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## B.F. SKINNER'S *WALDEN TWO* VERSUS ALDOUS HUXLEY'S *BRAVE NEW WORLD*: WHAT-TOPIA?

### Abstract

The paper compares the societies presented in B. F. Skinner's *Walden Two* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. It highlights that, if the criterion of authorial intent, used widely in utopian and dystopian criticism, is applied, Skinner's novel is utopian while Huxley's is dystopian, despite significant similarities in the assumptions about human nature that the two societies seem to make. Using the controversies surrounding *Walden Two* as an example, the paper discusses the relevance of traditionally understood authorial intent for utopian and dystopian literary studies. A different, "three-dimensional" model, is then presented, in which authorial intent, reader reception and an individual critic's reaction are all considered. It is argued that in the case of controversial works – the number of which may increase in modern times, due to the lack of agreement concerning ethics and values – such a tripartite assessment may be more useful, because it is better at capturing the complexity of a work's impact.

It sometimes happens that books which otherwise may even seem dated provide a good illustration of a contemporary problem. The present article is concerned with one such case – comparing the imaginary societies created by Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World* and B. F. Skinner in *Walden Two*, and discussing the controversies around the latter, it draws more general methodological conclusions about the ways in which controversial utopian or dystopian texts may be approached.

## 1. The books and plots

*Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley (first published in 1932), is set in 632 A.F. (After Ford), which, at the time of publication, was roughly six hundred years in the future. It depicts London that is now part of a World State, functioning according to the motto “Community, Identity, Stability.” (2005: 3). The novel is most often classified as a dystopia: a “non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived” (Sargent 1994: 9).

*Walden Two* was published in 1948. Its author, Burrhus Frederic Skinner, is much better known as a psychologist. In this fictional work, the only novel he ever wrote, Skinner depicts a society which employs “behavioural engineering” to achieve smooth and satisfactory functioning. While set in ostensibly contemporary America, the novel could be classified as covert science-fiction precisely due to the impact of “behavioural engineering” on the community. It is the cornerstone of all social arrangements, a complete, working science that can be applied to humans. At the time of writing, no such complete science actually existed, i.e. the society portrayed in *Walden Two* would have no chances of functioning as described.<sup>1</sup>

In both books the real “protagonists” are, in a sense, the respective societies and it is the similarities and differences between them that this article intends to explore. Yet, for the sake of clarity it may be worthwhile to briefly recapitulate the main points of the plots.

Huxley’s novel has four plot-central characters: Bernard Marx, Lenina Crowne, John the Savage and the World Controller Mustapha Mond. After three chapters that introduce the readers to the World State the plot proper begins: Bernard and Lenina visit the Reservation, from whence they transport John to London. John, brought up in a society that is primitive by World State standards (and not necessarily good by ours), functions as the outsider, the one to whom the ways of the World State will be shown and whose perspective will clash with that of the inhabitants. Eventually, John is brought before Mustapha Mond and their exchange – taking up two whole chapters of the book – is perhaps the most lucid exposition of the workings of the World State and maybe even the climax of the novel. Erika Gottlieb goes so far as to suggest that “it seems as if Huxley must have written the rest of the novel [...] for this opportunity to dramatize an exposition debate between two philosophical voices” (2001: 67). The novel concludes with John’s suicide.

If *Brave New World* may feel as if it was written to dramatise the debate between John and Mond, *Walden Two* has even less plot. A university professor and psychologist, Burrus, is visited after the Second World War by

a former student, who convinces him to arrange a trip to a utopian community, located in “R.D. I, Canton.” (Skinner 2005: 6), “about thirty miles from the largest city in the state” (2005:11) and founded by Burris’s colleague T.E. Frazier. Another university professor, philosopher Augustine Castle, is also invited to the expedition. Castle, Burris, two former students and their girlfriends subsequently embark on a six day trip to *Walden Two*. There they meet Frazier, who becomes their main guide. The rest of the novel consists of descriptions of life in the community, explanations by Frazier and a number of supporting characters, and arguments with some of the guests (most notably Castle, who could be described as the resident critic).

## 2. The societies

Initially, *Walden Two* gives the impression of a fairly standard utopian community. As Hilke Khulmann put it, “Until late into the novel, all the reader is presented with is the description of a farm populated by very unfarmerlike people who are free of stress, too much intellectual exertion, and life’s little annoyances” (2005: 8).

While some mentions of “engineering” are dropped at that initial stage (e.g. 2005: 25, 42), visitors seem rather uncurious about it. Furthermore, Frazier illustrates the scientific principles informing the community, but he chooses rather uncontroversial examples: readers learn about improvements made to the community tea service or eating schedules. Additionally, hints are given concerning certain psychological changes that occur in people at *Walden Two*. For example, they apparently approach fashion differently than outsiders do: Frazier comments that in Burris “the required change has not yet taken place” (2005: 28). At another point, the guide explains that the community has discarded large and flashy advertisements in favour of relatively small notices, since “excitement is a conditioned reflex” (2005: 77).

The really controversial ideas on which *Walden Two* is founded begin to emerge when the guests visit the nursery (i.e. in chapter 12, the book having 36 chapters in total). There they discover that children are cared for by professional nursery workers. In response to this, Castle asks “Don’t parents see their babies?” to which Mrs. Nash, a nursery worker herself, replies that they do, “so long as they are in good health. Some parents work in the nursery. Others come around every day or so, for at least a few minutes.” (2005: 87). The guests then go on to see cubicles in which children up to the age of one are kept in an automatically controlled environment. Again, Castle asks – this time about mother love. Both Frazier and Mrs. Nash laugh and Frazier asks Castle whether he is: “speaking of mother love as an essence” (2005: 89). The discussion later transforms into an exchange about the

sources of a child's "identification" – mother love is thus equated with a specific psychological mechanism.

At another point Frazier explains that the community has a policy of avoiding "strong personal dependency" of the children on their parents, even when they are nursery workers. The idea is to "have every adult member of *Walden Two* regard all our children as his own, and to have every child think of every adult as his parent". Consequently, it is "bad taste to single out one's own child for special favours." (2005: 132). In other words, *Walden Two* consciously disregards family ties and acts against them.

It should be noted that the conscious negation of special familial relationships is probably meant in good will. As Hilke Khulmann notes, "Apparently, Skinner did not think that abandoning strong emotional ties between children and their parents would be difficult to accomplish or in any way harmful" (2005: 11).

Burris and the others are also shown the quarters of the older children. There they learn that by the age of six children complete "ethical training" which eradicates certain emotions deemed useless in a cooperative society and strengthens others. The examples given involve the eradication of jealousy and development of a tolerance for annoyances. This section of the novel includes a few longer descriptions, two of which it may be worthwhile to quote extensively.

While learning to tolerate annoyances, children around the age of three or four are taught to ignore things that would otherwise cause them distress. Frazier describes the exercise as follows:

We give each child a lollipop which has been dipped in powdered sugar so that a single touch of the tongue can be detected. We tell him he may eat the lollipop later in the day, provided it hasn't already been licked.

[...] the children are urged to examine their own behaviour while looking at the lollipops. This helps them to recognize the need for self-control. Then the lollipops are concealed, and the children are asked to notice any gain in happiness or any reduction in tension. Then a strong distraction is arranged – say, an interesting game. Later the children are reminded of the candy and encouraged to examine their reaction. The value of the distraction is generally obvious. Well, need I go on? When the experiment is repeated a day or so later, the children all run with the lollipops to their lockers and do exactly what Mr Castle would do [hide the lollipop] – a sufficient indication of the success of our training (2005: 98).

Later, in another variant of that technique, children actually have to "wear their lollipops like crucifixes for a few hours" to develop the ability to "psychologically conceal" the annoying stimulus (2005: 99).

A technique similar in principle is used to eradicate jealousy:

A group of children arrive home after a long walk tired and hungry. They're expecting supper; they find, instead, that it's time for a lesson in self-control: they must stand for five minutes in front of steaming bowls of soup.

The assignment is accepted like a problem in arithmetic. Any groaning or complaining is a wrong answer. Instead, the children begin at once to work upon themselves to avoid any unhappiness during the delay. [...] When it's time to sit down to the soup, the children count off – heads and tails. Then a coin is tossed and if it comes up heads, the 'heads' sit down and eat. The 'tails' remain standing for another five minutes. (2005: 99–100)

It is worth noting that, while the readers never actually see the life of the inhabitants in sufficient detail to ascertain that they are indeed consistently devoid of jealousy and take annoyances well, they are assured that the training is successful (as are other, less controversial, psychological measures taken in the case of adult members). So that, for example, Mrs. Nash, who came to *Walden Two* as a twelve year old, “could probably recall the experience of jealousy, but it's not part of her present life.” (2005: 92).

It is important also that, before explaining the details, Frazier specifically draws the attention of his listeners to the fact that when the children are this young, adults “control the social environment” as well as the physical one (2005: 99). In other words, one can see a generalized principle of deliberately controlling the environment to create situations that will shape a person in a way deemed acceptable and profitable to the community.

Controlling the environment to develop a tolerance to adversity and curb jealousy may very well seem commendable. However, later the guests discover some other things deemed unacceptable at *Walden Two*, including: competitiveness, fame and the expression of personal gratitude. Frazier characterizes the community as “extraordinarily grateful,” even “overflowing with gratitude,” albeit one that is directed “to no one in particular.” He claims that gratitude is, in practice, “a readiness to do return favours” and each member of the community is always ready to act for the good of *Walden Two* (2005: 157). Furthermore, a member who is thanked supposedly feels “as if you had handed her a certain amount of money which belonged to the whole community.” (2005: 158). The abandonment of personalised gratitude is, nevertheless, viewed mainly as “a practical matter” – Frazier explains that “Things run more smoothly if we don't hand out tokens of gratitude and if we conceal personal contributions” (2005: 157).

Also the matter of social relationships in *Walden Two* is interesting. A little earlier, when discussing the marital and familial rules, Frazier explains that:

Here, there's no reason to feel that anyone is necessary to anyone else. Each of us is necessary in the same amount, which is very little. The community would go on just as smoothly tomorrow if any one of us died tonight. We cannot, therefore, get much satisfaction out of feeling important. But there are compensating satisfactions. Each of us is necessary as a person to the extent that that he is loved as person. (2005: 136).

The notion of streamlined functioning that makes each and every individual functionally unnecessary strongly resembles the approach taken by the people of *Brave New World*. There "We can't do without any one." (2005: 74) in the sense that every member has a function, but at the same time "Every one belongs to every one else" (2005: 43) – there are no lasting emotional attachments. In consequence, an earthquake in Japan merely means some Hatchery employees are going to have to do overtime, to produce additional citizens (2005: 10).

Of course there is a difference between the two, since Frazier claims functional lack of importance is compensated for by being "loved as a person" and a necessity originating in that personhood (although we do not see how that arrangement works in practice). Yet there is also a similarity. This pattern of similarity-with-a-difference is more prevalent and perhaps best examined in more depth by looking in more detail at how *Brave New World* treats childhood, compared to *Walden Two*.

Being set far in the future, the society of the World State employs multiple science-fictional techniques to create citizens it deems best for social stability. At the very beginning of the book, the readers are given an extensive tour of the London Hatchery. They learn that human viviparousness is an embarrassing fact of history – conception, pregnancy and "decanting" now take place outside of the mother's body. Because the process is industrialized, it can be carefully controlled. In consequence, embryos are created in accordance with the needs declared by the "Predestinators". Already before decanting, they are subject to complex conditioning, thanks to which they will later perfectly match the demands of society.

They are divided into five castes, with only the highest two being allowed a relatively normal course of pregnancy. All the others are, in a sense, clones with artificially arrested development. Their intelligence is limited, because it is expedient and possibly disruptive. The eggs are treated with x-rays to induce "budding", thanks to which "ninety six" adults can be obtained from one fertilized egg. Additional techniques are used make eggs mature at a very fast pace, so that, in sum, "you can get an average of nearly eleven thousand brothers and sisters in a hundred and fifty batches of identical twins, all within two years of the same age." (2005: 8).

Furthermore, during "pregnancy" embryos are conditioned to like whatever it is they will have to do in the future – tropical workers are

conditioned to “thrive on heat” (2005: 16), while future rocket-engineers “learn to associate topsy-turvydom with well-being” (2005: 17). Additionally, children undergo postnatal conditioning of two distinct kinds: “neo-pavlovian” and hypnopaedia. Hypnopaedia involves repeating slogans to children while they sleep, so that they internalize them as the rules of their behaviour (2005: 24–29). Neo-pavlovian conditioning, delivered earlier, is based on linking two impulses to cause an “instinctive” aversion. The example given in the novel involves conditioning Delta caste children against books (since both reading and a love of nature are deemed undesirable):

The swifter crawlers were already at their goal. Small hands reached out uncertainly, touched, grasped, unpetaling the transfigured roses, crumpling the illuminated pages of the books. The Director waited until all were happily busy. [...] And, lifting his hand, he gave the signal.

The Head Nurse, who was standing by a switchboard at the other end of the room, pressed down a little lever.

There was a violent explosion. Shriller and ever shriller, a siren shrieked. Alarm bells maddeningly sounded.

The children started, screamed; their faces were distorted with terror.

“And [...] now we proceed to rub in the lesson with a mild electric shock.”

He waved his hand again, and the Head Nurse pressed a second lever. The screaming of the babies suddenly changed its tone. (2005: 20–21).

It should be noted that some scholars and readers of Skinner’s novel, draw a sharp distinction between “operant conditioning” used by behavioural psychology and advocated in *Walden Two*, and “Pavlovian” conditioning (Dinsmoor 1992: 1458), or, less technically, between the way control is used in the societies depicted by Skinner and Huxley (e.g. Todd and Morris 1992: 1445, Khulmann 2005: 186). Specifically, much is written among behaviourists about the difference between positive reinforcement and punitive control. While personally I do not see a substantial difference in the outcome, the existence of such a distinction among Skinner’s readers ought to be noted here.

Furthermore, obviously, there is a whole world of difference between having to stand in front of a bowl of soup and being electrocuted. There is also a large difference – which will not be discussed in this paper – in the respective value systems of the two societies: books and a love of nature would be not only acceptable but commendable in *Walden Two*. Yet in the way the World State conditions its citizens and the way the people of *Walden Two* condition their children there is a striking similarity: the *instrumental understanding of human nature*. Neither of the two societies has

any qualms about exercising rigorous control and modifying the behaviour of its future members in any way it pleases. Hence, Hacker describes both societies as “totalitarian [...] in the sense that the ruling group acknowledged no restriction on the powers they might exercise over their subjects.” (1955: 609).<sup>2</sup>

Such philosophical similarities can be also observed in some other instances. For example, both Frazier and Mond muse on the same problem underlying the design of a society:

People are happy; they get what they want, and they never want what they can't get. (Huxley 2005: 220)

How can they [people] be made to want what they can get? Or how can they get what they want without taking it away from anyone else? (Skinner 2005: 189).

There is a similarity in the aim – making people want what they can get – and a difference in that *Walden Two* assumes it may also be possible to give people what they want.

The similarity is much stronger than the difference in the way the two respective societies treat the problem of freedom. Relatively early in Huxley's novel Bernard asks Lenina, whether she wishes she were free, to which she replies: “I don't know what you mean. I am free. Free to have the most wonderful time.” (2005: 91). Since the readers have already seen how citizens are conditioned, it is obvious Lenina is not free in any objective sense – she simply feels free.

A comparable but even stronger case is made by Frazier. He explains that freedom and the science of behaviour cannot coexist:

I deny that freedom exists at all. I must deny it – or my program would be absurd. You can't have a science about a subject matter which hops capriciously about. Perhaps we can never *prove* that man isn't free; it's an assumption. But the increasing success of a science of behaviour makes it more and more plausible. (Skinner 2005: 241–242).

Since the novel presupposes the existence of a working science of behaviour, it follows that, the novel assumes freedom does not exist in any objective sense. What is left to debate is whether the subject feels free or not. Frazier suggests that the answer should be affirmative, since the question of not feeling free supposedly arises only when the subject feels forced to act by repressive techniques. In other words, “When men strike for freedom they do so to counter oppression – They never strike against forces which make them want to act the way they do.” (Skinner 2005: 247).

### 3. The Dilemma

I would postulate that the two societies differ in important ways but also share certain philosophical foundations. As has been already noted, supporters of Skinner have argued there is a difference of kind significant enough to make *Walden Two* completely unlike *Brave New World*. Even Skinner himself alluded to Huxley's novel at least once, when Frazier declared that "Walden Two isn't that kind of brave new world, [...] We don't propagandize". (2005: 46). However, the readers often perceived Skinner's work as just as dystopian as Huxley's.

Initial reactions included some puzzlement as to whether Skinner was serious about the utopianism of *Walden Two* – to quote one reviewer: "the careful reader will wonder whether the author of *Walden Two* is serious, or whether he is writing with his tongue in his cheek." (Tinker 1949: 252). After that was clarified, criticisms and accusations of inherent dystopianism were still levelled at the novel (see e.g. account in Newman 1993: 168).

There seem to be at least five distinct approaches to authorial intent in utopian/dystopian criticism. The most obvious one is "orthodox" – when authorial intent can be both identified and readers agree with it (this is, arguably, the case of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*). Next is the case in which, presumably, authorial intent cannot be established beyond doubt. In other cases there may be a wide consensus with some exceptions – for example certain interpretations of *Brave New World* assume it may be utopian (see e.g. Izzo-Kirkpatrick: 2008, 96–106). Authorial intent can also be disregarded intentionally. Finally, it may be clearly established but so controversial that it will be widely contested, as is the case with Skinner (see e.g. the reviews of criticisms of Skinner in Altus and Morris 2004: 270, Newman 1993: 167–168 and Khulmann 2005: 31–38).

Ignoring authorial intent could seem legitimate, especially since utopias always have totalitarian tendencies (see e.g. Baccolini, 2003: 15–25). That approach, however, causes two kinds of difficulties. Firstly, because authorial intent has already become part of the standard methodology for differentiating between utopian and dystopian texts, abandoning it would be difficult, even if other, rival, methods of classification exist. Secondly, and I would argue, more importantly, since these kinds of texts always discuss ethics, values, right and wrong, in formulating interpretations critics who consciously and completely disregard authorial intent would be acting counterproductively and perhaps even dishonestly. I believe it *does* matter, to a certain extent, whether the author approves or disapproves of the arrangement he or she describes. And as Lyman Tower Sargent notes, while authorial intent may be difficult to establish at times (1994:12), and some works may not fit into the classification that is based on it (7), "Utopias [...]"

are historical artifacts that are brought into being at particular times and places and usually by identifiable people whose reasons for doing so are in principle knowable.” (6).

If, however, authorial intent is here to stay, it will continue to cause difficulties due to obscurity or controversy. I suspect these difficulties may be further exacerbated in the future by the competition between many value standards and the unwillingness of critics and writers to formulate decisive judgements about them.

The problem may be even worse for readers who are not literary scholars and for those scholars who want to read about the work but do not specialize in it. As Bobby Newman observed, in relation to the controversies sparked by *Walden Two*: “Unfortunately for the sake of classification, the author’s choice and the reader’s choice [...] may be entirely different. The reasoning and history that led an author to his or her utopian or dystopian vision may be totally lost on others.” (1993: 170–171).

Furthermore, even if researchers do know the “reasoning and history,” their individual responses to the text may influence their readings. Unfortunate as that is from the point of view of authorial-intent-focused methodology, it is also unavoidable: reading a work causes reactions, sometimes quite unlike those intended by the author, and to deny the critic the right to form their own strong opinions is potentially counterproductive – unacknowledged dissent may merely influence the analysis in more covert ways.

Additionally, even when the critic abides by the rules of formal classification and manages not to voice their dissent, they have to independently deal with the text’s readers and *their* response, since, to an extent, reception influences the utopian/dystopian status of a work independently of all formal criteria. For example, simply stating that the formal criterion of utopianism is satisfied is insufficient in analyzing Skinner’s novel.

An interesting specimen that further exemplifies the problem is one of the methodologies offered as a replacement for the authorial intent based one. In “Concrete Dystopia: Slavery and its Others” Maria Varsam suggests that “[...] it would be more useful if this determination, rather than being based on authorial intention, were to focus on the identification the reader is invited to make with the protagonist/narrator.” (2003: 205). In some ways this concept can be very useful. For example, it seems to shift the inquiry from biographical data about the author to a study of narrative techniques in the text. But at a deeper level it does encounter the same problem, which, in this case, can be summarized: by whom or what is the reader *invited*?

One can answer that the reader is invited by the *text*. This may be a good theoretical statement, but is not really helpful in controversial cases, since the

text, as an abstract entity, cannot resolve disputes itself. In practice, I believe, three kinds of people can be held responsible for the invitation – the author, the critic or the reader.

The author could be held responsible inasmuch as he or she is the creator, most consciously in control of the narrative devices in a text. While in some quarters of literary theory the “death of the Author” has been celebrated for some time already and granting an author authority may seem awkward, Jeremy Hawthorn demonstrates, using, among others, the cases of unfinished works, that in practice “readers and critics [...] demand that he or she [the author] have complete and relatively uninterrupted authority with regard to the establishing of a text,” which, as he correctly observes, “has interpretative implications” (2008: 81). In other words, so long as it does matter that *Walden Two* was written entirely by Skinner, it at least may matter what Skinner tried to convey or, in Maria Varsam’s terms, to what identification he invited the reader when he wrote the text.

Another person responsible for the invitation may be the reader, in a sense inviting themselves by reading. That interpretation could be supported, in the case of *Walden Two*, by the varied reception of the novel. Hilke Kuhlmann notes that “while Skinner’s critics overwhelmingly tried to identify with the bulk of ‘ordinary’ people finding happiness and mindlessness in Skinner’s utopia, and therefore strongly objected, those readers who went on to found Walden Two communities by and large identified with Frazier” (2005: 164). Different identification may read to different reception and, apparently the agency to identify with a given character belongs, ultimately, to the reader.

Finally, the person responsible for the invitation may be the critic, i.e. a special kind of reader. Not in the sense that he or she issues it, but in that he or she interprets the text or the readers’ response. Varsam focuses on the reader’s identification with the protagonist in dystopias. At one point she observes that “Without a successful process of identification, the reader will not be convinced of the narrator’s critique of the present” (Baccolini-Moylan, 2003: 205). But if it can fail, who should judge whether a failure has occurred? Specifically, would anyone be in position to declare (without recourse to declarations of authorial intent, that are not part of the novel text proper) that *Walden Two* failed in its stated purpose and, if yes, who? In practice it seems that the verdicts are simply passed by individual readers, and, most notably, individual critics.

All this may seem a trivial problem of labelling. Does it really matter whether a text is classified as utopian or dystopian? I argue it does. Firstly, inasmuch as these terms indicate how a particular literary vision is received by readers and how it is understood. It is especially interesting in the case of controversial texts (such as *Walden Two*), as varied reactions to a given text

may tell much about the individuals and societies who read and interpret it. This may be particularly true of relatively recent dystopias and utopias, which dialogue most closely with the present we inhabit. *Walden Two* and *Brave New World* are perhaps already slightly dated examples, by that metric, but they too have this effect. For instance, wide disagreement with Skinner's novel seems to indicate that it is not only the kind of depraved power characteristic of 20<sup>th</sup> century totalitarianism that is perceived as dangerous by his audiences – so is other power that is totalizing, even if it claims to be benign. In the case of Huxley's *Brave New World* one may stop to consider, for example, that Huxley's warnings about consumerism and conditioning seem to still elicit responses, but many readers have little to say about the promiscuity of the citizens of the World State.

Secondly, as I have already written, I do believe that the historical dimension of a given work is not to be ignored by literary criticism. In other words, even if for some readers *Brave New World* is not a dystopia, insofar as they do not read it as such, it still is a text with a history that is “in principle knowable” (Sargent. 1994: 6) and that includes, to an extent, knowledge about the intentions of the writer. I do believe it is the business of literary criticism to preserve that knowledge. Which becomes, of course, a much bigger problem when dealing with texts which have unclear authorial intent. The problem is additionally compounded by the fact that, at present, there is no single, agreed upon worldview or value system which could be understood as default and presumed to be the author's, in the absence of other data.

To sum up, literary criticism, and utopian/dystopian criticism specifically, cannot – in my opinion – abandon differentiations made on the basis of known authorial intent, because they are a part of the work's history, a part of the “complete and relatively uninterrupted authority with regard to the establishing of a text” described by Jeremy Hawthorn (2008: 81). On the other hand, it is insufficient, at least sometimes, to merely point at the intent, especially when the reception is widely divergent from it. Finally, the necessity to consider the authorial intent behind the work may sometimes be very inconvenient, since it is not and will not always be known and – given the present plurality of worldviews – cannot be easily presumed. Finally, an aspect not to be ignored is that the critic or literary scholar is himself or herself a reader, entitled to his or her own reaction to the work.

Given all this I would argue it may be profitable to create a more complex model for discussing a text's utopian/dystopian dimensions. One that includes three separate planes: authorial intent (known or presumed, often on the basis of data that is beyond the text proper), reader reception as separate from that intent, and the critic's own interpretation, provided overtly, both in recognition of the fact that the critic is a reader, having a right to react to a work, and as data for the readers of a given analysis.

There may, of course, be cases when consensus makes such a complex method unnecessary. If all parties – the author, readers in general and a particular critic – agree that a work is, e.g. a dystopia, there is no need to fragment the analysis. However, if there are significant controversies, it may be useful and sometimes even perhaps necessary, for intellectual honesty, to try to capture that controversy as an, at least, three-dimensional phenomenon.

Thus, to conclude with an example of such a tripartite assessment, in the case of *Walden Two* it seems that establishing authorial intent is almost a formality: Skinner apparently *meant* his work as a utopia. The overt mention of the critic's individual response to the novel may be a safeguard against bias. For instance, it may be actually useful for the readers of this paper to know that I consciously approached *Walden Two* as a dystopian text, despite its formal utopian classification. It is in fact this controversy that interested me in the first place. Knowing this lets the readers take corrective measures in their own reading or analysis. Finally, in the case of *Walden Two* it is only fair to note that, despite the utopian authorial intent, it was widely received as dystopian, since this has shaped its reputation, reception and further literary impact.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In the foreword written to *Walden Two* 28 years after the initial publication, Skinner did admit that “behavioural engineering’ [...] was, at the time, little more than science fiction” but also noted that the way behavioural psychology has developed in the 1960’s “come[s] even closer to what I had described in *Walden Two*. A technology of behaviour was no longer a fragment of the imagination.” (2005: vi–vii). Kat Kinkade, the founder of one of the communities inspired by *Walden Two*, was less enthusiastic when, in 1999, she wrote: “Behaviourism is not [...] nearly as far along in its potentially useful techniques as it was in the fictional *Walden Two*.” (1999: 52).

<sup>2</sup> To the extent that Skinner recognizes restrictions on control in general, according to Khulmann he seems to limit it to making the controller part of the controlled group (2005: 34). In the context of *Walden Two* specifically, additional “restrictions” are: the supposed necessity of good governance if the culture (community) is to survive, the necessity of keeping members satisfied since without that “revolt” would be supposedly “inevitable,” and the anti-competitive conditioning that Planners undergo just like all other members (Skinner, 2005: 255–256).

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