Univerzita Karlova

Filozofická fakulta

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Diplomová práce

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The Contemporary Hebrew Dystopian Novel

Současný hebrejský dystopický román

Praha 2021

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Acknowledgments

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Daniel Boušek, PhD whose continuous assistance, patience and involvement helped me finalize this thesis. My special thanks and gratitude also go to my family and my friends for their support and unflagging encouragement. Without them, this thesis would have been impossible to write.

Prohlášení o autorství

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Souhlasím se zapůjčením diplomové práce ke studijním účelům.

V Praze dne 28.06.2021

Jméno a příjmení

Abstract

This thesis aims to provide a thematic analysis of the leading Hebrew dystopian texts in contemporary Israel and to present a broader context of utopian thought within which these texts are best understood. The research attempts to explore and examine how the various anxieties and fears of Israeli society are reflected upon in contemporary Hebrew dystopian novels and how the Israeli reality is transformed and re-imagined, by means of authors' thought experiments, in the selected narratives. Dystopian fiction is an extremely useful tool for cultural studies inasmuch as it constitutes a direct interaction with the contemporary culture in that it describes an entire society suffering from oppressive and disastrous conditions which grow out of certain real-world social, political, and economic trends. Zionist utopian fiction which sought to imagine a Jewish homeland waned soon after the creation of the State of Israel and the local realities set the narrative on a much darker and more pessimistic course. Today many Israeli authors project a dystopian and (post-) apocalyptic future from the present Israeli reality by examining the current cultural and political situation. The thesis is, then, also an exploration of how these dystopian narratives come to terms with the current Israeli reality and what projections they offer us.

Keywords

Dystopia – Utopia – Israeli Dystopian Novel – Literature and Society – Literature and Politics

Abstrakt

Diplomová práce si klade za cíl předložit tematickou analýzu předních hebrejských dystopických textů a zároveň představit širší kontext utopického myšlení, který napomáhá hlubšímu pochopení těchto textů. Práce se též pokouší prozkoumat a posoudit, jak se odráží určité pocity strachu a úzkosti izraelské společnosti v současných hebrejských dystopických románech a jakým způsobem autoři přetváří izraelskou realitu ve vybraných příbězích. Dystopická literatura je nesmírně užitečným nástrojem v rámci kulturních studií, protože představuje přímou interakci se současnou kulturou v tom smyslu, že popisuje celkovou společnost vystavenou represivním a ničivým podmínkám, které pramení z určitých sociálních, politických a ekonomických trendů současného světa. Sionistická utopická literatura, která zobrazuje budoucí podoby židovského státu, se vytratila krátce po vzniku státu Izrael a místní podmínky vyústily ve výrazně pochmurnější a pesimističtější vize budoucnosti. Na základě současné socio-politické a kulturní situace v Izraeli dnes mnoho izraelských autorů předvídá dystopickou a (post)apokalyptickou budoucnost. Práce proto představuje způsob, jakým se tyto dystopické příběhy vyrovnávají se současnou izraelskou realitou, a představy o budoucnosti, které nám nabízejí.

Klíčová slova

Dystopie – Utopie – Izraelský dystopický román – Literatura a společnost – Literatura a politika

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Note on Transliteration

In this thesis, the Hebrew transliterations follow the "general" rules formulated in the second edition of Encyclopaedia Judaica. The transliteration rules are applied to titles of books and to proper names and place names where the English versions are not very well known. The book titles are given a working translation in brackets in quotation marks or, in the event of an English translation existing, the title is given in brackets in italics together with the year of publication. The English versions of personal names, place names, and others are used for those which are well known in English, such as Menachem, Haredim, Ein Harod, halakha, kibbutz, etc. The bibliographical references are given in the language in which they were consulted, which means the Hebrew sources are cited in transliterated Hebrew and the translated sources are given in English.

General Introduction

Jewish utopian narratives in Israel almost completely disappeared shortly after the establishment of the state and were replaced instead by scenarios prophesying dark and pessimistic futures brought about by self-destructive human behavior. But what can this sudden change tell us about Israeli society and its culture? Why are Israeli writers hesitant to imagine Jewish utopias? How are the common dystopian themes, such as war, government oppression, religious takeover, and ecological disasters, reflected in specific Israeli literary texts and, more broadly, what is the importance of projecting such dystopian futures? These are some of the significant questions to which answers are sought in this work.

The emergence of dystopian fiction on the Israeli literary scene, reflecting significant changes which Israeli society has been undergoing in recent decades, was dominated by four themes. Firstly, following the Israeli Declaration of Independence, the country was under the constant threat of large-scale military conflicts with its Arab neighbors, which often declared their plan to destroy the Jewish State. After the damaging Yom Kippur War in 1973, this threat loomed on the horizon more heavily than before. Secondly, the threat of the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the Middle East only exacerbated the existential threat of complete destruction. Thirdly, the seismic internal social and political changes which were initiated in Israel in the late 1970s gave rise to deep anxieties that took hold of the left-wing liberal part of society. And finally, parallel to the rise of right-wing groups to power, the new trends within the religious groups, such as the idea of turning Israel into a halakhic state and expanding its borders to encompass as much of the biblical Promised Land as possible, only deepened the rift between the secular liberals and religious populations. In the twenty-first century, all of these national disaster scenarios continue to dominate in one way or another, but we also witness the emergence of the specter of environmental devastation, which demonstrates the recent preoccupation of Israeli society and culture with the environment.

Structurally, the thesis is divided into theoretical and analytical parts. The first chapter discusses definitional problems of the concepts of utopia and dystopia and also explores different aspects of dystopia and utopianism more broadly. The discussion then continues by considering the various types and forms of dystopia,

drawing the reader's attention here to the fine line between utopia and dystopia. We also look at fear in politics and the relationship between discourse and power and how these relate to dystopias. Lastly, we consider the communal aspect of utopianism, the kibbutz movement in particular, and its utopian and dystopian sides. The second chapter deals with the literary side of dystopian thought – with the definition of the genre, definitional boundaries and developments, and the way the dystopian genre relates to other literary genres, such as science fiction and apocalypse. This is followed in the third chapter by a brief overview of the literary origins of dystopia and the canonical literary works. We first examine the light satires in the nineteenth to early twentieth centuries and then move on to the nightmarish scenarios presented in the great works of dystopian fiction of the twentieth century. The fourth chapter then presents the most common themes in the dystopian literature since the 1950s. Readers will have hardly failed to notice that, despite what the title might suggest, the aim of this work is not to provide a literary critique of any of the dystopian works presented here – this we leave to literary critics – but instead to adopt a thematic approach focusing on themes and ideas and a description of actual dystopian phenomena. In Chapter Five, we turn our attention to the ways in which Zionism, utopianism, and science fiction are intertwined. A brief discussion of Jewish and Zionist utopias in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is included here. Finally in this chapter, we seek to explain the non-existence of Israeli utopias and science fiction narratives. The last chapter aims to provide analysis of Israeli dystopian novels, chiefly focusing on their social and political content. First, we outline an overall thematic framework and then examine the socio-political background of the 1970s in Israel which spurred the creation of the first wave of dystopian literary texts. Finally, we analyze the leading literary texts in the Israeli dystopian tradition from 1969 until the present day. Brief plot summaries are offered in all cases because these texts are mostly unfamiliar and often inaccessible to English speakers, as only very few of them have been translated into English. The main concern of all of these dystopias, whether realistic or more science fiction-oriented, is with the developments in contemporary Israeli society.

1. The Theory of Dystopia

When did the vision of the Good Place, the Heaven-like utopian oasis, turn into a nightmarish vision of hell on earth? When did the Garden of Eden become a place full of death, destruction, and decay? The idea of the utter breakdown of society and apocalyptic visions of the end of the world go back at least as far as the Ancient Egyptians.[1] War, crime, death, robbery, and blood-red rivers with floating corpses are a few examples of a revelation, or to use the Greek term apokalupsis, of a possible destiny for mankind. Throughout the ages many variations on such nightmarish scenarios came down to us. Even today they play an increasingly important role in our cultural and mental world, except for the hopeful 'after', the renewed heaven on earth promised by theology. Secular pessimism is thus the essential feature of what we now associate with the modern phenomenon of dystopia.[2]

The word dystopia[3] is derived from two Greek words, dus and topos, meaning a bad, diseased, and unfavorable place, and is often presented as an antonym of utopia. The word probably first appeared in the mid-eighteenth century, but became widely used only in the late twentieth, and for which there are a few alternative terms, such as negative utopia, inverted utopia, or Jeremy Bentham's 'cacotopia', meaning 'an evil place'. In common usage, these terms function as opposites to 'utopia' or 'eutopia',[4] which are both neologisms, derived from Greek and coined by Thomas More. The former is rendered as a perfect imaginary 'non-place' and the latter simply as 'a good place' or 'a positive utopia'.[5] This sharp juxtaposition of the terms is, however, rather problematic.[6] The problem of

[1] Some of the earliest ancient texts that envision a time of distress and chaos both for nature and human society come from Egypt; these include 'The Admonitions of Ipu-Wer' and 'The Prophecy of Neferti'. These and other ancient millennial texts are detailed in Robert Gnuse, 'Ancient Near Eastern Millennialism', in *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*, ed. by Catherine Wessinger (Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 236–9.

[2] Gregory Claeys, *Dystopia: A Natural History* (Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 3–4.

[3] As far as we know, the term, stylized as dustopia, dates back to 1747 and was coined by Lewis Henry Younge in his *Utopia: or, Apollo's Golden Days*. Another important usage of the term goes back to 1868, when John Stuart Mill used it in a parliamentary speech. See Fátima Vieira, 'The concept of utopia', in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, ed. by Gregory Claeys (Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 16 and also Lyman Tower Sargent, *Utopianism* (Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 4.

[4] Critics often tend to use the variant eutopia, especially when contrasted with dystopia.

[5] The history of the terms and concepts is detailed in Vieira, 'The concept of utopia', in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature,* ed. by Claeys, pp. 3–27.

[6] Laurence Davis, 'Dystopia, Utopia, and Sancho Panza', in *Dystopia(n) Matters: On the Page, on Screen, on Stage*, ed. by Fátima Vieira (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), pp. 23–27.

viewing one concept as a negative mirror image of the other starts when we acknowledge that both utopia and dystopia are not purely literary traditions and that they can be defined in a number of ways.

It should thus be noted that although the noun dystopia is often used synonymously with dystopian literature, a dystopia is not inevitably a form of fiction. Fear of the consequences of events on a global scale, such as the thinning of the ozone layer, the greenhouse effect, deforestation, pandemics, and the predictions of a nuclear winter do not belong solely in the realm of fiction. The adjective 'dystopian', then, suggests a future world where chaos and destruction prevail. Clearly, the word also has a very real and empirical use. For many authors, totalitarianism, and particularly Stalinism, is simply a form of infernal dystopia, a nightmarish regime created in an attempt to build unachievable ideal systems.[7] It is this kind of totalitarian political dystopia, often associated with failed attempts at realizing utopian goals, which has received the greatest historical attention. This denotes that there are some three, often interrelated, types of dystopia: the socio-political, the environmental, and the technological dystopia, where technology and science threaten to destroy or to dominate humanity.[8]

Further consideration would suggest that each of these forms of dystopia can be understood as having some kind of a parallel in utopian ideas. The conquest of the Americas held out the hope of remaking one part of humanity while enslaving the other. Another modern manifestation of political dystopia, which coincidentally came about in the same year, 1516, as Thomas More's *Utopia*, is the creation of the first ghetto for Jews in Venice. But still, to imagine a utopia of excessive wealth, consumption, and materialism would probably result in environmental degradation and resource depletion. If we take a closer look at More's *Utopia*, however, we might discover that the relation between the two concepts is more intimate still. Like the snake in the Garden of Eden, to use a biblical analogy, dystopian elements lurk within Utopia.[9] The imaginary place is a fortified island, an imperial power with its own army, which sends out colonists to capture uncultivated land, driving out any of the indigenous people who resist

[7] Steven Rosefielde, *Red Holocaust* (Routledge, 2010), p. 14.
[8] Claeys, *Dystopia*, p. 5.
[9] In this line of thought, the Judeo-Christian myth of an earthly paradise in the Garden of Eden is a prototype of the utopian tradition, while the subsequent expulsion from the 'Heaven on Earth' and the human existence that follows function as a dystopian prototype.

them. The richness and peace of this ideal place are dependent upon war, expansion, and the ruthless suppression of others, that is to say, on dystopia. Indeed, for a contemporary reader, More's Utopia seems perilously dystopian, not only in its external, but also its internal relations, relying heavily upon transparency, the repression of heterogeneity, and the restriction of privacy. In More's time, however, such restraints would not have appeared for most of the readership to be unreasonable, given the security and prosperity which it has to offer.[10]

The literary utopias following More all resonate with similar imagery. In fact, the suppression of individuality and diversity and the creation of unity, order, and homogeneity prevail in early modern utopianism and remain common themes well into the twentieth century. Writ large, any privileging of the communal over the individual will necessarily, for some, have dystopian implications – and as such, a utopia can be regarded as the predecessor of the Marxist type of totalitarianism. On the other hand, the opponents of such a view would contend that the utopia here is not to be considered a dystopia, because the demands it makes (such as the suppression of individuality) are well justified by the ends accomplished in the sense of a more just and equal society. Then again, we could argue that such a utopia resulted in Stalinism and its various forms, and in conformity, in leader-worship, in systems of surveillance, etc.[11] Nonetheless, it would be wrong to assume that *all* utopian visions tend to produce dystopias. There are a number of intentional communities based on a communal lifestyle in which harmony without coercion exists and where the enslavement and suppression of individualism is replaced with voluntary submission to the group norms.[12] A relevant example of such an intentional ideal labor commune is the kibbutz, which began as a utopia combining the ideology of Zionism and socialism. Notwithstanding its noble ideals, the concept is far from unproblematic, as we shall see further on.[13] The literary form of the idea, the focal point of this work, might not evoke similar anxieties in readers, as they will correctly equate 'dystopia' with 'dystopian novel', which depicts a negative or evil fictional regime, usually in a cataclysmic

[10] Ibid., pp. 5–6.
[11] Gregory Claeys, 'Three Variants on the Concept of Dystopia', in *Dystopia(n) Matters*, ed. by Vieira pp. 14-16.
[12] Claeys, *Dystopia,* p. 7.
[13] Uri Zilbersheid, 'The Israeli Kibbutz: From Utopia to Dystopia', *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory*, 35:3 (2007), 413–434.

decline, dominated by fear and coercion.[14] The paradigmatic work in the genre is George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*,[15] which will be treated in greater detail when the origins of dystopian fiction come to be discussed.

To further elaborate on the modern phenomenon of dystopia and the utopia/dystopia relationship, let us take a closer look at some forms and models of the political collectivist dystopia. As we have already suggested, both utopias and dystopias display a collectivist character – selfish individualism is sacrificed for the common good and social solidarity. In utopias the sacrifice is non-compulsory, freely engaged in, and deemed acceptable because of the benefits it generates, whereas in dystopias it is coerced, and even dependent upon the enslavement of others, virtually destroying what is valuable in solidarity. At its darkest, a collectivist dystopia exhibits an extreme devotion to sociability, concentrating excessively on the common good, and creating a despotic rather than consensual atmosphere. The relationship between utopias and dystopias could then be illustrated in terms of a scale of anxiety, with the absence of fear and relative peace at one end, corresponding with fear, overt coercion, and paranoia at the other. The collectivist dystopia generally exhibits two primary forms, the internal[16] and the external, which could be typified by Stalinism and by More's Utopia. Stalinist coercion is internal, permeating the 'privileged' main group, whereas coercion in Utopia is defined by the relationship to outsiders, who are repressed in order to uphold and protect the main group. However, in both cases there are groups which benefit from wealth and equality at the expense of others. An important question arises here: how many are involved on each side? It would not be prudent to call every society in which a majority lives a privileged life by oppressing a minority a 'dystopia'. However, the point is that there is a possibility of treating some dystopias as utopias for a small equal elite which is dependent upon the oppression of many. A number of classical utopias were unavoidably

[14] Claeys, *Dystopia*, p. 7.

[15] Orwell himself insisted that the title be spelled out in words. Krishan Kumar notes that: "*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell seems to want to remind us again and again, is a novel, not a political tract […] This is one reason why it is wrong to abbreviate the title of the novel to *1984*, as if it is a date. As a date, 1984 is irrelevant to the novel; it simply reverses the last two digits of the actual date – 1948 – when Orwell wrote the novel. To concentrate on the date is to treat the work as prophecy, and this is something that Orwell was at pains to deny. His book was, he said, a warning, not a prophecy. It was meant to say: something like this *could* happen, and it might if we don't do something to stop it". (Krishan Kumar, 'Utopia's Shadow', in *Dystopia(n) Matters*, ed. by Vieira p. 20.).

[16] An internal dystopia is sometimes dubbed a carcerotopia, prison state, or slave state.

dependent on someone else's labor to secure the idyllic existence of the privileged few.[17]

Paranoia, ill-tempered hostility, and anxiety are a common denominator of early societies which serve as dystopian prototypes. A particular source of terror for these societies is witch doctors and sorcery in general. Much of their daily life is ritualized so that these malevolent forces could be neutralized. The Korowai people of West Papua, Indonesia, historical practitioners of ritual cannibalism, build their houses high above the ground, primarily to avoid attacks by two entities – the 'demons' that humans become after death and the 'witches' living within their own population.[18] Apart from these hostile types of early societies, several other related models of the political collectivist dystopia are worth considering.

In militarized societies such as ancient Sparta, their existence was conditioned upon conquest. Like war, slavery is another model, being ubiquitous throughout the whole of human history. Several modern totalitarian regimes, including Nazi Germany and the USSR under Stalin, have been described as 'slave states', thus linking state slavery with totalitarianism. The rule of fear and terror, characteristic of political despotism or later of totalitarian dictatorship, is another archetype of a collectivist dystopia. Prisons, torture, forced labor, concentration camps, mental institutions, and other organizations which are defined by depersonalization, uniformity, group discipline, and loss of identity are also popular features of dystopia. The last dystopian model is an exclusion of certain groups from society – mostly diseased populations such as lepers, which would later shift to Jews,[19] heretics, and witches. Now these last two models are closely connected with a relationship between discourse and power. The most influential analysis on the subject was created by Michel Foucault, who studied the history of practices in medicine, penology, and the law. He subjects all his material to a leftist critique

[17] Claeys, *Dystopia*, p. 8.
[18] Rupert Stasch, *Society of others: kinship and mourning in a West Papuan place* (University of California Press, 2009), pp. 4–6, 214. See also Claeys, *Dystopia*, p. 10.
[19] Perhaps it would be more accurate to use here the term "jews". The French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard contrasts the real-life Jews with his concept of "the jews", saying: "I use lower case to indicate that I am not thinking of a nation. I make it plural to signify that it is neither a figure nor a political (Zionism), religious (Judaism), or philosophical (Jewish philosophy) subject that I put forward under this name. I use quotation marks to avoid confusing these "jews" with real Jews." (Jean-François Lyotard, *Heidegger and "the jews"* (University of Minnesota Press, 1990), p. 3) In short, he uses the term to denote the symbolic alien group, the Other, that European society constructed in order to persecute or expel them.

and tries to show how power and knowledge fundamentally interact and whom or what the material excludes, and how. For example, he points out that the asylum is driven by the discourses of the 'reasonable' doctor who defines himself against the 'unreasonable' patient, and, having made his judgment, proceeds to lock the person up in an asylum. Similar techniques are used by racists, sexists, and imperialists who make their 'normalizing' discourses prevail by creating 'the deviant' or what the postmodernists call 'the other'. In his studies, Foucault talks about homosexuals, women, prisoners, the insane, or non-whites as paradigms of 'the other'. If the discourse gradually becomes more and more dominant in a society or group it may start to seem 'natural' and in that way justify itself by appealing to the ways of nature. 'Nature' as such can then proclaim the ordering powers of a god, or the hidden order discovered by scientists, or it can contain women, the mad, or the non-white people who are to be considered by their very 'nature' to be more animal and less reasonable than 'us', and so forth.[20]

Dystopia, crisis, collective angst, and the fear of groups are thus closely intertwined. It is reasonable to work with an assumption that each epoch has its own anxieties, which tend to predominate. From an evolutionary standpoint, we are sensitive, just like all animals, to possible threats lurking in our environment. Apart from retaining many natural fears, we tend to adopt others which are socially constructed.[21] In groups, these fears then tend to intensify, creating mass delusions, or what psychologists call mass psychogenic disorder. Such mass delusions can serve as an advantage for some, especially in a political power play. In other words, some social constructions of group fears can easily be manipulated for the benefit of the elite.[22] The state, an organized political community, is such an entity created by the hostility and fear one group feels about others. Fear, as it pertains to modern politics, is defined as "people's felt apprehension of some harm to their collective well-being"; in our age it is most commonly fear of

[20] Christopher Butler, *Postmodernism* (Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 45–50.
[21] A compelling anthropological argument of Gregory Claeys's book *Dystopia: a Natural History* concerning dystopia as a psychological phenomenon which has accompanied humanity since time immemorial is that '[…] we collectively progress from natural to socially compounded forms of fear. At first all the natural world is populated by threatening gods, monstrous beings, and malevolent spirits... Many of these gradually disappear. Others are reinvented, or rediscovered as inner monstrosity, or replaced in later modernity by fear of the science and technology we have created, of the recreation of ourselves in the image of our machines, and of their eventual domination over us. But the fear remains constant, if fluctuating, even if its objects vary... Our 'natural', original psychic state is one of constant mental anxiety.' (Claeys, *Dystopia*, p. 9.).
[22] Claeys, *Dystopia*, pp. 10–18.

terrorism, crime, moral decay, a nuclear strike, technology, and dangers posed to our environment.[23] Most of these fears, and the ways in which they are reflected in the Hebrew literature from the early 1970s and their literary functions and intentions, will be treated in the second, analytical part of this work.

1.1. Secular Perfectionism, Millenarianism, and Dystopia

> *To go to the length of imagining that we can design some plan for the whole society whereby harmony, justice and plenty are attained by human engineering is an invitation to despotism.*[24]

We have noted that a totalitarian political dystopia is often associated with failed attempts at realizing utopian goals, but a question arises here as to whether this implies that every utopia inevitably leads towards dystopia. Utopias seemingly represent the human capacity for perfectibility, which, according to many, is doomed to fail if considered outside theology. Many allegations have been made that assert that utopianism forms the basis for totalitarianism. The idea that utopian thinking in politics aims at achieving an 'ideal state' and devising rational plans for a way to get there originated with Plato. This perspective of utopianism was expressed by many thinkers, including the political theorist Karl Popper, whose work *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, published in 1945, argues that utopias depict perfect societies and since perfection is impossible, they must necessarily lead, if executed in all their details, to totalitarianism and violence.[25] This understanding of a utopia, however, is in accordance with an essentially religious mentality. Hence the problem with this approach is that it attempts to group a utopia together with religion. Although a utopia overlaps at many points with theology, it does not aim at perfectionism but rather at the improvement of human behavior so as to create substantially better conditions for a group or society as a whole. Indeed, contrary to eschatological visions that aim to perfect the whole universe, including human society, utopian visions do not go beyond the human capabilities. The expectation of moderate improvement in behavior is

[23] Corey Robin, *Fear: the history of a political idea* (Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 1–25.
[24] Leszek Kolakowski, quoted in Sargent, *Utopianism*, p. 126.
[25] The idea of utopias being dangerously idealistic and thus providing bases for totalitarianism was also expressed by anti-communist and liberal thinkers such as Leszek Kolakowski, Friedrich Hayek, Isaiah Berlin, and Michael Oakshott. (Laurence Davis, 'Dystopia, Utopia, and Sancho Panza', in *Dystopia(n) Matters*, ed. by Vieira, p. 23.).

realistic and has occurred, but expecting perfection is a call for destruction. The failure occurs exactly because of an assumption of quasi-millenarian rebirth or a return to the original purity (connected here with historical necessity rather than God), which is essentially a religious idea. Accordingly, this suggests that it is also incorrect to view a utopia as synonymous with millenarianism. Many utopias do not require either millenarian premises or revolutionary means to be fulfilled. Stalinism is an example of a radical millenarianism[26] as well as utopianism, and its call for perfect rather than improved people imitates religion rather than utopianism. So, to answer our question, we will rightly argue that utopia does not necessarily lead to dystopia, but secular perfectionism and millenarianism may easily do so, then. It is true that Nazism and Stalinism are also forms of utopianism, but they are not its *only* forms and there is no reason to invalidate and discredit utopian thinking and action as such, just as there is no reason to invalidate revolutions as such because of the failures of the Bolshevik revolution.[27]

1.2. Intentional Communities

> *The first Jewish utopia was a garden where, according to the Book of Genesis, God himself liked to stroll in the cool of the evening. It didn't end well. Almost 6,000 years later, in 1909, a group of young Jews decided to recreate that original garden in Ottoman Palestine, and on the southern tip of the Lake of Galilee set up a kibbutz (or "gathering") which they hopefully named Kvutzat Degania ("wheat of God").*[28]

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[26] Maoism in China has also been described as millennial, as it exerted immense efforts to produce the perfect society.

[27] Claeys, *Dystopia*, pp. 263–265 and *The Utopia Reader*, ed. by Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent, 2nd ed, (New York University Press, 2017), pp. 7–8. See also Gregory Claeys, 'News from Somewhere: Enhanced Sociability and the Composite Definition of Utopia and Dystopia', *History*, 98 (2013), 145–172. Following this line of argument Laurence Davis differentiates between what he calls 'transcendent utopias' and 'grounded utopias', distinguishing 'utopias associated with the imagination of and/or quest for perfection in some impossible future (transcendent utopia) and those associated with the encouragement of greater imaginative awareness of neglected or suppressed possibilities for qualitatively better forms of living latent in the present (grounded utopia).' He then goes on to claim that 'dystopia' should not be viewed as a satire on utopianism as such but rather a combination of a 'satire on existing society with a parodic inversion of transcendent or controlling utopian aspirations'. (Laurence Davis, 'Dystopia, Utopia, and Sancho Panza', in *Dystopia(n) Matters*, ed. by Vieira, p. 26.).

[28] Alberto Manguel, 'Between Friends by Amos Oz – review', 8 May 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/may/08/between-friends-amos-oz-review > [accessed

As indicated earlier, the most common aspect of utopianism is the genre of literature, the focal point of this work, but in order to have a better understanding of the concept it would be misleading to narrow its meaning exclusively down to the literary field without offering a brief exploration of the idea and its other components. However, any rigid definition in this case would most probably prove to be problematic. As a matter of fact, there is discord among scholars today over how the concepts of dystopia, utopia, and utopianism more broadly should be understood. The argument stems from the fact that the Greek terms for non-place, good place, and later bad place initially referred to a fictional place, and later to a literary genre, but over time they have also begun to refer to other phenomena.[29] The Polish philosopher and historian of ideas Leszek Kołakowski discusses the complexity of the meaning of utopianism and concludes that "[i]t is an interesting cultural process whereby a word of which the history is well known and which emerged as an artificially concocted proper name has acquired, in the last two centuries, a sense so extended that it refers not only to a literary genre but to a way of thinking, to a mentality, to a philosophical attitude, and is being employed in depicting cultural phenomena going back into Antiquity, far beyond the historical moment of its invention."[30] Utopianism, then, clearly has a long and complex history, and while the word utopia was coined by More in 1516 and new words were later added to describe different types of utopias, such as dystopia,[31] the idea can be traced back to the earliest written records we have and to every cultural tradition.[32] The division between the better and the worse in utopianism was also created very early on as people have always been dissatisfied with their living conditions and therefore have created visions of a better, longer, and

28 June 2021].

[29] *The Utopia Reader*, ed. by Claeys and Sargent, p. 5.

[30] Leszek Kolakowski, 'The Death of Utopia Reconsidered', in *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values IV*, ed. by S. M. McMurrin (University of Utah Press, 1982), p. 229 <https://tannerlectures.utah.edu/_documents/a-to z/k/kolakowski83.pdf> [accessed 28 June 2021].

[31] Other derivation neologisms include anti-utopia, euchronia, heterotopia, and ecotopia (named after Ernest Callenbach's novel of 1975 of the same name).

[32] Like most other terms we use now, utopia refers to things that existed well before the word itself was coined, and so we now talk about non-Western utopias such as ancient Chinese, Egyptian, Indian, etc. On non-Western utopianism in general see Jacqueline Dutton, ''Non-western' utopian traditions', in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature,* ed. by Claeys, pp. 223–258.

improved life, while at the same time they were worried about the possibility of a worse existence.[33]

A prominent scholar of utopian studies, Lyman Tower Sargent, equates utopianism with 'social dreaming'[34] and within this broad category he talks about three faces of utopianism – literary tradition, ideology (non-fictional utopian social theory), and utopian practice (the tradition of communal living and organization).[35] Indeed, the fact that utopianism, taken more broadly, contains what are termed the three faces is widely accepted among scholars today. Although scholars also often speak of dystopianism, whether there are three corresponding 'faces' of dystopianism is a contentious issue, because it is argued that we recognize no dystopian ideologies as such.[36] But dystopias are not merely fictional narratives either, since the term, as we have argued, has very practical usages and we have recognized that communalism in particular *also* has its dystopian side.[37] We therefore believe it is productive to recognize the symmetry between the broad tripartite definition of utopianism and any definition of dystopianism, which will, it is hoped, allow us to recognize key features linking literature, ideology, and the communal idea.

Throughout human history many individuals and groups have attempted to put their visions into practice. Some of the visionaries who also succeeded in gaining political power turned into dictators and instead of creating utopias their creations resulted in dystopias, of which the most noteworthy in the twentieth century are Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler, the USSR under Stalin, and Cambodia under Pol Pot. Clearly, 'social dreaming' has stimulated many to bring about actual

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[33] Sargent, *Utopianism*, p. 4.

[34] Gregory Claeys, J. C. Davis, or Krishan Kumar, for instance, oppose restricting utopia to 'social dreaming'. Claeys argues that a '[utopia] may both formally and psychologically have aspects of a "social dream" about it, in the senses of speculation, thought experiments, projection and extrapolation, imagined futures and/or forecasts. But it may be more helpful to restrict "utopia" to the less fantastic forms of the genre. For utopia has often been seen as something realizable, if only on a small scale, by real human beings.' (*The Utopia Reader*, ed. by Claeys and Sargent, p. 3.).

[35] Lyman Tower Sargent, 'The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited', *Utopian Studies*, 5:1 (1994), 1–37.

[36] Some scholars argue that there are ideologies which are intended to instill fear in large numbers, and that communities based on such ideologies exist (Claeys, 'News from Somewhere', *History*, 98 (2013), 145–172.). Others disagree and define dystopia only as a form of literary tradition (Adam Stock, 'Dystopia as Post-Enlightenment critique in George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four', in *Dystopia(n) Matters*, ed. by Vieira, pp. 115–129.).

[37] It is important to highlight that it would be a misconception to equate utopia with communism and then with dystopia. Voluntary communal property holding has been very common throughout much of human history and has created successful and long-lasting communities. Many utopias are less tied to communism and more to cooperation and profit-sharing. See Claeys, *Dystopia*, p. 265.

betterment but, at the same time, it has been misused by others to gain power, money, influence, and so forth for themselves, turning some utopias into dystopias. That being the case, it is safe to argue that utopias might be essential but they are also potentially dangerous. However, the form of putting specific utopian dreams into practice that has been far more common (and successful) is creating small communities with the purpose of either withdrawing from the majority population to implement and practice the beliefs of the members without interference or simply to prove to the majority society that the proposed utopia is practically achievable.[38]

The neutrally labeled intentional communities, popularly and better known as communes, had many names in the past, such as utopian community, practical utopia, or utopian experiment, thus making a clear connection with utopianism. Nevertheless, many people living in such communities have rejected the label 'utopian' and there are also ongoing disputes over what should be considered a utopia or an intentional community. Therefore, the problem also stems from the fact that no fully agreed-upon definition of an intentional community is available. Despite the rejection of the previous terms that incorporated the label 'utopian', the close link between utopianism and these small communities is evident. The definition of an intentional community that Sargent proposes, however, is generally acceptable: 'A group of five or more adults and their children, if any, who come from more than one nuclear family and who have chosen to live together to enhance their shared values or for some other mutually agreed upon purpose.'[39] Sargent also stresses that the most important part of this definition that connects utopianism with such communities 'is the emphasis on living a life based on 'shared values' or a 'mutually agreed upon purpose'.'[40]

Intentional communities have been designed to accommodate a particular way of life of their members. Among the aspects and domains of life which have been sought to be changed, sometimes radically, are eating habits, sexual behavior, the work ethic, gender distinctions, and so on. Many communities have been established so that their members could follow their faith, or a charismatic leader, and live their life accordingly. Many others have chosen to follow a social theorist, but there are countless other reasons why people have withdrawn from

[38] Sargent, *Utopianism*, pp. 33, 126–127.
[39] Ibid., p. 6, 34.
[40] Sargent, *Utopianism*, p. 34.

the mainstream society to live differently. Every community has rules and regulations, and formal or informal agreements on how the members are to conduct their lives. In cases where these documents and agreements existed as fiction, we would undoubtedly call them utopias, but they are often fictional in the sense that they do not strictly reflect how the community actually operates. The earliest intentional communities are thought to have been Hindu ashrams, followed by Buddhist monasteries, in India, China, Japan, and Southeast Asia. In what became the Western tradition, the first such communities to withdraw from the society to practice their beliefs were the Essenes, a Jewish religious sectarian group that resided in various locations and presumably established the Qumran community in the second century BCE, where most members lived a celibate and communal life based on religious purity and who produced their own library, or what we now know as the Dead Sea Scrolls.[41] In our times, such communities have been established in Africa, Israel, the United States, Japan, and many other parts of the world and have become melting pots of ideals and issues that have permeated the public consciousness, such as equality, civil rights, ecology, pacifism, sustainable agriculture, co-ops, personal growth, spirituality, etc.[42]

The most fully elaborated implementation of the communal idea in the last century was undoubtedly the creation of the kibbutz, which has most influenced twentieth- and twenty-first-century utopianism and, while presenting the possibilities and limits of communalism, it has also had a great impact on intentional communities around the world. From the beginning of the twentieth century various intentional communities and cooperatives were established by the Zionist movement throughout what is now Israel, including kibbutzim, moshavim, and other modes of settlement which were originally mostly secular. For many decades the kibbutz was an exemplary model of an agricultural and industrial cooperative that implemented equality, voluntary sharing, direct democracy among its members, and the abolition of private property and a wage system. It

[41] Another hypothesis assumes that the scrolls do not have any connection with the settlement, but originated in Jerusalem. At any rate, it is safe to assume that this library was not composed by a single sectarian community. For further details see John J. Collins, 'The Literature of the Second Temple Period', in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies*, ed. by Martin Goodman (Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 53–78.

[42] Sargent, *Utopianism*, pp. 34–35. See further Lyman Tower Sargent, 'Theorizing Intentional Community in the Twenty-First Century', in *The Communal Idea in the 21st Century*, ed. by Eliezer Ben-Rafael, Yaacov Oved, and Menachem Topel (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 53–72 and Yaacov Oved, 'Communes and Communities: History and Perspective', in *The Communal Idea in the 21st Century*, ed. by Ben-Rafael, Oved, and Topel, pp. 113–129.

was generally successful until the 1980s, when the majority of kibbutzim underwent far-reaching changes, largely as a result of globalization, economic crisis, and changes on the political scene in Israel (the political and ideological decline of the Labor movement) resulting in privatization and reclassification of the kibbutz, individual and differential salaries, etc. The kibbutz movement has survived these challenges but is not as prosperous as it once was and its old communal and egalitarian economic and social governance has largely dissolved, leaving only a handful of kibbutzim still adhering to the old utopian way of governance.[43] Zilbersheid refers to this period of changes as 'the dystopian transformation' of the kibbutz and continues to discuss the rise of 'the New Kibbutz', which was, according to him, 'a conscious choice to build a bad society'. For instance, Zilbersheid argues that the differential salaries, creating large social gaps, are to be considered 'a dystopian moment in the New Kibbutz – the deliberate building, by a leading group, of a bad society by a sophisticated distortion of the essence of common ownership'.[44] The Hebrew literary imagination also illustrates both the utopian and dystopian sides of the kibbutz by presenting us with a clash between individual desires and the collective ideal. The early fiction of Amos Oz and the critical visions of Nathan Shaḥam, Avraham Balaban, and Amos Kenan all bring the concealed dystopian aspects of the kibbutz to the surface and show how a utopian society breeds dystopian discontent. Ran Omer-Sherman explores the literary representation of the utopian vision of the kibbutz and concludes that the central theme in such works 'is the monumental tension between the individual and the collective, between individual aspiration and ideological rigor, between self-sacrifice and self-fulfillment. Portraying kibbutz life honestly demands retaining at least two oppositional things in mind at once – the absolute necessity of euphoric dreaming and the mellowing inevitability of disillusionment.'[45]

Still, we would surely want to distinguish between the kibbutz experience and intentional communities and cults that are far more destructive. These

[43] Sargent, *Utopianism*, p. 55. See also Eliezer Ben-Rafael, 'Kibbutz: Survival at Risk', in *The Communal Idea in the 21st Century*, ed. by Ben-Rafael, Oved, and Topel, pp. 301–321 and Ranen Omer-Sherman, *Imagining the kibbutz: visions of utopia in literature* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), pp. 1–22. The old collective kibbutz is called kibbutz shitufi and the new privatized (or 'renewing') kibbutz is called kibbutz miṯḥadesh.
[44] Uri Zilbersheid, 'The Israeli Kibbutz: From Utopia to Dystopia', *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory*, 35:3 (2007), 430–431.
[45] Omer-Sherman, *Imagining the kibbutz*, p. 7.

communities treat their members degradingly and with violence and the consensual atmosphere is transformed into one of coercion. The reorganization of much of the peasant population into communes in China by Mao Zedong resulted in brutal violence that forced the population to give up their houses and other private property, so that by 1958 thousands of what were called 'people's communes' existed. Forced collectivization had devastating consequences and many died during this period, while others who were forced to join this authoritarian form of communalism experienced a much worse standard of living than they had before. The dystopian community Colonia Dignidad in Chile, established by Germans and Chileans after World War II, became infamous after its leader was jailed for child sex abuse, torture, and murdering his opponents.[46]

Many religious sects provided the utopian tradition with successful, long-lived, and voluntary communities but some of them which assume cult-like features have been headed by strong and charismatic leaders who can potentially influence people to do things that they would not do otherwise, including rape, drug abuse, and even mass killings. Dystopian communities such as Jonestown, the Solar Temple, Centrepoint, and others are known for serious abuse of their members. The degree to which this happens is often dependent upon the level of paranoia and anxiety and the relationship between the leadership and their followers. But even these dystopian communities started well and morphed into apocalyptic dystopias only later: the Jonestown massacre ended disastrously with a mass suicide of more than 900 followers and some 924 members of the Ugandan Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God were burned to death or poisoned by the leaders of the community after their predictions of the end of the world failed to come about.[47]

[46] Claeys, *Dystopia*, p. 214; Sargent, *Utopianism*, pp. 42, 64, 68.
[47] Sargent, *Utopianism*, p. 42; Paul F. Starrs and John B. Wright, 'Utopia, Dystopia, and Sublime Apocalypse in Montana's Church Universal and Triumphant', *Geographical Review*, 95:1 (2005), 97–121.

2. The Literary Dystopia

> *The task of the literary dystopia […] is to warn us against and educate us about real-life dystopias. It need not furnish a happy ending to do so: pessimism has its place. But it may envision rational and collective solutions where irrationality and panic loom. Entertainment plays a role in this process. But the task at hand is serious. It gains daily in importance. Here, then, is a genre, and a concept, whose hour has come. May it flourish.*[48]

Now that we have recognized a more inclusive understanding of dystopia, we will turn our focus to one of the possible manifestations of dystopian thought – dystopia as a literary genre. In discussing the literary tradition, we will need to address these issues – the genre definitions, the problem of categorization, the dominant themes and trends running through the dystopian literature up to the 1950s, and then the major developments from the 1950s until the present. This brief sketch of major themes will prove useful for developing a thorough understanding of the Hebrew dystopian tradition, as the Israeli authors are, more often than not, influenced or inspired by the English utopian tradition. However, a detailed account of dystopian literary trends and of specific dystopian works is far beyond the scope of this theoretical part of the study and therefore we will attempt, instead, to map out only the contours of the dystopian literary tradition. Utopian and dystopian literature (written in English) has a varied and rich history, which it is not feasible to do justice to in the context of this work, but we refer the readers, in the text and footnotes, to a number of academic and often extensive works which are focused on all aspects of utopianism. The indispensable journal for this field, *Utopian Studies*, also contains discussions of numerous classical literary works, as well as less familiar ones, which certainly makes it a great reference point. Finally, it should be stressed that in providing reflections on dystopian literature we confine our attention chiefly to ideas and themes and less to literary forms.

There have been many attempts so far to define dystopia and the closely related concept of anti-utopia and the disagreement over these key terms persists, mainly

[48] Claeys, *Dystopia*, p. 501.

because the immense variety of texts is studied and analyzed by scholars from different fields, such as history, sociology, politics, and literary theory, and by liberals, Marxists, and other critics. Moreover, the somewhat disturbing proximity between utopia and dystopia, which we have already discussed, is yet another aspect contributing to the ongoing disagreement about key definitions. We will present a few suggestions, made by leading scholars, on how we can understand these concepts while at the same time we believe that any definitional boundaries have to be porous, which is not to say that we do not need any definitions, but only that these definitions should not be there to build a fortress around us so as to keep anything just slightly different outside. From a historical perspective, the distinction between dystopia and anti-utopia has been vague and often confusing inasmuch as the terms are sometimes used interchangeably. Some authors and critics oversimplify the terminology, while others make no distinction at all between the two terms. In his *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (1987), historian of political thought Krishan Kumar does not differentiate between the two and uses 'anti-utopia' as a general term. Most radically, perhaps, M. Keith Booker (1994) takes different concepts from utopian studies and groups them all under the term 'dystopia', saying that "[v]arious terms have been employed to indicate the range of skeptical treatments of utopianism depicted in modern fiction and film. Designations like "dystopia," "negative utopia," "anti-utopia," "heterotopia,"[49] and "cacotopia" have variously been used to describe this phenomenon, though the terms have not always been employed interchangeably. However, rather than quibble over terminology, in this study I use the term "dystopia" throughout to subsume all of the others, with the understanding that I consider "dystopia" as a general term encompassing any imaginative view of a society that is oriented toward highlighting in a critical way negative or problematic features of that society's vision of the ideal."[50]

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[49] The word 'heterotopia' was first coined, in a literary context, by the French theorist Michel Foucault. Heterotopian spaces are transient spaces, sites of otherness, spaces which are different from real spaces or even inversions or opposites of them. Examples of these include mirrors, asylums, prisons, cemeteries, libraries, museums, boats, etc. In dystopian literature heterotopias represent a safe haven for the protagonists, such as memories of the past, dreams of a better future, or places which constitute a refuge from the dystopian reality. For further details see Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', trans. by Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics*, 16:1 (1986), 22–27 and Kelvin T. Knight, 'Placeless places: resolving the paradox of Foucault's heterotopia', *Textual Practice*, 31:1 (2017), 141–158.

[50] M. Keith Booker, *The Dystopian Impulse in Modem Literature: Fiction as Social Criticism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), p. 22.

A more prevalent trend among scholars and critics today, however, is to keep sharply defined distinctions in utopianism, and especially the one between the anti-utopia and dystopia.[51] This work follows this second tendency. In the article 'The Three Faces of Utopianism' (1967) Lyman Tower Sargent conflates dystopia with anti-utopia, but in the updated version 'The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited' (1994) he makes a clear distinction between the two and defines a dystopia or 'bad place' as a 'non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived'[52], and an anti-utopia as a 'non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as a criticism of utopianism or of some particular eutopia'.[53] In the same manner, Darko Suvin (2003), a Marxist literary theorist and science fiction critic, distinguishes between anti-utopia and dystopia, arguing that '[d]ystopia […] divides into anti-utopia and what I shall call "simple" dystopia. Anti-Utopia finally turns out to be a dystopia, but one explicitly designed to refute a currently proposed eutopia. It is a pretended eutopia—a community whose hegemonic principles pretend to its being more perfectly organized than any thinkable alternative, while our representative "camera eye" and value-monger finds out it is significantly less perfect than an alternative, a polemic nightmare. "Simple" Dystopia (so called to avoid inventing yet another prefix to topia) is a straightforward dystopia, that is, one which is not also an anti-utopia'.[54]

Discussing socially critical science fictional texts (such as *He, She and It* by Marge Piercy), Sargent (1994) also suggested that we should start to consider

[51] For more detailed summaries of these definitional controversies see, for example, Artur Blaim, 'Hell upon a Hill: Reflections on Anti-Utopia and Dystopia', in *Dystopia(n) Matters*, ed. by Vieira, pp. 80–91; Claeys, *Dystopia*, pp. 278–284; *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, ed. by Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 4–11.
[52] Sargent, 'The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited', 9.
[53] Ibid., 9.
[54] Darko Suvin, 'Theses on Dystopia 2001', in *Dark Horizons*, ed. by Moylan and Baccolini, p. 189. Marxist theorists such as Suvin, Frederic Jameson, and Raymond Williams are all, to a different degree, hostile to dystopian fiction. Jameson, following Sargent, Baccolini, Moylan, and Suvin, recognizes two types of dystopian text – critical dystopias, which are essentially dark eutopias in their intent, and anti-utopias, which are the true antonyms of utopias, opposed to any utopian undertaking. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is then one such anti-utopia for Jameson, serving as a fine example of the anti-utopian movement. For further analysis of this argument see Andrew Milner, 'Changing the climate: The politics of dystopia', *Continuum*, 23:6 (2009), 827–838.

using the term 'critical dystopia', the dark side of 'critical utopia', for this kind of work. Critical utopias came to refer to the revival of distinctively eutopian writing of the 1970s, which was influenced by ecological, feminist, and leftist thought and was represented by writers such as Ursula K. Le Guin, Samuel R. Delany, Ernst Callenbach, Marge Piercy, and others. This distinct imaginative exploration of 'better' rather than 'worse' places gave the readership at the very least an indication of what needed to be changed in their own society while at the same time stressing the formal and political limitations of the classical utopias and presenting utopias as more of a dream and not as a blueprint. This major revival of utopian thinking since the nineteenth century, however, came to an abrupt end in the 1980s and dystopias became the prevailing form of utopian literary expression once again.[55] The term 'critical dystopia' was first used by Sargent and Raffaella Baccolini, but Tom Moylan gave it an extensive theoretical elaboration in his book *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*, where he argued that it was a recent development characteristic of the late 1980s and the early 1990s.[56] Moylan also contributes to the discussion by pointing out in this study how utopian and dystopian scenarios are intertwined within particular texts (which further problematizes the categorization of such texts).[57] In the introduction to the book *Dark Horizons* (2003) Baccolini and Moylan claim that the critical dystopia is a text 'that maintain[s] a utopian impulse. Traditionally a bleak, depressing genre with little space for hope within the story, dystopias maintain utopian hope outside their pages, if at all; for it is only if we consider dystopia as a warning that we as readers can hope to escape its pessimistic future. This option is not granted to the protagonists of Nineteen Eighty-Four or Brave New World… the new critical dystopias allow both readers and protagonists to hope by resisting closure: the ambiguous, open endings of these novels maintain the utopian impulse *within* the work'.[58] Sargent, later adding critical dystopias to his list of definitions, defines them in a similar vein: 'a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as worse than contemporary society but that normally includes at

[55] *Dark Horizons*, ed. by Moylan and Baccolini, p. 2.
[56] Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*, ed. by Raffaella Baccolini (Peter Lang, 2014), pp. 239–240.
[57] Tom Moylan, *Scraps of the Unpainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia* (Westview Press, 2000), pp. 183–199. The same observation is made by Sargent (1994) regarding the work *He, She and It.*
[58] *Dark Horizons*, ed. by Moylan and Baccolini, p. 7.

least one eutopian enclave or holds out hope that the dystopia can be overcome and replaced with a eutopia".[59] Following this line of thought Fátima Vieira then determines the success of dystopias on the basis of whether they provide us with hope, arguing that '[d]ystopias that leave no room for hope do in fact fail in their mission'.[60] The prevailing consensus is that the 'critical dystopias' today, that is, dystopias which include such elements as hope, are hardly a scarcity. Contrary to this view which classifies and determines the merit of dystopias according to their 'hope' index, Gregory Claeys argues that the secondary sources often generalize from rather narrow textual analysis (which his voluminous work attempts to remedy) and then concludes that 'literary dystopias are understood as primarily concerned to portray societies where a substantial majority suffer slavery and/or oppression *as a result of human action* […]. Some 'critical dystopias' (post-c. 1970) also suggest that such systems might be overthrown internally. But this does not imply a 'utopian' counter-proposal, only an alternative to dystopia, which may also be the status quo ante […] we can agree that 'anti-utopias' should be separated from dystopias insofar as the former reject utopianism as such, whereas the latter do not, or do so more obliquely. This definition does not privilege texts which retail 'hope', or those which propose utopian as opposed to non-utopian alternatives'.[61] In fact, many dystopias end disastrously with defeat, leaving us with no hope, but despite the fact that such texts may not hold out hope for a better future (especially *within the text itself*), they still carry an important didactic message – a message that serves as a cautionary example. Finally, contrary to previous definitions of anti-utopias, Claeys contends that the texts which oppose one type of utopia (and not utopianism as such) are not necessarily anti-utopias or even dystopias – that is, some texts can still be considered utopias even if they take issue with another specific utopian text.[62]

While these definitions help us understand various problems, at the same time they reveal further definitional difficulties. Dystopia is sometimes dubbed as the

[59] Quoted in *Dark Horizons*, ed. by Moylan and Baccolini, p. 7.
[60] Vieira, 'The concept of utopia', in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, ed. by Claeys , p. 17.
[61] Claeys, *Dystopia*, p. 290.
[62] Ibid., p. 280. A similar position is proposed by Gary Saul Morson, who considers the anti-utopia from a Russian formalist perspective, calling it an anti-genre and saying 'An anti-generic work must parody a target genre. That is, it must discredit not a single work in the target genre, but the genre as a whole.' Quoted in Blaim, 'Hell upon a Hill: Reflections on Anti-Utopia and Dystopia', in *Dystopia(n) Matters*, ed. by Vieira, p. 85.

'utopia's twentieth-century doppelgänger' and defined, perhaps aptly, as 'a utopia that has gone wrong, or a utopia that functions only for a particular segment of society'.[63] The concept of 'utopia' is often understood as a 'better' place and dystopia as a 'worse' place, which certainly holds true for the disaster and (post-) apocalyptic dystopian novels, but this understanding results in some logical problems when we realize that a great number of dystopian works grow out of social, political, and economic trends. Provided that the reality that is depicted is labeled as 'worse', the immediate questions that arise here are: worse for whom? And worse than what? Surely, the reader's perspective could be taken into account, but the readership always includes different societies, groups, and individuals and therefore it is unclear when the 'worse' applies (as an oft-quoted statement goes, 'one person's terrorist is another's freedom fighter' and so 'one person's utopia is another's dystopia') – perhaps to avoid this ambiguity it would be helpful here to simply specify this to mean 'for the majority'. Defining the work from a reader's perspective is thus relative to time and space, and to matters such as social position, ethical values, and other various factors. A different approach to literary dystopias is through authorial intention – an approach that is also problematic, as the authorial intention is often unclear. Another approach among critics highlights the historical context in which the author lived. Finally, the content or narrative approach emphasizes the need to look at the social relations and level of oppression (and estrangement) portrayed in the specific literary text.[64]

Some of the approaches are more problematic than others, but all of them are connected or overlap and, most importantly, all of them need to enter the discussion in the process of the interpreter's analyses of the text for a subtle treatment of the tradition. To sum up, we can agree that it is necessary to make a clear distinction between the critique of the contemporary society as expressed in dystopias, which often implies or even insists on a need for change, and the criticism of the very idea of wanting to imagine a perfect or a better world, which explicitly or implicitly calls for the preservation of the current state of affairs – as Andrew Milner puts it: 'anti-utopias are normally not dystopian fictions at all, but straightforwardly panglossian affirmations that we already live in the best of all

[63] *Utopia/dystopia: conditions of historical possibility*, ed. by Michael D. Gordin, Helen Tilley, and Gyan Prakash (Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 1.
[64] Claeys, *Dystopia*, pp. 280–284; *The Utopia Reader*, ed. by Claeys and Sargent, pp. 3–4.

possible worlds'.[65] Therefore we concur with the authors who distinguish the dystopia, cautionary in nature and presenting a future in which some aspects of the here and now have continued and deteriorated, from the anti-utopia, which also presents a dismal look at the future, but is specifically intended as a criticism of utopianism (or sometimes a specific utopia).

Finally, the last issue which needs to be addressed when it comes to categorization is the association of dystopias with the greater literary genre of science fiction and novels of apocalypse, cataclysm, and natural disaster – many of which are variants of millenarianism and are not dystopian as such. Literary dystopias may happen before or after an apocalypse or a natural disaster, but like the utopia, a key aspect of a dystopia's distinctiveness is the portrayal of social and political relations – it is also less important where (and when) the dystopia is projected, be it galaxies in space, remote islands, or underground.[66] If the concern of a critic is exclusively with the more realistic types of dystopian scenarios, it is in order to refine the definition even further in order to separate it from the much larger field of science fiction – surely not an easy task, given that science fiction has proved to be even more difficult to define and thus no agreed definition has been established.[67] Although the utopian genre precedes that of science fiction and for the most part it is, in its origins, generally not related to it, the popularity of science fiction has increased so dramatically recently that it has engulfed many other genres, including, by the mid-twentieth century, both utopia and dystopia. Some authors avoid subsuming utopia and dystopia under the greater genre of science fiction, arguing that science fiction is largely indifferent to social and political issues and organizations which are central to utopian literature and also that the predominance of science and technology does not make the fictional work necessarily science fiction as long as these elements are portrayed realistically. The critics that talk of a dystopian science fiction subgenre maintain that the advancement of science allowed science-related themes to move from the science fiction domain into that of dystopia – Philip Wegner thus goes as far as calling dystopias 'one of the most significant subgenres of modern SF'.[68] The dystopias after the 1950s progressively rely more and more on scientific and technological

[65] Andrew Milner, *Locating Science Fiction* (Liverpool University Press, 2012), p. 118.
[66] *The Utopia Reader*, ed. by Claeys and Sargent, p. 3.
[67] David Seed, *Science Fiction* (Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 1.
[68] Phillip E. Wegner, 'Utopianism', in *The Oxford Handbook of Science Fiction*, ed. by Rob Latham (Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 574.

tropes to advance their vision of the future or alternative reality because, just like in science fiction, the authors often extrapolate from current trends into the future (sometimes far beyond the frontier of plausibility). The fact that technology is so pervasive in SF is 'because every technological innovation affects the structure of our society and the nature of our behavior. Technology has repeatedly been associated with the future by SF, but it does not follow that the fiction is therefore *about* the future. The crudest reading of an SF novel is to ask 'did Arthur C. Clarke get it wrong?' Science fiction is about the writer's present in the sense that any historical moment will include its own set of expectations and perceived tendencies. The futures represented in SF embody its speculative dimension. In that sense, as Joanna Russ has explained, it is a '*What If* Literature'.[69] We can therefore see why some scholars consider dystopias to be so important to the SF field. Nonetheless, there are dystopias and utopias that do not adhere to this model (even after the 1950s) and are largely focused on power relations in clear social and political terms and submerging them in the science fiction domain is an inaccurate move.[70] Still, we cannot disregard the fact that all the major works of utopian literature of the past few decades show the extent to which science fiction is intertwined with the utopian and dystopian imagination – following Darko Suvin's definition of science fiction as 'literature of cognitive estrangement […] whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment',[71] Moylan, discussing utopian literature since approximately the 1960s, argues that 'utopia and science fiction are most concerned with the current moment of history, but they represent that moment in an estranged manner. They restructure and distance the present not to a misty past nor to an exotic other place but rather to that one place where some hope for a better life for all humanity still lingers: the future'.[72] Lars Schmeink talks about science fiction and dystopias as examples of the 'utopian imagination, whose job is at heart akin to that of the sociological imagination', and like Moylan, argues that 'dystopian and science fiction literature, film, television, and video games (as well as other media) are only outwardly concerned with the future; their main concern rather is with the present and with developments within contemporary

[69] Seed, *Science Fiction*, pp. 1–2.
[70] Claeys, *Dystopia*, pp. 284–290; Peter Fitting, 'Utopia, Dystopia and Science Fiction', *in The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, ed. by Claeys, pp. 135–53.
[71] Quoted in Simon J. James, *Maps of Utopia* (Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 39–40.
[72] Moylan, *Demand the Impossible*, ed. by Baccolini, p. 35.

society and how they influence human lives'.[73] Ultimately, we can conclude, then, that it is unfeasible to study the dystopias of the past fifty years without acknowledging the central role of science fiction.

[73] Lars Schmeink, *Biopunk Dystopias: Genetic Engineering, Society, and Science Fiction* (Liverpool University Press, 2016), p. 11.

3. The Origins of Dystopian Literature

> *This […] was the message of the book – This is possible: for heaven's sake be careful.*[74]

The history of the dystopia, apart from being much younger than that of the utopia, is not associated with one specific text or distinct tradition. The dystopias on the page, in the style of those associated with the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, first start to appear in the period of the French Revolution. The germ of the literary dystopia, however, seems to have been satires upon the Enlightenment notion of a life lived according to the principles of science and reason – of these the most influential and enduring was the work of Irish satirist Jonathan Swift, *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World* (1726), better known as *Gulliver's Travels*. Other agreeable examples of satires of this kind are Voltaire's *Candide* (1759), a lampoon of the Enlightenment belief in the idea of progress, and later Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* (1872), a satirical attack on the British attitudes of the time towards science, technology, and religion. Since the very inception of the genre, dystopias have therefore been targeting the meta-narratives of Modernity, such as science, reason, the idea of progress, faith in the future, and later revolution and socialism. We can really witness the beginning of this dialectical relationship between utopian thinking and the fictional anti-utopian and dystopian response with the French Revolution, which brought both fictional utopian works inspired by the leading trends of the time and a deluge of fictional satirical responses attacking the set of notions loosely described as perfectibility. This first wave of proto-dystopian fictional texts culminated in the gothic novel of Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1818), subtitled *The Modern Prometheus* – a title that reminds us of the consequences of humans 'playing God'. The work, considered by some to be a founding text of the science fiction genre and partially a satire on the failures of the Revolution, signals one of the main themes of later dystopian literary works – the dangers of unrestrained science or scientists. From that point on, the theme of science and technology becomes increasingly more common and from the beginning of the twentieth century the dystopian mode of expression, often formally situated within the genre

[74] Quoted in Milner, 'Changing the climate', *Continuum*, 833.

of science fiction, starts to dominate the utopian literary scene.[75] Moreover, this period also presented us with the first secular versions of the Apocalypse – a noteworthy example being *The Last Man* (1826), also written by Mary Shelley, describing a global plague which has eradicated the human race by the year 2100. It seems the novel has aged well as it has certainly something to say to the readership of 2020-21, years in which the world is dealing with the global pandemic and its effects. The novel however is more of an apocalyptic fiction and less of a dystopia since the disaster is not caused by human action and neither are the sociopolitical aspects of the catastrophe considered within the text itself.[76]

Another significant shift in utopianism which begins in the second half of the eighteenth century is marked by imagining the utopia not as a place to be discovered on the present-day earth or in the divine world beyond, but as a place to be created – firstly, by the end of the eighteenth century there was little left unexplored on the surface of the earth and so the prospects of discovering a 'no-place' became bleak, and secondly, with the dawn of the Enlightenment man became aware of the power of reason and scientific progress and understood that he was the architect of his own future. Consequently, by the end of the nineteenth century the idea of 'no-place', with its spatial possibilities exhausted, was largely displaced by euchronia, 'the good time coming', that is, a shifting of utopia into the future – a process which Reinhart Koselleck calls 'the temporalization of utopia'.[77]

Four major themes, which would often intermingle, define dystopian literature in the last decades of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century: Social Darwinism, which claimed to apply Darwin's theory of natural selection to the socio-political sphere, and in particular in the form of eugenics or the improvement of the human population through selective breeding; the destructive potential of scientific and technological inventions; the looming threat of socialist revolution and the terror it implied; and, more generally, the social consequences of mechanization. These themes herald an important change in the dystopian literature – the real possibility of such nightmarish scenarios makes lighter satire

[75] Gregory Claeys, 'The Origins of Dystopia: Wells, Huxley and Orwell', in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature,* ed. by Claeys, pp. 109–110; Kumar, 'Utopia's Shadow', in *Dystopia(n) Matters*, ed. by Vieira, p. 19.
[76] Claeys, *Dystopia*, p. 293.
[77] Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History* (Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 84–99; Vieira, 'The concept of utopia', in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, ed. by Claeys, pp. 9–15.

more difficult, and the seriousness of the situation only intensifies after World War I.[78] Many 'utopian' works were written that reflected either positive eugenics (selective breeding for certain characteristics) or negative eugenics (selective breeding to eliminate certain characteristics). Both of these approaches tend to be associated today with dystopias[79] either because of disagreements over the traits chosen or because of the potential of the misuse of the power to make such choices.[80] Racial wars, racism, and anti-Semitism are not at all uncommon themes in the 'utopias' of this period, and some, such as William Hay's *Three Hundred Years Hence* (1881), speak of the elimination of all non-white people.[81] Many other texts describe socialist revolution gone wrong, resulting in poverty, the destruction of individualism, and the creation of dictatorships, and sometimes combine both these socialist themes and eugenics. One of the most prolific and prominent authors of the earliest science fiction dystopias is H. G. Wells, whose *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1896) can be considered an exemplary type of eugenic dystopia. The work, a reworking of the Frankenstein motif, focuses on the scientific control of genetic development by portraying a mad scientist who vivisects people and animals, thus creating human-like hybrids. The theme of people falling into or rising above their animal nature is also present in Wells' downbeat depiction of the future of the human species in his time travel tale *The Time Machine* (1895). The novel, set nearly a million years in the future, portrays humans who evolved into two separate and distinct human species, the above-ground remnants of the aristocracy, the feeble and simple-minded Eloi, and the subterranean slave race the Morlocks, who prey on them. Wells' bleak prophecy about the ultimate extinction of the human race on the planet recognizes the political predicament of the class situation of his times and parodies both the Marxist position and the idea of selective breeding. These themes and other extrapolations of current trends reappear in some of Wells' major works that followed, particularly in *The Invisible Man* (1897), *The War of the Worlds* (1898), and *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899).[82] Wells, however, produced many other

[78] Claeys, *Dystopia*, pp. 294–295, 355; Claeys, 'The Origins of Dystopia', in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature,* ed. by Claeys, pp. 110–111.
[79] Eugenic themes, however, were not always portrayed as dystopian – positive portrayals also abound and are sometimes as simple as a reduction of family size.
[80] Sargent, *Utopianism*, p. 27.
[81] Claeys, *Dystopia*, p. 301.
[82] Ibid., pp. 299–300; Claeys, 'The Origins of Dystopia', in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature,* ed. by Claeys, pp. 113–114; Arthur B. Evans, 'Nineteenth Century SF', in *The*

works which are not necessarily dystopian – he tried his hand at prehistoric fiction, planetary disaster fiction, lunar voyage fiction, and future war fiction, and finally he wrote a number of prescient futuristic utopias, from *A Modern Utopia* (1905) to *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933) – the latter became the best-known English literary utopia at that time and in it Wells argued for a technocratic 'World State'.[83] While the works vary greatly, the central themes remain – the preferability of a world government and the conflict between capitalism and socialism, how to solve it, and what could happen if it is not solved.[84] Wells' works had a great influence, direct or indirect, on subsequent writers such as E. M. Forster and the writers who produced the classics of the dystopian genre: Yevgeny Zamyatin, Aldous Huxley, and George Orwell. Forster's '*The Machine Stops*' (1909), perhaps more related to our own age of smartphones, the internet, and virtual reality than to the twentieth century, is a reaction to the Wellsian inheritance and in particular to his belief in scientific technocracy – this Wellsian machine civilization would later also come under fire in the dystopian fiction of Huxley and Orwell. 'The Machine Stops' is a depiction of an imaginary 'reality' where humanity has withdrawn from the surface of the earth to live isolated in vast subterranean cities which are run by the omniscient Machine. The characters in the story become completely forgetful of their human aspects and, unaware of their unnatural condition, they prefer the simulation of reality to the real world itself.[85]

The most successful of the early twentieth-century anti-utopian dystopias[86] was, however, Zamyatin's novel *We* (written in Russian in 1921, translated into English in 1924) targeting the collectivist mentality, scientific positivism, and totalitarian rationalization, and presenting a negative vision of the possible realization of Utopia. The novel takes the form of a diary and depicts the One State, headed by the unanimously elected 'Benefactor', which dominates the

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Routledge Companion to Science Fiction, ed. by Mark Bould and others (Routledge, 2009), pp. 13–22.

[83] Evans, 'Nineteenth Century SF', in *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. by Bould and others, p. 21; Milner, *Locating Science Fiction*, p. 124.

[84] Sargent, *Utopianism*, p. 25.

[85] Silvana Caporaletti, 'Science as Nightmare: 'The Machine Stops' by E.M. Forster', *Utopian Studies*, 8:2 (1997), 32–47; Claeys, *Dystopia*, pp. 333–334.

[86] Often described by critics as an anti-utopian novel, 'Suvin, Moylan, and Jameson have argued, this novel should be read not as "anti-utopian" but as a "critical dystopia" that advocates "a vision common to Anarchism and libertarian Marxism'. William J. Burling, 'Marxism', in *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. by Bould and others, p. 241.

entire planet and has managed to eliminate privacy – the citizens, kept under constant surveillance, live in glass apartments and their names have been replaced by numbers thus depriving them of their unique, individual identities. The population, supervised by 'guardians', is forced to dress in uniforms and is allotted two 'personal hours' for non-work activities, one food item per day, and 'sexual days' which are designated by the Sexual Bureau. The daily lives of the citizens are therefore managed with an arithmetical precision and the One State is ruled by science and mathematicians as much as by the autocratic 'Benefactor'. The protagonist of the story, D-503, is seduced, both sexually and politically, by a femme fatale into the cause of rebellion, but the resistance is eventually suppressed and D-503 is lobotomized into subjection by the 'Benefactor'. The futile individual and collective resistance, suppressed by the One State, is one of the major aspects which unite Zamyatin's and Orwell's literary representations.[87]

The mid-twentieth century, characterized by the general disillusionment with both capitalism and socialism, the problematic of despotic collectivism and authoritarian leadership looming in divided Europe, and the negative impacts of the emerging human-machine civilization, gave rise to a number of dystopian literary responses to these developments, two of which would become classic examples of the genre: Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). Brave New World portrays the future World State, 632 years 'After Ford', which succeeded in maintaining social stability through the strict use of eugenic engineering and a stratified class society, the abolition of personal freedom and property, the consumption of the freely available drug *soma*, and obligatory participation in sexual and other distractions. The story can be read as either a perfect world utopia or as its dark alter ego, a dystopia, depending on the point of view of the reader. It is not, however, a typical dystopia, as these are usually dominated by fear in the form of pain, cruelty, slave labor, and mass murder, but rather it would be more apt to use the term 'hedonistic dystopia' as it 'has abolished original sin – and, according to Huxley, the creativity that comes from confronting it. There is no guilt about sex or any other form of "instant gratification". For all pain or anxiety there is the drug *soma*. There is no striving, no unhappiness that comes from unachieved ambition. Everyone fits snugly into

[87] Milner, *Locating Science Fiction*, p. 128; Claeys, 'The Origins of Dystopia', in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature,* ed. by Claeys, p. 114.

their place in society, genetically decanted into "types" in the laboratory and then further conditioned by sleep-teaching and the mass media. Brave New World has achieved prosperity, security and stability; what more could anyone desire? It is a hedonistic paradise, a utopia of consumption that Huxley in his old-fashioned way wishes to spoil by presenting it as a dystopia'.[88] The work is therefore not so much a criticism of totalitarianism, but instead it presents a critique of consumer capitalism, abuses of science, and Fordism since 'it takes as its target certain strands which Huxley regarded as inherent in modernity as such, especially the scientific application of the psychology of propaganda, indoctrination or the manipulation of behaviour'.[89]

Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four, on the other hand, presents a very different kind of dystopian world-state – a totalitarian regime where the '[c]onsent rests upon punishment and fear rather than the manipulation of pleasure [and] [c]onformity is instilled by routine practice rather than eugenic conditioning'.[90] Nevertheless, the suppression of individuality and the futility of attempts at resistance remain the central themes in both texts. Nineteen Eighty-Four is generally interpreted by scholars and critics as both a sharp criticism of totalitarianism and an attack on certain aspects of capitalism and modernity. The major and most powerful theme in Orwell's magnum opus is perhaps the corruption of the socialist movement by the lust for power and the problem of leadership – yet the work, as Orwell himself claimed, is not intended as a criticism of Socialism as such. The novel portrays a failed attempt at rebellion by the protagonist Winston Smith, who lives in Oceania under the constant threat of surveillance by the state power and Big Brother, which requires the expression of complete loyalty by avoiding 'facecrime' and 'thoughtcrime', learning 'doublethink', participating in 'Hate Week', and even by the suppression of individualism and eroticism.[91] The incessant rewriting of the past is another theme running through the novel – Winston is employed to remove any inconsistencies in Big Brother's official account of history. At the end of the novel, Winston, whose main crimes were keeping a diary and having a sexual affair with the femme fatale of the story, Julia, is caught, tortured, and brainwashed into loving

[88] Kumar, 'Utopia's Shadow', in *Dystopia(n) Matters*, ed. by Vieira, p. 21.
[89] Claeys, *Dystopia*, p. 389.
[90] Claeys, 'The Origins of Dystopia', in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature,* ed. by Claeys, p. 118.
[91] Ibid., pp. 118–126.

Big Brother – an ending reminiscent of Zamyatin's We. Despite the text being the most pessimistic of the three major novels mentioned here, some critics consider the appendix 'The Principles of Newspeak' as expressing a glimmer of hope as a result of it seemingly being written after the collapse of Big Brother.[92]

In short, both Orwell and Zamyatin captured the real horrors of the twentieth century far more accurately than Huxley and his materialistic civilization. However, given the retreat of Communism at the end of the twentieth century and, to some degree, the similar retreat of authoritarian regimes, it is Huxley's Brave New World, with its powerful description of the behavioral psychology of consumer society, which seems to have remained the most relevant over the years. As Krishan Kumar rightly points out: '[i]n selecting consumerism, in the broadest sense, as the major development of contemporary capitalism, Huxley had showed himself the most perceptive of the dystopian writers. Power is there, but it prefers to exercise itself in ways that evade our recognition and hence resistance. Foucault would surely have understood'.[93]

[92] Graham J. Murphy, 'Dystopia', in *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. by Bould and others, p. 475.
[93] Kumar, 'Utopia's Shadow', in *Dystopia(n) Matters*, ed. by Vieira, p. 22.

4. Dystopian Trends after the Second World War

> *We live in a world shaped by capitalism in its global stage, generally subject to authoritarian power (be it soft or hard, be it wrapped in an aura of democracy or served straight in varying degrees of overt control). In this world, nature (humanity included) is alienated, reified, exploited, oppressed and ultimately destroyed in some way or other. In this world, ecological, economic, political and cultural crises are increasingly the norm. The name of this world is dystopia (over against the misrepresentation of itself as utopia). While there are no dominant pictures of a Big Brother, there are the now familiar slogans: there is no alternative, history is over.* [94]

The philosopher Slavoj Žižek writes in the introduction to his book *Living in the End Times* that the contemporary world is facing four main threats: 'the four riders of the apocalypse', namely 'the ecological crisis, the consequences of the biogenetic revolution, imbalances within the system itself (problems with intellectual property; forthcoming struggles over raw materials, food and water), and the explosive growth of social divisions and exclusions'.[95] Following the conclusion of World War II, humanity entered the atomic age and the threat of nuclear warfare and complete annihilation, intensified during the Cold War, became a common theme in the dystopian imagination. Despite the hopes for continuous improvement promised by the scientific and technological discoveries and innovations in domains such as space exploration, electronics, computing, robotics, and genetics, the looming threat of catastrophe outweighed the utopian impulses. The portrayals of political collectivism and totalitarian leadership slowly dwindle from the 1960s and are replaced by pessimistic narratives of nuclear devastation, overpopulation, famine, neo-liberalism with its hedonistic consumerism and free-market world, cultural degeneration, global threats such as terrorism and pandemics, and environmental collapse. Moreover, starting from the

[94] Tom Moylan, 'Step into the Story …', in *Dystopia(n) Matters*, ed. by Vieira, p. 42.
[95] Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (Verso, 2011), p. x.

1980s, feminism, gender relations, and concerns about gender identity and misogyny also begin to play a crucial role in the dystopian literary imagination.[96]

In continuity with nineteenth- and early twentieth-century dystopias, the increasing confrontation of humanity with technology and the potential loss of humanity, identity, and free will dominate both science fiction and the dystopian discourse from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The ability of technology to render social relations increasingly transparent connects both earlier dystopian concerns with the threat of surveillance and the present-day digital age with its advanced techniques of a substantial portion of the population being observed and monitored by governmental organizations. The age of the internet also brought about surveillance capitalism, in which the constant tracking of our everyday activities is analyzed and monetized and the personal data that are collected are then used by advertisements, social media companies, and politicians to manipulate us.[97] Many authors also express their skepticism about scientific and technological advances in the areas of robotics, organ replacements, genetic engineering, and cyborgization by producing dystopian warnings about the loss of human nature and the moral and ethical dimensions of the biotechnological revolution.[98]

With regard to governance, the literary dystopias concerned with totalitarian regimes are replaced by depictions of enslavement to corporate dictatorships and neoliberal ideological attacks on centralized governments and on welfare and regulatory states acting as mediums in providing social justice and democratic well-being. This dystopian shift in representation might not be surprising, considering that if 'the ruling ideas of an era are those of its ruling forces, then the narrative step from state to economy as the motor of society can be read at its least self-conscious register as a symptomatic echo of neoliberal hegemony'.[99] While the wealthy few enjoy luxury and their privileged status, the rest of humanity is left to its fate, fighting for sheer survival. The plutocratic dystopias are hardly a scarcity. The main attribute of literary dystopias which diminishes the bleak projections and the reality of these threats is 'their insistence on the necessity for

[96] Claeys, *Dystopia*, pp. 447–477.
[97] Mark Weinstein, *The Rise of Surveillance Capitalism*, online video recording, YouTube, 30 April 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AoYC4ogezE4> [accessed 29 June 2021].
[98] Claeys, *Dystopia*, p. 490; Schmeink, *Biopunk Dystopias*, p. 38.
[99] Tom Moylan, '"The moment is here . . . and it's important": State, Agency, and Dystopia in Kim Stanley Robinson's Antarctica and Ursula K. Le Guin's The Telling', in *Dark Horizons*, ed. by Moylan and Baccolini, p. 140.

happy endings, imagining deviant rebels who beat the system, implausibly rescuing their central characters, and providing 'hope' in the persistence of utopian enclaves, the birth of children, and the like'.[100] This 'critical' attitude in dystopian texts, however, has become more and more sporadic recently, moving rather towards a post-apocalyptic despair and so from the end of the twentieth century 'dystopias are often less concerned with how plutocratic or collectivist regimes emerge and function, and more focused on how the Apocalypse feels, and whether it brings out our better or (as commonly) our less desirable attributes, both individually, when the monsters within are released, and in the groups which increasingly dominate us'.[101] The theme of groups as exercising control over us and the threat to the idea of individuality often connects various manifestations of dystopianism, both fictional and real-world.[102]

[100] Claeys, *Dystopia*, p. 489.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid.

5. Zionism, Science Fiction, and the Utopian Ideology

Science fiction literature at large and the literary utopias and dystopias in particular,[103] often science fiction-oriented, constitute a direct interaction with contemporary culture. Science fiction lies at the crossroads of technological, scientific, critical, and social thought in that it determines what the authors conceived of as possible in and for our future. Analyzing the collective fears and desires represented in such fictional works educates us about the present and about the social realities which act as stimuli for the science-fictional imagination. Utopianism, as a cultural discourse, has always been a reflection of the political and social issues of its time.[104] In the article '*Marxist theory and Science Fiction*' Istvan Csicsery-Ronay points out: '[i]n its simplest terms, sf and utopian fiction have been concerned with imagining progressive alternatives to the status quo, often implying critiques of contemporary conditions or possible future outcomes of current social trends.'[105] Similarly, in his book *Seven Beauties*, he writes about sf as 'not a genre of aesthetic entertainment only, but a complex hesitation about the relationship between imaginary conceptions and historical reality unfolding into the future.'[106]

Doreet LeVitte-Harten argues that, despite science fiction being a literary mode and Zionism a political movement, both can be considered as 'projects' which converge in a place of their ideological background. She then continues to discuss their mutual parameters: 'the sense of wonder' containing an element of

[103] Although we often talk about dystopia and utopia as literary genres, it should be noted that for the past fifty years or so, both have been considered by many to be socio-political subgenres of science fiction. This categorization was made possible by the recent expansion of SF into its modern phase. See Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 61 and Tower Sargent, Lyman, 'Utopia – The Problem of Definition', *Extrapolation* 16:2 (1975), p. 142. Similarly, David Seed, a prominent science fiction scholar, points out that '[Suvin's] linking of utopias with SF is helpful since they constantly overlap and their separation has less to do with conceptual rigour than with academic reluctance to devote serious critical attention to science fiction, now happily a prejudice of the past.' (Seed, *Science Fiction*, p. 73) Nevertheless, we will see that some Hebrew dystopias are more science fiction-oriented than others and therefore it is not always practical to subsume the dystopia under science fiction.

[104] Lars Schmeink, *Biopunk Dystopias: Genetic Engineering, Society and Science Fiction* (Liverpool University Press, 2016), pp. 19–20, 33.

[105] Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, 'Marxist theory and science fiction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. by Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 113.

[106] Quoted in Schmeink, *Biopunk Dystopias,* p. 19.

catastrophe – in Zionism the sense of wonder is evoked through the narrative of returning after thousands of years back to the Promised Land and the catastrophe through the phenomenon of Jewish messianism; both projects rely to a certain degree on colonial ideology; and lastly both share the meta-narrative of progress and expansion.[107] The emergence and proliferation of Jewish speculative fiction in the form of utopias in the late nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth[108] come, then, perhaps as no surprise. The first imagined utopian Jewish homeland appears in Moses Hess's *Rome and Jerusalem: The Last National Question* (published in German in 1862), which envisions the establishment of a Jewish socialist nation-state in Palestine as a part of a greater socialist revival of humankind that would eventually bring equality between all nations and races.[109]

The Jewish state, re-established in 1948 as the State of Israel, might be the only country in the world to have been at least partially inspired by science fiction novels. The utopian visions of an independent Jewish state were presented in a number of literary works, most of which appeared around the time of the hugely popular and influential utopian novel of the American author Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward: 2000–1887* (1888). These Jewish utopias were often structurally informed by Bellamy, but they also reflected on and reacted to European anti-Semitism and the pogroms in Russia. They present the future Jewish state as a model of virtues and idealism, with its society living harmoniously with the neighboring countries. Such imagined Jewish homelands are portrayed in, for example, Edmund Menachem Eisler's *Ein Zukunftsbild* ("An Image of the Future," 1885) and Max Austerberg-Verakoff's *Das Reich Judaea im Jahre 6000* ("The Kingdom of Judea in the Year 6000 [2241]," 1893). Both of these novels present a detailed description of the exodus of Jews from Europe, motivated by anti-Semitism, and the establishment of an independent Jewish state in Palestine with Hebrew as its official language. Henry Pereira Mendes's *Looking Ahead: Twentieth-Century Happenings* (1899), written in broad terms and, as the title indicates, inspired by Bellamy's Looking Backward, describes a newly formed Jewish homeland with Jerusalem as its capital, but fails to provide

[107] Doreet LeVitte Harten, 'On Science Fiction and Zionism', <https://www.petachtikvamuseum.com/en/on-science-fiction-and-zionism/> [accessed 29 June 2021].
[108] The outburst of utopian works in which Jewish authors portrayed a future Jewish state in Palestine occurred in the period between 1882 and 1922. See Eran Kaplan, *Beyond Post-Zionism* (State University of New York Press, 2015), p. 118.
[109] Zilbersheid, p. 419.

the reader with any details about the society, government, or economy as most of the story is dedicated to the analysis of all the ills plaguing humanity. There are also utopias which depict the future Jewish state bearing the name Israel – *Shenei Dimyonot* ("Two Visions," 1895) is a short story published in the Hebrew literary journal *Sifrei Sha'ashu'im* ("Books of Amusements") by the Galician-born Hebrew author Isaac Fernhof and describes one reality as experienced by the narrator, a Jew who is kicked and humiliated on a train by a Polish fellow-traveler, and another reality as the vision of an idyllic future State of Israel which the narrator creates so as to escape the present in his imagination. Reflecting the impact of the Balfour Declaration, Hillel Zeitlin's *In der Medinas Yisroel in Yor 2000* ("In the State of Israel in the Year 2000," 1919) is another utopia that refers to the imagined future Jewish state as the State of Israel. The founder of the Bezalel School in Jerusalem, Boris Shatz, also published a utopia named *Yerushalayim ha-Benuyah* ("Rebuilt Jerusalem," 1924) in which a man is transported to the future Jewish state in 2018. Describing Jerusalem from above, the narrator sees the city as a biblical paradise ruled in an egalitarian and socialist spirit with economic wealth brought about by worker and art cooperatives and eco-friendly technological advances. The Jewish population co-exists harmoniously with the Arab citizens, who agreed to move the Dome of the Rock close to the Jaffa Gate, allowing the Jews to rebuild the Third Temple. Rather than becoming a place of religious worship, however, the Temple serves as a museum of Jewish art, culture, and science, thus reflecting the author's understanding of art as a fundamental part of human existence.[110]

Most of these works, however, failed to gain a larger readership or enthusiasm among the Zionists and are also often absent from the histories of Western utopian thought. The two key utopian works of fiction which succeeded in attracting wider and enthusiastic audiences within the Zionist movement, Elḥanan Leib Lewinsky's *Masa le-Ereẓ Yisrael bi-Shenat Tat be-Elef ha-Shishi* ("A Trip to the Land of Israel in the Year 5800 [2040]," 1892) and Theodor Herzl's *Altneuland*[111]

[110] Kaplan, p. 118; Diego Rotman, 'The Fragile Boundaries of Paradise: The Paradise Inn Resort at the Former Jerusalem Leprosarium', in *Borderlines: Essays on Mapping and The Logic of Place*, ed. by Edwin Seroussi and Ruthie Abeliovich (Sciendo, 2019), p. 160. For an overview of Jewish utopias of this period see also Miriam Eliav-Feldon, ''If You Will It, It Is No Fairy Tale': The First Jewish Utopias,' *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 25:2 (1983), 85–103.

[111] The novel was named after the medieval Old-New Synagogue in Prague. A few years after its publication it was translated into a number of languages, including English, French, Ladino, Russian, Hebrew, and Yiddish. Naḥum Sokolow, who translated the work into Hebrew, entitled

("Old-New Land," 1902), came to represent the cultural and political strains of Zionism, respectively. Lewinsky, an ardent Zionist active in Odessa and a supporter of Aḥad Ha-Am's concept[112] of the spiritual renaissance of Jewish people, emphasized the importance of the revival of Hebrew culture in the Land of Israel. His utopia, published in the first issue of the Hebrew periodical *Pardes*, was received favorably, especially among Herzl's critics, who preferred Lewinsky's stress on the renewal of Jewish culture.[113] It tells the story of a newly wedded Jewish couple paying a visit in the year 2040 to the paradisiacal Land of Israel, which has become a spiritual and cultural center of the entire Jewish nation. The story offers a detailed description of life and cultural institutions as seen through the eyes of an admiring visitor who compares his experience with what he finds in the local newspapers and advertisements. The country is flourishing economically and while members of the modern and agrarian society own private property, mostly small farms, the accumulation of large property is not allowed, thus reducing exploitation and eradicating the struggle between labor and capital. The society is not religious, but the country's law is based on a secularized version of traditional Jewish law. The political leaders are virtuous, have no will to power, and after having served their governmental roles return to their agrarian way of life. Although the state lives in peace with its neighbors, Lewinsky presents us with a purely Jewish utopia as the Arabs and gentiles are not mentioned as being part of the landscape and what happened to them remains unexplained.[114] Indeed, Lewinsky follows Aḥad Ha'Am's vision, which emphasizes far more the inner world of the Jews. Yitzhak Conforti therefore argues that "Lewinsky's approach faithfully represents the Eastern Jewish intellectuals who had limited exposure to Enlightenment; their perspective was first and foremost internally Jewish. Therefore, his vision, as opposed to Herzl's,

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the novel "Tel Aviv" after a Mesopotamian site of the same name located near Babylon and mentioned in the biblical book of Ezekiel (3:15). The name came to represent the renewal of the ancient Jewish homeland – Tel standing for a man-made hill built by the accumulation of layers of civilizations built one on top of the other and Aviv for spring, signifying renewal. See 'Sokolow, Nahum' in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* <https://www.encyclopedia.com> [accessed 6 June 2021].

[112] Aḥad Ha'Am is a pseudonym of Asher Hirsch Ginzberg, who was a founder of cultural Zionism. According to him, the political aims of Zionism were to be put off until a time when the Jewish people would have undergone a fundamental cultural and spiritual transformation.

[113] Eliav-Feldon, pp. 88–99.

[114] Hillel Cohen, 'Zionism as a blessing to the Arabs', in *The British Mandate in Palestine*, ed. by Michael J Cohen (Routledge, 2020), pp. 157–158; Nir Kedar, *Law and Identity in Israel* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 17–28.

was particularistic and did not relate expansively to non-Jews or to the attempts of other nations to create a civilized society."[115]

However, the most famous and influential of Zionist utopias is *Altneuland*, written by the Austro-Hungarian Jewish journalist and founder of the World Zionist Organization Theodor Herzl, who drew inspiration from Theodor Hertzka's successful utopian work *Freiland: Eine soziales Zukunftsbild* (1890; *Freeland: A Social Anticipation*, 1891). Hertzka was in turn seeking to emulate Bellamy's proto-socialist Looking Backward, which earned him the title of the "Austrian Bellamy".[116] Altneuland, following the conventional structure of utopian novels, tells a story of two protagonists, Löwenberg and Kingscourt, who, disillusioned with their lives and society, decide to retire from the world and travel to a remote, uninhabited island. On their way to the blessed isle, the two visit Palestine and find it a land of desolation and poverty. In 1923, after spending some 20 years in solitude, the odd couple decide to visit Europe and again they stop en route in Palestine. To their amazement, they discover that the country has undergone a total transformation and the massive Jewish settlement has turned it into a land of milk and honey. The travelers set out on expeditions throughout the land and, with the help of a local guide, David Littwak, explore the structure of the utopian society – a New Society.[117]

The country is a parliamentary democracy, without an army or armed police, respecting human rights and granting universal citizenship. Like Lewinsky's imagined Jewish homeland, it is a welfare state, a synthesis of capitalism and socialism, based on the rule of law. However, Herzl does not speak of the country's law and culture as explicitly Jewish, whereas in Lewinsky's utopia the law and culture are derived from a secularized version of the Jewish tradition.[118] Despite the fact that Herzl describes the New Society as a modern, secularized, and highly technological enterprise, it shows numerous features which connect it with the Jewish religious tradition, such as the construction of the Third Temple (built in Jerusalem, but not in the place of mosques), an institution for communal prayer devoid of animal sacrifices. Herzl was also well aware of the sizeable Arab

[115] Yitzhak Conforti, 'Between ethnic and civic: the realistic Utopia of Zionism', *Israel Affairs*, 17:4 (2011), p. 568.
[116] *The Utopia Reader*, ed. by Claeys and Sargent, p. 351.
[117] Oded Nir, 'Literature at work: Zionist literary realism between utopia and "Khirbet Khizeh"', *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, 16:1 (2017), 1–16.
[118] Kedar, pp. 18–19.

population in the land and imagined that they would not only have true equality, but would fully participate in the social and political achievements of the new country. The fight for equal rights, for all citizens, including women and Arabs, is one of the major themes in the novel. A member of the New Society and a central figure in the novel, Reshid Bey, an Arab Muslim and a close friend of Littwak's, also accompanies the two protagonists on their travels and when he is confronted by Kingscourt about whether he is concerned about Jewish immigration into his native land, he reacts with surprise, arguing that the immigrants only brought social, economic, and technological progress for the land and that all people benefit immensely from this. Another major character of the novel is Rabbi Dr. Geyer, a new immigrant who, in the elections of 1923, leads the political party which seeks to restrict citizenship and voting rights only to Jews. Part of the story revolves around the electoral campaign, in which the progressive and liberal establishment, represented by Littwak, opposes the racist challenges posed by Geyer and his followers. In the end however, Geyer and his political party are beaten and the liberals win. Herzl's choice is therefore clear; the new Jewish state does not discriminate on the grounds of religion, race, or ethnicity.[119]

In short, Herzl addressed three issues in his novel which are relevant even today in Israel's public discourse: the social and economic structure of the society, the question of equality, and the relationship between state and religion. The Jewish society in Palestine and later in the State of Israel did indeed develop, to some degree, along the lines of Herzl's vision and it is only in the past few decades that the welfare state has begun to disintegrate and social solidarity has been replaced by a highly competitive market economy resembling other Western market societies. Notwithstanding the fact that Altneuland is often reduced to a mere romantic fantasy, the novel continues to be pertinent even today through its interface between the literary imagination and historical reality.[120] Commemorating the 70th anniversary of the State of Israel, Roy Chen produced a musical comedy, *Herzl said…*, an adaptation of Altneuland, showing to what extent the present Israeli reality has departed from Herzl's dream in the book.[121]

[119] Kaplan, pp. 113–146.
[120] Shlomo Avineri, 'Rereading Herzl's Old-New Land', *Jewish Review of Books*, Summer 2012 <https://jewishreviewofbooks.com/articles/213/rereading-herzls-old-new-land/> [accessed 6 June 2021].
[121] See <https://www.gesher-theatre.co.il/en/repertoire/a/view/?ContentID=1430> [accessed 6 June 2021].

Ultimately, following the creation of the Jewish state, the novel and the utopian ideology of Zionism have become haunting ghosts of the past that hamper the ability of Israeli authors to produce notable works of science fiction and fantasy, because, as Elana Gomel points out, 'science fiction, which needs the blank page of the future to write its narratives of unlimited technological progress, is discomfited by the tortuous temporality of Zionism, in which the ideal future lies in the past.'[122]

5.1. Science Fiction and Utopia in Israeli Literature

The post-1948 local realities set the narrative on a much darker and more dramatic path. Although utopian works are still being produced, the vision of the future of the State of Israel is more often translated into a darker dystopian and (post-) apocalyptic one, presenting us with a microcosm of the anxieties of Israeli society. Utopia, both as a political project and a literary genre, was particularly influential during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, whereas dystopia, as is generally believed, has come to dominate the Western thinking about society in the second half of the twentieth century up until the present. It is said that the ability of the writer to produce classic utopias died in the twentieth century, extinguished by the horrors of total war, of genocide, and of totalitarianism.[123]

The utopian ideals of the early Zionist thinkers started to erode in the 1950s, when the excitement from the War of Independence and the creation of the Jewish state gave way to the harsh realities of everyday life – nation-building, continuing conflict with the Arab nations, mass immigration, the shift of the foreign policy of the Soviet Union, and the necessity of compromising the ideals so that the new nation could survive militarily and economically.[124] What seemed to be utopia realized became utopia lost soon after 1948, and the literary utopias have not found their place in Israel since. In addition to the general trend in the West, the absence of literary utopias in Israel can also be attributed today to multiculturalism and the growing number and significance of non-Zionist groups, such as Israeli-Arabs and ultra-orthodox Jews, which indicates that the Zionist

[122] *With Both Feet on the Clouds*, ed. by Danielle Gurevitch, Elana Gomel, and Rani Graff (Academic Studies Press, 2013), p. 36.
[123] Guy Baeten, 'The Spaces of Utopia and Dystopia: Introduction', *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography,* 84:3-4 (2002), p. 141.
[124] *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. by Fred Skolnik and Michael Berenbaum, 2nd ed, 22 vols. (Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), VIII, p. 703.

utopian imagination of the past can no longer be actualized without turning the dream into a zero-sum game. Today, the very nature of Israeli society presents an insurmountable obstacle for the Zionist dream and the only possible way to mold it into a utopian form is either by erasing the Israeli aspect of it or by incorporating fantasy elements to avoid the difficulty. Indeed, to imagine what an ideal Israeli society looks like would be difficult, if not outright impossible, as the 'unbridgeable gap between the secular and the ultra-Orthodox in Israel is not merely political but ontological. The same is largely true of the Arab and Russian communities. Their realities are profoundly different, and yet they all have to share the same small piece of real estate.'[125] That is not to say that there is no hope for improvement, but the utopian change is by definition a significant one, which implies that any such change in the Hebrew literary imagination would turn either to a dystopia or to a non-Israeli utopia. General prosperity, technological advancement, and a lasting peace with the Arab world are probably the best scenario for a possible utopian vision, but the utopia as it was imagined by Herzl and many of his contemporaries is not feasible to achieve.[126]

Israeli literature, from its very inception until very recently, has remained stubbornly realistic. The most prominent Israeli authors, such as Amos Oz, David Grossman, and A. B. Yehoshua, have perfected a mimetic literary style which strives to represent the complexities of everyday life.[127] But why is it that a nation whose very existence was predicated upon imaginative fiction, has until recently, stigmatized the genre? Why did speculative literature not find any acceptance in the Hebrew world of belles lettres and why was realism, in an almost nineteenth-century sense of the word, the dominant form of literary expression? And, more importantly, what can we learn about a culture which refuses to accept such a literary genre? The reasons for the aversion towards science fiction literature among cultural and literary critics, luminaries, and even the general public are complex and varied, with numerous explanations having been offered. First of all, the emphasis on the mimetic representation of reality was in part a result of the general tendency in Western culture, which regarded science fiction as being a disreputable literary form of inferior quality and, considering that cultural

[125] *With Both Feet on the Clouds*, p. 37.
[126] Avital Pilpel, 'Why Are There No Israeli Utopias in Israeli Science Fiction?', in *Science Fiction beyond Borders*, ed. by Shawn Edrei and Danielle Gurevitch (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), pp. 113–126.
[127] *With Both Feet on the Clouds*, p. 9.

influences tended to spread much more slowly in the Jewish state, these sentiments continued in the country well after the attitudes toward science fiction in the Anglo-American world became far more favorable.[128]

Another explanation lies in the Zionist ideology of nation building – each individual was expected to contribute to the fulfillment of the Zionist dream to the best of their abilities and regardless of personal idiosyncrasies. One of the greatest achievements of Zionism, the new breed of Jew, the sabra – a strong, hard-working, and idealistic individual – was represented in many works of fiction, most iconically in the character of Uri in the novel *Hu Halakh ba-Sadot (*"He Walked Through the Fields") written by Moshe Shamir in 1947 and adapted for both theater and television. Following the establishment of the Jewish state, the writers were encouraged to produce works which were directly related to the building of a new nation and there was no place left for those who wished to write about imaginary worlds. Praising the establishment was desirable, criticizing it was also appreciated and even encouraged, but to deviate from these positions was not only frowned upon, it meant that no one would publish or read the work.[129]

Even many of the pre-state Yishuv authors, already influenced by Russian literary realism, decided to distance themselves from the imaginary literature of the Jewish past and from the miracle-infused Hassidic lore. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the Jewish community in the Yishuv had become increasingly oriented toward socialism, with the labor movement as the dominant force in politics. Socialist and Zionist ideology combined put a great emphasis on the role of intellectuals in the process of building a new society and culture, encouraging the artists, writers, and poets to render the utopian fantasy of a Jewish homeland in the most realistic and naturalistic terms possible. Considering the social pressures, the clear agendas of institutional publishers, and the aversion to the fantastic among the influential group of literary editors, critics, and scholars – all these elements effectively controlled the cultural output in the country. Unsurprisingly, speculative literature did not find any reputable publishers or widespread readership and it is absent both from the Hebrew literary canon and from what could be considered as popular fiction.[130]

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[128] *Zion's Fiction: a Treasury of Israeli Speculative Fiction*, ed. by Sheldon Teitelbaum and Emanuel Lottem (Mandel Vilar Press, 2018), pp. 2–3.
[129] *Zion's Fiction: a Treasury of Israeli Speculative Fiction*, p. 4.
[130] Ibid., pp. 5–6.

Even with the rising popularity of speculative fiction worldwide, until very recently hard-core science fiction and fantasy literature lingered on the margins of Hebrew letters – perhaps this also has to do with the everyday Israeli reality, where imaginary realms might be seen as escapist. Israeli literature often concerns itself with the individual's psychological response to the harsh realities of everyday life, whereas science fiction takes into consideration broader questions of social issues and the human condition in a changing world. The country still has to contend with many issues in the political and social realms, such as its own national borders, the rift between segmented parts of society, and its relationship with the neighboring Arab countries, the Palestinians, and with minority populations inside the country and so imaginary musings which go beyond the immediate future of everyday insecurities and conflicts are viewed by many as a luxury and distraction and are therefore dismissed.[131] To illustrate further, speculative fiction was not the only 'childish distraction' for the nascent Israeli establishment – television was banned until as late as 1966 (and even after it was introduced, there were only two state-owned channels for the next twenty years), because the Israeli Prime Minister David Ben Gurion considered it to be a 'vulgar' entertainment which would distract the minds of young Israelis.[132] Much of Israeli science fiction and fantasy existed only in the form of translations and magazines and its ups and downs very much reflected the condition of the Israeli economy.[133]

The appropriation and popularity of psychological realism in which authors aimed to portray the mundane, boring, and ordinary realities was equivalent to science fiction and the fantastic, because such reality proved elusive in a country with uncertain prospects and with normalcy becoming increasingly beyond people's grasp. Elana Gomel, a scholar and author, observes similarly that the 'popularity of Amos Oz, David Grossman, A. B. Yehoshua, and others attests not only to their considerable literary talents but also to the hunger of the Israeli public for the ordinary and the commonplace… The Israeli "book of the world" is rattling with the rocks of its incessant wars and the shards of its broken dreams. In

[131] *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, XVIII, p. 203.
[132] *Zion's Fiction: a Treasury of Israeli Speculative Fiction*, p. 7.
[133] Nachman Ben-Yehuda, 'Sociological Reflections on the History of Science Fiction in Israel', *Science Fiction Studies*, 13:1 (1986), pp. 64–78.

such a consensus reality, one longs for the quotidian and escapes into boredom. Realism is the Israeli fantasy.'[134]

[134] *With Both Feet on the Clouds*, p. 36.

6. Hebrew Dystopian Literature

6.1. Thematic Synopsis of Hebrew Dystopia

Dystopian literature is an exception to the rule that until recently speculative fiction was regarded with contempt among most Israelis and as an example of cultural inauthenticity among cultural luminaries. Although it was not as highly popular as in Western culture, it managed to attract considerable interest and attention among Israeli readers and several works of Hebrew dystopian fiction have been translated into English and other languages worldwide. One of the first Hebrew literary works to incorporate tropes of the genre was a novella written by Israel's respected and prolific author Amos Oz. *Ahava Meuḥeret* (1971; *Late Love,* 1975), while more psychological than cautionary, placed modern dystopian elements and imagery on the map of modern Hebrew literature. What enabled Israeli dystopian fiction to gain a measure of local acceptance was the fact that it provided a point of reference or some kind of a connection to the harsh realities of life. Despite the fact that these early works of speculative fiction were awash with science fiction and fantasy tropes, and can very well be qualified as works of science fiction, the authors vehemently rejected such assumptions. Amos Kenan, when interviewed about his dystopian political thriller *The Road to Ein Harod*, maintains that it is not a work of imaginative fiction, but rather a realistic portrayal of life in modern Israel. Not coincidentally, in the Orwellian year 1984 several authors, including Benjamin Tammuz and Mishka Ben David, published their futuristic dystopian novels, but Kenan's novel would eventually become one of the best received and most enduring examples of Israeli dystopias of the twentieth century.[135]

This may come as no surprise, considering that in Israeli history the 1980s provided ample sources to spur the dystopian imagination. The most prominent event, the ill-conceived invasion of Lebanon in 1982, was a cause for much Israeli popular disillusionment, set off an international outcry and protest in Israel as well, and would eventually crush the expected results for years to come.[136] The offensive was dubbed by the Israeli government Operation Peace for Galilee – a paradigm of the concept of Doublethink, which Orwell devised in his novel

[135] *Zion's Fiction: a Treasury of Israeli Speculative Fiction*, p. 21.
[136] Barry Rubin, *Israel: an introduction* (Yale University Press, 2012), p. 41.

Nineteen Eighty-Four.[137] Terrorist attacks against Israelis and Jews in Europe, the emergence of the first suicide bombers, the unsuccessful plan of the then Defense Minister Ariel Sharon to transform the Middle East, and the constant sense of helplessness and vulnerability pervading Israeli society together with issues in the social realm such as privatization and the erosion of the welfare state and dramatic increases in consumerism and the standard of living[138] would all provide fertile ground for dystopian visions.

The ever-present anxiety that permeates the Israeli consciousness, as represented in many dystopian works, is the daunting prospect of the destruction of the Jewish nation-state by a foreign power, a threat which has become an integral part of the Israeli psyche. The nightmare visions of destruction from without are reflected in works such as Amos Kenan's *Shoah 2* (1975), David Yaron's *Ha-Pitriyah* (1981), Mishka Ben David's *Ha-Beriḥah ha-Aḥaronah* (1984), and others. Similarly, in Zeev Ben Yosef's *Shalom al Yisrael* (1995) the reader is presented with a time when Israel is threatened by a Palestinian and neo-Nazi plot. David Melamed's *Ha-Ḥalom ha-Revi'i* (1986) is also an exemplary dystopia that relates to this theme, as it presents the destruction of the State of Israel by invading Arab armies, and then proceeds with a description of the exile of Israeli Jews back to Europe, especially to Poland and Germany.

In other novels it is not the enemy from without that brings about Israel's eventual downfall, but rather internal tensions. Kenan's *The Road to Ein Harod* (1984) portrays Israel in the grip of civil war after a right-wing military putsch. Yehoshua Granot's *Pargod ha-Bedolaḥ* (1969) likewise presents the future Israel as a totalitarian state persecuting Arab-Israelis and its other minorities.

Another common theme involves a fundamentalist takeover by ultra-Orthodox Jews who are threatening the existence of secular Jews. Yitzhak Ben Ner's *Malakhim Ba'im* (1987) follows the story of David Halperin, a secular man who had become part of a minority after the fanatical ultra-Orthodox takeover of the State of Israel turned it into an isolated and hated country with its citizens unable to leave and forced to live by religious norms. Other examples of these dystopias in shtreimels, so to speak, include Binyamin Tammuz's *Pundako shel Yirmiyahu*

[137] "War is peace" is one of three slogans of the omnipotent English Socialist Party in the fictional world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, where words can have two mutually exclusive meanings.
[138] Ari Ofengenden, *Liberalization and Culture in Contemporary Israel* (Lexington Books, 2018), p. 121; *Zion's Fiction: a Treasury of Israeli Speculative Fiction,* pp. 21–22.

(1984), Assi Dayan's *Toḥen ha-Inyanim* (1989), and others.[139] Judaism is also presented in the dystopias of the last decade, but it is no longer marked so much with this secular-religious dichotomy (e.g., Hagai Dagan's *Ha-Areẓ Shatah*, published in 2007, and Shimon Adaf's *Kefor*, published in 2010) that is so characteristic of the dystopias of the 1980s.[140]

Another common denominator shared by many Hebrew dystopias is an environmental crisis. The growing preoccupation of Israeli society and culture with the environment has also manifested itself in literature. Ecological issues play a crucial and central role in some novels, while others combine national anxieties or internal social clashes among Israeli citizens with ecological dangers. The center of the dystopian reality in Roi Bet Levi's *Harim Ani Ro'eh* (2014) is an economic crisis brought about by devastating and continuous droughts. Yishai Sarid's *Ha-Shlishi* (2015) and Dror Burstein's *Tit* (2016) are other ecocritical dystopias which have recently gained much popularity.[141]

Finally, a generation later, following in the footsteps of Amos Kenan's *Ein Ḥarod,* Sayed Kashua, a middle-class Arab-Israeli, published the dystopian thriller *Va-Yehi Boker* (2006), which reflects the author's sense of the worsening situation of Israeli-Arabs and Palestinians within the majority Israeli-Jewish society. The protagonist of the story wakes up one day trapped in his hometown, surrounded all around by military forces which are ready to kill anyone trying to cross the lines. The novel concludes, to the protagonist's horror, with a historic peace agreement between Israel and Palestine, including a land swap, with his village being transferred to the newly-established Palestinian territory. The work, being a part of the Israeli minority canon, presents a completely new and different perspective on the representation of Israeli reality through a dystopian prism.

6.2. From Bad to Worse: Hebrew Dystopian Fiction from 1969 to 2000

6.2.1. The Source of Anxiety: Political and Social Transformation

[139] Keren Omry, 'Israeli SF 101', *Science Fiction Research Association Review,* 306 (2013), 8–11.
[140] Gideon Katz, 'Beyond the Religious-Secular Dichotomy', *Israel Studies Review*, 30:2 (2015), 92–112.
[141] Netta Bar Yosef-Paz, 'Hebrew Dystopias', *Israel Studies Review*, 33:2 (2018), 66–84.

"We were sure that Begin's rise to power symbolizes the beginning of fascism in Israel and we were anxious and felt it was the end of the world."[142]

"For me, the fact that Likud took power is clear…there is a feeling that our world is about to be razed. The good old Land of Israel that we may be representing is going to hell."[143]

"This is the end of a period in the existence of Zionism. I have this feeling of devastation... We have lost the country... We are heading towards self-destruction."[144]

From the time of the Yishuv and well into statehood the labor movement, represented by the main party Mapai and from the 1965 by the 'Alignment',[145] controlled most of the ministries, the central institutions of the Zionist movement, the central federation of trade unions (*Histadrut*), and the press, publishing houses, radio and television channels, and other cultural enterprises. The movement also controlled the narrative about the Jewish people, the aims of Zionism, and the relationship between the state and the citizen. It held that a new healthy Jewish society was to be built in Israel as an antithesis to the Jewish existence in exile. The new Jew, or *sabra*, could do no better than to devote his life to building, defending, and developing the new country that was to uphold secular and democratic ideals closely linked to Western culture and society. These ideas were already internalized by the Jewish society during the time of the British Mandate as most of the immigrants at that point were from Eastern and Central Europe. After the creation of the state, this part of society would become the bearers of the hegemonic culture. The hegemony of the labor movement ended in 1977 when the right-wing Likud party, led by Menachem Begin, won the elections and remained the ruling party for some 45 years, apart from short break

[142] Quoted in Menachem Mautner, *Law and the Culture of Israel* (Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 141.

[143] Quoted in Herzl and Balfour Hakak, 'Gizanut, Hitnassut ve-Sina: Eykh Hegiv ha-Smol le-Mahpakh '77', 31 January 2016, <https://mida.org.il/2016/01/31/ #/-גזענות-התנשאות-ושנאה-איך-הגיב-השמאל-למ> [accessed 6 June 2021].

[144] Ibid.

[145] The Alignment Party was created when Mapai merged with another labor movement party, Aḥdut Ha-Avodah. The second Alignment was created in 1969, when Mapai entered into an alliance with yet another labor party, Mapam. The second alliance would last for more than two decades.

in the 1990s.[146] At the time the results were dubbed "an earthquake", because not only did the Labor Party lose in the elections for the first time, but the loss was by a wide margin. There were a number of reasons for this outcome, including the public's mistrust of the government and the Knesset for their inability to tackle the country's problems successfully, the Yom Kippur War in 1973, the hyperinflation which started in the 1970s and continued into the mid-1980s, and the rift between the Ashkenazi and Mizrahi populations and between the secular and religious groups.[147]

The political and cultural decline of the labor movement which started at the end of the 1970s marked a significant turning point in the historical process of the State of Israel. The changes that unfolded at this time in Israeli politics, culture, and society were far-reaching. The visions of the country's future would thereafter be shaped by the Jewish religious groups and Jewish secular liberals. The hegemonic domination of the labor movement was replaced in the following decades by a sharp cultural and political polarization that would later be conceptualized as multiculturalism. Discussing changes in the Israeli Supreme court and its involvement in the cultural struggle (an involvement that reflected its association with the Jewish liberal segment of the society),[148] Israeli law professor Menachem Mautner argues that after the labor movement's decline and the ensuing struggle over the character of the country, "members of the Jewish secular liberal group were struck by anxiety" and that this anxiety "dictated the group's political conduct during the 1980s […]."[149]

Israel has undergone, in a very brief course of time, a significant transformation of its cultural identity. The faith in socialism and the state's profound involvement in the economy transitioned to a faith in American-style hypercapitalism, neoliberalism, and the free market; the collectivist values of sacrifice and contribution gave way to the hedonistic existence of self-realization and to the rights and independence of the individual; and the perception of Israelis

[146] Mautner, p. 106, 109.
[147] Rubin, pp. 37–38; Mautner, pp. 99–100.
[148] Menachem Mautner's argument is that the political activism of the Israeli Supreme court and its support for the secular liberals was a result of the reduction of power and influence of the labor movement party.
[149] Mautner, pp. 102–103.

themselves as Hebrews, turning away from their exilic cultural heritage, changed to seeking a better understanding of that very Jewish exilic culture.[150]

The political struggle between Right and Left was accompanied by two more significant processes: the rising tensions between the Mizraḥi and Ashkenazi Jews and the rift between the religious and secular parts of the society. The labor movement was in complete control of the cultural life in the country up until the 1970s and most Jews living in Israel accepted its principles. When the labor movement and its hegemonic culture began to decline, it created a sense of disintegration of the previous common national frame and the new form of society began to be torn by social divisions between various groups which were separated by their lifestyles and world views. Indeed, sociologist Baruch Kimmerling claims that the most drastic changes the State of Israel has undergone were "the evaporation of the image of a single, unified Israeli society, the decline of a unique Israeli identity (notwithstanding excluded and marginal groups, such as the Arabs and Orthodox Jews), and the diminishment of hegemonic secular Hebrew culture."[151] Consequently, during the 1980s and 1990s, the Israeli society split into several sub-groups, each of them developing its own cultural features, identity, and understanding of the socio-historical processes of the country. These groups then also developed their distinct visions regarding the future of the State of Israel. In Kimmerling's account, seven cultures or social groups emerged after the decline of the original Zionist hegemony that maintain their own separate collective identities and are in constant cultural war against each other: "the previously hegemonic secular Ashkenazi upper middle class, the national religious, the traditionalist Mizrahim (Orientals), the Orthodox religious, the Arabs, the new Russian immigrants, and the Ethiopians."[152] All this social and cultural plurality led to the emergence of a new multicultural interpretation of Israeli culture, which superseded the old ideology of the "melting pot" of previous decades.[153] However, lacking a unifying core, plurality has been replaced by fragmentation, polarization, and antagonism and the Israeli society has become a society filled with anxieties over these sentiments. This then poses something of a

[150] Ibid., p. 114.
[151] Baruch Kimmerling, *The Invention and Decline of Israeliness* (University of California Press, 2001), pp. 1–2.
[152] Kimmerling, p. 2.
[153] Uri Ram, 'Hebrew Culture in Israel: Between Europe, the Middle East, and America', in *Handbook of Israel: Major Debates*, ed. by Eliezer Ben-Rafael, Julius H. Schoeps, Yitzhak Sternberg, and Olaf Glöckner (De Gruyter, 2016), pp. 60–75.

paradox: Israel recognizes its cultural, ethnic, and religious plurality through many multicultural processes, such as language rights, separate education systems, independent religious courts, etc., but at the same time all this recognition is ineffective in the face of the actual co-existence of diversity. President Reuven Rivlin pointed this out in the following speech he delivered to the Israel Knesset in 2016: "Every day I meet citizens from different sectors within Israeli society. Religious, orthodox, secular, Arabs. There is much that separates them. However, I am continually surprised to discover that they share a common sentiment. All of them, with no exception, think of themselves as a persecuted minority, whose identity and values are subject to constant threat from other groups."[154]

It is also worthy of note that the multiculturalization of Israel was one of the aspects of the extensive process of Americanization and globalization that Israel has undergone, through cultural borrowing, since the 1960 and which culminated in the 1990s, particularly in the spheres of the economy, law, and the media. This has led the Western culture in Israel to become synonymous with American culture rather than European culture. Additionally, the process of Americanization was also associated with the neo-liberalization of the economy, the inflow of global culture, a consumer lifestyle, postmodern culture, and in general with the transformation of the social composition and its dynamics.[155]

As mentioned earlier, the transformation of cultural uniformity and the supra-culture to multiculturalism was accompanied by another significant process – the emergence of an old-new, and until then politically marginalized, social and political entity that became to be perceived as a comprehensive alternative to the declining hegemony. The struggle over the shaping of Israeli culture was again between the liberal secular former leadership and the religious Zionists who believed the country should follow the traditional religious laws. Both of these groups had contrasting views on the future character of the state. Simultaneously with the labor movement's decline in the 1970s, the religious Zionist group

[154] Rebecca B. Kook, 'Multiculturalism and Identity Politics', in *Understanding Israel: Political, Societal and Security Challenges*, ed. by Joel Peters and Rob Geist Pinfold (Routledge, 2019), p. 120; see also ibid., pp. 119–132.

[155] See Uzi Rebhun and Chaim I. Waxman, 'The "Americanization" of Israel: A Demographic, Cultural and Political Evaluation', *Israel Studies*, 5:1 (Spring 2000), pp. 65–91; see also Uri Ram, 'Sociopolitical Cleavages in Israel', in *The Oxford Handbook of Israeli Politics and Society*, ed. by Reuven Y. Hazan, Alan Dowty, Menachem Hofnung, and Gideon Rahat (Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 123–140.

underwent some radical changes instigated by the *Gush Emunim* (Bloc of the Faithful) movement, which led the group to adopt fundamentalist theology and practices. Since the group's future vision of Israel became synonymous with a halakhic state, they no longer saw themselves as political partners within the hegemony, but rather as potential leaders of a new government that might evolve in the future. Indeed, the settlement endeavors of *Gush Emunim* in the occupied territories are often viewed as a foundation for turning the whole country into a halakhic state.[156] Amos Oz, representing the secular liberal group, comments on these new trends within religious Zionism during his meeting with settlers from Ofrah in 1982:[157] "When we look at you from a distance, maybe a little sketchily, we see in you a dangerous threat to what is dear and sacred to us. Here the dispute reaches higher than the highest of Samaria's mountains and drops much lower than the lowest point in the Jordan Valley rift: you threaten to boot Israel out of the union between Jewish tradition and Western humanism. As far as I am concerned, you threaten to push Judaism back through history, back to the Book of Joshua, to the days of the Judges, to the extreme of fanatical tribalism, brutal and closed."[158] Despite the opposition, the settlement movement has become one of the most influential political and social movements in the state's history and has been able to make its way into the political system, society, and the army, and it has been on a steady rise regardless of Israel's coalitions and policies.[159]

Besides the religious Zionists, the Jewish religious group includes another subgroup that has taken part in the government coalitions since the 1980s. The ultra-Orthodox [Haredim], both Ashkenazi and Sephardic, is the second largest subgroup of the religious political movement. The Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox behavior and stance towards modernity, Zionism, and the State of Israel remained, for the most part, consistent and can be understood on the basis of their positions on the Jewish Enlightenment movement and on the secular progressive attitudes in general, which they rejected and countered with stricter segregation and greater religious commitment. Although the ultra-Orthodox rejected the intellectual and cultural heritage of the West, they have never really objected to the consumption of Western technology. The group also rejects Zionism because it actively seeks

[156] Mautner, pp. 116–120.
[157] Amos Oz, *In the Land of Israel* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), p. 127; Mautner, p. 120.
[158] Oz, *In the Land of Israel,* p. 139.
[159] Eitan Y. Alimi, 'Extra-Parliamentary Politics: the Settlement Movement's Success Story', in *Understanding Israel*, ed. by Peters and Pinfold, pp. 81–96.

to interfere in the shaping of the Jewish people's destiny by promoting re-establishment and support for a Jewish state before the arrival of the Messiah, and so for them the establishment of Israel was not a significant moment in Jewish history. The majority of Haredim recognize the State of Israel and its law mostly on pragmatic grounds without any ideological identification with it and the only laws that the group truly recognizes are the divine halakhic laws. Hence their rejection of the religious Zionist vision of transforming Israel into a halakhic state.[160]

For most of the time when the labor movement dominated the political scene, the ultra-Orthodox, like Israeli Arabs, did not participate in the government coalitions. After the political upheaval of 1977, the Ashkenazi Haredim party *Agudat Israel*[161] joined the government coalition for the first time since 1952. Its support became, from then on, valuable for securing a coalition majority, and therefore it often exerts more leverage than its size would suggest. The party's involvement in the political arena and its allocation of funds to ultra-Orthodox educational institutions have grown enormously since 1977. Although historically anti-Zionists, the ultra-Orthodox mostly shifted to a non-Zionist stance and as they joined the government coalitions, they became increasingly involved in political decisions which are far beyond their sectorial interests, thus showing their readiness to shape the character of Israeli society according to their vision.[162]

The Sephardic ultra-Orthodox entered the national political arena independently and became an electoral force only in the early 1980s, when the religious-political movement Shas emerged as a party after Agudat Israel refused to add more Sephardic candidates to its list. The party repeated its electoral success in the subsequent elections and in 1999 it became the largest religious party and the third largest party in the Knesset with seventeen seats, making it a powerful voice in Israeli politics. Shas, however, presented a different kind of ultra-Orthodoxy than the Ashkenazi version. It did not enter Israeli politics only to promote the Jewish religious legislation, like the Ashkenazi Haredim parties, but it also had interests in implementing radical changes in the social sphere and improving the social condition of Mizrahi citizens. Combining the ultra-Orthodox

[160] Mautner, pp. 121–122.
[161] The party merged with another Haredi political party in 1992, creating the United Torah Judaism alliance.
[162] Rubin, pp. 223–225, Mautner, pp. 122–123.

religion with ethnic pride, Shas voters often identified with its social and oriental identity message. The party therefore had some success in attracting support from secular Mizraḥi voters, even though it promoted a religious anti-secular Jewish identity. Indeed, Shas does not promote social or geographical segregation from the rest of the society and it speaks to the entire public, not just the Mizraḥi ultra-Orthodox segment. Moreover, unlike the Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox, the group espouses Zionism and views the establishment of the Jewish state as a positive event playing an important role in the future redemption of the Jewish people. In this regard, Shas is ideologically closer to the religious Zionists, voicing its support for the replacement of Israeli democracy with a Sephardic version of a theocratic state.[163]

The significant transformation of the political composition of the Israeli government that started in the 1980s changed the balance of power in the religious camp: before the Shas party entered politics, most of the religious public was represented by the National Religious Party (NRP) – originally a Zionist centrist party closely linked to the secular mainstream and from 1970s drifting more to the right and associating itself with the Gush Emunim movement. Since the decline of the NRP in the 1970s and the emergence of Shas, the Jewish religious group has been represented overwhelmingly by ultra-Orthodox parties that are detached from the secular Israeli mainstream. Moreover, after the 1980s, when Israeli politics became split between two closely balanced political blocs, the ultra-Orthodox group as a whole gained the power to decide which of the two would get to form a government coalition. That way the ultra-Orthodox parties were often able to impose on the ruling majority the regulations and legislation desirable to them.[164]

We will now focus on the fictional worlds in which the imagined implications of all these social, political, and ideological processes are brought to a bleak and depressing future.

6.2.2. National Catastrophe Looms

[163] Rubin, pp. 225–226; Mautner, pp. 123–125; Guy Ben-Porat, 'Religion in Israeli Politics', in *The Oxford Handbook of Israeli Politics and Society*, ed. by Hazan, Dowty, Hofnung, and Rahat, pp. 549–564.
[164] Mautner, pp. 125–127; Rubin, 224–226.

The fundamental changes in reality that have been unfolding from the 1970s onwards have been accompanied by changes in culture. The cultural texts of the 1970s and especially of the 1980s were starting to reflect the frustration and deep anxiety among the Jewish liberal group, which became increasingly disillusioned with the direction the country was headed in. It was not only the internal anxieties that were being channeled through the works of fiction; they were being equally reinforced by the old external anxieties that the Israelis have been dealing with since the creation of the state. These external anxieties stemmed from Israel's relations with the Arab world. Starting with the Zionist settlement in Palestine and during the whole existence of the State of Israel, the Jews have been facing existential anxiety about the possibility of their expulsion or their physical destruction by invading Arab armies. The profound internal changes in Israeli politics and culture, combined with the anxiety about the destruction of Israel by external forces, eventually gave birth to the first wave of Israeli dystopian literature.[165]

The Israeli dystopias of this period primarily explore two themes: the issue of religion and the issue of conflict, both of which, however, often overlap. The conflict, resulting in the destruction of the country, is portrayed either as stemming from the oppression of Israeli-Arabs and other minorities by the Israeli regime and its increasing militarism and political repression ("dystopias on the left") or as a result of the peacemaking process with the Arab countries and their future invasion ("dystopias on the right"). The religious dystopias examine the problem of either continuity or a deep division between the Jewish identity and Israeli identity, and therefore can be divided into ultra-Orthodox dystopias and ultranationalist religious dystopias. The divisions in the texts themselves exist to indicate which of the two groups is responsible for the destruction of the country: the settlement movement, with its messianic and theocratic ideology, or the ultra-Orthodox group, with its religious fundamentalism. Both of these types of dystopias, however, have a common denominator: the seizure of power over the country, followed by the abolition of democracy and individual freedoms.[166]

[165] Gil Hochberg, 'Dystopias in the Kingdom of Israel: Prophetic Narratives of Destruction in Recent Hebrew Literature', *Comparative Literature*, 72:1 (2020), p. 22; Mautner, pp. 127–128.
[166] Tali Goldshmid, 'Ha-Distopyah ha-Ẓiyonit: Keriyah be-ha-Derekh le-Ein Harod le-Amos Kenan', *Giluy Daat*, 2 (2012), pp. 37–38.

Paradoxically, the beginnings of literary depictions of Israel's destruction by external forces in the Hebrew prose came shortly after the swift victory that ended 1967's Six-Day War. The first work to put dystopia squarely on the map of Modern Hebrew literature, *Pargod ha-Bedolaḥ* ("The Crystal Screen"), was written in 1969 by a little-known author and journalist, Yehoshua Granot, who published only a handful of works during his lifetime. The novel recounts the future events happening in 1989 in the State of Israel, which has become a totalitarian police state that limits the freedom of expression and has deprived the Arab minority of all of their rights as citizens. The work gave rise to heated debates among literary scholars and critics, with one of the most outspoken, the Israeli public figure and Jewish thinker Yeshayahu Leibowitz, writing to Granot: "You are mistaken about one crucial point: if the State of Israel turns into "Greater Israel" it will not continue to exist until 1989."[167] Granot's future fictional Israel of 1989 is governed by three major political parties which came to power after a number of measures were taken to restrict the elections, including the raising of the electoral threshold and the blocking of the creation of new political parties. Although Israel also has to cope with pressures from the Soviet bloc and the United States, together with a constant threat to its existence at the hands of Arab nations, it succeeds in surviving by demonstrating its nuclear capabilities. The protagonist of the story, Yair Ronen, works for the National Security Agency, whose objective is to suppress any Jewish subversion. Yair is confronted by a number of groups similar to those that the political establishment during the labor hegemony had to contend with: communists who support the establishment of a worldwide stateless communist society, communists who want to become a part of the Soviet bloc, and also liberal groups advocating the two-state solution.[168]

The novel, a political dystopia, also incorporates the use of technology in a way that assists the regime's exercise of power, such as projectiles that cause an electric shock upon contact with their targets, temperature-adapting synthetic clothing, nearly silent vehicles, and bliss-inducing drugs that also improve physical fitness. The impact of science and technology and the idea of a totalitarian dictatorship are defining characteristics of the dystopian genre.

[167] 'Ha-Mikhtav shel Leibowitz', *Ha-Olam ha-Zeh*, 22 October 1969, p. 26.
[168] Eli Eshed, 'Le-Ma'an Atid Yaldeynu', 5 May 2003, <https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=686076> [accessed 6 June 2021].

Elements such as wonder drugs and pills evoke the mood-enhancing drug *soma* from Huxley's Brave New World, while the underground conspiracies, secret services, and the overt use of force to suppress opposition call to mind the totalitarian regime of Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four.[169]

The prominent author, intellectual, and peace activist Amos Oz also reflected at this time on the growing anxieties over both external threats and internal issues in his story *Late Love.* The unappealing narrator Shraga Unger, an aged lecturer and cultural worker in poor health and with his breath reeking of decay, decides to travel all across the country to warn of the impending doom at the hands of the Soviet Russians and the Arab nations supported by them, who want to massacre the whole Jewish nation and are planning mass executions all over the world, including Tel Aviv, Ukraine, the Asiatic Republics, and Moscow itself. Unger is obsessed with a delusional conspiracy theory that Soviet Russia is plotting against the entire world, and against the Jews in particular. He is convinced that there are enemy secret agents in every corner of the country, including his workplace, and that the Bolsheviks' plan to exterminate the Jewish people is a first step toward bringing the world into a state of turmoil. Many parts of Unger's monologue seem to convey that the long-standing anti-Semitism of Russia has followed the Jews to their ancestral homeland, provides armaments for their enemies, and is as unstoppable as a "heavy Russian winter snowstorm" which "could wipe Tel Aviv completely off the face of the earth."[170] However, Unger's old friend and former colleague Liuba, who is a member of the Working Women's Council on the Commission for Clean Air, believes that the internal corruption and decay of the Zionist ideals is a more immediate and dangerous threat for the Jews. She insists that the dreams and ideals of the early Jewish pioneers are all dead and she continues to talk about the environmental degradation and aggravated pollution in Tel Aviv, which seemingly symbolize the decay of those ideals.

During Unger's visit to Liuba's home, she speaks at length about the destruction of the ecosystem, about food pollution, and how the fruits and vegetables are contaminated with poisonous chemicals. She then continues to talk about the air and water pollution. The drinking water is contaminated by toxic

[169] Hananel Livneh, 'Pargod ha-Bedolaḥ', <https://www.sf-f.org.il/archives/1799> [accessed 6 June 2021].
[170] Amos Oz, *Unto Death: Crusader and Late Love*, trans. by Nicholas Lange (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), p. 119.

pollutants and the air is full of exhaust gases – all this results in water shortages and the constant presence of thick smoke in Tel Aviv. The local flora and fauna are also affected by the pollution, and the trees all over the city are dying. The city of Tel Aviv, which was built upon the Zionist ideals, is slowly decomposing and the danger of disaster and collapse always looms large on the horizon. The imagery of urban decay and the imminent destruction of Israel has parallels in the physical deterioration of Unger's own body. The parallel and shared deterioration of both the body and its surroundings is an element which becomes common in the subsequent Hebrew works of fiction.[171] The novel is also an exception to the general presumption that the Israeli dystopias of this period hardly ever discuss or include environmental themes or ecological disasters, whether as a source of the catastrophe or as a symbol of moral decay – a theme that becomes much more prevalent in Hebrew dystopian fiction of the twenty-first century.[172]

Amos Kenan (1927-2009), a prominent left-wing novelist, dramatist, and an outspoken critic of Israeli policies, wrote two powerful dystopian novels, one of which became an Israeli best-seller and was translated into a number of languages. In his youth, Kenan was active in the socialist-Zionist movement Ha-Shomer ha-Ẓair and later became a member of the right-wing Leḥi underground militia. Kenan fought with the Leḥi in the 1948 War and participated in the attack on the village of Deir Yassin, whose inhabitants were massacred. Subsequently, he became a leading left-wing journalist and an early advocate of the two-state solution, but he also directed films and wrote plays.[173] In 1975 Kenan published a novel named *Shoah II,* a military-based dystopia set in a refugee camp after the destruction of Israel, which combines both national-political and existential themes. The description of daily life in the camp is portrayed in grotesque, even satirical terms – every day a person is executed, but no one knows who the next victim will be and those who are found to be affected by leprosy are sent to a closed colony, where the diseased are left to eat each other. The existential situation is explained in political terms – a national holocaust. The protagonist has no hope for better days and his past recollections become distant, vague, and

[171] Adam Rovner, 'Forcing the End: Apocalyptic Israeli Fiction, 1971–2009', in *Narratives of Dissent: War in Contemporary Israeli Arts and Culture*, ed. by Rachel S. Harris and Ranen Omer-Sherman (Wayne State University Press, 2013), pp. 210–211.
[172] See Oz, *Unto Death*, pp. 98, 119, 141–143.
[173] David B. Green, 'This Day in Jewish History: Amos Kenan, Iconoclast, Peacenik, and Would-be Assassin Dies', *Haaretz*, 24 April 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/jewish/this-day-a-would-be-killer-dies-1.5382587> [accessed 6 June 2021].

mixed-up. As he repeatedly tries to remember the scenery of the past, like the beautiful Tel Aviv or beaches of fine golden sand, he is left with memories of death and destruction, of Jews who fell during the siege of Massada, of the Spanish Inquisition and Expulsion. Here the fate and death of an individual represent the destruction of the whole Jewish nation. It is not only temporalities that are confounded; the space is equally stretched to desolation – pine forests and blue skies lead to visions of Nazi death camps and dreams of distant safe places become thoughts of Massada. Similarly, both realistic and miraculous dreams of redemption turn into dreams of fear and destruction. The novel thus creates a world of existential dread, a world devoid of hopes and dreams and of space and time. This existential dread, however, is not rooted in the universal human condition, but in a specific Israeli-Jewish background. Kenan thus explores the Israeli and Jewish past, disillusionment about hopes and dreams that were never truly realized, and the constant anxiety about possible pogroms and a repetition of the Holocaust, as well as the harsh reality of the ever-imminent war, which follows the protagonist even to his place of refuge – to his heterotopia.[174]

Almost a decade later Kenan crafted Israeli literature's most famous dystopian novel, *Ha-Derekh le-Ein Harod* (1984; *The Road to Ein Harod,* 1988). Although Kenan does not mention the Lebanon War in the novel, the grim and violent tone of the story can be read as a response to it. In this Orwellian novel, Israel is portrayed in the grip of a civil war following a right-wing military coup, with army patrols bloodily suppressing any kind of domestic liberal opposition, hunting down the remaining Arab population, most of which has been expelled to neighboring countries, and bringing the country to the brink of nuclear war. Rafi, Kenan's sardonic protagonist and narrator, living in Tel Aviv, rebels against the militarized police state, and despite the ban on travel and military forces shooting any traveler on sight, he sets out on a perilous journey across the hostile country after hearing antigovernment radio broadcasts from the last stronghold of the rebellion – the kibbutz of Ein Harod – an early kibbutz that the book takes its name from and also a powerful symbol of Israel's utopian aspirations. On his way, he is first aided briefly by a married Jewish woman who seduces him, but a stray bullet kills her in the middle of a sex act. The hero, a former soldier who – just

[174] Nurith Gertz, 'From Destruction to Redemption: Israeli Literature and Cinema 1960-1990', *Shofar*, 13:1 (Fall 1994), pp. 60–61.

like the author – used to drive the Palestinians out of their villages, must now team up with Mahmoud, an Arab insurgent, to guide him across the country to Ein Harod. Mahmoud, a hunted man filled with resentment against the Jews, is bound for an unspecified place somewhere beyond Ein Harod. The Holocaust imagery is evoked when the two fugitives witness the mass shooting of dissidents whose bodies are afterwards thrown into an open pit. As in Oz's *Late Love*, the memory of the persecution and mass murder of Jews by the Nazis is here projected into a catastrophic future war against Arabs and internal enemies. The apocalyptic theme becomes explicit when Rafi and Mahmoud pass through Har Megiddo – from which the Greek word Armageddon is derived – and make their way to "Free Ein Harod". The narrative takes a surreal turn when the protagonist is taken prisoner inside an underground bunker by a revenge-obsessed military general who plans to fight a retroactive war and launches missiles back through time to destroy the historical enemies of the Jews – from Nebuchadnezzar and Titus to the Ukrainian leader of the Cossacks, Khmelnytsky. When Rafi finally emerges from the bunker and reaches the Ein Harod kibbutz in the Jezreel Valley (in the past the site of Arab villages) he sees only a landscape untouched by humans – a pastoral scene from the times of biblical Israel. Seemingly, Kenan searches for the utopia in the past and suggests the world needs to be destroyed in order to be saved. Here, the dystopian warnings about the future, based on the combination of the present reality and the things we know about history, are a clear expression of anxiety on the side of the secular Ashkenazi leadership.[175]

As in Kenan's *Shoah II*, the existential crisis triggered by external threats reappears shortly afterwards in *Ha-Pitriyah 1988* ("The Mushroom 1988," 1981), by the little-known author David Yaron, and later in *Ha-Beriḥah ha-Aḥaronah* ("The Last Escape," 1984) by Mishka Ben David. In *Ha-Pitriyah 1988* a nuclear attack on Israel by Arab countries and its escape from this perilous predicament dominate the story. The narrative of Yaron's novel revolves around a nefarious plot by the Iraqis to drop an atomic bomb on Israel in 1988, Israel's 40th anniversary. This attempt is foiled by the protagonists of the story, members of

[175] See Goldshmid, pp. 33–56; see also Uri S. Cohen, 'Security Narratives in Israeli Literature', in *Routledge Handbook on Israeli Security*, ed. by Stuart A. Cohen and Aharon Klieman (Routledge, 2019), pp. 130–131; Adam Rovner, 'Forcing the End: Apocalyptic Israeli Fiction, 1971–2009', in *Narratives of Dissent*, ed. by Harris and Omer-Sherman, pp. 211–212; 'The Road to Ein Harod', *Kirkus Reviews*, 1 September 1988, <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/a/amos-kenan/the-road-to-ein-harod/> [accessed 6 June 2021].

Israel's Mossad espionage agency, who succeed in diverting the nuclear missile slightly so that it hits the Palestinian state instead of Israel. The State of Palestine did not exist when Yaron wrote his novel, but would declare its independence in 1988, the year in which the story is set. The novel concludes with the nuclear strike without elaborating on the effects it has on Israel and its population, and although Yaron later published a sequel, in which he describes similar events of Libyans attempting to erase Egypt from the map, there is no reference to the consequences of dropping a nuclear bomb near Israel's border. The nuclear threat was, at the time when the novel was published, a very plausible dystopian scenario and the Israeli fear eventually culminated in a surprise preventive airstrike, in 1981, by the Israeli Air Force, which destroyed an unfinished nuclear facility in Iraq.[176]

While its central focus is antisemitism and crime waves against Jews in the United States, in 1985, Mishka Ben David's *Ha-Beriḥah ha-Aḥaronah* also includes the theme of war in the Middle East. The armies of the surrounding Arab countries invade Israel and the crippling oil embargo against Israel's allies causes Washington to change sides and support the Arabs. In response, Israel's defense forces attack Saudi Arabia's key oil installations using bombs and shoot down an American reconnaissance jet. After these events, Israel is expelled from the United Nations and the US breaks off all diplomatic relations with it. American Jewry is helpless and torn between its strong bond to the Jewish State and its loyalty to the US government. The conflict is followed by an unprecedented wave of antisemitism – Jews begin to be excluded from society and from their employment. Ben David's dystopian projection and the dramatic developments in the novel are seemingly motivated by the traumatic events of the Yom Kippur War, when the Arab oil producers attempted to use oil as leverage to prevent nations from supporting Israel during the war.[177]

As discussed earlier, one of the facets of the cultural struggle taking place in Israel from the late 1970s was the religious-secular dichotomy. The disruption of social cohesiveness, in part as a result of religious extremism, and the impression

[176] See, e.g., Eli Eshed, 'Ha-Milḥamah ha-Ba'ah: Milḥamot ha-Atid shel Yisrael 1891-2040', 31 December 2020, <https://www.yekum.org/2020/12/2040--המלחמה-הבאה-מלחמות-העתיד-של-ישראל-1891> [accessed 6 June 2021]; On David Yaron see <https://ganeytikva.library.org.il/סופר-בעירו-writer-yaron-dudi/554> [accessed 6 June 2021].

[177] See Zvi Lavi, 'Sofshavuah', *Maariv*, 5 October 1984, p. 5; see also Eshed, 'Ha-Milḥamah ha-Ba'ah', <https://www.yekum.org/2020/12/2040-1891-המלחמה-הבאה-מלחמות-העתיד-של-ישראל> [accessed 6 June 2021]

of the Ashkenazi liberal group that their secular culture was being defeated by religious orthodoxy, were also reflected in the literary texts. When the Shas party gained a number of Knesset seats for the first time in the 1984 elections, it entered the consciousness of secular liberal Jews in Israel as something alien and threatening. The secular media reported on plans to limit the secular freedoms after the party was given the portfolio of the Ministry of the Interior in Israel's new coalition government. The emergence of religious dystopias at this time can also be linked to the sudden upsurge of renewed interest in returning to Orthodox religious tradition following the Yom Kippur War – among the well-known liberal figures from the world of entertainment who became religious was a famous filmmaker, Uri Zohar. The secular press and leading secular personalities regarded these processes as representing a return to the dark days of medieval fanaticism and religious fundamentalism.[178]

In 1984, Benjamin Tammuz, another leading Israeli writer and journalist, published his grotesque anti-utopian dystopia *Pundako shel Yirmiyahu* ("Jeremiah's Inn"). The protagonist of the story, Jeremiah Abramson, works at the beginning in a factory developing destructive futuristic weapons which can target a specific group of people on the basis of their nationality or other characteristics. The selective weapon is the only export product of the city-state of Jerusalem. Jeremiah outwardly pretends to be an ultra-Orthodox person, but secretly lives as a secular rapist. Gomer, Jeremiah's sister, is a divorced nymphomaniac who sleeps with anyone she can, in order to become pregnant, and only rejects a certain Buki Trantz, who tries to get her at all costs. Buki works as a spy for the ultra-Orthodox authorities, who suspect that Jeremiah is a secular person disguised as an ultra-Orthodox Jew. To find a safer position, Jeremiah leaves the bastion city of Jerusalem and moves to a place at the edge of a desert, father away from the authorities, where he sets up a roadside inn. The inn mostly accommodates people immigrating to Jerusalem and the ultra-Orthodox security services spy on the new immigrants both to find out locations within the city where the secular Jews are hiding and to prevent the disruption of the balance between the separate religious groups in the city that are constantly fighting one another.

[178] See, e.g., Katz, pp. 95–96; Mautner, pp. 199–200.

The futuristic novel imagines Israel in the closing decades of the twenty-first century, by which time it has long turned into a theocracy ruled by a Sanhedrin. The country's population, mostly made up of several religious groups, resides in three separate strongholds: Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and Nahariya. The vast majority of Israel's secular population has fled the country, and those remaining are persecuted by the secret services of the strongholds. To avoid persecution, these secular Jews conceal their identity and present themselves as living strictly according to the religious laws, though they practice their non-belief clandestinely in the city's underground and occasionally perpetrate terrorist attacks on the ultra-Orthodox institutions. The author also provides a background to his story by describing the history of Israel and the changes it underwent a century earlier, at the beginning of the 1980s. After gaining the power to tip the scales in the political stalemate, the ultra-Orthodox parties formed an alliance with ultra-nationalist groups and gradually converted Israel from a Zionist state into a theocracy.[179]

In his work Tammuz draws attention to the issue of religious coercion and provides a detailed description of extreme social violence. The violence is perpetrated by the governing ultra-Orthodox leadership against the remaining secular, Arab, and Christian inhabitants, either out of private interests or out of the desire to impose the religious laws. The author's criticism focuses on the irrational manifestations of hatred and violence of religious groups against secular people and among themselves, and on the problem of corruption and immorality within the religious community. The novel thus hints at what the author, and in general the secular liberal group, thought might happen to Israel in the future. It is an open and blatant expression of deep-rooted anxiety about the possible takeover of the country by religious zealots. Tammuz later sought to emphasize that his work is not an attack on religion as such, but rather a criticism of the authoritarian, populist, and violent behavior of the religious leadership, who see religion as a useful tool for gaining power.[180]

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[179] Dov Vardi, 'Pundako shel Yirmiyahu', *World Literature Today*, 59:2 (1985), p. 315; see Mautner, pp. 136–138.

[180] See, e.g., Ruth Yardeni, 'Kavei ha-Hitpaṭḥut bi-Yeẓirato shel Binyamin Tammuz ki-Rei li-Temurot be-Hashkafat Olamo' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Tel Aviv University, 2005), pp. 239–250; Ahuva Feldman, 'Ḥeshbon ha-Nefesh ha-Kibbutzi: al Sinah Aẓmit Yehudit be-Sipporet ha-Ivrit Bat Zemannenu', *Nativ*, 1 (2004), pp. 75–76.

Religion also comes to the fore in Yitzhak Ben-Ner's *Malakhim Ba'im* ("The Angels are Coming," 1987), which is on the border of dystopia, fantasy fiction, and crime fiction. The novel is centered around the character of David Halperin, a snobbish secular computer expert from Tel Aviv, who experiences a miraculous healing after being beaten to the brink of death by a group of religious thugs. Halperin, accompanied by two imaginary dwarves and briefly aided by a mysterious policewoman, Dolly, then sets out on a journey of self-discovery and revenge – he leaves his friends and family in Tel Aviv, moves to orthodox Jerusalem, and, disguised as a computer technician in a small printing house, pursues his enemies.

Set in the mid-twenty-first century, *Malakhim Ba'im* presents a world which has been radically altered by an unspecified global disaster. Miraculously, Israel is the only country which has not been affected by the disaster, and yet the character of the state has changed radically – it is no longer threatened by the fragile economy and by the Arab inhabitants, most of whom have been expelled or imprisoned, and the trade in scientific knowledge has transformed it into a technologically advanced and wealthy country. These are, however, marginal aspects of the novel's main plot as well as of its key themes – religious fundamentalism, brutal totalitarianism, and a diminishing and self-doubting secular minority which has lost its sense of national identity. Ben-Ner's fictional State of Israel, hated and isolated, is ruled by national religious fanatics and the waning minority of secularists is forced into passivity and compliance. The country's dissidents are heavily oppressed and the citizens are forced to adhere to strict religious norms, including a ban on smoking, abortion, blasphemy, homosexuality, and indecency. The secular and religious inhabitants have virtually nothing in common. The secular minority, regarded as inferior and weak, lives mostly in Tel Aviv, and uses Angrit, a combination of the Hebrew and English languages. The secular inferiority is expressed in the imagery of defeat and humiliation in the face of the strength of the religious camp, which is represented as an ancient but also fossilized entity with its unchanging customs, prayers, and clothing – a world over which the secular person has no influence, and a religion in which he has no share.[181]

[181] Katz, pp. 96–99.

At the start of the novel Halperin is portrayed as a conformist and his existential stance is one of passive survival. Indeed, the weakness and inferiority of the secularists is portrayed not only as a result of oppression by the theocratic state, but also by their own acquiescence and conformity to the authoritarian regime of the country. The turning point of the typical dystopian awakening comes only when the hero is physically assaulted by a trio of ultra-Orthodox militants, which sets him off on a quest for futile vengeance against those who inflicted pain on him. To hunt down his oppressors, Halperin turns from an indifferent conformist into a ruthless avenger, and although at some point he triumphs over his enemies, his apparent victory only leads to utter defeat as his oppressors retaliate against him and against everyone close to him. This leads Halperin to succumb to despair and, at the end, to death.

Malakhim Ba'im is a satirical projection of the author's fears into the future and the narrative continuously oscillates between realism and fantasy, comedy and parody, and social satire and individual anxiety. Although there are elements of the fantastic, the novel is clearly dystopian as the details of the futuristic story are portrayed realistically with a distinct didactic, cautionary, and ultimately political orientation.[182]

The themes of religion and war also feature in David Melamed's *Ha-Ḥalom ha-Revi'i* ("The Fourth Dream," 1986). Here a diary records the life of an unnamed Israeli refugee who, after the fall of the state of Israel in the near future, flees the country and settles in Germany. The brutal subjugation of Israel by the Arab states is followed by equally brutal military administration – public executions of dissidents, rape, robbery, and censorship are widespread. The new authoritarian Arab regime imposes a strict curfew and a complete blockade, virtually cutting off any contact with the outside world.

Unlike the two previous novels, the major catastrophe of Israeli society is not brought about by religion, and the threat of theocracy and religious authoritarianism is not a part of the reality. The destruction of the state forces many Israelis to seek asylum in their countries of origin, particularly Germany and Poland, as many other countries turn a blind eye to the conflict and refuse to accept any Jewish refugees. The story itself opens after the fall of the Jewish state

[182] Gilead Morahg, 'Subverting Dystopia: Yitzḥak Ben-Ner's Fiction of the Future', *Prooftexts*, 13:3 (1993), pp. 269–287.

and follows the protagonist on his journey of reclaiming his exilic identity – the first step in a sort of reverse metamorphosis that comes full circle at the end of the novel, when the exiled Israelis begin to form Zionist organizations in order to reconquer their fallen state.

In contrast to *Malakhim Ba'im*, the secularism of the exiles is not anti-religious, as one of the explanations given for the catastrophe is the weakening of Israel's character as a Jewish state. This weakening is identified with the growth of materialism and, most importantly, with a loss of Jewish identity among the new generation of young Israelis who become disconnected from Jewish history and traditions. After the fall, many Israelis eventually reclaim their religious and exilic identity. This happens in the context of Poland's accepting first Jews of Polish origin and later only ultra-Orthodox Jewish refugees, who are unlikely to engage in political activities, particularly in promoting the return of Jews to Israel, and according to the Polish authorities, they thus do not pose a danger to national security and are not likely to cause social unrest. Surprisingly, the return of secular Israelis to Judaism is presented as a completely natural thing, even though many of them had previously been harsh critics of religious coercion.

The narrative also recounts other, both direct and indirect, causes of the national disaster. The major reason for Israel's defeat and destruction by the Arab countries was compromised state security. The new generation of soldiers in the Israeli army were weaker and highly unmotivated to fight for their country, which was fragmented by internal conflicts and divisions. Israel also became completely isolated and lost even its main international partner, the United States, which stopped providing arms and diplomatic support for the Jewish State. The subsequent economic crisis caused by the general process of social disruption, hyperinflation, and the lack of foreign aid only aggravated the already hampered ability of the country to protect itself. Another major setback which undermined Israel's strength from within was the internal struggle between the secular and religious camps and between different ethnic groups. This eventually led to the formation of a deeply divided society unable to protect itself against external threats. The calamity, even though not directly connected to Judaism, is in part caused by both the adoption and abandonment of religion. The loose identity of secular Jews and Judaism's fixed and dangerous character, the distinct identities

of both camps, and their mutual alienation from one another are themes shared by both *Malakhim Ba'im* and *Ha-Ḥalom ha-Revi'i*.[183]

In contrast to the fictional worlds of the previously discussed dystopias, in which the future is, for the most part, portrayed realistically, Orly Castel-Bloom's *Doli Siti* (1992; *Dolly City*, 2010) imagines a dystopian future which refuses to represent the actual world of contemporary Israel in realistic terms, and instead presents a world infused with a surreal and postmodernist logic. The novel, written a few years after the Lebanon War and during the first years of the First Intifada, undermines the traditional relationship between reality and literary representation and ultimately provides a critique of Israeli society through postmodern skepticism.

The story, told in the first person, follows the fate of a mother and failed doctor named Dolly, who is suffering from violent and constant anxiety over the health of her adopted son, Ben, and as a result, she unnecessarily performs invasive surgical procedures on him in order to ensure that the boy is not suffering from any terminal illness or that he is not missing any of his internal organs. The story is deeply disorienting and the meaningless absurdity and mordant satire pose a challenge in interpreting the novel. Moreover, Dolly, the deranged protagonist, is a quintessential unreliable narrator and the reader is right to question everything she says.

On the surface, the reader is presented with an absurd journey of a mother and her son as they come across equally senseless and farcical situations on their way across the illusory and insane world, which is always hanging on the edge of extinction. Despite the profoundly negative image of the surrounding environment, the protagonist is inextricably bound to her world, Dolly City, and it is unthinkable for her to try to escape it. The behavior of Dolly is both irrational and destructive and the relationship she has with her son and with everyone and everything around her symbolizes Israel's most destructive tendencies. At one point in the novel, Dolly argues that if a powerful state like the State of Israel is unable to control the Arabs in the West Bank and Gaza territories, how can anyone expect her to control the occupied territories within her own mind? At another place in the novel, she claims that living in Dolly City, an unreal city vaguely resembling Tel Aviv, makes one go mad. Indeed, throughout the novel

[183] See Katz, pp. 99–101; Ehud Ben-Ezer, 'Ha-Ḥalom ha-Revi'i', *Moznaim*, 5/6 (1986), pp. 86–87.

Dolly performs grotesque and insane deeds in a matter-of-fact fashion. She casually carries out random killings and, seeing the external world as desperately sick, she also performs surgical procedures and excessive inoculations not only on living people and animals, but also on inanimate objects. Dolly, seeing cancerous growths everywhere, remorselessly destroys whatever she perceives as a threat. Here the deterioration and malfunctions of the environment and the human body reflect, as in Oz's *Late Love*, the maladies and dysfunctions of the country and surroundings where the protagonist lives – and by extension, of contemporary Israeli society.

The metaphorical representations of the aspects of Israeli society are presented through Dolly's relationship with her son and the outside world – it seemingly mirrors the attachment of Israeli citizens to their powerful state and its reckless policy makers. The Israeli government is parenting its difficult population by playing out increasingly destructive fantasies. However, just as Dolly's bizarre and destructive actions never seem to provide complete protection for her child, the controversial policies and preventive military actions of the state can never really assure safety for its citizens.

It is possible to discern interesting parallels between the fictional representation of Castel-Bloom's world and that of Jonathan Swift. The idea of using biting satire and absurd representations in order to criticize real-world situations is shared by both authors. Mockingly representing Great Britain's cruelty to the Irish, Swift, in his *A Modest Proposal*, talks about Irish babies as an ingredient that produces the most delicious meals, while Castel-Bloom's satirical representation of Israel's relationship with its Jewish population is conveyed, for instance, through Dolly's act of sewing her son to her back, so that she need not fear being separated from him.[184]

The postmodern elements of randomness, lack of meaning, fragmentation, and uncertainty of *Dolly City* are realized in a fully dystopian Israel, where derangement, insanity, and violence rule. It is the meaningful horizon of the near future that allows us to see meaning in the present moment, but an abnormal future with no clear direction necessarily results in a present which is devoid of

[184] Rose L. Levinson, *Death of a Holy Land: Reflections in Contemporary Israeli Fiction* (Lexington Books, 2013), pp. 21–36.

intelligibility. The absurd and arbitrary dystopian projection in *Dolly City* thus represents a reality which resists representation.[185]

So far, we have discussed dystopias which have a chiefly leftwing sensibility to them. This is because the dystopias on the right started to appear only in the 1990s following the Oslo Accords – peace agreements between Israel and the Palestinians – and other peace-making processes with the neighboring Arab countries. The futuristic doomsday scenarios are usually portrayed here as a result of Arabs' and Palestinians' betrayal of these peace agreements in the future. The authors of these kinds of dystopias, often coming from far-right circles, present a not completely implausible future projection in which the innocent and peace-loving Israelis are completely wiped out by the cunning Palestinians.[186]

One example which provides a penetrating portrayal of right-wing future scenarios may suffice here to illustrate these types of dystopias. Zeev Ben Yosef's *Shalom al Yisrael* ("Peace unto Israel") was published in 1995, two weeks before the assassination of the Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin by an ultranationalist opponent of the Oslo peace process. Set in 1945, the novel describes the destruction of Israel, which has been co-existing in peace with the Arab world for half a century. The dysfunctional state, divided into two autonomous territorial districts after giving up a portion of Galilee to the Palestinian State, becomes embroiled in internal conflict between devoutly secular Israelis and religious Jews. The religious messianic group is concentrated in the regions of Bnei Brak, Meah Shearim, and the suburbs of Jerusalem. The internal conflict escalates when the religious group begin to demand political and military independence. Following decades of internecine struggles, the politically, economically, and militarily weakened secularists ask the Palestinians to send their army to help restore order. The Palestinians, who have been on friendly terms with them for decades, happily send their troops in, but then refuse to leave. It turns out that the Palestinians and the whole Arab world never believed in a lasting peace and always hoped to destroy the Jewish State when the opportunity arose.

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[185] Ari Ofengenden, 'Language, Body, Dystopia: The Passion for the Real in Orly Castel-Bloom's Dolly City', *The Comparatist* 38 (2014), pp. 259–263; see also Todd Hasak-Lowy, 'Postzionism and Its Aftermath in Hebrew Literature: The Case of Orly Castel-Bloom', *Jewish Social Studies*, 14:2 (2008), pp. 91–95.

[186] See Eshed, 'Ha-Milḥamah ha-Ba'ah', <https://www.yekum.org/2020/12/-המלחמה-הבאה-מלחמות-העתיד-של-ישראל-1891-2040> [accessed 10 June 2021].

The reason given for the internal strife and the weakening of the state's power is the secular leftwing liberal leadership's adherence to the notion that no state can impose its control on any other state or people, even within its own territories. Consequently, when the Arabs in Upper Galilee demand to become a part of independent Palestine, the government is not very willing to stop their departure and the territorial secession. The ultra-Orthodox and messianic segment of society later starts to demand independence as well, especially following the liberal government's enforcement of secular-humanist values in the state's education system.

The Palestinians eventually succeed in destroying Israel with the help of Nazi Germany, which by 2045 had regained, together with Japan, its status as a superpower. Moreover, using advanced technology, the anti-Semitic Nazis manage to rebuild the extermination camps and ghettos of the past to rid the world of Jews. Finally, the last surviving Jew wipes out all the Palestinians with a futuristic death ray machine that he invented. Thus ends the story, which conveys very pessimistic sentiments of a certain part of the right-wing-minded population towards any peace process between Jews and Arabs. As articulated in the narrative with no intended irony, the destruction of Israel is a result of secularists bickering with other Jewish groups while ignoring their real enemy, as well as valuing the welfare of all people, rather than placing their own interests and welfare first.[187]

Finally, we still need to consider one more significant work, a strikingly prescient dystopian novel which has at its center a virus sweeping across the world and causing a global epidemic, very much like the coronavirus. Hamutal Shabtai's[188] powerfully gloomy *2020* was published in 1997 and, set in the United States in 2020, follows the lives of several characters as they navigate their way through a pandemic and deal with the introduction of increasingly draconian legislation on hygiene, which affects all aspects of life. The virus of *2020*, very much like HIV in that it is transmitted through bodily fluids, has killed millions of people over the last 30 years. There is also a not unfounded fear that a lethal new strain which is transmitted through respiratory droplets might appear. Regular

[187] See Sheli Teitelbaum, 'You Just Don't Get it', *The Jerusalem Report*, 22 February 1996, p. 37; see also Eshed, 'Ha-Milḥamah ha-Ba'ah', <https://www.yekum.org/2020/12/-המלחמה-הבאה-מלחמות-העתיד-של-ישראל-1891-2040> [accessed 10 June 2021].

[188] Hamutal Shabtai is a psychiatrist and the daughter of a prominent Israeli writer, Yaacov Shabtai.

antigen testing, strict hygienic rules, growing social isolation, and physical distancing became the new normal. Shabtai envisions a world divided into two groups – healthy people whose lives are defined by a constant fear of contracting the virus and infected or at-risk people who are confined to fenced-off areas and never allowed to leave.[189]

The novel describes an Orwellian global health dictatorship, where people are required to be tested every day for the virus, entrances to all public places require biometric authentication, alcohol, drugs, and homosexual activities are illegal, and extramarital affairs are deemed a serious violation of hygiene. Common places for social gatherings such as clubs and bars are banned, androids have leading roles in porn movies, and people are obsessed about cleaning products and disinfectants, which are advertised on television all night. The authoritarian governments also constantly surveil and track people through their phones and computers.

Hamutal Shabtai's dystopian future was informed by the AIDS epidemic, which was at its height during the 1980s and 1990s. The obsessive and irrational fear of contracting HIV, regular and frequent testing, and discrimination against people who became infected by the virus are some of the themes the author projected into her novel.[190]

6.3. Israeli Dystopia in the Twenty-First Century

Since the start of the third millennium, there has been a literary surge of dystopian future visions in Israel. There are three major, often interrelated reasons which continue to compel Israeli writers to use this genre: socio-political, religious, and environmental. Technological nightmares, while very common in English literature, are the least commonly employed element. Several examples of each thematic group can be introduced here, but because of a lack of space some works need to be omitted. Here we will continue our discussion of the leading texts with a thematic approach, concentrating on the most significant dystopian texts of the past two decades.

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[189] Vered Tochterman, '2020 / Hamutal Shabtai', 7 January 2001, <http://www.blipanika.co.il/?p=3> [accessed 17 June 2021].
[190] Neta Halperin, 'The Coronavirus Novel: An Israeli Author Wrote a Book on the 2020 Pandemic 23 Years Ago', *Haaretz*, 7 April 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium.HIGHLIGHT.MAGAZINE-this-israeli-author-wrote-about-the-2020-pandemic-23-years-ago-1.8747689> [accessed 17 June 2021].

The beginning of the 2000s in Israeli history is marked by the second intifada and disengagement from Gaza, which have led many to reconsider their expectations regarding the future and brought an anxiety-filled horizon with little sense of a clear path towards a better and peaceful Middle East. The improbability of normalization with the Palestinians, together with the destabilization of Iraq and later of Syria, had a deep impact on how the future is imagined. It is important to point out, however, that these negative developments which the country faced at that time have not necessarily provided a stimulus for a profusion of dystopian imagination. Clearly, Israel and its population overcame much more difficult problems in the past.[191]

Ari Ofengenden, a professor of Hebrew language and literature, argues that '[i]t is precisely the liberal intervention and attendant globalization of the 1990s that has undermined the symbolic imagination of a kind of strong nation-state developmentalism. It is precisely multiculturalism and individualism as background ideology that make historical events that in the past might be registered as tolerable sacrifices of nation building into events that lack intelligibility. Such events and changes are then exaggerated and projected into the near future as dystopian fiction.'[192]

A new ethos of consumerism has developed among the middle class recently. It has become a social imperative to enjoy oneself, and to tell others about it, especially in the sphere of travel and food. Tel Aviv has become a well-known site of one of the finest and most sophisticated cuisines in the world, while traveling, especially to Asia and South America, has turned into a 'post-army' ritual. This stands in stark contrast to the humble and local existence of the past. This atmosphere of enjoyment and consumerism has obscured the erosion in the fulfillment of other basic needs such as job security, affordable housing, adequate pensions, open spaces, a lack of noise pollution, and natural habitat.[193] Concerns regarding the cost of living and deterioration in fields such as healthcare and education erupted in the 2011 social justice protests.[194] The degradation of the environment manifested itself in the creation of numerous sinkholes around the

[191] Ofengenden, *Liberalization and Culture in Contemporary Israel*, p. 121.
[192] Ibid., p. 121.
[193] Ibid., p. 122.
[194] Guy Mundlak, 'Contradictions in Neoliberal Reforms: The Regulation of Labor Subcontracting', in *Neoliberalism as a State Project: changing the political economy of Israel*, ed. by Asa Maron and Michael Shalev (Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 162–165.

Dead Sea resulting from the dramatic lowering of the sea level, the destruction of large areas of forests caused by several extreme wildfires, and the retreat of the waterline to dangerously low levels in Lake Tiberias, the only source of drinking water in the past. Notwithstanding the fact that the environmental dangers are peripheral to the concerns of most Israelis and are taking a back seat to other main concerns such as war and economic security, they have contributed to the general feeling of precariousness and instability.[195]

The common perception among secular Israelis, especially since the 1990s, is that the country is undergoing a constant process of religionization (hadata), which is manifested in almost all spheres of public life, including the laws and practices of marital status, observance of Shabbat, education, and the character of the army. This discourse of the fear of religionization among secular Israelis, however, stands in sharp contrast to the overwhelming evidence against this perception published in numerous studies.[196]

Another disruptive element which is in part the source of all these destabilizing influences is the marketization and globalization of Israeli society, which destroyed previous ways of making sense of reality. According to Ofengenden, these phenomena have quickly "devalued the three olds: the old ways of production (agriculture, textile, and light industrial production), old ways of thinking (nationalism, Zionist socialism), and old ways of culture (state television, realism, and secular Zionist culture)."[197] The dystopian imagination comes to the fore here 'to articulate both intellectually and emotionally a chaotic present lacking a clear progressive future horizon and implicitly calls for political change from the present trajectory.'[198]

The events of the Second Intifada, which erupted in late September 2000, were first filtered seriously into dystopian fiction in Orly Castel-Bloom's unsettling novel *Ḥalakim Enoshiyim* (2002; *Human Parts*, 2003). In contrast to the First Intifada, in which the Palestinian resistance eventuated in non-lethal violence, the

[195] Ofengenden, *Liberalization and Culture in Contemporary Israel*, p. 122.
[196] Gideon Sapir and Daniel Statman, *State and religion in Israel: a philosophical-legal inquiry* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 230–231. The effects of consumerism and individualism on Israeli society and on the status of religion are also discussed in Guy Ben-Porat, *Between State and Synagogue: The Secularization of Contemporary Israel* (Cambridge University Press, 2013). Ben-Porat discusses in detail how the public sphere in Israel has been secularized over the past three decades, a finding which is contrary to the common perception among contemporary secular liberals, who claim the exact opposite.
[197] Ofengenden, *Liberalization and Culture in Contemporary Israel*, p. 122.
[198] Ibid., p. 123.

Second Intifada was marked by deadly suicide bombings and resulted in a significant number of Israeli civilian casualties. Castel-Bloom's dystopian scenario is dominated here by political, economic, and environmental disasters and its grim, hyper-realistic narrative reflects the anxiety, fear, and despair of Israeli society during this time.

Human Parts is set in Israel in the near future, when the country is experiencing a series of catastrophic events. After eight years of drought, during which all the sources of fresh water have almost dried up, the nation is hit by an unprecedentedly harsh winter, during which the temperatures drop close to zero and heavy snow which causes the roofs of buildings to collapse comes down even in the coastal cities. Snowy days alternate with periods of incessant rain and hailstones as big as tennis balls, damaging property and injuring animals and people. The extreme weather leads to serious flooding in some areas, forcing people to abandon their homes. In a scale that almost evokes Noah and his Ark, the roads turn to rivers and sailing ships begin to appear in what were previously inland cities, such as Petach Tikva and Kfar Saba.

The natural calamities are accompanied by an unstable security situation following the collapse of the peace process with the Palestinians, who now carry out devastating shooting attacks and suicide bombings. Information about human parts being scattered on the roads after the daily attacks can be heard in the headline news broadcasts. Despite the seriousness of the situation the State of Israel adopts a policy of restraint, shying away from a harsh response to the terrorist activities.

In addition to the precarious security situation and harsh weather, the "Saudi flu", a deadly new strain of influenza, is spreading across the country and many believe it to be a product of biological weapons developed in Saudi Arabia. The country is also experiencing extreme poverty – a large portion of the population lives below the poverty line, since the security measures have drained many of the available social resources. As a result, the poverty-stricken Israelis, not being able to afford heaters and warm clothing, cannot protect themselves against the extreme cold. They frequently fall ill and doctors need to amputate the body parts affected by gangrene or frostbite. On top of all that, the scientists discover toxic chemicals in the drinking water – a problem which is believed to be the result of a volcanic eruption somewhere under the sea or in a deeper layer of the Earth.

The policy of restraint, the economic and weather conditions, and the spread of Saudi flu, we are told, weaken the immune systems of the citizens and result in the death of one out of every four people. The hospitals are being overrun with patients infected by the flu and terror victims. The record-breaking number of deaths overwhelms the cemeteries, which begin to bury the dead in mass graves, one on top of another.

The main storyline takes place in two contrasting cities in central Israel: an affluent, Ashkenazi neighborhood in northern Tel Aviv and the impoverished city of Lod. The novel describes the lives of several characters trying to survive these economic, military, and physical hardships. However, there is no attempt to present an in-depth look at the main characters – their lives simply serve to indicate how dysfunctional everything is in the Israel of the early 2000s. The Israel of *Human Parts* is once again presented as a depressing and unbearable place threatened by death and destruction. There is no way of moving forward and a sense of hopelessness and overwhelming despair prevails.[199]

The unprecedented Palestinian violence is not given a causal explanation – it is simply a horrible situation which happened and Israel and its citizens have to suffer through it. In *Human Parts* Castel-Bloom, influenced by the Israeli world of the Second Intifada, describes fragmented episodes of human lives which are prematurely cut short and occasionally torn into pieces. The preoccupation of the novel with bodily deterioration and death again provides a link between societal dysfunction and human physical decay.[200]

Amit Zvika's *Kod Kaḥol* (2005; *Code Blue* 2016) unfolds a perfectly plausible dystopian vision similar to that of the right-wing military coup in Kenan's *The Road to Ein Harod*. Set in a near-future Israel in which the withdrawal of Jewish settlements in Gaza is already under way, the plot opens as an unnamed Israeli prime minister decides that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict can be resolved by the further withdrawal of Jewish settlements from the West Bank and the creation of an independent Palestinian State along the pre-1967 borders with land swaps. Accordingly, a number of influential figures and organizations work together to thwart these measures and to bring about what turns out to be a bloodless military takeover. In contrast to Kenan's novel, where the instigators of the coup are

[199] Hasak-Lowy, pp. 95–101.
[200] Levinson, pp. 36–43; see also Adia Mendelson-Maoz, *Borders, Territories, and Ethics: Hebrew Literature in the Shadow of the Intifada* (Purdue University Press, 2018), pp. 112–119.

portrayed as murderous fanatics, the major perpetrators in *Code Blue* are shown in a more positive light and as already being a part of the upper echelons of Israel's institutional structures. Indeed, Gavrush, the main protagonist, an ex-kibbutznik and the driving force behind the coup, is aided not only by various radicals and Jewish religious fundamentalists, who hope for the rebuilding of the Third Temple and for the reinstitution of sacrifices, but also by many high-ranking officials, who are described as religious settlers from the West Bank and Gaza. In fact, the takeover is chiefly successful thanks to the large portion of army officials and enlisted military service personnel who are devoutly religious. But Gavrush himself is portrayed as a moderate religious settler from the West Bank – prior to the takeover he had been a part of the prime minister's inner circle, meeting with him occasionally for friendly briefings. Lacking the ability to foresee the consequences of his actions, Gavrush sets in motion changes which quickly take a turn for the worse. The rise to power of the religious zealot and army general Ran Aviram eventually leads the country to destruction.

In a televised broadcast, Aviram claims that the country will be founded on love for the Torah and for the land of Israel and that a change of government needs to happen to avoid civil war and to strengthen the Jewish character of the state. But the new regime turns out to be a totalitarian and theocratic dictatorship which imposes radicalized religious policies on its citizens. It imposes strict censorship of the media under the pretext of safeguarding national security. Entertainment venues and public transport are forbidden to operate on Shabbat across the whole country and the stores are allowed to sell only kosher food. Dissidents are sent to prison camps and the Israeli-Arab population live under strict military rule. The new government declares war on terror, reconquers the West Bank and Gaza Strip, carries out massacres against the Palestinian population, and destroys or depopulates many of their villages.

The book also levels criticism at the left-wing and secular part of Israel's society, which leads a docile life of acquiescence and conformity to the religious dictates of the government. This is evidenced in a number of places throughout the novel, including the instance when the left shows no resistance to the overthrowing of the democratic government and to the subsequent installation of a harsh and unrelenting theocratic regime. By and large, this is a realistic dystopia which aims to demonstrate that a military takeover is possible when the messianic

religious Jews become a majority in the military and political leadership of the country. The fictional future world of the novel engages with the Israeli reality of 2005: it presents characters which are overly familiar from the Israeli public sector and alludes to Israel's plan of disengagement from the Gaza Strip.[201]

Amnon Rubinstein was born in 1931 and served as a member of the Knesset between 1977 and 2002. He was a part of the modernizing elite of Israel that had, for many years, a sense of control over the national project, but would later, with dramatic changes in the Israeli economy, politics, and culture, become marked by concerns regarding continuity and discontinuity. This sense of a lack of control and clear direction and its related anxieties also troubles the generation following Rubinstein; Hagai Dagan and his *Ha-Areẓ Shatah* ("The Holy Land Sets Sail*")* are a fine example.[202]

The beginning of Amnon Rubinstein's dystopian novel *Ha-Yam she-Me'alenu* ("The Sea Above Us," 2007) is set in a far future in which the coastal city of Tel Aviv has been completely submerged under water for years. After that, we transition to the near future, in which the sea is slowly rising on Tel Aviv. As the city is gradually evacuated by the authorities, the book's protagonist, Yitzhak Ḥalamish, chooses to stay in Tel Aviv and perish with the great flood. His choice to die with the flood and with his version of the state carries a symbolic imagery, implying a yearning for the ideal Zionist past.[203]

The story focuses on the close relationship Yitzhak has with Jumbo, a Rwandan refugee who takes care of Yitzhak after his stroke. Jumbo is portrayed in the novel as both a big, muscular, happy man, dancing when he walks, and as a figure who appears threatening at night for many Israelis. Jumbo is blatantly disliked by Yitzhak's neighbors and son, who calls him Kushi, a Hebrew word with strong offensive connotations – the environment in which Jumbo lives is clearly marked by racism. On the other hand, the story also emphasizes the affinity between the Jews and African refugees – both of which escaped a genocide. This affinity comes to a climax when Jumbo brings his daughter home and they both sing Zionist songs from her kindergarten. The author, just like the

[201] Tali Goldshmid, 'Apokalipsah Akhshav', *Haaretz*, 15 June 2005, <https://www.haaretz.co.il/literature/1.1018906> [accessed 17 June 2021].
[202] Ofengenden, *Liberalization and Culture in Contemporary Israel*, p. 129.
[203] Ibid., p. 123.

protagonist, is unable to see the story of 'the Other' in a way that does not project a Zionist narrative onto it.[204]

At the end of the book, which is set again in the far future of 2107, we learn that the unavoidable flood has become a blessing for Israel, an event that has ushered in an era of peace. The peace, however, is not brought about by a two-state solution, but by the destruction of the infrastructure of the Arab states. Nonetheless, there is no reference in the book as to what happened to the Palestinians living in Israel today and nor is there a proposal on how they are to live together in the same territory.

The book has three prevalent discourses – national, liberal, and ecological – out of which the national Zionist one is the most prominent. The protagonist, Yitzhak Ḥalamish, is a national hero who helped Jewish refugees fleeing from Nazi persecution. He is from the first out of five generations portrayed in the book that are symbolically affirming the continuation of the Zionist enterprise. Unlike the Zionist formative themes of constructive transformation, such as breaking from the past, negation of the diaspora, and political sovereignty and its subsequent aspects of state building and national security, Zionism here becomes a tool for conservation and continuity. In the book this continuity seems to be threatened by individualism and liberalism – specifically by intermarriage. Rubinstein is committed both to liberalism and the freedom of the individual and to Jewish continuity, which presents a particular difficulty. This tension between Zionism and liberalism is present in a few places throughout the book, because Rubinstein believes that intermarriage necessarily leads to nullification of the Jewish character of the state. The very inclusion of such narratives in the story reveals the anxieties in Israeli society regarding the clash between individualism and nationalism. The most prevalent theme in the book, however, is the relationship between Zionism and the ecological danger posed by the rise in the sea level, which structures the entire story. Unlike many other ecological threats, the rising sea level has very little to do with national policy and a lot to do with the global effects of greenhouse gas emissions, which are outside any national economic and military interest. It is unclear what caused Rubinstein to use a global disaster to tell a national story. In one interview, Rubinstein admits that he is using this specific ecological catastrophe to express his existential anxiety – the threat of

[204] Ibid., pp. 123–125.

nuclear war with Iran. Existential anxiety thus shifts from security to ecology. Virtually, Rubinstein uses a fashionable ecological discourse to deal with the anxieties of Jewish continuity in the Middle East and in his book, he ultimately reassures his readership with regard to the continuity of Jewish existence.[205]

Natural catastrophe looms larger in Hagai Dagan's *Ha-Areẓ Shatah* (2008). The hero of the book, a secular ex-kibbutznik called Elad, is on his way to a reunion with his classmates from the kibbutz, where he hopes to find his long-lost love, Violeta. The longing for Violeta symbolizes his nostalgic reminiscing for a more youthful and innocent Israel. The reunion, however, ends with an unexplained earthquake that ruptures the land all through the Great Rift Valley. Consequently, the land of Israel is split from the mainland and sets sail on a mysterious voyage that ends up touching the shores of Norway. The book tells less a story about the hero than a story about a land that is burdened and exhausted by religion, history, national claims, and, most importantly, by its population, but is ultimately sailing northward to Europe, breaking from its holiness and cooling the national, religious, and racial fires that devour it. The nostalgic Zionist love of the land that the hero is trying to access proves to be inaccessible as the other main characters are either settlers who are depicted as violent in their love for the land or entrepreneurs who are trying to generate a profit out of it. In both narratives, The Land is Sailing and The Sea Above Us, we are presented with a vision of Israel moving to a politically more stable place. In Rubinstein's story the stable place is the Arab Middle East accepting Israel out of impotence, whereas in Dagan's story Israel drifts out from the whole region altogether. Both dystopias therefore end in a kind of unbelievable, but wishful utopia, fulfilling normalization of Israel.[206]

The theme of environmental destruction also dominates Assaf Gavron's *Hidromanyah* ("Hydromania," 2008), a post-apocalyptic and corporate eco-dystopia set in a decimated Israel, which has virtually shrunk to a mere enclave after losing its wars with the Palestinian state. The narrative stretches across a year in a far future, from 2067 to 2068 – a symbolic date which marks the 120th anniversary of the establishment of Israel. The worst-case scenarios for climate change and global warming have already come to pass. The entire world has been

[205] Ibid., 126–129.
[206] Ibid., pp. 129–131.

devasted by extreme drought, leaving only a limited amount of water resources. The annual rainfall is extremely low and strictly controlled by the use of futuristic cloud technology. Following dramatic political, social, and cultural transformations and bloody military conflicts over land and water, a new world order is established on the basis of control over the water supplies. The American and Western influence over the world have greatly diminished and China, Japan, and Ukraine have emerged as new superpowers, sharing out the scarce water resources. These are controlled by giant and powerful international corporations, which sell water for wildly inflated prices. The corporations also possess knowledge and the ability to purify water. The short strip along the Mediterranean Sea which Israel has turned into is facing a severe water shortage and much of the remaining fresh water is badly polluted. There is also a general shortage of basic foodstuffs and commodities such as coffee, chocolate, Coca-Cola, cigarettes, and alcohol because either they trigger a feeling of thirst or their production requires extensive amounts of irrigation.[207]

Countries in this fictional world wage wars for the last drop of water. Thus, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict now has less to do with territorial disputes and much more to do with control over the remaining water reservoirs. Jerusalem has been the capital of Palestine since 2030 and in the armed conflict raging in the course of the novel Israel loses control over Tiberias and the Sea of Galilee, leaving Caesarea as the last major city within its borders. In fact, Caesarea and the surrounding districts are all that is left from the State of Israel and much of the population is reduced to the status of refugees. Moreover, the impoverished Israeli enclave is under the increasing influence of China, with Chinese scientists and businessmen practically controlling the whole region. The population is managed and monitored by microchip implants which enable access to various services on the basis of an individual's financial situation. The citizens are only allowed to buy water sold by the powerful corporations and the surveillance system, in the style of Big Brother, helps the authorities to enforce the ban on the private storage of water. The microchips also connect with special augmented reality smartglasses which are designed to enhance real-world experiences and make communication with others easier. The gradual withdrawal into virtual reality causes people to

[207] Inbal Malka, 'Ad ha-Tipah ha-Akharonah', *Haaretz*, 9 November 2008, <https://www.haaretz.co.il/literature/1.1359815> [accessed 17 June 2021].

become alienated from one another and therefore, we are told, the collective strength and organizational skills of the Jewish people have been lost. This was the root cause of their passive acceptance of the situation, as well as their inability to protect themselves from military aggression by the Palestinians.

The protagonist here, a former employee of the Ministry of Finance called Maya, is married to Ido, a water engineer who mysteriously disappears one day after inventing an apparatus named "Ji-Ji" which enables people to collect and purify rainwater themselves without having to rely on the ruthless water corporations. The narrative then follows Maya's attempt to deal with her worsening financial situation, pregnancy, the police investigation regarding the disappearance of her husband, and her effort to fight against the water corporations by carrying out her husband's project in his absence and setting up a huge filtration and storage facility for rainwater in the re-established kibbutz of Ein Harod.

The current political-social-environmental themes take a backseat in this science fiction-oriented eco-thriller. Despite the great advances in science and technology, *Hidromanyah* presents a scorched and impoverished world dominated by capitalist monopolies which exploit natural resources and a world of virtual sociability in which genuine human relationships and the collective Israeli-Jewish identity have largely been eroded. Privacy, many freedoms, and material luxuries are things of the past. Although the end is dystopian and does not provide us with any hope, the novel carries an important ecological message and warns us about the possible consequences of an environmental catastrophe.[208]

We return to religion with Avivit Mishmari's *Ha-Zaken Hishtage'a* ("The Old Man Lost his Mind," 2013), a mixture of social satire and a more plausibly realistic dystopia, which portrays a near-future Israel in the grip of a civil war between religious and secular Jews. The novel evokes a different type of imagery

[208] See, e.g., Yael Furman, 'Hidromanyah: Bikkoret al Sifro shel Assaf Gavron', 5 March 2009, <https://www.sf-f.org.il/sf-f/old_site/story384b.html?id=1090&NewOnly=2> [accessed 17 June 2021]; Arik Glasner, 'Al "Hidromanyah", shel Assaf Gavron, Hoẓa'at "Zmorah Bitan"', 22 November 2008, <https://arikglasner.com/2008/11/22/על-הידרומניה-של-אסף-גברון-הוצאת-זמורה/> [accessed 17 June 2021]; Volker Kaminski, 'Provocative Plot', 24 April 2009, <https://en.qantara.de/content/assaf-gavrons-novel-hydromania-provocative-plot> [accessed 17 June 2021]; Giulia F. Miller, 'The Rise of the Israeli Eco-Thriller: Assaf Gavron's Hydromania (2008) and Adi Ben-Artzi's Mezimat Effect Ha-Hamamah (The Global Warming Conspiracy, 2010)', The Jewish Theological Seminary, 2013, <https://www.academia.edu/4227425/The_Rise_of_the_Israeli_Eco_Thriller_Assaf_Gavron_s_Hydromania_2008_and_Adi_Ben_Artzi_s_Mezimat_Effect_Ha_Hamamah_The_Global_Warming_Conspiracy_2010_> [accessed 17 June 2021].

from the earlier religious dystopias, as much of the story is told from the point of view of an omniscient narrator and the conflict itself is largely a media event rooted in television broadcasts, news reports, and rumors. The televised dichotomy and confrontations between the religious and secular groups stand in marked contrast to people's actual relationships. The novel's numerous characters, who are given characteristic nicknames but, overall, not much literary depth, are crafted with finer nuance and their identities cannot be easily classified along the lines of religious-secular hostilities. Moreover, the narrator describes the comic characters and the dystopian reality in a critical and sarcastic way, rather than giving a gloomy account of the gruesomeness of the grotesque conflict which is so characteristic of many of the previously discussed dystopias.

The narrative opens with a televised speech of a veteran politician, dubbed the Old Man, who calls on Israel's secular population to rise up against the religious citizens, both ultra-Orthodox and messianic settlers, and their power of coercion. Here the Old Man represents the early strong and secular leadership of the country, the likes of David Ben-Gurion. The government in this future reality has been becoming increasingly religious for the past few years and the secularists are losing political power. The secular prime minister is described as weak, hedonistic, and nothing more than a mere puppet, manipulated by the religious leaders. The conflict that erupts leads to organized massacres of religious Jews, the burning down of synagogues and houses in religious neighborhoods, the looting of religious shops, and general violence all over the country. The doctors and paramedics are divided among themselves, providing medical treatment only to patients from the streams to which they belong. The country is on the brink of economic collapse and the government and army are too dysfunctional to bring an end to the raging conflict.[209]

The reasons for the war seem rather arbitrary and accidental, an explanation for the outburst is absent, and the reports on the ensuing mayhem are based on the media and rumors. The nature of these reports comes into question when the readership is introduced to specific characters in the story, such as a traditional religious couple of oriental origin who protect a secular person from an attack by yeshivah students. Another female character is portrayed as a former religious

[209] Hanna Herzig, 'Ma Yikreh ke-she-Tifroẓ Poh Milḥemet Aḥim', *Haaretz*, 23 June 2013, <https://www.haaretz.co.il/literature/prose/.premium-1.2047680> [accessed 17 June 2021].

Orthodox person, but her withdrawal from the religious world is not a complete one. She does not represent a full rift, but rather a bridge between the two seemingly hostile worlds. The events of the conflict are also varied, with some secular people, for instance, helping children from Orthodox neighborhoods who remain homeless after the fighting. In other words, the portrayal of the conflict as a battle between good and evil is only present in the media coverage and seems rather loosely connected to the reality which we are presented with. The life in Mishamari's novel seems much more complex and variegated than the media wants us to believe. The story's characters cannot be easily classified as either secular or religious and the hostilities are not construed purely on the basis of the animosity felt by the secularists towards the religious camp. Instead, it is corruption, poverty, ethnic tensions, and political instability which play a significant role here.[210]

We approach a purer form of science fiction in Shimon Adaf's *Kefor* ("Frost", 2010), a post-apocalyptic dystopia set in 2510, which describes humanity as it struggles to survive following a global disaster. The catastrophic event has killed hundreds of millions of people and destroyed vast amounts of scientific and cultural knowledge accumulated throughout human history. In the process of recovery, a post-human generation of cyborgs and androids emerges. All the world's societies become half-human and half-machine and an intelligent supercomputer helps them in the government of their societies and with the accumulation of lost knowledge.

After five hundred years of exile, the remaining Jews are assigned a special role within this post-apocalyptic world and they gather together from around the world to reestablish the Jewish state. They join together to rebuild the future Tel Aviv, the only city which has survived the destruction of Israel and the whole Middle East. The new society living in the secluded walled city-state is purely Jewish and governed by religious leaders. It is ruled by strict religious laws from the time of the Second Temple and is the only society on earth that outlaws interbreeding between humans and machines; the inhabitants are forbidden to mix with both non-Jews and those who are not fully human. The regime strictly prohibits the creation and dissemination of poetry which is not religious and approved in advance by the rabbis. The narrative itself follows several characters,

[210] Katz, pp. 104–05.

including a non-Jewish woman, a scientist, and a poet who must, in the light of all the regulations and prohibitions, hide from the religious authorities. The plot also revolves around a mysterious new disease that causes some yeshiva students to be transformed into creatures with wings and sharp teeth – angel-like creatures similar to seraphim. The earlier dystopian visions of Jewish theocracy, such as Ben-Ner's *Malakhim Ba'im* and Tammuz's *Pundako shel Yirmiyahu*, are here brought into a futuristic extreme with Jewish religious fanatics ruling over Tel Aviv, only this time, the future society is not divided into secular and religious camps and the Arab population is long gone. We find only deviant rebels who fight the system.[211]

Adaf's *Shadrach* (2017) is another novel which combines science fiction, post-apocalyptic, and dystopian scenarios. The narrative of this slim novel cuts back and forth between a post-apocalyptic far future Israel, in which the protagonist is a teenager named Shadrach, and the Israel of the 1980s, in which the main character's name is Hananiah. The names are a clear reference to the biblical book of Daniel, in which one of Daniel's three companions, Hananiah, whose Babylonian name is Shadrach, is thrown into a fiery furnace and comes out of it alive. The narrative line of *Shadrach* is set in an unspecified far future in which a catastrophic event befalls the Jewish state. This happens when Shadrach, living in Tel Aviv, goes to visit his family in New Sderot for the summer. Israel is bombed by Americans with nano-gas that makes the inhabitants go crazy, virtually transforming them into bloodthirsty zombies. The cities of New Sderot and Gaza are saved by means of a protective dome which stretches over this territory. In the course of the complete mayhem following the chemical attack, a nationalistic right-wing faction called the Guardians of Zion and supported by the Americans seizes power. The new authoritarian government abounds with Jewish symbols and calls itself Zionist, but it has no memory or knowledge of the Jewish past and the sources from which these symbols derive – the understanding of the Hebrew language is disconnected from its etymology and the burdensome history. The new government also fights wars with the Palestinians, without remembering the cause of the conflict. As time goes by, Shadrach volunteers to go back in time using a supertechnology that simulates the past in order to collect information.

[211] Rami Shalheveth, 'Kefor / Shimon Adaf', 17 September 2010, <http://www.blipanika.co.il/?p=2033> [accessed 28 June 2021]; Hochberg, pp. 25–27.

Instead, his consciousness is somehow sent back in time to the year 1987, and here he melds with the mind of a young boy named Hananiah. Shadrach realizes that he is not in a simulation of the past any more, and trapped there, he tries to find out why. The central message of the novel stands out clearly – in order to understand the present, we need to understand the past, that is to say, the biblical story of Shadrach and Hananiah.[212]

The traditional theme of Jewish theocracy predominates again in Yishai Sarid's *Ha-Shlishi* ("The Third," 2015) and Dror Burstein's *Tit* (2016; *Muck*, 2018), in which the focal point is the holy city of Jerusalem and the Jewish Temple. Both novels portray a dystopian version of a Temple-centered Jerusalem whose corrupt and megalomaniac leadership brings about its ultimate destruction. The story of *Ha-Shlishi* is narrated in the form of a journal, which is found after the destruction of the Kingdom of Judah. The journal belongs to a prince, Jonathan, who is imprisoned in a fortress in Jaffa and awaits execution after the Judean kingdom was destroyed by the modern version of the Amalekites – the eternal biblical enemies of the ancient Israelites, representing here perhaps the Arabs/Palestinians. Combining a biblical past and a dystopian future, the book presents a cyclical narrative of destruction-redemption-destruction.

Jonathan's journal chiefly describes the short-lived kingdom of Judah and the Third Jewish Temple, focusing particularly on the religious practices and sacrificial rituals. Jonathan also briefly recounts the apocalyptic events which preceded the establishment of the kingdom: the coastal cities of Haifa and Tel Aviv are razed to the ground following a nuclear strike by the Amalekites. The survivors unite on the Judean hills behind a new leader, Jonathan's father Jehoaz, who, acting in the name of a divine revelation, drives the Amalekites out of Jerusalem and the surrounding areas in a war of redemption. Jehoaz gathers his troops, demolishes the shrines on the Temple Mount, and, using advanced equipment, discovers the lost Ark of the Covenant and inside it, the Tablets of the Law. Encouraged by this divine validation, the Third Temple is rebuilt and Jehoaz becomes the king-savior and High Priest. Meanwhile, the international community imposes an embargo on the kingdom for driving out the Amalekites. The new

[212] Michael Weingrad, 'Out-of-Body Experiences: Recent Israeli Science Fiction and Fantasy', *Jewish Review of Books*, Spring 2018, <https://jewishreviewofbooks.com/articles/3048/body-experiences-recent-israeli-science-fiction-fantasy/> [accessed 28 June 2021]; Rina Jean Baroukh, '"We Don't Understand this Present": Shimon Adaf's Shadrach and the Possibilities of Hebrew Language', *Yod*, 23 (2021), pp. 151–168.

kingdom implements strict religious laws, instills a fear of secularism, and proclaims that the cause of the destruction of Tel Aviv and Haifa was the hedonistic and blasphemous lifestyle of their inhabitants.

Prince Jonathan, Jehoaz's youngest child, is seriously wounded by a grenade during an attempted assassination of his father by the Amalekites. The explosion leaves him with a limp and incapable of fathering children. The physical deformity also disqualifies him from serving in the Temple, but an exception is made and Jonathan becomes responsible for animal sacrifices and writing the Temple chronicles. He describes the worship and sacrificial rituals meticulously in great detail using biblical language. While other priests enjoy the consumption of leftover meat from the sacrifices, Jonathan is repulsed by the gruesome slaughters and becomes a vegetarian. To enter the Temple premises and offer an atonement sacrifice, all citizens of the Kingdom of Judah must have a microchip implanted in the back of their neck during their first year of life, which is used for identification of their status as descendants of Judah and also to preserve the purity of the pilgrims and the land. The majority of the population is impoverished and forced to bring sacrificial offerings to the Temple, while the priests and royalty lead luxurious lives.

As the story unfolds, Jonathan gradually loses faith in his father and realizes that he never truly cared for him. It becomes clear that Jehoaz only cares for himself when we learn that during Jonathan's childhood, the king dodged the grenade and allowed his son to get hurt instead. The relationship between the two deteriorates further when Jehoaz marries his second wife Efrat, who was originally intended to marry Jonathan. The story culminates shortly before the destruction of the kingdom and its Temple at the hands of the Amalekites after its short 23 years of existence. As the missiles fall on the city, the masses demand a special human sacrifice to appease God into saving the kingdom. The king therefore hands his new-born baby from Efrat to Jonathan and demands that he kills his infant brother as a sacrifice. Jonathan refuses, kills his father instead, takes the baby, and runs away from Jerusalem as it is being destroyed by the hostile forces. He is later captured, imprisoned, and sentenced to death. In his journal, Jonathan writes about a God who does not like to be locked up in the Holy of Holies, a God who has no interest in the blood and burning flesh of the sacrifices, and a God who is angry at the self-important king as he transgresses the

religious laws with impunity. The sacrifices and the Temple are ultimately portrayed as not providing the benefit they were intended for – God, it seems, is not interested in the barter approach any more.[213]

The novel's dystopian scenario exploring the idea of rebuilding the Temple and reinstituting animal sacrifices seeks to question the significance and relevance of such an attempt in our current reality. However, Sarid's fictional world is not purely a fantastic philosophical-religious thought experiment, as the discourse concerned with the rebuilding of the Temple is a reality among the radical religious-messianic circles. The attempts to resume sacrifices on the Temple Mount are also a part of the current Israeli reality – there were incidents in the past when the Israeli police arrested suspects in the Old City who were planning to sacrifice animals on the Temple Mount.[214]

A futuristic portrayal of the Judean kingdom and the Temple also marks Dror Burnstein's *Muck*, which combines the past, present, and future worlds as it describes the life of a prophet of doom, Jeremiah. Like those of his biblical counterpart, Jeremiah's prophecies about the downfall of the kingdom are not accepted by his audience and the corrupted Jerusalem is destroyed. The narrative connects the geopolitical reality of the First Temple period with descriptions and images of the present-day world, projecting it into an unspecified future. The novel can therefore be interpreted as a biting critique of contemporary Israeli society.

Burstein's old-new and post-Yom Kippur War Jerusalem, where people travel on light railways and talk on cellphones, is the capital city of Judah, a vassal kingdom torn between two regional powers: the Babylonian Empire led by Nebuchadnezzar and the Egyptian Kingdom led by Pharaoh. The story opens with the reign of King Jehoiakim, who is a vassal to both nations and is required to pay heavy tributes in exchange for peace. As the plot unfolds Jehoiakim stops paying

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[213] Adia Mendelson-Maoz, 'Jerusalem Time: Reading Contemporary Israeli Dystopias', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 2020, 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00111619.2020.1858747> [accessed 28 June 2021]; Maya Guez, '"Ha-Shlishi": Ḥazon Aḥarit ha-Yamim shel Yishai Sarid', *Haaretz*, 24 July 2015, <https://www.haaretz.co.il/literature/prose/.premium-1.2687281> [accessed 28 June 2021]; see also Ofri Ilany, 'Religious Extremism Reigns in New Crop of Dystopian Literature', *Haaretz*, 17 December 2015, <https://www.haaretz.com/life/books/.premium-religious-extremism-rises-in-new-crop-of-dystopian-lit-1.5378471> [accessed 28 June 2021].

[214] See, e.g., Elon Gilad, 'Why Jews Stopped Sacrificing Lambs and Baby Goats for Passover', *Haaretz*, 10 April 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/jewish/.premium-why-jews-stopped-sacrificing-lambs-for-passover-1.5440120> [accessed 28 June 2021].

the tribute to the Babylonians, which prompts a military response from the Babylonian king, who lays siege to the city. Before the Babylonians seize Jerusalem, King Jehoiakim kills himself and his son Jehoiachin becomes the new reigning king of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar, arriving in a black Mercedes and accompanied by an army of tanks and helicopters, captures the city shortly after Jehoiachin's coronation and deposes him as king. The upper class of the Judean population is exiled to Babylon together with Jehoiachin and his uncle Mattaniah is installed as king by Nebuchadnezzar under the name Zedekiah.

The central characters of the story are Jeremiah and Mattaniah-Zedekiah – who both start as poets, become friends, and in the last part of the novel confront each other as prophet and king. The novel portrays corrupted Judean rulers, religious functionaries, and military officials who lead a hedonistic lifestyle, employ a system of spies, and exercise strict control over the population. The kingdom is at constant war with internal dissidents, including false prophets, and external enemies such as the Sidonians. When Mattaniah-Zedekiah is proclaimed king, he too gradually becomes corrupted by his rise to power and eventually goes mad as he randomly demolishes buildings, enacts irrational laws, and focuses on his personal well-being while his people are suffering and dying from shortages, diseases, and crime waves while the city is being besieged. In the novel Jerusalem is portrayed as a city of moral decay, social injustice, and corruption where violence, gambling, slavery, and the trading of children are common sights.[215]

A completely different approach to envisioning the dystopian future is articulated in Sayed Kashua's (post-) apocalyptic *Va-Yehi Boker* (*Let It Be Morning*, 2006), published in 2004 at the height of the Second Intifada, which challenges the distinction between the Israeli utopia and dystopia. The story is recounted of the military blockade of a Palestinian village by the Israeli army, after which a peace treaty is signed between the Palestinians and Israelis and the village, populated mostly by Israeli-Arabs, becomes part of the Palestinian State. The Zionist utopia of erasing the Palestinian space and its inhabitants turns here into an Israeli-Arab dystopia.

[215] See, e.g., Hochberg, pp. 27–29; Mendelson-Maoz, 'Jerusalem Time: Reading Contemporary Israeli Dystopias', pp. 1–11; Adam Rovner, 'A Carnival Ride Reimagining Of The Book Of Jeremiah', *Forward*, 30 December 2018, <https://forward.com/culture/416646/a-carnival-ride-reimagining-of-the-book-of-jeremiah/> [accessed 28 June 2021].

The unnamed protagonist-narrator of the story, very much like the author himself, is an Israeli-Arab journalist writing in Hebrew who becomes stuck between his two ethnic-national identities. With the ongoing Palestinian uprising and increase in anti-Arab incitement, the readership for his articles diminishes and the ones he manages to publish are heavily censored. After many years spent working in Jewish Israel, the hero is therefore forced to move back to his native village. It is, however, not the safe haven he had hoped for – the village turns out to be a dangerous place rampant with crime and street gangs that attack random bystanders. He also dislikes the increased Islamic religiosity of the place and the narrow-mindedness of its inhabitants. One day, shortly after the protagonist returns to his family home, the Israeli military lays siege to the village, isolating it completely from the outside world. The main narrative then goes on to describe how the protagonist and the villagers cope with the blockade. The village suffers from food, water, and electricity shortages, telephone lines and the internet are cut off, and riots and looting break out over the worsening conditions. The reason behind the blockade is thought by the village leaders to be the illegal Palestinian workers from the Occupied Territories, as they continue to believe that Israel cannot be targeting its own Israeli-Arab citizens. The whole siege is therefore viewed throughout the novel as a misunderstanding – a blurring of the lines which separate the Israeli-Arabs and Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza.

The novel ends as the blockade is suddenly lifted and everything returns to normal. The military withdraws and the telephone and internet connection is restored. A historic peace treaty is signed between the Israelis and Palestinians. It involves an exchange of territory and populations – Israel gives up East Jerusalem and a large portion of the West Bank, but the villagers, including the protagonist, respond to the treaty with disbelief as they are now a part of the Palestinian state and no longer Israelis. The majority of the villagers clearly reject their new Palestinian nationality. The Zionist dream has been accomplished, the State of Israel is now one hundred percent Jewish, but this is not a utopian achievement for the ousted Israeli-Arab population. The end is clearly dystopian for the Arab minority, which is often considered to be a fifth column in the contemporary Israeli society.[216]

[216] Sadia Agsous, 'Hegemonic (Israeli) Time and Minority (Palestinian) Space: Sayed Kashua's Chronotopic Approach in Let It Be Morning', *Dibur literary journal*, 6 (2018),

<https://arcade.stanford.edu/dibur/hegemonic-israeli-time-and-minority-palestinian-space-sayed-kashuas-chronotopic-approach-let> [accessed 28 June 2021].

Conclusion

The literary dystopias provide their authors with the means to confront social, economic, and political transformations and the main objective of dystopian narratives is to educate us and warn us about possible futures we would wish to avoid. The central themes that helped to shape the dystopian genre, such as governmental control, corporate dictatorships, destructive ideologies, the dangers posed by technology and science, the collapse of civil order, ecological disasters, and others, are also represented in the Israeli dystopian tradition. The examination of Israeli dystopian novels shows, however, that the narratives have a distinctly Jewish character – the Jewish dystopias, for the most part, reflect the fears and anxieties Israeli Jews have about the future rather than the universal human experience. These dystopias relate to Jewish history and sources, are almost exclusively set in an imaginary future State of Israel, and have Jewish characters as the main protagonists. Hamutal Shabtai's *2020* and Sayed Kashua's *Let It Be Morning* are some exceptions here, as the two novels are not concerned with specifically Jewish dystopian futures.

The thesis also explored what agitated the Israeli authors to produce such nightmarish scenarios and why they have come to occupy an increasingly prominent role in Israeli society. The Israeli dystopian narratives started to appear in the 1970s and proliferated throughout the 1980s. Written by left-wing authors, the dystopias of this period contain warnings about the potential for the destruction of Zionist utopian values – secularism and liberalism. Here the gloomy futures portray authoritarian Jewish theocracies or violent militarized societies. A fanatical form of religion often plays a crucial role in the overthrow of the system and the relationship between secular and religious Jews is represented in dichotomous terms. The internal anxieties, rooted in the transformation of the political and cultural make-up of Israel in the 1970s, are also reinforced by the external anxieties Israeli Jews have been confronted with since the creation of Israel – the destruction of the Jewish state and subsequent extermination of its inhabitants in a future war with the Arab countries.

In the last decade of the twentieth century, the Lebanon War, the First Intifada, and the peace process come to dominate the dystopian projections. The extensive transformative processes, such as multiculturalization, globalization,

privatization, and the collapse of Zionist meta-narratives culminated in the 1990s and led to cultural and political fragmentation and the development of an ethos of individualism and consumerism. Thus, the traditional ways of making sense of reality have almost completely collapsed. The sense of no progress, rationality, and meaning was first reflected in Orly Castel-Bloom's *Dolly City*, which uses postmodern poetics in its portrayal of a dystopian future. For the first time, we also witness the emergence of future projections which have right-wing sensibilities to them – here the authors convey their anxiety about the peace processes initiated between Israel and the Palestinians.

The twenty-first century has only reinforced the sense of the absence of a clear path towards a better future. However, there is a clear thematic shift from Israeli dystopian thinking in the 1980s. The fear of an all-out war with the Arab enemy recedes into the background and the internal anxieties are portrayed in a more nuanced form. Ultra-Orthodox and messianic religiosity is still a focal point of many dystopias, but the horrifying futures are seldomly imagined in terms of a struggle between extreme secularism and extreme religiosity. Moreover, environmental disasters begin to play a major role in some Israeli dystopias, reflecting rising ecological awareness and the critical attitude Israeli society has towards environmental issues.

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