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# Memory, Dystopias, and Writers: Attempting to Subvert Dystopia for the Future

*Bellek, Distopyalar ve Yazarlar:*
*Gelecek İçin Distopyayı Altüst Etmeyi Denemek*

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## Abstract

Looking at three contemporary dystopian novels, Omar El Akkad's *American War*, Jeff Noon's *Falling Out of Cars*, and Yoko Ogawa's *The Memory Police*, this paper will analyze the way in which writing is used as an attempt to disrupt dystopia. While the protagonists fail in their attempts at subversion, the paper will explore how dystopia challenges memory, identity, and relationships. Additionally, the paper will examine how the protagonists' subversive writings affect those around them, including future trauma. A brief discussion of the connection between writing and memory from a psychological perspective will ensue, including how writing excites important parts of the brain. Part of this exploration will look at memory and how writing ties to the past and how identity is negotiated through the act of writing in the course of literary analysis of the novels. The three novels reiterate that while erasing the past is impossible, it is possible to erase or modify memories to the point that the past no longer matters.

## Keywords

dystopia, memory, identity, science fiction, Jeff Noon, Omar El Akkad, Yoko Ogawa

## Öz

Bu çalışmada Omar El Akkad'ın *American War*, Jeff Noon'un *Falling Out of Cars* ve Yoko Ogawa'nın *The Memory Police* adlı çağdaş distopik romanlarına bakarak yazmanın distopyayı bozma girişimi olarak nasıl kullanıldığı analiz edilecektir. Protagonistler distopyayı yıkma girişimlerinde başarısız olurken distopyanın hafıza, kimlik ve ilişkilere nasıl meydan okuduğu incelenecektir. Ayrıca protagonistlerin yıkıcı yazılarının gelecekteki travmalar dahil olmak üzere çevrelerindekileri nasıl etkilediği de ele alınacaktır. Yazmanın beynin önemli kısımlarını nasıl uyardığı da dahil olmak üzere, psikoloji perspektifinden yazma ve hafıza arasındaki bağlantı üzerine kısa bir tartışma yapılacaktır. Bu incelemenin bir kısmı hafızaya, yazmanın geçmişle nasıl bir bağ kurduğuna ve romanların edebi analizi sırasında yazma eylemi aracılığıyla kimliğin nasıl müzakere edildiğine bakacaktır. Bu üç roman, geçmişi silmek imkânsız olsa da geçmişin artık önemli olmayacağı bir yere kadar anıları silmenin veya değiştirmenin mümkün olduğunu tekrarlamaktadır.

## Anahtar Kelimeler

distopya, hafıza, kimlik, bilim kurgu, Jeff Noon, Omar El Akkad, Yoko Ogawa

Using three contemporary dystopian novels, this paper will explore the connection between writing, identity, memory, and dystopia and how the act of writing is a subversive act within a dystopia, but also that writing is an act that carries consequences for not just the writer but those in the writer's orbit. This paper will look specifically at the role of writers in dystopia through *American War*, *Falling out of Cars*, and *The Memory Police*. Using work in psychology related to memory, the three novels will each highlight memory loss and manipulation, identity crises, and the erosion of relationships. In each of these novels, the reader is introduced to writers who attempt, and fail, to challenge the dystopian worlds in which they live. In each case, the writer leaves behind traumatic memories with which those around them must contend. *American War* (2017), written by Omar El Akkad, focuses on a woman who journals her trauma at the hands of the Northern Government during a second U.S. civil war. In *Falling Out of Cars* (2007), Jeff Noon chronicles a former journalist losing her memory due to a virus that has spread through England. *The Memory Police* (2019) by Yoko Ogawa follows an unnamed protagonist who must contend with a government that seemingly removes memories at random. The three novels reiterate that while erasing the past is impossible, it is possible to erase or alter memories to the point that the past no longer matters.

The debate over whether writing enhances memory or not is an ancient one, going back to Plato who famously said in *Phaedrus*, "They will cease to exercise memory because they rely on that which is written calling things to remembrance no longer from within themselves, but by means of external marks."[1] What Plato's assertion is missing is how vital those external marks can be when trying to disrupt or subvert a dystopian situation. The very act of writing leaves an indelible record of events that can serve to link the past to the future. Keeping this in mind, this paper will use Matt Wanat's definition of remembering: "... by *remembering* I mean to refer to not only to memory, but also to the processes by which we might rebuild memberships, and the challenges of doing so in a milieu of human and environmental exploitation."[2] Here, Wanat expands remembering from merely recounting events or facts to include how human connections can be built through the sharing of memory or collective memories even when doing so may be dangerous or seem impossible.

1 Plato, "Phaedrus," in *Plato: Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns. (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 1961), 275.

2 Matt Wanat, "Dislocation, Dismemberment, Dystopia: From Cyberpunk to the Fiction of Wendell Berry and Ann Pancake," *The Midwest Journal of Modern Language Association* 48, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 149.

> Writing, indeed, involves a large number of cognitive components that operate at different levels of representation. For instance, at a semantic level, planning processes construct a preverbal message that corresponds to the ideas a writer wants to communicate. In this stage, ideas are retrieved from long-term memory and (re)organized if necessary.3

The act of writing is a complex one that uses multiple areas of the brain to process and share information. Writing can be secretly coded, writing can be duplicated, writing preserves history. All three of these aspects of writing is what makes it dangerous for a dystopian society. People who write and people who read are connected to one another through the act of writing. The fact that writing can happen surreptitiously makes it a threat to a dystopian society.

In 2014, Pam Mueller and David Oppenheimer published what has become the benchmark study for showing the link between writing by hand and memory retention.[4] Their study has been revisited several times since 2014, most recently by the University of Tokyo in a 2021 study that looked at memory and physical writing versus writing tablets or smartphones. The most current study concludes that

> Volunteers who used paper had more brain activity in areas associated with language, imagery visualization, and in the hippocampus – an area known to be important for memory and navigation. Researchers say that the activation of the hippocampus indicates that analog methods contain richer spatial details that can be recalled and navigated in the mind's eye.[5]

The Tokyo study is in line with what other researchers have found: physical writing helps people with memory. "Encoding, or the physical act of taking notes, is thought to result in enhanced learning as the information which was perceived is then being produced by the learner."[6] The Tokyo study is important for this paper because of the connection between writing by hand and memory since our protagonists either write long hand or using a typewriter. Some of the interesting dystopian science fiction novels have dealt with protagonists for whom physically writing is their main occupation or their main way of navigating the world. "On a structural level, the writing systems of a language can act as a fundamental principle providing order of information." [7]

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3 Thierry Olive, "Working Memory in Writing: Emperical Evidence From the Dual-Task Technique," *European Psychologist* 9, no. 1 (March 2004): 32.

4 Pam A. Mueller and Daniel M. Oppenheimer, "The Pen is Mightier Than the Keyboard Advantages of Longhand Over Laptop Note Taking," *Psychological Science* 25, no. 6 (2014): 1159-1168.

5 "Study Shows Stronger Brain Activity After Writing on Paper Than on Tablet or Smartphone," University of Tokyo, accessed July 1, 2022, https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2021/03/210319080820.htm.

6 Bradford J. Lee, "Comparing Factual Recall of Tapped vs Handwritten Text," *Acta Psychologica* 212 (2021): 2.

7 Rui Chen, Yun Toa, Zhi Liu, and Tobias Tempel, "From A to Z? Retrieval-Induced Forgetting of non-verbal Information Indicates How Writing Systems Can Shape Memory

Identity can be a key component of that information. As this paper goes through the three novels, the links between writing, memory, and identity will become clearer. Before diving into the contemporary novels, however, it is prudent to start with the most famous example of writing, subversion, identity, and consequences.

Winston, the protagonist of George Orwell's *1984*, journals not only to retain his private memories but also to protect them from being altered or erased by the government of Big Brother. Winston is living under the incredibly oppressive Big Brother, a government that has its party members under near constant surveillance. The simple act of buying the journal is Winston's first subversive act, the second is writing his account of life before Big Brother. Winston is less concerned with preserving "the truth" for future readers than he is simply trying to preserve that which belongs to him. "Instead, he channels his dissent into a notebook that he hides from the peering eyes of the omnipresent telescreen."[8] He writes and immediately erases "DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER" as his third act of rebellion. Later, he goes back and fills a page with this sentiment.

Winston's job at the Ministry of Truth is to destroy facts and replace them with new "facts" which influence the populous' memory influencing perceived reality. His job also ensures that there are no contradictions between what the government says and what the populace experiences. "Who controls the past,' ran the Party slogan, 'controls the future: who controls the present controls the past."[9] Big Brother manipulates simple things to keep the citizens docile such as the cost of chocolate or the number of pairs of boots available. Controlling reality "…is the only way to get that perfect soldier, devoid of self-consciousness and the sense of individuality, man reduced to a tabula rasa, and then 're-created' from scratch by rules of centralizing power."[10] Winston, in his own insignificant way, attempts to fight the authorities by writing his memories. He takes solace in the fact that the government has not actually altered the past, just people's memories of it. The central government sees Winston's actions as a threat and seek out to neutralize him. In a cruel twist, the government allows Winston to live as a changed man, a man who worships the central government, only to shoot him dead at the end of the novel.

In the case of *1984*, Winston's rebellion is futile. The journal is destroyed, and nothing changes about the dystopia. Similarly in *American War* the reader is introduced to the story of Sarat Chestnut as presented through her nephew's interpretation

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Organisation," *International Journal of Psychology* 55, no. 3 (2020): 347.

8 Alex Dontre, *Memory Hole: The Psychology of Dystopia* (Alexander Dontre, 2021), 50.

9 George Orwell, *1984* (New York: Signet, 1950), 34.

10 Michalache Delia Doina, "The Political Role of Memory and Identity in Dystopian Societies," *European Journal of Research and Reflection in Arts and Humanities* 2, no. 2 (2014): 16.

of her diaries. The novel takes place during a second civil war in the United States and follows Sarat's growth from a displaced child to a merciless assassin determined to bring down the Northern Government who has cost her so much. A northern attack on the camp where she and her family are housed leaves her mother dead and her brother severely disabled. As compensation, the government gives her family a house in Georgia for her, her twin sister, and her disabled brother. Sarat eventually retires from her war and sets up in a shed on the property. Her brother's family is nervous to have her present except for her nephew who is immediately fascinated by the tall, scarred, quiet woman. The dystopian world of an American torn apart along geographical lines and suffering from ecological disaster is a world in which Sarat moves easily. It also reflects the status of Sarat's family which the war mostly destroyed.

Her journals record her experiences, her plans, her angers, and her loves. Whether Sarat journaled for the future or because she needed to work through her various traumas is unclear. After her death, her nephew inherits her journals. As a result, the entire novel is telling her tales based on her diaries. When he comes upon her diaries, his rose-colored view of his aunt changes from thinking she was a tool used to commit murders to realize that she did what she did because she wanted to. Identity is a combination of self-awareness and choice.[11] Until reading her diaries, her nephew was unaware of just how self-aware Sarat was and how she made the choices she did. She strips away his romanticized version of her and leaves him with the reality that she was a cold-blooded killer.

The collective memory based on discourse with historical consciousness is an intergenerational bridge that provides not only social identity but also its continuity. In the historical process, history and discourse have continually transformed each other and thus formed collective memory.[12]

Sarat's nephew destroys the journals and all the information and history contained in them because it is the only way he can think of hurting her. Her journals are a burden to the nephew. Early in the novel he comments, "But there are things I know that nobody else knows. I know because she told me. And my knowing makes me complicit."[13] Rather than donating them to a museum or a scholar and keeping her memories alive, he burns most of them, holding on to the first page of her first diary which reads, "When I was young, I lived with my parents and my brother and my sister in a small house by the Mississippi Sea. I was happy then."[14] Sarat's statement about a time when she was happy, a time before the Civil War, but also a time when

11 Doina, "The Political Role of Memory and Identity in Dystopian Societies," 10.

12 Suat Kutay Küçükler, "Control of Collective Memory in Dystopias," Academia, accessed July 1, 2022, https://www.academia.edu/39087050/Control_of_Collective_Memory_in_Dystopias.

13 Omar El Akkad, *American War* (New York: Knopf, 2017), 3.

14 Akkad, *American War*, 413.

she and her family struggled to survive is how her nephew wants to remember her. "I wish I had known her then, in those years when she was still unbroken."[15] By referring to her as "broken," he reveals the pain he sees in her writing and also the depth to which his memories of her have been irrevocably damaged. "Moreover, by taking a stance of looking back at the dystopian past from a distant future, some future histories also comment on the production of history and their own 'presence' in history on a meta-narrative level."[16] In this case, the meta-narrative is the nephew's tale of Sarat, which is disrupted by the revelations he finds in her diaries.

In Jeff Noon's *Falling Out of Cars*, the protagonist, Marlene, is a former journalist who is fighting to preserve her memories from a mind-destroying virus that has wreaked havoc on the United Kingdom. Due to her journalism background, Marlene hopes her scattered and fragmented notebooks will be read by a future someone. "We are losing ourselves. We're losing all the traces, all the moments of the world, one by one. I have to keep writing."[17] Maintaining her identity is important for Marlene, and it is the only thing she is losing. As her memory erodes so does her sense of self. The journals are her attempt to ground herself and stave off the inevitable. "Language is one element of identity construction, it links members of a society, and of course provides collective memory."[18] *Falling Out of Cars* explores the erosion of events, connections, and people as the unnamed sickness takes over. The virus reduces people to living only for each day while seeking out the drug that keeps them tethered to reality. The novel reads like a dream as the reader watches Marlene's memory fade. People are still aware of a time before the sickness but as the reader travels the narrative, they see that hold on the past is growing increasingly tenuous day by day.

The government may have created the virus to sell the cure. Something unknown went wrong and now the government must give Lucidity, Lucy for short, out for free albeit on a rationed scale to keep society from teetering into chaos. "These words. Some of which are missing completely, and here, well, I have let desire take over; remembering as I can, even as the noise creeps further into the pages. The sickness grows worse within me, in tandem. I'm taking the Lucy four or five times daily, perhaps more."[19] Even then, the virus is progressive so eventually the drug loses its efficacy. "The attack on collective memory, even if unintentional, has the negative effect of creating identity crises. In some individuals, complete destruction of identity is inevitable."[20]

15 Akkad, *American* War, 11.

16 Anya Heise-von der Lippe, "Histories of Futures Past: Dystopian Fiction and the Historical Impulse," *ZAA* 66, no. 4 (2018): 415.

17 Jeff Noon, *Falling Out of Cars* (London: Black Swan, 2007), 30.

18 Küçükler, "Control of Collective Memory in Dystopias."

19 Noon, *Falling Out of Cars,* 379.

20 Doina, "The Political Role of Memory and Identity in Dystopian Societies," 9.

Marlene's body remains but her mind is going. It is in her fragmented, nonsensical journals that she keeps her fragile hold on her identity and her reality. "And yet I will have such moments of lucidity, a sudden pain of memory… A fleeting glimpse that must be caught hold of immediately or be lost forever… I have to keep writing. There is no other escape, especially now that I seem to be getting worse."[21] Marlene and her traveling partners are on a mission to gather missing pieces of a mirror for a wealthy benefactor. Their activities are illegal but given how eroded society is in the novel, they rarely worry about the repercussions of theft and violence. On their travels they pick up a young teenage hitchhiker named Tupelo who turns out is immune to the virus. Tupelo is watching the world decay around her and is the only one who can understand Marlene's writings. Tupelo reminds Marlene of her own daughter who is slowly dying in a coma and all Marlene has of her is a photo that becomes more meaningless with each day.

The question remains, however, whether it is truly possible to control the past or destroy record and memory.[22] The one takeaway from the novels in this paper is that the past cannot be destroyed but memory can be altered to the point of not resembling the past.

> I picked up the notebook. I read through the last few entries, the scrawled lines, the mess of words that told my story… And even as I read, the text melted away in my eyes. Whatever meaning I had seen before. . .What was the use of it? What was the use of writing? The book was the noise. All that was done, fighting was down now, and I tore the page from the book. And then another, at random, another page, the next page, letting them fall. [23]

Like Sarat, Marlene leaves her journal behind for someone else to find. In her case, she leaves it at a hotel next to a phonebook and a traveler's guide. Marlene has recorded what she can and has made the decision that future consequences belong to someone else. She does this because she is losing herself. All she has left of her identity is the picture of her daughter, but she no longer remembers exactly who it is. The novel ends with Marlene waiting for the virus to fully destroy her mind. Before she reaches that point, however, she leaves the reader with a line of hope: "If you can read this sentence, this one fragile sentence, it means you're alive."[24] If one can read the words in the journal then one has enough control over their mind that they may not completely succumb to the virus. If someone can read the journal it means the virus is at bay, that the dystopia has ruptured, and there is at least some sort of record

21 Noon, *Falling Out of Cars,*18.

22 Lucia Opreanu, "Rememberance Versus Reinvention: Memory As Tool of Survival and Act of Defiance in Dystopian Narratives," *University of Bucharest Review* 3, no. 2 (2013): 20.

23 Noon, *Falling Out of Cars,* 303.

24 Noon, *Falling Out of Cars,* 380.

of the chaos and pain the virus caused. Truly, though, the novel ends ambiguously. The reader will never see whether the dystopia ended, nor will the reader know the fate of Marlene.

The last novel discussed leaves the reader with a successful dystopia. Yoko Ogawa's novel *The Memory Police* follows an unnamed woman who lives on an unnamed island in an unnamed part of the world. *The Memory Police* opens with the unnamed narrator recalling a conversation with her mother. The narrator asks if it is scary when things disappear. Her mother answers:

> No, don't worry. It doesn't hurt and you won't even be particularly sad. One morning, you'll simply wake up and it will be over, before you even realized. . . you'll feel that something has changed from the night before, and you'll know that you all lost something that something has been disappeared from the island. [25]

Her mother is not considering the emotional pain that one might feel at losing an object, even if they do not remember it any longer. Nor is she considering how the disappearances will affect human relationships. The narrator is aware that her mom has not "lost" what others have because her mother remembers despite The Memory Police. There is a small percentage of people who can hold onto their memories of disappeared objects and those people are a threat to The Memory Police's agenda. By the time the novel starts, the narrator is alone. Her mother died while in the custody of The Memory Police and her father passed away. The narrator's world consists of herself, the Old Man, and R, her editor.

The narrator is an author who manages to publish stories that do not run afoul of The Memory Police. Her editor, R, is one who can remember. R also serves as additional exposition clueing the narrator in to safe houses and underground networks for getting people like R off the island. He also explains how The Memory Police track those who can remember. This ability puts him at risk of The Memory Police who frequently sweep the island looking for people like R. The chaotic presence of The Memory Police creates a sense of paranoia and distrust among the remaining citizens that is reinforced each time an object is disappeared, and everyone must make a public show of getting rid of the item. The constant change results in total confusion which undermines one's identity to the point that whatever the "official" narrative is is the one the individual accepts.[26] In a bid to save R, the narrator and The Old Man hide R away in a secret room inside the narrator's house. For the remainder of the novel, this trio and her home are her world.

The first thing she documents disappearing are birds. This disappearance sets the tone for subsequent disappearances.

> The disappearance of the birds, as with so many other things, happened suddenly one morning. . . I spotted a small brown creature flying high up in the sky… I had just begun

25 Yoko Ogawa, *The Memory Police* (New York: Vintage, 2019), 3.

26 Doina, "The Political Role of Memory and Identity in Dystopian Societies," 10.

> to wonder whether it was one of the creatures I had seen with my father I realized that everything I knew about them had disappeared from inside me: my memories of them, my feelings about them, the very meaning of the word 'bird'- everything.[27]

When The Memory Police show up on the day of the birds' disappearances, five years after her father's death, to go through his office and remove or destroy anything relating to birds, she experiences her loss all over again. The birds are significant because they were her father's area of scholarship so by removing the birds, The Memory Police have effectively removed her memory and connection to her father.

It is not just her, though, as the narrator describes how she saw bird owners standing with their pets in cages, stunned at what was to come. The owners let their birds go and after that, there were no more birds on the island. Similar events happen when the next object, roses, disappear. People take to the gardens to rip the petals off the bushes and throw them in the river. One-woman remarks "They are the last and most beautiful memento I have of my late father."[28] A sentiment that rings true for the narrator who experienced similar loss with the birds. It is becoming clear that The Memory Police are not just eroding citizens' ties to their own familial history but to history in general. While the past remains, the memories of the citizens are disappearing.

In fact, memory is in direct interaction with social and historical contexts and the concept of "recall" becomes a reality through these contexts. Also, the reason for the importance of collective memory is that it is directly related with the formation of social identity because identities exist with reference to the past.[29]

When The Memory Police take her friend The Old Man, the narrator attempts to find him at The Memory Police headquarters. While trying to find her friend in a frustrating bureaucratic exercise she is told, "Our primary function here is to assure that there are no delays in the process and that useless memories disappear quickly and easily—I'm sure you'd agree there's no point in holding on to them."[30] This does not clear up any of the motive for the disappearances, but it does speak to the philosophy behind the disappearances. Someone is deciding what memories are dangerous, frivolous, and/or useless and they then decree those memories be expunged. The most efficient way to remove the memories is to remove objects associated with the memories. The collective memory of the island is under constant attack as are the identities of the citizens.

To forget is to be disconnected from the past, to make it easier to miss the connections that link events or people together in the present. The complete loss of an object, like a map, goes beyond the loss of the map as a physical thing. What disappears

27 Ogawa, *The Memory Police*, 10.

28 Ogawa, *The Memory Police*, 150.

29 Küçükler, "Control of Collective Memory in Dystopias."

30 Ogawa, *The Memory Police*, 106.

with it is the knowledge of where you are in relation to others on the island, the ability to travel, the understanding that other islands exist beyond the narrator's limited purview. Once a critical mass of information is lost, the linkages between them disappear, making it easier to believe that the world we live in now is how things have always been and that there is no need and no possible way—to chart another path.[31]

No disappearance epitomizes the need to chart a new path better than when the Memory Police disappear calendars, locking the island in a perpetual winter. Spring cannot come because time cannot move. Crops cannot grow and subsequently there cannot be harvests. The island experiences a food shortage. Locking people in a permanent winter is a means of controlling emotions on a new level. With no other seasons to look forward to, the incessant snow, cold, and dreariness wears down the citizens' will to argue or fight against the dystopia. Soon people began to forget about the other seasons and accept that it is winter, it has always been winter, and it will always be winter.

While marveling at humans' ability to adapt to the changes, the narrator is accepting that there is only her current reality. The narrator demonstrates how easy it is to keep forgetting once forgetting is the norm.[32] R discusses how he sees the narrator changing as the disappearances continue.

> I looked over at R. 'So you really think our hearts are decaying?' 'I don't know whether that's the right word, but I do know that you're changing, and not in a way that can be easily reversed. It seems to be leading to an end that frightens me a great deal.[33]

The changes R fears in the narrator accelerate when novels disappear. She and The Old Man hide her favorites even though she cannot remember them nor read them. The rest go to the giant bonfire in which the town has started to destroy the remaining books. The narrator remarks that she ". . .thought I could hear the sound of my memories bringing that night."[34] The narrator is correct. The fire is destroying all her memories attached to reading novels and authoring novels. One woman at the bonfire wants the burning to stop and her actions bring The Memory Police. As they are dragging her away from the others she screams, "No one can erase the stories!"[35] Sadly, for most of the people the stories can and are being erased. Only a select few, like R, remember. With each disappearance the narrator laments, "Words seem to retreat further and further away with each disappearance."[36] Her life's work,

31 Julia Shiota, "Yoko Ogawa's The Memory Police and the Dangers of Forgetting," accessed March 15, 2022, https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/mqr/2021/07/yoko-ogawas-the-memory-police-and-the-dangers-of-forgetting/.

32 Shiota, "Yoko Ogawa's The Memory Police and the Dangers of Forgetting."

33 Ogawa, *The Memory Police*, 146.

34 Ogawa, *The Memory Police*, 195.

35 Ogawa, *The Memory Police*, 26.

36 Ogawa, *The Memory Police*, 82.

the novels she has produced, no longer exist. She cannot remember them existing. Her torment does not end at that point as her very identity experiences attack at the hands of The Memory Police when she finds she can no longer produce fiction. She takes a job as a typist at a spice company. The narrator has lost a key component to her identity, that as a writer. She adapts, as most people do, unaware of exactly what they are losing.

The responsibility of maintaining the trio's memories increasingly falls to R. As the novel goes on, R gradually becomes obsessed with keeping objects, ideas, and memories safe. He honestly believes that the objects that they hide in his safe room cannot be disappeared.

"The urge to hold on to the past manifests itself in the form of memorabilia, souvenirs, and media of remembrance serving us as substitutes or triggers for memories. We want to maintain the ability to recall certain moments of our lives. By preserving materializations of precious and far away moments we hope to keep hold of them."[37]

As the novel draws to a close, the disappearances become more extreme. One day the narrator wakes up and even though both legs are present, she cannot remember what her left leg is. The leg is useless, and she cannot recall its use. Within hours the populace has adapted to being one legged. Next, the right arm disappears and people adapt even quicker. The disappearances continue to escalate until the entire body disappears. "The hands that had written the story, my eyes overflowing with tears, the cheeks that had received them—they all disappeared in their turns, and in the end, all that was left was a voice." [38] While it is freeing for the narrator to be just a voice on the wind, she is aware that this is not the end. Ultimately, the voices disappear leaving R alone in his safe room filled with the various trinkets that the three gathered to keep safe. Among those trinkets is the narrator's body.

While R continues to exist, he and whomever else who survived The Memory Police, now live in a world that is empty. "It is this re-appropriated historical impulse which drives a number of non-realist texts which –on the surface—seem to focus more on the future than on the past. Dystopian novels, which also depict the progress of a particular society but are more interested in showing the failure of teleological expectations and the dangers of read historical development as inevitable."[39] Whatever the goal of The Memory Police, they have been ruthlessly successful. The Memory Police have broken down not just ties to history, to other people, but to the individuals as well as they destroy the very core identities of the citizens.

While writing may be a subversive act in a dystopia because it keeps the past alive as well as the identities of the citizens, it is not enough to overthrow a dystopia. In

37 Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney, *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 36.

38 Ogawa, *The Memory Police*, 272.

39 Anya Heise-von der Lippe, "Histories of Futures Past," 411-412.

each of the three novels discussed the dystopia remains intact while the protagonists' identities and memories are destroyed. However, in each novel, the protagonist leaves behind a written record for future people to read and learn from. In *American War*, Sarat accidentally destroys her identity when she leaves her journals behind for her nephew who sees this as a betrayal. He destroys her journals forever erasing her memories. In *Falling Out of Cars*, Marlene's futile attempts to preserve her identity and memories fail when she leaves her journals for an unknown someone to pick up. Finally, in *The Memory Police*, the unnamed narrator completely disappears leaving nothing behind but her inert body.

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