

FRAMING CATASTROPHE:
The Problem of Ending in Dystopian Fiction¹

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Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is the most famous of all English-language dystopias. And we all know how it ends: 'But it was all right, everything was all right, the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother.' Reminding us exactly where we have arrived at, the novel then reads, in most subsequent editions, as in the first: 'THE END'.² Little wonder that Williams should have read it as 'desperate because ... on such a construction the exile could not win, and ... there was no hope at all'; and its author as 'a man committed to decency who actualized a distinctive squalor'.³ It was a judgement he would amend, but never revise. So the last of his many readings continued to deplore 'the terrifying irrationalism of the climax of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'.⁴ Jameson's work on science fiction and utopia shares a similarly longstanding animus towards both novel and author. So he writes that:

the force of the text ... springs from a conviction about human nature itself, whose corruptions and lust for power are inevitable, and not to be remedied by new social measures or programs, nor by heightened consciousness of impending dangers.⁵

Both Williams and Jameson had grasped the central political dilemma of dystopian fiction: if its serious purpose is in its warning, then the more grimly inexorable the fictive world becomes, so the less effective it will be as a call to resistance. As Douglas Adams's Vogons were inclined to repeat: 'Resistance is useless!'.⁶ Or as Engels had it: 'Freedom is the recognition of necessity'.⁷ In short, there is no point in resisting the inevitable. Hence, Williams's judgement that 'in the very absoluteness of the fiction', it becomes 'an imaginative submission to ... inevitability';⁸ or Jameson's that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is not so much a critical dystopia as an 'anti-Utopia ... informed by a central passion to denounce and to warn against Utopian programs in the political realm'.⁹

There is no doubting that Orwell's later writings had express political purposes, but these are hardly as Jameson has them. 'Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936', Orwell

² G. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1989, p. 311; G. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four: A Novel*, London, Secker and Warburg, 1949, p. 298.

³ R. Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1963, pp. 283, 277.

⁴ R. Williams, 'Nineteen Eighty Four in 1984', in *Orwell*, third edition, London, Fontana, 1991, p. 124.

⁵ F. Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, London, Verso, 2005, p. 198.

⁶ D. Adams, *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, London, Pan Books, 1979, p. 57.

⁷ In truth, Engels wrote 'die Einsicht in die Notwendigkeit' (F. Engels, 'Herrn Eugen Dührings Umwälzung der Wissenschaft (Anti-Dühring)', in K. Marx und F. Engels, *Werke*, Band 20, Berlin, Dietz Verlag, 1962, p. 106), which is more accurately translated by Burns as 'the insight into necessity' (F. Engels, 'Anti-Dühring: Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science', trans. E. Burns, in K. Marx and F. Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1987, p. 105). But 'recognition' remains the best known English translation and better suits my (apparently illegitimate) purposes here.

⁸ Williams, 'Nineteen Eighty Four in 1984', pp. 125-126.

⁹ Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, pp. 198-199.

insisted in 1946, ‘has been written, directly or indirectly, *against* totalitarianism and *for* democratic Socialism’.¹⁰ Jameson sidesteps the question of Orwell’s peculiar politics - his combination of anti-fascism, neo-Trotskyism and libertarian socialism - by dismissing all reference to the “‘if this goes on” principle’ in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as ‘mere biographical affirmation’.¹¹ But when Orwell invited his American trade-union readers to read the novel in precisely these terms, he surely provided a gloss, not simply to his own beliefs, but to the text’s intended political effects. ‘I do not believe that the kind of society I describe necessarily *will* arrive,’ he had explained to the United Auto Workers, ‘but ... that ... it *could* arrive ... totalitarianism, *if not fought against*, could triumph’.¹² *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was written, at least in part, as exactly that inspiration to political resistance Williams and Jameson insist it cannot be. Their judgement is sustained, moreover, by a surprising lack of interest in the novel’s more formally literary properties. Williams writes as if it were written wholly within the conventions of literary realism, which it most definitely is not: witness the lengthy extracts from Goldstein’s *Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*.¹³ Worse still, Jameson virtually reduces it to its American reception as the paradigmatic ‘Cold War dystopia’, uncritically repeating the dominant American reading of both author and text as ‘at one with contemporary ... anti-socialisms’.¹⁴ More importantly for my purposes, however, neither seems to register that the novel doesn’t end at ‘THE END’, but continues, in my edition for over fourteen more pages, in the first for over thirteen.¹⁵

Nineteen Eighty-Four actually ends at the conclusion to the *Appendix* on Newspeak, with: ‘It was chiefly in order to allow time for the preliminary work of translation that the final adoption of Newspeak had been fixed for so late a date as 2050.’¹⁶ In content, these lines add little, but their form is redolent with meaning. For, as Margaret Atwood observes of the whole *Appendix*, it:

is written in standard English, in the third person, and in the past tense, which can only mean that the regime has fallen, and that language and individuality have survived. For whoever has written the essay on Newspeak, the world of *1984* is over.¹⁷

¹⁰ G. Orwell, ‘Why I Write’, in *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters: Vol. 1 An Age Like This*, S. Orwell and I. Angus (eds), Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1970, henceforth *CE1*, p.28.

¹¹ Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, p. 198.

¹² G. Orwell, ‘Letter to Francis A. Henson (extract)’, 16 June 1949, in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell: Vol. 4 In Front of Your Nose*, S. Orwell and I. Angus (eds), Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1970, henceforth *CE4*, p. 564.

¹³ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, pp. 191-208, 209, 210-226.

¹⁴ Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, pp. 200, 199. Jameson’s argument with Orwell is symptomatic of the wider American-centrism of this text, which is disappointing in so distinguished a comparatist.

¹⁵ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, pp. 312-326; Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four: A Novel*, pp. 299-312.

¹⁶ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p. 326; Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four: A Novel*, p. 312.

¹⁷ M. Atwood, ‘George Orwell: Some Personal Connections’, in *Curious Pursuits: Occasional Writing 1970-2005*, London, Virago, 2005, p. 337.

This must be right: the *Appendix* is internal to the novel, neither an author's nor a scholarly editor's account of how the fiction works, but rather a part of the fiction, a fictional commentary on fictional events. And, although Atwood fails to notice this, it is anticipated within the main body of the text, by a footnote in the first chapter, which assures us, again in standard English, in the third person, in the past tense, that: 'Newspeak was the official language of Oceania'.¹⁸ Atwood uses a similar device in *The Handmaid's Tale*, the first of her two dystopian science fiction¹⁹ novels, which concludes with an extract from the proceedings of a 'Symposium on Gileadean Studies', written in some utopian future set long after the collapse of the Republic of Gilead.²⁰ Moreover, she readily admits that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* provided her with a 'direct model' for this.²¹ If she is to be believed, then both Orwell's *Appendix* and her 'Historical Notes' work as framing devices, by which to blunt the force of dystopian inevitability.

Science Fiction as a Generic Context for *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

There are good reasons to take Atwood seriously, not least her SF novels, though the later *Oryx and Crake*²² clearly owes less to Orwell in particular than to mainstream SF in general. But it might be more productive to pursue, not so much the matter of her critical credentials as that of Orwell's intellectual contexts. Let me begin by noting how SF, or at least something very close to it, provided him with a generic context and related set of intertexts. Literary criticism tends to resist such identification between Orwell and SF: he is a 'great writer', after all, not some second-rate Trekkie. In 1943, however, when he began work on what was still entitled *The Last Man in Europe*, he hadn't known he was a great writer: none of his books had sold particularly well nor received much in the way of critical acclaim. But he had known about SF, not the term perhaps, still rarely used outside the United States, but certainly 'that kind of book', as he had written to Struve of Zamyatin's *My*.²³

The authors of that kind of book included, for Orwell, not only Zamyatin, but also Wells, Huxley and Čapek. Add in Mary Shelley and Verne and one would have something close to a canon of European, as distinct from American, SF writing. Canons aside, however, we may still ask what exactly were Orwell's interests in this European tradition of utopian and dystopian future

¹⁸ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p. 5n; Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four: A Novel*, p. 7n.

¹⁹ Henceforth SF.

²⁰ M. Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, London, Virago, 1987, pp. 311-324.

²¹ Atwood, 'George Orwell: Some Personal Connections', p. 337.

²² M. Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, London, Bloomsbury, 2003.

²³ G. Orwell, 'Letter to Gleb Struve', 17 February 1944, in *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters: Vol. 3 As I Please*, S. Orwell and I. Angus (eds), Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1970, henceforth CE3, p. 118. In the United States, Hugo Gernsback had coined the word 'scientification' in 1926 for the first issue of his pulp magazine *Amazing Stories*. But 'science fiction' became common only after 1938, when John W. Campbell Jr changed the name of a rival 'pulp' from *Astounding Stories* to *Astounding Science-Fiction* (J. Clute and P. Nicholls (eds), *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* London, Orbit, 1993, pp. 25, 64). By 1939, Orwell was already familiar with Gernsback's term, the paternity of which he traced to Wells (Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies', in CE1, p. 521), but not with Campbell's more recent coinage.

fictions. Zamyatin is by common consent one of the most important figures in early twentieth-century Russian SF: Suvin describes him as, along with Čapek, ‘the most significant world SF writer between the World Wars’.²⁴ He was certainly not appreciated as such, however, in Orwell’s England. Zamyatin’s dystopian novel *My* had been written in Russia and in Russian in 1920-21. But it wasn’t published in the original language until 1952, and then only in the United States: first publication in Russia came as late as 1988. The book had become available in English, however, in an American - but not British - translation, as *We*, in 1924, and in French translation, as *Nous autres*, in 1929.²⁵ Orwell had ‘not heard of’ it until 1944, when he first read Struve’s *25 Years of Soviet Russian Literature*.²⁶ Unable to obtain the American translation, then still unavailable in England, Orwell acquired a copy of *Nous autres* ‘several’ years later, which he promptly reviewed for *Tribune*, advising its readers that: ‘This is a book to look out for when an English version appears’.²⁷ In 1946, he wrote approvingly of the novel in his famous essay on Burnham; in 1948, he offered to review a proposed English translation, which unfortunately failed to eventuate, for the *Times Literary Supplement*; and in 1949, he urged it on Fred Warburg, who had published *Animal Farm* in 1945 and would shortly publish *Nineteen Eighty-Four* itself.²⁸

If Zamyatin was effectively unknown in England, Wells, by contrast, was clearly the leading English SF writer of the day, although, like Orwell, he remained unfamiliar with the term: as with Verne in English translation, Wells’s novels were marketed as ‘scientific romance’.²⁹ His utopian fictions included *A Modern Utopia*, *The Dream*, *Men Like Gods* and *The Shape of Things to Come*.³⁰ This last, which predicted and argued for the creation of a technocratic ‘World State’, became the best-known English literary utopia of the 1930s. The 1936 film version, *Things to Come*, directed by W. Cameron Menzies with a screenplay co-authored by Wells, occupied an equally prominent position in British SF cinema. Orwell could be fulsome in retrospective praise for Wells:

The minds of all of us, and therefore the physical world, would be perceptibly different if Wells had never existed ... Back in the nineteen-hundreds it was a wonderful experience ... to discover H.G. Wells ... here was this wonderful man

²⁴ D. Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: on the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1979, p. 280.

²⁵ E. Zamyatin, *We*, trans. G. Zilboorg, Introduction by P. Rudy, New York, E.P. Dutton, 1952 (1924); E. Zamyatin, *Nous autres*, trad. B. Cauvet-Duhamel, Paris, Gallimard, 1929; Y. Zamyatin, *My*, New York, Chekhov Publishing House, 1952.

²⁶ Orwell, ‘Letter to Gleb Struve’, 17 February 1944, in *CE3*, p. 118.

²⁷ Orwell, ‘Review *We* by E.I. Zamyatin’, *Tribune* 4 January 1946, in *CE4*, pp. 95, 99.

²⁸ Orwell, ‘James Burnham and the Managerial Revolution’ in *CE4*, p. 195; Orwell, ‘Letter to Gleb Struve’, 21 April 1948, in *CE4*, p. 473; Orwell, ‘Letter to F.J. Warburg’, 30 March 1949, in *CE4*, pp. 546-547.

²⁹ E. James, *Science Fiction in the Twentieth Century*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 9.

³⁰ H.G. Wells, *A Modern Utopia*, (ed.) G. Glaeys and P. Parrinder, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 2005 (1905); H.G. Wells, *Men Like Gods*, London, Cassell, 1923; H.G. Wells, *The Dream*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1924; H.G. Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come: The Ultimate Revolution*, London, Hutchinson, 1933.

who ... knew that the future was not going to be what respectable people imagined.³¹

But his work had become increasingly irrelevant to the twentieth century, Orwell continued: 'A crude book like *The Iron Heel* ... is a truer prophecy ... than ... *The Shape of Things to Come*.'³² Orwell particularly disliked Wells's utopianism: as early as 1935, he had described these 'Utopiae infested by nude school-marms' as a 'kind of optimistic lie'; in 1941, he objected to the sheer uselessness of 'rigmarole about a World State'; and as late as 1946, he repeated his 'low opinion' of Wells's writing after 1920.³³ Unsurprisingly, the great man had not taken kindly to such criticism, famously dismissing Orwell as a 'Trotskyist with big feet'.³⁴

For Orwell, Huxley clearly represented a more formidable figure than the later Wells. Orwell made a point of insisting that *Brave New World* had been 'plagiarized' from Zamyatin's *We*, a calumny later redirected at *Nineteen Eighty-Four* itself.³⁵ Unlike Orwell, always essentially a literary outsider, Huxley came from one of the leading intellectual families in England, descended on his father's side from T.H. Huxley and on his mother's from Matthew Arnold. When *Brave New World* was published in 1932, its author was already a well-established writer, with *Crome Yellow*, *Point Counter Point* and *Do What You Will* to his credit.³⁶ He had been a friend of D.H. Lawrence, whose letters he was then editing for publication, and of writers like Virginia Woolf and E.M. Forster.³⁷ Orwell, by contrast, was out of work, impoverished and staying with his elder sister in Leeds, where he borrowed Huxley's novel from the local public library.³⁸ Orwell would in retrospect treat Huxley, along with Joyce, Eliot and Lawrence, as part of 'the movement' of the 'middle and late twenties'.³⁹ And, despite mixed initial responses,⁴⁰

³¹ G. Orwell, 'Wells, Hitler and the World State', in *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters: Vol. 2 My Country Right or Left*, S. Orwell and I. Angus (eds), Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1970, henceforth CE2, p. 171.

³² Orwell, 'Wells, Hitler and the World State', p. 172. The reference is to J. London *The Iron Heel*, New York, Macmillan, 1958 (1907).

³³ Orwell, 'Review. *Tropic of Cancer* by Henry Miller', *New English Weekly*, 14 November 1935, in CE1, p. 179; Orwell, 'Wells, Hitler and the World State', in CE2, p. 167; Orwell, 'As I Please', *Tribune* 6 December 1946, in CE4, p. 293.

³⁴ B. Crick, *George Orwell: A Life*, London, Secker and Warburg, 1980, p. 294.

³⁵ Orwell, 'Review. *We* by E.I. Zamyatin', *Tribune* 4 January 1946, in CE4, p. 96; Orwell, 'Letter to F.J. Warburg', 30 March 1949, in CE4, p. 547.

³⁶ A. Huxley, *Crome Yellow*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1921; A. Huxley, *Point Counter Point: A Novel*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1928; A. Huxley, *Do What You Will: Essays*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1929.

³⁷ A. Huxley (ed.), *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, New York, Viking Press, 1932.

³⁸ Crick, *George Orwell: A Life*, p. 137.

³⁹ Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', in CE1, p. 554.

⁴⁰ The book was much more successful in Britain, where it sold 13,000 copies in 1932 and 10,000 in 1933, than in the United States (S. Bedford, *Aldous Huxley: A Biography, Vol. One: 1894-1939*, London, Chatto and Windus in association with William Collins, 1973, p. 251).

Brave New World had indeed become one of the intellectual landmarks in what we might now think of as the long twenties.

Orwell is at his most enthusiastic about Huxley in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, which denounces Wells at some length⁴¹, citing *Brave New World* with approval for its caricature of Wellsian utopianism as a 'paradise of little fat men'.⁴² Huxley had indeed intended to expose 'the horror of the Wellsian Utopia'.⁴³ But in writing *Brave New World*, he acquired a series of other targets - American capitalism and Soviet Communism; state planning and eugenics; sexual, pharmacological and mass media induced hedonism; Keynesian economics and Lawrentian primitivism - many of which he would elsewhere explore more positively. Part of the novel's peculiar character, at once both strength and weakness, is its capacity to represent sympathetically many different sides of many different questions. But this was hardly an Orwellian virtue. By 1940, Orwell would dismiss Huxley's dystopia as having no bearing on the actual future; the following year, he judged its failure reminiscent of Wells.⁴⁴

Orwell's primary objection to *Brave New World* was to its anti-political pessimism. So he found Huxley guilty of a:

refusal to believe that human society can be fundamentally improved. Man is non-perfectible, merely political changes can effect nothing, progress is an illusion.

'The connection between this belief and political reaction', he continued, 'is ... obvious. Other worldliness is the best alibi a rich man can have'.⁴⁵ Here, the argument is specifically directed at Huxley's pacifism, rather than at his dystopian novel. But in the review of *Nous autres* for *Tribune*, where the charge of plagiarism is first aired, Orwell was explicit that what distinguished Huxley from Zamyatin was the latter's 'political point'. The irony should be obvious: these were exactly the charges - that he plagiarised Zamyatin; that he was pessimistic about the possibilities for political change; that there was no practicable political point to his argument - which would be directed at *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by later leftist critics.

But Orwell continues:

In Huxley's book ... no clear reason is given why society should be stratified in the elaborate way ... described. The aim is not economic exploitation, but the desire to bully and dominate does not seem to be a motive either. There is no power hunger, no sadism, no hardness of any kind.⁴⁶

⁴¹ G. Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1962, pp. 169-172, 177-178.

⁴² Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, p. 169.

⁴³ A. Huxley, 'To Mrs Kethevan Roberts', 18 May 1931, in G. Smith (ed.) *Letters of Aldous Huxley*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1969, p. 348.

⁴⁴ Orwell, 'Notes on the Way', *Time and Tide* 6 April 1940, in *CE2*, p. 33; 'Prophecies of Fascism', *Tribune* 12 July 1940, in *CE2*, p. 46; Orwell, 'Wells, Hitler and the World State', in *CE2*, p. 172.

⁴⁵ Orwell, 'As I Please', *Tribune* 24 December 1943, in *CE3*, p. 82.

⁴⁶ Orwell, 'Review. *We* by E.I. Zamyatin', *Tribune* 4 January 1946, in *CE4*, p. 97.

By contrast:

It is [the] ... intuitive grasp of the irrational side of totalitarianism - human sacrifice, cruelty as an end in itself, the worship of a Leader ... - that makes Zamyatin's book superior to Huxley's.⁴⁷

The political point of Orwell's own dystopia was already becoming apparent. His book would need to be unremittingly horrible so as to expose the sheer ghastliness of totalitarianism. But it would therefore need something external to itself to inspire belief in the possibility of resistance. Which is why 'THE END' could not actually be the end.

Karel Čapek interested Orwell less than either Wells, Zamyatin or Huxley.⁴⁸ He and his brother, Josef, were nonetheless amongst the best-known figures in inter-war Czech literary life. Moreover, Karel's play *R.U.R. Rossum's Universal Robots* - the title is in English even in the Czech original - had proven an extraordinary international success. The first Czech production was early in 1921. An American English-language version was performed in 1922 by the New York Theatre Guild, a British version by the Reandean Company at St Martin's Theatre in London in 1923. Distinct British and American translations followed in book form later that year. A Japanese translation appeared in 1923, French and Russian in 1924, Rumanian and Turkish in 1927, Italian in 1929, Bulgarian in 1931, Swedish in 1934.⁴⁹ Orwell could not have attended the London production, since he was serving in Burma at the time, but he might well have noticed the reviews. He seems not to have owned a television set, so nor is he likely to have seen the BBC's 1938 35-minute adaptation, the first ever televised SF programme.⁵⁰ But he certainly knew of the play's existence and seemed familiar with its themes.

In *The Road to Wigan Pier*, he cites Čapek approvingly as a critic of mechanical progress for its own sake. '[T]he unfortunate thing', Orwell writes:

is that Socialism, as usually presented, is bound up with the idea of mechanical progress ... as an end in itself, almost as a kind of religion ... Karel Capek hits it off well enough in the horrible ending of *R.U.R.*, when the Robots, having slaughtered the last human being, announce their intention to 'build many

⁴⁷ Orwell, 'Review. *We* by E.I. Zamyatin', p. 98.

⁴⁸ Presumably this is so, in part, because *R.U.R.* is unconcerned with the issue of totalitarianism. Orwell seems to have been unfamiliar with Čapek's 1937 SF play, *Bílá nemoc*, which addressed the question very directly and was very promptly translated into English. Cf. K. Čapek, *Bílá nemoc*, Prague, Fr. Borovny, 1937; K. Čapek *Power and Glory*, trans. P. Selver and R. Neale, London, Allen and Unwin, 1938.

⁴⁹ K. Čapek, *R.U.R. Rossum's Universal Robots. Kolektivní Drama o Vstupní Komedii a Třech Dějstvích*, Prague, Československý Spisovatel, 1966, pp. 117, 204-205.

⁵⁰ The television adaptation, broadcast on 11 February 1938, was by Nigel Playfair, the production by Jan Bussell. At the time, the Orwells were living in Wallington, Hertfordshire, and might conceivably have known someone with access to a set. Playfair and Bussell later worked together on a 90-minute television version, again for the BBC, broadcast on 4 March 1948. By this time, the first draft of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was already completed and Orwell himself was in a sanatorium near Glasgow, where the facilities would not have extended to television.

houses' (just for the sake of building houses, you see).⁵¹

This is interesting for two reasons: because it directly addresses our own question of horrible endings; and because the (slight mis-) quotation suggests direct familiarity with the play, at least in book form. For this is indeed what their leader, Radius, demands of the robots, production for production's sake:

The Robots will build much. They will build new houses for new Robots.⁵²

The sentiment is repeated in the Epilogue:

Sir, have pity. Terror is coming upon us. We have intensified our labour. We have obtained a million million tons of coal from the earth. Nine million spindles are running by day and night. There is no more room to store what we have made. Houses are being built throughout the world.⁵³

But, as we shall see, Orwell was mistaken to describe the play as ending thus.

Three Intertexts: *Nous autres*, *Brave New World* and *R.U.R.*

We have traced Orwell's responses to Wellsian utopia and to the dystopias of Zamyatin, Huxley and Čapek. The problem of ending remains to be examined, however, at least for the dystopias - since here the formal issues confronting, respectively, utopian and dystopian writers become very different. Let us elaborate a little. Jameson has observed that the citizens of what he terms 'political' utopias are normally 'grasped as a statistical population', that is, that 'there are no individuals any longer, let alone any existential "lived experience"'. Hence the 'boredom or dryness' often attributed to the form. This is not a weakness, he continues, but rather a 'central strength' of the form, insofar as it reinforces 'plebeianisation', that is, our 'desubjection in the utopian political process'.⁵⁴ There is a certain perversity to this observation, which makes sense only given Jameson's subsequent insistence that:

⁵¹ Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, pp. 165-166.

⁵² K. Čapek, *R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots). A Play in three acts and an epilogue*, trans. P. Selver, in *The Brothers Čapek, R.U.R. and The Insect Play*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1961, p. 89. The Czech is more or less identical: 'Roboti budou mnoho stavět. Budou stavět nové domy pro nové Roboty' (Čapek, *R.U.R. Rossum's Universal Robots*, p. 85).

⁵³ Čapek, *R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots)*, p. 93. This speech by Radius in Selver's translation is actually a composite and elaboration of two different speeches in the Czech:

2. ROBOT/ Pane, měj slitování. Padá na nás hrůza. Všechno napravíme, co jsme učinili.

3. ROBOT/ Znásobili jsme práci. Není už kam dát, co jsme vyrobili.
(Čapek, *R.U.R. Rossum's Universal Robots*, p. 89)

There is no reference here to coal, spindles or houses. But this is immaterial to our analysis, since Orwell was familiar only with the Selver translation.

⁵⁴ F. Jameson, 'The Politics of Utopia', *New Left Review*, second series, No. 25, Jan/Feb 2004, pp. 39-40.

utopias are non-fictional, even though they are non-existent. Utopias in fact come to us as barely audible messages from a future that may never come into being.⁵⁵

But the instance he cites, from Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, runs directly contrary to the gist of his argument. For it is precisely insofar as some utopian texts work as novels, that is, as fictions - as Piercy's clearly does - that these attempt the kind of existential plausibility Jameson discounts. This is true, not only of Morris (as distinct from Bellamy), as Jameson half concedes,⁵⁶ but also of Piercy, Le Guin and virtually all other 'utopian' SF novelists, albeit not of More, who provides the template both for the form itself and for Jameson's reading. The sheer persistence of utopian strategies for discounting such boredom and dryness suggests how mistaken Jameson might be. Obviously relevant topoi include: the sexual romance within utopia (Morris successfully, Bellamy unsuccessfully, and almost everyone else to some extent); the distant view of utopia from its extremities (a recurring motif in Le Guin's Hainish and Bank's 'The Culture' novels, but also, for example, in *Star Trek*); the external threat to utopia (Banks again, but also Piercy and Kim Stanley Robinson); and so on.

If utopias are communities imagined as more perfect, as both Suvin and Williams argued,⁵⁷ then their political purposes will tend to range from negative critique of the real through to positive inspiration to the better-than-real. The nearer any particular utopian fiction - novel or film - approximates to the latter, the greater will be its attempt at existential plausibility, since such plausibility tends to render the fiction, and hence the utopia itself, credible. This is not to discount Suvin's insight that utopia is an estranged rather than naturalistic form,⁵⁸ but merely to insist that novels and films work in a very different register from the truly non-fictional utopias of political philosophy proper, that they must work as art or entertainment and are therefore more directly implicated in the conventions of literary and cinematic naturalism than Suvin allows. The worse worlds of dystopian fiction are similarly implicated, but here the relevant political purpose is not the inspiration, but the warning. As Huxley observed of *Brave New World*: 'This ... was the message of the book - *This is possible: for heaven's sake be careful*'.⁵⁹ Dystopias are rarely charged with either boredom or dryness, since their stock in trade of human beastliness remains captivating to conventional post-lapsarian sensibilities. The equivalent problem remains, however, that of how to represent a naturalistically plausible danger sufficiently terrible to be threatening, but insufficiently so as to be demoralising. Hence, what we have termed the problem of ending in dystopia. How, then, is it resolved in Orwell's three dystopian intertexts?

Zamyatin's *Nous autres* had much in common with *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, but was far more directly a critique of scientific positivism. So its '1'Etat Unique' (the Sole State or the One State) is ruled by mathematics and science as much as by the dictatorial 'Bienfaiteur' (Benefactor): like all its members, the novel's central protagonist, D-503, the builder of the *Intégral* space probe, is merely a 'numéro'; like all these numbers, his daily routine is ordered with arithmetical precision by 'les Tables des Heures'; and the novel itself famously comprises a series of his laboratory

⁵⁵ Jameson, 'The Politics of Utopia', p. 54.

⁵⁶ Jameson, 'The Politics of Utopia', pp. 39-40.

⁵⁷ Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 45; Williams, 'Utopia and Science Fiction', p. 196.

⁵⁸ Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 18.

⁵⁹ A. Huxley, London interview, 1961, quoted in Bedford, *Aldous Huxley*, p. 245.

‘Notes’.⁶⁰ D-503 is seduced into the cause of rebellion, both sexually and politically, by I-330. At one level, she provides the model for Orwell’s Julia, a sexually proactive woman whose affections serve to promote the male protagonist’s resistance to the state, but who he will therefore eventually be forced to betray. D-503’s final Note, reporting his subjection to the Benefactor’s lobotomy-like ‘Grande Opération’ to eliminate the imagination, and his subsequent impassive witness to I-330’s torture under ‘la Cloche’ (the Bell), is thus a moment of simultaneous defeat and betrayal, a model for the moment in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* when ‘I sold you and you sold me’.⁶¹

There are obvious differences, however. Where Orwell’s tripartite structure of rival totalitarianisms, Oceania, Eurasia and Eastasia, is a self-sealing, fully enclosed system of domination, Zamyatin’s Sole State remains encircled by the wild country outside ‘le Mur Vert’ (the Green Wall) and threatened from within and without by the ‘Méphi’ underground. Moreover, I-330 is a much stronger character than Julia, not only a leader in the Méphi, but also the novel’s chief intellectual antagonist to official positivism: her insistence that there can be no final number, and therefore no final revolution, radically undermines D-503’s faith in the mathematical foundations of the social order.⁶² If there is some homology between the destruction of Julia and Winston in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and that of I-330 and D-503 in *Nous autres*, there is, nonetheless, no equivalent to the latter’s illicit child by O-90, who will be born and brought up beyond the Green Wall. If the Benefactor still rules the Sole State at Zamyatin’s conclusion, his rule has been challenged more effectively in the course of the narrative by the unsuccessful Méphi revolution, than is Big Brother’s by either the illusory promise of the Brotherhood or Winston’s vague hope in the proles.

The contrast between the novels is perhaps at its keenest in their respective accounts of the mathematics of totalitarianism. For where Orwell’s O’Brien can make Winston see five fingers, I-330’s insistence that there is no final number will haunt D-503 through to this novel’s ‘La Fin’ in Note 39:

Ecoutez, je vous dis! Répondez-moi: de l’autre côté de la limite de votre univers fini, qu’y a-t-il?

[Listen, I’m talking to you! Answer me this: beyond the limit of your finite universe, what’s there?]⁶³

This isn’t quite the end, of course, since Note 40 is still to come. But even there, in the novel’s closing paragraphs, Zamyatin reminds us that the Green Wall has been successfully breached from the outside, that the Sole State is actually already in retreat:

à l’ouest, des régions où règnent le chaos et les bêtes sauvages et qui, malheureusement, renferment une grande quantité de numéros ayant trahi la raison.

⁶⁰ Zamiatine, *Nous autres*, pp. 7-8, 16.

⁶¹ Zamiatine, *Nous autres*, p. 233-234; Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p. 307.

⁶² Zamiatine, *Nous autres*, p. 179.

⁶³ Zamiatine, *Nous autres*, p. 232; cf. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p. 270.

Nous avons cependant réussi à établir, dans la 40^e avenue, un mur provisoire d'ondes à haute tension.

[to the west, some regions are ruled by chaos and savage beasts and, unfortunately, contain a great many numbers who have betrayed reason.

We have nevertheless succeeded in establishing, along the 40th avenue, a temporary high-voltage wall.]⁶⁴

The particular defeats of D-503 and I-330 are thus contextualised and mitigated against by the overarching promise of infinite revolution. As Suvin comments:

the protagonist's defeat is of the day but not necessarily of the epoch. The defeat in the novel ... is not the defeat of the novel itself, but an exasperated shocking of the reader into thought and action.⁶⁵

Like *Nous autres*, *Brave New World* is set in the twenty-sixth century. Like *Nous autres*, its target is an affluent, technologically sophisticated dystopia. But where Zamyatin's Sole State anticipated Oceanian sexual puritanism, Huxley explored the dystopian potential of the mass commodification of sexual, pharmacological and mass media pleasures. As Orwell observed, it was directed at 'the hedonistic principle', at a world 'turned into a Riviera hotel' and was thus a 'brilliant caricature' of the 'present of 1930', that is, the 1920s. From a twenty-first century vantage point, we might want to add the present of 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990 and perhaps even 2000, but for Orwell, writing in 1940, it seemed to cast 'no light on the future.'⁶⁶ Like *Nous autres*, *Brave New World* famously ends with a death, but a media-saturated suicide rather than a political execution:

'Mr Savage!'

Slowly, very slowly, like two unhurried compass needles, the feet turned towards the right; north, north-east, east, south-east, south, south-south-west; then paused, and after a few seconds, turned as unhurriedly back towards the left. South-south-west, south, south-east, east, ...⁶⁷

If John, the Savage, were the novel's hero and his resistance to the pseudo-Wellsian World State heroic, then this ending would be tragic. But it is closer to bathetic comedy. For he is clearly neither hero nor protagonist: he doesn't actually appear until Chapter Seven; his rebellion is comically excessive; his public self-flagellation in the closing chapter is near-ludicrous; and the Savage Reservation that nurtured him is as drug-obsessed and socially conformist as the civilization he pits it against. If the novel had a central protagonist, it would probably be the intelligent but self-important and self-pitying Bernard Marx. But he is too obviously yet another butt for the novel's humour to be its hero.⁶⁸ And this, surely, is the point: *Brave New World* is

⁶⁴ Zamyatin, *Nous autres*, p. 234.

⁶⁵ Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 259.

⁶⁶ Orwell, 'Prophecies of Fascism', *Tribune* 12 July 1940, in *CE2*, p. 46.

⁶⁷ A. Huxley, *Brave New World*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1955, p. 237.

⁶⁸ Donald Watt's careful examination of the novel's manuscript revisions leads him to conclude that: 'Huxley at first thought of Bernard as the novel's hero, then switched to John as more fitting for the hero's

above all a comic novel, a scattershot satire of Huxley's contemporary intellectual landscape, from Hollywood hedonism to Pavlovian psychology, Freudianism to Fordism (both in the sense used in the novel and that of more recent sociology and economics). As Huxley explained in a letter to his father, it is 'a comic, or at least satirical, novel about the Future'.⁶⁹ In this respect, it remains very different from our other three dystopias: the first act of *R.U.R.* is comic and, indeed, vaguely reminiscent of Shaw, but thereafter the dominant register becomes closer to Chekhov or Ibsen; there are comic moments in *Nous autres*, as for example when D-503 imagines I-330 as one of the Valkyries,⁷⁰ but these are comparatively few; and there is virtually no comedy to speak of in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

The one character exempt from such satire in *Brave New World* is Mustapha Mond, the World Controller for Western Europe. Significantly, it is only in the debate with him, in Chapters Sixteen and Seventeen, that the Savage becomes a truly serious figure. This is the philosophical core of the novel, where Mond speaks for Enlightenment *civilisation* and the utilitarian felicific calculus, the Savage for Romantic *Kultur*, but also for primitivist barbarism. The first of these chapters ends with Bernard Marx's and Helmholtz Watson's banishment to an island reserved for those 'too self-consciously individual to fit into community-life.'⁷¹ This is handled with explicit comic effect for Bernard, less so for Helmholtz, but in neither case is there much suggestion that the outcome is especially intolerable. The World State inspires satirical amusement rather than terrified dread. The second ends with the interestingly ambivalent philosophical conclusion to the entire novel. 'What you need,' the Savage argues, 'is something *with* tears for a change. Nothing costs enough here.' 'We prefer to do things comfortably', Mond retorts a little later. 'But I don't want comfort', the Savage replies:

I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness. I want sin.'

'In fact,' said Mustapha Mond, 'you're claiming the right to be unhappy.'

'Not to mention the right to grow old and ugly and impotent; the right to have syphilis and cancer; the right to have too little to eat; the right to be lousy; the right to live in constant apprehension of what may happen tomorrow; the right to catch typhoid; the right to be tortured by unspeakable pains of every kind.'

There was a long silence.

'I claim them all,' said the Savage at last.

Mustapha Mond shrugged his shoulders. 'You're welcome,' he said.⁷²

Chapter Eighteen, narrating the Savage's self-exile, self-mutilation and self-destruction, remains to come, but the philosophical argument ends here, with an unresolved choice between what Huxley would later describe as 'an insane life in Utopia, or the life of a primitive in an Indian

role, and finally decided that Helmholtz, if anyone, should be the book's only authentically uplifting character' (Donald Watt, 'The Manuscript Revisions of *Brave New World*', in Jerome Mecker (ed.), *Critical Essays on Aldous Huxley*, New York, G.K. Hall & Co., 1996, p. 80).

⁶⁹ Huxley, 'To Leonard Huxley', p. 351.

⁷⁰ *Zamiatine*, *Nous autres*, p. 204.

⁷¹ Huxley, *Brave New World*, p. 178.

⁷² Huxley, *Brave New World*, pp. 186-187.

village, ... in some respects ... hardly less queer and abnormal.’⁷³ In short, Huxley’s ending surrounds a philosophical impasse with a set of highly elaborate comic and satiric trappings.

We noted Orwell’s description of Čapek’s *R.U.R* as ending with the Robots producing for production’s sake, after their slaughter of the human race. But this isn’t how the play ends in either the Czech original or its British translation. The original was organised into a comic prologue and three acts, with the speech to which Orwell refers coming at the end of the second act. Paul Selver’s translation, as adapted for the London stage by Nigel Playfair, had three acts and an epilogue, with the speech coming at the end of the third act.⁷⁴ But in both one human remains alive, R.U.R.’s head of construction, Stavitel Alquist, and in both his function is to provide the play with a less horrible ending than Orwell recalled. Alquist has been retained by the Robots in an apparently futile effort to find ways to reproduce themselves in the absence of humans, who alone knew the secret of their creation. In *R.U.R.* humankind is led to extinction, through a combination of technological excess and unbridled capitalism; the Robots to a parallel near-extinction, through their cruelty in disposing of their onetime human masters. The play’s logic thus tends remorselessly toward the self-destruction of both, just as Orwell remembered. Indeed, the play might plausibly have ended there, with the theatrical equivalent of what Marx and Engels had called ‘the common ruin of the contending classes’.⁷⁵

Its actual conclusion, however, is that life will continue even though humanity may not, which is more optimistic, but nonetheless distinctly improbable because belied by almost everything that precedes it. Where no politics will work, the alternative turns out to be unconditional romantic love. In ways both unexplained and inexplicable, the play insists that self-sacrificial heterosexual love between the Robot, Primus, and the Robotess, Helena, will yield the promise of new life. Alquist is thus given the play’s last speech, in which to pronounce them the new Adam and Eve. Opening the *Bible*, he quotes directly from *Genesis* and then concludes by citing the song of Simeon from the Gospel according to St Luke. This is rendered slightly misleadingly in Selver’s British translation, but with more dramatic effect for an English audience, as a direct quotation from the ‘Nunc Dimittis’, in the form given by the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*, then still recited daily in the Church of England’s ‘Order for Evening Prayer’:

Now, Lord, lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy will, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.⁷⁶

Čapek’s conclusion is clear: no matter what the sterilities of human (capitalist) robotics and inhuman (communist) Robots, love and life will finally survive. Christian rhetoric thus serves to underwrite an essentially pantheist solution: that life will out, no matter what the actions of

⁷³ A. Huxley, ‘Foreword’ (1946), in *Brave New World*, p. 7.

⁷⁴ Compare Čapek, *R.U.R. Rossum’s Universal Robots. Kolektivní Drama o Vstupní Komedii a Třech Dějstvích* (literally, a collective drama in a comic prologue and three acts) with Čapek *R.U.R. (Rossum’s Universal Robots). A Play in three acts and an epilogue*.

⁷⁵ K. Marx and F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. S. Moore, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1967, p. 79.

⁷⁶ Čapek, *R.U.R. (Rossum’s Universal Robots)*, p. 104. In the Czech original, the reference is an allusion rather than a quotation: ‘Nyní propustíš, Pane, služebníka svého v pokojí; neboť užřely oči mé - užřely - spasení tvé skrze lásku, a život nezahyne! ... Nezahyne! ... Nezahyne!’ (Čapek, *R.U.R. Rossum’s Universal Robots*, p. 102).

humans and their robotic creations. In some ways, this anticipates more recent deep-ecological speculation about the planet's capacity to survive the depredations of our species. But for Čapek it was, rather, the way to square a circle, to produce an optimistic resolution where none was available. Certainly, it seems to have been insufficiently persuasive for Orwell to remember its details.

Dystopian Endings: An Ideal Typology and Some Hypotheses

To summarise: Zamyatin's *Nous autres* resolves the problem of dystopian ending by framing the particular catastrophes that overcome D-503 and I-330 in relation to a surrounding context of infinite - or at least continuing - revolution; Huxley's *Brave New World* by framing its philosophical impasse comically and satirically; and Čapek's *R.U.R.* by the contrivance of an optimistic outcome, in many respects at odds with the main narrative. The first seems to me the most persuasive, the last the least. But, however effective, they together provide three out of the four instances of a possible ideal typology, arranged around measures of internality and externality applied, respectively, to the formal question of narrative structure and to the dystopian content of the imaginary worlds represented in the fiction. So the solution in *Nous autres* is both internal to the text's main narrative and to the fictional history of the world it describes. That in *Brave New World* is also internal to the main narrative, but external to the fictional history of A.F. 632, insofar as satire necessarily implies a position outside the reality it satirises. That in *R.U.R.* is both external to the main narrative in form - the English translation is right to represent the fourth act as an epilogue - and also in content, insofar as the closing transcendental religiosity occupies a quite different conceptual space from that postulated in the first three acts. We may represent this ideal typology in diagrammatic form thus:

		<u>Form (continuity with the main narrative)</u>	
		Internal	External
<u>Content (continuity with the imaginary world represented in the fiction)</u>	Internal	<i>Nous autres</i>	<i>Nineteen Eighty-Four</i>
	External	<i>Brave New World</i>	<i>R.U.R.</i>

The fourth possibility, that of narrative externality in form, but historical internality in fictional content, is what we find in Orwell's *Appendix*. Given that we know he was familiar with each of the other texts, we may plausibly infer that this device was in fact a deliberate invention, an experiment in relation to 'that kind of book', that is, in relation to the genre of SF. Interestingly, there is no trace of the *Appendix* on Newspeak in what remains of Orwell's own manuscript.⁷⁷ Given its dilapidated state - there is much missing - this in itself proves very little. But it is suggestive of the possibility that the *Appendix* really was written last, as the real 'END' to the

⁷⁷ G. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four: The Facsimile of the Extant Manuscript*, ed. P. Davison, London, Secker and Warburg, 1984.

novel, the solution to a problem that had become apparent only once the main text was more or less complete. These inferences are strongly supportive of Atwood's reading of both the novel itself and its more general significance. We may reasonably conclude, then, that readings of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which remain premised on the assumption that the novel ends at 'THE END', as Williams's does, are misconceived and therefore unlikely to prove reliable.

Comparing *Nineteen Eighty-Four* unfavourably with *News from Nowhere*, Williams argued that the difference lay in the greater plausibility of the latter's fictional 1952 revolution: 'because its energy flows both ways, forward and back, ... its issue ... can go either way'. He judged this kind of openness, where the 'subjunctive is a true subjunctive, rather than a displaced indicative', absent from the 'dominant mode of dystopia', as represented paradigmatically by Orwell.⁷⁸ Williams was right to draw our attention to what he elsewhere termed 'the tenses of the imagination'.⁷⁹ But he was mistaken, nonetheless, in his understanding of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. For this true subjunctive is precisely what occupies the space between 'THE END' of the novel and the *Appendix* on 'THE PRINCIPLES OF NEWSPEAK'. Moreover, the subjunctive takes a particularly interesting form within the actual text of the *Appendix*, that of the subjunctive future perfect.

Citing Freud's notion of 'working through' and Paul Cohen on mathematical 'forcing', Badiou has observed that:

Forcing is the point at which a truth ... authorizes anticipations of knowledge concerning not what is but *what will have been if truth attains completion*'.

'This anticipatory dimension', he continues, 'requires that truth judgements be formulated in the future perfect.'⁸⁰ To be able to say something about a truth means, then, that at some future moment this truth will have been realised, that it will have been true. 'A forcing', Badiou writes elsewhere, 'is the powerful fiction of a *completed* truth.'⁸¹ Effective political and religious myths are therefore, for Roland Boer, precisely instances of such forcings: they construct or postulate worlds the truth of which will have been upon their completion.⁸² To be more precise, however, the tense to which Badiou and Boer both refer is the indicative future perfect. And, as such, it is the informing tense of all positively utopian myth, as in Boer's own example of Exodus.

This has an interesting theoretical corollary: that the equivalent tense of dystopian prevention, of that we seek to avoid by negative example, will be the subjunctive future perfect. We began with Atwood's observation that Orwell's *Appendix* had been written in the past tense. We should now add that there are other tenses at work there, notably the subjunctive future perfect. So that, in the

⁷⁸ Williams, 'Utopia and Science Fiction', p. 208.

⁷⁹ R. Williams, 'The Tenses of Imagination' in *Writing in Society*, London, Verso, 1984.

⁸⁰ A. Badiou, 'Truth: Forcing and the Unnameable' in *Theoretical Writings*, ed. and trans. R. Brassier and A. Toscano, London, Continuum, 2004, p. 127.

⁸¹ A. Badiou, *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return to Philosophy*, trans. and ed. O. Feltham and J. Clemens, London, Continuum, 2003, p. 65.

⁸² R. Boer, 'Political Myth', paper presented to the Centre for Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies, Monash University, Wednesday 3 August 2005.

sentences which provide its chronological frame, Orwell writes:

It was expected that Newspeak would have finally superseded Oldspeak ... by about the year 2050 ...

and:

within a couple of generations even the possibility of such a lapse would have vanished ... When Oldspeak had been once and for all superseded, the last link would have been severed.⁸³

Orwell's use of the subjunctive functions here almost exactly as Williams observed it in Morris: to mean that these events will not necessarily have eventuated. The subjunctive future perfect is by no means always empirically present in dystopian SF: its use in Atwood's 'Historical Notes', for example, is merely trivial. But, even when this is so, even where the tense fails to appear altogether, it remains nonetheless the logically informing tense of dystopia. For this is what dystopian future fictions recount: what *would have happened* if their empirical and implied readerships had not been moved to prevent it. Orwell knew this and that may well be an important part of his lasting significance.

The End.

⁸³ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, pp. 312, 324.