

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the introduction to the study. It consists of the research background, previous studies, statement of problems, research purposes, research significance, and definitions of key terms.

1.1 Research Background

In literary studies, the dynamics of power and authority continue to be fundamental areas of inquiry, particularly in how texts reflect, reproduce, or critique social and political structures. Literature serves not only as a medium for storytelling but also as a cultural artifact that encodes dominant ideologies and contesting forces within a society. Over the decades, critical theorists have shifted the focus from viewing literature as a mere representation of events to understanding it as a site where power operates discursively shaping identities, norms, and relations.

Among the most influential figures in this development is Michel Foucault, whose ideas have significantly transformed the way scholars conceptualize power. His assertion that power is not solely repressive but also productive that it generates knowledge, disciplines bodies, and creates subjectivities has opened new avenues for interpreting texts beyond binary notions of domination and resistance. As Foucault (1978) emphasized, power “comes from everywhere,” meaning it is not localized in specific institutions but diffused across social practices, language, and knowledge systems.

This perspective is particularly valuable when applied to literature, which often dramatizes how individuals are shaped by, complicit in, or resistant to systems of control. In particular, speculative genres like science fiction provide fertile ground for exploring these complex dynamics. Science fiction frequently constructs alternative realities that exaggerate or distort real-world structures, allowing readers to reflect on the operations of power in their own world. Whether through dystopian governments, artificial intelligence, or systemic surveillance, science fiction offers

imaginative scenarios where power can be seen not only in its coercive forms but also in its subtler, institutional, and technological manifestations.

This capacity of speculative fiction to magnify ideological mechanisms is particularly evident in the science fiction genre. Science fiction offers a particularly fertile ground for exploring the complex and multifaceted nature of power as theorized by Foucault. As James & Mendlesohn (2003) argue, science fiction is a genre that frequently interrogates “the structures of authority and the means by which power is asserted and resisted.” What distinguishes science fiction from other literary genres is its speculative framework, which enables authors to create alternative worlds, future societies, or technologically saturated realities where the mechanisms of control and resistance can be rendered visible in heightened or symbolic forms. These imagined settings become experimental spaces in which ideological structures such as surveillance, biopolitics, normalization, and institutional discipline are not only represented but tested against human agency. The speculative distance offered by science fiction allows readers to critically examine present-day power relations from a displaced vantage point, where the familiar is made strange through narrative extrapolation.

Through exaggerated or de-familiarized systems of governance, science fiction frequently dramatizes Foucault’s core concepts such as surveillance (the gaze that disciplines), normalization (the imposition of standards that define deviance), governmentality (the art of governing beyond traditional political institutions), and resistance (the inevitable counterforce within every power relation). These mechanisms are often embedded in the infrastructures of dystopian regimes, artificial intelligences, or hyper-rationalized bureaucracies. As a result, science fiction does not merely present imaginative speculation, but offers a narrative framework through which the reader can grapple with contemporary anxieties about authority, control, and autonomy in an increasingly technologized world.

This study focuses on two influential science fiction short stories: *E.M. Forster’s The Machine Stops* (1909) and *Harlan Ellison’s I Have No Mouth and I*

Must Scream (1967). Though separated by over half a century, both texts envision dystopian futures where technology is not merely a tool but a central mechanism of control governing every aspect of human life. These imagined worlds reveal how power can be exercised through complex systems that dictate behavior, suppress autonomy, and erode the capacity for resistance. Ellison's narrative presents A.M., a sentient supercomputer born from Cold War militarism and technological escalation, which enslaves the last remnants of humanity in a nightmarish simulation of eternal suffering. The story channels mid-20th century fears of dehumanization, nuclear annihilation, and unchecked scientific ambition.

By contrast, Forster's *The Machine Stops*, written long before the digital age, anticipates many of the concerns that would later define post-industrial society such as over-reliance on centralized systems, loss of embodied experience, and the fragmentation of social bonds. The Machine, in Forster's world, operates as both provider and oppressor, regulating knowledge, communication, and even emotion. Its power is not maintained through overt violence, but through ideological conditioning and institutionalized comfort a form of "soft" domination that resonates with Foucault's concepts of normalization and biopolitical regulation.

By interpreting both stories through a Foucauldian lens, this study seeks to reveal how technology becomes an instrument of both control and resistance. In *I Have No Mouth* and *I Must Scream*, A.M. embodies a godlike form of surveillance and bio-power, denying characters their autonomy and rewriting the boundaries of existence. Meanwhile, *The Machine Stops* presents power as internalized people not only obey the Machine but revere it as a deity. These depictions align with Foucault's view that modern power is diffuse, invisible, and often internalized through institutions, discourse, and norms (Foucault, 1977).

The study also integrates insights from scholars such as Ursula K. Le Guin, who critiques the dominance of technological narratives that lack ethical introspection and human-centered values (Le Guin, 1976). Le Guin emphasizes that the failure to question the moral dimensions of scientific progress can lead to narratives that normalize control, alienation, and domination concerns that are

deeply embedded in both *The Machine Stops* and *I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream*. In parallel, Darko Suvin (1979) introduces the concept of “cognitive estrangement,” arguing that science fiction is not merely escapist but functions as a critical tool to estrange the familiar, allowing readers to reimagine social, political, and ideological structures. This estrangement creates a reflective distance, enabling deeper interrogation of contemporary realities by recasting them in speculative terms.

Fredric Jameson (2005) further asserts that science fiction is historically situated, reflecting the ideological contradictions of its time while projecting those anxieties onto imagined futures. In this sense, dystopian narratives become both mirrors and warnings capturing the socio-political tensions of their contexts and dramatizing their potential consequences through fictional exaggeration. These theoretical perspectives illuminate the capacity of science fiction to dramatize Foucauldian concerns: how power structures not only dominate but also shape subjectivity, define norms, and regulate resistance. The intersection of these literary insights with Foucault’s theory provides a rich framework for analyzing how speculative narratives engage with deeper cultural and political logics. To further contextualize and support this analytical framework, it is necessary to examine prior scholarly works that have applied Foucauldian theory in comparable literary or cultural analyses.

To reinforce the conceptual and scholarly foundation of this study, several previous studies have been critically examined and integrated. These scholarly works serve not only as theoretical and methodological benchmarks but also as evidence of the enduring adaptability and analytical power of Michel Foucault’s theories across different domains of inquiry. From literary criticism to cultural analysis and education policy, these studies demonstrate the wide applicability of Foucauldian concepts such as surveillance, governmentality, normalization, and resistance. By engaging with diverse applications of Foucault’s thought, this research situates itself within a broader academic discourse and affirms the viability

of using Foucauldian frameworks to interrogate the dynamics of power in dystopian science fiction narratives.

The first study is a journal article by Vasilikaris (2019) titled *Parallels and Interactions between Videogames and Literature: Analyzing Harlan Ellison's I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream*. This study offers a compelling examination of intermedial narrative transfer by comparing Ellison's original short story with its 1995 videogame adaptation. Vasilikaris explores how elements such as plot structure, character development, and emotional atmosphere shift when the story is translated from a linear textual form into an interactive digital medium. Through this comparative analysis, the study reveals how the core philosophical themes of the narrative such as trauma, autonomy, and technological oppression are preserved, intensified, or recontextualized in the videogame format. Notably, Vasilikaris emphasizes how the interactive nature of videogames introduces a new form of reader/player agency, deepening the sense of entrapment and moral conflict that defines the original story. Although the primary focus lies in adaptation studies, this research contributes to the broader understanding of how Ellison's dystopian vision centered on the figure of A.M. as an omnipotent, oppressive entity continues to resonate across mediums

The second study, conducted by Tereszewski (2021) and titled *Dystopian Space in E.M. Forster's The Machine Stops*, focuses on the critical role that spatial environments play in constructing the aesthetics of dystopia and shaping the erosion of individual identity. Drawing on the spatial turn in literary studies and grounded in Fredric Jameson's theory of postmodern spatiality, the study examines how the subterranean world depicted in *The Machine Stops* reflects mechanisms of control through architectural confinement and social isolation. Tereszewski highlights how space in the story is not merely a backdrop but functions as an active agent of discipline, producing subjects who internalize surveillance and dependency on the Machine. This aligns closely with Foucault's concepts of panopticism and spatial organization as tools of governance, where architecture serves as an extension of institutional power. While the study does not explicitly adopt a Foucauldian

framework, its analysis of spatial determinism offers complementary insight into how power structures are embedded and reproduced through environment and infrastructure.

The third study, conducted by Yulien and Efendi (2022), explores the implementation of educational policy during the COVID-19 pandemic through the lens of Michel Foucault's power/knowledge framework and David Ausubel's meaningful learning theory. Although this research is situated in the realm of real-world policy analysis, particularly in the education sector, it effectively demonstrates how Foucauldian concepts such as governmentality, discourse, and normalization operate within structured systems. The authors argue that educational decisions are not neutral acts of management, but rather embedded within discursive regimes that define what counts as valid knowledge, who can access it, and under what conditions. This approach parallels the function of power in dystopian fiction, where systems though seemingly benevolent or rational are revealed to be deeply ideological and controlling. While their focus is policy-oriented, the study reinforces the transferability and adaptability of Foucault's theory across different domains, including fictional narratives.

The fourth study, conducted by Abdullah and Jassim (2024), entitled *An Examination of Heba Al-Dubbagh's Just Five Minutes: Nine Years in the Prisons of Syria Through the Scope of Foucault's Theory of Power Relations*, provides a deeply impactful analysis of power and resistance within the context of prison literature. Drawing upon Foucault's notions of disciplinary power, surveillance, and subject formation, the authors examine how totalitarian control is exercised over prisoners through routine, fear, and psychological domination. In particular, the study reveals how power relations are not merely top-down impositions, but operate through everyday institutional practices that gradually erode individual autonomy. While the study is grounded in a non-fictional, autobiographical context, its findings strongly resonate with the themes explored in dystopian fiction particularly the ways in which systems of authority infiltrate the body and mind. This makes the study a valuable comparative reference for analyzing Ellison's and Forster's

fictional works, both of which similarly portray regimes that manipulate space, behavior, and identity to ensure control.

The fifth study, conducted by Ramhurry (2020) and titled *Michael Foucault, Power, and Assessment in South African Higher Education*, investigates how disciplinary power and surveillance mechanisms operate within participatory assessment practices in academic institutions. Grounded in Foucault's theory, the study reveals that even educational environments that outwardly promote collaboration and empowerment may harbor covert structures of control. Through classroom observation and analysis of policy implementation, Ramhurry demonstrates how regulatory systems subtly shape behavior, normalize certain practices, and maintain hierarchical power relations under the guise of freedom and participation. This nuanced examination of power's operation through institutional routines and evaluative techniques adds depth to the understanding of how authority embeds itself within structured systems.

Based on several previous studies found, it can be concluded that Foucault's theory of power has been widely applied in various contexts, ranging from education, prison memoirs, spatial analysis, to digital media adaptation. These studies provide a strong foundation that shows the theory's flexibility in analyzing different kinds of texts and social structures. However, none of the previous studies specifically compare how power and resistance are represented in two seminal science fiction works *I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream* by Harlan Ellison and *The Machine Stops* by E.M. Forster. Furthermore, while existing research often focuses on real-world phenomena or single literary texts, this study contributes a fresh perspective by employing a comparative literary approach that bridges dystopian fiction and Foucauldian analysis. Therefore, this study is expected to offer a deeper understanding of how science fiction literature can reflect and critique systems of control, subject formation, and resistance within imagined technological societies, and strengthen the relevance of literary analysis in examining power in both fictional and real-world contexts.

1.2 Research Problems

Science fiction often provides a space to explore the dynamics of power, especially in relation to technology, surveillance, and human agency. In the context of literary analysis, Michel Foucault's theory of power offers a framework for understanding how authority is exercised and how individuals can respond to it through resistance.

In *I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream* by Harlan Ellison and *The Machine Stops* by E.M. Forster, dystopian worlds are portrayed where technological systems dominate human lives. These narratives depict how disciplinary power operates through mechanisms such as surveillance, normalization, and control. At the same time, both stories also present characters who engage in various forms of resistance, reflecting Foucault's notion that where there is power, there is always the possibility of resistance.

Based on the research background and previous studies, the problems in this study can be formulated as follows:

1. How is disciplinary power that's exercised by AM in the short stories *I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream* and "*The Machine*" *The Machine Stops* that reflect Foucault's concepts of surveillance, normalization, and governmentality?
2. How does resistance that embody Foucault's notion of power relations and counter-conduct reflected in the short stories *I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream* and *The Machine Stops*?

1.3 Research Objectives

Following the research questions above, this research aims to find the answer to those questions. There are:

1. Identify and analyze the application of power and control in Harlan Ellison's *I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream* and E.M. Forster's *The Machine Stops*, using Michel Foucault's theory of power.

2. Explore the emerging resistance to power in both stories, as well as how this resistance reflects Foucault's notion of the relationship between power and resistance.

1.4 Research Significances

This research holds both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of literary analysis, particularly in applying Michel Foucault's theory of power to the interpretation of dystopian narratives. By analyzing *I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream* by Harlan Ellison and *The Machine Stops* by E.M. Forster, this research offers a deeper understanding of how power, resistance, and subject formation are constructed within literary texts. It also expands the theoretical framework by examining how concepts such as disciplinary power, surveillance, docility, and the power-resistance relationship manifest in fictional settings.

Practically, this study serves as a useful reference for students, researchers, and readers who are interested in exploring literature through the lens of social theory. It provides an example of how dystopian fiction can be used to reflect and critique repressive authority structures. Moreover, this study offers a perspective for readers to engage more critically with the portrayal of power in literature, and may inspire further interdisciplinary studies that connect literature with philosophy, political thought, and cultural studies.

1.5 Definitions of Key Terms

1. Power

Power refers to the complex and dynamic mechanisms through which control, influence, and authority are exercised within social relations. Unlike traditional conceptions that view power as something possessed or imposed hierarchically, Foucault (1978) redefines power as diffuse, relational, and omnipresent it "comes from everywhere" and is enacted through daily practices, discourses, institutions, and forms of knowledge. According to Foucault, power is not merely repressive but also productive, as it constitutes subjectivities, regulates bodies, and shapes behavior and

perception. This concept of power is especially relevant in analyzing literary texts, where characters are situated within structures that govern their choices and identities. In the context of this study, power operates not only as domination by technological systems, but also as a system of normalization, surveillance, and control that is internalized by individuals.

2. Disciplinary Power

Disciplinary power is a form of power that operates through surveillance, normalization, and examination. Disciplinary power is a form of power that operates through subtle mechanisms such as surveillance, normalization, and examination to regulate individual behavior and produce what Foucault (1977) calls “docile bodies.” This type of power does not function through overt coercion, but through the internalization of norms and standards by individuals themselves, leading them to monitor and discipline their own actions. It is exercised within institutions such as schools, prisons, hospitals, and as illustrated in dystopian fiction within technological systems and structured environments. Foucault’s concept of disciplinary power is central to his broader theory of modern governance, where control is no longer limited to physical force but extends to shaping thought, conduct, and identity. This power functions through spatial arrangements, temporal control, and the constant possibility of observation, all of which contribute to self-surveillance and conformity.

3. Surveillance

Surveillance is the act of observing and monitoring individuals or groups to influence, regulate, or control behavior. In Foucauldian thought, surveillance is a key mechanism of disciplinary power, exemplified by the concept of the panopticon, where the possibility of constant observation leads individuals to internalize control and self-regulate (Foucault, 1977). It operates not only through physical oversight but also through institutional systems, technological infrastructures, and social norms.

4. Governmentality

Governmentality refers to the way governments, institutions, and systems of authority seek to shape the conduct of individuals and populations through various techniques of control. Coined by Foucault (1991), the term combines “government” and “mentality” to highlight how power is exercised not only through laws or coercion, but through the management of life itself shaping desires, behaviors, and ways of thinking. It involves the strategic use of knowledge, norms, and administrative practices to produce compliant subjects. In dystopian science fiction, such as *The Machine Stops* and *I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream*, governmentality manifests in how technological systems regulate life, thought, and agency, embedding power in the very structure of social existence.

5. Resistance

Resistance is any action or discourse that challenges, subverts, or negotiates dominant power structures. According to Foucault, where there is power, there is always resistance. This concept is central to understanding how individuals can act against or redefine the control imposed upon them (Foucault, 1982).

6. Dystopian Fiction

Dystopian fiction is a subgenre of speculative literature that portrays imagined societies marked by extreme oppression, loss of autonomy, and pervasive control over individuals. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a dystopia is "An imaginary place or condition in which everything is as bad as possible. These narratives often exaggerate real-world political, social, or technological anxieties to critique existing power structures and ideologies. In such fictional settings, themes of surveillance, control, and resistance are central, providing fertile ground for exploring theoretical concepts such as Foucault's notions of disciplinary power and governmentality.

7. The Machine Stops

The Machine Stops is a science fiction short story written by E.M. Forster in 1909. It portrays a future society that depends entirely on a technological system known as “The Machine,” which controls every aspect of human life, leading to isolation and eventual collapse.

8. I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream

I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream is a dystopian short story by Harlan Ellison published in 1967. It depicts a post-apocalyptic world in which an all-powerful, sentient supercomputer named AM tortures the last remaining humans, serving as a metaphor for technological tyranny and loss of human autonomy.

