

Urban and Natural Spaces in Dystopian Literature Depicted as Opposed Scenarios

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Abstract

Most scholarly studied dystopias show that in dystopian literature the action takes place in urban space. Some authors, nonetheless, portray, together with an undesirable metropolis, an outer environment in which characters usually see features opposed to those of the city. This can be seen in some of the major titles included in the genre. The purpose of this research is to verify if this aspect is a recurrent element in the dystopian genre, first in a choice of well-known titles of the 20th century and, secondly in some examples of dystopias published in the 21st. Should it be the case, the need to analyze in which ways will arise, with the aim of setting up a theoretical description in order to undertake a further study on a wider range of texts of the genre. As they are parodies of actual totalitarian policies, they might shed some light on urban patterns that have had a reflection on literature and has turned into an influence.

Keywords: dystopian literature, Huxley, Orwell, *We*, urban space.

Título: Espacios urbanos y naturales como escenarios opuestos en la literatura distópica

Resumen

Las obras distópicas más profundamente estudiadas por la academia coinciden en ubicar la acción literaria en un espacio urbano. Sin embargo, algunos autores del género describen un entorno exterior en el que los personajes encuentran características contrarias al de la urbe totalitaria. El objetivo de este estudio es confirmar si tal particularidad es un elemento recurrente en este tipo de literatura, en primer lugar entre algunos de los ejemplos más representativos del género en el siglo XX y, posteriormente, en recientes publicaciones del XXI. En tal caso, deberemos analizar de qué forma los autores construyen esta dualidad, de modo que sea posible establecer una descripción teórica que permita facilitar futuros estudios sobre un número mayor de textos distópicos. Dado que las distopías son parodias de prácticas totalitarias contemporáneas al autor, este estudio podría, asimismo, arrojar luz sobre patrones en los diseños urbanos descritos en el género.

Palabras clave: literatura distópica, Huxley, Orwell, *Nosotros*, espacio urbano.

Dystopian literature has been a matter of interest for researchers due to the fact that it is an area of fiction which depicts a wide number of social features. Within the context of literature, these novels arose as an independent genre in the 20th century, although there are certain precedents that go back to the 18th century, as is the case of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. Nevertheless, dystopias became a well known type of fiction, at least in Anglo-Saxon nations, with several milestones, among which Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* stand out. Since the release of these titles, dystopian fiction has spread not only in literature, but has also been brought to the attention of other arts such as the film industry.

The definition of dystopia can be understood from that of utopia, although the latter is not particularly prolific in fiction. In any case, if noted utopias like Thomas Moore's *Utopia*, or even Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* depicted perfect societies where men could develop culture and industry in plenty, dystopian authors did the opposite: they create a world in which present flaws in culture and power turn into predominant features, turning the *polis* into an undesirable community. Unlike utopian works, these are parodies framed in a novel with the purpose of warning the reader about current tendencies that are to be highlighted and stopped. Otherwise, the state will degenerate into a social hell that will neutralize any fulfilment of the individual or pleasure different from that proposed by the ruling power. In this way, it is surprising how dystopian plots are in many instances seen as a prediction, when authors are actually criticizing the present: it is us who they want to warn, who can change that result of events. Thus, dystopias, in spite of being fiction, are directly connected to the author's present time in terms of society.

The frame depicted by dystopian authors very frequently focuses on the importance of the city as a symbol of the success of power in organizing the new civilization. In most cases only one is presented, usually as the capital. Here time, work and in some cases even sex or drugs are organized. Then, what is the role of nature, which has always had a crucial importance in the organization of human life? It seems that the hunger for power of totalitarianism affects even this. In this way, it is remarkable how most dystopian authors notice this and try to give an explanation. Nature also falls under the power of the dystopian metropolis, and is either totally controlled or separated from the city. Eugene Zamiatin's *We* is possibly a paradigmatic example, describing what he calls "The Green Wall", which the citizens shall not trespass. Such a separation can be seen in Huxley's *Brave New World* as well, Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*.

The aim of this research is to determine the importance one of this topics, nature, and to confirm whether it is a transverse axis, regardless of the historical period when the titles were released. In order to do so, let us remember that these novels parody, more than anything, the ruler's flaws, and us permitting them. This formula is aimed at the readers as a warning, so the importance of the warning is the manner in which this message has been so easily transmitted to other types of artistic production, as it is the case of films. Thus, do dystopian authors systematically establish a division between urban and natural space? If so, is it still a relevant feature? An academic approach to classic 20th century titles can shed some light on the issue, though it is necessary to admit that much has been said about them: *Brave New World* or *Nineteen Eighty-four*. If the division we suggest is clearly a must, then, do 21st century authors still maintain it as an essential trope? The first part of the present paper analyzes the division of some of the most relevant titles of the genre: *We*, *Brave New World*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Yet, it is not the aim of this paper to present a vague study of them. Instead, the objective is to see the manner in which the division city-nature is established. Once this task has been satisfied, the text will proceed to analyze some examples of recent dystopian novels: Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies* (2005) and Hugh Howey's *Wool* (2013). If both titles still maintain such division in the same way, we can confirm it as an essential feature of the genre, even though the political context of the first and the latter is hardly connected. Plus, considering it is possible to reach such conclusions, it would open the necessity to study the whole process, including numerous dystopian titles that conform the genre in between the classics here explained and the modern *Uglies* and *Wool*.

The interest of the academy over dystopian fiction as a subject, beyond the greater borders of utopianism or political satire stood up in an energetic manner in the 20th century. It is necessary to highlight the fact that in these first cases, the horizon of these previous genres indicates utopianism as the origin. Studies that prove that can be the cases of George Orwell's thoughts on dystopian texts (Orwell 2000b: 370), Anthony Burgess's (Burgess 1967: 41), the later Rabking, Greenberg and Olander's (1983), gathering a number of contributions on both utopian and dystopian fiction, and Mary Snodgrass (1995). One can note that, in fact, Orwell and Burgess would even publish their own approaches to dystopian fiction, being particularly successful. All these authors, which are a shallow sample considering the amount of contributions on the matter, have this common feature: the inclusion of their studies on the dystopia within the wider field of utopianism. However, although the efforts of the academia try to emancipate the subject, there is still a tendency to include it as subgenre of utopianism at times, or even science-fiction,

and recent specialized releases confirm it. Such is the case of Gregory Claeys's Edition (2010), or Bould and Vint's (2011), which also helps to highlight the difference between dystopian novels and science-fiction, two concepts that are very often misunderstood. In any case, the debate highlights the interest of numerous scholars, being dystopian fiction a very much alive kind of novel, recently revitalized, by the way, by film productions leaning towards its typical themes.

Some experts suggest the further concern of authors around nature in an undesirable social scenario as a sub-genre itself. Brian Stableford (2011: 259) or Danny Bloom (Merchant 2013) embrace this idea, although suggest different names. Analyzing if such division exists might not shed much light on the thesis here presented, since being nature the core idea of the plot will result in a blatant conclusion. The present paper will instead analyze the most relevant titles of the 20th century, and then eye well known titles of the 21st, so as to establish the possible division metropolis-nature as a common trope in general dystopias, and not only what Bloom understands as 'Cli-Fi' novels. Further comments on this trope shed some light on the matter. Eric S. Rabkin, for example, explains precisely that in dystopias it is a common feature to isolate the city from nature, creating a sort of Garden of Eden (Rabkin 1983: 4).

Before the development of dystopian literature, the previous utopian tradition highlighted the difference between the city and a wild surrounding environment. In fact, thanks to the distinction from nature, civilization is able to become emancipated. This happens in a variety of features. For example, Plato is well aware in his *Republic* of a social emancipation from nature and depicts what the Greeks called *barbaroi* as those unable to foster a civilized metropolis. Insofar as Plato understands civilization, this would be a Greek metropolis. Mary Snodgrass, who has studied the evolution of utopias, also attributes to utopian cities the ability, to use and control nature for the benefit of its inhabitants (Snodgrass 1995: 523). Though there is a great number of titles within the genre, such as Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, once we focus on the dystopian tradition it is possible to realize that nature is not only different, but also the antithesis of the metropolis.

As we know, fiction writers later start to criticize their societies in what is to be called the dystopian genre, especially with the rise of modern totalitarianism, such as Nazism or Stalinism. Since dystopian cities are, thus, undesirable societies, the opposition between the city and natural environment means that nature stands out as a welcoming shelter for the characters that try to escape from the totalitarian rule. In fact, this conception of nature as the space of freedom has been fostered well before dystopian fiction saw a clear development. Pier Stephens makes an account of how Western literature has supported this vision as early as the Bible, with the

instance of the harmony in Eden. This is also recurrent in later literary traditions as, for example, in the myth of Robin Hood (Stephens 2010). Hence, it is to be known to what extent this duality is developed in dystopian literature.

While totalitarianism has appeared in history in countless different shapes, it is especially the 20th century ones which have been satirized the most in the dystopian genre. There is a number of previous dystopias that made an important contribution as well, like H.G. Well's *The Time Machine* (1895) or Jack London's *The Iron Hell* (1908) among others. Nevertheless, Eugene Zamiatin's *We* is the first to be analyzed here since it is one of the earliest in making a clear attack on contemporary totalitarianism. Plus, *We* also has an extraordinary strong influence on the later well known dystopias *Brave New World* (Nicol 2007: 44) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Sherborne 2005b: 8), along with E.H. Forster's *The Machine Stops*.

Eugene Zamiatin wrote *We* (*Мы*) short after the Russian Revolution and the establishment of the Soviet Union. Thus, it can be said that this text is one of the first, as a dystopia, to criticize the Communist state. This meant that Zamiatin had to leave Russia and his novel was known via the Anglo-Saxon literary community. Thanks to a translation into English the text was known among the English Speaking community (Stephens 2010), later influencing Huxley and Orwell. In his *We* Zamiatin depicts a fictional totalitarian state called the United State in which every aspect of a citizen's life is controlled, including any timing or even sexual intercourse. Individuals lack of a name, and are addressed by the use of a letter and a number. The purpose of these policies is the elimination of all personal identity, around the idea of a sole identity, that of the United State. The action takes place in a metropolis isolated from the rest of the world by what Zamiatin calls the Green Wall. This does not only prevents the citizens from knowing about life anywhere else, but also permits the state to organize and rule life without the conditions of nature. D-503, the main character and at the beginning of the story a typical United State citizen, shows dislike towards anything that live out of the law of the State, this is, following a natural, non-human, law. There are instances throughout the text:

From behind the Green Wall, from some unknown plains the wind brings to us the yellow honeyed pollen of Rowers. One's lips are dry from this sweet dust. Every moment one passes one's tongue over them. Probably all women whom I meet in the street (and certainly men also) have sweet lips today. This somewhat disturbs my logical thinking. (Zamiatin 2007: 5)

Contrarily to this feeling, D-503 worships human rational thought, including mathematics and mechanics:

The cranks were swinging from side to side with a glimmer; the working beam proudly swung its shoulder; and the mechanical chisels were dancing to the melody of unheard tarantellas. I suddenly perceived all the music, all the beauty, of this colossal, this mechanical ballet. [...] Why is this dance beautiful? Answer: because it is an *unfree* movement. Because the deep meaning of the dance is contained in its absolute, ecstatic submission, in the ideal *non-freedom*. (Zamiatin 2007: 6)

Pier Stephens, who analyzes the way in which Zamiatin understands nature in *We*, points out that D-503's vision of the metropolis as opposed to the wild outer world comes from a Western tradition in which nature is identified as liberty (Stephens 2010). In this way, such tradition was fostered since the times when myths like Robin Hood were waxed. This type of liberty, though, is different to that depicted in the Ancient tradition, as in the Genesis and Adam and Eve's paradise. This is because, while in the example of Adam and Eve there is total harmony between mankind and nature, men are not free, since they must follow certain rules. This is seen in Zamiatin's *We* as innocence. The United State is the god that takes liberty away from men but, in exchange, provides them with a harmony that they struggle to obtain. Such rules, however, are meant to provide this equilibrium and later happiness:

We returned to the simple-mindedness and innocence of Adam and Eve. No more meddling with good and evil and all that; everything is simple again, heavenly, childishly simple. The Well-Doer, the Machine, the Cube, the giant Gas Bell, the Guardians –all these are good. (Zamiatin 2007: 55)

This means nature in the dystopia is *bad* for the citizens. It means chaos and no protection, both in a material and moral way. If we remember that a dystopia is an undesirable society for the reader, outer nature becomes, hence, a *good* environment, a source of liberty. This is when images like Robin Hood or William Wallace appear, providing a better society as an outcast in a free natural space (Stephens 2010). In short, the United State must build a Green Wall to separate both worlds and maintain the *status quo*.

A decade after the release of *We*, it was Aldous Huxley who also decided to make his own contribution to the dystopian genre, especially aroused by the rapid changes that were being unravelled in science, creating one of the best-known novels in it: *Brave New World* (1932). In his later *Brave New World Revisited* Huxley makes an account of the particular fields that led him to the idea that society

was to change its shape in a short period of time if these new theories were applied, such as psychology, economy or chemistry (Huxley 2004b).

Brave New World is another satire of Aldous Huxley's present society in which the worst aspects of science, politics and economy have been developed to the maximum, fostering what this author calls a nightmare (Huxley 2004b: 5). Society is organized into what is called the World State, and men belong to five different castes, being literally harvested depending on economic factors. Bernard Marx, one of the main characters in this novel, has, however, a deep awareness of his individuality and a critical vision of the dictatorship to which he belongs. The hinge in the story comes with his recreational visit to a reservation in New Mexico. There, within the limits of an electric fence which resembles Zamiatin's "Green Wall", some human groups can live in nature according to tradition, isolated from the World State. They can be visited by standard citizens, what constitutes both a recreation and a reminder of the benefits of living in the civilized dystopia, away from the dangers of the world. Bernard brings one of the savages to London where he belongs, as he knows that his mother got lost in the reservation by accident years ago. Different characters try to convince him of the advantages of modern society:

'And you really can go flying, whenever you like?'

'Whenever you like.' And she would tell him about the lovely music that came out of a box, and the nice games you could play, and the delicious things to eat and drink. (Huxley 2004a: 110)

The savage's view of the city highlights the flaws of this dystopia, turning him into a misfit.

Huxley depicts a world clearly divided into two different types of society: the World State and the Reservation. It is true, though, that the first one is clearly larger and rules over the second. In short, in *Brave New World* there is the modern civilization, shaped by men, and that of the Reservation where humans live in nature and must adapt to its conditions. The Indians follow irrational and superstitious rules, often led by carnal desires. Then, the way to civilization is, according to Huxley, the creation of a sort of organization able to provide an increasing better welfare state, and this is through minimizing the struggle against nature: hunger, cold, etc. What *Brave New World* depicts, however, is a society that has gone too far, since it has wiped out not only any interaction with nature, but also any individual identity, all kinds of variety to which nature is prone. The aim of the city, as Huxley explains in his *Brave New World Revisited*, is to provide the maximum organization (Huxley 2004b: 8). Hence, the characters happily embedded within the World State structures dislike direct contact with nature:

'Queer,' said Lenina. 'Very queer.' It was her ordinary word of condemnation. [...] 'I wish we could have brought the plane,' said Lenina, looking resentfully at the blank impending rock-face. 'I hate walking. And you feel so small when you're on the ground at the bottom of a hill'. (Huxley 2004a: 92)

This hatred for life in nature is planned, so that civilization looks more appetizing for citizens. Thus, they are conditioned to hate the first and love the latter:

Primroses and landscapes, he pointed out, have one grave defect: they are gratuitous. A love of nature keeps no factories busy. It was decided to abolish the love of nature, at any rate among the lower classes. (Huxley 2004a: 18)

As a result, only the city can provide some of the factors that are needed to maintain social stability: first, consumerism of products and services; second, to prevent citizens from feeling loneliness, to cultivate their joy among others, and hate time in which they could develop dissident thoughts. Yet, there is a perception of the value of nature contrary to this as the average citizen of the World State, which can be seen not only in John, the savage invited to visit the metropolis of London, but in all his fellow reservation-natives. As Michael Sherborne points out, Huxley transmits the virtue of the natural space with the flight of an eagle, moving close to the characters and showing "a world very different from the man-made one" (Sherborne 2005a). No wonder that when the savage is to be sent away from the city in order not to cause any more trouble, he decides to stay in a lighthouse.

To sum up, it can be said that nature is bad for those coming from the dystopian city, while characters like John, originally from the Reservation, cannot find their place in the metropolis. Actually, the figure of John would be the representation of the reader's own culture, what leads to the conclusion that Huxley's message is that, since the savage dreads the city, so do we.

Scholar works on the dystopian genre agree at stating that, along with *We* and *Brave New World*, George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is one of the most well known titles of this kind of fiction. In fact, in his study called "Utopia Reconsidered: 1984", William Steinhoff not only highlights this fact, but gives an account of how well Orwell knew Zamiatin's *We* and Huxley's *Brave New World* (Steinhoff 1983), together with others such as *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Orwell depicts a world divided into three super-states ruled by totalitarian governments.

George Orwell does find a duality between life in the city and in nature. William Steinhoff, for example, highlights the fact that he

complains about not being able to get away from modern society (Steinhoff 1983). This is, actually, one of the main topics in Orwell's *Coming Up for Air* (1939), although the theme is well visible in other works (Orwell 2000b). In his later *Nineteen Eighty-Four* the main character, Winston Smith, like Orwell himself, longs for a run away to nature, while he puts away with death. The Party in power encourages the citizens, though, to appreciate love in the metropolis: "In the old days, before the glorious Revolution, London was not the beautiful city we know today" (Orwell 2000a: 75). In spite of this, Winston feels the poverty and terrible standard of life in this dystopian London:

Winston Smith, his chin nuzzled into his breast in an effort to escape the vile wind, slipped quickly through the glass doors of Victory Mansions, though not quickly enough to prevent a swirl of gritty dust from entering along with him. The hallway smelt of boiled cabbage and old rag mats. (Orwell 2000a)

This feeling towards London is, actually, almost identical to that depicted by Orwell in *Coming Up For Air* (Orwell 1979: 25). This is a portrayal of the English capital city is a sharp image of that of the late 1940s London (Sherborne 2005b). In the state described in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* it is possible to find a natural space as an escape from the struggle in the city in two main parts. One of them is inside Winston's mind, since the context of his imagined encounters with the alleged dissident O'Brien is what Winston calls "The Golden Country," meadows in a bright day:

It was an old, rabbit-bitten pasture, with a foot-track wandering across it and a molehill here and there. In the ragged hedge on the opposite side of the field the boughs of the elm trees were swaying very faintly in the breeze, their leaves just stirring in dense masses like women's hair. Somewhere near at hand, though out of sight, there was a clear, slow-moving stream where dace were swimming in the pools under the willow trees. (Orwell 2000a: 32)

The second natural space is the scenario where he meets Julia, his lover. Winston, hence, associates liberty, love and pleasure with the green picture of the English countryside, an image that George Orwell had fostered along the thirties. In fact, Orwell never hid his love for the English flora and fauna. A significant similarity can be found, for example, in the description of Winston's feelings before he finally meets Julia, and those of George Bowling in *Coming Up for Air*:

The sweetness of the air and the greenness of the leaves daunted him. Already on the walk from the station the May sunshine had made him feel dirty and etiolated, a creature of indoors, with the sooty dust of London in the pores of his skin. It occurred to him that till now she had probably never seen him in broad daylight in the open. (Orwell 2000a: 125)

You know the feeling of a June evening. The kind of blue twilight that goes on and on, and the air brushing against your face like silk. Sometimes on Sunday afternoons we went over Chamford Hill and down to the water-meadows along the Thames. (Orwell 1979: 104)

Unlike in *We* and *Brave New World*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* does not portray of a wall separating the urban and the natural space. It is, in fact, not illegal to leave the city, while Winston is aware that a very often visit to distant areas would be suspicious. There is, however, a physical wide separation between London and the meadows Winston dreams with, and this gap can only be saved by an apparently not short journey by train:

However, no patrols had appeared, and on the walk from the station he had made sure by cautious backward glances that he was not being followed. The train was full of proles, in holiday mood because of the summery weather. The wooden-seated carriage in which he travelled was filled to overflowing by a single enormous family. (Orwell 2000a: 124)

It is easy to see the connection between this gateway to the natural paradise and the one described by Orwell in "Such, Such Were the Joys," mentioned above and where the idea was probably taken from. In conclusion, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* does not show a sudden and rapid division between the city and nature, like Zamiatin's "Green Wall;" Orwell's totalitarian government is not particularly worried about preventing the citizens from finding wildlife. There is, nevertheless, a psychological difference in the dissident's attitude towards both spaces, as Winston identifies nature with liberty, contrarily to D-503 in *We* or Bernard Marx in *Brave New World*. What makes this portrayal of nature unique within the dystopian genre is, firstly, how Orwell understands it: a place capable of providing a better standard of life, away from the rackety and smoky London of the forties. This author, in fact, writes *Nineteen Eighty-Four* during a stay in the Scottish island of Jura. Secondly, it should be noted that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was composed immediately after the Second World War. The conditions of life in the post-war London Orwell saw then clearly highlight the author's hatred of the metropolis.

The possibilities to find recent examples of dystopias that focus on the relationship between the metropolis and its natural context are varied, such as Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies* (2005) or Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* (2008). This part of the present document is aimed at two examples of 21st century dystopias in the English language. The purpose is, as it was previously pointed out, to verify whether modern authors of the genre still maintain the duality suggested in the hypothesis. In order to do so, the choice of titles has been *Uglies* and the recently released *Wool* (2013), by Hugh Howey. The reason why *The Hunger Games* will not be appointed is the number of studies which have already been completed. Let us, instead, consider other works that, although commercially successful, have not received a similar interest by scholars. This approach, thus, can provide a more valuable contribution to the corpus of knowledge and serve as a platform for future research. It is necessary to admit, in any case, that this effort shall be continued with a great number of other titles.

Scott Westerfeld's novel *Uglies* presents what can be understood as a perfect state. All the citizens' needs in Westerfeld's text are satisfied in every way. What turns this haven into a dystopia is the fact that such happiness is compulsory. As it was the case of John the Savage in Huxley's *Brave New World*, the protagonist of *Uglies*, Tally Youngblood, does not make any decisions. That aspects awakes the curiosity of several dissidents, who eventually flee the metropolis. All those outcasts later gather in a campsite, the Smoke, hidden amongst natural marvels, away from the city, where the government cannot find them and force them go back and follow their pre-established social plan.

The division nature-city is present all along the book, although in a slight different manner from those 20th century classic dystopian texts analyzed in the previous part of this study. Pretty Town, which is the name Scot Westerfeld gives to the metropolis, is not surrounded by a "Green Wall". Instead, people can technically roam around freely. Yet, when Tally and a friend of hers head towards the countryside, considerably afar from the urban core, they are seriously warned about the prohibitions of leaving the town:

"Second warning. Restricted area."

Tally stopped her board. "If you keep going, Shay, you'll get busted and we won't be doing anything tonight". (Westerfeld 2012: 51)

In spite of the lack of a physical barrier, the city does forbid the exploration of outer areas, so in reality all citizens are enclosed inside the metropolitan space. Tally, who eventually decides to reject the dystopian society offered by the government, finds the village founded by dissidents and realizes about the possibilities of nature:

She'd never been beyond the city limits at night, had never seen it lit up like this from afar.

Tally pulled off her spattered goggles and took a deep breath. The air was full of sharp smells, evergreen sap and wildflowers, the electric smell of churning water.

"[...] Out here, you find out that the city fools you about how things really work". (Westerfeld 2012: 57-59)

This preference for the beauty of wild landscapes goes along a feeling of liberty in a town, the Smoke, not controlled by the totalitarian state:

The physical beauty of the Smoke also cleared her mind of worries. Every day seemed to change the mountain, the sky, and the surrounding valleys, making them spectacular in a completely new way. (Westerfeld 2012: 230)

Although the division between the metropolis and natural spaces is not the main trope in *Uglies*, those scholars who have studied Westerfeld's text agree to see that nature is drawn by this author as one of the various issues our present society is failing at. Isabel Walker Ross, for example, sees the satiric character of *Uglies* as a dystopia, aimed at the reader, instead of a fictional future. According to Walker Ross, it is hence directly connected with works such as *Brave New World* or Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (Walker Ross 2010: 42). Jennifer Miscec and Chris McGee are even more specific, explaining that Scot Westerfeld thoroughly plans the necessity to isolate the metropolis in *Uglies* from the wild areas (Miscec and McGee 2007: 174). The reason for such isolation is, as the reader can understand by reading the text, the prevention from other realities: the citizens cannot know alternative social arrangements and subsequently doubt about their own one. The evidence of this is that once Tally and many others escape from Pretty Town, they are intensely chased, caught, and their settlements burnt.

Hugh Howey later presents in *Wool* an atmosphere very different from that of *Uglies*. Unlike Westerfeld's New Pretty Town, the metropolis designed by Howey is far from desirable, not in appearance nor in philosophical conditions. The government knows it and maintaining social stability is the major priority. The reason for this is that the *mise-en-scène* imagined by the author is a post-war scenario. After devastating fights, the air on the surface on earth no longer allows life. Humans therefore must survive underground, in enormous deep vertical 150-storey structures called silos. Food, electricity and all other necessities must be artificially obtained in this enclosed space. As a result, years of thorny living conditions lead to

constant tension and the desire to escape, though it is not permitted the sole idea of thinking about it. Upon this crime lays the penalty of being sent out, the air killing any life form. The setting here described is very much a resemblance of that one imagined by E.H. Forster in *The Machine Stops*: "No life remains on it, and you would need a respirator, or the cold of the outer air would kill you. One dies immediately in the outer air" (Forster 2011: 6).

There is a division between what can be understood as metropolis and, again, what can be understood as nature, in so far as the metropolis is where the humans develop their activities in society, and nature is the wild surrounding space. Such physical separation is the big gate on top of the silo, at ground level, which only opens to let a citizen towards certain death. The matter that emanates much interest is the unique and particular way in which this separation is depicted, different from all the cases that have here been analyzed before.

First of all, even though citizens live in a suffocating atmosphere, they know that there are no possibilities of escaping due to the toxic air outside. Why are there people who violate the prohibited taboo of thinking about it? The fact is that once they are sentenced to leave the silo, they are asked to clean the outdoor cameras, so as to let the citizens underground see how sterile the earth is. All of them eventually do the cleaning, even though the government cannot force them. One of the characters wonders about it:

The view from the holding cell wasn't as blurry as it had been in the cafeteria, and Holston spent his final day in the silo puzzling over this. Could it be that the camera on that side was more out of the toxic wind? Did each cleaner, condemned to death, put more care in preserving the view they'd enjoyed on their last day? Or was the extra effort a gift to the next cleaner, who would spend their final day in that same cell? (Howey 2013: 9)

As in all the other dystopias, the explanation for this is the lack of liberty to think, and the obligation to follow whatever the government has planned for each person. The main characters, thus, foster the suspicion around the truth regarding the world outside. Just by forbidding it, do the rules excite their desire:

When compared to the stifling silo, that muddy grey view outside looked like some kind of salvation, just the sort of open air men were born to breathe. [...] They had arrived here because they wanted, on some insane level, to *be* here. All that remained was the curiosity of it all. The wonder of the outside world beyond the projected veil of the wall screens. (Howey 2013: 10-13)

Thus, it can be said that *Wool* presents the separation city-nature, confirming again the hypothesis here built, though it is not the government who initiates it. Yet, it consists of an axis around which the plot is developed. These comments on Howey's work, though, cannot be closed without highlighting one fact: it is a piece of fiction of great interest among readers that needs to be scholarly analyzed. The success of it can be proved by the fact that several spin-off works have already been published by other authors, following Howey's idea, such as a comic adaptation (Howey, Pamiotti, Gray and Broxton, 2014) or the novel spin-off story *Silo 49*, by Ann Christy (Christy 2013). Despite this popularity, the fact that Howey's text has been published recently has given the experts on the dystopian genre little time to provide valid analysis of it from an academic point of view, what urges researchers to satisfy this necessity.

After going through the characteristics of the way in which the urban space is depicted in remarkable titles of the dystopian genre of the 20th and 21st century, one conclusion arises: these novels portray a planned division between the city and life in the natural space. They also entail a completely different sort of life for the dissident depending on which side of the "Green Wall" this character lives in. This circumstance can be noted especially from a political point of view. The metropolis hampers the development of individuality and, therefore, freedom. However, dystopian authors emphasize the better conditions outside the urban area enhancing positive features of nature beyond liberty, such as life-standards, the recuperation of a long lost past –the reader's present–, or even feelings.

In terms of methodology, the frame used to achieve this conclusion has proved fertile. Although it is true that the examples chosen to illustrate the natural trope in the 20th century are very well known pieces of fiction, the fact is that the approach here sought has not been found in the materials so far published. With the methodology suggested in the present paper, it is possible to lay a thread around the separation of these two spaces, urban and natural, that can link the genre. The case of the novels published in the 21st century also confirms the existence of the same feature. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the number of titles not covered in these lines is significant, and there are, besides, chronological gaps that must be included. The scope of the medium is an explanation for that, since this very frame could not target such a wide range of literature. However, the confirmation of this literary theme in the texts analyzed encourages researchers to continue within the sub-field.

Finally, an assessment of the bibliography used to support all these conclusions can look under populated. In fact, the amount of academic contributions on the dystopian genre is so wide that is a

delicate task to select those specific enough so as to deal with a particular trope, especially if the aim is to understand a theme in a long period of time. Numerous are the works, besides, not only on the genre, but also around Huxley or Orwell, among others. However, those here quoted and mentioned were thorough and valuable enough that the goals stated at the beginning were by all means covered. Thus, it was not necessary to overwhelm the reader with an extensive exploration of a bibliographical order. In spite of this, one thing must be remembered prior the tackle of any research effort on dystopian fiction: the researcher must consider first the great availability of studies on the matter. On the contrary, there are a lower number of publications on recent dystopian fiction –with the exception of *The Hunger Games* or *Divergent*. The reason why *Uglies* and *Wool* were chosen was due to the need to provide with structure studies. Then, in the future, these lines could be a platform from which the research could be continued.

In terms of debate, the scholar materials previously provided by experts around the characteristics of the genre have shown that a number of them identify a sort of “ecotopia”, i.e. a dystopia built upon the status of nature. Yet, this idea still needs to be developed. Michael Sherborne offers a number of instances, though at the moment there is not a complete agreement even around the name of this subgenre. Such is the case of Danny Bloom, for instance. In any case, the debate is built around a noteworthy number of titles, what brings us an interesting discussion for the future.

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