



# Psychoanalytic Deconstruction of Dystopian Personae: A Comprehensive Study of *Brave New World*, 1984, *Fahrenheit 451* and *The Handmaid's Tale*

Souvik Datta, Ankita Dutta

Received: 05 Jan 2023; Received in revised form: 03 Feb 2023; Accepted: 11 Feb 2023; Available online: 17 Feb 2023  
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**Abstract—**“I think dystopian futures are also a reflection of current fears.” – Lauren Oliver

*The more we progress towards a better dawn, the more we find ourselves involved in a dystopian societal bond. Far removed from Thomas Moore and his concept of utopia, we have drowned deep into the abyss of never ending chaos, the chaos of erroneous distortions that mess up with the wits and generate robots. All dystopian fictions deal with the same concept, but each become more menacing than the former. This feature that emerged as a by product of post-colonialism, has stormed the world in general and the literary sphere in particular, striking alarming thoughts.*

“But within every dystopia there’s a little utopia.” – Margaret Atwood.

*We, readers, have to understand these minacious nightmares that have been penned down since the last century. This paper attempts to deconstruct the four pillars of dystopian narrative: *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, 1984 by George Orwell, *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury and *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood. The deconstructive analysis, done through psychoanalytic criticism, would be based on both the Freudian and Jungian principles. The novels selected are dystopian in nature, keeping in mind the postcolonial society and the crisis that it has been facing since the advent of the world wars. Some of the major analytical theories have been taken up together by this paper: deconstruction to point at the horror from the closest point of examination and psychoanalysis that will help with a better understanding into the psyche of the protagonists. This paper aims at giving a better insight into the postmodern dystopian society as a whole, seeking to provide a solution rather than posing a problem.*

“The beauty of dystopia is that it lets us vicariously experience future worlds – but we still have the power to change our own.” – Ally Condie

*This is exactly what this paper aims to present: an understanding of the future agitations, so that postcolonial dystopia remains a vague abstraction, never concretised!*

**Keywords—** Postcolonialism, Dystopia, Psychoanalytic Criticism, Postmodernism, Deconstruction.

“Between February and May 1955, a group secretly funded by the Central Intelligence Agency launched a secret weapon into Communist territory. Gathering at launch sites in West Germany, operatives inflated ten-foot balloons, armed them with their payload, waited for favourable winds, and launched them into Poland. These, though, were not explosives or incendiary weapons: they were books. At the height of the Cold War, the CIA made copies of George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* rain down from the Communist sky.”<sup>[1]</sup>

- Duncan White

In the Postmodern era, the horrifying Second World War created an unconventional topsy-turvy with the introduction of Dystopian Novels, which showcase the feelings, emotions and experiences of those who have been dealing with the wars and their after effects. On November 6, 2019, Justice (retired) B. N. Srikrishna, in connection with the alleged surveillance of phones by operators using Israeli spyware Pegasus said: "If the reports are true, we may be sliding into an Orwellian State with Big Brother snooping on us, as depicted in the novel *1984*."<sup>[2]</sup> The dystopian era urged authors like E. M. Forster, George Orwell, Ray Bradbury, Margaret Atwood, Aldous Huxley, H.G. Wells et.al. to pen down the 'unheimlich' on a platter for the readers.

Also born out of postmodernism is Deconstruction, a methodological approach to analyzing texts and arguments, derived from the work of Jacques Derrida<sup>[3]</sup>, the originator of Deconstruction.

Another major literary theory, Psychoanalysis, uncovers the 'subject' of the author as revealed through the images, the language and the codes of her/his work.<sup>[4]</sup> One of the main exponents of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory was the division of the human psyche into three distinct components. In *The Ego and the Id* (1923) Freud concluded that,

**The Id** is the primary process of thinking which is primitive, illogical and irrational; **the Ego** is the secondary process of thinking which is rational, realistic and oriented towards problem solving; **the Superego** is the tertiary process of thinking which includes the individual's Ego-Ideals, spiritual goals and the psychic agency (conscience).

Huxley's setting revolves around a systematic, civilised and well-choreographed society where the barbaric, native and uncivilised stay outside the borders. Chaos begins when the Savage is brought inside the 'perfect' world by Bernard Marx who himself is a misfit in the New America ruled by 'His Fordship', Mustapha Mond.

**John as the Id:** Because he is an illicit child, belonging to this world but fatefully brought up in the 'Savage Reservation', John has multiple instances of him going astray, of him going against the 'perfectionist' government. John was gifted *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* by Popé soon after his twelfth birthday and that began his journey towards knowledge, which was restricted and unknown in the world he actually belonged to. He was compelled to judge the ways of the controlled world through the eyes of the Bard.

He was impulsive enough to utter the words, "I ate civilization. It poisoned me; I was defiled. And then I ate my wickedness." He does not fear being handed over to the

World Controller. Yet he fears being experimented with and suddenly decided to go, *anywhere. I don't care. So long as I can be alone.* He goes away from Guildford to reside in *the old light house which stood between Grayshott and Tongham.* Though with strong virtues, John had to stoop in front of 'the civilised' and Lenina so much so that *he was slashing at her with his whip of small cords.* His Id comes out extremely strong-willed, he refused to give up in front of the rigorous suppressive ways of the Super Ego and finally killed himself, *just under the arch.*

**Bernard Marx as the Ego:** Bernard is remarkable because he comes out as an alpha male but of short stature, a misfit in the society himself, because of an alleged accident with his blood-surrogate before he was decanted. This puts him into introspection. He *hated them, hated them.*

As the Ego in the psyche is, so is Bernard, lonely. He has no one to concede except Mr. Hemholtz Watson. His relationship with Lenina also fails to develop and Marx is kept hanging midway, between the Id John and the Superego Mond.

His character as the Ego is further heightened through him bringing in the savage from the Mesa to Mond, thus reconciling the Id with the Superego. Bernard brings John from the reservation to their world and accompanies him to meet the World Controller.

Bernard is vanquished as he is sent to the island by Mond. His ultimate aim diminishes as his character becomes pointless in front of the government.

**Mustapha Mond as the Superego:** *His fordship Mustapha Mond! The Resident Controller for Western Europe!* His character aptly describes the Super Ego. He predominantly suppresses the Id because he has already been through those days of emotional precariousness and is well aware of the embarrassment that impulsiveness can usher. Mond disposes the Ideas of *family, monogamy, romance* and proposes *ectogenesis, neo-Pavlovian conditioning and hypnopædia* instead. He sent Bernard to the New Mexican Reservation, permitted him to bring back the Savage and enabled the completion of the psychic circle. He successfully draws parallels between Shakespearian society and Fordship's world, talks about the inconsequential God and declares that he *serves happiness.* He is one successful epitome of repressing freedom of *self-conscious individuals* who are not fit for community life which Mond desires to substitute with stability.

1984 is the story of Winston Smith and his co-worker Julia, residents in the province of Oceania that is a victim Super-state being ruled by the English Socialist Party (INGSOC), under Big Brother.

**Winston Smith as the Id:** While majority of the residents of Oceania have been brainwashed and do not dare to act against the principles of INGSOC, Winston dares to buy a diary for two dollars fifty from the free market knowing well that *if detected it was reasonably certain that it would be punished by death, or at least by twenty-five years in a forced-labour camp.* He even procured a pen, *an archaic instrument,* to write on it. Since *the telescreen received and transmitted simultaneously* so, Winston, in order to write down in his diary, chose to sit inside an alcove, and keeping well back, Winston was able to remain outside the range of the telescreen.

Emmanuel Goldstein, *the commander of a vast shadowy army, an underground network of conspirators dedicated to the overthrow of the State* named the Brotherhood, whom everyone hated with passion was looked upon by Winston as the saviour. Whenever there was an announcement of a glorious victory of Oceania the telescreen *crashed into "Oceania, 'tis for thee". You were supposed to stand to attention* during such a time. But Winston deliberately hid from the view and disobeyed the national traditions. *Anything that hinted at corruption always filled him with a wild hope.* Even *their embrace had been a battle, the climax a victory. It was a blow struck against the Party. It was a political act.*

Winston's impulsive reactions even hindered his work at the Records Department of Minitrue. He did the falsification of the historical data himself. Yet his inner conscience always echoed that *it was no good because I threw it away a few minutes later. But if the same thing happened today, I should keep it* where 'it' refers to the actual facts that were ordered to be falsified.

Winston went to meet with O'Brien in the latter's house. He admitted plainly that they wanted to join the Brotherhood and fight against Ingsoc. He even agreed to accept Goldstein's book *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism* without giving a second thought to O'Brien's ulterior motives. Because Winston felt O'Brien was on their side, Winston believed it had to be so, no matter what and committed the same mistake again by believing Mr Charrington.

During Winston's interrogation by O'Brien, his instinct came into play severally. He was not fed unquestioningly. He did not forget about the allies and the enemies during the forever war. Winston admitted that he remembered about Jones, Aaronson, and Rutherford, whom he knew were wrongly accused and executed. He strongly disagreed with O'Brien when he was forcibly asked to say *four* was not four but *five*. He was consistent in saying, "It does exist! It exists in memory. I remember it.... How can you stop

people remembering things? It is involuntary. It is outside oneself."

**Julia as the Ego:** Julia is introduced as *a bold-looking girl.* From the point of view of Winston, Julia was like the most dangerous of the young and pretty women, *who were the most bigoted adherents of the Party.* Winston believed Julia was an agent of the Thought Police.

But Julia managed to convey her passionate feelings to Winston by handing him over a hand written letter. She allowed Winston to hold her hands in the public amidst a huge crowd. She declared herself corrupt to the bones and had been engaged in sexual activities since she was sixteen, *for scores of times* and with Party members because she liked doing the thing in itself. Julia was the one who suggested the places where the couple would meet. She found them out, devised the plans for Winston to reach that place, and also managed for the two to stay safe until they returned back. Winston even believed that *presumably she could be trusted to find a safe place.*

Contrarily, Julia maintained to be a staunch follower of the Party and always adhered to its rules. Yet she kept bringing a lot of *real* stuff which was only restricted for use among the Inner Party members. She even managed to buy a complete set of make-up materials from some proletarian quarter. Ego was impulsive enough to take Id's side, go meet O'Brien. After getting out from the imprisonment, when Julia and Winston met, she confessed blatantly that she had betrayed him and had no feelings for him anymore thus protecting the Id all the way until finally getting suppressed by the Superego.

**Big Brother as the Superego:** The character is absent throughout the novel, his existence in real life is questioned but he controls the total plot by manipulating the course of Oceania.

'BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU' was the catch phrase that INGSOC used to create within the citizen both love and fear so as to obtain complete and utter surrender to the party Ideology. No one had ever met Big Brother; he was just in the posters plastered all throughout Oceania, depicted simply as *an enormous face, more than a metre wide: the face of a man of about forty-five, with a heavy black moustache and ruggedly handsome features.*

Winston remembered Big Brother's face because of seeing him *everywhere. Always the eyes watching you and the voice enveloping you. It was impossible to be certain* since when this phenomenon had been active but everything in Oceania was under INGSOC and was carried on in the name of Big Brother himself. Nobody dared to question his decisions delivered second-handed. Big Brother was like the omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient Almighty. The Super Ego thus controls both Id

and Ego while projecting the conscience and Ego-Ideal constantly.

In Bradbury's dystopia, where the government wants to burn every printed book, Guy Montag is a fireman whose life suddenly changes after his meeting with Clarisse McClellan but remains in a state of confusion while working with Captain Beatty as firemen who start fires that burn printed books.

**Guy Montag as the Id:** Till when Guy knew that what he was doing was right, he always took pleasure in it. For him *it was a special pleasure to see things eaten, to see things blackened and changed*. His smile, *it never went away*. But meeting with Clarisse McClellan, sprout in him, seeds of doubt. He went on to ask Captain Beatty whether fire houses always looked like they did at present. He even started hiding books. Montag knew that he was committing a blasphemy but he chose to believe that he *had done nothing. His hand had done it all*.

Montag didn't shy away from Mildred and *they read the long afternoon through*. Even though he knew that Captain Beatty might already know that he hides books, he thought of handing over a substitution. Guy kept hidden copies of the *Old Testament, New Testament, Shakespeare, Plato, Thoreau, Jefferson et al*. They *might be the last copy in this part of the world*, was what Montag believed and tried to preserve them.

Montag fixed a meeting with Faber, a professor under suspicion, and while going to Knoll View to meet him, he held open a copy of the *Bible* inside the subway train, in front of all the co-passengers. He read aloud verses and tried to remember them so that even if the book got burnt it stayed in his memory. Montag had even won over his fear of the mechanical hounds. When Mrs. Clara Bowles and Mrs. Phelps came to visit Mildred, Montag, out of intense passion, read out to them Matthew Arnold's *Dover Beach*, gradually leading to the ladies getting kicked out of the house, since they had no respect for poetry, which Montag disapproved of.

When Mildred gave away the information to the authorities that her husband kept books, Montag knew he had to run away. But *he remembered the books and turned back. He found a few books where he had left them..... Montag took the four remaining books and hopped, jolted, hopped his way down the alley...* He was Id in both his actions and his perceptions.

**Captain Beatty as the Ego:** Captain Beatty very excellently described the reason and significance of their profession to Montag during his sick leave. He said that books were burnt to bring *serenity and peace*. There should be no disagreement among individuals, *burn them all, burn everything. Fire is bright and fire is clean*. Unlike Montag,

Captain Beatty believed that firemen were *the Happiness Boys, the Dixie Duo. We stand against the small tide of those who want to make everyone unhappy with conflicting theory and thought*.

But then again, Beatty said that *at least once in his career, every fireman gets an itch. What do the books say, he wonders*. He admitted that he had also read a few and found that they were worth nothing, through which is visible a trait similar to the Super Ego. Beatty desired to shelter the Id from embarrassment. He supposedly knew that Montag had gone off track and started preserving books. He, as the Ego, specifically mentioned the fact clearly that if a fireman accidentally took a book with him, it was 'a natural error'. He clarified that *we let the fireman keep the book twenty-four hours. If he hasn't burned it by then, we simply come and burn it for him*.

Captain Beatty, time and again wanted to warn the Id about "Clarisse McClellan? The girl? She was a time bomb. ... She didn't want to know how a thing was done, but why. That can be embarrassing. The poor girl's better off dead." He wanted to strike a balance between and shield the Id from the Super Ego and was determined to put in some sense in everybody, *everyone nowadays knows ... that nothing will ever happen to me. Others die, I go on. There are no consequences and no responsibilities. Except that there are*.

**The Government as the Superego:** From Captain Beatty we come to know that nothing came *from the Government down. There was no dictum, no declaration, no censorship, to start with, no!* The government was not at all against book-burning, thus a false positivity forwarded in the name of houses that *had been given a fireproof plastic sheath many years ago*. Beatty informed Montag that their job *got started around about a thing called the Civil War*. This statement clearly means that the State actually did not ever fancy a society reading books and expressing opinions freely. The Government itself plunged into a post-literate era, where *school is shortened, discipline relaxed, philosophies, histories, languages dropped, English and spelling gradually neglected, finally almost completely ignored. Life is immediate, the job counts, pleasure lies all about after work*.

Gilead, the place, is an abstract Idea on which Atwood constructs the foundation of *The Handmaid's Tale*, the tale of the shadowy May Day, the omnipotent government and the powerless women folk. The human psyche adapts to different situations in different ways. This paper attempts to interpret the characters of this novel thus in two varied perspectives to highlight the contrasting mental attitudes that come into play.

**May Day as the Id:** The shadowy organisation that the author fidgets with and stacks behind the curtains is the



Id; that is extremely rebellious and fights against the Super-ego incessantly. May Day puts up a constant resistance against the government through the *networking*, employment of spies amongst the handmaids and thus keeps in touch with the Super Ego through the Ego. Also, in the course of time, the Super-ego can be interpreted as creating an example out of the Id May Day to prevent embarrassment in the public discourses.

**The Handmaids as the Ego:** The handmaids form a part of the controlled rebellion, May Day, and bridge the Id with the Superego. They are able to go for shopping; Offred is allowed to play scrabble and read magazines by the Commander; all these emphasize the fact that the Ego is not suppressed by the Superego, as has been stated by Freud because in turn the Ego will work in accordance with the Superego. The handmaids working according to the government delivers their unquestioning nature of accepting the fate and portrays the Ego's realistic approach to life.

**Government as the Superego:** The new government snatches success in suppressing the resistance and emerges a totalitarian theocratic Gileadean era that represses all rebellious movements and values only high morality. The Super-ego thus becomes a divine republic, where only the ways of the Almighty is morally correct. Their rejection of new approaches as well as a vacuum of female rights depicts the prevalent orthodoxy, inequality and lawlessness: the Super-ego is too blind to see their own mistakes. The government's strong faith in Biblical interpretations and the inability to break down anything beyond their personal understanding stand as an argument for assuming the government to be a perfect proposal of the Superego.

While the readers move through the phases of the novel, the characters seem to divulge and divert which illustrate them in a new light.

**Offred as the Id:** In showcasing her wishes to ultimately join May Day and overthrow the oppressive government, Offred delineates as the Id. She has the sudden minute urges to steal and to hide things, which she remembers in herself and thinks as appreciable acts of rebel. Having an affair with Nick while being assigned to the Commander when she was still caring about Luke; is also an act of defence against the Superego's dominant ways. Her fantasizing of oranges and a strong Identification with Moira's rebellious ways; is a forecast of her self-vanquishing efforts against the government.

**Serena Joy as the Ego:** Serena, a calculative and manipulative wife of the Commander becomes the Ego with the introduction of her character. Joy portrays a strong determination in not losing her position as the reputed wife to a mere handmaid thus acting as a suppressor of the Id

while also protecting it when she offers Offred a chance to copulate with Nick that would grant the Commander his baby and Offred her freedom. Serena's lack of emotions is a virtue of Freudian Ego, Ego that transcends to the realm of brain, heartless.

**Commander as the Superego:** Much in common as he is with Huxley's Mustapha Mond, the Commander has power that is utmost important. Like Mond, the Commander (probably named Fred) has been through all that the Id wants to do presently but chose to be a despot. He leaves the ladies, Serena and Offred *like two ailing mothers* and visits the brothel to lead the dandy life. In playing scrabble with Offred and giving her magazines, the commander shows that he knows very well not to compromise his own well-being while also superimposing his maxim on others.

These novels can be compared successfully. Though the character portrayal is similar at points, dissimilarities too can be noticed at different parameters.

The Superego, in all the novels, is ascribed to either the Ruling Party or the Government of the country. They can submerge and at times manipulate the Id and the Ego, as they want. The Super-Ego is installed in the mind as the force of the moral law. <sup>[5]</sup>

The characters that have been named the Ego do work as 'the conscious middle men'. They, on one hand warn the Id characters to abide by the government, and on the other hand they themselves take blame on reacting as per their own impulses. Ego successfully and lucidly forms a bridge connecting the others.

Though this paper has chosen Guy Montag as the Id in *Fahrenheit 451*, there has been a stark similarity between the Id characters and Clarisse on one trait. While Winston wrote in his diary that *I understand HOW: I do not understand WHY*, Captain Beatty had also pointed out to Montag that people like Clarisse *didn't want to know HOW a thing was done, but WHY*. This can be taken as a characteristic of impulsive people, their curiosity never ends until final satisfaction, which in most of the extreme cases, have been shown to result in elimination or execution.

Coming to the characters representing the Id, which Freud states as the 'dynamic unconscious'; this paper shows that they do not end up the same way. As for Winston, *it was alright, everything was alright, the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother*. This brainwashed Winston was made realistic according to Oceanic standards; he was subdued. But John committed suicide being unable to cope up with the ever-tormenting dynamic procedures of existence while Guy Montag escaped the clutches of the oppressive book-

burning bigoted government and vamoosed to another city where he hoped to live with his books. Again contrasting is May Day and Offred who keep defending their clan incessantly, neither trounced nor victorious.

This also shows the aspect of the working of the human psyche where a strong Id cannot get affected due to external factors but a weak Id can easily be misguided and moulded without much concentrated efforts. Also shown are the métier of determination that upkeeps the metamorphosis of a weak Id into an indomitable one.

A Swiss psychiatrist, Carl Jung was the supposed heir to Sigmund Freud, but their personal research and vision created a split in their theoretical doctrines. Jung disagreed with Freud's emphasis on the influence of biological factors on behaviour and personality. Rather he looked at areas of the mind that constitute the 'psyche'. He distinguished human psychic conception into two compartments:

Personal Unconscious is comparable to that of Freud's unconscious or Superego. This layer generally contains all our repressed memories which we are unaware of.

Collective Unconscious is a concept completely pioneered by Jung. The human psyche, postulated Jung, draws upon a set of 'primordial images' that are often cross-cultural, and have been existent for a long time in the collective imagination of the human race itself.<sup>16</sup>

**Mustapha Mond as the Personal Unconscious:** *Brave New World* portrays only one character that actually has repressed memories and very surprisingly it is Mond, the Super Ego of the novella. He informed John that *there used to be something called God-before the Nine Years' War*. Be it Bernard or Lenina, they remembered nothing of the old world; neither did John acquire any first-hand knowledge outside of Shakespearian Ideas. It was Mond who could recollect his yester years before the huge transformation, preserved books in his secret vault and in his unconscious was stored all the norms of the actual native society.

**O'Brien as the Personal Unconscious:** In *1984*, regarding repressed memories, only one explicit example has been put forward by the author. It is of O'Brien, who ultimately brainwashed Winston perfectly. He has been shown to recall the events while also imposing the directives of Big Brother with equal fervour. He yearned for the citizens of Oceania to exist in the alternate reality but knew deep down what the reality had been in originality. He was bait to the common man to come out as traitors and believed this new formation to be an epitome in comparison.

**Clarisse McClellan as the Personal Unconscious:** In *Fahrenheit 451*, none of the characters are shown to have

repressed memories that are trying to be manifest except Clarisse McClellan. According to Captain Beatty, "Her family had been feeding her subconscious." That was why Clarisse remembered about a time when *firemen put fires out instead of going to start them*. She knew about the time when people read and loved books. It was through her that Montag came to know about the other world that existed prehistorically.

**Offred as the Personal Unconscious:** In Atwood's dystopia, *The Handmaid's Tale*, there works an exception where all characters remember their collective past. Yet it is Offred who constantly reminds the readers and keeps them informed of the changes, of the better times in the past, of the then way of life and of the restrictions that have been imposed on the people of the present. Through her memories of her mother, through her reminisces of her husband Luke, through her conversations with Ofglen and through her secret exchanges with the Commander she brings about the past in excerpts now and then.

**The Collective Unconscious:** In the novels, the collective unconscious has been portrayed through the citizens of the States who have been successfully brainwashed by the governments. They only remember what they are told to remember, contradiction is illegal. While all the individuals must have different Personal Unconscious, their Collective Unconscious is alike. They share their perfectly hand crafted memories across cultures. While one country is an ardent atheist and recognises only science, another race has been absolutely transported to spirituality and orthodox behavioural patterns; one race is a staunch believer in Big Brother when the other race has become disgusted in books. This clearly showcases the fact that Governmental versions of real incidents have been impressed in the human psyche and compressed to form the collective unconscious.

This paper discusses dystopia; dystopia in the disguise of dictatorship and hegemony, that has been feared by authors across the Occident. Time and again their voices echo their mental horror and horrify the readers who do not desire to reside in such distortions of a polity. If a strong Id is not cultivated, it will be hard for the common masses to resent such major political uprisings in the future which would give full authority to the Superego, thus suppressing the Id and Ego as well as the Collective Unconscious.

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