



Discuss the Relationship Between Reality and Falsehood in the Literary Dystopian Tradition.

'Out of the crooked timber of humanity no straight thing was ever made.'

- Immanuel Kant

Dystopian literature is traditionally used to critique ideology and offer theoretical resistance to political oppression. The genre does so by probing the relationship between reality and falsehood to suggest that reality is a fabrication. It does not argue that there is no such thing as objective reality but seeks to unsettle the reader by invoking radical doubt about the nature of reality in order to affirm that one can know nothing for certain. It is on this logical foundation that dystopian literary narratives predicate their critique of ideology and establish a basis for political resistance. George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Katharine Burdekin's *Swastika Night* and the Wachowski's *The Matrix* all depict worlds in which ideology enforces a particular view of reality and these works are emblematic of the genre¹ However, this approach is problematic. To critique something on an extreme empirical basis means to hold another critical standpoint as valid, and if absolute knowledge is impossible, all logical arguments are equally invalid. This means political resistance in dystopian literature is logically impossible. I argue that this paradox may be overcome by appealing to the arguments of Slavoj Žižek. Žižek draws on German idealist philosophy and Lacanian psychoanalysis to produce a theory of ideology that incorporates the subjective experience. Through exploration of these texts I will demonstrate that dystopian literature's destabilising of the reader's reality does not render political resistance hopeless.

It has been previously established that George Orwell was concerned about a tension between two metaphysical concepts of the world that he held to be true and the potential for mass

¹ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000). Referred to as *NEF*.

Katharine Burdekin, *Swastika Night* (New York: Feminist Press, 1985) Referred to as *SN*.

The Matrix (Warner Bros. Pictures: Andy Wachowski, Lana Wachowski, 1999)

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political manipulation produced by this logical dischord.² In *NEF* Orwell is exploring the interplay of these two beliefs; that ideology distorts an individual's perception of the world but can never be fully detached from objective fact and that Descartes' theoretical separation of mind and body casts doubt upon the existence of objective fact. Orwell's understanding of ideology is the equivalent of the Marxist concept of ideology as 'false consciousness', in that it is fundamentally misrepresentative.³ This understanding of ideology and how it is affected by the Cartesian problem is expressed quite clearly in *NEF* during the torture of Winston Smith. O'Brien, his interrogator, voices this postmodern concern by stating 'nothing exists outside of human consciousness'.⁴ With this established O'Brien is able to impose the ideology of The Party on Winston through torture. Winston is powerless to resist because reality is subjective and he has nothing outside his own mind to confirm or deny O'Brien's statements. O'Brien is able to make Winston see five fingers when only four are held up in front of him by inflicting extreme pain.⁵ This is the most striking example of ideology physically redefining reality, though it is done in less explicit forms throughout the novel as I will explore later. Winston believes the destruction of objective fact is 'more terrifying than torture and death' and yet this incident proves that 'it is at any rate possible' for ideology to detach itself from the physical world.⁶ This section expresses Orwell's fear that the objective world *can* be manipulated by ideology and therefore a totalitarian state claiming 'a big lie is no worse than a little lie' could rendered literally meaningless be impossib.⁷ *NEF* shows how opposition to political oppression can be rendered literally meaningless and the future 'a boot stamping on a human face - for ever'.⁸ This revelation is what Erika Gottlieb describes as Orwell's 'cry from the abyss of despair' and the reason she believes some critics have called *NEF* a 'flawed masterpiece' for not producing some positive solution to this logical knot.⁹

² Bernard Crick, 'Nineteen Eighty-Four: Context and Controversy', in *The Cambridge Companion To George Orwell* ed. Rodden, John (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007)pp.146-159

³ Paul Ransome, *Antonio Gramsci : A New Introduction* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p.117

⁴ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p.278

⁵ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p.270

⁶ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p.37
Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p.270

⁷ Orwell, *Essays* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), p.333

⁸ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p.280

⁹ Erika Gottlieb, *The Orwell Conundrum: A Cry of Despair Or Faith in the Spirit of Man?* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1992), p.4



I argue however that this is not where Orwell's novel ends but where it starts; it is in fact a search for meaning *despite* this truth. This search is not unique to *NEF* either. I believe it is in fact a defining feature of the whole dystopian literary genre. The reality of the dominant ideology in dystopian fiction *is* reality itself, in as far as we internalise the total ideology of the dominant group and perceive the external world through that lens. This is Žižek's inversion of the idea of false consciousness; we cannot escape ideology because it is simply a conceptual framework we need to make meaning out of the world. Ideology is a necessary 'unconscious fantasy structuring our social reality itself'.¹⁰ This is the case in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as well as *Swastika Night* and *The Matrix*. Ideology need not be physically imposed because it psychologically structures our understanding in far more extensive and subtle ways. The purpose of dystopia is not to explore the relationship between reality and falsehood, since the two are reflections of the same illusion, offering no basis for ideological critique. Instead, dystopian literature explores what factors influence our conception of reality and how might we critique ideology given our subjective position.

To explain the subjective position and its relation to ideology, Žižek draws on Lacan. Lacan believes trauma essentially constitutes the subjective experience. It is born from the disconnect between the subject and 'the Real' and amplified by the excess selfhood not contained in definition through the 'big Other'. This Lacanian tripartite conception of the world can be understood through analogy with chess. The subject is a single piece, an emptiness upon which meaning can be placed. The rest of the pieces and the board make up the big Other; a code of meaning outside the subject but from which the subject draws meaning about itself and the world. The Real is the rules of the game, something unfathomable and unknowable to the pieces, yet it structures their world.¹¹ As Žižek explains, the science of physics, particularly quantum physics, 'touches the Real', but since it can only be conceived by the subject in the language of the big Other, it is unable to answer our everyday concerns about the nature of reality.¹² Therefore, we must look to the subject to

¹⁰ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object Of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), p.33

¹¹ Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2007), p.8

¹² Slavoj Žižek, 'The Matrix: Or, The Two Sides of Perversion', in *The Matrix And Philosophy* ed. Irwin Williams (Chicago:

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understand and approach ideological critique, as dystopian literature does. Ideology is a mask on the Real, something put in place to try to make sense of it. Ideology offers 'the dream of holistic fulfilment' by externalizing this traumatic lack in the subject into a goal or a dream, a utopia that might be achieved.¹³ Ideology sustains itself through the promise of social harmony, externalising the traumatic lack in the subject into a lack in society (Nazism for example externalises the lack in society as the presence the Jew, who disrupts the otherwise obtainable harmony).¹⁴ Ideology hides the fact that harmony is impossible, the trick is in keeping 'the object at a certain distance in order to sustain the satisfaction derived from the fantasy'.¹⁵ Every ideology has a utopia at its core. Ideas become utopian when the social group that believes in it attempts to realise it.¹⁶ Society functions through sustaining the fantasy, keeping the promise of utopia just out of reach in order to keep moving forward. A society which tries to establish its utopia 'will always result in mass murder' and this is what dystopian literature depicts.¹⁷

To begin exposing the distorting power of ideology, dystopian texts explore how reality and falsehood are manipulated. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* it is Winston's job to constantly edit and destroy historical records, correcting a past that has become 'ideologically offensive', incongruous with the reality that the ideology The Party holds.¹⁸ This incongruity is established as a metaphorical war between the two realities, The Party requiring an 'unending series of victories over your own memory', since this is where reality resides.¹⁹ Of course, the past, in its inherent intangibility, is the easiest target in this struggle, hence Winston's job, but it is also the physical world that becomes an ideological battle-ground. This is evident in the contrasting narratives given to buildings and cultural monuments. Winston's conversation with Mr. Charrington reveals that many buildings in London had a history prior to the revolution that lead to the current state. St. Clements Dane' is appropriated by the The Party as Winston 'never knew it had been a church'.²⁰ The narrator confirms here that 'one

Open Court, 2002) pp.240-266

¹³ Žižek, Slavoj, and Glyn Daly, *Conversations With Žižek* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2004) p.11

¹⁴ Žižek, *The Sublime Object*, p. 80

¹⁵ Žižek, Slavoj, and Glyn Daly, *Conversations With Žižek* p.12

¹⁶ Mannheim, Karl, *Ideology and Utopia* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1936) p.173

¹⁷ Reeve-Tucker, Alice, and Nathan Waddell, *Utopianism, Modernism, and Literature In The Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p.4

¹⁸ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p.45

¹⁹ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p.37

²⁰ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p.102



could not learn history from architecture' because it has been absorbed by the dominant ideology. Because of this, *Oranges and Lemons* becomes a subversive song. It shares an external signifier with The Party but the signs exist in contrasting semantic fields. Reciting it reinvigorates this historical semantic code that has been supplanted by The Party and draws upon a reality that is outside its ideology. Through the song, Winston conjures an illusion of a 'lost London that still existed, disguised and forgotten'.²¹ The London he imagines *is* real, though appears false to him because it is beyond his particular ideology. This point is paralleled in *Swastika Night* when the protagonist Alfred is informed by the Knight Friedrich Von Hess that churches existed in England before the establishment of the Hitlerian Empire in which they live they live, 700 years in the future. Christian churches were demolished to create Hitler churches because they were 'packed with records in stone of past civilizations'.²² The physical nature of the building makes it too ideologically incongruous to incorporate into the Nazi reality. However the Nazi's do not destroy Stonehenge because 'there is nothing civilized about it'. Von Hess tells Alfred that 'it served to remind you of your tribal darkness'.²³ This selective redefinition exemplifies Žižek's view that 'the essentially performative character of naming is the precondition for all hegemony and politics' because defining the material world is the basis for ideological congruence.²⁴ Žižek's understanding of naming explains the concept of thoughtcrime in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Any deviation from the doctrine of The Party is to deny the reality that it has established and thus 'all crimes [are] contained within'.²⁵ These dominant ideologies assimilate the environment to strengthen their conception of reality and therefore the external world offers us little site for resistance within the dystopian system.

If this is the case then how can the subject escape? In the tradition of dystopian literature, the body is represented as a site of both subjugation and resistance. We have already seen how violence can be used to manipulate a supposedly objective external world and how ideology

²¹ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p.103

²² Katharine Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, p.117

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Žižek, *The Sublime Object*, p.xiv

²⁵ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p.21

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interpellates the environment to affirm its own reality. But the body can offer escape in the form of subconscious rebellion, something felt but not consciously articulated, which can predicate an 'awakening' from ideological delusion. Awakening is a central theme of *The Matrix* and a trope of the dystopian genre generally. The computer hacker Thomas Anderson, known as Neo, starts his journey towards awakening by seeking the character Morpheus who will ultimately provide an understanding of what the matrix is. His reality, the matrix, is a virtual one, a simulacrum of the 'real' world, a digital construction fed through a computer his mind is plugged into. In Lacanian terms, it represents the big Other, a virtual expression of the mental fantasy veiling the Real. It is also, from the outside, ideology itself, constructed by an external force and unconsciously accepted by the subject. However Neo's unconscious rejects this provided fantasy and his feelings of corporeal rebellion are expressed by Morpheus as a 'like a splinter in your mind'. It is this that provokes Neo's probing of reality.²⁶ Morpheus further states that it is unexplainable, only felt; 'you don't know what it is' but 'there's something wrong with the world'.

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* the subconscious rebellion that provokes change is less articulated. However, The Party structures its ideology around repressing this subconscious rejection. Doublethink is its embodiment; an act of constantly accepting and forgetting the fantasy of ideology, a 'conscious deception while retaining the firmness of purpose that goes with complete honesty', part of the 'reality control' that comprises The Party's war on objectivity.²⁷ It is with doublethink that Orwell hypothesizes how totalitarian regimes could function if 'some of their leaders or functionaries, scientists or bureaucrats, did not know what was really happening'.²⁸ It is therefore built into the ideology of The Party to suppress this rejection, which does make Winston's skepticism of their ideology seem inconsistent with the totality of the state. Nonetheless, it is this unconscious rejection that drives his questioning of party doctrine. The only thing that sustains Winston's rejection is 'the mute protest in [his] own bones', referred to as 'an instinctive feeling that the conditions you lived in were intolerable and at some other time they must have been different'.²⁹ This echoes the felt aspect of rejection seen in *The Matrix*, the inexplicable wrongness of

²⁶ *The Matrix*

²⁷ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p.223

²⁸ Crick, 'Nineteen Eighty-Four: Context and Controversy'

²⁹ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p.76



a world that the body refuses to tolerate.

Subconscious rebellion is presented slightly differently in *Swastika Night*. In Burdekin's novel, in contrast to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the German Empire seems far less concerned with absolute obedience, and the subjected individuals seem far less inclined to rebellion. The internal monologue of one of the elite class of 'Knights' who rule the Nazi system of phallocracy suggests knowledge that 'it's all wrong' is widespread amongst the elite.³⁰ The rebellion against ideology is not unconscious but articulated in the mind. It slips out in one Knight's speech as he accidentally instructs the women to 'bear strong daughters' instead of men, an idea which 'would crumble' the Nazi state.³¹ This scenario requires a little unpacking to appreciate its significance. The Knight expresses a level of ideological rejection impossible in both *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *The Matrix*. In Orwell's novel this would be thoughtcrime, a rejection of the system that would soon after result in becoming an 'unperson', vanished. This level of intolerance keeps The Party going but it also makes it seem unsustainable in the long run as there will soon be no one left, an idea supported by the fact that almost all the primary characters in the novel end up in the Ministry of Love to be tortured and killed along with Winston at the end of the novel.³² In *The Matrix*, such a statement is inarticulable, because the Knight perceives the specific wrongness in the system whereas Neo does not, cannot, until he is outside of it. For this reason, Burdekin's text depicts a more believable dystopian state. Very few perceive the 'wrongness' of the dystopia in *NEF* or *The Matrix* and those that do seek change. In *SN*, the 'wrongness' is widely perceived but does not prompt widespread change. This is because the fundamental problem is hardly perceived by anyone within the society. The German Empire is based on exploitation and suffering of women, who are kept in cages separate from men and used only as breeding stock, but this is thought of as 'natural and right'.³³ This is really a

³⁰ Daphne Patai, 'Afterword', in *The End of This Day's Business*, p.159
Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, p.11

³¹ Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, p.13
Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, p.14

³² This furthers Crick's view that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is more satirical than most readers appreciate.

³³ Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, p.59

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depiction of ideology uncoupled from reality, such as Orwell could not believably establish. It indicates the true unconscious functioning of ideology, that it holds us fully 'when we feel no opposition between it and reality - when it succeeds in determining our reality'.³⁴ The wrongness is perceived only unconsciously by the women themselves, who respond to their subjugation by giving birth to fewer and fewer girls; 'unable to make a physical resistance to their oppression [they] make a genetic choice' to reject the reality constructed for them.³⁵ There is also a growing disaffection throughout the German Empire in the men as well. Hermann's sudden breakthrough of ideological understanding is an indicator of this disaffection. Hermann is a soldier, conditioned thoroughly in Nazi ideology, yet through admiration of Alfred, something supposedly impossible because Alfred is racially inferior, he realises that '*it's not true*', a 'wholly conscious break in his racial-superiority feeling' which is a 'mental acceptance of what he had always felt'.³⁶ What is clearly emphasised in the novel is the ability for the body to fight dystopia, and so indicates to the reader a site for potential resistance.

While the subjective nature of reality makes it an insubstantial support for resistance, the subconscious indicates a way out. The body, in expressing discontent, gestures towards an alternative or natural reality that mind cannot conceive of. This indicates that dystopian literature constructs the workings of reality and falsehood in society in a similar way to Antonio Gramsci who believes in a super-structural ruling system implicated in a fragmented sense in the consciousness of the individual through a hegemonic 'synthesis of force and consent'.³⁷ This concept of society rests on the Marxist understanding that 'all distorted beliefs are ideological', with a true or real way of non-distorted being that exists outside the dystopia, a natural way indicated to by the subconscious.³⁸ Gramsci's claim that 'the first step in emancipating oneself from political and social slavery is that of freeing the mind' seems to fit perfectly with the approach we have explored so far.³⁹ In *The Matrix*, the natural site of resistance outside the dystopia is fairly obvious, for it is the natural world itself. To exit the matrix, and move into the world of substance, is to literally move

³⁴ Žižek, *The Sublime Object*, p.49

³⁵ Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, p.14

³⁶ Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, p.21

³⁷ Ransome, *Antonio Gramsci*, p.26

³⁸ Ransome, *Antonio Gramsci*, p.118

³⁹ Ransome, *Antonio Gramsci*, p.180



into the world of resistance. The matrix is part of a control device built by autonomous machines that humans are at war with. They keep humans in vast farms of amniotic pods, each individual plugged into the matrix, and harvest them for energy. Humans are the power supply of their own delusion. In a very real sense they support their own fantasy.⁴⁰ Humanity, the world of substance, is therefore very much preferred to the world of rationality. Resistance is only possible when we perceive clearly the *true* struggle that lies beneath the fantasy. There are also moral implications for escaping the fantasy as denial of reality is hedonistic and divergent from our true struggle.⁴¹ To deny reality, to accept the matrix, as the character Cypher does with the quip 'ignorance is bliss', is to deny humanity itself.⁴² Reality and falsehood are clearly very much split along the lines of the emotional and the rational, a further emphasis of the Cartesian element at work in the film. The emotional that goes beyond the rational, therefore a candidate for resistance, is embodied in the redeeming power of love. Trinity, who initially doubts Neo, believes in him by the end, after he has been killed inside the matrix. She repeats over and over that she loves him, kissing him and bringing him back to life. Resurrection gives Neo the ability to bend the rules of the matrix, re-creating it to his own will. It is the triumph of the human over the mechanical.

The same emotional, natural element of humanity is evidently a site of resistance in *NEF* as well. It is Winston's last defence against the relentless barrage of rationality thrown at him by O'Brien, who cuts down any kind of logical argument against the eternal existence of The Party and its deified leader, Big Brother. Falling back upon 'inarticulate horror' Winston claims that 'life will defeat [The Party]' that 'there is something in the universe ... some spirit, some principle' that will never be overcome by rationality, 'the spirit of man'.⁴³ Critics have suggested that Winston's claim is a redeeming optimism of the novel, an argument predicated upon Crick's reading of *NEF* as satire, though O'Brien's logical assault upon hope is thought by some to be far too watertight to

⁴⁰ Zizek, 'The Matrix: Or, The Two Sides of Perversion', p.263

⁴¹ Gerald G. Erion and Barry Smith, 'Scepticism, morality, and The Matrix' in *The Matrix And Philosophy* ed. William Irwin

⁴² *The Matrix*

⁴³ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p.282

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disregard.⁴⁴ This inherent something in the human that cannot be reduced to the rational is an expression of the Lacanian 'kernel' of subjectivity. Language, the code of the big Other, fails to contain the subject in its entirety. This spiritual remainder of over-determination is the source of enjoyment, *jouissance* or 'pleasure', from which the subject draws out the fantasy of reality.⁴⁵ This is why O'Brien asserts that old totalitarian states operated on the fantasy that 'just around the corner there lay a paradise where human beings would be free and equal', it is the kernel of pleasure that drives and sustains the ideology. The ideology of Big Brother removes the enjoyment factor all together, 'the object of power is power'.⁴⁶ What this shows is the Cartesian separation, that dystopia removes not only free will but the kernel of subjectivity, humanity. It is against this that the subject must resist, re-drawing the line between reality and falsehood as rational definition and human fantasy.

The appeal to spiritualism and fantasy seen in *NEF* is far less developed however than Burdekin's. To appreciate the spiritual resistance in *SN*, it is important to consider her personal teleology how it manifests in the novel. Her utopia, residing at the core of her ideology is best illustrated in her novel *Proud Man*. The protagonist of *Proud Man* is a character known only as the Person who embodies the egalitarianism that Burdekin believes to be transformative for the human race. She posits in the novel that humans are only partially complete in their evolutionary development; we have developed a basic consciousness but retain much of our animalistic origins to be considered fully human. Instead the inhabitants of *Proud Man* in the early twentieth century are 'sub-human', displaying only 'germs' of humanity.⁴⁷ This notion is expressed in *SN* in the 'seeds' of positive change that suggest spiritual growth in the future. Alfred describes himself as 'the acorn' from which 'the oak' of resistance will grow, establishing himself in terms of the natural and drawing upon English myth and mysticism as a counter to German rationalism.⁴⁸ He perceives that the problems in Hitlerian society stem from the treatment of women. His desire to turn his baby daughter, Edith, 'into a real woman' by raising her to the same standards as men, make her an

⁴⁴ Gottlieb, *The Orwell Conundrum*, p.268

⁴⁵ Žižek, *The Sublime Object*, pp.72-75

⁴⁶ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p.276

⁴⁷ Katharine Burdekin, *Proud Man* (New York: Feminist Press at CUNY, 1993)

⁴⁸ Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, p.23



'embryo of something unimaginably wonderful'.⁴⁹ In the utopian society of *Proud Man*, the gender divide has disappeared. Alfred's egalitarian consideration is perhaps the first step towards that; his final words are 'in time-'.⁵⁰ His forward thinking attitude, and rejection of the present makes him an important character in Burdekin's utopian teleology. *Proud Man* depicts a time in which humans have become so empathetic that they communicate almost telepathically. An old woman, Marta, in *SN*, has something of a psychic importance, developed through patience and non-violent rejection of the world of suffering she inhabits. The old Knight who makes the accidental slip in demanding women bear girls covers his tracks with a kind of doublethink. He denies he said anything wrong and implies the women are mistaken in what they believe they heard, which they accept. However, the 'Knight's hypnotism ... rebounded' from Marta and she is 'quite convinced and completely uninterested' in the truth of the event.⁵¹ In developing a critical distance from the world Marta is able to perceive the reality outside of the ideological distortion. In a Gramscian sense, she holds a true consciousness that is able to penetrate and see clearly through the ideological distortion because she is separate from it. Again, this is a value that Burdekin encourages, as it may lead to the utopian humanity of *Proud Man*. Ultimately, it is the rejection of the rational way of thinking at the expense of feeling that Burdekin implores. The distinct discrepancy that Burdekin establishes between the two highlights the repeated assertion and divide between emotion and fact that dystopian literature traditionally emphasises. It is often shown in instances of clarity of perception. This is shown when Hermann is confronted with arguments non-congruent with his ideology; he 'left off Nazi thinking and went back to personal feeling'.⁵² Alfred's dissection of Nazi ideology leads him to questions whether Hermann believes in 'softness? In gentleness and mercy and love....?'⁵³ It is these qualities that Nazism cannot rationalise and for that reason they must be held onto as a fantasy from which to establish a resistance to dystopia. Burdekin does not pit the two against each

⁴⁹ Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, p.163

⁵⁰ Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, p.196

⁵¹ Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, p.16

⁵² Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, p.31

⁵³ Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, p.29

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other in the same emphatic terms as Orwell however, and her 'seeds of change' concept suggests that even in the face of violence, emotion and humanity will always triumph.

If love and emotional unconsciousness is the site of resistance in dystopian literature, the appeal to 'the universal', how does it differ from the utopia that the ideologies depicted in these dystopian societies set out to achieve? After all, 'the greatest mass murders and holocausts have always been perpetrated in the name of man as a harmonious being'.⁵⁴ Here dystopian literature strikes upon the same paradox of ideology that was problematic for Karl Mannheim. Ideology resides at an unconscious level in the individual and cannot be escaped. Perceiving reality is to apply meaning to neutral external stimuli which requires an internal conceptual framework of pre-conception.⁵⁵ In other words, there is no legitimate basis to critique ideology; to do so is to express preference for our own particular ideology. It is a reiteration of Orwell's fear that 'a big lie is no worse than a little one'. However, dystopian literature is not a critique of ideology from a position of neutrality, but from a necessarily established position of utopia, itself understood to be a fantasy. Dystopian literature critiques thinking that would attach itself and draw authority from a fixed interpretation of reality; as Ricœur states 'reality changes, whereas ideology has a certain inertia'.⁵⁶ The Matrix suggests that this inertia is actually fatal to the human condition. While Morpheus is being interrogated by the head police of the matrix, Agent Smith, Smith tells Morpheus that the first matrix the machines built was a utopia, a 'perfect world', which humans rejected, their minds wouldn't accept perfection, 'whole batches were lost'.⁵⁷ This is equitable to the reduction in baby girls in *SN*, as it is a biological, unconscious rebellion against stasis. Smith states that humans 'are a disease' and the machines 'are the cure'. It is in fact not the falsehood of the matrix that is 'the splinter' in Neo's mind, instead it is the rigidity and inertia that the matrix creates. This is because a society where everything is realized, everything is congruent, would be dead.⁵⁸ Society needs utopia and ideology because a static society cannot exist. Inside the matrix there is only utopia, escape. The film suggests then that humanity can never be contained, that there is a part that cannot be

⁵⁴ Žižek, *The Sublime Object*, p.5

⁵⁵ Friedrich Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, p.49

⁵⁶ Paul Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology And Utopia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p.273

⁵⁷ *The Matrix*

⁵⁸ Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology And Utopia*, p.180



rationality accounted for in 'the programming language' of dystopia.⁵⁹ Again, it is a return to the Lacanian notion of *jouissance*, the kernel of subjectivity.

Mannheim sets the theory of ideology and utopia into a state where society is perpetually stuck in an 'oscillation between ideology and utopia', thought to be 'practically unworkable'.⁶⁰ This is only unworkable if we believe there to be a 'true' reality beyond our own. We are 'literally engulfed in a process which is self-defeating' and this is the understanding dystopia seeks to establish because 'only when we are thoroughly aware of the limited scope of every point of view are we on the road to the sought-for comprehension of the whole'.⁶¹ Dystopian literature takes a quasi-Romantic sentiment towards utopia, the type expressed by Ernst Bloch as an 'escape attempt', a dream of a better life.⁶² It is valuable not in its achieving, but in its self-reflective, progressive potential. Winston's hope in the proles is one such expression of this. It is 'an act of faith', his Party rationality shying away from their perceived animalistic qualities.⁶³ The proles 'had remained human' however because they value individuality and human expression. Winston, in perceiving this, understands that 'the terrible thing that The Party had done was to persuade you that mere impulses, mere feelings, were of no account'.⁶⁴ It is this valuing of feeling over the rationality of The Party that is held as the site of resistance ('what you say or do doesn't matter: matter').⁶⁵ The fact that this is crushed, that by the end of the novel Winston 'loved Big Brother', is of little concern when read in this light.⁶⁶ The fact that 'it is at least possible' is not what matters because it was always possible, 'it was all contained in that first act. Nothing has happened that you did not foresee'.⁶⁷ Orwell is not revealing anything by showing The Party's ability to change reality, to crush

⁵⁹ *The Matrix*

⁶⁰ Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology And Utopia*, p.312
Ruth Levitas, *The Concept Of Utopia* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010)p.171

⁶¹ Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology And Utopia*, p.172

⁶² Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, p.84

⁶³ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p.89

⁶⁴ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p.172

⁶⁵ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p.173

⁶⁶ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p.311

⁶⁷ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p.268

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the spirit of man. Winston loses faith at the end of the novel, and it is this faith that must be retained. As Levitas establishes, 'utopia does not even need to be believed to be possible'. In the language of Bloch, Orwell's utopia is a not-yet-conscious expression, residing purely in the realm of the emotional as a compensatory hope for the dystopian future that 'could arrive'.⁶⁸ Winston's failure is not in his submission to Big Brother, but a flaw in his character that rejects the human.

It is only by going through the fantasy of ideology, our own projected 'lie experienced as truth', that we begin to perceive the Real in our desire, the presence of which brings about ideology and fantasy in the first place.⁶⁹ Fantasy is necessary, as Žižek explains, and this appeal to the universal in these texts is still valid as long as we recognise it as such a necessity. This is what makes Burdekin's 'great strength' her ability 'to imagine reality'.⁷⁰ She accepts the fantasy of her ideology, but also recognizes the transformative quality that it has and its importance as fantasy. As Elizabeth English argues, 'for Burdekin, the invert is an agitator or revolutionary, pushing forward the social, political, and even biological evolution of the species'. Alfred's rejection of the masculine notions of blood and mystery make him such a revolutionary. He defies Nazi ideology by supplanting the traditional male role of claiming the son from his mother. 'Woman ... where is my daughter?' he says to Ethel, an inversion of the normal Nazi phrase and an initiator for social change by breaking the bonds of ideological reality.⁷¹ Alfred's death, like Winston's succumbing to the pain of physical torture, is inconsequential. As O'Brien points out, 'power is collective' and every individual dies.⁷² This is affirmed with the death of Alfred and the implied death of Winston. It is not defeating, because 'the power behind the rebellion must be spiritual, out of the soul'.⁷³ The endurance of the spirit is key to utopia; it need not be established to be useful. Therefore dystopian literature takes the approach of Geoghegan in portraying utopia this emotional hope that encapsulates 'the human capacity, and need, for fantasy; the perpetual conscious and unconscious rearranging of reality and one's place in it'.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Orwell, quoted in Crick, 'Nineteen Eighty-Four: Context and Controversy', p.156

⁶⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, quoted in *The Sublime Object*, p.30

⁷⁰ Daphne Patai, 'Afterword', in *Proud Man*

⁷¹ Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, p.159

⁷² Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p.277

⁷³ Burdekin, *Swastika Night*, p.104

⁷⁴ Levitas, *The Concept Of Utopia*, p.181



Neo tells Morpheus that he rejects the idea of fate because he doesn't like 'the idea that I'm not in control of my mind'.⁷⁵ His awakening into the real world is perceived by himself and others to be a gaining of control over his mind. However Neo's success at the end of the film sees him return to the matrix, the place of falsehood, and bend it to his own will. In a Nietzschean *ubermensch* fashion, Neo is able to perceive the fantasy of the reality around him and construct his own fantasy, bending the rules of the Real to his own will; he is able to stop bullets, fly etc. Of course, as Žižek points out, this is only useful if we stay within the matrix.⁷⁶ What the film suggests is that seeing through the fantasy of ideology is liberating, yet it liberates us into a world of suffering and pain. This is the Real in the fantasy, the subjective trauma that is masked by our illusive projection of the real world, and Neo's awakening is where the fantasy collapses. It is an awakening to the failure of ideology, but an awakening to the trauma of the subjective experience that provokes the belief in ideology in the first place. To mount resistance, bring meaning to life, we must accept the trauma of the Real and create our own values, not have the fantasy placed upon us without question.

Dystopian literature implores its reader to question the nature of reality, not so as to fully understand it, but, like Neo, to be eternally driven by the question. In doing so we reject the stasis of ideology and push humanity forward on the inescapable cycle of ideology and utopia. Only through this can we learn and find new methods of political and social guidance and structure, and perhaps, as Burdekin believes, progress one day to a state in which we understand our subjectivity and are no longer compelled to provide fantasies that demand oppression and suffering in an impossible grab for utopia. What we learn from dystopia is echoed by Ricœur; there is no escape from the position of the subject, therefore 'we must try to cure the illness of utopia by what is wholesome in ideology ... and try to cure the rigidity, the petrification, of ideologies by the utopian element'.⁷⁷ Ideology grows from certainty in reality and imposing that certainty upon others. Dystopian literature reveals to its reader the instability of the reality that ideological claims are

⁷⁵ *The Matrix*

⁷⁶ Žižek, 'The Matrix: Or, The Two Sides of Perversion', p.263

⁷⁷ Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology And Utopia*, p.312

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predicated upon and at the same time, encourages an embrace of that instability as a part of life and development. There is no point of critique that is not subjectively flawed and therefore the individual must take responsibility and define reality themselves if they are to escape a dystopia.



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