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KATARZYNA PISARSKA

AMERICA OF FUTURE PAST: THE POST-APOCALYPTIC CHRONOTOPE OF JIM CRACE'S *THE PESTHOUSE*

A b s t r a c t. Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's assumptions concerning the literary chronotope, the article explores spatio-temporal relationships in *The Pesthouse* (2007), a novel by contemporary British writer Jim Crace (b. 1946). Katarzyna Pisarska contends that the dominant, post-apocalyptic chronotope of the novel arises from the interaction of two generic chronotopes, utopian and dystopian, which question the American myth of manifest destiny towards its ultimate reassertion. The topos of "a city on a hill", which presupposes the conflation of America's past (Eden) and future (New Jerusalem), is reworked as the eponymous pesthouse—the place of disease and recovery of not only the novel's protagonist but also, implicitly, of the American dream. In the end, Pisarska argues, the novel expresses a revisionist nostalgia (*sensu* James Berger), as it produces the shock of the past invading the present in order to bring forth a utopian impulse.

Key words: Jim Crace, chronotope, utopia, dystopia.

In his essay "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics," Mikhail Bakhtin postulates that space and time in literature should not be treated as separate categories but rather as a unity. He calls this "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships" the *chronotope* (space-time), explaining its nature in the following way: "Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (84). Bakhtin further argues that the artistic spatio-temporal continuum (chronotope) dominant in the novel determines its spe-

Katarzyna Pisarska, PhD—Institute of English Studies at the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University; address for correspondence: Pl. Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej 4A, 20-031 Lublin; e-mail: katarzyna.pisarska@poczta.umcs.lublin.pl

cific generic traits. Moreover, the chronotope foregrounds the construction of the fictional world, influencing the artistic "image of man," i.e. literary character, which is "always intrinsically chronotopic" (85). Literary characters possess particular physical attributes and function in a particular space (social environment, geographical location); this space, however, is inherently fused with temporal indicators (historical epoch, cycle of seasons and calendar). As a result, the characters both embody particular spatio-temporal relationships (social milieu, *Zeitgeist*) and influence them through actions, which are, in turn, representative of values characteristic of a certain spatio-temporal order. Following from this is the representational function of the chronotope, namely its ability to give a concrete shape to abstractions like "philosophical and social generalizations, ideas, [or] analyses of cause and effect" (250).

According to Bakhtin, we can find a number of chronotopes in a single literary text—what he calls *major* chronotopes (e.g. those responsible for generic traits) contain within them numerous *minor* chronotopes (motifs like "the road," "the threshold," "the salon," "the provincial town," etc.), which in the Bakhtin scholarship are given the name of *motivic* chronotopes (see Bemong *et al*. 7–8). "Chronotopes are mutually inclusive, they co-exist, they may be interwoven with, replace or oppose one another, contradict one another or find themselves in ever more complex interrelationships," writes Bakhtin, pointing to the dialogic nature of such interactions (252).

Taking Bakhtin's ideas as the point of departure, this essay explores the chronotopic relationships in Jim Crace's novel *The Pesthouse* (2007), seeking to establish how the construction of space and time in the novel contributes to the emergence of a post-apocalyptic narrative which simultaneously questions and re-affirms the foundational assumptions of American society. I contend that the post-apocalyptic chronotope of the novel is comprised of two facets, one which I call dystopian and the other utopian, whose interplay continually undermines and renegotiates the apparently negative vision of Crace's America, to the point of reaffirming the utopian potential inscribed in the American myth of manifest destiny.

The aforementioned myth itself is a chronotopic hybrid, based on the liminal negotiation between the literal and the symbolic, which is already visible in John Winthrop's famous sermon delivered on board of the *Arbella*:

> The eyes of the world will be upon us. We are as a city upon a hill, raised up. You may think we're in the howling wilderness. You may think we're out be-

> yond the farthest beyond. But in fact, God's providence is such that as the latter days begin to unfold, this may indeed be the city, the new Jerusalem that's unfolding before not only our eyes but the eyes of the world. (105)

As the passage indicates, the apocalyptic rhetoric informing the Puritan notion of "a city on a hill" or "the new Jerusalem" which is to be established in America brings together the geographical space of the new continent and the symbolic space of the heavenly kingdom on earth. According to Winthrop, the Puritan community is a beacon of light in the wilderness: literally, in the midst of Indian savagery, and symbolically, being surrounded by sinners. Most of all, America is a land of possibility, which *may*, i.e. has a potential to fulfil the apocalyptic prophecy. America is a project which is realised in temporality; the religious assumptions of predestination and the dissemination of the light of faith translate into a more tangible quest, namely the nation's move to the West, which is connected with the belief in its own chosenness and civilizing mission. The move to the Frontier propelled over the centuries by such types of human endeavour as emigration, conquest, colonization, and settlement, has offered a perpetual and practical reassertion of the utopian possibilities incarnated in the American West, which Thomas Pynchon calls a "subjunctive land", a land of potentiality (see Kolbuszewska 185). However, the American myth also presupposes living in the apocalyptic time, which is itself contradictory because it goes forward into the future as well as back into the past. Namely, according to Revelation 21–22, New Jerusalem in many respects resembles the Garden of Eden, a correspondence which brings together the beginning and the end of time, as a result of which the Apocalypse connects ahistorically with the Genesis. Seen from this perspective, the future to which America is heading is already in the past: progressing technologically, scientifically, and geographically, America simultaneously looks back in search of a paradise.

The above observations of cultural nature create a useful context for the present textual analysis. They not only show America in its capacity of the spiritual *telos*, but also highlight the direction (from the East to the West) of the country's quest for the fulfilment of its utopian potential. In consequence, they help one notice the irony of Jim Crace's literary depiction of future America, and understand the extent to which *The Pesthouse* contests and deconstructs, at least on the surface, the myth of America as a city on a hill. Crace uses the motif of a future apocalypse in order to push America literally into the past, to its social and biological origins. He presents the

country as a dystopia which has regressed culturally and technologically to the Middle Ages as a result of some unnamed but clearly man-effected technological disaster. The wild and depopulated America in Crace's vision suffers from economic problems, and the marauding gangs of rustlers, who rob, rape, murder and catch people into slavery, threaten the last remnants of humanity and justice in the land. The novel's protagonists, Franklin Lopez, a young farmer from the Plains, and Margaret, the only surviving inhabitant of Ferrytown, join the peregrine crowd of dispossessed Americans in their journey to the east coast, in order to get on board foreign ships and sail to the prosperous lands on the other side of the ocean. The novel, therefore, reverses the American myth of manifest destiny, as the characters literally and metaphorically retrace the footsteps of their forefathers, travelling from the west to the east, hoping to set out for the Promised Land of Europe.

Lyman Tower Sargent defines the dystopia (or the negative utopia) as "a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which the reader lived" (9). Sargent's definition not only highlights particular spatio-temporal characteristics of the dystopian world but also foregrounds the existence of dialogue between the chronotope of the author's/reader's world and the chronotope of a particular work—a phenomenon addressed by Bakhtin in the "Concluding remarks" to his essay on the chronotope. Bakhtin notes that the interactions between chronotopes in a text are always dialogical. This dialogue, however, is situated outside the presented world; it enters the world of the author and the world of the reader/listener, both these worlds being chronotopic (252). Although there is a clear boundary between the outside historical world, in which the authors and readers function as real people, and the world presented in the text, the former creates the latter, not only by functioning as the source of material for representation/imitation, but through the practices of creation and reception (254).

Moreover, Sargent posits the author's intention and the reader's recognition of this intention as determinants of the dystopian quality of the fictional world. This points to the genre's firm anchoring in the empirical reality of both the creator and her/his audience, which Crace is also vocal about with reference to *The Pesthouse*. He admits that his dour literary vision of America has its roots, on the one hand, in the post-apocalyptic mood following the 9/11 attacks in New York and, on the other hand, in his profound disappointment with the decisions of George W. Bush's administration which led

to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The author's concern with the US military interventions in the Middle East (a contemporary facet of the nation's move towards the Frontier) eventually inspired a novel in which the country was demoted from the position of the world hegemon and, backward and benighted, became a victim of internal violence and external exploitation (Balée 521).

The dystopian chronotope of *The Pesthouse* is therefore the author's response in the negative to the empirical reality and the chronotope of extratextual America based on expansionism, technology and violence effected outside its own territory. Thus, it is also a critique of the American arrogant self-image of a "redeemer nation" (i.e. a city on a hill among the wilderness), which stems from the Puritan notion of chosenness as grafted on the secular imagination (cf. Caldwell 41, 131). Instead of exploring the utopian possibilities of the subjunctive America, Crace chooses to interrogate its dystopian potential and the consequences of the technological apocalypse the country brought upon itself.

In Crace's revisionist depiction, the dystopian chronotope is connected, first and foremost, with the mutli-faceted regression of America—civilizational as well as biological. The country is again an uncharted territory, deprived of the topographical markings immediately recognizable by the contemporary reader. The land is largely uninhabited and its humanity is organized into small scattered units of government typical of the pre-modern and pre-industrial era. The political geography is thus contingent on the villages and towns where authority belongs to consuls, while the main occupations of the inhabitants include farming and crafts, e.g. pottery or net-making, which, however, do not involve mechanization. Thinking of a shoe factory in the "historic north" of her town, Margaret cannot understand why in older times people were not capable of producing shoes at home (118), which points to the lack of specialization characteristic of modern economy. The Americans in Crace's novel have also lost the knowledge of metallurgy and the production of firearms, which once made possible the country's colonization and movement to the West.

The ruins encountered by Margaret and Franklin on the way to the coast speak of the greatness and eventual collapse of the American master project—its cities and its highways, whose development marked the nation's persistent historical movement westward. The American highway, representing freedom and civilizational drive, has been invariably connected with the myth of the frontier, exploration and settlement. In *The Pesthouse*, however, it becomes a route of exile whose flat surface speeds up the emigrants' trek

to the east. The rubble, ruin and waste, which represent the transience of human life and the fragility of social and political structures, are contrasted with the eternity incarnate in the land and the immutable power and continuity of nature, which reclaims its former territory. The land is shown in the process of returning to its primordial condition before it was colonized by men—it colonizes human creations instead (109).

The dystopian chronotope of *The Pesthouse* reflects the subversion of the original utopian vision of America's founders, according to which the continent was a place of freedom, fertility and opportunities for everyone. In the America of *The Pesthouse*, the inhabitants have to struggle against the infertility of the land, harsh seasons, famine, epidemics (e.g. the body flux), ruthless violence at the hands of gangs of marauders, rustlers and slave-hunters, or against failing trade. Franklin and his elder brother, Jackson, leave their farm on the Plains and head eastward believing that the life on the other side of the ocean will be "more prosperous," and "safer too," "with *opportunity*" (52), which subverts the rhetoric of utopian possibilities associated in the past with the American West.

The inhabitants' alienation from the land corresponds to their alienation from society, or what is left of it. As Franklin notices, in America "salvation was in short supply," and "the world was in such a state of anarchy and spite that it might allow nobody to escape" (86), which points to the country's transgression against the first principle on which it was established—moral and spiritual regeneration—which was to make it a city on a hill (cf. Slotkin 38-40). Sympathy and charity, which John Winthrop addressed in his famous sermon evoked above, are rarely found in the land. Trying to get milk for little Bella, an orphaned baby in her care, Margaret meets only with distrust and even open hostility from the farmers beyond the river crossing. The current abnormality in human relationships is measured by the yardstick of past normality, which can be noticed in Margaret's musings:

> If this had been a village in the America that Margaret and the Boses had been born into, she could have expected a smile, a little curtsy from the girl. Her father would have reached his door not with a stick but with the immediate offer of a bench to sit on and a cup to drink from. In small communities like this, if not in places like Ferrytown, where there were too many people for these observances to survive, passing guests could expect a dozen offers of a bed for the night. Neighbors would have competed 'for the honor' of having *her* dent in *their* mattress. Who could be more generous? Who could promise most? (142)

The third conditional of Margaret's thoughts underscores the failure of the American utopia in fulfilling its moral potential. In the dystopian space-time, the collapse of the land and its economy goes hand in hand with the moral degradation of its people: the rise of indifference and proclivity for the abuse and exploitation of others. In this way the dystopian chronotope also determines the image of man—either a victim or a victimiser, cunning, unfeeling, or downright barbarous, at its worst turning into a human scavenger and predator "who wouldn't emigrate until they picked the carcass of America clean" (11). Places like Tidewater, or Margaret's hometown, Ferrytown, thrive on the misfortune and despair of their emigrating countrymen, charging high prices for everything, cheating and practically robbing people of their possessions on the pretence of fair purchase. In Ferrytown the smallest effort and the poorest service can yield a fortune made on those who have to stop in town and then cross the river by ferry (22-3). Hospitality, which is a business and not an expression of charity, extends only to those who can pay their bills. Everyone else ends up outside the palisade.

Within the limits of the dystopian chronotope, a major role is played by the motivic chronotope of the road, in which the linear movement eastwards is marked by seasonal hardships and the weakening of the human body over time. Outside the "season of migration" (12), the time of the year in which the conditions are the most favourable for a journey to the coast, space impedes movement, making the journey "more hazardous and then impossible" (8). Franklin's trek from the Plains makes his body fail bit by bit. However, those who are on the road must keep moving—once you stop you are dead, as noted by Franklin's elder brother, Jackson (11). The journey does not prove much easier for those who travel with wagons, either. Their progress is slowed down and impeded by elements of space like bumpy roads or rivers, which seem to bear ill-will towards humans and revel in their hardships. As Franklin observes, "[a] river's always pleased to have the opportunity to dismantle a wagon, to tear it into planks and carry it away in bits, together with its wagoner" (13).

In *The Pesthouse*, death comes from the road, which represents the openness of space and the unknown. The towns on the emigration route, like Ferrytown, are palisaded, or, like Tidewater, equipped with double sets of defensive walls, for protection. Within the walls, the open, linear and progressive chronotope of the road is suspended and gives way to a closed space organized around the cycle of arrivals and departures, daily work and communal meals, where public time is measured by the passing of seasons and gen-

erations. Despite the protective measures, however, the road breaches the closed space in the form of diseases, which "like bats and birds, were visible only too late, when the damage had been done" (23).

Moreover, the road and whatever comes from it are unpredictable—the inhabitants of Ferrytown rely on a hidden bridge in case they have to flee, as nobody can say "on what side of the river safety will prefer to live next season" (113).

The sinister aspect of American reality is intensified when contrasted with the utopian space-time represented by the lands beyond the sea, i.e. Europe, from which, ironically, the ancestors of the present Americans came to the new continent in search of a better world. In *The Pesthouse*, however, the European utopia is never presented or described by a reliable witness. Instead, the Far Shores, as the land is poetically called, is imaginatively constructed in opposition to the American dystopia, which can be noticed in Margaret's vision of her and Franklin's life in the new country, the land of the free (234–35). The stories about the other shore echo similar stories of America once recounted to the dispossessed of Europe about the general availability of land and its fertility (52). In the emigrants' belief, the Far Shores will also be free of disease and suffering (83). Others paint Europe as a Land of Cockaigne, where "[h]ogs run through the woods ready-roasted with forks sticking out of them" (106). Such stories remain unverified, as the journey to Europe is a one-way ticket and nobody has ever returned from there. However, judging by the ruthless, almost Nazi, methods of selection of the emigrants by foreign crews, Europe is far from an ideal place coveted by the travellers. As such the utopia imagined by Franklin and Margaret is a no-place (ou-topos) rather than a good place (eu-topos), as it probably does not exist.

According to Chris Ferns,

> [u]nlike the traditional utopia, dystopian fiction posits a society which—however outlandish—is clearly extrapolated from that which exists. Where utopian fiction stresses the *difference* of the society it depicts, and rarely indicates *how* such an alternative might be created, the dystopian writer presents the nightmare future as a possible destination of present society, as if dystopia were no more than a logical conclusion derived from the premises of the existing order, and implies that it might very well come about unless something is done to stop it. (107)

Accordingly, the novel's dystopian chronotope allows Crace to address a number of alarming contemporary issues whose consequences can be visited

on extra-textual America in the form of a future nightmare, an interrelationship which the characters cannot comprehend but which is immediately detectable for the reader. Apart from the warning against technological development and abuse of weapons, which apparently led to the destruction of the old way of life and tumbled America into barbarity, *The Pesthouse* offers an apparent critique of aggressive capitalism and individualism fostered by the governments of the US since the 1980s, phenomena which contradict the ideas of spiritual rebirth, communality/democracy and Christian charity upon which America was founded. One of the issues addressed in the novel is the already mentioned commodification of humanity, as the emigrants are worth, both to their fellow-countrymen and to other nations, only as much as they can pay or what skill they have to offer, which, ironically, reflects the US emigration policy and the law of supply and demand. Yet another subject of critique is the idea of self-aggrandizement and immediate gratification leading to egoism and disruption of archetypal bonds. In the novel, the Dreams of Leaving for the European Promised Land disrupt the already weakened social fabric of America as they favour individualism as opposed to the communal spirit. Franklin's elder brother, Jackson, sees his limping younger sibling as a "constraint" in his journey east and he contemplates leaving Franklin behind and setting out for the sea "unencumbered" (35). The dreams separate families, take children from their parents, make husbands abandon their wives. The fever of emigration wreaks havoc in the smallest social units, thus leading to the disintegration of entire communities and the aggravation of the dystopian reality.

Within the dystopian space-time, Crace also disinters demons which lie buried in American consciousness: slavery, violence, lawlessness and the exploitation of man and land, which accompanied the formation of the United States. Richard Slotkin describes this process as follows:

> The antimythologists of the American Age of Reason believed in the imminence of a rational republic of yeomen farmers and enlightened leaders, living amicably in the light of natural law and the Constitution. They were thereby left unprepared when the Jeffersonian republic was overcome by the Jacksonian Democracy of the western man-on-the-make, the speculator, and the wildcat banker; when racist irrationalism and a falsely conceived economics prolonged and intensified slavery in the teeth of American democratic idealism […]. (5)

The Pesthouse interrogates the ideological clash mentioned above in the relationship of the two brothers, Franklin, the name echoing Benjamin

Franklin, one of America's Founding Fathers from the time of the Enlightenment, and Jackson, whose name calls to mind President Andrew Jackson. Whereas the younger brother is characterised by innocence and his dream is to return to his farm in the Plains, his mother and the life of simple values, Jackson displays the voracious lust for success and self-gratification, even if this should be achieved over his brother's dead body. It is only fair that it is the Captain Chief, a rustler leader, who later appropriates Jackson's goatskin coat, a gift of love from Jackson's mother, which is too large for such a short man. It brings into focus the moral inferiority of the new Americans, trading their fellow-countrymen to quarry barons and gang masters, who are future counterparts of aggressive capitalists, conmen and financiers of the nineteenth-century American West. Therefore, the dystopian chronotope of *The Pesthouse*, which brings together the future and the past, underscores the violent underpinnings of the American statehood, and turns the glorious myth of the Frontier inside out.

However, the dystopian chronotope in *The Pesthouse* finds a counter-chronotope, as the plight of humanity in the new Middle Ages (an epoch which the empirical America has never experienced historically) is contrasted by the characters' utopian imaginings connected with the past, i.e. the Golden Age of America "all those grandpas ago" (119). Since there are no historical records, no libraries or written sources which can be used as verifiable evidence (literacy, it will be remembered, in Margaret and Franklin's America is non-existent), the only way for the characters to access the "prehistory" of the land is through legends and myths of the lost civilization which are passed from generation to generation. The legendary America is

> a land of profusion, safe from human predators, snake-free, and welcoming beyond the hog and hominy of this raw place, a place described by so many of their grandparents in words they learned from *their* grandparents, where the encouragements held out to strangers were a good climate, fertile soil, wholesome air and water, plenty of provisions, good pay for labor, kind neighbors, good laws, a free government and a hearty welcome. (42)

The welfare associated with the ancient country is displaced into the future in the form of Margaret's treasure box. It contains old coins with the images of American presidents, to which Margaret ascribes the function of talismans (the material value of the cents is thus replaced by the metaphysical one). Among them there is a one-cent coin with the visage of President Lincoln, whose achievements and historical role are long forgotten. Instead,

he is treated as a mythical patriarch who will deliver his America at the end of time (27) (cf. Edwards 770–71).

The Pesthouse, moreover, depicts two intentional communities on American soil whose aim is apparently eutopian, thus undermining the dominant dystopian space-time (cf. Edwards 774). The first one is the Ark, "an odd but organized" community of the Finger Baptists, who literally do not lift a finger, believing that the "hands do Devil's work" (192). Everyone who needs shelter and food and is willing to work and live in peace can find refuge within the palisaded establishment on condition that they give away all metal things in their possession. The latter are buried in the soil and thus returned to the earth from which they were torn out to be "the cause of greed and war" (184). The Ark, separated from the morally corrupt outside world, is a place of respite on the road, offering Margaret and other homeless women with kids refuge and security in wintertime. Despite detectable irony in the presentation of its religious "elite," the Ark nonetheless spatializes the values of brotherhood and cooperation, where "warmth and neighborliness replace avarice, jealousy, and competition" (199). The chronotopes of the Ark and the outside world of emigration differ considerably. Whereas the latter is horizontal and eastward-bound, the former is vertical and heaven-oriented, and the virtues of honesty, generosity, sobriety and industriousness observed in the community work towards the person's moral edification and reformation, and, by extension, their attainment of Paradise.

Another intentional community of *The Pesthouse* in which we can find traces of eutopia is the colony of the already-mentioned abandoned wives, i.e. women who had to stay behind while their husbands and grown-up kids took passage to the east. The wives have to resort to prostitution in order to support themselves, and after joining the sisterhood one has to work like the rest and "do [her] share" (272). Providing shelter for single mothers and their under-age children, the gender-specific community is characterised by "sociable warmth" (255) and empathy for female suffering. However, in the way of living it offers it is far from ideal. Created out of necessity and based on the sexual exploitation of its members, even though consensual, the female community is haunted by melancholy, their unity being dependent on the shared sense of exclusion from the overseas dream. Instead of hope for a better future, they are resigned to their fate and aimless existence without men (256-57). However, in the world in which egoism and violence have replaced charity and hospitality, the female community still embodies the values that made America.

The utopian chronotope is inextricably linked with the chronotope of the idyll, which places the hope for the reconstruction of the degraded country in the rhetoric of the land, home and family. The home as the space of sociality is represented by the eponymous Pesthouse, a crumbling soddy on a hill in the forest above Ferrytown, which is initially the place for the diseased and rejected, the solitary refuge for Margaret, who suffers from the body flux and waits for a certain death. Paradoxically, in the course of the novel, space-time of the Pesthouse becomes a metaphor for safety, togetherness, genuine care, charity, love and fellowship. Hiding from the rapists with little Bella, Margaret thinks about the Pesthouse as "[h]er place of greater safety" (166), where she could die as an old woman, surrounded by many familiar faces—the people she loved and who loved her in return (166).[1] The chronotope of the Pesthouse is also a liminal one, in which death and life become inseparable. The Pesthouse is a house of disease but it is also a beacon in the wilderness, "strengthened by an outer wall of boulders, dry built and sturdy" (25), protecting the two characters from the silent death which sweeps through the valley below. Instead, it offers them a new life, thus reflecting in a microcosm the apocalyptic space-time of the American myth of a city on a hill, which connects the end with the beginning, looking at once forward and into the past.

In her vision of the "place of greater safety," Margaret questions the existence of the Promised Land outside America (166). The same doubts are voiced by Franklin, who "even if he could persuade himself that there was Paradise at the far end of the sea—was no longer convinced that it was worth the journey" (247). The prospect of the distant and unknown European paradise loses its allure when compared with the practical possibilities of the American dystopia, which is harsh and unforgiving but also familiar, and lends itself to improvement. Having experienced the hardships of the journey to the east (hunger, cold, violence and slavery), and having learnt about the ruthless policy of emigration, Franklin can look "more fondly on the land than he had done for months" (247), spinning the fantasy of its conquest and settlement, and casting himself in the role of an early American farmer and a brave pioneer hero in the midst of agrarian bliss and plenitude:

> Remove the skin of sand and he'd find fertile earth. He was certain he could coax a little corn from it, despite the salt and wind. He had the horses. He

[1] Compare Bakhtin's observations on the chronotope of the idyll (225).

> could make a plow. In time, he'd have some chickens and a cow, a pair of goats. Milk, eggs and meat to feed the family. He'd build a kitchen garden, protected from the wind by logs and fences, for pumpkins, turnips, sugar peas, perhaps some salad greens. And what they couldn't eat, they'd sell or trade or butcher and smoke for winter. (247)

The idyllic notion of the connection of human life with the cycle of nature which manifests itself in the dynamics of growth and harvest envisaged by Franklin, marks the process of the character's reconsideration of his and Margaret's place in their native land. The romantic reunion of the lovers and their idyllic longings give rise to the reversal of their quest for a better life in the direction of home, which is the American West, "a land associated in American tradition with the Garden of Eden, or a pre-lapsarian site of as yet unrealized possibilities of metaphysical choices" (Kolbuszewska 205). The Frontier becomes a goal again, the dystopian road of exile turns into the utopian road of homecoming and regeneration—social, biological and moral. The chronotope of the novel, as well as the American myth, comes full circle.[2]

In the reversed/revised utopian chronotope the key role is played by the figure of mother Lopez (Franklin's mother), an overt allegory of America. In *The Pesthouse* motherhood is a setback which prevents a person from pursuing her dreams, which Margaret notices after listening to the stories of the abandoned wives, who had to bid farewell to their departing families but could not follow them. Similarly, Franklin's mother, too old and weak to head for the coast and abandoned by her sons in the decrepit farm in the West, is doomed to see her solitary end just as America is being deserted by her children. Already at the beginning of the novel, Franklin realizes that he has failed in his filial duty leaving his Ma behind (91). The characters' journey west is thus a return to the spirit and values of old America and the utopian possibilities incarnate in the American myth—prosperity, equality and liberty, to which the ocean in the East is "an obstacle" rather than "a route" (249). "His dream was not the future but the past" (249), realizes Franklin, verbalizing the contradictory dynamic of the American chronotope. The fulfilment of this dream involves the characters' journey west and up the hill, to the Pesthouse, which is the source of their new community (the family) (cf. Edwards 775–76). It is also "a place of remedy and recovery" (306) of the

[2] Caroline Edwards argues that "[Franklin and Margaret's] return west—full-circle in both a literal sense and in terms of the familiar American myth of manifest destiny—to the hill on which the Pesthouse stands at the end of the novel is a return home" (773).

American dream and identity, which is underscored by the characters' finding of Margaret's cedar box with the talismans of old America. In the post-apocalyptic times a soddy on a hill is as good as an entire city but it is only the beginning of "the hopes and promises, […] the thickness and substances that used to be America and would be theirs" (309).

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In his essay on Thomas Pynchon's *Vineland*, another novel discussing America's condition, James Berger rejects nostalgia as an idealization of the past in compliance with the prevailing structures of authority, instead defining it as "a form of cultural transmission that can shift in its political and historical purposes, and thus bears a more complex and, potentially, more productive relation to the past" than is commonly believed (par. 2). This type of nostalgia involves "the traumatic return of the past into the present" which is simultaneously accompanied by the "utopian, or revelatory, moment." The convergence of the traumatic and utopian moments, as Berger argues, creates an opportunity to revise past wrongs and errors, and revise the history of oppression and aggression (par. 5).

A similar nostalgic dialectic underlies the post-apocalyptic chronotope of *The Pesthouse*. The roots of trauma should be traced back to the distortion of the country's primary moral ideal, which, as we may infer from occasional textual hints as well as from the author's intention, developed into the arrogance of power and culminated in a technological/military disaster. The utopian moments, on the other hand, evoke the patterns of communal existence which were inscribed in the American foundational ideal but never truly realized. The vision of America as a new Jerusalem, a city on a hill, recurs in *The Pesthouse* in legends and in the characters' dreams, and most of all in the instances of charity, goodwill and love, which are like beacons of hope in the post-apocalyptic wilderness. In consequence, though critical of the American myth, as well as its past and current distortions, Crace does not seem to question its ultimate viability.

As such, *The Pesthouse* seems to represent the genre of the critical dystopia which emerged in the 1980s and 90s as "a significant retrieval and refunctioning of the most progressive possibilities inherent in dystopian narrative" (Moylan 188). According to Moylan, the new self-reflexive texts "represent a creative move that is both a continuation of the long dystopian tradition and a distinctive new intervention" (188). Quoting Baccolini's definition, Moylan

asserts the new genre's "open-endedness" and the presence of "the utopian impulse *within* the work" (188-89). Thus, despite the warning and anti-utopian pessimism, critical dystopias, in Moylan's words, "refuse to allow the utopian tendency to be overshadowed by its anti-utopian nemesis" (196).[3]

Paradoxically, by stripping America of its greatness and pushing it into the past, Crace enables it to recover its utopian vision and creates a possibility, if only in fictional terms, for the country to fulfil its apocalyptic destiny. Through the circular nature of the novel's chronotope, Crace at once destroys and reconstructs the American myth in compliance with its initial assumptions so that the wasteland of modernity can offer regeneration, and Franklin and Margaret can settle down in a new Eden. Eventually, Crace's America, which is a house of illness, begins its mythical recovery as a subjunctive space of ever realizable possibilities. It is a failed utopia, it is a dystopia, but it remains hopeful all the same.

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[3] The generic characteristics of the critical dystopia are probably best encapsulated by Sargent's definition, according to which the critical dystopia is "a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as worse than contemporary society but that normally includes at least one eutopian enclave or holds out hope that the dystopia can be overcome and replaced with a eutopia" (qtd in Moylan 195). This definition underpins my view of the *Pesthouse* as a critical dystopia, which differs from Caroline Edwards's postulates that *The Pesthouse* is a critical utopia (774-76).

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AMERYKA PRZ(Y/E)SZŁOŚCI: CHRONOTOP POSTAPOKALIPTYCZNY W POWIEŚCI *THE PESTHOUSE* JIMA CRACE'A

Streszczenie

Artykuł analizuje związki czasoprzestrzenne w powieści współczesnego brytyjskiego pisarza Jima Crace'a (1946–) *The Pesthouse* (2007) w oparciu o ustalenia metodologiczne Michaiła Bachtina dotyczące literackiego chronotopu. Autorka wychodzi z założenia, że dominujący w powieści chronotop postapokaliptyczny opiera się na dynamicznej relacji dwóch chronotopów gatunkowych – utopijnego i dystopijnego – które jednocześnie dekonstruują i odbudowują amerykański mit Objawionego Przeznaczenia. Topos „miasta na górze", łączący przeszłość i przyszłość Ameryki jako Edenu i Nowej Jerozolimy, w powieści Crace'a przyjmuje postać tytułowego domu zarazy (pesthouse), miejsca choroby i ozdrowienia bohaterki powieści, jak również, w podtekście, odrodzenia zdegenerowanej wizji amerykańskiej utopii. Ostatecznie, jak wnioskuje autorka, *The Pesthouse* jest wyrazem rewizjonistycznej nostalgii (w rozumieniu Jamesa Bergera), w której traumatycznej ingerencji przeszłości w teraźniejszość towarzyszy utopijny impuls.

Słowa kluczowe: Jim Crace, chronotop, utopia, dystopia.