

Gabriel Roman-Bărbuți



INDIVIDUAL VERSUS
SOCIETY IN THE DYSTOPIAN
FICTION OF THE FIRST HALF
OF THE XXth CENTURY

media

Lumen

www.EdituraLumen.com

Gabriel ROMAN-BĂRBUȚI

INDIVIDUAL VERSUS SOCIETY
IN THE DYSTOPIAN
FICTION OF THE FIRST
HALF OF THE XX-th
CENTURY

Lumen

Iași, 2008

Gabriel ROMAN-BĂRBUȚI
INDIVIDUAL VERSUS SOCIETY IN THE DYSTOPIAN
FICTION OF THE FIRST HALF OF THE XX-th CENTURY

Editura Lumen este acreditată CNCIS sub nr 003
www.edituralumen.ro

Redactor: Morariu Irina Maria

Descrierea Bibliotecii Naționale:

ROMAN-BĂRBUȚI, Gabriel

INDIVIDUAL VERSUS SOCIETY IN THE
DYSTOPIAN FICTION OF THE FIRST
HALF OF THE XX-th CENTURY

/ Gabriel ROMAN-BĂRBUȚI - Iași: Lumen,
2008

Bibliogr.

Pag. 101

ISBN: 978-973-166-092-9

821.111.09

Gabriel ROMAN-BĂRBUȚI

INDIVIDUAL VERSUS SOCIETY
IN THE DYSTOPIAN
FICTION OF THE FIRST
HALF OF THE XX-th
CENTURY

Lumen

Iași, 2008

**Pagin 1 sat
goal inten ionat**

Table of contents:

<i>List of Abbreviations.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Chapter I: From Nowhere to Erewhon: how utopia became dystopia</i>	<i>13</i>
1. a. Man's ancient dream of happiness.....	13
1. b. The dystopian nightmare.....	21
1. c. Dystopia versus utopia	25
1. d. The dystopian classics	26
1. e. Preliminary considerations.....	29
<i>Chapter II: The Dystopian Society.....</i>	<i>31</i>
2. a. The corrupting society.....	31
2. b. Social manipulation in dystopian literature.....	34
2. b. i. Class Organization.....	34
2. b. ii. Propaganda	37
2. b. iii. Physical and psychological constrictions	43
2. b. iv. The absolute power	47
<i>Chapter III: The Individual Accepting Society.....</i>	<i>49</i>
3. a. The Machine Man.....	50
3. b. The Grand Inquisitors	55
<i>Chapter IV: The individual rejecting society</i>	<i>63</i>
4. a. The nature of rebellion.....	63
1. b. The dystopian instigators	65
4. c. The dystopian outsider	70
4. d. The failure of rebellion- some possible causes.....	76
<i>Conclusions.....</i>	<i>83</i>
<i>Bibliography</i>	<i>89</i>

Pagin 1 sat goal inten ionat

List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations have been used in this paper for the main primary sources when giving notes:

- BNW - Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*, HarperCollins, New York, 1998
NEF - George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty Four*, Penguin, London, 1990
WE - Evgeny Zamyatin, *We*, Avon, New York, 1983

Pagin 1 sat goal inten ionat

Introduction

The present paper has as its main theme the complex relationship between the individual and society in the anti-utopian literature of the first half of the XX-th century. As we know, this period has been an extremely prodigious one for the utopian literature, marking a decisive shift of perspective of the utopian imaginary.

The reasons for this will be analyzed in the following pages, both from a synchronic and from a diachronic perspective. We will analyze the literary evolution of the utopian genre and the reasons that lead to its mutations, and also we will try to configure the paradigmatic changes in the collective imaginary that lead to the flourishing of anti-utopianism. We will thus try to understand the causes that lead to the emergence of the dystopian subgenre and to categorize them adequately.

This would also mean a contextualization of the general phenomenon concerning dystopianism, but also, due to the complexity of the writing, of the feelings and ideas expressed in it, from Zamyatin to Orwell, it will also be an attempt at an ampler vision on the matter, having in mind such issues as the origins of moral or the impact society has on the development and freedom of the individual.

The paper will be divided into four chapters and a conclusion, and it will deal, in its opening chapter, with the transition from utopia to anti-utopia, with broad and comprehensive study cases and a multitude of references, and its subsequent chapters with textual analyses of the different relationships between man and his governing society. First, the dystopian social structure and its actions and reactions will be debated and analyzed. Then, in the following two chapters,

making up the main body of the paper, there will be a shift of perspective over to the individual response to society.

The two main individual reactions, that of rejecting and that of accepting society, will be discussed at large and applied to the dystopian writings. As the dystopian literature usually has a fixed schematic, with several human typologies, we will name and analyze the most important of them, namely the “machine-man”, the Grand Inquisitor and the rebel, the critical observer of the decaying world around him. Finally, there will also be an ample talk on the failure of rebellion in anti-utopian literature and what the practical reasons are for this. The conclusions will also have to do with trying to better understand and define dystopian literature and the relationship it has to its times.

The primary sources chosen for this paper are the works of the three great dystopian writers, Zamyatin, Huxley and Orwell (I have mentioned them here in chronological order). Two possible objections can be raised against this choosing: that Zamyatin is not English, but a Russian writer (and this paper is one that should solely focus on Anglophonic literature, as I am trying to earn a degree in English) and the second would be on the discriminative choosing of authors (there are other authors in this period, like for example Arthur Koestler, who have written anti-utopian fiction, why not discuss them too?). To the first, I would answer that Zamyatin has played such an important role, not only on dystopian literature in general but also in its development as a literary (sub) genre in the English-speaking world, that he could not be ruled out. Secondly, the choice of the works of only these three authors is based on the fact that the majority of literary critics consider them as the three founding fathers of dystopia, and that all subsequent dystopian texts have been influenced by one or more of these three authors. In conclusion, extensive quotes from the works of these three will be used to argument and question the validity of several hypothesis and opinions that will be forwarded throughout the paper.

*Individual Versus Society in The Dystopian Fiction of
The First Half of The XX-Th Century*

Besides these primary texts, a varied as possible array of materials will be used in order to explain the different phenomenon underlined, materials ranging from critical works, to philosophical texts, up to internet resources and documentaries and films realized on the subject. All these will have the role not only of aiding me in my research but also in proving the importance and coverage of such a subject to our present-day world.

For although maybe not apparent at first, this topic is of high importance not only in defining an actual stage in the development of the utopian thought but also in configuring the general outline of the real world at the beginning of the previous century, as reflected in the dystopian imaginary. Starting from the hypothesis that the relationship individual-society is a basic one inside the newly emergent dystopian literature and that it has several causes, both internal and external in their nature, throughout the four major chapters with their several subchapters and a set of what I hope to be cogent conclusions on the matter, my objectives will be to set the guidelines of the many interactions that exist inside this relationship and how they affect (and have affected) not only fiction but also human thought in general . In a questioning of the role utopia has for our every day society, more stringent questions will be asked and hopefully answered, in a combination of methods having in mind the textual, the inter-textual and the outer-textual.

Pagin 1 sat goal inten ionat

Chapter I:

From Nowhere to Erewhon: how utopia became dystopia

1. a. Man's ancient dream of happiness

Motto: *An acre in Middlesex is better than a principality in Utopia. (Thomas Babington Macaulay)*

Defining dystopia, its origins and its emergence as a literary genre is an intriguing task. For a long time it was left in the shadow, as a satiric counterpart, while utopia was fascinating humanity and was capturing its imaginative capabilities. Then, at the end of the XIX-th century, something broke in the utopian mechanism. The regrets for an idyllic past or the dreams of a perfect future were being replaced, slowly but surely, by nightmarish dystopian visions. The XX-th century barely produced any memorable utopias, but instead anti-utopias, cacotopias or the utopian satire flourished in this period. Many claimed we were witnessing the end of utopia¹ in the modern conception of the word. What were the causes that lead to this downfall of one genre and the rise of the other? In order to answer this question we must first analyze utopia diachronically as well as synchronically, trying to understand how the temporal, spatial and social mutations in its ideals have affected its evolution.

¹ Herbert Marcuse coined the expression in his 1967 lecture *Das Ende der Utopie*, delivered at the Free University of West Berlin.

The birth of the utopian imaginary is difficult to be traced, as one might say that the wishful thinking behind utopianism is something deeply engraved in the human psyche, a corner stone of human nature, our basic ability to dream. The utopian domain in itself is also highly debatable. What is to be included and what is to be left out of it is one question that has baffled critics, lost in this *labyrinthine institution*² for centuries. Some³ argue that utopia is order winning out against anarchy, while for others Utopia is indeed “a vague term, synonymous almost with the Good Society or the Good Time. It is applied to the dreams and visions of all peoples and all times: from backward-looking myths of the Golden Age to the future prospect of a glorious Millennium, from Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained”⁴. Still, for both groups of thinkers, one thing is certain: the literary beginnings of utopias reach back to the Greek classical antiquity.

Hesiod’s “Work and Days” is the first written account of a possibly utopian past age when men “lived as if they were gods, their hearts free from all sorrow and without hard work or pain”⁵. And if Hesiod’s poem served as the first account of an idyllic lost age (similar to Arcadia or the Garden of Eden), then the passing of utopia from mythology into the history of ideas is clearly attributable to Plato’s “The Republic”. No other writing, not even More’s “Utopia”, has so much influenced the western utopical thought, as every piece of literature that followed acknowledged directly or indirectly “The Republic’s” influence in its construction of the social order, with its “threefold hierarchy of philosopher-kings, executive agents and ordinary producers and artisans; the elevation of public over private life, and the

² Sorin Antohi, *Utopica*, Ideea Design & Print, Cluj Napoca, 2005, p.3.

³ Lucian Boia, *Pentru o istorie a imaginarului*, Editura Humanitas, Bucuresti, 2006, pp.143-148.

⁴ Krishan Kumar, *Utopianism*, J.W. Arrowsmith Ltd., Bristol, 1991, p.3.

⁵ *Apud* Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*, Basil Blackwell Ltd., Oxford&Cambridge (Massachussets), 1987, p.3.

*Individual Versus Society in The Dystopian Fiction of
The First Half of The XX-Th Century*

pervasive control and regulation of daily life; the communism of property, wives and children and the eugenic approach to reproduction”⁶. Plato not only introduced the basic social organisation that would become the classic model for utopianism, but he can also be credited for having set the city (in this case the Greek polis) as the background for all utopian structures. And it is cogent for the main point this chapter is trying to make that Plato’s structures also served as a model for the dystopian writings of Orwell (there are high similarities between Plato’s *Guardians* and Orwell’s *Inner Party*)⁷ or Huxley (the communal property of women, similar to the free sexual habits of *Brave New World*). Communal property and sexual control are to be reconsidered and reinterpreted, over and over, both by utopian and anti-utopian writers.

⁶ Idem, p.2.

⁷ As pointed out in Keith Booker, *Dystopian Literature. A Theory and Research Guide*, Greenwood Press, Westport, 1994, p.60.

Continuarea acestui volum o puteți lectura achiziționând volumul de pe

www.edituralumen.ro

www.lumenpublishing.com

sau din librăriile noastre partenere.

BIG BROTHER
IS WATCHING YOU



Conținutul acestui volum nu
reprezintă în mod necesar
punctul de vedere al Editurii
Lumen sau al finanțatorilor

Publicat cu finanțarea

media
LUMEN

www.EdituraLumen.com