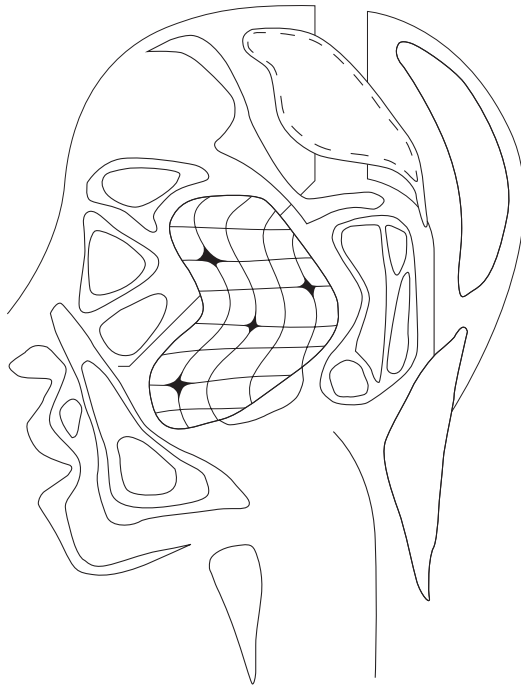


ANNA BUGAJSKA

# Engineering Youth

THE EVANTROPIAN PROJECT  
IN YOUNG ADULT DYSTOPIAS



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*Anna Bugajska*

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# INTRODUCTION

Sometimes fairy stories may say best what's to be said.

– C.S. Lewis, 1956

C.S. Lewis outlined in an essay written in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century his reflections on the potential utilization of downgraded and bypassed kinds of fiction for the expression and discussion of certain problems that found no other outlet or discursive space. In his apology for the fictive worlds which had been relegated to the heterotopia<sup>1</sup> of the nursery, hung up in empty rooms, locked away in attics or closets, he drew attention to the fact that these “othered” literatures found themselves in a position of unexpected freedom to talk about “othered” subjects, considered “nonsense and shame”<sup>2</sup> by the aeteronormative<sup>3</sup> society of adult hegemony. Even today, in a post-Barthian and post-Eco age of the appreciation of popular culture, there still exists a prejudice and failure to recognize the fact that many adults are in fact active recipients of juvenile fiction,<sup>4</sup> meaning that they can relate to it in an important way, and that it provides them with insights and answers to questions they would not have found otherwise. The “impossibility of children’s fiction,” famously elucidated in Jaqueline Rose’s insightful

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<sup>1</sup> Foucault’s term for a space for otherness (hetero + topos).

<sup>2</sup> In E. Nesbit’s *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* (1899), Noel writes a poem entitled “Lines on a Dead Black Beetle that was poisoned”: “O Beetle! how I weep to see/ Thee lying on thy poor back!/ It is so very sad indeed./ You were so shiny and black./ I wish you were alive again/ But Eliza says wishing it is nonsense and a shame.” Eliza is the children’s nurse, the epitome of a narrow-minded guardian of middle-class values.

<sup>3</sup> Aeteronormativity, a term coined by Maria Nikolajeva (2010), to express prejudice over what is and is not acceptable for children in the context of literary production.

<sup>4</sup> According to a 2015 Nielsen study, 80% of YA readers are adults (over 25). (Gilmore 2015; McGowan 2016)

study, may well be extended to young adult fiction, albeit perhaps with different implications and emphases. Half a century after the publication of Hinton's *The Outsiders*<sup>5</sup> (1967), we are witnessing a boom in the young adult literature market (Peterson 2018), which is also due to the interest of the adult audiences in media franchises directed at younger recipients.

The core of the impossibility debate when it comes to juvenile literature, as inextricably connected with but markedly distinct from its "younger sibling," is the cult of youth that has been in overdrive since the 1960s. Christopher Gilleard, in his contribution to *The Cambridge Handbook of Age and Ageing* (2005), traces its origins to the beginnings of modernism, i.e. the inception of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when "make it new" entailed "making it young." This translated into the massive economic and cultural presence of the body (re)juvenating industry—from movies extolling youth to cosmetics and fashion which were to enable it. This early fascination with bodily perfection, stemming partially from millenarian hygiene movements, and the positive valorization of this particular period in human development, resurfaces now with full force, and is owned up by creative writers. Scott Westerfeld, best known for his *Uglies* and *Leviathan* series, openly confesses in the introduction to *Mind Rain* (2013) that he consciously borrowed the features of his "pretty" slang from Evelyn Waugh's *Vile Bodies* (1930), thus establishing a firm intertextual index pointing to the fact that what was then achieved by a particular lifestyle and clothes is now replayed and augmented by the promises of emerging technologies. The contemporary version of the cult of youth was diagnosed by Marcel Danesi as "forever young syndrome." The markers for such a syndrome distinguished in his book are: obsession with looks, maintaining the interests developed in adolescence (e.g. for particular bands), being up to date with the culture of the contemporary teenagers, and even adopting their fashion and crazes (Danesi 2003: 21–22, 32–33).

The preservation of a youthful attitude in dress code and conduct has become a shibboleth of the societies of the liquid modernity, wherein the transitional quality of reality and daily experienced transformation of individual identity correspond to what has seemed proper only for the dire liminality of puberty. Simultaneously, adolescence has gained ground not necessarily as a counterculture but as

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<sup>5</sup> An American angry young man novel, often regarded as the first example of teen culture.

an important presence and something akin to a dictatorship of the iuventariat: 2017 witnessed the emergence of the term “youthquake,”<sup>6</sup> which refers to “a significant cultural, political, or social change arising from the actions or influence of young people” (Oxford English Living Dictionaries 2017). Incidentally, this coincides with young people’s familiarity with technologies, their awareness of virtual reality and tolerance for its demands of self-shifting (a so-called protean personality, Bainbridge 2013: 141). This dimension, revealing strong ties between the period of growing up and the contemporary world, is crucial for my study: both the scope of the texts chosen and the lens through which I wish to read them. Firstly, young adult literature would not only be a passing craze of youth-obsessed new adults, and a rich vein for the capitalistic market which found a new group to exploit, but the reservoir of life strategies for masses of people, not only guiding them through a critical period of their lives, but—perhaps more importantly—outlining the subconscious tendencies that lurk under the surface of business and leisure. Secondly, the constructivist perspective on the human body takes the youthful attitude an important step further from the simple adoption of the cultural codes proper for the young in search of perpetuation of regenerative life-force to the actual capture and harnessing of this force in the form of evantropian projects, seeking the limitation and final end to ageing, and the augmentation of human capacities. Retaining a young mind would in the long run assume designing its vessel: a body of optimal youth, the templates of which proliferate in the juvenile fiction. Actual adolescence is often not enough—being a turbulent state and tainted with concerns over bodily imperfections—hence what is promoted is the transcendent youth of extreme fitness and/or hybridity, allowing for the physical and cognitive performance that outstrip the current possibilities of human beings. These visions, as I wish to show further, are the product

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<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, although the definition seems to be positive, the term is derived from the destructive phenomenon of an earthquake. The etymology of the word allows one to spot how the power of youth is immediately inscribed within fear discourse, stemming from the latent anxiety of the Apollinian culture threatened by the Dionysian power of feral children. Additionally, it confirms the metaphorical links of the traditional Earth-Mother-Child triangle, thus serving as a shield to reaffirm the *status quo* of age hierarchy. Finally, the term supremely expresses the nature of juvenile dystopias, caught between the promise of youth and the constant “trembling” of unstable identity.



of transhumanist and posthumanist cultures, and promote the tools and technologies already under development.

In the present book I am interested in the biovaluability of the dystopian—and sometimes utopian—visions of the authors who construct their stories around biotechnological practices which are supposed to lead to the attainment of immortality and bodily perfection. Their narratives follow the transhumanist trend and are the expression of the evantropian drive, defined by Lucas Misseri in 2016 as the attempt to construct a utopia within one's body with the help of novel technologies. I would like to extend this notion of *eu anthropos* into the four dimensions of human enhancement proposed by Hauskeller (2016): physical, cognitive, emotional and moral, since all of these are to be achieved via human physicality. The alterations within the intangible do not subsume the notions of metaphysical subjectivity; rather, they are to be worked out within the paradigm of the constructivist, naturalistic notions of the body and self. Misseri sees this as closely related to the contemporary incarnation of the Enlightenment spirit: the transhumanist philosophy propagated by such scholars as Nick Bostrom, Max More, Julian Savulescu, Hans Moravec, Ray Kurzweil, David Pearce, S. Matthew Liao, Aubrey de Gray, and many others.

For these purposes, it is necessary to ground the debate in sound research into transhumanist philosophy and culture. Since the inception of the movement, which can roughly be dated to the 1960s, it has generated a vast debate which has been gaining momentum together with the advances in the biotechnological realm. Identified by Fukuyama as “the world's most dangerous idea” (2004), it has provoked a veritable pamphlet war between the so-called bioconservatists and transhumanists. Each year witnesses the appearance of a few important books by key commentators on the issues raised by transhumanist movements, cross-firing one another, and trying to keep up step with the breathtaking pace of the technological development.

The most important position on transhumanism to date, gathering together the stances of the chief proponents of the movement, is *The Transhumanist Reader*, edited by Max More and Natasha Vita-More, and published in 2013. It includes bold manifestos by, among others, the extropianist More, singularitarianist Kurzweil, neohedonist Pearce and pro-enhancement Bostrom. It touches upon ethically-sensitive notions of human nature, morphological freedom, germline engineering, cryogenics, etc. The mentioned authors have published numerous standalone books and articles, both independently as well as in joint

efforts. Today, the most renowned universities of the world host faculties and institutes supporting transhumanist endeavors: the Uehiro Centre for Practical Ethics and the Future of Humanity Institute (Oxford), the Centre for the Study of Existential Risk (Cambridge), numerous departments at the MIT; and the movement's goals generate billions of dollars of funding. Companies such as Google invest large sums into research on immortality (Calico), the EU sponsors The Human Brain Project, and DARPA actively seeks to create super-soldiers (Targeted Neuroplasticity Training-TNT, the Safe Genes program). At the same time, the diffusion of these ideas is backed by transhumanist parties (in the USA and Australia), novels (*The Transhumanist Wager*, Zoltan Istvan), movies (the Marvel franchise), and even religions (e.g. the Ter-aseem Movement, the Way of the Future, the Church of Perpetual Life).

The speculative nature of the discussion often conjoins the use of science-fiction as a model or dry dock for integrity-testing before proposed concepts take shape and are expected to hold water. The probability constructs of *The Invasion of Body Snatchers*, *Doctor Who*, *Star Trek*, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, *Brave New World* and *Gulliver's Travels*, are used i.e. by Michael Hauskeller, Nicholas Agar and Stephen Lilley to further their arguments. The scenarios run in either utopian or dystopian directions, thus polarizing the debate: utopia here being an idealistic vision of a perfect world with perfect people, and dystopia a catastrophic vision of dehumanization or even human extinction as a result of the attempts to build a utopia. However, Max More states that the desire to create a static utopia is alien to transhumanist thought. He proposes a "third" in the ou/dys dyad: extropy, which means the eternal, possibly epic, struggle towards perfection, and faithfulness to Condorcet's idea of progress. This feature of transhumanism is clearly visible and perfectly illustrated by Jethro Knights, the protagonist of Istvan's novel—an "overman" in the tradition of Hemingway's high mimetic, or even romantic,<sup>7</sup> heroes—but perhaps not readily embraced by all adherents of the movement.

In transhumanism human condition is seen as inevitably flawed, and thus suffocating the only "divine spark" in man i.e. the unlimited

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<sup>7</sup> The classification is after Northrop Frye, who discussed different types of heroes in literature: a romantic hero is typical of legends and the high-mimetic of epic and tragic narratives. Both display superiority over ordinary people in their powers/qualities, with varying degree of success in their stand against Nature.

strength of his will.<sup>8</sup> Naturally, human condition is seen as smaller or equal to the sum of material parts,<sup>9</sup> and not something greater, and thus is amenable to change. What follows is a great importance of various bodily enhancements, and the ultimate negation of the evolution, perceived as “fickle tinkerer” and “blind watchmaker”<sup>10</sup> (Buchanan 2011: 26, 48), condemning some of the organisms to death. Whereas transhumanism is not opposed to the idea of death, it is loath to accept any deterministic force, fettering human autonomy and agency. Thus, the quest for immortality and ultimate power is presented as an outgrowth of the Cartesian search for the limitless in man, at the same time propagating death and abnormality as valid choices of a free self. Granted, the superhuman is the promoted ideal, but it is to be realized in a variety of possible shapes and sizes.

As can be seen, the quest to end death does not equal the quest to end mortality, as astutely noticed in a different context by a Polish sociologist, Zygmunt Bauman. In his *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies* (1992: 7) he writes: “Immortality is not a mere absence of death; it is *defiance* and denial of death. It is ‘meaningful’ only because there is death, that implacable reality which is to be defied. There would be no immortality without mortality. Without mortality, no history, no culture—no humanity.” In this view, the effort to find the “death cure”—the final goal of the enhancement project—would not in any way endanger human nature, since mortality would not be removed, but only rendered one of “life strategies” to choose from. This is clearly stated in *The Transhumanist Reader* (e.g. by Damien Broderick), but has—nevertheless—generated a barrage of counterarguments from

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<sup>8</sup> Transhumanism being at least apatheistic in relation to individual gender, it is still predominantly masculine in the imagery it employs, and men are overrepresented. The same is true of fiction (to mention the portrayal of women in Heinlein’s *Friday*, Morgan’s *Altered Carbon* or Bacigalupi’s *The Windup Girl*).

<sup>9</sup> This statement by Kurt Koffka, the father of Gestalt Psychology, is often quoted with emphasis on “greatness” rather than “otherness” (*Principles of Gestalt Psychology*, 1935). In the context of transhumanism, and especially the novels I deal with, the references made by e.g. Shusterman in *The Unwind Dystology* ingeniously show how in transhumanism the greatness and otherness are dizygotically geminate.

<sup>10</sup> The phrases reference the intelligent design rhetorics of natural theology: thus, any force—be it natural or supernatural—that attempts to rule over humanity is challenged.

the bioconservative side. The defense of the mysterious “factor X”<sup>11</sup> by such thinkers as Francis Fukuyama and Leon Kass seems currently a part of an academic debate rather than practical consideration and will not be of direct interest for the present volume. The abundance of the available sources on human enhancement per se has forced me to limit the number of perspectives I foreground. For instance, the prolific critical output of such eminent thinkers as Donna Haraway, Katherine N. Hayles, or Raymond Kurzweil, will remain somewhat in the background, since they deal more with technoethics than bioethics, which is my more immediate perspective.

Although the H+<sup>12</sup> movement makes use of and advocates all technological means of transcending the human condition, the discussion of the assorted topics in fiction to date is largely limited to the cyborgization and the rise of A.I. This interest in the mostly technological Other seems to leave behind the ALife phenomenon, brought to a broader audience by the bicentennial anniversary of the publication of *Frankenstein* (2018). The rapid progress within the field of biotechnology demands urgent answers to ethical questions posed by genetic engineering (CRISPR-Cas9), cloning, transplantation, reproductive freedom (artificial uterus, growing/maturing female eggs in vitro), nanotechnology (the algae nanobot), neurosurgery (deep brain stimulation), RDFI implants, etc. The hectic pace of the ALife creation is reflected in the dystopian fiction for young adults; however, each of the bioethical areas referenced by the abovementioned technologies would necessitate a separate volume of criticism if they were to be treated fully. For this reason, these issues will be discussed in my analysis in their capacity as tools in the human enhancement project, rather than as standalone problems.

To further profile the research in the direction of practicality, I found it useful to employ the notion of narrative “biovaluability” discussed in a succinct essay by Arthur W. Frank (“Biovaluable Stories and Narrative Ethics of Reconfigurable Bodies,” 2013). He utilizes Catherine Waldby’s (2002) term inscribed in the Marxist division into “use value” and “exchange value,” and demonstrates how these are propelled by the media discourse and personal narratives, both influenced by and influencing the market of biotechnologies. As he writes (Frank 2013: 140):

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<sup>11</sup> Human nature, as dubbed by Fukuyama (2002).

<sup>12</sup> Humanity+, the name adopted by transhumanists in 2008.

Biovalue, I argue, depends crucially on stories, for the following simple reason. Biovalue's current exchange value—potential sources of profit and thus present reasons for investment—depends on promises of its eventual use value. Like all promises, promises of future uses for biotechnology are performative: they are enacted by being stated. Before biovalue takes the form of actual treatments and remedies—before it has actual use value—it acquires exchange value through claims made in the form of stories that promise future use.

Biovaluable stories generate biovalue. Some biovaluable stories are told with the strategic purpose of generating exchange value, and other stories generate biovalue as an unintended effect. ... To address the bioethics of biovalue, attention to storytelling is as important as tracing movements from laboratories to eventual product marketing and clinical application. Again, biovaluable stories are crucial because most of biovalue's use value remains speculative; it is promissory rather than deliverable. Only biovaluable stories can generate exchange value, which they do by doing what stories have a particular capacity for: making people believe something is real.

As can be seen, the study of the biocontent of fictional narratives can be treated as a prognostic for the future market tendencies, as well as allowing the trends and ideologies attempting to create the exchange value for the technologies not yet present or only emerging to be disclosed. This is one of the reasons why literature, especially that which is popular and directed at young readers, constitutes a corpus of texts of critical importance not only because it is formative of ethical attitudes, and not only because it follows closely the developments in science and technology. According to Frank's theory, such literature would condition the paths of technological advancement and shape the economic trends for many years ahead, creating a latent—or not so latent—demand for the half-imaginary products. As evidenced by numerous inventions in the recent years, the speed with which fiction turns reality does not allow one to treat the matter lightly. In my study I am especially interested in the biovalue of the technologies and ideologies of human enhancement, which enables me to draw a framework within which further necessary studies can be extended: e.g. the actual reception of the texts, the level of biotechnological awareness of the target audience, the potential for the transformation of exchange value into use value, etc.

These considerations overlap with a relatively new field of interdisciplinary study, Medical Humanities, enjoying a lot of attention and

generating the rise of many centres all over Europe. This multidisciplinary endeavor is oriented towards bringing diverse perspectives into the medical research and patient-doctor relationship, but also towards studying the impact of medical themes and developments in diverse fields of broadly understood humanities (Bates, Bleakey, Goodman 2014). When it comes to the study of the intersection between medicine and literature, numerous paths have been taken—especially, the trauma and pain narratives, as well as mental conditions, are investigated. This can be extended to the issues generated by the use of specific medical discourse in literature, medical motifs, etc. Importantly, it has been noticed that literary scholars are in danger of falsely attributing medical value to certain texts (e.g. *A Portrait of Dorian Grey*, Zeilig 2011). This was of importance to my study, especially when selecting the texts for the analysis: rather than seeking metaphorical presence of putative “biovalue,” I attempted to gather the texts which indeed feature biotechnological issues. However, it needs to be underlined that the medical aspect of human enhancement is not foregrounded in my discussion: rather, the ethical one is brought to the reader’s attention.

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Often, propositions like those presented above read like science-fiction, and the texts describing them may be treated as such. Therefore, this category of literary production will form important boundaries in terms of the scope of the texts which will be employed in my analysis. The proliferation of juvenile dystopias since Lowry’s *The Giver* (1993), and the revival of interest in Orwell’s *1984* (2017, bestseller), naturally invite the reflection upon the critical portrayals of “new world orders” in juvenile literature, and I would like to focus on the books that belong to this tradition. It is worth acknowledging the mutual interrelations between science-fiction and dystopia that were described by Prof. Gregory Claeys in his monumental *Dystopia: A Natural History* (2017): a queasy elbowing in the crowded room for the content percentage of science, political and economic interest, disinterested or negative prophecies. To quote but a few stances:

To Suvin, “the historically very intimate connection of utopian fiction with other forms of SF (extraordinary voyage, technological anticipation, anti-utopia and dystopia, etc.)” results from “the cultural interpenetration of the validating intertextual category of utopian fiction (socio-politics) with

the validating categories of the mentioned cognate forms (foreign otherness, technocracy or wrong politics)". This position has been accepted by Fredric Jameson, and also loosely by Moylan and Baccolini. ... Keith Booker says "dystopian fiction can be defined as the subgenre of science fiction that uses its negative portrayal of an alternative society to stimulate new critical insights into real-world societies". (Claeys 2017: 288–289)

The muddle of the generic discussion leaves one with only a few arbitrary criteria to employ in mapping out the body critical of juvenile texts. One of them would be the scientific orientation of the books—the use of specialized lexis proper for the technological phenomena that are being referred to, traceable allusions to current technological developments in terms of concrete examples (e.g. via the attachment of relevant snippets of verifiable publications or data to the main text of the book), the expertise and skills of the author in marrying literature and science, credentialed either by their education, profession or confirmed high level of adult science (fiction) output. As Noga Applebaum stated in her important *Representations of Technology in Science Fiction for Young Adults* (2009), the technophilia, implicit in the considerable scientific underpinning of a given juvenile text, would not likely yield a dystopia. Although the judgments passed in her research are not exactly accurate for the most recent novels, it seems that the dystopian—or critically utopian (to use L.T. Sargent's phrase)—texts abandon at least a part of the technicized discourse to put the ethical dimension of the discussed technologies in relief.

Another criterion could be the "principle of hope" which is inherent in science-fiction dystopian texts and discussed by Tom Moylan in *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* (2000: 14): "Several traces of radical hope linger on the last page, traces that—as with a departing audience at a Brechtian education play—go beyond the closure of the last line, the stated closure of invasion, capitulation, and reoccupation...". Young adult dystopias display a tendency to finish on a positive note: with the defeat of the villains and the Promised Land on the horizon. The inescapable idealization of the juvenile protagonists makes them necessary harbingers of hope and the carriers of various utopian standards. As in Beckett's *Genesis*, however, these hopes may be perceived as a virus, begetting future dystopias. Matt Alacrán's absolutist reveries at the end of *The Lord of Opium* give a dark lining to his dream about self-sufficiency in biological paradise. Still, it seems that in the

young adult literature the futuristic euchronia<sup>13</sup> must triumph over the existential depression of the adult dystopian classics, since it emerges from and is conditioned by the world of children's texts.

Finally, science-fiction for young adults, well-researched by, among others, Sullivan (1999), Westfahl (2000), Applebaum (2009), and Mendlesohn (2009), naturally displays certain differences when juxtaposed with the "adult" version. Gary Westfahl (xi–xii) claims that science fiction "naturally seeks to appeal" to juvenile audiences, and that despite numerous efforts at various attempts at its "maturation" it remains in a "strong and inevitable relationship" with the young. Mendlesohn<sup>14</sup> attempts to establish some boundaries which would circumscribe a body of texts avidly read by or marketed towards children and young adults, which could be seen as a valid counterpart to hard science-fiction. She insists (Mendlesohn 2009: 5–6) that science fiction for teens must resemble that which is written for the adult market i.e. participate in the same values: both ethical and scientific, otherwise it will be discarded by readers later on. It is particularly useful here to compare the adult and young adult texts by the same author to trace the alterations in motifs and measure the science content and philosophical compatibility. When it comes to the authors that fall within the scope of this study, it is opportune that some of them create both types of science fiction, enabling such comparisons. An ideal example would be Scott Westerfeld, whose *Succession* series from 2003 provides interesting insights into the reading of his more famous *Uglies* (2005–2007). The skinning of Rana Hart by the Rixwoman lays the basis for the prettifying operation, the marginal hedonistic Utopia blossoms into the Prettytown, the sentient house is replaced by smart technology—thus, while backed by solid science, the juvenile dystopian world is significantly simplified and more utilitarian: geared towards the valuation of the technologies and services readily accessible for

<sup>13</sup> Euchronia (Gr. eu+chronos): "good time," whether in the future or in the past.

<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that when Farah Mendlesohn lamented the lack of children's or teenage science fiction in 2009 ("yes, but nowhere near enough," Mendlesohn 2009: 4), the scientifically-informed fiction was just round the corner (Kirkus Reviews writes about Dan Wells's *Ruins* that it is "science [fiction] at the end of the world done right," thedanwells.com) and juvenile fiction authors such as Bacigalupi, Wells and Doctorow received Locus and Hugo Awards. The Andre Norton Award, awarded from 2006, and Locus Award for the Best Young Adult deal exclusively with young adult fantasy sci-fi (Westerfeld, Bacigalupi).



young people in the Western world. Importantly, even if both series deal with the same topic—human enhancement—in an impressive manner, the young adult version is deprived of the discussion of what is perceived as the ultimate goal of physical enhancement (Hauskeller 2016): immortality. The central premise of the *Risen Empire* in the *Succession* series is deracinated from the *Uglies* series, thus to a considerable degree falsifying transhumanist thought. This example would show that, despite the sound science behind the creation of the young adult dystopian world, it is rather its philosophical content that may suffer from unnecessary simplification and ideological naïveté, raising questions about the role of the market in shaping those.

As can be seen, the wishing and fantasy which Nesbit and Lewis wrote about is nowadays supplanted by bold dreams and reflections, acute nightmares and visions of futurity, which in adult science-fiction would have to pass the test of scientific verisimilitude. Darko Suvin writes about the hegemony of science over fiction in the adult genre (Claeys 2017: 286), which would correlate with the exemplified above instance of Westerfeld's internal aeternonormativity. In this respect, adolescent fiction has an advantage over the somewhat rigid and demanding realm of works for adults in that it can more boldly explore the ideas behind the science, pushing the boundaries of the probable. Especially in its dystopian rendition, juvenile science-fiction tends to focus on the impact of the rapid progress on the ethical angle of the debate, providing simple and convincing models of the transfigurations not only of the world, but above all, humanity, individual and society, through the lens of the liminal experience of an adolescent. This borderline quality is carried on to the young adult texts and reflected in their tissues, incidentally expressing the "adolescence of culture"<sup>15</sup> that contemporary civilization is experiencing. Alice Curry and Maria Nikolajeva both advocate embracing this state of constant (re)construction and (re)writing, enabling creativity, and propose that "[t]o view literary texts as interactive mediums *happening between* culture and nature, male and female, adult and child is to view narrative liminality as enabling of transformation: 'caus[ing] change and creat[ing] something new'" (Curry 2014: 13). Liberated from the adult hegemony, juvenile literature repositions itself around the belief in brotherhood, or even

<sup>15</sup> Almost daily transformations, redefinitions, searching for the meaning of life, individual identity—all of these aptly described by Bauman as signs of liquid modernity—are also proper to adolescents. Compare Delsol 2000: 108–109.

a sort of “extended” fraternalism, wherein one’s self extends to the Other in a phagic, associative gesture. This connectivism is expressed by Seth, the protagonist in Ness’s *More Than This*: “Look, I want both. I want them and I want you. Now that I know there’s more? I want to have more. If there really is more to life, I want to live all of it. And why shouldn’t all of us? Don’t we deserve that?” (Ness 2013: 4693–4696) In the same manner, forming a rigid divide between young adult science-fiction and young adult dystopia would defeat the purpose, and go against the open invitation of texts themselves. Given that both conventions already largely overlap, I will draw evidence for the existence of the evantropian project also from those novels that are not marketed as dystopias, or that only contain dystopian elements, while remaining simply biothrillers, adventure or fantasy books, as is the case with the *Maximum Ride* and *Artemis Fowl* series.

Young adult dystopias have already been subjected to multilayered readings within the frameworks of contemporary ideologies and critical schools, which testifies to their relevance for the present-day experience (to mention Marek Oziewicz’s *Justice in Young Adult Speculative Fiction*, 2015). Especially their environmentalist and technological angles are fairly well-studied, with such landmark works as Applebaum’s *Representations of Technology in Science Fiction for Young Adults* (2009), Flanagan’s *Technology and Identity in Young Adult Fiction: The Posthuman Subject* (2014), or Jaques’ *Children’s Literature and the Posthuman: Animal, Environment, Cyborg* (2015). Out of these, the one dealing with the most recent texts would be Applebaum’s impressive review of the trends within over 200 texts of juvenile science-fiction published between 1980s and early 2000s (i.e. Nix’s *Shade’s Children*, 1997; Reeve’s *Mortal Engines*, 2001; Anderson’s *Feed*, 2002; Westerfeld’s *Uglies*, 2005). Still, her conclusions may be of use for the present study only as a contrastive departure point, because of the attitude shift which Flanagan boldly—and quite rightly—terms a “sea change” in the valuation of technology within young adult texts. Science and technology, previously more often than not on the side of villains, increasingly help save the world or provide the backdrop for an exciting adventure. The fascination with the posthuman is particularly pronounced in cyborg romance novels, which are discussed by Flanagan.

Both Flanagan and Jaques are informed by Haraway’s and Hayles’ criticism, so they remain deeply feminist in their studies, and look to the posthuman Other mostly in the framework of the philosophy

of technology: the cyborgization of the body and the rise of A.I. are at the forefront of their critical interest, in accordance with strong contemporary trends towards keeping an anxious eye on the smart houses, autonomous cars, resident bots and “robot citizens.” Jaques extends the discussion to show the perennial connection between the human and the animal and non-animal Nature in a broad scope of fiction directed especially at younger children, while Alice Curry combines the feminist critique with the environmentalist slant of many of the juvenile novels, thus looking to Nature as the endangered twin of the discriminated “I-Robot” race, with the focus on hybridity and connectivity. None of these studies, however, addresses the question of biotechnologies in their less cyborgized aspect, i.e. the “cobbodification”<sup>16</sup> with other humans through genetic engineering, transplantation, neurosurgery, and the like.

It is worth remarking that none of the mentioned authors provides a comprehensive discussion of the existent young adult dystopias or attempts to build any canon: Jaques’ book reposes on the classical children’s literature and movie franchises, including *The Hunger Games* somewhat *en passant*, while Curry and Flanagan make their choice of juvenile texts somewhat arbitrarily, to suit their topics. This is a common practice in the existent young adult literature criticism, for the lack of the history of young adult dystopias, and the prevalence of sources spawned as add-ons to the media hype around bigger franchises driving the overall dystopian market. The movie adaptations, understandably, provide the stimulus for the critical discussion of the novels that are translated to the screen, with numerous publications, conference papers and theses devoted to *The Hunger Games*, *The Maze Runner* and *Divergent*. Especially Collins’s famous trilogy has been well-studied, with such publications as *Space and Place in The Hunger Games* (Garriot et al. 2014) or *Politics of The Hunger Games* (Heit 2015). It is also comparatively easy to find essays “by your favourite authors on your favourite juvenile dystopia,” which—although not claiming academic merit—quite often provide helpful insights for the construction of critical interpretation (especially Westerfeld’s introduction to *The Mind Rain*, 2013, and Blythe Woolstone’s discussion of the mirror neurons in *Divergent Thinking*, 2014, come to mind). They are

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<sup>16</sup> The term, naturally, connoting the market valuability of body modifications, not only the interdependence of various bodies within such practices (close to inter/intra-action within Haraway’s chthulucene theory, 2015).

especially valuable, since it is rather rare to find serious studies concerning a particular writer's oeuvre, and one has to depend on the "unofficial companions," interviews or personal communication with the authors, to ensure the quality of interpretation.

Nevertheless, it cannot escape one's notice that the bestselling books of Dashner and Roth do not offer much as far as their literary quality is concerned, being for the most part action- and romance-driven, with little depth to comment upon. In this debate many valuable texts find themselves somewhat sidetracked. Whereas it is impossible to bypass those works that stand out in the popular imagination and are flagships of the veritable invasion fleet of the dystopian wave sweeping over young adult culture, this "canon" fails to promote novels with powerful messages and imagery, which are perhaps more challenging and controversial due to the topics they raise. While delineating the possible range of texts to include in the present study, I tried to accommodate both books familiar to a general audience as well as those that still await more popular, as well as critical attention. Not wishing to encroach on an already well-covered field, I concentrated on the novels published after the landmark 2010 (proclaimed the Year of Youth and of Biodiversity by the UN), with a few justified exceptions.<sup>17</sup> To ensure the diversity and representativeness of the material gathered, I picked texts of low and high literary quality; written by authors of different sex and sexual orientation, various racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds, as well as at various age and of diverse professions. Altogether, I chose 65 novels by acknowledged authors, among others Neal Shusterman, Scott Westerfeld, Patrick Ness, Nancy Farmer, James Patterson, Gemma Malley, Marie Lu and Lauren Oliver.

Although this study is somewhat less involved in the generic discussion of utopian and dystopian features, the utopian studies provide a necessary scaffolding for reflection. The basic sources are the general utopian theories gathered in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* (Claeys 2010). The by now classical studies of Ernst Bloch

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<sup>17</sup> The first volume of Nancy Farmer's Matteo Alacrán series was published in 2002, but the sequel only came out in 2013. Westerfeld's *Uglies* series (2005–07) is crucial for the discussion of human enhancement and could not be omitted without detriment to the overall research outcomes. Similar reasons guided me in the inclusion of Malley's *Declaration* series (2008) and *Maximum Ride* (began appearing in 2005). The sea change Flanagan writes about can be clearly seen in these novels, as they are vividly distinct from the technophobic trends of the previous wave.

(1995), Keith Booker (1994), Frederic Jameson (2005), Ruth Levitas (2013), Lyman Tower Sargent (1994) and Tom Moylan (2000) formed my primary points of reference. For the literary aspects of utopia and the narratological theories I am indebted to the Polish utopian scholars, Artur Blaim, Ludmiła Gruszevska-Blaim and Krzysztof M. Maj, and their articles and books. Of the multitude of invaluable secondary sources Gregory Claeys's monumental *Dystopia: A Natural History* (2017) is definitely a crucial one, providing informative and broad social and cultural commentary. Of special importance for my book were the passages dealing with eugenics and eugenic motifs in literature culminating in Huxley's *Brave New World*. Still, while Huxley's novel remains a firm basis for talking about dystopias, Claeys's study leaves ample room for further research, especially in the field of contemporary fiction.

Since the project is conceived at the crossroads of literature, culture studies, sociology, philosophy and technology, the books that naturally lend themselves to it and provide much insight into evantropia as a project are those that grow out of the work of such organizations as the Society for Literature, Science and the Arts or the British Society for Literature and Science. In particular, the volumes edited by Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini have been helpful in the contextualization of the proposed utopian theory and the juvenile texts. *The Routledge Companion to Science and Literature* (2011) is a broadly-conceived, engaging and thorough study into the mutual interrelations of literary production and scientific development, with solid discussion of numerous fields, approaches and epochs. *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman* (2017) is more culture-oriented and somewhat less comprehensive, focusing on the applications of various theories typical for the "posthuman" reading of texts. Schmeink's *Biopunk Dystopias: Genetic Engineering, Society and Science Fiction* (2016) and McQueen's *Deleuze and Baudrillard: from Cyberpunk to Biopunk* (2016) directly address the issues that are the subject of the second chapter of the present volume, and prepare the groundwork for the larger theorizing of literary evantropia as an umbrella term encompassing and emerging from biopunk dystopias.

\* \* \*

Finishing this introductory discussion, I would like to present the structure of the book, and to summarize its main points. The monograph is a result of the research whose aims are as follows:

- to describe the human enhancement motif in contemporary young adult dystopias;
- to define the value(s) attached to human enhancement;
- to provide supportive evidence for the evantropia theory;
- to prove that evantropia is a bigger project, encompassing not only modifications of the human body but also adjacent realities (subjectivity, the external world);
- to add to the discussion on the posthuman condition.

The book is divided into three chapters: two theoretical and one analytical. The first chapter is devoted to the reflection upon and the extension of Misseri's term "evantropia" in the context of the history and ideology of the transhumanist movement. In this part of the volume I would like to present the philosophical underpinnings of the project, as they provide the necessary background and allow us to perceive the contemporary young adult novels as part of transhumanist culture.<sup>18</sup> This chapter combines the theoretical frameworks of utopian studies, transhumanism and posthumanism, as well as bioethics. I balance the voices of transhumanists with those of bioconservatists, and reach to the anthropology and sociology of liquid modernity, as well as contemporary ethics. I begin with the description of evantropia as it originated in the 1930s, and as it has been recently reinterpreted in the context of the biotechnological advancements. Further, I provide the brief sketch of the history and culture of transhumanism, relating it to and distinguishing it from posthumanism. Of special interest here is human enhancement in the four spheres described by Hauskeller; I discuss the existing technologies and try to see the trajectory of the changes currently under way. Finally, I outline the bioethical debate which the rise of post- and transhumanism engenders, paying special attention to those aspects of the controversies which appertain to human enhancement and immortality. I provide arguments that the attempt to build utopia within the body is actually a larger project, emerging from the tension between the *homo sapiens* of the Enlightenment and the Renaissance *anthropos*.

The second chapter addresses the question of the relation of the socio-philosophical dimension of evantropia to the literary world. Utopia, among many other aspects, is also a literary genre, and so the question arises if we can speak of evantropia as a genre, and—if

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<sup>18</sup> See especially Shusterman's comments in the exclusive edition of *Thunderhead* (2018), published by Barnes and Noble.

so—how it differs from the eugenic dystopia, a term accepted for texts such as Huxley's *Brave New World* and produced by similar societal trends as those which the present book deals with. Firstly, I discuss the emergence and the history of the eugenic dystopia as a literary genre, providing examples, which show the transformations of the genre: from medical dystopias (Bloch 1995 [1959]) to biopunk and ribofunk (Di Filippo 1998). The crossovers with science-fiction are demonstrated, as well as the departure from the focus on the societal effects to the focus on the technologies and their impact on an individual. The tension between utopia and dystopia is here very clear, since both terms—eugenic dystopia and evantropia—assume both *eu* and *dys* elements. Secondly, I try to arrive at a comprehensive set of features of a literary text that would allow one to call it an evantropia. The H+ dystopia is characterized by the focus on biotechnologies, explicitly inscribed in the rhetoric of human enhancement. I also show why it is more justified when talking about evantropia to join it with transhumanist thought than more popular posthumanist theories: evantropia being a larger socio-ideological project whose outgrowths can be discerned in the H+ dystopia, and being hinged upon some idea of a perfect human, rather than liquid humanity, which destabilizes the very notion of human.

Further, I proceed to define the scope of the chosen texts from young adult literature. The typically teenage focus on the body—rather than the state, time or community—makes it more likely to yield texts of value for the present research. As with adult dystopias, I try to see evantropian trends from a historical perspective, focusing especially on the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I provide a brief overview of the texts analyzed in chapter three and assess their evantropian potential. The essential background in young adult literary criticism are the key publications to date most related to the present study—besides those already mentioned, I build on *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism* (Cart 2017), *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults* (Hintz, Ostry 2009), *Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults: Brave New Teenagers* (Hintz, Basu, Broad 2013) and *New World Orders in Contemporary Children's Literature* (Bradford, Mallan, Stephens, McCallum 2011).

The analytical chapter is divided into two major parts. Although there are four types of human enhancement, I decided to devote the first part of the chapter only to physical enhancement, one which is overrepresented in young adult fiction. The reasons for granting more



space to the discussion of this type of enhancement are that body modification is more readily available and more advanced than any other type of enhancement, and that it encompasses the topic of immortality which—remaining an extension of physical enhancement—is distinct from the relatively simple concepts of morphological freedom or hedonistic principle. The key series and standalone novels for this part of analysis are: for the varieties of physical enhancement—*Maximum Ride*, *Uglies*, *Partials*, the *Unwind Dystology*; for immortalism—*The Arc of a Scythe*, the Matteo Alacrán series, *Declaration*, *Chemical Gardens*, *Mortality Doctrine*, *Mirador* and *More Than This*. The technologies that are promoted and presented as means to the H+ ends are: nanotechnology, regenerative medicine, transplantation, cloning, pharmacology and mind upload.

The second part of the third chapter is devoted to what can collectively be termed “subjectivity enhancement,” and is accordingly divided into three parts, corresponding to cognitive, emotional and moral enhancement. The problems occasioned by these types of enhancement are usually less visible in young adult dystopias: although we can still find instances of those, the newer texts do not discuss the extremely intelligent, extremely docile<sup>19</sup> or extremely good society as their main topic. They rather appear as necessary companion technologies to the central physical enhancement. Thus, the main texts for subjectivity enhancement are: the *Unwind Dystology*, the *Mirador* series, the *Maze Runner* trilogy, the *Legend* trilogy, the *Uglies* cycle, the *Delirium* trilogy, the *Divergent* trilogy and the *Killables* trilogy. The technologies that are present in the texts in relation to this type of enhancement are: brain stimulation, brain-computer interface, pharmacology, nanotechnology, neurosurgery, mind upload, selective breeding and transplantation.

In the conclusion I show that all of the research aims are met, and that further research is to be welcomed. The performed study indicates numerous areas for which it could be of interest. In the field of business, the notions of biovaluability and of youthquake should be given consideration, with the view to the increased role of young adults as consumers and producers of values. In linguistics, the groundwork of James A. Herrick, who tried to map out the biotechnological discourse, should be enlarged to encompass Critical Discourse Analysis of biotechnological articles (such as those in *The Wired* or *The MIT*

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<sup>19</sup> A great example would be *The Giver*.



*Technology Review*), and the languages of enhanced beings.<sup>20</sup> There are also multiple implications for classroom work, EFL teaching, critical/radical pedagogy, translation and cultural studies. This shows that the present book is but the tip of an iceberg of issues connected with the ongoing practice of human enhancement and emphasizes the vitality of the problems discussed.

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<sup>20</sup> It is worth mentioning that the Zoolingua initiative is also a type of enhancement: animal uplift (Dvorsky 2008).

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