BURYING DYSTOPIA: THE CASES OF VENEDIKT EROFEEV, KURT VONNEGUT, AND VICTOR PELEVIN

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Abstract

One of the main things we have come to expect from a dystopian novel is the portrayal of an evil social structure. Such a text would aim to put reader in a position of a judge and/or warn him/her about the inevitability of an impending catastrophe (Zamyatin, Orwell, Huxley). This thesis focuses on how Venedikt Erofeev's *Moscow to the End of the Line*, Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and Victor Pelevin's *The Clay Machine-Gun* respond to Dostoevsky's prophetic dystopia and go against the grain of the genre, and, by doing so, redefine the genre itself.

Keywords: utopia, dystopia, genre, socialist utopia, capitalist utopia, Venedikt Erofeev, Kurt Vonnegut, Victor Pelevin, Fyodor Dostoevsky.

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Introduction

"So this is Utopia,
Is it? Well?
I beg your pardon; I thought it was Hell."
Max Beerbohm

On Utopia

One of the most important theorists of utopia, Fredric Jameson, defines the utopian form as "a representational meditation on radical difference, radical otherness, and on the systemic nature of the social totality, to the point where one cannot imagine any fundamental change in our social existence which has not first thrown off Utopian visions like so many sparks from a comet."[1] Yet according to Ernst Bloch, utopia is much more than the pile of texts representing the nowhere places. Bloch talks about the utopian impulse in every aspect of our life, saying that we actually live in the future and guided by hope. The utopian principle, writes Bloch, is "expectation, hope, intention towards possibility that has still not become: this is not only a basic feature of human consciousness, but concretely corrected and grasped, a basic determination within objective reality as a whole."[2] Lyman Tower Sargent, in his article "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited," puts the emphasis on dreaming when he defines the broad, general phenomenon of utopianism as "social dreaming, the dreams and nightmares that concern the ways in which groups of people arrange their

[1] Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future* XII.
[2] Bloch 7.

lives and which usually envision a radically different society than the one in which the dreamers live."[3]

Jameson, for example, adds to the list of utopian wish/ or desire for utopia – political practice, social movements that tried to realize a utopian vision, communities and revolutions made in its name. According to him, when it comes to any properly utopian program or realization, there are at least two markers that can describe it: its commitment to closure and totality, which is "precisely this combination of closure and system, in the name of autonomy and self-sufficiency and which is ultimately the source of that otherness or radical, even alien, difference" (think of Thomas More's *Utopia,* for example). Yet, he continues, "it is precisely this category of totality that presides over the forms of Utopian realization: the Utopian city, the Utopian revolution, the Utopian commune or village, and of course the Utopian text itself, in all its radical and unacceptable difference from the more lawful and aesthetically satisfying literary genres."[4] But what's interesting here is not the fact that the utopian program that aims at destroying all "roots of evil" cannot be realized, even though this is supposed to be one of the objective preconditions for a utopia. The interesting thing is that the utopian text itself should be read negatively, that is not as a pastoral picture of a happy world, but, as Jameson puts it, "what is to be accomplished after the demolitions and the removals, and in the absence of all those lesser evils the liberals believed to be inherent in human nature." Rancière looks at the ambiguity of utopia from a slightly different angle. In his *The Politics of Aesthetics* he states that

[3] Jameson 5.

[4] Ibid.

"Utopia, in one respect, is a no-place, the extreme point of a polemical reconfiguration of the sensible, which breaks down the categories that define what is considered to be obvious. But it is also a proper place, a non-polemical distribution of the sensible universe where what one sees, what one says, and what one makes or does are rigorously adapted to one another."[5]

There is also a view – shared by many other scholars – that Utopianism creates a political program, giving direction and meaning to the idea of progress; progress is always on the way toward the notion of utopia (as opposed to ideology, says Karl Manheim, whose goal is to preserve / to conserve the existing social/political order).[6] There are, of course, difficulties in all this. Some imagined visions of utopias are partly satirical; at least this is what Edward Rothstein has to say: "we cannot be sure, for example, how much of More's vision was meant to be ironic. Some utopias are also often critical rather than affirmative, invoking the earthly elements of greed and envy and inequality, only to suggest that if the correct strategies are followed, they might be overcome or avoided."[7] But according to Edward Rothstein, "utopias, properly interpreted, are visions of what should be, even if they show what shouldn't be."[8] Macaulay expressed this attitude in his famous aphorism "An acre in Middlesex is better than a principality in Utopia."[9] So what happens when utopias are imagined not as no-places but as places transformed to real functioning states? Zamyatin's,

[5] Rancière 40.
[6] Manheim 45.
[7] Rothstein 23.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Sargent 6.

Orwell's, and Huxley's visions of such worlds show that such paradises appear to be just varieties of hell. From this perspective Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union could be also seen as utopian programs gone wrong, which evokes Kant's famous notion that "Out of the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing was ever made."

On Dystopia

If we assume that utopia cannot be approached with positive expectations, it can easily become a buffer zone that leads to "the worst of the possible worlds," that is, to dystopia. And all the way around – each dystopian society contains within it a utopian dream**,** which makes it rather difficult to draw a clear line between utopias and dystopias.

Indeed, in three classic dystopias, namely, Zamyatin's *We*, Orwell's *1984*, and Huxley's *Brave New World*, the societies were designed by their rulers to be utopias. D-503 is happy, and he knows that this happiness is due to his strict following of the regime ("*predpisaniya*"): everyone wakes up in the glass rooms at the same time, they walk to work, at a certain time they all return home and go to bed. For the satisfied citizens, no better society can be imagined, and none could more skillfully manage human desires and needs. Gottlieb puts it simpler: "The same thing for ones can be utopic for others – dystopian. The more perfect the utopia, the more stringent must be the controls."[10]

[10] Gottlieb 12.

On Utopia/anti-utopia/dystopia

When it comes to "labeling" the text as utopia, anti-utopia or dystopia, the terminological problem is well formulated and researched in Tom Moylan's *Scraps of Untainted Sky*. He says that the canonical texts by Zamyatin, Huxley and Orwell typify the form of the subgenre of utopia, as he defines dystopia. There was a tendency to reduce dystopian and anti-utopian texts to a single "anti-utopian" category and at the same time the tendency just to call the texts that explore "bad places" dystopias. It can be contended that Sargent suggests the simplest solution to the problem of definition. He simply says that if eutopia (and *U-topia)* defines texts that render the "good place," *dys*-topia names the places that explore the "bad place" but remain within the realm of utopian expression. And thus, the term "anti-utopia" would be reserved for the texts that are directed against Utopia and Utopian thought.[11] If going with this distinction, then all three texts that I analyze in this thesis should be called "dystopias."

With a decent number of critical studies treating dystopian fiction, there come three fairly popular ones that target larger audiences: Keith M. Booker's *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature: Fiction As Social Criticism*, then Booker's *Dystopian Literature. A Theory and Research Guide,* and Erika Gottlieb's *Dystopian Fiction. East and West. Universe of Terror and Trail.*

Keith Booker's books could serve as a good example of how one can do a bit of

[11] Sargent 20.

Krishnan Kumar's *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* and, of course, Booker's own book published in the same year as *Dystopian Literature.*

The book is divided into five parts. Part one is titled as "A Guide to Selected Modern Cultural Criticism with relevance to Dystopian Literature" and includes brief overviews of the theories by Theodor Adorno, Louis Althusser, Mikhail Bakhtin, Walter Benjamin, Michel Foucault, Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, and Friedrich Nietzsche. Part two is a guide to selected utopian fiction and focuses on such classic texts as Bacon's *New Atlantis*, Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, Campanella's *The City of the Sun*, Perkins Gilman's *Herland,* More's *Utopia*, Morris' *News from Nowhere*, Plato's *Republic*, and Wells' *A Modern Utopia*. Part three is a guide to a selection of 19th- and 20th-century dystopian fiction authors, among whom Bradbury, Burgess, Butler, Čapek, three texts by Philip K. Dick, Orwell, Huxley, Lewis, Le Guin, Skinner, Vonnegut, Wells, etc. A modest but still representative selection of Russian dystopian fiction includes various texts by Dostoevsky, Zamyatin, Aksyonov, Sinyavsky, Alexey Tolstoy, Voinovich, and Zinoviev. Then part four presents selected dystopian drama and finally part five is devoted to thirteen films that present their visions of the «worst of the worlds» including *Alphaville, Blade Runner, Brazil, The Running Man, Sleeper, Rollerball.*

Compared to *Dystopian Literature*, Booker's other work, *The Dystopian Impulse* is a traditional monograph that deals with dystopias as modes of social criticism. Starting with the idealization of the American dream and the ideal carceral society of consumer capitalism as the ideas behind Orlando Disneyworld, Keith

Booker gradually moves to the theory of utopianism and a brief historical overview of the genre of utopia that is basically an extended version of his above-mentioned book.

The text is divided into six chapters. First three deal with dystopian classics – Zamyatin's *We*, Huxley's *Brave New World*, and Orwell's *1984* – and offer different possibilities of a theoretical analysis that yet had been done by other people. Logically, part four concentrates on the texts by Skinner, Sinclair Lewis, Kurt Vonnegut, Gore Vidal, and Ray Bradbury that show nightmarish pictures of the crisis of a capitalist society.

The two final chapters are the most interesting to me because they deal with "postmodernist" dystopias in Russia (the Strugatskys brothers, Sinyavsky, Aksyonov, Voinovich) and the "west" (William Gibson, Delany's *Triton*, Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, and Pynchon's *Vineland*) suggesting that dystopia already came out of age in both parts of the world.

Finally, Gottlieb's *Dystopian Fiction. East and West. Universe of Terror and Trail* is the most systematic exploration of dystopian genre of the three. Gottlieb starts with the notion that dystopias are a post-Christian genre and therefore, one of the most important markers of the genre is the concept of heaven and hell. Consequently, the function of the narrator-protagonist of such text would be is to warn the readers about the impending catastrophe (Zamyatin, Huxley, Orwell). Then the discussion moves toward the correspondence between religious and secular concepts and again expectably to Marxist theory. Messianic promise of the utopian dream of socialism, says Gottlieb, as "a cure for the clearly obvious pathologies of capitalism had merely

led to a new pathologies in the form of the virulent psychoses of totalitarian dictatorship.[15] Therefore, the book aims at answering "three fundamental questions," namely, what are "the most salient characteristics of dystopian fiction," then whether we can we still speak of dystopian fiction in the Soviet Union after Zamyatin and in the satellite countries after 1948?"[16] And apparently the answer to that is yes, at least because there is a chapter in the book devoted to dystopian texts of the Soviet bloc 1950s-1980s. And the third question of the comparative nature: how those texts emerged in the USSR and the satellite countries differ from the ones written in the so called West that also gets answered.

The book has three parts: dystopia west, dystopia east: the Soviet Union 1920s-1950s, and dystopia east: the Soviet Bloc 1950s-1980s. Gottlieb also includes the most famous and discussed texts. The "western" part is illustrated by Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano*, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, and Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*. Although including Dostoevsky and Zamyatin in the "West" along with Aldous Huxley, Kurt Vonnegut, Margaret Atwood is rather an unexpected move taking into account the fact that Gottlieb confines this term to Great Britain and North America. And her comment that "although written in Russia, Zamyatin's *We* also belongs to this tradition by virtue of its undeniable influence on Orwell and the likelihood of its direct or indirect influence on Huxley"[17] doesn't

[15] Gottlieb 6.
[16] Id. 8.
[17] Id. 7

sound all that persuasive.

All in all, these three books on dystopias offer useful guidance to the theory and fiction of dystopian works

On the death of the genre

Classical dystopias (Zamyatin, Orwell, Huxley) portray an evil social structure, respond to a certain utopian program and explore such common themes as mind / body, technology, the collective versus the individual, reason versus imagination, etc. The aim of such texts would be to put the reader in a position of a judge and to warn him or her about the inevitability of an impending catastrophe. The texts that I analyze, namely, Erofeev's *Moscow to the End of the Line*, Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and Pelevin's *The Clay Machine-Gun,* try to transcend the genre by attempting to radically differ from their predecessors' exploits. They all are purposely anti-prophetic and in fact, play with the possibility of being prophetic. The reader here is not a judge, but a recipient of a good old parody: Vonnegut parodies science fiction, Erofeev – the whole tradition of Russian literature, and especially socialist realism, and Pelevin parodies all of the above and especially Erofeev. The concept of "nowhere" is taken to the extreme – in case of Pelevin's text, the novel takes place literally nowhere, in nothingness, in void, in absolute emptiness. But nearly the same could be said about Vonnegut's or Erofeev's text. This re-experiencing the past is not a liberating process. All three protagonists are sucked into the orbit of history but at the same time resist it in their own way. Just like the traditional dystopias they reject the idea of "livability" of the capitalist or the socialist

utopias. They all make a transit "stop" in their own utopias (Tralfamadore, Petushki, and Inner Mongolia) but then end up in the void (although, in case of Pelevin the void is utopia). In a way their "history" is the eternal struggling between heaven and hell, between freedom and happiness, etc. The theme was well articulated all throughout Dostoevsky's oeuvre. Therefore, here I evoke a rich heritage of his utopia that each of the three texts independently responds to.

In my thesis I specifically focus on this state between utopia and dystopia and argue that all three analyzed texts are manifestations of the end of the traditional dystopia as we knew it. Like all good novels, they go beyond the genre and set the course for the negation of negation, for nothingness as the ultimate mode of existence in the age when there is no hope. Thus, I start with exploring both socialist and capitalist utopias (as seen by Buber, Jameson, and Bauman) that the texts respond to (Erofeev responds to the socialist utopia, Vonnegut to capitalist utopia and Pelevin responds to both). Then I look at how all three texts articulate their places of "nowhere" as both utopian and dystopian at the same time. And finally, I analyze how all three texts explicitly and implicitly respond to Dostoevsky's first dystopian text, "The Grand Inquisitor," by re-writing or rejecting it.

Chapter 1.

Socialist Utopia vs. Capitalist Utopia

While during the Cold War – and long after, the mainstream political criticism would focus on the differences between socialist and capitalist systems, Susan Buck-Morss' book *Dreamworld and Catastrophe. The passing of Mass-Utopia* aimed to stress "the commonalities of the Cold War enemies, suggesting that socialism failed in this century because it mimicked capitalism too faithfully."[18]

Buck Morss elaborates on Marx's argument that "each system of political imaginary was deployed within economic and social conditions that were, at least potentially, in fundamental contradiction to that system." Therefore, the Cold War was over not because someone won and someone lost, but because the material developments challenged the legitimating of each political discourse.[19]

> We seemed, generally, to be reviving the official polarization between Eastern and Western discourses but this time with the positions reversed, the "East" using every stereotype of the Cold War to characterize its own totally unique, totally totalitarian past, and the West mouthing a standard criticism of capitalist, commodity culture that would have been acceptable in the USSR long before *glasnost'*.[20]

"Defining the enemy is the act that brings the collective into being," says at the beginning Buck-Morss.[21]

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[18] Buck-Morss XV.

[19] Id. 39.

[20] Id. 237.

[21] Id. 9.

Unsurprisingly, today's leftists are not so popular in either Russia or the US. In his *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* Slavoj Žižek illustrates their weak positions with a dissident joke about a fifteenth-century Russian peasant being happy to cover his enemy's testicles with dust while the latter were raping his wife. Today's leftists, says Žižek, are in the same predicament.[22] The 1990 seminar in Dubrovnik, as described in Susan Buck-Morss' book, is yet another colorful illustration of the point. The question of who better understands Marxism – the former "homo soveticus" who lived in a badly constructed socialist utopia or the western adepts of Marxism who used it as a theoretical tool to criticize capitalist society they lived in – is a merely rhetorical one. Susan Buck-Morss in the above mentioned book emphasizes not only the fact that from her perspective the soviet and the western scholars were "looking at the same images, but didn't see the same things"[23] when it comes to interpreting the visual objects or theorizing certain concepts, but also her amusement with the way the soviets were saving their dollars, not willing to have an extra cup of coffee. In this light criticizing the soviets for rejection of the past and not seeing things in perspective looks at least uncanny; especially when the argument about the similarities between the capitalist and socialist models is drawn on the basis of one of the soviet's philosophers (Valery Podoroga's concept of "political imaginary" (*politicheskoe voobrazhaemoe*) that Buck-Morss defines as a "topographical concept in the strict sense, not a political *logic*, but a political *landscape*, a concrete, visual

[22] Žižek 7.

[23] Buck-Morss 236.

field in which political actors are positioned."[24]). This is not to say that Buck-Morss' point about defining sovereignty through violence and how enemy is situated within a geographical landscape and how two biggest empires couldn't provide the basis to legitimate their sovereign action cannot be applicable to both systems. This is to say that one-sided imperialistic view on the other puts the western leftist in a quite uncomfortable position.

Recalling that 1990 seminar in Dubrovnik, Valery Podoroga in 2006 round table with Fredric Jameson in Russian Peredelkino concludes that they were just different Marxists: on the one side, there was Fredric Jameson with his Marxist critique of capitalism and Mamardashvili on the opposite side, working to renew Marx's and Hegel's ideas, and on this ground criticizing the existing socialist system he lived in.[25] Speaking of the latter, Podoroga recalls Mamardashvili telling him about his accidental meeting with the criminals on the street of Tbilisi and even after that unpleasant accident retaining the hope that the better time is coming. After all, it is impossible to equate those people who try to find some rights to those who scream that they are losing them. Or the way Žižek ironically puts it, "Socialism is bad – except when it serves to stabilize capitalism."[26]

Socialist utopia. Buber interprets Marx

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[24] Id. 12

[25] *Utopia I dialektika. Materialy kruglogo stola*. <http://www.polit.ru/article/2007/02/02/utopiya/>

[26] Zizek 18.

In his *Paths in Utopia* Martin Buber appears to be convinced that socialism is like a 'blind spot' or a 'place of nowhere' –a 'utopian' project, by its utter manifestation. He distinguishes between the concepts of society as an artificial state of things, operating in accordance with its interests, and the community, the community as a natural group of people linked by the common individual life. Buber calls for the implementation of community among people, 'community' in the second sense, which definitely is not an ideological state superstructure. From his work we find that the very realization of communion between people Buber saw in the socialist-oriented life of the early Kibbutz in Israel.

Despite his own 'utopian' image of an ideal community that would represent the nature of the socialism, he designs the chronology of ideas that take their starting point with the works and ideas of Saint-Simon, Fourier and Owen. All of them made an attempt to envision the future development of society. For instance, Buber notes that Saint-Simon lays down that society should progress from the dual to the unitary, the leadership of the whole should proceed from the social functions themselves, without the political order superimposing itself as an essentially distinct and special class. To this Fourier and Owen reply that this is only possible and permissible in a society based on joint production and consumption, i.e. the society composed of units in which the two are conjoined, hence of smaller communities aiming at a large measure of self-sufficiency. Fourier's answer affirms that each of these units is to be constituted like the present society in respect of property and the claims of the individual, only that the resultant society will be led from contradiction

to harmony by the concord of instinct and activity. Owen's reply, on the other hand, affirms that the transformation of society must be accomplished in its total structure as well as in each of its cells: only a just ordering of the individual units can establish a just order in the totality. This is the foundation of socialism.[27]

So the idea of socialism was born in the course of fruitful 'utopian' dialectics. However, the epithet utopian, according to Buber, "became the most potent missile in the fight of Marxism against non-Marxian socialism."[28] Contemporary social critics use this term in order to demonstrate suspicion and undermine the principles of modern social reality of the leading regime. Constructing his own utopia of community, Buber demonstrates an absolute rejection of the State as an ideological superstructure, which functions just to limit freedom and natural community. In search of 'real monsters' of socialism he appeals to its forerunners. Primarily, Proudhon, Kropotkin and Landauer. All of them have a common idea of transformation of society and State that definitely correlates with Buber's idea of decentralisation and disintegration of social order from the political one, without mere substitution of political regimes. He gives several fundamental arguments on that case: "First: so long as society was richly structured, so long as it was built up of manifold communities and communal units, all strong in vitality, the State was a wall narrowing one's outlook and restricting one's steps, but within this wall a spontaneous communal life could flourish and grow. But to the extent that the structure grew impoverished the wall became a prison. Second: such a structurally poor society

[27] Buber 12.
[28] Ibid.

awoke to self-consciousness, to consciousness of its existence as a society in contrast to the State, at the time of the French Revolution, and now it can only expect a structural renewal by limiting all not-social organizations to those functions which cannot be accomplished by society itself, while on the other hand the proper management of affairs grows out of the functioning society and creates its own organs.[29]

However, Buber is concerned about the relevance of each manifested idea. He argues Proudhon's non-individualistic approach toward the transformation of society, and his deviations towards federalism. Considering the group being a voluntary association of individuals, Buber admits: **"**Proudhon's socialism lacks one essential. For we cannot but doubt whether existing social units, even where the old community-forms remain, can still, being what they are, combine in justice; also whether any new units will ever be capable of it unless this same combination of freedom and order governs and shapes their inception."[30]

Kropotkin's idea of everlasting movable structure of society seems healthier to Buber, who explains: "Such a structure means mobilizing the social and political spontaneity of the nation to the greatest possible degree. This order, which Kropotkin calls Communism (a term usurped by that "negation of all freedom" so bitterly attacked by Proudhon) and which may be called more correctly Federal Communalism, "cannot be imposed – it could not live unless the constant, daily collaboration of all supported it. In an atmosphere of officialdom it would suffocate.

[29] Id. 23.
[30] Id. 28.

Consequently it cannot subsist unless it creates permanent contacts between everybody for the thousand and one common concerns."[31]

Both Kropotkin and Proudhon saw their positive goals in revolutionary acts, which Buber regards as their main tragedy.

Finally, Landauer is presented by Buber as a romantic socialist, who believed in organic cohesion of State and community - Individualism and Socialism united by the revolutionary spirit of Whitman's poems.[32]

All the above-mentioned ideas of the early socialist revolutionaries find their implications in the 'romantic' cooperative movements of England and France. Buber writes about these two waves as "they were no less expressions of the deep-seated crises accompanying the mechanization of modern economy than were the political movements proper Chartism in England and the two Revolutions in France."[33] Such experiments of Cooperative Movements were directed toward creation of social reality with an idealised image of heroic man.

Walking Buber's paths in utopia, we notice that 'romantic' and experimental are not only the moments of true cooperation, but also the 'great' leaders attempts' towards the renewal of society. Thus, we come across a curious paradox articulated by the philosopher: "neither in Marx nor Lenin does the idea give rise to any clear and consistent frame of reference for action. In both cases the decentralist element of re-structure is displaced by the centralist element of revolutionary politics."[34] The

[31] Id. 31.
[32] Id. 35.
[33] Id. 39.
[34] Id. 58-59.

conception of one absolute doctrine and action was lately developed in the dictatorship of Stalin and other "dictators of the proletariat".

Buber explains that Lenin did not advocate any general decentralist tendency, but his powerful call for instantaneous changes can be realized only by a decentralised order. Lately, as Buber notices, he will admit that: "We have become a bureaucratic Utopia."[35]

Thus, analyzing the Soviet implementation of the socialist utopia, Buber concludes that "in general individual submits to this regime, which grants him so little freedom of thought and action, perhaps because there is no going back and as regards technical achievements there is at least a going forward.[36]

Apparently, on the state level socialism is a great utopia, while in the small commune its principles can be easily implemented. Basically, because of the tight collective interests of its associates. Buber asserts on this behalf:

> "it must be built up of little societies on the basis of communal life and of the associations of these societies; and the mutual relations of the societies and their associations must be determined to the greatest possible extent by the social principle -- the principle of inner cohesion, collaboration and mutual stimulation. In other words: only a structurally rich society can claim the inheritance of the State."[37]

Buber emphasizes that state, which in its totalitarian form undermine and split the free associations, is not so dangerous as the presence of the centralistic power inside a community. According to the author, when it comes into the commune structure, it

[35] Id. 62.
[36] Id. 73.
[37] Id. 50.

does politicize a society to an ever-increasing extent. In this case an individual is destined to accept the rules of the great collectivities, which cannot substitute priceless autonomy of human relationships; therefore, the life of the individual become meaningful and functional because of perpetual dialogue with a repressive hierarchical apparatus (system).[38]

The salvation Buber sees in several tactical steps. First, in the establishment of peace which will accentuate social principle over political one. Moreover, in order to avoid 'ad libitum' in the political representation of the centralist authority, the group of humans should let itself be represented in the management of its common affairs. So it gives them a chance to form a powerful and stable communication inside.[39]

The concept of the community is the central one in the Buber's philosophy, and according to him, it was absolutely neglected by the Socialists of all times. So that he represents his own principles of collective co-existence which correlates with the early Kibbutz in Israel. These are some of Buber's remarks:

> Community should not be made into a principle; it, too, should always satisfy a situation rather than an abstraction...The idea of community must be guarded against all contamination by sentimentality or emotionalism. Community is never a mere attitude of mind, and if it is feeling it is an inner disposition that is felt. Community is the inner disposition or constitution of a life in common, which knows and embraces in itself hard "calculation", adverse "chance", the sudden access of "anxiety". It is community of tribulation and only because of that community of spirit; community of toil and only because of that community of salvation. A community of faith truly exists only when it is a community of work." [40]

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[38] Id. 75.

[39] Id. 76.

[40] Id. 76-77

Buber clearly defines the utopian elements in socialism, starting with the notion of Utopia in its broad context: “The Utopian picture is a picture of what "should be", and the visionary is one who wishes it to be. Therefore some call the Utopias wish-pictures, but that again does not tell us enough.”[41] Unlike the socialistic ideology, Buber does not neglect the very essence of human nature, while accepting Marx’s ideas of self-regulating community. He always remembers about human spirit and emphasizes the supra-personal communal bounds: “What is at work here is the longing for that Tightness which, in religious or philosophical vision, is experienced as revelation or idea, and which of its very nature cannot be realized in the individual, but only in human community.”[42]

Religion is also considered as a Utopian element: “The vision of Tightness in Revelation is realized in the picture of a perfect time -- as messianic eschatology; the vision of rightness in the Ideal is realized in the picture of a perfect space -- as Utopia.... Eschatology means perfection of creation; Utopia the unfolding of the possibilities, latent in mankind's communal life, of a "right" order.”[43]

Furthermore Buber reconsiders technical and social Utopias and its ‘messianic spirit’.

> Utopias which revel in technical fantasias mostly find foothold nowadays only in the feebler species of novel, in which little or none of the imagination that went into the grand Utopias of old can be discovered. Those, on the contrary, which undertake to deliver a blueprint of the perfect social structure, turn into systems. But into these "utopian" social

[41] Id. 14

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

systems there enters all the force of dispossessed Messianism."[44]

Finally, in the socialist meeting of 1928 Buber expresses the ideas upon socialism (Russian in particular). There he warns:

> There can be pseudo-realization of socialism, where the real life of man to man is but little changed. The real living together of man with man can only thrive where people have the real things of their common life in common; where they can experience, discuss 'and administer them together; where real fellowships and real work Guilds exist. We see more or less from the Russian attempt at realization that human relationships remain essentially unchanged when they are geared to a socialist-centralist hegemony which rules the life of individuals and the life of the natural social groups. Needless to say we cannot and do not want to go back to primitive agrarian communism or to the corporate State of the Christian Middle Ages. We must be quite unromantic, and, living wholly in the present, out of the recalcitrant material of our own day in history, fashion a true community.[45]

As we can see from Buber's "Paths," socialism in its realization was an absolutely 'utopian' project, because it neglected a human factor in the manifested programme. Essentially, it appeared to be a political substitution, rather than a renewal of society, which has led to communist totalitarianism of the Soviets. Therefore, Martin Buber sees in utopian socialism only delusion, obscurantism and ideological obfuscation.

Zygmunt Bauman in his article "Inhumanity is part of human nature" mentions Slavoj Žižek, who once said that "two German films that show the everyday life of the Ossis were coined, do not capture the essence of communist totalitarianism; moreover, they falsify its reality. If you want to know and tell others what life under communism was like, you should make films based on Varlam Shalamov's "Tales

[44] Id. 15.
[45] Id. 17.

from Kolyma." Using Žižek's rhetoric against the Slovenian writer, Bauman calls him 'a character lifted straight out the age of dada and *épater le bourgeois* into an age when there is nobody left to be "épatéd" because everyone has already been "épatéd" up to their eyeballs and driven completely mad by "épatation" of every kind. And maintaining Žižek's suggestion he says: "the truth of communism was concealed in the barracks of Magadan rather than permeating the streets of Tambov or Yaroslavl. And the truth of Nazism must have been located in Dachau and Auschwitz, rather than breeding in the village whose story is told in such excruciating detail in the TV series "Heimat".[46]

Observing the two totalitarian regimes, Bauman notes the most salient and dystopian symptom of modernity: "Surely, compared with the refined artistry of cinema, television, Nintendo or Play Station, the everyday life in the barracks of the concentration camps or the communist bloc must seem like some abortive creations produced by provincial amateurs and manufacturers of cheap kitsch." By this assertion, the philosopher ironically highlights that the overall tone of suspicion and anxiety creates 'utopian' narratives of nowadays which, in fact, represent 'utopian' scenarios: "an episode in which some beat and others are beaten. An episode that had to end with whipping those who had done the beating and rewarding those who were beaten. And after ending them, we could lock their yellowing and withered relics in archives, knowing they will never again trouble those of us who have locked them away."[47]

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46 Bauman, "Inhumanity is Part of Human Nature."

[47] Id.

Therefore, apparently we cannot be sure whether history, which returns in diverse forms in modern narratives, can be explained in its very essence. It is a great temptation for us to mock the horrors of the past in the movies; however, we "have to get beyond the confines of barbed wire"[48] in order to examine totalitarian laboratories from the inside perspective, which is also a 'utopian' idea.

Fredric Jameson summed it all up in his "Politics of Utopia" says "Utopia would seem to offer the spectacle of one of those rare phenomena whose concept is indistinguishable from its reality, whose ontology coincides with its representation"[49]

Capitalist Utopia

> "It is the awkward and unwieldy, unreliable, resistant and
> otherwise frustrating things that force themselves
> into our vision, attention and thought."
> Zygmunt Bauman "Identity in the Globalizing World"

In "Identity in the Globalizing World," Bauman surveys the construction of human identity, which was embodied in Marx and Engels's theory, and provided the ground for the modern capitalist idea: "Marx and Engels praised the capitalists, the bourgeois revolutionaries, for 'melting the solids and profaning the sacreds' which had for long centuries cramped human creative powers... Predestination was replaced with 'life project', fate with vocation - and a 'human nature' into which one was born was replaced with 'identity' which one need to saw up and make fit."[50] Bauman

[48] Id.

[49] Jameson, "Politics of Utopia" 35.

[50] Bauman 3.

postulates the main features of modern society, which greatly influenced the everlasting process of the construction of human identity. Firstly, he defines our epoch as overwhelmed with flexible realities and freedom of choice pregnant with twins: with human rights and 'totalitarian temptation.'[51] To an extent, his ideas correspond with Fredric Jameson's criticism of postmodernity and capitalism, while "Antinomies of Postmodernity" perfectly match "Liquid Modernity" when it comes to the critique of the disillusioned mix of capitalist utopias.

The most poignant aspect of capitalist utopias is this tension with the dystopic picture of the world offered by Marxist social critics. In the interview Jameson declared:

> I argued that the various attempts to devise Utopias are the most important political acts aimed at a breakthrough uniformity and standardization of late capitalism, which inspires that "no alternative to the impossible" and that no other social system is not sustainable. Necessary function of utopia today is to imagine a different social system. (Jameson, polit.ru)

Jameson's antinomies concern Kant's understanding of temporality ('a priori representations') and the mode of production, which is thought by the philosopher in terms of change and permanence, or variety and homogeneity.

As a result, the postmodern state presupposes that the Bergsonian opposition has dropped out along with that virtual eternity or slow permanence; therefore, it represents the eclipse of inner time and the end of subject-object dualism.[52]

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[51] Id. 4.

[52] Jameson, "Antinomies" 51-52.

Jameson's key notion of human anxiety, as a critique of the capitalistic order, was influenced by Sartre (probably, by his most remarkable novel "Nausea"). He indicates: "Sartre (who has been called the last of the classical intellectuals)... is a figure that has seemed to presuppose an omnipresence of Error, variously defined as superstition, mystification, ignorance, class ideology and philosophical idealism (or 'metaphysics'), in such a way that to remove it by way of the operations of demystification leaves a space in which therapeutic anxiety goes hand in hand with heightened self-consciousness and reflexivity in a variety of senses, if not, indeed with Truth as such"[53]

Only anxiety with an actual political order can be resulted in effective and persistent reflexivity in the 'utopic' perspectives of global changes. Of course, it does not give substantial results, however, only anxiety is able to confirm our sense of being. In fact, according to Jameson: "it seems to be easier for us today to imagine the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of late capitalism... Postmodernism as an ideology, however, is better grasped as a symptom of the deeper structural changes in our society and its culture as a whole, or in other words, in the modes of production."[54]

Considering the fact of the great machinery of consumption, our perception of temporality is modified within the velocity, Zygmunt Bauman noted:

> the twentieth century excelled in the overproduction of means; means have been produced at a constantly accelerating speed, overtaking the known, let alone acutely felt, needs. Abundant means came to seek the ends which

[53] Ibid. 55.

[54] Ibid. 50.

> they could serve; it was the turn of the solutions to search desperately for not-yet-articulated problems which they could resolve. On the other hand, though, the ends have become ever more diffuse, scattered and uncertain: the most profuse source of anxiety, the great unknown of men's and women's lives.[55]

Moreover, he states that "the main, the most nerve-wracking worry is not how to find a place inside a solid frame of social class or category, and – having found it – how to guard it and avoid eviction; what makes one worry is the suspicion that the hard-won frame will soon be torn apart or melted."[56]

With regard to consumerism Jameson remarked: "The consumerism of the capitalistic system causes antipathy among the US youngsters. That's why there is a great desire to go beyond the frame of the system and create such a type of human relationships which will not be defined through the form of productive relationships. And this occurs in the cultural (musical) sphere."[57]

Each time when we try to embed ourselves in social frames we fail because we are forced to feel uncertainty and the desire to go far beyond the system. Jameson insistently articulated the sense of temporality in the postmodern world:

> [...] what begins to emerge as some deeper and more fundamental constitution of postmodernity itself, at least in its temporal dimension – is henceforth, where everything now submits to the perpetual change of fashion and media image, that nothing can change any longer. This is the sense of the revival of that 'end of history' Alexandre Kojève thought he could find in Hegel and Marx, and which he took to mean some ultimate achievement of democratic equality (and the value equivalence of

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[55] Bauman. 6.

[56] Ibid. 7.

[57] Jameson 54.

> individual economic and juridical subjects) in both American capitalism and Soviet communism, identifying a significant variant of it what he called a Japanese 'snobisme', but that we can today identify as postmodernity itself (the free play of masks and roles without content or substance).[58]

Furthermore, one more paradox, which was articulated by Jameson on the behalf of temporality is a "rhetoric of absolute change" (or 'permanent revolution'). The meaning of it lies in what he calls "the language of absolute identity and standardization". According to Jameson,

> it was cooked up by the great corporations, whose concept of innovation is best illustrated by the neologism and the logo and their equivalents in the realm of built space, 'lifestyle' corporate culture, and psychic programming. The persistence of the Same through absolute Difference – the same street with different buildings, the same culture with through momentous new sheddings of skin – discredits change, since henceforth the only conceivable radical change would consist in putting an end to change itself. But here the antinomy really does result in the blocking or paralysis of thought, since the impossibility of thinking another system except by way of the cancellation of this one ends up discrediting the utopian imagination itself, which is fantasized as a loss of everything we know experientially, from our libidinal investments to our psychic habits, and in particular the artificial excitements of consumption and fashion.[59]

A similar idea about 'utopian' temporality of the consumer society was formulated by Zygmunt Bauman. He placed the territory of the shopping malls in alter space, which opposes Bakhtin's 'home-made' carnival:

> Mikhail Bakhtin's 'carnivals' used to be celebrated inside the home territory where 'routine life' was at other times conducted, and so allowed

[58] Ibid.

[59] Id. 60.

> to lay bare the normally hidden alternatives which daily life contained. Unlike them, the trips to the shopping malls are expeditions to another world starkly different from the rest of daily life, to that 'elsewhere' where one can experience briefly that self-confidence and 'authenticity' which one is seeking in vain in routine daily pursuits. Shopping expeditions fill the void left by the travels no longer undertaken by the imagination to an alternative, more secure, humane and just society.[60]

Thus, we can observe that the capitalist utopia becomes more "authentic" because we cannot imagine it in its very nature, since it "sells" authenticity in the shopping malls, which are not really an alter reality for a consumer.

Diminishing the utopian idea in political discourse, according to Jameson, is probably a more effective therapy. Postmodernity itself is characterized by a minimization of the sense of history and "the imagination of historical difference". In addition it "intertwined with the loss of that place beyond all history (or after its end) which we called utopia."[61] In order to represent the radical political programme it is necessary to have a conception of systemic otherness of an alternate society; thus, the antimony of the postmodernity appears in the form of dystopia, which, in fact, linked with utopia dialectically.

As we have already known the main feature of literary dystopia is critics and undermining of utopian ideas, which are represented in the conflict with human nature. Primarily it concerns repressive social control systems and progressive development of technology or mass production. Both 'evils' are always detected and dramatized in the course of the dynamic plot. Analyzing utopias Jameson uses two

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[60] Bauman 9-10.

[61] Jameson 36.

approaches: causal and institutional one. In causal he distinguishes the ‘roots of all evils’ (in the capitalist utopia it is a ‘wish fulfillment’). Jameson notes that “the root of all evil is to be found in gold or money, and that it is greed (as a psychological evil) which needs to be somehow repressed by properly utopian laws and arrangements in order to arrive at some better and more humane form of life. Construction perspective presupposes political institutions and its anonymous subject.[62] Both of these approaches clearly involve pleasure: almost by definition the wish fulfilment has something to do with pleasure, even though it may involve a long detour and a multiple mediation through substitutes. Pleasure, according to Jameson, in the postmodern society transforms into neurotic state, since sexuality, itself a meaningless biological fact, is in such societies far less invested with all the symbolic meanings with which we modern and sophisticated people endow it.[63] Furthermore, Jameson assumes that "fear of utopia is intimately linked with the fear of aphanisis, or loss of desire: the sexlessness of utopians is a constant in the anti-utopian tradition." Finally, he declares that the addictiveness and sexuality, are the very emblems of human culture as such, the very supplements that define us as something other than mere animals: competitiveness and passion.[64]

[62] Id. 37.
[63] Id. 50.
[64] Id. 53.

Jameson argues that the utopianism of the demand becomes circular and reveals the space of the utopian leap, the gap between our empirical present and the utopian arrangements of this imaginary future.[65]

Influenced by Louis Marin's book, Jameson states that utopia intrinsically has a negative mode, since its function is to represent our inability to imagine such a future in a non-utopian present without historicity or futurity. Thus, the utopian model of reality is situated beyond empiricity or historicity and tries to reveal the ideological closure of the system in which we are "trapped and confined" (46). It correlates with the idea of capitalism of the Frankfurt School. They believe that the logic of the capitalist system is positive and it tends to get rid of its the negative forms.

In the rundown of the critical ideas of the capitalism by Žižek, Bauman and Jameson we can notice some common views on the issue of consumerism, which overlap and function as a 'dystopic' comments to the current capitalistic regime.
For instance, Žižek talks about the "society of choice" as an "ideological investment in the topic of choice today." As a point of departure he takes the existentialists' idea of "authentic" existential choice, which "involves a full existential engagement as opposed to the superficial choices."

Jameson explains that people cannot imagine their future, which is a critique of the system itself, since that very system makes us think about our future. That is why it transforms time in an everlasting present. Such critique of the system is not destructive – vice versa, it opens itself for new possibilities to think future, creating

[65] Id. 38.

projects of this future. He assumes that the critique of capitalism is not destructive; however, capitalism is destructive by itself.[66]

> Bauman finds the collapse of the social community as an individual search for identity. He cites Jock Young who said: "Right when community collapses, identity is invented." 'Identity' owes the attention it attracts and the passions it begets to being a surrogate of community: of that allegedly 'natural home' which is no longer available in the rapidly privatized and individualized, fast globalizing world, and which for that reason can be safely imagined as a cozy shelter of security and confidence, and as such hotly desired."

In a nutshell, socialist or capitalist utopia represents the dialectical combination of the one dystopian project. Logically, Fredric Jameson concludes: "I have hoped to convey something that I have not yet said: namely that utopias are non-fictional, even though they are also non-existent. Utopias in fact come to us as barely audible messages from a future that may never come into being."[67]

Utopia and Religion

In the distinctions made between socialist and capitalist utopias it is necessary to define the place of religion, considering the fact that each utopia is based on the idea of absolute happiness. From the dystopian perspective we have to reveal the repressive nature of the whimsical and overwhelming joy of life in order to avoid great delusion. From this point of view, we should note that utopian communities are organized by the principle of everybody's faith in happiness and tediousness of being,

[66] Jameson, "Utopia I dialektika."

[67] Jameson, "Politics of Utopia" 53.

which is regulated by the state repressive apparatus. As in More's text sterile Catholicism is regulated by the state, which keeps people in fear of sins and in hope of redemption, modern political utopias use the principles of religion as a form of social organization in order to rationalize human spirit and manipulate it.

Let us consider the relation between utopian socialism, capitalism and religion or atheism. And in the framework of this analysis define how socialist utopians imagine the society of future – religious or atheist – and why did they represent it so? Moreover, it is essential to characterize the attributes of Christianity that were used in these utopias.

Martin Buber in his "Paths in Utopia" stresses that religion and socialism overlap in the point of "concrete personal life". He argues that inward aspect is important for both. However, Buber believes that the transformation of society is above all the transformation of man, rather than a change in the state. His socialism has religious and utopian characters. Buber always opposes the brutal politics of identification with religion and morality: "Religion – is the goal and the way; politics – is its goals and means. The religious purpose is to indicate the direction; it is never used in the historical process".[68] In fact, Buber's philosophy reveals certain affinities with existentialism. At the same time, he continues the tradition of Judaic prophecy, considering man in his relationship with God and claiming that modern man is "on the edge," in need of being rescued from the mass depersonalization and dehumanization. "Paths in Utopia" was written under the influence of the kibbutz

[68] Buber. 63.

movement known from other experiments and collective forms of life in Israel. So, daily living, but not a world-rejecting solemn ritual should express man's commitment to God according to Buber's philosophy. It is far from the socialist utopia, which manifested collective well-being, declaring absolute break with God and interiorizing transcendence. Buber's religious socialism pays the most austere attention to existential facts. For instance, the author of the "Paths in Utopia" asserts: "the fact that God is, the world is, and the concrete person stands before God and in the world."[69] Synthesizing socialism and religion Buber suggests the society of future, which will "serve their lord and master in the midst of simple, unexalted, unselected reality, a reality not so much chosen by them as sent to them just as it is; they are community only if they prepare the way to the Promised Land through the thickets of this pathless hour. True, it is not "works" that count, but the work of faith does. A community of faith truly exists only when it is a community of work." (Buber76-77)

In contrast to Buber, the socialism of the October Revolution rejected religion and separated it from the state. This atheistic ideology presupposed the total belief in historical materialism and evolutionism. Darwin and Marx brought up people of new type: octobrist, komsomolec and pioneers. Atheism as a new religion was a moral code that covered its cult essence. Communism used it in order to give people hope in happiness and maturity, whereas, the actual inhabitants of the Soviet lands were infirm, infantile cogs of the system. Buber emphasized that communities should be

[69] Id. 65.

built on the balanced understanding of the relationship between idea and reality, right proportion between spiritual act and work. In this case relevant centralization is where only a community of communities merits the title of Commonwealth.[70] Buber was aware of possibility of great illusion of "totalitarian" well-being and happiness, which could be implied with religious or socialistic ideas in their utter realization, so that he expresses his anticipation: "The picture I have hastily sketched will doubtless be laid among the documents of "Utopian Socialism" until the storm turns them up again. Just as I do not believe in Marx's "gestation" of the new form, so I do not believe either in Bakunin's virgin-birth from the womb of Revolution. But I do believe in the meeting of idea and fate in the creative hour."[71]

As for capitalism, it is a purely cultic un-dogmatic religion, as Walter Benjamin calls it in his "Capitalism as religion." He describes the nature of the capitalism "as it developed parasitically in Christianity in the West – not in Calvinism alone, but also, as must be shown, in the remaining orthodox Christian movements – in such a way that, in the end, its history is essentially the history of its parasites of capitalism... Compare the holy iconography of various religions on the one hand with the banknotes of various countries on the other: the spirit that speaks from the ornamentation of banknotes.[72] He articulates three characteristics of the religious structure of the capitalism. First of all, he defines capitalism as a purely religious cult in the most extreme form. It does not have any special dogma or theology; moreover,

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[70] Id. 78.

[71] Id.

[72] Benjamin 188.

its utilitarianism gains religious coloring (or we would rather say 'masking'). Secondly, the continuous duration of the cult is "*sans rêve et sans merci*". It means that cult does not know the time gap, which causes historical temporality. Every day, according to the philosopher, it celebrates its extreme exhibition of sacred consumerism. The third trait of the capitalist religion's uniqueness is blame, which arouses "an enormous feeling of guilt not itself knowing how to repent, grasps at the cult, not in order to repent for this guilt, but to make it universal, to hammer it into consciousness and finally and above all to include God himself in this guilt, in order to finally interest him in repentance."[73] Consequently, capitalism uses the principles of religion and demonstrates rejection of the transcendence appealing to God, who is a witness of this rejection. It is presumably the first case of blaming rather than a repenting cult. An enormous feeling of guilt not itself knowing how to repent, grasps at the cult, not in order to repent of this guilt, but to make it universal, to hammer it into consciousness and finally and above all to include God himself in his guilt, in order to finally interest him in repentance.[74]

Furthermore, in the philosophy of Nietzsche, in Freudian psychoanalysis and in Marx's theory Benjamin sees the self-made religion of capitalism, which actually represents utopian independence from the cult. Trying to suppress capitalism from inside, they just celebrate the temple of capitalist cult:

> Freudian theory also belongs to the priestly rule of this cult... The repressed, the sinful imagination is at bottom, still an illuminating analogy to capital – to which the hell of the unconscious pays interest... Nietzsche

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid.

> prejudged that in this breaking open of the heavens through increased humanization, the religion blame is and remains... Marx: the non-inverting capitalism becomes socialism with interest and compound interest, which functions of blame.[75]

Thus, if capitalism in itself is a religion, Christianity (and even more derivatives from its spiritual structure) is no more than an instrument. Benjamin does not leave even the slightest gap between the basis and spirit. As a result, instead of answers, we find whimsical divergent series of different symptoms. Firstly, Benjamin introduced a rule of immanence where "personal independence" is no more than a fiction, a form of global enslavement a binding debt. Moreover, Christianity, according to the philosopher served the system of capitalistic order with all the necessary attributes of sacrality. So, now we can observe that religious institutions are the part of consumerism and all its institutional levels. For instance, Zygmunt Bauman in "Liquid Modernity" defines a specific post-modern form of religion – fundamentalism. He indicates the paradoxical use of religion by the fundamentalists, whose choice liberates from the agony of choice. Compliance to God and the religious community will definitely liberate the individual from the uncertainty of choice making. Moreover, we can find the idea of "aestheticization" of church communities. Also he suggests that religious sects and churches nowadays function as leisure institutions that simulate the idea of God and rather look like modern "carnivals" communities that illustrate the symptoms of liquid modernity.[76]

Socialism itself, as we will argue in further is an implementation of the idea of

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[75] Ibid.

[76] Id. 199-201.

universal happiness. Communism as a religion leaves his supporters no chance to retreat, even such a (fictitious, according to “Capitalism as Religion”) outputs, as Marxism, psychoanalysis, and Nietzscheanism, since communism announces the release of a universal, there is essentially no idea of choice. If in the framework of the capitalist cult God continues to be honored after his death, communism, on the other hand, has no other choice as to become a sacralized form of collective life.

The law of immanence of the new faith is not yet clear, so its supporters declared dogma scientifically, calling theology an ideology. However, capitalism, just like religion, talk about the principle under which lack of redemption and the presence of increasing debt and economics substitutes for the theology of rationality. There is a global confrontation between the two religions in nowadays post-soviet world, the old one and a new one, productive, because the new religion duplicates key moments of the old. The October Revolution was thought as a ransom, as a transformation increasing debt in the fulfillment of the promise. But this is a redemption not only struck by capitalism in its highest point of enslavement duty and guilt, but on the contrary, it became possible due to the fact that bondage was minimal, and could still be played in the future. Redemption may yet turn into debt.

Chapter 2

Between Utopia and Dystopia

In "Frontiers of Utopia: Past and Present" Louis Marin offers a good, down-to-earth illustrative example of both totality and limits of utopia. He talks about two photos that visitors to the observation deck of the Sears Tower can purchase. One is taken from the top floor of the building, and another one - the view of the tower from the ground at a distance. The two views, says Marin, confront each other: on the one hand, a dominating gaze that totalizes everything within the horizon, and on the other hand, a center that screams power and control but at the same time is visible and therefore vulnerable. Marin is interested not in opposition between the two visions, but in looking at them together and thus understanding "the frontiers that limit utopia, if such frontiers "really" exist and the frontiers that any utopia traces if any utopian is capable of tracing such frontiers."[77] This tension between frontier and horizon, totality and infinity, limit and transcendence, closure and liberty extends to the way dystopia interacts with utopia, if we assume that every dystopia contains within itself a utopian dream. In our case, it is interesting to see how these frontiers work with respect to the dystopian narratives of Venedikt Erofeev, Kurt Vonnegut and Victor Pelevin.

[77] Marin 402.

THE CASE OF VENEDIKT EROFEEV

"It rushed like a dark, winged storm,
And was lost in the abyss of time...
Tram-driver, stop,
Stop the tram now."
Nikolai Gumilyov (1921)

Preaching and playing

Venedikt Erofeev's *Moscow to the End of the Line* just like any other Russian dystopia appeals to history trying to find that much needed link between the Russian "yesterday" and the Russian "tomorrow". But what makes it very different from the predecessors (Dostoevsky, Zamyatin) is its unique architecture that creates an art field where evangelic myth goes in line with the social realist myth, where Venya the alcoholic is not in conflict with Venya the thinker, where intense lyricism is followed by laughter and [Bakhtinian] carnival, and the dystopian train limits the grand scale of Venichka's utopian dream. Also, I will argue that Erofeev's dystopia is non-prophetic and, just like *Slaughterhouse Five* and *The Clay Machine-Gun,* it does not depict the future or even try to understand how it happened that "today" looks so unlivable and so nightmarish. Several interpretations of Erofeev's text were developed further. One is based on the assumption that the whole text is a "big citation" composed from different fragments easily and not so easily identifiable by a common readership (N. Bogomolov); Kuritsyn and Sukhih argue about Russian alcoholic myth; Epstein, Lipovetsky and many others suggest the biblical interpretation, with a focus on the Russian 'holy fool' image.

In the Soviet Union the poem, as the author defined the genre (allusion to Gogol), was published in 1988-89 in a journal, *Sobriety and Culture* under the label of the mass campaign against alcoholism. Indeed, it is due to an excessive amount of alcohol Venya does not reach his paradise in Petushki and dies in the hell of Moscow city. Russian literary critic Igor Sukhih points out Venya's inability to deal with the space. He is lost from the very beginning and it becomes gradually clear that he won't find his way: while being able to talk to angels, god, and the devil, Venya has no access to the centre of the action – the Kremlin: "I set out for the center all the same in order to see the Kremlin at least once, meanwhile thinking, "I won't see any Kremlin anyway and I'll end up right at the Kursk station."[78] After all, as Valeriya Navodvorskaya, one of the few Russian liberal politicians, mentioned in one of her interviews, "the familiar corps from the Red Square informed us that the Kremlin was rotten long time ago. Touch it and it'll come apart."[79]

In a nutshell, this is the diary of a drunk traveler on the train. Fired from his job ("Anyway, they fired me. Me, the thoughtful prince, the analyst lovingly inspecting the souls of his people – me, who was considered, at the bottom, a fink and a collaborator and, at the top, a good-for-nothing with an unstable mind. The lower strata did not wish to see me, and the higher-ups couldn't speak of me without laughing. "The top strata could not and the lower did not want to," as Lenin would

[78] Erofeev, *Moscow to the End of the Line* 14.

[79] Novodvorskaya,.

have put it. What does this betoken, connoisseurs of the philosophy of history? Absolutely right – next payday, I'll get the shit beaten out of me, according to the laws of good and beauty, next payday being the day after tomorrow, which means that by the day after tomorrow they'll be kicking my ass around."[80]), Venedikt drinks for a week and then on Friday, with a major hangover, he gets on the train Moskow-Petushki to see his lover and a son. He is trapped in his train like those pigeons in the game described by Vanya right before his death in Victor Pelevin's dystopia *Omon Ra*: "And you remember, when the crate comes down, the pigeon starts trying to fly off and beats its wings against the sides, so the crate even jumps about?"[81] Venya drinks more and more, recalling his recent past, meets several people on the train and that's about it. A sober reader of the journal *Sobriety and Culture*, writes Igor Sukhih, could say that there is no real action: "the drunk hero wakes up in the hallway, fantasize something and then gets knocked out."[82] Venya's monologue, including his meetings with god, the devil, angels, the sphinx, etc., would be no more than a hangover syndrome. Finally, the fantasy ends with a murder in the same hallway where it all started. Only that, as Venya himself says, anticipating the narrow-mindedness of the general audience: "the muzhik does not read and drink, he drinks without reading."[83] And so comes the sacramental question that Venya asks either himself or his readers: "after all, what's the vodka got to do with it?"[84] Despite

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[80] Erofeev. 41.

[81] Pelevin, *Omon Ra* 107.

[82] Sukhih.

[83] Erofeev 182.

[84] Id. 67.

its simplicity, the Russian myth about alcoholism is an important part of understanding *Moscow at the End of the Line* as a dystopian text. Erofeev presents an alcohol almost as a national symbol and a part of the communist aesthetics: "All worthwhile people in Russia, all the necessary people, they all drank like pigs. But the superfluous, the muddle-headed ones, they didn't drink."[85] Vodka is the force that keeps everything afloat (remember Venya's work arrangement) and also a measure of defining the good and bad:

> if a person feels nasty in the morning but is full of plans and dreams and vigor in the evening, he is a very bad person. But take someone who's full of energy and hope in the morning, but overwhelmed with exhaustion in the evening – for sure he's a trashy, narrow-minded mediocrity. That sort of person is disgusting to me." Those who like sunrise and sunset are "simply bastards.[86]

Also, Venichka tries to look at the eyes of his people and those are the drunken eyes, not active at any point of time; after all, just like his own, they represent the world of lack as opposed to the other world of "ready cash" that Vonnegut depicts in his *Slaughterhouse Five.*

> I like that. I like it that my country's people have such empty, bulging eyes. This instills in me a feeling of legitimate pride. You can imagine what the eyes are like where everything is bought and sold – deeply hidden, secretive, predatory and frightening. Devaluation, unemployment, pauperism… People look at you distrustfully, with restless anxiety and torment. That's the kind of eyes they have in the world of Ready Cash.[87]
>
> On the other hand, my people have such eyes! They're constantly

[85] Id. 80.

[86] Id. 26.

[87] Id. 28.

> bulging but with no tension of any kind in them. There's complete lack of any sense, but then, what power! (what spiritual power!) These eyes will not sell out. They'll not sell or buy anything, whatever happens to my country. In days of doubt, in days of burdensome reflection, at the time of any trial or calamity, these eyes will not blink. They don't give a good Goddamn about anything.[88]

The comparison between "Us" and "Them" gets developed even further when Venya the thinker takes the stage and recalls all his European and overseas travels:

> But, tell us, was there no freedom there either? And freedom thus remains a phantom on that continent of sorrow, as they write in our newspapers? Tell us." "Yes," I responded, and freedom thus remains a phantom on that continent of sorrow, and the people, thus, have become so used to it that they almost don't notice. Just think, they don't have – I walked around a lot and observed them closely – not in a single grimace or gesture or remark do they have anything like the awkwardness to which we have been accustomed. On every rotten face there is as much dignity expressed in a minute as would last us for our whole great Seven Year Plan.[89]

At this point it is clear that even a good dosage of alcohol cannot ruin the bitter taste of Soviet reality: "Everything should take place slowly and incorrectly so the man doesn't get a chance to start feeling proud, so that man is sad and perplexed."[90]

While Venya the drinker slowly starts dreaming about the world of Petushki, Venya the thinker already suspects that Petushki is unattainable utopia and there is no way he can get there:

> But why do the angels become troubled just as soon as you start talking about the joys of the Petushki platform and after? Do they think that nobody is waiting for me there? Or that the train will be derailed, or

[88] Ibid.

[89] Id. 101.

[90] Id. 14.

> that ticket inspectors will put me off in Kupavna? Or that somewhere around kilometer 105 I'll get sleepy from the wine and doze off and be strangled like a young boy or cut up like a little girl? Why are the angels troubled? Why have they fallen silent? My tomorrow is bright. Our tomorrow is brighter than our yesterday and our today. But who'll see to it that our day after tomorrow won't be worse than our day before yesterday?[91]

The visions on the train Moscow-Petushki gradually become more and more horrifying and Venya's tomorrow looks even less promising than Venya's yesterday. Likewise, the utopian world of the "place where the birds never cease singing, not by day or by night, where winter and summer the jasmine never cease blooming" that Venya recalls at the beginning closer to the end looks like the rest of the Soviet Union. Vladimir Tumanov in his article on *Moscow to the End of the Line* draws a parallel between Venya's drunkenness and Petushki as a no-man's land:

> The train ride in *Moskva-Petushki* is closely linked with the hero's gradual intoxication which causes him to sink deeper and deeper into delirium. In other words, just as the train brings Venja to Moscow and Petushki at the same time, i.e., to the above-mentioned "threshold city" or mystical transition zone, alcohol too places the narrator into a *utopic* (nowhere) state. Whereas in the beginning Venja is clearly in this world - dealing with the recognizably Soviet hostile restaurant staff at the Kursk station or sitting and chatting with other alcoholics travelling on the same train - after the meeting with Semenych, the train and the hero's intoxication shift him into a no-man's land from which he never emerges."[92]

Venya's inability to see and control himself in various real and phantasmagoric spaces matches the difficulty to draw the line between Venya the alcoholic (as a character) and Venya the thinker (as an author/narrator). Mikhail Epstein explains

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[91] Id. 45.

[92] Tumanov 96.

with Erofeev's self-created the "Venya myth," particularly with the "myth of a 'holy fool' and the myth of the hangover.[93] "Russian "holy fool", says Travis Kroeker, "intended to give dramatic impression to Paul's account in 1 Corinthians (1:18, 1:21,3:18,4:10) of the tension between spiritual foolishness' and worldly "wisdom."" As a living sign of this tension, the ""holy fool" adopted forms of behavior-poverty; eccentricity, and often feigned madness that were at once exercises in self-humiliation and an indirect judgment of the "world" and its ""commonsense."[94] And if the first one makes sense with respect to the great number of biblical allusions we have in the text and the clear imitation / appropriation of Christ's image, the myth of the hangover sounds more like an expected interpretation from the readers of *Sobriety and Culture* because Venya's search for Petushki or rather search for nowhere is hardly a hangover, but rather an artistic pose, his unique way to reject everything and everybody surrounding him. He is so intellectually and emotionally sensitive that he exposes himself, becoming too vulnerable, too unstable, and eventually ready to suffer and die. Moscow-Petushki, thus, is the only destination his life "train" can take. But the train as it appears brings him not even back to Moscow, it brings him to the past where he feels most comfortable: "I see, Venya, that you are completely in the past. I see that you don't wish to speak of the future at all."[95] In the narrative it is Venya the thinker who always takes over because he is the one in charge for the variety of forms (the cocktails or the genres the text plays with)

[93] Epstein.
[94] Kroeker 249.
[95] Erofeev 133.

and the one responsible for moving the text to a point of no return, that is, both to Petushki and away from it.

The genre

Somewhere between kilometer 43 and Khrapunovo the narrator gives us perhaps the only meta-reflection about his own text: "The devil knows in which guise (in original literally – "genre") I'll arrive in Petushki. All the way from Moscow it was memoirs and philosophical essays, it was all poems in prose, as with Ivan Turgenev. Now the detective story begins."[96] Later on Venya's companions tell their own love stories in Turgenev's style (or Dostoevsky or Tolstoy): "Like in Turgenev, let's everyone tell something"[97] Sukhih notes that Venya's story about his travels is written as letters of a Russian traveler going to Europe (Karamzin, Saltykov-Schedrin, etc.) Starting from the chapter Kilometer 85 – Orekhovo-Zuevo when Venya meets Semenych, Venya enters a new realm and the train goes into darkness. While at the very beginning Petushki is presented as a clearly utopic space: "Petushki is the place where the birds never cease singing, not by day or by night, where winter and summer the jasmine never cease blooming. Perhaps there is such a thing as original sin, but no one ever feels burdened in Petushki. There, even those who don't dry out for weeks have a bottomless, clear look in their eyes,"[98] After Orekhovo-Zuevo it becomes

[96] Id. 73.
[97] Id. 91.
[98] Id. 43.

anti-utopian with all the Soviet myths and revolutions. Also, Venya does a parody of a *Thousand and One Night* and then not being able to locate himself and his suitcase in time and space, he goes back to the detective story (which started with the missed bottle) that supposedly would reveal the mystery of not getting to Petushki, but it doesn't. In the detective line of the story Venya inserts phantasmagorias of meeting God, Satan, angels, the Sphinx who finally tells the reader that "Nobody, in general, ha, ha, will end up in Petushki!" "I walk and walk and it's nowhere. It's really dark all around – where is Petushki?"[99]

The story that started as a physiological sketch ends with a grotesque murder in the Kafka style (*The Trial*). Therefore, by appealing to a great variety of genres, Venya Erofeev transcends the classic examples of a genre of dystopia. There is no Grand Inquisitor who could get at least some of the fundamental questions answered. There is nothing and nobody at the end of the tunnel. With the cutting of Venya's throat, not only Venya's life and, consequently, the text, ends, but also the whole history ends or rather gets lost somewhere between Moscow and Petushki. Because ultimately after the end of the line comes the void.

[99] Id. 128.

THE CASE OF KURT VONNEGUT

Slaughterhouse-Five (1969)

What is "it" that goes?

When it comes to ambiguity of utopian/dystopian impulse in fiction and going beyond the classic genre of dystopia, Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* fits right in. Since 1969 critics of the texts were preoccupied with such questions as: what is the ethical engagement of the novel? What did Vonnegut want to warn us about? Is Tralfamadore utopia or a critique of utopianism? For instance, James Lundquist argues that Vonnegut's black humor expresses inability of humans to solve universal problems.[100] Tony Tanner suggests that hopelessness leads to quietism of the novel.[101] Robert Merrill and Peter A. Scholl say that Billy Pilgrim himself is the object of Vonnegut's satire and Billy's serenity "is bought at the price of complicity in the indifference to moral problems which is the ultimate 'cause' of events like Dresden."[102] Sharona Ben-Tov with respect to *Slaughterhouse Five* talks about artificial innocence and Tralfamadore as the American paradise machine.[103]

An interesting fact: both major comparative studies of dystopian fiction – *The Dystopian Impulse of Modern Literature. Fiction as Social Criticism* and *Dystopian Fiction East and West. Universe of Terror and Trial* in the corresponding chapters on

[100] Lundquist.
[101] Tanner.
[102] Merrill and. Scholl.
[103] Ben-Tov.

Post-War American dystopias[104] choose to concentrate on Vonnegut's sci-fi novel *Player Piano* and don't mention his *Slaughterhouse Five*. Isn't it because *Piano Player* better meets the criteria of the dystopian genre and does not go beyond it? If this is the case, then indeed it makes sense to focus on the markers of the genre that make *Slaughterhouse Five* a dystopia and those that do not.

First of all, unlike *Piano Player* or some of Vonnegut's short stories (he claimed he had to write them to make living so he could write novels), *Slaughterhouse Five* was predominantly analyzed as an anti-war novel but not as a science fiction, simply because it's not. In general, it makes fun of it, showing the mindset of those who write and read sci-fi. Or as Sharona Ben-Tov puts it, "Billy Pilgrim cast of mind is an American mode of thinking – the flight from history toward paradise – that utilizes science fiction's images."[105] In other words, being unenthusiastic about living and very enthusiastic about science fiction, Billy tries to replace his "old" reality with the "new" one, but not just imagine its very possibility. Second, unlike Vonnegut's short story *Harrison Bergeron*, *Slaughterhouse-Five* does not try to be prophetic. Billy's time travel has nothing to do with an attempt to go back to history and fix it, which is usually the case with sci-fi characters. Vonnegut rather depicts utopia gone wrong and without giving, us, readers, the reset button, weirdly pacifies us with the hope that even though the destruction of mother Earth is inevitable, we might not live to see it.

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[104] See Booker and Gottlieb.

[105] Ben-Tov 60.

Innocent babies at war

Vonnegut entertains the idea of the flight from history – which is clearly a utopian idea – to create an artificial paradise and live there happily ever after.

At the very beginning of the novel the narrator discusses his unwritten novel (which is *Slaughterhouse-Five*) with his friend who also went though WW2 and then the friend's wife, who clearly gets irritated by the talk, interrupts him and says:

> You'll pretend that you were men instead of babies, and you'll be played in the movies by… John Wayne… And war will look just wonderful, so we'll have a lot more of them. And they'll be fought by babies… " …She didn't want her babies or anyone else's babies killed in wars. And she thought wars were partly encouraged by books and movies.[106]

For the novel this becomes a departing point. Childish Billy is going through the painful process of growing up while participating in "The Children's Crusade," much like the narrator who eases his pain in alcohol and telephone calls:

> I have this disease late at night sometimes, involving alcohol and the telephone. I get drunk, and I drive my wife away with a breath like mustard gas and roses. And then, speaking gravely and elegantly into the telephone, I ask the telephone operators to connect me with this friend or that one, from whom I have not heard in years.[107]

But Billy and perhaps, partly the narrator as well, refuse to become adults as if history never happened to them, as if those events did not change them as persons.

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[106] Vonnegut 400.

[107] Ibid.

Throughout his life Billy continues being an innocent child. Even when he gets old his daughter Barbara does not take him seriously: "If you are going to act like a child, maybe we'll just have to *treat* you like a child."[108] Billy's hope for innocent universe is also expressed in the form of fantasy about a war movie:

> The American fliers turned in their uniforms, became high school kids. And Hitler turned into a baby, Billy Pilgrim supposed… Everybody turned into a baby, and all humanity, without exception conspired biologically to produce two perfect people named Adam and Eve, he supposed.[109]

This is still that very utopia about flight from history that Billy dreams. Seeing his birth and death, Billy "pays random visits to the events in between." Earthly Paradise project doesn't come to life, so along with a lack of desire to live and a fascination with science fiction comes the need to reinvent his universe elsewhere. Vonnegut calls that place in-between Tralfamadore. At first it seems that for Billy this planet functions as utopia. Along with young and beautiful porn-star (apparently all men's dream) Montana Wildhack, Billy enjoys his life in artificial Eden which very much contrasts with life he lives in Illium, observing his fiancée finishing her Three Musketeers bar and starting a Milky Way, then making him choose the right silver pattern. Not so pleasant sexual intercourse with his wife clearly adds up to the harsh reality of earth life: "Now he rolled off his huge wife, whose rapt expression did not change when he departed. He lay with the buttons of his spine along the edge of the mattress, folded his hands behind his head. He was rich now. He had been rewarded

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[108] Id. 433.

[109] Ibid.

for marrying a girl nobody in his right mind would have married."[110]

Comparing *Slaughterhouse-Five* with Heller's *Catch 22,* Alberto Cacicedo argues that both novels "present the blockages, material and psychological, to ethical action that we all must navigate; but they also refuse to accept the idea that we are nothing but a hill of beans."[111] Indeed, Tralfamadore functions as an artificial paradise that preserves the innocence by giving an illusion that one can play with time (for example, Trafamaldorians play with the zoo clock):

Billy says that "the most important thing I learned on Tralfamadore was that when a person dies he only *appears* to die. He is still very much alive in the past, so it is very silly for people to cry at his funeral. All moments, past, present and future, always have existed, always will exist. The Tralfamadorians can look at all the different moments just that way we can look at a stretch of the Rocky Mountains, for instance. They can see how permanent all the moments are, and they can look at any moment that interests them. It is just an illusion we have here on Earth that one moment follows another one, like beads on a string, and that once a moment is gone it is gone forever.

> When a Trafalmadorian sees a corpse, all he thinks is that the dead person is in a bad condition in that particular moment, but that the same person is just fine in plenty of other moments. Now, when I myself hear that somebody is dead, I simply shrug and say what the Tralfamadorians say about dead people, which is 'so it goes.[112]

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[110] Id. 424.

[111] Cacicedo.

[112] Vonnegut 362.

Sharona Ben-Tov argues that Vonnegut's refrain 'So it goes' is "the American Adam cry that nature has betrayed him," and the Trafalmadorians represent that very nature: "They are the nature who imprisons human beings within irreversible linear time; the time of biological reproduction (including Montana's pregnancy), of history (including the button-operated Bomb), and of mortality (including the heat death of the universe). While Billy preserves an artificial innocence in his chamber, the Tralfamadorians encompass all knowledge and experience in the poisonous atmosphere of alienated nature."[113] This means that Trafalmadore could be merely seen as an escape to utopia. Preserving innocence comes at a high price of seeing (Billy sees "the moment that simply is") and being seen (he and pregnant Montana are displayed like animals at the zoo (parallel with porn magazines that Billy comes across at the store). Detected Paradise yet is another Hell: Billy finds out that everything is already pre-determined. One of the Tralfamadorians will push the button that destroys the universe. When Billy asks whether it is possible to prevent, he gets an expected reply that complies with the Trafalmadorian philosophy of no free will and no questions "why: "He has *always* pressed it, and he always *will*. We *always* let him and we always *will* let him. The moment is *structured* that way."[114] At the same time, the wise voyeuristic creatures that could see in four dimensions, give their not so wise suggestion "ignore the awful times, and concentrate on the good ones" that for s long time keeps Billy alive.

Thus, utopians are not the Trafamaldorians; utopians are those who believe in

[113] Ben-Tov 63.

[114] Vonnegut 408.

healing, those who carry Utopian dream – us, humans. The refrains such as "and so it goes" and "poo-tee-weet," could be read as a part of the healing process or, as perhaps, some sort of a "code" that basically says "count your loses and move on," which is yet another utopia that pacifies. Unlike Erofeev's Moscow to the end of the Line, Vonnegut's text gives its readers a sense of hope. The protagonist Billy Pilgrim is dead but the world is still very much alive. "And so it goes."

THE CASE OF VICTOR PELEVIN

Victor Pelevin's *The Clay-Machine Gun* (aka *Budda's Little Finger*, aka *Chapaev and the Void*) (1996)

It seems that after *Moscow to the End of the Line* there were no questions left and Venya did end this search for the letter Ю in a quite definitive way: «They stuck their awl into my throat. I didn't know that there was pain like that in the world. And I writhed from the torture of it – a clothed red letter «Ю» spread across my eyes and started to quiver. And since then I have not regained consciousness, and I never will.»[115] But apparently this was not quite the end. After Erofeev, marginality became fashionable: «Aunt Clara's Kiss» and «Lenin's Lady» were deliberately substituted by cocaine and heroin. The rest stayed the same. But the Russian cultural process demanded both a new Erofeev and a fresh revision of Russian nothingness. And so it came. To establish continuity, Pelevin included Erofeev's version in his text:

[115] Erofeev 164.

«- Когда ж ты только в себя придешь... - Никогда, - ответил я. Глаза Чапаева округлились. - Ты смотри, Петька, - сказал он удивленно. - Неужто понял?»[116] As Danila Lanov noticed, "somebody had to tell that there is no metaphysics neither in Russia, nor in the lives of Russian intelligentsia, there is only dull schizophrenia."[117] And now there is a place called "inner Mongolia."

However, in certain Russian circles Victor Pelevin's texts had never been in vogue. His *The Clay-Machine Gun* for example, was continuously blamed for pseudo-philosophical meditations, "hard-boiled" style, and, pretentious playfulness that leads nowhere.[118] His *Homo Zapiens* was received with even more hostility.[119] However, despite all the trashing in Russia, the West accepted him in a heartbeat and it seems that there is no discussion about the fact that Pelevin radically redefines dystopia as a genre by offering a new form of thinking and writing about the Russian apocalypses. At the same time Leonid Fishman notes that, generally, Pelevin describes the Russian «today» using the aesthetic tools of a classical dystopia, only that in his texts there is no subject that makes it, there is no Grand Inquisitor: «A hero of a classical dystopia could at least on the trial to get his questions unanswered. The heroes of Pelevin's dystopias cannot get even that, what they get is only hints, partial answers. Maximum they can get is the freedom from illusions.»[120] But just like those who «got it» either from the forbidden book or from the Grand Inquisitor, Pelevin's

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[116] Pelevin, *The Clay Machine-Gun* 170.
[117] Lanin.
[118] See Ulyanov.
[119] See Rodnyanskaya.
[120] Fishman.

heroes stay in the matrix of dystopia and don't even try to escape. They do not stand of the way to «progress» anymore. A human being is turned from homo sapiens into a homo zapiens (this topic gets more development in Pelevin's *Homo Zapiens*). Manipulation of human's consciousness is another forte of classical dystopias that Pelevin successfully appropriates. But again he puts it in a very concrete economic dimension and while we all wait for a doctor in white robe, Pelevin says that the catastrophe has already happened. The question remains – how to live or not live with catastrophe. By juxtaposing an aesthetics of the void to an aesthetics of beauty Pelevin creates a dystopian world that is paradoxically more livable and more desirable than what so many call reality. The author himself claims that his *The Clay Machine-Gun* is "the first novel in world literature to take place in the absolute void."[121] However, the Russian-style void comes with "the machine-gun rattle of the 'r' in the words 'proletariat' and 'terror,'" which each character feels in his own way. Therefore, only by "killing" history can the void take over. Although, Irina Rodnyanskaya says that Pelevin "cautiously looks at a void that appears to be no more than the currents of affective links that both affirm and erase.»[122]

What makes Pelevin's texts different from both his predecessors and epigones is that he breaks the descriptive method of narrative dystopia (Voinovich, Tolstaya, partly Sorokin). Basically, there are three narratives in the novel that try to undermine each other and prove their own primacy: the one of Petr Voyd, who thinks he is the Russian Civil War commissar Pet'ka in 1917 Moscow, then of the same Petr Void,

[121] Pelevin 278.

[122] Petrovskaya.

who thinks he is a patient of Moscow mental institution in 1996, and finally, the fantasies of Petr's mentally unstable roommates who make certain projections on what they imagine themselves to be in modern Russia. The legendary figure of Chapayev appears to be not only the subject of numerous Soviet and post-Soviet jokes, but also a fruitful material to work and play with. Here is one of the jokes: Here's one the passages that perfectly illustrate it: Chapaev and Petka are having a few drinks and then Petka looks out the window. "The Whites are coming!" he cries. "Have another drink," says Chapaev. They drink. This goes on for some time, until Petka looks out the window, and Chapaev asks, "Can you see them?" "I'm not sure, they're blurry." "Can you see me?" "Not really." "Good, because I can't see you, either," says Chapaev. "We've camouflaged ourselves."

If, in Furmanov's text, Chapaev, his adjutant Petka, and the female machine-gunner Anna ("Anka") are ideologically conscious soldiers of war, Pelevin presents them as the bearers of the Void.

Just like in traditional dystopia there is a commitment to closure and totality: the reader step by step emerges into the seemingly artificial construct and eventually realizes that there is no way out. Only that the fragmentariness of the schizophrenic narration tends to constantly force the text to collapse, to become that very void that Petr gets to discover. This form works very well with the theme of Russian cultural disintegration after the 1917 revolution and after the downfall of the Soviet Union. Irina Rodnyanskaya, in a remarkable review on the novel, puts it quite precisely: "What is important here is that he was walking into one room, but ended up in a

different one: he wanted to create a parable about the way to get out from untruthful being, but when started to give it a body, it appeared that he wrote a novel about Russia, about Russia that we lost and continue loosing."[123] The place where Mother Russia was lost twice does not lack in materiality: it's a 'Musical Snuffbox' on Tverskaya, where "the customers were a very mixed bunch, but as has always been the case throughout the history of humanity, it was pig-faced speculators and expensively dressed whores who predominated."[124]

This was/is the case in both 1917 and 1996 Russia. But along with the mix of speculators and whores the vanity of fair is attended by literary figures, those faithful ideological servants who try to save Russia by being pro-active eaters and drinkers: "Sitting at the same table as Briusov, and grown noticeably fatter since the last time I had seen him, was Alexei Tolstoy, wearing a big bow instead of a normal tie. The fat that had accumulated on him seemed to have been pumped from the skeletal frame of Briusov: together they looked quite horrific."[125] The "ghost" of the Russian literature is everywhere: on the stage, in both Petr's minds, and, of course, literally in the figures of the currently living writers. "The Dostoevskian atmosphere," says Petr, "of course, was not created by the corpse or the door with its bullet hole, but by myself, by my own consciousness, which had assimilated the forms of another's repentance."[126] "The Dostoevskian atmosphere" is not randomly chosen. It is almost like Pelevin re-plays the (pre-)dystopian *Grand Inquisitor* in trying to understand

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[123] Rodnyanskaya.

[124] Pelevin, *The Clay Machine-Gun* 20.

[125] Ibid.

[126] Id. 10.

whether the Messiah could save Russia. The not-yet-empty Petr recalls Blok's poem *Twelve*: "What is Christ doing walking in front of the patrol? – he asks. Does Blok perhaps wish to crucify the revolution?"[127] Briusov and Tolstoy are too drunk to give a coherent answer. But it is in power of Petr who starts shooting.

It appears that the new Russia is as dead as the old one. In the third stream of narration Pelevin, through four mental projections, presents us with different possibilities of pop-cultural alliances for modern Russia: there is a cocktail of "Siempre Maria" and Schwarzenegger: alliance with the West, then Eastern philosophy of samurai and sake, and the one that's currently prevailing – the culture of the nouveau riche, oriented on destroying the dashes of what's left:

> If Shurik typified the elite type of St. Petersburg mobster, then Kolyan was the standard Moscow hulkdrome whose appearance had been so brilliantly foretold by the futurists at the beginning of the century. He seemed to be nothing but an intersection of simple geometrical forms - spheres, cubes and pyramids - and his small streamlined head was reminiscent of that stone which according to the evangelist was discarded by the builders but nonetheless became the cornerstone in the foundation of the new Russian statehood. 'There' said Volodin, 'now the mushrooms have come on.[128]

The fourth one seems to Pelevin the most acceptable. The beauty of the Void is that it is timeless. It is an alternative to dystopian reality(ies) that is utopian in its nature. Paradoxically, the fragmentariness which Pelevin uses as a main technique restores the gap between the Russian «before» and «after», thus giving his dystopia a

[127] Id. 23.
[128] Id.145.

new meaning, introducing the new function, not prophetic, but rather pacifying. Simply said, the anti-utopian reality is replaced by another utopian program, which, to Pelevin, looks promising and fuller than what "reality" has to offer. Its simplicity and elegance are well expressed at the end of Pelevin's interview in the Russian *Esquire*, where is asked to explain what the void means. He says "now listen very carefully. here we go." and then he keeps silence and finally says: "oh you just saw it."[129]

Such is the dialectics of the contemporary Russian dystopia that deals with distraction and de-construction of hope. What comes out of hopelessness is play. In his *In the System of a Double Dystopia* Leonid Fishman writes, "we (Russians) always have a good reason for being optimistic, because we are left with our old and well-known fears, such as, return of isolating Empire, extremist putsches, terrorist attacks. After all, Contemporary Russian dystopia depicts this endless approach to a total catastrophe that, as the Russians hope, finally changes nothing.»[130]

[129] Pravila zhizni Viktora Pelevina.

[130] Fishman.

Chapter 3

Dostoevsky and "Three Musketeers"

"Yes, sir," said one of the scouts. "We'd like to stick together
for the rest of the war, sir. Is there some way you can fix
it so nobody will ever break up the Three Musketeers?"
Kurt Vonnegut *Slaughterhouse-Five*

Either Freedom or Happiness, but not both

Ivan Karamazov's story "The Grand Inquisitor" is not only one of the central episodes of 1880 Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, but also a starting point for all significant dystopias of the 20th century.

In a nutshell, *The Grand Inquisitor* is a novella about two mutually contradictory utopias: the Grand Inquisitor's utopia about universal happiness and "Christ's" utopia of freedom for the mankind. But what is striking in this text is the intensity with which each utopia separates itself from the dystopic scenario, using all the real and imaginary tools that each has. Erica Gottlieb in *Dystopian Fiction East and West* appreciates in like tones this utopian/dystopian treatment: "a passionate, quasi-religious concern with the salvation of humanity through history, and an equally passionate preoccupation with the concept of the utopian pursuit of justice and the radical reversal of this pursuit in dystopia."[131]

Dostoevsky puts "Christ" in sixteenth-century Seville at the high time of Inquisition. The people of Seville immediately recognize him and so does The Grand

[131] Gottlieb 22.

Inquisitor. He realizes that Christ's presence and his miracles performed right on the street are a direct threat to his authority and thus orders to imprison Christ. In the cell Christ is not allowed to speak: "you have no right to add anything to what you have said in the days of old."[132] Yet even when the Grand Inquisitor asks him to speak, Christ doesn't utter a word. His "ideology" is in this silence. Thus, Christ's point of view can be either taken at faith or completely rejected. But seeming vulnerability of his position at the end becomes a way more powerful counter-argument than the whole Inquisitor's tirade, which is based on the rejection of the values "of old" and thus an explanation why Christ's utopia is unattainable.

As noted earlier, the Grand Inquisitor's stand proposes happiness for all at the expense of each one's freedom. Arguing that man is born a rebel and rebels cannot be happy, the Inquisitor justifies the process of enslaving people. And the son of God who asked too much of weak men and now stands on the way, must die again.

"You wanted man's free love," says the Grand Inquisitor. "You wanted him to follow You freely, enticed and captured by You. In the place of the rigid ancient law, man was hereafter to decide for himself with a free heart what is good and what is evil, having only Your image before him as his guide."[133] This appeared to be too much of a burden for a weak man, according to the Grand Inquisitor, and therefore the rulers had to stand up and above Jesus, and correct his mistakes so now the mankind is on the way to become happy. Again, his power is justified on the basis of what Christ's done wrong, which is not being tempted to recognize what is good for

[132] Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov* 293.
[133] Id. 299.

man, he ignored "warnings" and "signs."

The three temptations are bread, miracle, and the sword—in which, says the Grand Inquisitor, "the whole subsequent history of mankind is, as it were, foretold, and in [which] are united all the unresolved historical contradictions of human nature throughout the world."[134]

"Turn them into loaves, and mankind will run after you like a flock of sheep, grateful and obedient, though forever trembling with fear that you might withdraw your hand and they would no longer have your loaves."[135] Fear is the basis of the Inquisitor's power. "By accepting 'the loaves', you would have satisfied man's universal and everlasting craving, both as an individual and as mankind as a whole, which can be summed up in the words 'whom shall I worship?'"[136]

Finally, the Grand Inquisitor concludes that it is Christ's fault that he lost his kingdom: "It was yourself, therefore, who laid the foundation for the destruction of your kingdom and you ought not to blame anyone else for it."[137]

What Christ rejected, the people used to their advantage: miracle, mystery, and authority: "We have corrected your great work and have based it on *miracle*, *mystery* and *authority*."[138]

Yet one of the most intriguing moments in the Grand Inquisitor's discourse occurs when the old man rationalizes why Jesus rejected all three temptations. He

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[134] Ibid.
[135] Id. 296.
[136] Id. 297.
[137] Id. 299.
[138] Id. 301.

says: "Oh, you understood perfectly then that in taking one step, in making a move to cast yourself down, you would at once have tempted God and have lost all your faith in him, and you would have been dashed to pieces against the earth which you came to save, and the wise spirit that tempted you would have rejoiced."[139] Thus, by not being tempted, he did not lose his faith in God and therefore, did not tempt God to kill him.

The dreadful secret – "we are not with you but with *him*"[140] – concludes the Grand Inquisitor's tirade. "The wise and terrible spirit" appeared to be a better human psychologist than Christ. Men demand something real, something more tangible than freedom. The dichotomy of freedom and happiness is finalized in a very precise description of the Grand Inquisitor's utopia:

> With us everybody will be happy and will neither rebel nor everywhere destroy each other anymore as they did under Your freedom. Oh, we will persuade them that they will only become free when they renounce their freedom to us and submit to us. . . . We shall show them that they are weak, that they are only pitiful children, but that childlike happiness is the sweetest of all. . . . They will marvel at us and will be awe-stricken before us. . . . They will tremble more weakly before our wrath, their minds will grow fearful . . . but they will be just as ready at a sign from us to pass to laughter and rejoicing, to happy mirth and childish song. . . . And they will have no secrets from us. . . . [T]hey will bring everything, everything to us, and we will have an answer for everything. And they will be glad to believe our answer, for it will save them from that great anxiety and terrible agony they now endure supplying a free, individual answer. And everyone will be happy, all the millions of creatures except the hundred thousand who rule them. For only we, we who guard the mystery, will be unhappy . . . They will die peacefully . . . and beyond the grave they will find nothing but death. But we will keep the secret, and for their happiness we will tempt them with the reward of Heaven

[139] Id. 299.

[140] Id. 302.

and eternity.[141]

Finally, the old man's prophesy says that the rulers will get unlimited power and the absolute happiness will be granted for all people while their rulers will take the burden of suffering while making decisions for them:

> Then we shall give them the quiet humble happiness of weak creatures such as they are by nature… They will marvel at us and will be awe-stricken before us, and will be proud of our being so powerful and clever, that we have been able to subdue such a turbulent flock of thousands of millions… and they will have no secrets from us. We shall allow them or forbid them to live with their wives and mistresses, to have or not to have children – according to whether they have been obedient or disobedient – and they will submit to us gladly and cheerfully… And they will be glad to believe our answer; for it will save them from the great anxiety and the terrible agony they endure at present in making a free decision for themselves. And all will be happy, all the millions of creatures except the hundred thousands who rule over them.[142]

As noted by number of scholars, this kind of utopia suggests the obvious parallels between the rule of the Grand Inquisitor and Socialist utopias. The Utopian Socialists, says Ellis Sandoz, saw Christ (much as Dostoevsky had in 1838) as a divine figure that came to prescribe the laws governing the organization of the modern world, and whose teachings had to be finally put into practice.[143] Yet the compatibility of Christianity with socialism is a strange one: being its apparent ideological opposite, socialist ideology (and particularly Stalin's version) adopted the structure and the strategy of Catholicism as it was becoming a new religion. *The Grand Inquisitor* proves to be prophetic in its anticipation of totalitarianism, the new infallible Rome,

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[141] Id. 299.

[142] Id. 305.

[143] Sandoz.

as the central ideological conflict of the twentieth century. Or the way Gorman Beauchamp puts it: "Out of his antipathy toward the crypto-religious premises of socialism, that is, Dostoevsky wrote the mytho-history of Marxism before it happened, his prophetic power stemming precisely from his perception of a rival creed to Christianity, from that apocalyptic turn of mind that saw the Anti-Christ lurking in utopia and ensorcelling the century with a specious promise of salvation." Moreover, even its genre has proven to be prophetic (Zamyatin's *We*, Orwell's *1984*, Huxley's *A Brave New World*, etc).

Ivan's Christ vs. Dostoevsky's Christ

There is certainly a need to take a look at the "silent" utopia that is not directly manifested by Christ, but only interpreted by the Grand Inquisitor. The essential thing in understanding the figure of Christ would be his silence throughout the text and the kiss at the end as his counter-argument. Also, in the silent figure of Christ, Dostoevsky concentrated all that Russian Orthodox tradition (which he stands for) had to offer as opposed to the Catholic one. P. Travis Kroeker suggests that the reason the Christ character in *The Grand Inquisitor* is so complex is because we actually deal with the Christ as Ivan Karamazov's character and the Christ as Dostoevsky's "Truth."[144] These images are related.

First of all, for Dostoevsky it is important that we do not get to know Christ

[144] Kroeker *et al*. 242.

through his own reflections, but we see him indirectly through Zosima, Alyosha, Ivan, and the Grand Inquisitor. Ivan depicts him as a beggar, yet everybody recognizes him, there is something divine about him:

"He appeared quietly, inconspicuously, but everyone – and that is why it is so strange – recognized him. (…) The people are drawn to him to him by an irresistible force, they surround him, they throng about him, they follow him."[145] Christ's divinity and the Inquisitor's intention to kill the divine super-human is so striking that Alyosha, perfectly knowing that Ivan's story is a work of fiction, yet demands some certainty: "I am afraid I don't quite understand it, Ivan,' said Alyosha, who had been listening in silence all the time, with a smile, 'is it just a wild fantasy, or has the old man made some mistake, some impossible qui pro quo?' But Ivan's depiction of Christ as a divine figure is only a cover that hides the real reason why a ninety years old man wants to tell his version of why Christ's been dismissed: under the cover of a poor prisoner we reveal the "great idealist" who is forbidden to speak, a man with "a gentle smile of infinite compassion" who brings a completely different worldview. With the single kiss Christ countered all the arguments of the Grand Inquisitor and perhaps, this made it into one of the most artistic and intense passages ever written:

> I intended to end it as follows: when the Inquisitor finished speaking, he waited for some time for the Prisoner's reply. His silence distressed him. He saw that the Prisoner had been listening intently to him all the time, looking gently into his face and evidently not wishing to say anything in reply. The old man would have liked him to say something, however bitter and terrible. But he suddenly approached the old man and kissed him gently on his bloodless, aged lips. That was all his answer. The old man gave a start. There was an imperceptible movement at the corners of

[145] *Brothers Karamazov* 291.

> his mouth; he went to the door, opened it and said to him: "Go, and come no more – don't come at all – never, never!"
> And he let him out into "the dark streets and lanes of the city". The Prisoner went away.[146]

This passage reflects not only the way the Grand Inquisitor sees Christ, but also the way Ivan himself sees him. It's a mix of rejection and exaltation. Ivan treats Jesus as a human being, says Kroeker, and applies the category of idealist, "which is more than a "great moralist" or a "benefactor of humanity.""[147] Thus, according to Kroeker, Ivan focuses on both characteristics of Christ: "perfect idealism" and divinity. But what is even more interesting to trace is the image of Christ projected by Dostoevsky. In order to do that Kraurer and others refer to another Dostoevsky's great novel – *The Idiot,* which portrays Christ in a different light. There is certainly a correspondence between Prince Myshkin and Christ, seen by Dostoevsky as the ideal of the "perfectly beautiful man." Only that Myshkin as Christ is not silent, but aggressively prophetic. Perhaps, this is what Christ would say if he were to choose to speak:

> Roman Catholicism in its essence... is not exclusively a theological question. For socialism, too, is the child of Catholicism and the intrinsic Catholic nature . It, too, like its brother atheism, was begot- ten of despair . . . in order to replace the lost moral power of religion, to quench the spiritual thirst of parched humanity, and save it not by Christ, but also by violence![148]

There is also another important difference between Ivan's Christ and Myshkin's embodiment of Christ: Myshkin is a 'holy fool' (*yurodivyj*) (the term that was already

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[146] Id. 308.

[147] Kroeker 245.

[148] *Idiot* 456.

used by Mikhail Epstein and others with respect to Venedikt Erofeev's myth), which in the Russian Orthodox tradition is a very important character. Again, the 'holy fool' is a poor beggar and a great prophet in the Russian tradition.

By the sixteenth century, explains Kroeker, "holy foolishness" had come to acquire an important social and even political meaning. During this period, the Russian Church hierarchy had become noticeably stuck in the duty of defending oppressed and exposing injustice, so that the holy fools increasingly assumed this role of the ancient Church leaders. They also assumed the role of the ancient "minted" princes, who had built the state, and according to a tradition had attempted to realize it in the principles of Christian justice; for the Moscow rulers of the sixteenth century no longer paid even lip service to this princely ideal. With this abdication of moral leadership on the part of the Church leaders and the princes, the needed corrective of the Christian conscience came to be embodied in the holy fools.[149]

This means that divinity in Russian Orthodox tradition was widely attributed to a human being; Dostoevsky followed this tradition – his Christ being a silent 'holy fool' who at first is not allowed to speak and at the end chooses not to speak, which makes him more human than the Grand Inquisitor himself. And that's what makes his utopia so tempting for Dostoevsky and for the readers: the utopia of an ideal divine human being under the mask of a 'holy fool'. However, the realization of such a utopia would bring the end of history and Dostoevsky perfectly understood that. In a way the Grand Inquisitor himself embodied the concept of history – and its continuity.

[149] Kroeker 250.

At the same time the consequences of the realization of his utopia are too well known to rehash here. It is the impossibility of the Christ's utopia and looking simultaneously backward and forward that become so essential for Dostoevsky's greatest novels *Notes from Underground, Crime and Punishment, The Idiot, The Brothers Karamazov*. The reconciliation of these two utopias later on becomes the core theme for Zamyatin, Orwell, Čapek, Huxley, etc.

To sum up, both the Grand Inquisitor and the Son of God believe in their utopias. For the first one it is following the three temptations, for the second it is a rejection of the temptations and freedom for the mankind, which he silently manifests with the kiss. But if Zamyatin's or Orwell's characters, while meeting with their Grand Inquisitors, do retain that Jesus' belief, drunk Venya, traveler Billy and insane Petr do not – they perfectly know that there is no salvation and that their utopias (Petushki, Trafalmadore, and inner Mongolia, respectively) are only the temporary solutions before entering the state of non-being.

Erofeev's Reworking of Dostoevsky

Yuriy Levin argues that the basic element that organizes the formal structure of Erofeev's *Moscow to the End of the Line* is allusions to various Dostoevsky's texts.[150] There are at least three Dostoevsky's texts that definitely come to mind with respect to Erofeev's poem: *Notes from the Underground*, *Crime and Punishment*, and Ivan's

[150] Levin 34.

novella *The Grand Inquisitor.*

Venya and the Underground Man

Vladislav Bachinin argues that Russian philosophical modernity started with *Notes from the Underground* (1864) and went to its end with Erofeev's *Moscow to the End of the Line* (1969).[151] And indeed, the process started with the underground man who symbolically killed the God and ended with another underground man - Venya who resurrected him, even though, for most of his fellow citizens, Christ's been already dead for a long time.

However, what unites these two texts is not the figure of Christ (which is obviously the case with *Moscow to the End of the Line* and *The Grand Inquisitor*), but the genre of the underground that in both cases is a voice from the dark and deep underground of Russian "I" that Erofeev successfully adapted to the soviet reality.

Dostoevsky says goodbye to Russian classics, while Erofeev says rather late goodbye to the Russian official aesthetics of soviet realism. A hundred years separates these two texts, which take place-and-time in two different chronotopes (St. Petersburg and Moscow); plus, both of them refer to the void as a rejection of rejection, where «samyj der'movyj ad, gde utrom – ston, vecherom – plach, a noch'ju skrezhet zubovnyj.»[152]

The main problem of the Underground Man is his own "I." Every day of his life

[151] Bachinin.

[152] Erofeev 34.

is a punishment. But the same "I," that is constantly preoccupied with dialectics of paradoxes, keeps him for a long time in one piece. Underground Man has a demonic nature. There is no place for Petushki in his heart. He is in the process of self-destruction, while Venya is not demonic at all. «I am remaining downstairs and from here I am spitting on your ladder. Yes, every spit on every stair." There is also something from Ivan Karamazov: «…I'll die not accepting this world."

It is they who did everything to kill God in Moscow and sink it into the soullessness and created that dark social «underground.»

The characters of Dostoevsky and Erofeev's texts live in dystopian environments where there is no place for dialogue and mutual understanding. Each of them has their own "corner." For Venya that corner is alcohol. Unlike underground man, he does not have the luxury of social loneliness. His whole life is that train Moscow-Petushki with its own Lebedev, Rakitnyj, Lizaveta Smerdyaschaya etc.

Venya's underground is the dark places he visits: hallways, stairs, Kursk station, etc. But at the same time being an alcoholic, he creates in a way a more real underground that's outside of official and pretentious world. There he can express his own "I" and find, if not freedom, then at least its temporary substitution.

The way this is expressed is in the form of tractate about the hiccup. It's a hymn of logic and chaos, the way he is still capable of looking deep all of this the universal law can be read between two stations.

> Is it not so with every individual's triumphs and failures, ecstasies and afflictions – isn't there the slightest hint of regularity? Is it not thus that the catastrophes in the life of humanity follow one another in confusion?

> Law is higher than us all. The hiccup is higher than any law. And as its onset so astonished us not long before, so its ending will astonish us, as ending which – like death – you can neither predict, nor stave off: *Twenty-two*, *fourteen* – that's all, then silence."[153]

What is interesting is that while the underground man moves from order to chaos, Venya's train moves from chaos to order. Dostoevsky's preaching is nothing else but a call to abdicate the voice of reason and accept humbleness and insanity in Christ («bezumije vo Hriste»). Modern 'holy fool' Venya Erofeev, who propagates a mystical theory of the hiccup, consciously follows this tradition.

The Underground Man with his increased sensitivity and moral perversity strays from Christian values. And Venedikt Erofeev, continuing Dostoevsky's revolt against the cult of social success and even the laws of nature picks up this idea of Christianity and faith as the foundation of Russian morality in *Notes from the Underground* and develops it further in *Moscow to the End of the Line*.

Venya, Semenych, and Semyon Zaharovich Marmeladov

There is another famous Dostoevsky's character that Erofeev kept in mind while creating his Venya and his fellow companions from the train – Semyon Zaharovich Marmeladov, an alcoholic whom Rodion Raskolnikov meets in the tavern. Initially, Dostoevsky conceived a story around Marmeladov's family that was supposed to be published under the title *The Drunkards (P'yanen'kije)*, but having financial difficulties, the author was not able to finish the text and basically integrated the

[153] Id. 65.

storyline into his novel *Crime and Punishment.* Here it is "the question of drunkenness" that unites Dostoevsky's and Erofeev's texts. Both Venya and Marmeladov are looking for understanding and sympathy. For every man must have somewhere to go. – says Marmeladov. – Since there are times when one absolutely must go somewhere!"[154] For Venya that place appears to be the train Moscow – Petushki. Although Venya wholeheartedly hates the crowd, he still finds a few people to share his world sorrow with. Marmeladov goes to the tavern with the same intention:

> "Honoured sir, honoured sir, you know every man ought to have at least one place where people feel for him! [...] Do you suppose I don't feel it? And the more I drink the more I feel it. That's why I drink too. I try to find sympathy and feeling in drink.... I drink so that I may suffer twice as much![155]

To get away from emptiness, to find a firm ground; "Oh, emptiness, oh, the bared fangs of existence."[156] In a way Marmeladov functions as another 'holy fool': amoral suffering creature with only a dash of holiness. To redeem his sins he asks for the fate of Christ:

> Why am I to be pitied, you say? Yes! there's nothing to pity me for! I ought to be crucified, crucified on a cross, not pitied! Crucify me, oh judge, crucify me but pity me! And then I will go of myself to be crucified, for it's not merry- making I seek but tears and tribulation!... Do you suppose, you that sell, that this pint of yours has been sweet to me? It was tribulation I sought at the bottom of it, tears and tribulation, and have found it, and I have tasted it;[157]

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[154] Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment* 12.

[155] Id. 13.

[156] Id. 21.

[157] Id. 20.

Finally, both of them are presented as masochists. At the beginning of Erofeev's poem, Venya takes pleasure in being punched and kicked out of the restaurant. In a similar way, Marmeladov joyfully anticipates beatings from his wife: "And this is a consolation to me! This does not hurt me, but is a positive con-so-la-tion, ho-nou-red sir," he called out, shaken to and fro by his hair and even once striking the ground with his forehead.[158]

Also, by analogy with Semyon Marmeladov, Erofeev named his ticket control officer Semyonych, a celebrated alcoholic who takes bribes in the form of vodka from ticketless passengers. Remarkably, both Semyonych and Marmeladov are knocked down (the former – by the crowd, the latter – by a horse). All three characters – Marmeladov, Venya, and Semyonych – transit from century to century as Drunkards : "For every man must have somewhere to go."

Venya as a Silent Christ

One of the current leaders of the Russian opposition, Alexey Navalny, in an interview for the Russian edition of *Esquire*, expressed his fascination with Erofeev's *Moscow to the End of the Line*, and also talked about the need to teach Religious Studies in schools just so people would understand all Biblical allusions and reminiscences in Erofeev's text.[159] Indeed, along with Dostoevsky's texts and many other works,

[158] Id. 23.

[159] Navalny.

Erofeev heavily relies on the Bible and the biblical interpretations of *Moscow to the End of the Line* proved to be the most fruitful ones.[160] If one were to follow the Biblical associations, then Venya's Petushki would remind of nothing else but Jerusalem, while Moscow would resemble Babylon. But here I am more interested to look at how Venedikt Erofeev uses the Dostoevsky's image of Christ from "The Grand Inquisitor" and turns it into the soviet version of a character: a drunk melancholic beggar, full of sorrow and completely lonely, yet full of hope. Perhaps, Erofeev even re-plays the whole setting of *The "Old" Grand Inquisitor* in the modern conditions of atheistic Soviet Union.

If Dostoevsky in his text presented us with one Grand Inquisitor, Erofeev, more generous, came up with four. However, they are not named.

In the Soviet Union the prophesy of the Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor came true: the people with «empty eyes» do not rebel and seem to be happy.

The travestied «Christ» and 'holy fool' Venya tries at his best to distinguish himself from the crowd:

> «Do I really need your crowd? Are your people really necessary? Take the redeemer even, who to his own Mother said, «What art thou to me?» And indeed, what do these vain and repellent creatures have to do with me?»[161] In silence he celebrates his hangover on the nightmarish streets of Moscow: "stop together with me and honor with a minute of silence that which is inexpressible."[162]

«And in this silence your heart says to you: It is indiscernible and we are helpless. We

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[160] Among numerous examples: "Oh, the ephemeral! Oh, that most helpless and shameful of times in the life of my people, the time from dawn until the liquor store open up!"

[161] Erofeev 16.

[162] Id. 22.

are deprived of freedom of will and are in the power of arbitrary which has no name and from which there is no escape.»[163] Tumanov compares this dystopian Moscow with the Godless fallen Third Rome where the Antichrist rules and Venya, trying to get out, yearns for the New Jerusalem.[164]

> «Lord, you see what I possess. But truly is *this* necessary to me? Truly is this what my soul is pained over? This is what people have given me in exchange for that over which my soul is pained. But if they had given me *that,* would I really be in need of *this*? Look, Lord, here's the stout rose at a rub' thirty-seven.»
> and, all in blue flashes of lightning, the Lord answered me:
> «So what did St. Teresa need her stigmata for? It, too, was unnecessary, yet she desired it.»
> «That's the point,» I answered in ecstasy. «Me, too, I desire this, but it's not at all necessary.
> «Well, since it's desired, Venichka, go on and drink,'» I said to myself, but took my time. To see if perhaps the Lord had anything else to say.
> The Lord was silent.»[165]
>
> Venichka, what a blockhead you are, you're an out-and-out fool. Remember, you read in some man of wisdom that the Lord God only looks after the fate of princes, leaving the princes to look after the fat of the people. Well, you're the foreman and, therefore, a "little prince." Where is your concern for the fate of the people? Have you looked into the souls of those parasites, into their dark reaches?[166]

The angels doubt that Venya will get to Petushki: "Last Friday I went limp, angels, I took to staring at her white belly, round like the sky and the earth. But today I'll get there, if only I don't croak… killed by fate… today I'll be with her and I'll glaze among the lilies till morning. But tomorrow…"[167]

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[163] Id. 65

[164] Tumanov 101-102.

[165] Erofeev 27.

[166] Id. 37.

[167] Id. 48.

And here comes the prophesy:

> The day will come, that day of days. On that day when most weary Simon shall say finally, 'Now, absolve thy servant, Lord,' and the archangel Gabriel shall say, 'Hail, Mary, blessed art thou amongst women,' and Doctor Faust shall pronounce: 'The moment is now, linger and stop a bit!' And all whose names are written in the book of life shall sing out: 'Exalt Isaiah,' and Diogenes will extinguish his lantern. There shall be good and beauty and everything will be fine and all will be good and other than good and beauty there will be nothing and all shall merge into a kiss."
> "Merge into a kiss." Semenych was fidgeting impatiently now.
> "Yes! And the torturer and the victim shall merge into a kiss, and spite, design, and calculation shall disappear from the heart, and the woman.[168]

It is in words that Venya finds his freedom – Venedikt the writer in written narrative and Venya the character – in oral narrative. But both being guilty of breaking the order, eventually have to fall silent. The silent God betrays his «son».

«We are mere trembling creatures while it is omnipotent. It – that is, the Right Hand of God which is raised above us all and before which only cretins and rogues do not bow their heads. He is incomprehensible and therefore, He is. And thus, perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect.»[169] While Venya's 'holy fool' life full of suffering might be comprehensible, his artistic death definitely gets to that very level of perfection, the perfection of being silent, almost like the Dostoevsky's Christ. Only that the four «Grand Inquisitors» of the 20th century appear to be more cruel and pitiless than the one from 16th-century Seville. By killing Venya the «Christ», they not only kill the logos, they kill the history itself. In a way Venya is the

[168] Id. 114.
[169] Id. 65.

«un-resurrected» Christ, the Christ cast within the enigmatic, ultimate End.

Slaughterhouse-Five and *The Clay Machine-Gun*: Dostoevsky isn't enough anymore

And, for my part, I'll also make you a promise in return:
when at the age of thirty I want "to dash the cup to the floor,"
I shall come once more to have a talk with you about it
wherever you may be – even though it were from America."
Fyodor Dostoevsky *The Brothers Karamazov*

When it came to religion Kurt Vonnegut held a very firm position: he was an atheist. In one of his interviews he explained what the conservatives criticized him for:

> It's my religion the censors hate. They find me disrespectful towards their idea of God Almighty. They think it's the proper business of government to protect the reputation of God. All I can say is, "Good luck to them, and good luck to the government, and good luck to God." You know what H. L. Mencken said one time about religious people? He said he'd been greatly misunderstood. He said he didn't hate them. He simply found them comical.[170]

This is precisely the view that Trout's science fiction adopts: to make fun of Christianity. In *Slaughterhouse-Five* there is an episode in which Billy is in the mental institution with a former infantry captain, Eliot Rosewater, who introduced to Billy the world of science fiction and particularly Kilgore Trout's novels. In the process of «re-inventing themselves and their universe» through science fiction, Eliot Rosewater mentions Dostoevsky: "Rosewater said an interesting thing to Billy one time about a book that wasn't science fiction. He said that everything there was to know about life was in *The Brothers Karamazov*, by Feodor Dostoevsky. "But that

[170] Vonnegut, "The Art of Fiction No. 64."

isn't *enough* any more." said Rosewater."[171] The problematic of the Messiah, of salvation and of universal happiness for mankind in Dostoevsky's text find their 20th-century resolution in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Christ is simply not coming because he is not needed. So it is a perfect time to make fun of him re-imagining his nature and the miracles he performed according to the Holy Book.

After the "grand inquisitors" took over, there is no more choice between freedom and happiness, because it appears that people get neither. The loss of moral values Dostoevsky debated led, in the 20th century, to the search for the "new" Christ. The search proved unsuccessful. Perhaps this is why Rosewater says to a psychiatrist that it's time to come up with a new legend: "I think you guys are going to have to come up with a lot of wonderful *new* lies, or people just aren't going to want to go on living."[172] Later in the hospital Rosewater tells Billy about one of Kilgore Trout's novels he is reading, titled *The Gospel from Outer Space*. This novel tells of a visitor who is studying Christianity and who finds out why it is easy for Christians to be cruel: «He supposed that the intent of the Gospels was to teach people, among other things, to be merciful, even to the lowest of the low. But the Gospels actually taught this: *Before you kill somebody, make absolutely sure he isn't well connected.* So it goes."[173] And God speaks out: "The voice of God came crashing down. He told people that he was adopting the bum as his son, giving him the full powers and privileges of the Son of the creator of the Universe throughout all eternity. God said

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[171] *Slaughterhouse-Five* 412.
[172] Id. 413
[173] Id. 418

this: From this moment on, He will punish horribly anybody who torments a bum who has no connections!"[174]

This partly manifests the idea of the innocent victim that gets developed in the passages that narrate Billy's visits to Trafalmadore. Trafalmadorians, as Billy's mentors, explain to him that there is no free will and that the moment is structured in such a way that nothing can be changed: "If I hadn't spent so much time studying Earthlings," said the Trafalmadorian, "I wouldn't have any idea what was meant by 'free will.' I've visited thirty-one inhabited planets in the universe, and I have studied reports on one hundred more. Only on Earth is there any talk of free will."[175]

In the cynical world of *Slaughterhouse-Five* there is no human being who is ready to apply his understanding of ideology against this ideology and everybody's intent is to preserve his/her status quo. In the absence of someone or something to have faith in, the world of science fiction becomes, in a way, the new religion. Kilgore Trout invites his readers to a new world of travel in time and if not re-writing then at least re-considering history. In another Trout novel a time traveler witnesses Christ's crucifixion and, using the stethoscope, patiently checks whether Christ breathes or not. Then in the same calm manner, he measures the length of Christ. All in all, Dostoevsky's prophecy about the eternal rule of the grand inquisitors and universal happiness without freedom was on the spot.

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[174] Ibid.

[175] Ibid.

Dostoevsky and the void

Pelevin presents his own version of why and how Dostoevsky «is not enough anymore». At the beginning of his *The Clay Machine-Gun* Pyotr Pustota kills a Soviet political commissar comrade Vorblei and takes up his identity. Together with two other comrades he enters 'The Musical Snuffbox: Literary Cabaret', full of "pig-faced speculators and expensively dressed whores," with intention "to clean up" the place in the name of revolution. Conforming to the name «literary,» Russian poet Valery Briusov announces "a little tragedy" written by the chamber poet, Ioann Pavlukhin, that the author entitled *Raskolnikov and Marmeladov*. Being a poorly staged variation of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (although in the original the lines rhyme and they don't sound pretentious), «a little tragedy,» nevertheless surprises Pyotr with an unexpected twist: in the tavern Marmeladov asks Raskolnikov to sell his axe and at the end of negotiations Marmeladov takes off his mask and Raskolnikov and the audience sees the old woman Alyona Ivanovna. The play ends with the former victim killing her murderer and with four people carrying the dead body, à la *Hamlet*. Pyotr, who just killed his fellow commissar, attributes this «Dostoevschina» to a monstrous conspiracy, thinking that the play was staged on purpose and that everybody in the cabaret is aware of his crime. But then, deciding to take the situation under control and starting the mass killing, he thinks to himself:

> Gentlemen and comrades, I thought, as I strode slowly across the strangely expanded hall, today I too was granted the honour of stepping over my own old woman, but you will not choke me with her imaginary

> fingers. Oh, damnation take these eternal Dostoevskian obsessions that pursue us Russians! And damnation take us Russians who can see nothing else around us![176]

The last two sentences serve not only as a witty comment, but also as a serious call to maybe consider the bankruptcy of the Russian Idea (the one Dostoevsky propagated) under the new regime of Bolsheviks and then the absence of any idea after the downfall of the Soviet Union.

But then allusions to Dostoevsky progressively multiply. And now it's not a coincidence that *Brothers Karamazov* almost unnoticeably "takes" the stage in the conversation about A. Blok's poem *Twelve*: Pyotr says that he doesn't understand the symbolism of Blok's ending. He asks Bryusov and Alexey Tolstoy: "What is Christ doing walking in front of the patrol? Does Blok perhaps wish to crucify the revolution?"[177] Understandably, Christ appears to be the wrong character to serve the October revolution and Pyotr goes on saying that "now he (Blok) has a revolutionary sailor walking ahead of the patrol." Completely wasted, Bryusov exclaims that this version is a more accurate rendition of what's happening: "And Christ walks behind them! He is invisible and he walks behind them, dragging his crooked cross through the swirling blizzard!"[178] Only that, Pyotr adds, he moves in the opposite direction, that is not being needed, Christ goes away from Russia and, in the same literary cabaret seventy years later, with the same "pig-faced speculators and expensively dressed whores," the loss of faith becomes even more apparent. In the godless

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[176] Pelevin 22.
[177] Id. 23
[178] Ibid.

country consumerism takes over and becomes a new religion. Later on the mentor-student relationship between Chapaev and Pyotr, as well as Pyotr's search for the truth in the void does remind us of father Zosima's teachings and Alyosha's spiritual search for Christ. Therefore, each time Dostoevsky is rewritten / restaged to comment on a new Russian reality. In case of Pelevin he might not be sufficient, but is still necessary.

Conclusion

Darko Suvin in his 2001 tract on dystopia reminds us that the function of a typical dystopia is to call for action: "Utopian reflections, in and out of fiction, have now to undertake openings that lead toward agency: action."[179] Edith Clowes with respect to dystopian novels of Zamyatin, Platonov, and Orwell talks about the same, "a kind of warning," about dogmatism that these texts try to convey.[180] The specific of the three dystopias I look at is that they are not preoccupied neither with judging nor calling for action. The worst catastrophe that could happen already happened.

Drunk and hopeless Venya got to live and die among the people with "empty eyes" in the socialist utopia of the Soviet Union; the capitalist utopia of Billy Pilgrim didn't bring anything but grief and, again, death, because the moment is structured this way and there is nothing that can be done; and finally Pyor, not being able to deal with the remnants of the socialist utopia and the country's sudden entrance into the capitalist utopia, chooses the void that erases it all.

The political component of such failed utopias is well expressed by Fredric Jameson in his "The Politics of Utopia," where he says that utopian has become some sort of a code for socialism or communism and for the right wing it became synonymous with 'totalitarianism.' Therefore, they both are similar in the way that

> imply that a politics which wishes to change the system radically will be designated as utopian—with the right-wing undertone that the

[179] Suvin 382.

[180] Clowes 4.

> system (now grasped as the free market) is part of human nature; that any attempt to change it will be accompanied by violence; and that efforts to maintain the changes (against human nature) will require dictatorship. So two practical-political issues are at play here: a left critique of social-democratic reformism, within the system; and on the other hand a free-market fundamentalism.[181]

Literature responds to this with a new alternative utopia that manifests a new sort of flight from history (in case of Erofeev it's expressed through the letter Ю, in case of Vonnegut - through his famous expression "and so it goes," and in case of Pelevin – through the figure of Chapaev and his philosophy of eternal non-return). In fact, all three novels appear to be saturated with the Void. In all three texts the loss of faith and disillusionment is final and there is no afterward. Only that Pelevin's vision of dystopian world of the post-Soviet Russia gets developed in his next novel *Generation P* (aka *Homo Zapiens*), which is a satire on the Russian hunger to consume and to eject money, or as Sofya Khagi puts it in her article on Pelevin's consumer dystopia - "Russia's traumatic entrance into the brave new world of commodities"[182] and a transformation into Homo Zapiens (good consumers) that Vonnegut's characters "successfully" went through in the 1960s.

Moreover, all three texts are very responsive to the utopian impulse and the bankruptcy of the Russian national idea as expressed by Dostoevsky in his various texts (but most of all in "The Grand Inquisitor") and make them relevant for their texts. But if the classic dystopian texts use only Dostoevsky's prophecy that the

[181] Jameson, "The Politics of Utopia" 37.
[182] Khagi 565.

Grand Inquisitor manifests, the texts that I analyze go further and reject the very opposition of freedom or happiness. For instance, Erofeev reworks Dostoevsky making his "Christ" into a soviet character, then adapts Dostoevsky's genre of the underground replaying the dark and deep underground of Russian "I", that he again adapts to the soviet reality. And also, Erofeev borrows the theme of Dostoevsky's *Pyanen'kie*, which Dostoevsky had as a basis for his *Crime and Punishment*. Dostoevsky's preaching is nothing else but a call to abdicate the voice of reason and accept humbleness and insanity in Christ («bezumije vo Hriste»). And Modern 'holy fool' Venya Erofeev, who propagates the mystical theory of hiccup, consciously parodies this tradition. For Vonnegut and Pelevin Dostoevsky simply "isn't enough anymore," i.e., if in the case of Pelevin, Dostoevsky becomes a "commentator" of the Post-Soviet reality, for Billy and the man he shares a room with, the dilemma of freedom or happiness is no more because they get neither. Both the Grand Inquisitor and the Son of God believe in their utopias. For the first one it is following the three temptations, for the second it is a rejection of the temptations and freedom for the mankind, which he silently manifests with the kiss. But if Zamyatin's or Orwell's characters, while meeting with their Grand Inquisitors, do retain that Jesus' belief, drunk Venya, traveler Billy and insane Petr do not – they perfectly know that there is no salvation and their utopias (Petushki, Trafalmadore, and inner Mongolia) are only the temporary solutions before entering the state of non-being.

All in all, the "dreams of a better life," the utopian longing for fulfillment is packaged and distributed as something else. And if Camus said that "the tragedy of

our generation… to have seen a false hope," then maybe the tragedy of our generation is that we don't see any hope at all.

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