

Formal and Stylistic Features to Portray the Themes of Utopia and Dystopia Throughout Alex Garland Novel *The Beach*

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Abstract - The aim of the article is to analyse the formal and stylistic features utilized by Alex Garland in *The Beach* to support his thematic depiction of utopia and dystopia. To conduct this analytical investigation, the novel, *The Beach*, is used as the main source of analysis. Secondary sources, including websites, will be referenced as supporting evidence to aid the understanding of utopia and dystopia as thematic concepts.

Key words: utopia, dystopia, A. Garland's *The Beach*, stylistic features.

I. INTRODUCTION

To discuss the research question “How does Alex Garland use formal and stylistic features to portray themes of utopia and dystopia throughout his novel, *The Beach*?”, there will be investigated Garland’s use of literary devices such as hyperbole, flashback, the rule of three, metonymy, repetition, parataxis, simile, foreshadowing and archetype to aid his initial representation of a utopian community, but a latter representation of a dystopian community. The analysis will be divided into two sections to segregate the arguments supporting utopia versus dystopia. Before these arguments, characterisation will also be briefed to analyse the characters which play a role in the foundation of Garland’s thematic development.

II. ANALYSIS

Within the scenarios of the plot, Garland argues his illustration of a utopian society with dystopian factors to highlight that no society can be *truly* perfect. The term utopia and dystopia derived from Ancient Greek through the specific words: *eutopia*, meaning “good place”, and *doutopia*, meaning “no place” (Britannica). The word was coined by Thomas More in 1956 after his famous work called *Utopia*, in which he paints a portrait of a hypothetical, quintessential society. The definition and conception of utopia in literature has been expressed in numerous ways, although consistently depicting “an idealized future or past, or non-existent ideal society” [2]. Thus, defining a place, state or condition which is perfect (Viera). With time, the conception of utopia and dystopia further developed - particularly from its popularity in the 19th century - which sprung imagination of an ideal political, social, and economic system in a world which does not exist. Some sources reveal that the portrayal of utopia is not necessarily good, in the sense that it is often flawed. In this regard, there is no society which is *truly* perfect, so gradually what seems positive becomes negative (Sargent). Perfectionism gradually becomes its limitation. This entails that while trying to form the perfect utopia, imperfection, or dystopia, is often created instead (Viera). Dystopia can be defined as a fallacious ideation of a state or society based on a “failed utopia” [3]. This analytical research will utilize dystopia as an antonym for utopia. A dystopian society often has the illusion of perfection, despite having cruel societal control, governmental oppression, among other flaws which emphasise the defectiveness of the society (Masterclass). While countries in the past and present homogeneously attempt to create a *perfect* society through governance, flaws are an inevitable variable in every society - even those in the future. Garland’s representation of utopia and dystopia in *The Beach* serves as an allegory for the real world, supporting that utopia is an unachievable and unrealistic

concept in the real world. This creates a compelling motive to analytically investigate how utopia is presented and how dystopia unravels throughout *The Beach*.

III. RESULT

Utopia

To begin, Garland utilizes cumulative sentences and the rule of three to illustrate the inhabitants' lives within the beach community as perfect - utopic-like - unlike their lives outside of the beach. This is exemplified when Richard says to Etienne, "You fish, swim, eat, laze around, and everyone's so friendly [...] If I could stop the world and restart life, put the clock back, I think I'd restart it like this"[4, p. 133]. Garland incorporates the rule of three in an already cumulative sentence to dramatically emphasize on the utopian nature and glorifies the paradisiacal attributes of the beach, even though it is general and common traits.

Garland's utopic depiction is further solidified when Richard reveals that the beach is an escape from the flawed world. This is reflected when Richard states upon his rice run, "I was suddenly aware that encountering the World would bring back all the things I'd been doing such a good job of forgetting." [4, p.166]. Here the author reveals and underlines Richard's fear of the outside world, as the W in "world" is capitulated. This grammatical effect shows the reader the outside world as standing out, this references the big threat and fear that the outside world poses to the inhabitants of the beach. Furthermore, the capitalized W, could be referencing the enormity of the world and the unavoidable element of it. This is also supported when Richard reflects, "Escape through travel works. Almost from the moment I boarded my flight, life in England became meaningless." [4, p.115]. In this section, Garland takes use in a hyperbole regarding the "Escape through travel works". Escape is exaggerated, as escape generally regards a flee from some sort of incarceration, while Richard's escape is concerning escape from the reality of the outside world. Garland draws parallels between the outside world and confinement. This is accompanied by a quick flashback to Richard's departure from apparent reality. This results in an emphasis on the paradise that is the beach.

Next, through Sal's dialogue, Garland depicts the beach as a paradise in its isolation away from the rest of civilization, amplified by his use of metonymy and repetition. This is demonstrated through Sal's statement, "-this is more than a beach resort. But at the same time, it is just a beach resort. We come here to relax by a beautiful beach." [4, p.96]. Sal's statement features metonymy, which is the beach resort. This symbolises a paradisiacal and relaxed life. Yet, Sal also states that it is *just* a beach resort, foreshadowing the inevitable ending of the stay at this "beach resort", since no one ever stays at a beach resort forever, some day one must return to reality and continue life as it is. However, Sal argues that the utopic nature of the community is only maintained in isolation. This is demonstrated through her following statement, "But it isn't a beach resort because we're trying to get away from beach resorts. Or we're trying to make a place that won't turn into a beach resort." [4, p.96]. Sal indicates in this statement that it is not a beach resort because a beach resort would have an element of the outside world, and since the beach has no association with reality it is not a beach resort. Sal's continuing repetition of beach resort lessens the credibility of the word and the beach itself, progressively becoming less prominent and more common, referencing the unpleasantness which also inhabit the beach. This cooperates with Sal contradicting herself making her statements less reliable and Sal's strong figure progressively weakens throughout the story. This is further built upon when Sal states, "After a little while you'll see that this is a wonderful place, as long as you appreciate it for what it is." [4, p.96]. Sal continues to solidify the heavenly paradise that is the beach. However, also continues to foreshadow the dystopian reality of the beach, but encourages to ignore the elements of uncertainty and doubt, and live life on the beach with peace and serenity. Despite the foreshadowing of Sal's statement, Richard reaffirms the perfection of the island upon his reflection of Sal's statement in the quote, "I pushed my shoulders back and closed my eyes against the hot sun, and thought how right she was." [4, p.134]. Richard is essentially confirming the previous statement from Sal and ignores the uncertainties of the utopia in which he is placed, and this seems to be the same for all of the inhabitants of the beach.

On the other hand, through Richard's monologue, Garland progressively portends the implicit dystopia of the island, supported through the use of foreshadowing and metonymy. This is practiced through Richard's monologue, specifically when he admits, "A prison could hardly have been built with more formidable walls, although it was hard to think of such a place as prison-like" [4, p.102]. This reflection foreshadows the dystopian future of the beach. A future which does not feature the paradise of the beach. This is furthermore emphasized by a metonymy in Richard's reflection, regarding his fears of the outside world. This is seen in, "...the aera [waterfall] made me feel uneasy." [4, p.135]. In this section, the waterfall is a symbol of the terrors and scares, which fill the outside world. While the waterfall is somewhat a gateway to the outside world it is also a gateway to these fears and discomforts. The fact that it is *only* a waterfall that lays between the

uncomfortable reality and the comfortable and paradisiacal beach furthermore foreshadows the inevitable deterioration of the ideal society on the beach.

Garland heavily relies on these literary devices to aid the reader in understanding the uncertainty of the utopia on the beach. With perfection, there are imperfections. Although the characters evidently ignore these warnings, Garland somewhat points out these clues to the reader with the literary devices as a tool of emphasis.

Dystopia

The theme of dystopia is aided through the revealed portrayal of Sal as a totalitarian, authoritative figure of the beach community, as shown through the use of parataxis and simile. Sal's totalitarian authority is introduced through the statement, "If there was a leader, it was Sal. When she talked, people listened." [4, p.119]. The use of parataxic sentence construction, consisting of these short and concise sentences, aid in the emphasis on Sal being the only leader, showing her totalitarian authority over the beach and the inhabitants of the beach. Sal's totalitarian authority is further demonstrated when Richard includes, "At first she devoted a lot of time to making sure we were settling in OK [...] but after the first week she seemed satisfied, and we rarely saw her during the work period." [4, p.119]. This section shows Sal's involvement in the lives of the inhabitants of the beach, but essentially only caring about maintaining and sustaining the secret community on the beach. Furthermore, it suggests that Sal does not participate in any of the work-related details of the beach. One can interpret this as Sal's desire to be as far away from reality as possible and work reminds her of the outside world. In addition to this, she is the sole leader of the island, and she does therefore not have to partake in practical work. This references her totalitarian authority and can be compared to dictatorship and monarchies, where no work is put in, but the leader still reaps the rewards. However, Sal's comprehensive power compared to everyone else in the community is best demonstrated through Richard's recollection when talking to her, to which he describes "I found myself [...] talking to her as if she were a tape recorder or a priest [...] as if I was in confession, guiltily describing my panic on the plateau and trying to justify why I'd lied to the Thai police." [4, p.94]. Here Garland takes use in a simile, "as if she were a tape recorder or a priest." comparing Sal to a tape recorder or a priest, where Garland implicitly raises Sal above Richard displaying and emphasizing the power difference between Sal and Richard, ultimately demonstrating Sal's authority over anyone on the beach. This totalitarian authority Sal possesses, exhibits the imperfections of the utopia and, slowly reveals the dystopian nature and elements of the beach.

Moreover, through Richard's character, Garland conveys that fear is instilled among the beach community from not just the drug farmers, but also from getting caught by the marine park authorities and the rest of civilization. This is expressed through Garland's use of archetypes and more metonymy. This is first shown through Richard's description of the drug farmers within his statement, "-I learnt that if the devil you know is the guard of a drug plantation, then all other devils pale in comparison." [4, p.81]. Garland provides, with this section, an archetype for the whole story. This is in case the drug guards of the marijuana plantation, where they are anti-heroes, due to them also wanting the island to be kept a secret to society but essentially are a threat to the society of the beach. This assists in creating the dystopian reality of the community of the beach. Furthermore, Richard refers to the drug lords being the island's devil symbolising a great fearful threat to the inhabitants of the beach. Garland further illustrates the communal fear of the dope farmers through Richard's perspective when he confesses, "-the knowledge that the cliffs lay between me and them [the dope farmers] was still comforting." [4, p.102]. Richard's reflection displays the superficial comfort of the cliffs. All the inhabitants know that the dope farmers could at any time conquer their part of the island, and their community would cease to exist, but they all ignore this as the cliffs comfort them, even though the cliffs are basically useless, in terms of protection from the dope farmers. In addition to this, the fear of the marine-park authorities is communicated by Garland through the dialogue between Richard and Sal, where Richard asks "How do [the drug lords] get around the marine-park authorities?", to which Sal replies, "Same as us. Keep quiet. [...] If we got raided then they'd get raided too." [4, p.97]. This section implies the similarities between the drug lords and the beach inhabitants. This results in the reader portraying the beach community and its perfections as superficial and they become more alike the drug farmers, resulting in an emphasis on the dystopian element of the beach community. By the same token, Garland conveys the fear of being exposed by the rest of civilization through Jed's statement to Richard, "We don't want to be seen from the air. Planes sometimes fly over." [4, p.88]. Garland expresses the extensive fear that the inhabitants of the beach community have. A plane flying over the island, assumingly having no apparent interest in the island, scares the inhabitants as it again reminds them of the reality of the outside world.

Lastly, under Sal's authority of the beach community, Garland reveals that basic health is not promoted or prioritized, but instead is the secrecy of the civilization - showing Sal's immoral governance. This is communicated through the use of descriptions and depictions of the people's morals and wellbeing. This is first expressed in the dialog between Françoise and Richard, "Ugh, I did not remember the way [toothpaste] burns." [4, p.193]. Garland describes the non-existing everyday health precautions that the inhabitants have neglected

and forgotten, to further emphasize the horrible health condition the people of the beach community are in. In addition to this, Sal's immoral prioritization of maintaining the secrecy of the civilization is exhibited when Jed says to Richard, "But it means the beach is safe. Tet and morale... and our secrecy" [4, p.373]. This section shows the excessive, immoral, and brutal lengths that Sal will go to keep the society of the beach in secrecy.

With these formal and stylistic features, Garland shows the reader a progressive transition of the beach, from being a perfect, utopian paradise, meant for relaxation and wellness, to an abominable and macabre dystopia, filled with murder and horrible health conditions. All this displays the fact that a utopian paradise is impossible.

IV.CONCLUSION

In all, Alex Garland's portrayal of utopia and dystopia in *The Beach* serves as an allegory for the world outside of the novel, exemplifying that utopia is an unachievable and unrealistic concept in the real world. Garland uses formal and stylistic features such as metonymy, repetition, and foreshadowing to underline the progressive transition from a paradisiacal utopia to an abominable dystopia, especially through Sal's authority, Richard's monologue, and the beach community's inhabitants.

Further investigation could include how Garland reflects the modern society by drawing connections to real life scenarios and/or incidents. This could include Garland's mirroring of Generation X and the role social media and technology plays in disconnecting people from reality in its idealistic illustration of reality.

Throughout his novel, *The Beach*, Garland portrays the theme of utopia using formal and stylistic features, including foreshadowing, flashback, the rule of three, hyperbole, metonymy, repetition, parataxis, while portraying the theme of dystopia through the use of formal and stylistic features, including simile, metonymy, parataxis, and archetype.

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