

Nineteen Eighty-Four's legacy in Sally Gardner's *Maggot Moon*: rewriting dystopian themes for teenagers

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Abstract

Sally Gardner's 2012 novel *Maggot Moon* is a British dystopia set in a totalitarian world heavily inspired by George Orwell's seminal work, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Our article focuses on how Orwell's key themes are rewritten and modified in the novel to suit a teenage audience and thus questions the borders between adult and children's literature. The paper focuses on the similarities between the worlds, through war, shortages and surveillance (thanks to Foucault's theories), as well as the use of language which is used both by the regime to control and by the main characters to rebel on a narrative level. On a linguistic level this also adds humour and poetry for the reader.

Résumé

Le roman de Sally Gardner, Une planète dans la tête (2012), est une contre-utopie britannique qui se déroule dans un monde totalitaire fortement inspiré par 1984 de George Orwell. Notre article s'interroge sur la façon dont les thèmes clés d'Orwell sont réutilisés et modifiés dans le roman pour convenir à un public adolescent et questionne les frontières entre littérature pour adultes et littérature de jeunesse. L'article analyse les similitudes entre les deux mondes, que ce soit à travers la guerre, le manque, la surveillance (grâce aux théories de Foucault), ainsi que sur l'utilisation du langage. Le langage est en effet utilisé par les régimes totalitaires pour contraindre la population et par les protagonistes pour se rebeller. Cela permet aussi d'ajouter une note poétique et humoristique aux œuvres.

Plan

Maggot Moon and Nineteen Eighty-Four: two degraded societies

Language: a tool of control and a way to escape for the protagonist and the reader

Bibliographie

In the last twenty years, dystopian fiction has become synonymous with Young Adult literature as many novels and series have taken up the key tropes of the genre. In 2013 Michael Ray explained that “[a]lthough *The Hunger Games* is by far the most successful dystopian novel thus far, the genre has undergone something of a boom in the past 10 years.”¹ Indeed, many novels such as the *The Hunger Games* (Suzanne Collins 2008-2010), but also *Divergent* (Veronica Roth 2011-2014), *Uglies* (Scott Westerfeld 2005-2007) or *Gone* (Michael Grant 2008-2013) among others, place teenagers in a nightmarish world where they are manipulated, tortured and even killed. George Orwell’s vision therefore seemed to have seeped into the realm of children’s literature, making it a darker, more frightening space where the child or teenage protagonists must fight for their very survival.

This phenomenon started in 1993 with Lois Lowry’s *The Giver*, one of the very first dystopias written for young readers. Even though many titles in the sub-genre of dystopian children’s literature are penned by American authors, we shall focus on a British novel, *Maggot Moon*. Published in 2012, Sally Gardener’s book is part of this greater phenomenon of dystopian writing for young readers but seems to follow more closely in Orwell’s footsteps than her American counterparts. Sally Gardener is a British novelist and illustrator who has written more than thirty books for children and two for adults. Her novel *Maggot Moon* received two literary prizes, the Costa Children’s Book Award and the Carnegie Medal in 2012.

A dystopia is “an imagined place or state in which everything is unpleasant or bad, typically a totalitarian or environmentally degraded one”², and the word was coined in the late 18th century in opposition to the word “utopia”. As is typical with dystopia, the characters with whom the reader identifies (Winston Smith in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Standish Treadwell in *Maggot Moon*) are both slightly eccentric and are outsiders in their own world³. The third-person narrator in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has given way in more contemporary dystopias to first-person narrators, just as we have here. In *Maggot Moon*, our narrator Standish Treadwell, lives in a world eerily reminiscent of Oceania as he resides in the “Motherland”, a terrifying world which seeks to control the population through propaganda, war, torture and killings as the author herself analysed:

The Motherland is essentially any tyrannical dictatorship the reader chooses to make it. It doesn’t, in my humble opinion, take long for any political system to turn oppressive. The essence of it is that it is fueled by fear, by the regime’s using divisions, zones, work camps,

¹ Michael RAY, “Dystopian Children’s Literature: A Darker Spin on an Established Genre”, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica. 2013 Book of the Year*, Chicago, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 2013, p. 279.

² *Oxford Dictionary of English*, 2005.

³ “Pour l’évolution ultérieure de la dystopie [au regard de l’utopie], deux innovations narratologiques sont d’une importance décisive : d’un côté il s’agit de transformer le personnage d’identification, c’est-à-dire le personnage qui dirige la perception du lecteur, de visiteur enthousiaste en habitant excentrique, marginalisé, du monde étranger ; de l’autre, il s’agit de remplacer l’écriture satirico-parodique [...] par un mode narratif sérieux.” (Peter KUON and Gérard PEYLET, *L’Utopie entre eutopie et dystopie*, Bordeaux, Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2013, p. 27). Yohana Gonçalves Bonfim also goes in the same direction when she states: “No gênero distópico, a figura do herói assume papel importante, visto que geralmente pertence à estrutura social distópica; e é comum que ainda não tenha sido conquistado ou dominado pelas doutrinas do regime, como é o caso de Winston, em 1984; e Standish, em Lua de Larvas.” (Yohana Gonçalves BONFIM, “1984 e Lua de larvas: o reflexo da idealização utópica na distopia”, *Migulim - Revista Eletrônica do Netlli*, January 2020, vol. 8, nº3, p. 8).

surveillance, and propaganda so that it becomes a place where people are too scared to ask questions⁴.

Whereas *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was placed in a dystopian future set nearly forty years after the novel was written, in *Maggot Moon* the story takes place at the end of the 1950s, nearly sixty years before the book was published. This chronological chiasmus places both characters in a different era to the reader's, either in a futuristic or past dystopian world. *Maggot Moon* could be considered not only as a dystopia but also as a counterfactual historical fiction as Sally Gardner wrote it thinking about "what if" Churchill had died in 1931 (even though this event is never mentioned in the novel). This vein of analysis is further developed by Catherine Butler in her 2017 article⁵.

This article will look into how Orwell's ideas and themes have been rewritten for a younger 21st century audience in this novel, thus questioning the boundary between adult and children's literature, and how the key ideas of surveillance, death, thought-control but also resistance to the regime are both being reused and questioned.

We shall first concentrate on the similar atmosphere that we can find in both books as they portray a degraded society, a constant state and inter-person surveillance and frequent purges, then we will look at how language is used both as a tool for control and a way for the protagonist and reader to resist and escape.

***Maggot Moon* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: two degraded societies**

Maggot Moon and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* both feature societies which offer very similar living conditions to the protagonists who reside in a world at war, as Standish explains: "Before the war – which war I don't know, there's been so blooming many, all won of course by the great Motherland [...]"⁶. Oceania is also constantly at war with one of the other two superpowers and it too seems to win battles: "Our forces in South India have won a glorious victory"⁷. These wars and bombings place our protagonists in damaged cities with shops that were "boarded up"⁸ in *Maggot Moon* and "vistas of rotting nineteenth-century houses, their sides shored up with baulks of timber, their windows patched with cardboard"⁹ in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. This constant state of war also leads to food and fuel shortages in both worlds.

Electricity is scarce in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* ("at present the electric current was cut off during the daylight hours")¹⁰ and in *Maggot Moon*: "Why did it need so much electricity when we were lucky to get an hour or two a day?"¹¹ but what is the hardest

⁴ BookBrowse interview with Sally Gardner, 2012: https://www.bookbrowse.com/author_interviews/full/index.cfm/author_number/1195/sally-gardner. (Last viewed 23/08/2023).

⁵ Catherine BUTLER, "Counterfactual historical fiction for children and young adults", in Clémentine BEAUVAIS and Maria NIKOKAJEVA, *The Edinburgh Companion to Children's Literature*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2017, p. 179-93.

⁶ Sally GARDNER, *Maggot Moon* (1^{re} ed. 2012), London, Hot Key Books, 2013, p. 155).

⁷ George ORWELL, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1^{re} ed. 1949), London, Penguin Books, 1989, p. 28.

⁸ S. GARDNER, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

⁹ G. ORWELL, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹¹ S. GARDNER, *op. cit.*, p. 114-115.

for the protagonists is the rationing of food. Neither Winston nor Standish are able to eat enough and both worlds seem to rely heavily on cabbage as a staple food: “The place smelled of over-boiled cabbage, cigarettes and corruption”¹² and “The hallway smelt of boiled cabbage and old rag mats”¹³. For a British audience boiled cabbage is reminiscent of the Second World War and poor living conditions as cabbage is a cheap vegetable that grows very well in the British climate. Traditionally it is boiled but any over-boiling will create a very pungent smell that lingers in the air. The smell consequently creates a host of associations for a reader who is knowledgeable about British cuisine, bringing together notions of poverty, war and possibly also canteen food. These two sentences about cabbage smells are constructed in mirror fashion with the exact same sentence structure: The place / hallway + the verb “smell” in the past form + “boiled cabbage” + one or two other smells. The intertextual link is thus obvious here. Christine Wilkie-Stibbs applied Kristeva’s theory to Children’s Literature thus:

At the level of the literary text (the intertext), it is possible to identify three main categories of intertextuality: (1) texts of quotation which quote or allude to other literary or non-literary works; (2) texts of imitation which seek to parody, pastiche, paraphrase, ‘translate’ or supplant the original, [...] and (3) genre texts where identifiable shared clusters of codes and literary conventions are grouped together in recognisable patterns which allow readers to expect and locate them, and to cause them to seek out similar texts¹⁴.

In the case of the cabbage-smell we are in the first category where the initial quote is visible through the rewriting in Gardner’s text but the previous electricity example is closer to the second category. We shall see examples of the third category too in *Maggot Moon*, specifically with the similar use of language in the second part.

The food trope continues with not only cabbage but also carrots, but in this case the main difference between the two books is the tone used. Whereas *Nineteen Eighty-Four* remains very factual about the scarcity of food “there was no food in the kitchen except a hunk of dark-coloured bread which had got to be saved for tomorrow’s breakfast”¹⁵, *Maggot Moon* on the other hand uses humour to undermine the gravity of the situation:

that watch, when all was said and done, was just made from cheap chrome. No carrots in it like Mr Lush’s. I didn’t know gold was weighed in carrots. I do now. Whoever dug up gold in the first place must have seen this coming. He knew we would be swapping gold for food¹⁶.

The paronomasia of “carats” and “carrots” is here artfully exploited to trigger laughter for the reader as he or she both laughs at Standish for confusing the two words and laughs at the joke as Mr Lush’s watch was indeed exchanged for food. The tone is therefore very different in the two novels as *Maggot Moon* is able to keep the writing lighter than *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. As mentioned by Stephen Lee Hodgkins, another explanation for this confusion could also be the fact that it is implied throughout the novel that Standish has dyslexia: “Standish is Dyslexic, although this

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 83.

¹³ G. ORWELL, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

¹⁴ Christine WILKIE-STIBBS, “Intertextuality and the child reader”, in Peter HUNT (eds), *Understanding Children’s Literature* (1^{re} ed. 1999), Oxon, Routledge, 2009, p. 170.

¹⁵ G. ORWELL, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

¹⁶ S. GARDNER, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

is not explicitly labelled in the text, rather this is implied in the opening pages”¹⁷. The author herself expounds on this in a 2013 interview:

It’s really funny but I wrote it all out, finished the story, and sent it off to Hot Key [Gardner’s British publisher] and they told me, ‘Oh. He’s dyslexic, isn’t he?’ I hadn’t even realized I had done that and that’s because he’s just me. His voice was me. Things I remember from when I was small that so riveted me, like trying to figure out why anybody would put carrots into gold [...]”¹⁸.

The two societies both rely heavily on surveillance to function. In the two novels the characters are constantly watched by the state through cameras, either telescreens in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (“so long as he remained within the field of vision which the metal plaque commanded, he could be seen as well as heard”¹⁹) or security cameras in *Maggot Moon*: “She [Miss Phillips] looked down the corridor and up at the camera that went round like clockwork. She waited until the all-seeing eye was turned elsewhere”²⁰. The two novels use the device of the panopticon, the institutionalised building devised by Bentham and theorised by Foucault²¹, in which a supervisor is able to see all the prisoners in their cells without their knowing when or if they are being watched. In these cases, the windows on the cells of the inmates are replaced by the machines which are able to follow the characters’ every move. Moreover, the passive role of the prisoners is maintained as no one knows when they are being watched: “There was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment.”²² It is interesting to notice that even though surveillance is constant, it is not complete, as both Miss Phillips and Winston are able to escape it at least momentarily. Winston retreats to his “shallow alcove”²³ when writing his diary from which he cannot be seen and Miss Phillips waits for the opportune moment to help Standish with his tie, thus getting him out of trouble. As Bonfim identifies, there is a notable difference between the two types of surveillance as in *Maggot Moon* the cameras only occur in public spaces whereas in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* the cameras are in both public and private areas: “Diferentemente das câmeras utilizadas pela Terra Mãe, que ocupam somente espaços públicos, quase toda a população de Oceania dispõe de um destes aparelhos em sua residência”²⁴. Nonetheless, home is not a safe haven either in *Maggot Moon* as the police patrol the streets and seem to be able to hear conversations, possibly through listening devices.

Even though there is an abundance of cameras and microphones, it seems likely that the regimes are conscious of the loopholes in state surveillance as they both institute and promote betrayal within the population. This inter-person surveillance is carried out by the other citizens, usually the women and children. Winston Smith is well aware that “[i]t was always the women, and above all the young ones, who were

¹⁷ Stephen Lee HODGKINS, “Maggot Moon Book review”, *Inclusion Now*, 2013, Issue 34, p. 16.

¹⁸ Sue CORBETT, “Q and A with Sally Gardner”, *Publishers Weekly*, January 15, 2013: <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/authors/interviews/article/55503-q-a-with-sally-gardner.html>. (Last viewed 23/08/2023).

¹⁹ G. ORWELL, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

²⁰ S. GARDNER, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

²¹ Michel FOUCAULT (trans. Alan Sheridan), *Discipline and Punish, The Birth of the Prison* (1st ed. 1975), St Ives, Penguin, 1991, p. 200.

²² G. ORWELL, *op. cit.*, p. 4-5.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁴ Y. G. BONFIM, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

[...] the amateur spies, and nosers-out of unorthodoxy.”²⁵ as well as the children as we are told:

hardly a week passed in which the Times did not carry a paragraph describing how some eavesdropping little sneak – ‘child hero’ was the phrase generally used – had overheard some compromising remark and denounced his parents to the Thought Police²⁶.

Maggot Moon follows the same pattern with both the children and “the Mothers for Purity”²⁷ who “report on all the good citizens who don’t toe the party line”²⁸;

This constant surveillance leads in both cases to arrests and disappearances for those who do not conform. Basu, Broad and Hintz explain that “[a]nother major theme in YA [Young Adult] dystopias is conformity, which is often exaggerated for dramatic effect”²⁹. This extreme conformity is portrayed through the re-enacting of Orwell’s nightmarish vision of the physical and sociological erasure of those who refuse to adapt. Indeed, in Winston’s world:

People simply disappeared, always during the night. Your name was removed from the registers, every record of everything you had ever done was wiped out, your one-time existence was denied and then forgotten. You were abolished, annihilated: vaporized was the usual word³⁰.

In *Maggot Moon* the situation is eerily similar: “There were many unexplained disappearances: neighbours and friends who like my parents had been rubbed out, their names forgotten, all knowledge of them denied by the authorities”³¹ and “once you are rubbed out you never existed [...] His name was erased from the register”³². The vocabulary here is nearly identical with “removed from the registers” in the former and “erased from the register” in the latter as well as “wiped out” in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* versus “rubbed out” in *Maggot Moon*. The effect of the purges is therefore identical in the two novels with history being constantly rewritten as the “non-existent”³³ are slowly removed from its pages. It is interesting to notice that the word “non-existent” which is used in *Maggot Moon* to describe those who have been erased works in the same fashion as Orwell’s Newspeak with the addition of the prefix “non” before “existent” to create “an exact opposite”³⁴ exactly like the well-known coining of “ungood”.

The theme of conformity can also be seen through physical attributes and not only psychological ones. Indeed, Standish is considered physical impure in the Motherland as his eyes are not the same colour: “my blemish of impurity. What odd eyes you have”³⁵. This physical attribute is linked immediately to death through the reference to *Little Red Riding Hood* with “what odd eyes you have” which echoes the young girl’s questions to the wolf before he eats her. We learn later on that being

²⁵ G. ORWELL, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

²⁷ S. GARDNER, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

²⁹ Balaka BASU, Katherine R. BROAD and Carrie HINTZ (eds), *Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults: Brave New Teenagers* (1st ed. 2013), New York and London, Routledge, 2014, p. 3.

³⁰ G. ORWELL, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

³¹ S. GARDNER, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 151.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

³⁴ G. ORWELL, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

³⁵ S. GARDNER, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

physically different can have dramatic consequences as “Mrs Lush was a doctor who had refused to eliminate the impure”³⁶. Conformity is hence pushed to its limit with such small modifications as eye colour being enough to warrant a death sentence.

Nevertheless, it is not only the totalitarian society which can limit, survey and even kill people, language also plays a fundamental role in both dystopias. Language can be used by these governments as a tool for control, thought-processes can be modified through words.

Language: a tool of control and a way to escape for the protagonist and the reader

As regards language, the similarities between the two governing entities in the worlds are immediately visible. Both are portrayed on posters, with “the only [word] I could read was the huge red word that was stamped over the picture of the moon. Slapped you in the gob that word did. MOTHERLAND³⁷.” and “On each landing, opposite the lift shaft, the poster with the enormous face gazed from the wall. [...] BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU, the caption beneath it ran³⁸.” The capital letters used by Gardner on the poster harken back unmistakably to Orwell, but it is not only the font which is reminiscent of Oceania. In point of fact, she also reuses the linguistic trick of using the name of well-loved family members in order to control and manipulate the population. The use of the words “brother” and “mother” are thus twisted from their original loving and caring functions to represent those who are abusing and killing the population³⁹. This warping of language enables the regimes to modify people’s core values as it damages some of the most sacred bonds in society, that is to say, family.

The words used by the two heads of state (the President of the Motherland and Big Brother) are also intended to brainwash the population as Standish comments: “Her words were worms that buried themselves into your worried mind, to rot all thoughts of freedom”⁴⁰. In Winston’s world “Nobody heard what Big Brother was saying. It was merely a few words of encouragement [...] restoring confidence by the fact of being spoken”⁴¹. Interestingly, neither speech is given, only the effect on the listener is described. In the two cases it feels as though the words themselves are not essential, but the message is. The speeches are effective at modifying people’s point of view (“rot all thoughts of freedom”) and “restoring confidence” even for those who are striving to rebel. This is the exact definition of brainwashing as neither Standish nor Winston are fully capable of resisting this discourse.

The regimes are skilled at distorting the truth and even leading those who strive to defy them to question the notions of reality and lies. Standish Treadwell and Winston

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

³⁸ G. ORWELL, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

³⁹ One can notice that a similar phenomenon can be found in Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* with the women at the Rachel and Leah Re-education Centre being called “Aunts”. François Brune comments on the use of the word “Big Brother” in 1984 by adding that “Big Brother n’est ainsi nommé que par antiphrase. Il est en fait une figure ambivalente du Père, l’incarnation frappante du surmoi collectif.” (François BRUNE, 1984 *ou le règne de l’ambivalence : une relecture d’Orwell*, Paris, Lettres Modernes, 1983, p. 7).

⁴⁰ S. GARDNER, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

⁴¹ G. ORWELL, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

Smith find themselves in similar situations as they have difficulties distinguishing between the two. In the former's world, "we heard The Voice, the only one Gramps trusted to tell the truth. That is, he said, if there is any such thing as a truth. Hard to tell when so much is a lie⁴²." and in the latter's

at such moments his heart went out to the lonely, derided heretic on the screen, sole guardian of truth and sanity in a world of lies. And yet the very next instant he was at one with the people about him, and all that was said of Goldstein seemed to him to be true⁴³.

The distortion of language thus leads the characters to live in a quagmire of thoughts where they are unable to fully decipher what is real and what is not.

On the other hand, words also represent power and knowledge and can lead the heroes to a better understanding of their world and ultimately to freedom. In the introduction to *Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults*, Basu, Broad and Hintz point to the fact that "[m]any novels feature an awakening, sudden or gradual, to the truth of what has really been going on [...] [a]ccess to information is often dangerous, but is repeatedly presented as the only way to become free⁴⁴." Standish and Winston are able to access information and understand the world around them, Winston through the reading of *The Book* and Standish through the radio and his encounter with the astronaut. Nevertheless, neither are capable of really joining the resistance movements, the Obstructors in the case of *Maggot Moon* and the Brotherhood in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Even though the main characters are unable to become official resistance fighters against the regime, they are both capable of acting in their own way through their use of language.

Winston uses the written word to resist. The story starts with him opening an illegal diary⁴⁵ and continues with him reading a banned book. Standish, on the other hand, can neither read nor write therefore his relationship with language is very different. Our young hero relies on sound to gain a better understanding of his world and access information that is hidden to him. He says "I might not be able to spell but I have a huge vocabulary. I collect words – they are sweets in the mouth of sound⁴⁶." This poetic relationship with language enables him to understand the "Mother Tongue", the official language of the Motherland which he does not know:

What I have discovered about languages is this: when you are not good at spelling or reading you become a whizz at hearing words. They are like music, you can squeeze out the essence of them. All I had to do was empty my mind, tune into the delivery of the speech and nine times out of eight I had it spot on⁴⁷.

The pun on "Mother Tongue" is continued in Standish's comment on his ability to understand it, in the exact same way as one would understand one's mother-tongue. The poetry previously evoked is prolonged here in the musicality of words ("[t]hey are like music"). Words also seem to take shape, they are "sweets" in the first quote

⁴² S. GARDNER, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

⁴³ G. ORWELL, *op. cit.*, p. 16-17.

⁴⁴ B. BASU, K. R. BROAD and C. HINTZ (eds), *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁴⁵ "The thing that he was about to do was to open a diary. This was not illegal (nothing was illegal, since there were no longer any laws), but if detected it was reasonably certain that it would be punished by death, or at least by twenty-five years in a forced-labour camp." (G. ORWELL, *op. cit.*, p. 8).

⁴⁶ S. GARDNER, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

and can be “squeezed” in the second. There is thus a reification of words as they take on a life of their own and reveal their secrets to the protagonist and reader. The end of the last quote reinforces this as the reader understands something that Standish cannot, that is to say that “nine times out of eight” is not mathematically correct. The joke is here made at the expense of Standish in order to entertain the reader and keep him on his linguistic toes.

Even though Standish cannot read or write, his imagination sets him free as his friend Hector explains: “There are train-track thinkers, then there’s you, Standish, a breeze in the park of imagination”⁴⁸. For example, during an intense interrogation scene Standish sees the comedy and poetry through his use of language: “The leather-coat man suddenly brought his bare fist down hard on Mr Hellman’s watch. It shattered with a satisfying ping as small wheels of time spun across the desk”⁴⁹. The violent action on the part of the interrogator (the “leather-coat man”) is completely overturned by Standish who chooses to concentrate on the poetic image of the wheels of time spinning rather than on the destruction of this object. This linguistic detachment results in him being able to coolly answer the man, something that Winston cannot do when he is with O’Brien.

Standish’s rebellious streak will ultimately lead him to act against the Motherland by revealing to the world the hoax that is at the core of the regime’s propaganda: that is to say the state’s moon-landing which they are promoting as a technological breakthrough but that they are actually staging in a studio as they do not have the technical skills to go to the moon.

Language thus gives the characters more power to understand and rebel against their world, and linguistic innovation can also be used to give the readers clues to better understand the texts. The names of our main characters can be seen as hints for the readers to better decipher the books as a whole. The name “Winston Smith” has been thoroughly analysed by Robert A. Lee:

In choosing the most commonplace of English surnames and combining it with a Christian name obviously drawn from Winston Churchill, Orwell immediately suggests several things about his hero: He is Everyman and Anyman [...] Winston Smith is the potential hero of the world of 1984, the man who can maintain his private virtue against public demands; at the same time his surname suggests that it is impossible, that he can ultimately only share the fate of his fellowman⁵⁰.

Standish Treadwell’s name can also be deciphered onomastically, even though there is a little less deciphering *per se* in this case as the construction seems more obvious than in Orwell’s prose. Firstly, our hero has a very unusual name which marks him as separate from his peers. One can also suppose, just as with Winston’s first name, that there is something rather heroic about him as he may “take a stand” against the regime as Standish may suggest. Secondly, his last name takes on all its meaning at the end when it is through his artful footwork (hence “tread well”) that he is able to show the world that the moon-landing is staged: “I am bobbing up-down, up-down, landing on each of my markers”⁵¹. Unfortunately, this incredibly heroic act of resistance has tragic consequences for Standish as it results in his death.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁵⁰ Robert A. LEE, *Orwell’s Fiction*, London, University of Notre-Dame Press, 1970, p. 136.

⁵¹ S. GARDNER, *op. cit.*, p. 274.

Even though both novels end with our hero's demise (Standish is shot and Winston has been brainwashed and the reader understands that he will soon be vaporized) the endings and the last words are fundamentally different. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* the last sentences read: "He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother"⁵². This leaves the reader in no doubt as to the psychological and soon-to-be physical annihilation of the protagonist. Big Brother has won and the hope that had been sparked through Winston Smith's actions is extinguished as Raffaella Baccolini explicates: "Both Winston Smith and Julia, the main characters of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, are crushed by the totalitarian society; there is no learning, no escape for them"⁵³. Baccolini contrasts this with the ending of more contemporary dystopias which she claims offer a more confident outlook: "recent novels [...] allow readers and protagonists to hope: the ambiguous, open endings maintain the utopian impulse within the work"⁵⁴. *Maggot Moon* follows this tradition as it places hope at the centre of its ending. Even though the reader knows that Standish is dying, the fact that the hero's last visions are those of his fantasy world where he is reunited with his best friend Hector (who had also died at the end of the book) creates a very different reading experience: "You see, only in the land of Croca-Colas [sic] does the sun shine in Technicolour. Life lived at the end of the rainbow"⁵⁵. The last two sentences of *Maggot Moon* contrast heavily with those of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Instead of Winston's depressing love for the entity that ordered his torture, the reader is here given a painting of hope as Standish finally arrives in the "land of Croca-Colas" which is the land that he saw when he was illegally watching television (hence the reference to Technicolour). This land is meant to represent the United States (or a fictional equivalent of it) and is the country against which the Motherland is fighting. The citation is also an intertextual reference to Bob Dylan's 1971 song "When I Paint my Masterpiece" which features the line "Oh, to be back in the land of Coca-Cola!". This corresponds to Christine Wilkie-Stibbs's first category of intertextuality, that is to say "texts of quotation which quote or allude to other literary or non-literary works"⁵⁶. The intertextuality paints a much more musical, lilting and positive picture than the two short and austere Orwellian sentences. The very last sentence in *Maggot Moon*, "Life lived at the end of the rainbow", points both to this wonderful state but also to the world of imagination, as the end of the rainbow is host to pots of gold and leprechauns in popular culture. Moreover, the rainbow is a symbol of optimism and promise as the meteorological phenomenon is revealed when the sun comes out at the end of a shower of rain. One must here bear in mind that *Maggot Moon* was written not for an adult but for a young audience and thus the final message is not as bleak as Orwell's. The fact that Standish is able to reach his dream-world and reunite with his dead friend creates a hopeful atmosphere. Moreover, even though one can imagine that Standish Treadwell will be "rubbed out" by the Motherland, it seems like his act of rebellion cannot be erased as he revealed the fraud on live television. As a reader one can hope that the consequences of this act will lead to the downfall of the political establishment and enable his dream to become a reality for the survivors.

⁵² G. ORWELL, *op. cit.*, p. 311.

⁵³ Raffaella BACCOLINI, "The Persistence of Hope in Dystopian Science Fiction", *PMLA*, May 2004, vol. 119, n°3, p. 520.

⁵⁴ *Loc. cit.*

⁵⁵ S. GARDNER, *op. cit.*, p. 279.

⁵⁶ C. WILKIE-STIBBS, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

As we have seen, *Maggot Moon* rewrites many elements from *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, be it in the way the society is structured or how language and resistance operate. The two societies are based on a degraded living environment where there are food and electricity shortages. They also rely on constant surveillance of the population, be it through technology or inter-person surveillance. Furthermore, the two novels portray a world where disappearances and death are part of daily life. Language is also both a tool used by the regimes and by the resistance fighters as it is used for control and brainwashing as well as a way to gain and share information. Moreover, language also enables the reader to come to a better understanding of the novel and enables him to escape the tragic end through the addition of humour and hope. The teenage rewriting of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is thus much less bleak than the original even though the elements of the story are very similar. Gardner's use of language thus turns on the light at the end of the tunnel and enables her readers to feel much more hopeful than when reading Orwell's *œuvre*. One must also add that the societies in which these dystopias were penned are very different. In 1948, when Orwell was writing, mass-surveillance through telescreens was impossible and only heard of in science-fiction. In 2012 none of the technology portrayed in *Maggot Moon* is fictional (even though some technology is anachronistic for 1956 when the novel is set) as CCTV is part of the contemporary world. 21st century teenagers live in a world where technological advances have overtaken fiction and all the most horrendous dystopias could materialize at the click of a button. Writers in the current century need not invent new technology in order to create a dystopia, they simply have to apply the available machinery to its full capacities. What they do have to invent though is a way of resisting this technology and fostering hope in generations that live with miniature telescreens, microphones and geolocators in their pockets.

It is likely that a reader who is familiar with *Nineteen Eighty-Four* will notice common patterns and themes when picking up *Maggot Moon* and most adult readers will have read the former before the latter. Interestingly, many young readers will live through the reverse situation, by reading *Maggot Moon* as children or teenagers and encountering *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in their adult years. The intertextual links will therefore work in the opposite way, enabling the readers to interpret *Nineteen Eighty-Four* through the prism of *Maggot Moon*. Orwell's posterity thus lives on, changing and evolving with the times and different generations, but still engaging and challenging readers to rethink and question their societies, in order to make sure that Orwell's and Gardner's nightmarish visions remain in the realm of fiction.

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