of cognitive estrangement. Due to the importance of the participation on the part of the reader, it seems that investigating dystopian texts without referring to a cognitive stylistic framework would not only be lacking but unsystematic. The relationship between text, reader, and context is also addressed by Gainer:

> 'When the dystopian text we encounter requires us to draw on our prior schemata to orient ourselves in a new world, we draw on our reality. In exchange, the dystopian text moves us, the audience, to critique our own society based on these possible outcomes posed within fictional borders.'
>
> (Gainer, 2012: 66-7)

It is only when successful text world creation and mapping of schemata occurs, that the readers will be driven to critique their own reality. Yet most speculative fiction studies in general seem to give little focus to readers, with some exceptions that have dealt with readers of utopian texts (Roemer, 2003; Kumar, 1991; Ruppert, 1986; Morson, 1981). In science fiction, on the other hand, the role of the reader is acknowledged due to this increased cognitive engagement and the cooperation of the reader with texts (e.g. McKnight, 2000; Moylan, 2000). This is especially important when dealing with speculative works of fiction, where 'the very impossibility of a present-day narratee for a futuristic narrative forces us to pay attention to this figure' (McKnight, 2000:14).

One way of tracing this relationship between the text and reader is through presenting a stylistic analysis of the text, which allows for 'systematic and explicit accounts of the relationship between texts on the one hand and responses and interpretations on the other.' (Semino and Culpeper, 2002: ix). Therefore, after discussing the definitions and origins of dystopia in this study, it will be useful to include an overview of the terms 'stylistics' and 'cognitive poetics' in the next section, which are the frameworks I will use to discuss the responses and interpretations of *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Harrison Bergeron*.

1.3 Stylistics and Cognitive Poetics

The term 'style' has origins in Classical rhetoric and poetics, for example Aristotlean 'style' in reference to art and poetry (Poetics). In general, 'style' for stylisticians is 'the way in which language is used in a given context, or by a given person, for a given purpose' (Leech and Short, 2007: 10), and as such, style is considered as an authorial choice (Crystal, 1969:66). Whereas traditional and practical criticism rely on intuition and perhaps some textual evidence in their interpretations of texts (Short, 1996:6), stylistics is concerned with the analysis of linguistic features of texts in context, a sub-discipline of linguistics that allows for a systematic analysis of the language of texts and their interpretations.

Stylistics has roots in the Russian formalist school of literary criticism, with scholars such as Roman Jakobson and Victor Schklovsky focusing on the characteristics of

literary language, and how the concept of defamiliaristion functions in art and literature as a means of denoting the aesthetic value of art. Owing to these roots in Formalism and Classical rhetoric, there is a large focus on the study of literary texts. This is because most literature primarily consists of written language, to study the linguistic features of texts is considered as the 'proper study of literature' (Carter and Stockwell, 2008: 291; Stockwell and Whiteley, 2014:1). This study is proper in two senses: first in its 'rigorous' explicit frameworks based on linguistic analysis, which allow for a 'retrievable' organized analysis through explicit terms and criteria, its 'replicability' and transparency which allows other researchers to verify these findings (Simpson, 2004:4) and secondly because 'any approach to literary study that does not engage closely with the language in which the literary work appears is by definition indirect, distracted, partial and improper.' (Stockwell and Whiteley, 2014:1).

This focus on the literary is not arbitrary: literary texts tend to be 'complex and sophisticated creations' that may undergo crafting and re-crafting (Toolan, 2014:17; Sotirova, 2014) and many canonical texts hold a special literary status and regard that persists over time and space which deems these texts worth investigation. This is not to say that stylistics is only concerned with the literary, there are studies that look at different forms of discourse, but the applications of the frameworks and the constant attention to rigour is the same in these cases. For example, McIntyre et. al. (2004) applies stylistic frameworks to a spoken corpus, Jeffries (2007) looks at political speech, and Hidalgo-Downing and Kraljevic Mujic (2011) discuss the language of advertisements.

The use of linguistic frameworks is what allows for the clarity and replicability of these analyses. Due to the nature of the texts that are under scrutiny, and because of the complexity of both the texts and the interpretations of readers, stylistics cannot be described as a purely objective discipline (see Leech and Short, 2007: 57; Toolan, 2014). Fish argues critically against the arbitrariness of assigning meanings to only selected linguistic features based on the critic's own mental assumptions, and his call for an 'Affective stylistics' that takes into account readers of texts as part of the context (1970, 1980). Fish argues against essentialism, and maintains that meaning is a product of social conventions rather than in the arbitrary linguistic structures. His

view is that texts cannot be sole determiners of meaning, and depend upon the cultural context and the cooperation of the reader and interpretative communities. This is an argument resumed by Mackay (1996, 1999) against formalism as well. Other arguments against stylistics include ignoring the ideological position of the reader, the institutionalization of literature and literary language, and the confinement of meaning to the language of texts (see Carter and Walker, 1989; Zyngier, 2001). As an interdisciplinary field between literary criticism and linguistics, stylistics is subject to such criticism such as being a 'forlorn attempt to validate metalanguage,' (Harris, 2000) due to the "elusive" nature of subjective interpretations (Widdowson, 1992).

On the most part, these comments are not applicable to more recent stylistic analyses, where the interest of stylistics has changed to include the context of its production as well. Stylistics has accordingly grown in reaction to these criticisms, utilizing multidisciplinary approaches in addressing these concerns of arbitrary objectivity. For example, to avoid the bias of the researcher's intuition in choice of linguistic features for investigation, corpus stylistics uses quantitative measures which provide some objectivity to the choice of stylistic features worthy of analysis (Semino and Short, 2004; Stubbs, 2008 ; Mahlberg, 2013). Furthermore, texts are not viewed as artefacts in isolation of their cultural context. Stylistics is concerned with the ideological viewpoints and the historical context such as work in feminist stylistics (Burton, 1982; Mills, 1995; Ryder, 1999; Page, 2007; Walsh, 2016). The context of reading in academic institutions are dealt with similarly in pedagogical stylistics (Brumfit and Carter, 1986; Carter and Long 1987; Cook, 2000, 2001, 2004; Clark and Zyngier, 2003; Widdowson, 1975, 2004). The emergence of these sub-disciplines to address these concerns further establishes stylistics has as a field in its own right, cemented with the recent publication of multiple handbooks that illustrate the weight of the discipline (e.g. Burke, 2014; Stockwell and Whiteley, 2014; Sotirova, 2016).

Perhaps as a reaction to another of Fish's concerns, namely the consideration of the reader's role in interpretation, the interest in the cognitive aspects of interpretation and comprehension of texts has been growing in the field of cognitive stylistics (Tsur, 1992; Emmot, 1997; Semino and Culpeper, 2002; Brône, Geert and Vandaele,

2009), also known as cognitive poetics (Stockwell, 2002; Gavins and Steen, 2003; Sanford and Emmot, 2012). While the original aim of Stylistics was to look systematically at the features of texts as a way to achieve rigour, to 'make use of linguistic theories or frameworks in order to explain or predict interpretation' (Semino and Culpeper 2002: ix), cognitive stylistics looks at a textual analysis in light of cognitive theories to explain readerly interpretations. This is done with the caveat, that 'whilst textual analysis cannot prove what goes on in a reader's mind, it can reveal the complexity of texts and thereby indicate the nature of the task to be undertaken' (Emmot, 1997:121). Thus the reader is considered as an active participant in the 'construction' of meaning which the 'texts project' (Semino, 1997:125); leading to a text-driven, context sensitive approach to literary works.

Cognitive poetics has also faced its fair share of criticism, due partly to the focus on introspective analysis of personal interpretations of texts. This is because introspection is the most direct access to a reader's mind, therefore many cognitive poetic-based analyses fall into the trap of providing an analysis for a single reading of a text. For example, Al-Mansoob (2006) provides a Text World Theory analysis of Raymond Carver's short stories, but bases her analysis on her own interpretation of the text. Such analyses do provide insight to textual features, but are heavily criticised for lacking empirical evidence that includes more than one reader (Miall, 2006). Cognitive poetics is also criticised for the choice of application of cognitive theories which may lead to misinterpretation due to the borrowing of concepts from other disciplines, and not giving the theoretical traditions of linguistic based analysis enough attention (see Sternberg, 2003: 314; Abbot, 2006: 714; Belmonte, 2008). It has also been noted that often cognitive poetic analyses confirm what narratology already knows or only pick and choose the models from cognitive theories to fit the analysis (Louwerse and Van Peer, 2009; Benaerts et al, 2013: 11), thus the contributions of cognitive poetic analyses are questioned (Tsur, 2008) on whether they are useful or actually shed light on reading practices. Cognitive poetics can also fall into the trap of being 'too essentialist or reductionist' in which the interpretations are considered as the most 'concrete possible interpretation' available for a given text (Bernaerts et al., 2013:13).

These concerns have been addressed through various improvements to cognitive frameworks, for example, through the utilization of empirical data to substantiate claims and collaborative work (e.g. Sanford and Emmot, 2012), and the use of reader response data in the form of reading group recordings or online reviews of narratives (e.g. Whiteley, 2011; Gavins, 2013) which provide an empirical dimension to the analysis. Cognitive poetics also resolves Fish's criticisms of formalist modes of stylistic enquiry by including the dimension of the reader's cognitive abilities in the discussion of texts, therefore providing a more context-based analysis rather than an 'arbitrary' set of meanings, it becomes possible to ground the analyses within replicable, proven frameworks.

Due to the main focus of this work on the readerly interpretations of dystopia, a cognitive poetic analysis seems to be most suitable due to the emphasis that is placed on the reader in the process of interpretation. This thesis therefore adopts the view that readers are active participants in the creation of the dystopia in the text. Speculative fiction, as aforementioned, is like science fiction. Dystopia involves 'cognitive estrangement' (Suvin, 1979), which is why the text must be able to draw upon the reader's frame knowledge to create fictional worlds. I am particularly interested in theories that focus on the building the fictional world, therefore the analysis in this thesis draws upon ideas from frameworks such as contextual frame theory (Emmot, 1997), and deictic shift theory (Duchan et. al, 1995; Stockwell, 2002:46-49; McIntyre, 2010) but the bulk of the analysis makes use of Text World Theory (Werth, 1999), which will be discussed in more detail in chapter 2.

1.4 Thesis Preview

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. The first three chapters outline the main concerns of the study. In this first chapter I briefly discussed the theoretical foundations and background for this study. In chapter 2, I will introduce the frameworks that support my analysis of the texts and the reader response data, such as preference organisation and Text World Theory. This chapter discusses the theoretical background for considering how these text worlds are created through the cooperation of text and reader. In chapter 3, I will provide a brief overview of reader

response studies and discuss the use of interview data as a valid means of collecting reader responses. This chapter will also include my rationale for including reader traits in my discussion of dystopian readers and the methodology employed.

The subsequent chapters provide the main body of analysis and arguments for this thesis. Chapter 4 will present the results of looking at negative reviews of *The Handmaid's Tale*, in an attempt to include dispreferred responses to texts as valid readings and meanings worthy of investigation. Moving from the critical dystopia of *The Handmaid's Tale* to a closed dystopia in the short story *Harrison Bergeron*, Chapter 5 analyses online responses to *Harrison Bergeron*, noting the lack of information an analysis that relies on 'naturalistic' data can have, and provides the thematic tags that will be used in the semi-structured interviews. In this chapter, I focus on similar themes found in online reviews, yet unlike the large number of negative reviews that are found for *The Handmaid's Tale*, the small number of online accessible reviews means that although the texts are comparable depictions of dystopia, there is some difficulty in focusing primarily on dispreferred responses. The chapter therefore focuses on the lesser preferred responses that are drawn from semi-structured interviews. Furthermore, the studies in chapters 4 and 5 highlight how little information about the readers can be explored through online reviews. Chapter 6 is an attempt at remedying the lack of information about readers through the use of semi-structured interview data to collect reader responses. In this second study, ten readers are interviewed after reading the short story *Harrison Bergeron*. The results of the second study in chapter 6 highlight a few dispreferred responses regarding the ending of *Harrison Bergeron*, which forms a basis for Chapter 7 and the investigation of reader traits alongside the interview data. In this study, 19 participants take a self-reported questionnaire of the positive psychology traits of hope and optimism, then are interviewed after reading the short story. Although correlation does not always equal causation, it is interesting to investigate how the accessibility of multiple speculative future pathways in real life correlates with the readers' interpretation of dystopia. Finally, Chapter 8 concludes this thesis and summarises the main findings of each chapter; the main contributions to the existing framework of Text World Theory and reader response studies, as well as providing suggestions for further research.

This thesis continues the trajectory of reader response-based stylistics by prompting a reconsideration of the status of dispreferred responses in literary stylistic discussions, as well as utilizing interviews as a method of reader response collection. I argue for the importance of analysing texts that look 'simple' on the surface that usually evade investigation in stylistics. In order to discuss such texts in detail, the inclusion of interpretations that arise from textual features that are not salient to all readers, but become more discernible with a close stylistic analysis, is necessary. In this study, Text World Theory is my main framework for textual analysis that is based upon reader response data.

Chapter 2 Text World Theory and Literary Dystopia

2.0 Overview

In this chapter I set out to elaborate on the specific frameworks and concepts upon which I will build my textual analysis. Firstly, in section 2.1, I discuss the basic tenets of Text World Theory which is the main framework of text and readings analysis. In Text World Theory analyses there is a tendency to focus on the generalizable readings favoured over stranger idiosyncratic interpretations of texts. These possible interpretations that are not part of the generalizable readings can be considered as lesser preferred responses to the text, therefore I discuss the use of Preference organization in literary discourse in section 2.2. In section 2.3, I discuss different readings of dystopia. Finally, section 2.4 provides a summary of this chapter.

2.1 Text World Theory

Text World Theory is a cognitive poetic discourse-based framework utilized for text analysis. One of the basic premises of Text World Theory is the emphasis it places on the participants of the discourse (i.e. the reader and writer), the text, and its surrounding context. In stylistic analyses, the focus is primarily on the linguistic features of the represented language. Text World Theory looks at the context of the language even and how it is produced (Gavins, 2007: 7). The 'rich and densely textured real-life representation of the combination of text and context' is achieved through the reliance on both the literary discourse's text and its participants' cognitive abilities (Stockwell, 2002: 136). Werth defines 'worlds' and 'text worlds' as follows:

> A world (...) is a conceptual domain representing a state of affairs. A text world, in particular, represents the principal state of affairs expressed in the discourse. First, the world must be defined: this is affected by means of the deictic and referential elements nominated in the text, and fleshed out from knowledge (specifically, knowledge frames).
>
> (Werth, 1995a: 78)

According to Werth, all uses of language must occur within a situational context, and involve a conceptual domain of understanding that is constructed by both the producer and the recipient of the texts (Werth, 1999: 17). In Text World Theory, the text creates three different layers, or domains, of interpretation. The first layer is the 'discourse world', the second 'the text-world' and final domain is the 'sub-world'. The first conceptual domain, the situational context in which the language event occurs, is the 'discourse world' containing the reader, writer, text, and the surroundings of the reader at the time of reading the text, and is built from direct perception and the knowledge stores which participants bring to the discourse. The second domain, the 'text world' is built from the in which the cognitive participation of the reader, writer, and resulting from the text itself, is a construct, created through drawing upon imagination, memory and frame knowledge (Werth, 1999: 17). Both of these domains are important in the analysis of the language event, and they are both dependent on the cognitive ability of the participants as well as on the text. Figure 1 below, represents a simplified diagram of these domains for a reader of *The Handmaid's Tale*:

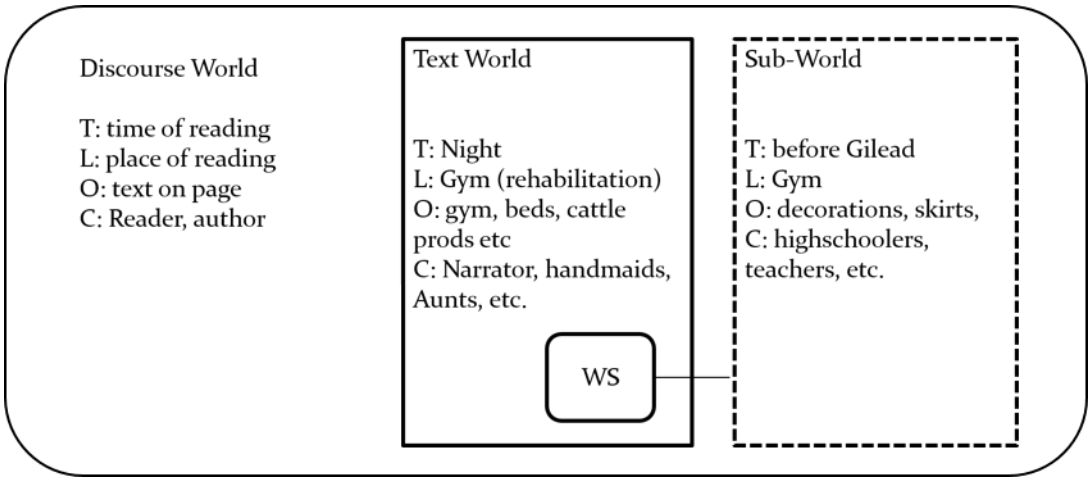


Figure 1 Text World Diagram for the Handmaid's Tale

The discourse-world contains the situational context of the linguistic act of communication. In the case of literary narratives, discourse worlds typically contain: the author, the reader, the text of the narrative, and the immediate surroundings perceptible to the reader. These discourse 'participants' consist of two or more humans in the natural discourse event (Werth, 1999: 83). According to Werth, face-to-face conversations form the most basic form of discourse type, with both

participants sharing the same space and time (Werth, 1995a: 51; 1999: 85). In such conversations, readers can depend on non-verbal cues and refer to objects in their vicinity, without the need for over-clarification through verbal communication.

In written discourse, however, there is usually a distance between the author and the reader which makes the discourse world 'split', since each participant occupies a different space/time point of reference (Werth, 1995a: 54-55). In this case, the language becomes more important in the absence of shared vantage points, thus Werth notes that the linguistic aspects of the discourse gains primacy in this case:

> The discourse worlds of written texts are almost always split: since the writer and the readership occupy different spatio-temporal points, there will certainly be very little which is mutually perceivable. So even if the writer is writing about his/her discourse world, this won't correspond to anything in the reader's discourse world.
>
> (Werth, 1995a: 54-5)

Gavins also discusses the role of the participants in creating the discourse event; she claims that during written communication readers resolve this 'split discourse world' through 'construct[ing] a re-creation of a face-to-face communicative situation at the text-world level. A text-world entity, the narrator, becomes a substitute co-participant in the discourse' (Gavins, 2007: 129).

Text World Theory also considers the mental aspects of both participants of the discourse, regarding their own knowledge, beliefs, memories, hopes, dreams, and intentions as part of the context of the discourse world (Werth 1995a: 52). The participants in a discourse do not only rely on their senses (i.e. sight or hearing) in the interpretation of meaning, but also bring their own knowledge, memories, and imaginative capacities of their minds, which in Text World Theory is a crucial part of building the context of the discourse situation (Werth, 1999: 86). Although Werth stresses the importance of considering the participants as human beings with complex mental capabilities, memories and beliefs, the individuality of the participant and proper investigation of the effect of these faculties on the interpretations and creation of these text worlds has not been addressed in Werth's original work. These issues were later addressed along with ideas of emotion, reader's experiences with the narrative, and their projections and self-implication in

texts (Gavins, 2007; Lahey, 2005; Stockwell, 2009; Whiteley, 2011a, 2016). This focus on the role of the reader in creating meaning is one of the key elements that sets Text World Theory apart from other worlds theories such as possible worlds theory (Ryan 1991; Dolozel 1980, 1995).

The potential for multiple interpretations and meaning creation that the reader takes part in should therefore be one of the concerns of text world analyses. I argue that 'deviant' or 'strange' readings of texts should not be marginalized but are worthy of investigation, providing that the participating reader has sufficient knowledge in order to build the relevant text world. In Text World Theory terms, this means the reader must have enough general, cultural and linguistic knowledge that is necessary to create a 'common ground' with the discourse participants. 'General' knowledge means the information that is 'in principle, available to all individuals by virtue of their membership in larger social groupings (Werth, 1999: 95-6). Cultural knowledge means 'all the non-linguistic information available to individuals or groups living in a particular society' (1999: 97). This knowledge depends on the individual, and varies in richness and detail according to the frames required from the text. 'Linguistic knowledge' refers to 'the general knowledge underlying the use of language,' (Werth, 1999: 98). Werth uses 'frame theory' to explain the organization of knowledge, using Fillmore's concept of the frame semantics (Fillmore, 1985). A frame is 'a cognitive structure of culturally determined assumptions and expectations developed from past experiences with similar situations' (Werth, 1995b: 192). In written discourse, readers will make assumptions about the writer's environment at the time of writing, and Werth considers that the immediate location and time that the acts of writing and reading takes place 'are presumably less important [. . .] than the shared cultural assumptions, general knowledge etc. – collectively known as frame knowledge' (Werth, 1995a: 55). The time of reading certain fiction may also alter the reading of a text, due to the significant changes that occur in language, culture and society. For example, a person reading *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in 2015 reads the novel as a fictional past rather than a speculative future as the contemporaneous reader in 1949 would view the novel. This would change the genre and subject matter of the narrative greatly, since there is a change in the knowledge of the reader. A concept closely related to frame knowledge and which is used interchangeably with frames in cognitive poetics is 'schemas' (Cook, 1994; Schank

and Abelson, 1977; Stockwell, 2003). A schema is also a set of knowledge that is based on experience and creates an idealised representation that is drawn upon when encountering a similar situation. In this work I use both terms interchangeably. Frames or schemas thus determine the way readers interpret texts, since they are presented with written propositions of situations that they may or may not have experienced. In the case of a familiar situation presented by the text, there is a correlation between the frame knowledge of the reader and writer, and thus there is a successful creation of the 'common ground' in the discourse world. This common ground contains the mutual knowledge necessary for the creation of the second layer in the cognitive domains of discourse processing: the text-world. The text-world is 'the situation depicted by discourse', 'the story' of the discourse (Werth, 1995a: 53). It is a conceptual representation of the discourse, and a 'construct' built by the participants (Werth, 1999: 17). Informed by the participant's memory and imagination, text-worlds rely on the linguistic cues provided by the text to create the discourse represented space (Werth, 1999: 17). To build a text-world, participants rely on two main sources: the text and the cognitive resources of both discourse participants. The text provides the participants with different information with which the world is constructed: 'world building elements' and 'function advancing processes'. The world building elements, which create the background in which the story unfolds, are as follows:

> Time (t): time-zone of verbs; adverbs of time; temporal adverbial clauses, e.g. *it was a dark and stormy night, in 1979, at two minutes past midnight on April 7th* […]
>
> Place (l): locative adverbs; NPs with locative meaning, locative adverbial clauses, e.g. *on the table, at Lewes in the county of Sussex* […]
>
> Entities (c and o): noun phrases, concrete or abstract, of all structures and in any position, e.g. *my friend Susan, these are the voyages of the starship Enterprise, a policeman who had lost his way,* [. . .]
>
> (Werth, 1999: 187)

As shown above, time and place refer to deictic information, while the referential information nominates entities in the text-world (Werth, 1999: 52). The characters in the text world are equivalent to 'real' people as well within the text world that they occupy. Thus a character also has their own cognitive abilities, dreams, desires, and

emotions (Werth, 1999: 210). Referential information also helps evoke the knowledge frames which provide the information necessary to resolve ambiguities (Werth, 1999: 53).

Text worlds can be created by the discourse participants themselves, and in the case of spoken discourse the participants can ask each other questions or clarify parts of the discourse that require explanation. In this way, the participants of the discourse create sub-worlds in the conversation that are accessible to them; they can verify the contents of the text worlds. Werth (1999) describes these worlds as *participant accessible*, drawing upon possible worlds and accessibility logic (Ryan, 1991). In the case of written discourse, however, there are instances where the reader cannot verify or add to the text worlds that are created, such as a character created text world. In this case, the text world that is created is *character accessible*, where the contents of the text world can only be verified by the character. For example, in the extract above, Offred's flashback worlds are character accessible, when she describes the time before Gilead the reader cannot verify or modify these text worlds.

In addition to the world building elements, text worlds also contain function-advancing processes. Function-advancing processes are the propositions that fulfil the aim of discourse depending on its register (Werth, 1995: 59). They function as the 'foreground' of the text world against the 'background' of the world-building elements, and serve to advance the plot, description, or argument. Function advancing elements are of two types: the first are 'modifications', which add descriptions to entities already established in the text world through world-building elements, and these 'attributes' are symbolized by horizontal arrows in visual representations of Text World Theory analysis. The second type are 'path expressions' that either denote a steady state, or a change of state, such as actions and processes. This latter type is visually represented by vertical arrows. In the example given below in figure 2, these lines from *The Handmaid's Tale* have a prevalence of modifications over path expressions (detailed discussion of the text will follow in section 4.4). This is typical of a dystopian narrative that focuses on world-building in a text:

> A chair, a table, a lamp. Above, on the white ceiling, a relief ornament in the shape of a wreath, and in the centre of it a blank space, plastered over, like the place in a face where the eye has been taken out. There must have been a chandelier, once. They've removed everything you could tie a rope to.
>
> (Atwood, 1996: 17)

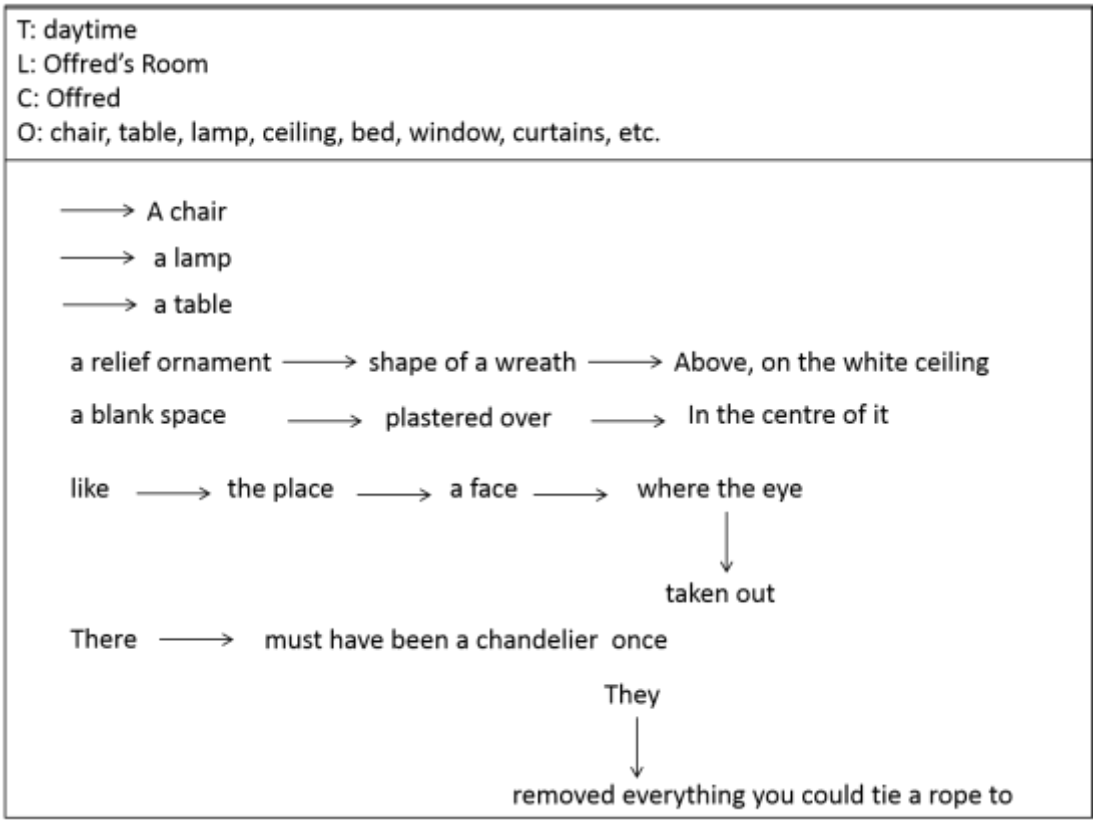


Figure 2 Visual representation of function-advancing processes in The Handmaid's Tale

Towards the end of the twentieth century, the interest in Text Worlds was strongly influenced by the developments in cognitive linguistics, schema theory and ideas in philosophy and logic in possible worlds. Text World Theory was created by Werth as more humanistic approach to stylistics (1995a, 1995b, 1999). This approach was developed further through works conducted of Gavins (2000, 2003, 2005, and 2007) and many other scholars (e.g. Hidalgo-Downing, 2000a, 2000b, Lahey, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007; Al-Mansoob, 2006; Stockwell, 2002, 2009; Whiteley, 2011a). As a developing theory, Werth's theory has been criticized and modified accordingly in subsequent work; for example, there is a lot of criticism of his choice and reliance on short extracts and fabricated sentences as examples that illustrate a framework that was to be applied to all types of discourse. This, however, has been addressed

through works on short stories (e.g. Al-Mansoob, 2006), complete novels (Hidalgo-Downing, 2000a; Whiteley, 2011a), poetry (e.g. Lahey, 2005), absurd fiction (Gavins, 2000), advertisements (Hidalgo-Downing, 2000d), and films (Lugea, 2013).The widespread application indicates that the theory is versatile and applicable to most types of discourses, and based on its demonstrated utility, I chose this framework as a systematic method to look at dystopian texts. Other frameworks also consider the status of creating the 'worlds' of the text, such as 'mental models' (Johnson-Laird, 1983), 'situation models' (Van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983), possible worlds theories (e.g. Ryan, 1991a, 1991b), Transportation (Gerrig, 1993), Mental Spaces Theory and Conceptual Integration (Fauconnier, 1997), Contextual Frame Theory (Emmott, 1997) and 'storyworlds' (Herman, 2002). These frameworks, as well as Rosenblatt's Reader response theory (1994a) can also be seen as a precursors as well as parallel models to Text World Theory.

De Beaugrande's (1981) model for reading and text processing, for example, uses similar terminology to Text World Theory. He views reading as 'an interaction of phases of processing dominance, i.e. as a correlation of processing types sharing the processor's cognitive resources in varying distributions' (de Beaugrande 1981: 286). This framework focuses on the distinctions of surface and deep structures as indicators of meaning. He emphasises that 'the goal of processing cannot be syntactic analysis, but rather *building a model of a textual world*' (emphasis in original, de Beaugrande, 1981: 287; de Beaugrande and Dressler, 1980). In this model, readers 'reconstitute a more or less extensive 'world' containing the situations and events depicted by a text along with various amounts of prior knowledge and assumptions that might reasonably apply to such a world.' (Beaugrande, 1981: 287), and also shares Text World Theory's emphasis on schematic knowledge as a necessary component of world-building:

> To build a text-world model, the reader would set up configurations of concepts connected by relations. [. . .] Here, the reader can use networks, whose nodes are not surface words, but rather concepts for which the words are only names, that is, instructions to activate knowledge in the memory which creates a 'model space'.
>
> (Beaugrande, 1981: 289-90)

This model of text processing is also 'text-driven' in the sense that the concepts appearing in the text-world model must be activated by the text. However, as Beaugrande himself points out, his model requires 'some means […] to capture the updating of a textual world as reading progresses' (Beaugrande, 1981: 294). The updating of the text world is accounted for in Text World Theory in the form of 'world switches' which functions alongside the function advancing elements as a method for systematically tracing this constant updating of the text world. Furthermore, Beaugrande discusses the difficulty of discussing references to real and possible objects 'in the world of everyday of experience' (1981: 294), which is addressed through using the concept of 'enactors' and 'counterparts' (Stockwell, 2002: 94).

The final type of world in Werth's theory is the sub-world. The text world is a product of the discourse world, built by the participants using the discourse, and the cognitive abilities and resources of both participants. In a similar way, sub-worlds are products of the text-world and the characters that exist in it. For the characters of the text world, their immediate discourse world would be the text world itself, and the result of their discourse is a sub-world (Werth, 1995a: 60-61). Participants thus exist in the discourse world, and can access the text world that they create, as well as any sub-worlds that arise from that text world, while characters are only able to access the text world, and any subsequent sub-worlds (Werth, 1999: 213). Sub-worlds in Werth's theory can be of three kinds:

> (a) deictic: departures from the basic deictic signature of the conceptual world, e.g. flashbacks, direct speech, windows on to other scenes.
>
> (b) attitudinal: notions entertained by the protagonists, as opposed to actions undertaken by the protagonists in the discourse
>
> (c) epistemic: modalised propositions expressed either by participants or by characters.
>
> (Werth 1999:216).

The first type of sub-world results from a change in the situational variables of the text worlds: these could be temporal, spatial, or the displacement of an entity. For example, a flashback constitutes a temporal and deictic sub-world. Attitudinal sub-

worlds have to do with the characters' desires (want worlds), beliefs (believe worlds), purposes, intentions or motives (intent worlds) (Werth, 1999: 113, 216). The final kind, the epistemic sub-worlds, are related to 'remoteness' (Werth, 1997), which is the distance that the speaker maintains towards a situation.

Sub-worlds were modified later in Gavins (2000, 2001, 2003, 2007), where she added categories of sub-worlds created through modality. In this version of the text-world model, focalization is also considered sub-world forming, creating an 'epistemic sub-world' (Gavins, 2007: 131-5). A further adjustment made to Werthian text worlds is that the embedding of sub-worlds is replaced by the concept of 'world switches'. Sub-worlds in this case are not embedded within a hierarchy of worlds; rather, after the initial creation of a text world, the reader is led to create a new text world that is foregrounded in the narrative, 'switching' from a new world with its own world-building elements and function-advancing processes (Gavins, 2007). This adjustment is useful when considering frame narratives, in which most cases the over-arching frame is in the background and may or may not be foregrounded again by the end, transporting the reader to the new sub-worlds rather than going back to the original text-world.

Sub-worlds are an area of interest due to issues of accessibility and the creation of multiple embedded worlds (e.g. Lahey, 2004). In particular, Negative sub-worlds have garnered attention (Hidalgo-Downing, 2000a, 2000b, 2002; Nørgaard, 2007; Nahajec, 2009, McLoughlin, 2013). In discourse, participants are expected to be cooperative, thus following Grice's cooperative principle: the maxims of quality, quantity, relation and manner (1975). However, instead of presenting and establishing entities in the most direct way, through manner of assertion, negative constructions are used in the presentation of the new information and world-building entities, creating complex meanings. Negation can function in two ways, either to trigger a reframing of the text world, or as a tool for accommodation where negations create the propositions that they nullify in the first place (Hidalgo-Downing, 2000b). Negation can also have a foregrounding element, and this is because

> to deny the existence or presence of an entity, you have to mention it. The very act of denying it brings it into focus. It also has the effect of restricting possible interpretations of the sentence in isolation to just those which are compatible with, and cohere with, the given context.
>
> (Werth, 1999: 251)

Negative worlds require a great deal of processing on the part of the reader, because the sub-worlds created through negation are both the negative sub-world, as well as the denied proposition's world. The text simultaneously introduces and denies the same proposition. Thus, the reader evokes both frames, and when the correct frame is chosen, this process of double creation makes the meaning seem greater (Hidalgo-Downing, 2000b: 178). Because this thesis deals with dystopian texts, it seems useful, therefore, to consider sub-worlds as embedded mental spaces within a hierarchy, especially in texts in which authorial intention is typically foregrounded as part of the genre (see previous chapter's introduction to dystopia 1.2). Thus I consider that each embedded sub-world has significance in the very choice of embedding. All the sub-worlds created through different world-switches in the text, including negations, counterfactuals, and irony that are not accessible by the participants nor the characters, form un-fulfilled domains which may contain world-building elements but no function advancing propositions that advance the plot of the narrative.

2.2 Preference in Literary Discourse

In 'The Positioned Reader', Stockwell (2013) argues that while literary linguists and critics cannot account for a reading being right or wrong, there is a degree of preference regarding responses to texts. Borrowing the term from sociolinguistics and pragmatics (Pomerantz, 1984; Sacks, 1987, Levinson 1983), a 'preferred second' in an adjacency pair within a conversational context is the response that is not usually avoided by participants in the discourse, so for example the preferred response to a request is acceptance (Levinson, 1983: 332-6). In the case of written discourse and literary reading, the responses to the text depend heavily on the 'text-drivenness of the stylistic form' due to the minimal context and 'displaced situation'

(Stockwell, 2013: 268). A preferred response therefore would be the most generalizable interpretation drawn from cues from the text.

Preference is a technical term used in sociolinguistics and pragmatics (Sacks, 1975, 1987, 1992; Pomerantz, 1975, 1984; Pomerantz and Heritage, 2013; Levinson, 1983, 2000). In conversation analysis (CA), discourse is divided into sequences called 'adjacency pairs' which are paired utterances in a conversation, for example Greeting – Greeting, Question – Answer, and so on. Adjacency pairs 'are [also] deeply inter-related with the turn-taking system as techniques for selecting a next speaker' (Levinson, 1983: 303). Schegloff and Sacks (1973) characterize adjacency pairs as being:

> (i) adjacent
>
> (ii) produced by different speakers
>
> (iii) ordered as a first part and second part
>
> (iv) typed, so that a particular first part requires a particular second (or range of second parts) – e.g. offer require acceptances or rejections, greetings require greetings, and so on.
>
> (as summarised in Levinson, 1983: 303-4)

A 'preferred second' in an adjacency pair is the response that is usually the first choice of utterance by participants in the discourse, so for example the preferred response to a request is acceptance, the preferred response to a work of art is approbation (Levinson, 1983: 332-6; Bilmes, 1988: 163). 'Dispreferred seconds', on the other hand, are a second part in an adjacency pair that consists of a response that is generally avoided by participants, and usually marked by delays, prefaces and accounts (Pomerantz, 1975; Levinson, 1983: 333-6). Levinson lists a general list of the characteristics of dispreferred seconds as follows:

> (a) delays: (i) by pause before delivery, (ii) by the use of a preface[…] (iii) by displacement over a number of turns via the use of repair initiators or insertion sequences.
>
> (b) prefaces: (i) the use of markers or announcers of dispreferreds like Uh and Well, (ii) the production of token agreements before disagreements, (iii) the use of appreciations if relevant (for offers, invitations, suggestions,

> advice), (iv) the use of apologies of relevant (for requests invitations, etc), (v) the use of qualifiers (e.g. I don't know for sure, but…), (vi) hesitation in various forms, including self-editing.
>
> (c) accounts: carefully formulated explanations for why the (dispreferred) act is being done.
>
> (d) Declination component: of a form suited to the nature of the first part of the pair, but characteristically indirect or mitigated.
>
> (Levinson, 1983: 334-5)

In conversation, the production of a dispreferred response actually requires more conversational effort than a preferred second (Atkinson and Drew, 1979). There must be a reason, then, that there are a few readers who manage to draw upon the text in a way to achieve a 'mischievous' reading of a text (Stockwell, 2013:268). This is because these interpretations are not created from a void, but stem first and foremost from the text, which leads these readers to their own individual interpretations of the text world. Whether that world is one of dystopia, critical dystopia, or utopia, however, relies on the readers' own contributions to the text, drawing upon their individual experiences and personalities.

According to Sacks (1975, 1987), the notion of preference used in CA is not related to its psychological meaning, i.e. it is not bound by the wants and needs of the participants of the discourse. However, the implications of the literal meaning of preference linked to the psychological interpretation influences its various applications in subsequent work, which is pointed out by Bilmes (1988) and Boyle (2000). This leads to various applications of the term, and as Church (2004: 112) mentions, 'the use of the term as a technical concept and abstract notion leads to multifarious application in CA and beyond'.

Although it is possible to confuse first-pair part preference with authorial intention, which is considered by some critics as the deciding factor of the genre of the literary work (e.g. Levinson 1996), they represent very different concepts. Intention is concerned with the mental capacities of the author who writes the literary work in a certain style, and this has historically been the subject of debate in terms of literary study ranging from situating meaning entirely with the author's mental states and semantic intention for the literary work, to creating a hypothetical author to which

the reader attributes a mind with a certain intention, to completely disregarding the author's views and intentional meanings in interpreting literary works (Wimsatt and Beardsley, 1946,1954; Hirsch, 1967, 1976; Levinson, 1996; Irvin, 2006; Sotirova, 2014). A distinction must also be made regarding the use of the word 'preferred' in this work and the 'preferred meanings' in audience reception theory in which the author's intentions create a 'dominant' reading (Hall, 1992: 134). Stuart Hall's 1980 essay makes a point that the audience plays a role in interpretation, but follows Eco (1979) and expands the categorization of readings as positions that the readers take: as being preferred or dominant positions when the meaning maps on to the author's intended meaning, via a process of encoding (by the author) and decoding (by the reader), in what he calls the 'dominant code' (Hall, 1992: 136). In this case, authorial intention decides what is the normalized reading or generalized reading. In this CA sense, however, it is a more technical tool or term to analyse the turns in the conversation and is not related to the mental or psychological wants or choices of the participants in discourse.

In considering what constitutes a 'preferred' first-pair part of the discourse, then, it is the forms that are indicated by the genre of the book. Some critics argue that the author's intention does not establish literary meaning but that it determines the work's genre, such as Levinson (1992). Genre, however, is not always related to the author's intention but can change according to the response of readers, or how the readers postulate the genre of the work. For example, Margaret Atwood's intention for *The Handmaid's Tale* to be read as a speculative dystopia did not prevent the work from being classified as science fiction, even winning science fiction awards and topping lists of best science fiction novels. The text becomes part of what Wimsatt and Beardsley consider 'public' sphere (1945) wherein the text's meaning is no longer part of the author's intended semantic meanings, but inherent in its linguistic forms and structure, as well as the readings and interpretations of the work that formulate the public sphere.

Authorial intention becomes problematic when biographical information, interviews, and other aspects of the author's life are brought in an interpretation of a text. It also ignores the conventions of semantic meanings in favour of allusive authorial intention, especially in the case of deceased authors whose wants, desires and mental

states are impossible to discern. However, it is difficult to discuss a text and its meaning without considering that the text's existence is due to a writer who formulates the sentences onto the page in the first place. Thus, it seems there is need for some kind of author in discussion of the meaning of literary texts, an issue resolved in cognitive poetics through the use of either the concept of the 'ideal' author or a hypothetical postulated author (e.g. Herman's 2008 application to deixis): this author is one the reader attributes certain features, in Theory of Mind terms (Palmer, 2002, 2004; Zunshine, 2006), which altogether would be considered as the 'mindstyle' of the writer. Thus, for example, when reading *The Handmaid's Tale*, readers will postulate an author named Margaret Atwood who chose this style of presenting the text in a certain way, but this Margaret Atwood may not share any features with the real life person. Similarly, a reader can know of some of Atwood's other works and so, attributes certain styles and techniques to this writer, or if they come across her interviews and twitter account they might gain a fuller picture of this author. The resulting authorial intention that the reader draws from these source will not be a true match for the 'real' author's intention because they do not have direct access to Atwood's mind. Regardless of how this frame knowledge is aquired, this all contributes to the main characterization of this author in the readers' minds as they read but not the author herself.

Although the context is different, the participants of the discourse are still considered in Text World Theory, since there will always be a hypothetical author in the minds of the readers shaped by their experiences of the author as a writer who lived in the real world as well as by the text. The text drives them to create the other participant in the discourse, even if it is a split dialogue there are still two or more participants in the discourse (Werth 1995a: 54-55; Gavins 2007: 129). Cognitive stylistics thus adopts 'hypothetical intentionalism' (Irvin, 2006) as a way to account for intention and the position of the participants in the discourse, without claiming knowledge of the writer's actual intentions.

In the case of written discourse, whether the author is physically present is of little consequence because the conversational cues that are missing (e.g. verbal cues, gestures and pauses), are all replaced with textual cues instead. The context that arises from the text on the pages in front of the reader, to recommendations of

friends and book clubs specify the preference of the text as a first-pair part. This can be considered as a 'postulated' first-pair part in the minds of the readers, which then allows the reader to draw upon certain narrative frame knowledge that maps onto the similarly grouped narratives that the reader encounters in daily life and from other readings.

The application of pragmatic tools to literature is not entirely new, other frameworks such as Politeness theory (Lakoff, 1973; Brown and Levinson, 1978, 1987; Leech, 1983) and Grice's (1975, 1978) conversational maxims are applied regularly to literary texts. There seems to be a reluctance to apply pragmatic analysis of preference in literary analysis unless it is dealing with the conversations of the characters themselves (e.g. Goatly, 2008). But I would argue that applying conversation analysis tools to literary discourse is not too different to that of a discourse between two fictional characters, since it will always require a flesh-and-blood reader and an author who produces the text. In light of the extensive work done on moving discourse analysis models to literature that highlight the dialogic nature of texts, this broadens application of preference to a literary discourse level that serves as a useful adaptation of conversation analysis frameworks rather than a transgression of established theory.

Furthermore, most conversation analyses make use of conversations that are transcribed. The texts that the analysts focus their analysis on are also a textual discourse. Although they analyse 'natural' data in the form of recorded conversations, these transcriptions are almost devoid of contextual cues altogether. In Sacks'(1987) example of the preference for agreement:

> A: You are afraid of your father.
> B: Oh yes. Definitely. I – I am. To a certain extent.
>
> (Sacks, 1987: 63)

He mentions that there is a possibility that the two parties in the conversation are being ironic. However, due to the lack of context it is impossible to ascertain this; the CA analyst does not include the participants of the discourse in the analysis, and thus also disregards the intentions of the speakers in the conversation. The same process also applies to the conversation of literary discourse, which may be a

‘fictional’ discourse in the sense it is a positioned narrator and narratee, but nonetheless the data is pretty much the same for the purpose of stylistic research.

Preference not only affects second-pair parts in conversation, but also regulates the formulation of first-pair parts as well. For example, Sacks illustrates how initiators of first-pair parts must formulate their actions in a way that invites agreement for the other participant in the discourse (1987), and he also indicates that there is a preferred first-pair part in forming invitations, namely that there must be a clear indication whether dinner will be served or not (1971). In Pomerantz’s work on preference in assessment pairs, she also follows Sacks’ model of preference, and indicates the association between an action’s preference status and the turn shape in which it is produced (1984). She observes three separate types of assessment, namely

1. Assessment after participating in an activity
2. Assessment when reporting an experience or activity
3. Assessment as a turn following initial assessments (which is a way for a co-participant in conversation to proffer a second assessment in agreement in order to participate)

(Pomerantz, 1984: 58-9)

It is difficult to maintain strict rules for preference in CA because of the confusion of the psychological personal ‘preference’ for a certain outcome, as well as the different preferences across cultures. For example, asking your guest if they want a drink is a dispreferred first-pair part in Middle Eastern cultures, with the preferred first-pair part action being to pour drinks for guests as soon as they are seated and offer them the drinks directly instead. In Western societies, on the other hand, the question itself is a preferred first-pair part. Thus it is clear that across cultures, there are different levels of preference. Preference is a culturally tied and pragmatic feature, rather than a psychological one related to the participant’s wants.

Some conversation analysts, however, place more importance on preference as a technical aspect of adjacency pairs, rather than a linguistically indicated phenomenon. For example, Boyle (2000) discounts the use of linguistic markers as the sole indicator of dispreferred response, arguing that these markers in Levinson’s (1983) list of characteristics are indications of ‘reluctance’ rather than dispreferred

responses. Bilmes (1988) also highlights some issues with the applications of Preference Theory since Sacks' initial work which drew upon the standard psychological meaning of 'Preference' rather than the structural rule meaning that Sacks originally intended. Bilmes also points out how Sacks himself also deviates from his own concept towards the standardized meaning (Bilmes, 1988). Bilmes is also against using frequency as an indicator for preference, and argues for a purely structural approach to Preference as a concept, making it devoid of motivational speculation, stating that conversational preferences are not characterizations of participant's motives: '[conversation analysis] is a structural not a statistical undertaking' (Bilmes, 1988: 173).

Although the markers may indicate a reluctant response, the reason for this reluctance is probably due to the discourse participant's awareness of the response being a dispreferred second, and thus they attempt to mitigate the effect of this response. It could also be an attempt by the participant to uphold Leech's Politeness Principle (1983). Leech's Politeness Principle looks at the 'interpersonal' function of language, and is concerned with six maxims: Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement and Sympathy (Leech, 1983: 83-84). Preference is closely related to this principle; there is a strong preference for agreement and contiguity in second-pair parts to questions, and holding off disagreements later into a turn is a way of making the disagreements as weak as possible. Thus, disagreements contrary to agreements are not contiguant to the first-pair part (Sacks, 1987: 58). Moreover, Levinson's (1983) list of linguistic indicators of dispreferred second-pair parts has not been, as of yet, adequately discounted as markers of dispreferred responses. For the purpose of this study, they are considered valid indicators of dispreferred responses.

These conversation analysts (Bilmes 2004; Boyle, 1988) stand against considering personal motivation in preference theory, indicating that it leads to confusion between the psychological concept and the use of the term as a purely technical aspect of adjacency pairs. This is an attempt to retain the Preference Theory concept as a purely technical linguistic structural feature, which exists indexically within the situation or arises during the conversation. Although Sack's view of preference (1975, 1987) is highly structural and not related to the participant's motivations,

participants usually partake in judgement of preferred responses as they take their turns in the conversation, cueing extra-textual information such as tone of voice and facial expressions, in order to determine the flow of the next pair part that they choose to participate with in the conversation. But as Church (2004) illustrates, it is difficult to insist that preference is completely stand-alone and exists independently from participant's expectations. Church also argues that it is 'overly ideological to insist that preference exists entirely independently from the participant's expectations' (2004: 119).

Avoiding the participants' motivations and assumptions when dealing with pairs such as assessment is difficult, especially because it involves commentary about personal attitudes. For example, Pomerantz's work on self-deprecations as part of personal assessment does seem to include the personal psychological preference of the speakers (1984). This pinpoints a flaw in this type of CA, because it only looks at conversations in transcribed extracts devoid of contexts, from which the analyst has to infer and create meanings that may not be part of the discourse situation. Sacks (1987) notes that some of the examples of the exchanges he mentions in his chapter may be for ironic or humorous purposes rather than dispreferred responses, but there is no explanation of the context that would lead to this sort of conclusion. For a more comprehensive concept of preference then, it is important to look at the discourse situation as a whole, including the participant's mental functions as well. As a cognitive stylistic framework that describes fictional world building, Text World Theory is a systematic and comprehensive way of analysing discourse. Applications of Text World analyses, however, seem to neglect some responses to literary works in favour of the generalized, agreed-upon responses. In order to adapt Text World Theory to include these minority of readers, the concept of preference may be a welcome addition to the framework, thus allowing for the inclusion of both the readings that follow the generalised responses, as well as those 'deviant', 'mischievous' and 'strange' responses a small number of readers seem to have.

This is different from what I refer to as 'misreadings', which include misunderstandings that arise due to insufficient knowledge on part of the reader. This includes what Werth terms as 'general', 'cultural' and 'linguistic' knowledge (1999: 95-8) which is necessary for the successful creation of a common ground of

discourse. A dispreferred second should be a result of a response to the text with sufficient knowledge, and in this study I place more importance on 'linguistic' knowledge because there will invariably be differences between the participants in terms of their cultural knowledge which may affect their responses to allusions and intertextual links. These differences can even occur within members of the same society. For example, one person may know of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* but it is possible they have never read it. Although they may recognize the term 'Big Brother', their intertextual links are different from another person who was assigned the novel in an academic setting. In fact, the cultural knowledge differences are the more interesting variables in this research, and thus are not considered as 'misreadings' but as dispreferred responses instead.

The second type of misreading is concerned with misunderstandings related to not reading the entire text. Simply put, if a reader skips entire passages of a story or skips a chapter in a novel, this undoubtedly creates a different text world from that of the generalized preferred response. Thus, a dispreferred response must result from sufficient knowledge and a complete reading of the whole text to ensure that the text worlds created are a result from the meanings that these readers derive from the stylistic features of the text, rather than due to incomplete readings or insufficient knowledge. These dispreferred responses could also arise due to differences in cultural knowledge, and personal differences in experience, ideology and identity, but not as a result of misunderstanding.

Although spoken discourse in conversation analysis is very different to written discourse, it is possible to appropriate the use of concepts from pragmatics to the discourse-based framework of Text World Theory. In spoken discourse, both participants are physically present in the discourse world, whereas in written discourse the participants are distanced by time, due to the nature of the writing process itself, and most often location. In conversation analysis, turns are referred to as 'actions' instead of limiting them to utterances or sentences. In literary discourse we can consider the action in the first-pair part as a written form in the adjacency pair, then the response of assessment on part of the reader as well as the interpretation of the text as the second-pair part in this interaction. Instead of the

turn-taking exchange that takes place in spoken conversation, in literary discourse there is only one set of first-pair part and second-pair part.

In Text World Theory terms, the responses to the text also include the creation of the reader's mental representations of the text worlds, the negotiated meaning that is driven first and foremost from the text. Text-drivenness is central to Text World Theory analyses because unlike the normal prototypical situation of discourse in which both participants are in the same discourse world time and space, there is always a necessary divide between the time of writing and the time of reading. In addition, there can be some confusion because both participants' mental and cognitive functions are considered as part of the discourse, wherein their assumptions, goals, and their preferred outcomes also contribute to the creation of the text worlds. However, this is different from the technical term of preference that is used when referring to the responses, which is related to form and turns rather than the participant's wants and needs. Thus when considering the building of the text worlds, this would follow the psychological meanings of the participants' preferences related to their wants and motivations, whereas when considering their response as a whole focuses on the form that their final text worlds take shape, according to the highest level of preference following the text.

First-pair part preference in literary discourse is thus related to form of the genre. Literary Readers frame texts within a genre from the general knowledge they have about reading, and is also a model of expectation for the reader, as part of their literary competence (Culler, 1975). For second-pair part preference, there is a certain reading or text world that is the preferred response to the text. This preferred response follows the text and context of the reading process, and is usually reflected in the generally agreed upon popular response to a text. Deviant and strange readings by contrast, are part of the lesser preferred and dispreferred responses to texts. These alternative responses do not arise from a void; they are part of the discourse in Text World Theory framework, and the negotiated text worlds create meaning driven from the text. Rather than disregarding these responses, we should consider these readings in the same fashion as assessments, deprecations and approbations (e.g. Pomerantz, 1984). In the case of readers who do not follow the general interpretation, these responses are marked by delays and accounts for their readings,

thus indicating their awareness of their violation of preference. Using the example of artwork, the preferred response to a work of art is some form of approbation (Bilmes, 1988:163), and the responses in the data set seem to provide evidence of their awareness of this preference, especially when it is previously praised, then their preferred response is agreement with that praise (Pomerantz, 1984).

I suggest that the technical forms, tone, tropes, and conventions of a genre are part of what constitutes its preference in the discourse. There is a hierarchy of characteristics that these texts, which as a first-pair part, should fulfil in order to elicit the corresponding second-pair part. In the case of the dystopia, then, the readers should be able to create the second-pair part that is a text world, 'considerably worse than their own', and in the critical dystopia, the preferred second-pair part is to find the utopian enclave within the dystopian narrative. However, this is not always the case, as real readers do not read in the same manner as the 'ideal' reader, which is the stance most stylistic and critical analyses of dystopian and critical dystopian texts maintain. There are readers who will find a critical dystopia without hope, or readers who consider the closed dystopia as offering solace. Looking at the differences of these responses in terms of second-pair parts to dispreferred first-pair parts allows the discussion of the conventions of the genre of the dystopia and the critical dystopia to be viewed in a new light.

2.3 Readings of Dystopia

As aforementioned in the introductory chapter, dystopian writings critique the reader's reality through 'interrogating that actual reality' and 'negating [it], thus opening up to new ways of being' (my emphasis, Moylan, 2000: 279). Because of its extrapolative nature, speculative fiction allows for readers to transcend their own reality and critically think about the imaginative worlds as representations and recreations of their own.

> In its extrapolation of the present, [science fiction] has the potential to envision different worlds that can work, at least, as purely imaginative constructs, or at most, as critical explorations of our society. [Science fiction] has then the potential, through estrangement and cognitive mapping, to move

> its readers to see the differences of an else-where and, in turn, to think critically about one's own world and, possibly, to act upon it to change it.
>
> (Baccolini, 2011: 164-5)

There seems to be a distinction then, between a more imaginative, purely speculative constructed world, and a world that is a critique of the specific society. Thus these genres emerge that allow for the exploration of exaggerated forms of the writer's and readers' social and political environments. In what is usually considered the more traditional 'classical closed dystopia', Baccolini argues that 'dystopia is traditionally a bleak, depressing genre with no space for hope within the story, where utopia[n hope] is maintained outside the story: it is only if we consider dystopia as a warning that we as readers can hope to escape such a pessimistic future' (Baccolini, 2011: 165). Thus the critical dystopia emerges as a result of reworking the previous genre into the evolving political, cultural and economic concerns of the times that are reflected in the texts. Sargent defines the critical 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 worse than contemporary society but that normally includes at least one eutopian enclave or holds out hope that the dystopia can be overcome and replaced with a eutopia.
>
> (Sargent, 1994: 9).

This definition illustrates that the differentiating and the most important aspect of a critical dystopia is to project the possibility of a world beyond the control of the totalitarian society depicted, with a possibility that the dystopia is destroyed and a utopian society takes its place. This utopian possibility arises according to Baccolini (2000, 2004) and Calvacanti (1999) through a narrative that goes against the dystopian regime throughout the text, and thus is considered a formal operation of the critical dystopia that differentiates it from the classical dystopia. This distinction, however, blurs when we consider the responses of readers to a dystopian fiction. We return to fiction not to despair but as a form of entertainment, with some readers taking it as pure satire rather than a warning.

The problem with such a definition of a critical dystopia is that this 'eutopian enclave' is not only present in critical dystopia, but by definition would apply to all

dystopian fiction, due to the fact that ‘even the darkest dystopian fiction contains certain utopian energies, if only because the very motivation behind dystopian fiction is so often an attempt to provide satirical, cautionary warnings that might help us to prevent undesirable events depicted in fictions’ (Booker ,2013: vii). ‘Each dystopian society contains within it seeds of a utopian dream’ (Gottlieb, 2001: 8), if only through dialectical negation. The ‘utopian enclave’ can, however, exist in the text, implicitly through the creation of sub-worlds that are not fully realized. A stylistic analysis of the text itself can reveal how these new horizons and hopeful worlds are created in the minds of the readers, even if the text creates a terrible dystopia.

Critical dystopias thus create more complex mirror images of reality than the dystopia or anti-utopia, in which ‘both possibilities’ are presented (Sargent, 2004). Baccolini’s work on narrative and counter-narrative in feminist critical dystopian texts provides insight to how the counter-narrative functions in a text (2000, 2004, Moylan, 2000; Baccolini and Moylan, 2003). She notes how language is used as a weapon and means of control for the dystopic regime; thus resistance against this control forms one part of the counter-narrative. For example, in *The Handmaid’s Tale* it is Offred’s secret diary, which presents not only her point of view but also provides her with a means of resistance against the ruling power as well. ‘The control of means of language, over representation and interpellation, is a crucial weapon and strategy in dystopia resistance.’ (Moylan, 2000: 149). Not only is it beneficial to look at the use of language within the dystopian world, but it also shows how the text self-reflexively looks at its creation, and the role of language used in the creation of these dystopian worlds.

The second part of the counter-narrative includes the use of memory, looking at how things were before the oppressive regime, a fictive past versus. a real past, for another weapon used by totalitarian control is the manipulation of the past and history. Offred’s recollections of her life with her love and child ‘before’ Gilead’s regime, are all instances of reconstituting the memory of the past and are parts of the resistance against the dystopia. Furthermore, the ambiguous and open endings that ‘resist closure’ lead to a potential ‘good ending’ or utopia (Moylan, 2000: 151-2). This is due to the readers being driven to continue to think about the worlds of the narrative even as they close the book, or the effect of ‘resonance’ (Stockwell, 2009

see section 4.4 for discussion). Finally, dystopian novels borrow conventions from other genres, and thus 'blur' the boundaries of the dystopian genre, to 'expand' its creative potential for critical expression in what Baccolini terms as 'genre blurring' (Baccolini, 2000). The dystopian narrative is therefore rendered as an 'impure text' that makes the dystopia 'multi-oppositional' which contributes to the creation of resistance and a 'counter-narrative' that embodies the utopia impulse within the dystopian narrative. In *The Handmaid's Tale* there are the blurred genres of the diary and epistolary novel with realism, which creates the 'impure genre' (Baccolini, 2011: 166).

The counter-narrative does provide additional meanings to the reading of the text, but considering the presence of the counter-narrative as indicative of the critical dystopia is problematic due to the ambiguity of what constitutes a critical dystopia in the first place. For example, although Atwood wrote *The Handmaid's Tale* as a 'classical dystopia' (Atwood, 2004: 516), and she notes how it parallels *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in terms of the ambiguous ending and the appendix at the end of the book, the latter is not considered a 'critical utopia'. Baccolini (2011:165) claims that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a classical dystopia in which the totalitarian society crushes the protagonists, that there is closure in this story. She says: 'Utopian hope is maintained outside the story: it is only if we consider dystopia as a warning that we as readers can hope to escape such a pessimistic future' (Baccolini, 2011: 165). As such, she does not consider *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to be a critical dystopia, unlike *the Handmaid's Tale* and *Parable* series, which 'resist closure: ambiguous endings of these novels maintain the utopian impulse within the work' (Baccolini, 2011: 166), through the open ending that 'reject[s] the traditional subjugation of the individual at the end of the novel, the critical dystopia opens a space of contestation and opposition for those groups for whose subjectivity has yet to be attained' (Baccolini, 2011: 166). There is some ambiguity then in considering the part that this utopian enclave plays in interpretation.

In the definition of dystopia, the 'intended' audiences are supposed to feel the fear and loathing of the society that is presented in the text. The readers in this study are not contemporaries of the time of the publication of the two selected texts, however the majority of readers are capable of positioning themselves in the role of a

contemporary reader, providing the preferred response to the text. These utopian enclaves, then, are possibly less preferred responses to the dystopias that are created in the text, and thus it is worth investigating the factors that lead the readers to create text worlds that aren't necessarily salient to all readers of the same text.

2.4 Summary

In this chapter I set out the specific frameworks and concepts upon which I build my textual analysis. In section 2.1 I provided an overview of Text World Theory as a cognitive discourse-based framework which allows for a systematic account of world-building in texts. Text World Theory places a lot of emphasis on the reader, but it is only recently that there has been any study of reader response data, and sometimes this ignores some readers in favour of generalizable, agreed upon accounts of readings. I consider the deviant and strange readings of this minority of readers as lesser preferred or dispreferred text worlds, rather than idiosyncratic readings that are not worthy of attention. I provide a discussion of preference as a concept in literary discourse in section 2.2, and finally discuss how readings of dystopian literature may fall into such categories of preference in section 2.3. Dispreferred responses to a text are, in sum, different versions of text worlds activated depending on the context of the text world building, therefore relying on the reader, author, and context of writing and receiving the literary work. It seems like reading experience may affect readings of texts more than personal traits, but a more nuanced study is needed, hence the suggestion to look at measurable reader traits in my second study.

After establishing the basic tenets of my textual analysis in this second chapter, the next chapter discusses the study's place within the field of reader response studies, and provides the rationale for the methodologies I adopt in the analysis of the reader's responses to dystopian fiction and the application of this to the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* and the short story 'Harrison Bergeron'.

Chapter 3 Investigating Readers and Readings

3.0 Overview

This chapter situates this study within the wider field of reader and reader response studies. I will provide a brief introduction to the wide field of reader response studies, firstly noting idealisations of reading in theoretical discussions of readers in section 3.1. Then, I will look at some studies that utilize 'real' readers as participants in their studies in section 3.2, noting where I share or diverge from these views in my own work. Section 3.3 discusses briefly the effects of personality and self-identity on interpretations of texts, as an introduction for my basis of exploring traits such as optimism and hope in relation to reading dystopia. Section 3.4 introduces how the reader in the context of this study describing my approach to reader responses to the dystopian texts and my rationale for the use of interview data. The final section 3.5 provides a summary of this chapter.

3.1 Idealisations of reading

Considering literary reading as a type of discourse necessarily brings back the reader into the spotlight of analysis. Reader response criticism in the late 60s and 70s focused on meaning creation by the text and reader. This moves away from the emphasis on the text as the sole source of meaning that was the focus of New Criticism and Structuralist accounts of texts. For example, Fish (1967, 1970), places the reader as an active participant in the creation of meaning. In Fish's (1980) call for an Affective stylistics, the text itself is devoid of meaning for extraction; rather, the reader actively creates the meaning during the act of reading. As Ravaux comments in 'The Return of the Reader':

> Fish refuses to assume that the world of a text, as well as the world itself, is filled with prior significations that the reader is required to extract. Reading is not putting together scattered parts of meaning until they form a complete thought; it is an event that happens to, and with the active participation of, a reader […]
>
> (Ravaux, 1979: 709)

Consequently, there is more attention paid to the sequential processing of the text than the reader necessarily enacts. Fish is concerned with what happens in the mind of the reader during the reading process, thus the reader creates meaning controlled by the text. The reader in this case must have some linguistic and literary competence; he's 'informed' before the reading event happens. Fish later introduces the idea of 'interpretative communities' (1980) which readers are a part of. This further expands on the 'informed' aspect of a reader, by positing that readers start off with initial interpretative strategies and cultural assumptions about stylistic features of texts that will determine the outcome of the reading process. These strategies would be according to the shape and form that these interpretative communities take at that certain point of time. Thus, 'institutions' and 'conventional structures' also play a role in determining what parts of the text's meanings are the most 'obvious' (Fish, 1980).

Other reader response theory based critics also view the reader, as the main source of meaning in the text, in a similar abstract conceptual manner. For example, if the reader notices every linguistic feature and stylistic nuance, this theoretical reader is referred to as Riffatere's 'superreader' (1971). Wilson (1981) also considers differences between abstract concepts such as the fictive reader and the implied reader and their ontological status in a literary work. Ong's (1975) readers are even further abstracted, as fictional constructs, he considers reading as a fragmentary process which readers take part in as part of a literary 'game' (Ong, 1975:11). This approach to readers is similar to Iser (1974). His interest was in a highly theoretical 'implied' reader, Iser suggests that the dynamic relationship between the text and reader is how a literary text can have meaning, stating that 'one must take into account not only the actual text but also, and in equal measure, the actions involved in responding to that text' (Iser, 1974: 274). In his theory, Iser notes that '[t]he convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence, and this convergence can never be precisely pinpointed, but always must remain virtual, as it is not to be identified either with the reality of the text or with the individual disposition of the reader'(1974: 275). Thus the implied reader is always a highly theoretical construct and not related to a certain reader. In this view, meaning does not exist in the text alone, nor is it construed by the reader, but lies 'halfway between the two' (Iser, 1974: 269) and is generated by the reading process itself. The 'gaps'

between given parts of the text lead to the reader's imagination being simulated, and thus they fill in these gaps with their own experiences. Therefore this theoretical view can be considered as a precursor to cognitive stylistic approaches that draw upon schemas as well as leads into negotiated meaning in literary discourse. Thus, Iser includes the processes of interpretation as part of the literary analysis, and places importance on both the text and the reader but posits meaning in a virtual realm between them.

A theoretical and abstract notion of the reader is useful for a methodological application of stylistic analysis, through referring to the 'implied' or 'ideal' reader that is 'posited by the text' and 'is crucial to the understanding of the operations of the text' (Culler, 2001: xxi). The reader in these approaches remains an abstract concept, because it draws upon a theoretical position to the text rather than from 'the information about responses' from readers of the text (Culler, 1981). Therefore this analysis tends to stem from the critic's own reading of the text, related to the careful linguistic analysis of its parts to produce meanings. This could be due to the goal of most stylistic studies:

> [. . .] to show how a text 'works': but not simply to describe the formal features of texts for their own sake, but in order to show their functional significance for the interpretation of the text; or in order to relate literary effects or themes to linguistic 'triggers' where these are felt to be relevant.
>
> (Wales, 2011: 400)

The reader in these stylistic analyses is either a description of the stylistician's own mental processes and interpretation of the text, or is an ideal reader who notices all the stylistic features of the text and thus utilizes it to create meaning. The reader has always played a role in stylistic inquiry, and as Short (1996) says stylisticians are 'profoundly interested in the *rules* and *procedures* which we, as readers, intuitively know and apply in order to understand what we read' (Short, 1996: 6). This interest in 'the rules and procedures', however, seems to apply only when discussing more theoretical readers such as the 'ideal' reader (Prince, 1973; Culler, 1975) in literary criticism. Peplow and Carter (2014: 440) mention this tendency 'to focus more on textual analysis than on the reader' indicating that 'generally the 'reader' has remained a theoretical construct, similar to the ideal reader in much literary reader-

response criticism' or as Allington and Swann (2009) mention is 'the reader who would realize, unassisted, the meanings and effects with which the critic credits the text, and is […] implicit in much literary study' (Allington and Swann, 2009: 221). During the analysis, the researcher may re-read the text many times, thus experiencing many different readings and interpretations, whereas, as noted by Stockwell (2009: 43-4), the reader may not necessarily experience or notice these textual features or their effects. An analysis that is based on an ideal reader will only represent a partial picture of the interpretation of the text due to the subjectivity of the reading experience. More recent cognitive poetic and empirical studies, however, have taken into account real reader response data, rather than relying on the researcher's own interpretation as the sole source of literary meaning.

3.2 Empirical Models of the Reader

While the theoretical reader is a useful concept that allowed for the discussion of stylistic choices, the need for establishing a more objective method of stylistic inquiry necessitates a look at bringing back real 'actual' readers to become part of the dialogue on interpretation (Miall, 2000). The growing and on-going interest in pursuing case studies of actual 'flesh and blood' readers who do not resemble the ideal readers, and investigating how they responded to literary works due to different factors are not usually taken into account when analysing the text only. More specifically, there is this shift towards attempting to look at reader responses to texts outside of an academic context (Jeffries, 2001: 331; Miall, 2006; Stockwell, 2009: 137) or what De Beaugrande considers as 'how ordinary readers negotiate a text'(1981). These can be mainly categorized into case studies of readers, readers in experimental environments, and finally more naturalized reader response data.

Due to the subjective nature of reading texts, many early reader response studies other than the researcher's introspection usually included some form of case study. For example, Hartman (1995) uses case studies to explore intertextual links and what occurs as readers relate various texts in a certain unified context. Squire (1994: 647) comments that 'studies of this kind are valuable in showing us that many of the traditional analyses that focus on reactions to a single text may result in overly

simplistic generalizations.' This is mostly true because readers draw upon their previous reading experiences in creating meaning for a new text, and thus it is beneficial to look at the intertextual links that they draw upon in order to demonstrate the text worlds created in their minds.

In Rosenblatt's (1938, 1978, 1994a) Reader Response Theory of Transactional reading, the conversation model of transaction is applied to the reading process, but also deals with reader responses to literature. Using case studies based on students in the university literature class, Rosenblatt (1978) looks at literature as exploration of meaning and asserts the role of personal experience in shaping literary interpretations. The very act of reading gives the text its meaning, as Rosenblatt asserts that 'the text is merely an object of paper and ink until some reader responds to the marks on the page as verbal symbols' (1994a: 23). She also distinguishes aesthetic reading of literary texts from 'efferent reading' (reading for information from non-literary texts) (Rosenblatt, 1978). The model is developed further and continues to be utilized in reader response studies, due to the shift of meaning to being an interaction of text, reader and context (Beach, Appleman and Dorsey, 1994; Flynn, 2007; Connell, 1996; Many, 1994; Ruddel and Unrau, 1994).

In Rosenblatt's model, 'the reader focuses attention on and transacts with an element in the environment, namely the signs on the page, the text.' (Rosenblatt, 1994b:1061). Each reading, then, is a unique experience of the reader as they approach the text. This is due to the fact that this model draws upon the knowledge of the speaker and listener in order to create the interpretation, on the basis that 'any interpretations or new meanings are restructurings or extensions of the stock of experiences of language, spoken and written, brought to the task,' (Rosenblatt, 1994b: 1062). As a framework within reader response studies, in RRT the literary work itself does not have a fixed meaning for every reader, and more importantly emphasises the essentialness of 'individual background knowledge, beliefs, values, cultural expectations, and reading context to the act of reading' (1994a: 144).

Therefore the reading process is not a result of interaction, but of transaction of different elements in terms of 'reverberations, rapid oscillations, blendings and mutual conditionings' (Rosenblatt, 1994b:1062). The term *transaction* is used here in order to highlight that the experience of reading is not a one-way process but a

constant interaction of text and reader (Rosenblatt, 1994a:12) 'The meaning – the poem – "happens" during the transaction between the reader and the signs on the page' (Rosenblatt, 1994a: xvi). The participation of the reader in creation of meaning is similar to Fish's Affective Stylistics, in which meaning is an event created by conflation of reader and text, but he doesn't describe it as a performative aspect.

This emphasis on the role of the reader's memory, knowledge and experiences is also of prime importance in Text World Theory, in which these elements are all considered as part of the context of the discourse. The importance that is placed on the individuality and idiosyncratic interpretation of the individual is beneficial for this study, which aims to look at unique responses to a dystopian text. Langer's (1995) contribution to Reader Response Theory also reflects the closeness of the two frameworks, where her term 'envisionment' is defined as 'text worlds in the mind and they differ from individual to individual' (Langer, 1995:9). These 'envisionments' are not static but are subject to changes 'at any time as ideas unfold and new ideas come to mind.'(Langer, 1995: 10). It is important, then, to note these parallels as a precursor to Text World Theory, especially the emphasis on the reader as the contributor of meaning. Text World Theory, however, provides a more systematic method of tracking text processing, due to the *text-driven* emphasis of the model, thus provides a more balanced tool for this research.

Case studies were also utilized in psychoanalytical approaches (Diakidoy, 2013) to reading, such as Holland's 'identity theory' (1975, 1998, 2003). In '5 readers reading' he discusses the case studies of 5 students' responses to three short stories, and using a psychoanalysis approach of creating 'identity themes' he demonstrates that the literary interpretations arose from the readers' identities, and not from the texts (1975). His subsequent works also deal with psychoanalytic responses to literature, in which case the reader in his studies is Holland himself; thus he delineates how his own identity relates to how he interprets various works from books to film (e.g. 1998, 2003). Holland's approach places the meaning of a text solely with the reader. Regardless of the text structures and linguistic codes, readers will create meaning according to their own psychological needs and primary core personalities, where they 'draw upon the treasury a literary work provides to re-

create [their] own characteristic psychological process[es]' (Holland, 1975: 247). The 'Meaning' of a literary text recreates and maintains the identity of the reader that they bring to the text, rather than being purely text-driven. In his model, however, the reader has one core personality or identity theme they attempt to recreate through reading, but this doesn't take into account more recent views of mind reading and embodiment, where a reader may be able to project and empathise with personalities that do not match their own (e.g. Theory of Mind, Palmer, 2004; Zunshine, 2006). As opposed to cognitive poetic models, then, Holland focuses on a subjective creation of meaning, which creates multiple and infinite interpretations. A similar approach is Bleich's (1978) view that readings and meaning are developed by readers rather than discovered in texts. Literary meaning in Bleich's view is a result of intersubjectivity created by cultural contexts, according to the needs of the reader's community (Bleich, 1978: 38-9).

Although the identity of the reader may define the direction in which the reader creates meaning, it is erroneous to completely disregard the text, because it is the driving force in the choice of which memories, ideologies, and experiences are triggered in the reader's mind. Because reading is a (mostly) linear direction activity following the lines of text on a page, the text directs the reader's interpretation and therefore is crucial for meaning. Furthermore, due to the displaced situation of the discourse in literary reading, the text becomes more important as the only link between the narrative and the reader, since written discourses are always displaced in time. Although Holland's and Bleich's approaches look at individual readers, in such case studies the evidence is usually based on themes that are formed by the researchers themselves rather than the readers themselves. My study is concerned with how the responses are related to or driven by the text, while considering the background knowledge of the readers without attempting to provide a full psychoanalysis or creating identity theme profiles of the readers. This difficulty of creating a uniform and replicable method of investigating reader's psychology also necessarily narrows down the number of participants that the researcher is able to involve in the study, therefore these tend to be smaller scale and while informative, become problematic to draw comparisons and provide little insight to more general assumptions about readerly behaviour.

With the cognitive turn in the humanities, there was also a surge of interest towards more scientific modes of research, shifting interests to empirical studies of reader responses to look at specific stylistic features. With the aim of creating a more rigorous and replicable approach to investigating reader responses, quantitative empirical studies were conducted on readers to isolate the influence of specific textual features on reader responses (Sotirova, 2006; Gerrig, 1993; Oatley, 1999). Other studies focused on stylistic effects such as transportation (Fong et al, 2013), or how reading texts effects or alters attitudes and belief systems (Green, Strange, and Brock, 2002; Prentice, Gerrig, and Bailis, 1997; Mazzocco, et al, 2010). Empirical studies also took into account the representation of characters and character perspective (Rapp and Gerrig, 2001). These approaches utilise tools that ranging from lab-based measures such as eye-tracking (Mahlberg, Conklin and Bisson, 2014) and Magnetic Resonance Imaging scanning (Cheetham, Jurgen and Lutz, 2014; Altmann et al, 2014) to self-reported questionnaires (e.g. Gerrig, 1993).

In these studies, the need for creating a valid and replicable study necessitates that the researcher focuses on certain stylistic features in isolation to create the sample of responses. For example, foregrounding and literariness is examined in studies by Miall and Kuiken (1998; 2002). Da Costa Fialho (2007) also looks at foregrounding in the responses of students to short stories in her study. Zillmann and Voderer (2000) explore emotions in readers of media, Millis (1995) focuses on reader responses to perspective in the short story 'The Demon Lover', and in Sotirova's (2006) study reader responses were utilized in order to address the analysis of free indirect style and the presentation of narrative viewpoint. Ryan (2003) also conducts a reader response study in the form of drawing maps in order to research the creation of cognitive mental maps of textual worlds, and maintains that a 'mental map of a textual world is exclusively geared towards the mind that constructs it (2003:238).

These empirical studies tend to take place in highly controlled environments, using extracts of texts, or interrupted reading (e.g. taking down notes, free association writing while reading). Furthermore, in terms of testing stylistic theories, isolating features can prove beneficial, so an extract or manipulated text, in which certain textual features are changed according to the stylistic feature that is under scrutiny, is deemed necessary. Eye tracking experimentation and MRI scanners also are highly

artificial reading environments. This therefore sacrifices what Hall terms the 'ecological validity of the empirical research' (2008:31), namely that the reading takes place in artificial settings, which may affect the reader's response to a text. Peplow adds that these studies 'tend to neglect the social embodiment of reading' and therefore 'are limited in their applicability' (2012:19) since they only explore one aspect of style at a time. As Hall argues,

> reading an extract may not represent well how the complete novel from which the extract is taken would be read, particularly if the blurb had been scanned, the book selected for herself by the individual reader or recommended by a friend, then read alone at home with a packet of crisps to hand on the sofa.
>
> (Hall, 2008: 29)

It is difficult, however, to capture such responses in its most 'natural' setting, due to constrains of time and space, as well as dependence on the individual's ability to commit their initial responses to a text to memory. Empirical studies can have the ability to 'factor in the (individual) responses of real readers' instead of hypothetical guesswork, an experiment can be set to test the reader's response to the text according to a specific feature, thus avoiding the approach to readers 'as aggregate, hypothetical entities responding in unison' (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003: 6). This is seldom the case, due to the focus of such studies on quantitative measures for reader responses, such as Likert scales to indicate transportation in the narrative. This leads to a reduction of the readers' interpretations to mere numbers corresponding with what the researchers choose to measure, and thus falls into the same danger of not considering the readers as full participants in the creation of meaning.

Moreover, in these empirical studies, the usual participants would consist of students at university level, who may have received some prior stylistic or literary reading training. More recently, readers who read outside of academia have also been acknowledged, with a growing interest in investigating these responses of 'untrained' readers who are not experts in stylistics or poetics but nevertheless their readings are affected by the features of the text (e.g. Burke, 2011). It is nearly impossible, however, to find participants who are living in a literary void with no stylistic or literary training whatsoever. According to Hall and others, there may be

no ‘ordinary reader’ (Hall, 1999, 2009:336) since ‘[r]eading is always by definition schooled to some degree. There can be no innocent unschooled reading.’ (Hall, 2009:336). From an early age, we are taught how to read in schools, how to spot themes and recurring items and to relate them to certain topics given in class. These exercises may influence our readings out of the classroom as well, even if not on a conscious level. In terms of this study, it may be possible to some extent to find participants who are not familiar with the terms ‘dystopia’ and who have not been exposed to similar texts in a classroom setting, due to the texts being in their second language, or because the texts were not part of their curriculum. Thus I attempt to avoid the more ‘knowledgeable’ and ‘trained’ readers such as students in the school of English.

In striving for naturalistic data validity, and to find readers who read outside of academia, then, researchers turned towards existing reading groups and book group discussions as their source of reader response data (Halsey, 2009, Allington and Swann, 2009; Allington, 2012). This focus on existing groups situates readings in their social context, and facilitates the empirical exploration of readers outside of academia. Allington and Swann ‘propose a complementary approach: empirically exploring the practices and positions adopted by readers in the real (which is to say, the social) world’ (Allington and Swann, 2009: 220), which later allows for a stylistic analysis based on these observations. More commonly, however, the discourse of the reading groups’ meetings is the object of study, rather than the discourse of the texts that are read by the groups. For example, Swann and Allington (2009) look at the ways in which the language of literary texts was discussed in reading groups, while Peplow’s (2012) study looks at the language of a reading group in terms of it being a community of practice, where reading becomes a social activity.

Text World Theory applications to real readers also strived towards utilizing these naturalistic sources of reader response data. These approaches focus on more qualitative analysis of responses. This reader response data was collected in the form of surveys (Burke, 2011), reading group recordings (Whiteley, 2011a), and online discussions of texts (Gavins, 2013). In Whiteley’s study of *Remains of the Day*, she investigates the ethical and emotional positioning of three participants who

were given prompts for discussion of the text (2011a). Similarly, Norledge looks at mind reading and positioning in the discussion of a reading group given the dystopian short story 'Pop Squad' (2014). Finally, Gavins (2013:117) analyses the reading practices of readers in non-manipulated settings through looking at online readers' reviews of absurd fiction in non-academic contexts. In these group settings, however, there tends to be agreement on the interpretation of the text, which usually follows the generalized, agreed-upon interpretations shared by critics and the majority of readers, (the aforementioned 'preferred responses' to the text (Stockwell, 2013: 268; see also section 2.3 in the previous chapter)).

In these studies, which were valuable for discovering the 'general' or 'shared' response to a text, the researchers tend to overlook the deviant or 'strange' readings, thus not considering these idiosyncratic responses. In cognitive poetics, the reader is viewed as the starting point for analysing and understanding literary texts, and Allington (2012) suggests an integrative mode of text analysis, in which the study of readers can feed back into the stylistic analysis of texts (Allington, 2012: 320; see also Stockwell, 2002; Semino and Culpeper, 2003; Peplow et al 2016, Whiteley 2011a; Nuttall 2015).

One study in particular that is closely related to this study is Roemer's (2003) collection of his work on utopian audiences. In his book, he discusses 20 years of written, spoken and reconstructed reader-responses. His collection of responses looked at different types of readers: he discusses ideal readers, real historical accounts in textual responses such as reviews and authorial comments of 19th and 20th century critics and writers, a reconstruction of the author as the first reader of the text, and finally his own study collection of 733 written responses. In his study, he considers the implications of reader-response criticism, warning against the danger of claiming that texts do not have meanings or emotional experiences 'in' them (Roemer, 2003: 33). He rightly points out the main difficulties of any reader response related study, namely that '[i]t is extremely difficult to know exactly what people read in private and practically impossible to predict exactly how an individual reader will respond to a particular text' (Roemer, 2003: xii).

Roemer (2003:182) does not attempt to provide a definitive answer on this process, indeed he maintains that his methods seem 'unscientific' with regards to sample size

and procedure, this work explores the possibilities of using reader responses in the study of utopian literature. The research also provides a gateway to understanding how readers transform utopian texts as they read. Specifically, Roemer studies the responses of his 733 actual readers and their roles in 'transforming' utopian texts. In a similar vein to interaction (Feagin, 1997), transaction (Rosenblatt, 1994a) and feedback (Moylan, 2000) theories, Roemer also points out that the previous experiences and knowledge of the reader have effects on the current reading and this in turn can have effects on the reader as a result of this reading process. For this, Roemer uses the term 'transformational associations' that he maintains is: 'a concept that suggests the complexity and reciprocity of the process, the diversity of the reader's perceptions of their reading experiences, and the transformational powers of utopian texts and readers […]' (2003: 181). This approach is both situated within the field of reader responses and reception studies, as well as taking into account the context of the reading situation. For Roemer, in order for readers to create a 'transformation' while reading, they must draw upon a 'network of associations' that are 'determined by personal, family, community, regional and cultural conditions' (2003: 181). In his data, he asks the readers to provide a written response that reflects on how the readers have transformed the text, drawing upon notes that the readers take during the reading of Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*. He also provides a questionnaire about the reader's personal background including a brief biographical page, and questions designed specifically to create comparisons with 19th century reviews, centring on certain conventions and concerns, such as character types, and categorization. Roemer thus attempts to create a more encompassing view of how readers are effected by their reading habits, and their social and cultural background.

Roemer's large scale study necessarily leads to generalisations about readings of a certain community. This thesis follows in this vein of focusing on personal accounts of readers, however the focus is on a smaller scale of case studies and looking at personal traits of the readers that may lead to such interpretations. This is because Roemer's focus is to create a general understanding of how readers interpret utopia, whereas I am interested in collecting lesser preferred responses to dystopian fiction. Therefore, while a larger scale study would possible provide a larger number of lesser preferred responses, my goal is to provide a cognitive poetic account of a

sample of these responses rather than analyse the responses quantitatively. Roemer's contribution also indicates the importance of the recognition of genre for the reader's world building processes, thus activating the utopian reader's prior knowledge of similar titles in the genre and comparing the text they are approaching with these different text worlds. Whether dystopian readers should also be able to do this comparison and contrast activity using the transformational associations/transactions/prior knowledge and schemata that they bring with them to the texts is also a concern of this study, thus I also focus on the role of genre and intertextual links in the responses that I collect.

3.3 Reader Traits and Reader Interpretations

Text World Theory includes readers as part of the discourse, including all their cognitive functions and schematic knowledge. When a text confirms or reinforces the readers' world view, the world building process reflects the schematic knowledge of the readers. This is called 'schema affirmation' (Jeffries, 2001: 340), and is part of the resources that readers draw upon when reading fictional texts. Identity and self-implication in narratives are also important factors in interpretation (Kuiken et al, 2004). In psychology, this satisfaction that arises from matching the text world to the readers' own world views are part of self-verification processes (Lecky, 1945; Swann, 1983, 1997, 2011), or what Bolton and Reed (2004) refer to as 'sticky priors'. These researchers argue that self-identity can govern judgement. Because I consider that reception of a literary work is a second pair part that involves assessment (Pomerantz, 1984) in this study, these personality factors that affect judgments and interpretations are therefore also important in text world building. According to Bolton and Reed (2004), identity is defined as a 'self-relevant social category' which could be permanent (e.g. gender and nationality) or transient (Student, teenager, child) (2004: 397). What is relevant to this study is how judgements and assessment are formed. People form judgment in two ways: either through identity-based judgments, or reason judgements (as a result of analytical thinking) (Bolton and Reed 2004:397). At the time where a person needs to judge something, some features of identity will be more salient than others, and are foregrounded according to the situation. Identity is related to self-relevance, in which

case the more importance that you give to an aspect of your social identity, the more it effects your judgement. This is based on the schemata of the self, which is '[a] salient, and strong identity [which] activates an elaborate and integrated schema' that affects judgements (Bolton and Reed, 2004: 398), and I would argue, interpretations as well. Bolton and Reed suggest based on their findings that 'identity-driven thinking leads to biased judgment that resists change, that is, a procedural bias or 'sticky prior' in favour of an initial identity-based judgement.' (Bolton and Reed, 2004: 398).

Self-verification theory is another concept that also allows for the emergence of atypical, lesser preferred reader responses. In Self-verification theory, people have certain view of their self, and thus strive towards having others see them as they see themselves. Lecky's (1945) self-verification theory proposes that having a sustained and chronic self-view allows for the individual to create a sense of coherence of the world and thus maintain them in order to hold on to that coherence. Swann (1983) reinstates Lecky's belief 'that stable self-views organize people's efforts to maximize consistency [. . .] Self-verification theory holds that people are motivated to maximise the extent to which their experiences confirm and reinforce their self-views.' (Swann, 2011: 26). 'Presumably, this is because self-verification makes the world seem coherent and predictable', and people prefer others to see them as they see themselves, even if their self-views happen to be negative' (Swann, 2011:23). In Swann's studies, he reports that '[t]here seemed to be a tendency for people to prefer self-confirming feedback over non-confirming feedback' (2011:23).

According to Swann, a person will create self-verifying social worlds in three ways:

1) Construct 'opportunity structures' i.e. social environments that satisfy their needs
2) Identity cues communication of self-views to others
3) 'seeing' non-existent evidence to affirm their self-view

(From Swann 2011: 27)

The need for self-verification allows for the reader to create world builders outside of the text, as long as it allows for their self to be verified through the interpretation

process. This is different from misreading the text, however, in that the interpretation will be guided by the text, but also aided by these sticky priors and need for self-verification. Swann also mentions this, he maintains that 'self-views may guide three stages of information processing: attention, recall, and interpretation' (2011: 27, my emphasis). In the case of reader response studies, the primary focus is usually on the overall interpretation of texts, as well as their discussions of these texts in reading groups and focus groups. This study also follows in the same vein; however I am also investigating the effects of these identity and personality traits which allow for dispreferred readings to occur (forthcoming in Chapter 6). What the readers remember and interpret is entrenched within their cognitive and mental abilities, and while Text World Theory acknowledges this, there hasn't been much enquiry into these reader traits that are part of the reading interpreting process. What I suggest is that world-building and reader responses to texts also attempt to create these self-verifying worlds, drawing upon their sticky priors and personal traits.

As a further attempt to recognise readers as individuals that aim to preserve and affirm their own schemas about their selves and their world view, I will also investigate personality traits. In critical dystopian narratives, there is a focus on the possibility of hope in the controlling society. In this study, I focus on the positive psychology measures of optimism and hope (see chapter 7 for a more detailed discussion). This study discusses a few examples of readers and their reading experience, to provide some insight to the reader's interpretations as a more personal and idiosyncratic experience. Optimism and hope are traits of personality that are dealt with extensively in the field of 'positive psychology' (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Both of these traits are related to expectancies of positive outcomes, and therefore could account for hopeful readings of hopeless dystopian endings. Hope and optimism are considered cognitive constructs, which is why I include them in this discussion of a reader response-based cognitive poetic analyses.

3.4 The Reader in this Study

In this section, I discuss my approach to reader responses and the rationale of the methodology that I apply in chapters 4, 5 and 6. In this thesis, in line with Text

World Theory, I consider the reader as the active participant in discourse who creates a set of text worlds that culminatively account for a certain interpretation. Thus I use the terms 'responses' 'readings' and 'interpretations' interchangeably to refer to the specific reader's set of text worlds. Furthermore, I maintain that the preference of certain readings, which is affected by social and ideological constructs (see previous section 2.2), is due to the text, and the readings that are usually considered strange or different from the norm can be considered as lesser preferred responses to the text rather than disregarding them completely. This is because a lesser preferred response is textually driven, and therefore worthy of investigation.

In choosing the texts for discussion of lesser preferred responses, my first intuition was to use either science fiction or speculative fiction as the medium, due to the cognitive and mental investment that is required of the reader in the creation of these fictional text worlds (see Suvin (1979) on cognitive estrangement, Moylan (2000), on readers who enjoy science fiction because of its mental involvement and exercise). In dystopian literature particularly, the intention of the author and the positioning of the reader are at the centre of the genre, with Sargent's definition (1994) stressing that the author 'intends' specific readers to view the dystopia as a worse society than their own. This emphasis directed the attention of the study to these texts.

Because dystopia was the main focus of this research, Text World Theory (Werth 1999) was considered as a suitable framework for investigating world-building in the mind of readers. This is especially due to the consideration of the reader as a participant in written discourse, including his mental aspects, thus the knowledge, beliefs, memories, hopes and dreams, etc. of the reader are part of the context of the discourse world (Werth 1995a: 52, 1995b, 1999). This emphasis on the consideration of the reader as part of the context differentiates Text World Theory from other world-building theories (e.g. possible worlds, Dolozel, 1980; Ryan, 1991) and is considered a 'crucial' difference between the two models (Gavins, 2005:90). Reader responses have not been neglected in Text World Theory applications. For example, there are case studies that consider other readers, with studies based on reading groups responses to texts (Whiteley, 2011a, 2011b) that strive towards gathering more 'naturalistic' data that is not influenced by the researcher (such as book clubs

in the studies of e.g. Benwell, 2009; Swann and Allington, 2009; Peplow, 2012), however these responses are affected by other factors, such as group dynamics, and preservation of 'face' (Brown and Levinson, 1987) or even creation of a knowledgeable internet alter-ego and positive self-representation (see Steen, 1991). Furthermore, due to the researcher's choice of distance from the participants, as a consequence these studies do not include any background information on the readers themselves, their view of self, their reading experience, and what other titles they may have read prior to the text that may influence their readings, and thus possibly leaves out their experience of 'intertextuality' (Hogan, 2014), which, according to Text World Theory, is part of the context of the reading process (Panagiotidou, 2012; Giovanelli, 2010). These approaches also disregard 'unideal' readings, or dispreferred responses to the texts, e.g. the reader who considers that Hazel and George Bergeron are living a peaceful life in the dystopia *Harrison Bergeron* because they do not remember 'sad things'. Providing that the participating reader has sufficient 'knowledge' needed to create a discourse world (Werth, 1999:95-98) these responses should not be marginalized but are worthy of investigation. For both ease of reference and due to the tendency for readers to adopt a preferred reading, many interpretations of the text are neglected as deviant or mischievous. While I agree with Iser and Rosenblatt that there is a possibility of multiple interpretations that are derived from the same text, in which the 'background knowledge, beliefs, values, cultural expectations and reading context' contribute to 'the act of reading' (Rosenblatt, 1994a: 144), and that the text is 'is potentially capable of several different realizations, and no reading can ever exhaust the full potential, for each individual reader will fill the gaps in his own way' (Iser, 1972: 285), I maintain that these different readings or realizations of meaning are finite and not unlimited in scope. These possible meanings are limited necessarily by what 'gaps' that these texts allow. The collection of reader response data may provide a sense of what Iser calls the 'full potential' of a text's meaning; the culmination of all the possible text worlds and interpretations that arise from a single text.

The reader in this study is considered as an active participant in the literary discourse. Literary meaning is thus created in the minds of the reader, but driven first and foremost by the text. In Text World Theory, this process includes the entire cognitive abilities of the reader (Werth 1999). The role of contextual information,

however, can be ignored in text-processing accounts of interpretation and comprehension. In order to combine both the text-processing and reader response approaches to literary reading, this study will treat reading as a multi-directional process that involves the reader, the context of reading and the text, as well as the reader's posited hypothetical author. The data collection of this study follows a mixed method approach, in which there is qualitative analysis of the text and the reader responses, as well as looking at reader traits that are drawn upon for the purpose of highlighting some aspects of the reader's personality.

This study follows somewhat in Roemer's footsteps, but diverts from his work in terms of genre, the scope and breadth of study, and type of data collected. This study attempts to collect the most immediate responses to the readings, which follow immediately after the reading process. Furthermore, I avoid the sociological pressures of reading groups by using the friendly interview. Having fewer participants in the conversation meant that readers' views would not be as affected by other peoples' reactions as they would in a reading group.The semi-structured interview approach creates a replicable data collection process, but also allows the readers to expand and share their thoughts freely with me when I asked them questions about their reading experience. Due to the time and space limitations of this thesis, I focused primarily on a relatively small number of readers in order to analyse their intertextual references and their personal responses to the texts. The findings show that in this sample, the personal traits of hope and optimism govern the meanings created by the texts only in the case of the lack of narrative intertextual relations drawn by the readers.

In order to explore readings other than my own, the first source of data that I approached was the book reviews website *Goodreads*. These are reader submitted reviews that are posted on the internet on a public forum. Readers provide a rating of 1 to 5 stars for books they have read, with 1 being the lowest possible score and 5 being the highest. These responses provide limited and variable information, for example there is no indication how many times the reader has read the text, or whether the time between the reading and writing the post could be days or years, as well as are varied in response length and form (e.g. some reviews include links to videos, memes and pictures) due to lack of researcher intervention and input (Swann

and Allington, 2009). Because of this, there is no attempt to provide a quantifiable corpus analysis of these responses, due to the difficulty in ensuring the uniformity of these online reviews. However, because these responses are not explicitly elicited by the researcher, it may provide some more 'natural' responses than an artificial reading setting, and due to the recurrence of themes across the data. These readings can be affected by 'forgetfulness and post-hoc rationalisation' (Short and van Peer, 1989: 25) that can occur due to the length of time between reading the book and writing the review. But this also goes for even carefully planned empirical laboratory tests, Bortolussi and Dixon (2013) found for example that memory retained only around 60% of the meaning of a text, with poor recollection of surface structure of texts. There will always be some degree of forgetfulness when discussing reader responses to texts that doesn't detract from the valuable information that can be drawn from the data. Any reading or responses to literature are in a way reconstructions: even if they are jotted down as the reader is reading, they will undergo some level of processing in order to be transcribed into words. Until interpretation can be measured in an on-line empirical method, looking at reviews, reading group recordings and interviews is the closest possible access to a 'natural' reader response other than introspection. Because Goodreads is a public online forum with accessible reviews, I consider it as analogous to other forms of publication in line with other researchers in the field who find that there are no harmful repercussions to the users; there is no ethical issue in reproducing parts of the accessible reviews in this research (Schreier 2004; Gregoriou 2012; Harrison, 2013; Nuttall, 2015; Mason, 2015; Stewart-Shaw, 2017).

This study argues that meaning is created through the individual's cognitive abilities and thus it takes on the ontological position of a subjective study (Denzin and Lincoln, 2013:26; Bryman, 2008). This is because the interpretation of the texts and the creation of meaning is a highly subjective process. Furthermore, the data that is presented is not based on observable empirical data but on self-reported narratives of interpretation; thus the subjective nature of the research is highly foregrounded. The data collection also suggests that individual readers have their own subjective meanings of their reading experiences, which are varied and multiple rather than fixed. This approach allows for a multiplicity of meanings to arise from a given text, allowing for the broadening of reader-response studies to all types of responses, both

preferred and dispreferred. As such, this research loosely follows a constructivist paradigm, in which subjective meanings are constructed by the individual as a result of their own experiences (Creswell, 2014:8; Lincoln et al, 2011; Crotty, 1998). Rather than beginning with a hypothesis, the analysis of the responses undergoes an inductive process, which is aimed at generating a 'pattern of meaning' that emerges through the analysis (Creswell, 2014:8) and then relating these emergent meanings to a cognitive stylistic analysis of the text. Therefore this necessitates that I personally gather the information and this allows for a greater understanding of the context and background of the individual participants, as well as ensure that the questions are open-ended in order to ensure that the participant can share freely share their views.

For the first part of this study, I collected the 100 most recent responses to the critical dystopia *The Handmaid's Tale* and the short story 'Harrison Bergeron'. These responses were thematically tagged using the qualitative analysis software Nvivo, in which emerging themes were tagged into nodes and listed according to frequency across the data. The primary tags were then grouped into more general nodes, which will be presented in the analysis. The main aim for the analysis of this data was to discover themes that were noticeable to readers outside of academic contexts. Although I focus on the world building and world switches in these texts, it will only be possible to discuss these themes in detail if the reviewers explicitly mention these effects. The frequency of tags across the reviews highlighted some issues that were frequently mentioned by multiple readers. The themes that emerge from the tagging process create a starting point for the interview question design, as well as informs the subsequent stylistic analysis of the texts.

The second part of the study aimed to mitigate the effect of group dynamics upon responses, and because the aim is eliciting an individual idiosyncratic response to the text, I suggest borrowing from the methodology of social studies, in which the human experience is documented through interviews. Personal interviews allow for the collection of data that is otherwise uncollectable and 'unquantifiable' by numbers alone (Franklin, 2012: 169), such as emotions, beliefs and world views which all contribute a role in the mental interpretation of texts. Furthermore, it allows for the documenting of the 'idiosyncratic' and 'deviant' responses to literature that may not be publicly expressed due to 'face' saving. Conversely, in interviews the participants

will be given more freedom to generate their own responses detached from what would be considered the 'ideal' response in a group setting. In addition, as noted by Peplow (2012), in reading group settings, style, language and/or writing is not usually discussed. In interviews, however, it is possible to elicit responses to style through direct questions, or to elaborate on what the readers refer to when they mention style or authorial choice.

In my research I primarily look at dystopian texts, which are typically negative constructs of totalitarian regimes, with themes of subjugation and control. In all these previous frameworks, the worlds that are evoked by the discourse function as layers, in which the focus of the reader is drawn to the world that is foregrounded, bound by the linear nature of reading the discourse that controls which world is evoked in the mind of the reader at a certain time. While the reader may be resistant to such ideas, (for example, the loss of freedom of expression in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*) this does not prevent the reader from constructing this possible world. The recent trend in young adult fiction towards dystopian themes (e.g. *The Hunger Games* series) highlights that however gruesome and horrible these worlds that are depicted in literature are, there is an aesthetic appeal to readers that leads to the popularity of such genres. Self-reported interpretations can shed new light on how the text creates meaning through drawing upon the readers' own self-representation. Usually deviant readings are not given weight in stylistic analysis. Provided that the reader has sufficient linguistic, cultural and background knowledge, their responses to the text are triggered by the language of the text. It is my view that this textual effect is worth investigating in cognitive poetics.

Using interviews is a way of pursuing these different interpretations further and allowing the reader to explain how she or he reaches these conclusions without the pressure of group dynamics of reading groups, or the classroom setting in which teachers tend to steer the conversation to a more 'academic' and uniform interpretation of texts. A friendly interview allows for the collection of more 'naturalistic' reader responses. Although interviews in themselves are considered as highly artificial situations (Harvey, 2014), the responses themselves are allowed more freedom and spontaneity than written responses, in which case it is difficult to elaborate on certain ambiguous points, or in certain cases the reader is given more

time to think and to write up and edit their answers. Although the power relations of the interview may lead to some bias on the part of the researcher asking the questions, every attempt was made to keep the environment friendly, and a casual setting rather than a formal interview session was adopted. For example, the microphone was not externally visible and the participants were free to eat and drink and comment on any aspect they wished, but were guided gently from time to time using the semi-structured guide.

There are certain problems that arise when using this methodology, however, that has led to interviews not being widely used in stylistic research. This is due to the amount of time needed for conducting the interviews, transcriptions, and resources needed (e.g. incentives for participants, providing the texts). In terms of longer narratives, it is quite difficult to ask the participant to recall emotions and interpretations, depending heavily on the readers' own ability to remember the events in the text and their reaction to them. Interviews also do not track the readers' reading process. Some readers re-read some parts of the text to understand it, and in the case of longer narratives like novels, they may go back and re-read entire chapters. Finally, although the researcher conducting the interview will try their best at making the participant feel comfortable and confident in providing their honest responses to the text, issues of 'face' preserving and shyness may still hinder the data-collecting process. As pointed out by Mullany (2007), using interview data as a key to individual identities is problematic; it is difficult to encompass the entire life experiences, ideologies, and identity of a person only through an interview which lasts thirty minutes.

Nevertheless, the advantages of using the interview as opposed to other research methods are numerous. It is possible to examine the effect of the text as a whole, rather than artificially created stories or using extracts that remove from the meaning of the texts that are used in empirical tests. Furthermore, by asking the participants to read a short story and ask questions right after the reading, will allow direct self-reported interpretation, without interference of outside sources, for example, looking up information online about the text. The semi-structured format allows for elaboration and in-depth discussion of points that may arise during discussion that have not been hypothesized. Most importantly, the interview removes the participant

from the pressures of group dynamics and the classroom setting, in which there is a 'right' or agreed-upon answer, thus providing less mitigated or controlled responses. Moreover, it is also a useful way of documenting unquantifiable data such as emotions, memories, into a more accessible format for encoding. Finally, it allows for the inclusion of many different interpretations as responses to the same text, which can inform stylistic analysis rather than choosing only one meaning for a text.

The qualitative interview aims to look at the personal and socio-psychological aspect of the reader's contribution to meaning. This data does not aim to be a generalizable study that attempts to account for all readings. The aim is to generate detailed reader responses to dystopian texts and relate these interpretations to the text. This is difficult to implement because of the time and effort needed to meet up with the participants, and due to the difficulty of encompassing a person's life experience into one interview. However, this can lead to insights about sociocultural and psychological factors in reading dystopia, which in turn could be beneficial in teaching English Literature to foreign students, or those who learn English as a second language. It could inform the way these texts are introduced in order to facilitate the more 'academic' responses to literature, and to enable readers to situate themselves as the 'ideal' reader in a classroom setting.

The data collection was conducted as a semi-structured guided interview, in order to ensure some uniformity across the interviews while allowing for expansion upon new emergent themes as they occur in the conversation. By adopting a semi-structured interview, the interviewer 'can have a guide for the questions to ask and at the same time the interviewees are allowed and encouraged to elaborate on certain topics' (Wellington and Szczerbinski, 2007: 83-4). The participants were encouraged to elaborate on relevant ideas and to express themselves as much as they can. The first interview that was conducted before reading the text includes warm-up questions that ask about their general reading habits, as well as some main questions that served as a guide for the researcher that are related to the research topic. The second and third interview questions were asked after the participants read the texts. In the case of the short story, the interview was conducted directly after the reading, while there was a time gap between the third interview and the time of reading. The

participants were invited to add comments at the end of the interview and to ask any further questions about the research.

Because the questions are open-ended, there was some difficulty with participants' brief answers to questions, and the tendency for steering away from the research topic questions. This was dealt with through encouraging the participants to elaborate on unclear answers and through re-asking the questions in a different manner to direct them back to the main guided questions. In addition, there were also issues related to the subjective nature of personal narratives, because

> [o]ur personal narratives are shaped by our desire to maintain high self-esteem, make sense of (often random) events and reduce the cognitive dissonance between conflicting pieces of information. Even the recall of factual information can be highly selective and inaccurate, especially if the information is emotionally charged.
>
> (Wellington and Szczerbinski, 2007: 91)

Keeping this in mind, this study therefore avoids presenting this data as overtly observed representations of the participant's individual and social reality, but rather emphasises the reported, subjective nature of these accounts of reading and interpretations. The reported meanings may only be closely related to the actual interpretations at the time of reading, however they do provide insight to how the readers reflect and think about their readings and experience.

The validity of this research is mainly reflected in the detailed description of the data and data collection process (Ryle, 1971; Geertz, 1973; Hood 2009; Denzin and Lincoln, 2013: 17-20; Creswell, 2014). The data is appropriate for this study of responses, in which I aimed to elicit readings that reflect more than a purely stylistic reading of the text, i.e. a more inclusive look at how the reader's experiences and background effects their reading, and whether these responses can be considered as 'dispreferred responses'. Furthermore, the criteria is designed so as not to be a sample of a demographic but to provide multiple readings of the same texts. In this manner, the study avoids the problems of overgeneralizing the results of this study. Although there has been careful attention to the transcription process, there is always going to be a 'residue of ambiguity' due to the transformation of the spoken words to written findings (Fontana and Frey, 1998: 47). The reliability of this approach stems

from the detailed descriptions of the approach and data analysis, as well as the clear documentation of how the themes were generated in the analytical process. Because of the qualitative nature of the data, the narrative presented in this chapter attempts to display this data as clearly as possible, as clarity of presentation is crucial in presenting qualitative data (see Miles and Huberman, 1984; Creswell, 2014). In addition, the original data was used to illustrate the interpretations through using various quotations, when possible, from more than one participant in a systematic manner in order to ensure the validity of findings and to allow you as the reader of this study to evaluate the conclusions described (Schensul, Schensul and le Compte, 1999). It was difficult to compare and create triangulations of these findings against the body of scholarly research, and that is due to the simple, concise language of 'Harrison Bergeron' which deters most stylisticians from approaching this text for analysis.

It is also important to discuss the ethical dimensions of collecting reader responses. In this thesis, *Goodreads* data is reproduced without permission of the original posters, however, following previous research (Allington, 2007; Harrison, 2013; Nuttall, 2015), I believe that the use of such data is ethically acceptable because the responses are accessible on a public platform online. Furthermore, the responses here are reproduced without any identifying information such as profile names or images, therefore providing some privacy to the reviewers. The participants for the interviews signed informed consent forms and the interviews themselves have no known risks involved. The participants were informed of the recording process and transcriptions beforehand, assured that their identities will remain anonymous, and the information gathered will not be used for any other purpose than research for this thesis. Participants were also required to answer a short questionnaire related to their level of English, frequency of reading, age, recently read literature and other personal information related to the study. In the case the participants are not comfortable with answering these questions, they can choose to not answer and move on to the next questions instead, and were free to end the interview and/or withdraw from the study at any time. If the participant wished to withdraw fully from the study, all related information and interview data was deleted. The collected data was stored in their original form of recorded audio files, as well as in the form of transcripts, and kept securely: the recorded sound clips will remain only on the

researcher's personal hard drive, and the original transcripts of the recordings will be stored as a soft copy on hard drive and hard copy in secure files accessible only by the researcher. The participants were also informed that while the raw data will be accessed solely by the researcher and supervisor, excerpts and extracts of the transcripts will be presented in this thesis, as well as future papers and other publications. Participants will be quoted anonymously in such publications. All recorded data was filed anonymously under numbers, e.g. 'P01', and participants will be referred to using these numbers in the written reports, thus ensuring the maximum anonymity and privacy for the participants.

Finally, in order to further ensure the reliability and validity of this research, there must be a discussion of the researcher's own role in the collection and interpretation of data. As a stylistician, the main goal here was not to decipher all the thoughts and meanings that are elicited in the minds of these readers during the reading process, but to provide readings that were different to those that were previously studied in cognitive stylistic analyses. This is with the goal of providing a more holistic view of readers rather than limiting stylistic enquiry to reading groups and written responses. This is also not an attempt to provide a full psychological profile for the readers (e.g. Holland, 1975), but for the purpose of providing evidence towards the readers' experiences that may supplement their readings with the extra-textual information needed for interpretations. The reason this study was chosen to be qualitative rather than quantitative is to avoid the rigidity and 'artificial' settings of the quantitative-driven reader response studies, in which the reader's experience of reading is reduced to numbers on a scale. This study is thus a more 'flexible, data-led, and [. . .] artful' way of looking at reader responses (Dornyei, 2007: 244) that it is hoped will present the reader's interpretations in as much detail as possible. The thematic tagging may seem to group together the readers into categories, but this is done mainly to facilitate the presentation of the data rather than categorise readings indiscriminately.

As aforementioned in the review of reader response studies in this chapter, the discussion of readings that were 'strange' or 'incoherent' with the textual evidence of the literary work is generally ignored in stylistics in which the 'generalized' meaning as well as 'strange' texts are generally garner more scholarly attention. In

this study, what I look at instead is a text that has fairly 'simple' diction to elicit as many different readings as possible. In order to be familiarized with the data, I transcribed the recordings myself, as well as compared it to the transcriptions of an external transcriber to ensure that the data is as accurate as possible. This is with certain limitations, of course, in which case as a transcriber I also bring my own ideology and interpretations to the responses. Although it is argued that 'all transcription is representation and there is no natural or objective way in which talk can be written' (Roberts, 1997: 168), there is still a substantial amount of meaning that is mostly conveyed by the participants themselves. Even if it is presented in a transcribed form, I strive to present the participants' voice and response as closely and as faithfully as possible to the actual recordings. The transcriptions were reviewed by an independent researcher at the University of Nottingham to ensure that they were as faithfully close to the recorded interviews as possible. While precautions were taken in order to avoid interviewer bias (Schensul, Schensul and le Compte, 1999:144), there is no doubt that there will be my own interpretation of the data that will control the presentation of findings. This was attempted to be kept at a minimum through presenting the findings at various conferences and receiving peer feedback on these results, as well as consulting an independent researcher to verify the coding validity.

More recently, there have been concerns with the controlling role of the interviewer, which led to new directions in qualitative interviewing, focusing on the increased attention to the voices and feelings of the respondents, (Marcus and Fischer, 1986), and interviewer-respondent relation (Crapanzano, 1980). The importance of the researcher's gender (Gluck and Patai, 1991) has also come to the fore in feminist and postmodernist studies, as has the issue of race (Stanfield, 1985; Denzin and Lincoln, 1998:51) Although [. . .] the interviewer or moderator is often implored to remain neutral during data gathering process, to withhold their own opinions vis-à-vis the questions and to remain impassive in the face of their respondent's answers' (Litosseliti 2010:158), it is more often than not that the power relations in an interview are regarded as 'uneven'. This imbalance happens because the interviewer controls the flow of the conversation and the topics at hand. This concern was addressed through providing a relaxed environment for the interviews. The participants sat at a round table with 4 chairs which did not indicate a difference in

status or power positions, unlike a square or rectangle in which the 'head of the table' can have a higher and stronger position (Lott and Sommer, 1967; Knapp et. al., 2013), and were permitted refreshments during the interview which created a more comfortable situation and established some grounds for camaraderie and friendliness through discussing the types of cookies and juices available, for example. Furthermore, the participants were students in the University of Nottingham, providing some grounds of relationship between the interviewer and participant as members of the same institution.

3.5 Summary

In this chapter, I discussed different approaches to including the reader as a participant in literary study. In reader response theory and affective stylistics, literary meaning is viewed as an interaction of reader, text and context. The reader is discussed as theoretical concept, such as the implied reader. Studies varied in their focus, from the experiential emphasis to the psychological and social aspects of reading. In most stylistic applications, the reader is regarded as an abstract concept that is able to notice every linguistic feature of the text. As stylistics has evolved as a discipline, the influences of cognitive scientific methodologies have prompted the investigation of an empiricised reader. In cognitive poetics, there is also this interest in 'real' readers in the world as a basis for literary analysis, through case studies and collecting reading group data.

This study views that the reader is integral to the world-building process. In Text World Theory, this includes the reader's schemas, traits and identity as part of the discourse. Therefore I suggest exploring reader traits and their relation to how the readers view hopeless endings. This study therefore expands upon the current trend of regarding reader responses in Text World Theory analyses. In order to explore how hope is created by readers of closed dystopian narratives, using semi-structured interviews. This is an attempt to personalise readings, and by considering the traits of hope and optimism it is possible to include readings that are generally overlooked in favour of more generalised and quantified responses to texts.

The next chapter is a study of reader responses to *The Handmaid's Tale*, as an example of critical dystopia. I focus on negative reviews of the novel, as potential dispreferred responses to a usually well-received text. Although the negative reviews do not constitute the majority of reviews online, they are numerous enough that they cannot be ignored. The emergent themes from the online responses are used as a basis for the semi-structure interviews of readers of the text. The responses from the two sources of data therefore provide a starting point for a cognitive poetic analysis that is not based on my own interpretation of the text, but from lesser preferred readings.

Chapter 4 Reading *The Handmaid's Tale*

4.0 Overview

In this chapter, I present a selection of readers' negative reviews and interviews of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* in an effort to include negative, and what seem to be, dispreferred responses as part of the cognitive poetic analysis of the text. In section 4.1, I synopsise *The Handmaid's Tale* and address a number of critical views of the novel. In section 4.2, I describe the negative review data collection process and utilizing negative reviews in research, and in section 4.3, I provide examples of the responses from interviewing readers of *The Handmaid's Tale*. The inclusion of lesser generalised readings provides a fresh starting point for the cognitive poetic analysis of passages related to these readings. This creates a starting point for searching for specific keywords in the text related to the ambiguity of narration that the readers felt throughout the text, which was one of the main reasons why the readers found themselves unable to engage fully with the narrative. Section 4.4 discusses the cognitive poetic features of the text that may lead to the emergence of such readings. The analyses show how it is possible to account for these 'deviant' readings using the textual features and examples, and as such they are valid responses and worthy of consideration. Text World Theory as a framework allows for the inclusion of this readerly intervention in the creation of meaning, and serves well in describing the world building processes that occur in the novel, especially one set in a speculative fictional world of Gilead. Finally, in section 4.5 I provide a summary of the findings of the chapter.

4.1 Critical views of *The Handmaid's Tale*

The Handmaid's Tale follows the life of the handmaid Offred, who lives in the dystopian society of the Republic of Gilead. Here, women are stripped of their rights, for example Offred's name is a compound of 'Of' and 'Fred' as she was stripped of her birth name and renamed to indicate that she is the property of Commander Fred. The novel is set in a speculative United States of America which is ruled by

totalitarian theocracy drawing upon misconstrued notions from Christianity. Due to the spread of an epidemic and post-nuclear disaster, birth rates are low and women are used as concubines by those in power as vessels for procreation, they are referred to as 'handmaids'. The narrative follows Offred's daily activities, with frequent flashbacks to the time before Gilead, which shows how she lost her daughter and husband when they attempted to flee to Canada. Offred is captured and sent to the Red Centre where she and her strong-headed friend Moira are indoctrinated handmaids. Moira escapes the Red Centre, and Offred is assigned to the Commander's house where she must undertake duties such as shopping with other handmaids, visiting the Wall where rebels are hanged as punishment by the Gilead regime, and participating in group executions. She is forced to take part in the 'Ceremony' of sex with the Commander in order to conceive.

The Commander, however, also meets Offred secretly in order to play the forbidden game of Scrabble and lets her look at magazines; and finally taking her to Jezebel's, a men's club where women who were not deemed fit as handmaids work as prostitutes. There, Offred finds out that Moira didn't manage to escape but works at Jezebel's. Offred learns of an underground organization, 'Mayday,' that is plotting for the end of Gilead. However, Offred later learns that the only person she knows from the organization, Ofglen, commits suicide when the secret police go after her.

After a long time without conceiving, the Commander's wife suggests to Offred to sleep with the gardener Nick in order to conceive, because it seems the Commander is infertile. Offred does so, but this leads to an affair with him. The Commander's wife finds out that Offred went to Jezebel's, and the secret police, 'the Eyes', come for her. Although Nick tells Offred not to be afraid, and that the black van that has come for her actually contains members of Mayday, Offred leaves the house with them, not knowing if she is being rescued or imprisoned. After this abrupt end, an epilogue in the form of a lecture by a Professor Pieixoto explains the customs of Gilead, and indicates that the entire narrative consists of recorded tapes. The epilogue shows that Gilead fell in 2195, but there is no indication that Offred was saved or recaptured.

From the summary, is possible to note how *The Handmaid's Tale* has many parallels with Orwell's (1949) *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: the control of the protagonist by the

totalitarian regime, 'The Eyes' are this world's 'Thought police', the Offred's affair with Nick is similar to that of Winston and Julia, and the ambiguous appendices situated at the end of the books that take place at a time after the fall of the regime. Atwood also points out these parallels and maintains that she wrote the novel as a speculative fiction and as a 'classical dystopia' (Atwood, 2004: 516). *The Handmaid's Tale* is, conversely, considered as a canonical feminist critical dystopian text (Baccolini, 2000, 2004; Baccolini and Moylan, 2003). Since its publication in 1985, it has received extensive analysis and study, especially as a dystopian, political novel that deals with feminist themes (e.g. Hammer, 1990; Hansot, 1994; Stillman and Johnson, 1994; Howells, 2005).

Despite many critics' and the author's own descriptions of her work as speculative fiction (Dvorak, 1998: 141; Atwood, 2005, 2011; Howells, 2006: 161), the novel transcends this definition of a closed ending and complete control, with extensive critical work that examines the novel from different aspects. For example, Deery (1997) constructs a scientific feminist reading of the novel by looking at the text in terms of the female body, whereas Yin and Yahya (2013) adopt a social science perspective looking at the idea of freedom within the novel. This is despite the fact that Atwood maintains that she is not a science fiction writer, and stresses that she is instead a *speculative fiction* writer. According to Atwood, science fiction proper 'denotes books with things in them we can't yet do or begin to do, talking things we can never meet and places we can't go', whereas speculative fiction 'employs the means already more or less to hand and takes place on planet Earth.' (Atwood, 2011: 513). Although *The Handmaid's Tale* does not employ what Atwood considers as prototypical elements in science fiction, such as aliens, spaceships or interplanetary travel, it is still classified as science fiction by various critics and readers (e.g. Yahya and Chin, 2013). Furthermore, the novel is frequently listed as a'must-read' work of science fiction, and has been nominated for various awards in the science fiction genre, receiving the *Arthur C. Clarke* award for science fiction in 1987.

The Handmaid's Tale is considered by many critics to be a critical dystopia. For example, Baccolini describes how the elements of genre-blurring, memoirs, and open endings function as a counter-narrative in the text as a form of resistance against the oppressive regime, thus allowing for a utopian enclave within the text

(Baccolini, 2003, 2011). Calvacanti (1999) also argues that it is precisely the formal operation of dystopian narrative that produces the nonnarrative, conceptual space of utopia. That is, the work of the counternarrative, to use Baccolini's term, generates a 'blank space' anticipatory of social possibilities which are radically other' (Calvacanti, 1999: 3, also cited in Moylan, 2000: 191). Calvacanti thus considers how the narrative leads towards utopia via dialectical negation. It seems that this ambiguity and uncertainty of the narrative may lead readers to more frustration than allowing for a utopian enclave. The novel then thwarts the readers' expectations of a clear resolution as a pay-off for the effort and cognitive investment in the narrative world building. When the narrative ends abruptly, the readers respond with confusion, anger and frustration (with a few profanities not included in the upcoming dataset).

Baccolini's (2003) and Calvacanti's (1999) work on the novel as a critical dystopia is insightful, yet they do not look at *real* readers' responses. Not all critical dystopias seem to include a hopeful utopian enclave for real readers. Although they maintain that there is a possibility for a utopian enclave in the narrative, this chapter will show how some readers found the ambiguous endings more frustrating than hopeful.

The Handmaid's Tale has garnered a lot of critical attention since its publication, however due to restrictions on space I specifically focus more closely at these two reader-oriented studies: Cooke (2004) and Nuttall (2015). Cooke (2004) implements a reader-response theory reading of the novel. She maintains that readers go through four stages during their reading, developing different levels of satire and irony with each stage. Interestingly, Cooke does admit that not all readers consider the historical notes as part of the narrative during their first reading (Cooke, 2004: 132), observing that these four stages of reading do not apply to every reader. In the interviews that I held with readers, participants acknowledged that the historical notes section of the novel actually did shift their point of view and changed the frame of the story for them. Cooke's four stages of reading *The Handmaid's Tale* are as follows. The first stage of reading is directed by the epigraphs, where irony arises due to the first opening quotations from Sufism, the Bible and Swift's 'Modest Proposal': the first is the biblical quotation which provides the historical precedent for this speculative future society. The second quotation is the Sufi quotation indicates how lunacy is

possible when lawmakers lose common sense. The final quotation in the introduction to the novel is from Swift's modest proposal which is practical on the surface but also inhumane. The exaggerated satire in that work perhaps primes the reader to accept that satire that is in the novel. The second stage, according to Cooke, is uncovering the satire and irony that is apparent between the official account of Gilead and what readers begin to understand: Gilead's practical solution, like Swift's, is inhumane. The third reading is that of a 'gothic romance' in which Offred has a relationship with both Nick and the Commander, as Hammer notes 'for in such stories the heroine, like Offred, is often made a helpless prisoner by an evil and sexually desirous male force, until she is finally liberated by the romantic hero'(Hammer, 1990:41). Hammer also draws parallels with the romantic heroine, pointing out that:

> First, she is desired by and must eventually choose between two men who, second, embody an impressive combination of male stereotypes drawn from gothic romance and romantic comedy: on one hand, Fred, the older, paternal, established authority figure who connotes at once a lord of the manor and a seasoned military campaigner; and on the other hand, Nick, the ambiguous, delinquent, dangerous and there- fore more sexually attractive younger man of inferior social position.
>
> (Hammer, 1990: 41)

Interestingly, Cooke (2004) maintains that this is a separate reading stage, however this is not necessarily reflected in my data (discussed in sections 4.2 and 4.3). There are no references to romance in my readers' responses to the text, and any references to the sexual content are within a negative context, perhaps most likely due to the sample consisting largely of negative reviews. Cooke's final stage of reading is when the professor reveals that most of the novel is a fictional construct, which in itself is a transcription of a recording and thus is further removed from the truth. This reveals that the story, which the readers have invested themselves in and gotten to know the characters, is all possibly a recreation (Cooke, 2004: 133). There is even more disappointment and irony because '[. . .] although the power structure has shifted somewhat in the years between the Gileadean regime and 2195 – the chair of the conference is an Inuit woman – the male academics still make remarks that patronize women and go uncensored (indeed, are even applauded) by the audience' (Cooke,

2004: 135). I would add that the fact the novel ends on 'Are there any questions?' with no possibility of readers receiving answers further adds to this feeling of betrayal by the narrative. However, this is not really a difficult notion for the readers, because throughout the narrative Offred maintains that her story is a 'reconstruction', and the readers know that this is a work of fiction from the very beginning. This text world repair happens throughout the text and is not a new change at this point in the narrative as, the readers have already been forced to repair their text worlds multiple times long before the historical notes at the end. In my study, interview participants indicated various degrees of repair during their readings, so they are aware of this constant rebuilding and re-centring of the narratives.

Furthermore, there is another reading that Cooke does not mention that emerges when following Moira's story. At one point, Moira's narrative is clearly defined by quotation marks, and all the modalised embedded text worlds of Offred's assumptions of the possibilities of her escape, when there is a mixed feeling about Moira's ending as a failed feminist heroine's escape. There is some foreshadowing of her fate in the information about Offred's mother, who was a feminist banished to work in the polluted outskirts of the city, however some of the interviews mentioned that they were disappointed by this element of the plot.

The second study that looks closely at readers of the novel is Nuttall's (2015) cognitive grammar analysis of mind style in the narrative. Nuttall draws on the online reviews *Goodreads*, and provides a qualitative tagging process following the same procedure adopted in this thesis. My own analysis differs from Nuttall's study in various ways. First, the data collection presented in this chapter is concerned with the reviews which gave a score of 1 or 2 stars out of 5, because my focus was on the negative reviews of the text (see section 4.2. below). Second, Nuttall was concerned with readers' attitudes to world views portrayed by the mind style presented in the text, which necessarily controlled her tagging procedure and limited the themes of the reader responses that she included as secondary evidence for her text analysis. In my study, I did not begin the data collection with specific themes in mind, thus allowing for emergent themes as a bottom-up approach to guide my cognitive poetic analysis of certain passages that are related to these themes. This is not to say that the passages chosen for analysis are those which specifically created the meanings

for the readers. However they illustrate possible ways that the readers have approached the text, showing that their readings, although a minority and negative, are still possible to trace with textual evidence.

The popularity of *The Handmaid's Tale* is not universal. There are many negative reviews for the novel, and while they do not consist of the majority (the book rates very highly with 72% of reviewers on *Goodreads* giving the score of 4-5 out of 5 stars) the number of these negative reviews reaches over 25,000 (see *figure 1* below). Although this may be representative of a small proportion of readers, nonetheless these shared responses of thousands must be due to certain issues these readers have with the text. Since they are reading the same text, one of the defining factors in their enjoyment of the book is therefore their own cognitive abilities and personality: their role as the participant in the discourse as discussed by Werth (1995a, 1999)in Text World Theory. A Text World Theory based approach is a useful starting point to begin looking at the differences between responses, and to analyse how these readers interpret the text in different ways. This is because while the framework is text-driven, but also context-sensitive and relies on the readers' cooperation and participation in the creation of meaning.

This chapter is situated within a large body of existing literature on this work of speculative fiction and aims to expand it by providing an account of the readers who did not enjoy the narrative and deemed it worth of only 1 or 2 stars. The chapter also provides interview data that offers evidence towards the cognitive effort that is required of readers in order to comprehend this work, and perhaps, when reading literary works in general.

4.2 Collecting qualitative data: negative reviews

On *Goodreads*, readers are asked to rate books out of 5 stars, with 5 being the highest rating and 1 star as the lowest possible rating. As shown below in the overall rating frequency measures on the site, the majority of readers rated the book highly.

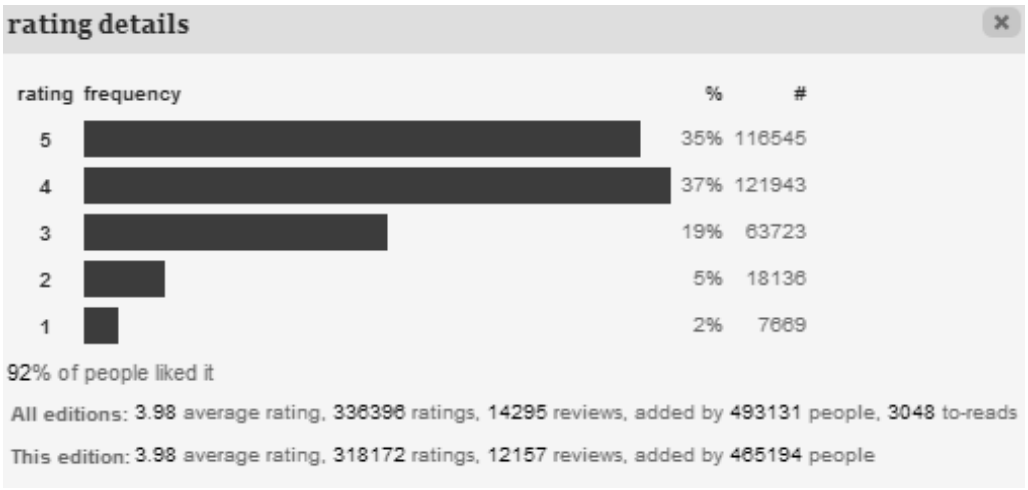


Figure 3 Goodreads reviews of The Handmaid's Tale

With a popular text such as *The Handmaid's Tale*, the majority of readers gave the book positive reviews, with a total of 72% out of 336,396 ratings giving the higher scores of 5 and 4 star ratings. The novel topped bestseller lists, but also appeared on top 100 lists for the most challenged books of all time (American Library Association, 2013). In general, the focus of cognitive poetic analyses of reader responses is on the general assumptions of readers within a community. When dealing with *Goodreads* reviews, there is a tendency to take an overall look at the reviews rather than looking at the negative responses (see Nuttall, 2015). Although it is difficult to ascertain whether these responses are indeed dispreferred responses to the literary work, (i.e. the opposite of approbation which is the second pair part to a word of art), when looking at the data the researcher must keep in mind that negative reviews do not necessarily overlap with dispreferred responses. For example, the review may be negative due to the overt sexual descriptions in the novel, or due to the criticism of organized religion, or due to the lack of schema affirmation. This voice of dissent is also interesting due to the high number of negative reviews *The Handmaid's Tale* has received, wherein 25,805 people disagree with the more common approbation of the novel. The novel is considered as a critical dystopia,

with an oppressive society that has a utopian enclave within the narrative, however the negative reviews seem to view it as otherwise.

Gathering the online responses allowed me to gather naturalistic responses to the novel, with no interference on the part of the researcher. Most researchers look at the general consensus of readers who, as shown above, enjoyed the book which neglects the lesser researched responses of those who did not. Although these responses are only a fraction of the overall reviews on the site, 7% in total, I would argue that it is worth investigating the reasons behind 25,805 negative reviews of this generally well-liked title, because it illuminates the nature of a dispreferred response to a literary work.

The data gathered for this study consists of 100 most recent responses from *Goodreads* that gave the novel 1 or 2 stars out of 5 in order to provide a more contemporaneous collection of reader responses. I made the decision to discard the reviews that were overly emphatic without providing reasons for their emotions (e.g. using vulgarities to insult the book in a one-sentence review), or if the reader indicated they did not finish the novel, as well as the cases in which the reviewer referred to a different medium such as the film adaptation or audiobook rather than text. This left 93 remaining responses which were then thematically tagged using *NVivo,* which facilitated accessibility and transparency of the data and codes. In the table below, I present the initial tags that emerged through the thematic analysis of the responses. The numbers of reviews that share a thematic tag are labelled as 'Sources' and the numbers of the appearances of the tag across the data are labelled as 'References'. The initial tags were as follows in order of frequency across the data:

Tag	Sources	References
Writing	46	55
Ambiguity	41	47
Believability	34	49
Characterization/narrator	30	34
Narrative interrelations	22	23
Feminism	22	24
Dispreferred	20	21
Long descriptions	17	21
Expectations	17	20
Comparison with 'now'	10	11
Fictional history	8	11
Confusion	8	8
Questions	8	8
Not well described	7	8
Punctuation	7	7
Awareness of preferred reading	4	4
Religious	4	4
Setting	2	2

Table 1 Primary tags for online reviews of The Handmaid's Tale

These initial tags are all related to the reasons that the reviews provided negative star ratings. The first tag *writing* is related to instances where the review referenced the writing process, including the punctuation, the author's choices, and so on. This tag was the most frequent throughout the reviews, which could be a reflection of the reader's awareness of the author's role in creating the narrative, and since these reviews are negative the readers would put more blame on the author's role in the discourse. The *ambiguity* tag was used when the reviewers found anything unexplained or obscure. The tag *believability* was related to the logic and whether the reviewers viewed the speculative future as credible or not. *Narrative interrelations* point to the references to other fictional works, which in this case was usually to compare *The Handmaid's Tale* with other established and well-received dystopias such as *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The tag *feminism* was used whenever the review referred to the novel as a feminist genre, or to Offred as a feminist protagonist. The *dispreferred* tag was used when the review included an overt declination component that has the features of a dispreferred response. The tag *long descriptions* was used when the reviewers found repetitive descriptions of objects in the text world to be tedious or tiring. The tag *expectations* was used when the

reviewer expressed that they had their expectations for the story left unfulfilled. The tag *comparison with 'now'* was used when the reviewers referenced real-world history and their own time of writing the review. Similarly, the tag *fictional history* was used when the reviewers commented that the speculative fiction was written in the past meaning that this dystopia was supposed to occur in the present, thus the book in this kind of reading is a 'counterfactual historical fiction'. The tag *confusion* was used when reviewers expressed their confusion at the way the narrative was structured, or related to how they viewed the events depicted in a non-sequential order. *Questions* indicated the reviews that expressed that they had questions left unanswered at the end of the narrative. In the tag *not well described*, the reviewers found that the way the dystopia was created was not described enough in full detail. The *punctuation* tag was related to whenever the reviewers did not understand the use of punctuation, or mentioned they were dissatisfied by the lack of uniformity in its use. The *religious* tag indicated where they mentioned the portrayal of Christianity in the novel. The tag *awareness of preferred* refers to the reviewers' explicit mentioning of their awareness of the preferred response to the text. For example, that they are aware of the approbation that is required for an esteemed literary novel, and any reference to the novel being well-received by the majority. Finally, the tag *setting* was used when the reviewers mentioned that the setting of the story in the USA was not believable. Since some of these tags occasionally overlapped and converged in some common themes, these compounded into more general tags. This secondary tagging process is outlined as follows:

Grouped tags	**Tag**	**Sources**	**References**
writing, punctuation, long descriptions	Author	57	83
not well-described, questions, confusion	Ambiguity	41	71
Setting	believability	34	49
	characterisation	30	34
feminism, religious	ideological commentary	25	28
awareness of preferred, dispreferred	Preference	21	25
	expectations	17	20
fictional history, setting	comparison with 'now'	14	24
	narrative interrelations	22	23

Table 2 Final tags for online reviews of the Handmaid's Tale

As shown, for example, the reviews tagged with *author* included all references to authorial choices, or textuality references, such as *writing*, *punctuation*, and *long descriptions*. *Ambiguity* includes the tags *not well described*, *questions*, and confusion. Both *awareness of preferred* and *dispreferred* references were merged into the tag *preference*. There was some thematic overlap with the primary tags *comparison with 'now'* and *fictional history* so they were merged with *comparison with 'now'*.

4.3 Interviewing readers of *The Handmaid's Tale*

The results from the analysis of the online reviews prompted the creation of the questions for the interviews. Instead of asking arbitrary questions about the novel, the main emerging themes from the online reviews provided starting points for discussion. In the case of the online reviews, it is difficult to ask for elaboration or explanation of the comments made by the reviewers, whereas in an interview it is possible to backtrack and return to the interviewee's answers for more in depth explanation of their interpretations. The second set of data that is a set of interviews of 8 readers who were given the novel to finish reading within three weeks. These participants were given a copy of *The Handmaid's Tale* to keep as incentive for participation.

The advertisement used for data participation asked for people who enjoyed reading books in general, and can arguably be considered to be more experienced readers of fiction. Two of the readers who participated in the study mentioned that this would be their second reading of the book; therefore their interview data was not included in this study as it could potentially bias the results. All participants were students at the University of Nottingham, and there were no known access issues for this researcher. The interview participants are numbered from H1-H6 for anonymity and ease of reference.

Code	Age	Sex	Language
H1	22	Female	Second-language
H2	21	Female	Second-language
H3	33	Female	Second-language
H4	36	Male	Native Speaker
H5	19	Female	Native Speaker
H6	28	Female	Native Speaker

Table 3 Interview participants for The Handmaid's Tale

The questions for the interviews were formulated based on the most frequent tags found in the online reviews. The readers were asked about their thoughts on writing, on the believability of the characters, on relating to the characters and relating the story to other fiction or real life experience or knowledge. This was conducted in a semi-structured setting in order to ensure that the participants felt comfortable and to control the flow of the conversation and allow for elaboration when necessary. The interviews below are presented as case studies of the participants' own expertise of reading and to note the narrative interrelations that were drawn between the narrative and other dystopia fiction or from historical knowledge or experience. In the interviews, participants were asked what they thought about characters, the writing, on striking or interesting moments in the text, and general overall commentary about the ending. I discuss the methodology in more detail in the previous chapter (see 3.4).

In this section, I provide an example of how participants responded to the questions in the interviews and shed light on their interpretations of *The Handmaid's Tale*. Since the questions for the interviews were based on the themes that emerged from the online reviews, this allowed for an exploration of these themes in more detail because the semi-structured interviews could prompt more explanations to short responses. Due to the nature of the negative review, there was a lot of reference to the author and writing style, but this is also apparent in the interviews where the readers also referred to the author directly, such as: 'because Margaret Atwood was trying to write from the perspective of Offred' (H3). The interviews also revealed how some of the definitions of the genre of dystopia and science fiction can be reflected in the participants' responses to a text. For example, the participants drew

parallels between the novel and the real world as well as with previously encountered literature that was part of the dystopian genre. Interestingly there were many more parallels drawn to the actual world events than to other fiction:

- I think it reminds me of the situation in Saudi Arabia or the middle east where girls are also covered in clothes and they are not allowed to talk to men , I don't really know a lot about those situations those countries, but it seems similar (H1)
- I think that it's like the extremist[s] you see in the real world, taking everything too far. It reminds me of past events that you see in newspapers, these religious leaders being very extremist in their views. (H2)
- [. . .] I found it quite thought-provoking was because bits of it already exists so if you go to Bible heartland in America, I have a lot of colleagues from my past life who very firmly believed that women should not own property and in the middle east certainly a woman cannot own property and you can't own anything or some tribes in Africa they actually say if your wife is barren then the man has the right to take on a surrogate who bears his child, because it's more important to carry his family line forward but that has nothing to do with how he feels towards his wife. So this kind of exists in the world, and if there were to be a war or holocaust or some war where the world loses every asset it has, then a lot of the times people will go extreme wont they. [. . .] I found it interesting, because I kept making parallels with the real world, I found it interesting how Margaret Atwood was writing about a fictional world, but can so easily be possible in the world we know it now. (H3)
- [The novel presents a] bleak future of the US, and she integrated the cultures that are in existence and interwoven it into that and that's what it could be like. I like the bit at the end where the researchers are sort of looking at this period of time a hundred or so years ago it was a nice touch by the author. [. . .] And it's more recently in the west that women have become more equal whereas in other cultures there is more equality, where the woman can be the head of the society. I don't think it's a strange concept at all. Women are humans, and we share equal feelings (H4)
- As an American, I found it very, very believable, and it gets more believable as time goes on. [. . .] What terrified me the most was the scene with the Japanese tourists, and the fact that the world knows that this crap is going on, and we don't know about it, but there's nothing, there doesn't seem to be any help from outside. And it makes me kind of think, well, there are regimes like this in other parts of the world, and we don't do anything about it. We can't do anything about it, but am I going to be a tourist and gawk at their situations? There are definitely some parallels that made me uncomfortable. (H6)

This extrapolation from reality is part of the cognitive estrangement in science fiction; these participants actively draw upon their knowledge from the real world as they read about the dystopian society. These responses are therefore in line with and support the classification of this work in the genre of dystopian science fiction novel. This schema affirmation allows the readers to engage with the narrative and create a 'bleak' text world (H4), thus leading to a narrative that is capable of causing terror (H6).

The reader's responses to the ending of the novel seems to consider the epilogue as part of the story. This then falls into the fourth reading category, contrary to Cooke's (2004) suggestion that many readers would consider the lecture as outside the ending of the main story. For example, the following readers commented on the ending of the story and how the epilogue functions in creating the uncertainty of what happens:

- I think it gives you more information about what was going on in the Republic, but as for her situation, she was probably saved like they said but what happens after is unknown. [. . .] both are possible: she could be saved or not. Considering what happened after they captured her family in the first place, it could happen again [. . .] as seen from History when oppression occurs then it overturns. (H2)
- I think that kind of left it open, it could have gone either way at that point [where she was taken away by the car] but I think after you've read the story you have the idea she may have survived and gotten away and made a new life, and the research [in the lecture] kind of throws the question of what really happened. (H4)
- They are talking about [Gilead] in a historical sense [in the conference lecture] they are studying what happened , and they were talking about the different periods of Gilead as well so it kind of gave the impression that it wasn't around anymore. [. . .] I guess [the citizens in Gilead] are free, the ending made it seem like that, I think they mentioned it wasn't there anymore, you're allowed to believe it was abolished. (H5)
- I couldn't imagine she'd been taken off and tortured [. . .] It's just too bleak [. . .] and the epilogue, you find out that the society has crumbled, awesome, there is hope there. [. . .] I was overwhelmed with the happiness and hope that Gilead had crumbled. Not by the fact that it was a male speaker. In light of all the other atrocities in Gilead, his kind of academic disregard [of a female narrator] was nothing in comparison. (H6)

Considering the epilogue as part of the story creates an extra world switch to a text world that exists in a later time and place from the original narrative. These readers all seem to agree that this world switch occurs in their readings of the text, and it changes the entire narrative for them and drives them to repair the initial notions about Offred's narration, as well as cause more ambiguity and uncertainty about Offred's fate at the end of the story.

Finally, when the participants were asked about their views on the characters of *The Handmaid's Tale*, there was more interest in Moira in general:

- [. . .] Moira, seems like one of my cousins who is a rebel and doesn't follow the rules. (H2)
- Moira, she's a great character, it's kind of sad she found her in that club and she doesn't really end up doing anything great she just ends up in some kind of escort, that was sad (H4)
- Moira, I was very surprised that she didn't escape, that she ended up in that brothel thing, that was very odd. The way she was describing her friend made it sound like she can do anything, and that she won't let anyone beat her down or whatever, so I guess her not escaping kind of makes sense because it wouldn't make sense if she was able to but then her being in that place surprised me where I thought she would try to escape again, she was kind of disappointing, and I think she [Offred] was kind of disappointed in her as well. (H5)
- Moira, I just felt terrible for. Really terrible for. And at the same time I was thinking would I have made the same choices that she made? You know, if I was given the choice between prostitution and exile, what would I choose? I don't know (H6)

In contrast, their attitudes towards Offred varied, with some participants viewing her from a more negative perspective and considering her an 'unbelievable' character. This mirrored the negative *Goodreads* reviews that mentioned that the character Offred is unbelievable:

- Offred, I couldn't really believe that kind of transition could happen without some sort of serious surgery or drugs or tranquilizers of some sort, Her character was difficult to believe, but not the other characters [. . .] You know, not the character of the General's Wife who was such a vocal believer in this kind of a world, and she looked like she became disenchanted, the rest of the characters weren't difficult to believe but Offred was difficult to believe. It's almost like she has all the memories of her past world, she even remembers how resentful she felt when she was fired from her job without any reason, when she had no access to her bank

> account when she had to go on the run, but then nothing was ever explained about why she made that transition so easily when she has nothing to live for. She doesn't know where her daughter is, she's probably dead, she keeps looking for her husband, he's probably dead, the mother's probably dead, so what exactly is their hold on her? If it was drugs, then I could understand but I found her character a little hard to believe, but other than her character I found all the characters were really well-written I could believe them, yeah (H3)

The following participants, however, had a more positive view of Offred as what may be considered as the more 'typical' feminist protagonist:

- The principle character is a strong woman who survived even though of all these problems and memories. She also risks her own life when she starts to talk to the commander, I think she is very strong and brave (H1)
- [the] Most believable [character] is the main character [Offred] since that's where the emphasis is on [. . .] she's more described.. it's her point of view isn't it? (H2)
- Well she was the main character, I think I did like her, she was definitely a victim of circumstance wasn't she (H4)

The characters of *The Handmaid's Tale* are similar to the setting of Gilead in the ambiguity and uncertainty that the readers feel towards them. The questions for the interviews were based on themes that were collected from the negative reviews were specifically from readers who did not like the text. The interview participants, on the other hand, did maintain that they enjoyed reading the novel, but also pointed out similar concerns with the online reviews, such as long descriptions (H3) and the ambiguity of the Gilead regime's rise to power. To investigate these responses, a cognitive poetic analysis of the text is necessary to look at what causes this ambiguity and lack of believability in Offred's character. The next section of this chapter analyses a selection of passages from the text in order to explore the ambiguity and hopelessness that some of the readers feel towards what critics consider as a feminist critical dystopia.

4.4 Cognitive Stylistic evidence and discussion

The data collected from the *Goodreads* website highlights various issues that the readers faced when reading the text. Some of the most prominent issues were the Offred's characterisation and how the Gileadean regime was allowed to continue. In order to discuss these readings, it is beneficial to analyse the most crucial parts of the text that are drawn upon during world building which are the opening chapters. Usually, a dystopian novel begins 'in medias res', where the controlled society is already in place (Baccolini and Moylan, 2003: 5). Looking closely at the opening chapters for *The Handmaid's Tale,* it appears that this is not the case, and does not follow this preferred generic technique. The narrative is written in first-person from Offred's perspective, producing a homodiegetic and intradiegetic narrator (Genette, 1983:248). This narrative is therefore focalized through the perspective of Offred, which 'refers to the "angle of vision" through which the story is focused, but in a sense which includes not only the angle of physical perception [. . .] but also cognitive orientation [. . .] and emotive orientation.' (Wales, 2011: 164; Genette 1983; Rimmon-Kenan, 2002). Offred's worldview is interesting due to the fact she remembers the past, yet seems disconnected from that reality and engaged with a new mode of thought. This peculiar way of viewing the world has been discussed in terms of mind style since the narration carries a distinct voice and a foregrounded deviant cognitive grammar which adds to the complexity of world building (Nuttall, 2014). The fact that the narrator is an I-narrator leaves room for speculation regarding the unreliability in narration (Short, 1996: 257). The narrative is subjective due to the vantage point of the narration, and the 'facts' reported may or may not be true recollections. In Text World Theory, characters are regarded as entities with their own beliefs, desires, and ambitions, therefore this subjectivity of events will be taken into consideration in the analysis.

The narrative begins with a short first chapter spanning over two pages. The first paragraph describes night-time for the women who were gathered in camps and retrained and indoctrinated to take their places as handmaids in the new world order. There is no indication of who 'we' are until the end of the first chapter, where we learn their names; 'Alma. Janine. Dolores. Moira. June' (Atwood, 1996: 14, this edition referenced hereafter as *HT*), yet no more information about these character is

disclosed at this point. There are gaps in the descriptions, and blank spaces such as why they were there, why were they watched and patrolled, and so on. The first chapter thus establishes a sort of child-like surrender; reading this chapter on its own seems to be an account of a frightened or imaginative child. However, there are adult themes and nostalgia for teenage years, indicating that the speaker is probably mature, even if they slept in army cots attempting to whisper to one another.

> We slept in what had once been the gymnasium. The floor was of varnished wood, with stripes and circles painted on it, for the games that were formerly played there; the hoops for the basketball nets were still in place, though the nets were gone. A balcony ran around the room, for the spectators, and I thought I could smell, faintly like an afterimage, the pungent scent of sweat, shot through with the sweet taint of chewing gum and perfume from the watching girls, felt-skirted as I knew from pictures, later in mini-skirts, then pants, then in one earring, spiky green-streaked hair. Dances would have been held there; the music lingered, a palimpsest of unheard sound, style upon style, an undercurrent of drums, a forlorn wail, garlands made of tissue-paper flowers, cardboard devils, a revolving ball of mirrors, powdering the dancers with a snow of light.
>
> (*HT*, 13)

In the first chapter a considerable amount of the objects that are described in the text world domain are introduced in negative forms, or referring to what they once were, rather than what they are. This creates a world switch to a negative, unrealized world in which these objects exist but it is a domain that does not contain the enactor Offred (who is still unnamed at this point). The narrative is in the simple past, and the referral to what these objects once were is through the past perfect tense. They are sleeping in 'what had once been the gymnasium', 'games were formerly played there' and the 'nets were gone' from the basketball hoops. There is a sense of de-familiarization and disconnection of the past and the time of the narrative, in which the details are noticed before the whole, for example: '[T]he floor was of varnished wood, with stripes and circles painted on it' precedes the nomination of 'gymnasium'.

Further instances of negation occur within the description of the former dances held in that space, with a mixture of nostalgia and materialism, thus both cynical and longing at the same time: 'forlorn walls' and 'paper flower garlands' and

'cardboard devils' are bathed in a 'snow of light' (*HT*, 13). Most of the function-advancing processes in this passage are descriptive attributes of negation. These describe what once was, in a sub-world of a past that no longer exists, in a negated domain. The sound is 'unheard', the scents are like 'an afterimage' and dances 'would' have been held.



Figure 4 Negated text worlds in the opening paragraphs of The Handmaid's Tale

It is important to note the prevalence of descriptive processes in the opening passage. This is considered characteristic of dystopian fiction because of 'the great difficulty of *creating* an adequately deep and complex alien fictional world without being able to *evoke* very much of it from background knowledge.' (Hoover, 2001: 103, italics in

original). Dystopia, as a speculative and extrapolative genre, requires a great deal of establishing of entities to fill the domains of the text worlds in order to present an image that is reflective of the readers' own society to move them mentally and emotionally.

In this chapter the personal group pronoun 'we', indicates a collection of thoughts, although the main narrator Offred does not necessarily have access to the thoughts of the other characters, she is projecting herself onto the group and making her thoughts applicable to the others. This mirrors the indoctrination of becoming a handmaid: they are all required to wear the same clothes, not permitted any vanities such as doing their hair or make-up, they all require governmental issued beds, and so on. There is a clearly a de-personalization process at work in the 'school'. The 'resistance' against the regime exists in the whispers, in the passing, and indeed sharing, of names. Nomination is a huge part of cognitively acknowledging the presence or absence of an entity, thus holding on to their names at that time showed that they were not fully controlled.

The descriptions of the gymnasium and its former glory should function to trigger the readers' frame knowledge about high school, high school dances, fashion, uniforms, as well as the insecurities of being a teenager. Readers will be able to build the idea of 'school gymnasium' by the descriptions given in the paragraph. If their own memories and experiences in the discourse world do not provide this information, then they draw on their knowledge and frames constructed from other text worlds, be it from literature, films, or experiences. In the case of this setting, the prevalent depiction of an American high school in most Hollywood productions may be drawn upon. This description of the lost past continues:

> There was old sex in the room and loneliness, and expectation, of something without a shape or name. I remember that yearning, for something that was always about to happen and was never the same as the hands that were on us there and then, in the small of the back, or out back, in the parking lot, or in the television room with the sound turned down and only the pictures flickering over lifting flesh.
>
> (*HT*, 13)

This passage begins to offer more information about the narrator, showing that she is an adult looking back on her teenage years. The use of negation continues, with 'old sex', 'loneliness' as semantic negatives, 'something without a shape or name', and 'was never the same'. Old memories of young love and relationships are evoked through the mention of glimpses of those memories, leaving the reader to fill in these gaps themselves. Throughout this introduction, there is a salience of these blank spaces, or 'lacunae', with clearly defined edges that signify what was lost, which Stockwell (2009: 31-5) terms as 'textual attractors'. These create *resonance* (Stockwell, 2009) for readers, especially due to the constant evocation of the schematic knowledge of 'proms', and 'high school'. In Stockwell's (2009) model of resonance, he focuses on attention and foregroundedness as a primary source for the experience of literary resonance. Elements that are introduced in the text can be brought to the attention of the reader and become 'textual attractors', allowing the reader to respond to these elements either by focusing on the attractor when it is first brought to attention, engaging with the element when it is maintained in the text, or fading/extinction of the element when it is neglected or occluded in the text (2009: 20-22).

The objects that are described in this extract are all contained in a flashback world narrated by Offred. This sub-world is therefore character accessible. Although ontologically the sub-world is further removed from the reader in terms of text world accessibility, where the negations create world switches within a flashback that is already inaccessible to the reader, the world building that occurs here draws upon schematically familiar items to the reader. Readers can recognise the negated world building elements, and thus the world that Offred remembers is closer to the readers than the world in which she is a participant.

The description of army cots, and forbidding the women to talk to each other, with the cheap basic sheets and old army blankets, evoke the WAR schema. The references to tasks and regimens that occur in the text, however, force us to repair this initial assumption, and the use of the word 'aunt' which has connotation of family in: 'Aunt Sara and Aunt Elizabeth Patrolled' is confusing: 'Aunt' is a deictically proximal title, and the names are female, however instead of nurture and warmth these two are armed with 'electric cattle prods slung from thongs from their

leather belts' (*HT*, 14). Their patrolling further reinforces the PRISONER schema, yet these prison guards are not allowed to carry guns. The captives, however, are trapped in this domain. They attempt to escape through 'fantasy' worlds (*HT*, 14), in which they fantasize of being able to bargain with the guards to escape, but this resistance turns out later to be another inaccessible and unrealized world, a failed dream.

Instead, they turn to the 'semi-darkness' (*HT*, 14) around them, as the 'lights were turned down but not out' (*HT*, 13). In this time, at the beginning of the re-education of these women into becoming handmaids, they still have hope. They communicate through whispering 'almost without sound' (*HT*, 14). The list of their names at the end of the first chapter, however, and the beginning of the next chapter, seem to be parallel. While in this world these women think they still had their bodies (*HT*, 14), the world-switch triggered by the turning of the page to a new chapter and the introduction of a narrator using the singular pronoun suggests that this is no longer the case. The focus of the function-advancing processes in this second chapter is dedicated to describing the room in quick glimpses of detail. This continues with the constant occurrences of negation also utilized in a similar construction to the first chapter at the beginning of the second chapter:

> A chair, a table, a lamp. Above, on the white ceiling, a relief ornament in the shape of a wreath, and in the centre of it a blank space, plastered over, like the place in a face where the eye has been taken out. There must have been a chandelier, once. They've removed everything you could tie a rope to.
>
> (*HT*, 17)

In this paragraph, there is special attention drawn to the 'blank space' in the centre of the ceiling, with the word 'wreath' carrying inherent negation alluding to funerals, the simile in which an eye is taken out of a face, the epistemological world switch in 'there must have been a chandelier', and the ominous frame reference to suicide. The description of Offred's assigned room is parallel to that of the gymnasium. The introduction of the objects 'a chair', 'a table', 'a lamp' using the indefinite article 'a', suggest newness, bringing these objects into the domain for the first time. The description of the relief ornament in the white ceiling where the chandelier once was is similar to describing the floors of the gymnasium before the description of the

court with the missing nets, games and people. The sense of loss is therefore heavily constructed through the constant evocation of this unrealized, inaccessible world.

The opening passages of the book thus describe very little of the dystopia, instead providing an abundance of text world switches to unrealized negated worlds and the past rather than immediately building the immediate text world of the main narrative. Readers are constantly switching to worlds that do not follow the main narrative. This causes a jarring effect and confusion once the narrative returns to Offred's perspective in the house of Commander Fred in the main text worlds of the narrative. The negative reviews that mention the lack of description, unanswered questions, and overall confusion of the world depicted in the text is therefore supported by the complex negative world building that is required from the beginning of the narrative.

As noted in Cooke's (2004) analysis, *The Handmaid's Tale* begins with the quotations that allude to the main themes of the story, followed by a short description of the Red Centre, which takes place in a past text world. In the main text, there are constant world switches to the past, with Offred's dreams and flashbacks, which creates confusion. Furthermore, the epidemic that leads to the implementation of the handmaids system is only explained at the very end of the novel in a separate text, when the usual generic expectation or preference for first-pair parts is that the world building takes place at the beginning of a narrative. The first mention of declining birth rates is well into the middle of the narrative (*HT*, 123). This requires readers to resort to 'repairing' and rebuilding the world in light of information that comes at the very end, and which was not provided in the first place by Offred:

> Need I remind you that this was the age of the R-Strain Syphilis and also the infamous AIDS epidemic, which, once they spread to the population at large, eliminated many young sexually active people from the reproductive pool? Still-births, miscarriages, and genetic deformities were widespread and on the increase, and this trend has been linked to the various nuclear-plant accidents, shutdowns, and incidents of sabotage that characterized the period, as well as to leakages from chemical and biological –warfare stockpiles and toxic-waste disposal sites[…]
>
> (*HT*, 316-17)

This second-person pronoun ‘you’, is doubly deictic which helps to convey irony (Herman, 1994). The speaker in the conference is addressing both his fictional audience as well as the readers. The real readers implicated by ‘you’ *do* need to be reminded; they need this information from the beginning that led to the creation of these rules and government, but do not receive this crucial information only until later in the narrative. The final sentence of the book also reflects this irony. Pieixoto asks the fictional audience in the text world ‘Are there any questions?’ (*HT*, 324), however, if the readers do have any questions they remain unanswered because of their inaccessibility to the Professor in the text.

Some readers also did not understand the plausibility of the narrative that explains how the congress was shot (*HT*,183) in a few lines, even though to them it is a foregrounded event that deserves more description in a narrative that is predominantly descriptions. From self-verification theory, readers shape their responses to correspond with their own world view and to fit within their own ‘sticky priors’ of judgement (Bolton and Reed, 2004). With the responses in *Goodreads*, the readers that self-identified as American pointed out that the story is at odds with their world view and it was impossible for congress to be shot down in such a manner. Alternatively, others mentioned that because they are American, they find the narrative more believable (this is also evident in the interviews, e.g. H3, H9). Other points that may have contributed to the incredulity of the narrative is perhaps related to the tag of ‘comparison with ‘now’’, where certain scripts in the text did not fit within the readers’ schematic knowledge. This lack of ‘schema affirmation’ (Jeffries, 2001) may be triggered by the tourist scene (*HT*, 38-9) where a group of Japanese tourists take pictures of the handmaids. Their attire is described as ‘westernised’ and ‘scandalous’, which is against the norm of the readers’s own knowledge. As mentioned in the reviews, the existence of Japanese tourists is an indication that there are other regimes outside of Gilead that somehow do not implement the same societal rules, and regard theirs as ‘exotic’ and extraordinary. This is in contrast with the usual orientalist schema of Far East countries being a tourist destination or the exotic location with strange customs.

This lack of believability is further heightened by building the speculative text world in the location of the USA. Interestingly, the country is only mentioned in

reference to military issued blankets (*HT*, 13, 272, 273) and a military locker in which Offred's recordings were found (*HT*, 313). Offred's references to location are obscure but enough to suggest the USA, thus instead of explicitly stating the location, the readers are left to infer it through the progression of the text. At the very end of the narrative, the Professor reveals that the place Offred lived in was 'formerly known as the state of Maine.'

In the novel, there are numerous passages referring to Offred's daughter. However, due to the information being 'buried' in the text (Emmott et al., 2010), it is extremely difficult to decipher from the text alone that she is missing her daughter. Offred's avoidance and distancing from her past seems so successful that the readers are also distanced from her relationship with her family and daughter. She seems to dive into her memories as a pastime, choosing which one to relish at a time. Even more confusingly, she does not use the same references to mention her daughter, with more indefinite descriptions of this character than definite. This leads the readers to struggle in situating this character within the text world. Offred refers to her daughter as 'child', 'little girl', 'she' and 'her' with no evaluative or emotive descriptions. In addition, because Offred usually spends time with other women such as the Marthas, and during her shopping walks with Ofglen, the use of the pronoun 'she' becomes difficult to distinguish. When she suddenly switches to a memory of her daughter it can go unnoticed, especially when she describes a memory of blowing on dandelions and making daisy chains without a clear indication of a flashback world switch (*HT*, 224). In this interpretation of the narrative, Offred's character becomes mercenary and selfish, not caring for her child or husband enough to plot to escape, there are actually a lot of passages in which Offred dwells upon memories of the past.

The first time Offred mentions her daughter, the nature of the relationship is unclear: 'I can remember feeling quite calm. I can remember screaming, it felt like screaming though it may have been only a whisper, Where is she? What have you done with her?' (*HT*, 49). On a first reading it is difficult to tell who she is talking about, since the pronouns 'her' and 'she' usually refer back to a person already mentioned in the discourse, but by this page Offred still hasn't introduced her child at all. The realisation that Offred's daughter was taken from her only manifests if the readers decide to re-read these passages. This passage also evokes the schema of MENTAL

HOSPITAL where children are taken to foster care if the parent is deemed mentally unfit.

Offred's memories of her family's failed escape to Canada are presented throughout the novel in brief flashbacks, and because these scenes are ambiguously placed out of order it is difficult to ascertain if they are flashbacks or dream worlds. Looking at the page numbers in which these events unfold provides an indication of how difficult it is to trace this flashback world:

1. Offred and her husband, Luke, plan to escape with their daughter across the border under the guise of having a picnic (*HT*, 94-95);
2. Offred and Luke have fake passports with them which they hand to the guards at the border who report them, so Luke drives his car away from the checkpoint (*HT*, 236)
3. Offred leaves the car with her daughter and runs into the forest away from the guards or soldiers, but is caught and her daughter is taken from her (*HT*, 84-5);
4. Offred lies in a bed at the Red Centre where she sees her daughter for the last time, in a photograph that shows her living with another family (*HT*, 49).

The readers therefore have a jumbled sequence of the events when reading the novel for the first time, with event 4 appearing first, then 3, 1, and finally 2.Thus, situating the time for each flashback sub-world requires further effort on the part of the reader, and perhaps re-reading. Furthermore, Offred places her daughter before everyone else in the list of people they might use against her (*HT*, 297), but not the first person she asks about when she has a chance during the birth day (*HT*, 134). Although it is possible for the readers to fill in the gaps of the narrative, in which they draw upon their schematic knowledge of FAMILY, MOTHERHOOD, and all the associated emotions that are evoked through the mentioning of these relationships, but due to the difficulty of deciphering these frames from the minimally described character of the daughter, it becomes clear that the text worlds that some readers create would lack these extra dimensions of meaning.

Moreover, the reviewers and interviewees seem to agree that the novel is written from a certain viewpoint or focalisation, that of the main character, Offred. Although the text provides these various world switches to the past that form an emotional connection between Offred and her daughter, some of these readers provide the seemingly dispreferred response of viewing her as apathetic towards her own child. This is due to Offred reducing the daughter to the socially distal 'child', the definite 'the little girl who is now dead', instead of the possessive 'my little girl', and the third-person pronouns 'she' and 'her' which are also socially distal in terms of 'person deixis'(Levinson, 1983; McIntyre, 2010:123). Offred does not attempt to search for her child, or her husband, but instead enquires about Moira's fate. Some of the readers in this study view Moira as more interesting or had more emotive reactions to Moira's fate than that of the protagonist. Out of all the characters that the readers encounter in the narrative, Moira seems to be most dynamic and foregrounded character. This is because Moira is the last person that Offred sees alive, and seems to be the only person that Offred is sure is not dead. In contrast, Offred has mourned her mother and Luke, and although she refuses to mourn her daughter she considers her as dead for her own sanity. Thus Offred seems to cling to the idea of Moira surviving against the odds in the oppressive government, only for her (and the readers) to discover that she is instead living as a prostitute at Jezebels.

There are reasons that can support such readings. First, the terms that Offred uses to refer to her daughter are deictically distant, which may be the reason for why the readers feel she is indifferent towards her daughter, even though the narrative refers to her at various times throughout the narrative. For example, in the following paragraph all the underlined pronouns refer to the daughter:

> I'm running, with her, holding her hand, pulling, dragging her through the bracken, she's only half awake because of the pill I gave her, so she wouldn't cry or say anything that would give us away, she doesn't know where she is. The ground is un-even, rocks, dead branches, the smell of damp earth, old leaves, she can't run fast enough, by myself I could run faster, I'm a good runner. Now she's crying, she's frightened, I want to carry her but she would be too heavy.
>
> (*HT*, 84-85)

From this paragraph, it is clear that the first time the readers are introduced to the daughter is through these distal references. From their existing schematic knowledge, the readers realise it is someone small and feeble but they do not know their relationship in this section. The paragraph is also ominous because of the reference to drugging her daughter to keep her quiet, and this further alienates the readers. The paragraph also refers to a flashback of a longer process of Offred's attempted escape from Gilead with her husband, and the beginning of this narrative within the dream/flashback sequence is actually set some pages after (*HT*, 94-5).

This distance is also part of Offred's coping with her situation, which is summed up when she says the following 'One detaches oneself. One describes' (*HT*, 106), when Offred explains the breeding ceremony while describing everything else in the room except the forced sexual act that is the purpose of the ceremony. The sentence itself creates the sense of distancing deixis, using the depersonalized 'one' instead of personal pronoun 'I'. Using the depersonalized pronouns allows her to detach herself from her daughter and her husband, and thus permits her to survive in the position that she is forced to be in. But it seems she succeeded in the detachment in such a way that she also alienates the readers, who view her detachedness as mercenary or selfish. But Offred does state that this narrative is a reconstruction: 'This is a reconstruction. All of it is a reconstruction. It's a reconstruction now, in my head, as I lie flat on my single bed rehearsing what I should or shouldn't have said, what I should or shouldn't have done, how I should have played it'(*HT*, 144). Thus the readers' world building can differ greatly in the construction of the relationship of Offred and her daughter.

Furthermore, readers may find it difficult to ascertain world switches such as flashbacks clearly, and to attribute pronouns to the correct referent. For example, although she uses 'her' to refer to her daughter in one sentence which is in an embedded flashback world, in the following sentence it could refer to anyone else in her immediate text world (*HT*, 224). The reading of Offred as apathetic and detached from her daughter is therefore not a dispreferred response, but actually a preferred response to the text, where Offred's detachment and attempt to distance herself from her sorrow is successful to the extent that the readers feel like the character does not care about her daughter.

What further establishes the ambiguity of Offred's narrative stance and thus creates difficulty for these readers to engage with the narrative is a constant repetition of similes. Readers are faced with ambiguity unless they re-read the book, or go beyond repair and re-read entire chapters. Take, for example, the following reviewer's comments:

> […] Worst of all is Atwood's obsession with simile. She crams similes into every corner of her sentences. And once she starts with one simile, she usually throws in another, and often yet another, all unrelated and so divergent as to be meaningless. The only way I was able to finish this book was to just start skipping each of these metaphorical diversions as soon as they started. They were utterly meaningless in the wider narrative, and so common as to be worthless. […] I know some will say that the writing style is explained in the narrative, but frankly, I don't care. It's so mind-numbingly repetitive so as to be nearly unbearable. There has to be a limit somewhere as to how annoying a narrator can be before the author decides to make changes. I wish someone had suggested such changes to Atwood.
>
> (S. Y., *GoodReads,* 2013, 1 out of 5 stars)

In order to discover if such repetition can be clearly ascertained through quantitative textual evidence, I conducted a comparison of ambiguous world building elements in *The Handmaid's Tale* with the written fictional prose sub-corpus in the British National Corpus (BNC). In corpus stylistics, 'keywords' are words that appear in a significantly more frequent manner in one text in comparison to a reference corpus such as the BNC (Mahlberg and McIntyre, 2011; Carter, 2010). This frequency is considered as significant when the log-likelihood calculation of the word occurrence across the two corpora is greater than 6.63, which indicates that probability of the difference happening by chance is $p<0.01$.

By generating the most frequent words list of the novel, 'like' is in the top 100 words of the novel, ranking at 30:

Rank	Frequency	Word
1	5167	the
2	3264	I
3	2280	to
4	2116	a
5	2109	of
6	1916	it
7	1815	and
8	1557	in
9	1190	she
10	965	that
11	957	is
12	909	her
13	891	he
14	844	they
15	840	on
16	832	was
17	801	you
18	753	we
19	726	for
20	704	my
21	691	me
22	660	with
23	641	as
24	633	be
25	633	there
26	598	but
27	590	have
28	587	at
29	568	this
30	565	like
31	548	what
32	514	or
33	512	not
34	458	are
35	435	one
36	425	can
37	422	said
38	396	if
39	386	them
40	377	out
41	366	from
42	366	up
43	366	were
44	346	would
45	336	all
46	327	say
47	324	his
48	310	been
49	308	no
50	305	says

Rank	Frequency	Word
51	296	so
52	287	could
53	281	time
54	275	us
55	269	know
56	270	now
57	268	about
58	268	an
59	267	too
60	266	him
61	257	by
62	253	do
63	251	had
64	234	some
65	232	their
66	231	then
67	229	don't
68	217	when
69	208	back
70	205	down
71	204	see
72	200	into
73	200	something
74	200	who
75	198	way
76	193	here
77	192	think
78	188	must
79	187	go
80	186	over
81	184	our
82	180	will
83	168	even
84	164	aunt
85	164	women
86	162	has
87	162	look
88	160	get
89	160	want
90	160	which
91	159	room
92	158	where
93	153	other
94	151	more
95	150	only
96	148	things
97	146	two
98	142	still
99	140	how
100	139	through

Table 4 top 100 most frequent words in the Handmaid's Tale

As shown by the most frequent words that occur in the novel, articles and participles are the most recurrent, followed by 'like' as the 30th most repeated word in the novel. The word 'like' is one of the most frequent words in the book, occurring 565 times in 95,867 words, of which 307 of these instances were used in simile form. For example 'I walk along the gravel path that divides the back lawn, neatly, like a hair parting' (*HT*, 27). The abundance of these similes is even more apparent when looking at the concordance lines of the word in the novel:

. Or if I couldn't tell that, I'd	like to say she blew up Jezebel's, with fifty
Jezebel's, with fifty Commanders inside it. I'd	like her to end with something daring and spectacu
foot, his fingers encircling the ankle, briefly,	like a bracelet, where the tattoo is, a Braille he
kind man; that, under other circumstances, I even	like him. His hand pauses. "I thought you might e
feathers, but it's no good, I lie there	like a dead bird. He is not a monster, I
his. Without his uniform he looks smaller, older,	like something being dried. The trouble is that I
, and the walls store up warmth, give it out	like a used oven. Surely it will rain soon. Why
out the window I can see it, a glimmer,	like the phosphorescence you get in stirred seawat
warm air of the room, all over. I'd	like to take off my clothes, bathe in it, rub
moves away from me, turns off the lamp. Outside,	like punctuation, there's a flash of lightning; al
fog; and then all at once these red events,	like explosions, on streets otherwise decorous and
this story. I'm sorry it's in fragments,	like a body caught in crossfire or pulled apart by
. I am coming to a part you will not	like at all, because in it I did not behave
I would almost turn back, it sounded so metallic,	like a mousetrap or a weapon, but I would not
, each time, I keep my eyes open. I would	like a light on somewhere, a candle perhaps, stuck

Figure 5 Concordance lines of the word 'like' in The Handmaid's Tale

As shown above, the word 'like' can be used in verb form to mean 'wish' as in the first two lines, but then we find a succession of 'like' used as a conjunction in the list of similes 'like a dead bird', 'like something being dried', 'like a used oven', 'like punctuation', 'like explosions', 'like a body caught in crossfire', 'like a mousetrap or a weapon.' This overuse of simile further adds to the ambiguity of the narrative, because Offred is constantly describing A in terms of B. Similes are also complicated world builders as they require the readers to toggle the metaphorical descriptions with that of the world builder. Typically the similes compare the unfamiliar with the familiar, in this case however, the narrator compares the familiar with the familiar, thus creating diversions from the text, indeed as she herself is creating diversions from her monotonous ritualised life. By comparing the number of occurrences of the word 'like' in the novel against the number of occurrences in the corpus of written fiction, it becomes clear that this word is used heavily in *The Handmaid's Tale*, with a highly significant log-likelihood score of 260.38. Table 5 below illustrates the log-likelihood of some world-building elements that aid in conveying the sense of ambiguity and repetition.

Item	Odds ratio	Occurrence in *HT*	Percentage in HT	Occurrence in BNC Written Fiction	Percentage in BNC Written Fiction	Log Likelihood
Like	2.16	565	0.59	42748	0.27	260.38
One	1.52	435	0.45	47442	0.30	66.50
Time	1.55	281	0.29	30027	0.19	46.94
Know	1.38	269	0.28	32316	0.20	25.12
something	2.03	200	0.21	16069	0.10	79.74

Table 5 Log-likelihood scores of ambiguous world builders in The Handmaid's Tale

Other vague world building elements include the words 'one', 'time', 'know' and 'something'. Likewise, 'one' used as a pronoun creates this ambiguity, with its under-specificity, and then the word 'time' is also overused in this text, which refers to the various flashbacks or refers to Offred's own descriptions of the passing of time. The word 'know' is also used in excess, both referring to the narrator's (lack of) as well as the readers'. The narrator's frequent repetition of 'I know' or 'I don't know' is closely related to Offred's chaotic memories and confused flashbacks to her mother, her daughter, and her life with Luke and Moira. Finally, the indefinite 'something' is overused in the novel as well. Thus, these terms further help create this ambiguous and treacherous world building process, in the text worlds of *The Handmaid's Tale.*

As a more quantitative means of stylistic analysis, this corpus linguistic analysis further indicates that these readings, although a small percentage of the overall reviews of *The Handmaid Tale's*, can be justified through the text itself. This quantifiable repetition and overuse of ambiguous world-builders is therefore noticed by not only critics but also these reviewers. While the amount of expertise and critical training these reviewers have are not clear, as discussed in chapter 3, there is no 'uneducated' reader, therefore I view the use of terms as 'simile' and 'narrator' from online reviews to be a more general sense than a strict narratological or stylistic device. But the fact remains that these features were salient to these readers, and therefore these readings which can be pinpointed to features of the text are worth

considering in the discussion of reader response studies as well as in the wider field of cognitive poetics.

The issues that the readers brought to light in their negative reviews, from ambiguity, unsympathetic characters, unbelievable setting, to repetitive ambiguous structures, are all thus accounted for by conducting a stylistic investigation of the text. Although these responses are negative, they are still text-driven and thus are valid interpretations, even if the text was created to be re-read in different ways. Atwood's portrayal of a heroine who distances herself emotionally by description has thus also succeeded in distancing these negative response readers from the character of Offred and her narrative, but these negative responses are by no means 'dispreferred' in the conversation analysis sense of the word, only less accepted by the majority of readers. They are only lesser preferred readings in the sense that they do not provide approbation for the literary work.

4.5 Summary

In this chapter, I have focused on negative reviews and interviews with readers of *The Handmaid's Tale*, in an effort to ascertain whether these negative responses can be considered as dispreferred responses to the novel. I began the chapter with a discussion of the critical work that discusses readings of the narrative in section 4.1, such as Cooke (2004) and Nuttall (2015). These analyses do not take into account the interpretations of readers who view the novel negatively, which could be considered as a dispreferred response to a literary work that is highly renowned. This section also highlights the status of *The Handmaid's Tale* as a critical dystopia and feminist novel, and as such negative reviews may be stigmatised and therefore fewer readers would take this stance. Thus, in order to investigate whether these responses to the text would be considered as dispreferred, I analysed the most recent negative reviews on the website *Goodreads* in section 4.3. The emergent themes were then used in the interviews with readers in section 4.3, which enabled me to discover more details about the reading process and different interpretations of the text other than my own. The results from the reviews and the interviews show that the readers struggled with the vague world building elements in the text, which possibly stem

from textual features in the text. The cognitive poetic analysis in section 4.4 illustrates how the difficulty of building the text worlds of *The Handmaid's Tale* may impede these readers' enjoyment and appreciation of the text. First, the initial world building of the novel consists predominantly of negative subworlds that are inaccessible to the reader and Offred. Second, the first-person narration from Offred's point of view and the ambiguity of pronoun references throughout the narrative leads to the difficulty and frustration of the readers in building the text worlds. Third, the distancing of Offred from her daughter also alienates the readers from sympathising with the protagonist in the narrative and presents her as mercenary or heartless. Finally, the frequency of unclear descriptions in the form of similes and vague world builders can also be quantitatively proven through corpus stylistic keyword analysis related to vagueness, and this also contributes to the readers' frustration in reading the text.

Overall, this chapter presents an example of reader responses to a critical dystopia that suggests the possibility of a utopian enclave and hope. My next research question is related to how an unambiguous closed-ended or classical dystopia may create similar responses. That is, whether the readers of a dystopia that is decidedly close-ended by the text nevertheless create their own hopeful enclaves in the narrative, and whether this is also a less preferred response rather than a dispreferred response to the text. After looking at reviews and interviews of *The Handmaid's Tale* in this chapter, the following chapters 5 and 6 discuss responses to Kurt Vonnegut's short story *Harrison Bergeron* as an example of a closed dystopian narrative.

Chapter 5 Readers of 'Harrison Bergeron'

5.0 Overview

In the previous chapter I discussed negative reviews to *The Handmaid's Tale* as potential dispreferred responses to a literary work, and discussed the different text worlds created by readers that do not create what critics view as the inherent utopia in the text. Following this discussion of dispreferred readings of a critical dystopia, my next question is whether readers construct hope in a closed-ended dystopia when the text does not seem to allow such an ending. In this chapter, I examine both preferred and dispreferred responses to the text, the latter of which find hope in the dystopia. This chapter will explore reader responses to the short story 'Harrison Bergeron', first providing an introduction to the text itself and its context in section 5.1. Then in section 5.2, I provide a brief overview of the critical literature on 'Harrison Bergeron'. This provides an overview of how readers in academic contexts view the short story. In section 5.3. I analyse online responses using a similar methodology as described in the previous chapter in section 4.3, thus making a comparable study with the responses to the critical dystopia of *the Handmaid's Tale*. Section 5.4 illustrates the discussion and stylistic analysis that is carried out in light of these responses. For ease of reference, the tags will be discussed in the order that follows the natural (generally) linear progress of reading and interpretation, from the beginning to the end of a text. Thus I will begin with the tag 'Style' commenting on the general language used in the text as well as the tags 'Themes' and 'swift world building' in section 5.4.1, due to the close relation of the emphasis on the themes of equality and dystopia with the building of the text worlds of 'Harrison Bergeron'. The initial world-building in the text illustrates how the readers create multiple negative world switches in the first paragraph, creating the dark dystopian text world. Because of their relation to intertextuality and prior knowledge, the tags 'Narrative Interrelations and Actual World reference' are grouped in section 5.4.2. In order for readers to provide the preferred interpretation, they must have some knowledge prior to their reading of the dystopian genre in general, as well as some background in real world politics. The tags 'Emotional responses' and 'Characterisation' are discussed in 5.4.4, with a focus on the focalisation of the

narrative from the point of view of George Bergeron. In this section, I argue for the inclusion of character perception on the cline of speech and thought presentation as part of the subjective slant of a narrative. Readers' interpretation of the 'ending' of 'Harrison Bergeron' is discussed in 5.4.3, in which I discuss how some readers create endings that seem dispreferred on the surface due to the effect of their prior schematic knowledge and experience. Finally, I provide some analysis of the responses that mentioned the 'resonance' of the story after reading it in 5.4.4, looking at the foregrounding that occurs in the narrative that may lead to this textual effect that lasts after reading.

5.1 Introduction to the text and its criticism

The short story 'Harrison Bergeron' by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. was first published in a magazine (1961) but did not receive much attention until the story was anthologised in the collection *Welcome to the Monkeyhouse* (1969). The story has since then received attention as a good example of a dystopia; e.g. Lynn (2012) and Vied (2012) include the story in high school curricula as an introduction to dystopia and ideas about freedom, and Mentor (2015) uses the short story as an example of deviance in a criminal justice introductory course, whereas Bryant and Bates (2015) and Milner et al (2014) look at the use of the short story in K-12 levels of education.

In 'Harrison Bergeron', the USA government in 2081 has implemented more than 200 amendments to the constitution, putting into effect an equality law that ensures that all citizens are on the same level, both mentally and physically. This is implemented through the issuing of handicapping devices to citizens who are more talented, so for example, a beautiful ballerina must wear a mask and be shackled with weights to ensure she is not more beautiful or graceful than anyone else. The story follows the couple George and Hazel Bergeron as they are watching ballet on television, when suddenly their extremely talented son, Harrison, who was taken away by the government's 'Handicapper General', appears in the studio. Harrison breaks free from his handicapping devices and urges one of the ballerinas to dance with him. He is then shot by the Handicapper General Diana Moon Glampers, and then the television tube burns out. George and Hazel witness the death of their son,

but due to Hazel's feeble mind, and George's handicapped thoughts, they continue talking with no recollection of what they saw unfold on screen.

The narrative is both dystopian as well as satirical, and M. K. Booker makes the distinction between purely satirical and dystopian, since he

> consider[s] the principle literary strategy of dystopian literature to be defamiliarisation: by focusing their critiques of society on imaginatively distant settings, dystopian fictions provide fresh perspectives on problematic social and political practices that might otherwise be taken for granted or considered natural or inevitable.
>
> (Booker 1994b: 4)

In Booker's terms, the setting of dystopia is not necessarily futuristic, but must contain social distance otherwise it would be categorized as satire alone. The text world depicted in 'Harrison Bergeron' is removed in time and place from the contemporaneous reader through the setting of the year 2081, as well as the number of amendments that were made to the constitution in the story. Whereas there have only been 27 amendments to the USA constitution, in 'Harrison Bergeron' there are 213. There is also a salient and highly foregrounded display of the use of controlling technology and the acceptance of these rules by society, exemplified through the characters of George and Hazel, which allows for the creation of the dystopia. Gottleib (2011) does not make this distinction between satire and dystopia, and says that 'political satire' characterizes dystopian fiction (Gottleib, 2011:7). Similarly to Booker (1994b), Gottleib maintains that the dystopia does not need to be futuristic in order to convey a 'bad place', but can be a depiction of 'a world worse than the existing world of reality' whether it is set in 'the present time (or possibly at any other time as well' (2011: 5). In these terms, then, 'Harrison Bergeron', although it is set in a near future for current readers, will still depict a dark dystopia and a 'worse' society for readers.

Interestingly, although the story gained enough acclaim to be included as a standard text to introduce dystopia in the classroom, there is very little research that discusses and analyses the text of the short story. Instead, there is scholarly focus on its political nature. For example, Hattenhauer (1998) focuses on the story's satire of American politics, and Post (2000) uses the text as an example of the dangers of anti-

discrimination laws, while Nichols (2012: 268) describes the story as an example of the dangers of 'egalitarian communitarianism'. These can be seen as the text's preferred readings.

Moreover, mentions of 'Harrison Bergeron' appear in non-literary contexts, in which the authors of various scholarly disciplines make use of these preferred readings of the story to illustrate their arguments. For example, the short story is used to illustrate equality in American law, and was republished in the Law Journal *Arkansaw Law Review* (1991: 927-33), used in a deliberate 'misreading' to attack the notion of equality in school funding (Rothschild, 2005), in the discussion of ethics of hyperandrogenism policies and how they are similar to Vonnegut's 'dystopic vision' (Kazarkis and Young, 2013: 68) and in an article that looks at the effects of using cellphones and the relationship of technology (Barr et al., 2015).The story is used in these examples because it portrays the extremes of having an equality legislation that uses technology that strips people of their individuality.

In addition to satirising the laws of antidiscrimination and equality in a dystopian setting, the story is also considered as 'a fable about what ultimately could happen in America if all people are forced to be equal' and 'in any levelling process, what really is lost, according to Vonnegut, is beauty, grace, and wisdom' (Schatt, 1976: 133), For example, March-Russell (2009) discusses the story as a postmodernist tale that has 'echoes of witch hunts and persecutions, both from the Puritan context of the seventeenth century and during the paranoia of the Cold War' due to the postmodernist tendency to question 'systemized knowledge'(March-Russell, 2009: 224-5). 'Harrison Bergeron' is also a warning for the destructive potential of technological advancement, as noted by Aube (2011: 3-4): 'Vonnegut's message throughout these works is consistent: machines make humans feel obsolete and lead to a society-wide inertia which precludes the possibility of purposeful action'. Thus there is a consistent focus on Vonnegut the author in the analysis of the story, which is perhaps summarised in Mustazza's (2005) book review:

> There can be no full understanding of Vonnegut's work without considering his biography and American history, particularly the early personal influences and social events that shaped his sensibility. You simply cannot come to terms with *Slaughterhouse-Five* without considering Vonnegut's own experiences in Dresden in 1945. To a greater or lesser extent, the same can be said about all of his fiction.
>
> (Mustazza, 2005:166)

In other interpretations, however, the story can be read purely as satire as a distinct genre from dystopia. Satire is embedded throughout the narrative, in the comical depictions of the horrific handicaps and weights, the author's intention, and intended readers are also discussed in the literature. For example, Hattenhauer (1998) points out that the story leads to a common misinterpretation, in which the story is critical of Communist ideals of equality, whereas it actually portrays a direct criticism of American society. Hattenhauer's defence of this notion is drawn from Vonnegut's other works, and also points to the fact that Vonnegut only wrote the story in this accessible and short manner due to his struggles as a writer who needed to appeal to a wider audience (Hattenhauer, 1998; see also Allen, 1991:3). In his overview of 'Harrison Bergeron', Alvarez (2002: 13) also maintains that 'Vonnegut satirizes the notion of handicapping people to enforce equality, the failure of rebellion, the apathy engendered in people who watch television, and authoritarian government.' In the same vein, Festa (1997) comments that fits into the satiric genre because it 'sustain[s] a reductive attack on their objects', conveys 'to [its] intended readers significances at odds with the literal or surface meanings and [is] pervaded and dominated by various satiric techniques'(Festa, 1997: 134).

Overall, there is very little linguistic discussion of 'Harrison Bergeron'. Joodaki and Mehdiany's paper (2013) seems to be promising in its premise, in which they set out to discuss the story in Bakhtinian terms and focus on the dystopian setting in their paper titled 'Equality versus Freedom in "Harrison Bergeron" by Kurt Vonnegut: A Study of Dystopian Setting'; however the arguments in their work are not particularly text-based and focus more on the general themes of the story. They claim that their analysis focuses on the handicapper general using media as a means of creating a monological setting. This mono-logism is present, they argue, in the breakdown of communication between George and Hazel, in which their dialogues

are ‘meaningless’, and in the action of the dance Harrison and the ballerina attempt to escape this mono-logism. Thus the main focus of this paper, too, is on the satire, rather than a direct discussion of the language used to portray the setting, with very little linguistic reference to the text. The argument draws upon the theories and definitions of Bakhtinian terms without attempting to contextualise them in light of the text and thus joins the body of work that explores the themes of the story rather than its linguistic elements.

The themes of control and subjugation that are present in most ‘classical’ dystopias that have closure (Baccolini 2011:165) are also present in this short story. Where ‘Harrison Bergeron’ differs from other dystopian tales would be the amount of description of the setting, and that is more bound with the short story form and length which allows for less description and more emphasis on plot and setting in general, especially with the post-modern emphasis on ‘idea and situation’ over, for example, characterisation (March-Russell, 2009:225). Overall, there is little interest in the actual text of the story, possibly due to the ‘short and easily understood’ and ‘accessible’ sentences which are attributed to ‘[Vonnegut’s] early work as a journalist’ (Allen, 1991:3), and also because of the poor reception of the short story which is viewed as ‘lack[ing] the originality and technical creativity of Vonnegut’s best fiction’ (Wood and Wood, 1973; Kellman, 2006).

The preferred reading of *Harrison Bergeron*, then, is that which creates a close-ended dystopia where the government quashes any hopes of freedom. Overall, there seems to be a general consensus amongst academic readers of the text in this regard and to the general themes presented in the narrative. This consensus gravitates towards the author’s irony and the satirical interpretation of the law of ‘equality’, with comments on the ‘broad cartoon-like strokes’ of the exaggerated implemented handicaps (Morace, 2010: 156; Hattenhaur, 1998; Reed, 2000; Milner et. al 2014). However, Hattenhaur points out that the irony isn’t addressed by early critics or is often misinterpreted because

> they miss the narration’s unreliability is [because] the plot hides the undeniability [sic] of the irony until the end. It is not until the plot resolution that the physically impossible happens. [. . .] after that impossible event, the preposterousness of the preceding events emerges more clearly. For example, in a society in which no one is more intelligent than anyone else, everyone

> would be as stupid as the most mentally deficient person in the populace, and therefore, all would be unable even to feed themselves. But the critics miss this plot development.
>
> (Hattenhaur, 1998: 391)

Townsend is one of the critics that Hattenhaur addresses in his argument above. Townsend views that the story in *Harrison Bergeron* is a 'no-plot' situation in which nothing happens (Townsend, 1988: 99). Although the action is cyclical in the sense it begins and ends in the Bergeron living room, the story is in no way plotless. The main 'action' is contained in the frame of the sub-world switch to the television screen and studio, in which Harrison rebels and fails due to his hubris. Furthermore, the irony is noticed by readers before what Hattenhaur refers to as the 'impossible event' of Harrison defying gravity and hovering in the air as he dances with the ballerina. Readers are already primed to notice the irony of the narrative once they engage in the text world repair of the notion of 'equality' in the text, which is on the very first page of the narrative and not at the end (see upcoming section 5.4 for more detailed discussion). The exaggeration of the handicap contraptions, and the foregrounded descriptions of these devices also lead the readers to understand the satire in the text at the beginning rather than at the end, and isn't subtle at all. Furthermore, the unreliability of the narration is also inherent in the narration's informal tone and the constant repair that the text evokes, and the evaluative perception that is present in the narrator's voice. This will be discussed further in the upcoming analysis in section 5.4 below.

5.2 Online Reviews of *Harrison Bergeron*

As shown below in the overall rating frequency measures on *Goodreads*, the majority of readers rated the short story very highly:

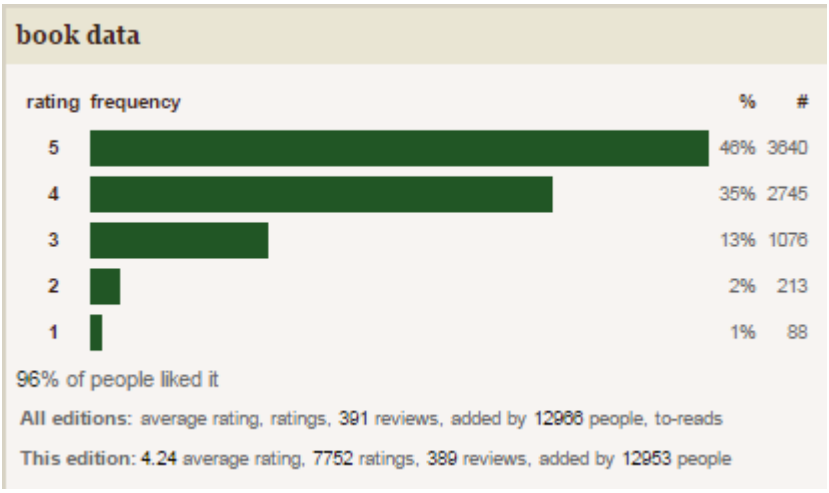


Figure 6 Ratings of Harrison Bergeron on Goodreads

Initially, I was interested in looking at the negative reviews of the short story, as with the analysis of *the Handmaid's Tale* reviews in chapter 4 as potential dispreferred responses to the text. In the case of *Harrison Bergeron*, although 218 readers gave the story 2 stars, and 88 readers gave the short story 1 star, totalling to 301 reviews with ratings of one or two stars, there were only 12 negative written reviews. Thus, in order to generate a sense of the general interpretations of the text, I looked at the written reviews on the website without focusing on negative reviews, with 111 total responses in the dataset. These responses used in this chapter are consecutively numbered from O1 to O111 for ease of reference in the analysis. Unlike the novel, the short story length was beneficial because none of the readers indicated that they didn't read the entire story. In general, there was an overlapping of content, for example the mention of the author and evaluation of the writing of the story, as well as its comparisons with other dystopian fiction. New tags in this set included 'equality' which was one of the main concepts that is directly mentioned in the story,

After initial coding of significant themes, these were re-coded following the same methodology of the previous study of *The Handmaid's Tale* (see 4.3). Overall, the most significant thematic tags over the data were as follows in order of frequency across the data in the final coding:

Tags	Sources	References
Themes	41	69
negative criticism	21	26
narrative interrelations	19	19
Style	18	21
actual world reference	17	17
emotional responses	17	17
swift world building	15	19
positive evaluation of the story	11	18
Ending	10	11
Characters	9	12
Resonance	9	10
didn't like the story	5	5
self-positioning	2	2
extrapolation beyond text	2	2

Table 5 Tags for online responses to Harrison Bergeron

Although *Goodreads* reviews provide authentic responses to texts without researcher intervention, as this sample reveals, the information that these reviews provide can be limited due to the lack of uniformity of these responses, and the limited information available about the reader and the context of reading. Following initial coding of emerging topics, the most frequently recurring tag is the 'themes' that are presented in *Harrison Bergeron*. Because the story is usually taught in a classroom setting, this may have led to the higher number of 41 readers who pointed to the 'themes' of equality, satire, dystopia and utopia that are present in the story, and 21 readers provided negative criticism of the story pointing to plot structure and ambiguity (readers O44, O54, O77), as well as the inability of the readers to suspend disbelief (readers O13, O23, O42, O97, O108). For example, the following responses highlight the absurdity of the world-building:

- The only thing I would have preferred is if [Harrison] wasn't seven feet tall. I don't know why. I couldn't see how it was an advantage and, as there are a lot of very gifted people, I think it would have felt more in-line. That just seemed like a random detail which jarred with the surprising realism of the story(O23)

- There's no other way to describe it. I almost laughed at how (spoilers ahead) the seven-foot-tall, drop-dead gorgeous, fourteen-year-old genius that is Harrison Bergeron was conveyed as a serious character (?); and how he burst onto the set of a live, televised ballet performance (??), apparently claimed one of the dancers as his Empress (okay WTF), defied

the laws of gravity by dancing mid-air (now you're just pulling my leg), and got shot...and there is the entire plot, I suppose (O42)

- I could tell I wasn't going to like "Harrison Bergeron" when author Kurt Vonnegut expected there to have been 184 constitutional amendments added between this story's publication and 2081. Sure, I get it's fiction, and even science fiction — but in no conceivable reality could there ever be that many amendments so quickly (O44)

- I find it difficult to understand why crashing the ballet and claiming a bride was his first order of business(O69)

- Probably the one point that bothers me most in "Harrison Bergeron," is Harrison's age. How likely is it that a fourteen year old would be so tall, so strong, and so smart? Also, what self-respecting ballerina would really want to be his "Empress?" Even if he is as handsome as Thor, he is still just a kid(O81)

- I don't exactly think that intelligence, looks, and personality can be relative to others. There is no line that shows what exactly is normal/perfect. I thought this was interesting to read, just that I kind of disagreed with the fact that people have to be limited to be normal(O83)

- If everyone were equal and at the level of intelligence that is suggested in this story, the world would crash and burn. Imagine the world filled with 8 year olds in adult bodies. Could we really survive for long? No. (O87)

Although 'Harrison Bergeron' is a short story that only spans 9 pages, many readers mentioned that they were able to create a rich and memorable text world based on the text. The tag 'swift world building' is used to indicate the 15 readers who mentioned this world-building or creation based on a short stretch of text:

- This book gets five stars because it creates a whole world, in just a few pages (O18)

- I'm amazed to how he was able to develop fairly decent characters in only 9 pages, makes me want to read more of Vonnegut... soon (O20)

- Vonnegut needs exactly 5 minutes to make us feel the way we do after reading the entire length of *1984* (O31)

- Vonnegut manages to pack a surprising amount of story into such a short amount of words [. . .] amazing that Vonnegut could accomplish this in just a few pages (O29)

- In a few brief pages, Vonnegut rewrites the entirety of the future to be an epic, Orwellian dystopia of forced equality taken too far and nightmarish government surveillance passed through the lense of dark humour (O68)

- Is it possible to pack emotion and surprise and fear and frustration into a 5 min story? If your name is Kurt Vonnegut, the answer is yes (O86)

In direct contrast to the examples above, other readers felt that the story lacked enough description and wanted more information about the text world. These readers described their frustration with the lack of detail or backstory to the narrative:

- I thought that the author was good at show not tell but I think that he could improve with his descriptions of how people were feeling. I would like to of heard more of what they were thinking about when he came on the show. […] It could use some more detail.[sic] (O28)

- I think the author could have added more background story to understand how their society became that way. (O30)

- But this one just wasn't developed enough; it ended too soon with no interesting climax or resolution. It was just blah in the end. It was predictable, and the most exciting point of the whole story was way too rushed; it felt too fast, like it was a synopsis rather than live action. (O44)

- I realize it's a short story, but I felt like the story overall could've been fleshed out a bit more to make it more satisfying. (O77)

The reviews also show that readers created some intertextual links between the short story and their own experiences with literature and background knowledge. 19 reviews mentioned 'narrative interrelations' with other dystopian fiction, which according to Mason (2015) are the links that readers continuously create during the reading process between literary works as they encounter a new text. These links were usually with dystopian or post-apocalyptic works, such as *the Giver* (O41, O62, O101, O103) *the Uglies* series (O8), *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (O5, O26,O31, O53, O99), *Fahrenheit 451* (O5, O12). 17 readers pointed to intertextual references with real world current or historical events in the tag 'Actual world reference.' This is due to the setting of the story in the USA, with these reviews pointing out parallels with their knowledge of American politics:

- American readers really shouldn't be too shocked: Our secretive government agencies--particularly the FBI and CIA--have abused their powers with murderous activities under the guise of patriotism for decades(O3)

- You don't have to be right wing or left wing to enjoy it, and it's much better written. (O24)

- It was a good experience overall because it was an interesting story. It made me appreciate our country and that too much equality can be bad. (O28)

- The things it has to say about equality give voice to thoughts I've had before- it seems, today, that everybody wants equality all the time. Poor little kid didn't win at the softball tournament- let's give him a trophy for trying. What? Rewarding somebody for performing badly isn't going to turn out well. (O70)

- Unfortunately, I recognize some of the issues from today's society in comments that seem absurd when seen in print. For instance, when Hazel says that the announcer should "get a nice raise for trying so hard," it reminds me of instances when people think they should be given some sort of extra compensation just for attempting to do what's expected of them. For the most part, American society is all about "equality," but a story like "Harrison Bergeron" gives the reader some things to think about (O81)

- Will we ever allow this to happen in our quest for oneness and equality? (O111)

Although the short story is highly rated on *Goodreads*, only 18 readers referred to the writing of the story and commented on the 'style' used in the story, referring to the writer's role in world building. This is not elaborated on in these responses and therefore it is difficult to discern whether these readers are referring to 'style' as specifically linguistic choices:

- I thought the writing style was an easy format to understand (O30)
- this provocative, magnificent, yet well written short story (O45)
- very well told, captivating science fiction short-story (O46)
- strangely well-written (O54)
- Still, it was a well written short story(O83)
- His writing is very splended [sic] (090)

Only 11 readers had ‘positive evaluative’ remarks commending the story and praising the depiction of the themes in the short story. 17 reviews referred to the ‘emotional responses’ that they felt during the reading process, and these emotions were generally more negative, describing the story as ‘scary’ (e.g. O10, O34. O36. O45), disturbing (O8, O55, O81), and sad (O3, O27, O66). This emotional involvement is perhaps what leads some readers to note how the story ‘stuck with [them] ever since’ reading it for the first time (O36), with some reviews noting this experience of ‘resonance’, most of them attributing it to the descriptions of George’s experiences of the noises

- [. . .] now I can't get it out of my head. (O51)
- It is a fast read that will stay with you forever. (O92)
- Although it only takes a few minutes to read, it definitely sticks with you. (O98)
- I have thought back to it many times over the years th[e] i[m]age of him dancing in chains with awful sound torture breaking his thought process (O100)
- It always stuck with me, particularly the ballerinas. (O103)

Two reviewers positioned themselves within the text world, with evidence of self-implication of themselves in the narrative (Kuiken et al., 2004) and noting that having more handicaps indicates that they are more talented, therefore the equality that is depicted in the text is not true equality:

- it made me imagine what i'd be like for me in that 'utopia'. I'm smart (even though i maybe dumb).I'd have to have that ear thing. Also im prettyish so i'd have to wear a mask.Im strong/fastish so i'd have to wear those ball things in the sack (some guy said it this way and i swear it sounded SO wrong!) I would NEVER want to live in their world. (O71)
- If I was born in the twisted and sad world this book presents, I would need a 5 ton weight on me with the most grotesque mask you've ever seen and a really big earpiece ;) (O80)

Using *Goodreads* responses as a starting point for the text analysis in the following section thus allows me to provide an account of reading that is grounded by evidence of actual reader responses. Although the thematic tagging may be somewhat

influenced by my own judgements, the frequency of themes across the response data allows for a discussion of what can be considered as a general or preferred response of the text within the scope of the data that is collected in this chapter. This provides valuable information about interpretations that are not my own, and provides a new angle of interpretation away from a purely subjective reading. This is not a generalisation for all readers of 'Harrison Bergeron'; there are various factors that may lead to a difference in frequency of certain themes according to more specifically controlled response groups of certain demographics, which would share cultural, ideological and religious values and ideals that would undoubtedly effect the frequency of certain tags. Due to the nature of the anonymous data in this study, there is no indication of the demographic of the readers, and therefore I avoid making any generalisations for readers of 'Harrison Bergeron' in the analysis, but maintain that the results reflect at least a trend within the responses collected for the purpose of this study. In the following section, 5.3, I explore the responses of readers to 'Harrison Bergeron' in order to provide data that contains more context for the interpretations that the readers provide. Section 5.4 in this chapter provides textual analysis that stems from the results of the qualitative tagging of these responses, discussing the most prevalent themes found in the data.

5.3 Interviewing Readers of *Harrison Bergeron*

The main recurrent themes found in the previous datasets presented in chapter 4 and section 5.2 were incorporated into the investigation of the reader responses to 'Harrison Bergeron' as part of a semi-structured interview guide. The guide thus encouraged the participants to comment on the characters, the ending of the story, and their familiarity with the story or similar works in the genre. The readers were also asked briefly about their preferences in reading, and their views on the main themes such as equality and totalitarian control. Finally, readers were also asked about foregrounded moments in the text, which were 'striking' or 'memorable' to them after their readings. Interview participants are encouraged to give as much information as possible about their reading experience and their attitudes towards the writing style and themes in the story. This study aims to elicit readings that provide a broader look at the reader as a participant in the discourse world, and thus the

readings are compared to the experiences that are mentioned by the readers themselves. Although the interviews cannot provide a comprehensive view of the entirety of the reader's experience and knowledge, it can provide some insight in so far as the information that the interviewees are willing to divulge.

The online reviews of 'Harrison Bergeron', while useful in providing the overview of the generalised response to the text, were in general short in length and had little or no indication of the readers' experience of the reading. In contrast, in an interview situation, such vague and short responses can be elaborated upon, thus providing a more in-depth explanation of interpretations.

The 10 participants in this study consisted of 4 native speakers of English, the remaining 6 participants were second-language speakers of English, with 3 self-identifying as bilingual. The readers were asked to fill in a language background questionnaire, in which they provided their test scores. These were anonymised and responses were numbered P1 to P10 for ease of reference. For the purpose of validating the readers' interpretations as dispreferred responses rather than misreadings due to lack of linguistic knowledge, participation in the study required an IELTS score of 7.0 in reading or equivalent scores. The main aim of the study was to explore the operationalisation of the interview questions; therefore a wide range of participants was accepted for purposes of clarifying the strength and consistency of the interview questions, while at the same time gathering these responses for investigating recurrent themes, even across this small sample. The aim was *not* to create representative samples of a certain social demographic, so the discrepancies in age (ranging from 19-37) and gender (7 female, 3 male) were not considered problematic, but served the purpose of this exploratory investigation.

Code	Age	Sex	Self-identified reading habits
P1	37	Male	Usually reads autobiographies
P2	22	Female	Enjoys novels and science fiction
P3	21	Female	Reads a lot of books, magazines, especially SF
P4	33	Female	Prefers non-romantic fiction, including drama and slice-of-life
P5	36	Male	Prefers John Grisham novels over everything else
P6	19	Female	Enjoys fantasy and historical fiction
P7	32	Female	Enjoys books that revolve around curiosities, and short stories
P8	24	Male	General fiction, Slice of someone's life
P9	28	Female	Loves horror stories and 'really trashy romance novels'
P10	24	Female	Prefers slice-of-life over fantasy genres

Table 6 Reading 'Harrison Bergeron' Interview Participants

The goal was not to account for all readings of 'Harrison Bergeron' or to provide a quantitative study, but to provide a number of case studies that illustrate the concepts discussed in the previous chapters and to portray how these real readers interpret texts. Ethical approval was obtained following the University of Nottingham guidelines for ethical research. In the case the participants are not comfortable with answering any questions, they were informed that they can choose to not answer and move on to the next questions instead, and are free to end the interview and/or withdraw from the study at any time with no repercussions. If the participant wishes to fully withdraw from the study all related information and interview data will be deleted. The call for participants was advertised on the University campus, and as such the participants were all students at the university, with no known access issues. As an incentive to participate in the study, the volunteering participants were offered a copy of a novel or a coffee voucher, as well as entry into a monetary prize draw at the end of the pilot study.

The interviews were transcribed and coded by topic in Nvivo and will be described in detail according to the thematic recurrences across the data. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, not accounting for accents or other non-verbal gestures or stutters, which facilitated the analysis and coding process. This also allowed for avoiding bias or 'stigmatization' of minorities or different varieties of English

(Dornyei, 2007: 248). The transcriptions were checked against the recordings thoroughly in order to ensure the data presented the responses of the interviewees in full detail. Due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews, some of the topics in the question guide were discussed in more depth by some participants, whereas others proved difficult to elaborate on short-ended answers. For example, note the following exchange with participant P3 when attempting to ask about a foregrounded/striking moment in the text:

> Is there anything in the story that stands out to you?
>
> P3: No.
>
> Is there a part in the story that is memorable?
>
> P3: No.
>
> Some event? Some character that really strikes you?
>
> P3: No, not really.

Overall, however, the reader did say that the story was interesting, and through other questions mentions that there are more aspects to the character of George, for example, when asked about her opinion on characters: 'I think it's brief, but the way that you can see that George thinks a lot actually by how often it's triggered and obviously their son is like him in some ways but um… sometimes- I just don't see how this is possible- it's a bit hard to stomach something like this actually' (P3).

The pre-reading interview questions provided some insight to the participant's reading preferences and habits, in which they discussed the types of fiction they usually read. This also allowed for an establishment of some informal camaraderie with the participants to put them at ease when answering the questions about the story. After reading, the participants were asked about their view about the story, with the general prompt: 'What did you think about the story?" The majority of the responses mentioned that the story was interesting (P1, P3, P5, P6, P7, P8), 'well written' (P3, P8) that they enjoyed or liked it (P2, P9) and that it reminded them of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (P1, P10). Usually with written responses or online reviews this is the extent of the evaluation and response of the reader, but with the semi-

structured interview the readers were asked to elaborate on what they found was interesting or enjoyable:

- It's very interesting because it shows what society could do to – in terms of control and it's a bit of a scary prophecy that that might happen in about a hundred to two hundred years' time- when this kind of ultimate communism comes into force. (P1)

- I think it was original, the theme [of equality] was very well presented, I don't really see how society can come to this kind of stage but it was an interesting presentation on [the topic]. (P3)

- I though initially it was really interesting content, and everyone is equal, […] then you realize what that meant (P5)

- Ridiculous, it reminds me of a book I read for one of our modules (we) by Zamyatin kind of a futuristic society with control (P6)

- Yeah I like it, the influence of the government, I find quite interesting, I was wondering, it talks about the United States Handicapper general, it doesn't necessarily mean the US or? (P7)

- I think it's very interesting because I think it's telling a world with laws that are different to the ones we have in our world, [. . .] I think there is a stark contrast between what we are used to and what the author describes through the eyes of these two people and that makes it ever the more interesting to read, and find out what is the deeper meaning behind this storyline. (P8).

The use of the evaluation 'interesting' thus carried multiple meanings that varied from the speculative future that is presented by the text (P1, P3, P8), commentary on the presentation of the theme of equality (P3, P5), to ridiculousness and absurdity (P6). The flexibility of the semi-structured interview also allows the participants to provide additional information about their reading experiences that they may not have included when answering the direct questions about their reading habits, such as P6 mentioning she read Zamyatin's *We* as part of coursework. P8 also notes that the text world provides a contrasting society to his own, which also fits Sargent's (1994) definition of dystopia.

The readers were also asked about their views on the characters, to comment generally on the characters or if they didn't answer they were provided with more

prompts such as what kind of characters they enjoy reading about, and the following responses show that these readers indicate that self-verification or identification helps with the connection with the characters and making them more relatable.

- I think with any of the male characters I think really, I could see myself, I could imagine myself- what could happen if I had to control my thoughts or what happens if I achieve something in life and was punished for that achievement- […] society being competitive and everybody want everyone else to be equal or worse than themselves, rather than better (P1).

- Sometimes I think it's very nice if they [characters] are similar to you in personality (P2)

- I'd feel more involved, especially as I come from a certain society so if the character comes from the same, I would feel like the protagonist in the story (P5)

- I think [the] characters that are kind of exciting and maybe relatable and like a really strong climax in the story I think is really interesting

- (Interviewer: So what do you mean by relatable?)

- I guess- they don't have to be completely like 100% realistic, like you think they might be too perfect or something but just something like- an emotion[?] perhaps or maybe relatable at the same time. (P6)

- I like a bit of identification with the characters. Like if I can identify myself with the character, or if I see something that I have similarities, I feel more hooked to the book if I can find some kind of identification with the characters. And I think it really depends on how the story is narrated as well, I think narration is key. (P7)

- I like George and Hazel but they are fictional characters, I feel kind of bad for Hazel, um and I feel even worse for George because obviously he can't have a single thought stay in his head, and what does that mean for him, what does that mean for society, um how could you possibly have a functional society without having thoughts? (P9)

Interestingly, most of the responses discuss George and Hazel rather than Harrison, even though he is the title character. This could be related to the fact that George is repeated throughout the text more, thus is activated and primed in the minds of the readers more than Harrison. Furthermore we have more direct access to George's

senses, especially hearing when the text mentions the sounds that he hears, which serves to position the focalized narrative in George's point of view (see detailed text discussion in 5.4.3).

5.4 Discussion & Cognitive stylistic Analysis

5.4.1. Style, Themes & swift world building

When the readers commented on the writing style of the short story, they indicated that the 'style' was 'simple' (O14, O20, O42, O43), easy to understand (O20, O21, O30) and that it was 'well' written (O18, O24, O45, O46, O54, O83, O90). In 'Harrison Bergeron', the third person narrator uses simple sentence structures. For example, the entire first paragraph of the short story (see below) does not have any embedded clauses which may lead to complicated world building. There is also repetition of sentence patterns, and listing of features of the world builders which also appears simple on the surface, but also lessens the burden of the reader. For example, the ballerina's voice when she reads the bulletin for the first time is a 'warm, luminous, timeless melody' (Vonnegut, 1968: 10, this edition referenced hereafter as *WMH*), Harrison in his handicaps is described as 'Clanking, clownish, huge' (*WMH*, 11) and he says of himself that he is 'crippled, hobbled, sickened' and the music initially played by the musicians is 'cheap, silly, false'. Overall, direct speech is the primary mode of representing character speech, and while there are instances of presenting George's free indirect perspective throughout the text, this is not difficult for the readers to decipher because they are usually framed to indicate that the sounds are in his head, e.g. 'A buzzer sounded in George's head.'(*WMH*, 8) This is possibly why the short story has evaded detailed stylistic analysis, due to the focus of most enquiries on more complex structures, however as the section below illustrates, the world building on sentence level is still an intricate and complex process, even if both the reviewers and the critics deem 'Harrison Bergeron' as a 'simple' short story, the fact that it remains relevant to classrooms and law reports show that there is a lasting textual effect that is worth investigating.

Thus it is possible to consider that the reading of the text from the reviews analysed in the previous section generally agrees with the preferred reading that is prevalent in the critical views of 'Harrison Bergeron', in which the readers generally created a

‘worse’ society that led to negative emotional responses of sadness and fear for the characters in the short story. Therefore most of these readers have created a closed-ended dystopia, in which there is no hope for the society. Readers were able to recognise themes such as dystopian control and equality in the text, and maintain that although the text is comparably shorter than other dystopian works that the readers have previously encountered, such as *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, these reviewers were able to make connections and identify the genre of the short story as a dystopia, as well as build complete text worlds. These two thematic tags ‘Themes’ and ‘swift world building’ are related: it is because of successful world building that the readers can draw upon these themes in the text.

The world building elements in this short text rely heavily upon the ‘Principle of Minimal Departure’ (Ryan, 1991) in which nothing more than sparse description of the setting is enough to create the dystopian world of a totalitarian USA government in 2081. The opening paragraphs in ‘Harrison Bergeron’ set the initial world building elements of the story. The beginning is as follows:

> THE YEAR WAS 2081, and everybody was finally equal. They weren't only equal before God and the law. They were equal every which way. Nobody was smarter than anybody else. Nobody was better looking than anybody else. Nobody was stronger or quicker than anybody else. All this equality was due to the 211th, 212th, and 213th Amendments to the Constitution, and to the unceasing vigilance of agents of the United States Handicapper General.
>
> Some things about living still weren't quite right, though. April for instance, still drove people crazy by not being springtime. And it was in that clammy month that the H-G men took George and Hazel Bergeron's fourteen-year-old son, Harrison, away. It was tragic, all right, but George and Hazel couldn't think about it very hard. Hazel had a perfectly average intelligence, which meant she couldn't think about anything except in short bursts. And George, while his intelligence was way above normal, had a little mental handicap radio in his ear. He was required by law to wear it at all times. It was tuned to a government transmitter. Every twenty seconds or so, the transmitter would send out some sharp noise to keep people like George from taking unfair advantage of their brains.
>
> (*WMH*, 7)

The first paragraph provides the time (t) as the year 2081 in the future, the location (l) as the United States. The initial sentence ‘everybody was finally equal’ indicates that equality is positive and something worth striving for, however the usual frame knowledge or schema is that equality is demanded in laws and in religion, and the second sentence indicates that this ‘equality’ is not limited to these aspects, thus leading readers to ‘repair’ their notion of equality, and create the text world in equality means ‘they were equal every which way’. For example, the following responses mention the place in which George and Hazel Bergeron are watching television:

- I think good stories are like that that, you know, it all starts off in a calm, in the living room […] and then resets back into- well, it’s the same as the room before[…] (P1)
- ‘The family are sitting together in the living room, to watch tv and relax[...]’ (P3)
- ‘They’re in their living room watching tv to relax and their own son comes on tv[…]’ (P7)

The participants seem to agree upon the ‘living room’ as the location of the first text world, although the words ‘living room’ do not occur throughout the text of ‘Harrison Bergeron’. Instead, the following world building elements are mentioned explicitly in the text (underlines mine):

- George and Hazel were watching <u>television</u>. (*WMH,* 7)
- ‘All of a sudden you look so tired,’ said Hazel. ‘Why don't you stretch out on <u>the sofa,</u> so you can rest your handicap bag on the <u>pillows</u>, honeybunch.’ (*WMH,* 9)
- It was then that the Bergerons' <u>television tube</u> burned out. (*WMH,* 13)
- Hazel turned to comment about the blackout to George. But George had gone <u>out into the kitchen</u> for a can of beer. (*WMH,* 13)
- George <u>came back in</u> with the beer (*WMH,* 13)

Drawing upon their frame knowledge of houses and living rooms, the use of minimal world building elements 'sofa' and 'television', in addition to the deictic markers 'into the kitchen' and 'came back in' that demarcate that this is a room in the 'house' is enough for the reader to create a rich text world in which the living room is not different from the living rooms they grew up in and are familiar with. This is in line with the 'Principle of Minimal Departure' (Ryan, 1991) which indicates that readers will 'reconstrue the central world of a textual universe', in a way that 'conforms as far as possible to [their] representation of [the actual world].' (Ryan, 1991: 51). The home that is depicted by the text is close to what the readers' own knowledge of reality, and when they utilize the world building elements present in the text to signal that the part of the Bergeron house in which the conversations are taking place is indeed in 'the living room'. Although it is not mentioned whether in the year 2081 televisions are kept in a bedroom, or whether they have multiple rooms in their houses, with these textual clues the readers will reconstrue the 'living room' as similar to the one they are familiar with, even adding their own experiences to the text. For example, the third response from P2 mentions that the 'The family are sitting together in the living room, to watch tv and relax[...]' providing more information than is present in the text, which does not mention whether the watching of television is indeed relaxing for the Bergerons, or if it is a government suggested activity that couples must partake in as citizens of this dystopia. However, since the text does not dictate this clearly, then the readers will draw upon their own representation of the world, and in this case, their representation of watching television with the family. At one point in the interview, P2 points out that in her family, they would gather around meals together at the end of the day, '[. . .] they have to be together at night to have dinner and at morning they have to have breakfast together', and this is reflected in her interpretation of the text, where clearly her own knowledge frames of 'FAMILY' affect her reading.

The notion of 'world-repair' is also useful in describing the mentally constructed worlds of 'Harrison Bergeron' (Emmot, 1997). In Emmot's model, repair occurs due to miscues or mistakes by the readers in interpreting textual signals which forces readers to repair these worlds created at a later point, however, in Text World Theory, Gavins uses the term 'repair' because it 'provide[s] a perfect account of the cognitive effort readers must invest if they are to salvage the wreckage of their

mental representation of the text' after confirming that the initial world constructed is not the correct or suitable one for the context (Gavins, 2000: 31). While initially the term 'equality' has positive connotations, readers will soon realise that the term also has a darker meaning in the context of this story. This is also noted by the interview participants, who indicated their awareness of the repair that they are required to perform when dealing with the notion of 'equality' (emphasis in italics):

- '*initially* when I was reading it- I felt it was a really good way of almost satirizing what is happening without making it too contentious, and *when I was really into it*, I know it wasn't difficult [to understand what the author meant]' (P4)

- 'I thought initially it was very interesting content, and everyone is equal *then you realize what that meant*'- (P5)

- '…it said they are all supposed to be average intelligence, *but seems like average intelligence is less than average intelligence,* so they are all scatter-brained or forced to be.' (P6)

- Yeah, well you start with confusion, then I feel , […] , I start with confusion then you go into sort of like incredulity, like how can they treat people like this, and you start to think how my own society is kind of a little bit like that or how it can turn into something like that, it's always a little exhilarating when it gets to the climax of the story and the end it's just 'oh it's so sad' (P9)

The repeated negations and repetitions in 'Nobody was smarter than anybody else. Nobody was better looking than anybody else. Nobody was stronger or quicker than anybody else.' lead to negative world switches which prime the reader with a sense of foreshadowing that 'equality' is not used in the usual sense of the word. The '211th, 212th, and 213th Amendments to the Constitution' help establish the location of the narrative in the USA, which also provides a world building element that is at odds with the reader's frame knowledge of the discourse world in which there have only been 27 amendments to the US constitution. The multiple world switches continue in the complex sentence 'Some things about living still weren't quite right, though' in which the reader creates epistemic world switches that are related to the narrator's stance, especially with the final 'though' which creates a characterised conversational tone to the narrative. This is also echoed with the casual 'for instance' for the reasoning that things weren't 'quite right' in this society. Thus what begins as

a distanced omniscient third-person narrator that is located outside the text world and is omniscient, is repaired to an ambiguous enactor within the text world. The world switches created by this opening paragraph can be summarised in the following diagram, where the multiple negations become foregrounded to create temporary unrealised worlds that slow down the reader's world building and further create the sense of impending doom.

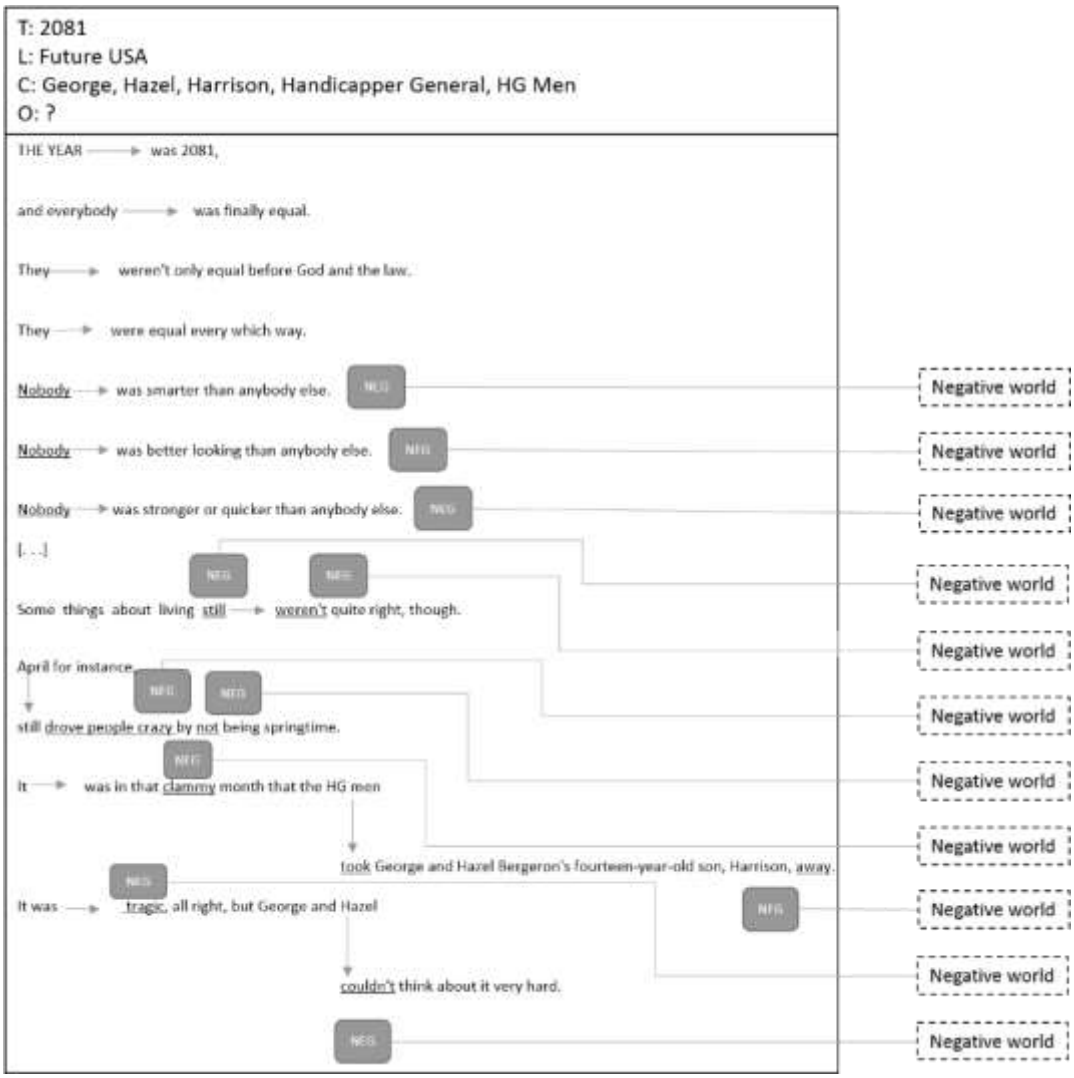


Figure 7 Negative worlds created in the opening paragraphs of 'Harrison Bergeron'

Although ‘Still’ isn’t a typically semantically negative word, in this paragraph it takes on a negative meaning of ‘something that has not happened yet’, thus creates a negative epistemic world switch. The negations ‘not being springtime’, and inherently negative ‘clammy’, ‘took [. . .] away’ and ‘tragic’ further continue this layering of negative worlds. The characters (c) introduced here are George and Hazel Bergeron, as well as their son Harrison. These enactors trigger the frame knowledge of FAMILY and HOME, but this is also soon negated because the son is taken away in the next sentences. The narrator says that the loss of their son is ‘tragic’, but also follows the negative statement with the conversational ‘alright’ that diminishes the tragedy. The narrator is therefore also characterised by this conversational tone even though he is unnamed in the narrative. The reason for this further establishes how unequal this world is, and helps further create this sense of foreboding about this society, where parents cannot think about their own missing son.

Equality in ‘Harrison Bergeron’ means that everyone has the same level of intelligence, but in this society ‘perfectly average intelligence’ is revealed to be a mental issue in which a person ‘couldn’t think about anything except in short bursts’. George’s ‘way above normal’ intelligence is thus not a sign of genius but the ability to think in stretches more than 20 seconds. Thus, to ensure that George’s level of thinking is the same as Hazel’s, who cannot think except in short bursts, his thoughts are dispersed through the use of a radio which transmits jarring sounds in his ear at set intervals. The negated world created by the world switch, in which it is fair to take advantage of mental abilities, is closer to the discourse world knowledge of the reader. In the discourse world, being able to have complete thoughts is not considered an ‘unfair advantage’.This world-building of negative worlds is similar to the dystopian world that is built in *The Handmaid’s Tale* (see section 4.4), the negated inaccessible worlds are therefore closer the readers’ experiences of the real world in the discourse world.

The notion of equality in the world we live in would be different according to different world views. Gender, race, and religion all effect the views of equality across cultures and languages. A reader brings in their own notions and worldview to negotiate and create this text-world triggered by the text. Multiple instances of repair

is therefore necessary for the creation of this text-world: where the reader will build a new notion of ‘equal’ and ‘fair’ revised to fit with the story’s world-view. This is also a reason for the prevalence of the themes of ‘control’ , ‘equality’ and dystopia being the most recurring in the *Goodreads* data, in which the idea of equality is established in these first paragraphs and reinforced through the continuous reference to the handicaps throughout the narrative. There are multiple world switches caused by negations, epistemic and temporal world switches that also occur in the narrative. These switches are temporary, but their recurrence throughout the story may be part of why the narrative has such resonance with the readers, because of the cognitive processing required to build such complex text worlds.

The main spatial world switch occurs as the Bergerons are watching ballerinas on television, and Harrison suddenly appears on the screen, where Harrison displays his strength and declares himself emperor, and finally the sentence ‘It was then that the Bergeron’s television tube burned out’ switches the location of the text world back into the Bergeron household where it began.

There is also some distinction between the action that occurs in the studio and the relatively little action that takes place in the Bergerons’ living room. George and Hazel are watching TV, and while Hazel has inability to think about anything, she comments on the action on the screen and reacts emotionally to what happens, even if she cannot remember what it was. George, on the other hand, is forced to be unable to analyse anything he sees due to his mental handicapping radio device.

What happens in the living room is a verbal conversation, in which there is a breakdown of communication between the couple that cannot remember what the other person is talking about. This frequent loss of established common ground in their discourse also indicates how the government control occurs in 2081. This conversation also serves the purpose of presenting the worldview of the conforming citizens of this dystopia. The following exchange occurs when Hazel tells George that he can remove some of the weight to lessen the weight of a heavy sack of birdshot that he is wearing to handicap his strength and movement:

> ‘Two years in prison and two thousand dollars fine for every ball I took out," said George. "I don't call that a bargain.’

> ‘If you could just take a few out when you came home from work,’ said Hazel. ‘I mean-you don't compete with anybody around here. You just sit around.’
> ‘If I tried to get away with it,’ said George, ‘then other people'd get away with it-and pretty soon we'd be right back to the dark ages again, with everybody competing against everybody else. You wouldn't like that, would you?’
> ‘I'd hate it,’ said Hazel.
> ‘There you are,’ said George. ‘The minute people start cheating on laws, what do you think happens to society?’
> If Hazel hadn't been able to come up with an answer to this question, George couldn't have supplied one. A siren was going off in his head.
> ‘Reckon it'd fall all apart,’ said Hazel.
> ‘What would?’ said George blankly.
> ‘Society,’ said Hazel uncertainly. ‘Wasn't that what you just said?’
> ‘Who knows?’ said George.
>
> (*WMH*, 9-10)

In this exchange, although there are only two characters, there is no usual ellipsis of the direct speech marker ‘said’, which further establishes the repetitive style of the narrative. The repetition of the direct speech markers also maintains the narrator’s visibility in the narrative, which leads to the narrative being controlled by the narrator, as mentioned above, an ambiguous enactor. There is also a repetition of the two counterfactual ‘If’ sentences, ‘If you could just take out a few[…]’ and ‘If I tried to get away with it [. . .]’ followed by the mirroring of the narrator’s ‘If Hazel hadn’t been able to come up with an answer to this question, George couldn’t have supplied one’. This further characterises the narrator and adds to the irony of the narrative. The interjection of the narrator also mimics and provides the interruptions of the sounds that George experiences, further breaking down the dialogue between George and Hazel. In a conversation, the participants of the discourse would share some prior knowledge and build upon this established knowledge by contributing to the creation of the text world of their dialogue, however due to the short memory of Hazel, and the interruptions of George’s mind by his ear radio, the text worlds that are created are very soon lost instead. Even when there is an attempt for repair and clarification, with George’s question ‘What would?’, the final two utterances are marked by ‘said’ followed by negative adverbs, semantic inherent negation ‘blankly’, and the morphological negation ‘uncertainly’. Thus while the world

switches occur due to the direct speech in the text world of George and Hazel's discourse, this world switch is also followed with negative world switches, ending the dialogue with the unrealised negative worlds, instead of returning to the first established text world of their discussion of society. Thus this conversation illustrates that there is not only a breakdown of the worldview of the people living under this dystopian rule, there is also the deconstruction of the basic dialogue, which even when it occurs for the short while that they can remember (which is only twenty seconds), it is an ultimately unrealised dialogue with no full message delivered to the recipient. There are multiple world switches that occur in this conversation as well, with the direct speech creating a world switch to the time of the dialogue, then the epistemic world switches of the repetitions of the counterfactual 'If', followed by the narrated sound in George's head of the siren which also constitutes a world switch into George's perspective.

This text thus begins world-building with constant repair and multiple world-switches to reader inaccessible and unrealised worlds, which require cognitive effort on the part of the reader despite the seemingly 'simple' and clear style of the text. There is also an emphasis on the theme of equality that is foregrounded in the text with the use of repetition and multiple references to the government and the harsh rules they use to enforce the rules of equality triggers the genre recognition of dystopia, which is recognised by critics and the online reviews as well. Furthermore, the narrator's characterisation lends subjectivity to the narrative, which allows for a degree of scepticism on the part of the reader, therefore 'Harrison Bergeron' could be further removed from the reader's knowledge of the discourse world.

In this section 5.4.1. I discussed the tags of 'Style', 'Themes' and 'swift-world building', and explain how the world-building in 'Harrison Bergeron' aids in creating the negative and dark dystopian themes of the story. The genre of dystopia may bring to mind other dystopian works, and this is apparent in the tag 'Narrative Interrelations' where readers found similarities between 'Harrison Bergeron' and other dystopian literary works and films. And due to the similarity of the negative worlds to the reader's discourse world, it is also possible to draw upon real world events that are similar to the narrative, which is covered in the tag 'Actual World reference', in which their knowledge of how politics work in the discourse world is

necessary for successful world building. These two tags will therefore be investigated stylistically in the next section.

5.4.2. Narrative Interrelations & Actual World reference

It is difficult to ascertain the 'preferred' intertextual links for a given text, due to the vast differences of individual background knowledge. For example, in a discussion of 'Harrison Bergeron's allusions and intertextual links, Akers and Moore (1999) point to indirect references to other literary and non-literary works in the short story, such as T.S. Eliot's 'the Wasteland', where the allusion depends wholly on the sentence: 'Some things about living still weren't quite right, though. April for instance, still drove people crazy by not being springtime' which is argued to mirror the first line of the poem 'April is the cruellest month [. . .].' They argue that the attack on television in the story takes place coincidentally after a similar argument is in a 1961 speech given by Federal Communications Commission Chair Newton Minow who refers to television as 'a vast wasteland.' (Akers and Moore, 1999: 170). They make further connections where the name 'Diana Moon' is seen as a reference to the Roman goddess of the hunt, further supported by the mentioning of 'Thor' and 'Adonis' to describe Harrison, that the handicaps are a reference to Rube Goldberg cartoons, and finally that the 'dark humour' of the final exchange between George and Hazel alludes to 1950s comedians George Burns and Gracie Allen (Akers and Moore,1999:170-171; Alvarez, 1999).

An ideal or super reader perhaps can make these connections, but there seems to be a disconnection between what readers generally agree upon in their readings and these more subtle and detailed links that individuals can draw upon but are not as accessible to all readers. For example, readers from the online reviews were able to distinguish the intertextual relationship of 'genre' and mentioned that the story was 'dystopian' or a dystopia in their reviews (readers O8, O12, O14, O25, O26, O29, O31, O39, O44, O53, O65, O66, O68, O74, O91, O92) and thus compared the story to dystopias such as *the Giver* (O41, O62, O101, O103) *the Uglies* series(O8), *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (O5, O26,O31, O53, O99), *Fahrenheit 451* (O5, O12). The pointless conversation between George and Hazel is noted by some online reviewers

as well, but instead of the comedy duo Burns and Allen, these refer to their own sources of reference such as the theatre of the absurd, noting the similarity with *the Bald Soprano* (O7) for example, in which a married couple also has meaningless conversation.

Since these online book reviews are often a platform to suggest to others what to read, there seems to be a tendency to compare 'Harrison Bergeron' with other dystopias that are well-known, and the interview participants also exhibited this tendency, as aforementioned, P6 mentioned *We*, and in the following examples as well:

- It reminded me of something.. I forgot that, I remembered it in the middle of the story, I think it was this movie I saw [. . .] Girl on Fire? No no, *Hunger Games*, So I saw the movie I didn't read the story and I think it reminds me of that, where the president of all the different regions trying to keeping all the regions all equal and he imposes his power by you know, making competing against each other, so one region won't take over the other, in the end everyone will be killed, there will be killing on every part, so no one will be stable and that relates a lot [to this story] (P8)
- It's very dystopian, very Orwellian, [. . . It reminds me of] 11th Anthem by Ann Rand, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, a Little bit of *Brave New World* but I didn't like *Brave New World* that much , um, there's a number of movies it reminds me of as well, so, like *Divergent*, *Equilibrium*, I love dystopian futuristic movies, It reminded me very much about *Equilibrium* (P9).
- It's a bit, reminds me a bit of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* [. . .] Yeah, like *Blade Runner* too, It's set in the future, society's crumbling, and everyone is under control [. . .] Apart of finding similarities from *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* yeah it's like uh post-apocalyptic society something happened so that they are under control (P10)

The online reviews also indicated links drawn from the readers' referencing their actual world, such as the following examples:

- I identify it regarding wartime atrocities which annihilate targeted groups. It is also a strong comment on social conformity on a much more innocuous scale (O2).

- American readers really shouldn't be too shocked: Our secretive government agencies--particularly the FBI and CIA--have abused their powers with murderous activities under the guise of patriotism for decades (O3).
- Stories like this truly scare me, not because of the unimaginable horrors it portrays but because in a world that is so full of competition, what if people were to get tired of it and deem mediocrity to be the rule of law? Worth pondering and downright scary right?
  I value my freedom too much and this book has just brought to light, just how free we are today in the world we live in. Our world, with all its faults and misgivings, is still a free one compared to the world described in this story, where parents don't even have the basic emotions or knowledge to mourn the death of their son! (O10).
- Unfortunately, I recognize some of the issues from today's society in comments that seem absurd when seen in print. For instance, when Hazel says that the announcer should "get a nice raise for trying so hard," it reminds me of instances when people think they should be given some sort of extra compensation just for attempting to do what's expected of them. For the most part, American society is all about "equality," but a story like "Harrison Bergeron" gives the reader some things to think about (O81).

For some of the readers, these links to the actual world create fear (O10), and the recognition makes the story memorable and thought-provoking (O81). It is because of this difference between the critical intertextual links and the readers responses that I agree with Hogan who maintains that '[not] every link is part of intertextuality. Many such ties would be contingent, ephemeral and insignificant.' (Hogan, 2014: 120). An interpretation that includes every possible allusion and intertextual link requires an extremely strict or hypothetical postulated or 'ideal' author (Carroll, 1992, 2000; Irvin, 2006) who 'intends' for each and every intertextual inference possibly made. These critics therefore assume an authorial intention to allude to each political, cultural or social event in the context of writing this short story, based on Vonnegut's focus on the political and social themes throughout his works. This disregards the readers' role in interpretation, which is crucial in the world building process. Because of the repetition of the themes of equality and governmental

control in the story, readers are able to build text worlds based on their prior schematic knowledge of the dystopian genre. This prior knowledge is required as part of creating a preferred reading, or in other terms, successful text world creation (Werth, 1999, 1995b). A reader's ability to create narrative interrelations with other dystopian works as well as their knowledge of current equality laws and law enforcement is necessary in a reading of 'Harrison Bergeron'. However, more obscure links, such as the general month of 'April' forced to have so much meaning referring to 'The Wasteland' as well as a political speech that the readers may not have access to, makes a lesser preferred reading that is not generalised and as shown by the data presented here, not shared by the readers in this study. This is also an argument that can be said of most intertextual links that are taught in classroom settings, which force readers to adopt one single line of association rather than a broader sense of how literature interacts with their own knowledge and creates it in 'authentic readings' (See Mason and Giovanelli, 2015; Mason, 2015).

5.4.3. Emotional Responses and Characters

The general response in the *Goodreads* online reviews indicate that the readers were emotionally attached to the characters in the short story, where they feel the story is 'scary' (e.g. O10, O34. O36. O45), disturbing (O8, O55, O81), and sad (O3, O27, O66). One reader pointed out this as emotional investment: 'some nine-paged short stories can make you as emotionally invested as a single guy in a dog shelter' (O99). This is possibly due to the focalisation of the narrative through the character of George's perceptions. In the text of 'Harrison Bergeron', George is the most repeated word in the story, (34 times) compared to Harrison (26 times including the title) and Hazel (29 times). Although the narrator at the beginning of the story is characterised as detached and ironic, there are some passages which are arguably presented from George's perspective or point of view, which can possibly have a 'strongly manipulative effect' on the readers (Bal, 1997: 144):

> He tried to think a little about the ballerinas. They weren't really very good-no better than anybody else would have been, anyway. They were burdened with sashweights and bags of birdshot, and their faces were masked, so that no one, seeing a free and graceful gesture or a pretty face, would feel like something the cat drug in. George was toying with the vague notion that

> maybe dancers shouldn't be handicapped. But he didn't get very far with it before another noise in his ear radio scattered his thoughts.
>
> (*WMH*, 8)

In traditional stylistics and narratology, narrative point of view and perspective slant has a manipulative effect on the reader, encouraging sympathy and identification with certain characters (Booth, 1961; Bal, 1997: 144; Leech and Short, 2007; Stanzel, 1984). One such model that categorises the presentation of character speech and thought, and thus the character perspective, is Leech and Short's cline of subjectivity, in which the different modes of representation are categorised along a cline which lends apparent subjectivity and interference towards the narrator or the character (Leech and Short, 2007; Semino and Short, 2004).

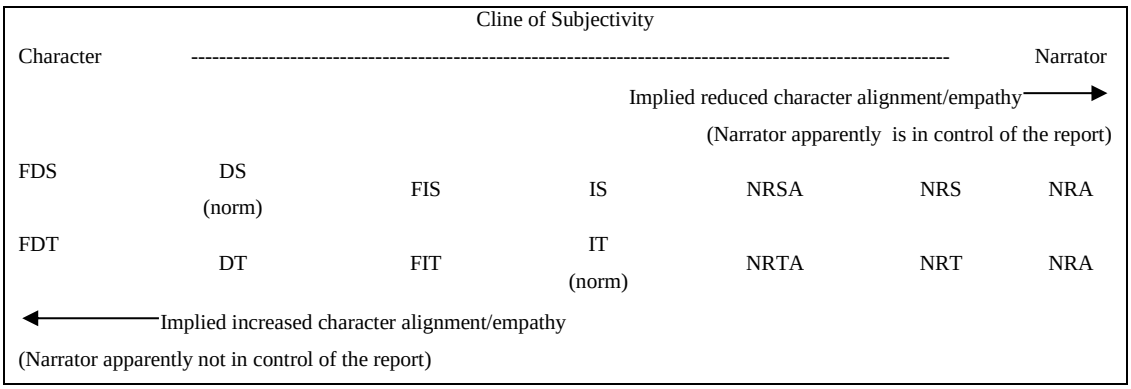


Figure 8 Cline of subjectivity in speech and thought presentation (adapted from Leech and Short, 2007)

On the cline, the norm for character speech representation is Direct Speech (DS), while the norm for thought representation is Indirect Thought (IT). When the narration deviates from this norm, it thus lends alignment with or against the character. For example, 'He tried to think a little about the ballerinas' is a Narrative Representation of a Thought Act (NRTA), and thus leans towards decreased character alignment. By contrast, 'They weren't really very good,' can be categorised as Free Direct Thought (FDT), but the interjection '-no better than anybody else would have been, anyway' is possibly the narrator's interjection, which would mirror the conversational tone in the previous sentence 'Some things about living still weren't quite right, though'. If we consider the rule of 'primacy' (Jahn,1997), in

which the initial frame of perspective and reference for a story is used to interpret the rest of the narrative that follows, the readers are likely to keep the rest of the sentences as focalised from the same character's perspective and keep the same frame of focalisation as the initial sentence, especially with the paragraph ending with sounds in George's head as well.

This focalization through George's perspective is maintained throughout the narrative; there is some alignment with George's perspective through the representation of George's hearing. The narrative shows us George's direct perception, such as: 'A buzzer sounded in George's head. His thoughts fled in panic, like bandits from a burglar alarm.' This is different from reflection and thought related processes. Although the model of speech and thought representation was later updated to include categories of the representation of writing in discourse (Semino and Short, 2004), there still remains this ambiguous category of perception: what I consider as the character's sense representation, whether it be sight, sounds, tastes, smells or textures (touch). Although Semino and Short (2004) introduce the category of Internal Narration (NI) in order to label 'those cases where the narrator reports a character's cognitive and emotional experiences without presenting any specific thoughts' (Semino and Short, 2004: 46), this distinction helps account for sentences that reveal emotional and cognitive components of a certain character's state that do not fall under Free Indirect Thought (FIT). This does not neatly categorise character perceptions that do not have an emotional or cognitive component, but are still connected to a certain character's perspective. The model does not account for this distinction between reflective perception (and thus thought representation or NI) and non-reflective perception, which Brinton defines as:

> a literary style whereby an author, instead of describing the external world, expresses a character's perceptions of it, directly as they occur in the character's consciousness. By using this style, the author avoids indirect report of the perpections[sic]; he can directly verbalize the perceptions without implying that the character himself has verbalized them.
>
> (Brinton, 1980: 370)

Character perception or experientiality (Brinton, 1980; Fludernik, 1996) can also control the focalisation of the narrative in a similar manner, because readers are led

through the characters' perceptions and thus epistemic stance to build specific epistemic text worlds. I suggest that these categories will be as follows:

- Direct Perception (DP): He heard 'RA-TAT-TAT-TAT-TAT' of a gun firing.
- Free Direct Perception (FDP): RA-TAT-TAT-TAT-TAT
- Indirect Perception (IP) He heard the sound of a riveting gun.
- Free Indirect Perception (FIP): There was the sound of a riveting gun in his head.
- Narrative Report of Perception (NRP) He heard a loud sound.

Although finding the baseline for perception will require further extensive research, it is possible to hypothesise intuitively that the norm for perception in fiction is usually IP in a third-person narrative. This will require testing by thematic tagging of characters' sensory narrations across a corpus of written fiction (e.g. Semino and Short, 2004), which is outside the scope of the current thesis. If we consider that IP is the norm, then the sounds in George's head are FIP and fall to the left of the Leech and Short subjectivity scale, leading to increased character empathy which correlates with the findings of the reviews. The readers in the *Goodreads* data mention that the sounds that George hears through his ear radio are salient and foregrounded in their readings (O51, O92, O98), with one reviewer saying that these noises are important for the story: 'The motif in this story is the noise created by the ear pieces and scrap metal. The noises get louder throughout the story which represents people trying to think and fight back at the government' (O30).

The sounds that are perceived by George are represented in the story only 8 times in a 9 page narrative, in the following lines:

- A buzzer sounded in George's head. (FIP) (*WMH*, 8).
- But he didn't get very far with it before another noise in his ear radio scattered his thoughts. (NRP) (*WMH*, 8)
- George winced. (NRP) (*WMH*, 8)
- "Sounded like somebody hitting a milk bottle with a ball peen hammer," said George. (DS) (*WMH*, 8)

- [. . .] a twenty-one-gun salute in his head stopped that. (FIP) (*WMH*, 9)
- If Hazel hadn't been able to come up with an answer to this question, George couldn't have supplied one. A siren was going off in his head. (FIP) (*WMH*, 9)
- The realization was blasted from his mind instantly by the sound of an automobile collision in his head. (FIP) (*WMH*, 11)
- He winced. There was the sound of a riveting gun in his head. (FIP) (*WMH*, 14)

Here, the number of times the readers encounter FIP over IP is more than the instances of NRP. But even in the case of the NRP sounds, these are accompanied by negative world switches, with the inherently negative 'scattered his thoughts' and 'winced' which draw empathetic responses because of the cognitive effort of the negations and because the character is depicted in pain.

This empathy with George and the sounds that are sounding in his head can also be due to simulation and 'imagination' of the readers in which they 'direct their consciousness toward non-actual worlds' (Caracciolo, 2013:91). In cognitive poetic theories of embodiment, readers are considered as enacting the storyworld and creating an 'experiential feel of a storyworld space', citing the role that 'embodiment and kinaesthetic activity play in language understanding' which is provided by 'enactment imagination'(Caracciolo, 2013: 94). A reader thus mentally simulates body movements in the text, taking on the character's perspective rather than adopting a zero-point focalisation or narrative point of view or stance, thus not adopting the reflector-character but enacting the fictional consciousness (Caracciolo, 2013: 96). Within the embodiment framework, the readers are thus running embodied simulations of the sounds that are described in the text. So when George winces in pain or hears loud sounds, readers also imaginatively enact these responses and reactions to the sounds as well. The basic perceptual act of hearing these loud sounds repeatedly in the text, can be simulated by 'linguistic mediation' (Caracciolo, 2013: 96).

Overall, the text worlds that the readers construct are heavily epistemologically focalised through the perspective of the character George, especially when the location of the text world is the Bergeron house. This focalised perception of the

narrative allows the readers to embody these sounds, and foregrounds the presence of the noise handicapping George. By proxy, this jars the readers as they read the short story and experience the interruptions of the Handicapper General, aligning them with the characters and creating empathy.

5.4.4. Resonance

The tag ‘resonance’ was used whenever the readers pointed out that ‘Harrison Bergeron’ had some sort of ‘atmosphere in the mind that seems to persist long after the pages have been put down’ (Stockwell, 2009: 17), or a prolonged response to the text (O51, O92, O98, O100, O103), as well as the sense that there is significance to this text that is worth thinking ‘profoundly’ about (O10, O32, O45, O100, O106). This is known as the ‘resonance’ of the text (Stockwell, 2009: 17-55). It is possible to analyse this short story by going through Stockwell’s list of textual attractors: *newness, agency, topicality, empathetic recognisability, definiteness, activeness, brightness, fullness, largeness, height, noisiness, aesthetic difference from the norm* (Stockwell, 2009: 25), especially when discussing the sounds in George’s head, and the characterisation of Harrison, which were both mentioned by reviewers as most memorable in the text.

In ‘Harrison Bergeron’, most of the descriptions of the noises and characters’ handicaps are attractors, and therefore although the text is fairly short, the textual effects and resonance or the ‘texture’ of the text remains for a long time after reading (Stockwell, 2009). The extremity of this society is reflected in the oppositional unrealized worlds, there are multiple negations that act as attractors and create resonance (Giovanelli, 2013; McLoughlin, 2013). As aforementioned in section 5.4.1, there are multiple world switches to negative worlds that are closer to the reader’s own discourse world than that of the main text world. This contrast of the text world that is unfamiliar and the inaccessible negated worlds that are familiar helps create the memorable atmosphere of the text. The world which Harrison proposes where there is inequality and a tyrannical ruler who chooses people only on the basis of their physical and mental attributes rather than their actions is hardly any better than the one depicted in this narrative. The rebel in this story is actually the

embodiment of corrupt power: claiming himself emperor and seeking to have supreme ruling over everyone and in a way negates the freedom that he claims to have provided. Repetitions maintain the textual attractors and thus the reader engages with the intense images. In this short story there are many repetitions, but the most salient of all is that George is also the most repeated word in the narrative, repeated 34 times in 9 pages.

In addition, the character Harrison is portrayed with all the features of an attractor, we are focused on maintaining and creating this character but then when he is negated it is an abrupt end to his character and not allowed to occlude. When he first appears as a character, he is mentioned in passing in the first paragraph as the son of Hazel and George, and this is allowed to occlude when the narrative continues to describe the bizzare handicaps that George is wearing. Harrison later appears in a picture on the TV, which has attentional priming due to the absurdity and newness of the descriptions: 'A police photograph of Harrison Bergeron was flashed on the screen-upside down, then sideways, upside down again, then right side up. The picture showed the full length of Harrison against a background calibrated in feet and inches. He was exactly seven feet tall.'(*WMH*, 10-11)

Harrison is portrayed as very tall for a fourteen-year-old, which is *new* and *large*, as well as *different from the norm*. One interview participant says 'Harrison is seven feet tall at age fourteen; I thought that was a bit random!!'(P6). Interviewee P9 also mentions this foregrounded description of Harrison: 'one of the things that stood out to me in this story was [. . .] Harrison is only 14, they say that he's 14 and the description of the character never lends itself to the idea of a 14 year old, [. . .] it just doesn't fit.' As Harrison is introduced, he is portrayed as loud, with god-like strength and beauty, capable of flying in the air and picking up people with his bare hands and depicted as an agent of defiance against a corrupt regime, in fact, checking all the listed features above for an attractor. However, while this continuous description of Harrison in the narrative keeps maintaining attention to the character, this is brought to an abrupt negation via his death. The sentence where Harrison is shot does not mention his name, and refers to him as the Emperor instead: 'She fired twice, and the Emperor and the Empress were dead before they hit the floor'(*WMH*, 13). Thus the lacuna left by this exaggerated, attention sustaining character becomes

more foregrounded, because he was not allowed to occlude or fade gradually. Harrson is abruptly negated when he is shot by a less impressive, archaic and old device: a double-barrelled shotgun. Readers invest cognitive effort in maintaining and creating this vibrant character in the text world, the sudden negation and removal of this character could account for the resonance that is felt in Harrison's sudden death.

5.4.5. Ending

These readings also support the notion that 'Harrison Bergeron' has a 'closed' ending, and can be considered a 'dead-end' classical dystopia (Hattenhaur, 1998), which lacks the elements of ambiguity, the reconstitution of empowering memory, and genre blurring which are crucial in the critical dystopia to allow for a utopian possibility or enclave (Baccolini, 2011). The critical dystopia 'contain[s] the implication of a possibility of visionary reform to create utopian future' (Verheul, 2004:2). In this case, however, there is a lack of ambiguity to what happened to Harrison. The protagonist is shot dead, and these are final sentences of the story:

> And then, neutraling gravity with love and pure will, they remained suspended in air inches below the ceiling, and they kissed each other for a long, long time.
> It was then that Diana Moon Glampers, the Handicapper General, came into the studio with a double-barreled ten-gauge shotgun. She fired twice, and the Emperor and the Empress were dead before they hit the floor.
> Diana Moon Glampers loaded the gun again. She aimed it at the musicians and told them they had ten seconds to get their handicaps back on.
> It was then that the Bergerons' television tube burned out.
> Hazel turned to comment about the blackout to George. But George had gone out into the kitchen for a can of beer.
> George came back in with the beer, paused while a handicap signal shook him up. And then he sat down again. "You been crying" he said to Hazel.
> "Yup," she said.
> "What about?" he said.
> "I forget," she said. "Something real sad on television."[. . .]
>
> (*WMH*, 13-4)

The shift from the fantastical, fairy-tale like suspension in the air mid-kiss, is brought flat down through the simple archaic shotgun which Diana Moon Glampers

only needs to fire twice to end the mini-rebellion of the emperor Harrison. Although the world switch to the living room occurs later 'the television tube burned out', the shift in tone from the lyrical to the direct and less embellished narrative signals the end of the fairy tale part of the narrative. There is no ambiguity, and no indication that Harrison is not dead. His parents' conversation indicates they continue their lives forgetting about him. The equality implemented by the Handicapper General continues, and the narrative ends as it begins in the living room of the Bergeron household in a cyclical fashion, returning to the original text world in the beginning.

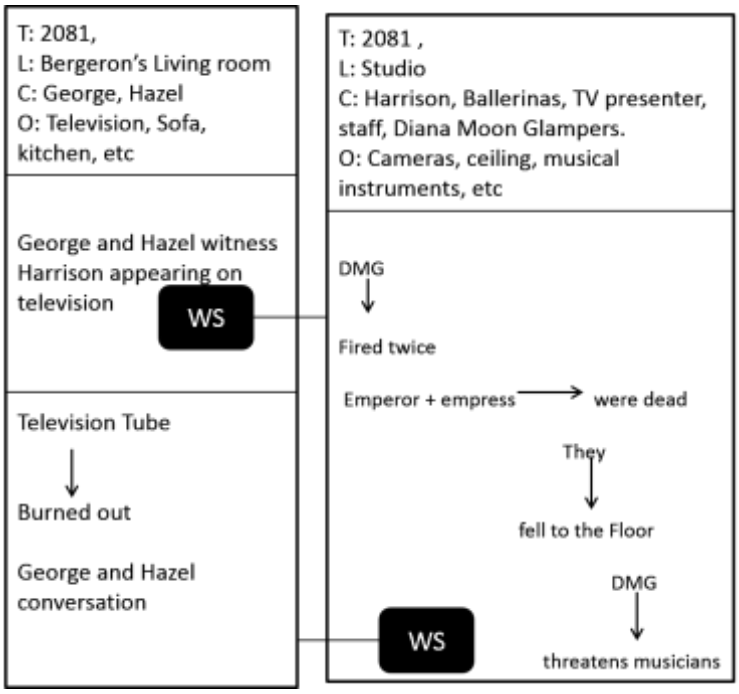


Figure 9 Simple diagram demonstrating ending of 'Harrison Bergeron'

In this dystopia, there is a constriction of language and thought firstly through means of the handicap device, as well as in the text itself through twisting the meaning of 'Equality', where freedom to develop one's own talents and make use of them is considered as 'taking advantage'. This idea is embedded and further reiterated in the attitude towards the past as well. Although in the critical dystopia, going against the dystopian rule is achieved by reconstituting nostalgia about the past, there is no such nostalgia here. The past is viewed as archaic and not 'fair', as the 'dark ages' according to George. In the critical and classical dystopia, the rebel views the past as something to be strived for, (e.g. Winston romanticizes the past and buys the paperweight in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and Offred remembers the past in *the*

Handmaid's Tale through flashbacks of her past pre-Gilead). In this case, George is depicted as a citizen that is conforming to the dystopian ideals of the Handicapper General which prevents the possibility of a different ending.

These are the participant's responses when asked about their thoughts on the ending:

- I think it's quite good because it goes back to normality, it's almost like a wave I think good stories are like that that, you know, it all starts off in a calm, in the living room , then the main drama happens in the narrative, and then resets back into- well, it's the same as the room before, but something is slightly altered and I think that's a tried and tested narrative where you've got a- you've got a something settled, then something happens, then something settles but different (P1).
- They do not know the meaning of the word 'happy' and even if George thinks of unhappy thoughts he cannot hold his thoughts long enough to make sense of it (P2).
- If everyone is like this, I hope there will be another Harrison, if not then, it's really tough (P3).
- I don't know, the story is quite short, uh If I had to extrapolate then if one person was able to stand up then it is possible that other people will also stand up, there might be some revolution starting or something like that , when one dies it's usually is the start. I suppose in oppression like this there can be no happy ending (P4).
- Well, it seems since Harrison has done his great gesture breaking free and he was killed… Well he was shot. um but it doesn't mean that somebody else who has talent wouldn't think of trying to get more people together, which often happens in civil rights movements where the first person who tries will be killed, but there are more people who come .. The French revolution actually failed three times before there was any change to the regime (P5).
- No [it's a sad ending], well it depends whether they have a resistance group or uprising, or an underground movement (P6).
- It's just a sad ending (P7).

- I think yeah, I think, is George comes back to Hazel at the end saying .. he missed the last part he went into the kitchen to get a can of beer, it's not appetizing I'd say they could have done a better ending, I think it would have been better that George and Hazel are both in prison at the ending and seeing George Reaction as well as Hazels', if George's reaction if he was watching would that be the same throughout and also the ending (P8)
- I think it [the ending] was exactly what it needed to be. There was no way that Harrison could have been left alive. (P9)
- It's like another day, the husband gets up to get a can of beer, Hazel saw on tv being shot and she turns around to tell the husband and he's not around and it's like life

  If the rest of the society are like this, I mean people like George and Hazel, they would be in their 40s or 50s, since Harrison is 14, so people like them do not have the energy, but if more people like Harrison and his age group because they might be, late teens, twenties who want to make big changes and are inspired (P10)

The preferred reading of 'Harrison Bergeron' is a closed, dystopian satire of American laws of anti-discrimination and notions of equality, with no hope for the inhabitants of this fictional future USA. Although most readings found in the online reviews and literary criticism adhere to this generalised reading of the text (see previous sections 5.1., 5.2), only some interview participants maintained the hopelessness of the narrative, e.g. P1, P2, P7. The semi-structured interview setting did allow for collecting a sample of dispreferred responses to the text: some of these responses contain a possibility of a hopeful ending for the narrative. P5, for example, is drawing upon his knowledge of past historical events as a basis for the possibility of hope in the narrative. Because the French revolution led to a new government of hope and democracy, this reader draws upon this discourse world knowledge to provide the hope in this otherwise hopeless ending.

Other readers draw upon their previous experiences with dystopian literature and film. Although the narrative ends with an unambiguous ending in which the handicapper general succeeds in destroying the opposition of Harrison, in which case

it would be a 'closed' dystopia, similar to the finality of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, reader P5 seems to consider that there is still a chance for this dystopian control to be overthrown. In the responses P2, P3, P6, the intertextual links with other fictional oppressive regimes and dystopias open the possibility of hope in the closed narrative. The readers reported familiarity with the text, and that it was similar to or reminded them of the movies *the Hunger Games* and *Blade Runner*. In the case of P10 who mentions similarities with *the Hunger Games* for example, in which the dystopian government is successfully overthrown by the resistance including the teen heroine Katniss, specifically mentions that younger people in their 'late teens' can bring change to the world. One participant says this: 'I do draw upon other stories and that people who decide to do this, not necessarily George but people like George will be able to change things.' (P10). In this interpretation, the oppressive government evokes the text world of *the Hunger Games* in the mind of the reader, in which the rebellion against the government of Panem was successful.

Another method that the reader uses to create the utopian enclave is through drawing upon the concept of love between the husband and wife. It is interesting how the reader P4 for example, deciphered that there was love between George and Wife, despite the breakdown of communication between the couple who often couldn't remember what they were talking about:

> He wouldn't break the rules because he felt his wife, the reason he gave was his own, it seems like he said that, his wife would feel unaccepted, it was more his wife really. I don't think he is capable of fighting the handicapper general, If he was to break free and not follow the rules, his wife will be upset , it was more for his wife really I think it's how the other inhabitants are. They thought: well, if I did this then my children will suffer or my wife or family. (P4)

This interpretation is not explicitly represented in the text, however the reader infers this from their conversation through drawing upon their own knowledge frames and schemas of relationships.

These responses illustrate endings that the readers infer and are not world switches created by linguistic cues. This is due to the complexity of the effect of the reader's own experiences and knowledge on world-building and narrative comprehension. These possible hopeful endings are therefore related to the ability of the reader to

imagine different possible outcomes of a narrative and alternatives of what the author writes (Gerrig, 1993; Rapp and Gerrig, 2006; Dannenberg, 2008). The hopeful endings and these possible outcomes that do not arise from the text or the joint participation of the discourse participants are hypothetical constructs that could draw upon the reader's hopes, fears and expectations, which Whiteley calls 'participant-worlds' (2016: 516). These participation-worlds 'are mental representations created by the reader (or hearer) during discourse processing, which are not part of the communicated text worlds but which both reflect and reinforce participant's involvement in the discourse' (Whiteley, 2016: 516). Because these worlds 'encode highly emotional content' (Gerrig, 1993:67), including the participant's hopes and indirect cues from the text, they are not constrained by linguistic features in the text, and thus are a different form of mental representation ontologically from those in the formal Text World Theory framework (Werth, 1999; Gavins, 2007).

The participant worlds created by the reader's historical knowledge of the discourse world (P5), intertextual similarity to other dystopian narratives (P2, P3, P6, P10), or schematic knowledge (P4) are liminal worlds that are created by the participants themselves which can create different alternatives to the text world. It is possible, then, that these dispreferred responses to a closed dystopian story arise from this ability to create hope and optimism in an otherwise closed dystopian satire of American laws of anti-discrimination and notions of equality. In the case of these dispreferred responses, the dispreferred readings view the text as a 'critical' dystopia, in which there is the possibility of hope. This ability to find different possible outcomes is also related to the psychological traits of optimism and hope (Scheier and Carver, 1985; Snyder et al., 1991; Snyder et al., 1996; Bryant and Cvengros, 2004). Measuring these personal traits and comparing the reader's ability to create different positive endings to a closed dystopia with their personal traits and previous experience with historical and fictional dystopian regimes is therefore the focus of the study in the next chapter, chapter 6.

5.5. Summary

In this chapter, I first set out to provide an overview of critical work on the short story 'Harrison Bergeron'. Because the short story was not critically well-received, yet still garnered enough attention to be included in school curriculums, it was worth investigating what could be a general response to the text. Looking for 'found' reader response data led me to draw upon *Goodreads* reviews, from which the main topics of investigation were established via the frequency of thematic tags across the data. In this study, it was not possible to focus solely on negative reviews of the short story due to the lack of written negative online reviews, therefore this chapter discusses both the preferred and dispreferred responses to the text, using semi-structured interviews in order to generate possible dispreferred 'hopeful' responses to 'Harrison Bergeron'.

The data also provided a starting point for a textual analysis of the short story, and although it was considered one of Vonnegut's lesser literary works, the analysis provides insight to how certain features of the text allowed for the preferred readings to arise, such as the multiple text world switches in the short story, the different narrative interrelations that were drawn between the text and other works of fiction or references to the reader's discourse world, focalisation of the narrative via controlled character perceptions and thoughts, the closed ending of the short story and finally the attentional foregrounding of Harrison and the handicaps.

The Critical dystopia according to Baccolini (2011, 2010) should contain ambiguity, have open-ended endings, constricting language and the struggle of the protagonist against the dystopian regime through the empowerment of language, memory and nostalgia about the past. The story here does not provide such an enclave that will allow the world switch to a utopia to occur. 'Harrison Bergeron' does not fill these requirements of a critical dystopia, and looking at general literature and the responses online seem to support this interpretation. This chapter thus looks at lesser preferred responses to the text, and attempts to analyse the text in the light of this response. Although it is difficult to access all the knowledge frames that a reader draws upon in world creation, asking about what the work reminds them of can be a possible clue into their reading experiences and how they classify a genre by mentioning similarly themed works.

By allowing the discussion of the intertextual as well as the personal in the analysis of texts, we can uncover not only how readers read but also provide some insight into how we acquire knowledge and link stories with the ones we already know. As shown from the thematic analysis of the reader reviews, it is difficult to assess certain aspects of reading due to open-endedness of the format of such websites, in which the readers are encouraged to comment in any form they wish. This leads to no uniformity in the responses, and thus difficulty in analysing specific textual effects. This also leads to a difficulty of discussing data in which the themes that are tagged most frequently in the data set form less than 40% of the total responses collected. The need arises for a method of eliciting responses that are more comparable, and because the aspects of meaning comprehension that are under scrutiny consist of data that is not normally observable, I look at reader responses using interviews which allow for the investigation of such unobservable phenomena. Furthermore, using interviews allows for less reflection and introspection than a written response which allows for thought and editing of the submission. The responses collected are as close as possible to the time of reading which will help somewhat in memory retention of the story.

The dispreferred responses that are elicited by the semi-structured interviews indicate that the readers have an ability to create possible endings to the text that are not confined by linguistic cues, but are generated through their own personal traits and knowledge. These sub-worlds are called participant worlds and are linked to the reader's mental traits and abilities. This chapter highlights that readers can have dispreferred responses to texts that arise due to the personal traits and experiences, rather than linguistic cues. This led to a consideration of measuring these personal traits, and prompted the study presented in the next Chapter, where I investigate the effects of optimism (Carver and Scheier, 1990; Peterson, 2000; Brandt, 2011; Forgeard and Seligman, 2012) and hope (Snyder et al., 1991; Snyder, 2000; Moneta, 2014) on the reading of Harrison Bergeron, as well as the reader's prior experiences with dystopia.

Chapter 6 Investigating Reader Traits

6.0. Overview

The interviews in the previous chapter revealed various and interesting interpretations of the text. Most importantly, it highlighted how a reader's experiences and previous readings contribute to their world building. But it seems that there is more than intertextuality at work here, for some readers also considered the ending hopeful for its own end, for 'hope's sake'. Although Text World Theory attempts to account for the reader with all his mental abilities and cognitive functions, it is not really the case in most applications, because it is difficult and perhaps impossible to represent the whole of a human psyche in a textual analysis. However, the utopian enclave in dystopia is drawn from this very part which exists extraneously to the text. It is thus worth investigating these innate personality traits, which not only affect the reader's actions but also their reactions to the text, their responses to the literary work. In this chapter, the first section, 6.1, discusses the concepts of optimism and hope in positive psychology. Section 6.2 introduces the second study design and methodology, while section 6.3 presents the results and the collected reader responses. Section 6.4 discusses these responses in light of the text, noting how the readers align themselves with different interpretations due to intertextual effects and their own personality traits. Section 6.5 provides a summary and some closing remarks of the chapter.

6.1. Optimism and Hope

One of the personal traits that seemed to create these dispreferred readings was the prevalence of hope, and expectation of a better future, and in the case of the ending of 'Harrison Bergeron', of a better ending in which the Handicapper General was overthrown. In other words, the participants of the interviews in section 5.3 seemed optimistic about the future of the citizens of the USA in 2081 despite the death of Harrison and the cyclical ending of the narrative. Although the text would be

considered a ‘closed’ dystopia, the participants found there *could* be hope beyond the story:

- ‘There’s always hope isn’t there? There can be another Harrison […]’(P2).
- ‘it depends if there is an underground movement or something’(P5).
- ‘another person can have the same abilities and help free them’(P10).

This led to the consideration of how optimism and hope function in literary readings, and whether measuring these personality traits would allow for certain readings to emerge as part of the reader’s personality. Therefore it is important to clearly define what optimism and hope mean in the context of this study before considering measuring these traits in the participants of the second stage of interviews.

Optimism and hope are traits of personality that are dealt with extensively in the field of positive psychology. As a branch of psychology that developed as a reaction to the emphasis of psychology on pathology, positive psychology ‘seeks to improve quality of life and prevent the pathologies that arise when life is barren and meaningless’ (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000: 5). The term was introduced by Martin Seligman in 1998, and together with Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi they outlined the directions of this renewed ‘positive’ psychology. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi point out that psychology has the goals of increasing human productivity and sense of fulfilment and identifying talent, however the emphasis of most research post-World-War-II was mainly on understanding and curing mental disorders. Thus, as Moneta (2014) argues, empirical research in psychology became ‘focused on how hostile and thwarted environments can cause stress, and in turn, psychological and physical disorder’ in which ‘the individual was a passive being’ that was subject to outside stimuli and harmed by it (Moneta, 2014: 1). In the same vein, before the study of optimism and hope was established properly in the field of positive psychology, Alarcon (2013) says that ‘it was widely believed that positive expectations regarding one’s future were misguided, maladaptive, and perhaps a reflection of psychopathology’ (Alarcon, 2013: 822).

Thus these terms have fairly recently entered the spectrum of academic study, and may explain why there is a tendency in cognitive stylistics towards the depiction of unstable minds or mental disorders as well, due to the vast developments in those

fields, e.g. Semino (2014) looks at the literary autistic mind style in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*. Cognitive stylistics seems to be more concerned with the depiction of disturbed or mentally unstable minds in fiction, and not for example, optimistic ones such as Eleanor H. Porter's *Pollyanna.* This again points to the tendency of psychology and stylistics to be more interested in the strange and the complex, rather than looking at less deviant linguistic and mental constructions.

Although the term optimism is popularly indicated by a 'glass half-full' mentality, in positive psychology it refers not to the current state that the person perceives, but is related to a general expectancy of positive outcomes in the future. The general definition of optimism is related to expectancies of positive outcomes (Tiger, 1979; Scheier and Carver, 1985: 219; Brandt, 2011; Forgeard and Seligman, 2012) and is considered as a cognitive and emotive construct (Carver and Scheier, 1990; Peterson, 2000). Optimistic people therefore both *think* and *feel* positively about future outcomes. In this study, I will be focusing mainly on *dispositional optimism*, which considers optimism as a personality trait of these positive expectations of good things to happen rather than bad (Scheier and Carver, 1992).

In Carver and Scheier's model, all human activity is considered in terms of 'goals', and thus people's behaviours depend on 'the identification and adoption of goals and the regulation of actions vis-à-vis these goals. Therefore, they refer to their approach as a self-regulatory model (Carver and Scheier, 1981; Peterson, 2000). Thus, optimism is measured in this framework through the Life Orientation Test (LOT) (Carver and Scheier, 1985), which was modified to the Life Orientation Test – Revised (LOT-R) (Scheier et al., 1994), in which ten self-reported items were scored from 0-4 with four filler items and a few reverse-score items to ensure validity. The test items are related to goals and how people respond to obstacles in achieving these goals. If people believe that they are able to overcome these obstacles then they are optimistic. The higher values in the test indicate higher optimism, according to three main band scores: a total of 19-24 indicates high optimism, 14-18 indicates moderate optimism, and 0-13 indicates low optimism (see also: Scheier and Carver, 1987; Strack, et al., 1987; Scheier et al., 1989; Carver et al., 1993).

The ‘wishful and positive thinking inherent in optimism’ can also ‘become volitional thinking that leads to adaptive, goal-directed behaviour’ that is part of hope (Snyder et al., 1991; Snyder, 2000; Moneta, 2014: 162). In Positive Psychology, hope is defined as ‘[. . .] a cognitive set that is based on a reciprocally derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed determination) and (b) pathways (planning of ways to meet goals)’ (Snyder et al., 1991: 571). The higher the hope levels in an individual, the more likely they are able to create multiple pathways to goals, and this is measured in the case of ‘Agency’ related items and ‘Pathways’ related items in a five-item scale questionnaire (Snyder, 1994, 2000, 2002; Lopez et al., 2000; Arnau et al., 2007; Bailey et al., 2007). Although pathways and agency are both important in order to ‘produce adaptive, goal-directed behaviour’ in individuals (Moneta, 2014: 163), in the case of fiction, in which agency is simulated or given to a character, the goal orientation becomes focalised from that character’s perspective. This is different from the case of ‘make-believe theory’ that makes the distinction between reality and fiction, in that emotions which result from reading fiction seldom imply that the reader can ‘do’ something about it (Walton, 1990, 1997; Currie, 1997; Feagin, 1997).

Pathways seem more important when discussing activation of storylines in the minds of the reader. As aforementioned in the discussion in 5.4.5, Readers have the ability to create multiple possible outcomes of a narrative and alternatives of what the author writes (Gerrig, 1993; Rapp and Gerrig, 2006; Dannenberg, 2008). This is because the ability to think of many different possible routes towards a positive goal is very high in hopeful individuals. When applying this notion to reading fiction, then having many ‘viable routes’ (Snyder et al., 2005) and overall high hope levels will increase the possibility of more hopeful interpretations of closed endings, as well as the range of possible participant worlds (Whiteley, 2016).

Snyder’s Adult Dispositional Hope Scale is designed to measure hope in line with Snyder’s view of hope, and as such looks at self-reported answers on an eight-point Likert scale, with four that look at Agency related thoughts, and four that focus on Pathways, as well as filler items (Snyder, 1991). This provides three measures related to hope: the first is the sum of the Agency related items, and provides the agency score. The second is the sum of the Pathways items and provides a Pathways

score. These two can range between a minimum score of 4 and a maximum score of 32, with higher scores indicating higher levels of agency and Pathways thoughts. The third score is a sum of the Agency score and the Pathways score, and this is considered as the hope score, which ranges from 8-32 (Snyder et al., 1991; Hanson, 2010). Lopez et al's (2000) study reports 48 as being the average hope score, but other studies show that the average can be much lower in clinical samples, such as Snyder et al. (1991). Hanson (2010) mentions that these scores are still towards the hopeful end of the response scale, thus it could be that the average response is to be hopeful, whereas the deviant response is to be completely hopeless. As such, hope continues to be studied within positive psychology in order to indicate how it functions and how it can be fostered.

Optimism and hope 'share important conceptual similarities' (Alarcon et al., 2013: 882). Both are generally stable mental personality traits that reflect the extent to which one believes that his or her future will be prosperous and favourable (Scheier and Carver, 1985; Snyder et al., 1991; Snyder et al., 1996; Bryant and Cvengros, 2004). Although some studies use the terms optimism and hope interchangeably, such as Fleming (2006), others sought to mark the distinction between the two terms, such as Alarcon et al. (2013) who considered the two terms as 'related yet distinct constructs' in their study (2013: 882), as well as Gallagher and Lopez who explore this same question in their (2009) study. Carr (2004) also maintains that Snyder's hope model is close to optimism, and this is a view shared by Fleming (2006) who uses both terms interchangeably, accounting for both using Snyder's hope questionnaire. Other studies use both measures side-by-side in exploring the individual's longitudinal personal positive attitudes (Baily et al., 2007), due to the relationship between these traits and the tendency for the person to believe in possible positive outcomes for their future (Scheier and Carver, 1985; Snyder et al., 1991). This study therefore makes use of both the Adult Trait Hope Scale to measure Agency and Pathways hope levels for the participants (Snyder et al., 1991; Snyder et al., 1996) as well as the Life Orientation Test-Revised (Lot-R) for the measurement of optimism levels (Scheier et al., 1994). This is to account for both hope and general optimism; the measures may provide insight into the reader's tendencies to create new world-switches while reading.

My hypothesis thus draws upon theories of optimism and hope in positive psychology: it is possible that more optimistic readers will tend to activate more pathways than pessimistic readers, thus activating more endings that may not exist within the text itself, creating a counter-narrative of the utopia in a similar fashion to critical dystopias. The text seems secondary in this case of extrapolation of the narrative, and these dispreferred responses could very much be part of engaging with a dystopian text, where the texts function as satirical warnings.

In order to investigate the readers' optimism and hope levels, this second study makes use of Snyder's Adult Hope Scale (AHS), as well as Carver et al.'s (1994) Optimism Test, (Lot-R) test. Although the number of participants in this study is not enough for a generalizable outcome, or a quantitative study of personality traits, it is worth investigating the personal traits of these participants because of the possible effect they may have during interpretation.

6.2 Second Interview Design

After the first study on interviewing readers of 'Harrison Bergeron' demonstrated the procedure of the questions and helped measure the time required for the entire interview process, the second study looks at other factors including optimism and hope levels. This second set of participants consisted of 20 students (referred to as E1-E20 for ease of reference) were first asked to fill out the optimism and hope questionnaire, and then were given the full text of 'Harrison Bergeron' to read at their own pace. Once they had finished reading, they took part in the recorded interview which lasted around fifteen-twenty minutes. Similar to the previous study, the guided interview questions allow for the investigation of intertextual links, foregrounded moments in the text, and the reader's views on characterisation and writing style, as well as commentary on the ending of the story. The participants were also asked whether there was hope at the end of the story.

Although the responses to *The Handmaid's Tale* as a critical dystopia provided information about interpreting a critical dystopia, the length of the novel made it difficult to first, find participants willing to read the novel within a short time, and second, deal with issues of memory and remembering the events in the book due to

the longer time period between finishing the novel and the interview. Conducting interviews right after the reading of the short story minimizes the time between reading and gathering responses. This is unlike reading group discussions, for example, in which the time of reading may vary from days before the recording to weeks. The interviews were transcribed and coded using *Nvivo* to provide a broader thematic analysis of the data, and will be described in detail with regards to different groups of participants and how they responded to the text. The discussion will draw a link between the text of 'Harrison Bergeron' and these responses, as well as looking at how the traits of optimism and hope factor in the creation of these endings.

The study utilises Snyder's (1991) Hope Scale, using a numerical scale from one to eight for participants to judge hope related items. The test includes four items related to Agency, four items related to Pathways thinking, and three filler items. To ensure validity of the test, some of the items are negative reconstructions which are reverse-scored. The reliability of these two tests have been discussed extensively as a 'brief, internally consistent, and valid self-report measure of ongoing goal-directed thinking' (Babayak et. al. 1993; Snyder et al 1996; Shchier and Carver, 1985, Shchier et. al., 1994) and have been implemented widely in various psychology studies (e.g. Fleming, 2006, Bailey et. al., 2007, etc).

The number of participants (nineteen) is not enough to consider these results in a quantitative manner, and I will not be making assumptions or general comments that are applicable to all readers despite the diverse sample I have obtained from native and non-native speakers of different genres and ages. The use of the optimism and hope questionnaire will, however, allow me to compare the individual responses with their respective readers' tendencies to find and construct multiple pathways, or in other words, multiple world-switch possibilities, for the narrative. The two measures may be unrelated to their readers' responses, because of the tendency to provide a preferred response to the text, but in the case of dispreferred responses there may be some connection between these personality traits and the responses to the texts.

The nature of the responses in an interview setting may be affected by the researcher's questions, and the danger of forcing readers down a certain path. This

was tested most by participant E16 who provided a misreading (see upcoming discussion in section 6.3) in which case the interviewer allowed for the participant to continue their interpretation to the end despite the contradiction of the interpretation to the text, which is essential to text-world building and a starting point for the reader's response. Furthermore, although the optimism and hope measures were extensively tested for reliability and validity, the questions are limiting in the scale of their answers, and although the length of the tests are suitable for the experiment, there is always a chance that participants will choose the most neutral options in their answers in order to finish the test as quickly as possible. Providing a relaxed and private environment was an attempt to mitigate this effect, as well as providing refreshments for the participants.

Furthermore, although the participants scored as 'moderately optimistic' and highly hopeful, these measures are in relation to studies based heavily on American undergraduate samples, and may be very different due to the various backgrounds of the participants in this study. This has been looked at by researchers who examined differences in other ethnic backgrounds (Chang and Banks, 2007) as well as different age groups (Cheavens and Gum, 2000). Both studies show that different backgrounds provide lower hope ratings overall, however, these scores are usually stable for the individual, thus providing some insight into the participant's own traits.

6.3 Results

In this second study, the participants are labelled from E1-20 for ease of reference and for the sake of anonymity.

No.	Age	Gender	Pathway Score	Agency Score	Hope Score	Optimism
E1	21	F	28	15	43	11
E2	23	F	21	24	45	17
E3	20	F	18	24	42	14
E4	18	F	27	26	53	19
E5	21	F	29	26	55	19
E6	19	F	25	22	47	12
E7	19	F	28	29	57	13
E8	26	M	29	28	57	16
E9	19	M	20	20	40	11
E10	20	F	28	30	58	18
E11	19	F	28	27	55	13
E12	20	F	30	30	60	17
E13	19	F	27	29	56	12
E14	18	F	25	26	51	12
E15	19	M	30	30	60	16
E16	20	F	27	29	56	18
E17	23	F	28	22	50	18
E18	20	F	26	27	53	12
E19	19	F	25	28	53	13
E20	18	F	31	27	58	14

Table 7 Optimism and hope scores for readers of ‘Harrison Bergeron’

Overall, the participants had high hope scores (with an average of 52) and moderate optimism scores (average of 14.75). The age of the participants ranged from 18-26 years and they were all students at the University of Nottingham. The average hope score is 48 based upon Lopez et al.'s (2000) study, in this set of responses the average score is slightly higher at 52 out of a possible maximum of 64. Most of the participants were female undergraduates.

The following sections will discuss the over-arching themes of the participants' responses to the interview, such as the participants' attitudes towards the author and the text of the short story; their views on equality; their answers regarding the ending of 'Harrison Bergeron'; the character's portrayals; responses that indicate the level of implication that is involved in the interpretation of a read text; intertextual links; and extra-textual world-switches that the readers create within the building of the narrative text world. This will provide an overview of the interviewee responses to the short story and provide the starting point for the cognitive poetic analysis as well as the comparision of these responses with the participant's optimism and hope traits scores.

Author

One of the advantages of the interview is the possibility to ask the participants directly about the writing. The question was a general reference to the writing: 'What did you think of the writing?' Many of the participants evaluated the work as 'well-written' (E1, E3, E4, E6, E7, E8, E14, E19, E20) whereas in the case of E13 her response to the writing was to mention punctuation, which interestingly was also an issue that was raised in some of *The Handmaid's Tale's* negative reviews discussed in Chapter 4:

> I don't mean to be mean, but I think there's a couple where there's hyphens, there should be a comma rather than a hyphen, the way it's set out, it's almost, it's not script, it's prose, but the indents kind of adds to the jolted feel of the piece, it kind of adds to the piece, it kind of separated it all out […] (E13).

The more positive comments on the writing and style include the mentioning of:

- **Simplicity:** ‘I like that it’s quite a simple style and simply written, no kind of big words because I think it adds to the fact that by making everybody equal they’ve made everybody average almost’ (E4). ‘I guess it’s quite simplistic, it makes you focus on the story and what’s happening rather than a lot of eloquent language’ (E7) ‘it’s quite simple’ (E12) ‘was written quite simply which fits in with the story’ (E14).

- **Flow:** ‘I think it flows quite interestingly, I haven’t properly read fiction in a long time it seems to flow well for me like I can tell it’s written in in an interesting style’ (E3), ‘it flowed quite easily’ (E5), ‘if there are a lot of words and the story doesn’t go further, as in it’s stuck just describing something, it might get a bit boring but I thought that in this one it was flowing quite well’ (E6).

- **Clarity and ease:** ‘I think it was clear and it read fast enough while also kind of explaining in the background you can sort of pick up what was going on’ (E8), ‘Easy to read, telling it as it is, quite clear’ (E10), ‘It was very easy to read’ (E15), and ‘It’s quite easy’ (E17).

The salience of the idea of ‘flow’ across the responses is interesting especially since the question did not prime the term, yet participants E3, E5 and E6 mention the exact same words. It seems to be used in reference to the coherence of the text overall (E3, E5), but also refers to the sequences of events that happen in the text (E6). This could indicate the need to include some way of explaining coherent world-switches vs. incoherent world-switches, using the term ‘flow’ to indicate a fluid movement between mental spaces, with flowing narratives having more congruent world switches. Interestingly, another reader found these transitions were actually more ‘jerky’ and had an effect in the text. E11 mentions that the narrative is ‘in places it’s quite jerky in the same way that obviously the thoughts are of people who have to wear the um transmitters’, and E13 mentions she feels that the writing has a ‘jolted feel’.

Unfair/ equality

Equality is another issue brought into more focus in this set of interviews, where the participants commented on the warning of taking equality too far (preferred response). These preferred responses were present throughout the answers of most of the participants. These participants acknowledge that while equality is a good thing, there is a limit to how much good it provides to society:

- It seemed kind of really unfair and that people for instance like the dancers have to wear weights so that they are equal, it seems really unfair and George not being allowed to be more intelligent than other people it seems [. . .] (E1).

- I don't think that's very fair (E2).

- […] like it wasn't fair, so I know that the purpose of the story is to make everyone equal, but the way they approach it isn't (E6).

- Although equality in some ways would be nice, in some ways it's completely impossible and that shows that it wouldn't be nice (E11).

Endings

The participants' responses to the ending and whether it presents any hope conform to the generalized preferred reading of the text, in which the ending is hopeless and closed. However, there seemed to also be dispreferred responses to the text, in the form of responses that are preceded by accounts and delays.

For example, E1 maintains that if a revolution occurs, then there is a possibility of the society breaking free from oppression:

- […] It seems it can only be resolved in some sort of a revolution especially as the example Harrison who decides he's the emperor, and obviously this character was meant to behave, he was quite radical and that was just, he was just shot, and the ballerina who was his empress was just killed, if there would be a revolution, but if not then no. Plus it seemed they had their spirits crushed and even the way George was reluctant, like he would rather put up with the general discomfort and just take it as it is (E1).

Conversely, the story also had echoes of a cyclical iteration of events according to participants E10, E14, and E15. This possibility for hope then diminishes with an inevitable return to the status quo in 2048:

- The ending? Well, they went back to their ordinary state so it's quite expected that they, that nothing changes, because of how they are and they are handicapped and they can't get rid of anything […] ,[there is hope] if a large enough number of them are like Harrison yeah, then if there are enough people like Harrison then it will be different, I think there is that

possibility because human intelligence is not something you can so easily suppress I think (E10).

- The story showed that there kind of could be, because there were some people who would try and fight but it also seems like when they did, everything just went back to normal. So possibly not (E14).

- No [hope in the ending]. I would say. I mean, the story does show that revolution plot, even though it is foiled these plots are clearly existing and do happen. Well if revolutionary plots do continue to happen, [they would] probably not [succeed] (E15).

- There is [hope], in that there would be more people like Harrison, but at the end of the day it depends whether people kind of bands together, so I don't know [. . .] A little bit, not a lot (E19).

The idea that there is a need for a Hegelian-type Superman or hero that would allow for change to happen also appears in the story, and this is perhaps based on the heroic acts of Harrison which mirror those of heroes in other texts.

- If someone like this guy, Harrison, if he uses his mind correctly, instead of coming straight on TV and removing all his handicaps, and doing something there and then, if he escapes prison and then stayed low for a while, and really thought about what he wanted to do, then maybe he could overthrow the government (E12).

- [...] if there are people as strong as Harrison, but go about it a different way rather than declaring themselves as an emperor, there could be hope for them, if they can change it so they are not handicapped, it's like a good start to have people equal in some way but not just level like they are putting them at, [. . .] I do think there is hope for them (E20).

- I'm not sure, I mean maybe because that attempt was on television, maybe people can try and rebel in other ways, but like the things are trying to suppress what they do, like the headphones and things, if those failed the whole system might fail (E3).

The readers also think that the act of Harrison is the inspiration that people need to set themselves free from the tyranny of the government. In these interpretations, Harrison becomes more of a Martyr-figure:

- I mean perhaps, because you can see throughout it that George is starting to think, and you get the sense with the ballerinas that they are starting to think as well, so Harrison has shown them that they can take off their handicaps, so perhaps there is hope in that way if they realize they can set themselves free (E4).
- [. . .] but maybe someone else sees what he does and thinks 'oh maybe I can do something' and try to change the government, but the way it's ended, maybe not (E6).

Other participants viewed that the story is just the first part of a larger, overarching story, in which there will be possibility for hope within the larger text-world instead:

- Yeah I think so, it seems to me to be the start of a story, maybe George and Hazel will go and try to change things after seeing that, although at the end it seemed that they don't really seem to quite know what happened, I thought it was where it was going to go after that […] I think just a general sense, [Chekov's Gun]? Was it that? Where you don't introduce something unless it's going to be relevant later in the story, so it seemed to have some sort of, kind of rebellion thing would be influential later on in the story or probably something to do with the son perhaps, yeah it kind of seemed like they would rebel and get some bunch of other people (E8).

- There's no hope, it will continue I think if somebody can actually survive at the time, so maybe they can bring about an action, so probably another story will continue (E17).

Characters

One of the issues raised is that there is little character description in the text; however this did not stop the readers from emotionally responding. However participants E3, E6, E7, E8, E11, E14, E17 and E18 all comment on the lack of description of the characters, but they also mention how they feel 'sorry' for these characters regardless of the amount of information that they received from the text.

- I can't tell, you can't really tell much about their personality I'd say, It's like they're trying to go against all the rules they have to follow but it doesn't work, so I kind of like them because they're trying to be strong it seems but I am not sure (E3).

- Well since it's a short story you cannot really get drawn into the characters, you cannot emp[athize] with them that much (E6).

- I think it's hard, Hazel especially seems limp as a person, who I find a bit frustrating, obviously it's not really her fault it's part of the society that she is in and made to be (E7).

- They seem like interesting characters, Hazel, there seems to be less information about Hazel it seems more from George's point of view. Harrison, it seems it could have been quite interesting but it ended so suddenly so I couldn't know anything about him (E8).

- Even though they are individual characters they are almost the same as stock characters would be in like the older plays where they have the seven deadly sins kind of like that, they are stock characters but individuals as well (E11).

- [I] want to find out more about the characters and whether that world could be changed (E14).

- There's not much explanation about who George and Hazel are at first, so I was quite confused at first, this one, this first part is they watch TV, then the ballerina and what happens on TV, so I am quite confused since it's different [settings] (E17).

- [I did] not really [think anything of the characters]. I think because it wasn't that descriptive (E18).

- It's such a short story you can't connect with [the characters] (E20).

- I kind of am attached to the characters because the girl at the end, I think both the girl and the boy have a tragic ending, they are all tragic, nothing good happens to them! I really didn't like the Diana woman, she was just like, whoa! Does that mean she's not equal to everyone? Because she's the one who kills them, surely that means that she has more power over them, surely that means, she's the general isn't she? Does she have… that's weird, Why do I want to know? It's like I really want to know whether she is handicapped (E20).

- Yeah, [I would like to have] more background, more about the characters, because she is a general so does that mean that she has, she has more thought processes than everyone else, I know Hazel does say she can be a good general but so could anybody else, so what does that mean? I don't know, it's weird just thinking about it? Does she also have a handicap? Does that mean that everyone [does]? (E20).

The narrative thus serves as a starting point for filling out the text-worlds of 2081 that the readers must somehow conceptualise through their own imaginations. Especially with the short story and sparse settings that are available, it seems important for the reader to cooperate in creating meaning in this sense.

George's PoV:

It's not surprising that the participants didn't feel as drawn to Harrison, with George being the most repeated name (and overall word) in the text; there is a constant foregrounding and priming of this character over the others. Most readers in this set of interviews also point out that the narrative is predominately from George's point of view, which fits with the preferred response for this text (previously discussed in Section 5.4.3):

- The noises in George's head when has like an intellectual thought, I think that was really cruel (E5).
- [I feel more close to] George, I would say, because the way he is living since he is smarter he has to have the thing in his ear, he also has weights around him and everything, I don't think that is a way of living, even if they are trying to make them equal I don't, it is because he cannot form a clear line of thought or anything, and then hazel who is just normal she sort of can but can't achieve anything greater because of her memory (E6).
- George is the most developed because you sort of learn the most about him, because there's a whole body of the story focused on him and his sort of stress, but yeah I thought it was all quite interesting, we didn't learn much about Harrison, so it made it sort of a bit of shock when he turns up which might be intentional, but yeah he wasn't necessarily developed as a character he just turned up [. . .] I felt quite sad for George through the whole thing [. . .] (E9).
- I felt sad for George, because he is obviously cleverer than Hazel and he can't think properly which you know, it's not a good handicap to have and obviously doesn't remember his son, and doesn't remember that his son has just died, Hazel, yeah she's just not as clever. I can't remember something 20 seconds, [the transmitter kept making sounds] (E12).

- Yeah, particularly George I think, because you can kind of see he was trying to not just fit in with what the government wanted, but sort of can't do anything about it (E14).

- Yeah I quite liked the different characters, I thought that George's characters was quite interesting, I found it interesting how he was like kept having these ideas and they were kind of decimated by the handicap (E15).

- Well, I felt quite bad for George, for having that thing in his ear and hearing terrible noises all the time, I thought I couldn't imagine having that in my ear (E18).

- I really like the way it is because when the sounds go off in George's head, his dialogue goes down? So he only makes short noises, like 'um' 'yup' then at the end when he says 'you can say that again' which is just an expression that we say that indicates we agree with something she actually does say it again (E20).

George and Hazel's relationship

Another response that was generated through the general question 'what did you think about the characters/ how did you find the characters?', the participants pointed out that in the midst of the dystopian setting, there was still a glimmer of humanity within the interactions between George and Hazel. The husband-wife relationship triggers the readers' own schemas of life partnership, love, and companionship. P6 projects into the mind of Hazel's character noting that she is sparing her husband sadness:

- Well, Hazel I think she, like here it says 'you've been crying' she says yes, I think she was trying to mask what it was about but doesn't want him to know (E6).

Although the interactions between George and Hazel were short, Hazel suggests that George to remove some balls from his weights so he can be slightly more comfortable, even though Hazel doesn't quite have the ability to remember or recognize the strain George is under:

- [. . .] and I felt quite sad for Hazel because obviously she doesn't quite understand how he feels the whole time, like when she asks I think it might be quite interesting, she hasn't quite understood so I kind of feel

quite sorry for her because she has to live with that and almost like a wife that cares for husband type if they're ill or if they are healthy and have to care for each other that sort of thing, that's the sort of image I got from it (E9).

E20 also mentions this more explicitly; in her response she talks at length about how they can still have a nice relationship in the midst of the dark oppression of the government.

- They are husband and wife, maybe their relationship, I guess that in the society they are it's quite nice because she says you don't have anyone to compete with here, in a way they still have the brain capacity to feel for each other. [. . .] they still understand each other and that's I guess in that society it's quite difficult to be attached to other people because even if you know they are not as handicapped as you because you can tell what they have, like more weights, you can still tell who is stronger and who is more beautiful because her mask is more hideous than everyone else's, I guess it must be quite difficult to connect with each other but I guess George and Hazel have quite a nice relationship. (E20)

Views on Harrison

Others mentioned that the most interesting character is Harrison, because he broke free and seemed most heroic and more interesting than the rest of the characters. He is also a more dynamic figure set against the static characters of George and Hazel who are sitting while they watch TV. In general, the readers seem to fall into two main camps, with either Harrison as a hero/martyr/inspiration or as another dictator that tries to take over after the Handicapper General. For example, E13 mentions that Harrison's defiance 'was empowering' when he 'stood up to everybody.' The second group consists of the readers who viewed Harrison's rebellion as an attempt for creating another controlling regime, such as E4 and E12:

- I liked how, I thought first when you heard about the 14 year old son being taken away, I didn't think it was going to be because he was almost super human above average in all these different ways, I thought it was just going to be, I don't know, the government disappearing people, but then for him to come back and declaring himself emperor, I thought that was interesting as well because he wasn't coming back almost to save people he was coming back to declare himself the ruler, you know replacing one dictator with another (E4).

- I liked it, this guy Harrison didn't seem, at first I was kind of on Harrison's side, but the way he turned in front of the camera just seemed quite forceful, he started shaking people around [. . .] so that would have just been a dictatorship (E12).

The same text therefore leads to different characterisations of the same character, and interestingly enough the main character of this text, Harrison, is the one that is the most controversial in the responses, whereas the sympathy towards George and Hazel is more unanimous. Although the readers enjoy Harrison's efforts and his grand gestures, their empathy lies more with the parents who witness the murder, rather than the murdered son himself, who is described at the very beginning of the text as being fourteen years old.

Emotive responses to the text

The participants were asked whether they felt any strong emotions while reading the text. Despair (E1), sadness (E2, E5, E7, E10, E11, E12, E13, E19, E20), pity or feeling 'sorry' for the Bergerons (E3, E13, E20) and frustration (E5) are discussed in the following responses:

- Maybe despair! (E1).
- I felt really sad for the parents […] they have supressed emotions (E2).
- It kind of makes me feel sorry for them that they can't feel (E3).
- Frustration, sadness, [and a] sense it was eerie if it was ever to happen, hatred towards this woman who is controlling everybody (E5).
- I think it's obviously sad because they died, but I think the saddest part is how his parents didn't really respond to it, and Hazel forget why she was crying and that saddened them, actually dying I think it's quite an inevitable thing that they will die because they couldn't break out of everything, they couldn't get away with it (E7).
- Very sad, well it's hard to be sad for them but it's sad in the way that they don't even recognise their own son like the father didn't, like he went out and came back and couldn't even remember and he missed everything and the mother couldn't even remember that she saw her son on television and

the son was trying to revolt but then got put down so in a way everything is quite sad (E10).

- Well it's not exactly happy is it? (E11).
- It was really sad (E12).
- I feel sorry for Hazel, and George, when they can't remember, I do feel sorry for them but I can't relate to them, [. . .] but I felt sad for them because they didn't get to remember (E13).
- It was sad, because Harrison didn't achieve what he wanted to achieve and everything had to go back the way it was [. . .] When Harrison first came in and tore the handicap things off the ballerina and musicians that made you feel happy because he was getting somewhere, so that emotion was gone quite quickly (E19).
- It's sad but, of course it's really sad because they don't understand what's happened to their son, but I think it's also wrong, like the context of it, like what's actually happening and everyone is handicapped to make them equal [. . .] Just the last part, yeah, Sad (E20).

This is especially interesting in light of the readers mentioning that there is not much information about the characters, and that they did not seem to be recognisable or aligned with these characters in any form. It seems that the richness of the characterisation is not an important factor when it comes to empathy or sympathy with literary fictional characters. Although the readers did not always align with any characters, they still had emotive responses towards their (fictional) dire situations, for example E18 mentions that he didn't think anything of the characters, but was still able to feel bad for George: 'I felt quite bad for George, for having that thing in his ear and hearing terrible noises all the time'.

Personal Bias

In the responses, there is some evidence of self-implication in the narrative that is in line with self-verification and sticky priors. For example, female participants seem to be more aligned with the ballerina who appears briefly but is forced to hide her beauty and disguise her beautiful voice (*WMH*, 10), stating they want to be able to express themselves and use their talents fully. Some of the female participants

viewed that the moment where the ballerina is forced to squawk to hide her beautiful voice was the most striking moment in the narrative, they aligned themselves with her on two counts, firstly because she is female, and secondly because the participants felt that they should be allowed to do what they want to do regardless of the amount of talent they have. This is interesting because it seems to have triggered the sticky priors of 'female' identity, thus highlighting this part of the narrative. For example, E1's response shifts to the first-person narration of her thought processes, where the participant mentions how she thinks people should use their gifts:

- I think the part where the ballerina took over to report the news, the fact that she had a nice voice and just a nice voice, and I don't think it's anything to be competitive about, and she had to be sorry for that? To apologize for what she was born with, I think that's very silly.

  [. . .] I think people should be able to use their gifts to the fullest and I don't think they should be ashamed of it (E1).

E2 is also a female participant, and she uses second person pronouns in her generalizing of the importance of freedom of speech and thought as a right:

- Yeah I think it's nice to be able to be opinionated and to be able to speak your thoughts but here like as soon as you want to have an opinion, they just blur everything out and turning back into a black hole (E2).

E7, however, more explicitly states her involvement as the reader in the narrative by using the first-person pronoun to place herself within the situation of the ballerina and how she relates to the character, who she viewed as being strong due to her having more weights than the other dancers:

- Yeah I think she could have been like she seems like a strong character but she's not allowed to be a strong character she is kind of stopped. [. . .] I am quite a strong personality I wouldn't do things if I don't want to do them or whatever, so I think I felt related because she can't do what she wants to do (E7).

The participants who aligned themselves more closely with George draw upon the idea of personal intelligence and thoughts, saying he is an intelligent man who is not allowed to think, in a similar way to the ballerina, in which case George is most interesting because they feel they can align themselves with the character. For example, E10 mentions that she is aligned with George because she too 'get[s]

distracted by things and can't focus on [her] train of thought', while E11 mentions that she feels more emotions with the characters who took off their handicaps, Harrison and the Ballerina, 'because [she would] like to think that in a similar situation [she] wouldn't just sort of take it either.' In a similar manner, E12 mentions that when George is trying to talk to Hazel and it seems difficult to get his point across, she says she feels the same frustrations when 'just trying to get a point across to someone who isn't listening or wouldn't understand the point anyway, and you either get annoyed and go 'forget it' or yeah I just usually get annoyed' describing what she would do in that situation. And finally, E18 mentions that she tries to put herself in George's situation, saying: 'Well, I felt quite bad for George, for having that thing in his ear and hearing terrible noises all the time, I thought I couldn't imagine having that in my ear.'

Real World Links:

The participants that made real-world links referred to political events such as 'revolution'[s] (E1), dictatorships, 'like North Korea' (E2), and everyday life knowledge, such as the items in the Bergeron household: '[they] like still talk about the tv and a can of beer in the kitchen it's still quite it's modern and it's not futuristic except for the fact that they hang metal on people to make them all as equal' (E11). Participants also related the text to their own required reading for courses, for example, 'I was reading bits and pieces about competing and equality before the law, and I thought this is very relevant to my degree since I am studying law.' (E18). This is a more conscious effect of the participant's background on their readings, which they linked to their own experiences in the academic field of law and equality.

Fiction links

There were also data about possible intertextual links to fiction in the interview responses because the participants were directly asked if the story reminded them of anything in general, and most answered with fiction titles of movies or books that they had read previously. The following lists of intertextual links are ordered in number of repetitions across the interviews, then according to participant number:

- Dystopian (E4, E6, E7, E8, E9, E10, E11)

  The participants mention that the story seemed very dystopian to them, as there is control and terror in the society and the presence of and unjust system.

- Orwellian/*Nineteen Eighty-Four* (E1, E4, E9, E10, E14, E15)

  The words 'Orwellian' and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* were mentioned many times through the interviews, because the participants were more familiar with this text, as a result of assigned readings in classroom settings, or due to the prevalence of the term 'Orwellian' in philosophical thought.

- *The Hunger Games* (E2, E10, E13, E19)

  As one of the most recent and popular dystopian franchises, it seems unsurprising to see this on the list, especially with the themes of media control, the propaganda of the government and the prevalence of television in the story.

The rest of the intertextual links that were mentioned by readers included Raymond Carver's writings (E1), *Equilibrium* (film) (E3), the *Divergent* series (E6), *Book of Ice*, by Anne Carver (E8), *War of the Worlds* (E10), *Animal Farm* (E11), *'The uglies and the pretties'* series (E12), the concept of the American Dream (E13), *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (E13), *Utopia* (E20) and *V for Vendetta* (E20), which also fall under the genre of dystopia. It seems that the readers in this sample are easily able to distinguish genre without any cues or clues outside of the text.

Misreading?

Participant E16 provided a very different reading that seems to divert completely from a text-driven response, in which she considers the entire story framed within a dream:

- It's about Hazel's dream, there are two people in the story, George and Hazel, and Hazel has a dream and the whole story describes Hazel's dream, and in this dream Hazel discusses with George how handicapped [people] wish to be able to do [the same things] normal [people] do (E16).

In this case it is possible that the reader's language background was not sufficient to provide a response that is triggered by the text. Reading the handicaps as

‘handicapped people’ creates distinctly different world-building elements in which case the text-world does not fit with the rest of the responses. Conversely, in the same way that participants E8 and E12 consider the narrative to be part of a larger story, it is possible that E16 is doing the same thing and minimising the horrors of the dystopian world by pushing it further away ontologically within the dream frame. When asked about her responses, she maintained throughout that this was her interpretation, and that she thought ‘Harrison Bergeron’ was an interesting story especially the surprise at the end that it was all a dream, saying that ‘perhaps when Hazel mentions at the end that she does not remember why she was crying’ is the indication that the story is a dream sequence. However, this will have to negate the previous lines that indicate that Hazel could not remember anything within 20 seconds (*WMH*, 7), and thus the mental handicaps that George and some of the ballerinas wore was in order to make them equal in that regard. Participant E16’s interpretation thus loses much of the world-building that occurs in the readings of the other participants, and cannot be considered as a highly dispreferred response but as a ‘misreading’ instead and as such was disregarded from the rest of the text and optimism analysis.

6.4 Finding Utopia in Closed Text-Worlds

This second group of interview participants find it easier to suspend disbelief, except in the case of the Handicapper General. There was not enough description of the background or how this society began and it led to some confusion about the text-world. Usually dystopias begin ‘in medias res’ and provide explanation further on in the narrative, but in ‘Harrison Bergeron’ there is a brief introduction to the world of the dystopia which needs to be repaired fairly quickly within the very first page, when the reader realises that equality does not have a positive connotation in the context of this narrative.

Furthermore, as a dystopia has the ultimate goal of being a warning to the reader, the activation of alternate pathways to problems is the ‘preferred’ response, thus the reading should be one of utter despair at the ending. Surprisingly, while some of the readers (E2, E5, E7, E11, E13) gave the firm answer ‘no’ to the question of whether

there was hope at the ending, most provided an alternative, providing a dispreferred response that was preceded by 'if', 'maybe', 'possibly' and 'perhaps' in order to mitigate the despair of the ending, and serve as delays to lessen the impoliteness of the dispreferred second (Pomerantz, 1975; Levinson, 1983: 333-6).

There is also the possibility that the participants are responding to the interview question with a preferred responses of affirmation, to the question 'is there hope at the end of the story?' but the preferred response would necessarily refer to the text rather than the general notion of hope. Furthermore the question was preceded by asking about what the participants thought about the ending in general, and this usually elicited the answer of 'sad, despair' etc. which is the preferred response to the text. The preferred response to 'Is it good?' would prompt a preferred second of 'yes.' rather than 'no.' and we can see these are dispreferred responses precisely because there is this hesitation and the need to explain their standpoint. The interviewer did not even need to ask the readers to elaborate their answers since they had to provide these explanations.

Finding Hope in the Ending

In general there is a reluctance to say 'no, there isn't hope in the ending', however there was always an attempt to find pathways towards hope, as seen in E1's response, in which the only possible way out of the dystopia was for a revolution to occur. The reader also provided all the reasons in the text that relate to the hopeless ending:

- I don't know, maybe if they, it seems it can only be resolved in some sort of a revolution especially as the example Harrison who decides he's the emperor, and obviously this character was meant to behave [so], he was quite radical and that was just- he was just shot, and the ballerina who was his empress was just killed, if there would be a revolution [there would be hope], but if not then no. Plus, it seemed they had their spirits crushed and even the way George was reluctant, like he would rather put up with the general discomfort and just take it as it is [...] (E1)

E14 and E15 mention that there is no hope in the ending due to the possibility of future failures that have the same outcome of the killing of Harrison when he tried to break free. E15 also says there is no hope in the ending, citing that the failure of

Harrison to break free is an indicator that any future attempts will also fail, regardless of whether there was a revolution.

- The story showed that there kind of could be, because there were some people who would try and fight but it also seems like when they did, everything just went back to normal. So, possibly not (E14).
- No. I would say. I mean the story does show that revolution plot, even though it is foiled these plots are clearly existing and do happen. Well if revolutionary plots do continue to happen, probably not (E15).

Participant E3 also shows this search for alternate pathways, in this response they also point out it is possible for Harrison's actions to be taken as an example, but also interestingly the solution for E3 is to get rid of the devices of control and thus the government. This is similar to E4's and E6's responses as well, in which the removal of the handicaps is the way towards hope and freedom. These rely on Harrison being some kind of inspiration or role model that leads to salvation of the people in 2081.

- I'm not sure, I mean maybe because that attempt was on television, maybe people can try and rebel in other ways, but like the things are trying to suppress what they do, like the headphones and things, if those failed the whole system might fail (E3).
- I mean perhaps, because you can see throughout it that George is starting to think, and you get the sense with the ballerinas that they are starting to think as well, so Harrison has shown them that they can take off their handicaps, so perhaps there is hope in that way if they realize they can set themselves free (E4).
- [. . .] but maybe someone else sees what he does and thinks 'oh maybe I can do something' and try to change the government, but the way it's ended, maybe not (E6).
- If someone like this guy, Harrison, if he uses his mind correctly, instead of coming straight on TV and removing all his handicaps, and doing something there and then, if he escapes prison and then stayed low for a while, and really thought about what he wanted to do, then maybe he could overthrow the government (E12).

- There is [hope], in that there would be more people like Harrison, but at the end of the day it depends whether people kind of bands together, so I don't know (E18).

The next group of responses, however, are more certain that hope exists at the end of the narrative. Participants E8, E10 and E20 portray the most optimistic answers. The scores of all the participants were fairly high in overall hope scores (57, 58, 58 respectively) and these participants are among the higher scoring band of overall readers in this study. E20 seems to indicate that equality in itself is not undesirable, but that the government have implemented it in the wrong way and there is a possibility of the implementation of equality in a more constructive manner:

- […] if there are people as strong as Harrison, but go about it a different way rather than declaring themselves as an emperor, there could be hope for them, if they can change it so they are not handicapped, it's like a good start to have people equal in some way but not just level like they are putting them at, because, just because you're more intelligent doesn't mean you should be made handicapped. I do think there is hope for them. They have a good, the right idea but just the wrong level, yes (E20).

Participant E8 on the other hand seems to note that the story is a precursor of events to happen, in which there is definite possibility for hope. Whereas the previous responses above strived to create pathways from the text itself, this response considers the text as part of a greater overarching story and thus only a small part of the tale and allows for a bigger possibility for hope to arise in the end of the story:

- Yeah I think so, it seems to me to be the start of a story, maybe George and Hazel will go and try to change things after seeing that, although at the end it seemed that they don't really seem to quite know what happened, I thought it was where it was going to go after that [. . .] I think just a general sense, Prokofiev's gun? [Checkov's Gun] Was it that? Where you don't introduce something unless it's going to be relevant later in the story, so it seemed to have some sort of um kind of rebellion thing would be influential later on in the story or probably something to do with the son perhaps, um yeah it kind of seemed like they would rebel and get some bunch of other people (E8).

E10 is also very confident that there will be hope for the citizens after the ending, saying that either Harrison or someone like him can overthrow the tyranny of the Handicapper General:

- Yes, if a large enough number of them are like Harrison yeah, then if there are enough people like Harrison then it will be different, I think there is that possibility because human intelligence is not something you can so easily suppress I think. (E10)

Perhaps then there is a grading or scale of hopeful vs. hopeless interpretation that can be drawn against these responses rather than a clear-cut segregation of the main views. Although those who maintain there could be hope do mention that the text denies them this ending. On the other hand, those who say there is no hope also mention the possibilities and pathways available towards hope. So it becomes a difference in stance rather than in the presence of hope, depending on the participant world that the reader creates.

The figure below illustrates how the responses are distributed along the definiteness of their answer of whether the story has a hopeful or hopeless ending, with readers on the left of the scale viewing the dystopia as a closed-ended dystopia, whereas readers on the right were sure about the possibility of overthrowing the handicapper general:

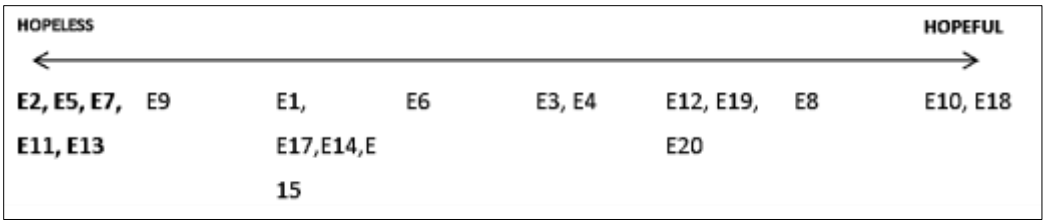


Figure 10 Scale of hopefulness of readers' interpretations of the ending to 'Harrison Bergeron'

These responses are then compared to their positioning on the hope scores of agency and pathways, as well as their optimism scores, where scores nearer the right of the scale indicate higher levels of optimism and hope, and scores on the left of the scale indicate the lower ends of the scale:

Lower scores → Higher Scores

Pathways	18	20	21	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
Participants	E3	E9	E2	E6, E14, E19	E18	E4, E13, E16	E1, E7,E10, E11, E17	E5, E8	E15	E20

Lower scores → Higher scores

Agency	15	20	22	24	26	27	28	29	30
Participants	E1	E9	E6, E17	E2, E3	E4, E5, E14	E11, E18, E20	P8,P19	P13, P16	P10, P12, P15

Lower scores → Higher Scores

Optimism	11	12	13	14	16	17	18	19
Participants	E1, E9	E6, E13, E14, E18	E7, E11, E19	E3, E20	E8, E15	E2, E12	E10, E16, E17	E4, E5

Figure 11 Hope Scores and Optimism Scores for readers of 'Harrison Bergeron'

Although at first glance, the responses show a tendency towards the hopeless ending regardless of the hope and optimism levels of the participants, it seems that those who steered towards the hopeless endings scored slightly lower on the hope and optimism scores among the participants, for example E2 has lower Pathways score at 21, a middle Agency score at 24, and a moderate optimism score at 17, and maintains there is no hope at all in the ending of the narrative. E18, on the other end of the spectrum, has slightly higher scores for Pathways at 26, and Agency at 27, but scores lower on the optimism scale at 12. Optimism, then, which is a different measure from hope, does not seem to affect the readings as much as the pathways score, which correlates more with the hopeful ending, for example E20 has the highest pathways score and their response is higher on the hope scale.

I began the study with the hypothesis that the traits of hope and optimism would lead readers to create alternate endings and readings of the text that had a hopeful outcome. The dispreferred responses would correlate with higher scores. However, as seen above the scores did not always correlate with the hopeful endings. The discrepancy for the readings of the closed endings and the optimism and hope scores seems to be related to the reader's experience with the dystopian genre. For example, it seems there is some effect from the 'narrative interrelations' (Mason, 2015) that the readers draw between the narrative and other titles in the dystopian genre, which is shown in the previous section 5.4.5 as well, where readers drew upon historical and fictional schematic knowledge in order to create the alternative participant world for the text. Thus, genre interrelations constitute a huge role in the building of narrative worlds. In order to explore this, I added the intertextual links that the readers mentioned in the interviews to the scale of hopefulness of the ending of 'Harrison Bergeron':

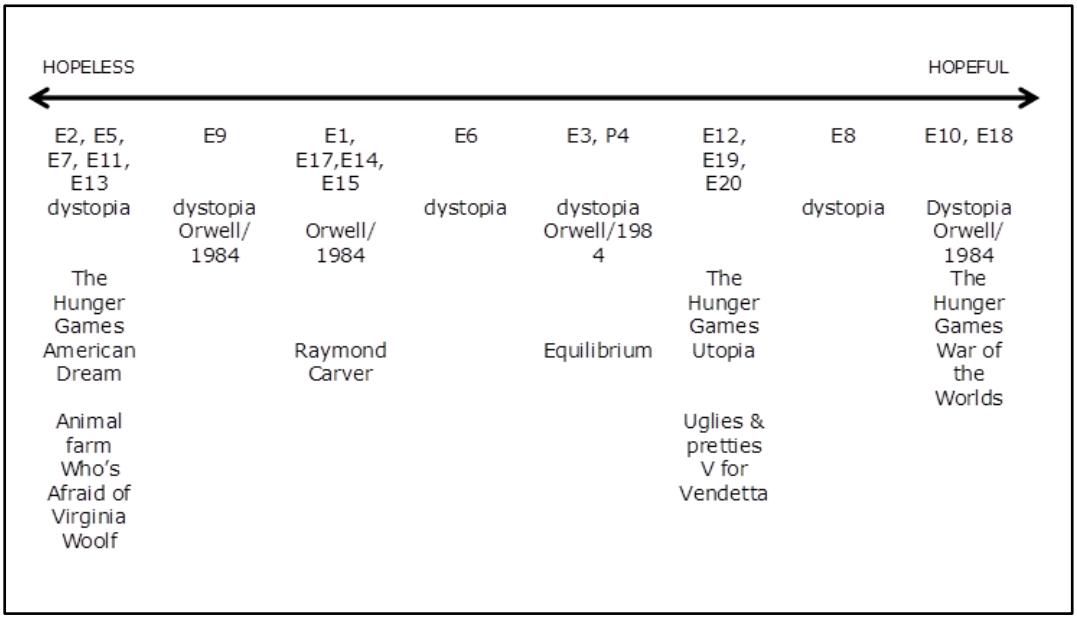


Figure 12 Comparison of readers' dystopian experience to their readings of the ending

For example, participant E18, their Pathways score was 26, Agency 27, and their optimism score was lower at a score of 12. Despite this somewhat lower score than the other participants, E18 suggests that there is a definite hopeful outcome for 'Harrison Bergeron': 'There is [hope], in that there would be more people like

Harrison, but at the end of the day it depends whether people kind of band together'. This participant also mentions that the story reminded them of *the Hunger Games*: 'It kind of reminded me of *the Hunger Games* and things like that, the way they were trying to not have the people rise up and be better than the people at the top, the government' (E18). The ending of *the Hunger Games*, where it was possible to overthrow the dystopian government, seems to have affected the possible participant world created by this reader. Interestingly, participant E2 also mentions *the Hunger Games* as a related title to the story, however their response indicates a hopeless ending. This is because while the heroes overthrow the government at the end of *the Hunger Games* series, E2 only read the first part of the three instalments, which ends with a bleak hopeless ending with the dystopian government still in power.

Another reason readers may attempt to create dispreferred hopeful readings in their participant worlds is to avoid facing pessimism and to avoid the horror of the narrative by compartmentalising it further ontologically (see E16's response in section 6.3) or through considering it part of an over-arching narrative with possibilities for new endings (E8, E12). It would also be interesting to note whether the setting of the USA would have similar implications like it did in *HT* reviews, where it was mostly rejected because such a tyrannical regime of the Handicapper General 'couldn't happen in America' (See end of Chapter 4 for similar responses from readers of *The Handmaid's Tale*).

Overall, these examples show that participant worlds depend both upon the personal mental traits of the reader, as well as their prior knowledge, be that schematic knowledge in the discourse world, or related to narrative interrelations to other works in the same genre. Dispreferred hopeful responses to closed dystopias can thus be attributed to the participant worlds that are evoked through the reader's traits or experience.

6.5 Summary

In this final chapter, I explored the notion that collecting personality trait data may lead to some indication of reading behaviour, especially with traits that are related to the expectations of positive outcomes such as optimism and hope. The participants thus took part in a personality questionnaire and semi-structured interview after reading 'Harrison Bergeron', and the results show that in some cases the readers' dispreferred endings that lean towards a hopeful resolution would correlate with their pathways scores on the LOT-R scale, whereas there seemed to be no relation with the optimism scores nor the agency scores. This is possibly due to the fictional story being inaccessible to the participants in the discourse-world, and thus the readers do not have as much agency or control over the narrative, which are more related to optimism and agency.

What seemed to really affect the dispreferred hopeful outcomes was the prior experience of other dystopian fiction, in which the hopeful ending was possible. When looking at the relationship between the readers' reported narrative interrelations, and their endings, the readings seemed to correlate with the endings of the prior dystopias. This encourages further research into how fiction is approached by readers and how they draw upon their experiences with narratives when approaching a narrative that they can easily distinguish as part of a certain genre. Optimism and hope offer positive expectancies, as part of reading and transportation. The reader also activates these traits in regards to the situation of the characters. Especially noting the emotive 'if I was in their place' or 'I wouldn't want to be prevented from doing what I wanted to do' the readers clearly imagine themselves within the text world as they are reading and thus look for expectancies other than the ones offered by the text, which is a huge part of pathways accessibility thinking. Optimism is related to readers' positive outlooks in general, but the pathways scores seem to more specifically related to their readings. This could be related to multiple narrative interrelations that occur in different possible text-worlds, but at the same time these activations would not occur unless the reader imagines these possibilities extraneously from the text which allows the reader to choose and create their own reading.

I argue that these pathways for the story ending are diverse and multiple but there are still a *finite* number of responses for any given text, in line with Rosenblatt's assertions of diverse but limited endings (1978). The more ambiguous the ending of a dystopia, the more pathways become available for activation. Even with a closed ending in a dystopia, however, the pathways still remain activated, and the readers can create different participant worlds as is shown in the responses of this study and the closed dystopia of 'Harrison Bergeron'. As the examples discussed in this sample of readers show, hope and optimism scores seem to factor more in this set of participants when readers do not have much experience with the genre of dystopia, but less when the intertextual links indicate a possible hopeful/hopeless ending.

There may be other factors that allow for dispreferred responses as well, and it is worth investigating such readings for more insight into reader behaviour as well as for classroom and educational implications that would make use of a more reader-based approach such as Text World Theory (Werth, 1999, Gavins, 2007). Furthermore, the analysis illustrates that simple texts can also carry a plethora of meanings, whereas stylistic enquiries tend to focus on the foregrounded and saliently deviant texts. There is still much to uncover in the analysis of the narratives that are deemed 'simple', 'clear' and with a coherent 'flow' to the text.

Chapter 7 Conclusions

7.0 Overview

This present study examines reader responses to two dystopian narratives, *the Handmaid's Tale* and 'Harrison Bergeron' as a starting point for a Text World Theory–based cognitive poetic analysis of the texts. I argue for the use of the semi-structured interview as a means for examining responses to texts in depth and providing meaningful explanations to vague answers that are usually prevalent in found online data of reader responses. This is also the first study that looks specifically at negative reviews as lesser preferred readings of texts, which argues for the inclusion of such responses for stylistic analyses that take the role of the reader into consideration. In this chapter, I provide a summary of the thesis in 7.1, followed by a discussion of the main contributions of the study in 7.2. Finally, section 7.3 discusses the implications of this study for future research.

7.1 Overview of the thesis

The first three chapters of this thesis focused on situating this research within the wider fields of dystopian studies, cognitive poetics and reader response studies. In chapter 1, I briefly touch upon the study of dystopian literature, and the focus on the emphasis of the authorial intention as part of the definition of dystopia, as well as the focus on the historical and ideological perspectives of dystopian texts as a huge part of the author's creation of the text. Because of the emphasis of the dystopia on creating an extrapolative society recognisable to the reader (Aldridge, 1984; Sargent, 1994; Claeys, 2011), dystopian studies will take the reader and context of reading into consideration (e.g. Roemer, 2003). While stylistics is concerned with the body of the text itself, cognitive poetics discusses the author and reader as participants in a discourse processing activity in which the text is the medium (Stockwell, 2002; Gavins and Steen, 2003; Sanford and Emmot, 2012). A cognitive poetic framework was thus deemed to be suitable for the analysis of texts that aim at 'cognitive estrangement' (Suvin, 1979).

The thesis is also situated within the field of reader response studies, where literary texts are analysed following the collection of reader response data and which is garnering recent attention in stylistics and cognitive poetics. In chapter 2, I discuss the main theoretical frameworks used in the analysis of the texts in this thesis, namely Text World Theory as a cognitive poetic framework, which is fundamentally a discourse-based approach that takes into consideration the participants of the discourse (the reader and the author) (Werth, 1999; Gavins, 2007, 2013). I also discuss the application of preference organisation to literary discourse (Stockwell, 2013), which is originally a Conversation Analysis tool, however it is useful in the discussion of responses that are usually ignored in stylistic analyses of reader responses, which can be considered as dispreferred text worlds instead of disregarding such interpretations as mistakes or 'deviant' misreadings. In the context of a dystopian text, a utopian enclave that is not found in the preferred readings of the text may perhaps be situated within the dispreferred responses instead, and this is one of the main points of investigation in the studies presented in the body of the thesis.

Chapter 3 is the final theoretical chapter in which I provide a more detailed overview of literary reader response studies, noting that the reader I am concerned with in this study is not a theoretical concept but a participant in discourse that provides empirical data as a starting point for text analysis (e.g. Allington and Swann, 2009). In this chapter I argue for borrowing the semi-structured interview from the social sciences as a tool for collecting reader responses, this is because it is primarily a tool for collecting data about personal experience (Wellington and Szczerbinski, 2007; Franklin, 2012:169), and therefore can be considered suitable for the subjective matter of interpretation (Bryman, 2008; Denzin and Lincoln, 2013:26). The following chapters provide the main body of the thesis, and the main studies of reader responses.

I discuss negative reviews of *The Handmaid's Tale* as an example of a critical dystopia which has a utopian enclave in chapter 4 that is generally highly acclaimed and has received much scholarly attention, however still accrued a high number of negative reviews on the *Goodreads* website. In an attempt to include dispreferred or lesser preferred responses to texts in stylistic enquiry, I provide an overview of the

100 most recent negative reviews to the text. This methodology uses the frequency of recurring themes across this data as a starting point for building the semi-structured interview guide as well as a Text World Theory-based analysis. The responses highlighted certain linguistic features of the text that are worthy of investigation, such as the providing a basis for conducting a corpus analysis of certain features of the text that deal with perspective and the vague text worlds of *The Handmaid's Tale*. This highlights the importance of including such dispreferred responses in reader response studies as a starting point for stylistic analysis.

In chapter 5, I look at an overview of responses to 'Harrison Bergeron'. In this chapter, I look at the responses from three sets of data, the first being critical reception of the short story, the second from online reviews on the *Goodreads* website, and data from semi-structured interviews. Due to the lack of negative reviews for the short story, the focus of this chapter is not primarily on dispreferred responses, but I also explore lesser preferred responses that are revealed from the online reviews. The results of tagging the online reviews reveal that the generalised response correlated with the preferred response to the text, which is a close-ended dystopia with no hope for its citizens. This also provided the guide for stylistic analysis of the text by pointing to George's perspective as striking in the online readings, as well as the resonance of certain features of the text, such as the loud sounds in George's radio transmitter. This chapter illustrates that while the online responses provide a hefty amount of data for stylistic analysis, there is ambiguity and lack of uniformity in such responses because they are uncontrolled by the researcher. The responses commented on various aspects of the text, and thus it becomes difficult to compare and contrast such responses, furthermore there is little information about the respondents themselves other than what they choose to include in their responses. This need for generating more uniform but still flexible responses led to the use of the semi-structured interview which allows for elaboration on obscure evaluations of the text, as well as provided some interesting dispreferred responses to the text that viewed the possibility of hope in a hopeless ending. The results of interviewing 10 participants revealed that readerly experience and prior knowledge may play a role in interpreting this hopeless ending as a hopeful one. Furthermore, it is possible that the reader's own personal traits of hope and optimism may also factor in these interpretative processes.

Finally, in chapter 6, I investigate 20 participants' optimism and hope levels and compare these responses to their view of the ending of 'Harrison Bergeron'. Within this small sample, some readers with higher scores did have more hopeful outlooks on the ending, whereas others did not map on to their traits. In the cases where there was a mismatch between their responses and their traits, however, there seemed to be a connection between the intertextual links or narrative interrelations that the readers were able to make with other dystopian fiction, in which the endings of the other titles may have affected their readings of 'Harrison Bergeron'. These studies therefore serve as an indication that reader responses can help inform Text World Theory analyses of texts. Rather than relying solely on the researcher's own interpretation of a text, this allows for a discussion of multiple responses, both preferred and dispreferred, to a given text. This thesis therefore is situated within the growing field of applying Text World Theory analyses to real reader responses, and argues for the inclusion of dispreferred responses and reader traits in such analyses.

Chapter 4 looks specifically at negative reviews of *HT* on *Goodreads* in an attempt to discover some dispreferred responses, since for a highly acclaimed literary work, the general preferred response is that of approbation (Levinson, 1983: 332-6; Bilmes, 1988: 163); in which the reasoning given for these dispreferred negative reviews provided the basis for analysis of some aspects of the text which would otherwise be ignored in most analyses that focus on the more popular preferred readings of the novel, such as the alienation of Offred's daughter, and the prevalence of metaphors used in the novel. This also provided a starting point for a cognitive poetic text world analysis, as well as a corpus-based analysis, rather than starting with solely my own interpretation of the text as a guide for these textual analyses it was possible to draw upon existing dispreferred reviews for the analysis of the text. In chapter 5, I draw upon the critical literature on 'Harrison Bergeron' as well as the online reviews on *Goodreads* to generate a general idea of the preferred response to the text, and this launched an examination of the responses in the semi-structured interviews in chapters 5 and 6 as potential dispreferred responses. These dispreferred responses also provided starting points for the text analysis, and highlighted that certain responses that do not follow the generalized preferred response to a text are also confined by the text and the reader's own personal knowledge and traits.

7.2 Contributions

I set out to answer the following research questions in this thesis:

- Can semi-structured interviews be utilized in the collection of reader-response data for a Text World Theory-based analysis? And how will such responses inform cognitive poetic analyses of narrative texts?
- Are the readers who interpret texts in a manner that deviates from the generally agreed upon interpretation providing a dispreferred response to the narrative? And are they truly dispreferred responses if the text analysis supports their interpretations?
- Is it possible to investigate reader traits and previous reading experiences and relate them to hopeful readings of dystopian hopeless endings?

In this study, I argue for the use of semi-structured interviews in the collection of reader response data to provide a starting point for Text World Theory based analyses. As shown by the analyses in chapters 4,5 and 6, the use of the semi-structured interview opens up the possibility of discussing interpretations that do not follow the generalised academic readings of texts. This includes responses that are lesser preferred second pair parts to the text. Semi-structured interviews are therefore shown in the study to be a powerful investigative tool in the field of reader response and cognitive poetics. This study expands upon reader response methodologies in Text World Theory analyses by including this method of collecting reader responses to texts.

I also argue for the inclusion of lesser preferred responses to texts as part of Text World Theory analyses. Text World Theory is a discourse-based cognitive poetic framework, it is important to look at different text worlds that are possible interpretations of a single text rather than disregarding the deviant or strange meanings that some readers create. The focus on generalised responses and replicability of certain themes across responses is considered as evidence for certain interpretations (e.g. Gavins, 2013; Nuttall, 2015), however this can only provide a partial picture of the multitude of readings that are possible for a certain text. Although this largely stems from an attempt to systematise meanings of literary

works, the very nature of the subject matter of literature allows for subjectivity and human interaction with texts that do not fit within rigid quantitative methods. As shown by the analyses in the previous chapters of the responses to *The Handmaid's Tale* and 'Harrison Bergeron', these lesser preferred interpretations are also text-driven, and controlled by the context of reading (which in Text World Theory includes the reader's own experiences, personality, and cognitive functions). While I argue for the inclusion of multiple responses to a text within stylistic enquiry, I maintain that these interpretations are necessarily *finite* due to how text, discourse participants, and context combine in building the text worlds of these dystopias.

The inclusion of such lesser preferred responses is shown to be useful in the discussion of texts that are otherwise ignored in stylistic enquiries, due to the tendency of focusing on complex linguistic structures. 'Harrison Bergeron' receives little attention from stylisticians, for example. Beginning a stylistic analysis based on actual reader responses creates a crucial starting point for an in-depth discussion of the world building that occurs in the text.

Furthermore, this study attempts to bridge the gap between an important premise of Text World Theory and its application, namely with regards to reader traits and experiences as part of the discourse. Although one of the main tents of Text World Theory is this inclusion of the reader's cognitive abilities and traits, there is little discussion of the reader's personality traits in reader response data. The inclusion of hope and optimism measures in the study allows for the inclusion of a partial picture of how readers' traits may affect readings. Comparing the reader's trait scores with their responses, reveal that reading experiences may allow for the activation of certain participant worlds in the narrative.

This thesis is the only study that specifically focuses on negative reviews of a dystopian text as lesser preferred responses to a literary narrative, therefore contributes to the ongoing field of empirical investigations of reader responses. Rather than indicating that some readings are deviant or eccentric, these should be included as lesser preferred responses to the text and not marginalised as strange or deviant readings. Readings that should not be considered in investigation of text meanings, however, would be 'misreadings' in which case the reader does not have

the ‘knowledge’ necessary to build the text world (Werth 1995b, 1999:95-97; Gavins, 2007: 21-23).

Finally, the application of this cognitive poetic framework is also situated in dystopian studies. This study also contributes to the ongoing discussion of how readers respond to dystopian endings and create the hope that is found in narratives of dark controlling societies. This triangulation of the three fields of cognitive poetics, reader response and dystopian literary studies is an innovative approach to dystopian literature.

7.3 Implications for further study

This study focused on a qualitative approach to a smaller group of participants in order to generate different readings from my own first and foremost, and as such I was not interested in focusing on quantitative data that would allow for the categorisation of reader behaviour and generalisations of certain reader demographics. The analysis of a larger sample of participants that share the same gender, age, cultural, and educational background in order to collect quantitative data about the responses to this short story, a possible extension of this project that will require more time and space than the confines of this thesis. This will allow for comparisons on a wider scale by providing more quantitative-based statistical evidence of transactional relations/intertextuality being more influential on readings than personal traits.

The thematic tagging of the responses in this project can be a starting point for discussion of personal interviews on a larger scale across different dystopian short stories as well, and thus create the grounds for a cross-examination of intertextual links formed by reading titles from the same genre. The methodology employed in this study can also be applied to different genres, although the focus is on world-building, the analysis of texts by beginning with the reader responses can reveal linguistic features that otherwise would not be subject to analysis, as shown by the analysis of extracts in this thesis.

Finally, the inclusion of lesser preferred responses as valid responses to a text provides a basis for the analysis of various readings and text worlds, and thus draws attention to texts that otherwise would be ignored in favour of the more obscure, ornate texts. This will also allow for the further investigation of texts that are deemed 'unliterary' or unsuitable for scholarly discussion, and opens doors into utopian horizons where dispreferred readings are no longer marginalised in favour of institutionalised, general responses to texts. The study of readerly preferences from a cognitive poetic perspective has the potential of opening up new avenues of research into literary reading.

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