

# The Genesis of Dystopian Meaning Structure and its Relation to Utopian Literary Tradition

Zhurkova M. S.\*

*Chelyabinsk State University,  
Chelyabinsk, Russia*

Khomutnikova E.A.

*Management of Youth Outreach Department  
Kurgan State University  
Kurgan, Russia*

**Abstract**-The article represents an attempt of generalizing the material, collected while researching the problem of meaning structure of dystopian novels of the first half of the 20-th century. The meaning structure of the novels studied was determined as consisting of partial meanings, integrating into initial meaning. Not only the traits of identity between the partial meanings of dystopian novels were revealed, but it was also determined that the partial meanings of utopian novels resulted to be of similar nature. As was revealed in the course of the research many of the partial meanings of dystopian novels ascend to Plato's "Republic". The identity of meaning structure of utopian and dystopian novels allows to draw the conclusion that both genres have generic nature and can be defined as meta-genre.

**Keywords**-meaning structure, meaning plane, utopia, dystopia, justice

## I. INTRODUCTION

Dystopian literary tradition takes its rise in the dialogue with utopian mentality that exists now for more than two thousand years. It is generally assumed that the first example of utopian literary heritage that was passed down to us in written form is Plato's "Republic" that dates back to 360 B.C. Utopian thinking gets away from the philosophical ideas and attains self-sufficiency only in 16th century. The climax of utopian genre comes in the 17-18th centuries, when utopian works get greater social thematic range. The next centuries are marked by the decline of interest in the utopian genre. Utopian novels revealed the human's discontent with dramatic present, detected the gap between lofty ambitions and reality. The focal themes of the utopias are the ideas of equality and justice. The utopian paradigm presents a detailed and thoroughly worked out fantasy of ideal society. Utopias show their readers an ideal society, guided by the norms of equality and justice.

What concerns dystopian novels, their first motives may be traced back to the 18th century. The development of dystopian genre is largely determined by its relation to the utopian literary tradition. Not only the dystopian genre emerged from the utopian one, but became its thematic reflection. It is clear that utopia presents an ideal society regulated by rules, based on the norms of fairness and justice. Dystopia, on the contrary, shows the society enormously miserable and wretched where inequality and

injustice prevail. In dystopia most motives are turned over and showed in a grotesque distortion. In the 20th century dystopian literary tradition indicated the ideas that differed from those that were the subject of the previous ages, now they were mostly waking the human to the danger of removal from historical process, wide dehumanization and an uprising consumer society. This historical period is marked by the emergence of the most prominent dystopian novels that pointed out the problems the discussion over which remains urgent to scientific discourse up to nowadays.

## II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

From the fundamental position that dystopia originated from utopian literary tradition comes quite rightful question concerning the problem of genre identification. The scholars debate whether there are reasonable grounds to consider dystopia an independent genre. There are five main approaches to this problem: dystopia and utopia have similar genre nature; dystopia and utopia represent a complex meta-genre; both genres are merely varieties of science fiction; dystopia represents an anti-genre; dystopia is an independent genre [1].

## III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

On the one hand, there appears to be a number of dissimilarities that do not allow to formulate an idea of common genre nature of utopia and dystopia. They differ in structure as well as in the category of author's modality. Utopia operates more general categories, describing the most prominent features of a society, while the life of a single citizen is not of its concern. The genres in question also differ in description of their subject. While the main subject of utopia is a thorough description of a society model, the dystopia aims at revealing the life way of its character in a hostile social system. A human in utopia is considered as a building material, a brick in the wall of society: neither his destiny nor his thoughts, doubts or feelings are revealed, moreover it is presupposed that none of these are of any importance, because in ideal society frame there is no place for human error, for emotional pain, a dream, a feat. "Utopia builds up an ideal state, which ensures a society monolith as a number of similarly happy human units. Dystopia [...] discovers an ideal machine for ego-dystonic acts where the ideal society was supposed to be, and instead of a monolith - an impersonal community,

that lost the aim and meaning of its existence” [1]. A human life in utopia is subordinate to the life of the society, dystopia, otherwise, proclaims an individuality of each single person, shows interpersonal relationship revealing the inner world of its characters. The author’s and protagonist’s consciousness that were brought to life by dystopian genre are generally wider than the standards the utopia has to meet. Thus dystopia appeals to belletristic literature, adopting the elements of novel, satire, science fiction and extending this way the context of its genre. Dystopia’s main accomplishment is a character model of a protagonist confronting a dilemma, who is looking for a solution for an upcoming cognitive dissonance. Utopia provides no plot dynamics. Thereby, utopian description is static, while dystopian is dynamic.

The next point that differs for both genres is time category. In utopia the reader gets a feeling that the time has stopped, historical perspective is completely predetermined by the present and limited to it. By contrast to it time in dystopia is dynamic, it can slow down or speed according with plot dynamics. A monologue is a typical form of narration for a utopian novel, while dystopian novel is, otherwise, characterized by dynamics and dialogical structure.

Aforementioned dissimilarities, as it seems, bring us to a conclusion that even though utopian and dystopian genres find themselves in ethnogenetic kinship, they differ in core content and functions. Adherents of this theory distinguish dystopia as an independent genre relying on previously mentioned arguments. However, the existence of multiple affinities that we intend to discuss below, objects to it.

The fact that dystopia represents a critique of utopian conception is of significant importance. It counts in favour of the idea that the subject of both genres is identical. Nevertheless, author’s pragmatics reveals the difference in attitude to the described society, as the result we see ambivalent linguistic world-images. The difference is brought only by the element of modality, i.e. the position from which the narrator describes the world. One social framework described from the point of its ruling class member and an average citizen we will result with two absolutely different descriptions. Thus, if the factor of modality is excluded, in many cases the reader may come to the result, opposite to that presupposed by the addresser of the text.

#### IV. FINDINGS

The most telling argument in favour of considering utopia and dystopia as literary works belonging to a complex, but single genre, is the fact that they embody similar range of problems, to be more precise, their existence is determined by identical meaning which is expressed in the idea of justice and its implementation. This idea ascends to Plato’s “Republic”, in which the objective of the social framework is defined by the criterion of justice. In Plato’s interpretation justice as a supreme good lies in the proposition that each citizen is to

be occupied with his own duties, thus each member of the society has a certain position which cannot be altered. There are no opportunities for social mobility or change of duties. The most just society by Plato is a society in which a medley of classes is prohibited and thus the stability of social hierarchy is guaranteed [2]. In his city Plato sacrifices many of human freedoms and rights to social order and stability. A citizen in the “Republic” should entirely submit his life and interests to the benefit of the state system. Achieving state’s welfare and approximation of social life to ideal rationalized harmony is described as the highest justice. What an average citizen loses while getting to that justice is not what troubles the author of the treatise, human personality with individual potential and a need of versatile activity is turned into a human unit, a part of a perfect state machine. This idea of justice suggested by Plato looks harmonious when described by the narrator or a representative of the ruling society, but when described from the position of an average citizen it appears inhumane and despotic. Hereby, from the narrator’s point of view the “Republic” is a utopia, but when described on behalf of its citizen it gains negative connotation and turns into dystopia. Utopian society makes justice the corner-stone, but this justice is abstract, applied to the state structure in general but not to its citizens. However, this is exactly how Plato puts it, here he “sacrifices human, his happiness, his freedom and even his moral portrait to his city ... This state exists for itself, for its outer splendour: what comes to a citizen, his function is to facilitate the state’s beauty and be a mere service character” [3].

The idea of justice is central for all novels of utopian genre, whether it is implemented as the equality of all members of the society or strictly determined social hierarchy. Each of the utopian novels pictures an ideal, harmonious and just society from the position of its creator. Justice is the pivotal category of dystopian novels as well, but here it is shown from the position of a citizen, and as it turns out, what is just for the society in general cannot be just for human individuality. To turn utopia into dystopia it is enough to describe a utopian social structure on behalf of an average citizen. Even if the state structure remains unchanged what was just for the society in general results to be unjust for a person living in it. We are inclined to think that this is how the category of justice transforms into its antipode – the category of injustice. As a result, the main difference between utopian and dystopian novels is in contrast of central categories of meaning formation which are the category of justice and injustice.

It should be pointed out that the great role is to be given to those natural changes that the category of justice underwent at the influence of historical process and due to the change of judgemental thinking. What was alleged as the highest good by the Greek philosopher could seem antonymous at the beginning of the 20th century. Nowadays some utopian literary works of the past can be evaluated as belonging to dystopian genre by unsophisticated reader. Some critics called it unfree and too rigid, for example a well-known philosopher Karl Popper

in his book “The Open Society and its Enemies” speaks of Plato’s city as of totalitarian state and estimates “Republic” as a dystopia [4]. Those restrictions respecting individual freedom that the citizen of “Republic” had to undergo could be excused as necessitated by slavery more than two thousand years ago, but now seem barbarian. Nevertheless, Plato’s conception retained its topicality and can serve as a detailed instruction for enslaving all segments of the population by a united state system. It can be proved by such ideas, implemented in the treatise as the absolute power of the ruler, absence of written legal system, closed country borders, strict governmental censorship of all arts, controlling children’s education since early ages, suppression of insurgencies and all sorts of oppositions by force, covert surveillance of the population, etc.

The concept of justice introduced two thousand years ago has turned into its antipode, which was proved by dystopian novels of the 20th century. In this aspect dystopian genre brings nothing new – here we find just the same ideas of oppression and relations of authority and hierarchy when citizens have to comply with the rules and sacrifice themselves to an abstract idea of supreme good proclaimed by the ruler. In dystopian novels we see all of that ideas preserved, they are strict governmental censorship, caste society, indoctrination since early childhood, the denial of personal benefits for the benefit of the society in general, covert surveillance, etc. The state system is almost identical to that one, introduced by Plato, but with one difference - in dystopian novels they are mostly totalitarian regimes, where the rulers are tyrants who crave for power. Despite the change of the philosopher suggested as a ruler by Plato by a tyrant in dystopian novels, the state structure remained almost unchanged in the researched novels. The depicted dystopian regimes has borrowed and brilliantly implemented all those methods of governing a state suggested in the Greek treatise, because they resulted being the most efficient in controlling people. Here due attention should be given to the words of P. Alexander saying that “realization of utopias is considered harmful universally due to two mutually exclusive circumstances a) utopias are chimerical b) realized utopia is a totalitarian state” [5]. The message that dystopias of the 20th century aim to deliver is that under cover of such ideas as justice and equality inevitably lead to realization of such notions as injustice and inequality. Transformation of the concept of justice into the concept of injustice is the key problem for the most notable dystopias of the 20th century. These novels become classical example of the genre. They are: “We” by Yevgeny Zamyatin [6]; “Brave New World” by Aldous Huxley [7]; “1984” by George Orwell [8]. These novels demonstrably show how under cover of common advantage and justice the state machine depersonalizes human, making the society easily manageable bends it to submission. It is remarkable to what extent the states depicted by dystopian novels resemble the structure of Plato’s city; they represent idiosyncratic projections of the

state, described in the treatise, but with the other coordinate system.

In Zamyatin’s novel “We” the United State is almost identical to Plato’s state system, the crucial difference is that the narration is done from the point of view of an average citizen, this is no more a philosophical dialogue in outside perspective, when the scale of depiction of a whole city does not allow to take into account the life of individual, but the description of average citizen’s lives through the life of one of them. This novel, just as two others, show not only the ills of life of one of the citizens, but the inner world of an ordinary person who is beaten to his knees by the state system, a person who hesitates, who is afraid and who looks the way out. As like as not, the people of Plato’s city might feel the same, because, despite the technological advance and many visible social improvements, human individuality even in times of Plato wasn’t something to be neglected, even if for the sake of common good. The aim of the philosopher was not to make the people of his city happy, but to make the state machine rational and perfect. Using this line of reasoning, the crucial difference between the first utopia and classical dystopias would only be the angle of vision, that point from which the narration coordinate system starts off. The change of narration character leads to the change in modality, due to that what seemed just to us in utopias turns out to be unjust, when depicted in dystopias.

The most important similarity, as we consider it, is the one revealed in the analysis of the meaning structure of utopian and dystopian novels. Within the scope of our study we consider the idea of research and analysis of the meaning level of the text on the material of dystopian novels. The uniqueness of the novels of this genre is that “in terms of analysis not only inductive reconstruction of meanings is possible, when the synthesis of partial elements results in obtaining a more general and complex idea, but the possibility of deductive approach becomes available as well. It means a possibility of analysis from more general aspects to more partial ones, due to the fact that the initial idea of a dystopia novel is determined by the origins of the genre. By that approach text is considered as a single unit, representing the problematic communicative situation, and the text in its unity, integrated by the parameter of initial idea, is defined as the starting point of analysis, from which the research may be conducted to the deeper levels, i.e. to the elements, constituting it” [9].

As judged by the specific of the dystopian genre nature the main pursuit of these novels’ authors is to warn their readers about the social perspective that the humanity shouldn’t realize, about the disastrous consequences that the attempts of bringing to life the utopian society might lead to, because instead of justice they inevitably bring injustice. According to that the initial meaning acquires a preventive character and consists in the message that utopias are chimerical and should be avoided. This initial meaning is developing in the text plane by implementation of partial meanings, such as inhumanity of totalitarian

regime, unification of society, the denial of the value of the individual life, the denial in privacy, regimentation of interpersonal relationship, strict regimentation of daily routine, strict governmental censorship of all arts, controlling children's education since early ages, suppression of insurgencies and all sorts of oppositions by force, covert surveillance of the population, etc. Nevertheless, we consider that the analysis of meaning formation is possible and more informative from the position of more traditional inductive approach, when partial meanings, explicated in the process of reading, integrate (under the condition of existence of common identical feature) into the meaning of the highest level – the initial meaning.

Through the partial meanings implemented into the text dystopian novels show that if personal is neglected for the sake of social, justice turns into injustice. In the novels of the investigated genre this idea is realized in partial meanings, which by integration constitute the initial meaning. In dystopian novels we have singled out more than twenty partial meanings, most of which will be general for the novels studied. Moreover, as the results showed, most of those partial meanings ascend to the core ideas that were expressed in Plato's "Republic". These ideas related directly to the description of the state order, which was, in the opinion of the philosopher, the most just one. We depicted 12 of them that remained almost identical in the dystopian novels in study, they are: caste society (social pyramid), the denial of the value of the individual life, covert surveillance of the population, the denial of human nature, a threat of war, adaptation of all arts to the political needs of the ruling class, unification of society, retention of power by force, closed country borders, the denial in privacy and private property, indoctrination since early childhood, indoctrination that aims at personality obliteration. All the above mentioned ideas, introduced by Plato, were realized in the partial ideas of the dystopian novels, where they actualized their commonality in the category of injustice. For the integration of partial meanings into initial meaning a certain leap is required - a change of quantity into quality. The category of justice is the uniting element, that is capable of transacting partial meaning into higher level and uniting them into the initial meaning. In the dystopian texts the category of injustice persists in all meaning components, being expressed in the suppression of human nature by government, in forced indoctrination, in official oppression and denial of citizens' rights and freedoms.

Applying the ideas of state structure, introduced by Plato, dystopias show that the realization of justice for all the members of the society at once is impossible. State system, described in the "Republic" impels to unlimited power of the ruler, and the state where the power is unlimited is predisposed to tyranny and the justice becomes the "right of the one who is in power" [3], meaning that what is suitable for the most powerful member of the society is said to be the most just for the whole society. The realization of unlimited power, which is considered as the

highest good by Plato is true evil itself, because it leads to absolute injustice. In such a state a citizen has to submit his intellect and his feelings to reason, which is sometimes deliberately substituted with a sophisticated forgery by the ruling class. Reasoning cannot satisfy all human needs; at the same time neglecting feelings that can be irrational is against human nature. By Plato it is enough to explain the benefits of rationalized life to the population and the people will render obedience, but as Zamyatin's novel shows this is not enough, and the human nature can not be rationalized otherwise than destroyed. The same idea can be traced to the novels of G. Orwell and A. Huxley - a human can not be adapted to the needs of the state system, and if it is done the human nature is demolished and human becomes the object of mass production as in the "Brave New World" or a divest of individuality party member as in the "1984". In dystopian novels, under the influence of the state ideology, "a person turns into a function, because people are important only in the context of the functions performed" [10], whether it will be a function of consumption, production or party activity – does not matter. Depersonalization – is the extreme form of injustice, which the unlimited power is ready to apply for retaining its power or for the sake of its ideal state structure.

Implementing on the pages of their novels the most central ideas, introduced by Plato, authors of dystopias showed the world similar to the one of the Greek philosopher's from within. The dystopias, however, showed the society not from the restrained position of its creator, but from the point of view of its citizen. Due to the change of the narration position a change in modality have taken place.

## V. CONCLUSION

To recapitulate what was said earlier, we consider it reasonable to assert that utopia and dystopia is a united meta-genre due to some factors. First of all, the subject of description is identical for both utopias and dystopia, what differs is the character of narration. Secondly, a sameness of the elements of the meaning level of the texts can be observed, which leads to a conclusion that in the aspect of meaning formation both genres rest on the similar elements of meaning structure, represented by partial meanings. The above mentioned cases of meaning identity realized through the partial meanings in Plato's utopia and the three dystopias in study may be considered as the vivid demonstration of injustice, committed by the rulers of the state towards its citizens. Injustice is the category that unites the described above and some of the unmentioned partial meanings, objectified in classical dystopian novels. The integration of partial meanings proceeds in accordance with the principle of sameness, expressed in the category of injustice. The further meaning integration and explication of the initial meaning, which can be classified according to the theory of the dialogism as the answer to the key question which was set by the addresser before the addressee, is realized under the principle of nonadditivity.

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