

Dystopian Depths in John Lanchester's *The Wall* (2019)

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□ ABSTRACT □

The study argues that John Lanchester's *The Wall* (2019) is a dystopian novel as it incorporates all the elements of dystopian fiction. The elements of dystopian fiction detected in the novel include environmental ruin, technological predomination, inequality, enslavement, violence, despotism, and the propaganda used to mislead the citizens of society. From the perspective of post-colonialism, the Anthropocene, and Marxism, this study follows a descriptive qualitative approach. These theories help to uncover various dimensions of the text, with Marxism shedding light on class conflict and exploitation, Post-colonialism exposing the oppression and discrimination against the "Others," and the Anthropocene theory highlighting the impact of human activities on the environment. The purpose of the study is to satirize the status quo including the environmental, political, and social aspects. The study argues that *The Wall* exceeds being a pessimistic narrative; it is a channel for contemplation, consideration, satire, and transformation. Overall, the study thoroughly addresses these dimensions by analyzing the novel and how it portrays a dystopian world that reflects contemporary fears related to oppression, despotism, and environmental as well as technological degradation. The particular significance of this study lies in being a useful vehicle to learn about global challenges. In terms of the findings, the study warns about how current challenges could cause havoc if left uncurbed. Serving as both a mirroring and a thrust for transformation, the study holds a far-reaching implication in the sphere of change.

Keywords: Dystopia, Discrimination, Environment, Tyranny, Violence



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الاعماق الديستوبية في رواية الجدار لجون لانشستر

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□ ملخص □

تدعي الدراسة أن رواية "الجدار" لجون لانشستر (2019) هي رواية ديستوبية لأنها تضم جميع عناصر الخيال الديستوبي. تشمل عناصر الخيال الديستوبي المكتشفة في الرواية الخراب البيئي، الهيمنة التكنولوجية، عدم المساواة، الاستعباد، العنف، الاستبداد، والدعاية المستخدمة لتضليل مواطني المجتمع. من منظور ما بعد الاستعمار، والأنثروبوسين، والماركسية، تتبع هذه الدراسة نهجاً وصفيًا نوعيًا. تساعد هذه النظريات في كشف أبعاد مختلفة من النص، حيث تسلط الماركسية الضوء على صراع الطبقات والاستغلال، وتكشف نظرية ما بعد الاستعمار عن الاضطهاد والتمييز ضد "الآخرين"، وتبرز نظرية الأنثروبوسين تأثير الأنشطة البشرية على البيئة. الغرض من الدراسة هو السخرية من الوضع الراهن بما في ذلك الجوانب البيئية والسياسية والاجتماعية. تدعي الدراسة أن "الجدار" يتجاوز كونه سردًا متشائمًا؛ فهو قناة للتأمل، والتفكير، والسخرية، والتحول. بشكل عام، يتناول الدراسة هذه الأبعاد بشكل شامل من خلال تحليل الرواية وكيف تصور عالماً ديستوبياً يعكس المخاوف المعاصرة المتعلقة بالاضطهاد، والاستبداد، والتدهور البيئي والتكنولوجي. تكمن الأهمية الخاصة لهذه الدراسة في كونها وسيلة مفيدة للتعرف على التحديات العالمية. فيما يتعلق بالنتائج، تحذر الدراسة من كيف أن التحديات الحالية قد تسبب فوضى إذا تُركت دون معالجة. تعمل الدراسة كمرآة ودافع للتحويل، وتحمل دلالة بعيدة المدى في مجال التغيير .

الكلمات المفتاحية: ديستوبيا، تمييز، بيئة، طغيان، عنف

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Introduction

By presenting a glimpse of the future, dystopian literature is a type of meditative fiction. Dystopian literature probes the gloomiest conditions of the present-day times. It examines the alarming effect of political, social, and environmental systems on mankind's future. There are many dystopian novels that imagine a future place in cataclysmic decline, such as Le Guin's *Always Coming Home* (1985), Victoria Roth's *Divergent* (2011), and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953).

The study provides a thorough analysis of John Lanchester's *The Wall*, successfully exploring its dystopian elements and connecting them with contemporary socio-political and environmental issues. Lanchester's *The Wall* is set in Britain in the future times. The novel alludes to an apocalyptic event known as the "Change", which refers to climate change: "The Change—before and after. Elsewhere, though, it was not like that. The Change was not an event but a process, a process that in some places, some unlucky places, has not stopped. In many of the hotter places of the world, in particular, the Change is still continuing, still reshaping landscapes, still impacting people's lives" (Lanchester, 2019, p. 105). Relocation is banned. The shoreline of Britain has been encircled by a shielding construction. All the young are recruited to work a couple of years as "Defenders" to prevent "Others" on the other side of the wall to get in the country (Thomas-Corr, 2019).

The use of multiple theoretical frameworks such as Marxism, Post-colonialism, and the Anthropocene adds depth to the analysis and offers a comprehensive understanding of the novel's themes. The study uses different theories such as Marxism, Post-colonialism, and the Anthropocene to provide multi-dimensional analysis of Lanchester's *The Wall*.

Methodology

The research methods used throughout this study tracks a qualitative- descriptive methodology in the form of analyzing the primary source, John Lanchester's *The Wall*, and referring to secondary sources that are relevant to the study. The study makes use of many theories, such as post- colonialism, the Anthropocene, and Marxism.

Problem of the Study:

The study imparts a thorough analysis of Lanchester's dystopian novel, *The Wall*. It scrutinizes the various elements commonly detected in dystopian novels, such as despotism, ecological deterioration, and the disintegration of identity. Furthermore, the study examines the socio- political as well as ecological contexts that the dystopian novel reflects.

Objectives of the Study

- 1- By displaying an imaginary society that is replete with environmental predicaments, inequality, and fascism, the main aim of the study is to inspect and critique political, ecological, and social predicaments.
- 2- To detect all the elements of dystopian literature in *The Wall*, including environmental ruin, technological predomination, inequality, enslavement, violence, the loss of identity and individualism, and the misleading propaganda.
- 3- To alert against political, environmental, and social practices that if remain unbridled, pandemonium will prevail.

Significance of the study

It encourages readers to contemplate the signification of certain behaviors and ideologies and ponder their own times. The study proposes the prospect for apposition and conversion of the present-day challenges.

Review of Related Literature

Lanchester's *The Wall* is a dystopian novel (Wittmann, 2019). This study offers a thorough analysis of *The Wall* as a dystopian novel. Dystopia is a fantastical world in which oppression is maintained through totalitarian control (ReadWriteThink, 2006). The study shows how the entire society in the novel lives under a repressive regime that restricts individual freedom and makes them completely subordinate to the state's authority, reflecting the control of a totalitarian system over all aspects of life. *The Wall* is profoundly metaphorical. *The Wall* infuses a meaning not unequivocally set forth in the novel (Nevala-Lee, 2019). The study shows how *The Wall* serves as a physical and metaphorical barrier reflecting social and political divisions in society. *The Wall* consolidates different trepidations that are confronting modern society. It deals with the reverberations of global warming, isolationism, ethnocentrism, Brexit, age bias, and social inequality (Murdock, 2019). *The Wall* incorporates all the essential elements of dystopian literature, such as environmental collapse, technological domination, inequality, enslavement, violence, despotism, and misleading propaganda. These elements firmly position the novel within the dystopian genre, reflecting contemporary fears and challenges through a dark, fictional future world. *The Wall* is instantaneously a satire of contemporary civilization. The book is full of penetrating wrath (Buchanan, 2019). The study warns that current political, social, and environmental practices, if left unchecked, could lead to a bleak future similar to that depicted in the novel. The novel serves as a reflection of what might happen if authoritarianism, environmental degradation, and inequality continue unchallenged. Lanchester's *The Wall* is distinguished by the inseparability of real life complications and fiction. According to Thomas-Corr (2019), the novel exposes many current plights, such as, anti-immigration sentiments, class conflict, climate change, and Brexit (Thomas-Corr, 2019). *The Wall* is a novel unswervingly for our time. The study highlights that dystopian literature, as exemplified in *The Wall*, plays a crucial role in critiquing reality and warning readers about potential dangers. Dystopian fiction uses satire and exaggeration to spotlight current issues, encouraging readers to reflect on matters such as political oppression, climate change, and social discrimination.

Discussion

The Wall is analyzed as a dystopian novel in this study. *The Wall* features all the elements that are frequently seen in dystopian novels, including class conflict, dictatorship, violence, propaganda, slavery, discrimination, and ecological degradation. The novel also presents the ecological and socio-political settings that make up the core of the novel's connotation. Lanchester presents dystopia through the prism of class conflict, which is one of the most important elements of dystopian fiction. One of the functions of dystopia is to show that there are extreme differences between the social classes. According to Marxist conflict theory, society is split into two classes: the proletariat class and the bourgeois ruling class (Hayes, 2022). *The Wall* shows the discrepancy between the lives of the elite and the lives of the poor and the slaves. The elite are exempted from guarding the Wall, while the poor are assigned the job of defending the wall (Lanchester, 2019, p.83). The actual and the metaphorical violence in the novel is particularly palpable among the most sociopolitical disempowered. In addition, the elite live lavishly while many suffer from privation and persecution (Ciuffreda, 2022). The island's authority rigorously controls the share of resources to keep the population alive, leading to inadequate food and energy resources. Social and economic institutions are regarded to be means to foster the conflict between

classes, used to sustain discrepancy, disparity, and the superiority and domination of the controlling and leading class (Hayes, 2022). Not only class dichotomy takes place inside the island but it also trespasses beyond the wall. The dichotomy between the Capital's prosperity and the undersupply beyond the wall that Joseph witnesses is an indication of the disparity and unevenness between those inside and outside. In the novel, slavery is put in practice by abusing the "Others" and the lower class to be in service of rich citizens. The novel bears a witness to the committed injustices against the powerless poor while the upper class enjoys riches and high rank. *The Wall* does not shrink back from criticizing its present time socio-economic biases.

Discrimination constitutes an important element of dystopian literature. Lanchester offers an intriguing fancy of a future epoch of vigorous discrimination. Post-colonialism sheds light on the system of persecution stemming from discrimination that has affected "Others". Lanchester presents a microcosm severed into two social strata: those who are still inside the territory, and those who have been outside it. The deaths of Others at the hands of Defenders are a tragic outcome of the chauvinistic system and institutions that orchestrate modern society, and that does not relate human worth with the morality of the citizen but rather with the fact of being an insider or outsider (Embrick, 2015). In the novel, Joseph Kavanagh changes to become an Other. Kavanagh has become a lawbreaker for failing to fulfill his job as a Defender (p.124).

"Us vs. Them" is the core ideology of the novel. There is a plethora of largely "Us vs. Them" mindsets under the categories of gender, race, or politics. By using the "us v. them" conception, we fall into a hole known as "othering." Othering means ranking people on the basis of skin colour, religion, gender and recognizing them as inferior by using the "us vs. them" reasoning to exclude the group (Us Vs. Them: The Process of Othering | CMHR, n.d.). In *The Wall*, the government categorizes people into: the so-called "Us" whom they consider superior; and the so-called "Others" whom they consider inferior. This classification of people as "lesser than" is a process of othering.

A very apparent dystopian element of the novel is the deterioration of environment. Present-day dystopian environments are often those that have had glamour, but have lost it because of wrong use or negligence. Such environments seem depilated, filthy, and misused. Lanchester's *The Wall* displays a dystopic microcosm in which global warming has risen sea levels, and as most people may be flooded, they leave their homes. The climate crisis forces them to be stateless. A main proposition of dystopian novels is that humanity is the reason of its own gruesome situation (Scholes & Ostenson, 2013). According to the theory of the Anthropocene, humans can definitely cause a lot of harm to the ecosystem. They can contaminate the land, water, and air, change the climate, mess up the equilibrium of environment, lead species to extermination, and consume natural deposits ("What Is the Anthropocene?", 2019). In the novel, the older generation referred to as "the olds" are blamed for being liable for the climate crisis: "And that the people responsible for it ending up like this were our parents—they and their generation. I don't want to know their advice or to know what they think about anything, ever" (pp. 55-56).

Violence plays a vital role in formulating a dystopian world. Louisa Demerjian (2016) claims that dystopian worlds are replete with agony (p.76). Lanchester's *The Wall* presents a dystopian world engulfed with violence where "you have to kill or be killed" (p. 42). In the novel, Others are killed by the defenders at any attempt of trespassing the wall. On the other hand, many defenders are murdered by the Others. One example of violence is when, the cook, Mary, is fired while handing out coffee to Kavanagh: "It can't be coffee, can she

have spilt food on herself? but no, it's a liquid, it's wrong for water, and it's not spilling it's pumping, it's not been poured over her, it's coming out of her. There's only one thing it can be, it's blood" (p. 117). The Others who yearn to cross the wall are described as holding blades, blood thirsty, have nothing to lose (p. 34).

Technological advancement is an important element of dystopian literature. Some plausible leaps of technology are presented in the story. For example, the idea of the society all being equipped intramuscularly with a digital identification card and personal data; the intrusive Others who are not chipped are marked out from those equipped with this digital ID: "Maybe somewhere else, somebody was getting them chipped, hacking into databases, faking IDs "(p. 158). Lanchester's *The Wall* explores the murky zones of technologized dystopias where advancement swerves into persecution. *The Wall* reveals how technological leaps, while encouraging momentum, can convert into control mechanisms. One of the facets of technologized dystopias is the use of advanced detection systems to track and control the public. In these schemes, technology that was originally geared towards guaranteeing safety is redirected to impose compliance and subdue protest. These chips track every movement that predict and preventively hinder any behavior considered inappropriate. Below the crust of these cutting-edge advances is sheer control.

Enslavement is an important feature of dystopian literature. Others who are captured while trying to get in the country are enslaved and referred to as "Help". They are recruited as servants by government or hired by individuals. According to Gramsci, hegemony is an act of approving the sovereignty of the ruling upper class over the lower class through governmental institutions .He also believes that government is a structure of oppression and tyranny which lawfully and legitimately governs and dominates the lower class people. By discussing hegemony, Gramsci branches the social system into two sectors: The State or government and civic population (Al-Amin & Masum Sikdar, 2016). This may be in accordance with the whole dystopian air of a tyrannical sovereignty that subjugates, murders, and brutalizes refugees. This choice given by the government to be Helps is like that offered to war prisoners. They are given the choice between the lesser of two evils. These migrants choose to become Help, which is a form of government- decreed slavery in order to survive. In the novel, Hifa's mother recognizes that having a Help at one's disposal is a ruining of one's own humanity (p.138). Under the ultimate domination of the tyrannical government, Others were compelled to give up their lives for the benefit of the elite insiders and the ruling class while their own requirements and rights are ignored. Those who are enslaved, and even their children, live under the fog of discrimination. Discrimination deeply pain slaves, whose children are taken from them. They are slaves, outsiders, Others, but not people of individuality. Under slavery, they are treated as nonhuman properties and objects: "Another human being at one's beck and call, just by lifting a finger, simply provided to one, in effect one's personal property... though of course they are technically the property of the state" (p. 138).

As a dystopian novel, *The Wall* serves as a political satire. It warns readers against the schemes of tyrannical governments. Lanchester tabulates the mechanisms with which totalitarian governments work: governing by coercion, procuring the compliance of the citizens by force, instilling lies that are considered as absolute truth into the public mind, creating the perception that the state is under acute danger of the Others, and restricting people's capacity to dispute or defy:

It looks like a cold, hard, unforgiving, desperate place. (It is.) You feel trapped. (You are.) You are longing for this to be over, longing to be somewhere else; you would give

anything not to be here. Maybe, even if you're not religious, you say a prayer, out loud or under your breath, it doesn't matter, because it doesn't change anything, because your prayer says, please please please let me get off the Wall. (p. 5)

In this intriguing novel, the author explicates the convoluted workings of totalitarianism, delving into its underlying schemes. The novel reveals how totalitarianism manipulates propaganda, exploits otherness, and targets the rich to gain power. Despotism forces citizens to abide by the rules. In *The Wall*, everyone in society is depicted complying with conformity. In dystopian literature, individualism is a vice. Individualism constitutes an antithesis with governments, which restricts human freedom. In Lanchester's unnamed island, individuality is prohibited because the ruling power intends to keep a grip over the citizens. By repressing individuality, the ruling power can curb individual thought, making it easier to compel conformity and submission. *The Wall* by Lanchester cautions against the menaces of totalitarianism, and the importance of safeguarding individual autonomy. The futuristic world in Lanchester's novel has eradicated nonconformity; the populace no longer harbors individuality and autonomy.

Misleading propaganda is another feature of dystopian literature (ReadWriteThink, 2006). During his exile, Joseph realizes that the government's propaganda has misreported the reality of the county's situation. Throughout history, governments have used propaganda to brainwash people's minds in an effort to direct and convince them to accept the government's agenda. Propaganda is intentionally impartial, tricky or delusive to steer people into the track favoured by the government. In Lanchester's *The Wall*, propaganda is utilized to promote political grounds and agendas: "They think you need the Wall to keep out the water but not to keep out human beings. Some of them don't agree with turning people into Help. They think it's slavery. It's a big network, much bigger than you realize" (p. 177). In addition, Machiavellian politicians use heroism propaganda to arouse Defenders to fight: "The National Coastal Defense Structure and the Defenders and how important we are and what heroes we are and how ours is a nation of heroes and how our heroism is in the finest tradition of heroism and how heroic that is" (pp. 129-130). The novel conveys an important signal about how language can be maneuvered and falsified and how the populace can be influenced by it.

Conclusion

Dystopian literature is more than just a literary trend; it is an insightful, heartfelt reaction to an era engulfed in upheaval. As a dystopian novel, *The Wall* focuses on the despotism and fascism represented by the government, the destruction of the environment, and the feeling of the worthlessness of individuals living in this environment.

By incorporating all the core features of dystopian literature, the study argues that Lanchester's *The Wall* is a dystopian novel. Tyranny, technological advancement, environmental ruin, slavery, class inequality, violence, and misleading propaganda are all spotted as dystopian elements in Lanchester's *The Wall*. *The Wall* is analyzed as a dystopian novel by resorting to the following theories: Marxism, the Anthropocene, and Post-colonialism. The study links these three theories to illustrate how the novel addresses interlinked issues, including class exploitation, racism and discrimination, and environmental degradation. It shows that the novel warns against these practices and urges reflection on their consequences for humanity. The study aims at revealing how *The Wall* delivers a satirical signification to question the status quo and stimulate critical thinking.

This study will cultivate the study of dystopian literature by adding worthwhile points into the role of satire and insurrection in dystopian novels (Almujalli, 2023).

Given that the research highlights the impact of climate change and environmental destruction on society in the novel, the study recommends taking immediate actions to protect the environment and address climate change to avoid the bleak future depicted in the story. Since the study deals with class conflict and economic exploitation, it likely suggests implementing policies that promote social justice and reduce the gap between social classes to prevent the kind of inequality experienced by the characters in the novel. Given the novel's treatment of themes like slavery and discrimination, the study recommends enhancing human rights protections and safeguarding the rights of minorities and migrants to prevent such violations as portrayed in the novel.

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