

# ENVIRONMENTAL TOPICS IN CONTEMPORARY CROATIAN DYSTOPIAN PROSE AND PROSE WITH DYSTOPIAN ELEMENTS<sup>1</sup>

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Important ecological topics: climate change, pollution of air, water and soil, extinction of plant and animal species and food as a basic human need are in the corpus of dystopian texts and those with dystopian elements. The dystopian component in all of them belongs to the second wave of dystopian fiction (Matus 2009: 7). The corpus consists of a novella “White Promenade” (“Bijela promenada”, 2016) by Ed Barol and eight novels: *Battlefield Istria (Bojno polje Istria*, 2007) by Danilo Brozović, *Centimeter from the Happiness (Centimetar od sreće*, 2008) by Marinko Koščec, *2084: House of Great Misery (2084: Kuća Velikog Jada*, 2012) by Ivo Balenović, *Planet Friedman* (2012) by Josip Mlakić, *Romeo at the End of the History (Romeo na kraju povijesti*, 2015) by Aljoša Babić, *War for the Fifth Taste (Rat za peti okus*, 2015) by Veljko Barbieri, *Dedivination (Dedivnacija*, 2018) by Jelena Hrvoj, and *Crab’s Children (Rakova djeca*, 2019) by Dalibor Perković. The theoretical perspective in the paper is ecocritical: aspects of the relationship between

KLJUČNE RIJEČI:

*anthropocentrism, dystopia, ecocriticism, pollution, resources*

<sup>1</sup> The work was created by a significant expansion and theoretical elaboration of the research presented online at the international scientific conference I Encuentro Nacional sobre Utopías y sus Derivas, held in Buenos Aires, August 27 – 28, 2021, and the organizers of the conference were Cátedra de Literaturas Eslavas, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad de Buenos Aires, then Grupo de investigación UBACyT “Utopía y sus derivas en las literaturas eslavas” and Sociedad Argentina Dostoievski. The primary research is available at the link: <http://eventosacademicos.filo.uba.ar/index.php/EIUD/IEIUD/schedConf/presentations>

man and the nature that surrounds him are investigated, i.e. to what extent man perceives nature and its inhabitants as equal to himself. The last chapter gives an insight into the results and solutions that some authors offer as a way out of cataclysmic situations, and the meaning and efficiency of these solutions are valued from an ecocritical point of view.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The paper deals with the ecological themes of eight contemporary dystopian novels: *Battlefield Istria* (*Bojno polje Istra*, 2007) by Danilo Brozović, *Centimeter from the Happiness* (*Centimetar od sreće*, 2008) by Marinko Koščec, *2084: House of Great Misery* (*2084: Kuća Velikog Jada*, 2012) by Ivo Balenović, *Planet Friedman* (2012) by Josip Mlakić, *Romeo at the End of the History* (*Romeo na kraju povijesti*, 2015) by Aljoša Babić, *War for the Fifth Taste* (*Rat za peti okus*, 2015) by Veljko Barbieri, *De-divination* (*Devinacija*, 2018) by Jelena Hrvoj and *Crab's Children* (*Rakova djeca*, 2019) by Dalibor Perković as well as novella “White Promenade” (“Bijela promena-da”, 2016) by Ed Barol. In order for the reader to get an insight into the content of the texts, each individual text will be presented with a short synopsis.

### *Battlefield Istria*

Brozović's dystopian cyberpunk novel focuses on Istria's war for independence from the rest of Croatia. We follow the war and post-war events from the perspective of Oliver Riemer, a returnee from the German diaspora to Croatia, and then a fugitive on the side of the Istrian separatists.

### *Centimeter from the Happiness*

From the point of view of the four narrators, the main characters: Rolo, Kix, Taša and Maša, we witness discontinuous accounts of their fate and personal stumblings during thirty years: Rolo participated in a war that greatly changed him for the worse, Kix became a corrupt politician, Maša end up as a careerist, and only Taša tried to preserve her humanity not a valued quality in society. The background of personal decay is social collapse: consumerism, hunger, corporate ethics, alienation, human trafficking, pornography, genetic modification, pollution, bird flu, and pharmacology.

### *2084: House of Great Misery*

The title of the novel parodies Orwell's *1984*, and the content of the show “Big Brother”. The autodiegetic narrator is Vladimir, one of residents of the House of Great Misery, together with: General, Jesus, Milovan Ugor (colon), Jersinija (plague bacteria), Čebutikin (a character from Chekhov's play), Hitler's father Alojz, Tycoon and Blonde. Conversation between characters is full of sarcasm, irony and grotesque, and beneath allusions and jokes there is often talk of serious problems in society.

*Planet Friedman*

The world of the novel is divided into zones. Zone A is ruled by large corporations, survival is guaranteed by “the solvency threshold”, and the only goal is money. Emotions are stifled by medication, and people are not intimate. Zone B is a resource for the remnants of arable land and the recruitment of gifted children. Privileged encourage the spread of diseases that reduce population in Zone B and maintain a monopoly on food sales in well-guarded shopping malls. In Zone C live hopeless people, and the land is completely exploited and destroyed. Dr. Gerhard Schmidt is sent by a powerful pharmaceutical company with athlete Paula Bolt to Zone B to discover the identity of Bluetooth, the leader of the revolution. Gerhard learns that his father smuggled the vaccine into zones B and C and became a Savior, and over time his life values and attitudes change, so he goes with his son and Paula to one of the last oases of preserved nature in zone C.

*Romeo at the End of the History*

Deltacor company manages Croatia’s economic and social life in 2035: parents go to correctional facilities, retirees fight bloody games, and the UFC is the most important subject in schools. Robots deliver subpoenas, prostitution becomes the most important export branch, religions unite, the radical left and right march together, and former enemies in the Homeland War plan joint actions. After the death of a child from a slum caused by an American drone-killer, boyfriend of a daughter of Deltacor’s important manager idealistically tries to start a revolution to change the ugly reality.

*War for the Fifth Taste*

The war is being waged between two diametrically opposed gastronomic armies: the superior international one, which seeks to destroy national cuisines and all naturally grown foods and advocates GMOs, and the weaker one, gathered around the restaurant with the symbolic name Arca (which alludes to Noah’s Ark), which fights for the survival of traditional cuisine.

*Dedivination*

The year is 3154. Aurora Blue lives in a world without crime. Every day she is assigned a new personality: negotiator, forensic analyst, professor of ancient human knowledge or active member of special regulatory units. Computer called G.O.D. (B.O.G.) gives her the necessary dose of feeling, and when she gets upset, it injects her with a small dose of tranquilizer without asking. Although innocent, Aurora is

blamed for the murder of her colleague Deon Brown, so she runs as far away from the city as possible. Among the isolated members of society, she realizes that she lives in a false and manipulated world.

### *Crab's Children*

After the Judgment Day, the destruction of the Earth, the genocide of the people and the thousand-year slavery under the Xandrians, the human race is divided into Families, based on family ties and ownership, and the more creative Freelancers. Jan Kerensky's parents belonged to the Family, but decided to join the Freelancers. They took with them a huge property that belonged to them. They died working to terraform a planet when Jan was young. He was returned to the Families and raised by his uncle Kieven. In the midst of preparations for Jan's wedding to Nastasja Bergen, mercenaries Baha, Alba and Gyerek try to prevent the possible murder of the groom.

### *"White Promenade"*

On Earth, civilization has come to an end, pollution is widespread, and a third of the population is terminally ill, but desperately wants to survive. A connection was established with the people of the future, of whom there are only a million due to genetic diseases, even though they have ideal conditions. Therefore, they offer the terminally ill hibernation and thawing in the future. The 30 million hibernated in the ice chambers of the South Base at the North Pole are guarded by elite Intergard soldiers, among them Mat whose sister is one of the hibernated. A group of people from the future tricks Mat, he breaks the chambers, and all the frozen people float into the ocean.

At the beginning, it is necessary to define terms of "dystopia" and "dystopian prose". The term dystopia was created as the opposite of Thomas More's concept of utopia. The term utopia consists of two Greek words, *eu*, meaning no, and *topos*, which means place, so we translate utopia as a place that does not exist. Accordingly, a dystopia would represent any social system, whether existing or imagined, in which there are noticeable shortcomings in the form of state repression, crime, war, infection, pollution, which leads to the dissatisfaction of people living in such a system. Dystopian prose includes literary works that describe a dystopian reality.

It is also necessary to define "science fiction", its subgenres and overlaps with other genres. In the *Croatian Encyclopedia (Hrvatska enciklopedija, enciklopedija.hr)*, science fiction is defined as "a genre in literature, film, television and comics that

depicts an individual and human society in the context of a possible future, most often through interaction with possible or probable science and technology”. The second, we would say the canonical definition, comes from the pen of one of the top connoisseurs of the science fiction genre, Darko Suvin: “SF is, then, a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author’s empirical environment” (1979: 7–8). Suvin further lists the subgenres of science fiction: “the Islands of the Blessed, utopias, fabulous voyages, planetary novels, *Staatsromane*, anticipations, and dystopias – as well as the Verne-type *romans scientifiques*, the Wellsian scientific romance variant, and the twentieth-century magazine- and anthology-based SF *sensu stricto*” (Ibid., 12). Exploring the intersections of utopia, science fiction and satire and their relationship to dystopia, Eric Rabkin comes to the conclusion that dystopian literature can be a subgenre of all three genres, so we can talk about pure dystopia (as a subgenre of utopia), SF dystopia and satirical dystopia (1996: 122).

In the more recent divisions of SF, a larger number of subgenres are mentioned: classic science fiction, science fantasy, hard science fiction, science fiction for children, science fiction for teens, urban science fiction, soft science fiction, cyberpunk, post-apocalyptic science fiction, military science fiction, space opera, science fiction horror, alternate history, slipstream, time travel, steampunk, science fiction comedy, science fiction romance and parallel worlds (scifisreal.com). Of the mentioned subgenres, we are particularly interested in post-apocalyptic science fiction, cyberpunk, slipstream, and space opera, and only the title of the first subgenre seems clear, the others need to be explained.

The term “cyberpunk” was popularized by Gardner Dozois in an article published in the *Washington Post* in 1985, and borrowed from the title of a 1983 short story by Bruce Bethke (Dery 1996: 75). The term referred to works about computer hackers, lone heroes, fighters against global megacorporations in the world of high technology. Cyberpunk stories take place in the future where such megacorporations have all the power and authority, and the life of individuals takes place in a cold, post-industrial society, in an environment of high technology and crime (Ibid., 9). In the world of cyberpunk there are no aliens, unknown planets or strange phenomena foreign to our material world, even some aspects of cyberpunk can be found in the environment of the developed end of the 20th century (Ibid., 11).

The term “space opera” was created after the example of the term “horse opera”, created in the 1920s, which was used to describe Westerns and “soap opera”, which dates back to 1938, as radio dramas in countless sequels were called. In 1941, Wilson

Tucker proposed the term space opera for the “hacky, grinding, stinking, outworn, spaceship yarn” (sf-encyclopedia.com). This derogatory term eventually became widely accepted for subgenres full of epic intergalactic battles, squadrons of spaceships cruiser and destined interplanetary heroes. Space opera “focuses on space exploration and adventure” and is “often filled with dramatic storylines, larger-than-life characters, and spectacular settings” (scifisreal.com).

Since Bruce Sterling came up with the genre name “slipstream” in 1989, there has been a restless period of different definitions, and numerous parallel terms have appeared: interstitial. Transrealism, New Weird, nonrealist fiction, New Wave Fabulist, postmodern fantasy, Postgenre fiction, cross-genre, span fiction, Artists without Borders, New Humanist, Fantastika, liminal fantasy (Wolfe 2011, 164). As for the definition, “[s]lipstream falls between speculative fiction and mainstream fiction. While some slipstream novels employ elements of science fiction or fantasy, not all do. The common unifying factor of these pieces of literature is some degree of the surreal, the not-entirely-real, or the markedly anti-real” (theslipstream.com.au).

We still have to explain the terms “petrofiction” and “cli-fi”. The term “petrofiction” was coined by Amitav Ghosh and used to name an essay published in the magazine *New Republic* in 1992, in which he analyzed Abdel Rahman Munif’s novel *Cities of Salt*. According to Abiodun Fakemi, petrofiction “is a narrative about petroleum and the victims of oil. Petrofiction is activism for the environment and the people living in oil-producing communities” (Fakemi 2022: 6). Petrofiction is, therefore, fiction that focuses on the oil industry, the dependence of modern society on that industry and all the negative consequences it has on modern society.

“Cli-fi” (climate fiction or climate change fiction or climate change science fiction) is the genre named by Dan Bloom in 2007, using the term “to describe a set of texts, often including genre fiction elements, which present a storyworld changed by anthropogenic climate change” (Gourley 2020: 751). Alexa Weik von Mossner claims that, almost without exception, American cli-fi is a “*risk fiction*” (Weik von Mossner 2017: 129) – but this claim is applicable to cli-fi fiction around the world. The most important topics of this fiction are the consequences of human actions on the climate, especially the impact of burning fossil fuels and thinking about the risks of these actions at a time when not much is known about the nature and degree of these risks (Ibid.) Disturbing and alarming cli-fi books mostly describe unwanted and uncontrollable man-made weather changes, excessive warming or cooling.

We explained the terms and subgenres so that, at least in principle, we could categorize the prose that we will analyze. Of course, there are overlaps between them, and

they are not all “textbook cases” of genre belonging to the same extent, moreover, a text can belong to multiple genres, but at least we roughly assign them to certain categories, so that we can establish relationships between them.

The texts can be divided into several groups by genre. The first group consists of anti-modernist dystopias that play with SF themes. In that group we include the novels *Planet Friedman* and *Centimeter from the Happiness*: in *Planet Friedman*, the component of SF is a drug that kills all human emotions, (while the supposedly intelligent psychopharmaceutical in *Centimeter of Happiness* called Neuroeternum®, which will extend human life to 140 years, looks more as a good marketing trick that cannot be proven for decades, until at least one of the users lives to be 140 years old). In the novel *Centimeter of Happiness*, the SF sequence is present only at the end of the novel and concerns the extracorporeal reproduction of the human species and descendants on order.

The second group of texts consists of postmodern satires that contain elements of dystopia. It includes the novels: *Romeo at the End of the History* and *2084: House of Great Misery*. There are no SF elements in the second novel, while the SF component in the first is the existence of robots delivering subpoenas to home addresses.

The remaining works can be counted as SF with dystopian elements. The most fringe novel is *War for the Fifth Taste*, which we could count in the “slipstream” subgenre – a shift towards science fiction and astonishment are certainly numerous monstrous animal species that abound on the menus of international restaurants of New World. We classify “White Promenade” in a relatively rare subgenre, post-apocalyptic science fiction, *Crab’s Children* definitely belongs to space opera, and *Battlefield Istria* to cyberpunk which also often deals with an ecological devastation. Finally, the novel *Dedivination* can be counted among classic science fiction with dystopian elements.

In some texts we find elements of cli-fi, somewhere less, elsewhere more: in the second part of the novel *Centimeter of Happiness*, excessive warming is mentioned, while the action of the story “White Promenade” is based on global cooling. In the novels *Crab’s Children* and *Dedivination*, the cli-fi component concerns human intervention in “fixing” the climate. Cli-fi often intrudes into SF genres, and sometimes into dystopias that only episodically have SF elements.

Considering the time of creation, analyzed dystopias and dystopian elements in other texts belong to the Second Wave of dystopian works according to the classification of Hannah Matus. In contrast to the First Wave of dystopian fiction, which is characterized by the following themes: constant government supervision and control over citizens, strict punishment and rehabilitation of socially deviant



people, and state monopoly over knowledge, reality and history (Matus 2009: 7), at the centre of the Second Wave is “a state that is too inept to protect its citizens from terrors like global warming, biological warfare, economic crises, terrorism, and other such non-state terrors” (Matus 2009: 27). The number of dystopian works and other genres with dystopian elements that thematize ecological disasters has increased significantly in recent times, mostly because they are emphasized, somewhat caricatured images of reality, in which, like in Mlakić’s interpretation, “a vision of the Earth’s future teems with direct allusions to its present”<sup>2</sup> (Beljan 2013: 141).

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The theoretical basis of this paper is mainly made up of works from the field of ecocriticism, which Cheryll Glotfelty defines as

the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies (Glotfelty 1996: XVIII).

She further emphasizes that “all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it” (Glotfelty 1996: XIX). Benjamin M. Garner explains ecocriticism in more detail:

To read a text ecocritically then, is to examine the specific role of nature, environment, and ecology in the text, and from that reading of the text to apply the observations to offer solutions and alternative ways of thinking for environmental and ecological problems that humanity faces. (...) An ecocritical reading is concerned with more than how the environment may or may not manifest itself in a text. Instead there is a greater purpose, to understand the role of the environment within the text itself, and consider how that role creates a textual opinion of the environment, either within the text or beyond it (Garner 2015: 5).

<sup>2</sup> All quotes from the Croatian language were translated by the author of the article.

Ecocriticism deals with the way we perceive nature. Theorists are interested in the role of nature outside the text, with the full awareness that language and text are instruments by which nature is available to us. Culture, therefore, should act as a mediator. However, even in the ecologically-minded literary works the cultural dominance of people and the anthropocentric vision are overemphasized, so it is necessary to return Nature at the center. Lawrence Buell offers “a rough checklist of some of the ingredients that might be said to comprise an environmentally oriented work” (Buell 1995: 7):

1. The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history; (...)
2. The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest; (...)
3. Human accountability to the environment is part of the text’s ethical orientation; (...)
4. Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text (Buell 1995: 7–8).

In the selected works, all topics related to nature are entirely in the spirit of anti-ecology – they thematise a world in which anti-ecology is the dominant mode of thinking and behaving. There are several works in which we witness an ecological disaster more than in the others (Koščec, Mlakić, Barol). The picture is post-apocalyptic: nature is exhausted, devastation has already occurred due to neglect of nature as well as excessive exploitation of all natural resources, and the consequences are irreparable. However, in most novels the environmental disaster is not set as its central theme – it is more of a background effect. The focus is on the unstoppable capitalist hunger for profit, insatiability and profit as the ultimate goal of all actions, so, among other things, “Mlakić’s dystopia represents a critique of capitalism as ecologically harmful” (Ćirić 2014: 63). However, ecocritical reading does not concern only works with ecological themes in the foreground: everything can be read from the ecocritical theoretical niche, the question is the relevance of the interpretations obtained (Garner 2015: 6).

The text that stands out is the novella “White Promenade” by Ed Barol. Although, according to the genre definition, nature is usually not the focus of SF, it can be “nature-oriented literature” and can introduce environmental themes at the level of plot (Murphy 2009: 90). The plot of Barol’s post-apocalyptic science fiction novella is based on the destruction of nature: a devastated, hopeless nature and a sick, incurable

population are the main drivers of events, so the fatal action of the main character is also conditioned by them. However, the prequel and the background of the current events in the story are the result of capitalist greed, this is repeatedly underlined and can be read quite clearly.

When it comes to topics from the field of ecology, in the selected novels and the novella we singled out those changes that Karen Thornber points out as the most relevant that have befallen the Earth: “climate change; mass extinctions of plant and animal species; and widespread pollution of sky, sea, and land make clear the extent to which humans have shaped global ecologies” (Thornber 2014: 989). Considering the theme of the selected analyzed prose, we add to Karen Thornber’s classification a significant theme of food that results from the extinction of plants and animals, and is reflected as food shortages and an increasing share of GMOs.

### 3. ANALYSIS

#### 3.1. CLIMATE CHANGE

Elements of cli-fi can be found in several represented works. In Koščec’s novel, high temperatures in the country where Rolo lives (it is most likely Croatia) three years ago directly killed almost 300 people, two years ago 382 people, and official data for last year were not published. Rolo wonders how many indirect victims there are.

In “White Promenade”, climate change will go in the opposite direction from the announced global warming:

Civilization will almost collapse in the next fifty years, climate change will become nasty, there will be a nuclear winter, whether because of wars or a bunch of ancient power plants that will collapse, they don’t want to tell us that. Diseases that are already out of control will have a devastating effect and everything goes to hell (Barol 2016: 48).

The cataclysmic situation was preceded by pandemics, solved by the principle of encirclement and waiting for the infected to die, and liquidation by fire of all who try to escape followed with disinfection of places with green foam. Pandemics are a thing of the past – the present are deadly diseases, but they are also “tickets” for hibernation tanks in which the frozen will wait for the future and thawing. So, after the nuclear winter, a renaissance will follow: Earth will rise from the ashes – the

terminally ill from the present will heal in the future and restore the nearly exterminated population of the Earth. So, as much as they were destroying the Earth, people will get another chance. It is comforting that in the process both nature and all non-human species of life will be restored.

However, in some novels climate changes are intentional, the perspective is extremely anthropocentric, people are self-indulgent and completely inconsiderate of others, for example, in the novel *Dedivination* under a glass dome in the elite futuristic settlement of New World G 23 the climate is always the same, pleasant, there is no summer or winter.

In *Crab's Children* by Dalibor Perković, after the destruction of the Earth, and colonizing new planets, people deliberately change their climate in order to adapt them for life: each planet (Octavia, Albatross, Alcatraz, Communes of Antares, Tedesco) has a different climate, and all changes are the result of human intervention. In some of them, the conditions are adapted to man down to the last detail (controlled rains, cyclones, temperature). The trajectory of some planets has also been changed, they have literally cooled down, but the results are by no means what the “terraformers” expected:

(...) thirty years ago Tedesco was several million kilometres closer to the sun and about a hundred degrees warmer; ten years ago they finally got it to its current orbit, the water vapor began to condense and it started to rain. In addition, an average of one comet would arrive every hour from the local Kuiper belt and break up somewhere in the equatorial region. As a result of all this, the atmosphere of Tedesco was a turbulent vortex of cyclones that overlapped and swirled around each other like bubbles in a pot of boiling water, and every day on every point of the surface was rainy with occasional alternations of showers, cursed showers and cloud breaks in which it seemed as if the flowing water wanted to make up for the eons of absence and quickly erode everything it could, washing over the rocky plains and creating canyons, rolling stones and crumbling them into gravel and sand (Perković 2019: 79).

On other planets, there was much less intervention, only hurricanes and tropical cyclones were mitigated, because these planets were inherently more suitable for life. Nevertheless, the following example shows that nature “shows its teeth” even in such cases, because the inhabitants of planets where ideal conditions prevail cannot adapt elsewhere:

People from Albatross were at the very bottom of the scale of people suffering from various incidental diseases, viral infections, colds, flu, but also more serious illnesses. Maintaining immunity had its price and life on the space station may have been more comfortable, but it brought with it possible inconveniences every time a person left such a controlled and sterile environment (Perković 2019: 59).

Due to their egocentricity, people think that it is permissible to change the climate and temperature. They don't at all consider the consequences that their actions will have on each of those planets. From the quote about the massive interventions on the planet Tedesco, we see that the consequences of the constant rain on that planet are very serious. Over time, they could become dangerous for the Universe due to possible landslides. But the colonizers are not aware that they are endangering the survival of the planets, and consequently their own. We know that people are aware of their own impact on the environment since *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, which talks about deforestation, but actual "awareness of anthropogenic climate change entails a paradigm shift in that we must recognize that our environmental impacts are not just site-specific or even downstream, but cumulative over time" (Griffiths 2013: 89).

### 3.2. PLANTS AND ANIMALS

In all zones of the *Planet Friedman*, animals died out, due to lack of food, the stronger devoured the weaker. It goes without saying that there are no fish in the ocean, they are farmed in pools with filtered and detoxified seawater. Cranes were exterminated as carriers of influenza, fireflies melted due to unfavourable weather conditions. There are dogs left in zone B, but they are infected with rabies. There are no more dangerous animals in the forest, so athlete Paula convinces doctor Gerhard, her physician and later lover and fiancé: "It's beautiful. The forest calms a person like that", she said. "It's safe there. It wasn't safe before, there were animals all over it" (Mlakić 2012: 126). Forests are dying slowly but surely, the mistletoe is depleting them. Man has disturbed the natural balance and caused incalculable damage, but Paula sees it as an improvement because man no longer has to fear dangerous animals.

The dystopian reality of Koščec's novel begins at the turn of the new millennium, and lasts until the 2020s. Some elements of dystopia are mocked, for example, the president of the USA is Paris Hilton. A pandemic in the form of mutated bird flu

appears in Koščec's dystopian world, which in the winter of 2010 killed resident birds, a cat treat, so cats, after pressure from the USA and the Hilton's presidential address to the nation with the famous sentence "The cat has to go", were literally wiped off the planet. (This is the counterpart of the cranes in *Planet Friedman*, with the difference that people, driven by consumerism, afforded cats some coffins, tombs, temples.) After domestic birds and cats, industrial poultry quietly disappeared from the scene – expressly replaced by surrogates of soya with the genomes of chickens, ducks and quails. Seagulls are carriers of H5N1, but they do not get bird flu themselves. They were saved from international persecution by the tropical winter of 2014, when the virus could not survive. At Rolo's local level, there are no fish in the rivers for a long time. In the novel, animals are a source of infection or a food item for humans, replaceable by someone else or something else. Such behaviour towards animals clearly shows speciesism, the attitude that man has a moral right to use non-human animals. The relationship of people to nature seems to be similar in many literary works. The following statement refers to the human race in early Russian Soviet utopian and dystopian novels, but it is also applicable to our corpus: "Human society sees the world as its slave, a resource that can be exploited without end. There is, generally, no mention of the right to life of other beings" (Božić 2022: 55).

In Balenović's novel, too, the fish are dead, their bellies are burning as they sail the river, and oil is dripping from the birds' wings. The protagonists don't even know what trees are:

Part of the wall is made uglier by an ugly growth sticking out of the ground. It is bumpy, crooked and branches all the way to the green ends. The elders say it is a tree. Once upon a time there were many trees. Combined in groups, they formed forests, and forests covered large areas of the Earth. They were full of monstrous creatures (Balenović 2012: 9).

In addition to being completely detached from nature and not knowing what a tree looks like, generations of young people see forests as habitats for wild animals, similar to the way it is in Mlakić's novel. From the quote, it can be read that they consider it good that these beasts no longer exist, even though it means the extinction of more animal species.

In *Crab's Children*, "terraformers" and geneticists on newly conquered planets change the nature of wild animals: they make carnivores harmless to man. Such an attitude confirms Teresa Mangum's claim that animal representation in literature "can-

not escape the binary opposition that segregates people and animals” (Mangum 2007: 156).

Babić approaches the issue of animal protection ironically and grotesquely: people who fight in UFC fights are locked in cages, and due to reduced interest in caged animals, zoos with giraffes and rhinos are closed, and parks with indigenous animals are opened: cows, bulls, goats and sheep, because they are completely exotic for young people in Croatia – they don’t even know what these animals look like. In Croatia, more and more homeless people live in nature, mostly in forests, which includes the “privilege” of women picking mushrooms, blueberries and other berries, and men hunting animals with a bow and arrow (both exclusively for personal use). The grotesque rises to a new level by mentioning a new fashion: the fur coats worn by Davy Crockett and the Flintstones. Some animal rights are in the spirit of “restoring the connections between humans and nonhumans” (Jimmy 2015: 371), for example the prohibition of hitting a bee that has stung someone and great concern for stork habitats, but others are grotesque and insane, e.g. allowing fish to live only in square aquariums (because round aquariums spoil their life perspective), etc.

The usual excessively anthropocentric position of thematizing animals in literature (Ortiz-Robles 2016: 147) is more or less satirized in the analyzed novels.

### 3.3. SKY, SEA AND LAND

In addition to the undoubted impact of CO2 emissions on global warming (especially during the last half century)<sup>3</sup>, the melting of ice at both poles, the rise of sea and ocean levels, and the warming of the soil, the huge negative impact of exhaust gases on air quality is unquestionable. Reality in several novels in focus is literally smoky. In Balenović’s novel, smog obscures the sun that once caused skin cancer, and the Sun has descended so low that the characters have to walk bent over.

Due to the exhaust of the car, Brozović’s protagonist Oliver Riemer feels a burning sensation on his skin as a result of polluted air. He cannot see the Zagreb reference point Sljeme, and the solution devised by the rulers is not visionary or suitable for nature.

<sup>3</sup> According to Frank Levin, temperature anomalies between 1970 and 2021 became a *trend*, and in the period 1970–2015 the temperature anomaly per decade was 0.18 °C (Levin 2023: 30–31).

- The botanical garden is fenced with barbed wire – he said – and wickedly armed guards pass through it twenty-four hours a day. That someone would not steal genetically modified plants from the city. The guards have weapons better than his military unit. Satellite surveillance cameras, network of infrared lights. Genetically modified plants are more expensive than Rembrandt and Da Vinci canvases.
- The only way to preserve the permanent greenery of plants in the midst of smog – she said. Just like in Zrinjevac Park (Brozović 2007: 83).

Although both air and soil are poisoned in Koščec’s dystopian world, there is still a difference between the more polluted West, and Eastern Europe, where there are still remnants of once unpolluted nature and cleaner air:

Outside, the horizon was gripped by twilight redness. As every day, because it is his spiritual exercise, Kix is overwhelmed with pleasure. Gratitude. A deep reverence for that scene, which the West can no longer experience. Here the sky is still alive, its changes are accessible to the eye, they are not obscured by a lead mantle of smog (Koščec 2011: 259).

Although *Planet Friedman* does not belong to the genre of petrofiction (petronarratives, petrol literature), gasoline as a vehicle fuel in Zone B is an extremely important factor. As fuel is no longer available, the inhabitants of Zone B reuse the tar collected on the surface of the ocean. According to Michael Thompson’s classification, tar would not be neither “rubbish”, an item “of zero and unchanging value” (Thompson 1979: 27) nor “durable” object that will “increase in value over time” (Thompson 1979: 25), rather we could consider it a “transient” object that “decrease in value over time” (Thompson 1979: 24–25).

We are witnessing that the Petroleum Age (Age of Oil) leaves rather destructive traces in the environment. However, the time of traditional energy sources has passed. In the analyzed dystopias, the authorities did not choose natural sources of energy: sun, water and wind. Nevertheless, it is not a question of insufficient scientific awareness among Croatian writers of this type of fiction. The author’s somewhat critical attitude towards those characters who opt for very harmful fuels and at least a mild affection towards those who choose less polluting types emerges. Koščec’s protagonist Kix, although not particularly ecologically aware, as prime minister faces the inevitability of choosing the energy sources that will save the country from the crisis, and he also knows that destructive radioactive synthetic materials or sewage basins are equally bad solutions. On the other hand, his son,



educated in the West, is much less conscience-stricken: he blackmails his father into accepting fourth-generation nuclear power plants as a strategic way out of the energy crisis.

In almost all selected dystopias societies are segregated, in Mlakić's novel even by wire, fences, and guards, primarily in order for the rich to keep all available resources for themselves, mostly water and land. Regardless of the division according to socio-economic status (only the rich in zone A got an expensive and sophisticated vaccine against superinfluenza, and in zones B and C millions of people died) and attempts to implement ecological racism, the division of nature failed. Although rich corporations from zone A in *Planet Friedman* tended to create zonal pollution in zones B and C, contamination spread to the entire territory. First of all, the ocean: despite of the fact that privileged residents of zone A drive only electric cars (as well as privileged in Deltacor area in Babić's novel while rare petrol cars are considered environmentally unacceptable), from the surface of the ocean they inhale as stinking tar as the inhabitants of zone B: no matter how hard they try to cover it with the scent of a freshener, they can't get rid of the ubiquitous "perfume distillate" of tar. The only difference is the existence of refineries along the ocean in zone B where tar collected from collectors (including children under the age of ten) is processed into fuel for obsolete cars (with thick, almost black smoke). Furthermore, barren "dead earth" is spreading unstopably throughout Zone A, despite the enormous amount of money being invested in research into the phenomenon. That's why Blue Water company "scans" zone B to create arable land into which Zone A could be expanded (actually kills the population there and then demolishes the houses and huts in which they lived).

Despite the anthropocentric view of life that prevails in the modern world, ecocriticism emphasizes the priority and dominance of nature over human endeavors and culture. In the mentioned example from Mlakić's novel, it can be seen that nature does indeed have mechanisms by which it shows supremacy.

In Babić's novel, a separate elite ghetto consists of employees of the leading company Deltacor, whose president is also the president of Croatia. On the other side of the spectrum are inhabitants of the slum – 50 kilometres from Zagreb, fenced with wire, but by the will of the inhabitants, so that everyone would leave them alone – to whom Deltacor's agents under the motto that "water is an economic category and not a fundamental human right" (Babić 2015: 115) do not allow to dig wells.

Although in Koščec's novel the part of society in which Kix lives is not divided by wire (while fences are very present in the countries where Masha and Tasha live), the poor do not have access to real water:

Nevertheless, the anticipation tightens the old woman's shoulders. The glass that Kix filled her, she accepts piously, between her palms, as if it was alive. She brings it to her face, smells it, takes a small sip with her eyes closed. A tear slid down her cheek. "I'm sorry, I haven't drunk real water in a long time" (Koščec 2011: 255).

In Rolo's close environment, the symposium on ballast water was turned into a joke by bloggers, the importance of the protest was diminished by the discovery of a pedophile affair of an activist. After that, data on plankton RN-2011, the cause of severe allergies, was published, but everything calmed down. In his world, the river stinks even when it's not hot, and global air pollution has brought a useful custom of wearing a mask over your face. Both ballast water and allergenic plankton came into the focus of the protestors only because they endanger people's health, and then turn into harlequinade because of superficial bloggers and the pedophile tendencies of one of the participants – extremely important topics concerning nature were ridiculed because of inappropriate people.

In *Dedivination*, most people live in a technologically advanced society, and the richest live in isolated (already mentioned) communities under the dome. Outside the society are exiles, an endangered species of genetically unmodified people. There are generally accepted uncritical truths in society that water in nature is heavily polluted, that rainwater causes burns (sometimes death), that for the most necessary needs (drinking and irrigation) it must be purified with a large amount of chemicals, and showering is possible only with sonic waves:

She imagined how wonderful it must have been thousands of years ago when people bathed their bodies in clear water in the morning. She imagined it as a wonderful experience she will never experience because previous generations were to blame for destroying that wonderful experience (Hrvoj 2018: 21).

Fleeing from the police, Aurora Blue accidentally ends up in a settlement of outcasts from society, and one of them bathes in a lake in front of a horrified Aurora:

In my life I have often faced people prone to suicide, but this was too much even for me. I imagined his bare bones floating on the surface, but when his smiling head emerged a few feet from the surface, I breathed a sigh of relief (Hrvoj 2018: 210).

At that point she realizes that stories of resource pollution are really just a control mechanism of the rulers. Nature is only a tool in the hands of the most powerful, devoid of empathy for members of their own species, the human species, and they do not think about other organisms and biosystems at all.

### 3.4. *FOOD*

Food is a common topic in dystopia, often because the population faces shortages. In Barbieri's novel, food is extremely important, since the novel is about a conflict of worldviews, it is understood as a sign of identity in the relationship between "our" (domestic) and "their" (foreign) food. Binary catalogues are extensive and frequent: the menus of local, healthy food are true gourmet anthems of tradition (we would dare to say that the word "food" is the most frequent word, and the word "tradition" is the second most frequent in the novel), and catalogues of artificially grown food are funny and scary at the same time, crowded with "the nascent germ of a species about-to-become", each of them represents "an unprecedented mutation" (Milburn 2003: 604):

Those self-farmed Norwegian lobster tails mingled with fish without head, scales and entrails, with frog legs that also jumped without the rest of the body... shellfish without shells, fish roe that hatches only fish roe, headless cephalopods and self-farmed plankton the size of dolphins, were interflowing in the kitchens of the New World restaurant (Barbieri 2015: 153).

Such monsters "are the embodiment of the broken boundaries, confusion, and chaos that define ecophobic conceptions of nature" (Estok 2011: 83), and, even worse "they are disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration" (Cohen 1996: 6). If we define ecophobia "as a pathological aversion toward nature, an aggravated form of anthropocentrism expressed variously as fear of, hatred of, or hostility toward nature at least in part motivated by a sense of nature's imagined unpredictability" (Estok 2011: 128) or, in a softened interpretation of Estok's words, as "cultural tendency to relate antagonistically to nature" (Brayton 2012: 226) then it is obvious that ecophobia is the life principle of the members of the "New World", while the group gathered around the Arka restaurant respects the principles of ecophilia or biophilia, that is "nature-friendliness or love of nature" (Hensley 2015).

Barbieri and Babić share the concept of criticism of invasive GMO producers who unscrupulously suppress natural cultivation, and impose plants that they sell them-

selves and that are nurtured by means produced only in their stores.

The final part of the process was the most demanding and important. In the rear of the machine, a mixture of fertilizer, herbicide and accelerator was added to the minced human flesh. This resulted in the finest fertilizer that was thrown into the field, plowed in the meantime by other machines, with the addition of GM seeds from which a salad will sprout in just a few days, which will be sold on Deltacor's shelves for something plus ninety-nine<sup>4</sup>.

Here, once again, the capitalist market's focus on ecology and nature protection was demonstrated, as well as the justification of the slogan that waste, even human waste, is not garbage (Babić 2015: 322).

Košćec also condemns experimentation with nature: Kix does not approve of his son Vuk's justification of GMO production as a necessity due to a completely changed climate (warming) and completely poisoned soil and air. Vuk wants to destroy all the flora and fauna, divide the agricultural area into two or three geometric figures, grow one GM crop on each, which he will fertilize to the point of unconsciousness with artificial fertilizers. Although half the world suffers from malaria and plague, and the other half from allergies and reduced immunity, he thinks this is an opportunity for pharmacy to prove itself. Although a third of plant and animal species are extinct, he believes children need to be exposed to emulsifiers, stabilizers and phosphates from an early age to strengthen themselves. Vuk's capitalist and nature-opposite option seems to have prevailed, as over time natural products can no longer be bought: visiting his young male assistant (actually a lover) Kix buys bad wine at a gas station, advertised as a product of state-of-the-art technology, and so-called milk chocolate with milk from alpine pastures, actually from dehydrated raw materials from the Chernobyl area, but still gives up on buying homemade, actually Chinese cookies that sparked a revolt by European health organizations and ended up on a store shelf next to a gas station.

Balenović's derision elicits a sour smile from the reader:

Dr. Eko's food differed not only in colour but also in physical state. The taste was constant. The old man mixed all the ingredients in a large yellow basin before we started grabbing.

<sup>4</sup> "Something" means the amount in kunas, the former Croatian denomination money and "ninety-nine", the amount in lipas, one hundredth of a kuna.

The good side of Dr. Eko's food was that, in addition to nutritional purposes, it could be used as a shampoo, shaving foam, universal glue, and DVD player (Balenović 2012: 13).

#### 4. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In the context of the ecological crisis that we witness every day and which seems to be getting worse every day, it is not surprising that a noticeable number of authors decide to write about the topic of eco-catastrophes. Ecological dystopias and other genres that contain dystopian elements are a reflection of the real state of the world and a projection of what seems probable based on the current state. In our immediate environment, the waters are polluted, the forests are cut down too much, so rivers flood us more and more often, and forest fires are the topic of every summer. Swirling wind is increasingly common along the Adriatic coast, and last summer in central Croatia there was a wind that blew away roofs. The crisis seems to be deepening. Despite this, those who can change something, do not. The world's largest coal consumers, China and India, are too slow to switch from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources. The need for electricity and thermal energy is huge, and plants for the use of renewable sources are expensive. Summits are held, meetings are given and promises are broken. At the same time, writers can only write, point the finger, show us how far we have brought the planet we live on and what our future could look like.

Judging by the analyzed corpus, not only the Earth but also the entire Universe has a questionable future. The perspective in some texts is indeed very depressing: in the novel *Planet Friedman*, cannibalism is predicted when the insatiable zone A leads to the disappearance of food and then: "Civilization will inevitably come to an end. The sun will shut down, or the planet will turn into a desert before that, it will be covered by *dead earth*... Life will one day leak from this planet. All our attempts to prevent it are in vain" (Mlakić 2012: 219). "White Promenade" predicts a nuclear winter due to wars or old power plants, devastating diseases and the near collapse of civilization in about fifty years. There is no trace of non-human focalization in any of the selected works: although man is to blame for the destruction of nature, the focus in all works is concern for the human race, not for the ecosystem. Man should show a little more feeling for other species, dampen human superiority. If we had to value the texts according to this feature, we wouldn't say that they are worse because of that, just insensitive. Or not sensitive enough.

Environmental justice, the availability of healthy and safe nature to everyone regardless of class or equality for all oppressed groups according to socioeconomic status, gender, sexuality, etc. (Adamson, 2001; Buell, 2005) could not be achieved because there is almost no preserved nature. There are no resources either: Barol sees the solution to depleted resources on Earth in the hibernation of incurable patients so that they will revive in the future, Brozović in the colonization of asteroids, and Perković in the conquest of other planets. It is about the “domestication” of nature outside the home planet – human well-being is in the foreground, an anthropocentrism in its rudimentary form. In these works, there is no attempt to improve the Earth or to improve life for other species on it, but it is moving to conquer new expanses, new places that could be polluted and destroyed over time.

Other solutions are somewhat better, they are implemented on a planet that needs to be saved, they take into account other species besides humans, and they are achievable already in the present time. These solutions are in accordance with the characteristic feature of dystopian criticism that it does not accept misery and passivity, and it “includes at least one eutopian enclave or holds out hope that the dystopia can be overcome and replaced with a eutopia”<sup>5</sup> (Sargent, qtd. in Baccolini and Moylan 2004: 7). Therefore, in some works, in the general ecological collapse, there is also a place resembling an oasis, a bucolic niche. In Barbieri’s novel, we find a rebel enclave in the middle of an urban space: the protagonist isolates himself in a healthy food restaurant and cooks organically grown food with a group of supporters. Part of the population in *Dedivination* lives in nature, respecting coexistence with it, traditionally growing food and organic products. Although these self-willed exiles from privileged society have to stay out of the reach of the rulers, there is still hope: there are people who do not only think of themselves, but protect nature and its inhabitants. The main protagonist of Mlakić’s *Planet Friedman* Gerhard Schmidt and his newly created family also retreated to such a heavenly space of ecological utopia, to their own “communal spaces of utopian resistance” (Jones, 2020: 698) went to the Arcadian Crane’s springs (Ždralovi izvori), beyond pollution, beyond civilization, beyond the reach of power. Although such an act seems defeatist, they are a small subversive group that wants to reject consumerism and the capitalist worship of profit. Perhaps arcadia could eventually spread to an ever-increasing swath of polluted Earth?

<sup>5</sup> Ecological utopias were very popular in the 1970s and 1980s, and after the publication of Callenbach’s novel *Ecotopia: The Notebooks and Reports of William Weston*, published in 1975, the genre was also called “ecotopia”.

The fate of utopian places, a kind of “paradises lost”, is not the same: Barbie-ri’s cook-narrator and his assistants from his small restaurant manage to preserve healthy eating habits, and then rebuild the world destroyed by GM food; we do not know the fate of the community of genetically non-modified exiles in *Dedivination*, and Gerhard’s search for peace in Crane’s springs is under the loop of questions because of the uncertain fate of the inhabitants of Zone A who sailed away on ships with intention of saving themselves from robbers and arsonists led by the former revolutionary and then dictator Bluetooth who set fire to and destroyed the entire zone, what makes Gerhard think about whether there is anyone to send a message in a bottle at all. With all that in mind, we leave the possibility that (hard-earned) new opportunities will remain unused and that the endings are not exactly ideal.

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## EKOLOŠKE TEME U SUVREMENOJ HRVATSKOJ DISTOPIJSKOJ PROZI I PROZI S DISTOPIJSKIM ELEMENTIMA

VLADIMIRA REZO

### SAŽETAK

Važne ekološke teme: klimatske promjene, onečišćenje zraka, vode i tla, izumiranje biljnih i životinjskih vrsta te hrana kao temeljna ljudska potreba analiziraju se u korpusu distopijskih tekstova i onih s distopijskim elementima. Distopijska sastavnica u svima pripada drugom valu distopijske fikcije (Matus 2009: 7). Korpus čine pripovijetka *Bijela promenade* (2016.) Eda Barola i osam romana: *Bojno polje Istra* (2007.) Danila Brozovića, *Centimetar od sreće* (2008.) Marinka Koščeca, *2084: Kuća Velikog Jada* (2012.) Ive Balenovića, *Planet Friedman* (2012.) Josipa Mlakića, *Romeo na kraju povijesti* (2015.) Aljoše Babića, *Rat za peti okus* (2015.) Veljka Barbierija, *Dedivnacija* (2018.) Jelene Hrvaj i *Rakova djeca* (2019.) Dalibora Perkovića. Teorijska perspektiva u radu je ekokritička: istražuju se aspekti odnosa čovjeka i prirode koja ga okružuje, odnosno u kojoj mjeri čovjek prirodu i njezine stanovnike doživljava kao sebi jednake. Posljednje poglavlje daje uvid u rezultate i rješenja koja neki autori nude kao izlaz iz kataklizmičkih situacija, a smisao i učinkovitost tih rješenja vrednuje se s ekokritičkog stajališta.

### KLJUČNE RIJEČI:

*antropocentrizam, distopija, ekokritika, zagađenje, resursi*