


2015

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### Recommended Citation

Roman, Stephanie (2015) "Feminism and the Force of Institutions in Twenty-First Century Dystopian Novels," *The Oswald Review: An International Journal of Undergraduate Research and Criticism in the Discipline of English*: Vol. 17 : Iss. 1 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/tor/vol17/iss1/7>

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# Feminism and the Force of Institutions in Twenty-First Century Dystopian Novels

**Keywords**

feminism, institutions, dystopian novels, Orwellian, totalitarian

## **Feminism and the Force of Institutions in Twenty-First Century Dystopian Novels**

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**T**wentieth century dystopian novels are categorized by the prevalence of Orwellian, or totalitarian, language. Their institutions and governments are synonymous, usually ruled by a despotic dictator or autocratic party, such as George Orwell's *Big Brother* in *1984* (1949), Aldous Huxley's *Mustapha Mond* in *Brave New World* (1932), and David Lloyd and Alan

Moore's Adam Susan in *V for Vendetta* (1982-89). These novels feature the paradigm of a male protagonist and a prominent female companion who attempt to overthrow the dystopic, dictatorial political regime.

If I read the twentieth century as one of male domination—i.e. the Bolshevik Revolution, WWI, WWII, and the Vietnam War were conflicts fought largely by men and dominated by men—then it's not very surprising to annotate the mass of dystopian literature in this period as overwhelmingly male. Hierarchical power structures can only be so, and even in collectivist, socialist-inspired dystopias, internal hierarchies still persist. Contrast this history to several twenty-first century dystopias, Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and *The Year of the Flood* (2009) and Dave Eggers' *The Circle* (2013). These versions of dystopian nightmares lack centralized, bureaucratized authority, because they are emblematic of the present much like Huxley, Orwell, and Thomas More wrote of

their presents. *Oryx and Crake* depicts an ecologically destroyed world whose best and brightest scientists live in scattered and disparate Compounds, owned by various capitalistic corporations. In Eggers' novel, the Circle is a largely distributed and monopolistic technology corporation that has roots in everything from drone strikes to counting the grains of sand in the Sahara.

The biggest difference is that the twentieth century concerned itself with government ruining the lives of its people while the writers of twenty-first century dystopias fear corporate greed and capitalism. I propose that this shift allows previously marginalized groups—women and people of color—into the active, political spheres of twenty-first century dystopias because the enemy is no longer an oppressive political state, but instead technological corporations. This method of capitalistic organization pays no mind to race or sex, so long as someone makes money.

The corporations themselves are paradoxically both exploited and exploitative, much like women, so in this sense, megacorporations like the Compounds from *Oryx and Crake* and the Circle are the functional equivalent of women in the twenty-first century, due to technology and technological protocols. These societies also provoke the creation of “post-human” characters, beings that have transcended normal human existence through scientifically altered biology or technology implants. Both of these societies feature a fundamentally oppressive corporation(s) that inspires differentiating degrees of resistance to authority; the relation between the consumed, the resisters, and the post-human forms a separate triangle of power with unabashedly sinister consequences.

First, the structures of the institutions need to be examined in order to distinguish them from preceding power structures. French philosopher and critic Michel Foucault aptly summarizes how power

and control worked in classical and modern times in his chapter “Panopticism” from *Discipline and Punish*: in the classical era, discipline was centralized under a despotic sovereign, while in the modern age power is decentralized, placed in the hands of several separate but hierarchical systems. He theorizes a structure called the Panopticon, which was first laid out by English philosopher Jeremy Bentham. The Panopticon is the epitome of surveillance, power, and the effect of control over a population. Foucault describes it as:

At the periphery, an annular building; at the center, a tower; this tower is pierced with

wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell

from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy. (Foucault 201)

Though Foucault describes the Panopticon mainly as a tool to control inmates, whose every move would be observed from the central tower, he suggests that this mode of power is endemic to all institutions, including hospitals and schools. Evidence of it is still seen daily as it forms a basic hierarchy like the kind seen in corporate America. Each cell in the Panopticon can flare out to have more underneath it, with each tier reporting only to the one preceding it, until finally it reaches the head (the sovereign or CEO). Particularly in twenty-first century America, both government and private parties constantly impose surveillance over cellphones and computers, demonstrating one of the most visceral and frightening realities of the Panopticon. Life in this



endlessly surveilled Panoptic state is largely what forms the remainder of this argument.

French philosopher Gilles Deleuze adds a third network that applies to the present: societies of control, which are run by computers and information network technologies rather than pulleys, clocks, and thermodynamic machines. These control societies are characterized by what media theorist Alexander R. Galloway calls “distributed” or rhizomatic organizations in his book *Protocol: How Control Exists After Decentralization*. As Galloway writes, “In a distributed network there are no central hubs and no satellite nodes, no trunks and no leaves. Like the rhizome, each node in a distributed network may establish direct communication with another node, without having to appeal to a hierarchical intermediary” (14). It resembles an utterly anarchic mode of control, because every node can directly access any other node; there is no sorting, hierarchy, or established source of power. This isn’t the

case, however, thanks to protocological ordinances that govern this type of communication. Protocols function in vastly different ways, but most of them entail an orderly flow of goods, information, and so on. Understanding the distributed network is vital to my understanding of both the Compounds and the Circle: in both Atwood's and Eggers' novels, both institutions *are*, in various degrees, control societies arranged like distributed networks.

At the onset of *The Circle*, a young woman named Mae Holland arrives at the company for her first day of a new job. Eggers describes it as a campus, but “a workplace too, four hundred acres of brushed steel and glass on the headquarters of the most influential company of the world” (1). It's located somewhere in California (though never stated, it's presumably Silicon Valley). It employs 10,000 at that campus alone, but it has divisions around the entire globe. Visually, it's an immense and striking place: “The front hall was as long

as a parade, as tall as a cathedral. There were offices everywhere above, four floors high on either side, every wall made of glass” (Eggers 3). It structurally relies on an abundance of glass, a physicality that extends to a major theme, transparency—there are moments when Mae and her friend Annie are separated by several floors but can spot each other through the distance as if they were looking through unobstructed windows. As the novel proceeds, this transparency becomes one of the Circle’s most polemical developments, as it essentially forces politicians and Circle employees to wear cameras and microphones at all times in order to eradicate gerrymandering, extortion, and general corruption. Based on the Circle’s description, it nicely fits the mold of a control society: not only is the California office one of many divisions spread out globally (one node out of many), but the individuals who work at the Circle are the equivalent of nodes as well, as the employees are expected to engage in mass communication,

sending zings, comments, photos, messages, and likes to numerous feeds in order to satisfy a “Participation Rank,” a company-wide mode of monitoring (Eggers 101).

Meanwhile, in *Oryx and Crake*, society resembles something more familiar. Its pre-apocalyptic world is divided in two: the suburbs, coined Compounds and run by various scientific communities, and the cities, designated “pleeblands.” There’s a strict “us” and “them” systematization between members of the Compound and the pleeblands from the city. The protagonist, Snowman, reflects on his younger life when he was known as Jimmy, and he recalls the things his parents and TV tell him about life in the Compounds versus life in the pleeblands:

Long ago, in the days of knights and dragons, the kings and dukes had lived in castles, with high walls and drawbridges and slots on the ramparts so you could pour hotpitch on your enemies ...

and the Compounds were the same idea. Castles were for keeping you and your buddies nice and safe inside, and for keeping everybody else outside. (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 28)

Jimmy asks his father if they are the kings and dukes, and Jimmy's father answers affirmatively. Another conversation with his father reveals that members of the Compound encompass everyone of value to the company, including middle-range executives and junior scientists, not just its top people. The Compounds intend for everyone to stay inside their protective walls in order to prevent infection from the Modules and pleeblands, and these walls are carefully supervised by the CorpSeCorps, a military police force.

The Compounds are described as nearly resort-like in their isolation. After moving to HelthWyzer, one of the larger and better funded Compounds, its superiority abounds: "It had two shopping malls instead of one, a better hospital, three dance clubs, even its own

golf course,” and best yet, it was protected by a large wall and tight security at the gates (Atwood, *O&C* 53).

However, because the Compounds are based in scientific research and discovery, they inevitably lead to the creation of hierarchies. There’s a distinction between top-level scientists and junior ones, the CorpSeCorps guards, and the elusive executives funding the research. The Compounds—contrary to Jimmy’s belief in kings and dukes—lack a sovereign’s command as in the classical era, and instead adopt a modern, decentralized form of government. This system is the Compounds’ major failing, because Crake’s—the “antagonist,” though I might say “visionary”—philosophy detests such hierarchies and seeks to exterminate them in his Paradise project. It’s the failure of the capitalistic, decentralized network that prompts such disagreeableness in Crake. According to Jimmy, the Compounds are miniature utopias, but Crake envisions the problems with institutions

based on the systematic divides between us and them, rich and poor, and intelligent and unintelligent. Crake sees the Compounds' rigid security measures, pleebland decontamination, microbial warfare, pigeons (artificially raised livestock), and secrecy as processes only a diseased society needs. Art, history, religion, violence, sex, and the awful videogames and Internet programs the boys view (e.g. HottTotts, BrainFrizz, and Blood and Roses), all fuel Crake's image of a broken, unfixable dystopic capitalist society. Jimmy elaborates on one example, the videogame Barbarian Stomp (See If You Can Change History!):

One side had the cities and the riches and the other side had the hordes, and—usually but not always—the most viciousness. Either the barbarians stomped the cities or else they got stomped, but you had to start out with the historical disposition of energies and go on from there. Rome versus the Visigoths,

Ancient Egypt versus the Hyksos, Aztecs  
versus the Spaniards. (Atwood, *O&C* 77)

Crake takes these youthful misadventures and fascinations and aims in his adult life to create a utopia lacking the things he considers undesirable, namely God and art. The pre-apocalyptic world of the Compounds is an undeniably screwed up and masculine one regimented by hierarchy. So then Crake, Jimmy's brilliant scientist-philosopher best friend, uses his abilities and resources to found the Paradise Project, which ultimately leads to the eradication of the human population via an internationally distributed miracle sex pill loaded with the fatal JUVE virus. Crake revises the world by creating a new species removed of all God, art, and history, leaving behind no leaders or patriarchies. Thus the Crakers, the world's new inhabitants, form an ideal distributed form of organization.

The story of *Oryx and Crake's* pre- and post-apocalypse continues in Atwood's second MaddAddam



book, *The Year of the Flood*, where she covers the stories of two women, Toby and Ren, who are members of the God's Gardeners religion and socio-political activist group. The God's Gardeners are an eclectic branch of vegetarian eco-terrorists. They grow vegetables on the roof of their base and are led by Adam One, a distinguished orator who preaches the tenets and virtues of preserving animal life. The God's Gardeners enforce a strange dress code that leads to much belligerence and harassment from regular pleeblanders, and consequently function as an enclosed society that relies on no outside help. Its members create, grow, and mend anything they need, and when they do need money the Gardeners sell soap and vegetables at an outdoor market.

Despite their peaceful-sounding hippie lifestyle, numerous legitimate reasons exist as to why the God's Gardeners get labeled as "cultists" and "terrorists." In their William Blake-inspired rhyming poetry that serves

as a bible, one theme prevails: the waterless flood, a simulacrum of the flood Noah and his family endured on the ark, which would exterminate most life. The Gardeners believe it their mission to stand on street corners and preach warnings of the coming apocalypse, but understandably this invites only scorn to their ranks. Yet because the Gardeners are God's chosen children, they prepared for this eventuality and knew they would survive the waterless flood. Evidently, even when Crake unleashes the JUVE pandemic throughout the world (the waterless flood), some of them do survive.

One of the Gardeners is Toby, a young woman rescued by Adam One from a dangerous and vindictive burger shop owner. As repayment she joins the God's Gardeners, eventually (though unwillingly) working her way up the ranks to become Eve 6, a position akin to a medicine man or potion master. Although an admitted non-believer, Toby embeds herself in the God's

Gardeners for protection from this violent man. Toby acknowledges some initial difficulty figuring out their society, and as she later explains,

Adam One insisted that all Gardeners were equal on the spiritual level, but the same did not hold true for the material one: the Adams and the Eves ranked higher, though their numbers indicated their areas of expertise rather than their order of importance. In many ways it was like a monastery, she thought. The inner chapter, then the lay brothers. And the lay sisters, of course.

(Atwood, *The Year of the Flood* Chapter 10)

Perhaps on a spiritual level the Gardeners are truly egalitarian, but Toby quickly notes after her promotion to Eve 6 the discord between what Adam One preaches and what the elevated Adams and Eves actually practice. In the Edencliff Rooftop Garden, there is a secret room attached to the supply room, where the Adams and Eves

meet to discuss matters privately, a place where they ultimately survey and evaluate their followers. At first, the God's Gardeners' distributed structure seems to lend itself to a tightly-knit, effective cell, where no individual holds power over another, but Toby soon realizes this is the farthest thing from the case, as the Gardeners are bogged down by the same hierarchical power structures as the rest of MaddAddam's pre-apocalyptic world.

Now that I have described the institutions, I will examine how their horizontal or hierarchical structures affect the way women are represented in current dystopian fiction. The second proposal of my thesis relies on a female or feminine presence to ensure the continued, propagated functioning of the control societies. In Alexander Galloway's *Protocol*, he makes this point abundantly clear when he draws on the works of cyberfeminist Sadie Plant. Plant argues that technology is inherently feminine, despite the common

belief that technology is ruled and dominated by male geeks, computer scientists, and writers, because it actually has origins in the female. Plant cites telephone operators (mostly or all female), notable computer scientists Ada Lovelace and Grace Hopper (who coined the term computer “bug”), and the weblike structure of cyberspace as examples of technology’s femininity (Galloway 189). Galloway, summarizing Plant’s ideas, writes that “Patriarchal power structures, which have unequally favored men and male forms in society, should be made more equal through a process of revealing and valorizing overlooked female elements,” and also that “technology threatens phallic control and is fundamentally a process of emasculation” (Galloway 188-89).

Similarly to Plant’s and Galloway’s writings, literary critic Chris Ferns draws attention to the Renaissance’s reliance on utopian patriarchal power and criticizes twentieth century writers like Huxley, Orwell,

and H.G. Wells because their fictional societies embody a “specifically male fantasy of establishing a familiar security” (174). This “familiar security” Ferns refers to literally correlates to the walls of the Compounds—in one dialogue, Jimmy’s father asks of his wife, “Didn’t she want to be safe, didn’t she want her son to be safe?”—but, regardless, the guards’ protocols, including phone-tapping, brutalization, and spying, make her feel like a prisoner there (Atwood, *O&C* 53). Her resistance to such policies is characteristic of the feminine’s need to break down the “male fantasy” and subscribe to a new societal organization.

Machinations like these are at work at the Circle as well. It originates from the same patriarchal attitudes, a product of its three “Wise Men” founders: Tyler Alexander Gospodinov (Ty), the genius programmer and boy-wonder who created the Unified Operating System the Circle runs on; Tom Stenton, the CEO and “Capitalist Prime”; and Eamon Bailey, the everyman,

spokesman, and salesman, the one who puts a human face to all of the Circle's products. Until Mae arrives at the company, the three are hardly known to intervene much in its affairs. Stenton and Bailey act as Circle endorsers rather than enforcers. Once the Wise Men establish the Circle, its progress and development are placed in the hands of its highly competent employees, chief among these Mae's college roommate and friend, Annie.

While Mae struggles with averageness, Annie is her beautiful, rich, blond, athletic, *wunderkind* companion. Before Mae graduated with even one degree, Annie had an MBA from Stanford and was a highly sought prospect. Annie quickly climbed the Circle's ladder, becoming one of its most important nodes of communication. She frequently takes foreign business trips, pitching ideas to various and varied consumers. She's a highly visible, highly respected, and even tentatively feared presence, almost single-handedly

responsible for the Circle's upkeep—Annie jokes that her lofty title is “Director of Ensuring the Future” (Eggers 3). She has a hand in nearly all of its projects and models the Circle's idea of a perfect citizen. She's a member of its “Gang of 40,” its forty most influential and imaginative minds involved in planning all its secrets. She's a blueblood who traces her roots back to the *Mayflower*.

Contrast Annie to Mae, and the power dynamic between them explains much of Mae's reverence towards her. Mae embodies the overwhelming averageness of the bourgeoisie. She befriends Annie on the college track team because her scholarship depends on it, suffers massive amounts of student debt because she changed her major several times, and works at a dead-end utility company job for several years before applying to the Circle. Annie encouraged her to apply, and though Mae doubted her eligibility, she suspects Annie pulled a few strings in order to get her the position: “a million people



wanted to be where Mae was at this moment, entering this atrium ... on her first day working for the only company that really mattered at all” (Eggers 3). When hired, she’s placed in Customer Experience, which entails answering hundreds of customer queries with one generic response after another. As Eggers writes it, it’s one of the dulllest jobs imaginable, but Mae relishes the opportunity. She emblemizes graduating college students today, as the economic crisis leaves many jobless or working in positions in which a degree isn’t necessary.

However, as *The Circle*’s narrative develops, Mae dissolves into merely a vehicle for the reader’s point-of-view. She loses all agency as a character. Mae gradually turns into a machine and is continually dehumanized by the layers of technology heaped on her. By the novel’s conclusion she carries about nine different monitors, phones, quizzing headgears, and cameras on her person at all times. She unquestioningly loses all

semblance of humanity and thus becomes technology itself, a mindless, unthinking drone, and the definitive post-human. But in doing so, she elevates herself to the very top of the Circle—she is, in fact, the one who “completes” it, who voices the opinion that Circle membership should be mandatory, and that democratic voting should be governed through its systems. This entails implementing a program called “Demoxie,” which repeatedly nudges its users to vote via annoying and ceaseless sound effects. Ty, under the pseudonym “Kalden,” and a few people from Mae’s former life like her parents and ex-boyfriend Mercer, appear as the diminutive dissenting force. Ty weakly and ineffectually attempts to persuade Mae to stop the Circle’s completion. As he rationalizes his actions, “I was trying to make the web more civil. I was trying to make it more elegant. I got rid of anonymity ... But I didn’t picture a world where Circle membership was mandatory, where all government and all life was channeled through one

network” (Eggers 485). Eggers’ vision of the Unified Operating System that blocks anonymity on the Internet is a tantalizing prospect. In the world of *The Circle*, and by extrapolation the real, twenty-first century we live in, being forced to take responsibility for all your actions and words online would inevitably lead to a cleaner, more charitable environment.

Despite Ty’s efforts, if not Mae’s, Stenton and Bailey would have found another naive body to control. Mae experiences the rush of power, the ability to observe everything and everyone from a distribution model, thanks to zings (a program like Twitter), TruYou (Facebook), and SeeChange (hidden cameras). In this elevation, Mae seizes the powers Annie previously held. They form an essentially tethered relationship, a hierarchy where one holds all the influence and the other holds nothing. Mae’s rising status in the Circle forces Annie to be the test subject of a project called PastPerfect, a flawless program for tracing one’s

ancestry. Upon discovering that her ancestors owned slaves and that her parents engaged in swinging, PastPerfect causes Annie to collapse into a catatonic state. In *The Circle's* conclusion, Annie is a nonentity and Mae becomes the control society, or protocol itself. They have both lost their sex and their humanity, inhabiting the new technological spaces as post-humans and pieces of genderless protocol.

Regardless of *The Circle's* alluring elements, its multitude of projects—including TruYouth, a program that implants a chip in all infants to prevent kidnappings and brutalization by recording, tracking, logging, and analyzing everything the subject does—represent the most horrific nightmare of Panoptic surveillance, where one private corporation holds all the power in the world. “Everyone will be tracked, cradle to grave, with no possibility of escape,” says Ty, characterizing the drastic and debilitating surveillance control already imposed on people by companies like Facebook and

Google (Eggers 486).

While the women in *The Circle* become mechanical post-humans entrapped by technology, the female characters in *Oryx and Crake* tackle post-humanism in another way, by complementing the liberation of post-feminism. Atwood, a well-known feminist writer, introduces Oryx as a child sex slave, a victim of trafficking. She originates from somewhere in Asia, but Oryx refuses to clarify where, and again refuses to reply to Jimmy when he insists he saw her on HottTotts, a child pornography website. Oryx, who's spent so much of her life as a purely exploited object, refuses to be the victim, which is what makes her so morally frustrating and difficult to understand. She does not let her horrific past haunt her—she shrugs it off while Jimmy pines over it, expressing guilt for the despicably patriarchal and passively consumerist society he lives in and which preys on her. Before Oryx, both Jimmy and Crake appeared entirely at ease and

complicit with the violence and pornography they viewed. Later, it becomes apparent Crake had long intended to eradicate those sorts of things with his new branch of genetically modified humans, but Jimmy never acknowledges the diseased state of the world until after its civilization is gone.

Inherently, *Oryx* is the product of capitalism's grip in highly industrialized nations. Fiona Tolan writes that *Oryx* encapsulates the "frequently contradictory problems" of the pornography debate—chiefly, that she's "at once liberal and conservative" and that *Oryx* "articulates significant tensions surrounding the notions of sexual liberation, free will, exploitation, commercialism, race, exoticism and ethnicity that congregate around the theme of pornography" (286). Though scrutinized for being a largely anti-feminist figure, *Oryx* manages to embody the "contradictions" of pornography by being all of these things while also resisting them. In order to reconcile *Oryx's* dubious

nature, doubtful origins, and apathetic lifestyle, we need to stop observing Oryx as merely the dispassionate sex worker or successful businesswoman, and in order to navigate this, Tolan applies the term post-human to Oryx as well as the Crakers. Additionally, Tolan refers to Oryx as “post-feminist,” meaning that “women are no longer victims, but are now free to construct and explore the lineaments of their own sexual gratification” (285). The post-human and post-feminist views of Oryx appear to be the only combination that can balance her contradictions. I have, for some time, concerned myself with how to read Oryx’s mystification, sexuality, and deification with regard to Atwood’s feminism. With a little bit of Orwellian irony, I suggest Oryx to be understood via “doublethink:” she’s pacifist, ignorant, sexist, sexy, academic, uneducated, whore, Madonna, nobody, everyone, product, producer, and so on. She is capable of inhabiting all of these roles, and because she does, she is the perfect candidate to be the Crakers’

instructor.

In *The Circle*, Annie and Mae pair together because of their friendship and the company they work for, but *Oryx and Crake* is relatively devoid of female characters—even the titular Oryx is physically absent until late in the novel. This seems partly to characterize Jimmy/Snowman's issues with women and his preoccupation with sex. Undoubtedly, the root of these problems comes from his mother's abandonment in his preteen years.

Jimmy's mother, Sharon, is presented tangentially in the text through the dialogue of other characters, like Jimmy's dad and Ramona, his lab assistant. Sharon was one of the scientists on her husband's team, and according to Ramona, she used to be brilliant until she quit due to depression. She smokes heavily and dons a bathrobe most of the time. Jimmy dedicates his childhood to provoking reactions out of her, like making her cry or laugh. She attempts



to explain the Compound's science to Jimmy, but he refuses to listen. She sees through the Compound's veils, so rather than participate in them, she disengages from the Compound, her husband, and Jimmy completely. As Tolan writes, "Sharon maintains her sense of the real, of immutable right and wrong, and refuses to be seduced by economic comforts and a ruthlessly maintained social stability for a privileged few" (279). Rather than comply with the institutionalized safety and comfort of the Compound, Sharon hangs on to her convictions as she witnesses the faults and failures of the Compounds. In Galloway's distributed network system, he writes that, "Opposing protocol is like opposing gravity" (147). Using protocols (living in the security of the Compound, in Sharon's case) automatically entails complicity. She resists by quitting her job and failing to be a mother, yet still partakes merely by living there. As Galloway writes, "The nature of resistance itself has changed within the protocological age ... There is a new

category of enemy. And this new category of enemy is not at all similar to the bosses, barons, or bullies of yore” (150). Therefore, the only way for Sharon to truly oppose protocol is to remove herself entirely from it, in the vein of Ty’s attempts to resist democratization in *The Circle*. Sharon exits the Compound society to join the God’s Gardeners, a group that deliberately undermines the Compounds by inciting terroristic attacks like burning fields of monopoly-owned Happicuppa coffee beans.

Finally, Tolan very aptly diagnoses the motivation behind Sharon’s actions when she writes, “Sharon’s political convictions push her to the margins of her society, until she becomes a terrorist. Involved in the anti-globalisation movement ... Sharon turns to violent resistance in the face of overwhelming governmental and commercial power structures” (280). Again, the issue of “resistance” arises. Sharon has no alternative but to do so, or else she aids and abets a

morally corrupt system of corporate capitalism, a world governed by Compounds like HealthWyzer, AnooYou, and RejoovenEsense. While under the protection of the God's Gardeners, Sharon is temporarily safe from her former life and the militarized CorpSeCorps. As a result, Jimmy must submit to annual interviews with the CorpSeCorps regarding his mother's émigré status. Adam One clarifies this precarious security in a conversation with Toby:

It would be bad for [the CorpSeCorp's] image to eviscerate anything with God in its name. The Corporations wouldn't approve of it, considering the influence of the Petrobaptists and the Known Fruits among them. They claim to respect the Spirit and to favour religious toleration, as long as the religions don't take to blowing things up: they have an aversion to the destruction of private property. (Atwood, *TYOTF* Chapter 10)

Of course, as the narrative goes, “blowing things up” is exactly what the Gardeners propose to do, thereby provoking the CorpSeCorps to raid their Edencliff Rooftop Garden and eradicate them. Sharon ultimately dies in the name of resistance—she honors something like “la liberté ou la mort,” and takes the morally “noble” path rather than acquiesce to the “evidently corrupt and dangerous” prevailing hegemony (Tolan 280).

With these case studies, I’ve referenced a couple of trends. We have corporations holding all the cards at the top (Compounds and the Circle) with a branch of post-human slaves and/or drones who buy into that institution fully (Mae and Oryx) and a second wing of resisters marginalized by the society (Annie, Kalden/Ty, and Sharon). What’s interesting about this? First, things often end badly for the resisters. Annie is in an indefinite coma, Ty is kept virtually imprisoned on the Circle campus, unable to leave, and Sharon is executed—clearly the path of resistance is not the ideal

one. Conversely, does life end satisfactorily for the post-humans? Does being post-human allow them to experience life and happiness anyway? Consider Mae, who's now one of the Circle's top employees and its public face, who wholeheartedly believes what she's done is right: "Completion was imminent, and it would bring peace, and it would bring unity, and all that messiness of humanity until now, all those uncertainties that accompanied the world before the Circle, would be only a memory" (Eggers 497). But she fails to recognize that she's surrendered everything humans desire: love, family, friends, and privacy, in the name of openness, democracy, peace, and transparency. Compare Mae to Oryx, who unquestioningly helps precipitate a worldwide pandemic that leads to apocalypse, an outcome she may not have fully understood but at least suspected: "If Crake isn't here, if he goes away somewhere, and if I'm not here either, I want you to take care of the Crakers" (Atwood, *O&C* 372). Unfortunately

for her, she ends up a martyr to Crake's cause.

In the usual understanding of feminism, the questions of a woman's place in the workforce, in society, as mother/caretaker, as connected to the earth and nature, and as dissatisfied with the status quo, are mostly addressed in both the figures of Sharon and Annie, who show many of these qualities. In contrast, Oryx and Mae embody post-feminist models of interpretation by refusing to be victims of their circumstances and by inhabiting societies that prohibit sexism by eliminating it entirely. The Circle is well established as being multicultural and equal-opportunity in its hirings, and the Crakers lack the capacity to distinguish race or sex. There appears to be a correlation from these examples: post-human, post-feminist characters propagate global demise, while traditionally feminist archetypes experience critical failure. Neither option sounds promising; curiously, while Atwood offers the Crakers as an

alternative to state control, they still systematically function by surveilling each other in an evolved form of panopticism. Similarly, Eggers offers no solution but to accept a ruthless, constant state of transparency, an ending that harkens back to *The Circle's* preceding dystopian tradition. This perpetuated silencing of the heroes or resisters at each of these novels' conclusions suggests that critique is necessary to society's continued functioning, in a way symptomatically related to Orwell's *1984* and Huxley's *Brave New World*. Regardless, state power in twenty-first century dystopias has instead been shifted to private institutions. Power within those institutions is now more freely distributed among its members, which importantly now include minorities. By exploring the relationship of power, women, and institutions in *The Circle*, *Oryx and Crake*, and *The Year of the Flood*, I've argued that these new protocological spaces allow women to participate in ways never demonstrated in prior dystopias. The advent

of the Internet, the cellphone revolution, Google, and the overwhelming abundance of information now at our fingertips has shifted society in very real, very dramatic ways, so these issues unavoidably arise in concurrent dystopian fiction, particularly where technology is concerned.

This doesn't necessarily bode well for feminism in dystopic fiction, because there does seem to be a newfound insistence on "Big Sister"-like characters. Primarily, Oryx's position is founded in "correcting" the dystopian, masculine, deadened, uncontrollable, pre-apocalyptic world by implanting new, superior post-human life into it. Meanwhile, Mae's ambition to complete the Circle advocates total democracy—and who in the United States would argue against *that*? She exposes corrupt politicians and eliminates child kidnappings and molestations. In these scenarios, there is a very fragile, unseen line between doing what is morally "right" or politically "just" and utter



annihilation.

In conclusion, I once again return to the arguments posed by Galloway, in the guise of Foucault. Galloway fervently insists that “networks are not metaphors,” meaning that libertarian and bureaucratic views of control in the information society are too limiting in scope (Galloway *xiv*). The networks are not metaphors; they are actual, tangible, and material, like the Compounds, the God’s Gardeners, and the Circle, which are real manifestations of Foucault’s and Galloway’s perceptions of power. As Foucault writes,

The panoptic schema, without disappearing as such or losing any of its properties, was destined to spread throughout the social body; its vocation was to become a generalized function ... The Panopticon ... has a role of amplification; although it arranges power, although it is intended to make it more economic and more effective,

it does so not for power itself, not for the immediate salvation of a threatened society: its aim is to strengthen the social forces—to increase production, to develop the economy, spread education, raise the level of public morality; to increase and multiply. (209)

Several of his tenets speak directly to the flow of power seen in the Compounds, the Crakers, and the Circle. Panopticism clearly spread through the “social body” in *The Circle*; in fact it “strengthened the social forces” so greatly that Mae willingly morphed into a piece of the panoptic machine. Relatedly, the sort of selflessness of the Panopticon (“although it arranges power, although it is intended to make it more economic and more effective, it does so not for power itself”) is evidenced in the Crakers’ society, whose ignorance supposedly prevents bureaucratic or hierarchic power structures from forming (Foucault 209). Finally, in a backwards way, the “increase of production” and “developed

economy” apply most to the morally degraded  
Compounds that function exclusively on consumerism.

Ideally, utilizing feminism, cyberfeminism, post-feminism, and post-humanism, twenty-first century dystopias create spaces where women embody not only massively exploited and exploitative people and institutions, but create spaces effectively managed by women. The utopian Crakers would not exist without Oryx’s practical life teachings, yet she also bears responsibility for ending the world; and Mae, in her drive to become an asset to the Circle, sacrifices all aspects of humanity to establish worldwide democracy. Then, agitators like Sharon and Annie face the consequences of resistance, become stripped of their power, and fail to produce change in their institutions. Thus, a trend seems to have emerged in twenty-first century dystopian novels that emphasizes the woman’s power to rebel and lead, but—because they are dystopian—the worlds invariably still go to hell anyway.

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