

Utopia After the Human: Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* Trilogy and the Possibility of a Post-Human Harmony

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In her *MaddAddam* trilogy (2003-2013), Margaret Atwood portrays a futuristic world with bioengineering controlled by corporation reign in the pursuit of capitalistic profit. After a “waterless flood” aimed at destroying all humanity to make way for a bio-engineered race that will live in harmony with the planet, the apocalypse takes a utopian turn. Embodying harmony in all aspects, this post-human race of “Crakers” bring forward an ecological harmony by a strictly vegetarian diet harmless to the planet and all non-human beings. After the dystopian apocalypse, through Crakers and the spiritually aware eco-cult “God’s Gardeners,” the trilogy closes with MaddAddamites and Gardeners uniting with the non-human animals and protecting what remains of the ecology, which becomes the start of a transformation into a post-human utopia in harmony with the natural world. However, through Atwood’s novels this paper aims to question whether such a utopian future is for the human at all; as the end of the trilogy is not the beginning of humanity but of a new post-human race. In Atwood’s vision, only with the almost end of the entire humanity can a sustainable utopia founded on harmony begin. Accordingly, the aim of this paper is to discuss the post-human utopias that may come after an apocalypse, focusing on whether such a utopia is possible and hopeful, and whether there is a place for the human in any such ecological, post-human harmony.

Keywords: Post-apocalyptic narratives, Dystopia, Utopian turn, Post-human harmony, Ecology

The Utopian Melody of Rainer Maria Rilke

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Rilke, as a poet, has always been very close to the visual arts. His poems are true pictorial manifestos where we can see his care in choosing the chromatic palette of the grammar with which he constructs his literary images. I will start with this paper from a text by Rilke's youth, "The Melody of Things," written after a trip to Florence in 1898. Rilke spent three months in Florence, following the advice of her friend Lou Andreas Salomé, who insisted on say that he would need to know the painting of renaissance. This text composed of 40 fragments is simultaneously a long poem, an essay on aesthetics, a diary, but also a treatise on utopia. Rilke tries to think about the images to come, about the function of hope, and the function of cutting of an image when it is able to open space for new languages. From the idea of turning around a blind spot (*circare*) that we see in some fragments of the text, I will open a dialogue with the Lacanian *object a* , a concept that I believe triggers a thought about utopia.

Keywords: Rilke, Literature and utopia, Object a and utopia

The Role of Agency in the Environmental Discourse and Climate Change Dystopias

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This paper aims at exploring the meaning and the role of agency within the contemporary debate on the environment and in climate change dystopian fiction. 2017 has bore witness to increased discussions on the issue of climate change and global warming: as Trump's administration acts as mouthpiece for scepticism and denial, scientists, activists, and journalists raised their voices in opposition. Calls for the acknowledgement of human responsibility on this global matter have been widespread. While denial has justified inaction, responsibility calls for action: choices in defence of the environment are made both at individual and collective level. After a reflection on the concept of agency in political theory, this paper will explore its role in the environmental debate, focusing in particular on individual agency as opposed to collective agency. These reflections will work as a framework in order to analyse the role of agency in contemporary dystopian fiction, in particular in novels where the theme of climate change is strongly present. Examples of both individual and collective agency will be presented, as well as an observation on the relationship between agency and nostalgia.

Keywords: Agency, Environmentalism, Climate change fiction

Dystopian Authority and the “Otherness”: Gender, Sexuality, Race and Politic in Superhero Worlds

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In dystopian realities, “Other” often comes to be interpreted as “Dangerous”. Mutants, aliens, women, homosexuals, rebels, minorities: those who don't fit the racial, sexual, religious or sociopolitical standards of power have to be subdued or erased for the safekeeping of authority. Often presenting themselves as utopian powers offering security and peace, dystopian politics and media spread alarming news and anxiety to justify the limitation of civil rights and the use of brutal force against their enemies. Influenced by propaganda, also people go from fear to hatred and desire of exploitation, and from these to violence. Why are we frightened by otherness? Why do dystopian authorities need to transform diversity into an element of crisis and trauma? Nowadays more than ever, these questions are not simply about imaginary worlds, they deal with the increasing racist, misogynist and homophobic drift of our society. The paper will analyze selected comics, such as *V for Vendetta*, *X-Men (Days of Future Past; God loves, Man Kills; Uncanny X-Men #235; etc.)* and *Wonder Woman (Omnibus by Pérez)*. It will be focused on three main themes:

- the construction and the representation of the “others” and of their roles, identities and images;
- the control and the repression perpetrated by dystopian powers and/or individuals on “discordant” bodies, focusing on gender-based and on race-based violence and traumas;
- the influence of media, politics, stereotypes and traditions on the perceived identity of minorities and more vulnerable groups.

This paper aims to illuminate the prejudices and the dangerous rhetoric that influence the interpretation and affirmation of the “Other” in fiction and in reality, hoping to show the discourses and the actions that lead to crisis, and to suggest new theoretical approaches to these phenomena. Dystopia can help us to recognize the symptoms of a sick society. Dialogue and education can support the creation of an harmonic, freer, and fairer world. Utopia can become dystopia, but the actions of conscious people can prove that also the opposite is possible.

Keywords: Authority, Otherness, Comics

Escape and Salvation as a Self-Discovery in Hillary Jordan's *When She Woke*

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Hillary Jordan starts by saying “When she woke, she was red” (3) and ends by stating “She woke, and she was herself” (341) in her novel *When She Woke* (2011). As seen in most of the fields of social studies or other genres of literature, dystopian fiction also puts the issues like reproduction, eugenics, birth control at the centre which are used as control mechanisms on women. In Jordan's novel, the main character Hannah Payne is punished by being chromed to red for abortion which is seen as a crime. The role of woman in this conservative and fundamentalist system, the role of shaming as a method of punishment, and the role of religion as the base of governmental structure are the main focus of the novel. How these restrictive mechanisms are subverted by the main character forms the argument, and this paper will emphasise the subversion of the traditional attributions in such a conservative society and system to pass through a self-creation or maybe turning to the real and inner self.

Keywords: Feminist dystopia, Chromatic scale, Self-discovery

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Harmony is associated with the area of the utopian rather than that of dystopian; however, the quest for harmony plays a pivotal role in dystopian narrative. In a dystopian text, the utopian harmony may be disrupted and shattered due to a manipulative discourse and a suppressive monolithic ideological system, which does not facilitate plurality, diversity and heterogeneity. This politics of repressive discourse may inhibit individual growth and the flowering of a critical, inquisitive mind, yet such a disharmony may engender dissatisfaction, indignation and exasperation on the part of some characters, especially the protagonist in fictional dystopian projections. The protagonist's critical realization of the dysfunctional and disharmonious social order may lead him/her to insurgency and dissent, which sparks the search for yet another utopian harmony and hope.

P. D. James's novel, *The Children of Men* (1992) illustrates a world of disharmony, dissonance and friction in the aftermath of a mysterious infertility pandemic. The world sinks into despair, despondency and anguish after the last human being, Joseph Ricardo's death. The society in James's vision is made to believe in the improbability of fertility till the revelation of a pregnant woman, Julian, whose baby is to become a token of hope, a new harmony or of intensification of manipulative power politics. The protagonist, Theo Faron's transformational journey of confrontation against the system ultimately reveals the trajectory of hope in the face of the constraining power. The aim of this presentation is therefore to discuss the search for a utopian harmony and revisionary epistemology in James's novel, *The Children of Men*.

Keywords: Harmony, *Children of Men*, Hope, Disharmony, Dystopian literature, In/fertility, Power practice, Manipulation

The New Woman in the “New Harmonies”: Socialist-Feminist Utopias of 1880s-90s

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The context of the present paper is given by my research on philosophy of female education and the questions of female *Bildung* in the 18th and 19th centuries. I have been studying not only works of educationalist and philosophical concerns (for instance, Mary Wollstonecraft’s and John Stuart Mill’s writings), but also literary works such as the *Bildungsromans* and utopias written in the related period. While the novels of upbringing display the process of individual development, female utopias are to show the possibility of social development, being strongly contextualised in their historical present.

The figure of the New Woman, being articulated in the second half of the 19th century, “is a feminist in search of New Women” and it is strongly utopian while the anti-feminist and sexist reactions are dystopian and satirical (Beaumont, *Utopia Ltd.*, 2009: 97-8). Utopian works written by female and feminist writers were published from the 1870s: we can mention such socialist-feminist works as Jane Hume Clapperton’s *Margaret Dunmore, or, A Socialist Home* (1888), Elizabeth Corbett’s *New Amazonia* (1889), Lady Florence Dixie’s *Gloriana* (1890), Olive Schreiner’s fantasy titled *Dreams* (1890), and Isabella Ford’s *On the Threshold* (1895). The dreamlike “new harmonies” of the *fin de siècle* feminist utopias are also related to the socialist debates about “the Woman Question” which involved, for instance, Friedrich Engels, Eleanor Marx, Edward Aveling, and August Bebel. Consequently, in my presentation of the analysed works, the current issues of childrearing, distribution of female and male tasks, education, and gender norms are discussed in the framework of the ideal future communities.

Keywords: New Woman, Woman Question, Feminist and socialist utopias, *Fin de siècle*

Possibilities of Eutopia in Contemporary Hungarian Science Fiction Novels

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Hungarian eutopian literature reached its height in the second half of the 19th century. The late Industrial Revolution and the following Age of Dualism intensified the technical and social changes that led to positivist-optimistic visions of the near and far future called the “Great Hungarian Dream”. In the twentieth century in Hungary (just as in other countries) eutopia was overshadowed by dystopia, the appealing future gave way to pessimism and disappointment. Hungarian utopian literature lacks the wave of critical utopias in the 1970s and the pessimist trend has continued in the early 21st century – with only a few exceptions.

The Rite of Passage by Sándor Szélesi takes place on a distant planet. The novel is linked to the myth of Eden where a father and his son live and the protagonist refers to Rousseau's thoughts about returning to nature to be free of every oppressing bond of society and the prejudices of civilization. When human colonists arrive to the planet to build their community nature itself doesn't take them in. Szélesi employs the 19th century eutopian framework to reflect on values a society can be based on but from a new point of view.

In *iDeal* by József Antal an AI awakes to consciousness and creates an earthly paradise for all human beings. The new world is based on the 19th century communist ideology but as it is clarified in the novel „not what is usually called communism but how Marx and Engels imagined it long ago”. Some emphasize the importance of freedom over perfection and rebel against the power of the AI; Antal employs the usual plot of a dystopian novel to a eutopian context.

This paper's attempt is to examine how these novels expand the original framework of eutopia and reshape utopian thought in the 21st century.

Keywords: Eutopia, Contemporary, Science fiction

Towards National Harmony. Bulgarian Struggle with the Difference

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The paper raises the question of the relation between the nation and utopia in Bulgarian culture from the point of view of the history of concepts and the cultural history. Various texts of the Bulgarian intellectuals from 19th and 20th century devoted to the idea of national unity and harmony are interpreted in order to reveal their hermeneutic potential as far as the utopian thinking is concerned. The analysis is focused on two concepts: confession and politics and is conducted in terms of *the utopia of politics* and *the monastic utopia* (by Jerzy Szacki). The aim is to show the Bulgarian ways of neutralizing/annihilating national (political, confessional) differences are strictly related to the ambiguous process of modernization and as such they are only an example of wider phenomena, and Szacki's typology can be fruitful in this regard.

Keywords: Utopian thinking, National harmony, Politics