

Between Utopia and Melancholy — in Search of Impossible Worlds

This doctoral dissertation is devoted to the relationship of melancholy and utopia, with particular emphasis on their interpenetration in literary texts, distinguished by their utopian features. The subject of detailed analysis are dystopian works that present a perfectly designed world, highlighting the dark side of utopian thinking; for this reason, they are referred to as negative utopias in contrast to positive utopias, which show a perfectly arranged world. The latter appeared to the visitor as an emanation of paradise, the land of plenty (*locus amoenus*), being at the same time a complete contradiction of what the visitor knew from his own surroundings. When it comes to dystopia, we get to know the world through the eyes of the main character who is part of an ideal ecumen. It turns out, however, that under the influence of circumstances unclear to him, he begins to question the surrounding reality. At the same time, he feels alien to others. This experience can be read as a feeling of a melancholy which "invades" into the utopia and undermines the foundations of its existence. Melancholy itself is also of an ambiguous nature. On the one hand, it is directly related to a drop in mood and fatigue, when a person is prone to experiencing depression. On the other hand, we are dealing with hyperactivity and hyperactive behaviour, which, according to Italian humanists (Marsilio Ficino), was a feature of genius people, i.e. those who are distinguished by a strong sense of uniqueness.

It should be remembered, however, that utopia in positive and negative terms is a non-place, or "ou-topia" according to the Greek meaning proposed by Thomas More. The Greek prefix "ou-" means "nowhere" and "topos" is a place, so we deal with a deliberately implied ambivalence, because "ou-" is pronounced in English the same way as the prefix "eu-", meaning "good". Thus, when thinking about an ideal place, we realise that it does not exist. Nevertheless, utopian thinking itself can be considered attractive and cannot be entirely described as bad, because it contributes to the progress and implementation of far-reaching plans to improve the shortcomings and limitations of everyday life.

The very construction of "outopian" worlds (if one defines both positive and negative utopias in this way) is based on a similar plot and narrative pattern. It is a place fenced off from the rest of the world and the access to it is limited. Citizens live in an egalitarian society divided into social castes. Everyone has a job that serves the common good in the framework of collectivism and shared planning. There are no symptoms of dissatisfaction. A perfect example is "Civitas Solis" by T. Campanella here. Therefore, it is difficult to find any evidence of the existence of melancholy there. The very closure and isolationism of non-place marks the place of melancholy beyond its borders. This is important because melancholy is an undesirable guest in utopia.

To illustrate the relationship between utopia and melancholy, there have been selected novels which are referred to as the "dystopian trilogy": *We* by Yevgeny Zamyatin, *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley and George Orwell's *1984*. In each of the works, we deal with a situation where melancholy, banished from a perfectly arranged world, haunts the main character, who begins to question the reality surrounding him and questions the sense of the state's existence. It is worth adding that in *Brave New World*, unlike other works, melancholy affects several heroes at the same time, ranging from Bernard Marx, ridiculed and unaccepted by the environment, John Savage, disappointed with his arrival in utopian London, and Helmholtz Watson, a poet who is clearly tired of living. The symptoms of melancholy in the protagonists of the three discussed novels affect their attitudes and behaviour, leading to rebellion and contestation. When faced with a perfectly arranged world, they become helpless and the "defect" becomes only an opportunity to remedy their indisposition. Utopia is therefore a medicine that heals, though it is worth noting that this fails in the case of John Savage, who commits suicide; he is a stranger who does not agree with the order of Ford civilization.

Melancholy and utopia, although apparently alien to each other, have much in common. In both cases there is no unequivocal definition. In the case of melancholy, as an ideological construction of a cultural and literary nature, we notice a tendency to reflection combined with the loss of will and weariness, which can be described as *acedia* (spiritual depression); at the same time, we are dealing with enthusiasm which, according to Neoplatonists, was treated as "divine madness" (*furor divinus*). Thus, the term is as ambiguous as the utopia itself. Therefore, the very concept introduces the unity of opposites (*coincidentia oppositorum*), because speaking of an ideal place, it cannot be located in any way. The fact that the birth of utopias was accompanied by geographical discoveries can be treated as both an encouragement and a disappointment in the search for impossible worlds.

There is no doubt that a world without utopian thinking could succumb to inertia and eventually fall into melancholy. Hence, utopian thinking seems to dispel sorrow, and the thought of a perfectly arranged place seems to be a remedy for experiencing grief.

Hence, it can be assumed that by departing from melancholy we end up in a utopia, while being in a utopia we may experience weariness and find ourselves under the influence of Saturn. Therefore, we are moving along the Möbius strip, and although it seems to us that we are moving on two planes, we find ourselves on one. Thus, utopia and melancholy attract and repel each other. It can even be said that they cannot exist without each other. While the utopia prohibits melancholy, the latter is still present. While it is not discernible in the description of positive utopia texts - because it is devoid of any *raison d'être*, in the case of a negative utopia, melancholy is the main heroine. So, when we get to know the worse side of utopia, we get to know the melancholy that manifests itself in the protagonist, which first of all shows him that the world is not as perfect as its creators want it to be. Melancholy "undermines" the represented world, raises question marks, and calls into question the founding ideals. Note also that the utopias in the "dystopian trilogy" are incomplete or defective. We see it in Huxley where they are still building something else. In the case of Zamyatin's novel, the main character is the constructor of a spacecraft, which is to be used as an ark, which is to carry the achievements of civilization to unknown places of the universe. In Orwell, as in the novel by S. Lem, *The Futurological Congress*, everything is in ruins, but thanks to lies, the illusory world under the influence of propaganda and terror is treated as ideal - you cannot even think otherwise, because you can commit a "thought crime".

It should be emphasised that the world presented in individual novels is in its concept perfect and this is, in fact, for its authors. It is distinguished by an excellent organisation, the primacy of work, ideal living conditions - with the exception of 1984, because Big Brother cares only for a small group of members of the Inner Party. The rest of the inhabitants live in derogatory conditions, but the power of propaganda makes the world appear ideal, which is actually illusory. In turn, the states depicted in the novels *We* and *Brave New World* are technologically advanced places where the living conditions are at a very satisfactory level. In Zamyatin's novel, the city is made entirely of glass, which makes everything transparent so that no one has anything to hide.

In every novel, however, there is an area that is antinomic to a perfectly arranged world. They take the form of an enclave in which there is no clear influence of an ideal organisation. They are a reserve in New Mexico where Bernard Marx and Lenina Crowne in *Brave New World* arrive and meet John and his mother Linda. In the novel *We* Δ-503 crosses

the border of the Green Wall and goes to a place completely alien to him. It is similar in the case of Winston Smith, who travels the Proli district and ends up in Mr. Charrington's shop to rent a room upstairs, which is a kind of refuge for him, where he reads a mysterious book that opens him to the Brotherhood.

Actually, all the characters are an example of a defect and disease that makes their thinking aporetical. That is why they feel strangers and try to solve the difficult situation for them. Their desire is to know the truth about the world. Ultimately, they face the problem of undecidability, for each of them fails through knowledge and is incapable of resisting. Their contestation is defeated, and the very destruction of the ideal order is doomed to failure. *Furor divinus* and excitement turn into resignation and disappointment. We are convinced of this by the conclusion of each novel, the best example of which is Winston, whom we meet as changed and converted. He becomes a "bloodless" citizen of a utopia, whose will is completely lost. According to Emil Cioran, this "bloodlessness" is a feature of utopian citizens who behave like children. This can be seen in particular in the case of the citizens who gave their lives to Ford in *Brave New World*, but also in *We*.

The doctoral dissertation has been divided into two parts, the first deals with the definition of the concept of utopia, which has been recognized as the sphere of "idolum" (Mumford Lewis). It should be considered important that utopia as a good place becomes an emanation of Paradise or the Golden Age. One has to be aware of the fact that Kronos aka. Saturn, as the patron of melancholy, reigned in a perfectly arranged world. Hence, in the first part, the theme of melancholy appears as a starting point for planning a world that would be devoid of all manifestations of sadness and could be "an ideal response to imperfect reality" (Łukasz Zweiffel); what appears to be imperfect grows out of the melancholy that marks man with a defect. The first part focuses on the genesis of the concept of utopianism, referring to examples of literary texts that deal with perfectly arranged places. The manifestations of utopian thinking were also presented, which has allowed to capture the pejorative side of the issue in question. With regard to dystopian texts, the similarities and differences between positive and negative utopias were characterised in order to introduce the "dystopian trilogy" into the context of the works. The analysis of the subject of dreams as an expression of "utopian impulsion" (Frederic Jameson) was also not omitted.

The second part of the work is devoted to the presence of melancholy in the novels that make up the series of the so-called "dystopian trilogy". First, the utopia of Robert Burton was characterised, which was added as a passage in the introduction to his *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Burton's intention was to break down the melancholy through work and to create

the conditions for the melancholy to have no access. Hence, the wide-ranging mode of functioning of an ideal state is an attempt to negate melancholy. The example of *Civitas Solis* by Tommaso Campanella was also cited, referring to specific fragments which clearly showed that utopia deprives melancholy of its right to exist. Assuming, therefore, that dystopia is still a non-place and meets the criteria of "outopia", the analysis of the above mentioned works belonging to the "dystopian trilogy" has shown the experience of melancholy by the main characters. It turns out that the main characters began to experience a sense of alienation from the community, and they can notice symptoms that are characteristic of them, which fit in with a melancholic mood. It is also accompanied by getting to know another space as a periphery that is different from the ideal centre. These are, respectively, the forest beyond the Green Wall in Zamyatin's novel, a New Mexico reservation at Huxley, and the Proli district where Winston Smith ends up in Orwell's novel.

There are also symptoms typical of melancholy, such as weariness and laziness, which were treated as acedia experienced by the characters. They also develop a disease as a state of anxiety psychosis, which leads to a nervous breakdown (the concept of humors according to Hippocrates and Galen). Eventually, rebellion and contestation appear (Winston Smith and Δ-503 become part of rebel organisations, while John Savage expresses his opposition to the functioning of the Ford state), which in this dissertation was treated as a manifestation of demonic powers. This approach is due to the fact that in the Middle Ages melancholy was treated as "the devil's bath", therefore evil inclinations and bad thoughts (Greek: *logismoi*) were prompted by Satan. This approach to the problem also allowed us to present the dystopia as a diabolical world that becomes oppressive and close to totalitarian states. However, it should be remembered that the experience of melancholy in the main characters did not in any way contribute to the negation of a perfectly arranged world. It continues, and all manifestations of the protagonist's sadness and indisposition have been "cured". Thus, a non-place becomes a cure for melancholy.

In the presentation of the above-mentioned themes and motifs, auxiliary literature was used. One of the most important works was the work of the German sociologist Wolf Lepenies *Melancholie und Gesellschaft (Melancholy and Society)*. Notions from the field of anthropology were also used, such as the term "*homo defectus*" by Arnold Gehlen (1903-1976) in order to show the behaviour of the main characters in the novels, who thus show a deviation from the norm. To better grasp the problem of rebellion and contestation, the term "numinosum" was used to represent the ultimate affirmation of the state as

"inverted" divinity (Winston tortured by O'Brien). This problem was presented in the light of the views of the German theologian Rudolf Otto (1869-1937).

The work has been supplemented with paintings and drawings that are an extension or supplementation of the issues discussed and have been added as an appendix to the work. There is no doubt that it was the print by Albrecht Dürer that turned out to be the starting point for the author of this dissertation to reflect on the relationship between utopia and melancholy. We can ask ourselves whether an angel - while working on an architectural project, as evidenced by abandoned tools, let us not forget that Saturn was the patron of geometry and geodesy - does not begin to doubt the existence of an ideal world? Will this world that is in the process of arising actually be of a divine nature? Could it become the complete opposite of Paradise? Should not the angel himself in the *penseroso* pose (reflection and wandering) be treated as a harbinger of what utopian thinking leads to? We are talking about totalitarian countries in which utopian thinking is, after all, the foundation of functioning. Thus, can an angel of melancholy become an angel of doom and assume a pose from Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus*, painting from 1920, in which we can see the outline of an angelic figure with raised hands, and a face permeated with an ominous smile(?) or fear. How much this image resembles one of the photos from World War II is striking. We are talking about a photo taken in 1943, showing a Jewish boy in Warsaw, with his arms raised, walking at the front of a group of women and children led out of the Warsaw Ghetto, from where they will most likely end up in a concentration camp. It can be assumed that utopian thinking carries with it many dangers and one should be attentive to listening to those who want to make the world better, not using the means of terror and coercion.

08.02.2022 Tulum Steer