

Forget the Twentieth Century: Dystopia and Regression in *Julian Comstock*

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Robert Charles Wilson's 2009 novel *Julian Comstock* is set in a 22nd century America which has suffered the collapse of the cheap oil economy, a widespread population die-off and a resulting resurgence in fundamentalist Christianity. Superficially, this places the novel within a lineage of postapocalyptic SF which posits the onset of theocratic fascism. In this article, however, I argue that, due to its complex narratology which conflates dystopia and regression, *Julian Comstock* may challenge received understandings of the entire SF genre.

Reading *Julian Comstock* provokes the cognitive estrangement that Darko Suvin has suggested we should expect from science fiction (hereafter SF). However, the form of estrangement evoked by Wilson's novel extends beyond that of the dystopia or the alternative history, while drawing its strength from both. Wilson partly achieves this through his clever reconstruction of the boy's own adventure narrative style which was popular in the 19th century, and partly through his postmodernist layering of familiar SF tropes such as ecological collapse, the postapocalyptic world and dystopia. Yet I hope to show that it is his depiction of his titular hero, a reconfigured Emperor Julian the Apostate from fourth century Rome, which generates the novel's radical challenge to accepted understandings of where SF comes from and what it does.

Wilson's future America is a neo-feudal state, led by an imperial 'president' and embroiled in a war with Central Europeans in Canada. Following the end of 'the efflorescence of oil', ensuing hunger and urban collapse, the society that emerged from the wreckage is religious, feudally structured, scientifically backward and suspicious of the long twentieth century and its technology, which has become either mythical or forbidden. Just as Julian the Apostate aimed to reinstate what he believed was the more advanced civilisation of Hellenic religious belief, so Julian Comstock seeks to remember the scientific achievements of Darwin and restore the long twentieth century that followed. Forgotten technological advances such as the moon landings, cinema and the discovery of

DNA all form part of Comstock's radical pro-scientific agenda, an agenda rendered all the more dangerous since, like his Roman forebear, Julian faces the power of a regressive religious hegemony in Christianity.

Julian Comstock's understanding of DNA becomes a central metaphor within the text, and is central to understanding Wilson's achievement. According to Julian, "DNA isn't changeless. It struggles to remember itself, but it never remembers itself perfectly. Remembering a fish, it imagines a lizard. Remembering a horse, it imagines a hippopotamus. Remembering an ape, it imagines a man" (16). This protean quality of DNA comes to represent not only the subjectivity of historical recollection, but also Wilson's own subtle and complex narratological strategy which, I argue, may have some wide-ranging ramifications for SF as a genre.

Flavius Claudius Julianus Augustus, better known as the Emperor Julian and commonly referred to as 'the Apostate', died in 363 CE at the age of 32 after a brief two year reign, allegedly saying with his dying breath, "You have won, Galilean, you have won." He has been consistently misremembered ever since. Julian's intellectualism, brief reign, his famous apostasy from Christianity in 351 CE and his lost attack on the religion in his polemic *Contra Galileos*, have all contributed to his attraction as a literary figure across different eras. As Gore Vidal wrote, "Julian has always been something of an underground hero in Europe. His attempt to stop Christianity and revive Hellenism exerts still a romantic appeal..." (ix).

From the attacks made by St Gregory of Nazianzus soon after Julian's death right up to the present day, the figure of Julian has remained a controversial and often misunderstood figure. According to Julian scholar Adrian Murdoch, "Until the late Middle Ages, Julian was a caricature, a cipher used in literature and art that was instantly recognisable" (207). In Hrotsvitha's play *Gallicanus* from the end of the tenth century, Julian is 'the devil's chaplain', a catalyst for evil and persecutor of the Church. Later in the middle ages, Murdoch claims (209) that "Julian was a recognisable term of abuse at royal and Vatican levels", and in this sense his infamy spread far and

wide. He is even mentioned in the Norse saga the *Heimskringla*, and two lost Tudor plays entitled *Julian the Apostate*, one by Thomas Ashton in 1556, and another by an unknown author performed three times by the Admiral's Men in London in 1596, both seem to propagate the same depiction of Julian as Marlovian overreacher cursing 'the Galilean' with his dying breath.

Though Montaigne's essay *On Freedom of Conscience* compared Julian favourably to Alexander the Great and Scipio, the first truly positive depiction came from the pen of Voltaire, whose *Philosophical Dictionary* contains two entries which seek to rehabilitate Julian as a model of tolerance. It is this tradition which informed Edward Gibbon, who described the short-lived emperor as 'my friend Julian' in *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, and it is from Gibbon that Wilson's depiction of Julian Comstock largely derives.

The so-called Julian Romance, a sixth century Syriac text preserved in the British Library, is likely only the earliest iteration of how Julian's brief reign came be used symbolically to represent contemporary political and religious concerns. In the text, possibly written by a convert from Judaism, Julian's reign is used to explain the loss of a Christian city to the Persians. This use of Julian as a metaphor for contemporary political discourse became especially prominent in the 1680s, when a pamphlet war erupted over the equally controversial reign of King James II. A sermon by George Hickes entitled *A Discourse of the Sovereign Power* provoked a response from the pamphleteer Samuel Johnson in which he discussed James mediated through the guise of Emperor Julian. This *Julian the Apostate* pamphlet led to a number of sequels, including *Julian's Arts*, and provoked responses from other pamphleteers operating in a similar mode of using classical parallels to critique contemporary concerns. These included *Jovian*, written by Hickes and *Constantius the Apostate* by John Bennet. The pamphlet war continued for over two years, with a half dozen writers using the mode of classical metaphor and the controversial figure of Julian to conduct a thinly-veiled debate about the reign of James.

In the eighteenth century, La Bletterie's life of Julian, translated by V. Desvoeux, was

published in Dublin in 1746 and likely influenced Edward Gibbon in dedicating three chapters of his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* to the reign of Julian; chapters XXII, XXIII and XXIV in volume II, which was published in 1781. Drawing upon Gibbon's work, Julian became a major literary figure featuring in the work of many writers throughout the 19th century. Bryan Waller Procter, the contemporary of Byron and dedicatee of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, wrote a verse drama *Julian the Apostate* which was published in 1821 and was based, he admitted, on Gibbon. The following year saw another verse drama on Julian from the pen of the Irish poet Aubrey de Vere, the father of the more renowned poet and critic Aubrey Thomas de Vere. Then in 1831, the American lawyer-poet Charles J. Ingersoll wrote a long dramatic poem about Julian.

The translator and playwright C.J. Riethmüller also wrote a verse drama about Julian in 1883 towards the end of a long literary career, while the Jamaican-born religious writer David Morrieson Panton's long poem about Julian was published in 1891 while he was still a 21 year old student at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, prior to his full immersion baptism and conversion to nonconformist rapture beliefs. In 1888, Charles William King translated the attacks upon Julian made by Gregory of Nazianzus into English for the first time, and King's work may have attracted the young Panton to the subject of Julian.

Wilmer Cave Wright published three volumes of the works of Julian with his own translations into English between 1913 and 1923, which likely inspired both Edward James Martin's essay on Julian in 1919 and Hillaire Belloc's essay correcting Gibbon on Julian which appeared in an Irish Jesuit journal also in 1919. The *Julian Romance* was finally translated from Syriac into English in 1928 by Hermann Gollancz, a publication which sparked yet another flurry of texts about Julian by authors such as Douglas Simpson (1930), Edward Hamilton Sears (1930), T.F. Powys (1936), Francis Ridley (1937) and Nikos Kazantzakis (1939). More recently, a burgeoning tradition of novels about Julian has developed, including Anna Morduch's 1960 *The Death and Life of Julian*, which was inferior fiction to that written by Gore Vidal in 1964. Constance Head's biography of

Julian was published in 1976, and Glen Bowersock's renowned history of Julian in 1978. Rowland Smith's thematic study of Julian's Hellenic influences, *Julian's Gods*, emerged in 1995, and there have been a number of valuable histories and biographies since then. Notably, John Ford's 1983 fantasy novel *The Dragon Waiting* is set in a fifteenth century *uchronie* in which Julian's pagan reforms had been successful and Byzantium never fell.

From Hrotsvitha to Ford, each literary generation has rediscovered Julian and his apostasy, and recreated his life anew in varying literary forms. Robert Charles Wilson's *Julian Comstock* is the latest iteration in this lengthy line of commemorations; he is our generation's Julian. Obviously, all these different Julians reflect more upon the cultures and eras from which they arose than they indicate an empirical attempt to depict the historical Julian. And it is this very distortion in repetition, this imperfect remembering, which becomes the central metaphor in *Julian Comstock*. If *Julian Comstock* is our generation's imperfect remembrance of Julian the Apostate, then inevitably the novel must be read as a commentary on contemporary America in which Wilson wrote the text, a continental nation riven by conservative ideologies and possibly at risk from a takeover by the religious right.

Wilson's protagonist recalls not only Julian the Apostate but also Gordon Comstock, the hero of Orwell's early novel *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, who resists what he sees as the 'Money God' in order to dedicate himself to art. Gordon soon discovers that the romantic appeal of penury is much less attractive than the reality, and after two futile years he relents and returns to his job as an advertising copywriter, and the middle class lifestyle which he had previously spurned on principle. Similarly, Julian Comstock spends much of his brief presidency engaged in resurrecting the art of cinema, working on a magnum opus about Charles Darwin just as Gordon Comstock labours fruitlessly on his epic *London Pleasures*. Both Comstocks resist a God in order to pursue art, but find that the practicalities of life intervene. In Julian's case, his dedication to his cinematic project causes him to neglect his presidency and leads to his overthrow.

Julian is not the only Comstock, however. The latest in an imperial lineage inheriting the presidency, Julian is the nephew of the previous president Deklan, an autocratic leader who propagated conservative and regressive social policies intended to support the power nexuses of the military and religious phyla of society. In this sense, the Comstock imperial line evokes not Orwell's Gordon but rather Anthony Comstock, the 19th century reformer who dedicated his life to campaigning against all forms of vice. Like Wilson's Julian, Anthony Comstock's formative years were spent in an oppressive religious environment and at war, leading him to a career in politics.

Anthony Comstock championed the suppression of what he deemed obscenity, leading to the passing of the so-called 'Comstock Act' which barred distributing obscene material through the US Postal Service, and the foundation of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice in 1873. Like Julian the Apostate, Anthony Comstock was a reformer who sought to revert to an imaginary golden age in which the paradigms of his own religious beliefs would be upheld entirely. So within the literary DNA of Julian Comstock's character, a whole series of historical and literary characters are carefully misremembered.

More intriguingly, Wilson's novel also deliberately misremembers and conflates SF forms. His depiction of a religious post-apocalypse, for example, is far from an original dystopic vision. This particular sub-genre has a lengthy lineage in American SF, in books such as Edgar Pangborn's *Davy* or Walter Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. Pangborn's novel is narrated by the eponymous Davy, who proudly proclaims (7) that “[b]eing now twenty-eight and far advanced in heresy, and familiar with the fragments of Old-Time literature, I say to hell with the laws that forbid most Old-Time books or reserve them to the priests!” *Julian Comstock* opens (9) in a literalisation of Davy's proclamation, as Julian and his amanuensis, the novel's narrator Adam, encounter a tip where miners uncover “ancient books, wholly free of the Dominion Stamp of Approval.”

In both of these texts, a regressive religious hegemony – the Holy Murcan Church in *Davy* and the Dominion of Jesus Christ in *Julian Comstock* – has arisen following the apocalypse to fill

the gap left by the destruction of progressive science. This antipathy between religion and science in SF has long been noted by critics. Adam Roberts identifies the post-religious Enlightenment as the founding point of the entire genre in his definitive *History of Science Fiction*, and Stephen Clark notes that “science fiction seems well suited to the needs and fantasies of an irreligious age, easily persuaded that there are no transcendent purposes” (98). These fantasies often posit, as they do in both *Davy* and *Julian Comstock*, a fascist theocracy.

Yet it also functions as the most recent iteration of a longstanding SF tradition, in which Christianity, and specifically Roman Catholicism, is misremembered as anti-science and fundamentally socially regressive. This trope is especially common in alternative histories such as Keith Roberts's *Pavane* or Kingsley Amis's *The Alteration*, where the Catholic Church's defeat of the Reformation is deemed to simultaneously set back or eradicate the onset of the scientific Enlightenment.

However, irreligiosity is not an inherent generic quality in SF. Belief systems, often of alien origin, proliferate in the genre, and some are even depicted as preferable to a purely scientific view of the universe, as in the overtly religious SF of writers like Andrew Greeley, but also the fiction of Philip Jose Farmer (*Night of Light*), Dan Simmons (*Hyperion Cantos*) or Robert Silverberg (*Tom O'Bedlam*). From this nuanced tradition stems Walter Miller's *A Canticle for Liebowitz*, in which the role of the Catholic Church is simultaneously conservative and progressive, shoring up the ruins of the apocalyptic past in a regressive - though modernist - fashion but also seeding the scientific development of its own future. Comstock, like other more recent American SF writers such as Patricia Anthony and Dan Simmons, expresses a much less nuanced role for religious power in SF contexts. Anthony's *Inquisition* in *God's Fires* (1997) and Simmons's galaxy-wide Catholic theocracy in the *Endymion* novels merge into the oppressive political power wielded by the syncretically but conservatively Christian Dominion in Wilson's Hugo Award-winning novel. Theological opposition to the Dominion is provided by Julian's lover Magnus, who expresses an

apparently liberational and progressive vision of God as conscience which upon examination turns out to be yet another example of conservative forces self-delusionally masquerading as progressive ones. Adam describes Magnus as

“a true apostate, in that he denied the legitimacy of the Dominion of Jesus Christ as a worldly power, and his ideas about God were profoundly unorthodox. God, he asserted, was not contained in any Book, but was a Voice, which every human being could hear (and which most of us chose to ignore). The common name of that voice was Conscience; but it was a God by any reasonable definition, Stepney claimed” (560).

This definition appears to be reasonable in the Enlightenment sense of reason but devolves into traditional religious conservatism. The conflation of God and conscience, or more accurately the diminution of God into conscience, is to be found in Enlightenment era philosophy, beginning with Hegel's 'Philosophy of Mind', wherein freedom of conscience facilitates perception of the unity of truth or existence, and later expressed by Kant as the 'moral law within' which connects the individual to the infinite by way of the categorical imperative. Later philosophy tended to take a more limited or sceptical approach to the role of conscience, either subordinating it to God within the religious tradition, exhorting it as the voice of *exemplum* within free will as part of a transcendental tradition, or considering it as anything from a tribal identification principle (Durkheim) to the cohesive principle required to attain personal integrity (Hannah Arendt) to a delusionary denial of the element of self-interest (Peter Singer) within the sceptical tradition. Magnus's transcendence by contrast pursues a simplistic relationship with God that eschews the power differential inflicted by institutional mediation of the religious principle by the Dominion. Ultimately, Magnus's credo is plain and simply Biblical, deriving directly from the Old Testament admonition (Isaiah 30:21) that “God is your conscience.” Despite his gay and dissident status, he

incorporates a false alternative to the regressive theological hegemony. His vision is no less conservative, no more progressive.

Where the world of *Julian Comstock* experiences an ecological collapse following the end of oil, in Miller's text by contrast, records of the distant past hint at a cataclysmic nuclear event, again sometime in our 20th or 21st century. We could speculate that the distance between *A Canticle for Liebowitz*, written in the mid-1970s, and *Julian Comstock*, written in the 21st century, explains the differentiation of relative apocalypse methodologies. If nuclear destruction was the nightmare of the Cold War era, then ecological disaster appears to have displaced it as the predominant cultural apocalyptic nightmare in this era of anthropogenic climate change. Certainly, Wilson's novel follows hard upon the emergence of overtly ecological SF in recent times, a sub-genre increasingly known as 'cli-fi', featuring works by authors like Kim Stanley Robinson and Paolo Bacigalupi. However, where *Julian Comstock* differs from most cli-fi is in its unremittingly regressive depiction of a post-apocalyptic future.

In Robinson's *Science in the Capital* trilogy, scientists attached to the National Science Foundation function as progressive resistance to the onset of devastating anthropogenic climate change, providing techniques for mitigating the effects and adapting to the changes enforced by climactic upheaval. In a more nuanced fashion, science and scientists offer a diminished and compromised, but still progressive vision in Bacigalupi's *The Wind-up Girl*. Bacigalupi does depict a world effectively devastated by science, especially the agri-science which has led to genetically modified and sterile crops and mutated pest infestations. Yet he also features geneticists like Gibbons, who works to preserve a natural seed bank, combats the spread of plagues and eventually uses the genetic material of the eponymous wind-up girl, Emiko, to create a newly fertile species of 'New People' in a neat subversion of both the Pinocchio and Frankenstein myths.

In *Julian Comstock*, by contrast, there are neither cloisters of monks preserving the science of the past, nor maverick scientists adapting to the post-apocalyptic future by developing new

scientific stratagems, and certainly none of Robinson's coolly rational scientist-messiahs. Science, or at least modern post-industrial science, may lurk hidden in the basement of the New York public library, guarded by the anti-technological forces of the religious Dominion, but it has also been effectively erased from history. This erasure of the long twentieth century is itself a form of nostalgia, as can be found elsewhere in the steampunk sub-genre. Steampunk habitually infers an alternative history in which the causalities of an augmented industrial revolution are explored, positing a world in which the Victorian age experienced its own variants of contemporary technologies such as air flight or computing.

Wilson's strategy in *Julian Comstock* is somewhat different. Rather than posit a neo-Victorian age replete with our own technology which often then overturns conservative 19th century social norms such as slavery or colonialism, Wilson suggests the more profoundly regressive scenario in which 19th century norms displace those of the 20th and 21st centuries. In *Julian Comstock* the 20th century occurred but was subsequently wiped from history by a combination of societal collapse and the rise of religious conservatism. Wilson does not re-imagine the Victorian age so much as replay it, and therefore *Julian Comstock* must also be read as a highly unusual form of *uchronie*, an alternative history in which the 19th century actually recurs.

This is especially evident in the novel's narrative style, which Wilson consciously borrowed from the boy's own adventure genre of the mid- to late-nineteenth century. As he explained in an interview with Brian Slattery: "I started immersing myself in mid-19th century American popular literature as a kind of depth gauge. Basically asking the question: What's the cultural distance between then and now, and can I build a comparable degree of change into my book?" Wilson obtained this cultural distance by replicating it in reverse, and reinstating the culture of the nineteenth century as it was depicted in the popular fiction of Victorian authors like Oliver Optic, to whom the novel is dedicated. Comstock's metaphor for Darwinian evolution – DNA remembering itself imperfectly – thus can be read as an analogy for Wilson's own achievement in reimagining

Julian the Apostate into a post-apocalypse future that is itself an imperfect re-imagining of the nineteenth century, one derived from popular literature rather than historical reality.

If one considers alternative histories as SF deriving from the past, then the Suvinian *novum* – the cause of the reader's cognitive estrangement – is the *Jonbar* point, the moment of rupture out of recorded history (Suvin 4). Reader alienation arises from the discontinuity of the depicted world and our own. This contrasts generally with postapocalyptic SF, whose *novum* emerges from the discontinuity between our projected societal future and that which is depicted in the created world of the text. Wilson cleverly elides the distinction between these two forms of SF, effectively nesting multiple levels of *uchronie* – a world with Julian the Apostate in charge of an empire once more, predicated upon the kind of politically feudal structure which existed from the time of the Roman Empire until the late Middle Ages. Yet Wilson's novel simultaneously depicts a world of nineteenth century technology and socio-cultural values contained within the frame of postapocalyptic 22nd century North America. Wilson's confluences extend beyond subject matter to rhetorical forms of narratology, as he merges the rhetoric of Roman Imperial *historia* with the faux-naive literary style of 19th century populist fiction for boys within Adam's narrative.

There is a further conflation in Wilson's text, which arises from its dystopian and regressive content. In Darwinian evolution, when genes remember themselves imperfectly, beings can devolve as well as evolve, and Wilson suggests that societies and civilisations can too. In the world that Julian Comstock inherits, three expressions of politically regressive force – the army, the Dominion and the aristocratic executive – vie for control of a feudal warring society which has technologically regressed. As Major Lampret tells Julian:

“There are three centers of power in the modern Union, and only three. One is the Executive Branch, with its supporting host of Owners and Senators. One is the Military. And the last is the Dominion of Jesus Christ on Earth. They're like the tripod feet of a stool: each

supports the other, and they work best when they're equal”

(198).

This suggests what may be a new juncture for SF – the depiction of a future made up entirely of allied or warring conservatisms. Liberal irreligious scientism is in this novel associated rightly or wrongly with the “efflorescence of oil”, and by extension the twentieth century of the 'immoral ancients', and has therefore been systematically removed from history. Wilson deliberately culturally associates the forbidden twentieth century with the liberal and utopian vision of SF's great progressivist, H.G. Wells. When Julian accesses the archives of the past, which have been rendered anathema by the Dominion, he gives Adam

“another book he had culled from among the Archival duplicates, a short novel called *The Time Machine* by Mr. H. G. Wells, about a marvelous but apparently imaginary cart which carried a man into the future—and it fascinated me—but the Archive itself was a Time Machine in everything but name. Here were voices preserved on browning paper like pressed flowers, whispering apostasies into the ear of a new century” (551).

This confluence of dystopia and regression adds a further level of narrational *uchronie* in that it permits the text of *Julian Comstock* to be read as a commentary on contemporary US politics. Yet it also effectively sunders any definitive link between SF and the post-Voltairean Enlightenment project. This is a novel which actively turns its back on the Enlightenment, progressive science and political liberalism.

This can be identified through the character of Julian himself. Though he aligns himself alongside the 'ancients' and their scientific achievements, when he secures power and gains unlimited access to the forbidden scientific knowledge of the past, his sole act is to attempt to make a musical about Charles Darwin that does immeasurable damage to Darwin's actual historical

existence. The script for Julian's screenplay, *The Life and Adventures of the Great Naturalist Charles Darwin*, is obviously Darwin remembered imperfectly, partly due to prioritising drama over accuracy, but also because it adheres to the Hollywood notion of biopic as 'Great Man' history, and hence inevitably it distorts the facts of Darwin's actual life. Its presence in the novel also raises some postmodern question marks over the veracity of any allegedly factual narrative, especially one claiming to recollect a human life, such as Adam's narrative does in relation to Julian.

Julian attempts to present Darwin's life as a musical in a cinematic tradition which has been both sundered by the techno-collapse and sanitised by the influence of the Dominion, and hence its very form is fatally distorted. The resulting film is therefore not merely Darwin imperfectly remembered; it is also the narrative form of cinema itself imperfectly remembered and ultimately, it is the scientific process imperfectly remembered. *Julian Comstock* can therefore be read alongside postmodernist anti-histories such as Thomas Pynchon's *Against the Day*, which similarly seek to undermine the validity of the long twentieth century (contra Hobsbawm, who coined the idea of long eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but a short twentieth, scholars such as Giovanni Arrighi have theorised the long twentieth century as an expression of American capitalist geo-economic hegemony) and its concomitant progression of scientific achievement.

Wilson's deft and repeated usage of his metaphor for DNA – imperfect remembrance – thus unlocks a series of historical and stylistic connotations, the most important of which is his recreation of the figure of Julian the Apostate. The romantic appeal Gore Vidal attributed to Julian has long since been deconstructed by historians, who acknowledge the historical Julian to have been no less conservative and regressive than the Christian establishment he hoped to reverse. Wilson's deliberately imperfect remembrance of Julian – imperfect because set in the future – as a regressive conservative who believes he is a revolutionising liberal, is ironically one of the more accurate fictional depictions of a figure who has been largely misrepresented for centuries.

Yet it is Wilson's conflation of dystopia and regression, his merging of nightmare future with

fondly remembered pasts, that is the most intriguing in the context of SF. His use of postmodernist narratology to elide formal structures of SF into one another has generated a text which, while identifiably SF, nevertheless challenges the entrenched critical idea that SF, progressivist politics and the scientific Enlightenment are inherently intertwined. The Suvinian condition of cognitive estrangement arises, in *Julian Comstock*, not from the anachronistic appearance of a Roman Emperor in our own future, nor from any single Jonbar point located in our past, but from the multiple layering of historical and literary eras on top on one another, and from the fact that it is our own era among them all which has been deliberately and consciously erased.

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The article investigates dystopian fiction in British and American literature as exemplified in the books "Brave New World" by Aldous Huxley and "451 Fahrenheit" by Ray Bradbury. It draws the reader's attention to the author's anxious attitude towards the portrayed events which can be considered to be a warning to future generations. The research mainly concentrates on common features of dystopian novels in both cultures. Dystopian fiction of the twentieth century has its beginnings in the utopian fiction of authors such as H.G. Wells and William Morris. Wells called himself a "utopiographer" and believed that scientific advancements would outlaw war and poverty, as he proposed in his novel, *Men Like Gods* (1923). This utopian ideal was also described in Morris, who wrote about the perfect socialist society in *News From Nowhere* (1890).
Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is among the best-known dystopias of the twentieth century. The future world has been divided into three super-states, Oceania, Eurasia and Eastasia all of which are embroiled in a perpetual war. In Orwell's future, governments use a manipulative form of language called "Newspeak", which states that "War is Peace" and "Freedom in Slavery". With this prestigious 19th Century novel, Wells is said to have popularized the concept of the time machine. It tells the story of an English inventor, simply known as the Time Traveler, who recounts his adventures in other eras to his dinner guests. The 60's saw the arrival of two major dystopian films: *Alphaville* (1965) - Jean Luc Goddard. *Planet of the Apes* (1968) - Franklin J. Schaffner. 'The Time Machine' became so popular that, since its publication, it has been adapted into three feature films. This is the trailer for George Pal's 1960 adaptation of the same name, starring Rod Taylor. Includes index. A history of the United States in the twentieth century, featuring sociological and cultural events, as well as strictly historical, and using many pertinent literary excerpts. Grades 9-12. Nation of nations, 1765-1900: forging a new nation; expanding nation; rift and reunion; industrial nation -- Roots of a modern nation, 1880-1920: progressive impulse; progressivism takes hold; progressivism abroad -- A new era of the twenties, 1920-1929: getting on with business; a prospering society -- Economic crisis and the New Deal, 1929-1936: Great Depression; New Deal. - My interpretation of the late twentieth century is that there are many coexisting worlds and different concomitant and layered spaces of both real and virtual kinds. It seems to have become impossible to fully verify the "real" observed experiences and observations, and cyberspace can become as real as the "real". The main argument is that, in particular, technoreals as artificial "Other" have come to co-exist with the sensory real. The premise in this thesis is that in the context of the late twentieth-century visual culture of the West, a condition of dystopia is distinct. I argue that since the Sixties, developments in computer technology ("new technologies") have unleashed worlds of artifice and that the visual media are the prime mediators in perpetuating dystopia.