

Critical utopias/dystopias and heterotopias in Caribbean postcolonial science fiction

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Introduction

Since its inception in 1516 by Thomas More, the concept of utopia has adopted many different forms throughout history in varied academic fields such as literature, economics, philosophy and architecture. In literature, the concepts of utopia, dystopia or anti-utopia in works such as Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, George Orwell's *1984* or Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* are evidences of the evolution and transmutation of utopia, most of the time according to the context of production (Sargent 9).

In the last 50 years, as literary utopias have become more fragmentary, discontinuous and ambiguous (Pordzik 3), the terms of critical utopia and critical dystopia have emerged and popularized among scholars thanks to the thorough contributions of Tom Moylan (*Demand the Impossible* (1986), *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* (2000)) and Raffaella Baccolini (*Dark Horizons* (2003)), among many others. Consequently, new voices and social classes have emerged in this new wave of utopian writing, with "characters who are not dominant, white, heterosexual, chauvinist males but female, gay, non-white, and generally operating collectively" (Moylan *Demand* 44-45).

On the other hand, Foucault's concept of heterotopia has also experienced a revival in Utopian Studies, more specifically in postcolonial utopianism, as seen in Pordzik's *The Quest for Postcolonial Utopia* (2001). Hence, heterotopian fiction serves as "a testing-ground for the writers' own preconceived notions of reality, space and language and the way they interact" (Pordzik 5). Heterotopias, as products of post-modern, post-capitalist society, could be considered as experimental novels in which any narratological technique can be applied and even subverted, resulting in a text in which "History is thus no longer conceived of as the solid and material, primary basis from which every narrative takes its course", but an illusion in which "dissent and discontinuity dictate the course of action" (Pordzik 5).

Objectives and Methodology

The aim of this research is to analyse postcolonial science fiction novels produced by Caribbean-born writers from the perspective of the critical utopia/dystopia and heterotopia. In addition, the critical frameworks of Afrofuturism and science fiction will also be considered. Taking into account the multimodality of these cultural movements, even inside literature, examining Caribbean science fiction from this combined scope could provide an original insight on how these writers construct their own utopias and how they try to imagine brave new worlds in which Afrodiasporic citizens play a predominant role.

Therefore, seminal theoretical frameworks such as Tom Moylan's critical utopia in *Demand the Impossible* (1986) and critical dystopia in *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* (2000) will be used in this research. In addition, Foucault's concept of heterotopia, as well as Pordzik's ideas on postcolonial utopianism and heterotopias will also be very relevant. On the other hand, to contextualize these concepts, Ytasha Womack's theory in *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture* (2013) as well as those contributions by Isiah Lavender III in *Afrofuturism Rising* (2019) will be employed.

Conclusions

Since this research is in its early stage, no clear conclusions can be drawn yet. However, my intuition is that, through these heterotopian and critical representations, Caribbean writers implicitly aim at fighting inequality and reaching their own utopia, eliminating systemic racism both in society and literature.

By placing Afrodiasporic and non-normative people at the front of the narrative instead of the archetypal white heterosexual male, as it has been traditionally conceived in science fiction and utopian writing, Caribbean Afrofuturist writers give voice to those world citizens that have always been forgotten or neglected. Plus, in the same vein, Caribbean myths, history and geographies, which take an important role in their narratives, are vindicated.

References

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