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BEYOND PHILOLOGY 15/3

Contents

DYSTOPIAN CHRONOTOPE

Defining the dystopian chronotope:
Space, time and genre in George Orwell's
Nineteen Eighty-Four 9
URSZULA TERENTOWICZ-FOTYGA

DYSTOPIA AND SOLIDARITY

Sorority without solidarity:
Control in the patriarchal utopia
of Margaret Atwood's *The Handsmaid's Tale* 43
ALMUDENA MACHADO-JIMÉNEZ

David Fincher's *Fight Club*
as an example of critical dystopia 67
KATARZYNA GINSZT

Lost, redefined, or preserved?
Expressions of solidarity
in Paul Auster's *In the Country of Last Things* 85
JULIA KULA

From solidarity with the people to solidarity
with the 'company': State capture and Karen Jayes'
dystopian novel *For the Mercy of Water* 105
EWALD MENGEL

Questions about solidarity in the dystopian world
(inspired by Dmytro Ternovyi's *High Resolution*) 119
ANNA URSULENKO

Mere solidarity is not enough:
Exploring dystopian reality
in Edward Bond's *The Tin Can People* 135
SEÇIL VARAL

Limitations of solidarity
in P. D. James' *The Children of Men* 149
RUDOLF WEISS

Solidarity, dystopia, and fictional worlds
in contemporary narrative TV series 163
MIŁOSZ WOJTYNA

Information for Contributors 181

DYSTOPIAN CHRONOTOPE

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Defining the dystopian chronotope: Space, time and genre in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

URSZULA TERENTOWICZ-FOTYGA

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Abstract

The paper examines George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a canonical example of the dystopian novel in an attempt to define the principal features of the dystopian chronotope. Following Mikhail Bakhtin, it treats the chronotope as the structural pivot of the narrative, which integrates and determines other aspects of the text. Dystopia, the paper argues, is a particularly appropriate genre to consider the structural role of the chronotope for two reasons. Firstly, due to utopianism's special relation with space and secondly, due to the structural importance of world-building in the expression of dystopia's philosophical, political and social ideas. The paper identifies the principal features of dystopian spatiality, among which crucial are the oppositions between the individual and the state, the mind and the body, the high and the low, the central and the peripheral, the past and the present, the city and the natural world, false and true signs.

Keywords

dystopia, chronotope, space, genre, Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Definiując dystopijny chronotop:
przestrzeń, czas i gatunek w *Roku 1984* George'a Orwella

Abstrakt

Analizując *Rok 1984* George'a Orwella jako kanon powieści dystopijnej, artykuł podejmuje próbę zdefiniowania głównych cech dystopijnego chronotopu. Za Michaiłem Bachtinem traktuje on chronotop jako strukturalną oś narracji, która integruje i określa inne aspekty tekstu. Dystopia, jak twierdzę w artykule, jest szczególnie odpowiednim gatunkiem do rozważania strukturalnej roli chronotopu z dwóch powodów. Po pierwsze, ze względu na szczególny związek utopianizmu z przestrzenią, po drugie ze względu na strukturalne znaczenie procesu konstruowania świata dla wyrażenia dystopijnych idei filozoficznych, politycznych i społecznych. Artykuł identyfikuje podstawowe cechy dystopijnego chronotopu, wśród których najważniejsze są opozycje między jednostką a państwem, ciałem a umysłem, tym co niskie i wysokie, centralne i peryferyjne, między przeszłością a teraźniejszością, miastem i światem natury oraz między fałszywymi a prawdziwymi znakami.

Słowa kluczowe

dystopia, chronotop, przestrzeń, gatunek, Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

1. Introduction

Dystopia, like its predecessor and optimistic relative – utopia, has a special relationship with space. The name utopia and its generic derivatives, dystopia, eutopia and anti-utopia, share the root word "topos", which in Greek signifies "place". The term "utopia" was coined by Thomas More in a narrative which gave birth to a series of related literary genres and which named and subsumed a much older philosophical tradition of utopian thinking. As Fátima Vieira explains, "In order to create his neologism, More resorted to two Greek words – *ouk* (that means not and was reduced to *u*) and *topos* (place), to which

he added the suffix *ia,* indicating a place” (2010: 4). The term is thus “spatial” in a double sense – through the root word “topos” *signifying* “place” and the suffix “ia” *indicating* “place”. At the same time, however, the two spatial signals are contrasted with the prefix *ouk* (reduced to *u*) that carries a powerful negation. “Etymologically, utopia is thus a place which is a non-place, simultaneously constituted by a movement of [spatial] affirmation and denial” (4). Or, as Gregory Claeys and Lyman Sargent put it, “the primary characteristic of the utopia is its nonexistence combined with a *topos* – a location in time and space – to give verisimilitude” (1999:1). This double move of spatial affirmation and denial suggests, among other things, that even though utopia does not exist as a place, it is essentially spatial in so far as it formulates ideas by imagining and constructing worlds. Utopian, and later on dystopian, narratives are narratives of ideas in which space- and world-building is given a prominent structural function.

The importance of space for utopian thinking is particularly evident in literature and in other narrative forms. Since space is one of the principal categories of human experience and cognition, it is a fundamental aspect of the world-building function of narrative texts. As Marie-Laure Ryan argues, “all narratives imply a world with spatial extension, even when spatial information is withheld” (2009: 420). To construct a world is to construct its space, even if by negating spatiality. For Yuri Lotman (1990), the language of spatial relations, one of the fundamental means for interpreting reality, is crucial in constructing and analysing representations of reality modelled by individual texts. Through the analysis of space, we can interpret other, non-spatial categories and define the world view of a particular work and ultimately of a given culture.

The utopian narrative, as an expression of an idealized social system, makes the link between space and systems of values particularly strong. Utopian narratives function as expressions of ideas inscribed in the structure of the utopian world and they can be read as models of the axiological order adumbrated by the construction of space. Artur Blaim in *Gazing in*

Useless Wonder argues that early utopian literature was possible thanks to the growing importance of moral geography at the time:

> The emergence of utopian fiction as a mode of European cultural and literary practices […] was possible only in a culture which based its conception of geographical space on the moral opposition of good, at first identified with one's own land and people, and evil, represented by alien lands and their inhabitants […]. (2013: 135)

Blaim thus points to the interrelation of spatiality and the axiological order as a defining feature of the utopian tradition. In an extended analysis of utopian spaces and places, he defines individual spatial constructs and elements, such as boundaries, private and public spaces, gardens and the natural world, as expressions of the rules and values of the ideal (or best possible) world.

The emergence of dystopia, as utopia's "anti-model" (Blaim 2013: 231) and "critical friend" develops the link between space and the social order that defines utopian worlds further. The term "dystopia" is of a recent coinage, though Gregory Claeys (2010: 109-111) locates the two dystopian turns in the period following the French Revolution and after the 1890s respectively. Yet, as Blaim convincingly argues, even in early utopian narratives, constructed before the dystopian turns, the existence of dystopian space is assumed and volubly implied. The construction of the normative model of the ideal state would not be possible without the suggested existence of its counterpart, its direct opposite. While it is not always described, its "ontological status within the fictional universe is identical to that of the utopian world" (Blaim 2013: 231) and indicative of "the suggested or open negation of the narrator's world" (242). The negative world functions as a reversed paradigm of the utopian idealization and the reader is expected to take a critical stance through a dialectic movement between the two.

This study proposes to examine George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a canonical example of the dystopian novel in an attempt to define the principal features of the dystopian chronotope. The concept of the chronotope, defined by Mikhail Bakhtin in "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel" in terms of post-Einsteinian time-space, points to "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (Bakhtin 1981: 84). Bakhtin's conceptualization of literary spatiality goes beyond the traditional idea of the setting. For him, the chronotope is the structural pivot of the novel; it functions as "the organizing cente[r] for the fundamental events of the novel. The chronotope is the place where knots of narrative are tied and untied. It can be said without qualification that to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative" (Bakhtin 1981: 250). The semiotic importance of the chronotope lies in its ability to organize and concretize information by "giving flesh and blood" to "dry information and communicated facts" (Bakhtin 1981: 250). In effect, the chronotope:

> emerges as a centre for concretizing representation, as a force giving body to the entire novel. All the novel's abstract elements – philosophical and social generalizations, ideas, analyses of cause and effect – gravitate toward the chronotope and through it take on flesh and blood, permitting the imaging power of art to do its work. (Bakhtin 1981: 250)

Through the chronotope the abstract and the general "thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible" (Bakhtin 1981: 84); through its "representational importance", ideas and values, generalizations and abstractions become artistic worlds and universes. Thanks to its "wholeness and fullness" (Bakhtin 1981: 243), the chronotope functions as the foundation of the artistic modelling of reality.

The chronotope offers a particularly important form of expressing structures of values and norms. "In literature and art itself, temporal and spatial determinations are inseparable

from each other, and always colored by emotions and values". Therefore "the chronotope in a work always contains within it an evaluating aspect" (Bakhtin 1981: 243), which explains why it is such an important aspect of utopian and dystopian narratives. The chronotope functions as "an optic for reading texts as x-rays of the forces at work in the culture system from which they spring" (Bakhtin 1981: 427). It guarantees the unity of the work and determines its relation to reality but it also underlies the representation of the human realm. Bakhtin links the model of the world as inscribed in the chronotope with the modelling of individual and social worlds. As he writes, "The chronotope as a formally constitutive category determines to a significant degree the image of man in literature as well. The image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic" (Bakhtin 1981: 85).

As a structural centre of the novel, the chronotope is closely interrelated with genre. The chronotope in literature, writes Bakhtin, "has an intrinsic generic significance. It can even be said that is is precisely the chronotope that defines genre and generic distinctions" (1981: 84-5). While the quote suggests that chronotopes determine generic variations (Bakhtin 1981: 243), the relation between the two is of interrelation rather than of hierarchy. Bakhtin does not define the form of this interrelatedness, rather his conceptualization of the chronotope "brings space, time, and genre together in a conceptually integrated way" (Tally 2013: 56). In his analysis of forms of chronotope in the novel, as Robert Tally aptly explains,

> at times the chronotope primarily appears to be defined by its respective genre, such as the chronotope of the ancient Greek romance, while in other moments it seems to refer to a particular spatiotemporal figure within a work or genre, such as "the road" as distinctive chronotope. (Tally 2013: 57)

The structuring role of the chronotope is explicated by Bakhtin's analysis in "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel". He demonstrates the way the chronotope integrates

and determines other aspects of the text. It is shown to model not only the setting but also the plot, character construction and structure of values – the novel's philosophy or ideology.

In what follows, I shall try to define the dystopian chronotope in the way it organizes and models the represented world in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four.* Dystopia, as a novel of ideas, a satire on a particular social order, is a particularly apt genre to consider the structural function of the chronotope. From the inception of the utopian tradition, utopian world-building functioned as a way of expressing – "giving flesh to" as Bakhtin puts it – general and abstract ideas about the social order. In utopian literature, the link between genre, space, time and the social and axioloxical orders is thus particularly strong and defining for the whole tradition. The spatial model of the world is the structuring centre that gives the text its unity but also determines, as pointed out by Blaim, its relation to external reality – the criticised "now and here" of the writer and the reader.

2. Plot

Contemporary dystopian narratives developed from "the colossal failures of totalitarian collectivism" (Claeys 2010: 108) of the twentieth century and take these failures as their principal concern. The structuring theme of dystopia is the relation between the individual self and the oppressive, monolithic state. The plot usually takes on the story of a protagonist that awakens to the true nature of social and political reality and starts to rebel, usually unsuccessfully. The story often ends with the protagonist's failure, though in critical dystopias a way out of dystopian reality is offered, or at least, hinted at. A common motif in dystopia is the protagonist's interrogation and trial (Gottlieb 2001: 10), which may function as a way of explicating the ideology behind the authoritarian state.

One of the principal tensions in the composition of dystopian narratives is the tension between the demands of the dramatic plot and the need to explicate the ideological premises of

the totalitarian state, which characterises many novels of ideas. Dystopian narratives often contain a comprehensive presentation of the principles of the organisation of the system, which may take the form of a separate narrative, an extended discussion or a monologue.

Nineteen Eighty-Four tells the story of Winston Smith, a citizen of London, the chief city of Airstrip One in Oceania in the not-too-distant future. In a limited omniscient narrative focalized by Winston, we learn of his failed rebellion against the totalitarian state ruled by Big Brother. The functioning of the state is explained in his diary, in his thoughts, in conversations with other characters, especially with his lover Julia and torturer O'Brien, but also in Goldstein's book and in the novel's Appendix, containing "The Principles of Newspeak".

3.1. Private vs public: spaces

The defining plot pattern of dystopia, focusing on the relation between the individual and the state, translates into a particular construction of space, in which the boundary between the space of the individual and the space of the state becomes a crucial locus of signification. The lines separating the private from the public, the individual from the communal, the intimate realm belonging to the self from the shared (or transgressed) space controlled by the state, become an important source of narrative dynamics – either because the boundaries exist and are transgressed or because they do not exist and the reader is expected to interpret the lack in negative terms. The first case characterises *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* in which, as will be demonstrated below, the drama of the plot hinges largely on the revelation of the state's penetration of the realm of the individual self. The second defines the spatial construction for example in *Brave New World*, where the very first scene of infant conditioning shows the individual self to be completely shaped by the discourses of the system, which suggests the nullification of the boundary between the private and the public, between the individual and the communal. The lack of this

boundary functions as a signal of the dystopian character of the represented world that the reader is expected to note and criticise.

3.2. Private vs public: social relations

The dystopian problematization of the tension between private, individual and public, communal spaces entails a recurrent use of certain common spatial tropes, and since in dystopian narratives the spatial and the social are closely interrelated, spatial themes signal specific forms of social relations. Among the common spatial motifs are the destruction of private space – most importantly the destruction of home and/or home privacy, a critical representation of different forms of communal living and the ubiquity of surveillance systems, be it in the form of the eye of Big Brother in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the glass houses in *We* or infant conditioning into sameness in *Brave New World*. Dystopian society either discourages or firmly forbids the forms of social interactions that might promote privacy, intimacy and individualism. The destruction of private space signals the disintegration of family life, intimate relationships and the impossibility of individual development outside the system of the state.

3.3. Private vs public: mind vs body

The semiotic importance of the boundary separating intimate and shared spaces highlights the significance of other, related boundaries, among which crucial is the one separating the inner, mental and the outer, bodily space. In this sense, the thematic preoccupation with the body, common in dystopian narratives, can be seen as a corollary of the semiotic and dramatic importance of the tension between private and public spheres. In dystopias, the body is often portrayed as the area where the conflict between the individual and the state is waged. The state wants to bring the corporeal under control, while the individual tries to protect it and in principle, the

more intimate the experience of the body, the more dystopian is the effect of its control. Thus, for example, the control of food and consumption tends to be seen as less intrusive than the control of sexual relationships and procreation, the latter being a particularly important theme in feminist dystopias. What is more, the evaluation of biological manipulation as a form of social engineering as either positive or negative tends to function as an important marker of utopian versus dystopian society.

3.4. Private vs public: *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

The dystopian problematization of the tension between private, individual and public, communal spaces is well observable in *Nineteen Eighty-Four.* The authoritarian state of Oceania constructs social relations by depraving its citizens of any sense of privacy and individualism and promoting instead obligatory communalism and conformism. In the novel, the family is either completely absent, as in Winston's present life, or is subordinated to the principles of the state, as illustrated by the fate of Parsons, whose arrest is the result of his daughter's denunciation.

The disintegration of the family and the values that it stands for, mutual support, comfort, intimacy and sharing, finds a material equivalent in the dilapidated condition of the houses. Dominating the landscape of the city are rotting nineteenth-century houses, in which nothing seems to function and which prevent any sense of comfort, cosiness or intimacy. Obligatory communal activities and constant surveillance by the ubiquitous telescreens, present not only in public but also in private spaces, function as consistent markers of the destruction of the private sphere.

The destruction of the private realm is the principal characteristic of the novel's spatial construction but it is also inscribed in the development of the action. In fact, one might argue that the principle of transgression, of the state intervention and destruction of the private space of the individual, is

the structuring principle of the novel's plot. This theme, as I suggested elsewhere (Terentowicz-Fotyga 2015: 76-77), is signalled in the very first sentence of the novel, portraying Winston's frail attempts to prevent the atmospheric turmoil from entering the space of the house:

> It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen. Winston Smith, his chin nuzzled into his breast in an effort to escape the vile wind, slipped quickly through the glass doors of Victory Mansions, though not quickly enough to prevent a swirl of gritty dust from entering along with him. (Orwell 1975: 7)

Winston's inability to stop the wind from entering the house functions as ominous foretelling of his subsequent failure to defend not only his private realm, but also his inner self from the intrusion of the state.

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* the development of the plot is propelled by the shifting of the boundary separating the inner from the outer realms. In the totalitarian reality of Oceania, state surveillance embraces all the material spaces in which Outer Party members are allowed to exist: from public, communal and work spaces to the private space of home. Big telescreens in the streets and in private quarters ensure the system's total penetration and control of the realm of the individual.

In effect, all spaces become metonymic expressions of the dominant ideology. As *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism* explains, the maintenance of the *status quo* of a hierarchical social system, demands that the growth of wealth be controlled and limited to a small minority, while the majority of Oceania kept "bare, hungry [and] dilapidated" (Orwell 1975: 153) by a continuous shortage of consumption goods. This principle, as Winston notes observing the people in the canteen, is reflected both in the urban fabric and in the human body. The urban and the corporeal, in equal measure, are the canvas of the Party's dominance:

> A low-ceilinged, crowded room, its walls grimy from the contact of innumerable bodies; battered metal tables and chairs placed so close together that you sat with elbows touching; bent spoons, dented trays, coarse white mugs; all surfaces greasy, grime in every crack; […] there had never been enough to eat, one had never had socks or underclothes that were not full of holes, furniture had always been battered and rickety, rooms underheated, tube trains crowded, houses falling to pieces, bread dark-coloured, tea a rarity, coffee filthy-tasting, cigarettes insufficient. […] He looked round the canteen again. Nearly everyone was ugly, and would still have been ugly even if dressed otherwise than in the uniform blue overalls. […] The majority of people in Airstrip One were small, dark, and ill-favoured. It was curious how that beetle-like type proliferated in the Ministries: little dumpy men, growing stout very early in life, with short legs, swift scuttling movements, and fat inscrutable faces with very small eyes. It was the type that seemed to flourish best under the dominion of the Party. (Orwell 1975: 51-2)

As the novel opens, the only space that truly belongs to the individual is the space of the mind. The private realm, opposed to the shared and controlled outer reality, in this case is limited to the reality of thoughts, as one of the most powerful sentences in the novel suggests: "Nothing was your own except the few cubic centimetres inside your skull" (Orwell 1975: 25). The biggest crime in Oceania, "the essential crime that contained all others in itself" (Orwell 1975: 19) is Thoughtcrime, the crime of independent, individual thinking, as it contradicts the most essential rule of the system – that no private realm beyond the control of the state should exist. Inner freedom, the freedom of the mind, can only be assured by outer conformity and self-control. To keep the boundary between the private and the shared realms tight and in effect to keep the inner thoughts sealed, you need to control not only what you say and what you do but even your voluntary and involuntary body reactions, face expressions, breathing, even the heartbeat. As Winston says, "To keep your face expressionless was not difficult, and even your breathing could be controlled, with an effort: but you could not control the beating of your heart,

and the telescreen was quite delicate enough to pick it up" (Orwell 1975: 66).

When Winston decides to rebel against Big Brother, he in fact decides to disturb the boundary that separates the private realm of thoughts from the sphere controlled by the state, to extend the space of inner freedom beyond the space of the mind. What starts as an expression of his thoughts that so far belonged to the "locked loneliness in which one had to live" (Orwell 1975: 18), gradually takes over the material spaces in which Winston functions. The rebellious activity spills first into the little corner of the room in which he writes his diary, then into the places that Julia and Winston visit during the trip to the country and finally into the space of the room above the junkshop. Visiting O'Brien convinces him that dissident activity has even penetrated the spaces of some Inner Party members. This conviction is soon to be painfully contradicted and Winston will realize that the process of extending the space of dissidence has only been apparent, that the perception of spaces as free of state control has been misconstrued.

When Julia and Winston start the affair, they do not believe that the external rebellion can last; deep in their hearts they know that they will not be able to get away with what they are doing. However, they are convinced that inner space will remain intact, that the realm of thoughts and feelings is ultimately beyond the reach of the state. In one of the crucial passages in the book, Julia tells Winston: "Confession is not betrayal. What you say or do doesn't matter: only feelings matter. [...] They can make you say anything – *anything* – but they can't make you believe it. They can't get inside you" (Orwell 1975: 136), to which he answers in his thoughts:

> With all their cleverness they had never mastered the secret of finding out what another human being was thinking. [...] They could not alter your feelings: for that matter you could not alter them yourself, even if you wanted to. They could lay bare in the utmost detail everything that you had done or said or thought;

> but the inner heart, whose workings were mysterious even to yourself, remained impregnable. (Orwell 1975: 136)

Yet, the conviction that the inner self is beyond the reach of the Party is precisely where the lovers are proven wrong and the failure of their rebellion consists in gradual unravelling of the scale of the state intervention into their private space. First, the outer spaces that for a while seemed impregnable to state control – the little corner of Winston's room, the room above the junk shop – are revealed to have been infiltrated all along. Then, the most inner space of individual thoughts and emotions is penetrated. The collapse of Winston's world is marked first by the destruction of material spaces, then by the devastation of his body and finally, and most importantly, by the ruin of his inner self, signalled by the emotional betrayal of Julia and his declaration of love for and belief in Big Brother.[1]

As I argued elsewhere, it is in the destruction of the most private, inner realm, the one that separates the inner space of the mind from the shared, communal reality controlled by the state, that the truly dynamic character of the novel lies.

> Not in the failure of the external rebellion, not in the brutal ending of Winston and Julia's relationship – right from the start they and us, readers know that they cannot succeed. But it is only [...] in the long interrogation and conversations with O'Brien, do we realize that totalitarian power *can* alter thoughts and emotions, that the system *can* undermine the most basic form of identification [rooted in the inner self]. (Terentowicz-Fotyga 2015: 78)

The drama of the plot lies precisely in demonstrating to the reader and to the characters themselves that the space of the mind is not impregnable, that inner feelings, thoughts and convictions are alterable, that the state "can get inside you" and "make you believe" and thus that not even "the few cubic centimetres inside your skull" belong to you. Ultimately, all

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[1] The transgression of the state into the inner space leads to its materialization when Winston's most private fear, the fear of rats, is externalized in Room 101.

individual thought is erased and the type represented by Winston's wife, one that "had not a thought in her head that was not a slogan, and there was no imbecility, absolutely none that she was not capable of swallowing if the Party handed it out to her" (Orwell 1975: 57), is to predominate.

4. Dominant-dominated, appropriated, reappropriated spaces

Whereas the binary division into the private, individual and public, shared (and controlled) realms may be seen as a basic principle of dystopian spatiality, a more complex conceptualization of dystopian spatial worlds can be proposed. In an illuminating analysis of eutopian mapping, Ludmiła Gruszewska-Blaim (2012) constructs a model of dystopian spatiality based on Yuri Lotman's definition of the semiosphere and Henri Lefebvre's conceptualizations of dominant-dominated, appropriated and re-appropriated spaces.

In this reading, the dominant-dominated spaces are "the hegemonic, monologically oriented dystopian" realizations of a master's-project (Gruszewska-Blaim 2012: 169-173); they represent spaces that are controlled by the state, defined and determined by its rules and ideology. In dystopian narratives, the master's-project tries to control ever greater areas, as its principal aim is to "freeze altogether the inner dynamics of the semiosphere" (Gruszewska-Blaim 2012: 173) and impose a singular code upon the whole space.

Appropriated spaces, by contrast, are spaces that serve the needs and possibilities of a group of people and thus enable the introduction of different codes than those defined by the master's-project. Appropriated spaces lean to uniqueness, estrangement, and an aesthetic function (Gruszewska-Blaim 2012: 175-176) and can be linked to the personal, intimate realm of the individual or to spaces dedicated to specific activities of a group of people. Quoting from Lefebvre, Gruszewska-Blaim mentions the spaces of the family and of the individual but also the school, the workplace, the church, even a square

or a street, as potentially appropriated spaces. What distinguishes dystopia, however, Gruszewska-Blaim convincingly argues, is that in contrast to many other genres that "revel in producing spaces of one's own: private, familiar, idiosyncratic, the dystopia apparently undermines the very idea of the appropriated space" (Gruszewska-Blaim 2012: 176). Since the masterminds of the dominant-dominated spaces aim at reducing the diversity of the space under its control, they limit the possibility of introducing other codes than those defined by the master's-project.

Therefore, in dystopia crucial is the structural function of the third kind of space – reappropriated space, being the locus of dissidence, the place where "most counterfactual and liminal plotting originates and develops" (Gruszewska-Blaim 2012: 178). Though, due to the threat they pose to the master's-project, reappropriated spaces in dystopia can only be transient and temporary:

> The reappropriated space in dystopia, which is born of the "utopiacrime" committed by protagonists, is the most likely location to dream the eutopian future. The most typical sub-space where eutopian mapping may occur are the peripheries of the dominant space: cellars, roots, dilapidating, pauperized city districts, woods, seacoasts, as if encourage reappropriation. […] reappropriation takes place whenever two or more characters are capable of finding their own way out of the dystopian chronotopos through verbal exchange, gazing, touching or other signals and means of communication. (Gruszewska-Blaim 2012: 179)

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* the master's-project of Ingsoc dominates the whole space of Oceania, even if in the areas inhabited by the proles the rules are more lenient, mostly due to the fact that proles are considered incapable of constructing a meaningful code of their own. What appears as appropriated space, the junk shop or the Chestnut Tree Café, proves to be fully controlled by and inscribed in the dominant ideology. The appropriation is thus only illusory. Reappropriated spaces are of necessity only temporary. As Winston says, "[r]ebellion

meant a look in the eye, an inflexion of the voice; at the most, an occasional whispered word" (Orwell 1975: 59). The brightly-lit corridor in which Winston and Julia first touch and exchange the written message, the little corner in his room, where he seems to be beyond the reach of the telescreen, the natural spaces they explore during the trip to the country and, finally, the room above the junk shop, ultimately prove to have been fully invigilated by the state. As Gruszewska-Blaim explains in an unpublished paper entitled "The Dystopian Beyond: George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*", Orwell's dystopia "eliminates one kind of beyond after another, leaving its subjects with neither space nor time or discourse that could allow them to feel or imagine that they are behind the confines of the dystopian semiosphere" (2).

5. Heightened semantics of the extreme

As was argued in the Introduction, the structural function of the chronotope as "a centre for concretizing representation" in which "philosophical and social generalizations, ideas, analyses of cause and effect […] take on flesh and blood" (Bakhtin 1981: 250) is particularly well-observable in dystopias. The close relation between space and ideology in dystopian narratives means that social and political ideas about nightmarish reality find very marked, symbolic expressions in the construction of space; the spatial language of architecture functions as a visible expression of the social order. And since dystopias tend to portray extreme visions of society and its future, the language of space also tends to rely heavily on the poetics of the extreme.

Apart from the dynamic semiotization of the private-public boundary, the markedness of forms can be observed in a strong dynamization of such binary oppositions as the centre and the periphery and top and bottom. Gruszewska-Blaim writes about the second of these aspects, the importance of verticality, as a defining feature of dystopia. She argues that the "heightened semantics of the extreme (i.e. the highest and

the lowest) points on the vertical axis" (Gruszewska-Blaim 2012: 171) is used in dystopia to represent the relation between the ruling and the ruled:

> Images of verticality and great height as the spatial expression of potentially violent power (Lefebvre, *Production of Space* 98) have regularly inspired dystopian cinema. The arrogant verticality of the architectural design, appropriately conveying 'the spatial disposition of a totalitarian state defined by a pyramidal, hierarchical structure, in which power flows from the top' (Erickson 28), appears already in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927). (Gruszewska-Blaim 2012: 170)

The dystopian social structure is strongly stratified and hierarchical. In *Nineteen Eighty*-Four, this is most evident in the image of the imposing pyramidal structures of the Ministries dominating the landscape of the city. The Ministries "dwarf [ing] the surrounding architecture" (Orwell 1975: 7) function as marked indicators of the power of the state, visible symbols of its tyranny and oppression. The dominance of verticality in a totalitarian social architecture, John Erickson rightly argues, signals the imposition of power from above:

> though verticality dominates, the movement is usually downward, the downward movement of the dystopia, where only oppression and subordination, not release, are possible. "[T]he black-moustachio'd face [of Big Brother gazes] down from every commanding corner" (4). Helicopters descend from the sky to peer into people's windows (4). Winston thinks of his disappeared mother as "sitting in some place deep down beneath him […] down in some subterranean place – the bottom of a well, for instance, or a very deep grave – but it was a place which, already far below him, was itself moving downwards" (31). (Erickson 1993: 28)

Vertical hierarchies and the downward movement of power, Gruszewska-Blaim argues, is accompanied by the impenetrability of the top and the penetrability of the bottom realms. The ruling caste, living in "visible yet inaccessible towers" can

"choose the degree of (in)visibility of their own persons and/or places of residence" (2012: 171), which is a privilege denied to those at the bottom. "Social and/or spatial invisibility of the dystopian elite successfully blocks rare attempts on the part of the disempowered mob to open a dialogue with the empowered top" (171).

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* extreme differences between the empowered top and the disempowered bottom are also reflected in the contrast between the rotting houses of the proles and Outer Party members and the neat, comfortable interiors of the Inner Party notables. The "huge block of flats, the richness and spaciousness of everything, the unfamiliar smells of good food and good tobacco, the silent and incredibly rapid lifts sliding up and down, the white-jacketed servants hurrying to and fro" (Orwell 1975: 137) that Winston admires during his visit at O'Brien's signal the hierarchical superiority of Inner Party members over the rest of society.

The same principle of the "heightened semantics of the extreme" that Gruszewska-Blaim identifies at the vertical level can also be observed at the horizontal level. The representation of the relation between the ruling and the ruled can be portrayed through marked differences between the centre and the periphery. Any semiosphere, Lotman argues in *Universe of the Mind*, is marked by the asymmetry between the centre, where "the most developed and structurally organized languages" (1990: 127) are formed, and the periphery, which is "the field of tension where new languages come into being" (1990: 134). While the centre is associated with power and semiotic closure, the periphery is the space of dissidence and semiotic dynamism:

> in the centre of the cultural space, sections of the semiosphere aspiring to the level of self-description become rigidly organized and self-regulating. But at the same time they lose dynamism and having once exhausted their reserve of indeterminacy they became inflexible and incapable of further development. On the periphery – and the further one goes from the centre, the more noticeable

> this becomes – the relationship between semiotic practice and the norms imposed on it becomes ever more strained. Texts generated in accordance with these norms hang in the air, without any real semiotic context; while organic creations, born of the actual semiotic milieu, come into conflict with the artificial norms. This is the area of semiotic dynamism. (Lotman 1990: 134)

Using the terms employed by Gruszewska-Blaim, one might argue that the centre is the space of the master's-project, while the peripheries are the spaces of potential reappropriation. The more active the periphery, the more more potential for dissidence and in effect, the greater the semiotic dynamism of the whole semioshpere. Yet, since one of the principal markers of dystopia is the urge to "freeze altogether the inner dynamics of the semiosphere" (Gruszewska-Blaim 2012: 173) and impose a singular code upon the whole space, the control of the periphery is absolutely essential for the stability of the master's-project. The control is both physical and ideological, as the peripheries need to be kept politically powerless and semiotically inactive.

The hierarchical separation of different spaces of the dystopian semiosphere and the dominance of the master's code of the centre are only possible thanks to a strict organization of different spaces, a full control of people's movement and the marked and clearly visible definition of their codes. As Gruszewska-Blaim rightly argues, "[t]he rigidness of spatial arrangement, underlined by both vertical and horizontal compartmentalization, clearly marked centres, borders, and peripheries, repetitiveness of forms, etc. is often accompanied by the neatness and/or uniformity of colour codes or precisely defined trajectories of movement" (Gruszewska-Blaim 2012: 174). Different spaces are demarcated by different, strictly-defined principles and clearly marked verbal and visual codes. People's movements and activities, the books they are allowed or forbidden to read, the food they eat and the clothes they wear, all function as markers of people's position in "the dys-

topian pyramid" (Gruszewska-Blaim 2012: 182) that reflects their power or powerlessness.

In the reality of Oceania, though no spaces beyond the control of the state can be found, the scale of control clearly differs. On the whole, the further away from the centre, symbolized by the four Ministries, the lower the degree of the state penetration. The district of the proles is less invigilated than that of the Outer Party Members, yet more controlled that the space of the countryside, where there are no telescreens, only microphones and thus it is easier to have some sense of impenetrability than in the areas closer to the centre. At the same time, a degree of influence over Big Brother's invigilation that is possible in the spaces of Inner Party members, which Winston witnesses when O'Brien turns off the telescreen, does not signify the absence of control. Relaxing the invigilation is only possible because Inner Party members themselves function as masterminds and guardians of the master's-project. In the rigidly organized and compartmentalized space of Oceania, citizen's class belonging is defined as much by the spaces they are allowed to frequent, as by the clothes they wear and the food they eat. The limited power to move beyond the marked trajectories, the standardised blue overalls resonating with the dominant greyness of the surrounding space, the nonsensical, repetitive drudgery of daily activities, all signal the typically dystopian uniformity and lack of individual agency.

6. Heterochronies: past versus present

Among the defining themes of dystopian narratives is the role of history and the past. As Erika Gottlieb argues, "one of the most typical 'messages' of dystopian fiction is that access to the records of the past is vital to the mental health of any society. […] a past the totalitarian regime would like to distort or deny completely" (2001: 12). The contrast between the past and the present is thus inscribed in the principal dystopian conflict between "a narrative [of the hegemonic order] and a counter-narrative [of resistance]" (Baccolini qtd. in Moylan

2000: 150) and thus, by default, in the principal plot of the individual's rebellion against the state. People's experience of an "absolute break with their traditional time" (Foucault 1986: 26) has a spatial dimension, as narratives of history are in fact stories of the past worlds. Thus, the differences in the spatial organization of the past and present worlds speak of their different social models. As Gruszewska-Blaim explains in "The Dystopian Beyond: George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*":

> Dystopia attempts to distance itself not only from its present beyond but also from the discourse, politics, culture, history and even topography of *the old world*, regardless of the ontological nature of the latter. Interestingly, the old world, or rather its picture conveyed by the official media, is often a propagandist, fictitious, doubly dystopianised construct conceived by those who control dystopia. (8)

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the narrative of history is one of the principal areas of state control. In contrast to *Brave New World*, where the past of civilization finds material expression in the Savage Reservation, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* the past has been fully appropriated by the master's-project, as one of Oceania's principal slogans declares: "Who controls the past controls the future, who controls the present controls the past" (Orwell 1975: 199). The past, O'Brien says during Winston's interrogation, does not exist "concretely, in space" (Orwell 1975: 199), only in the written records controlled by the Party, while history is constantly rewritten and fully manipulated. As Goldstein's book makes clear, the alteration of the past is necessary firstly to safeguard that no point of reference and standard of comparison for the present system exists and secondly to prove the full control of the Party over the real world: "Past events […] have no objective existence, but survive only in written records and in human memories. The past is whatever the records and the memories agree upon" and thus the full control over the records both ensures and demonstrates

the "full control of the minds of its members" (Orwell 1975: 170).

Though the past is to some extent inscribed in the space of the city, in the rotten condition of the nineteenth-century urban fabric, Winston finds it difficult to decipher, as the disintegrating urban space speaks primarily of the destruction of the past. Similarly, the artefacts he finds in the junk shop are of limited use, as they remain only fragmentary and inconclusive. Moreover, as Gruszewska-Blaim demonstrates, these artefacts are in fact false signs:

> However, neither an old engraving of St. Clement Dane, a church, nor the fragile glass paperweight with a coral inside, sheltering, as Winston believes, a world of its own, is the footprint of the past that leads backwards, into the temporal beyond. Misleading is also a light-hearted tone of the old nursery rhymes: […] "Here comes the candle to light you to bed, / here comes a chopper to chop off your head". In actuality, all of these 'footprints of the past' happen to be false signs—the indicators of the dystopian here and now testifying only to the omnipresence of the Thought Police. Ironically, they are the warnings the dystopia of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* can allow itself to issue, appropriating the old discourse and props. Behind the two-hundred-year-old engraving, there is a "bug" installed by the Thought Police. The paperweight with its fragile world is as easily crushed as Julia and Winston's re-appropriated niche—their rented room which proves to be a trap and anti-home. And the chopper coming to chop off one's head does not only belong to a playful poetic reality constructed for children's sake. It really comes to claim Winston's head. (Gruszewska-Blaim, "The Dystopian Beyond" 19-20)

In effect, the only truth about the past can be found in the individual mind, in Winston's memories of his childhood years and in the inconsistencies of the documents he rewrites and tries to remember. Yet, once his mind is "rewritten", his "defective memory" (Orwell 1975: 197), capable of remembering things unaccepted by the Party, is finally cured and the break with the past is complete.

7. Urban dystopia

Peter Fitting rightly contends that "[d]ystopia shares with the traditional utopia a predominantly urban emphasis" (2010: 120), primarily, it seems, because the spatial language of the city lends itself better to expressing the complex architectonics of the social order. Discussing urban dystopias in American film, Thomas Halper and Douglas Muzzio (2007) propose the following typology of dystopian cities: the city as chaos, defined by an anarchic return to pre-civilized forms, the city as a totalitarian machine, in which a totalitarian state imposes rigid system of control and order, the environmentalist's city in which the ecological problems of today are shown to evolve into different forms of nightmarish futures, the postmodern city, as exemplified by *The Matrix,* and retro city presented, for example, in *Blade Runner*. Yet, a brief consideration of canonical dystopias suggests that the totalitarian city can take very different shapes that cut across Halper and Muzzio's typology. It can take the form of sleek futurity, as well as of chaotic, retro urbanity.

In the representation of dystopian cities, the principle of "heightened semantics of the extreme" that Gruszewska-Blaim writes about also plays a major role. Dystopian cities tend to operate with extreme architectural and visual codes, which is perhaps exemplified best in the film medium. Dystopian urban spaces are associated either with sleek, sterile, technologically developed places, often organized with mechanical efficiency, as seen in *Equilibrium* or *Minority Report* or with grimy, chaotic, disintegrating spatialities represented, for example, in *Blade Runner* or *Escape from L.A.* Monochromatic colour codes, so memorably used in *THX 1138* contrast with splashing colours of *The Hunger Games*. Carceral places are juxtaposed with spaces of anarchic chaos; crowded, labyrinthine cities and buildings are contrasted with vast, empty, often desert-like landscapes, sometimes even within one narrative. Extreme visual codes function as clear signals of extreme forms of the social order.

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, one of the principal purposes of the master's-project is to "arrest progress and freeze history at a chosen moment" (Orwell 1975: 163) and since science "has almost ceased to exist [and] technological progress only happens when its products can in some way be used for the diminution of human liberty" (Orwell 1975: 156), the London of Oceania encapsulates the idea of "used future" or "future as the past". Though some signs of futurity in relation to the writer's present are introduced into the novel, among which crucial are the ubiquitous telescreens, on the whole, the city is defined by the disintegrating nineteenth-century urban fabric, constantly threatened and demolished by bombs during air raids. The ugly, monochrome, grey, grimy city encapsulates the Ingsoc's vision of modern life – "its bareness, its dinginess, its listlessness" (Orwell 1975: 62). As Winston says:

> The reality was decaying, dingy cities where underfed people shuffled to and fro in leaky shoes, in patched-up nineteenth-century houses that smelt always of cabbage and bad lavatories. He seemed to see a vision of London, vast and ruinous, city of a million dustbins, and mixed up with it was a picture of Mrs Parsons, a woman with lined face and wispy hair, fiddling helplessly with a blocked waste-pipe. (Orwell 1975: 63)

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* there are no sleek interiors or technological gadgets to signal advanced civilization, there are only crumbling houses with dysfunctional appliances and crude machinery. As I argued elsewhere, the grey, derelict city is well portrayed in Michael Radford's adaptation of the novel:

> A powerful aspect of the *mise en scène*, largely responsible for the film's haunting atmosphere, is its monochrome colour palette. The whole film is shot in washed-out, desaturated colours, in greyish and sepia tones. Since the camera is often placed behind a screen or a window, many shots have a rough, grainy texture, which further suggests the gap between the inner, private world and the public, official perspective. Radford's *1984* is reportedly a rare example of the use of a film processing technique called bleach by-

> pass being done on every release print rather than the internegative or interpositive, which creates the washed-out look of the shots and gives the projected image depth (IMDb). The forest and the Golden Country are the only spaces portrayed in vivid hues and the change of the colour palette captures well Orwellian contrast of bleak urbanity and dreamy rurality. (Terentowicz-Fotyga 2015: 89)

8. The city versus the countryside

Another structuring spatial contrast characterising dystopian narratives is the contrast between rural and urban spaces. In the analysis of the English Robinsonade of the eighteenth century, Artur Blaim (2016) identifies the relation between nature and civilization as an important theme for the whole tradition. Evoking the binary model proposed by Harold Toliver, Blaim analyses utopianism's dialogue with the pastoral tradition with its contrasting visions of nature and civilization (2016: 151-3). The contrasting features Blaim identifies in *The English Hermit* can be said to define well the dystopian chronotope. Within this model, nature is associated with freedom, organicism, democracy, plainness and honesty, innocence, simplicity and cultural order, while society by constriction, mechanical formality, hierarchy, masked artificiality, experience, complexity and barbaric violence. In fictional dystopias, as Peter Fitting explains, "the rebel finds in the rural, pastoral world beyond the confines of dystopian society a space and freedom otherwise denied […] the natural, organic character of the rural world is inalterably opposed to the controlling human design of dystopian society" (2010: 120-1).

Contrasting features evoked by Blaim define well the relation between nature and civilization in *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* where the artificial and threatening space of the city is contrasted with the natural world of the countryside. What is significant, in the novel, the natural world functions both as real and mental space. The Golden Country of Winston's imagination, is both a distant memory of the past and the landscape he recognizes during the trip with Julia. Presented as an ideal-

ized image of natural beauty and harmony represented by peaceful coexistence of different elements and creatures, it stands in stark contrast with the drab ugliness, devastating hierarchies and barbaric violence of the city:

> In his waking thoughts he called it the Golden Country. It was an old, rabbit-bitten pasture, with a foot-track wandering across it and a molehill here and there. In the ragged hedge on the opposite side of the field the boughs of the elm trees were swaying very faintly in the breeze, their leaves just stirring in dense masses like women's hair. Somewhere near at hand, though out of sight, there was a clear, slow-moving stream where dace were swimming in the pools under the willow trees. (Orwell 1975: 28)

The clash between the realistically represented city and the dreamy pastorality of the Golden Country represents the contrast between the brutal order of the present system and the idealised spaces of the past but also between the crude reality of the contemporary city and the imaginary Arcadia of the mind. Yet, like all reappropritated spaces, the Golden Country offers only a transient respite from the dystopian world of the city and ultimately it cannot "constitute a viable utopian enclave" (Moylan 2000: 162). In the last scene of the novel, the memories of the happy moments from the past are deemed false, while welcoming the future depends on Winston's acceptance of the propagandist version of the present "entering his brain" (Orwell 1975: 239).

9. The false signs of dystopia

Finally, the defining aspect of dystopian spatiality takes on the relation between language and reality. As Artur Blaim convincingly demonstrates, in contrast to utopia, being the domain of true signs, "the dystopian world is the domain of false or empty signs" (2013: 250), signs that are either openly misleading or meaningless. In dystopian worlds, the "bond between signs and their meanings becomes tenuous and relative (251) and in effect reality stands apart from its representations. Totalitarian

regimes, as Michael Urban demonstrated in his analysis of discourse in the communist countries, are dominated by "non-referential signification" in which the "official descriptions of the prevailing order lack the practical referents" while the actual practices of the dominant party cannot "be named or discussed" (2006: 122).

> False signs are at the core of the philosophy of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as they pervade the notions of Newspeak, doublethink, Thoughtcrime, reality control and the denial of objective reality. In Oceania, Winston says, words have "no connection with anything in the real world, not even the kind of connection that is contained in a direct lie" (Orwell 36) and the different aspects of the split between language and reality are dramatized throughout the novel, from the lie about the chocolate ration to rewriting the past to the interrogation in which Winston learns to see the evidence of his senses as tentative and modifiable. [...] We are told, for example, that the Ministry of Peace concerns itself with war and Ministry of Love maintains law and order. The paradox culminates with the oxymoronic: "war is peace, freedom is slavery, ignorance is strength" (Orwell 25). (Terentowicz-Fotyga 2015: 79)

The split between language and reality has an effect on the representation of the dystopian world, which exists as if in two forms. In one, created by the incessant propaganda pouring out of the telescreens, life is plentiful, people beautiful and the system efficient. In the other, nothing works, emaciated people suffer from scarcity of everything and the system only "perpetuat[es] *un*freedom and *in*equality" (Orwell 1975: 163) enforcing the "controlled insanity" of its citizens (Orwell 1975: 172):

> Life, if you looked about you, bore no resemblance not only to the lies that streamed out of the telescreens, but even to the ideals that the Party was trying to achieve. [...] The ideal set up by the Party was something huge, terrible, and glittering – a world of steel and concrete, of monstrous machines and terrifying weapons – a nation of warriors and fanatics marching forward in perfect unity, all thinking the same thoughts and shouting the same slogans, perpetually working, fighting, triumphing, persecuting –

> three hundred million people all with the same face. The reality was decaying, dingy cities where underfed people shuffled to and fro in leaky shoes, in patched-up nineteenth-century houses that smelt always of cabbage and bad lavatories. […] Everything faded into mist. The past was erased, the erasure was forgotten, the lie became truth. (Orwell 1975: 63)

10. Conclusion

The contemporary popularity of dystopian narratives indicates that a range of themes, tropes and visual motifs used in portraying dystopian realities is very broad. But numerous features that characterise the dystopian chronotope in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, as identified in the study, have proved defining and persistent for the dystopian tradition. Crucial among those are the oppositions between the individual and the state, the mind and the body, the high and the low, the central and the peripheral, the past and the present, the city and the natural world and between false and true signs. Though they evolved through different forms and contexts, they continue to structure the nightmarish visions of the human world in literature and cinema.

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DYSTOPIA AND SOLIDARITY

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Sorority without solidarity: Control in the patriarchal utopia of Margaret Atwood's *The Handsmaid's Tale*

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Abstract

Despite all variables, the subjugation of the female figure has always been the constant in the conceptualisation of patriarchal utopias. To ensure that subjugation women must undergo a process of reformation and surrender into normative sororities that are at the mercy of the state. It is argued here that such patriarchal utopias involve the elimination of solidarity with and between members of the sororal collective. This ensures the isolation of women and, consequently, eliminates the emancipation of womanhood from patriarchal idealisations. Sororities without solidarity are subjected to a comparative analysis of various classical utopian/dystopian texts and Atwood's feminist dystopia *The Handmaid's Tale* in order to foreground the problem concerning the construction of normative female beings. Moreover, the figure of (e)merging women in contemporary feminist utopian/dystopian discourses paves the way for female empowerment within patriarchal society by combining sorority *and* solidarity.

Keywords

sorority, solidarity, desexualisation, patriarchal utopia, *The Handmaid's Tale,* (e)merging women

Żeński kolektyw bez solidarności: Kontrola w patriarchalnej utopii *Opowieści podręcznej* Margaret Atwood

Pomimo najróżniejszych zmiennych, fakt podporządkowania postaci kobiecej był nieodmiennie stałym elementem patriarchalnej utopii. Kobiety zmuszone są przejść proces „reformacji" podporządkowując się normom żeńskich kolektywów całkowicie uzależnionych od woli państwa. Niniejszy artykuł stara się dowieść, że taka sytuacja pociąga za sobą rozbicie solidarności pomiędzy członkiniami żeńskiego kolektywu oraz pomiędzy nim a resztą społeczeństwa. Prowadzi to do osamotnienia kobiet, a w konsekwencji uniemożliwia emancypację kobiecości w ramach patriarchalnych utopii. Zjawisko żeńskiego kolektywu pozbawionego solidarności zostaje omówione na przykładzie analizy porównawczej klasycznych tekstów utopijnych/dystopijnych oraz feministyczną dystopią Margaret Atwood *Opowieść podręcznej*, która ma na celu ukazanie problemów pojawiających się podczas próby konstrukcji normatywnych modeli kobiecości. Ponadto postać kobiety wyłaniająca się ze współczesnych feministycznych dyskursów utopijnych/dystopijnych zdaje się sprzyjać umocnieniu pozycji kobiet w patriarchalnym społeczeństwie, poprzez stwarzanie możliwości uczynienia solidarności niezbędnym czynnikiem spajającym żeński kolektyw.

Słowa kluczowe

żeński kolektyw, solidarność, deseksualizacja, utopia patriarchalna, *Opowieść podręcznej*, kobiety

> If utopias are based on the imperative of order, we must ask:
> Whose order is it? At whose expense has it been constructed?
> At what cost is it maintained?
> (Bammer 1991: 17)

Even though the word 'utopia' is open to interpretations, if we were to understand classical utopia as a patriarchal space whose order falls under male-defined terms (Bammer 1991:

19), we could easily respond to the first two questions by saying that men's control in the utopian dream is only possible at the expense of women. However, the answer to the third question may vary among scholars, producing as a result a wide range of possibilities (e.g. women's bodies, voices, freedom, equality, etc.). Without questioning earlier attempts at answering such a question, this study suggests that patriarchal utopia is maintained at the cost of female solidarity, this being the one quality that, when lost, causes the distortion – but not complete removal – of the aforementioned features.

The aim of this essay is to discuss the origins of the loss of female solidarity in the conceptualisation of patriarchal utopias as well as to analyse the process of the enforced distortion of female nature that converts sorority into a patriarchal instrument rather than an empowering bond. Secondly, I consider the deconstruction of the stagnation and essentialism of patriarchal utopia that Margaret Atwood undertakes in *The Handmaid's Tale*, revealing its true nature as a feminist dystopia. Consequently, the latest movements in feminism may consider resorting to new forms of utopianism and, accordingly, of solidarity, in order to restore sorority as the (e)merging power for women to fight, rather than serve, patriarchy.

The lack of solidarity with women characterised fictional utopian lands and permeated the historical realm too. The French Revolution, regarded as the pivotal impulse to put utopia into political practice, clearly excluded women from its motto *Liberté, Egalité, et Fraternité,* (French 2008b).[1] "Definitions may be constructed in such a way as to exclude that which should be included" (Sargisson 1996: 14), and by reducing solidarity to the fraternal bond patriarchal utopias largely ignore the female collective. Thus, the solidarity contract is

[1] However, French (2008b: 398) continues saying that the French Revolution constituted a major event in women's history considering that it occasioned their first mass protest as a caste. Women were never again silent, but men continued ignoring their demands for over two centuries. This reflects the ideas presented by Ardener (1993) in the theory of mutedness, which I apply in what follows in order to examine the lack of solidarity with women in utopia.

flouted inasmuch as there is a failure of the “presumption of reciprocity” that defines solidarity (Laitinen and Pessi 2014). Moreover, Boparai also claims that this quality must emerge from a conjoining of visions (2015: 5), and yet, the elimination of women from decision-making in the state clearly shows that utopia proves functional for only one segment of the society (Gordin et al. 2010: 1).

The most appropriate definition of solidarity in patriarchal utopia[2] is the one provided by Dean, when she characterises traditional or conventional solidarity. For her, traditional solidarity has usually operated “within a notion of membership that is both exclusionary and repressive” (1996: 15). Likewise, Sargisson (1996: 74) shows how repressive the patriarchal idea of difference is, since it is conceived as a deviance from the established norm and therefore justifies inequality. Given that he is the Absolute and she the Other (Beauvoir 2010: 28), woman’s deviance from the patriarchal norm justifies her exclusion from solidarity.

Nonetheless, this does not presuppose the banishment of women from the utopian land. Quite the opposite, the female collective turns out to be a crucial element in the conceptualisation of the patriarchal utopia, the womb being the lacking organ in the fraternity. Thereby, patriarchal utopias engender the idea that gives title to this essay: sororities without solidarity. Not only is this quality denied to women in general, but the success of patriarchal sororities consists also in the elimination of solidarity *among* women. The creation of antagonistic feminine archetypes and the lack of communication between them prevent empathetic feelings and solidary reciprocity, leaving sororities at the mercy of patriarchy’s desires.

As has been previously said, the elimination of solidarity does not divest sororities of their bodies and their voices nor

[2] When I refer to patriarchal utopia here I do not only have in mind classical literary utopias, but also any utopian movement in history that, despite its democratic intentions introduced in a more or less revolutionary way, ultimately undermined the position of women as a result of patriarchal mentality.

does it deprive them of freedom and equality enjoyed in the patriarchal utopia. However, the distortion of these elements is necessarily effected in order to fully integrate women as compliant members of the patriarchal society. Although it might seem illogical or paradoxical to observe that patriarchy *engenders* sorority, when it is usually sorority that carries out the reproductive labour in the system, women are in a way "reborn" after they have undergone this process of enforced adjustment (distortion) turning each of them into *the* ideal patriarchal woman.

1. The origins of (in)consistency in patriarchal utopia

Classical utopias have often been described as imaginary perfect societies. In order to achieve such perfection in the state, social organisation and stability must take precedence, and the patriarchal system ensures that these requirements are met. Even so, "the generic conventions of utopian fiction have on the whole been inimical to women" (Bammer 1991: 12), since patriarchal utopias rely on traditional exclusionary solidarity. As Dean claims, this notion always involves three persons: "I ask you to stand by me over and against a third" (1996: 3). The eternal third in patriarchy is a woman, if we understand patriarchy as

> a set of social relations between men, [...] which though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women. Though patriarchy is hierarchical and men of different classes, races, or ethnic groups have different places in patriarchy, they are also united in their shared relationship of dominance over their women; they are dependent on each other to maintain that domination. (Hartmann 2017: 219)

Emil Cioran suggests that "utopia is essentially anti-Manichean. Hostile to anomalies, deformities, irregularities, it tries to secure homogeneity, tradition, repetition and ortho-

doxy. But life is rupture, heresy, the exemption from the norms of the subject" (1960: 110)[3]. Though I reject the idea of patriarchal utopias as anti-Manichean, considering that Manichaeism shares with the patriarchal utopia an opposing dualist view, I agree with Cioran that patriarchal utopia aims at the eradication, or at least partial elimination, of any kind of imperfection or deviation that endangers the homogeneity of the system. Moreover, patriarchy, just like utopia, defies life itself as it tries to attain timelessness.

Marilyn French in her four-volume work *From Eve to Dawn* (2008) explores how history undergoes a shift from anarchic nature-centred communities to new highly organised societies that confer "symbolic immortality on a man and his descendants" (2008a: 68). This change assumed the end of the so-called matrilineal societies[4] in favour of the establishment of the patriarchal state, ensuring the continuity of male supremacy. Consequently, the first megalomaniac utopian dreams invariably reflected this desire for static consistency:

> although utopias may sweep away such fundamental existing institutions as private property, money, or the Christian religion, they rely as heavily on the maintenance of patriarchy for their distinctive character as on the abolition or transformation of other aspects of society. (Ferns 1999: 64)

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[3] The translation is mine. The original passage reads as follows: "L'utopie est d'essence antimanichéenne. Hostile à l'anomalie, au difforme, à l'irrégulier, elle tend à l'affermissement de l'homogène, du type, de la répétition et de l'orthodoxie. Mais la vie est rupture, hérésie, dérogation aux normes de la matière".

[4] Marilyn French (2008a: 43) insists on the difference between matrilineal families and matriarchal organisations. In matrilineal clans, people were gathered around the female figure and the offspring was thought to come from the mother, not the father. But, according to her, there has never been a fully matriarchal regime that implied an institutionalised organisation of state members under female order. Such matrilineal bond was caused by the worship of Nature being incarnated in goddesses of fecundity and rebirth. The change to sedentary life and the consequent discovery of man's contribution in the process of procreation would entail the beginning of new phallocratic religions.

Solidarity's withdrawal from sorority does not exempt women from contributing to the utopian dream. The reformation of female identity so as to create new submissive members of the patriarchal regime is of utmost importance to guarantee such perpetual hierarchy.

It is war and religion, the two major patriarchal instruments (French 2008b: 12), that brought about the end of solidarity between people and the struggle for dominance between civilisations. The same factors were also responsible for the emergence of sororities without solidarity. Apart from the infliction of hatred and fear through violence, the new patriarchal religions manifested a stiff sexual hierarchy where 'man' and 'woman' were put into a binary opposition. In particular, the power enjoyed by female individuals in the matrilineal community was to be restricted, as their fluid and ambivalent identity as well as their mighty sexuality could endanger the permanence of male control in a patriarchal utopia. For this reason, all women who belonged to the system were bound to suffer strict control of their sexuality, adjusting it to the arbitrary model of the normative woman. Patriarchy did not offer any real alternative to women: to succumb to the patriarchal sororal code or be damned.

The devising of patriarchal sororities requires two steps: the demonisation of women's nature and their subsequent reformation. Firstly, the demonisation of female natural condition facilitates patriarchy's revocation of solidarity contract with women. The utopian idea of paradise finds the original woman as a parasite, guilty of the fall of humanity, hence there cannot exist any remote possibility of finding affective bonds aimed at her within the society. Afterwards, the reformation of women is carried out, which consists in the nullification of their mind and the desexualisation[5] of her body. Such a process is

[5] I prefer to use the term 'desexualisation' rather than 'asexuality' or 'asexualisation' attending to the etymology of the classical prefixes 'de-' and 'a-'. Whereas the Greek prefix 'a-' means "not, without", the Latin prefix 'de-' (also used for negation) originally means "down, off, away" (See *Online Etymology Dictionary*). Unlike the virgin-mother, whose sex remains untouched,

masked as a gesture of deference, leading to the salvation and raising the position of the patriarchal woman once she has been mended by the process of reformation. Notwithstanding, this desexualisation of the female body shows a certain inconsistency, for, while women's sexuality was considered a taboo, it was at the same time essential to the continuity of the patriarchal utopia.

The best exemplification of the ideal patriarchal woman comes in the form of the Virgin Mary in the Christian religion. Unlike Eve, punished because her sexuality and curiosity led her to defy the patriarchal order of God, Mary turns to be a role model for patriarchal sororities as she perfectly embodies the idea of a submissive virgin-mother. Albeit sexually chaste, she is able to contribute to the state with her motherhood. As Boulous Walker affirms, this asexual fertility becomes the "impossible dilemma of femininity under patriarchy" (2002: 136). The patriarchal utopia projects an unattainable female identity that repels the fluidity of nature and transgression. In this way, women are categorised according to their sexual status, creating archetypal female sororities, whose collective identity is "normative and exclusionary" (Butler 1990: 14). And again, the notion of exclusion appears, now as a conditioning factor to revoke solidarity among the supposedly antagonistic sororities.

Classical utopian narrative shows how women are arranged in sororities, without the possibility of intermingling with others or transcending their own condition. Accordingly, in utopian texts, female characters are "muted" by the male collective in the utopian state and/or by the narrator. But, as Ardener has noted (1993), mutedness should not be misinterpreted as silence, insomuch as muting occurs as a social phenomenon whenever the muted group is under the dominance of another social group. In the case of sexual polarity, it is women who

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patriarchal female members have to make use of their sexuality to accomplish their purpose in the utopian state. Nonetheless, their sexuality is severely restricted by male power, cutting off their sexual arousal and desires and just leaving their reproductive use.

are usually the muted group (7). Sororities may also participate in some public events of the utopian life, but they are overshadowed and dependent on male control. Likewise, the fact that the narrator does not give a voice to the utopian women does not make them naturally silent. In line with Ardener's theory, female muting happens because of male deafness, just as female invisibility correlates with male blindness (8). Deafness and blindness result from patriarchy's initial lack of female solidarity which, as a vicious cycle, aims to prevent any possible solidary attempt considering that the chain of communication between narrative participants is broken. In so doing, the external reader might also obviate the need to reenact the lost female solidarity.

In the process of devising *Utopia* (2006 [1516]), Thomas More did not contemplate other possibilities than the traditional patriarchal family, as was suggested by many scholars (e.g. Bammer 1992; Ferns 1999: 54; Serras 2002; Theis 2009: 2;). However, the muting and submission of women into patriarchal sororities turned this supposedly ideal society into the "first involuntary feminist dystopia" (Serras 2002: 330). Utopians are strictly separated by their sexes in every single aspect of their lives, as can be seen in the clothes they wear (*Utopia* 550), their place at the church during service (585), or at the dining table – women sitting on the outside so that they do not disturb others with nursing issues (555). Besides, other Utopian sororities are also marked by their clothes, distinguishing unmarried women from married ones. As has been aforementioned, sororal organisation depends on particular phases of female sexuality. When girls turn eighteen they reach the age of marriage, therefore their reproductive function may begin. From this point onwards, female inhabitants of Utopia will enter in the sorority of married women, regardless of whether they will ever become widows. That being the case with a Utopian woman, she will be married again until she is barren.

As "wives are subject of their husbands and children to their parents" (554), women are always dependent on a male figure and excluded from making any state decisions or performing any public role as long as their reproductive powers are still effective. Actually, only an old post-menopausing widow can have a slim chance of enjoying a similar status as men in the Utopian society, invariably limited to religious service as a result of the patriarchal desexualisation: "women are not debarred from the priesthood, but only a widow of advanced years is ever chosen, and it doesn't happen often" (583).

In one of the letters to his daughters' tutor, Thomas More remarked that "nature's defect may be redressed by industry" (1518). Meaning by "nature" woman's wit, and by "industry" patriarchal education, the idea of reforming female identity appears again in *Utopia*, and despite receiving the same education as men, women's nature will be tamed like the gardens of Utopia in order to please the senses and endure the legacy of patriarchal dominance.

> The Utopians are very fond of these gardens of theirs. They raise vines, fruits, herbs, and flowers, so well cared for and flourishing that I have never seen any gardens more productive or elegant than theirs. [...] Certainly you will find nothing else in the whole city more useful or more pleasant to the citizens. And this gives reason to think that the founder of the city paid particular attention to the siting of the gardens. (*Utopia* 549)

Utopian women are highly significant for the island too. But, just as gardens are kept in the back part of the house, women's exclusion from the public life and seclusion into opposing sororal organisation (unmarried – married – old widows) expose the fallacy of patriarchal utopia.

With the rise of 20th century dystopias, writers like Aldous Huxley or George Orwell uncovered the fallacies of utopia. In their respective novels, *Brave New World* (1994 [1931]) and *Ninety Eighty-Four* (2000 [1949]), they presented what Gordin et al. call utopia's doppelgänger (2010: 1). The same old patri-

archal regime is displayed, but this time it has been perfected as a result of scientific progress, which becomes another instrument employed by modern patriarchy. Through the eyes of the narrator the reader is able to see the inconsistency of patriarchal utopia. And yet, the male dissenters presented in these dystopias remain consistent in their lack of solidarity with female characters. Women still fall under the imperative classification of antagonistic archetypes: the temptress versus the patriarchal rebel; both having their discourses muted, not only by the system but also by the protagonist himself. In the case of the temptress/female rebel, it is noticeable how neither of the enemy forces (state/individual) in the story solidarises with her. On the one hand, dystopian governments encourage people to ignore and mistrust each other, suppressing any affective bond that may enact solidarity. On the other hand, female rebels and their insurrection methods are misconstrued or underrated by their allies in the rebellion, since all of them have received a patriarchal upbringing almost impossible to be unlearnt, where woman is always the weak one to be blamed.

In *Brave New World,* Lenina's complex feelings are ignored by the members of the polygamous patriarchal World State, even by her female friend Fanny. On the hand, Lenina's bodily sensuality infuriates John the Savage when she declares her love for him: "Whore! Impudent strumpet!" (*Brave New World* 170). Julia from *Nineteen Eighty-Four* undergoes a similar situation: her sexual freedom is forbidden by Ingsoc, and though Winston Smith enjoys her sexuality as part of the heresy, she is reduced to be "only a rebel from the waist downwards" (*Nineteen Eighty-Four* 179), clearly muting her voice in his revolt. The "misbehaviour" of these female dissidents arises precisely from the break of homogeneity inside the artificial patriarchal sororities, whose sexuality is being rationalised under governmental control (Theis 2009: 27). The female rebel, an in-between figure, fails in her attempt not only to surpass the limits imposed upon these constructed patriarchal organisations, but also to find empathy either in the male rebel or in

the patriarchal woman. Once again, female solidarity is lost in translation inside a great fraternal community, always under the gaze of Big Brother.

2. Sororities in Atwood's Gilead: Coercive solidarity

The 20th century also witnessed the arrival of the first feminist wave: weary of patriarchy's deafness, female voices were united for a common end and pleaded solidarity with their collective in the factories, in the parliament, in their homes. Female 'un-muting' exposed the dystopia woman was living in and enabled several writers to venture into the utopian genre. A good example of the feminist utopias from the first wave is Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (2015 [1915]) in which she depicts an ideal country governed and exclusively organised by and for women, i.e., a matriarchy.

Nonetheless, even these first feminist utopian manifestations continue to remain in the domain of the patriarchal conventions of classical utopia. Gilman retains the figure of the active male explorer that describes the matriarchal territory – a big enclosed garden. Besides, the narrative reduces all female inhabitants of Herland into a single female archetype that unites them all: the mother. Like More's *Utopia*, motherhood is assumed to be a natural predisposition being regarded as woman's ultimate contribution to the state: "By motherhood they were born and by motherhood they lived – life was, to them, just the long cycle of motherhood" (*Herland* 79).

However, by depicting a secret matriarchal state, Gilman was successful in elevating the old concept of the virgin-mother to its purest form with the concept of the great Mother. In this matriarchy, sexual binary hierarchy is not feasible insomuch as there are only women in Herland. Consequently, male dominance cannot overshadow female authority. However, the great Mother becomes divinised thanks to her asexualisation, as all inhabitants of Herland come from a single virgin-mother.

Therefore, this “holy sisterhood” (76) perpetuates the patriarchal sorority of virgin-mothers, and, in so doing, it presents certain discrepancies among Herland’s citizens that are illustrated by the external narrator. While this utopia acknowledges the solidarity reserved to Woman in general, it can be observed that there is a certain lack of solidarity towards individual women inside the sorority, who are eventually muted by the female normative identity of the utopian state.

As Bammer suggests, the insistence on the idea of sisterhood as the “commonalty of woman” (1991: 90) came to be a major pitfall in feminism. By taking for granted womanhood as a “quasi-universal female experience”, this “homogenizing function” (Sargisson 1996: 84) provokes the ignorance of other factors pertinent to the construction of different female identities. Quoting Cixous, “there is [...] no general woman, no one typical woman [...]. But what strikes me is the infinite richness of their individual constitutions: you can’t talk about *a* female sexuality, uniform, homogeneous, classifiable into codes” (1976: 876). The muting of differences to accomplish the reorientation toward the normative female code applies again to the habitual loss of solidarity seen in patriarchal utopia. But now, it occurs among members of a sorority, who got trapped in their biased idea of equality and freedom.

The feminist dystopia of *The Handmaid’s Tale* (2010 [1985]) can be seen as a satire on the old patriarchal utopian commandments, combined with a critique of the essentialist stance of some feminisms. In the novel, Atwood presents the dangers of female stereotypification resulting from feminist absolutism and the sacrificing of one’s own individuality within the sororal community. The patriarchal utopia hidden behind the façade of feminist slogans turns into a perfect trap: single-faceted sororities whose solidarity is taken away from female individuals coerced into serving the male supremacy of the patriarchal utopia.

In the epilogue of the novel, Professor Piexoto characterised Gilead as “undoubtedly patriarchal in form”, but “occasionally

matriarchal in content" (320). Ironically, this statement can be understood in an opposite way in relation to physical bodies – sororities in Gilead are empty vessels employed to serve patriarchal discipline which follows the same process of reformation and subjugation as the old patriarchal utopias based upon the sacred scriptures. In fact, the imposition of the principle of 'Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity' upon the Gileadean sororities reveals a deeply negative aspect of these abstract concepts within this pseudo-matriarchy.

In the story, Offred, the female protagonist, narrates the slow process of the "dystopification" of her contemporary society ultimately leading to the establishment of Gilead's patriarchal sororities. The use of the confessionary mode of writing allows the reader to be constantly aware of the protagonist's thoughts and emotions, which opens the channel of communication between the fictional female dissident and her possible real-world counterpart. By this means, the reader is encouraged to show the affective bonds of solidarity which were forbidden in the narrative setting, due to the ironical distortion of freedom and equality.

When these ideals of liberation are tested upon the female collective of Gilead, they lead to actual enslavement. Defined as "the state or fact of not being subject to despotic or autocratic control, or to a foreign power; civil liberty" (*Oxford English Dictionary*), *freedom* loses its conditions of freewill and independence in the Gileadean community: "There is more than one kind of freedom [...]. Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don't underrate it" (*The Handmaid's Tale* 34). Similarly, *equality* is misinterpreted as sameness. Gilead – as well as any other patriarchal utopian conceptualisation – is organised *equally* under a strict hierarchical arrangement, all members being *equal* in their clothing, schedules, and obligations, but all of them must abandon their personal ambitions for the sake of the stability of the collective.

Every member of the Gileadean society abides by the specific rules of a particular social group to which she/he belongs, although men permit themselves greater freedom. On the contrary, women must strictly comply with the roles imposed upon them by their respective sororities,[6] which are determined primarily by their sexuality/fertility, but also, in some cases, by their former social status. The Wives function as submissive companions of their husbands. Married to the founders of Gilead, they can continue enjoying certain privileges despite their infertility. Their pious behaviour and support for the patriarchal utopian morality, together with their asexuality, turns them into embodiments of the patriarchal virgin-mother. In a sense, the sorority of Handmaids becomes the "womb" of the Wives. As will be discussed below, the Handmaids participate in the sorority without solidarity *par excellence* in the patriarchal utopia of Gilead: despite their dubious and heretical ideology, they become essential as their fertility is essential for the survival of the system. Thanks to the Handmaid, the initial discrepancies found in the Virgin Mary are solved by means of the combination of these two sororities in the Ceremony, asexuality is maintained while striving for motherhood.

Other sororities are the Aunts and the Marthas, the latter in charge of housekeeping and the nurture of children. With regard to the former, the Aunts also enjoy a position of privilege and great responsibility in the society, being in charge of shaping the identity of women to fit the normative sororities.[7] The rest of women who are unable to yield to the pattern of this new society (either because they are infertile, lesbian, old, or

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[6] Each sorority must manifest externally their homogeneity and orthodoxy by a code of colours that delimits connections between them: wives wear blue, the colour of the Virgin Mary, while the Handmaids express their fertility with red. The Marthas wear green and the Aunts wear brown, and the Unwomen, who are eliminated from the state, wear grey.

[7] The narrative establishes a parallelism between the aunts and female defenders of patriarchal religions. Aunts are the collective in charge of spreading the morality of Gilead upon other women. However, this proves to be incongruous, as the message they divulge actually silences sororities in this society, in the same way as many Christian women unconsciously "helped to eradicate women's voice in the church" (French 2008a: 252).

because they are simply regarded as immoral) are called Un-women, being condemned to forced labour in the colonies or to death.[8]

However, women from the poorer classes that were married and fertile before the creation of Gilead disrupt the desired stability among these sororities. Bearing the name of Econowives, these women have a multi-faceted and complex identity represented by the multicolour dress they wear. Gilead is a utopia in transition, but "when times improve, says Aunt Lydia, no one will have to be an Econowife" (54). The reason why the Econowives are unwanted and dangerous to the system is twofold: on the one hand, having a complex and dynamic identity permits them to question the static and archetypical tenets of Gilead, and on the other hand, econowives can enact a process of understanding and solidarity towards all the members of the different sororities which may strengthen women through major compliance. Econowives are a sorority that embraces all sororities at once, and in embracing their differences, these women constitute a form of utopian transgression, following Sargisson's terminology (1996).

The prevention of female solidarity is not only achieved by the separation of women into traditional patriarchal sororities, but also by the rules applied to their inner organisation. Women, whatever the sorority they belong to, are isolated and secluded at home, with the exception of celebrations organised by the state of Gilead, such as prayvaganzas, particicutions, or births. Particularly, these rules of surveillance and confinement are strictly followed inside the group of the Handmaids. Whenever outside the residence, a Handmaid must be always

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[8] In the story, we also find the presence of the Jezebels, who satisfy the sexual fantasies of the Commanders that come to Jezebel's secret brothel. Since the brothel does not officially belong to the realm of Gilead, this female collective does not follow a homogeneous communal identity nor a strictly prescribed way of dressing. Nonetheless, their relative individuality and freedom of its members are at the expense of their sexual subjugation to the desires of the Commanders. Eventually, all women in the narrative are facing the question of survival inside the patriarchal utopia: conforming to Gilead's sororities, the brothel, the colonies, etc.

accompanied by another Handmaid, but they cannot gather themselves in bigger groups. A single Handmaid is prone to self-awareness and dissenting thoughts, while the connections made in a large group of Handmaids may lead to cooperation and empowerment, possibly leading to their rebellion against the state: "We aren't allowed to go there except in twos. This is supposed to be for our protection, though the notion is absurd: *we are well protected already*" (*The Handmaid's Tale* 29, italics added). Like in other dystopian narratives, the indoctrination of distrust together with male surveillance thwart any possible collective action. The Handmaids are encouraged to watch over other Handmaids, to question them and to report on them. This illustrates perfectly the oxymoronic character of sororities in the patriarchal utopia: there is multitude, but no union; there is solitude, but no privacy; there is sorority, but no solidarity.

Atwood revisits the symbol of the garden as an instrument of women's taming and reclusion in the patriarchal utopia. However, this command is concealed under a heap of pseudo-feminist slogans:

> For the generations that come after, Aunt Lydia said, it will be so much better. The women will live in harmony together, all in one family […]. Women united for a common end! […] Why expect one woman to carry out all the functions necessary to the serene running of a household? It isn't reasonable or humane. *Your daughters will have greater freedom. We are working towards the goal of a little garden for each one, each one of you.* (*The Handmaid's Tale* 172, italics added)

During the indoctrination of the Handmaids in the Rachel and Leah Center, Aunt Lydia refers to the false ideas of freedom and unity which paradoxically isolate each single women of Gilead from public life. However, this quote clearly shows the coercive solidarity imposed upon the Gileadean sorority of Handmaids. If we follow Laitinen and Pessi's ideas on solidarity (2014), this mode of social integration should be opposed to

chaos and conflict, as well as to coercion or maximisation of self-interest. We witness how the Handmaids' reformation in Gilead is depicted as an act of kindness or solidarity by the Aunts, who channel the oppressing authorities' policies, because women have been saved from anarchy and damnation. However, women are forced to solidarise with Gilead's preservation and aggrandisement too. They are even trained in submissive altruism when they arrive at the Rachel and Leach Center so as to ensure their contribution to the interests of the state. Thus, Gileadean women are coerced into obeying patriarchal utopian tenets in order not to face the horrible fate of the Unwomen. This solidarity becomes an illusion with enforced harmony and submission to the interests of the state as key characteristics of the sororities in Gilead's patriarchal utopia.

As has been previously stated, by means of the politisation of patriarchal religion, the transition from the pre-Gileadean society into this new utopian community entails the initial demonisation of the female figure. Their heresy needs to be redressed not only by the desexualisation of their bodies ("arousal and orgasm are no longer thought necessary" /*The Handmaid's Tale*, 105/), but also by the nullification of their minds. Women learn how to become "hollow vessels" at the Rachel and Leah Center ready to be filled by Gilead's commandments and sons. In the process of the nullification of their minds, the Handmaids must assimilate distrust and accusations, erasing any trace of solidarity with their friends in order to survive and avoid punishment. The choral cry in unison "her fault, her fault, her fault" (82) against Janine, who was gang raped in her adolescence, exemplifies the demonisation of female sexuality and the violation of affective solidarity before entering the Gileadean sororities.

In short, Gilead's harmony consists in the replacement of freedom by claustrophobia, equality by uniformity, and solidarity by survival. And, as Offred's story clearly demonstrates, survival in a patriarchal utopia can only be achieved after

women have endured the humiliation and scorn from their dearest friends: "friendships were suspicious" (81). Hence, the more advanced the indoctrination is, the more perfected the sorority. And the stronger the sorority, the weaker the female solidarity.

3. (E)merging women: The decisive sisterhood

In both the patriarchal utopia and the essentialist matriarchal regime, it is eventually the imposition of their radical stand what impedes the mutual understanding of our complexities and idiosyncrasies in society, which, as a consequence, prevents any bonds of affective solidarity. Sororities without solidarity were not simply one of the aspects of the fictional world of *The Handmaid's Tale*. In fact, the "realness" of fiction (Melzer 2006: 4) can be seen as a magnifying glass that evinces the social flaws of our contemporary identity politics. As Atwood claims in her lecture "The Curse of Eve", it is necessary "to take the capital W off Woman" (1979: 33) first in order to empower women from within sisterhood. For this, the feminist stance of equality and difference standing in direct binary opposition has been transgressed, so as to reconsider utopianism "as a conscious and necessary desire to resist the closure that is evoked by approaches to utopia as perfect" (Sargisson 1996: 226).

Despite the distress and hesitation presented by the female rebel living in the patriarchal utopia, *The Handmaid's Tale* as well as other feminist transgressive utopian dystopias offer a glimpse at the dissident's aspirations to succeed in the acceptance of her complex identity. Mohr argues that these transgressive utopian dystopias "refuse a logic of sameness, dissolve hierarchised binary oppositions, and embrace difference, multiplicity and diversity" (2005: 51). Thus, the protagonist stops being a victim trapped in the sorority and explores new ways of being.

This shift does not mean the rejection of the notion of sorority. Like utopianism, the concept of sorority is revaluated by the latest feminisms with the lost solidarity restored. This new sisterhood is described as decisive for two reasons. First, its inclusionary model allows its (e)merging members to decide upon their bodies. Second, in so doing, the sororal bonds are strengthened and this empowerment can turn the sorority into a determining voice in the state decisions, acting as the loudspeaker of many muted groups.

I propose the term *(e)merging* not only to ratify the recent appearance of these female rebels in the utopian canon, but also to highlight their ambivalent and hybrid identities, with regard to gender, race, age, culture, sexual condition, etc. Furthermore, the failures presented by the first matriarchal utopias like *Herland* proved that the most effective tactic was not to escape from the system but to confront it. In this way, (e)merging women also merge (with)in patriarchy and use their positive divergence as a disruptive power to dismantle the incongruities of patriarchy: "if woman has always functioned 'within' the discourse of man, […] it is time for her to dislocate this 'within', to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers" (Cixous 1976: 887).

The (e) in *(e)merging* also stands for the acknowledgement of the importance of electronic resources that in the last decades have facilitated easier connection and cognisance of other women's condition around the world. The understanding of different female experiences as enriching prompts women to feel mutual empathy (e) that reactivates solidarity. However, this solidarity differs from the patriarchal conventionalisms of exclusion, and approximates what Dean (1996) regards as reflective solidarity. Thanks to reflective solidarity, sorority becomes a space that embraces openness and indeterminacy, where "solidarity no longer blocks us from difference, but instead provides a bridge between identity and universality" (30).

This essay has attempted to offer a summary view of how the patriarchal utopia's idea of Woman has been distorted and

asphyxiated by the indoctrination of constructed exclusionary archetypes in sororities without solidarity. However, the (e)merging female models in utopianism overcome hierarchical homogeneity by means of their polyvalent uniqueness. Rather than perceiving fragmentation as a negative destructive element, these new generations recognise all their facets to create a richer personality. And yet, the positive appraisal of their individualities does not clash with the concurrent female entities, forming a kaleidoscopic sorority out of variegated beings: "If [woman] is a whole, it's a whole *composed of parts that are wholes*, not simple partial objects but a moving, limitlessly changing ensemble" (Cixous 1996: 889, italics added). This fluidity between "wholes" mobilises solidarity *with* and *among* sisters, now rejoicing in the sorority that joins individuality and multiplicity.

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Fincher's *Fight Club* as an example of a critical dystopia

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Abstract

This article investigates David Fincher's film *Fight Club* as a critical dystopian narrative. The first part of the article provides the definition of critical dystopia as well as it presents characteristic features of the subgenre. It also sets forward the difference between classical and critical dystopias. The following sections are case studies in which different elements of the film in the context of the subgenre are examined. They focus on the construction of a dystopian society and the negative influence of consumerism on the protagonist and therefore on other people. Moreover, this paper attempts to demonstrate how the overall pessimistic tendency of the narrative is realised. Finally, the protagonist's actions as well as the aftermath of these actions are described and analysed. The final part of the article focuses on the significance of the last scene which introduces a utopian impulse into the narrative.

Keywords

critical dystopia, *Fight Club,* capitalism, consumer society, utopian impulse

Fight Club Davida Finchera jako przykład dystopii krytycznej

Abstrakt

W artykule przedstawiono analizę filmu Davida Finchera pt. *Fight Club* w aspekcie cech charakterystycznych dla dystopii krytycznej. W pierwszej części pracy przytoczono definicję dystopii krytycznej oraz główne cechy podgatunku, a także wyjaśniono różnicę pomiędzy dystopią klasyczną a krytyczną. W kolejnych częściach artykułu poddano analizie poszczególne aspekty filmu w kontekście dystopii krytycznej, skupiając się na konstrukcji społeczeństwa dystopijnego oraz negatywnym wpływie konsumpcjonizmu na głównego bohatera, a co za tym idzie na innych ludzi. Dalsze rozważania dotyczą reakcji protagonisty na otaczającą go rzeczywistość i konsekwencje jego czynów. Ostatnia część artykułu poświęcona jest końcowej scenie filmu oraz jej znaczeniu. Scena ta jest bowiem kluczowym czynnikiem w interpretacji dzieła w kontekście dystopii krytycznej.

Słowa kluczowe

dystopia krytyczna, *Fight Club*, kapitalizm, społeczeństwo konsumpcyjne, impuls utopijny

1. Introduction

David Fincher's film adaptation of Chuck Palahniuk's 1996 novel *Fight Club* has made a great impact on the history of cinematography. As a relatively young work, released in 1999, it has received a lot of attention on the part of scholars and critics and has often been a subject of academic writings. The present article is yet another attempt to explore and analyze the film with a view to investigating the formal strategies that position the film within the critical dystopia subgenre.[1]

[1] The content of the article is partially based on my MA thesis entitled "The Problem of Dissociative Identity Disorder in Cinematography: An Analysis of Hitchcock's *Psycho* and Fincher's *Fight Club*".

2. The concept of critical dystopia

Dystopian literature of the late 1980s and 1990s differs from classical dystopian narratives. Texts from the end of the twentieth century, which "represent a creative move that is both a continuation of the long dystopian tradition and a distinctive new invention" (Moylan 2000: 188), have been classified as critical dystopias. Unlike earlier literary dystopias, which have been characterized by many scholars as anti-utopian, critical dystopia draws on the utopian heritage and "retains a utopian commitment as the core of its formally pessimistic presentation" (Moylan 2000: 156). Undoubtedly, pessimism is a dominant feature of every dystopian narrative. Classical dystopia seems to be completely absorbed by negativity and does not leave any space for resisting the overwhelming trend, whereas critical dystopia provides some horizons of change (Burns 2016: 45). Lyman Tower Sargent defines critical dystopia as:

> a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as worse than contemporary society but that normally includes at least one eutopian enclave or holds out hope that the dystopia can be overcome and replaced with a eutopia. (2001: 222)

Also Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini (qtd. in Moylan 2000: 189) indicate that the characteristic feature of critical dystopia is an explicit open ending providing space for overcoming pessimistic stagnation. Therefore, critical dystopian narratives give a new positive perspective that the current oppressive situation, which is shaped by few and profitable to few, can be changed by those culturally, politically and economically insignificant people who will now have an impact on the formation of a new reality.

Considering timeframes in which critical dystopian works emerged, the 'old' reality described in dystopias is usually the fictionalized version of a present-day capitalism and related

terrors of the twentieth century (Mirrlees, Pedersen 2016: 307). The critique of social problems focuses on "dire consequences of the continuing concentration of wealth and power into fewer and fewer hands and subsequent reduction of agency for most people" (Kline 2013: 16). Critical dystopias describe near-future negative consequences of the development of a current system. However, the desire to annihilate the system tinges dystopianism with a utopian spirit. According to Vita Fortunati (2013: 29), the dystopian narratives after 1980s set direction for a reader (or a viewer) which he/she must follow now for the situation to change. And with the change possible, with the space left for action, critical dystopia aims at building the new "anti-capitalist, democratically socialist and radically ecologist" reality (Moylan 2000: 190). The new dystopias serve an important function, suggests Sargent in his essay entitled "Do Dystopias Matter": "[w]e need dystopia to remind us that our dystopia could get worse, but we need eutopia even more to remind us that better, while difficult, is possible" (2013: 12).

3. Capitalist dystopian society

David Fincher's film *Fight Club* depicts a dystopian vision of a contemporary consumer society and its negative influence on people, or to be more precise, on men. The film has been widely referred to as a vivid criticism of consumerism in academic literature, which contributes to positioning the work in the critical dystopian subgenre. Bülent Diken and Carsten Bagge Lausten notice that *Fight Club* presents "the universe of capitalism" as "immanent, infinite, without an end" where "the source of anxiety" is mainly connected with "too much pseudo-freedom, e.g. freedom to consume" (2002: 352). Omar Lizardo states that the film provides "a critique of a consumer society" (2007: 231) while in Lynn Ta's view *Fight Club* highlights "late capitalism's obsessive push for profits and excessive consumerism" (2006: 265). Elsewhere the film is directly described as "a complex and variably understood contribution to the critical

dystopian subgenre" (Kline 2013: 17-18) which as being "deeply critical of contemporary corporate and consumer culture" corresponds to "the true critical dystopias examined by Moylan" (Wegner 2009: 125).

A different view is presented by Henry Giroux who maintains that *Fight Club* "functions less as a critique of capitalism than as a defense of authoritarian masculinity wedded to the immediacy of pleasure sustained though violence and abuse" (2001: 15). Such a reception of the film could stand in opposition to classifying *Fight Club* as a critical dystopia, however, as discussed below, I present an opinion that consumer culture is the central theme of the movie, and violence and brutality are means to deal with its negativity.

The movie presents a pessimistic vision of reality, in which the system manipulates people into believing that purchasing goods is a ready-made recipe for happiness. With so many products available, people have been brought up in the atmosphere of endless possibilities, which later turns out to be just an illusion. Instead of becoming individuals, distinguished by their special talents or virtues, they all blend into a shapeless, grey mass. The clash of expectations with what reality can actually offer causes frustration. Tyler Durden explains the facts of life to the members of the eponymous fight club in one of his speeches: "We've all been raised on television to believe that one day we'd all be millionaires, and movie gods, and rock stars. But we won't. And we're slowly learning that fact. And we're very, very pissed off". Also, people's beliefs in their own uniqueness have been redefined in the context of globalization. With everyone drinking Starbucks coffee, living in houses furnished according to the newest Ikea catalogue, and working in depersonalized corporations, people have become "a copy of a copy of a copy". The dystopian presentation of consumer society emphasizes all negative aspects of reality disregarding the advantages of the system. In that sense, consumerism is not understood as a new form of hedonism but rather as a new form of social discipline, where to function properly you have

to follow certain standards. Therefore, instead of individuality and distinctiveness people face “predictability, duplicability [and] redundancy” (Lizardo 2007: 236).

Such a situation has had an extremely negative influence on men traditionally defined by strength, individuality as well as physical and emotional power. According to Omar Lizardo (2007: 222), the movie depicts the crisis of traditional manhood that cannot adapt to the new status quo. In the post-industrial society, men were forced to change their occupation from factories to offices. The disempowerment of men in the 1990s led to the emergence of a “new man” whose characteristics oscillated around sensitivity, weepiness and softness. The castrated version of a man no longer resembled the image of the working-class man from the 1950s. The macho labourers covered in dust and sweat transformed into neatly-dressed and brushed white-collar workers whose workplaces have been limited to cubicles. A working-class man shifted from a masculine element of production to a womanish target of consumption (Ta 2006: 266).

The crisis of masculinity is accompanied by the feeling of entrapment in the corporate world. *Fight Club,* like many other dystopian works, presents men as slaves and victims of contemporary culture, prisoners who perform dissatisfying jobs and spend most of the day in their cubicle cells. Moreover, men are “trapped in the depths of alienation” (Wegner 2009: 129), which is triggered by various mental problems, such as depression, problems with forging relationships and the feeling of being alone in the crowd.

4. Everyman’s everyday pessimism

In *Fight Club*, capitalism exerts a destructive influence on society represented by the unnamed narrator and the protagonist who attempts to struggle with all of the social ills of the post-industrial era. As a representative of males of the 1990s, the protagonist plays a role of an everyman. As Phillip Wegner

puts it (2009: 129), he can be understood in terms of a social stereotype rather than a fully developed character. Omar Lizardo also observes that the protagonist "is not really a 'character' in any meaningful of the term. He is the symbol of a collectivity, a collective that can only be defined in class terms: Jack is the 'everyman' of the service society" (2007: 233).

Also the protagonist's name, or actually lack thereof, deprives the character of the definite signs of individuality. Although David Fincher never used the protagonist's name in the film, he identified the character in the script as Jack, a diminutive form of John, usually used as a synonym for an average citizen. As Marek Wojtaszek notices, the protagonist also uses the name as if it represented an ordinary man. He "often calls himself using a possessive case, 'I'm Jack's cold sweat, I'm Jack's smirking revenge, I'm Jack's wasted life,' which gives the impression of a story told by incorporeal singularities, rather than by the individualised subject" (2009: 330). Also, the protagonist himself believes to be a representative of a bigger group: "Like so many others I have become a slave to the Ikea nesting instinct", and he retells the story of his, or everybody's, depressing existence in the consumer society.

The overall pessimistic narrative is built around Jack's total absorption in consumerist lifestyle. As a victim of omnipresent advertising, the protagonist becomes addicted to collecting goods. His behaviour as a consumer illustrates his purchasing capacity and becomes a symbol of a social status. The protagonist lives in a "condo on the fifteenth floor of a filing cabinet for widows and young professionals", which identifies his position in a particular socioeconomic stratum. He also seeks his social and personal identity in products as at some point he wonders: "what kind of dining set defines me as a person". In one of the scenes, the protagonist walks around his empty apartment and orders some pieces of furniture. The empty space gradually fills up with furniture and fittings from the catalogue until the condominium looks exactly like the one from the picture with the difference that the protagonist is an

additional element in the set. As Kyle Bishop describes it, gathering of goods has become the protagonist's main occupation. But the things he seemingly yearns for are mass-produced, well-advertised products. Jack, susceptible to external influences, believes that purchasing guarantees happiness and success, however, it makes the protagonist miserable. Yet, he obeys the lifestyle rules imposed by the consumer society (2006: 45-46).

Moreover, the narrator has become so soaked in the capitalist lifestyle that doing shopping and collecting products replace the need for sexual satisfaction. Jack notices that buying substitutes masturbating as he says: "We used to read pornography; now it's the Hoarshack collection". According to Lynn Ta, the scene in which Jack goes through the Ikea catalog and orders items through the telephone while sitting on a toilet mirrors a standard image of a man who, while masturbating, reads a pornographic magazine and talks on the sex phone in the bathroom. With consumerism as a new pornography, "the film suggests that commercialism has replaced normative sexual stimulator and has reduced the male sex drive to furniture, traditionally an article of the domestic, and therefore feminine sphere" (Ta 2006: 274).

Jack replicates the image of a man imposed by society. In one of the scenes, he stands next to a Xerox machine and makes copies of some documents having a Starbucks coffee, while the voice in his head comments: "Everything is a copy of a copy of a copy". The camera then shifts into a point of view shot, where the viewers see what the protagonist is looking at – a room filled with Xerox machines and people copying papers and drinking Starbucks coffees. Consumerism and commercialism destroy the potential for uniqueness, individuality and distinctiveness offering a recipe for a standardized existence.

Paradoxically, Jack does not achieve happiness by following the "standard" way of life. Instead, he develops various mental problems like insomnia, depression, and schizophrenia. He becomes apathetic, demotivated, and bored. After the explo-

sion in his apartment, Jack looks at the remains of his refrigerator with splashed ketchup and mustard lying on the street and comments: "How embarrassing. A house full of condiments and no food". The protagonist's words suggest that his life, although full of goods that should give it a nice flavour, has no substance. Bülent Diken and Carsten Bagge Laustsen point to mobility of the society as the cause of some of the protagonist's problems. Forced to be constantly on the move by his job, Jack becomes "a spectator of his own life and he paradoxically lives in inertia in the midst of a mobile network society" (2002: 349). Jack describes his mobility with the following words: "You wake up at Air Harbor International... You wake up at O'Hare. You wake up at LaGuardia. You wake up at Logan... you wake up and have to ask where you are... You wake up, and you're nowhere".

Jack experiences the feeling of emptiness because he has no opportunity to socialize or to establish any closer relationship with another person. As a response to his hyper-mobile lifestyle, Jack develops insomnia and depression, which dissociates him from society. The protagonist's mental illness has also been triggered by identity problems. As Jack is only a meaningless, nameless pawn in a corporate world, he faces some problems with identifying his place in this reality (Bishop 2006: 45-6). The influence of consumerism on people's lives is so strong that it destroys their fundamental value – family relations. As a child, the protagonist had to face the lack of a male role-model and the unstable family situation, which is compared by Tyler, Jack's alter-ego, to a franchise business model:

> Jack: I don't know my dad. I mean, I know him, but he left when I was like six years old, married this other woman, had some more kids. He did this like every six years – he goes to a new city and starts a new family.
> Tyler: Fucker's setting up franchises.

The dystopian vision of the manhood affects every aspect of Jack's, and thus an average person's life. A sense of entrapment and helplessness is known to a whole army of powerless individuals inhabiting contemporary cities.

5. Utopian potential

The protagonist starts to realize all the negative aspects and influences of the consumer society, which results in emergence of his alter-ego, Tyler Durden, who stays in total opposition to the model of a man imposed upon Jack by the contemporary world. As Kyle Bishop explains, the film's major conflict is based on the binary opposition of two main characters who contrast each other to the extreme (2006: 54). Tyler, a well-built, physically strong and handsome man, represents freedom and masculine strength. Jack, who stands for a victim of oppression, is of average appearance, and his body looks fragile and weak. The former character, played by Brad Pitt, is a colourful person that stands out, the latter, played by Edward Norton, is definitely less impressive. David Greven, who suggests that Tyler contrasts the nonentity of the narrator, describes his appearance with these words: "chiseled, trashy, given to wearing neo-70s pimp ensembles, with buzz-cut hair and big dark sunglasses and wrapping his murderous musculature in disorienting hipster mood clothes" (2009: 162). Jack, like those subjugated to the system, looks dull and boring in his gray suit and brown tie. He blends in with the crowd, whereas his alter-ego attracts the attention of others.

Tyler exposes manipulation that victimizes contemporary people. The alter-ego, a free-thinker who believes in anarchy and total freedom, serves a therapeutic function for Jack. During the course of the plot, Tyler changes the way Jack perceives reality and totally influences his life because, as David Greven puts it, "Tyler performs a salutary rescue mission on the dull Narrator's life" (2009: 162). Tyler Durden is presented as a spiritual guru, a hero that inspires and opens the eyes of

many. He is once referred to as a god, as Jack says: "In Tyler we trust". The quote bears resemblance to the American motto "In God we trust". It is Tyler who throughout the greater part of the film is perceived as a true leader that will liberate men from the constraints imposed on them by the post-industrial society. With such a good preacher as Tyler, Jack's perception of the capitalist world changes:

> Jack: When you buy furniture, you tell yourself, that's it. That's the last sofa I'll need. Whatever else happens, got that sofa problem handled. I had it all. I had a stereo that was very decent. A wardrobe that was getting very respectable. I was close to being complete.
> Tyler: Shit man, now it's all gone.
> Jack: All... gone.
> Tyler: All gone. Do you know what a duvet is?
> Jack: It's a comforter.
> Tyler: It's a blanket. Just a blanket. Now why do guys like you and I know what a duvet is? Is this essential to our survival, in the hunter-gatherer sense of the word? No. What are we then?
> Jack: I don't know... consumers?
> Tyler: Right! We are consumers. We are by-products of a lifestyle obsession. Murder, crime, poverty – these things don't concern me. What concerns me are celebrity magazines, television with 500 channels, some guy's name on my underwear. Rogaine, Viagra, Olestra.
> Jack: Martha Stewart.
> Tyler: Fuck Martha Stewart. Martha's polishing the brass on the Titanic. It's all going down. So fuck off with your sofa units and strine green stripe patterns. I say never be complete. I say stop being perfect, I say let... let's evolve, let the chips fall where they may. But that's me, and I could be wrong. Maybe it's a terrible tragedy.
> Jack: Now, it's just stuff. It's not a tragedy.

Jack realizes that his former life was only vegetation and wants to change his current situation. After his apartment blows up, he moves into the house in which Tyler squats. The dilapidated mansion with boarded windows and no locks

where nothing works properly replaces Jack's polished condominium. As Phillip Wegner observes, "the blasted urban landscapes [...] are very much those of cyberpunk fiction: post-industrial urban cores, filled with abandoned buildings, decaying factories, and the waste products and 'throwaway' populations of twentieth-century capitalist culture" (2009: 124). Surprisingly, a visible decline in the quality of life helps Jack overcome his modern-day addictions – "by the end of the first month, I didn't miss TV" says the protagonist.

Not only does Jack change his attitude towards material goods and comforts, but also he adopts Tyler's aggressive and careless behaviour. He comes to his office dirty, bruised and with blood on his face and clothes – he clearly disregards the standard requirements as his job in the corporation no longer takes the central position in his life. Instead, a fight club, the underground boxing community, does. Jack overcomes his apathy owing to the real physical pain experienced in the fight club. Tyler claims that without pain you do not know anything about yourself: "How much can you know about yourself if you've never been in a fight? I don't want to die without any scars". With the body covered in scars from fights, you stop being "a copy, of a copy of a copy", but you become unique. Moreover, unlike anything that consumer society offers, the marks on your body are long lasting. They cannot be changed, replaced or thrown away like goods you buy. They take time to heal. Fighting is a way to experience, live and feel the life: "You weren't alive anywhere like you were there".

According to Jennifer Barker, instead of complex rules that govern the capitalist world, the fight club proposes rules of simplicity and atavistic drives that boil down to hitting somebody in a face. As she notices, "anxieties about contemporary life and meaning are simply annihilated by exhausting the body and silencing the mind" (2008: 179). Dissatisfied and depressed men from every social class, crushed by the regime of consumerism, gather together to celebrate the "cult of sensation" (Wegner 2009: 128). Their plastic lives lack excitement.

In the fight club, they celebrate physicality by giving vent to primitive instincts which have been successfully suppressed by social constraints. Tyler creates a place where it does not matter who you are outside the fight club, what you do for a living, or how much money you have. The only thing that matters is the combat to test your strength and to release the tension through the fight (Bishop 2006: 47). As Omar Lizardo puts it, "fighting can be seen as a denial and a subversion of the logic of 'niceness' and forced sociability that the McDonaldized corporations force their workers to display..." (2007: 235). Thus, the fight club can be understood not only as a form of abreaction but also as the beginning of a rebellion against the social constraints. Under the cover of "innocent" fist fights it turns into Project Mayhem, which is actually a "Nazi-type organization" "with unreflexive skinheads who just repeat Tyler's orders" (Diken and Laustsen 2002: 356).

A seemingly positive attitude towards the unofficial organization becomes explicitly negative in the course of events. As Lynn Ta ascertains, "*Fight Club* illustrates the potential disaster that can happen when agency is privatized, and personal dissatisfactions are resolved through private means such as vigilante paramilitary groups. Members of Fight Club must take aim at an enemy culture that has crippled their masculinity, but the recourse they choose literally self-destructs" (2006: 276). The goal of this terrorist organization is to destroy credit-card companies. Unfortunately, what seemed to be a gateway to "freedom" turns out to be another source of oppression. Even though Jack is terrified with the scale of the undertaking and wants to stop the destruction of the credit card buildings, the demolition is another step forward in his process of liberation. However painful and tragic this part of the film appears to be, it serves an important stage for the protagonist to change his reality and see the utopian horizons.

Despite the fact that at some point, when the situation worsens, Jack realizes that Tyler, his "imaginary friend", is not real ("Jesus, you're a voice in my head"; "You're a fucking hal-

lucination, why I can't get rid of you?"), and that he himself is the head of anti-capitalists' army, the protagonist still believes that only his alter ego can put a stop to the process of destruction: "I'm begging you, please call it off". Yet Tyler wants to proceed with the plan for Jack's sake: "What do you want? Wanna go back to the shit job, fucking condo world, watching sitcoms? Fuck you! I won't do it". However, Jack takes some drastic measures to get rid of Tyler – he shoots himself in the cheek. As a result, Tyler, with his head blown off, disappears. Through the suicidal act Jack wins the psychological struggle over his mind and cuts himself off the maniac-rebel conduct.

The last scene presents Jack with Marla, the femme fatale of the movie, in an empty office from which the headquarters of credit card companies are visible. When Marla is concerned with Jack's condition after the shooting, the protagonist calms her down saying "I'm really ok" and "Trust me, everything's gonna be fine". In that moment the credit-card skyscrapers begin to explode. The last scene, in which Jack and Marla observe how buildings collapse one by one, holding hands, eventually looking at a limitless horizon and then affectionately looking at each other, coupled with the music by Pixie, is filled with positive atmosphere. Even though they observe the accomplishment of Tyler's plan, which the protagonist wanted to stop, the ending provides a closure for what Jack calls "very strange time in [his] life". After all Tyler did not stop the destruction because, according to his words, it would lead Jack back to the previous, consumer-oriented lifestyle. Jack, on the other hand, accepts the finale of his story as he calmly, passively observes the demolition. Then, he shifts attention to his beloved Marla, already looking into the hopeful future. As Chuck Palahniuk once said: "destruction makes way for the character to evolve into a better, stronger person, not so hampered by their past" (qtd. in Diken and Laustsen 2002: 364). The destruction also symbolizes liberation from the consumer society. Collapsed buildings expose a limitless horizon giving hope for a better future. According to Lynn Ta, "the end of

Fight Club suggests that with the return of violence and outward destruction is the return of all things 'normal,'" and "all Jack needed to do in the first place was to take Marla's hand and unite with her against corporate culture..." (2006: 276). The movie brings an end to the dystopian pessimism and retains a utopian potential. The last scene which presents the destruction of capitalist symbols, restoration of mental health, and finally forging a romantic relationship with Marla is a "direct statement of a utopian vision in the film" (Wegner 2009: 125).

6. Conclusion

The film *Fight Club* is an example of a critical dystopia which has reached a mass audience. The phenomenon of the film is based on the fact that it raises various modern world issues on many different layers, exposing the paradoxes of post-industrial society. The dystopian vision of the world, where nobody is free and nobody lives the life which consumerism has promised, is highlighted by the internal ordeal the protagonist experiences. Being suppressed by culture, the protagonist attempts to, figuratively and literally, fight for his life. The conflict between him and society is translated into a mental distortion and dystopian landscapes. The juxtaposition of contradictory elements, e.g. internal despair in a "perfect" community, calming the mind in physical violence, the protagonist's blandness and Tyler's charisma, is even more explicit when the internal paradox of the film is taken into consideration. Being a critique of a consumer society, encouraging the viewers to abandon a consumer lifestyle, the film remains the child-prodigy of popular culture itself. As it depicts socio-economical conflicts, the film addresses a contemporary viewer who may experience similar problems as the film's protagonist within the consumer society.

Fight Club, as an example of a critical dystopia, presents guidelines for a member of the consumer society concerning

what should be done in order to change the oppressing situation. It may seem that there is no golden mean when it comes to a consumer lifestyle. You are either a corporate drone or a rebel. An interesting point has been made by Michael Clark, who writes that, "the solution, however, lies not in the masculine or patriarchal paradigm of targeting consumerism as one more macho enemy; rather, the solution lies in turning to right-relational justice and eco-social responsibility – not to battle consumerism, but to abandon it" (Clark 2002). Is it not what the protagonist does at the end of the film? He started his struggle from violence but in the last scene he wants to abandon the macho-fight against society. His apparent passivity during the last scene, coupled with shifting his focus from objects of consumerism to another human being, is a sign that he has made the right decision to get away from dystopian oppression. The overall pessimism of the film is now overcome by the hope for a better future.

Although the film was released in 1999, it presents a universal vision of a dystopian society which is a continuum of the near past, the present, and, looking at the current socio-economical tendencies, the future. With such broad time-frames and accuracy in diagnosing the worst social menaces, this example of a critical dystopian film will certainly raise further interest among viewers and scholars.

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Lost, redefined, or preserved? Expressions of solidarity in Paul Auster's *In the Country of Last Things*

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Abstract

In his novel set entirely in a dystopian environment, *In the Country of Last Things*, Paul Auster portrays a disturbing vision of urban space where pervasive processes of disintegration and destabilisation profoundly determine the relations inside it. In this study the semiotic space of this unnamed city will be examined on the basis of the opposition between dominant dystopian space and impermanent sanctuaries located within the urban realm. The defining division of space has its reflection in the practical realisation of the concept of solidarity. The city is inhabited by society for whom moral codes and higher values can be considered relics of the past. Consequently, genuine solidarity has been replaced by what Sally Scholz calls 'parasitical solidarity'. Temporary refuges, on the other hand, serve as the last anchorages of humanity trying to resist detrimental impacts from outside and to preserve natural gestures of solidarity.

Keywords

Auster, dystopia, sanctuary, solidarity, urban space

Utracona, przedefiniowana czy zachowana? Manifestacje solidarności w *Kraju rzeczy ostatnich* Paula Austera

Abstrakt

W swojej powieści *W kraju rzeczy ostatnich*, której akcja całościowo rozgrywa się w dystopijnym otoczeniu, Paul Auster ukazuje niepokojącą wizję przestrzeni miejskiej, gdzie wszechobecne procesy dezintegracji i destabilizacji całkowicie warunkują relacje tam panujące. Przestrzeń semiotyczna tego bliżej nieokreślonego miasta będzie analizowana w oparciu o kontrast pomiędzy dominującym, dystopijnym otoczeniem i nietrwałymi miejscami o charakterze sanktuarium usytuowanymi wewnątrz miejskiego uniwersum. Definiujący podział przestrzeni ma swoje odzwierciedlenie w praktycznej realizacji konceptu solidarności. Miasto zamieszkiwane jest przez społeczeństwo, dla którego kodeksy moralne i wyższe wartości wydają się być reliktami przeszłości. W skutek tego autentyczna solidarność została zastąpiona przez to, co Sally Scholz określa mianem „solidarności pasożytniczej". Tymczasowe azyle, natomiast, służą jako ostatnie ostoje cywilizacji, które za wszelką cenę starają się stawiać opór niekorzystnym wpływom zewnętrznym, oraz zachować naturalne oznaki solidarności.

Słowa kluczowe

Auster, dystopia, azyl, solidarność, przestrzeń miejska

> "There is no stability without solidarity
> and no solidarity without stability".
> (Jose Manuel Barroso)

1. Introduction

One of the most fundamental understandings of solidarity, provided by *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, emphasises its central idea of "support by one person or group of people

for another because they share feelings, opinions, aims, etc." (Hornby 2010: 1468). As such, the given definition focuses on a practical realisation of the basic tenets of human nature – expressing empathy towards the other individual(s) by means of direct and mutual help or demonstrating unstinting support towards particular opinions or actions. Yet, the concept in its whole complexity that has been put into theory does not appear to be so straightforward since it might encompass diverse ideological dimensions.

In her book *Political Solidarity*, Sally J. Scholz (2008) explores various types as well as expressions of solidarity in different contexts – from social to political ones. Therefore, in her attempts to construe a comprehensive definition of the aforementioned conception, she maintains that the very notion "is used to describe a particular type of community and it is used to describe the bonds of any community. Solidarity is a feeling that moves people to action and it is an action that invokes strong feelings" (Scholz 2008: 17). In other words, in its basic understanding, the term refers not only to the social dimension encompassing relations between individuals that create a sense of unity, but, for instance, to emotional aspects. Amongst members of a particular group or a community, it evokes specified reactions that drive individuals towards a pre-established aim. Apart from the outstanding importance of the concept in building the history of primarily the Eastern European countries, the issue of solidarity constitutes a fertile ground for the examination of fictional worlds.

Scholz points out that solidarity cannot be regarded as a homogeneous conception referring solely to the practical realisation of convictions and ideological standpoints commonly held amongst members of particular groups. She discerns that "more often than not, the understanding of solidarity is blurred as scholars use it to discuss external identity, shared experience, shared consciousness, and political resistance separately and simultaneously" (Scholz 2008: 3). Hence, the phrase can be considered as a universal umbrella term for a wide range of other concepts overlapping with and, not rare-

ly, complementing one another. Solidarity may be understood as not only unity maintained in a particular community, which creates a sense of shared identity, but also as harmony, mutual support, and the pursuit of a common goal. In such forms, it is a fairly attractive concept to be explored in dystopian narratives where one out of protagonists' many challenges is the struggle for survival in unfavourable conditions. Therefore, there arises the question regarding the applicability of solidarity to spaces that are far from friendly for people immersed in them, such as the ones ravaged by cataclysms, wars; territories suffering from oppression or, at the opposite end of the spectrum, worlds under the absolute control of technology.

The novel under consideration is Paul Auster's dystopian *In the Country of Last Things* (1987), which portrays a dilapidated urban space governed by oppression and in which unfavourable and inhuman conditions are the defining components of the city. The protagonist, Anna Blume, commences her journey with the aim of finding her missing brother William, a journalist, who travelled to the place in which destruction and decay are present on a daily basis. The circumstances she has to deal with after arriving at the turbulent city are motivational for composing a letter addressed to her childhood friend. Her reported narration reveals deplorable conditions that shape the urban space and relations within it. The letter also testifies to how the dystopian centre exerts its influence upon the peripheral, impermanent sanctuaries located inside the space.

In the Country of Last Things is one of Auster's earliest novels and the specificity of the universe construed by the author has been a fertile ground for academic contributions. In *Paul Auster*, for instance, Mark Brown's focal point is Anna's experiences within "a dystopia of disturbing presents" (2007: 142), as he calls the city. He also addresses the notion of sanctuaries with great emphasis put on Woburn House. Tim Woods in "'Looking for Signs in the Air': Urban Space and the Postmodern in *In the Country of Last Things*" (1995) analyses the uni-

verse of the novel primarily through the lens of postmodernism. Katharine Washburn's "A Book at the End of the World: Paul Auster's *In the Country of Last Things*" (2004) also revolves around the dystopian specificity of urban space, yet with a focus on its representing "a hellish present" (2004: 169). Bernd Herzogenrath in *An Art of Desire* (1999) offers two close readings of the novel – one regarding the conventions of science fiction and the second depicting the semiotic world as "entangled between absence and presence, between things irrevocably *lost* and things that seem to *last*" (1999: 95). Yet, none of the publications offers the analysis of Austerian universe in terms of possible expressions of solidarity amongst urbanites. Therefore, the principal aim of this article is to examine the spatial dimension of the novel with the main focus on the blurring opposition between the dystopian city and ephemeral refuges within it, in reference to the notion of solidarity.

2. Reflections on urban space

Thomas Halper and Douglas Muzzio's article "Hobbes in the City: Urban Dystopias in American Movies" (2007) proposes a coherent division of dystopian universes. As stated there, "urban dystopias fall into one of two opposing categories: the city as chaos or the city as under rigid, comprehensive control" (2007: 381). The former type portrays metropolises as in a state of disorder and turmoil, "where none is safe from the depredations of their fellows. The other depicts cities as Leviathan, imposing order and stability" (2007: 380). It may be assumed that the portrayal of the former – the turbulent and dysfunctional city – is closely related to spaces overwhelmed with oppression and disorganisation, where conventional relations are no longer acknowledged, whereas the latter category represents futuristic constructs dominated by the power of technology and scientific advances. Although in their findings Halper and Muzzio refer to urban dystopias in cinematic productions, these divisions may be as well employed to literary

representations in which the primary setting is the city, as in the case of *In the Country of Last Things*. The urban space in Auster's novel cannot be discussed in terms of futuristic dystopian spaces governed by technological advances that are prevalent in, for instance, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) or Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968). Rather, it can be classified as the one permeated with chaos and disarray, as, for instance, in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) or José Saramago's *Blindness* (1995).

To briefly characterise the city, its physical space is 'trapped' in inevitable and irreversible disintegration – the metropolis literally falls into pieces; what prevails is ruins, rubble, and overwhelming desolation that deprive individuals of any hope for a better future. As Anna states, "slowly and steadily, the city seems to be consuming itself, even as it remains […]. Every day in the streets you hear explosions, as if somewhere far from you a building were falling down or the sidewalk caving in" (*In the Country of Last Things* 21-22). The city constructed by Auster is irreversibly damaged by unidentified blasts, which turns the whole space into a literal wasteland. Such a situation, as I have argued elsewhere, is reminiscent of the one present in the classic representative of dystopian fiction, namely in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Kula 2017: 383). Similarly to the Austerian universe, in Orwell's urban space – Airstrip One – "sometimes in the far distance there were enormous explosions which no one could explain" (Orwell 2016: 172). In both cases, what shapes the fictional worlds is various damaging processes of unidentified and unknown origins; the protagonists are somehow distanced from them and, as a result, unable to explain their nature. Unexpected and sudden explosions destroy the cityscapes and wipe out any traces of the buildings' existence; as Anna recounts, "[a] house is there one day, and the next day is gone. A street you walked down yesterday, is no longer there today" (*In the Country of Last Things* 1).

However, it must be emphasised that what Anna witnesses while getting acquainted with the unknown territory is not on-

ly the destruction of the landscape, but also evanescence of the daily necessities, such as ailment, attire, and even the memory of them. "Close your eyes for a moment, turn around to look at something else, and the thing that was before you is suddenly gone. Nothing lasts, you see, not even the thoughts inside you. [...]. Once a thing is gone, that is the end of it" (1), claims the protagonist, which emphatically concludes the situation present in the city. Being confronted not only with the destruction and disintegration of the urban space, but also with a subsequent unfavourable life situation, makes it evident that some crucial measures should be taken in order to persevere in the city; such memories ought to be primarily based on moral conduct, mutual support, and cooperation in public commitment to a shared objective. *In the Country of Last Things*, however, presents a social situation in which the genuine understanding of the concept of solidarity appears to be redefined so as to adapt it to the prevailing circumstances. What is demonstrated is comparable to what Scholz calls "parasitical solidarity" (2008: 46).

3. Dystopian space: solidarity lost or reversed?

In his book *Dystopia. A Natural History*, Gregory Claeys emphasises that "literary dystopias are understood as primarily concerned to portray societies where a substantial majority suffer slavery and/or oppression as a result of human action" (2017: 290). The terror may be inflicted by an unjust totalitarian or authoritarian government, which results in adverse living conditions or the surroundings perceived as dehumanised; powerlessness and suffering are what individuals experience on a daily basis. The devastation of the urban space present in the novel under consideration has its inevitable consequences in the social structure and its organisation. Harper and Muzzio briefly characterise dystopia as a place "of oppression and suffering" (2007: 281) and, indeed, what can be found within Austre's city is pervasive poverty and practices perceived by the contemporary man as revolting, usually immoral and, hence,

testifying to the demise of the civilised man. Each day, the community described by Anna faces oppression enforced not only by the governments that "come and go quite rapidly here, and it is often difficult to keep up with the changes" (*In the Country of Last Things* 86), but also by the inhabitants themselves, who in order to survive, adhere to rules comparable to the 'jungle law'. The city itself, where "[t]hings fall apart and vanish, and nothing new is made, [p]eople die, and babies refuse to be born" (7), resembles an urban jungle, in which only the strongest individuals, whose activities do not conform to morals and ethics of civilised beings, stand realistic chances of perseverance. Survival in space defined by burdensome conditions "seems to entail killing off all those things that once made you think of yourself as human […]. In order to live, you must make yourself die" (20). Therefore, mutual support, civilised behaviour, sympathy, or even reliability have been, step by step, erased from the collective consciousness.

Further exploring the connotations attached to the concept of solidarity, Scholz also enumerates "the bond uniting individuals whatever their life circumstances may be" (2008: 2) and "expressions of sympathy, or struggles for liberation" (17). Neither the governmental actions nor the steps taken by inhabitants can be discussed in terms of compassion or common understanding, which leads to problems such as homelessness, grinding poverty and, as a result, unexpected deaths. In such deplorable conditions, the urbanites are forced to work out certain patterns of behaviour that would enable them to survive, no matter what the consequences could be. Although the city literally deprives the citizens of their human nature, in order to persevere some signs of solidarity between inhabitants can be identified, some of them being based on the concept of a group's influence.

Michael Hechter in his book *Principles of Group Solidarity* (1988) focuses on communities and how their representatives may affect one another. He points out that

> membership in some groups has a greater potential for influencing behavior than membership in others. Another way of putting this is that "groupness"—that is, the group's capacity to affect the member's behavior—is itself a variable. Following Emile Durkheim, the "groupness" of any group may be referred to as its solidarity. The more solidary a group, the greater the influence it casts upon its members. (Hechter 1988: 8)

In other words, belonging to particular groups established with a view to accomplishing specified aims or expressing shared ideologies, is always associated with the pressure exerted by the group collectively. In order to be regarded as fully-fledged participants, all the members develop a sense of collective identity and have to adhere to established rules and principal objectives. As such, the feeling of solidarity is demonstrated; yet, in the case of Auster's dystopian universe, the realization of this notion "ignores or even contradicts the moral content of the concept" (Scholz 2008: 18). As Scholz explicates further,

> there are solidarities that are not really solidarities at all: the pretenders or posers, the parasites. By "parasitical solidarity," I mean that the term "solidarity" is used to connote a variety of feelings or relations that do not themselves count as full-fledged forms of solidarity because they often lack one or more of the key elements. (Scholz 2008: 46-47)

If moral reasons do not motivate a group's or community's actions, it is not possible to regard them as based on true solidarity. The gestures of solidarity amongst urbanites in the novel are not oriented towards positive aspects, such as emotional relations, genuine, unconditional support, or aid in need. Instead, they unite urbanites in their activities – deceiving other dwellers or establishing groups/sects dominated by specific, often distorted or twisted ways of thinking. At one point, Anna accounts instances of union between frauds:

> I know a man who makes his living by standing in front of the old city hall and asking for money every time one of the newcomers

> glances at the tower clock. If there is a dispute, his assistant, who poses as a greenhorn, pretends to go through the ritual of looking at the clock and paying him, so that the stranger will think this is the common practice. (*In the Country of Last Things* 7)

Thus, the only reason for cooperation is extorting money; in such a way the collaborating individuals share one common goal which, to some extent, may be translated into common experience. Scholz also points that solidarity "is a feeling that moves people to action" (2008: 17), and this claim has its reflection in partnerships established between scavengers – urbanites who look for pieces of junk that can be sold or objects that can be 'reanimated'. When Anna's letter accounts garbage collectors' and object hunters' work, she reports:

> You need allies, however, especially to protect yourself against the Vultures—scavengers who make their living by stealing from other scavengers […], the job is a free-for-all, with constant attacks and counterattacks […]. With friends, I might have been able to avoid some of these raids. (*In the Country of Last Things* 37)

The feeling that group collaboration is more beneficial moves people to form some alliances to have stronger chances for much better findings or to ensure relative safety. Yet, as in the case of the frauds above, such bonds between individuals are not created out of moral motivations.

Another interesting example of "parasitical solidarity" regards the groups and sects that have come into existence in urban space. Examining group psychology in the context of dystopia, Gregory Claeys suggests that "[c]rowds were atavistic and primitive. Always 'unconscious', their power was always destructive. […]. It exemplified a 'collective mind' where the 'sentiments and ideas of all the persons in the gathering take one and the same direction" (2017: 20). Indeed, taking into consideration death groups, such as the Runners, what can be observed is that all the members share the same idea and the goal. The 'association' brings together individuals whose will to live is shattered by the conditions present in the city. Here,

solidarity is identified with "a form of unity [...]. Something [that] binds people together" (Scholz 2008: 19). In the case of the Runners, their uniting aim is death, yet, not sudden and on streets, but more spectacular, as if it were a kind of an artistic performance:

> The point is to die as quickly as possible, to drive yourself so hard that your heart cannot stand it. The Runners say that no one would have the courage to do this on his own. By running together, each member of the group is swept along by the others, encouraged by the screams, whipped to a frenzy of self-punishing endurance. (*In the Country of Last Things* 12)

The functioning of weather sects – associated individuals who perceive weather changes as dependent on human behaviour – is based on a similar principle. What unites them in concerted actions – performing certain rituals, behaving in a particular way – is a common belief shared by all the representatives, usually stemming from mythical thinking. The group of the Smilers "believes that bad weather comes from bad thoughts" (26), whereas the Crawlers' standpoint is "that conditions will go on worsening until we demonstrate—in an utterly persuasive manner—how ashamed we are of how we lived in the past" (27). Yet, no matter what the group's interest is, it is always of a damaging nature – participation in suicidal associations ends in death, whereas weather sects look for mythical explanations having nothing in common with the surrounding reality.

4. Impermanent shelters: solidarity regained?

As mentioned above, not the whole urban space is submerged into processes of destabilisation and destruction that force people to seek various ways of dealing with the oppressive situation. Mark Brown argues that "Anna is able to find and occupy small, almost utopian spaces of stability which offer shelter, refuge and even renewal" (2007: 150); places that stand in

opposition to the dystopian universe. These sanctuaries provide the protagonist with a temporary escape from the outside suffering and oppression; nevertheless, they are not safe from surrounding chaos and decay.

As such, these impermanent refuges can be considered in terms of appropriated and reappropriated spaces contrasting with the dominant dystopian space. As Henri Lefebvre maintains, "[i]t may be said of a natural space modified in order to serve the needs and possibilities of a group that it has become appropriated by that group" (1991: 165). These are the venues that function as loci of some higher values and meanings attached by individuals residing or operating in them. During her road through the dystopian wasteland, Anna finds momentary respite in more civilised places, as opposed to hostile urban space, such as Isabel's home, the National Library or, finally, Woburn House, where she is transported after an almost deadly accident. In all these locations, the protagonist is able to observe and subsequently experience some expressions of natural human tendencies – mutual help, support and cooperation – gestures that are lost in the culture shaped by the dystopian space. In contrast to the oppressive centre, they testify to expressions of solidarity in its genuine understanding.

From the very beginning, Isabel's flat as well as Woburn House have been designated as places that are supposed to satisfy essential needs of their residents and to preserve some human instincts. In their standing in opposition to the dystopian environment, these buildings represent appropriated spaces. However, the National Library can be regarded rather as reappropriated space – the one whose function has been altered as compared to the traditional one. As Lefebvre puts is,

> An existing space may outlive its original purpose and the *raison d'etre* which determines its forms, functions, and structures; it may thus in a sense become vacant, and susceptible of being diverted, reappropriated and put to a use quite different from its initial one. (Lefebvre 1991: 167)

Libraries serve as loci of knowledge gathered through centuries and, therefore, may be considered as sacred places. Yet, in the case of the building in the novel, its traditional purpose has been reformulated. Although in the very beginning the library functions as the place for ideological discussions, its primary role is to provide shelter for religious groups and various associations.

Nevertheless, all the spaces to which Anna attaches some meaning are not safe from the damaging influence exerted by the dominant space. In her article "Spectres of Eutopia: (Re)app-ropriated Spaces in Filmic Dystopias", Ludmiła Gruszewska-Blaim contends that "[a]cts of penetration and violence on the part of the dystopian State, which feels free to ignore all divides […], destabilize both the physical and social structure of the theoretically appropriated space" (2012: 176). In the unnamed city, brutality and disorder find their way also to invade the reappropriated space of the National Library. As Anna's letter proves, these impermanent refuges from "the misery and squalor" (*In the Country of Last Things* 139) are able to exist and adequately fulfil their intended functions as long as the border between the oppressive centre and the volatile sanctuaries is not violated by what is inextricably connected with the outside – violence or/and death.

"If we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause", explains Yi-Fu Tuan (2001: 6). Places offer the sense of safety and protection against outside dangers; they also signify a momentary suspension in one's journey, the one providing a few moments of repose. For Anna, they provide her with a break from the routine, which lets the woman stop her relentless quest for survival and feel relative safeness for a moment in appropriated and re-appropriated spaces. Isabel's shelter becomes the first refuge for the protagonist after she has saved the elder woman from the band of the Runners. The moment she enters the private space, what can be observed is the metamorphosis that Anna has undergone since she arrived at the city:

> The building that Isabel lived in was made of brick […]. Ants and cockroaches moved about unmolested, and the whole place stank of turned food, unwashed clothes, and dust. But the building itself seemed reasonably solid, and I could only think of how lucky I was. Note how quickly things change for us. If someone had told me before I came here that this was where I would wind up living, I would not have believed it. But now I felt blessed, as though some great gift had been bestowed on me. (*In the Country of Last Things* 12)

In the devastated urban space, as Anna's reaction shows, even a small break from daily suffering is regarded as a precious gift. Although the shelter does not fulfil the pivotal function of home as a place "in which individuals come together in intimate relationships" (Madanipour 2003: 76), it provides the protagonist with a temporal feeling of moderate safety and stability. As Anna confesses, the days spent with Isabel, who invites the protagonist to her austere shelter and decides to take care of her after the rescue, "were the best days we had" (*In the Country of Last Things* 56). There, the protagonist has experienced practices lost in the city – mutual, sincere cooperation and support, and friendliness – which translates into the expressions of genuine solidarity that cannot be found in Auster's dystopian space.

As long as Isabel and her husband, Ferdinand, domicile the house, Anna can, at least to some extent, feel at home, even though the aspect of real intimacy is lost. The situation changes dramatically after Isabel's death since Anna, again, becomes marooned in the intimidating reality:

> I was awakened by a loud pounding on the door […]. The housebreakers forced the door open and then, crossed the threshold with the usual bludgeons and sticks in their hands. […] Isabel had been dead for only two days, and already, the neighbors had pounced. (*In the Country of Last Things* 83-84)

The very process of the degradation of the sanctuary is triggered by the forces from the dystopian surroundings that have

been slowly sneaking into the place and was initiated by deaths, so rife in the city. The safe, private space of the house finally loses its status as soon as it is invaded by the house-breakers; consequently, Anna is precluded from it and has to seek asylum somewhere else.

Up to the moment of the degradation, Isabel's shelter stands for the anchorage where basic human tendencies, such as support, cooperation, and mutual care of each other are preserved, where real solidarity between the protagonist and the elderly woman is observable. Yet, it is the National Library, another coincidental stop during Anna's journey, that offers her hope and unforgettable experiences. Although, as in the case of the first refuge, "the best days were behind it" (94) since the influence exerted by the urban space is inescapable and irreversible, the library also offers Anna 'the relics' of the former life. Apart from the temporal stability, shelter, or friendship with the Rabbi, she is given an ersatz of normality that could not be found outside – genuine love.

"Those were the best days for me. Not just here, you understand, but anywhere – the best days of my life" (107), continues Anna in the letter. Her words may sound a bit weird taking into consideration the conditions present in the city; the situation has not changed since she entered the area of the library, nor have the daily struggles disappeared. Yet, it is here that the protagonist finds long-sought Samuel Farr, a journalist who has also been sent to the dystopian metropolis. As she states, "Sam made all the difference […]. [N]ow I had been given the possibility of hope, and I began to believe that sooner or later our troubles were going to end" (107). Since then, the small room that Samuel has lived in becomes "the center of [her] world" (107); the initial flat-sharing turns into real intimacy between the bodies and allows Anna to believe that moments of happiness are possible in the city – after all she experiences what it means to be loved.

However, "the happiness and stability Anna finds with Sam prove to be ephemeral, as the horror of the city once again

undermines permanence and destroys certainty" (Brown 2007: 151), which leads to the collapse of the protagonist's sanctuary established in the library. Its calm is ravaged by the dystopian conditions encroaching in the person of Dujardin, the ethnographer. His offer to sell the protagonist new shoes leads to Anna being taken to a human slaughterhouse and to her almost losing life while trying to escape. Whereas in the case of Isabel's house what she is deprived of is shelter and the friendship with the woman, here it is the ersatz of genuine interpersonal relations and family.

Woburn House, where Anna finally finds herself in after the almost deadly accident, is another peripheral subspace in the urban territory that contrasts sharply with the dilapidation of the outside world; it is like a "heaven, an idyllic refuge from the misery and squalor around it" (*In the Country of Last Things* 139). As a place which serves as a philanthropic organisation, it 'associates' people with one common objective – providing help to people in need. Describing the idea of the sanctuary, Anna recollects:

> [w]ith constant, back-breaking effort, they were able to house from eighteen to twenty-four people at any given time. Indigents were allowed to stay for ten days; the desperately ill could stay longer. Everyone was given a clean bed and two warm meals a day [...] people were given a respite from their troubles, a chance to gather strength before moving on. (*In the Country of Last Things* 132)

In comparison to the reality outside, in this sanctuary people have developed a certain sense of being united in a common goal – helping the residents to regain their lost stability, expressing sympathy for them, offering a friendly and supporting talk and, in general, taking care of the dwellers. Woburn House, therefore, "produces a very particular sense of place" since it "represents a stability that grounds and stabilises the permanent inhabitants" (Brown 2007: 152). Victoria and the rest of the stuff feel obligated to continue what the doctor initiated – the endeavour to share their luxury even if it only re-

sults in a momentary respite. The appeal of Woburn House is so powerful that some of the urbanites start to perceive it as "an earthly paradise, the object of every possible longing they had ever felt. The idea of being allowed to live there had kept them going from one day to the next" (*In the Country of Last Things* 140).

Woburn House is a place where Anna is not only able to recover after the accident, but also to slowly rebuild the lost stability after her whole world has collapsed. In Victoria she finds the soul mate and the closest and most intimate confidante of secrets and thoughts; as the protagonist claims: "we each became a refuge for the other, the place where each of us could go to find comfort in her solitude" (156). Yet, even though the permanent residents of the mansion create a successfully working system based on cooperation, a system trying to push off the outside influence, the peace is only illusionary since the sanctuary is "built on a foundation of clouds" (154); it cannot escape the disruptive influence ad infinitum. Its temporal calm and peace are destroyed when the outside nightmare once more transgresses the peripheral borders. Mr Frick's death is a flashpoint for the whole chain of succeeding events that lead to Woburn House also losing its status as the last anchorage for people seeking some hope. As Anna concludes, "[l]ittle by little, the distinction between Woburn House and the rest of the city was growing smaller. We were being swallowed up, and not one of us knew how to prevent it" (171).

5. Conclusion

Paul Auster's *In the Country of Last Things* depicts the vision of the unnamed city in a state of decay. The landscape undergoes a gradual degradation and, together with it, all the constituents of urban space, such as society, economy, politics and interpersonal relations. Therefore, the inhabitants have had to develop certain patterns of behaviour enabling them to persevere in the oppressive space. Being united in frauds or various communities, such as suicidal or ideological groups, seems to

resemble the idea of solidarity in the name of which individuals share common beliefs or goals and, therefore, mutually support the common interest of the association. "Members of solidarity would thus be obliged to one another because of their membership in the community" (Scholz 2008: 10); the role of the group pressure cannot be discarded while examining expressions of solidarity in the dystopian city. Nonetheless, these gestures cannot be regarded as the genuine realisation of the concept since, as Scholz points out, it is individuals' "opposition to injustice or oppression [that] unites the group" (2008: 10). In the case of *In the Country of Last Things*, no acts of resistance can be found; rather, these are immoral impulses and motives that unite urbanites. Therefore, gestures of genuine solidarity have been deflated in favour of what Scholz calls "parasitical solidarity".

Even though the central dystopian space is submerged in total devastation, there exist some refuges standing in opposition to the surroundings – appropriated and reappropriated spaces. However, there arises a significant problem with places such as Isabel's shelter or Woburn House: "when they are embedded in environments of antithetical or antagonistic processes, is that they will always be at risk of attack, erosion or degradation by the forces that surround them" (Brown 2007: 153). There is always a danger that the dominant forces generated in the more powerful, but chaotic, central part of the urban space would trespass the borders separating it from the more organised, yet weaker, appropriated and reappropriated spaces.

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From solidarity with the people to solidarity with the 'company': State capture and Karen Jayes' dystopian novel *For the Mercy of Water* (2012)

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Abstract

For the Mercy of Water sheds light on an uncanny conjunction between the rape of women, the rape of a country and the rape of the truth. It relates a story about the vulnerability and resilience of women in a phallogocentric world. It deals with the phenomenon of 'state capture', the exploitation and abuse of state institutions and resources for the sake of private profit. Last but not least, it examines the relation of journalism and novel writing and flies the flag of truth-telling as a form of bearing witness and 'remembering' in a post-factual and increasingly totalitarian environment.

Keywords

South African dystopias, rape, privatization of water, state capture, truth-telling

Od solidarności z ludźmi po solidarność z ‘firmą’: Przejęcie państwa a dystopijna powieść Karen Jayes *For the Mercy of Water* (2012)

Abstrakt

Powieść *For the Mercy of Water* rzuca światło na niesamowitą łączność pomiędzy gwałtem na kobiecie, gwałtem zadanym krajowi i gwałtem zadanym prawdzie. Opowiada historię o bezbronności i wytrzymałości kobiet w fallogoncentrycznym świecie. Zajmuje się zjawiskiem ‘przejmowania państwa’, wyzyskiem i nadużyciami w instytucjach państwowych i zasobach dla celów prywatnego zysku. Co nie mniej ważne, powieść rozpatruje relacje między dziennikarstwem a pisaniem powieści i promuje prawdomówność jako formę dawania świadectwa i ‘pamiętania’ w post-faktualnym i coraz bardziej totalitarnym środowisku.

Słowa kluczowe

dystopie południowoafrykańskie, gwałt, prywatyzacja wody, przejęcie państwa, prawdomówność

1. Introduction: South African dystopian novels

South Africa has always been a good soil for dystopias (cf. Schoeman 1972; Gordimer 1982; Coetzee 1982), and even after the fall of apartheid, dystopias continue to be written (cf. Dovey 2007; Langa 2008; Bruce 2011; Strydom 2015). A number of explanations can be found for the writers’ dystopian inclinations. Because of South Africa’s violent history, the fear of a totalitarian government is deeply ingrained in the cultural memory of writers. While the white population is still afraid that the pent-up hatred against them might break out after all, the black majority is becoming more and more disillusioned with their own government because it has failed to ‘deliver’ and has disappointed the hopes of many people for quick economic change. Moreover, both population groups have had to realize

that negative global developments do not stop at South Africa's doorstep.

Karen Jayes' novel *For the Mercy of Water* relates a story about the vulnerability but also the resilience of women in a phallogocentric world. It shows how the rape of women is used as a means of waging war even against one's own people. It sheds light on the phenomenon of 'state capture', the exploitation and abuse of state institutions and resources for the sake of private profit. Last but not least, it examines the relation of journalism and novel writing and flies the flag of truth-telling as a form of bearing witness and 'remembering' in a post-factual and increasingly totalitarian environment. If there is any hope in this rather bleak novel, it lies in the regenerative faculties of nature – the 'mercy of water', which according to Jayes is a present to mankind from 'above' – and in the conviction that it is important to listen to these individual testimonies. For the testimonies keep the truth alive, even if those in charge are desperately bent on stifling it and cynically construct a different tale.

2. *For the Mercy of Water*: A local tale with global relevance

For the Mercy of Water makes use of the well-known conventions of the dystopian genre (cf. Rabkin et.al. 1983; Booker 1994a and 1994b; Gottlieb 2001; Mohr 2005; Claeys 2017). The novel is set in a not too distant future; the country is in the grip of a severe drought, and potable water has become a rare commodity; economy is going badly and the government has handed over control of the water resources of the country to a privately-owned 'water company', the daughter firm of a global player; a civil war has been going on for some time between city-based and state-supported paramilitary troops of this water company, which tries to uphold control over the water resources, and country-based rebels who fight for free access to clean water.

Following rumours that there have been heavy rainfalls in a remote and supposedly depopulated valley of the arid country, the anonymous first-person narrator, a writer of novels, goes on a quest to find out the truth. Travelling to the valley in a lorry of the water company, she is raped by one of the drivers. When she finally arrives at her destination, she sees three large tents, harbouring a doctor, a young aidworker, a man representing the company, and a journalist. In one of the tents, there is a character called 'the woman'. She is severely traumatized, and her story does not seem to make sense. What transpires is that she was in charge of eight girls for whom she acted as mother and teacher and who were gang-raped and finally killed by men of the company – with one exception: a girl called Eve managed to escape and has disappeared from the area.

While the company is denying the authenticity of the old woman's story, the first-person narrator and novelist sets out to prove its truth. With the help of the journalist, she searches for evidence. In a dilapidated building which formerly contained the schoolroom, she finds a number of small reddish handprints on the walls, as if children had left them there with their tiny hands soaked in blood. When she follows the course of the newly sprung river up the mountain, she comes to a cavern that the old woman has mentioned in her story. She again finds traces of blood that confirm the truth of the old woman's tale. Finally, the old woman gives her a piece of skin with reddish hair that Eve is supposed to have cut from the head of her rapist.

Back in the city, she tracks down Eve in one of the female penitentiaries. She also finds the address of the guard by visiting the hospital in which he received eye surgery. When Eve has spent her term, the two visit the flat of the company guard who turns out to have become blind in the meantime. Eve confronts him with what he has done, putting a knife to his throat and injuring him in the process. Before the women leave, they

destroy the orientation system of strings which he has installed, and Eve opens the water tap to flood his rooms.

On a company plane the first-person narrator and Eve fly back to the mountain valley to which the old woman was allowed to return. The plane crashes, caught in a twister. The pilot is killed in the plane crash, but the two women are only slightly injured. Eve stays behind with 'the woman', while the life of the first-person narrator is saved by a rescue party.

3. Local and global issues

Karen Jayes is a South African, Cape Town-based novelist, and there can be no doubt that South Africa is at the centre of her novel (cf. Steenkamp 2013; Sofianos 2013). South Africa belongs to the countries with the highest rape rates in the world; in recent years, there have been severe periods of drought; and 'state capture' has been a hotly discussed political issue and has become highly topical in the present.

However, beyond these South African issues, the novel has a global relevance. The rape of women is an urgent problem, not only in times of war and in the so-called 'Third World' or 'developing countries', but also in our apparently 'civilized' Western societies. Climate change and global warming have been put on the agendas of governments over the last two generations and seem to have become an even more burning issue in the days of Donald Trump. Although the United Nations Organization (UNO) in a resolution from 2010 declared that free access to clean water is an inalienable human right, there have been attempts on various continents to privatize water distribution and sanitation, which increases the risk of excluding those who cannot pay for it. Last but not least, looking at the political situation as it presents itself in countries such as Turkey, Russia, Hungary, or Serbia, one gets the uncanny feeling that a phenomenon such as state capture, which goes hand in hand with the undermining of democratic institutions, corruption, and the manipulation and suppression of a free

press, is not only taking place in African, South American, or Asian countries but is happening at our doorstep.

4. Privatization of access to clean water

In 2010, the United Nations Organization declared the access to free water an inalienable human right (cf. UNO Resolution no. 64 from 2010). Jayes' dystopian view builds on the fact that not all the states in our world are able or willing to guarantee this human right and provide potable water for their population. For financial reasons, some of them have authorized private companies to handle this difficult task, but the privatization of water is a highly complex and controversially discussed political issue.

In the past, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were only willing to give loans to developing countries for piped water projects if they took private water companies on board (cf. Mason and Talbot 2002) – with all the consequences appertaining to it. The supporters of the privatization scheme point out that privatization brings in technological know-how and increases efficiency, while its antagonists claim that it means selling off one's natural resources to global money grabbers. In many cases and in various countries, the attempts at privatization did not prove to be successful. In the present, the trend or tendency of handling the task of providing clean water is actually pointing in the opposite direction. Nationalization instead of privatization seems to be called for (cf. Kattnig 2017). As far as South Africa is concerned, the existing water supply system is better than that of other African states, although it is far from being perfect.[1]

[1] When I was writing this paper in June 2017 and it should be raining in Cape Town during the winter season, the city's dams were almost empty, the water restrictions had been raised to level four, which cuts down the daily per head allowance of drinkable water by two thirds, and people were getting restless because ENSO (El Niño Southern Oscillation) showed no mercy. In this respect, too, Jayes' *For the Mercy of Water* is highly topical.

However, we are not dealing with the annual water report of the Department of Water Affairs but with a dystopian novel that projects actually existing and notable trends and tendencies into a future that is imaginable and serves as a warning about what may become reality. In the novel, the water company is laying its hands on whatever water resources can be found. Tolerated by the state, its paramilitary troops wage a cruel war against all those who try to undermine or circumvent its water schemes. In the valley that is visited by the journalist and the first-person narrator, rebels have repeatedly tried to sabotage and reroute the water pipes. The two writers are on their side:

> 'But everybody's forgotten that we all have a right to water,' I said. 'That we shouldn't have to pay for it.'
>
> He turned to me. 'There are not many people left who believe that,' he said.
>
> 'I know,' I said. 'I feel like some kind of ancient being sometimes.'
>
> He smiled. 'Not ancient,' he said. 'Just logical. The government has sold the very thing that keeps us alive, into a business and a security concern run primarily by international shareholders, who are their benefactors. It's suicide.' (*For the Mercy of Water* 54)

5. Rape

South Africa has been repeatedly called the "rape capital of the world" (King 2014), but so have the Democratic Republic of Congo, India, or even the USA. Comparing statistics does not help very much in this respect, for rape is defined differently in all of these countries, the statistical figures are unreliable, women who have suffered rape are unwilling to report to the authorities, and the dark figure concerning rape is great (cf. Wilkinson 2014). Suffice it to say that rape is still a huge problem in South Africa and in Africa in general, but also in our Western world.

When in Jayes' novel *For the Mercy of Water* the protagonist is raped on her trip to the deserted valley, the author's reason for inventing such an incident is obviously to equip her first-person narrator (and the reader) with some kind of understanding of what rape means for a woman, and the trauma that arises out of it. In a letter to the journalist whom she has begun to love she cautiously indicates what happened to her (Jayes' italics):

> *But now I know how the body really is; we remember the part that is broken or that holds the wound. Its memory and its pain spills from the point of invasion through all our parts, and through all of us, even those parts who pretend they will not see the pain, or turn from it because they think they can be immune.* (*For the Mercy of Water* 292)

Being traumatized herself, the narrator afterwards becomes an empathic listener to – and a sensitive recorder of – the old woman's and Eve's testimonies. When Eve is better acquainted with her, the girl trusts her with her own story, at the centre of which is a most atrocious gang rape that Eve describes explicitly and in the minutest details. She remembers how her legs were tied apart, fastened with ropes to a rock and a tree:

> 'When he was inside me, it was like I was being stabbed or bitten. I was shaking, my whole body … It was like he was tearing me in half, splitting me open, and making a passage for this evil thing to come, this long line of ants … And they did come. One after the other. There were seven of them.'
>
> She was breathing fast and her body shook.
>
> 'They kept on until the middle of the night,' she said. 'When they couldn't do it any more because they got too drunk or too tired, they used bottles and guns and branches. I fainted. Sometimes I tried to make myself choke. I was moving my neck on the rope so I would die.' (*For the Mercy of Water* 308)

Shocking the reader seems to be the narrative intention behind episodes of this kind. Winning the reader's empathy with

the fate of Eve and the other women is necessary, for Eve and the narrator go on a crusade to revenge themselves – a revenge they do not really carry out because in the confrontation with the company guard they recognize how commonplace and banal evil may look in broad daylight, an insight which Eve and the narrator share with Hannah Arendt (cf. the subtitle of Arendt 1963) and many survivors of Hitler's concentration camps.

6. State capture

In South Africa, 'state capture' has become a burning political issue. It concerns the former ANC underground fighter and current South African president Jacob Zuma and his shady connections with the Gupta family. In his case, it seems that his former solidarity with the people, which was the starting point for the ANC in its fight against the apartheid regime and helped to overthrow the apartheid government, has turned into a solidarity with the 'company' that has captured the state, and that Zuma's talk about 'white monopoly capital' and 'radical economic transformation' (Bendile 2017) just puts up a smokescreen behind which he and his ilk can go about undisturbed in their business of private enrichment.

Strong evidence for this comes from the former Public Protector's report (Madonsela 2016), titled

> *State of Capture*: Report on an investigation into alleged improper and unethical conduct by the President and other state functionaries relating to alleged improper relationships and involvement of the Gupta family in the removal and appointment of Ministers and Directors of State-Owned Enterprises resulting in improper and possibly corrupt award of state contracts and benefits to the Gupta family's businesses.

While the Public Protector is still very cautious with her statements and only mentions 'possible corruption' and the likelihood of office abuse by the President, a group of researchers

from various South African universities have been much more outspoken and (surprisingly) clear on these matters in a report that was presented in May 2017 (Bhorat et al. 2017):

> In our view the South African case is just one quite typical example of a global trend in the growth of increasingly authoritarian, neopatrimonial regimes where a symbiotic relationship between the constitutional and shadow states is maintained, but with real power shifting increasingly into the networks that comprise the shadow state. Understanding the South African context and challenge, therefore, is an important contribution to our understanding of this global phenomenon. It is also our contribution to the broad struggle to save South African democracy and development practice from a power elite that pursues its own interests at the expense of South African society, in particular the poorest people who will suffer first and most from the consequences of what is in reality a de facto silent coup.

7. Conclusion: Rape of women, rape of the country, rape of the truth

The Mercy of Water sheds light on an uncanny conjunction between the rape of women, the rape of a country and the rape of the truth. According to Jayes, the 'antidote' against this kind of 'rape' is courageous journalism and novel writing. Both attempt to tell an alternative story that is not corrupted by the power of the 'company'. Journalism and novel writing are both forms of truth-telling that become increasingly important in a time of growing totalitarianism, when the ruling powers have not only captured important institutions of the state but also attempt to capture the truth. This is the case in *For the Mercy of Water*, where the water company sends in its own PR people in order to save the reputation of the company:

> 'I'm PR,' he said. 'I'm here to maintain the reputation of the company in this, but also, of course, to see that the truth be told.'
> 'I'm not quite sure what you mean,' I said.

> He looked around, back at the tents. 'The recent web reports that have been coming out of here are, well ... The company wants the news to be a bit more objective.'" (*For the Mercy of Water* 91)

The private water company not only has a private army of soldiers but also an army of PR officers that rewrite reality in such a way that the reputation of the company is not endangered, which practically means that they construct a web of lies, denials, and falsifications while the government tries to intimidate the media by open threats or the imprisonment of "journalists who scratch too close to the truth" (107). Karen Jayes uses the medium of the novel because she feels the urge to tell us something about us:

> 'I felt that there was something important in what she had to say,' I said. 'I felt the glimmer of a story, a bigger story – about the water, about us. I approached a publisher I know overseas. They gave me a small advance, and a commission letter and, well, here I am. Pretty desperate, huh?
>
> He smiled, a white bright smile that lit up in his eyes. We listened in silence while the plane landed and slowed.
>
> 'What you're doing here is good,' he said, turning to me. (*For the Mercy of Water* 88)

The "glimmer of a story, a bigger story – about the water, about us" has resulted in *For the Mercy of Water*, an admirable and topical novel which is uncannily close to what is happening around us. In her search for the truth, Jayes reminds us of the brittleness and fragility of evidence, and the unreliability of memory in an increasingly totalitarian and 'closed' environment, where writing becomes an act of remembering, of defiance, and also of self-assertion and -construction. In this way, it is complementing the healing powers of nature in which Jayes also believes:

> The tiniest parts of the earth remain beautiful in the presence of human cruelty. Even when the blood washes over them and the cries of children run over them and the mothers pick up pieces of

> their wombs and gather the flesh of others in piles, and the bones of men dry up and disappear, for the mercy of water the life is still here, the sand is still soaked with rain, the seeds are still heavy with life and the stem that rises up from them carries, every time, the first perfect green vein. (*For the Mercy of Water* 378)

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Questions about solidarity in the dystopian world (inspired by Dmytro Ternovyi's *High Resolution*)

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Abstract

The article discusses the means of creating images and argumentation lines used to achieve a multidimensional representation of the concept of solidarity in the 2012 drama *High Resolution* by Ukrainian playwright Dmytro Ternovyi. The story of inhabitants of a certain Ukrainian city and their experiences during anti-regime protests coinciding with the hunt for immigrants organized by the authorities is interspersed with fantastic and grotesque scenes featuring animate objects, which allowed the author to create a range of social worlds haunted by traumas and fears. By definition, a dystopian reality is a space where social relationships are disturbed, which may cause the society to atomize, but it can also consolidate it. Ternovyi shows both options, indicating that it is possible to have an ambivalent point of view on solidarity. He creates alternative variants of development of such situations. The analysis of those visions shows that it is possible to perceive the discussed drama as a specific study of solidarity – an anatomy of its triumphs and failures. Furthermore, setting the drama in the context of the recent events in Ukraine made it possible to correlate solidarity and collective identity and show current trends in thinking about the Ukrainian identity.

Keywords

dystopia, Ukraine, solidarity, identity, utopianism

Pytania o solidarność w dystopijnym świecie (na materiale dramatu „Detalizacja" Dmytra Ternowego)

Abstrakt

W artykule zostały przeanalizowane środki obrazowania i argumentacji, wykorzystane do stworzenia wielowymiarowego obrazu zjawiska solidarności w dramacie *Detalizacja* (2012) ukraińskiego dramatopisarza Dmytra Ternowego. Opowieść o losach mieszkańców pewnego ukraińskiego miasta w czasie wzmagających się protestów antyreżimowych oraz urządzonej przez władze obławy na imigrantów, przeplatana fantastyczno-groteskowymi scenami z udziałem ożywionych przedmiotów, pozwoliła autorowi na wykreowanie różnych światów społecznych naznaczonych traumą i lękiem. Rzeczywistość dystopijna *ex definitione* jest przestrzenią zaburzonych relacji społecznych, co może przejawiać się zarówno w atomizacji społeczeństwa, jak i w jego totalnej konsolidacji. Ternowyj pokazuje obydwa te warianty, wskazując na możliwość ambiwalentnego postrzegania zjawiska solidarności. Jednocześnie autor tworzy odmienne wersje rozwoju takiego typu sytuacji. Analiza tych wizji pozwoliła spojrzeć na wybrany utwór jako na swoiste studium solidarności, anatomię jej porażek i triumfów. Ponadto umiejscowienie dramatu w kontekście ostatnich wydarzeń na Ukrainie umożliwiło skorelowanie zjawisk solidarności i tożsamości zbiorowej, a także pokazanie aktualnych tendencji w myśleniu o tożsamości ukraińskiej.

Słowa kluczowe

dystopia, Ukraina, solidarność, tożsamość, utopizm

Yuval Noah Harari once wrote that "every man-made order is packed with internal contradictions". In his opinion, "cultures are constantly trying to reconcile them" (Harari 2014: 143), and this process provides an enabling environment for the development of any cultural community. Contemporary political

order is characterized by an irremovable contradiction between the ideals of freedom and equality that began to spread across the world after the French Revolution[1]. As Harari puts it, "the entire political history of the world since 1789 can be seen as a series of attempts to reconcile this contradiction" (143). Shlomo Avineri (2011) notes that while the traditions of liberty and equality are discussed widely, and there is a huge body of literature focused on their interpretations, the concept of *Fraternité* has never attracted much interest. The scholar supposes that "to some extent it could be connected with a hazy, vague, maybe even kitschy and quasi-romantic atmosphere associated with that concept" (Avineri 2011). He argues that fraternity, originating from the Enlightenment tradition, was largely overlooked in the traditional liberal discourse, so in the nineteenth century it was taken over by the socialist thought. It is worth noting that this concept can be seen quite clearly in the nationalist ideology as well, as nationalists adopted the metaphor of the family as a basis for thinking about a nation. While the ideas of solidarity of all workers or mutual loyalty between members of national communities initially brought a positive force of emancipation, with the lapse of time they also laid the foundations for Messianic movements, which, as Leonidas Donskis (2016: 41) puts it, were hypnotizing with faith in the promise of collective salvation.

In the twentieth century, millions of people experienced the horror of collectivist utopias of nationalism and communism, but the end of that century saw the triumph of liberal democracy, which attempted to harmonize various aspects of liberty and equality. Nonetheless, political, state-imposed or economic regulations, which are intrinsic to that system, are generally thought to promote the expansion of freedom and individualism, stimulating the growth of worrying trends at the same time. Contemporary thinkers point out that the "Cartesian

[1] Therefore, the French Revolution which, in Bronisław Baczko's words, "was building its great promise from the ideas and expectations of the Age of Reason" (2016: 433), which were rooted in the belief that "an individual has the right to search for his or her own happiness, and collective welfare is the prime purpose of social life" gave rise, quite paradoxically, to one of the central dilemmas of the most recent history.

perspective with a human «me» in the centre" (Czyżewski 2014), which determines the nature of order in liberal democracy, often fails becoming a source of dysfunctions in both individuals and societies. Krzysztof Czyżewski (2014) notes that: "[…] while the field of individual freedom is constantly increasing, we have also started to learn the bitter taste of alienation, egoism and loneliness […]". The realization of ever deeper divisions within societies, cultural conflicts and the breakdown of relations between people is the leitmotif of most contemporary social diagnoses. Presently the concept of solidarity seems to be the cure for those pains and a way for the culture to ease the internal tensions.

There are at least several reasons why this concept is becoming a space that provokes particularly deep reflection in humanists and cultural figures. Firstly, Avineri (2011) argues, fraternity is more difficult to adapt to the Procrustean bed of legal instruments. Hence, solidarity, as Czyżewski (2014) asserts, is becoming the greatest challenge for the culture preoccupied with the most important affairs of our time. Secondly, the challenges of globalisation force the redefinition of solidarity in line with the current needs. It is emphasized that interpreting solidarity as a synonym of patriotism or thinking about it in terms of slogans borne on socialists' banners should give way to understanding it as a foundation on which to develop an altruistic attitude combined with humanistic opening to Others. The range of traditional motifs associated with moral issues defining the meaning of that concept (such as responsibility, social justice or cooperation) is therefore extended to include tolerance, rising above divisions and even pro-environmental awareness that is not limited to just human beings. Maybe the most compelling evidence of the idea of solidarity being rooted in our culture is that it is linked to emotions, which are a hidden driving force behind social transformations connected with modernization. Literature may play an important role in this process. As Przemysław Czapliński (2015) emphasized, a mindset focused on putting xenophobic attitudes to shame and inducing pro-solidarity behaviours, which has been present in Polish literature since mid-1980s,

was one of the mechanisms that formed a pluralistic society in Poland.

Having thus outlined the issues related to the idea of solidarity, I intend to analyse them in the context of the Ukrainian reality, taking into consideration the subject-matter of Dmytro Ternovyi's *High Resolution* (2016) in the first place. For this purpose, I have developed three basic sets of questions, and the search for answers to them will lie at the heart of my analysis. The first thing of interest will be to see how images are created and what lines of argumentation showing that points of view on solidarity can be ambivalent have been used to achieve the multidimensional representation of solidarity in *High Resolution*. Secondly, I will attempt to establish the situations in which the concept of solidarity as an agent that binds fragmented societies will imply tensions between the ideals of freedom and fraternity. What qualities of literary dystopias created by post-Soviet writers make them predisposed to highlight and characterize such tensions? How is it possible to draw conclusions with regard to characteristic features of the author's utopia, which is rooted by definition in any anti-utopia or dystopia, taking into consideration the resolution of such conflicts and the concept of the protagonist in a specific work? And to what extent do the author's ideas reflect social sentiments and intellectual trends in and outside his or her country of origin? My third aim is to gain insight into how the aforementioned process of redefining the concept of solidarity is reflected in Ternovyi's work. How can the romantic pathos of national (and social) uprisings be harmonized with the anti-xenophobic discourse? In addition, how do the factors that define the Ukrainian identity change in the periods right before and just after the Revolution of Dignity as a result of such harmonizing?

Dmytro Ternovyi finished *High Resolution* in 2012. In 2013 the drama, written in the Russian language, won the first prize in the international competition for playwrights *Über Grenzen sprechen. Lebensgefühl in Zeiten des Wandels*, and in 2014 a play based on it was staged by the Badisches Staatstheater in Karlsruhe. In early 2016 the drama, by then translated into

the Ukrainian language, was included in the Contemporary Anthology of the Ukrainian Drama, entitled *The Maidan – Before and After. Contemporary Drama Anthology*. *High Resolution* tells the tale of inhabitants of a Ukrainian city and their experiences during anti-regime protests coinciding with the hunt for immigrants organized by authorities. Their story is interspersed with fantastic, grotesque scenes featuring animate objects. The plot centres on experiences and actions of spouses, Andrey and Yelena. To provide an in-depth coverage of the inner selves of his characters, Ternovyi anthropomorphises objects, making an extremely efficient use of that technique. The even-numbered scenes of the drama and particularly the second and the sixth scene, where the author makes protagonists out of animate objects, are significant in terms of carrying the message through the work, especially if those scenes are to be considered a form of an artistic statement on solidarity.

Crockery items – Cup, Saucer, Teapot, Decanter and Wine Glass – are made the protagonists of the second scene, which is set in the flat that belongs to Andrey's parents, Anna Sergeyevna and Lev Borisovich. The objects talk, allowing the reader to learn more about the couple's life and the nature of relationships in the family. It turns out that arguments between the husband and wife are by no means infrequent, and Anna Sergeyevna reacts to them with outbursts of cry followed by hysteria attacks during which she breaks crockery. The Teapot ceaselessly alarms his companions during the conversation because there has been a quarrel in the family recently, so there are reasons to fear that the crockery might get broken again.

The scene is constructed as a polylogue, but soon the attention is drawn to the dialogue between the Cup and the Teapot, which shows utter disagreement between the two. In terms of axiology, the characters are worlds apart. The Cup, preoccupied with Anna Sergeyevna's affairs, represents a petty bourgeois mentality. She fends off fears of an impending hysteria attack, dreaming about watching TV series together in the evening. The Teapot, on the contrary, is not interested in chit-

chatting about family affairs; he prefers meditations to tea, and the question that is central to his contemplation on life is: 'What is the purpose of our existence?' That is why he is terrified of death coming near, which to him is tantamount to failure to understand the meaning of life, and consequently to achieve self-realization. In addition, even though both the Cup and her antagonist Teapot fear destruction, there is still an abyss of alienation between them. If this scene was to be treated as a metaphor of social relationships, one would see there a well-known motif of conflict between intellectual elites and common people, who vary in all sorts of ways starting from aspirations, through attitude towards authorities, to the awareness of threats to society. Both sides are disrespectful and treat each other with near disdain. None of them conceals their irritation when they hear confessions of the other. The Teapot, whose emotions and thoughts on life are deeper and reach beyond the present circumstances, represents a type of intellectual feeling helpless when it faced with common people's inertia, submissiveness, and shortsightedness. On the other hand, the quality of his arguments that are streaked with unconcealed protectionism makes him unable to get through to the hearts of his friends of misery and trigger behaviours that would be adequate to their situation, even though he is genuinely concerned about the fate of his community. His ability to foresee tragic developments does not make him able to rise above divisions to reach an agreement, though it seems that the narrow-minded resistance his efforts are met with is decisive for that inability. In the end, Anna Sergeyevna storms into the room, wraps all the crockery in the tablecloth and throws it against the wall. Therefore, the perishable material the protagonists are made of emphasizes even more strongly the fragility and weakness of the social organism exhausted by the disintegration sickness.

At the other end of the scale of solidarity understood as a synonym of community's unity is a collective described in the sixth scene, where paving blocks become the metaphor of a post-totalitarian society. Still haunted by insecurity, such a society freezes to the spot, and its traumatized memory

adopts the strategy of passive behaviour and mimicry. With abiding memories of horrors of the old regime, people submissively yield to new authorities and their doings, condemning those who disagree with such submissiveness. This is the meaning gathered from conversations between paving blocks, which have just ordinal numbers instead of names. The block named Fifth, the youngest of them all, does not want to put up with the pain inflicted by passing troops, and he dreams of a different world. He does not know what fear is, so the older blocks try to instil that fear in him by telling him a legend substantiating their cardinal rule: 'The most interesting thing is to lie flat, life is about serenity, and patience is our work' (Ternovyi 2016: 80). This ancient tradition combines the story of the expulsion from Paradise and the tale of Icarus. The Fifth is stubborn and keeps dreaming about flying, this is why he was eventually banished from the community. What unfolds is an allegorical, grotesque vision of a society that is subject to oppression, but still generates the standards of repressive morality. The nature of community's unity is tribal in this case, which means that the unity is based on the principles of 'genetic' loyalty that makes it easier for a 'tribe' to survive. The adopted strategy does guarantee survival and accord; it draws the community members closer together, but waives the principle of individual freedom. Nonetheless, when combined with the consciousness of a victim, it leads people to eliminate themselves from the fight for national interests or for interests of an individual or a group within the state on their own.

The juxtaposition of those scenes highlights the author's intention to show that having an ambivalent attitude towards solidarity is possible. On the one hand, the lack of a consensus may cause a major disaster, but on the other hand, peremptory attitudes and negatively excessive loyalty lead to the involution of an autarkic, closed collective. Even so, the polarity of those models of society's functioning, which are anti-utopian in many ways, is not an obstacle for the author to using them as an example on which to show the tension that can be created when the ideals of liberty and fraternity are juxtaposed. This thought will be elaborated on in full in the remain-

ing parts of the drama, which describe the main protagonists' experiences in correlation with the diagnosis of problems of the Ukrainian reality.

Artistic components and the non-literary context of the odd-numbered scenes are what makes the drama a dystopia. Firstly, the author himself admitted that he had been thinking about presidential elections that were to be held in Ukraine in 2015 when writing the text back in 2012. This makes his work a near-future dystopia, i.e. a type of negative utopia, where the author's attention is focused on the near future of a country and predominantly on its political aspects. A correlation between the situation before the elections, marked by symptoms of a social and mental crisis, and the creation of numerous literary forms of dystopian fiction has been noticed in Russia and the United States as well as in Ukraine. Secondly, in line with the rules of the genre, *High Resolution* offers a diagnosis of the society's condition combined with the modelling of the developments in the future. Thirdly, in line with the rules of political fiction it is not only modelling, but also some sort of programming. As Boris Dubin (2001) notes, literary fiction that takes a form of "hypothetical warfare, confrontation, competition, solidarity or partnership" is "a mean of intellectual control over the issues connected with social changes and with the speed and directions of a society's momentum, and it is an artistic reaction to problems that arise in this area".

As regards this particular drama, such intentions are more than clear, and their sources and related reckonings easy to identify. The city where the anti-regime protests take place remains anonymous, but the name of the square occupied by protesters is mentioned many times, and the name is Maidan. It is difficult to overlook a direct reference to the Orange Revolution events, which, in fact, is not just a reference, but an evocation of its spirit (notably, the spirit devoid of bitter disappointments!). At the time when the play was being written, political elites and their ineptitude began to be blamed for the failure to implement the words spoken out on the Maidan in Kiev in 2004, and the social capital began to be seen as the greatest success of those events. This fostered a growing belief

in the Orange Revolution as the mother of another great change. Bringing the Maidan's legend back to life made it possible to conjure up optimistic visions of future changes in Ukraine, and more specifically to look for ways to break the social and political deadlock the country was in under Viktor Yanukovych.

The idea of solidarity so understood should be examined in a strictly political context as an indispensable factor in mobilizing a society to take strong corrective actions, or more broadly, to show care for the commonwealth. However, the most crucial question asked in *High Resolution* is not political but existential: is it possible for people to demonstrate solidarity with one another in the environment in which general pessimism, disintegration of human relationships and scepticism towards great ideals prevail. Furthermore, is it possible to follow the ideals of fraternity in the world in which, as Zygmunt Bauman (2013) has it, "day-to-day drudgery is inhospitable to solidarity"? Are not the dreams of an individual's freedom and welfare in conflict with self-limitation or self-sacrifice necessary to achieve common goals? Ternovyi invites the reader to think about these questions from the perspective of an artist, i.e. a representative of a group that attaches a tremendous value to the right that guarantees freedom to an individual.

Andrey is a talented musician, who signed a contract for a number of concerts across Europe. He is going through the procedure necessary to obtain the documents allowing him and his wife to leave, and he is just about to complete it when the protests begin. Initially, it seems that they both want to leave the country as quickly as possible, no longer believing it could be possible to in fact there. Their life and relationships with those who surround them can largely be thought of as an illustration of Bauman's (2013) diagnosis: "The deepening of our mutual physical and mental isolation, the loss of common language and the ability to communicate with and understand each other – these processes no longer need to receive external stimuli […]". Still, each of the spouses suffers in secret, being torn apart by fear for their own safety and guilt because they do not commit themselves to fighting for the right cause, and

predominantly because they do not join their friends, who have decided to demonstrate.

Therefore, the dwellers of the depicted dystopian world are faced with a dilemma that is not present in the classical anti-utopia, in which efforts to save one's own dignity and the desire to liberate fellow brothers from the chains of the totalitarian system are actually inseparable. The reason for it is that the setting of the post-Soviet dystopia resembles a peninsula isolated from the civilized world rather than an anti-utopian island, and this peninsula sometimes has certain characteristics of the grey zone. What is important is that this place has an exit, and it is tempting to make use of it. At times such temptation is particularly strong because dystopias, which frequently show the condition of 'societies of survival', sometimes depict worlds that offer no hope for a change. Consequently, a voluntary decision to remain part of such a world may seem to be tantamount to giving up both freedom and dignity. At the same time, dystopian worlds are more heterogeneous, they have visible symptoms of chaos and insecurity, and thus in theory they are more flexible and susceptible of potential changes as opposed to anti-utopian ones. All the aforementioned factors conjure up a vision of a dysfunctional society, and the decision about which attitude to take towards that society is a key challenge that the protagonist has to face.

The sociological story of the play, or as Czapliński (1996: 101) puts it, the story of reconciliation (or a conflict) between an individual and a group, is moving away from dystopia towards utopia, and this movement can be described as "returning to Prometheus" to paraphrase Maria Janion's words. In fact, the return begins from the same direction that the scholar pointed to as a potential direction of escape from Prometheus nearly three decades ago. Discussing the Dionysian vision of human condition presented in *Eros and Civilization* by Herbert Marcuse, Janion writes: "Men will liberate themselves by turning away from the Prometheus myth, and turning to erotic and aesthetic activity through the myths of Orpheus and Narcissus" (1989: 155). Andrey, as we initially see him, is the incarnation of that vision, but one that lacks the most crucial

component, which is the feeling of true, genuine liberation. On the contrary, he is childish and full of concealed fears and phobias. However, if the evolution of Andrey, whom we can see playing for revolutionists on the Maidan's stage in the final scene of the drama, is to be considered a transposition of Prometheus's fate, it will be necessary to emphasize that Ternovyi, to quote Janion once again, "has tailored the titan's old clothes to suit his own size" (1989: 149), and more specifically, to suit his own times. And these are times when the motion of the utopian thought no longer resembles a brave gallop, lively march or euphoric flight (especially in the familiar territory), but it seems to have earmarks of careful movements of a tightrope walker balancing on a rope over the abyss of bloody history lessons.

Such a play-safe type of utopianism could be called humanistic, if we took André Glucksmann's reflections into consideration, or liberal, if we were to adopt the thought of Richard Rorty. From this perspective the approach to solidarity, which was actually postulated earlier in Jan Patočka's (1975) works, is free from any ideologies in the first place, and is based on the experience of an individual and on the assumption that "the significance of violence is limited" (Rorty 1996: 6). Glucksmann insists that the new pro-society ethics should not rely on the united forces of those who are already convinced, but it should be built on equally firm solidarity of the shocked ones. The ones, who in his words are "shocked at witnessing evil" (1994: 10), i.e. the people who develop a kind of moral sensitivity underpinned by a bitter opposition against the "scandal of evil", as Adam Michnik (2009) puts it. Much as it avoids absolutism in thinking about ethical categories, the proposed approach still presumes a necessity of moral progress aiming at achieving ever wider solidarity. The leverage of such progress is not to be sought in the collectivist element, but in the individualism, and more specifically in behaviours triggered by people's emotions and experiences. That the emotion is an important stimulus eliciting pro-social behaviours is a well-known rule of social psychology. Taking a similar point of view as a basis, Daniel Batson (2008) formulated the empa-

thy-induced altruism hypothesis, arguing that an empathic ability to feel some pain and suffering of another person is one of the key mechanisms of altruism.

The evolution of the protagonists can be regarded as a literary exemplification or a kind of artistic summary of contemporary trends in thinking about solidarity which have been discussed above. Even though Ternovyi's work does contain numerous publicist components, no ideological bent or even slightest attempts to make use of the slogans sanctified by the national tradition are to be found there. The focus is primarily on human behaviour, which is rife with dramatic tensions in the face of injustice and violence. A shift in the protagonists' attitudes is gradual and determined by a spontaneous reaction to the events. Yelena, who initially covers the windows of her flat tightly with curtains, cannot refuse to help Wally, an immigrant, who accidentally knocks at her door, trying to hide away from the police dragnet. Then she learns from the officer who chases Wally that the protesters are to be shot down by snipers hidden on roofs. In exceptional circumstances the ethical imperative is decisive: the fear for lives of others makes her shed all the inhibitions arising from the fear for her own safety. Yelena acts quickly and decisively. She grabs the telephone, and passes the information to people who can pass it further to the media and protesters at the square. However, when she sees the shooting is just about to begin, she opens the window and begins to shout warnings to protesters, who hide themselves away from shots and put up effective resistance, using catapults to hurl stones onto the roofs. A stone falling in through the open window hits Yelena in the head. It is before her death that we can see her happy and triumphant for the first time. In the final scene of the drama, Andrey is getting ready to play for the crowd of protesters on the Maidan's stage. He mourns his deceased wife, and this is undoubtedly a crucial factor behind his decision. At the same time, the sense of belonging to the community and altruistic commitment to its affairs becomes one of the ways to alleviate the pain.

A year and a half after the drama was composed, snipers on the roofs and catapults used by the revolutionists became the reality of another Maidan, i.e. anti-regime protests that were later dubbed the Revolution of Dignity (November 2013-February 2014). Interpreting the drama in the context of those events and their consequences leads to a conclusion that the work anticipated the current trend concerning changes in thinking about the Ukrainian identity. In particular, the civic nature of mobilization of the Ukrainian society rules out traditional (primarily ethnic) factors that restrict the expressions of identity. On the other hand, the war that broke out in the eastern Ukraine and the general sense of insecurity that it carries must have a negative impact on the process of forming a pluralistic, open society. A situation that strikes with so contradictory tendencies still offers scholars a promising opportunity to take a close look at the changes in Ukraine and treat them as another 'case study' of a utopia clashing with reality.

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Mere solidarity is not enough: Exploring dystopian reality in Edward Bond's *The Tin Can People*

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Abstract

Solidarity is an indispensable part of the utopian and dystopian world since people gather around a common cause either to create an ideal community or to get rid of a difficult situation. Unlike utopia, in which solidarity mostly comes out voluntarily, in dystopia, it grows up compulsorily triggered by emotions such as anxiety, distrust, paranoia, and fear primarily due to a totalitarian regime or the effects of a nuclear war. However, in *The Tin Can People* (1984), British playwright Edward Bond propounds a new perspective to post-apocalyptic dystopia by portraying a group of people who create a utopian community, a heaven in the aftermath of a nuclear holocaust, as a result of living in solidarity. This article aims to trace how dystopian world reveals the bitter 'reality' against this illusionary heaven with the arrival of a stranger and dissolves the community despite the solidarity that the survivors have been preserving for years to show that mere solidarity is not enough to save a community.

Keywords

post-apocalyptic dystopia, utopia, solidarity, enhanced sociability, compulsory solidarity, dystopian reality, Edward Bond

Zwykła solidarność nie wystarcza: Analiza dystopijnej rzeczywistości w *The Tin Can People* Edwarda Bonda

Abstrakt

Solidarność stanowi niezbędną część utopijnego i dystopijnego świata, ponieważ ludzie gromadzą się wokół wspólnego celu stworzenia idealnej społeczności, lub znalezienia wyjścia z trudnej sytuacji. W przeciwieństwie do utopii, w ramach której solidarność opiera się na zasadzie dobrowolności, w dystopii solidarność wynika z konieczności, będąc pobudzana przez takie emocje jak strach, nieufność, paranoja i niepewność wywołane przez reżim totalitarny, lub też spowodowane przez wojnę z użyciem broni nulearnej. W sztuce *The Tin Can People* (1984) brytyjski dramaturg Edward Bond proponuje nowe spojrzenie na post-apokaliptyczną dystopię przedstawiając grupę ludzi, którzy żyjąc w solidarności tworzą utopijną społeczność pośród ruin świata zniszczonego przez wojnę. Poniższy artykuł ma na celu zbadanie, jak pojawienie się w niej człowieka ze świata zewnętrznego ujawnia iluzoryczność idealnej społeczności poprzez wprowadzenie elementu śmierci należącej do realnego dystopijnego świata. Pomimo solidarności, którą ocaleni budowali przez lata ich społeczność ulega rozpadowi, dowodząc, że zwykła solidarność nie wystarcza, by ocalić społeczność.

Słowa kluczowe

post-apokaliptyczna dystopia, utopia, solidarność, Edward Bond

The 20th century witnessed so many bloody wars[1] affecting numerous artists, authors and playwrights. With the improvement in technology and the subsequent changes in military tactics, wars turned into mass murders, whose victims were mostly civilians. Each massacre manifested the ever-increasing intensity of human violence. During such a chaotic period theatre could not ignore the increasing fears and tensions, and anti-war themes overtook the stage with the challenging plays of leading playwrights such as Howard Brenton, John Arden, or David Hare. Edward Bond, who directly experienced the horrors of war in his youth, distinguished himself with his uncompromising approach to the causes of contemporary violence and its psychological impact on the people. In his works, he primarily showed the cruel nature of human beings and the need for a social revolution by confronting people with the act of violence to which they have become inured. In *The War Plays* (1984), which, for him, sum up all his previous works, Bond introduces a dystopian world representing the agony, anxiety, horror, and destruction caused by a nuclear holocaust.

The War Plays was premiered by Bread and Circus Theatre Company on 4th of May, 1984, at the time marked by Margaret Thatcher's pro-nuclear discourse as well as the nuclear arms race in Europe. Furthermore, the tensions that arose between the US and the Soviet Union in 1983 brought the world to the brink of a nuclear war. In this respect, with *The War Plays,* Edward Bond lays bare "the consequences of a nuclear exchange" as well as "the ideological effects of 'The Bomb' and points out that nuclear politics is itself destructive whether the bomb falls or not" (Cawood 1986: 21). In other words, by pre-

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[1] Along with the two World Wars, the 20th century was marked by many civil wars, international conflicts and invasions which aroused panic and fear of a possible third world war. Especially in 1982 (two years before the composition of Bond's *The War Plays),* there occurred "the re-opening of the Iran-Iraq war, the Malvinas war, the preparations for the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, and the growing foreign intervention in the civil war in El Salvador" (Mandel 1983: 23). These strained international relations triggered the debates on the probability of a 'nuclear' third world war.

senting a dystopian vision of the future, Bond not only warns the society of a possible nuclear disaster, but also criticises the current nuclear politics. As a prominent socialist, Bond makes explicit his purpose of writing the dystopian trilogy in one of his letters: "in past revolutionary situations, the future was seen optimistically, even utopianly. [...] I think we have to point out a real danger in the future. A collapsing future has always been an argument in fascism, or all reaction: it now has to be an argument in socialism" (1995: 100). With such an incentive, the dystopian world of *The War Plays* set the stage for a discussion of a variety of topics including humanity, class difference, consumerism and capitalism besides the destructive consequences of a nuclear war.

Each play of the trilogy shows the brutality and destructive consequences of a nuclear apocalypse through different plot lines. The first play, *Red Black and Ignorant* (1984), touches upon issues such as love, work, and death by depicting the possible life of a character named Monster killed in her mother's womb because of a nuclear bomb. In a similar vein, the final play, *Great Peace (*1984-85), focuses on suffering, despair, and insanity, portraying an unnamed woman's losing her mind, when her baby was killed by her own son ordered to do so by military authorities. On the other hand, *The Tin Can People* (1984) differs from these two plays, as it brings a new perspective to the nuclear apocalypse by elaborating on its revolutionary power more than its destructive consequences. Here, violence brings about a social revolution and a utopian community based on solidarity is built in a dystopian post-apocalyptic world. The play shows how, despite the long-lasting bonds of solidarity, the survivors living in this utopian community vanished when forced to confront the surrounding dystopian reality. The demise of solidarity suggests that Bond refutes utopias in which the satisfaction of human needs and solidarity are deemed sufficient to create a perfect community. Unlike the approach adopted in this paper, the play has generally been discussed in connection with such topics as "the

relationship between the individual and normalized violence in society" (Yungduk 2002) or "the relationship between the family politics currently destroying human society and the possibilities for radical change" (Reneilt 1991).[2] In this sense, the present paper offers a new insight into the play by asserting that mere solidarity, which is regarded as an "umbrella term" for unity, fraternity, and equality, is not enough to save a community.

The Tin Can People revolves around unnamed[3] survivors of a nuclear holocaust who established an ideal community amongst the ruins and lived in solidarity for seventeen years until the arrival of a newcomer. The tin cans that the survivors found in an army store-house after the war provided the opportunity to establish a new, just community which turned hell into a miniaturised heaven where they did not have to work to earn their living, be divided into classes or fight for their freedom against some enemy. Bond, in a way, portrays a perfect community from a socialist viewpoint. However, for the survivors, living in affluence without labour is living in a 'dream',[4] an escapist 'fantasy' protecting them against dystopian reality. Their utopia built on solidarity and prosperity

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[2] It is worth noting that there is scarcely any study that discusses in detail *The War Plays,* particularly *The Tin Can People,* since the plays in the trilogy tend to be analysed as a single whole. In this respect, this paper also aims to contribute to the existing studies of the play by proposing a new perspective.

[3] Bond believes that names are the indicators of "humanity" (1998: 361). The survivors are devoid of names because they have lost not only themselves but also their humanity in the traumatic experience of the nuclear war.

[4] In his commentary on *The War Plays*, Bond alludes to the dream world of the Tin Can community by explaining the dream and reality dichotomy. He asserts that "in dreams objects are unreal but reasoning and emotion are real. But objects, not emotions, present reality to us" (1998:345). In this sense, when the survivors found the tin cans, they stopped fighting for their survival thereby, lost touch with the equipment and machines which would establish a connection between them and reality. On the other hand, the newcomer has always been a part of reality since he has to struggle to survive. As a result, he is the one who brings reality to the dream place of the Tin Can community.

falls apart in the face of bitter "reality" of death, horror, anxiety, and irrationality that the newcomer brings along with him.

The play is composed of three sections which depict the devastation in the aftermath of the nuclear war. However, portraying the lives of a group of survivors who created a utopia within the dystopian post-apocalyptic world, the play juxtaposes "utopia/dystopia", "heaven/hell" and "dream/reality" contradictions. In particular, the first section entitled "Paradise in Hell" evidently reveals that there is a blurred line between the conflicting worlds of the Tin Can people. As the title suggests, the section dwells upon the question of whether it is possible to establish a peaceful, perfect community in a chaotic world. On the face of it, the survivors manage to accomplish this goal, living in happiness and unity irrespective of the surrounding destruction. However, Bond frequently reminds the audience of the nuclear apocalypse which the survivors seem to forget by living in their ideal community. In this sense, the surrounding dystopian reality never ceases to exist, but the survivors just prefer to ignore it constructing a dream world which will collapse once they become aware of it.

The chorus, which "broadens the plays' political and psychological scope" (Bond 1998: 345), plays a significant part in the depiction of the dystopian reality of the post-apocalyptic world. At the beginning of each section, it not only evokes probable consequences of the nuclear armaments in Europe, but also describes the potential psychological effects of a nuclear war on people. And so, the first section starts with the chorus which comments on how the world turned into hell after the nuclear holocaust:

> Years later a dust as white as old people's hair settled on everything
> The world looked like a drawing in lead on white paper
> Hours after the explosions I walked over a bridge
> The thirst caused by the fires was so severe that even the drowning called for water
> (Bond 1998: 51)

The destitution and despair mentioned in the opening remark of the chorus create the expectation that the play would display the survivors' struggle for their lives against hunger and thirst in a hostile environment. In a similar vein, the Second Man's portrayal of the devastated world they lived in after the bombs, not only reinforces this expectation but also reveals the magnitude of the disaster:

> In the first years after the bombs, we came together. Perhaps there are other survivors but there've been no planes or search parties. The burning core set fire to its seed- the trees burned their own fruit. Nothing grows: the dust of so many dead has stifled the earth. The animals are dead: their bones traps. If a few live they keep of our way. Yet we're in paradise. (Bond 1998: 55)

Contrary to the first expectation, however, the final statement of the Second Man implies that hard times become history for the survivors who have managed to create a new order, an ideal community. In this sense, living within a dystopian reality becomes a distant traumatic and painful memory for the survivors. Even if the bombs destroyed every living thing turning the world into a wasteland, it brought the survivors together. The physical and psychological devastation, the nuclear war caused, enabled them to live in 'solidarity' and harmony which the begetters of the nuclear war had failed to do.

Solidarity,[5] in its basic terms, refers to "collective liability", "the cohesion of a particular community" (Scholz 2015: 725) and mainly represents a variety of concepts such as empathy, mutual trust, equality, fraternity and unity among the com-

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[5] As a term, solidarity dates back to the Roman law of obligations and has been used in different ways since then. In his article "Four Uses of Solidarity", Kurt Bayertz notes that "solidarity" was first mentioned as *obligatio in solidum* in Roman law to refer to the assurance that the members of family or community would pay the common debt. In the nineteenth century, however, the term gained a political meaning and was used together with concepts such as unity, liberty, fraternity, and equality in the aftermath of the French Revolution (1999: 3).

munity members.[6] The term also signifies commitment to a common cause which mostly serves the common good and may or may not result from compulsion. In the light of these, the solidarity fostered among the survivors seventeen years ago was compulsory, since they were dependent on each other. In other words, when they were just children, they were unified around one common purpose: to survive in this hell on earth. Furthermore, as Laitinen, Arto, and Anne B. Pessi argue in "Solidarity: Theory and Practice: An Introduction", solidarity is mostly built on "similarity", "uniformity with members" and "shared values and beliefs" which come out of "common history or living in the same area" (2015: 3-4). They share the same traumatic past, the same "common wound", which is 'helplessness' they felt watching dying people or when "babies suckled their dead mothers and mothers tried to give milk to their dead babies" (Bond 1998: 58).

On the other hand, the tin cans that the survivors found in the army store-house, turned their hell into heaven not only by supplying their basic needs but also preventing them from fighting for the maintenance of their lives. Bond, thereby, underlines the significance of the tin cans, which convert destitution to prosperity and dystopia to utopia, by reminding the audience of the post-apocalyptic reality through the chorus and painful recollections of the survivors. The tins which they called "the fruits of paradise", thus, rendered their unity possible and laid the groundwork for a desire for sociability. In this nascent utopian world of the Tin Can community, a high level of social solidarity, friendship, and fraternity held the community together. According to Gregory Claeys, people exhibit a collectivist ethos with a sense of communal belonging or identity in utopias, which he terms as "the enhanced socia-

[6] There are many types, forms, and levels of 'solidarity' such as moral, philosophical, political or civil, etc., used in numerous contexts as the term connotes various things. Moreover, it has become an issue discussed in different fields such as sociology, epistemology or philosophy. However, instead of delving deeply into the use of the concept of "solidarity" in a wide range of fields this paper primarily focuses on the depiction of solidarity in utopian and dystopian communities.

bility" (2013: 151). They devote themselves to the common good and "social solidarity trumps selfish individualism" (Claeys 2017: 8). It is through such enhanced sociability that the survivors welcome the newcomer into their utopian world when they encounter him desperately searching for food. They believe that he is sent to replace the newly deceased member of their community and make them a whole again:

> **Second Woman:** He's one of us!
> **First Woman and Third Woman:** He's one of us!
> *Second Man goes to the Women and embraces them.*
> **Second Man:** One of us! (Bond 1998: 63)

The survivors accept the newcomer as one of "them" not as the "other" because they are similar with respect to the horror and pain they have experienced. In this sense, the frequent use of "us" here "emphasize[s] the collective identity of the utopians" (Levitas 1995: 91), which represents the strength of solidaristic relations of the communal whole. Moreover, they believe that no one has any reason harm them, because they have millions of tin cans that are enough to live on for a thousand years and they do not have to work or struggle to earn their living. Anyone joining this small, peaceful, and classless community in which no one is superior to the other, cannot be an enemy since he can share their prosperity. They live in luxury as they possess houses, towns, lands, in brief, everything around them that is left, but they are alone in the post-war world. What they need is anyone 'alive' who can not only share their loneliness but also sustain the continuation of the human race. There are only fourteen survivors left, and they are on the edge of extinction since they are unable to reproduce. In this respect, the appearance of a young survivor out of nowhere gives meaning to their purposeless lives by raising hopes not only for the existence of other survivors but also the possibility of giving birth to a new generation.

However, the newcomer brings 'death' instead of 'life' to the Tin Can community. With the first death after his arrival, the

voluntary solidarity of the survivors which comes out as a part of the utopian enhanced sociability changes gradually into "compulsory solidarity" of dystopia. According to Leszek Kolakowski, fraternity could most easily emerge when it was forced on people by a common danger, wars or disasters (1983: 246). In this regard, anxiety and fear reinforce solidarity and fraternity among the survivors who face a real threat for the first time in seventeen years. Their heaven has verged into hell again with the newcomer whom they blame for having a contagious disease. Henceforth, the survivors begin to use the words "us" and "we" to "establish outsider status of the visitor" (Levitas 1995: 91). As an outsider, he now poses a threat to the Tin Can people and they unite against the common enemy to save their community. To this end, they come up with the idea to kill him, and as the Second Man demands, all of them should take responsibility for the killing and hunt him together. However, as this may endanger the whole community, the Second man is willing to sacrifice himself for the common good. Being the embodiment of solidarity among the survivors, he voluntarily risks his life to kill the newcomer for the sake of saving the community.

Either compulsory or voluntary, solidarity is not enough to save the Tin Can community since sudden deaths continue. Especially, with the unexpected death of the Second man, while making a spear to kill the newcomer, the survivors grow frantic. Fear, anxiety, and panic prevail in the community, and they begin to display irrational behaviour. For instance, the Second Woman constantly moves, walks, jumps and eats believing that if she stops she will die, while the Fourth pretends to be dead to deceive death. Their nonsensical deductions and absurd methods to escape death end in a riot. As a result, the survivors destroy their living source and burn all of the tin cans. Within this frame, the Second Section, entitled "The Tin Can Riots", shows how the survivors lose their control and exhibit inherently destructive behaviour in the face of dystopian reality. Burning the tin cans implies that the survivors have

repeated the mistakes of those who brought their end upon themselves by destroying everything with nuclear bombs.

The survivors were living in a dream world, a utopia where they were exempt from any responsibilities or obligations. Death has restored ‘reality’ by shattering the dream world of the Tin Can people in which no one has died since the nuclear war. In this respect, behind this utopia there lies a reality of extreme consumerism, capitalism, violence, and destruction. The survivors have not struggled to produce their means of survival since they have been living in other people’s properties and ate their food for which they had killed each other and died. Bond likens the survivors to the ruling class who exploit the working class and thereby become irrational and destructive when “faced with the non-economic problems of life” (Bond and Tuallion 2015: 80). Like the ruling class, the Tin Can people consume without labour and the lack of any threat to their way of life or their community results in their losing touch with the real. In this respect, their first confrontation with reality culminates in panic, insanity and further destruction.

Bond named the final section “The Young Sages”, in a way, to refer to the awakening of the survivors about the bitter ‘realities’ of dystopia. After the tin cans had been destroyed in the riot, the survivors realized that they were possessed by the tin cans and the properties they had. They could not manage to kill the newcomer, and ironically, it was he who became not only the precursor of a new community, but also the one who revealed the truth about their condition with his final remarks:

> A tree grows but it doesn’t own field. The owner can come along anytime and cut it down and burn it. It is the same with us. When the things we need to live are owned by someone else we’re owned – we can be cut down and burned at any time. Now no tins – so we can only own what we make and wear and use ourselves. That’s the only difference – but it means that at last we own ourselves. (Bond 1998: 96)

In a way, the survivors lived the life being provided for by other people, thus, they made the same mistakes as them. Now, to maintain their existence they have to start from scratch which gives them a chance to change the future. In this sense, Bond ends the play with a utopian hope that the survivors would build a better future and a new just order by working and creating.

To conclude, in an epoch of wars and the threat of nuclear holocaust, Edward Bond was not the only playwright to deal with the issues of increasing violence and destructive power of nuclear weapons. However, what differentiates Bond from the other post-war playwrights is, the fact that, as Benedict Nightingale puts forward, "In his time Bond has looked where other people don't, faced what they won't, felt what they can't, that's what has made him an authentically challenging playwright" (qtd. in Witham 1988: 300). The extremely challenging scenes in his plays such as the murder of babies in *Saved* (1965) and *Great Peace,* cannibalism in *Early Morning* (1967), and bloody mutilation in *Lear* (1971) are just a few examples that reveal the unorthodoxy of his dramatic style. Likewise, with *The Tin Can People,* Bond again proves Nightingale right with his unconventional approach to utopia and dystopia by building an ideal community within a dystopic world. In this sense, he uses nuclear holocaust as a means of social revolution that wipes away injustice and inequalities in the society offering hopes for a better future and true solidarity.

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Limitations of solidarity in P. D. James' *The Children of Men*

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Abstract

The Children of Men, the 1992 novel of English crime writer P. D. James, combines dystopia with the apocalyptic narrative. In 2021, England, like the rest of the world, faces extinction, as, mysteriously, global infertility has struck. The prevailing 'sense of an ending' has drained the energy of the people, who allow themselves to be ruled by the Warden of England, whom most regard as a benevolent dictator. In the secondary sources the conversion of Theo Faron, the stoic, self-regarding protagonist, is primarily read as a gradual awakening to love and faith, attesting the book a touch of the utopian and of the Christian parable. In contrast, this deconstructive reading of the novel explores the mechanisms accountable for a desolidarisation in the doomed society, which, eventually, appears to be irreversible, something glossed over in the text and in the available literature.

Keywords

dystopia, apocalyptic narrative, P. D. James, *The Children of Men*, desolidarisation

Ograniczenia solidarności w *Ludzkich dzieciach* P. D. James

Abstrakt

Ludzkie dzieci, powieść z 1992 roku angielskiej pisarki powieści kryminalnych P. D. James, łączy dystopię z narracją apokaliptyczną. W 2021 roku Anglia, podobnie jak reszta świata, stoi w obliczu zagłady w wyniku tajemniczej, globalnej bezpłodności. Dominujące 'poczucie końca', pozbawiające ludzi energii, spowodowało, że dali oni przyzwolenie na rządy Strażnika Anglii, którego większość uznaje za łaskawego dyktatora. Źródła bibliograficzne odczytują konwersję Theo Farona, stoickiego, egocentrycznego protagonisty, jako przebudzenie do miłości i wiary, nadające powieści subtelny wymiar utopijnej i chrześcijańskiej paraboli. W przeciwieństwie do nich niniejsza dekonstruująca interpretacja powieści bada mechanizmy odpowiedzialne za desolidaryzację w społeczeństwie skazanym na zagładę, która okazuje się ostatecznie nieodwracalna, czymś, co tekst i dostępne źródła na jego temat tuszują.

Słowa kluczowe

dystopia, narracja apokaliptyczna, P. D. James, *Ludzkie dzieci*, desolidaryzacja

The Children of Men is an intriguing exception among the oeuvre of P. D. James, the queen of crime fiction who died in 2014. She published this dystopian/apocalyptic novel in 1992. It has mainly been read as a text with Christian overtones and a moderately optimistic ending. This reading will be questioned by focusing on equivocations, contradictions and incongruities, intended or not, as well as on narrative gaps, one of the major voids being the absence of any overt exploration of solidarity. Another key issue of the analysis will be the web of ambivalences generated by dichotomous features and controversial motivations of the main characters.

The Children of Men blends dystopia and the apocalyptic narrative, two genres which, as Kunkel argues, conjure antithetical societal scenarios:

> The end of the world or apocalypse brings about the collapse of order; dystopia, on the other hand, envisions a sinister *perfection* of order. In the most basic political terms, dystopia is a nightmare of authoritarian or totalitarian rule, while the end of the world is a nightmare of anarchy. (Kunkel 2008: 90)

In entire contrast to the indicated generic features, in James's novel dystopia and the apocalypse are not opposed in terms of governance and control; quite the reverse, the authoritarian regime in dystopian England possesses and exercises the authority to maintain order. *The Children of Men* is set in 2021[1] in an England which is ruled by the dictatorial Warden and surveilled by the State Security Police. The country, like the rest of the world, is afflicted with human infertility. Yet, England, while waiting for the extinction of its population, does not tumble into chaos but is administered in an orderly, though hardly humane, fashion. The apocalyptic *zeitgeist* has generated a political lethargy, an a-political mentality which plays into the hands of the regime. As Wood maintains, "[t]he people have surrendered to a paternalistic government, welcoming despotism in exchange for security" (1994: 283), or, as the protagonist Theo Faron reflects, "people […] no longer have the energy to care how or by whom they are governed as long as they get what the Warden has promised: freedom from fear, freedom from want, freedom from boredom" (*The Children of Men* 128) Xan Lyppiatt, the Warden, and his Council of England practise social division, as an appeasement policy and instrument of power, by catering for the needs of or privileging some social groups while exploiting and eliminating others. In consequence, solidarity as a social value is no longer present. The Omegas, "[t]he children born in the year 1995" (13), are

[1] Alfonso Cuarón's adaptation for the screen of 2006 is set in 2026. For an analysis of the film version see Terentowicz-Fotyga (2011).

most valued and most indulged. Strangely enough, they are all "exceptionally beautiful". However, many of the boys are "also cruel, arrogant and violent;" "[l]ike their male counterparts, the female Omegas seem incapable of human sympathy" (14).

The discrepant physical and moral features of the last generation of the human species establish a further opposition in the text. The old generation in this divisive society is less fortunate. Those who are no longer useful, have become or may become a burden to the community, are disposed through a euthanasia programme, which is euphemistically advertised as "Quietus". The "sojourners", workers from abroad who have been lured into the country, forced to do undesirable jobs for very little money, are kept in camps (men and women separately), and then are sent back when they reach the age of sixty. Criminals who have been convicted of deeds of violence are sent to the Isle of Man, which has been turned into a penal colony where the prisoners are left to their own devices: "The island is a living hell. Those who went there human are nearly all dead and the rest are devils" (90).

Theo Faron, an Oxford don specializing in Victorian history, incidentally the cousin of the Warden, is the prototype of the depoliticised citizen, withdrawn into himself, the epitome of an individualist who has settled more or less comfortably into his privileged position in this desolidarised apocalyptic world. With no sense of social responsibility or communal belonging, he does not even feel attached to the members of his family. Mattson and Lagrand perceive him as "an emotional and moral cripple – unable to love parents, wife, child, or himself" (2012: 283). Theo is certainly the least likely candidate to join a group of dissidents, which could be regarded as another fault-line of the novel, together with the group's inadequate solidarity. While sociologists affirm that "solidarity is constructed and reproduced in the process of struggle", when activists are exposed to repression and persecution (O'Hearn, 2004: 493), such "solidary cultures of resistance" (O'Hearn, 2004: 492) are more or less absent among the dissidents in *The Children of*

Men. Although the members of the Five Fishes, the rebel group in the novel, have a common aim, that of changing the policies of the Council of England or overthrowing the repressive system, they have all their individual, private, motives and view each other with suspicion. Theo sums up the deficits of this amateurish assemblage of rebels:

> I can't think of any group less equipped to confront the apparatus of state. You've no money, no resources, no influence, no popular backing. You haven't even a coherent philosophy of revolt. Miriam is doing it to avenge her brother, Gascoigne, apparently, because the Warden has appropriated the word Grenadiers. Luke out of some vague Christian idealism […]. Rolf hasn't even the justification of moral indignation. His motive is ambition; he resents the Warden's absolute power and would like it for himself. [Julian is] doing it because [she is] married to Rolf. (*The Children of Men* 156)

Not solidarity but distrust determines the relationships among the dissidents. Rolf, the self-appointed leader of the group, and Theo, the new member, dislike each other and keep arguing about strategies. Rolf even secretly leaves the group. Miriam is convinced that "[h]e's changed his allegiance. He's always been fascinated by power. Now he's joined forces with the source of power" (*The Children of Men* 277).

Theo only joins the group with great reluctance. Most significantly, he does not do so for any ideological or moral reasons. Moreover, it is not a rational, well considered decision. Theo is lured into associating with them until he reaches a point of no return and is more or less forced to leave his former life behind. He is well aware why Julian, the attractive young rebel he has fallen in love with, is chosen to approach him: "He might despise them as a gang of amateur malcontents, but they had outwitted him, had sent the one member whom they knew he would find it difficult to refuse" (*The Children of Men* 97). From the very beginning Theo is drawn into an internal conflict between his fascination with Julian and his rationality,

sound judgement, need of security and desire for comfort. Even after his first involvement with the group he keeps trying to suppress his powerful feelings for Julian: "It was a romantic impulse, childish and ridiculous, which I hadn't felt since I was a boy. I had distrusted and resented it then. Now it appalled me by its strength, its irrationality, its destructive potential" (186). It is symptomatic of his dilemma that he simultaneously "plan[s] [his temporary] escape" to the continent and commits himself to the woman to whose charms he has fallen prey: "If you ever need me send for me […] and I'll come" (188), only to immediately regret his pledge. When Gascoigne is caught by the State Security Police, and, most importantly, because Julian is, miraculously, pregnant, she sends for Theo. From now on the group is on the run and Theo is inescapably entangled with the dissidents. "He was with them by choice but there had been no choice. It was to Julian and her unborn child, and to them only, that he owed allegiance" (228). Mattson and Lagrand construe a complete change of heart from the description of an intimate moment, when Theo hears and feels the child in Julian's womb: "[*Eros*] enriches Theo's determination to secure other people's good. He is freed first for friendship, then for love, and finally for a tentative approach to Christian faith" (2012: 286). However, there is no textual evidence that Theo develops any interest in the common good or in religious ideas. Even after this instance of emotional, almost mystical closeness, Theo analyses his position with rigorous rationality: "All he had on offer was reason, argument, intelligence, and he had put his faith in them all his life" (*The Children of Men* 217). He is still trying to suppress his profound sense of connection but through his knowledge of the pregnancy he is virtually trapped and tied to The Five Fishes: "He might well try to escape commitment but he couldn't now escape knowledge" (222). While Mattson and Lagrand (2012: 287) claim that these experiences "gradually shift him from a complacent rationality to a moral and spiritual sensitivity", Theo's acrimonious reaction to Luke's view that

"[t]he child belongs to God" (*The Children of Men* 219), confirms the opposite: "Christ! Can't we discuss this at least on the basis of reason?" (219). Notwithstanding Theo's repeated attestations of rationality and agnosticism, Mattson and Lagrand stylize him into a repentant infidel on the road to conversion: "His experience of erotic love transforms him from a person at home in the world without a god to someone standing on the brink of terror in a world in which he suspects that God lives" (2012: 287). Likewise, Ralph C. Wood, ignoring the unparalleled incompetence of the Five Fishes, the lack of solidarity, the spirit of jealousy and mistrust among the group, misreads Theo's involuntary recruitment as his transformation into a committed social and political reformer: "[…] Theo comes to see what is wrong with his solitary and self-protective life, what is right about the life of mutual trust and solidarity" (1994: 286).

In terms of the religious agenda of *The Children of Men*, Julian is the key figure. She has decided to improve society "because God wants [her] to" (*The Children of Men* 157). From the very beginning her religiously inspired mission is infused with her quixotic idealism: "[W]e have to change the moral will. We have to change people" (93). Her pregnancy in this infertile, doomed universe must be regarded as a miracle; she appears to save the world by facilitating a new beginning of the human race, perhaps, becoming the foremother of the revived human species. However, the darker side of this central Christian figure undeniably subverts or even controverts the Christian argument of the novel. She is married to Rolf, the self-opinionated, confrontational leader of The Five Fishes, whom she no longer loves or has never loved at all. She allows herself to be impregnated by Luke, a former priest, whom she does not love either, and uses her charms to lure Theo into getting involved with a group of rebels. Julian's wish to give birth to the child in secret may be primarily politically motivated – to prevent the regime from exploiting mother and child and thereby enhancing their prestige and power. On the other

hand, the venturous enterprise to keep them out of the hands of the Warden and the Council for long, is totally impracticable and naïve. Moreover, to deliver the baby on the run, somewhere in the wild, puts the mother and her child at considerable risk. Julian's insistence on the delivery in secret is, essentially, her personal choice, which further underscores her self-centeredness. In this context the opposing positions of Julian and Theo as to social responsibilities correlate to the overall pattern of 'fault lines'. Julian, the putative spiritual reformer and political activist, ignores any considerations of the communal good by deciding to give birth to the procreative saviour of humanity in secret and keep him away from the public. In contrast, Theo, the self-sufficient, self-absorbed cynic, lacking any interest in the well-being of his fellows, reminds the group of rebels, and particularly Julian, of their obligation to the world at large: "You aren't children with a new toy which you can keep to yourselves, play with by yourselves, prevent the other children from sharing. This birth is the concern of the whole world, not just England. The child belongs to mankind" (219).

Julian's unfaithfulness to Rolf has another serious consequence. During the attack of the Omegas Luke sacrifices himself to allow the rest of the group to escape. Julian abandons herself to sorrow. She claims that Luke died to save her and "[kneels] by Luke's body, cradling his shattered head in her lap, her dark hair falling over his face" (*The Children of Men* 263). This unrestrained demonstration of grief provokes Rolf's fatal question: "Whose child is she carrying?" (263) Julian's answer that she is sure that it is Luke's child triggers a moment's tornado of rage; after some time of consideration, Rolf clandestinely leaves the remaining members of the group, Julian, Miriam, and Theo. They are convinced that Rolf will give the sensational news – that of the existence and possible hiding place of a pregnant woman – to the Warden. From now on they are not simply some dissidents in flight from the authori-

ties but the most wanted people in England, their capture of national, or even global, interest.

In standard moral terms Julian can be considered a loose woman. In a conversation with Theo, she openly admits the underlying selfishness and sinfulness of her behaviour, undeceiving him about her defects of character: " '[Y]ou didn't think I was a saint.' 'No, but I thought you were good.' She said quietly: 'Now you know that I'm not' " (*The Children of Men* 268). Towards the end of the novel, the Warden expresses his view of Julian's immorality in more direct terms: "She may be the most important woman in the world but she isn't the Virgin Mary. The child she is carrying is still the child of a whore" (337). The biblical allusions, particularly the circumstances of the birth, for example the setting of the ramshackle woodshed and the 'visit' of the Council of England, comparable to the visit of the three magi, are clearly problematized by the Warden's harsh assessment.

A further minor yet essential inconsistency in the novel relates to the idea of procreation and concerns Julian's deformity. When Theo looks at her more closely for the first time, very early in the book, he notices that "her left hand was deformed. The middle and forefinger were fused into a nail-less stump and the back of the hand grossly swollen" (*The Children of Men* 55). In the infertile apocalyptic world, particularly in totalitarian England, eugenic principles determine the measures to remedy the infertility problem, as Theo knows: "[…] at least, he thought, she had one compensation. No one who was in any way physically deformed, or mentally or physically unhealthy, was on the list of women from whom the new race would be bred if ever a fertile male was discovered" (56). Among all women it is exactly Julian who becomes pregnant. The irony at the heart of this miracle is never addressed in *The Children of Men*. The phenomenon that the new human species will evolve from what the regime has hitherto considered genetically impure material is not explored at all, neither is the significant

antinomy that it is not one of the physically flawless Omegas who may save humanity.

The ambiguities of the novel are clearly spelt out at the end of the text. In the theatrical confrontation between the Warden and Theo, reminiscent of duels or shoot-outs in Western movies, a rather Unchristian contest, a kind of supernatural, divine, intervention is introduced. Of course, one may also regard it as a theatrical trick: "[Xan] stretched his arm and took aim. And it was in that split second of time that the child cried, a high mewing wail, like a cry of protest. Theo heard Xan's bullet hiss harmlessly through the sleeve of his jacket" (*The Children of Men* 337). The narrator interprets the child's crying as a protest, probably against this atavistic, ungodly, encounter. However, it can also be read as an interference in support of Theo: the wailing of the child disrupts the Warden's concentration so that he misses his target, Theo remains unharmed and can shoot "Xan through the heart" (337). The child, miraculously, has not only saved the world from extinction but has also helped to liberate England from her dictator.

These are the positive implications of the ending of the novel. Yet, there is also a darker, less hopeful aspect to it. Theo takes the ring, the symbol of power, from the finger of the dead Warden, thus assuming absolute control himself, a claim to power the members of the Council of England immediately understand and accept. In his typical manner, Theo analyses his new position, "this sudden intoxication of power […]. The sense that everything was possible to him, that what he wanted would be done, that what he hated would be abolished, the world could be fashioned according to his will" (*The Children of Men* 341). Although he hesitates, the sheer magnetism of omnipotence appears to overwhelm him at this moment: "He drew the ring from the finger, then paused and pushed it back. There would be time later to decide whether, and for how long, he needed it" (341). Theo's reaction to Julian's critical remark, "[t]hat wasn't made for your finger" (341), casts legitimate doubts on his suitability as the political saviour of England.

The inability to take criticism with equanimity and tolerance as well as a dominant disposition or even an emerging authoritarian trait hardly qualify him to re-establish democracy: "For a second, no more, he felt something close to irritation. It must be for him to decide when he would take it off. He said: 'It's useful for the present. I shall take it off in time' " (341). After these political considerations the novel ends on a religious, a Christian, note with a sentimental touch. Julian asks the new Warden to christen the baby after his father Luke and after his rescuer Theo. While the latter is performing the rite "[h]is tears [are] falling over the child's forehead" (342). Positioning this pathetic scene at the very end of the novel may be intended to foreground the religious agenda. Yet, a momentary surge of emotion cannot substantiate Theo's progress to Christianity; essentially, he remains a rationalist, who, paradoxically, has come into power through saving the woman he loves. Moreover, his immediate fascination with power does not bode well. Ralph C. Wood's overall assessment of the book appears to disregard the ambiguities, the contradictions, and the fault-lines of *The Children of Men* altogether: "[…] James's novel […] is a book of surprising, indeed apocalyptic, hope. James wants to suggest a way out of our cultural and religious *cul de sac*, to disclose the nature of divine rescue, to reveal the springs of redemption" (1994: 285). This extremely biased, pronouncedly Christian interpretation of the novel has nothing to do with the text, elides its complexities, particularly its dialectical strategies, and fails to probe its subtextual dimensions.

The Children of Men, with its antinomies, gaps, and ambiguities, leaves the critical reader in search of a meaning. There are only two certainties at the end of the novel: 1) opposition to an authoritarian system does not spawn solidarity, not even among a small group of dissidents, 2) there is new life on the planet, the apocalypse is called off. Whether the performance of Christian rituals will engender a Christian society and whether the country will reintroduce a democratic system remains more than uncertain.

This interpretation clearly contradicts P. D. James's own perception of her work as voiced in an interview with Ralp C. Wood:

> When I began *The Children of Men,* I didn't set out to write a Christian book. I set out to deal with the idea I had. What would happen to society with the end of the human race? At the end of it, I realized I had written a Christian fable. (James qtd. in Wood 2002: 353)

The present analysis provides an alternative view of the novel by uncovering the 'textual unconscious' (Barry 2002: 71).

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Solidarity, dystopia, and fictional worlds in contemporary narrative TV series

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Abstract

One of the most spectacular cultural macro-events of the last five years, the rise of high-brow narrative TV series has proven to be indicative of several tendencies in contemporary audio-visual culture, both in Europe and in the US. The presentation of dystopian fictional worlds in *Mr Robot*, *Westworld*, *Utopia*, *Legion*, and several other series is perhaps the most significant manifestation of both the maturity of the TV series form, and the unfaltering interest of audio-visual culture in the utopian/dystopian subject matter. This paper illustrates the connection of the TV series to both solidarity and dystopia, and explains how contemporary TV series has decidedly manifested its artistic ambitions.

Keywords

narrative TV series, dystopia, genre, narrative, fictional worlds

Solidarność, dystopia, światy fikcjonalne we współczesnych narracyjnych serialach telewizyjnych

Abstrakt

Rozwój narracyjnego serialu telewizyjnego, który dało się zaobserwować w kulturze angloamerykańskiej w ostatnich pięciu latach, w dużej mierze zbiegł się z zainteresowaniem narracją dystopijną. Teksty takie jak *Mr. Robot*, *Westworld*, *Opowieść podręcznej*, *Legion*, czy *Utopia* w istotny sposób przedefiniowują konwencje, które kojarzyliśmy z narracjami telewizyjnymi. Artykuł przedstawia artystyczne aspekty wybranych współczesnych seriali telewizyjnych, analizując jednocześnie fikcjonalne światy dystopijne, które zostały w tych utworach przedstawione.

Słowa kluczowe

narracyjny serial telewizyjny, dystopia, genologia, narracja, światy fikcjonalne

Serialized shows with narrative or quasi-narrative content have been the domain of American television at least since 1931 and CBC's *The Television Ghost*. Their charms have been of various sorts, but fictionality and seriality seem to have defined their very nature from the very beginning. The form has evolved in a myriad of genres, developed a wide range of conventions, explored numerous thematic areas, and – through a convoluted mechanics of marketability rules and audience preferences – solidified as a characteristically consumerist middle-class form of popular entertainment. What in hindsight seems to be formal and artistic mediocrity of a significant part of serialized TV shows contributed to the relatively low status of the form in the hierarchy of cultural communicates. For this, and other reasons, Jason Mittell was right to claim that "conventional episodic and serial forms […] have typified most American television since its inception" (Mittell 2006: 29). It seems that for the majority of its historical development the TV

series has remained highly stable when it comes to its position as an essentially popular form of entertainment.

Still, however, it was also Mittell himself who in 2006 noticed a significant development in the area that had altered the rather stagnant landscape:

> Just as 1970s Hollywood is remembered far more for the innovative work of Altman, Scorsese, and Coppola than for the more commonplace (and often more popular) conventional disaster films, romances, and comedy films that filled theaters, I believe that American television of the past twenty years will be remembered as an era of narrative experimentation and innovation, challenging the norms of what the medium can do. (Mittell 2006: 29)

The goal that Mittell sets for himself – "to chart out the formal attributes of this storytelling mode, explore its unique pleasures and patterns of comprehension, and suggest a range of reasons for [the] emergence [of complex TV series] in the 1990s" (2006: 29) – is indicative not merely of his academic ambition, but also of a certain growing maturity of the TV series form that – in the eyes of scholars and audiences began to manifest nothing less but an artistic quality (understood in line with Victor Shklovsky's definition of art as a complex set of mechanisms that result in a deautomatization, defamiliarization, estrangement of perception).[1] Indeed, although Mittell fails to diagnose the changes as furthering the status of the TV series as work of art, deautomatization – resulting in the highlighting of both audience engagement and of the artifice of the material, is what critics have referred to as the increasing "complexity" of the form. The exponential quantitative and

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[1] "When studying poetic language – be it phonetically or lexically, syntactically or semantically – we always encounter the same characteristic of art: it is created with the explicit purpose of deautomatizing perception. Vision is the artist's goal; the artistic [object] is "artificially" created in such a way that perception lingers and reaches its greatest strength and length, so that the thing is experienced not spatially but, as it were, continually. 'Poetic language' meets these conditions. According to Aristotle, 'poetic language' must have the character of the foreign, the surprising" (Shklovsky 2015: 171).

qualitative growth that could be observed between 2006 and 2015[2] (when Mittell published a more systematic monograph on the TV series), confirms the increasingly mature focus on the use of "device" as organizing principle. As he puts it,

> Often [changes in television storytelling] are framed as television becoming more "literary" or "cinematic", drawing both prestige and formal vocabulary from these older, more culturally distinguished media; [...] In the past 15 years, television's storytelling possibilities and practices have undergone drastic shifts specific to the medium. What was once a risky innovative device, such as subjective narration or jumbled chronology, is now almost a cliché. Where the lines between serial and episode narratives used to be firmly drawn, today such boundaries are blurred. The idea that viewers would want to watch – and rewatch – a television series in strict chronology and collectively document their discoveries with a group of strangers was once laughable but is now mainstream. Expectations for how viewers watch television, how producers create stories, and how series are distributed have all shifted, leading to a new mode of television storytelling that I term *complex TV*. (Mittell 2015: 2–3)

Still, the momentum of current developments has proven incomparably larger, and more promising both to the audiences and to academic scholarship. Unprecedented changes brought to audio-visual culture by the omnipresence of screens (and the resulting further promotion of the rules of spectacle described five decades ago by Guy Debord [1967/1995]) have accelerated the redefinition of the TV series: not only have the means of dissemination and reception of the series changed (thanks to the rise of streaming platforms that have reorganized the poetics of audience experience and of reception

[2] The developments in the period can be illustrated by such diverse narrative TV series as *Dexter*, *Jericho* (2006), *Californication*, *Mad Men* (2007), *Breaking Bad*, *The Wire* (2008), *The Walking Dead*, *Boardwalk Empire* (2010), *Game of Thrones, Black Mirror* (2011), *House of Cards*, *Rick and Morty* (2013), *Fargo*, *True Detective*, *The Affair*, *The Knick*, *Olive Kitteridge* (2014), *Better Call Saul*, *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*, *Mr. Robot*, *Narcos*, *Sense8* (2015).

processes[3]), but also the structure and format of the series have developed surprisingly original aspects. Pierre Bourdieu's argument about "the correspondence between good production and taste production" seems to be confirmed again (Bourdieu 1984). With a plethora of texts that have appeared since the publication of Mittell's monograph[4], it has become evident that with the increasingly ambitious narrative organization of contemporary series we can observe the emergency of a fully original, critical, mature cultural form. Today, it no longer seems extravagant to talk about the TV series as an art form; defamiliarizing formal means such as metalepsis, significant violations of logical chronological presentation of the story material, meta-fictional and meta-narrative passages, and even the most striking instances of *trompe l'oeil* no longer seem out of place in the TV series. The TV series is coming of age as we speak.

To announce the maturity of a given cultural form is to position it as part of a larger cultural continuum. I would like to claim that a large body of contemporary narrative serialized TV texts have made a claim to belong where television genres did not easily belong before – to the category of aesthetic objects (that is, high-brow forms central to the culture they originate from)[5]. While hierarchies of cultural forms and genres are rela-

[3] Debord's "immense accumulation of spectacles" happens to be an accurate description of the organizing principle of streaming platforms such as Netflix. The specific rhetorical organization of such libraries of texts is aimed at organizing a relationship between authors and audiences "that is mediated by images" (Debord 1995). The tendency is evident in historical records of the material watched by a given user, as well as in the algorithm-based offers that the platforms make for individual users. *Horror vacui* is essentially countered by such formal means as autoplay, personalization features, and language tools.

[4] The most striking examples include *Westworld*, *Stranger Things*, *Atlanta*, *The Night Manager*, *The Night of*, *The Get Down*, *The Young Pope* (2016), *Mindhunter*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Legion*, *Dark*, *Dear White People*, *American Gods*, *Big Little Lies*, *Taboo*, *13 Reasons Why*, *Manhunt: Unabomber*, *She's Gotta Have It* (2017) as well as further episodes of *Black Mirror*, *Narcos*, *Bojack Horseman*, *Mr. Robot*, *Twin Peaks* and *House of Cards*. Some of these will be discussed below.

[5] Mittell in a careful way observes the status of specific television forms and genres. Aware of what is often perceived as immaturity of television culture, he employs a most cautious parlance: "We might conceive of television

tively easy to determine for the pre-digital era (thanks to large critical debates devoted to such categorizations on the one hand and the evidently dominant positions certain forms occupied in the canon of a given epoch on the other),[6] to specify criteria for the maturity of contemporary cultural forms or genres is a daunting task, especially because the dynamic between Bourdieu's "field of production" and "field of consumption" (1984: 230) has been made more complex in digital participatory, user-oriented culture. In other words, as the increased production and commodification of culture has been followed by a radical diversification of taste judgements, contextualizing criteria for maturity of cultural forms, difficult as it may seem, can allow us to monitor major cultural changes that have appeared on the screens and beyond. For the sake of this argument I would like to list the following six criteria, which by no means extinguish all possibilities:

(1) self-reflexivity,
(2) global and local intertextuality,
(3) genre blending/genre bending,
(4) significant levels of recalcitrance and indeterminacy,
(5) investment with comprehensively organized fictional worlds,
(6) comprehensive utopian/dystopian preoccupations.

As self-reflexive narratives comment on their own narrative and fictional nature, they tend to manifest a significant awareness of cultural practice they stem from. Genres and forms that prove broadly capable of incorporating intertextual material effectively aspire to position themselves within or outside a larger cultural tradition. Generic experimentation proves a lineage of affiliation and negotiation, and either makes a given text more intelligible or increases its level of difficulty. Recalcitrant texts – or texts that insistently make use of egre-

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genres as clusters of cultural assumptions and discursive practices constituting categories of programs" (2003: 36).

[6] Which makes the epic poem, the sonnet, the tragedy, the novel, the short story, and narrative film the dominant forms of cultural production in modern and early modern Western culture.

gious lacunae – are mature in themselves inasmuch as they do not have to rely on over-determination to be understood. If one assumes these four criteria, the sonnet, the crime novel, film noir, the Gothic short story can surely be considered mature, while twitter fiction, the Youtube video clip, and the photographic essay might perhaps not.

My principal interest here lies with features five and six. I would like to propose that we consider the emergence of TV series with highly complex fictional worlds that address utopian/dystopian questions to be a part of a larger development in the aesthetic of contemporary narrative TV series – a development indicative of the maturity of the form itself. If the below argumentation is correct, I believe we might wish to consider the various narrative worlds that appear in the TV series to be a benchmark of some larger developments in Western culture. To paraphrase, it seems that the contemporary TV products discussed below (delivered by television broadcasters and streaming platforms) both respond to and organize a specific habitus – Bourdieu's "system of dispositions […] characteristic of the different classes and class frictions" (1984: 6). If we watch the TV series today, we watch "an active cultural practice that works to both reproduce and produce social systems and hierarchies" (Mittell 2003: 37).

Comprehensively organized, intelligible fictional worlds have become the favourite domain of contemporary narrative TV series not only because audience experience can be neatly organized along the sequential (episode by episode) exploration of a large fictional universum,[7] but also because the possibility of an alternative has been increasingly tempting in a post-communist, post-Cold War, post-modernist, post-industrial world of post-politics and post-truth. Fictional worlds of dystopian or utopian kind, "imaginative projection[s], positive or negative, of a society that is substantially different from the one in which the author lives" (Claeys and Sargent 1999: 1),

[7] Which, incidentally, offers the viewer a certain cultural equivalent of Heidegger's *Dasein* for all things fictional.

allow for a profound anchoring of themes and characters in a spatiotemporal semiotic construct. Without such anchoring, as one might expect, building social relationships between authors and audiences – a basic process needed in any serial narrative that depends on audience engagement – would be impossible. Thus, it is the semantic capacities of fictional worlds, and the contemporary focus of dystopia go hand in hand. Lyman Tower Sargent's definition of dystopia naturally overlaps with the preoccupations of fictional worlds theory:[8] "a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived" (Sargent 1994: 9).

As Artur Blaim and Ludmiła Gruszewska-Blaim claim, "apparently imperfect worlds, plagued by such afflictions as social unrest, anarchy, coups d'état, totalitarian regimes, lethal systems of coercion, sensual, emotional and intellectual deprivation of citizens, that is, by less spectacular misfortunes transpiring on a smaller scale, could hardly compete with visions of mass destruction and annihilation of humankind" (2011: 7). All of these could hardly compete with the social drama that the TV series used to prefer in the era of the soap opera and sit com. This is no longer the case, though. In the dystopian fictional worlds of the latest high-brow serialized shows, the artistic ambitions of the TV series culminate. The proliferation of dystopian fictions in contemporary narrative TV series is a phenomenon that proves both the increasingly high ambitions of television storytelling, and a large, unorthodox capacity of dystopias to permeate any fabric of contemporary cultural discourse. While Jean Pfaelzer claims that dystopian fiction is

[8] Artur Blaim and Ludmiła Gruszewska-Blaim note an interpretive advantage that results from Sargent's definition: "What is interesting in Sargent's definition is that he does not set out to define the characteristics of a genre, or mode of discourse, but conceptualizes dystopia as a certain way of constructing the represented worlds. In other words, all other elements, often distinguished in formulating a normative poetics of the genre, such as the mode of narration, plot pattern, standard motifs, or typical characters and events, are not taken into consideration" (2011: 8).

a "formally and historically, structurally and contextually [...] a conservative genre" (1984: 78), contemporary employment of dystopian fictional worlds in the TV series seems to point to inexhaustible capacities dystopia manifests for making itself accessible to "the contemporaneous reader" (Sargent 1994: 9). Thus, the correlation of dystopias and of the TV series form results in a need for a reappraisal of the two phenomena: dystopia today hardly seems to be as conservative as Pfaelzer claimed it to be three decades ago, and the TV series appears to have effectively abandoned its position in the territories of low-brow culture.

The radical increase of ambitions of the TV series form is reflected in a "dystopian turn" that could be observed in the most significant series of the last five years. Such a turn is a logical part of the developments of the form; with more and more ambitious artistic, narrative, visual and thematic preoccupations of the TV series, it seems only natural that one of the most structurally complex and prominent cultural paradigms – the utopian/dystopian model – has become an important ambition for creators of the form. The escalation of oppressive practices in the world that "the contemporaneous reader" lives in, is also a significant factor. Tadeusz Sławek comments on the intersection of utopia and reality in the following way:

> No utopian impulse is conceivable in the situation where we remain harmoniously connected to the world because utopia is energized by disharmony, not by the 'marriage' of the individual and the world but by their 'divorce' which always necessitates a critical appraisal of the past and present as a mandatory condition of any authentic thinking of the future. The question "what now?" inaugurates utopia". (Sławek 2012: 35)

One is tempted to claim that nothing promulgates dystopias more today than the trumpization of politics and of public discourse, in which audiences are mercilessly confronted with discordant, aggressive messages, and with what seems to be

a revival of newspeak (as in the case of Kellyanne Conway's unabashed reference to "alternative facts"). Alternatives are, indeed, sought for, but their status has to be altogether different. The examples of TV narratives I will now discuss propose solidarity to be a promising counter-solution.

In *Mr. Robot* (USA Network, 2015–2017), a narrative critique of capitalism and the alienations of technological progress, the attempts of a group of hackers who call themselves "Fsociety" and struggle to dismantle the dominance of a villainous enterprise called E-Corp, are paralleled by the individual psychological struggle of the main character. The devastatingly grim dystopian series focuses on the entrapment of individual subjectivity in a social system governed by mass media, consumerism, and corporate greed. The main character is at some point interviewed by his therapist:

> Christa: "What is it about society that disappoints you so much?"
> Eliot: "Oh, I don't know. Is it that we collectively thought that Steve Jobs was a great man, even though we knew he made billions off the backs of children? Or maybe it's that it feels that all our heroes are counterfeit, the world itself just one big hoax, spamming each other with our running commentary on bullshit, masquerading as insight, our social media faking its intimacy. Or is it that we voted for this? Not with our rigged elections but with our things, our property, our money. I'm not saying anything new, we all know why we do this – not because Hunger Games books make us happy but because we want to be sedated. Because it's painful not to pretend. Because we're cowards. Fuck society!" (*Mr Robot* season 1, episode 1)

The text continuously underlines its investment with the present.[9] Protesters in the series parallel the activities of Occupy Wall Street, and the presentation of American politics features a striking commentary on the presidency of Donald Trump:

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[9] Mr. Robot/Mr. Edward Alderson (Christian Slater) suggests this specific focus early in the series: "Exciting time in the world right now. Exciting time" (season 1, episode 1).

> Whiterose: I need you to start an image rehabilitation on Tyrell Wellick. He's an ex-E Corp employee who's about to be blamed for the Five/Nine hack. No matter how public it gets, it is important that he stays in a positive light.
> Frank Cody: Huh. Any chance Obama goes after him? People love to defend anything he hates.
> Whiterose: Also, there's a new narrative I would like you to explore. I need you to put fsociety's origin on Iranian soil.
> Cody: Iran, huh? It's brown enough, shouldn't be too hard.
> Whiterose: One last thing – I may have a potential candidate for president I want you to back.
> *Donald Trump speaks from the TV screen.*
> Trump: Now, I've created tens of thousands of jobs over my career, tens of thousands.
> Cody (laughs): Look, the country's desperate right now but you can't be serious. I mean, the guy's a buffoon. He's completely divorced from reality. How would you even control him?
> Whiterose: If you pull the right strings, a puppet will dance any way you desire.
> Trump [on the TV screen]: Right? Make America great again. I say it. (*Mr. Robot*, season 3, episode 3)

The dystopian fictional world the series presents[10] hinges on such contemporaneous preoccupations. Their aim is to convince the implied audience, though, that – to refer to Sargent again – the conditions presented "in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view" are hardly worse than those in which the reader lives. Indeed, the dystopian *Mr. Robot* is a piercing critique of the present – with all the poignant allusions to the overwhelming ways in which

[10] While the dystopian paradigm is crucial for the entire narrative, the relationship of an individual with power (and its consequences on human psyche) is especially prominent. The main character, Eliot (Rami Malek), struggles against a double power. "Sometimes I dream of saving the world, saving everyone from the invisible hand, the one that controls us every day without us knowing it" (season 2, episode 1), he claims, referring to both the institutionalized power and the personal influence of his father, whose absence/presence is a crucial conveyor of narrative instabilities in the series.

conspiracy theories, fake news, cyberattacks, and political hassle undermine the image of the US as a realized utopia.[11]

Westworld (HBO, 2016), an adaptation of Michael Critchton's 1973 science-fiction film of the same title, explores the awaking of individual consciousness in robotic individuals operating in a theme park that has been built by a corporate concern for the entertainment of affluent customers. A bold criticism of both totalitarian regime (which aims at creating man through propaganda, while the owners of Westworld do so through technological construction) and of technological progress that blurs the boundary between human consciousness and robotic artificial intelligence. The series focuses on a developmental paradigm in which the androids observe repetitive loops, learn and, curiously, unite across ontological borders. Solidarity links arise between humans and non-humans as a response to the increasingly demoralized materialistic, bloodthirsty society. The commentary the show makes on the vicissitudes of exploitative tourism in a bitter way highlights the epistemological and characterological difficulties an individual confronts in collision with systemically organized dystopias. Robotic characters in the series struggle to develop a degree of critical insight. Their viewpoint is that of a complacent citizen whose awareness of the *status quo* is not the result of experience, but of programmatic education:

> Bernard: Have you ever questioned the nature of your reality?
> Dolores: No.
> Bernard: Tell us what you think about your world.
> Dolores: I like to remember what my father taught me. That at one point or another, we are all new to this world. The newcomers are

[11] The tension between critical visions of American society and the foundational utopian vision of the US as a utopian state is commented on by Artur Blaim: "American culture offers a very unique situation in which both literary and 'realised' utopias appear in a country that projects itself as a utopia. Thus, we have a case of a utopia-in-a-utopia, resembling that of a text-in-a-text, which has far reaching consequences for the status of practical utopian experiments or texts calling for a radically different mode of social organization" (Blaim 2017: 19).

> just looking for the same place we are. A place to be free, to stake out our dreams. A place with unlimited possibilities. (*Westworld* season 1, episode 1)

The visually extravagant *Legion* (FX, 2017), a series based on the Marvel franchise, presents a schizophrenic mutant in a dystopian world of psychiatric institutions and suspect governmental agencies. The main character, equipped with a variety of curious superpowers, engages in solidarity relations with other patients of the asylum, in order to seek understanding of his subjectivity, and, ultimately, as could be expected, to wreak havoc on villains. Solidarity in the series not only underscores the functional effectiveness of coalitions combating dystopian systems, but also increases the plausibility of the fictional world presented. The more the characters cooperate, the more they understand their own individual – and collective – capacities. At the same time principles that govern the fictional world of the series are legitimized for the audiences as the possession of superpowers turns out to be an essential feature of most characters in the superheroic text. In other words, in the narrative rhetoric of the series, actions of the main character – entirely implausible in the face of any extratextual doxa – appear plausible due to their similarity to other character's behaviours. A visual *tour de force*, the adventurous sequence that culminates the first episode not only problematizes the ontological status of the fictional world presented (Is the fictional diegesis composed of further illusions? Is – in this fictional world – seeing equivalent to knowing? Which of the versions of the fictional illusion is the most prominent?) but also highlights the importance of solidarity bonds that – in the face of an absolute absence of other promises – motivate characters to collective effort. What also seems at stake in this psychotic narrative is the individual mental disarray that psychiatric institutions fail to alleviate; apparently, contemporary TV dystopias find this intersection of individual experience and institutional failure increasingly attractive.

Solidarity functions in a similar manner in the fictional worlds of the Wachowskis' *Sense8* (Netflix, 2015–2017), a complex, disturbingly dynamic series that focuses on the experiences of eight individuals from eight parts of the globe, who discover they are "sensates" – humans connected parapsychologically to one another – and, despite their idiosyncratic cultural, sexual, and professional backgrounds, unite in a curious utopian coalition organized around a strikingly meaningful principle: "You are no longer just you". The series refers to prejudice and preconceived normative notions in what seems to be an adamant statement on the condition of contemporary society, and proposes a novel system of informal social relations focused on mutual support and exchange of competences. In the face of all the struggles individual identity is forced to engage in in confrontation with dominant epistemological and characterological canons that organize the dystopian world of the series, characters of *Sense8* experience an almost utopian alternative. They can reassure their own "selves" in mirror relationships with the Other. "A self does not amount to much, but no self is an island. Each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before", Jean-François Lyotard claims, suggesting that solidarity is a possible cure to numerous modern maladies (1979: 15).

The Handmaid's Tale (Hulu, 2017), an adaptation of Margaret Atwood's celebrated novel, presents a fictional world of what used to be the United States. In a totalitarian regime governed by religious fundamentalists in a period of a civil war, fanaticism rules, social classes are defined anew, military order is introduced, and women are subjected to devastatingly oppressive treatment. The dystopia is political, and the fictional world – materially analogous to the extratextual "real world", is ideologically alien due to its radically ideological nature. The mode of presentation is mimetic, the rhetorical effect – as ominous as it could be. The narrative illustrates the dangers of totalitarian power and, symptomatically, shows the emergence

of solidarity bonds among women, whose combative and cooperative power appears to be not at all inferior to the regime governed by men. The lasting resonance of Atwood's novel, and of the dystopian paradigm in the presentation of women's rights and women's solidarity proved quite up-to-date during the visit of President Donald Trump in Warsaw in July 2017. In order to protest the visit a group of Polish female activists, dressed up as handmaids, held signs highly critical of Trump and his policy.

Solidarity as a pragmatic anti-dystopian gesture is more lasting than some might have assumed, and it is activated, as the series suggests, in moments of resistance. "A culture of fear, which employs appropriate tools to systematically eliminate independent narratives (frequently together with their potential story-tellers), aims at monophony", Ludmiła Gruszewska-Blaim aptly claims. "The polyphonic discourse", she adds, "would undermine totalitarian axioms and the control of the masses by the few who wield the power of coercing others into conformity and submission" (2011: 78). Because such submission does not lie in the nature of Ofred (who fails to follow the rules "of the meek") nor of any of the principal characters in the series discussed above[12], their relative success in opposing the oppressive regimes is a primary generator of narrativity in the series. In other words, *The Handmaid's Tale* narrative character – that is, that of an artifice that oc-

[12] Another instance of visually and narratively intricate series in which a dystopian setting and solidarity relations go hand in hand is Channel 4's grimly humorous *Utopia* (2013–2014), which presents a group of individuals – characteristically, of various ethnic and class backgrounds – who build a solidarity team to defend the global society against a villainous conspiracy of the British government striving to reduce the population of the planet by infecting masses with a virus that would make a major part of the human race practically infertile. *SS-GB* (BBC, 2017), in turn, is a counterfactual historical narrative that uses dystopian fictional worlds to speculate on the might-have-beens of Nazi invasion on Britain. The less complex *The Man in the High Castle* (Amazon 2015–2017) proposes an equivalent narrative of nazified America. The phenomenal *Black Mirror* (Netflix, 2011–2017), on the other hand, focuses on the terrors of a technological dystopia in which overdependence of humans on devices results in the undermining of human agency.

curs when "somebody tells somebody else on some occasion and for some purpose that something happened" (Phelan 2005: 20) – hinges on the attractiveness of the impossible. If you have wondered who might wish to oppose a realised dystopia, well, characters in the series have learnt the lesson of „Solidarność" [Independent Self-governing Labour Union "Solidarity"] and employed a collective strategy of productive, comprehensive resistance.

One of the most spectacular cultural macro-events of the last 5 years, the rise of high-brow narrative TV series has attested to several tendencies in contemporary audio-visual culture, which today tends to do the following: to narrativize social issues, to undermine conventional genre distinctions, to highlight the artistic potential of popular cultural forms, and to use seriality as conveyor of comprehensive, engaging fictional worlds. The presentation of dystopian fictional worlds in the series mentioned above is perhaps the most significant manifestation of both the developing ambitions of the TV series, and the unfaltering interest of culture in the dystopian subject matter. In the series in question, solidarity actions and dystopian fictional worlds are frequently presented in conjunction in order to address a variety of social, political, ecological, and artistic preoccupations that have attracted the attention of the global general public in the last decade. A principal lever of social action and a generator of narrative utopias within the larger overriding dystopian narratives, solidarity appears to serve the following functions in the series analysed: 1. organizing the revival of individual subjectivity (and resocializing disturbed selves), 2. contributing to the reorganization of informal social relations (based on courageous confrontations with the Other and the known), 3. reorganizing the principles of plausibility within the fictional world (by making the unlikely individual success more likely as part of collective struggle), 4. increasing the narrativity of the dystopian text (by proposing a narrative of an anti-dystopian alternative), 5. enhancing the

mimetic function of the narrative (by referring audiences to the extratextual reality).

In the face of all the above arguments, it seems that the most significant of all the ambitions the TV series has entertained is to make a bold statement on extratextual reality, to assume a large, social, global, if not cosmic referential system for the fictional worlds presented. Insularity and repetitiveness are no longer the defining characteristics of TV shows, at least in the narrative domain. The preoccupation with social solidarity on the larger plane of comprehensive dystopian fictional worlds, together with an increased structural complexity of the series, points to a profound hermeneutic change that is also required of audiences. Although it might seem the TV series has envied the novel its monopoly for sociologically-engaged mimesis, the TV form has found its own way of addressing an ambitious critical agenda without forsaking its entertainment value. Now we need to learn to watch the TV series as attentively as we read literary dystopias. Because if the TV series becomes art, it is sometimes art of the engaged kind.

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