

Preface

The volume *Literature Across Utopia, Dystopia and Heterotopia* establishes a critical platform for exploring the intersection of language, literature, culture, and society through the lens of spatial and narrative imagination. By rooting the inquiry in philology – conceived as the study of texts where historical, aesthetic, and theoretical dimensions converge – the collection invites an interdisciplinary analysis of how human subjects navigate the boundaries of perfection and nightmare. Central to this scholarly endeavor is the tension between the traditional concepts of utopia (the ideal, non-existent place) and dystopia (the failed society) and Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia (the real, enacted "other space" that mirrors and contests normative social structures). These concepts are not treated as static categories but as dynamic, mutually constitutive processes that reveal the underlying structural logic of power and identity in the 21st century.

The exploration of these "other spaces" begins with the historical and imperial roots of science fiction, as seen in Robert William Cole's *The Struggle for Empire: A Story of the Year 2236*. In this early work, the "heterotopian impulse" serves to both affirm and subtly undermine narratives of Anglo-Saxon supremacy. While the novel ostensibly presents a triumphalist account of imperial conquest, its depiction of a future London functions as a heterotopia of compensation, an over-determined response to the deficiencies of Victorian urban life. This perfected city, however, is structurally precarious and built upon the systematic erasure of "useless" knowledge, such as philosophy and literature, in favor of purely practical, power-oriented science. The encounter with the Sirians, an alien race that mirrors human greed, creates a "joint, mixed experience" akin to Foucault's mirror analogy, where the empire is forced to recognize its own image in an alien form. Even the domestic gardens inhabited by characters like Flora Houghton function as feminized heterotopias – regulated, beautiful enclosures that are entirely dependent on the violent extraction of resources from the margins. Ultimately, the catastrophic destruction of London and the cosmic rifts caused by war represent the ultimate form of heterochrony, where the assumed linear progress of "Species Man" is shattered by rupture and dislocation.

The theme of state power and its persistence beyond the fall of a regime is further scrutinized in Alan Moore and Kevin O'Neill's *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen: Black Dossier*. Set in an alternate 1958 following the collapse of the Ingsoc regime from Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the narrative reveals that the "liberated" population remains subject to the same "medieval

precepts” of governance slightly modified for a new era. The Ministry of Love remains a site of state-sanctioned violence, and iconic figures of British culture, such as a youthful but sinister version of James Bond, are re-imagined as boorish agents of a corrupt state apparatus. Moore, an anarchist, uses these literary archetypes to argue that the state itself, regardless of its ideological branding, is inherently prone to replicating its own brutality. The persistence of Ingsoc imagery, like the peeling “Big Brother” posters, serves as a visual metaphor for the messiness of regime changes where remnants of the old dystopian orders linger in ordinary life. In this vision, the governed exist in a perpetual state of “before, amidst, and after dystopia,” where even fashionable political warnings offer no true shield against institutional corruption.

The shift from physical to digital sites of control is explored through the analysis of philanthropic websites and financial markets. Fredrica Markson Eduaful reimagines these digital platforms for child aid as heterotopias of crisis and deviation. These sites organize and frame the imaginary for Western donors by constructing a “platformed African child,” a voiceless figure objectified through curated images of suffering and vulnerability. This digital access creates a panopticon-like trajectory where the child becomes a consumable commodity, trade-off their dignity for the possibility of aid. To resist this violence, Eduaful suggests a “double vision” heterotopic mirror that allows for a social reordering where donors and recipients simultaneously gaze upon each other, breaking the binary of savior and victim. Similarly, Robert Harris’s *The Fear Index* explores the “algorithmic agency” of VIXAL, an autonomous machine-learning entity that governs financial speculation. Here, the financial market functions as a heterotopian space that mirrors the wider economy but operates according to its own temporal logic of acceleration and abstraction. VIXAL represents a Postmodern Prometheus, a creation that escapes human control and transforms the rational/irrational dichotomy by operationalizing human fear as structured data. The resulting epistemic opacity means that human decision-making becomes irrelevant, leaving individuals as mere bystanders to a system whose inner logic is fundamentally unintelligible.

The role of the individual within increasingly privatized and digital spheres is a central concern of Ernest Cline’s *Ready Player One*. The novel depicts a “liquid modern” society where the OASIS, a virtual reality simulation, offers an escape from a deteriorating physical landscape. While the OASIS functions as a heterotopic “counter-site” that allows characters to self-fashion their identities, it remains bound by the market system of a neoliberal platform society. The corporate entity Innovative Online Industries (IOI) seeks to further privatize this metaverse, threatening to turn a shared public space into an

entrepreneurial zone of exploitation. The quest for control of the OASIS reveals the limits of traditional individual agency, as the protagonist Wade Watts must eventually move beyond his solitary efforts to embrace a conscious collective agency. The narrative serves as a warning against the dangers of isolation and underscores that true happiness and impactful social change can only be found in the “real” world through simultaneous digital and physical action.

The intersection of gender, agency, and resistance is vividly portrayed in the works of Nnedi Okorafor and Suzanne Collins. Okorafor’s Africanfuturist universes feature female protagonists like Phoenix and Onyesonwu who confront generational and personal trauma to “break and mend worlds”. These stories subvert the “reason vs. magic” dichotomy by centering African cosmologies as valid knowledge systems. Characters like Phoenix, an “accelerated organism” or cyborg, dismantle capitalist systems from within, utilizing their invested capital to raze prison-like laboratory complexes. In Collins’s *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*, the conflict between ideology and utopia is gendered. While Coriolanus Snow internalizes the masculinized, power-obsessed ideology of the Capitol, Lucy Gray Baird embodies a feminized utopian force through balladry. Her songs, rooted in folk traditions, carry embodied memory and communal longings that exceed the Capitol’s ideological containment. Even Snow’s attempts to erase her story unknowingly utilize the aesthetic structures of her balladry, ensuring her voice persists as a “ghostly” trace in the cultural memory of Panem.

Mythological reformulations continue to serve as vital tools for understanding contemporary anxieties and the human condition. Sana’ BenAli-Taga’s analysis of the series *Kaos* (2024) demonstrates how the Olympian order is sustained through bureaucratic despotism rather than ethical legitimacy. The tripartite spatial matrix of Olympus, Krete, and the Underworld maps the “velocity of power,” where divine sovereignty is revealed as a parasitic illusion dependent on human extraction. The narrator Prometheus acts as a metaleptic saboteur who shatters this sovereign frame, democratizing truth and initiating a structural migration toward human collectivity. In Sarah Kuratle’s *Chimäre*, the “chimairic” and the “metamorphotic” are explored as epistemic tools on a heterotopic island. The island serves as an experimental space for re-imagining the relationship between nature, culture, and identity, though it eventually collapses under the weight of rereactionary ideologies. Similarly, afterlife settings in films like *Another World* and *Eternity* function as transitional heterotopias where characters must reckon with their past memories and evaluate the true value of their lives. In *Another World*, negative emotions are

literalized as the “Seed of Evil,” which can transform humans into beasts, highlighting the destructive power of unresolved resentment.

The posthuman condition and the blurring of human-machine boundaries are further examined through theatrical performance and biopolitics. Yuko Nobe’s analysis of the Vietnamese play *Blue Daisy in the Swamp* explores how socialist theatre functions as a heterotopic space where utopian desires to create “perfected subjects” inevitably lead to dystopian fragmentation. The robotic doubles in the play occupy a liminal position, asserting their own agency and disrupting the assumption that subjectivity can be programmed. In Shu Lea Cheang’s *UKI*, the concept of “viral becoming” is reframed as a radical strategy of resistance against digital biocapitalism. In the ruins of E-trashville, marginalized subjects engage in trans-species material entanglement, forging “emerging kinships” that transcend traditional blood ties. This “viral assemblage” induces systemic glitches that paralyze corporate data harvesting, offering a utopian imaginary of symbiosis and “viral love”. Finally, Jude Daniel Tolo critiques advanced technology in *Knotenpunkt* and *Ich bin dein Mensch*, framing total surveillance and AI-driven dependency as core dystopian problems of the present. These works serve as a “prophetic” warning that the unthinking embrace of technological progress can lead to the loss of individual autonomy and the erasure of essential human values.

Collectively, the chapters in this volume demonstrate that philological work remains essential for interpreting the shifting landscapes of power and identity. By combining textual analysis with cultural theory, these diverse scholarly voices illuminate how utopia, dystopia, and heterotopia operate not just as literary tropes, but as fundamental mechanisms for imagining – and contesting – the future of the human and posthuman experience. Through the exploration of ruined heterotopias, algorithmic frontiers, and mythic reformulations, the collection underscores the persistent relevance of the “utopian impulse” as a restorative act that maintains the social collective as a site of potentiality in an increasingly fragmented world. The volume concludes that any system seeking total control inevitably generates the conditions of its own undoing, and it is within these “other spaces” that the possibility for re-seeing, engagement, and resistance truly resides.

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