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Abstract

This thesis examines political and social thought in dystopian fiction of the mid-twentieth century. It focuses on works by four authors: Yevgeny Zamyatin's We (1924), Aldous Huxley's Brave New World (1932), George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four (1949), and John Wyndham's postwar novels (especially The Day of the Triffids (1951), The Kraken Wakes (1953) and The Chrysalids (1955)).

The central concern of this thesis is how political and social ideas are developed within a literary mode which evolved as response to both literary concerns and political ideas, including on the one hand literary utopias, science fiction, satire, and literary modernism; and on the other hand modernity, social Darwinism, apocalypse, war, and changes in gender roles in the broader culture. It is argued that the narrative structures of these novels are crucial in enabling them to perform such critical tasks. These texts use fictionality to enact self-reflexive critiques of the disasters of their age that both acknowledge their own emergence from the post-Enlightenment tradition in the history of political ideas, and criticise the failings of this very tradition of which they are part. The work of a variety of critical theorists, including Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, Hannah Arendt and Raymond Williams inform this analysis. This thesis aims to demonstrate how comparative readings of critical theory and literature can reveal their mutually interactive significance as cultural reactions to historical events.

Dystopian fictions of the mid-twentieth century are both important documents in cultural history, and valuable literary examples of the development and diffusion of a plurality of modernisms within popular fiction.

Mid Twentieth-Century Dystopian Fiction and Political Thought

Volume 1 of 1

Adam Stock

Ph.D.

Department of English Studies, Durham University

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*To my grandparents,
All of whom lived through the mid-twentieth century.*

RING THE BELLS THAT CAN STILL RING,
FORGET YOUR PERFECT OFFERING.
THERE IS A CRACK IN EVERYTHING.
THAT'S HOW THE LIGHT GETS IN.

-LEONARD COHEN, ANTHEM.

THROUGH THE DARKNESS
FUTURE PASSED

-DAVID LYNCH, TWIN PEAKS

Dystopian Fiction: Some Theoretical and Historical Perspectives

AND YOU MAY ASK YOURSELF,
'WELL, HOW DID I GET HERE?'

-TALKING HEADS

The Significance of Dystopia

Dystopian fiction is a mode of narrative prose. Between 1920 and 1960 its expressions were characterised in a number of specific ways. Such texts were entangled in, and responded directly to, a complex and intricate web of material historical conditions, intellectual and cultural currents and dramatic social change. From the aftermath of the First World War to the close of the postwar era political structures were challenged, overturned and re-thought; the modern nation-state expanded and evolved in an unprecedentedly urgent fashion. This thesis is concerned with works written by authors who were born into rigidly stratified societies around the turn of the twentieth century. During the course of their writing careers, however, they would witness total war, revolutions, the Great Depression and extraordinary advances in science including the discovery of the double-helix structure of DNA and the development of atomic bombs.

To engage with this world in flux, dystopian fiction absorbed a range of experimental techniques from literary modernism, deploying them in a genre that held genuinely popular appeal. These texts are significant not only as documents in cultural and intellectual history, but also within literary studies as an example of a genre engaged with the plurality of literary modernisms that negotiate and situate themselves within cultures regarded as non-elite or popular.

A number of formal features characterised the genre in this period. Typically, such dystopian fictions began *in medias res*, with the narrative focusing upon

the growing self-awareness and consciousness of an individual protagonist or small group of individuals who begin to rebel against prevailing conditions. As a general rule these were novels of ideas engaged in forms of critique in which satire played an important role. As such, dystopian fiction developed from a (post-)Enlightenment tradition that ran through the Victorian era and into the work of writers like H. G. Wells. However, like contemporaneous critical theorists such as Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, and scholars of political thought like Hannah Arendt, dystopian authors were self-consciously critical of the very conditions and assumptions of the post-Enlightenment tradition from which they emerged. An important related aspect of dystopian literature was its reaction against specific trends in the history of literary utopias, especially as found in the works of Wells. Dystopian criticism of literary utopias does not in and of itself imply that it is orientated towards anti-utopian thought. Rather it points to dystopian fiction as being, in Tom Moylan's term, "largely the product of the terrors of the twentieth century."¹ A contention of this thesis is that at its best dystopian fiction from this era presents an idea of individuality in which moral and/or political autonomy are retained, whilst also attempting to think through some of the implications of these traumas. A cultural history of dystopian fiction should therefore seek to reflect upon not only what the terrors of the twentieth century can tell us about dystopia, but additionally what dystopian fictions in turn have to say about the terrors which were conditions of their own production. A broader implication is that dystopian fiction can tell us much about the changing nature and value of social experience. However, such fiction does not discuss social experience as a static, reified, neatly conceptualised whole, but as a process, an evolving part of present, lived experience or a "structure of feeling" in Raymond Williams's term, which he defined as

specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and inter-relating continuity... a social experience which is still *in process*, often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating, but which in

¹ Tom Moylan, Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia ed. Paul Smith (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2000), xi.

analysis (though rarely otherwise) has its emergent, connecting, and dominant characteristics, indeed its specific hierarchies.²

Dystopian fiction grappled with moral, social and political problems in these terms, by viewing them not only in relation to their past but also to a future which paradoxically both construes and resists the idea of historical necessity. At a time when humanist values were threatened, and in many cases looked to be breaking down entirely, dystopian authors as post-Enlightenment thinkers offered a critique of the intellectual, cultural and political heritage which had led to such a state of affairs, consciously embedded in the very Enlightenment values which they were critically analysing. Dystopian fiction of the mid-twentieth century was timely, reflecting the social conditions of its production in terms of the prevalent social anxieties and cultural outlooks.

Dystopia in Contemporary usage

'Dystopia' is a word with increasing cultural currency. In recent years, it has been used almost interchangeably with 'Orwellian' in popular and media discourse as an indicator of a nightmarish future. This interchangeability is itself significant, but it is also interesting to note the changes in use here: the first well-known use of the word "dystopians" in the 1860s by J.S. Mill was as a critical and satirical device.³ After ninety years of very infrequent use, it started to be deployed to denote a literary genre. 'Dystopia' has recently begun to be employed as a term indicating any set of conditions significantly worse than they have been either in the past or are in the present time – be these in fiction or in empirical reality.⁴ Indeed, it seems that often the word

² Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977), 132 *emphasis in original*.

³ See below, 56-7.

⁴ See, for example, Simon Hoggart, "Britain Goes From Dystopia to Arcadia in Six Months," Simon Hoggart's Sketch. *Guardian* 30 November 2010. Online ed. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2010/nov/30/simon-hoggarts-sketch-george-osborne?INTCMP=SRCH>>, 1 June 2011; Paul Mason, "Decaying US City Proves Hard to Turn Around," 2010, Web Page, BBC Radio 4, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/9139226.stm>, 3 December 2010 (featuring the subheading "American Dystopia"); and Jan Moir, "What Kind of Sick Society Has Jack Tweed as a Pin-Up - and What Kind of Girl Wants to Sleep

'dystopia' is chosen to express conditions that appear fictitious because they are, to quote Mill, "too bad to be practicable" and yet nonetheless are entering empirical reality.⁵ An example of this usage can be found in the opening chapter of Francis Fukuyama's *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (2002), which contrasts the roles of technology in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. According to Fukuyama, the technology of "telescreens" in Orwell's novel already exists in the form of PCs and the Internet. But far from being nefarious in its effects, Fukuyama claims (anachronistically) that such technology has facilitated a democratising advance which has helped to bring about the end of Soviet Communism. Having used dystopian fiction to explain one set of socio-political changes brought about by cultural-technological advance, he then turns to *Brave New World* to look at a future set of challenges that we are only beginning to encounter. For Fukuyama, while the biotechnological advances in Huxley's World State have produced humans who are supposedly "happy and healthy," these characters

have ceased to be *human beings*. They no longer struggle, aspire, love, feel pain, make difficult moral choices, have families, or do any of the things that we traditionally associate with being human. They no longer have the characteristics that give us human dignity.⁶

The socialist attempts to "modify" humans socially have, Fukuyama argues, all failed. But the scientific ability to "modify" ourselves physically, emotionally and mentally still threatens Fukuyama's avowedly Aristotelian notions of 'human nature' and the humanist tradition.

It is beyond the scope of the present discussion to pick apart this polemical argument. It is pertinent to note, however, that it demonstrates that twentieth-

with Him?," Daily Mail 28 April 2010. Online ed. <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1269335/What-kind-sick-society-Jack-Tweed-pin-up.html>>, 1 June 2011. ("he seems to thrive in his carefully cultivated dystopia of party drugs, booze, violence and loveless sex"). The word 'dystopia' was first used in a scholarly context in Glenn Negley and J. Max Patrick eds. The Quest for Utopia: An Anthology of Imaginary Societies (New York: Henry Schuman, 1952), 298.

⁵ Hansard Commons 12 Mar. 1868, vol. 190, c. 1517. See below, 56-7.

⁶ Francis Fukuyama, Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution (New York: Farrar, 2002), 4-6.

century dystopian fiction continues to have much to say about the most fundamental questions surrounding the human condition and the concept of human nature today, and looks set to continue to do so well into the future. That the date 1984 has long since passed is from this perspective irrelevant – dystopian fiction is not so narrowly or empirically predictive. Rather, it is the questions, the socio-political, psychological and philosophical critiques which these books undertake that continue to make them not just important historical documents but vital and living texts. The legacy of Yevgeny Zamyatin, George Orwell, Aldous Huxley, John Wyndham and others is not just in the continued production of dystopian fiction but in the epistemological terms of debate surrounding the future: they continue to give us tools to question the future, how we get there and what it will look like. Yet, as I will argue below, dystopian fiction does this in a unique way that differentiates it from utopian fiction, science fiction and non-fiction.

Cultural History

This thesis is concerned with the cultural history of dystopia. While the genre has a long pre-history with roots stretching back to the mythic, prophetic and apocalyptic writings of antiquity, Moylan traces the development of the genre in the novel form back to the early twentieth century when it was characterised by specific formal narrative and thematic concerns.⁷ Indeed, the present tendency, most easily observable in the popular press, to view future conditions as dystopian often makes explicit or implicit reference to literary texts and narratives in order to do so. The commonplace adjective ‘Orwellian’, for example, usually indicates a social injustice or nefarious political action that is in some way comparable to conditions in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (or more rarely *Animal Farm*).

⁷ Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* xi-xiii. Likewise, for M. Keith Booker, “Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We* [(1924) is] often considered to be the first genuine modern dystopian text”. M. Keith Booker, *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature: Fiction as Social Criticism*, Contributions to the Study of Science Fiction and Fantasy 58 (Westport, CT: Greenwood P, 1994), 25.

Meanwhile, in much of the standard literary scholarship on the genre, 'Dystopia' is frequently presented as the creation of a (fictional) world considerably worse than the author's present. A salient presupposition of such interpretations is that authorial intent may be discovered and assessed accurately. The more rigorous or precise of these interpretations, including those of Lyman Tower Sargent and Darko Suvin, differentiate between a dystopian mode and an 'anti-utopian' mode that categorically rejects the utopian tradition in its entirety, while broader (and usually more conservative) accounts like Karl Popper's do not.⁸ Dystopian fiction tends to have a more ambivalent or ambiguous relationship than anti-utopian thought does with utopian thought.

A major consequence of an interpretation of 'dystopia' centred on the socio-political features of a storyworld is a strong emphasis on formal aspects of the text.⁹ Gregory Claeys, for example, maintains that a dystopia must be "broad[ly]... feasible" in the terms of the context in which it is produced, without any "utterly unrealistic features dominat[ing] the narrative," and that it should be "cast principally in fictional form."¹⁰ This is quite a wide definition, whose principal advantage is that the 'feasibility' test stops dystopia from being conflated with some science fiction. It also acknowledges the centrality of narrative to the genre, although Claeys does not develop this implication as far as he might. It is important to clarify that Claeys indicates that 'feasibility' denotes a dystopia being "based on the extrapolation of some existing trend." Greater elaboration would be useful here to prevent the emergence of distracting arguments over what might be possible in any fictional far future. Moreover, while Claeys's conception is helpful in

⁸ Thus, Sargent argues, "it is not always possible to be certain of an author's intention... intention is a factor that a scholar has to take into account, but it does not provide a basis for characterizing a genre." Lyman Tower Sargent, "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited," Utopian Studies 5.1 (1994), 6; "Theses on Dystopia 2001," Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination eds. Raffella Baccolini and Tom Moylan (New York: Routledge, 2003), 189; Karl Popper, The Open Society and Its Enemies, 5th ed., vol. 1 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 157.

⁹ This in turn implies that dystopias are properly *narrative* aesthetic texts such as novels, films, plays, and graphic novels.

¹⁰ Gregory Claeys, "The Origins of Dystopia: Wells, Huxley and Orwell," The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature ed. Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010), 109.

suggesting a literary dimension, it does not address problems of authorial intent fully, or offer a narrative of the historical development of the dystopian genre. Other critics meanwhile, such as Suvin, have focused on narrower formal categories. For reasons I will outline below formal theories like Suvin's can be problematic, tending to be primarily political rather than aesthetic.

An account of the relations between ideology, form and historical context is a necessary framework for any critical understanding of dystopian texts and each of these may be regarded as separable for analytic purposes. However, I shall argue that it is important to resist the temptation to privilege any one of these hermeneutic categories above the others. A critique or exposition of the ideological content of dystopian work is valuable for many reasons – for example, it permits questioning of how the author viewed the social and the political, and may give insight into her or his aesthetic values. But without grounding such a critique in the historical context of the text it can easily become polemic. Likewise, investigating the historical milieu in which a dystopian novel is written without attention to its formal construction would overlook the interactive relationship between the two. As form and ideology are important concerns for a full understanding of dystopian fiction, neither can be adequately engaged without a grasp of the wider cultural and intellectual history that underpins and contextualises individual works in the genre. Accordingly, the conception of dystopia to be presented here will take account of both historical and formal aesthetic mediation.

'Modernist' Dystopias?

The works upon which I will focus were written between the end of World War I and the end of the 1950s and, to a greater or lesser extent, in the shadow of new types of literary writing that would later be grouped together and known as modernism (and which have recently been re-assessed more inclusively as 'modernisms').¹¹ As "an artistic attempt to capture [the] sense of fragmentation and alienation" of "the modern condition," modernism(s)

¹¹ Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1995).

dealt with a world of uncertainty. Such writing was characterised by “deliberation on art and the artist, the attempted narrative registration of consciousness,” as well as “experiment and innovation.”¹² One of the consequences of the recent explosion in scholarly interest in alternative modernisms, however, is the recognition that modernist experiment was not simply narrowly technical but also involved a revolution in approaches to epistemology, metaphysical questions about mind, concepts of political order and sociological constructions of selfhood. Over the past twenty-five years or so, literary critics have recognised that modernist writers were not simply engaged in the kind of solipsistic ‘inward turn’ assumed by critics such as the Hungarian Marxist Georg Lukács, but, like their nineteenth century realist forebears, they were deeply concerned with social and political realities.¹³ Similarly, as homogenised conceptualisations of modernism have broken down, it has become apparent that the over-simplified dualism realism/modernism can no longer stand.

In dystopian fiction of this period, experimentation is pervasive both on the narrative level and in terms of the “range of literary language” that “widened extraordinarily” in literary modernism.¹⁴ The experimental diary style and imagery of Zamyatin’s *We*, for instance, records the fracturing of D-503’s sense of self. Indeed, Zamyatin’s ‘Neo-realist’ aesthetic can be seen as absorbing modernism and thereby collapsing the Lukácsian modernism/realism dichotomy. To declare oneself a ‘modernist’ in early Soviet Russia was to court danger: the Communist Party had been suspicious of modernism long before Socialist Realism became doctrinally enshrined, not least because in the pre-modernist mid-nineteenth century

¹² Peter Brooker, “Early Modernism,” *The Cambridge Companion to the Modernist Novel*, ed. Morag Shiach (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007). Cambridge Collections Online, 04 June 2011 <DOI: 10.1017/CCOL052185444X.003>, 45; Chris Snipp-Walmsley, “Postmodernism,” *Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Patricia Waugh (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006), 409-10.

¹³ Georg Lukács “Realism in the Balance” in Ernst Bloch *et al*, *Aesthetics and Politics* ed. Ronald Taylor (London: Verso, 1980) 36. One of the earliest works in the trend against Lukács’s hypostatized dualism of realism and modernism is Alex Zwerdling’s *Virginia Woolf and the Real World* (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1986), which explores the social and political thought in Woolf’s fiction.

¹⁴ Robert Martin Adams, “What Was Modernism?” *Hudson Review* 31 (1978), 27.

Marx and Engels had championed “authentic realism.”¹⁵ Zamyatin’s labelling could be viewed from this perspective as a political move by an avant-garde writer who did not want to be associated with supposedly ‘bourgeois’ modernism.

The influence of literary modernism is plain to see in *Brave New World* too, where the montage narrative technique that Huxley called “counterpoint” is used to capture the fragmentation and relentless pace of subjective experience at the narrative level. Similarly, an exploration of the limits and plasticity of human identity and subjectivity underpins *Nineteen Eighty-Four*; questions of authorship and fictionality surround both the lengthy political pamphlet “The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism”, and “The Principles of Newspeak” appendix, which resists narrative closure. While less formally experimental, Wyndham’s postwar novels frequently use modernist tropes and themes: the telepathic child narrator of *The Chysalids*, for example, calls into question modern Western assumptions about the integral boundaries of selfhood and the nature of language and communication, and the ironic inversion of Wellsian symbols including the green comets in *The Day of the Triffids* plays on modernist concerns with cosmopolitan cities.

In order to differentiate these texts from dystopias of other periods without either arbitrarily defining ‘dystopia’ as such to indicate solely this era, or coining another neologism based on the suffix ‘-topia’, I will term these works of the early-mid twentieth century ‘modernistic dystopias’. I want to emphasize the innovative new ways of thinking about the human mind and conceptions of the self which these texts explore, their lack of stable or certain endings, and their concern with memory and the loss of a more perfect past. The term ‘modernistic dystopias’, while grammatically slightly clumsy, is chosen in place of ‘modernist dystopias’ as the latter term could be open to at least two challenges. Firstly, while Orwell’s and particularly Wyndham’s novels may belong to the same ‘structure of feeling’ as those of

¹⁵ Eugene Lunn, *Marxism and Modernism: An Historical Study of Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin and Adorno* (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1982) 26.

Zamyatin and Huxley, it may be more accurate to see them as fully embodying the legacies of modernism rather than being strictly 'modernist'. Secondly (and consequentially), it would stretch the usual periodisation of modernism to a point that might limit it conceptually. By using the adjectival form 'modernistic' I imply a subtle distinction, approaching these texts in the spirit of Laura Marcus's argument that in recent scholarship, "the 'realisms' of many mid-twentieth century writers and beyond are beginning to look not only more interesting and more complex, but closer to the 'modernisms' that they are conventionally held to have displaced."¹⁶

Literary Antecedents

Strong dystopian tendencies can certainly be found in pre-twentieth century texts including, for example, Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. But the early twentieth century witnessed changes in both narrative structure and thematic concerns of such literature. For Moylan, E.M. Forster's *The Machine Stops* (1909) is "one of the first instances of dystopian narrative."¹⁷ It contains many characteristics that came to define dystopian writing later in the twentieth century. This short story opens *in medias res*. Its protagonist is Vashti, a woman whose son becomes disillusioned with the society he lives in, and seeks a way out of the slowly degenerating underground machine-world in which they live, thereby challenging social structures. Satire is a major feature, and (here through techniques including free indirect discourse) the tale engages in a forthright critique of political and cultural thought. The narrator informs the reader that Vashti

had studied the civilization that had immediately preceded her own – the civilization that had mistaken the functions of the system, and had used it for bringing people to things, instead of for bringing things to people. Those funny old days, when men went for change of air instead of changing the air in their rooms!¹⁸

¹⁶ Laura Marcus, "The Legacies of Modernism," *The Cambridge Companion to the Modernist Novel*, ed. Morag Shiach (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2007). Cambridge Collections Online, <DOI: 10.1017/CCOL052185444X.006>, 5 June 2011, 82.

¹⁷ Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* xv.

¹⁸ E.M. Forster, *Collected Short Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1954), 115.

Here the satire is Janus-faced: the “system” of universal transportation in the future-as-past is attacked for reducing geographical and cultural particularity to the lowest common denominator, while Vashti’s own society is satirised by comparison to a past in which “the system” did the bidding of men who were still autonomous from the machine. Although she avers that “there [i]s nothing mysterious” about the communication system, subterranean living has made her agoraphobic.¹⁹ The trip across the surface world represents a link to an unknown and unknowable past.

The loss of memory and history is a recurring theme. Yet while the future setting of the narrative shared by all dystopian fiction is present, Forster’s text, in contrast to the later novels which this thesis examines, does not concern itself quite so much with a point in time between the author’s present and the “temporal level of narrative” (the point in the future at which the story is set).²⁰ While this future-as-history is frequently hinted at, it is not developed as far as in later dystopian fiction.

The Machine Stops also sits on the very cusp of modernism. Some characteristics of modernist literary writing can already be found here; free indirect speech is used in novel ways, the narrative is concerned with time and memory, and, with the “re-establishment of religion” (in which the Machine is “worshipped as divine”), Forster satirises religious urges.²¹ Yet at the same time, it is also very much an Edwardian story that looks backwards toward nineteenth-century naturalism. The sense of boredom experienced by the youthful character Kuno, and the satirical preoccupation of his mother Vashti with ideas as far removed from empirical experience as possible (“[I]et your ideas be second-hand, and if possible tenth-hand, for then they will be far removed from that disturbing element – direct observation”),²² place it of an age with novels like G.K.Chesterton’s *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (1904). Fears of degeneration constitute a major thematic concern, and

¹⁹ Forster, *Collected Short Stories* 115.

²⁰ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1980), 48. Dystopian narrative strategies are discussed below in Genette’s terms on pages 31 and 60-1.

²¹ Forster, *Collected Short Stories* 136-7.

²² Forster, *Collected Short Stories* 135.

this ties in to wider *fin de siècle* anxieties about the English working class (particularly in the aftermath of the failure to recruit sufficient physically fit volunteers during the Boer War).²³ In this regard, Forster seems to draw on Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895) in which humanity has split into two races – the child-like, effeminate surface-dwelling “Eloi” and the animal, predatory “Morlocks” who live underground. But in *The Machine Stops*, by contrast, all *known* humans live underground in individual isolated cells within “the Machine”. In this society, “it was a demerit to be muscular. Each infant was examined at birth and all who promised undue strength were destroyed.”²⁴ However, the protagonist's son Kuno begins to exercise. Eventually he gains the strength to illegally visit the earth's surface, where he discovers that it, too, is populated by some sort of humanity, living in a pre-machine state. Kuno's questioning of the basis of his society is then a turning away from introspection and towards nature and man as a physical, animal being. Like Joseph Conrad's Marlow, Kuno experiences a primal urge to visit man's *Heart of Darkness*, but, unlike the jungle-explorer, Kuno finds a place not just of increased vitality but of light, beauty and human dignity. The implication of the survival of surface-dwellers is that this is a more physically healthy, robust state, “untainted” by the atomization and reliance on technology that imprisons and finally kills those underground.

At the end of the story, when the machine suffers an irrevocable breakdown, Kuno and his mother weep together over the disappearance of an erotically charged, masculine ideal of humanity:

Man, the flower of all flesh, the noblest of all creatures made visible, man who had once made god in his image, and had mirrored his strength on the constellations, beautiful naked man was dying, strangled in the garments that he had woven.²⁵

²³ Arnold White found that in Manchester, during the first ten months of hostilities (1901), among 11,000 volunteers, 8,000 were “physically unfit” for service and a further 1,800 had insufficient chest size or “muscular power” to serve. Quoted in Carl Chinn, *Poverty Amidst Prosperity: the Urban Poor in England, 1834-1914* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995), 114.

²⁴ Forster, *Collected Short Stories* 124.

²⁵ Forster, *Collected Short Stories* 145.

The real crime of the machine society is revealed to be the sin *against* flesh, the sin of turning the body into “white pap” by covering it not with the enriching garments made from “culture” and “self-denial” but with “colourless” ideas and over-reliance upon machine production. By re-affirming their commitment to the ideals of youth and robust physical strength Kuno and Vashti’s deaths are valorised. As Kuno declares, “we die, but we have recaptured life, as it was in Wessex, when Aelfrid overthrew the Danes.”²⁶ To die in the death of the Machine is to have lived, or more accurately to have helped to re-invigorate life itself. It signals a return to empirical sense experience and romanticised princely virtues of the medieval period, and away from mechanism and idealist philosophy.

Ironically, however, the mass deaths themselves remain abstract. “[T]he bodies of the dead” over which Vashti crawls toward Kuno are not described. There is no sense of futility attached to these deaths – “Humanity has learnt its lesson” and the humans in the “honeycomb” structure of the broken city are only symbolic, given historical significance by being a part of this great dramatic ending.²⁷ This links *The Machine Stops* to nineteenth-century war literature in which, Daniel Pick argues, war became “an end in itself” as it “is capable of defining precisely what it is to be human, because it involves giving up the supreme ‘self-interest’, life itself.”²⁸

Forster’s glorification of individual deaths amid flames and explosions, which ascribe to them a greater cultural death, evoke militarism. The mechanisation of the Great War increased cultural anxieties surrounding mechanical mass production that are already present here. But the mixture of homoerotic and Oedipal imagery in these final passages, as well as the valorisation of the collapse of a civilisation, belongs to an age of innocence before the mechanised slaughter of World War I.

²⁶ Forster, *Collected Short Stories* 146.

²⁷ Forster, *Collected Short Stories* 145-6.

²⁸ Daniel Pick, *War Machine: The Rationalisation of Slaughter in The Modern Age* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1993), 15.

In contrast, the works examined in this thesis from Zamyatin's *We* onwards were written in the knowledge of millions having been slain in European theatres of mechanised conflict. Although there is arguably an arbitrary element to describing them as modernistic while leaving out Forster's 1909 story from their ranks, it may be justified by the pre-War naivety of the final pages of *The Machine Stops*. The experience of living through World War I, in spite of (or perhaps *because of*) the fact that none of the authors I focus on directly participated in it, causes a decisive sea change in dystopian writing, and a new mode that is only embryonic in Forster's 1909 story emerges after the War.²⁹ It is this new, modernistic mode of writing, part of wider post-1914 cultural and ideological shifts, which this thesis focuses upon.

The role of H. G. Wells, who was emblematic of the wider growth of idealistic and utopian thinking before WWI, was key to these preliminary moves of Forster and others towards writing dystopian fiction. All four of the authors I look at considered themselves in some way post-Wellsian, and his influence is clear even if often negative.

However, this does not mean that dystopia as a literary genre is the binary opposite of utopia. Since dystopia emerged on one level as a reaction to utopian fictions and ideas, it is not possible to fully understand dystopia without reference to the utopian tradition. Yet to think of dystopia, and specifically dystopian fiction, as *only* a reaction to (or against) utopia would be a narrow and restrictive understanding. There are both concrete historical events and intellectual traditions that have shaped dystopia which mark it out as a unique phenomenon. But within utopian studies, the relation of dystopia to utopian thought and fictions has at times overshadowed these discrete, unique aspects. The first task of the remainder of this chapter is, then, to assess how scholars have dealt with dystopia both as a concept and as a

²⁹ Yevgeny Zamyatin's contribution to the Tsarist Russian war effort was to help design and supervise the building of ships for Russia in Britain. Aldous Huxley was at Balliol College, Oxford when war broke out, but he was exempted from war work as he was partially sighted. Both John Wyndham (*née* John Wyndham Parkes Lucas Beynon Harris) and George Orwell (Eric Blair) were born in 1903 and were therefore too young to participate.

literary mode through a critical survey of the field of utopian studies. This will demonstrate and critique the extent to which conceptions of dystopia have relied upon binary oppositions with utopian thought. The second task is to theorise how a cultural history of what I term modernistic dystopian fiction both fits in with – and at times challenges – existing knowledge. This approach will serve as a new means by which to explore the specific terrain of modernistic dystopian fiction.

Problematising Dystopia

The term dystopia is cited as first appearing in 1747, when it was coined “by Henry Lewis Younger in his Utopia or Apollo’s Golden Days (Dublin: Ptd. By George Faulkner) spelled as “dustopia” used as a clear negative contrast to utopia.”³⁰ Conceptualising dystopia as “a clear negative contrast” may appear intuitively to be workable, but in reality it only shifts the problem of definition back onto an understanding of utopia, which is also a frequently disputed term.

Utopian ideas pre-date the term “Utopia” itself, coined by Sir Thomas More’s 1516 text of that name. The word is formed from the Greek words *ouk* (not) and *topos* (place), with “the suffix *ia*, indicating a place.”³¹ But utopia (no-place) is also a homophonic play on *eu*+*topos*, meaning “good place”. More’s work is part (imaginary) travel literature and part political philosophy in the form of a dialogue.

Sargent, a political scientist, first produced his taxonomy of utopian forms in his seminal essay “The Three Faces of Utopianism” (1967). He has periodically updated this conception, but maintains that utopianism is “social dreaming” at base. Sargent contends that,

³⁰ Lyman Tower Sargent, citing Deirdre Ni Chuanacháin, “Re: dystopia.” Email to the author, 15 July 2009. Sargent alludes to this early use in his Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010), 4.

³¹ Fátima Vieira, “The Concept of Utopia,” The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature, ed. Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010), 4.

utopianism has been expressed in three different forms, each with many variants – utopian literature, which includes two fundamental traditions – which I call body utopias or utopias of sensual gratification and city utopias or utopias of human contrivance; communitarianism; and utopian social theory. It is essential that we keep them distinct but not deny the existence of any of the three.³²

In practice, it may be more difficult to keep these separate than Sargent allows. Many literary utopias are expressly written as social theory. For example, although their literary status is significant, the later utopias of Wells tend to subsume literary and aesthetic concerns beneath political discussion, while the works of Bellamy and Morris led directly to the creation of political movements. Dystopian fiction was caught up in this conflict of the aesthetic and the political, expressing a strong narrative thrust that contrasts sharply to the descriptive qualities of many literary utopias.

Sargent's focus upon the ideational content of utopias is perhaps a means for him as a political scientist to emphasize the political analysis of utopias as his primary concern. However, this focus upon ideational content as a fixed "thing" tends to diminish the importance of the form in which literary utopias are presented. It is significant in this respect that More's *Utopia* is in dialogic form, which recalls the Socratic model as performed in Plato's proto-utopian *The Republic*. Hans-Georg Gadamer argues that "the dialogical aspect of Plato's writing is essentially tied up with his conception of truth, rationality and knowledge."³³ In other words, the dialogic form is inseparable from the models of rationality and knowledge which Plato presents. As Patricia Waugh puts it,

from Plato's *Republic* to More's *Utopia* and Morris's *News From Nowhere*, the acclaimed literary utopianists have built into their fictions an interrogation of epistemology which seeks to discover appropriate models of knowledge as vehicles for the construction of the good society.³⁴

³² Sargent, "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited," 4.

³³ Kristin Gjesdal, *Gadamer and the Legacy of German Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), 32.

³⁴ Patricia Waugh, "Utopias and Utopianism: Political Science, Aesthetic Indeterminacy and the Legacy of Thomas More," *Utopias*, eds. Françoise Le Saux and Neil Thomas, Durham Modern Languages Series (Durham: U of Durham, 2000), 6.

Literary utopias are not simply an exposition or blueprint for a planned society – they represent a processual exploration, a “*thinking through*” of ideas. Literary utopias are not just an organization of social life, but a self-reflexive *organizing*. This aspect of process, of “thinking about” and “telling about” within a formal structure is a significant part of what makes such texts *literary*. This is worth emphasising in the context of a discussion about the possibility of theorising dystopia because a defining characteristic of “dystopia” in any medium is that it is a narrative form. “Dys-topia” is not just a “bad place”, but one in which bad things happen in the life of a central character. However, dialogue frequently plays an active role too – the confrontation between Mustapha Mond and John Savage in *Brave New World* or O’Brien and Winston Smith in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are key elements in the development of both novels. There is a complex formal inter-relationship between dystopian and utopian literature.

Krishan Kumar, who uses the term “anti-utopia” in place of dystopia to signal what he sees as its purely negative, antithetical role, does stress that the “interdependent” relationship between utopia and “anti-utopia” is “not symmetrical or equal. The anti-utopia is formed by utopia, and feeds parasitically on it.”³⁵ It is interesting, given that Kumar approaches Utopian Studies as a sociologist, that unlike fellow social scientist Lyman Tower Sargent he does not separate the “faces” of utopia for analytic purposes. Quite the reverse: the same analysis is brought to bear on utopian theory, communitarianism/intentional communities and literature. Likewise, Kumar argues that dystopian literature is part of the broader “anti-utopian” tradition of thought which opposes the very *idea* of utopia – usually by interpreting ‘utopian thought’ to mean nothing more than political blueprints for radically changed societies.³⁶ Thus “Anti-utopia”, Kumar continues, “draws its material

³⁵ Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 100.

³⁶ Peter Firchow criticises Kumar on precisely the grounds that as a sociologist his understanding of the ‘literariness’ of literary utopias and dystopias is weak. Yet Firchow’s own analysis is highly polemical and in insisting on the absolute and exclusive importance of “literary” qualities of utopian and dystopian fiction he falls victim to the reverse problem of denigrating the importance of political and social ideas in such fiction. Dystopias like Orwell’s are often politically engaged at a sophisticated level. Firchow’s refusal to discuss

from utopia and reassembles it in a manner that denies the affirmation of utopia. It is the mirror-image of utopia – but a distorted image, seen in a cracked mirror.”³⁷ This is to conflate two discrete phenomena. Just because dystopian fiction and anti-utopian thought are both *not* utopian, it does not follow that they are the same, or that the former must express the sentiments of the latter. Furthermore, dystopian literature has a different relationship to existing reality than utopian theory or literature. Utopian writing may be wholly unrealistic – if Karl Popper and other anti-utopians are to be believed it must necessarily be so (although Popper himself admits that this in and of itself is no reason to criticise it).³⁸ But a dystopia must be “feasible” in the sense of being “based on the extrapolation of some existing trend,” in Claeys’s words. As Chris Ferns states,

Unlike the traditional utopia, dystopian fiction posits a society which – however outlandish – is clearly extrapolated from that which exists. Where utopian fiction stresses the *difference* of the society it depicts, and rarely indicates *how* such an alternative might be created, the dystopian writer presents the nightmare future as a possible destination of present society.³⁹

Dystopian fiction can express utopian sentiments in a variety of ways. But in offering a critique of present-day conditions othered into a fictional future setting it necessarily focuses upon much that is *not* utopian too. The recognisable elements of ‘thirties or ‘forties London in *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* respectively offer proof of Ferns’s point. More generally, such elements also indicate that the modern state is an important locus of critique in dystopian literature.

One important achievement of Kumar’s definition, however, is that it recognises that what Sargent terms the other two “faces” of utopianism – namely communitarianism and utopian social theory – are highly relevant to

political content and motivation betrays a lack of self-reflection upon his own New Criticism approach to literary analysis. Peter Edgerly Firchow, *Modern Utopian Fictions from H. G. Wells to Iris Murdoch* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic UP of America, 2007), 15-16.

³⁷ Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* 100.

³⁸ See Karl Popper, *The Open Society*, vol. 1, chapter 9, “Aestheticism, Perfectionism, Utopianism”, here 161.

³⁹ Claeys, “The Origins of Dystopia,” 109; Chris Ferns, *Narrating Utopia: Ideology, Gender, Form in Utopian Literature*, ed. David Seed (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1999), 107.

the understanding of utopian and dystopian fiction, having both directly and indirectly influenced it. Some dystopian fiction has been written directly against attempts to implement social dreams. For example, Katherine Burdekine's *Swastika Night* responds directly to the pseudo-mythologies and misogyny of Nazism. Other dystopian fiction, meanwhile, has been a source of utopian theory, such as Adorno's essay "Huxley and Utopia", which examines Huxley's *Brave New World*.⁴⁰ Moreover, attempts to define and conceptualise dystopia have mainly come from scholars with an interest in utopian ideas as well as dystopian fiction.

Utopian theory I: Bloch and Adorno

Utopia as a form of theoretical discourse is largely a twentieth-century development. The seminal text of this tradition is Ernst Bloch's *Geist der Utopie* (1918, republished 1923), translated as *The Spirit of Utopia*, which, together with his vast *Das Princip Hoffnung* (1959) has become an increasingly important source for leftwing utopian studies scholarship today.⁴¹ Bloch's methodology has proved attractive to utopian theorists because he puts the longing for utopia at the heart of human experience. Distinguishing between "concrete" (meaning "anticipatory") and "abstract" (or "compensatory") elements, for Bloch "the task is to reveal and recover the anticipatory essence from the dross of contingent and compensatory elements in which utopia is dressed up in particular historical circumstances."⁴² In the "hermeneutic sense" that he treats utopia, it becomes "a way of thinking and of reading."⁴³ In his own day Bloch influenced both Adorno and Walter Benjamin.

At the heart of Bloch's theory is the "utopian function," an ever-present psychological category that is also a social force. According to Moylan, Bloch

⁴⁰ See chapter 3 below, especially 120-3 and 135-6.

⁴¹ Freedman notes that "Bloch's title is in fact untranslatable into idiomatic English" and suggests "The Hope Principle" as the best possible rendering. Carl Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2000), 62.

⁴² Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (Hemel Hempstead: Philip Allan, 1990), 88.

⁴³ Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* 62, 63.

Understands the utopian function as a dynamic social force that both motivates ideologies and carries human aspirations beyond their encapsulation within ideologies, and he understands that such aspirations can be enlisted long after their particular historical moment in the further movement of human emancipation.⁴⁴

The utopian function can be perceived throughout history in both “concrete” and “abstract” forms – from the God of Moses who led the Tribes of Israel to the Promised Land, to the Communist Manifesto. As Ruth Levitas has pointed out, this implies “both that it is part of human nature and that therefore it is only the form in which it is expressed which will be historically variable... There is no reason to suppose that this is the case.”⁴⁵

The utopian function is not always recognised. Bloch laments the “blindness of all traditional philosophy to the future and its unique dimensions,” and, in common with existential philosophers, he denounces “philosophies and ideologies, like Platonic anamnesis, [that are] stubbornly fixated on the past, on childhood and origins.”⁴⁶ *Geist der Utopie* was written before any of the modernistic dystopias discussed in this thesis. However, Bloch here seems to anticipate some of the objections that Marxist theorists including Suvin and Adorno would later make to such dystopias, in particular *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Brave New World*. These dystopias project forwards to look backwards, turning today’s future into the day after tomorrow’s past.⁴⁷ In an important sense then, they are indeed “fixated... on childhood and origins.” A more sympathetic view, however, might point to the value of the consciousness-raising powers of dystopias as warnings. Furthermore, utopian longing is frequently the motivational drive behind dystopian protagonists’ continued rebellion against their conditions. Bloch himself

⁴⁴ Tom Moylan, “Bloch Against Bloch: The Theological Reception of *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* and The Liberation of the Utopian Function,” *Not Yet: Reconsidering Ernst Bloch*, eds. Jamie Owen Daniel and Tom Moylan (London: Verso, 1997), 113.

⁴⁵ Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* 183.

⁴⁶ Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: the Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005), 6-7.

⁴⁷ See Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 40 & 62; and see below, 31.

therefore later recognised the value of what he termed “negative utopias.”⁴⁸ But in contrast to non-Marxist dystopian fiction, Bloch aims to show how utopian longing connects to the Marxist metahistorical narrative.

Bloch’s position is further complicated by his desire to toe the Communist Party line during the Stalinist era. Bloch saw the Soviet Union as a concrete example of a utopia, which for many years he stubbornly refused to criticise even when his own methodology *should* perhaps have led him to do so.⁴⁹ Adorno, in a friendly and jovial conversation with Bloch about utopianism recorded for radio broadcast in the 1960s, tactfully did not touch on the subject of the Soviet Union. The most interesting point raised in this discussion was perhaps Bloch’s assertion that from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries onward, the *topos* of utopia moved out of space and into time. This denied the existence of utopia in the present but at the same time made utopia more of a possibility as a place that “could be there if we could only do something for it.”⁵⁰ The modern utopian narrative is thereby linked with the Enlightenment belief in Progress. Such an idea was key not only to the development of Marx’s philosophy of history, but also to optimistic Victorian beliefs in scientific and technological advance leading to a future characterised by increasing standards of living, as well as a worldview which perceived colonialism as a ‘moral’ mission. Yet the very “evident possibility of fulfillment” of these beliefs co-existed with the “just as evident” contradictory belief in the “impossibility of fulfillment”, and so people were compelled “to identify themselves with this impossibility and to make this impossibility into their own affair. In other words, to use Freud, they ‘identify themselves with the aggressor’ and say that *this should* not be”, even while knowing that “it is precisely *this* that *should be*.” In this situation, “negative utopia[s]” express a *longing* in the direction of utopia, in effect affirming precisely that which they deny.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Ernst Bloch, “Something’s Missing: A Discussion Between Ernst Bloch and Theodor W. Adorno on the Contradictions of Utopian Longing,” trans. Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenburg, *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays* (Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 1988), 5.

⁴⁹ See Moylan, “Bloch Against Bloch,” 108-112.

⁵⁰ Bloch, “Something’s Missing,” 3.

⁵¹ Bloch, “Something’s Missing,” 4-5 *emphasis in original*.

Although Bloch and Adorno were in almost complete agreement on this occasion, elsewhere Adorno more rigorously refused “to submit himself to the discipline of one of the parties claiming to speak for the oppressed,” believing this would compromise him as an intellectual:

His refusal to compromise grew out of a characteristically Western Marxist insistence on the *utopian potential of modern society*, which prevented him from ever confusing any actually existing socialist regime with the genuine realization of the socialist dream.⁵²

As a Marxist, Adorno maintained a radical hope for the future, but as a critical theorist he was ruthless in his criticism of the present. His theoretical stance was grounded in his concept of the “negative dialectic”, by which the Marxist-Hegelian means of historical movement and progress was forever construed and then denied. As Fredric Jameson explains, “a negative dialectic has no choice but to affirm the notion and value of an ultimate synthesis, while negating its possibility and reality in every concrete case that comes before it.”⁵³

Utopia, for Adorno, exists in a most delicate and precious state. To touch utopia is to break it, but to deny it would be an act of the worst cynicism. There is *no fixed content* of utopia, not even freedom. More accurately, perhaps, we cannot know what ‘freedom’ would mean in a radically transformed utopian society. To conceptualise (say) the meaning of freedom in utopia from our present, compromised vantage point, is a move toward reification. For Adorno, that which is reified cannot be a truly transformed society; it still exists within the conceptual realm of the present capitalist totality and is therefore tarnished by it. Adorno’s complex position is not without conceptual problems and issues of consistency. These issues will be more fully explored in chapter three in relation to his essay on *Brave New World*, which he criticised on the grounds that it failed to escape the ideological underpinnings of the capitalist totality that it sought to attack.

⁵² Martin Jay, *Adorno* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1984), 16 *emphasis added*.

⁵³ Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971), 56.

Here, it is sufficient to state that to ask what utopia *is*, for Adorno, is in fact the wrong question. Starting from his conception of the negative dialectic, he argued that utopia can only be approached in the negative: we only know true utopia through what it is not, through false utopia. "Utopia is essentially in the determined negation... of that which merely is, and concretizing itself as something false, it always points at the same time to what should be."⁵⁴ From this perspective, literary utopias, as critical documents, are predestined to failure (in Adorno's terms), but it is precisely the nature of this failure that makes them so important.

Dystopian literature represents a problematic area for Marxist utopian theorists such as Adorno. Dystopia uses a proleptic narrative strategy, a "flashforward" by which the contemporary world is 'othered' into a future that is both a continuation of current trends and entails considerably more oppressive power relations than the present totality.⁵⁵ Such futures inherently question the Marxian philosophy of history by envisioning a more oppressive world to come. At the same time they look not further forward towards a radically utopian future, but, via the narrative techniques that structuralist theorist Gérard Genette called "analepses" and "paralipses", backwards towards the contemporary reader's own near-future-as-past. Genette termed analepses "any evocation after the fact of an event that took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at any given moment." Meanwhile, "Paralipses" refer to the gaps formed "by the omission of one of the constituent elements of a situation in a period that the narrative does generally cover... Here the narrative does not skip over a moment of time, as in an ellipsis, but it *sidesteps* a given element."⁵⁶ References to the past, such as the fragmented history lesson given to students by Mustapha Mond in chapter three of *Brave New World*, employ precisely these techniques to construct a partial, satirical and oblique narrative that internally (to the students) functions as history, but externally (to the reader) functions as prophecy or warning.

⁵⁴ Adorno, quoted in Bloch, "Something's Missing," 12.

⁵⁵ David Herman, *Basic Elements of Narrative* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 192.

⁵⁶ Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 40, 51-2.

Utopian Theory II: Suvin and Williams

For others on the Left, including Suvin and Williams, theorising the relationship of utopia, dystopia and science fiction has been crucial to forming a politically acceptable basis from which to explore these genres critically. Both of these theorists approach the question of definition formally, but while Williams's approach is centred on the transformative aspect of utopian/dystopian texts as that which differentiates them from science fiction, Suvin sees far less of a clear line between the modes of SF and utopia/dystopia. Indeed, over the years he has come to see 'utopia' as an umbrella term under which dystopia and much science fiction may be subsumed and in which perfection need not feature, arguing in his "Theses on Dystopia 2001" that "utopian fiction is, today and retrospectively, both an independent aunt and a dependent daughter of sf." He continues,

Utopia will be defined as the construction of a particular community where socio-political institutions, norms, and relationships between people are organized according to a *radically different principle* than in the author's community; this construction is based on estrangement arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis; it is created by social classes interested in otherness and change.

Furthermore, he insists that we must

Abandon the meaning and horizon of utopianism as automatically entailing radically better relationships. More perfect relationships have to be proved (or disproved) for each particular case or type of texts. Confusing *radical otherness* and *radically greater perfection* leads to muddle: incommunicability or wilful obscurantism.⁵⁷

Thus utopia has for Suvin not only abandoned the concern with space in favour of a vaguer "alternative historical hypothesis"; it has also abandoned the 'eu' or 'good' of utopia in favour of merely "different".⁵⁸ Like dystopia,

⁵⁷ Suvin, "Theses on Dystopia 2001," 188 *emphasis in original*.

⁵⁸ This represents a change of position from his 1970s definition of utopia: "The verbal construction of a particular quasi-human community where socio-political institutions, norms and individual relationships are organized to a more perfect principle than in the author's community, this construction being based on estrangement arising out of an alternative

'eutopia' is now just a subtype of "utopia". The difference between them is simply that eutopia is a community organized according to a "radically more perfect" principle, while dystopia is organized according to a "radically less perfect" principle. Roger Luckhurst has criticised Suvin's formalist approach to SF as "a profoundly prescriptive and judgemental formulation", which is "not historical but political – cognitive estrangement arises from Suvin's particular take on Marxism."⁵⁹ The same charge could be levelled at Suvin's definition of the utopian modes: because it relies upon, and is created by, "social classes interested in otherness and change", utopia becomes a more politically orientated and partisan term. Furthermore, whilst the term "social class" implies group input, historically most literary utopias have been written by single individuals.⁶⁰ The individual author must therefore become representative of a class, one moreover which is interested in "otherness and change." It is noteworthy too that while it is "social classes" that are supposedly interested in change, they operate not upon society but upon "communities". This idea presupposes a high level of class-consciousness and class unity.

The political thrust of Suvin's argument is made clear in his conception of dystopia, which he splits into the ideal types of "simple dystopia" and "anti-utopia":

Anti-Utopia finally turns out to be a dystopia, but one explicitly designed to refute a currently proposed eutopia. It is a pretended eutopia – a community whose hegemonic principles pretend to its being more perfectly organized than any thinkable alternative, while our representative 'camera eye' and value-monger finds out it is significantly *less* perfect than an alternative, a polemic nightmare.

historical hypothesis." *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 6 (1973) 132; quoted in Lyman Tower Sargent, British and American Utopian Literature 1516-1975: An Annotated Bibliography (Boston, MA: G.K. Hall, 1979), xvi. This definition is closest to what Suvin calls "*eutopia*" in his "Theses on Dystopia 2001".

⁵⁹ Roger Luckhurst, Science Fiction (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), 7-8.

⁶⁰ Furthermore, if the "author's own community" is taken as the standard by which to judge whether her/his fictional "community" is utopian or dystopian, then how are critics to assess dystopian texts where the notion of "community" is absent or subverted? In Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four, the undermining of community values isolates and atomizes characters while simultaneously destabilising individual identities. More satirically, in Huxley's Brave New World the state motto "Community, Identity, Stability" points with irony to the disappearance of precisely these values on the personal level.

'Simple' *Dystopia* (so-called to avoid inventing yet another prefix to *topia*) is a straightforward dystopia, that is, one which is not also an anti-utopia.⁶¹

Suvin seems almost to be suggesting here that the difference between anti-utopia and dystopia can be reduced to the formal distinction between subjective and objective standpoints respectively. In other words, it is the position of the narrator that is the key. The narrow subjectivity of an anti-utopia is merely satirical; it is highly unlikely if not structurally impossible for such a narrative to be 'progressive' or 'revolutionary' rather than reactionary. The "polemic nightmare" is a horror world, but precisely as an individual's *subjective* nightmare it cannot correspond to objective social reality. The problems with Suvin's definition all come sharply into focus with his polemical suggestion that "the intertext of anti-utopia has historically been anti-socialism, as socialism was the strongest 'currently proposed' eutopia ca. 1915-1975". He follows this, for good measure, with the proposition that "all the poorer followers of Zamyatin" – excluding though Zamyatin himself – "from Ayn Rand and George Orwell on" are "examples of proximity to anti-utopia" as ideal type.⁶²

Like Suvin, Raymond Williams had an ambivalent attitude to Orwell's work. As Andrew Milner has shown, Williams's attitude towards Orwell and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* evolved over his career.⁶³ His most systematic evaluation of utopia and dystopia was contained in an essay entitled "Utopia and Science Fiction", which like Suvin's work looked at utopia within the contextual frame of SF. Beginning with an idea that desire is key to understanding utopia, but that such desire must be on some level realisable, Williams concentrated on the transformative aspects of texts. In doing so he put forward four categories of transformed fictional societies as ideal types,

⁶¹ Suvin, "Theses on Dystopia 2001," 189.

⁶² Suvin, "Theses on Dystopia 2001," 189.

⁶³ Milner identifies three phases in Williams's attitudes towards SF in general, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in particular. Williams moved from calling it "putroplan" in a 1956 essay to "what appears to be a more evenhanded account" in *George Orwell* (1971), which criticised it for a perceived "failure of experience" in his "pessimism about human capacity". Finally, in the 1984 afterword to *George Orwell* (2nd ed.) he "combined a developed understanding of the novel's workings as a text with an expanded sense of its sociopolitical and intertextual contexts." Andrew Milner, "Utopia and Science Fiction in Raymond Williams," *Science Fiction Studies* 30 (2003), 202, 206.

in a discussion in which he sought to differentiate between SF as a whole and utopia/dystopia as a related, but not identical, mode. These categories each had correlative negative types, “commonly expressed as ‘dystopia’”, which led to the following schema:

Positive transformation	Negative transformation
1. <i>The Paradise</i> – [which simply exists elsewhere]	1. <i>The Hell</i> – a more wretched kind of life... existing elsewhere;
2. <i>The externally altered world</i> – [in which a new kind of life is] made possible by an unlooked-for natural event.	2. <i>The externally altered world</i> , in which a new but less happy kind of life has been brought about by an unlooked-for uncontrolled natural event.
3. <i>The willed transformation</i>	3. <i>The willed transformation</i> , in which a new but less happy kind of life has been brought about by social degeneration, by the emergence or re-emergence of harmful kinds of social order, or by the unforeseen yet disastrous consequences of an effort at social improvement;
4. <i>The technological transformation</i>	4. <i>The technological transformation</i> , in which the conditions of life have been worsened by technical development. ⁶⁴

Using this schema, Williams set about trying to uncover a definition of utopia and dystopia by interrogating how these transformations occur. Thus he finds number (1) in both instances reveals very few utopian or dystopian traits, as it is “commonly beyond the conditions of any imaginable ordinary human and worldly life.” Going further than Claeys’s and Ferns’s positions, Williams here posits that both dystopia *and* utopia must be “feasible”, or adhere to a certain type of realism: in contrast to Sargent’s position, Eden and Cockaigne are for Williams only “latently utopian”. From a cultural materialist position, Williams makes clear that utopia and dystopia are not about the dealings of deities in human affairs, but rather about human agency and human possibilities. Hence (3) “*The Willed Transformation* is the characteristic utopian or dystopian mode, in the strict sense”, while the

⁶⁴ Raymond Williams, “Utopia and Science Fiction,” *Science Fiction: A Critical Guide*, ed. Patrick Parrinder (London: Longman, 1979), 52.

externally altered world (2) “typically... either falls short of or goes beyond the utopian or dystopian mode... the common emphasis is on human limitation or indeed human powerlessness: the event saves or destroys us, and we are its objects.” This mode (2) can be SF though, as it is often construed, related or foretold in the “context of increased scientific understanding of natural events.”⁶⁵

Williams’s study of utopia – and particularly dystopia – is grounded in material historical circumstance. While he does not directly apply his notion of ‘structures of feeling’ in this essay, his discussion of *Brave New World*, which he describes as emerging from the “black amalgam” of the 1930s and as a response to both Wells’s and Morris’s utopian texts, indicates his awareness of the historical specificity of the genre.⁶⁶ Elsewhere, he did comment that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was interesting precisely (and only) in that it belonged to a “structure of feeling.”⁶⁷

Finally, the technological transformation (4) “only becomes utopian or dystopian, in the strict sense, when it is used as an image of *consequence* to function, socially, as conscious desire or conscious warning.”⁶⁸ Thus while Williams begins with a focus on transformations that concentrates on narrative structure, this is then turned back upon itself as a concern, like Suvin’s, with the ‘otherness’ or defamiliarized aspect of the text. Political judgements are again brought to bear over and above properly aesthetic concerns. Furthermore, and despite Williams’s historical awareness, narrative is not explored here as an unveiling process so much as the way in which description of an alternative (future) world is stretched over a short period of time. In other words, the focus is on the background as foreground, upon the social and political relations of the fictional world rather than the interaction of the central characters with that world. This therefore overlooks

⁶⁵ Williams, “Utopia and Science Fiction,” 54.

⁶⁶ Williams, “Utopia and Science Fiction,” 60. This is explored in greater detail in chapter 3 below, 131-4.

⁶⁷ Raymond Williams, “Science Fiction,” *Science Fiction Studies* 15 (1988).

⁶⁸ Williams, “Utopia and Science Fiction,” 55.

the importance of the narrative structure and techniques employed by the authors to achieve these effects of (amongst other things) 'otherness'.

Utopian theory III: Jameson, Moylan and Wegner

One implication of Suvin's Marxist formalism and Williams's cultural materialism, then, is that utopias are more significant in their descriptions of social, economic and political mechanisms than in the transformed human relations which provide building blocks for the narrative element of literary utopias. Jameson spells this position out when he argues that "the Utopian text does not tell a story at all; it describes a mechanism or even a kind of machine, it furnishes a blueprint rather than lingering human relations that might be found in a Utopian condition."⁶⁹ Notwithstanding his Marxist background, this conception is superficially similar to that of anti-utopians like Karl Popper and Isaiah Berlin. However, unlike such liberal thinkers, Jameson sees utopian planning in a positive light, arguing that the utopian author is like the inventor in his garden tool shed: an eccentric, slightly obsessive individual, to whom "the social or historical moment" has offered itself,

To be read in terms of causes, or problems and solutions, questions and answers. It must have reached a level of shaped complexity that seems to foreground some fundamental ill, and that tempts the social theorist into producing an overview organized around a specific theme.⁷⁰

The "social theorist" and author of utopian fiction are here collapsed into one category, linked by their utopian desire. The major split in utopian thought occurs then not between literary and theoretical, but rather between an overt tradition "intent on the realization of the Utopian program" and "an obscure yet omnipresent Utopian impulse finding its way to the surface in a variety of

⁶⁹ Fredric Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), 56. More recently, Jameson qualified this image, characterizing the "blueprints" which Utopias seem to offer as "maps and plans to be read negatively, as what is to be accomplished after the demolitions and the removals, and in the absence of all those lesser evils the liberals believed to be inherent in human nature." *Archaeologies of the Future* 12.

⁷⁰ Jameson, *Archaeologies of the future* 13-14.

covert expressions and practices.”⁷¹ The task of the literary utopia, then, is to tap into the ever existent “Utopian impulse”. For a literary utopia to strike a chord, for it to reach out and meet “collective recognition”, it must shape itself around and adequately represent existing “Utopian raw material”, as it were, drawn from the world at large.⁷²

Jameson’s emphasis is on a holistic view of utopia that recognizes what he earlier referred to in *Seeds of Time* as an open-ended (and finally productive) contradiction within its definition. Jameson contrasts the struggling contradiction of the Marxist dialectic (which eventual results in synthesis) with the closed either/or nature of a (neo-)Kantian antinomy. The latter, Jameson notes, presents mutually exclusive alternatives between the revolutionary praxis of utopian planning and the (in Blochian terms) “compensatory” nature of capitalist utopian longing.⁷³

Jameson’s idea is just as apt to describe the dependence upon historical specificity that is key to understanding dystopian texts too. Indeed, the implications for the conceptualisation of dystopia are perhaps more important and far-reaching than his more orthodox understanding of utopia. In a brief discussion in *Seeds of Time* (1994), cautioning against the simple deployment of utopia and dystopia as binary opposites, he compares the relation of the two terms to Gilles Deleuze’s argument that sadism and masochism are “not opposites and in reality have nothing to do with each other.” The masochist seeks something fundamentally different to that which is offered by the sadist, and likewise

⁷¹ Jameson, *Archaeologies of the future* 3.

⁷² Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future* 13.

⁷³ Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* 1-2. A similar but subtly (and importantly) different point is put forward in Slavov Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 2006), 7 and 9-11 *passim*: Like Jameson, he contrasts Kant’s unproductive, oppositional antinomy against Hegel’s finally productive, struggling/conflicting dialectic. However, he also collapses Hegel’s dialectic in upon itself, so that thesis and antithesis can be seen as a single struggling (Lacanian) split subject (\$). This differentiation between the Kantian antinomy and the Hegelian dialectic subsequently underpins much of his ontological discussion of Kant and Hegel (20-36). Elsewhere Žižek claims that both his *and* Jameson’s interpretation of the Kantian antinomy as irreducible is drawn from Kojin Karitani’s *Transcritique. On Kant and Marx* (Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 2003). See Slavov Žižek, “The Parallax View,” *New Left Review* 25 (2004), 121.

The pleasures of the nightmare – evil monks, gulags, police states – have little to do with the butterfly temperament of great Utopians like Fourier, who are probably not intent on pleasures at all but rather on some other form of gratification.⁷⁴

However, the relation between utopia and dystopia is more complicated than this constellation of pleasures and desires suggests because, Jameson proposes, they are different at the formal, narrative and structural levels:

Dystopia is generally a narrative, which happens to a specific subject or character, whereas the Utopian text is mostly nonnarrative and, I would like to say, somehow without a subject-position, although to be sure a tourist-observer flickers through its pages and more than a few anecdotes are disengaged.⁷⁵

Andrew Milner takes issue with this argument, as Jameson presented it in the *New Left Review* in 2004,⁷⁶ by pointing to narrative strategies such as “sexual romance... the distant view of utopia from its extremities... the external threat to utopia, and so on,” which can be found in a variety of texts from Morris and Bellamy, through to Marge Piercy, Iain M. Banks, Ursula Le Guin and Kim Stanley Robinson. Milner therefore argues that one can distinguish between the “non-fictional utopias of political philosophy proper” and those fictional utopias, in the form of novels and films, which “must work as art and entertainment”.⁷⁷ While this is an important criticism, it is worth noting that such utopian fictions frequently work as political philosophy too. Indeed, techniques of the novel form such as the multiplicity of voices it permits could make it preferable to a political-philosophical text as a means of presenting utopian ideas. Additionally, while Jameson was less cautious in his 2004 article, in *Seeds of Time* and *Archaeologies of the Future* he added qualifiers to his observations on utopian nonnarrative form.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* 55; see also Moylan's summary of Jameson's position in *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* 140-1.

⁷⁵ Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* 55-6.

⁷⁶ Fredric Jameson, "The Politics of Utopia," *New Left Review* 25 (2004), 35-54.

⁷⁷ Andrew Milner, "Framing Catastrophe: The Problem of Ending in Dystopian Fiction," Monash University Centre for Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies Seminar, Monash University, Australia, 21 September 2005. <<http://arts.monash.edu.au/cclcs/research/papers/frames-catastrophe.pdf>>, 20 January 2009.

⁷⁸ Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* 55-60 *passim*; Jameson, *Archaeologies of the future* 12; and see above, n. 69.

For this reason, as well as the issue of feasibility as outlined above by Claeys, a text like Wells's *The Time Machine* should not be designated a dystopia: despite the Traveller's dangerous escapades, it is essentially a tour of a radically different society by a tourist-observer. While Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) does not pass Claeys's test, it comes much closer to Jameson's criteria. Despite the traditional utopian narrative framing of the journey to, and return from, a far away place (in time or space), the narrative upon the island centres not upon systematic accounting of the various different aspects of life there, but on the gradual violent disintegration of Moreau's community of inhuman beings. However, a strict application of Jameson's schema would discount this novel too, as the protagonist's moral abhorrence of the island community (as Dr. Moreau is keen to point out to him) is a result of his socialisation in Victorian London. Edward Prendick is not *of* Moreau's island, he is a visitor who does not belong there – his disillusion is not the awakening moral rebellion of a native (one of Dr. Moreau's animal-men) but a result of his conformism to the values of contemporary English society.

Tom Moylan's work in utopianism can be seen as an attempt to synthesize Suvin's formalism with the emphasis upon narrative strategies of Jameson. In doing so, he is conscious of both Brecht's influence upon the former and Bloch's and Adorno's influence upon the latter. The concern with narrative strategies also places him close to Raffaella Baccolini, with whom Moylan has co-edited books on utopian and dystopian themes.⁷⁹

Placing Suvin's polemicism within its historical and institutional context, Moylan contends that in the early 1970s, scholarly criticism of SF was limited, with "New Criticism and canonical literary studies" performing "an elitist elevation of *some* SF to the status of 'serious literature', usually interpreted with criteria appropriate for the realist or modernist novel", while "unreflexive populist reading[s]" saw "*all* SF as paraliterature, but... did not

⁷⁹ Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini, eds., *Utopia Method Vision: the Use Value of Social Dreaming* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007); Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan, eds., *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

make the distinctions required to comprehend SF's social production and consumption." Moylan therefore accepted and even applauded the political aspect of Suvin's intervention because his "[a]nalysis of SF in its own terms, his identification of 'the interaction of estrangement and cognition' and 'an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment', shifted SF scholarship beyond" contemporaneous limited approaches.⁸⁰

Yet Moylan acknowledges that it was only with Jameson's intervention in the 1990s, as detailed above, that the concept of dystopia was addressed in specific terms. Drawing upon Jameson's turn to the narrative strategies of dystopia as defining features of the literary genre, in *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* Tom Moylan affirmed the tendency of dystopia to start *in medias res*, without the journey that has frequently characterised literary utopias, and with a protagonist consequently not a visitor to the imagined *topos* but rather a citizen of that very polis. However, he argued that because of this, "cognitive estrangement is at first forestalled by the immediacy, the normality, of the location."⁸¹ For the novels discussed in this thesis, this position is not tenable: Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, for instance, famously opens "[i]t was a bright cold day in April and the clocks were just striking *thirteen*."⁸² As the discussion of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in chapter four will show, this "thirteen" serves the function of estranging the reader, and alerting her/him to the idea that something is both seriously different and amiss in the fictional realm into which she/he is embarking. Likewise, John Wyndham's *The Chrysalids* begins "[w]hen I was quite small I would sometimes dream of a city – which was strange because it began before I even knew what a city was."⁸³ Estrangement is similarly immediate in Huxley's *Brave New World*, which starts with an ironic and satirical fragment: "[a] squat grey building of *only thirty-four stories*."⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Tom Moylan, "Look Into the Dark: On Dystopia and the Novum," *Learning From Other Worlds: Estrangement, Cognition and the Politics of Science Fiction and Utopia*, ed. Patrick Parrinder (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2000), 52.

⁸¹ Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*, 148.

⁸² George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (London: Penguin, 1989), 3 *emphasis added*.

⁸³ John Wyndham, *The Chrysalids* (London: Penguin, 1958), 5.

⁸⁴ Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited* (New York: Harper-Perennial, 2005), 15 *emphasis added*.

While estrangement of some kind is present from the opening of many literary dystopias, “*cognitive* estrangement” seems unnecessary and cumbersome as a critical tool as well as being objectionable as an instrument of political polemic in critical reading. ‘Estranged’ though dystopian fiction certainly is through the proleptic strategy that it employs, the positivist and empiricist conceptions of science upon which “cognitive estrangement” lie are not necessarily present in dystopian fiction. Nor is the presence or absence of such qualities useful grounds for making value judgements about literary works. Because of Moylan’s insistence upon cognitive estrangement and the role of the *novum* as conceptual apparatus, Luckhurst contends that he falls into the same trap as Suvin, adhering to a “prescriptive political agenda” which “contracts the genre to a chosen few texts, and has contempt for the majority of the field.”⁸⁵ While Moylan’s approach is openly political, this criticism does seem a little harsh. Unlike Suvin, Moylan treats texts from which he ideologically distances himself such as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* with a degree of nuance and reasonableness lacking in Suvin’s comparison of Orwell with Ayn Rand. Moylan’s categories are overtly political and therefore do express an exclusionary tendency, but they are not as radical or sweeping as those of Darko Suvin.

Furthermore, Moylan’s concern with narrative strategy remains valuable. Following Baccolini, Moylan contends that “The typical narrative structure of the dystopia”, presents “an alienated character’s refusal of the dominant society”. Through this refusal, which stems from the protagonist’s growing awareness of the dystopian nature of their society, she or he counters the narrative of the hegemonic order. The “action [then] leads to a *climactic* event that does or does not challenge or change the society.”⁸⁶ Language is a particularly frequent site of contestation in this challenge. Moreover, Moylan notes,

an important result of the reappropriation of language by the dystopian misfits and rebels is the reconstitution of empowering memory. With the past

⁸⁵ Luckhurst, *Science Fiction* 10.

⁸⁶ Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* 147, 148.

suppressed and the present reduced to the empirica of daily life, dystopian subjects usually lose all recollection of the way things were before the new order, but by regaining language they also recover the ability to draw on the alternative truths of the past and 'speak back' to hegemonic power.⁸⁷

While this is not a contentious claim, there is some danger here of subsuming history under "memory". As will be argued in chapter four in a discussion of the interrogation of Winston Smith in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, it is not merely subjective, individual memory – which as O'Brien proves is both manipulable and fallible – but the collective values of history in social and cultural terms which the dystopian narrative contests. In *Brave New World* only the World Controller Mustapha Mond has access to a historical narrative that is compatible with the structural and methodological demands of history as a discipline in the humanities. John Savage, in contrast, relies upon a religiously and romantically tainted vision of the past as nostalgia. The analeptic presentation of fragments of "History" by Mond to the group of students in chapter three of the novel plays a key narrative role, linked both to didactic content and dystopian form.⁸⁸

To Moylan, it is the ending of the dystopian novel, more than the content of its anachronic (that is, proleptic and analeptic) strategies that most characterise it as a genre. Indeed, for Moylan only such works that carry a persistent "openness" or space in which resistance and opposition is still possible really achieve the status of 'dystopia'. He designates rightwing texts like Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*, 'anti-utopias' because they literally reject the concept of utopia as inherently tyrannical. However, this seems to compromise Moylan's discussion of narrative strategy. It stands in contrast to Jameson's concept of the anti-utopia as a sort of hellish blueprint that criticises the very idea of utopianism by re-producing realised utopias as terrible places. Such an anti-utopia would have to mimic too the structure of a literary utopia, with the concomitant features of the visitor seeing the utopia from an estranged perspective; the framing journey; and a detailed, careful

⁸⁷ Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* 149.

⁸⁸ The historical context of *Brave New World* is examined below in chapter 3, 123-34. On Mond's 'history lesson' see below, 137-8 and 140-1.

examination of the institutions of such a society. It also leads Moylan, who is most interested in contemporary literature, to proliferate the categories of utopian literature. As well as the utopia, the “classical” dystopia, and the anti-utopia, he details the more contemporary and radically open categories of “critical utopia” and “critical dystopia”, whose content is more ambiguous but whose stance is open to utopian longing. As these historically situated categories apply only to more contemporary novels it is beyond the scope of the present discussion to question whether, if one rejects the political premises of Moylan’s work, these extra categories are superfluous or helpful.

Philip Wegner builds on Moylan’s theory of dystopia by looking at the emergence of the genre. Beginning with a brief discussion of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Wegner quotes a letter from George Orwell to his publisher Fredric Warburg sent in May 1947 about the novel he was then writing: “this is a novel about the future – that is, it is in a sense a fantasy, but in the form of a naturalistic novel. That is what makes it a difficult job – of course as a book of anticipations it would be comparatively simple to write.”⁸⁹ Noting the influence of naturalist Victorian writers like George Gissing upon Orwell, Wegner argues that dystopia represents the dialectical synthesis of the “asphyxiating historical closure” of Victorian naturalism and the utopian optimism of Morris and Bellamy.⁹⁰

However, Orwell’s use of the term “anticipations” could be taken as an allusion to H. G. Wells’s 1901 work of that name. Wells’s influence hangs over not just Orwell but the whole genre of dystopia in the twentieth century. Yet his literary career does not fit the pattern of Wegner’s dialectic – either chronologically or thematically. Wells rose to fame with the publication of his

⁸⁹ George Orwell, *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, ed. Peter Davison, vol. 19 (London: Secker and Warburg, 1998) 149, quoted in Philip E. Wegner, “Where the Prospective Horizon Is Omitted: Naturalism and Dystopia in *Fight Club* and *Ghost Dog*,” *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, eds. Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan (New York: Routledge, 2003), 172. Wegner quotes the American 1968 Harcourt edition of *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, eds. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, vol. 4, 329-30.

⁹⁰ Interestingly, this dialectic mirrors Yevgeny Zamyatin’s conception about his “Neo-Realism” as the dialectical synthesis of nineteenth century Realism and turn-of-the-century (Russian) Symbolism. See below, 68-73.

early 'scientific romances' including *The Time Machine* (1895), *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) and *The War of the Worlds* (1898). These novels tend to look askance at the future, expressing the post-Darwinian degeneration fears of the late Victorians. Whether or not one chooses to term these 'dystopias' (and most critics would concur that they do not fully fit this genre), they certainly explore some dystopian themes and influenced later dystopian writers like Zamyatin, Orwell and Huxley. Wells's (generally less commercially successful) pre-twentieth century naturalist fiction is not as well known. It was in the early 1900s, around the time he wrote utopian texts such as *A Modern Utopia* (1905) and *In the Days of the Comet* (1906), that he also had artistic *and* commercial breakthroughs in his naturalist fiction with popular novels like *Kipps* (1905) and *Ann Veronica* (1909). But from the end of the Great War he concentrated increasingly on a mix of non-fiction and utopian literature.

Wegner's historical inaccuracy with regard to Wells's career lessens the force of his argument. He does, however, perceive a salient pattern that

haunt[s] the tradition of dystopian writing throughout the twentieth century: desirous of a radical change of affairs but unable to imagine any mechanism or agency by which such a change might come about, these dystopias oscillate between the radical openness of Utopia and the asphyxiating closure of naturalism.⁹¹

Dystopias throughout the twentieth century were timely fiction. As a politically engaged, socially aware mode, some of its most significant writers were keen to employ the 'logical' fantasising of Wells – to build from a fantastic premise a logical chain of consequences. The concern with exploring the limits of some of the worst excesses and terrors of the twentieth century, and with extrapolating events from shifting social and political relations, entailed a substantially different practice to the social dreaming of literary utopias. If, as Chris Ferns suggests, "Unlike the traditional utopia, dystopian fiction posits a society which – however outlandish – is clearly extrapolated from that which exists," then the existing economic structures, social and political institutions of the twentieth century arguably had little to offer the dystopian writer by

⁹¹ Wegner, "Where the Prospective Horizon Is Omitted," 173.

way of “radical openness.”⁹² In such circumstances, it could be ‘utopian’ enough simply to demonstrate that, in the words of Leonard Cohen, “There is a crack in everything/That’s how the light gets in.”⁹³ So, for instance, the didactic message of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was, Orwell declared in a U.S. press release dictated to (and edited by) Warburg, “*don’t let it happen. It depends on you.*”⁹⁴ While Orwell passionately believed in what he termed “democratic Socialism”, his political focus was first on avoiding further catastrophes in the present era.

Historicising Dystopia

An important narrative strategy of dystopian fiction is the text’s answer to the analeptic question ‘how did we get here?’ Having established that the fictional world in which the novel opens is a ‘dys-topia’ in the literal sense of bad-place, and at a point in the future, the question of origins hangs darkly over the texts. But what of the origins of dystopia itself? If Wegner’s dialectical origin of nineteenth century naturalism (thesis) and fin-de-siècle utopianism (antithesis) is, as argued above, insufficient, then what are the origins of the genre?

As a politically engaged literary genre that characteristically produces novels of ideas, a good basis for assessing the origins and development of dystopia can likely be established by examination of the broad intellectual and cultural background from which it emerges. In terms of intellectual history, dystopia may be perceived as following the post-Enlightenment tradition of critique and satire. The legacy of the Enlightenment in dystopian fiction manifests in several ways. At the formal level, the use of fiction to critique social and political relations was widely practised during the “Republic of Letters”. Indeed, the rise of the novel occurred more or less concomitantly with the growth of Enlightenment thought. In ideational terms, dystopian authors adopted specific values professed by Enlightenment thinkers. However, they

⁹² Ferns, *Narrating Utopia* 107; and see above, 26.

⁹³ Leonard Cohen, “Anthem.” *The Future*. Columbia, 1992.

⁹⁴ Bernard R. Crick, *George Orwell: A Life* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1980), 395 *emphasis in original*.

also critiqued the very tradition of which these values were part. As chapter two will show, for example, Zamyatin's invocation of individual freedom in *We* is used to critique the moral ideas of thinkers including Kant. Hence, like the Frankfurt School scholars Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, dystopian authors seemed to be well aware of the mood of optimism and confidence in a humanitarian future that characterised the Enlightenment, but while they admired many of the ideas and ideals of Enlightenment thought, they also perceived many of its flaws and contradictions.

To approach the issue from another angle, if *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) was Hannah Arendt's attempt to understand how Europe could give birth to the Enlightenment and the Rights of Man as well as a "brutally murderous" form of politics like totalitarianism, then dystopian authors also took this task in hand using techniques of the novel form.⁹⁵ As novels of ideas they were mediated through the utopian literary tradition, for which H. G. Wells acted as a lightning rod to the authors principally examined in this thesis as both a target of satire and a literary influence.

The Limits of Enlightenment

Wells also provides a key link between modernistic dystopias and the Enlightenment. His commitment to the idea of a 'World State' was in effect a desire to bring about the End of History; the age of the World State is an age when nature and mankind alike are subdued and perfectly ordered. As the twentieth century progressed, his ideas – which had been calmly discussed in early works like *A Modern Utopia* (1905) – became more frantically repeated in response to desperate political and social conditions. The more he focused on the End of History, the more his own social and political context becomes relevant to understanding his utopian work.

This situation is also true of the beginning of the Enlightenment. On the one hand the social context of Enlightenment thinkers, as well as the political

⁹⁵ Dana Villa, "The Development of Arendt's Political Thought," Introduction, *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*, ed. by Villa (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 3.

context in which they wrote, was of crucial importance to the ideas that they produced. On the other, from the early 1600s philosophers attempted to limit the influence of the social and political context of production on the content of their work. For Steven Toulmin, the nature of what was acceptable as legitimate philosophical reasoning fundamentally changed from the 1600s onwards. This change in both the style and content of philosophical debate reflected a shift from a *practical* model to a *theoretical* conception of philosophy.

From 1630 on, the focus of philosophical inquiries has ignored the particular, concrete, timely and local details of everyday human affairs: instead, it has shifted to a higher, stratospheric plane, on which nature and ethics conform to abstract, timeless, general, and universal theories.⁹⁶

Ironically, however, this very change was itself a response to a traumatic series of events that had engulfed the whole of Europe, and as such could not be more topical. Descartes's quest for certainty in reason can be seen as a response to religious and political crisis: the *Discourse on Method* was written in the middle of the bloody and brutal Thirty Years' War, at a time when religious uncertainty had deep-seated political ramifications. Indeed, "the 17th-century founders of modern science and philosophy had theological commitments which shaped their whole enterprise."⁹⁷ Sixteenth century humanist Michel de Montaigne had rhetorically asked 'Que sçais-je?' starting his philosophy from an assumption that much was unknowable, which made religious toleration a more feasible position to uphold. But such uncertainty had not prevented religious war. The quest for religious certainty through philosophy was a quest for an exclusive truth, a truth which by its very nature precluded alternatives.

If uncertainty, ambiguity, and the acceptance of pluralism led, in practice, only to an intensification of the religious war, the time had come to discover some *rational method* for demonstrating the essential correctness or incorrectness of philosophical, scientific, or theological doctrines.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (New York: Free P, 1990), 35.

⁹⁷ Toulmin, *Cosmopolis* 37.

⁹⁸ Toulmin, *Cosmopolis* 55.

The dystopian opposition to discourses of certainty – in particular the political discourses of meta-narratives of history – are in the first instance an opposition to a long-standing tendency which began in proto-Enlightenment philosophy and became normative with the rise of the scientific paradigm. For all that later philosophers and scientists argued against Descartes he helped to set an agenda, to put in place methodologies in scientific, philosophical and theological debate. Essentially, when he declared “*cogito ergo sum*”, Descartes rephrased the old question about the (Aristotelian) animal soul, turning it into “an inquiry into animal intelligence, since to the author of *cogito ergo sum* the word ‘soul’ spelled reason.”⁹⁹ The Cartesian dichotomy, splitting the rational freedom of the mind from the causal mechanics of the body, had diverse and wide-ranging implications for the practice of philosophy and science. By the time that “the Cartesian division... was endorsed and continued by Isaac Newton, [it] ceased to be of concern to natural philosophers alone. From then on, it played a major role in social and political thought as well.”¹⁰⁰ The power of Descartes’s argument was felt not directly in visible political and social changes, but in the setting of the agenda, the terms of debate. From this also, however, stemmed ideological power – for soon his model of rationality became paradigmatic so that the persuasive success of an argument came more and more to be seen in its adherence to rationalism.¹⁰¹ The optimism of a reasonable, thinking mind ruling over the body (except during states of passion) was to become an essential belief for the Enlightenment ideal of Progress and discussion of the soul, reason, and the nature of man took place – particularly in the French Enlightenment – in expressly Cartesian terms. Within the diverse strands of the Enlightenment, the tendency to see mankind as a thinking entity standing rationally outside and separate from nature, like the view of the (rational)

⁹⁹ Leonora Cohen Rosenfield, *From Beast Machine to Man Machine: Animal soul in French Letters from Descartes to La Mettrie*, 2nd ed. (New York: Octagon, 1968), xxiv-xxv. Diderot essentially followed this position, proclaiming: “Man is composed of two substances, one known as soul... the other known as body.” Denis Diderot, “Man [Homme],” trans. Nelly S. Hoyt and Thomas Cassirer, *The Encyclopedia of Diderot and d’Alembert: Collaborative Online Translation Project* (Michigan, MI: U of Michigan) <<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.did2222.0000.070>>, 1 June 2011.

¹⁰⁰ Toulmin, *Cosmopolis* 107.

¹⁰¹ I am here following the sociological analysis of power as put forwards in Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1974). See especially 21-5.

mind as separate from the material (animal) body, was almost universally accepted. The primacy of reason was essential to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's account of the state and the general will. Equally, Denis Diderot argued in *D'Alembert's Dream* that the brain rules over the body like a despotic ruler governs his state.¹⁰² This dualist separation occurs along Cartesian lines, but the religious consequences of Descartes's formulation is absent – Diderot believed in no deity. While he was drawn towards the anti-Newtonian and anti-Cartesian idea that the Universe is self-animating, for Diderot “the Cartesian criterion that what was true could be formulated in clear distinct notions... remained valid.”¹⁰³ Julien Offray de La Mettrie, meanwhile, attempted to counter the Cartesian dualism through his appeal to the possibility of self-animation inherent in living matter, but his account of natural law relied on the primacy of reason, an inconsistency he was not able to overcome.¹⁰⁴ Ironically, then, Descartes's philosophy even helped to make possible the very eighteenth century materialism which undermined the certainty of the pre-existing Catholic conception of the universe.¹⁰⁵

Yet even the overthrow of the “certainties” Descartes believed in only led to more attempts to find universalizable laws describing both the nature of man and of the natural world. The *philosophes*, no less than Descartes himself or indeed any other of the diverse and heterogeneous thinkers of the Enlightenment, were students of the methodology of Francis Bacon (“the father of experimental philosophy” in the words of his admirer Voltaire),¹⁰⁶ who wrote, “Human knowledge and human power meet in one, for where the cause is not known the effect cannot be produced. Nature to be commanded

¹⁰² Denis Diderot, *Rameau's Nephew/D'Alembert's Dream*, trans. Leonard Tancok (London: Penguin, 1966), 205.

¹⁰³ John Hope Mason, *The Irresistible Diderot* (London: Quartet Books, 1982), 12.

¹⁰⁴ Julien Offray de La Mettrie, “*Man a Machine*” and “*Man a Plant*”, trans. Richard A. Watson and Maya Rybalka (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1994), 68-70.

¹⁰⁵ Popper goes further with an unusual and challenging argument that Karl Marx was a “practical dualist” because thought to him was a different “form” of matter to matter of the body. Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, 5th ed., vol. 2 (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 102.

¹⁰⁶ François-Marie de Voltaire, “On Bacon and Newton” in Isaac Kramnick, *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*, Viking Portable Lib. (London: Penguin, 1995), 53 & quoted in Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Verso, 1997), 3.

must be obeyed.”¹⁰⁷ The new science was concerned from the very beginning with the mastery of nature and while Bacon still accepted the rule of nature over man for the time being, *The New Atlantis* (1626), his vision of the scientific and technological possibilities of the future, showed mankind as master of his own destiny. Indeed, the escape from nature into civilization is a recurrent theme in utopias. For Lewis Mumford, the city itself represented the first utopia for this very reason.¹⁰⁸ If the city is man’s attempt to leave behind nature (and it is certainly presented as such by both Zamyatin in *We* and Huxley in *Brave New World*), to carve out his own realm and refuge from nature’s power, then it is specifically modern to export this thinking beyond the city walls, through the suburbs and from there across every land and sea. The older aim of *escaping from* nature still acknowledged the power of nature: the walled city is a bulwark, a *topos* with defined boundaries. Even after Bacon, Swift’s satirical utopias in *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726; amended 1735) are still *found* in a distant land where we are not. But in the eighteenth century, as Bloch pointed out, the *topos* of utopia moved out of space and into time.¹⁰⁹ Thus utopia was no longer *somewhere* foreign, but represented a possibility in one’s own future. In accordance with the Enlightenment tradition it became a more generalised, universalised place that discounted localism. The aim was no longer to fabricate a refuge, a space outside nature, but to overcome the power of nature entirely. Ultimately, by the nineteenth century it was so thoroughly subjugated that “enlightened” governments began to create national parks, refuges and reserves for nature, not for man.¹¹⁰

For Arendt, “the notion of man as lord of the earth is characteristic of the modern age,” and implicitly secular, being in direct contradiction to the “spirit

¹⁰⁷ Francis Bacon, “The New Science” in Kramnick, *The Portable Enlightenment Reader* 39.

¹⁰⁸ Cited in Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* 5-6.

¹⁰⁹ Bloch, “Something’s Missing,” 3. See above, 29.

¹¹⁰ Wells, a thoroughly post-Enlightenment thinker, imagined in the 1930s a situation two hundred years hence in which “Most of the ‘wild beasts’ of our ancestors [sic] are now *under control* in their special enclosures and reservations... in which various specially interesting faunas and floras flourish *without human interference*.” H. G. Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come*, ed. Patrick Parrinder (London: Penguin, 2005) 406 *emphasis added*.

of the Bible.”¹¹¹ From this viewpoint, Kant’s Enlightenment motto *Sapere Aude!* (Dare to know) is the call of a Prometheus: he who dares to know will not just emerge from his “self-incurred immaturity” (in some translations “tutelage”) into independence, but will also gain mastery over nature and the vast numbers of unenlightened people.¹¹² Adorno and Horkheimer note that it was Bacon himself who acknowledged that “knowledge is power”. They therefore slightly facetiously point to the work of the Marquis de Sade as an example of “‘understanding without the guidance of another person’: that is, the bourgeois individual freed from tutelage.” In Sade’s *Juliette*, they contend, the systematic deployment of every sexual possibility, “reveals a[n] organization of life as a whole which is deprived of any substantial goal” in much the same way as the structures of Kant’s socio-political thought.¹¹³ His bid to construct morality from *a priori* principles of reason, in which God formed the cornerstone by which “moral action and natural law can entirely converge,” was a clear attempt to turn ethics into a system of universalizable rational judgement.¹¹⁴ Kant’s categorical imperative in its first formulation prescribes a deontological ethics in which being consistently rational is the ultimate value (“I ought never to act except in such a way that I can also will that my maxim should become universal law”) over and above what might (in today’s language) be labelled humanitarian concerns on a case-by-case basis.¹¹⁵ In other words, rather than serving substantive humanitarian goals, rationality becomes instrumental – a means serving only itself.¹¹⁶ In their different ways, and with quite separate aims in mind, both Arendt, and Horkheimer and Adorno make a common point: the Enlightenment failed to recognise that Kantian reason and social domination are intimately entwined

¹¹¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998), 139, n. 3.

¹¹² “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’” in Immanuel Kant, *Political Writings* trans. H. B. Nisbet, ed. Hans Reiss, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), 54. “Unmündigkeit” is translated as “tutelage” in, for example, Kramnick’s translation of the essay in Kramnick, *The Portable Enlightenment Reader* 1-7 (here 1).

¹¹³ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* 88.

¹¹⁴ Douglas Burnham, *An Introduction to Kant’s Critique of Judgement* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2000), 25.

¹¹⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. H.J. Paton (London: Routledge, 1991), 67.

¹¹⁶ This was perhaps what Nietzsche was referring to when he declared that “the categorical imperative gives off a whiff of cruelty...” Friedrich Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) II §6, 47.

and even mutually reinforcing.¹¹⁷ With the eclipse of substantive rationality by instrumental rationality, means become ends in themselves. Such rationality, which has no normative referent but itself, is not so much immoral as *amoral*. The question 'is this morally just?' could henceforth be replaced by the formulation 'is it rational?'

The problem with Enlightenment rationalism, Horkheimer and Adorno contended, is that it can (and *did*) so easily become an end in itself, in which the human costs involved in the means were ignored. The quest for certainty and the emphasis on reason over emotions and rhetoric can easily lead to the narrowing and even shutting down of debate rather than opening it out. According to Adorno and Horkheimer, "[t]he program of the Enlightenment was the disenchantment of the world; the dissolution of myths and the substitution of knowledge for fancy."¹¹⁸ From as early a thinker as Bacon, however, the quest of "the human mind... to hold sway over disenchanted nature" was a quest for power that would hold sway over people as well. Just as knowledge of nature was a means to control nature so too, Adorno and Horkheimer argued, did this knowledge change relations between men. "Technology is the essence of this knowledge" and "[p]ower and knowledge are synonymous."¹¹⁹ In the words of Orwell's O'Brien, "[t]he real power, the power we have to fight for night and day, is not power over things, but over men."¹²⁰ Adorno and Horkheimer assert that natural philosophy, which they see as emblematic of the Enlightenment, had been channelled into the dominance of men over mankind. From the start it was evident that the rationality upon which it was based was being narrowed into an instrumental means. Bernstein explains that such "instrumental" or "subsumptive" rationality,

disregards the intrinsic properties of things, those properties that give each thing its sensuous, social and historical particularity, for the sake of the goals and purposes of the subject... such a rationality must treat unlike (unequal)

¹¹⁷ For a discussion of the problems inherent in Kant's political thought in a post-totalitarian world, see Hans Reiss, Postscript, *Political Writings* by Kant, 264-8.

¹¹⁸ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 3.

¹¹⁹ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 4.

¹²⁰ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 279.

things as like (equal), and subsume objects under (the unreflexive drives of) subjects. Subsumption, then, is domination in the conceptual realm.¹²¹

If subsumption is identified with the ideal of reason *per se*, “the possibility of cognition of the particular in its own right” is lost. The true ends of “enlightened rationality... become occluded.”¹²² The problems of human living, as Arendt suggests, are reduced to matters of technique.¹²³ Meaning is replaced by utility; everything is done ‘in order to’ achieve something else without any principle on which to base this utilitarian framework ever arising. For when rationalism is applied universally, everything

must be of some use, that is, must lend itself as an instrument to achieve something else, [and so] meaning itself can appear only as an end, as an ‘end in itself’ which actually is either a tautology applying to all ends or a contradiction in terms. For an end, once it is attained, ceases to be an end and loses its capacity to guide and justify the choice of means, to organize and produce them.¹²⁴

Rather than serving specific and humanitarian goals, rationality “becomes its own end, and thereby turns against the true aims of Enlightenment: freedom and happiness.”¹²⁵ Despite the clear differences between Arendt’s analysis of totalitarianism and that of Horkheimer and Adorno, on this point they are closely aligned. Arendt, for instance, observes that Kant’s third formulation of the categorical imperative, that human beings must always be treated as ends in themselves and never means, leads to paradox. His intention, Arendt tells us, was first of all to “relegate the means-end category to its proper place and prevent its use in the field of political action” but he was nevertheless unable to free his formula from the “tenets of the utilitarianism of his time.” If man is established as the “supreme end” then it permits him to subject the whole of nature, “that is, to degrade nature and the world into

¹²¹ J.M. Bernstein, Introduction, The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture, by Theodor W. Adorno, ed. Bernstein (London: Routledge Classics, 2001), 5.

¹²² Bernstein, Introduction, The Culture Industry 5.

¹²³ Isaac C. Jeffrey, Arendt, Camus and Modern Rebellion (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1992), 45.

¹²⁴ Arendt, The Human Condition 154-5.

¹²⁵ Bernstein, Introduction, The Culture Industry 5.

mere means, robbing both of their independent dignity.”¹²⁶ Hence man, as the only thing capable of standing outside the endless chain of means and ends, becomes lord and master of all things.

Horkheimer and Adorno likewise point to men “renouncing any claim to meaning” in the march towards “modern science” (which they position as the keystone of instrumentalism in Enlightenment thought).¹²⁷ But for them this is also an indicator of the attempt by science to sublate metaphysical problems, and reduce them all to the quest of finding a suitable formulaic or algebraic expression. “To the Enlightenment, that which does not reduce to numbers, and ultimately to the one, becomes illusion.” Horkheimer and Adorno’s presupposition is that the Enlightenment wished to leave no corner hidden in shadow – that in the process of illumination all illusion had to be unmasked, all matter shown to conform to clear and distinct ideas. The success of the Enlightenment on this front enabled mankind (they ignore the cultural and geographical specificity of the Enlightenment) to live at the centre of a disillusioned universe, so that “from now on, matter would at last be mastered without any illusion of ruling or inherent powers, of hidden qualities. For the Enlightenment, whatever does not conform to the rule of computation and utility is suspect.”¹²⁸

From Victorian Values to Victory Mansions

Horkheimer and Adorno’s rather stronger words point to a substantially similar understanding to Arendt of the tendency to place utility at the forefront of judgement. The utilitarian imperatives which according to Arendt, Kant tried but was unable to escape, were regarded as virtues in another ascendant strain of thought. Jeremy Bentham, “the father of English utilitarianism”, orientated his rigid philosophy around a single doctrine – the formula of the “greatest happiness of the greatest number.” In so doing he literally attempted to complete by application of the “utilitarian formula” what

¹²⁶ Arendt, *The Human Condition* 156.

¹²⁷ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* 5.

¹²⁸ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* 7, 6.

Horkheimer and Adorno saw as the great perversion of the Enlightenment as discussed above – to make every sphere amenable to “computation and utility.” In Bentham’s utilitarian conception, happiness “could be expressed by a calculus of pleasure and pain, a calculus that could only be arrived at rationally, analytically.”¹²⁹ For Arendt a central failure of all such liberal theories of politics were that they did not distinguish between the interests of the polis and the sum of the interests of the individuals who constituted it: “public life takes on the deceptive aspect of a total of private interests as though these interests could create a new quality through sheer addition.”¹³⁰

It is interesting to note that Bentham numbered among his neologisms “cacotopia”, used in a discussion of the “filth” of endemic political corruption in his 1817 *Plan of Parliamentary Reform in the Form of a Catechism*: “As a match for Utopia, suppose a *Cacotopia* discovered and described – would not filth in this shape be a ‘*fundamental feature*’ in it?”¹³¹ Bentham on a number of occasions in this work uses “Utopia” to mean something unrealistic or unattainable, and contrasts his own ideas as being radical yet practicable. On the other hand, he links “Cacotopia” to literary utopias – designating them as descriptions of a miserable political order elsewhere that resemble exactly the existing British political order of the day, a satirical ‘other’ place resembling exactly the here and now.

The utilitarian idea of Cacotopia becomes more revealing when contrasted with the first utilitarian use of the term ‘dystopia[n]’ in 1868 when, during a Commons debate on Irish Land Tithes, John Stuart Mill quipped that the Conservative Government “ought... to be called dys-topians, or cacotopians”

¹²⁹ Gertrude Himmelfarb, Introduction, *On Liberty*, by John Stuart Mill, ed. Himmelfarb (London: Penguin Classics, 1985), 13.

¹³⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt, 1966), 145. Arendt makes this point during a discussion of Hobbes’s *Leviathan*. However, *Leviathan* serves her only as an example of the inevitable self-destructiveness of any social system founded on the principle of the ongoing individual acquisition of property – hence her allusion here to Francis Bacon with the comment that “since... men are neither ants nor bees, the whole thing is a delusion.”

¹³¹ Jeremy Bentham, *Plan of Parliamentary Reform in the Form of a Catechism*, with Reasons for Each Article, 2nd [1818] ed. (London: T.J. Wooler, 1817), 73.

because “what they appear[ed] to favour [was] too bad to be practicable”.¹³² The significance to dystopian studies of this early appearance of the term is that Mill’s use reveals his wider post-Enlightenment beliefs and his Victorian values, while at the same time demonstrating, albeit in simplified form, the interplay of critique and satire which would later become the hallmark of the literary dystopia. Thus the epithet “dys-topian” here signifies both an unrealistic or unsustainable aim, and a (misplaced) desire to implement *eu-topia*. Meanwhile, by invoking “cacotopian”, Mill recalls Bentham, his father James Mill’s great friend, who as a bachelor with no children of his own had taken a deep interest in the education of “his chief disciple’s eldest son.”¹³³

The Conservative Government’s supposedly “equitable” measure, as Mill saw it, was to take a situation that was unjust for some in Ireland and make the injustice universal rather than improving the situation for those already suffering. Casting it in these terms was a satirical, Swiftian move. Mill loads the term “dys-topians” here with a sense of absurdity that the literary dystopia retained in the twentieth century. However, while Mill believed there to be an eventual inevitability to “progress” that would solve the problems of governing Ireland someday, in literary dystopias a state of affairs “too bad to be practicable” may nonetheless be established and maintained (as was, it is pertinent to note, British colonialism). When, for example, Orwell’s O’Brien sneers, “if you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face – for ever,” he imagines a society sustained by the energy of violent hatred alone.¹³⁴ Yet in the context of a brutal torture scene this statement – for O’Brien at least – is wholly believable. Meanwhile, dystopian fictions set further into the future such as Burdekin’s *Swastika Night*, Zamyatin’s *We* and Huxley’s *Brave New World* all present apparently stable societies that have, at the moment the novels all open *in medias res*, already been in place for at least a hundred years.

¹³² Hansard Commons 12 Mar. 1868, vol. 190, c. 1517. Before the Irish Church Disestablishment Act 1869, all Irish subjects were required to pay tithes to the established, Anglican Church in Ireland, who only represented a minority of the people of Ireland. Mill demanded better treatment for the Irish Catholics – but only to ensure that they would offer no dissent to British colonial rule.

¹³³ Himmelfarb, in Mill, *On Liberty* 11.

¹³⁴ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 280.

When viewed in the context of the rest of his speech, the Conservatives' apparently untenable position is one in which Mill also, ironically, finds himself. His address is suffused with a tension between his avowed belief in the universalizable laws of science claimed to be objective (and extended to political economy) on the one hand, and a Victorian moral belief in Empire on the other. While Mill believed that the British State was in need of reform, he also maintained that the aims of British colonialism were *morally* correct and just. In the same speech he promotes the universal "truth" of the mission of colonialism: "I maintain that there is no country under Heaven which it is not possible to govern, and to govern in such a way that it shall be contented."¹³⁵ Despite arguing that all knowledge is built out of inductive reasoning from the observation of empirical reality, Mill searched for a totalised system of laws in every field he studied, government no less than ethics:¹³⁶ material progress, as part of a liberal meta-narrative, appears here as a historical necessity. The easy manner with which he brushes aside the Irish Famine ("[w]e certainly saved many lives—though there were probably a greater number that we could not save—and for that we are entitled to all credit") demonstrates an attitude in which government, as an activity, is an abstract intellectual challenge.¹³⁷ The brutal concrete reality of British colonialism is masked by Mill's sense of duty to govern.

One of the strengths of dystopian fiction is its ability to show the human consequences of the imposition of grand narratives built upon impersonal and abstract ideas. Mill's self-confidence in his utilitarian ideals rests on wider (post-)Enlightenment assumptions about Progress and the possibilities of science. Dystopias of the mid-twentieth century sought to critique some of these assumptions by creating a narrative framework around individual characters such as *Nineteen Eighty-Four's* Winston Smith, *Brave New World's* John Savage and Helmholtz Watson, or *The Chrysalids's* David. Their rebellions are characterized not just by the assertion of alternative "rational"

¹³⁵ Hansard Commons 12 Mar. 1868, vol. 190, c. 1523.

¹³⁶ Alan Ryan, The philosophy of John Stuart Mill (London: Macmillan, 1970), xi-xii. Ryan quotes Mill's diary of 1854 in support of this claim.

¹³⁷ Hansard Commons 12 Mar. 1868, vol. 190, c. 1521.

ideas, or alternative models of rationality itself, but rather in terms of subjectivity and affect.

These texts, then, resist narratives of instrumental rationality precisely through an insistence upon affective morality as central to an understanding of human nature. In doing so, dystopian fiction also stands in contrast to the utopian literary tradition, and most overtly to the literary utopias of Wells. In Orwell's highly charged essay "Wells, Hitler and the World State" (1941) he rhetorically asked if it were "not a sort of parricide for a person of my age (thirty-eight) to find fault with H. G. Wells? Thinking people who were born about the beginning of this century are in some sense Wells's own creation." Nevertheless, Orwell was blunt in his criticism, arguing that "just the singleness of mind, the one-sided imagination that made him seem like an inspired prophet in the Edwardian age, make him a shallow, inadequate thinker now."¹³⁸ Orwell saw Wells as an internationalist "nineteenth-century Liberal" – in contrast, it should be noted, to Zamyatin, for whom Wells was "of course, a socialist" albeit one not affiliated with any formal party.¹³⁹

Wells's utopian literature generally followed the traditional formal layout of the genre. Howsoever the journey to the utopia occurs, the same narrative takes place: the visitor (usually from London and invariably male) is shown around a rationalist World State and just as in, say, Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, he discusses with an interlocutor the social, economic, political make-up of the society. These are precisely the sorts of texts that Jameson had in mind, then, when he claimed – as noted above – that "the Utopian text does not tell a story at all; it describes a mechanism or even a kind of machine, it furnishes a blueprint..."¹⁴⁰ Through its close adherence to generic conventions, Wells's utopian fiction consciously inscribes itself within

¹³⁸ George Orwell, *Complete Works*, vol. 12, 539. Shortly afterwards, Wells became a personal acquaintance of Orwell's. The diaries of an observer of their first meeting recall the elderly Wells taking Orwell to task over this essay. Half a year later his rather curter rejoinder to another Orwell essay on his fiction was "read my early works you shit." Quoted in D. J. Taylor, *Orwell: The Life* (London: Vintage, 2004), 305.

¹³⁹ Orwell, *Complete Works*, vol. 12, 539; Yevgeny Zamyatin, *A Soviet Heretic: Essays by Yevgeny Zamyatin*, trans. Mirra Ginsburg, ed. Mirra Ginsburg (Chicago, IL: U of Chicago P, 1970), 268.

¹⁴⁰ Jameson, *The Seeds of Time*, 56. See above, 37.

a literary tradition which, for authors of modernistic dystopias, he came to represent.

Dystopia, as Jameson again notes, was not in formal terms directly opposed to literary utopias. Orwell and the other dystopian authors may commit “a sort of parricide” by criticising Wellsian utopianism in their dystopian novels, but in doing so they provide an ironic commentary upon such “Edwardian” thinking. The historical *necessity* and *inevitability* of Wells’s project, which leads Orwell to call him a “nineteenth-century liberal”, is precisely that which leads him to lump Wells’s ideology together with the sense of destiny common to Stalinism, Nazism and Burnham’s Managerial Revolution in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. As he comments in a 1941 essay arguing against the post-Enlightenment liberal-Wellsian idea of Progress (and in a rather Adornian turn of phrase) “[m]odern Germany is far more scientific than England, and far more barbarous.”¹⁴¹

Dystopian fiction of the early-mid twentieth century was not the antinomy of utopian literature, but rather struggled with a particular development in utopian literature that in turn occurred in response to Enlightenment thought. This is namely the move, as outlined above (described by Adorno and Bloch), of the *topos* of utopia out of space and into time. As Bloch made clear, this brought utopia closer to becoming a reality than it had ever been before. It thereby raised the stakes; expectation was high. Dystopias intervened in the utopian tradition, providing a literary structure of fiction to critique the demands of utopias-as-future-worlds and to call into question the sense of inevitability which visions of ‘Progress’ entailed. The narrative strategy by which dystopias achieved this was prolepsis – projecting forwards into an alternatively construed future that denied the basis of progress. Dystopian *analepses*, meanwhile, usually look backwards over an only partially-revealed past, in which truth and reliability of historical commentary are questioned. This partial past is, however, (at least substantially) in the contemporary reader’s own future. The dystopia must

¹⁴¹ Orwell, *Complete Works*, vol. 12, 170.

therefore be seen as orientated towards the future-as-past. This experimental and unusual characteristic of dystopian fiction in the early-mid twentieth century is one of the elements that mark it out as modernistic prose.

The chapters in this thesis are ordered chronologically by author. Each chapter deals with a different author's dystopian work, assessing their literary role within the cultural history of dystopian fiction. An understanding based on Genette's structuralist framework of proleptic-analepses underpins the narrative strategies of these texts, while key themes of both modernity and literary modernism tie the texts together as dystopias. Discussions of, for instance, various strands of political thought, gender issues and cultural developments of the early-mid twentieth century appear in each chapter, but in each case these themes are approached in specific ways tailored to the different perspectives of the authors. Chapter two analyses Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* as a "Neorealist" satire in which modernist experimentation is mingled with a profound concern with regimentation and order in modern life. An exploration of Zamyatin's ambiguous figure of the "heretic" opens up a discussion in which Kantian and Hegelian models of rationality and aesthetic judgement are called into question, and (modern) notions of selfhood are destabilised. Picking up on this latter issue, chapter three approaches Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* by critiquing Adorno's essay on the novel and the relationship between "high" culture, "mass" culture, and happiness presented in both of these texts. Assessing the novel within its political, scientific and literary context, I then investigate how satire mingles with serious engagement with a wide range of thinkers in the novel, including Vilfredo Pareto, John B. Watson and Sigmund Freud. Chapter four returns once more to questions of rationality, modernity, nature and metaphysics with relation to George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The novel's focus on the nature of the self, on epistemological belief structures and moral autonomy is stressed as being important to the text as a dystopian novel. In chapter five I examine how John Wyndham, a reluctant SF writer and more overtly a literary descendant of Wells than Orwell or Huxley, began to move the dystopian genre in new directions by emphasising the importance of

apocalypse and SF themes to the dystopian anachronic framework. Biological and postwar political themes often interact savagely in his fiction as the human condition within the modern state is analysed through the dissolution and breakdown of this environment.

The dystopian future seems almost invariably to lie beyond a terrible war, apocalypse or catastrophe. As will be argued in chapter five, the choice between these three paths of war, apocalypse and catastrophe is significant, and while the strategy chosen can include some element of overlap, these three different strands should not be collapsed into each other. Thus while dystopia involves some element of a failure in utopian thought to address the dangerous aspects of utopian thinking, it also lies beyond a terrible future event that dwarfs even the terrors of the twentieth century.

A Modern Dystopia: Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* as Post-Enlightenment Critique and Satire

Yevgeny Zamyatin prided himself on being a heretic. To be such a figure was, to him, an artistic ideal as much as a political statement. Yet like the dialectic at the centre of his theoretical and philosophical thought, he was heretical only while simultaneously critically engaged with a well-established intellectual tradition. His novel *We*, completed in 1921 but only ever published outside Russia and in translation in his lifetime (including one unauthorised re-translation into Russian), is set in the distant future, centuries after a catastrophic 200-years war. *We* is the diary of D-503, citizen of the authoritarian, rationally administered One State. He is chief builder of the “*Integral*” – a spaceship made from the toughened glass that is the principal building material of the entire polis. The city is “girdled” by a “Green Wall” of this glass, separating it from the natural world beyond. The diary records the fracturing of D-503’s supposedly “mathematical” collectivist social values and the development of an individual self, a disease doctors call “growing a soul”, as he falls in love with the rebel “Number” (citizen) I-330 who leads a tribe living in nature beyond the Green Wall. After some revolutionary successes, her plot to commandeer the *Integral* to overthrow the state is uncovered. D-503 undergoes a surgical operation to remove his imagination and gives up I-330, who is put to death.

This chapter begins with a biographical discussion of Yevgeny Zamyatin, focusing on the elements of his life most relevant to the creation and reception of *We*. The novel is then analysed within its historical and literary context as a “Neorealist” satire, with particular attention given to the key characteristics of this literary movement. Zamyatin was also indebted to other literary developments, in addition to the new medium of cinema as a way of viewing the world. Yet embedded as he was in wider literary movements, Zamyatin’s critical work is characterised by the central importance of the heretic, an anomalous and problematic figure with both

religious connotations and Nietzschean overtones. A discussion of whether or not such a heretic exists in the ambiguous text of *We* here leads into an examination of metafiction in the novel. The chapter then develops by exploring the manner in which a specific model of rationality is opposed to emotional life in the One State. This separation of emotional and rational faculties in man derives, it will be suggested, from Zamyatin's reading (as a left-Hegelian) of Kant. Indeed, *We* contains a persistent and multi-faceted engagement with Nietzsche and Kant, particularly with their theories of aesthetics and judgement. Elaborating on this theme with reference to the central image of the *Integral* spacecraft, the argument then proceeds by turning towards Zamyatin's construction of his protagonist's sense of self. This analysis is positioned within a wider discourse about the condition of modern man in *We*, and the realisation (and failure) of Enlightenment ideals – in particular the implementation of utilitarian doctrines – in the One State. Zamyatin's interest in the work of H. G. Wells is important to this persistent critique of modernity, in which the industrial landscapes of Edwardian England and political developments in Russia are linked together with extraordinary imagination, ambiguity and wit.

Zamyatin's Life and Work

The available biographical information of Yevgeny Zamyatin is modest and patchy. Alex M. Shane's 1968 literary biography relied largely on three sketches the author composed in the 1920s, which were later published in the translator Mirra Ginsburg's collection of Zamyatin's essays, and totalled together less than eleven pages.¹

Yevgeny Zamyatin (1884-1937) was born in the provincial town of Lebedyan, some two hundred miles south of Moscow. His father was a teacher at the local *Progymnasium*, his mother a piano teacher. In his autobiographical

¹ Alex M. Shane, *The Life and Works of Evgenij Zamiatin* (Berkley, CA: U of California P, 1968); Zamyatin, *A Soviet Heretic* 3-14.

articles he treats his provincial childhood as largely grey and dull, although he drew on his life there for many of his early stories.²

Zamyatin studied Naval Architecture in St. Petersburg. There, he became embroiled in the 1905 Revolution. “In those years,” he wrote in 1929, “being a Bolshevik meant following the line of greatest resistance, and I was a Bolshevik at that time.”³ He was arrested and imprisoned until spring 1906, then exiled to his hometown. He surreptitiously re-entered St. Petersburg and remained there illegally, frequently moving district, until he was exiled again in 1911. Still working as a naval architect, by this time he was also publishing fiction including *A Provincial Tale*. He was permitted legal re-entry to St. Petersburg in 1913. When his novella *At the World's End* was published, the issue of *Zavety* in which it appeared was confiscated. Zamyatin and the editors were later tried and acquitted.⁴

In 1916 Zamyatin left Russia for Britain, where he was to supervise building icebreakers as part of Imperial Russia's attempt to open up a northern route circumventing Germany's naval blockade. This was a key moment in his literary development. In England, Zamyatin lived in Jesmond, a bourgeois suburb of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne. He designed and supervised the building of several icebreakers, including the *St Alexandr Nevskii* (later renamed *Lenin*), at Swan Hunters Shipyard, Wallsend. He also oversaw construction in Glasgow, Sunderland and South Shields. During his stay he “looked at ruined castles, listened to the dull thud of bombs dropped by German zeppelins, and wrote *Islanders*.”⁵ Many images and themes from *Islanders* later found their way into *We*. Zamyatin's tale *A Fisher of Men* also dates from around this time. Alan Myers's studies of Zamyatin's time in England are rich both in biographical information and possible sources for his fiction, although some of the links he tries to establish are tenuous. His evidence

² Shane, *The Life and Works of Evgenij Zamjatin* 8.

³ Zamyatin, *A Soviet Heretic* 10.

⁴ Zamyatin, *A Soviet Heretic* 12-13.

⁵ Zamyatin, *A Soviet Heretic* 4.

also suggests that Zamyatin tended to talk up his encounters with zeppelins.⁶

Scholarship on Zamyatin has been most prolific in America. Although Cold War era American scholarship on Zamyatin (in which his opposition to Bolshevism tends to be over-emphasised) should be approached with caution, the quality of American research on *We* has often been high. Surprisingly, it is U.S. studies of his fiction set in England that frequently do not match this level. Specifically, the setting of the novels seems not to have merited American investigation. While, for instance, Christopher Collins's Jungian reading of *We* is a detailed and interesting discussion, his comment that *Islanders* is set in "the fictional English city Jesmond" betrays an ignorance which prevents him unlocking the precision (and hence the full force) of the satirical content of Zamyatin's novella.⁷ Worse is E. J. Brown, who claims that "The literary method and the basic thematic content of *Islanders* is developed further in *We*, where the rigid patterns of London life have become the utopian laws of a state of the twenty-ninth century."⁸ The distinction (here conflated) between Newcastle and London is important because it adds a provincial element to Zamyatin's English satire, which is not present in *We*. However, as Myers has shown, the northern industrial landscape, which Zamyatin had observed over a long period, is an inspiration for the physical setting of the novel. Geographical and temporal accuracy is important to any reading of *We* that takes into account the utilisation of, and commentary upon, contemporary conditions. This cannot be said of Owen Ulph's claim that, "weathering the sulky fogs of the London

⁶ Alan Myers, "Evgenii Zamyatin in Newcastle," *Slavonic and East European Review* 68 (1990); Alan Myers, "Zamyatin in Newcastle: The Green Wall and The Pink Ticket," *Slavonic and East European Review* 71 (1993). Myers's argument that the quarter-mile long glazed sheds in which the ships were built is a source for the architecture in *We* seems sensible, the suggestion that the pink tickets by which sex is regulated in the One State could be based on pink clocking-in cards in the Wallsend docks seems less likely.

⁷ Christopher Collins, *Evgenij Zamiatin: An Interpretive Study*, Slavistic Printings and Reprintings, ed. C. H. Van Schooneveld (The Hague, Neth.: Mouton, 1973), 29.

⁸ E.J. Brown, "Brave New World", "1984" and "We": An Essay on Anti-Utopia, Ardis Essay Series (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1976).

Dockyards, [Zamyatin] directed the construction of icebreakers.”⁹ The London Dockyards did not hold a large shipbuilding industry.

Zamyatin returned to Russia from England during the October Revolution. He threw himself into early Soviet literary life and worked in both the House of Writers and the Petrograd House of Arts, writing many of his finest short stories, as well as translating and staging *King Lear* with Blok, and serving on various literary committees.¹⁰ While all publishing was impeded by paper shortages, from 1918 onwards Zamyatin took on a huge amount of editing work that was prepared for publication, including the World Literature series. At this point,

The necessary stimulus for *My* [the Russian transliteration of *We*] undoubtedly came from Zamjatin’s editorial work in 1919 on translations of H. G. Wells’s sociofantastic novels and perhaps from acquaintance with some works by Anatole France as well. Apparently *My* was written in 1920, but Zamjatin spent considerable time polishing and revising it the following year.¹¹

By the time he was ready to submit *We* for publication, Zamyatin was already viewed suspiciously by Bolsheviks. Indeed, he had a minor scrape with Cheka, the Soviet State security service, in 1919. They arrested him again in 1922. He had published a number of essays that were not only philosophically heretical to Bolshevik doctrine, but had rather inconveniently drawn attention to the paucity of literary output from the Proletcult organization, a powerful rival to the Petrograd section of the All-Russian Union of Writers (VSP) which he had helped to establish: “[t]he Proletcult art is, thus far, a step back, to the 1860s”, he declared.¹²

Zamyatin gave a number of public readings of *We*, but despite the high regard with which he was held in the VSP it was clear that the satirical likeness of certain aspects of the Benefactor’s regime in the novel to the Bolshevik project were too close for comfort for it to be published in Russia.

⁹ Owen Ulph, “I-330: Reconsiderations on the Sex of Satan,” *Zamyatin’s We: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Gary Kern (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1988), 80.

¹⁰ Shane, *The Life and Works of Evgenij Zamjatin* 25-35.

¹¹ Shane, *The Life and Works of Evgenij Zamjatin* 37-8.

¹² “I am afraid” (1921) in Zamyatin, *A Soviet Heretic* 56.

Alexander Voronsky praised Zamyatin as a “master of the word. His language is fresh, original and exact”, but nevertheless denounced *We* as narrowly individualistic, a “lampoon” on existing socialism by a scared man who had lost touch with his epoch: “[t]o oppose *grass*, human *wilfulness*, and people covered with hair to communism means not to understand the essence of the question,” he argued, while admitting that “the artistic aspects of the novel are excellent.”¹³

Gregory Zilboorg had begun translating “*My*” in 1922; *We* appeared in New York in 1924. It was subsequently translated into French, as *Nous Autres*, as well as Czech. When an émigré publisher re-translated the work without Zamyatin’s permission from the Czech into Russian in 1929, Zamyatin was viciously denounced, denied access to all publishing outlets and forced to resign from the Petrograd VSP. His fledgling career as a dramatist was wrecked. Only through Gorky’s intervention and his own daring letter to Stalin was he granted permission to leave the Soviet Union. His career and his health faded in Paris until his death in 1937.

Zamyatin as Neorealist

Zamyatin was acutely aware of, and frequently reflective upon, the literary context in which he wrote. However, his conception of Russian literary movements was quite idiosyncratic. At the time he was writing *We*, Zamyatin saw himself as a “Neorealist.” For Zamyatin, Neorealism as a movement was only explicable with reference to its literary origins, although within these explanations he tended to make reference only to Russian literature. In this context, he saw Neo-Realism as a synthesis of late nineteenth-century Realism and early twentieth-century Symbolism. The art of Realists like Gorky, and particularly Chekhov, “consisted of reflecting in a tiny splinter of a mirror – a book or a story – the truest and most vivid piece of the earth.” Man was at the centre of this world, the only being capable of occupying the focus of their lens, for all intents and purposes treated as a god, according to

¹³ Alexander Voronsky, “Evgeny Zamyatin,” *Zamyatin's We: A Collection of Critical Essays* 25, 45, 46.

Zamyatin. Realism “depicted the apparent reality, visible to the naked eye”, which for the Realists was man and earth. “In Chekhov’s work the art of portraying life, of portraying the earth, attained its highest point.”¹⁴

Zamyatin believed that with no greater achievement possible within the Realist mode, writers like “Fyodor Sologub, Andrey Bely, Gippius, Blok, Bryusov, Balmont, Andreyev, Chulkov, Vyacheslav Ivanov, Minsky, Voloshin” reacted by creating Symbolism.¹⁵ This is a neat conceptualisation, but one that skirts over the more complex historical context and literary tensions between these writers. In its first expressions in the 1890s Russian Symbolism in fact had “close links with Paris”, with Bryusov in particular taking inspiration from Rimbaud and Mallarmé, and publishing a translation of Verlaine’s *Romances sur Paroles*. Meanwhile, younger writers including “Blok and Vyacheslav Ivanov as well as Bely distanced themselves from Bryusov and Balmont. Blok... condemned Bryusov as decadent”, a move that echoed many previous dismissals of French Symbolism in Western Europe, particularly by conservative figures.¹⁶

By concentrating on Symbolism as a Russian movement, Zamyatin argued that Symbolism represented both Realism’s antithesis, and a shift in literary ideas analogous to the technological leap from trains to aeroplanes. Like early flight, he argued, Symbolism was clumsy and experimental at times. But it looked at the world from a different perspective, moved more rapidly and in new directions as a reaction against the constraints and overdevelopment of Realism. Zamyatin’s belief was that the faster “tempos of modern life do not tolerate the ‘slow, horse-and-buggy descriptions’ of nineteenth-century Realism. The age demands that syntax become ‘elliptical, volatile,’ and the image must also convey ‘quickness of motion.’”¹⁷

¹⁴ Zamyatin, *A Soviet Heretic* 36, 42, 36.

¹⁵ Zamyatin, *A Soviet Heretic* 37.

¹⁶ René Wellek, “The Term and Concept of Symbolism in Literary History,” *New Literary History* 1.2 (1970), 261-2.

¹⁷ Quoted in Milton Ehre, “Zamyatin’s Aesthetics,” *Zamyatin’s We: A Collection of Critical Essays* 133.

Russian Symbolism not only responded to the increased speed of the twentieth century, it also produced grim, universally symbolised pictures of life reflecting an industrial, mass age. To Zamyatin, who consistently adopted technological metaphors to describe aesthetic changes, the Russian Symbolists looked at details not as if reflecting the apparent reality of life with the most perfect mimesis as Chekhov had done, but as if using an x-ray machine. He characterized their approach as being like an x-ray image of a skeleton; the anatomical and technologically sophisticated photograph which was both a symbol of life and a symbol of death. The Russian Symbolists' most valuable contribution, to Zamyatin's mind, was their concentration on form and on the sounds of words. To fit the complex emotional states about which they were writing, the Symbolists successfully "created a science of verbal music."¹⁸

In Zamyatin's schema, the sublation (*Aufheben*) of this dialectical struggle between Realism and Symbolism was what he termed "Neorealism", or "synthesism". "The material of the Neorealists", he explained,

is the same as that of the Realists: life, earth, rock, everything that has weight and dimensions. But, while they use this material, the Neorealists do primarily what the Symbolists sought to do; they create generalizations and symbols.¹⁹

Neorealism employed images as if using a microscope, which were more 'real' precisely because thus magnified they appeared estranged and alien. Characterised by irony, a satirically Swiftian smile at the world and the "use of the method of Impressionism; clarity and sharp, often exaggerated, vividness of colors; use of the village, the backwoods, as the scene of action", Neorealism, Zamyatin asserted, contrasted with Symbolism's concentration on the bustling novelty of industrial cities. However, both movements used "broad, abstract generalizations – achieved by depiction of everyday trifles; terseness of language; 'showing' rather than 'telling about'; use of folk and local speech; use of verbal music."²⁰

¹⁸ Zamyatin, *A Soviet Heretic* 39.

¹⁹ Zamyatin, *A Soviet Heretic* 44.

²⁰ Zamyatin, *A Soviet Heretic* 48.

The diary form of *We* is exceptionally well suited to the depiction of “everyday trifles” and D-503 is assiduous, even obsessive, in his recording of trivia. We learn not only what he eats, for example, but how (fifty chews per mouthful); the weather is a recurrent theme even though it is never extreme (something, it is tempting to suggest, that could be a satirical reflection on the author’s time in England); and at one point D- notices an inkblot next to his name on U’s sheet of paper. Each of these trifles, however, is highly charged and exists within a tightly controlled, and expertly deployed, extended schema of imagery: the weather is not merely pathetic fallacy but a device by which the totality of the One State’s power over nature is tested – as fog, clouds and wind pass over the Green Wall, the outer world brings the scent of “yellow honey pollen... of some unknown flowers” with it, which “interferes to some extent with the flow of logical thought.”²¹ The inkblot on U’s paper by D-’s name recalls an earlier “everyday trifle” in which D- recollected crying as a child because he got an inkblot on his “unif”. The inkblot indicates irrationality and carelessness, but also D-’s childishness, and U’s relation to him as a surrogate mother. It is D-503’s failure to be “good”, and a perfectly rational “number”.

We utilises a defamiliarizing process by virtue of being placed in the distant future. Its “local speech” is more localised in time than in space. For Patrick Parrinder, “the future consciousness, and even the future language” of *We* are its “most radical conceptions” and “it is Zamyatin’s imagination of these conditions – his revelation of the future through its writings – that establishes *We* as a uniquely modernist work of science fiction.”²² As Kern elaborates, Zamyatin achieves this futurity of language through a number of intelligently crafted techniques. His syntax is highly idiosyncratic, eliminating many grammatical parts of written language, as well as eschewing lengthy

²¹ Yevgeny Zamyatin, *We*, trans. Mirra Ginsburg (New York: EOS HarperCollins, 1999), 3. There are a variety of translations available of *We*. As Ginsburg’s translations of Zamyatin’s essays are referred to extensively in this chapter, for the sake of consistency I also use her translation of *We* throughout (unless otherwise indicated). I also follow her transliterations of Russian names and terms (except in quotations where original spellings are retained).

²² Patrick Parrinder, “Imagining the Future: Zamyatin and Wells,” *Science Fiction Studies* 1 (1973), 20.

sentences containing multiple subordinate clauses. Using this technique, Kern claims, Zamyatin

Sought to reproduce what he called 'thought language' (*myslennyi iazyk*) – the speed language of 'pieces, fragments and additions.' The reader is thus given only the guidelines to the action: faced with incomplete sentences (aposiopesis), changes of construction (anacoluthon) and bare allusions, he is forced to fill the missing links, to think, and, in a sense, to create with the author.²³

The combination of the proleptic future setting and prose laden with aposiopesis and anacoluthon (for example: "But now... Yes, precisely: I feel some alien speck in my brain, like the finest eyelash in the eye")²⁴ has a defamiliarizing effect. The concept of defamiliarization, as developed by Victor Shklovsky, was premised on the idea that "art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*."²⁵ Through a variety of techniques including, but not limited to, "wordplay, deliberately roughened rhythm, or figures of speech", the writer arrests the "automatism" of perception and forces the reader to be aware of each individual word.²⁶ While the two disagreed politically, Zamyatin's prose clearly drew on Shklovsky's theory.²⁷ *We* is a text that forces the reader to actively fill in gaps, and prevents her or him from digesting any part of it automatically and without reflection. The pace and use of irregular pauses and ellipses stand in sharp contrast against each other, reinforcing the bright confusing clash of colours. Although Zamyatin sometimes described his work and that of other Neorealists as "impressionistic," Ehre's argument that "impressionism" is the wrong word to describe the Neorealist project appears sound (although *post-impressionism* may be closer). The brightness of the colours used in *We*, their lack of subtlety in hue or tone, adds weight to his

²³ Gary Kern, "Zamyatin's Stylization," *Zamyatin's We: A Collection of Critical Essays* 120.

²⁴ Zamyatin, *We*, 32-3 *ellipsis in original*.

²⁵ Victor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, *Russian Formalist Criticism*, eds. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, Regents Critics Series (Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska P, 1965), 12.

²⁶ Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, Introduction, "Art as Technique," by Shklovsky, 5.

²⁷ Shklovsky's review of *We* condemned Zamyatin's "one-sided ability" and with pointed irony threw Zamyatin's image of the freedom of the aeroplane back at him, referring to him as a plane that had reached its "ceiling". Victor Shklovsky, "Yevgeny Zamyatin's Ceiling," *Zamyatin's We: A Collection of Critical Essays* 49-50.

suggestion that “it is a similar solidity that Picasso and Braque, looking back to Cézanne, were working for in the Cubist experiments.”²⁸ The Cubists, after all, as German Expressionist Ludwig Meidner put it, were modern artists who were “the contemporaries of the engineer.”²⁹ While Zamyatin presents D-503’s devotion to geometric forms as representative of his devotion to the alien and terrifying values of the One State, it is not certain that he does not also share with D-503 an aesthetic appreciation for such forms as, for example, the *Integral*: “a graceful, elongated ellipsoid made of our glass – as eternal as gold, as flexible as steel.”³⁰ These forms, particularly the *Integral*, are not often described as cold or static. There is genuine admiration for the ship-like vessel being constructed at the heart of a mechanical, humanised dance.

Cinema

The (post-)impressionistic style and fast movement is not only characteristic of Neorealism, but also of the new medium of cinema. Tim Armstrong cites an American newspaper, which in 1896 described the new cinema as “Electricity in its application to the arts.”³¹ Given Zamyatin’s insistence that new prose should reflect the ever-increasing, electrified pace of modern life, cinematic imagery appears as practically a *sine qua non*. On the Day of Unanimity, the satirical episode in which the supposedly “democratic” election of the Benefactor by a unanimous public vote is disrupted by thousands of the Mephi voting against him, the cinematic quality is emphasized with the image of “thousands of silently screaming mouths, as on some monstrous movie screen.”³² This is followed by a repetition of the

²⁸ Ehre, “Zamyatin’s Aesthetics,” 133.

²⁹ Ludwig Meidner, “Instructions for Painting Pictures of the Metropolis,” *Art In Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 170.

³⁰ Zamyatin, *We*, 82.

³¹ Quoted in Tim Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology and the Body: A Cultural Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 222.

³² Zamyatin, *We*, 144.

word “screen” in each of the following two paragraphs to underline the comparison with cinema.³³

Cinema was expanding at a phenomenally rapid rate during Zamyatin’s stay in Britain.³⁴ In the Russian context, meanwhile, Russell notes that “the visual distortions and defamiliarizations in *We* anticipate by a few years the work of Russian constructivist photographers and avant-garde film directors of the 1920s.”³⁵ Zamyatin believed that in cinema “the most important thing is motion, motion at any cost.”³⁶ Flicking between images of isolated body parts and monumental buildings, between the individual and cityscapes, in *We* the elimination of grammatical parts of speech, as described above by Gary Kern, is replaced in part by the grammar of cinema.³⁷

As a writer obsessed by the tension between opposites, Zamyatin frequently alternated between the microscopic and the telescopic, or panoramic.³⁸ In the Second Entry of his diary, D-503 records meeting O-90 for a walk. “[S]he looks exactly like her name[...] carved in the round, all of her, with that pink O, her mouth, open to meet every word I say. And also, that round, plump fold in her wrist, like a baby’s.”³⁹ Linking the shape of the name “O-90” with her body shape creates a memorable visual impression that Zamyatin can rely on every time she subsequently appears in the text. To reinforce the theme, the tight focus on mouth and wrist act as a synecdoche for her

³³ Robert Russell, *Zamyatin's "We"*, Critical Studies in Russian Literature (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2000), 95.

³⁴ “There were approximately 1,600 cinemas in Britain in 1910. Further expansion brought them to a total of perhaps 3,500 by 1916.” Dean Rapp, “Sex in the Cinema: War, Moral Panic, and the British Film Industry, 1906-1918,” *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 34 (2002), 422, n.3.

³⁵ Russell, *Zamyatin's "We"* 109.

³⁶ Zamyatin, *A Soviet Heretic* 291.

³⁷ Interestingly, Zamyatin’s description of the (Russian) Symbolists’ “surgical” approach to writing as contrasting to the essentially romantic view which the Realists held is congruent with Walter Benjamin’s comparison of painter and cinematographer in his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”: “magician and surgeon compare to painter and cameraman. The painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, the cameraman penetrates deeply into its web.” Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zorn, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1999), 227.

³⁸ Kern, “Zamyatin's Stylization,” 125.

³⁹ Zamyatin, *We*, 4.

character and physical appearance.⁴⁰ D- ‘reads’ the features of O-’s body and character as open, softly rounded, innocently honest and unblemished. When she does not live up to this identity – as when, for example, she reacts negatively to his decision (never acted upon) to inform the Guardians about I-330’s illegal activities – he becomes angry. In the congruence between the shape of her name (“O”) and the shape of (the details of) her body, the body is literally turned into writing in D-503’s diary, to be read by him. This “heightened readability of the body”, its intensely *visual* meaning, has a cinematic quality.⁴¹ Following these ‘shots’ (full-length portrait, close-ups of mouth and wrist) D- and O- go down into the street. D-503’s cinematic gaze moves across the scene: “[t]he avenue was full[...] The numbers marched in even ranks, four abreast, ecstatically stepping in time to the music”.⁴² The description places D-503 as separate from the marching ranks, like a wide-angled shot panning across the street from above. It is entirely fitting with D-503’s ideal of the citizens of the One State as being efficient as machines that he views them as if through a lens. As Walter Benjamin put it, “mass reproduction is aided especially by the reproduction of masses.”⁴³ By identifying himself with a camera viewpoint, D-503 stresses both his “mechanical” nature and his belief of himself as an objective, rational recorder of daily life, while simultaneously representing the crowd as an expression of the ideology of the One State in action.

Robert Russell notes that the eye of D-503 is on several occasions analogous to that of a camera lens selecting, for example, “the beautiful patterns of synchronized movement” in the construction site of the *Integral*.⁴⁴ Zamyatin’s anticipation of Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov in the scene in the Fifteenth Entry to which Russell refers is remarkable. In his 1922 “WE: Variant of a Manifesto”, Vertov exclaimed, “saws dancing at a sawmill convey to us a joy more intimate and intelligible than that on human dance floors.” “*The new man*” whom Vertov wanted as his future “gratifying”

⁴⁰ On the importance of synecdoche in *We*, see Eliot Borenstein, “The Plural Self: Zamyatin’s *We* and the Logic of Synecdoche,” *The Slavic and East European Journal* 40 (1996).

⁴¹ Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology and the Body* 227.

⁴² Zamyatin, *We* 5.

⁴³ Benjamin, *Illuminations* 243, n. 21.

⁴⁴ Russell, *Zamyatin’s “We”* 77.

subject, would be “free from unwieldiness and clumsiness, will have the light, precise movements of machines.”⁴⁵ Such are the many men “turning like the levers of a single huge machine” in the construction of the *Integral*.⁴⁶ This pointed prophetic accuracy, based only upon the continued trajectories of Soviet art of many media, makes the text all the more satirically biting.

Vertov and Zamyatin shared an obsession with movement: in Vertov’s seminal *Man With a Movie Camera* (1929), shots are edited together at an incessantly lively pace. However, the theoretical underpinning of the two differed substantially. While both grounded their work dialectically, Vertov ultimately aimed to reflect the Bolshevik conception of the ‘reality’ of the new ‘Soviet paradise’. His development of montage techniques, which required “the geometrical extract of movement through an exciting succession of images”, were intended only to valorise “electric man.”⁴⁷ In other words, he followed the orthodox Bolshevik aesthetic of rationalised, mechanised labour.

The application of this aesthetic was exemplified in the literary world by Aleksei Gastev, a labour organiser, metalworker and author of *Shockwork Poetry*. “Work in all its manifestations was sacred for Gastev... Taking labor as a raw material, [he believed] the new specialist will transform it into a thing of harmony and beauty.”⁴⁸ For Gastev, Patricia Carden argues, the improvement of labour conditions, and the efficiencies that capitalist thinkers such as Henry Ford and Frederick Winslow Taylor had instituted, could lead to work being not only more productive, but also less frustrating and ultimately fulfilling. “He sees technology as the means to an honorable life in which not just a few in the privileged occupations, but every member of society will be joined in productive and fulfilling labor.” But to Zamyatin, the anonymity and subordination of life to rationalized impersonal systems was an evil. Moreover, humanity was incapable of holding to such systems.

⁴⁵ Dziga Vertov, *Kino-eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, trans. Kevin O'Brien, ed. Annette Michelson (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1984), 7-8.

⁴⁶ Zamyatin, *We* 82.

⁴⁷ Vertov, *Kino-eye* 8.

⁴⁸ Patricia Carden, "Utopia and Anti-Utopia: Aleksei Gastev and Evgeny Zamyatin," *Russian Review* 46 (1987), 6.

Zamyatin was influenced by Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground*, in which the Underground Man declares that "the whole human enterprise seems indeed to consist in man's proving to himself every moment that he is a man and not a sprig!" Thus, the Underground Man declares, "man needs *only* independent wanting," needs only to follow his own whims and wants; if mankind lived in the most rational and harmonious "gingerbread" cockaigne imaginable, the invention of "destruction and chaos" would still be inevitable.⁴⁹ Hence, Carden argues that "it is as though Zamyatin issues a challenge to the Gastevs of his generation: Your love of beauty, your capacity for philosophy, can only lead you ultimately to the irrational, the non-machine, if you are not to betray it."⁵⁰

Heretics

To Zamyatin himself, such a challenge was easy to accept. As a naval architect, his designs had to be streamlined and efficient. As a writer, he prided himself on being a heretic, a naysayer stubbornly opposed to literature that treated men as nameless appendages to modern machinery, slightly less efficient tools of industrial production than the plant which they tended in dull repetition. The heretic's calling was precisely to prevent the smooth functioning of the chain of endless reproduction and repetition.

The world is kept alive only by heretics: the heretic Christ, the heretic Copernicus, the heretic Tolstoy. Our symbol of faith is heresy: tomorrow is inevitably heresy to today, which has turned into a pillar of salt, and to yesterday, which has scattered to dust.⁵¹

Heretics create tension, provoke responses, and ultimately must sacrifice themselves to the tomorrow that they bring into existence. Heretics are the compelling, dissatisfied outsiders of society. Ironically, however, the elevation of the historical agency of individual heretics represented a tension within Zamyatin's own philosophy, which also held that history progressed

⁴⁹ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Notes from Underground*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (London: Vintage, 1993), 31, 26, 30-1.

⁵⁰ Carden, "Utopia and Anti-Utopia," 12.

⁵¹ "Tomorrow" in Zamyatin, *A Soviet Heretic*, 51.

according to more structured dialectical change. The valorisation of individual charismatic heretics, rhetorically reified until they appear to possess quasi-fantastical abilities and visions, seems to undermine Zamyatin's insistence elsewhere on the framework of Hegelian dialectics in historical (and artistic) change, in which artists and political actors are merely representative of broader movements and structures. In Russia, Voronsky was one of the first to point this out, while in the West both Andrew Barratt and Victoria Rooney have tried to unpick this seemingly elitist and inconsistent element of Zamyatin's worldview.⁵²

This issue of elitism is linked to Zamyatin's fashionable flirtation with the ideas of Nietzsche. Rooney in particular has criticised Zamyatin for peddling what she sees as a vulgar and superficial interpretation of Nietzsche's ideas that attempted to tie the eternal recurrence to his own more Hegelian framework. She finds Zamyatin's separation of the creative individual from the "masses" elitist and dogmatic. The force of her argument is reduced by her misapplication of the label "Marxist" to Zamyatin – a point which Russell criticises. Zamyatin was once, as she asserts, a member of the Bolshevik Party, but only in his student days, years before the October Revolution.⁵³ If the heretic, as Rooney intimates, is a politicized form of the Nietzschean *Übermensch*, and (as she also appears to suggest) heretics are for Zamyatin the primary agents of historical change, then Zamyatin cannot be thought of as Marxist, especially not in the crude, historically determinist sense she seems to intend. This would rather be closer to the 'Great Man' view of history associated with Whig historians. Her conflation of Darwinism and the social Darwinism of philosophers such as Herbert Spencer also detracts from her thesis. Notwithstanding these problems, she is correct to flag up the issue of elitism in Zamyatin's thought. He did indeed privilege the creative artist and the creative scientist. He felt that among these elite practitioners

⁵² Voronsky, "Evgeny Zamyatin," 45; Andrew Barratt, "Revolution as Collusion: The Heretic and the Slave in Zamyatin's *My*," *The Slavic and East European Review* 62 (1984); Victoria Rooney, "Nietzschean Elements in Zamyatin's Ideology: A Study of his Essays," *The Modern Language Review* 81 (1986).

⁵³ Rooney, "Nietzschean Elements in Zamyatin's Ideology," 675; Russell, *Zamyatin's "We"* 33.

were heretics able to look at the world anew and see things in a fresh light, to see a new relation between contemporary forces.

Moreover, there is something uncanny about the endless repetition of faceless crowds in *We*. Almost all the main characters of the novel are members of a cultured and educated elite: D-503 is the chief builder/mathematician, S-4711 a guardian, I-330 a classical pianist (among other things), R-13 is a state poet and even U is a school teacher. Significantly, only O-90's job is never mentioned. She goes to live with the Mephi, creatures of every colour who only ever behave as a crowd, whether protesting at the Day of Unanimity or celebrating the breach of the Green Wall. As Barratt points out, Zamyatin's conception of heresy,

rests on a profoundly undemocratic conception of mankind (a point which is inevitably overlooked by those who stress his humanism). The heretic's function is to inject into the historical process the iconoclastic element without which the dialectic of progress would fail to operate.⁵⁴

Zamyatin's conception of heresy is then seemingly inconsistent with his belief that the pattern of the Hegelian dialectic is the driving force of history, unless the heretic is viewed as both an *Übermensch* (a figure who, "embracing the moral as well as the immoral side... is valuable in himself, in the richness of his individuality"), as well as a politician performing the socially useful function of historical actor (which Nietzsche's *Übermensch* did not).⁵⁵ If Zamyatin's heretic can be rescued from the charge of inconsistency, it is through his insistence that heretics must focus not on the near future, but on the far future; not on such narrow political acts as (say) the collectivization of farms, but on a different historical epoch altogether. The heretic cannot be a political strategist. Perhaps this is one reason why I-330's revolution is destined to fail. She is not an artist, merely an agitator. It is D-503, seemingly an innocent fly caught in her web, who is in reality (and whatever his doubts) the true artist. Furthermore, it is through the creative act of propagation, of D-agreeing to have a child with O-90, that the novel is left critically open at its

⁵⁴ Barratt, "Revolution as Collusion," 353.

⁵⁵ Rooney, "Nietzschean Elements in Zamyatin's Ideology," 681.

end, allowing a radical element of hope to remain. His son or daughter will grow up with the Mephi beyond the Green Wall, the progeny of irrational and rational forces in creative tension. For Barratt, the failure in *We* of I-330 to fully convert D-503 to her cause is evidence of a profoundly pessimistic insight that “revolutionaries and slaves are incapable of making common cause together.”⁵⁶ But if D-503 is merely a “slave” then this complicates the picture of the heretic as a creative and artistic force. Though I-330 is an agent of change and a muse to D-503, it is finally he who, as both builder and writer, is the creative artist in spite of himself. She creates chaos, he creates form.

Metafiction

D-503's failure to act in a truly revolutionary manner exposes the difficulties of attaining the status of heretic. Zamyatin indicated in his essay “Scythians” that Christ on the cross is properly a heretic and “spiritual revolutionary”, but D-503 does not willingly sacrifice himself.⁵⁷ Indeed, for Richard Gregg, D-503's decision is an ironic inversion of Christ's: rather than die for the freedom of mankind, he lives to ensure their continued slavery.⁵⁸ From the start of the novel it is clear that writing is something intensely personal and important for D-503; he feels like a pregnant woman becoming aware of the “pulse of a new, still tiny, still blind little human being” within herself. The alienating aspect of artistic production, of being conscious of the production of the diary as a consciously willed act – in other words in separating the creative experience of artistic labour from the final fruit of one's labour as something apart and detached from oneself – is an emotionally charged experience. The diary, writes D-, “is I, and at the same time, not I. And for many long months it will be necessary to nourish it with my own life, my own blood, then tear it painfully from myself and lay it at the feet of the One State.”⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Barratt, “Revolution as Collusion,” 355.

⁵⁷ Zamyatin, *A Soviet Heretic* 21-33, here 22.

⁵⁸ Richard A Gregg, “Two Adams and Eve in the Crystal Palace: Dostoevsky, the Bible, and *We*,” *Slavic Review* 24 (1965), 687.

⁵⁹ Zamyatin, *We* 2.

The text of *We* had a remarkable life of its own once it left its author's hands, not only appearing in translation without Zamyatin's permission, but then subsequently being partially responsible for the denunciation of Zamyatin in the late 1920s. D-503's writings have unintended consequences within the fictional realm of the novel itself too: when O-90 is read to from them she cries, and when U reads them she discovers the Mephi plan to commandeer the *Integral* spaceship and informs the authorities. Within the text, the diary, this thing that "is I, and at the same time, not I", in its very conception stands as an individual unit against its own title of "We", and works against its fictional creator. Hence D-503 characteristically sets out to be a "mathematical" recording instrument of daily life but becomes a novelist, an adventure-story writer.

The plot of the novel slides away from D-503 gradually, just as his rationality and socialised model of self fragments and slips from his grasp. D-503 often finds time to reflect on the process of writing, and from this information we can on occasion glean something of Zamyatin's own attitude towards the artistic process that is reflective of his wider philosophy. D-503's penchant for addressing his imaginary audience directly ("you, the unknown readers to whom the *Integral* will bring my notes") has a defamiliarizing effect, reminding the reader that not only the content of the novel but its premise too is fantastic.⁶⁰ This prevents what, as alluded to above, Shklovsky termed the "automatism of perception."⁶¹ But this technique also draws attention to the *artfulness* of the diary; D-503 is not only an adventure-story writer but a writer exploring and *experimenting* with the process of writing. Zamyatin turns the traditional pattern of the 'scientific romance' (as Wells termed his early works) on its head: instead of someone like "The Time Traveller" in Wells's *The Time Machine* coming back from the future to the present to relate future events, D-503 is a writer from the (proleptic) future writing (analeptically) *as if* his readers are from the past (our present). This is why D-503 comments:

⁶⁰ Zamyatin, *We* 10.

⁶¹ Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," 12-13.

I am confident you will not judge me too severely. I am confident you will understand that it is far more difficult for me to write than it has been for any other author in the history of mankind. Some wrote for their contemporaries; others for their descendants. But no one has ever written for ancestors, or for beings similar to his primitive, remote ancestors.⁶²

D-503 is ironically deceiving himself: the “troubling X” which he ascribes to his readers is already just as much within himself. In a move characteristic of Zamyatin, he here brings together science and literature. D-503 is (by analogy) attempting to write a text that stands outside of the normal human perception of time as linear, and sees it as something relative, perceived differently according to one’s viewpoint. In structuralist terms, D- is an “intradiegetic-homodiegetic” narrator (he lives within the ‘storyworld’ and tells a story in which he is a central character), but he constantly strives – and fails – to achieve a camera-eye ‘objectivity’ that somehow negates the subjectivity of space and time.⁶³ Zamyatin is, in other words, writing with awareness of Einstein’s general theory of relativity and trying to find a way to develop its implications in relation to fiction.⁶⁴ D-503 writes anachronically ‘back in time’, to historical beings that he, as a member of the flight crew of the *Integral*, believes he will meet in his own future. The Newtonian theories of space, which D-503 venerates as something sacred, are in conflict with his own avowed mission to write for beings of the past living in his own near future. The “mathematical certainty” on which he builds his worldview thus stands in stark contradiction to his own creative process.

The metafictional hereby intersects with the psychological development of character. Putting pen to paper, putting *part of himself* into his work (“it is I, and, at the same time, not I”), without him realising it D-503’s notes are an important agent of both historical and personal change. Unlike the building of the *Integral*, which is a joint project involving constant collaboration, the writing of the diary is an intensely personal activity necessitating his

⁶² Zamyatin, *We*, 23.

⁶³ Herman, *Basic Elements of Narrative*, 66-67.

⁶⁴ An excellent discussion on the engagement with Einstein and general relativity in *We* and early Soviet society can be found in W.J. Leatherbarrow, “Einstein and the Art of Yevgeny Zamyatin,” *The Modern Language Review* 82 (1987).

withdrawal from social life and a turn to self. In an age of mass socialisation, in which “individual consciousness is merely a sickness”, and where “the natural path from nonentity to greatness is to forget that you are a gram and feel yourself instead a millionth of a ton”, the diary form with which D-503 naively chooses to express himself is inherently rebellious.⁶⁵ Furthermore, writing, the imagination and doubt are all clearly linked by Zamyatin, all three working against the formulaic “happiness” of the One State. “Can it be true that I once felt – or imagined that I felt – all this?” D-503 rhetorically asks on the penultimate page, after he has had his imagination removed by surgery. The removal of his imagination has removed his doubts about the One State and his own identity. This is underlined by the final topic, “I Am Certain.” The heading relates to his final assertion that “Reason must prevail”; the One State will crush the rebellion completely.⁶⁶ But it also recalls his assertion in the Eleventh Entry that “knowledge, absolutely sure of its infallibility, is faith.” There is nothing ‘scientific’ (in the Newtonian sense D- intends) about such faith. At this earlier point in the text, seeing his “steel-gray eyes” as if for the first time in the mirror, D- comments “and there, behind this steel ... it turns out I have never known what is there.”⁶⁷ D-503 only begins to gain such insight through social upheaval and personal drama, by developing a soul and falling in love. What he finds is a fragmented self, desperate to cling to the certainty of the One State sense of identity, but equally and paradoxically craving “madness”, love, uniqueness and sensuous, deliciously painful experiences of disruption and change. The certainty of faith, the final topic heading seems to indicate, is linked to a pathological lack of imagination. Only the “humanoid tractors” herding the terrified individuals towards the operating rooms have total faith in the ideals of the One State, coupled with zero imagination. Hence the writing of fiction is connected to empathy, imagination, love, a desire for change and a multilayered, complex model of self. This nexus is not causal, but related in more subtle and uncertain ways. Opposed to this, a scientifically-induced lack of imagination causes the writer to fail to make links between *superficially* unrelated phenomena (the

⁶⁵ Zamyatin, *We* 128, 115. It is significant, given that Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is consciously inspired by *We*, that Winston Smith’s first rebellious act is to write a diary.

⁶⁶ Zamyatin, *We* 231-2.

⁶⁷ Zamyatin, *We* 59.

auditorium where D- is taken for his operation, for example, is the same one to which he was summoned to hear I-330 play Scriabin on the piano at the start of the novel, but he cannot put his finger on why it is familiar). Zamyatin thus appears to end the novel with the polemical suggestion that any attempt by a mechanical and vulgar writer to report the One State uncritically, unambiguously and without imagination would be doomed to artistic failure.

The Rational and the Emotional

The plot of *We* is complicated by a sense of desperate ambiguity throughout. It is impossible to know whether I-330 really ever loves D-503, for instance, or, as is hinted more than once, if she is merely using him to gain access to the *Integral*. Characters' motivations slip between the frequent ellipses and dashes in the text: the narrator, D-503, fails to understand either his own psychic life or that of others ("this is precisely why – precisely why I...").⁶⁸ Indeed, it is the aim of One State to keep its citizens completely ignorant of the emotional content of the self. The State is premised upon a totalising model of rationality from which emotional considerations are excluded as something unworthy, animal-like and unsanitary. The One State seeks to control the populace by regulating its behaviour, narrowing their citizens' emotional spectrum to preclude unpredictable passions. By withholding from the populace knowledge of emotions like anger, jealousy, and pain, the State hopes to maintain happiness as a constant. The first logical consequence of the narrator's total emotional illiteracy is, paradoxically, a lucidly described incomprehension of the mental lives of others. Russell argues that in a world of transparent glass, "The opaqueness of the body is used throughout *We* as a metaphor for the mysterious, unknowable quality within each person."⁶⁹ In addition, there are also two other important opaque objects in the One State. The first is the Ancient House, whose shuttered windows are more than once compared to human eyes, open or closed to the outside world. The second is the paper upon which D-503 writes his diary. Through this device the metafictional is cleverly linked to the psychical exploration of the main

⁶⁸ Zamyatin, *We* 72.

⁶⁹ Russell, *Zamyatin's "We"* 107.

characters, which is central to the text. Like the novel's characters, whose names are all symbolic letters, the text both demands to be read and resists interpretation. This shared opacity of the diary-novel as work of art and the human body is comically brought together in the Twenty-Eighth Entry, when S-4711, the One State "guardian" who has been spying on D-503 throughout the narrative, bursts into his room (the naïve D-, unlike his readership, does not yet admit to himself any suspicion that S- is a double agent for the Mephi). The only place in his glass room where D- can hide the diary is beneath himself on the glass chair on which he sits. On blank paper in front of him, in order not to look suspicious, he writes

'The Benefactor is the most perfect disinfection, essential to mankind, and therefore in the organism of the One State no peristalsis...' With a jumping pen I squeezed out this utter nonsense, bending ever lower over the table, while in my head there was a crazy hammering, and with my back I heard the door handle click [...] My whole being throbbed and pulsed in that (fortunately untransparent) part of my body which covered the manuscript.⁷⁰

As Russell points out, S notices immediately that this writing is "somewhat ambiguous". "The 'detritus' flushed out by the Benefactor is, in fact, D-'s entire subconscious, which gives rise to the diary."⁷¹ What appears as waste is in fact most valuable, while the apparently inoffensive and ideologically pure image of the Benefactor is "utter nonsense." The diary, it should be remembered, was originally intended to be literally a digest of the One State, "to record what I see and think, or, to be more exact, what we think."⁷² In other words, this "utter nonsense" is the sort of drivel that D-503 originally intended to subject his readers to throughout the diary, a paean to a sterile and boringly 'happy' existence. But from the beginning of the novel, when, as noted above, D-503 compares himself as writer to a pregnant woman, it is clear that other psychological motivations are at work.⁷³ This being so, there is an ironic and rather Rabelaisian inversion in D-'s actions as he sits on his diary. The diary is new life, creative, and D- protects it like a bird sitting on its nest because it is an "anguished – perhaps most precious – piece of myself."

⁷⁰ Zamyatin, *We* 166-7.

⁷¹ Russell, *Zamyatin's "We"*, 100, 101.

⁷² Zamyatin, *We* 2.

⁷³ See above, 80.

The digestive image which D-503 “squeeze[s] out” in order not to get in trouble with the State, on the other hand, in its literal and most puerile, scatological sense, acts as a most dismissive judgement upon the crass mechanistic literature which Zamyatin felt was increasingly prevalent and ascendant in Revolutionary Russia, most importantly among the Proletcult Bolshevik writers.

The diary does not, then, represent an anal fixation but is rather a new life, opaquely human in its emotions, desires and thoughts, becoming ever more complex and interesting to attempt to read. The metafictional theme carried through the work implores us to study D-’s psyche in the opposition he voices between (his model of) rationality and emotions. In particular, through the device of an x-ray operation to exorcise the faculty of the imagination, the question is posed as to where the imagination fits into the make up of the life of the mind.

Kant, Hegel and the Faculties of the Mind

The One State model of rationality clearly excludes the faculties of the emotions and of the imagination. The latter is consistently linked with “irrational” emotions, and apparently non-causal associations. If D-503 reifies rationality and emotional life into a false binary opposition, then Zamyatin’s presentation of the life of the mind nevertheless implies that these elements can be analysed as different faculties.

While much work has been done on the influence of Hegel’s dialectic upon Zamyatin’s thought, little critical attention has been given to the place of Kant in his philosophy. Two reasons can explain this. Firstly, Zamyatin’s concept of change was quite clearly and directly underpinned by the Hegelian dialectic.⁷⁴ Secondly, although he is referenced several times in *We*, Kant is not discussed in the main corpus of essays to which most critics have first turned in their discussions of the novel. Yet it is the very presence of an

⁷⁴ Shane, *The Life and Works of Evgenij Zamiatin* 23. It is relevant to note that Hegel developed his dialectic as a departure from and reaction against Kant.

otherwise overlooked thinker in the text who is directly referenced on several occasions that should draw our attention to his role. In a novel in which so much effort is spent upon the formal elegance and beauty of the prose, it is significant that for Kant an idea properly meant a rational concept, and “when a rational concept is given a concrete expression, it appears as an ideal of beauty.” In other words, it is not concepts themselves that are beautiful, but their individual expressions in the phenomenal world. More precisely, “a judgment of the kind ‘x is beautiful’ is not a judgment regarding the properties of an object ‘x’ at all. It is a judgment about the feeling that the contemplation of this object induces in us.” Beauty is thus for Kant both a reflexive judgement and an ideal of the imagination.⁷⁵

Applied to *We*, the significance of formal and aesthetic qualities and techniques (including imagery, expression, use of voice, character and irony) is elevated through their continual interaction with theoretical and intellectual concerns. D-503’s idea of the beautiful is not really Kantian. When, for instance, he anthropomorphizes the machines “dancing” as they build the *Integral* in the Second Entry (“I saw the whole beauty of this grandiose ballet”), he does not have an aesthetic experience of the beautiful in Kantian terms. Whilst his reaction to the experience is a subjective judgement capable of being universalised, the scene has a clearly recognisable external purpose (constructing the *Integral*), and, as the builder, D-’s view cannot be construed as disinterested. Furthermore, having aestheticised so elegantly this moment of industrial construction, his judgement (“why is this beautiful? Why is dance beautiful? Answer: because it is unfree motion”) is reductive and utilitarian.⁷⁶ He attempts to capture the whole of the experience in a more Hegelian fashion, whereby the philosophical concept generated by this discussion is more important than the subjective experience itself, adding “the whole profound meaning of dance lies precisely in absolute, esthetic subordination, in ideal unfreedom.” The philosophical ambiguity by which D-503 undermines the very precision of his own argument here does not in itself commit Zamyatin to either philosophical position – as the passage

⁷⁵ Gjesdal, *Gadamer and the Legacy of German Idealism* 13, 24.

⁷⁶ Zamyatin, *We* 4.

continues, there is no indication as to whether the author favours a more Kantian or a more Hegelian perspective:

If it is true that our forebears abandoned themselves to dance at the most exalted moments of their lives (religious mysteries, military parades), it means only one thing: the instinct of unfreedom is organically inherent in man from time immemorial, and we, in our present life, are only consciously...⁷⁷

The discussion is left ambiguously open by the characteristic ellipsis at the end of the passage. While it could be that the combination of the terms “abandoned” and “exalted moments” with “religious mysteries, military parades” is intended to demonstrate the absurdity of D-503’s argument, he is also unintentionally linking the One State to the most “exalted moments” of non-rational societies of the past. One other possibility is that this passage is making reference to the “Apollonian-Dionysiac duality”, which Nietzsche believed to underpin the “continuous evolution” of art.⁷⁸ The formal nature of the dances to which D-503 here refers with their “unfree” movement, most rigidly in military parades, would bring it under the banner of the Apollonian. However, the “exalted” nature of chorus dances, as “rites of redemption, of glorious transfiguration” also demonstrate the profound influence of the Dionysian.⁷⁹ D-’s suggestion that “the instinct of unfreedom is organically inherent in man from time immemorial” is therefore an ironic inversion of Nietzsche’s description of the Apollonian Greek who, feeling himself for the first time under the influence of Dionysian symbolic forces, “realize[s], with a shudder... that his Apollonian consciousness was but a thin veil hiding from him the whole Dionysiac realm.”⁸⁰

Zamyatin’s engagement with Kant is coloured by both Nietzsche and by his position as a left-Hegelian. Yet Kant remained an important touchstone for Zamyatin by allowing him to modify Hegel’s elevation of philosophy above art, which he could not accept. This grounding in idealism is characteristic of Zamyatin’s debt to Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thought in

⁷⁷ Zamyatin, *We* 4.

⁷⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Francis Golffing (New York: Doubleday, 1956), 19.

⁷⁹ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* 26.

⁸⁰ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* 28.

general. His concentration on dialectical change and aesthetics, together with his argument that historically specific models of both rationality and the self inherently posit a (false) opposition between emotions and reason, are all generated with direct references to Enlightenment thinkers such as Kant and Newton. In addition, they make many indirect references to Hegel and other nineteenth century post-Enlightenment thinkers whose work followed on from that tradition.

As argued above in chapter one, the mode of *critique* so favoured in the Enlightenment was renewed by critical theorists in the twentieth century even when they sought to criticise the very ideas and processes of Enlightenment thought. Zamyatin's conception of the Enlightenment as a period and an intellectual movement shared similarities with others who approached their work from otherwise radically different angles. For Hans-Georg Gadamer, for instance, the Enlightenment represents "the conquest of mythos by logos."⁸¹ Zamyatin's *We*, no less than the discussion of Odysseus and the sirens in Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, illustrates this interpretation poignantly.⁸² In the ceremonies of the One State, for example, the "Benefactor" who rules the city has as prescribed a role to play as the passive spectators like D-503, or the skimpily clad females who surround him, offering garlands of flowers. In the image of the Benefactor, "still wet with spray" from the "liquefied" prisoner he has just killed, we see not only the executioner, but also the alpha male in front of "the flushed faces of ten female numbers, lips parted with excitement." He is a "high priest" and a phallic symbol of power owing to his "great destiny", and yet he can do nothing but be "the instrument, the resultant of a hundred thousand wills". It is the "numbers" who demand this sacrificial murder as a vicarious sexual thrill.⁸³

⁸¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Historicity of Understanding," *The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present*, ed. Kurt Mueller-Vollmer (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 258.

⁸² Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* 32-7.

⁸³ Zamyatin, *We* 48.

Dialectics

Zamyatin's epistemological approach to art and aesthetics was, his essays make clear, based on Hegelian dialectics. But contrary to Beehler's and Rooney's analyses, Zamyatin was no dogmatic Hegelian. In *We* (Zamyatin's interpretation of) Hegel is tested, and on numerous occasions found wanting. The Hegelian dialectic – in which Zamyatin does seem to believe – is manoeuvred into place as one pillar of a philosophy that owes much not only, as Rooney and Beehler point out, to Nietzsche, but also to Kant.⁸⁴ Indeed, it could not be otherwise. For Zamyatin, literature was a “wife”, a vocation, a love that made life worth living.⁸⁵ Hegel's philosophy was thus profoundly problematic, as he had famously argued that art in modernity was a reflection of the absolute and, as Gjesdal puts it, was “surpassed by religion and, ultimately, philosophy.”⁸⁶ Zamyatin, like Gadamer, therefore used Kant to modify his Hegelianism. Kant insisted “that the experience of art can never be fully exhausted by conceptual (philosophical) means.”⁸⁷ It is through Kant that art is once more veiled in *We*, and as the story progresses becomes “opaque” like the character of I-330, whose eyelids lower “like shades”, so that he only sees “two eerily dark windows, and within, such a mysterious alien life.”⁸⁸ The explosive, life-affirming imagery of colour and nature, the celebratory poetic power of the text, is an object lesson in Kant's belief that although aesthetic judgements “do not themselves contribute a whit to the knowledge of things, they still belong to the faculty of knowledge.”⁸⁹ The profusion of such opulent, impressionistic imagery in *We* demonstrates (rather than merely arguing for) the power of aesthetic comprehension. For Kant, this power is the imagination, which “can be shown to contribute to the interpretation, as well as to the constitution, of

⁸⁴ Rooney, “Nietzschean Elements in Zamyatin's Ideology”; Michael Beehler, “Yevgeny Zamyatin: The Essential, the Superfluous, and Textual Noise,” *SubStance* 15, No. 2.50 (1986).

⁸⁵ In his letter to Stalin requesting permission to leave Russia, Zamyatin stated boldly that “to me as a writer, being deprived of the opportunity to write is nothing less than a death sentence.” Zamyatin, *A Soviet Heretic* 305.

⁸⁶ Gjesdal, *Gadamer and the Legacy of German Idealism* 11.

⁸⁷ Gjesdal, *Gadamer and the Legacy of German Idealism* 11.

⁸⁸ Zamyatin, *We* 26, 27.

⁸⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith, ed. Nicholas Walker (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 4.

experience.”⁹⁰ Even in his essays, arguing for the Hegelian dialectic as the motor powering the development of art, Zamyatin clearly considers the poetic effect of the imagery he employs:

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These are the three schools in art, and there are no others. Affirmation, negation, and synthesis – the negation of the negation. The syllogism is closed, the circle completed. Over it arises a new circle – new and yet the same. And out of these circles the spiral of art, holding up the sky.⁹¹

The dialectic is here thrust forward not merely as creed but as a creative force, and it is precisely through the addition of a creative image, that of a “spiral of art, holding up the sky” that what can appear as dogmatic assertion is in fact grounded in an aesthetic sensibility above all else. What begins as negative and closed (“there are no others”) becomes a moment of vital importance, powerfully free and universal. It is a closed structure which rather than being oppressive or dictatorial allows for almost unlimited movement under “the sky.” The phrasing of Zamyatin’s assertion also suggests that Rooney’s use of the term “Marxist” to describe Zamyatin is inaccurate.⁹² Based on this unequivocal statement, his understanding of dialectics should be more precisely seen as idealist: beginning with the conceptual apparatus of dialectics and applying it to concrete situations. Opposing Marx, it is a heaven-down approach, not earth-upwards.⁹³ The greatest point of disparity, however, between Marx’s dialectical materialism and Zamyatin’s own philosophy (of both history and art) is that while Marx looked forwards to Communism as the End of History when the class struggle would cease, Zamyatin denied the possibility of an end to struggle as such. To him there could not be a Hegelian Absolute Ideal - revolution is *unending*.

⁹⁰ Rudolf A. Makkreel, Imagination and Interpretation in Kant: The Hermeneutical Import of the “Critique of Judgement” (Chicago, IL: U of Chicago P, 1990), 1.

⁹¹ Zamyatin, A Soviet Heretic 81.

⁹² Rooney, “Nietzschean Elements in Zamyatin’s Ideology,” *passim* (and see above, 78); Russell, Zamyatin’s “We” 33.

⁹³ Arguing against the methodology of both Feuerbach and post-Hegelian Idealism more generally, Marx wrote, “In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here it is a matter of ascending from earth to heaven.” Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “The German Ideology,” Collected Works, ed. Jack Cohen et al., vol. 5: 1845-47 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976), 36.

In Zamyatin's philosophy, the universe is polarised between two forces: Entropy and Revolution. "Entropy tends towards a state of rest or death, Revolution towards a state of movement and life."⁹⁴ Through ceaseless struggle and the originality of heretics the tendency towards entropy, stasis and banality is resisted. In practical terms, this meant that relatively soon after the October Revolution he began to oppose its direction. For Zamyatin, neither the historical Bolshevik Revolution, nor the orthodoxies of artistic agencies like the slavishly pro-Bolshevik Proletcult could endure *forever*. Against Bolshevism's position, he averred that to stake a claim to the final Revolution is to make the nonsensical claim that "this is the highest number". As I-330 says to D-503 in *We*: "There is no final [revolution]. Revolutions are infinite. The final one is for children: children are frightened by infinity, and it's important that children sleep peacefully at night..."⁹⁵ If the Bolsheviks believed they could stem or channel the flow of the very dialectical historical process that brought them to power, they were mistaken. They might sleep soundly in the short term, but someday they would have to grow up.

Hegelian Themes and the *Integral*

The Hegelian content of *We* encompasses more than merely the dialectic. The influence of Hegelian ideas in the novel can be observed in the interactions of D-503 and I-330. This is apparent from D-'s self-image during their first meeting, when he shows her his "hairy, shaggy hands... An ape's hands" of which he is ashamed.⁹⁶ On first glance this could *appear* to be compatible with Hegel's claim that "precisely because he *knows* he is an animal, [man] ceases to be an animal."⁹⁷ However, the point is only made (and underlined) by D-'s attempts to deny in himself what he knows may apply more generally only too well ("even in our time the wild, apelike echo

⁹⁴ D.J. Richards, *Zamyatin: A Soviet Heretic* (London: Bowes & Bowes, 1962), 16.

⁹⁵ Zamyatin, *We* 174.

⁹⁶ Zamyatin, *We* 7.

⁹⁷ Quoted in Suzanne Gearhart, "The Dialectic and its Aesthetic Other: Hegel and Diderot," *MLN* 101 (1986), 1042.

still occasionally rises from somewhere below, from some shaggy depth”).⁹⁸ D-503 is so frantic to escape his animal origins that he literally splits his identity in two in order to protect the “rational” side of his identity from contamination by this alien, animal other. Thus when in the Tenth Entry, D-’s sexual desire, always allied in the narrative’s schema with the animal, is irrepressibly expressed, he writes:

“I became glass. I saw – within myself.

There were two of me. The former one, D-503, number D-503, and the other...”

While I-330 is fully human, an opaque woman able to lower her eyelids like blinds and prevent anyone from seeing within herself, D-503 is transparent “glass”, open like a book and split between the utilitarian “rational” “number” (citizen) and the “irrational”, lustful and jealous “avatar” with “hairy paws.”⁹⁹ These hands to which he ashamedly draws attention are a part of himself that he does not want to recognise, that he wishes to cut off. To D-503, most assuredly, Hegel’s thesis that “the real is the rational and the rational is the real” is taken at face value: his “unknown planetary readers” are not to remain unknown; everything – universally – can and therefore *must* be integrated into the One State system by the successful mission of the *Integral*.¹⁰⁰

The One State argument in favour of the *Integral* contains, however, a logical absurdity: there is no “must” – in fact there is no reason at all within the ratio of a State wishing to *end* imagination to build a spaceship. The stated aim (for which there is oddly very little planning – this is not to be systematic exploration) is to find inhabited planets and make the inhabitants “divinely rational.” This is a justification, but not an explanation. There is no practical utility to the stated aim unless it serves a political purpose within the One State. After all, if no one has been beyond the Green Wall since the “Two Hundred Years War”, as the reader is informed in the analeptic passage that begins the third entry, there is undoubtedly a danger to the State in

⁹⁸ Zamyatin, *We* 14.

⁹⁹ Zamyatin, *We* 56.

¹⁰⁰ Terry Pinkard, “How Kantian Was Hegel?” *Review of Metaphysics* 43 (1990), 837.

permitting a space vehicle full of citizens to see uncharted and unknown areas of the home planet, as well as the unpredictable dangers of meeting non-rational beings.

The One State concept of happiness is essentially an absence of privation, an absence of want or desire – hence, for instance, the *lex sexualis*: “Each number has a right to any other number, as to a sexual commodity.”¹⁰¹ There is no imperative and no privation driving space exploration. Having spent centuries consolidating the withdrawal of humanity from nature by gathering the populace within a green city wall that is completely sealed from the outside, the idea of pioneering a mission over the wall, climbing through the freedom of the sky to interact with a non-rational universe is contrary to the *raison d’être* of the One State. As D- states

The entire history of mankind, insofar as we know it, is the history of transition from nomadic to increasingly settled forms of existence. And does it not follow that the most settled form (ours) is at the same time the most perfect (ours)?¹⁰²

The obvious retort to D-503’s rhetorical question is that he neither proves that historical transition entails “progress” towards “perfection” nor that the most settled form *must* be the most perfect. As the reader soon discovers, this is not even a particularly settled form of society. But even if we do take D-503’s argument at face value, it only begs the question as to why this “most settled” society is building spaceships to explore regions beyond all knowledge. If one judges the *Integral* by its avowed purpose of exploration then rather than being that which “integrates” everything it touches, bringing everything into the same unified field of mathematical happiness, the *Integral* is in fact a sower of dissonance, a site of insurrection and a symbol of one of the central tensions of life in the One State.

The *Integral* is, then, an ironic figure. The irony extends, as Collins notes, even to its name because by balancing creative design and rational production the *Integral* “represents a balance of thrust and containment” like

¹⁰¹ Zamyatin, *We* 21.

¹⁰² Zamyatin, *We* 11.

an *integrated* psyche.¹⁰³ But while in the psyche the presence of both the rational and the irrational is healthy, the attack of the One State on its citizens' imaginations (which D-503 treats reductively as a synonym for the irrational) represents a gross inconsistency on the part of the One State and is itself therefore a non-rational action. The "unknown beings on other planets, who may still be living in the primitive condition of freedom", addressed by D-503 as "you, pink-cheeked, full-bodied Venusians, and you, Uranians, sooty as blacksmiths" are hypothetical products of his imagination. Indeed, unlike the narrators of space novels such as Wells's *The First Men in the Moon* (1901), D-503 as narrator of *We* offers no empirical knowledge of the creatures that he imagines live on other planets. Ironically, his readers are entirely "imaginative" in every sense. It is both part of the satirical purpose of the novel that the State promotes creative, imaginative work like D-'s diary (which despite its author's avowed intentions works to undermine the State), and an element that imbues the text with radically open hopefulness. The tension created by the State's *irrational* pursuit of two contrary aims – an increase in individual creativity (albeit in the service of the State) and the exorcising of the imagination – creates the very cleft through which the Mephi can attack.

The Power of Love

The dichotomy symbolized by the *Integral* – simultaneously demanding creativity and condemning imagination – is ultimately a reflection of the processes occurring within D-503 himself, particularly in his social interactions. It is as though the spaceship represents D-503's socialized self, a respectable citizen of the One State, while the explosive fuel within him propelling him is his irrepressible emotions, and particularly the violent passions he suffers as a jealous atavistic lover. In a move that links Immanuel Kant's utilitarian view of marriage with a critique of the preaching of what might be described as 'free love' in certain novels of H. G. Wells (who was himself notoriously promiscuous), the pink tickets allow the citizens

¹⁰³ Collins, Evgenij Zamjatin 76.

of the One State to access any other number as a sexual product.¹⁰⁴ Specifically, Wells's *A Modern Utopia* (1905) and *In The Days of the Comet* (1906) both contain, in their utopian states, procedures that allow either for marriage to be easily dissolved, or for polygamy to be practiced. In the latter novel, despite the misgivings of the framing-narrator, the 'free love' of the post-Change society is valorised when the reader looks out of the window at the "*splendid nearer prospect of that dreamland city*."¹⁰⁵ The changes in personal morality and sexual mores are reflective of the change in mankind that sees its 'baser' instincts towards sexual possession (linked to aggression, competition, and warmongering) overtaken by the more reasonable systems of rebuilding, re-educating and harmonious communal living. Zamyatin's suggestion seems to be that even in such an *apparently* harmonious world, there is "under this cool quiet glass something violent, blood-red, shaggy."¹⁰⁶

The theme of free love is not only Wellsian, however, but topical within early Soviet society. In the 1920s the Soviet Union had mixed attitudes towards 'free love'. In major cities, and especially within the universities of Petrograd and Moscow, sexual liberation – for which many read 'free love' – was simply another side of political liberation. According to Sheila Fitzpatrick,

Soldiers demobilized from the Red Army brought back a casual macho attitude toward sex which younger brothers worked hard to imitate. Younger sisters absorbed Soviet teaching on the emancipation of women, including emancipation from the bonds of bourgeois marriage and the traditional passive role. The Soviet government legalized divorce and abortion, secularized marriage, gave de facto marriage the same legal status as registered marriage, and tried to remove the social stigma from unmarried mothers and their children.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ In "The Metaphysics of Morals", Kant described the marriage contract as "the union of two persons of different sexes for lifelong possession of each other's sexual attributes." Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, trans. Mary J. Gregor, Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant, eds. Allen Wood and Mary J. Gregor (New York: Cambridge UP, 1996), 427.

¹⁰⁵ H. G. Wells, *In the Days of the Comet* (London: Hogarth, 1985), 249, *emphasis in original*.

¹⁰⁶ Zamyatin, *We*, 57.

¹⁰⁷ Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Sex and Revolution: An Examination of Literary and Statistical Data on the Mores of Soviet Students in the 1920s," *Journal of Modern History* 50 (1978), 255.

For comic and satirical writers including Zamyatin, Pilnyak, Malyshkin and Kataev, the effects of these legal changes on social mores, and in particular the theme of free love, were a natural choice of target for humorous writing.¹⁰⁸ As Fitzpatrick makes clear, whatever the less riotous reality of student life, in literature they were often portrayed as startlingly promiscuous and decadent. Commissar for Social Welfare Aleksandra Kollontai achieved notoriety for her declaration in 1921 that “[t]he sexual act must be seen not as something shameful and sinful but as something which is as natural as the other needs of [a] healthy organism, such as hunger or thirst.”¹⁰⁹ Although probably made too late to have a direct effect on the writing of the novel, this comment was typical of a view of sexual equality that held some currency at the time. To be clear, “the authorities – most of the old Bolsheviks” saw “too much sexual activity” as “a distraction from the Revolution.”¹¹⁰ Yet given Wells’s influence on Zamyatin and the freedom which he accorded to sexual expression, the theme of promiscuity was especially fitting for *We*.

The “pink tickets” system is not merely light-hearted relief, nor simply an expression of the lengths to which the One State will intrude into private life, completely dismantling the private sphere. A darker side of the ticket system is revealed by the historical context of early Soviet society, where abortion rates were high.¹¹¹ Contraception is not mentioned in *We* and a contemporary Russian reader could well be imagined to read between the lines when promiscuity is normalised and the State places tight restrictions on who may beget children. Far from normalising children born out of wedlock, the One State abolishes all familial relations and takes charge of child rearing, as well as the biological processes of breeding.

In so doing, and in common with later dystopias including Huxley’s *Brave New World* and Wyndham’s *The Chrysalids*, Zamyatin’s *We* deals

¹⁰⁸ Vera Sandomirsky, “Sex in the Soviet Union,” *Russian Review* 10.3 (1951), 200.

¹⁰⁹ Quoted in Greg Carleton, “Writing-Reading the Sexual Revolution in the Early Soviet Union,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 8 (1997), 233.

¹¹⁰ Fitzpatrick, “Sex and Revolution,” 255-6.

¹¹¹ Fitzpatrick, “Sex and Revolution,” 256-7; 263.

extensively with man's place in the biological world. *We* was written at a time in the history of biology when Darwinism was far from universally accepted as the basis of evolutionary theory. The turn of the century had seen the "re-discovery" of Mendelian genetics, which seemed for a time to repudiate Darwinism completely. Geneticists increasingly looked to explain individual characteristics, rather than species formation, during what Peter Bowler has termed the "revolt against morphology."¹¹² Only from the late 1920s did Mendelian genetics and Darwinism begin to be synthesised. Zamyatin's interest in Darwin therefore reveals more than simply a passing interest in biology. D-503's atavistic "shaggy" hands, the hairy tribes beyond the Green Wall (whose differences to the One State population can in large part be explained with reference to their different geographical as well as social situations) point to the influence of the theories of Darwin, and his student T. H. Huxley – who in turn taught H. G. Wells during the mid-1880s.¹¹³

D-503 comments on "the ancients" thus: "Isn't it ridiculous: to know agriculture, poultry-breeding, fish-breeding [...] yet fail to go on to the ultimate step of this logical ladder – child-breeding; fail to establish such a thing as our Maternal and Paternal norms."¹¹⁴ Such was the basis of eugenics, growing steadily in the interwar period as an area of scientific interest across a range of political ideologies, from conservatives who worried about national degeneration, to socialists like Jack London and H. G. Wells. In *A Modern Utopia* (1905) Wells had argued against eugenics, noting

State breeding of the population was a reasonable proposal for Plato to make, in view of the biological knowledge of his time and the purely tentative nature of his metaphysics; but from anyone in the days after Darwin, it is preposterous.¹¹⁵

By the time of *Men Like Gods* (1923), however, Wells's utopians speak of having had "eugenic beginnings", of "a new and surer decision in the choice

¹¹² Peter J. Bowler, *Evolution: The History of an Idea*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 2003), 226.

¹¹³ The differences between Darwinism proper and the socio-biological views of T. H. Huxley are discussed in greater detail in chapter 5 below, 250-4.

¹¹⁴ Zamyatin, *We* 13-14.

¹¹⁵ H. G. Wells, *A Modern Utopia*, ed. Gregory Clays and Patrick Parrinder (London: Penguin, 2005) 125-6.

of parents, of an increasing certainty in the science of heredity.”¹¹⁶ Eugenics here represented the “ultimate step” of conquering nature by making even the biological process of reproduction (as distinguished from the act itself) subordinate to self-conscious human will. As such, the practice of eugenics is a logical step not only from pedigree breeding in domesticated animals (as D-503 claims), but, in addition, from sealing the city off from the realm of nature by means of a (supposedly) impenetrable wall. The ‘domesticated’ citizens have tightly proscribed boundaries of behaviour, like well-trained (and well bred) dogs. These “rational” beings should behave unexpectedly only in the event of a physical malfunction, as in a mechanical device. As D- puts it,

Man ceased to be a wild animal only when he built the first wall. Man ceased to be a savage only when we had built the Green Wall, when we had isolated our perfect mechanical world from the irrational, hideous world of trees, birds, animals...¹¹⁷

For mankind to cut themselves off completely from this “hideous” and “irrational” world would require the removal of the characteristics enabling humans to survive in such conditions: either through natural selection, artificial selection, or surgical mutilation. Only by being *unable* to go back can the One State ensure that its citizens do not *wish* to go back. But just as the Table of Hours only extends to twenty-two hours of the day, so the One State is unable to make mankind a completely rationalised, urbanised being, alienated from its own “natural” nature. D-503 momentarily recognizes this when he sees an animal through the Green Wall and is struck with the question “What if he, this yellow-eyed creature, in his disorderly, filthy mound of leaves, in his uncomputed life, is happier than we are?”¹¹⁸ In other words, even D- begins to question the premises of the utilitarian notion of the One State’s rationally planned happiness. D- quickly dismisses this idea as “absurd” but it underlines the scale of the problem that the One State faces in trying to turn humanity away from the Green Wall and face forever the phallic accumulator tower at the geographical centre of the One State.

¹¹⁶ H. G. Wells, Men Like Gods (London: Cassell, 1923), 87.

¹¹⁷ Zamyatin, We 93.

¹¹⁸ Zamyatin, We 93.

The Techniques of Taylorism

At first, D-503 celebrates the very blankness of his infant mind, which he dutifully opened to the childhood teachings and indoctrination of the One State. But as he is led astray and starts to question the values of the One State, the issue is raised as to whether his mind ever really was a Lockean *Tabula rasa*. It seems more accurate to suggest that the One State used certain methodical techniques to overcome his spontaneous, unpredictable individuality and to order his behaviour according to regularised patterns. Two techniques in particular make the State's omniscience possible: on the one hand, the implementation of the "Table of Hours" maps out to the minute how each "number" (citizen) will spend their day; while on the other, every aspect of life is subjugated to the scientific management principles of Frederick Winslow Taylor.

The One State reduces human life to mathematically manageable numbers. To operate efficiently, this requires the application of scientific management to every area of life. As children are not private property, but educated by State machines, every "number" is imbued from birth with the mantra developed by early twentieth-century American industrial entrepreneur and theorist Frederick Winslow Taylor of "one best way." Zamyatin subjects Taylor's methods to polemic and satirical criticism. He does not mention, for example, that while Taylor's efficiency drives could be ruthless he also frequently sought higher wages and better conditions for workers. Taylor's methods called for time and motion studies for individual workers to get each working on a task to which they were physically and mentally suited, and "to develop each individual man to his highest state of efficiency *and prosperity*."¹¹⁹ By contrast, Zamyatin uses him as a straw man to argue against "unfree" movement. The "fifty chews per mouthful" of petroleum food (literally, McCarthy notes, turning the One State citizens into machines run

¹¹⁹ Frederick Winslow Taylor, The Principles of Scientific Management (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1998), 19 *emphasis added*.

on fuel) takes this to an absurd conclusion.¹²⁰ Notwithstanding its focus on individual workers, the Taylor method of scientific management treated each worker as a quantifiable part of the industrial production process, like any machine. Through quantified experiments including “time and motion” studies, Taylorism worked to determine the “one best way” in which a worker could make the least movements possible and maximise efficiency, and therefore output.

For Zamyatin, attacking Taylor served a useful satirical means by which to attack Lenin, who saw Taylorism as “a way to modernize archaic Russian industry after the Revolution; Taylorism's good, he believed, could be embraced, its evil expunged.”¹²¹ In the One State, the total social application of Taylorism establishes a rational, empirical constant which can be used to determine behaviour in any given circumstance. By establishing a technology of technique in every part of life, the whole of the citizenry can be treated as an amalgamation of equal and identical parts, conforming always to easily manageable, unified norms.

To Zamyatin, uniform conformity was a problem of modernity in general, but one that he had seen most prominently in England. As Edwards, Alan Myers and others have pointed out, there is much overlap in both themes and imagery between *We* and the satirical anti-English novella *Islanders* that Zamyatin wrote while living in suburban Newcastle.¹²² In a letter to his wife, Zamyatin complained:

...All the streets, all the houses are identical, do you understand me, - completely identical, like the grain barns in Petersburg near the Aleksandr Nevskii monastery. When we went past, I asked: 'What are those storehouses?' - 'They're houses that people live in.' . . . Next day it turned out to be possible to go to London; it was about a six-hour journey. And the very same, identical barn-like towns flashed by, shorn to the same zero number.

¹²⁰ Patrick A. McCarthy, "Zamyatin and the Nightmare of Technology," *Science Fiction Studies* 11 (1984), 123.

¹²¹ Robert Kanigel, *The One Best Way: Frederick Winslow Taylor and The Enigma of Efficiency* (London: Little, 1997), 505.

¹²² T. R. N. Edwards, *Three Russian Writers and the Irrational: Zamyatin, Pil'nyak, and Bulgakov* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982), 38-45; Myers, "Evgenii Zamyatin in Newcastle," 94, 96, 98-9.

What a terrible lack of imagination.¹²³

In *Islanders* the narrator calls the ability of the parishioners of Jesmond, leaving church one Sunday “to find their own houses among the thousands of identical houses produced by the factory,” a “miracle.”¹²⁴ Banal, orderly ranks in which “originality is unquestionably criminal” were common to England and the Bolshevik Party membership alike.¹²⁵ What further amazed Zamyatin was the pride the English seemingly took in conforming to a dull, dutiful existence. The lack of architectural imagination was to him a reflection upon English society, including the literary establishment (with only a few notable exceptions like Wells).

Conformity was a symptom of a rationalised, bureaucratic society. To Zamyatin the demands of the imperial Great War and the methods of industrial production were catalysts for creating an ever more rationally administered English society, in which man was trapped by both social mores and the economic mode of production. In the vast shipyards on the Tyne where Zamyatin worked, he saw in action the rationalised production of warships. His own icebreakers completed what Francis Bacon had, exactly three hundred years earlier, hinted was the purpose of his *New Science*: to conquer nature.¹²⁶ In the One State, D-503 can boast (although he is subsequently proved wrong) “we’ve channelled all the elemental forces – there can be no catastrophes.”¹²⁷ Every element of life is subsumed to utilitarian imperatives.

The citizens of the One State are taught to see themselves as part of a ‘divine’ polis, which is also a “perfect mechanical world” of “humanized machines, perfect men.”¹²⁸ Consequentially, the One State philosophy asserts that “the natural path from nonentity to greatness is to forget that you

¹²³ Quoted in Myers, “Evgenii Zamyatin in Newcastle,” 95.

¹²⁴ Yevgeny Zamyatin, *Islanders, and The Fisher of Men*, trans. Sophie Fuller and Julian Sacchi (Edinburgh: Salamander Press, 1984), 23.

¹²⁵ Zamyatin, *A Soviet Heretic* 65; see also Zamyatin, *We* 28.

¹²⁶ Francis Bacon, “The New Science” in Kramnick, *The Portable Enlightenment Reader* 39.

¹²⁷ Zamyatin, *We* 23.

¹²⁸ Zamyatin, *We* 69, 93, 82.

are a gram and feel yourself instead a millionth of a ton.”¹²⁹ This materialist use of images of mass and motion, derived from natural philosophers like Newton, to describe institutions and practices in the social and political realms is a technique that was much used during the Enlightenment. It is typically found in materialist texts such as La Mettrie’s *Man Machine*, Rousseau’s *Discourse on Political Economy*, and even pornography like John Cleland’s *Fanny Hill*. At its most extreme, to La Mettrie man was a machine who merely had “a few more cog wheels and springs than in the most perfect animals, [and a] brain proportionately nearer the heart so it receives more blood.”¹³⁰ In a sense, materialism was the logical consequence when, as Margaret Jacobs puts it, “nature [was] abstractly mechanized and bodies in motion [were] made wholly sufficient.”¹³¹

In recalling such materialist works, however, Zamyatin demonstrates the gap between the Enlightenment ideal of freedom and the Benthamite utilitarian happiness of the One State. In a moment of obedient thought, in which D-503 sees himself as a synecdoche for the whole of the One State, he writes of “antiquity” (the twentieth century): “How could [the ancients] write whole libraries of books about some Kant yet scarcely notice Taylor – that prophet who was able to see ten centuries ahead?”¹³² The satirical comparison is significant when one considers the practical formulation of the Categorical Imperative given by Kant in *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*: “Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end.”¹³³ While Taylor viewed humans as more or less efficient machines, Kant’s approach to philosophy – particularly of the mind – was most un-mechanical. As a transcendental idealist he opposed both pure rationalism and pure empiricism.¹³⁴

¹²⁹ Zamyatin, *We* 115.

¹³⁰ La Mettrie, “Man a Machine” and “Man a Plant” 59.

¹³¹ Margaret C. Jacob, “The Materialist World of Pornography,” *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500-1800*, ed. Lynn Hunt (New York: Zone Books, 1996), 161. On Enlightenment rationalism and nature see also above, 47-55.

¹³² Zamyatin, *We* 33.

¹³³ Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* 91.

¹³⁴ Burnham, *An Introduction to Kant's Critique of Judgement* 9; 18-19.

The extended Taylor system of scientific management establishes within the Numbers internal regulators like an engine's governors, mechanisms that are supposed to prevent the individual from experiencing love or developing a soul. Freud described the super-ego as the mechanism by which civilisation "obtains mastery over the individual's dangerous desire for aggression by weakening and disarming it and setting up an agency within him to watch over it, like a garrison in a conquered city."¹³⁵ The One State goes a stage further; the "garrison" which it sets up in the individual does not just passively observe the individual's actions, but sets him to task and regulates each moving muscle. Under such conditions, based upon a satirical extrapolation of an existing theory as applied in contemporary conditions, Zamyatin drew attention to the potential for the total loss of ethical self-autonomy in a mass industrial society.

The sense of horror and confusion that this situation generates is highlighted by the ambiguous, at times contradictory, manner in which the novel engages with Kant's ethical theory. Thus in acting out the ideology of the One State D-503 strives to behave according to the first formulation of the categorical imperative: "*act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.*"¹³⁶ This is the very meaning of D-503's attempted orthodoxy. He reads in the *State Gazette*: "everyone who feels capable of doing so must compose... works extolling the beauty and the grandeur of the One State." In response, he writes the diary that forms *We*. He will "merely attempt", he declares, "to record what I see and think, or, to be more exact *what we think* [...] will it not be, of itself, and regardless of my will or skill, a poem? It will. I believe, I know it."¹³⁷ Moving from the particular to the general, D- interprets the One

¹³⁵ Sigmund Freud, "Civilisation and its Discontents," trans. James Strachey, in collaboration with Anna Freud, assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, vol. 21 (London: Vintage, 2001), 124.

¹³⁶ Kant, *Practical Philosophy* 73 *emphasis in original*.

¹³⁷ Zamyatin, *We* 1-2 *emphasis added*.

State command to apply to him as a constitutive unit of the citizenry and wills that his personal record reflect a universalized consciousness.

This consciousness is free from any truly ethical demands towards an 'other', however. It recognizes no individual within the mass of other numbers, no empathetic sense of shared humanity between one single person and the next. D-503 describes the citizens of the One State marching together during a leisure hour as "[t]housands of feet raining down in time, a million-footed *leviathan*". The term "leviathan" could well be a reference to Hobbes, but here it is not a sovereign power that towers over D- as an individual, but rather the citizenry as an overwhelming mass.¹³⁸ Indeed, this endless torrent of numbers is completely undifferentiated, while in contrast the unique nature of the human eye is used as a symbol over 160 times in the novel.¹³⁹ When "a dozen or so" Numbers die in an industrial accident during the testing of the *Integral*, D-503 feels pride that the other workers barely notice because the dead represent "less than one hundred-millionth part of the population of the One State; practically considered, it is an infinitesimal of the third order."¹⁴⁰ That the rebellion is ethical, as well as being aligned to individuality, is underlined when by contrast I-330 stakes the success of the revolution on gaining control of the *Integral's* test flight in an attempt to prevent twelve of the Mephi in the hands of the One State from being executed.¹⁴¹ Thus I-330 is overjoyed when she learns that D-503 interceded to protect a woman from being harmed who was protesting against the violent treatment of prisoners. She believes that D-503 has become a humanitarian rebel. The irony of which only the reader of D-'s diary is aware,

¹³⁸ Zamyatin, *We*, trans. Clarence Brown (London: Penguin, 1993) 85, *emphasis added*. The Russian is Левиафан (*Leviafan*) meaning, Barratt notes, the "legendary sea monster frequently mentioned in [ancient] Hebrew poetry". Yevgeny Zamyatin, *Мы [We]*, ed. Andrew Barratt (London: Bristol Classical P, 1994) 141, n. 53. This is the same word normally used to render Hobbes's work into Russian. Ginsburg's choice of "monster" (87) is therefore unusual among translations of the novel. Natasha Randall (London: Vintage, 2007), renders it "leviathan" (77), and Russell, *Zamyatin's "We"*, uses "leviathan" too (77). Guernsey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972) concurs, but additionally provides a footnote offering "behemoth" (93) – the same word which Zilboorg (Boston, MA: Gregg, 1975) opts for (83). Whilst it is possible that Zamyatin did not intend a reference to Hobbes, the reference would be entirely in keeping with this section and seems very likely.

¹³⁹ Ray Parrott, "The Eye in *We*," *Zamyatin's We: A Collection of Critical Essays* 106.

¹⁴⁰ Zamyatin, *We* 107-8.

¹⁴¹ Zamyatin, *We* 172.

as Barratt notes, is that D- only acted because he mistook the woman for I-330. "In her own mistaken belief that D- has become a rebel, she supplies him with the very reward he most desires: the 'fearless hero' receives a protestation of 'love' from the 'grateful heroine'." The two thus "collude" in a game of mutual self-deception destined to a tragic conclusion.¹⁴²

After she leads him astray through blackmail, D- seems to I- to begin to act as a self-autonomous ethical agent, while in reality he never abandons his "mathematical-moral" utilitarianism. The conflict dramatizes opposing ideologies as well as desires, ideas as well as interests. I-330 does not ultimately want to coerce D-503, but to convert him to her cause.¹⁴³ She demands all or nothing, to choose between the freedom of the Mephi or the happiness of the One State.

But this is a very particular conception of happiness – the unfree happiness of Eden, a life of unending stasis and uniformity. The "happiness" of the One State is the happiness discovered by Nietzsche's "Ultimate Men."¹⁴⁴ In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche, with an eye firmly on the English utilitarian tradition, wrote: "Man does not strive after happiness; only the Englishman does that."¹⁴⁵ Influenced by Nietzsche, Zamyatin saw utilitarianism as an English "disease", linking the late Enlightenment and early nineteenth century to inhuman aspects of the rationalisation of industry with modern production methods. To reinforce this, the architecture of the One State is avowedly Benthamite, the product of "philosophical-mathematical thought" as D- puts it.¹⁴⁶ The whole city is a unified glistening tribute to the "nonfreedom" of stasis, of "[i]nseparable two times two."¹⁴⁷ As in Bentham's *Panopticon* – which he coincidentally conceived while visiting White Russia – the primary concern of this non-aesthetic of control is to discipline the

¹⁴² Barratt, "Revolution as Collusion," 349.

¹⁴³ Barratt, "Revolution as Collusion," 348.

¹⁴⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), 46-7.

¹⁴⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols And The Anti-Christ*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 2003), 33.

¹⁴⁶ Zamyatin, *We* 116.

¹⁴⁷ Zamyatin, *We* 66.

inhabitants by placing them on permanent display to the state.¹⁴⁸ But while Bentham's panopticon also entailed the punishment of isolation and was intended to prevent communication between prisoners as far as possible, the utilitarian aim of the One State is to ensure "mathematical happiness". Far from isolation, the One State wants to create atomized individuals who see themselves as members of a vast and endless mass of "numbers". Thus, D-503 comments:

seven o'clock, time to get up. On the right and the left through the glass walls I see myself, my room, my clothes, my movements – repeated a thousand times over. This is bracing: you feel yourself a part of a great, powerful, single entity.¹⁴⁹

D-503 lives as if surrounded by mirrors, seeing his own actions replicated by thousands of others. This is seductively narcissistic; as collectivised man the Number (citizen) is "immense, powerful." Yet simultaneously the glass dominates and isolates him by delineating a limit: to quote Lacan on the mirror-stage, it is "that which cannot be crossed."¹⁵⁰ D- feels empowered by that which in reality subjugates him.

In contradistinction, the citizen of the One State is made to feel isolated and powerless when divorced from the social body, like a "human finger cut off".¹⁵¹ When D- calls I-330's plan to start a revolution "absurd" it is because he takes the unchanging nature of the One State for granted. Even an attack by a small group cannot, in his mind, hope to have any permanent effect on the organism as a whole. The paradox of the drive for the creative cargo of the *Integral*, as stated above, is that it opens the possibility of difference, of an alternate space and way of life to the present. Even a life portrayed as inferior still shows that difference is possible. The One State appears not to have realized the potential problems it may face in encouraging creativity, and social dreaming. It is little wonder that they act quickly to reverse the

¹⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, trans. Alan Sheridan, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage, 1995), 169-170, 171-172.

¹⁴⁹ Zamyatin, We 33.

¹⁵⁰ Jacques Lacan, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960, trans. Dennis Porter. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (London: Routledge, 1992), 151.

¹⁵¹ Zamyatin, We 103.

rebellious forces they unleash in their own citizenry by removing the dangerous imaginations of their populous.

Utopia

Despite the commitment to the value of social dreaming in *We*, and while it can productively be read as a hopeful and open-ended text, Yevgeny Zamyatin did not see himself as utopian. Writing about utopia in an essay on H. G. Wells in the mid-1920s, Zamyatin forthrightly asserted,

There are two generic and invariable features that characterize utopias. One is content: the authors of utopias paint what they consider to be ideal societies[...] The other feature, organically growing out of the content, is to be found in the form: a utopia is always static; it is always descriptive, and has no, or almost no, plot dynamics.¹⁵²

In the present day, scholars in the field of utopian studies including Sargent, Vieira and Moylan have refuted the charge that utopias are “ideal societies”. They point to Sir Thomas More’s *Utopia* (which Zamyatin also references in this context) as one of many utopias which are *not* ideal, but which *are* significantly better than the author’s own.¹⁵³ That Zamyatin views utopia in this less nuanced way is perhaps an expression of his opposition to Marxism-Leninism as an official State ideology. The USSR projected a detailed image of its future as an ideal society built upon industry, electrification and (what would by the mid-1920s become known as) constructivist architecture. This put it far from the radically open-ended philosophy of Marx, who refused to be drawn on the content of communism.¹⁵⁴ As already noted, Zamyatin’s conception of the Hegelian dialectic admitted no final revolution.

¹⁵² Zamyatin, *A Soviet Heretic* 286. Ginsburg dates this essay 1922, but as the essay directly references H. G. Wells’s 1923 novel *Men Like Gods* this seems untenable.

¹⁵³ See, for example, Sargent, “The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited,” 6, 9; Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* 74-5 (quoting Sargent); Vieira, “The Concept of Utopia,” 7.

¹⁵⁴ The one exception to this is the following passage from “The German Ideology”, a text not published in any event until 1932: “In communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the

Interestingly, *We* does not adhere to Zamyatin's (flawed) characteristic of the content of utopias: it may be a close approximation to the ideal which D-503, in his loyalty to the One State envisions, but he also makes clear that "even we have not yet found an absolute, precise solution to the problem of happiness."¹⁵⁵ Nevertheless, Zamyatin weaves an intertext with myths of paradise through the novel. As Gregg noted, "just as Adam, the servant and mortal replica of Jehovah, once labored for his Maker in the fields of Eden, so D-503, the dedicated architect, labors to improve the 'glass paradise'... of the Well-Doer."¹⁵⁶ In this reading, I-330 is seen as the temptress, D-503's Eve, while S-4711 becomes the serpent in the garden, leading I-330 astray. Given that she is a leader of the Mephi (deriving from the name of the Faustian demon Mephistopheles), however, this reading seems to ascribe insufficient agency to her as a forceful character. Moreover, it abstracts D- and I- from their social context. Owen Ulph's assessment of I-330's character may be closer. Ulph insists that she is not merely a femme fatale, but actually an incarnation of Satan, possessing a "dialectic duality – siren and revolutionary."¹⁵⁷

Zamyatin's second point about utopias, relating to form, is strikingly similar to Jameson's comment in *The Seeds of Time* that "dystopia is generally a narrative, which happens to a specific subject or character, whereas the Utopian text is mostly nonnarrative."¹⁵⁸ As noted above in chapter one, Jameson here sees utopian fiction as allied to travel literature and as a type of "blueprint" for a "machine" (an *anti-utopia*, for Jameson, would therefore more closely resemble the machine of Kafka's *In The Penal Colony* than a dystopia like *Nineteen Eighty-Four*). A machine is from this perspective not organic – it consists of a fixed set of inter-related parts that make up an

evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd [sic] or critic." Marx and Engels, "The German Ideology," 47.

¹⁵⁵ Zamyatin, *We* 13.

¹⁵⁶ Gregg, "Two Adams and Eve in the Crystal Palace: Dostoevsky, the Bible, and *We*," 682. Gregg uses Zilboorg's 1924 translation of *We*, in which the character Ginsburg, Brown, Randall and Guernsey all subsequently render as "the Benefactor" is translated as "the Well-Doer".

¹⁵⁷ Ulph, "I-330: Reconsiderations on the Sex of Satan," 82.

¹⁵⁸ Jameson, *The Seeds of Time*, 55-6.

externally knowable and describable totality. Whilst Jameson does not see the content of utopia as necessarily *ideal* in the manner that Zamyatin did, an inexorable consequence of a mechanical view of utopia is that it represents an End to History, finality – a view that Jameson reiterates more forcefully in *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005).¹⁵⁹

Zamyatin went far further than Jameson, however, calling utopia “sugary pink.” This slightly confusing and simplistic conception mistakes what more precisely might be termed cockaigne or arcadia (not just “ideal” but Edenic) with the more general category of utopia. He therefore claims that Wells’s only utopia is *Men like Gods*, leading to an absurd categorization where, for instance, *A Modern Utopia* (1905) does not qualify as a utopia.

We as Synthesis

Drawing on Zamyatin’s essay on Wells, William Hutchings argues that Wells’s *In the Days of the Comet* is “an essentially *static* and retrospective account of actions and conflicts that occurred in the narrator’s distant past and are now recollected in the relative tranquility of old age.” By contrast, Zamyatin’s use of the diary form, while making it more like (utopian) travel literature, also “deliberately avoids the leisurely pace of most reminiscences – a pace that is manifestly inappropriate in the newly heralded age of dynamic speed.”¹⁶⁰ Whereas Wells’s novel ends with the narrative framing of the unnamed reader of Willie’s transcript looking out of the window at the transformed *and completed* world of tomorrow, the diary of D-503 ends as it starts, *in medias res*, with a question mark over whether the One State will succeed in crushing the rebellion.

The problems in Zamyatin’s argument on utopia could then justifiably be overcome by seeing them as a clash of opinion over terminology rather than concepts. Wells’s sociofantastic novels, Zamyatin argues, are “almost solely

¹⁵⁹ Jameson, *Archaeologies of the future*, 7.

¹⁶⁰ William Hutchings, “Structure and Design in a Soviet Dystopia: H. G. Wells, Constructivism, and Yevgeny Zamyatin’s ‘We’,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 9 (1981-1982), 83 *emphasis added*.

instruments for exposing defects of the existing social order, rather than building a picture of a future paradise” and as such are to be regarded as “social tracts in the form of novels.” The genealogy of these works therefore includes Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726; amended 1735), and Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s *The Coming Race* (1871), but only in terms of the “approach to the theme – not the theme itself, and not the literary methods employed.”¹⁶¹ If, following Sargent rather than Zamyatin, we may place the aforementioned novels of Swift and Bulwar-Lytton along with Wells’s sociofantastic novels in the literary category of utopia, then *We* should also be seen in this light. However, one further distinction of Zamyatin’s should be borne in mind: he regards the “sugary pink”, “ideal” utopias as “bear[ing] a + sign” whereas most of Wells’s “social fantasies bear the – sign.”¹⁶² Around the time he wrote the essay on Wells, Zamyatin also wrote “On Synthetism”, already quoted above:

+,-,-

These are the three schools in art, and there are no others. Affirmation, negation, and synthesis – the negation of the negation.¹⁶³

If utopia represents the thesis and Wells’s social fantasies the antithesis, then Zamyatin, who was a passionate advocate for a dialectical model of change and development, may well have regarded *We* as the synthesis, the negation of the negation.¹⁶⁴ Such a reading would see the novel as a critique of the present othered proleptically into a supposedly ideal distant future, but using this very distance to create irony and satire.

¹⁶¹ Zamyatin, *A Soviet Heretic*, 286, 287.

¹⁶² Zamyatin, *A Soviet Heretic*, 286.

¹⁶³ Zamyatin, *A Soviet Heretic*, 81. See above, 91.

¹⁶⁴ This use of mathematical symbols as metaphor may itself (consciously or unconsciously) be drawn from Wells. “Individual liberty in a community is not, as mathematicians would say, always of the same sign” Wells, *A Modern Utopia*, 29; cf. Zamyatin, *We*, 80, where, in a passage offering a biting satire of Cheka, D-503 contrasts the “Operational Section” of the One State to the Catholic Inquisition: “one has a + sign, the other a –.”

The Gilded Chains of *Brave New World*

BECAUSE THEY ALL WANT TO LAND US IN HELL. ALL, WITHOUT EXCEPTION. LENIN AND MUSSOLINI, MACDONALD AND BALDWIN. ALL EQUALLY ANXIOUS TO TAKE US TO HELL AND ONLY SQUABBLING ABOUT THE MEANS OF TAKING US.

-ALDOUS HUXLEY

Point Counter Point (1928)

Brave New World is a novel of three societies. The first, at the level of the proleptic narrative frame, is the dystopian World State. The novel opens in a future that has seen the victory of applied materialist science, engineering and technology, superficially catering for all human needs and desires. While the World State is stable and prosperous, the uniform happiness of its citizens is manifestly false, and almost barbaric. Marx's famous analysis of the industrial workman as existing in an inverted relationship to industrial plant, as an appendage to the machine *for* which he works, is in Huxley's World State carried to its logical end: babies are now carried to term not viviparously but "with a faint humming of machinery" along a conveyor belt, at precisely "thirty-three centimetres an hour" in the "red darkness" of a factory.¹

The second society is that of "Malpais", the New Mexico Savage Reservation where John the Savage grows up and enjoys an ambivalent but loving relationship with his mother, the beta-minus Brave New Worlder Linda. This enclave within the World State is a closed, anachronistic society, which practices magic and bloody, penitent ritual. It is an intentionally Lawrentian primitive tribe which has absorbed elements of Christianity into its hybridisation of Native American religious practices. Religion is at the heart of this society just as science is the pneumatic blood pump of the World

¹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Samuel Moore, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992), 10; Huxley, *Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited* 62.

State. Life in Malpais (literally “*bad country*”) is an unhappy, ignorant hand-to-mouth existence.

These two future societies of science and new-age mythological religion are juxtaposed in *Brave New World*, and in some respects they are remarkably similar. After all, both must try to cater for human needs which, for Huxley, are universal. The primitive drums of Malpais comfort Lenina Crowne because of their proximity to the music of her own society. Yet John the Savage, with the benefit of a little education, discovers Shakespeare and tragedy, embodying the residual survival of “high” culture that falls between the gaps of both societies. He becomes a noble savage, his knowledge of “culture” changing him into a truly tragic outsider (in both Malpais and London) and (anti)hero.

The third society is the ever present and always denied past – Huxley’s present. *Brave New World* is fully understandable only when seen within its historical context. It is a critique and satire of the early 1930s as much as a book about possible futures. This ‘ancient’ society can still understand tragedy – which is incomprehensible in the World State – but in it, Huxley believes, culture is under threat from technology. 1930s society has access to the foundations of the scientific knowledge which could eventually transform it into Brave New World. In chapter three, Mustapha Mond regales students with a satirical ‘world history’ of the transformation of twentieth century life into the World State. There is a serious question lurking within the proleptic-analepses of barbed fragments like “liberalism, of course, was dead of anthrax, but all the same you couldn’t do things by force”, a question implied, but never spoken: is Brave New World inevitable?²

Theodor Adorno, in his essay “Huxley and Utopia”, regarded the novel as a serious prophecy. Picking apart the system of needs and false needs generated by the World State, he saw at the heart of Huxley’s novel a false dichotomy between a brutish, uncivilized happiness and “higher” culture.

² Huxley, *Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited* 54.

Through this opposition, culture *necessarily* entails unhappiness. This is an important criticism, which will be explored below. It raises the question of what “need” can be said to constitute in a future where privation, feeling, and most forms of suffering seem (on the surface) to have been eliminated and only pleasurable sensations remain. Nevertheless, Adorno’s criticisms about the (false) opposition of happiness and culture should not detract from or obscure the essential value of *Brave New World*. It is the very confusion of ideas, steeped in the confusion of Huxley’s own world, which makes the novel so important. Given his family background and the circles in which he mixed, it is unsurprising that Huxley was well versed both the political and the scientific debates of his day. The impossible contradictions of *Brave New World* point to contemporary dilemmas and debates between figures such as J. B. S. Haldane and Bertrand Russell, both of whom Huxley knew well. (In *Brave New World* their argument is explored in the context of the scientific prophecies and avowedly utopian political ideals of H. G. Wells, who was also an acquaintance of Huxley.) Furthermore, the popularising work of Huxley’s brother Julian helped shape the very terms of public scientific discourse.

A discussion of these competing models of futurology below will lead on to an examination of social, aesthetic and finally psychological aspects of the novel, beginning with the influence of Italian social theorist Vilfredo Pareto on Huxley’s thought. Pareto provides significant help in uncovering Huxley’s sociological beliefs, but as is typical for Huxley – particularly within the context of *Brave New World* – he is treated not seriously but satirically. Satire is even more important when looking at Huxley’s critique of mass entertainment: his treatment of “low-brow” “feelies” as artistic linear descendents of the consciously “high-brow” Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* is exemplary in this respect. Finally, the role of the psychoanalytical theories of both Freud and Watson in *Brave New World* will be considered. Huxley treats their work as jostling against each other in a sceptical but highly interested manner, seeing them as mutually reinforcing each other’s most troubling conclusions.

Skirting between the advancing dogmatic forces of Fascism and Communism, Huxley imagined a future society in which the victory of science, and in particular applied biology and psychology, was complete. Such a state would be capable of complete control and psychological manipulation to the extent that dissent would not only be impossible, but actually unthinkable. The extinction of creative, independent, and autonomous thinking people is the darkest fear voiced in *Brave New World*.

Need and False Needs

The central theme of Huxley's *Brave New World*, Adorno believes, is "what becomes of human beings when they no longer know need."³ The novel describes a world in which all of the social and economic problems of the early 1930s have been solved through technology and a radical restructuring of society from the individual upwards. The novel opens with a detailed description of the *in vitro* cloning processes by which reproduction takes place, which utilizes eugenics (the science of selectively breeding humans to increase the occurrence of desirable heritable characteristics and thereby to "improve the stock") to create those destined for the highest places in the social hierarchy.⁴ Meanwhile, other embryos are produced in groups of up to ninety-six identical twins through "Bokanovsky's process." At "decantation" (no one suffers the psychological "trauma" of birth anymore), these test-tube babies become members of less individualised lower social classes. As the "delta" or "epsilon semi-moron" foetus develops, it is given doses of alcohol and other toxic chemicals to restrict brain and/or physical development. The World State thus produces precise numbers of workers, specialised for every job imaginable, to order; their lives are both socially and economically predetermined from the moment of conception. Added to this, as chapter two details, a variety of "neo-Pavlovian", behaviorist and "hypnopaedic"

³ Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. S. Weber & S. Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 1967), 99.

⁴ "eugenics, n." *New Oxford American Dictionary* 2nd ed. Mac OS X application; "eugenic, adj. and n."; OED Online, March 2011. Oxford UP, <<http://oed.com/view/Entry/64958?rskey=FATYqK&result=4&isAdvanced=false>>, 1 June 2011.

conditioning is used to fully socialise the children – who are all raised in gigantic nurseries or “hatcheries”.

The World State has replaced the family with state child (re)production and communal care. The twentieth-century home is described as having “No air, no space; an understerilized prison; darkness, disease, and smells... And home was as squalid psychically as physically.”⁵ In contrast, the World State enjoys complete sterile harmony – always cheerful and with no almost surprises possible. Overpopulation, unsanitary housing, economic recession, unemployment, disease, famine and old age are unknown. “Feeling lurks in that interval of time between desire and its consummation”, warns the World Controller, Mustapha Mond. “Shorten that interval, break down all those old unnecessary barriers.”⁶ The key to preventing social unrest in Huxley’s dystopian future is to prevent the arising of unconsummated desire.

Everyone, no matter what their position in society, has access to almost every kind of luxury good they *could* want, but only because the State is able to control what each caste desires. Hence, the Director of the London Hatcheries declares, “We condition the masses to hate the country... But simultaneously we condition them to love all country sports.” The “masses” spend a large chunk of their wages regularly visiting the countryside, but only to “consume manufactured articles as well as transport”.⁷ Alphas, who have access to helicopters for personal use, are additionally conditioned to want exotic holidays abroad in expensive hotels, where nothing is “foreign” or different from home: all the luxuries and conveniences of London are gathered under one roof. It is neither market capitalism nor Bolshevik Communism that has prevailed to create this bounteous society, but a peculiar form of highly managed state capitalism, which keeps supply and demand in a static equilibrium through a totalitarian grip upon the population. Brave New World is able to meet all needs by controlling exactly what needs exist. More accurately, need has been replaced by the infantilism and

⁵ Huxley, Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited 43.

⁶ Huxley, Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited 49.

⁷ Huxley, Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited 31.

eroticism of desire.⁸ The State does this by creating and stimulating desires, and so conditioning the population that every such desire becomes a psychological necessity. The taped “hypnopaedic” voices which whisper in every sleeping child’s ear each time they go to bed ensure that adults will “never put off till to-morrow the fun you can have today” as Lenina gravely tells Bernard Marx, a hypnopaedic specialist, whose retort is “[t]wo hundred repetitions, twice a week from fourteen to sixteen and a half.”⁹ At the linguistic level, the possibility of even articulating an insatiable need becomes impossible: “want” ceases to be expressive of “need” (as in the phrase “in want of a good night’s sleep”) and assumes the role solely of expressing desire (as in the phrase “I want to have her”). Because desire is centrally stimulated and controlled by the World State, it is limited to that which can be more or less immediately obtained. The emotional and psychological problems of twentieth-century life have not been solved so much as negated.

In his *Vanity Fair* column in 1929, Huxley stated that “good art” existed to satisfy “fundamental needs of the human spirit... such as the desire for beauty, for heightened experience, for knowledge of reality and also for escape from reality.” But all of these needs can be superficially satisfied by “swindlers” who “mimi[c]... the sublimest creations.” In a consciously elitist passage, Huxley asserts that the London music-hall audiences of the late 1920s lack a “certain artistic sensibility”, and therefore readily lap up such superficial satisfaction indiscriminately.¹⁰ This tendency is extrapolated in *Brave New World*, where faith, hope and the consoling function of art have disappeared because gratification is immediate. If gratification is ever delayed or denied, then the drug “soma” negates the original need or desire by making the individual forget about it. When human beings are denied need or what Mustapha Mond calls the “right to be unhappy” the result, in the

⁸ “Infantile” and “infantility” are words which Huxley puts into the mouths of Bernard Marx (93), the Director of the Hatchery (96) and Mustapha Mond (200) to signify that *Brave New Worlders* are emotionally and intellectually undeveloped in their wants and needs.

⁹ Huxley, *Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited* 92.

¹⁰ “Art and the Critic” in Aldous Huxley, *Complete Essays*, eds. Robert S. Baker and James Sexton, vol. 3: 1930-35 (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 2001), 17-18.

World State, is a regression to easily manipulable, puerile and erotically motivated wants – in other words, false needs.¹¹

The problem with this system of false needs, as Adorno points out, is that “in his critique of false needs Huxley preserves the idea of the objectivity of happiness.”¹² The falsely created needs of *Brave New World* leave the characters of the novel in some indefinable way unsatisfied, a feeling that they can only repress with more *soma*. Huxley’s World State is a society made possible through totalitarian psychological conditioning devices such as hypnopaedia, but to create sufficient dramatic tension to drive the narrative of the novel he has to give his characters psyches that have resisted in some way the totality of this conditioning. Many of the characters’ psyches indeed show signs of an imminent and perhaps even dangerous unravelling: Bernard likes solitude, monogamy and being unconventional; Lenina resents, and is psychologically damaged by, her constant submission to the convention of promiscuity; Helmholtz is a free-thinking and voluntarily ascetic individual; Henry Forster is troubled by the turning of corpses into fertilizer; and even Mustapha Mond recognises the demonstrable falseness of the values on which he runs society. Huxley has created a totality which is not a totality; his nightmare “perfected” world is something far less than “perfect” because its intelligentsia constantly resist its reproduction.

Huxley continually stresses, through frequent references to Shakespeare, that the cultural ideal of happiness in his imagined society is false, shallow and unfulfilling. The World State may have succeeded in creating the *desire* to be conventional, but for the Alphas the culture offered by conventional society is patently not enough. As the intellectual elite they require more than cheap, mass-produced commercial culture can offer them. What they need, as John Savage puts it, is “something with tears for a change. Nothing costs enough here.”¹³ Unfortunately, tragedy has no meaning in the World State. “To make a tragedy the artist must isolate a single element out of the totality

¹¹ Huxley, *Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited*, 215.

¹² Adorno, *Prisms*, 110.

¹³ Huxley, *Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited*, 214.

of human experience and use that exclusively as his material", Huxley believed.¹⁴ Such elements would include familial and sexual jealousies, loyalties, and rivalries. It is the dubious accomplishment of the World State to have rendered this material unavailable. Helmholtz, for example, an intelligent and unusually unorthodox Brave New Worlder, laughs despite himself at Juliet's unenviable situation in act three, scene five of *Romeo and Juliet*, in which Capulet and Lady Capulet try to persuade her to marry Paris:

The mother and father (grotesque obscenity) forcing the daughter to have some one she didn't want! And the idiotic girl not saying that she was having some one else whom (for the moment, at any rate) she preferred! In its smutty absurdity the situation was irresistibly comical.¹⁵

Helmholtz's laughter is a satirical device: Huxley's parentheses demonstrate the breadth of the cultural gap between his intended 1930s readership and his vision of a future society in which need is unknown. His rather darker implication is that the virtues and range of emotions embodied in the play are also constructs which may be attacked by consumer culture. Helmholtz does not appreciate the familial pressures which Juliet is subjected to, and there is something quite horrific in the idea that such ties could be so undermined that dramatic tension of this kind would cease to be meaningful, becoming merely ridiculous. Monogamy, chastity, honour, traditional patriarchy, sorrow, self-sacrifice – such ideas are so foreign to Helmholtz, so "insane [and] excruciating", that what Huxley sees as their poignancy is lost. Insane and excruciating as they are, this almost unbearable intensity of feeling constitutes man as a feeling, complex being. Citizens of the World State no longer have the receptors, as it were, for tragedy. In a world full to overflowing with the irrelevant distractions of consumerism, the "distilled" and "chemically pure" tragic forms of art have lost their "power to act upon us quickly and intensely," as the characters are so wholly socialised that they are unable to imagine alternative social codes of behaviour.¹⁶

¹⁴ "Tragedy and the Whole Truth" in Huxley, *Complete Essays* 54.

¹⁵ Huxley, *Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited* 168.

¹⁶ "Tragedy and the Whole Truth" in Huxley, *Complete Essays* 54.

The significance of the scene in which John Savage reads *Romeo and Juliet* to Helmholtz Watson is to demonstrate that although both are intelligent and emotional men, socialisation has had lasting effects upon them. John's upbringing takes place in a family environment. His relationship with his mother (who blames him, in place of his father, for her misfortune), together with the stilted parody of John's Oedipal relationship with Popé, his mother's lover, serves as the basis for a thorough appreciation of tragedy. Helmholtz Watson, meanwhile, has no family. He is the model of success in World State terms. The payoff for his 'civilised' upbringing is ruthless social suppression of all the emotional outlets where the tragic could be experienced. In a society "without need", an act of self-sacrifice such as that of Shakespeare's Juliet would be incomprehensible because, as Krishan Kumar puts it, "tragedy needs suffering and social instability."¹⁷

Kumar sees Mustapha Mond as playing the role of the Grand Inquisitor from Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, but in Huxley's World State good and evil have no Christian reference point. This highlights a profound problem in the intellectual and moral landscape of the novel, which Adorno was quick to pick up on: in the World State, "what is, is right," and "you can carry at least half your mortality about in a bottle."¹⁸ For Adorno, the Christian metaphysics of the Savage's position (that salvation is possible only through suffering) is untenable, and suffering has become "an absurd end in itself."¹⁹ In answer to Mond's admiration for the World State, John Savage can only offer a vision of some mythical golden age comprising the values of Shakespearean literature, suffering, Christian meaning and individualism – an England that has never existed.

To readers acquainted with Huxley's oeuvre, this is perhaps not surprising. The Savage's position, with which Huxley *appears* to side, is a wistfully nostalgic vision, cherry-picked like Huxley's own political views from a myriad of different and often contradictory ideas. He held, for instance, that

¹⁷ Kumar, *Utopia and anti-Utopia in Modern Times* 261.

¹⁸ Adorno, *Prisms*, 101; Huxley, *Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited* 213.

¹⁹ Adorno, *Prisms*, 107.

“progress, objectively considered, is a reality”, because “human life is, on the average [sic], longer, healthier, safer, and more convenient than it was” and felt that the crisis of the ‘thirties was “due, in the last resort, to the fact that science has been applied to human affairs, but not applied adequately or consistently.”²⁰ At the same time, though, he argued that “All the resources of science are applied in order that imbecility may flourish and vulgarity cover the whole earth.” The application of science as the basis of the technologies providing “mass culture”, as he terms it, are for Huxley being driven through commercial pressure to supplying only the “lowest” forms of entertainment:

Machinery makes culture possible but does not necessarily produce it among those who do not want to have it... machinery makes it possible for the capitalists who control it to impose whatever ideas and art forms they please on the mass of humanity.²¹

The “mass of humanity” are thus kept happy, but happiness (as *Brave New World* makes clear) is for Huxley not a suitable goal for civilization. There is “a correlation”, he wrote in September 1931,

between the present popularity of the ideal of happiness and the rise of mass production. The pursuit of goodness, truth, and beauty sets no wheels turning, employs no labor. Whereas the ideal of happiness is a most valuable stimulus to production.²²

The pursuit of infantile happiness, catering to the lowest common denominator, is an economic imperative that places a bar against (high) “culture”. Adorno’s assessment was that Huxley

believes that by demonstrating the worthlessness of subjective happiness according to the criteria of traditional culture he has shown that happiness as such is worthless... A society which wants nothing but happiness, according to Huxley, moves inexorably into insanity, into mechanized bestiality. But Lenina’s overzealous defensiveness betrays insecurity, the suspicion that her kind of happiness is distorted by contradictions, that it is not happiness even by its own definition... The holes in the vicious circles which Huxley draws with so much care are due not to inadequacies in his imaginative construction but to the conception of a happiness subjectively consummate but objectively absurd. If

²⁰ “The Reality of Progress” in Huxley, *Complete Essays* 339; “Science and Civilisation” in Huxley, *Complete Essays* 148.

²¹ “The Outlook for American Culture” in Huxley, *Complete Essays* 188, 190.

²² “Ideals and the Machine Tool” in Huxley, *Complete Essays* 294-5.

his critique of subjective happiness is valid, then his idea of a hypostatized objective happiness removed from the claims of humanity must be ideological. The source of untruth is the separation of subjective and objective, which has been reified to a rigid alternative.²³

Huxley's juxtaposition of a nostalgic, false "golden age" of high culture and the gross infantile consumer culture forced unceasingly upon the population of the World State is a crude dichotomy indeed. For Adorno, the limitations and contradictions of the latter are obvious even without the hackneyed Shakespeare quotations taken from the former, quotations which have been stripped of their social and historical context and rendered down into bite-size chunks. Similarly, Huxley's presentation of an objectively meaningful culture as the polar opposite of the doctrinal, subjective happiness of the State is a false opposition. If it really was a dichotomy, how could Helmholtz find the Shakespeare which the Savage reads to him so satisfying and meaningful?

At the heart of Adorno's criticism of Huxley is the notion that his novel contributes to the very totality it seeks to negate. He sees Huxley's book as an *ideologically committed* work in the pejorative Marxist sense, one that not only offers a warning of the potential impact of the triumphs of science, technology and engineering on human life, but that also serves to reinforce the dominant capitalist ideology (which precludes any alternative). Adorno reads *Brave New World* as a "negative utopia" which fails because the cracks in characters' psychological health, as much as the static nature of the State, are overt.²⁴ To the theorist of utopian longing, *Brave New World* demonstrates an eye for detail in observation of the twentieth-century capitalist totality, but its view of the future shatters utopian hope through its crude opposition of the "barbarism of happiness and culture as the objectively higher condition that entails unhappiness."²⁵ Moreover, this crude binary opposition is, in Adorno's view, an example of the very sort of categorising, systematising, instrumental rationality that characterised the

²³ Adorno, *Prisms* 111.

²⁴ Adorno, *Prisms* 114.

²⁵ Adorno, *Prisms* 112; Ferns, *Narrating Utopia* 124-5 & 247, n.11.

non-linear development of Europe from the intellectual background of the Enlightenment to the modern, brutal, late-capitalist totality of the mid-twentieth century.

Adorno, looking at Huxley's work from the point of view of a critical theorist, and interested primarily in explicating his own ideas on utopia, thus saw Huxley's future society as an unsuccessful creation. But the theorist of utopian longing clearly has a different set of values to the writer of utopian satire. Huxley began writing *Brave New World*, he claimed in a personal letter, as a response to "the horror of the Wellsian Utopia."²⁶ Although Huxley's novel may have evolved from this declared intention to subsequently encompass many wider topical concerns, there is an element, as Krishan Kumar has suggested, of all dystopian fiction being "a case of Wells *contra* Wells."²⁷ *Brave New World*, as such a work, was deeply embedded in its literary and historical context. While Adorno convincingly undermines Huxley's opposition of culture and happiness, *Brave New World* remains valuable precisely because it was constituted in the particular historical circumstances that it reflects. Huxley might well be impinged on all sides by the forces he seeks to criticise, but eloquently and with humour he elucidates the complex constellation of social fears and anxieties prevalent in his epoch.

The Historical Context

"A book about the future," Huxley reminded his readers in his 1946 preface to *Brave New World*, "can interest us only if its prophecies look as though they might conceivably come true."²⁸ Huxley's great achievement was to synthesize into a future society many disparate and contradictory ideas from his own, a confusing cacophony that reflected the dangers and fears of the modern world. Huxley wrote *Brave New World* during 1931, shortly after completing a tour of the industrial heartlands of England. It was a more low-

²⁶ "Letter to Mrs. Kethevan Roberts" in Aldous Huxley, *Letters of Aldous Huxley*, ed. Grover Smith (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), 348.

²⁷ Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* 225.

²⁸ Huxley, *Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited* 7-8.

key affair than Orwell's famous trip a few years later, which produced *The Road to Wigan Pier*, yet nonetheless extensive in scope. He visited major industrial sites, including coalmines in County Durham, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, and the ICI chemical works at Billingham. "When Huxley returned to Sanary to write his utopian novel the sights and sounds and smells of modern industrial society in a depression were fully in his consciousness."²⁹ Huxley was impressed by the sheer scale and the functional aesthetic of ICI, terming it a "vast cooperative work of art."³⁰ He was surprised by the eloquence and intelligence of some of the miners he met. In Whitechapel, a young, "highly cultured and intelligent" kosher slaughterer took him aback: in a rag merchants' living room, while the hostesses played Bach preludes and sang Schubert, the *schochet* gave Huxley an erudite Marxist analysis of D.H. Lawrence.³¹ This did not completely break through his class prejudices, however. None of Huxley's working class guides around industrial England are named. They remain "alien", something "other". He compares the growth of Middlesbrough to that of fungus or "staphylococcus in a test-tube of chicken broth". His horror of the sight of vast numbers of unemployed men is even more revealing:

Crowds of unemployed men... fill the streets... with their slow interminable procession. Dead men walking, walking from nowhere in particular to nowhere else, aimlessly and in silence... no ghost could be quite so terrifying as these spectres of flesh and blood who walk the streets of our northern cities.³²

One can already see the slightly less-than-human description of the "Epsilon-Minus Semi-Morons" of *Brave New World* in this passage. The unnamed "small simian creature" dressed in black who operates the lift in the London Hatcheries, for example, repeatedly cries the word "Roof!" like a barking dog on seeing daylight, before descending back into "the twilight of his own habitual stupor."³³ All such "lower caste" members look almost exactly the same due to the "Bokanovsky" process: short, physically adapted to manual labour but mentally stunted. While in real life Huxley met members of the

²⁹ Nicholas Murray, *Aldous Huxley: An English Intellectual* (London: Abacus, 2003) 248.

³⁰ "Sight Seeing in Alien England" in Huxley, *Complete Essays* 277.

³¹ "Greater and Lesser London" in Huxley, *Complete Essays* 300-1.

³² "Abroad in England" in Huxley, *Complete Essays* 270-1.

³³ Huxley, *Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited* 64-5.

working class who attended his miners' institute lectures, sang Schubert, read Lawrence and possessed an "extraordinary strength and vitality, a passion for higher things", such individuals have been eradicated from *Brave New World*. It is therefore tempting to conclude with John Carey that Huxley, along with other modernist literary writers, based his art on the principle of "the exclusion of the masses, the defeat of their power, the removal of their literacy, the denial of their humanity."³⁴ Carey reads *Brave New World* as a savage attack upon mass culture and a proclamation of the superiority of individual feeling and high culture. Beginning with a quotation from an article Huxley wrote on his industrial tour, which decries the fact that the only solutions offered to mass unemployment during the depression, such as Communism, would be worse, Carey polemically argues that the "genesis" of the novel was to "show that, bad as mass misery is, mass happiness would be worse."³⁵

This charge ignores the historical context and the content of the political "solutions" on offer in 1932. Soviet Communism, for example, was becoming increasingly unattractive by this time. Stalin's dictatorial dominance, the strict "regimentation" of the workforce, and State trials of former leaders who had fallen out of favour were all well reported in the West.³⁶ Huxley viewed Communism as being essentially a "religious" faith. In 1931, in an essay on Soviet propaganda in education, he declared,

[C]ommunism is the religion of this world; its heaven is here and, in future time, its High God in Proletarian Society. It has its dogmatic theology – a fine old-fashioned nineteenth-century materialism. It can boast its inquisitors at home, its persecuted martyrs abroad. It has its ceremonial rites...³⁷

In October 1932 Huxley repeated this assessment in his play *Now More Than Ever*. In it, a Communist character at Speaker's Corner in Hyde Park, addressing the theme of revolution, cries "it's a religion, it's a man's whole

³⁴ John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice Among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939* (London: Faber, 1992) 21.

³⁵ Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses* 87.

³⁶ See, for example: "New Moscow Trial: Socialist Experts Indicted," *Times* 27 February 1931, 14, Col. E; "Regimenting Russia." Editorial. *Times* 8 July 1931, 15, Col. C.

³⁷ "A Soviet Schoolbook" in Huxley, *Complete Essays* 309.

life, it's the reason why he exists..."³⁸ As with Christianity in earlier centuries, Communism also had a strict code of censorship relating to art. In July 1932, in a short article on – significantly – Zamyatin's view of the future of Soviet theatre (which had appeared in *Le Mois*), Huxley derided the fact that a "new Shakespeare" in Russia would have "no drama" to base a tragedy on, and would be reduced to "themes of farce and knockabout. Themes of pure fantasy and romance... Highly moral, tragic themes showing the sad fate which overtakes the individual if he fails to do his duty towards the state."³⁹

Meanwhile, the other "solution" Huxley has in mind is the one offered by Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists. Huxley had met Mosley in Paris and lived in Italy under Mussolini's dictatorship. His opposition to this sort of plan was based on his own lived experience. Huxley mercilessly caricatures Mosley throughout his 1928 novel *Point Counter Point* with the character Everard Webley (a far more impressive and enthralling figure than Mosley himself), who is finally brutally murdered. This seems to confirm Huxley's firm opposition to Mosley's militarism and power-hunger.⁴⁰ An alternative reading to Carey's is, therefore, that *Brave New World* satirises not just the consumerist ideals of mass leisure, but also the supposedly 'mass' ideologies of Soviet Communism and Fascism, which offered only false consciousness and art that was thinly veiled political propaganda.

In his essays from the North of England, Huxley expresses sympathy and pity for the unemployed (notwithstanding his tendency to fail to see them as individuals). Despite his apprehensions about the dangers of both Communism and Fascism, he was willing to sacrifice his own ideals of liberty and more laissez-faire government to "the most careful and systematic national planning", for which his friend John Maynard Keynes argued. In this spirit, Huxley declared: "we must either plan or else go under." To "go under" could mean "economic breakdown, revolution, and a final Communist

³⁸ Aldous Huxley, *Now More Than Ever*, eds. David Bradshaw and James Sexton (Austin, TX: U of Texas P, 2000), 33. The play was never produced in Huxley's lifetime.

³⁹ "New World Drama" in Huxley, *Complete Essays* 337.

⁴⁰ Aldous Huxley, *Point Counter Point* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1928) 516.

triumph”, which meant that Huxley was willing to consider even methods based on “unconstitutionally” applied “force”.⁴¹

Writing during the Depression, with liberal democracy across Europe in danger of breakdown, Huxley shared with many of his contemporaries in the British intelligentsia a sense of foreboding and a fear that “such liberal ideals as free trade, free press, unbiased education, either already belong to the past or soon will do so.”⁴² Rather than choose between the forces of Fascism and Communism in which to place his future society, Huxley looked past immediate battles for political power and beyond the chilling ideals both ideologies offered. He saw a future in which technology and science had created the conditions for man to escape from nature entirely. Huxley wanted to go further than any political, social and economic revolution, to demonstrate what a “really revolutionary revolution”, of the sort envisaged by the Marquis de Sade, but enacted by scientists, would look like.⁴³ He shared the belief of Bertrand Russell, who argued that “in consequence of scientific inventions which facilitate centralization and propaganda, groups become more organized, more disciplined, more group-conscious, and more docile to leaders.”⁴⁴ Thus “the theme of *Brave New World* is not the advancement of science as such; it is the advancement of science as it affects human individuals.”⁴⁵ In point of fact, the individuals in *Brave New World* are mostly scientists, but aside from Helmholtz Watson, Mustapha Mond and Bernard Marx, they tend towards being technocrats rather than scientific visionaries capable of seeing the wider picture of how science is transformed into public policy. Huxley’s friends Robert Nichols and Maurice Browne had in 1928 written a play exploring the political consequences of the discovery of nuclear fission by a young, naïve but brilliant physicist who exclaims, “I have no position. I am a scientist – that is simply a mind, the Mind of Man, if you

⁴¹ “Abroad in England” in Huxley, *Complete Essays* 272-3.

⁴² Bertrand Russell, *Icarus, or The Future of Science* (London: Keegan Paul, 1925) 38.

⁴³ Huxley, *Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited* 8-9.

⁴⁴ Russell, *Icarus, or The Future of Science* 33-4. In Huxley’s *Point Counter Point* (1928), the Fascistic militant political party the British Freemen, led by the charismatic and imposing character Webley, is an example of one such group.

⁴⁵ Huxley, *Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited* 8.

like.”⁴⁶ But the Kantian ideal of the disinterested scientist as a voice of reason is replaced in *Brave New World* by *uninterested* and apathetic scientists. Furthermore, in this polity science has enabled the processes of centralization and propaganda to be taken so far that the individual has almost ceased to exist below the upper hierarchy of Alphas and Betas. Through “Bokanovsky’s Process” of “embryo budding”, even the individual’s body may be replicated a hundred times in his co-workers, so that no one can recognise him except as part of a mass.

Not only does *Brave New World* arise, therefore, from the confusion of competing political systems of the early 1930s, but from competing models of scientific knowledge and advancement. Huxley had an insatiable general interest in science, and biology in particular, which he had hoped to pursue as a career until partial blindness made this impossible.⁴⁷ He was thus exceptionally well versed in scientific discourse for a non-scientist, as his writing shows from *Crome Yellow* (1921) onwards. Huxley’s fears surrounding the future of science came from his familiarity with this discourse. The influences of his brother Julian Huxley, Bertrand Russell and his Oxford friend J.B.S Haldane can all be seen in the scientific discussions which pepper Aldous Huxley’s inter-war works. Huxley was aware of Haldane’s views about the future of science long before the latter published *Daedalus, or Science and the Future* (1923) and Russell replied with *Icarus, or the Future of Science* the following year. While Nicholas Murray sees in the character of *Crome Yellow*’s Mr. Scogan “Bertrand Russell (with shades of Mencken or Norman Douglas)”, Peter Firchow looks more towards J. B. S. Haldane as the model, arguing that “the chances are extremely good that Aldous Huxley knew about the essentials of what was to become *Daedalus* by 1921 at the latest.”⁴⁸ Firchow’s argument is persuasive but he risks reducing Scogan to simply a fictionalized Haldane, when in fact both Scogan’s views and the repeated expressions of these ideas in *Brave New*

⁴⁶ Robert Nichols and Maurice Browne, *Wings Over Europe: A Dramatic Extravaganza on a Pressing Theme* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1932) 14.

⁴⁷ Peter Firchow, “Science and Conscience in Huxley’s *Brave New World*,” *Contemporary Literature* 16 (1975), 301-2, 304, 306, 309-10.

⁴⁸ Murray, *Aldous Huxley*, 134; Firchow, “Science and Conscience in Huxley’s *Brave New World*,” 305, 306.

World owe a debt to other individuals too – including Russell, but more importantly Wells. Scogan argues that in the future, “in vast state incubators, rows upon rows of gravid bottles will supply the world with the population it requires”, which can be seen clearly enough in the London Hatchery of *Brave New World*; but Haldane also prophesizes that mankind will discover how to keep ovaries alive outside the female body, and in his future “ectogenesis” will be “universal.”⁴⁹ Later on in the text of *Crome Yellow*, Scogan asserts that Wellsian “men of intelligence must combine, must conspire, and seize power from the imbeciles and maniacs who now direct us. They must found the Rational State.” Having done so, they will utilise psychology and conditioning on an unimaginable scale to separate humans into different “species” from childhood onwards, preparing them for their stations in later life.⁵⁰ Eugenics and conditioning were seen as possibilities by both Haldane and Russell, but while Haldane was optimistic about these processes, Russell warned that if governments began to sterilize those “not desirable as parents”, “in the end, there will be a tendency to include all who fail to pass the usual school examinations” and the population’s average intelligence may increase at the expense of individual exceptional intelligence. Positive eugenics, meanwhile (the “increasing [of] desired types”), could also have unintended consequences, Russell warns. Its achievement might not be implemented as scientists intend, once it “is handed over to the average citizen... it would not be the types desired by present-day eugenis[t]s [sic] that would be increased, but rather the types desired by the average official.”⁵¹

Thus Scogan can be seen to point openly and ambiguously to the debate between Russell and Haldane, in which Wells’s visions were also present. As Haldane put it, “The very mention of the future suggests him,” and yet “considered as a serious prophet, as opposed to a fantastic romancer, [Wells] is singularly modest”. Moreover, Haldane viewed Wells as being “a generation behind the time” and failing to focus sufficiently on biology in his

⁴⁹ J. B. S. Haldane “Daedalus, Or science and the Future” in Krishna R. Dronamraju and J. B. S. Haldane, *Haldane’s Daedalus revisited* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995), 41-2 .

⁵⁰ Aldous Huxley, *Crome Yellow* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1921), 47, 241, 242.

⁵¹ Russell, *Icarus, or The Future of Science*, 48-9, 50.

Anticipations (1901).⁵² Nevertheless, and despite his pledge to be as conservative and realistic as Wells in his predictions, Haldane's own economic prophecy went beyond even Wells's plea for World Government and predicted a Bellamy-like utopian future in which the demand for "stable and regular production" by companies could lead to a situation where "capitalism itself may demand that the control of certain key industries be handed over to the workers in those industries simply in order to reduce the number of sporadic strikes in them."⁵³ Huxley rejected this vision, which eschews the laws of supply and demand. In order to imagine a world whose motto is "COMMUNITY, IDENTITY, STABILITY", he would have to use – in a somewhat satirically transformed manner – Wells's idea of the World State.⁵⁴

The scientific prophecies of *Brave New World* are, then, steeped in an ongoing debate which Huxley himself had been engaged with for over a decade. Huxley was also aware of the wider scientific context in which his two acquaintances wrote: the epistemological debate that the general acceptance of Einstein's general theory of relativity had re-ignited in science – that of materialism versus vitalism.⁵⁵ If *Brave New World* was, as has been indicated, Huxley's vision of a Sadian "really revolutionary revolution" then it did not, for all that, follow the Marquis de Sade's materialism. As Huxley was so fond of irony and satire (not to mention frequent Pyrrhonic touches), it is not always apparent to the reader unacquainted with this debate that Huxley sided firmly with the vitalists, believing that life could not be explained by reference to matter alone, and must be endowed with a vital principle, something that could perhaps be called more spiritual. The mechanical metaphors of the Enlightenment, of automata, springs and cogs, bodies in

⁵² J. B. S. Haldane, "Daedalus" in Dronamraju and Haldane, *Haldane's Daedalus Revisited*, 26. Orwell later assessed Wells in very similar vein, not long after the start of World War II, with the caveat that he had been "in the main a true prophet" until 1914. See "Wells, Hitler, and the World State" in Orwell, *Complete Works*, vol. 12, 536-41, here 540.

⁵³ J. B. S. Haldane, "Daedalus," 29.

⁵⁴ Thus, in a letter to Sidney Schiff dated 7 May 1931, he described his work in progress as "Wells's Utopia realized, and the absolute horror of it, a revolt against it." Aldous Huxley, *Selected Letters*, ed. James Sexton (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2007), 255. See also the letter to Mrs. Kethevan Roberts cited above, 123 n. 26.

⁵⁵ Firchow, "Science and Conscience in Huxley's *Brave New World*," 309.

space and matter in motion, were not enough to explain the animation of life to Huxley.

Brave New World engages with science and politics at a time of turmoil, and with modernist aesthetics and the ascendancy of mass media forms like the 'talkies' during a period of far-reaching social and cultural change. It is little surprise that with this multitude of competing ideas, the novel at times becomes confused. In chapter three of the novel, for instance, the Director of the hatchery informs students about the repressive dictates of twentieth century sexuality, and compares it to their own liberated encouragement of children to engage freely in erotic play. In this parody of Freudian psychology, the implication is that through hedonism the taboos surrounding sexuality have been negated.⁵⁶ Immediately, however, the authority figure of Mustapha Mond enters the scene,

And his voice sent a strange thrill quivering along their diaphragms. 'Try to realize what it was like to have a viviparous mother.'

That smutty word again. But none of them dreamed, this time, of smiling.⁵⁷

What can this "strange thrill" be but the taboo associated with "smutty" sexual subjects? In his ironic reversal of sexual and familial mores, it is impossible to know whether Huxley intended to show the drawbacks of the separation of reproduction and sexual intercourse (the Freudian distinction between the "mature" reproductive function and "regressive" tendency of sex), whether he was arguing that rules and taboos governing sexuality are ubiquitous and unavoidable, or if the presence of this authority/father figure presenting the adolescents with a taboo from which they are supposedly liberated is simply an oversight.

The novel is similarly ambiguous, even confused, in the political realm. Indeed, Raymond Williams, placing *Brave New World* in the context of two other dystopias (Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*) argued that:

⁵⁶ Huxley, *Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited* 37-9.

⁵⁷ Huxley, *Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited*, 42.

Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) projects a black amalgam of Wellsian rationality and the names and phrases of revolutionary socialism, in a specific context of mobile and affluent corporate capitalism. This sounds and is confused, but the confusion is significant; it is the authentic confusion of two generations of science fiction itself, in its dystopian mode.⁵⁸

Whilst Adorno could not forgive Huxley for the confusing and self-contradictory messages of *Brave New World*, Williams situates the novel historically within the early 1930s, and thereby shows it as an expression of its age. However, like Adorno, he chooses to read Huxley's novel primarily as a sketch of a future society, seeing little comedy in the sexual and consumerist excesses of the World State such as the subversion of Anglican Christianity, and paying only lip-service to the satirical side of the novel.

Although a black comedy because of its all-too-real prophecy, *Brave New World* is also the culmination and apotheosis of Huxley's satirical writing, which stretched back to his first novel *Crome Yellow*. The characters and setting of this work so closely resembled and caricatured real-life visitors to Garsington Manor in Oxfordshire, home of Philip and Lady Ottoline Morrell, that the latter, who had been very hospitable to Huxley, was at first "horrified" by her transformation into the character Priscilla Wimbush.⁵⁹

Huxley's previous works, together with the few extant letters he sent while writing *Brave New World* in which he mentions the novel in progress, point to many of the contradictions in the "black amalgam" of *Brave New World* being both intentional and satirical. Opposite each other stand the idealist, vain but rebellious (Bernard) Marx and the thoughtless, conformist Lenin(a); an oversexed child named (Polly) Trotsky (the 'Polly' perhaps a reference to Robinson Crusoe's parrot, whom he vainly taught to endlessly repeat his name) and the god-like figure of Ford, who is sometimes conflated with Freud. For Christopher Hitchens, this borrowing of names is "stodgy and

⁵⁸ Williams, "Utopia and Science Fiction," 60.

⁵⁹ Murray, *Aldous Huxley* 134, 135.

heavy rather than ironic.”⁶⁰ Huxley’s conglomeration of famous names is symptomatic of his “plague-on-all-your-houses approach” to satire, but it goes beyond the placing of names of historical figures in an alternate and silly context.⁶¹ On the contrary, the inclusion of these clashing figures as influences on the society of Huxley’s World State satirises on different levels: it shows how radical ideas can be rendered down through moderation, how capitalism can commodify and envelop an idea that is seemingly oppositional to the conceptual framework of capitalism. Huxley’s future society is premised upon a synthesis of disparate, competing ideas, and in this specific sense the novel is deeply realistic: the ranges of ideas that influence history are inevitably contradictory. At the same time, the inequalities of the caste hierarchy and the sustained oppression of all citizens of the World State serve to demonstrate that, although contradictory, the forces driving history are neither solely economic nor moving along a Marxist dialectical pattern. This thereby demonstrates the limits of teleological views of history, conflating grand narratives to reveal their ontological similarities as epistemological viewpoints. For Huxley, then, ‘abstract’ theories are bound to have unintended consequences when implemented in the ‘real’ world. Given the sceptical interplay of ideas which characterises the narrative of *Brave New World*, the use of the names of nineteenth and twentieth-century figures in this context is also unusually revealing of the premises from which Huxley writes. As such, this satirical move is significant in illuminating Huxley’s epistemological beliefs. The juxtaposition of these characters reveals something about Huxley’s view of history in which ‘Great Men’ and psychological factors interacted with socio-economic forces of change. Huxley’s World State is the child of twentieth-century actors upon the world stage, the weird bastard offspring of state socialism and mass capitalism, the synthesis of the different production methods and ideals of Lenin, Ford, Alfred Mond (Chairman of ICI), the behaviorist psychologist John B. Watson and many others. The children of Brave New World are named for their society’s forefathers, the ‘great’ men whose names have become

⁶⁰ Christopher Hitchens, Foreword, Huxley, *Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited* xi.

⁶¹ Ferns, *Narrating Utopia* 108.

synonymous with the movements, companies and states they led. Rather than cry victory for any one of the potential future ways of life that these men represented, Huxley created a fictional world-order stamped with the birthmark of the chaotic and contradictory world of the 1930s.

Vilfredo Pareto

Huxley's reading of Vilfredo Pareto may have influenced his belief that neither Fascism nor Communism would ultimately and forever be adopted worldwide.⁶² An anti-socialist and early supporter of Mussolini (he died shortly before the dictator consolidated his power), Pareto laid out an empirical, hermetic system in his *Treatise on General Sociology*, which sought to explain how circulating elites controlled society. Pareto was concerned with the past several decades of misrule and corruption in unified Italy. A gifted mathematician, economist and former engineer, he wanted to raise the analysis of society to scientific enquiry, to subject it to the "objective" standards of his logico-experimental method.

At the heart of Pareto's theory are the concepts of logical and non-logical (as distinct from illogical) action. "Man as seen by Pareto is at the same time unreasonable and reasoning. Men rarely behave in a logical manner, but they always try to convince their fellows that they do."⁶³ Pareto conceptualised the strategies by which men attempted to make non-logical practices appear logical. Religion was one such strategy. In the subjective context of Malpais society, for instance, it appears to John and the other savages that the penitent rites of flagellation are logical. In reality, however, there is no causal link between the rites and their supposed effects, and they

⁶² Pareto's major work, which Huxley read in Italian, was *Trattato di Sociologia Generale* (1916). It became "something of a social theory bible to Huxley in the 1920s" (Murray, *Aldous Huxley* 205). Huxley offered to comment on a few sample pages of the English manuscript, translated by Arthur Livingston and published as *The Mind and Society* in 1935, for T. S. Eliot. He also agreed in principle to write an introduction for the translation "because I like and admire the book so much" (Huxley, *Letters of Aldous Huxley* 379-80). He later reviewed the translation as "Pareto's Museum of Human Stupidity", in *New York Herald Tribune Books* 9 June, 1935 and wrote the piece "Pareto and Society" in *Time and Tide* 15, 10 March 1934, reprinted in Huxley, *Complete Essays* 386-8.

⁶³ Raymond Aron, *Main Currents in Sociological Thought: Durkheim, Pareto, Weber*, trans. Richard Howard and Helen Weaver, vol. 2 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967) 109.

are therefore objectively non-logical. “For an action to be logical, the means-end relation in objective reality must correspond to the means-end relation in the mind of the actor.”⁶⁴ Many of the practices of the State in *Brave New World* aimed at stability are, by this definition, logical. The suppression of John Savage’s rebellion at the hospital by use of *soma* gas, for instance, is a logical action in that, both in objective reality and in the policemen’s minds, the deployment of *soma* functions as a quick and efficient means to the end of restoring order. However, such a theory reduces all of mankind’s actions into the two narrowly-defined categories of logical and non-logical.

This sort of systemic, instrumental use of reason is precisely what Adorno finds execrable in *Brave New World* – the placing of ideas as reified *things* into binary, antithetical categories when the ideas are not, in themselves, polar opposites. Adorno’s earnest critique, however, does not – as has already been suggested – engage with the satirical, Pyrrhonic side of the novel. Huxley may have employed Pareto’s narrow categories because, despite finding large parts of Pareto’s theories valuable, he also enjoyed satirising other parts as containing reductionist, pseudo-scientific concepts.

When John Savage is brought before Mustapha Mond, for instance, he refers to the denouement of *King Lear* and asks the controller whether the “pleasant vices” of *Brave New World* degrade man. “Degrade him from what position?” Mond replies. “As a happy, hardworking goods-consuming citizen he’s perfect. Of course, if you choose some other standard than ours, then perhaps you might say he was degraded. But you’ve got to stick to one set of postulates.”⁶⁵

In his analysis of *Brave New World*, Adorno took issue with this separation of postulates: “[i]n this image of the two sets of postulates, exhibited like finished products between which one must choose, relativism is apparent. The question of truth dissolves into an ‘if-then’ relation.”⁶⁶ However, Adorno

⁶⁴ Aron, *Main Currents in Sociological Thought* 111.

⁶⁵ Huxley, *Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited* 212.

⁶⁶ Adorno, *Prisms* 111.

quoted only the three sentences above, and not the sentence that followed: “You can’t play Electro-magnetic Golf according to the rules of Centrifugal Bumble-puppy.” The self-satirizing tone of Mond’s argument was therefore lost. Also lost was Pareto as the target of the satire, which the gentle reference to non-logical rules seems to imply. Truth has indeed become a relative and *non-scientific*, non-empirical, normative value. Yet this has happened as a result of Mond’s enforcement of narrow categories of logic. As the trivialising final sentence implies, argument according to such categorisation will only get so far in analysing human behaviour in *King Lear*.

Pareto believed that the social scientist’s task was to elaborate the “sentiments most frequently present in the human consciousness,” which he termed “residues”, of which “theories were the ‘derivations’.” Pareto “discovered some fifty-two residues, which he broke down into six classes.” The first two of these classes, however, were where most political conduct resided.⁶⁷

Class I was termed “instinct for combinations”. “The Italian word, *combinazione*, connotes a range of meanings suggesting shrewdness and wit, as well as the usual English sense of the term.” This “intellectual and imaginative attribute,” was, Pareto believed, “employed equally by the scientist using the logico-experimental method, the poet in his creative fantasy, and the schemer playing on the sentiments of others.” Those who belonged to this group ruled by guile, and could be “mercantile, materialistic, innovatory.”⁶⁸ In *Brave New World*, Helmholtz Watson would belong to this category as a poet and fantasist, as would Bernard Marx through his cunning schemes to bed women and to force his boss at the Hatchery to resign.

Pareto’s Class II was called the “persistence of aggregates”. This was a “Conservative tendency, which held on to conventional ways of seeing the

⁶⁷ Aron, *Main Currents in Sociological Thought* 109; Richard Bellamy, *Modern Italian Social Theory: Ideology and Politics From Pareto to the Present* (Cambridge: Polity, 1987) 27.

⁶⁸ Bradshaw, ed., *The Hidden Huxley: Contempt and Compassion for the Masses 1920-36* (London: Faber, 1994) x.

world and resisted the establishment of new combinations.”⁶⁹ As political leaders, such actors were “bureaucratic, idealistic, conservative”, and more likely to rule by force.⁷⁰ In *Brave New World*, this category includes the director of Hatcheries and the Arch Community Songster.

Despite the presence of both classes in *Brave New World*, there is no chance of any circulation within the elite. History, by the time of *Brave New World*, has been rather unkind to Pareto: the all-powerful elite of the World State represent an amalgamation of both classes.⁷¹ The dictatorship has achieved the stability of a society dominated by Pareto’s bureaucratic Class II, the “persistence of aggregates”, but the requisite “economic and mental stagnation” which normally accompanies such an elite is actually diffuse throughout society, so that the very weakness of this class becomes a strength within the World State.⁷² Moreover, the character of Mustapha Mond inhabits both classes, assuring his stability. He has the guile and fox-like cunning of the “instinct for combinations” class, and the stabilising conservative views of the “persistence of aggregates” class. Thus whilst he speaks with ironic wit, gives up science for power, risks keeping forbidden books in his safe, and quickly orders out riot police to put down the commotion caused by John Savage at the hospital, those same riot police deploy *soma* vapour rather than truncheons. Likewise, in his taboo history lesson to the students, he cautions “government’s an affair of sitting, not hitting. You rule with the brains and the buttocks, never with the fist.”⁷³ The supposed stability that came from a government willing to use force, Mond tells the students, had resulted in massacres at museums. Only with the employment of psychology and eugenics had the distinctions between the different types of ruling classes defined by Pareto been finally negated. In *Brave New World*, “biological engineering and social conditioning have ensured that history’s ‘graveyard of aristocracies’ is as much a thing of the

⁶⁹ Bellamy, *Modern Italian Social Theory* 27.

⁷⁰ Bradshaw, ed., *The Hidden Huxley* x.

⁷¹ See also Martin Kessler, “Power and the Perfect State,” *Political Science Quarterly* 72 (1957), 567-8. Kessler argues that both Huxley’s and Orwell’s “distopias” [sic] effectively function by finding a way to stop the circulation of elites in Pareto’s “law”.

⁷² Bradshaw, ed., *The Hidden Huxley* 143.

⁷³ Huxley, *Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited* 54.

past as *The Tempest*, darned socks and viviparous mothers.”⁷⁴ Beyond Fascism and Communism, with Liberalism long since “dead of anthrax”, *natural* science and psychological manipulation have rendered Pareto’s social-scientific theory obsolete. Huxley keenly endorsed much of what Pareto had to say and saw him as a scientist, a “prodigious debunker” and a “realist”, who avoided Germanic “gratuitous metaphysical entities” and was “perfectly aware of the limitations of the scientific method, yet perfectly aware of his rights.”⁷⁵ Such was Huxley’s pyrrhonic sense of humour (and his determination to remain detached and sceptical) that he chose to satirise ideas which he believed useful and truthful. While in an essay entitled “Pareto and Society” Huxley argued that in the West in the 1930s, “[s]keptical and humane cunning is no match for fanatical force,” it is by cunning, conditioning and what might be termed the “soft violence” of policemen who carry *soma* gas that the order in *Brave New World* is stabilised.⁷⁶ The narrow, reductionist categorizing of human actions – ironically one of the weakest aspects of Pareto’s theory – is satirically all that remains of the theories which Huxley admired. Despite Pareto’s predictions, in *Brave New World* a perfect balance is found to keep one elite in power and maintain unchanging social conditions.⁷⁷

The “Feelies” and Synesthesia

Notwithstanding this subtle and nuanced treatment of contemporary political thought in *Brave New World* as a novel of ideas, Adorno criticised the text for developing what he perceived as “a caricature of the men of today” in place of three-dimensional characters.⁷⁸ For June Deery, the two-dimensional characters in *Brave New World* are entirely “appropriate; rather than being an artistic weakness, they illustrate Huxley’s essential point that technology

⁷⁴ Bradshaw, ed., *The Hidden Huxley* xii.

⁷⁵ Huxley, *Letters of Aldous Huxley* 380.

⁷⁶ “Pareto and Society” in Huxley, *Complete Essays* 388.

⁷⁷ See Bellamy, *Modern Italian Social Theory* 28 for a summary of how the two classes circulated power, and the parallel economic cycle between speculators and *rentiers*.

⁷⁸ Adorno, *Prisms* 117.

leads to a soulless conformity.”⁷⁹ Moreover, the characters in *Brave New World* are not only “soulless”; they are also, appropriately, cognitively vacant. They live in an overstimulated world of sensation and simulation, of “colour organs” and the “feelies”, and are properly products of such an oversaturated culture. “Art”, such as it is in the World State, is merely mimesis, a representation of an already crude and vulgar reality. As the Assistant Predestinator at the Hatchery tells Henry Foster, “I hear the new [feely] at the Alhambra is first-rate. There’s a love scene on a bearskin rug; they say it’s marvellous. Every hair of the bear *reproduced*. The most amazing tactual effects.”⁸⁰ When Lenina and John Savage later go to watch this feely, entitled “THREE WEEKS IN A HELICOPTER”, John is taken aback when

suddenly, dazzlingly and incomparably more solid-looking than they would have seemed in actual flesh and blood, *far more real than reality*, there stood the stereoscopic images, locked in one another’s arms, of a gigantic negro and a golden-haired young brachycephalic Beta-Plus female.⁸¹

The draw of the feelies, the “marvel” to which the crowds flock, and which brings Lenina “fine shuddering roads of anxiety and pleasure across her skin” is the synthetic representation of reality (literally a re-presentation, in the sense of presenting reality back to the audience) using “tactual effects”. By making them “more solid-looking than they would have seemed in actual flesh and blood” the actors become impenetrable, hollow shells, “far more real than reality”. As such, they are without any artistic significance or meaning in Huxley’s schema. Typically, for Huxley, biological discourse is utilised to satirise the shallowness of the show: the narrator’s synopsis satirises eugenic obsessions by focusing upon physical description. This reveals gender and racial prejudices in the eugenic description of the film’s main characters, which in turn emphasises the objectification of the characters as mere hollow animal specimens. The “gigantic negro” fulfils every negative racial stereotype of black males, while the “brachycephalic”

⁷⁹ The same could be said of other dystopias examined in this thesis, especially Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We* and George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Notwithstanding this, a question remains as to why the New Mexicans also lack depth. June Deery, *Aldous Huxley and the Mysticism of Science* (London: Macmillan, 1996) 34.

⁸⁰ Huxley, *Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited* 41 *emphasis added*.

⁸¹ Huxley, *Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited* 154 *emphasis added*.

blonde is likewise viewed through the prism of a discriminatory racial and gender model. The only difference between the two is that she acts in accordance with accepted sexual mores, whilst he, as a racial 'degenerate', acts against them.⁸²

The use of the term "brachycephalic", which properly belongs to nineteenth-century anthropology, in this context hints at nineteenth century racial beliefs, which reached their most grandiose artistic expression in the work of Richard Wagner. There are, moreover, a number of similarities between the aesthetic of the "feelies" and that of Wagner's oeuvre. The assault upon all five senses by the spectacle seems to draw on the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* – Richard Wagner's term for a fully-synthesised or integrated "total" work of art. For Wagner this meant an opera integrating the elements of music, theatrical elements and elaborate visual design into a spectacular experience. The feely, which includes not only "stereoscopic" vision, singing and tactile effects, but "SYNCHRONIZED SCENT-ORGAN ACCOMPANIMENT", is an exact re-presentation of reality that is in fact nothing like reality, a spectacular which, for all its ideologically-charged and didactic messages, contains no meaning beyond the mere sensory experience. The experience, which bombards the audience's every sense simultaneously, is thus "synesthetic" – the stimulation of each sense is supposed to affect the other senses.

There is a certain irony here in Huxley's choice of satirical target, and not just because he went on to be a writer for MGM Studios in the 1940s. In his novels, Huxley himself used techniques which he laid out in *Point Counter Point* through the notebook of his character Philip Quarles as being a "musicalization [sic] of fiction. Not in the symbolist way, by subordinating sense to sound... But on a large scale, in the construction."⁸³ An excellent example of this can be found in chapter three of *Brave New World*, where the scene shifts regularly between the lawn of the Hatchery and Conditioning Centre, where the D.H.C and Mustapha Mond are discussing history with

⁸² Huxley, *Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited* 154-5.

⁸³ Huxley, *Point Counter Point* 408.

students, to the male and the female dressing rooms where several conversations are taking place concomitantly. The scene changes gradually accelerate towards a climax in which single lines and half-sentences are interpolated.⁸⁴ “The abrupt transitions are easy enough. All you need is a sufficiency of characters and parallel, contrapuntal plots.”⁸⁵ The denouement of this chapter comes as Mustapha Mond moves from history to the present, where “such is progress...the old men have no time, no leisure from pleasure, not a moment to sit down and think”, and this cognitively vacant world is finally contrasted, like the dying strings of a symphonic movement, with a return to the conveyors of the Hatchery where the foetuses move “[s]lowly, majestically, with a faint humming of machinery” in their tubes: “in the red darkness glinted innumerable rubies” – precious, mass-produced jewels in devilish light – a quietly dissonant image of colour, reining-in the narrative tempo and bringing to an end a frantically contrapuntal chapter.⁸⁶

There is a difference, however, between Huxley’s “musicalization”, which took inspiration from the structure of classical music, and the synesthesia, both of Wagner and of the feelies. Ultimately Huxley does not contradict himself here, as he is not approaching the task “in the symbolist way, by subordinating sense to sound.” Ideational integrity, the “sense” or meaning of the contrasting and juxtaposed ideas, remain in Huxley’s work in a dominant position over interest in the technique itself. “Musicalization”, in the final analysis, is a metaphor to explain a method of prose construction that remains nothing more than prose, while synesthesia attempts to produce an affect whereby an impression on one sense influences the sensation of another.

Wagner’s interest in synesthesia influenced the impressionists’ and symbolists’ interests in synesthetic process in art from the 1880s onwards. In psychology, meanwhile, which saw a concomitant rise in interest in synesthesia, the 1920s saw the first “laboratory experiments with synesthetic

⁸⁴ Huxley, Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited 52-62.

⁸⁵ Huxley, Point Counter Point 408.

⁸⁶ Huxley, Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited 62.

subjects” to try to establish the basis of the process by which synesthesia was experienced.⁸⁷ In the early twentieth century, the Wagnerian position had been attacked by American behaviorists and “European associationistic [sic] psychology”, who had put forwards the “modularity thesis” of synesthesia, which “claimed that synesthetic perception was the product of the conditioning of mental associations of sensory elements.” However, in 1931 the Wagner-influenced strand of synesthetic theory seemed to enjoy a partial vindication when Karl Zietz, following a series of experiments, “concluded that sensations of color and sound are part of an indivisible Gestalt perception in which the auditory and visual perceptions mutually influence each other.”⁸⁸

It is quite possible that Aldous Huxley was aware of this debate given his general interest in psychology. It is certainly unsurprising that Wagner should be a target for Huxley’s satire. He had little time for the “ceaseless torrent” of Wagner’s music, calling him “a sad vulgarian”, whose work, “because it is always speaking”, and hence “very poor in silence”, “says” far less than the music of Beethoven or Mozart (who, by contrast, for Huxley were more significant as they came “nearest to expressing the inexpressible”).⁸⁹ The sketch of the feely, presented as a dystopia-within-a-dystopia in parody of the play within *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, is also a sort of satirically subverted *Gesamtkunstwerk*: the stimulation of one sense does not affect the others, but on the contrary remains a mere ‘special’ effect. It is laden with several layers of meaning, but all of these are ironic, a product not of the work itself but rather of the narrator’s voice. The final layer of irony is the relation of the feely to realism. On the surface it adheres to an incredibly detailed realism (“every hair of the bear reproduced”) yet it is a formulaic narrative built upon a ludicrously contrived scenario (a concussion “knock[s] all the negro’s conditioning into a cocked hat. He develop[s] for the Beta

⁸⁷ Crétien van Campen, “Artistic and Psychological Experiments with Synesthesia,” *Leonardo* 32 (1999) 12.

⁸⁸ van Campen, “Artistic and Psychological Experiments with Synesthesia,” 12.

⁸⁹ “The Rest is Silence” in Huxley, *Complete Essays*, 56-7 and “Beyond the Mexique Bay” in Huxley, *Complete Essays*, 588. According to Jameson, Adorno held a similar view of Wagner, arguing that the composer offered “[the listening masses] the repetition of easily recognizable themes not unlike advertising slogans.” Jameson, *Marxism and Form* 16.

blonde an exclusive and maniacal passion” and takes her hostage in a helicopter). This reflects with perfect mimesis the World State itself, in which the citizens lack self-reflexive cognition (the “meaning”) of the physical manifestation of their emotions.

Psychologies

The lack of emotional literacy of the Brave New Worlders is surely due to the success of their emotional and intellectual conditioning. Only Helmholtz Watson, an intellectual giant who is actively resisting his conditioning, can *begin* to reflect upon his emotions. Watson gets into trouble when he produces “Rhymes in Moral Propaganda and Advertisement” – a crudely rhythmic lyric still bearing in the jolly bounce of the rhyme scheme the very conditioning that he seeks to escape. The lyric nevertheless strives for affect, and begins to structure his interior reflections into a poetic form.⁹⁰ For the rest of the citizens of the World State, the emotional range is severely limited to narrow, moderate states of physical sensation which cannot be interpreted to mean anything.

The psychologist William James, who was concerned with the physicality of emotions, argued that “emotional brain-processes not only resemble the ordinary sensorial brain-processes but in very truth *are* nothing but such brain-processes variously combined.” In James’s famous example, we do not see the bear, feel fear and run; we see the bear, tremble and consequently feel fear. He believed that the “cognitive” perception of environmental phenomena is secondary to the bodily states of perception.⁹¹ Only after we tremble do we rationalise flight to be the best cause of action. In Huxley’s fictional society (leaving aside the fact that there is little for citizens to actually fear inside the World State), intellectual passions, rationalised reactions and cognitive perceptions are almost entirely eliminated. Psychological conditioning and the restriction of feeling were central to Huxley’s novel from its very conception. In the early stages of

⁹⁰ See Huxley, *Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited* 165-6.

⁹¹ William James, “What is an Emotion?” *Mind* 9 (1884) 188, 190.

writing, Huxley told his friend Sydney Schiff that his aim was to “make a comprehensible picture of the psychology based on quite different first principles from ours.”⁹² His success on this score was that in the revolutionised, libidinal economy of the novel, psychological conditioning limits emotional feeling to physical sensations alone, and restricts the breadth and depth of these sensations to a narrow, moderate band through techniques such as the “violent passion surrogate”.

The moderation and tempering of emotional excess is a key component of the power which the World State holds over individuals. This emotional restriction is achieved in part by the destruction of family structures, which are described as being full of “misery...every kind of perversion... madness and suicide” – in other words, the markers of tragedy. The World Controller charges Freud with being “the first to reveal the[se] appalling dangers of family life,” and insinuates that he advocated the dissolution of family structures.⁹³ It would be easy to concur with Adorno, therefore, that Huxley has a “complete misunderstanding” of Freud and hence treats the psychoanalyst “rather shabbily”.⁹⁴ Adorno mistakes Huxley’s purpose, however. Huxley’s reduction of Freud’s whole body of work to an anti-familial, crude and permissive hedonism can be viewed more productively as a commentary on the processes of history in general, than as evidence of Huxley’s lack of understanding of, or engagement with, Freud’s thought.⁹⁵ Indeed, it would be just as feasible to make the case that Huxley treats Henry Ford shabbily: he is presented as the founding father and consumerist saviour of the World State, in which “ending is better than mending”. Yet Ford proclaimed in his own autobiography that he wanted “the man who buys one of our products never to have to buy another”, and, in further contrast to Huxley’s wholly urbanized future World State, that “the modern

⁹² Letter to Sydney Schiff, 7 May 1931 in Huxley, Selected Letters 255.

⁹³ Huxley, Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited 44.

⁹⁴ Adorno, Prisms 104, 106.

⁹⁵ Huxley, Letters of Aldous Huxley indexes some fifteen letters concerned – at least in part – with Freud or “Freudism” [sic]. While Huxley was very interested in psychology, particularly after his interest in mysticism was aroused in 1936, he was usually fairly scathing of Freudian psychoanalysis in his correspondence. See also the satire of Freudian dream analysis in Huxley, Crome Yellow 65-6.

city has been prodigal, it is to-day bankrupt, and to-morrow it will cease to be.”⁹⁶ That Ford would not have liked Huxley’s dystopian World State (or even recognised his own ideas within it) is beside the point of Huxley’s satire. As with Freud, it is not Henry Ford himself, but the public image of Henry Ford, his ideas as digested by the wider world, which Huxley attacks. In this sense, Ford stands for mass production on a mechanized assembly line, and for all the multinational companies then revolutionizing production, business practice, and consumerism.

Moreover Firchow finds evidence that although Huxley attacks Freud somewhat unmercifully, he does so only after careful assessment:

[For Freud] achieving positive happiness seems impossible in the universe as presently arranged; the best man can hope for is to avoid unhappiness. Of the various means of realizing this end, “the most interesting . . . are those which seek to influence our own organism [i.e., by chemical means]. In the last analysis, all suffering is nothing else than sensation; it only exists insofar as we feel it, and we only feel it in consequence of certain ways in which our organism is regulated.”

Here Freud comes very close to the mechanist position of someone like Watson and even closer to the position of Mustapha Mond in *Brave New World*.⁹⁷

To a vitalist and a self-confessed aesthete like Huxley, the idea that suffering is nothing but mechanically explicable physical sensations would be anathema. Huxley’s aesthetic and moral positions rely heavily on the idea of *feeling*. Hence the suggestion that the final end of psychological study will be to “free” mankind from the extremities of these human emotions would be profoundly disturbing to him. From his point of view, such a world would be one in which, as John Savage points out, “nothing costs enough.”⁹⁸ Firchow’s reading of Freud, and the reading of Freud that he assigns to Huxley, perhaps needs the addition of some careful qualifiers. Freud is not quite the straightforward mechanist that Firchow reads him as in this context.

⁹⁶ Henry Ford, *My Life and Work* (La Vergne, TN: BN Publishing, 2008) 103, 131.

⁹⁷ Firchow, “Science and Conscience in Huxley’s *Brave New World*,” 313; quoting Sigmund Freud, *Works* vol. 21, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1961) 56.

⁹⁸ Huxley, *Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited* 214.

Far from him *denying* the existence of feeling (as opposed to sensation) he merely asserts that,

It is not easy to deal scientifically with feelings. One can attempt to describe their physiological signs. Where this is not possible... nothing remains but to fall back on the ideational content which is most readily associated with the feeling.⁹⁹

For Freud, these physical symptoms are interesting not because they explain feelings, but because “a feeling can only be a source of energy if it is itself the expression of a strong need.”¹⁰⁰ Hence, as Firchow rightly points out, Huxley’s World State is a society which does not know feeling *because* it does not know need. But the social problems elucidated in *Civilisation and its Discontents* (1930) and the transformation of the psyche in *Brave New World* overlap slightly differently to the way in which Firchow contends. Suffering, Freud contends, comes from three sources: “from our own body” in pain and anxiety, “from [forces in] the external world”, and “from our relations with other men. The suffering which comes from this last source is perhaps more painful to us than any other.”¹⁰¹ While the first of these has been all but eliminated in Huxley’s World State, and the second reduced to a minimum through conditioning, even such “neo-Pavlovian” and “hypnopaedic” methods as Brave New World has access to cannot eliminate this final source. As argued above, many of the characters’ psyches show dangerous signs of imminent breakdown or near collapse. Thus whilst the pleasure principle is no longer transformed into the “more modest reality principle” at every juncture, the most heavily indoctrinated Brave New Worlders do in fact still expend *more* energy on avoiding suffering than on obtaining pleasure.¹⁰² Huxley, as Firchow argues, does use Freud to “trace the consequences (as Huxley wrote to his father, of all people) ‘of the abolition of the family and all the Freudian ‘complexes’ for which family relationships are responsible.’”¹⁰³ But the presence of “*soma* holidays” seems to indicate that social suffering has not vanished: humanity still expresses a “need” to negate suffering through intoxication.

⁹⁹ Freud, “Civilisation and its Discontents,” 65.

¹⁰⁰ Freud, “Civilisation and its Discontents,” 72.

¹⁰¹ Freud, “Civilisation and its Discontents,” 77.

¹⁰² Freud, “Civilisation and its Discontents,” 77.

¹⁰³ Firchow, “Science and Conscience in Huxley’s *Brave New World*,” 312.

The development of *soma* points more generally to the fact that happiness and suffering in the World State are treated as problems not of, say, art, ethics or philosophy, but rather of science. This is a dramatic epistemological claim relating to the possibilities of the application of scientific knowledge, and in this area Firchow is indeed correct that Freud's attempt to deal with happiness "scientifically" puts him closer to the behaviorist psychologist John B. Watson than either of them would have liked to see themselves.

Watson, for his part, dismissed Freudian psychology as a form of "introspective" psychology devoid of any merit since it did not approach the subject from a quantifiable, logico-experimental "scientific" angle. Reductively, Watson saw the physical symptoms of emotions, which James had taken to be only the primary, non-cognitive manifestation of emotions, to constitute emotions in their entirety. He was interested only in quantifiable behavioural responses to external stimuli, therefore regarding consciousness as "neither a definite nor a useable concept" for the psychologist.¹⁰⁴ Behaviorism, believed Watson, was

An attempt to do one thing – to apply to the experimental study of man the same kind of procedure and the same language of description that many research men had found useful for so many years in the study of animals lower than man. We believed then, as we do now, that man is an animal different from other animals only in the types of behavior he displays.¹⁰⁵

Watson attempted to do something on the level of individual behaviour which is comparable to that which Vilfredo Pareto had endeavoured to do on the sociological level. Both were trying to breakdown the boundaries between a human science and the natural sciences, by subjecting their analysis of the human (as social individual or as socio-political actor respectively) to what they perceived as the rigours of a natural science method. Because of this similarity, Huxley is able to satirise them both with the same weapons. The torture of eight-month-old babies by electric shock and sirens is one such example:

¹⁰⁴ John B. Watson, Behaviorism, 2nd ed. (London: Kegan Paul, 1931), 2.

¹⁰⁵ Watson, Behaviorism, ix.

Books and loud noises, flowers and electric shocks – already in the infant mind these couples were compromisingly linked; and after two hundred repetitions of the same or a similar lesson would be wedded indissolubly. What man has joined, nature is powerless to put asunder.

“They’ll grow with *what the psychologists used to call an ‘instinctive’ hatred* of books and flowers. Reflexes unalterably conditioned,” [said the director.]¹⁰⁶

Whilst the terminology of “instinctive hatred” is drawn straight from John B. Watson, the “high economic policy” behind the treatment, as well as the endorsement of the use of force, is more likely a satire of Pareto’s theories.

Yet it is immediately apparent in Watson’s work in particular that the use of scientific discourse – the “language of description that many research men had found useful” – is as important to the author as using the scientific method itself. Watson is keen to appeal to businessmen as well as parents in his book, to use it as a platform to promote a new way of life, a “scientific” route to well-being by producing identikit individuals moulded to neatly fit the roles to which society assigns them. Watson candidly points out that the primary use of his science is control: “It is the business of behavioristic psychology to be able to predict and to control human activity.”¹⁰⁷ He furthermore argues against free speech and the right of workers to unionise.

Huxley saw the political implications of the application of Watsonian behaviorism on a mass scale. Such psychological manipulation would play into the hands of the most authoritarian leaders. Behaviorism could well become a propaganda weapon as potentially epoch-changing and destructive as any other in the ideologies of soviet Communism, Fascism or National Socialism.

An intelligent and perceptive reader such as Huxley could not fail to notice that Watson’s ‘scientific’ rhetoric was his primary method of shirking awkward questions about the viability of his ‘science’, which effectively reduced the complexity of a human being’s psychological make-up to

¹⁰⁶ Huxley, *Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited*, 30 *emphasis added*.

¹⁰⁷ Watson, *Behaviorism*, 11.

outwardly observable phenomena, and then judged the success of attempted psychological conditioning purely on the narrow basis of the immediately observable changes affected. A healthy individual, to the Watsonian psychologist, is one who can be easily induced to do exactly as the psychologist desires. But this is also an exact definition of power – as Steven Lukes memorably put it, “A may exercise power over B by getting him to do what he does not want to do, but he also exercises power over him by influencing, shaping or determining his very wants.”¹⁰⁸ Watson’s behaviorism is nothing less than an attempt to make psychological control into a science. For this reason, John Gray argues, Isaiah Berlin’s concept of “negative liberty”, as “*choice among alternatives or options that is unimpeded by others*” cannot be applied to “the majority of the inhabitants of *Brave New World*”, as such freedom could have no “application to human beings who had been so conditioned that actions actually available to them could not be perceived by them as options.”¹⁰⁹ Arendt’s psychological truism, that “the will to power and the will to submission are interconnected,” cuts both ways in relation to Watson’s behaviorism.¹¹⁰ At the zenith of his attempt – and made all the more interesting by its ambiguous utopian longing – Watson argued that:

The universe will change if you bring up your children, not in the freedom of the libertine, but in behavioristic freedom – a freedom which we cannot even picture in words, so little do we know of it. Will not these children in turn, with their better ways of living and thinking, replace us as society and in turn bring up their children in a still more scientific way, until the world finally becomes a place fit for human habitation?¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* 23. Lukes then comments “One does not have to go to the lengths of talking about *Brave New World*, or the world of B.F. Skinner to see this: thought control takes many less total and more mundane forms.”

¹⁰⁹ John Gray, *Berlin* (London: Fontana, 1995), 15 *emphasis in original*. This is a contentious reading – Berlin’s definition of liberty does not require an individual to have perfect knowledge of options or presuppose the existence of a single rational choice – indeed, he argues that any “rationalist” design to force people to use their reason “correctly” is “to deny their human essence”. Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958) 34-7, 22.

¹¹⁰ Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 1969), 40. For Arendt, in contrast to Steven Lukes, the unchecked control of the citizenry without their *informed* consent by means of psychological manipulation would be an extreme example of violence rather than power, which for her implies acting “in concert” within a group structure (44).

¹¹¹ Watson, *Behaviorism* 303-4.

Watson could therefore be seen as a stronger influence on the socio-political make up of *Brave New World* than any other, whether Communist or capitalist.¹¹² Huxley could see the awesome potential of such a science if widely adopted, and in *Brave New World* Helmholtz Watson is named after the behaviorist.

Fool's Gold

Writing in May 1930, Huxley pointed to the (as he saw it),

Obvious tendency, all over the western world, to follow the lead of Russia – not through any desire to imitate the Soviets but because circumstances are rendering it increasingly necessary for all States to guard against the dangers of insurgent individualism. Human standardisation will become a political necessity.

Psychologists having shown the enormous importance in every human existence of the first years of childhood, the State will obviously try to get hold of its victims as soon as possible.¹¹³

The brutal logic of the attempt to get hold of the “victim” as soon as possible could ultimately end only when the State succeeded in gaining control over the child before it became a living being – that is, at the very moment of conception itself – for psychological conditioning. Only then, in the circular economic reasoning of the World State, could the World Controllers ensure the preservation of the exact socio-economic class make-up of society and cater for the socio-economic needs of *Brave New World* society. Watsonian psychology, directed towards economic imperatives, is behind the treatment embryos receive in the hatchery detailed in the first chapter of *Brave New World*, starved of oxygen and injected with alcohol. The second logical conclusion of the widespread success of Watsonian psychology, then, would be a much more controllable and suggestible population, a society where power relations became more hidden and insidious. As Huxley described it in his 1946 preface,

¹¹² Remarkably, given their otherwise entirely antithetical worldviews, Watson's concept of “a freedom which we cannot even picture in words” here seems superficially very close to Adorno's view of utopian longing as striving towards the unknown.

¹¹³ Bradshaw, ed., *The Hidden Huxley* 49.

A really efficient totalitarian state would be one in which the all-powerful executive of political bosses and their army of managers control a population of slaves who do not have to be coerced, because they love their servitude.¹¹⁴

Huxley thereby anticipated Lukes's belief that the "supreme exercise of power" consisted of avoiding conflict and ensuring compliance by actually controlling the substance of thoughts and desires.¹¹⁵ The entire mechanisms of social production of human beings in the novel are geared to this purpose. Not only do the hatcheries counteract the waste built into capitalist production – that commodities (including, from a Marxian perspective, workers) are produced for profit rather than to satisfy social needs in the first instance – but they create human beings with no desires or needs beyond that which the State provides. Watsonian psychology therefore negates desire and need in Huxley's dystopia. Huxley looked askance at a possible state monopoly on the production of human beings. In a cheerful, reductive comment that is surely laced with irony, The Director of the London Hatchery says, "that is the secret of happiness and virtue – liking what you've got to do. All conditioning aims at that: making people like their unescapable social destiny."¹¹⁶

This comment hints at how we may usefully apply Adorno's critique to *Brave New World* and still move beyond his specific criticism that *Brave New World* hypostatizes barbaric happiness and high culture into a false binary opposition. Watsonian conditioning transforms Brave New Worlders into laboratory rats, making conditioned responses to the regular external stimuli that those who manage their lives provide (and it is most significant here that Mustapha Mond, the World Controller, is an ex-biologist). The conditioning externalizes and collectivizes the super-ego – or, more accurately, the conditioning itself *becomes* the super-ego – and thereby the super-ego within the individual is stunted in its development. Watsonian conditioning constantly encourages the id to pursue its desires, to dominate the psyche, but regular "violent passion surrogates" prevent the violence of the id from

¹¹⁴ Huxley, *Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited* 11.

¹¹⁵ Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* 23.

¹¹⁶ Huxley, *Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited* 26.

growing beyond that which is easily externally controlled by the State. Trapped between the monstrous misshapen id and the bombardments of the externalised super-ego, the ego stands little chance of successfully asserting the identity of the individual *qua* individual. In this complex, the externalized super-ego dictates to the id *how* to desire as much as what to desire.¹¹⁷ The World State creates the happiness which becomes the gilded chains upon the citizen. In so doing, it binds and horribly misshapes the psyches of its citizens, meticulously pruning them like bonsai trees so that it is no wonder that the main characters all appear to demonstrate, as Adorno puts it, “subjective derangement.”¹¹⁸ *Brave New World* demonstrates Rousseau’s dictum that

Nothing can be more certain than that every man born in slavery is born for slavery. Slaves lose everything in their chains, even the desire of escaping from them: they love their servitude, as the comrades of Ulysses loved their brutish condition.¹¹⁹

The love of servitude, of the happiness which is manifestly false, traps the population in their condition – a condition made all the more brutish by the juxtaposition with the penitent religious rites and quasi-traditional family morality of the economically backward Savage Reservation. Genuine creativity – only half-realised by Helmholtz Watson in his poems – much less the genuine individualities of fully-developed psyches, is not only impossible under such conditions but the very *antithesis* of them. For Aldous Huxley, culture is, and can only be the result of, the unrestricted free-thinking powers of creative individuals. It is nothing short of the symbolic expression of human freedom itself. In this sense, the systemic false happiness of the World State not only makes culture impossible in practice; it stands in genuine opposition to any individual who is psychologically able to produce such works. The issue is not that Helmholtz Watson sees through the false

¹¹⁷ Compare with Žižek’s comment that “cinema teaches us *how* to desire” made in *The Pervert’s Guide to Cinema*, dir. Sophie Fiennes, written & perf. Slavov Žižek, Television Broadcast, Channel 4 Television Corporation, 2006.

¹¹⁸ Adorno, *Prisms* 112.

¹¹⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On The Social Contract*, trans. G.D.H. Cole (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2003), 3. Rousseau is alluded to in *Brave New World*, through reference to a half-remembered former acquaintance of Lenina’s called “Jean-Jacques Habibullah”. Huxley, *Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited*, 87.

happiness of the World State, but that he chooses a path of individual self-development. Any such path is antithetical to the false happiness, and hence the gilded chains, of the World State.

The chains of *Brave New World* are hammered out from the “black amalgam” – to return to Raymond Williams’s phrase – of the historical context of the early 1930s. Huxley forged together into a future fictional society the confusion of political extremities, nascent totalitarianism, American consumerism, Paretian (non-)logical action, scientism, warmongering and psychological conditioning of his time. The twisted, contradictory result shone like fool’s gold. This is the nature of the false, cheap, shiny happiness that gilded the chains which enslave the population of the World State in *Brave New World*.

Questions of the Self: Nature, Rationality and Metaphysics in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

If the World State of *Brave New World* relied on making its citizens love their servitude, George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* took a rather more direct and confrontational approach to power relations. To the Inner Party functionary O'Brien, obedience to the State's demands is not in itself enough, for "Unless [a man] is suffering, how can you be sure that he is obeying your will and not his own? *Power is inflicting pain and humiliation.*"¹ The bleak violence of Orwell's dystopian vision has led to polarised critical debate. This chapter begins by exploring the different ways in which the text has been critically assessed and appropriated. Its importance to the discipline of utopian studies is complicated – being both a canonical text and a stubborn, provocative thorn that has led to a variety of polemical critical responses.

Picking up on the post-Enlightenment themes already discussed in previous chapters, the treatment of rationality, nature and metaphysics in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* will be focused upon here in particular. From its opening lines, Orwell's text associates the representation of a disquieting combination of poor, inefficient living conditions with an overbearing political expression of rationalism. This is a grey, concrete urban landscape but, unlike *Brave New World*, it is far from sterile or clean. Amid the dirt and wreckage of wartime conditions, nature creeps into the city of London through the cracks opened up by decay, an action that is mirrored in Winston Smith's own body. Julia, by contrast, is allied to a sense of the natural through her youth, femininity and sexuality. As feminist readings have shown, her character seems the product of a patriarchal gaze, and shows Orwell to have some rather conservative prejudices.

Nevertheless, it is important to stress that the political beliefs Orwell expresses in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are strongly allied to what he termed

¹ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 279.

“democratic Socialism”. His conception of socialism was characterised by fervent opposition to imperialism, to hierarchical Party discipline, and to the subsuming of humanist values to revolutionary ends.² Consistent with these beliefs, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is also a bureaucratic nightmare, in which rationality becomes absurdly and menacingly instrumentalised. The effect is to extend Orwell’s critique of Fascist and Communist totalitarianism to cover all instrumental rationality – including James Burnham’s theory of “Managerial Revolution”, and the liberal idea of progress. Oceania’s peculiar claim is to combine such instrumental rationality with a political movement based upon maintaining a furious level of entirely *irrational* hatred among the population, which is manipulated towards any end the State desires. Citizens are made to feel alienated not just from their peers, but from the very physicality of their own being. The physical torture of Winston Smith is just as much an attack on his epistemological beliefs and moral autonomy as is O’Brien’s ruthless questioning. This chapter therefore draws to a close by considering moral affect and rationality as intertwining, key parts of a model of self. It is the very reliance upon instrumental rationality and irrational hatred that create the cracks in Oceania’s system of power, which in turn point toward a very real possibility of its future downfall.

***Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the Problem of Genre**

Nineteen Eighty-Four has been both appropriated by scholars of all political persuasions, and denounced from across the political spectrum:³ to the Marxist Isaac Deutscher it was a gift to right-wing reactionary Cold-War politicians, “a cry from the abyss of despair” made by a “simple-minded anarchist”.⁴ For the British cultural materialist Raymond Williams it was a

² Orwell identified himself as a “democratic Socialist” throughout his later life, declaring in a 1946 essay, for example, “Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, *against* totalitarianism and *for* democratic Socialism, as I understand it.” Orwell, *Complete Works*, vol. 18, 319.

³ An excellent summary of these trends over the first twenty-five years of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*’s publication history is provided in Valerie J. Simms, “A Reconsideration of Orwell’s 1984: The Moral Implications of Despair,” *Ethics* 84 (1974).

⁴ Isaac Deutscher, “1984 - The Mysticism of Cruelty,” from *Russia in Transition* (New York: Coward McCann, 1957) 230-45, Rpt. in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of 1984*, ed. Samuel Hynes (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971) 29-40, here 29, 35, 38.

bourgeois “putropia” (although he later gave a more generous and subtle critique of the novel).⁵ Frankfurt School scholar Eric Fromm believed that it expressed “the powerlessness and hopelessness of modern man,” in accordance with Frankfurt School critiques of modernity.⁶ To Lionel Trilling “the exposition of the *mystique* of power is the heart and essence of Orwell’s book”, and as such it is written in the spirit of liberal politics, for despite Orwell’s “radical” political beliefs, he remained a common-sense English empiricist.⁷ At another extreme, to Philip Goldstein the reception of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* apparently demonstrates that the novel supported neo-conservatism in the 1990s against more radical post-modernist literary critique.⁸ It is the fate of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to remain a literary hot potato even twenty-five years after the date in which the novel is set has passed. In criticism of the text, aesthetic and political judgements continue to be almost impossible to disentangle.

Such polarization affects how the novel is placed generically. Whether the novel is viewed as a satire, a fantasy, a “negative utopia”, a “utopia in reverse”, an anti-utopia, a dystopia, a “critical dystopia” or some combination of these is both dependent upon the critic’s orientation and directly affects the reading which the critic takes. Yet the fact that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has been so often appraised or condemned on more-or-less overtly political rather than aesthetic grounds need not necessarily lead one to reject out of hand all such criticism – after all, Orwell himself in the essay *Why I write* commented

⁵ Williams, “Science Fiction,” During the later critique in Raymond Williams, *Orwell* (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1971) he aptly comments “it would be easy but pointless to start a quarrel over Orwell’s inheritance” (85). On Williams’s changing attitude towards Orwell, see above 34 n. 63; and see Milner, “Utopia and Science Fiction in Raymond Williams”.

⁶ Eric Fromm, Afterword, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, by George Orwell, Centennial ed. (New York: Plume, 2003), 327. Carey also notes similarities between scholars of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research and Orwell’s protagonist. This is explored below in chapter 6, 265-7. Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, 43.

⁷ Lionel Trilling, “Orwell on the Future,” *The New Yorker*, 18 June 1949, 74-7, Rpt. in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of 1984*, ed. Samuel Hynes (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971), 24-8; Irving Howe, “1984: History as Nightmare,” From *Politics and the Novel* (New York: Horizon, 1957) 235-51, Rpt. in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of 1984*, ed. Samuel Hynes (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971) 41-53, here 26, 24.

⁸ Philip Goldstein, “Orwell as a (Neo)conservative: The Reception of 1984,” *Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 33.1 (2000).

When I sit down to write a book, I do not say to myself, 'I am going to produce a work of art'. I write it because there is some lie that I want to expose, some fact to which I want to draw attention, and my initial concern is to get a hearing. But I could not do the work of writing a book, or even a long magazine article, if it were not also an aesthetic experience.⁹

Politically motivated artistic work can, from this perspective, encourage and even consciously motivate political responses. For *Nineteen Eighty-Four* this is especially the case, as it is set in a near future London physically very similar to the bombed-out postwar city Orwell himself knew. In this narrative national politics and identity have been subsumed within the larger ideological framework of Oceania, but while the names of “England” and “Britain” which Winston Smith remembers from his childhood have been replaced by the satirically utilitarian “Airstrip One”, “London, he felt fairly certain, had always been called London.” The reader’s attention is repeatedly drawn to the similarities between the war-beaten capital of rationing and reconstruction in 1949, and the fictional year of 1984.¹⁰

This identification should not be over-extended, however. While Maria Varsam correctly contends that dystopian fictions draw upon past and present trends in empirical reality and extrapolate them into the future, she overlooks the radical imaginative and satirical elements that also characterise dystopias.¹¹ Varsam maintains that by being able to identify the past as the protagonist describes it with historical narratives already known to us as readers, we begin to trust the protagonist more. From this perspective, history serves a purpose in bringing the reader to a point where he or she regards the protagonist’s view of the dystopian society as the most reliable within a multiplicity of voices, which is key to the text being received as dystopian.¹² A logical consequence is that to challenge the protagonist’s viewpoint is to question the generic status of a text as ‘dystopian’. For example, feminist criticisms of the text such as those of Chris Ferns and

⁹ Orwell, *Complete Works*, vol. 12, 319.

¹⁰ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 34.

¹¹ Maria Varsam, “Concrete Dystopia: Slavery and Its Others,” *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, eds. Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan (New York: Routledge, 2003), 208-10.

¹² Varsam, “Concrete Dystopia,” 205.

Marxist criticisms such as those of Raymond Williams both see certain already marginalised groups within social reality (women and workers) as further oppressed in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as much by the protagonist's beliefs as by the State. Far from offering a radical critique, they both argue (for different reasons) that the novel supports the existing patriarchal/bourgeois order, that it accepts and desires the past, demonstrating nostalgia for a time when male middle-class dominance was unchallenged.¹³ The predictive warning of Orwell's novel, from these points of view, accepts oppression of women/the working class as inevitable and even natural. Such approaches therefore contend that it is unsuccessful as a novel, being far too anchored in the inequalities of the past/present in its underlying assumptions. If, as Varsam suggests, the reader must trust the protagonist's viewpoint as reliable, it is deeply problematic that Winston is presented at the start of the novel as horrendously misogynistic:

He disliked nearly all women, and especially the young and pretty ones. It was always the women, and above all the young ones, who were the most bigoted adherents of the Party, the swallows of slogans, the amateur spies and nosers-out of unorthodoxy.¹⁴

By identifying young pretty women with the orthodoxy of the Party, Winston can justify his hatred of women (which would seem more likely to stem from guilt and resentment surrounding the disappearance of his mother when he was a child). Through this identification, Winston is able to turn his fantasy of raping and murdering a pretty girl (whom he does not yet know as Julia) into a political act against the Party. In this way he justifies his aggressive instincts to himself and enjoys the fantasy without guilt, despite understanding that the real reason for this particular aggression is that "he wanted to go to bed with her and would never do so." Can someone who deceives himself as to the nature of his misogynistic prejudices in order to experience as "vivid, *beautiful* hallucinations" fantasies of slitting a woman's throat "at the moment of climax" while raping her, be regarded as a

¹³ Ferns, *Narrating Utopia* 123-4, 129; Williams, *Orwell* 78-9, 81.

¹⁴ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 12.

trustworthy source in his views of other characters and the world around him?¹⁵

Orwell chooses to narrate in the third person, not directly through Winston, allowing him to distance himself from the views of his protagonist, and permitting a multiplicity of voices to develop. None of these voices are entirely likeable or virtuous – even Julia tacitly agrees to commit atrocities like throwing sulphuric acid in the face of a child if it aids opposition to the Party. Indeed, the very idea of an infallible saintly figure would run counter to Orwell's opposition to doctrines that claimed a monopoly on truth such as those of totalitarian regimes.

The criticisms of feminists and socialists point to an issue at the intersection of politics, history and genre. If they were wholly justified, it would also go some way to explain why (mainly male) liberal commentators have been the most vocal champions of the novel. These criticisms should thus lead us to reflect on the place of marginalised individuals and groups in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* precisely because it is a politically committed novel, written by an overtly socialist writer, about the potential for disaster when power relations are allowed to develop unchecked and unquestioned, without a politically active citizenry fighting for socially progressive and egalitarian ideals. Even from a liberal or conservative perspective there remains an interesting question about the relation between avowed authorial intent (to write a politically committed novel, from a “democratic Socialist” perspective) and the outcome (in which more right-wing, bourgeois and/or patriarchal opinions have been read into the novel). However, viewing the book as a social and political critique, written in the post-Enlightenment tradition, allows the ideational content of the text, as an example of material culture from a specific historical context, to be explored.

Literary Context

¹⁵ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 17 *emphasis added*.

Dystopias, as near-future novels, inherently have a predictive aspect.¹⁶ This is combined with a socially critical role, mingling satire, serious critique of the author's present. Structurally, therefore, a dystopian text may offer some account of how society has moved from the author's contemporary world to the near-future radically altered one. As discussed in chapter one, the othering into the future can be termed "prolepsis", while the backward glances filling-in details of the future-as-past are "analepses" (and therefore the dystopian anachronic combination may be termed "proleptic-analepses"). One point at which politics, narrative strategy and genre intersect with reference to interpretations of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is the question of whether the text is "open" or "closed": whether it is merely a stark warning to prepare for a coming deluge written by an ill and broken man, or whether it offers prophetic hope that disaster may yet be mercifully averted – as when, for example, the citizens of Nineveh heed Jonah's warning and atone.¹⁷

The former position has become far harder to maintain since the publication of an openly hopeful dystopian novel (a "critical dystopia" in the terminology of Tom Moylan) – Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*.¹⁸ At the close of this novel there is an appendix unequivocally stating that Gilead, her fictional feminist dystopia, was a specific historic phenomenon that had been overthrown.¹⁹ Atwood consciously draws parallels between her novel and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. For her, there *is* hope in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: "The

¹⁶ Huxley saw this function as important. In his reply to Orwell to thank him for his gift of a copy of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Aldous Huxley maintained that the future of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was more likely to "modulate" into the scenario of *Brave New World* ("Letter to George Orwell (E. H. Blair), 21 October 1949" Huxley, *Letters of Aldous Huxley*, 604-5, here 605). Notwithstanding this, Huxley had recently published *Ape and Essence* (New York: Harper, 1948), a novel about a post-Bomb future society of brutal sadism and cruelty. Orwell, meanwhile, thought that *Brave New World* was the novel that contained an unsustainable social order. See below, 163 n. 26.

¹⁷ The Argument that Orwell's last book represented the despair "of a dying man" has been advanced numerous times, including by John Strachey, *The Strangled Cry: and Other Unparliamentary Papers* (London: Bodley Head, 1962), 29, Rpt. in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of 1984*, ed. Samuel Hynes (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971) 54-61, here 59; and more recently (and less subtly) by John J. Ross, "Tuberculosis, Bronchiectasis, and Infertility: What Ailed George Orwell?," *Clinical Infectious Diseases* 41 (2005) and Robert McCrum, "The Masterpiece That Killed George Orwell," *Observer* 10 May 2009. Online ed. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/may/10/1984-george-orwell?INTCMP=SRCH>>, 29 May 2011. The Deluge is forewarned in Genesis 6:17. God spares Nineveh in the Book of Jonah 3:10.

¹⁸ See Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*, chapter 6, "The Critical Dystopia".

¹⁹ Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (London: Vintage, 1996) 311-24.

Principles of Newspeak" appendix, she argues, is written in the past tense as if it were a scholarly text from a different, future society, much like it is in her own work.²⁰ There certainly was literary precedence for Orwell to make such a move – he had read Jack London's novel *The Iron Heel* (1908), a novel in which a socialist revolution is brutally crushed by an oligarchy, which used a similar device. This novel is presented as the edited diary of a female activist and revolutionary leader from a society in the far future after the final destruction of the oligarchy. Footnotes from the "editor" provide this literal subtext throughout. As with *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the novel ends with the complete crushing of rebellion (although it finishes with the capture, not the conversion of the rebels). The proleptic references in the footnotes – to the ultimate success of the Revolution at a time after the point at which the text ends – make it impossible to argue that *The Iron Heel* is not an 'open' text, ultimately looking beyond the catastrophic to a positive future. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* borrows the title image of *The Iron Heel* for the key, often cited, phrase "If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face – for ever."²¹

The Iron Heel had a significant role within a literary tradition of near-future writing that Orwell consciously wrote within. Other literary texts that were central to this frame of reference included Zamyatin's *We* and Huxley's *Brave New World*.²² Orwell also drew – perhaps more satirically – on some ideas that Wells put forwards in several of his novels. Thus, in his 1941 essay "Wells, Hitler and the World State", Orwell stated, "a crude book like *The Iron Heel*... is a truer prophecy of the future than either *Brave New World* or [H. G. Wells's] *The Shape of Things to Come*."²³

²⁰ Margaret Atwood, "Orwell and Me," *Guardian* 16 June 2003, Sec. G2. Online ed., <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2003/jun/16/georgeorwell.artsfeatures>>, 29 May 2011.

²¹ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 280. In *The Iron Heel*, a member of the "Oligarchs" warns, "We will grind you revolutionists down under our heel, and we shall walk upon your faces. The world is ours, we are its lords, and ours it shall remain." Jack London, *London: Novels and Social Writings* (New York: Literary Classics of the US, 1982) 384.

²² On the influence of Zamyatin's *We*, see Orwell, *Complete Works*, vol. 16, 99; Gleb Struve, *Russian Literature Under Lenin and Stalin, 1917-1953* (Norman, OK: U of Oklahoma P, 1971) 50. The fact that Orwell sent a copy of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to Aldous Huxley on its publication suggests he was conscious of some similarities with *Brave New World*.

²³ Orwell, *Complete Works*, vol. 12, 540.

This last book, published in 1933, was written as a proleptic-analeptic history of the years 1930-2105 from the year 2107. Like London and Huxley, Wells here imagines that things will get far worse before they improve – he sees the Wall Street Crash of 1929 as a decisive date in the history of credit from which the world would never recover, sliding through war and pestilence to a point in the 1950s where the state system has completely collapsed, the global population is halved and subsistence living is the norm. The surviving scattered aviation and shipping industries come to the rescue, keeping the rudiments of international trade going and eventually they gain enough power via their combined monopoly of the means of transport and communication to establish a benign world dictatorship. Over a couple of generations, remaining believers in nationalism and partisan or religious ideologies are wiped out or converted to the ideology of the Modern State and eventually the dictatorship withers away – its ruling council being sensible and disinterested enough to realise that its work is done – leaving humanity in the hands of capable bureaucratic administrators.

Orwell confessed to having adored Wells's fiction as a child, but saw him as naïve and old-fashioned in his outlook and politics after World War I.²⁴ "The object of power is power" and, for Orwell, the dictatorship of any powerful, organised, administrative group was unlikely in the extreme to vote itself out of existence.²⁵ Moreover, in direct contrast to *The Shape of Things to Come*, war in Orwell's novel leads not to state bankruptcy but to a sort of nationalised economic stasis, in which the wealth generated within the state is taken from a population who are purposefully made to endure low living standards and used up in unproductive warfare. While both men's understanding of economics appears limited here, Orwell's political point is that hate, fear, war and tyranny can be just as self-sustaining as any other political motivation and that politics founded upon such deep-seated

²⁴ Despite this criticism of Wells, Wyndham Lewis assessed *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as being "Wellsian in form, Wellsian in the style of writing, Wellsian in the colourlessness and anonymity of the personae." Wyndham Lewis, "Climax and Change," *The Writer and the Absolute* (London: Methuen, 1952), 189-93 (here 189-90), Rpt. in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of 1984*, ed. Samuel Hynes (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971), 105-9 (here 106).

²⁵ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 276.

emotional values are more likely to succeed in their aims than politics founded on the *values* of coolly disinterested 'rational' decision-making.²⁶

Like Huxley – whose *Brave New World* and *Ape and Essence* were both set in futures that follow apocalyptic wars – Orwell evidently saw something powerful in the eschatological elements of Wells's novels of the future, but he denied that such conflict would in any likelihood produce a more enlightened and reasonable humanity as its result:

For forty or fifty years past, M[ess]rs. H. G. Wells and others have been warning us that man is in danger of destroying himself with his own weapons, leaving the ants or some other gregarious species to take over. Anyone who has seen the ruined cities of Germany will find this notion at least thinkable. Nevertheless, looking at the world as a whole, the drift for many decades has been not towards anarchy but towards the reimposition of slavery. We may be heading not for general breakdown but for an epoch as horribly stable as the slave empires of antiquity.²⁷

To Orwell, the redemptive quality of the Wellsian apocalypse, whereby the (self-) destruction of humankind is validated post-hoc as a step towards a rational and enlightened world-state society, does not in the end negate the then dominant post-Enlightenment view of history in which Western dominance and the cause of 'progress' were seen as going hand in hand. For Orwell, modern history seemed rather to reflect a violent system of power politics, empire building and the destructive use of technology.

²⁶ In his 1946 review of Zamyatin's *We*, Orwell argued that in Huxley's *Brave New World* "[t]here is no power hunger, no sadism, no hardness of any kind. Those at the top have no strong motive for staying at the top... life has become so pointless that it is difficult to believe that such a society could endure." Orwell, *Complete Works*, vol. 18, 14.

²⁷ Orwell, *Complete Works*, vol. 17, 321.

A Rationalist World Perverted

On one level, then, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is about the betrayal of late-Victorian and Edwardian ideas of utopia, revealing what lies hidden in the smoke and mirrors of modern political life. Yet at the same time it is not an anti-utopia, and it draws upon the corruption of an image of the past which itself has utopian aspects. Orwell reconstitutes London as a dystopian space but it is a space which is not so very far removed from his contemporary reality. This is made clear from the first paragraph:

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 with him.

The hallway smelt of boiled cabbage and old rag mats.²⁸

“Victory Mansions” can be read as a cruel joke, an ironic and satirical stab at life in postwar Britain, a period “experienced for the most part as a continuation of suffering, deprivation and anxiety, and the landscape of Britain changed little.”²⁹ Here “mansions”, a term that could connote the traditional typically grand, prosperous and sturdy homes of the landed gentry and upper classes, is used as a derisive metonym for a run-down tenement block. So much for victory in Europe and Japan: we are immediately aware of the drabness, grit and dust of postwar Britain, the smells of bland soggy food and disrepair. Meanwhile, Winston Smith is characterised as an individual man who feels uncomfortable in his world, caught up in a “vile wind”. His effort to escape the vileness of this outer world only results in entering the nauseating decrepit block of flats.

This first paragraph also alerts readers to the intellectual background of the critical project which Orwell undertakes in the novel: “the clocks were striking thirteen.” This alienating phrase arrests the flow of prose before it can even begin. It may only seem on first glance to be a slightly clumsy method of

²⁸ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 3.

²⁹ Patricia Waugh, “The Historical Context of Post-War British Literature,” in *The Post-War British Literature Handbook*, ed. Katharine Cockin and Jago Morrison (London: Continuum, 2010) 38.

alerting the reader to the future setting of the novel, but the apparent ease with which such a reading can arise is instructive: Orwell is playing here with a basic assumption that the future is a place of greater rationality and order than the present, which frequently underpins imaginative/fictional writing set in the future. The use of “thirteen” also suggests to the reader that technical or military interests are of primary importance to the society in which the novel is set and that an industrial drive towards efficiency and the minimising of the risk of human error are highly valued. Ironically, despite this rationalist approach, “thirteen” also resonates with the reader (if not characters within the novel) as an unlucky number. In the future world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the traditional, local and idiosyncratic measurements of time and space, weights and measures, have gone. The replacement of pints with litres is later dwelt upon too, the amount of beer served in “prole” pubs being seen by the old man Winston talks to as an imposition unsuited to the needs of the human beings using the system: “A ’alf-litre ain’t enough. It don’t satisfy. And a ’ole litre’s too much. It sets my bladder running. Let alone the price.”³⁰

In this rationalist, future world the character entering the first scene shares in what is purported to be the aim of humankind since the beginning of urban living: he is attempting to escape from “vile” nature into a human-controlled atmosphere. As far as man has come in the quest to control nature since Francis Bacon declared this to be a worthy challenge for him, the first human we encounter in the time of “thirteen” is no better off than a human of the remote past: he is still at nature’s mercy. From the first paragraph, a limit is placed on Oceania’s power: that of nature. This hints at the chaos and inefficiency of Oceanian society. The Party regularly exposes the population to the vileness of (its own skewed conception of) nature, permitting them to feel the worst effects of nature’s powers only in order to draw their adoration as a bastion against the natural world, as the only agent capable of hoisting mankind away from the foul odours of decay, weather, and the shortages of basic commodities necessary for human life, from shelter and food to

³⁰ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 92.

healthcare. This manoeuvre gives the population a feeling of being removed from nature, yet they remain in fear of being at its mercy. The separation of man from nature is in itself a theme stretching back to the earliest days of human history. Nevertheless, as suggested in chapter one, a critical turning point for this relationship was the Enlightenment during which the separation of man from nature became part of a much larger and more ambitious quest to subsume nature, to raise man above the reach of its dangers altogether. In Oceania this project is twisted back upon itself. In perfect synchronisation with the principles of *Newspeak* and *doublethink* the Party offers to provide that which it never will – namely the means by which the individual may escape nature and gain security through the totalising power of the Party. But just as the Party believes that only by making someone physically suffer can one be sure the person is obeying the torturer's will and not her or his own, so too it believes that only through engineering a constant privation of needs (for which it is responsible) can the Party make these "guarantees" it refuses to fulfil.

Conceptions of Nature

While the Party is able to engineer and manipulate basic human needs, and while the Party is far crueller than any natural phenomenon anyone living on the temperate British Isles is likely to experience, nature still stands as a power against the Party which it is not able to subsume. To the rulers of Oceania, nature is the controlled decay of life in Airstrip One. Winston wonders to himself:

Were there always these vistas of rotting nineteenth-century houses, their sides shored up with baulks of timber, their windows patched with cardboard and their roofs with corrugated iron, their crazy garden walls sagging in all directions? And the bombed sites where the plaster dust swirled in the air and the willowherb straggled over the heaps of rubble; and the places where the bombs had cleared a larger patch and there had spring up sordid colonies of wooden dwellings like chicken-houses?³¹

³¹ Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four 5.

Nature for the Party is damp rot and infestations, mould, leaks and cold drafts under ill-fitting doors. People are made to live like chickens, crowded together in makeshift “sordid colonies” and constantly (re-)producing for the benefit of their masters. In contrast to this is the Ministry of Truth, “startlingly different from any other object in sight”, a vast blank pyramid bearing testament to the power and the modernity of the regime: the very antithesis of the decay and corruption of the surrounding streets of London.³²

This decay extends to Winston himself, who suffers from a varicose ulcer impairing his mobility and rough skin caused by the “cold of the winter that had just ended.” Pia Maria Ahlbäck argues that the body is an impediment that the State must overcome to control the human mind. “However, the fact that the body will die, and the mind with it (no matter what Oceania legislates), is evidence of the fact that it has been alive, separately and individually.”³³ No matter what the Party does to the body, and how it alters the ways in which people (mis)conceive reality, it has existed. The body, as part of nature, *must* exist whether $2 + 2 = 4$ or 5 or any other number. The bodies of others can be “disappeared”, their physical being removed as easily as the airbrushing of a photograph or the burning of a letter. Yet inasmuch as the Party needs human matter on which to inflict pain, an instrument on which torture may be carried out, they require something that must be taken out of nature in order for it to be branded with the mark of Oceania. A part of the victim must remain “natural” for him or her to experience the true horror and trauma of torture as a monstrously “unnatural” thing to happen to him or her.

Ironically, in Marxist terms, it is only through the body that man can separate himself from nature, or rather it is through man’s relationship with his body that nature can be seen as something exterior. In a dense passage in the 1844 *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Marx links alienated labour with man’s relationship to nature, and specifically what he terms “inorganic

³² Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 5.

³³ Pia Maria Ahlbäck, *Energy, Heterotopia, Dystopia: George Orwell, Michel Foucault and the Twentieth Century Environmental Imagination* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi UP, 2001) 119.

nature.”³⁴ This arresting, unexplained phrase seems to mean that which is neither human nor a product of human creation, including “plants, animals, stones, air, light, etc.” It is the nature that man is conscious of as nature, and from which he physically lives:

The universality of man manifests itself in practice in that universality which makes the whole of nature his *inorganic* body, (1) as a direct means of life and (2) as the matter, the object and the tool of his life activity. Nature is man’s *inorganic body*, that is to say nature in so far as it is not the human body.³⁵

Marx, a truly post-Enlightenment thinker, makes mankind lord and master of the earth. Mankind is only able to be master through his universality: through the ability of the individual to see himself and his own activities within the social body as being representative of such activity in general; to form generalisations from the particular (himself) to the world at large. The individual’s relationship to nature (the particular to the general) is here a metonym for the relationship of the whole of mankind to nature (the universal to the general). This is clearly philosophically problematic – not least because “nature” is such a vast, unordered ‘thing’, and is as historically, geographically and socially specific as the experience of reality itself. Indeed, to see nature as a ‘thing’ in this way, rather than a vast constellation of interconnected and constantly evolving ecosystems, life processes and physical environments is to reify it.

Marx argued that animals are at one with their vital activity: a bird building its nest is simply being a bird. Being ‘nest-builder’ is part of what makes it ‘bird’ – it is what it does. Only mankind, according to Marx, can separate himself from his vital activity. Mankind makes his labour an object of his own consciousness and thereby separates himself from what he does to remain alive, to satisfy his physical needs and to remain a physical part of nature.³⁶ It is one of the many paradoxes of Oceanian ideology that the citizen should

³⁴ Karl Marx, *Early Writings* trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregory Benton, The Pelican Marx Library, ed. Lucio Colletti (Harmondsworth & London: Penguin & New Left Review, 1975), 327-30, here 327.

³⁵ Marx, *Early Writings* 328.

³⁶ This is what Popper refers to as a “dualism” in Marx – a view that the thinking mind conceives of itself as a different type or form of matter from that of the body. See above, 50, n. 105; and Popper, *The Open Society*, vol. 2, 102.

believe that nature is something entirely separate and exterior to him/herself and the Oceanian state, yet at the same time understand that his or her own body is part of nature, to the limited extent that there are “natural” and “unnatural” things that can happen to it. The Party’s plan to “abolish the orgasm” is a plan to make the population view sexual pleasure as alien and unnatural, as much as to eradicate any bonds of loyalty outside the relationship between the atomized individual and Big Brother.³⁷

Julia as “Rebel From the Waist Downwards”

Orwell’s conceptions of the terms “natural” and “unnatural” are problematic, however. The construction of the character of Julia is value-laden, and while hinting at revolutionary promise it fails in the end to escape reinforcing a conservative, patriarchal view of femininity.

Julia appears to be sexually liberated, and through her own sexuality is an erudite analyst of the social role of sexuality in Oceania: her opinions, for example, on the absurdity of public hate are closely tied to her highly developed sexuality. She comments sardonically that “all this marching up and down and cheering and waving flags is simply sex gone sour.”³⁸ The sex instinct is indeed the “driving force” used to keep “the fear, the hatred and the lunatic credulity which the Party need[s] in its members... at the right pitch.”³⁹ As Chris Ferns notes,

It is the instinctual, spontaneous, uncontrollable quality of sexual desire that makes it a threat to officially imposed conformity, and indeed part of Julia’s appeal to Winston lies precisely in her promiscuity, which he sees as representing a breach in the ‘wall of virtue’ which the state has tried to erect.⁴⁰

Harnessing the power of sex drives is then a double strike at the heart of individuality and autonomy: it protects the Party against individuals forming emotional bonds with each other that, like familial bonds, could be a source of loyalty outside the Party. Moreover, it robs the individual of the capacity for

³⁷ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 280.

³⁸ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 139.

³⁹ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 140.

⁴⁰ Ferns, *Narrating Utopia* 123-4.

a particular type of spontaneous action and in so doing creates a tension and frustration that needs an outlet for release – provided in the form of mass hate.

Yet Julia courts the danger of illicit liaisons not because she believes that “hope lies in the proles” but because she derives pleasure from performing traditional female roles. What begins as “an anarchic, carnivalesque celebration of desire,” settles into something far more “conventional”.⁴¹ Their relationship begins with a spontaneous expression of lust and rebellion, when sex is “a political act” and Winston’s desire for Julia is stimulated by her corruption. By the time of their arrest they have settled into the conventionality of their love nest and “in the end, what is opposed to the massive tyranny of the state is little more than a bourgeois domestic idyll, a brief, fragile dream of quasi-marital bliss.”⁴² Julia is transformed from the “only truly free individual” in Oceania into a domesticated and motherly housewife – cooking, protecting Winston from the outside world and re-defining her identity in terms of patriarchal norms and desire: “With just a few dabs of colour in the right places she had become not only very much prettier, but, above all, far more feminine.” Julia purchases the “very same scent” which an old whore Winston once visited wore, although “at the moment it did not seem to matter.” Julia’s dream extends also to clothes, constructing a new ‘individual’ identity for herself entirely out of the markers of gender conformity in Orwell’s own society: “I’ll wear silk stockings and high-heeled shoes! In this room I’m going to be a woman, not a Party comrade!” she exclaims. While the scent and the clandestine nature of their activities links their relationship with the corrupting, spontaneous desire of their early courtship, the reminder of the whore also suggests that she is mapping the co-ordinates of Winston’s escape fantasy rather than her own. Only now she has taken on a more “feminine” appearance can Winston

⁴¹ Ferns, *Narrating Utopia* 123.

⁴² Ferns, *Narrating Utopia* 124. The extent to which this is a “bourgeois” domestic ideal is questionable: it could also be read as a romanticised ideal of a working class interior, as presented in George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (London: Penguin, 1987) 106-7.

finally uncover the “pale and meagre” body of which he is ashamed in front of her.⁴³

This transformation leads feminist Chris Ferns to castigate Orwell for falling into the same trap as Zamyatin – that of opposing “to the monstrous sexual conformity of the dystopian state a purportedly ‘natural’ sexuality which is in fact no less socially constructed.”⁴⁴ Certainly there are stereotypical aspects of Julia as the ‘love-interest’ character of a mid-twentieth century male-authored novel. It remains significant, however, that Julia’s transformation into socially constructed gender roles of the past are strongly linked to a particular space in the novel, and as such are a product of place as much as of time. The room at Mr. Charrington’s “was a world, a pocket of the past where extinct animals could walk.” It is strongly reminiscent of scenes in Orwell’s novels of the 1930s like *Keep The Aspidistra Flying*:

There was a large, low, broken-backed bed with a ragged patchwork quilt... a deal table ringed by dynasties of teapots; a rickety kitchen chair... The bare floorboards had never been stained but were dark with dirt. In the cracks in the pink wallpaper dwelt multitudes of bugs...⁴⁵

Mr. Charrington’s room, a non-dystopian space within the dystopian framework of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, is just as shabby and insect-ridden. As such it is no more of a realistic or positive alternative to the outer dystopian setting than is “Malpais”, the New Mexico ‘Savage’ reservation in *Brave New World*. The nostalgia of Orwell’s pre-War working class interior is ambivalently marked by social prejudice and tempered by the poverty of threadbare, bug-infested sheets and rats that hide in the corner. This couple “are the dead”, ghosts from a forgotten world who can only be happy in the past as long as the present remains hidden. The scene is reflexive and self-critical. The gender roles as well as the entire social basis of this scene’s 1930s values are questioned.⁴⁶ Winston and Julia are as much accomplices

⁴³ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 149.

⁴⁴ Ferns, *Narrating Utopia* 124.

⁴⁵ George Orwell, *Keep The Aspidistra Flying* (London: Penguin, 2000) 231.

⁴⁶ Such self-critique is typical of Orwell. His character Gordon Comstock, for example, realises in his filthy attic that the “other world, the world of money and success, is always so

in the Oceanian order as the British were reliant on the impoverishment and exploitation of Africans and Asians in the pre-War British Empire for their own (comparatively) high standard of living – a point that Orwell emphasized too in *The Road to Wigan Pier*.⁴⁷ This is brought home to them when Julia “vaguely” states, “there’s been a lot of tea about lately. They’ve captured India, or something,” a comment that brushes over the human cost involved in the production of this commodity.⁴⁸ Julia’s femininity, while of a nostalgic male fantasy construction, is similarly ambivalent. ‘Whore’, ‘mistress’ and ‘wife’ are the only antiquated identities Julia can conjure from the nostalgic past of Mr. Charrington’s spare bedroom. But the whole of their rebellion is meaningless and doomed precisely because they oppose the State armed with nothing but the unreliable tools of memory and nostalgia. If, as Patricia Waugh suggests, “only the past, symbolized in the glass paperweight, seems to hold out any vision of the social good”, then the transformation of Julia points to the fact that salvation cannot be found in a rose-tinted vision of the past because such a vision holds no power against the modern state.⁴⁹ “The Principles of Newspeak” appendix, written in the past tense, points to the death of the Oceanian world-system but the rest of the novel demonstrates that, if there is a way out, it is not by looking backwards towards what seemed in the immediate postwar era as the extinct tenets of liberal capitalism in its pre-war form.

Orwell and contemporary Political Thinking

Nineteen Eighty-Four seeks to critique these notions of nostalgia without becoming oppressively didactic. While the sense of imperialist guilt is tangible, Orwell studiously avoids the moral pedagogy of, for example, H. G. Wells. Before the War, Wells posited that when humankind finally exhausted

strangely near. You don’t escape it merely by taking refuge in dirt and misery.” Orwell, *Keep The Aspidistra Flying* 245.

⁴⁷ “Under the capitalist system, in order that England may live in comparative comfort, a hundred million Indians must live on the verge of starvation – an evil state of affairs, but you acquiesce in it every time you step into a taxi or eat a plate of strawberries and cream.” Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* 148.

⁴⁸ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 148.

⁴⁹ Waugh, “The Historical Context of Post-War British Literature,” 39.

all available war materials and the breakdown of the international credit system made the mass production of further war materials impossible, humanity might finally turn to rational means of governance and thereby attain enlightened global rule. Even in the 1930s Orwell had found such an attitude to be jejune and Edwardian.⁵⁰ Somewhat darker visions of war and continuing inequality seemed more in keeping with the context of world events with which Orwell had lived the whole of his adult life. He believed that it was not tenable to take the righteous position of Wells without first recognising that the English middle class to which they both belonged was one of the intransigent problems in the way of a more humanitarian world developing. Hence the protagonists of Orwell's fiction are frequently consciously trapped inside social and cultural structures which rely on the exploitation of others, but which they are powerless to alter or escape: Winston Smith finds himself on what he regards as morally the wrong side of the social structure just as Gordon Comstock does in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936) and Flory in *Burmese Days* (1934). In a passage reflecting Orwell's own stated views on the British Empire, the narrator of *Burmese Days* comments that the world of the *pukka sahib* is

a stifling, stultifying world in which to live. It is a world in which every word and every thought is censored... Everyone is free in England; we sell our souls in public and buy them back in private, among our friends. But even friendship can hardly exist when every white man is a cog in the wheels of despotism.⁵¹

The burden of guilt as a result of being on the side of the exploiters is a deadening weight that Flory must carry entirely alone, and which eventually proves too much for him. Publicly exposed for flouting the *pukka sahib* code, he commits suicide. The same loneliness haunts Winston until he finds Julia. As a member of the fifteen per cent of the population who are Party members, and despite the poor living conditions he must endure, Winston is part of the exploitative class. As a Party member, Winston romanticises the proles and adopts their lifestyle with Julia in a room above a junk shop. Ironically, his own class must suffer the terror imposed daily by the Party

⁵⁰ See Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* 179-81, 188-93 *passim*.

⁵¹ George Orwell, *Burmese Days* (London: Penguin, 2009) 69.

whereas the proles are 'paid off' with the deadening products of mass culture: mechanically written pornography, literature and music, watery beer and a fraudulent lottery. While the presence of these puerile cultural forms does not occupy as central a position in the narrative of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as it does in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, they are an important but easily overlooked aspect of the text. As the Party slogan has it, "proles and animals are free." It is in keeping with the ideology of the Party that this is the freedom of working animals under a heavy yoke.

For Winston, guilt cuts both ways: he is both horribly exploited and part of the mechanism oppressing the proles. His own standard of living is lower than some sections of the working class before World War II. Indeed, were it not for the fact that he is employed in a skilled and perversely creative office job, one could argue that he is 'proletarianized' in accordance with Marx's prediction that more and more of the middle class would be drawn into the ranks of the proletariat as machine production grew and capital was concentrated in fewer hands. For Orwell, the closeness of the interests of the lower-middle class and the upper-working class was a recurring theme, leading him to declare, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, in *The Road to Wigan Pier* that "we of the sinking middle-class... have nothing to lose but our aitches."⁵² In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Party membership formalises the separation between workers and bourgeoisie, reinforcing their differences. Like all of Oceania's unspoken rules, it is a line that it is treacherous to cross.

This formal separation performs an ironic reflection on the ideas of James Burnham, whose work *The Managerial Revolution* (1940) Orwell critiqued on several occasions, most notably the essays "You and the Atom Bomb" and "James Burnham and the Managerial Revolution" (later reprinted as "Second Thoughts on James Burnham"). Burnham had argued that Marx's prediction that capital would be concentrated into progressively fewer hands which would in turn lead to "proletarianization" of the lower bourgeoisie had been incorrect. On the contrary,

⁵² Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* 215.

The last seventy-five years have seen the growth of the so-called 'new middle class', the salaried executives and engineers and managers and accountants and bureaucrats and the rest, who do not fit without distortion into either the 'capitalist' or 'worker' category.⁵³

Burnham held that Marx had inherited a model of the structure of businesses from early economists like Adam Smith, in which an all-powerful owner-supervisor-director ran a mill or factory from the gangway above the shop floor. By the twentieth century, more complex models requiring greater technical expertise had superseded this model. The state too had grown in its reach and its responsibilities, requiring a vastly enlarged bureaucracy. Arguing against the privileged locus of the proletariat within Marxist theory, Burnham contended that it was in fact managers, bureaucrats, salaried executives and the like who represented a real universal class on the edge of power. Indeed, the "Managerial Revolution" had already begun: Burnham dates it "somewhat arbitrarily" as beginning with World War I, and suggests that it will be complete within fifty years of that date – by the mid 'sixties.⁵⁴ It is unlikely to be a coincidence that the consolidation of Ingsoc power in Oceania also dates from this time. The specific agent of change, in Burnham's theory as well as in Orwell's novel, is industrial global war. Burnham claimed that "the war of 1914 was the last great war of capitalist society; the war of 1939 is the first great war of managerial society."⁵⁵ He saw no reason why the rule of the managers would necessarily be benevolent or humanitarian. Given that Stalinist Communism and Nazism represented the two most developed forms of managerial ideology, a managerial state was likely to be overwhelmingly huge, dominating and powerful. Orwell cribbed Burnham's specific prediction that managerial ideologies would split the world into three vast superstates. In 1940, Burnham had predicted that these would centre around the US, Japan and Germany. By October 1945, Orwell could plainly see that this would not be the case – Russia was more likely to dominate the European landmass, while China and not Japan held the balance of power in East Asia. In 1946,

⁵³ James Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962) 55-6.

⁵⁴ Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution* 73.

⁵⁵ Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution* 164.

Burnham changed his mind too, arguing that only two superpowers, the US and the USSR, could compete for world domination. But Orwell, who had begun work on *Nineteen Eighty-Four* at least as early as 1943, continued to split the world between three superpowers in his novel.⁵⁶ He argued in 1945 that Burnham's central thesis had been unaffected by the outcome of the war:

More and more obviously the surface of the earth is being parceled off into three great empires, each self-contained and cut off from contact with the outer world, and each ruled, under one disguise or another, by a self-elected oligarchy. The haggling as to where the frontiers are to be drawn is still going on, and will continue for some years, and the third of the three super-States—East Asia, dominated by China—is still potential rather than actual. But the general drift is unmistakable, and every scientific discovery of recent years has accelerated it.⁵⁷

In production terms, the atom bomb was the most undemocratic weapon in the history of warfare – giving sudden and overwhelming power to a handful of states that would be denied to all others. Orwell immediately saw that this presented an opportunity for those in power in these most affluent countries to affect a system whereby the nuclear nations would exist in a permanent “cold war.”⁵⁸ Large-scale conflict between these states would be impossible, but the quest for both human and natural resources would lead to smaller, localised wars. These superstates, Burnham predicted, would fight over “what parts and how much of the *rest* of the world are going to be ruled by each of the three strategic centres.”⁵⁹ Despite the emerging Cold War, Orwell believed this earlier prediction to be more pertinent and terrifying than Burnham's thesis as revised in *The Struggle For the World* (1946): post-Hiroshima, Orwell felt that Burnham's 1940 work only needed to be updated with an assessment of the ideological implications of such a world system in a nuclear age. After all, in 1940 Burnham himself had argued,

⁵⁶ Crick, *George Orwell: A Life* 331.

⁵⁷ Orwell, *Complete Works*, vol. 17, 320.

⁵⁸ The OED credits Orwell with coining the term in this article. “cold, adj.”. *OED Online*, March 2011. Oxford UP, <<http://oed.com/view/Entry/36101?redirectedFrom=cold%20war>>, 1 June 2011.

⁵⁹ Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution* 165.

The ideologies expressing the social role and interests of the managers (like the great ideologies of the past an indispensable part of the struggle for power) have not yet been fully worked out, any more than were the bourgeois ideologies in the period of transition to capitalism.⁶⁰

While Orwell could not accept many of Burnham's arguments, his broad brushstrokes seem to have appeared startling and realistic enough for Orwell to engage with them. One of the tasks that Orwell took up with *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was to critically and imaginatively answer these ideological and political questions. This attention to Burnham's ideas helps to explain why Orwell inserted an experimental section into part II of the novel, supposedly taken from a political pamphlet written by Emmanuel Goldstein, but for which O'Brien later claims authorship (although he could of course be lying). The extract from *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism* is in part a satirical yet serious and more or less direct engagement with some of Burnham's ideas:

The new aristocracy was made up for the most part of bureaucrats, scientists, technicians, trade-union organisers, publicity experts, sociologists, teachers, journalists and professional politicians. These people, whose origins lay in the salaried middle class and the upper grades of the working class, had been shaped and brought together by the barren world of monopoly industry and centralised government.⁶¹

This is precisely the group of technically-skilled professionals that Burnham had in mind when he spoke of the "so-called 'new middle class.'"⁶² Goldstein's text paints this class as less concerned with the luxurious trappings of power and more concerned with the wielding of power itself. This partially accords with Hannah Arendt's conception of the totalitarian "mass man." However, for Arendt this "mass man" was at base the product of the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie, comprised of groups who were the socio-economic descendents of the early ruthlessly exploitative bourgeois class that originally led the totalitarian movements. The followers, meanwhile, were made up from politically apathetic and socially conformist

⁶⁰ Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution* 74-5.

⁶¹ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 213.

⁶² Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution* 55-6.

elements. Ultimately the leading selfish groups had withered, leaving only a ruthlessly driven mass conformism.⁶³ While Burnham saw the potential for this class to be authoritarian in power, he did not see the potential for radical novelty in their rule: tyranny is reified in his account of power into an essentially ahistorical, unchanging phenomenon. What distinguishes totalitarianism from former examples of dictatorship for Burnham is

the number of facets of life subject to the impact of the dictatorial rule. It is not merely political actions, in the narrower sense, that are involved; nearly every side of life, business and art and science and education and religion and recreation and morality are not merely influenced by but directly subjected to the totalitarian regime.⁶⁴

To subject the whole of life to dictatorial rule in this way requires the instruments of modern technology – *telescreens* are just one extrapolation of the sort of high level of surveillance required by a totalitarian movement over every area of life. As Goldstein/O'Brien puts it in *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism* "with the development of television, and the technical advance which made it possible to receive and transmit simultaneously on the same instrument, private life came to an end."⁶⁵ In this area Burnham is inconsistent. While he stresses the novel aspect of total surveillance and technology within totalitarianism, emphasising that totalitarian ideologies are managerial ideologies which herald a completely new organisation of society, at the same time he argues that "totalitarianism is not so startling an innovation as many spokesmen of the moment try to make it appear. Lies, cruelty, terrorism, brutality are, after all, normal, not exceptional, ingredients of human history."⁶⁶ This latter point may be true, but it overlooks revolutionary aspects of totalitarianism, including (but not limited to) the subversion of reality to maintain ideological consistency at all costs; the constant terror and purges and their accompanying bureaucracy; the widespread use of concentration camps to intern not the enemy but large sections of the totalitarian-ruled country's own civilian population and the

⁶³ Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *The Attack of the Blob: Hannah Arendt's Concept of the Social* (Chicago, IL: U of Chicago P, 1998) 86, 87.

⁶⁴ Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution* 143.

⁶⁵ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 213.

⁶⁶ Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution* 144.

mobilisation of the masses. Burnham's conception of totalitarianism is then historically specific (in a way in which Karl Popper's, for example, is often not) but it is not dynamic.⁶⁷ His lack of insight into the true nature of totalitarianism prevented him from seeing that totalitarianism can only remain stable by constant expansion and ruthless exploitation. To suggest, as Burnham did, that "with the consolidation of the structure of managerial society, its dictatorial phase (totalitarianism) will change into a democratic phase" is to misunderstand the meaning of totalitarianism.⁶⁸ Only through a complete overthrow of the power of the totalitarian movement and a radical ideological shift could a totalitarian state become a democracy. Using rather Burnham-like phrasing (particularly the reduction of political possibilities to a small number of defined factors, which appear comprehensive but in reality may not be so) Goldstein/O'Brien argues:

There are only four ways in which a ruling group can fall from power. Either it is conquered from without, or it governs so inefficiently that the masses are stirred to revolt, or it allows a strong and discontented Middle group to come into being, or it loses its own self-confidence and willingness to govern. These causes do not operate singly, and as a rule all four of them are present in some degree. A ruling class which could guard against all of them would remain in power permanently.⁶⁹

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* the Party is, for the time being, guarding against all four of these dangers successfully. It is a monumental and continual effort, which shows in the heavy lines on O'Brien's face. Just as *Brave New World* critiques Pareto's conception of the "circulation of elites", *Nineteen Eighty-Four* resists the idea of progress as an ideological premise.⁷⁰ This includes the (Post-)Enlightenment conception of Progress, in both Hegelian and Marxist forms, as well as liberal capitalist notions which tie increases in material conditions to increases in mental and physical wellbeing. Not only did such conceptions sit uneasily with Orwell's empiricist streak, but he felt

⁶⁷ Popper, for example, asserts, "Most of the modern totalitarians are quite unaware that their ideas can be traced back to Plato." Popper, *The Open Society*, vol. 2, 31.

⁶⁸ Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution* 156.

⁶⁹ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 215.

⁷⁰ On Huxley and Pareto, see above, 134-8.

that they were somehow morally as well as intellectually false. As he put it in his 1945 essay “Catastrophic Gradualism”:

it is logical to condone tyranny and massacre if one assumes that progress is inevitable. If each epoch is as a matter of course better than the last, then any crime or any folly that pushes the historical process forward can be justified.⁷¹

Such justifications are examples of what Adorno referred to as “subsumptive reasoning” or “instrumental rationality”.⁷² In Oceania, every action is done in the name of the Party and its mute figurehead Big Brother, but the ideology of Ingsoc shares similarities with that of the Oligarchy in Jack London’s *The Iron Heel* – albeit used to keep a different class in power. It is the ideology of the continual, brutal use of power to inflict suffering. Goldstein and the armies of the two other superstates are the only objects with which to fill the void of belief which is the necessary facilitator of loyalty to the Party. The terrible bleakness that many readers have found in the novel relates, in part, to the apparent success of this partial vacuum, to the idea that undifferentiated hate could successfully usurp politics. O’Brien’s commitment to the gross paradox of what could be termed an *anti*-political ideology is terrifying precisely because it is truly authentic and unwavering. As Richard Rorty boldly puts it, Orwell “does not view O’Brien as crazy, misguided, seduced by a mistaken theory, or blind to the moral facts. He simply views him as *dangerous* and as *possible*.”⁷³

O’Brien’s very persuasiveness is testament to the power that Orwell saw in the “intellectual implications” of totalitarianism.⁷⁴ The scale and immediacy of the danger, as Orwell saw it, has not always been appreciated. Alex Zwerdling, for example, in what is generally a sympathetic account of the novel, objected, “If the purpose of Orwell’s book is to make people able to resist totalitarianism by exposing its nature and methods, the utter defeat of

⁷¹ Orwell, *Complete Works*, vol. 17, 343.

⁷² See above, 53–5.

⁷³ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), 176 *emphasis in original*.

⁷⁴ Orwell, *Complete Works*, vol. 19, 487.

his hero is hardly apt to strengthen their resolve.”⁷⁵ But if the meagre powers of a single anonymous desk clerk like Winston Smith were able to rise successfully against the might of O’Brien and Oceania, then the danger that they present would not appear so real or prescient.

Such criticism strips Orwell of the firm political stance from which he consciously wrote. He was a committed “democratic Socialist” and time and again he wrote to provoke and persuade people to rally behind causes of the Left. “He took his stand among those who were to the Left or on the Left of the Labour Party: fiercely egalitarian, libertarian and democratic, by Continental comparisons, surprisingly untheoretical, a congregation of secular evangelists.”⁷⁶ His empirical, “common sense” socialism was founded not upon dialectical materialism, but upon deeply held humanistic values, although as his biographer Bernard Crick acknowledged, “many of his prejudices were conservative.”⁷⁷ Like Michel de Montaigne (as Stephen Toulmin describes him), Orwell’s was “the modest skepticism of those who respect everyone’s right to opinions arrived at by honest reflection on first-hand experience.”⁷⁸ Orwell reserved his wrath for those whom he believed were actively dishonest (such as Stalinists) or did not have first-hand experience on which to reflect (as with his notorious criticism in the essay “Inside the Whale” of W. H. Auden’s poem “Spain” for seeming to condone “necessary murders”).⁷⁹ Orwell believed that while armed conflict (which he distinguished from murder) could be justified, political ends could not be reached unless the means too were just.

This, then, was one reason that Orwell opposed all historical meta-narratives, including the liberal-Enlightenment idea that material progress was an inevitability, the Communist idea that the “success” of the Soviet Union paved the way for an eventual and inevitable world socialist revolution, the Fascist belief that history was a war of races, and James Burnham’s

⁷⁵ Alex Zwerdling, “Orwell and the Techniques of Didactic Fantasy,” *Twentieth Century Interpretations of 1984*, ed. Samuel Hynes (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971), 96.

⁷⁶ Crick, *George Orwell: A Life* xv.

⁷⁷ Crick, *George Orwell: A Life* xvi.

⁷⁸ Toulmin, *Cosmopolis* 50.

⁷⁹ Orwell, *Collected Works*, vol. 12, 103-4.

picture of a “managerial” revolution and dictatorship of technocrats. The empirical evidence of reality, of events which each of these narratives had been unable to predict except through spurious *post hoc* justification, was sufficient proof for him of their intellectual poverty.

Furthermore, Orwell believed that science and technology in and of themselves could not hold the answers. He understood “the idea that science means a way of looking at the world, and not simply a body of knowledge” and could see that “a mere training in one or more of the exact sciences, even combined with very high gifts, is no guarantee of a humane or sceptical outlook.” For example, “a number of German scientists [had] swallowed the monstrosity of ‘racial science’.”⁸⁰ The opinions Orwell expressed in his journalism in the years when he was working on the manuscript of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* thus share similarities with Horkheimer’s (essentially Nietzschean) view that “The objective progress of science and its application, technology, do not justify the current idea that science is destructive only when perverted and necessarily constructive when adequately understood.”⁸¹ Science as it stood predicated no set of ethical values. Orwell categorically opposed any *political* worldview, such as Soviet Communism, which viewed itself as “scientific” in these terms. Not only did he disavow their scientific claims, but also the harnessing of science for non-scientific ends. O’Brien’s – and indeed Winston’s – manipulation of history demonstrates that the structuring of the past into historical narrative on the one hand and prediction of the future on the other are structurally two quite different exercises. Finding a pattern in the relations between continuity and discontinuity in the past does not imply that one is capable of extrapolating such trends *scientifically*. Indeed, to accept that science has a history of progress and achievement inevitably invites a negative comparison with social and political “progress”. As Adorno puts it, fully conscious of the self-contradiction of asserting a universal history while simultaneously denying *the notion* of universal history,

⁸⁰ “What is Science?” in Orwell, *Collected Works*, vol. 17, 323-6, here 325.

⁸¹ Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (London: Continuum, 2004) 40.

it would be cynical to say that a plan for a better world is manifested in history and unites it... No universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but there is one leading from the slingshot to the megaton bomb. It ends in the total menace which organized mankind poses to organized men... History is the unity of continuity and discontinuity. Society stays alive, not despite its antagonism, but by means of it.⁸²

This critique of Hegel denies that a universal meaning is written upon or discoverable within “History” that will reveal its future end. The totalitarian, Burnhamite and liberal ideologies of the twentieth century, which were structured around historical grand narratives (albeit that the liberal narrative of “progress” was not professed as “law” in the way that the totalitarians professed their ideologies), aim towards achieving a final synthesis ending the antagonisms of historical change and creating a stable future. Yet given the past propensity to move towards ever greater destruction – “from the slingshot to the megaton bomb” – such theories had until then served only catastrophic failure.

Although characteristically hyperbolic, Adorno’s teleological image may still be useful when we hold it up against dystopian fiction. In it, we see how dystopia is not so much a direct opposition to utopia, but rather an ironic commentary on it. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* denies the universal history offered by Soviet Communism by showing a future in which the past as we have already experienced it is reconstrued to fit into a mostly – but not wholly – different teleology. But it is not, as Deutsch, Williams and other critics would have it, *only* Soviet Communism which is attacked through this reconstruction of a universal history. The success of the text as satire is its ability to hold up a particular example such as Soviet Communism as an exemplar of the more general idea of destiny which is also common to the liberal, Enlightenment idea of progress, the Nazi ideal of the master race, and James Burnham’s prediction of a global managerial revolution. The satirical element of dystopian critique therefore functions by presenting the present othered into the near-future. Hence *Nineteen Eighty-Four* can be

⁸² Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1973), 320. See also Bernstein, Introduction, *The Culture Industry*, 3-4.

read as a critique of the industrial modern state in all its permutations from a point in the near future following the total collapse of the nation-state into a post-industrial power bloc system of lawless total war.

Critical investigation of the modern state through the self-reflexive movement of othering forwards (prolepsis) in order to look backwards (analepsis) is a common technique to dystopian fiction. As such, Orwell merely “reacted to the sense of an omnipresent menace, felt by many of his contemporaries, in a peculiarly obsessive way.”⁸³ Experiences of contemporary politics left him feeling distrustful of all political classes, in every country. Politics and “ordinary common sense” had for him been undermined by the “cult of ‘realism,’ with its inherent tendency to assume that the dishonest course is always the best one.”⁸⁴ This, Orwell believed, had been central to international relations since before the start of World War I.

When, for instance, the very same British Conservative politicians who Orwell accused of defending Mussolini during the 1920s and 1930s attacked him as a war criminal in 1943, Orwell put it down to them acting in their class interest: “[i]n their clumsy way they were playing the game of Machiavelli, of ‘political realism,’ of ‘anything is right which advances the cause of the Party’ – the Party *in this case*, of course, being the Conservative Party.”⁸⁵ Although Orwell is to an extent attacking straw men here, it is instructive to note *how* this satire works. He essentially accuses Conservatives of behaving like well-disciplined and fully indoctrinated members of the Communist Party. Arthur Koestler, later reflecting on his days in the Communist Party in the 1930s, neatly summarised Communist discipline thus:

I learnt to distrust my mechanistic preoccupation with facts and to regard the world around me in the light of dialectic interpretation... Both morally and logically, the Party was infallible: morally, because its aims were right, that is,

⁸³ Malcolm Smith, “George Orwell, War and Politics in the 1930s,” Literature and History 6 (1980), 221.

⁸⁴ Orwell, Collected Works, vol. 16, 106.

⁸⁵ Orwell, Collected Works, vol. 15, 295 *emphasis added*. Orwell’s quotations are not all entirely accurate here, and he seems rather unfair on Duff Cooper in particular, who had described Hitler and Mussolini as having similar “mentalities” during his resignation speech in the Commons, given in protest over Munich. Hansard Commons, 3 Oct. 1938, vol. 339 c. 33.

in accord with the Dialectic of History, and these aims justified all means; logically, because the Party was the vanguard of the proletariat, and the proletariat the embodiment of the active principle in History.⁸⁶

By distrusting “facts” and empirical “reality”, Koestler moved from an adherent of Leninism into a fully indoctrinated member of the Communist Party. The logic was brutally simple and deceptively consistent: the Communist Party is the Revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat. Therefore, they always act in the ultimate revolutionary interests of the proletariat, even when it appears they are doing the opposite: whatever is best for the Communist Party is best for the workers in the long-term. By identifying the Conservative Party with the interests of the ruling class, Orwell draws an analogy with the Communists – thus castigating both as disreputable and dishonest.

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Realism again turns into farce in the war between the three global power blocs of Oceania, Eurasia and Eastasia: during a “Hate Week” rally against the enemy Eurasia, Oceania swaps sides. The orator, “without pausing in his speech” or “even breaking the syntax” immediately switches the names of those he is angrily denouncing:

Without words said, a wave of understanding rippled through the crowd. Oceania was at war with Eastasia! The next moment there was a tremendous commotion. The banners and posters with which the square was decorated were all wrong! Quite half of them had the wrong faces on them. It was sabotage!⁸⁷

The crowd tearing down these posters are of course the very same people who had put them up, a fact they work busily to forget. If the Party is infallible, reality must represent doctrine. If a gap appears between the two, it is reality that must adjust to the consistency of Ingsoc ideology, and the Party can “twist reality into whatever shape they choose.”⁸⁸ This element of Oceanian society mirrors Orwell’s experience of the manipulation of the

⁸⁶ Arthur Koestler, “Utopia” in Richard Crossman, ed., *The God That Failed: Six Studies in Communism* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1950), 43.

⁸⁷ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 188-9.

⁸⁸ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 207.

internecine Spanish Republican struggle by Communists: "The peculiarity of the totalitarian state is that though it controls thought, it doesn't fix it... It declares itself infallible, and at the same time it attacks the very concept of objective truth."⁸⁹ Stephen Ingle even forthrightly claims that Orwell was "so shaken... by his experiences in Spain that he devoted the rest of his creative life to painting pictures of a state that had torn the concept of truth from the fabric of social discourse." Hence, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, "Arendt's worst fear was realised, for the very nature of truth as a concept had disappeared."⁹⁰ Oceania is in direct accord with Arendt's view of totalitarianism as a system that "destroys individuality... [by] depriv[ing] people of any fixed reality by which they might orient themselves."⁹¹ Sudden and often oppositional change is more or less constant. Normalising such a state of flux inhibits resistance and prevents any but ideologically pure values from becoming deep-seated. The effects of this run deep. Thought control in Oceania is not limited to state control over what constitutes, at any given moment, the officially-sanctioned "truth": as well as telling the population what to think, there is a sinister domination of affectivity, with the Party telling people *how* to feel and towards whom.

Mass Hate

At a practical level, the episode during Hate Week in which the regime changes the identity of the foreign power that Oceania is at war with many hundreds of miles away at short notice is not a remarkable exercise of power for a state with a monopoly on the means of communication and travel. The speed with which this change is accepted as "true" might shock us, as might the "wave of understanding" that changes in the present have changed the "facts" of the past. The idea that the crowd as a single mass would uniformly and simultaneously comprehend the error as "sabotage" is certainly unnerving, perhaps even uncanny. But these aspects of the change are not truly terrifying. The full farcical horror of the response to Oceania switching

⁸⁹ Orwell, *Collected Works*, vol. 12, 504.

⁹⁰ Stephen Ingle, "Lies, Damned Lies and Literature: George Orwell and 'The Truth'," *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 9 (2007), 733.

⁹¹ Pitkin, *The Attack of the Blob*, 89.

allies in the war resides in the speed at which hate is once more picked up: within four minutes of the announcement “the feral roars of rage were again bursting from the crowd. The Hate continued exactly as before, except that the target had been changed.”⁹² The ground is now littered with torn banners and posters, the square unadorned: such make-up is superfluous glitter for the furious crowd. The discarding of these pictures demonstrates that no real target is needed for hate, that it is “an abstract, undirected emotion which could be switched from one object to another like the flame of a blowlamp” because of the daily practice the citizens receive during the “Two Minutes Hate.”⁹³ Its only prerequisite is that there is a target – whoever, whatever or wherever that should be. It is a controllable means whose only real end is the maintenance of its own paranoid hysteria. The manufactured hate of Oceania’s population is, in other words, a self-propagating creation, whose true nature is underlined by the capitalization of the word “Hate”, turning this emotion into a self-sustaining force.

According to Hannah Arendt, one of the attractions of the totalitarian movements of the ‘twenties and ‘thirties was their dropping of any pretence to the respectability of bourgeois mores and values. These were ostentatiously violent movements, publicly whipping up hate:

The propaganda of totalitarian movements which precede and accompany totalitarian regimes is invariably as frank as it is mendacious, and would-be totalitarian rulers usually start their careers by boasting of their past crimes and carefully outlining their future ones. The Nazis ‘were convinced that evil-doing in our time has a morbid force of attraction.’⁹⁴

Arendt is here citing Franz Borkenau’s *The Totalitarian Enemy*, a book which Orwell himself had reviewed for *Time and Tide* (4 May 1940), as support for the arrogant public swagger of the Nazis’ criminality. Orwell, summarising Borkenau’s argument, tellingly writes,

As for the hate-campaigns in which totalitarian régimes ceaselessly indulge, they are real enough while they last, but are simply dictated by the needs of

⁹² Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 189.

⁹³ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 16.

⁹⁴ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 307, quoting Franz Borkenau, *The Totalitarian Enemy*, (London: Faber, 1940), 231.

the moment... almost anyone can figure as Public Enemy No. 1. Hatred can be turned in any direction at a moment's notice, *like a plumber's blow-flame*.⁹⁵

The recurrence of the image of the blowlamp of hatred in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* shows that Orwell's early recognition that hatred could be produced, inflamed, sustained, controlled and directed by totalitarian movements was an enduring concern. Totalitarian movements selected targets against which to express hatred in order to rouse violent support for themselves. The aim of such hysterical anger was simply to further the ends of the totalitarian movement.

To do this required a variety of tactics. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Party members undergo a daily propaganda exercise (the Two Minutes' Hate). War is kept continually in the consciousness of Party members by any means possible. Telescreens continually announce the production figures for war materials and report from the fronts. Social pressure to participate on the home front is constant – indeed, Julia persuades Winston to volunteer in a munitions factory for one evening a week to detract suspicions away from their rebellion. Furthermore, they live with the daily terror of rocket attacks. If, as Julia suspects and as the narrator also obliquely alludes, the government is actually launching these attacks against its own civilians then it is only to provoke anger. It can serve no purpose in entrenching solidarity as the population is already atomized and isolated. Each death is, at bottom, that of a potential informant and enemy: in Oceania there are no friends or ties of kin. Winston's reaction to the human hand severed at the wrist which he finds in the road after a nearby blast is typical:

he kicked the thing into the gutter, and then, to avoid the crowd, turned down a side-street to the right. Within three or four minutes he was out of the area which the bomb had affected, and the sordid swarming life of the streets was going on as though nothing had happened.⁹⁶

The seemingly random victims that the blasts choose merely underline the fact that no one is safe in any quarter. Three or four minutes' walk away,

⁹⁵ Orwell, *Collected Works*, vol. 12, 159 *emphasis added*.

⁹⁶ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 88.

however, it is business as usual (which is not to say that the explosion was unheard, its meaning unknown). For the narrator, there is something clearly immoral, something “sordid” about the lack of concern that the populace shows here. But the lack of concern also points to the complete isolation and alienation of the whole population, including Winston Smith. The severed hand is after all dehumanised by him, seen like a plaster moulding, a unhuman “thing” – the small piece of discarded life which is more disgusting than horrifying. The citizens of Oceania may in fact be more terrified of the potential consequences of getting involved, of helping out in a situation whose existence may very soon be denied, than wholly unconcerned.

The continual changing of history is another source of creation for the energy needed for mass hatred. The effort required to suppress memories is itself a violence perpetuated upon the self. The continual suppression of old memories and re-inscribing of new ones ensures not only a complicit population, but one with a high degree of frustration, primed for destructive behaviour.

The pressure of these mental gymnastics is greatly enhanced by the social dimension in which they must take place (more accurately, perhaps, this dimension should be termed *asocial*, as social connections among Party members are barely permitted in Oceania). When O’Brien alludes to Syme, a disappeared *unperson*, under the gaze of a telescreen, he hints at the boundaries of which citizens in Airstrip One must beware, to stay within the reality created by the regime. Each of these tactical boundaries, reinforcing aggressivity and alienation, combines with the sense of individual isolation that runs through the novel. The Party slogan “Big Brother is Watching You”, for instance, works on several levels. The friendly, avuncular aspect of Big Brother – a figure to look up to and to be inspired by – infantilises the citizen, who seeks in the attentive Big Brother approval and legitimisation for his actions. By constantly *performing* in front of the hidden Big Brother through the surveillance system of Oceania, the Party member hopes to win acceptance. Such acceptance is in reality the hollow prize of surviving one more day without having been subjected to the terrors of the Ministry of Love

(terrors which, on the flip side, are the price to pay for failure to perform according to the standards of Oceanian conformity). Inasmuch, however, as there is a hidden threat also lurking in the slogan, the poster does not attempt to rouse support through propaganda or genuine love for the Party or even Big Brother, but rather through terror. Indeed, in Arendtian terms, propaganda is entirely absent from Oceania. As with totalitarian movements, the Party does “not actually propagate but indoctrinate.” This difference is important – the masses of Airstrip One do not need to be convinced of the purity of Ingsoc ideology, merely shown the overwhelming power to which they must inevitably submit. Such indoctrination “inevitably coupled with terror, increases with the strength of the movement’s or the totalitarian government’s isolation and security from outside interference.”⁹⁷ In Oceania then, where the outside world is cut off entirely, the conditions for total indoctrination and merciless terror have been perfected. In a world in which the appearance of reality must match a pre-written but constantly shifting plan, and where surveillance is absolute, the individual’s ability to display venomous hatred on command must be good enough to convince Big Brother of the completeness of her or his indoctrination. In a situation where everyone is a potential enemy or informant, it must also appear indisputable to the individual’s peers. Notwithstanding this, putting oneself beyond suspicion is impossible – even for O’Brien. Fear of failure to produce a convincing appearance of hatred powerfully motivates the affectation of emotions: to all intents, Party doctrine here succeeds in affecting reality. Even Julia, who claims to be close to laughing during the Two Minutes Hate, seems so caught up in hatred that while her claim may incite “envy” in Winston, it carries with it the air of uncertain braggadocio.⁹⁸

Nineteen Eighty-Four, Totalitarianism and the Modern State

There is, however, an element of fantastic absurdity in the Two Minutes’ Hate. In a satirical move, its description in the first pages of the novel immediately follows, and is juxtaposed with, Winston’s diary account of his

⁹⁷ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* 344.

⁹⁸ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 160, cf. 16.

previous evening's trip to the cinema, in which a film depicting the killing of refugees in boats by Oceania helicopter gunships is greeted with "*shout[s] of laughter*" by Party members (it is unclear whether this is a "news" film or a work of fiction). The two experiences are tightly linked: "It was, he now realised, because of this other incident [the Two Minutes' Hate] that he had suddenly decided to come home and begin the diary today."⁹⁹ In both scenes Winston is part of an emotionally manipulated group audience observing war-related propaganda, and the status of "truth" and "fiction" constantly shifts. The Two Minutes' Hate utilises every cheap cinematic propaganda trick possible to rouse enmity. But lest this seem too fantastical, the previous night's cinema experience reminds the reader that propaganda and indoctrination take many forms. War films in Britain during World War II, such as British Pathé's coverage of the bombing of Dresden – which seems to joke about the destruction caused by the R.A.F. and US Air Force – could be just as dehumanizing.¹⁰⁰ As Zwerdling notes, Orwell's "use of fantasy is deliberately rationed, and within the fantastic framework there is a good deal of realistic observation."¹⁰¹ The scene is then at once satirical and sobering. It is the first attempt of the novel to provide a critique of the ambivalent relationship between totalitarianism and the modern state in which the potential for new totalitarian forms frequently lurks and must be in every instance vigilantly resisted. In other words, there are clear and important differences between the totalitarianism of the 1930s and '40s as described by German émigré theorists such as Arendt, Adorno and Horkheimer, who had lived through the Nazi rise to power, and the fictional superstate of Oceania.

The critique of the modern state reaches its apotheosis in Part III of the novel, when O'Brien tortures Winston Smith in the Ministry of Love. As Deutscher points out, there is a similar scene in both Huxley's *Brave New World* and Zamyatin's *We* – the ultimate source of inspiration can be ascribed to the Grand Inquisitor in Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers*

⁹⁹ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 10, 11.

¹⁰⁰ *Dresden Bombed to Atoms*, first broadcast 22 February 1945, British Pathé Newsreel Archive, <<http://www.britishpathe.com/record.php?id=13192>>, 13 February 2011.

¹⁰¹ Zwerdling, "Orwell and the Techniques of Didactic Fantasy," 93.

Karamazov.¹⁰² Where it differs from these other texts, however, is that O'Brien is no leader – merely an inner Party functionary. Big Brother is a symbol who unlike Zamyatin's Benefactor or Huxley's World Controller is nowhere given his own voice. He may not even be a living individual. Indeed, the hollow personality cult surrounding this silent poster boy demonstrates that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* goes far beyond Nazi or Stalinist totalitarianism. Critics like Peter Firchow, who see the whole text as a direct allegory of extant, particularly Russian, totalitarianism, are bringing presuppositions to the text which may be ultimately unhelpful.¹⁰³

In some ways Oceania has gone beyond totalitarian methods and aims; in other ways it is less arbitrary.¹⁰⁴ Orwell implies this difference directly when O'Brien says, "in the twentieth century, there were the totalitarians, as they were called."¹⁰⁵ He uses these societies as contrasting examples to his own. The totalitarians, according to O'Brien, allowed martyrs to be made of their enemies. They did not control the past in its totality. These were their weaknesses. Oceania makes every confession true – everyone who goes through Winston's ordeal *believes* in their guilt and the infallibility of the Party by the end of it. The radical power of the Party is to break down the personality, and then rebuild it, cast it anew. "The command of the old despotisms was 'Thou shalt not'. The command of the totalitarians was 'Thou shalt'. Our command is '*Thou art*'."¹⁰⁶

Oceania's ontological power of destruction and re-creation – its ability to command "Thou art" – rests on its control of history and its control of language. *Newspeak* is a language created by the Party to try to prevent

¹⁰² Deutscher, "1984 - The Mysticism of Cruelty," 32; on Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor as a source of dystopian narrative and imagery, see Kumar, *Utopia and anti-Utopia in Modern Times*, 120-2.

¹⁰³ Firchow argues that the reaction of the Soviet government to the text, which denounced Orwell as *if* he had provided a sequel to *Animal Farm* that attempted to provide the same criticisms in a different way, is proof (*post hoc*) that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is just such an attack on Russia. This seems to put the cart before the horse. See Firchow, *Modern Utopian Fictions from H. G. Wells to Iris Murdoch*, 114 n. 20.

¹⁰⁴ Hence Irving Howe terms *Nineteen Eighty-Four* a "post-totalitarian" world, of "totalitarianism after its world triumph." Howe, "1984: History as Nightmare," 53.

¹⁰⁵ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 266. See also O'Brien's comment, "The German Nazis and the Russian Communists came very close to us in their methods..." (276).

¹⁰⁶ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 267.

dissent from orthodoxy by cutting out the ability to formulate unorthodox opinions verbally. This is a means of psychological terror and, in contrast to the totalitarian regimes that merely burnt subversive books, requires the translation (i.e. butchering) of all pre-Newspeak literature into new, censored versions, so that the possibility of subversive interpretation is lost. A consequence is that while both Oceania and the Arendtian description of totalitarianism entail “a system of ubiquitous spying, where everybody may be a police agent and each individual feels himself under constant surveillance...” the attempted occlusion by means of *Newspeak* of the ambiguities of language implies that no longer can “every word becom[e] equivocal and subject to retrospective ‘interpretation’.”¹⁰⁷

Under a totalitarian regime, Arendt argues, the secret police “are no longer concerned with knowing what is going on in the heads of future victims (most of the time they ignore who these victims will be).”¹⁰⁸ None of the victims in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is chosen randomly or because of their class, ethnicity or other social grouping as in totalitarianism. Syme, for example, the theorist and writer of the *Newspeak Dictionary*, is “too intelligent” and creative for his own good.¹⁰⁹ Parsons, a most enthusiastic Party worker, is arrested on the evidence of his young child for talking subversively in his sleep. As for knowing what is going on in their victims’ heads, O’Brien is aware almost before Winston himself what his answers will be. “You are thinking...” is his repeated dictate.

Although the terror is not random, neither is the persecution logical. Winston Smith’s only physical acts against the Party are making love to Julia and keeping a secret diary. His rebellion is the anonymous intellectual revolt of an extremely unimportant bureaucrat. Yet O’Brien claims to have been tracking Winston for seven years. The lack of anonymity of this low-level desk clerk, the personal and planned nature of Winston’s victimisation,

¹⁰⁷ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* 431.

¹⁰⁸ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* 426.

¹⁰⁹ The case of Symes actually demonstrates a trait shared by totalitarianism as Arendt describes the phenomenon: brilliance is not tolerated for long, mediocrity being by far preferable. See Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* 339.

distinguishes the torture of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* from that of texts about totalitarian terrors such as the interrogation of the former Party grandee in Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, or the forgotten Siberian Gulag of Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*.

Orwell's critique of historical processes suggests that totalitarianism is not static, that it must evolve and morph significantly in its approach to really gain total domination. The text also suggests that totalitarianism is a historically contingent form of society whose origins can be traced back to the Enlightenment and beyond, but whose movement is by its very nature irrational and volatile. Totalitarianism does not develop out of any ontological necessity – be it laws of Nature or of History – and neither will Oceania. But both are possible futures, and this is Orwell's warning: it *could* happen anywhere. The potential exists in the nature of the modern state. Orwell's call to arms, his moral, as he put it in a press release for the US, is “*don't let it happen. It depends on you.*”¹¹⁰

Nature, the Body and the Self

Such ‘unnatural’ mutations of the modern state would entail what Huxley had, with reference to *Brave New World*, termed a “really revolutionary revolution” – that is, a complete transformation of the notion of selfhood.¹¹¹ In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the Party's actions throughout are intended to prevent the citizen from forming a coherent identity based around a stable model of self. The identity which the citizen of Oceania is permitted is fragmented, uncertain, frantically anxious and always frightened. The body is itself something alien to the self, something which in its very ‘naturalness’ is somehow slightly revolting. It is pressed into the minds of the Outer Party members every morning during the “Physical Jerks”, a daily series of exercises they are required to practice under the watchful eye of the telescreen, while “wearing... the look of grim enjoyment which was

¹¹⁰ Quoted in Crick, *George Orwell: A Life* 395. The press release was dictated to, and edited by, Fredric Warburg.

¹¹¹ Huxley, *Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited* 8-9.

considered proper.”¹¹² The purpose of these exercises, as the instructress makes clear by reference to the hardships endured by Oceanian troops fighting “on the Malabar front”, is to demonstrate to people like Winston their physical inadequacy. Only the conscious mind, which can choose to consciously submit to the will of the Party, is capable of purity. Like these exertions, physical torture forces the Oceanian victim to recognise the body as a central part of his or her *self*, to recognise that “nothing in the world [is] so bad as physical pain.”¹¹³ In a sense, in Oceania physical pain is criminal, or at least proof positive of guilt; as an overwhelming physical sensation it demonstrates to the individual that they have failed to live up to the standards that the Party expects of them. In singling out a person’s individuality, pain inherently contains an added humiliation in a society where even to feel as an individual, distinct from the mass, is both criminal *and* a vice.

Ahlbäck regards the body as a reminder of the natural in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and a representative metonym for nature. “The Oceanian fiction of limitless expansion means at least an explicit war against physically living human bodies.”¹¹⁴ In her reading, the body is a symbol of the ‘real’ beyond the Party’s control, which they wish to tame. Oceania’s power is condemned to remain incomplete, because “the body lives and resists through its pure crying existence, however tortured.”¹¹⁵ The difficulty with this approach is that it implies that the Party is an agent operating within rational parameters for its own self-interest, and moving towards a final and attainable goal. This seems contrary to its concern with maintaining an abysmal social stasis of oppression. Indeed, to maintain its iron grip on power, Ingsoc must perform a careful balancing act between the need for expansion in order to sustain the Party as a movement on the one hand, and on the other the requirement for human fuel, victims to spend in the brutal exercise of power. The body is a conduit for attacking the mind, and its preservation as the one site in which something outside of the Party remains in the individual has as much use to

¹¹² Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 34.

¹¹³ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 251.

¹¹⁴ Ahlbäck, *Energy, Heterotopia, Dystopia* 118.

¹¹⁵ Ahlbäck, *Energy, Heterotopia, Dystopia* 120.

Party ideology as complete control of the whole organism would. The fact that bodies exist is not an “irritant” to the Party – on the contrary, it demonstrates on behalf of the Party to the individual that he or she is flawed, guilty, and therefore deserving of punishment, humiliation and torture.

Furthermore, physical pain demonstrates to the individual that there is something *physically* wrong with them. This is imperative for the Party to be able to show them that they are *sick*. The attack on Winston’s faculty of reasoning in Part III of the novel is two-pronged: O’Brien seeks to show Winston that his model of self, so intimately tied up with his faculty of reasoning (in accordance with the post-Enlightenment tradition) is faulty. But he also wishes to convince Winston that he is ill, that his mistreatment is for his own good: “I am taking trouble with you, Winston... because you are worth trouble... You are mentally deranged. You suffer from a defective memory... Fortunately it is curable.”¹¹⁶ The physical mistreatment is itself the litmus test for this argument. Physical mistreatment proves, in Oceanian terms, that Winston is ill and enables Winston to believe this. But mistreatment is also a cause of the breakdown in Winston’s ability to reason. Pain literally prevents him from reasoning. It is the “surgery” which excises the “deranged” faculties within him. The use of violence against Winston is a viciously circular process.

Torture and Philosophy

The torture of Winston Smith is imperative to breaking down his personality, but severe physical mistreatment is not enough by itself to affect the change that the Party desires. It is part of a much longer process. After his arrest, Winston is first kept in a cell through which various other characters pass, each of them condemned for the same crime – “there is only one offence” as the newspeak poet Ampleforth puts it. The sycophant Party activist Parsons asks him rhetorically “You don’t think the Party would arrest an innocent man, do you?” Guilt is assured. Winston is made aware that everyone is

¹¹⁶ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 258.

culpable, from a drunken prole woman who tells him “I might be your mother” to a “skull-faced” victim of starvation whose humanity has deserted him.¹¹⁷ There is something appalling in the physicality of these visitors: the drunken woman falls on top of Winston, vomits on the floor, pulls him towards her “breathing beer and vomit into his face.” Parsons defecates “loudly and abundantly.” The starving man’s overly-large eyes appear “filled with a murderous, unappeasable hatred of somebody or something.”¹¹⁸ Winston must first begin to associate himself with these people, both as someone who is guilty and as *something* dirty, decaying and offensive to his own sensibilities. Only then does his physical torture begin. The mistreatment which the text skirts over, at the hands of lower-level functionaries, prepares Winston by humiliating him and making him feel a certain way about his physical self, to make it easier for O’Brien to undertake the real interrogation.

The dialogue between Winston and O’Brien in these torture scenes focuses on metaphysical questions: the nature of memory, reality, and belief, models of rationality, and the limits and plasticity of that slippery phrase “human nature.” This is Orwell’s turn to self, to questions of how to cope with the loss of autonomy engendered in a modern world of terror. Orwell explores the links between historical changes in philosophical modelling of the self and the implications of a modern ideology that undermines the very notion of selfhood. Using the multiplicity of voices which the novel form permits, he probes this question from several angles.

If *The Origins of Totalitarianism* was Hannah Arendt’s attempt to understand how Europe could give birth to the Enlightenment and the Rights of Man as well as a “brutally murderous” form of politics like totalitarianism, then *Nineteen Eighty-Four* seems to ask the Arendtian question:¹¹⁹ ‘Why does the Enlightenment tradition have no answer to O’Brien?’ or, put another way, why is Winston so easily defeated by his arguments – that “[w]hatever he

¹¹⁷ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 242, 245, 240, 246-9.

¹¹⁸ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 239, 246.

¹¹⁹ Villa, “The development of Arendt’s political thought,” 3.

said, the swift answer crushed him like a bludgeon”?¹²⁰ The novel’s answer is only partially Arendtian: we can read in the conversion of Winston from rebel to penitent the repression of spontaneous action into socially controlled behaviour. This for Arendt was part of the modern human condition.¹²¹ But by juxtaposing the concrete physical torture of Winston with abstract anti-philosophical argument by a character well-versed in rationalist philosophy, Orwell links physical domination with domination in the conceptual realm – a more Adornian move. Richard Rorty argues that, “Like Nietzsche, O’Brien regards the whole idea of being ‘answered,’ of exchanging ideas, of reasoning together, as a symptom of weakness...”¹²² This belies the time and trouble O’Brien is willing to take with Winston. O’Brien is a new type of man from a truly transformed society for whom metaphysical questions about the self are simply irrelevant: “All this”, O’Brien says of their metaphysical discussion “is a digression.”¹²³

Yet O’Brien is perfectly willing to explore questions of truth and subjectivity, just so long as they take place within parameters that he rigidly controls. O’Brien structures these debates as *if* they were exchanges between oppositional epistemological viewpoints, when in fact he will only have discussions on his own terms. Put crudely, O’Brien offers an instrumentalized rationalist epistemology that is able to consume Winston’s empirical understanding of the world: Oceania is not as it appears, but as the logic of Ingsoc ideology dictates. This, as explored above, involves the disappearance of the very concept of truth as we understand it.

The process of conceptual domination begins to break down Winston from the moment that he asserts his existence as a thinking being. Descartes’s *cogito ergo sum* here becomes (in Winston’s words): “I think I exist... I am conscious of my own identity.”¹²⁴ But since he entered the Ministry of Love Winston has no identity in the sense he intends. Nor has he recourse to

¹²⁰ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 278.

¹²¹ Arendt, *The Human Condition* 40-1, 45.

¹²² Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* 176.

¹²³ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 279.

¹²⁴ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 272.

causality – to an “ergo”. His power of reason, his ability as an individual to frame questions in terms of causality, has come into doubt: interrogation and torture have affected him so severely he almost takes O’Brien at his word. O’Brien dominates Winston’s mind to such an extent that the Cartesian introspective construction of the self is displaced and it is O’Brien who becomes the first referent by whom Winston may begin to reconstruct his identity. For O’Brien and the Party “Power... creates reality, it creates truth” – a position that “can be said to be an extreme form of philosophical idealism.” Whether or not this is philosophically tenable is irrelevant to O’Brien’s aims – all that really matters to him is the radically pragmatist goal that Winston should construct his identity on O’Brien’s own terms.¹²⁵ O’Brien therefore shows him that as he frequently leaps to conclusions that are not in accordance with Ingsoc ideology, Winston’s powers of reason must be dangerously unreliable. Winston knows, for example, that O’Brien’s statement “‘you do not exist’, contain[s] a logical absurdity”, but as he knows he could not win such an argument, “what use was it to say so?”¹²⁶

Likewise, O’Brien cautions Winston against empiricism as his senses may very well deceive him (the Cartesian “evil demon” here being the “sickness” which O’Brien asserts Winston is suffering from).¹²⁷ Not heeding his warning, Winston continues to press O’Brien by recourse to materialism: “I was born, and I shall die. I have arms and legs. I occupy a particular point in space. No other solid object can occupy the same point simultaneously. In that sense”, he asks O’Brien, “does Big Brother exist?” Winston frantically grasps here at the discourse of the physical sciences, empirical Newtonian physics, matter and motion. These accounts of reality, so easily taken for granted, are again

¹²⁵ Fromm, Afterword, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Centennial ed., 332.

¹²⁶ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 272.

¹²⁷ René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and The Meditations*, trans. F. E. Sutcliffe (London: Penguin, 1968), 100. Interestingly, Orwell’s exploration of affective morality contrasts markedly with both the post-Cartesian rationalist tradition and the more avowedly Christian argument for religious sentiment as the basis of morality. Kant’s attempt to construct morality from *a priori* principles of reason, in which God formed the cornerstone by which “moral action and natural law can entirely converge” (Burnham, *An Introduction to Kant’s Critique of Judgement*, 25) was perhaps the clearest example of such an attempt to turn ethics into a system of universalizable rational judgement by unifying both of these traditions. But Winston has no sense of religious duty (just as he lacks a sense of patriotic “duty” in which he is supposed to be socialised). Moreover, the Ingsoc regime impinges upon the concept of “free will” at every turn.

defeated – not by oppositional theses but by virtue of being irrelevant: “It is of no importance. He exists”, replies O’Brien.¹²⁸

For Rorty, this breaking apart of Winston’s faculty of reason, the tearing up of his ability to construct a “coherent web of belief and desire” is the central purpose of this torture. The only reason for getting Winston to believe that $2 + 2 = 5$ is because Winston himself has picked on $2 + 2 = 4$ as symbolic. Breaking this apart means that he can “no longer justify [him]self to [him]self.” Without this ability to *rationalize*, Winston is “forced to realize that he has become incoherent, realize that he is no longer able to use a language or be a self.”¹²⁹ The symbolically invested idea is like a lever-point that allows O’Brien to break open Winston completely. To Rorty, “it is the sound of the tearing, not the result of the putting together, that is the object of the exercise. It is the breaking that matters. The putting together is just an extra fillip.”¹³⁰ Rorty is correct that at the subjective level, the symbolism with which Winston invests “ $2 + 2 = 4$ ” means that to make him disbelieve this has profound and far-reaching consequences. However, the “object of the exercise” is not simply to break Winston. Were this the case, it could be done in far more impersonal surroundings – such as, for example, the labour camps which are mentioned at the start of Part III. Furthermore, Winston’s interrogation by O’Brien is not immediate, but the end of a process of weeks or months of previous mistreatment and torture, interrogation and assimilation into the prison world of Miniluv.

The ultimate act of power to which O’Brien aspires is not just to break his captive but for Winston to thank him for destroying him and then offering him a means of redemption, by allowing him to constantly debase and humiliate himself. It is not just that the old thoughts are now impossible, but that the new thoughts are what the Party puts there, and nothing more. As O’Brien

¹²⁸ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 272.

¹²⁹ Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 178-9. For a discussion of the philosophical problems relating to Winston’s reliance on “ $2 + 2 = 4$ ”, see Ingle, “Lies, Damned Lies and Literature: George Orwell and ‘The Truth’,” 734-6. Ingle, following Hannah Arendt, argues that “[o]utside of mathematics, what follows from the statement that $2 + 2 = 4$ is—nothing” (735).

¹³⁰ Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* 179.

insists, “we shall squeeze you empty, and then we shall fill you with ourselves.”¹³¹ The breaking and re-moulding of Winston is one of only a very few avenues for creativity left in Oceania. O’Brien sees himself as a sculptor, a morbid type of ‘artist’, who sculpts not from wood or stone but from human beings, and who believes that “even though men suffer and die in the process, they are lifted by it to a height to which they could never have risen without [his] coercive – but creative – violation of their lives.”¹³² If he is able to practice “doublethink” – to simultaneously hold two contradictory beliefs – to the extent which he claims he can when he drops a photograph in an incinerator and immediately denies that it ever existed, then he is a remarkable creator indeed. O’Brien also claims to be author of the ‘Emmanuel Goldstein’ text *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism* in which he presents a cogent and coherent anti-Ingso account of the development of Oceania and the three super-states’ world order. O’Brien entirely understands Winston’s opposition – but it is irrelevant to the concrete reality of physical torture in the Ministry of Love. It is not so much that the state of play has shifted, but rather that O’Brien is playing an altogether different and more terrifying game.

O’Brien’s ‘creative’ work as torturer is comparable to that of the eponymous villain of H. G. Wells’s *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), who explains to the narrator visiting his island that “these creatures you have seen are animals carven and wrought into new shapes. To that – to the study of the plasticity of living forms – my life has been devoted.”¹³³ Not only does Moreau transform the animals physically, breaking their bodies, and then go on to transform them into new, human shapes with re-moulded brains, he then completes (so he believes) the ultimate act of power: he gives them “the Law” – a catechism with which he tries to impose on them a new moral and ethical consciousness, a whole belief structure. Similarly, O’Brien breaks Winston’s body, and in the ultimate act of power he gets inside Winston’s psyche and transforms his whole consciousness, his personality, his

¹³¹ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 269.

¹³² Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty* 35.

¹³³ H. G. Wells, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, ed. Patrick Parrinder (London: Penguin, 2005) 71.

individuality, that which makes him human. At the same time, he sets up a new Law, “an agency within him to watch over [the individual’s dangerous desire] like a garrison in a conquered city” as Freud described the super-ego in *Civilisation and its Discontents*.¹³⁴ Ahlbäck’s analysis of O’Brien’s actions in this section of the novel stresses his conformity to the figure of the Lacanian Father.¹³⁵ The Law (as the Lacanian *Nom du père*) can be seen in action in the novel’s final scene: “He pushed the picture out of his mind. It was a fake memory. He was troubled by false memories occasionally. They did not matter so long as one knew them for what they were.”¹³⁶

The fact that the Inner Party can bring Winston back to the memory of his betrayal just by playing “under the Chestnut tree/I sold you and you sold me” and thereby humiliate him is not the final end for which he is tortured. The tears in Winston’s eyes seem to suggest instead that he has been made to feel genuinely grateful for this humiliation. He sees himself as a born-again Christian sees himself through the eyes of a vengeful God and a ‘fire-and-brimstone’ preacher. He has been reconstituted as a masochist – whereas he previously felt sorry for himself, for the Victory Gin and varicose veins, the boredom and daily humiliations, he is now thankful for precisely these very attacks and pains he is made to suffer.

Hope for the Future?

To pose the question of whether Winston’s conversion means that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a despairing or an ultimately hopeful novel is to approach it with an agenda already set, to come to it having pre-made a decision of what it *should* do as a political novel to conform to our own anxieties or hopes about the future. To present this as an either/or choice may be ultimately unhelpful. Orwell wrote many essays, several pamphlets and three book-

¹³⁴ Freud, “Civilisation and its Discontents,” 124. This occurs similarly in Zamyatin’s *We*: see above, 104.

¹³⁵ “Winston’s body in the uncouthly fatherlike O’Brien’s mirror is a trace... Winston is overcome by sorrow for his tortured body, he can hardly recognize himself. He starts crying out of pity for his body. In Lacanian terms this is the mirror of a sadistic symbolic order, the mad Law of a mad Father.” Ahlbäck, *Energy, Heterotopia, Dystopia* 118 +ff.

¹³⁶ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 309.

length documentaries. Had he wished to present a single predictive viewpoint on the future of world history, he was amply capable of doing so using the skills of a seasoned journalist and his varied lived experience. In Williams's words,

Orwell [was] much more than a passive figure in this dominant structure of feeling. He shared it, but he tried to transcend it... He was the writer who put himself out, who kept going and taking part, and who learned to write as a function of this precise exploration.¹³⁷

He chose to write an experimental dystopian novel, stretching the capacities and traditional limits of the form through the inclusion of Goldstein's text and "The Principles of Newspeak" appendix. As such, one should assume that he wished to make use of the unique advantages that the novel form permits. The first edition of the book made a point of this on the dust jacket cover, on which, over the top of the number '1984' written in light green on an emerald background were the words in white,

nineteen eighty-four
a novel

Only in subsequent editions was the second line removed.

A principal advantage of using the novel form for any political writer is the ability to present a multiplicity of voices. The third person omniscient narrator enables Orwell to mingle satire, social commentary and critiques of a variety of political ideologies *as well as* a warning about the future. In this warning was both despair and hope. There was despair for the complicated path of history that had led from the Enlightenment promise of a future founded on peace and reason to the Nazi death camps, and seemed to be heading only towards further terrors. Despair too that the postwar world had replaced many of the problems which had led to war with new, and potentially even more dangerous ones. Yet even in this despair there was, implicitly, hope in the notion that this fictional world was after all only *one possible world*, that in history as in the novel there are a multiplicity of voices and potentials. Despite the presentation of the future as containing an inherent potential for

¹³⁷ Williams, Orwell 89.

evil, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, as a dystopian fiction, expresses hope and reassurance that a future is worth fighting for.

It is for this reason that some critics like Ahlbäck have looked for the utopian potential in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.¹³⁸ At the very least, in provoking the discussion about whether *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is an open or closed text, Orwell has successfully roused generations of his readers into an argument about their own attitudes towards the future and what sort of world we can or should try to achieve, as well as what sort of society we can and should avoid creating. The novel thus prompts its readers to look for the cracks in the Oceanian regime, to find our own way to challenge O'Brien and the Party. Winston fails so that we as readers can do better. The choice for the active, politically-minded reader is, then, between accepting *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a despairing text, or, renouncing quietism, to look for hope in even its darkest passages. Once this choice is wagered, finding a route out of Oceania is by no means impossible: Ingsoc is after all riddled with contradictions.

The seeds of destruction of Oceania are in fact contained within the seeming strength of its total domination because, paradoxically, of its need for victims and for terror. The system in Oceania is based not on total world dominance but on total war; conquest of the world is only the justification for conquest of the individual, represented by Winston and Julia. Oceania is wholly dependent upon an 'other' to function. As O'Brien puts it "Goldstein and his heresies will live for ever."¹³⁹ But Goldstein is not the only 'other': Winston Smith, Julia, the prisoners of war hanged in Trafalgar Square, the cheap African and Indian labourers over whom the power blocs fight, the ignored proles who are not Party members – all these are others. Williams condemns Orwell for making the proles and the "coolies" passive.¹⁴⁰ But their very passivity – or rather their latency – could also be the Sword of Damocles that makes the text an open, hopeful one.

¹³⁸ Ahlbäck, *Energy, Heterotopia, Dystopia* 116.

¹³⁹ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 281.

¹⁴⁰ Williams, *Orwell* 79.

These others, these outsiders, are the pillars on which the power of Oceania is dependent, a power which must constantly expand or else fail:

Since power is essentially only a means to an end a community based solely on power must decay in the calm of order and stability; its complete security reveals that it is built on sand. Only by acquiring more power can it guarantee the status quo; only by constantly extending its authority and only through the process of power accumulation can it remain stable.¹⁴¹

The problem for Oceania is that the world is finite. If it burns too brightly it will run out of human fuel. If the adoption of Newspeak is successful, O'Briens of the future will find no more victims with subversive thoughts. But if Goldstein is, as O'Brien assures us, to live forever, then the language of dissent, the possibility of betrayal, the meaning of the word "sabotage" and "counter-revolution" must always be widely known too. The open-ended nature of the dark history of Oceania mirrors the mood and experience of the postwar climate. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a dystopia should be conceived as dealing with an emerging world, as negotiating shifting sands and a future that was terrifyingly uncertain where dark spectres new and old loomed and hope flickered, a small but still bright light.

¹⁴¹ Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism 142.

“Life in All its Forms is Strife”: John Wyndham, Dystopianism and Science Fiction

LIFE IN ALL ITS FORMS IS STRIFE; THE BETTER MATCHED THE OPPONENTS, THE HARDER THE STRUGGLE.

—JOHN WYNDHAM

The Kraken Wakes (1953)

Beginning with his 1951 breakthrough novel *The Day of the Triffids*, John Wyndham began to take the dystopian novel in a new direction, emphasising afresh the genre's strong links to the fantastic premises and transformations of science fiction. The fact that he was so overtly inspired by H. G. Wells's scientific romances helped him win over an unusually large readership for science fiction in Britain.¹ Huxley and Orwell had turned to Wells's later utopias principally as targets for criticism and satire. In contrast, Wyndham looked appreciatively toward Wells's earlier work. Nevertheless, what links Wyndham to Huxley and Orwell is his specific “attention to social and political critique.” Wyndham's fiction seems to back up M. Keith Booker's belief that such critique marks dystopia out from the more general category of science fiction, placing it closer to “projects of social and cultural critics.”² This is not to suggest, however, that dystopia and SF are wholly separable. Just as, say, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is no less gothic for being a *Bildungsroman*, so *The Day of the Triffids* can be productively read as both an apocalyptic SF novel and dystopian fiction. Indeed, one characteristic difference separating literary utopias and dystopias is that while utopias represent “an older high cultural tradition of writing to which some (but actually very little) generic SF can be allied”,³ dystopias are more closely aligned to generic SF, which Luckhurst describes as

a literature of technologically saturated societies. A genre that can therefore emerge only relatively late in modernity, it is a popular literature that concerns

¹ Edward James, *Science Fiction in the 20th Century* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994) 79.

² Booker, “The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature,” 19.

³ Luckhurst, *Science Fiction* 5.

the impact of Mechanism (to use the older term for technology) on cultural life and human subjectivity...⁴

Several of Wyndham's novels engage with "the impact of Mechanism" through a kind of *via negativa*, by taking the social structures of Mechanism away. The role of technology is highlighted by the gradual removal of its trappings, especially modern technocratic specialisation. This may occur through the breakdown of society (as in *The Day of the Triffids* or *The Kraken Wakes* (1953)) or through the radical transformation of social relations so that they more closely resemble those of a non-scientific age before the colonisation of 'nature' through scientific technologies took place (as in *The Chrysalids* (1955)). The dystopian elements of these novels work along a similar logic: rather than pit individuals against the might of the modern state, in *The Day of the Triffids* individuals are pitted against the power of nature. Diverging from the earlier dystopias discussed in previous chapters, critique in Wyndham's novels veers more towards the social than the political (in its formal, institutional terms). Thus whilst L.J. Hurst is to some extent correct when he posits that, like *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the main theme of *The Day of the Triffids* is "permanent horror", and that "[t]he two novels are about the logical consequences of irrationality", there are two important caveats.⁵ Firstly, the endings of both novels, far from being despairing, offer some hope (however tentative) in humankind's ability to form non-oppressive societies (however geographically and temporally limited). Whilst, in Barry Langford's words, *The Day of the Triffids* seems "caught between nostalgia for a lost world of dubious merits and scepticism about what may replace it", the Isle of Wight provides a space for a community founded on a humanistic model of rationality.⁶ Secondly, although Orwell's novel focuses on the terror of power relations that are expressly political in nature, *The Day of the Triffids*, by collapsing the hegemonic locus of power – the modern state – focuses to a greater extent on the varying success and failure of attempts by people to organise

⁴ Luckhurst, *Science Fiction* 3.

⁵ L.J. Hurst, "We Are The Dead," *Vector* 113 (1986) 4, 5.

⁶ Barry Langford, Introduction, *The Day of the Triffids*, by John Wyndham (London: Penguin, 1999) xvi.

themselves socially when, as it were, stumbling blocks are placed before the blind.

Dystopian themes are, then, more diffuse in *The Day of the Triffids* and Wyndham's second (published) postwar novel *The Kraken Wakes*, both of which may be termed 'apocalyptic-dystopias' (a term that will be explored below). But *The Chrysalids* makes more straightforward use of a dystopian structure as well as clearly signalled dystopic themes. It is here that the Cold War and socio-biological themes that characterise his fiction of this period most closely and lucidly intertwine.

John Wyndham has received remarkably scant attention from literary scholars considering both his long-term influence on Anglo-American SF and his wide readership. This chapter begins by endeavouring to picking apart one of the reasons for this – namely that in *Billion Year Spree*, Brian Aldiss (who was also the author of Wyndham's entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography*)⁷ dubbed him the "master of the cosy catastrophe" – a charge from which Wyndham's work has never escaped. This will make it possible to re-position Wyndham in the critical field and to examine his work in the postwar context – particularly the interrelations of apocalyptic and dystopian themes. The importance of war and the figure of the atomic bomb (which is rarely named but which can often be found lurking in the background of his fiction) will be emphasised. A further defining element of Wyndham's postwar fiction is the central importance of gender relations and sexual politics, which ties *The Chrysalids* firmly into the dystopian genre. Turning to more esoteric and religious themes, the continuing impact of (post-)Enlightenment thought on dystopian fiction, particularly with regards to the image of the walking carnivorous eponymous plants of *The Day of the Triffids* will be considered. This chapter draws to a close by mapping Wyndham's work as the dystopian thought of a liberal Utopian.

⁷ Brian W. Aldiss, "Harris, John Wyndham Parkes Lucas Beynon [John Wyndham] (1903-1969)". *Oxford DNB*. Eds. H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2004.

Cosy Catastrophes

In *Billion Year Spree*, Brian Aldiss describes Wyndham's novels as "cosy catastrophes", and with dismissive elitism, claims that both *The Day of the Triffids* and *The Kraken Wakes* "were totally devoid of ideas but read smoothly, and thus reached a maximum audience, who enjoyed cosy disasters." What Aldiss means is unclear, however, as in seeming direct contradiction he then asserts that these novels' popularity rests on inter-related social concerns they embody: "either... the collapse of the British Empire, or the back-to-nature movement, or a general feeling that industrialisation had gone too far, or all three."⁸

Owen Webster's article "John Wyndham as Novelist of Ideas", is not directly concerned with refuting Aldiss's claim, but nevertheless does so by default. It is, Webster argues, "the spectacle and symbolic power of chaos through blindness, worked out logically and remorselessly, that elevates [*Triffids*] to the status of a novel of ideas."⁹ One such episode, for him, is the chaining of the sighted protagonist Bill Masen to a scavenging gang of blind people by a humanitarian agitator (Coker): "Here, though virtually unexplored, is one of the key issues of our time: the strange ties that exist between opposing elements – master and servant, oppressor and oppressed." The scene recalls for Webster the relationship "more potently developed... with Pozzo and Lucky in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*",¹⁰ (or indeed, one could add, the social analysis of Odysseus and the Sirens made by Horkheimer and Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*).¹¹ Despite his intentions to get away from the gang of blind scavengers, Masen is daily bonded further to them by pity (the "trick" Coker has played on him he therefore terms "holding the baby"). While Masen, unlike Odysseus, quickly breaks the physical bonds put on him by Coker's men through his cunning, the social bonds grow ever tighter and he attempts to organize scavenging systematically. In an act presented in

⁸ Brian W. Aldiss, *Billion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction* (London: Weidenfeld, 1973), 294.

⁹ Owen Webster, "John Wyndham as Novelist of Ideas," *SF Commentary* 44/45 (1975), 44.

¹⁰ Webster, "John Wyndham as Novelist of Ideas," 45.

¹¹ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 32-6.

patriarchal terms as both courageous and pathetic, a nameless eighteen-year old virgin offers her body to Masen on condition he stays with the group.¹² This provokes an unusually emotional reaction from Masen; he cannot “stand the reproach of her. She was not just herself – she was thousands upon thousands of young lives destroyed...”¹³ Appalled by her desperate offer he resolves to stay, but when a mysterious fatal virus takes hold of the blind in his care he helps the young woman only so far as to give her the means to kill herself. As C.N. Manlove puts it, “it is a case of Bill paying his last respects to a moral code fast disappearing with society; or in practical terms, since he quickly escapes scot free, of having his moral cake and eating it.”¹⁴

Jo Walton fiercely criticises the placing of Masen as bourgeois master over the blind masses. She strips the term “cosy catastrophe” of Aldiss’s cultural elitism (that of an SF aficionado towards the mainstream). Re-conceptualising the phrase so that “cosy” essentially becomes a metonym for “bourgeois”, Walton uses it to charge John Wyndham with class snobbery and social elitism. In “Who Survives the Cosy Catastrophe?” Walton’s answer to the question her title proposes is that it is

Almost inevitably nice middle-class white men. They’re usually well educated. They may not have a university degree, but they all have A-levels. They usually went to minor public schools, or a good grammar school. They’re never rich or titled, but they never grew up in a council house either. They’re practical, often scientists, inevitably secular agnostics.¹⁵

While Walton does not establish a connection between public school and “cosy” environments here, it is true that the heroes of Wyndham’s novels (who, like Aldiss, Walton uses as an exemplar) were all secular, agnostic scientists. Yet this is also true of a fairly large amount of SF – particularly in the historical context of the postwar period. Indeed, whilst more comprehensive than Aldiss’s briefer summary, Walton’s extensive exposition

¹² Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids* 114, 123-5.

¹³ Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids* 124.

¹⁴ C. N. Manlove, “Everything’s Slipping Away: John Wyndham’s *The Day of The Triffids*,” *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 4 (1991) 40-1.

¹⁵ Jo Walton, “Who Survives the Cosy Catastrophe?,” *Foundation* 93 (2005) 36.

of six characteristics she finds in the “cosy catastrophe” also has limitations. Thus while her first observation that this is a British genre dating from 1951 to 1977 and whose writers arrived at adulthood before World War II is an interesting one, she does not pursue this further. One conclusion it is possible to draw, however, is that the experience of war as a mass phenomenon was an important concern of the genre.

Secondly, Walton argues, “a cosy catastrophe need have no worries about plausibility... the disasters are always treated absolutely seriously, however campy and nonsensical they may seem when looked at out of their context.”¹⁶ The same statement could be made about any number of non-naturalist literary works from Homer’s *Iliad* onwards, and in any case, as Suvin points out, SF stands outside of, and in opposition to, “naturalistic or empiricist literary genres.”¹⁷ Similarly, Kingsley Amis argued in his early study of science fiction that verisimilitude is not a necessary characteristic of the environment in SF prose, but rather is seen in “the human effects of spectacular changes in our environment, changes either deliberately willed or involuntarily suffered.”¹⁸ If Walton’s assessment of Bill Masen being a bourgeois man behaving in a typically bourgeois fashion throughout is correct, then on this scale of values *The Day of the Triffids* is enormously successful. Moreover, by concentrating on the so-called cosy catastrophe as a middle class, “unrealistic” genre, Walton fails to examine the more radical aspects of Wyndham’s novels. As Robert Wymer has shown, Wyndham is far from being a “safe” author.¹⁹ He was certainly a thoroughly middle-class SF writer who consciously wrote in what he saw as the tradition of Wells, and as such the fantastic elements in Wyndham’s texts follow logical patterns of behaviour. But these patterns point to the truly radical aspect of his work: Wyndham’s fearless engagement with theories of evolution and biological competition (discussed in detail below). As a middle class liberal, with one eye particularly on the events of World War II, he questioned the role and

¹⁶ Walton, “Who Survives the Cosy Catastrophe?,” 26.

¹⁷ Darko Suvin, “On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre,” *College English* 34 (1972) 372.

¹⁸ Kingsley Amis, *New Maps of Hell: A Survey of Science Fiction* (New York: Arno, 1975) 26.

¹⁹ Rowland Wymer, “How ‘Safe’ is John Wyndham? A Closer Look at his Work, with Particular Reference to *The Chrysalids*,” *Foundation* 55 (1992) 26.

limits of ethical action. If all creatures must on some level engage with the struggle for survival within the natural economy, then forever lurking behind the traumatic experience of war is the thorny question of whether liberal humanist values are viable in a world apparently governed more by forces of nature than by the political creeds of man.

Walton's third critical characteristic is that, "nothing really nasty happens... The cosy catastrophe, while killing off ninety percent of humanity, does it without dwelling too much on the painful details."²⁰ It is true that neither suicides in the opening of *The Day of the Triffids*, nor subsequently the dead who litter the cities, are morbidly dwelt on although, as Hurst points out, "The [supposedly] "decent" narrator actually goes around killing people and helping people to kill themselves."²¹ Whilst conservatively-written, these novels are not, Walton admits, politically conservative: the survivors are "upbeat about the possibility of building a better world from the ashes of the old" rather than looking back to a golden age. This being so, Walton's fourth point is that "despite being written during the Cold War, nuclear wars are quite specifically a banned topic", an argument that excludes all metaphorical or allegorical content and in Wyndham's case is questionable even on the narrow, literal level.²² Interestingly, Wyndham did once attempt to write a nuclear war novel – three drafts of the opening chapter survive in his archive.²³ The reason for his lack of success with such projects is revealed in an unpublished review article he wrote entitled "Science Fiction and Armageddon":

The H-bomb, in spite of its dramatic qualities and emotion-rousing factor [sic] cannot make a satisfactory protagonist. Indeed, how could it? - It is a thing, and stories are not about things, they are about people...

Moreover, it is either so devastating in operation that all is destroyed, leaving nothing more to be said; or it turns out to be not quite devastating, in which

²⁰ Walton, "Who Survives the Cosy Catastrophe?," 34.

²¹ Hurst, "We Are The Dead," 4.

²² Walton, "Who Survives the Cosy Catastrophe?," 34-5.

²³ John Wyndham, *Atom Bomb Fragment* Ms. 7/2/13. The John Wyndham Collection, U of Liverpool. While interesting from the point of view of the way Wyndham constructs a set of typically 'Wyndhamesque' characters in a small West Country village, these fragments are not sufficiently sophisticated or well-rounded enough to warrant analysis here.

case the author finds his warning has deteriorated into a modified success story about how-we-beat-the-bomb, and so defeated his intention.²⁴

Wyndham's solution to this problem is to sublimate the Bomb, so that commentary upon it is allegorical. In both *The Day of the Triffids* and *The Kraken Wakes* disaster comes ultimately from the skies, and the consequences of the disasters are clearly analogous to the potential consequences of nuclear disaster. Indeed, through the deployment of covert nuclear references the author attempts to construct a greater air of plausibility: the epigraph from Tennyson at the start of *The Kraken Wakes*, for instance, ends "...fire shall heat the deep;/Then once by men and angels to be seen,/In roaring he shall rise and on the surface die." Such epical Victorian imagery takes on a new significance when one considers that it was published only a few months after Britain's first underwater atomic test in October 1952. Phyllis's observation on the opening page of "Phase One" reinforces this subtext: "Mars is looking pretty angry to-night, isn't he? I hope it isn't an omen[.]" But the "omen" she observes is a different harbinger of war: five red points (an allusion perhaps to the Soviet star) descend from the heavens to the horizon, each "a brilliantly red light as seen in a fairly thick fog so that there is a strong halation". As they hit the water, Mike the narrator reports, "A great burst of steam shot up in a pink plume. Then, swiftly, there was a lower, wider spread of steam which had lost the pink tinge, and was simply a white cloud in the moonlight."²⁵ In *The Day of the Triffids*, the green shooting stars which make the night sky "almost as light as day" (and which, as Moore points out, drawing on David Ketterer, are an ironic reversal of the reason-bringing celestial phenomena of Wells's *In the Days of the Comet*) are handled with similar imagery.²⁶ These obvious nuclear analogies lend credibility to phenomena that, as Walton herself makes clear, would be unbelievable outside of an SF context. Likewise, there is plenty of

²⁴ John Wyndham, "Science Fiction and Armageddon," Ms. Unpublished book review, 5/3/15. The John Wyndham Collection, U of Liverpool.

²⁵ John Wyndham, *The Kraken Wakes* (London: Penguin, 1955) 11, 12, 13.

²⁶ Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids* 6; Matthew Moore, "A Critical Study of John Wyndham's Major Works," PhD, U of Liverpool, 2007, 75-6, 78-88 *passim*. These images might also recall V-1 and V-2 rocket attacks on London during WWII, although Wyndham was with the British Army in Europe when these attacks took place.

commentary about the Bomb in *The Chrysalids*, but it is couched in religious terms of “Badlands” and “Tribulations”. Hence it can be argued that the very “taboo” (in Walton's view) on naming the Bomb serves to maintain the force of the Bomb as a figure in the texts.

Walton's next criterion for the genre is that it normally has a narrow focus on a small group of individuals as opposed to the “broad spread” she claims are usually associated with horror and disaster fiction (although she does not substantiate the latter half of this claim). Her final contention is that “cosy catastrophes” spend “hardly any time on the catastrophe itself. They ideally begin, like Wyndham's [*The*] *Day of the Triffids*[,] with the survivor waking up unharmed on the day after the disaster.”²⁷ This is really only the logical outcome of her third characteristic, however. It should be noted though that in Walton's exemplar *The Day of the Triffids*, it is the triffids as biological/evolutionary competitors (to which a large portion of the novel is devoted) that prove the greatest threat to humanity, rather than the more briefly explored mass blindness catastrophe. Walton seems to have conflated the precipitous breakdown of the state in the face of the blindness catastrophe with the ultimate break up of civil society and return to a state of nature. The latter is the result of more long-term processes.

Wyndham, Apocalypse and Postwar Science Fiction

While there are problems with Walton's specific generic characteristics, this is not to deny there is a generic quality to Wyndham's works. Reasons for this include his literary debt to Wells, his desire for commercial success, and his pre-War background as a short story writer for American SF pulps. After the War, despite his ever-increasing disapproval of the term “science fiction” and a strong prejudice against certain strands of SF writing, he remained a prolific reader of the genre. Hence, to grasp the narrative strategies and formal frameworks of Wyndham's postwar dystopian fiction it must be read within the wider context of science fiction of the period. Whilst his writing style is unique, the fears and concerns that he expresses, as well as some of

²⁷ Walton, “Who Survives the Cosy Catastrophe?” 35.

the figures and images he uses, are very much of his time in SF. Wyndham's mutants and aliens from this period (and even the *terrestrial* origins of flying saucers in *Plan For Chaos*) are standard SF figures. Monsters, mutants, aliens and a variety of humans, flora and fauna exposed to radioactivity or radioactive fallout are defining tropes in postwar science fiction. Often, they were an easy way to make the fantastic believable to audiences in a secular, scientific era.

Wyndham felt that the "hard" science fiction stories of (for example) Arthur C. Clark and Isaac Asimov could appeal only to an audience initiated into its technical vocabulary.²⁸ He summed up such idea-centred texts as "scientists at play."²⁹ Nevertheless, the "logical extrapolation" of Wyndham's approach mirrored the insistence of John W. Campbell Jr., US editor of *Astounding Science Fiction*, that scientific laws be fully acknowledged in the stories he published. In a rare interview in 1961 Wyndham commented,

The critics crashed down on *The Day of the Triffids*. They invoked Wells's ruling that readers could only be asked to accept *one* fantastic thing. 'I got fairly lambasted by the better-read. But, do you see, neither [the theme of "mobile vegetables" nor universal blindness] would work on its own.'³⁰

Wyndham's reference here acknowledges Wells's influence upon him as the father of the generic tradition within which he saw his work. He followed Wells critically, rather than slavishly, in particular utilising a technique he termed "logical fantasy", or the "logical" extrapolation of a fantastic premise. Far removed as triffids, alien sea-monsters, telepathic mutant children and cloned Nazis in flying saucers are from reality, the (threatening) figures in Wyndham's fiction do not behave fantastically; their extrapolation from the original imaginative genesis is logical. Wyndham therefore saw his work as "logical fantasy" rather than "science fiction". The premises of his postwar novels are all questions beginning "What would happen if..." which

²⁸ John Wyndham, "'M.B.L.' - Notes for a Talk," Ms. 5/3/2. The John Wyndham Collection, U of Liverpool.

²⁹ John Wyndham, "Questionnaire for Kingsley Amis," Ms. 11/5/3. The John Wyndham Collection, U of Liverpool.

³⁰ 'Pooter', "Talking to John Wyndham," *Times Saturday Review* 16 March 1968. Tearsheet held as item 9/2/1, The John Wyndham Collection, U of Liverpool.

Wyndham believed marked him out as a social dreamer and a disciple of Wells rather than an adventurer writing in the wake of Jules Verne.³¹ Hence, for example, ‘*what would happen if, instead of the Nazi threat ending in 1945, their scientists had developed cloning techniques to produce the master race of which Hitler had dreamed?*’ (*Plan for Chaos*) Or ‘*What would happen if 99.9 per cent of the population were suddenly blinded?*’ (*The Day of the Triffids*). In the case of *The Chrysalids*, Wyndham later insisted that his main question was not ‘*What would the human world look like ten generations after a nuclear war?*’ But rather “if human evolution is not a dead end, homo superior must one day turn up; how is he going to be received when he does?”³²

This strategy of following an idea through a logical chain of events, while shared by many of Wells’s literary descendents, is indeed a very pure strain in Wyndham’s fiction. His correspondence with readers shows that this was indeed a criterion on which he wished his fiction to be judged: “I’ve always found the taking to pieces to be a part of the game: if it comes to pieces too badly, it should prove salutary for the author – if it doesn’t come to pieces at all, he can consider himself a miracle worker, or at least abnormal...”³³

Whilst Wyndham would by no means wish to be seen as prophesising, the frequent presence of catastrophic and apocalyptic events in his dystopian fiction should be taken seriously. Indeed, Wyndham’s postwar fiction can best be described as apocalyptic-dystopian. The “dystopian” label here draws attention to the specifically modern, twentieth-century nature of the apocalypse while at the same time pointing to the nature of the modern state and modern warfare as the focus of the socio-political critique of the novel. The term apocalypse, meanwhile, is “derived from the Greek *apokalupsis*;

³¹ “Verne asked himself: what excitement can we get out of this invention? Wells enquired: what effect, if it could come about, would this state of affairs have on people?” John Wyndham, “Wells v. S-F,” Unpublished article. Ts. 5/2/9. The John Wyndham Collection, U of Liverpool, 1-2. In the Ms. “Questionnaire for Kingsley Amis,” Wyndham claimed that “Wellsian” SF is “what I mainly attempt” (1).

³² John Wyndham, “‘Sunday Pictorial’ – Rough” Ms. (Draft #1 of 2). 5/3/8. The John Wyndham Collection, U of Liverpool.

³³ John Wyndham, Letter to Mrs. Margaret Lowe, 22 Oct. 1951. CC. 12/1/3. The John Wyndham Collection, U of Liverpool.

the roots being *apo* (away from) and *kalupto* (concealment)" and in its modern conception draws on both Jewish and Christian traditions. While it is a difficult term to define precisely, "apocalypse should not be thought of as merely a synonym for chaos or disaster or cataclysmic upheaval; more properly we should think of disclosure, unveiling and *revelation*."³⁴

Thus full-scale nuclear war would not necessarily be apocalyptic: if total, putting an end to human life as such, it would indeed foreclose any possibility of a revelatory message or meaning. By shutting off the possibility of reflection or the future practice of history it would carry no critical meaning, only destruction. For writers like Wyndham to make meaning out of the threat it had leave a possibility for hope to remain in the world, the Bomb's threat had to be 'minimised' as one-less-than-total and in some insane and minimal way renewal could not be ruled out. The human element of chance must still be put in play.

The apocalyptic conceptualising of the Bomb did not detract however from the fact that it was a real threat and felt as such. Frank Kermode's assertion that "it would be childish to argue, in a discussion of how people behave under eschatological threat, that nuclear bombs are more real than armies in the sky", misses the point of most "Bomb fiction", and especially that of John Wyndham.³⁵ In eschatological myth, the process of apocalypse is directly controlled by divine power: human reaction is fated, and salvation only exists for the subject who turns away from the world and towards the power of God as a humble and obedient servant to do *His* will. On this score, however, Wyndham's fiction is closer to being an epic: it is the struggle of a hero or group of survivors to adapt to the surrounding uncontrolled and competing forces of nature which determines their eventual salvation through their will and their various abilities. Thus, in *The Day of the Triffids*, Bill Masen and Josella Playton's adopted daughter Susan shows a natural instinct for

³⁴ Philip Neil Best, "Apocalypticism in the Fiction of William S. Burroughs, J.G. Ballard and Thomas Pynchon," PhD, Durham University, 1998, 5.

³⁵ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford UP, 1967) 95. This comment is specifically and comprehensively refuted in Best, "Apocalypticism," 26-9.

survival from the moment Masen meets her. Ever since she narrowly avoided being stung by one, “she had been very careful about the *things* [Triffids], and on further expeditions had taught [her younger brother] Tommy to be careful about them too.” But Tommy had been too small to see the triffid lurking over the garden wall which struck him dead. Susan “had tried half a dozen times to get to him, but each time, however careful she was, she had seen the top of the triffid tremble and stir slightly...”³⁶ Through her caution, intelligence and intuition, Susan is ideally capable of adapting to the new triffid-dominated world. As she grows up to become one of the many strong female characters who populate Wyndham’s postwar fiction, Susan takes an instrumental, social scientific attitude towards the study of triffid behaviour (ostensibly linked back to the death of Tommy). “I always watch them. I hate them,” she tells Masen.³⁷ Far from turning away from the world, for the human qua subject to survive she must become *more* concerned with herself and her relationship to the surrounding physical world.

Moreover, as Jacques Derrida pointed out there is an important sense in which nuclear war *is* entirely unprecedented: it is “fabulously textual”, a “non-event” in the sense of never having occurred.³⁸ But unlike Kermodé’s “armies in the sky” this “fantasy, or phantasm” to which modern literature properly belongs (and not, Derrida provocatively argues, the other way round) is at the same time conditioned by the rhetoric of previous wars, of “techno-military” discourse and traditional power politics:

Between the Trojan War and nuclear war, technical preparation has progressed prodigiously, but the psychagogic [sic] and discursive schemas, the mental structures and the structures of intersubjective calculus in game theory have not budged.³⁹

³⁶ Wyndham, The Day of the Triffids 180.

³⁷ Wyndham, The Day of the Triffids 201.

³⁸ Derrida, writing in the 1980s, has in mind here the exchange of hundred-megaton Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles in what could be termed (with due reference to Stanley Kubrick’s Dr. Strangelove Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb (1964)) a “doomsday” scenario. Hiroshima and Nagasaki are not precedents for this as from the bomber’s point of view they represent “tactical” strikes. There can be nothing tactical about a “doomsday” scenario. If there are no survivors then everyone loses, as again Dr. Strangelove demonstrates eloquently.

³⁹ Jacques Derrida, “No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives),” Diacritics 14.2 (1984), 23, 24.

For Derrida, it is vitally important that the *ahistorical* nature of such political discourse does not cloud our judgement as to the uniqueness of the concrete historical situation. The danger is that the very fact that there are such similarities,

could make us stand blind and deaf alongside that which cuts through the assimilating resemblance of discourses (for example of the apocalyptic or bimillennarist type), through the analogy of techno-military situations, strategic arrangements, with all their wagers, their last-resort calculations, on the 'brink,' their use of chance and risk factors, their mimetic resource to upping the ante, and so on- blind and deaf, then, alongside what would be absolutely unique.⁴⁰

Total nuclear war carries the possibility of being precisely *non-apocalyptic* in the sense that it is simply an end to the "archive" of human "symbolic content", rendering any attempt to assimilate or "soften" the blow – as cultures do with individual deaths – impossible. In Daniel Pick's words, "whilst it can be anticipated according to the terms of our current language and memory, its actual occurrence would overrun and obliterate the very possibility of its own retrospective representation."⁴¹ The critical struggle for literature is thus to maintain the apocalyptic revelation of "its own truth" while understanding that its own destruction would be "un-symbolisable" and "unassimilable", and with no symbolic referents possible it would therefore be without proportion.⁴²

Radioactivity was the greatest gift science ever bequeathed to science fiction, the unknown 'x' which could account for any premise. The transformation of something supposedly 'natural' into an 'unnatural' monster, ripping through societal barriers and monstrosly intruding upon life was explicable simply by reference to the transformative magic of radioactivity – from the fallout responsible for the mutants and telepaths of *The Chrysalids*, to the radioactive treatment by which zygotes are repeatedly split by Nazi

⁴⁰ Derrida, "No Apocalypse, Not Now," 21.

⁴¹ Pick, *War Machine* 7-8.

⁴² Derrida, "No Apocalypse, Not Now," 27.

scientists in *Plan for Chaos* to create the race of *herren Volk* of the mad 'Mother'.

In a natural world considered to be tamed and *understood* by science, radioactive transformation enabled figures of postwar SF to become dangerous. Radioactivity is the trope *par excellence* for establishing a convincing threat in SF of the mid-twentieth century. For instance, in *The Thing From Another World* (1951), a film adaptation of John Campbell's story "Who Goes there?" directed by Christian Nyby, a scientist reveals that the invader's cellular make-up closely resembles a carrot.⁴³ Yet the blood-sucking invader is not supposed to be an object of ridicule. Scientists track his approach using a Geiger counter. The counter's beat, like a steadily increasing heart rate, matches the growing fear and unease of the characters at the North Pole base. Their fear is believable precisely because of the inclusion of the radioactive element – a fear of an unseen, deadly atmospheric poison that could be released anywhere and at any time, with the potential to infect not only the current population, but generations to come. As Jon Turney puts it, "in the prolonged controversies about the dangers of radioactive fallout of the 1940s and 1950s, two fearful possibilities loomed large. One was an increase in cancer after exposure to radiation, the other the prospect of mutations."⁴⁴ But these dangers were themselves only part of the story. In the background of radiation, as it were, other dangers scurried amid the shadows connected by all sorts of cultural signifiers. While Turney is to an extent correct he does present a simplified situation: the fecundity of radioactively transformed figures in postwar SF suggests a more complex relationship with social fears and anxieties of the Cold War, invasion, changing social and gender roles and the aftermath of World War II.

⁴³ *The Thing From Another World*, writ. John W. Campbell Jr. and Charles Lederer, dir. Christian Nyby, RKO: 1951.

⁴⁴ Jon Turney, *Frankenstein's Footsteps: Science, Genetics and Popular Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1998) 127.

The Aftermath of World War II

The end of WWII was a hard time for John Wyndham, both politically and personally. Aged forty at conscription, he participated as an NCO in the Royal Signal Corps in the D-Day landings. Wyndham found military life extremely lonely and mostly boring. His letters to his partner Grace Wilson from this period, along with his brother Vivian's remembrances, indicate that he was continually homesick, lovesick and depressed.⁴⁵ He felt little sense of camaraderie, but had to keep his negative feelings to himself, informing Wilson,

You'll have to go on reading me into these arid letters which look so impersonal that I sometimes hate to send them. What else can there be? This that writes them and sends them is not me. It's a kind of abridged version – abridged of all but the extravert part. The introvert must be kept away – he is dangerous and bloody unhappy + hasn't any place here [...] So you can see me feeding [sic] (quite well) and looking after the extravert in order to keep a habitation going. But it isn't really alive.⁴⁶

By turning his life into a narrative, Wyndham finds a method to 'abridge' his character, to forge a hard shell which, he believes, protects the "introvert" within. While it would be reductive to view Wyndham's character Masen in *The Day of The Triffids* as a mere authorial self-image, he does confront the dying city of London with a similar attitude: "‘you've got to grow a hide,’ I told myself. ‘Got to. It's either that or stay permanently drunk.’"⁴⁷

It was not just army life that Wyndham felt negatively about, however. The 1945 General Election campaign on which he held fairly cynical views took place while he was still in occupied Europe. Wyndham's letters to Grace Wilson confirm that he favoured "Liberalism" (whether this was the Liberal National Party or the Liberal Party is unclear) although he held out no real

⁴⁵ Wyndham's wartime letters to Grace Wilson are held in The John Wyndham Collection, University of Liverpool Library. The manuscript "[My Brother] John Wyndham: A Memoir" by Vivian Beynon Harris, edited by David Ketterer, appeared in *Foundation* 75 (1999), 5-50.

⁴⁶ John Wyndham, Letter to Grace Wilson, 29 July 1944. Ms. 10/21/10. The John Wyndham Collection, U of Liverpool.

⁴⁷ Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids* 69.

hope of a turnaround in Liberal election fortunes.⁴⁸ The Labour landslide significantly changed the country to which he returned, and seemed to suggest that the whole political landscape had shifted to the left. “Wartime unity” lingered in the “sense of solidarity across the spectrum of class and social groups... a deeply shared sense of threat and emotional horror arising from experiences such as the Blitz.”⁴⁹ Moving forward, it was incumbent upon politicians to redress wartime falls in living standards, and so “a distinctive *ideology* of welfare-capitalism was propagated... The rights to be guaranteed by the state entered the rhetoric of politicians across the spectrum.”⁵⁰ To Alan Sinfield, “The [W]ar exemplified (though not without contest) a pattern of state intervention and popular co-operation to organize production for a common purpose.” Indeed, the avowed aim of the Labour Party in their 1945 manifesto, was “the establishment of the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain.”⁵¹ The far left also did relatively well in the 1945 election. The left-of-labour ILP (Independent Labour Party, – of which George Orwell had been a pre-War member) won three seats returning an average of 35.2 percent of the vote across the five seats in which their candidates stood, while the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) won two seats and had nine deposits returned, averaging 14.6 percent of the vote in the twenty-one seats it contested.⁵² By 1950, despite the Communist Party fielding a hundred candidates, neither of these parties won any seats, and the Labour Party’s majority was slashed to five (although this was partly due to the Conservative-favouring Redistribution of Seats Act 1949; Labour returned a popular majority of 1.5million). Nevertheless, the sudden and dramatic swing to the left of 1945 – even if then followed by a smaller sway back to the right – demonstrated to middle class liberals like Wyndham the mass appeal of which socialism was capable, as well as hinting at the potential for the rise of an even more radical left, to which he was strongly

⁴⁸ John Wyndham, Letter to Grace Wilson, 6 Nov. 1944. Ms. 10/24/2 The John Wyndham Collection, U of Liverpool.

⁴⁹ Waugh, “The Historical Context of Post-War British Literature,” 35.

⁵⁰ Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics, and Culture in Postwar Britain* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 16 *emphasis in original*.

⁵¹ Sinfield, *Literature, Politics, and Culture in Postwar Britain*, 1, 15.

⁵² Matthew Leeke, *UK Election Statistics: 1945-2000* (Westminster: House of Commons Library, 2003), 9.

opposed. For some members of the governing elite, social justice was the price to pay for preventing revolutionary unrest at the War's close.⁵³

The Soviet Union, meanwhile, had ended the War in a phenomenally powerful position and set about consolidating her influence over the Eastern Bloc. Competition with the US for economic and political dominance was inevitable. But the US was now a nuclear power, raising the stakes considerably. To quote *The Day of the Triffids*, "From 6 August 1945, the margin of survival has narrowed appallingly."⁵⁴ With the success of the first Soviet atomic test in August 1949, the spectre of Communism and the risks involved in confronting it did indeed haunt Western Europe. By 1950, when Wyndham was completing *Triffids*, nuclear weapons were indissolubly linked with the Cold War. When Britain became a nuclear power in 1952 it lent weight to the belief, maintained in the mainstream British press, that despite the break-up of her empire, Britain was still a *world power* and an important international actor, if not quite a *superpower* on the scale of the USSR or the USA. In Wyndham's 1959 space-set novel *The Outward Urge*, Britain's neurosis about being a declining power persists even during a Cold War race to establish moon bases in the mid twenty-first century with the threat to "prestige" of failing to build a British base being sufficient to drive policy.⁵⁵

Wyndham, in common with so many SF writers, remained anxiously obsessed by the Bomb in his fiction. Yet he was still prone at other times to deny the fears that the Bomb provoked on the grounds of its utility to the peaceful resolution of problems by political actors who were rationally self-interested. As late as 1962, he suggested that the Bomb

Could remain a stabilizing factor – and very likely be good for us. The presence of an Omnipotence [sic] powerful enough to curb selfish ambitions is

⁵³ Sinfield, *Literature, Politics, and Culture in Postwar Britain* 10.

⁵⁴ Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids* 96.

⁵⁵ John Wyndham and Lucas Parkes, *The Outward Urge* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), 64. "John Wyndham" and "Lucas Parkes" were in fact one individual, John Wyndham Lucas Parkes Beynon Harris. Ostensibly, the decision to market the book as written by a partnership was because of a dramatic change in style and content away from the previous novels of the 1951-1957 period.

not necessarily a bad thing – as the Children of Israel had to be reminded from time to time.⁵⁶

Although within ten months such ideas came widely under attack as a result of the Cuban Missile Crisis, this was not an especially idiosyncratic view for the postwar era in general. After the announcement that the Soviet Union had successfully tested a nuclear warhead *The Times* leader column had suggested that the availability of such a powerful weapon to both sides could ensure a more stable peace if handled correctly.⁵⁷

Wyndham's attitude toward the Bomb was then contradictory and anxious. Outwardly, he projected a liberal stance affirming the possibility of states adhering to the rule of international law and working through institutional mechanisms to ensure peace. Yet this was only a possibility because of the illiberal power of the Bomb to act as Leviathan. In *The Kraken Wakes* Russia accuses the West in their every public statement of being "capitalistic warmongers", too quick to use atomic weapons against the undersea threat. Concomitantly, their ironic declarations that the USSR will "fight unswervingly for Peace with all the weapons it possessed, except germs" becomes a running joke.⁵⁸ Wyndham's satire of Russian bellicose propaganda seems to point towards him having nagging *realist* doubts about international governance of the sort displayed by commentators like E. H. Carr. Looking back to the interwar period, Carr had argued that international relations was a field in which power trumped moral concerns and as such any international governance was in effect the enforcing of the will of dominant nations: "To internationalize government in any real sense means to internationalize power; and international government is, in effect, government by that state which supplies the power necessary for the purpose of governing."⁵⁹ Whether such states supply economic or military power, or else power over opinion, they are following realist doctrine and rationally acting in their own

⁵⁶ Wyndham, "'Sunday Pictorial' – Rough" Ms. (Draft #1 of 2) 7-8.

⁵⁷ "The Bomb" Editorial. *Times* 24 September 1949, 5, col. B.

⁵⁸ Wyndham, *The Kraken Wakes* 53, 52.

⁵⁹ E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001) 100.

national self-interest. In *The Kraken Wakes*, the arrival of the underwater “xenobath” threat makes international actors begin to think about acting for the common interest of all, but when the Russian delegation withdraws from an international conference to deal with the threat following a spate of accusations and counter-accusations the narrator comments that there is a “reassuring ring of normality” about the proceedings.⁶⁰

The distrust between the great powers in *The Kraken Wakes* is symptomatic of nervous anxiety about the Bomb in a world where annihilating another country could potentially be the rationally self-interested thing to do, providing the state in question could find a way to do so without endangering its own population. In the mid-fifties behaviourist and realist theories of Political Science, propounded by the likes of Hans J. Morgenthau, made ambitious claims about the potential of their approaches to “forecast” behaviour.⁶¹ Especially ascendant in America, these theories were premised upon the idea that international actors are “game players”, trying rationally to secure their self-interest whether they are pursuing co-operation or acting in competition.⁶² Thus in any given scenario,

The strategies chosen are based on rational calculation. Rational actors, according to game theorists, (1) evaluate outcomes, (2) produce a preference ranking, and then (3) choose the best option available. These are the essential elements of rationality.⁶³

The risks of such narrow “game based” rationality are high: if a nuclear state viewed International Relations in terms of “games”, and at the same time placed her self-interests above all else, then there would be a temptation to try to cheat or to find an alternate strategy that exists ‘off the board’. If

⁶⁰ Wyndham, *The Kraken Wakes* 106.

⁶¹ John Lewis Gaddis, “International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War,” *International Security* 17.3 (1992) 7-9.

⁶² The CIA, infamously, took the goal of “forecasting” behaviour to its darkest conclusion in the 1950s, commissioning research into “behavioral modification” that would include torture, hypnosis and drugging. The details of “Project MKULTRA” were later brought to light in the Senate: *United States Cong. Senate. Select Committee on Intelligence and Committee on Human Resources*. “Project MKULTRA, The CIA’s Program of research in Behavioral Modification,” 95th Cong., 1st sess. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977.

⁶³ Richard Little, “International Regimes,” *The Globalization of World Politics*, eds. John Baylis and Steve Smith, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001) 308.

Wyndham's postwar fiction was premised upon questions that began 'what would happen if...' then the ultimate 'what if' that constantly intruded into his fiction was the escalation of the Cold War, the ultimate social nightmare being the effects of nuclear conflict.

Purity and Dirt

In the US the threat of Communism was felt differently to the UK: fears of Soviet expansionism, conspiracy and subversion provided justification for the Marshall Aid Plan to the public and to Congress at a time when the direct threat of Communism on the US mainland was in reality low.⁶⁴ As Shapiro notes,

the United States did its damndest to *convince* itself that it possessed a secret, and this secret made the country feel unique and more secure. Almost paradoxically, the considerable effort required to maintain the nation's 'secret' and security seemed to enflame latent fears of insecurity and jeopardize individual identity and personal freedoms.⁶⁵

After the first successful Soviet nuclear test in 1949, such anxieties became common themes in cultural production. Issues of identity were mingled with nuclear fears at the heart of US Cold War paranoia. One relevant example can be found in the featuring of brainwashing and alien identity thefts in SF movies of the 1950s and early 1960s such as *Invasion From Mars* (1953) and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956). As with *The Day of The Triffids*, the threat in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* derives from seedpods carrying the potential for subversion and terror imminently within them (in this case in the shape of body doubles).⁶⁶ In Hollywood SF-horror, these characters typically became automata, with monotone voices and wide, unblinking eyes focused somewhere beyond the camera in the middle distance. They were depicted as incapable of individual, rational thought or the capacity to show 'real' emotions such as familial love. Their aim was to integrate themselves

⁶⁴ Sinfield, *Literature, Politics, and Culture in Postwar Britain* 95, 94.

⁶⁵ Jerome K. Shapiro, *Atomic Bomb Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2002) 53.

⁶⁶ *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, writ. Daniel Mainwaring, story by Jack Finney, dir. Don Siegal. Allied Artists: 1956. Like Wyndham's "Revolt of the Triffids" (an early version of *The Day of the Triffids*), Finney's story was first published in *Colliers*.

into American life, but their failure to uphold American values showed them to be unAmerican.

The alien invader threats of Hollywood dovetailed perfectly with Government discourse. In 1957, Warner Brothers produced a Department of Defense propaganda film for the US armed forces, directly supervised by Jack Warner himself, entitled *Red Nightmare*.⁶⁷ The nightmare, in which a complacent citizen awakes to find himself in Communist America, draws many parallels with SF 'brainwashing' films like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and uses the idiom of the alien-possessed American to demonstrate what the take over and break-up of the American family structure by the godless unfree Russian doctrine of Communism would look like. The film's message is that American freedoms must not be taken for granted or Communism will prevail. Only through strict observation of social codes of behaviour is the task of watching for infiltration by a nervous, wide-eyed communist impostor possible. Yet the price of freedom is not merely vigilance: the dutiful American citizen is free to do what he likes, as long as what he likes doing involves conforming to existing cultural and social codes and aggressively preventing anyone from acting "differently". He is free to go to church, watch television, eat his wife's home cooking and enjoy his children's unquestioning obedience – in short, free to live according to a strict patriarchal order. The prevention of the spread of Communism, then, relies upon what Zygmunt Bauman terms "the Dream of Purity": "a vision of *order* – that is, of a situation in which each thing is in its rightful place and nowhere else." Anything that does not conform to such an order is thus impure, dirty. In fact Bauman, following anthropologist Mary Douglas, defines dirt as disorder.⁶⁸

A preoccupation with purity is central to John Wyndham's 1955 novel *The Chrysalids*. Set a thousand years after a nuclear holocaust wrecks the

⁶⁷ *Red Nightmare* dir. George Waggner, Warner Bros., 1962. The film seems to have been produced by Warner Bros. for the Defense Department in 1957 under the working title *Freedom and You* to be screened to the Armed Forces before wider broadcast in 1962. It was also known as *The Commies Are Coming! The Commies Are Coming!*

⁶⁸ Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodernity and its Discontents* (Cambridge: Polity, 1997) 6, 7.

northern hemisphere, the novel's protagonist-narrator is a teenager called David who lives in the small, subsistence farming community of Waknuk, in Labrador.⁶⁹ Genetic mutation is relatively common, and the community wages an unrelenting war against it, an obsessive dream in which religious salvation is closely tied to the ability to rid one's whole environment of contamination by disorder. Mutant livestock and crops are destroyed; children born with even a slight deviation from a tightly proscribed norm are sterilised and cast out or else killed. David is one of a group of youngsters with a new, unseen mutation – he is a telepath.

According to Bauman's schema,

'Order' means a regular, stable environment for our action; a world in which the probabilities of events are not distributed at random, but arranged in a strict hierarchy – so that certain events are highly likely to occur, others are less probable, some others virtually impossible. Only such an environment do we understand.⁷⁰

Waknuk, a society at an early modern stage of technological development, knows almost nothing about what occurred before the holocaust they term "the Tribulations." The community's religious "knowledge" is linked to fears for survival in a brutal realm of nature. Their catechism "Blessed is the norm" is an essentially Baconian call in which the known is controllable, and therefore blessed, in a chaotic, largely unknowable world.

The uncontrollable elements around Waknuk are the bands of "fringes" people – those with various birth defects who live as best they can in the backcountry where everything is deviational, unique. They are perpetually at war with the puritan communities. These people are Strangers, the dirt that reminds the puritans of the filth of nature which surrounds them and the possibility that their own children will be declared impure.

⁶⁹ It may be significant that *The Chrysalids* was set in North America rather than southern England, as Wyndham's previous two novels had been, but as a "logical fantasy" there was also a practical reason: Wyndham needed a location remote enough that global nuclear conflict would leave moderate effects, but still lying within the Anglophone area of the West in order to explore and critique ideas of normality and heterodoxy.

⁷⁰ Bauman, *Postmodernity and its Discontents* 7.

Waknuk is othered as a dystopic “no-place” by the similarities between the authoritarian form of the post-Christian religion practised there and the New England Puritanism of the first American settlers in the early modern period. Indeed, the similarities are so marked that more than one critic has mistaken the setting for New England.⁷¹ Moreover, as Wymer has pointed out, there are also significant similarities between *The Chrysalids* and Arthur Miller’s 1953 play *The Crucible*, set during the 1692 Salem Witch Trials and highly satirical of the investigations of The House UnAmerican Activities Committee.⁷² In Miller’s play, ambiguity surrounds the causes of some events: the line between malicious behaviour and the (attempted) deployment of the supernatural is never made quite clear. Nevertheless, it quickly becomes apparent where the audience’s sympathies should lie. *The Chrysalids*, however, is more morally ambivalent. As Robert Wymer points out, the reader “remain[s] in basic sympathy with David, who has consistently provided the novel’s narrative viewpoint. However, the possibilities for such an inversion are clearly present...”⁷³ When David’s childhood friend Sophie is forcibly sterilised and banished as a deviant for having six toes we are encouraged to have “liberal sympathy” for her plight as a minority in an authoritarian society. Yet Wymer argues that the group of telepaths themselves become increasingly intolerant. By the climax it is apparent that the narrative is no longer about toleration of minorities but a fight to the death between different “species”, a conflict that is hardened in the mind of the “Sealand” woman who comes to rescue them:

‘In loyalty to their kind they cannot tolerate our rise; in loyalty to our kind, we cannot tolerate their obstruction.’

...‘They are alert, completely aware of the danger to their species. They can see quite well that if it is to survive they have not only to preserve it from deterioration, but they must protect it from the even more serious threat of the superior variant.’⁷⁴

⁷¹ Examples include Aldiss, *Billion Year Spree*, 294; and Everett Franklin Bleiler, “John Wyndham 1903-1969,” *Science Fiction Writers: Critical Studies of the Major Authors from the Early Nineteenth Century to the Present Day*, ed. J. Scarborough (New York: Scribner, 1982) 221.

⁷² Wymer, “How ‘Safe’ is John Wyndham?” 29.

⁷³ Wymer, “How ‘Safe’ is John Wyndham?” 34.

⁷⁴ Wyndham, *The Chrysalids* 196.

The brutal struggle for survival is hereby given a sinister edge in the celebration of the telepaths as a “superior variant”, which for Wymer “echoes the rationalisations offered by Hitler” for the murder of the Polish intelligentsia.⁷⁵ For a student of Wells like John Wyndham, writing in the postwar era, the question of evolutionary struggle in the aftermath of the destruction caused by a radical, and perverted, social Darwinism was one that could never be left alone – from the late 1940s he returned to it repeatedly. It is also a question that despite his recurrent attentions Wyndham could never fully and satisfactorily answer. Notwithstanding the discourse of “species” and “variants”, the Sealand woman’s argument is not Darwinian. A teleological idea is implicit in her argument about “superiority”. Tellingly, she chooses the phrase “superior variant” rather than, for instance, ‘better adapted for survival.’ According to Darwin’s theory of natural selection “there can be no goal toward which evolution is striving.”⁷⁶ Variants cannot be “superior”, only better adapted to survive in a given environment. As T. H. Huxley put it, “what is ‘fittest’ depends upon the conditions.”⁷⁷ *The Chrysalids*, by contrast, seems to follow novelist Katherine Burdekin’s proposition that “the life you are yourself is all life... Everything that is something must want to be itself before every other form of life.”⁷⁸ This applies to the non-telepaths as much as the telepaths. They see themselves as made in God’s image, and are therefore *superior* to the “blasphemous” telepaths. Wyndham seems ambivalent on the question of whether the telepaths, with their hive-like minds and sense of racial self-satisfaction, are in any real sense ‘superior’. Hence picking up on textual hints that the Sealand society itself may someday ossify, Wymer asks “Is the arrogance and ruthlessness of the Sealand woman any real ethical advance on the religious bigotry of Waknuk?”⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Wymer, “How ‘Safe’ is John Wyndham?” 31.

⁷⁶ Bowler, *Evolution* 6.

⁷⁷ From T. H. Huxley, “Evolution and Ethics” (1893) in Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst, eds., *The Fin de Siècle: a Reader in Cultural History, c.1880-1900* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000) 238.

⁷⁸ Katherine Burdekin, *Swastika Night* (New York: Feminist P, 1985) 106-7.

⁷⁹ Wymer, “How ‘Safe’ is John Wyndham?” 33.

The bigotry of Waknuk at least conforms to an ethics in its demands. The foundationalist belief structure of their religion allows them to assess situations according to moral precepts. All the actions of the community under the patriarchal authority of David's father follow a moral sense of purpose which, however disagreeable, is internally consistent. The Sealand woman, in contrast, motivated only by what is in itself an exceptional mission to save David's precociously able younger sister Petra, blurs moral lines. When David finds out that his father is with the band of fighters on their way to attack the Fringes people in whose village they are sheltering, he is caught in a moral quandary:

'Purity...' I said. 'The will of the Lord. Honour thy father... Am I supposed to forgive him! Or to try to kill him?'

... 'Let him be,' came the severe, clear pattern from the Sealand woman. 'Your work is to survive. Neither his kind, nor his kind of thinking will survive long...'⁸⁰

The bleak social Darwinism that she preaches to David, Rosalind and Petra has the imperative only to survive. Rather than face David's difficult ethical dilemma, she commands him to avoid the process of ethical decision-making entirely. The irony is that in going with the Sealand woman to the city over the ocean where the air is full with telepathic communication like the "buzzing of a hive of bees", and thereby opening himself up to the life of the mind-race, he must forsake the ethical autonomy which accompanied the privacy of his mind that he had previously enjoyed when under the yolk of Waknuk orthodoxy. Indeed, during the final attack on the Fringes people by his father's militia, David is compelled to hide away from taking any action by the new voice in his head, a voice originating god-like from the sky. The mission of the Sealand woman is not merely to rescue the telepaths, but to impose upon them a new moral code from above (in every sense). Unsurprisingly, they are irked by her supercilious attitude. The Sealand woman forces her domineering demands into the telepaths' conscious thoughts, not like a superego developed organically in negotiating the social world, but rather imposed upon their psyches by an Other. She literally

⁸⁰ Wyndham, *The Chrysalids* 182.

paralyses the existing warring patriarchal order by dispersing constricting plastic strands from her aeroplane over the battlefield. She may furthermore be seen as representing David's inability to resolve Oedipal issues surrounding his "detached and disapproving," emotionally distant mother.⁸¹

This difference between the community of the Sealand woman and the community of Waknuk is underlined by the respective ways they each deal with difference. According to Bauman's schema, drawing in turn on the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss, there are two ways by which communities like Waknuk or Sealand with strongly-held beliefs in an ideal of purity can deal with the threat of variation from the norm (which here is effectively synonymous with disorder). The first is the *anthropophagic* route, whereby the strangers in their midst are swallowed up, "digested" and made indistinguishable from the norm. In Sealand, "everybody... *wants* to make [thought-pictures], and people who can't do it much work hard to get better at it."⁸² The Labradorean immigrants will all undergo such training to assimilate into Sealand society. The alternative is the *anthropoemic* route, whereby the strangers are "vomited" out, thus "banishing them from the limits of the orderly world and barring them from all communication with those inside."⁸³ Waknuk adopts this route for both physical deviations such as the six-toed child Sophie, and the mental deviations of the telepaths. For Waknuk the anthropophagic route is simply not an option; it would be much like the Nazis attempting to solve "the Jewish question" (which for them was exclusively a matter of their extraneous notion of "race") through the implementation of forced baptism. Nazism was concerned not with souls (as in the Catholic Inquisition) but with blood. The so-called "Final Solution" was, if Arendt's literal interpretation of ideology as "the logic of an idea" is correct, the only "solution."⁸⁴ The adherence to such a perverse logic is one reason she termed the genocide *radical* evil. Couched in the discourse of *survival*, assimilation cannot be considered. The watchword by which the religious in

⁸¹ Wyndham, *The Chrysalids* 53-4.

⁸² Wyndham, *The Chrysalids* 145.

⁸³ Bauman, *Postmodernity and its Discontents* 18.

⁸⁴ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 469. Arendt analyses the way that this interpretation of "ideology" was played out under totalitarianism on 470-3. See also above, 187-8, 190 and 193-4 on this theme.

this community live is purity. Just as Jews (or Communists or homosexuals for that matter) did not necessarily carry a visible marker until they had a patch sewn on to their clothing or were tattooed with a number, so telepathy is already an invisible difference, one which can neither be exorcised nor assimilated. The process of searching for these deviants is hence necessarily a process of unmasking, of looking for a reality behind a mask – much like the systemic hunt for Communists in America under the Truman and Eisenhower administrations. While the Waknuk orthodoxy must look for evidence and attempt to implicate conspirators through the confessions of those they already hold, the Sealand woman is able to discern who to kill through lack of evidence: she simply coats everyone in sight with constricting plastic threads and then sprays a solvent antidote on to those individuals who are able to communicate with her telepathically to stop them from suffocating. Anyone not able (or not willing) to produce the evidence of this ability dies. Even the telepaths cannot refuse her.⁸⁵

The Sealand woman is able to kill so easily because she believes in a culturally constructed idea that a racial boundary exists between telepaths and non-telepaths. This is contrary to evidence. The telepaths all come from non-telepath backgrounds; from families who have all passed the purity test. Furthermore, as a result of the gender imbalance in the group (five females to three males), one of the telepaths, Anne, chooses to marry a non-telepath. Despite his lack of telepathic ability, she is sufficiently in love to choose him over the telepath group – with whom she refuses to communicate any longer, eventually betraying them before killing herself. The Waknuk telepaths represent an evolutionary jump, but there is no reason to suppose that they could not mate successfully with a non-telepath. The impediments are mental and cultural: mental because the telepaths all feel a lot closer to each other than David claims they ever could to a non-telepath (although again, Anne's love disputes this claim), cultural because their reasoning is the necessity of keeping their mutation a secret from their families.⁸⁶ David's Uncle Axel, who sides with the telepaths and even murders Anne's husband

⁸⁵ Wyndham, *The Chrysalids* 188-93 *passim*.

⁸⁶ Wyndham, *The Chrysalids* 92, 94.

in an effort to protect their identities, is both a non-telepath and a non-threat to them.

Gender in Wyndham's Fiction

The character Axel, who quietly does not accept the established order and is covertly subversive, serves to indicate that Katherine Burdekin's 1937 dystopian novel *Swastika Night* may be an inspiration for *The Chrysalids*. *Swastika Night* is set in the far future in a world split between the empires of Germany and Japan. With a few exceptions necessary for maintaining control of a worldwide empire, including aeroplanes and radios, technology has regressed to the level of the early modern period. Echoing Richard Jefferies's 1885 novel *After London Or Wild England*, the strict social hierarchy is both feudal and racial (with the latter developed and updated by the growth of Nazism). But while Jefferies's novel valorises Christian virtues, in *Swastika Night* only Christians are below women, who according to the official "Hitlerian" religion are unclean "non-humans." The only form of love permitted is Athenian-derived homosexuality. The official religion, a cult of masculinity, has borrowed much from Catholicism as well as some aspects of other Abrahamic religions. An intense, threatening feeling – far darker than anything in *The Chrysalids* – is palpable throughout. Wyndham had read *Swastika Night* and early drafts of what would become *The Chrysalids* suggest that it worked an influence upon him, particularly in some of the social elements of his imagined society.⁸⁷ Both texts deal with resistance within an insular society based on an extreme and puritan perversion of Christianity in a post-cataclysmic world war and, while society in Wyndham's text is violently patriarchal, in Burdekin's novel it is violently misogynistic. Both texts involve a severe future technological and social regression from an enlightened ideal and in both cases this regression is due to the socio-political actions of the present, turning Enlightenment values upon their heads. The overcoming of religious superstition in favour of humanist reason is instrumentalised to create a belief system that is capable of indoctrinating

⁸⁷ In John Wyndham, "Roar of Rockets," *John O'London's Weekly* April 2 1954, he calls *Swastika Night* "remarkably perceptive".

and controlling the whole population. Science and engineering, put to military use, have created the means by which the authors' contemporary society can destroy itself. The binding force by which these post-catastrophic dystopic societies are maintained, however, is not precisely religious belief *qua* faith, but rather the strict separation of the pure from the unclean, of that which is in its rightful and proper place from disorder and dirtiness. The paradox of German society in *Swastika Night* is that while the cult of blood and masculinity exist there can be no "men" in Germany (in the sense of "a mentally independent creature who thinks for himself and believes in himself, and who knows that no other creature that walks on the earth is superior to himself in anything *he can't alter*").⁸⁸ The telepaths in *The Chrysalids* occupy exactly this position, and it is for this reason that they are persecuted.

Yet whereas female characters in Burdekin's novel are stripped of their humanity and agency to demonstrate the logical ends of Nazi misogyny, in Wyndham's novel they are given agency to decisively influence and shape the narrative. In an odd turn of phrase, David Ketterer asserts that, "Wyndham was a feminist (albeit of a rather dated romantic kind) and females often have starring roles in his [SF]". Wyndham does indeed seem to have a positive yet oddly "romantic" view of women when his postwar fiction is considered as a whole. There are plenty of female principal characters in his fiction, but only in the story *Consider Her ways* (1956) is the narrator a woman. In the "Facts of Life Sextet", as Ketterer terms Wyndham's major postwar works, the female leads are usually the romantic interests of the narrator (the exception being *Trouble with Lichen*, which is narrated in the third person). However, many of these women are more intelligent and independent than the male narrators. They are generally endowed with a calm sense of authority, empirically-generated knowledge, common sense and powers of reason which enable them to make decisions that often get the hero-narrator *out* of trouble. They are also healthily cynical in their outlook, but in a way that acknowledges humanitarian concerns in a more "traditional", "feminine" manner. Josella Playton, for example, is upset

⁸⁸ Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, 28 *emphasis in original*.

by the scene in which shots are fired over the heads of the blind protestors in Malet Street outside the University. But when she and Bill Masen are each chained to a separate band of blind people to look after by Coker, Bill has to await a chance crisis to get himself free of the shackles, while Josella, more logical *and* cynical, gives her group a simple ultimatum: take off her handcuffs or “find themselves drinking prussic acid or eating cyanide of potassium on her recommendation.”⁸⁹

Plan for Chaos, written in the late 1940s but first published only in 2009, has a more ambivalent attitude towards women and female sexuality. In this novel, Wyndham experimented with a more hardboiled, film noir style of narration, and the fear of matriarchy and expression of a certain dangerous type of female sexuality is typical for this (not always brilliantly emulated) Chanderlesque feel. It should be noted that even here, where the Nazi “mother” to five hundred identical “twins” is most theatrically diabolical, the narrator’s consanguineous fiancée Freda is elevated as a heroine far more capable, mature and practical than the hapless narrator himself. This position is cemented by the character Josella Playton in *The Day of the Triffids* (1951), and by *The Kraken Wakes* (1953) the narrator, Mike, is married to a woman far more capable and intelligent than he is.

David Ketterer links Josella Playton to the triffids through the repetition of the verb “tethered” in order to describe both how Bill finds her (“tethered” to a blind man who is beating her) and how the triffids in nurseries are “tethered” to the ground. He describes her as John Wyndham’s “idealized” fantasy woman, with Bill Masen standing for Wyndham himself. But to reductively read Masen as Wyndham’s fictionalized self-image seems odd considering Masen’s ruthless selfishness. This narrow psychological methodology leads Ketterer to further argue that in *The Day of the Triffids*, *The Kraken Wakes*, *The Chrysalids* and *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957) John Wyndham expresses successively a “fear of women, female sexuality, and sexual relations.” In

⁸⁹ Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids* 191. Hubble notes that neither “can extricate themselves in the ruthless manner” of Michael Beadley’s followers however. Nick Hubble, “Five English Disaster Novels, 1951-1972.” *Foundation* 95 (2005), 95.

this schema, “the triffid is an illegitimate offspring of wayward sexuality”, and its funnel-like stinging head, which Bill Masen’s father lifts him up to look inside as a child is “an image of the vagina dentata.”⁹⁰ The explicit cultural link between flowers and female sexuality has a long history, successively embellished through the Enlightenment science of comparative anatomy in materialist texts like La Mettrie’s (1751) *L’Homme Plante* (Man a Plant). But if, as Ketterer suggests, the real horror of the rise of the triffids for Wyndham/Masen lies in their parallel with female sexuality, then it is strange that relations between Mason and other characters do not in turn parallel this fear. Indeed, Bill Masen is not excessively scared by Josella Playton’s well-developed sexuality. Manlove notes that on their first meeting Masen is “not interested in her character”, seeing Playton in utilitarian terms as “a mass of fragments, all of them physical.” There are sexual overtones (“her clothes, or the remnants of them, were good quality”), but “his general view is that the equipment for good practical work is there.”⁹¹ Bill Mason possesses the ruthlessness of a hard-boiled detective from the genre fiction Wyndham had previously attempted, but here Wyndham is playing more reflexively and metafictionally with the genre’s expectations, so that after Playton cleans herself up he comments, “She approximated now to the film director’s idea of the heroine after a rough-house, rather than the genuine thing.”⁹² Hence when Josella explains her book “*Sex is my Adventure*” to him he quickly recovers. She initiates physical contact with him and it is from this point on that her character becomes less of a patriarchal stereotype of a young affluent woman. The next morning,

she had an air of self-possession which was hard to associate with the frightened figure of the night before... I have no idea how I expected to find her dressed... but the practicality of her choice was by no means the only impression I received as I saw her.⁹³

Mason’s physical attraction to Playton is smuggled in under an observation of her “practicality”, but it is not merely her ability to be an object of lust

⁹⁰ David Ketterer, “John Wyndham: The Facts of Life Sextet,” *A Companion to Science Fiction*, (Blackwell, 2005).

⁹¹ Manlove, “Everything’s Slipping Away,” 42; Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids* 52.

⁹² Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids* 52.

⁹³ Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids* 80.

adapted to living in a post-catastrophic world to which Mason is attracted. Indeed, he first notices her “self-possession” (in contrast to the more ambivalent description of her “frightened figure of the night before”), and without Playton’s self-assured intelligence and independence, the character would lack depth. This would make it considerably difficult for Wyndham to maintain Masen’s long search to be reunited with her as a credible plot device.

This ambivalence is maintained when, using a lecture delivered to a hapless young woman by Coker at Tynsham Manor, Wyndham calls for female independence based upon education and reason, and argues for a greater female presence in the workplace. The lecture is, however, as much a swipe at contemporary SF writing as at societal ills.⁹⁴ Coker aggressively accuses women in general of having had “a vested interest in playing the part of parasites” and implores this particular female, who has been mending clothes by candlelight, to be more mechanically minded. The woman of the future must still mend clothes (there is no suggestion he must learn to do this), but she should do so by electric light from a generator she has herself fixed. Equality, to paraphrase Lenin, here equals sewing power plus electrification.

Notwithstanding such patriarchal oversights, Wyndham’s message for science fiction is that female characters should do more than simply play the part of the beautiful daughter of the scientist. As noted above, Masen and Playton’s adopted daughter is sensible, practical and headstrong from her first introduction. She develops the skills of a social scientist in her triffid-monitoring capacities – a role she takes on for and by herself, showing maturity and self-reliance. That she does this out of hatred for triffids is evidence that she achieves precisely the sort of virtues which Coker demands of women in a post-catastrophic world, where “we’ll all have to learn not simply what we like, but as much as we can about running a

⁹⁴ Hubble aptly describes Coker as “a mixture of lower-class origins and progressive education – identical to that of Wells – representing the ideals and aspirations of a new middle class.” Hubble, “Five English Disaster Novels,” 95.

community and supporting it.”⁹⁵ The blindness catastrophe has given the survivors an opportunity to build a new community if only they can break free from the conventions and double standards of the old. Real, practical equality in gender relations is a key foundation for the establishment of a successful participatory and democratic liberal utopia.

At a time when the scientist's daughter was still a stock figure of SF, the careful characterization of strong and independent women in the foreground of Wyndham's postwar fiction was a significant development for SF in general, and particularly for SF which strove for a large, mainstream readership.

In *The Chrysalids*, for instance, it is almost entirely female characters that drive the whole plot: Sophie, the six-toed girl whom David protects, provides the first narrative impetus; the developing telepathic relationship between David and Rosalind the next narrative turn. Sophie's "deformity" is discovered and her family flee. David's Aunt Harriet attempts to switch his sister Petra with her own baby to prevent it from being declared a "blasphemy"; when she fails she commits suicide. Petra's commanding telepathic abilities are awakened and the subsequent chapter deals with the telepath Anne's decision to marry a "norm." Petra's distress signal causes the telepaths to meet face-to-face together for the first time (significantly it is the more resourceful and practical Rosalind who shoots the wild animal attacking Petra's pony with bow and arrow while David has yet to cock his gun). The arrest of two of the telepaths, Sally and Katherine, increases the tempo. As they escape, Rosalind kills a man who she finds stalking them while David is sleeping. At this point, Petra establishes contact with the Sealand woman, and from here on the woman's approach figures largely in the narrative; while David, Rosalind and Petra are taken hostage by the fringes people. Sophie re-emerges to free them from captivity after it is hinted at that Rosalind is in imminent danger of being raped. Finally, following the battle between the Fringes people and the Puritans, it is the

⁹⁵ Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids* 150.

intervention of the Sealand woman that brings about the denouement of the novel. While women are subjugated and frequently suffer terrible violence at the hands of this patriarchal society, the structure of the novel works to oppose these forces by demonstrating women's powers as agents to drive the narrative forwards. If the telepaths have a privileged form of knowledge that undermines the religious basis of Waknuk society, then the women of this society have powers of praxis that work counter to the hegemonic patriarchal order too.

Scientology, Scientism and Satire

The telepaths' claim to a privileged form of knowledge that undermines the (religious) foundations of the society in which they grew up suggests allegorical content. To a certain extent both Wymer and Webster interpret *The Chrysalids* in terms of the rhetoric and paranoia surrounding the Communist threat to 1950s America, as previously indicated. However, there is also some evidence for less immediately obvious allegorical content at the level of the SF genre.

It took Wyndham a long time to achieve literary success. His first publications in the early 1930s were short stories, appearing in US SF "Pulp" magazines including *Galaxy Science Fiction*, *Amazing Science Fiction* and *Future Science Fiction*. He also wrote detective fiction, and while he had early novels in both genres published, he eventually gave up his attempts to write the latter after his breakthrough with *The Day of the Triffids*. By the mid-1950s, Wyndham was well connected in American SF circles. His US agent was for some years Frederick Pohl, who was himself a talented writer (his dystopian novel *The Space Merchants* (1953), written with C.M. Kornbluth, is of particular note). After years of selling stories to the Pulps, Wyndham had a good knowledge of them, despite persistently claiming to dislike both the label "science fiction", and all "hard" SF of the type written by Isaac Asimov and published by John W. Campbell Jr.

Campbell, for all his editorial insistence upon scientific plausibility, began in 1945 to express an interest in ideas of psychology and parapsychology through his editorship of *Astounding*.⁹⁶ There, he published parapsychology stories by the likes of A.E. van Vogt and Henry Kuttner, whose ‘baldy’ series of short stories (published in *Astounding* using the penname “Lewis Padgett”), were later collated into the novel *Mutant*.⁹⁷ In them Kuttner describes a “decentralized” post-bomb North America where a strain of humanity has become bald and developed telepathy, within a “human” (i.e. non-telepath dominated) world. It is a narrative in which assimilation is pitted against the urge for biological dominance and reason against paranoia; it anticipates *The Chrysalids* in a number of ways. For Edward James, both texts are “not so much about the post-nuclear holocaust world as, in the tradition of Van Vogt’s *Slan*, about the ways in which ordinary people react to those who are different and/or superior.”⁹⁸ Campbell was also responsible for publishing a long article by L. Ron Hubbard entitled “Dianetics: A New Science of the Mind” in May 1950, the ideas of which would eventually lead directly to the creation of the Church of Scientology in 1954. Albert Berger, citing Barry Malzberg, claims that Campbell was in fact “co-creator” of the idea, and remained supportive of Hubbard, albeit not uncritically, for well over a year as the writer developed and publicized his “auditing” techniques.⁹⁹

Berger contextualizes the early stages of the Dianetics movement with reference to the belief, commonly held by the editor and many of the writers and readership of *Astounding* alike, that the development of science and technology was the driving force of history yet human irrationality prevented social and political progress from matching the pace of technological change.

⁹⁶ Albert I. Berger, “Towards a Science of the Nuclear Mind: Science-Fiction Origins of Dianetics,” *Science Fiction Studies* 16 (1989) 130. The OED defines parapsychology as “The field of study that deals with paranormal phenomena in psychology.” *OED Online*, Mar. 2011. Oxford UP, <<http://oed.com/view/Entry/137614?redirectedFrom=parapsychology>>, 1 June 2011. The discipline was founded by J.B. Rhine at Duke University, with his text *Extra-Sensory Perception* (1934). For Rhine, the term “parapsychology” was only a “temporary subdivision” from the field of psychology. Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy: 1870-1901* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002) 252-3.

⁹⁷ Henry Kuttner, *Mutant* (Feltham: Hamlyn, 1979) first published in the US 1953.

⁹⁸ James, *Science Fiction in the 20th Century* 92.

⁹⁹ Berger, “Towards a Science of the Nuclear Mind,” 125.

Increases in the destructive capabilities of war-making technology were, from this view, a reflection of human irrationality overruling scientific progress. This problem was a well-established theme in science fiction, dating back at least to early novels of H. G. Wells like *The War in the Air* (1908). After Hiroshima, however, the disjuncture was so acute as to necessitate a complete re-appraisal. Hence, during the next few months, "Campbell and many of his readers [grew] increasingly angry at the scandalously low level of Congressional debate on the creation of a permanent atomic energy establishment."¹⁰⁰ They believed that the development of nuclear weapons pointed not to fundamental problems with the social or economic role of science, but to a failure of politics and law. Dianetics was one way of dealing with this problem, although by no means everyone who saw the problem in this light believed Dianetics to be the solution:

Nuclear energy had been a metaphor in SF for the most powerful of new technologies that could move history forward. Now, not only had the quantum leap of progress not materialized, but in the absence of that social transformation called for in the script, technology posed a serious threat to the continuation of civilization itself.¹⁰¹

To John Wyndham (for whom such "progress" would have entailed the ascendancy of liberalism) nuclear weapons seemed to threaten civilisation. Without the subjection of nuclear armaments to international control under democratic checks and balances, they could serve to be the means of dramatically increasing both the chances of international conflict and the deadliness of its result. Yet as discussed above, he held out little hope for the survival of liberalism in the postwar era.

Berger argues that in a situation where destructive technological advances and political hatred went hand in hand, "regardless of the spirit in which he created it, Hubbard's "solution" was the creation of a mechanism for reducing the irrationality."¹⁰² By turning the question about human irrationality into a medical-psychological question of post-traumatic stress and dysfunction,

¹⁰⁰ Berger, "Towards a Science of the Nuclear Mind," 131.

¹⁰¹ Berger, "Towards a Science of the Nuclear Mind," 134.

¹⁰² Berger, "Towards a Science of the Nuclear Mind," 135.

Hubbard aimed to use a rationalized system to overcome the flaws of human irrationality.

However, the discourse employed in L. Ron Hubbard's system of Dianetics clearly places more emphasis on scientific rhetoric than on scientific method, and as such was analogous to the "hard" SF which Wyndham so disliked. Hubbard proposed, for instance, that the human mind is split between "analytical" and "reactive" parts, and that

While the analytical mind is accurate, rational, and logical—a 'flawless computer'—the reactive mind is the repository of a variety of memory traces or what Hubbard calls engrams. Consisting primarily of moments of pain, unconsciousness or emotional loss, these engrams are burned into the reactive mind and cause us a variety of problems in the present, ranging from neurosis to physical illness and insanity.¹⁰³

These ideas perhaps recall Freud's analysis of the memory as being like a "mystic-writing pad."¹⁰⁴ Building on his work in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud argued in a 1924 article that "our mental apparatus" is like a pad that

provides not only a receptive surface that can be used over and over again, like a slate, but also permanent traces of what has been written, like an ordinary paper pad... The layer which receives the stimuli... forms no permanent traces; the foundations of memory come about in other, adjoining systems.¹⁰⁵

Just as Freud hoped that the neurotic patient could be cured by bringing repressed (childhood) traumas into the conscious mind and talking through them, through the "auditing" process of dianetics, the "pre-Clear" patient

can erase these painful engrams, by regressing to the original painful event and reliving it, thereby clearing it from his/her reactive mind... once all the

¹⁰³ Hugh B. Urban, "Fair Game: Secrecy, Security, and the Church of Scientology in Cold War America," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74 (2006), 365.

¹⁰⁴ The official website of the Church of Scientology claims that L. Ron Hubbard was introduced to Freudian psychoanalysis as a teenager by an American naval officer who had studied under Freud in Vienna. *Who Was L. Ron Hubbard?*, 2010, The Church of Scientology, <<http://www.scientology.org/faq/scientology-founder/who-was-Ironhubbard.html>>, 24 August 2010.

¹⁰⁵ Sigmund Freud, "A Note Upon The Mystic Writing Pad," in *Works*, vol. 19, 230.

engrams have been removed, the patient achieves the state called 'Clear.' As Hubbard claims, the Clear individual experiences himself/herself and the world in a radically new way, achieving a variety of intellectual and physical benefits, ranging from increased IQ to optimum health and vitality... Eventually, Hubbard and his students would make even more remarkable claims for the Clear state[,],... such as the ability to communicate telepathically, to see through walls, even to re-arrange molecules to fix appliances like broken coffee makers and air-conditioners.¹⁰⁶

What begins here as a somewhat flawed reading of Freudian psychoanalysis eventually comes full circle. Beginning with an SF problem – the gap between technological change and social progress – Hubbard moved beyond SF to propose a practical solution utilizing a vulgarized Freudian view of memory. It should be noted too that while Freud had an “unenthusiastic and ambivalent” relationship with telepathy and the occult, he also insisted that “[psychoa]nalysts are at bottom incorrigible mechanists and materialists.”¹⁰⁷ If one accepts that there are Nietzschean overtones to Hubbard’s concept of “engrams”, the inconsistency of this position quickly becomes apparent. While for Freud the permanence of *all* memory traces – not merely traumas – indicates that there is a fundamental link between unconscious memory, mental health and the very formation of identity itself, “engrams” stem only from moments of pain. Contemporary trauma theory now tends to view trauma as “an event or experience which overwhelms the individual and resists language and representation”,¹⁰⁸ but in the 1950s Hubbard believed that “engrams” could be eradicated from the unconscious mind by bringing them into the conscious mind. As such “engrams” are perhaps analogous to Nietzsche’s concept of the development of “bad conscience”, in which “something is branded in, so that it stays in the memory.” In human “prehistory”, Nietzsche claimed, mankind “guessed” that “only that which hurts incessantly is ‘remembered’.”¹⁰⁹ Primitive though this means is, the greater the cruelty, the greater the affect was believed to be.

¹⁰⁶ Urban, “Fair Game,” 365.

¹⁰⁷ Sigmund Freud, “Psycho-Analysis and Telepathy,” in Works, vol. 18, 181, 179. On Freud’s changing relationship with telepathy, see Luckhurst, The Invention of Telepathy, 270-5.

¹⁰⁸ Anne Whitehead, Trauma Fiction (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2004) 3.

¹⁰⁹ Nietzsche, On The Genealogy of Morals II§3, 42.

For Hubbard, the repression of such pain is precisely what creates engrams, and by becoming aware of these memories, one can remove their affect. Nietzsche, however, believed that not only is forgetting an “active” process but that, constituted as “selective remembering [it is] the recognition that not all past forms of knowledge and not all experiences are beneficial for present and future life.”¹¹⁰

Turning ever further towards the fantastic, esoteric and mythical, in 1954 Hubbard founded the Church of Scientology, which placed less emphasis on achieving “the state of Clear and optimal mental health in this lifetime” and focused instead on what he called the “Thetan” or eternal, spiritual soul of man. Not only engrams from this lifetime, but the lives of scientologists’ previous incarnations now had to be “audited”, for the ultimate “liberation of the Thetan from its bondage to the world of matter, space, energy, and time.”¹¹¹

On the surface, Scientology promises a schema of spiritual enlightenment fitting with the mid-twentieth century historiographical view of the Enlightenment, which Hans-Georg Gadamer referred to as “the schema of the conquest of mythos by logos.”¹¹² Yet the meaning of “logos” is stretched by its almost tautological incorporation into the word “Scientology”. Indeed, Dianetics conforms to what Vilfredo Pareto termed “non-logical” action: subjectively logical but objectively illogical.¹¹³ Furthermore, Scientology also creates its own esoteric truths, its religious narratives. In both of these respects, drawing parallels with the Frankfurt School conception of the Enlightenment, Scientology thus “reverts to mythology”.¹¹⁴

There are obvious parallels here with the mutant-Christianity at the centre of Wyndham’s novel *The Chrysalids*. The “Offences”, those animals or plants which do not conform to the “norm” for their type (“that is to say, d[o] not look

¹¹⁰ Peter Ramadanovic, “From Haunting to Trauma: Nietzsche’s Active Forgetting and Blanchot’s Writing of the Disaster,” *Postmodern Culture* 11.2 (2001) §1.

¹¹¹ Urban, “Fair Game,” 366.

¹¹² Gadamer, “The Historicity of Understanding,” 258. See also above, 89.

¹¹³ On Pareto and Aldous Huxley, see above, 134-8.

¹¹⁴ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, xvi. See above, 53, 55.

like their parents, or parent-plants”) are ritually burned or slaughtered by David’s father like an engram brought to the surface. As “deviations” from the norm they are unassimilable. The prevalence of offences on a person’s farm is read as being in indirect proportion to their closeness to God, for “THE NORM IS THE WILL OF GOD” while “THE DEVIL IS THE FATHER OF DEVIATION”.¹¹⁵ The community patriarchs, like David’s father, ultimately decide what the “norm” is, however, so that a power hierarchy based around esoteric knowledge is inevitable. Unlike Abraham in the Bible, David’s father’s attempts to kill his son are not driven by a message from an angel. In a society that believes “only the image of God is Man” he needs invoke no holier messenger than himself. Waknuk Mutant-Christianity, like Scientology, is about the potential of Man to be God if he can only realize his dream of purity. As Zamyatin had earlier put it, “Our gods are here, below, with us... the gods have become like us. Ergo, we have become as gods.”¹¹⁶

While there are no direct textual references to Scientology in the novel, it certainly existed at the crosshairs of two of John Wyndham’s pet hates: the “hard” science fiction of John W. Campbell Jr., Isaac Asimov and others which he felt insisted on technical vocabulary that rendered it opaque to the non-initiated, and established religion – particularly anything to do with esotericism, mysticism, a monopoly claim on truth and a rigid power structure enforced through ritual and spiritual law.¹¹⁷ If Scientology were an object of satire for Wyndham in *The Chrysalids*, then the fact that those with telepathic abilities (which Hubbard claimed could be reached through dianetics) are themselves persecuted by religious fundamentalists would be an ironic stab in the direction of the founders of the Church of Scientology and their demonstrable non-abilities.

Religion and Enlightenment in *The Day of the Triffids*

¹¹⁵ Wyndham, *The Chrysalids* 18.

¹¹⁶ Zamyatin, *We* 69.

¹¹⁷ Hence, when his friend Biff Barker’s daughter converted to Catholicism and entered a convent, Wyndham wrote her out of his will. David Ketterer, “A part of the ... family [?]: John Wyndham’s *The Midwich Cuckoos* as Estranged Autobiography,” *Learning From Other Worlds: Estrangement, Cognition and the Politics of Science Fiction and Utopia*, ed. Patrick Parrinder (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2000) 162.

Wyndham was a thorough secularist. Indeed, he once described himself as “so shocked and nauseated” by his first communion after Confirmation into the Church of England at the age of fourteen that he had “never been since.” Nor did he have any time for the strict Wesleyan Methodism of his maternal grandparents. In his typically understated way, Wyndham said of religions “power tends to corrupt them. [I h]ave a suspicion that they may be the Achilles’ heel of humanity.”¹¹⁸

Nevertheless, he could also see that the power of religious narrative lay beyond merely the mysterious or esoteric, and it was perhaps because of this very suspicion that religious imagery and narrative frameworks appear throughout his postwar works. Wyndham was particularly interested in the idea of enlightenment in both the apocalyptic-religious sense and the historical sense. Fusing spiritual enlightenment and the Age of Enlightenment together, Wyndham attempted to explicate the power relations and ideological beliefs implicit in both. Thus the characters in *The Day of the Triffids* and *The Kraken Wakes* no less than *The Chrysalids* can be split both between categories of an Elect and the Condemned as well as between a liberal enlightened elite and the masses.

Indeed, Koppenfels makes clear that these need not even be mutually exclusive readings.¹¹⁹ Catastrophe in these works is signalled in the heavens, and while only *The Chrysalids* makes continual direct reference to Revelations through the invocation of “the Tribulations”, in *The Day of the Triffids* the narrative framework can be seen as a path of redemption.¹²⁰ In Koppenfels’s words, “since the sun of reason appears as the secular avatar of the all-seeing divine eye, blinding is the appropriate sanction for an act of

¹¹⁸ John Wyndham, Correspondence between John Wyndham and Sam Moskowitz. Questionnaire and Response. Ms. 11/5/4. The John Wyndham Collection, U of Liverpool.

¹¹⁹ See W. V. Koppenfels, “These Irritant Bodies: Blinding and Blindness in Dystopia (A Powerful Parable Found in the Narratives of Cyrano de Bergerac, Swift, Wells, Wyndham, and Saramago),” *Cambridge Quarterly* 33 (2004).

¹²⁰ “...These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” (Revelations 7:14.) It is significant that the many beasts of the book of Revelations – including the seven-horned, seven-eyed Lamb – would immediately be declared mutants and destroyed in Waknuk under their strain of Christianity.

defiance of its authority.”¹²¹ Masen begins the novel stricken by temporary blindness, awaking in “isolation and helplessness” on a hospital ward with bandaged eyes.¹²² With the social structures of hospital care removed, Masen’s first act of autonomy is to remove his bandage. By contrast, the “isolated incoherent individuals” around him remain helpless.¹²³ Masen journeys through London, witnessing the despair of the blinded, observing the decay of the city and its reclamation by nature, realising that “the metropolis has become a necropolis.”¹²⁴ Inebriation and suicide are frequent responses to the crisis, while religious repentance is conspicuous by its absence.

By the time Masen leaves London during the virulent pandemic, it is clear that only the liberal enlightened elite (in both the philosophical sense and in the sense of response to the stimulus of light) or elect few can survive this apocalypse. Those who cling to the derelict values of the old society, like Miss Durrant who attempts to build a “clean, decent community with standards – Christian standards” at Tynsham Manor, fail to recognise that the contingency and fragility of such standards and values have been exposed.¹²⁵ The unavoidable didactic message is that only the liberal elect/elite are capable of both the empirical sense experience of sight, from which they can continue to gain new knowledge, and the liberal reason by which they may adapt as a species-being to new circumstances and survive.

It is with relief that Masen finally finds his way to Shirnings Farm, and receives temporary redemption, while his new “family” builds up production on the farm and strengthens it as a civilised bulwark against the intrusion of the triffids. But as in the Book of Revelations there comes a second period of strife, beginning with the mass attacks of the triffids and ending ultimately with the final showdown between good and evil; light and (pre-Enlightenment, medieval) darkness; liberal reason and hopeless self-

¹²¹ Koppenfels, “These Irritant Bodies,” 156.

¹²² Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids* 5.

¹²³ Manlove, “Everything’s Slipping Away,” 47.

¹²⁴ Koppenfels, “These Irritant Bodies,” 168.

¹²⁵ Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids* 144.

deceiving *Realpolitik*. The Isle of Wight, then, is the New Jerusalem from which the new world order of Enlightenment and reason shall eventually spread. The text is revealed to be against the current developmental path of science, but not against either science as such or scientific methodology. These remain redeemable in spite of the destructive, irresponsible and immoral uses to which they have been put in developing the blindness-causing satellites and the triffids. Indeed, Masen prophesizes a return to the mainland which he describes as a “great crusade to drive the triffids back and back with ceaseless destruction” – the goal of the enlightened elect thereby given both religious and military meaning.

Evolutionary Theory and the Triffids

The militarization of the triffid threat draws upon the power of the image of the seedpod, which, (as discussed above) was used frequently in the 1950s to represent the atomic bomb’s power. The seedpod here becomes a terrifying symbol of imminent hidden potential for alien invader threats. Like a Communist cell a seed may lie dormant for a long period before growing into a menace.¹²⁶ The seed is a traditional pastoral symbol of renewal and growth, but when exposed to radiation its springtime imagery can be perverted or mutated into something more subversively sinister, like the murderous body doubles of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. From the time of the first atomic explosions in 1945 governmental, scientific and some media discourse had presented atomic weapons as unlocking a hidden secret of nature (in the sense of the non-human universe), an awesome and powerful new world. The Bomb used, in President Truman’s words, “the basic power of the universe.”¹²⁷ Significantly, the analeptic tale in which the worldwide spread of the deadly triffid plants is related occurs in a chapter which opens with a history of the successful launching of satellite atomic and biological weapons, an “unknown number of menaces up there over your head, quietly

¹²⁶ Such was the hope of the German Communist Party in 1932, when ahead even of Hitler’s election victory they formed into “Groups of Five” by which no one would be able to give up more than five others if arrested. See Arthur Koestler, “Utopia” in Crossman, ed., *The God That Failed* 59, 63-4.

¹²⁷ “Basic Power of the Universe: How the Bomb Was Made, Mr. Truman’s Account,” *Times* 7 August 1945, 4, Col. C.

circling and circling until someone should arrange for them to drop".¹²⁸ The triffids, in parallel, are released into the atmosphere when a plane carrying a stolen box of seeds from a Soviet laboratory is shot down. Interestingly, in the first publication of the novel (as an abridged serialization) in the American *Colliers* magazine under the title *Revolt of the Triffids*, the plants are created not through genetic modification in the Soviet Union, but by intergalactic intrigue. In the *Colliers* version, set further in the future, large financial interests ("what in older times would have been called monopolies") have conquered the solar system by space rockets, driven less "by the fact that men could live on the planets than they were in the wealth the planets produced."¹²⁹ This colonialist economic exploitation of nearby planets proves ill fated. Among other valuable vegetable matter, triffids are discovered growing wild on Venus by an Argentinean plantation owner. It is an oil magnate, "Artic & European", which shoots down a rocket full of triffid seeds in the earth's atmosphere, in contrast to the Soviet Union plotline in the British edition.

This difference has important implications regarding Wyndham's attitude towards evolutionary theory. While the Venus version does demonstrate the sort of "Huxleyanism" which Matthew Moore points to as at the heart of the "Wyndham strategy", the British text is more ambiguous.¹³⁰ Here, the arguments of Darwin and T. H. Huxley about geographical adaptation are mingled with notions of sudden evolutionary jumps – which Darwin, but not Huxley, rejected. To use "Huxleyanism" as a way of distinguishing between merely the purely "scientific" theory of Darwin (which he himself saw as

¹²⁸ Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids* 20.

¹²⁹ John Wyndham, "The Revolt of the Triffids," *Colliers* 6 January 1951, 64. While the *Colliers* text is set in the far future, Ketterer argues that the novel version of *The Day of the Triffids* is set in 1976 in his introduction to the hardback academic text of John Wyndham, *Plan for Chaos*, eds. David Ketterer and Andy Sawyer (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2009). He reasons that many textual hints in *Plan for Chaos* point to it being intended as a prequel to *The Day of the Triffids*. Furthermore, Wyndham once attempted to write a *sequel* to the latter, of which two fragments exist in the John Wyndham Collection (7/1/10 and 7/2/5). In these fragments, which are set on a remote Pacific island in 2006, the blindness-causing comets occurred exactly thirty years earlier. An updated version of this introduction is available online: David Ketterer, *The Revised and Updated Introduction to Plan for Chaos by John Wyndham*, 2010, Blog, <<http://sfhubbub.blogspot.com/2009/11/revised-and-updated-introduction-to.html>>, 3 February 2010.

¹³⁰ Moore, "A Critical Study of John Wyndham's Major Works," Chapter 1 *passim*.

having social implications) and the “philosophical” arguments of Huxley is to brush over this, among other important differences between the two.¹³¹

In the British text triffids have in someway been produced, as a new species, in the Soviet Union:

a cleavage of methods and views had caused biology there, under a man called Lysenko, to take a different course. It, too, then succumbed to the endemic secrecy [of the USSR]. The lines it had taken were unknown, and thought to be unsound – but it was anybody’s guess whether very successful, very silly, or very queer things were happening there – if not all three at once.¹³²

The reference to Lysenko is telling. Having shot to fame in the Soviet Union in the late 1920s, his position was cemented by his “discovery of the ‘vernalization’ of wheat, a process in which the seeds are frozen so that they will germinate earlier the next spring.” Lysenko was politically astute and ruthless in maintaining his position as an authority on biological research in the USSR.¹³³ But while in the West the 1930s saw the rise of the “Modern Synthesis” of Mendelian genetics and Neo-Darwinian evolutionary theory, in Russia there were worries that the inherent competitiveness of Darwinism could be viewed as somehow undermining the “scientific” status of Marxism. Lysenko therefore based his approach on the late-Enlightenment French evolutionist J.B. Lamarck, who believed that organisms could induce more rapid evolution by passing on to their offspring their own *acquired* characteristics such as improved physical strength. Modern genetics rules out the possibility of this theory, but until the 1950s Lamarckism was still used as a basis for scientific research in the USSR.

Yet Wyndham makes it clear that such a process is not the exclusive means by which the “very queer” Lysenkian triffids come into being. In the words of the character Umberto,

¹³¹ See Ernst Myar, One Long Argument: Charles Darwin and the Genesis of Modern Evolutionary Thought (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1991) 37, 46.

¹³² Wyndham, The Day of the Triffids 23.

¹³³ Bowler, Evolution 246.

I do not say that there is *no* sunflower there at all. I do not say there is no turnip there. I do not say that there is no nettle, or even no orchid there. But I do say that if they were all fathers to it they would none of them know their child. I do not think it would please them greatly, either.¹³⁴

Lysenko is here painted as a latter-day Dr. Moreau, with the triffids serving to demonstrate the plasticity of (plant) life. Domesticated crops are mixed with stinging weeds and exotic wild flowers. The effect is only slightly sinister, but nevertheless beyond the ken of 1950s science. This illegitimate wild child is alarming when compared to its more conservative forebears. Moreover, the fact that “none of them would know their child” (significantly the first of many anthropomorphic comments about triffids in the novel) also suggests a saltation, or evolutionary leap, artificially induced by Soviet science.

This move plays on postwar fears of radiation, but it builds too on the “Modern Synthesis” in biology, a phrase coined by Julian Huxley in 1942 to describe the meeting of Neo-Darwinism and Mendelian genetics in evolutionary theory. According to Peter Bowler, saltation theories posit that “occasionally individuals may be born so different from their parents that they count as a new species – critics call this possibility the theory of the ‘hopeful monster’.”¹³⁵ This idea was rejected by Darwin, on the grounds that “[s]ince we see no evidence of species being formed by sudden saltations today, we may not invoke such discontinuities in the past.”¹³⁶ However, this was a moot point for Darwin’s so-called “bulldog” T. H. Huxley, who always had problems accepting natural selection – the part of Darwin’s theory that has survived most intact to the present day.¹³⁷ On these grounds, Wyndham’s approach does appear to be Huxleyan.

Moore goes even further though, insisting that Wyndham’s “Huxleyan” interpretation of Darwin, used to explore evolutionary and survivalist themes, is accessed exclusively through H. G. Wells, a student of Huxley’s during the

¹³⁴ Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids* 24.

¹³⁵ Bowler, *Evolution* 5.

¹³⁶ Bowler, *Evolution* 9-10.

¹³⁷ Bowler, *Evolution* 184.

mid-1880s. It is true that Wells held Huxleyan views during the late-Victorian and Edwardian eras. A clear statement of such beliefs can, for example, be found in *A Modern Utopia* (1905):

The way of nature... is to kill the weaker and the sillier, to crush them, to starve them, to overwhelm them, using the stronger and more cunning as her weapon. But man is the unnatural animal, the rebel child of Nature... In the Modern Utopia he will have set himself to change the ancient law. No longer will it be that failures must suffer and perish lest their breed increase, but the breed of failure must not increase, lest they suffer and perish, and the race with them.¹³⁸

But it is immediately clear that the blind “masses” in *The Day of the Triffids*, who are at an extreme biological disadvantage, differ markedly from these Utopian “failures”: there is no suggestion in *The Day of the Triffids* that the children of the blind will also be blind. Indeed, Dr. Vorless makes quite clear with his plan for polygamy between sighted men and blind women that the contrary should be the case.

Furthermore, there is no reason to suppose that Wyndham was not aware of the Modern Synthesis. Not only had he at one time directly studied heredity during his abortive attempt to become a rare-breed sheep farmer, but he took an active interest in science that went beyond merely accessing it through the science fiction of writers like Wells who had been students of science.

Even Wells, whose contact with T. H. Huxley occurred some sixty-five years before *The Day of the Triffids* was published, changed his opinions from the Huxleyan views he had expressed in early scientific romances like *The Time Traveller* (1894-5). In the 1930s, in collaboration with his zoologist son George P. Wells and the biologist Julian Huxley (T. H. Huxley’s grandson and brother to Aldous) – who were both far better informed than he about recent biological science – he co-wrote and edited the nine volume series *The Science of Life*. It was Julian Huxley who twelve years later wrote *The Modern Synthesis*, popularizing the evolutionary position from which biology

¹³⁸ Wells, *A Modern Utopia* 96.

developed into today's biosciences. It is at least very likely that a post-Wellsian author with sufficiently active an interest in the natural sciences to be a regular attendee of meetings of the British Interplanetary Society would also be acquainted with more modern biological principles than those featured in the early novels of Wells.

Moreover, while the triffids are created in an ambiguous and shady manner compatible with both Huxleyan evolutionary theory and Lysenko's approach to biological research, the manner in which they behave suggests an understanding of the Modern Synthesis. "Natural selection does not positively produce anything. It only eliminates, or tends to eliminate, whatever is not competitive", and as such it seems to underpin the success of the triffids in their war against humanity.¹³⁹ Thus, while the triffids are not produced through a selective breeding program but rather constitute a saltation, their victory is possible because without sight humanity is no longer biologically competitive. As humanity is constituted socially, the break down of the social order additionally weakens the competitiveness of the remaining humans, who (as personified in Masen) are atomized and monstrosly self-interested without the framework of society to hold them in check. It is Masen's "ruthless practicality and his careful selfishness" that make him so adaptable to a post catastrophe world.¹⁴⁰

The Image of the Triffids

In both *The Revolt of the Triffids* and *The Day of the Triffids* the airborne spread of triffid seeds encapsulate not only socio-biological fears, but also prescient worries about satellite weapons and invasion anxieties. Masen speculates:

When the fragments [of the plane] began their long, long fall towards the sea they left behind them something which looked at first like a white vapour.

It was not vapour. It was a *cloud* of seeds, floating, so infinitely light they were, even in the rarefied air. Millions of gossamer-slung triffid seeds, free now to drift wherever the winds of the world should take them...

¹³⁹ Anthony Flew, *Darwinian Evolution*, ed. Justin Wintle (London: Paladin, 1984) 25.

¹⁴⁰ Manlove, "Everything's Slipping Away," 49.

It might be weeks, perhaps months, before they would sink to earth at last, many of them thousands of miles from their starting place.¹⁴¹

The deadly threat of nuclear and biological weapons hovering in space is thereby transformed into the deadly drift of fallout-like seeds from the upper atmosphere, global and indiscriminate. The seeds, as discussed above, are imminent; the threat they contain may be realised in diseases and deformities only years after they land. As they are scattered across the world and take root, they grow into a new threat, which can be read not merely as Cold War fears of the enemy within but a whole constellation of social anxieties, including the invasion fears engendered by the previous war. Significantly, in this context, John Wyndham lived out the Blitz in Bloomsbury, frequently on fire watch and narrowly escaping explosions on more than one occasion.¹⁴²

The first triffid plants, Masen recalls, with their lashing poisonous stings, appeared “odd and somehow *foreign*.”¹⁴³ They walk in a lurching, goosestep like fashion.¹⁴⁴ But triffids are far from human: more properly they are a product of human creation. They represent a biological mutation writ large, an evolutionary saltation through human intervention. The floating seeds recall the threat of radioactive fallout, but the threat they carry is already, imminently, both mutated and threatening of mutation. The success of creating the triffids through tapping into the basic process of biological change (evolution) is hereby linked to the tapping into the “basic power of the universe” (atomic power), and in both cases human limitations look to have fatal consequences. The triffids, as well as being invaders, are then an interesting metaphor for nuclear disaster, for as Turney puts it

Mere physical destruction is rather dull...[and] can only have a limited grip on the imagination. What grips is a change in the conditions of life, and what

¹⁴¹ Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids* 27 *emphasis added*.

¹⁴² Evidence for this appears on numerous occasions in Wyndham's many wartime letters to Grace Wilson from this period, held in the John Wyndham Collection, University of Liverpool. In his letter of 25 September 1940, for instance (10/1/12), Wyndham reports that he has been temporarily moved out of his room in the Penn Club because of a burst gas main and a time bomb and has taken refuge in a nearby shelter in Bloomsbury Square.

¹⁴³ Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids*, 27 *emphasis in original*.

¹⁴⁴ In this context, “The book's ‘Dunkirk’ is the successful evacuation to the Isle of Wight”. Manlove, “Everything's Slipping Away,” 33.

would change the conditions of life more than a change in the forms of life itself?¹⁴⁵

Human creation places triffids within the natural economy. In doing so the triffids, like a critical nuclear reaction, become animated by their own force, alienated from human understanding and weaponised. In dealing with triffids humanity approaches a part of the natural economy that is on some basic level incomprehensible, a biological rival with a very different life cycle which also has the potential to be a vast economic resource.

As a threatening image, then, to adapt Iago's words, the triffid is the green eye/less "monster, which doth mock the meat it feeds on", precisely because its meat is also its uncomprehending creator. This relation cuts both ways: just as triffids can feed upon decomposing corpses, humans can use them as "cattle feed" or even, in desperation, boil and mash them for their own nutrition (as Torrence instructs the Shirnings Farm group to use them). The battle against triffids is a battle against nature, which having been transformed by man now stands over him once again: as with *The Chysalids*, humankind has returned to living in early-modern frontier societies of bounded polities built to keep nature out.¹⁴⁶

In this constellation, the triffids occupy an ambivalent position. As usurpers, they evoke the invasion threats of both German and (in turn) Soviet armies overrunning the British Isles, without being a simple allegory. At the novel's climax, Torrence tries to impose an apparently regressive feudal order upon the Shirnings. Dennis declares,

I'm suddenly feeling quite kindly towards the triffids. Without their intervention I suppose there would have been a whole lot more of this kind of thing by now. If they are the one factor that can stop serfdom coming back, then good luck to 'em.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Turney, *Frankenstein's Footsteps*, 127.

¹⁴⁶ On the relationship between nature and Enlightenment, see above, 47-55.

¹⁴⁷ Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids*, 230.

Politically, the triffids tie together a nexus of fears about authoritarian government – both of the past and of the present. To the liberal proponents of this view – put most forcefully in Friedrich Hayek’s critique of Communism *The Road to Serfdom* (1944) – differentiating between an economic and philosophical theory of history and the contents of medieval history was unimportant. In their interpretation, authoritarian government belongs to the past, liberal democracy and “the Open Society” (to use Karl Popper’s phrase) to the future. Bill Masen happily leaves Torrence and his men to be killed and eaten by the triffids not only because their pugnacious attitude threatens the “family” unit, but also because their demand that living conditions be universally reduced to the lowest common denominator are incompatible with Masen’s liberal conception of society. Torrence’s nationalistic feudal order – whose *raison d’être* is ostensibly to give succour to as many of the blind survivors as possible – is aligned with the triffids and will rely upon them for survival. He offers a compound of impersonal bureaucratic decision, brutal dictatorship and a battle for survival against the triffids, with one hand tied by the provision of barren survival for so many of the blinded. Torrence, from Masen and his “family’s” point of view, is stuck in the old world: obsessed with an immediately far too ambitious plan to save the blind masses and the militarism of the nation-state system. In contrast, for Masen himself the blindness and ascendancy of the triffids was an *apocalypse* in its true sense (as suggested by Philip Best), revealing the possibility of a better order.¹⁴⁸ With their technological superiority (represented by the scientific approach to battling triffids at a research laboratory and their use of a helicopter) the Isle of Wight commune is an enlightened liberal elite without ties to the restrictive superstition of religious rules and with a voluntary code of government. It is presented as being held together not through a sense of communal identity but rather through rational self-interest. This is the value to which the novel finally points, through the exploration of dystopic alternatives. Wyndham’s dystopic world exists at the interstice of the state of nature and an enfeebled, chest-puffing, early-modern Leviathan.

¹⁴⁸ Best, “Apocalypticism,” 5.

The Dystopian Thought of a Liberal Utopian

Wyndham claimed that in an earlier draft of *Triffids* he had attempted the more openly Utopian project of writing about life on the Isle of Wight. He later rejected this move because, as he put it in a letter to a fan, it “looked like a pill of preaching hidden among the rest.”¹⁴⁹ Wyndham, concerned with the fluency and readability of his novel (and wanting to steer clear of the literary shortcomings of the later Wells) wished to avoid producing “a very dull bog of sociological dissertations” at all costs – which was also the very reason his attempts to produce a sequel never got far.¹⁵⁰

While Wyndham’s oeuvre is clearly of Wellsian descent – a point on which he himself was clear – the utopian content of his work is necessarily more subtle. Indeed, one reason for the prevalence of catastrophe and negativity in Wyndham’s work may be the negative influence of the later Wells’s utopias and their highly didactic tone. Yet Wyndham was a firm (if sometimes despairing) believer in the English liberal tradition that stretched back through the social reforms of Asquith and Lloyd George and ultimately as far as J.S. Mill. There is evidence of Wyndham’s belief in a liberal teleology of progress in all his fiction. Indeed, the catastrophic disasters that befall the world in *The Day of the Triffids*, *The Kraken Wakes*, *The Outward Urge* and *The Chrysalids* are all chances for renewal and the revealing of the path to a better organized, more productive and socially cohesive society and in this sense Wyndham is a dystopian-apocalypse writing utopist.

The most utopian of his novels from the 1950s is *The Outward Urge*. It is also stylistically the weakest, imitative of Wells’s *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933) and the starry adventures of Olaf Stapledon’s *Last and First Men* (1930). In the novel, Wyndham imagines that following the construction of space stations in the 1990s, the USSR, the US and the British establish

¹⁴⁹ John Wyndham, Letter to Adam Kelso, Esq., 14 Apr. 1954. CC. 12/22/8 The John Wyndham Collection, U of Liverpool.

¹⁵⁰ John Wyndham, Letter to Mr. and Mrs. Miller of Transvaal, South Africa, 20 Nov. 1951. CC. 12/2/4 The John Wyndham Collection, U of Liverpool.

military moon bases by 2020. In 2044 nuclear war breaks out, rendering most of the northern hemisphere uninhabitable. Brazilian hegemony, with Australian rivalry, ensues. Brazil claims that “space is a province of Brazil”, but after a disastrous first Martian landing does little to exploit it beyond annexing the space stations circling earth and the remaining ex-British moon base. It falls to private enterprise to overthrow Brazilian interplanetary dominance. Space, the novel preaches, should be conquered not by competitive states seeking military advantage or imperial prestige, but by beneficent “privateers” for the good of humanity.¹⁵¹ Rather than entities in space being annexed for one nation or another, at the climax Brazilian extraterrestrial supremacy is successfully usurped by an Australian of Brazilian descent, who announces “Space will declare itself an independent territory – if the word ‘territory’ is valid in the circumstances.”¹⁵² The *raison d’être* of (the human exploration of) “Space” (now capitalized due to its status as a sovereign power) is no less than its systematic exploitation – just as it was in the *Collier’s* text of *Revolt of the Triffids*. The space race is even explicitly compared with Pope Alexander VI’s dividing up of the New World between Portugal and Spain.¹⁵³ The point of space exploration is financial gain; and despite romanticising the desire to explore space, once “out there” the protagonists (all successive male descendents of the Troon family) proceed primarily to look for natural resources with economic value. Even the Troons’s rosy-eyed views of the heavens mask ruthlessly self-interested and atomistic conceptions of humanity. When quizzed on their motivation for exploration, they each invoke the final lines of Rupert Brooke’s poem “The Jolly Company”:

... for all the night
I heard their thin gnat-voices cry
Star to faint star across the sky.¹⁵⁴

The “outward urge” to which the novel’s title alludes is a deep psychic longing to be at one with the lonely stars of the poem in the unlimited

¹⁵¹ Wyndham and Parkes, *The Outward Urge* 137.

¹⁵² Wyndham and Parkes, *The Outward Urge* 167.

¹⁵³ Wyndham and Parkes, *The Outward Urge* 147.

¹⁵⁴ These lines are quoted in full on page 11, and subsequently referred to throughout the text.

vastness of space, to be a lone patriarchal adventurer of the final frontier: singularly dedicated, rational and emotionally untouchable. This is then a sort of cosmic synecdoche for the human condition, where every man remains, "*In his lone obscure distress/Each walketh in a wilderness*", cut off from all other men.¹⁵⁵

However, it is more properly through each male descendent of the Troon line's lack of relationship with his father that he is cut off from humanity. A recurring theme is the death of Troon characters leaving behind unborn or infant sons, condemned to live in the shadow of their fathers until they in turn take to space exploration. It is colonialist traders who claim to explore space 'for its own sake' or for the sake of 'science', whilst exploiting uninhabited areas (and hence doing so guiltlessly), who finally put these Oedipal anxieties to rest. Their ascendancy ends international conflict and establishes the liberal utopia of "Space" as a non-territorial, internationalist body acting simultaneously as the world's policeman.

David Ketterer's analyses of Wyndham often fall back on biographical and psychological explanation.¹⁵⁶ The absent fathers which he finds in *all* of Wyndham's other postwar novels feature in *The Outward Urge* even more keenly. In each generation there is a breakdown of authority and an increase in anxious uncertainty followed by a rite of passage in which the son becomes an autonomous man. Ketterer is most likely correct that the sharply felt absence of Wyndham's father from 1911 (when he was eight) had an effect upon narrative strategies in his fiction. More significant to this study, however, is the political and religious impact of fatherlessness in the novels. Put another way, the psychological question of what fatherlessness in the novels says about Wyndham is in the end a question of authorial intent. But

¹⁵⁵ Rupert Brooke, "The Jolly Company," *The Poetical Works: Edited by Geoffrey Keynes*, Literature Online (London: Faber, 1970). "Male condition" would be more accurate here: this is Wyndham's only post-World War II novel in without a strong female central role. Brooke's description of atomized humanity shares interesting parallels with Hannah Arendt's description of the Boers, thinly dispersed across the Transvaal at the turn of the century. See Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, chapter 7 "Race and Bureaucracy".

¹⁵⁶ See, for example, Ketterer, "*The Midwich Cuckoos* as Estranged Autobiography," 153; Ketterer, "John Wyndham: The Facts of Life Sextet".

it can also be looked at politically, in terms of the relations and interplay between form, narrative and the social and economic forces working within human ecology in the novels.¹⁵⁷

In these terms, the most overt effect is that it allows the central protagonists to “be their own man”. As Susan Sontag noted, “The lure of such generalized disaster as a fantasy is that it releases one from normal obligations.”¹⁵⁸ Bill Masen, protagonist-narrator of *The Day of the Triffids*, sums up his immediate feelings about his life now that a global pandemic of blindness has just caused the end of the socio-political order as he knew it thus:

I suppose that had I had any relative or close attachments to mourn I should have felt suicidally derelict at that moment. But what had seemed at times a rather empty existence turned out now to be lucky. My mother and father were dead, my one attempt to marry had miscarried some years before, and there was no particular person dependent on me... All the old problems, the stale ones, both personal and general, had been solved by one mighty slash... I was *emerging as my own master, and no longer a cog*. It might well be a world of horrors and dangers that I should have to face, but *I could take my own steps* to deal with it – I would no longer be shoved hither and thither by forces and interests that I neither understood nor cared about.¹⁵⁹

The note of irony is that he will in future live in battle against the triffids: a force in which he has an abiding care and interest, if not ever quite full comprehension. Masen can be glad that he has no parents or dependents to mourn or look after, but this was his position *before* the disaster. What has changed, giving him a sense of *release*, is the breakdown of societal obstructions and impediments to his will, including the State, social mores and the socio-economic order. He is indeed in the upper echelons of the *new* socio-economic hierarchy based solely on his abilities as a sighted hunter-gatherer/scavenger; not only master of his own life but freed from the responsibilities of the postwar settlement and the burden of care for others *within society*. Without the state or religious institutions his moral compass is

¹⁵⁷ Webster, “John Wyndham as Novelist of Ideas,” 41.

¹⁵⁸ Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, 1st Picador USA ed. (New York: Picador, 2001), 215.

¹⁵⁹ Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids*, 47-8 *emphasis added*.

guided – in his own mind – not by the internalisation of a traditional code handed down by his father but rather by the force of his own (liberal) reason. The complex of emotions that Masen feels at his newly-found autonomy is most revealing in the fact that it links together a lack of family ties to an absence of all authority: parental, the State, and religion. The utopian aspect of the novel lies in Masen's rejection of absolute autonomy to become a co-operative and co-dependent member of a new "family", one that bonds together and remains together through intellectual exchange and the shared values of liberal reason as opposed to the traditional obligatory hierarchies of the patriarchal family.

Looking Back at the Future

PROGRESS AND DOOM ARE TWO SIDES OF THE SAME MEDAL

-HANNAH ARENDT

Preface to the first edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*

We

Eternally enamored two times two
Eternally united in the passionate four
Most ardent lovers in the world—
Inseparable two times two...¹

Brave New World

Bottle of mine, it's you I've always wanted!
Bottle of mine, why was I ever decanted?

Skies are blue inside of you,
The weather's always fine;

For

There ain't no Bottle in all the world
*Like that dear little Bottle of mine.*²

Nineteen Eighty-Four

It was only an 'opeless fancy,
It passed like an Ipril dye,
But a look an' a word an' the dreams they stirred
They 'ave stolen my 'eart awye!

[...]

They sye that time 'eals all things,
They sye you can always forget;
But the smiles an' the tears acrorss the years
*They twist my 'eart-strings yet!*³

The Day of The Triffids

My love's locked up in a Frigidaire
And my heart's in a deep-freeze pack.
She's gone with a guy, I'd not know where,
But she wrote that she'd never come back.
Now she don't care for me no more
I'm just a one-man frozen store,
And it ain't nice
To be on ice

With my love locked up in a Frigidaire,
*And my heart in a deep-freeze pack.*⁴

¹ Zamyatin, We 66.

² Huxley, Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited 79.

³ Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four 145 and 148; 227.

⁴ Wyndham, The Day of the Triffids 51-2.

The epigraph of *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination* (2003), edited by Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan, is a translation of Bertolt Brecht's short poem, "Motto":

*In the dark times
Will there also be singing?
Yes, there will also be singing
About the dark times*⁵

None of the book's contributors actually make specific reference to singing in dystopia in their analyses. Nevertheless, it remains an oddly prevalent activity in the texts that have been examined in this thesis. Mathematics and sex, test-tube reproduction and infantile hedonism, hopeless and forgotten dreams and fancies, personal loss and consumer technology: the song lyrics of dystopias can pointedly emphasise some of their central themes. The ostentatiously trite and even comically tedious nature of the lyrics, meanwhile, serves to underline their deployment as satirical commentary on both (events occurring in) the narrative as a whole, as well as song in contemporary popular culture. In clear parody, lazy clichés of commercially produced songs litter these verses so thoroughly that they start to blend into each other ("My love's locked up.../Eternally enamoured.../It's you I've always wanted.../Twist my 'eart-strings yet..."). Indeed, Orwell's verse, in its simulated Cockney accent, refers directly to the integral role of the cliché in this machine-produced "prolefeed" with the repetition in verse two of the self-reflexive example "they sye".

In Orwell's text, the ideological content of the song, reflecting the conditions of its production by the Party, is somehow mitigated by the "valiant figure in the yard" who "sang it so tunefully as to turn the dreadful rubbish into an almost pleasant sound" while pegging up washing on a line.⁶ As Richard Hoggart suggested in a discussion of the popularity of "Tin Pan Alley" songs, when "the people... have taken [a song] on their own terms... it is not for

⁵ Baccolini and Moylan, eds., *Dark Horizons* v.

⁶ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 229, 145.

them as poor a thing as it might have been.”⁷ Moreover, the placement of the song in the text is itself significant; Winston Smith feels “mystical reverence” for the woman “singing alone and spontaneously” but the song she sings is in fact a re-telling of his own story. Beginning on “a bright cold day in April”, his affair with Julia is – as they both know – an “opeless fancy”.⁸ In the Ministry of Love O’Brien teaches Winston that you can indeed “always forget”. Furthermore, in the final scene we are told that Winston realised his “heart-strings” belonged to Big Brother when “[t]wo gin-scented tears trickled down the sides of his nose”.⁹

Orwell invokes an affective response to a re-production of machine-produced song and uses this both to satirise the commercially-driven culture industry and to reflect upon the narrative. For John Carey, “the impasse at which Winston arrives [i]s essentially the same” as that of the Frankfurt School theorists Horkheimer and Adorno; an elitism which “regarded the masses as dupes, seduced by capitalism’s equivalent of Prolefeed.” Carey argues that for Orwell and the Frankfurt School alike, only “the individual can appreciate ‘high’ culture – and mass civilization threatens to obliterate the individual.”¹⁰ Carey’s opposition of “high” modernism and “mass culture” hypostatizes what was in effect a more complex picture: plenty of mass-market magazines “were liberally peppered” with work both by and about modernists. Indeed, between them *Gent Magazine* and *Escapade* published pieces by the likes of Faulkner, John O’Hara, Jean Paul Sartre, Jack Kerouac, S.J. Perelman, William Soroyan and Somerset Maugham. Other modernist writers including Joyce, Henry Miller, DeMaupassant and D.H. Lawrence also published in mass-market periodicals.¹¹ Furthermore, Orwell himself owed his success to selling to the mass market: *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was “select[ed] by the American Book of the Month Club despite [Orwell’s] refusal to remove the long extracts from *The Theory and Practice*

⁷ Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958) 162.

⁸ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 3.

⁹ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 311.

¹⁰ Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses* 43.

¹¹ David M. Earle, *Re-Covering Modernism: Pulp, Paperbacks and the Prejudice of Form*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009) 1.

of *Oligarchical Collectivism*.”¹² This does, though, point to the American Book of the Month Club viewing Goldstein’s text as outside the norms or expectations of mass-market fiction.

A case can be made for Carey’s view that Orwell’s last novel may be essentially regarded as modernist. But what links Orwell to the modernist movement is not merely a propensity to denigrate mass society and culture. In a typically modernist fashion, Orwell mingles “high brow” intellectual discourse, such as the extract from a text on Political Economy, with texts from commercial art and mass culture like the lyrics of the song the washerwoman sings in the yard behind Charrington’s shop.

For Patricia Rae, “Charrington is to Winston Smith as [T. S.] Eliot is to Orwell: a prospective solution to a deficit of history.”¹³ In his junk shop, Winston’s concerns with memory, time and history are mapped onto physical objects. Among the “miscellaneous rubbish” of the past, Winston sees “lacquered snuff-boxes, agate brooches and the like – which looked as though they might include something interesting.”¹⁴ In Rae’s allegorical reading,

The fragmentary state of the junk shop’s contents... and the nostalgia they evoke, suggests a possible parallel between the shop and the text of *The Waste Land*, another ‘heap of broken images’ inspiring its reader to view the present in the light of a nobler past.¹⁵

What David Trotter, borrowing from D.H. Lawrence, terms the “friability of actual life”, was demonstrated by Zamyatin in the fracturing of D-503’s sense of self, and by Huxley in the fracturing of narrative into contrapuntal fragments. Here, Orwell domesticates this friability of modernity in a space evoking “ancestral memory.”¹⁶ But what seems authentic is later revealed,

¹² Taylor, *Orwell: The Life* 408.

¹³ Patricia Rae, “Mr. Charrington’s Junk Shop: T. S. Eliot and Modernist Poetics in Nineteen Eighty-Four,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 43 (1997) 200.

¹⁴ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 98.

¹⁵ Rae, “Mr. Charrington’s Junk Shop,” 202.

¹⁶ David Trotter, *Paranoid Modernism: Literary Modernism, Psychosis, and the Professionalization of English Society* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001), 2; Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 100.

like the engraving hanging over the telescreen, to be a façade as fragile as the coral paperweight smashed on the floor when Winston and Julia are arrested. “[H]ow small it always was!” Winston reflects.¹⁷

Modernist tropes and themes are common in dystopian fiction of this period. The critique of religious themes, for example, which in Orwell’s novel occurs implicitly through the character of O’Brien as a priestly father figure, achieves more explicit expansion in Wyndham’s 1955 novel *The Chrysalids* in its mutated puritan Christianity. Similarly, the situating of this narrative a thousand years after a nuclear holocaust in a distant future that mirrors the distant past tacitly engages with questions arising from the implications of writing within the scientific paradigm of modernity. In Zamyatin’s *We*, meanwhile, this is made even clearer with the ironic inversion of the image of Prometheus in the poetry of the One State. Here, rather than being confined by chains to a rock as punishment for stealing fire from the gods to give to mankind, Prometheus, now *representing* mankind, “unfreezes” humanity by imposing law upon nature (through natural sciences) and man (through the modern state): “He harnessed fire in the machine, in steel,/And bound chaos in the chains of Law.”¹⁸

These dystopias, then, have interrelated aesthetic and socio-political significance: they are allied to literary modernism, while as a mode of critique they are reactions to both the everyday realities of specific modern conditions, and more broadly to the modern condition of their epoch. Their ability to perform these critical functions stems from a common approach to narrative strategy. As argued in chapter one, at the level of the narrative arc, dystopias of this period project forwards into the future – a strategy which, following Genette, can be termed *prolepsis*.¹⁹ Within this “storyworld”, however, the narrative often uses *analepses* (flashbacks) to examine the

¹⁷ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 232. For Patricia Waugh, “the paperweight stands too as an image of the novel, the book we are holding, and it also represents the importance of touch and of the tacit in a rationalized and bureaucratized world of newness, symbolizing the need to feel, to cradle something from the past, in one’s hands.” Waugh, “The Historical Context of Post-War British Literature,” 39.

¹⁸ Zamyatin, *We* 47.

¹⁹ Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 40.

author's present and even their own near future.²⁰ As discussed in chapter three, during the contrapuntal narrative in chapter three of *Brave New World*, in which the narrative flicks between different scenes with increasing rapidity, Mustapha Mond, the World Controller, gives some students a history lesson.²¹ By skipping not only between subjects, but between discourses (from the banality of sexual gossip to the absurd presentation of an authoritative scientific account of terror), Huxley gives the reader just enough information to piece together an idea of how the World State of *Brave New World* came into being. There are glimpses of increasing disorder, war, economic collapse – crises of unprecedented proportions. None of this is fleshed out: we do not find out, for example, who the belligerents were in the Nine Years' War, or why anthrax was used against civilians. The solidity of dystopian storyworlds, in which a future world is, Sargent insists, "described in considerable detail" seems to gesture towards the predictive texts of H. G. Wells, J. B. S. Haldane and others, models of futurology which would prove important to the nascent subgenre of what John Wyndham termed "hard" science fiction.²² However, the ambiguous content of the proleptic-analeptic manoeuvre of dystopian fiction, in which the gap between (the author's contemporary) "now" and (the future) "then" is clouded and obscure, points to a deeper, subtler engagement with the processes of history.

This engagement drew together strands from both socio-political and cultural-intellectual history. While, for example, Zamyatin made post-Revolutionary trends in sexual behaviour subject to satire through an extrapolation into a future setting, these trends were also tracked backwards through history, hinting perhaps towards Kant's views of marriage, but more generally to the questioning of sexual norms from the Enlightenment onwards. The questioning of these norms, which can be readily observed not only in the libertine pornographic fringes of Enlightenment thought (in writings of the Marquis de Sade, the Marquis d'Argens, and John Cleland, for example) but also in the thought of more mainstream thinkers like Denis

²⁰ Herman, *Basic Elements of Narrative* 130.

²¹ See above, 137-8 and 140-1.

²² Sargent, "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited," 9.

Diderot, re-appeared at the turn of the twentieth century in the work of H. G. Wells. There is a clear line separating gratuitous pornography like Cleland's *Fanny Hill or Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* from Diderot, who had declared in the *Encyclopédie* that "everyone is more or less sensual. Those who preach [otherwise are] bilious men who should be shut up in a madhouse..."²³ Diderot was also interested in wider scientific questions surrounding reproduction and biology. It was this latter area, far more than the advocacy of free love, which held H. G. Wells's interest throughout his literary career.

This was also the case for Aldous Huxley, for whom satire of sexual mores and codes of behaviour was not only an end in itself but also a way into discussing questions of reproduction and the morality of eugenics. In his test tube future, the desirability of distant possibilities of science are critically questioned by being placed within a "utopia" whose very utopian status is constantly, satirically undermined. Huxley consciously positioned his text as (in part) responding to Wells's utopias, and more widely to the utopian literary tradition, while re-assessing post-Enlightenment values to do with "improving" human nature. *Brave New World* is an extraordinarily clear example of the capabilities of the proleptic-analeptic structural manoeuvre in modernistic dystopias to critique, satirise, problematise and question in a sustained and literary manner.

From the sixteenth century, semiotician Louis Marin argues, utopia appeared as an imaginative space beyond the limit of the horizon. "Utopia is the infinite work of the imagination's power of figuration", he writes, and as such, the "utopian representation always takes the figure, the form of a map."²⁴ Marin restricts his analysis to More's seminal text, without engaging with the implications of the change in meaning that, he asserts, occurred through the admission into eighteenth-century dictionaries of "utopia" not as a "toponym" but as "a common noun". The results of this change were important:

²³ Denis Diderot "Voluptueux", *Encyclopédie*, vol. 27, 446-7, quoted in Mason, *The Irresistible Diderot* 124.

²⁴ Louis Marin, "The Frontiers of Utopia," *Utopias and the Millenium* eds. Krishan Kumar and Stephan Bann (London: Reaktion, 1993), 8, 12, 13.

increasing knowledge of the world's geography began to restrict the extent to which the island of Utopia could be othered in geographical space as beyond the oceanic horizon (when maps detailing the content of the space beyond the physical horizon were easily obtainable). But more forceful than this process, as Bloch and Adorno concurred, the Enlightenment had provided writers of literary utopias in the West with a narrative of progress and social evolution that enabled them to conceive of utopia as a transformative creative possibility for their own future.²⁵

The binding of utopia to the ideals of the Enlightenment also tied it to the Enlightenment's failures and misuses. Just as the injustices of colonialism, and later imperialism, were justified by reference to the "enlightening" of colonial/imperial subjects, so too would the dubious concepts of the "Law of Nature" and the "Law of History" be invoked in order to radically transform societies towards dreams of purity and "perfection". From the Enlightenment onwards, the inherent dangers of utopia were amplified. In his discussion of what he termed "utopian engineering", Karl Popper argued that "[t]he Utopian attempt to realize an ideal state, using a blueprint of society as a whole, is one which demands a strong centralized rule of a few, and which therefore is likely to lead to dictatorship..."²⁶

Popper here approaches the problem of power relations within the framework of utopian visions. As critiques of these visions, this issue has been central in the development of literary dystopias too. Within the psychological topography of dystopian fiction, the limits and lengths to which relations of domination and power could be stretched were systematically explored. Responding to the darkest moments of the early-mid twentieth century, "radical evil" (as Arendt termed it) was mapped onto a fictional future so that both contemporary history and the ideological projections of totalitarian movements could be better understood.²⁷ But dystopia does more

²⁵ Bloch, "Something's Missing," 5. See above, 29.

²⁶ Popper, *The Open Society*, vol. 1, 159. This analysis rests on a problematic conflation of utopianism with visions of an "ideal" or perfect state rather than "radically better." Against Popper, see Sargent, "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited," 24-28.

²⁷ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* 459.

than simply create a plausible setting. Dystopia, it is worth re-stating, is not only a bad place, but one where bad things happen in the life of a central character or group of characters. The proleptic-analeptic manoeuvres of the dystopias examined in this thesis are not only a way of critically assessing history and the utopian literary tradition, but often a device for characterising the speaker(s)/(fictional) writer(s) of this future history, and for helping to structure the narrative.

The importance of proleptic-analepses as a multifaceted tool is observable in the critiques of Wellsian utopian ideals that are present in all of the dystopian fictions that have been examined in depth in earlier chapters. Wells is (at times crudely) taken as representative of a tradition of literary utopias in which Enlightenment rationalism is extrapolated from being the epistemological basis for scientific, mathematic and metaphysical investigation, to being the ideological basis for a projected future society. This leads to a situation in which a model of the “good society” is reduced to a projection of a “rational” society, grossly distorting the values of freedom and happiness. In Zamyatin’s *We*, one way in which this is addressed is through the reification of a (false) dichotomy between happiness and freedom into static, polar opposites. As the poet R-13 puts it,

Those two, in paradise, were given a choice: happiness without freedom, or freedom without happiness. There was no third alternative. Those idiots chose freedom, and what came of it? Of course, for ages afterward they longed for the chains. The chains – you understand? That’s what world sorrow was about.²⁸

For Zamyatin, in contrast, to be human is to be free, and unlike the Mephi community beyond the Green Wall, “those two, in paradise” were not fulfilling their human potential: in Sartrean terms, “man *is* freedom.”²⁹ The positing of freedom *against* happiness is thus a false dichotomy – neither is fully possible without the other. In the One State, what is termed “happiness” is a mere absence of privation. The values of the One State, then, seem fairly

²⁸ Zamyatin, *We* 61.

²⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, trans. Philip Mairet (London: Methuen, 1948) 34 *emphasis in original*.

close to those put forward by Karl Popper, for whom the choice is between the “piecemeal” approach, which he inconsistently characterises as “a *systematic* fight against suffering and injustice and war”, and that of the “utopian engineer”, who commits violent acts in the name of a distant end of universal happiness.³⁰ In a footnote, Popper refines his position by disputing the validity or applicability of the utilitarian ‘greatest happiness’ principle. There is, as he sees it, “no symmetry between suffering and happiness, or between pain and pleasure.” Moreover, it would be morally untenable to count one person’s happiness or pleasure against another’s suffering or pain.³¹ However, elsewhere Popper argued “that freedom is more important than equality.”³² This rests on an acknowledgement that freedom (as he conceives it) may actually *entail* inequality, but that this is a price worth paying. But if inequality causes suffering, then an insoluble contradiction of values emerges.

Part of the problem that Popper shares with the utilitarianism he rejects is that both positions are underpinned by a strong belief in the power of scientific thought, as “problem-solving”, to undertake not just tasks related to natural sciences, but also to human and social sciences. As noted in chapter one, according to Stephan Toulmin’s rather grand historical narrative, such a path was typical of the fate of philosophy in modernity, which from its earliest days saw a change in both the style and content of philosophical debate, reflecting a shift from a *practical* model to a *theoretical* conception of philosophy, in which “nature and ethics conform to abstract, timeless, general, and universal theories.”³³

In the post-Baconian world, as they journeyed toward the rise of the scientific paradigm, “the natural sciences... moved in a zigzag, alternating the rationalist methods of Newton’s mathematics and the empiricist methods of

³⁰ Popper, *The Open Society*, vol. 1, 158 *emphasis added*.

³¹ Popper, *The Open Society*, vol. 1, 284-5.

³² Karl Popper, *Unended Quest: An Intellectual Autobiography*, 4th ed. (London: Routledge, 1992) 36.

³³ Toulmin, *Cosmopolis* 35. See above, 48.

Bacon's naturalism."³⁴ Both methods ultimately had the same end: the presentation of "clear and distinct" ideas, whose truthfulness was evident in their very clarity and distinctiveness. By the twentieth century, this elevation of the value of particular types of truth claims and the rhetoric surrounding them had become a dominant cultural norm.

As critiques of both cultural norms and the processes of Enlightenment as they were embedded in history, dystopian fictions were well positioned to question assumptions of the scientific age. Indeed, one of the most obvious targets for dystopian satire and cultural criticism was that post-Enlightenment social and political values, which were often couched in the rhetoric of the scientific era, were at odds with the applied science and technology of an age of industrial warfare.

For Orwell, to refuse to grapple with these issues was to pursue a course of quietism that to him seemed unsustainable intellectually in an age of "fear, tyranny, and regimentation." In an essay on Henry Miller, whom he characterised as talented, but whose refusal to engage with politics disturbed him, Orwell wrote,

To say 'I accept' in an age like our own is to say that you accept concentration-camps, rubber truncheons, Hitler, Stalin, bombs, aeroplanes, tinned food, machine-guns, putsches, purges, slogans, Bedaux belts, gas-masks, submarines, spies, provocateurs, press-censorship, secret prisons, aspirins, Hollywood films and political murders. Not *only* those things, of course, but those things among others.³⁵

This rhetoric of consumerism, dictatorship, mass society, *realpolitik* and militarism was the reality with which dystopian fiction grappled. It is the language of emotional manipulation and the creation of desires, of ceaseless change and static conditions, of analgesics and intolerable suffering – all targets of satire or criticism in dystopian novels of the period. Mass production and the regimentation of modern life are conceived of together, as mutually reinforcing.

³⁴ Toulmin, *Cosmopolis* 105.

³⁵ Orwell, *Collected Works*, vol. 12, 91 *emphasis in original*.

Dystopian fiction from circa 1920 to 1960 had “a particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities, which gives the sense of a generation or of a period.”³⁶ These novels therefore formed part of what Williams terms a “structure of feeling”, existing in a space in which the full meaning and significance of lived social experience was not yet analysable in historical terms. Within the context of this particular structure of feeling, which stretched from the end of World War I up to the social upheavals around the start of the 1960s, this thesis has sought to demonstrate that dystopian fictions mapped social change as it emerged in a number of important ways.

One of the most important new social experiences of this period was that of modern, global, industrial warfare. The contentious end of the Great War had hinted that scores were not settled and more conflict was to come. The War also showed that the line between civilian targets and the front line of conflict could be rapidly eroded. War was an agent of change, helping to bring about the conditions for the Bolshevik Revolution, for example. It was also a mass experience that left indelible marks in the social and cultural spheres, not merely through the ruins of cities, but in the changing attitudes and values of whole populations too. The exploration of these themes was deeply important to dystopian fictions. Whilst in the case of John Wyndham’s postwar work there is a cathartic element to his presentation of invasion themes, in *The Day of the Triffids* there is also a properly apocalyptic sense of unveiling and revealing. The world in Wyndham’s postwar works is forever changed by devastating upheavals. But through these transformations, new ways of life and social exchange are manifest in a process not only of cataclysmic ending and horrific, *unnatural* disasters, but also of renewal.

Yet even amid sea monsters and walking venomous plants, the powerful figure that truly haunts these narratives is in fact real and empirically existent: the elephant in the room is the atomic bomb. In the postwar era, the

³⁶ Williams, Marxism and Literature, 131.

Bomb was a key trope in the narrative structures of dystopias. It formed part of a worldview that reflected shifts in attitudes towards developments across the sciences in the mid-twentieth century, from the Modern Synthesis in biology to the evolution of technologies of surveillance. Alexander Aldridge goes as far as to argue that it is the scientific worldview which brings many dystopias into generic close proximity. Thus, Zamyatin's *We* may be characterised as being

not merely a satire on excessive rationality as critics sometimes suggest, nor an anti-scientific or even anti-technological statement. Rather, Zamyatin assumes that a specifically outmoded scientific ideal has formed the mythos of a culture, that that particular scientific mythos manifests itself in everything from architectural regularity to regulated sexual behavior.³⁷

While the Enlightenment was characterised by Gadamer (as noted above in chapters two and four) as engendering “the conquest of mythos by logos”, in dystopian fiction mythos may be reasserted as a hypostatized rationality.³⁸ This path was traced by Horkheimer and Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, for whom “Enlightenment reverts to mythology” when science is elevated from the methods of a research community to a worldview and ideological basis for an entire society.³⁹

Science in dystopian fictions is intimately tied up with political structures and power relations. Indeed, it is political relations that form the basis of critique in these novels, the trunk from which the boughs of science, war and other concerns grow. As Arendt put it, “never have we depended so much on political forces that cannot be trusted to follow the rules of common sense and self-interest – forces that look like sheer insanity, if judged by the standards of other centuries.”⁴⁰ Goldstein's text in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* likewise summarises the situation from the 1930s onwards as being most desperate:

³⁷ Alexandra Aldridge, *The Scientific World View in Dystopia* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research P, 1984), 37.

³⁸ Gadamer, “The Historicity of Understanding,” 258. See above, 89 and 245.

³⁹ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* xvi. See above, 53-5 and 245.

⁴⁰ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* vii.

...by the fourth decade of the twentieth century all the main currents of political thought were authoritarian. The earthly paradise had been discredited at exactly the moment when it became realisable. Every new political theory, by whatever name it called itself, led back to hierarchy and regimentation...⁴¹

Zamyatin wrote *We* at a time when he perceived that the Russian Revolution which he had originally backed was also set on a dangerous course back toward “hierarchy and regimentation.” This set the trend for dystopian fiction. Huxley, for example, subsequently extrapolated forward in *Brave New World* some of the processes of consumer capitalism that he had observed at their zenith in America, where he identified “a revaluation of values, a radical alteration (for the worse) of established standards.”⁴² In John Wyndham’s dystopian novels in contrast, even where they began to move away from the model of dystopian narrative that centres on the power of the modern state, this brought into focus the reach of regimentation in modern life precisely by the ability of such regimental orders to persist during the collapse of the state itself. For Wyndham, it seems the “earthly paradise”, sketched by his predecessor H. G. Wells, is unrealisable perhaps because of its totalised aspect, attempting to govern every human being in the world, imposing universal order. The utopian enclaves that are scattered around his works represent a turn away from the universal and global, towards the local and particular.

However, as argued in chapter five, in Wyndham’s fictional worlds it is characters with strong, coherent identities and a sense of rugged autonomy like Bill Masen (*The Day of the Triffids*), Phyllis Watson (*The Kraken Wakes*) and Rosalind (*The Chrysalids*) who not only survive, but thrive in the face of social upheaval. These characters are able to resist regimenting social pressures. As a group, it is significant that while the political persuasions of their authors differ markedly, dystopian novels in the mid-twentieth century tended to promote the claims of individual liberty against the advancing power and reach of the modern state. As modernistic texts, many of these

⁴¹ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 213.

⁴² Quoted in Murray, *Aldous Huxley* 184.

novels called into question the notion of a stable sense of self – Zamyatin's D-503 is an especially prominent example of the fracturing and alienating impact of modernity on models of subjecthood.

Question marks remain, though, over the status of women in Zamyatin's text: it is never made clear whether I-330 is merely a *femme fatale* or a revolutionary leader betrayed by D-503's worst instincts. In *Brave New World* gender roles are similarly ambiguous: while patriarchy is continually presented as natural and inevitable, there are hints at the damage which enforced promiscuity does to Lenina Crowne. On the other hand, economic gender inequality is lower than in 1930s Britain. Even in Wyndham's novels, where women are frequently presented as more intelligent, resourceful and practical than men, they are also presumed to continue to undertake traditional female gender roles. This very ambivalence throughout dystopian fictions reflects changing cultural and social attitudes towards women, which have moved at a far from uniform pace.

Dystopian Legacies

These are just a few of the ways in which dystopian fiction from 1920-1960 mapped social change and formed part of a structure of feeling. Due to their multifaceted, often intelligent and exploratory approach to issues surrounding the mass experience of war, scientific developments, politics, cultural changes, moral autonomy and gender relations, dystopias are important cultural historical documents. They are in addition significant literary works: all are novels of ideas that engaged with trends in modernism as well as marking milestones in the emergence of the new genre of science fiction, while also responding to the rich utopian literary tradition.

The legacies of dystopian fiction from this period can be split – for analytical purposes – between the critical and the literary. As interventions at a time of profound political and social crises, dystopias were influential in providing a timely alternative means by which to think about the world. In other words, dystopian fiction offered a way of reshaping the epistemological basis of

critique from *within* the post-Enlightenment tradition. Dystopian novels demonstrated some of the limits of rationalist and empiricist investigative techniques by providing a space for the inclusion of affective enquiry. Beginning from a critical stance which withheld from a post-Enlightenment liberal or socialist teleological belief in progress, dystopian fiction considered the implications for the slippery ideological notion of “world history”. They questioned whether the social, political and cultural changes that accompanied developments in scientific and technical knowledge could be considered improvements. Dystopian fiction asked its readers to consider why, just at the moment when utopian transformations that might eliminate inequality and injustice seemed technically possible, such political, social and cultural change seemed to slip further from grasp.

In thinking *through* such questions, dystopian fictions were also highly influential *as* criticism. As part of a structure of feeling, deeply embedded within the history of their time, they mapped social and cultural change. Yet they were also influential in actively changing attitudes and marking expectations. Most obviously, the language of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* continues to this day to mark popular media across the political spectrum, with the term “Orwellian” as a heading above a set of “newspeak” words that are now well-worn clichés.⁴³ But more subtly, and in a more varied and

⁴³ In the week of 7-13 March 2011 alone, for example, the term “Orwellian” appeared in the online editions of the Daily Mail (twice), the Mirror, Metro, the Guardian, the Observer and the Times. The articles, all retrieved on 15 March 2011, are as follows: Bill Neely, “Rebels Hold Off Gaddafi Forces in His Own Backyard,” *Daily Mail*, 8 March 2011, <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1363985/Libya-No-10-hangs-William-Hague-dry-SAS-humiliation-desert.html>>; “Tory Bid to Stop Soup Runs for Homeless ‘Because it Encourages Them to Live on the Streets’,” *Daily Mail*, 10 March 2011, <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1364973/Tory-bid-stop-soup-runs-homeless-encourages-life-streets.html>>; Paul Routledge, “Cameron’s Pensions Axeman Lord Hutton Drops Us in It,” *Mirror*, 11 March 2011, <<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/columnists/routledge/2011/03/11/cameron-s-pensions-axeman-lord-hutton-drops-us-in-it-115875-22980714/>>; Fred Attewill, “Hacking Alert on Google Phones as Apps Deleted Without User Knowledge,” *Metro*, 8 March 2011, <<http://www.metro.co.uk/tech/857573-hacking-alert-on-google-phones-as-apps-deleted-without-user-knowledge>>; Peter Beaumont, “Libya Regime Treating Journalists Like Idiots – But Ones Who Are Useful to Them,” *Guardian*, 8 March 2011, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/mar/08/libya-regime-ill-treats-foreign-journalists?INTCMP=SRCH>>; Sarah Churchwell, “A Visit from the Goon Squad by Jennifer Egan,” Review, *Observer*, 13 March 2011, Sec. The New Review, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/mar/13/jennifer-egan-visit-goon-squad?INTCMP=SRCH>>; and Tom Whipple, “Are We Heading for a Chocolate Calamity?” *Times*, 11 March 2011, <<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/life/families/article2942017.ece>>.

complex manner, dystopian fiction contributed to debates about developments in science; social Darwinism; modern industrial warfare and the military-industrial complex; political movements across the spectrum including Communism, Fascism, social democracy and consumer capitalism; and last, but by no means least, theories and literary visions of utopia.

On the literary front, meanwhile, dystopias were important landmarks in the development of the science fiction genre. While John Wyndham showed one very English way in which the dystopian trajectory could be taken in the 1950s by tracing the footsteps of Wells, the US was developing its own dystopian tradition, through novels like Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* (1952), Frederik Pohl and C.M. Kornbluth's *The Space Merchants* (1953) and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1954), texts which investigated regimented futures of corporatism and conspicuous consumption. In Britain, meanwhile, the end of the 1950s saw the rise of new science fiction writers who sought to break away from the shadow of H. G. Wells and his dystopian descendants. For some, like Brian Aldiss, this meant not only refusing to acknowledge a debt to writers like John Wyndham, but also to strategies of radical estrangement where landscapes, social orders and even the appearance of "people" became utterly unrecognisable in any contemporary terms (as in his *Hothouse* (1962)). The narrative strategy of proleptic-analepses, which so characterised dystopian fictions from 1920 to 1960, is mostly absent from the liminal, dark spaces of alterity in J.G. Ballard's early fiction, which exist in a far more dream-like psychological sphere. Feminist texts like Doris Lessing's *Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974), meanwhile, marked an important new phase in which the frequently patriarchal assumptions of SF and dystopian genres were critiqued from within the tradition.

The blackened, poisonous pastures of dystopia, strewn with the debris of the twentieth century – empty tins and bullet casings, newsprint, broken radios and shards of glass – are walked again. Newly scattered detritus is brought into focus. Dystopia continues to haunt the future, tracking the limits and horizons the most culturally prevalent fears and pressing anxieties. The "New Maps of Hell" to which Kingsley Amis referred in his early criticism of

the science fiction genre persistently return as a means for inscribing political and critical thought into literary works, continually revaluing the values of modernity.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Amis, New Maps of Hell.

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