"GENDER IS A SHELL GAME". POLITICAL IMAGINATION ON FEMINIST DYSTOPIAS

MAYTE DONSTRUP

Name: Mayte Donstrup
Email Address: mariateresa.donstrup@urjc.es
Academic Centre: Universidad Rey Juan Carlos

KEYWORDS
Television series; politics; cultural studies; textual analysis; dystopia

ABSTRACT
The dystopian genre is defined as narratives portraying societies in which a substantial majority of humanity suffers slavery and/or oppression as a result of human action (Claeys, 2017). This article is situated within academic studies of dystopian fiction and analyzes, in particular, a television series based on Naomi Alderman's novel The Power. Bearing the same title as the novel, the Amazon Prime series imagines a scenario in which women acquire a biological power that grants them the ability to generate electricity. This study presents a thematic analysis that identifies the dystopian tradition in which the analyzed fiction can be placed. To this end, a theoretical framework has been developed to contextualize the different dystopian typologies; these thematic categories were subsequently applied in the analysis through a qualitative narrative template. The findings indicate differences from the original novel, as the series under examination fits within the tradition of feminist critical dystopias.

DOI https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.2421-454X/22888
ISSN 2421-454X

1. **INTRODUCTION**

Winner of the Bailey's Women's Prize for Fiction, *The Power* is a novel written by Naomi Alderman that imagines a scenario in which women biologically acquire a power granting them the ability to generate electricity. This power confers upon them a physical superiority that extends into the political sphere, challenging existing gender roles and reversing the axis of patriarchy. Alderman concisely explains the Power as a latent chromosomal advantage accidentally produced by chemical agents, thereby blurring the traditional masculine–feminine power binary. However, this is not a plot in which all women can kill all men (Miller, 2020). Thus, *The Power* is not solely about physical domination; its ramifications are explored in political terms, opening debates about human behavior, sociopolitical context, and resistance against oppression.

> It follows that there are two ways for the nature and use of human power to change. One is that an order might issue from the palace, a command unto the people saying 'It is thus.' But the other, the more certain, the more inevitable, is that those thousand points of light should each send a new message. When the people change, the palace cannot hold. (Alderman 2018, p. 45)

Regarding the author, her biography is relevant to understanding the personal and academic influences reflected in her work. Naomi Alderman is a novelist born in 1974 in London, daughter of Geoffrey Alderman, a British historian specializing in the Jewish community in nineteenth- and twentieth-century England. She studied at South Hampstead High School and later at Lincoln College, Oxford, where she completed studies in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics, before moving to the United States for work-related reasons. It was during her time in North America that she began to engage with feminism, and since then she has actively supported women's rights—a commitment that is strongly reflected in her literary production. Her best-known work, *The Power*, is said to be inspired by the fourth wave of feminism and by her relationship with Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood, internationally renowned for her dystopian novel The Handmaid's Tale (Banerjee et al. 2022).

This article focuses on the recent adaptation of The Power by Amazon Prime, a series that currently consists of a nine-episode first season. Before undertaking the analysis, we will outline the theoretical foundations that define the genre of the series: dystopia.

2. **ESCENARIOS ALTERNATIVOS: LA DISTOPÍA COMO GÉNERO**

Traditionally, dystopia (and utopia) has been categorized as a subgenre of science fiction (Barceló 1990, Fitting 2009, Suvin 2016). Isaac Asimov (1975) defined science fiction as the branch of literature concerned with human reactions to changes in science and technology. Utopias and dystopias, however, are fictions concerned with the improvement or deterioration of sociopolitical circumstances; thus, although utopian and dystopian works may contain elements of science fiction, they are not limited to those elements (Suvin 2003, Claeys 2017). Utopias and dystopias are sociopolitical genres (Suvin 2016), distinguished by their plausibility and strong political charge (Claeys 2017), for "they address political themes critically and creatively, telling us what is wrong with the now and how it might be improved" (Sargisson 2011: 32). Roemer (2011) describes utopian and dystopian texts as spaces that invite readers to vicariously experience new political situations.

Aligned with this, utopias (and dystopias) share a key element with science fiction: the *novum* (Moylan 2000a), referring to the essential feature of an imagined world that makes the fictional environment different from, yet familiar to, the empirical world of the reader (Suvin 2000). Within speculative fiction—which encompasses dystopia, utopia, and science fiction, among others—the present is transformed into the past of a future yet to come, enabling "a structurally unique method for apprehending the present as history" (Jameson 2006: 288). The power of the *novum*, in the case of dystopia, lies in reconciling the principle of reality with the principle of hope (Suvin 2000). Thus, Moylan (2000a) contends that the potential of dystopian and utopian texts resides in their capacity to resist the mythological and ideological closure of texts, connecting reality with hope.

The definition and characterization of utopias and dystopias has sparked extensive academic debate, given that what is considered socially desirable or disastrous may vary according to sociocultural context and differing ideological positions (Claeys 2010). For instance, while utopia may refer to an ideal society, what constitutes such a society remains contested (Greene 2011). Given the longer historical trajectory of the utopian tradition (Moylan 2000), it is useful to begin by outlining the concept of utopia. Levitas defines utopia as "the expression of desire for a better way of living" (2011: 53). Uhlenbruch (2015) adds that a crucial aspect of utopia is the imaginative representation of a radically altered situa-

DOI https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.2421-454X/22888
ISSN 2421-454X

tion extrapolated from issues arising in the novelist's reality. Jameson (2010) concurs, describing utopia as a practice of mentally reconfiguring contemporary society. Suvin (2016) offers one of the most recognized definitions of the genre:

> Utopia is the verbal construction of a particular quasi-human community where sociopolitical institutions, norms, and individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author's community, this construction being based on estrangement arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis (2016: 63)

According to Sargisson (2011), as hermeneutic texts, utopian (and dystopian) works are politically useful because they constitute spaces where alternative solutions to present-day problems can be imagined: "The negative criticizes while the positive creates or imagines something new" (2011: 41–42). The dystopian impulse is thus closely aligned with the utopian one: both extrapolate from contemporary reality to enable readers to experience an alternative world, either as endorsement (utopia) or warning (dystopia) (Uhlenbruch 2015: 129).

Sheperd (2013) argues that our cognitive frameworks are produced through the stories we tell ourselves and others; from these stories, we derive ideas and ideals about the world and our position in it. As Sargisson (2011) and Levitas (2011) note, this is linked to political ideologies, which, like utopian texts, help us orient our aspirations toward the future: "socialism contains utopias of egalitarianism and liberalism seeks various (economic, social, and political) utopias of freedom. This aspect of utopianism (and this aspect of ideology) brings hope to politics: the hope and desire that things can be different" (2011: 42). Consequently, there are utopias—and dystopias—rooted in diverse ideological perspectives, such as far-right, socialist, or feminist frameworks (Levitas 2011, Rosenfeld 2020). In essence, utopia depicts a society in which the correct political and ideological decisions have been made, resulting in a free and prosperous social order, whereas dystopia represents its antithesis (Claeys 2013a).

Although the concept of dystopia is often attributed to John Stuart Mill (1868), the term appeared earlier, in a letter to the editor published in The Gentleman's Magazine in September 1748, where it was used to describe an inverted, negative version of utopia in a poem praising Chesterfield's administration in Ireland and warning of sociopolitical disorder following his departure (Budakov 2010). Dystopian fiction imagines an uncertain future extrapolated from contemporary events: "dystopian narratives are also historically aware, responding to present conditions and informed by knowledge of historical events and traumas" (Stock 2019, p. 2). As politicized narratives, they function rhetorically to help readers think through political issues of their time: "grounded in anxieties of their present, these politically engaged narratives mobilise knowledge of historic events and traumas to speculate upon consequences of current trends and actions for the future" (2019: 3). According to Rosenfeld (2021), the values negated by dystopias are the humanist axioms of reason and debate.

For Moylan (2000b), the most important feature of dystopia lies in its capacity to encourage reflection on the causes of social harm: "Crucial to dystopian vision in all its manifestations is this ability to register the impact of an unseen and unexamined social system on the everyday lives [of individuals]" (2010: xiii). Dystopian narratives are products of the traumas of the twentieth century: "exploitation, repression, state violence, war, genocide, disease, famine, ecocide, depression, debt, and the steady depletion of humanity through the buying and selling of everyday life provided more than enough fertile ground for this fictive underside of the utopian imagination" (Moylan 2000: xi). Dystopia emerges as the result of human errors (Tower Sargent 2013), yet despite their often bleak depictions of the future, dystopias are fundamentally didactic and moralizing. Stock (2019) argues that dystopias, as politically committed narratives, "mobilise knowledge of historic events and traumas to speculate upon consequences of current trends and actions for the future" (2019: 3). The future society presented in dystopias is depicted as plausible: the genre seeks to frighten readers into understanding that the future depends on moral, social, and civic responsibility (Viera: 2010).

Having outlined the origins and main characteristics of dystopias, it is useful to group the different existing typologies. First, it is important to distinguish between dystopian works and works with dystopian settings. While the former propose scenarios in which sociopolitical relationships prevail, the latter merely take place in apocalyptic environments but do not delve into human relations and therefore cannot be considered dystopias per se (Rosenfeld 2020). Regarding dystopian narratives, Moylan (2000) proposes a series of questions that help determine the typology:

> How do the narrative and counter-narrative of the text play out in the iconic and discrete registers of the text? How does the text negotiate the differ-

DOI https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.2421-454X/22888
ISSN 2421-454X

> ence between an open or a closed strategy? How does the text contend with the difference between epical and mythic form and substance? How is the text informed by a novum or a pseudo-novum? Where does the assemblage of textual work place the dystopia along the continuum of militant or utopian pessimism versus resigned or anti-utopian pessimism? How, then, does the dystopia situate itself in the contest between history and the end-of-history, between utopia and anti-utopia? (2000: 157).

Drawing on Moylan (2000), dystopian narratives can be classified into:

- Classical dystopia (characterized by militant pessimism and open endings),
- Anti-utopia (defined by cynicism and despair and rejecting utopian ideals),
- Pseudo-dystopia (marked by resigned pessimism and closed endings).

In classical dystopias, militant pessimism preserves a utopian horizon that keeps hope alive. Thus, one may distinguish between:

- Open dystopias, which preserve a utopian impulse within an otherwise pessimistic narrative, and
- Closed dystopias, which suppress the textual ambiguity of dystopian narratives in favor of an absolutist stance that negates utopian possibility.
- Anti-utopias, for their part, question or ridicule utopian values. As Suvin (2021) argues, anti-utopias are written not to warn against the existing status quo, as dystopias do, but rather to warn against utopian aspirations themselves. Similarly, Blaim defines anti-utopia as: "a function or social use of a dystopian text explicitly or implicitly questioning/opposing particular utopian solutions or utopianism in general" (2022: 45).

To illustrate these distinctions, Moylan (2000) notes that dystopian narratives of revolt—or the potential for revolt—express militant pessimism that amplifies utopian possibilities (dystopia). By contrast, pseudo-dystopias tend to favor linear plots in which revolts are decisively crushed, leaving no residue of dissent or opposition within society. Beginning in the 1980s, new typologies emerged, such as critical dystopias and anti-critical dystopias.

- Critical dystopias negotiate generic dystopian pessimism with an open, militant, utopian stance that breaks through the hegemonic enclosure of the fictional world and explicitly resists the anti-utopian temptation inherent to dystopian narratives (Moylan 2000: 195).
- Anti-critical dystopias, by contrast, remain closer to pseudo-dystopias:

> texts that more readily remain in the camp of nihilistic or resigned expressions that may appear to challenge the current social situation but in fact end up reproducing it by ideologically inoculating viewers and readers against any form of anger or action, enclosing them within the very social realities they disparagingly expose (Moylan 2000: 196).

According to Baccolini (2000), classical dystopias locate hope outside the text in their warning function, whereas critical dystopias place hope within the text by preserving the characters' capacity for choice. The elements that enable resistance in critical dystopias include language and its reappropriation, memory, and critical historical consciousness (Baccolini 2013). As Moylan (2000) explains, one crucial outcome of linguistic reappropriation by rebels and nonconformists is the reconstruction of empowering memory:

> Whereas the hegemonic order restricts memory to nostalgia for a fictive Golden Age that embodies the ideological attributes of its own system, the dystopian protagonist often reclaims a suppressed and subterranean memory that is forward-looking in its enabling force (2000: 149).

Critical dystopias emerging in the 1980s and 1990s thus negotiate pessimism with a militant utopian stance that breaks through the hegemonic enclosure of the dystopian world while self-reflexively rejecting the anti-utopian temptation. One paradigmatic example is The Handmaid's Tale, which recounts the experiences of Offred, a "handmaid" enslaved and periodically raped to bear children for a fundamentalist couple. Although Moylan (2000) classifies Atwood's novel as a transitional narrative between classical and critical dystopia, authors such as Baccolini (2000) and Cavalcanti (2022) situate it firmly within critical dystopia due to its narrative strategies. Baccolini (2000) identifies several common traits of critical dystopia: coexistence of utopian and dystopian elements within the narrative; cognitive explanation of historical evils and of resistance to them; high degree of textual self-reflexivity (genre-awareness through linguistic emphasis and intertextuality); activation of a utopian function in relation to the reader's critical response, leading to political positioning (with emphasis on issues such as gender, class consciousness, and race).

DOI https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.2421-454X/22888
ISSN 2421-454X

Building on the previous theoretical distinctions, the following major classifications have been proposed by Moylan (2000), Tower Sargent (1994), and Balasopoulos (2006):

- Utopian Satire: A non-existent society located in a specific time and place, where the predominant function is the satirical critique of the author's contemporary society (Tower Sargent 1994).
- Anti-Utopias: Works that criticize the utopian impulse, utopias themselves, and their authors (Tower Sargent 1994). Anti-utopias warn that the application of utopian ideals may lead to totalitarianism (Uhlenbruch 2015). If utopia represents hope and utopian satire embodies distrust, anti-utopia is rooted in disbelief (Viera 2010). Balasopoulos (2006) distinguishes five categories of anti-utopias:
  - Satirical Anti-Utopias: Mild critiques exposing utopias as unrealistic.
  - Dogmatic Anti-Utopias: Narratives in which the implementation of a utopian project leads to undesirable outcomes; these works do not ridicule utopian aspirations but warn against their execution.
  - Dogmatic Anti-Utopias in Non-Fiction: Political theory texts exposing the inherent flaws of utopian projects.
  - Anticipatory Anti-Utopias: Narratives suggesting that the reader's contemporary world is already a utopia, implying that criticism of it would be dangerous.
  - Critical Anti-Utopias: Works that oppose the extreme ideals associated with utopias, such as the erasure of all antagonism.
- Dystopia (Balasopoulos 2006): Dystopia has historically been associated with the idea of hell brought to earth, transforming the world into a space where the will of the majority has been eroded (Claeys 2013, 2017). Sargent defines dystopia as a detailed depiction of a society situated in a specific time and place. Balasopoulos (2006) identifies five dystopian categories:
  - Dystopias of Tragic Failure: Narratives in which utopian schemes fail despite their noble premises. Causes of failure may include human nature, ideological contradictions, or the persistence of antagonisms. These narratives do not discredit utopia and often offer closure to the utopian project.
  - Authoritarian Repression Dystopia: Texts where the State acquires an authoritarian character, becoming the source of societal evil. Unlike anti-utopias, these narratives do not depict the failure of a utopian project.
  - Catastrophic Contingency Dystopias: Stories in which societal collapse is triggered by an external threat: alien invasion, meteor impact, unexpected biological mutation, etc. While these narratives may contain critiques or satires of the State or social institutions, they do not hold them responsible for the catastrophe.
  - Nihilistic Dystopias: Narratives portraying societies governed by multinational corporations, marked by social decay and technological bureaucratization. Although their critique of the existing social order may be inconsistent, they are considered strong dystopias.
  - Critical Dystopias: Narratives that present utopian enclaves connected to and in conflict with non-utopian parent societies (Moylan 1980). Their ambiguous, open endings preserve the utopian impulse within the text. By rejecting the traditional submission of the individual at the narrative's end, critical dystopias create a space for contestation and opposition for those whose class, gender, race, sexuality, or other positions are not empowered by hegemonic domination (Gordin, Tilley and Prakash 2010). Critical dystopias maintain hope for an unrealized utopia, showing readers a path that must begin in the present through a dialectical process that they themselves must initiate (Fortunati 2013).

Other Utopian and Dystopian Variants

- Critical Utopia: A central concern in critical utopias is the awareness of the limitations of the utopian tradition. These narratives reject utopia as a closed project while preserving it as a dream. Critical utopias focus on the persistence of difference and imperfection within utopian society itself and therefore offer more recognizable and dynamic alternatives (Tower Sargent 2013).
- Defective Utopia: A work that initially appears to depict a good society but gradually reveals foundational flaws that invite critical questioning.

DOI https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.2421-454X/22888
ISSN 2421-454X

3. **OBJECTIVES**

After presenting the theoretical foundations that support this article, we now outline the general and specific objectives guiding the research. First, the overarching purpose is situated within the study of the dystopian genre and can be stated as follows:

O1. To examine the dystopian typology in which the television series The Power is situated.

In addition, the review of the academic literature on dystopian fiction has uncovered a relevant question: several scholars have detected thematic differences in the genre when it is written by women. Accordingly, we propose the following research question:

RQ1. Does the series under study display distinctive characteristics associated with feminism?

The table below summarizes the variables considered in the analysis template:

Feminism	**Temática distópica**
Patriarchy	Precariousness
Sorority	Corruption
Myth of Romantic Love	Exploitation
	Environmental degradation
	Imperialism
	Militarization
	Economic austerity
	Totalitarianism
	Authoritarianism

TABLE 1 SOURCE: AUTHOR'S OWN ELABORATION.

4. **METHODOLOGY**

To address the proposed objectives, a qualitative methodology was selected, consisting of a thematic and ideological analysis of the series under study. For this purpose, the analytical template incorporates specialized literature on the study of characters (particularly Casetti and Di Chio 2010, Chatman 2013) and various manuals on political ideologies to identify feminist ideologemes present in the narrative (Heywood 2017, Balanguer 2019, among others). The classification of ideologemes used here has already been applied in previous research examining political ideologies in mass culture (e.g., Pineda, Fernández-Gómez and Huici 2018). With reference to feminism, examples include works such as Rebollo-Bueno (2021), Sánchez-Gutiérrez and Barragán-Romero (2022), and Donstrup (2024).

In addition, specific variables of the dystopian genre were incorporated into the qualitative analysis grid. Beyond the authors referenced in the theoretical framework—such as Balasopoulos (2006) and Tower Sargent (1997)—the thematic categories included were drawn from Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia (Thomas Moylan 2001), The Dystopian Imagination in Contemporary Spanish Literature and Film (Diana Q. Palardy 2018), Dystopian Visions and Utopian Anticipations: Terry Bisson's Pirates of the Universe as Critical Dystopia (Peter G. Stillman 2001), and Handmaids, Tributes and Careers: Dystopian Females' Roles and Goals (edited by Myrna Santos 2018).

5. **RESULTS**

The Power is a series that explores the question: What would happen if, in some way, the social and physical imbalance of power between women and men were altered? The series offers a possible answer by granting women an electrical energy within their bodies, allowing them to electrocute others in various ways. However, power entails responsibility, and the protagonists are aware of this, using it primarily as a defensive resource against sexual aggression or explicit violence. Moreover, this power requires training; it is not an ability that can simply be switched on and off, and it is exhausting, as shown by the series' protagonists.

In this way, *The Power* presents a shifting narrative told through the stories of four characters—three women and one man—creating four interconnected plotlines. Before beginning the analysis, we introduce a brief overview of the series' protagonists.

Roxy is the first woman to realize she has the Power when, at fourteen, she witnesses her mother's murder at the hands of hitmen. After the event, she becomes an increasingly influential figure within her father's criminal organization, as he uses her as a weapon against his enemies. Unlike her brothers, Roxy is intelligent and rises quickly within the family hierarchy. She does not waste time on petty revenge or disputes that preoccupy the men and openly challenges her father. Above all, Roxy seeks justice for her mother's murder.

Tunde first witnesses the Power when he sees a girl strike back at a man who is harassing her in a supermarket. When

DOI https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.2421-454X/22888
ISSN 2421-454X

Tunde's girlfriend uses the Power during sex, he is fascinated, but he does not feel compelled to experience it again. Although he harbors some fear, he becomes acutely aware of the repression women face and becomes the first photojournalist to record and disseminate evidence of a widespread female rebellion against male oppression. He attempts to document everything faithfully, without distortion, listening closely to the protagonists of the unfolding events. His meticulous commitment to reporting—rather than seeking power or personal favor—allows him to survive, evade entrapment, and avoid detection in an increasingly unjust and terrifying world. A woman in rebellion tells Tunde: "Now they will know that they are the ones who should not walk out of their houses alone at night. They are the ones who should be afraid." [6x01].

Margot is a politician in Seattle who is outraged by the incompetence of an arrogant mayor who publicly targets her on multiple occasions, even subjecting her to routine tests to detect the Power as part of an electoral stunt. Although her daughter transferred the Power to her, Margot agrees to the tests knowing she can pass them, having trained to conceal her ability. Her campaign promise is to help young women control their new condition by allocating funds for training camps where they can learn to use their gift responsibly and safely. In contrast, the mayor wishes to restrict the Power, positioning himself as the candidate who represents men concerned about this reversal of roles. In the novel, Margot begins forming an army; in the series, this trajectory begins to emerge at the end of the first season. Early on, she is the one who decides to publicly reveal the truth about women's transformation:

> Because everyone's trying to suppress this truth, this new evolution—it's a serious change that's affecting people, young females specifically, all around the world, with a knock-on effect of affecting everybody, society at large. And nobody is telling the truth about it. [2x01]

Allie is an African American orphan who leaves her last foster home after killing her adoptive father, a pedophile rapist, and finds refuge in a girls' home run by nuns. She quickly rises within this environment, forging her own hierarchy, because Allie can do more than control neural pathways: she can heal psychological and physical injuries. Her healing "miracles" and the Voice in her head lead her to create a worldwide movement of female disciples. Allie's new religion, dedicated to "the Goddess," brings forth the feminine dimension that has been suppressed by global theologies. Mother Eve says:

> God loves all of us, and She wants us to know that She has merely changed Her garment. She is beyond female and male. She is beyond human understanding. But She calls your attention to that which you have forgotten. Jews: look to Miriam, not Moses. Muslims: look to Fatima, not Muhammad. Buddhists: remember Tara, the mother of liberation. Christians: pray to Mary for your salvation.

Although the four characters' stories are presented separately, they share one common thread: the profound impact that power has had on their private lives and environments. The themes explored and the consequences of the new power acquired by women suggest a strong relationship with feminist concerns, as feminism is defined as:

> a theory, a social movement, and an emancipatory practice that fundamentally seeks to free women from the gendered impositions that determine what space they occupy, under what conditions they work, what they should study, how they should be, feel, desire, move, love, etc. By questioning the sex-gender system, all people gain greater freedom of movement (Moreno Balaguer 2019: 10)

The Power grants women physical superiority, which leads to a reconfiguration of gender roles. Rather than becoming dissociated, gender expectations invert, and men's lack of superiority often results in their punishment for transgressions. Many examples appear throughout the series: in an Arab context, a revolt erupts after a girl is beaten for failing to hide her Power; Allie electrocutes her adoptive father; and two Ukrainian sisters, Tatiana and Zoia, experience empowerment after long histories of exploitation and oppression. Tatiana, formerly an Olympic-level competitor, is sold by her mother to a high-ranking minister who becomes infatuated with her. As an adult, she learns to comply with her husband's desires—now the country's president. Zoia, on the other hand, is trapped in a human-trafficking network, forced into prostitution and confined under conditions of slavery. Their pasts and presents illustrate how poverty and inequality shaped their divergent paths but led to the same outcome: both became prisoners of similar men. Observing Zoia and Tatiana acquire the Power becomes a moment of liberation, particularly

DOI https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.2421-454X/22888
ISSN 2421-454X

because the viewer now understands how transformative this ability would have been during their childhoods. This dynamic reflects the logic of Alderman's novel, in which she describes a pervasive hunter-prey dynamic:

> There is a part in each of us which holds fast to the old truth: either you are the hunter or you are the prey. Learn which you are. Act accordingly. Your life depends upon it. Gender is a shell game... Tap on it and it's hollow. Look under the shells: it's not there (Alderman 2018: 76).

The series opens with a voice-over by Margot Cleary-Lopez, looking into a mirror as future scenes unfold. She speaks of a near future in which women rule instead of men, in which God is imagined in women's image, and in which women no longer have to be afraid. She notes that to reach that world, everything had to be burned down, and that every revolution begins with a spark. This idea is reinforced in another scene where Allie converses with the inner light: "No point running, girl, I'm in your head... You can feel it, can't you? The Power. A better future is in your hands."

Throughout the episodes, society adapts to the new situation while counterforces attempt to limit women's abilities, like political movements that emerge seeking to sterilize women to prevent them from developing the Power. Due to the many storylines in the novel and the series' recent release, Amazon's adaptation focuses primarily on pre-Power inequalities and the process of adjustment, rather than on how society ultimately stabilizes in the new order. As a result, the first season ends with a political debate that foreshadows future developments: Margot electrocutes her political opponent live on air after his smear tactics, inaugurating a new era in the use of power.

6. **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

In the theoretical framework, we noted that dystopian fiction imagines an uncertain future extrapolated from contemporary events: "dystopian narratives are also historically aware, responding to present conditions and informed by knowledge of historical events and traumas" (Stock 2019: 2). These politically charged narratives function as rhetorical structures that help readers think through the political issues of their time: "grounded in anxieties of their present, these politically engaged narratives mobilise knowledge of historic events and traumas to speculate upon consequences of current trends and actions for the future" (2019: 3). This foundation underpins the dystopian series The Power, which imagines a world in which women acquire greater physical superiority, creating an imbalance within gender roles assigned by the patriarchal system. Alderman's narrative emphasizes this shift:

> You have been taught that you are unclean, that you are not holy, that your body is impure and could never harbour the divine. You have been taught to despise everything you are and to long only to be a man. But you have been taught lies (Alderman 2018: 23).

Based on the classifications of Balasopoulos (2006) and Tower Sargent (1994), the series *The Power* presents the characteristics of a critical dystopia, as the first season's conclusion suggests that the patriarchal dystopian paradigm has been fractured and that hope for a more egalitarian world remains. Moylan (2000) argues that narratives depicting revolt—or the potential for revolt—express militant pessimism that serves to amplify utopian possibilities. Such revolutions are widely present in the series.

However, because the series was cancelled after its first season, it remains uncertain whether the emerging order will result in peaceful equilibrium, a utopian matriarchy, or a new system of oppression dominated by women. In this regard, the violent uprising portrayed in the series contrasts with Russ's (1980) conception of classical feminist utopias, which she characterizes as non-urban, classless, communal, and relatively peaceful spaces (1980: 14). For Russ, feminist utopias view male supremacy as the root cause of violence and emphasize the necessity of female bonding, community organization, and non-hierarchical social models. The elimination of men—or, more broadly, the elimination of sexualized power differentials—symbolizes the rejection of domination itself (Pearson 1977: 51).

Ultimately, the series *The Power* belongs to the subgenre of role-reversal feminist dystopian fiction, defined as depictions of societies in which women are granted attributes typically reserved for men—economic, political, and sexual dominance (LeFanu 1989). This demonstrates the political utility of speculative fiction, where feminist theory and praxis interweave to articulate alternative viewpoints capable of imagining pathways toward gender equality (Oziewicz 2017). The role-reversal feminist subgenre has thus served as a tool

DOI https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.2421-454X/22888
ISSN 2421-454X

to imagine fictitious societies in which gender ceases to function as a structural axis of power.

However, regarding Alderman's novel—on which the series is based—scholars have argued that it reverses contemporary gendered violence while leaving intact a binary structure of domination. Yebra (2018) argues that the novel achieves a radical inversion through a literal transfer of power from men to women. Yet this inversion does not necessarily make the novel feminist, as Rebollo-Bueno (2021) points out in her analysis. Following this line, Mondragón Paredes (2022) argues that *The Power* does not eliminate differences in gender roles but merely reverses them in women's favor. These inversions allow the narrative to satirize the most blatant aspects of women's oppression by constructing explicit parallels between the fictional world and contemporary patriarchy (LeFanu 1989: 43).

Structurally, Mondragón Paredes notes, the novel mirrors misogynist literature that depicted women as unfit to wield power, suggesting that women should not, cannot, and must not hold authority (Russ 1980: 2). Sarah LeFanu similarly argues that such role reversals rarely support feminist goals because their dichotomous structure reduces gendered power relations to two possibilities: one group dominating or regaining dominance over the other; or an attempt to reach balance, which often ignores the complex historical realities of sexual inequality (1989: 45). Nonetheless, Mondragón Paredes (2022) contends that despite the conceptual limitations of the subgenre, role reversal remains essential in this novel to question gender as the basis of social organization.

Miller (2020) also highlights the narrative's cautionary emphasis on the danger of replicating existing paradigms. She argues that although a female superpower may offer a temporary escape from reality, it is neither inherently optimistic nor inherently feminist. Yet, like Mondragón Paredes (2022), she connects Alderman's narrative to mythical archetypes associated with femininity—particularly the monstrous-feminine and hypersexualized female figures. In contrast, the television adaptation presents moral dilemmas that suggest a different dynamic: most protagonists are reluctant to use their power or use it only in self-defense. They attempt to alleviate the fear their power provokes in men by exercising self-restraint. Nevertheless, the repression and threats they face lead to a revolution whose outcome remains uncertain due to the series' cancellation.

REFERENCES

Alderman, Naomi (2018). *El poder.* Barcelona: La Roca.

Asimov, Isaac (1975). "How Easy to See the Future!" *Natural History* 84(4): 92.

Banerjee, Maumita, Milina Bhattacharya and Trisha Bhattacharya (2022). "Reviewing Feminist Futures in Literary Fictions: A Comparative Analysis of the Visions of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and Naomi Alderman" *The Text* 4(2): 31-47.

Barceló, Miquel (1990). *Ciencia ficción: una nueva guía de lectura.* Hauppauge: Nova.

Blaim, Artur (2022). "Anti-utopia". In *The Palgrave Handbook of Utopian and Dystopian Literatures,* edited by Peter Marks, Jennifer. A. Wagner-Lawlor and Fatima Vieira, 39-52. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Budakov, Vesselin M. (2010). "Dystopia: An Earlier Eighteenth-Century Use" *Notes and Queries* 57(1): 86-88. https://doi.org/10.1093/notesj/gjp235.

Byron Cover, Arthur (1974). "Vertex Interview with Philip K. Dick". https://n9.cl/gscyw (last accessed 16-04-26).

Casetti, Francesco (1994). *Teorías del cine. 1945-1990.* Madrid: Cátedra.

Casetti, Francesco (1996). *El film y su espectador.* Madrid: Cátedra.

Casetti, Francesco and Federico di Chio (1991). *Cómo analizar un film.* Barcelona: Paidós.

Claeys, Gregory (2013a). "Three variants on the concept of dystopia". In *Dystopia(n) Matters: On the Page, on Screen, on Stage,* edited by Fatima Vieira, 14-18. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Claeys, Gregory (2013b). "News from Somewhere" *History* 98: 145-173. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-229X.12005.

Claeys, Gregory (2017). *Dystopia. A natural history.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Claeys, Gregory (2022). "Dystopia". In *The Palgrave Handbook of Utopian and Dystopian Literatures,* edited by Peter Marks, Jennifer A. Wagner-Lawlor and Fátima Vieira, 53-64. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Donstrup, Mayte (2024). *Series de televisión e ideologías políticas.* Madrid: Fragua.

Fitting, Peter (2009). "A Short History of Utopian Studies" *Science Fiction Studies* 36(1): 121-131. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25475211

Fitting, Peter (2010). "Utopia, dystopia and science fiction". In *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature,* ed-

DOI https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.2421-454X/22888
ISSN 2421-454X

ited by Gregory Claeys, 135-153. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge University Press.

Freedman, Carl (2000). *Critical Theory and Science Fiction.* Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

Grandío, María del Mar (2011). "Riesgo y trauma en la ficción televisiva estadounidense post 11-S: el caso de Heroes" *Zer. Revista de Estudios de Comunicación* 16(31): 51-67. httpS://doi.org/10.1387/zer.4823.

Greene, Vivien (2011). "Utopia / Dystopia"*American Art* 25(2): 2-7. https://doi.org/10.1086/661960.

Heinlein, Robert A. (1964). "A SympoSium By Robert A. Heinlein". In *Of Worlds Beyond: The Science of Science Fiction Writing,* edited by Lloyd A. Eshbach, 87-102. Reading: Fantasy Press.

Heywood, Andrew (2012). *Political ideologies. An introduction.* London: Palgrave MacMillan.

Jameson, Fredric (2007). *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions.* London: Verso.

Kristeva, Julia (1982). *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection.* New York: Columbia UP.

LeFanu, Sarah (1989). *Feminism and Science Fiction*. Bloomington: Indiana UP.

Levitas, Ruth (2011). "The imaginary reconstitution of society: utopia as method". In *Utopia method visión. The use of social dreaming,* edited by Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini, 47-68. Bern: Peter Lang.

McKee, Robert (2009). *El guion: sustancia, estructura, estilo y principio de la escritura de guiones*. Barcelona: Alba.

Miller, Alyson (2020). "Day of the Girls": Reading Gender, Power, and Violence in Naomi Alderman's The Power *College Literature* 47(2): 398-433. https://doi.org/10.1353/lit.2020.0016.

Mondragón Paredes, Veronica (2022). "Gender and the Monstrous-Feminine: Subversion in Naomi Alderman's The Power" *Contemporary Women's Writing* 16(1): 79-97. https://doi.org/10.1093/cww/vpac008.

Moreno Balaguer, Rebeca (2019). *Feminismos. La historia.* Tres Cantos: Akal.

Moylan, Tom (2000a). "Look into the dark": On Dystopia and the Novum". In *Learning from Other Worlds: Estrangement, Cognition, and the Politics of Science Fiction and Utopia*, edited by Patrick Parrinder, 51-71. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Moylan, Tom (2000b). *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: science fiction, utopia, dystopia.* Boulder: Westview.

Oziewicz, Marek (2017). "Speculative Fiction". *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.78,

Pearson, Carol (1977). "Women's Fantasies and Feminist Utopias". *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 2(3): 50-61. https://doi.org/10.2307/3346349.

Rebollo-Bueno, Sara (2021). El feminismo (liberal) como ideología política en The Power. In *Poder, ideología y propaganda en la ficción distópica*, edited by Antonio Pineda, 281-305. Valencia: Tirant Lo Blanch.

Roemer, Kenneth M. (2011). "More aliens transforming utopia: the future of reader response and utopian studies". In *Utopia method visión. The use of social dreaming, e*dited by Tom Moylan and Rebecca Baccolini, 131-158. Bern: Peter Lang.

Russ, Joanna (1980). "'Amor Vincit Foeminam': The Battle of the Sexes in in Science Fiction (Amor Vincit Foeminam: La Bataille Des Sexes En *Science-Fiction)" Science Fiction Studies* 7(1): 2-15. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/4239306.

Sargisson, Lucy (2011). The curious relationship between politics and utopia. In *Utopia method visión. The use of social dreaming,* edited by Tom Moylan and Rebeca Baccolini, 25-46. Bern: Peter Lang.

Suvin, Darko (2000). "Novum Is as Novum Does". In *Science Fiction, Critical Frontiers,* edited by Karen Sayer y John Moore, 3-22. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Uhlenbruch, Frauke (2015). *The Nowhere Bible. Utopia, Dystopia, Science Fiction.* Berlin: De Gruyter.

Yebra, Jose M. (2018). "'Acheronta movebo': Violence and Dystopia in Naomi Alderman's The Power*" ORBIS Litterarum* 74(2): 71-83. https://doi.org/10.1111/oli.12207

DOI https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.2421-454X/22888
ISSN 2421-454X