Mutation of Dystopian Identity in the Age of Posthumanism: Literary Speculations

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Abstract. Dystopia, while deconstructing utopian ideas, generates a special type of identity as the consequence of a deviation from anthropocentric principles, crises of national and cultural worldviews, and manifestations of social shifting in a posthumanist world. The article focuses on four symptomatic dystopian texts – George Orwell's "Nineteen Forty-Eight", Ray Bradbury's "Fahrenheit 451", Ahmed K. Towfik's "Utopia", and Salman Rushdie's "Quichotte" – to explicate the dichotomous nature of the opposition of identity vs society in posthumanist transformations. Those conditions are considered a cause of the mutation of dystopian identity that troubles its anthropological bases and modes of existence. To reconstruct the posthumanist context and its influence on the dystopian identities in the selected novels, this study has exploited a mixture of the following methods: intertextual, cultural, and genre ones; phenomenological approach; hermeneutic interpretation; conceptualisation, etc. The novelty of the study emanates from the very attempt to interpret the writers' names of the AGEs represented in the books as a background of storytelling and a lens through which the posthumanist space is transformed from a dystopian perspective.

Keywords: shifting identity; quasi-reality; (after)humanism; (post)modernity; dichotomy.

Hell is other people!

(Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit*, 1944)

Our lives are not our own. We are bound to others, past and present,
and by each crime and every kindness, we birth our future.

(David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, 2004)

Introduction

The crisis of anthropocentric ideas has led to the blurring of the moral and ethical bases of society and the emergence of posthumanist attitudes to have formed a dystopian worldview. Man is no longer the measure of all things, not the pinnacle of evolution; their role in socio-political processes is levelled. However, posthumanism declares no human extinction; man begins to exist under ever-changing conditions – a state of a shifting or mutating identity.

Posthumanist ideology greatly corresponds to the dystopian transformations of the *new* world order. The significance of dystopia for understanding man in the socio-philosophical dimension lies in the opposition of *identity* vs *society* that can help define clear criteria for the divergence of these categories in view of "a posthumanist unsmoothing" (Cirell, Sweet, 2020). In research from Harrison (2019), posthumanism appears to be open to a multiplicity of interpretations. To understand the posthuman theory, Harrison makes a reasonable distinction between *the human* as an ontological state open to different cultural interpretations and *humanism* as the most prevalent of those interpretations in current discourse. Such an approach contributes to comprehending posthumanism as "a critique of the critical discourses of humanism as a social, political, and philosophical framework" (p. 7). Such a perspective fits as closely as possible into the paradigm of dystopian identity in a dehumanised society.

It is a dystopian literary text that mostly explores the failure of humanism and the depletion of humanity. Utopian literature arose from the social need to harmonise the relationship between the individual and society, to create conditions where the interests of individuals and society would be in agreement, and the contradictions would be resolved by universal harmony. Any true writer subtly feels the slightest changes in society and reproduces them, grotesquely modifying reality. Such *distortion* can be seen as a warning against unsuccessful steps and wrong decisions as dystopian stories occur in the future, in a time-space when ominous threats have already emerged (Sargent, 2010, pp. 26–29). Nonetheless, dystopias are meant to warn the readers of the dangerous course of events (Stein, 2016, p. 48). Such events, depicted by the writers, are projected by the readers onto their own space and time since "spatial imaginaries of the apocalypse" are commonplace (Schlosser, 2015, p. 307).

Violation of the established social order, the problems of moral collapse and cultural self-determination come to the fore in dystopia. The picture of the world depicted in such works creates the image of the future at the expense of grotesque and oxymoron, and

at the same time, breaks all proportions and connections between components from the utopian/dystopian perspectives. Moreover, a line between utopia and dystopia considers the model of human civilisation (Bohovyk, Bezrukov, 2022, p. 84).

A dystopian society is arranged so that it cannot but provoke resistance – from internal rejection to acts of disobedience. That accounts for the prevailing happiness of living environments still goes back to social order (Karhu, Ridanpää, 2020, p. 123). In this dimension, of great interest are George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), Ahmed Khaled Towfik's *Utopia* (2008), and Salman Rushdie's *Quichotte* (2019). The mentioned novels are highly symptomatic literary texts since they trouble mutating dystopian identities in specific social environments. The events in the selected novels occur from different time perspectives: the middle of the previous century and nowadays.

As dystopias usually exaggerate social trends and offer serious social criticism (Burnett, Rollin, 2000, p. 77), the dichotomy of *good places* vs *bad places* is vividly shown in the selected books to demonstrate the worst social conditions, poverty, misery, suffering, death, and disease. Devastating stories represent societies where people lack freedom, security and even emotions. Hence, dystopia "evokes disturbing images" (Claeys, 2017, p. 3) to stress the ways of their mutation.

Regardless of affiliation, period, and beliefs, the authors of the explored novels image the time and life they know, conveying the feeling of the time in an artistic dimension, sometimes resorting to exaggeration, reproducing reality, since

> when literature does achieve a faithful depiction of reality in this broader sense of what it ought to be and become, then it may indeed have some impact upon what reality becomes, although it cannot, of itself, change reality. (Olwig, 1981, p. 53).

It is substantial how each of the selected writers calls the *AGE* he lives (lived) in and uses (used) to be the prism through which a posthumanist world is transformed from a dystopian perspective. Orwell called it *the age of uniformity, solitude, Big Brother,* and *doublethink* (Smith uses these names in his message to the descendants): "*From the age of uniformity, from the age of solitude, from the age of Big Brother, from the age of doublethink greetings!*" (Orwell, 2016, p. 29). Bradbury explored *the age of the disposable tissue*: "…this is the age of the disposable tissue. Blow your nose on a person, wad them, flush them away, reach for another, blow, wad, flush" (Bradbury, 2012, p. 15). Towfik used *the dark ages*: "Indeed I live in the dark ages!" (Towfik, 2011, p. 6). Rushdie calls his time *the Age of Anything-Can-Happen*: "And in the Age of Anything-Can-Happen, well, anything could happen" (Rushdie, 2019, p. 12).

Posthumanist ideas in the books are de facto opposed to the principles of anthropocentrism. The above-mentioned names of the *AGEs* actualise the modes of society existence when people abandon humanistic ideas to achieve the goal of creating an ideal world for themselves and a model for privileged citizens to control the lives of others because the conception of *good* or *better* is always based on individual opinion and not socially shared (Kumar, 2013, p. 100).

Dystopian worlds in the novels appear to be dark: "…the world looked cold. Down in the street little eddies of wind were whirling dust and torn paper into spirals, …, there seemed to be no colour in anything" (Orwell, 2016, p. 2). Orwell uses personification to add expressiveness. Bradbury, creating a depressing picture of helplessness and alienation of the protagonist, also exploits personification: "…the stars looked, …, like the enemy discs, and the feeling that the sky might fall upon the city and turn it to chalk dust" (Bradbury, 2012, p. 88). Rushdie compares the past and present, but not in favour of the latter: "MANY, MANY YEARS AGO, when the sea was clean and the night was safe, there was a road called Warden Road…" (Rushdie, 2019, p. 34). The author begins the sentence with words similar to those in fairy tales. With parallel constructions, they attract attention and visualise despair and helplessness, along with capital letters. In *Utopia*, the utopian and dystopian worlds are built on stark contrasts: the dystopian Shubra – "…most prominent smell was the stench of sweat. Dissolved in this smell were the strange odours of food, trash, human excrement and maybe blood" (Towfik, 2011, p. 34). To describe the *ideal world*, Towfik uses sentence fragmentation to emphasise the basic structure and explicit core information and increase the rhythm of the text: "Excitement. Crime. Assault. Breaking the rules. Provocation. Violating taboos. Disorderly conduct. Misdemeanor. Destruction. Tension. Adrenaline. Change. Disobedience. Dissolution. Shock. Privilege. Astonishment" (p. 17).

Peace in dystopias exists as a potential chance, but the value of dystopia is *measured* by the attitude to this potentially existing reality. In this context, the issue of identity and identification arises as a determinant of fictional and non-fictional realities. Dystopian identity in a shifting society experiences mutation to adapt to dramatic changes. These mutations are often caused by external and internal factors that determine the modes of existence of dystopian identity under posthumanist conditions. The external ones include, first of all, socio-political transformational processes, and the internal ones are psycho-emotional.

The research has been undertaken to explicate the dichotomous nature of the binary opposition of *identity* vs *society* under posthumanist conditions as well as to specify the anthropological bases of shifting and mutating dystopian identity in the selected novels. The ways of naming the *AGEs* as a background of storytelling make the books symptomatic from a dystopian perspective.

The research methodology is based on the idea of specific relations between posthumanism and literary studies that refer to changing conceptions of the literary (Wallace, 2010, p. 692). The new type of identity that is formed in the selected dystopian novels undergoes mutations under posthumanist conditions. Placing this idea in an interdisciplinary context, the article primarily follows the phenomenological approach (Natanson, 1998) that involves a descriptive determination of the phenomena of conscious life in a particular paradigm. The selected novels are explored as the phenomena of the author's consciousness, expressing how the world appears to it and how that alters dystopian identity.

The main function of dystopia is a reflection on the phenomenon of the social time the characters live in and change (the author's vision of historical reality). The cognitive

function of dystopia is closely intertwined with reflection: it consists in comprehending society and its modes of existence and values that can clarify the mutational mechanisms that occur with the characters in a particular literary work. Increased interest in dystopia in the study of personality psychology and the nature of the sacred, encourages using the methods of conceptualisation of socially significant facts in the process of cognition of social reality.

Intertextual analysis, cultural and linguistic-stylistic approaches, as well as the method of hermeneutic interpretation, have been exploited to reconstruct the posthumanist context and its influence on the dystopian identities in the books. To determine the subjective organisation of the novels, genre analysis has also been used.

1. A *little man* of some importance: Irreflection of society

The theme of a *little man* was almost not been covered in the context of the opposition of *naive man – collective identity*. This interest of the authors in 'mass' consciousness is not random. The authors introduce the character – a *goose*, a naive person who paradoxically highlights the true nature of *imaginary quantities* established in a society of conventions. Such observations confirm that since the beginning of the last century, a new type of self-consciousness of ordinary people has emerged to attract the attention of writers.

Naming the *AGEs* in the novels occurs from a *little man's* perspective. The characters through which the readers view the fictional world are not always capable of positive change. This may be a transparent hint by the authors that the future may be rapidly changed, depending on the *quality* of the next generation. As a rule, a *little man* is an ordinary person who does not differ much from the mass.

In *Nineteen Forty-Eight*, the main character is Winston Smith: "His hair was very fair, his face naturally sanguine, his skin roughened by coarse soap and blunt razor blades" (Orwell, 2016, p. 2). In *Fahrenheit 451*, a *little man* is a firefighter Guy Montag: "With his symbolic helmet numbered 451 on his stolid head… Montag grinned the fierce grin of all men singed and driven back by flame" (Bradbury, 2012, pp. 1–2). The author does not give a detailed portrayal of his character but skilfully touches on his appearance and temper, provoking the readers to create their own picture of what is read. In *Quichotte*, the main character, Mr. Ismail Smile, appears in rather a sarcastic manner: "a traveling man of Indian origin, advancing years, and retreating mental powers" (Rushdie, 2019, p. 2). In *Utopia*, the fascinating way to introduce the readers to the main character has been chosen; he does not even have a name: "Sixteen years old, and you don't belong anywhere except Utopia. … Who am I? Let's not talk about names" (Towfik, 2011, p. 10).

The main character's idea as a *little man* allows the authors to create a nearly real world. The reflection of reality in a literary work is a kind of quasi-reality because it is conditional, not absolute, though one of the conditions for creating a literary text is that the life depicted in it is perceived as *true reality*. The quasi-reality of the created worlds in the selected dystopian novels makes the heroes fall into the world of madness.

2. A mutating dystopian identity under posthumanist conditions

The focus of utopia is always a successful society with a realised man, while dystopia has a man who opposes the state. Utopia always represents an ideal society in a view of a casual observer, while dystopia is the experience of a hero *from within* with all the troubles that occur in and with this society. In dystopias, the conflict of the individual with the state takes such a *naked* form that the readers sympathise with the hero who opposes the almighty state. The authors of dystopian literature fear ideological state apparatuses the most because they enable force "a loss of identity" (Wise, 2019, p. 9).

The study of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, Towfik's *Utopia*, and Rushdie's *Quichotte* has allowed us to develop our own vision of the mutation of dystopian identity in a posthumanist world.

2.1 The state apparatus changes the worldview

For Smith from Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, as for almost all Oceania residents, the main means of obtaining information was "the telescreen … but here was no way of shutting it off completely" (Orwell, 2016, p. 2). This device would help any totalitarian state promote specific ideas and monitor the citizens: "Any sound that Winston made… would be picked up by it, moreover, …he could be seen as well as heard" (pp. 2–3). The author conveys the emotion of tension through exaggeration, emphasising the grotesqueness of the phrase *any sound.*

Smith and his compatriots are deprived of even the illusory choice that Rushdie's Mr Smile has. In *Quichotte*, the source of truth, or quasi-truth, is the TV that leads "to that increasingly prevalent psychological disorder in which the boundary between truth and lies became smudged and indistinct" (Rushdie, 2019, p. 3). Thoughtless consumption of information does not allow going outside *a filter bubble*, and "Must See TV" (p. 7) becomes a tool for creating "the world we see when we open our eyes" (p. 5).

Bradbury also chooses TV as the main tool for influencing people's consciousness. Montag's house has TVs in every room, but Montag's wife wants more: "It'll be even more fun when we can afford to have the fourth wall installed" (Bradbury, 2012, p. 18). Representing the main aspects of the manipulative influence of the state on dystopian identity through the media (the dominance of on-screen entertainment, virtualisation of real life and the reverse process of perception of the non-real as real, information overload, etc.), the author depicts a totalitarian machine of oppression. The idea of the manipulative state in the novel is not so much unimaginable as natural, enhanced by the grotesque manner of storytelling.

Towfik's no-named character remains a *dark horse* to the end. Utopia begins with a scene where a 16-year-old boy watches the murder of the Other, comparing it to a movie poster: "It was like the famous old poster for the movie Platoon" (Towfik, 2011, p. 8). The teenager is no longer happy to watch scenes of violence in movies; he wants to see them in real life: "The scene was fearsome, especially since it wasn't on the television screen. Everything was real and terrible and cruel and, and… And seductive" (p. 8).

In addition to TV and entertainment, drugs and alcohol affect consciousness and help cope with boredom and frustration. Smith, who is devastated and dulled by labour, poor living and a shortage of consumer goods, finds an outlet through alcohol: "He took down from the shelf a bottle of colourless liquid … VICTORY GIN. …and the world began to look more cheerful" (Orwell, 2016, p. 5). The author exploits capital letters to draw attention to the sarcastic name of hard drink. Citizens are prepared for victory over an illusory enemy in a country without essential goods. That is a transparent allusion to the Soviet Union times. Rushdie also uses sarcasm to demonstrate the way to treat excessive alcohol consumption offers with providing *patients* with hard drinks: "Are you alcoholic?... We can help. Call this number for liquor homedelivery" (Rushdie, 2019, p. 73). The author also describes addiction to drugs to help his characters relieve pain and even more to escape from reality: "Spraying the powerful opioid under the tongue brought faster relief to terminal cancer patients…. The new spray made it [pain] bearable, at least for an hour" (p. 11).

Bradbury's characters Guy and Mildred (the last almost died from an overdose) are addicted to sleeping pills: "'I don't know anything any more,' he said, and let a sleep-lozenge dissolve on his tongue" (Bradbury, 2012, p. 15), "You took all the pills in your bottle last night" (p. 17). To describe the drug addiction in *Utopia*, Towfik uses an ascending gradation and climax: "I've tried all kinds of drugs, even the new phlogistine imported from Denmark" (Towfik, 2011, p. 11) – "You come back to your senses hours later, only to realise you need more" (p. 11) – "I had started experimenting with marijuana – no big deal – and I've tried ecstasy and LSD" (p. 11) – "Phlogistine – the lord of drugs… rivers of phlogistine flowed. They ate and drank it. They sweated it. Women had phlogistine periods and men urinated it" (p. 34).

In dystopian worlds, the government does not care about the citizens' health but teaches people to be obedient and dedicated for the sake of a bizarre leader's idea. As Gottlieb (2001) asserts, one of the most conspicuous attributes of dystopian novels is that "once we allow the totalitarian state to come to power, there will be no way back" (4).

Besides the standardisation of society, the authors are concerned about the monopoly on the media, which plays a crucial role in shaping people's consciousness and unifying society. Technical devices help a government machine gain power over the people, imposing its leading idea, which ensures the existence of totalitarian societies in the world. It is not about stopping consuming information from the media but using critical thinking and reasonable consumption of information.

2.2 Quasi-religion as a whip of a governing party

The transformation of the understanding of the sacred and transcendental under conditions of loss of genuine religiosity and other spiritualisation has led to the emergence of a new worldview. To control people, the machine of oppression offers a quasi-religion that contains the concept of *faith without belonging* (Hann, 2000; Davie, 1994; Casanova, 1994). The same is true for the concept of *quasi-religion*, which is the point of the following

section. The Party and its leader, Big Brother, in Orwell's novel, are worshipped. Smith works in the Records Department, and there is always *the Two Minutes Hate* break to Goldstein, "the Enemy of the People" (Orwell, 2016, p. 11), one of the former leading figures of the Party, who is declared a public enemy and a harmful element. *The Two Minutes Hate* shows a newsreel with Goldstein and marching soldiers from Eurasia or Eastasia, Oceania's rivals in the world. People leap up and down in their places, shout at the tops of their voices and try to drown the voice that comes from the screen; they start crying out "Swine! Swine! Swine!" (p. 14). Smith starts doing the same: "In a lucid moment Winston found that he was shouting with the others and kicking his heel violently against the rung of his chair" (p. 14). This insanity stops with Big Brother's image appearing on the screen that utters a few words of encouragement and disappears. Instead, the three slogans of the Party stand out: WAR IS PEACE, FREEDOM IS SLAVERY, IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH (p. 4). The apogee is in the scene of *praying*:

> Partly it was a sort of hymn to the wisdom and majesty of Big Brother, but still more it was an act of self−hypnosis, a deliberate drowning of consciousness by means of rhythmic noise. (Orwell, 2016, p. 16).

TV appears to be God for Rushdie's main character. People are creating their own religion, where they worship television. They willingly believe the voices of the *messiahs* who lead to populist decisions: "Men who played presidents on TV could become presidents" (Rushdie, 2019, p. 6). Perception of the real world becomes spoiled: "In their opinion her real migration had been from silver screen to computer screen, not from Bombay/Mumbai to L.A." (pp. 42–43).

One of Rushdie's protagonists, the writer Brother, alludes to Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: "BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU" (Orwell, 2016, p. 1). Quichotte's character is an omnipresent figure representing oppressive control over the other characters' fates, and he introduces the conflicts in Quichotte's life, which allude to Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Rushdie's main characters have to go through *seven valleys of purification* (Rushdie, 2019, p. 251) to get to New York, where Quichotte has to meet his beloved.

For Bradbury's Montag, as for the aforementioned Orwell's and Rushdie's characters, the state apparatus becomes the object of unquestioning obedience. When he loses his social status, appearing in the naked nature, Montag perceives it as a catharsis: "Some sign that the immense world would accept him and give him the long time needed to think all the things that must be thought" (Bradbury, 2012, p. 136). The period of limitation symbolises the final break between the character and his society and, at the same time, the qualitative change in his spiritual content.

Towfik describes events through a significant time gap from those described in Orwell's and Bradbury's novels, but in *Utopia* "The truth is that we have our own special television that only shows us what we want to watch" (Towfik, 2011, p. 27) too. Towfik describes two worlds in his novel where people lose their identity:

Here and there, we're both in love with violence. Here and there, we both love drugs. Here and there, we both avidly watch movies about rape. Here and there, we both talk about religion all the time (Towfik, 2011, p. 84).

Those who live in Utopia appear to be a kind of personification of the gods on earth, and their actions are "nothing but a show, let the sheep know who the boss is" (Towfik, 2011, p. 23). The mention of sheep is an allusion to the sacrificial rite of the Jewish people, which creates a personalised symbolic name for the people who need God's care.

The two most important features that bring quasi-religions closer to traditional religions are organisational dynamics, but without belief in the supernatural, and the existence of certain *marginal interests* of human existence. The quasi-religion in the hands of the ruling parties becomes the whip that forces people to obey. An attempt to interpret some aspects of existence is of great importance for these marginal interests, giving meaning to human life (Greil, Rudy, 2017), which acquires grotesque in totalitarian societies.

2.3 Conformity vs individualism: In search of identity

Orwell's adaptation becomes a formula for life as to survive in the totalitarian world where the Thought Police work, one needs to become a *gray mass*: "You had to live did live, from habit that became instinct in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard" (Orwell, 2016, p. 3). This way, Smith appears at the beginning of the novel, searching for and collecting printed publications to be destroyed, replaced or rewritten if the figures, opinions or predictions contain contradictions to the state's ideology. He is involved in history falsification. That is why the collective memory is "our only shield against repeating the mistakes of history" (Doina, 2014, p. 16). Memory immanently shared by all dystopian narratives is considered a manifestation of the ability to manipulate human capacity for recollection and rewrite the past (Opreanu, 2013, p. 110).

Bradbury's Montag behaves similar to the above-mentioned characters. He burns books without thinking, without reading them, because he was told that literature is "… against the law!" (Bradbury, 2012, p. 5). The protagonist does not stand out from his *colleagues*; he mimics under them: "Had he ever seen a fireman who didn't have black hair, black brows, a fiery face, and a blue-steel shaved but unshaved look?" (p. 30). The author uses a soliloquy to reflect on the suffering and thoughts, which is the first shot of his mental transformation.

Rushdie's Mr Smile is affected by watching TV and begins "to think of himself as a natural citizen (and potential inhabitant) of that imaginary world beyond the screen" (Rushdie, 2019, p. 3). The character realises himself as one of the many common people who hides his memories of past love in "a lead-lined casket of forgetting far beneath the bed of the remembering ocean within him, an unmarked sarcophagus" (p. 14).

Towfik describes the society in Utopia as if dividing it into two parts, where "adults are crazy about combining the traits of wealth and piety" (Towfik, 2011, p. 5), while young people are described as an arrogant and carefree stratum of society to choose

weird entertainments: "Kleptomania is the cause of most crimes here; the rest take place in a moment of drunkenness" (p. 6). The inhabitant of a *paradise on earth* is an ordinary corrupt person who throws an artificial identity on the pedestal of his ego: "You're a Utopian resident, softened by a life of luxury and boredom" (p. 10).

It is often required a kind of shock to feel like a *chosen* hero, and this one can be a passion of a different nature. For Smith, this is love for Julia: "Even in sleep he could not altogether escape from her image" (Orwell, 2016, p. 125). Montag, fascinated by the young girl Clarisse McClellan, feels something he has never felt before: "He felt his body divide itself into a hotness and a coldness, a softness and a hardness, a trembling and a not trembling" (Bradbury, 2012, p. 21). The author uses an antithetical way to describe the events to create a stronger emotional appeal. Mr Smile, nicknamed Quichotte in Rushdie's novel, is a prototype of Cervantes' Don Quixote, who finds his own muse who influences his identity. This is an Oprah-like talk-show star, "a certain television personality, the beautiful, witty, and adored Miss Salma R" (Rushdie, 2019, p. 3). All the mentioned heroes are united by the only desire to become better. Instead, Towfik's character is eager for murder to tickle his nerves: "I asked him if I could try hunting. I offered him my reasons, which could be summed up in three words: boredom, boredom and boredom" (Towfik, 2011, p. 10).

The main heroes of the selected novels are initially inseparable from a *gray mass* but the authors, while developing them, point out a certain feature of their characters that is shown as the antithesis of *being similar to others – becoming an individual*. A rebellious hero tired of obeying and following authoritarian ideals imposed by society on a social or personal level appears in dystopia. The authors use their heroes to embody the writers' position on the inadmissibility of suppressing the natural, psychological elements of personality. Attempts at such activities are ineffective due to the fundamental impossibility of their implementation in reality if we are speaking about the typical existence of a person as a biological, psychological, and social personality. Thus, the authors create so-called quasi-reality, and the conflict between the *individual* and *society* is the advantage over the freedom of sensory manifestations of the last. Therefore, the conflict is mainly determined by the psychological sphere, where the human rationale lacks space.

2.4 A hero vs the inertial mass of society: Transforming inner and outer worlds

Bernard Show separated people into crowds and leaders where two per cent of the people think; three per cent think they think; ninety-five per cent would rather die than think. The hero begins with a passive, i.e. internal confrontation with the state, which results in an open revolt against the system.

Smith's love for Julia turns him from a quiet clerk into a frantic rebel who declares: "I hate purity, I hate goodness! I don't want any virtue to exist anywhere" (Orwell, 2016, p. 142). Such statements do not negatively characterise the character, as he opposes the falsified purity, goodness, and virtue he meets in Oceania. Love wings the hero, and he writes a letter to Goldstein, hoping to become a member of the opposition. He and his

beloved girl have been arrested. Smith has been imprisoned in the Ministry of Love, where he is tortured. Smith cannot stand it and screams frantically: "Do it to Julia! Not me! Julia! I don't care what you do to her" (p. 330). Thus, he is forced to renounce himself and his love.

Smith becomes almost a *hero*: he opposes the ruthless government machine but cannot overcome his fears. Having betrayed love, he again turns into a *submissive gray mass* who loves his tyrant: "He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother" (Orwell, 2016, p. 342).

Bradbury's Montag stands out from the crowd after meeting Clarisse and seeing the old lady's suicide. Memories of women come to his mind again and again: "That woman, the other night, Millie, you weren't there. You didn't see her face. And Clarisse" (Bradbury, 2012, p. 64). Guy's metamorphoses help him to feel like nature's son: "He walked in the shallow tide of leaves, stumbling. And in the middle of the strangeness, a familiarity" (p. 138). Montag becomes the Book of Ecclesiastes (p. 144), which is salvation from the material and corporeal. Spiritual freedom is important to him. Bradbury says only the spiritual essence of the world and man is true. This is how the book introduces the theme of religion as an alternative to spiritless mass culture, and Montag becomes the hero who brings the spiritual to those in need.

The characters in two of the four selected novels (Orwell's Smith and Bradbury's Montag) are developed almost identically to the climax. Nevertheless, Towfik's hero does not evoke warm feelings as he seeks only pleasure: "Suzanne… Katie… Maya… Germinal… But I prefer the last of them for some reason. It isn't love, of course" (Towfik, 2011, p. 12). He despises the Others, the poor people behind the wall of prosperity because they are "nothing but sheep" (p. 24). The young man wants to get a dose of adrenaline, something unknown: "There's nothing new to stimulate your curiosity or your enthusiasm in Utopia. Nothing changes" (p. 14). He meets a young man Gaber, who saves him from the massacre of Shubra residents and leads him through a tunnel to Utopia. The readers with a fading heart expect positive changes in the character and behaviour of the protagonist, but expectations and hopes are not met. Here is what the residents of Shubra say about the boy and his girlfriend: *"…they killed him* [Gaber] *and cut off his arm after they raped his sister, who was a virgin!"* (p. 121). The 16-year-old boy failed to become a real hero, but the Others still believe "that one of their sons will change everything" (p. 74).

Mr. Smile works for a company that sells opioids. Imagining himself a knight he leaves a job for love. For many years, his beloved woman has been taking pills to help cope briefly with depression: "The meds had controlled the monster within, just about, but there were bad moments…" (Rushdie, 2019, p. 109). The novel finishes with the end of the world, and Rushdie gives a clear hint that the hero has changed radically because he and his beloved are at the gates of paradise: "Here at the heart of a canyon of light an old man and the woman he loves to stand in front of an open door" (p. 393).

Conclusion

Dystopia always multiplies the fears of a certain time and therefore appears to be an ideal psychological and historical source for studying the mutation of dystopian identity. An eloquent confirmation of this maxim can be the various names of the *AGEs* the writers use to describe the continuum in which they and their characters live. In the selected novels, the special semantic meaning of the *AGEs* appears as the prism through which a posthumanist world is transformed from a dystopian perspective: Orwell's *age of uniformity, solitude, Big Brother, doublethink*, Bradbury's *age of disposable tissue*, Towfik's *dark ages*, and Rushdie's *Age of Anything-Can-Happen*.

In the explored novels, a model of a dystopian society is created with such feature constants of the genre as the motif of warning, the pressure of a repressive state apparatus, control over the people, propaganda as a means of governance, fear and overcoming fear, and contrast with a utopian world. However, the problem of a *little man* – a mutating identity whose tragic pathos of existence is explained through the dichotomous nature of the opposition of *identity* vs *society* from a posthumanist perspective, is most clearly actualised in the selected books.

Such posthumanist conditions produce dystopian narratives of the transition from a dystopian representation of the crisis of social utopianism to the accentuation of a split between spiritual and social ties, which complicates the process of forming a new identity. In the selected novels, the trend of socio-cultural development is directed from the phase of contradiction of legitimations and alternatives of the dominant ideology to the phase of a transformation of dystopian identity. The genre convention of dystopia in various authorial strategies manifests itself through different types of narration, which ultimately serves a global purpose – to demonstrate some mechanisms of the mutation of dystopian identity in the age of posthumanism.

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