

“WHAT A SPLENDID WORLD WE RUINED”: THE PRECARIOUS PRESENTS AND POSTHUMAN FUTURES OF MARGARET ATWOOD’S *ORYX AND CRAKE* AND DMITRY GLUKHOVSKY’S *METRO 2033*

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Abstract

Speculative fiction is a particularly relevant genre at the moment when, apart from the troubling global impact of late-modern phenomena, the ongoing pandemic and the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian War have raised universal concern. This paper conducts a comparative analysis of two novels which describe a postapocalyptic world after a deadly plague and a nuclear conflict, respectively: Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* (2004 [2003]) and Dmitry Glukhovsky’s *Metro 2033* (2010 [2005]). It approaches the texts as critiques of late-modern neoliberal capitalism, employing the theory by Zygmunt Bauman, Ulrich Beck and Mark Fisher. Additionally, it scrutinises the representation of the neoliberal subject in Atwood’s book and utilises Svetlana Boym’s reflection on nostalgia in post-Soviet Russia to comment on Glukhovsky’s work. Lastly, it examines the posthuman alternative the two authors present for the deeply flawed human social orders.

Keywords: late modernity; neoliberalism; nostalgia; posthumanism

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The literary genre of speculative fiction, which habitually provides ample commentary on the authors' society (Kurtz 2017, 133), assumes at present a particular relevance. The global society has currently entered the stage variously termed late modernity, liquid modernity, world at risk, or capitalist realism (Bauman 2000, 6; Beck 2008, 4-5; Fisher 2009, 2). Ulrich Beck highlights the adverse effects of the successfulness of modern enterprises, such as industrialisation and globalised capitalism, for the world at large (8), and the constant presence of risk as a dominant characteristic of contemporary life: the growing awareness of the threats of environmental catastrophe and terrorism affects politics and economy worldwide, ever increasing the uncertainty of existence (1, 3). Zygmunt Bauman, in turn, focuses on the erosion of "patterns, codes and rules to which one could conform, which one could select as stable orientation points and by which one could subsequently let oneself be guided" (7) due to unfettered economic growth becoming the preeminent force shaping the social order (4), while Mark Fisher stresses capitalism's "[capacity] of metabolizing and absorbing everything with which it comes into contact" (6) and its detrimental effect on one's ability to think and decide (16). These processes have led to the emergence of neoliberal subjects and societies, which resort to a defence mechanism of rationalisation in order to cope with the exponentially increasing global instability (Bailes 2020, 1). In addition, the events of the recent years have proven notably unsettling: the Covid-19 pandemic exposed the vulnerability of societies around the world, whereas the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine has raised fear of an outbreak of another global military conflict. In a moment of widespread foreboding, it becomes especially compelling to examine speculative narratives describing scenarios similar to ongoing disquieting events, and to scrutinise the manner in which contemporary authors have imagined future developments. In this context, this article offers a comparative analysis of two early twenty-first century speculative fiction novels, both of them noteworthy as postapocalyptic visions and pessimistic extrapolations of present trends: Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, first published in 2003, and Dmitry Glukhovsky's *Metro 2033*, first published in 2002.

Honoured with numerous awards, Margaret Atwood (b. 1939) ranks among Canada's best-known writers. The scope of her work varies widely, including criticism, poetry and prose fiction. In several of her novels she departs from strict realism, yet she has been reluctant to classify them as science fiction, preferring instead her own term "Utopia," a combination of utopian and dystopian writing (Atwood 2011, "The Road to Utopia" 2). The author justifies her inclination by stating she extrapolates humanity's contemporary utopian longings and their potential dystopian consequences, always basing her visions on precedents from the historical past (4). Certainly, at present Atwood's eleventh novel *Oryx and Crake* (2004) appears much less fantastical than on its publication two decades ago.

The book follows Jimmy/Snowman, the lone survivor of a global epidemic, as he struggles to endure in a hostile postapocalyptic environment, accompanied solely by genetically engineered posthuman beings, the Crakers. The narrative

simultaneously explores the protagonist's life before the catastrophe, when he enjoyed a privilege of living within the technologically advanced Compounds, secured from numerous global crises. Jimmy is nevertheless largely unhappy, and unable to establish any relationships with the exception of his school-friend Crake. The latter becomes a brilliant scientist and eventually offers Jimmy a job at a secret laboratory complex where he works on the creatures later known as the Crakers, and a sexually-enhancing pill BlyssPluss. The pill, however, turns out to contain a deadly virus engineered by its maker, and a violent plague swiftly wipes out the world's population. Having killed Crake, Jimmy is left to a precarious and lonely existence among the Crakers.

Dmitry Glukhovsky (b. 1979) is an acclaimed Russian writer of speculative fiction, known best for his *Metro* trilogy (2005-2015), which has earned him international fame as the successor to the literary legacy of Russia's most esteemed sci-fi authors, the Strugatsky brothers (Lakhmitko 2018, 186). The series is noteworthy for its unconventional publication history – it evolved on a Web page, shaped by readers' suggestions, before coming out in print (184, 187). Glukhovsky has also written realist fiction and journalistic articles, having worked for magazines and news stations from Germany, France and the United Kingdom. He stresses the philosophical dimension of his work (Polak 2013, 128), which is moreover politically engaged: he “[has insisted] that he foresaw some of the future xenophobic and antagonistic propensities that would characterize Vladimir Putin's administration ... in the late 1990s” and used them as a basis for extrapolation when writing *Metro 2033* (Lakhmitko 185). He has openly condemned the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, which resulted in his name being placed on the Russian federal wanted list.

Metro 2033 (2010) tells the story of Artyom, a twenty-year-old living on the VDNKh station of the Moscow Metro. The underground railway system has become a refuge for the metropolis's residents, after, some twenty years earlier, a nuclear war brought humanity to near extinction. The survivors have created a new society below, establishing several factions across the stations and tunnels. After the VDNKh comes under the attack of the “dark ones,” a mutated humanoid species, Artyom undertakes to bring a message of warning to the Polis, located in the heart of the Metro, with the hope that the most powerful and knowledgeable of the new micro-states will devise a plan for eliminating the threat. Before he reaches his destiny, however, he needs to face countless dangers, both from hostile groups and inexplicable phenomena occurring in the dark tunnels.

This article focuses on the two texts' engagement with the hallmark phenomena of late modernity, illustrated by a neoliberal-capitalist society's destructive effect on the individual. The analysis employs theories elaborated by Bauman, Beck, Fisher, and other critics, to reflect on the highly problematic characteristics of the global society as described by Atwood. In the case of Glukhovsky's novel, Svetlana Boym's consideration of nostalgia is additionally used in the examination of neo-Soviet and neo-Nazi communities of the Metro. The paper aims to demonstrate how both authors express concern about the agency of an individual in a crisis-

dominated world. In their novels, individual resilience takes primacy over late-modern institutions as the Anthropocene ends and posthuman species, better adapted to the new conditions of the ravaged Earth, replace humanity. These forms of life – the Crakers and the dark ones – present a noteworthy alternative to the two protagonists' societies, emphasising collectivity, empathy and a cooperative relationship with the environment instead of an exploitative one. Nevertheless, *Homo sapiens* proves to be too obstinate in its thinking to embrace such alterity, choosing instead to hold on to what is familiar. The scrutiny of a Western and a Russian text demonstrates that the most marked contrast between the two narratives comprises the depiction of the pre-apocalypse reality – the early twenty-first century. Atwood highlights the problematic aspects of the post-national late-capitalist order, emphasising the threat of climate change. Glukhovsky, on the other hand, appears more concerned about the legacy of twentieth-century conflicts and the upheavals in contemporary Russian society. Understanding this difference constitutes an important step in comprehending the dynamics of the West/Russia division, which has currently re-emerged on a scale unprecedented since the time of the Cold War.

Oryx and Crake: the Destructive Forces of Late Modernity

Atwood's novel differs from *Metro 2033* in its detailed description of a pre-apocalypse society. While the protagonist belongs to a privileged minority enjoying a comfortable standard of living, the world at large is troubled by countless crises stemming from late modernity, ranging in their impact from the level of an individual to altering the functioning of global society at large.

At the time of Jimmy's birth, the majority of Western countries' territory is taken up by "pleeblands" – areas inhabited by those unfortunate enough not to have been born into families of powerful corporations' employees. The latter part of the population lives in the Compounds, high-tech, heavily secured microcities connected by a hermetically sealed train network. Their residents enjoy benefits of the latest scientific advances, such as rejuvenating treatments and vital organ replacements, at the same time being sheltered from the predicaments afflicting the world outside: poverty, pollution, diseases, hunger and violent riots. Jimmy's father explains this segregation by an analogy with medieval times: "the kings and dukes had lived in castles, with high walls and drawbridges and slots on the ramparts so you could pour hot pitch on your enemies, ... and the Compounds were the same idea. Castles were for keeping you and your buddies nice and safe inside, and for keeping everybody else outside" (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 32). Jimmy's family thus belongs to the caste of "the kings and dukes," while the underprivileged minority is perceived as a threat to be repelled at all cost. Such rampant social inequality is what Beck identifies as a representative feature of the "world at risk," in which the power of decision-making usually rests in the hands of those who need not fear the consequences of their choices (140-141). The fruits of the research conducted at the Compounds facilities are largely unavailable to

the population outside, but it is the pleeblands' inhabitants that must struggle with the noxious by-products, such as omnipresent "hostile bioforms." The corporations responsible exemplify the neoliberal stance: justifying their work as an effort to advance human well-being, they eschew all ethical concerns in exploiting the population to maximise profit (Bauman 4; Harvey 2006, 4).

This stance results harmful to individuals in a twofold manner. On the one hand, it transforms the structure of the market so that gains are accumulated almost exclusively by large, multi-branch firms: for instance, HelthWyzer specialises in medical research, yet it also owns the Happicuppa subsidiary, the inventor of a new type of coffee bean which ripens much faster and enables more efficient, automated harvest. In consequence, plantation workers and individual growers are faced with "starvation-level poverty" (Atwood, *Oryx* 209-210). An even greater danger stems from corporate attempts to "turn any product or service into an instrument of economic speculation" (Enright 2013, 20): the practice of viewing human lives in terms of potential capital gain is made visible in a still more startling strategy of HelthWyzer. The corporation creates new hostile bioforms, which are later inserted into vitamin supplements distributed on the market. As novel diseases spread rapidly in the overpopulated pleeblands, the company profits on the sales of antidotes prepared in advance, but provided in limited supply in order to maintain a high price (Atwood, *Oryx* 248). Crake's cold remark on the process is revealing: "illness isn't productive. In itself, it generates no commodities and therefore no money" (246). Accordingly, illness is made into a source of profit with the use of scientific tools at the corporation's disposal. Moreover, the firm actively eliminates people threatening its success: as due to globalisation "effective authority leaks away from the state" (Lacher 2006, 1), HelthWyzer orchestrates the assassination of Crake's father, who planned to expose their unethical practices. Law enforcement remains powerless against corporate interests and the death is ultimately ruled a suicide.

The novel thus identifies the troubling impact of late modernity in affluent societies, yet it does not limit its scope to the privileged part of the world. While ecological concerns are altogether absent from *Metro*, Atwood frequently emphasises that "capitalism ... is primed to destroy the entire human environment" (Fisher 18). The consequences of the exploitation of the ecosphere are frequently mentioned: non-synthetic food becomes a scarcity, while weather patterns change drastically, with the usually "sunny and moderate" June becoming "the wet season all the way up the east coast" characterised by daily thunderstorms (Atwood, *Oryx* 203). For Compound residents, such extreme conditions mainly constitute an inconvenience in organising outdoor events. However, as the story of Jimmy's lover Oryx amply demonstrates, the citizens of developing countries suffer substantial harm.

The late-modern decline of the significance of the nation state in relation to the global capital network is accentuated by the fact that Oryx is not even certain in which country she was born. It is an anonymous "Third World" state, where the poorest part of the population are forced to make the drastic choice

of selling their children to ensure their own survival, since due to the severe climate change they can no longer sustain themselves with farming. Jimmy is shocked once he learns about the practice, but for those directly affected it is merely another instance when a situation that would once be considered a crisis becomes an accepted norm. The logic of late capitalism justifies treating people as instruments "through an appeal to objective necessity" (Bailes 38), and the villagers participating in the trade rationalise the process to themselves:

This man [buying children] wasn't regarded as a criminal of any sort, but as an honourable businessman ... Therefore he was treated with respect and shown hospitality ... He was the villagers' bank, their insurance policy, their kind rich uncle, their only charm against bad luck. ... [H]e would give ... a good price, or what he said was a good price; and it was a decent-enough price, considering what people were used to. With this money, the mothers who sold their children would be able to give the remaining children a better chance in life. So they told one another. (Atwood, *Oryx* 136-37)

Struggling to endure in the new reality brought about by the neoliberal order, the community accepts the capitalist standard of treating people as commodities. They therefore become examples of what Julian Reid (2016) terms resilient subjects: they "[cannot] conceive of changing the world, its structure and conditions of possibility [...] but instead adapt to its enabling conditions via the embrace of neoliberalism" (216, 57). In the case of *Oryx*, an observation by Beck becomes especially relevant: he claims that "[o]ne of the demoralizing paradoxes of world risk society is that [the victim regions] refuse to recognize their own victim status ... [they] turn themselves into involuntary accessories to their own exploitation" (176-77). The girl builds her resilience through learning how to perform well the role of commodity that is imposed upon her, comforting herself with the notion that while "having a money value [is] no substitute for love," it ensures her survival (Atwood, *Oryx* 146-147). Forced to act in child pornography films, she adapts by making transactions of her own: she persuades a cameraman to assuage his guilt over molesting her by teaching her to speak English and read, purchasing with her body the knowledge which later facilitates her incorporation into the Compound society. She eventually thrives as Crake's assistant, and appears stoical with regard to her grim past, going as far as justifying her mother's decision to sell her children, and refusing to acknowledge her own trauma. Crake does not consider *Oryx's* childhood particularly disturbing either, and he rationalises the trade in children through a claim that "You can't couple a minimum access to food with an expanding population indefinitely," urging Jimmy to approach the matter "realistically" (138-9). In the world of the novel, a realistic approach equals reducing human lives to numerical data.

This is further supported by the fact that there is no comfort to be drawn from communal bounds, which have disintegrated in the sheltered Compounds as well as in the hazardous pleeblands and destitute developing countries. Such

instability and the fact that “obligation, trustworthiness [and] commitment are ... held obsolete in the new capitalism” (Fisher 32-33) prevents forming any lasting and meaningful connection between family members. It is revealed that Crake’s father’s death was the result of the denunciation by the mother, who feared scandal and the loss of prestigious status. When she remarries, her son accepts the presence of a disliked man in his life without complaint, because in his eyes the institution of family is one devoid of any importance. Jimmy, however, is incapable of such disengagement. The constant uncertainty of late-modern life, with its lack of stable sources of comfort, leads to the boy’s development of a persistent sense of inadequacy. One of the chief reasons for Jimmy’s social maladjustment is the turbulent relationship with his mother. Reminiscing about Sharon, he bitterly wonders if there “wasn’t supposed to be a maternal bond” (Atwood, *Oryx* 69): this seemingly obvious notion no longer holds true in liquid modern society. The character of Sharon personalises all the major problematic aspects of the precarious present. The woman hardly pays attention to her son, as she is permanently distraught by the unethical practices of bioengineering companies and the prevalent social injustice. She refuses to embrace the possibilities offered by scientific advancement and the privileges resulting from working for a prosperous corporation: she sees the Compounds as a “theme park” denying the existence of a global crisis (31), and, unwilling to pursue a lifestyle she considers meaningless, eventually flees, deserting her family.

Jimmy attempts to compensate for the lack of bond with his parents by establishing other relationships, yet this proves a challenge since all forms of human connection have become equally transient as the family. Murat Kabak (2021) notices that the novel engages with the *Bildungsroman*, modernity’s representative narrative mode which “believes that there is a linear progression in the protagonist’s development leading into the protagonist’s emotional and psychological maturity, and his/her conformity to society’s norms and expectations” (39). It quickly becomes apparent that in Jimmy’s world a belief in such successful development may no longer be upheld, and no integration into society can be achieved by the protagonist. Since corporation employees frequently transfer to a different Compound in pursuit of more lucrative jobs, their children are subject to a constant change of their social circle and prevented from forming lasting friendships, which instead are “always contingent” (Atwood, *Oryx* 82). As Alberto Bellochi and Jonathan H. Turner (2019) remark, late modernity is linked with “fracturing the social contexts of individuals,” who need to form separate identities to adopt in different situations (52). For Jimmy, assuming particular identities becomes a coping strategy as he engages in “the free play of masks and roles without content or substance” (Jameson 1998, 60). Yearning for affection, he secures his classmates’ approval through enacting grotesque parodies of his parents’ arguments. The pantomimes he performs make him uneasy, since they are “too close to an uncomfortable truth [he doesn’t] want to examine” (Atwood, *Oryx* 68), yet he continues the game because the others’ applause is the only means of self-validation he knows. This pattern of thought is reinforced later in

his life, when he develops another persona to satisfy his emotional needs: that of a brooding, melancholic loner, which proves attractive to vulnerable women whose attention he frequently secures by relating the story of being abandoned by his mother. His invariably short-lived romantic relationships are a transaction, where in exchange for soothing his partners' insecurities he receives attention and therefore a sense of purpose he is otherwise lacking (222-4). Any fixed patterns an individual is supposed to follow no longer exist, supposedly leaving one free to choose their path. For Jimmy, however, such freedom results oppressive and contributes nothing beyond the intensification of his feeling of aimlessness. His situation exemplifies, in Fisher's words, the plight of "the generation that had come after history, whose every move was anticipated, tracked, bought and sold before it had even happened" (9).

In contrast to Crake, Jimmy is not gifted in the area of scientific studies. This field of knowledge is the most valued one as it directly facilitates incorporating the human "ability to create and innovate" into "the productive powers of capital" (Enright 23): scientific discoveries are immediately implemented to develop more commercialised products. Jimmy's talent for words is considered worthy only as long as it aids this process in some manner. Nathaniel F. Enright highlights that the neoliberal subject's "[empowerment] through market choices" (21) is deceptive, and indeed Jimmy has no real choice but to pursue a career in advertising if he wishes to preserve his comfortable standard of life. He finds the perspective depressing, yet accepts it as another aspect of his life he is unable to control. A relatively profitable job does not alter his bleak outlook, which his reflections make apparent: "So this was the rest of his life. It felt like a party to which he'd been invited, but at an address he couldn't actually locate. Someone must be having fun at it, this life of his; right at the moment, it wasn't him" (Atwood, *Oryx* 296). Fisher remarks that the illusory freedom of capitalist realism frequently results in "falling into hedonic (or anhedonic) lassitude: the soft narcotics, ... all-night TV and marijuana" (23) and that is precisely what Jimmy does: he attempts to distract himself with essentially useless gadgets, increasingly shallow love affairs, and substance abuse, but all these prove ineffective. The capitalist promise of fulfilment thanks to work and consumptionism (Bailes 30) turns out to provide as little comfort as the decaying family and romantic relationships.

Jimmy's passivity may be attributed to the fact that he has grown up in a vastly unsustainable world, being aware of global crises since childhood. According to Fisher, the late capitalism reality triggers a response of "nihilistic hedonism" in the subjects, who attempt not to consider the real implications of what they see around (1). Apathy and denial are Jimmy's preferred strategies to cope with anything possibly unsettling. When watching the news, he finds himself bored with "more plagues, more famines, more floods, more insect or microbe or small-mammal outbreaks, more droughts, more chickenshit boy-soldier wars in distant countries. Why was everything so much like itself?" (Atwood, *Oryx* 298). Even more striking is his lack of response to violent Web content he watches with Crake in the afternoons after school. Child pornography, live-transmitted executions

or assisted suicides all leave him largely unaffected. The frequency with which disturbing events happen globally makes them lose their emotional impact; moreover, they are transformed into commercial ventures, with “sports-event commentary ... spot commercials, ... and logos painted in bright yellow” (94). Jimmy accepts them as a regular feature of his profit-driven society. At all times he either chooses to remain ignorant about the mechanisms by which it is shaped or succumbs to denial. Even though he is initially shaken and disgusted when he is shown the process of production of Chickie Nobs – breeding genetically altered brainless creatures – he actually takes liking to the product very soon. Sharon’s radical decision to escape the Compound world fails to convey the importance of her rebellion to the son: tellingly, he dismisses the justification left in her farewell note as “blah blah” (69), without the slightest intention to comprehend the message. Only after the global catastrophe does he acknowledge he has been ignoring signs of imminent disaster throughout his life, wilfully disregarding the unsustainability of his world. Effectually, the protagonist has adapted to the environment of late modernity without making any attempts to transform it, and he displays no agency until a plague exterminates humanity. Thus, it is not only the adverse conditions of life in the late-modern present that the novel posits as in need of an alternative; it is also the attitude of indifference and passivity.

After civilizational collapse, Jimmy finds himself forced to undertake action in order to survive. The transformation is signalled by his rejection of his given name and adopting a new one – Snowman. For the first time in his life, he is assigned a role of importance, instead of being a passive spectator: Crake has instructed him to take care of his posthuman “children.” Moreover, finding himself in a hostile environment, the protagonist eventually begins to utilise his considerable practical skills, which he has never attempted to develop before (43). It would be erroneous, however, to perceive this change in terms of a final metamorphosis into a mature and capable hero: the novel implies the time of such figures has passed, negating the classical *Bildungsroman*. Though Snowman recognises Jimmy’s failings, it is too late to utilise this, and neither is he able to move beyond the past. He remains plagued by recollections of his former life and of Oryx, whom he has been unable to save. Thus, in the reality described by Atwood, there is no possibility of redemption and a new beginning for the neoliberal hero, who remains forever marked by late modernity even after its ultimate dissolution.

Metro 2033: Neoliberal Capitalism versus Nostalgia for the Twentieth Century

Glukhovsky’s protagonist Artyom certainly bears little resemblance to Jimmy, and their stories differ considerably: he has only the vaguest recollection of his life on the surface, since nuclear war broke out when he was four years old. He has grown up in the world already destroyed but where, nevertheless, a form of human society has been preserved. Thousands inhabit the Moscow Metro, many

of them old enough to remember the time before they were forced underground – it is through their memories that the protagonist accesses the past. The image he forms is distorted, however, since these reminiscences are distinctly marked by nostalgic yearning and utterly unlike Atwood's detailed panorama, which exposes at length the social ills of the early twenty-first century.

The nostalgic distortion becomes most prominent in Artyom's conversation with Mikhail Porfirevich, an elderly man accompanying him from the Kitai Gorod station to Pushkinskaya. The fellow traveller becomes overwhelmed when he describes his former flat back on the surface, remarking how welcoming it was, recollecting the beauty of the pictures on the walls, the comfortableness of the "luxurious" handmade wooden bed, and lamenting the loss of his books (Glukhovsky 178). Such grief for commodities previously taken for granted is universal among the inhabitants of the Metro, where even the most basic resources are permanently scarce. However, the longing for the lost past is not limited to material comforts. When asked about cities other than Moscow, Mikhail Porfirevich holds back tears as he speaks about Saint Petersburg:

Ah! What a beautiful city ... Admiralteistvo, the spire there... What grace, what grace! And evenings on Nevsky Prospect – people, noise, crowds, laughter, children with ice cream, pretty girls... Music playing... In summer especially... the sun, the sky is clear, azure... And then, you know, it's just easy to breathe again...
... Lord, what a splendid world we ruined... (190-2)

The imagery evoked is idyllic, presenting the past as a lost utopia impactful in its beauty. Artyom, deeply impressed by Mikhail's recollections, begins to dream of a "shimmering, joyful [sky]" and "enormous [buildings] ... light, easy, as though they were woven out of sweet air" (192). Significantly, his only memory of his life on the surface is also filled with bliss: it is the day when his mother took him to the Moscow Botanical Garden. He is able to summon again the sunlight, the vivid colours of flowers, the taste of ice cream and the whistling of the wind among tree leaves with startling clarity, yet he is not able to remember his mother's face (597). As in the case of Jimmy in *Oryx and Crake*, the woman has left a lasting mark on her son's psyche, standing as a symbol for a world gone forever. Nonetheless, in Atwood's novel the tumultuous mother-son relationship accentuates the instability of late modernity, whereas in *Metro 2033* it focalises the nostalgic desire for home, safety and happiness, resulting in an incomplete and sentimentalised recollection.

Under closer scrutiny it becomes apparent that Glukhovsky considers his present to be anything but unproblematic. Nostalgia, which the survivors of the apocalypse display in their idealised reminiscences is, as Boym (2001) notices, "a sentiment of loss and displacement, but ... also a romance with one's own fantasy" (xiii). Selectively focusing on the past instances of comfort and joy, they largely ignore aspects of the post-Soviet Russia that have persisted after the disaster and continue to affect the society of the Metro system. The underground

community, in Andrzej Polak's words, "has a specific structure, largely replicating the divisions ... from the pre-war times. We see the entire Russian panopticon in miniature ... the nuclear catastrophe has taught humankind nothing" (129). The inhabited stations are divided into conflicted factions, many of them guided by ideologies prevalent in the present-day Russia. On his journey, Artyom has an opportunity to observe the workings of several of such social orders.

One of the most powerful and prosperous factions is the Concord of Ring Line Stations, customarily called the Hansa. Situated at the intersection of all major trade routes, it has rapidly amassed substantial wealth, which "[arouses] the envy of ... many" (Glukhovsky 19) and, in order to protect its resources, organised efficient armed forces to guard its borders. It thus fits Bauman's description of the liquid modern community: "defined by its closely watched borders rather than its contents; 'defence of the community' [is] translated as the hiring of armed gatekeepers to control the entry" (94). The guards' task is not only to stop any hostile newcomers, but also to prevent access to the inhabitants of the poorer stations, since "[t]he number of places in paradise is limited" (Glukhovsky 249) – a certain parallel with the "kings and dukes" from Atwood's novel is noticeable. The borders allow the influx of capital, but not people, exemplifying the characteristic of "the modern/capitalist society" (Bauman 165) where "barred from moving ... [people] are in a position *a priori* inferior to the capital which moves around freely" (166). Profit remains the Hansa's ultimate objective, which is why the faction is willing to come to an agreement with the Red Line governed by communists: though supposedly the two adhere to incompatible ideologies, the Red Line proves to be "a favourable economic partner" (Glukhovsky 24). With the goal of securing further gain, the Concord also allows foreigners to trade on its outlying stations, but never to cross the border into the inner territory.

Artyom is granted an opportunity to enter, though in less than desirable circumstances. He is immediately impressed by the ostentatious prosperity, unparalleled by any other station. Polak observes that in the Hansa, the capitalist economy has assumed the role of religion, as demonstrated by Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* being displayed on a "quasi-altar ... sheltering relics" (130). It has been noted by Michael S. Aßländer (2020) that Smith's work is often misinterpreted in the neoliberal economic context in order to justify immoral and self-serving market practices employed to "legitimize profit maximization" (84). Citizens of the Hansa live in relative comfort, yet the agreeable conditions result not merely from their resourcefulness and willingness to work: the Concord exploits underprivileged individuals to provide its community with a better standard of living. Artyom effectively becomes a slave when he loses a bet against one of the Hansa's officials. Treated as a commodity, he is forced to clean out latrines, tolling for hours "in a monstrous, unimaginable stench" (Glukhovsky 249). When they are first introduced to their repulsive duties, Artyom's companion Mark states jokingly that "emigration is always difficult at the beginning" (250), but the comment soon proves a distressing parallel between the new arrivals' situation

and that of the contemporary migrants from developing countries. After several days, Artyom begins to feel his identity disintegrate:

[He] had ... grown accustomed to the idea that ... the fate of a pariah was in store for him. It was as though he were no longer human and had turned into an inconceivably monstrous being, whom people saw not just as something ugly and repulsive, but also somehow perceptibly related to themselves – and that scared them and repulsed them even more, as if they might catch this monstrousness from him, as if he were a leper. (251)

The passage emphasises the dehumanising conditions of taxing, monotonous labour and social exclusion. Such is the situation faced by countless immigrants in prosperous capitalist countries: exploited and forced to work in appalling conditions, they are treated with universal scorn by the privileged citizens (Breman et al. 2019, 13). Artyom is eventually able to escape only because of the revulsion he provokes in the armed guards, who are too disgusted to touch him. Through this fragment of the protagonist's journey, Glukhovsky demonstrates that the capitalist order, represented by the dazzling wealth of the Hansa, amounts to a society founded on the principles of exclusion and exploitation (Therborn 2019, x), and therefore needs an alternative.

However, unlike *Oryx and Crake*, *Metro 2033* does not highlight the shortcomings of just this particular social order. Understanding the significance of other communities Artyom encounters requires familiarity with the highly specific context of contemporary Russia, as the novel actively engages with the issue, particularly by commenting on the legacy of the country's communist past.

According to Beck, while communism used to be perceived as the major threat to the free market (200), at present it no longer receives much attention in most European societies (232). Nevertheless, in Russia the memory of the Soviet Union remains well alive, as the image of "a Soviet golden age of stability, strength and 'normalcy' [was] the prevalent [one] in Russia" at the time of *Metro's* publication (Boym xvi). Accordingly, the novel describes how the "Red" Sokol Metro line – connecting stations such as Komsomolskaya or the Lenin Library – "would draw to itself everyone who was nostalgic for the glorious Soviet past." The process of the organisation of the new faction mirrors actual historical occurrences:

The idea of a resurrection of the Soviet state took easily ... The veterans ... , former Komsomol men and Party officials, permanent members of the proletariat ... all came together ... They founded a committee, responsible for the dissemination of this new revolution and its communist idea ... under the almost Lenin-era name of 'Interstational.' It prepared divisions of professional revolutionaries and propagandists and sent them to enemy stations. ... [T]he starving inhabitants of the Sokol line were thirsting for the restoration of justice, for which, as far as they understood, apart from unjustified egalitarianism, there was no other option. So the whole branch ... was soon engulfed by the crimson flames of revolution. (19)

The events outlined form a parallel with the course of the October Revolution of 1917, resulting in Russia's transition to the socialist order. The dissemination committee's name is a direct reference to "The Internationale," the USSR's original anthem. The call for "the restoration of justice" is particularly significant: though Glukhovsky immediately makes apparent his critical attitude by terming the revolutionary egalitarianism unjustified, the utopian aspect of the socialist upheaval is worth highlighting. Soviet communism initially promised an alternative to capitalism and its inevitable exploitation and alienation (Bremen et al. 7). It officially proclaimed that once it achieved its "final victory," history would come to an end (Boym 59) with the establishment of a global society where no capitalist oppression, as manifest in the world of *Oryx and Crake* or in the Hansa, would ever take place. However, the historical failure of the Soviet utopia is amply documented in its citizens' accounts of mass repression and "collective trauma" (58). The dream of an egalitarian, classless society swiftly evolved into the dystopian reality of Stalin's dictatorship, while "the exploitation ... and the various forms of social and economic equality [were] not eliminated but only [changed] their forms; and in some instances [became] worse" (Zinoviev 1984, 25). Artyom does not visit any of the stations of the Red Line, yet what he learns from the other inhabitants of the Metro sufficiently demonstrates that the reinstated Soviet state continues the original's legacy of oppression. In a manner explicitly compared to the functioning of the KGB, the Soviet Union's security agency, those living on the Red Line are subjected to authoritarian rule and constant surveillance (Glukhovsky 83). In the case of neoliberal capitalism Artyom becomes disillusioned only after his ordeal at one of the Hansa's stations, but he needs no incentive to mistrust the communists: outside the Red Line, the survivors are unanimously hostile towards its residents, because the remembrance of the Soviet era's hardship remains vivid. Re-emerging communism is hence perceived "as a tumour that [is] metastasising, threatening to kill the whole organism" (19), and a coalition is swiftly formed to prevent the spread of the neo-Soviet revolution. Although the rejection of the former Russian order is thus marked clearly, Glukhovsky also underlines the presence of nostalgia for the period, lingering in the Russian society and posing a risk for any meaningful transformation. Uncompromising embracement of Western-style free market does not constitute the answer to the contemporary Russia's social ills, but neither does the return to the Soviet past romanticised in the memory of many.

The third option frequently adopted by those dissatisfied with the Russian present, especially among the younger generations, is the endorsement of Nazi ideology, as pointed out by Boym: she remarks that the youth are attracted to "right-wing popular culture ..., Nazi paraphernalia, ... the xenophobic chic of racist and anti-Semitic slurs" (69). Glukhovsky extrapolates this tendency, imagining the emergence of a miniature neo-Nazi state. Thus, at one point of his quest Artyom finds himself on the territory of the Fourth Reich. The stations' walls are covered in modified Swastika symbols, paintings of Nazi eagles, and slogans proclaiming the superiority of the Russian people (Glukhovsky 196).

The protagonist is puzzled by the fact that some of these are written in German, yet this is in accord with Boym’s observation of the paradox whereby foreign discourse is employed to justify nationalist claims, for “[t]he young Russians restore the dreams of someone else’s youth, mimic the fantasies of others” (69). In embracing the Nazi fantasy, the soldiers of the Fourth Reich give way to the most brutal and sadistic impulses. A mentally disabled boy travelling with Artyom is unscrupulously shot on the faction’s border, his body joining a pile of the dead mouldering there as a warning that “[n]ot one swarthy animal is allowed within” (Glukhovsky 196). Vanechka’s death is justified by the fascists, since in their belief “subhumans” ought to be eliminated from the population (211). For trying to protect his companion, Artyom undergoes beating and torture, and is sentenced to be hanged, as a “degenerate, who discredits his own nation” (216). Though at the last moment he is miraculously saved, the memories of the cruelty he witnessed and experienced in the Fourth Reich continue to haunt the hero. The encounter with the neo-Nazis serves as a warning against “the outburst of xenophobic and racist frenzy – the most common manifestations of the ‘primal shelter’ nostalgia” (Bauman 214), but it also references actual discourse of post-Soviet nationalistic groups (Polak 130), thus identifying one more deeply flawed ideology threatening the present and the future.

Still other alternatives are mentioned: Artyom’s path leads him through communities of Jehovah’s witnesses and the technophobic, cannibalistic cultists of the Great Worm. He hears talk of Satanists, supposedly planning to dig through the Metro’s foundation to open the gates of Hell, and of a mysterious “Emerald City,” which is rumoured to form an isolated enclave of knowledge and civilisation. As he observes various practices and ideologies which the groups adopt to survive underground and comfort the minds of their members, he becomes progressively disillusioned, seeing that all these solutions ultimately perpetrate violence, deceit and exploitation:

Whom should he believe? And in what? In the Great Worm – the cannibalistic god, ... populating the barren, scorched earth with living beings; in the wrathful and jealous Jehovah; in his vainglorious reflection – Satan; in the victory of communism in the whole metro; in the supremacy of the fair-haired men with turned-up noses over curly haired, swarthy races? Something suggested to Artyom that there were no differences in any of it. (480)

Even so, this disappointment does not lead Artyom to passive despair. Demonstrating unswerving resolve, he is a complete opposite of Jimmy. Despite the deaths of his companions, he perseveres on his quest, always prioritising his goal of reaching the Polis. Polak compares the youth to the classical figure of the hero searching for a path in a labyrinth (135) and indeed the Moscow Metro system is a maze full of dangers. In order to maintain his determination, Artyom creates his own narrative, thinking of himself in terms of a chosen individual, burdened with grave responsibility, yet simultaneously protected by fate. This

belief is consolidated by his encounter with two peculiar strangers at the Polyanka station. He is engrossed by their perplexing conversation, during which one of the men proposes a theory of predetermined plots of individual lives, which could develop into a meaningful storyline were a person to make correct choices. In such a case, they would receive the aid of fate itself (Glukhovsky 281). This appears to Artyom a convincing explanation as to how he has managed to survive countless instances of mortal danger. Reassured thus that he is pursuing his destined plot, he at last reaches the Polis and helps its soldiers destroy the breeding ground of the dark ones. An argument could then be made that the novel celebrates an attitude of individual resilience, rejecting societal structures, as well as collective narratives, in favour of personal ones. However, Artyom's perseverance proves to have been tragically misguided. Seconds before the salvaged missiles strike the hive of the mutant species, he experiences an epiphany and realises that far from being hostile, the dark ones are intelligent and highly empathetic posthumans who have adapted to hazardous conditions brought about by the nuclear war. The realisation nevertheless comes too late, leaving him not the saviour of his race, but an accomplice in the extermination of another. In contrast to Jimmy, Artyom has displayed inquisitiveness, compassion and loyalty, decidedly refusing a passive neoliberal stance; nonetheless, he is ultimately unable to move beyond the mode of thinking which resulted in civilizational collapse and the emergence of conflicted factions underground twenty years before. In helping to recover and fire the forgotten Russian rockets, he accepts the reasoning of former nuclear powers and the ideologies continuing to clash in the Metro: what is different and unknown must be destroyed.

After the End: the Posthuman Alternative

Strikingly, both Atwood and Glukhovsky do not put forward a new model of society as an alternative to late modernity's shortcomings, but instead imagine a radically different species taking humanity's place. Although the events leading to the emergence of the Crakers and the dark ones can be seen as nothing but tragic – the horrifying deaths of billions of people as a result of biological warfare and radiation sickness – they arguably serve as a warning that unless humanity changes its ways, some kind of catastrophe is inevitable. In order to avoid it, it might be worth to consider the two posthuman species' mode of living. Nevertheless, the fact they are relatively little described in comparison to the human societies hints at the human inability to acknowledge the possibility of change.

Settled among the Crakers, Jimmy is able to observe the extent to which their maker has modified the human genome in creating his "children." They subsist solely on plant matter, and find the act of killing any animal abhorrent. Their bodies reach maturity and recover from injuries much more rapidly than *Homo sapiens*'. Still, not all modifications have been enhancements: some of them, especially the ones affecting the functioning of the brain, have removed certain human behaviours and patterns of thought. Thus, next to the propensity

to violence, Crake has eliminated love, sexuality, ambition: the new species live happily and harmoniously with their surroundings, forming a community without hierarchy and conflict. They reproduce in a manner similar to animals, experiencing no feelings beyond temporary arousal. Kabak sees the Crakers as a failed experiment at creating a paradisiacal utopia, since, in his opinion, "[t]he hybridity of human and non-human ... can neither produce a positive change nor is able to promise a better future" (48-9), yet Crake's design very precisely corresponds to what Ursula K. Le Guin (1997) describes as a society that ought to be hoped for: "predominantly concerned with preserving its existence; a society with a modest standard of living, conservative of natural resources, with a low constant fertility rate ... a society that has made a successful adaptation to its environment and has learned to live without destroying itself" (93). Seen from this perspective, "Project Paradise" has been a success, even though Crake's decision to exterminate humanity is not condoned. On the other hand, an utterly pessimistic reading of the novel is conceivable as well: one may see *Oryx and Crake* as an assertion of late-modern civilisation's being past redemption and doomed to certain collapse, confirming Fredric Jameson's claim that it is "easier for us today to imagine the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and nature than the breakdown of late capitalism" (50). There is no place for Snowman among the Crakers: he finds himself painfully alienated and on the whole incapable of integration into their community. Kabak notes Atwood's work is a highly ambiguous text (49), but on balance, even if the posthuman species described by the author appears too radically different not to cause a degree of unease in the reader, it still offers an interesting and thought-provoking vision of an alternative to the global neoliberal order. It is also noteworthy that unlike Glukhovsky's dark ones, who thrive due to their adaptation to the ruined post-war environment, the Crakers are specifically engineered to lead a pre-anthropocentric existence which excludes all remnants of the ruined civilisation, as this highlights Atwood's reverence for nature and the ecosphere, which the Russian author does not appear to deem important.

Glukhovsky initially provides little information about the creatures who succeed humanity, though the novel's plot pivots on the supposed threat of their invasion. In the opening chapter Artyom shivers at his recollection of the time when he witnessed the mutants' approach: the black creatures advanced relentlessly in spite of the bullets fired. Despite the attack being successfully countered, the "sinister image [continues] to hover before [his] eyes, for a long time to come" (Glukhovsky 32). The concerned inhabitants of the VDNKh soon realise that the "undead" affect their psyche, provoking recurring nightmares and spreading despair. It is not until the book's final pages that the protagonist "suddenly [sees] the universe with [a dark one's] eyes": in an unexpected instance of telepathic communion, he understands that the numerous mutations, terrifying to the human eye, allow the posthumans to survive and thrive in the hostile environment. Moreover, the dark ones have developed collective consciousness and the capability to experience any other being's feelings as their own:

New life was being reborn ... and thousands of individual minds were being joined together into a single whole... The dark ones were the true inheritors of the ruined universe, a phoenix that had risen from the ashes of mankind. And they possessed a mind – inquisitive, living, but completely unlike the human mind.

... He saw people with the eyes of the dark ones: embittered, ... talking back with fire and lead, destroying the bearers of the flag of truce who had been sent to them with a song of peace. ... Artyom understood the growing despair at the inability to establish contact and reach a mutual understanding, because ... infuriated creatures who had destroyed their own world ... continued to bicker among themselves and ... would die out soon if no one could re-educate them.

... [T]here was nothing dividing people and the dark ones ... they were not competing for survival but were two organisms intended by nature to work together. ... [T]he dark ones were ... part of mankind, a new branch of it ... the consequence of the final war, ... the children of this world, better adapted. (502)

As in *Oryx and Crake*, there can be no return to the late-modern reality: the dark ones' adaptation to the new, hazardous conditions is the only possibility of survival. Yet moving away from the past has a liberating and utopian dimension too: old ideologies and their resulting divisions and conflicts would be eradicated, as, with the help of the dark ones' collective empathetic mind, "[u]nseen new horizons" (504) would open to humanity. Nevertheless, this alternative to continued violence and oppression is annihilated by humans, no more capable of embracing the possibility than Snowman is of understanding the Crakers; ultimately, the future perspectives described by Glukhovsky are as bleak as in Atwood's novel.

At a moment when the binary opposition of the West and Russia has become manifest once more, the similarities between concerns expressed in the two novels acquire increased significance. *Oryx and Crake* and *Metro 2033* share a highly critical stance towards neoliberal capitalism and its dehumanising mechanisms. Nonetheless, Atwood's text approaches the issue from a broader perspective, giving more attention to global adverse effects of late-modern phenomena and, in particular, the danger of these to the individual's development and happiness, especially due to the disintegration of social bonds. Glukhovsky highlights the dangers of succumbing to unreflective nostalgia and idealising the past, as well as of uncritical endorsement of ideologies founded in divisions and exploitation. Even so, both authors imagine a drastic metamorphosis of the human species as necessary to transcend its earlier failures. The Crakers and the dark ones share a reverence for other forms of life, and a collective mode of being, where each individual's joy and sorrow is shared by the whole community. Moreover, they fit into the postapocalyptic environment not as its supposed owners, but as a part of the network of interconnected organisms. Both novels therefore embrace posthumanism understood not only as physical evolution of the *Homo sapiens* into a more advanced form of life, but also as a rejection of humanistic anthropocentrism (McQuillen and Vaingurt 2018, 1-2). At the same time, they convey a message far from hopeful in their endings: Snowman, overpowered

by the yearning for the company of his own kind, risks approaching a group of strangers, choosing the possibility of death as preferable to the continued existence among the Crakers, while the devastated Artyom helplessly watches the total destruction of the dark ones. Humans are thus unwilling to consider alternative paths represented by the posthuman species, rejecting alterity and turning back towards what is familiar. Bearing in mind the uncanny accuracy of the authors' predictions and observations, and the insight they provide into global and local contemporary concerns, respectively, a comparative analysis of complete *MaddAddam* (2003-13) and *Metro* trilogies might comprise a worthwhile direction for further research.

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