

2012

# "That's a Lotta Faith We're Putting in a Word": Language, Religion, and Heteroglossia as Oppression and Resistance in Contemporary British Dystopian Fiction

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## Recommended Citation

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“That’s a Lotta Faith We’re Putting in a Word”:  
Language, Religion, and Heteroglossia as Oppression and Resistance  
in Contemporary British Dystopian Fiction

by

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A Thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Gardner-Webb University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of English

Boiling Springs, N.C.

2012

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## Introduction to Dystopian Literature

At the time of this writing, the top selling children's series is Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games*, a dystopian trilogy for young adult readers.<sup>1</sup> The series follows the protagonist Katniss as she and twenty-three other teenagers from a futuristic, post-American society compete in the Hunger Games, a gladiator-esque fight in which only one player can emerge victorious—and alive. Readers young and old are eagerly awaiting the film adaptation of the first book, which will be released on March 23, 2012. The popularity of these novels indicates the surge of interest in the genre of dystopian fiction, and while there is certainly entertainment value within the storyline of these books, dystopian fiction, even for younger readers, has a higher purpose—to reveal some inherent truth about contemporary society.

### History of Utopian and Dystopian Literature

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, philosopher John Stuart Mill first used the word “dys-topians” (and the synonym “caco-topians”) in 1868 as a noun in opposition to “utopians” who imagined the future as a perfect society, either socially, politically, economically, religiously, or some combination of these ideals (“Dystopia”). While philosophers and writers as early as Plato anticipated the concept of utopia (Booker, *Dystopian Impulse* 5), Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*, published in 1516, is the most recognizable example of the genesis of the genre of utopian literature. In More's book, a character named Hythloday tells of his travels to the island of Utopia. Important to the notion of this utopia are such societal precedents as the distribution of all property to citizens, a dependence upon agriculture, freedom of worship, punishment of sexual immorality, and a society that ensures the welfare of its citizens, where even euthanasia is

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<sup>1</sup>According to the *New York Times* bestsellers list on January 29, 2012.

permissible. Because society must work toward this level of perfection, literary utopias are generally set in the future, when writers imagine how their contemporary societies will transcend to a better existence than the ones in which they live.

The word “utopia” derives from the Greek and means “no place,” making the word a perfect choice for More’s imaginary island paradise. Implied in this meaning is the idea that a utopia does not, and perhaps cannot, actually exist. More frequently, however, those who reference the word “utopia” imply the meaning of a different word, “eutopia,” from the Greek, meaning “good place.” This definition seems more fitting for the hope of a perfect society that defines utopian conventions in literature.

Often, dystopia is perceived as a reaction to utopian ideals, a notion that will be discussed later in this chapter. For this reason, there are varying, interchangeable terms for what most critics now refer to as dystopia. Mark R. Hillegas, an early critic of twentieth-century dystopian literature, states, “Although sometimes given such names as *dystopias* or *cacotopias*, they have most often been called *anti-utopias* because they seem a sad, last farewell to man’s age-old dream of a planned, ideal, and perfected society, a dream which appeared so noble” in early works of utopian fiction, including More’s *Utopia* (3-4).

However, since the 1960s, when Hillegas was writing, dystopian literature has evolved, and the term “anti-utopian” no longer satisfies the distinction in genre. David W. Sisk, in his study of language in modern dystopias, finds the term “*dystopia* is preferable to *anti-utopia* for two main reasons” (5). First, dystopia (“bad place”) “reverses” the idea of “eutopia,” and “[s]econd, dystopia as a genre encompasses a spectrum of works ranging from a few anti-utopians proper through novels that create miserable societies

without directly attacking utopian ideals” (Sisk 5, 6). Thus, dystopian is a broader term that includes both those writers who oppose utopian thought and writers who warn against a bleak future without directly opposing utopian vision.

Other recent criticism regarding dystopian fiction has also integrated Michel Foucault’s idea of *heterotopias* (“other spaces”)<sup>2</sup>; however, a discussion of space, physical or otherwise, has little bearing on a study of language and religion within dystopian fiction. Thus, the term “dystopia” will suffice to categorize the primary sources analyzed in this thesis.

Although Mill (and subsequent critics) provided the terminology for those ideas that opposed utopia, much time passed before these ideas spread to a wider audience due to the publication of two preeminent dystopian novels by British writers: Aldous Huxley’s 1932 novel *Brave New World* and George Orwell’s 1949 novel *1984*. Both of these texts, published just after destructive global conflicts, represent the changing notion of an enemy. For the first time, many countries were fighting against one another, and the battlefield encompassed the entire globe instead of just the landscape of one or two isolated countries. Within the realm of dystopian literature, these societal changes can be seen clearly. Both Huxley and Orwell imagined that the future would involve a unified global society, which they feared. Changing technology and wars begun by dictators intent on forcing their ideology upon millions of citizens ensured a highly uncertain future. Often, dystopian literature is driven by this fear of a future that was formerly unimaginable. However, writers like Orwell and Huxley served as literary prophets to warn society of the dangers of a totalitarian governmental regime and the potential for a nightmarish future if change did not occur.

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<sup>2</sup>See, for example, Langer.

### Preeminent Dystopian Texts

In *Brave New World*, most of the countries of the world have united in a global society called the World State, and human cloning technology is advanced to the point that human reproduction is no longer necessary. Embryos are divided into five different class systems, denoted by the first five letters of the Greek alphabet, from Alpha to Epsilon. From their occupations to their interpersonal relationships, the lives citizens lead is dependent upon this class system. The institution of a traditional family is abolished, sexual promiscuity is expected, and a dependence on the drug *soma* is encouraged. The novel follows three main characters: Bernard Marx and Lenina Crowne, citizens of the World State, and the Savage, whose given name is John, whom Bernard and Lenina meet on a trip to an uncivilized land in New Mexico.

John returns to the World State with Bernard and Lenina and is perceived as a curious anomaly by other citizens. John fosters a love for Lenina that is not sexually driven but is instead based on what he knows of love from reading the plays of Shakespeare, a writer who is unknown to this society in which all literature has been destroyed or hidden. Although John initially finds favor among these “civilized” citizens, he is soon horrified by the lifestyle of drugs and sex that he encounters; he begins to resist the society around him, eventually leading to his isolation in a small cabin. He turns to self-flagellation during his isolation, but he is unknowingly being recorded and broadcast to the rest of society, who seek him out to watch the spectacle first-hand. John cannot handle the pressure of knowing that Lenina is also watching, and the novel closes with the discovery that John has committed suicide.

*Brave New World* has long retained a place in the canon of British literature and is always included in a critical discussion of dystopian literature. Huxley, living in a post-World War I society of profound technological advances, did not perceive science or genetics in and of themselves to be threatening to society; instead, he recognized that the misuse of these tools could cause potential harm. Robert S. Baker notes that Huxley's fear was "the potential exploitation of technological advances given over to rampant consumerism, governed by massive centralized bureaucracy, and submissive to the ministrations of the expert or specialist" (9). Booker also notes this concern, stating that Huxley perceived that science could "become a mere tool of oppression" (*Dystopian Impulse* 48-49). Other themes of Huxley's dystopia include an opposition to "conventional religion" (50), as well as "ominous characteristics of advanced capitalism and of developing totalitarianism" and "certain negative aspects that have informed Judaeo-Christian culture all along" (52). Like other writers, including Orwell, Huxley recognized that a dystopian society could result from myriad social, political, and religious problems, and that no one social institution was fully to blame.

What makes Huxley's novel so lasting and relevant to contemporary society is that the world he imagined still seems plausible these eighty years later. Booker explains, "Advances in fields like industrial engineering, genetics, medicine, psychology, computers, and communications have all combined to make the society of *Brave New World* seem technically possible" (*Dystopian Impulse* 66). *Brave New World* remains a chilling reminder to readers that a dystopian society may not always exist only in the realm of fiction.



George Orwell's novel *1984*, set in the global society of Oceania, opens with an introduction to two main characters: the protagonist Winston Smith and Big Brother, the mascot of English Socialism (INGSOC), whose image stares down upon Winston as he leaves work. Winston works with the Ministry of Truth, and his job is to rewrite history, to recreate newspaper headlines that ensure that Big Brother has always been correct in his assessments of society. The novel follows Winston's gradual suspicion of the Party and his ever-increasingly rebellious actions, from writing in a journal to joining a covert anti-government society and beginning a clandestine relationship with a woman named Julia. Inherent to these rebellious activities is the belief in the power of the written word; Winston recognizes the power of his own private journal in resisting Big Brother, and he recognizes the power that Big Brother holds over Oceania through controlling and repressing written language. This paradox of language as both oppressive and revolutionary will recur in other works of dystopian fiction.

Eventually, Julia and Winston are discovered and taken into custody, where the Party separates them and begins the process of interrogation designed to reintegrate them into society. This process is successful for Winston, who fully accepts the ideology of the Party, acknowledged by Winston's self-professed love for Big Brother.

Orwell's lasting legacy differs from Huxley's in that the future he predicted seems less plausible than Huxley's. Instead, Booker notes that *1984* is remarkable in "its ability to participate in so many of the conventions of the genre of dystopian fiction while deriving so much of its material from real events and situations" (*Dystopian Impulse* 70). Orwell's novel is a reaction to the political climate of the time—Stalinism in Russia, fascism in other areas of Europe—as well as "a warning against the excesses that might

develop in England in the attempt to *combat* Stalinism” (Booker, *Dystopian Impulse* 69). Just as with Huxley, Orwell recognized the potential for disaster originated from many different sources.

Orwell’s Party, like Huxley’s World State, opposes organized religion, in this case because of the similarities between the government entity and a religious organization (Booker, *Dystopian Impulse*). Other dystopian elements of the novel include the repression of sexual desire, the use of language to transmit the ideology of INGSOC to the citizens of Oceania, and the “fictionality of reality,” intrinsic in the ability to rewrite factual events (Booker, *Dystopian Impulse* 82). These themes, like those in Huxley’s novel, will reappear in other works of dystopian literature.

#### Defining the Dystopian Genre

Dystopian literature is often grouped into the genre of science fiction because of the tendency for writers of dystopias to create a futuristic setting. Dystopian novels often contain advanced technological innovations and speculation about the future of society. For example, in *1984*, Orwell imagined a future just thirty-five years away in which his country of England no longer existed. He envisioned a world in which every home would contain a screen through which the government could monitor its citizens, a technological innovation that would have been unthinkable in the 1940s. Furthermore, Huxley imagined a world where humanity existed because of advancements in cloning technology that are still being developed eighty years after the publication of *Brave New World*. Science certainly becomes important in futuristic societies; however, to limit dystopian literature to mere science fiction and to study only those futuristic aspects of any work of literature hinders the true purpose of dystopian literature.

Whether a pure dystopian novel like *1984* or *Brave New World* or a novel of another genre that contains dystopian elements, such as some of the primary texts I will be studying, dystopian literature always serves as commentary on contemporary society. Even when these novels are set years in the future, these texts are meant to reflect upon the society in which they were first published. Dystopian critic M. Keith Booker states,

[D]ystopian literature is specifically that literature which situates itself in direct opposition to utopian thought, warning against the potential negative consequences of arrant utopianism. At the same time, dystopian literature generally also constitutes a critique of existing social conditions or political systems, either through the social examination of the utopian premises upon which those conditions are based or through the imaginative extension of those conditions and systems into different contexts that more clearly reveal their flaws and contradictions.

*(Dystopian Literature 3)*

Early dystopian writers, including Huxley and Orwell, were certainly resisting utopian visions of the future. Readers can see this resistance in the setting of the books in that both Huxley and Orwell's texts are false utopian novels. On the surface, these societies seem to be perfect. In Orwell's novel, Big Brother is watching out for the citizens of Oceania, and in Huxley's novel, the government supplies every need and desire of its citizens. However, the characters in these novels and, thus, the readers soon begin to see cracks in the façade, and upon further examination, the dark truth about these "utopian" societies is revealed. Through exposing the dangers of a utopian society, writers are responding to the hope for a utopian future.

However, dystopian literature seems to have changed in recent years. Instead of warning against the hope for utopia, writers seem to be warning against systems that are already in place and already flawed. Dystopian novels now seem to be a warning against a terrifying future that is rapidly approaching. One author who has noted this change within society is Rebecca MacKinnon. In an excerpt from her recently published book on internet freedom, MacKinnon notes,

George Orwell published *1984* at the dawn of the Cold War, as a warning about the totalitarian possibilities of a modern industrialized state that combines centralized power, utopian ideology, and electronic media. The struggle for freedom in the internet age is shaping up to be very different from the ideological struggles of the twentieth century. [ . . . ] Today's battles over freedom and control are raging simultaneously across democracies and dictatorships; across economic, ideological, and cultural lines. (par. 5)

The political and social climate that today's dystopian writers address is far different from Orwell's, as MacKinnon recognizes. Writers are responding to these current societal trends and concerns and are seeking to warn readers that if these behaviors and social norms do not change, the future is far bleaker than the present. For example, Collins' trilogy *The Hunger Games* "could be taken as an indictment of reality TV" (Miller n.p.) as well as criticism of the tendency to delight in the struggles and conflicts of people whose lives are constantly transmitted to millions of people, a setting even Orwell did not imagine in his vision of the future. Collins portrays a world in which a fascination becomes a deadly obsession when magnified.

In order to critique the society in which they live, writers must be able to provide a clear vision of a society gone wrong. To accomplish this goal, writers distance their novels from the readers and from contemporary society through a process of “defamiliarization,” as termed by Booker: “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 and inevitable” (*Dystopian Literature* 3-4). In another setting with which they are not so familiar, readers are able to discern the dangers that exist within these fictional dystopian societies and then reflect on how those dangers are present in their own societies.

Although dystopian texts may vary in setting, and although each novel may be a reaction against a different social problem, many dystopian works of literature contain similar themes. First, these novels frequently feature a strict governmental regime that severely limits the freedom of its citizens, such as Huxley’s World State and Orwell’s *1984*. This government will often suppress various aspects of society—religion, language use, literature, among others—in an effort to exert full control. A resistance against such a strong government entity usually begins with one person or a small group of people who recognize the danger of such a force and rebel against it. David W. Sisk, in his study of language in dystopian literature, claims, “Twentieth-century dystopias in English universally reveal a central emphasis on language as the primary weapon with which to resist oppression, and the corresponding desire of repressive government structures to stifle dissent by controlling language” (2). In order to resist or overthrow such a regime, citizens must reclaim language to take back control.

### Selection of Primary Sources

I have chosen three more recent texts of British literature in which dystopian themes are evident. I chose to analyze British dystopian fiction merely as a way to limit my focus. Furthermore, British literature is important to my study in that the two most commonly cited dystopian writers are Orwell and Huxley, and all dystopian literature seems to pay homage in some way to their legacy. Of the three books I will be analyzing, only one book, the graphic novel *V for Vendetta*, is set in England and contains any inherent British-ness. The other two novels occur in fictionalized worlds and depict concerns about society on a global scale; however, they also pay tribute to the work of Orwell and Huxley.

First, Alan Moore and David Lloyd's *V for Vendetta* fulfills the traditional theme of dystopian literature as critique of a particular political regime (specifically, Conservative politics in 1980s England); however, this graphic novel was originally published as serial comic books, thus, revealing dystopian content in a form often unexplored by literary critics. The protagonist of this novel is an anarchist who is known only by his moniker V. Although the book was written and published in the 1980s, the book occurs in 1997, when an organization called Norsefire controls England under a totalitarian regime, mainly through a computer system called Fate. V opposes the practices of Norsefire and evokes the legendary character of Guy Fawkes in his plan to overthrow the government. V takes a sidekick, a sixteen-year-old girl named Evey, whom he mentors; Evey, though resistant at first, eventually embraces V's revolutionary ideology. Throughout the novel, as V acts as a vigilante administering justice to a group

of people who wronged him, the readers learn about the circumstances that led to the contemporary setting.

The second primary text I will analyze is *The Knife of Never Letting Go* by Patrick Ness. This book, the first in the *Chaos Walking* trilogy, portrays a dystopian society in a human colony on a planet called New World. This novel reveals both the shifting geographic locales that house dystopian societies and the spreading influence of dystopian literature in that the trilogy is marketed specifically for young adult readers. The novel's protagonist, Todd, is a twelve-year-old boy, eagerly anticipating his thirteenth birthday, just a month away, the time when he will become a man by society's standards. Todd lives in a village called Prentisstown. No women live in the town; Todd believes all the women were killed by the Noise germ, which also enabled every man to hear every other man's (and animal's) thoughts. When Todd is walking in the woods one day, he hears a space of silence and meets Viola, the first female he has ever encountered. Viola's presence sparks a sequence of events that leads to Todd and Viola fleeing the town, pursued by the mayor of Prentisstown and his army. Through the course of the novel, Todd and Viola meet other colonizers of New World, learn the truth about the Noise germ, and join a resistance against Mayor Prentiss and his powerful army.

Finally, the last primary source is China Miéville's novel *The City & the City*, which can be classified as both an urban fantasy and a crime procedural. This novel is set on the border of two cities, Ul Qoma and Beszel, that exist side-by-side in an unnamed Eastern European country. The intriguing and complicated factor of this novel, however, is that the residents of each city are allowed absolutely no contact with the other city; if contact occurs, the citizens risk invoking Breach, a mysterious, Orwellian entity that

controls the two cities. The novel's protagonist, Tyador Borlú, is a Beszel detective investigating the murder of a woman who is found dead on the border of the two cities. Borlú must join forces with a detective in Ul Qoma to solve the crime, and during the investigation, Borlú discovers that the victim was a doctoral student investigating the presence of a mythical third city existing between the two. Borlú is eventually summoned into Breach, where he attempts to uncover the truth about these cities. Once more, Miéville's novel includes dystopian themes in an unusual genre and can also reveal nuances about societal problems even while being set in a fictionalized locale.

### Theoretical Framework

In my analysis of these novels, I will rely heavily upon theory that has already proven to be useful in a critique of dystopian literature. Dystopian literature, because of its focus on certain political environments and themes of governmental oppression, is often highly Marxist in content. Furthermore, because of the role that language plays both in oppression of the people and resistance to a totalitarian regime, an understanding of deconstruction theory is necessary.

### **Marxism**

Marxist theory is a vital framework for understanding the role of the government in dystopian texts because one must understand the societal tension between the superstructure (the cultural and religious structure of a society) and the base (the economic structure of a society), as well as tension between the bourgeoisie (middle class) and the proletariat (working class). Language and religion are aspects of the superstructure by which the bourgeoisie impose their dominant ideology, or hegemony, onto the proletariat, who form the base of a society.



Marxist theory was established with the publication of *The Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1848. In the first section of this important text, Marx and Engels relate the ways that the bourgeoisie, throughout history, created the tension between themselves and the workers, effectively establishing a capitalistic society. In the next section, Marx and Engels explain that the Communist agenda aligns with the proletariat; their chief goal is “formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat” (234). Within dystopian literature, this must also be the goal of those who resist the government: overthrowing and reclaiming the power.

Engels also explains the method by which governments are so aptly able to control the masses. In a letter to Franz Mehring, a German politician who helped found the German Communist Party, Engels explained the idea of false consciousness, writing,

Ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously, indeed, but with a false consciousness. The real motives impelling him remain unknown to him, otherwise it would not be an ideological process at all. Hence he imagines false or apparent motives. Because it is a process of thought he derives both its form and its content from pure thought, either his own or that of his predecessors. He works with mere thought material which he accepts without examination as the product of thought, he does not investigate further for a more remote process independent of thought. (par. 4)

False consciousness is the way that the proletariat so readily accepts the ideology of the ruling class. Members of the working class believe that they have, of their own devices,

agreed with the ideology of the bourgeoisie, but this acceptance is false. When an individual begins to resist that ideology, he can then determine his own ideology apart from the dominant ideology, or hegemony, of the ruling class.

Marx and Engels also explain the varying sects of Socialism, including “Critical-Utopian Socialism and Communism.” Socialists and Communists claimed the idea of utopia as a state that could be achieved through “enlightenment of the working class” (Marx & Engels 255). Those who seek to achieve this type of utopia propose methods “such as the abolition of the distinction between town and country, of the family, of the carrying on of industries for the account of private individuals, and of the wage system, the proclamation of social harmony, the conversion of the functions of the State into a mere superintendence of production” (255). Often, writers of dystopian literature, such as Orwell and Huxley, use these methods to create their falsely utopian societies.

Marx and Engels’s *Manifesto* should not be considered a how-to guide for creating a utopian society. Instead, their ideas are vital to an understanding of the class struggles that occur within dystopian fiction as well as the ways that governments oppress the citizens and those citizens seek to resist oppression.

Later Marxist critics expanded on the ideas that Marx and Engels established in *The Communist Manifesto*. Louis Althusser notes a distinction between the Marxist idea of state apparatuses (which Althusser deems to be “repressive state apparatuses”) and what he terms Ideological State Apparatuses (or ISAs). Althusser explains the idea of a State as repressive: “The State is a ‘machine’ of repression, which enables the ruling classes (in the nineteenth century the bourgeois class and the ‘class’ of big landowners) to ensure their domination over the working class, thus enabling the former to subject the

latter to the process of surplus-value extortion (i.e. to capitalist exploitation)” (138).

These repressive apparatuses are part of the public domain and include government and administration, police forces, and military, all of which “ultimately” enforce hegemony primarily through the use of violent force and secondarily through the use of ideology (144, 146).

In contrast, ISAs are part of the private domain and include such institutions as the church, family, and schools. In contrast to Repressive State Apparatuses, these ideological apparatuses function first through ideology and then through repression (146). Althusser notes that “very subtle explicit or tacit combinations may be woven from the interplay of the (Repressive) State Apparatus and the Ideological State Apparatuses” (146-47). This interplay can be seen within dystopian literature when a government takes over these ISAs in an effort to control its citizens. At that point, a state is functioning both repressively and ideologically.

### **Mikhail Bakhtin**

Mikhail Bakhtin was a Russian philosopher writing during the reign of Lenin and afterwards. Bakhtin was arrested and exiled, and many of his works were repressed during much of his lifetime. Only at the end of his life and afterwards did Bakhtin’s ideas become mainstream, when Western interest in his works grew. Four of his essays on the novel as a genre were translated and collected into a volume entitled *The Dialogic Imagination* in 1981. Many of Bakhtin’s ideas are relevant to dystopian literature.

Bakhtin addresses what he calls “authoritative discourse” within the novel:

The tendency to assimilate others’ discourse takes on an even deeper and more basic significance in an individual’s ideological becoming, in the

most fundamental sense. Another's discourse performs here no longer as information, directions, rules, models and so forth—but strives rather to determine the very basis of our behavior; it performs here as *authoritative discourse*, and an *internally persuasive discourse*. (342)

This idea of authoritative discourse is similar to the Marxist notion of false consciousness: one institution (such as a government) that holds authority exerts control over a group of people; the authoritative discourse is the way that hegemony is transmitted. Authoritative discourse is often enforced through language, written or spoken, which then highly influences a person's ideology.

Bakhtin also discusses the tension between a unitary language and what he terms “heteroglossia,” the complex, multi-faceted intersection of various ideologies within language. Bakhtin explains,

[L]anguage is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form. These “languages” of heteroglossia intersect each other in a variety of ways, forming new socially typifying “languages.” (291)

Furthermore, a unitary language always works at “overcoming” and “imposing specific limits” on heteroglossia, and the unity that exists within this language is “unity of the reigning conversational (everyday) and literary language, ‘correct language’” (270). Bakhtin's discussion of heteroglossia actually applies to the way authors engage with

language through their own writing processes. However, I believe this notion becomes important within the novels themselves as characters embrace heteroglossia to combat unitary language. This understanding of unitary language versus heteroglossia is important in a study of dystopian literature as one begins to understand how a government uses that unitary language to convey the authoritative discourse; likewise, heteroglossia, existing with so many different ideologies, becomes a way to resist authoritative discourse.

Inherent in this tension between unitary language and heteroglossia is the belief that language is a very powerful political tool. Bakhtin perceives language

as ideologically saturated, language as a world view, even as a concrete opinion, insuring a *maximum* of mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life. Thus a unitary language gives expression to forces working toward concrete verbal and ideological unification and centralization, which develop in vital connection with the processes of sociopolitical and cultural centralization. (271)

Here, one must recognize that language must be unified in order to transmit a central ideology—hegemony, or the authoritative discourse that Bakhtin has already acknowledged. Language is the best method of ensuring that a group of people adheres to the same ideology.

Furthermore, Bakhtin recognizes that language is ever-evolving, thus, becoming important in any resistance movement against a dominant ideology. As long as one accepts an institution's ideology by internalizing that language, one exists under a false consciousness. However, when one begins to think for oneself and question that unitary

language, one can reclaim language: “The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention” (293). Reclaiming language occurs when one formulates his own ideology, choosing whether to accept or reject the dominant ideology under which he has lived, and is vital to resisting a totalitarian governmental regime.

### **Deconstruction**

Although the term “deconstruction” actually refers to the ideas of the French poststructural theorist Jacques Derrida, the ideas of German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, several decades earlier, highly inform deconstructionist ideas. In his posthumously published essay “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense,” Nietzsche discusses ways in which we use language to construct truth and lies through metaphor and concept. Language does not convey truth as we assume that it does; instead, language attempts—and fails—in this conveyance. Nietzsche states, “[W]e believe that we know something about the things themselves when we speak of trees, colors, snow, and flowers; and yet we possess nothing but metaphors for things—metaphors which correspond in no way to the original entities” (par. 5). In the transmission from origin (what Nietzsche calls a “concept”) to language, the idea loses its truthfulness and becomes a construction.

This process of creating metaphor from a concept causes truth to become muddled. Nietzsche defines truth as

a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which, after long usage,

seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding. Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions—they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force, coins which have lost their embossing and are now considered as metal and no longer as coins. (par. 7)

Language undermines truth. This idea is important to an analysis of dystopian literature in a study of the ways that societies corrupt and pervert language in order to portray a reality that does not exist. This process of producing metaphor from concept can be seen clearly in *1984*, when Winston rewrites newspaper headlines so that Big Brother is always correct in his predictions of the future of society. The citizens of Oceania believe the truth that Big Brother spouts, without recognizing that the “truth” is constantly changing.

Nietzsche also recognizes that the concepts from which we form metaphors must originate somewhere: “We obtain the concept, as we do the form, by overlooking what is individual and actual; whereas nature is acquainted with no forms and no concepts, and likewise with no species, but only with an X which remains inaccessible and undefinable for us” (par. 6). This quality of being both inaccessible and undefinable is what removes the truth from the metaphors we attempt to create; our lack of understanding of the X, or the concept, means that we cannot aptly convey that concept through language. Jacques Derrida, writing several decades after Nietzsche, would perhaps define this X as the “transcendental signified.”

Both Nietzsche and Derrida assert that an idea exists that influences every sign, including language, used by humanity; these signs are attempts to reflect the original idea

(or transcendental signified), but they are mere constructions that we then perceive to be truth. Derrida declares, “From the moment that there is meaning there are nothing but signs. We think only in signs. Which amounts to ruining the notion of the sign at the very moment when, as in Nietzsche, its exigency is recognised in the absoluteness of its right” (n.p.). Although the terminology differs, the ideas are similar: Nietzsche’s metaphors and Derrida’s signs are the ways that we use language in an attempt to convey a truth that becomes lost in transmission.

Derrida seeks to deconstruct the transcendental signified in order to “place a reassuring end to the reference from sign to sign” (n.p.), thus, proving the signs to be meaningless. Derrida recognizes the innate need within humanity to rely upon the transcendental signified; he calls this need the metaphysics of presence, or “the exigent, powerful, systematic, and irrepressible desire for such a signified” (n.p.). In regards to dystopian literature, a government can become a transcendental signified, informing all language use throughout society. Because of the metaphysics of presence, the desire for humanity to have a concept on which to base truth, the government is able to assert its ideology to fulfill the need for the transcendental signified. Only through overthrowing, or deconstructing, that government by reclaiming language and cultural signs can any base hope to overthrow the superstructure of society.

### Purpose

Through applying the ideas of Marx and Engels, Althusser, Bakhtin, Nietzsche, and Derrida, I will examine the role of language within these three contemporary works of dystopian fiction. Additionally, religion, as an Ideological State Apparatus, is intertwined with language as a tool for oppressing the citizens of a society. Within



dystopian fiction, a totalitarian governmental regime often becomes the transcendental signified in society, the standard by which all language and ideas must be measured; furthermore, in becoming the transcendental signified, the governmental agency then corrupts both language and religion in an effort to assert the dominant ideology upon its citizens. However, the protagonist(s) of each of these novels is able to deconstruct and overthrow the transcendental signified by reclaiming language and culture, embracing heteroglossia, and revealing the corruption present within the hegemony of the superstructure.

In regards to the remainder of this analysis, I will first examine the role of naming in constructing the identity of both characters and places within these works of literature. This chapter will establish a basis for the method by which language can convey truth through simple nomenclature. Then, I will move to a discussion of, first, the ways that governments use language and religion to oppress and control a people group and, second, the way that people group is able to reclaim language to overthrow or resist the dominant ideology present within a society. Finally, the analysis will close with a chapter discussing the implications for future research as well as the role of recent dystopian fiction as social commentary that is relevant to our time.

**“People *Need* Symbols”<sup>3</sup>:**

**The Importance of Naming in Dystopian Literature**

The Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, in his lectures on linguistics, developed the idea that a word, or sign, is more than just a group of letters or sounds. Instead, “the word does not exist without a signified as well as a signifying element” (Saussure n.p.). The signifier, or “signifying element,” is the word in its written and audible form while the “signified” is the concept that a reader or hearer imagines upon experiencing the sign. Together, the signifier and signified form the totality of a sign. Likewise, names, whether belonging to people or places, function in the same way. A name is more than just an identifying marker; identity can actually be constructed through one’s name, whether that name is given or chosen. In *V for Vendetta*, *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, and *The City & the City*, understanding and claiming the names of people and places and establishing an identity through those names becomes an important initial step in resisting an oppressive power.

“What Shall I Call You?”:

Naming in *V for Vendetta*

The graphic novel *V for Vendetta* opens with a juxtaposition of setting that introduces the two major characters of the novel. The frames of the comic move back and forth between the bedroom of a sixteen-year-old girl, who is applying makeup and getting dressed in preparation to prostitute herself for the first time, and the dressing room of a man who pulls on a long, black cloak and dons a Guy Fawkes mask. Through the act of dressing, these characters reveal a version of their identities to the reader: the girl paints

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<sup>3</sup>Quote from Moore and Lloyd’s *V for Vendetta*: “People *need* symbols, Dominic. *He* understood that. We’ve *forgotten* it” (252). The speakers are two detectives who have been investigating V.

her face, and the man wears a mask. However, these identities are constructions, lies presented as truth so as to mask their real identities. The girl, in fact, is not a prostitute, which the reader discerns as soon as the girl attempts to proposition a man. The man is not Guy Fawkes; although he is emulating the legendary revolutionary figure, his true identity hides behind the mask.

The reader does not yet know these characters' names, but Alan Moore and David Lloyd are already establishing the pair as the two central figures of the novel, figures whose lives are intertwined. At first, their identities act in seeming opposition to one another; however, by the end of the novel, their two identities have merged. The complexities of their relationship is revealed through the names of these two characters: Evey and V.

### **“Codename V”: V as a Constructed Identity**

Evey and V do not remain unknown entities for long. After the initial scenes in which the characters don their costumes, their lives intersect. The man whom Evey propositions is actually an undercover cop, who then attempts to attack her. When V witnesses the attack, he emerges into the alley and rescues Evey, then takes her to a nearby rooftop to watch his successful bombing on the House of Parliament. On this rooftop, V reveals his identity to Evey, although she is unaware. The fireworks in the sky above the exploding Parliament building are formed into the letter “V” (Moore and Lloyd 14). This first act of terrorism sets the stage for the way that V reveals his identity through the rest of the novel: an encircled V left at the scene of each of his crimes. This “V” is the way the authorities identify him; he is “codename V” (30) in the absence of any conventional, true name.

V takes Evey back to his home, called the Shadow Gallery, and the next morning, Evey expresses her gratitude for V's saving her and remarks that she does not even know his name. V responds, "I don't have a name. You can call me 'V'" (Moore and Lloyd 26). Within this statement, V reveals a great deal about his identity. In refusing to give his name (and, in fact, V reveals neither his name nor his true face to anyone), V signifies that he is eschewing any previous identity, history, or familial connection associated with himself. He has no genealogy, and, borrowing terminology from Nietzsche, there is not yet a concept on which this sign is dependent. In providing such a simple symbol by which others can recognize him, V is able to construct his own identity and convey his own truth to whomever he encounters.

V's identity is a construction, one that is slowly revealed through the course of the novel. V's vendetta is ascertained as investigators begin to make connections between the victims who are found murdered; all of them have been involved with a resettlement camp called Larkhill, where a group of patients underwent medical experiments. One of V's victims was a doctor named Delia Surridge, who worked at Larkhill and whose diary was found on her nightstand during the investigation into her death. In her diary, which V intentionally left for the investigators to find, the detectives discover the origin of V's codename: his room number at Larkhill. Dr. Surridge writes of the "patient in room 5" (a room marked with the Roman numeral V) who survived the intensive hormone treatment that killed all the other patients; appropriately, that medicine was referred to as "batch 5" (Moore and Lloyd 80-83). Larkhill was closed down after the man in room five blew up the compound with homemade mustard gas and napalm. After his escape, he tracked

down everyone who had been involved with his imprisonment at Larkhill and killed them.

When the investigators learn of V's past, they question, "'What happened to the man in room five? What did he do in the four years following his escape from Larkhill? How did he become codename 'V'?"' (Moore and Lloyd 84). These questions reveal the major tension that exists about V's identity. He is a construction, a result of the torture he underwent at Larkhill. Instead of retaining any of his prior existence, V took on the identity of the man who escaped Larkhill. The Roman numeral on his door became the appropriate sign of his transformed identity, and his mission in life, his vendetta, became ensuring appropriate retribution for the people who had aided in constructing this new identity. This is the reason that Moore and Lloyd never reveal V's face or his given name; he has become V, and once one understands the origin of this signifier, no previous identity is required.

### **"I'm Nobody. Nobody Special": Evey Hammond's Transforming Identity**

Evey's story, and the signifier that she uses to identify herself, is drastically different from V's. When the reader finally learns Evey's name, it is because she gives her name to V. After V establishes his own identity, he asks, "What shall I call you?" (Moore and Lloyd 26). This question is immediately revelatory. He is not asking her for her name or her history; he is asking for the identity that she wants to convey to people. At the same time, he is also retaining control of her identity. "What shall I call you?" implies the power that V holds in assigning an identity to Evey. Perhaps Evey's name does not matter; what matters more is the identity that V chooses for Evey. This becomes particularly important later in the novel.

Evey, however, does not yet understand the power struggle taking place. She gives V her name: ““My name is Evey . . . Evey Hammond. I’m nobody. Nobody special. Not like you”” (Moore and Lloyd 26). Evey, in contrast to V, has a name, the one her parents gave her. Evey retains this identity; she has a history and a life story to tell. She narrates the events of her life to V, and Evey’s naiveté and innocence act in sharp contrast to the shadows and mysteries of V’s identity. Even the spelling of Evey’s name implies a level of innocence. The “y” on the ending of her real name, Eve, implies youth and girlishness. Evey is young and needs someone to care for her, and V fulfills that role. Throughout the early events of the novel, V assumes a fatherly role toward Evey, even, at one point, reading her a bedtime story to help her fall asleep (68).<sup>4</sup> V does not remain a father figure for long, however.

When Evey and V have a disagreement, Evey moves out of the Shadow Gallery and in with a man named Gordon. When Gordon is murdered, Evey follows the man who killed him, but V captures her before she can fire the gun. Evey does not realize who has apprehended her, and V (unbeknownst to Evey) interrogates her, tortures her, shaves her head, and imprisons her in an effort to release Evey from her false consciousness and allow her to embrace his own ideology.<sup>5</sup> When he finally reveals himself to Evey, one can recognize that Evey is undergoing a powerful transformation. No longer is she the young, naïve girl, and although V still calls her “Evey,” he also refers to her as “woman,” saying, ““This is the most important moment of your life. Don’t run from it”” (Moore and Lloyd 170). V is orchestrating Evey’s transformation from girl to woman, and this is a

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<sup>4</sup>For an in-depth discussion of the particular story that V reads (Enid Blyton’s *The Faraway Tree*) and its significance to the relational dynamic between Evey and V, see OrvisEvans’s essay on textual allusions in *V for Vendetta*.

<sup>5</sup>This seen will be analyzed further in chapter 4.

verbal signal that she is evolving. Several pages later, Evey appears, wearing a suit and carrying a box of toys. V comments, ““Spring cleaning, Eve?”” (183). Not only is Evey physically removing the vestiges of a childhood with V, but she also now responds to her grown-up name of Eve. Her innocence is gone along with her teddy bears and dolls and her diminutive, feminine nickname. That V is the first to call her “Eve” indicates his important role in her shifting identity. Although he rescued her from a life of prostitution and initially helped her retain her innocence, his treatment of her through her false imprisonment was the act that brought about her maturation. Furthermore, the name Eve, an inversion of his own sign, reveals how V now perceives Eve as a partner, and perhaps an equal, rather than a youthful, naïve child who needs to be cared for.

In her new role as Eve, that woman takes on yet another role—that of a partner, evoking the role of the first woman in the biblical account of the creation. In chapter 2 of Genesis, after Adam has been created, God creates Eve, saying, ““It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him”” (Gen. 2.18). It is not until this next chapter that the woman is named: “The man called his wife’s name Eve” (Gen. 3.20).<sup>6</sup> Just as Adam bestows a sign upon his wife, so V bestows a sign upon his partner and declares his authority over her.

The biblical Eve was “created in response to Adam’s need” and existed “to *correspond* to him” (Galumbush 436). In the biblical account, Eve is created as Adam’s partner, and, interestingly, a character named Adam also appears within Moore’s universe. Adam Susan is the head of the fascist ruling party Norsefire, the governmental regime to which V is so opposed. In placing these two characters of Adam and Eve in

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<sup>6</sup>Eve is not named until after she and Adam have sinned by eating the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. It is this sin that causes Eve’s submission to Adam and his authority over her, implied in his assigning a name to her (Galumbush 436).

opposition to one another, Moore is reclaiming the traditional tale of Adam and Eve and rewriting a creation story set in his own universe, a story that challenges the reader's traditional ideas of Adam and Eve.

In the world of *V for Vendetta*, Moore's Eve becomes a partner to V, a figure who opposes Adam Susan and the ideology that Norsefire transmits to the citizens of England. After her faux-imprisonment, Eve is drawn back into V's life and accepts his anarchist ideology. In trying to educate Eve on his plans, V seems to speak in riddles that Eve does not at first understand. However, V does reveal the necessity of a partnership between himself and Eve and explains their respective roles: “‘Anarchy wears two faces, both *creator* and *destroyer*. Thus destroyers topple empires: make a canvas of clean rubble where creators can then build a better world’” (Moore and Lloyd 222). Although Eve does not yet understand, V, in his current manifestation, is wearing the face of a destroyer. Upon his death, Eve will then wear the mask and become the assumed creator of anarchy.

For most of the book, V and Eve exist as separate identities, partners but individuals with distinct histories. This changes, however, when V dies from a stab wound. Before his death, he makes his way back to the Shadow Gallery to give final instructions to Eve, who finally recognizes V's plan that she should take over his identity. Even Eve, his closest ally, has never seen the face behind the mask, and she struggles with the decision of whether to remove V's mask after his death. She muses, “If I take off that mask, something will go away forever, be diminished because whoever you are isn't as big as the idea of you” (Moore and Lloyd 250). She kneels down to pull off the mask



but does not follow through because she finally recognizes V's identity, narrating, "I know who V must be" (250).

A few pages later, V's shadowy figure appears on a rooftop, to the surprise of those who have heard the reports of V's death, and V declares, "'With anarchy, from rubble comes new life, hope reinstated. They say anarchy's dead, but see . . . reports of my death were . . . exaggerated'" (Moore and Lloyd 258). With this statement, Eve has ceased to exist. V the destroyer is also gone, replaced by V the creator. Eve has fulfilled the role that V desired and crafted for her. Eve's identity no longer exists, just as V's original constructed identity—that of a vengeful prisoner of Larkhill—is gone. However, V's ideology, which is more important than any individual identity, lives on because, as he infamously declares just after his final fight, "'Ideas are bulletproof'" (236). V the person is unimportant, but V the ideology will never die as long as another person chooses to accept the ideology as his or her own, just as Eve does. The cycle will continue; the last the reader sees of V is when she has brought a young man home. In response to his confusion, she informs him, "'We are in the Shadow Gallery. This is my home'" (263). This V has found her own protégé, one to train in the ideology, one to mold into her own partner, one to take on the persona of V when his time comes.

"It Seems Like a Price, Giving Up Our Names":

#### Naming in *The Knife of Never Letting Go*

The first chapter of *The Knife of Never Letting Go* presents the reader with an intriguing plot device that allows for the introduction of several major characters. The male protagonist of the story, a twelve-year-old boy named Todd Hewitt, is walking in the woods with his dog Manchee. The first "words" spoken are actually Manchee's

thoughts, which Todd can hear. In New World, the setting of this novel, every man's thoughts (and every animal's thoughts) can be overheard by everyone else. For Todd, hearing another's thoughts is normative, which is why Todd is unsurprised to hear his name bellowed in someone else's Noise when a preacher named Aaron follows him into the woods. Furthermore, Todd is shocked and confused when, just moments later, he encounters a vast space of silence, created by the presence of the first female he has ever met, a girl named Viola Eade; because women do not project Noise as men do, Todd is unable to discern anything about Viola's identity, and her very presence becomes a threat to the town. These three characters, Todd, Viola, and Aaron, whose lives intersect in the woods, will be the focus of a discussion of how names create identity in *The Knife of Never Letting Go*. Furthermore, place names also become important to the concept of space and location, an idea that will also be developed.

### **“God’s Own Mouthpiece”: Aaron as Revision of a Biblical Figure**

Aaron is the major religious figure in this book, and when he shows up in the woods, his noise is full of “fragments of scripture” (Ness 6). Aaron's given name is significant, evoking that of the biblical Aaron, brother of Moses. In the book of Exodus, Moses is called by God to free the Israelites from their enslavement by the Egyptians. God asks Moses to speak directly to the pharaoh, but Moses argues that he is “‘slow of speech and of tongue’” (Exodus 4.10). God instructs Moses to bring his brother Aaron with him when he confronts the pharaoh, saying, “‘He shall speak for you to the people, and he shall be your mouth’” (Exodus 4.16). In this way, Aaron becomes the mouthpiece for his brother Moses and, thus, for the God of Israel. Later, Aaron and his sons become leaders of a group of Levitical priests; they “oversee Israel's sacrifices and cult centered

in the ark and tabernacle” (Olson 1). Even with this high honor and responsibility, Aaron also sometimes acts in opposition to both Moses and God, revealing “the potential for disobedience among all leaders” (Olson 2).<sup>7</sup> Understanding the biblical Aaron is vital for understanding the portrayal of Ness’s character Aaron.

Ness’s Aaron is the spiritual leader of Prentisstown, where he and Todd live. The settlers of New World have left Earth behind and colonized a new planet in hopes of creating a religious utopia; Todd reflects, “[W]e’d aimed to start a new life of purity and brotherhood in a whole new Eden”<sup>8</sup> (26). Aaron is the leader of the church, and his Noise and language reflect his religious fervor. He avoids animals when their Noise begins to be shared because he believes animals are “unclean” (116), a word reminiscent of Old Testament law, hearkening back to his namesake, the biblical Aaron. Aaron himself recognizes this connection. He declares himself to be “God’s own mouthpiece” (451) and “a saint” (458) who is offering himself as a sacrifice so that Todd may undergo the rite of passage to become a man. The words that Aaron preaches, however, are a perversion of traditional religious beliefs, and the words that he spouts are not those of God, but of Mayor Prentiss, the leader of Prentisstown. This perversion will be discussed further in the next chapter, but Aaron’s role as a mouthpiece is particularly important to the conveyance of dominant ideology, and his name certainly fits the role that he plays.

### **“Yer a Symbol”: Todd Hewitt, the “Last Innocent Boy of Prentisstown”<sup>9</sup>**

Todd Hewitt’s given name has no significant connotation, as Aaron’s does; however, just as with Evey Hammond in *V for Vendetta*, Todd’s name provides him with

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<sup>7</sup>Further narrative of Aaron’s role as priest and his disobedience can be found primarily in the biblical books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. See Olson’s explanation, as well.

<sup>8</sup>“Eden” itself has religious implications, as the word refers to the Garden of Eden, the paradise in which Adam and Eve lived before sin existed in the world. Eden is an example of a true utopia.

<sup>9</sup>The speaker is Ben (Ness 397).

one of the last connections to his deceased parents. Todd has been told that his mother and father both died from the Noise germ that killed so many of the other Prentisstown citizens. Furthermore, as the last “boy” in town who has not yet undergone the ceremony to become a man, Todd holds on strongly to his name as a way to separate himself from the men like Aaron and Mayor Prentiss who run the town. Repeating his full name is a way that Todd reminds himself of his own identity:

*I am Todd Hewitt, I think to myself with my eyes closed. I am twelve years and twelve months old. I live in Prentisstown on New World. I will be a man in one month's time exactly.*

It's a trick Ben<sup>10</sup> taught me to help settle my Noise. You close yer eyes and as clearly and calmly as you can you tell yourself who you are, cuz that's what gets lost in all that Noise.<sup>11</sup> (Ness 17)

While Todd uses the repetition of his name as a way to calm his nerves and retain his own sense of identity, others use his name as a threat against him.

The discovery of Viola, as well as her lack of Noise, is a threat to the men of Prentisstown, who have convinced all the boys that every woman has been killed by the Noise germ. Because Todd discovers a female near the town, which raises questions about the truth of the original Prentisstown women, Ben and Cillian convince him to flee the town,<sup>12</sup> and Todd brings Viola with him. Mayor Prentiss forms an army to chase the two children, and when he is following Todd, the mayor yells out Todd's full name. Todd notes, “It's the Mayor, shouting his first words ever to me in person” (126). The mayor,

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<sup>10</sup>After the death of Todd's parents, their friends Ben and Cillian adopted and raised Todd.

<sup>11</sup>The misspelled words are Ness's and will be discussed further in chapter 4.

<sup>12</sup>Ben and Cillian had already planned for Todd to escape Prentisstown. The ceremony for him to become a man would involve Todd killing another man, and Ben and Cillian wanted to avoid that scenario. The discovery of Viola merely facilitated an earlier escape than originally planned.

who follows this up with a threat that he and Todd are “not finished,” intends the use of Todd’s name to be a reminder of the Mayor’s own power; however, Todd’s resolve to oppose the mayor is only strengthened<sup>13</sup> (126).

**“Where’s the Sign?”: Viola Eade as the Counterpart to Todd Hewitt**

Although Viola’s presence is discernible in the first chapter, Todd does not at first recognize that a girl is the cause of the empty space he encounters. Ben and Cillian understand what is happening, but Todd himself does not understand until he leaves Prentisstown and encounters Viola in person. For awhile, Todd is unaware that Viola is able to speak because she refuses to do so; thus, Viola is identified merely as “the girl” for some time.

When Todd and the girl run from the Prentisstown army, they cross a bridge, and Viola sets off an explosion that prevents Mayor Prentiss from following them. At this point, once Viola and Todd recognize that they are fighting on the same side, against the Prentisstown army, the girl offers her name to Todd:

“Viola,” I hear.

I spin around, look at her.

“What?” I say.

She’s looking back at me.

She’s opening her mouth.

She’s talking.

“My name,” she says. “It’s Viola.” (Ness 127)

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<sup>13</sup>This resolve is developed further in the two sequels, *The Ask and the Answer* and *Monsters of Men*, in which Todd actually projects his own name within his Noise as a mental weapon.

Finally, Viola identifies herself and provides a sign by which others can refer to her. The giving of one's name signifies that Viola finally trusts Todd, at least a little bit. This girl, who has no Noise and has not yet spoken, finally has a voice that enables Todd to at least attempt to understand her. In New World, men do not actually need to voice their thoughts to be heard, but women are an unknown, and their physical voices are vital to any sense of identity. Todd also responds in kind: "I'm Todd," although this is unnecessary (131). Viola has heard his name in Todd's Noise as well as from Mayor Prentiss, yet Todd is acknowledging that, for Viola, the spoken word is her primary form of communication. He reminds her of his identity.

Later, Todd also uses her name just as he uses his own: as a reminder of the intrinsic qualities that make up Viola. Viola has just read to Todd from his mother's journal, and Todd recognizes Viola's pain over the loss of her own parents<sup>14</sup>:

"She hurts. I know all this. I *know* it's true. Cuz I can read her. I can read her Noise even tho she ain't got none. I know who she is. I know Viola Eade" (Ness 420). Todd is using Viola's name as a symbol for everything he has learned about her, in spite of her lack of Noise. Just as he is Todd Hewitt, she is Viola Eade; together, they recognize the truth about one another and are able to fight as partners against Aaron and the army from Prentisstown.

Aaron recognizes that Viola is an important figure as well. When he first begins chasing Todd and Viola out of Prentisstown, Todd and Manchee fight against Aaron while Viola hides. Aaron asks "'Where's the sign?'" when he cannot find her (Ness 78). Todd, who does not even know Viola's name at this point, believes Viola is whom the

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<sup>14</sup>Viola is in New World because her parents were scouts from another spaceship of colonists. They were sent early on a reconnaissance mission to determine what the settlers would find, but their ship crashed. Viola was the only survivor.

Prentisstown army is seeking, and Aaron's Noise seems to confirm it: "THE HOLY SACRAMENT and THE SIGN FROM GOD and THE PATH OF THE SAINT and pictures of the girl in a church, pictures of the girl drinking the wine and eating the host, pictures of the girl as an angel. The girl as a sacrifice" (80). Aaron's intent is that this sign from God—this as yet unnamed girl—is the path to his own sanctification. Aaron intends to kill Viola himself as a "last example of the evil that hides itself which I could destroy and purify" (453). Aaron is wrong, however; Viola is not intended to be a sacrifice. In fact, she is the one who finally kills Aaron when Todd cannot. Her presence is the catalyst for the conflict between Aaron and Todd and for Todd's escape from Prentisstown, but her true purpose is as Todd's companion, one who knows him and is known by him. She is Viola Eade, a girl with a history and a place by Todd's side.

Todd also recognizes that their names are an important commodity. When the two reach the next town, the first woman they encounter is Hildy, who asks, "What might yer good mothers have dubbed ye?" (Ness 145). She is recognizing that these two unknown children have a history and, most likely, a family, and she wants to be able to identify them. Todd hesitates, thinking, "It seems like a price, giving up our names, but maybe it's a fair exchange" (145). Identifying themselves is a risk. Todd already recognizes that the Mayor is using his own name as a threat against him, and Hildy could as well. However, he and Viola are seeking protection, and he is willing to make a trade.

### **New World as Utopia: Place-Names in *The Knife of Never Letting Go***

Just as people's names are revelatory of their identities, so are the names of places. The planet on which the story is set is called New World, and Earth, the planet the colonizers has left behind, is referred to as Old World. Todd mentions that the settlers

were looking for a “New Eden” (Ness 26), and a woman named Francia in a nearby town reminds Todd that the early colonists were ““church settlers’ [ . . . ] ‘getting away from worldly things to set up our own little utopia’” (188). Francia’s sister Hildy had just described the nightmare of Old World: ““Old World’s mucky, violent, and crowded’ [ . . . ] ‘a-splitting right into bits with people a-hating each other and a-killing each other, no one happy till everyone’s miserable. Least it was all those years ago’” (163). These place-names, while simple, represent the hopes of the colonizers and the reason why this story is taking place. Humanity was seeking utopia, a fresh start, and by calling a place “new,” the colonists hoped to leave behind what was “old.” This hope for a better future can also be seen in the geography of the land. All of the cities on New World lie along a river that ends in a waterfall in the last town, appropriately called Haven. Todd and Viola follow the river, chased by the Prentisstown army, seeking shelter and safety in Haven, placing all their hopes on the rumor of a town that may or may not exist.

Even Todd’s hometown, Prentisstown, is heavily laden with symbolism. The town was originally called New Elizabeth, after the first mayor, a woman named Jessica Elizabeth (Ness 415). When Prentiss became mayor of the town, he renamed it in honor of himself, and the town’s name carries a stigma with it. When Todd and Viola arrive in the next town of Farbranch, Todd recognizes that the word “Prentisstown,” as well as his and Viola’s names, are filtering through the Noise of the men, Noise that is filled with “fear and suspishun (sic)” (197). When Todd learns the truth about Prentisstown, that Mayor Prentiss actually killed all the women and men who opposed him, Todd understands why Prentisstown is such a dangerous and hated word to those outside his village. Mayor Prentiss himself understands the power that his name carries, and the



novel ends with chilling words as Todd and Viola finally reach Haven: “‘Welcome,’ says the Mayor, ‘to New Prentissstown’” (479). The army has arrived before Todd and Viola, and the Mayor carries his name, with all its fearful connotation, eliminating fully the idea that a safe haven exists for Todd and Viola.

*“Noms de Unification”:*

#### Naming in *The City & the City*

China Miéville’s detective novel is rife with evidence of the importance of language in building a society, even a fictional one. Just as with previous authors, the names of characters and places is vital to an understanding of identity within the novel. The fictionalized locales of the cities of Beszel and Ul Qoma exist in an unnamed Eastern European country, but the reader has no historical context by which to understand the names of people and places. Whereas Moore and Lloyd rely on the history and political context of late-twentieth-century London for *V for Vendetta*, and Ness creates an entirely new universe by setting his novel on another planet in *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, Miéville must blend twentieth-century history into a new setting to create context for the reader. Miéville relies on these contexts in his titling of the police units in the two cities as well as his naming of the Beszel inspector Tyador Borlú and the crime victim and her many aliases.

#### **The *Policzai* and the *Militsya*: Beszel and Ul Qoma’s Police Forces**

When the body of an unknown woman is discovered on the border of the city of Beszel, Police Inspector Tyador Borlú begins to investigate and discovers that this mysterious woman was perhaps killed in Ul Qoma instead of Beszel. These two cities exist as separate entities, and even the police forces must get special permission to cross

the borders and investigate the crime in both cities. One way that Miéville reveals this tension between the two cities is through the names of the police forces, relying on foreign words with connotations of oppressive violence.

The Besz police force, of which Borlú is a part, is called the *policzai*, the German word for police. The word “police” alone carries no heavy connotation; however, Miéville could have chosen to create a Besz word for police instead of borrowing from another language, and a reference to Germany could potentially evoke connotations of the *Gestapo*, the secret police during the Nazi Party’s control of Germany. This subtle reference to an oppressive governmental regime helps to establish this novel’s role as a dystopia and allows the reader to begin to question the role of the governmental institutions within the novel.

Beszél is not alone in referencing a powerful, historical, oppressive government. The Ul Qoman police force is called the *militiya*, a word used to reference civilian police forces in several Communist countries. Furthermore, the supervisors in the Beszél *policzai* also have a name borrowed from another language; the word *commissar* is a Russian word given to officials in Russia’s Communist Party from 1917 until 1946 (Kowalsky n.p.). Once more, Miéville is referencing a historical, feared ruling party in creating his own fictional world. That the commissar’s secretary also refers to him as *el jefe*<sup>15</sup> adds another layer of development, as Miéville references the Dominican Republic’s murderous dictator Trujillo<sup>16</sup> (106). Miéville’s use of borrowing from other

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<sup>15</sup>Spanish for “the chief” or “the boss.”

<sup>16</sup>Rafael Trujillo ruled the Dominican Republic from 1930 to his assassination in 1961, although he was only officially elected president for part of that time. His regime tortured dissidents, assassinated political opponents, and oppressed the citizens of both the Dominican Republic and the neighboring country of Haiti, among other actions.

languages in creating the nomenclature of his society is a reminder that the government, even the police force, is not to be trusted.

### **Tyador Borlú: A Gift of Breach**

The inspector protagonist of the novel has a name that at once evokes a religious connotation. Tyador is a revision of the name “Theodore,”<sup>17</sup> from the Greek for “a gift from God.” Miéville is not referring to the traditional Christian God, as the name is implied; however, the organization Breach, which controls the actions of citizens in both cities, is worshipped and feared as a religious entity and replaces the conventional role of a god. Borlú’s narration details the religious power that Breach holds: “There is no theology so desperate that you can’t find it. There is a sect in Beszel that worships Breach. It’s scandalous but not completely surprising given the powers involved. There is no law against the congregation, though the nature of their religion makes everyone twitchy” (Miéville 38). Furthermore evidence of Breach’s religious identity can be found in its operatives, known as “avatars,” that move throughout both cities; the title of “avatar” clearly references the Hindu concept of the manifestation of a religious deity. At the end of the novel, Tyador has committed a crime worthy of sanction by Breach, and when he enters that organization, he learns he cannot return to his previous life. He accepts the only choice he has, to become an avatar of Breach himself and to exist always both within the two cities and outside of them. Although he is not specifically a “gift” of Breach, he does become a possession nonetheless and must adhere fully to this governing body that controls him.

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<sup>17</sup>Miéville is not alone in his choice of naming. The protagonist of P.D. James’s dystopian novel *The Children of Men* is named Theodore Faron.

### **“Byela Fulana Foreigner Murdered Girl”: The Many Identities of Mahalia Geary**

One of the most fascinating characters in the novel is that of the murder victim, who undergoes a seemingly endless shift in identities as the investigators work to discern her true identity. When Borlú and the other investigators first arrive on the crime scene, they give the victim the name of Fulana Detail, “the generic name for a woman unknown,” Beszel’s version of the American phrase “Jane Doe” (Miéville 8). The girl does not remain unknown for long; early in his investigation, Borlú receives a covert phone call offering him a tip in the case. The caller states, ““Her name’s Marya. That’s what she went by. I met her here. Ul Qoma-here”” (35). The mysterious woman finally has a name, but the caller contradicts himself, implying that “what she went by” was not actually her name. In fact, he is right; Fulana/Marya undergoes several name changes as the investigators discover more about her life.

Borlú and his partner Corwi discover more about their victim when they visit the Beszqoma Solidarity Front, an underground organization promoting unification of the two cities. The victim, a Ph.D. student, had visited them while conducting research on the potential of a hidden third city called Orciny rumored to exist between the two cities. To the unificationists, she had given the name Byela Mar, and Borlú recognizes the brilliance of her pseudonym: “It was an obvious, and elegantly punning pseudonym. Byela is a unisex Besz name; Mar is at least plausible as a surname. Together, their phonemes approximate the phrase *byé lai mar*, literally ‘only the baitfish,’ a fishing phrase to say ‘nothing worth noting’” (Miéville 47). Borlú knows this is clearly not the victim’s name, but he also recognizes that the woman is attempting to hide in plain sight, to conduct research without calling attention to herself. He even refers to her many names

as “[n]oms [ . . . ] *de unification*,” names she is using to move back and forth between the two cities (47). She relies on the power of a name, and the connotations of the name Byela Mar in the Besz language, to provide her with camouflage.

As Borlú uncovers more information about this woman, he begins to express frustration at not knowing her true identity. At one point, he calls the victim “Marya Fulana Unknown Foreign Detail Breacher” (Miéville 37) and, at another time, “Byela Fulana Foreigner Murdered Girl” (55). He cannot refer to her merely as “the girl” or the generic “Fulana.” He is investigating her life and her death, and he needs to be able to assign a meaning to her. Until he knows her true identity, and her name that is indicative of her identity, he has to call her something. Finally, however, when the evidence leads to the victim’s presence in Ul Qoma, they discover that among her “various invented names” (57), she possesses a real one: Mahalia Geary. Just as with Evey Hammond, Todd Hewitt, and Viola Eade, she now has a genealogy and a history. Her name now allows investigators to pursue the real identity of the previously unknown woman.

### Assumptions

In any situation, names become symbols to express a much deeper level of identity. These signs serve as markers to provide history and context to those who hear or see the word. When Borlú sees the battered face of Mahalia Geary at the crime scene, he remarks, “It was impossible to say what she looked like, what face those who knew her would see if they heard her name” (Miéville 7). A name provides a point of recognition between people, a personal connection to a family and a place, context to historical events and figures in order to reveal aspects of a name holder’s personality, and an audible, legible foundation for retaining one’s identity and resisting those who threaten to

oppress. Within dystopian literature, the claiming of one's name is the first step in recognizing the power of language.

**“They Have *Eradicated Culture*”<sup>18</sup>:**

**Language and Religion as Tools of Oppression**

The corruption of both language and religion is a theme that has consistently appeared in works of dystopian literature. Language and religion are both powerful cultural commodities, and frequently, oppressive governments attempt to contain that power to craft the societies they desire. In his exploration of language in dystopian literature, David W. Sisk notes the method of language control in Huxley’s *World State*: “Huxley’s society fears the printed word as perhaps the only force that can permanently subvert years of careful conditioning. The threat is countered by a policy of appropriating words, stripping them of undesirable meaning, and using them to further extend State conditioning” (20). From conception, the embryos are subjected to recordings that project the society’s dominant ideology, ensuring that they are producing a society full of citizens who never question the government. The *World State* also overtakes religious aspects of the culture: “religion has been disposed of except for an officially sanctioned faith that gives restless citizens an outlet for their needs to worship” (Sisk 23). Religion, an Ideological State Apparatus, becomes a possession of the government, who then “provides” for the spiritual needs of its citizens, ensuring that they will never desire any other outlet for religious desires.

Orwell’s portrayal of language in relation to a totalitarian government differs from Huxley’s in that language is used more actively to suppress the citizens of Oceania. Sisk asserts that through the development and use of Newspeak, the controlling state “intends not only to silence opposing voices, but furthermore, to rend any unorthodox

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<sup>18</sup>From *V for Vendetta*; the speaker is V, and “they” refers to Norsefire, the governing body of England (Moore and Lloyd 18).

political idea intellectually impossible” (41). Instead of merely conditioning citizens into false consciousness, as Huxley’s World State does, Orwell’s INGSOC actually uses language forcibly in an effort to stifle political dissent.

Contemporary writers of dystopian fiction have continued the work of Huxley and Orwell. In each of these primary texts, writers portray governmental regimes that use language either to condition citizens from birth to accept the hegemony of the ruling class or to enforce that dominant ideology upon citizens who may already be resistant. Furthermore, religion is often supplanted by the government institution itself as the government seeks to become the new transcendental signified; as an Ideological State Apparatus, as identified by Althusser, the church is an establishment that can be used to disseminate ideology.

“They Took Our Power”<sup>19</sup>:

Oppression in *V for Vendetta*

Moore and Lloyd’s dystopian setting in London is much more reminiscent of Orwell’s Oceania than Huxley’s World State. In *V for Vendetta*, the nuclear war that led to dystopia is in the very recent past,<sup>20</sup> and London’s citizens, even those as young as Evey Hammond, still remember a time before the fascist government Norsefire controlled the country. Thus, there has not been sufficient time to condition the citizens of society, as in *Brave New World*. Instead, Norsefire’s computer system, known as Fate, controls all media transmitted to the Londoners, and the motto of the party attempts to develop a unified language to quell any uprisings. Furthermore, Norsefire and Fate come to be

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<sup>19</sup>From Eve-as-V’s final speech in the graphic novel, referring to “a handful of oppressors” throughout history (Moore and Lloyd 258).

<sup>20</sup>The nuclear war destroyed Africa and much of Europe, though not England. However, the climate was affected, which destroyed all the crops, leading to riots and chaos. Norsefire rose up and took over (Moore and Lloyd 27-28).



worshipped as the new transcendental signified after the government has infiltrated and further corrupted the church.

**“The Voice of Fate”: Propaganda and Media in *V for Vendetta***

The first image in *V for Vendetta* is Jordan Tower in London, from which the Voice of Fate is being transmitted to the city of London. The Voice is seemingly harmless, delivering the date, time, and a weather report (Moore and Lloyd 9). However, the radio broadcast then shifts to reports of scenarios common to dystopian societies: quarantined areas, food rationing, and police raids (9). The Voice of Fate, however, is much more than just a method by which to provide the society with information; Fate’s primary function is to distribute propaganda that enforces the society’s dominant rule.

Immediately after V blows up the Houses of Parliament, the “mouth,” the branch of Norsefire responsible specifically for propaganda, must dispatch a cover story so as not to reveal the terrorist nature of the explosion. Roger Dascombe, head of the mouth, explains, “‘*Fate* wants us to say it was a *scheduled* demolition undertaken at night to avoid *traffic congestion*’” (Moore and Lloyd 16). Fate is the mechanism that allows Norsefire to construct truth, and as V continues his attempts to destroy the government, Fate continues to hide the truth. The reality that an anarchy-promoting terrorist is destroying vital government buildings undermines the perception that Norsefire is in total control of a unified England. Fate is hoping that the presentation of an altered reality will supplant the actual truth, just as in *1984* when Winston rewrites headlines to create the illusion that Big Brother is omniscient and all-powerful. Just as Nietzsche observed that constructed realities supplant the truth, so do the citizens of London ignore the resistance

happening before their very eyes, when presented with an alternate truth. They are living in a false consciousness, and the Voice of Fate prevents them from seeking autonomy.

Fate continually perpetuates this false consciousness through controlling the language transmitted to the people. After V destroys Old Bailey, the criminal court, Conrad Heyer, head of the “eye,” the visual surveillance team of Fate, tries to determine what story to tell the people. His wife remarks, “‘Another *scheduled demolition*? Who’s going to believe it after the Houses of Parliament and the Old Bailey? What can they [Fate] possibly say?’” (185). Heyer responds, “‘I don’t know. Anything. At a time like this, anything’s better than silence’” (185). His response reveals the rationale behind’s Fate’s dispersal of information: if they control the language and the reality constructed by language, then they can prevent the truth from being revealed. In silence, people will be able to both question the authority of the government and speculate on the truth. Norsefire believes, whether or not it is correct in its assumption, that the control of language implies control of the collective consciousness of the people.

Another way that the government enforces its unified ideology on its citizens is through media. The television show *Storm Saxon* reveals the bigotry of the ruling party through stereotypically racist portrayals of African-Americans, the objectification of vapid female characters, and even warnings against those who resist the practices of the party by hoarding food during a ration (Moore and Lloyd 107-108). Even the name of the TV show’s protagonist, “Storm Saxon,” contains implications of white supremacy reminiscent of Nazi Germany. Hegemony has infiltrated the entertainment industry, turning that medium into a tool of oppressing groups of people whom those in power deem inferior.

Another way that Norsefire controls the perception of the people is through censorship of literature, art, music, and film. When V first brings Evey to the Shadow Gallery, she marvels at the bookshelves holding books she has never read and the juke-box playing music she has never heard. However, she has not just ignored the existence of these cultural artifacts; she has not had access to them. Evey states that the only music she has “ever heard is the military stuff they play on the radio” (Moore and Lloyd 18). V responds to her curiosity by saying, “You couldn’t be expected to know. They have *eradicated culture* . . . tossed it all away like a fistful of *dead roses*” (18). Norsefire has destroyed the literature and art forms of pre-fascist England because these are the means by which revolution is made possible. Furthermore, censorship only gives credence to those ideologies that align with the party’s hegemony and elevate certain races and groups of people above others. For example, Motown music is completely expunged because it does not align with the white supremacy prejudice that is also displayed in *Storm Saxon*. Censorship is a way for the party to ensure that only their officially sanctioned ideas will exist in the public domain.

**“Uniformity of Thought, Word and Deed”: Unified Language in *V for Vendetta***

Another way that a totalitarian regime controls language is through unity of language. Bakhtin recognizes unitary language as “[giving] expression to forces working toward concrete verbal and ideological unification and centralization” (271). This unification of language is vital to creating a central ideology in a fascist organization. Unified language allows no room for other ideologies to corrupt the hegemony of the party. One way of creating a unified language is through the party’s motto.

On the third page of the graphic novel, the motto appears for the first time. When Evey is pushed against the wall by one of the men harassing her, one of the party's posters appears in the frame of the comic, declaring, "Strength through Purity, Purity through Faith" (Moore and Lloyd 11). The implications of this motto reveal the ultimate goal of party unity.<sup>21</sup> If the citizens are loyal to the party and pure in their actions, the party will be strengthened. Division will bring weakness. Adam Susan, leader of Norsefire, indicates the resolve of the party to unify language, even at a cost: "I believe in strength. I believe in unity. And if that strength, that unity of purpose, demands a uniformity of thought, word and deed then so be it. I will not hear talk of freedom. I will not hear talk of individual liberty. They are luxuries" (37). Individual language and, thus, freedom are martyred for the sake of unity. Furthermore, faith in the government alone—to the forsaking of all else—allows the government the power to become the transcendental signified.

### **"A Wisdom that is God-Like"<sup>22</sup>: Fate as the Transcendental Signified**

Derrida's idea of the transcendental signified and Nietzsche's idea of the original concept by which we create metaphors are very similar. Both are the recognition that an entity exists on which we base reality, an entity that dictates every aspect of life. For many people, a religious deity is the transcendental signified; for others, knowledge or success or recognition—some lofty goal to be attained—becomes the transcendental signified. As previously stated, within these examples of dystopian literature, the government becomes the transcendental signified, the entity that controls every facet of

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<sup>21</sup>In the film adaptation, the motto was changed to "Strength through Unity, Unity through Faith," which is even more revelatory of the ultimate goal of a unified language to promote hegemony.

<sup>22</sup>A quote from one of Adam Susan's interior monologues proclaiming his adoration for Fate (Moore and Lloyd 38).

life for its citizens, and a regime's dominant ideology is the method by which the government controls the metaphysics of presence, the innate need for a person to seek a transcendental signified.

Before the reader is even introduced to Fate, the idea that the government is an entity to be worshipped is clearly revealed in the posters proclaiming the party's motto. Beneath the words on the poster is the emblem of the party: a cross, the traditional symbol of Christianity, with a pair of wings<sup>23</sup> (11). By reimagining the conventional image of a dominant religious group, Norsefire is emphasizing its own power and desire to rule over and be worshipped by the people of England.

More than any other character in the novel, Adam Susan most clearly represents the utter subservience to the computer known as Fate that runs Norsefire. Fate has become the body by which every aspect of Susan's existence is defined. He speaks of Fate in the terms of a lover whose love is unreturned; still, he pledges complete allegiance to her: "She touches me, and I am touched by God, by destiny. The whole of existence courses through her. I worship her. I am her slave" (Moore and Lloyd 38). Thus, his control over England is not a manifestation of his desire for England to prevail, a mantra he repeats throughout the novel; instead, Susan's leadership is his way of worshipping Fate.

Further, Susan constructs a concept of reality based fully around his existence with Fate:

There's only me here, isn't there? I've known since childhood no one else is real. Just me and God. [ . . . ] God was real, embodied in a form that I

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<sup>23</sup>The official symbol of the Nazi party in Germany was an eagle, wings spread, atop a swastika, the bent cross, providing further connections of Norsefire to a dangerous totalitarian regime ("Eagles" n.p.).

could *love*. When I first saw her screens, her smooth unyielding lines . . .  
 not as a woman with strange sweat and ugly body hair, but something  
 cold, hard; sensual. We loved, my God and I. But then she betrayed me.  
 Now there's nothing. Now I am alone. (232)

The betrayal of which Susan speaks is the time period when V hacked the computer system and shut down surveillance over all of England. Fate was in the hands of another and was no longer the method by which the citizens were constrained by Norsefire's fascist ideology. When Susan's transcendental signified has been undermined, he turns to the people of England, hoping that his leadership will sustain him. However, while this interior monologue is taking place, his motorcade stops, and he opens the door to greet one of his constituents. Rose Almond, whose husband worked for Susan and was murdered, fatally shoots Susan. Betrayed by his transcendental signified and the people he believes he is serving, Susan's life ends along with the reality he so painstakingly constructed.

### **“Thou Who Art Our Fate”: Religion as a Corrupted Ideological State Apparatus**

Because Norsefire has become the transcendental signified in Moore and Lloyd's vision of England, and Fate has become an entity to be worshipped, there is little room left in society for any other kind of religion. Therefore, the government takes over control of the Church as a means by which to infiltrate the lives of its citizens even more. As Althusser notes, the church is a normally private institution that exerts a tremendous amount of influence over followers of religion. Under the guise of religious leadership, the government's pawns can ensure that the words being preached to the congregation

align with the party's ideology. One such pawn in *V for Vendetta* is Bishop Lilliman, a powerful figure image of the perversion of the church.

In the bishop's first appearance, he is leading a prayer at Westminster Abbey, which is crowded with Londoners, including Adam Susan and other high-ranking leaders of Norsefire. The bishop's prayer specifically asks for resistance against the temptation of "the evil one," whom one can surmise to be V (Moore and Lloyd 44). Lilliman also reveals through his language the influence of Norsefire on the church: "'Oh, God, thou who knowest all that we do, thou who are our fate and final destiny, clearly perceive thy holy will'" (45). Lilliman subtly equates Fate with God, an acknowledgement that the transcendental signified has passed from religion to the government. His prayer also reveals the ultimate goal of Norsefire: unity. Lilliman specifically prays that England will "'stand firm in thee. One race, one nation, united in thy love'" (45). Just as the television show *Storm Saxon*, the bishop's prayers further perpetuate the ideology that the Anglo-Saxon race is better than all others. Furthermore, Lilliman, who should be a model of Christian virtue as leader of his congregation, is then revealed to be as vile and corrupt as the evil one he prays against.

Lilliman, who worked at Larkhill while V was imprisoned there, is one of the last victims whose death fulfills V's vendetta. V appeals to Lilliman's known desire, his sexual relationships with young girls. Just after Lilliman's sermon at Westminster Abbey, Evey, dressed up to look even younger than she is, appears at Lilliman's quarters for one of his regular appointments. Before the servant ushers her in, Lilliman ponders, "'I wonder which of the seven deadlies the good Lord will see fit to tempt me with today?'" (Moore and Lloyd 46). He later reveals his disappointment that the girl, at fifteen, is older

than his usual prospects and compares himself to the biblical figure of Job<sup>24</sup> (47). After he leaves Evey with Lilliman, the servant converses with security guards outside the palace; his conversation suggests that Lilliman's indiscretions are well-known but tolerated because of his position as a religious figure: ““There may be no peace for the wicked . . . but the righteous can get a piece whenever they feel like it”” (49). Lilliman's corrupted character is an important symbol of the oppression of the government; on the surface, the church, like the government, seems to provide for the needs of the people, be they spiritual or physical. In reality, however, the heads of both the church and the government are perverted leaders who use their power to exploit the people.

“Binds Us Like Prisoners on a Chain”<sup>25</sup>:

#### Corruption of Language and Religion in *The Knife of Never Letting Go*

In this novel, the protagonist Todd has never known a life without Noise. Just as those citizens of World State in *Brave New World*, he has been conditioned through Noise to accept the history and beliefs of those in power. In this novel, the government entity differs from that of other novels. Todd lives in a small village, controlled by a dictator-like Mayor Prentiss, who dominates over the men of the town and eventually seeks to take over all the other towns on New World. This government is not an organized, fascist regime relying on scientific innovation and technology. Instead, these are men on horseback in a primitive world who nonetheless have a powerful weapon: Noise.

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<sup>24</sup>The book of Job in the Christian Bible relates the story of a man who lost his family, his health, and all his worldly possessions and still honored God. Comparing oneself to Job implies that one has suffered greatly.

<sup>25</sup>When Aaron first approaches Todd in the woods, he chastises Todd for his language use: ““Language, young Todd,’ he says, ‘binds us like prisoners on a chain. Haven’t you learned anything from yer church, boy?’” (Ness 7).



### **“Forging Some Kind of Noise Weapon”: Language and Violence**

When the colonizers first landed on New World, they discovered quickly that only men’s Noise could be heard. Todd grew up believing, being told in both spoken language and Noise, that the Noise germ eventually killed all the women after enabling men’s thoughts to be heard. In reality, however, Noise became a divisive weapon that threatened the men. The powerful men of Prentisstown, including Prentiss, killed all the women because, as Viola realizes, ““They couldn’t stand women knowing everything about them and them knowing nothing about women”” (Ness 392). In a world where hearing the thoughts of every man became normative, women’s silence was enough to damn them. So began a violent tradition to control the Noise.

These men recognize that Noise must be controlled because, without regulation, Noise is chaotic and overwhelming. Todd describes this cacophony:

[Noise is] what’s true and what’s believed and what’s imagined and what’s fantasized and it says one thing and a completely opposite thing at the same time and even tho the truth is definitely in there, how can you tell what’s true and what’s not when yer getting *everything*?

The Noise is a man unfiltered, and without a filter, a man is just chaos walking. (Ness 42)

Described this way, one can easily understand the need for self-control in relation to Noise. These men are inundated with words, ideas, and mental pictures so that order becomes a way to keep their sanity. However, Prentiss also recognizes an opportunity: if one can learn to control his Noise, that Noise can then become a powerful weapon to oppress others. Todd, even though he has yet to become a man and join Prentiss’s ranks,

understands the power that the mayor holds: “[Prentiss] believes, see, that order can be brought to Noise. [ . . . ] [H]e’s molding a little army into shape, like he’s preparing himself for something, like he’s forging some kind of Noise weapon” (27). Todd’s own descriptive language in this passage reveals the transition of Prentiss’s ideas, from merely bringing order to his own chaos to using that ordered Noise against others.

In the *Chaos Walking* trilogy, Prentiss actually learns to corral his Noise and then project it at others so violently that it causes physical pain. This idea is developed much more in the sequels to *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, but it is implied in this book first. In one of Todd’s many confrontations with the preacher Aaron, Todd explains, “[Aaron’s] Noise is hitting me as hard as a punch” (Ness 346). He soon learns that Prentiss’s Noise is much more powerful than Aaron’s ever was.

In the sequel *The Ask & the Answer*, after Todd and Viola arrive in New Prentisstown (formerly Haven), Todd learns the precision of the Mayor’s control of his Noise: “And then I hear it. I AM THE CIRCLE AND THE CIRCLE IS ME. Clear as a bell, right inside my head, the voice of the Mayor, twining around my own voice, like it’s speaking direktly into my Noise, so sudden and real I sit up and nearly fall off my horse. Davy looks surprised, his Noise wondering what I’m reacting to” (Ness, *Ask*, 52-53). The Mayor projects his Noise into Todd’s mind so that only that boy can hear him. In this way, he is able to assert his own ideology without fear of any outside resistance. Mayor Prentiss is embracing the idea that Noise can be a unitary language, preventing the existence of heteroglossia through his control and projection of Noise.

### **“I AM THE CIRCLE AND THE CIRCLE IS ME”: The Unification of Language**

As previously mentioned, one can never escape the Noise. Even when Todd and his dog Manchee are alone in the woods, the Noise is still present in their own thoughts and in the animals around them. Noise actually becomes a manifestation of Bakhtin's heteroglossia, or the idea that multiple languages exist simultaneously, always reflecting different ideologies and experiences. Bakhtin intended heteroglossia to refer to the actual process of authors who must write under the influence of multiple voices and ideologies; however, one can easily see how the idea could also relate to this situation: each man's Noise always overlapping, interrupting, and influencing the Noise of everyone else.

Prentiss's solution is to attempt to create one unitary language: Noise that can be controlled fully. Prentiss begins the process with a select group of men, whom he trains to control their Noise using a mantra: “I AM THE CIRCLE AND THE CIRCLE IS ME” (Ness 27). In their training, the men also chant, “IF ONE OF US FALLS WE ALL FALL” (28). The repetition of this mantra enables the men to control exactly what Noise they want others to hear. Just as Norsefire's motto in *V for Vendetta* is intended to bring unity to the citizens of England, Prentiss's motto is intended to build an army of men who can control their Noise and begin to control others.

Once again, part of creating a unitary language is to eliminate all other means of heteroglossia, including any written documents that could potentially subvert the hegemony of the ruling body. Prentiss, like many other dictators, rids the town of all the books; Todd explains, “Mayor Prentiss decided to burn all the books, every single one of them, even the ones in men's homes, cuz apparently books were detrimental as well and Mr. Royal, a soft man who made himself a hard man by drinking whisky in the classroom,

gave up and took a gun and put an end to himself and that was it for my classroom teaching” (Ness 18). Because Prentiss destroyed the books, he ensured that the men and boys in Prentisstown could never be educated outside of his guidance. Isolated as they are, the people of Prentisstown have no other way of educating themselves, and the cost of such oppression is high. Mr. Royal, Todd’s only teacher, chooses suicide rather than life in a town under Prentiss’s rule.

### **“A Man by His Own Meaning”: Prentiss as the Transcendental Signified**

The power that Prentiss holds is attractive to the men of Prentisstown. Todd wonders at all the men who have joined Prentiss’s ranks: “The men on foot march their way into town. The first one I reckonize is, of all people, Mr. Phelps the store-keeper. Which is weird cuz he never seemed armylike at all. [ . . . ] And Mr. Tate who had the most books to burn when the Mayor outlawed them” (Ness 214). Prentiss’s power, his ability to control his Noise, attracts even the most unlikely of men: those who understood the power of literature, those who seemed to prefer peace to war. The unyielding power of Noise changes the desires of men who want to suppress language as well as those who cannot yet control their language.

Prentiss’s ability to inflict his Noise upon others is not the only means he has of controlling language. At the end of the novel, when Todd and Viola ride into Haven, they believe they are safe because they have not heard any man’s Noise and assume that no one is nearby. However, the mayor and his army are waiting for the teenagers. Todd is confused by their presence but he soon understands: “And then I realize. I can’t hear his Noise. I can’t hear *anyone’s*” (Ness 478). Prentiss’s circle of men have been able to

silence their Noise completely, to prevent others from hearing it, to set themselves apart from the ordinary men who have not developed that skill.

In this way, Prentiss, like many other governmental bodies in dystopian literature, becomes the transcendental signified. He craves complete control and utter devotion from those whom he rules. When Todd questions Ben about why Prentiss is devoting so much time and energy to chasing after him, Ben explains that Todd is the last obstacle to Prentiss's complete domination: "'You were the last,' Ben says. 'If he could make every single boy in Prentisstown a man by his own meaning, then he's God, ain't he? He's created all of us and is in complete control.' [ . . . ] 'If he can make you fall, then his army is complete and of his own perfect making'" (Ness 397). Prentiss's role as the transcendental signified is best perceived in Ben's comment about "a man by his own meaning." Prentiss wants all the Prentisstown men to succumb to his own ideas about manhood. Todd has even accepted this ideology; he believes he will never become a man because his birthday passes while he is running from Prentisstown, and he misses the initiation ceremony that would have taken place. For Prentiss, becoming a man means a boy has killed another man—ideally, a man who has resisted Prentiss's dominant ideology. In this way, Prentiss is able to expunge the village of any detractors and convert another to his way of life. For Todd, just as the other boys, the rite of passage to manhood becomes the driving force in his life, a sure sign that Prentiss, through his hegemony that overrules all other ideologies, has become the transcendental signified.

### **"A Poisonous Preaching": The Perversion of Religion**

Prentiss and his hegemony have no room for religion, unless it serves a purpose in extending his power. This is why Aaron, the preacher and only religious figure in the

novel, becomes such a vital commodity to Prentiss. Aaron's ultimate goal, which Todd discovers in his last confrontation with Aaron, is to be a sacrifice that will allow Todd to undergo the ritual to become a man. He intends to fulfill Prentiss's goal for Todd, and his method of provoking Todd is through a perverted version of Christianity. New World was intended to be a religious utopia, a place where the colonists could escape from the sinful ways of their former home; however, Ben explains that this utopia did not last. He tells Todd and Viola, "[T]imes were hard all over New World and getting harder. Crops failing and sickness and no prosperity and no Eden. Definitely no Eden. And a preaching started spreading in the land, a poisonous preaching, a preaching that started to blame" (Ness 391). The colonists encountered an anti-utopia instead of the Eden they expected, and as a result, their religious ideas transformed.

Instead of finding comfort and solace in an all-powerful God, Aaron actually threatens Todd with mentions of God. When Todd's Noise fills with swears, Aaron reminds him that "'God *hears*'" (Ness 7), implying that, although Todd can apologize to Aaron for his language, judgment will still come from God. Todd later explains his belief that even the initiation into manhood is part of the religion of Prentisstown. When Viola questions the importance of becoming a man right at the age of thirteen, Todd explains, "'That's how New World's always done it. It's sposed to be scriptural. Aaron always went on about it symbolizing the day you eat from the Tree of Knowledge<sup>26</sup> and go from innocence into sin'" (228). Instead of the traditional theology of Christianity in which sin is renounced and redemption is sought, Aaron, and most likely the men of Prentiss's

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<sup>26</sup>A reference to the original sin in the Christian Bible. Adam and Eve were told that they could eat of any tree in the garden, except the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. In eating from this tree, Adam and Eve sinned for the first time. God's command appears in Genesis 2:16-17, and the story of Adam and Eve's sin and the consequences appears in Genesis 3.

army, celebrate the sin that brings about manhood. These men embrace their sinful natures and turn away from any belief in God except when the presence of God becomes a useful tool for oppression. Instead, Prentiss becomes the god-like figure in the society of New World and is able to control both language and religion.

“In the Interstice”<sup>27</sup>:

### Conditioning Separation in *The City & the City*

Miéville’s detective novel differs from the two previous novels in several ways. As previously mentioned, Miéville blends actual twentieth-century history with a fictional setting, unlike Moore and Lloyd and Ness. Furthermore, the institution responsible for oppression within the novel is not a specific political organization, as in *V for Vendetta*, or a man seeking absolute power, as in *The Knife of Never Letting Go*. Instead, the organization known as Breach is responsible for only one thing: ensuring that no resident of either Beszel or Ul Qoma commits breach by engaging with an aspect of the other city, whether accidentally or purposefully.<sup>28</sup> However, in seeking to prevent committing breach, the citizens of both cities remain isolated from each other and spend their lives “unseeing” and “unhearing” those people and places in the other city. Just as in *Brave New World*, citizens are conditioned from birth to avoid any contact with their opposing city. In this way, Breach is able to retain absolute authority and control over the lives of both the Besz and Ul Qoman people.

### **Besz and Illitan: Separation through Language**

As one reads *The City & the City*, one realizes how finely crafted are the two cultures of Beszel and Ul Qoma. The two cities began with the same history, but at some

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<sup>27</sup>From Borlú’s last words to the reader (Miéville 312).

<sup>28</sup>When “breach” is capitalized, the word refers to the organization; when lowercased, to the act of committing breach.

unknown time, a “Cleavage” occurred. At this point, the two cities separated, each with a distinct culture, and were never allowed any interaction. One preeminent way that the two cities retain their own identities is through their languages. Beszel’s language is called, simply, Besz while Ul Qoma’s language is Illitan. Borlú explains the distinctions between the two languages:

If you do not know much about them, Illitan and Besz sound very different. They are written, of course, in distinct alphabets. Besz is in Besz: thirty-four letters, left to right, all sounds rendered clear and phonetic, consonants, vowels and demivowels decorated with diacritics—it looks, one often hears, like Cyrillic (though that is a comparison likely to annoy a citizen of Beszel, true or not). Illitan uses Roman script.

(Miéville 41)

Borlú continues by explaining that the two languages are much more closely related than they seem to be on the surface, although “[i]t feels almost seditious to say so” (42).

Subtly, Borlú, speaking from the Besz mindset, is implying the conditioning of both the Besz and Ul Qoman people. The Besz people detest any comparison to another culture, be it through similarities of their language to the Cyrillic alphabet or to Illitan. The citizens of Beszel, through extreme separation with Ul Qoma, have developed a fiercely independent perception of their culture. In this independence, they are succumbing to the power of Breach, which exists to keep them separate and independent. Breach is promoting the existence of two unified languages that cannot intermingle. Under threat of punishment for breaching, heteroglossia is rendered impossible.



### **“Faithful and Alone”: Folktales as Conditioning Agents**

Even the collective unconscious of the people contains stories of the importance of separation between Beszel and Ul Qoma. The Besz people have developed myths about Illitan’s development as a language (Miéville 41) as well as folktales about the necessity of remaining isolated from Ul Qoma:

How could one not think of the stories we all grew up on, that surely the Ul Qomans grew up on too? Ul Qoman man and Besz maid, meeting in the middle of Copula Hall,<sup>29</sup> returning to their homes to realise that they live, grosstopically,<sup>30</sup> next door to each other, spending their lives faithful and alone, rising at the same time, walking crosshatched streets close like a couple, each in their own city, never breaching, never quite touching, never speaking a word across the border. (134)

For the Besz and Ul Qomans, nothing is as important as avoiding breach. There is no reason for a person to cross into the city that is not his own, even if that city exists within mere feet of his home. Citizens are prevented from experiencing anything that happens in the other city through the process of unseeing and unhearing.

These processes are conditioned from birth. The cities themselves are distinct enough that, over time, the process of unseeing becomes second nature. Citizens are aware of what style of clothing their own countrymen wear, what models of vehicles exist in which city, what colors are used for paint on the buildings. When one witnesses a foreign entity, one quickly looks away and forgets the experience. This conditioning causes difficulty for Borlú when his investigation leads him to partner with the Ul Qoman

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<sup>29</sup>A location that exists in both cities, Copula Hall is where those with legal permission may pass between the two cities and the only location where citizens of both cities can interact without committing breach.

<sup>30</sup>A term that Miéville uses for those locations that exist side-by-side but within separate cities.

police force. He must undergo training before being allowed to enter Ul Qoma: “the course was concerned to help a Besz citizen through the potentially traumatic fact of actually *being in* Ul Qoma, unseeing all their familiar environs, where we lived the rest of our life, and seeing the buildings beside us that we had spent decades making sure not to notice” (Miéville 133). Although he is Besz, once Borlú enters Ul Qoma, he must unsee his home city; to fail to do so would be to breach.

**“The Breach is Not Like Us”<sup>31</sup>: Breach as the Transcendental Signified**

Breach is a unique organization, existing outside of the government of both Ul Qoma and Beszel and monitoring every action within the two cities. When Borlú investigates Mahalia Geary’s death and discovers that she was most likely killed in Ul Qoma and her body dumped in Beszel, Borlú recognizes the possibility that the murderer committed breach. When the murder victim’s parents, who are American, visit Beszel to claim their daughter’s body, an American ambassador accompanies them and attempts to explain the role of Breach, stating, “Besz laws and Ul Qoman laws are kind of irrelevant. The, ah, sanctions available to Breach are pretty limitless” (Miéville 79). This emissary is pointing out the powerlessness of both the Besz and Ul Qoman police forces compared to Breach. Soon, the Gearys themselves learn the consequences of breaching. Mr. Geary suspects a unification group of murdering his daughter, and he enters Ul Qoman space when he tries to visit them. Avatars of Breach immediately capture him, poison him, and escort the Gearys to an airport to return to the United States. They will never be allowed to return to either city. Breach’s power is eternal and unyielding, even for people who are not citizens of either city.

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<sup>31</sup>Borlú attempts to explain Breach to Mahalia Geary’s parents (Miéville 78).

Borlú himself later invokes Breach after murdering a suspect in the case. He is on a street in Ul Qoma, and the suspect is on a street in Beszel. Borlú should have unseen the suspect until he crossed back into Ul Qoma, and the consequences of not unseeing cause him to be transported into Breach. He continues the investigation and learns more of how Breach manages to maintain control. An avatar of Breach explains:

It's not just us keeping them apart. It's everyone in Beszel and everyone in Ul Qoma. Every minute, every day. We're only the last ditch: it's everyone in the cities who does most of the work. It works because you don't blink. That's why unseeing and unsensing are so vital. No one can admit it doesn't work. So if you don't admit it, it does. (Miéville 310)

The pretense of power is what gives Breach all the power. It is impossible for the two cities to exist side-by-side and have no contact, yet the people pretend because Breach tells them to do so. Breach has so effectively conditioned the Besz and Ul Qomans into the false consciousness that Breach's power is absolute, and their purpose in separating the two cities becomes the ultimate guiding force over the two cities.

Breach is able to maintain this pretense because those who invoke Breach are never allowed to escape, at the risk that they will subvert Breach's control. Thus, Borlú is unable to return to Beszel; he ceases to exist as an investigator. At the close of the novel, Borlú announces to the reader that he has now become a part of Breach: "I sign off Tye, avatar of Breach, following my mentor on my probation out of Beszel and out of Ul Qoma. [ . . . ] I live in both the city and the city" (312). Borlú now has the freedom to pass between the two cities, but at the cost of giving up his entire identity and his relationships; he must now act as an avatar, constantly monitoring the citizens of both

cities to dole out punishment for those who breach and conditioning others to unsee and unhear, ensuring that Breach's position as the transcendental signified will be upheld.

### Assumptions

Despite the differences among the governing bodies of these three novels, connections can be made to reveal the implications of the use of language and religion in dystopian literature. When an organization or a person seeks to maintain absolute authority over a people group, then the freedom of those citizens must be limited, if not entirely abolished. To revoke liberty, the governmental body must quell resistance by controlling language, the best method that revolutionaries have to communicate with one another and resist the dominant ideology. Language can be controlled in a variety of ways: by censoring literature (often burning every book in the country), by constantly subjecting citizens to recordings that promote the ruling party, and by isolating language so as to eliminate any existence of heteroglossia.

Furthermore, because religion, as an Ideological State Apparatus, is such an integral part of culture, as people look to a deity for guidance in their lives, religious freedom must also be limited. If a government can infiltrate a religious body, then religion becomes a commodity and another way to spread the ideology of the ruling party to the people it is trying to control. Often, totalitarian regimes are able to overtake religion by corrupting the clergymen, such as Bishop Lilliman in *V for Vendetta* and Aaron in *The Knife of Never Letting Go*. Other times, as with Breach, the government becomes the institution that is worshipped instead of a traditional religious body.

**“*Vox Populi*”<sup>32</sup>:**

**Reclaiming Language to Deconstruct the Transcendental Signified**

When a government has possessed control of language, literature, religion, and other elements of culture, that government has all but ensured that the spread of their authoritative discourse will create a false consciousness in its people. In order to overthrow a fascist regime, a powerful dictator, or even an organization punishing those who commit a crime, citizens must be able to recognize that they are existing under a false consciousness, that they have accepted the hegemony of the ruling party. In order to resist and respond to this hegemony, one person (or a group of like-minded individuals) must recognize corruption and begin to question the government’s ultimate authority. Furthermore, citizens must recognize the importance of preserving cultural artifacts and history that the government seeks to oppress. Finally, in the face of unified language, the citizens must embrace heteroglossia and realize that the best method of revolution is to make their voices heard.

““He’s Taken Away the *Voice of Fate*””:

Reclamation of Language and Religion in *V for Vendetta*

Before the events of this novel occur, the protagonist V has already learned to resist the hegemony of Norsefire, the government ruling England in Moore and Lloyd’s dystopian society. He recognizes the corruption of society and actively fights against it. V understands that retaining elements of culture, including books, music, and art, as well as learning from historical events and personas, is the way to overthrow the dominant ideology of the ruling class. Furthermore, he also leads his protégé Evey through the

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<sup>32</sup>Latin for “voice of the people.” This is what Moore and Lloyd entitled chapter 1 of book 3 of *V for Vendetta* (188-194).

process of recognizing corruption to embracing heteroglossia and then provides silence so that the people of England may have a voice once more. Finally, both Evey and Eric Finch, leader of the “nose” of Norsefire, embrace an unconventional form of spirituality that allows them to throw off restraints of traditional religion, bringing freedom from the oppression of religion.

### **“It Sounds So [ . . . ] Alive”: Preserving Cultural Artifacts**

When V first brings Evey to the Shadow Gallery, the first room he brings her to is his storehouse: books line the many shelves, music plays from a juke-box, and art hangs suspended from the ceiling. Evey is surprised because all of these important aspects of culture had been censored or destroyed by Norsefire. This is the first she has seen of these books, including works by Shakespeare, Homer, Sir Walter Scott, and many other classic authors, and the first she has heard of actual music. She does not even remember the correct word for juke-box, calling it a “duke-box” and saying that the song (“Dancing in the Street” by Martha and the Vandellas) “sounds so . . . I dunno . . . alive!” (Moore and Lloyd 18).

The reader’s first glimpse of V’s collection, however, happens on the first page of the graphic novel and is highly indicative of V’s persona. His private collection exists in his personal space, not the public room to which he brings Evey. The movie posters that hang on the wall behind his vanity (*Son of Frankenstein* and *Murders in the Rue Morgue* as well as movies featuring Boris Karloff and James Cagney) reveal his monstrous and violent interests (Moore and Lloyd 9). Furthermore, the books on this smaller bookshelf are much more indicative of his revolutionary nature: Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, Marx’s *Das*

*Kapital*, More's *Utopia*, among others<sup>33</sup> (9). V has embraced heteroglossia; he has studied the ideologies of others and is inspired by them. He is an intertextual being, borrowing bits and pieces from history and literature, ensuring that those original elements remain true while blending them as he constructs his own identity. By embracing heteroglossia, V relies on the mystery of the traditional superhero by donning a cape and a mask; he calls upon the history of the revolutionary historical figure Guy Fawkes<sup>34</sup> in his appearance and his *modus operandi*; he quotes from Shakespeare, Yeats, and other authors when their words are applicable to his situation; and he merges all of these elements into a masterful theatrical performance that echoes a cabaret.

Annalisa di Liddo, in her analysis of Alan Moore's work, recognizes the writer's use of heteroglossia in integrating the many literary quotations in his text; she defines heteroglossia as "deliberately diverse narrative forms that are open to the multiplication of interpretive levels, where self-reflexivity and intertextuality do not deprive the past of its possible significances and do not disconnect it from the author's context" (62). Certainly, while Moore is a master of using these intertextual allusions in the way that Bakhtin recognizes as heteroglossia, di Liddo never actual delves into the reason that Moore created such a heterglot, intertextual universe: as a way for the character of V to resist the unitary language that Norsefire uses to indoctrinate the English citizens and a way to embrace revolution. In retaining the history and culture that Norsefire seeks to repress, V successfully reveals his hatred of Norsefire and his desire to overthrow that government.

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<sup>33</sup>For a (mostly) complete list of the literary, historic, and artistic allusions in *V for Vendetta*, see Madelyn Boudreaux's annotated list.

<sup>34</sup>The narrative begins on November 5, 1997, a date that is traditionally celebrated in England as Guy Fawkes Day. Guy Fawkes was part of an unsuccessful plot to blow up the Parliament building on November 5, 1605, and he was sentenced to death by hanging. V's plan to blow up Parliament is successful, however, and he wears the Guy Fawkes mask as a disguise.

### **“The Very Last Inch of Us”: Personal History as Revolutionary**

Norsefire does not just suppress the words, music, and art that are relics of history; they also, in their oppression, silence those groups of people whose lifestyles do not conform to the ideal of English society: the white, male heterosexual. V recognizes the silencing that occurs, and he seeks to retain some examples of personal history. Through the story of a woman named “Valerie,” V engineers Evey’s freedom from her false consciousness. Further, through the diary of the doctor who treated him at Larkhill, V releases part of his own story to the public so that the investigators will understand the violent oppression of those imprisoned by Norsefire.

The story of Valerie is an integral part of V’s imprisonment of Evey. After Evey’s attempt to murder the man who killed her lover Gordon, V, unknown to Evey at this point, brings her back to the Shadow Gallery under the pretense of having arrested her for her connection to V. He locks her in a solitary cell, interrogates her about her relationship to V, and shaves her head. Evey truly believes she has been imprisoned by Norsefire, and the only thing that sustains her is a letter, written in pencil on toilet paper, from another prisoner named Valerie. Evey explains the importance of this letter: “I know there’s a woman who wrote me a letter on toilet paper. I know she’s alone. I know that she loves me. I don’t know what she looks like. I read her letter, I hide it, I sleep, I wake, they question me, I cry, it gets dark, it gets light, I read her letter again . . . over and over” (Moore and Lloyd 155). Valerie’s story explains that she is a lesbian who had been a successful actress. When the war began, Norsefire “started rounding up the gays,” and Valerie’s lover gave the authorities her name, then committed suicide because of her betrayal (159). Valerie has retained her integrity even in the face of torture and abuse,



and she writes, “I shall die here. Every inch of me shall perish . . . except one” (159).

The “inch” to which Valerie refers is her own story, which she can tell Evey through her letter. Valerie never allows the ruling party to take away her love for her lover Ruth, and she retains her hope “that the world turns and that things get better, and that one day people have roses<sup>35</sup> again” (160).

Valerie’s story inspires Evey to fight back against those who have imprisoned her, as well. The chapter of Valerie’s story closes with Evey’s echo of Valerie’s words: “I know every inch of this cell. This cell knows every inch of me. Except one” (Moore and Lloyd 160). Evey is soon brought out of her cell, and the prison guards read a confession they have written for her, admitting that she was abducted by V, who tortured her and convinced her to kill for him. The end of the confession states, “I, the undersigned, swear that the above statement is genuine, and that it was not signed by means of intimidation” (161). The guard immediately commands Evey, “We’d like for you to sign that for us, Miss Hammond. Where we’ve put the little cross” (161). Evey refuses, recognizing that she is indeed being coerced to lie about her relationship with V. Even when the interrogator commands the guard to “take [Evey] out behind the chemical sheds and shoot her,” Evey is silent (161). She understands that to sign her name to the confession is to allow her tormenters to control her identity. One’s own name, as discussed in chapter 2, is more than just words on a page; Evey’s name is representative of her identity, and she refuses to let herself be defined by Norsefire. Refusing to give her name is the first, very important method of her resistance. Without Valerie’s story, without the inspiration of someone else who was also imprisoned and tortured, Evey may never have found the courage to resist.

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<sup>35</sup>The rose is a significant symbol in the novel: V leaves one at every crime scene. See Boudreaux.

Another personal story that is vital to V's resistance is the diary of Dr. Delia Surridge, who oversaw the medical experiments at Larkhill. Dr. Surridge is one of V's final victims, and investigators find her journal in her bedroom. Within, investigators read her reports of V's time at the concentration camp, and this is where they discover most of the information about their suspect. They also recognize that V intentionally left the journal, even going so far as to censor the entries to control his own story: "He wanted us to know the story. But . . . and here's a funny thing . . . he didn't want us to know *all* of it. When we found the diary, some of the pages had been torn out. It wasn't Dr. Surridge who did that. What was on the missing pages, eh? His name? His age? Whether he was Jewish, or homosexual, or black or white?" (Moore and Lloyd 85). Just as V used Valerie's story to influence Evey, so he uses his own story, in the voice of Dr. Surridge, to construct his identity for the investigators who know so little about him.

Furthermore, by censoring all identifying markers, V controls the language being used to identify him; this is part of his resistance. Although both of these written documents have different functions in the narrative, both reveal that V understands the importance of individual stories in a revolution against a governmental regime. Because the government attempted to annihilate those citizens who did not fit the mold of their ideal society, each personal resistance can be powerful in the face of unified power. Each story—Valerie's refusal to renounce her sexuality, V's desire to bring anarchy to a fascist society, and countless others—is one weapon against Norsefire. V hopes to bring all these voices together in his effort to overthrow Norsefire; by doing so, his use of heteroglossia opposes Norsefire's unitary language.

### **“I Just Showed You the Bars’’: V as Engineer of Evey’s Resistance**

Both Valerie’s story and V’s story contained in the doctor’s diary are examples of ways that V used written accounts to construct his revolution. While V’s leaving the diary behind for investigators to find was a way to influence his public façade, Valerie’s story plays a pivotal role in his construction of a partner to help lead his resistance. Much of V’s actions, in fact, directly relate to allowing Evey to recognize the false consciousness under which she lives and to begin to embrace a different ideology.

From Evey’s first encounter with V, his work to re-train Evey has already begun. When he saves her from the fingermen and then brings her with him to witness his blowing up of the Parliament building, V intends to reveal the corruption of society to Evey. This is the first step in her resistance. By presenting himself as an opposition to the men who would have attacked her, V becomes Evey’s hero and, thus, holds a great influence over her. As previously mentioned, however, her true resistance begins when she refuses to sign her name.

From that point forward, her resistance continues. When the guard comes to escort her to her certain death, he offers her a chance to change her mind, saying that she would be out of prison in just a few years and could most likely work with the “finger,” the police unit of Norsefire. Evey declares that she would “rather die behind the chemical sheds” (Moore and Lloyd 162). The guard then inexplicably responds, “Then, there’s nothing left to threaten with, is there? You are free” (162). Evey, confused, follows a series of hallways and walks through a door into the Shadow Gallery. Unbeknownst to Evey, her torture and imprisonment was engineered not by Norsefire, but by V. She is horrified and demands to know why; V responds, “Because I love you.

Because I want to set you free” (167). What follows is a painful argument in which V declares that Evey, although she was happy with her parents and with Gordon, was already imprisoned by society. V explains, “I just showed you the bars” (170).

Through a summary of Evey’s history—her mother’s death, her father’s arrest, her lover’s murder—V seeks to show Evey that all the choices others made were the results of their imprisonment. He calls Evey to reject that same fate, convincing her that his torture was intended to reveal her strength, her desire to fight, and tells her, “The door of the cage is open, Evey. All that you feel is the wind from outside. Don’t be afraid” (Moore and Lloyd 171). While seeming like a horrific method for bringing about change, V’s treatment of Evey is perhaps the only way of revealing her true strength, as Jordana Greenblatt notes in her discussion of the role of the sidekick. Greenblatt asserts, “For Moore, the innocent child in need of protection [Evey] can never serve as a functional basis for social renewal. Rather, her comfort functions as a conservative<sup>36</sup> influence and, at the same time, influences her to be conservative. If she is comfortable, she will not grow, she will not change, and everything will stagnate” (par. 9). This stagnation, this complacency, is what allows Evey to exist in a false consciousness initially. V’s imprisonment and torture of Evey is the shock that she needs to jolt her into an awareness of the dangers of remaining complacent.

His treatment of her is effective, and his construction is complete; Evey finally stands, no longer weeping, and declares, “I don’t want . . . to be blindfolded” (171). She has finally shed the false consciousness of the society in which she lives, and she has embraced another ideology. V used many tools to engineer this moment: his storehouse

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<sup>36</sup>“Conservative” here could hold a dual purpose: the traditional denotation of the word and the reference to Conservative politics in England, which Moore strongly opposed.

of literature, individual stories of resistance, Evey's own history and identity. Without an understanding of the power of language and story, both in oppression and resistance, V may never have been able to release Evey from her societal imprisonment.

### **“Bolucs”: Silencing Fate and Giving Voice to the People**

After V has gained a partner in Evey, his plan continues to free the rest of London from the confines of Norsefire. In order to do so, he must bring down Fate, the supercomputer that controls the media and imbeds a false consciousness in the people. On November 5, 1998, a year after destroying the Parliament building, V also sets off a series of explosions that destroys Jordon Tower and the Old Post Office Tower, completely eliminating the offices that house the eye and the ear, the two surveillance divisions of Norsefire. Amidst the chaos, V begins a previously recorded transmission:

Good evening, London. This is the Voice of Fate. Almost four hundred years ago tonight, a great citizen<sup>37</sup> made a most significant contribution to our common culture. It was a contribution forged in stealth and silence and secrecy, although it is best remembered in noise and bright light. To commemorate this most glorious of evenings, Her Majesty's government is pleased to return the rights of secrecy and privacy to you, its loyal subjects. For three days, your movement will not be watched . . . your conversations will not be listened to . . . and “*do what thou wilt*”<sup>38</sup> shall be the whole of the law. God bless you . . . and goodnight. (Moore and Lloyd 186-187).

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<sup>37</sup>A reference to Guy Fawkes and the Gunpowder Plot.

<sup>38</sup>A reference to the “Law of Thelema” of Aleister Crowley, a magician and occultist from the late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Boudreax notes, “Although some interpret the law as allowing pure anarchy, it may actually mean that ‘one must do what one must and nothing else’” (qtd. in Boudreax n.p.).

Here, V is actually foreshadowing the fall of Norsefire. By claiming he is the “Voice of Fate,” he deconstructs Fate’s identity by spreading an ideology that opposes the hegemony of Norsefire. Furthermore, in this speech, V is providing silence so that the voice of the people may be heard. He is promoting anarchy as a better alternative to the fascism of Norsefire. The next day, one young girl takes advantage of the silence. This unnamed girl stops beneath one of the cameras that V has shut down. She peers up at the camera, says, ““Bollocks,”” then digs around in her bag, finally pulling out a can of spray paint (Moore and Lloyd 188-189). On the street below the camera, she begins to paint while saying, ““Bollocks Mr. *Susan*. Bollocks *Fate* . . . bollocks our *dad*, bollocks Miss *Platt* at the *school* . . . bollocks, bollocks, *bollocks!*”” (189). In the last frame of the page, the girl rides her bicycle away, and the reader can finally see what the girl has painted: the word “BOLUCS” on the street and an encircled V on the brick wall (189). Here is the freedom for which V has so desperately been striving, that a girl can express her frustration with the society in which she lives and with all the authority figures therein. In her freedom, she can even misspell the word without fear of repercussion because, since the cameras are shut down, no one witnessed her act of rebellion. She also claims V’s sign for her own, revealing once more that he is far more than an individual; he is an ideology.

### **“Become Transfixed . . . Become Transfigured”: Unconventional Spirituality**

Beyond taking back control of the language in society, V also advocates the shunning of the traditional religion that has become corrupt in England. For V, the acceptance of freedom is accompanied by a spiritual experience, and he leads Evey to one similar to his own. After the conversation in which V convinces Evey that she has

been imprisoned by society and must accept the freedom that he offers, he escorts her to the roof during a rainstorm. She stands naked in the rain and declares, “‘Everything’s so . . . different,” to which he responds, “‘Five years ago, I too came through a night like this, naked under a roaring sky’” (Moore and Lloyd 172). He spurs her on toward freedom, commanding, “‘This night is yours. Seize it. Encircle it within your arms. Bury it in your heart up to the hilt . . . become transfixed . . . become transfigured . . . forever’” (172).

This idea of becoming transfixed or transfigured is a Christian idea. Three of the four biblical Gospels<sup>39</sup> tell of Jesus taking three of his disciples to a mountain, where the Transfiguration takes place: “And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light” (Matthew 17:2). The word transfiguration derives from the Greek word that means “to transform” (Scharlemann 886). Evey’s experience mirrors that of the Christ: she is atop a high place, emitting an ethereal glow, and transforming; however, her transfiguration is not a conventionally religious one, but a personal shedding of false consciousness. For V and Evey, throwing off the restraints of society and embracing a new ideology, a new freedom, involves a new kind of spirituality, one that the government cannot infiltrate.

Eric Finch, the lead investigator of V’s crimes, experiences his own religious transformation when he visits Larkhill. Having declared that he could not understand V until he got inside his head, Finch takes four tablets of LSD<sup>40</sup> in an effort to replicate V’s own experience at Larkhill. Finch hallucinates, seeing the people whom Norsefire killed and regretting his part in their deaths; he also recalls memories of Delia, with whom he

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<sup>39</sup>The accounts of Jesus’ Transfiguration occur in Matthew 17, Mark 9, and Luke 9.

<sup>40</sup>According to Boudreaux, this was 4 to 8 times the amount he should have taken, which explains the intensity of his trip (n.p.).

had an affair, and images of V's room at Larkhill. Finally, he comes to a realization similar to what V and Evey have already had. In his hallucination, Finch notes, "But *he* [V] was drugged too, locked away to die, and *he* reached some *understanding*. Why can't I? I look at this mad pattern, but where are the answers? Who *imprisoned* me here? Who *keeps me here*? Who can *release* me? Who's controlling and constraining my life, except . . . *me*?" (Moore and Lloyd 215). Finch has now realized that he has imprisoned himself in his hallucination, in the job that he hates, in his total belief of the fascist ideology of Norsefire. Here, Finch is able to overcome his own false consciousness and accept freedom.

Then, just as Evey did on the rooftop, Finch strips off his clothes, a physical symbol of his newly unconstrained mind. He climbs a hill, elevating himself just as Evey does during her own transfiguration. In his hallucination, this hill leads to Stonehenge, that mysterious, pagan structure, representative of his embrace of unconventional spirituality and his shunning of traditional Christianity. While doing so, his mental narration invokes the words, "*La voie . . . la vérité . . . la vie*,"<sup>41</sup> French for "the way, the truth, the life"<sup>42</sup> (216). By claiming the words of Jesus as his own, Finch is resisting the constraints of Christianity and negating his need for an external savior. Like V and Evey before him, he finds this freedom from oppression within himself and not from any religious deity.

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<sup>41</sup>I am certain that Moore chose to use the French translation for no other reason than that all the words began with the letter "V." Throughout the text, Moore names every chapter and book title with a word or phrase beginning with V, which is effective in revealing the power of V's ideology.

<sup>42</sup>These words of Jesus appear in John 14:6: "Jesus said to him [Thomas], 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'" These words inform the Christian doctrine that only through Christ's sacrifice can one receive salvation.



“A Book in One Hand, and a Knife in the Other”<sup>43</sup>:

Reclaiming Language in *The Knife of Never Letting Go*

Whereas V’s attempt to overthrow the government is a carefully planned and orchestrated series of events, Todd and Viola’s resistance to Mayor Prentiss is more of a reaction against oppression than any premeditated revolution. Nonetheless, the protagonists of *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, as well as its sequels, must follow a similar process of embracing heteroglossia to resist the unitary language of Mayor Prentiss. First, Todd and Viola, with the help of other citizens of New World, must recognize the corruption of Prentisstown and learn the truth of Prentiss’s rule. One vital method to this recognition is through the embrace of history and cultural artifacts, particularly Todd’s mother’s journal. Finally, they must recognize that embracing heteroglossia involves joining forces with a group of female revolutionaries known as “The Answer” as well as the indigenous people of New World, called the “Spackle.” Additionally, in the final book of the trilogy, one character in particular becomes the true embodiment of heteroglossia.

**“I Think I’m Finally *Understanding* the Story”<sup>44</sup>: Recognizing Corruption**

Todd, as the last boy in Prentisstown, and Viola, the newcomer, may just be the only two people on the planet who do not know the true story of Prentisstown. The ritual to become a man involves learning the truth about the village: that the Noise germ is not what killed the women, but that Prentiss and his men murdered the women because they

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<sup>43</sup>Throughout *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, Todd often sees an image of himself like this one, sometimes taunting, sometimes encouraging. This phrase aptly describes Todd throughout most of the novel: holding onto his mother’s words and his physical weapon against Aaron (Ness, *Knife*, 330). Here is a physical representation of Althusser’s notion that a government can possess both repressive and ideological state apparatuses. Todd has a weapon to fight both the violence and the ideology of the state.

<sup>44</sup>Viola’s words to Todd. She recognizes from the first time she meets him that he is different from Aaron and is not planning to kill her. She also realizes that Aaron is not chasing her but Todd because “[Todd has] an army who wants to *make* [him] a killer” (Ness 265).

were threatened by the silence. Todd has been sheltered from this truth in order to protect him. Ben and Cillian, Todd's adoptive parents, kept the secret, too. When Ben and Cillian force Todd to flee Prentisstown, Ben tells Todd, "'We promised [your mother we would] keep you safe. [ . . . ] We promised her and then we had to put it outta our minds so there was nothing in our Noise, nothing that would let anyone know what we were gonna do'" (Ness 50). Ben and Cillian always intended to force Todd to leave Prentisstown before the ceremony that would make him a man, but they had to pretend to follow the tradition of Prentisstown to keep Todd safe.

Ben and Cillian's resistance is subtle, but necessary. Todd, as a young boy, could never have grasped the truth about Mayor Prentiss and his army of men. Ben and Cillian had to bide their time and care for Todd while he grew up. However, when the time comes for Todd to leave, Ben, through his Noise, shows Todd the secrets of Prentisstown: "What the other boys did who became men— All alone— All by themselves— How every last bit of boyhood is killed off—" (Ness 52). Ben and Cillian provide Todd with the tools that he needs to understand the corruption of Prentisstown and to begin to resist. Todd's false consciousness is dispersing, and he can begin his journey to discover truth and fight Prentiss's domination.

### **"My Ma's Own Book"<sup>45</sup>: Preserving Cultural Artifacts**

As mentioned in the last chapter, Mayor Prentiss burned all the books in the town; however, Ben and Cillian managed to hold onto one: Todd's mother's journal, in which she wrote from the day of Todd's birth to the day she died (Ness 50). Inside the journal is a map of New World, and although Todd does not read well, he and Viola determine that Todd is to warn the other cities about the Prentisstown army. Todd's mother's journal is

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<sup>45</sup>Todd's narration when Ben first gives him his mother's journal (Ness, *Knife*, 50).

more than just a map and a warning, however. His mother chronicled the first days of Todd's life, and Todd is reminded of his mother's love for him, as well as her hope for his life: "[T]here's so much wonder to be had, so much just waiting for you, Todd, that I almost can't stand that it's not happening for you *right now*, that yer going to have to wait to see all that's possible, all the things you might do" (Ness 416). Just as with Valerie's story for Evey in *V for Vendetta*, Todd's mother's journal becomes a force that sustains him. His mother's hope becomes his hope and Viola's hope, even in the face of so much oppression. The next day, as Todd and Viola approach Haven, they recognize the persistence of hope:

I see Viola looking back at me as we run and there's brightness on her face and she keeps urging me on with tilts of her head and smiles and I think how hope may be the thing that pulls you forward, may be the thing that keeps you going, but that it's dangerous, too, that it's painful and risky, that it's making a dare to the world and when has the world ever let us win a dare? (Ness 423)

Even though Todd's mother was killed by the men of Prentisstown, her words live on to encourage her son and Viola, even as those same men hunt the two children. Words are powerful and sustaining, and Todd holds onto his mother's words even in the chaos of the Noise of men who want to control him.

### **“You Can Open Yourself Up to It Completely”: Embracing Heteroglossia**

Ness creates a sense of heteroglossia within his novels quite differently than Moore does in *V for Vendetta*. Noise, the constant intersection of every man's thoughts, is inherently heteroglot, layering myriad languages from varying sources into one reality.

As previously discussed, Mayor Prentiss, through utter control of Noise, seeks to transform Noise into a unitary language that can be used as a weapon to control others. However, Todd consistently stands in opposition to Mayor Prentiss, recognizing the benefits of such a heteroglot language. In the final book of the trilogy, *Monsters of Men*, Todd and Prentiss converse about Noise:

“This planet is information,” the Mayor says. “All the time, never-ceasing. Information it wants to give you, information it wants to take from you to share with everyone else. And I think you can respond to that in two ways. You can control how much you give it, as you and I have done in shutting off our Noise—”

“Or you can open yourself up to it completely,” [Todd says]. (Ness 463-464).

When Todd references opening up oneself to the Noise, he means learning to communicate with the indigenous people of New World; to the colonizers, these people are known as Spackle, but the Spackle refer to themselves as “the Land” (Ness, *Monsters*, 78). The Land have been able to embrace their heteroglot language, which expands further when the colonizers arrive on New World and experience Noise for the first time. Prentiss has sought to separate himself and his army from the Land and achieve his own unitary language, but Todd and others learn to communicate with the Land in an effort to resist Prentiss.

In this way, Ness embraces heteroglossia in his writing. One of the fascinating aspects of these novels is Ness’s mastery of language within all three novels. In the first novel, Todd’s voice, with the rare exception of others’ Noise interrupting, is the only

voice the reader experiences. From the first sentence, the reader is thrust into Todd's world because his voice is so strong and so indicative of the chaotic world in which he lives: "The first thing you find out when yer dog learns to talk is that dogs don't got nothing much to say" (Ness, *Knife*, 3). Todd's dialect, the double negative, and the poor syntax reveal Todd's lack of education in a village where all the books have been burned and knowledge has been feared. Furthermore, Ness also misspells words, generally those that end in *-tion*; thus, *information* becomes *informayshun* (391). Ness also uses sentence fragments and run-on sentences effectively to create a heightened sense of urgency and to reveal Todd's inner turmoil.

In the second book, Todd's voice is joined by Viola's, and the narrative switches back and forth between the two protagonists. When the second book, *The Ask and the Answer* begins, Todd and Viola are separated; Todd is imprisoned by Prentiss and is put to work, and Viola, injured from the final fight with Aaron in *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, is taken to a clinic run by a nurse named Mistress Coyle, who leads a revolutionary group of women called "the Answer." The reader is, thus, able to experience more of the circumstances of New Prentisstown because two different perspectives are presented.

Finally, a new voice is added in the final book, *Monsters of Men*. In *The Ask and the Answer*, Mayor Prentiss puts Todd and Prentiss's son Davy in charge of identifying all of the Spackle, the native species of New World, by applying a metal band stamped with a number to the Spackle's arms. One Spackle in particular, number 1017, fights back against Todd; he is also the only one to survive when the Answer sends a bomb that blows up the building in which the Spackle are held. He finally joins forces with the rest

of the Spackle, who call him “the Return,” and his voice joins Todd’s and Viola’s in the narrative of *Monsters of Men*.

One additional character in the series truly becomes the embodiment of heteroglossia, however. Ben, Todd’s adoptive father, was shot by Davy Prentiss and taken by the Spackle, who heal him. When he returns to New Prentisstown in *Monsters of Men*, he is changed; he explains, ““The Spackle speak the voice of this planet. They live within it. And now, because of how long I was immersed in that voice, I do, too. I’ve connected with them”” (Ness 452). Ben later describes himself as ““the conduit between the settlers and the Land”” (590). Ben, the human, no longer speaks audibly; his Noise is clear and steady, “surrounding” Todd and the others in a way that is unique to the Spackle (449). Ben is the one to keep the peace between the remaining settlers and the Spackle when the war between Prentiss’s army, the Answer, and the Spackle is over. Furthermore, while the reader experiences heteroglossia because of experiencing Todd, Viola, and 1017’s individual voices, Ben actually lives out heteroglossia because of the merging of different voices within one individual who will maintain peace because of the way he embraces the multitude of languages and cultures.

““They’re Trying to Merge Us””:

#### Resisting Breach in *The City & the City*

In the two previous texts that have been discussed, the protagonists have been successful in their attempts to overthrow the transcendental signified of society. V manages to cripple Norsefire and Fate, and his ideology lives on when Eve wears the mask. At the end of the *Chaos Walking* trilogy, Mayor Prentiss chooses to end his life rather than continue fighting the resistance against him, and Todd, Viola, Ben, and the

others are able to begin a peaceful existence with human settlers and the native Spackle on New World. In *The City & the City*, however, Breach maintains control at the end of the novel, even bringing Inspector Borlú into its ranks, asserting once more the all-encompassing control it holds over the two cities. Although the resistance was quelled, several characters seek to embrace heteroglossia in an effort to bring the two cities together: Mahalia Geary, the murder victim; Dr. David Bowden, author of a book on the alleged third city Orciny; and groups of “unifs,” short for “unificationists.”

### **Mahalia Geary**

In his investigation of Geary’s death, Borlú discovers that, although she was a doctoral student in archaeology, Geary was secretly researching the existence of a third city called Orciny, rumored to exist between Beszel and Ul Qoma. The genesis of Geary’s interest in Orciny was her reading Dr. David Bowden’s book *Between the City & the City*, in which he sought to prove that Orciny exists in the *dissensi*, spaces that are not in either city but which each city believes exists in the other. Bowden’s book had been banned in both cities, and his career has suffered for his claims; however, Geary hoped to bring Bowden’s theory to the forefront of scholarly research, so she covertly placed a copy of Bowden’s book, with her annotations, in the library at Ul Qoma University, where she studied.

After Borlú breaches by killing a man in another city, an avatar of Breach who is assigned to Borlú takes him to retrieve Geary’s copy of the banned text. When he opens the copy of the book, they find “[i]nk flickers, most pages annotated in tiny scrawl: red, black, and blue. Mahalia had written in an extra-fine nib, and her notes were like tangled hair, years of annotations of the occult thesis” (Miéville 255). Borlú and the other

investigators assume that Geary believed in the existence of Orciny and had set out to prove it to the two cities; however, when Borlú actually reads through her annotations, he discovers “years of opinions set together. [Borlú] had been trying to be an archaeologist of her marginalia, separating the striae. Now [he] read each page out of time, no chronology, arguing with itself” (266). Instead of finding proof of Orciny, Borlú finds the evolution of Geary’s thoughts: she refused to stop at believing Bowden’s theories alone. Instead, she continued researching other theorists’ ideas of Orciny, finally determining that the city did not exist and was Bowden’s fabrication. In this way, Geary embraces heteroglossia, merges others’ ideas with her own, to shed her false consciousness, her unwavering belief in Orciny as yet another all-powerful entity existing outside of Beszel and Ul Qoma.

### **Dr. David Bowden**

As part of Dr. Bowden’s research on Orciny, he investigates the time before the two cities split apart, a time known as the Precursor Age. After Geary’s death and the disappearance of another student named Yolanda Rodriguez, Bowden also fears for his own safety, especially since he has received threatening messages. One note, a single-word, Precursor warning is “[l]ike a skull-and-crossbones. A word that *is* a warning” (Miéville 217). At the end of his investigation, Borlu determines that the threats against Bowden were a hoax as he was actually Geary’s murderer and the engineer of a series of events designed to convince others of the existence of Orciny, events that led to a lockdown of Breach for thirty-six hours.

During the lockdown, Bowden leaves Copula Hall and walks along crosshatched streets, not breaching but never entering or leaving Beszel or Ul Qoma. His years of



scholarly research and his position as an outsider have permitted him to embrace heteroglossia. He, like Breach, can move within either city without being detected. Breach explains, “[Bowden has] been a student of the cities,’ Ashil [the avatar of Breach] said. ‘Maybe it took an outsider to really see how citizens mark themselves, so as to walk between it’” (Miéville 308). Unlike the Besz and Ul Qomans, Bowden was never conditioned fully to unsee or unsense the other city. As a scholar, his research allowed him to immerse himself in the culture of each city and to understand how to navigate between the two. He understands the language of each, as well as the Precursor language, and he understands how to avoid Breach and the power it holds over both cities.

### **Unificationists**

The first true suspects into Geary’s death are a group of unificationists who seek to merge the two cities, away from the power of Breach. As Geary investigated the existence of Orciny, she asked questions of both the Beszel and Ul Qoman unification groups. Although not directly involved in her murder, the unificationists are part of Bowden’s plot to make Orciny known. After Borlú breaches, and he and Ashil begin investigating Bowden, the unificationists stage a bus accident on a crosshatched street, causing Breach to lock down the two cities and allowing Bowden to escape his apartment and an American businessman named Buric to escape Beszel. During the lockdown, the unificationists make their resistance to Breach known. Ashil, the avatar, says to Borlú, “[The unifs] are working in concert. We don’t even know if it was the Besz unifs who stopped the buses.’ [ . . . ] [T]hose little bands of eager utopians could do this? Could

untether this breakdown, could make this happen?<sup>46</sup> ‘They’re everywhere in both cities. This is their insurrection. They’re trying to merge us’” (Miéville 276).

The unifs’ method to bringing unity in the cities is through merging the languages. Whereas Breach hopes to keep the Besz and Illitan languages isolated so as to maintain separation of the two cities, the unifs actually combine the two languages, writing messages in graffiti during the Breach lockdown. Borlu describes the unifs:

It was shocking to me even then after days of interstitial life to see them running together, from both chapters, in clothes which despite their transnational punk-and-rocker jackets and patches clearly marked them, to those attuned to urban semiotics, as from, whatever their desire, *either* Beszel *or* Ul Qoma. Now they were grouped as one, dragging a grassroots breach with them as they went from wall to wall painting slogans in a rather artful combine of Besz and Illitan, words that, perfectly legible if somewhat filigreed and seriffed, read TOGETHER! UNITY! in both languages. (Miéville 279).

This heteroglossia, this merging of two previously unitary and divided languages, is what the unifs believe to be the tool to overcoming Breach. If the two cities can recognize that Breach has no power, that the power is conditioned into them, then the resistance has the potential to be successful. Like Bowden, the unifs are able to move between the two cities (although they actually commit breach while doing so) by wearing clothes that will blend in with either city. Just as Bowden could walk the streets and have no one recognize which city he actually walked through, these unifs can fool those citizens who are so enslaved to Breach that they fear breaching themselves.

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<sup>46</sup>The unquoted sentences in this passage are the thoughts of Borlú, as narrator.

Unfortunately, Bowden and the unifs' revolution is unsuccessful. Breach is too powerful, too present, within the two cities for unification to happen. Breach, as the transcendental signified, has retained this control for so long that it is ingrained in the false consciousness of most of the citizens. Borlú re-enters Breach, dragging Bowden with him; Bowden is "taken care of," according to Ashil, and is never heard from again, and Borlú becomes "Tye, avatar of Breach" (Miéville 308, 312). Breach retains its position as the transcendental signified over Beszel and Ul Qoma.

### Assumptions

Whether a revolution is successful, as in *V for Vendetta* and the *Chaos Walking* trilogy, or unsuccessful, as in *The City & the City*, language, literature, and culture are vital instruments of any resistance against a powerful governing body. When a government seeks to repress literature, the protagonists must understand the value of such an oppressed medium and seek knowledge from the subversive material. Furthermore, resisters must retain their own control of language against the totalitarian regime; they must recognize that control of language, through propaganda, Noise, or the separation of languages, is the method by which the transcendental signified retains its power, and they must rise up against that force by reclaiming language for their own purposes. Finally, they must reclaim language through heteroglossia, by integrating others' ideas, words, and voices into constructing their own ideology that can overcome oppression and resist those who oppress.

Furthermore, the role of religion may become muddled when revolution occurs. When one recognizes the corruption of a traditional branch of religion, such as the perversion of Christianity in *V for Vendetta*, one may choose an alternate version of

spirituality, as Evey and Finch do. However, in other scenarios, one may simply choose not to worship a religious institution at all. In *The Knife of Never Letting Go* and *The City & the City*, vestiges of religious institutions remain in the language of a people group; however, one can just as easily choose to worship nothing instead of supplanting one spirituality with another. This absence of religious fervor can be just as powerful and important as worship of a deity.

This process of resistance against the corruption of language and religion is vital in dystopian fiction; however, an inherent danger lies within. When a transcendental signified is deconstructed, the natural human response is to replace it with another; this is Derrida's metaphysics of presence, when a person continually seeks a transcendental signified. This danger is particularly prevalent in *V for Vendetta*. V promotes anarchy, a lack of centralized government, and he exists primarily as an ideology. However, for citizens seeking change and revolution and a new transcendental signified, the figure of V—not the *idea* of V—has potential to become worshipped and, thus, the potential to become as corrupted as the previous regime. For example, V leads Evey through the process of resisting her false consciousness under Norsefire; however, she replaces her ideology with V's anarchist tendencies, merely supplanting one ideology with another's. Anarchy is not the only response to fascism, but V does not allow Evey to explore other options, and she does not seem to seek them out on her own, either. Revolution has the potential to replace one's false consciousness and deconstruct a transcendental signified, only to have another consciousness and another entity rise up to replace those that have been overcome and overthrown.

## Conclusion

Although over sixty years has passed since the publication of Orwell's *1984*, and even more since Huxley's *Brave New World*, dystopian literature remains a vital genre of fiction that serves as social commentary. In fact, these two novels, because of their long-standing regard, inform much of contemporary dystopian fiction. Sisk asserts, "Dystopian writers since 1949 have been forced to locate their works, more or less explicitly, on a spectrum between the archetypes presented by Huxley and Orwell" (38). As mentioned in chapter 3, current dystopian literature often reflects the various ways that Huxley and Orwell created totalitarian governmental regimes through conditioning of its residents or oppression through control of the written word. Much research has been done on those two novels in regards to the importance of language as both an oppressive tool and as a tool for resistance, and those roles of language are clearly observable in contemporary works of dystopian literature, as well. Further, religion plays an important function in society as an Ideological State Apparatus that can be controlled by a totalitarian government that seeks to assert its dominant ideology upon all citizens.

The importance of language to a governmental regime and a people group is obvious: language, whether written, oral, or mental, is the primary method of communication in any society. In all these examples of dystopian literature, as well, written language can be a subversive way of both overcoming one's false consciousness and leaving behind a record of one's life. Just as Winston's private journal in *1984* provided a way for the reader to understand his process of resisting Big Brother, so do journals and other written artifacts become important in contemporary texts. Valerie's story, Todd's mother's journal, and Mahalia Geary's annotated marginalia in a banned

book allow those writers' voices to remain even after their deaths, and those words continue to aid the resistance against an oppressive ruling party.

The role of religion is just as important. As a system of beliefs that informs one's everyday life, religious institutions are easily taken over and corrupted by a governing body that seeks to become the transcendental signified, the entity by which a person or people group bases every aspect of life. Furthermore, religion becomes important to dystopian literature specifically because of varying religions' concerns with the end of the world. Just as every religion has a story of how the world came to be created, religions also address the after-life. Dystopian literature often reveals the after-life of a culture after the fall of society, and writers may reflect this connection to religion through echoes of stories and names that are significant to religions, including Christianity. When a character is named Eve or Aaron, for example, understanding the reference to that biblical counterpart lends a deeper understanding of a character. Furthermore, because religion can be so influential on a people group, governments often seek to replace religion as the entity to be worshipped; thus, characters must either embrace a new kind of spirituality, as in *V for Vendetta*, or simply choose not to engage in worship of the new transcendental signified in an effort to overthrow society, as in *The Knife of Never Letting Go* and *The City & the City*.

#### Relevance of Contemporary Dystopian Literature

Because dystopian fiction provides distance to function as commentary on contemporary society, one must understand the relevance of each individual dystopian text. Although *V for Vendetta* was written as a warning against Margaret Thatcher's brand of Conservatism in Britain in the early 1980s, Moore and Lloyd's graphic novel

has recently proven to be highly relevant to contemporary political movements. In 2011, a movement that began as Occupy Wall Street spread to other cities around the world, and often, protestors wore Guy Fawkes masks in homage to the character V. Furthermore, a hacking group called Anonymous adopted the mask as a symbol of their movement to promote a de-centralized online community. Sam Jordison notes other similarities to *V for Vendetta*:

[Anonymous'] videos, for a start, seem to replicate V's speech patterns—not to mention the staging used for similar transmissions in the book and the film. The many-headed nature of Anonymous—where the end result is more important than the individual bringing it about—also chimes with the denouement of *V for Vendetta*, as does their apparent desire to change world institutions by spreading a little well-aimed chaos and fear. (n.p.)

More than thirty years after Moore and Lloyd began writing *V for Vendetta* as a response to a political climate that they feared, contemporary protesters looking to enact social change have reclaimed the Guy Fawkes mask as symbolic of their own method of resistance, and Moore himself is pleased with the impact his work has made (Jordison n.p.).

The more recent dystopian texts are also highly relevant to contemporary society. Patrick Ness's *Chaos Walking* trilogy is part of the booming trend of young adult literature that addresses dystopian themes. A passage from *The Knife of Never Letting Go* reveals the book's main theme: ““That's what New World is. Informayshun, all the time, never stopping, whether you want it or not. [ . . . ] [T]oo much informayshun can drive a

man mad. Too much information becomes just Noise. And it never, never stops” (Ness 391). Ness himself addresses his inspiration for the book:

The serious idea is about information overload. About how the world is already a really noisy place. You can’t go anywhere without being forced to listen to someone on their mobile phone or your phone going off with texts or people trying to get your attention on the internet, and I thought, “Well, what if you couldn’t get away? What if you *really* couldn’t get away? What if there was no escape and there was no privacy at all?” And I thought, “What if, in particular, you were young and had no privacy?” Because, if you think about it, young people these days have the least amount of privacy that anyone has ever had. (“In Conversation” n.p.)

Ness is right; social networking has boomed in the last few years, and children and young adults have had to grow up with a constant influx of words and thoughts in a way that other generations have not. Ness perceives the danger in this trend, and he turns virtual noise into literal Noise in a highly thought-provoking way in his *Chaos Walking* trilogy, as a way to engage with the idea that too much information can be dangerous to society.

Additionally, although not strictly a dystopian novel, Miéville’s *The City & the City* certainly contains themes reminiscent of other definitively dystopian texts. Miéville is known as a writer of science fiction, but each of his novels defies strict genre classification. As reviewer Thomas M. Wagner notes, “[*The City & the City*] continues a trend [ . . . ] of working comfortably within established genres [ . . . ] while simultaneously taking those genres apart and rebuilding them via his own idioms” (n.p.). Although generally defined as a detective novel, a crime procedural, or a noir, *The City &*



*the City*, because of its potential for social commentary, is important to contemporary society. Michael Moorcock agrees. In his review of the book, he explains, “Subtly, almost casually, Miéville constructs a metaphor for modern life in which our habits of ‘unseeing’ allow us to ignore that which does not directly affect our familiar lives. Yet he doesn’t encourage us to understand his novel as a parable, rather as a police mystery dealing with extraordinary circumstances” (Moorcock n.p.). Miéville has created a setting that is deep and rich in cultural significance. His novel is far from simple, but one can make at least a surface connection to contemporary society in the frequent civil wars over disputed land, such as the decades-old debate between Israel and Palestine. Also, as Moorcock alludes to, one may also find a magnification of the personal apathy that allows us to dismiss any person, place, or situation that hardly affects our day-to-day lives.

#### Importance of Research

As one may perceive from my research, dystopian literature is a valid and highly relevant genre open to criticism and analysis. These themes are not bound to any one style of writing. *V for Vendetta* reveals the use of dystopian settings in comic books and graphic novels, a genre that has been dismissed for decades as unliterary and unworthy of interpretation. Furthermore, Ness’ *Chaos Walking* trilogy reveals that dystopian themes are not merely intended for an adult audience; in fact, the dystopian novel, as seen in the popularity of such books as *The Hunger Games*, is an important trend in literature written for young adults. And, finally, Miéville’s reliance upon these themes in his genre-blending novel further reveals the universality of dystopian literature.

These three novels have not been studied in-depth just yet. The oldest novel of my three primary sources is Moore and Lloyd's *V for Vendetta*, but because of its status as a graphic novel, it has been largely ignored by academic literary critics, although the film adaptation of the novel has been critically acclaimed. Aside from a few essays, the only full-length work dedicated to the work of Alan Moore (not the film adaptations of his work) that I discovered is Annalisa di Liddo's *Alan Moore: Comics as Performance, Fiction as Scalpel*. While di Liddo did engage with the graphic novel alone, reviewer Eric L. Berlatsky notes that di Liddo's analysis is lacking: "While [di Liddo] is better than most of her predecessors about offering the possibility of critique, she hesitates to actually make clear arguments about where Moore's work falls short in her own estimation (and thus also where his successes are greatest)" (par. 2). Keeping in mind the intense recent resurgence in popularity of Moore and Lloyd's novel, one can see the necessity of further in-depth criticism of this text. Ness's *The Knife of Never Letting Go* and Miéville's *The City & the City* are so recent that sufficient time has not passed for published analysis of these two novels; however, due to their critical acclaim, I anticipate that these novels will become very important to further study of both dystopian literature and science fiction.

Furthermore, criticism of these three primary texts need not end here. These novels contain myriad characters, settings, themes, and ideas that are available for criticism. Further studies might include a discussion of the use of space and location, an analysis of Bakhtin's idea of *carnival* in relation to characters who wear masks, studies of gender perception, and countless other interpretations. Moreover, these theories about the use of language and religion are important to other texts, both texts written by the authors

of these primary sources, as well as other dystopian texts. As the canon of science fiction and dystopian texts evolves, scholars should remain aware of emerging voices and their relevance to contemporary society.

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