

UNIVERZITA KARLOVA V PRAZE – FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA
ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

**After the Future Went Away:
The Dystopianism and Current Trends in Modern Speculative British Fiction**

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

Vedoucí bakalářské práce (supervisor):
Colin Steele Clark, M.A.

Zpracoval (author):
Barbora Šedivá

Studijní obor (subject):
Anglistika a amerikanistika

Praha, květen 2016

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně, že jsem řádně citovala všechny použité prameny a literaturu a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného či stejného titulu.

I declare that the following BA thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned, and that this thesis has not been used in the source of other university studies or in order to acquire the same or another type of diploma.

V Praze dne 23. 5. 2016

Barbora Šedivá

Permission

Souhlasím se zapůjčením bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům.

I have no objections to the BA thesis being borrowed and used to study purposes.

Abstract

The objective of the present study is to identify and analyse the common themes of dystopian fiction in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and to trace the transformation of these themes, as well as the development of new thematic realizations, in contemporary British speculative fiction. The analysis involves prominent recent authors including Iain Banks, Ken MacLeod, Adam Roberts, Charles Stross, and Chris Beckett; and through the selected works of these authors it aims to explore the recent trends in science fiction and its utopian subgenres. Besides these goals, the study aims to provide the reader with a thorough definition of dystopianism and a concise overview of the historical development of this genre and its manifestations in the works of the above-mentioned authors. As the most prominent and recurring themes in dystopian literature, both traditional and contemporary, the thesis recognizes concepts such as the manipulation through language and media, the loss of individual freedom and privacy, and the abuse of power by elites, all of which are of special importance for the present-day social thinking and politics.

Structurally, the study is divided into three chapters, the first of them assuming the role of theoretical introduction, whereas the latter two represent the practical analysis. With the help of prominent critics such as Tom Moylan, L. T. Sargent, or Adam Roberts, the first chapter attempts to define the characteristics of dystopian writing and those of the related genres, descending from the general terms of "speculative fiction" and "science fiction" to the more specific ones concerning utopian literature and all of its variants, with a clear distinction between utopianism, dystopianism, and anti-utopianism. Following is a brief summary of the historical transformation of these genres, primarily throughout the twentieth century, which was especially rich in the various literary trends and styles as an answer to the frequently changing political opinions of that era.

Second chapter focuses on the classical authors and the depiction of the traditional themes in their influential novels, taking into account their non-fictional works as well, which include Orwell's famous essay on politics and language and Huxley's critical rediscovery of his own famous novel. For the purposes of this analysis, the depicted alternative societies are observed through three different perspectives: their use of language, the attitude they perform towards social relations and sexuality, and the solutions they employ to the issue of incompatibility of communal values with individual freedom.

The last chapter provides a close examination of the contemporary fiction through the works of the recent authors listed above. Even though these works are to be discussed separately, an identification of common themes among them takes place as well, and these findings are used in the following speculation about the further development of British fiction.

As for the choice of the primary texts, the selection provided is meant to represent both the traditional and highly celebrated works, as well as those that have not yet received such extensive critical acclaim. Whereas Orwell and Huxley are generally acknowledged as the founding fathers of the dystopian genre, some of the recent authors will yet have to prove their worth in order to secure their rightful places on the contemporary literary scene; a process to which this thesis contributes by analysing the following works: Iain M. Banks' *The Player of Games*, Ken MacLeod's *Intrusion*, Adam Roberts' *New Model Army*, Charles Stross' *Halting State*, and Chris Beckett's *Dark Eden*. These novels represent the contemporary British speculative fiction in all of its diversity, providing a spectrum of different alternative societies located all over the universe.

Key words: science fiction, utopia, dystopia, freedom, language, individuality, society, politics, manipulation, power, technology

Abstrakt

Cílem této práce je nalézt a pojmenovat tradiční témata v antiutopické literatuře, zejména pak v dílech Aldouse Huxleyho – *Konec civilizace*, a George Orwella – *1984*, a následně prozkoumat, jakým způsobem se daná témata proměnila v současné britské literární sféře, popřípadě jaké nové motivy tento časový posun vyvolal. K těmto účelům slouží výběr z tvorby následujících britských autorů: Iain Banks, Ken MacLeod, Adam Roberts, Charles Stross a Chris Beckett, a prostřednictvím jejich románů je nahlíženo na aktuální trendy v science fiction a příbuzných žánrech. Mimo jiné, tato studie nabízí čtenářům důkladnou definici antiutopie jakožto literárního žánru, a zároveň stručný přehled jeho historického vývoje a rozbor konkrétních vyobrazení v dílech výše uvedených autorů. Za nejvýznamnější a často se vyskytující témata v antiutopické literatuře, tradiční i současné, se zde považuje manipulace skrz jazyk a média, ztráta svobody a soukromí jednotlivců, a zneužívání moci vyššími vrstvami. Tyto motivy nabývají na významu především v kontextu dnešní doby a na pozadí našeho sociálně-politického smýšlení.

Text sestává ze tří kapitol, z nichž první slouží jako teoretický úvod, zatímco zbylé dvě přenáší tyto znalosti do praxe. Za pomoci sekundární literatury od významných kritiků, jako je například Tom Moylan, L. T. Sargent, nebo Darko Suvin, se první kapitola pokouší načrtnout charakteristické prvky zvoleného žánru, přičemž postupně sestupuje od obecných termínů, jako je „spekulativní literatura“ a „science fiction“, ke konkrétnějším vyjádřením popisujícím utopie včetně všech jejích variant, a neopomene vysvětlit rozdíly mezi těmito variantami, tedy mezi utopiemi, dystopiemi a antiutopiemi. Dále následuje stručné shrnutí historických změn v těchto žánrech, především pak během dvacátého století, které s sebou přineslo mnoho nových směrů a stylů jakožto odpověď na tehdy rychle se měnící politické a sociální ideje.

Druhá kapitola se věnuje tradičním autorům a jejich antiutopickým vyzím ve výše zmíněných románech, zároveň však zmiňuje i věcnou literaturu od těchto autorů, především pak Orwellovu proslulou esej o politice a jazyku, a Huxleyho kritické navrácení se ke svému původnímu románu. Pro co nejsnazší orientaci v těchto i primárních pracích bude na vyobrazené alternativní společnosti nahlíženo ze tří různých perspektiv: jakým způsobem zacházejí s jazykem, jak se stavějí k otázkám mezilidských vztahů a sexuality, a jakým způsobem řeší problém neslučitelnosti osobní svobody s hodnotami sociálního státu.

Poslední kapitola přináší podrobný rozbor děl ze současné britské literatury v románech od výše zvolených autorů. Přestože je o těchto románech pojednáváno jednotlivě, je zde snaha mezi nimi nacházet společné prvky, jejichž znalost je následně implikována v nadcházející spekulaci o možných směrech, kterými se britská literatura bude nadále vyvíjet.

Co se týče volby primárních textů, díla jsou vybrána tak, aby se mezi nimi objevily jak romány tradiční a proslulé, tak i takové, které se prozatím netěší tak zásadnímu kritickému ohlasu. Zatímco Orwell a Huxley jsou obecně uznáváni jakožto zakladatelé žánru antiutopie, někteří ze zvolených současných autorů mají před sebou ještě notný kus cesty, aby podobným způsobem potvrdili svou váhu a udrželi si tak své pracně dobyté pozice na literárně-utopické scéně. Tato studie přispívá k tomuto procesu rozbořením následujících děl: Iain M. Banks – *The Player of Games*, Ken MacLeod – *Intrusion*, Adam Roberts – *New Model Army*, Charles Stross – *Halting State*, a Chris Beckett – *Dark Eden*. Současná britská sci-fi literatura je tak zastoupena ve vší své rozmanitosti, skrz škálu různorodých alternativních světů, které jsou roztroušeny po celém vesmíru.

Klíčová slova: science fiction, utopie, dystopie, svoboda, jazyk, individualita, společnost, politika, manipulace, moc, technologie

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|------|
| Declaration | ii |
| Permission | iii |
| Abstract | iv |
| Key words | v |
| Abstrakt | vi |
| Klíčová slova | vi |
| Table of Contents | viii |
| | |
| Introduction..... | 1 |
| | |
| Chapter 1 – About the Genre | 5 |
| 1.1 Definitions: Speculative Fiction, Science Fiction, and Utopia | 6 |
| 1.2 Utopia and Its Opposites | 10 |
| 1.3 Historical Development of the Utopian Trends in Literature | 14 |
| | |
| Chapter 2 – Traditional Themes in Dystopian Fiction | 18 |
| 2.1 Language, Literature, and Memory | 19 |
| 2.2 Social Relations and Sexuality | 27 |
| 2.3 Freedom versus Stability | 35 |
| | |
| Chapter 3 – Contemporary British Speculative Fiction | 41 |
| 3.1 Iain M. Banks, <i>The Player of Games</i> | 42 |
| 3.2 Ken MacLeod, <i>Intrusion</i> | 47 |
| 3.3 Adam Roberts, <i>New Model Army</i> | 51 |
| 3.4 Charles Stross, <i>Halting Stating</i> | 55 |
| 3.5 Chris Beckett, <i>Dark Eden</i> | 59 |
| | |
| Conclusion | 64 |
| | |
| Bibliography | 66 |

Introduction

According to the famous quote by Ezra Pound, “we live in an age of science and of abundance.”¹ With this view in mind, it comes as no surprise that speculative fiction, including science fiction and its subgenres, belongs to the most popular kinds of literature nowadays. Even though the genre of science fiction might seem as a recent invention, its beginnings can be traced all the way back to the ancient times in the works of authors such as Cicero or Plutarch.² In this sense it might be said that speculative fiction is as old as literature itself and has always, in one way or another, been present in the literary history of our culture. However, the popularity of this genre has never been as prominent as today. The unprecedented quantity of works (both in literature as well as in the film industry), produced in this genre during the second half of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century, confirms the recent popularity of science fiction among the audiences all over the world, both young and old.

The novels of science fiction are especially valuable for their reflections and, in many cases, the critique of contemporary politics, society, and the role of individuals in it. As Tom Moylan claims, it is central to science fiction texts to “re-create the empirical present of its author and implied readers as an ‘elsewhere,’ an alternative spacetime,” which is the source of both pleasure and knowledge that the text offers to its readers.³ This is especially true of the utopian texts and those of the related genre of dystopia, which has proven to be the most beneficial in the study of these matters, and therefore shall be the primary focus of this thesis. As the depiction of a “non-existent society [...] that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in

¹ Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 2010) 17.

² Adam Roberts, *Science Fiction* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006) 38.

³ Tom Moylan, *Scraps Of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000) 5.

which the reader lived,”⁴ the literary dystopia provides many themes that not only help to chart the faults of previous societies, but also serve as the warning signs against any ideology, which, if brought to its extreme, always proves harmful.

Dystopian literature emerged at the beginning of the last century and ever since its first complete manifestation, which Moylan recognized in E. M. Forster’s short story “The Machine Stops” (1909),⁵ it continued to reflect critically on the contemporary political and social situation. The twentieth century was an age of major historical turns, and the pessimism caused by the World Wars, Great Depression, Holocaust, and other tragic events had irretrievably marked the common perception of life, society, and humanity. People from all the countries of Europe have experienced great miseries, and a general chaos has presided over the world. The sudden state of instability called for extremist views in politics, with every country adopting different solutions, all of which proved to be disastrous in their extremes.⁶ Whether the investigation focuses on the regime of Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia or Fascist Italy, it will come out with common faults such as the suppression of individual freedom, intervention into personal privacy, and manipulation of its citizens. All of these ominous themes and the frequently changing attitudes towards the political systems of different countries helped shape the common sense of right and wrong, which is often mirrored by the literature of that period. As Christopher Hitchens claims, “the three great subjects of the twentieth century were imperialism, fascism and Stalinism. [...] Most of the intellectual class were fatally compromised by accommodation with one or other of these man-made structures of inhumanity, and some by more than one.”⁷ In his critical work bearing the name *Brave New World Revisited*, Aldous Huxley outlined the

⁴ Lyman Tower Sargent, “The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited,” *Utopian Studies* 5.1 (1994): 9, JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20719246>>, 2 Mar. 2016.

⁵ Moylan 111.

⁶ Mary Evans, *Short History of Society: The Making of the Modern World* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2007).

⁷ Christopher Hitchens, *Orwell’s Victory* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003) 4.

different political influences on his writing and that of his contemporary George Orwell as follows:

George Orwell's *1984* was a magnified projection into the future of a present that contained Stalinism and an immediate past that had witnessed the flowering of Nazism. *Brave New World* was written before the rise of Hitler to supreme power in Germany and when the Russian tyrant had not yet got into his stride.⁸

Ever since the emergence of these classical works, dystopian literature has been concerned with a number of traditional themes such as manipulation, limited freedom, and the abuse of power, all of which revealed the shortcomings and failures of the contemporary political systems.

The objective of this study is to identify the above-mentioned themes in the novels of George Orwell and Aldous Huxley, and to trace their development in contemporary British fiction, as well as to discover a new thematic freight through the works of prominent recent authors, including Iain M. Banks, Ken MacLeod, Adam Roberts, Charles Stross, and Chris Beckett. In this process, the thesis aims to explore the dystopian genre in its entirety, and to speculate upon the directions it may be moving in henceforward.

For these purposes, the list of primary texts was assembled as to represent both traditional and contemporary works. The names such as George Orwell and Aldous Huxley speak for themselves, for there could hardly be found any works of dystopianism more classical and prominent than their masterpieces. Regarding Huxley's *Brave New World*, this novel is of special interest, since it features a society that may be viewed as both utopian and dystopian. This is a characteristic that is not exclusive to Huxley's novels, and it shall be discovered that the decision of classifying the depicted society as good or bad is not always as black and white as people are tempt to believe. Concerning the recent

⁸ Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited* (London: Vintage, 1994) 4.

authors, the study focuses on the following works: Iain M. Banks' *The Player of Games*, Ken MacLeod's *Intrusion*, Adam Roberts' *New Model Army*, Charles Stross' *Halting State*, and Chris Beckett's *Dark Eden*. Even though these novels provide as diverse representation of the current trends as possible, they have a lot in common. Whether we become embroiled in the complex games of Banks's *Culture* novel, investigate the cybercrimes in Stross' near-future society, witness the horrors brought about by wars with Adam Roberts, seek our individual freedom from the oppressive rules of MacLeod, or get lost in the woods of the sunless Eden, we shall always emerge from this encounter with new knowledge about ourselves, the values we hold, and the roles we assume in our society.

Chapter 1 – About the Genre

Before analysing the particular novels, it is essential to make sure that there is a proper understanding of the genre itself. As James Gunn accurately suggests, “the most important, and most divisive, issue in science fiction is definition.”¹ Even though the quest of defining science fiction might seem straightforward, it must not be underestimated. Many have a clear vision of what this genre means, but when asked to put this vision into words, people are often at a loss, finding it especially challenging to explain the distinction between science fiction and other modern genres, such as fantasy. This might be caused by the fact that science fiction has become the object of academic interest relatively recently, and although its roots can be traced all the way back to the Ancient times, it was not until the second half of the 20th century that critics started to recognize this then quickly developing genre as worth of their attention. The vocabulary used in this field of study is therefore also quite new and not as well established as to be taken for granted. This matter is further complicated by the fact that every critic takes a slightly different view on what are the most prominent elements of science fiction literature, which is another reason for the need of clarification of the definitions before the actual usage of the terms in question takes place. In order to do so, this chapter will aim to compare various approaches towards the definition of science fiction, as well as the related genres and/or subgenres, namely speculative fiction, literary utopia and all of its variants. For the purposes of this chapter, the focus shall descend from the most general terms to the more specific ones. For economic reasons, the term science fiction will be from now on referred to by its abbreviated form SF, which is, as opposed to the popular neologism sci-fi, the preferred form by both the academia and the science-fiction community.

¹ James Gunn, “Toward a Definition of Science Fiction,” *Speculations on Speculation* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2005) 5.

1.1 Definitions: Speculative Fiction, Science Fiction, and Utopia

Beginning with the term *speculative fiction*, it might be said that it is the widest as well as the least used of all the possible expressions available. It is usually associated with, and in some cases even used as a substitute for, SF as such, but it is essential to keep in mind that speculative fiction encompasses much larger range of literature, including genres such as fantasy or alternative history.² It is therefore difficult to come up with a working definition that would comprise the whole range of genres and literary elements falling under this kind of literature. The most comprehensive definition that captures this genre in its entirety is probably the one by Orson Scott Card, who claims that “speculative fiction includes all stories that take place in a setting contrary to known reality.”³ To his description I would only add the fact that this contrariness does not necessarily need to be in terms of setting; it can also, and often does, take place in different time levels, as for example in the past, or, according to the popular trend, in the future.

In narrowing the scope of focus down to SF itself, it will thus become useful to distinguish it from the other genres under the common heading of speculative literature. According to the definition given by *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, “science fiction is a popular modern branch of prose fiction that explores the probable consequences of some improbable or impossible transformation of the basic conditions of human existence.”⁴ Even though the improbability or impossibility of the transformation might be argued upon with some particular novels, this is overall a useful description, and also a helpful one in drawing the necessary distinctions. What makes SF different from the other subgenres of speculative fiction is exactly this transformation, which is the most prominent element of the genre, or, as James Gunn puts it, “science fiction is the literature

² Colin Bulman, *Creative Writing: A Guide and Glossary to Fiction Writing* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007) 200.

³ Orson Scott Card, *How to Write Science Fiction & Fantasy* (Cincinnati: Writer’s Digest Books, 2001) 17.

⁴ “Science fiction,” def., *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: OUP, 2001).

of change. Change is its subject matter and its method.”⁵ Of course, it might be argued that SF is not the only genre that uses some kind of transformation to create its setting, however, no other genre places this transformative process as its main concern. Darko Suvin has famously called the concept of transformation in SF texts the ‘cognitive estrangement,’ arguing that “in SF, the attitude of estrangement – [...] within a still predominantly ‘realistic’ context – has grown into the *formal framework* of the genre [emphasis in the original].”⁶ In other words, the textual world is estranged from the real one, but still cognitively connected to it.

The concept of cognitive estrangement is an important feature, which distinguishes SF from other genres of speculative fiction. Nowadays, SF is often being compared to fantasy, the two of them appearing together as a pair of rival genres considered as those most appealing to the popular demand. Both of them feature a world that is in one way or another transformed from the everyday reality, but each of them deals with a different kind of transformation. The difference between these genres is usually described in terms of characters and/or settings – whereas the fantastic worlds are mostly inhabited by mythical creatures such as elves, dwarfs or magicians, SF is concerned with technological progress and therefore occupied by machines, robots, and spaceships. While this notion is on the right track, it needs to be expressed in a more articulate and comprehensive way. Gunn suggests:

Fantasy and science fiction belong to the same broad category of fiction that deals with events other than those that occur, or have occurred, in the everyday world.

But they belong to distinctly different methods of looking at those worlds: fantasy

⁵ Gunn 10.

⁶ Darko Suvin, “On the Poetics of Science Fiction Genre,” *College English* 34.3 (1972): 375, JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/375141>>, 31 Mar. 2016.

is unrealistic; science fiction is realistic. Fantasy creates its own universe with its own laws; science fiction exists in our universe with its shared laws.⁷

Similarly, Suvin would describe fantasy as a genre of noncognitive estrangement. This notion not only clarifies the distinction between SF and fantasy, it also facilitates the comprehension of the genre of SF itself. With this view in mind, it is no longer appropriate to approach the textual world as ultimately disconnected from the real one, but rather as a place that is in some significant way transformed, yet with the same rules applying to the projected society as they do to actual people. In this sense, reading SF texts involves continuous comparison of the constructed world and its society to the reader's experience, making value judgements on the way, and according to their positivity or negativity classifying the worlds as either utopian or dystopian, the distinction between them being the main concern of the next section of this chapter. Furthermore, based on the knowledge brought from the real world, the reader contributes to the construction of the imaginative world, and thus fills in what Marc Angenot has called 'the absent paradigm.' According to him, the aesthetic goal of SF "consists in creating a remote, estranged, and yet intelligible 'world,'"⁸ the intelligibility being of implicit rather than explicit nature. In other words, the SF text presents an alternative world whose order is only partially described, and the reader is invited to fill in the missing information according to his experience from the real world in order to construct a working and realistic system.

Another opinion as to the distinction between SF and fantasy comes from Adam Roberts, who looks at this issue from the theological perspective. According to him, "SF develops as an imaginatively expansive and (crucially) *materialist* mode of literature, as opposed to the magical-fantastic, fundamentally religious mode that comes to be known as

⁷ Gunn 11.

⁸ Marc Angenot, "The Absent Paradigm: An Introduction to the Semiotics of Science Fiction," *Science Fiction Studies* 6.1 (1979): 10, JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4239220>>, 30 Mar. 2016.

Fantasy” [emphasis in the original].⁹ This description provides yet another important aspect of SF to take into consideration when defining the genre itself.

To summarize what have been discovered in this section: SF is a literary genre whose main objective is to construct an alternative materialistic world based on cognitive estrangement from the naturalistic world, with the reader actively participating in this process by filling in the absent paradigm. This description made it obvious that the setting of SF texts is at least as important as the plot itself, or even more so, since to be able to understand the plot, the reader must first understand the place. If the text is supposed to have some impact on his/her life, the reader must either identify with it or take it as a warning to the present situation. Thus the process of defining the genres arrives at its last destination – the literary utopia.

Literary utopia is generally thought of as a subgenre of SF, even though the term itself is much older than that of SF. Some critics, such as Darko Suvin, even believe utopia to be the precedent of SF in claiming that “SF is at the same time wider than and at least collaterally descended from utopia.”¹⁰ The general difference between utopian and other SF texts is that the latter presents alternative possibilities through technological progress, whereas utopia presents them through political revolution, which is often of little appeal for most SF writers.¹¹ This notion keeps up with Sargent’s view of utopianism as a social dreaming and utopia as “a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space.”¹²

In etymology, the word *utopia* is a combination of the Greek word *topos*, meaning place, and the prefix “u” standing for “no.”¹³ In other words, the term *utopia* stands for *no*

⁹ Adam Roberts, *The History of Science Fiction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2006) X.

¹⁰ Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979) 61.

¹¹ Gregory Claeys, *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010) 222.

¹² Sargent 9.

¹³ “Utopia, n.,” def., *OED Online* (Oxford: OUP, 2016), 31 Mar. 2016.

place, suggesting that the main characteristic of utopian world is its non-existence. With this view in mind, it is hardly surprising that the adjective *utopian* began to signify, in certain contexts, the impossibility or futility of some ideas or concepts. For the purposes of this paper, however, I shall stick to the notion of *no place* as a location either in time or space that is, in Suvin's terms, cognitively estranged from reality. Apart from the word *utopia* introduced by Thomas More in his famous novel bearing the word as its title, the influential author proposed yet another term, which eventually came to mean the same as the former – *eutopia*. The prefix “eu,” meaning *good*, thus adds another perspective to the utopian world, which is not only non-existent, but also better than the real one.

1.2 Utopia and its Opposites

‘It wouldn’t be long before war was too expensive for anybody.’

‘What a utopian you are,’ I observed.

‘Man, the opposite. What’s the opposite of a utopian?’

‘A politician?’

‘You know the word I mean. I’m a pessimist. Is it nontopian? I can’t remember the word. But that’s what I am.’¹⁴

One of the best ways to define utopia is by comparing it to its opposites. However, the main objective of this section is not only to define the literary opposition of utopia, but also to differentiate between the terms *dystopia* and *anti-utopia*, a distinction that is often disregarded, since these expressions are generally thought to be synonymous. As will

¹⁴ Adam Roberts, *New Model Army* (London: Gollancz 2010) 195. All future page references will be to this edition and will be included in parenthesis in the text.

become obvious, this objective is definitely not an easy matter, because, even in the academic field, the distinction between these terms is not established uniformly.

When trying to identify the opposite of utopia, etymology might once more prove to be helpful. If utopia is supposed to represent a *good place*, then the contrary would without doubt be a *bad place*. And thus the term *dystopia* suggests itself, with the prefix “dys” standing for *bad*.¹⁵ The exact definition of dystopia as found in the Oxford dictionary goes as follows: “a modern term invented as the opposite of utopia and applied to any alarmingly unpleasant imaginary world, usually of the projected future.”¹⁶ This is a helpful definition in establishing dystopia as the literary opposite of utopia; it does not, however, make any distinctions between dystopia and anti-utopia, which might also seem as a suitable candidate for that position. There is probably no better explanation of this distinction than the one invented by Tom Moylan, first in *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*, and later with Raffaella Baccolini in the introduction to *Dark Horizons*. According to him, the most prominent feature of dystopia as opposed to anti-utopia is the fact that the former “shares with *eutopia* the general vocation of utopianism,” even though it “achieves this vocation through specific formal strategies that are distinctly different from the literary utopia” [emphasis in the original].¹⁷ Anti-utopia, on the other hand, is seen as contrary to both utopia and utopian thought, with absolutely no hope inside or outside of the text. To use Sargent’s terms, whereas utopianism represents a “complex of ideas,” anti-utopianism is rather a “constantly but generally unsystematic stream of thought.”¹⁸

In this view, dystopia is not as much the opposite of either utopia or anti-utopia, but rather a negotiation between these two, in the sense that it envisions a society considerably worse than the actual one, yet retaining at least some level of hope, either in the textual

¹⁵ “Dystopia, n.,” def., *OED Online* (Oxford: OUP, 2016), 31 Mar. 2016.

¹⁶ “Dystopia,” def., *CODLT*.

¹⁷ Tom Moylan, and Raffaella Baccolini, *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 2003) 5.

¹⁸ Sargent 21.

world itself or outside the pages, serving as a warning to the reader. Moylan perceives anti-utopia as the nemesis of dystopia, whereas literary utopia is its generic sibling.¹⁹ This notion is further developed in *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*, where Moylan positions dystopia as if on a scale, the one end being that of utopia, the other of anti-utopia. Depending on the level of hope offered by the text, the particular dystopia can either be closer to the utopian extreme and thus seen as representing militant pessimism, or it can be found on the other side of the scale, where it is described as pseudo-dystopia with resigned pessimism. Whereas the former of these maintains an open possibility for change, the other one remains static, as no change seems possible.²⁰ However, Moylan does not forget to acknowledge the fact that the classification of a work as either utopian or dystopian is to a large extent matter of personal opinion as well as contemporary convention. Thus, a text that was intended as utopia might seem dystopian to some people or even a whole generation, or vice versa.

Concerning the narrative strategies, there is one prominent difference between eutopia and dystopia. The classical eutopian narrative is usually told from the perspective of a visitor from our world to the utopian society, and the plot thus consists of a guided journey through the estranged reality, which provides an explicit comparison between the two worlds. The dystopian text, on the other hand, “usually begins directly in the terrible new world; and yet, even without a dislocating move to an elsewhere, the element of textual estrangement remains in effect since the focus is frequently on a character who questions the dystopian society.”²¹ In other words, whereas the eutopian society is presented through the eyes of a stranger, the dystopian narrative deals with a character who belongs to the textual world, but for some reason feels alienated from it, and usually revolts against the local system. The focus of the dystopian text is thus both on a specific

¹⁹ Moylan, *Horizons* 4.

²⁰ Moylan, *Scraps* 157.

²¹ Moylan, *Horizons* 5.

individual as well as the construction of the hegemonic order that is seen as faulty. The character offers a rational view on an irrational society, and at the same time he or she represents something that the reader can identify with. The effect of estrangement is not achieved by any trip undertaken or any other form of physical or mental displacement, but rather by the way things and situations are described in the textual world. What might be perceived as strange or completely unthinkable for the contemporary reader is described as if normal and ordinary, which, of course, it is for the local inhabitants. This is one of the reasons why Moylan and Baccolini stress the importance of language in the dystopian narrative, and this view shall be vindicated in the discussion of the particular novels in the second chapter.

Two more terms need to be clarified before moving on to the next section. The first of them is *critical utopia*, the other one, as might be expected, *critical dystopia*. Moylan is again credited with the invention of the former of these, whereas Sargent derived the latter. However, both of these expressions aim at a similar meaning in the sense that their common objective is to trace the transformation of the original genres. As the works of both utopia and dystopia became popular in the second half of the 20th century, their authors and critics started to acknowledge the limitations of these genres, a realization that they critically reflected in their own works. The term *critical utopia* was introduced in Moylan's *Demand the Impossible* as a literary concept whose "central concern is the awareness of the limitations of the utopian tradition, so that these texts reject utopia as a blueprint while preserving it as a dream."²² The critical alternative allows for a more direct articulation of the social change between the real and the textual world as well as a larger "focus on the continuing presence of difference and imperfection within utopian society

²² Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (New York: Methuen, 1986) 10.

itself,” which renders “more recognizable and dynamic alternatives.”²³ In a similar way, critical dystopias interrogate both society and the dystopian genre as such. They do not only criticize the present system, but also try to find ways to transform it. It is not appropriate, however, to think of critical utopia and dystopia as completely new genres; instead they should be perceived as reworkings of the original genres, whose limitations became especially visible in the political and social context of the second half of the twentieth century. Interestingly enough, both of these generic transformations were especially popular among the female writers of that period.

1.3 Historical Development of the Utopian Trends in Literature

Considering the written tradition of almost any historical age, there was always the tendency to deviate from the everyday reality. Even though there are as many reasons for this deviation as there are authors, the one thing they all have in common is the desire to create new things, characters or even the whole worlds. After all, writing is always the process of the imagination, and whenever authors set to write anything, either meant as realistic or not, they are already confined within the bounds of their own imaginative capacity. In this sense, it might be said that the transformative features of SF are inherent in literature itself, and that the utopian tendency towards invention has always, in one way or another, been present, if not in literature as such, then at least in fiction of any kind. However, it is universally understood that the official beginning of utopian literature as a separate genre came in the year 1516 – the publication of Thomas More’s *Utopia*, which, at the same time, introduced the term itself. Moylan sees this novel as a pioneer work of

²³ Moylan, Demand 11.

the specific western tradition of utopianism, which, according to him, leads up to the critical utopias of the twentieth century.²⁴

Ever since More's influential work in the sixteenth century, the literary utopia has always flourished mostly in times of significant political changes or social instability. As Moylan explains, "this is not to say that utopias are written only in times of crisis, but the form itself is suited to the sort of discourse which considers both what is and what is not yet achieved."²⁵ The process of transformation into the different world or society thus allows both the author and the reader to reflect critically on their own society in the concrete historical moment. The nature of these projected places is therefore subject to contemporary conventions, and some general tendencies can be traced in every age. The ancient visionaries, for instance, located their alternative spaces at the beginning or end of time. Thomas More, on the other hand, established the western tradition by writing at the onset of capitalism and the discovery of the New World, a fact that was reflected in his work and those of the subsequent authors, who projected their dream societies into other, not yet discovered, parts of the globe. It was not until the 1890s that the general fashion in literary utopia took as its objective the historical future, which is a tendency that has prevailed until today.

The turn of the century was an important stage in the development of literary utopia. The general rise of urbanization, self-awareness and concern for the basic human rights allowed for a great variety of social movements as alternatives to the dominant system. Each of these alternatives, as well as any other political or social opinion, had at its base a utopian vision. People began to dream of better times, which, as opposed to the previous visions, were situated in the future. The tense political atmosphere before the outbreak of the First World War thus became a perfect environment for the creation of

²⁴ Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*, ed. Raffaella Baccolini, Ralahine Utopian Studies edition (Oxford: Peter Lang AG, 2014) 1.

²⁵ Moylan, *Demand* (Ralahine) 3.

literary utopias. Although the general mood at that time was still rather optimistic, the beginning of the twentieth century witnessed the first instances of pessimism that was to be enhanced later by the tragic outcomes of the two world wars and other horrors of the contemporary world. Apart from the utopian dreaming of better times, the first dystopian works emerged to foreshadow the bleak realities of totalitarian political systems to come, and the limitations these systems will impose on the individual freedom, which is a theme that would be reappearing in the dystopian fiction ever since.

The shock of the First World War brought about a deep sense of pessimism, which caused the dystopian turn to dominate the first half of the twentieth century. The prophetic novels of George Orwell and Aldous Huxley became the symbols of this age. Even though these works are often seen as utterly pessimistic in the sense that they offer no escape for their protagonists, both of them maintain at least a hint at the utopian hope by looking beyond the textual world and thus serving as warnings to humanity. In this way, these authors still remained within the scope of utopian literature, as opposed to others, who attacked the concept of utopia as such. According to Moylan, the targets of contemporary literature included “the hegemonic system of capital, the oppositional project of the Left, and the premises and processes of Utopia itself.”²⁶ The whole idea of social dreaming became so unfavourable to certain authors, that they opted for anti-utopias instead and thus derived a genre that offers no hope at all.

The pessimistic mood in literature prevailed until the second half of the twentieth century, when the general attention turned back towards utopia. The 1960s and 1970s were characterized in terms of the post-scarcity economy, which offered an impulse to what later became known as the New Wave SF. However, people did not let themselves be easily deceived by the new utopian visions, and the general view remained sceptical. In literature,

²⁶ Moylan, *Scraps* 123.

a new possibility emerged that maintained the utopian hope, and, at the same time, acknowledge the limitations of that genre, by introducing what Moylan later designated as the *critical utopia*. This new turn in the utopian literature became associated especially with the works of Ursula Le Guin and Samuel R. Delany, both of whom were not afraid to include features of other genres in their works, thus participating in the process that Raffaella Baccolini calls 'genre blurring'.

The rest of the century was largely in terms of experimental writing. The rising focus on technological development brought about the genre of cyberpunk, which juxtaposed the technological advance with social instability and the subsequent crisis of the established order. Also, the long-awaited year of Orwell's formidable vision as formed in his novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* produced several reworkings and critical responses to this famous work, which revived the general interest in dystopian literature. However, instead of simply revealing the shortcomings of the contemporary political systems, the dystopian works began to suggest the causes of these failures and thus transformed the genre into the critical dystopia.

The end of the twentieth century is also where most of the prominent critical works concerning dystopian fiction come to an end. As for the further development, it will be discussed in the last chapter of this study, which attempts to investigate the themes of utopian literature at the turn of the twenty-first century and to speculate upon the directions this genre may be moving in hereafter.

Chapter 2 – Traditional Themes in Dystopian Fiction

As explained above, the political instability of the twentieth century had a special effect on the literature of that period. It is no wonder that this age produced novels considered by many as the most depressing works of literature ever written. According to Edward James, “the ability of the writer to imagine a better place in which to live died in the course of the twentieth century, extinguished by the horrors of total war, of genocide and of totalitarianism.”¹ As a result, a general fear presided over the population, which was reflected in the form of the dystopian impulse in literature. In this way, a number of traditional themes have emerged that represented the anxieties of the contemporary society. The most prominent of these included the suppression of language and literature, restrictions on privacy and sexuality, and the limitations of individual freedom for the benefit of social stability. By describing these subjects, the texts revealed the faults of the contemporary political systems and in this way criticized their aims and strategies. Whereas some of the authors exaggerated the current tendencies in order to create their alternative worlds, others built their visions around the exact opposites to show that neither extreme was desirable. Huxley’s novel is the example of the latter method: “Ours [the inhabitants’ of the second quarter of the twentieth century A.D.] was a nightmare of too little order; theirs, in the seventh century A.F., of too much.”² This chapter is going to discuss the traditional themes of dystopian fiction as they were portrayed in George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, the two novels that, along with Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We*, “came to typify the ‘classical’ or canonical form of this inverted subgenre of utopia.”³

¹Edward James, “Utopias and anti-utopias,” *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, eds. (Cambridge: CUP, 2003) 219.

² Huxley, *Revisited* 3.

³ Moylan, *Scraps* 121.

2.1 Language, Literature, and Memory

Apart from the depression and grim atmosphere, the twentieth century had a lot to offer on the bright side. Industrialization and great advancement in technology brought about many inventions that made everyday life easier and more enjoyable than ever before. As Douglas Kellner claimed, even though Orwell in his own time could not yet experience the largest expansion of the communication media, the omnipresent “telescreen” of his novel already “anticipated the centrality of television in the home.”⁴ Sooner or later, every middle-class family became equipped with TV and/or radio, and world was practically overflowed with words and information. However, the sudden exposure of language made it especially vulnerable to abuse by the power structures, as the dissemination of information became a crucial part of political propaganda. More importantly, ordinary people were often unaware of this defect of their favourite media, and thus they were left completely defenceless against its force. In this sense, language, media, and mass culture became probably the most powerful instruments of power, especially for the dominant systems. For this reason, dystopian fiction often took language as one of its main concerns and reflected critically on its frailty, as will be confirmed by both *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Brave New World*, even though each of these works takes a different approach to the discussion of the chosen motives.

Language is not only among the principal themes of the dystopian novel, but also its main instrument and strategy. After all, it is through language that the textual world is mediated to the reader, and, just as the characters in the story are under influence of the fictional ruling class, the reader is at the mercy of the narrative voice, which dictates exactly how the text is to be read and what kind of stance is the reader to take within the

⁴ Douglas Kellner, “From *1984* to *One-Dimensional Man*: Critical Reflections on Orwell and Marcuse,” *Illuminations*, <<http://www.uta.edu/huma/illuminations/kell13.htm>>, 4 Mar. 2016.

narrative. In other words, the reader is unconsciously driven to form opinions that the author wants him to form, in the same manner as the antagonists of the story force their subjects into obedience. It is for this purpose that the classical dystopian narrative is mediated through an individual with a strong sense of alienation from the rest of the society – a character that the reader is supposed to identify with and share his views and opinions.

The importance of language as a main textual strategy becomes obvious as early as on the first pages of the novel, since it uses familiar terms to describe an unfamiliar world. Instead of explaining every object and situation that divert from the common expectations, the narrator passes over these as if they were parts of the everyday life, which, of course, they are in the textual world. As opposed to the traditional eutopian narrative, the dystopian reality offers no escape to the protagonist, not even anything to compare his situation with. This comparison is left to the reader himself, who is supposed to view the projected society as considerably worse than his own.⁵ As Baccolini claims, the protagonist often does not even have the privilege of using language as it would be found necessary, and “when s/he does, it means nothing, words having been reduced to a propaganda tool.”⁶ This claim brings back the notion of language as a main theme of the dystopian text, since it continues to occupy the central position of the text, as it assumes a significant role in the conflict between the protagonist and the system. In Moylan’s terms: “throughout the history of dystopian fiction, the conflict of the text has often turned on the control of language.”⁷

Before turning for evidence to the novels of George Orwell and Aldous Huxley, the opinions of these authors as concerning language shall be disclosed, as displayed in their

⁵ See the definition of ‘dystopia or negative utopia’ in Sargent’s “The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited”

⁶ Raffaella Baccolini, “‘It’s Not in the Womb the Damage is Done’: Memory, Desire, and the Construction of Gender in Katharine Burdekin’s *Swastika Night*,” *Le trasformazioni del narrare*, E. Siciliani, et al., eds. (Fasano: Schena, 1995) 295.

⁷ Moylan, *Scraps* 148.

non-fictional works. In his famous essay “Politics and the English Language,” Orwell discusses the state of contemporary English, and to what extent it is corrupted by its use and misuse. For the purposes of this thesis, his elaboration is of considerable importance, since it explains many features of language that Orwell three years later incorporated in his creation of Newspeak – the political language in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. One of Orwell’s main arguments in this critical piece is built around the claim that “the decline of language must ultimately have political and economic causes.”⁸ As he further argues, the cause-and-effect process of corruption of the English language can be easily reversed, and, in the next stage, the effect becomes the cause. In other words, the wrong and foolish thoughts that people often cultivate in their minds affect the mode in which they express themselves, and the language thus harmed then affects their thoughts back, until the whole nation ends up in a vicious circle of language corruption. Towards the end of his essay, Orwell does offer several solutions how to stop, or at least slow down, this endless process; but rather than these suggestions, the following analyses focuses on the way language corruption is demonstrated in his novel.

The scientists and Party members of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are undoubtedly well aware of the cause-and-effect mechanism, in which language affects thoughts and vice versa. They even try to use it in their advantage by subverting the process; instead of language corruption they aim for what they perceive as language improvement. However, the purpose of this procedure is not so much to refine the language itself, but rather to purify the thoughts of the speakers, turning them into more submissive, and thus better, citizens. The idea behind this objective is that people can only think in terms of what their language offers them, and once an idea is deleted from the language, it becomes unthinkable and thus also impracticable. To achieve this, a department of lexicographers is

⁸ George Orwell, “Politics and the English Language,” *All Art is Propaganda*, George Packer, eds. (New York: Mariner Books, 2009) 270.

established, whose job it is to gradually eliminate all the words that might provoke bad ideas in people and eventually to purify Newspeak so that any crime, or even the thought of it, against the Party becomes impossible. As Winston's friend, lexicographer Syme, explains: "Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it."⁹ In this way, the Party is to become untouchable, as no one can ever even think about revolting against it. According to Robert Philmus, the simplification of language is directed towards simplification of thoughts as such, or, in his own words, "the goal of Newspeak is to get rid of higher thought-processes altogether."¹⁰

Another important view of language, which Orwell considered in his essay, is that it often serves as "an instrument which we shape for our own purposes."¹¹ This fact is especially visible in politics, where the English language falls victim to the objective of making "lies sound truthful and murder respectable."¹² The textual world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a great example of this defect, since the Party, Big Brother, and practically the whole world are based on lies. More importantly, the Party even forces its subjects to create these lies, just as Winston does in his job, and thus the citizens participate in the creation of illusion of a great state by lying to themselves. By lying, in this case, I mean the process of rewriting texts from the past so that they suit the Party's prospects and thus add to its invincibility. Paradoxically, the department responsible for this process belongs among the many branches of the 'Ministry of Truth'. What the Party aims for is through language to alternate the history itself and in this way to become the masters of it. As Hitchens pointed out in his analysis of Orwell's fiction, this strategy is especially

⁹ George Orwell, *1984* (London: Penguin Books, 2008) 55. All future page references will be to this edition and will be included in parenthesis in the text.

¹⁰ Robert M. Philmus, *Visions and Re-Visions: (Re)Constructing Science Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005) 24.

¹¹ Orwell, *Politics* 270.

¹² Orwell, *Politics* 286.

frightening, because “the very concept of objective truth is fading out of the world.”¹³ The following passage illustrates the way in which the truth ceases to represent what is objectively valid and instead takes up the shape of what most people believe to be true:

The Party said that Oceania had never been in alliance with Eurasia. He, Winston Smith, knew that Oceania had been in alliance with Eurasia as short a time as four years ago. But where did that knowledge exist? Only in his own consciousness, which in any case must soon be annihilated. And if all others accepted the lie which the Party imposed – if all records told the same tale – then the lie passed into history and became truth. (37)

However, merely controlling the history is not enough for the Party. What they wish to achieve is to become the masters of the past, present and future as well, as their slogan goes: “Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past” (37). And, by the novel’s resolution, it seems they have already achieved that. Since there is no one left to oppose the Party, its future is secured in the same way as is their present and past.

This is the part where memory becomes crucial. In the dystopian worlds such as that of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, where the past is suppressed and language reduced to a number of basic terms, people usually need to depend on their memory in order to preserve the glimpses of yesterday and thus retain at least the slightest sense of opposition, that is, in their mind. However, as the Party takes over the past, it seems to conquer the human mind as well, until all that remains is the present itself: “He [Winston] tried to squeeze out some childhood memory that should tell him whether London had always been quite like this. [...] But it was no use, he could not remember: nothing remained of his childhood” (5). According to Moylan, “with the past suppressed and the present reduced to the

¹³ Hitchens 50.

empirica of daily life, dystopian subjects usually lose all recollection of the way things were before the new order,” but, since memory seems to be interconnected with language in a significant way, “by regaining language they also recover the ability to draw on the alternative truths of the past and ‘speak back’ to hegemonic power” [emphasis in the original].¹⁴ In this way, instead of looking for the opportunities of the bright future, Winston chooses the past as the source of his hopes, or as Baccolini noted: “journeying to the past through memory often coincides with the realization that what is gone represented a better place and time.”¹⁵ It turns out that the only ones, whose memory is not behind the veil of oblivion, are the proles, as can be perceived from the dialogue with the old barman, who, as opposed to the members of the Party, still uses the non-metric units in his speech: “Litre and half litre – that’s all we serve” (91). After all, as Winston said, “if there is hope, it lies in the proles” (72).

Although several similarities can be traced between Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Huxley’s *Brave New World*, the latter seems to be taking rather different approach in the building strategies of the fictional world. The first and the most obvious contrast between these two texts lies in the overall atmosphere they create. As opposed to the nightmare world of the Party and Big Brother, where the technological progress produces even gloomier version of London than ever before, the London of Huxley’s vision really lives up to the novel’s name, at the first sight at least. *Brave New World* thus often leaves the reader at a loss as to whether the text should be considered as eutopian or dystopian. After all, the inhabitants seem to be perfectly complacent with their situation, with two little exceptions of the protagonist himself, of course, and ‘the Savage’. Furthermore, if the proles in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are left out, the members of the Party are none the less

¹⁴ Moylan, *Scraps* 149.

¹⁵ Raffaella Baccolini, “Journeying through the Dystopian Genre: Memory and Imagination in Burdekin, Orwell, Atwood, and Piercy,” *Viaggi in utopia*, Vita Fortunati and Nadia Minerva, eds. (Ravenna: Longo, 1996) 345.

satisfied with their lives, even though it might seem incomprehensible for the reader. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that the government in *Brave New World* is much more benevolent than the Party in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which will be illustrate on its treatment of language.

It is true that the motif of word reduction appears in Huxley's novel as well, but with completely different causes. Words tend to disappear from the language, because there is no longer any use for them, and the government or the 'World Controllers' do not actually play any part in this process at all. It is not that the words are deliberately deleted as a part of some larger project; rather the concepts behind these words lose their meanings as the world moves towards the future. Therefore, *Brave New World* demonstrates the inverted process of that which is taking place in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* – in the latter, words are deleted in order to abolish the ideas behind them; in the former, words disappear as their referents cease to exist, or they are reduced into mere swear-words. Examples of these include expressions such as "birth," or "parent," concepts that in the course of the history became obsolete, as illustrated in the following passage:

‘And “parent”?’ questioned the D.H.C.

There was an uneasy silence. Several of the boys blushed. They had not yet learned to draw the significant but often very fine distinction between smut and pure science. One, at last, had the courage to raise a hand.

‘Human beings used to be...’ he hesitated; the blood rushed to his cheeks.
‘Well, they used to be viviparous.’

‘Quite right.’ The Director nodded approvingly.

‘And when the babies were decanted...’

‘”Born,”’ came the correction.

‘Well, then they were the parents – I mean, not the babies, of course; the other ones.’ The poor boy was overwhelmed with confusion.¹⁶

It is not only the words that become lost in the new world; even whole languages are disregarded, as for example Polish, French or German – the major European languages of the present age.

Some suppression of the past is also taking place in the *Brave New World*, and this time, the government actively participates in this process by creating “a campaign against the Past” (50). The motives behind this suppression are not only to secure the power for the ruling class, but also to get rid of the remnants of the old world, which is earnestly believed to be bad and harmful for the inhabitants themselves, not just the government. The agenda of this campaign involves: “closing of museums, the blowing up of historical monuments, and the suppression of all books published before A.F. 150” (50-51). In this sense, literature is as undesirable as history. To this, the Director adds: “There were some things called the pyramids, for example. And a man called Shakespeare. You’ve never heard of them, of course” (51). Art as such has no place in the ‘World State’, where any kind of entertainment serves only for the purpose of distraction, or in Huxley’s own terms, “of preventing people from paying too much attention to the realities of the social and political situation.”¹⁷ The question of art and literature is of great concern for the Savage visiting the new world, and its absence is the source of his great disappointment:

‘Do they read Shakespeare?’ asked the Savage as they walked, on their way to the Biochemical Laboratories, past the School Library.

‘Certainly not,’ said the Head Mistress, blushing.

¹⁶ Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (London: Granada Publishing Limited, 1982) 30. All future page references will be to this edition and will be included in parenthesis in the text.

¹⁷ Huxley, *Revisited* 48.

‘Our library,’ said Dr Gaffney, ‘contains only books of reference. If your young people need distraction, they can get it at the feelies. We don’t encourage them to indulge in any solitary amusements.’ (133)

Thus, the main concern of the World Controllers is to keep their subjects together, satisfied, and as little involved in any larger prospects as possible. Orwell, on the other hand, does allow his subjects at least some comfort in reading, watching TVs, and other kinds of “solitary amusements.” There is even a whole department devoted to the production of books and TV shows. However, all of these are produced by the Party-programmed machines, and therefore a little diversity in terms of their themes and subjects can be expected from these.

In this section, it has been discovered that language can serve as a means of manipulation in several different ways. However, the most horrific visions of future worlds are not concerned merely with the process of language corruption; they also involve literature and memory as the sources of knowledge about the past. In order to the works of art as well as the minds of people untouched, a special protection of the language becomes necessary in the first place.

2.2 Social Relations and Sexuality

The position of an individual within the society is another essential question to consider when building up the alternative worlds of dystopian fiction. Whereas some authors decide to exclude the individual completely from the rest of the society, others opt for the alternative of including him as much as possible within the mass. Both of these strategies have some pros and cons. By separating one from the rest, the government prevents the

possibility of people getting together in order to revolt against the regime. In addition, people, when alone, seem much more insecure and unsure of their own abilities than they are within the crowd. On the other hand, too much individuality never does any good, since a solitary person tends to think a great deal more about his/her situation, which might lead to the production of undesirable thoughts. Also, for the leader it is much easier to talk to a crowd than to separate individuals, who stand outside of the realm of shared emotions. With Orwell and Huxley, each represents one of these oppositional strategies.

The motif of social interactions has already been hinted at in the previous section, where it has been witnessed that the government of the Brave New World was generally encouraging people to participate in the social form of entertainment in preference to “any solitary amusements” (133). This might be exactly for the sake of manipulation as suggested by Huxley’s claim that “assembled in a crowd, people lose their powers of reasoning and their capacity for moral choice.”¹⁸ What he is trying to say is that crowds, as opposed to individuals or organized groups, are chaotic, divided in opinion, and incapable of any unified thought or action, and their suggestibility is thus increased. After all, it is always easier and more secure to identify with others and their opinions than to invent your own and stand alone at the edge of society. The Party of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, on the other hand, discourages people from any kind of social gatherings apart from the ‘Two Minutes Hate’ – a social event whose objective was to celebrate Big Brother and reprove the state’s enemies, no matter who these currently were. Other than that, it is generally seen as undesirable for people to gather for any other purpose than reproduction. Of course, if you love Big Brother as you are supposed to do, you never have to fear loneliness, because Big Brother is everywhere, watching you from the omnipresent telescreens, making sure you are doing just the right thing. As it happens, the protagonist

¹⁸ Huxley, *Revisited* 55.

does feel lonely, and he does yearn for other people more than for Big Brother. Winston's desire, however, is much more ideological than physical. What he wants is a person that would share his opposition towards the Party. But in the society where even your own thoughts, if oppositional, are considered a crime, it is almost impossible to find likeminded person who would be at the same time brave enough to express his/her thoughts to you: "He [Winston] was alone. The Past was dead, the future was unimaginable. What certainty had he that a single human creature now living was on his side?" (28–29) And yet, Winston manages to find a person who shares his resistance towards the ruling class. But, as will become clear later in this section, their motivations for this struggle are utterly different.

In connection with the overall theme of this section, two major subjects will be discussed – the role of family and sexuality in the chosen novels. With the latter of these, Huxley and Orwell represent the oppositional views. In the case of the former, both authors agreed on its undesirability in the dystopian society, but each of them processed this view in a different way. Whereas in *Brave New World* the concept of family is seen as obsolete and therefore no longer existent, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* some families can still be found, even though their sole purpose is to reproduce. Once this task is done, the family is turned into the instrument of power, or disintegrates:

The family could not actually be abolished, and, indeed, people were encouraged to be fond of their children, in almost the old-fashioned way. The children, on the other hand, were systematically turned against their parents and taught to spy on them and report their deviations. The family had become in effect an extension of the Thought Police. It was a device by means of which everyone could be surrounded night and day by informers who knew him intimately. (140)

Even Winston himself had once the privilege of experiencing marriage, but from the Party's point of view it was seen as unsuccessful, and therefore it did not last long. His wife Katharine is a perfect example of the Party woman and she married Winston only for the sake of having children with him. Even though they used to have sex regularly, she did not find any pleasure in it, because she considers the act a mere duty to the Party of reproducing the human race. When this was proved as impossible for some reason, Katharine no longer found any reason for staying with Winston and left him. This fact only deepened Winston's anxiety about the family institution, the view of which had been already very fragile in him, as can be seen from the scattered memories of his childhood. In fact, the only clear recollection he has of his family is linked to "that precious little morsel of chocolate" (170), which the young Winston stole from his dying baby sister. After this childish incident, he never saw his family again, even though the thought of them keeps haunting Winston in his dreams. There is no explanation as to what actually happened with his family, only it is revealed in one of his dreams that "in some way the lives of his mother and his sister had been sacrificed to his own" (32).

As opposed to the repressed desires for family in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the inhabitants of the World State have neither the desire, nor any personal experience with the family life as such. The mere thought of being bound to other people causes them discomfort. Most of the young people are even unfamiliar with words such as 'mother,' 'father' or 'home.'

'Just try to realize it,' he said, and his voice sent a strange thrill quivering along their diaphragms. 'Try to realize what it was like to have a viviparous mother.'

That smutty word again. But none of them dreamed, this time, of smiling.

'Try to imagine what "living with one's family" meant.'

They tried; but obviously without the smallest success.

‘And do you know what a “home” was?’

The shook their heads. (39)

Of course, the level of intimacy among the people in Huxley’s novel is increased to such an extent that there is no need for any closer relations anymore. The concept of motherhood and fatherhood is no longer needed, when the reproduction of human kind becomes artificial, and children are brought up all together at places especially designed for this purpose. In this sense, the production of people is in no way different from the production of any other commodity – making children has become business as any other. Frightening as this vision might be, it definitely has its advantages. As shall be seen in the next section of this chapter, it is a general characteristic of the dystopian society to prefer stability to individuality. If order is imposed upon reproduction, the ideal number of people can be easily maintained in proportion to available resources and for other conditions on the planet. After all, one of Huxley’s most prominent arguments in *Brave New World Revisited* asserts that “overpopulation and the accelerating increase of human numbers” form “the shortest and broadest road to the nightmare of Brave New World.”¹⁹

Another interpretation explains the abolition of parenthood in connection to the fear of the Oedipus complex. As Brad Buchanan claims: “By controlling all aspects of a child’s birth and upbringing, and by keeping adults in a condition of infantile dependency on a larger social body, Huxley’s imaginary state has taken over the role of parent and robbed the child of his or her Oedipal potentialities.”²⁰ This argument is further supported by the fact that the term ‘Oedipus complex’ was coined by Sigmund Freud, who served as an inspiration for creating the character of Henry Ford – the greatest thinker and founder of the World State. Their names even get confused within the text: “Our Ford – or Our Freud,

¹⁹ Huxley, *Revisited* 25.

²⁰ Brad Buchanan, “Oedipus in Dystopia: Freud and Lawrence in Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 25.3/4 (2002): 76, JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3831855>>, 22 Apr. 2016.

as, for some inscrutable reason, he chose to call himself whenever he spoke of psychological matters – Our Freud had been the first to reveal the appalling dangers of family life” (41). Even though it is not mentioned explicitly, incest undoubtedly is one of these dangers, and the fear of it contributed towards the decision to abolish family altogether.

According to Huxley himself, the abolition of the family institution makes it possible to legalize “a degree of sexual freedom that practically guarantees the World State against any form of destructive (or creative) emotional tension.”²¹ As opposed to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the role of sex here is completely devoid of any reproductive function. Nor does it have anything to do with love, which had disappeared along with the abolition of family and other ties. As John Attarian claims, “love is frequently replaced by dystopia’s obsessive, casual sex.”²² As the hypnopaedic proverb goes, “everyone belongs to everyone else” (42), therefore love would only be an obstacle for the otherwise unrestricted possibilities of possession and experience. Words such as ‘monogamy’ or ‘romance’ have disappeared from the language with the rest of the useless phrases and empty expressions. For the inhabitants, sex is carried out merely for the sake of pleasure and amusement, and the World Controllers encourage it in order to divert their subjects’ attention from the more serious issues of the state, which are best dealt with by the government alone.

Orwell completely inverts this view – in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, sex is devoid of any sense of pleasure or enjoyment, and its single objective is to proliferate. The pure act without the intention of pregnancy is even considered to be a crime, and promiscuity is unforgivable. However, this kind of behaviour is not very often among the Party members, for whom sex never embodied any pleasurable act and therefore no need to violate the law. This state is, of course, a result of the Party’s intention, whose aim “was not merely to

²¹ Huxley, Revisited 34.

²² John Attarian, “*Brave New World* and the Flight from God,” *Bloom’s Modern Critical Views: Aldous Huxley*, Harold Bloom, eds. (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003): 22.

prevent men and women from forming loyalties which it might not be able to control. Its real, undeclared purpose was to remove all pleasure from the sexual act” (68). When Winston finally gets the chance of taking possession of Julia’s body, all he can feel is a sense of “sheer incredulity” (126). As Michael Clune claims, “since the prohibition on the erotic is a species of a more general prohibition on the perception of the surface, the new perceptions enabled by the erotic encounter tend to drown out sexual desire itself.”²³ Nevertheless, if pleasure is not Winston’s motivation for breaking the law and exposing himself to the risk of that violation, why does he choose to do it in the first place? And why with Julia?

According to Daphne Patai, “Winston sees his sexual relationship with Julia, which she initiates, as a political act, a blow against the Party. It is thus made to serve a political purpose – or, in other terms, it is corrupted by the Party’s all pervasive control.”²⁴ Winston himself acknowledges the fact that he is not in love with Julia. After all, such feeling as love is hardly possible in a society constantly driven by fear: “you could not have pure love or pure lust nowadays. No emotion was pure, because everything was mixed up with fear and hatred. Their embrace had been a battle, the climax a victory” (133). It is not only that Winston does not love Julia; he hates her. He hates her for her obvious attractiveness, which at first seems unattainable, and, when yet attained, unwanted. Coming back to Patai’s interpretation, she sees the real object of Winston’s attraction in the character of O’Brien. By this attraction she does not mean any physical desire, but rather an ideological one. “The smallest expression of interest from O’Brien makes Winston blossom into a conspirator, in full defiance of all common sense and caution.”²⁵ Julia, on the other hand, can never occupy this role, because her motivations are purely physical. She is not the least

²³ Michael Clune, “Orwell and the Obvious,” *Representations* 107.1 (2009): 37, JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/rep.2009.107.1.30>>, 22 Apr. 2016.

²⁴ Daphne Patai, “Gamesmanship and Androcentrism in Orwell’s *1984*,” *PMLA* 97.5 (1982): 860, JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/462176>>, 22 Apr. 2016.

²⁵ Patai 860.

interested in the political side of their sexual act and continues to participate in it only for the sake of pleasure. She even falls asleep during the reading of the forbidden manuscript.²⁶ Edward Quinn sees Julia's only importance within the story in the way she serves "as the vehicle for the theme of sexual politics."²⁷ Quinn later reveals the fact that the character of Julia is thought to be inspired by Orwell's second wife, Sonia Brownell, who herself was, before marrying Orwell, a kind of sexual rebel fighting her way against the repressive methods of her Catholic boarding school.²⁸

There is one last point I would like to make before moving to the next section – the importance of dress code in establishing the social relations. Whereas *Brave New World* offers a great variety of colourful clothing, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* requires its inhabitants to dress up in the same blue overalls, day after day, no matter what kind of background they are coming from or where their place is on the social scale. In the former, the particular colour signifies which caste a person belongs to, and in this way the dress serves to distinguish among the individual social classes. The latter unifies all people under one class, making the only necessary distinctions between the particular jobs they are to perform. However, there are no alterations between the requirements of the male versus female body. As Nadia Khouri pointed out, "no distinction of dress is permissible, and differences between the sexes have been drastically altered by uniformity of dress and appearance."²⁹ For Winston, hiding the female body in the shapeless uniform only adds to the suppression of his sexual desire.

²⁶ In his close examination of the female characters of Orwell's prose, Christopher Hitchens discovered a general dullness of character and a lack of intellectual or reflective capacity. As opposed to the male protagonists, the women are usually, with the exception of Julia herself, also grasping and conformist (as for example Mollie in the *Animal Farm*). Hitchens attributed this fact to the possibility of Orwell being a homosexual. See *Orwell's Victory*, 103-110.

²⁷ Edward Quinn, *Critical Companion to George Orwell: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work* (New York: Facts on File, 2009) 250.

²⁸ Quinn 257.

²⁹ Nadia Khouri, "Reaction and Nihilism: The Political Genealogy of Orwell's 1984," *Science Fiction Studies* 12.2 (1985): 139, JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4239680>>, 22 Apr. 2016.

This section outlined several important differences between the two novels in terms of their depiction of social relations and sexuality. The following section will hopefully clarify some of the motivations for the choice of these strategies and add more distinctions, especially in the field of social stability and individual freedom.

2.3 Freedom versus Stability

The most prominent difference, one might argue, between the textual world of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Huxley's *Brave New World* is in the way the fictional governments impose power on their subjects and maintain obedience. This difference is probably best described in terms of positive versus negative motivation, or, as Huxley explained it in his critical revision of the novel, published thirty years after the original version:

The society described in *1984* is a society controlled almost exclusively by punishment and the fear of punishment. In the imaginary world of my fables, punishment is infrequent and generally mild. The nearly perfect control exercised by the government is achieved by systematic reinforcement of desirable behaviour, by many kinds of nearly non-violent manipulation, both physical and psychological, and by genetic standardization.³⁰

In the previous section, this strategy was witnessed in practice as performed on the question of social interactions and sexual behaviour. Whereas the Party discourages people from any public gatherings and sex is thus generally perceived as undesirable, the World State cultivates the tendency to form close intimacies among its inhabitants from the

³⁰ Huxley, Revisited 5.

earliest childhood. In this section, the focus will not be on the particular realizations of the opposite strategies, but rather on the outcomes they are supposed to generate.

It might be interesting to note that, even though Orwell and Huxley often uses different, or even contradictory, methods in creating their alternative worlds, they generally aim for the same thing. Both of them wish to construct a world that is, as opposed to the real one, organized in a perfect structure, with every single person performing the role that was assigned to him, and no exceptions. In other words, they are trying to transform the chaotic human society into a flawless ant colony. However unrealizable this requirement might be, it is only natural for the leader to desire a perfect system: “The wish to impose order upon confusion, to bring harmony out of dissonance and unity out of multiplicity, is a kind of intellectual instinct, a primary and fundamental urge of the mind.”³¹ Of course, such perfect societies would bring several advantages to the chaotic world, but the price that would have to be paid in order to achieve this state is absolutely unthinkable. If any superb order were ever to be successful and favourable to everyone, each person would have to possess exactly the same personality as the rest, with identical opinions and views about basically everything. What is most horrific about the alternative worlds of dystopian fiction is their extremity in preferring one idea to all others and the subsequent suppression of freedom and individuality – the basic concepts of a democratic society.

This theme is not exclusive to the works of dystopian fiction, and to some degree it is also common in their literary opposites, eutopias. In fact, the whole concept of an ideal society is based exactly on this perfection in terms of structure and order. It is just that with the eutopian text, the projected society is perceived as desirable, whereas the dystopian one as dreadful. According to Edward James, it was precisely for the sake of this feature that the eutopian works became criticized in the twentieth century and consequently replaced

³¹ Huxley, Revisited 29.

by those of dystopia. It was argued that “many such utopias would turn out to be ‘dystopias’, that is, oppressive societies, either because of the tyranny of the ‘perfect’ system over the will of the individual, or because of the difficulty of stopping individuals or elites from imposing authority over the majority.”³² Instead of perfection and static society, utopian literature started to aim for continued struggle and progress. It might be for this reason that Sargent consciously avoided the usage of the adjective ‘perfect’ in his definitions of eutopian or dystopian writing. Instead, he described them as either better or worse than the reader’s reality. Suvin also resolved this situation in an astute way by describing utopian as “the verbal construction of a particular quasi-human community where socio-political institutions, norms, and individual relationships are organized according to a *more perfect* principle that in the author’s community” [emphasis added].³³ With the revival of utopian writing in the 1960s and 70s, and the emergence of critical utopias, the novels no longer pursued an image of perfect society, but rather focused “on the continuing presence of difference and imperfection within utopian society itself and thus render[ed] more recognizable and dynamic alternatives.”³⁴

Coming back to Orwell and Huxley, the critique of ‘perfect’ society and the extreme methods used in order to achieve this state is more than evident in their works. It is widely perceived today that totalitarianism and limited freedom were among Orwell’s greatest enemies. According to Hitchens, the two things that Orwell valued the most were liberty and equality.³⁵ Even though he acknowledged the fact that these two were not natural allies, he perceived them as the ultimate objects every government should be aiming for. With this value at heart, he set to write *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to show the drastic results of society driven by precisely the opposite values: “The new movements

³² James 220.

³³ Suvin 49.

³⁴ Moylan, Demand 11.

³⁵ Hitchens 58.

which appeared in the middle years of the century [...] had the conscious aim of perpetuating unfreedom and inequality. The purpose of all of them was to arrest progress and freeze history at a chosen moment” (211–212). Since the novel’s original title was to be ‘The Last Man in Europe,’ it might be assumed that Winston is the only character in the book who is thought of as possessing the human instinct for freedom. Hitchens described the society of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as that of North Korea, where “individual life is absolutely pointless”, and “everything that is not absolutely compulsory is absolutely forbidden.”³⁶ The Party defends itself by arguing that their ultimate aim is the happiness of its subjects, and that freedom has to be sacrificed in order for the people to be happy:

That the Party did not seek power for its own ends, but only for the good of the majority. That it sought power because men in the mass were frail cowardly creatures who could not endure liberty or face the truth, and must be ruled over and systematically deceived by others who were stronger than themselves. That the choice for mankind lay between freedom and happiness, and that, for the great bulk of mankind, happiness was better. (275)

Of course, in modern democratic societies, happiness came to be perceived as a part of that freedom to decide for oneself what is deemed to be the best, even though it might not always be the best for society as such.

Already in his time, Orwell saw through the corrupted side of human nature, and he knew what lied behind the lust for power – lust for even more power. As he argued: “Socialism necessarily gives power to an inner ring of bureaucrats, who in almost every case will be men who want power for its own sake and will stick at nothing in order to retain it” (qtd. in Hitchens 59). Within *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Patrick Reilly found this claim to be reflected in O’Brian’s “honest totalitarianism based on de Sade, power as an

³⁶ Hitchens 54.

end, exercised for its own sake,”³⁷ or in O’Brian’s own words: “‘We are the priests of power,’ he said. ‘God is power’” (276). What Orwell suggested as a cure for the centralization of power in contemporary Britain was that planned economy should be disregarded and free competition allowed for instead. Shortly before his death he explained the real purpose of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as follows: “My recent novel is not intended as an attack on socialism or on the British Labour Party (of which I am supporter) but shows the perversions to which a centralized economy is liable” (qtd. in Hitchens 61). In this regard, he agreed with Huxley, who also came to criticize the current economic situation when he bitterly acknowledged that “democracy can hardly be expected to flourish in societies where political and economic power is being progressively concentrated and centralized.”³⁸ In *Brave New World*, everything is managed through economy. The inhabitants are not only physically transformed according to the profession they are to perform, even their likes and dislikes are altered through the special method of sleep teaching in order to secure the consumption of whatever commodity being currently on the market:

If the children were made to scream at the sight of a rose, that was on grounds of high economic policy. Not so very long ago (a century or thereabouts), Gammas, Deltas, even Epsilons, had been conditioned to like flowers – flowers in particular and wild nature in general. The idea was to make them want to be going out into the country at every available opportunity, and so compel them to consume transport. (29)

As it turned out, this was not a very successful move, and the love of nature was later replaced by preference of some other, more profitable, commodity.

³⁷ Patrick Reilly, *George Orwell: The Age’s Adversary* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986) 275.

³⁸ Huxley, *Revisited* 26.

From what has been described so far it becomes evident that Huxley, as opposed to Orwell, had his own strategies for imposing power and maintaining order. Nevertheless, both of them depicted in their novels a form of a governing institution that perceived freedom as generally undesirable, both for themselves as well as their subjects. Similarly to O'Brien in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning in *Brave New World* argues "liberty to be inefficient and miserable, freedom to be a round peg in a square hole" (47). After all, the only ones who are not satisfied with the current state of affairs are Bernard and the Savage – Bernard does not quite equal the others from his caste, and the Savage does not perceive the comforts of life in the World State as great enough to sacrifice for them all the things he lived for – God, poetry, danger, freedom and sin. Mustapha Mond expresses this desire for freedom as "claiming the right to be unhappy" (192), which is precisely the necessary risk of choosing freedom over 'perfect' society.

In this chapter, the common themes in traditional dystopian fiction from the first half of the twentieth century have been identified. It will be the objective of the next chapter to trace the development of these themes in recent British fiction and to identify new ones that reflect the concerns of contemporary authors about the current state of the society.

Chapter 3 – Contemporary British Speculative Fiction

It has always been one of the main concerns of literature to reflect critically on the contemporary age. The most prominent literary transformations thus often spring up from the revolutions and changes undertaken in the social and political spheres and thinking. If the authors chose to seek refuge in other worlds, it is only to compare the estranged societies to those of their own and through this analogy to acquire more critical view of reality. It is no longer in the past, nor in the future, where new inspirations are to be searched for; the authors should rather rely on the present state of being as a sufficient source of all hopes. As Daniel Singer puts it, “our society contains the elements of its *potential* transformation, and in this interaction of the existing and the possible [...] lies the burden of our responsibility and the mainspring of political action” [emphasis in the original].¹

Our present age seems to be especially rich in producing new hopes and ideas concerning the direction the society may be moving in. Every year, new names are appearing on the contemporary British literary scene, who come up with yet unprecedented visions of alternative futures that might, as well as might not, become the present. Even though some of these alternatives are so removed from this world that they would hardly be perceived as possible, some valuable knowledge about the society we are living in is still available in them. Whether desirable or horrific, whether taking the shape of utopia, dystopia, or anti-utopia, all of these visions include some of the concerns and questions we are currently facing, as well as those introduced in the traditional dystopian fiction. We will now explore some of these alternative realities in selected works of five prominent authors of this age: Iain Banks, Ken MacLeod, Adam Roberts, Charles Stross, and Chris Beckett.

¹ Daniel Singer, *Whose Millennium? Theirs or Ours?* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1999) 277.

3.1 Iain M. Banks, *The Player of Games*

Iain (M.) Banks² is one of the most widely recognized contemporary authors of speculative fiction. His death in 2013 was preceded by almost a thirty-year-long career of writing and publishing both fictional and non-fictional works, including novels, short stories, articles and critical introductions for works by other writers.³ He is especially acknowledged for his popular *Culture* series – novels that are set in the alternative space reality called ‘the Culture.’ What is interesting about all of these works is that instead of presenting one alternative society that is either eutopian or dystopian, each novel provides two of these alternatives, one of them being the Culture, the other some space society that is in a way contrary to the former. Where the Culture represents the eutopian ideal, the other world opposes it with its dystopian imperfections and shortcomings. Once this deficit become dangerous to the social order and stability of the Culture, it is up to its inhabitants to interfere with the other society in order to either correct their mistakes, or destroy the world altogether. The sense of otherness thus no longer applies to the distinction between an alternative society and the real one, but between two alternative societies, one of which is supposed to be viewed as more perfect and the other as less perfect than that of the author/reader.⁴ Instead of questioning the values of the Culture, the focus of the narrative is precisely on the conflict with this otherness, or, as Michał Kulbicki puts it, on the “utopia encountering a non- or anti-utopian ‘other’”.⁵

² The middle initial is used only in Banks’s SF writings.

³ For more information about Iain Banks visit <http://www.iain-banks.net/>.

⁴ See the definition of literary utopia and dystopia in Sargent’s “The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited”

⁵ Michał Kulbicki, “Iain M. Banks, Ernst Bloch and Utopian Interventions,” *Demanding the Impossible: Utopia, Dystopia and Science Fiction*, Monash University: *Colloquy text theory critique* 17 (2009): 38, <www.colloquy.monash.edu.au/issue17.pdf>, 16 May 2016.

In terms of genre, Simon Guerrier has classified Banks's Culture novels as critical utopias,⁶ in Moylan's sense of the expression. Banks was definitely aware of the limitations the utopian genre imposed on its specific realizations, and he did not try to present the Culture as a completely flawless society. Instead, he remained hopefully critical both to the Culture and its various opponents; where the encounters with them did not only expose their mistakes, but also uncovered some uncertainties within the Culture itself. *The Player of Games* (1988) comes as a second novel in *the Culture* series and presents the already familiar nation in conflict with the remote Empire of Azad – a society where everything is determined according to the rules of the terribly complex and demanding game. When the Empire becomes a distant threat to the Culture, the main protagonist, a skilful player called Jurneau Gurgeh, is sent forth to the Empire in order to win the game and thus overthrow the local social order. For this thematic development, the story of *The Player of Games* resembles the classical utopian structure, employing the guided journey through an estranged world. The innovation lies in that the main protagonist comes as a stranger both to the society he is visiting as well as to the reader. Nevertheless, this construction invites to compare the two societies and, through the protagonist, to become sympathetic with one of them. The contrast between the Culture and the Empire of Azad provides several motifs, some of which were introduced already in the works of Orwell and Huxley. The following paragraphs trace the transformation of these motifs from the classical dystopian fiction to Iain Banks.

By beginning where the previous chapter did, it shall be demonstrated that the almost forty years between the publication of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *The Player of Games* have witnessed the transformation of language from the means of manipulation to the symbol of national identity. As the end of the latter novel discloses, Gurgeh's five-

⁶ Simon Guerrier, "Culture Theory: Iain M. Banks's 'Culture' as Utopia," *Foundation: The International Review of Science Fiction* 28.76 (1999).

year-long visit to the Empire of Azad had a heavy impact on his identity that over the course of his exile from the Culture underwent a significant change. Already in Orwell's critical essay, the language was accused of possessing the power to shape thoughts, and vice versa; and therefore it could affect people's personalities. It is precisely language that lies behind one of the reasons for Gurgeh's transformation:

When Culture people didn't speak Marain [the language of the Culture] for a long time and did speak another language, they were liable to change; they acted differently, they started to think in that other language, they lost the carefully balanced interpretative structure of the Culture language, left its subtle shifts of cadence, tone and rhythm behind for, in virtually every case, something much cruder.⁷

When Gurgeh comes back home, he encounters some difficulties concerning the transition from the language of Azad to that of the Culture, which has its manifestations on his behaviour and identity – a major theme in Banks's novels. According to Martin Procházka, "Banks's fiction is deeply concerned with the problems of individual and collective identity and freedom, but Banks does not approach them as general human issues."⁸ Instead, he reconstructs these values in different galaxies and positions them against each other represented by two distinct societies. As will become obvious, identity and freedom intertwine all the way through *The Player of Games*. For the larger part of this novel, even the character of the narrator is unknown, which is a fact that is commented on by the narrator himself, who subsequently debase the whole question as follows: "Does identity matter anyway? I have my doubts. We are what we do, not what we think. Only the

⁷ Iain M. Banks, *The Player of Games* (London: Orbit, 2006) 247. All future page references will be to this edition and will be included in parenthesis in the text.

⁸ Martin Procházka, "From Heteroglossia to Worldmaking: Fictions of Robert Burns and Iain (M.) Banks," *Moravian Journal of Literature and Film* 2.2 (2011): 49 <www.moravianjournal.upol.cz/files/MJLF0202Prochazka.pdf>, 16 May 2016.

interactions count” (231). He immediately connects this declaration with the theme of freedom and free will, saying that it is “not incompatible with believing your actions define you” (231). This connection between identity and freedom appears in several places throughout the novel, especially in relation to the different societies and their strategies:

Every society imposes some of its values on those raised within it, but the point is that some societies try to maximise that effect, and some try to minimise it. You cannot choose not to have the politics you do; they are not some separate set of entities somehow detachable from the rest of your being; they are a function of your existence. (171)

This distinction presents the most prominent difference between the two societies and also the reason why Gurgeh is so successful in the game of Azad. Since the values of the Culture he has brought with himself are the right ones, it allows him to make the right decisions and thus to win even in the unfamiliar background. The freedom that the Culture offers to its citizens thus manifests itself in the ability of the people to make the adequate choices, and it is one of the prime reasons why the Culture always overcomes its enemies.

The different approaches to freedom can be observed in the specific strategies and handlings of laws and restrictions by the ruling classes. Where the Culture imposes “no laws or written regulations at all,”⁹ one of the representatives of the Empire explains their situation as follows: “Here we have many rules, and try to live according to the laws of God, Game and Empire” (221). However, as he later specifies, these rules are there mainly for the “ordinary, decent...I would even go as far as to say *innocent* people” [emphasis in original] (223), whereas for the higher society “rules and laws exist only because we take pleasure in doing what they forbid” (221). This notion might bring to mind the strategies of the ruling classes in the Brave New World, whose main goal it was to bring equal

⁹ Iain M. Banks, *Look to Windward* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002): 12.

happiness to the ordinary people, even if it meant the suppression of individual freedom. Moreover, just as in the case of Huxley's society, the Empire of Azad maintains its stability primarily through the use of mass media and its ability to shape 'the objective truth.'

As the game progresses, and Gurgeh works his way up the social ladder, the truth becomes less and less important until it is finally replaced by what the most believe to be true. No matter whether Gurgeh wins or not, the media and therefore the whole society will be presented with the hoped-for defeat: "We have unequivocal control of the communications- and news-services and as far as the press and the public will be concerned, you will be knocked out in the first round. [...] The *truth* has already been decided" [emphasis added] (223). Thus it has been proven that Orwell's pessimistic assertion about the negative influence of press on the public opinion and beliefs still predominates the contemporary fears.

Apart from language and mass media, freedom and individuality, and the concern about the existence of objective truth, Banks's novels continue with the thematic tradition initiated by Orwell and Huxley in several other aspects, such as the social stratification and positive encouragement of sexual relationships. Along with these issues, the second half of the twentieth century has brought its own concerns, as for example sexism or the questions of ownership, both of which find their manifestations in *The Player of Games*. As becomes known on the way to the Empire, the local society "is based on *ownership*. Everything that you see and touch, everything you come into contact with, will *belong* to somebody or to an institution" (114). To some extent this includes even the ownership of other people: "according to which sex and class one belongs to, one may be partially owned by another" (114). This is not meant in the sense of slavery, which has been abolished even within the obsolete society of Azad, but rather in terms of one sex having the power over the

other(s).¹⁰ The concept of marriage is thus transformed into an enterprise, where the females sell their bodies as means of pleasure and sexual favours. The socio-gender stratification has its implications also in the game. Even though women are not forbidden to participate in it, their lack of education, which is only available to the highest of the sexes, presents a great disadvantage to them. One of the main issues of the modern world – the question of gender equality – thus enters the literary world and joins the traditional themes in their dominance in utopian fiction.

3.2 Ken MacLeod, *Intrusion*

Ken MacLeod is another prominent Scottish author, known especially for his various SF series as well a number of separate works, short stories, and collections of poetry. His novels are seen as a continuation of the Orwellian tradition in the sense that they often portray dystopian visions of socialist and communist societies. MacLeod is concerned with a number of the traditional dystopian themes, such as surveillance, identity, and individual freedom versus social stability, especially in the field of economy.

Intrusion (2012) is one of MacLeod's most recent works, and it presents a near-future society, where free will and individual choices are suppressed in behalf of social stability and economic prosperity. The main conflict within the story comes through the character of Hope Morrison and her contradiction with the state, whose laws and restrictions concerning motherhood she finds too constrictive. She refuses to take the pregnancy pill, or the so-called "Fix," that is supposed to prevent all genetic anomalies in her yet unborn child. As a consequence, the whole neighbourhood turns against Hope, and

¹⁰ Instead of the usual division between the male and female counterparts, the social system of the Empire is composed of three sexes – one "carrying the testes and penis", second "equipped with a kind of reversible vagina" that turns inside-out "to implant the fertilised egg in the third sex, which has a womb" (74).

she becomes a public enemy. After many horrific struggles and endless attempts to obtain her freedom, Hope is finally overcome by the ultimate victory of the state and gives up. This nightmarish vision brings attention to several important questions of the present age, where the conflict between social responsibility and individual will becomes increasingly important.

One of the main questions suggested by the book is to what extent the private decisions about the upbringing of one's children affects the whole society, and whether such a decision should be regulated by the state. As becomes revealed later on, there is no longer any such thing as a private decision, and the choices and preferences of individual people must give way to what is seen as best for the society. In the economic sphere, the Labour Party finds its own solutions by introducing what one of the prominent politicians calls "a truly free market."¹¹ It works on an assumption that ordinary people do not have sufficient information to make the right choices; therefore it is up to the state to decide for its inhabitants:

'The standard model of a truly free market assumes that everyone in the market has perfect information. They must know what choices they're making, otherwise it isn't a free and rational choice, right? [...] Now obviously, this doesn't *actually* obtain in the real world. Nobody really has perfect information. [...] So for the market to be really free, it has to work *as if* everyone involved had perfect information [...]. This is where the social side comes from – the state steps in to allow people to make the choices *they would have made* if they'd had that information. Because these are the really free choices.' [emphasis in the original]

(147)

¹¹ Ken MacLeod, *Intrusion* (London: Orbit, 2012) 147. All future page references will be to this book and will be included in parenthesis in the text.

But to Hope, as well as to any contemporary reader, the system does not seem to be free at all, both from its description, as well as through the actual manifestation in the everyday reality. When Hope justly argues that real freedom consists in deciding for oneself, the politician simply returns that there is nothing free about making the wrong choices. The state ultimately fails to recognize the real value of freedom, and it is thus subverted again, this time in connection with economic prosperity and the general well-being.

Apart from the suppression of freedom, the story provides a number of other traditional themes, many of which found their inspiration in Orwell and his dystopian visions presented in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In fact, MacLeod openly admits this inspiration by referring to the influential novel in both direct and indirect ways in various places throughout his work. One of these direct references comes when Hope's husband Hugh uses the famous quote from Orwell's book: "Do it to Julia" (186), which evokes in his wife the memory of having encountered it as a compulsory reading on the high school. The obvious misinterpretation of the book both by Hope and her high-school teacher prevents her from drawing parallels between the society of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and her own, and the failure to recognize the apparent similarities between these two societies leads to her inability to learn from Winston's misjudgements. Instead, in her pursuit of freedom, she repeats some of the fatal mistakes made already by Winston, and she ends up in a similar situation – in total submission to the impersonal system. As opposed to the hopeless atmosphere at the end of Orwell's novel, MacLeod's ending is still a little more optimistic in the sense that Hope's resistance survives at least within herself in the form of inner hatred. In other words, there is yet a spark of hope for Hope.

One of the obvious similarities between *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Intrusion* lies in the theme of surveillance. The famous picture of the omnipresent screen returns with several innovations and new technologies that make the public pursuance even easier.

Screens in schools and public places, cameras in private homes, microphones to record every conversation, and, above all, sensors installed in pregnant women to ensure there will be no consummation of alcohol or any other drugs. As a result of all of these, Hope stays in a constant state of uneasiness and dread, especially when she sees someone in uniform, which comes to symbolize the unrestricted power of the state. Yet, she ostentatiously refuses to see the analogy between Orwell's society and that of her own, as she justifies the reality against the novel: "Here we had transparency and accountability. Everything was transparent and people were accountable. Or everything was accountable and people were transparent" (187). However, Hope herself is no more transparent, nor accountable, than Winston, and just as well as him, she attempts to get away from the reach of the omnipresent control, or in her own terms to "go off grid" (64), by seeking refuge in the country. Hugh is at first sceptical about this step, claiming "there's no away. [...] Nowhere's off grid anymore" (64), but at the end he accepts the idea and takes Hope and their son to his parents in Northern Scotland, where his initial statement proves to have been right.

Of course most of the actual strategies of the Party in MacLeod's novel are vastly different from that of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the overall atmosphere being much less depressing and the practices of the system more corresponding to the contemporary age. As a result, the story achieves a prominent sense of realism, with the probability of it becoming true being the most terrifying aspect of the novel. As opposed to Orwell's vision, one does not perceive *Intrusion* merely as a warning against the undesirable social state, but as a future possibility that is already almost here.

Some of the thematic innovations in this book include thoughts on religion, community, or the use of guns; but none of these are discussed in direct connection with the workings of the dystopian society. In this sense it might be said that *Intrusion* is a

faithful follower of the Orwellian tradition, both in the storyline and its themes. Apart from the traditional motifs, the already hinted-on technological and medical advances bring about a new thematic realization, which adds to the formidable force of the Party what George Orwell could have only dreamt of for his nightmarish society. Already in 1958, Huxley has noted that “recent advances in science and technology have robbed Orwell’s book of some of its gruesome verisimilitude.”¹² Huxley was generally sceptical about technology and the possible effects it might have on the society if it is used for the wrong purposes. MacLeod’s novel thus came to represent many of his fears in practice.

3.3 Adam Roberts, *New Model Army*

From the beginning of this millennium, Adam Roberts has published precisely one novel a year, which ranks him among the most productive British authors of this age. Apart from novels, he has also published several short-story collections, parodies of contemporary popular fiction, and books of criticism.¹³ He is especially acknowledged for his non-fictional works concerning the genre of SF and fantasy, some of which were consulted and/or cited from in this paper.¹⁴ The common motifs of Roberts’s fiction include intergalactic voyages, wars, technology, freedom versus slavery (both physical and mental), and politics. *New Model Army* (2007) is his eighth novel, often classified as military SF.¹⁵ The story is set in the near-future Europe, and it portrays a utopian vision of an ideal society in the form of an army unit called Pantegral. The main concern of the novel lies in the politics of war and the incompatibility of democracy with the human nature and beliefs.

¹² Huxley, Revisited 4-5.

¹³ For more information about Adam Roberts visit <http://www.adamroberts.com/>.

¹⁴ See pages 2 and 10.

¹⁵ Nader Elhefnawy, Rev. of *New Model Army* by Adam Roberts, *Strange Horizons* (30 June 2010) <http://www.strangehorizons.com/reviews/2010/06/new_model_army_.shtml>, 19 May 2016.

With the rather unconventional first sentence: “I am not the hero of this story” (3), Adam Roberts, through his narrator, makes it clear from the beginning that *New Model Army* is not a heroic story of one soldier, but a description of a mass of individuals that stand together to form one large entity with clearly defined function – war. The plot is actually only a secondary factor of the novel, its most prominent aspect being the discussion of democracy, freedom, and human nature. This intention is not only implicit throughout the whole book, but also explicitly stated after a short introductory scene from the action: “I don’t want to fill this narrative with detailed accounts of fighting; because it would become tedious. And, more to the point, it’s not the street-to-street stuff that is the theme of my narrative. Awareness is the theme” (39). The narrator does not even bother with a further explanation of what it is that the reader supposed to be aware of – it is more than obvious already from the first chapter that is devoted to the description of NMA in connection with democracy, which continues to be the primary concern that lies behind the whole narrative.

The story follows the experience of Anthony Block, who insists on being only a former component of the actual protagonist – the Pantegral. Despite this insistence, the reader will sooner or later become sympathetic with the narrator and accept him as the protagonist, for it is in the human nature to identify oneself with individual heroes rather than the whole groups or armies. A removal from Tony’s story shall now take place in order to allow for an exploration of the themes that lie behind his narrative, for these not only form the primary message of the story, but also reveal some of the reasons, why democracy was seen as both undesirable and impossible in the above discussed dystopian societies.

Already on the very first page of the book, Tony introduces the theme of democracy and connects it with what he calls “the asymptote of complete Zamyatin

transparency” (3). He argues that transparency is necessary for any democratic society, and, in a direct address, he accuses the contemporary reader of inability to accept this allegiance: “You want to preserve your privacy. I understand, although it necessarily means that you are not properly committed to the idea of democracy” (3). Tony goes on claiming that none of the contemporary societies are actually democratic, not only for their unwillingness to sacrifice privacy, but also for maintaining rigid hierarchies of power that are in themselves incompatible with the nature of democracy. NMAs, on the other hand, disregard any such hierarchy. Due to the technological progress with all of its microphones, cameras and other nanotechnological inventions, the soldiers are in a constant communication with each other, which allows them to abolish any leading positions and, at the same time, ensures a complete transparency among themselves. The army is thus composed of absolutely equal units, which together form a perfectly uniform entity, where every single part is in connection with the rest. This apparently utopian vision would not only be impracticable in natural societies, but also ultimately artificial and incompatible with religious beliefs:

It *fits* your consciousness to think [...] of God as hierarchical order, a supreme leader whose orders are passed down through the chain of command (archangels, angels, popes, bishops and priests, the godly and the ungodly) – so, so, then, if that is the way the cosmos is, then the cosmos *is* undemocratic, and democracy itself is a sort of violation of divine order. [emphasis in original] (118)

Several pages before this declaration, Tony even argues that this religious aspect of our thinking finds its realizations in the forming of armies today: “It’s religious! [...] Folk see an army and they think it’s been *intelligently designed*. They think: it must have been made by a single figure. Generals are Popes, you see” [emphasis in the original] (77). I would go on claiming that this notion of hierarchy does not necessarily come from Christianity or

religion as such, but from the inherent need for some kind of an arrangement, or what Huxley called the “Will of Order,”¹⁶ as discussed in the third section of chapter two. The problem comes when people form hierarchies only to seek and/or maintain power, where the possession of power becomes an end in itself. This situation has been described in the case of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, where the main goal of the Party was to ensure an endless supremacy over the world.

What is it then that lies behind the NMA’s success in overcoming this inherent obstacle? The answer is simple – war. As Tony argues: “*fighting* and *democracy* are actually the same thing” [emphasis in the original] (88). This argument follows the idea that the world is tremendously complex, and there is no clear distinction between what is right and what is wrong. Actually, if the world were thus black and white, there would be no reason for war, nor would there be any reason for democracy, for everyone would be of the same opinion, and that would be the right one. However, since there is an endless variety of opinions and views, humanity has only a few choices of what to do – either to prioritize one opinion over every other (which has been witnessed in an absolute realization with Orwell and Huxley), or to find some kind of a compromise between all of the existing opinions according to their representation within the population, which is what is nowadays understood to be democratic. Tony has his own way of describing this choice as follows: “The choice is between tyrannies that bring war upon the people, and democracies that bring war upon the people. And the key difference – except that democracy is rather better at making war than tyranny – is only this: that in the latter case, at least people are not slaves” (266).

The difficulty about war is that people tend to perceive it as a duel of two clearly defined sides. However, there is no such clear distinction, and the two sides represent

¹⁶ Huxley, *Revisited* 29.

rather two groups of people with various opinions and reasons to join the war. “But that’s the nature of war. A country is never divided into two portions, a red and a blue” (92). NMAs, however, do not fight for this or that opinion. They do not represent any country or value; they fight for whomever hires them, and their ultimate goal is victory itself, because that is what they are hired for, as well as what they are all united in:

In the New Model Army we don’t care about that; just as we don’t care about your age, or your religious convictions, or your *lack* of religious convictions, or your ethnicity, or your sexual orientation, or sexual *reorientation*, or your gender, or those things the outside world considers handicaps. We only care about two things: that you fight, and that you be prepared to live democratically. [emphasis in the original] (87)

After all, Tony himself is a gay who has fallen in love with one of his comrades, which generates one of the dramatic diversions of the plot and adds a sense of sentimentality to the otherwise highly intellectual realization of the novel.

New Model Army has proven to be of special interest for the present study, in that it offers new perspective on democracy and the human nature, which are seen as mutually incompatible. As opposed to the dystopian visions of Orwell and Huxley, as well as their generic followers such as MacLeod, Roberts’s novel thus provide the opportunity to view some of the traditional themes from the other, ultimately utopian, side.

3.4 Charles Stross, *Halting State*

Charles Stross is another prominent British author, whose contributions to the contemporary literary scene include over thirty SF novels, several collections of short stories, and hundreds of magazine articles. Before becoming a full-time writer, Stross has

worked in a variety of jobs, including programmer, software engineer, and pharmacist,¹⁷ which is also reflected in his works. In his fiction, Stross has experienced with a variety of literary forms and genres, the most prominent of these being hard SF and space opera. With a few exceptions, most of Stross's novels are produced in series. *Halting State* (2007) is the first of the originally planned three-book series, with the third novel eventually being cancelled. It is set “fifteen minutes into the future”¹⁸ in Scotland, which is still coping with its recently acquired independence. The story deals with the increasing importance of technological advancement, virtual realities, and the questions of ownership, which become especially problematic in the contemporary Internet age. Stross experimented with both thematic and formal aspects of the novel – it conveys a story of a bank robbery that took place in an online computer game, and it is told from second-person viewpoint, making the reader also the protagonist of the book. Structurally, the story is split between three protagonists – detective sergeant Sue, insurance fraud investigator Elaine, and programmer Jack – whose sections alternate respectively.

The most convenient section of the book to start with in the analysis is actually not even within the story itself, but in the interview with Charles Stross found at the very end of the 2008 edition by Orbit. Apart from explanations of the complex plot, Stross also offers in the interview some additional information about the temporal frame of the story, which is according to him somewhere between the year 2016 and 2018. Even though most of the technology described in the book was actually already available when he wrote it in 2007, he found it much more convenient to explore the impact of these technologies on “a generation of young professionals who don't remember a time before YouTube, MySpace and transparency, and a cohort of teenagers behind them who don't even understand the concept of being lost in a strange city because they *always* know where they are”

¹⁷ For more information about Charles Stross visit www.antipope.org/charlie/index.html.

¹⁸ Charles Stross, “Fiction by Charles Stross: FAQ,” *Charlie's Diary*, 18 Apr 2016, <<http://www.antipope.org/charlie/blog-static/fiction/faq.html>>, 19 May 2016.

[emphasis in the original].¹⁹ This is actually reflected in one scene within the plot, where the protagonists are forced to turn off their phones to avoid being tracked: “‘I hate being lost,’ she mutters. ‘Really?’ You are taken aback. ‘It used to be normal’” (328-329). But without the help of her phone at hand, Elaine becomes suddenly vulnerable not only to unknown places, but people as well: “‘We’re nearly halfway.’ Which is a little white lie, but with her phone turned off, she’s capable of being deceived” (328). This passage in the story is followed by a discussion about the changing nature of society due to various technologies, initiated by Jack’s challenge: “‘Imagine you were a time-traveller from the 1980s, say 1984...’” (329). Jack further explains the choice of this year as an age when people did not have mobiles yet,²⁰ but it might as well be taken as an allusion to Orwell’s novel; after all, it would not be the only one within Stross’s book.²¹ Nevertheless, all of this twiddling with the motif of time and technology confirms Stross’s statement in the interview that “the effects of these technologies on society are part of what I was trying to explore in *Halting State*” (viii).

Another prominent motif of Stross’s novel is virtual reality, and the extent to which it can be approached as an adequate reality of its own. In this sense, there are actually two alternative worlds within the story – the ‘real’ and the virtual one – with a close interaction between the two of them. One of the questions appearing in the interview is whether the author would enjoy living in such a close proximity of two realities. I believe that Stross’s answer is worth of quoting in its entirety:

I think, on balance, it’d be a better world to live in than many of the alternatives on offer. All too often, SF focuses on futures wracked by strife and pain – distinctly

¹⁹ Charles Stross, *Halting State* (London: Orbit, 2008) vii. All future page references will be to this edition and will be included in parenthesis in the text.

²⁰ According to Jon Agar, *Constant Touch: A Global History of the Mobile Phone* (London: Icon, 2013) 63, 1984 was the year of introduction of “the first hand-portable cellular phone, the Motorola 8000.”

²¹ Some aspects of the story hint on Stross’s strong knowledge of Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, as for example the reference to room 101 (74).

unpleasant places to live. In contrast, the future of *Halting State* is grounded in today; many trends already visible in our current civilization are present and amplified, and some of them aren't good, but it's still a future with room for ordinary people to live. They've got expensive oil and annoying traffic jams and they're worried about global climate change and international relations – but that's a far cry from living in a bombed-out radioactive wilderness while being hunted by killer robots! And they've got computer games to die for. (viii)

However, for Sue, whose task it is to investigate the crime that has taken place in one of these computer games, the vision of virtual reality is rather repulsive, as she ponders on the question of “how to investigate a crime that was committed by a radge bunch o' faeries in a place that doesn't even exist” (39). As the story progresses, it turns out that this virtual reality is much more real than Sue has expected, since a great deal of actual money is involved in the little online entertainment. After all, where is the difference between the money that is nowadays stored on the bank accounts and the treasures that are collect in online games? They are both just series of numbers and codes with no physical representation in the real world other than the meaning people had assigned to them. The manager of the game in question within the story confirms this notion by saying: “To prevent fraud, every item in a distributed game space has to be digitally signed [...], this means we're into the same authorization and authentication business as your credit card company” (60). Moreover, the real money and the virtual one is becoming interchangeable, for more and more games today offer the possibility of paying with real money in order to speed up the processes within the game. But why would anyone want to give up something with of a real value for a commodity that exists only on the screens of computers or phones? The ultimate answer to this question is fun – people are willing to pay for what they perceive as entertaining. Again, the manager affirms: “Imaginary worlds with millions

of players don't obey quite the same economic rules as the real world – or I guess they obey them differently, because rather than running on money, games run on fun” (59).

Stross's vision of what future might possibly look like is not only the most realistic of those encountered so far; it has also already come true, at least partially. Even though it represents a fairly sensible alternative in comparison with the other contemporary SFs, it still has some disagreeable aspects, such as the loss of real-life pleasures, or the suppression of direct interpersonal communication and relationships. However, such is the nature of the present age where every technological innovation makes the life easier and more complex at the same time. After all, this is a fact that was known already to Huxley and his contemporaries: “The Nature of Things is such that nobody in this world ever gets anything for nothing. These amazing and admirable advances have had to be paid for [...]. And each instalment is higher than the last.”²²

3.5 Chris Beckett, *Dark Eden*

Chris Beckett is not only an influential SF author, but also a prominent university lecturer and social worker. Apart from four already published novels and one more forthcoming this year, he produced many short stories assembled in two collections, and several textbooks drawing on his experience in the field of social studies. Beckett's writing career started off already at the beginning of the 1990s, even though his first novel did not get published until this millennium. He is often compared to authors such as William Golding or even George Orwell. On his web page, Beckett comments on his writing career as follows: “Although I always wanted to be a writer, I did not deliberately set out to be a

²² Huxley, Revisited 25.

science fiction writer in particular. My stories are usually about my own life, things I see happening around me and things I struggle to make sense of.”²³

Dark Eden (2012) is Beckett’s third novel and also the first in a series about the mystical planet called Eden, which is so far away from the sun that it stays in constant darkness. The only sources of light and warmth are the lantern trees, and food is provided by harvesting tree candy or hunting the two-hearted animals called woollybucks. The story takes place 163 years after the first human beings landed on the planet, and because of their inability to get back to Earth they decided to start a family there. As already the name suggests, the novel presents a reworking of the Biblical story of the original sin, where instead of Adam and Eve, Angela and Tommy represent the mythical predecessors: “We were brothers and sisters really, all of us, that was the weird part. Me, Mehmet, David Redlantern: every one of us in Eden came from the same mother and the same father.”²⁴ However, whereas Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden, Angela and Tommy were expelled *to* Eden, and they were more than eager to depart again. Instead, after six generations of constant incestuous inbreeding, the Family reached the total number of 532 descendants, some of which have been marked by this process with various physical deformations. Beckett’s alternative world with its imaginative capacity has thus far surpassed all of the above-discussed possibilities. The primary concerns of this dystopian vision include the problems of isolated small communities, gender roles, and the forming of one’s identity.

As in the case of the previous novel by Charles Stross, *Dark Eden* also provides several viewpoints, even though Beckett opted for the more conventional first person narrative that often takes shape of inner monologues. Because the people lack the knowledge of most of the complex words, and their vocabulary is distinctly limited, the

²³ Chris Beckett, “About,” *Chris Beckett’s Fiction* <<http://www.chris-beckett.com/about-2/>>, 20 May 2016.

²⁴ Chris Beckett, *Dark Eden* (London: Corvus, 2012) 372. All future page references will be to this edition and will be included in parenthesis in the text.

text appears to be linguistically undeveloped with repetitions used in place of intensification and abstract notions described in concrete terms. Different narrators take turns to tell the story as it happened from their perspective, with the plot centred on the character of John Redlantern, who is also the main protagonist, and whose narration occupies most of the chapters. John is different from the rest of the Family in that he refuses to follow their deep-rooted traditions, and he generally perceives the community as stuck in the past with blind hopes for the future. Most of the events within the plot are initiated by John, and as the story progresses, the Family is gradually split into two groups – those who follow him, and the rest who are unwilling to abandon their dwelling in fear of missing the people from Earth coming to rescue them.

The Family is a strongly bound community of people who share the common hope of returning to the planet Earth, even though none of the descendants has ever been there or saw what it looked like. All they know about Earth comes from the stories passed from generation to generation and performed during their traditional rituals. The inhabitants do not try to invent new things or explore new places, because they live in the notion that Eden is only their temporary destination, and sooner or later a space ship will come that will bring them to their rightful home. John is the only one who does not share this opinion, and he realizes that their dream vision of the Earth might not correspond with the real picture. In fact, Eden is their real home: “We’re in Eden. Maybe no one will ever come to take us back to Earth. And anyway, that *isn’t* ‘back’, it wouldn’t be *going back*, because none of us has *ever been there*” [emphasis in the original] (95). However, in the end even John himself acknowledges that people need some kind of a tradition or a common belief that they can rely on for them to be able to make some progress: “They need a story. They need something from the past to hold onto when they go forward into the future. Like

when you're climbing high up in a tree, you need to hold tightly onto the branch you are already on until you're sure you've got a tight grip on the next" (309).

John's pursuit of exemption from the past is accompanied by various moral and ethical questions that not only shape his view of the world around him, but also his own identity: "I wasn't just deciding what I wanted to do, I was deciding what kind of person I wanted to *be*" [emphasis in the original] (57). For a teenage boy this is not an easy quest, and even though John strongly disagrees with most of the Family's values, he cannot completely remove himself from its influence: "Family was inside us, not just out there in the world. If we didn't do what Family asked, Family out there wouldn't need to say anything, because it would be accusing us already from inside our own skin" (72). After all, there are no other people in Eden, and Family is the only thing everyone knows. Even John realizes that he cannot stand alone as he claims: "People needed other people like they needed air. And for a while I was so lonely I could barely breathe" (171).

One more significant question arises with John's independence – the question of gender roles within the community. Family consists of six groups of people with distinct surnames and different customs concerning the performance of their daily chores. Each of these groups has its own leader who distributes work and represents the rest in the council of elders. Out of these six groups only one of them has a male leader who has retained his position only out of respect for his old age, and who nevertheless dies in the course of the story. However, as John gains more and more power as well as influence over some of the younger generations, the matriarchal society starts to fall apart. Caroline Brooklyn, the secretary of the council and also the most powerful woman in the Family, is well aware of this threat, and as the tension between her and John rises she gives way to the more powerful David, who becomes John's biggest enemy. As a result, Family breaks down into two separate groups, and John with his followers is forced to leave the community. One of

the female narrators comments on the situation as follows: “The time of men was coming, I could see. Women had run things so far, where there was just one Family, but that was over now, and in this new broken-up world it would be the men that would get ahead” (180). The story is thus not only a reversal of the Biblical myth of expulsion from paradise; it also turns over the development of some of the traditional values and tendencies that are present in the real world.

Apart from portraying a completely estranged society, *Dark Eden* thus proves to be most successful in providing new knowledge about the human kind as such.

Conclusion

“‘This is not a heroic age,’ he told the drone, staring at the fire. ‘The individual is obsolete. That’s why life is so comfortable for us all. We don’t matter, so we’re safe. No one person can have any real effect any more’” (Banks 22). In his humble deliberation, Jurneau Gurgeh was able to grasp the essence of the present age, where people ceased to perform great deeds, and instead they became integrated into society as components of a single mechanism. The contradiction between an individual and society is not only a ubiquitous element of the everyday struggles, but also a crucial point in dystopian fiction, both traditional and contemporary, and it found its realizations in all of the works discussed in this paper. In the background of the themes that have been identified and subsequently analysed, first in the celebrated works of George Orwell and Aldous Huxley, and further with the contemporary authors, lies the question of the relationship between a single person and his/her family, community, or even the whole human race. It is no coincidence that for most of the societies encountered in this study, individualism was seen as generally undesirable or even incompatible with the principles of the state and, above all, its government. Interestingly enough, all of these alternative societies were presented through individual characters, even though sometimes numerous, whose most prominent feature is their distinctive personality and the sense of alienation from the rest of the society. It is precisely through the perception of these strong individuals, in some cases it might be even said ‘heroes,’ that the loss of freedom in favour of communal goals comes as most shocking and horrible. It even seems as if there was a direct proportion between the degree of horribleness of the society and the limitations it imposes on individuals. In this competition of nightmarish dystopian visions, Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, with all of its omnipresent telescreens and practically non-existent privacy, still undoubtedly occupies the first place.

Throughout the analysis of the chosen novels, one particular image turned out to be rather conspicuous in its frequent recurrence – the image of sacrificing one value for those that are perceived to be of more importance. In this case it has been witnessed that freedom becomes especially vulnerable and is often given up for communal values such as stability, happiness, or even material well-being. The means of execution of these exchanges are various and heterogeneous in their nature, but they generally fall into three broad categories: linguistic and cultural, social and sexual, and scientific and technological. Whereas the lattermost of these finds its prominence in the recent fiction, its dire consequences were foretold as early as the 1930s and 40s by Huxley and Orwell, respectively. Analogically, even though contemporary SFs continue to include the linguistic and cultural influences, they were most significant in the earlier dystopian fiction, mainly because the first half of the twentieth century witnessed the greatest interest in these fields, as well as prominent discoveries and inventions. Therefore, as the contemporary conventions and tendencies transform and develop, literature shapes itself accordingly in its thematic realizations; however, the general motivations behind the individual genres remain, to a large extent, identical. The conflict between the individual and society thus continues to predominate in dystopian fiction, even though the variety of methods used to describe this conflict knows no bounds.

As for the further development, a steady increase of interest in the field of technology might be expected, most prominently in virtual realities, online communications, and the AIs, that have already entered our lives and continue to shape it in a significant way. In terms of genre, dystopian fiction and SF in general will probably remain among popular literature, even though people might eventually grow tired of the endless list of alternative worlds, and they will return to more realistic genres.

Bibliography

- Agar, Jon. *Constant Touch: A Global History of the Mobile Phone*. London: Icon, 2013.
- Angenot, Marc. "The Absent Paradigm: An Introduction to the Semiotics of Science Fiction." *Science Fiction Studies* 6.1 (1979): 9–19. JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4239220>>. 30 Mar. 2016.
- Attarian, John. "Brave New World and the Flight from God." *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Aldous Huxley*. Harold Bloom, eds. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003. 9–24.
- Baccolini, Raffaella. "'It's Not in the Womb the Damage is Done': Memory, Desire, and the Construction of Gender in Katharine Burdekin's *Swastika Night*." *Le trasformazioni del narrare*. E. Siciliani, et al., eds. Fasano: Schena, 1995.
- _____. "Journeying through the Dystopian Genre: Memory and Imagination in Burdekin, Orwell, Atwood, and Piercy." *Viaggi in utopia*. Vita Fortunati and Nadia Minerva, eds. Ravenna: Longo, 1996. 343–357.
- Baldick, Chris. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Oxford: OUP, 2001.
- Banks, Iain M. *The Player of Games*. London: Orbit, 2006.
- _____. *Look to Windward*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002.
- Beckett, Chris. "About." *Chris Beckett's Fiction* <<http://www.chris-beckett.com/about-2/>>. 20 May 2016.
- _____. *Dark Eden*. London: Corvus, 2012.
- Buchanan, Brad. "Oedipus in Dystopia: Freud and Lawrence in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*." *Journal of Modern Literature* 25.3/4 (2002): 75–89. JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3831855>>. 22 Apr. 2016.
- Bulman, Colin. *Creative Writing: A Guide and Glossary to Fiction Writing*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007.
- Candelaria, Matthew, and Gunn, James. *Speculations on Speculation: Theories of Science Fiction*. Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2005.
- Card, Orson Scott. *How to Write Science Fiction & Fantasy*. Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books, 2001.
- Claeys, Gregory. *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*. Cambridge: CUP, 2010.
- Clune, Michael. "Orwell and the Obvious." *Representations* 107.1 (2009): 30–55. JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/rep.2009.107.1.30>>. 22 Apr. 2016.

- Elhefnawy, Nader. Rev. of *New Model Army* by Adam Roberts. *Strange Horizons* (30 June 2010)
 <http://www.strangehorizons.com/reviews/2010/06/new_model_army_.shtml>.
 19 May 2016.
- Evans, Mary. *Short History of Society: The Making of the Modern World*. Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2007.
- Guerrier, Simon. "Culture Theory: Iain M. Banks's 'Culture' as Utopia." *Foundation: The International Review of Science Fiction* 28.76 (1999): 28–37.
- Gunn, James, and Candelaria, Matthew. *Speculations on Speculation*. Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2005.
- Hitchens, Christopher. *Orwell's Victory*. New York: Penguin Books, 2003.
- Huxley, Aldous, *Brave New World*. London: Granada Publishing Limited, 1982.
 _____ *Brave New World Revisited*. London: Vintage, 1994.
- James, Edward. "Utopias and anti-utopias" *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, eds. Cambridge: CUP, 2003. 219–229.
- Kellner, Douglas. "From 1984 to *One-Dimensional Man*: Critical Reflections on Orwell and Marcuse." *Illuminations*.
 <<http://www.uta.edu/huma/illuminations/kell13.htm>>. 4 Mar. 2016.
- Khoury, Nadia. "Reaction and Nihilism: The Political Genealogy of Orwell's 1984 *Science Fiction Studies* 12.2 (1985): 136–147. JSTOR
 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4239680>>. 22 Apr. 2016.
- Kulbicki, Michał. "Iain M. Banks, Ernst Bloch and Utopian Interventions." *Demanding the Impossible: Utopia, Dystopia and Science Fiction*. Monash University: *Colloquy text theory critique* 17 (2009): 34–43 <www.colloquy.monash.edu.au/issue17.pdf>.
 16 May 2016.
- MacLeod, Ken. *Intrusion*. London: Orbit, 2012.
- Moylan, Tom. *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*. New York: Methuen, 1986.
 _____ *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*. Ed. Raffaella Baccolini. Ralahine Utopian Studies edition. Oxford: Peter Lang AG, 2014.
 _____ *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*. Boulder: Westview Press, 2000.
- Moylan, Tom, and Baccolini, Raffaella, *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Oxford: OUP, 2016. 31 Mar. 2016.

- Orwell, George. *1984*. London: Penguin Books, 2008.
- _____. "Politics and the English Language." *All Art is Propaganda*. George Packer, eds. New York: Mariner Books, 2009.
- Patai, Daphne. "Gamesmanship and Androcentrism in Orwell's *1984*." *PMLA* 97.5 (1982): 856–870. JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/462176>>. 22 Apr. 2016.
- Philmus, Robert M. *Visions and Re-Visions: (Re)Constructing Science Fiction*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005.
- Pound, Ezra. *ABC of Reading*. New York: New Directions Publishing, 2010.
- Procházka, Martin. "From Heteroglossia to Worldmaking: Fictions of Robert Burns and Iain (M.) Banks." *Moravian Journal of Literature and Film* 2.2 (2011): 43–54. <www.moravianjournal.upol.cz/files/MJLF0202Prochazka.pdf>. 16 May 2016.
- Quinn, Edward. *Critical Companion to George Orwell: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*. New York: Facts on File, 2009.
- Reilly, Patrick. *George Orwell: The Age's Adversary*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986.
- Roberts, Adam. *The History of Science Fiction*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2006.
- _____. *New Model Army*. London: Gollancz, 2010.
- _____. *Science Fiction*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2006.
- Sargent, Lyman Tower. "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited." *Utopian Studies* 5.1 (1994): 1–37. JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20719246>>. 2 Mar. 2016.
- Singer, Daniel. *Whose Millennium? Theirs or Ours?* New York: Monthly Review Press, 1999.
- Stross, Charles. "Fiction by Charles Stross: FAQ." *Charlie's Diary*. 18 Apr 2016. <<http://www.antipope.org/charlie/blog-static/fiction/faq.html>>. 19 May 2016.
- _____. *Halting State*. London: Orbit, 2008.
- Suvin, Darko. *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.
- _____. "On the Poetics of Science Fiction Genre." *College English* 34.3 (1972): 372–382. JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/375141>>. 31 Mar. 2016.