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## ЧЕРТЫ АНТИУТОПИИ В РОМАНЕ Р. ХАРРИСА «THE SECOND SLEEP»

Научная статья

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## Аннотация

Данная статья посвящена рассмотрению основных жанрообразующих черт жанра антиутопии целью их выявления в романе Р. Харриса «The Second Sleep». Данный роман является одним из последних антиутопических произведений, опубликованных на английском языке. Современные англоязычные антиутопии имеют ряд черт, отличающих их от «классических» примеров рассматриваемого жанра. Авторы приходят к выводу о том, что роман «The Second Sleep» обладает рядом характерных черт и компонентов, присущих как современным англоязычным произведениям жанра антиутопии, так и «классическим».

**Ключевые слова:** антиутопия, жанр, вербализация, черты, роман.

## DYSTOPIAN GENRE FEATURES IN THE NOVEL BY R. HARRIS «THE SECOND SLEEP»

Research article

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## Abstract

This article is devoted to the main genre-forming features of dystopia with the aim of identifying such features in «The Second Sleep» by R. Harris, one of the latest dystopian works published in English. Modern English-language dystopias have a number of features that distinguish them from the “classic” examples. The authors have concluded that «The Second Sleep» has a number of characteristic features and components inherent in both modern English-language dystopian works, and the “classic” ones.

**Keywords:** dystopia, genre, verbalization, features, novel.

## Introduction

The social and political events that have taken place over the past thirty years have caused the dystopian genre to flourish in modern literature since dystopias appear in crisis periods in order to predict what certain actions of humanity may lead to [see 4, 5]. At the moment, environmental problems and the excessive use of digital technologies are particularly acute. The novel «The Second Sleep» by R. Harris was published in the autumn of 2019. It touches on the dangers of the excessive use of technology by modern society [9].

## Discussion

The novel begins with a description of time and space:

(1) «**Late on the afternoon of Tuesday the ninth of April in the Year of Our Risen Lord 1468**, a solitary traveller was to be observed picking his way on horseback across the wild moorland of that **ancient region** of southwestern England known since **Saxon times as Wessex**» [9, P. 5].

Example (1) tells us the exact date, which, in the reader's opinion, certainly falls within the limits of the XV<sup>th</sup> century. The phrase *the Year of Our Risen Lord* gives the impression that further narration will have a religious connotation. The toponymical marker «Wessex» has temporal semantics in the context of this example since it gives the reader an idea of how long ago this region had this name (V<sup>th</sup> century).

The main character – the priest Christopher Fairfax – goes to a remote village to hold the funeral of his colleague Father Thomas Lacy. In the priest's office, he discovers things that are artefacts and belonged to the «ancients»:

(2) «There **was one of the devices used by the ancients** to communicate, its back marked with the ultimate symbol of their hubris and blasphemy – **an apple with a bite taken out of it**» [9, P. 59].

Before the moment described in (2), while mentioning the ancients, the author says that all that remains of them is plastic and glass. The reader also gets the idea that something is anachronistic from the fact that the priest smokes a pipe. As in the XV<sup>th</sup> century there were neither tobacco and pipes in Europe:

(3) «Then he struck **a match**, lit his **pipe** and sat back in his chair» [9, P.48].

Most likely, this fact does not attract the reader's attention as much as the mention of the iPhone in (2). Later it turns out that the events described in the novel actually take place in the distant future – eight hundred years after the «Apocalypse», an unknown disaster that occurred in 2025:

(4) «It was as if the **long recovery after the Apocalypse had stalled at the point civilization had reached two centuries before disaster struck**» [9, P. 65].

Example (4) illustrates that the disaster had long-lasting consequences. It took a very long time for humanity to recover, never reaching the pre-apocalypse level of development.

The novel does not exactly specify what happened, but hints that the abuse of technology and science led to it:

(5) «... that God **had punished the ancients** for their elevation of **science above all** else by bringing down upon the Earth the four terrible riders of **the Apocalypse...**» [9, P. 82]

In example (5), the disaster cause is represented by the phrase *elevation of science above all*.

The main character finds a book dated 2022, in which one of the scientists of the past describes six possible scenarios:

(6) «We have broadly identified **six possible catastrophic scenarios** that fundamentally threaten the existence of **our advanced science-based way of life**:

1. Climate change
2. A nuclear exchange
3. A super-volcano eruption, leading to rapidly accelerated climate change
4. An asteroid strike, also causing accelerated climate change
5. A general failure of computer technology due either to cyber warfare, an uncontrollable virus, or solar activity
6. A pandemic resistant to antibiotics» [9, P. 77]

Example (6) describes the events that may have occurred before the «Apocalypse» – an event that became the starting point for the development of a dystopian society. The presence of an event that divides the storyline of the novel into «before» and «after» is one of the genre-forming features of dystopia and this point is present in most works of this genre. Since such events drastically change the course of human history, bringing about the dystopian society, they are an important element of the temporal structure in the works of the dystopian genre. We have coined the term «*divortional point*» to refer to such events.

The society of the future in the work under consideration is governed by the Church and religion. After the Apocalypse, the year 2025 was designated as number «666», starting a new chronology, which means that the events of the novel take place 802 years after the year 666 (in 2827 our time):

(7) «The calendar **had been reset after the Apocalypse** so that it **started in the year 666**: the numeral assigned to the Beast of Revelation, whose appearance in the New Testament had foretold the ruin of the world at Armageddon» [9, P. 108].

This refers to attempts to reset the calendar in real history. The first one is the French Revolutionary calendar and the second one is “Year Zero”, which was introduced on the territory of Cambodia after the seizure of power by the Khmer Rouge [see 12]. The basic idea of these resets is that religion, tradition, and culture should be completely destroyed and replaced with new ones, as happened in the novel.

Changing the chronology is also a sign of dystopia, since it is used to distort or completely erase from the memory of the population knowledge about the past. In this case, erasing people’s memory is critical here because the government wants to intimidate the population and further enforce the administrative agenda. The population is indoctrinated with the belief that it was the sins of the ancients that were responsible for the Apocalypse.

Therefore it is forbidden to explore the past, the punishment being execution, but the main character continues the investigations of his predecessor. The main conflict of the work is between the main character's research and his violation of the ordinances set by the government. The novel refers to some «Supreme Ruler» (probably, there is mention of the King), and in the nearby city of Exeter there is a Bishop Pole, who can punish Christopher for heresy.

The Church has established control over all spheres of life, even assuming the authority to impose a curfew:

(8) «Soon it would be dusk, and if he was caught out of doors **after curfew he risked a night in a jail**» [9, P. 3].

In this example, *a night in a jail* shows that the government is monitoring its citizens, and is quick to punish them for not following orders. The noun *curfew* is a temporal verbalizer, clearly separating the time period when people are allowed to be active from the time when all activity out of doors becomes illegal, but it doesn't give a clear idea of exactly when it happens.

A typical feature of dystopia is the limited number of words that are permitted in speech, as well as the prohibition on using certain words (see example (10)) that can potentially create unwelcome associations. The same principle underlies the «Newspeak» created by G. Orwell [11]:

(9) «**Centuries earlier**, as part of its rejection of scientism, the Church **had rooted out** heretical modernized texts **of the time before the Apocalypse** and had returned Christian worship to the language of the King James Bible. **Its twelve thousand words formed the basis of the Authorised National Dictionary** – although other words found their way into common usage, **the Biblical lexicon alone was taught in school**» [9, P. 43].

(10) «...the very word ‘antiquarian’ **forbidden** from use» [9, P. 85].

Example (9) illustrates the idea that the language in the period «before» the Apocalypse was very different from the language spoken in the society built after it. This idea is very important for the dystopian genre and essentially explains why so many authors have tried to create a new «dystopian» language – dubbed «progressive» for the masses to encourage its use, but in fact *policing*.

The life of a dystopian society is usually *ritualized*. Since the Church is in power in the novel, this means that the life of the entire society is subject to religious order and observance of religious ceremonies and rites.

In addition to mentioning the iPhone, the author uses various realities that exist today to show the reader that the time «before» the disaster is a contemporary reality:

(11) «An entire generation’s correspondence and memories had vanished into this mysterious entity the antiquarians called ‘**The Cloud**’» [9, P. 106]

(12) «What was ‘**cyberspace**’, or an ‘**ATM**’, or ‘**antibiotics**?’» [9, P. 82]

In (11) and (12), the highlighted lexical units acquire temporal semantics because in the context of the work they relate to the artefacts of the very distant past.

In our opinion, there is another plot-forming event in the temporal structure of the novel, in addition to the event that led to the construction of a dystopian society (a divortional point). [see 1]. In this novel, such an event is the death of priest Lacy, which divided the main character's life into «before» and «after» (a divortional point on a minor scale):

(13) «“Could not some local priest have taken the service?” He had asked the same question of Bishop Pole **the previous day when the task of officiating had first been entrusted to him** – had phrased it diplomatically, of course, because the bishop was not a man, who expected to have his orders interrogated» [9, P. 65].

As is revealed later in the book, Bishop Pole himself tried to find out facts about the past, using his power, to collect knowledge for the Church:

(14) «One does not *burn* knowledge! **That is a show for the common folk. One hides knowledge – one keeps it close.** The libraries of the Church hold truths you cannot dream of, Shadwell. No, of course I did not burn your books <...>» [8, P. 426].

This is a similar to the situation of Mustapha Mond from A. Huxley's «Brave New World» [10], who also kept and read forbidden books.

The story includes fragments of the scientist's letters from the era before the Apocalypse:

(15) «Imperial College, London, 22 March 2022

Dear Colleague,

Forgive this impersonal form of address. I am sending the same letter, as a matter of urgency, to a number of highly placed individuals...» [9, P. 76].

**Letters** often appear in the works of the dystopian genre; they serve as powerful artefacts connecting the dystopian present with the forgotten past and setting them against each other at the same time.

Also, a typical feature of a dystopian society is an *eternal war with an invisible enemy*:

(16) «“My brothers has all been took by the army, sir, **to fight the Northern Caliphate.**”

Fairfax nodded encouragingly. “Brave lads, I’m sure.” **That was a war had gone on all his life – and for centuries beforehand**, or so it was said – **ever present but oddly distant**, its occasional lulls punctuated by lurid reports of horrible atrocities that aroused a fervor of public outrage and set the whole thing off again» [9, P. 93].

In this example, the expressions *all his life, for centuries, ever present* confirm the assumption that this is a war that has long helped the ruling powers to unite citizens against a common enemy. At the same time, it explains why there insufficient resources for improving the general standard of living.

The novel has a set of characters typical of the dystopian genre. This is the protagonist – Christopher Fairfax, the antagonist – the Bishop Pole, as well as the «companion» of the main character on the love line – Sarah Durston [see 2, 3].

In general, the temporal structure of the novel «The Second Sleep» corresponds to a typical dystopian structure. For example, the dystopian temporal structure includes dreams:

(17) «His **second sleep** was more dream-filled **than his first**, although **afterwards** he could **not remember** any of them, **apart from the last, a recurrent nightmare** that had started soon after his parents and his sister had died of the sweating fever and around the time he had been sent to live with his elderly uncle» [9, P. 78].

In (17), the adjective *recurrent* verbalizes the cyclical element in the temporal structure of the novel. For more information about the temporal structure of works of the dystopian genre, see our other works [e.g. 8].

We also see the title of the novel in (17). The example illustrates that the main character had two sleeps, and probably had a period of wakefulness in between. We are also referred to the direct meaning of the word “sleep” by the preface, which contains the following quotation from the book by A. Roger Ekirch, “*At Day’s Close: Night in Times Past*” [see 6]: «Until the close of the early modern era, Western Europeans on most evenings experienced two major intervals of sleep...The initial interval of slumber was usually referred to as “first sleep”... The succeeding interval was called “second” or “morning” sleep... Both phases lasted roughly the same length of time, with individuals waking sometime after midnight before returning to rest» [9, P. 3]. This book is devoted to the study of people's night life in Western Europe before the Industrial Revolution.

In our opinion, the title is a metaphor for the epochs of human development. The first period was antiquity, during which science and art flourished. Then, after the fall of the Roman Empire, came the “Dark Ages” – the “first sleep”. During this period, the Church hid and controlled any knowledge. Then humanity “woke up”, the Renaissance and technological progress came. This period lasted until 2025 (according to the book), and after a big disaster came the “second sleep”, which returned humanity to the dark period when the Church dominated. Thus, the author hints that the “Dark Ages” may be repeated in the future since now we are in a “period of wakefulness”.

The end of the novel under discussion is not exactly dystopian. The main character reaches his goal – he finds out what happened in the past. His antagonist dies, but it remains unknown whether his discovery and the death of the Bishop affected the rest of society. The end in which the totalitarian system prevails over the main character is typical of classic dystopias. By contrast in modern examples – the main character wins and the end is more optimistic. The novel «The Second Sleep» has an open end (the ending leaves many questions unanswered), which is rather unusual for modern dystopias.

### Conclusion

The novel «The Second Sleep» has many genre-forming features of dystopia. Including ones found in classic dystopias. In general, the author claims that the modern world is extremely fragile, and if it is to survive and avoid self-destruction, humanity should think about its future. “The Second Sleep” is not the only recent work to raise the issue of the abuse of technology and the possible seizure of power by the Church [another notable example would be: 7].

### Конфликт интересов

Не указан.

### Conflict of Interest

None declared.

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