

Tribhuvan University

**Dystopian Vision in Caryl Churchill's *Far Away***

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## Declaration

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled "Dystopian Vision in Caryl Churchill's *Far Away*" is my original work carried out as a Master's student at the Department of English at Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus except to the extent that assistance in presentation style, and linguistic expression are duly acknowledged.

All sources used for the thesis have been fully and properly cited. It contains no material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree at Tribhuvan University or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgements is made in the thesis.

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**Letter of Approval**

This thesis entitled "Dystopian Vision in Caryl Churchill's *Far Away*" submitted to the Department of English, Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus by Ms. Menuka Kadel has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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## Table of Contents

Declaration	ii
Letter of Approval	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Abstract	v
<b>Dystopian Vision in Caryl Churchill's <i>Far Away</i></b>	<b>1</b>
Introduction: Dystopia and Caryl Churchill's <i>Far Away</i>	1
Dystopia, Dystopian Literature and Its Characteristics	9
Chaotic World of <i>Far Away</i>	15
Dystopian Situation in the Play	17
Senseless Violence and Fear	21
Totalitarian Oppression	22
Civil War Situation	24
Conclusion: Social Criticism	27
Works Cited	30

## **Abstract**

This research studies the play of the British playwright Caryl Churchill's *Far Away* using the concept of dystopia as forwarded by M. Keith Booker, Lawrence Buell and Chad Walsh. The play deals with the realistic portrayal of contemporary world moving towards some sort of dystopia due to war, disintegration of human social and moral values and environmental degradation.

*Far Away* seems to present a dystopian vision of the postmodern society which is moving towards some sort of apocalypse. The world the characters inhabit is a hideously ravaged place because of war, oppression and material concern of the people. It is a dystopian vision of a world turned against itself and filled with horror and disgust triggered by wars, meaningless killing, anxiety and threat of the weapons of mass destruction, loss of human values and ecological problems invited by industrialization, urbanization, and other health hazards. Despite the hopes envisaged by the notion of American Dreams, the play seems to be exposing the myths of the Great American Dream. The play shows that American system as a whole is in real trouble, that it is heading in a direction that spells the end of its historic values of equality, liberty and meaningful democracy.

## **Introduction: Dystopia and Caryl Churchill's *Far Away***

John Stuart Mill defines dystopia in *Encyclopedia Britannica Online* as "an imaginary place or condition in which everything is as bad as possible"(2). The term "dystopia" is coined as a counterpart of utopia; a term originally coined by Thomas More and applied to the works which depict the ideal society. Utopia is a fictional village created by Thomas More in his book *Utopia*. It represents his concept of an ideal society whereby all the people live in perfect happiness and harmony.

In opposing to this thought, some science fiction writers argue that in future, humankind is likely to destroy the whole world in the pursuit of quest for colonizing nature. Problems such as nuclear warfare, overpopulation, and pollution of the environment and technological evolution are some of the issues that the human beings are likely to create to fulfill their desires. This sort of world which is likely to lead to some kind of apocalypse is called dystopia. It is utopia's polarized mirror image. While utilizing many of the same concepts as utopia—for example, social stability created by authoritarian regimentation—dystopia reads these ideas pessimistically. Dystopia angrily challenges utopia's fundamental assumption of human perfectibility, arguing that humanity's inherent flaws negate the possibility of constructing perfect societies, except for those that are perfectly hellish. Dystopia presents oppressive societies—with the moralistic goal of preventing the horrors they illustrate.

A single literary work *Utopia* (1516) by Thomas More serves as the origin for both utopia and dystopia. *Utopia* depicts a fictitious country named for Utopus, its first conqueror. Having reshaped a savage land into an ideal society through planning and reason, King Utopus's benevolent reign fulfills Plato's ideal of the philosopher-king expressed in *The Republic* (c. 400). A utopian world suggests a good place free

from civil conflict and social inequality. It is a good place that does not exist, but shown to be possible through social engineering.

By contrast, a dystopia is a bad place, deliberately written to frighten the reader; the fact that it, too, is fictitious offers scant comfort, because it is equally possible. More's fictive land has eliminated most class distinctions, but with a concomitant loss of individual freedom and artistic creativity. As dystopian fiction has become more widespread and popular since the end of World War II, critics have grown comfortable in classifying dystopias based on their own generic qualities, rather than explicitly by contrasting them against utopias. The term dystopia has also grown more familiar and is commonly used to refer to any dark or unpleasant future. Finally, by the end of the twentieth century, critics seemed to have abandoned the effort to segregate dystopia from science fiction, the larger literary genre to which dystopia belongs.

*Far Away* (2000) by British playwright Caryl Churchill is about the fear and horror experienced by the characters like Joan, Todd and Harper. The nightmarish play begins with a scene of a young girl, Joan, talking with her aunt, Harper. Joan says she looks out of the house and sees things happening outside where Joan's uncle has been torturing people in the barn who thinks that he is making things better: "You're part of a big movement now to make things better. . . . I'm on the side of the people who are putting things right" (14). Her uncle's act of torturing people is regarded to be an essential thing to make things better.

Likewise, another scene of the play shows an older Joan, now working with a man named Todd in a hat factory to make hats for, "A procession of ragged, beaten, chained prisoners, each wearing a hat, on their way to execution" (30). Each week one hat wins a prize and is kept in a museum; the rest of the hats are burned with the



corpses of the prisoners. Similarly, the final scene brings Harper, Joan, and Todd together at the end of the world because of war. Joan and Todd, who are now married, want to get away from the war for a day. However, there is really no escape, no rest. The play ends in a horrible scene of death and destruction where, "there were piles of bodies and if you stopped to find out there was one killed by coffee or one killed by pins, they were killed by heroin, petrol, chainsaws, hairspray, bleach, foxgloves" (43). It shows some sort of apocalyptic scenes where various social forces are at war against each other. There are scenes of blast and burn.

The plot of *Far Away* gradually indicates towards a nightmarish future with the entire world at war. It is set in England, where society has lost its moral bearings and succumbed to murder and violence. The world of *Far Away* has turned against itself and filled with horror and disgust. The holocaust environmental issues, ethnic cleansing and the everyday brutality of humanity's disregard for humanity are combined in the play. It shows the world in chaos and war which is full of horror. Its world has been damaged by a political and social creed of self interest. The world of *Far Away* is one where it is difficult to differentiate friend from foe, and one cannot even know what side nature is on, from birds and bees to rivers and forces, "Who's going to mobilise darkness and silence?" (44). It is clear that there is a war going on, but already from the beginning of the play Churchill clearly invites us to question who is good and who is bad, especially when it becomes evident that Harper and her husband harm children.

*Far Away* also shows the fear imposed by a government upon its citizens. This fear permeates the work from the smuggling people by Joan's uncle to the public march of death for prisoners of the government. No-one takes social responsibility, and just lets the world fall into chaos in the play. It suggests an absence of social and

political responsibility. The play shows the lack of a well-functioning system. Despite their very bad situation and continuous exposure to fear and horror, Joan, Harper and Todd in the play celebrate the terrific scenes of the people being tortured. Despite their inability to escape the apocalypse, they are involved in the artistic work of making and decorating hats. At this point, it seems to be problematic that: Why does the play expose the readers to the nightmarish scenes of death, destruction and horror? Why do Joan and her aunt regard that the way Joan's uncle tortures people is the way to better or improve the world? If the characters of the play represent the people of postmodern society, are they leading the world towards millennialism of apocalypticism? Why are the characters keep on decorating hats, an artistic activity, despite their inevitable destruction? What does the "big movement to make things better" (20) suggest in the play? Where will the lack of well functioning system in the society portrayed in the play lead?

*Far Away* seems to present a dystopian vision of the postmodern society which is moving towards some sort of apocalypse. The world the characters inhabit is a hideously ravaged place because of war, oppression and material concern of the people. It is a dystopian vision of a world turned against itself and filled with horror and disgust. The Holocaust, environmental issues, ethnic cleansing and the everyday brutality of humanity's disregard for humanity are combined in this drama. The lack of order and system in the society will lead to some sort of apocalypse.

Critics and scholars have written much about Caryl Churchill's plays and her uses of the fantastical in the dystopian backdrop to the play, nature is humanized in *Far Away*, and takes part in the world-wide war that is going on. Significantly Churchill's *Far Away* is a pre-9/11 play. Simon Stephens describes it as the strongest

theatrical response to 9/11 despite its precedence of the destruction of the twin tower claiming Churchill's public opposition to this war. He states:

Increasing numbers of brutalizing global conflicts and the removal of restraints on military interventions are clearly important contexts for *Far Away*, especially its final apocalyptic act, in which war no longer holds geographical, temporal or even human boundaries. Here, animals, landscape and the weather join with humans from every part of the globe in an ecocidal apocalypse. Having learnt to unsee the systemic horrors that surround them in Act 2, by Act 3 it is too late for Joan, Todd or any other character to undo this spiral of environmental and social devastation which has reached fantastic proportions. (qtd. in Adiseshiah 110)

He concludes *Far Away* uses elements of the fantastical in the dystopian backdrop to the play, but instead of mythological creatures, nature is humanised in *Far Away*, and takes part in the world-wide war that is going on.

Similarly, discussing political themes in Churchill's plays, Laura Doan points out:

Churchill is not situated against contemporary British theatre, or contemporary British feminism, or contemporary. . . . Churchill is a playwright immersed in the politics and culture of contemporary Britain. . . a socialist-feminist playwright with overarching interests in issues relating to gender, sexuality, social change, class, capitalism, socialism, colonialism and post-colonialism. (394)

Likewise, Beth Watkins also labels her to be a political playwright. He claims her to be "the most important political playwright in contemporary Britain" (481). He further points out "Caryl Churchill created, in *Far Away*, a terrifying vision of

dystopia, where cultural and social norms slid headlong into war" (481). He explains that the scenes in *Far Away* progress "from secret domestic horror to absurd descriptions of the nationalistic alliances made by animals and birds in a new world war" (481). Basset's Aunt Harper was a suspicious, frightened, caring woman who desperately wanted to believe she was siding with the right and wanted to protect her niece from knowing too much about wars that happen "far away" (481).

Similarly, Christine Dymkowski mentions that Churchill's sense of play stands theatrical convention on its head and challenges her audiences to engage positively with each work on its own terms. At the same time, she also challenges herself: there is no playing safe, no return to familiar patterns, but constant reinvention. The only predictable aspect of a new Churchill play is that it is certain to surprise expectation. However, her playfulness with genre, structure, and style, often witty and sometimes exuberantly comic, is characteristically allied to a serious political, social and moral commitment, albeit one that is undidactically expressed. Indeed, Churchill's theatrical inventiveness serves to make meaning elusive but not indeterminate, engaging spectators in a dialectical search for the significance of the theatrical experience (55). Christine Dymkowski argues in her article "*Far Away* but Close to Home" that the hats are representative of how, when a natural disaster happens, the loss of national art treasures often is the focus rather than the loss of human lives" (60). This is an important point as the hats are not only a representation of how they do not take social responsibility, but how war and death are used as entertainment. Churchill presents this moral issue with the parade where the hats are shown on death row prisoners on their way to execution. This is not revealed until scene five of act two, after having watched their hats become more and more extravagant in each previous scene, and Todd has revealed that he "stays up every morning until four to watch the trails"

(Churchill 18). This is another kind of inaction that Churchill seems to criticise, that in not doing anything with the horrible things happening in the world, one lets it become entertainment, and by allowing it to be entertainment, and by being entertained by it, Todd again feeds the system that oppresses him, just like he is doing every day by creating the hats. Christine Dymkowski explains:

Analysing Churchill's extraordinary 50-minute play in this way feels a bit like plucking out the heart of its mystery, as Hamlet might complain.<sup>10</sup> Although the play itself, as I hope I have demonstrated, explicitly demands a cerebral response once the audience has left the theatre, it works on a visceral level in the theatre, appealing to intuition, instinct, and emotion. (65)

As is evident, *Far Away* is preoccupied with communication between characters and between characters and audience: how is meaning created, and how is it conveyed? In this way, the play is characteristic of Churchill's other recent work. For example, the tension of the first scene, where the audience becomes increasingly aware that all is not right in Harper's house but cannot pinpoint exactly what is wrong, provokes the kind of gut response one expects from a thriller; in the production, the blood clearly visible on Joan's uninjured foot and Harper's own occasional unease as she spoke undermined the latter's calm and reassuring explanations. Similarly, the outlandish hats whose development we witness have a theatrical vitality that appeals on an emotional level, and, of course, our previous enjoyment of them increases our shock when we realise their final destination. Likewise, the surreal dialogue of the last scene provokes laughter shadowed by glimpses of its real-life, and altogether serious, analogues.

In other words, *Far Away* carries us along into a world of its own making that resonates uncomfortably with our own, and demands that we look the latter squarely

in the face. The play's insistence on active engagement rather than passive consumption, however, does not imply that its ultimate meaning depends on the idiosyncratic preoccupations of individual spectators: virtually all of my ideas about and responses to the play find an echo in one or more newspaper reviews, even though critics' views did not inform my own. Churchill's tremendous achievement in this play stands an apt proverb on its head: she has not only led the horse to the water, but coaxed it to drink as well.

Likewise, Yael Prizant mentions:

Although all creatures are implicated in the ongoing destruction, it is exceedingly unclear who fights for whom (or for what) and how much distress this causes these characters. Is it possible that we are simply watching the absurd, paranoid fantasy of three excessively fearful individuals? (505)

By the end of the play, the entire world has turned on everyone and everything within it. Inanimate objects, animals and nature itself is joining sides trying to find the right side to be on in this war. Every creature is participating in the ongoing war and it is difficult to analyze who is in the which side.

While evaluating all the works on *Far Away* discussed above, either they focus on political engagement of the author or the contemporary political themes of the play regarding Churchill as a pioneer of the 21<sup>st</sup> century feminists or on her theatrical skill. However, the proposed thesis attempts to explore the play thematically focusing on realistic portrayal of contemporary world moving towards some sort of dystopia due to war, disintegration of human social and moral values and environmental degradation.

The thesis uses the concept of dystopia as forwarded by M. Keith Booker in his book *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature: Fiction as Social Criticism*

and the notion of ecological dystopia put forth by Lawrence Buell in his book *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* to examine the features of dystopia such as individualism, regimented life of the people under the surveillance, human manipulation through language, ecological decay and nightmarish life of the character due to war and addiction to technology and different symbols that suggest an apocalypse. Thomas Moor's *Utopia* has become an instrumental book to the methodological tool for this thesis. Besides the concepts of these theorists, insights provided by thesis supervisor and professors from the Department have also been taken as the guidelines for this thesis.

Caryl Churchill has written a large number of plays with diverse themes. However, this thesis focuses on analyzing only one play *Far Away*; it limits its scope on dystopia only without paying attention to other aspects.

### **Dystopia, Dystopian Literature and Its Characteristics**

Thomas Moore suggests that utopia is the evil-free society where, civilized people live happy lives. J. S. Mills used the term dystopia in 1868 in contrast with the term utopia. He defines "What is commonly called Utopian is something too good to be practicable" and dystopian "too bad to be practicable" (88). The term utopia is associated with the sense of goodness and dystopia with badness. Describing the features of utopia, Thomas Moore writes,

Utopia, where every man has a right to everything, they all know that if care is taken to keep the public stores full no private man can want anything; for among them there is no unequal distribution, so that no man is poor, none in necessity, and though no man has anything, yet they are all rich; for what can make a man so rich as to lead a serene and cheerful life, free from anxieties;

neither apprehending want himself, nor vexed with the endless complaints of his wife? (142-43)

On the contrary, dystopia is a world full of badness. The *Oxford Advanced Learner's English Dictionary* describes dystopia as "an imaginary place or condition in which everything is as bad as possible" (476). The term utopia is often applied to the works which depict the ideal society. On the other hand, dystopia, also called as anti-utopia, is the worst possible world.

According to *New World Encyclopaedia*, "A dystopia . . . is the vision of a society that is the opposite of utopia. A dystopian society is one in which the conditions of life are miserable, characterized by human misery, poverty, oppression, violence, disease or pollution" (n. pag.). In fact, utopia and dystopia are the two sides of a coin. If the depiction of the society generates a positive outcome, it is a utopian society and if it leads to negative results, it is dystopia. According to Maria Varsam, "utopia is a manifestation of desire and hope for a better world and an unalienated order that upsets the status quo . . . dystopia delineates the crushing of hope and the displacement of desire for the purpose of upholding that status quo" (209). She points out that when the dream of perfect society with the help of technological advancement is challenged and when the hopes of human being are crushed, it becomes a dystopia. Dystopia is the projection of evil society where everything is horrible.

Discussing the characteristic differences between utopian and dystopian literature, Chad Walsh articulates, "If utopia is social planning that produces good results, dystopia is most often social planning that backfires and slides into nightmare" (137). Similar stances are taken by Jessica Langer, who, in her book *The Shapes of Dystopia: Boundaries, Hybridity and the Politics of Power* argues,



. . . rather than imagining a world in which the criticized aspects of the author's society have disappeared . . . [dystopia] . . . imagines a world in which those same aspects are overgrown and run amok, displacing them into an alternate universe where life is defined by them. (171)

Thus, dystopia is the projection of nightmare where sever aspects have overgrown.

Peter G. Stillman posits that "Dystopias are presentations of imagined societies that—as a noted definition reads—the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived" (58).

Discussing the features of dystopian writings, he further explains,

. . . these dystopian authors see, to a powerful authoritarian state, with a strong centralized government that diligently controls political and social life through state power and modern technology. The state manages information and thought and so controls personal memory and collective history. The state shapes individuals' material and psychological needs and their interpersonal relations by creating, facilitating, or prohibiting specific activities—so it can regulate emotions and sex, frustration and fulfilment, fear and love. (58)

In other words, dystopian writings make us ponder how an originally utopian promise was abused, betrayed or, ironically fulfilled so as to create tragic consequences for humanity.

Dystopian writings present imagined societies in which "the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived" (Sargent 9). The twenty-first century dystopian works "present that human actions and institutions have created powerful and destructive societies that control and manipulate human beings which tell the story of what human life on earth

is like after cataclysmic events (59) . Likewise, discussing the features of 21<sup>st</sup> century dystopian writings, Stillman elaborates:

Along with corporate capitalist power coursing through all of social life in these new dystopias are highly developed technologies, especially biotechnologies, environmental degradation, and a state that is non-existent, weak, or controlled by corporate power. The contemporary capitalist pursuit of profits and power to the exclusion of other values means that individuals' lives are marked by chance, randomness, and discontinuities. (59)

Fredric Jameson further explains, dystopian writings present the world where the lives of people are controlled by "a multidimensional set of radically discontinuous realities, whose frames range from the still surviving spaces of bourgeois private life to the unimaginable decentering of global capital itself" ( 351). Contemporary capitalism with its powerful corporations and pervasive neoliberal rationality is too destructive of the environment, relations among human beings and other beings is worsened and individual growth and development has become corrupt. Dystopia writing shows capitalism cannot be included in the utopian possibilities. It is worth noting that "many twentieth century totalitarian dystopias consider nature as oppositional or as a solace to the dystopia, whereas in the twenty-first century, the anthropocene era, nature is no longer separable from human beings" (Bacigalupi 48-49).

Not many of the stimuli for dystopian literature have changed today, although some new ones have emerged with the current social development. One of the topics that recently attracts vast amount of attention is air pollution and global warming. Other social issues, such as obesity, developed as a result of hedonism – the topic that was touched upon in dystopian fiction already more than half a century ago. Due to

this and several other reasons, the humankind has become more and more self-critical. Claeys suggests that "the addition of perceptible global warming to the list of the world's political problems and the drastic exaggeration of individual anxieties about obesity played a major role in switching the emphasis of popular rhetoric to the magnification of individual responsibility and the careful cultivation of an individual sense of ecological sin" (278). In consequence, claims that dystopian visions from the past are now being gradually fulfilled are becoming increasingly popular.

The increase of technology and industrialization "expand[s] human possibility while also threatening it because of the environmental harm that comes hand-in-hand with increase of construction and creation" (Sugarman 110). The ways in which modern day communities mistreat the natural world around them lead to global warming and other hazards that cause "social, political, and economic nightmares that sensitize readers to the dangers of environmental ruin at the same time that they depict young protagonists learning to adapt and survive in altered times" (Hintz 3). There is a problem with the current trend of harming the world in which we live. There are many consequences associated with the degradation of the natural world which is depicted by environmental dystopias.

According to Jasanoff, contemporary environmental writing presents the world which is "the dystopic image of the ruined, uninhabitable planet, rendered so by human mistreatment" (qtd in Buell 216). According to Buell, during the last third of the twentieth century,

As the prospect of a sooner-or-later apocalypse by unintended environmental disaster came to seem likelier than apocalypse by deliberate nuclear machismo, public concern about the state and fate of "the environment" took increasing hold, initially in the West but now worldwide. (4)

In this way, dystopian writing today regards that human invasion onto nature and nature world will lead to some sort of apocalypse.

Another trend of dystopia today is "rather than environmental hazards causing the decline of the world, post-apocalyptic dystopias are created by plagues, cosmic crashes, and zombies" (Hintz 3). Because of increased use of different pesticides and chemicals, humans have been forced to consume poisons which has resulted in different types diseases including cancer.

The nuclear anxiety and the rampant society living in the terror caused by the weapons of mass destruction is another feature of dystopian literature of the time. The threat of nuclear war has reshaped the landscape of politics and eventually entirely restructured societal matters. The potential for, or in some instances, the effect of a nuclear apocalypse has forced humanity to recreate their societal structures. In particular,

the prevalence of nuclear anxiety in the dystopian novels then calls into question how society was reacting to technological advancements of the time. With the heightened role of science and technology in daily life, there has been an increase in the utopian prognostications that have generally accompanied monumental scientific and, especially, technological developments. (Maus 77)

The fear and skepticism towards technology is not limited to the killing might of nuclear weapons. Rather, the restricting and repressive role that technology plays in society is common as well in many dystopian writings.

Most critics agree that dystopian literature "functions as a form of social and political criticism that resonates with the work of a number of modern cultural critics and theorists" (Booker 181). Dystopian literature functions as a means to

social criticism. It remains an important means of envisioning alternatives to the existing order. It "reveals the evils in society through shocks of recognition" (183). It makes us to see the world in new ways making us capable of entertaining new and different perspectives on reality. Dystopian writing is not against utopian writings. Rather dystopian thought can serve as a valuable corrective to this tendency, and therefore should be thought of as working with rather than against utopian thought.

### **Chaotic World of *Far Away***

The play *Far Away* dramatizes the postmodern society moving towards some sort of apocalypse triggered by wars, meaningless killing, anxiety and threat of the weapons of mass destruction, loss of human values and ecological problems invited by industrialization, urbanization, and other health hazards. Despite the hopes envisaged by the notion of American Dreams, the play seems to be exposing the myths of the Great American Dream. The play shows that American system as a whole is in real trouble, that it is heading in a direction that spells the end of its historic values of equality, liberty and meaningful democracy.

The play has four characters: Harper, Young Joan, Joan and Todd. It is based on the premise of the world in which everything in nature is at war. It begins with a scene of a young girl, Joan, talking with her aunt, Harper. Joan says she sneaked out of the house and saw things happening outside. "It was a person screaming" (12). Her uncle was "pushing someone. He was bundling someone into a shed" (14). While curious Joan wants to know the causes of this sort of violence taking place in the outside world, at first, Harper explains the things she saw with ordinary explanations, but with every item that Joan adds, Harper's stories become less tenable, and it is

clear that Joan's uncle has been torturing people in the barn. It's all for the best, though, Harper insists:

HARPER. You're part of a big movement now to make things better. You can be proud of that. You can look at the stars and think here we are in our little bit of space, and I'm on the side of the people who are putting things right, and your soul will expand right into the sky. (20)

And so Joan goes to sleep. The next scenes take place some years later, and show us an older Joan, now working with a man named Todd in a hat factory. They talk about the hats they make, and their discussion shows them to be devoted artists. As the short scenes progress, the hats grow larger and brighter, until they are described as "enormous and preposterous" (30). The audience do not know what the hats are for until what is probably the most famous scene in the play, one that exists only as stage directions: "A procession of ragged, beaten, chained prisoners, each wearing a hat, on their way to execution" (30). Each week, the audience are told one hat wins a prize and is saved in a museum; the rest of the hats are burned with the corpses. Joan wins, and Todd is impressed: "No one's ever won in their first week before" (30). Todd and Joan have some qualms with how the hat factory is run, but they are perfectly accepting of the necessity and artistry of the hats, and proud to have their work recognized.

The final scene brings Harper, Joan, and Todd together at the end of the world. A war has begun, but not an ordinary war: a war of, quite literally, everything such as "butterflies"(34), "wasps"(35), "cats" (35), "ants" (36), "mosquitoes" (36) "engineers, chefs, the children under five, the musicians" (36). "Portugese" (36), "Russians" (37), "Thai" (37), "Latvuan" (37), " cricidiles" (37) is in was against everything. Joan and Todd are now married, and Joan has run to Harper's house to see

Todd and get away from the war for a day. It is clear, though, that there really is no escape, no rest. It is hard for them to tell what is with us and what is against us.

Harper asks Todd if he'd feed a hungry deer if it came into the yard. "Of course not"

(41). In a monologue that ends the play, Joan reveals the depths of the war:

It was tiring there because everything's been recruited, there were piles of bodies and if you stopped to find out there was one killed by coffee or one killed by pins, they were killed by heroin, petrol, chainsaws, hairspray, bleach, foxgloves, the smell of smoke was where we were burning the grass that wouldn't serve. The Bolivians are working with gravity, that's a secret so as not to spread alarm. But we're getting further with noise and there's thousands dead of light in Madagascar. Who's going to mobilise darkness and silence?

(43-44)

In this way, the world of *Far Away* is full of fear, uncertainty and apocalyptic images.

Despite their bad situation, the characters are compelled to exist, they cannot escape it.

### **Dystopian Situation in the Play**

Dystopia is a world full of badness. It is the worst possible world. As described by *New World Encyclopaedia*, "A dystopian society is one in which the conditions of life are miserable, characterized by human misery, poverty, oppression, violence, disease or pollution" (n. pag.). In the words of Maria Varsam, "dystopia delineates the crushing of hope and the displacement of desire for the purpose of upholding that status quo" (209). It is the projection of evil society where everything is horrible. Dystopian writings present imagined societies in which "the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived" (Sargent 9).

The world of *Far Away* is one where it is difficult to differentiate friend from foe, and one cannot even know what side nature is on, from birds and bees to rivers and forces: "Who's going to mobilise darkness and silence?" (44). It is clear that there is a war going on, but already from the beginning of the play, Churchill clearly invites us to question who is good and who is bad, especially when it becomes evident that Harper and her husband harm children:

JOAN. He hit one of the children.

HARPER. That would have been the child of the traitor. Or sometimes you get bad children who even betray their parents. (20)

Parents are regarded to be the most intimate persons to a child and it is believed that parents usually can do no harm to children. Likewise, children are also supposed to be loyal to their parents. But in the world of *Far Away*, even parents seem to betray their and harm their children. While Joan sees her uncle exercising violence against some people outside, she asks "Why was uncle hitting them?" . . . . He was hitting a man with a stick. I think the stick was metal. He hit one of the children" (19). Parents are always supposed to tell truth to their children. But Harper tries to hide truth from Joan the the truth of what Harper has told Joan is questioned. However, as the play progresses, it becomes clear that the question of who is good and who is bad is not going to be answered for us, the only thing that is obvious is that there is a lot of wrongs happening in this world.

Joan is growing up from a young girl to adult, in her journey of trying to figure out what is right and what is wrong in the world, Joan is being frightened in her aunt's house. The play draws a parallel to the initial fear of Joan at her aunt's house with the ending of how the world is frightening. With a world in chaos and war, it is exactly that the world in *Far Away* is frightening.



Churchill is portraying a society where no-one takes social responsibility, and just lets the world fall into chaos suggests that an absence of social and political responsibility will lead to global catastrophe. By criticising the lack of a well-functioning system, the play highlights the importance of having one. Harper always positions herself as the one having all the answers, and has practical solutions to everything:

HARPER. Do you want a drink?

JOAN. I think I am cold.

HARPER. That's easy enough then. There's extra blankets in the cupboard. (9)

Harpers solution to everything is something practical, there is always something to do, but just like everyone else in this play, her efforts are to no avail, they do not solve anything. In this sense she is a reflection of the dystopian world she inhabits, doing lots of things that do not help.

In the dystopian world of *Far Away*, reality is different in the way that it is impossible to know what is right or wrong, and the young protagonist is no longer the one character that can differentiate right from wrong, even though she tries. People have lost her faith in humans; the world becoming more difficult to understand.

The contradiction between the celebratory and individual nature of the hats and the miserable condition of the anonymous people who wore them was, at the least, disorienting: whereas Churchill's stage direction makes clear that the prisoners are "on their way to execution" (30), the audience do not learn this fact until the next scene between Joan and Todd, who are beginning "A new week" (30) at work and still marvelling that her first hat has unprecedentedly won and will now "go in the museum" (31):

JOAN. Sometimes I think it's a pity that more aren't kept.

TODD. There'd be too many, what would they do with them?

JOAN. They could reuse them.

TODD. Exactly and then we'd be out of work. ( 31)

We discover the fate of the prisoners only from Joan's casual next comment, "It seems so sad to burn them with the bodies" (31), chilling in its prospective regret for the burned hats and unconcern for the human beings destroyed with them.

We can at once guess the different types of wrongs going on in the contemporary society just analyzing the classic monologue spoken by Joan in the climatic scene of the play:

I went through towns I hadn't been before. The rats are bleeding out of their mouths and ears, which is good, and so were the girls by the side of the road. It was tiring there because everything's been recruited, there were piles of bodies and if you stopped to find out there was one killed by coffee or one killed by pins, they were killed by heroin, petrol, chainsaws, hairspray, bleach, foxgloves, the smell of smoke was where we were burning the grass that wouldn't serve. (43)

In the play, the earth has been littered by the corpses of human beings scattered everywhere. The scene Joan describes in this monologue is full of horror. It is some sort of nightmarish world threatened by loss of human values, war and many kinds of environmental problems the world is heading towards. The monologue continues:

By the third day I could hardly walk but I got down to the river. There was a camp of Chilean soldiers upstream but they hadn't seen me and fourteen black and white cows downstream having a drink so I knew I'd have to go straight across. But I didn't know whose side the river was on, it might help me swim or it might drown me. In the middle the current was running much faster, the

water was brown, I didn't know if that meant anything. I stood on the bank a long time. But I knew it was my only way of getting here so at last I put one foot in the river. It was very cold but so far that was all. (43-44)

Joan is a representative of the confused postmodern people. They are living in confusion in a completely chaotic society engulfed with innumerable complexities. They all seem to leading to doom.

### **Senseless Violence and Fear**

According to Maria Varsam, "dystopia delineates the crushing of hope and the displacement of desire for the purpose of upholding that status quo" (209). She points out that when the dream of perfect society with the help of technological advancement is challenged and when the hopes of human being are crushed, it becomes a dystopia. Dystopia is the projection of evil society where everything is horrible.

Like most of the Dystopian writings, *Far Away* depicts a surreal dystopia, not too far in the future, in which a totalitarian government performs weekly mass executions to the accompaniment of tinny martial music; a global war has escalated so that not only have the French and the Chinese formed strategic alliances but so have the world's cats, crocodiles, and rivers; and the millinery trade has been taken over by the government, to perverse and sickening ends.

In the first part, Joan glimpses an act of apparently senseless violence. She hears "somebody screaming" (12). There was "so much blood" (15) and "I heard crying inside" (15). She asks Harper about it. But Joan is enabled to go back to sleep by being told a comforting story about what she's seen – a story that she's a little too willing to believe. In the second part, the child is older and we begin to understand how that violence has a political aspect to it, how whole sections of her society are imprisoned and then executed. By the play's conclusion, the society has broken down

completely, and the characters are embroiled in a war that encompasses not just all of the world's nations but all living (and many non-living) things. Participants in the war include elephants, crocodiles, grass, and even light. "Who's going to mobilise darkness and silence?" (44), asks the protagonist, and it's a question that is at once funny and haunting. We are presented with an absurd situation that so closely mirrors our own society. The play gives us an act of violence that was glimpsed, covered up, and all too quickly forgotten, and she shows how that willful suppression leads ultimately to a tolerance of totalitarianism. Dystopian literature presents a universe in which oppressive societal control and the illusion of a perfect society are maintained through corporate, bureaucratic, technological, moral, or totalitarian control. In *Far Away*, Churchill pushes her analysis one step further showing how human violence inevitably takes in all living things and the world is completely destroyed due to violence.

In her cast-list, Churchill cryptically notes in reference to the parade that "five is too few and twenty better than ten. A hundred?" (8). It refers to the anonymous prisoners who wear the hats "on their way to execution" (30). This all evokes a sense of fear and violence. Symbolically, this also suggests that the world is moving towards destruction.

### **Totalitarian Oppression**

Many works of fiction, especially the ones that are set in the future, depict futuristic societies "as countries or nations run by totalitarian governments which dehumanize its citizens; often the world is in a difficult situation as a result of some kind of an environmental disaster or a destructive war that brought about a significant decline in society" (Markocki 120). The presents a world which has been controlled and manipulated completely by totalitarian government where its citizens are forced

to serve the government despite its corrupt policy. Joan and Todd both help the oppressing system by making the hats in act two, while seemingly fighting it as well. Although they talk about the possibility of corrupt capitalism, they carry on making new hats: their actions speak differently to their words. "The management is corrupt. . . We are too low paid" (27). In this way, Joan knows that making the hats just feeds the system oppressing them. When Todd goes to the management to speak about all the problems they are having, the reply is: "These things must be thought about" (32). Todd's lack of fight in him proves how he wants to seem like he is doing right but does not really want to do anything uncomfortable to change. Christine Dymkowski argues in her article "*Far Away but Close to Home*" that the hats are representative of how, when a natural disaster happen, the loss of national art treasures often is the focus rather than the loss of human lives" (Dymkowski 60). This is an important point as the hats are not only a representation of how they do not take social responsibility, but how war and death are used as entertainment. *Far Away* presents this moral issue with the parade where the hats are shown on death row prisoners on their way to execution. This is not revealed until scene five of act two, after having watched their hats become more and more extravagant in each previous scene, and Todd has revealed that he stays up every morning until four to watch the trails. "I stay up till four every morning watching the trails" (24). This is another kind of inaction that the play seems to criticise, that in not doing anything with the horrible things happening in the world, one lets it become entertainment, and by allowing it to be entertainment, and by being entertained by it. Todd again feeds the system that oppresses him, just like he is doing every day by creating the hats.

### Civil War Situation

The play's final scene takes place "*Several years later. HARPER's house, daytime*" (34) and mirrors the others in the gradualness of its revelations. The scene opens seemingly domestically, with Harper and Todd discussing the need "to poison the wasps" (34) and Harper's apparent fear of insects in her description of an encounter with "a cloud of butterflies" (34). The audience soon discover, however, that Joan, who is asleep off-stage, has recently arrived on foot 'in the middle of a war' and that Harper's home, which "Everyone thinks [is] just a house" (35), is "a place of [relative] safety" (35). However, Harper's next comment, "The cats have come in on the side of the French" (35), makes clear that the fighting is not simply national but global and, moreover, that it is total, involving nature as well as people:

TODD. But we're not exactly on the other side from the French. It's not as if they're the Moroccans and the ants.

HARPER. It's not as if they're the Canadians, the Venezuelans and the mosquitoes.

TODD. It's not as if they're the engineers, the chefs, the children under five, the musicians. (36)

Harper's lack of trust pins Todd down, making him agree that deer are "vicious" (40) and that he "[wouldn't feed] a hungry [one that] came into the yard" (41). Her questions, however, have set a trap:

HARPER. I don't understand that because the deer are with us. They have been for three weeks.

TODD. I didn't know. You said yourself.

HARPER. Their natural goodness has come through. You can see it in their soft brown eyes. (41)

According to Gregary Clayes, "As the century closed, however, the spectre of totalitarian dystopia gave way to a far more humbling confrontation with nature itself, as environmental destruction came to pose an even greater threat to humanity's long term prospects than either politics or technology had previously done."(21). Judging from this point of view too, environmental destruction due to technology seems to have been portrayed in the play.

The conversation about crocodiles highlights the relativism of moral judgements presented as objective, while that about deer pushes the idea further. Harper's comment about their "natural goodness" (41) satirises the kind of shifting political alliance that, while presenting itself as quite the opposite, has nothing to do with ethics and everything to do with opportunism; the substitution of changed opinions about deer for, say, the kind of respective change in Western attitudes towards Iraq and Iran occasioned by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait gives the issue a startling clarity that cannot be swept away by altered real-life circumstances. In addition, as with so much aggression, the victims are blamed for the crimes committed against them: much of the damage of which Harper accuses the deer seems to result from human destruction of their habitat and subsequent persecution of them when they consequently invade human space.

The play ends with a long monologue from Joan, in which she dismisses some of Harper's worries, saying anyone who saw her would have assumed she was "on a mission" ( 43). She then voices her own fears:

It wasn't so much the birds I was frightened of, it was the weather, the weather here's on the side of the Japanese .... there were piles of bodies [on the road] and if you stopped to find out there was one killed by coffee or one killed by pins, they were killed by heroin, petrol, chainsaws, hairspray, bleach,

foxgloves . . . . The Bolivians are working with gravity . . . . But we're getting further with noise and there's thousands dead of light in Madagascar. Who's going to mobilise darkness and silence? ( 43–44)

Joan's late arrival on the scene gives her a kind of choric status, and her examples of everyday, murderous substances are again double-edged. On the one hand, they bespeak the genuine environmental damage inflicted on the natural world by human negligence, which will ultimately redound on its perpetrators: destruction of the ozone layer, for example, could well result in "thousands dead of light". On the other hand, her words express Western preoccupation with the elimination of all risk, which manifests itself in fear, taken to the point of paranoia, about the safety of what we eat, drink, and breathe. In this way, Joan's list shows no sense of perspective, with innocent (and indeed therapeutic) foxgloves damned alongside ecologically damaging petrol.

The end of Joan's speech, where she describes how she had "to go straight across" a river because of the "Chilean soldiers upstream" (44) and "fourteen black and white cows downstream" (44) encapsulates these points and, indeed, much of the entire play:

But I didn't know whose side the river was on, it might help me swim or it might drown me. In the middle the current was running much faster, the water was brown, I didn't know if that meant anything. I stood on the bank a long time. But I knew it was my only way of getting here so at last I put one foot in the river. It was very cold but so far that was all. (44)

Joan's need to interpret the meaning of the brown water without knowing how to do so, mirrors her predicament at the beginning of *Far Away* – and, indeed, of the audience's throughout it. Her imputation of conscious agency to the water reflects the



siege mentality of the rest of the play, where the entire human and natural worlds are regarded as potential enemies.

In a monologue that ends the play, Joan reveals the depths of the war:

It was tiring there because everything's been recruited, there were piles of bodies and if you stopped to find out there was one killed by coffee or one killed by pins, they were killed by heroin, petrol, chainsaws, hairspray, bleach, foxgloves, the smell of smoke was where we were burning the grass that wouldn't serve. The Bolivians are working with gravity, that's a secret so as not to spread alarm. But we're getting further with noise and there's thousands dead of light in Madagascar. Who's going to mobilise darkness and silence?  
(43)

*Far Away* gradually drifts into a surreal, nightmare future with the entire world at war. The society has lost its moral bearings and succumbed to murder and violence and heading towards apocalypse.

### **Conclusion: Social Criticism**

As stated by Booker dystopian literature "functions as a form of social and political criticism (181). It remains an important means of envisioning alternatives to the existing order. It "reveals the evils in society through shocks of recognition" (183). *Far Away* makes us to see the world in new ways making us capable of entertaining new and different perspectives on reality. By showing the world heading toward apocalypse, the play makes us aware of these evils of the postmodern society and points to valuable corrective to this tendency.

In the play showing the worsened relationship between nature and humans who are against each other is the war projected by the play, it attempts to aware us that something must be done to avoid the apocalypse environmental hazards are likely

to invite. The genuine environmental damage inflicted on the natural world by human negligence, which will ultimately redound on its perpetrators: destruction of the ozone layer, for example, could well result in "thousands dead of light". On the other hand, her words express Western preoccupation with the elimination of all risk, which manifests itself in fear, taken to the point of paranoia, about the safety of what we eat, drink, and breathe. In this way, Joan's list in her final monologue shows no sense of perspective, with innocent foxgloves damned alongside ecologically damaging petrol. Showing humans and nature destroying each other, the play warns us about the possible dangers such human activities are likely to invite in the near future.

Likewise, depicting the senseless violence, execution and torture of the anonymous prisoners, the play indicates to the dangers the competition for power and weapons is likely to invite. Such competition has endangered the sense of humanity and human values. People are engaged in the activities of meaningless killing like Joan's uncle and Joan herself admits of killing two cats and a child of under five in the last scene. Right from the individual level to the national and international levels, countries are at war against each other. People support and admire crocodiles and hate deer. This is a severe criticism of the people and countries' tendency to support the powerful countries like America even if they are wrong and stand against innocent and weak countries like deer. The conversation about crocodiles highlights the relativism of moral judgements presented as objective, while that about deer pushes the idea further. Harper's comment about their natural goodness satirises the kind of shifting political alliance that, while presenting itself as quite the opposite, has nothing to do with ethics and everything to do with opportunism; the substitution of changed opinions about deer shows the change in Western attitudes towards Iraq and Iran occasioned by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait gives the issue a startling clarity that

cannot be swept away by altered real-life circumstances. In addition, as with so much aggression, the victims are blamed for the crimes committed against them: much of the damage of which Harper accuses the deer seems to result from human destruction of their habitat and subsequent persecution of them when they consequently invade human space. The play also criticizes the exploitation of workers and corruptness of the managers. And also their inability to fight against those behaviours towards them without risking too much is focused. Thus depicting the world heading towards apocalypse because these various reasons, the play provides social criticism to make us aware of such wrongs prevalent in postmodern society.

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