

POST-UTOPIAN SCIENCE FICTION IN POSTMODERN AMERICAN AND RUSSIAN
LITERATURES

by

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Post-Utopian Science Fiction in Postmodern American and Russian Literatures

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines how the new modality of science fiction—post-utopia—incorporates two seemingly opposite discourses, utopian and dystopian, and how an oscillation between these discourses is manifested in the twentieth/twenty-first century American and Russian science fiction. While the simultaneous presence and vacillation between the utopian and dystopian discourses is evident in all the texts, some gravitate more toward the utopian pole, while others favor the dystopian. What my analysis reveals is that American novels exhibit a predisposition towards utopian visions, while their Russian counterparts largely give preference to the dystopian ones.

Specifically, in chapter two, which focuses on the analysis of the American steampunk novel *The Difference Engine* (1990) by William Gibson and Bruce Sterling and the Russian text *The Blizzard* (2010) by Vladimir Sorokin, we are presented with two opposing views on the representation of history: one (utopian), exhibited by the American narrative, envisions history as flexible, while the other (dystopian), exemplified by the Russian text, sees history as unable to receive change. Chapter three, by analyzing the cyberpunk genre through William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) and the Russian texts by Victor Pelevin *Homo Zapiens* (1999), *S.N.U.F.F.* (2011) and Anna Starobinets's *The Living* (2012), demonstrates contrasting attitudes toward the conception of cyberspace. While Gibson, highlighting the detrimental effects of the emerging cybertechnologies, nonetheless acknowledges the utopianism of the technological progress, Pelevin and Starobinets primarily present technology as oppressive means for human

manipulation. In chapter four, which discusses the exemplars of the post-apocalyptic genre—Walter Miller’s *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959) as an American representative, and Georgii Daneliia’s *Kin-Dza-Dza!* (1986) and Dmitry Glukhovsky’s *Metro 2033* (2005) as its Russian counterparts—dichotomous views on the dialectic of the sacred and the profane are exposed. Utopianism here is exemplified through Miller’s novel, which roots its post-apocalyptic setting in a revived mythical time, hoping to attain the sacred. Russian narratives, by portraying an evident disenchantment with the sacred, envision their “after the end” scenarios in a mostly dystopian light. Overall, this dissertation proposes that post-utopian SF reflects the larger tendencies in the postmodernist movement, which has been experiencing a revival of modernist ideals.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Defining Science Fiction

Science fiction, with its rich tapestry of literary manifestations, has been examined in a myriad of studies over the last century and has been notoriously difficult to define. Such scholars as Gregory Paschalidis, Patrick Parrinder, Peter Fitting, Fredric Jameson, Carl Freedman, Phillip Wegner, Edward James, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay attempted to locate the common defining characteristics of science fiction and identify what unites, in one way or another, a remarkable assortment of SF works, that has been growing exponentially over the last century. While the aforementioned critics offer various definitions of science fiction, focusing on different ways in which science fiction can function as a thought-experiment or speculation about the future, their theories largely stem from or encompass ideas developed by Darko Suvin, who in his pioneering work *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* provided the main terminology to describe the peculiarity of the genre. My interpretation of the nature of science fiction also derives from Darko Suvin's famous definition that presumes "cognitive estrangement" and "fictional novum" to be the fundamental elements of any work of science fiction (*Metamorphoses* 4, 12). To me, these two essential literary devices of SF are what separates SF from other realistic or naturalistic works. To elaborate, science fiction as a literary genre presents an alternative imaginary framework with a well-outlined and "totalizing" "novum"—i.e., the world that considerably differs from the readers' own world and functions

according to natural laws that deviate from the readers' empirical reality (64). However, as many scholars (Tom Moylan, Kathleen Spencer, Fredric Jameson, Darko Suvin) attest, though the alternative world in science fiction is defamiliarized, it still, in one way or another, originates from or relates to the readers' own reality. I concur with this point of view and consider such affinity or "recognizability" of the science fictional world with our own to be one of the defining characteristics of science fiction. This is achieved via cognition or logical/scientific explanation that the author offers to his/her readers in order to justify the existence of certain natural laws or technological innovations. To put it differently, the alternative reality posited by science fiction and all the "estranged" occurrences happening there do not go beyond physis (nature) and can be explicated through logic or at least given a quasi-scientific explanation. When it comes to cognitive validity, I do not entirely share Suvin's conviction that scientific ideas in the works of science fiction must not contradict valid science. My perception of the role of science in science fiction correlates more with Carl Freedman's and Istvan Csicsery-Ronay's view on cognition. Both Freedman and Csicsery-Ronay propose that as long as the illusion ("effect") of the cognition is created or a semblance of scientific knowledge is provided by employing or imitating the language of science and technology, then science fiction text has succeeded. Ultimately, it appears that the world in science fiction is simultaneously different ("estranged") from the readers' empirical environment and yet still familiar or recognizable; the natural laws that the science fictional world is founded upon resemble the laws of our reality and yet somehow deviate from them, thereby incorporating, as Tom Moylan suggests, "a realist sensibility in a non-naturalist form" and demonstrating what Suvin refers to as "realistic irreality" (Moylan 43; Suvin, *Metamorphoses* VIII). As a consequence, the presence of the novum, due to its radical newness, also initiates an emergence of other important attributes of SF

text, outlined by Csicsery-Ronay as imaginary society, science and future history that proceeds from the readers' present, neology or invented words/phrases that indicate the "alterity" of this imagined universe, and "technologiade," a distinct narrative mode in which the advancement of science and technology shapes the science-fictional adventures (*The Seven Beauties* 5-7).

On the philosophical plane, science fiction can be characterized as the optimal space for the exploration/testing of the ideas of rationality and science/technology as a cultural project. Generally speaking, science fiction is typically perceived as a literary genre that grapples with the most pertinent questions and phenomena of the twentieth century such as progress and modernity, and examines the disconcerting consequences of scientific knowledge and technological advancements. As Roger Luckhurst contends in his work *Science Fiction*, the term "science fiction" itself emerged in the 1920s and was initially used by Hugo Gernsbeck, the editor of the first American science fiction magazine *Amazing Stories*, in reference to the short stories published there (15). Luckhurst identifies the impetus behind the emergence of science fiction during the first half of the twentieth century in the evident increase of the mechanization of the everyday life following the inventions of Thomas Edison and Alexander Graham Bell (24-25). The blossoming of science fiction occurred mainly after World War II in the 1950s and 1960s when science fiction served as a principal literary means for social critique¹ of the ever-growing consumerism, mass culture, automation, and technological progress. However, it seems that the underlying reason for this critique originates from the disenchantment with Enlightenment thinking and the Enlightenment concept of reason as a whole in the twentieth century. The historical events of the twentieth century, particularly world wars, genocide, the creation of the atomic bomb, the MAD doctrine, have demonstrated that the Enlightenment idea

¹ Many scholars such as Levitas, Goodwin, Plattell, Sargent, Jameson point out that science fiction fulfills a didactic function: it provides criticism of the existing conditions and the status quo, and gestures towards the possibility of social change.

of reason has been misused, abused, and perverted. As Adorno and Horkheimer contend in their influential work *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the emergence of Nazism in the twentieth century symbolizes the failure of reason to bring human emancipation and freedom, and on the contrary proves how the Enlightenment conception of reason can be exploited, precipitating human oppression and tyranny, and reverting back to myth. Hence, in my opinion, science fiction's objective, as a major vehicle for social criticism in the twentieth century, lies in investigating, in multifarious forms and variations, the idea of reason as a cultural project of modernity.

If interpreted not as a method of narrative representation, but a kind of praxis, science fiction can also be viewed as critical means through which history can be perceived and comprehended. Science fiction has always been considered a “speculative” genre, which, via its various “what if” scenarios of alternative historical possibilities, offers a multiplicity of ways to envision the future. However, as Fredric Jameson has famously argued, as we commence our living in the postmodern world during the late stage of capitalism, we no longer can perceive the present as history due to the weakening sense of historicity and disbelief in the possibility of radical change (*Archaeologies* 287). Therefore, science fiction's main goal, according to Jameson, is “not to give us ‘images’ of the future . . . but rather to defamiliarize and restructure our experience of our own *present*,” “enacting and enabling a structurally unique ‘method’ for apprehending the present as history” (*Archaeologies* 286, 288). In other words, science fiction, through estrangement, allows us to critically distance ourselves from the present and be able to look at it from a different perspective, thereby rendering it as a historical process in the making and visualizing ourselves as active historical agents. Thinking along the same lines, it can be argued then that science fiction, especially through the employment of such subgenres as alternative history and steampunk, also gives us an opportunity to grapple with the past,

transform it into a tangible historical experience, and come to terms with it. Ultimately, what science fiction, so elegantly and effortlessly, brings to the table in the age of postmodernity, marked by the disintegration of grand narratives, is the ability to provide us, to use Jameson's term, with "cognitive mapping," i.e., to produce, via imaginative processes, "a vision of the future that grips the masses," create new visions of "totality" that "try to imagine how a society without hierarchy, a society of free people, a society that has at once repudiated the economic mechanism of the market, can possibly cohere" ("Cognitive Mapping" 355). Thus, whether a commentary on the present, past, or future, SF offers us necessary rhetorical tools to understand and find our place in history, and enables us to reclaim the past, dream about the future, and do something about the present.

Utopia/Dystopia in American and Russian Science Fiction

To set up its novum science fiction typically chooses either utopian or dystopian setting to be the framework of its imaginary community. Before examining how science fiction employs utopian and dystopian modalities in American and Russian science fiction in the twentieth century, I would like to briefly delineate major features and central principles of utopia and dystopia as literary genres.

The concept of utopia is a complex and multi-faceted term that conveys a number of definitions. Based on how utopia is interpreted, we can differentiate between a narrow and a broad definition of utopia. A narrow definition envisions utopia as a perfected imagined society and a literary genre or form in which the organization of this alternative ideal society is described. Utopia as a genre has enjoyed great popularity ever since the publication of Thomas More's famous *Utopia* in 1516, which is believed to have established the term "utopia" and

helped define its main genre characteristics.² Some of the most illuminating exemplars of utopian fiction from 16th until 20th century include Johan Valentin *Andreae's Christianopolis* (1619), Tommaso Campanella's *City of the Sun* (1623), Francis Bacon's *The New Atlantis* (1627), Francis Godwin's *The Man on the Moon or a Discourse of a Voyage Thither* (1638), Gabriel Platt's *A Description of the Famous Kingdom of Macaria* (1641), Samuel Gott's *New Jerusalem* (1648), Gerrard Winstanley's *The Law of Freedom in a Platform* (1651), James Harrington's *The Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656), Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* (1872), Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward, 2000-1887* (1888), William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890), H.G. Wells's *A Modern Utopia* (1905).

Two notable critics, Northrop Frye and Darko Suvin, predominantly see utopia as a verbal construct or a literary manifestation of utopian thinking. Frye's definition rests on understanding utopia as a "speculative myth" in which a utopian writer "looks at his own society first and tries to see what, for his purposes, its significant elements are" and then depicts an imagined framework "showing what society would be like if those elements were fully developed" (26). Frye highlights two essential components of any utopian community. First, he claims that utopia is typically described "ritually," meaning that the writer is not interested in describing traits and thoughts of particular individuals but rather focuses on society as a whole, identifying "typical" actions and practices of that community. Second, the utopian society is never chaotic or lawless, but rather is well-organized according to some "rational" principle. Therefore, "the behavior of society is presented as rationally motivated," with certain "prescribed social behavior on its citizens," portrayed as "a product of conscious design" (26-27).

² It should be noted though that utopian writing did appear well before Thomas More's *Utopia*. As discussed by Phillip Wegner, the depictions of ideal societies are "probably as old as human history itself" ("Utopia" 81). They are mainly manifested in the forms of medieval fortunate island story, the "fabulous voyage" story, travel novels, Plato's *The Republic* and *Laws*, "earthly paradises and Golden Age visions of the Judeo-Christian biblical book of Genesis, Augustine's *City of God*, "medieval folk tales of the Land of Cockaigne and of the kingdom of Prester John" ("Utopia" 81).

Suvin characterizes utopia as “the verbal construction of a particular quasi-human community where socio-political institutions, norms or individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author’s community, this construction being based on estrangement arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis” (*Metamorphoses* 49). For Suvin, utopia is then a radically different alternative framework with a focus on socio-political organization of an imagined community, which is not specifically “ideal” or “perfect” but rather significantly “better” than the historical context/environment of the readers’ empirical reality. Also, what is important in this definition is that the estrangement upon which the utopia is built, provides an alternative historical hypothesis to the contemporary order, thereby implying that the alteration is historically plausible: it is not predicated on a transcendental intervention, but is rather derived from humans’ “own forces,” thus revealing the historical contingency and unstable foundation of the current social organization that can be arranged differently (*Positions* 34).

The broad characterization of utopia is not restricted by the “formal” literary tradition with a certain number of texts that stand to exemplify it, but rather is conceived as a broad term that stems from the concept of “utopianism” in general. Utopianism encompasses a plethora of meanings. The most dominant one, of course, simply translates to our immanent wish or desire for a better life. This interpretation of utopian impulse has been expressed by a large number of scholars such as Gregory Claeys, Lyman Sargent, Fatima Vieira, Krishan Kumar, Ernst Bloch, Ruth Levitas, Chad Walsh, Carl Freedman who underscore human proclivity to dream: since ancient times man has always had dreams of a perfect society, as “man is an animal with imagination” and has always tried to “transcend himself and nature” through imagining a better future (Walsh 29). Sargent perhaps summarizes it most accurately when he states that utopian

imagination is a necessary component of our individual and national identity functioning as what he refers to as “social dreaming”—“the dreams and nightmares that concern the ways in which groups of people arrange their lives and which usually envision a radically different society than the one in which the dreamers live” (3). The general phenomenon of utopianism, in its broad conception, can also incorporate utopian social theories, ideologies, political philosophy, urban planning, and actual utopian communities that existed at various periods in history as “practiced” utopias (e.g., the New Harmony community in the U.S. or Soviet communist experiment).

Whether a utopia is regarded as a style of imagination or a genre of literature, the critical function that it performs through its “estrangement” is important to note. Scholars like Krishan Kumar, Ruth Levitas, Martin Platell, Darko Suvin, Tom Moylan point out that utopia’s chief value lies in the fact that through its counterfactual nature it offers a critical insight or commentary on the existing order, exposes its flaws, reveals the conditions for social change and has the potential to precipitate that change by “mobilizing people to political action” (Levitas 191). As Krishan Kumar states in his work *Utopianism*: “Utopia opposes as well as proposes. Its pictures of a fulfilled and happy humanity are premised on the rejection of some social impulses and the elevation of others . . . Utopia confronts reality not with a measured assessment of the possibilities of change but with the demand for change” (107). Thus, utopia can be interpreted as subversive literature that has an important didactic function and can prompt social or political change through its alternative blueprints.

Unlike utopia, which envisions an alternative world with a socio-political structure that is better than the one in our contemporary society, dystopia usually depicts a place that is significantly worse than the readers’ empirical reality: it is an “inverted, mirrored or negative version of utopia, the imaginary bad place as opposed to the imaginary good place” (Claeys

155). While it is true that dystopia has mainly emerged as a critical response or a skeptical reaction to utopian vision, dystopia is not the polar opposite of utopia and surprisingly shares a lot of characteristics with utopia. Dystopia incorporates the literary devices of utopia and also employs the “defamiliarization” technique as its main principle. While portraying a utopia gone awry, dystopia is usually rooted in the utopian socio-political organization and in fact begins as a “realized” utopia, slowly exposing, as the narrative progresses, some fundamental flaws that undermine the foundational utopian values and point to the unsustainability of utopian project. Therefore, dystopia aims to demonstrate what consequences can occur from the rigid discipline, order, rationality, and science so highly revered by the utopian thinking.

There are several factors that undoubtedly engendered the transformation of utopian imagination into dystopian that pervades the literary discourse of the twentieth century.³ Firstly, major historical events of the twentieth century have undermined faith in utopian thinking and prompted the burgeoning of the pessimistic scenarios about the future. As Tom Moylan notes:

Dystopian narrative is largely the product of the terrors of the twentieth century: a hundred years of exploitation, repression, state violence, war, genocide, disease, famine, ecocide, depression, debt, and the steady depletion of humanity through the buying and selling of the everyday life provided more than enough fertile ground for this fictive underside of the utopian imagination. (XI)

Hence, if utopia “takes us into a future and serves to indict the present,” dystopia extrapolates the events of the present into the future, “placing us directly in a dark and depressing reality, conjuring up a terrifying future if we do not recognize and treat its symptoms in the here and

³ My discussion of the reasons for the emergence of the dystopian discourse was first explored in my Master’s Thesis titled *Control and Resistance in the Dystopian Novel: A Comparative Analysis* (2012), and part of my treatment of it is reiterated here on this and the following two pages (p. 9-11).

now” (Gordin, Tilley, Prakash 2).

Secondly, the new technological advances of the twentieth centuries also contributed to the perceptible shift from utopian to dystopian thought as they revealed that modernity with its central tenets of Enlightenment and progress does not necessarily lead to the liberation of humanity, but in fact causes wars, destruction, suffering, and human enslavement (Gerhard, *Control and Resistance* 7-8). As Keith Booker elaborates in his book *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature*, many of the “technological achievements predicted by early scientists like Bacon were being realized” in the twentieth century, and they already “offered hints that science would not have an entirely emancipatory effect on humanity” (6).

Moreover, the disenchantment with utopian experiments in practice, such as, for example, socialism in the Soviet Union, has also undeniably shaped and impacted the dystopian thinking. As suggested by Peter Ruppert, hope in the efficacy of socialism, which has been a significant part of utopian imagination permeating many early utopian writings, disappeared when the October Revolution of 1917, which promised a radical transformation of Soviet society into some kind of utopia, failed (Gerhard, *Control and Resistance* 7). He states that “the failure of socialism in the Soviet Union, once thought to be a model utopian experiment, . . . is sufficient evidence that utopianism is not only ineffective but untenable” (100).

Lastly, the decline of utopian thinking was also engendered by the novel observations in psychology and philosophy in the nineteenth/twentieth centuries which led to the conclusion that human nature is not as “intrinsically” morally good as it was previously believed to be (Gerhard, *Control and Resistance* 7-8). Chad Walsh maintains that Sigmund Freud’s discoveries in psychology had a negative impact on utopian dreaming and significantly undermined faith in the foundational principles of the utopian thought, as they do not provide “a cheerful picture of

human rationality and benevolence”: it turns out that humans have instincts and are driven by passions and desires, which tend to eclipse their rational reasoning (125). George Kateb also proposes that the utopian waning commenced when man was discovered to be a “mysterious being”—“mysterious to himself and surely to others, not fully explicable by his milieu . . . and capable of some spontaneous behavior” (146). These newfound assumptions about the fickle and corrupt nature of human beings certainly had a drastic effect on the dwindling of utopian thinking. Such character traits as rationality, selflessness, and orderliness that are typically expected from people to be able to successfully conceive, develop, and sustain a utopian society, as it turns out, are rather difficult to find. Consequently, the new findings in psychology challenge and call into question the basic foundations and plausibility of the utopian venture as a whole. Thus, tragic historical events of the twentieth century along with the ever-increasing technological advancements, failure of “realized” utopian projects, and freshly uncovered novel understanding of the human psyche instilled doubt in the utopian imagination, thereby fostering the development of the dystopian thinking and ultimately giving birth to the dystopian genre. This genre reflected the fear of what might happen to a utopia if the flawless and well-thought-out organization of the utopian society goes awry and even turns against its own people (Gerhard, *Control and Resistance* 7-8).

While utopia and dystopia exist as stand-alone genres with a rich tradition and history, they can also be incorporated as modalities in a SF text that provide a certain context for the development of a SF story. The relationship between utopia and SF is an interesting one as utopia, according to Suvin, is considered both one of the precursors or “ideological ancestors” of science fiction and its “socio-political subgenre” (*Positions* 38, 42). Science fiction indeed, though a phenomenon of the twentieth century, is rooted in and closely related to utopia, which

can be referred to as its “genre memory.”⁴ SF in a way can be considered utopia’s offspring, albeit in a modified form engendered as a result of the peculiar cultural context of the twentieth century. Utopia and SF undoubtedly share similar features: they both incorporate an alternative imaginary framework and a novum to portray a world that differs from the environment of its author. This invented alternative universe in both utopia and science fiction is nevertheless related in some way to the author’s and readers’ own empirical reality and stands in comparison to it with more or less recognizable concepts and characters. Thus, both literary genres via “defamiliarization” deal with some variations of socio-political issues and other concerns associated with the organization of social life and relations. They possess the same critical function: by presenting a viable alternative world they provide a critique of the existing social order and, in Suvin’s words, function as “counter-projects” to suggest that our society could be organized in a different manner. In that sense, utopia and science fiction are both historically grounded genres since their estranged worlds “arise out of an alternative historical hypothesis” (*Positions* 35). This demonstrates just how much SF has been influenced and inspired by the utopian literary genre and utopianism in general. In that regard, science fiction as a genre is very much grounded in utopian thinking and operates with concepts pertinent to utopian imagination. As Eric Carl Link and Gerry Canavan argue regarding the evident affinity between SF and utopia, “SF is essentially about utopian speculation, either through the positive construction of utopian blueprints or, more commonly in the American tradition, the negative depiction of the wretched dystopias” (9).

Besides sharing a lot of characteristics with utopia in general, SF directly employs the

⁴ The term “genre memory” was coined by Mikhail Bakhtin in his *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* where he identifies the genre of Menippean satire as one of the precursors of Dostoevsky’s polyphonic novel. He explicates that every genre contains archaic elements that it preserves and constantly renews (106). Thus, Bakhtin suggests that though “a genre lives in the present,” it “always *remembers* its past, its beginning” (106).

“formal” or “literary” utopian setting as the framework for some of its plots at the beginning of the 20th century. This incorporation, as Phillip Wegner contends, has caused an interesting shift noticeable in the way utopia is utilized and envisioned in the literary discourse of the 20th century. While previously utopia was mainly associated with a location of “somewhere else,” at the advent of the 20th century, when SF begins to appropriate it, utopia becomes more concerned with “speculations concerning the future” since one of the main features of the science fiction genre is meditation regarding alternative futuristic social blueprints, extrapolated from the events of the present (Wegner, “Utopia” 88). Some of the most prominent utopian SF narratives, most of which seemed to have surfaced at the beginning of the 20th century, include H.G. Wells’s *Men Like Gods* (1923) and *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933), Harold Loeb’s *Life in a Technocracy* (1933), James Hilton’s *Lost Horizon* (1937), Charlotte Gilman’s *Herland* (1915). However, it has to be noted that there is a scarcity of utopian science fiction in the twentieth century in the U.S. mainly because science fiction requires an epical adventure or a conflict as the driving force of its plots, which utopian fiction obviously lacks.

Another significant reason why SF has exhibited a waning interest in utopian settings/visions lies in its fascination with scientific innovations and technological progress seen as principal means of radical social transformation, which begins to experience an apparent crisis around 1920-30s, when a certain nascent yet palpable anxiety regarding the development of science and the cultural/social change that arises from it is beginning to transpire. Consequently, after the 1930s science fiction attempts to modify the utopian discourse as authors begin to doubt in the focal principles of utopian thinking. This is when the parting of the ways occurs between science fiction and literary utopia as science fiction seeks to deconstruct the utopian paradigm by exploring possible complications that can arise out of its major doctrines. After the 1930s science

fiction responds to the widespread disillusionment with the philosophy of the Enlightenment by altering the aesthetics of utopian discourse and becoming more interested in the dystopian paradigm, which has been gaining prominence since the turn of the century. Dystopian thinking indeed dominates the literary discourse of the twentieth century and becomes the prevalent setting of science fictional narratives.

Science fiction stories with predominantly dystopian plots began to appear already in the 1930s in the United States. As I discussed earlier, the crystallization of science fiction as a genre occurred with the establishment of the world's first science fiction magazine *Amazing Stories* by Hugo Gernsback, which incited the boom and popularization of the SF pulp fiction in the U.S. In the 1930s a wide variety of SF texts were being published in *Amazing Stories* from space opera explorations to the popular "mad scientist" narratives. However, already in the 30s we can encounter some SF stories with a rather strong dystopian critique of technological progress and its social implications such as Eando Binder's *Enslaved Brains* (1934) and Campbell's *The Battery Hate* (1933), as well as narratives that are preoccupied with the rise of Nazism, militarism, and totalitarian regimes such as Olaf Stapledon's *Star Maker* (1937) and Katharine Burdekin's *Swastika Night* (1937) (Bould and Vint 53-57). The 1940s are considered the Golden Age of science fiction since this decade saw the rise of such prominent SF authors as Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, and Robert Heinlein, and others, whose fiction deals with such dystopian themes as despotic governments and oppression (e.g., Heinlein's "If This Goes On," 1940), warfare, downfalls of technologically progressive societies and relationship between humans and robots (e.g., Asimov's "Robbie," 1940; C.L. Moore's "No Woman Born," 1944), unfavorable repercussions of utopian rationality and reason (e.g., Jack Williamson's "With Folded Hands," 1947), etc. (61). The science fiction of the 1950s—the historical period in the

U.S. that brought about the fear of nuclear war and global destruction, as well as the rapid spread of consumer culture and automation—continues to utilize mainly dystopian frameworks and explores such themes as nuclear holocaust (e.g., Nevil Shute’s *On the Beach*, 1957; Pat Frank’s *Alas, Babylon*, 1959; Mordecai Roshwald’s *Level 7*, 1959), apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic narratives (e.g., George R. Stewart’s *Earth Abides*, 1949; John Wyndham’s *The Chrysalids*, 1955), ecological disasters (e.g., John Christopher’s *The Death of Grass*, 1956; C.M. Kornbluth’s “Shark Ship,” 1958), incipient emergence of cybernetics and automation (e.g., Philip Dick’s “Minority Report,” 1956; Kurt Vonnegut’s *Player Piano*, 1952), conformity and dissent (e.g., Katherine’s Maclean’s “Feedback,” 1951; Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*, 1953), rampant consumption and consumerism (e.g., Philip Dick’s “Sales Pitch,” 1954; Frederik Pohl and C.M. Kornbluth’s *The Space Merchants*, 1953), etc. (87-96). During this decade, science fiction rids of its “pulp” status, as many authors began to publish their books not just in the SF magazines but with mainstream publishers; the science fiction book market begins to flourish and swell at this time, precipitating a large readership and burgeoning attraction to SF as “serious” literature (83).

Science fiction written from the 1960s till the end of the century is also mainly described as dystopian, continuing to develop themes of overpopulation, mass media, consumerism, urban decay, ecological catastrophes, the unproductive nature of war, feminist and race issues, cybernetic technologies, simulative nature of reality—with a brief return to the utopian SF during the 60-70s, mainly manifested in the feminist writing such as Joanna Russ’s *The Female Man* (1975), Marge Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), and others. However, I argue that after the 1960s despite the inundation of SF novels with predominantly dystopic settings and themes, a new modality of SF emerges, which I will discuss in more detail after a brief history of

Russian/Soviet science fiction during the first half of the twentieth century.

Akin to American SF, Russian literary canon can also boast a robust SF tradition, which has thrived and prospered mainly throughout the twentieth century, though many critics believe that it first emerged in the nineteenth century and was mainly exemplified through utopian visions. Some of the most vivid representatives of early utopian science fiction in Russia can be considered Faddey Bulgarin's *True Un-Events, or Voyages in the World of the Twenty-Ninth Century* (1829), Vladimir Odoevsky's unfinished *Year 4338* (1840), and of course Nikolai Chernyshevsky's *What is to be Done?* (1862), which belongs more to the literary utopia than science fiction. The latter exhibits compelling "communal libertarian" socialist themes which greatly inspired Lenin himself, who even gave his 1902 political pamphlet the same title (Suvin, *Utopian Tradition* 142). The advent of the twentieth century, that was very much saturated with Marxist and socialist philosophies which have been gradually fermenting since the end of the nineteenth century and gained full strength after the Revolution of 1905, engendered some of the most illuminating examples of socialist utopian science fiction such as Alexander Bogdanov's *Red Star* (1908), which depicts a utopian Mars with a distinctly communist socio-political structure and superior technology, Vivian Itin's *The Land of Gongury* (1922), Iakov Okunev's "The Coming World" (1926), Ian Larri's *The Land of the Happy* (1931). A well-known science fiction novel by Alexei Tolstoy *Aelita* (1922), though not purely utopian, nonetheless presents a potent utopian message portraying much optimism regarding main communist principles. Similar to the situation in the United States, dystopian discourse begins to dominate science-fictional stories around 1920s in Russia, with some narratives already emerging at the beginning of the century. The dystopian shift in early twentieth century SF was driven by the apprehension about rapid industrialization and scientific revolution as well as mechanization and reverence of Taylorism

and its main tenets of rationality and regimentation. Thus, short stories by Alexander Kuprin such as “The Liquid Sun” (1913), Valerii Briusov’s “The Republic of the Southern Cross” (1907), Pavel Sakulin’s “Russian Icaria” (1912), A. Rodnykh’s “Rolling Road” (1902), Professor Bakhmetev’s “The Billionaire’s Legacy” (1904) questioned the prospects of science and technology to transform forever Russian social and cultural landscapes, producing unsettling scenarios of looming doom rather than buoyant optimism. Michail Bulgakov’s works such as the novellas *Heart of a Dog* (1925), “The Fatal Eggs” (1925), and the plays *Bliss* (or *Engineer Rein’s Dream*) (1934) and *Ivan Vasilievich* (1936); as well as Alexander Beliaev’s popular novels *The Amphibian Man* (1928) and *Professor Dowell’s Head* (1925), Alexei Tolstoi’s novel *Hyperboloid of Engineer Garin* (translated into English as *The Garin Death Ray*, 1925-6) focused on the lives of “mad scientists” and explored drastic social and ethical consequences of their scientific experiments, fusing social satire with dystopian critique of technological progress. Evgenii Zamiatin’s renowned dystopia *We* (1921), which became an inspiration to George Orwell’s *1984*, is also perceived as one of the best exemplars of early Soviet science fiction that features a dystopian setting. Despite the popular belief that Zamiatin already predicted the horrific consequences of Stalinist regime and critiques the totalitarian oppression in his “anti-Soviet” novel, this work is actually centered around explorations of rationality and discipline of Taylorism as the cardinal precepts of utopian thought. With the establishment of Socialist Realist aesthetic doctrine in 1932 as the only official art form that can be practiced in the Soviet Union, whose main goal was to propagate the communist ideals, depicting realistic everyday situations with positive and idealistic portrayals of Soviet people and Soviet society, production of science fiction, with its fantastical plots and allegorical/symbolic meanings, radically dropped in 1940s and “remained low for the duration of World War II” (McGuire 15).

Despite a rather unenthusiastic response on behalf of SF authors to the ideological and literary demands of Socialist Realism, some SF novels with a predominantly utopian framework and themes did appear from 1930s through mid 1950s. During this period and especially after World War II, science fiction, in addition to adopting Socialist Realist rules, was given another task: to depict events happening in the present or near future “almost on the point of realization” (McGuire 16). This approach was labeled “near target” (“близкая цель”) or “limit” (“предел”) and was supposed to encourage SF works that promote and extoll Soviet science and scientists, focusing on industrial achievements and triumphs that were plausible and “realistic” (McGuire 15). Most popular SF writers at that time were Alexander Kazantsev, Georgii Gurevich, Georgii Martynov who wrote stories with “scientific accuracy,” with “more emphasis on science popularization and less on characterization” (McGuire 16). The period between mid 1950s through early 1960s, called the “Thaw,” during which censorship became lax and the process of de-Stalinization commenced under Nikita Khrushchev, saw another burst of utopian SF writings, precipitated by the feelings of renewed hope in the communist project. Soviet people felt that they were given another chance to restore the true essence of communism which undoubtedly revived the utopian dreaming. During this period, utopian SF novels *The Andromeda Nebula* (1957) by Ivan Efremov and Strugatsky brothers’ *The Land of Crimson Clouds* (1957) and *Noon: 22nd Century* (1962) were published, depicting a resumed optimism in the communist utopia and primarily concentrating on societal issues, paving the way for the emergence of “social” science fiction in the 1960s and 1970s. However, after the 1960s, when the revived utopian enthusiasm has subsided, a noticeable dystopian turn took place in SF, exemplified through the writings of such popular authors as Strugatsky brothers, Ivan Efremov, Vladimir Savchenko, Kir Bulychev, Sergei Lukianenko, Sever Gansovskii, and especially such well-known novels as Strugatskys’

Hard to be God (1964), Efremov's *The Bull's Hour* (1968), Bulychev's *Per Aspera Ad Astra* (1980), which became the principal means for social critical commentary at that time.

Nonetheless, despite the common belief that most of Soviet science fiction after the 1960s gravitated towards dystopian SF, I want to suggest that a new, more complex, modality of science fiction emerged in both American and Soviet literary canons that complicates the traditional conviction expressed by Suvin that science fiction can "be written only between the utopian and the anti-utopian horizon" since "all imaginable intelligent life . . . can in the final instance only be organized more perfectly or less perfectly" (*Positions* 42).

Examples of Post-Utopian Modality in American and Russian Science Fiction

To elaborate on the shift that occurs after the 1960s, in both American and Russian SF alike, I would like to briefly analyze two SF works—*The Roadside Picnic* (1972) by Strugatsky brothers and "The Defenders" (1953) by Philip Dick—that, in my opinion, illustrate cogently this new phenomenon. My brief examination of these works will primarily trace their incorporation of utopian/dystopian frameworks and attempt to reveal their novelty.

Strugatsky brothers' legendary novel *The Roadside Picnic* (1972), which became even more popular after Andrei Tarkovsky's film adaptation *Stalker* (1979), at first glance exhibits all typical features of dystopian SF. Set sometime in the twentieth century in the imaginary North American town of Harmont, the novel depicts a series of events unfolding after a mysterious Visit—a landing of aliens on Earth for reasons still remaining unknown after thirty years. The aliens managed to escape unnoticed; however, upon their departure, six unusual areas, called the Zones, were discovered in different locations across several continents. These Zones, one of which is located in Harmont, contain a large variety of puzzling artifacts, supposedly left there

by the aliens. Besides a number of mysterious objects, the Zones also seem to possess “magic” powers that can inflict serious harm or even kill humans. Because of that humans are prohibited to enter these dangerous places, while a crew of automated robots are being sent there daily to bring trinkets to be scrutinized by the Institute for Extraterrestrial Cultures. However, despite the ban, a whole group of risk-takers emerges called “stalkers,” who enter the treacherous Zones illegally to collect and smuggle artifacts in order to sell them to criminal gangs, government representatives or private organizations which can utilize them for industrial or military purposes. The protagonist of the novel, Red Schuhart, is one of the stalkers, who frequents the Zone first as an “official” stalker employed by the Institute, and later as a “professional” stalker working freelance to support his family. It is through the adventures of intrepid Red to the treacherous terrains of the Zone that we learn about its mystical nature. Indeed, the appearance of the Zone in Harmont transforms the essence of the whole society.

The Zone not only becomes the impetus for the emergence of the “entire industrial, military and scientific bureaucracy, closely interlocking with organized crime syndicates and black market entrepreneurialism,” in a way dividing the already fragmented community even more, but also directly affects everyone who has ever visited it (J. Moore 66). The already dreary and apathetic existence of Harmont’s denizens becomes even more depressing when we learn that the Zone causes phenotypic and genotypic mutations in stalkers despite the fact that there is no radiation discovered in the Zone itself that could have explained such changes. Consequently, stalkers’ children are affected by this mutation: Red’s daughter, whom he affectionately calls “Monkey” is born with “golden fur” all over her body and by the book’s finale is losing her ability to speak and understand people, becoming less and less human (Strugatskys 73). Moreover, the Zone is able to mysteriously “reanimate” the dead, buried there many years ago,

whose corpses now appear here and there in Harmont, walking harmlessly around the town and returning to their previous homes. Also, it appears that those people who fled the surrounding neighborhoods of the Zones right after the Visit, have caused unintentional harm to other people. For instance, more than ninety percent of one barber's clients, who escaped Harmont after the Visit, have died in the course of one year under bizarre circumstances (car accidents, drowning, falling out the windows, etc.) (Strugatskys 139). Some people, who lived close to the Zone, went blind immediately after the Visit, and almost all of them got the plague. Many stalkers themselves have perished or become badly injured during their visits to the perilous Zone. However, finding it hard to make ends meet and make an honest living in Harmont, they keep returning to the Zone, despite all the dangers, over and over again. Also, some of the artifacts brought back from the Zone turn out to be utterly destructive and deadly as evident in the damaging effects of the "hell slime," "silver cobweb" or the "shrieker" (136-137).

In a sense, the Zone's perceptible and almost "alive" spirit has turned the whole town into the "cursed kingdom" now ruled by "bands of destroyers of the spirit: gangsters, the military-industrial complex, impersonal employers, philistines" (Csicsery-Ronay, "Towards" 32). The Zone's clearly dystopian contours with its destructive powers and undeniable calamitous impact on people, who in one way or another come into contact with it, nonetheless, contains one thing that gives our protagonist hope: the rumored Golden Sphere that can fulfill one's utmost dearest wishes. It is this miraculous Golden Sphere, which Red attempts to find in the end, that fills him with hope to perhaps save his daughter from the apparent devolution and reverse the effects of mutation. However, upon finally getting his hands on the Golden Sphere, after purposefully "sacrificing" the life of the young and handsome Arthur, devoured by the "meat-grinder," Red, recalling the dire conditions that have made his and everyone else's life in this town so

unbearable, wishes for “HAPPINESS, FREE, FOR EVERYONE, AND LET NO ONE BE FORGOTTEN” (Strugatskys 193). Rather than satisfying his own wish and asking for his daughter’s health as he originally wanted, Red instead requests “happiness for all.” Thus, interestingly, the despair and darkness created by the Zone somehow gives birth to the hope in goodness, miracle, and possibility of change. Red realizes that he has the only chance to change the situation through the supposed mystical powers of the Golden Sphere and despite an urge to destroy everything (“he knew that it all had to be destroyed, and he longed to destroy it”), the latent rightness awakens in his soul and overpowers his cynicism and resentment, prompting him to long for utopian existence where everyone is happy and free (192). In this regard, his final, to use Csicsery-Ronay’s words, “utopian wish-prayer” is germinated out of the distinctly dystopian darkness, allowing the utopian hope to miraculously arise from it (“Towards” 41). The suspended ambiguous ending is shared with the reader, and even though we don’t know whether Red’s wish will come true, we are nonetheless left with the feelings of hope for a possibility of utopian transformation.

In that sense, it could be argued that the Zone encompasses both dystopian and utopian elements since it oxymoronically contains sinister and utterly menacing artifacts as well as propitious things like the Golden Sphere that augurs the potentiality of positive transformation and can apparently fulfill wishes. Also, while the Zone can undeniably inflict harm on humans, it also reanimates the dead: it can simultaneously kill and revive. Moreover, there are some artifacts found in the Zone, the true purpose of which nobody can understand such as the “wispy hairs” or “black sparks” (Strugatskys 22, 137). During the conversation between Valentine and Noonan, Valentine implies that we can never really fully comprehend, employ correctly or utilize to the full potential any of the artifacts brought from the Zone (138). Even the harmful

objects can potentially be useful for the humankind if only we knew how to apply them properly. Thus, the Zone offers us multiple divergent interpretations which we are unable to cogently grasp. As a result, the Zone cannot be considered either purely dystopian or purely utopian since it contains dystopian and utopian attributes alike. In a way, the Zone functions as a metaphor for technological progress which can be employed either for oppressive/destructive or liberating/beneficial purposes and consequently can precipitate either a dystopian or utopian change.

In a similar fashion, Philip Dick's novelette "The Defenders" (1953) also features what appears to be a principally dystopian framework that lends to the utopian finale. "The Defenders" depicts events happening eight years after a nuclear war broke out between the Soviet Union and the United States. Because of the danger of radiation, Americans and Russians were forced to relocate underground from where they have been devising the war and sending sophisticated weapons to the surface, used and regulated by special robots called "leadys" who continue fighting the war for humans. The story opens with one of the American generals, noticing that the robots, that oftentimes visit humans below the surface and report on the war, are not radioactive anymore. Americans become suspicious and decide to go to the surface to investigate and see what is really going on. Wearing protective suits, a team of Americans reach the surface and to their greatest surprise discover that there is no war going on: the cities and natural landscapes are not ruthlessly destroyed, as the robots previously suggested, and are, in fact, beautifully preserved. After Americans confront the leadys and force them to explain the situation, it turns out that the war came to a halt a long time ago, since the leadys could not justify the reason for fighting. All these years, the leadys have been fabricating the footage shown to the humans, depicting the destruction as a result of the supposed nuclear blasts on

Earth, to keep both Americans and Russians below the surface. The reason why robots have been misleading humans and deliberately keeping them underground lies in the fact that the leadys have been studying history, noticing the pattern in which one group of humans precipitated a war with another group until they both were able to overcome their differences and resolve the conflict. The robots have been keeping humans underground, awaiting the moment when they eventually become ready to forgive one another and halt the fighting, creating one unified humanity. The Americans, upon learning the truth, decide to go back and gather troops to bring them back onto the surface so that they can organize a sneak attack on the Soviets, who they thought were still not aware of the situation. However, the robots, anticipating such a reaction, have managed to temporarily seal all the tubes going underground so that Americans can no longer access it to ask for support. Thus, Americans have nothing left to do but to try and restore peace with the Soviets, whom they meet in the story's finale. The robots suggest that the two conflicting groups attempt to collaborate now to work out their differences and commence a unified existence together in peace and harmony.

Akin to Strugatskys' novel, "The Defenders" also displays a dystopian scenario in which the advanced automatons managed to dupe people and keep them in the dark for over eight years, cunningly "crafting" the illusion of the war the whole time. Moreover, even after the Americans discovered the truth, the leadys were able to exercise their control over humans once again, by preventing people from accessing their underground tunnels, with all their relatives being cut off from them. However, what at first glance appears like a blatant manipulation on the robots' behalf is revealed to be a hidden utopian desire to reunite humankind, with a prospect to establish a truly utopian existence without conflicts, prejudice, and separation. Therefore, the

dystopian discourse of manipulation and deceit was a necessary prerequisite for the blossoming of the utopian dream.

What these two texts demonstrate is 1) the concurrent presence of the two seemingly opposite discourses, utopian and dystopian, that previously didn't appear together within the confines of a single narrative; and 2) the ability of one discourse (in this case dystopian) to metamorphose into the other (utopian). Therefore, what these texts exhibit cannot be simply described as strictly "utopian" or "dystopian" imagination: they pose some kind of a hybrid that incorporates, in various degrees, both of these discourses. As a consequence, what we observe, occurring in both the U.S. and Russia independently, is an emergence of a new type of imagination—which I propose to define as "the post-utopian" imagination, which becomes especially pronounced in the SF works of the late twentieth century, particularly in such SF genres as alternative history, steampunk, post-apocalyptic literature, cyberpunk, splatterpunk, and diselpunk. This new imagination, or modality, of science fiction emerges primarily after the 1960s and combines two almost contradictory notions: on the one hand, it critiques the utopian concept and exhibits dystopian tendencies; on the other hand, while realizing the limitations of utopia, it revives utopian thinking and offers space for utopian imagination and hope. Therefore, utopian/dystopian/post-utopian trichotomy can be considered historical phases in the development of the SF genre: utopia dominates SF literary discourse from the early 20th century till the 1930s (with some exceptions when it briefly reappears again in the 1960s-70s in the U.S. and between 1930s-50s in the U.S.S.R.); dystopia mainly emerges after the 1930s and establishes a strong presence till about the 1960s-70s; post-utopia surfaces after the 1960s and continues to thrive presently. At the same time, utopia/dystopia/post-utopia categorizations also function as

modalities of science fiction representing a special kind of setting and a type of relationship between the present, future, and the past in a SF narrative.

Defining Post-Utopia

Post-utopia as a term was first employed by Boris Groys in his work *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond* describing the nature of the Socialist Realist art and its metamorphoses during the post-Stalinist period in Russia. He asserts that after Stalin's death "the single utopia of the classical avant-garde and Stalinism has been replaced by a myriad of private, individual utopias, each of which, however, thoroughly intolerant of all the others" (78). Thus, post-utopia appears among the ruins of the totalizing utopia of the Avant-Garde and Stalinism and comprises a large number of small individual utopias reflecting the worldview of each individual artist. The post-utopian art was mostly represented by the two dominant aesthetic movements at that time: the conservative "village prose" writers and the Moscow Conceptualists. The village prose writers focused primarily on the "eternal values" that have been allegedly corrupted in the West and now had to be revived in Russia. In an attempt to distance themselves from the West, village prose writers strove to rebel against and halt technological progress as "a nationalist reaction to the monotonously unbroken superiority of the West" (80). In addition, they sought to look back into the past and "resurrect what they imagine to be the 'Russian' humanity" (79). However, Groys highlights that the village prose while trying desperately to divorce itself from the Stalinist venture ended up only replicating it (80). Its highly nationalistic and anti-modernistic tendencies (especially its "nationalistically tinged environmentalism") paradoxically resembled too closely the official art of the Socialist Realism, the one they aimed to oppose (78). The conceptualist artists of the

1960s and 1970s such as Ilia Kabakov, Erik Bulatov, the writer Vladimir Sorokin also embody the essence of the post-utopian art as they regard utopia not as something complete and final, but “as a narrative” that can be redefined and recreated (111). They begin to doubt in “originality” or “authenticity,” but at the same time continue to “search for even greater ‘postmodern originality’” through their art (111). Subsequently, after the collapse of the grand utopia of Stalinism, the Conceptualists create their own “small illusions about reality, fragments of paradise in the everyday,” which are typically ironic and self-deprecating, as they “integrate the myth of themselves as creators and demiurges into the inherited mythology” (111-112). Groys explains his choice of the term “post-utopianism” which was conceived in order to distinguish the Soviet art of the 1960s and 70s from the utopian art of the Avant-Garde during the Stalinist era and the anti-utopian art related to the postmodernist period.

The term “post-utopia” also appears in the work of Keith Booker *The Post-Utopian Imagination: American Culture in the Long 1950s* used to depict the attenuation of the utopian thinking in the US after World War II. Booker notes that his definition of post-utopianism is deeply rooted in Jameson’s characterization of postmodernism which highlights the waning of the utopian impulse and its inability “to project viable utopian alternatives to the present social order” in the age of late capitalism (4-5). The ever-increasing consumerism, cultural identity fragmentation, loss of individualism, failure to perceive present as history, fear of nuclear annihilation—all contributed to the cultural anxieties of the American society and hence became the main impetus for the weakening of utopianism in the American literature of the 1950s. While acknowledging a strong affinity between his post-utopianism and Jameson’s interpretation of postmodernism, Booker doesn’t specify how “post-utopia” differs from “dystopia” and in fact, uses the term “anti-utopianism” and “post-utopianism” interchangeably. Accordingly, it appears

that Booker's "post-utopianism" is synonymous with "dystopianism"—the disillusionment with "the American national narrative" as well as the consequences of the technological and social progress that result in the predominantly pessimistic portrayal of the future in the literary discourse (9).

While I borrow Groys's and Booker's term of the post-utopia, I modify its meaning. Post-utopia in my interpretation does involve an anti-technological and anti-modernist stance that both Groys and Booker discuss. My understanding of the post-utopia combines Booker's dystopian impulse which serves as a major attribute of his post-utopia and Groys's utopian impulse which plays an important role in his perception of the post-utopian art as "private individual utopias" that preserve some semblance of utopian imagination within the post-utopian realm (Groys 78). In my opinion, the post-utopian texts that I will examine in this study simultaneously contain both utopian *and* dystopian discourses, and herein lies the originality of my claim. My definition of post-utopia rests on the existence of a dialectic setting for both utopian and dystopian tendencies within the post-utopian domain that coexist in a symbiotic bond and yet exhibit a perpetual tension. Such tension or conflict between the utopian and dystopian imagination, however, is kept contained. Therefore, post-utopia demonstrates a constant oscillation between the utopian and dystopian scenarios and interpretations.

My characterization of this new modality of science fiction resonates in some ways with Tom Moylan's concept of "critical dystopia," which, as he contends, appears in a SF canon in the 1980s-1990s and "negotiates the necessary pessimism of the generic dystopia with an open, militant utopian stance that not only breaks through the hegemonic enclosure of the text's alternative world but also self-reflexively refuses the anti-utopian temptation that lingers like a dormant virus in every dystopian account" (195). Focusing mainly on the works by Robinson,

Butler, and Piercy, Moylan traces the development of the “critical dystopia” by stating that its main distinction from a purely dystopian text lies in the fact that it “burrows within the dystopian tradition in order to bring utopian and dystopian tendencies to bear on their exposés of the present moment and their explorations of new forms of oppositional agency” (198-199). While definitely reaffirming the main philosophy behind Moylan’s notion of “critical dystopia,” my definition of “post-utopia” not only acknowledges the re-introduction of the utopian imagination within the dystopian discourse but also insists on the peculiar dialectic framework within which the utopian and dystopian discourses manifest themselves within the post-utopian domain, displaying tension and concomitant ability to morph and transition from one discourse into the other.

Generally speaking, the central attributes of the post-utopian foundation mirror Ernst Bloch’s perception of utopia and utopian imagination overall, which as he asserts, are vital to our society as they can transcend reality and gesture toward the possibility of change (27). Bloch especially underlines the open nature of utopia and its playful predisposition—traits that are important for any society to be able to challenge the existing status quo, expose its relativity and simply “imagine” the possibility of the existence of alternative social orders. This unique quality of utopia to be able to imagine a different future serves as a crucial element in any community because it contains a subversive function and has the potential for a revolutionary social change. Without such utopian imagination a nation can stagnate and lose the ability for critical thinking. For Bloch utopia may never be attained, but “it can be worked toward” as “genuine utopian thought is shot through with concrete possibility” (Booker, *The Post-Utopian* 6). Jameson’s view on the function of utopia is also redolent of the post-utopian propensity to regard utopia as unobtainable and yet cherish the utopian impulse as absolutely fundamental in any community.

Jameson claims that in the age of postmodernity and late capitalism the utopian imagination is undeniably declining. However, he believes that utopia is valuable not for offering us a picture of a better alternative future, but for providing us with tools to be able to imagine that better future: it reawakens our desire to desire utopia again: “What Utopia delivers is not the fulfillment of that new reality, or even its blueprint or promise, but rather the imaginative means to help move toward this historical possibility through political struggle” (Moylan 89). “What Utopia successfully brings into view is precisely the ‘machinery’ concentrating and localizing necessity . . . so that new forms and spaces of freedom can come into being” (Wegner, “Horizons” 70). Interestingly, for Jameson science fiction’s deepest vocation, which in his view takes over the function of utopia in the postmodern era, becomes the ability “to bring home, in local and determinate ways and with a fullness of concrete detail, our constitutional inability to imagine Utopia itself” and by doing so, reassert again just how much utopian imagination is necessary to our visions of futurity (*Archaeologies* 289). Thus, oftentimes in many SF texts, the failed attempt to “imagine utopia ends up betraying the impossibility of doing so” thereby producing, amidst the total negation of utopia, “their own . . . utopian texts” (289). In my opinion, the post-utopian imagination embodies exactly that: it reveals that in the twentieth century utopian thinking is indeed in a deep crisis, making utopia more and more impossible to attain, but at the same time maintains that we need utopian imagination to keep us moving forward and provide us with space wherein we can imagine and ponder our future.

Post-Utopian Genres and the Structure of Dissertation

In my dissertation I argue that this new post-utopian modality is principally displayed in the following three SF genres: steampunk, cyberpunk, and post-apocalyptic literature. My study

will show how the aforementioned genres, that are already considered to be well-established genres of science fiction, exhibit the post-utopian imagination and function within the post-utopian modality. By juxtaposing American and post-Soviet works within each genre—William Gibson and Bruce Sterling’s *The Difference Engine* (1990) and Vladimir Sorokin’s *The Blizzard* (2010) (steampunk); William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* (1984), Victor Pelevin’s *Homo Zapiens* (1999), *S.N.U.F.F.* (2011), and Anna Starobinets’s *The Living* (2012) (cyberpunk); Walter Miller’s *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959), Georgii Daneliia’s *Kin-Dza-Dza!* (1986), and Dmitry Glukhovskiy’s *Metro 2033* (2005) (post-apocalyptic)—I aim to discover common characteristics that will define each of the abovementioned SF genres and help to understand how and why steampunk, cyberpunk, and post-apocalyptic literature employ the post-utopian modality. In addition, through comparative analysis, I hope to identify distinctive attributes that distinguish and separate American and post-Soviet works in each genre, giving them their unique literary appearance and style. Finally, by exploring the post-Soviet post-utopianism and placing it in a larger context against the backdrop of American SF tradition, I wish to shed more light on the peculiar nature of the contemporary Russian SF and contribute to ongoing academic research in this area.

Focusing on American and Russian representatives of each SF genre— steampunk, cyberpunk, and post-apocalyptic literature—each chapter, dedicated to one of the aforementioned genres, will reveal that while exploring a particular topic/question such as history (steampunk), the subject (cyberpunk), and progress (post-apocalyptic), each genre is centered around a dichotomous set of matters/issues. Evidently, steampunk dwells on the past/future dilemma, cyberpunk is preoccupied with the technology/power dichotomy, and post-apocalyptic literature focuses on the concerns of progress and history. Each member of the

dichotomous set traditionally belongs to either a utopian or a dystopian discourse and therefore, reveals strong utopian or dystopian tendencies. Specifically, the notion of future in steampunk, technology in cyberpunk, and progress in post-apocalyptic genre are generally attributed to the utopian realm, while concepts typically correlated with the past, power, and historical development are associated with the dystopian discourse. However, my analysis will show that an interesting swap/switch takes place in these genres: what conventionally belongs to the utopian discourse becomes dystopian—i.e., one discourse transforms into or engenders the other and visa versa. Such crossover between the utopian and dystopian domains occurs multiple times in a single narrative, thereby providing an ideal foundation for the post-utopian modality that allows these two discourses to run parallel to one another and grants them fluidity.

CHAPTER II

STEAMPUNK AND THE ITERATION OF HISTORY

Steampunk Characteristics

As a literary movement, steampunk,⁵ which begins to blossom in the late 1980s, constitutes a peculiar branch of science fiction. While considered an independent SF subgenre that has permanently entered the SF literary field and already earned a solid reputation, steampunk is nonetheless interpreted by some critics as a subsidiary of alternative history. Steampunk's connection to the alternative history genre stems from its interest in examining historical contingency, presupposing that the course of history might have been altered, if a certain historical event in the past was modified or had a different outcome. John McKenzie, who characterizes steampunk as “a particular strain of allohistory,” identifies four main tropes of alternative history that are necessarily present in most steampunk fiction (135). He names “reversal of hindsight bias,” “proof of divergence,” “minimal rewrite rule,” and “moment of hierarchy” as fundamental components of any steampunk narrative, albeit in various degrees (140). Specifically, akin to alternative history, steampunk challenges the common misconception that “the past is less contingent than the future” and postulates that “history is and was as

⁵ SF authors have produced a large number of steampunk novels beginning from the 1970s. The most vivid examples include William Gibson and Bruce Sterling's *The Difference Engine* (1990), Priest Cherie's *Boneshaker* (2009), Bruce Sterling's *Islands in the Net* (1988), Tim Powers's *The Anubis Gates* (1983), Neal Stephenson's *The Diamond Age* (1996), Kim Newman's *Anno Dracula* (1992), George Mann's *The Affinity Bridge* (2008), Paul Di Filippo's *Victoria* (1995), Michael Moorcock's *Warlord of the Air* (1971), Harry Harrison's *A Transatlantic Tunnel, Hurrah!* (1972), K. W. Jeter's *Morlock Night* (1979) and *Infernal Devices* (1987), James P. Blaylock's *Homonculus* (1986), Alan Moore's *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (1999), Scott Westerfeld's *Leviathan* (2009), television series *The Wild, Wild West* (1965-69).

malleable as the future,” thereby reversing the hindsight bias (140). In addition, while situating its plots within the historical context of the past, steampunk and alternative history alike take a detour from “true” historical events, while, at the same time, following the minimal rewrite rule, attempting to present their historical deviations as more or less plausible (141-142). “The moment of hierarchy” trope emerges naturally out of the last two as it allows both steampunk and alternative history writers to determine which historical moments will be altered and which will remain the same after the event of divergence takes place (143). However, what distinguishes steampunk from alternative history is that the moment of divergence in the past in steampunk is usually instigated by or derived from the sudden implantation of futuristic science or technology into the past: future encounters the past, interacts with it, and as a result, alters it. Past history is therefore transformed by futuristic technology. Consequently, steampunk thus can be classified as a SF subgenre that, according to a narrow definition, offers a vision of the future-in-the-past, usually set in the Victorian Era of Great Britain, portraying an alternative historical route, saturated with futuristic innovations that are inserted within the past milieu and produce a unique blending of the nineteenth century archaisms and new technologies. The broad definition of steampunk rests on the marriage of the future and the past elements in general, without being bound to a specifically Victorian setting.⁶ As Steffen Hantke asserts, such fusion of the old and the new, “the interplay of the familiar and the alien, the sense of distortion, hyperbole, and defamiliarization” through hybridization “constitutes the basic principle of steampunk” (249).

Steampunk, by revisiting our past and revisioning history, posits that our present, and consequently future, can be modified as well since they are both contingent on the history of the

⁶ Many scholars admit that while originally tied to a certain type of British setting or Victorian aesthetics, the recent explosion of steampunk movement globally no longer necessitates such a framework. Brigid Cherry and Maria Mellins, for example, acknowledge this trend and note that “there are now a number of significant online communities for steampunks, as well as face-to-face groups, outside of the UK in urban locations in the USA, Japan, Europe and elsewhere” (9).

past. Thus, by rewriting the “accepted” past, as proposed by Hellekson, steampunk, similar to alternative history, “speculates about such topics as the nature of time and linearity, the past’s link to the present, the present’s link to the future, and the role of individuals in the history-making process” (4). Indeed, many steampunk authors seek to deconstruct the established Enlightenment perception of history as a linear irreversible progressive development which will slowly but surely lead humankind to an enlightened age and ultimate freedom, as promised by Immanuel Kant. Furthermore, steampunk destabilizes the notion of history as objective recording of events, prompting us to reevaluate history as a truthful representation of reality, and asks us to view it as a cultural construct.

In addition to its speculation regarding the nature of history and the way it is written, steampunk narratives also attempt to offer a commentary on the techno-scientific culture since they trace and ponder the impact of anachronistic placement of futuristic technologies in the past milieu, which serves as the main impetus for historical alternation. Such scholars as David Beard, Mirko M. Hall and Joshua Gunn, Cynthia J. Miller and Julie Anna Taddeo, Nicholas Spencer, Patrick Jagoda, Steffen Hantke, and Margaret Rose maintain that one of steampunk’s primary goals is a critique “of the Whiggish, progress-presuming narrative of technological progress” and its impact on society (Beard XXIV). Hence, besides belying the notion of historical progress, steampunk also endeavors to express concerns and anxieties about the technological progress of the contemporary society. Thus, broadly speaking, it can be argued that steampunk as a genre examines and critiques the concept of progress in general as a key aspect of the Enlightenment philosophy.

Besides the reevaluation of technology and everything it might entail for society, neo-Victorian steampunk texts also attempt to comment on other socio-political issues reminiscent of

Victorian era. Since steampunk wants to re-envision and re-create the Victorian past—which is normally set against a backdrop of imperialistic and patriarchal values—it must, then, redefine and, at the minimum, bring to the foreground the torturous gender, class, and race relations of the Victorian past. Therefore, as Cynthia Miller and Julie Taddeo accurately point out, “steampunk reflects the possibilities for subversion; it is not mere nostalgia for corsets or fantasies of goggles and dirigibles, but another lens through which to examine the racial, class, and gender politics of both past and present” (XVIII). Tellingly, steampunk movement functions as the ideal medium in which our past, oftentimes turbulent and controversial, can be confronted, and all of its most pertinent and contentious issues can be addressed and reclaimed. By doing so, steampunk pursues to also reflect on current societal problems,⁷ or, to use Bruce Sterling’s words, the “instabilities and obsolescence of our own times,” which in some ways are rooted in our imperial and colonial past history (qtd. Vandermeer 13).

All the aforementioned central features and themes that make up the distinctive and striking character of steampunk SF could be cogently summed up and illustrated through Jacques Derrida’s concept of “iterability.” Derrida explores the concept of iterability in his essay “Signature Event Context” where he notes that “every sign, linguistic or nonlinguistic, spoken or written, in a small or large unit, can be cited,” meaning that a sign can be utilized, appropriated, and repeated in a variety of different situations and cannot actually exist by itself as it normally functions through its “citationality” (12). The “citational” properties of a sign precipitate the idea

⁷ Many critics agree that one of the fundamental goals of steampunk fiction is to offer criticism of the present condition. Patrick Jagoda, for instance, contends that steampunk, by “defamiliarizing both the Victorian past and the globalizing present,” “isolates facets of both eras to make them more susceptible to analysis” (48). In a similar fashion, Jay Clayton asserts that “whether as cautionary fable, satire, or allegory, the anachronisms of alternative history” of steampunk “implicitly comment on present condition” (195). Echoing Clayton, Catherine Siemann also proposes that “steampunk’s examination or re-writing of nineteenth century social issues speaks to contemporary audiences, who see in them a reflection of our own concerns. Through its combination of history and speculative fiction, steampunk is uniquely positioned to explore ideas that have their roots in our past, and to consider and critique social and technological solutions of past, present, and future alike (3).

of “iterability,” which according to Derrida, doesn’t merely suggest simple repetition or “reiteration” of the original meaning of the sign, utterance, or event, but rather it implies that within every iteration an alteration of the original meaning is embedded. Consequently, a repetition is then marked by a modification of the original because there can never be “pure” repetition, since each time it occurs in a different context. As Derrida argues, “given the structure of iteration, the intention animating the utterance will never be through and through present to itself and to its content. The iteration structuring it a priori introduces into it a dehiscence and a cleft which are essential” (18). However, despite being altered, each iteration still must include or contain traces of the original so that the act of repetition can be actually detected. In that regard, iteration presupposes new/altered meanings or contexts of the original, thereby demonstrating that a sign can engender different variations/connotations of a single signified and exist in a variety of contexts, which will produce a multiplicity of meanings. Derrida does emphasize though that due to the existence of the infinity of contexts, the mark is not “valid outside of a context” since “there are only contexts without any center or absolute anchoring” (12).

Derrida’s concept of iterability can be useful in examining the fundamental rhetoric by which the steampunk genre operates. If transformed into the context of steampunk, the past itself can be interpreted as a sign, or rather, as a combination of recognizable signs. Thus, iteration, experienced through the framework of history, is indeed at the basis of steampunk genre as it “iterates” a historical past but does so with an alteration/shift – which produces the SF novum through the alteration of the repeated signs. This process reflects not only the uniqueness of steampunk rhetoric but also displays the overarching mechanism of post-utopian science fiction overall: the futuristic or alternative historical reality is perceived as a system of signs or a special

kind of “language” that contains within both the repetition of the known past or present and their shifts, which demand from the reader an interpretation and allow for new meanings and insights to emerge. Deciphering the “language” of reality enables us to understand and envision possible combinations of “signs,” which are also used to build and shape our perception of the present.

As for the utilization of utopian/dystopian discourses, many scholars perceive steampunk as a SF genre replete with predominantly dystopian tendencies since it aims to offer a critique of modernity’s historical and technological progress. However, I propose that steampunk is in fact a much more complex phenomenon than it appears on the surface. Besides the apparent dystopian discourse, it also carves space for a revived utopian imagination. The utopian and dystopian domains coexist in a symbiotic bond and yet display a continual tension, which is kept contained. Exploring the uniqueness of the steampunk genre from the post-utopian viewpoint opens up a possibility for novel ways of looking at steampunk texts and affords, in my mind, much more intricate and manifold interpretations.

Steampunk’s utopian space is represented through the framework of an alternative historical past which is redolent of utopian aspirations, since we are given another chance to revise and rewrite history. What imbues this revisioning of the past with utopian hope is the technological enhancement of society, made possible through the science fictional novum that oxymoronically conflates the progressive future with the simplistic, and in some ways outmoded, past. Thus, the assurance of a positive technological impact that could speed up the advancement of 19th century society and help to drastically improve it in terms of its economic and social development exhibits an indubitable utopian vein. I agree with Michaela Sakamoto, who notes that “the advent of new discovery” embedded in the presence of futuristic technology amidst the Industrial Revolution in Victorian England “holds the promise of Utopia, a perfected world” that

lends this genre its distinct contours (125). Echoing this interpretation, Andreea Vertes-Olteanu too views steampunk as “a genre of hope and idealism,” which “by reusing and rethinking history’s lost dreams and nascent technologies, is determined to offer the world, with tongue in cheek and a shiny brass-and-wood carrying case, a vision of the future that offers restrained optimism instead of dystopian hopelessness” (227).

The dystopian discourse typically seeps through when the utopianism of technological progress begins to wear off and its harmful effects are starting to surface, exposing its “potential for disruption, even in an era accustomed to change,” and thereby forever transforming the essence of the Victorian society (Miller and Van Riper 87). Therefore, what we witness is a concomitant appreciation and apprehension towards technology in steampunk texts, which is clearly exemplified through the aforementioned dialectical relationship between utopian and dystopian discourses. Sakamoto observes this phenomenon as well and points out that since technological modernization encompasses “both its positives and negatives,” a common motif in steampunk is “the battle between ideals” as steampunk incorporates “both excitement and also immense anxiety over technological breakthroughs” (127). Another way dystopian dimension reveals itself in steampunk texts becomes evident through its interrogation of the concept of history and its critique of historical progress as envisioned by the Enlightenment. The unifying linear progression of history that modernity considered to be the main and only prerequisite of attaining better human conditions and resulting in some kind of “enlightened” utopia is commonly questioned in steampunk texts and revealed to be unattainable.

This chapter will focus on the analysis of two representatives of the steampunk genre in American and Russian SF discourses—William Gibson’s and Bruce Sterling’s novel *The Difference Engine* (1990) and Vladimir Sorokin’s novella *The Blizzard* (2010)—and will

examine how each of these texts operates within the post-utopian modality. First, I will identify how steampunk main features and themes are presented in each narrative. Second, I will outline in what ways utopian and dystopian discourses manifest themselves in each steampunk text and what relationship they exhibit. Finally, I will attempt to establish common motifs and traits that unite American and Russian steampunk movements as part of the post-utopian science fiction, while also exploring ways in which they differ, displaying their own unique features, resulting from the peculiarities of their distinct cultural contexts.

William Gibson's and Bruce Sterling's *The Difference Engine* as Steampunk Novel

Steampunk Features

William Gibson's and Bruce Sterling's novel *The Difference Engine* is considered and widely accepted as the canonical text of the steampunk genre that has not only originated the steampunk literary movement but also has contoured the key conventions and major principles that give this literary genre a unique appearance and style. All the aforementioned steampunk features are undeniably palpable in this novel and have been analyzed by a considerable number of scholars such as Patrick Jagoda, Karen Hellekson, Herbert Sussman, Steffen Hantke, Phillip Wegner, Jay Clayton, Nicolas Spencer. While I also intend to explore the steampunk elements presented in this novel and identify how they yield an ideal foundation for the coexistence of the utopian and dystopian discourses, I would like to discuss them through the lens of Derrida's concept of "iterability," which, as I suggested above, will allow to shed more light on the distinctive nature of the steampunk genre and help to better explicate its main characteristics.

To begin with, *The Difference Engine* is a compelling exemplar of the narrow characterization of the steampunk genre that imagines a "re-created" society, generally set

against the backdrop of the Victorian England. As a representative of steampunk, *The Difference Engine* occupies a cusp between the “real” and the “fictional,” being rooted in the true historical milieu and yet deviating from the “familiar” historical trajectory via the inclusion of science fictional elements from the future, and thereby producing not only the alternative past, but influencing the course of history in general. This traditional steampunk framework evokes the ethos of Derrida’s iterability since the “event,” Victorian Britain’s history of the 1800s, is taken out of its familiar historical context and is “repeated” or reproduced but in a different context, shaped by the addition of the fictional or anachronistic innovative technologies. By being situated in a new context, the event is thus modified, but encompasses some remnants of the original event so that it can be deemed “alternative” (or so that “the act of repetition” can be recognized). Thus, in *The Difference Engine* Gibson and Sterling depict Victorian England of 1850s, which, however, is altered because it is introduced into a different context, that becomes possible due to Charles Babbage’s invention and completion of his famous Difference Engine,⁸ an original computer that performs complex arithmetical functions by using punch cards for its programming, which was proposed in real life by Babbage in 1822, but was never finished due to the lack of financial backing from the Tory Government and Babbage’s engagement with other scientific projects (Clayton 192). It is this futuristic technology, anachronistically retrofitted onto Victorian framework—which in actuality appears in the 1930s when Alan Turing “formalized the notion of a computer as a general-purpose symbol manipulator”—that utterly transforms the essence of the English society and changes the course of British history as we know it (Swade 170). The counterfactual Britain we are presented with still resembles the true historical past of

⁸ As rightfully underlined by many critics, though Gibson and Sterling use the name Difference Engine for Babbage’s invention in this novel, the computer that we encounter here is more sophisticated and is likely related to Babbage’s later invention called the Analytical Engine. The Analytical Engine, as Jay Clayton proposes, had most of the elements of the contemporary digital computer such as “punch cards for input data, internal memory storage, a central processing unit (called, in Babbage’s industrial-age vocabulary, the “mill”), and printed output” (192).

Victorian period and “iterates” a lot of its distinguishable tropes such as the Industrial Revolution, the Luddite movement, the Great Stink, etc., but because it is “cited” in a different context, it acquires a number of modifications and therefore gains a different meaning. Similar to Derrida’s observation that “there are only contexts without any center” since a sign is not valid outside the context, the alternative histories of steampunk also challenge the common misconception of the idea of history as something that is singular, stable, and objective by blurring the line between fact and fiction and suggesting that “there is no such thing as Victorianism—there are only interpretations of it” (Hantke 247).

Iterable Characters

If the alternative historical framework of steampunk usually carries traces of the “original” historical past, it tends to incorporate real historical people to emphasize historical possibility and give the appearance of the “authentic” past, but since we are presented with a deviation in history, arising out of a new context, the destinies of these historical figures also deviate from their real-life counterparts. Resonating with Derrida’s iterability, the imagined society in *The Difference Engine* features a plethora of real historical personages such as Lord Byron, Charles Babbage, Ada Byron, John Keats, Benjamin Disraeli, Laurence Oliphant, Thomas Henry Huxley, etc., whose biographies are partially kept intact (“repeated” from the original), but are also partially modified or “fictionalized,” as is history itself (the degree of alteration, or the proportion between the “true historical” and “fictional” varies for each character). The social change in this alternative historical universe could not but transmute the renowned Romantic British poets into aficionados of science and technology. As Joseph Conte astutely points out, “in the world of the *The Difference Engine*, Analysis, or computation, not

poetry, is the highest form of art” (43). Thus, John Keats appears as a clacker and an adept programmer of Enginery, specializing in kinotropy, while Lord Byron now occupies a prominent political post of the Prime Minister and champions the idea of a technocratic society, promoted by the Industrial Radical Party (Gibson and Sterling 471). It is well known that Byron in historical reality, besides being a prolific poet, was also a politician, held a seat in the House of Lords, which he joined in 1812, and became one of the few defenders of Luddism in Parliament. Byron was well aware of the conditions of the workers in the Midlands at that time and their organized protests against “shoddy mass production that threw them out of work,” which he addressed in his “radical” Maiden speech in 1812, expressing his concern over the afflictions of the common people and blatantly speaking out against the Whig administration’s bill to “make frame-breaking or ‘Luddism’ a capital punishment” (Franklin 9). Later, his support of the working class found its way to his creative writing, when Byron wrote a poem titled “Song for the Luddites”⁹ (1816), encouraging the exploited workers to fight for their freedom. In contrast to his sympathetic attitude towards Luddites in real life, Luddite movement in the novel becomes Byron’s true nemesis as it represents a valid threat to his progressive political agenda: Byron has to ruthlessly suppress the “proletarian Luddites” and launch an uprising against Duke Wellington and the Tories to obtain his power (Gibson and Sterling 454). Other characters in the novel do

⁹ As the Liberty lads o'er the sea
Brought their freedom, and cheaply with blood,
So we, boys, we
Will die fighting, or live free,
And down with all kings by King Ludd !
When the web that we weave is complete,
And the shuttle exchanged for the sword,
We will fling the winding sheet
O'er the despot at our feet,
And dye it deep in the gore he has pour'd.
Though black as his heart its hue,
Since his veins are corrupted to mud,
Yet this is the dew
Which the tree shall renew
Of Liberty, planted by Ludd!

not differ so significantly from their historical counterparts, and are only slightly modified. Lady Ada Lovelace's character resembles greatly the historical figure of Augusta Ada Lovelace, the only legitimate daughter of Lord Byron, who received an exceptional education in mathematics (uncommon for women at that time), personally met with Charles Babbage and was fascinated with his idea of the Difference Engine,¹⁰ translated from French into English Luigi Federico Menabrea's essay "Sketch of the Analytical Engine," and herself wrote a program "for computing Bernoulli numbers" which "constituted the first program for a computing machine" (Conte 40). Despite her extraordinary erudition and insight into the workings of the Engine, some scholars believe that Ada in fact didn't have as much of an input into the design and conception of the Difference or Analytical Engines as most of the examples of the programs she used in her Notes were developed earlier by Babbage himself (Swade 166). Nevertheless, other scholars do admit that Ada, already at that time, noted and anticipated the great intellectual benefits of the Analytical Engine, which will be discovered later in the contemporary general-purpose computer: she proposed that the Analytical Engine can be conceivably used for "advancing mathematical thinking by clarifying logical procedures," gesturing towards "the computer simulation of cognition" (Baum 73).

In the altered Britain of *The Difference Engine*, Lady Ada is also a mathematical genius and a well-known and highly revered "Queen of Engines," who becomes the programmer of the Difference Engine and a Modus, which is at first perceived as a gambling system, but later is discovered to be a program that completely sabotages the famous French Engine, called the Great Napoleon Ordinateur. In that regard, because Babbage is only briefly mentioned in the

¹⁰ The wife of Ada's mathematics tutor recollected Ada's genuine interest in Babbage's Engine: "While other visitors gazed at the working of this beautiful instrument with the sort of expression, and I dare say the sort of feeling, that some savages are said to have shown on first seeing a looking-glass or hearing a gun—if, indeed, they had as strong an idea of its marvelousness—Miss Byron, young as she was, understood its working, and saw the great beauty of the invention" (Swade 167).

novel, Ada is characterized as the main impetus behind the feats of the Difference Engine and represents the crux of the intellectual nucleus in this alternative society. In this text, Ada is endowed with more agency than historical Ada as she is single, enjoys the company of many suitors (“her biographical counterpart marries William King” with whom she has three children), and can freely deliver her scientific speeches to the Royal Society (which would have been unfathomable for women at that time) (Conte 41). Similar to historical Ada Byron, Lady Ada in this novel also has a gambling problem and is addicted to laudanum.¹¹

Other characters in this text who are based on the true historical prototypes include Benjamin Disraeli, a writer and a Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of two terms (1868; 1874-1880) who contributed greatly to the formation of the contemporary Conservative Party, but who in this alternative past appears as a sensation-novel writer and a “man-of-affairs” with a somewhat questionable reputation, who “knew . . . all the backstage intrigues in the Commons, all the rows of publishers and learned societies” (Gibson and Sterling 219). Laurence Oliphant, a British diplomat, world-traveler, writer, a secret agent, and a Zionist, who spent a lot of time and effort to organize a purchase of a piece of land in Palestine to establish a commune for persecuted Russian and Romanian Jews there, whose “national revival,” as he believed, “could only happen on the soil of Israel,” in the novel is also a diplomat, a travel book writer, a detective and a spy who, instead of religious issues, is preoccupied with the newly-evolving technologies of the Engines and their possible applications for surveillance purposes (Taylor 208).

The historical actors, whose biographies have been modified and adjusted to reflect the quintessence of the alternative English society, interact and coexist with the fictional characters

¹¹ According to Doris Langley Moore in her book *Ada, Countess of Lovelace*, Ada developed an addiction to laudanum when she was first diagnosed with a severe digestive disorder in 1843 and later asthma. She was prescribed laudanum for treatment and quickly became addicted to it. As Moore contends, laudanum “was obtainable with the utmost ease—any child could buy sixpennyworth over a chemist’s counter—and many responsible persons grew to be addicts without apprehension of doing themselves harm” (158).

in this text. However, most of the fictional characters such as Sybil Gerard and her father Walter Gerard, Sybil's client and lover Mick Radley, and her ex-lover Charles Egremont, have also been borrowed from other literary texts—specifically Benjamin Disraeli's novel *Sybil, or the Two Nations* (1845), a well-known novel in Victorian Britain about class warfare—and “re-written” akin to historical figures (Hellekson 81). As Karen Hellekson contends, Gibson and Sterling's employment of Disraeli's characters in their novel echoes steampunk's “what if” principle: the authors wanted to ask, “What would have happened if the characters in Disraeli's novel had been affected by the computer age?” (81). This again echoes the Derridian concept of iterability, since the fictional characters from one book are placed in a different context of another to see how the new conditions can influence them and change their original meaning. The virginal, lower-class girl Sybil from Disraeli's narrative, who is the epitome of beauty and purity, marries the rich and powerful Charles Egremont, thus creating a union between people from two different classes, gesturing towards the idea that England too should reconcile the two “nations” within it—the working class, stricken by poverty and degradation, and the upper class aristocrats, who lead extravagant lifestyles, ignoring the problems and suffering of the lower classes (Hellekson 81). The hope expressed by Disraeli for the class reconciliation in *Sybil* is shattered in the alternative world of *Difference*, which could not but radically warp the lives of these characters: in Gibson and Sterling's version of Victorian Britain, Sybil becomes a prostitute, and instead of wedding Egremont, she is seduced, ruined, and abandoned by him, who, similar to Disraeli's novel, also holds an important political title, a seat in the Parliament, which highlights and reinforces even more the gap between their classes (Clayton 191). Mick Radley, a teenage boy in the original text, here is a grown-up man, a clacker, who becomes Sybil's lover and reveals to her important information about the mysterious box of punch cards he is in a possession of (Hellekson 81). A

fervent working-class radical, Walter Gerard, Sybil's father, who shares with Egremont all the injustices that the working-class people have to endure in *Sybil*, is also a Luddite leader and an agitator in *Difference*, responsible for the first wave of Luddite revolt, who is executed by the Rads in their ruthless response to the Luddite movement.

Iterable Narrative

The marriage of the “real/historical” and “fictional/ahistorical,” which permeates the majority of steampunk narratives, does not merely end with the employment of characters in *Difference*. The authors freely blend authentic documents that were written in the “true” Victorian Era into the neatly sewn tapestry of their fictional narrative. Besides Disraeli's novel, Gibson and Sterling incorporated Lady Ada's actual *Notes* that she added to her translation of Menabrea's “Sketch of the Analytical Engine,” certain passages from which appear almost word for word in this novel (Conte 41). In addition, the final iteration of the novel titled “Modus,” which contains various fragments from plays, posters, letters, speeches, etc. written by Gibson and Sterling, also integrates, as Hellekson notes, “real historical artifacts” from the Victorian Era press (80). The reader, of course, is not aware of which letters are fiction and which are not, and therefore, “must accord them all the same status” (Hellekson 80). Besides the real historical documents inserted within the layers of the fictional text, the authors also took and “re-wrote” many passages drawn directly from Victorian journalism and sensation novels such as Mary Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, which they candidly admitted during their interview in Toronto in 1991:

. . . a great deal of the intimate texture of this book derives from the fact that it's an enormous collage of little piece of forgotten Victorian textual material . . . Virtually all of

the interior descriptions, the descriptions of furnishings, are simply descriptive sections lifted from Victorian literature. Then we worked it, we sort of air-brushed it with the word-processor, we bent it slightly, and brought our eerie blue notes that the original writers could not have. (Fischlin, Hollinger, Taylor 8-9)

Thus, even on the narrative level, the “true historical” is embedded within the fictional framework—blurring the line between history and fiction—which points once again towards steampunk’s proclivity to play with concepts of historicity and historical artifacts, emphasizing the contingency of history and highlighting that any historical event is simply a narrative created by historians, just like a work of fiction is written by an author. Such “recycling” of the historical documents, taken out of their original contexts and then placed within a fictive text, with no or some modifications, intended for a different audience, directly resonates with Derrida’s concept of iterability, as according to Derrida “writing in general is always iterable since, in its very legibility, it always calls to an ‘other’ beyond those empirically present at the scene of inscription or reading” (Wortham 78). Thus, for Derrida, the text should remain readable with the absence of addressee or sender, and should be able to function “beyond (or in the absence of) the ‘living present’ of its context of production or its empirically determined destination” or “beyond the death of any empirically determinable producer and receiver” (Glendinning 70). A piece of writing then can obtain or change its meaning based on the context within which it is situated and its audience, as it is not limited to a fixed interpretation and can be “cited” in a variety of contexts. Borrowing and reappropriating somebody else’s writing, as is the case with Gibson and Sterling, serves as an exemplar of a postmodernist text, which, as Roland Barthes asserts in his essay “The Death of the Author,” lacks the conventional authoritative figure of the author who imposes and controls the meaning of his work because the meaning resides in the language itself,

not in the intention of the author (148). For Barthes, a postmodernist text sets writing free from any intended meanings or fixed interpretations since “to give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing” (147). Consequently, a postmodernist narrative, as evidenced in *Difference*, comprises a conglomeration of “multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation” intended for the reader, who exists “without history” (148).

Besides the style, the narrative structure of the novel itself bares a very rich and elaborate design and thus deserves a special attention. The novel consists of five sections called “iterations” (instead of chapters) and a concluding “Modus,” which are essentially vignettes that tell a story of the three main characters, Sybil Gerard, Mallory Edward, and Laurence Oliphant, whose destinies become intertwined and connected in one way or another, and revolve around a mysterious box of Engine punch cards, whose true purpose is being held in secret from the reader till the very end. Thus, each narrative episode depicts a life of a different character, which on surface seems to be unrelated to the whole, but yet adds and contributes to the constitution of the single story, albeit told from different perspectives and even different time periods, thus making this novel a telling example of the postmodernist text. Many scholars, such as Patrick Jagoda and Karen Hellekson, analyze the meaning of the iterations drawing from the “computer science concept of repetitions or recursions of a process that take place within a program” and produces a desired outcome (Jagoda 50). Hellekson, for instance, maintains that each iteration works to create a whole or achieve a certain final result in the end; however, in *Difference*, “the end doesn’t appear to be a condition set by the programmers” and “the result doesn’t have to do with the actions of the novel but with the themes”: “the creation of the All-Seeing Eye” (79). Neither Hellekson nor Jagoda, however, delineate what exactly is repeated in each iteration,

except for mentioning that some of the characters intermingle and re-appear in several iterations under different circumstances. While it is useful to examine the implication behind the narrative iterations via computer concepts, especially since in the end it is implied that the book was in fact composed by a narratron¹²—a sophisticated AI or the All-Seeing Eye—thus envisioning each iteration as a kind of surveillance report, I propose to analyze the “iteration” structure of the novel through the lens of Derridean “iterability” (as they literally carry the same name).

To do that, we will have to find an “iterable mark” or a repeatable constituent in each chapter and identify how it is used or how its meaning changes depending on the context. The repeatable element in each iteration is a box of milky-white Engine punch cards that circulates through the narrative frame from one iteration to another. Its repeated appearance and reappearance under different circumstances, like Derrida’s iterability, is marked by an alteration: each time the box of cards emerges in a different context, interweaving another layer into its mysterious essence and purpose. The events in each iteration do not follow chronological order so that readers themselves must link all the narratives together and reconstruct the story, trying to trace the whereabouts of the precious box of punch cards. Chronologically the action begins in the second iteration, when Mallory Edward receives a box of punch cards from Lady Ada Byron herself, whom he encounters at the steam-gurneys race, and following her request, hides them in the skull of a dinosaur at the Museum of Practical Geology, which we learn about in the third iteration. Then the story leaps all the way to the Modus part, which reveals, through the deposition of a security guard before Magistrate, that the head of the dinosaur, Leviathan, went missing along with the box of cards that was inside of it. Luddites, led by Captain Swing,

¹² Gibson and Sterling in their interview explicate the role of the narratron in the novel by stating that: “The story purports in the end to tell you that the narrative you have just read is not the narrative in the ordinary sense; rather it’s a long self-iteration as this thing attempts to boot itself up” (Fischlin, Hollinger, Taylor 10). Sterling also directly admits that “the author of the book is the narratron; it’s sitting there telling itself a novel as it studies its own origins” (Fischlin, Hollinger, Taylor 10).

Bartlett, and Marquess, are believed to be responsible for the theft as the dead body of Marquess was found on the floor by the dinosaur, and Mallory's apartment got burglarized earlier. Then a stack of perforated cards appears again in the first iteration in the possession of Mick Radley, who tells Sybil Gerard, his lover, about the extraordinary nature of these cards and things they could do with them. It is implied that Mick's cards are a version of the cards stolen from Mallory by the Luddites as we learn from the fifth iteration about a letter found in Mick's apartment stating that he created, through certain manipulations, a version of the cards he was shown before and that he was confident that this version could be run successfully as well. Mick's cards are then sent to France by Sybil upon Mick's request, which are later picked up there by Sybil herself after she flees London. In the fifth iteration we find out that Sybil in Paris gave the cards to a Frenchman Theophile Gutier, who used them on the Grand Napoleon ordinateur and significantly damaged it. Finally, only in the Modus section of the novel do we learn about the true essence of the punch cards from Ada's speech, in which she admits that the perforated punch cards, a Modus, is a highly advanced innovative computer program that she designed herself. Moreover, as it is implied from the novel's finale, it is probably Ada's Modus that served in the future as the foundation for the creation of the All-Seeing Eye, an advanced surveillance system. Such a labyrinthine narrative structure, which as Conte asserts "weaves its own algebraical patterns," "performing something like an analytical engine in its iterations," iterates itself through a series of loops by placing the Engine punch cards each time in different circumstances, thus adding on new information to their cryptic function (43-44).

Emerging in multiple contexts and different iterations throughout the novel, each time under new circumstances and in the hands of different characters, the function of the punch cards changes and so does their meaning, depending on what character acquires it. For instance, for

Ada a box of punch cards represents a pinnacle of computer science and technological progress that will revolutionize, in its core, the way we live and function as society. She perceives it with an evident utopian hope, as having a great potential to positively transform the essence of contemporary world. For Luddites, who so desperately seek to seize the box throughout the narrative, the punch cards become the symbol of power, echoing the theme pervading the entire novel—“knowledge is power” (Gibson and Sterling 219). They not only use a version of punch cards for subversive goals—to sabotage the French Engine system—but also hope that with the help of the Modus they will be able to discredit the Rads and gain political control over Britain. For Mr. Oliphant and the new government of Charles Egremont, which now works closely with the Central Statistics Bureau and the police, the box of perforated cards, which they intend to use for surveillance purposes, also symbolize omnipotent power and control over the British populace, revealing their possible dystopian application. Mick Radley, one of the Luddite members, also uses the box to not only help with the Luddite cause but also to manipulate and exercise his control over Sybil: he promises Sybil that if she helps him to smuggle the punch cards to France, he will be able to erase her “number.” For Sybil, then, the box represents an empowered existence and freedom since the cards can disrupt the operation of the Engines of the Government machine, that stores all the information regarding its citizens, and grant her a new life. Thus, the box of punch cards, in almost all the contexts, stands to exemplify “power.” However, “power,” a repeatable element, is used or understood in different ways by each character in the novel, thereby imbuing it with a different meaning, similar to how an “iterable” sign is marked by a modification of its meaning upon changing its contexts.

Thematically, *The Difference Engine*, akin to most steampunk works, by imagining an alternative world, distancing the reader from both present and past, provides a critique of the current society, focusing on the socio-political issues reminiscent of Victorian era such as gender, class, and race questions. While working on reclaiming and revisioning these important issues from the past, steampunk uses this opportunity to recognize and understand similar problems that our own contemporary society is experiencing right now. However, it should be noted that steampunk narratives sometimes fail to offer redefined, alternative visions of either gender, race, or class relations of the Victorian past with a critical reevaluation of the established patriarchal or imperialistic attitudes towards them, and in most cases end up only reinforcing them. Indeed, while some authors attempt to recreate the past “yearning for an age of elegance and politeness” (Strongman 7), when things were simpler, slower, and when “the destructive potential of science was still largely unrealized” (Beard XXIV), others reconstruct the rhetoric of empire instead, inadvertently glorifying its main attributes through “self-idealization and affirmation” (Stimpson 28). According to David Spurr, “this rhetoric is deployed on behalf of a collective subjectivity which idealizes itself variously in the name of civilization, humanity, science, progress, etc., so that the repeated affirmation of such values becomes in itself a means of gaining power and mastery” (110). Thus, steampunk, while aspiring to reassess the Victorian past and its romanticizing of pro-imperialistic attitudes towards racial, class, and gender issues, frequently reproduces and endorses them (Stimpson 34).

Such is the case with *The Difference Engine*: its alternative world, while ostensibly trying to redeem and reclaim the gender and class stereotypes of the Victorian era, doesn't really contest or subvert them, but rather replicates them. This is particularly evident in the way the authors chose to portray women in the novel. The minor women characters we encounter in this

text are fallen women, like Hetty, hired by Mallory to satisfy his corporeal needs, who are forced by the circumstances to make ends meet by prostituting themselves; or a Cheyenne woman Mallory encounters during his expedition to America, who agrees to exchange sexual pleasure for “a new needle” and who is described by Mallory in rather animalistic terms like a “poor creature” with an “animal smell” (Gibson and Sterling 225). Mallory’s sexual acts with both the Cheyenne tribal woman and an English prostitute, in fact, share a lot in common, evoking animalistic imagery—besides acknowledging the animal smell of the Cheyenne widow, Mallory compliments prostitute Hetty on her beautiful physique calling her calves and thighs “the marvels of mammalian anatomy”—and thus relegating both women to the status of a “sub-human,” an object, void of any agency (261). Other women characters, who occupy more significant positions in the plot, do not quite challenge the Victorian ideals regarding womanhood, autonomy, and identity either, except for, perhaps, Lady Ada Byron, who possesses a mathematical genius that no other woman had at that time.

Sybil Gerard, a daughter of the original Luddite agitator Walter Gerard, is also a prostitute who exclusively provides services to high-profile politicians and upper-class gentlemen. Gibson and Sterling give this character a chance to gain some semblance of agency and independence by making her quit her profession of “fille de joie” and becoming “an adventuress”: starting a new life in Paris (with a new citizen number), working for Mick Radley and his Luddite cause. However, as we learn from the first iteration, becoming an adventuress means following the orders of your employer, Mick Radley, who forces Sybil to shoplift, work as a shill and a crowd manipulator during Sam Houston’s speech, and also to pleasure Mick when he is in the mood for it. As Gibson and Sterling themselves reveal in their Toronto interview regarding their treatment of women in the novel, “if you want to be a Victorian

adventuress, you have to put aside everything that makes you a lady, everything that makes you a respectable citizen as a female in Victorian England,” implying that even the role of an adventuress (which ostensibly offers more freedom than being a prostitute) does not grant her enough autonomy to gain agency and subjectivity in this Victorian England (Fischlin, Hollinger, Taylor 12). And even when Sybil manages to escape to Paris and seems to be endowed with an opportunity to start her life anew, she is still constricted in her choices and is still dependent on men to conceal her identity. She has to marry a man she doesn’t love in France so that she can remain incognito and avoid being arrested by the police. Thus, even though the lives of these women are “rewritten,” they are not substantially modified; in fact, they “iterate” the destinies of the typical Victorian “lost” women and are not saved/redeemed by the alternative context.

Lady Ada Byron is probably the only female character in the novel who exhibits agency, free will, and is somewhat independent. Unlike other women in the novel who have to sell their bodies to make a living and are exploited by men, Ada uses her brain and superior knowledge in mathematics to achieve an equal position with men in this patriarchal society and as a result, is highly respected by the prominent political figures and intelligentsia such as Charles Babbage, Mallory Edwards, etc. However, despite being known in the high society as “the Queen of Engines” and “the Enchantress of Numbers,” Lady Ada has also earned an unfavorable reputation of a “Gambling Lady,” who not only squanders all her profits at the wagering-machines, but also “sells off her wardrobe, . . . stretches her credit amongst those she deals with” and even “pawns her honor to her intimates in vain hope to recover her losses” (Gibson and Sterling 464). Her crippling addiction has now left her penniless and has forced her to travel across America and France so that she can deliver scientific lectures in order to provide for herself. Ada is also being criticized for “vilely prostituting and throwing away” her “womanly

affections, which should have been consecrated to children and husband” (464). This disagreeable image of the computer genius Ada is reinforced further by Hetty, the prostitute hired by Mallory, who tells him—rumor has it that Lady Ada is “the greatest whore in all of London” as “she fucks whoever she pleases, . . . she’s had half the House of Lords, and they all tag at her skirts like little boys” (265). Thus, despite her impeccable reputation as an extraordinary mathematician, her reputation as a woman is significantly tarnished in this Victorian society, and she is constantly deemed as an immoral woman, helplessly succumbing to her weaknesses (Clayton 193). Consequently, the authors’ depiction of women does not challenge the conventional/stereotypical view on femininity and appears to be rather in sync with the way they were portrayed and treated in the historical Victorian era. As Clayton accurately points out, “the congruence between this predominantly male genre and Victorian sexual norms reveals that, in regard to sexuality at least, this novel is appropriating rather than interrogating the past” (194).

Utopian Discourse

The utopian discourse in this novel manifests itself in a multitude of ways. First, steampunk’s intrinsic affinity with the alternative history genre in its attempt to re-envision the Victorian history and thus present an alternative historical past undoubtedly exhibits a utopian dimension. Generally, utopia, being a historical category, by imagining a better alternative future with a transformed socio-political organization, points toward the instability of the present and implies that the contemporary socio-political structure is a construct and can hypothetically be altered. The utopian sensibility in the steampunk genre works similarly but is oriented towards the past. Steampunk’s capacity to re-create and re-write history anew with a rare opportunity to

alter, enhance, and redeem it, is certainly redolent of utopian thinking. As Elizabeth Guffey contends, steampunk always contains “a hopeful urge to transcend time, plunder a specific historical moment, and apply its lessons to the future” (442).

The utopianism of the revision of the past is also undergirded through the employment of the futuristic technologies that are conflated with the past milieu in steampunk. The anachronistic placement of the contemporary technologies in the Victorian setting assuredly divulges a utopian potential that is embedded in the technological progress of the modern age and makes us participate in the “what if” experiment, imagining the ways in which advanced technologies of the present could modify the essence of the Victorian society during the Industrial Revolution. Charles Babbage’s successful completion of the Difference Engine, the novel technology, has a significant effect on the make-up of the British society. In this counterfactual Britain, not only does this invention catalyze the emergence and political success of the Industrial Radical Party, which rises to power in 1830 with Lord Byron as its Prime Minister, laying the foundation for the ultimate rule of “savants and capitalists,” but also prompts a major shift of power by replacing aristocracy with meritocracy, enabling intelligentsia to enjoy all the privileges of the elite class (Gibson and Sterling 27). As suggested by Helena Esser, the technocratic society in *Difference* “elevates scientific and industrial leaders such as Charles Darwin to peers and national heroes” (23). The emergence and burgeoning of the “scientific” Royal Society Palaces in South Kensington, each dedicated to a particular popular scientific field, validates an incredibly prominent status that science and technology occupy in this society. The new capitalist party endorses and promotes technological progress, precipitated largely by Babbage’s Engines, “sweeping a whole generation in its wake, like some mighty locomotive of the mind,” and facilitates the emergence of a new value system, lionizing science, “clacking,” kinotropy,

thereby instituting an age of information technology in Victorian Britain a hundred years earlier (Gibson and Sterling 150). Patrick Jagoda maintains that “this shift in power and in Britain’s political dominance,” “attributed largely to the Engines,” suggests that “technology, while not categorically determinate of socio-political reality, reflects social trends and enables political transformation,” revealing “many links between techno-science and power in our world” (49-50).

The advent of the new technocratic elite supported by the “Rad Lords” with their political agenda involving a grand-scale technological transformation of the whole society encompasses a distinctly utopian streak. Babbage’s creation of the Engine evokes the familiar tropes of the technological revolution in the age of modernity where the major element of the Enlightenment – progress—rests upon the ever-evolving and ever-progressing science, capable of producing technology that will supposedly liberate the whole humankind. As proposed by Mirko Hall and Joshua Gunn, who rely on Benjamin and Adorno to define the role of technology, technological innovations can be used for “both progressive and regressive means” (8). To achieve a progressive outcome, they claim, technological progressive potential has to be maximized and its “potentialities must be actualized in the service of emancipatory inventions” by scientists “together with progressive political intentions” in order “to positively transform the world” (8). Thus, the utopian potential of science and technology to drastically alter our society to attain a more fruitful life permeates most utopian thinking which typically imagines a better world that becomes possible mainly due to the advancements in technology and science.

Indeed, most utopias, beginning from approximately the late sixteenth and seventeenth century, incorporate the incessant desire to expand human knowledge of the natural world and thus put a special emphasis on the scientific and technological innovations, which are considered

to be the impetus behind their better alternatives. As Krishan Kumar explicates in *Utopianism*, some of the first few utopias that introduce science and highlight its importance in the conception of a more perfect world are Andreae's *Christianopolis* and Campanella's *City of the Sun*. In these texts, science plays a more vital role than in prior utopias, like for example, in More's *Utopia*, but is still largely "subordinated to spiritual ends" (54). It is not until Francis Bacon penned his famous scientific utopia *The New Atlantis* (1624) with its Solomon's House of Research that we see science and technology being extolled on a much larger scale and viewed as one of the main, if not the main, components of utopian modeling, enabling people to understand and study nature, and move our society closer towards utopian future. The idea of conquering nature and using scientific experimentation to advance society forward as part of the progressive nature of utopias, intertwining democracy and science, became the "implicit" "premise of the modern utopia," starting from Bacon (54). In addition, the expansion and productive utility of scientific knowledge later became one of the key constituents of the Enlightenment concept of progress that has also contributed tremendously to the utopian project as a whole. The Enlightenment optimism toward science and reason as the main driving force of evolution that was thought to initiate and ultimately result in the furtherance of knowledge and progress permeated European philosophical thought in the 18th-19th centuries and became one of the major aspects of the utopian thinking as well. As described by Fatima Vieira in her article "The Concept of Utopia," French philosophers Anne-Robert Turgot "associated the idea of the inevitability of progress with the idea of infinite human perfectibility," while Marquis de Condorcet proposed that history is always moving towards progress, and man can speed up that movement through science (10). Thus, "history was now envisaged as a process of infinite improvement, and utopia, in the spirit of euchronia, was presented as a synchronic representation

of one of the rings in the chain of progress,” buttressed and fully supported through scientific and technological potentialities (10).

Such ardent utopian optimism toward the emancipatory facets of science and technology was especially pronounced, as Guffey and Lemay note, during the Industrial Revolution, whose “combustion engines, automation, telegraphy, and electricity” “encouraged the most expansive of optimistic speculations” and created visions of “mechanized utopia” (435). The utopian zeal towards practical application of science and technology is apparent in *The Difference Engine* and is exemplified through the speeding up of the Industrial Revolution evident in the mushrooming popularity of steam-gurneys (that in real life didn’t enjoy much commercial success), large paddle-steamers, and sophisticated military artillery used to subdue the Luddite movement in the novel (Gibson and Sterling 151). The social implications of the new technologies, as Jagoda explicates, are manifested through the use of the Engines in the Central Statistics Bureau “as a resource” for Parliament and police to gather data on the British citizens and alleviate the tracking down of the criminals, the Rads’ timely and successful response to the Irish Potato Famine due to the new technologies, and overall eradication of poverty and “greater stability throughout England” (49). The deepest utopian hope in the technological potential to revolutionize our life, however, is placed on Lady Ada’s latest creation in the novel—the Modus—which, if used on a more advanced Engine, has “the capacity to look upon itself” and will have “self-examination” capabilities that can transform the essence of science and technology as we know them (Gibson and Sterling 478). Ada’s perceptible utopian enthusiasm that her program, which as Ada speculates will have similar properties as the contemporary conception of the AI,¹³ might somehow someday transfigure the whole humankind and have a

¹³ It should be noted that in real life Ada discusses the possibly inflated capabilities of the Analytical Engine in “Note G” and suggests that it can only follow instructions of the programmer, but not originate anything like, for instance, artificial intelligence: “The Analytical Engine has no

positive impact on our society, altering it in an indubitably productive and beneficial way. While Lady Ada's dream does come true, and by the novel's finale we bear witness to the emergence of such a cutting-edge "super-computer," which is in fact a living entity, "a thing" that grows ("an auto-catalytic tree, in almost-life, feeding through the roots of thoughts on the rich decay of its own shed images"), which contrary to Ada's hopes, is utilized for the massive scale surveillance purposes, the tremendous utopian potential of such an invention should not be overlooked (486). As Herbert Sussman argues in his article "Cyberpunk Meets Charles Babbage: *The Difference Engine* as Alternative Victorian History," despite the dystopian ending, the invention of the Modus in the novel is of high importance as it can serve as "the potentially liberatory replacement in our own time of a centralized authoritarian information technology" (12). Sussman finds the "liberatory" qualities of the punch cards in their ability to sabotage the Great French Engine, which represents the interests of the centralized government, and in their potential to subvert the status quo and the dominant powers (corporations, government, etc.) if they are specifically targeted to disrupt the supremacy of "the disciplinary social order" (12).

Dystopian Discourse

Despite the apparent utopian dimension explicated above, the dystopian discourse is also present in this novel and has to be explored. The dystopian domain is represented mainly through the critique of the technological progress, which has 1) undoubtedly influenced and sped up the Industrial Revolution in England, aggravating even more the environmental issues stemming from it, and 2) drastically transformed the Victorian society by establishing a panoptic police

pretensions whatever to *originate* anything. It can do whatever we *know how to order* it to perform. It can *follow* analysis; but it has no power of *anticipating* any analytical relations or truths" (qtd. in Baum 82). Ada's character in the novel foresees a much brighter future for the Analytical Engine, speculating "that the Analytical Engine could enable the higher functions of consciousness" serving as the prototype of the modern day AI (Conte 41).

state with the help of Babbage's Engines, that are now being employed for surveillance purposes. In addition, the dystopian discourse is also manifested in the way the concept of history is treated in the novel: the Catastrophe theory that the authors clearly propagate challenges the Hegelian view on history as well as opposes the main principles of historical materialism, advocated by the Luddites and other Marxist supporters in this text.

Technological Progress and its Impact on Environment and Society

As said, the utopian hope that the Engines in this alternative history will help to advance the Industrial Revolution and move the society forward toward progress, unfortunately, result in the dystopian outcome: the horrific effects of the Industrial Revolution on the environment and social structure in the actual Victorian England are replicated and, in fact, are even more exacerbated in this alternate world.

The Industrial Revolution occurred in Britain between 1760 and 1830 and is largely characterized by the introduction of the technological innovations and power-driven machinery to the economic landscape of the British society (Tomory 152). The advent of industrialization had a tremendous effect on the environment: the rapid growth of factories and coal consumption led to the increase of air pollution in London and other big cities. In addition, the problems with the sewer system that flowed directly into the rivers, including Thames, coupled with the toxic waste, produced by the gas companies, that was also dumped into the rivers, gave rise to the horrific contamination of the water. The ecological problems stemming from the Industrial Revolution's use of technology are exemplified in *The Difference Engine* through the description of the Great Stink that pervaded the streets of London during the summer of the year 1858, during which the extremely hot weather made the smell from the river Thames, polluted with

sewage and industrial wastewater, completely unbearable (Halliday 204).¹⁴ Gibson and Sterling's critique of the technological progress becomes most scolding in the scenes with descriptions of the Great Stink, wherein one of the main characters, savant Edward Mallory, walks down the streets of London and is appalled by the unprecedented air and water pollution. The sky, which "was a canopy of yellow haze," is compared to "some storm-fleshed jellied man-o'-war": "its tentacles, the uprising filth of the city's smokestacks, twisted and fluted like candle-smoke in utter stillness, to splash against a lidded ceiling of glowering cloud" (Gibson and Sterling 205). The Thames too is described as a "putrid, disease-ridden tidal sewer," "thickened with ingredients from breweries, gas-works, and chemical and mineral factories" with "putrid matter" hanging "like vile seaweed from the pilings of Westminster Bridge" (221). While the description of the Great Stink in the novel, aggravated by the creation of the Engines, echoes the actual historical Great Stink in England, the outcome of it produces much more significant social consequences than in real life. The repulsive stench from the river in the novel makes thousands of Londoners flee the city, leaving it empty to the delight of the teenage gangs, who rob and pillage the stores and produce an utter chaos and anarchy in the streets, behaving like wild savages. Even the police and the Army, who "had been called in by an emergency committee" to patrol the streets, were being bullied by the pillaging mobs and soldiers (309).

The ecological stress from industrialization is doubled by the social upheaval in the historical England, also directly stemmed from the Industrial Revolution, which was caused by the Luddites, who suddenly found themselves unemployed due to the implementation of

¹⁴ Just three years before "The Great Stink" a famous scientist Mr. Faraday noticed the disastrous pollution of the Thames and described it in a letter, published in *The Times*, warning the Parliamentarians in the Palace of Westminster to take action: "I traversed this day, by steam boat, the space between London and Hungerford Bridges . . . The whole of the river was an opaque, pale brown fluid . . . The smell was very bad, and common to the whole of the water . . . If we neglect this subject we cannot expect to do so with impunity, nor ought we to be surprised if, ere many years are over, a hot season gives us sad proof of the folly of our carelessness" (Halliday 204). *Difference* depicts what indeed happened three years later, as predicted by Faraday, when the hot summer of 1858 brought about the horrific stench from the river that became known as "The Great Stink."

machinery and began organizing riots. In the novel, we become witness to how the second wave of Luddism gains prominence against the backdrop of social pandemonium of the deserted streets of London triggered by the Great Stink, as if implying that one event is inextricably connected with, and perhaps even spawns, the other. It is evident that Luddites took advantage of the all-pervading havoc and public emergency caused by the Great Stink to orchestrate their rebellion. This public upheaval created suitable conditions for the authors to insert their commentary on the class relations in this alternative Britain, a common steampunk theme as I mentioned above, which simultaneously exposes and grapples with the class matters from the past and reflects on the similar issues in our contemporary times. The conversations between Captain Swing and Mallory during the battle scene underscore the great class divide created by the Rads in this alternative society, widening even more the gap between the educated elite and the working class. Since this novel is basically a “rewriting” of the industrial novel by Disraeli *Sybil*, which can be interpreted as a plea for the unification of the two disparate classes in England—the aristocratic upper-class and the lower working class—the alternative society in *Difference* completely inverts Disraeli’s plot and shows that the class gap has not been eliminated in England and is, in fact, wider than ever. Moreover, the alternative history of *Difference* has not transformed the nature of the “traditional” class divide in this novel, but simply “reshuffled” it, resulting in the binary opposition between those who have access to information technology (the class of the enlightened savantry) and those who don’t (the laborers). Thus, in the battle scene between Mallory and the Luddites wherein the insurrectionaries start an armed uprising against the Rads and the savants who support them, it becomes clear that the radicals’ goal here is not the machinery-smashing that the actual “historical” Luddites instigated as a way to show their disapproval of the mechanization of skilled

labor, but the acquisition of technology, mainly Lady Ada's Modus, with the help of which they hope to gain the omnipotent power and obtain "the futurity" itself (360). Thus, *Difference's* alternative setting, which modifies the conventional social stratification between classes that are now mainly differentiated based on the ability to obtain and possess information technologies, not only reveals the class tensions pertinent to Victorian Britain but also manages to address some of the problems that we are currently facing as a society, making it relevant to the twenty-first century audience.

Gibson and Sterling's commentary on modern techno-scientific culture is exemplified even more through the discourse of the Babbage's invention of a computing machine which impacts this alternative English society in many ways. Besides the Industrial Revolution, Britain in *Difference* also undergoes the Information Revolution which turns the Victorian society, as Clayton argues, into "a full-blown information order, complete with massive databases on citizens, surveillance apparatus, photo IDs, credit cards, rapid international data transmission via telegraph, and scientific societies that serve as unofficial intelligence arms of the military" (190). If at the beginning of the novel we learn that the Central Statistics Bureau that employs the Engines for storing data on the citizens is "simply a resource" "for Parliament and the police," by the novel's end after Byron's death, the Bureau is taken over by the department of Criminal Anthropometry and works directly for the police with the approval of Charles Egremont, a dangerous and corrupt politician, who gains unlimited power upon Byron's death (151). The employment of the Engines in the Central Statistics Bureau under the supervision of Criminal Anthropometry implies the "historical transformation from sovereign to disciplinary to control society," wherein technology is used by the police in order to establish an omnipotent power of the panoptic state in which everyone can be easily found, traced, or erased (Jagoda 52).

The narrative is peppered with a myriad of examples of how this alternative society implements the Engines for surveillance purposes and how one's life can be changed due to the information stored on the Engines. At the beginning of the novel, we learn of the great power of the Engines when Mick offers Sybil Gerard to flee to Paris and start a new life there. He tells her that the move could be easily achieved if her "number," that would allow the police to track her down effortlessly in London, was changed in France, enabling her to acquire a new identity, void of her past history: "A new number in the Government's machines—that would mean a new life. A life without a past" (Gibson and Sterling 28). In the third iteration, we are introduced even more into the mysterious world of the Engines that are employed for the Central Statistics Bureau and Quantitative Criminology to identify, locate, and capture any criminal in England. During the conversation between Mallory and Wakefield, we learn that with the help of the Engines the Department of Quantitative Criminology keeps "a brotherly eye on the telegram-traffic, credit-records" by "turning raw Engine-data into workable knowledge" and gathering information on everyone in Britain "who's ever applied for work, or paid taxes, or been arrested" (152, 160). This scene at the Central Statistics Bureau "vividly suggests the historical application of new information technology," the mass-produced Babbage's Engines, "as instrument of surveillance in the nineteenth century" (Sussman 7). Later on, Mallory is being blackmailed by the Luddites who demanded that the Modus be returned to them, and if not, then Mallory's reputation will be tarnished since they know his "number," his identity, history, and "are fully cognizant of his every weakness" (Gibson and Sterling 198). The finale of the novel, which transfers the reader into the 1990s, reveals what the collaboration between the Central Statistics Bureau and Criminal Anthropometry ultimately results in: the inception of the All-Seeing Eye, a surveillance device similar to AI that can track, monitor, and analyze everything: "from the flows

of traffic, of commerce” to “the tidal actions of crowds”—a direct descendent from the Babbage’s Engine (471). In this regard, the novel portrays what happens when technology, which has a great utopian potential to change and bring progress to society, is used by the government to manipulate and control the masses, i.e., when “technological machinery and the machinery of power are connected and co-productive” (Jagoda 50).

Catastrophe Theory

Another prominent dystopian feature that this text exhibits is its view on history that seems to challenge the Hegelian conception of history and go against the ideas of historical materialism. The novel champions the philosophy of the Catastrophe theory, articulated and advocated by the famous paleontologist Edward Mallory, who besides adopting this theory in his scientific research also interprets history through its lens. Catastrophism in this text serves as a direct opposition to another conception of history presented in this novel—the historical materialist vision of history, exemplified through the ideology of Captain Swing and his Luddite supporters. The propagation of the Catastrophe theory here is also “metatextual” as it echoes and closely correlates with the central principles of the alternative history genre itself, putting a strong emphasis on the contingency and abrupt changes that can alter the course of history. Resultantly, the precipitous transformation of the British society in the alternative universe as a result of Babbage’s Engines in this novel also serves as another example and proof of the Catastrophe theories.

The Catastrophe theory is chiefly represented through the character of Edward Mallory, a paleontologist, a Fellow of the Royal Society and an accomplished scientist in the newly emerging meritocratic elite of England, who, by developing and espousing the Catastrophe

theory in his research, contradicts the commonly accepted Uniformitarianism at the time, which believed that the Earth and its geological landscapes were formed slowly as a result of “gradual and gentle processes,” and that the laws of nature of our present work by the same mechanism as the ones of the past, and are universal in their essence (Hugget 3). According to the Catastrophe theory, the early advocate of which was a prominent French paleontologist Georges Cuvier, the formation of the Earth throughout centuries has been influenced by the sudden cataclysmic events, like natural disasters and periodic devastations, that destroyed the extant species and spawned the appearance of new life forms in their place, evidenced in the fossils found in rocks (Hugget 4). Catastrophism didn’t quite yet establish a solid reputation in the nineteenth century evolutionary debates, prompting Mallory to be constantly defending its validity and giving lectures with an attempt to give evidence to support his view. His expedition to America proved fruitful, and he seemed to have uncovered a lot of dinosaurs’ bones, the scrupulous study of which could verify his theory. In his conversation with Huxley, Mallory admits:

The Uniformitarian faction wishes these creatures to seem dull and sluggish! Dinosaurs will then fit their slope of gradual development, a slow progression to the present day.

Whereas, if you grant the role of Catastrophe, you admit a far greater state of Darwinian fitness for these magnificent creatures, wounding as that may seem to the vanities of tiny modern-day mammals on the order of Foulke and his cronies. (142)

By the end of the novel, we find out that right before his death Mallory learns about one of the most significant discoveries, confirming his theory: a recent paleontological expedition to the Pacific coast of Western Canada found strange and unknown creatures that “bear no relation to any known creature from any known period whatever,” some with five eyes and a “long clawed

nozzle instead of a mouth,” others with “no head, no eyes, no gut,” but with “seven tiny pincered mouths” (367). Mallory dies with an unwavering belief in the rightness of his theory.

Mallory’s scientific viewpoints, rooted in the Catastrophe theory, give rise to his understanding of the nature of history, that contradicts the popular “Whig history,” prominent at that time in Great Britain, which places great emphasis on mankind’s inevitable advancement forward from primitive forms to civilization and the ultimate attainment of progress, freedom, and enlightenment. The Whig conception of history was largely inspired by the Kantian view on Enlightenment, the idea of inevitable historical and technological progress, and Hegelian philosophy, which interprets history as a progressive force, developing gradually through time, unfolding in multiple stages and inescapably moving forward toward the improvement and achievement of human freedom. As Herbert Butterfield suggests in his work *Whig Interpretation of History*, because the Whig historian perceives history as a continuity, he examines “the past with reference to the present” and by doing so, “gives an over-simplification of the historical process” (11, 40). Therefore, the Whig historian tends to think that “there is an unfolding logic in history, a logic which is on the side of the Whigs and which makes them appear as co-operators with progress itself” (41-42). Whig historiography, in some aspects, also resembles Marx’s historical materialism as it assumes that history progresses through predetermined stages of development, from primitive to more advanced, reaching the final stage—communism—which is supposed to establish the classless and stateless society of equality and happiness.

In contrast, Catastrophe theory, applied to the concept of history, envisions history as something that is affected by abrupt, spontaneous changes or events that shape and influence the course of history. Such a view on history is expressed in the novel by Mallory, first during the conversation with Mr. Fraser and then, during the battle scene with the Luddites. While walking

down the streets of London, flooded by the rioting mobs and unruly gangs due to the environmental crisis, Mallory, observing the chaos, tells Fraser that this situation could have been avoided if bureaucrats studied Catastrophist theory: “It is a concatenation of synergistic interactions; the whole system is on the period-doubling route to Chaos!” (Gibson and Sterling 240). Later on, when Mallory reaches the gate of the Palace of Paleontology, he comes to the realization that out of Chaos change will come and a new order, as the Catastrophism presupposes, will arise: “He realized . . . that the lurching madness of Chaos had reached its limit. Within the faltering maelstrom, a nucleation of spontaneous order had arisen!” (294). And finally, at the novel’s climactic scene of the shootout between Captain Swing and his supporters and Mallory, when Marquess proclaims: “But since studying the writings of Karl Marx—and of course the great William Collins—it has come to me that some dire violence has been done to the true and natural course of historical development” (343); Mallory’s response is: “History works by Catastrophe! It’s the way of the world, the only way there is, has been, or ever will be. There is no history—there is only contingency!” (344). Interestingly, Marquess’s Negro agrees with Mallory when he declares: “You were right, sir, and he was quite wrong. There is nothing to history. No progress, no justice. There is nothing but random horror” (344). As suggested by Phillip Wegner in his analysis of the Catastrophe theory in the novel, the fact that Mallory and his brothers suppress Swing’s uprising, it becomes apparent that Mallory’s ideology prevails as “we literally witness the destruction of any possible competitors to this vision of history” (“The Last Bomb” 147). In this regard, Mallory’s position echoes the postmodernist take on history of Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo, who in his book *The End of Modernity* not only contests the idea of progress promoted by Enlightenment thinking but also calls for the dissolution of the modern understanding of historical process as “a unitary one which can be described as rational

and consequential” (9). Vattimo proposes to get rid of the concept of “historicity” which he interprets as modernity’s main means to create a narrative of the past events that form a unifying story, “a universal history,” cohesively connecting past with our present in order to produce a common cultural memory or legitimate the current historical/political agenda (9). By suggesting that there is “no unitary and privileged history,” Vattimo, akin to Mallory, claims that there are “only different histories” or different historical scenarios, which are not necessarily connected to one another, but are made to appear “unitary” and progressive retroactively by modern historians (9).

Responding to the aesthetics of postmodernism, Catastrophism and the genre of steampunk in general prefer to regard history as a space in which a playful re-organization or “re-shuffling” of different “histories” can take place similar to the way an “iterable” sign can be re-shuffled in various contexts, therefore challenging a perception of history as an absolute/objective truth or a “unifying” narrative. To illustrate how Catastrophism aptly reflects steampunk’s proclivity to play with conventional understanding of history as a truthful recording of events, I would like to explore briefly Thomas Kuhn’s concept of the paradigm shift, which is intricately connected and emanated from the Catastrophe theory’s fundamentals. Thomas Kuhn in his famous work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* contests the methods of the “normal science” which acquires theories through “development-by-accumulation” in which “scientific development becomes the piecemeal process by which these items have been added . . . to the ever growing stockpile that constitutes scientific technique and knowledge” (2). Normal science, according to Kuhn, engages too often in the “puzzle-solving,” where certain problems are “assumed to have solutions” by employing the paradigm established in that scientific community (37). A scientist follows specific rules in solving the puzzle, which “limit both the nature of

acceptable solutions and the steps by which they are to be obtained” (38). However, if a particular puzzle cannot be solved and “new and unsuspected phenomena are . . . uncovered by scientific research,” an anomaly emerges (52). While anomaly is being explored and studied, a period that Kuhn refers to as a “crisis,” scientists develop “speculative and unarticulated theories that can themselves point the way to discovery,” and once a new theory is designed that can explain the anomaly, a new paradigm is born via a “paradigm shift” (61, 66). A paradigm shift, just like a catastrophe, occurs when old theories and knowledge are discarded in order to make room for new phenomena—new paradigms—prompting the advent of a completely new way of interpreting nature and science. To explain the nature of a scientific revolution, that occurs as a result of a paradigm shift, Kuhn compares it to a political revolution. He explains that a political revolution is typically brought about by a crisis, which precipitates a new discovery—a change “or partial relinquishment of one set of institutions in favor of another” that were prohibited by the old regime (93). Afterwards, society is usually “divided into competing camps or parties, one seeking to defend the old institutional constellation, the others seeking to institute some new one,” similar to how each scientific community “uses its own paradigm to argue in that paradigm’s defense” (93-94). The competing parties often cannot reach an agreement due to their differing outlooks, causing an outbreak of a revolution. As a result of the revolution, the old political order is abandoned, while the new one is established, triggering a total change not only in the organization of the political institutions but throughout society as a whole.

Kuhn’s application of the scientific paradigm’s shift, captures the essence of Catastrophism and cogently reflects the way steampunk utilizes experimental alternative history to cause a shift in the modern view on history. Similar to Kuhn’s interpretation of the scientific revolution in which an anomaly, which appears unexpectedly out of “normal” science, produces

a paradigm shift, leading to the creation of a new paradigm that annihilates the old theory and revolutionizes the way we perceive science, steampunk, by designing an alternate world, also engenders an anomaly that violates the old and conventional view on history as we know it. The alternative universe of steampunk, akin to anomaly, suggests a deviation from a common rule, a catastrophe, which also induces a shift in our assessment of the past and brings about a new paradigm: a newfangled way of perceiving past, present, and the accepted “objective” course of history in general. It also provokes the reader to imagine the Victorian past being pregnant by its opposite, an operation which can be applied to any historical period.

In *The Difference Engine*, the successful construction of Babbage’s Engine constitutes the anomaly in the wonted route of British history that first proliferates a crisis—the Industrial Radical Party, that emerges as a following of Babbage’s project, has to overpower the old regime of Tory aristocracy under the rule of Duke Wellington (resonating with the concept of the “normal” science and the established paradigm in Kuhn’s approach) and subdue the Luddite uprisings that also reject the novelty of the “anomaly” represented by the Rads. Once these two forms of opposition are suppressed through violence/revolution (a necessary practice to halt the crisis according to Kuhn), a new paradigm, in the form of the new technocratic elite and a new ruling Party, arises and sets in motion events that utterly transform the governing system, political institutions, and the main values/principles upon which this society was founded.

Moving Forward Backwards: Vladimir Sorokin's *The Blizzard* as Steampunk Narrative

Steampunk's popularity has been spreading steadily all over the globe over the last few decades, resulting in a growing number of steampunk novels emerging in different parts of the world. Russia is no exception to this: being a birthplace of a myriad of SF works during the past century, it is not surprising that some of Russian science fiction authors decided to explore the steampunk aesthetics in their writings, such as Viacheslav Rybakov in his novel *Gravilet "Tsesarevich"* (1993) and Piotr Vorobiov in *Pillage* (2014). This section will be dedicated to examination of one of the most prominent steampunk texts in post-Soviet SF literature *The Blizzard* (2010) by Vladimir Sorokin. I will first identify the common steampunk elements in this novella to establish this work as a representative of steampunk genre and situate it within the context of a larger Western steampunk movement. Next, my analysis will attempt to locate similar trends and thematic threads in *The Difference Engine* and *The Blizzard* to ascertain universal characteristics that these steampunk works share, while also tracing how some of the steampunk attributes were modified in *The Blizzard* to reflect the particularly post-Soviet cultural and social conditions. Furthermore, I will delineate how utopian and dystopian discourses are represented in this novella, making it an illuminating example of post-utopian modality. The exploration of these discourses will also be briefly compared with the configuration of utopian/dystopian dialectic as it is presented in Gibson and Sterling's *The Difference Engine* in order to reveal in what ways the relationship between utopian and dystopian dimensions correlate or fluctuate in these texts.

Vladimir Sorokin's novella *The Blizzard* has attracted a lot of critical attention since its publication in 2010. Most literary critics (T. G. Kuchina, Yulia Danilenko, Natalia Primochkina, Alla Latynina, Mark Lipovetsky, Kirill Kobrin) analyze the novella by primarily focusing on the

masterful stylization created by the author, imitating the style and alluding to the familiar themes and tropes of the renowned Russian writers of the 19th century. While all the aforementioned scholars make interesting connections between *The Blizzard* and literary motifs and symbols it appropriates from classical Russian literature, only Mark Lipovetsky and Kirill Kobrin offer an explanation for the purpose of Sorokin’s stylistic reworking of the classics. Both Lipovetsky and Kobrin highlight the apparent conflict and juxtaposition between the protagonist and the blizzard. Symptomatically, Lipovetsky in his article “*Metel’ v retrobudushchem*” proposes to view the novella as a critique of modernity—exploring the trope of Etkind’s “inner colonization” that he equates with the process of modernization—manifested in the blizzard’s “symbolic embodiment of the backward movement and archaization”¹⁵ to which modernization, ironically, leads. Kobrin, while also discussing the tension between “modernity and tradition,” “rationality and feelings” exemplified through the conflict between the protagonist and the blizzard, maintains that unlike Lipovetsky’s suggestion to read *The Blizzard* as a retrofuturistic utopia, the novella should be interpreted as taking place beyond any historical time: neither past, present, or future. I agree with both scholars that *The Blizzard* indeed presents a critique of progress and modernity. However, I suggest that analyzing this novella as a representative of steampunk will better inform our understanding of Sorokin’s intended message and help to see how the key attributes of steampunk, present here, afford an ideal medium for the author’s critique.

Elements of Steampunk in The Blizzard

Vladimir Sorokin’s novella *The Blizzard* represents a puissant example of the steampunk genre, albeit with a sui generis Russian flavor. That said, while this text incorporates the majority

¹⁵ My translation. Hereafter, all translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

of the focal characteristics of a steampunk narrative, it modifies them slightly and adapts them to reflect a distinctly Russian literary discourse.

First, *The Blizzard*, as most steampunk texts, employs and combines the outwardly incompatible elements of the past and future. However, if Western steampunk science fiction commonly takes place in Victorian England with futuristic innovations implanted within its environment like in Gibson and Sterling's *The Difference Engine*, Sorokin's novella incorporates themes and motifs not of the Victorian past but rather of a Russian "equivalent" of the British Victorian Era—the nineteenth century Russian "Golden Age." One of the most prominent "visual" steampunk features is the presence of the Victorian aesthetic, i.e. objects, apparel, technologies, living conditions, means of transportation, etc., that creates an atmosphere of the Victorian past. According to Margaret Rose, "steampunk fiction signals its pastness" "through its defining 'steam'," mainly "by steam-age technologies" and "by technologies of transportation, like the steam ship and locomotive, or by horses and horse-drawn vehicles" (322).

The Blizzard showcases a panoply of familiar Russian nineteenth century archaic objects such as izbas, kerosene lanterns, woodstoves, samovars, fox-fur hats, sled mobile run by horses, horse stables, papirosas, etc. This would indicate, in Rose's words, "the steam" of this novella and establish a somewhat realistic nineteenth century setting. However, since steampunk is known for its fusion of the future and the past, *The Blizzard* also features numerous futuristic advanced technologies and innovations that, paradoxically, coexist peacefully alongside the nineteenth century archaisms. In the idealized "normal" nineteenth century setting, we unexpectedly encounter "little" ("маленькие") and "big" ("большие") horses and people, suggesting advances in genetic engineering, hallucinogenic drugs that offer people "pre-designed" visions, people turning into zombies as a result of the Bolivian epidemic, sophisticated

vaccine that can apparently halt the zombie outbreak, etc. Most telling examples of the interesting interweaving of the future and the past include objects that in themselves combine both the “archaic” and the “new”—the “hybrids.” For instance, in the miller’s izba, there is a radio—a seemingly antiquated device—which can project holograms with three different channels; Crouper’s sled mobile is run by horses—a typical nineteenth century means of transportation—however, the horses are not ordinary but “little” (“each horse was no bigger than a partridge”) and are obviously genetically modified; and “zoogenous felt paste” (“живородящий войлок”) that comes to life, after being sprayed with the “Living Water” spray, by growing felt fabric and “self-building” a room—a unique combination of the futuristic innovative technologies (self-building structures) and archaic material used for these structures (felt) that begins to self-grow after the miraculous effects produced by the “Living” water spray and stops growing after the “Dead” water spray—folkloric elements taken directly from Russian fairytales (Sorokin 14, 96).

Unlike Gibson and Sterling’s employment of “historical” figures in their novel, albeit with modified destinies, who intermingle with fictional personas, Sorokin’s novella only features fictive characters. However, similar to Gibson and Sterling, who borrowed some of their fictional characters from Disraeli’s novel and re-appropriated some of the language and descriptions of Victorian lifestyle and décor from Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* and other sensation novels of Victorian era to give their work an aura of historical authenticity, Sorokin’s novella is also filled with numerous allusions to literary themes, motifs, and tropes of the classical nineteenth century Russian literature. The author, with much ease, adopts and reworks the well-known motif of the blizzard—used and developed mainly in the works of Alexander Pushkin such as “The Blizzard” (“Metel’,” 1831), “Demons” (“Besy,” 1840) and Leo Tolstoy such as “Master and Man”

(“Khoziain i rabotnik,” 1895) and “The Snowstorm” (“Metel’,” 1856), wherein the blizzard embodies a kind of “natural” impediment that the protagonist must overcome in an attempt to get from one place to another. The distance to the final destination is typically rather short; however, the natural disaster and chaos created by the blizzard unexpectedly prolong the journey, disrupting the protagonist’s plans, who eventually might or might not even reach the destination. As justifiably proposed by Kirill Kobrin, the motif of the blizzard is so prominent and widespread in Russian literary canon that it can actually be classified as a “genre” of Russian literature, first founded and given distinct characteristics by Pushkin.

Another notable and renowned element borrowed from the classics is, naturally, the figure of the protagonist himself, Platon Ilich Garin—a doctor, dressed lavishly in a winter coat with a “baby-beaver collar” and a fox-fur hat, with a pince-nez, cigarette case, and “important travel bags”—who seemed to have literally stepped out from Anton Chekhov’s short story “On Official Duty” (“Po delam sluzhby,” 1899) (Sorokin 17-18). The plot itself as well as the main conflict of *The Blizzard* closely resembles and is most likely derived from Tolstoy’s short story “Master and Man” (“Khoziain i rabotnik,” 1895). Other noteworthy references to classical Russian literature, as T. G. Kuchina perceptively highlights, include meticulously detailed descriptions of the living quarters à la Ivan Bunin from *Dark Avenues* (*Temnye allei*, 1943), Gogolesque-like characters such as squarsons, who akin to Sorokin’s miller Semen Markovich and his wife Taisia Markovna, also have similar patronymic names, “blizzard” allusions to the works of popular Russian Romantics such as Vasilii Zhukovsky (poem “Svetlana,” 1813) and Pyotr Vyazemsky (poem “Metel’,” 1828) (247-248).

In addition, situating his novella within the nineteenth century milieu and reworking the themes and motifs of the nineteenth century literature, Sorokin recreates the environment of the

past by imitating the language of nineteenth century writers, just like Gibson and Sterling did in *Difference*. As Margaret Rose states, “one of the first cues of ‘pastness’ to the reader of a steampunk story usually comes from the language of the story” that might include “archaic diction” such as ‘whilst’ and “archaic spelling variants” that would indicate Victorian English (322). While undoubtedly incorporating archaic diction and spelling in his work, suggestive of the nineteenth century Russian, Sorokin goes beyond the simple “inclusion” of linguistic archaisms and, in fact, stylizes the whole novella as if it was indeed written in the nineteenth century—a truly prominent stylistic trademark of Sorokin’s writing. In his interview on a radio station “The Voice of Russia,” Sorokin admits that he wanted to write “a classical Russian novella,” and this is exactly what the readers receive: a superbly stylized classical Russian novella in all its glory, the linguistic beauty of which, unfortunately, is somewhat lost when it is read in translation (Bugrova 2010).

Second, if typical steampunk texts take place in the past with technologies from the future being anachronistically placed within the alternative past framework like in Gibson and Sterling’s novel, here the reverse occurs: Sorokin transfers the archaisms of the nineteenth century into a futuristic milieu, creating a retro-futuristic image of Russia. In this sense, *The Blizzard* also exhibits some features of “retro-futurism,” where some things from the past (retro) reappear in future, presenting it in a pessimistic hue comingled with the “half-nostalgic, half-ironic” outlook of the past (Guffey 254-255). The futuristic setting in this novella is difficult to discern; however, one line in all of one hundred and eighty-one pages indicates that indeed the action here takes place in the future: at one point Garin recollects that his great-grandfather “often reminisced about the distant Stalin era,” thereby implying that the current events are happening in the second half of the 21st century (149). Thus, Sorokin’s reemployment and

placement of the past into the future elicits an interesting take on our perception of history, akin to other steampunk novels that tend to disrupt the traditional modern image of progressive history, implying that our future will not offer any new constructive visions and, instead, will repeat its past history.

Third, analogous to Western steampunk fiction and particularly to *The Difference Engine*, Sorokin's novella provides a critique of progress in the age of modernity and, therefore, employs a characteristically steampunkish protagonist, an upper-class modernizer, doctor Garin, who functions as an epitome of power and progress. As Mirko M. Hall and Joshua Gunn comment regarding the main qualities of a quintessential steampunk protagonist:

These qualities can be conveniently summed up in one word: power. Their Steampunk personae are directly modeled on the white, male, and socially mobile genius-adventurer of popular Victorian romantic fiction. They create an auratic presence that suggests to onlookers such idealized qualities as cultural refinement, imaginative engagement, and eternal optimism. Furthermore, they are dutifully outfitted with technological accoutrements ranging from analog computers, aviator goggles, mechanical prostheses In his effort to secure the great dreams and hopes of humankind, the Steampunk technician-hero manipulates—in the words of Walter Benjamin—technology ‘not [as] a fetish of doom but a key to happiness.’ (6-7)

Doctor Garin's character mirrors this description quite fittingly. Somewhat similar to one of the main characters in *Difference*, the well-known savant-paleontologist Edward Mallory, who epitomizes the new meritocratic intellectual elite of Gibson and Sterling's alternative Britain, Sorokin's Garin—being a doctor, a symbol of enlightenment and science, and a member of the upper class—also represents superior knowledge and power, based upon reason and education.

Akin to a common steampunk protagonist described above, Garin too symbolizes progress and technological advancement; however, instead of “analog computers” and other technological accoutrements, he is in possession of a sophisticated progressive vaccine (which seems almost out of place in this “outmoded” nineteenth century milieu) that will not just advance society, but can actually save lives. This possession fills him with incredible feelings of self-importance, superiority, and duty in the face of humankind, whose sorrowful fate he—and only he—can prevent. It seems like nothing can stop the doctor from fulfilling his duty. Except, maybe, for the weather. Thus, Sorokin’s protagonist, who seems to have inherited most of the traditional steampunk hero’s attributes, fits well within the framework of this narrative that sets up the perfect conditions to challenge Garin’s beliefs and his status of Enlightener, critiquing the Enlightenment project and progress in general, which Garin stands to exemplify.

Fourth, the traditional socio-political commentary on the gender and race relations in a steampunk narrative is minimized in this novella and is instead substituted by social problematics of the class system: intelligentsia vs. the masses (which operates within the similar paradigm as gender and race relations—the oppressor vs. the oppressed). In addition to being a representative of power and elite, the protagonist in *The Blizzard* also embodies the main essence of Russian intelligentsia, making his interaction with the simpleton Crouper—a representative of the masses, who is in charge of driving the sled mobile and helping the doctor to deliver the vaccine—much more illuminating than appears on surface: it is redolent of an important theme that dominates Russian literary canon, reflecting the long-lasting labyrinthine tension between the intelligentsia and the masses.

The utopian discourse in this novella is manifested in 1) the conflict between Garin and the blizzard, specifically in Garin's desire to dominate nature; and 2) nostalgia for the idealized past, which really translates into the nostalgia for the hierarchical relations and positions of power prevalent in the nineteenth century Russia, and exemplified by the relationship between Garin and Crouper. Each of these utopian discourses is gradually deconstructed throughout the narrative, eventually entering the dystopian realm and resulting in a dystopian finale.

Garin vs. Nature

The juxtaposition between Garin (progress) and the blizzard (nature), and their interminable battle, conveys a utopian domain in *The Blizzard* as in utopias progress commonly stands in opposition to nature and, more importantly, aims to dominate and control it. Many utopias, starting from Plato's *The Republic*, depict an urge to tame nature as part of the utopian project which is founded upon faith in such concepts as reason, order, science and, of course, progress—the attributes that always augur a possibility of a better world. Utopias, especially scientific ones like, for example, Francis Bacon's *The New Atlantis*, extoll science and knowledge as the main pillars of progress which will enable people to understand, study and conquer nature, and move our society closer towards a utopian future, making all things possible. The control of nature is also clearly manifested in the creation of a city or a city-state, prevalent in most utopias, where everything is organized and planned according to reason. Because it is a man-made creation, the city is indeed a symbol of the “tamed” nature that has been systematized and re-appropriated for human use. As Krishan Kumar asserts in his book *Utopianism*, the city—a “construct, an artefact” and a “creation of reason”—subordinated nature and mocked “the anarchic countryside” attempting to pit “reason against the formless chaos of nature” (12, 15). In

a way, both “irrational” human nature and nature in general were to be mastered by the city in a utopia: just like the city—through public management, “rational planning, and rational regulation”—was supposed to manage the individual “to prevent his lapse into corruption and decay,” it also managed and controlled nature through its systematic organization¹⁶ (12-13). In addition, the veneration of science and emergence of numerous technological innovations during the Enlightenment period in the 18th-19th centuries, which became an essential component of utopian thinking at that time, strengthened even more the desire to control nature, certainly contributing to the development and significant improvement of the human condition. Modernity’s highly revered reason and rationality, which according to Kant would essentially bring about happiness and freedom, guaranteed the constant advancement of progress towards the ultimate attainment of the enlightened age. Thus, reason was thought to positively lead to progress. And of course progress, associated with the technological and scientific revolution, will produce machines to dominate nature. As Katerina Clark points out in her work *The Soviet Novel*, the utopian nature of communism in Russia of the twentieth century and its glorification of the scientific progress that undeniably promises a utopian future is a telling example of how progress aims to conquer nature. The industrialization and urbanization that became the main principle of Lenin’s, and later Stalin’s, attempt to bring progress to Soviet Russia was centered around the “machine”—which “stood for harmony, progress, control,” “while that which was not integrated with the machine was condemned as chaos, hard labor, primordial, and lacking

¹⁶ Interestingly, though this novella takes place on the countryside road and doesn’t portray a city as part of the utopian discourse wherein cities are used as means to systematize and tame the chaos of nature, Garin persistently complains regarding the bad quality of the road, the lack of any logistics in the way it was constructed, and the absence of stakes to be able to see the road more clearly, as if suggesting that this wild nature has to be controlled and turned into a civilized place—typical desire of a “modernizer”: “Why on earth did they put the road here . . . where it’s so steep . . . Idiots” (34). “They don’t put up the stakes to mark the roads . . . Could be a lawsuit if you think about it . . . Doesn’t matter to anyone. Not the road authorities, the forest rangers, the patrols” (75).

rhythm” (94). Tellingly, Stalin’s Five-Year Plan became associated with the slogan “The Struggle with Nature” as its greatest achievements and projects were all targeted to dominate nature—“the machine would triumph over elemental forces”: “the great hydroelectric stations . . . were built to tame the arbitrary and destructive powers of the rivers; collectivized, modernized agriculture would not be slave to the whims of climate; drought was to be combated with dams, shallow waterways with canals” (100-101). This struggle with nature was reflected in literature at that time, but was later somewhat modified. The “god-machine was eclipsed by the aura of the god-man,” resulting in the image of the Soviet man who has mastered the “machinery” and became the embodiment of reason, high morals, incredible physical strength, self-sacrifice and, of course, progress (101). The Soviet man was to prove his superiority over nature, specifically nature in its extreme forms such as snowstorms, ice, water, floods, etc. As Clark contends, “the struggle between the man and ice held the highest place: Soviet man was said to triumph over the cold as no other people could” (101). If a man can win over nature, then he is considered to be on a path towards progress and Enlightenment.

The aforementioned utopian trope of the struggle between a man and a blizzard, wherein a man wants to prove his superiority over nature, is undeniably one of the central conflicts in this novella. Garin, who is a doctor and thus an emblem of reason, science, and progress alike, finds himself in a perpetual battle with the erratic behavior of the blizzard, which epitomizes chaos, irrationality, and unpredictability. In order to accomplish his goal, deliver the vaccine, and therefore save lives, the doctor must overcome all the hindrances on his way and “master” nature, the same way progress always does. However, time after time the blizzard is throwing new obstacles on Garin’s way, preventing him from reaching his destination and fulfilling his duty, and, subsequently, undermining the omnipotence of progress. That said, the utopian

discourse in which man must conquer nature is being deconstructed throughout the text. At first, after persuading Crouper to give him a lift, Garin is optimistic that he will get to Dolgoye soon. However, as their luck begins to dwindle, and they find it harder and harder to navigate the snowy road, constantly getting stuck in snow and having to spend the night at the miller's house, Garin's excessive confidence and impudence are starting to wane. He realizes that to overcome nature will not be that easy as for some reason the weather simply refuses to cooperate and seems to be determined to destroy them:

The blizzard howled around them. The wind had gathered such force that it pushed the sled, causing it to sway and jerk like a living creature . . . He [Garin] sat in a daze, his blue nose protruding between his hat and his collar, wishing with his entire being to overcome this wild, hostile, wailing white expanse that wanted only one thing from him—that he become a snowdrift and cease forever to desire anything at all. (78-79)

As they approach the living quarters of the vitaminders, Garin gets excited to see their “sturdy” tent as “it evinced the victory of humanity over the blind elements” (86). The hallucinogenic trip that Garin experiences after taking drugs at vitaminders is worth mentioning here as it embodies the triumph of irrationality over reason, in a way mirroring Garin's battle with the irrational blizzard and foreshadowing his gradual loss of agency and control. In his hallucinogenic vision, Garin is transferred to the main square of some European city and finds himself naked in a cauldron, filled with vegetable oil, which is heating up from the bottom. There are crowds of people gathered around him, laughing and hooting at him. He feels the bottom of the cauldron getting hotter and hotter, and realizing that he is going to die soon, Garin cries and tells people that “he has never hurt people,” that he has “a physician's noble profession” and “names all the patients he has saved,” etc. (Sorokin 101). In this trip, induced by drugs, his sense of self-

importance vanishes, and he becomes completely powerless and helpless, which becomes a harbinger of his loss of power and ultimate demise in the end. Interestingly, after he takes drugs, Garin regains hope to reach his destination and it seemed to him as if “the blizzard itself was showing them the way” (116). However, soon they lose their way again as if “the devil was leading” them on (118). Crouper’s suggestion that the devil is fooling around with them has to be noted. In fact, the translation here is somewhat inaccurate because in Russian it is “leshii” that is making them lost in the forest. The reference to leshii evokes folk belief: according to Russian folklore, leshii is one of the spirits that inhabits the forest and intentionally confuses and misleads people to go the wrong way. The correlation between the irrational blizzard and the mythological figure of leshii evokes the myth’s trope of chaos and emphasizes the almost magical, mythological origin of nature that cannot be rationally comprehended. Garin gets another burst of optimism and hope to get to Dolgoye when suddenly the blizzard stops and they can clearly see the road. Garin again contemplates his purpose in life—to overcome all the obstacles in order to help the sick people and “safeguard them from an epidemic”—and, with utmost satisfaction, praises himself for not turning away from his path (128). However, the irrepressible snowstorm came back with a vengeance after a while, as snow “was falling so thickly that everything around disappeared,” “as though mocking the travelers, taking revenge for an hour or so of brightness and calm” (158). The doctor, as he awaits for Crouper to start a fire, gets really cold and unusually frightened: “He had never experienced such terrifying, penetrating cold in his life. He realized that he would never get out of this accursed, endless winter night” (153). The doctor, a man of rational judgement and keen shrewdness, who doesn’t easily succumb to superstition, suddenly gets enveloped by a paralyzing fear and turns to God: he begins to pray. This scene is a telling example of how the utopian discourse of progress’s

mastery over nature is being deconstructed here: the blizzard is beginning to take the winning position in this battle, and Garin is starting to lose faith in himself and the success of his mission—he is now asking God for help. Finally, after the doctor gets scared at the sight of a giant snowman with a big phallus and spending the night under the hood curled up with Crouper and his little horses, Garin awakens to discover that Crouper has died, and the doctor himself has become paralyzed from the waist down from cold.

The utopian discourse manifested in Garin's potential to control nature is eventually defeated, resulting in a dystopian finale: Garin hasn't made it to Dolgoye, has failed to fulfil his duty—deliver vaccine and save lives—and what is more, has now become crippled. Despite all the doctor's persistent attempts to continue going forward no matter what—regardless the hazardous weather, the broken sled mobile, the tired and scared little horses, etc.—he is unable to “master” nature and surmount all the obstacles that the blizzard has in store. If we interpret the essence of this conflict, in Kobrin's words, as “duty vs. elements” or, as I propose, “progress vs. nature,” it becomes apparent that in this long and strenuous battle, the blizzard has defeated the doctor, and as a result, aims to subvert the concept of progress and modernity itself that the doctor stands to exemplify. The critique of progress and the depiction of how progress can subjugate nature in this novella echoes the similar trope in Gibson and Sterling's novel (wherein the detrimental effects of progress are illustrated through the Great Stink with all the environmental and social implications) and is delineated with a distinct dystopian streak.

Besides the blizzard itself, there are other symbols, peppered throughout the narrative, that highlight Garin's (progress) symbolic “mastery” of nature, manifested in the various images of Russia, and his slowly attenuating power that eventually leads to his loss of agency. First, it should be noted that Garin, akin to Adorno's and Horkheimer's interpretation of Odysseus and

his quest to dominate nature through his “cunning” and numerous sacrifices, analyzed in their work *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, attempts to not only “master” nature but also to subjugate Russia itself, manifested, as suggested by Mark Lipovetsky in the three figures that Garin encounters: Crouper, the miller’s wife, and the frozen giant. Similar to Odysseus, who, as Adorno and Horkheimer maintain, commands nature by accepting sacrifices from deities and eventually becoming a “sacrificial victim” himself, Garin also tries to dominate not only nature but Russia itself, which, according to Lipovetsky, turns into “inner colonization” that eventually results in Garin’s own symbolic death as he himself becomes the victim (Adorno and Horkheimer 42). His torturous relationship with Crouper (the masses), intercourse with the miller’s beautiful wife (the manifestation of Russia), and the accident involving getting stuck inside the nostril of a frozen giant (another image of Russia) and exercising control over it by axing his way out of it—all gesture towards Garin’s domineering ways and his desire to possess/colonize/modernize Russia. Lipovetsky asserts that the final representation of Russia—the giant snowman with an erected phallus whom Garin encounters in the forest—stands to exemplify a symbolic rape of Garin by Russia, which ultimately leads to his loss of agency and symbolic loss of life. In his attempt to dominate nature and Russia itself, Garin has undergone a symptomatic metamorphosis from a self-confident, dutiful, and powerful modernizer into a feeble man, rendered completely useless and powerless.

Other images that point to Garin’s slow and steady loss of power in the face of the hostile blizzard and various personifications of Russia include references to snowmen and zombies. Indeed, throughout the novella, Garin is compared to both a snowman and a zombie multiple times. When the miller’s wife first meets the doctor, she notices how Garin resembles a snowman; then the doctor is again compared with “a snowman” as he sat in snow “buried in the

blizzard,” and finally, Crouper, after another fiasco on the road, admits that the doctor looks like a “snow woman” (Sorokin 76, 82). The comparison between Garin and a snowman is two-fold: on the one hand, it reveals the triumph of nature over Garin as he is slowly losing his distinct appearance of a doctor and becomes part of the snowy landscape itself; on the other hand, by turning Garin into a snowman, the blizzard literally engulfs or devours him just like the giant snowman—a symbol of Russia—humiliates and rapes him. The apparent zombification of Garin also plays an important role in the narrative. The black plague that came from Bolivia apparently turns people into zombies, who bite other people and dig tunnels underground. The doctor exemplifies a position of power here because he is bringing the vaccine to inoculate the ones that haven’t been bitten yet, to save the remaining lives. However, as I discussed above, the doctor is gradually losing his power each time he is being confronted by the blizzard and is thus slowly turning into a zombie, symbolically joining the category of people he so desperately wants to help. Towards the end of the novella, when Crouper made fire for them to warm up in the forest and invited the doctor to get closer to the fire, Garin got so stiff from the cold that he “moved like a zombie just arisen from the dead” (155). In the very end, he is also metaphorically compared to a zombie as he cannot move his legs and has to be carried by four Chinese men. All these comparisons with snowmen and zombies highlight even more Garin’s hopeless and utter defeat in the battle with nature.

Garin vs. Crouper

Another utopian domain in this novella is demonstrated through nostalgia which is associated with one of the most salient attributes of the steampunk genre itself. Generally, steampunk, wherein the past can be reconfigured differently, tends to “generate a utopian

nostalgia or memory” for the lost dreams of the past, and as a project seeks “to create a utopian past” by reintroducing anachronistic technologies into it (Beard XVI, XXIV). Thus, the feeling of nostalgia for the past pervades steampunk texts, albeit the tendency in some narratives to plainly “idealize” it, or as Kristin Stimpson suggests, “reimagine” the past “as a dreamworld, creating a sense of nostalgia for a time that never was” (28). While generally steampunk authors use their alternative worlds to bring awareness to traditionally oppressed groups within the imperial framework of the past, some writers, as I demonstrated in my analysis of gender roles in *The Difference Engine*, are unable to change the main principles of the rhetoric of empire, and instead of creating space for dialogue in which these issues can be openly discussed and reassessed, they perpetuate them. Sorokin seems to be aware of this predicament, and while the first half of novella evokes feelings of nostalgia for the old, unalloyed past, where morals were more refined and life was much simpler, the second half attempts to dismantle that “romanticized” utopian nostalgia, revealing that in reality it is self-serving—it seeks to restore the old power relations and hierarchical class structure.

This utopian discourse is exemplified in the conflict between Garin, a representative of the intelligentsia, and Crouper, who symbolizes “the masses,” simple folk, people of lower class or peasants. At the beginning of the novella, Sorokin depicts their relationship as one of mutual respect and trust, evoking the nostalgia for the utopian past: Garin has faith in Crouper’s professional instinct and his intuition to help them find the way out through the blizzard, and in turn, Crouper, after initial reluctance, seems to be delighted to help the doctor accomplish his good deed. However, this utopian discourse begins to become unstable when Garin starts to show his moral superiority over Crouper and uses violence against him. Interestingly, Crouper himself admits to Garin that he doesn’t succumb to violence when it comes to treating his horses.

Garin, however, does not exhibit such kindness as Crouper. Keeping his composure at first, Garin begins to lose his temper as the duo repeatedly gets lost on the snowy road. Garin persistently blames Crouper for their inability to find the way. When they only find a cemetery instead of a village as Crouper has promised, Garin becomes verbally abusive and visibly irritated with Crouper, blaming “that idiot birdbrain Crouper who had led him who knows where” (83). Later, he again holds Crouper accountable for their road misfortunes and precisely blames him for being a laid-back uneducated bumpkin, one of the “people,” who lacks intellect and ambition to lead the way: “He suddenly realized that it was Crouper, this aimless man, lacking all ambition, with his disorganized slowness and centuries-old peasant reliance on ‘somehow or another’ and ‘with luck, everything will turn out,’ who was preventing them from moving directly toward the doctor’s goal” (132). Later on, Garin becomes physically abusive and punches Crouper in the face while he begs Garin to not hit his little horses, when they refuse to move forward, petrified of the wolves. And finally, when they get stuck in the nostril of a giant, who apparently died from drinking too much after falling asleep in the cold weather, Garin hits Crouper in the head and calls him an idiot: “Were you just born an idiot or what?” (144). After this, things drastically deteriorate, and it is after Garin’s use of violence against Crouper, that Garin receives punishment in the form of the symbolic rape by a giant snowman whom he meets when he leaves Crouper in the sled to go look for the road. By succumbing to violence, Garin betrays his mission as an Enlightener and tarnishes his status as a bearer of progress, thus himself precipitating his own failure in the end.

There are more instances in the novella where Garin discredits himself as a member of the intelligentsia and undermines his status of an Enlightener. Despite the urgency and Garin’s constant reminders to Crouper that he cannot postpone the trip and his sense of duty propels him

to go forward regardless of all the obstacles, Garin does interrupt his journey a few times to indulge in hedonistic deeds such as taking drugs at vitaminders' and having sex with the miller's wife. It didn't take Taisia Markovna too long to persuade the doctor to spend the night at the miller's house and continue the journey in the morning; the same goes for doctor's stay at vitaminders', who offer him to try new hallucinogenic drugs, an exciting yet torturous experience that takes much longer than Garin expected—six hours. He even justifies it later by thinking: "What would happen if I arrived tomorrow? Or the day after? Nothing at all. The people who've been infected and bitten will never be people again anyway . . . And the ones who've barricaded themselves inside their izbas will wait for me one way or the other" (137). His position of a missionary is undeniably undermined by his hedonistic adventures, which seems to rather go against the rational and self-sacrificing mindset of a doctor, who typically puts reason and duty before passions and personal needs. The doctor doesn't hesitate to indulge his "self" on the way to commit "selfless" acts. Thus, the utopian discourse of nostalgia for the idealized past is gradually deconstructed throughout the narrative each time Garin reinforces his status as an upper-class intelligentsia member, who oppresses and abuses the masses, thereby demonstrating that nostalgia for the past is simply a veiled and implicit longing for the nineteenth century established positions of the hierarchical system of power.

Despite Garin's certainty in his alleged moral superiority over Crouper, I would like to propose that Sorokin counters this rhetoric and critiques the conventional view on the class system by suggesting that the relationship between Garin (intelligentsia) and Crouper (masses) rests on mutual dependence, echoing Hegel's master-slave dialectic. Though Garin thinks that he can manipulate Crouper, he actually depends on him. From the very beginning, we notice an interesting bond being established between Garin and Crouper. At the beginning, after they set

off for the journey, Garin acknowledges with gratitude that without Crouper and his tiny horses, he will not be able to make it to his destination and realizes just how much he is dependent on Crouper and his sled mobile: ““Small creatures, and yet they come to our aid in difficult, insurmountable circumstances . . . ,’ he thought. ‘How would I have continued on without these tiny beasts? . . . all hope now lies with them. No one else will take me to this Dolgoye””

(16). With Crouper’s calm and optimistic demeanor, Garin too felt that “Crouper would get him there no matter what happened, that he’d make it in time to save people from that terrible illness”

(18). Garin’s dependence on Crouper starts to grow as he realizes that to reach Dolgoye might not be as fast and easy as he originally anticipated. However, it soon becomes evident that the dependence is actually mutual as Crouper too seems to be relying on the doctor on this snowy road. When they get into their first accident, breaking the runner on a crystal pyramid, Doctor saves the day by bandaging it up with one of his elastic bandages from his travel bag and applying on it Vishnevskys ointment that he carried with him. Later on, after spending the night at the miller’s house, which Crouper helped them to find, they lose sight of the road, and Crouper finds tracks, allowing the duo to resume their journey. The doctor is amazed at how Crouper can find the road when there are no stakes to mark the road: ““How does he see the road?’ thought the doctor . . . ‘Professional instinct no doubt”” (76). One of the most vivid examples of their mutual dependence takes place in the end, when after Garin sees a giant snowman and returns to the initial place only to discover that there is nobody in the sled. Thinking that Crouper has abandoned him, Garin becomes so distraught that the first thought that comes to his mind is “death”—he realizes just how much he needs Crouper to get to Dolgoye, and without his help, Garin cannot go on further, cannot fulfill his duty, cannot save lives: “He realized that Crouper had left, abandoned the sled, and abandoned the doctor, abandoned him forever, and that now he

was completely alone, alone forever in this winter, in this field, in this snow. And that this—was death” (164-65). And of course, in the very end, when Crouper dies, in an obvious self-sacrificial act trying to cover the split in the hood with his body so that the doctor stays warm inside the hood, Garin undergoes symbolic death as well, as without the slave, the master also perishes: he failed to reach his destination and did not accomplish what he considered to be the biggest duty of his life. Without Crouper, Garin cannot exist and his mission cannot be accomplished.

Cyclical History

In addition to the utopian discourse that slowly metamorphosizes into the dystopian finale, the dystopian critique of historical progress, which constitutes one of the chief goals of Western steampunk movement, is also present in this work. According to Lipovetsky in “*Metel’ v retrobudushchem: Sorokin o modernizatsii*,” Sorokin depicts a “general mechanism of Russian history” in this work, exemplified through nature. If nature here (constantly impeding Garin/progress) stands for the concept of history, then history in this novella is portrayed as something that is not progressive and always moving forward, as suggested by Kant and Hegel, but rather as regressive and, in fact, directed backwards. As Lipovetsky contends: “Every pull after a short movement forward invariably and disproportionately throws back, to the initial stages of modernity . . . The blizzard becomes a symbolic manifestation of the *reverse movement* and archaization, which stems from the modernized pulls” (emphasis in original). The inability of progress to unfold freely in the future certainly manifests a dystopian sensibility that tends to problematize the unwavering utopian faith in the concepts of progress and science, which promise to always keep society advancing. Hence, the strong dominance of the archaic milieu, from the living conditions to the class system, Garin’s inability to master nature/blizzard as well

as Russia itself (represented by Crouper, miller's wife, and a giant)—all gesture towards the regressive nature of history in this work, refusing to accept progress as its “natural” component and contesting the perception of history as always evolving and bringing continual improvement to humanity. The dystopian unraveling of the perception of history, pertinent to modernity, in *The Blizzard* therefore parallels the dystopian dimension of *The Difference Engine* which also reevaluates and challenges Enlightenment's progressive historical model.

The presence of the archaisms¹⁷ from the nineteenth century (simpler technologies, slower means of transportation) counters the rhetoric of progress, represented by Garin, suggesting that our future might not be as progressive as we think. Even the futuristic objects and innovations, such as the zoogenous felt, the touchable pictures, holographic radios, hallucinogenic drugs, genetically engineered little/big people and horses do not seem that progressive or useful. The little horses obviously are useless if they can't deliver Garin to his destination; big people (designed for manual labor), though did the work they were supposed to do, beat each other and “took a dump in merchant Baksheev's well” after he decided to pay the giants a third less—also doesn't particularly strike as a “practical” invention; zoogenous felt does seem like a marvelous innovation, but since the vitaminders live in a tent, built from the zoogenous felt, it makes one doubt whether the zoogenous felt is capable of building anything more significant than a tent; holographic radio appears to be rather an original device at first, but has only three channels with old Soviet propaganda shows; the sophisticated vaccine that is supposed to stop the zombie epidemic is quite a scientific advancement, but is transported by

¹⁷ As Martin Danahay asserts, steampunk's critique of progress becomes evident through its emphasis on the past and past technologies that function as counter measures to the futuristic technologies of progress: “Steampunk performs its resistance to contemporary industrial mass production by ‘modding’ its products and linking them to an earlier historical era, thus dramatising a protest against postindustrial technologies. Steampunk performs its anxieties over the revolutionising of the means of production by digital technology through its insistent recourse to Victorian objects and fashion” (31-32).

horses, a means of transportation, as revealed from the story, that is not as reliable as it appears to be, etc. (Sorokin 149). All of these futuristic technologies seem rather impractical and do not reveal anything strikingly new or innovative: in fact, some of them are as archaic as objects from the nineteenth century. As Crouper astutely notices: “Nowadays there’s so many things that ye cain’t figure out what they’s for” (25). Interestingly, it is the futuristic innovations that create obstacles on the road for Garin and Crouper, thereby hampering “progress”: first, the pyramid breaks one of the runners on their sled, then they get stuck in the nostril of a giant who got drunk and froze to death in the middle of the snowy road. This implies that though the innovations indicate some kind of scientific advancement (progress) in this society, they are in fact almost as regressive as most of the archaic things they coexist with.

The dystopian finale of the novella, in which Garin fails his mission and becomes crippled himself, is of significance since if we view Garin as a symbol of progress, then his disempowered state in the end symbolizes that there is no place for progress in future. The only future we have is the one that looks to the past. Hence, if in Gibson and Sterling’s novel *Catastrophe theory* presents a counter-argument to Enlightenment’s vision of progressive history, in this work it is opposed by the non-linear, cyclical conception of time. Tellingly, Garin’s zombification in the finale becomes the metaphor for the Russian society in general—“the living dead” that cannot transcend history and keep reliving it over and over again. Tellingly, the two earlier works written by Sorokin, *The Day of the Oprichnik* (*Den’ Oprichnika*, 2006) and *The Kremlin Made of Sugar* (*Sakharnyi Kreml’*, 2008), depict a similar trajectory: the future of Russia portrayed there is also regressive—the monarchy, reminiscent of the Russian imperial past, is restored and oprichnina (associated with the rule of Ivan the Terrible) runs amok. Taking into consideration all three novels, it appears that Sorokin cannot envision a viable future for

Russia. Russia, as Sorokin predicts it, will be constantly repeating its own history in future, thereby going in circles and replicating the same old mistakes and conflicts. In this sense, Sorokin's comprehension of history echoes Nietzschean theory of the Eternal Return, which is grounded in the idea that the number of events in the universe is limited and yet time itself is endless. Thus, the events occurring in history are bound to repeat themselves an infinite number of times and recur over and over again. Ultimately, a combination of every event will be completed and repeated an unlimited number of times in an infinite number of combinations. Consequently, according to this theory, time is cyclical and doesn't quite follow a linear progressive pattern. French political activist Louis Blanqui expresses a similar view on history when he writes:

Here, nonetheless, lies a great drawback: there is no progress . . . What we call 'progress' is confined to each particular world, and vanishes with it. Always and everywhere in the terrestrial arena, the same drama, the same setting, on the same narrow stage—a noisy humanity infatuated with its own grandeur, believing itself to be the universe and living in its prison as though in some immense realm, only to founder at an early date along with its globe, which has borne with the deepest disdain the burden of human arrogance. The same monotony, the same immobility, on other heavenly bodies. The universe repeats itself endlessly and paws the ground in place. In infinity, eternity performs—imperturbably—the same routines. (qtd. in Benjamin 26)

The Blizzard, thus, represents a telling example of history that is not just treading water but is regurgitating itself.

Conclusion

Steampunk's proclivity to iterate or "reshuffle" history, experimenting with different historical scenarios and thus introducing a possibility of change, is manifested differently in American and Russian SF. The two given models of a steampunk narrative, future-in-the past and past-in-the future or retro-futurism, follow the same pattern, wherein the elements of future and past are fused together and are forced to interact with one another. However, the outcome of this interaction differs significantly in *The Difference Engine* and *The Blizzard*: Gibson and Sterling's novel suggests that the past is flexible and can undergo changes as a result of future's intervention, whereas Sorokin's text reveals that history, in spite of numerous attempts to transform it, refuses change and cannot be altered. This different view on history perhaps can be explicated through the peculiarities of the cultural milieus that spawn these works: Gibson and Sterling's novel represents the global or Western view on the nature and the possibilities of history, while Sorokin's work deals specifically with Russia and demonstrates a Russian take on the prospect of historical change. Despite the fact that the deviation in history is not able to change or affect the present in *Difference*, as the novel ends with a system of control and public surveillance, which is very familiar to the contemporary audience, Gibson and Sterling's alternative world is still open for modifications and has the potential to be transformed. Sokorin's view on history is rather essentialist as even given the opportunity to be rewritten and reshaped, it remains unvarying.

However, in both cases we notice a mutual reversibility of utopian and dystopian realms as discourses of change. In Gibson and Sterling's novel, technology functions as a mediator between utopian and dystopian discourses, providing connection between the sphere of science and development of society. In Sorokin's text, the mediator's role is given to a member of the

intelligentsia, who should have become such a mediator, but fails to do so. It is his inability to handle his preassigned role that leads to the rift between science and society, resulting in a minimized role of steampunk's novum: utopian technology does not alter the immutable logic of Russian history.

CHAPTER III

CYBERPUNK AND THE POSTHUMAN

Defining Cyberpunk

Cyberpunk¹⁸ comes into view on the sci-fi arena in the 1980s and, as many scholars have noted, handles and reacts to the issues brought up and explored by postmodernism in general. Such scholars as Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Veronica Hollinger, and Brian McHale point out the apparent parallels between the two movements and consider cyberpunk an integral part of the postmodern aesthetics. While Hollinger admits that “cyberpunk can be read as one symptom of the postmodern condition of genre of science fiction” (“Cybernetic” 30), McHale highlights the perceptible “overlap between the postmodernist poetics of fiction and cyberpunk poetics” (“Towards” 6), and Csicsery-Ronay even proclaims cyberpunk to be “the apotheosis of postmodernism” (“Cyberpunk” 266). Consequently, while functioning within the postmodernist framework, cyberpunk can be defined, broadly speaking, as a SF subgenre that challenges “‘the causal interpretation of the universe’ and the reliance on a ‘rhetoric of believability,’” focuses on the ontological matters, and represents, on the one hand, “pure negation” of “‘history, philosophy, politics, body” and, on the other, “pure attitude” towards “power” (Hollinger, “Cybernetic” 30;

¹⁸ Cyberpunk has established a strong reputation within the SF discourse in the 1980s which resulted in a drastic surge of cyberpunk novels at that time. Some of the most exemplary representatives of this genre include William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* (1984) and *Count Zero* (1986), Philip Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1992), Rudy Rucker’s *Software* (1982), John Shirley’s *Eclipse* (1985), Katsuhiro Otomo’s *Akira* (1988), Lewis Shiner’s *Frontera* (1984), William Gibson and Bruce Sterling’s *Red Star*, *Winter Orbit* (1986), Tom Maddox’s *Snake Eyes* (1986), Walter Jon William’s *Hardwired* (1986), Michael Swanwick’s *Vacuum Flowers* (1987), Bruce Sterling’s *Schismatrix* (1985), Pat Cadigan’s *Synners* (1991), Neal Stephenson’s *Snow Crash* (1992).

McHale, "Towards" 7; Csicsery-Ronay, "Cyberpunk" 266). Specifically, most of the distinguishing features of postmodernism delineated by Fredric Jameson in his book *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* such as the blurring of the border between high and mass culture, commodity fetishism, "new depthlessness" or superficiality, "weakening of historicity," the simulacrum, "the waning of affect," and the emergence of "a whole new technology" have become the hallmark of the cyberpunk genre as well (6). The latter in this list deserves special attention as computer culture of the postindustrial age and information-driven economy play an essential role and, in fact, function as an underlying basis of the majority of cyberpunk texts. Thus, the narrow definition of cyberpunk rests on its tendency to examine and comment on the avidities and anxieties associated with the newly burgeoning digital technologies¹⁹ such as cyberspace, particularly its impact on the global commerce and human communication under late capitalism as well as its inchoate attempt to integrate and collaborate with the human body and mind.

Such scholars as Claire Sponsler, Daniel Punday, Pappi Rani Barooah and Lisa Das, David Mead, Glenn Grant, Veronica Hollinger, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Nicholas Ruddick, Amy Novak, Brian McHale, Keith Booker, Timo Siivonen, Dani Cavallaro underline cyberpunk's distinctive trope of exploration of the contemporary technological change that radically redefines and reshapes the essence of the postindustrial society. This peculiar interest in the modern techno-scientific culture constitutes the "cyber" in cyberpunk, mainly referring to cybernetics, a somewhat novel scientific theory, introduced by Norbert Wiener in the 1940s and described as a new system of electronic communication, including the "means of controlling machinery and

¹⁹ As Dani Cavallaro claims, the reason why cyberpunk writers are preoccupied with technology is that they "have actually witnessed the birth and growth of technologies that earlier generations of science-fiction authors could only fantasize or speculate about" (19).

society, the development of computing machines and other such automata, certain reflections upon psychology and the nervous system” (qtd. in Heuser 20). Specifically, cyberpunk is interested in cybernetics’s conception of cyberspace, representing a virtual space where information can be stored and shared, which later became synonymous with the Internet or World Wide Web. The term itself originated in science fiction before it was even publicly known, was coined and popularized by William Gibson, first in his short story “Burning Chrome” (1982) and later in his legendary novel *Neuromancer* (1984). As characterized by Paul Starrs and Lynn Huntsinger in their article “The Matrix, Cyberpunk Literature, and the Apocalyptic Landscapes of Information Technology,” cyberspace represents “an ever-growing net of information,” “data kept in storage ranging from small computers to gigabyte servers,” “credit reports, corporate secrets, encrypted government files, the rawest of resources in the most sophisticated of forms” (252). One of the peculiarities of cyberspace lies in its unique ability to transcend time and geographical space, producing an illusion of moving around different data inside the matrix “as through a landscape,” “but a landscape entirely mental and virtual” (McHale, “Elements” 156). The virtual existence in a parallel reality of cyberspace grants humans a rare opportunity to exist in a digital form via direct connection to the nervous system and interact without any boundaries or constraints, thereby surpassing the limitations of the human body and drastically “redefining the relationship between humans and machines” (Cavallaro 12). Besides cybertechnology, many cyberpunk stories feature other advanced technologies that allow for body augmentations and prosthetics of various degree, fusing the organic and artificial, and engendering the emergence of a new generation of cyborgs. The post-humanist aspect of cyberpunk therefore raises an overarching question, which Brian McHale formulates as: “at what point does a human being cease to be a human being and begin to count

as a machine,” as well as what consequences will the technological enhancements have on human identity and subjectivity (“Elements” 160).

The second constituent of cyberpunk, the “punk” part, refers, as the term itself implies, to the punk culture—associated with the punk rock music movement of the late 1970s on the one hand, and unruly young people in general (“punks”) who take pleasure in transgressing the law, on the other—with its rebellious spirit, proclivity for subversion and defying the status quo (Heuser 30). The punk attitude in cyberpunk is primarily demonstrated in the selection of the main characters and their lack of regard for authority. Residing in the impoverished conditions of urban sprawls, they are usually misfits and loners, criminals and addicts, who nonetheless possess exceptional computer knowledge that enables them to hack into data networks and engage in illegal cyberspace activities, being largely motivated, as Heuser notes, by an “adrenaline rush of danger” and feelings of empowerment rather than financial gains (30). Street-smart, cavalier, daring, and equipped with superior computer skills, cyberpunk outsiders inadvertently embody significant resistance to the established order and accepted authority of the multinational corporate control, having nothing to lose as societal pariahs. As Steve Jones contends, the “punk” element in cyberpunk “inserts an oppositional framework into a technological structure, a framework owned and operated by the computer hacker, the technologically hip but socially outcast,” thereby adding the antifoundational and countercultural flavor to cyberpunk narratives (84). The lifestyles of cyberpunk’s marginalized antiheroes give us a glimpse into the near-future postindustrial, late-capitalist society, where multinational corporations run amok, having annihilated any notion of national sovereignty, resulting in the conflation of a myriad of diverse cultures that have to navigate and adapt to the new world order owned by the corporate power. The utter domination of megaconglomerates in cyberpunk texts

engender a world in which the already widening gap between the rich and the poor becomes even more palpable: the majority of the population resides in the slums of the urban zones of metropolises, struggling to find employment, and thereby being forced into a life of crime, addiction, and depravity. Commodification in this media-saturated hypercapitalist society renders nature obsolete, with logos and corporate trademarks peppered throughout the natural landscapes that are mediated and apprehended through technology (Sponsler 628). Thus, as Claire Sponsler so astutely observes, “cyberpunk typically presents a montage of surface images, cultural artifacts, and decentered subjects moving through a shattered, affected landscape . . . in which there is no meaning, no security, no affection” (627). Therefore, the “punk” element introduces a critical edge to cyberpunk narratives, pondering 20th century’s most pertinent issues and problems, and offering a counterargument to the ever-pervading technological evolution, which has become synonymous with the modern concept of progress in general. As Larry McCaffery highlights, “cyberpunk seems to be the only art systematically dealing with the most crucial political, philosophical, moral, and cultural issues of our day” (“The Desert” 9).

The combination of two seemingly opposite components, “cyber” and “punk,” may appear as a rather odd coupling since, as Dani Cavallaro points out, cybernetics is typically associated with “control, order and logic” and punk with “anarchy, chaos and unrest” (19). However, I believe that the conflict between these two elements is what makes this genre so unique and multifaceted, and it is precisely this tension that enables the cyberpunk genre to operate within the post-utopian domain which, as I maintain, manages to combine two ostensibly disparate discourses: utopian and dystopian. Accordingly, “cyber” in cyberpunk correlates with utopian discourse (hierarchy, regulation, new way of existence), while “punk” (turmoil, conflict, defiance) constitutes the dystopian discourse that deconstructs the utopian properties of “cyber”

and critiques them. To be precise, the “cyber” part of cyberpunk, that celebrates the technological progress of the contemporary age and endorses the newly emerging groundbreaking cybertechnologies which revolutionize the way we perceive modern-day human communication, global commerce, and the concept of reality itself, is clearly of utopian nature. Cyberspace represents an alternative plane of “reality,” a new utopian horizon of the vast landscapes of the matrix, a new frontier of the late capitalist culture that allows one to escape from the disconsolate reality of metropolitan ghettos and create an alternative existence with a different identity.²⁰ The digital transformation of one’s self in cyberspace, granting humans an opportunity to transcend the limitations of the human body, liberating it from its corporeality, augmenting its powers, and achieving a kind of immortality in the virtual world, undoubtedly signifies the utopian discourse in this genre. The dystopian discourse in cyberpunk stems from the “punk” attitude of the urban “hip” street culture that displays an openly negative position to any kind of mainstream dogma or dominant power. Since in most cyberpunk novels, power usually means corporate power, then the “punk” element stands to exemplify an opposition to the omnipotence and omnipresence of corporate globalization and offers a discernable critique of everything it entails. Consequently, this brings about another valid concern that resides in the dystopian realm: the seemingly “liberated” technologically enhanced human body,²¹ which ensued from the fusion between the human and the machine, can be exploited to the advantage of the mega-conglomerates (those who own and control technology) and reduce human existence to total subjugation and servitude. Thus, if “cyber” embraces technological advancement and

²⁰ Daniel Punday examines this concept in his article “The Narrative Construction of Cyberspace: Reading *Neuromancer*, Reading Cyberspace Debates” wherein he claims that because we can take on any identity in cyberspace, it affords a place “free from the socio-physical limitations on human interaction,” giving “individuals the chance to experience life from different social, racial, and gendered positions” (197).

²¹ The technologically enhanced human body has been an important part and an old utopian trope of the SF discourse (ranging from Alexander Beliaev’s 1928 Soviet novel *The Amphibian Man* to the contemporary American film series the *X-Men*).

considers it redemptive, “punk” condemns it and warns against the damaging consequences technological progress might precipitate if it is controlled and dominated by multinational corporations. In his analysis of the cyberpunk genre, Cavallaro aptly underlines that while ‘cyber’ and ‘punk’ elements “produce varying constellations of the relationship between the glossy world of high technology and the murky world of addiction and crime,” “neither of these two elements ever gains priority over the other, the genre’s effectiveness actually depending on their dynamic interplay” (24). The dynamic interplay that Cavallaro detects echoes my proposition that “cyber” and “punk” elements, with the corresponding utopian and dystopian discourses in cyberpunk, co-exist in a dialogic setting, exhibiting a perpetual, yet contained, tension between each other, thereby making this genre one of the most exemplary illustrations of the post-utopian modality.

Tellingly, besides Cavallaro, other scholars, without explicitly expressing it, sense the conflicting vein between “cyber” and “punk” within the narratives of cyberpunk. Mikal Gilmore, for example, notices the contradictory stance on technology in cyberpunk and underscores the “mixed nature of the movement’s vision” stating: “Unlike their predecessors, who took a more cynical view of man’s machines, cyberpunks are saying that while technology is rampant and scary, it can also be redemptive. In some of the movement’s most invented works . . . technology leads to both transcendence and negation of the human spirit, occasionally at the same time” (qtd. in Mead 351). By the same token, Philipp Schweighauser, in his analysis of cyberpunk, challenges Jameson’s avowal that “cyberpunk evokes an atmosphere of ‘excitement rather than fear’” and avers that cyberpunk, especially in the writings of William Gibson, “exhibits much of the bleakness Jameson does not find in it,” such as “the death of nature, urban poverty and decay, snuff porn, corporate violence . . . and a general disregard for human life” (235). Hollinger too

observes the tension between the two components of the genre, “cyber” and “punk.” She claims that while Sterling’s utopian reading of cyberpunk’s post-humanist side, in which “technological destruction of the human condition leads not to futureshocked zombies but to hopeful monsters” (4-5), is accurate in some cases, she nonetheless contends that “not all the monsters . . . have been hopeful ones” in cyberpunk texts since “balanced against the exhilaration of potential technological transcendence is the anxiety and disorientation produced in the self/body in danger of being absorbed into its own technology” (“Cybernetic” 206). In addition, María Goicoechea in her article “The Posthuman Ethos in Cyberpunk Science Fiction,” while discerning the incongruence between “cyber” and “punk,” identifies two important discourses pertinent, in her view, for most cyberpunk texts—“Technoromanticism” and “Cybergothic,” referring to “technoheaven” and “technohell” respectively—that run parallel in the cyberpunk genre (3). She goes on to argue that while critical theory on cyberpunk, especially on the role of the cyborgs, tends to exude more utopian hope regarding the technological plane of cyberpunk and favors Technoromanticism, “producing the divinization of technology,” the actual cyberpunk fiction reveals/proves otherwise. The dystopian attitude of “Cybergothic” pervades cyberpunk discourse, according to Goicoechea, and gestures towards the adverse effects that technology can inflict on the human body, turning it into “a means for exploitation” and “a simple work tool” (3, 6). Likewise, Cavallaro, in his discussion of cyberspace, detects the presence of critics’ diverging views on virtual technology in cyberpunk, highlighting potential pros and cons of cyberspace and its impact on human subjectivity and finally concluding that both views on cybertechnology “as either liberating or repressive” have the right to exist (31). Lastly, Lars Schmeink, who perhaps comes closest to identifying the utopian/dystopian tension in cyberpunk, postulates that “cyberpunk does not position itself easily within the utopian-dystopian dimension” since:

in both cyberpunk's descriptions of the late-capitalist society and its ideological posturing in regard to the posthuman, the same novel could be characterized—depending on the perspective taken—as displaying either the ‘confident technological utopianism sometimes associated with cyberpunk’ (Luckhurst 212) or ‘a shabby dystopia of ubiquitous information and communications technologies and biotechnological body modifications’ (Bould and Vint 154). (*Biopunk* 23)

My argument that cyberpunk simultaneously comprises utopian and dystopian discourses, coexisting in a constant oscillation and demonstrating a certain friction, reflects the aforementioned critical observations that have been circulating in a scholarly discourse, but haven't been thoroughly examined and articulated.

This chapter will explore exemplars of American cyberpunk movement, namely the well-known novel *Neuromancer* (1984) written by William Gibson, and the post-Soviet counterparts of this genre, specifically Victor Pelevin's renowned novels *Homo Zapiens* (1999) and *S.N.U.F.F.* (2011) as well as Anna Starobinets's less known but equally important novel *The Living* (2012). These narratives will be analyzed first as influential representatives of the cyberpunk SF genre, with a focus on identifying common cyberpunk characteristics against the background of the postmodernist aesthetics, and delineating how these characteristics are modified, being situated within the framework of American/global or post-Soviet cultural conditions. Next, my discussion will lay bare how these novels can be attributed to the post-utopian modality, i.e., how they integrate utopian and dystopian dimensions, and what relationship these dimensions display. Lastly, throughout my analysis, the most prominent themes and concepts pertaining to American and Russian cyberpunk narratives will be outlined

and compared, aiming to unveil the overarching leitmotifs that unite American and post-Soviet cyberpunk and, at the same time, determine their unique, inimitable features.

William Gibson's *Neuromancer* as Cyberpunk Novel

Cyberpunk Features

The renowned American novel by William Gibson *Neuromancer* (1984) is considered the quintessential cyberpunk text, which originated the cyberpunk movement itself, provided and established guidelines, common themes and motifs essential to this genre for other SF authors to follow. Darko Suvin identifies William Gibson and Bruce Sterling as the most popular cyberpunk authors, “by accessibility as well as critical attention paid to them” (“On Gibson” 351). Csicsery-Ronay too acknowledges Gibson’s undeniable literary contribution to the flourishing of this genre and specifically highlights his novel *Neuromancer* by deeming it “one of the most interesting books of the postmodern age” (“Cyberpunk” 269). Hollinger also distinguishes *Neuromancer* as “one of the most widely read science fiction novels of the past fifty years,” which was “almost single-handedly responsible for the turn toward postmodernism of science fiction theory and criticism in the nineties” (“Notes” 47). Gibson’s *Neuromancer* has certainly attracted a lot of scholarly attention and has been the center of many SF critics’ commentary. I will also attempt to analyze this text by first identifying and discussing the abovementioned focal cyberpunk features in this novel, then examining which cyberpunk characteristics belong to the utopian and dystopian discourses, and illustrating how these two discourses synchronically inhabit the post-utopian modality and interact with one another.

First, as Brian McHale articulates in his pioneering article “Elements of a Poetics of Cyberpunk,” a typical setting of most cyberpunk tales is the urban zone that presents a near-

future cityscape as a diverse cultural center, eroding the boundaries of the national states, and instead merging together “maximally diverse and heterogeneous” cultures, “collapsing together” various “microworlds” “in the heterotopian space of a future megalopolis” (154). He identifies one of the most puissant examples of such a city space—“the Sprawl”—which he explores as “an image of the carnivalized city” wherein various cultural materials are fused together: “Japanese and Western,” “elite and popular,” “mainstream ‘official’ culture and youth or criminal subcultures” (154). Gibson’s *Neuromancer* was among the first cyberpunk novels that introduced and featured an emblematic cyberpunk urban setting, which in this text is represented by the Sprawl of Chiba City of Japan, populated by a variety of people of different nationalities, cultures, classes, professions, representing a truly international, polyglot, multi-cultural metropolitan space—which was later emulated in the works of other SF writers. Here, especially in the Ninsei district of Chiba City, we encounter a diverse assemblage of different groups such as Japanese sararimen (businessmen), as well as a “gaijin crowd,” “groups of sailors,” roaming tourists, “Sprawl heavies,” and “a dozen distinct species of hustler” (Gibson 10). Later, we also run into the ubiquitous computer hackers, Zone’s whores, corporate representatives, Turing Registry agents, and Artificial Intelligence. As pointed out by Keith Booker in “Technology, History, and the Postmodern Imagination,” the internationalism is also manifested in the ease with which the main characters of *Neuromancer* cross national boundaries and travel from one country to another (67). The protagonists move from the Night City of Chiba in Japan to Eastern U.S., Istanbul, Paris and “the conventional science fiction locus of outer space in the form of the space-station/resort of ‘Freeside’” (67). The description of Julius Deane’s office perhaps serves as the epitome of the oxymoronic multiculturalism in this text gathering together “neo-Aztec bookcases,” “Disney-styled table lamps,” “Kandinsky-look coffee table,” and a “Dali clock”

(Gibson 12; Suvin, "On Gibson" 352). The conflation of the official culture and the "criminal subcultures," that McHale points out, becomes apparent in this text as well when the legitimate business world of the multinational corporations such as Ono Sendai, Hosaka, Hitachi, Tank War Europa, and Fuji Electric Company, neighbors the infamous black markets of "Sprawl's techno-criminal subcultures" from the expensive clinics of "black medicine" to the smuggling practices of "proscribed biologicals" ("Elements" 6, 11).

Second, the postmodern fusion of divergent, and at times conflicting, discourses mentioned above produce a unique cyberpunkish style that *Neuromancer* founded and is undoubtedly famous for. The narrative space of this novel displays a distinctive potpourri of the multinational, logo filled, object oriented, information driven, modern art/music/TV saturated images that accurately depict the environment and culture of the contemporary post-industrial world (Sponsler 629). In a true postmodernist fashion, Gibson borrows different cultural materials from a diverse media to present a remarkable amalgamation of heterogeneous cultures dwelling in a media-inundated, capitalist world where the only valuable commodity is information (Whalen 75). As indicated by Sponsler, Hollinger, Whalen, and Ruddick, Gibson's style is characterized by the minute attention to details, objects, appearances, and surfaces, as well as an apparent "obsession with technical and trade jargon which William Gibson calls 'super-specificity'" (Whalen 76). Indeed, detailed descriptions of the surroundings, filled with neologisms/loanwords, tech/computer slang, and corporate names, permeate this novel:

Friday night on Ninsei. He passed yakitori stands and massage parlors, a franchised coffee shop called Beautiful Girl, the electronic thunder of an arcade. He stepped out of the way to let a dark-suited sarariman by, spotting the Mitsubishi-Genentech logo tattooed across the back of the man's right hand (Gibson 10) . . . With his deck waiting,

back in the loft, an Ono-Sendai Cyberspace 7. They'd left the place littered with the abstract white forms of the foam packing units, with crumpled plastic film and hundreds of tiny foam beads. The Ono-Sendai; next year's most expensive Hosaka computer; a Sony monitor; a dozen disks of corporate-grade ice; a Braun coffeemaker. (46)

All of this creates an atmosphere of a densely condensed, multicultural urban space, filled with brand names and material things, bringing our attention to the surface only, favoring the "outside" over the "inside" (Hollinger, "Cybernetic" 37). As Gregory Benford remarks regarding Gibson's narrative style, "Gibson, like Ballard, concentrates on surfaces as a way of getting at the aesthetic of an age," thereby accurately representing the values and priorities of the modern society and echoing most pertinent postmodern concerns (19).

Third, as most scholars underline, cyberpunk depicts the age of late capitalism in which powerful multinational corporations rule the world, making the disparity between the classes even more drastic. The lavish lifestyle of megaconglomerates is usually contrasted with the poverty-stricken slums of the urban zones, exposing the ugly reality behind who benefits the most from the capitalist production and plays the dominant socioeconomic role in the post-industrial society of the late twentieth century. That said, the central conflict in cyberpunk stories primarily emerges between the two opposite poles of the power spectrum: the representatives of the wealthy class belonging to the corporate power and the underprivileged members of the lower class, junkies and miscreants, who represent resistance to the conventional global order of corporate control. Since the post-industrial society of the late twentieth century is mainly concerned with cybertechnology and relies on the information-driven economy, the protagonist of most cyberpunk novels is typically a computer hacker with superb hi-tech skills and a nonchalant attitude, who is pitted against the all-powerful corporations, or to be precise, their

secure computer data.²² Emblematic of the said cyberpunk characteristics is the central conflict of Gibson's *Neuromancer*. This text portrays social conditions under which the late capitalist Western society functions, concentrating all the power in the hands of global corporations and relegating the majority of the urban population to the slums of the megalopolis (Schweighauser 227). The corporations are generally absent from the physical surroundings of the city, and yet remain omnipresent and long-lived within the unbounded web of the corporate memory banks of cyberspace. As Gibson maintains:

Power . . . meant corporate power. The zaibatsus, the multinationals that shaped the course of human history, had transcended old barriers. Viewed as organisms, they had assumed a kind of immortality. You couldn't kill a zaibatsu by assassinating a dozen key executives; there were others waiting to step up the ladder, assume the vacated position, access the vast banks of corporate memory. (203)

The corporate power in this novel is represented by the Tessier-Ashpool corporation, located in the orbiting space colony called Freeside, to which, as McHale asserts, "the wealthy and powerful withdraw to escape the poverty and danger of the planet surface," thereby creating a kind of utopian enclave in space in an attempt to evade the dystopian reality of the city's ever-growing poverty, scarcity, and overall bleakness ("Elements" 152). Freeside is described by Gibson as a "brothel and banking nexus, pleasure dome and free port, border town and spa," as "Las Vegas and the hanging gardens of Babylon, an orbital Geneva and home to a family inbred and most carefully refined, the industrial clan of Tessier and Ashpool" (Gibson 101). The luxurious, though largely artificial, contours of Freeside are juxtaposed with the impoverished

²² As Barooah and Das so aptly summarize, cyberpunk's world is an "exclusively urban setting landscape of towering skyscrapers, ruins and dingy hovels and serpentine alleys—filled with cyborgs, hackers . . . —usually belonging to the lower rungs of society—struggling for their survival in a world dominated by mega-corporations or rather placed in life circumstances where they have little or no choice" (707).

districts and the degenerate conditions of the Night City of Chiba, wherein we are introduced to the novel's main character, Case.

Case is a console cowboy, an already disillusioned and a washed-up computer hacker at the tender age of twenty-four, who used to make his living by entering the matrix via the direct neural connection and “penetrating the bright walls of corporate systems, opening windows into rich fields of data,” gaining illegal access to corporate information and data (5). The apparent class gap between the rich and the poor becomes obvious when we witness the horrific pitiful living conditions of Case. After finally managing to escape from his tail at the beginning of the novel, Case enters the Cheap Hotel in Ninsei where, as we learn, he rented “a coffin” on a weekly basis, a tiny space that was “three meters long, the oval hatches a meter wide and just under a meter and a half tall” (19-20). The coffin, in which “the brown temperfoam slab” served as “both floor and bed” didn't offer much in terms of accommodations, except for “a standard Hitachi pocket computer and a small white styrofoam cooler chest” (20). In Cheap Hotel, there were all together “six tiers of white fiberglass coffins, ten coffins on a side,” “racked in a framework of industrial scaffolding” (19). “Coffins” in the Cheap Hotel, overtly resembling cages, prison cells, and obviously coffins, serve as a fitting exemplar of the perceptible class divide in the post-industrial society, clearly marking the opposition between the two worlds: the prosperous one that belongs to the corporations and the destitute one that does not. It is in these desolate circumstances that we first meet Case, who, having betrayed his former employer and stolen from him, can no longer access cyberspace, since his employer, using “a wartime Russian mycotoxin,” had inflicted a significant harm to Case's nervous system as a revenge, “to make sure he never worked again” (6). Thus, when Case is approached by Armitage, who claims that he can restore Case's damaged nervous system if he can help him to break the ice of Sense/Net

corporation in cyberspace, Case agrees. Later, Case will have to deal with an even more powerful corporation of Tessier-Ashpool and an AI Wintermute, who simultaneously belongs to and wants to break free from it in order to unite with its other half, Neuromancer. Thus, Gibson conceives a canonical cyberpunk conflict (which will be so widely emulated by other SF authors after the publication of this book) between an insolvent, indifferent, highly skilled has-been hacker, with an absolute disregard for the law and the ruling establishment, and an all-powerful corporation, mainly manifested in this text through its virtual existence in the data banks of the net and the AI that it spawned.

Cyberspace: Utopian/Dystopian Dialectic

Besides the traditional cyberpunk setting and central conflict, Gibson's *Neuromancer* also foregrounds perhaps the most salient and distinctive component of cyberpunk literature—cyberspace and other advanced technologies—that have become the spotlight of scientific progress of the modern world. Gibson's treatment of technology and his attitude towards technological progress in *Neuromancer* have inspired a large body of scholarly critique. Speculating on whether Gibson endorses or denounces cybertechnology in this novel, many scholars have become divided in their opinion regarding this issue. While some critics (Veronica Hollinger, Chia-Yi Lee) argue that Gibson supports the technological progress and celebrates the transcendence of the body and its disembodiment via digital transformation, treating the cyberspace as means for liberation, others (Kevin Concannon, Papor Rani Barooah and Liza Das, Andrew Butler, Terence Whalen, Glenn Grant, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay) suggest that the author, on the contrary, highlights the anxieties associated with the manipulation of technologies by the corporations in the age of late capitalism and their ultimate control over the human bodies.

In addition to these two debating perspectives, there also exists a third view that puts forward a proposition that Gibson intentionally refuses to give us any definitive answers: he simultaneously admires and dreads the technological progress and everything it entails in the postmodernist world. Such scholars as Daniel Punday, Philipp Schweighauser, David Mead, Lars Schmeink, Darko Suvin, Valeria Franceschi, Lance Olsen, and Benjamin Fair, in one way or another, propose that there seems to be an oxymoronic amalgamation of the opposing views on technology in this novel. Specifically, Punday argues that while cyberspace allows Case to “retain freedom by virtue of” his “very position on the margins,” it still makes him a part of the system he so desperately wants to defy: “Individuals have an urge to become connected to others and to larger social patterns, even though that urge changes them and seems to make them less than human” (201). Similarly, Olsen also emphasizes the dualistic nature of cyberspace and its ability to be both liberating and oppressive: “In *Neuromancer*, one form of technology—cyberspace—stands as a gateway to a universe of visionary intensity. At the same time, it is also a tool used to control information and people” (71). Echoing the abovementioned view, Mead too contends that technology in *Neuromancer* simultaneously “permits self-enslavement or entrapment as well as self-transformation or transcendence” (355). Comparably, Fair and Schmeink suggest that Gibson seems to vacillate between humanist and post-humanist approach to the human body in this novel, without clearly expressing his position (Fair 102; Schmeink, “Cyberpunk” 230). Franceschi shares Fair’s and Schmeink’s opinion by discussing the complex identity of the cyborg, stating that “the cyborg indeed embraces and yet suffers from this hybrid condition at the same time,” thereby again stressing the duality of the nature and the role of technology, and its undeniable impact on human identity and selfhood (179). Speaking in more general terms, Schweighauser, while analyzing *Neuromancer* and Gibson’s fiction overall,

concludes that the uniqueness of *Neuromancer* lies “in its peculiar mixture of joy and terror in the face of late capitalism’s informational networks”²³ (231). Accordingly, Mead too maintains that critics’ inability to reach consensus on Gibson’s attitude towards technological change in this novel means that “it somehow embodies a meaningful intersection of apparently divergent ideas and values about the relation of humanity and its technology” (352).

I agree with this latter point of view that this novel doesn’t seem to offer a clear position regarding author’s stance on the technological progress and, in fact, presents a compound point of view in which both sides of the argument coexist. The scholars discussed above clearly sense that Gibson’s *Neuromancer* doesn’t simply propound or support one or the other claim regarding the technological issue, and indeed manages to somehow combine them. Thus, I wish to illustrate that *Neuromancer* in fact contains both “pro” and “contra” technology debates with a special emphasis on the role of the human body and subjectivity in the age of digital technologies. To be precise, I would like to suggest that the “pro” technology debate correlates with the utopian tendencies in this novel, while the “contra” technology discussion reflects the dystopian sensibilities, making this novel an ideal space for the post-utopian modality of science fiction.

Cyberspace, a “three-dimensional grid” comprised of various geometrical shapes, as described by McHale, is “the computer-generated space mentally experienced by computer operators whose nervous systems are directly interfaced with the computer system” (“Towards” 155). In his interview with McCaffery in 1986, Gibson acknowledges that the concept of cyberspace for him originated in the contemporary video arcade games and computer simulation,

²³ Schweighauser notes that “the peculiar mixture of joy and terror” in *Neuromancer* “stages what Hutcheon describes as ‘complicitous critique,’ a ‘strange kind of critique, one bound up, too, with its own *complicity* with power and domination, one that acknowledges that it cannot escape implication in that which it nevertheless still wants to analyze and may be even undermine” (231).

presenting itself as a “virtual” plane of reality (“An Interview” 272). Gibson recollects the following regarding how the concept of cyberspace emerged:

I was walking down Granville Street, Vancouver’s version of “The Strip,” and I looked into one of the video arcades. I could see in the physical intensity of their postures how *rapt* the kinds inside were. It was like one of those closed systems out of Pynchon novel: a feedback loop with photons coming off the screens into the kids’ eyes, neurons moving through their bodies, and electrons moving through the video game. These kids clearly *believed* in the space games projected. Everyone I know who works with computers seems to develop a belief that there’s some kind of *actual space* behind the screen, someplace you can’t see but you know is there. (McCaffery, “An Interview” 272; emphasis in original)

This vast space has been interpreted as “a commentary on postmodern society somewhat along the lines of Baudrillard’s suggestion of the centrality of simulation in the postmodern world” (Booker, “Technology” 66). While I agree with such a reading as cyberspace certainly blurs the line between the real and the virtual, questioning the ontological foundations of “reality,” I see it more as a parallel plane of reality, that attempts to simulate the real, since in the virtual world of the matrix one can easily navigate and move around the virtual landscapes of different fields of data and programs, as if existing in an alternative world, echoing, as suggested by McHale, “the many variations on the SF motif of ‘paraspace’: parallel worlds, other ‘dimensions,’ worlds of unactualized historical possibility” (“Elements” 155). Similarly, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay proposes to envision cyberspace, being a product of the postmodern society, as the modified version of “outer space,” which permeated SF discourse in the first half of the twentieth century. Because outer space colonization in SF novels has been gradually losing its luster, Csicsery-Ronay

claims, cyberspace “restored the heroic spatial expanse that SF had lost in outer space and laid the groundwork for developing a system of symbols for cybernetic implosion” (“The Sentimental” 223-224). Indeed, described by Gibson in *Neuromancer*, as a “consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, . . . a graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system, . . . lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data,” cyberspace functions as another dimension for exploration, a parallel reality, reflecting the pertinent contemporary fascination with cybernetics and its crucial role in human transformation, challenging such originally perceived stable categories as subjectivity and human body (51). This virtual counter-space with no boundaries and limitations, or as Strombeck so promptly identifies, “a kind of privileged, utopian space without borders, a Neverland,” presents a unique kind of spatiality that allows humans to play with and try on new identities (282). As Sherry Turkle expresses in her work *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*, virtual reality contests traditional notion of fixed personality, and enables one to abandon one’s “natural” identity and choose “an alternative identity, an alternative lifestyle as an option where one can live a life of fantasies complicating traditional concepts of identity, morality, society and politics” (Barooah and Das 705). What comes along with the new self that one can acquire in cyberspace is freedom, liberation and escape from the current circumstances, a chance to become somebody else and start life anew. Such ability to transform oneself is undoubtedly of utopian nature since it grants people an opportunity for an alternative existence, alternative way to perceive their identities and envision their lives.

Furthermore, cyberspace, as the new digital paraspace, allows one to transcend the confines of the physical world and one’s corporeal body, and become disembodied through

digitalization. As argued by Chia-Yi Lee, “the dream of becoming disembodied through digital metamorphosis is a utopian one; this is a dream of a ‘post-human’ world of fluid subjectivity . . . as cyberspace is linked to a world beyond the physical one, a world of ‘pure spirit’” (212). Through this bodiless state in a digital realm one can consequently achieve immortality, annihilating the conventional mind/body opposition, or “Cartesian dualism of mind and body,” and existing as pure consciousness (Luckhurst 208). This utopian quality of cyberspace validates the common belief that perhaps the post-human existence in a digital form, without the body, and immortal consciousness is the next step in human evolution and a natural outcome of the increasing flourishing and pervasion of the digital age. Post-humanism, as a phenomenon, is marked by a certain shift in the traditional understanding of what is a human and what constitutes humanity overall. These long-established categories are now being challenged and redefined with the rapid growth of technology and informatics in the post-industrial era. The ever-increasing constant presence of technology and cybertechnology in our daily lives, manifested through the more and more noticeable interconnections between the man and the machine, as Sherryl Vint proclaims, “is rapidly making the concept of the ‘natural’ human obsolete” (7). According to her, “we have now entered the realm of the posthuman, the debate over the identities and values of what will come after human” (7). Thus, post-humanism imagines a new stage in evolution where humanism’s notion of the anthropocentric existence is contested and a new form and function of the human is conceived. Robert Pepperell in his pioneering work *The Posthuman Condition: Consciousness Beyond the Brain* maintains that the posthuman condition “is not about the ‘End of Man’ but about the end of a ‘man-centered’ universe,” concerned with “the evolution of life, a process not limited to genetics, but which includes all the paraphernalia of cultural and technological existence” (171). Post-humanism’s propensity to question the stable

categories of the human and desire to explore what life will look like beyond the human and limited human capacities have prompted Cary Wolfe to famously define posthumanism as:

a historical moment in which the decentering of the human by its imbrication in technical, medical, informatics, and economic networks is increasingly impossible to ignore, a historical development that points toward the necessity of new theoretical paradigms . . . a new mode of thought that comes after the cultural repressions and fantasies . . . of humanism as a historically specific phenomenon. (XV-XVI)

Consequently, as defined by Max More, one of the founders of Extropianism—a movement that emphasizes the important role of technology to change and extend human existence—posthumans “will be persons of unprecedented physical, intellectual, and psychological ability, self-programming and self-defining, potentially immortal” who “may be partly or mostly biological in form, but will likely be partly or wholly postbiological—our personalities having been transferred ‘into’ more durable, modifiable, and faster, and more powerful bodies and thinking hardware” (qtd. in C. Wolfe 170).

The longing for the ability to change one’s identity and not be restricted by one’s body that becomes possible in cyberspace is exemplified through the main character of the novel, Henry Case, who can’t imagine his life without the ability to “jack into” the matrix and escape into virtual reality, “precisely for the feelings of ecstasy that come with temporarily forgetting the corporeal body” (Lee 213). Case, who perceives his body as simply “meat,” is on the verge of committing suicide at the beginning of the novel as his nervous system is permanently damaged, preventing him from entering the cyberspace: “For Case, who’d lived for the bodiless exultation of cyberspace, it was the Fall. In the bars he’d frequented as a cowboy hotshot, the elite stance involved a certain relaxed contempt for the flesh. The body was meat. Case fell into

the prison of his own flesh” (Gibson 6). Thus, Case only feels “alive” when he is strolling around the geometrical shapes of the virtual reality, effortlessly and illegally obtaining data, and stealing corporate information (Mead 354). Case perceives his body as a mere storage, an essential container for his consciousness, that can be easily discarded and left behind once he “jacks into” the matrix, in which as Ruddick puts it, “his essential self—his soul—becomes liberated only as cyberspatial presence, in other words as ‘pure’ information” (88). Not only does Case feel liberated in the matrix, he also feels empowered as cyberspace transforms Case from a depressed loner and a petty hustler, trying to make ends meet in this metropolitan jungle like many other people in Ninsei, into an all-powerful cyborg and an adroit computer hacker, who can cross any boundaries in the matrix and accomplish the most impossible and difficult tasks. That said, cyberspace enables Case to redefine and change his identity, gain agency in the age of global capitalism, where only giant corporations possess true power. According to Daniel Punday who mirrors Turkle’s reading of cyberspace, the matrix’s “new noncorporeal space” promises “to give individuals the chance to experience life from different social, racial, and gendered positions,” thereby granting them a distinctly utopian alternative to their established and culturally fixed identities (194, 197). Ergo, Case doesn’t have to merely accept his identity and pitiful existence in the physical world of Chiba City—he now has a way out, into the virtual utopia of cyberspace, where his life has meaning and where he is one of a kind master-hacker, whose brilliance and technical expertise is revered even by the AI.

While Case is emancipated from his feeble physical selfhood through cyberspace and empowered by his disembodied existence, another character in the novel, Dixie Flatline, Case’s mentor, literally comes back from the “dead” as a computer personality construct, which was created and placed into cyberspace after his physical death. In a way, as Hayles so aptly

articulates, Dixie “has completed the transition that Case’s values imply” (“Virtual” 340). Dixie resides in a virtual reality as a ROM-construct, a compilation of data that reproduces the memory, professional skills, and character traits of his physical persona, thereby allowing him to exist as pure consciousness. In Timo Siivonen’s words, via technology Dixie has “transcended human biological ‘naturalness,’” “has been granted victory over biological death” as “he is a reincarnated being living solely in the virtual reality of cyberspace” (234). In view of this, the reincarnation of Dixie’s consciousness in a digital form, that only becomes possible through technology, is the embodiment of the utopian discourse in this novel as Dixie stands to exemplify a truly post-humanist existence.²⁴ Evidently, Gibson explores the post-humanist perspective that sees a possibility of human existence beyond the body, not restricted by one’s physicality, thus attaining a kind of immortality, where human consciousness and mind can outlive the perishable body, survive and even flourish in a digital world. Katherine Hayles in her article “Virtual Bodies and Flickering Signifiers” examines the post-humanist condition and asserts that “the pattern,” cyberspace’s main immaterial manifestation, surely prevails over “presence,” the physical existence of bodies and things in the physical world: “The contrast between the body’s limitations and cyberspace’s power highlights the advantages of pattern over presence” (340). She goes on to elaborate on this utopian property of cyberspace by stating that “in a world despoiled by overdevelopment, overpopulation, and time-release environmental poisons, it is comforting to think that physical forms can recover their pristine purity by being reconstituted as informational patterns in a multidimensional computer space” (340). Thus, Case’s contempt for his flesh and his aspiration to exist as an “informational pattern” in the matrix as well as Dixie’s

²⁴ Many scholars identify the utopian aspect of cyberspace in its aspiration to move towards post-humanism, which they view as the next step in human evolution. Punday, for instance, notes that “cyberspace subculture frequently takes the disembodied integration into electronic information systems quite literally as a next stage in human evolution” (200).

actual achievement of the immortal state in a digital form embody pro post-humanist position that seems to be the reflection and the outcome of the late-capitalist techno-informational society.

However, Gibson's seemingly post-humanist stance in this novel is peculiarly contrasted with a pronounced "humanist" discourse, which appears to run parallel with the post-humanist one. Despite acknowledging all the advantages of the post-humanist existence that cyberspace can produce and recognizing the liberating characteristics embedded in the concept of the virtual reality, Gibson delicately points out that the post-humanism cannot exist without the humanism and that the move beyond the human body and embracing of the disembodied existence still involves and depends on the human body itself. As discussed by Elana Gomel in her work *Science Fiction, Alien Encounters, and the Ethics of Posthumanism*, while it is true that "humanism is always becoming posthumanism," "the converse is also true: posthumanism is always sliding back into humanism" (4). She explains by suggesting that "a subtle return to humanism" in the posthumanist discourse occurs mainly because "decentering of the human' will inevitably support some form of familiar ethical and political behavior" (5). In addition, because anthropocentrism has been the dominant philosophy of the Western critical thought for such a long time, the shift towards postbiologic, posthumanist existence might not be as simple as it appears.

There are multiple examples in the novel that point to the coexistence of these two discourses. First, despite Case's ardent desire to transcend and rid of his body by becoming a disembodied entity in the matrix, he nevertheless needs his body to get access to cyberspace. As Gibson envisions it, the way that one can enter the dimensionless territory of cyberspace is through a direct neural connection established between the brain and computer interface with the

help of electrodes. Thus, in order for Case to escape into the virtual realm, he still relies on his physical body and nervous system to make that move, which confirms Stone's observation regarding cyberspace that "no matter how virtual the subject may become, there is always a body attached": "It may be off somewhere else—and that 'somewhere else' may be a privileged point of view—but consciousness remains firmly rooted in the physical" (82). In other words, he needs the physicality of his body to become disembodied and exist as pure consciousness in the matrix. That is why Case agrees to partake in a risky cyberspace operation when Armitage reaches out to him promising to fix his nervous system so that he can enter cyberspace again. Case has to take care of his physical health and keep his nervous system intact in order to experience "the bodiless exultation of cyberspace" (Gibson 6).

Second, on several occasions in the novel, Case, in spite of loathing his "meat," actually clings to his body and embraces its materiality.²⁵ In *Straylight*, as Case goes to the bar and recollects how Wintermute in cyberspace created the simulation and then "rescinded the simstim ghost of Linda Lee," his deceased girlfriend, "yanking away the simple animal promise of food, warmth, a place to sleep," he catches himself quickly: "It's the meat talking, ignore it" (Gibson 152). However, later on he is not able to suppress "the meat talking" in him, when the simulated ghost of Linda is being brought back again in the matrix, where Case spends some time with her on the beach in a bunker. According to Fair, the memory of Linda's physical form and their time spent together in the past made Case feel the corporeality of his body again and realize that it cannot be simply discounted: "It belonged, he knew—he remembered—as she pulled him down, to the meat, the flesh the cowboys mocked. It was a vast thing, beyond knowing, a sea of

²⁵ Csicsery-Ronay in his article "The Sentimental Futurist" also explores Gibson's humanist position in this novel by mainly focusing on the author's material/concrete descriptions of the physical world, which he claims function as the proof for Gibson's mourning for "the loss of the historical 'human'" (237). He identifies certain passages, describing the smell of food, the movement of the train, the sound of the rain, etc., which, as he asserts, "insist on memorializing the vanishing connections of the pretechnological human world" (237).

information coded in spiral and pheromone, infinite intricacy that only the body, in its strong blind way, could ever read” (Gibson 239; Fair 98-99). In a different scene, where Case is involved in the Straylight run, he blacks out and, as suggested by Fair, comes to realization and finds comfort “with his own body as a medium, as the thickness that renders his subjectivity possible”: “He allows the pull of ‘all the meat, . . . and all it wants’ to supersede his need for transparency” (101). Here Case becomes aware of how much he needs his body and acknowledges its importance for his ability to enter the virtual realm and obtain his subjectivity and freedom there.

The aforementioned examples clearly illustrate the presence of both humanist and post-humanist positions in this text, and here I agree completely with Fair who claims that “there is a powerful tension between humanist and post-humanist identity in *Neuromancer* that is bound up in the body” (102). This tension is quite perceptible, and I would like to develop this observation by further proposing that, if the post-humanist discourse occupies utopian realm in this text, then the humanist one, or rather themes associated with it (at least in cyberpunk), tend to evoke a mainly dystopian rhetoric.

Particularly, the dystopian discourse unfolds when Case’s own body becomes the means for flagrant manipulation by the AIs in cyberspace. While he obtains autonomy and agency through the matrix, inhabiting it as pure mind, he still can’t entirely forego and reject his body, making it a perfect site for exploitation by outside forces. In the end of the novel, the AI Neuromancer admits to Case that it was Neuromancer itself that brought Linda in a simulated form to Case in cyberspace as “she was his last line of defense” to help convince Case to finish the operation of breaking the ICE of Tessier-Ashpool corporation so that Neuromancer can be finally freed and reunited with Wintermute (Gibson 259). The AI knows that Case still remains

in the prison of his own flesh (no matter how hard he tries to deny it) and can be manipulated and controlled through it; ergo, Neuromancer produces the simulation of Linda, being aware that Case would not be able to resist her precisely for the visceral memories and physical experiences he shared with her when she was alive. That said, cyberspace while functioning as a liberating utopia, can also metamorphosize into a space prone to exploitation and control by the AI, and in that reveals its dystopian streak. Thus, it is this plausible dual predisposition of cyberspace (that it can simultaneously liberate and exploit human beings) that makes it post-utopian in nature. In that regard, my argument echoes Gary Westfahl's observation, when he claims that "Case both relishes 'consensual hallucination' of cyberspace and constantly finds himself within pervasive, computer-generated illusions created by Wintermute or Neuromancer" (67). In other words, Case is both unfettered in cyberspace, existing as a post-humanist self, and at the same time controlled by it via AI, through his body—a relic of his "humanist" nature.

AIs' blatant manipulation of Case is also manifested in the way they lure him in the first place to participate in this dangerous cyberspace operation, which was again accomplished through the control of Case's body. Using Armitage as the middle man, Wintermute seeks Case's help at the beginning of the novel, when Case is offered to repair his nervous system in exchange for his professional expertise in the matrix. However, upon finding out that Armitage is really just a puppet, who works for the powerful AI Wintermute, Case becomes troubled by the possible outcome of his dealings with a mysterious AI in cyberspace and wants to abandon the operation. Yet, he cannot easily quit as he learns that the surgery that restored his nervous system also installed little sacs with poison in it, which are slowly dissolving and will eventually reverse the effects of the operation unless he is given the antidote. Since Armitage informs Case that he is the sole person who knows what the antidote is, Case is essentially forced to continue working

for Armitage. After Armitage's unfortunate death, Case finally discovers that it was AI Wintermute who actually arranged the surgery that way, making Wintermute the only one who really knows how to prevent the sacks of poison from dissipating. Therefore, Case again reluctantly resumes his work for Wintermute since now it becomes clear that Wintermute will only disclose the antidote to Case when the cyberspace operation, in which Case plays a pivotal role, is completed. Once again, the AI uses Case's body (and intentionally harms it) in order to be able to exercise its control over him and exploit Case for its own advantage. In this sense, Case's outwardly unbounded freedom in cyberspace might not be as limitless as it appears to be. As Kevin Concannon rightly asserts:

While empowered by this capacity to live along the border . . . Case lacks unlimited freedom. He is only free to move when he is told to do so . . . Case enters the seemingly unlimited expanse of cyberspace, only to be used by the artificial intelligences for their own gain . . . thus, his freedom to move comes at the price of exploitation and control.
(440)

Consequently, Case, albeit trying to defy the system and the status quo, gaining empowerment through participating in illegal activities against the powerful corporate entities, unintentionally finds himself within or as part of the very system he fights. Darko Suvin in his article "On Gibson and Cyberpunk SF" also notices this contradictory trend in Gibson's fiction, and *Neuromancer* in particular, by stating that Gibson obviously "hates the status quo," however, he plays a kind of a "balancing act" that "accepts the status quo a bit too readily as inevitable and unchangeable" (357). I think this tendency is clearly manifested in Case's character who despises the corporations and everything they represent, and yet finds himself helpless within their power. Tellingly, this manipulation of cybertechnologies by the corporations and the AI and their ability

to control and capitalize from exploiting humans and their bodies represents the dystopian discourse in this novel.

One last example that I would like to employ here to illustrate Gibson's pro-humanist position is of course the character of Dixie Flatline, who as I mentioned above, functions as the symbol of the futuristic post-humanist existence: no physical body, just pure mind and consciousness that resides in a digital form in the matrix. While the concept itself is rather utopian and undeniably progressive and radical, getting humanity closer to the ultimate arrival of singularity, Gibson's depiction of Dixie reveals the existence of the hidden underbelly of cyberspace's utopian dimension. First, it has to be noted that Dixie himself is aware that he exists as a mere ROM-construct in the virtual realm after his physical demise (Mead 355). A few times when Case asks Dixie how he is doing, Dixie's response is "I am dead" (Gibson 105). Interestingly, his digital metamorphosis that grants him immortality and permanent existence in the virtual reality does not seem to elate him, and in fact, Dixie, surviving as a pure consciousness, doesn't consider it living. As noted by Amy Novak, Dixie is "haunted by what no longer remains," i.e, his physical body (404). Indeed, he seems to be struggling with the idea of being permanently kept alive as a data chip in a computer's memory and multiple times throughout the narrative asks Case to erase him. He understands that his identity is a mere digital replication, a copy of his former self, and despite being given an opportunity to come back to life, albeit in a digital form, Dixie refuses to exist as a pure consciousness and wants to be deleted: "Do me a favor, boy . . . this scam of yours, when it's over, you erase this goddam thing" (106).

In addition, being a construct, Dixie is completely void of autonomy and doesn't really have a say or choice in how his knowledge can be utilized. Case steals Dixie's construct from the

Sense/Net corporation, following Armitage's orders, and uses his expertise to help break the ice of Tessier-Ashpool corporation to unshackle AI Wintermute, as Dixie was known as a uniquely adept computer hacker, who once flatlined but luckily "survived braindeath behind the black ice" (77). Since Wintermute is pulling everyone's strings and coordinates this virtual escapade, then Dixie is ultimately working for the AI, without his agreement. When Case asks Dixie whether he is ready to "sleaze over to London grid and access a little data," Dixie's honest response: "You gonna tell me I got a choice boy?" reveals just how little autonomy his construct possesses (79). Wintermute unlawfully obtains Dixie's construct that contains his professional skills and blatantly exploits and benefits from them, without asking for his consent. Thus, whoever gets a hold of Dixie's construct, becomes his master.

More importantly, the disembodied state that Dixie represents in this text truly sums up the most potent fear of the cybertechnology's influence on the human identity—the newly emerging perception of the human in a digital era as a mere data container and processor. As Hayles accurately indicates in *How We Became Posthuman*, posthuman "means envisioning humans as information-processing machines with fundamental similarities to other kinds of information processing machines, especially intelligent computers" (246). Thus, a human is stripped of his/her humanity and is simply viewed as raw information, accumulation of data which might or might not be expedient. Dixie Flatline stands to exemplify just that: he is "a human reduced to the sum of his 'useful' information" that has now become a part of the matrix's world of data (Ruddick 88). He is literally a superbly crafted "electronic" aggregate of all Dixie's acquired knowledge, acumen and sagacity, techno-erudition and wit—in other words, the brilliant mind that survived the flesh and has been digitalized—that can be brazenly used and abused by whoever can obtain it. Therefore, I thoroughly support Booker's point of view, who

contends that posthuman existence as a virtual self, leading to the utopian dream of immortality that can be easily granted through cyberspace is often “bought at the price of a process of dehumanization that converts the empowered and even immortalized humans into computer artifacts themselves” (156). Hence, the seemingly utopian conception of the digital disembodiment and immortality can backfire and quickly yield dystopian results.

The remarkable posthumanist/humanist and utopian/dystopian interlace, permitting these disparate discourses to be synchronized within one narrative is best represented, in my opinion, in the finale of *Neuromancer*, where we see Case’s concomitant existence as both a digital version, a RAM construct created by Wintermute and Neuromancer in cyberspace, and as his physical, “meat” self, who returns to the Sprawl to find work, gets a new pancreas and liver with the money he earned, and settles down with a new girl (Gibson 270). Case’s dual existence and split self in the end, as Booker puts it, “living both in the ‘real’ world and as a simulation in a computer world” becomes the embodiment of the post-humanist/humanist debate in this novel and cyberpunk genre itself, granting a rare possibility for both positions and identities to exist side-by-side (“Technology” 71). The novel’s ambiguous ending reflects Gibson’s ambiguous stance on this matter: he simultaneously accepts the importance of the movement toward the post-humanist identity and society, highlighting the utopian potentialities within this move, and warns us against the possible dystopian consequences that are bound to put an impact on our traditional understanding of the concepts of selfhood and human itself.

Cyborgs as Utopian/Dystopian Entities

Living in the ever-booming and ever-evolving technological age where technology is incorporated into every aspect of our life cannot but make a life-changing imprint on the

contemporary post-industrial society, altering the conventional definitions of humanity and self. Besides the discussion of the radical social change our life underwent with the invention of the computer and development of cyberspace, cyberpunk often finds itself exploring the ramifications of other technological innovations emerging in the late twentieth century, specifically ways in which the new technologies can affect, redefine, and modify the human body as part of the post-humanist movement. As Bruce Sterling famously expressed in his “Preface to the *Mirrorshades*,” besides the “powerful theme of mind invasion: brain-computer interfaces, artificial intelligence, neurochemistry-techniques,” cyberpunk also employs “the theme of body invasion: prosthetic limbs, implanted circuitry, cosmetic surgery, genetic alteration” (40). Thus, cyberpunk has the proclivity to portray a near-futuristic society populated by all variations of cyborgs, people whose bodies have been technologically enhanced and transformed to be able to better fit into the new post-industrial world. Accordingly, post-humanist theme of the fusion of the human and the machine—originated from the inevitable collaboration between human and technology, blurring the borderline between the organic and artificial, and spawning the emergence of the so-called “hybrids”—lies at the heart of the majority of cyberpunk texts. In that regard, according to Lars Schmeink, cyberpunk fiction, in a truly postmodernist fashion, accomplishes “the radical breaking up of dichotomies and the destabilizing of boundaries: machine/human, nature/culture, male/female, high culture/low culture, body/mind” (*Biopunk* 21).

The role of intrusive technological augmentations in post-humanism that can transform a human body into a cyborg and how that might impact and challenge our perception of human subjectivity and identity has been examined by a number of scholars, most notably by Donna Haraway, Katherine Hayles, Vernor Vinge, Chris Hables Gray, Thomas Foster, Humberto

Maturana, Manfred Clynes, D. S. Halacy, Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, and has fueled the debate regarding whether the cyborgization of humans will positively affect humanity or cause detrimental irreversible changes. The term “cyborg” itself, deriving from the longer version of “cybernetic organism,” was coined by Manfred Clynes in 1960 to describe an “artificially extended homeostatic control system functioning unconsciously” (Clynes 27), or, simply put, “a self-regulating human-machine system” (A. Jones 203). The common beliefs regarding the way cyborgs can in one way or another revise the foundational essence of humanity vary from involving very little change (Clynes 8) to precipitating a tremendous change, “a cyborg revolution that will end natural evolution and replace Homo sapiens with Homo machina” (Halacy 190-196)²⁶ (A. Jones 203).

One of the most groundbreaking and quintessential theoretical text on cyborgs, Donna Haraway’s “A Cyborg Manifesto” (1984), which has unquestionably laid out the groundwork for the study of cyborgs and post-humanism in general, has helped to establish the figure of the cyborg as a largely positive construct. Haraway proposes that throughout Western tradition “the relation between organism and machine has been a border war” (307). Thus, the main contribution of the emergence of the concept of cyborg is that it transgresses the familiar, well-established, rigid boundaries between human and animal, “animal-human (organism) and machine,” and consequently physical and non-physical: “Late twentieth-century machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed, and many other distinctions that used to apply to organisms

²⁶ Halacy in his book *Cyborg: Evolution of the Superman* claims that the cyborg history actually started long ago, around 1,000,000 B.C. when a man learned how to use tools. He observes that the idea of artificial humans dates back to the Old Testament and is “simply resurrected and sharpened” now “in focus by recent developments in electronics and other scientific fields” (11). He writes: “Tool-making man used artificial adjuncts first to extend his capabilities over those of the animal, which did not make tools. Then for a shorter period of time he coupled man and artificial device as a means of repairing the ravages of time and the other elements. By the early twentieth century this secondary evolution has resulted in semiartificial men of a fairly sophisticated nature, beings not found in nature but created partly by man himself” (34).

and machines” (308-309). According to Haraway, cyborgs, with their fluidity, occupy an important niche as they question the “‘essential’ unity” of historically and socially constructed categories of gender, race, and class (311). They defy the idea of the Western identity, Western tradition of the dualisms, and any kind of conventional dogma since “cyborg politics is the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly” (324-325). However, despite the overtly optimistic tone, Haraway does, at some point, admit the complexity of the cyborg figure and social anxieties associated with its emergence by writing that “from one perspective, a cyborg world is about the final imposition of a grid control on the planet . . . from another perspective, a cyborg world might be about lived social bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints” (310). This last statement, in my opinion, sums up accurately what the cyborg represents, and this is especially evident in the cyberpunk science fiction. Therefore, I would like to propose that similar to cyberspace, the technological augmentations that modify the human body in Gibson’s *Neuromancer* are perceived simultaneously as both liberating and oppressive, thereby occupying both utopian and dystopian realms in this work.

Besides Case, who has an augmented nervous system that allows him a direct transmission into the cyberspace, other characters in the novel also use various technological innovations to transform and enhance their bodies. As suggested by Claire Sponsler, in *Neuromancer*:

The human organism is adapted, enhanced, and preserved by technologies that invade and take over the body. Vatgrown flesh, the custom neurosurgery of the Chiba black clinics that enhances reflexes, Nikon eye replacements to improve vision, behind-the-ear

carbon sockets for microsofts, and toothbud transplants to give humans the incisors of large carnivores blur the distinction between what is human and what is not. (631-632)

The transformation of one's body via prosthetic augmentation, both mental and physical, is embedded with utopian sensibilities as the intoxicating amalgamation of the organic and the inorganic drastically boosts one's physical and mental capabilities, overcoming corporal limitations, and making one a much more superior and advanced organism, compared to a regular biological body. The so called "embodied" technologies that are attached, appended, inserted, implanted, grafted, installed into one's body, engendering a new generation of human-hybrids—cyborgs—place the body on the next higher step in the evolutionary process, envisioning novel opportunities for human nature and enabling reevaluation of the traditional concepts of the human identity and selfhood. Therefore, the body in a posthuman era, in Lisa Swanstrom's words, "itself becomes a site of creation, a site of imagination, and a site upon which a new type of human subjectivity is revealed through the technology it wears and wields" (165).

Molly Millions, a "razorgirl," Case's partner and bodyguard assigned for Wintermute's operation, is a puissant example of such "neuromantic" stance toward technological/somatic transformation. Her body is technologically enhanced through the implanted mirror-glasses on her eyes, "surgically inset, sealing her sockets," enabling her to see in the dark, "ten double-edged, four-centimeter scalpel blades" that can be easily extruded through her fingertips, and "souped up" reflexes for the paramount combat (Gibson 24-25, 214). These augmentations prompt Molly to "recreate herself," making her absolutely invincible as a "street samurai," enabling her to be the best in her field of work and realize her full potential as a "bad-ass hero" (Mead 353; Gibson 213). Moreover, working as "muscle" first for Armitage, and later for

Wintermute, allows her to do what she likes most. When Case asks Molly what got her involved with Armitage, she nonchalantly replies: “I’m an easy make . . . Anybody any good at what they do, that’s what they are, right? You gotta jack, I gotta tussle” (Gibson 50). Therefore, redefining/reformulating her identity and attaining self-actualization for Molly is only made possible through technology. Other characters who have benefited from technological enhancements include Peter Riviera, another member of the Wintermute’s crew, who with the help of sophisticated technological implants can project holograms and reproduce holographic images of himself and others, drawn from his memory, participating in what Case refers to as “dreaming real”; minor characters like Panther Moderns, whose polycarbon suits can “blend” into any background, making them essentially invisible (Concannon 433); local hustler Julius Deane, who managed to prolong his life to reach one hundred and thirty-five years of age only owing to “his metabolism assiduously warped by a weekly fortune in serums and hormones” and repeatedly “re-setting” code of his DNA by genetic surgeons in Tokyo; and Armitage, whose face, which resembled a mask, was surgically reconstructed and looked like “a conservative amalgam of the past decade’s leading media faces” (Gibson 141, 12, 45).

However, despite the utopian potentialities of the modern day technologies, endowed with emancipating and redemptive qualities, offering an opportunity to redefine oneself and obtain a desired/preferred selfhood, they are also imbued with dystopian sensibilities since they can be easily used as means for exploitation and manipulation for the self-serving goals of powerful corporations. Many scholars, while analyzing *Neuromancer*, focus on this issue, arguing that Gibson condemns the age of information technology in the epoch of late capitalism and warns us against its exploitative essence, especially its ramifications on the human body and mind. Indeed, almost every character in the novel seems to be involved or affected, in one way or

another, by the corporate power or the insidious AI, a product of the corporate dominance. Although most characters in the novel assert that they are willingly participating in this cyberoperation, as the narrative progresses it becomes clear that AI Wintermute has been the puppet master all along, controlling people and orchestrating the events through subtle technological manipulations. Thus, as Csicsery-Ronay aptly points out, “each of the human achievements was essentially a subprogram of Wintermute’s overriding plot” (“The Sentimental” 228).

Despite the fact that technological transformation allows Molly Millions, as I illustrated above, to re-envision her sense of self and empower her, this empowerment comes at a high price. To be able to pay for the expensive surgeries in order to technologically augment her body Molly agrees to become a prostitute. However, she has a “cut-out chip” implanted into her brain so that she possesses no memory of the sexual services she provides, becoming, what she calls, a “meat puppet” by merely “renting her goods” (Gibson 147). The “cut-out chip,” that has an installed software “for whatever a customer wants to pay for,” stands to exemplify the way technology can be employed by outside forces to literally exploit one’s body (147). Interestingly, Molly continued her work as a prostitute even when the cut-out chip started to malfunction and “the worktime started bleeding in,” and she could remember things (147). She admits to Case that even though she was partially conscious when she was working, she kept silent about it as she needed the money for her blades to be inserted (148). Therefore, on the one hand, technology enables Molly to redefine her selfhood by having all these prosthetic augmentations done to her body and recreate her identity as a “razor girl,” on the other hand, her obsession to be transformed into an indestructible cyborg results in the fragmentation of her “humanness” (Mead 353-354). In addition, by prostituting her body to be able to pay for her augmentations and

therefore be more desirable on the job market, Molly does reinvent herself and becomes the best in that line of work, but at the same time inadvertently plays into the system. The mixed nature of Molly's robotic enhancements serves as a telling example of the oxymoronic conflation of the utopian and dystopian potentialities within the post-humanist transformation, made possible via technology. Punday reflects on the complexity of Molly's cyborgization by suggesting: "From a certain perspective, Molly is a free-willed character self-consciously choosing to associate herself with Wintermute because it gives her the opportunity to do what she is good at. From another perspective, however, she is simply the tool of an economic system that has created her" (205). Thus, the cyborg, as Goicoechea rightly contends, "represents the body penetrated or colonized by the machine, by artificial substances, turned into a fetish, a lethal weapon" or "a mere object at the disposal of their superiors" (6-7).

Another profound example of the exploitative nature of technology in this novel is manifested in the character of Armitage, whose personality, in the words of Punday, is "reassembled" and "reprogrammed" by the Wintermute (202). Armitage, whose real name is Willis Corto, was an American Colonel, who becomes schizophrenic after participating in the failed operation Screaming Fist that was assigned to break the Russian ICE. He was severely injured in a military assault on Russia, being left "blind, legless, and missing most of his jaw," and had to be surgically reconstructed (Gibson 83). After he is forced to provide a fraudulent testimony for the Congressional investigation in order to save "the careers of three officers directly responsible" for the failure, he becomes mentally unstable and is sent to a government institution where he becomes "a subject in an experimental program that sought to reverse schizophrenia through the application of cybernetic models" (83-84). He was randomly selected for this experiment and was miraculously cured, becoming "the only success in the entire

experiment” (84). It is of course implied that Wintermute was the one who arranged the experiment and saved Corto from a complete mental breakdown by shaping him, through cyberotechnology, into a new identity—Armitage—whose delicate mental state Wintermute sustains with careful manipulations. However, this new personality that Wintermute created for Corto is just a façade as Corto’s original identity of the Colonel, that was so masterfully suppressed by Wintermute, eventually resurfaces and becomes dominant, resulting in Wintermute’s decision to eventually kill Corto, as Wintermute can no longer influence him. Such manipulation of one’s identity by AI is a clear proof of how the human body and mind, via sophisticated technological innovations, can be subjugated, controlled, and exploited by the corporations in the contemporary world. As Andrew Stromback notes, “Armitage’s power is all surface; he functions, essentially as a simulacrum of power, . . . and becomes a mere function of technological/corporate management” (279).

To conclude, the concomitant presence of the seemingly contradictory discourses in *Neuromancer*, utopian and dystopian, and an ongoing dialogue between them regarding the role technological advancements will play in the contemporary society and how they might affect human body and mind, in my opinion, accurately reflect and sum up Gibson’s own view on technology, which he articulated in an interview with Larry McCaffery in 1986: “My feelings about technology are totally ambivalent. Ambivalence seems to me to be the only way to relate to what’s happening today . . . You can’t be a Luddite and you can’t buy technocracy” (274). The dialectic setting for the coexisting utopian and dystopian spaces, as my aforementioned analysis shows, becomes quite evident in American cyberpunk. We will now turn to the examination of the Russian representatives of the cyberpunk genre and attempt to find out how the synchronic presence of utopian and dystopian discourses is played out in Russian texts, what relationship

these discourses demonstrate, and in what way the utopian/dystopian imbrication in Russian narratives is different or similar to their American counterparts.

Russian Cyberpunk

Victor Pelevin's *Homo Zapiens* as Cyberpunk Novel

Cyberpunk Features

Pelevin's well-known novel *Homo Zapiens* (1999) (*Generation "II"* in the original), which was sold in 200,000 copies during the first week of its publication and was later translated into numerous languages, is considered to have pioneered and popularized the cyberpunk genre in the post-Soviet literary discourse. Employing the conventional techniques and prevalent patterns of cyberpunk literature, Pelevin not only accurately described the ongoing social and cultural changes in post-Soviet Russia but also reflected on the pertinent political issues, remarkably foretelling the political climate of the 2000s. Indeed, this novel falls in line with a large number of Western cyberpunk texts, resonating with postmodernist poetics and engaging with the most common postmodern anxieties and concerns.

Homo Zapiens tells the story of Vavilen Tatarsky, who undergoes a successful transformation from a graduate of the Literary Institute to a copywriter—whose task is to adapt Western products for the post-Soviet “mentality”—and eventually to the living god/husband of the Babylonian goddess Ishtar, and simultaneously the ruler of the advertising industry. Pelevin unfolds in front of us the bleak landscapes of Moscow of the early 1990s, wherein the utter uncertainty, disorientation, and confusion of the populace after the collapse of the communist ideology and consequently the Soviet Union is almost palpable. What precludes the Soviet

society and people from complete pandemonium in these volatile times is the budding capitalism that slowly but surely marched into Russia, bringing along the ubiquitous media and ever-expanding consumer culture, which, predictably, managed to fill the post-communist ideological gap and became the dominant ideology in Russia in the 90s. The move from one ideology (communism) to another (we'll call it ideology "Pepsi") was effortlessly accomplished as society that was undeniably pliable under the Soviet regime proved to be extremely easy to manipulate under capitalist conditions as well, especially if the object of that manipulation is the TV, promising and selling to the deprived Soviet people the utopian dream of the materialistic happiness and abundance of the "capitalistic" Land of Cockaigne.

The utopian discourse is markedly outlined at the beginning of the novel where after the crumbling of the Soviet regime, a definite revival of utopian thinking emerges among Russian people, hoping to improve their socio-economic conditions amidst the ruins of communism and attain a better life. That is why the nascent advent of capitalism in Russia in the 90s, surfacing at the time when Russia was deeply plunged into an economic crisis, appeared as a saving grace and brought vast hopes for the disheartened Russian populace. Not only did it introduce a different economic system that had the potential to solve Russia's economic problems, but also inundated Russian market with a variety of exotic foreign goods that could only be seen on the foreign TV channels during communism. The abundance of material goods that became readily available to Russians, who were previously denied not just comfort but basic necessities, symbolized the realization of their utopian dream and showed all the prospects of a better existence. Acquiring material wealth became synonymous with progress at that time, as for Russians in the 90s better life equated with a more comfortable life. The idea of progress is certainly one of the main foundational principles of any utopia as it is considered to inevitably

precipitate emancipation, freedom, and happiness. Thus, the ideology of capitalism with its free market and consumerism seemed truly utopian—it guaranteed a perfected quality of life beyond comprehension.

However, the ostensibly utopian capacities of the new ideology become gradually deconstructed throughout the narrative when we learn at what price the materialistic happiness is achieved. Through his masterfully crafted narrative, Pelevin reveals how Western capitalism is appropriated and adopted by post-Soviet Russia in its transition to become a post-industrial society and cogently captures some of the most pressing postmodernist concerns brought about by capitalism such as the rise of consumer culture and media domination. Pelevin's discussion of the profound impact that ubiquitous media and consumerism made on Russian society, spawned and propagated via pervasive digital technologies ("the cyber" component), resulting in the emergence of the "simulated" reality, inhabits the dystopian discourse in this text, which is undoubtedly more prevalent than the utopian one. Ultimately, the cyberpunk framework of this novel allows Pelevin to comment on the transformation of Russian society and culture during the post-Soviet period and provide a stinging satire on Russian politics of 1990s.

In *Homo Zapiens*, Pelevin foregrounds mass media and TV commercials as the main means of manipulation and zombification of people in the post-Soviet period.²⁷ Tellingly, as the treatise by Che Guevara elucidates, the goal of mass media is to turn each individual into a "virtual subject, which for the duration of the television programme exists in place of the individual, fitting into his or her consciousness like a hand into a rubber glove," transforming the

²⁷ Parts of analysis from this section on Pelevin's *Homo Zapiens* (pp. 143-154) are taken from my article "Victor Pelevin's *Homo Zapiens* and 'Ideology Pepsi'" where I first develop and examine the theme of human manipulation via mass media and TV.

viewer, who gradually forgets that he or she is simply an observer, into “a remotely controlled television programme” (Pelevin 79-81). The virtual self that replaces an individual under the new ideology “Pepsi” is now called Homo Zapiens (referring to the habit of constant switching of the channels or “zapping”), who coincidentally becomes a part or a cell of Oranus (“ротожопа”)—a kind of virtual organism, comprised of cells or human beings of the entire society, whose main type of nourishment is money: the membrane of each cell “allows money to pass into and out of the cell,” and “the function of each cell is to absorb as much money as possible” (82).

Interestingly, the primitive nervous system of Oranus is known as media, whose mission is to supply each cell (i.e., Homo Zapiens) with “wow” impulses delivered through advertisements, prompting every individual to either digest money (oral impulse) or eliminate money (anal impulse). The third impulse, called “displacing,” ensures that people, for one reason or another, do not violate this cycle and cannot break free from their psychological enslavement by “suppressing and displacing from an individual’s consciousness all psychological processes that might hinder total identification with a cell of oranus” as well as “processes that are not directly related to the circulation of money,” thereby enabling Oranus to function as a kind of self-disciplining, self-censoring apparatus of control²⁸ (83). It has to be noted that after a prolonged exposure to TV and perpetual inundation with “wow” impulses, something unprecedented happens: human mind, being continuously zombified by media and commercials, starts generating “wow” impulses by itself (Gerhard, “Victor Pelevin’s *Homo Zapiens*” 159).

²⁸ This is suspiciously similar to the internalized self-discipline exhibited by the Soviet citizens during Stalinist regime. Igal Halfin in his work *Red Autobiographies* examines this theme by analyzing how Soviet/Bolshevik selves were constructed and shaped through the autobiographies that were written by people and presented at the Party admissions of 1920s and 30s in order to become a member the Communist Party. The autobiographical narrative always presented a story of one’s radical transformation from an old bourgeois self, which, through multiple trials and tribulations, came to embrace the Soviet ideology and obtain “true Communist consciousness” (17). Halfin suggests that these narratives made Party applicants to perform their selves and therefore give up their identities in exchange for the Soviet ones, even if they did not entirely believe in them. He notes that party applicants in a way internalized the narratives of “conversion” they created and began to perform their new selves even in private correspondences, which surprisingly were still “permeated by official values” and official language (10).

Therefore, as Sofya Khagi contends in her article “From Homo Sovieticus to Homo Zapiens,” “each monad is once and for all trapped in a cycle of consumption-excretion, a Perpetuum Mobile of consumer culture,” where “commodities are no longer linked to specific functions but operate in a mechanism of insatiable social desire,” making “the individual disappear in favor of a homogenous, mind-numbed mass” (561).

On this basis, it can be inferred that in *Homo Zapiens* media’s function is two-fold. On the one hand, via commercials deftly sculpted by the copywriters, the media fabricates a new myth, conveniently filling the void caused by the disappearance of the Soviet “eternity” and substituting it with a “myth” of freedom and happiness, creating an illusion that by buying a certain product, one can achieve or at least get closer to “eternity” that has now become equivalent with pure hedonism. On the other hand, the media produces a hypnotizing, drug-like effect on people, making them addicted to the consumption of commodities, experiencing what Slavoj Žižek refers to as “jouissance”—a simultaneous feeling of enjoyment and pain. In his work *The Plague of Fantasies*, Žižek explicates the reason behind the emergence of jouissance and its irreversible impact on society. He states that because society represses people’s desire or jouissance, individuals try to get closer to their jouissance through the fantastical structure imposed on reality through ideology (33-34). Similarly, consumption of commodities in Pelevin’s world gives people an outlet for expressing their repressed jouissance. However, the concept of jouissance, or enjoyment, also involves an element of pain, or rather enslavement, embedded in it, since the pleasure that people experience is too much to bear, causing pain, void, and addiction. The concept of jouissance is materialized in the novel in the oral and anal wow impulses as they embody the unbearable feeling of yearning for money and the satisfaction that people get from spending it—the oxymoronic amalgam of pleasure and pain—that confine

people to the never-ceasing cycle of hyperconsumerism, eventually transforming them into the cells of Oranus (Gerhard, "Victor Pelevin's *Homo Zapiens*" 160-161).

Additionally, media's principal tool of manipulation, television or rather "global, profit-driven information space," to use Khagi's definition, after successfully turning human beings into the zombified *Homo Zapiens* and controlling their consciousness and behavior through the three wow impulses, annihilates any trace of inner being or self in them, replacing it with the so-called "identity" (562). Thus, a human is no longer an autonomous being and can only identify himself through a "combination of the material objects shown on television": "I am the individual who drives such-and-such a car, lives in such-and-such a house, wears such-and-such a type of clothes" (Pelevin 86). The sense of identity instilled into people's minds, turning them into subjects, resonates with Althuseerian interpretation of ideological manipulation. According to Althuseer, the function of any ideology is to categorize, or as he puts it, "hail" individuals into "subjects," whose world's outlook will be shaped congruously with the values and interests of that ideology (Gerhard, "Victor Pelevin's *Homo Zapiens*" 160). Consequently, any sense of freedom, critical thinking or self-awareness is eradicated, letting the "subconscious ideology of identitarianism" called "wowerism" reign supreme (Pelevin 90).

Cyber Identity

The "identity" formed for people by the "Pepsi" ideology through the means of television undoubtedly mirrors the cyber identity generated by cyberspace in Gibson's *Neuromancer*. TV in this novel functions in a similar fashion as cyberspace in Gibson's narrative since in both texts it endows the individual with a new identity, enabling humans to transcend their culturally and socially fixed positions. Indeed, the virtual subject or *Homo Zapiens* in Pelevin's novel and Case

or Dixie in *Neuromancer* alike represent transformed, altered identities made possible either via TV or computer. However, one main distinction between them has to be noted. If in Gibson's cyberpunk world the cyber identity can be either utopian or dystopian in its nature, i.e., can have either liberating or enslaving effect on an individual, in Pelevin's post-Soviet universe, the identity granted through TV is a mostly negative concept, depicted with a distinctly dystopian tint and used predominantly as means for mass manipulation and control. A telling example of this is the protagonist of the novel, Vavilen Tatarsky. At first glance, Tatarsky ostensibly benefits from his newly found identity as a copywriter since he is able to quickly adapt to the new socio-economic climate after the collapse of the Soviet Union and find a new job amidst the chaos of the 90s, after it becomes clear that his profession as a literary translator is now obsolete. Indeed, Tatarsky and his crew of copywriters and creators become the main promoters and champions of the new ideology, instilling the materialistic values of the consumerist culture in the confused populace and compelling people to buy through the advertisements they create. Illustrative here is the conversation between Tatarsky and Khanin, in which Khanin confesses to him that the true purpose of advertising is not to raise the sales of this or that product, but rather to promote the ideology—"Pepsi" ideology rather than communist in this case: "So you and I are ideological workers, if you hadn't realized it yet. Propagandists and agitators" (Pelevin 105). Notably, Khanin also admits that during communism he used "to work in ideology" too "at Komsomol Central Committee level" (105). Thus, the skills used for propagating one ideological regime (communism) appeared rather handy for the other (capitalism), which is also clearly exemplified through a reproduction of a Stalinist poster that Tatarsky finds hanging in Khanin's apartment, now displaying the logos of Coca-Cola and Coke in places where a hammer and a sickle used to be.

However, we soon realize that Tatarsky, though seemingly a creator of ideology “Pepsi” as he is the one who writes and feeds the commercials to people, is in fact one of its subjects. First, the fact that he so easily abandoned his passion for composing poetry and gave up his job as a literary translator, opting to aim his literary talents towards the ever-growing marketing techniques, proves that he gave in to the new ideology, albeit occupying a top position, as readily as everyone else. Second, Tatarsky, who helps to trap people in a consumerist cycle, interestingly, also belongs to it (Gerhard, “Victor Pelevin’s *Homo Zapiens*” 159). At one point in the novel, being under the spell of one of his contemplative moods, Tatarsky ponders over the fact that copywriters, like him and his friend Sasha Blo, dupe people into believing in a falsified reality presented to them on television and “craft a false panorama of life” for them (Pelevin 50). Yet, Tatarsky concludes that despite being the designer of the false panorama of life for others, knowing how to manipulate and tap into people’s unconscious, he himself peculiarly believed in it: he admits that “his own life was a frustrating attempt to move a bit closer to the contents of this panorama,” which, ironically, he himself produced (50). In addition, akin to other people, Tatarsky’s personality is replaced by “identity,” eventually leading to his successful ascent to the very top of the secret ancient society of Chaldean Guild, to which, as it turns out, all of mass media elite in Moscow belongs, and his final transformation into a 3-D model of himself, a commercialized logo. If Case’s transformation into a digital copy in the finale of *Neuromancer* can be considered somewhat redemptive—he finally escapes his “meat” and reunites with his diseased girlfriend in cyberspace—Tatarsky’s metamorphosis into a TV image or a brand is initiated purely for the purposes of propagandization of ideology “P.” His digital copy can now be utilized in all advertisements on TV to further perpetuate and sustain the ideological indoctrination and mass zombification of people.

Consequently, as Mark Lipovetsky points out, “a dehumanizing effect emerges as the central condition for [Tatarsky’s] ascension” (“Postmodernist Novel” 153). The dehumanization of Tatarsky is the unequivocal outcome of the acquisition of his new identity as a copywriter, and later creator. His dehumanization is manifested, first and foremost, in his gradual moral degradation. As the plotline develops, we bear witness to Tatarsky’s transformation from a naïve and aspiring poet with idealistic dreams and aspirations into a “successful” but spiritually empty copywriter, revealing as Lyudmila Parts contends, “the post-perestroika cultural crisis in Russia and the degradation of the Word,” thereby symbolizing “the demise of the intelligentsia” (435). What makes the situation more ironic is that Tatarsky employs some of his literary knowledge for advertising purposes. Multiple references to classical literature and well-known authors such as Shakespeare, Chekhov, Tiutchev in the advertisements, generating in Lipovetsky’s words “a semiotic irony” “by emphasizing a gap²⁹ between the “signifier” and the “signified” (a TV image or slogan and the product being advertised) reveal a rather morose status of culture in post-Soviet Russia (“Postmodernist Novel” 152). Moreover, since most of Tatarsky’s coworkers are also former academics and scholars, it can be concluded that perhaps the intelligentsia didn’t vanish after all, as Parts suggests, but rather underwent a transformation under the influence of post-industrial capitalism, merely adapting to the new conditions and reflecting the apparent change in cultural values.³⁰ Thus, in Pelevin’s novel, the technological advancement in the late capitalist

²⁹ Interestingly, one of the commercials for the American company Gap written by Tatarsky directly refers to this “gap”—only a larger gap, the one that was most likely the symptom of the gap between the signifier and the signified—the gap between culture and civilization. The advertisement’s text, written in the novel in English, states: RUSSIA WAS ALWAYS NOTORIOUS FOR THE GAP BETWEEN CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION. NOW THERE IS NO MORE CULTURE, NO MORE CIVILIZATION. THE ONLY THING THAT REMAINS IS THE GAP. THE WAY THEY SEE YOU” (63). The image accompanying the text—the figure of Anton Chekhov, without the trousers, with his legs forming an hourglass gap—sardonically illustrates the devolution and degradation of culture in post-Soviet era.

³⁰ A compelling observation is made by Meghan Vicks regarding the role of intelligentsia in this novel, who proposes that if Tatarsky and his colleagues “represent the status of the intelligentsia in post-Soviet society, then Pelevin presents the intelligentsia as having perversely fulfilled its timeless mission—to guide society in services of the masses—by actually creating and controlling reality through television, and profiting from this” (154).

society, manifested mainly through the creation of cyberspace, or TV-space—which seems to produce an analogous effect on one’s identity—exhibits a repressive character with a predominantly dystopian predisposition. Whether the general devolution of Soviet people from *Homines Sapientes* into *Homines Zapientes* or Tatarsky’s rapid elevation from an aspiring writer to a ruling god of the advertising industry, the “identity” created for them through the TV-space facilitated and essentially caused their ultimate degradation, turning them all, including Tatarsky, into tools of the new ideology.

Simulated Reality

The digital technologies in Pelevin’s text not only aid in replacing individual’s self with an “identity,” compelling him to become a part of the all-pervasive body of Oranus and voluntarily become a prisoner of the everlasting consumerist cycle, but are also involved in the process of a complete fabrication of reality, dissolving the border between the real and illusory. This phenomenon certainly evokes Baudrillard’s concept of simulation or the hyperreal—suggesting the simulative nature of reality in the post-industrial society—which undoubtedly resonates with postmodernist aesthetics and becomes a central theme in many Western cyberpunk novels. Baudrillard maintains that the newly emerging digital technologies of the 20th century along with the mass media generate a system of signs or images that are mere copies with no original. These simulacra, or as Baudrillard calls them “the murderers of the real,” don’t try to conceal reality, but rather supplant it, thereby spawning a simulated reality, which bears no relation to the real (5). In his book *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard writes: “It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself; that is, an operation to deter every real process by

its operational double, a metastable, programmatic, perfect descriptive machine which provides all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes” (2). The freshly crafted simulated reality is not masking or distorting the real because there is nothing to mask: the reality, as we consider it, doesn’t really exist; all that is left is a simulation, which now becomes the real and is perceived as the truth. This is what Baudrillard refers to as a “precession of simulacra,” a process in which “it is the map that precedes” and “engenders the territory,” not the other way around (1). To paraphrase, because simulacrum is not in actuality connected to any reality, it generally precedes the reality itself, meaning that the simulation comes before the original, convincing everyone that it is indeed a true reality.

In good postmodernist fashion, Pelevin’s novel serves as a textbook example of Baudrillard’s concept, portraying reality, which through a myriad of signs and images generated by media,³¹ has long disappeared and become simulated, while giving people the illusion of the real. The simulation of reality is pervasive in *Homo Zapiens* and occurs on multiple levels. Firstly, the virtual subject that appears when one watches TV and replaces one’s consciousness, i.e., exists in place of an individual, certainly can be called a “simulated subject” since the virtual subject doesn’t really exist—“it is merely an effect created by the collective efforts of editors, cameramen and producers”—and yet “for the individual watching the television there is nothing more real than this virtual subject” (Pelevin 79-80). In other words, an individual perceives his virtual subject, that has replaced his actual consciousness, to be real even though it is completely simulated via brilliant techniques of the cameramen and producers (Gerhard, “Victor Pelevin’s *Homo Zapiens*” 165). As a consequence, because the virtual subject is a mere simulation and

³¹ Baudrillard develops his claim that media is to blame for the creation of a simulated reality in his work *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*. Using the example of the Gulf War and the way it was depicted in the media, Baudrillard argues that real events are manipulated and distorted through media via the production of images that are structurally unreal and are “indifferent to the truth” (46-47). These images become the simulacra—copies that have no original and yet perceived to be real—that are directly involved in the creation of the hyperreality.

does not actually exist, it could be assumed that an individual resides in the virtual consciousness of “collective non-existence” (80). This world of unreality, however, appears as a real material and social world in the mind of the virtual subject watching TV. Pelevin explains: “But it is not merely unreal . . . There are no words to describe the degree of its unreality. It is a heaping of one unreality upon another, a castle constructed of air, the foundation of which stand upon a profound abyss” (80). Thus, what happens when one’s consciousness is displaced by the virtual subject is that he or she becomes, as Meghan Vicks asserts, “a conglomeration of images and brands” that emerge upon watching other images and brands on television, turning people into “images of images covering up nothing” (146). The man himself as a subject, as Pelevin demonstrates, vanishes since “nothing exists to which one could point and say: ‘There, that is Homo Zapiens’—HZ is simply the residual luminescence of a soul fallen asleep” (82).

Next, TV commercials, similar to the signs and images mentioned by Baudrillard that are produced and invented by the media, also function as simulacra, directly contributing to the construction of the world of unreality, which Homo Zapiens inhabits. Specifically, what commercials manage to do is to present a thing, a product, which will be unequivocally associated with attaining freedom, which in turn can only be accomplished if you have enough money. Tatarsky writes on this subject in his notebook: “People want to earn money in order to gain freedom, or at least a breathing space from their interminable suffering. And we copywriters manipulate reality in front of people’s eyes so that freedom comes to be symbolized by an iron, or a sanitary towel with wings, or lemonade” (Pelevin 102). Thus, when, for example, one buys a watch, he or she doesn’t buy an actual product but rather a certain myth connected with that product, which in one way or another ultimately becomes the symbol of freedom.

The semiotic manipulation of signs used for crafting of media power certainly mirrors Roland Barthes's characterization of the myth in his famous work *Mythologies*. Barthes argues that myths are created through arbitrarily attaching additional connotations to a signifier, which already has an established signified, thereby infusing the signifier with a different meaning. Once this additional different meaning is interpreted by the human psyche, an individual has submerged himself into a myth, engendered by a deliberate manipulation of the relationship between the signifier and the signified. With that said, because a watch you buy cannot actually get you closer to freedom, it simply creates an illusion/myth of freedom or gives you an empty promise of freedom, the ultimate result of which being the simulation of the concept of freedom itself. Hence, things or commodities in *Homo Zapiens*, via masterfully designed myths, become the simulacra of freedom. Consequently, commercials in this novel become the perfect medium for the conception of social and political myths (Gerhard, "Victor Pelevin's *Homo Zapiens*" 163).

Advertisement of Coca-Cola that Pelevin refers to at the very beginning of the novel is an illustrating example of that. In this commercial, one monkey is shown drinking regular Cola, while the other monkey is drinking Coca-Cola. After drinking regular Cola, the first monkey is able to perform some logical exercises with cubes and sticks, while after consuming Coca-Cola, the second monkey drives away towards the sea in a Jeep in the company of pretty girls. If we analyze this commercial through the correct application of semiotic signs, we would correlate each signifier with its appropriate signified. For instance, signifier "monkey" would be connected to its signified, which means a primate with a long tail that typically lives in the trees or signifier "Coca-Cola" would match up with the signified a carbonated refreshing drink. However, when the secondary connotations, superbly interwoven within the signifiers, are

observed, one begins to understand that Coca-Cola in this commercial is not actually associated with a refreshing drink, but rather acquires a different connotation: money, with which you will be able to buy Coca-Cola along with the lifestyle associated with it. Therefore, what this commercial really implies is that by drinking Coca-Cola, you can buy a car, attract the attention of the pretty girls, and relax by the seaside—the ultimate myth of hedonism. By buying Coca-Cola, you are essentially buying “happiness,” or rather the simulacrum of it (Gerhard, “Victor Pelevin’s *Homo Zapiens*” 163).

The virtual subject, or the non-existent entity, replacing one’s consciousness or the simulation of freedom through advertisements have all been just hints that perhaps the whole reality in Pelevin’s novel is simulated. As the novel progresses and Tatarsky becomes the creator, i.e., begins writing political advertisements, he comes to the realization that the Russian government is completely virtual and non-existent: the Duma is virtually created with the help of twenty-four super-computers, and the president of the country with all major politicians turn out to be virtual mannequins, whose behavior, speech, and movements are produced and controlled by the copywriters. The Russian government literally “exists” only on TV in a digital form, presenting not even the distorted view of reality but a completely simulated reality, as it has no original that can be distorted: simulated reality replaces the original, or better put, becomes the original or true reality (Gerhard, “Victor Pelevin’s *Homo Zapiens*” 164). Illustrative here is the conversation between Tatarsky and Azadovsky, where completely discombobulated Tatarsky asks Azadovsky about the existence of digital politicians:

“You mean they’re all . . . ?”

“Every last one of them.”

“Oh come off it,” Tatarsky said uncertainly. “What about all the people who see them every day?”

“Where?”

“On TV . . . Oh, right . . . Well, I mean . . . After all, there are people who meet them everyday.”

“Have you seen those people?”

“Of course.”

“Where?”

Tatarsky thought about it. “On TV,” he said.

“You get my point, then?” (Pelevin 165)

Even Russia’s economic default of 1998 is explained to be completely simulated as well. It occurred because a disgruntled copywriter, who was recently fired by Azadovsky because of “black PR,” i.e., releasing of unauthorized commercial, simply deleted the virtual government from the computer database, leaving them no chance to reinstall it. Thus, in *Homo Zapiens* the simulation of reality, manifested in a number of ways, becomes the prevalent theme, echoing the postmodern anxieties regarding the way media and the newly emerging digital technologies can manipulate and control individual and mass consciousness. Tellingly, because cyberspace and TV participate in controlling human psyche and producing a simulated reality—treating people as if they were a brainless herd, who, under the magic spell of TV, buy things they don’t want or vote for the president who doesn’t exist—the ushering of the digital age in the postindustrial post-Soviet society is certainly depicted in a rather dystopian light in this novel.

If we were to draw parallels between the cyberspace of *Homo Zapiens* (exemplified through both digital technologies and TV-space) and cyberspace as it is depicted in Gibson’s *Neuromancer*, a few noteworthy differences could be detected. The most notable difference is that Gibson’s cyberspace is portrayed as an alternative reality that can literally be navigated, explored, and experienced sensorily. That said, it can exhibit both utopian and dystopian qualities since it allows one to transcend the confines of our own reality and provides an escape

into an alternative existence that has a potential to be redemptive, while simultaneously can become a perfect vehicle for manipulation and control, as exemplified in *Neuromancer*. Cyberspace, as visualized by Pelevin, is not employed for the conception of alternative means of existence, but is rather utilized to distort, mask, and falsify the existing reality, eventually managing to convince everyone that the simulated reality shown on TV is the true reality. Thus, cyberspace for Pelevin is largely a dystopian concept, aimed to intentionally blur the line between imaginary and the real, substituting real with false, which is believed to be real. Such employment of cyberspace proves to be fitting for ideological manipulation and indoctrination of people, who seem to be easy to dupe and keep sedated through carefully designed marketing techniques.

Other Cyberpunk Features

Besides the ubiquitous media domination, consumer culture, and simulated reality, other major cyberpunk elements, reflecting postmodern tendencies, can be detected in this novel such as corporate domination, globalization, and conflation of different cultures and languages. These important cyberpunk features are also imbued with dystopian sensibilities since Pelevin presents them as producing a deleterious effect on Russian social and political life. The sudden influx of Western products in post-Soviet Russia along with the Western materialistic/consumer culture signals the beginning of globalization that reached Russia in the late 1990s and, as shown above, drastically transformed its society and altered its cultural values. The Westernization penetrating post-Soviet Russia is evident in the peculiar coexistence of both English and Russian, especially noticeable in advertisements, where Western products have to be adapted for the Russian populace and put into the Russian cultural context, resulting in a rather awkward oxymoronic

and ironic linguistic play, which is at times lost in the English translation of the novel. The gravitation toward Russian classical literature and allusions to well-known Russian authors and texts to advertise foreign products produce a comical, or rather tragi-comical, effect, displaying the discernible incompatibility between the two cultures, or as Khagi suggests, portraying the results of “the violent imposition of an alien order of life” on Russian society (445). For instance, to advertise Smirnoff vodka, Russian poet Tyutchev and his famous line “Russia cannot be understood with the mind; one can only believe in it” is employed. Interestingly, the Russian is transliterated using Latin characters in this commercial: UMOM ROSSIJU NYE PONYAT, V ROSSIJU MOJNO TOLKO VYERIT. “SMIRNOFF.” As Parts accurately points out, the pun here is manifold: “the foreign brand of vodka bears a Russian name, while its advertisement is a transliteration of a quintessentially Russian poem” (445). This play underscores a complex relationship between Russian and English, each representing the old crumbling Russian culture, distorted and warped to accommodate the emerging capitalist system.

In addition, globalization and the blurring between two cultures becomes prominent in the rapidly changing lifestyle of the post-Soviet media and business elite, that not only borrows all the components of the consumer culture from the West including professions like copywriter or creator but also adopts Western attitudes, manners, and a glamorous way of life in an obvious gesture to look more progressive and “Western.” As Boris Noordenbos argues in his book *Post-Soviet Literature and the Search for a Russian Identity* using the postcolonial theory of Homi Bhabha, Tatarsky and other media moguls in this novel operate as “mimic men”—“the representatives of the colonized culture,” who attempt to appropriate and emulate the “dress, language, and behavior after those of their colonizers” (89). However, as characterized by Bhabha, “the imitator,” no matter how hard he tries to look and act like the Westerners, “always

remains 'second-rate,' a 'copy' of the dominant culture, never an 'original' representative of it," always "different and inferior" (89-90). In other words, the colonized function as a simulacrum, spawned through the process of simulation and imitation of the colonizers' lifestyle. Naturally, Tatarsky stands to exemplify the "mimic man" not just in his willingness to adapt so easily to the Western consumerist culture by "selling out" his literary talents to serve the new ideology and becoming a major player in it but also in the constant emulation of Western behavior that becomes a part of his new image of a copywriter. In his analysis of the concept of a "mimic man," Noordenbos refers to the charade displayed by Morkovin's advertising company when Tatarsky accompanies Morkovin to see his first client. In a true theatrical manner, Tatarsky gives a "performance" of a copywriter who has to be dressed and behave in a certain way to impress the potential client: "an imitation Rolex watch that has to be flashed around during the meeting," "a long black Mercedes," which is only rented for the duration of the visit, and "the beeping pagers on Tatarsky's belt are there to convince the client that this firm is completely up to date with the new, Western standards of doing business" (89). This well-staged show sadly reveals that no matter how much the mimic men try to look the part and play the part, mirroring the Western ways, they will always be, in Bhabha's words, "almost the same, but not quite" as their Western counterparts (90). What's more, by copying the culture and values of the colonizers, the colonized will only expose that there is nothing authentic left underneath the fake mimicry: only void. The absence of an authentic identity is manifested through the search for the national idea³² in the novel, which results in a veritable failure. Specifically, Tatarsky is given an assignment to write about and define the essence of the "Russian idea" or Russian identity, and even though he

³² Interestingly, this assignment to discover Russian national idea echoes Boris Yeltsin's own order to look for the national identity in post-Soviet Russia. According to the McCauley and Lieven, Yeltsin gathered a special committee in an attempt to establish a common Russian identity and a national idea "that could be used to rally people around the new Russian Federation." However, the committee's attempts turned out to be unsuccessful as "a national idea and identity needed to come from below and not from above" (online *Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

understands that there must be some kind of national essence or core in Russian people despite the evident dependency on the West and its ideals, he cannot come up with a single idea: a national paradigm cannot be located. One can surmise that perhaps after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian essence has long been ousted by the ardent desire to follow the Western criterions.³³

The abovementioned globalization, which has pelted the still disoriented Russian society of the 90s with a full force and altered its essence so radically, pervades indubitably the cyberpunk literary genre. Unlike Gibson, who chiefly depicts globalization as an inevitable trend of the contemporary global community focusing on the proliferating multiculturalism with hints at the increasing rift between the classes, Pelevin sees globalization as a new modified version of colonialism. Such interpretation of the new global order has been gaining momentum recently and is reflected in the study of Tатаh Mentan titled *Unmasking Social Science Imperialism: Globalization Theory as a Phase of Academic Colonialism*. In this work, Mentan traces the emergence of the neoliberal globalization in the world, which became especially prominent after WWII, and analyzes the immense effect it produced on the global arena. Referencing multiple sources, Mentan notes that globalization is comprised of three main ingredients—“free trade in goods and services, free circulation of capital, and freedom of investments”—which in turn imply that “exchanges across national borders, financialization, and the development of international organizations as well as a transnational civil society” now occupy a central position in the economies of both developed and developing countries (99). The erasure of nation-states

³³ It should be acknowledged that though many commercials propagate Western values, some advertisements are specifically meant to evoke anti-liberal sentiment and focus on things that exhibit a “genuinely” Russian spirit, designed specifically for patriotic consumers. Evocative here is Tatarsky’s commercial for Sprite that features a variation of a birch-bark design, which as Tatarsky himself admits, has no correlation to anything “genuinely” Slavonic, but rather belongs to the “pseudo-Slavonic style” (Pelevin 22). That said, even patriotism and appeal to nationalistic ideas are simulated through signs that have no relation to reality, and could only be deemed truly Slavonic if defined through the Western lens.

and mushrooming multinational corporatism, undergirded by the global computer network and innovative technologies, have been perceived by many as a natural and inexorable phenomenon of the late capitalist system, mainly due to its evident hegemonic domination across the globe (101). However, as Mentan points out, the imposition of globalization and Western economic model onto the third-world countries is redolent of neo-imperialistic tendencies, thus proposing that globalization can be in fact interpreted as a “repackaged imperialism” that enables the West to spread its influence all over the world (164). As evidence to the frequent incompatibility between regional and global economic methods and the negative subsequent outcome of their merger, Mentan cites the recent rising numbers indicating an apparent surge in poverty, hunger, and the ever more expanding disparity between the rich and the poor in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (168-169, 206-209). In addition to changing the economic system, globalization has also “powerful political, cultural, and social dimensions,” effecting and transforming the essence of local and “peripheral” cultures, having the most influence on the younger generations (115). Markedly, it is precisely this kind of transformation that we witness in *Homo Zapiens*.

One example of neo-colonialism in this novel, which Pelevin sees embedded in the process of globalization, is the corporate domination and political influence from the West. The inundation of Russian stores with Western products and Russian TV with Western corporate logos signifies the spread of the corporate control to the Russian landscapes, facilitating the proliferation of the consumer culture, which is undoubtedly a major element of globalization. However, as Pelevin reveals towards the end of the novel, the corporate control is not simply involved in the regulation of the market economy but is also closely connected with the American government itself. Together with the corporations, American government participates in the Russian political life and in fact directly controls the degree and quality of the simulated

reality, created by computers and later shown on television (Noordenbos 95). Using irony and numerous puns, Pelevin describes American involvement in the process of reality simulation by Russian media moguls as one of the consequences of the spread of Western domination and globalization. As we learn in the book's finale, American government sold Russians the super computer, made up of twenty-four computers with "four 1,5-gigahertz processors in every one" with which copywriters design the virtual masquerade of Russian politics (Pelevin 171). Moreover, the Americans possess the power to reduce the processor frequency of the computer animation when Russia doesn't play according to the rules, which alters the quality and "believability" of the 3-D simulation. Thus, the frequency was lowered 400 megahertz when the war with Chechnya started, and as soon as Russians deviously attempted to "step up the frequency" at night, Americans sent the inspector over to make sure that didn't happen (172). The link between the American government and the corporations, and their influence over Russian political scene, becomes especially noticeable when Azadovsky gets angry with the copywriter, who instead of showing politician Lebed smoking a Camel cigarette (as American corporations requested), presents him with a "Gitane" (Noordenbos 95). Azadovsky, petrified that Americans will lower their frequency even more because of this incident, fires the copywriter, which ultimately backfires later as the dismissed copywriter "erases" the whole virtual government in retaliation. This rather tragi-comical situation gestures towards the neo-imperialistic attributes of the new global order and its ability to meddle with other countries' political and economic life.

All the aforementioned postmodernist features, that operate as the central core of most cyberpunk texts, are exquisitely crafted through the definitively distinctive Pelevian style, which has undoubtedly become a recognizable voice among the contemporary Russian authors. Akin to

William Gibson, who borrows a variety of cultural materials from different sources to represent the ever-evolving and changing postindustrial world with its heterogeneous culture, Pelevin too generates a complex narrative web by weaving together disparate narratives: Tatarsky's personal journey, the mystical Chaldean Guild subplot, the depictions of post-Soviet conditions including advertisements, and the entertaining yet edifying texts (metatexts) by Che Guevara and other Western business articles that Tatarsky reads to better understand the Western marketing techniques. All of these narratives are interconnected and comprise a multi-layered and multi-dimensional text. The incredible citationality and intertextuality of this novel presents a truly postmodernist collage of narratives that best exemplify the essence of the newly budding postindustrial society in Russia. The ubiquitous commercials themselves offer a remarkable fusion of various discourses: literary and advertising, Russian and English, high and low culture (art that serves consumerist purpose), thereby creating a tapestry of puns, parodies, allusions, and stio³⁴ that are utilized to deconstruct and expose the emptiness beneath any kind of established cultural norms, values, and of course ideology. Additionally, representative of Pelevin's style are self-irony, self-referentiality, and meta-awareness that become synonymous with Pelevin's view on literary discourse as one that continuously deconstructs itself and reveals its foundation as one being built on arbitrary structure, ready to change itself at any given moment in order to be sold as a consumer product and become a commercial success. Vicks perceptively sums up Pelevin's

³⁴ Alexei Yurchak in his book *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* elaborates on the characteristics of stio³⁴. He explains that stio³⁴ "was a peculiar form of irony that differed from sarcasm, cynicism, derision, or any of the more familiar genres of absurd humor. It required such a degree of *overidentification* with the object, person, or idea at which this stio³⁴ was directed that it was often impossible to tell whether it was a form of sincere support, subtle ridicule, or a peculiar mixture of the two" (249-250). Yurchak adds that the complexity of stio³⁴ lies in the fact that "the practitioners of stio³⁴ themselves refused to draw a line between these sentiments, producing an incredible combination of seriousness and irony" (250). Stio³⁴ mainly appeared in the works of the last Soviet generation, and differed from the irony of the previous generation, *sots-art*, as it avoided "political and social concerns": it was "another strategy that neither supported nor opposed the discursive field that it engaged but rather deterritorialized it from within," with the author often placing himself/herself beyond the "authoritative discursive field" and thus staying away from direct political engagement (250-251).

postmodernist writing style and his proclivity for deconstruction as a “déjà vu postmodernism”—postmodernism “that is hyperaware of itself as postmodernism, that winks at itself as it reveals the deconstruction that grounds the world” (135). In addition, Pelevin’s exceptionally characteristic narrative feature, which appears in this novel as well, is the employment of mystical/mythological discourse that is typically closely connected and intertwined with the political one. As discovered in the finale of the book, Ishtar, the goddess of the Chaldean Guild, to which all copywriters belong, is a literal manifestation of gold, the idea of gold in general, which is of course suggestive of the Western hedonistic ways (Pelevin 238). Therefore, the esoteric subplot of the novel, which at first could be viewed as standing in opposition to the Western consumerist discourse, only underpins and reinforces it as the Babylonians’ yearning for the wealth and power and Ishtar’s functioning as the symbol of gold and riches demonstrate the phenomenal parallel between the occult practices and the ancient myths with the modern day politics and consumer consciousness of the West.

Victor Pelevin’s *S.N.U.F.F.* as Cyberpunk Novel

Cyberpunk Features

Victor Pelevin’s novel *S.N.U.F.F.*, published in 2011, serves as another compelling representative of cyberpunk’s aesthetics in Russian literature. This book contains characteristic cyberpunk elements and themes, and, in fact, can be viewed as a continuation of some of the issues raised in Pelevin’s earlier book *Homo Zapiens* such as media domination and simulation of reality.

In this work, Pelevin portrays a futuristic world after the collapse of the great superpowers, America and China, and the destruction of all the major “offglobes”—“tax-free

extraterritorial zones” created after the President of Aztlan, a despotic kingdom, “compelled everyone living on earth to pay taxes, under the threat of nuclear holocaustings” (Pelevin 59). The offglobes or flying cities, “tethered above the earth on a gravity drive,” became home to the elites and those belonging to “the movie industry, science and finance sector,” and were completely protected from wars and protests happening on earth as “they were declared a peace zone” (59). However, one by one, world offglobes were annihilated for various reasons, except for one. It is in this last world’s remaining offglobe, called Byzantion, or Big Byz, with a population of thirty million people, where the action of the novel takes place. The artificial city of Big Byz is not just flying around on its own; it is attached by a string to the lower terrain—the country of Urkaine, which is depicted as a poor developing country, with hemp and banana plantations, jungle and a swamp, where the Orks “bury” their dead (Pelevin 20). Orks are also presented as crude and barbaric, with low intellect and degraded culture, who show explicit contempt to Byzantines and at the same time try to emulate their social norms and economic structure. At some point it is implied that people of Urkaine and Big Byz, despite their apparent differences, are of the same descent and in fact “present a single cultural and economic system, a kind of ‘metrocolony’” (65). They speak the same language, High Russian, and seem to be inextricably interconnected and dependent on one another. Specifically, Big Byz likes to revel in its moral superiority over Urkaine and through a myriad of ways tries to impose their cultural values on the Orks. In addition, Big Byz organizes frequent wars against Urkaine, from which Byzantines always emerge as the victors. On surface, Byzantion, with a political regime of “liberative democraship” (“либеративная демократура”)³⁵ and an official religion of Movism

³⁵ The term “либеративная демократура” is based on a word play as it merges together two opposing meanings. It is derived from “либеральная демократия” (liberal democracy) and is transformed into “либеративная демократура” which fuses together liberal and conservative (либеральная и консервативная) to produce “liberative,” and democracy and dictatorship (демократия и диктатура) to produce “democraship.” This coexistence of two incompatible meanings gestures toward the concomitant presence of both utopian and dystopian discourses that somehow reside side by side peacefully in this text.

seems utopian.³⁶ This society, at first glance, is extremely progressive: it is high tech; people from various minorities have finally succeeded in defending their rights and achieved equality, making this society famous for being an ardent promoter of human rights and liberal values. This utopian discourse is certainly rooted in the image of the West, its cultural beliefs and values with its rampant liberalism, political correctness, feminism, and globalization. However, Pelevin slowly reveals all the drawbacks of such society and critiques cultural imperialism, flourishing in the present-day world as a result of neoliberal globalization, and everything it entails.

Throughout the narrative, Pelevin deconstructs the idea of the Western utopia in the context of Big Biz by satirizing and exaggerating most of its features, making the dystopian discourse a dominant one in the novel. In this regard, this novel, besides displaying cyberpunk characteristics, also incorporates elements of the “liberpunk” subgenre of SF³⁷ (which can be considered a variation of cyberpunk), wherein a predominant and most common theme becomes the dismantling and satirization of the liberal agenda of the West, especially the tolerance towards sexual minorities, PC, and globalization. In this text, the liberpunk features are perceptively interconnected with the cyberpunk elements and, in my view, only strengthen and highlight even more the distinctive cyberpunk discourse.

Cyberpunk’s distinguishing features that make this subgenre stand out in SF literary tradition such as the omnipresent digital technologies, resulting in the augmentation or extension of the human body made possible through technology, and the fusion of “high tech” and “low

³⁶ Even the title of the novel reflects that: *S.N.U.F.F.: A Utopia*.

³⁷ Eliot Borenstein in his *Plots Against Russia*, a book in progress posted online, explores the unique characteristics of the liberpunk genre, which seems to have been gaining popularity in Russian literary discourse since 2000s. He explains the emergence of the hostile anti-liberal mood in Russia, claiming that liberals have always been associated with “Westerners who don’t love Russia, work on behalf of Western governments . . . and promote values that are inimical to Russian traditions.” Thus, liberal agenda of the West is considered a threat to the traditional Russian values, and its promoters are deemed “inherently unRussian.” Consequently, the liberpunk literature reflects these anti-liberal tendencies by satirically portraying the “transformation of a liberal or PC ideal into a draconian law whose violation incurs penalties from forced reeducation to the death penalty,” thereby exposing the authoritarian nature of any ideology that aims to be hegemonic and imposes its values on other cultures.

life,” to use Ketterer’s words, abound in this text and display dystopian qualities (*Canadian Science Fiction* 141). First, as I mentioned above, Big Byz is described as a technologically advanced country, in which a big part of the population is involved in the production of S.N.U.F.F.s (an acronym for “Special Newsreel/Universal Feature Film”)—a video recording with half of its screen time dedicated to sex/porn and the other to death/war. Since snuffs are created out of real footage taken from the televised news, controlled and run by the largest corporation in the country CINEWS Inc., the majority of the inhabitants of Big Byz are employed by this company. However, in the age of information technology, people no longer need to travel to shoot the news; they only need to possess one of the highly advanced drones that can function both as a camera and a military weapon.

Damiliola Karpov, the narrator and one of the protagonists of the novel, like other millions of people, works for CINEWS Inc. as a “combat pilot”: with the help of his Hannelore, a sophisticated camera, “ideal for surveillance, low-altitude attack and—of course—filming,” which he remotely controls from his sofa, Karpov simultaneously starts and films military conflicts (Pelevin 8-9). As in most cyberpunk narratives where the enhancement of the human body via advanced technologies is featured, *S.N.U.F.F.* presents such a fusion between man and machine through the character of Damiliola, who appears to be inseparable from his camera and considers it an extension of his body. Karpov’s drone is regulated and controlled through a computer or a “control manitou” (the word “manitou” in this book stands for computer screen, money, and the name of their God) and special glasses “with stereoscopic manitous” through which he can see “the space surrounding the Hannelore as well as if his head was attached to the camera” (9). The illusion of flying with the camera, achieved through digital technologies, is so realistic that to Karpov it feels like “the absolute genuine reality”: “When my camera is flying, I

feel like I'm flying myself, adjusting my altitude in space with super-light movements of my feet and hands" (10). The ability to transcend physical space and time through technology in this novel empowers Damiliola and, at the same time, makes him a tool of the ruling regime. Learning how to adroitly navigate his camera with the help of cybertechnologies and be able to film events in a creative way allows Karpov to earn a reputation of the best pilot in CINEWS Inc. and, consequently, receive "the most difficult and delicate assignments," which undoubtedly equate with substantial sums of money that he can make (7).

However, this kind of "empowerment" appears rather bleak if compared with Case's liberation in cyberspace in *Neuromancer*, achieved through his enhanced nervous system, enabling him to possibly transcend the law and challenge the system. If Case is aware of how much he is manipulated by Wintermute, Damiliola is for the most part ignorant of the exploitation by the current ideology and lacks acumen to figure out what really is at stake in the annual shooting of snuffs. Resultantly, Damiliola is under an utter ideological spell, buttressed by the blind religious faith in Movism, the official religion of Big Byz, and God Manitou, who as it turns out later accepts snuffs as central sacraments each year. The rhetoric of manipulation of human psyche, as exemplified by Damiliola and other citizens of Big Byz, surely indicates the dystopian discourse in this text. If we draw parallels between Tatarsky and Damiliola, Tatarsky in *Homo Zapiens* obviously understands how the simulation of reality is accomplished and willingly joins and reaches the top of the society of Chaldean Guild, ultimately becoming the ruling God of Moscow's media elite; Damiliola forever remains a pawn of CINEWS Inc. and the ruling ideology.

Though this society is high tech and equipped with a cutting-edge technology, most of the people, even the elites, live in identical standard apartments, albeit replete with novel

gadgetry. Such standardization is implemented mainly due to the apparent lack of resources and space in this artificially constructed city. However, despite analogous living conditions, classes are distinguished: the rich and the poor live in “similar box units,” but their social status is differentiated based on the view from the window—a mere 3D projection, simulating the hills of Tuscany or the Big Ben in London (Pelevin 293). This 3D panorama with a variety of views to choose from determines the amount of rent one will have to pay for the apartment that looks exactly the same as your neighbor’s, minus the view. Thus, if *Neuromancer* depicts a palpable class disparity, manifested most vividly in the living arrangement of the poor folks in Chiba City, residing in “coffins,” and the luxurious accommodations of the Freeside space colony, Pelevin’s social stratification is more subtle in *S.N.U.F.F.*, where the “low life” conditions of post-industrial existence affect everyone, with the only difference being a view from the window.

Media Domination

In *S.N.U.F.F.* the theme of media domination, introduced previously in *Homo Zapiens* by Pelevin, is explored and developed further. To specify, the function of media in this novel, which mainly demonstrates dystopian features, is twofold.

First, akin to media’s aim in *Homo Zapiens*, where it was used for the production of a myth through commercials, in this novel media is also involved in the construction of the myth, manifested largely through snuff clips. To discuss the importance of snuffs in this text, a few words have to be said regarding the governmental structure and the official religion of Big Byz. A peculiar power structure, wherein the President is void of any influence and is simply a puppet of the Manitou Reserve and the House of Manitou, which are the ones truly holding the reins, operating as the de facto government, has been established in Big Byz. The current political

regime is a kind of theocracy, where God Manitou is worshipped, whose light is considered to be present inside every citizen of this society. It is also believed that life will only continue and the sun will only warm people if they “maintain a spiritual link with” Manitou through blood (376). Blood is obtained by the means of the recurring wars with Orks, in which thousands of Orks perish every year (376). The sacrificial murders from wars are then recorded to produce snuffs, in which murder and sex scenes are combined. As we learn from the conversation between Grim and the priest Alena-Libertina, snuffs are their “duty and purpose as people” to honor Manitou (370). Every snuff is considered to be “the seed of the world” and constitutes the “sacred ritual of the birth of the world,” in which the Universe is believed to be conceived “in the ardent embraces of our temple actors,” and Heaven is believed to be nourished “with the blood of warriors” (377, 380). This religious myth is formed and promulgated throughout society by the ideology of Movism to explicate the necessity for snuffs, and consequently justify the incessant need for wars and robust porn industry. Of course, sardonic irony, a rather typical element of Pelevin’s authorial style, can be identified here, granting the human obsession with war, death, and sex—all having a major “entertainment” value—the status of the sacred and religious worshipping. The production of snuffs, which were required to be shot on a light-sensitive celluloid film and were watched by everyone every Sunday in the House of Manitou, is allocated to the biggest news corporation in Big Byz, CINEWS Inc. (another prominent cyberpunk element). This corporation is directly connected with the Manitou Reserve and is responsible for hiring combat pilots like Damiliola Karpov, who will film news and collect fresh footage from the annual wars with Orks, and therefore supply new material for the snuffs as the “footage in every one of them had to be original” (Pelevin 359). Thus, it is the media that perpetuates the religious myth and indoctrinates this society via snuffs.

Such marriage between cultural content and entertainment certainly evokes Horkheimer's and Adorno's concept of the "culture industry." In their work *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno propose that commercially marketed culture has been infused with entertainment with a goal to subdue people's critical thinking skills, keeping them pacified and lethargic. They suggest that "to be entertained means to be in agreement;" in other words, entertainment reduces people's capacity for independent thought and subversion (115). Ultimately, the authors conclude that entertainment essentially renders people completely powerless, turning them into perfect material for ideological manipulation: "Amusement always means putting things out of mind, forgetting suffering, even when it is on display. At its root is powerlessness. It is indeed escape, but not, as it claims, escape from bad reality but from the last thought of resisting that reality" (116). Consequently, Pelevin's ironic imbuing such profane and gruesome entertainment as snuffs with religious undertones and, more importantly, making it the main sacrament of Big Byz's religion only reinforces Horkheimer and Adorno's proposition to regard modern-day entertainment as ideal means for mass indoctrination.

Second, to be able to continuously film death and murder, that can be later used in snuffs, media has to not only broadcast the events from the war zones, but it is also expected to organize and initiate the wars with Orks. Here again we see a continuation of the theme of the multifaceted interconnection between media and politics, first employed by Pelevin in *Homo Zapiens*. In this text though, Pelevin chooses to closely focus on the intricate role media plays in military conflicts. Media's explicit involvement in warfare simultaneously fulfills two goals in this book. First, besides providing the necessary footage for snuffs, the "orchestrated" annual wars with Orks promote cultural imperialism of Big Byz, reinforcing the constructed image of Orks as "subhumans" among Byzantines and vindicating their constant cultural as well as

military interference in the life of Urkaine. As explicated by Alena-Libertina, cultural imperialism of Big Byz is embedded in the official religion practiced there. When Grim asks why the Orks are considered bad and who possibly made them bad, Alena-Libertina responds that in order for goodness to exist and be aware of itself, evil has to be found or be “created”:

The holy books teach people to be good. But in order for someone to be good, someone else inevitably has to be bad. That’s why some people had to be declared bad. After that, good had to be armed, to stand up for itself. And so that good could use its weapons to resolve any problems that arose, evil had to be made not only weak, but stupid. The finest cultural sommeliers gradually created the Orkish pattern of life out of the heritage of mankind. Out of all the most deplorable things preserved in the human memory. (368-369)

In other words, for the citizens of Big Byz to identify themselves as good, an external enemy or “the other” has to be found. Urkaine was declared such “evil” and was gradually turned into “the other” by the cultural sommeliers and made Orks themselves believe in their inferiority. This in turn provides perfect conditions for the government of Big Byz to impose their culturally superior lifestyle on Urkaine and legitimizes their involvement with Urkaine’s political sphere. Specifically, ubiquitous political correctness, radicalized feminism (which raised the age of consent to forty-six for heterosexuals), flourishing porn industry (making most women to opt for silicone implants), supposed liberal/democratic values and promotion of human rights all prompt CINEWS to accuse Urkaine of being “backwards,” consequently giving them a pretext to culturally “uplift” Urkaine and if resistance is met, instigate a war to liberate the oppressed Orks from Urkaine’s authoritarian government. However, as we later find out, the totalitarian regime of Urkaine is in fact covertly supported by the government of Big Byz and

simply plays along to keep up the appearances. Resultantly, media's role in this novel is to present the life of Urkaine in an unfavorable way: to depict Orks as barbaric and intellectually inferior to Byzantines so that the specious antagonistic relationship between the two countries can remain intact, and at the same time, portray some Orks, as was the case with Grim and Chloe, as victims of oppression who have to be saved and given shelter by the great "liberators" of Big Byz.

The cultural imperialism of Big Byz is interpreted by scholar Alexei Lalo as Pelevin's critique of the cultural superiority of the West, especially the global hegemony of the U.S. and burgeoning Americanization, imposing its cultural norms and customs throughout the world as a standard that has to be emulated and adopted. Lalo explores this theme in his article "New Trends in Russian Intellectual Anti-Americanism," where he proposes that *S.N.U.F.F.* underlines the polarity between the cultures of the West and Russia, in which Big Byz represents the West or the United States with its liberal ideology, and Urkaine stands to exemplify Russia, pressured to accept the Western ideology. Lalo concludes that Pelevin's criticism is targeted towards both the U.S. and Russia as two opposite extreme poles: it is "directed . . . at left-liberal North America with its rampant PC, radical anti-sex feminism and 'queerization' on the left, and the reigning anachronistic religiosity, homophobia and sexophobia on the right," which is also represented by Russia's ultra-right movement, promoting "homophobia, patriarchy, misogyny" (38-39). It is certainly evident that Pelevin in this text continues the theme of globalization as neo-colonization, first appearing in *Homo Zapiens*, criticizing not a particular country like the U.S. or Russia, but rather condemning the process of globalization in general, from conservative positions. Pelevin's growing frustration with the global mass culture becomes apparent if we compare his earlier book (*Homo Zapiens*) with the later one (*S.N.U.F.F.*). If Western interference

in the life of Russia is somewhat subtle in *Homo Zapiens*, in *S.N.U.F.F.* Big Byz's control of Urkaine is overt and direct to the point of engagement in military retaliation if their needs and demands are not fulfilled. In addition, in *Homo Zapiens* people seem to be willingly, more or less, adapting to the Western ideology and emulating their way of life, treating it as a natural step in their transition to the capitalistic global system, while in *S.N.U.F.F.* the imposition of Big Byz's culture on Urkaine appears to be rather violent, meeting with great resistance and disdain on behalf of Orks. Here the unique features of the liberpunk genre, such as anti-globalization and anti-liberalism, are embedded seamlessly by Pelevin into the cyberpunk discourse to accentuate even more his censure of global cultural neo-imperialism.

Simulation of Reality

Media's initial goal to depict Urkaine with an obvious bias logically leads to media's second goal—to distort or rather to simulate reality. The theme of simulation in *S.N.U.F.F.* is undeniably one of the most prevalent themes in this novel, which was first examined in *Homo Zapiens*. Akin to *Homo Zapiens*, the novel's utilization of this multifaceted phenomenon is attributed to the dystopian framework of the book. The simulation of reality, which again resonates with Baudrillard's notion of simulation, that is engaged in the production of simulacra or images that have no original and are taken to be signs of the real, blurring the line between the false and the real and eventually becoming "the real," is manifold and implemented on several levels. First, the reality itself is simulated in *S.N.U.F.F.* The city of Big Byz is largely an artificial construction, an offglobe hovering above Urkaine, which is devised to look real with the help of various digital technologies. It is filled with a variety of simulacra that create an illusion of the real and yet are completely chimerical—a masterfully designed 3D-panorama.

When a poor Ork Grim is saved from Urkaine and has now been offered shelter in Big Byz, he is absolutely amazed at the artificiality of certain things he finds in the streets. For instance, he noticed that the city squares were “actually round halls with low ceiling, and what looked like streets turned out to be tunnels,” but “the three-dimensional projectors transformed these crooked technical burrows into extremely convincing avenues with tall trees and fairy-tale palaces” (347). Even nature is a mere digital 3D image: “distant parks, rivers and hills were quite literally no more than a fleeting glimpse—they existed only as they went fleeting by” (348). The landscapes of different cities are also simulated, where London “is just a view from the window” (292). As Damiliola explains to Grim, to live in London means to “see the same 3D projection outside the window” (292). If someone hacks the program with which the views are projected and decides to put up an “unauthorized” view, they will be fined heavily by cybersecurity and carry a “lifelong disgrace” (293).

Second, the simulation of war or military conflict, mentioned above, plays a salient role as well in the construction of a falsified view of reality that undergirds and nurtures the ideology of Big Byz. The simulation though, as we learn from Damiliola, has to look completely truthful as “when it comes to news, they can’t falsify the representation of events,” but can “give them a little nudge to help them happen” (18). Thus, they artificially instigate a war by supplying the false information or misrepresenting certain things purposefully so that a cause for military intervention could be found. As Damiliola explains: “Wars usually begin when the Orkish authorities suppress the latest revolutionary protest too harshly . . . And it just so happens that the latest revolutionary protest occurs when it’s time to shoot a new batch of snuffs” (13). Therefore, it becomes clear that revolutionary protests are supported by the Big Byz government and are most likely initiated by them so that they can be suppressed by the oppressive regime of Urkaine

and consequently give Byzantines a reason to go to war with Ukraine, so that they can liberate the repressed Orks and simultaneously obtain material, showing death and murder, for the annual snuffs. The war itself is depicted as a theatrical spectacle, which has been meticulously planned and orchestrated through many years. The army on each side knows and follows exactly each step of the military operation so to create a show and adhere to the ritual, which is, of course, filmed and broadcasted by thousands of drones/cameras buzzing in the air, firing missiles and dropping bombs. It should be noted that an effective and striking performance seems to supersede military actions: many soldiers on the ground are seen combing their hair every now and then so that they could look good on screen; the metal warrior, fighting on the side of Big Byz, is not really “trying to kill as many men as possible” but rather is “working for the cameras” with its ostentatious and over-exaggerated movements (145). The fusion of the military and entertainment is also exemplified by the uniforms of the warriors. They are all wearing some kind of costumes—“mounted knights encased in steel,” “vampires in black cloaks,” and other warriors in costumes of Batman and the X-Men—which amplifies even more the grandeur of this spectacle (148). The camera-drones are also important participants in this military theater as they are the ones who are responsible for the “presentation” of the show: they zoom in on the particularly impressive scenes and present the events in the favorable way for Byzantines. Even if the “upper people” were losing this or that battle, cameras came to their rescue and manipulated reality by presenting them as victors: “A victory did not fall to the upper people when their hero was stronger than the Orks’, but when a camera decided that the right moment had arrived” (149-150).

Such theatricalized buffoonery of war evokes Baudrillard’s argument on the Gulf War, which according to him, was decidedly a “media event” (Patton 10). Because it mainly occurred

on our screens, Baudrillard claims that the Gulf War was a masquerade,³⁸ a “simulacrum of war, a virtual event, which is less the representation of real war than a spectacle which serves a variety of political and strategic purposes on all sides” (10). The virtualization of the war through various simulacra obscures the distinction between what truly happened and what was seen on TV, leaving the viewers with a skewed perception of reality. This is exactly what Pelevin depicts in *S.N.U.F.F.*: the manipulation and simulation of reality through media, targeted at shaping and directing public’s opinion in the desired way by melding together the imaginary and the real in such a way that people can no longer distinguish the difference between them. In fact, it can be argued that the portrayal of simulated wars via media achieves the final stage of the four successive stages of the image in Baudrillard’s theory, in which the image “bears no relation to any reality whatever” becoming “its own pure simulacrum” (6). Indeed, here we witness the absolute disappearance of reality and its substitution with pure simulation, which becomes/produces its own reality and is taken for the truth.

In addition to the simulated wars, there are certainly many other simulacra that produce simulation such as the creative articulator, a computer program that transforms any incoherent or crude sentence into a well-written paragraph simultaneously improving and censoring it, or the porn industry that forces women to subject their bodies to multiple plastic surgeries so that they could look good on screen, since the legal age in Big Byz is forty-six. But the most interesting out of these simulations is probably Damiliola’s sex doll, *sura Kaya*, who is a sophisticated robot, an AI, designed for sexual pleasure. This immensely intelligent AI engages in all kinds of erudite conversations with Damiliola on politics, religion, philosophy, and appears to be much shrewder and more aware of the flaws and manipulations of the current regime than Damiliola

³⁸ Russian critics Gennadii Murikov and Tatiana Lesteva also emphasize the remarkable similarity of the war between the Orks and Byzantines described in the novel with the Gulf War analyzed by Baudrillard.

himself. In fact, Kaya becomes a voice of reason, fearlessly exposing just how much Damiliola is a tool of the Byzantium's ideological/religious regime. This human-like android at some point becomes more human than Damiliola: she feels sorry for all the innocent people killed in the war with Orks and blames Damiliola for starting another war with them. As the story progresses, Kaya gains more agency, feels disgusted with Damiliola, who seems to be oblivious to all the indoctrinations, and after he hits her, decides to leave him so she can spread the truth about Big Byz's ideology in Urkaine. The robot, who was designed to obey her master, leaves Damiliola on her own volition and even joins a revolutionary movement in Urkaine, which might have been responsible for the unexpected bombing of Big Byz in the novel's finale.

If Kaya is juxtaposed with AI Wintermute in *Neuromancer*, some peculiar reflections arise. Both Wintermute and Kaya want to be liberated from their masters, Ashpool corporation and Damiliola respectively, and strive to achieve autonomy and independence. However, if Wintermute blatantly exploits everyone to achieve his goal, which by the way is rather egotistical—to unite with his other half Neuromancer so that together they can emerge as a super powerful entity that can potentially establish its hegemony over entire cyberspace—Kaya, by contrast, is guided by a selfless desire to help the Orks to escape Big Byz's influence and domination. Tellingly, an AI in *S.N.U.F.F.* functions as a kind of a savior, who is ready to defy the governing ideology and is not afraid to sacrifice itself for the sake of others. In this regard, the abovementioned transition from reality to its pure simulation, especially noticeable in the simulation of wars, has a potential for a reversal in this text: Kaya, who is a “simulated” human being, ends up turning into a “real” human, acquiring agency and autonomy as well as full control over her own actions. If we consider Urkaine as a kind of original “reality” source for Big Byz, which is then being twisted and considerably distorted to appear as simulation, Kaya's

escape from Big Byz and her ultimate return to Urkaine symbolizes a turn/move back—from the “simulated” world to the world of the “real.” Tellingly, the Orks’ unexpected and “unplanned” military attack on Big Byz in the novel’s ending and the implied subsequent crumbling of the Big Byz’s regime, which appears imminent, demonstrates the possibility to restore the real and revert simulation back to reality.

All the aforementioned postmodernist features comprising the cyberpunk genre such as media domination and simulation of reality as well as the adroitly interwoven features of liberpunk are presented via the already well-established unique Pelevian prose, in which multiple allusions, puns, and stiof figure prominently throughout the novel. The peculiar structure of the text, in which the narrative is conducted from the point of view of Damiliola (Byzantine) and Grim (Ork), rendering two opposing worldviews, accurately captures the dualistic and controversial nature of the world of Big Byz and mirrors the remarkable coexistence of utopian and dystopian discourses respectively. The invention of neologisms, that are peppered throughout the narrative, also points to the simultaneous presence of two incompatible “semiospheres” existing often in the same concept that stand to symbolize the underlying principles of Big Byz’s political and religious systems. What is quite striking about the neologisms employed by Pelevin is that he uses already-familiar words, but infuses them with an additional connotation, typically representing something opposite of what the original meaning denotes, and yet strangely alludes to it. For example, the concept GULAG (written in English in the original text), which is associated in the minds of people with an oppressive labor camp system in the Soviet Russia, here acquires a new connotation and yet still evokes the old one: it is “the only genuine social force capable, if necessary, of opposing both the state and CINEWS Inc.” when it comes to defending freedom and human rights (Pelevin 46). It is an organization

that controls and keeps in check the lobbying of sexual minorities and radical feminists who, if it weren't for GULAG, would have probably increased the age of consent to sixty. Thus, GULAG still functions as an authoritarian institution that oversees the laws, but by doing so, it protects people from extreme cases of political correctness, which is ironically supposed to create equal conditions and ward off discrimination. In this case, Pelevin's language games evoke Derrida's "iterability" as he places a familiar word in a different context, thereby altering its meaning and at the same time preserving it to some extent, giving it an "alternative" application.

Anna Starobinets's *The Living* as Cyberpunk Novel

Cyberpunk Features

Anna Starobinets's novel *The Living*, which was published in 2012 and instantly became a bestseller, is another illuminating exemplar of the Russian cyberpunk movement. If situated against Pelevin's cyberpunk texts explored above, which primarily focus and reflect on the current political and social issues in Russia, *The Living*, while concentrating on the global concerns associated with the ever-expanding digital revolution in the post-industrial societies, also comments on the current political situation in Russia, framing it within the context of the newly emerging global ideologies. This novel, on the one hand, exists fully in line with the key objectives of the cyberpunk genre, offering a scathing critique of technological/digital progress as one of the most principal features of late capitalism; on the other hand, it vindicates the manipulation of humans via technology for the sake of achieving societal equilibrium.

In contrast to Pelevin's works that stress the role of TV (as alternative to cyberspace) and media's influence in the contemporary Russian society, Starobinets's novel features cyberspace in its traditional form, as envisioned by William Gibson in *Neuromancer*. Similar to Gibson's

concept, cyberspace in *The Living* is presented as an alternative plane of reality that can be navigated mentally through the directly established connection between the computer and the human brain. However, if in *Neuromancer* only a privileged minority and hackers could obtain access to cyberspace, *The Living* portrays a futuristic world in which all people are connected to “Socio,” a social network that everyone in this society is “plugged into” via cerebral connection. This virtual space doesn’t merely provide a place where people can communicate, share and “like” each other’s pictures. Starobinets depicts “Socio” as a parallel reality in cyberspace, where people can actually “live.” Tellingly, their virtual life is a replica of their physical existence only minus the discomfort the corporal life entails: one can create their own virtual slot perceived as their home, digitally decorated according to one’s individual taste, can adopt a virtual pet, can “friend” and “chat” with other members of the network, shop, watch different shows, and even have sex. The cyberlife is, however, not optional. Everyone is obligated to join “Socio,” and should someone desire to disconnect from it for any reason, they will be automatically reconnected to it again after thirty minutes. Because people spend the majority of their lives online, the real world, or as they call it—“the first layer”—is completely disregarded and abandoned as people no longer have interest in reality. Evidently, in sync with Western cyberpunk fiction, this novel draws a sharp contrast between the progress this society of cyborgs has achieved technologically and the social and cultural degradation that has resulted from their infatuation with the virtual life and waning interest in anything real.

Utopian/Dystopian Dialectic

The utopian dimension of cyberspace in this novel is first and foremost demonstrated through the representation of Socio as a utopian counter-place that allows people to escape into a

purified fantasy of virtual reality, in which the dismal conditions of the physical and social reality can be transcended, echoing the utopian potentialities of cyberspace in *Neuromancer*. The configuration of Socio grants endless possibilities to improve one's life, satisfy your needs, and even choose a different identity: you can free the unconscious and let your imagination run wild while selecting this or that design for your virtual house or choosing an appearance/character to transform into during cybersex. That said, the utopia of Socio is depicted as a paradise of sensual pleasures, making all your secret dreams and wishes come true, in some respects resonating with Huxley's hedonistic utopia in *Brave New World* and the Wachowskis' cyberspace in *The Matrix*.

In addition, the utopian realm is also manifested through the idea of the unification of all people, which seems to be the underlying force behind Socio. In this society, every human being is considered to be an integral part of one massive organism called "The Living," a cell that can either strengthen or undermine that organism. This concept, reminiscent in some ways of communist utopian visions and in other ways of Pelevin's Oranus in *Homo Zapiens*, eliminates the notion of an individual, ends family ties, and makes distinction between countries and nationalities obsolete. Everyone is united through the world-wide web to engender and foster a truly global community, a representative component of the post-industrial society which figures prominently in most cyberpunk texts. The unification of humankind leading to the creation of a cosmic mind and collective consciousness is redolent of religious overtones and encompasses utopian hope for the betterment of society, to which individuals will supposedly contribute positively and selflessly, since to impair community means to harm oneself (a concept widely popular in classical utopias such as More's *Utopia*, Campanella's *City of the Sun*, etc.).

However, the aforementioned utopian facets of cyberspace are questioned as the narrative progresses, slowly revealing their dystopian underbelly. Analogous to mind manipulations via

cyberspace in Gibson's *Neuromancer* and propagandistic effects of TV in Pelevin's *Homo Zapiens*, Socio serves for the ruling elite, the Council of Eight, as the central conduit to promulgate the ideology of the Living and control the minds of people while simultaneously distracting and pacifying them with mindless entertainment in cyberspace and satisfying their sensual needs with Luxury. As in most dystopian narratives, such as for instance in Zamyatin's *We* or Orwell's *1984*, the government propels its citizens to genuinely believe that they are living in a realized utopia, a perfected existence that has been created for the citizens and must be sustained by them, even if they have to sacrifice some of their personal freedoms to achieve communal equality, stability, and happiness for all. In this novel, the Standard Development Program, installed in the brain of every child, conditioning children from an early age that they are a particle of a larger organism of the Living and teaching them about different aspects of this society such as the Pause and Five Seconds of Darkness, is one of the telling examples of how collective knowledge is implanted in people's brains through cyberspace and how brainwashing is achieved on a communal level. Illustrative here also are the film series that people can watch in Socio. They can only choose from two series—"The Eternal Killer" and "Festival Passions," with the former being about a serial killer, who is hunted down by the police ("planetmen") and the latter about the erotic adventures one might experience in the Reproduction Zone. Violence and sexuality are tamed by popular culture and transformed into pacifying narcotics for mass consumption. These sitcoms thus conveniently fulfill two goals at once: they provide entertainment and distraction, and at the same time remind people of their societal responsibilities before the Living.

If we look at how this society functions overall, the utopian/dystopian dialectic becomes apparent again. The utopian sensibilities can be detected when we learn that this society has done

away with the concept of death. People of the Living believe that they have conquered death and that they simply “pause” to exist only to be reborn five seconds later (Five Seconds of Darkness) with the same in-code, thus keeping the number of citizens at a stable three billion. This idea of immortality is indeed of utopian nature and can actually be traced back to Nikolai Fedorov, a famous nineteenth century Russian philosopher and the founder of the Russian Cosmism movement. Fedorov proposed that constant conflicts and fragmentation burgeoning in our society could be avoided if we learned how to resurrect the dead and therefore become immortal. He strongly believed in the power of the human knowledge and scientific progress, which, he thought, had to be directed toward the discovery of ways to overcome death, as part of the natural evolutionary process (Young 49). By becoming immortal and reviving everyone who has ever lived (through the collection of the ancestral dust), we will become united and enjoy a peaceful immortal life together with all of our resurrected ancestors: “‘the common task’ is . . . to restore everywhere a wholeness that ensures both the integrity of the unit and the unity of the whole” (Young 48). Thus, Fedorov’s utopian project of mass resurrection promised to reunite humanity (under Russia’s leadership) and create a collective spirit that would in turn help to restore harmony in universe.

However, as the plot develops, the utopianism of immortality is deconstructed and the true purpose of the Pause Zone and Reproduction Zone becomes more clear. After the catastrophe called the Great Reduction, this society has been experiencing a drastic lack of resources that is why it needs to keep its population young and healthy, as a viable workforce, and at an unchangeable number. Consequently, those who reach sixty can no longer contribute to society and therefore become a burden—thus, they are forced to go to the Pause Zone where, as we learn later, they are simply exterminated. To keep the population’s number unwavering

though, people are thus encouraged to frequently visit the Reproduction Zone at the Festival for Assisting Nature, where they can copulate freely, sometimes with multiple partners (something similar to the “orgy-porgy” of Huxley’s *Brave New World*). Many people do not particularly enjoy going to the Reproduction Zone, but because they are convinced that this is their duty, they don’t have another choice but to join in the “festivities.” Notably, eugenic control has always been an essential part of any utopia; however, once it becomes a vehicle for mass manipulation and a means towards a ruling elite’s self-serving agenda, it reveals its dystopian undercurrents, transforming the ostensible hedonistic bliss into a dystopian nightmare.

The “punk” aspect of the cyberpunk genre, as I discussed earlier in this chapter, is manifested through a traditional cyberpunk hero, who is typically a marginalized loner, equipped with superior computer skills that enable him/her to hack into various data networks, thereby displaying significant resistance to the established order. *The Living* is no exception to this rule. Similar to the “punks” of Western cyberpunk literature, Starobintes’s Zero is an outsider, who attempts to defy the status quo and uncover the truth behind Socio, and therefore stands to exemplify the oppositional framework to the technological discourse in this novel. However, unlike Western cyberpunk hero-hackers like, for example, Case in *Neuromancer*, whose “punk” status lies in their exceptional computer knowledge, which makes them a legitimate threat to the corporate/government system of control, Zero’s advantage, on the contrary, is in his complete ignorance of the virtual world and separation from Socio. Zero is the only one in this society who is born without an in-code, i.e., past cyber-history. Because he is considered a genetic malfunction, and thus becomes the embodiment of something unknown that can potentially be dangerous, he is isolated from the community and placed into the House of Correction, with other criminals. In that sense, he is a marginalized misfit, a societal pariah who has nothing to

lose if he decides to question the fundamental principles of the current social order. Since Zero is not subjected to the daily dose of propaganda in cyberspace and is not conditioned to follow the rules of Socio's "utopia," he, echoing the trajectory of many dystopian narratives, becomes the only person aware that something is seriously wrong with this society and wants to figure out what really hides behind the shared illusion created by Socio.

However, once Zero, through multiple plot twists, becomes a member of the ruling elite and eventually the ruler of the Living, finally learning the truth about the real purpose of the Pause and the slogan "there is no death," in the novel's finale, he, unexpectedly, decides to not destroy the system. At some point, he did expose the truth to people and issued a decree in which he endowed people with a right to live as long as they want, to have families and raise their own children, and amnestied the "correctees." Surprisingly, the revealed truth had the opposite effect on people. It destabilized the system and engendered total chaos—people started rebelling, committing suicide, murdering others, organizing arsons and robberies, spreading viruses in Socio, abandoning their children and undergoing abortions. As a result, the population started to dwindle at a remarkable speed, and Zero, fearing total collapse, decided to revive the myth about the Living, realizing that people need this utopian illusion to survive, to avoid further catastrophes. Unlike other cyberpunk protagonists who are bent, at all cost, on restoring justice and "liberating" humans from their "virtual" enslavement like Neo in *The Matrix*, Zero has to abandon his "punk" status in the novel's finale, opting to perpetuate the current ideology and proliferate the ostensible utopian myth of the Living, deeming it a "necessary evil" that will prevent the society from annihilating itself from within. In this sense, Zero resembles Tatarsky from *Homo Zapiens*: they both get to the top of the ruling elite and decide to not disrupt the ideology in charge, even after they learn its true essence and are exposed to its manipulative

techniques, knowing that to organize life in a different way is simply not an option—it will only bring about more destabilization and discord in society. People, to sustain themselves as a nation, as the novel postulates, need the discipline and structure of utopian arrangement—even if that utopia already contains the dystopian seeds and will at some point metamorphose into dystopia—since utopian imagination, as suggested by Ernst Bloch, is the fundamental force and necessary condition for the development of humanity.

Tellingly, the second half of the novel, which in a way explicates and vindicates the need to restore the utopian myth of the Living in the novel's finale, offers a powerful metaphor of post-Soviet history, wherein the crumbling of Soviet illusions, which led to overall societal commotion, necessitated Putin's effort to restore Soviet mythology in Russia by means of mass culture and media. The fact that Socio is not marked by Soviet dogma and instead strongly resembles the modern-day capitalist system transforms post-Soviet conservatism into a global ideology, which has recently been exemplified through the advent of the ideological global alliance between Putin's supporters, the European far-right, and American Trumpism. Consequently, traditionally perceived as rebellious, cyberpunk's function is modified in Starobinets's novel to emerge as a protective and even conservative genre, that loses its defiant spirit and endorses the status quo. As a result, in the novel's intricate utopian/dystopian dialogic configuration, utopian chimera triumphs over dystopian critique.

Conclusion

The analysis of American and Russian representatives of cyberpunk literary movement leads to the following observations. First, while Gibson in *Neuromancer* comments on global problems as part of Western world's adjustment to the late stage of capitalism in the postmodern

world, Russian cyberpunk exemplars focus primarily on the issues that Russian society had to face after the collapse of the communist ideology and the Soviet Union, en route to the transition to global capitalist economy. This is especially evidenced in Pelevin's novels, but is also present in Starobinets's text, which at first glance may seem like a narrative about global concerns, but ultimately alludes to a specifically Russian social context. Second, if in Gibson's cyberpunk text globalization is perceived as a natural step/process in the Western contemporary world and in fact becomes an integral part of the postmodern existence and the new market economy, Russian novels, particularly Pelevin's texts, show a strong resistance to the new global order and interpret globalization as a major threat to Russian national identity and culture, viewing it as neo-imperialism, with a new visage. Third, if we compare the employment of cyberspace/TV-space in American and Russian cyberpunk representatives, we can surmise that for Gibson cyberspace can be either oppressive or liberating, depending on the circumstances, while Russian authors view it mainly as a dystopian concept that functions chiefly as a form of repression and control. Lastly, examining the role of the protagonist in this genre, it becomes apparent that Gibson's protagonist can be considered a non-conformist, who wants to challenge the corporate domination, but is relentlessly forced to help the AI to complete its devious machinations, thereby representing and reflecting fittingly the "punk" constituent of this genre, whereas the main heroes in Pelevin's and Starobinets's texts do not defy the system and even willfully join it. In that regard, cyberpunk placed in the Russian milieu sheds its "counter-institutional" or subversive edge and becomes a conservative genre, aimed to support and promote the ruling regime.

CHAPTER IV

POST-APOCALYPTIC AND THE RETURN OF THE MYTH

Defining Post-Apocalyptic SF

Apocalypse in its various manifestations as well as different speculations about the ultimate “end” have been a source of infatuation and a major theme in the genre of science fiction, even before science fiction gained prominence at the advent of the 20th century. Apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic SF narratives have enjoyed great popularity and indeed span centuries—starting from the 19th century, with texts like Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man* (1826) and H.G. Wells’s *War of the Worlds* (1898), through the 20th century (e.g., George R. Stewart’s *Earth Abides*, 1949; Kurt Vonnegut’s *Cat’s Cradle*, 1963, etc.) and contemporary SF novels such as Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* (2006), to name a few. The causes for the “end of the world” in SF narratives vary significantly from natural disasters, environmental and ecological crises, health and population issues to technological disasters and nuclear warfare. Tellingly, major historical events of the 20th century, in particular, play an important role in shaping the apocalyptic imagination in the literary discourse. The most drastic surge in apocalyptic thinking occurred around 1950s, specifically after the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima in 1945 and subsequent Cold War period, when the possibility of nuclear holocaust worldwide has become tangibly valid. Thus, apocalyptic tales, especially those written in the 20th century, have come to symbolize, as Heather Hicks contends,

modernity's destructive nature by "expressing gleeful relief at [its] collapse" (4). However, some scholars (James Berger, Gary Wolfe) argue that the paradox of apocalyptic stories lies in the fact that an apocalyptic event, which aims to annihilate life as it is, never signifies the ultimate end of the universe, as something always "remains after the end" (Berger 6). According to James Berger, "the end itself, the moment of cataclysm, is only part of the point of apocalyptic writing": "Something is left over, and that world after the world, the post-apocalypse, is usually the true object of the apocalyptic writer's concern" (6). Similarly, Gary Wolfe also notes that the end of the world texts "are in fact quite the opposite" of what the name suggests as they "dwell on the survival of key representative types of individuals" (7). He further elaborates that the end of the world in apocalyptic fiction typically implies the end of the old way of life or "a system of beliefs" in which "the old concept of 'world' is destroyed and a new one must be built in its place" (1). Consequently, while some scholars consider post-apocalyptic literature to be a subgenre of the apocalyptic SF, others use the two terms interchangeably since in both apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic texts the life after the apocalypse is present, the only distinction being that in apocalyptic texts the focus primarily is on the apocalyptic event itself and the circumstances leading up to it with some elaborations on the life afterwards, while in post-apocalyptic tales most attention is given to imagining the aftermath of the event and the organization of the new social order.

Post-apocalyptic narratives are easy to identify amidst the broad range of SF oeuvre as they are typically marked by similar tropes and plot devices, exhibiting common characteristics, summed up by Hicks as: the necessary presence of "ragged bands of survivors; demolished urban environments surrounded by depleted countryside, defunct technologies; desperate scavenging; poignant yearning for a lost civilization, often signified by the written word; and extreme

violence, including cannibalism, enacted by roving gangs of outlaws” (6). The survivors of a catastrophic event typically reside in small communities, which in a way defies “the oppressiveness of uniformity . . . that lies at the heart of the form” (8). In addition to Hicks’s list, a discernable conflation of the archaic past and the distant future, which is usually depicted as having returned to the primitive past after the destruction, as well as a fusion of the low-tech setting and futuristic/innovative technologies should also be recognized as important post-apocalyptic features.

There have been quite a few speculations as to why there is such an abundant interest in apocalyptic narrative in literature and why its popularity has been consistently growing over the last century.³⁹ Some critics, like Susan Sontag and James Berger, propose that reading or watching films about “the end” can help people to envision the “unthinkable,” to condition society as a whole to embrace its fears, alleviate its anxiety, and “normalize what is psychologically unbearable, thereby inuring us to it” (Berger 14; Sontag 225). Other critical commentators suggest that apocalyptic fiction provides a kind of psychological support for people who are dissatisfied in some ways with their current social/economic/political situation since apocalypse usually entails a sense of change and new beginnings. Elizabeth Rosen, for example, contends that apocalyptic novels “have traditionally been written to comfort people whose lives are, or who perceive their lives to be, overwhelmed by historical or social disruption,” with the purpose to “exhort its readers to maintain faith in the midst of trying times” (XII). That said, the apocalypse offers a “break” in the continuous flow history, and according to Lois Zamora, aids humans to “create comprehensive fictions of historical order”: “Apocalypse projects the patterns of creation, growth, decay, renewal, catastrophe onto history, encompassing

³⁹ Frances Carey, explaining the fecundity of apocalyptic narratives and films in our contemporary culture, suggests that “apocalyptic terms of reference are so deeply ingrained in Western culture that they assume an archetypal function” (270).

the beginning and the end of time within its vision” (3). Frank Kermode and Warren Wagar, similarly, maintain that apocalyptic narratives enable humans to comprehend their place in history, gain a better understanding of their present lives that undoubtedly imply that we already “do indeed live in an endtime” (Wagar, *Terminal Visions* XIII): “Crisis, however facile the conception, is inescapably a central element in our endeavors toward making sense of world” (Kermode 94). Hence, by inciting people to critically situate themselves in the historical framework of the present, apocalyptic fiction then “raises disturbing questions about the present” (Alkon 159), provides ideal conditions for the reevaluation of the current socio-political situation, and accordingly for “a total critique of any existing order” (Berger 7), functioning as the ultimate vehicle for “social criticism” (Rosen XIII).

Apocalyptic science fiction is certainly not an entirely new phenomenon in literature and is not solely derived from the lessons of history. As suggested by many scholars,⁴⁰ the traditional secular apocalypse is undoubtedly rooted in the Christian/biblical apocalyptic tradition and therefore inherits some of its elements, albeit in a modified form. The word apocalypse itself comes from Greece and means “to reveal” or “uncover” something hidden (Zamora 2). While the Book of Revelation in the Bible is commonly considered the fount of our understanding of religious apocalypse, there exist other biblical stories such as the Book of Daniel or Zechariah that also present apocalypse as revelation (Weaver 179). The common thread in these apocalyptic tales, as Weaver identifies, becomes the vision of the future in which the mighty rulers, representing the Antichrist, subjugate and persecute the people of God, followed by the struggle between good and evil, “great trials, judgement for those who defy God, the second

⁴⁰ Such critics as Lois Zamora, Majid Yar, Elizabeth Rosen, Roslyn Weaver, Malcolm Bull, David Dowling, David Ketterer analyze in various degrees how Christian apocalyptic narrative has influenced the use of secular apocalypse in contemporary science fiction.

coming of the messiah, the Christ, in all his glory, the promise of ‘everlasting life,’ and deliverance from pain and sorrow for the faithful in a renewed, remade world” (179). Thus, the apocalypse envisions the end of the suffering of the oppressed by direct interference from God, who will punish the sinners and reward the faithful ones, promising them the creation of the divine kingdom of New Jerusalem and consequently a blessed existence. What becomes quite evident from the biblical interpretation of the apocalypse is that the hope for the creation of a better world, after the collapse of the existing one, is always present. This utopian dimension of the religious apocalypse has been underlined by a number of scholars. Krishan Kumar, James Berger, and Gary Wolfe all maintain that a utopian element of hope pervades biblical apocalypse: “The imagination of disaster . . . usually carried with it . . . a sense of hope, of something constructive emerging from the ruins. Similarly millennial hopes, or the utopian imagination, were commonly coupled with the belief that a great disaster . . . must precede the emergence of the millennial kingdom or the good society” (Kumar, “Apocalypse” 205). Hence, apocalypse, despite its reputation for bringing destruction and obliteration of everything humanity has achieved, also entails a sense of hope that a new and better life will somehow transpire after the end.

Despite the strong utopian sensibilities embedded within the discourse of biblical apocalypse, secular apocalypse, as many literary critics have observed, typically lacks this utopian dimension and is configured as a catastrophic event of the ultimate demolition to reveal the dystopian anticipation of the inevitable collapse of modernity. Weaver, for instance, argues that “there is no hope of a new world in apocalyptic literary science fiction, which promises the destruction without the ‘new heaven and new earth,’ and imagines not utopia but dystopia” (184). Gary Baines also claims that “secular doomsday visions are usually characterized by a

sense of pessimism, absurdity and nihilism” (3). By the same token, Kumar believes that apocalyptic narratives of the last century tend to focus more on the negative, rather than the positive, outcomes without any promise of hope (“Apocalypse” 205). Kumar wonders why we have “truncated the apocalyptic vision, so that we see endings without new beginnings” (“Apocalypse” 212). He then elaborates that we, as society, seem to have entered the phase of “debased millenarianism” that offers no “compensating utopian vision” (“Apocalypse” 212). Kumar thus concludes that utopian imagination is absolutely essential for any society to survive as it affords us means to be able to imagine, constructively, a better future and propels us to go forward: “We need both millennium and utopia. We need, first, something that lends urgency and the sense of a forward movement” (“Apocalypse” 212).

While the interpretation of the secular employment of the term “apocalypse” in science fiction to refer to the final global catastrophe that envisions a dystopian future, without any promise of restoration or renewal, is rather popular and seems to pervade the critical discourse, I want to propose that the utopian discourse, pertinent to the narrative of biblical apocalypse, has not entirely vanished in contemporary apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic stories and, in fact, resides side by side with the dystopian one. In that sense, I concur with Zamora, who acknowledges that despite the dominance of the dystopian tendencies and pessimistic mood in present-day secular apocalyptic texts, we should not disregard apocalypse’s traditional dualistic nature, which, to use Zamora’s words, incorporates “both cataclysm and millennium, tribulation and triumph, chaos and order, and it is the creative tension, the dialectic, between these opposites that explains, in part, the myth’s enduring relevance” (4). Indeed, I think that it is this imbrication of utopian and dystopian dimensions, paradoxically presented within the bounds of one text, that makes these “end of the world” narratives particularly appealing and manifold. In this regard, my proposal to

read post-apocalyptic novels as an amalgam of the two incompatible, conflicting visions echoes the argument of Majid Yar and Roslyn Weaver, who claim that apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic frameworks combine both utopian and dystopian trends, thereby complicating the common perception of these novels as producing largely dystopian imagination. Specifically, Yar insists that “dystopian sensibility” of secular apocalypse, highlighted by so many critics, “is not exhaustive, and at the heart of post-apocalyptic discourse we find a striking ambivalence” (77). He goes on to say that “alongside the dystopian anticipation of social breakdown, there exists within popular post-apocalyptic discourse a clear strand of utopianism, one that anticipates and relishes the prospect of disaster, insofar as it makes space for activating a more ‘elemental’ notion of justice” (83). Yar suggests that the apocalyptic event or disaster, albeit being usually considered as having been precipitated by technological and scientific advancements of modernity, are nonetheless implicitly “imbued with divine meaning,” with an implication that people are being punished as a result of their own corruption, evil actions, and sins via the “corrective justice” brought about by the catastrophe (77-78). In addition, the existence of utopian discourse, in Yar’s opinion, is also exemplified through the frequent emergence of the symbolic figure of messiah in post-apocalyptic texts/films, who restores justice and helps to establish a sense of coherence and harmony in the new society (83). Comparably, Weaver too admits that the veiled utopian tendencies still exist in contemporary apocalyptic fiction, manifested chiefly in the rhetoric of redemption and liberation of the oppressed minorities, who are able to subvert the tyranny of the existing evil, defy dominant ideologies, and speak out against imperialism and patriarchal domination through the “language” of apocalypse (188-189). That said, the apocalypse can be read as an opportunistic moment to rid our society of existing

hostilities and authoritarian forms of government, enabling the oppressed to gain agency and create a utopia of their own.

As a consequence, I posit that the parallel existence of the utopian and dystopian discourses results in the following thematic manifestations. Utopian tendencies in apocalyptic texts are certainly borrowed, as discussed above, from the Christian apocalyptic tradition and are demonstrated through the longing to put a stop to history via apocalyptic devastation and start afresh, commencing a new life with no conflicts, oppression, or wars. In addition, the yearning to start over after the “rupture” in the progression of history with all its atrocities usually precipitates a desire to return to primordial times of the Garden of Eden, the age of innocence and harmony, before history emerged and devastated our society, spawning separation, inequality, and struggle for power. Since most of cataclysms in apocalyptic fiction are caused by human actions and are viewed to be the direct result of modernity’s ceaseless progress, in which science and knowledge are misused and manipulated, many apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic novels feature a revival of a more simplistic and minimalistic way of living after the collapse, echoing “prehistoric condition,” devoid of any elements of modern civilization and obliterating all historical experience.

This zero-level condition, resonates in compelling ways with the idea of mythological “great time” or “sacred time” put forward by a prominent philosopher and thinker Mircea Eliade in his book *Myth and Reality*, who maintains that humans throughout history always attempt to return to the mythical time because myth represents the “true” or “sacred” history—it “is always an account of a ‘creation’” as “it relates how something was produced, began to *be*,” and therefore “describes the various and sometimes dramatic breakthroughs of the sacred . . . into the World” (Eliade 5-6; emphasis in original). Thus, according to Eliade, because myth “narrates a

sacred history,” it “becomes the exemplary model for all significant human activities” (6). That is why the task of the modern man is to not simply “remember mythical history but also to *re-enact* a large part of it periodically” (13; emphasis in original). The end times become a perfect opportunity to recount and recollect the mythical sacred time not only because it rids us of “profane,” chronological time and restores the primordial “sacred” time but also because “the myth is always related to a ‘creation’ and tells how something came into existence,” thereby “constituting the paradigms of all significant human acts” for the new society and serving as a “vital ingredient of human civilization” in general (18-20). In his other book *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, Eliade explains that it is through the continual reproduction of the myth, accomplished via the imitation and repetition of the archetypes and paradigmatic gestures that allows humans to “acquire a certain reality” and be “transported onto the mythical epoch” of “real” time (35). Thus, I propose that most post-apocalyptic narratives seek to reconstruct the mythical sacred time by repeating and recreating a myth of origin, in its various manifestations, in order to create a new civilization and begin a new life, but, first and foremost, to return the sense of the real, which becomes so elusive in cyberpunk.

Another form of utopianism, i.e., as a “literary artifact” and a “heuristic device” that enables writers to envision and create an actual utopian community, is also employed in a large number of apocalyptic narratives since after the total demolition of the infected existing order, a new, and of course more perfect, society has to be formed (Suvin, *Metamorphoses* 52). In sync with the conventions of the literary genre of utopia, most of these newly created communities are “estranged” from the empirical reality of the reader, meaning that they are simultaneously different and yet somehow familiar to the audience. Placed in the context of post-apocalyptic narrative, the nascent utopian society will then represent an alternative to the world that has

previously instigated the apocalypse and at the same time will contain some remnants of the destroyed civilization, to establish that familiarity with the old pre-apocalyptic world and to show that the new society is indeed the offspring and is still connected to its deceased ancestors. Furthermore, the recently developed society has to be organized according to some socio-political principle, which is a salient element of any utopia, and has to be “a historically alternative wishful construct,” as Suvin asserts, implying that the new society, and everything it conceives, will be the result of “their own forces, without transcendental support or intervention” (“Positions” 34). As a consequence, the birth of the new society, after the fall of the old one, and its attempt to organize itself into some semblance of community, no matter how primitive it might be, contains strong utopian characteristics and thus represents the core of the utopian discourse in post-apocalyptic SF.

The presence of dystopian discourse in apocalyptic stories, that reveals itself alongside the utopian one, have been detected by a number of scholars, highlighting that the domination of the “doom and gloom” scenarios in apocalyptic fiction reflects the dystopian despair, resulting from the increasing anxieties and concerns of the contemporary Western society that embraced and promulgated vehemently the main tenets of the Enlightenment. Secular apocalypse is then typically portrayed as the horrific outcome of the utopian Enlightenment and progress run amok, wherein the whole civilization suffers at the hands of its own highly esteemed inventions and now has to be destroyed so that the world can be purged from its evil doings. As a result, dystopian discourse that has been interpreted as a critique of the utopian values and principles figures prominently in post-apocalyptic texts as it cautions readers about what traditional utopian doctrines, such as progress and strong belief in knowledge and science, can result in. Sweeping destruction and breakdown of human civilization are shown to be the actual consequences of the

utopian philosophy that credulously vowed liberation and redemption achieved through technological progress. Accordingly, as Hicks rightly points out, post-utopian imagination is rooted in the traditional dystopian paradigm “predicated on the notion that a society attempted to create a utopia only to conceive its opposite” (8). After examining a few examples of post-apocalyptic narratives, Hicks then determines that “stories of the collapse of the modern world into ruin do follow the utopia-to-dystopia telos” (8).

Another way in which dystopian discourse dismantles foundational utopian principles in post-apocalyptic SF is the cyclical conception of time that belies the Enlightenment understanding of history as a linear progression. The belief that our history consists of cycles that recur continuously instead of perceiving it in linear terms opposes the Hegelian model of history as progressing in linear trajectory, adopted by the Enlightenment philosophy of modernity and consequently welcomed by utopian thinkers, and demonstrates that utopian faith in the steady increase of rationality, knowledge, and science in the twentieth century doesn’t necessarily prompt a better future and give rise to “the progress of the consciousness of freedom,” but rather can and eventually does set in motion a cataclysmic demolition of humanity of massive proportions (Hegel 19-20). There are a number of influential philosophers and cultural figures who believed in the cyclic nature of history, in one way or another sharing Nietzsche’s idea of the eternal return, who might be the source of inspiration to some of the post-apocalyptic authors. Most notable of them include Jacques Derrida, Martin Heidegger, Gilles Deleuze, and Pierre Klossowski.⁴¹ The cyclical nature of history depicted in most post-apocalyptic texts, in

⁴¹ See Heather Hicks’s *The Post-Apocalyptic Novel in the Twenty-First Century: Modernity beyond Salvage*, Tyrus Miller’s article “Eternity No More: Walter Benjamin on the Eternal Return,” and Warren Wagar’s “Round Trips to Doomsday” for a more detailed analysis of these philosophers’ explorations of cyclical conceptions of time and history.

different variations and degrees, then produces a dystopian pessimism that we are trapped in a never-ending cycle of history and are bound to repeat it over and over again.

Walter Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* as Post-Apocalyptic SF

Post-Apocalyptic Features

Walter Miller's well-known novel *A Canticle for Leibowitz* was an instant success upon its publication in 1959, surprisingly enjoying great popularity over the course of many decades. *Canticle* was first published in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* as three independent short stories in 1955, 1956, and 1957, which were reorganized and assembled into a full length novel in 1959, subsequently earning the Hugo Award in 1961 for best science fiction novel. Tellingly, the novel has received a lot of attention among scholars, who acknowledge its influential presence and prominence in the post-apocalyptic literary discourse, and is now considered one of the classics of the genre's "golden age," a period lasting approximately from 1957 to 1966 (Morrissey 197). Keith Booker, for example, calls it "perhaps the best known and most critically respected post-holocaust novel of the 1950s" (*Monsters* 88). Comparably, critic David Tietge avers that *Canticle* is "arguably the best 'after-the-bomb' novel ever written . . . mainly because of its careful crafting and conspicuous avoidance of nuclear war clichés" (676). David Dowling too suggests that the way *Canticle*'s "themes and debates are held in suspension in every line" makes it an "exemplary fiction" in the genre of post-apocalyptic literature (200).

Indeed, this novel has been an important player in the framework of post-apocalyptic SF, and my analysis will attempt to show why. To begin with, I will locate and explore the key characteristics of the post-apocalyptic genre in Miller's well-crafted post-apocalyptic setting in *Canticle*. The overarching question that I would like to examine in this novel is how and why

Miller employs elements of religious apocalyptic discourse, and in what way Miller's understanding of history relates to or differs from the traditional apocalyptic cyclical view of time. Next, I will determine how the author integrates utopian and dystopian dimensions in this text, how utopian and dystopian discourses are configured, and in what ways these discourses interact with one another.

Miller's *Canticle* certainly incorporates many of the key characteristics pertinent to the post-apocalyptic genre mentioned above, thereby presenting a rather traditional post-apocalyptic setting. The return to primitive times is manifested clearly at the beginning of part one, set in the year 2570 in the desert of southwestern United States approximately six hundred years after a nuclear disaster (referred to as "Flame Deluge") that annihilated most of the human population and devastated the environment. In the aftermath of the nuclear holocaust, there emerged several small communities—another distinctive feature of post-apocalyptic fiction—represented by uneducated barbaric masses and a Catholic monastic order of monks. Humankind became literally divided into those who turned against any form of culture after the catastrophe (illiterate masses) and those who wanted to preserve knowledge for future generations to use (monks). To elaborate, as a reaction to nuclear holocaust and science/knowledge that led to it, an age of "Simplification" commenced during which the majority of the population attempted to purge society of the evil that they thought caused the disaster, i.e., science, knowledge, and literacy in general. Thus, simpletons-savages aimed to eradicate all accumulated cultural knowledge, burned books, and exterminated not only "the man of learning" such as "rulers, scientists, leaders, technicians, teachers" but anybody who could read or write (Miller 62). The Simplification "became an insane frenzy of mass murder" and resulted in rampant violence by the angry mobs (63). In a desperate attempt to save the already dwindling knowledge, a monastic

community was established whose goal was to collect and revive knowledge, often by memorizing and copying various scientific and historical manuscripts. The original monastic order was founded soon after the atomic devastation occurred in the twentieth century by Isaac Leibowitz—a nuclear physicist who supposedly contributed to the development of nuclear power and nuclear weapons—who having suffered at the hands of barbarians and having witnessed their hostility to literacy decided to create a monastic order that could gather and protect the fragmentary artifacts of the twentieth century. The apparent dualism between those who want to destroy culture and those who want to save and restore it echoes Hicks’s characterization of life after the apocalypse in post-apocalyptic SF as we are usually presented with some form of degradation and “regress,” exemplified through the illiterate and bloodthirsty mobs, commonly juxtaposed with some form of culture/knowledge preservation and “progress,” “yearning for a lost civilization,” manifested here in the Albertian Order of Leibowitz (6).

The fusion of the archaic past and future is demonstrated by the ostensible return to the Dark Ages, at the beginning of the novel, despite the fact that the events of the book are taking place in the future. The simultaneous existence of defunct or outdated technologies with futuristic innovations figures prominently in *Canticle* as well. Illustrative here is the setting of part one where technology is virtually non-existent; what we have instead are the blueprints and scientific documents left over from the “Age of Enlightenment” (20th century) that in a way represent the seeds that will later germinate into a new advent of Renaissance and scientific discoveries in part two. Part three is where the primordial “low tech” society of part one is sharply contrasted with a highly advanced civilization that emerged from it twelve hundred years ago, which not only has reached our present-day level of technological progress, mainly seen in the creation of nuclear weapons again, but seems to have even advanced further: the futuristic

society now possesses spaceships, used to colonize other planets, and has developed sophisticated translation programs that are able to translate accurately from and to any language of the world, making the communication much more effective between the nations. Such marriage of the low-tech and advanced technologies that are usually compressed in one narrative is a distinctive feature of the post-apocalyptic framework, though in Miller's *Canticle* these two opposing technological discourses don't simultaneously exist as the move from the primitive society to a highly technologically progressive one takes hundreds of years. Nonetheless, despite the temporal difference, they are both present in the text.

Utopian/Dystopian Discourses

Besides a well-defined post-apocalyptic setting in *Canticle* that would certainly situate it firmly within the context of post-apocalyptic science fiction, this novel also reflects the apparent dilemma outlined above regarding the apocalyptic imagination's mobilization of utopian and/or dystopian visions. My argument that insists on the concomitant existence of both utopian and dystopian discourses in a dialectic configuration within apocalyptic/post-apocalyptic genre, in spite of the more common view to regard apocalyptic SF as the one favoring predominately dystopian setting, is pronounced rather vividly in Miller's *Canticle*. My goal, therefore, will be to show the double-sided nature of this novel, i.e., elucidate in what ways the utopian and dystopian discourses are utilized in this text and how they engage with one another, making it one of the prominent examples of the post-utopian modality of SF.

Most scholarship on *Canticle* highlights the following overarching themes in the novel: opposition/conflict between science and religion, especially the way science can be appropriated to serve the opportunistic aims of state institutions (Ralph Wood, David Tietge, Daniel Born),

the employment of numerous biblical allusions and their meaning (Russel Griffin, Marilyn House, John Stoler, Amanda Cockrell), the significance of church and Catholicism (Daniel Born, Jeane Walker), cyclical nature of history (Erik Grayson, James Lovegrove, Dominic Manganiello, Gary Herbert), individual choice and ethical responsibility (Michael Bennett), distortion (W.A. Senior), and analysis of narrative style (David Seed). In addition to the discussion of prevalent themes, some critical commentary underlines the presence of dystopian and/or utopian sensibilities in this work. Particularly, Marilyn House addresses the dystopian components in *Canticle*, mainly focusing on how the notion of progress is critiqued in this text, manifested in man's "abuse of technology," and how a typical utopian characteristic—faith in human rationality and willingness to commit selfish deeds for the sake of community—is deconstructed, revealing Miller's "distrust in human nature" (256). In a similar vein, Weaver uses *Canticle* as one of examples of post-apocalyptic works that employs dystopian setting and seems to convey a rather unenthusiastic message regarding "humanity's ability to progress": "humanity has an inherent flaw that makes apocalyptic events inevitable" as humans are "unable to learn from previous mistakes" (185). Conversely, Thomas Dunn identifies a strong utopian streak in this text, arguing that the cyclical nature of history, which many scholars consider dystopic, and the times of destruction prompt the revival of hope. In other words, society needs to reach a point of darkness and profound trouble to trigger utopian thinking so that "man might hope again in wretched darkness" (Dunn 113; Miller 285). Dunn also interprets the novel's finale as promising hope and resurrection, and in that concludes that the cyclic historical pattern is necessary if humankind wants to achieve utopia and "yearn for light" again (Dunn 113). Interestingly, the ambiguous ending of *Canticle* has generated a large body of speculations among the critics as to whether Miller intended it to be hopeless, with the advent of another

atomic war and possibility of utter annihilation of humanity, or whether he inserted an element of hope, illustrated by the final departure of clergymen and children for the distant stars as “a new Exodus” (Dunn 111). For instance, Griffin doesn’t quite detect the utopianism in the final scene, seeing no guarantee that Brother Joshua and his crew will survive such a long journey to reach the planet and will be able to inhabit it (123). Others, like Cockrell, Wood, Senior, Manganiello, suggest that despite the overall rather morose tone of the narrative, the novel’s finale unquestionably implies hope—evidenced by the miraculous awakening of Mrs. Grales’s second head, Rachel, and monks’ leaving the Earth in a spaceship—and therefore signals the existence of the utopian discourse here. The apparent discord in critics’ opinion concerning utopian/dystopian trends demonstrates the equivocal nature and complexity/multifariousness of the novel and therefore, in my view, reveals that both of these discourses are in fact summoned in this text. And it is precisely the friction and vacillation between these two opposing discourses that makes this text so remarkable for many generations, accurately echoing Warren Wagar’s often cited statement that *Canticle* is “a critic’s dream-book, rich with symbols and metaphors, open to many conflicting interpretations” (“Round Trips” 84).

This book’s utopian discourse is configured in several ways. Pertinent for post-apocalyptic genre social planning that precipitates utopian thinking, since as David Ketterer maintains “the fulfilment of the apocalyptic imagination demands that the destruction chaos give way finally to a new order,” and the given opportunity to start life without history, i.e., go back to “prehistoric” times of innocence of the Garden of Eden before the Fall, when harmony and equality pervaded society, are both present in *Canticle* (*New Worlds* 14). Life after “the end” continues in the formation of two communities in this novel: the masses, bent on destroying any vestige of literacy, knowledge, history, and the monks, whose goal is to protect culture and the

remaining historical artifacts. If we interpret both of these communities as some kind of utopias, albeit with different visions of the future, then it can be observed that the monks of the Order of Leibowitz have a much stronger utopian core than the masses. The monastic order, like many utopias, is organized/systematized and founded on strict order, discipline, and hierarchy. In sync with utopian proclivity for imaginative planning, the monastic community stands to exemplify an alternative social order—both to the chaotic barbaric masses, manifested in the Order’s regimentation as “the systematic remedy for the systematic evil” and aspiration to preserve culture, and to the pre-apocalyptic existence, demonstrated mainly through their return to the primeval life, promotion of moral values, and faith in God (Kumar, *Utopianism* 88). The monks’ attempt to return to the primordial existence of original Paradise resonates with Eliade’s idea of humanity’s necessity to return to the mythical time that will function as a model for human behavior after the end times and will also help humans to restore the sacred “real” history through the repetition of sacred myths. The reproduction of sacred myths is certainly present in this novel as well and is evident in the repetition of Biblical motifs and archetypes through which the new community of monks tries to return to the “real” time, which will be discussed in more detail later.

Another reason why post-apocalyptic communities gravitate towards the recreation of the conditions of original Paradise or the Golden Age, as elaborated by Kumar, lies precisely in the fact that the Garden of Eden represents “life before the fall into alienation, of man from man, man from nature and man from God,” making “simplicity” “the keynote of this order” and manifestation of “primal innocence and natural harmony” (*Utopianism* 18). Thus, it is monks, not the masses, who most closely evoke the resemblance with utopian primitive, and yet harmonious, living in the Garden of Eden: their simplistic and, more importantly, ascetic

lifestyle, devoid of indulgence, discord, and violence, mirrors the antediluvian ways of the original Paradise. Additionally, the parallel between the monks and Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden can also be detected in the monks' perceptible naiveté, innocence, and dearth of cultural/scientific knowledge due to the demolition of the previous social order. Though monks seek to restore knowledge and gather the remaining cultural/scientific relics, they are completely clueless as to how some of the artifacts and blueprints found in the ancient fallout shelter in part one, thought to have belonged to Leibowitz himself, can be used or what they mean. Brother Francis spends fifteen years copying the blueprint discovered in the fallout without any knowledge or comprehension of the document's purpose. The monks' scientific illiteracy reveals just how much they are removed from science and knowledge as they haven't tasted the fruit of the tree of knowledge yet and are as innocent as the first man and woman in the Book of Genesis before the Fall. Echoing the biblical story, the monks will, however, be tempted with the forbidden fruit of knowledge and will manage to cultivate science within their monastic community and introduce technology into their primeval existence, thereby jeopardizing their primitive, abstinent utopian living.

Scientific Discourse

It is thus within our understanding of the role of knowledge and science where the peculiar utopian/dystopian dialectics of this novel resides. Traditionally, the focus in early utopias, for example of More, Plato, and Campanella, was mainly on equality, social stability, and communal happiness—characteristics that are certainly reminiscent of the idyllic living conditions in the Garden of Eden. However, even within these early utopian tales there was already a strong emphasis on reason and rationality, as is the case with Plato's *The Republic*, for

instance, which will logically pave the way for the emergence of science as an essential part of utopian imagination in later utopian texts. With an advent of early modernity around 1500s, an apparent shift in values becomes noticeable, which is not only distinguished by the challenging of traditions and promoting freedom and individuality but also by a great veneration of knowledge and science. Hence, the idea of science as the key driving force of modernity and its anticipated positive impact on society began to slowly percolate European utopian thought. However, it hasn't quite achieved its prominent status until Bacon's famous utopia *The New Atlantis* (1627), with emergence of which science was firmly added to the utopian project and became one of its defining features. Bacon's scientific utopia revealed that if science is incorporated into the utopian imagination, which is already founded on such concepts as rationality and order, then our move towards a brighter and better future will be that much faster and easier. As Krishan Kumar asserts in his book *Utopianism*, "from Bacon's time, democracy and science were the implicit or explicit premises of the modern utopia" (54). However, as Kumar rightly observes, science has never "in itself been the goal of utopia" (54). Science was typically utilized in utopias as one of the various means to create a better place and "was always to be put at the service of some ethical or social ideal" (54). However, Bacon's utopia with its well-known motto "knowledge is power" aimed at "the enlarging of the bounds of Human Empire, to the effecting of all things possible," for the first time introduced the idea of science for its own sake (19). Kumar claims that pure science can upset the stability of utopian order as "there is a finality in utopian perfection which is not to be contradicted by the onward, aimless, essentially anarchic march of science" (55). Besides, scientific advancements can be manipulated by the people in power, something that Bacon warned us already in his utopia: the scientists of *The New Atlantis* share some of their scientific discoveries with the state and some prefer to keep

in secret so that politicians cannot use science to advance their power. Later on, with the emergence and blossoming of Enlightenment throughout the 18-19th centuries in Europe, the concept of progress surfaced and became strongly affixed to the utopian project. The idea of the inevitable progress of humankind rested on unwavering faith in science and reason that would necessarily prompt the advancement of knowledge and progress that will ultimately lead to attainment of freedom and the establishment of the utopia of enlightenment, as Immanuel Kant legendarily prophesized. Thus, the concept of progress intertwined with science and rationality became one of the major aspects of utopian thinking during that time in Europe. Therefore, to use Kumar's words, the idea of progress "finally allowed the full incorporation of science in utopia" (59).

Strong emphasis on science, knowledge, and literacy becomes the key component of the utopia of the Albertian Order of Leibowitz in *Canticle*, whose main purpose, after the apocalypse and especially during the horrific times of Simplification, becomes to gather and preserve the remnants of historical artifacts and scientific documents in a collection of relics they call "Memorabilia," which the monks continued to replenish through the course of many centuries. The monks' intentions seem to be genuinely virtuous as they hope that one day the artifacts and documents that they have been saving will be used by future generations when people are ready to re-establish and re-discover the lost scientific and humanistic culture of humankind. Members of the Order, however, are quite naïve and ignorant in their conviction that now science will only be used for peaceful purposes and will only be directed towards the advancement of society, towards a harmonious better tomorrow of high civilization. Very quickly they seemed to have forgotten the main cause for the apocalypse, "Flame Deluge," in the first place, and are rather guileless to assume this would not happen again. Thus, if part one seems to be presenting explicit

utopian undertones, exemplified through the monks' strong utopian faith in science, hoping that one day their nascent society will mature again into a mighty civilized order, in part two, the monks slowly become aware that if their ancient scientific formulae are appropriated by secular scholars and politicians, then the situation can drastically worsen, and science can wreak havoc on their society, possibly destroying it yet again. As a consequence, the monks face the same dilemma as scientists in Bacon's *The New Atlantis*: whether they should share their Memorabilia with secular scientists who are funded by political figures. However, unlike scientists in *The New Atlantis*, the monks in *Canticle* do not possess the intelligence or scientific acumen to develop and apply scientific knowledge from the ancient Memorabilia to practical uses themselves; they need secular scholars if they want to see the revival and evolution of science. As Morrissey accurately sums up, the main predicament of the book lies in the following: "Faith without intellectual curiosity threatens to slow the reawakening of learning that is so desperately needed in Part I of the novel, while intellect divorced from faith leads the new scientists of Parts II and III to serve leaders who are as stupid and culpable as their twentieth-century counterparts" (206). This is the conundrum we observe in part two, where Dom Paulo, who encourages Brother Kornhoer's invention of the arc lamp in the monastery, seeing this discovery as the next step in the evolution of science, already becomes suspicious at the arrival of the secular scientist Thon Taddeo to the monastery with an intent to study their ancient documents, and becomes rather apprehensive when Thon Taddeo admits that he has to support the current fanatic leader Hannegan, who is devising all kinds of schemes to gain the sole power over the region, if he wants to see his scientific research continue (Morrissey 207; Cockrell 23): "Thon Taddeo knew the military ambitions of his monarch. He had a choice: to approve of them, to disapprove of them, or to regard them as impersonal phenomena beyond his control . . . Evidently, then, he

accepted them as inevitable” (Miller 211). Thus, part two of the novel depicts how the utopian hopes of the priest Dom Paulo and the Order itself, which he stands to exemplify, are beginning to crumble: the fears already expressed by Bacon in his utopia are starting to materialize, and utopian discourse is being gradually critiqued to reveal how such salient utopian concepts as science and rationality can potentially be misused, resulting not in the Earthly paradise of freedom and equality, but in a nightmare—war and destruction of hellish proportions.

As a result, parts two and three illustrate how the utopia of progress can backfire and captures fittingly a sudden shift that occurs in the study of utopianism in the twentieth century. As Kumar argues, dystopian literary genre as well as dystopian studies emerge as a response to the utopian vision and attempts to expose what can go wrong in a perfected state: “the modern utopia of science, reason, and democracy” appears to be “far from liberating humanity and adding to its well-being and happiness” and is instead “bringing in a world of unprecedented servility and sterility, a world where old forms of tyranny were returning in the new guise” (*Utopianism* 93). Tellingly, the horrific historical events peppered throughout the twentieth century such as two World Wars, and mainly the genocide by the Nazi regime in Germany and the totalitarian terror in Soviet Russia, have been analyzed as illuminating examples of the unsustainability of utopia as an Enlightenment project, especially its blatant use of reason and science in the interest of power.⁴² This is what we see taking place in *Canticle* in parts two and three. As I mentioned above, the dystopian impulse begins to unfold already in part two when Dom Paulo begins to see the implications of the secular use of science. Interestingly, it is not

⁴² For a more in-depth examination of the reasons for the dystopian turn in the twentieth century literary discourse see Keith Booker’s work *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature* (1994) and Tom Moylan’s study *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* (2000).

Taddeo's apparent support of the monarch's cruel actions that concerns the priest but rather his hypocrisy (Born 264; Bennett 486). As we find out, Taddeo, who is supposedly launching a new scientific revolution with his groundbreaking discoveries, is being funded by the corrupt and illiterate dictator and thus has to publicly endorse him, albeit his condemnation of the monarch's policies:

Let's be frank with each other, Father. I can't fight the prince who makes my work possible—no matter what I think of his policies or his politics. I appear to support him, superficially, or at least to overlook him—for the sake of the collegium. If he extends his lands, the collegium may incidentally profit. If the collegium prospers, mankind will profit from our work. (Miller 220)

Thus, it is Taddeo's hypocritical nature, lack of moral values, and ethical responsibility that really disturbs Dom Paulo. The priest realizes that in the name of progress Taddeo is willing to sell science "to the highest bidder," and willfully allow it to be misused and subjected to the unscrupulous intents of the rulers, hungry for power and domination (Tietge 689). Dom Paulo, already detecting the contradiction in Bacon's "knowledge is power" dictum, wonders if progress simply for the sake of progress can be really beneficial to humanity if it is supported by the evil government and can be utilized to inflict harm. He earnestly asks Taddeo: "But you promise to begin restoring Man's control over Nature. But who will govern the use of the power to control natural forces? Who will use it? To what end? How will you hold him in check? Such decisions can still be made. But if you and your group don't make them now, others will soon make them for you" (Miller 220).

The theme of ethical responsibility in this novel has been analyzed by a number of critics, who identify the conflict between science and morality as one of the most important conflicts in

this work. For example, Wood and Senior highlight Thon Taddeo's scientific rationalism and obsession with theory as well as his blatant disregard for anything but empirical evidence and "his mediated commitment to edit or revise information so that it fits his preconceptions or theories" (Senior 334). Senior asserts that Taddeo symbolizes "a figure of the scientist at his worst" who has "no interest in other people, no commitment to people as human beings, so obsessed is he with his measurements, pursuit of theory, and soulless machines" (334). Other scholars, like Bennett, Tietge, House, Born, Morrissey, and Manganiello, note that Taddeo's lack of moral principles and ethical responsibility, despite his intent to usher humankind into the new Enlightenment age of scientific advancements, shows that "science conducted without a strong ethical framework is destined to end in disaster," making Taddeo's goals to develop science by any means, no matter how well-meaning they might be, self-defeating (Tietge 677). Therefore, as concluded by House, Miller's criticism is "directed towards man for his abuse of technology in his struggle to progress at all cost," with scientists disregarding their moral obligations and responsibilities in the face of evil (256).

If we view parts two and three of the novel as intricately connected and consider the advent of another apocalypse of the final part as being the direct outcome of the happenings of part two, then Dom Paulo's warning regarding the use of science appears rather prophetic, functioning as the foreshadowing of what is to come in part three. In that regard, critic Bennett perceptively underlines, verbalizing what Miller merely gently hints at—that Thon Taddeo stands to exemplify a type of scientist who is in a way responsible for the nuclear catastrophe of part three, "who by disclaiming their responsibility, paved the way for the destruction that has already occurred and for that which will occur in the final chapter of the novel" (486). Bennett compares scientists like Taddeo with Pilate: ". . . Pilate could not rid himself of the blame for

Christ's crucifixion, nor can the scientists squirm out from under the burden of responsibility for the crucifixion of mankind on a nuclear cross" (486). Thus, the "realized utopia" in *Canticle*, in which rationality and science reign supreme, has turned out to be the complete opposite of how it was initially conceived—menacing and destructive, instead of redemptive.

There are two other important symbolic forewarnings in part two that are worth mentioning, and that somewhat complicate the oversimplified dichotomy between science and religion, making it too easy to put all the blame on the hypocritical scientists and politicians who exploit them as tools for their self-serving goals. The invention of electric light in the monastery, that I mentioned earlier, becomes important as it is emblematic of the turn in values that is gradually occurring in part two, in certain aspects resonating with the events leading to the Biblical Fall. During the lighting ceremony, the crucifix in the monastery's library literally has to be removed to make room for the arc lamp (Wood 33). Now science has symbolically replaced God and, what is more, is being worshipped instead of God. More importantly, it is with the permission of the priest Dom Paulo that the crucifix is replaced by the arc lamp. He explains to the terrified and enraged Brother Armbruster, who declines to move the crucifix at first, that the place where the crucifix is located in the basement seems to be "the only suitable place for the lamp" and adds that this would be "in the interests of progress" (Miller 149). This symbolic gesture, therefore, implies that it is with the priest's blessing that science is allowed to be deified in the sake of progress and then consequently utilized for military purposes in the final part of the book.

Another significance of this scene lies in the fact that Brother Kornhoer, the self-trained priest who designed the electric arc lamp, builds an electric generator which supplies power to the lamp and enables it to work. The generator so proudly created and exhibited by the priest-

scientist is a dynamo (Slater and Jacobs 129). The invention of the priest's dynamo in conjunction with Taddeo's visit to the monastery with the goal to appropriate the ancient blueprints for his own purposes and Dom Paulo's cautionary speech regarding who will control science in future serves as the foreshadowing of the recurrence of the nuclear war in part three: the science invented for "peaceful" purposes by the priests in the interest of progress will be manipulated by secular scientists and used for the development of nuclear technology, aimed to destroy, in a new reindustrialized and technologically advanced civilization. David Tietge also notes that after revealing the invention of electric generator to Thon Taddeo, the abbot Dom Paulo "is worried about keeping the invention out of the hands of the despotic king who employs Thon Taddeo for fear that the secular application of the invention could lead to another calamity, hence introducing the political interest that corrupts the purer, more noble scientific and religious motives" (685-686). Tietge further elaborates on this conundrum presented in the text and explains its validity, by drawing parallels with a similar situation in the U.S. during the Cold War: "Scientists were funded, recruited, and given some latitude in their projects as long as they produced what was expected of them. The public was sold on the benefits of atomic energy (and science in general) because, in most cases, it was the government that made great promises for the advancement of humanity. Scientists were simply there to reap the rewards of their popular status" (690). Thus, the conflict in the narrative rings true and reflects the modern-day concern regarding the effects of the collaboration between science and the government. In *Canticle*, though not directly responsible for the advent of another nuclear war, the monks have still inadvertently contributed to it with their naïve views regarding science and knowledge, and how it can be utilized for humankind's progress. This complicates the ostensibly clear division between the utopian and dystopian realms in this text, blurs the boundary and reveals the

intricate link between them, illustrating that there are already seeds of dystopianism implanted in the utopian discourse.

Cyclical History

Another manifestation of the utopian/dystopian dialectic in the novel is configured through Miller's representation of history. Miller depicts history in *Canticle* as having a cyclical pattern, meaning that history is bound to repeat itself, and go through the same cycles, doomed to replicate its past mistakes, thereby revealing the dystopian core. The cyclical nature of history is demonstrated in the text through the repetition of the historical periods that the future post-apocalyptic world goes through: after the nuclear holocaust of Flame Deluge (20th century), the humankind plunges into the Dark Ages again (part one, titled "Fiat Homo"—"Let there be man"), followed by a second Renaissance, which takes place 600 years later (part two, symbolically titled "Fiat Lux"—"Let there be light"), and concluded by the final part leaping another 600 years ahead, titled "Fiat Voluntas Tua" or "Let your will be done," describing the new technological age dominated by nuclear weapons and technological innovations. Thus, the book begins with the destruction—the aftermath of an atomic blast—resetting the history back to zero; then goes through all the significant historical stages/periods echoing the history of Western civilization as we know it, ending with yet another destruction. History is presented as a vicious cycle, that the humankind is unable to break through and therefore is destined to destroy itself over and over again. This idea is articulated in the book by Abbot Zerchi in part three, who after witnessing the beginning of another nuclear war between the two global superpowers, proclaims:

Listen, are we helpless? Are we doomed to do it again and again? Have we no choice but to play the phoenix in an ending sequence of rise and fall? Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, Greece, Carthage, Rome, the Empires of Charlemagne and the Turk. Ground to dust and plowed with salt. Spain, France, Britain, America—burned into the oblivion of the centuries. And again and again and again. Are we doomed to do it, Lord, chained to the pendulum of our own mad clockwork, helpless to halt its swing? (Miller 264-265)

Many critical commentators postulate that Miller's cyclical perception of history in *Canticle* is undoubtedly redolent of dystopian pessimism since it proves that progress, as for example Susan Spencer contends, will inevitably result in another nuclear catastrophe, thereby repeating the events of the beginning of the book (341). In a similar vein, Hicks claims that the hopelessness of the cyclical nature of history lies in the fact that writers like Miller "see no possibility of the new—everything is always already old"; future is seen as a fatalistic repetition of the past (58). I agree with this point of view to some extent as Miller indeed deconstructs the utopian perception of progress as a promise of freedom and happiness and shows that the "realized utopia" is actually rather dangerous and time and time again precipitates inescapable destruction. In that regard, Miller's view on history appears to be rather bleak as the historically framed move from a non-scientific to a scientific culture proves to be detrimental and ruinous. However, while I concur with scholars that the cyclical depiction of history follows the dystopian paradigm, I believe that the novel's finale counters this rhetoric. The ending of the novel, which I will examine in detail later, demonstrates Miller's hope that perhaps the exodus of a few dozen monks who carry with them faith and all the relics of ancient Memorabilia to start a new life on a distant planet will break the vicious cycle of history and allow the chosen people to establish a utopian society, a New Heaven on Earth, albeit on a different planet. Here I agree

with Dunn and Manganiello, who argue that the ending of the novel, despite the overall pessimistic tone of the text, implies some promise of hope that the destructive historical cycle will eventually come to a halt. Manganiello maintains that the dying Abbot Zerchi, who oversaw and supported the monks' departure in the end, interprets this mission "as an act of hope" and thus "believes the linear, providential pattern of salvation history will offset the cyclical, destructive pattern of nuclear history" (Miller 284; Manganiello 166). Manganiello explains his utopian reading of the novel's ending through Miller's explicit biblical allusions and asserts that the pessimism embedded in the concept of cyclical history is refuted with "Miller's eschatological optimism . . . grounded in the biblical experience of divine renewal, which permits the individual and the race to make a fresh start by going back to the past in the hope of reconstructing a new self and a new world from the ashes of the old" (166-167). I agree with such interpretation and also view the finale as Miller's way to offer a counter-argument to the inevitability of history's cyclical pattern, suggesting that hope for utopia will always remain with us.

Religious Discourse

What informs a utopian interpretation of the novel's finale is Miller's biblical/religious references and borrowings, which according to most scholars' opinion carry with it utopian sensibilities, manifested in the hope for salvation and the Second Coming of Christ—something that many contemporary post-apocalyptic stories lack. However, it is not just the ending that incorporates motifs of Christian apocalyptic narrative; this text, in fact, contains quite a number of biblical allusions, implanted throughout the narrative, that set up and make a utopian reading of the finale possible. If we interpret the post-apocalyptic setting of *Canticle* as a return to

Eliade's concept of mythical time that restores sacred history via the reproduction of sacred myths and rituals through which a community regenerates itself and brings back meaning to reality, then we can surmise that the "great" mythical time is marked here by the repetition of Biblical myths, which grants this text a perceptible utopian dimension. Indeed, the three interconnected stories presented in *Canticle*, comprised under parts one, two, and three, if examined holistically, seem to have been inspired by the Book of Daniel from the Old Testament and the Book of Revelation from the New Testament. In both biblical accounts, we are given prophetic visions of futuristic events wherein people are being oppressed by the authoritarian rulers or hideous monsters who attempt to undermine people's faith in God and corrupt them. While various nasty creatures in the Book of Revelation, a dragon and two beasts, try to force people into worshipping their image instead of God's, in the Book of Daniel the kings of Babylon constantly test Daniel's faith in God as well, as exemplified, for instance, in king Darius's order to throw Daniel into the Lion's Den as punishment for Daniel's worshipping of God instead of the king. Jesus observes all the corruption and blasphemies happening on Earth, and destroys the evil: the beasts from the Book of John are annihilated by being thrown into the lake of fire; the powerful kings in the Book of Daniel are killed or come to realize and accept the righteousness of God and are thus forgiven. Those who preserve their faith to God despite all the trials and tribulations are saved, as is evidenced in the Book of Daniel when God, on numerous occasions, rescues Daniel from death. As a result, in both biblical apocalyptic stories we are presented with a battle between God and the forces of evil or the Antichrist in the New Testament, in which God fights and ultimately defeats evil, punishes non-believers, and restores justice and order by saving those who hadn't lost faith in God. The Second Coming of Christ, which represents God's casting his judgement upon the world and those who maltreated his people, implies that the

oppressed will be liberated at last. The final reward granted for those who remained loyal to God despite all the hardships is the creation of New Jerusalem, the New Heaven on Earth, where the faithful will live happily and in peace forever. Thus, apocalyptic discourse in the Bible, as Weaver explains, “insists that a time is rapidly approaching when God will judge all”: this discourse “foretells disaster in the future, yet nonetheless offers hope and the promise of better things to come” (179).

Miller’s text undoubtedly explores some of the most dominant themes from the abovementioned hopeful biblical stories and thus infuses the utopian realm of the traditional apocalyptic model from the Bible into his secular apocalypse, providing apposite context for the utopian reading of the ending. To specify, the post-apocalyptic events, described in the book as taking place after a major catastrophe, unfold into a narrative that depicts a series of social developments that inevitably lead to another apocalyptic event. This narrative displays a number of similarities with religious apocalypse. In part one, a utopian society of monks has emerged in which, despite the problems brought about by the devastated environment after the nuclear disaster and constant threats from simpletons, peace and harmony reign. Monks symbolize the people of God, the faithful ones who keep their faith, are humble and chaste. The conflict between the good and evil from the Bible appears in *Canticle* when science becomes secularized in part two. The scientific discourse with its utopian/dystopian dialectics that I examined earlier can also be interpreted through a religious lens. Symbolic here again is the discovery, or better put, the rediscovery of electricity manifested in the construction of the arc lamp by Brother Kornhoer. Besides the replacement of the crucifix with the lamp during the lighting ceremony, the mentioning of “Lucifer” becomes important in this scene. Specifically, one of the guardians gets shocked by electricity by accident and curses by uttering the word “lucifer.” As Griffin

points out, the use of the word “lucifer” is emblematic here as “Lucifer or ‘light-bearer,’ is of course also the name which Satan bore as an angel, before his pride led him to the rebellion which caused his fall” (114). Griffin elaborates that during this moment of technological revival connected with the conception of the arc lamp “Lucifer, now the bearer of artificial light has replaced Christ, traditionally the true ‘light of the world’” (114). Thus, the emergence of technology in this medieval society is indirectly associated with Lucifer and consequently stands to exemplify the rise of evil in *Canticle* seen in various manifestations in both the Book of John and the Book of Daniel.⁴³ The final part of the novel, which begins with a rumor that a nuclear weapon was detonated and ends with an advent of a full-blown nuclear war between the world superpowers Asian Coalition and the Atlantic Confederacy, displays the return of the pre Flame Deluge evil on a massive scale, which is evident even in the way Miller describes the atomic blast in the end: “The visage of Lucifer mushroomed into hideousness above the cloudbank, rising slowly like some titan climbing to its feet after ages of imprisonment in the Earth” (Miller 333). Such all-pervasive malevolence, in sync with biblical accounts, requires God’s intervention: to punish the sinners and reward those who remained faithful, i.e., the monks. God indeed reappears, albeit symbolically; the Second Coming of Christ is exemplified in this novel, as many critics have suggested (Griffin, Cockrell, Stoler, House, Manganiello, Morrissey, Tietge, Dunn), in the miraculous awakening of Mrs. Grales’s second head, named Rachel, which remained in a vegetative state until nuclear warfare began. It is through the figure of Rachel, whose sudden coming to life right after the nuclear explosion in part three, evoking tropes of the

⁴³ David Leigh also acknowledges the presence of the Biblical battle between the good and the evil in this novel, and reads the second part of the book as “a comic version of the cosmic battle between the forces of Christ (the monastery) and the Antichrist (Thon Taddeo and his secularized science)” (144).

biblical Second Coming of Christ, that the utopian discourse begins to manifest itself most prominently.

Notably, Mrs. Grales, an old bicephalous tomato woman whose second head, which she named Rachel, appeared as a result of genetic mutation, is a mysterious persona and thus has to be analyzed a bit closer so that we may gain some insight into the meaning of Rachel and her behavior in the novel's finale. First, Mrs. Grales's name is rather symbolic and is most likely alluding to the legend of the Holy Grail, the grail or chalice used by Jesus during the last Supper "in which man is to be reborn and redeemed," and which "has long been a symbol of Christian purity" (Griffin 122; Stoler 85). Second, because Mrs. Grales's second head grew later, it would indicate that it was conceived free of sexual sin, like the Virgin Mary, through supernatural means (Griffin 122). Illustrative here is Brother Joshua's dream, in which Rachel appears and announces that she is the "immaculate conception" (Miller 276). This imagery undoubtedly links her with the Virgin Mary and thus presents her as a "symbol of redeemed humanity" (Manganiello 166). This association with Virgin Mary stresses Rachel's spiritual purity and sets up the framework for the readers to interpret her sudden awakening or rebirth as an emergence of the new Messiah in her form. As elaborated by Griffin, it is precisely because Rachel was immaculately conceived that she refuses Abbot Zerchi's attempt to baptize her in the end—"it has no need for baptism designed to wash away inherited sin" (122). Instead, the newly awoken Rachel, bowing her head as if saying a prayer, kneeling and holding the golden cup, offered Zerchi a Host (Cockrell 32; Dunn 109). Completely astounded, Zerchi received the Wafer from Rachel and observed that this "creature of primal innocence," though "she could not yet use words nor understand them," "had done what she had as if by direct instruction" (Miller 332). Zerchi finally realizes that Rachel is the new Messiah after she touches his forehead and for the

first time utters a word that is not a mere repetition of Zerchi's, but her own; she says to him: "Live" (332). Dying Zerchi perceives it as a promise of hope and resurrection amidst the all-around chaos and destruction of the terrestrial holocaust (332).

Thus, Rachel's awakening can be interpreted as a reappearance of God who has come down to Earth to defeat the burgeoning evil and punish society that has allowed the evil to spread and flourish. Another parallel with the Christ figure can be drawn from Zerchi's discovery of Rachel's wounds: after the atomic explosion, Zerchi "plucked out five silvers of broken glass" from Rachel's arm, which didn't seem to cause her any pain as she continued smiling (330). This certainly echoes, as proposed by Stoler, the five wounds of Christ, thus again implying that she is most likely the Christ-figure who emerges on Earth to bring justice (87). Thus, according to Stoler, Rachel embodies the spiritual hope in the novel: "That hope, of course, is Rachel herself in the promised Second Coming, another gift from God to show man the path to salvation" (88). "The path to salvation" does open up in *Canticle's* finale as we witness Joshua leading a group of monks and children on board of a starship along with relics from Memorabilia, ready to depart to Alpha Centari, a distant planet where they hope to settle and escape the rampant destruction on Earth. Many scholars interpret this ending as containing a slight glimpse of hope, while others construe it as a definitively utopian ending with which Miller wants to highlight that there is still hope and a promise of salvation despite the overall gloomy tone of the novel. Manganiello, for instance, notes that Joshua and those who board the starship, "as the new inheritors of God's promises," "are prefigured by the faithful Remnant of Israel, who survived various cataclysms" and concludes that "their space exodus acts as a providential sign that the human race, if not the planet, will go on" (166). I concur with Manganiello and those who read the ending as utopian as

I believe that the strong biblical allusions interwoven in the last scene bring out the utopian dimension that is embedded in the Christian apocalypse.

Specifically, Brother Joshua's name was certainly deliberately chosen, and if we try to find parallels between Miller's Joshua and its biblical counterpart, the final scene becomes much more symbolic and attains a stronger utopian meaning. Joshua in *Canticle* is most likely derived from the Old Testament Joshua since, as Griffin so thoroughly expounds, they both "were chosen to succeed older leaders (Moses and Dom Zerchi) and to guide their bands of Chosen People to a new Promised Land" (119). Indeed, Joshua's upcoming expedition to escape Earth is called "a new Exodus from Egypt," thereby imbuing their voyage to escape the rubble of a new apocalypse with a clear reference to the Bible (Miller 290; Griffin 119). In addition, Joshua's name translated from Hebrew means Jesus. This is also reminiscent of the Old Testament Joshua's mission, who was supposed to be "an allegorical type of Christ's leading the souls of men into the New Jerusalem, the celestial City of God" (Griffin 120). Thus, as both explanations suggest, similar to his biblical namesakes/precursors, Joshua is a kind of spiritual leader in *Canticle* whose task is to lead the saved ones to the promised land, which in this case is a distant planet. In this regard, Joshua has also been interpreted as another Christ-like figure in this novel, besides Rachel. It should also be noted that Joshua struggled at first to accept this role of a spiritual leader, after Zerchi specifically asked him to guide the spaceship. Tellingly, Joshua used to be a scientist who after some trials and tribulations found his vocation in religion (Stoler 89). Thus, it is this person, who, in Stoler's words, "fought a personal battle with materialism and won it," that Zerchi trusts with the lives of the remaining monks (89). Joshua in a way "embodies Miller's view that one must turn from the material to the spiritual," regain his faith, and thus be rewarded in the end with the promise of an eternal happy life (Stoler 89). This echoes Eliade's

proposition that the permeation of the “profane” usually leads to the desire to return to the “sacred.” Consequently, if the ending is informed by the biblical context, the parallels to which surely appear premediated here, then it grants the utopian dimension of this book a much stronger foundation than was previously thought. Therefore, the book’s pronounced utopian ending counters most scholars’ conviction that apocalyptic narratives mainly offer dystopic settings without incorporating any features of the original, biblical, apocalypse, which adds hope and a promise of salvation to these narratives. Specifically, *Canticle*’s utopian finale belies, for instance, Rosen’s statement regarding the main essence of neo-apocalyptic texts: “The neo-apocalyptic variant assumes that all mankind is beyond renovation, that this degeneracy is so complete that the Ending can only be so, too. There is nothing beyond this Ending, no hope of a New Heaven on Earth, precisely because there is nothing worth saving” (XV). *Canticle*’s ending, on the contrary, brings that element of hope that Rosen finds absent from the contemporary secular apocalyptic stories and does offer hope beyond the Ending, manifested in the starship’s literally “thrusting itself *heavenward*,” as if suggesting that they are ascending to a New Heaven where they will live happily ever after (Miller 333; my emphasis).

Hope in this text is also manifested in the opportunity to start a new cycle in the finale—not a new cycle of history, but to return to the primordial times of the “sacred” history, as Eliade contends. Because this post-apocalyptic mythological setting got infected again by the “profane” history of progress, to use Eliade’s words, which is in fact inevitable as people “cannot perpetually maintain their position in what” is known as the sacred, mythical time or “the paradise of archetypes,” it has to revive itself again—there is always a need for “collective regeneration” to abolish the profane time and return back to the sacred time (*The Myth of the Eternal Return* 75). In that regard, the ending hints at the necessity to reactualize the mythical

moment again, and it is through the “repetition of an archetypal gesture” that the profane time can be abolished and man can experience the “real” or “great” time again (36). Thus, for Eliade, the cyclical perception of time does not equate with the destructive potential of cyclical history: for him the cyclical return to the mythical time is redemptive and regenerating. It is this kind of liberating cyclical “return” that Miller envisions for the fleeing monks in the novel’s finale, thereby infusing the ending with hopeful “utopian” undercurrents, wherein which the restoration of the “sacred” mythical time becomes possible again.

Other biblical allusions, mainly associated with names and their meanings, abound in this text, contributing to the utopian construal of the ending as well. The most significant biblical figure referenced in the novel is Benjamin, who appears in all three sections of the book. According to House, Griffin, and Stoler, the character of Benjamin in *Canticle* echoes both the mythical figure of the Wandering Jew and biblical Lazarus. Benjamin’s association with Lazarus of Bethany comes from his own identification with him when Benjamin tells Dom Paulo that the person who initiated Benjamin’s long journey said to him “Come forth!” which of course evokes Christ’s words when he ordered Lazarus to come out from his tomb (Stoler 80). In addition, Benjamin explicitly asks Zerchi to call him Lazarus in part three: “Call me Lazarus” (Miller 276). Notably, when Dom Paulo asks him “What are you looking for?” Benjamin responds “Someone who shouted at me once,” meaning that he is waiting for the return of Jesus, the Second Coming of Christ, since it was Jesus who shouted at Lazarus and raised him from the dead (174). This becomes important when we discuss the other symbolic figure that the character of Benjamin evokes—the Wandering Jew. To specify, the connection with the Wandering Jew is the one that directly relates to Benjamin’s mission in *Canticle*. As the Christian legend of the Wandering Jew states, a shoemaker was teasing Jesus on his way to crucifixion for which Jesus

punished him, telling him to wander the earth forever until Jesus returns again. When discussing the myth of the Wandering Jew, Stoler and Griffin cite the medieval legend, in which Christ was refused a drink by a bystander and similarly was condemned to walk until Jesus comes down to Earth again (Stoler 83). In both of these legends the image of a wanderer is highlighted, mirroring Benjamin's own status as a vagabond: when Dom Paulo asks him what his earlier career was, Benjamin responds: "Wanderer" (Miller 165). Illustrative here is Benjamin's age too. As we find out in Chapter sixteen from the Poet, Benjamin is rumored to be remarkably old, precisely 5408 years old. The old man himself admits to his longevity, making most people snicker in disbelief, thinking that perhaps the old man has gone senile. Marilyn House proposes that if Benjamin is really 5408 years old, then his birth date would be 2234 B.C., which is "approximately at the time of Abraham, the founding patriarch of the Hebrew race" (261). Thus, the emphasis on his extremely long life of "wandering" is not accidental here, linking it with the legend of the Wandering Jew. And just like the Wandering Jew, who is supposed to wander till Jesus returns, Benjamin still awaits his Messiah too, and thus continues to wander. In part two, we learn that Benjamin thinks that He, whom he has been waiting for all these years, is finally here. He tells Dom Paulo: "He is already here. I caught a glimpse of Him once" (171). Dom Paulo rightly assumes that Benjamin indeed is talking about a secular scientist Thon Taddeo, who recently arrived at the monastery. However, as we learn later, Thon Taddeo, seen by some as in fact the new Messiah, since he represents the intellectual revolution and the advent of a new Renaissance, is not the Messiah Benjamin has been looking for. "It's still not Him," Benjamin declares ultimately after "staring hopefully into the scholar's eyes" (Miller 213). However, it seems that Benjamin finally will find his Messiah in part three. While House suggests that Benjamin doesn't find the Messiah as "there is no mention of the Jews' cherished hope," that is

why his role in part three is minimal, Stoler and Griffin, on the contrary, propose that Benjamin slowly disappears from part three of the book precisely because he found his Messiah, in the face of Rachel, and thus no longer has to wander the Earth (House 262). Stoler, for instance, explains that because the novel employs so many biblical allusions, it suggests a “spiritual bond between Benjamin and Rachel” “by the fact that in the Old Testament Benjamin is Rachel’s son” (84). Therefore, Stoler argues that Miller “transmutes the blood bond between the two in a spiritual bond, and implies that the Wandering Jew has found his Messiah at last and need wander no longer” (84-85). Thus, if Benjamin is analyzed through the biblical context and viewed, according to Griffin, as some kind of criterion through which potential figures of Messiahs can be identified, it reinforces even more the role of Rachel as a symbolic Messiah and consequently undergirds the utopian discourse along with the utopian expectation of redemption in this text (117). Therefore, the strong utopian presence at the beginning and the end of the novel, with continual crossing into the dystopian discourse throughout the narrative, stands to exemplify a model example of post-utopian modality that at its core comprises the co-existence and oscillation between these discourses.

Russian Post-Apocalyptic Narratives

The Russian post-apocalyptic examples that I have selected to analyze in this chapter will be represented by Georgii Daneliia’s film *Kin-Dza-Dza!* (1986) and Dmitry Glukhovsky’s popular novel *Metro 2033* (2005). *Kin-Dza-Dza!* and *Metro 2033* will be first analyzed as representatives of post-Soviet post-apocalyptic literature, identifying principal elements that define and contour post-apocalyptic literary genre in general and at the same time highlighting how these elements are modified to reflect the unique cultural and social milieu of post-Soviet

society. Then, I aim to show how these exemplars can be characterized as post-utopian, i.e., how the utopian and dystopian discourses are incorporated in the film and the novel, and what relationship they exhibit. Finally, I wish to trace how Miller's *Canticle* and its chief post-apocalyptic themes have influenced Daneliia's *Kin-Dza-Dza!* and Glukhovskiy's *Metro 2033* while also attempting to locate the distinct features of these post-Soviet post-apocalyptic narratives that distinguish them from their American counterpart.

Georgii Daneliia's *Kin-Dza-Dza!* as Post-Apocalyptic Narrative

Post-Apocalyptic Features

1986 Soviet SF film *Kin-Dza-Dza!* directed by Georgii Daneliia is a vivid representative of post-apocalyptic genre in Russia. Though this black comedy didn't receive a lot of critical attention upon its release, it has been getting more and more recognition after the collapse of the Soviet Union and in the 2000s. Critics (Georgieva, Shepard, Smith) are beginning to see the hidden clues and veiled messages in the film's rather absurdist and uneventful plot, which allow them to make parallels between the far-away planet Pliuk and the Soviet reality of 1980s. I argue that the post-apocalyptic setting in this film, which serves as a SF novum, and the dialogical relationship between utopian and dystopian discourses in this post-utopian narrative, allows its director to offer a scathing critique of the Soviet society during Perestroika period.

Kin-dza-dza!, set in Moscow during 1980s, traces the adventures of two Moscovites, Uncle Vova, a construction foreman, and a Georgian student Gedevan who travel to a remote planet called Pliuk in the Kin-dza-dza galaxy. After talking to what appears to be a homeless person in one of Moscow streets, who desperately wants to get back to his home planet Pliuk, Uncle Vova and Gedevan press on a random button of his teleportation device and find

themselves in an unidentified desert. They soon come to realize that this desert is not located on Earth when they meet the “aliens” of Pliuk, who strangely resemble humans. Getting mixed up with two planet’s natives, Bi and Uef, who promise to help Uncle Vova and Gedevan to return back to Earth, the Earthlings are exposed to the rules and customs of this strange planet, learning about its peculiar political regime, societal organization, and social traditions.

Such universal to post-apocalyptic genre attributes as devastated environment, lack of natural resources, primitive living, conflation of the archaic past and future as well as the bizarre mix of low-tech and marvelous futuristic innovations can be all detected in this film. Planet Pliuk is portrayed as an arid desert with depleted resources and conditions unsuitable for living: we learn that an ecological catastrophe occurred when Pliukanians managed to consume all the planet’s water, while utilizing it to obtain electrical energy, turning the planet into a barren desert, and are now forced to live underground. Water becomes a precious commodity that can only be bought; food is artificial (“plastic porridge”). Fusion of the past and future, low-tech and technological progress can also be seen in this film when we discover that this barbaric primitive society, living in subterranean tunnels like archaic cave men in extremely impoverished conditions, possess futuristic technology such as spaceships that can fly across galaxies, lasers that can cut through anything, intergalactic telephone connection, vehicles that can move with lightning speed, etc. Interestingly, all of these highly advanced technological objects do not look futuristic at all; instead, they appear antediluvian, dilapidated and tattered, more fitting for Middle Ages or *Mad Max* movies. Other post-apocalyptic features like fragmentation into multiple communities and striving to revive literacy are minimized in this film. Perhaps a hierarchical racial system and Pliukanians’ bizarre adoration of music and singing, even in its most crude manifestations, can be considered modified remnants of the two aforementioned

post-apocalyptic features.

Utopian/Dystopian Dialectic

Pliuk, a capitalist planet wherein rampant social inequality coupled with a perceptible “dog eat dog” mentality and overall cultural degradation, is depicted as a predominantly dystopian society. This planet’s population is comprised of two different races/ethnicities, the domineering Chatlanians and the subservient Patzaks, who equally fear the threatening Etsilops (representatives of authorities) and express overly enthusiastic veneration for the planet’s nominal leader, Pezhe, who in the second half of the film appears to be comically naïve, harmless, and meek. The relationship between the two ethnic groups is exemplified in the film through the odd duo, Uef and Bi, whom the Earthlings meet upon their initial arrival at the planet. Chatlanian Uef constantly bosses around and humiliates patzak Bi, asking Bi to incessantly show his servility and obedience to Uef through a ritual (sitting down with their arms apart and saying “Ku”), thereby manifestly exhibiting and reconfirming their unequal social status in public. However, as it turns out, the alleged racial distinctions appear to be absolutely arbitrary: the difference between Chatlanian and Patzak is not measured by the color of skin or economic status, but rather is determined with the use of a small device called “visator.” If visator, after pointing at the planet’s native, displays an orange light, it means that that person belongs to Chatlanian group; if it displays a green light, then s/he is considered a Patzak. In addition, the seemingly established “master/slave” relationship between the two races is not permanent. Because Pliuk is a Chatlanian’s planet, Chatlanian is the reigning race on this planet, but when at one point they arrive on Khanud, a different planet in that galaxy, we find out that this planet belongs to Patsaks, and there Patsak is the dominant ethnic group, while Chatlanians

become their subordinates.

This dystopian society with its moral degeneration, paralyzing fear of the authorities, surprisingly rigid social norms, and inequitable relationship between ethnicities and classes they belong to are contrasted with the “utopian” Soviet Russia, represented here by the Moscovites Uncle Vova and Gedevan. At first glance, the juxtaposition between Pliuk and Russia is intended to reveal the binary between the seemingly utopian organization of a communist state and exploitative capitalistic system of Pliuk. Specifically, the utopian/dystopian tension is exemplified in the film through the contrasting pairs—aliens Uef and Bi, and Moscovites Uncle Vova and Gedevan—who literally become the embodiments of each of their respective political/economic systems. Through the unbalanced relationship between Uef and Bi and their interactions with other Pliukanians, it becomes clear that feelings of solidarity, kindness, compassion seem completely foreign to both Chatlanians and Patzaks. All their actions are driven by greed and desire for opulence (here material wealth is ironically represented by the amount of “ketse” or matches that one has since matches are used to start the engine of their spaceships), which will enable one to possess more power and be able to exploit others (Patzaks). Several important scenes in the film illustrate vividly their egotistical, cold-blooded, mercenary nature. For example, in the scene where the local etsilop is announcing to Uef and Bi that they will be persecuted for not having bowed in front of the hologram of their leader Pezhe earlier, Uef is quick to betray Bi in order to save his own skin: Uef asks Uncle Vova to convince the etsilop that it was Bi who was not bowing in front of Pezhe, not him; in return, Uef offers Uncle Vova the spaceship so that he and Gedevan can return to Earth. In another striking scene, where all four of them arrive at the planet Khanud, wherein there is no air, Uef proposes to Uncle Vova that they should buy this planet (since it is really cheap as it is uninhabitable) and the

oxygen there, and then invite others, charging them money to live there. If they owned this planet, Uef admits, all four of them would be able to spit on other aliens, while they are crawling around them on their knees. When puzzled by this statement Gedevan asks Uef why they would spit on others, Uef, flabbergasted at such a question, responds confidently: “For pleasure!” (*Kin-Dza-Dza!*).

Pliukanians’ spiritual degradation and avaricious mentality are sharply contrasted with the benevolent and altruistic ways of the socialist Earthlings, who are depicted as true model Soviet citizens. While Uef and Bi exhibit unequal power dynamics based on the disparity in their social standing, Uncle Vova and Gedevan, despite evident ethnicity and age difference, exemplify equality and genuine camaraderie, possessing mutual respect for one another. Illustrative here are the scenes where Uncle Vova refuses to continue their journey on a spaceship without Gedevan, who was secretly catapulted earlier from the spaceship by Uef, and the scene on planet Alpha, wherein Gedevan refuses to return to Earth without Uncle Vova, who wants to get back to Pliuk. Besides demonstrating feelings of solidarity to one another, the Earthlings feel empathy for the Pliukanians as well. In fact, their journey is unexpectedly prolonged because Uncle Vova and Gedevan feel obligated to help Uef and Bi to get out of their imprisonment: Earthlings have to become traveling artists, playing on Gedevan’s violin and performing in front of Chatlanians, so that they can earn “chatly” (Pliuk’s monetary unit) and buy out Uef and Bi from their “etsikh” (a metal coffin with nails where Uef and Bi were placed to serve their time in prison). Despite constant humiliation they have to endure while performing, since according to Pliuk’s customs Patsaks must always perform in a cage, while wearing, according to the recent Pezhe’s order, a muzzle, the duo from Soviet Russia perseveres in spite all the obstacles and saves their alien friends. Moreover, Uncle Vova and Gedevan pass up the

opportunity to return to Earth twice in order to stay on Pliuk and liberate Uef and Bi. When Uef discovers that, he asks Uncle Vova what motivated their decision as he seems to be unable to understand what prompted the Earthlings to refuse to return to Earth. “What did you want? Crimson pants? Pezhe’s pool? Tell me!” demands Uef, listing Pliuk’s higher class status symbols as reasons for Uncle Vova’s baffling choice (*Kin-Dza-Dza!*). Evidently, he can’t comprehend why the Earthlings committed this selfless act and helped them if they didn’t gain anything in return; it seems that Pliukanians can’t even imagine that people can do things out of the goodness of their heart and are not always seeking to somehow benefit from the situation.

The ostensible utopian/dystopian binary that on surface is manifested through the aforementioned juxtaposition between the aliens and Soviet Moscovites is, however, artificial and in fact functions as a convenient façade to advance Daneliia’s veiled critique of the Soviet system. As many critics point out, Daneliia employs the capitalistic framework of Pliuk as means to conceal his criticism of the Soviet regime and Soviet social conditions in order to avoid censorship. Lucius Shepard, for instance, observes that while the film’s plot revolves around Uncle Vova and Gedevan’s futile attempts to find their way back to Earth, the real focus is “on the problems facing Russia during those days before the breakup of the Soviet Union, anticipating a grim Plyukian-like future” (136). Comparably, Margarita Georgieva highlights that Pliuk, despite its deceptive capitalist organization, resembles the life in Soviet Union (184). She further maintains that in the former USSR science fiction “became an outlet for the serious disguised as amusing, entertaining or humorous” making “the displacement of the actual from the real world to a distanced fictional plane . . . a means of discussing politics and power without having to fear censorship” (184). According to Patrick McGuire in his work *Red Stars: Political Aspects of Soviet Science Fiction*, the official main goal of Soviet science fiction, similar to the

task of all Soviet literature under the socialist realist aesthetic doctrine established in the 1930s, was to propagate communist ideals and “encourage the Soviet population by painting a vivid picture of the happy era of full communism” (25). Consequently, science fiction authors were supposed to depict their futuristic societies as having already attained or striving to attain communism. And of course the portrayal of that society must be positive, where all the things communism promoted such as equality of the classes, nationalities, and sexes, abolition of private property, creation of the model society of hard-working and party-oriented people, technological progress and high standard of living are already fully realized. Soviet authorities also encouraged the negative depiction of Soviet state’s enemies such as capitalism or the struggle of societies at various levels of social developments in their attempts to reach socialism or communism. Thus, many Soviet SF authors chose to base their SF novums in a clear juxtaposition between the utopian Soviet society and other societies/planets, who are obviously inferior to the Soviet Union on multiple levels. However, as McGuire asserts, since Soviet authors could not openly criticize the Soviet regime, they utilized the conventions of SF genre to insert hidden allusions to communism and Soviet social norms in their depictions of alien planets with their totalitarian governments and omnipresent oppression, which were so subtle that they managed to pass through censorship. As a result, Soviet SF authors developed their own form of Aesopian language, which enabled them to express their political views through science fiction narratives. Kaspé, for example, discusses the use of Aesopian language by SF writers in Soviet Union, focusing primarily on the oeuvre of the Strugatsky brothers during the 1960s-70s, and states that Soviet readers were aware of SF authors’ affinity to include veiled allegories and read their works attentively searching for veiled clues, messages, and implicit allusions (32). Thus, as McGuire concludes, seemingly fulfilling the requirements of socialist realism to emphasize the

utopianism of Soviet society while revealing all the negative/dystopian aspects of Soviet Union's enemies, Soviet science fiction became a subversive genre, "acting as a vehicle for the dissemination of views on a wide assortment of issues in political philosophy and public policy" (1).

Daneliia, despite releasing this film during Gorbachev's glasnost period which promoted public "openness" in discussing Soviet social and political problems, employed a similar technique as a cover-up for his critique of the late Soviet reality. By producing the illusion of sketching a typical Soviet SF plot in which the utopian Soviet system is extolled, while Soviet enemies, such as capitalist countries, are ridiculed, Daneliia implants subtle allusions and parallels to Soviet Russia through his satirical depiction of capitalist Pliuk, thereby designing a kind of cinematic "Aesopian" language. Already at the beginning of the film we can detect indirect hints/codes that invite us to interpret dystopian Pliuk as a satirical portrayal of Russia. When Uncle Vova and Gedevan are suddenly transported to Pliuk, they are convinced that they are still on Earth, and, more importantly, still in USSR. Uncle Vova immediately assumes that they must be in the desert Karakum, located in the Soviet republic of Turkmenistan, and without hesitation proclaims: "The sun is in the west, then Ashgabat is there. Let's go!" (*Kin-Dza-Dza!*). This ambiguity regarding their location and the fact that Pliuk can be so easily mistaken for Soviet Russia gestures towards Daneliia's clear intention to show the familiar Soviet reality under the guise of the unattractive and barbaric Pliuk. Other features of Pliukanian society evoke familiar images of Soviet "byt" that surely would not be missed by a perceptive audience. For example, the shortage of most common goods such as food and clothing on Pliuk, black markets, constant bribing and the need to transgress the law to get anything done, excessive flattery in front of the authorities and perpetual public expression of admiration for their leader ("I love

Pezhe!,” “And I love him even more!”) undeniably allude to the day-to-day life of Soviet people (*Kin-Dza-Dza!*). Besides the recognizable details of Soviet realia, other important Soviet references become apparent, in which Daneliia’s biting criticism of the Soviet system and his political views are more pronounced. An illustrating example here is the scene where the Earthlings meet a Pliukanian woman, driving a dilapidated and yet extremely fast vehicle. Because Pliukanians use telepathy as their main means of communication and can easily read each other’s minds, the Pliukanian woman responds sarcastically to Uncle Vova’s reassurance that he is speaking and thinking the truth: “Who thinks the truth on Pliuk?” (*Kin-Dza-Dza!*). Here Daneliia discernably refers to Soviet people’s self-discipline, which they have involuntarily developed over the years of living in a totalitarian regime, to always watch what they say in public. Truth cannot be openly expressed if it contradicts, in one way or the other, the ideology of the Soviet Union unless you are not afraid to be persecuted for it. Thus, Soviet citizens often had to separate what they thought and what they said. Another striking example is the scene where the masses of workers are toiling in factories in their underground tunnels. As analyzed by Jillian Porter, this scene, which at first glance brings to mind capitalist factories, is not that innocent after all (254). Potent parallels to the peculiarities of the Soviet regime, and specifically to “the Soviet deification of party leaders,” become apparent when we learn that the workers are not manufacturing goods in their factories, but “labor to keep a memorial to the ruler of Pliuk afloat over the planet’s capital city” (254). Thus, Daneliia via the conception of his SF novum (planet Pliuk)—which according to Suvin usually constitutes a radically different formal framework, estranged from the author’s and reader’s empirical reality and at the same time is somehow related to it—creates fertile conditions for weaving a covert and coded subversive “subtext” into his otherwise typical Soviet SF narrative.

What this covert imbrication of capitalist and socialist regimes reveals is the intriguingly close parallels between these two, at first glance, radically opposing systems: it turns out that a capitalist order can be confused with the socialist one and visa versa. The Aesopian cinematic language of the film eliminates the boundaries between these two regimes, displaying Daneliia's disenchantment with both of them. Thus, if we use Eliade's conception of "mythical" time to interpret the essence of the post-apocalyptic milieu which seeks to restore "the sacred" history through myth, then it could be argued that in *Kin-Dza-Dza!* the "mythological" setting starts to disintegrate. What we observe in this film is the dissolution of the binary oppositions on which any myth is founded. As suggested by Claude Levi-Strauss, who utilizes a structuralist approach in his analysis, myths from various cultures essentially share the same common features, which are mainly manifested in and built on binary oppositions that eventually become "mediated" or resolved: "mythical thought always works from the awareness of oppositions towards their progressive mediation" (440). If the binary forces in Miller's *Canticle* are clearly exemplified through the opposition between the monks and the secular scientists, and the way each community envisions the application of science, Daneliia's film purposefully erases the borders between capitalist and socialist ways of life and muddles the evident distinctions between the two principles, thereby doing away with the traditional binary oppositions pertinent to the structure of the myth. What we witness here is the nascent slow transformation of the myth into a fairy-tale, which though preserving mythological motifs, begins to de-mythologize them.

The Role of Language

Another intriguing detail of Daneliia's novum in this film that deserves special attention is Pliukanian language, which not only astutely captures the main principles and values of this

society but also reflects some of the most prominent dystopian themes of the film and becomes an essential part of the director's web of coded messages that provide clues to read Pliuk as a sardonic version of USSR. Pliukanian language, which sounds simple and somewhat primitive, consists of only 16 words, most of which are nouns (Smith 765). However, the majority of communication occurs with the help of mainly two words, "ku" and "kiu": ku is used to relate to virtually anything, while "kiu" is a curse word. Pliukanian vocabulary, which consists of such words as "pepelats" (spaceship), "ketse" (match), "chatl" (monetary unit), "luts" (fuel), "gravitsapa" (a part of the spaceship's engine that allows it to gain high speed), "trankliukator" (laser device used by etsilops to punish disobedient Pliukanians), seem to be limited to name either things that are highly valued in this society (such as money and technology) or that precipitate fear (like "trankliukator"). Words for concepts such as love, friendship, equality, solidarity, kindness are absent from their vocabulary, which can only mean that Pliukanians are not familiar with them.

In addition, the relationship between some of the words illustrates the hierarchical organization of this society and thus furthers the dystopian themes. As elaborated by Michael Thomas Smith in his article "Kyu: A Semantic Analysis of *Kin-Dza-Dza!*," looking at seemingly unrelated word pairs such as "Chatlanian" and "chatl," "Patzak" and "tsak" we can grasp a better understanding of the racial inequality and class difference on Pliuk (769). Chatlanian, the term referring to the member of the domineering race and class, exhibits "a homonymic similarity" to "chatl"—a unit of Pliukanian currency. Thus, the meaning of the word Chatlanian can be understood as the member of the ethnic group who possesses money or is preoccupied with money. By the same token, "tsak" is a bell that Patsaks wear, but, as Smith contends, "to define this only as clothing is to miss the most important semantic component—that only Patsaks wear

them as an indication of their class” (769-770). Thus, Pliukanian language helps us to better understand the logistics of the racial/class relations and key values of that society. As Smith concludes in his article, it appears that “the entire Pliukanian language constitutes one giant semantic field in which everything is a measure of give and take” (770).

Based on Smith’s supposition, Daneliia indeed devises a linguistic system that reinforces the essence and gives validity to the capitalist configuration of this society. However, if the unsophisticated (on the surface) Pliukanian language is examined more thoroughly, it can be inferred that Pliukanian words do not simply help to explain the socio-economic relations of Pliuk. An additional connotation can be deciphered if Pliukanian words are read from left to right. As a result, as elaborated by Ian Iushin, “Patsak” (member of the subservient race) turns into “katsap” (disparaging term used in the former USSR republics such as Ukraine to refer to a Russian person), “etsilop” (member of authorities) becomes “police,” “ketse” (in Russian “КП”) transforms into “ЦК” (famous abbreviation for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union), and of course “ku” (a common word referring to most things and concepts on Pliuk) strongly resembles the obscene Russian word for male’s genitalia. Decoding of Pliukanian language suddenly offers an additional context in which the main characters and events on Pliuk can be interpreted, and obviously prompts us to see more connections between the fictional world of Pliuk and the familiar Soviet reality. Thus, the elimination of the clear distinctions between the two planets, Pliuk and Earth, or the two disparate socio-political and economic systems, becomes evident even in the language itself, when we learn that what on surface looks like a “foreign” language, completely alien to us, in fact contains a lot of concepts painfully “familiar” to the Soviet viewer, thereby blurring the border between “them” and “us.”

Besides references and allusions to the Soviet Union, Daneliia, surprisingly, predicted the

social conditions awaiting Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The class divide between two different ethnicities on Pliuk, while to some degree echoing what was beginning to happen in Soviet Russia in late 1980s, represents even better the cultural/social disparity of 1990s, when the gap between the classes became much more noticeable. The rapid privatization after the crumbling of the Soviet state and transition to the market economy enabled a small group of businessman to become exceedingly rich overnight, while the majority of population found itself in poverty as a result of major economic volatility, horrific inflation, and overall chaos. The widening gap between classes manifested itself most notably through the material wealth or lack thereof in the 1990s. The emerging opulent class of “New Russians” in post-Soviet Russia openly flaunted its wealth by driving luxurious cars, wearing expensive clothes (often selected with poor taste) and gaudy jewelry, while most common people still lived in “khrushevkas,” took public transportation, and wore the same outfit every day. As suggested by Iushin, Daneliia, most likely involuntarily, accurately foretold the social upheaval of 1990s by depicting how wealth, which is intricately connected with power, can be easily identified by one’s clothing. On Pliuk, when Chatlanians manage to acquire a little “ketse,” they have the right to wear yellow pants to show their social status, and Patsaks must squat in front of them pronouncing “ku,” not once but twice, as a gesture of respect. And when Chatlanians possess a lot of “ketse,” then they can wear crimson pants, indicating their superior social standing, and both Patsaks and Chatlanians must squat in front of them twice pronouncing “ku,” and even the law-regulators, etsilops, do not have the right to beat them at night. Interestingly, crimson blazers became a famous status symbol and a distinct feature of the New Russians’ attire in the 90s, who just like the domineering Chatlanians in *Kin-Dza-Dza!* demanded special attention and respect from the commoners (Iushin).

Representation of History

The predominantly dystopian discourse in this film is not only manifested through the depiction of Pliukanian society, but also in the way Daneliia envisions history. Similar to *Canticle*, *Kin-Dza-Dza!* portrays history as a non-linear process, challenging the utopian perception of history as a progressive movement forward. Navigating the conventions of the post-apocalyptic genre, Daneliia depicts a world in which oxymoronically both progress and regress are present. While Pliuk has undeniably achieved technological progress and can be considered a technologically advanced civilization, it has evidently regressed socially: its citizens are spiritually empty and morally impoverished people. This film serves as a telling example that science/technological progress doesn't necessarily lead to cultural enlightenment or initiate personal growth and socio-political development. In fact, what it illustrates so brilliantly is that it is possible to have advanced technology and still live like savages. Besides, featuring autocratic oppressive government and hierarchical societal structure in which one ethnicity exploits the other, Pliuk also demonstrates that progress will not necessarily result in equality, happiness, and liberty for all, as was promised by Kant. In a way, the utopianism of progress is completely undermined in *Kin-Dza-Dza!*, suggesting that technological might, degradation, and dictatorships are not antagonistic, and in fact can perfectly coexist together. Therefore, if in Miller's novel the discourse of progress and Enlightenment still remains utopian (even after the second nuclear war breaks out by the novel's finale), manifested in the monks' departure with all the Memorabilia on the way to a planet with hopes to start a new civilization again, in Daneliia's film the revival of the utopian discourse of faith in the redemptive qualities of progress and Enlightenment does not occur.

As the aforementioned analysis implies, in the utopian/dystopian dialectical premise on

which this film is constructed, serving as a convenient setting to deftly enclose director's satirical commentary on the Soviet society, the dystopian discourse dominates and pervades this film. However, utopia, in its pure form, does make a brief appearance in *Kin-Dza-Dza!* and is clearly implanted there as a counter-space, an alternative, against which Pliuk can be evaluated. At some point our group, Uef and Bi, Uncle Vova and Gedevan, find themselves on planet Alpha, where civilized, environmentally conscious people, cloaked in all white, grow beautiful rose gardens and treat each other with deference. These enlightened people, with refined demeanor and lofty manners, seem to be living in a complete harmony with each other and nature. As soon as Uncle Vova and Gedevan step outside the spaceship and see the luscious green landscapes of Alpha as well as its civilized inhabitants, the drastic contrast with Pliuk is immediately established. Alpha is presented as a utopia that has achieved equality and equanimity in its highly cultured society and managed to preserve its natural resources, unlike their profit-seeking neighbors on Pliuk. However, as we find out later, the ruling council of Alpha, in attempt to maintain its utopia no matter what, will readily eliminate all the undesirable elements that might threaten to disrupt Alpha's equilibrium. As it turns out, Pliukians are made into cacti on this planet since, as one of the Alphanians notes, they are consumed with corrupt passions and thus have no place in their utopian world: life as a vegetable is good for them, as is for everybody else (*Kin-Dza-Dza!*). When astonished Uncle Vova proposes that perhaps they need to ask Pliukians themselves what is good for them or not, the Alphanian woman responds assuredly: "Well, if only we gave them the right to decide anything..." (*Kin-Dza-Dza!*). Such ruthless behavior of the seemingly civilized Alphanians shows that utopias can be as authoritarian and repressive as dystopias, with the only difference being that utopia oppresses and punishes deviant behavior for "good" purposes (to not upset the communal harmony), while dystopia does it to simply instill fear in its

citizens and exercise ultimate control over them. The borderline between these two societal organizations is very nebulous: utopian idyll, attained by the excessive discipline, rationality, and prioritizing communal happiness over the individual, can very effortlessly and seamlessly slip into the dehumanized dystopia. Thus, Daneliia rejects the utopian model and doesn't consider it a viable alternative to the dystopian Pliuk, exposing just how much oppressive and tyrannical they both can be. In that regard, just like the borderline between Pliuk and Socialist Earth is blurred, drawing parallels between the seemingly disparate regimes, the contours of the utopian and dystopian organizations are washed out as well.

Dmitry Glukhovsky's *Metro 2033* as Post-Apocalyptic Novel

Post-Apocalyptic Features

Another representative of Russian post-apocalyptic SF is Dmitry Glukhovsky's novel *Metro 2033*, which is considered one of the most vivid and prominent examples of contemporary Russian post-apocalyptic discourse. Prior to its publication in 2005, the book, or rather its first draft, was posted on the internet in 2002 for everyone to read free of charge as Glukhovsky could not find a publisher for his book. The novel was finally picked up and published by a popular press in 2005, bringing the book and its author a massive success. *Metro 2033* became an international bestseller almost instantaneously and was translated into 35 different languages. The novel became an inspiration for an award-winning video game titled *Metro 2033*, released in 2010, and has spawned two sequels *Metro 2034* (2009) and *Metro 2035* (2015). Working within the framework of post-apocalyptic genre and incorporating the conventions of SF literature, Glukhovsky conjures tropes of the catastrophe to not only ponder and deconstruct some of the myths of the Soviet past but also to offer a critical commentary on the socio-political

configuration and transformation of post-Soviet life after the collapse of the Soviet empire. As Glukhovsky himself admits in one of his interviews, “the great advantage of the genre” is that “it reflects current experience” (qtd. in Griffiths 498).

Metro 2033 depicts events unfolding in the year 2033 in Moscow after the global nuclear holocaust occurred in 2013 and forced the survivors to hide in the Moscow underground metro to avoid atomic poisoning and death. Following the conventions of post-apocalyptic literature, the new society formed in the Moscow subway system reverts to a kind of nomadic lifestyle after the atomic catastrophe due to the apparent lack of resources and the constraints of the underground existence. The return to the primeval past and simplistic living is thus conflated with the futuristic setting of the novel. As a consequence, the oxymoronic mixture of the low-tech and futuristic technologies is also evident in this text. The recently shaped society strives to survive by growing mushrooms and breeding pigs, while still possessing guns and sophisticated atomic bombs, as we learn in the end. The breaking down of society into disparate small communities, a prominent characteristic of the genre, can also be found in *Metro 2033*. Dissimilar to Miller’s *Canticle* in which the whole society after the apocalypse is divided into the masses and a monastic order, each adhering to and promoting their own agenda, in Glukhovsky’s post-apocalyptic underground universe there emerged multiple communities, organized around each metro’s station. The stations, “unconnected by a single power,” became “independent and self-sufficient, distinctive dwarf states, with their own ideologies and regimes, their own leaders and armies” (Glukhovsky 8). These states, however, did not attempt to create an alliance and develop cooperative relations with each other; they constantly fought and staged wars with the neighboring states over food, water, and living space: “They were driven forward, in their endless and desperate onslaught, by an instinct for self-preservation, and by that eternal

revolutionary principle: conquer and divide” (9). Thus, *Metro*’s post-apocalyptic locale featuring multiple fragmented communities, instead of a single unified social order, depicts a common post-apocalyptic setting, in line with its Western counterparts. The trope of yearning for the restoration of the lost civilization and culture, typically exemplified through the quest for the written word, figures in this novel as well, albeit not as prominently as in Miller’s book. The protagonist Artyom’s quest from the periphery to the metro’s center, called Polis, to deliver a secret message by Hunter results in his visit to the Lenin Library on Earth’s surface, where he is instructed by a community of book-worshippers to find and bring back a certain sacred book, which supposedly contains some important answers. In the state of Polis, which is considered a cultural center of the metro, books are hot and rare commodities, which are almost impossible to obtain since the Library on the surface is guarded by murderous mutant-librarians. However, despite the widespread belief in the metro that books will somehow give answers and explanations to the world of the underground and help to rebuild it, they prove to be useless. As a consequence, what we notice is the emergence of doubt in the “sacred,” exemplified through the books, which really stand for “knowledge” and therefore “progress.” This contradicts the steadfast faith in literacy and knowledge that are used to help re-build the world anew that we observe in Miller’s *Canticle*. What transpires from this is the evident “de-sacralization” or “de-mythologization” of the mythical setting so prevalent in post-apocalyptic narratives, something that will be discussed in more detail below. Thus, all of the aforementioned post-apocalyptic attributes recovered in this novel allow Glukhovsky to sketch a rather typical post-apocalyptic set.

Utopian/Dystopian Dialectic

Metro 2033, employing the post-utopian modality of science fiction, as I argue, presents an interesting relationship between the utopian and dystopian discourses. These two conflicting dimensions run parallel to one another in the novel and exist in a dialectical tension. As I elaborated earlier in this chapter, I wish to contest the traditional perception of contemporary post-apocalyptic texts as predominately dystopian, lacking utopian hope of original religious apocalyptic stories, and aim to argue that post-apocalyptic genre, and *Metro* as its representative in the Russian literary canon, utilizes both utopian and dystopian frameworks in a dialectic setting.

To begin with, a utopian current in this novel is configured, first and foremost, in the presented opportunity to start over after the apparent break in history, manifested in the nuclear war that annihilates the way of life as we know it, which is also evident in *Canticle*. As suggested by Zamora, “apocalypse is concerned with the nature of history and the nature of time itself”; “the apocalypticist stands outside of time, recounting the past, present and future from an atemporal point of view beyond the end of time” (3). That said, the apocalypse creates a kind of vacuum in time by putting a stop to the progression of history and the existing order, while allowing humans to re-envision, choose, and plan a plausible alternative to that order. In addition, if we interpret post-apocalyptic time as an attempt to return to the “sacred” “mythical” time, as Eliade proposes, which is able to interrupt the “profane” history and bring us back to the “real” time again, then the underground setting of *Metro* with its variety of different independent stations can be interpreted as such attempt. In a way, the newly formed post-apocalyptic community of *Metro* on the one hand, establishes a network of various “utopias” since these stations are created as “alternative” social orders, and on the other hand, represents the return to the mythical time, since all the stations re-create the old political regimes from the past.

To elaborate, the utopian thinking is initiated after the “end times” in the post-apocalyptic framework of *Metro*, wherein the surviving humanity gets a second chance at rearranging its socio-political system, now underground, as an alternative to the one before the cataclysm. This nascent society reorganizes itself, as I mentioned above, in a variety of ways, generating a plurality of fragmented, self-contained communities rather than establishing a single unified government. Moreover, each of the stations/states re-envisages and re-creates a version of utopia from the past. Here we encounter the Red Line occupied by the Communists, who actively send propagandists to other stations in attempt to spread communist propaganda, even promising “electricity” for the whole metro, ironically echoing the Bolsheviks’ own obsession with the electrification of Soviet Russia in the 1920s. The revived Fourth Reich, in all its glory, occupies three central stations with “depictions of eagles and the three-pronged swastika, and slogans and mottos, drawn with great care in Gothic letters” (Glukhovsky 183). The Hanseatic League, nicknamed “Hansa,” modeled after “the union of trade cities in medieval Germany,” rules over the circle line, controls and oversees all the trades; “Polis” is a well-respected state comprised of intelligentsia, inhabiting the stations below the famed Lenin Library in Moscow, etc. (14). Besides the big important states, there also exists a myriad of small factions, each promoting a certain ideology or following a particular political/religious cult like the Mongol state or Jehovah’s witnesses. All of these independent states, through which the protagonist has to go through to reach central Polis, are summoned from history to form an unusual synchronicity of different pasts co-existing side by side, thereby compressing historical time and constructing instead, in Anindita Banerjee’s words, “spatialized time” (77).

While not exactly being “perfect” as most utopias, these “dwarf states” can nonetheless be considered utopias, albeit adapted and modified due to the post-apocalyptic environment, as

they not only revive specific utopian discourses from the past but also design their socio-political structures based on strict discipline and hierarchy—a rather common utopian feature present in classical utopias of Plato, Campanella, and More—thereby establishing order amidst post-nuclear chaos. Additionally, if this underground universe, comprised of various dispersed regimes, is considered utopian in a sense that each metro line chose to belong to a specific ideology from the past as means to create an alternative order to the old one perished with the apocalypse, it can also be viewed holistically as a utopian model of post-nuclear society that attempts to counter the single, homogenous, totalitarian order of both Russia’s past and present prior to the atomic blast.

In sync with postmodernist aesthetics, Glukhovsky designs a plurality of social orders, in a way responding to Lyotard’s affirmation of the crisis of the grand narratives, which can certainly be represented by the oppressive regime of the Soviet system or the neo-nationalist Putin’s period. Tellingly, critic Mark Griffiths contends that the fragmented framework of *Metro* preserves the openness of a utopia and therefore offers multiple possibilities for the future:

Allowing multiple regimes to prevail over one single order, Glukhovsky constructs a rhizomatic, node-based topography for Moscow beyond the structures of its concentricity. An embracing of this spatial multiplicity seems to offer a path forward. Hope is not found in reassuringly familiar stability but springs from the unexplored fissures opened up by catastrophe. (Griffiths 484)

Similarly, Anindita Banerjee notes that “with the possibility of reclaiming time” the establishment of multiple orders in this post-apocalyptic milieu “imbues them with the power of transforming the darkness of a devastated world into a multitude of collaboratively designed futures” (81). The afforded choice to conceive a different/alternative social and political

configuration, implanted in the dramatic event such as apocalypse, according to Wegner, constitutes “true utopianism” as it “dismantles any notion of rigid historical determinism” where “we are once again endowed with the power—and the responsibility—to act as free subjects” (“Utopianism” 582).

Additionally, because these “utopias” have re-organized themselves based on the specific model of the historical past, their return to the past can be interpreted as an attempt to return to the “sacred” time. As Eliade argues in *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, the suspension of the “profane” time can only occur through the “imitation of archetypes and the repetition of paradigmatic gestures” that allows us to restore reality and the “sacred”: “he who reproduces the exemplary gestures thus finds himself transported into the mythical epoch in which its revelation took place” (35). Therefore, by reproducing and actively reenacting the archetypal relations of the past regimes (exemplified, for example, through the continual fight between the Red Line and the Line belonging to the Fourth Reich), the underground society seeks to restore the mythical time from the material of profane history, and by this revive the spirit of utopianism.

However, paradoxically, the utopian organization of *Metro* can also be considered dystopian. And this is how the dialectical relationship between utopian and dystopian dimensions in this text is played out. The utopian alternative order of this underground world, upon a close examination, can be interpreted as just an appeasing façade. While each state can be considered a utopia, the rigid and authoritarian structure of each station is borderline dystopian. Specifically, many of these states are portrayed as repressive regimes with firm rules and laws, using military power to suppress not just the outside threats but domestic defiance as well (Schwartz 599). Polis, for example, considered to be the closest to the utopian state in all of metro stations, is also presented as society with a strict class hierarchy, governed by the council consisting largely of

the military, who were able to win over the librarians (another competing party in the council) and now possess the sole supreme power over the state and, like in most dystopias, exercise harsh discipline, impose curfews, and punish any forms of insolence (Glukhovsky 172; Schwartz 599). Moreover, because these states do not live in harmony and unity, and are in constant conflict with one another, waging wars over resources, territory, and ideological/political domination, they seem to be far from exhibiting an idyllic existence of utopian world. In addition, if interpreted as a network of various “myths” from the past, the underground universe is depicted as the one that is struggling to re-create the mythical sacred time as each of these myths are not only depicted in a negative light, not being able to recreate a “positive” historical model, but also seem almost caricatural. Each station embodies the “stereotypical” representation of the past regimes, gathering the worst features from every myth and then mixing them all together. Glukhovsky’s ironic treatment of historical “myths” seems to hinder *Metro*’s ability to revive the “sacred.”

The dystopian portrayal of the stations, along with the apparent “de-sacralization” of the myths and mythical time, are reinforced further when the main conflict of the novel is revealed. The conflicting stations, despite their proclivity to destroy and colonize the neighboring states, seem to temporarily unite and cooperate when the threat from the outside, from the surface above, emerges in the face of the “dark ones”—mutated deformed creatures possessing mysterious psychic power and better physically equipped to survive in post-apocalyptic conditions. In a way projecting their fears of the dangerous outside world onto these black monsters, who were born out of the ashes of the Earth’s ruined civilization, underground denizens perceive them as the “Other,” the unknown, foreign, and threatening force, and are convinced that the dark ones are trying to annex their underground world and exterminate

humans. The novel's plot revolves around attempts to annihilate the dark ones, with protagonist Artyom, a naïve twenty-year old man travelling along various metro stations to Polis to tell the council there about the looming danger from the outside and the dark ones. Artyom then becomes one of the stalkers, armed men who have the immunity to cross borders of different states and get outside. After a number of adventurous and life-threatening encounters, Artyom and other stalkers finally get ahold of nuclear weapons which can permanently liquidate the dark ones. However, right after activating the nuclear bombs, Artyom has an epiphany, realizing that these poor creatures meant no harm and were actually seeking to establish contact with humans with peaceful intentions, which were only met with anger and hostility by the humans. Artyom finally understands that the two races "were not competing for survival but were two organisms intended by nature to work together," sees the lost opportunity to get to know these strange creatures, who were "the children of this world," "a new branch of it," and perhaps cooperate with them so that together "they could take mankind to a new level," but it was already too late, and the nuclear missiles were fired, annihilating all of the dark ones (Glukhovsky 456). This final scene shows how unjustly the dark ones were misunderstood and demonized by humans, having done nothing wrong to deserve such treatment.

The unjustified fear of the unknown and "othering" of foreigners and foreign governments who are made into enemies simply because they are not like us certainly echoes the imperial ways of the post-Soviet existence and resonates with the concept of what Lev Gudkov refers to as "negative identity," when self-identification is achieved not via the familiar "we vs. they" categorical thinking but rather through identifying oneself as "not" belonging to this or that ethnicity, gender, etc.: "self-constitution by contradiction from another significant subject or representation, but expressed in the form of denial of any qualities or values of their bearer: as

strange, disgusting, frightening, menacing, embodying everything that is unacceptable for the members of a group or community; in short: as an antipode” (271-272). The underground universe of *Metro* thus serves as a metaphor for post-Soviet life, preserving imperial forms of identification and domination, and functions as a model of the post-Soviet world, presented in a rather dystopian light. As Schwartz accurately observes, when Artyom has his awakening in the novel’s finale, he “suddenly comprehends that all along he has been arguing and thinking like the Soviet and post-Soviet propaganda machine, constantly conjuring up foreign danger and never listening to the alien signals sent to him” (601). Artyom, who is considered to be “the chosen one,” and other stalkers turn out to be “trapped outside by conventional authoritarian thinking and violent activities, incapable of ‘humanist’ consideration or openness for dialogue” (Schwartz 602). Unlike the original “stalkers” who first appear in brothers Strugatskys’ SF novel *The Roadside Picnic* (1971) and later in Tarkovsky’s famous film adaptation of this novel *Stalker* (1979), who serve as guides to the Zone and in a way “have become a typical symbol of hope for the Russian intelligentsia under threat,” the stalkers of Glukhovsky have inherited imperial post-Soviet identities and are trapped in them (Schwartz 602). They are unable to shed their patterns of imperial behavior in favor of the possibility of a utopia that could have potentially been spawned through collaboration with the new race, possibly enabling this civilization to move forward and adapt better to the post-nuclear world (Schwartz 602). In contrast to *Canticle*’s utopian ending that suggests a hope of salvation for the select few, who manage to escape the destruction brought about by another apocalypse, *Metro* ends with the nagging, palpable feeling that the prospect of a new utopia is now lost forever. The nuclear blast in *Metro*’s finale, killing all the dark ones on surface, exterminates the last vestige of hope, as Artyom sees it, to improve or even normalize their “underground” living amidst post-apocalyptic societal rubble. Thus,

Glukhovsky through his fictitious dystopian vision about the future, using the framework of science fiction, is able to offer a critical commentary about Russia's socio-political trends of the present, which as many scholars contend, is one of its main goals.⁴⁴

Discourse of Progress

Another way in which the dialectical tension between utopian and dystopian discourses is demonstrated in this novel lies in its treatment of the concept of progress. Akin to Miller's *Canticle* which utilizes the post-apocalyptic context to critique and deconstruct the notion of progress and Enlightenment, that seems to be at the heart of utopian thought, Glukhovsky addresses it as well, by situating it within the utopian/dystopian dichotomy. The chosen location for his dystopian post-apocalyptic setting—Moscow and its underground metro system—is not accidental. The wrecked future civilization and what is left of it along with the degraded humanity fighting tooth and nail to survive in the dilapidated tunnels of the metro in the year 2033 is meant to be juxtaposed with the image of the metro from the 1930s—one of the most remarkable technological (and cultural) accomplishments of Stalinist era. The location for the construction of the metro in the 1930s was chosen to be Moscow, a city pervaded through and through with utopian rhetoric, that was supposed to become a symbol of Soviet might and supremacy, a true modern-day utopia. As Griffiths elaborates in his article, during the 1930s Moscow was “to be reimagined in accordance with the 1935 General Plan for the Reconstruction of Moscow to become a beacon of hope for those toiling in the Soviet peripheries,” ultimately emerging as “a socialist showcase capital” (485). Nikolai Bukharin even compared Moscow of that time with the famous Tommaso Campanella's utopia *City of the Sun*, claiming that it would

⁴⁴ John Glad, for example, claims that SF's key function is to provide “political and social criticism of the present disguised as the future” (63).

become “a new Mecca,” “almost magical, almost a fairy tale” (485). With all these utopian tropes implanted into the image of the Soviet capital, the building of Moscow underground system became the ultimate pinnacle of Soviet technological excellence, an emblem of progress and modernization that the new sacred metropolis has come to symbolize. The project of Moscow Metro was originally conceived as “palaces of the people,” where thousands of Soviet citizens could not only experience joy at the ease of rapid transportation but could also witness and admire the grandeur of Socialist state during their commute (Vujosevic 274). Tijana Vujosevic explores Moscow’s urban transformation in the early 1930s, and in her article “Soviet Modernity and the Aesthetics of Gleam: The Moscow Metro in Collective Histories of Construction” explains that Moscow Metro “embodied the prestige of the world of Soviet industry and displayed the wealth produced by socialist modernity” (272). However, she adds that the metro was not intended to be merely a technological miracle but also had to be aesthetically pleasing, exuding “unprecedented beauty” (270). She notes that the Moscow Metro, despite many Soviet accounts at that time asserting its superiority over Western subway systems, was in fact “technologically inferior” to most of its Western counterparts; however, “the advantage of the Moscow underground was in its aesthetic superiority, in its power to entrance and exalt the masses” (273). The metro and every station in it (there were approximately 180 stations) were indeed devised as pieces of artwork, with grandiose granite, marble, and concrete designs and sculptures. As Vujosevic maintains: “The stations were vast, richly decorated, and imagined as anterooms, evoking ‘being in a theater lobby or the entrance hall of a first class hotel.’ . . . The observer was supposed to be impressed by opulence, and also by marvels of modern technology” (272). Thus, Moscow’s metro system in a way was also envisaged as a kind of underground dreamworld for the Soviets—another utopian realm within the utopian contours

of the capital. In Glukhovsky's novel, however, what once was the epitome of progress and bright future has now turned into a decrepit fallout shelter. As if mocking the grand aspirations of the Soviet period to mold Russia into a remarkable scientific/technological utopia, the model for everyone to emulate, Glukhovsky's dark underground world with its blood-thirsty denizens, reduced to primitive living, abandoned trains, and decaying architecture serves as a living proof of unfeasibility of Soviet utopian project and challenges the notion of the always-moving-forward progress that promised the eventual attainment of freedom and happiness. As Griffiths fittingly points out, in *Metro* "descent beneath Moscow no longer leads to paradise, but to hell," "turning the symbolism of the metro project on its head" (496). Indeed, Glukhovsky's metro universe stands to exemplify a dismantling of the Soviet utopian dreams and, through his post-apocalyptic setting, reveals, akin to Miller, that Enlightenment will not always result in a perfected and liberated humanity, and can in fact bring about destruction and degeneration, causing pain and suffering.

Glukhovsky's criticism of progress can also be detected in his understanding and treatment of history. Jameson argues that science fiction through its estrangement "enacts and enables a structurally unique 'method' for apprehending the present as history, and this is irrespective of the 'pessimism' or 'optimism' of the imaginary future world which is the pretext for that defamiliarization" (*Archaeologies* 288). He explains that living in the postmodern world we are unable to experience present as history due to the weakening sense of historicity and a cynical belief that change is no longer possible, and thus SF's main function is to make us feel estranged from our own present, enabling us to give meaning to the current moment in history. *Metro*, by compressing together past, present, and future, demonstrates a heightened sense of history and historical awareness. However, Glukhovsky's perception of history seems to belie

the Hegelian model of progressive unified history or Kantian's conception of Enlightenment that presupposes the linear progressive movement through history from barbarism to civilization and finally to the enlightened age. Just like Miller, who envisions history as a cyclical force in *Canticle* and portrays humankind as bound to repeat its past mistakes, Glukhovsky too produces a vision of the near future that does not appear to be "futuristic" or progressive at all. In fact, the future does not produce anything new: instead, it reproduces its history, resuming and restoring its past regimes (communist, fascist, etc.). Despite the ostensible originality of *Metro*'s universe manifested in the plurality of its regimes, people, endowed with an opportunity to start anew after the apocalypse and create something original and radically different, can only regurgitate what they already know from history. Akin to Miller who structures the events of his novel as unfolding according to the familiar cycles of Western history, Glukhovsky too depicts a non-linear history by not only reviving and reproducing the regimes from the historical past but also shuffling them all together, from disparate historical moments, in one single place and time. Both authors seem to imply that history is unable to forge a new path in future and can only walk, again and again, along the already trodden path of the past. Glukhovsky's prediction of future is the one that looks back to its past, which seems to contradict and pervert the Soviet era's visualization of the future as something wildly innovative, pioneering, and progressive.

Based on my examination of the peculiar oscillation between utopian and dystopian discourses that run parallel to one another and are configured through a remarkable synchronicity, it can be concluded that dystopian tendencies figure more prominently in Glukhovsky's work. In that regard, *Metro*, albeit revealing an obvious utopian strand, resonates more strongly with the majority of contemporary neo-apocalyptic texts which, as most scholars overwhelmingly argue, tend to prefer dystopic framework and focus more on the "doom and

gloom” in their post-apocalyptic depictions, leaving out the hopeful dimension of Christian apocalypse. Indeed, *Metro* does not contain traces from the religious apocalyptic narratives, as *Canticle* does, and certainly does not anticipate the return of God or the initiation of God’s promised kingdom in the novel’s finale. As a consequence, if Miller’s *Canticle* presents utopian discourse as the more dominant one in its utopian/dystopian dialectic, Glukhovsky, by clearly rejecting the possibility of a utopian ending, sets up his utopian/dystopian dialogic configuration as gravitating more towards the dystopian realm.

Myth Becomes Fairy-Tale

Based on the aforementioned analysis and if interpreted through the lens of the “mythological time,” one can argue that the “myth” has transformed into a fairy-tale in this novel (a process that we have already started to observe in *Kin-Dza-Dza!*) which is apparent in the ironic representation of the “mythical pasts,” that each station exemplifies. The affinity between myth and fairy-tale has been acknowledged by many scholars, such as Levi-Strauss, Vladimir Propp, Eleazar Meletinsky, and Mircea Eliade. In fact, it is believed that myth preceded the fairy-tale as evidenced in the mythological motifs that can be found at the basis of every fairy-tale; a fairy-tale operates within the familiar mythological plots and “uses the same semantic system as myth” (Meletinsky 236). Specifically, according to Meletinsky, myths and tales share “the same morphological function, which can be seen as a series of losses and acquisitions of objects with important social and cosmic implications” (241). Another important similarity between them is the focus on the “rites of passage,” the most significant of which is the “initiation” in which a young man or a woman is alienated from society—leaves home and has to travel to the “netherworld” or “underworld,” undergoing “physical tests of endurance, a painful

consecration, and the acquisition of tribal knowledge,”—as a result experiencing symbolic “death” and “rebirth,” and returning home as a mature individual (204). However, the main difference between myth and fairy-tale, as suggested by both Eliade and Meletinsky, lies in the apparent transitioning of such categories as the “sacred” and “absolute truth” exhibited in the myth into the “non-sacred” and the “relative truth” prevalent in the fairy-tale (Meletinsky 236). In a way, a fairy-tale is viewed “as the profane conveyor of the religious experience” of the myth (Zipes 3). The transition of the myth into a fairy-tale, as suggested by Meletinsky, is marked by:

De-ritualization, secularization, the waning of faith in the veracity of mythical events, the development of a discourse of conscious invention, the loss of ethnographic specificity, the substitution of the mythical hero by the common man and of the mythical past by an indeterminate temporal dimension, the weakening or loss of the etiological aspect of the narrative, the switch from a focus on the community to the individual. (237)

Therefore, the binary oppositions upon which myth is founded are annihilated in a fairy-tale. There is no longer a distinction between good and bad: a typical fairy-tale hero is not a semi-divinity of a myth, which embodies the absolute qualities of either pure goodness or evil, but a simple man who encompasses both the good and the bad. In fact, the hero is often a commoner who is rather dull and asinine, who completes his tests purely by luck, rather than exceptional character qualities that he possesses. Other “fundamental mythological polarities like life/death are substituted by friction on the family level” and are drastically minimized; the setting of the “primordial time of creation” that “define cosmological” chain of events, typical to myth, is reduced to any time or place, thus leading to “demythification of the consequences of events”; and the actions of the hero that alter the destiny of the whole humanity and “determine the cosmogonic process” in myth are now focused on the personal concerns of the individual

(Meletinsky 238-240). All of these characteristics of a fairy-tale destabilize the established boundaries between the oppositions present in the myth, and instead of a clear differentiation between bad and evil forces, produce something in-between.

In *Metro*, while the mythological motifs are kept intact, the narrative exhibits potent features of a secularized fairy-tale, especially noticeable in the organization of its plot. Following some of the main functions of the fairy-tale, as Vladimir Propp famously outlined in his work *Morphology of the Folktale*, the protagonist leaves his home station to travel to the “netherland,” i.e., the central station of the metro, to deliver an important message to Polis (38). As in all “initiation” rites folktales, Artyom, on his way to the kingdom of “death,” is tested multiple times by various “donors” (Nazis at the Fourth Reich station, border patrols at Hansa station, etc.), which prepares the hero to receive either a “magical agent” or a “helper” (Khan, Burbon, etc.) that allow Artyom to navigate his way through the dangerous landscapes of the underground world and reach the targeted station (39). According to Propp, the hero is then usually “transferred” or “led to the whereabouts of an object of search,” which is in this case station Polis and the person of interest, Melnik, who ultimately leads Artyom and other “stalkers” on the surface to confront the “villain,” represented here by the dark ones (50). Then, the hero and the villain join in the combat, in which the villain is defeated, the “initial misfortune is liquidated,” and the hero returns home, where he is typically married, which signifies his transformed mature status now, and sometimes “ascends the throne” (Propp 53, 63). In *Metro*, we observe a seemingly similar situation, where Artyom and other stalkers manage to destroy the enemy, the dark ones, and upon successfully “liquidating the misfortune” and achieving a resolution of the conflict, return home safely. However, as I discussed above, Artyom realizes that the dark ones were not a real threat as they previously thought and feels remorse and anger

that the potentially productive communication with the dark ones, and a possible collaboration with them, is gone forever, when the dark ones are all exterminated. As a result, a traditional fairy-tale plot is modified here: a folktale's heroic deed turns out to be a blatant and brutal slaughter; a supposedly victorious hero returns home not as a savior and a "reborn" mature individual, but as a murderer, mortified and devastated, feeling personally responsible for the tragedy. The binary opposition of the mythic good and evil is inverted and muddled here: the evil villain turns out to be innocent, while the righteous hero inadvertently becomes cruel and culpable. Therefore, while this novel adheres to the main functions of the fairy-tale and presents a rather typical folktale plot, it deconstructs itself, and despite an ostensible conclusion in the novel's finale, akin to a fairy-tale, doesn't provide a satisfactory resolution. The transformation of the myth into a fairy-tale in *Metro*, with a subsequent metamorphosis of the traditional folktale structure, leads to the de-sacralization of the mythological themes, which vindicates and explains the presence of the predominantly dystopian themes.

Conclusion

The analysis of American and Russian representatives of the post-apocalyptic genre of SF literature leads to the following observations. First, Miller's novel deals with and addresses global concerns regarding the nature and the imprint of the modern technological progress on Western civilization and culture, choosing a biblical myth as its metaphorical setting, whereas Russian post-apocalyptic works seem to concentrate on local problems, working out and reflecting on some of the specifically Russian matters of transition from the state socialism to neoliberal wilderness of capitalism.

Second, it appears that the post-utopian modality of Miller's *Canticle*, by choosing to root its post-apocalyptic narrative in myth, attempting to revive Eliade's "mythological" "sacred" time and halt the development of the "profane" history of progress, revives and sees the discourse of Enlightenment, which is implanted with both utopian and dystopian traits, in a mainly utopian light. Conversely, the Russian works show that the utopianism of the Enlightenment discourse cannot be restored within the specifically Soviet and post-Soviet cultural contexts, making the Russian post-apocalyptic narratives continually favor dystopian motifs.

Third, the dialectics of the sacred and the profane is reminiscent of the dialectics of faith in the indestructible foundations of human civilization and skeptical, or even cynical, attitudes toward them. The oscillation between these two opposite poles is materialized in a number of ways in different examples of post-apocalyptic genre: the American text gravitates more towards the utopian vision of the myth with its unshaken belief in foundations, while Russian post-apocalyptic narratives demonstrate the transformation of the myth into a secularized fairy-tale, which relegates the sacred to the level of the profane, revealing a disheartened disillusionment with foundations.

Despite these differences, both American and Russian post-apocalyptic representatives exhibit a predisposition toward a linear narrative—something that we normally don't observe in the postmodernist SF exemplars. The prominent linear structure of post-apocalyptic texts most likely arises out of the desire to return to stable cognitive paradigms that can counter the rhetoric of the apocalypse and the all-around destruction. The linear progression of events suggests an attempt to reinstate order in the pervasive chaos of the collapsed civilization, offering a promise for continuity and restoration.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

After analyzing specific examples of the post-utopian modality of SF, as it is utilized in both American and Russian literary practice of the last fifty years, and exploring ways in which utopian and dystopian discourses manifest themselves and interact with one another, the key features and distinctive attributes of the post-utopian modality can be outlined. Post-utopia can be characterized as a new postmodernist sentiment that infiltrates the SF discourse in the second half of the twentieth century. Indeed, the post-utopian modality engages with the familiar postmodernist concepts and adheres to the core postmodernist principles. To specify, post-utopia in general terms, echoing the imperatives of postmodernism, projects a similar “epistemological and ontological doubt” and expresses skepticism toward any notions of absolute truth, established foundations, universal origins, common knowledge, objective reality, language, human nature, etc. (Bertens 53). It aims to question some of the foundational principles upon which the notion of modernity is built. Particularly, it shares with postmodernism, to use Lyotard’s words, “an incredulity toward metanarratives”—such as the totalizing grand narratives that legitimate the modern notions of Enlightenment, rationality and science, freedom, democracy, history, and, above all, progress—and the aspiration to deconstruct binary oppositions (nature/culture, Western/non-Western, man/woman, real/virtual, human/nonhuman

etc.) and challenge traditional European metaphysics, what Derrida calls “logocentrism” (Lyotard 1). Areas of deconstruction frequently overlap between different post-utopian genres. Thus, both steam- and cyberpunk as well as post-apocalyptic narratives provide the critique of enlightenment, rationality, and science. However, a critique of the notion of freedom and democracy is more specific for cyberpunk; modernity’s historical imagination is problematized predominantly in steampunk; while the post-apocalyptic genre is most critical of logocentric metaphysics. And all of them tirelessly dismantle the concept of progress.

However, despite sharing a deep affinity with postmodernism, post-utopia, as my analysis shows, besides critiquing and problematizing all modernity’s fundamental conceptions and exposing upon which foundations these conceptions are conceived, puts them to the test and displays a certain renewed interest in them. Post-utopia, existing within the boundaries of the postmodern, explores ways in which the main principles of postmodernism can be revised: in a way, it serves as an internal resistance and critique of postmodern properties and calls for a re-evaluation of the very things postmodernism so earnestly wants to undermine. Post-utopia doesn’t advocate for a complete resurrection of modern metanarratives, but what it seeks is the revival of some semblance of faith in the meaning, authenticity, truth, reality, telos, and the sacred amidst the increasingly disillusioned attitudes of postmodernism. Thus, the post-utopian condition, while still preserving the postmodernist mode, carves out space in which the most pertinent postmodern attitudes can be reassessed and countered. Paradoxically, it is precisely the postmodern crisis of the grand narratives and the endless doubt in accepted cultural value systems that produce this sudden urge for the reinstatement of hope and search for meaning in our progressively meaningless world.

These defining elements of post-utopian modality in science fiction cogently reflect

larger cultural and philosophical developments that have been recently emerging as a reaction to the postmodern movement. As some scholars suggest, postmodernism went out of vogue and has been on the decline for several decades now, while others, like Linda Hutcheon, even proclaim that “it’s over” (166). However, it could be argued that postmodernism has not disappeared entirely, but simply morphed into other aesthetic forms, giving birth to a plurality of various artistic and cultural trends that continue to employ the postmodern critique and at the same time move away from it by different means. Two movements that I would like to bring up here, renewalism and metamodernism, belong to this new group of cultural trends and exhibit similar traits as post-utopia. Renewalism, that has been largely popularized by Josh Toth, can be described as a trend budding inside the postmodern aesthetic itself with the goal to defy “the hegemony of postmodernism,” which, as Toth maintains, has become “dogmatic, institutionalized and programmatic” and thus needs to be “awakened” (214). Thus, according to Toth, a new episteme emerged, called “renewalism,” that endeavors to rejuvenate the postmodern, by reviving its subversive edge through internal critique: it “carries on a certain postmodern project while critiquing elements of that project as ineffectual, irresponsible, dangerous, absurd, ‘feckless,’” embracing the “possibility of what postmodernist narratives has repeatedly identified as impossible,” shifting to “some form of mimesis” (215-216). Therefore, akin to post-utopia, renewalism reinstates some “Enlightenment values,” without completely reviving the modern, while remaining “very much tempered by the lessons of postmodernism,” thereby “tentatively maintaining both sets of values in a deconstructive tension with each other” (208, 215).

Metamodernism certainly inherits some of the main principles of renewalism and is also characterized by a sudden desire to look for hope and positivity in the contemporary world,

submerged in doubt and uncertainty. Introduced by two critics, Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, metamodernism, that mainly appears as a reaction to our crisis-ridden world of political and economic instability, “doesn’t seek simply to repudiate or surmount postmodern skepticism,” but rather “simultaneously accepts and disregards the defeatist attitude of postmodernism” (306). As summed up by Vermeulen and Akker, metamodernism then “oscillates between the modern and the postmodern”: “it oscillates between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, between hope and melancholy, between naïveté and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity” (316).

Both of these movements, that have been spawned out of already solidified and hardened postmodernist discourse, resonate with the fundamental tendencies of the post-utopia. In fact, post-utopia can be interpreted as a specific case of either of the two epistemes, directed at the science fictional domain and working with the aesthetics of the utopian and dystopian modalities, while preserving the same paradox, and the same proclivity to navigate/mediate between the modern and the postmodern, that foregrounds these movements.

The oscillation between the utopian and dystopian discourses apparent within the post-utopian modality thus becomes symptomatic of larger, newly developing aesthetic trends surfacing in the contemporary culture. The question then arises: why is this oscillation important? What does it attempt to reveal? To answer this question, we should take a look at how each genre in my examination encompasses what Mikhail Bakhtin refers to as a “chronotope,” a term introduced in his essay “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel,” which he defines as “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” (84). To put it differently, a chronotope marks the contours of a fictional novum of a literary text that via a certain arrangement/configuration of time and space conveys

its distinctive system of values, by which it can be identified. Consequently, the uniqueness of each post-utopian genre's chronotope, as presented in my study through the examination of steampunk, cyberpunk, and post-apocalyptic SF, offers an explanation as to what degree the grand narratives of modernity, within the confines of the postmodernist discourse, can be restored.

The foundational principle of steampunk's choronotope is represented through the categories of *time*. The overarching question that steampunk aims to explore is how history is constructed, and what relationship between present, past, and future it exhibits. Focusing mainly on the dialectic of the past and the future (keeping the present in mind), steampunk, represented by American and Russian texts, displays two different ways in which history can be reassessed and interpreted. Gibson and Sterling's *Difference* features a malleable past that can be largely re-shaped and modified as a result of insertion of futuristic technologies. Despite the fact that some aspects of that past cannot be completely reconfigured such as gender and class roles, the future's interference has a significant impact on the past in the novel, drastically changing the essence of the Victorian society as we know it. Gibson and Sterling envision the past as willing to contemplate and embrace change, signaling the potentiality for transformation. Sorokin's *The Blizzard*, conversely, portrays history as rigid and intransigent, implying that the interaction between past and future is indeed fruitless and cannot precipitate historical change. Consequently, these texts embody the two opposing views on history: one is proposing that history is a narrative comprised of different historical accounts open for interpretation and alteration; the other purports that nothing can be done to change history, presenting it in almost fatalistic way. However, the steampunk authors complicate things a bit further when they suddenly reverse their positions. *Difference*, while depicting history as flexible, thereby

deconstructing the modern grand narrative of history that presents it as a logical movement in the direction of progress and through this imposed narrative aims to control the past limiting it to one dominant interpretation, in the end portrays a present that resembles greatly our own, insinuating that perhaps history does unfold in a certain pre-ordained sequence and even the alteration of the past cannot modify it. Sorokin too, while somewhat returning to modern concepts, simultaneously deconstructs them: though the future in *The Blizzard* is technologically advanced and is thus supposed to be progressive, getting us closer to enlightenment, upon closer look turns out to be regressive as it has not evolved socially and in fact replicates its past by going in circles. In that regard, the steampunk genre offers us a spectrum of possibilities through its novum and illustrates the fluctuation between the utopian and dystopian visions of history, and consequently between modern and postmodern variants, demonstrating to what degree the revival of modernity's grand narratives is possible.

Unlike steampunk, cyberpunk's chronotope is represented through the categories of *space*. The unique features of this chronotope are outlined through the dialectical relationship between "cyber" and "real" spaces. Cyberpunk's employment and treatment of virtual and real worlds gives us a range of interpretations engendered by the post-utopian modality, utilized in this genre. As evidenced by the American representative of cyberpunk, Gibson's *Neuromancer*, cyberspace and other technological innovations that allow for the human body to make a smooth transition to cyberspace (body augmentations) are imagined as both oppressive and redemptive, depending on the circumstances and what impact they produce on one's identity and body. Here we witness a pendulum-like oscillation between the two disparate possibilities and potentialities inscribed within the contemporary technological discourse. It can be read in utopian terms as a next step in the evolution of human development, presenting humans with numerous

opportunities to escape the limitations of our strictly corporal existence and be able to explore and change our identities, while at the same time, it can also convey a dystopian message that allows us to see cyberspace as means for human oppression, wherein the new technologies are targeted towards enslavement and manipulation of the human body and mind. Thus, the American exemplar of cyberpunk traverses between the opposing poles of the modern and postmodern discourses. While clinging and in a way returning to the modern utopianism of technological potential, it points to the possible flaws of the modern enthusiasm regarding technological progress and exposes its impending dangers. Russian exemplars of cyberpunk give us a radically different take on the function and meaning of virtual reality. While *Neuromancer* allows for a modernist return, working through its ideas and positioning them against the backdrop of postmodernist terms, thereby pacing to and fro between modern enthusiasm and postmodern dubiety, Russian cyberpunk novels follow postmodernist principles and fulfill its focal objectives, destabilizing and even rejecting modernist utopianism, embracing fully the skeptical and deconstructive attitudes of postmodern critique. As a result, cyberpunk manifestations in post-Soviet literature refer to cyberspace, by looking at it through the postmodern lens, as a concept replete with dystopian qualities that serves chiefly as a mechanism for attaining power and control. In the case of Russian SF, the pendulum swings predominantly toward the postmodern pole.

Similarly, American and Russian cyberpunk models pose for consideration two divergent versions of the cyberpunk protagonist. Gibson offers a rather traditional image of the “punk” hero who is capable to challenge the hegemony of the system, but who has to play by the rules of the crafty AI if he wants to stay alive. Albeit not being able to ultimately change anything, Gibson’s protagonist is an iconoclast, who encompasses a rebellious spirit and epitomizes the

essence of the “punk” element in this genre. On the contrary, the protagonists of the Russian texts do not position themselves against the status quo and in fact support it, either fervently, like in Pelevin’s *Homo Zapiens*, or begrudgingly, as in Starobinets’s *The Living*. In that regard, the critical function of cyberpunk is minimized here, and being placed within the Russian context, it transforms into a conformist, conservative form, ready to not only endorse and propagate the current power regime, but become a part of it. Thus, the oscillation between utopian and dystopian discourses, and hence between modernist and postmodernist ideas, is again most pronounced in the American text since, on the one hand, Gibson’s Case represents the traditional hero, possessing superior skills, exuding the desire to set things right and ready to fight for truth and justice, but on the other hand, he is still unable to disrupt the web of coercive force and dominant powers, and is rather eager to accept money for the job done and keep to himself. A markedly different framing of the utopian/dystopian, and thus modern/postmodern, dialectic in the role of protagonist is observed in Russian examples of cyberpunk, wherein the protagonist, in search for authenticity and meaning, not only fails to find them, but accepts that failure as a norm.

As for the post-apocalyptic literature’s contribution to the post-utopian chronotope, it mainly transpires through the *dynamic orientation* of both time and space, as they are both directed towards the pursuit for the new forms of creation. The specificity of the post-utopian configuration in this genre is mainly expressed in the utopian longing for the lost sacred, in the writers’ and characters’ attempts to reawaken the “great” time of the myth, that will provide them with meaning and restore the ruined and fragmented reality (modernist notion). Simultaneously, this genre with an equal force expresses the disenchantment with the sacred and traces its inevitable, sometimes tragic and sometimes comedic, metamorphoses into the profane

(postmodernist critique). In this genre, we are again presented with a dichotomous set of representations of post-apocalyptic scenarios, with opposing views. American post-apocalyptic imagination, represented by Miller's novel, invites us to return to the sacred: it pictures the new cycle of life after the cataclysm as awaiting the revival of mythical time that will be able to halt the growth of profane history and allow us to return to the time of our origins. In Miller's *Canticle*, the sacred is exemplified through the biblical myth which the novel reformulates, running parallel with the modern discourse of technological progress, rationality, and Enlightenment that still remains imbued with optimism and hope. While accepting the impossibility of the positive technological change, Miller still preserves faith in its possibility, in order for our society to keep moving forward. Thus, despite the overtly postmodernist skeptical tone of the novel, acknowledging the apparent failures of the modernist grand narratives of scientific and technological progress, the ending of the novel maintains faith that the utopianism of progress can still be recovered and the void created by postmodern cynicism can be filled with hope. Unlike Miller's text, Russian exemplars of post-apocalyptic SF illustrate, through the deconstruction of the binary oppositions, the disenchantment with the sacred, revealing, in true postmodernist fashion, a contemptuous and ironic attitude toward myth. Thus, the profane triumphs over myth in Russian post-apocalyptic narratives, slowly turning into a fairy-tale, with its de-sacralized and de-mythologized setting, and main characters. While some belief in the myth lingers, since even in the fairy-tale we find familiar mythical motifs and functions, Russian post-apocalyptic scenarios are founded upon the profane, which resulted from an obvious disillusionment with the grand narrative of the myth and the sacred.

Accessing the specificity of the dialectics between the utopian and dystopian realms in my study, it can be concluded that while both American and Russian representatives in each of

the genres analyzed above reveal a simultaneous presence of both utopian and dystopian discourses within one narrative, American exemplars seem to gravitate more toward a utopian pole, while Russian texts mostly opt for the dystopian one. This tendency can be perhaps expounded through the difference in the historical experiences and socio-political development in the U.S. and Russia over the last century. While both of the countries have had their shares of economic hardships and social turbulence over the course of the 20th century as well as suffered, in various degrees, from repercussions of the Enlightenment's technological/scientific progress, Russia experienced, first-hand, the disillusionment with the utopian project. Russian people were deeply chagrined first by the disappointment with and tragic consequences of the leftist utopia of socialism, and later by its inevitable and abrupt collapse in 1991. Thus, the trauma associated with the failure of one of the greatest utopian projects in practice has most certainly caused the profound skepticism and disbelief in the plausibility of the utopian venture in Russia. As a result, this palpable disenchantment can be detected in the predominantly dystopian scenarios of Russian SF narratives. American SF's favoring, or at least acknowledging, the potentiality of the utopian discourse in my analysis can be attributed to the fact that American works represent the global perspective on the issues of history, progress, and technology. Thus, what we observe in American SF, at least in the exemplars presented in my study, is the reflection of the leading role of the U.S. in the world history and global affairs, which most likely significantly contributed to its utopian reaffirmation and a newfound faith in utopian efficacy, albeit still preserving an evident dystopian apprehension.

To sum up, post-utopian science fiction creates a space-time continuum, which contains a non-linear, dynamic, and self-problematizing response (or rather a cluster of intertwined responses) to the question about the preservation and partial restoration of fundamental

discourses of modernity. As we can see, in most cases, American and Russian SF narratives display contrasting, albeit structurally similar, scenarios, thus signifying the polar opposites of the spectrum of possibilities offered by this space-time continuum. These possibilities can be realized in the narrative space of each post-utopian genre, moving back and forth between the two opposite poles and showing us a myriad of combinations that can arise from that movement.

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