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The Image of an Island in Seven Days by Robert Graves

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## ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE (projektu, uměleckého díla, uměleckého výkonu)

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### Zásady pro vypracování

Autorka se ve své práci zaměří na méně známé dílo *Seven Days* britského autora Roberta Gravesa. Soustředit se bude zejména na otázky poetiky místa a literárního žánru. Na základě sekundární literatury v úvodu načrtne nejčastější aspekty toposu ostrova a dystopického románu. Zdůrazní zejména ty rysy, které sdílí – např. atributy jinakosti a autonomie. Na tomto základě provede detailní analýzu zvoleného Gravesova díla v kontextu další prózy, ve které se ostrov vyskytuje jako hlavní místo děje (*W. Golding, J. Wyndham, aj.*). Cílem je zmapovat Gravesovo využití tradičních rysů ostrovní krajiny pro stavbu dystopického románu. Práci završí závěrečná kapitola, která z dílčích úsudků vyvodí obecnější závěry.

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## ANNOTATION

This bachelor thesis deals with the portrayal of the island in the novel *Seven Days in New Crete* (1949) by Robert Graves. The theoretical part deals with the terms closely related with the thesis and highlight important island themes in literature which are then used for the analytical part. The core part of this thesis is to analyze the island topos in the novel and compare it with the chosen island literature.

## KEY WORDS

island, utopia, dystopia, topos, Graves, place

## NÁZEV PRÁCE

Zobrazení ostrova v díle *Seven Days* Roberta Gravesa

## ANOTACE

Bakalářská práce se zabývá zobrazením toposu ostrova v románu *Seven Days in New Crete* (1949) Roberta Gravesa. Teoretická část se zabývá termíny úzce souvisejícími s prací spolu s častými ostrovními motivy, které se vyskytují v literatuře tvoří podklad pro analytickou část. Jádrem celé práce je analýza ostrovního toposu ve výše zmíněném románu a jeho porovnání s vybranou ostrovní literaturou.

## KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

ostrov, utopie, dystopie, topos, Graves, místo

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## INTRODUCTION

As both real and imaginative places, islands have been a fascinating phenomenon throughout human history. People imagined islands as specific, and often magical places, and plenty of ideas about them rose in the human imagination.<sup>1</sup> This interest naturally did not last only in an imaginative realm, but as humanity progressed (mainly technologically), humans were soon able to examine islands physically. People not only dreamed about life on an island – but they also, at times, wanted to experience it – as seen, for instance, in the numerous discovery expeditions in the European Age of Discovery.<sup>2</sup> Personal experience is regarded as an essential practice to understand islands properly since people who only always thought or heard about islands often tend to misinterpret, albeit probably unintentionally, the actual reality of island life. As noted by Mareš, the perception of islands dramatically differs from person to person, the most significant difference being the individual's affiliation to the land – people living (and being born) on islands tend to view them in different ways than mainlanders do, often feeling some kind of a “belonging” both physically and mentally.<sup>3</sup>

“Islands are sites of innovative conceptualizations, whether of nature or human enterprise, whether virtual or real”<sup>4</sup> – this is how Godfrey Baldacchino introduces islands in the editorial of the first volume of the *Island Studies Journal*. Both claims from contemporary scholars focused on the real facts about islands, and the numerous ideations confirm the reality of these particular places' influence on humans throughout history. One of the pieces of evidence for this sustained (and now even growing)<sup>5</sup> interest in islands can be the fact that for more than fifteen years now, the island enthusiasts have contributed with their ideas to the *Island Studies Journal* – “a peer-reviewed academic journal dedicated to the interdisciplinary study of islands, archipelagos, and the waters that surround and connect them.”<sup>6</sup> The plentiful of academic articles served as an affluent source of a considerable knowledge about the island problematic for this paper – although it tends to focus more about the reality of islands than the island topos, a number of papers concerning the island image in literature were presented as well.

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<sup>1</sup>Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1974), 118.

<sup>2</sup>Godfrey Baldacchino, “The Lure of the Island: A spatial analysis of power relations,” *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures* 1, no. 2 (December 2012): 56. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.imic.2012.11.003>.

<sup>3</sup>Martin Mareš, “The Island Topos in Web by John Wyndham,” (Bachelor Thesis, Pardubice University in Pardubice, 2017), 8.

<sup>4</sup>Godfrey Baldacchino, “Islands, Island Studies, *Island Studies Journal*,” *Island Studies Journal* 1, no. 1 (2006): 3. <https://doi.org/10.24043/isj.185>.

<sup>5</sup>Baldacchino, “Islands,” 3.

<sup>6</sup>“*Island Studies Journal* | *Island Studies*,” *Island Studies*, accessed January 12, 2021, <https://www.islandstudies.ca/>.



Despite humanity's interest in the physical aspect of islands being significant, according to Tuan, the true importance of islands is ultimately placed in the role they hold in our imagination.<sup>7</sup> Islands can certainly be characterized by objective specifics – the most general, well-known one is that they are secluded lands bounded by the sea. But when looking closer at the island problematic, it becomes obvious that there is more to islands than meets the eye. As Baldacchino mentions, “an island cannot be naïvely understood in its strict material, reified form,” and that it is sometimes very difficult, perhaps impossible to differentiate its materiality from its metaphorical meanings.<sup>8</sup> According to Tuan, the island belongs to the four natural environments that had a prominent influence on people's ideas of the perfect world – together with the forest, the shore, and the valley.<sup>9</sup>

Humanity's interest in islands provides a broad history, consisting of countless legends from all around the world, however, it was eventually the Western world in which the imaginary ideas about islands grew the most prominently.<sup>10</sup> This fascination is often presented as a considerably positive, or at least neutral, one, although this fairly recent endearment, according to Berg, still continues to be stained by negative undertones and used to be preceded by indifference and repulsion.<sup>11</sup> She also concludes that, rather than geographical units, islands serve as significant metaphors for humans to reflect their own desires; their meaning never being hard fixed or constant, and changing together alongside humanity.<sup>12</sup>

Island imagination thus naturally manifested itself within the minds of dozens of creators, its beginnings traced back to ancient Greece with *Odyssey* by Homer<sup>13</sup> and the legend of the Island of the Blessed sharing similarities with the Celtic legend, later serving as a pagan foundation for medieval legends in the Christian Ireland.<sup>14</sup><sup>14</sup> Around the European age of Discovery, the island served as a place, seen by mainlanders, where exoticism awaited, where innocent and native people lived.<sup>15</sup> Following this notion and colonial expansion, the so-called ‘Robinsonades’ (named after the famous novel *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe) started to gain popularity, celebrating heroic voyages and self-sufficiency even in unfavorable circumstances the islands render.<sup>16</sup> Lastly, in modern times, islands became sites for vacations and traveling adventures, relaxation or self-discovery. People who are tired of their previous lives often seek some kind of change or new experience which they hope they may find on island.

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<sup>7</sup>Tuan, *Topophilia*, 118.

<sup>8</sup>Baldacchino, “The Lure of the Island,” 57.

<sup>9</sup>Baldacchino, “The Lure of the Island,” 55.

<sup>10</sup>Tuan, *Topophilia*, 118.

<sup>11</sup>Ina Berg, “Island Attractions? Travel Writing on the Cyclades from the Middle Ages Until the Modern Day,” *Mediterranean Studies* 20, no. 1 (2012): 71. <https://doi.org/10.5325/mediterraneanstu.20.1.0071>.

<sup>12</sup>Berg, “Island Attractions?,” 82.

<sup>13</sup>Baldacchino, “The Lure of the Island,” 56.

<sup>14</sup>Tuan, *Topophilia*, 118–119.

<sup>15</sup>Baldacchino, “The Lure of the Island,” 56.

<sup>16</sup>Baldacchino, “The Lure of the Island,” 56.

This thesis discusses various island motives in the novel *Seven Days in New Crete* (1949), also known as *Watch the North Wind Rise*, by the British poet and novelist Robert von Ranke Graves. The main character of the novel Edward Venn–Thomas, a poet living in the mid–20th century, is mysteriously transported in time to a place called New Crete by the magical powers of its inhabitants. The main aim of this paper is to analyze the story in more detail regarding mainly the island topos together with its utopic themes, as well as to compare it to the other influential novels that also deal with utopia, dystopia, or islands.

In the first part of the paper, essential terms (namely topos, utopia and dystopia) are analyzed and explained for the analytical part to be better understood. Utopian fictions use the island environment as their setting often (or, alternatively, a place possessing some type of island-like qualities – an insularity and some type of a boundary) and since *Seven Days in New Crete* is regarded as a utopian novel, a brief reflection on the term is due. Frequently used island motives are then introduced and are worked with later in the analytical part, where the novel itself is analyzed on the basis of these motives and contrasted with other literary works in which the island themes appear. The primal focus concerns the attributes such as insularity, autonomy and stagnation, as well as mythical themes and magical powers. Other significant themes apparent in the world of New Crete will then be highlighted and contrasted in context of other literary works and a brief speculation in the context of today's world view will be discussed. The findings and ideas are subsequently summarized in the last part of the thesis and more general conclusions are drawn.

## THE ISLAND THEMES, TOPOS, UTOPIA AND DYSTOPIA

Prior to the analysis of the novel itself, an essential terminology needs to be introduced and explained further for more clear orientation in the next parts of the thesis. The terms topos, utopia and dystopia are discussed before selecting several island motives most relevant to the portrayal of the New Cretan settings. Those will then be worked with in the analytical part of the paper when analyzing Grave's work. Both the terms utopia and dystopia are not only relevant to the novel itself, but also due to the fact they generally appear on islands or use the island topos for their setting – that is why special attention is also paid to their proper definition.

The term topos (plural, topoi) is derived from the Greek word topos (τόπος) which literally means place, region, or space.<sup>17</sup> To determine a precise definition of the term topos is slightly problematic since ambiguous and often conflicting definitions of the term exist – used within the writings on rhetoric, philosophy and literature, thus diverse interpretations raised.<sup>18</sup> According to Otakar Slanař, “despite a certain obviousness with which the term is generally used, we do not have a clear idea about its meaning and scope.”<sup>19</sup> He then propose that “the term topos is, even today, used rather automatically, maybe even subconsciously, and under which we sort everything that has in literature [...] the character of generally used and known, adopted by generations of writers, in short, often reoccurring.”<sup>20</sup> Jon Hesk claims that most of the modern critics regard the term topos as “rhetorical strategy with specific content which recurs across the corpus of speeches.”<sup>21</sup> The *Oxford Advanced Dictionary* offers the definition of “a traditional subject or idea in literature.”<sup>22</sup>

The term topos could be compared with another, better known and generally familiar term archetype. These words are not entirely interchangeable, albeit sharing various similarities and are often used as synonyms.<sup>23</sup> Since this thesis regards literary problematic, the term topos is thus more suitable to use than the term archetype, albeit the latter term is certainly more approachable and comprehensive to the general reader and as already mentioned, proposes similar characteristics and serves complementary purposes. Other argument for the use of the term topos is the obvious closer

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<sup>17</sup>“Topos (n.),” Etymology, accessed March 20, 2021, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/topos>.

<sup>18</sup>Jon Hesk, “Despisers of the Commonplace: Meta-topoi and Para-topoi in Attic Oratory,” *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 25, no. 4 (Autumn 2007): 362.

<sup>19</sup>Oskar Slanař, *Dvory a residence ve středověku* (Praha, 2006), 273. My translation („navzdory samozřejmosti, se kterou tento pojem užíváme, nemáme zcela přesnou představu o jeho významu a rozsahu.“)

<sup>20</sup>Slanař, “Dvory”, 273. My translation („označení topos je i v současnosti užíváno spíše automaticky, možná takřka podvědomě, kdy pod jeho hlavičku řadíme vše, co má v rámci literatury [...] charakter obecně užívaného a známého, přejímaného celými generacemi spisovatelů, zkrátka často se opakujícího.“)

<sup>21</sup>Hesk, “Despisers,” 363.

<sup>22</sup>Albert Sidney Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, eds. Joanna Turnbull et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1576.

<sup>23</sup>Kamila Selby, “Island Topos in John Fowles' *The Magus*.” (Bachelor Thesis, Pardubice University in Pardubice, 2014), 11.

relation with places. Despite this decision, to mention the term archetype seems convenient as an alternative and more approachable definition regarding general audience.

Now that the term *topos* was clarified, the most significant *topoi* regarding islands will be introduced and further explained. The portrayal of these in Grave's work will be then discussed in the analytical chapter.

Insularity is perhaps the most typical feature attributed to islands, which is obvious, given its physical properties. This attribute, however, is associated with rather negative connotations.<sup>24</sup> The dominant Western conception of islands often likes to compare island with its mainland counterpart – there, island is seen as a “peripheral, secondary to or derived from the continent.” This view also influences the idea of the island as “a-historical, disconnected from change and exchange and representing an “original” stage.”<sup>25</sup> According to Tuan, island symbolizes an innocence and bliss by being separated from the ills of the continent by the sea.<sup>26</sup> Yet Dautel and Schödel argue that this is a rather outdated image since contemporary literature offers different conceptions of islands as a places with their own openness and changeability.<sup>27</sup> Kathrin Schödel and Katrin Dautel also claim that recent island discourses are constantly re-negotiated – “ranging from traditional constructs of the insular as spaces of isolation and backwardness to concepts of islands as places of interconnectedness and fluidity.”<sup>28</sup> They propose that the rigid colonialist island imaginings are challenged by the constantly re-created space with changing boundaries, making the island rather dynamic construction – same as the real changeability of the border between land and sea.<sup>29</sup>

Andreas also points out that in real life, islands are almost exclusively anything but isolated, despite serving as a symbol for isolation.<sup>30</sup> He argues they often maintain strong reciprocal relationships with neighboring islands. The phenomenon of archipelagos display engaging ambivalence of islands – being both autonomous and part of a larger unity, suggesting interconnectedness contrary to the traditional insularity *topos*.<sup>31</sup> The aspect of insularity is also evident in the fact island basically never being the place from which the main character of a story comes from, it's the other way around – he arrives, discovers and travels, consequently resulting in unexpected “encounter with an ‘other’ space.”<sup>32</sup> This often overshadows the perspective of islanders,

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<sup>24</sup>Godfrey Baldacchino, “The Coming of Age of Island Studies,” *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 95, no. 3 (2004): 272. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9663.2004.00307.x>.

<sup>25</sup>Katrin Dautel and Kathrin Schödel, “Island Fictions and Metaphors in Contemporary Literature,” *Island Studies Journal* 12, no. 2 (2017): 230. <https://doi.org/10.24043/isj.40>.

<sup>26</sup>Tuan, *Topophilia*, 118.

<sup>27</sup>Dautel and Schödel, “Island Fictions,” 232.

<sup>28</sup>Dautel and Schödel, “Island Fictions,” 229.

<sup>29</sup>Dautel and Schödel, “Island Fictions,” 232.

<sup>30</sup>Marcus Andreas, “Must Utopia Be an Island? Positioning an Ecovillage within Its Region,” *Social Sciences Directory* 2, no. 4 (2013): 10. [https://doi.org/10.7563/ssd\\_02\\_04\\_02](https://doi.org/10.7563/ssd_02_04_02).

<sup>31</sup>Dautel and Schödel, “Island Fictions,” 233.

<sup>32</sup>Dautel and Schödel, “Island Fictions,” 232.

making it a place needing to be “civilized.”<sup>33</sup> Baldacchino assumes the semantic connotation of separation and backwardness that the word insularity evokes is to blame.<sup>34</sup>

According to Hay, islands “lend themselves to sophisticated fantasy and mythology,” given their “powerful place in modern Western imagination.”<sup>35</sup> He also mentions the topoi of both island as a paradise and prison are frequent used, although being criticized for being merely paradigms caused by this continental notion.<sup>36</sup> The idea of the island as a paradise and blessed place held its place thoroughly – it was cherished by Celts as well as Christians and was popularized during medieval times in Europe.<sup>37</sup> A modern take on the idea of island-like paradise in a real world, the Eco-villages, try to realize “a place of hope in a world of destructive capitalism.”<sup>38</sup>

Likewise the island efficiently serves as a place of supernatural and fantastical – literary exotic islands of the Irish immrama were home for ant-like creatures or demons racing on demonic horses.<sup>39</sup>

Islands tend to be characterized by its tendency for autonomy, albeit a pure autonomy is not always completely practicable.<sup>40</sup> Islanders are able to work with their limited spacial framework or solving the potential issue of crucial commodities missing in their land by allying with neighborhood territories and mutual exchange of necessities,<sup>41</sup> yet mostly maintaining their sovereignty. According to Dautel and Schödel, this preference of autonomy reflects the human longing for liberty and biological independence.<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless, in the same way islands often cannot be fully self-sufficient, humans are in the same manner linked with other entities and surrounding environment. Islands as well as humans are “part of an interconnected process of becoming rather than being self-enclosed, stable entity.”<sup>43</sup> Lastly, the island topos of autonomous subject can be also applied to the almost exclusive trend of a male traveler in island fictions out to discover or colonize islands which are symbolically homes of mythical or desirable women that are to be conquered. This notion creates rather objectifying and restricted pattern that is still prevalent and considerably limiting the island narrative into a sexist cliché.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Dautel and Schödel, “Island Fictions,” 232.

<sup>34</sup>Baldacchino, “The Coming,” 272.

<sup>35</sup>Pete Hay, “A Phenomenology of Islands,” *Island Studies Journal* 1, no. 1 (2006): 20–2.  
<https://doi.org/10.24043/isj.186>.

<sup>36</sup>Hay, “A Phenomenology,” 21.

<sup>37</sup>Tuan, *Topophilia*, 119.

<sup>38</sup>Andreas, “Must Utopia,” 10.

<sup>39</sup>Chet Van Duze, “From Odysseus to Robinson Crusoe: A Survey of Early Western Island Literature,” *Island Studies Journal* 1, no. 1 (2006): 146. <https://doi.org/10.24043/isj.192>.

<sup>40</sup>Dautel and Schödel, “Island Fictions,” 233.

<sup>41</sup>Hay, “A Phenomenology,” 23.

<sup>42</sup>Dautel and Schödel, “Island Fictions,” 233.

<sup>43</sup>Dautel and Schödel, “Island Fictions,” 233.

<sup>44</sup>Dautel and Schödel, “Island Fictions,” 233.

Baldacchino suggest islands serving as places of emotional offloading or religious pilgrimage<sup>45</sup>, which is what Graves essentially projects through the main character of Edward Venn-Thomas - rendering his inner struggles into the novel. The background regarding Graves' reasons for writing *Seven Days in New Crete* will be discussed in more detail in the next chapters as well as throughout analysis of the aforementioned, which together could be incorporated under the topos of island as place for personal reflection, self-hood and identity.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, the human tendency to nostalgia – indulging in the idea or image of the ‘good old times’, can be related to longing for pastness,<sup>47</sup> conserving of one's roots or remembering memories.

As mentioned earlier, islands were often imagined as paradises, thus it is not coincidental the origin of the word utopia is linked with island. Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), a satirical fiction about a society living in the eponymous island, gained its name due to a sensible use of word meanings and thus creating a unique neologism – “More resorted to two Greek words – ouk (that means not and was reduced to u) and topos (place), to which he added the suffix ia, indicating a place.”<sup>48</sup> The term eventually established itself as a common designation for the perfect places and ideals which society should aim for and has influenced not only literary fields but also socio-politic and philosophic discourses.<sup>49</sup> It is worth mentioning that the original purpose of the story of *Utopia* consisted of actual criticism of More's era which aimed to make the reader think about alternative ways of how society could possibly work (thus philosophical critique),<sup>50</sup> to contrast the current society with preferable image of one ‘so great it shall not possibly exist’. This idea served more as a satirical criticism rather than a means for storytelling, but interestingly enough it soon evolved from the ridiculous “too good to be true” to an actual concept people genuinely begun to believe could be attained. The idea of a perfect society, however, is not novel to More – the original utopic proposal traces back to Plato's *Republic*.<sup>51</sup>

Apart from utopia being an image of “a dream land with a flawless social establishment”<sup>52</sup> and “unrealizable idea and phantasy,”<sup>53</sup> the term had been subsequently established into a “prosaic genre of fantastic literature, in which ideal circumstances within an imaginary land are being depicted.”<sup>54</sup> Vieira remark that this narrative about “imaginary paradisaical places” became known

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<sup>45</sup> Baldacchino, “The Lure of the Island,” 55.

<sup>46</sup> David Lowenthal, “Islands, Lovers, and Others,” *Geographical Review* 97, no. 2 (January 2007): 218.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1931-0846.2007.tb00399.x>.

<sup>47</sup> Lowenthal, “Islands,” 208-209.

<sup>48</sup> Fátima Vieira, “The Concept of Utopia,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 4.

<sup>49</sup> Vieira, “The Concept,” 3.

<sup>50</sup> Andreas, “Must Utopia,” 9.

<sup>51</sup> Vieira, “The Concept,” 5.

<sup>52</sup> Dušan Karpatský, *Labyrint literatury* (Praha: Albatros, 2008), 505. My translation („vysněné zemi s dokonalým společenským zřízením“).

<sup>53</sup> Karpatský, *Labyrint*, 505. My translation („neuskutečnitelné představě a fantazii“).

<sup>54</sup> Karpatský, *Labyrint*, 505. My translation („prozaickému žánru fantastické literatury, kde se líčí ideální poměry v

as utopian literature.<sup>55</sup> She also mentions the idea of utopia being the product of Renaissance.<sup>56</sup> Raising appreciation of humanity's capability of reason during promised a hope of achieving the traditional "Christian idea of paradise in heaven."<sup>57</sup>

Dystopia, as both a genre and a term, is considerably younger and derived from utopian premise as well as the precedent neologism of utopia. Before the term dystopia existed, the idea about a future not getting better, but worse than present emerged (in the same way the utopian ideal existed before the term itself):

"[...] the scepticism of the conservative eighteenth-century intellectuals also gave birth to anti-utopia. This literary form could never have come into existence without the literary utopia, as it shares its strategies and its narrative artifices; it points, however, in a completely opposite direction. If utopia is about hope, and satirical utopia is about distrust, anti-utopia is clearly about total disbelief. In fact, in the anti-utopias of the eighteenth century, it was the utopian spirit itself which was ridiculed; their only aim was to denounce the irrelevance and inconsistency of utopian dreaming and the ruin of society it might entail."<sup>58</sup>

It was John Stuart Mill who came up with the term dystopia, which is yet another derivation neologism (dys coming from dus, meaning bad in Greek).<sup>59</sup> As humanity's scientific progress grew exponentially during the 19th century, understandable doubts and fears arose simultaneously. People feared the inventions could inevitably cause more harm than good since the discoveries had a huge impact on their life and a potential to be abused. According to Vieira:

[...] things may go either right or wrong, depending on the moral, social and civic responsibility of the citizens. [...] dystopia rejects the idea that man can reach perfection. [...] on the one hand, the readers are led to realize that all human beings have (and will always have) flaws, and so social improvement – rather than individual improvement – is the only way to ensure social and political happiness; on the other hand, the readers are to understand that the depicted future is not a reality but only a possibility that they have to learn to avoid. If dystopias provoke despair on the part of the readers, it is because their writers want their readers to take them as a serious menace [...]. Dystopias that leave no room for hope do in fact fail in their mission.<sup>60</sup>

Thus, the true calling of dystopia is, despite the human imperfection and the impossibility of an ideal society, that people must do their best to construct a better one, should they want to avoid dystopic scenarios.

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pomyslné zemi“).

<sup>55</sup>Vieira, "The Concept," 4.

<sup>56</sup>Vieira, "The Concept," 4.

<sup>57</sup>Karpatský, *Labyrinth*, 505. My translation („křesťanskou ideou ráje na nebesích“).

<sup>58</sup>Vieira, "The Concept," 16.

<sup>59</sup>"Dystopia (n.)," Etymology, accessed March 20, 2021, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/dystopia>.

<sup>60</sup>Vieira, "The Concept," 17.

The greatest times for dystopia as a literary genre came during the 1st half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the creation of novels such as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* or *Brave New World*, and as Mir mentions, the key reasons for such a pessimistic outcomes were not only the World Wars, but a failure of major utopian projects of the 20th century.<sup>61</sup> Dystopia means “mistrust of utopia,” undesirable future portrayed with the means of literary fictions, evoking themes such as dehumanization, alienation, post-apocalyptic scenarios of desolation or overpopulation and working on the premises of totalitarian control or anarchy.<sup>62</sup>

When looking at the vast majority of utopias – or, more often dystopias – written in the modern times, one of the most prominent and usual themes occurring tend to be some sort of technological advancement within the society – which is not surprising given the situation of modern technologies rapidly rising since the Age of Enlightenment. Since people’s lives started to improve noticeably, it was only natural for authors to use those advancements in their works, using it for the purposes of utopias or other speculative genres of prose – H. G. Wells being one of the first authors applying modern technology into his works. It is no coincidence he is know as the ‘father of science fiction’.<sup>63</sup> Another author known for his dystopic novel is George Orwell, who, in his novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, pictured a totalitarian society controlled by the means of technology. The settings Graves chose for his utopian novel *Seven Days in New Crete* shows a different approach when it comes to use of modern technologies – and even most of the advancements altogether. When traveling in the future utopian worlds, it is only logical to expect to find the modern civilization advanced further than the civilization the traveling subject is coming from. However, when the main character Edward Venn-Thomas wakes up in the New Crete, he finds himself in a world closer to the pre-Christian period, stylized into the Ancient- Greek society, rather than some futuristic one with scientific progress developed on the basis of the technologies existing in his epoch. To his surprise, New Cretans abolished almost every technological advancements and returned to very a simplistic way of life.<sup>64</sup>

This theoretical chapter introduced essential terminology and discussed relevant themes in more detail. In the next three analytical chapters, the novel *Seven Days in New Crete* will be analyzed in regards to certain island motives as well as contrasted with other chosen novels.

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<sup>61</sup>Marc Villanueva Mir, “From the Island to the Border: The Problematization of Space in Contemporary Dystopian Fiction,” *Junctions: Graduate Journal of the Humanities* 3, no. 2 (January 2018): 40. <https://doi.org/10.33391/jgjh.46>.

<sup>62</sup>Mir, “From the Island,” 40.

<sup>63</sup>H. G. Wells, *When the Sleeper Wakes* (London: Arcturus Publishing Limited, 2020), 7.

<sup>64</sup>Robert Graves, *Seven Days in New Crete* (London: Penguin Classics, 2012), 5.



## NEW CRETE AND ITS “ISLANDNESS”

The world of New Crete offers plentiful of island motives despite not being island physically. The way the New Cretan society is organized, however, makes it a perfect island-like place. The specifics of the place will be discussed in greater detail and attributes forming the “islandness” of New Crete will be highlighted. This chapter focuses mainly on the aspects of insularity, autonomy, self-sufficiency and self-governance.

To understand how the story of New Crete operates, a brief introduction and description about its space-time is necessary. Edward Venn-Thomas, the main character of the novel, wakes up and finds himself in the same place he lives but in different timeline – as he immediately points out, things around him are similar to what he knows but not quite the same:

Yes, the district was familiar. That rocky headland, the low hill, with the church of Sainte Véronique on the top – except that it was not the same church, and perhaps not a church at all. But the Mediterranean had retreated a mile or more, a broad belt of farmland stretched nearly to the horizon, and the bare hills were now covered with trees.<sup>65</sup>

It can be assumed by mentioning the french sounding name and the Mediterranean that this place is located in north part of today's France. It is however more common for utopic fictions to be located on islands. More's original utopia (of the same name) offers a rather interesting origin story- it itself used to be part of a continent until Abraxa Utopus conquered the territory and literary ordered “to bring the sea quite round them”<sup>66</sup> by making inhabitants dig a deep channel around the whole area, virtually creating an artificial island. Finally Pala, an island from Huxley’s utopic novel *Island*, can be noted as an example of a typical island.<sup>67</sup>

The whole plot of the novel takes place exclusively (except from the very last moment of Edward's return back to his age) in a rather small part of the whole New Cretan territory, which scope is not, however, explicitly determined and known to the reader and the true size and boundaries of it are left quite ambiguous.

As for the time, the story unfolds during approximately one week window (as the name suggests, seven days). The exact time/historical period remains uncertain throughout the whole story. It is most likely to assume this era is truly somewhere in the future, although in the case of New Cretans the reader cannot be completely sure as they tend to skew facts. This fact can be observed when Edward finds out more about the way New Cretans treat history and facts generally – they try

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<sup>65</sup>Graves, *Seven Days*, 4.

<sup>66</sup>Thomas More, *Utopia* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1997), 28.

<sup>67</sup>Aldous Huxley, *Island* (London: Vintage, 2008), 11.

to simplify it as much as possible, abolished dates and, as Edward mentions, they tend to “telescope history” as well as compose new historical characters.<sup>68</sup>

The history of New Crete demonstrates in detail what makes it so isolated. A whole chapter is dedicated to explain how the New Cretan society came to be, illustrating the history being rather complex and somehow complicated. Edward calls the current place a “pseudo-archaic system of civilization.”<sup>69</sup> The era from which he comes from is known to New Cretans as the “Late Christian” epoch<sup>70</sup>, its main characteristics consisting of people abandoning spirituality, love and misuse of money, science and technology in general ultimately leading to wars and fall of the modern civilization. It was concluded humanity should retrace its steps, or perish.<sup>71</sup> The so called “anthropological enclaves” were established where people were made to live in conditions as primitive as possible and observed by the Anthropological Council. Conclusions of this “research” should help to understand an ideal environment for humanity to prosper.

He recommended ‘anthropological enclaves’, the setting aside of small territories [...] and the re-erection there, as far as possible, of social and physical conditions as they had existed in prehistoric and early historical times. These enclaves were to represent successive stages of the development of civilization, from a Palaeolithic enclave in Libya to a Late Iron Age one in the Pyrenees; and were to be sealed off from the rest of the world for three generations, though kept under continuous observation by field-workers directly responsible to the Anthropological Council.<sup>72</sup>

The inhabitants prospered and when overpopulation threatened they were invited to the island of Crete, a large region prepared explicitly for them with lots of crops to cultivate. The “project” continued to be successful due to inhabitants taking excellent care of the land ultimately leading to closure of the enclaves and moving everyone to Crete.<sup>73</sup> New religion based on the pre-Christian European pagan roots was established and New Cretans emerged from research subjects to inhabitants of “the seed-bed of a Golden Age.”<sup>74</sup> Soon the islands of Rhodes and Cyprus became colonized as well. First tendencies for self-autonomy and insularity can be observed by further careful, almost eugenic, management of people allowed in the island and trade only allowed to take place outside of the country. New Cretans were particularly resolute and uncompromising:

Despite all precautions, illegal landings on the island itself became frequent, and once there, the immigrant was either accepted or destroyed; never sent back. The population increased rapidly, and the spread of the New Cretan system was further stimulated by apprenticeship: orphans of good physique and intelligence were sent there from all

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<sup>68</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 58.

<sup>69</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 28.

<sup>70</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 28.

<sup>71</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 30.

<sup>72</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 30.

<sup>73</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 30.

<sup>74</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 31.

over the world, but the New Cretans had the right of refusing any that they did not like.<sup>75</sup>

They ultimately stood their ground in the same manner when defending against the outer world while the New Cretan system also successfully spread to other parts of the habitable world, mainly consisting of today's Europe. New Cretans' means of successfully maintaining their autonomy against technology and weapons was “magic – a combined exercise of moral power that debilitated enemy war-lords and made soldiers drop their weapons.”<sup>76</sup> The very source of these magical powers originates from the Goddess, their deity, which will be discussed in greater detail in next chapters.

Right from its beginning the New Crete society was rather self-sufficient. Strict customs and people separated into “estates” (a system similar to castes or classes) made this possible, as no official leader or leading power rules over the New Crete – rather the customs were what kept and still keeps everything in place.<sup>77</sup>

‘There isn’t any governing estate. Custom is the governing principle, and each estate has its obligations to it.’ [...] ‘The recorders keep detailed accounts of past disasters and if a new one happens, the captains consult with them at once on the best way to meet it. There’s always a precedent of sorts. Then they set the commons to work. They work until the danger has passed. The less responsible tasks are performed by the servants. The magicians stand by; they aren’t consulted unless the disaster concerns public health or morals, when they’re expected to intervene.’<sup>78</sup>

New Cretans recognize five estates, and each has different role in the society.<sup>79</sup> By the description of the estates as the fingers as well as other instances in the novel, Graves tend to be most satirical about the captains, commoner and servants, mocking their unfortunate status:

‘We reckon them on the hand, beginning with the thumb. Look, thumb, the captains, who roughly correspond with your nobles; forefinger, the recorders; third finger, the commons [...]’ ‘That’s the middle one and the tallest; you see, the commons are the middle estate and the most numerous. Here it’s called the fool’s finger. The fourth finger stands for the servants, because of all the fingers it’s the least capable of independent movement.’ [...] ‘Well, that leaves the little finger, which stands for the magicians [...] because ours is the smallest of the five estates. They’re all interdependent, like the five divisions of a plane-tree leaf. [...]’

To which estate an individual belongs is determined during persons childhood. It is not an uncommon occurrence a child born into one estate is eventually “transgressed” into another one.

‘[...] Birth is never a clear indication of capacity; parents of one estate may have children who properly belong to another. And property is an indication of a man’s

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<sup>75</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 31.

<sup>76</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 32.

<sup>77</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 14.

<sup>78</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 14.

<sup>79</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 13.

estate, not his qualification for belonging to it. And attainments are the result of capacity.’<sup>80</sup>

‘[...] The child remains in his mother’s estate until there’s general agreement that he belongs somewhere else. [...] Then representatives of the estate to which he properly belongs come to claim him.’ ‘[...] It’s painful to lose a child, but it’s worse to have one who doesn’t belong in the house. The parents are the first to reject him. usually they get another of the right kind in exchange – an orphan, or a misfit from some other estate. [...].’

Similar deterministic approach regarding the place a person is destined to occupy in the society can be seen in the dystopic world of *Brave New World*, except people here are deliberately bred in certain way to exert definite tasks in society according to their predispositions:

Interaction between estates is also very limited, as New Cretans say: smokes do not mix.<sup>81</sup> People spend most of their day in the company of other members within their estate and almost exclusively working.<sup>82</sup> It is obvious from the way the estates are described and compared to fingers they do not exercise equal rights and the only real privilege is given to the magician estate. They are the only true active agents - “magicians think in an active way; everyone else thinks passively.”<sup>83</sup>, possessing executive powers manifested by their magical abilities. Magicians still have their own obligations and restrictions, compared to the other estates they, however, truly exercise the greatest freedoms and possibilities. Overpopulation is never an issue since magicians execute powers over other estates reproductive potential by either drugs or prescribing new customs:

‘[...] we reduce their pulse-rate, and their sexual inclination, by giving them cola to chew. This has the additional advantage of making them content to perform monotonous tasks day after day without diversion. [...] Since cola is reserved for the servants’ estate, the usual remedy is a change in the regional costume, or music. Melancholy music stimulates breeding, serene music discourages it. [...] Melancholy music produces a vague anxiety in its hearers, vague anxiety carries with it a presentiment of death, presentiment of death suggests the need for breeding children.’ ‘I shouldn’t have expected that. Who prescribes these changes?’ ‘We magicians do [...]; we diagnose and prescribe. The prescriptions are announced by the priests, which gives them religious force. The commons aren’t told why their customs are changed, but they accept the orders out of respect for their priests and the captains see that they’re carried out.’<sup>84</sup>

This practice also provides the advantage of making people content with their tasks which helps maintaining proper order.

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<sup>80</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 12.

<sup>81</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 15.

<sup>82</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 149.

<sup>83</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 13.

<sup>84</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 40.

Despite the class inequalities, New Cretans are mostly content with their life and fulfill their duties proudly. Thanks to everyone's firm adherence to their roles and contribution to society, New Cretan world manages to work perfectly and is able to execute flawless self-sufficiency.

Another way in which the New Crete self-governance is sustained is the fact that there are no civil wars or any real wars whatsoever – at least not in the matter known to mankind throughout its whole history – bloody and fatal. War, as New Cretans call it, became sort of a game or sport activity. Wars occur when misunderstanding between two villages escalate and the village winning the war is declared to be in the right (as at a court which New Cretans do not use):

‘[...] With us, a war is always great fun – apart from the defensive fighting in which our travellers sometimes get involved when they cross the frontier of New Crete – and if anyone were killed we should end it at once.’<sup>85</sup>

It is evident New Cretans are rarely dissatisfied and the whole society functions as intended. As already mentioned, the main governing principle is custom, which will be discussed more in the next chapters. The strict order it enforces is the primal driving force behind New Crete's insular yet fully autonomous existence.

Lastly, before elaborating more about other island-like aspects of New Crete in the next chapters, a few facts about the means in which the New Cretan “economy” works and on what foundations do the self-sufficiency stands will be stated.

After Edward's evocation, he learns New Cretans abolished both the concept of money and turned away from technology and science. Both of these facts stem from the unfortunate historical events that the overuse of modernistic whims caused. No need for money, aside from the issues it caused in the past and New Cretans repulsion of the concept can be attributed to the fact that there is plenty of everything people need, no hunger and no material deprivation. Private ownership practically does not exist as people do not see any value in material things – the main value lies in their practical use.<sup>86</sup> Should someone need anything for daily use – be it food or cutlery, they simply get them on the market in exchange for other goods or services others may need. The manner in which New Cretan trade functions is very simple yet undoubtedly effective:

‘[...] the gondoliers have conveyed truck-loads of produce from the outlying villages to Sanjon. It is whatever the villagers find superfluous to their needs [...], and anyone is allowed to carry off whatever produce he happens to require. That which remains when the market closes at midday is collected and sorted by the recorders of Sanjon; and all that can be stored for future distribution, or pickled, or conserved, is handed over to the people whose obligation it is to keep the store-houses replenished; the rest goes to the pigs or poultry. Most villages are self-supporting in food, and those that are

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<sup>85</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 9.

<sup>86</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 6.

not so have some other product to offer, e.g. wool, or linen, or charcoal, or baskets, or shoes, or soap [...] custom ensures that everyone shall farm according to the most enlightened principles and that no one shall lack the necessities of life. The commons supply the other estates with the aforesaid necessities; but these must make some token payment, consisting of a present to the Goddess, to show that they are not “eating idle bread.” [...] It is part of our religion never to waste food or any other product of the soil; and since there is enough to go round no one carries off more produce of a perishable sort than he needs for himself and his family until the next market day.’ [...] <sup>87</sup>

Again it can be observed that not all estates contribute quite equally to the system – the commoner and servant classes procure most of the hard work while other estates give things in return rather symbolically. Magicians often pay with a poem or a prayer.<sup>88</sup> The trading system between kingdoms is managed on the same principle as between villages.<sup>89</sup>

New Cretan approach to both agriculture and ecology is yet another reason for their self-sufficiency being possible:

I commented on the kitchen-garden richness of the fields. ‘Nothing is ever taken from the soil without subsequent restoration,’ [...] ‘What all but destroyed the human race in your epoch was the sewage system. [...] The fields were given artificial fertilizers in exchange and in process of time became denatured. There followed a shortage of food, which made for wars; and the wars did further damage to the soil. [...] But they left it to us to embody the principle of soil-worship in our religion. We boast that with every new generation the top-soil grows blacker and deeper.’<sup>90</sup>

New Cretans were also able to train their cattle to lay their waste into special pits so they can then use their waste effectively as a natural fertilizer.<sup>91</sup>

In the end, the only exception from the strict customs are the New Cretan elders, that seem to be interested in the old way of living as well as its discoveries – other than that, there are no new discoveries or progress happening in New Crete. All in all, the New Cretan world displays capability in autonomous life as well as a tendency to insularity, as is often attributed to islands. The change which is also known for being typical of the idea of islands is portrayed by the introduction of a new element (Edward) into the static world of New Crete. It can be observed that the world of New Crete is very insular from the outside world yet despite this fact, it is completely self-sufficient and its methods, albeit very primitive, are definitely effective in eliminating existential deprivation.

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<sup>87</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 78.

<sup>88</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 78.

<sup>89</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 82.

<sup>90</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 83.

<sup>91</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 36.

## MAGIC, CHANGE AND INTROSPECTION

In the previous chapter, New Cretan insularity, autonomy, and self-sufficiency was discussed, mainly focusing on its history and social structure. However, New Crete is specific due to its other island-like attributes which the second analytical chapter is about. First, New Crete is a place where supernatural events happen. This is directly linked to the Goddess, a deity worshiped by New Cretans. More about how magic, custom, and the Goddess tie together will be clarified, as well as the relation to the New Crete's perfection, sterility and stagnancy, and the consequent need for change. Lastly, a slight insight into Robert Graves's own life and reasoning behind writing the novel will be proposed, making the story no short of both personal introspection and contrasting the New Cretan reality with the one of the real world.

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, New Cretans are strictly bound to customs. Yet these customs extend deeper than simple moral codes: “Custom here is based not on a code of laws, but for the most part on the inspired utterances of poets; that is to say, it’s dictated by the Muse, who is the Goddess.”<sup>92</sup> Poets, in other words, the magician estate, praise the Goddess by chanting poetry in her name. According to the wisdom of poetry, the custom is determined. The Goddess, for the most part of the novel, appears as a rather mysterious figure, yet it is her from whom every supernatural event originates – be it through her own actions or the actions of magicians to whom she grants magical powers. She herself can transform into various forms and shapes.

The Goddess is not the sole deity appearing in *Seven Days*, although she is without a doubt the most important authority for the society and ultimately possesses the highest status among deities. Outside of the matriarchal figure taking the faces of Nimuë, Mari, and Ana, there happen to be two twin male demi-gods who are competing for the Goddess’ favor. The first one is the star-god ruling during the first half of the year. The second one is a serpent god whose reign is set in the second half of the year. This again ties to the cyclic nature of New Cretan life. Other than that, there are local village godlings mainly serving their purpose during wars between villages. The Goddess is however the greatest force known to people and essentially serves as the ultimate deterministic element – every event that ever occurred happened, according to New Cretans, due to Goddess’s will, or more precisely, her whim. Her ways tend to be rather mischievous, but every deed of hers stems from her love for humans.

The first occurrence of magic can be observed right at the introduction to the story – Edward is evoked from past by magicians. After his arrival, oddities begin to slowly arise in his proximity. New Cretans call these phenomena “brutches” and it is the duty of magicians to eliminate them. One

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<sup>92</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 15.

of the brutes manifests itself as a woman from Edward's past, Erica, being a direct doing of the Goddess. Sally, a magician in love with Edward, tries to use magic several times to make Edward fall in love with her. She eventually succeeds by taking on the form of his wife and tricking him into sleeping with her, essentially raping him.<sup>93</sup> Names also possess magical meaning, which is why New Cretans use nicknames and their true name is a secret. By knowing someone's true name, a person obtains full control over them – this can be seen when Sally's true name is accidentally revealed by Sapphire who uses this power to smite her for what she's done.<sup>94</sup>

In general, no deeper explanation about how exactly the magic works is given (except for who wields the power and where it originates) - as a fantastical fiction, *Seven Days in New Crete* presents a magical system that could be classified as a soft one. Magic systems in fictional stories has existed long before modern times, however more solid terminology was conceived relatively recently. The soft/hard magic idea, also known as the Sanderson's Laws on Magic, was popularized by Brandon Sanderson and was found on the premise of the soft/hard terminology regarding sciences, science fiction, and fantasy – each meaning the opposite side of a broad spectrum.<sup>95</sup>

Sterility and immutability, which Edward observes throughout his stay in New Crete, can be observed in almost every aspect of the New Cretan way of life. This is the first impression Edward felt from his new friends when pondering about the world he appeared in (which is an activity he indulges in almost constantly):

They seemed never to have had a day's illness; their faces were placid and unlined and they looked almost indecently happy. Yet they lacked the quality that we prize as character: the look of indomitability which comes from dire experiences nobly faced and overcome. [...] Not only did they lack character, which the conditions of their life had not allowed them to develop, they lacked humour – the pinch of snuff that routs the charging bull, the well-aimed custard pie that routs the charging police-constable. For this they had no need, and during the whole of my stay there I heard no joke that was in the least funny. People laughed, of course, but only at unexpectedly happy events, not at other people's misfortunes. The atmosphere, if it could be acclimatized in an evil epoch like ours, would be described as goody-goody, a word that conveys a reproach of complacency and indifference to the sufferings of the rest of the world. But this happened to be a good epoch with no scope for humour, satire or parody.<sup>96</sup>

Right at the first night in the presence of New Cretans Edward observes how distinct and ridiculously perfect they are. As Edward soon finds out, there is no evil in New Crete, the world and the life in it is simple and predictable therefore they never had a chance to experience “real” struggle, experience

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<sup>93</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 127-128.

<sup>94</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 70.

<sup>95</sup> Levi Johnson, “How to Choose between a Hard or Soft Magic System: Campfire Learn,” Campfire (Campfire Technology, November 22, 2021), <https://www.campfirewriting.com/learn/how-to-choose-between-a-hard-or-soft-magic-system>.

<sup>96</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 10.



anything that could shape them in a way, make them distinct. For New Cretans, on the other hand, Edward is too complex which puzzles them.<sup>97</sup> They, in general, tend to simplify everything as much as possible. New Cretan clothing is rather simple as well and every estate has a certain dress code to follow (consisting of a rather simple composition of fabrics as well).<sup>98</sup>

Tendency to simplicity can be observed in different parts of New Cretan life and environment – for example, their gardens:

It was a very simple garden: a few gnarled apple-trees and leafy rose-bushes, two or three beds of brightly coloured flowers, like zinnias but shorter-stemmed and more profuse in bloom, a curving yew-hedge, an enormous oak, a mulberry-tree, three or four massive weather-worn stone benches, and a little brook running over slate pebbles. No rows of plants or bushes, no level surfaces whatever – the lawns were all slightly undulating – except the water of the fish-pool into which the brook emptied. Sally explained that straight lines, level surfaces and a large variety of flowers fatigued the eye, and that this garden was intended for relaxation. ‘In our gardens we have only the thorned damask-rose and the white moss-rose, and all our cornflowers are blue; we grow no double dahlias and no giant flowered sweet-peas nor anything of that sort.’<sup>99</sup>

The New Cretans comment that too many sensations at once are too tiring for them when Edward talks about his epoch and how many people and sounds can be seen everywhere in the city.<sup>100</sup> For people in New Crete, the more comprehensive texts become, the more space is there for errors, and the more words the less one can focus on things that are important. Quality over quantity seems to be the way New Cretan society works. Tendency to simplicity even at the cost of bending the truth is thus apparent in New Crete, as already mentioned in the previous chapter when their approach to history was discussed.

The strict rules New Cretans follow together with their insularity from the outside world is what ultimately made New Crete stale and looped. Finally, the change in the form of Edward's arrival breaks this constancy. When he finally encounters the Goddess personally, it is clear that Edward's arrival was the Goddess' doing: “‘Oh, well – it isn't really beyond criticism. Though the bread's good and the butter's good, there doesn't seem to be any salt in either.’ ‘That's why I sent for you.’”<sup>101</sup> When speaking with Sapphire, he can finally understand the underlying issue with the perfection that ultimately stales New Crete:

‘Don't you distinguish what is merely bad from what is evil?’ ‘She banished evil from our world when she set foot in New Crete. Evil was the illusion of good raised by the Rogue Trinity. Evil has vanished without trace; the good only remains [...] ‘The other night she defined bad as a freak or error, a failure in natural function, a falling short of

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<sup>97</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 9.

<sup>98</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 11.

<sup>99</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 35.

<sup>100</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 17.

<sup>101</sup> Graves, *Seven Days* 105.

the normal. But she knows that the good isn't merely the normal. There's another sort of good which is as much above normality as the bad is below it; and that sort of good can be known only in relation to another concept, which is evil. [...] For many centuries now you have had peace in New Crete, peace and love, and whenever the bad has appeared, your witches have destroyed it; but as your memories of the evil old days faded, your notion of good was gradually reduced from supreme good to normality. Your poets and musicians ceased to honour the Goddess as she deserves; her decision to sow a wind in order to reap a whirlwind shows clearly that the normal isn't enough to satisfy her.<sup>102</sup>

A tendency to cyclicity in the life of New Cretans can be observed, for example, in their manner of organizing time – the concept as we know it today is abolished, and people follow the natural paces of nature, for example by the moon phases.<sup>103</sup> As customs make people behave, people do not express any particular preferences, on which Edward comments multiple times throughout his journey.<sup>104</sup> This sterility, be it in the way people talk, act, live, and overall exist, is one of the main issues the New Cretan society is riddled with. It is apparent without the concept of evil, the ever-present good became average and Edward is here to stir up the world again.

The introspection in which Edward often immerses during his stay mirrors the struggles Graves' apparently faced in the times of writing the novel. His nephew Richard Graves mentions:

[G]raves was so far removed from the world in which he normally lived. His friend Richard Hughes once declared that an author writes best not about what is under his nose, but about what is under his skin; and in the course of this novel Graves analyzed with appropriately clinical precision the exact nature of his own emotional needs.<sup>105</sup>

Richard Graves thus claims that “Graves's [Robert's] 'Utopia' novel ultimately turns out to be a ferocious attack upon all so-called Utopian visions of society. Along the way, there is a great deal of searching self-analysis.”<sup>106</sup> When finalizing the novel, the autobiographical implications regarding his take on women, mainly his former lover Laura, which was symbolized by Erica, and Beryl, his wife, symbolized by Sapphire, became obvious. The main character faces conflicts of loyalty the same way Robert was at the time.<sup>107</sup>

A kind of loyalty to Antonia has been preserved; and yet this part of the novel feels very contrived. The emotional truth is that Graves was subconsciously tiring of a domesticity which he sensed was inimical to his poetic genius; and in the final chapter he makes Venn-Thomas cry out: ‘Blow, North wind, blow! Blow away security; lift the ancient roofs from their beams; tear the rotten boughs from the alders, oaks and

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<sup>102</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 147.

<sup>103</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 45.

<sup>104</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 90.

<sup>105</sup> Richard Perceval Graves, *Robert Graves and the White Goddess, 1940-85* (London: Phoenix Giant, 1998), 143.

<sup>106</sup> Graves, *Robert Graves*, 144.

<sup>107</sup> Graves, *Robert Graves*, 151.

quinces; break down the gates of the Moon House and set the madmen free...’ Which reads like a prophecy about the future of his own private life.<sup>108</sup>

Edward is haunted by his feelings and nostalgia quite regularly. Graves achieved this by placing his character in the same space he used to live, only in a different time. The reality of Graves’ inner restless state is, nonetheless, clearly implicated and reflected in the story with “a Gravesian clone”<sup>109</sup> as a protagonist. Besides this, Graves could finally breathe life onto his precious idea of the White Goddess, which is a crucial element in the novel’s plot. By incorporating magic, Graves achieved reliable gradual tension building which makes both Edward and the reader question the reality of New Crete constantly, as well as refraining from leaking what is coming next in the story or how the story is going to end. The fantastic elements also amplify the inevitable omnipotence of the Goddess, mediating her greatness to the reader thanks to Graves’ imagination.

The island of Mallorca used to be Graves’ home for a great portion of his life.<sup>110</sup> Graves claimed that “poetry is a condition, not a profession”, to which Nick Freeman comments that “throughout his life he emphasized the bardic, even sacred function of the poet, often linking the art of poetry with its pagan origins. This fact can be best observed precisely in the story of Seven Days in New Crete – not only in the importance the poets hold in the world of New Crete, but also in the frequent presence of poetry used by Graves in his work. The poetic parts of the story are the previously mentioned utterances of poets claimed as an appreciation of the Goddess as well as moral ideas which should be followed.

Graves’ idea of the One Goddess, who is the great Muse of the Western culture, also influenced Wicca, Neo-paganism, or contemporary Celtic spiritualities.<sup>111</sup> He based his own idea on the groundwork of Jane Harrison and linked the three faces of the Goddess – Maiden, Mother, and Crone to the phases of the moon. This Trinity is also present in *The Seven Days in New Crete* as the Triple Goddess, and her three sub-forms are called Nimuë, Mari, and Ana. The Goddess also appears in the shape of Erica, crane, and crone when confronting Edward. Freeman claims “the Goddess and the poetry she inspires is a profound challenge to rationalist and patriarchal thought, epitomized by Christianity and the industrialized, war-torn Europe that so horrified him”<sup>112</sup>.

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<sup>108</sup> Graves, *Robert Graves*, 151.

<sup>109</sup> Graves, *Robert Graves*, 143.

<sup>110</sup> Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature 710

<sup>111</sup> Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature 710

<sup>112</sup> same

## NEW CRETE IN CONTEXT

In the last chapter specifics of *Seven Days In New Crete* will be contrasted with literary works dealing with similar issues or sharing themes. Both differences and similarities will be discussed, as well as the story in a general context.

*Seven Days in New Crete* is regarded as a speculative fiction novel, similarly to More's *Utopia*. It is presumable that Graves was trying to draft New Crete with the same intention of contrasting it with the times he was living in the similar manner as More did in his times, while also crafting a story with mythical images based on nostalgia and imagination, meant to be both internally experienced and critically evaluated. Utopia lacks extensive plot, as its purpose was to stir thoughts rather than emotions. Thanks to Grave's design of the story, reader can both imagine and experience the world and consider deeper implications – the story is narrated by its main character, therefore his feelings as well as thoughts are unfolded. The plot of *Seven Days in New Crete* is frankly simple yet is complex enough to work as compelling story stirring number of emotions as well as deeper thoughts, while its simplicity gives a lot of space to a quite detailed description of the New Cretan society. A whole chapter of the novel is dedicated to the historical aspects regarding the foundation of the New Crete and its implications are crucial for understanding the specific customs of New Cretans throughout the whole story. It is rather extensive yet explains reasons for the New Crete being as it is at present.<sup>113</sup>

Theism is not uncommon in utopias, even though most of the modern ones tend to rely more on science than on belief. We can see religious freedom in More's *Utopia*, an idea very modern for the medieval times it was composed in. In *Utopia*, people are allowed to worship any God they please, as long as they do not force their belief on others.<sup>114</sup> In New Crete, however, people are naturally brought up to believe in The Goddess and her power which can be seen in everything. This can be seen as rather repressing but is quite a satisfactory idea in the minds of New Cretans, as they generally seem very content with the reign of the Goddess and probably never questioned her.

No other religion except the boundless believe in the Goddess is permitted in New Crete, and while New Cretans seem more than content with this reality, this concept rises contradiction with the utopian premise of religious freedom which can be observed in the original *Utopia*. For its time, the thought about religious liberty was certainly audacious, whereas in modern times, it is almost taken for granted. In *Island* by Aldous Huxley, most palanians act, more or less, according to the Buddhistic principles, but do not permit anyone from making up their own religious notions.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 28–33.

<sup>114</sup> More, *Utopia*, 71–73.

<sup>115</sup> Huxley, *Island*, 76.

What is, however, quite surprising for Edward is the fact that the presence of the Goddess is in fact real. First, he questions her and the magic around him frequently, yet her authenticity is confirmed and revealed slowly throughout the story – as Edward explores the world more and is witnessing the deeds of the Goddess with his own eyes. As islands are often considered places filled with supernatural forces, in this case it is not only an illusion, as for example in *The Lord of the Flies*, where the boys believe in the presence of supernatural even though it is all just in their head. Edward also, for a while, thought the things that are happening around him are mere illusions. Little by little it became clear that this new world he finds himself in is genuinely woven with a weird kind of magic. These supernatural anomalies, however, are nowise random powers without any structure. Every oddity happening is directed by the Goddess, and due to her powers, she is able to influence quite a few events or even people themselves. Robert H. Canary, however, suggests that “the dream journey can be explained either by magic or by sleepwalking.”<sup>116</sup>

New Cretans are unwaveringly serving in accordance to their customs, which are not, albeit, enforced by any human ruler (as their kings act only as a symbol and subsequently happen to be the victims for New Cretan’s ritual sacrifice celebrating Goddess’ omnipotence). The Goddess could thus, theoretically, serve as a kind of totalitarian ruler, and whoever does not show their boundless love toward her, is to be punished. Similar totalitarian setting can be seen in *Ninety Eighty-Four*, where this omnipotent entity is symbolized by the Big Brother, which, in the same way as the Goddess, sees every move anyone makes and has the power to punish any disobedience – as seen when Winston is eventually apprehended for betrayal.<sup>117</sup>

The human sacrifice of New Cretans’ kings, which happens during their celebratory ritual twice a year (in accordance to their cyclic pagan views of the world), seems to contradict the basic utopian vision of every citizen being happy and safe, however according to the ways of New Cretans, the king is the ultimate servant<sup>118</sup> and sacrifices himself honorably in the name of the Goddess. Another victim – ‘king’s other self’, is then sacrificed well and his soul is reborn. This gruesome reality is, nonetheless, a great parallel to a similar system functioning in the world of Omelas in *The Ones who Walk Away from Omelas*. There, the whole society lives a perfectly content life – the only requirement for this universal happiness is the complete misery of one unfortunate child, which is kept in filth, darkness, and despair. This child, however, undergoes this fate involuntarily, while should any kindness be shown to them, the utopia everyone lives in would turn to dystopia. A few

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<sup>116</sup> “Science Fiction Studies,” Robert H. Canary- Utopian and Fantastic Dualities in Robert Graves's *Watch the North Wind Rise*, accessed March 5, 2022, <https://www.depauw.edu/sfs/backissues/4/canary4art.htm>.

<sup>117</sup> George Orwell. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. (London: Penguin Books, 2000): 196–202.

<sup>118</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 14.

Omelans cannot tolerate such reality and rather than living with the premise of one suffering individual being the source of their happiness, they leave this utopia to an unknown destination.<sup>119</sup>

Among the main aims of utopian societies is the utilitarian one – making as many people as possible happy, life easy and just.<sup>120</sup> This proved to be feasible thanks to new discoveries technologies in our modern era. The purpose of new technologies is clearly to make life of people easier and more enjoyable<sup>121</sup> or for them to spend less time on daily chores, giving them hope for more fulfilling life since they now have more free time to truly enjoy life without laboring almost all the time. Hope, according to Fátima Vieira, is one of the principal energies of utopia. However, people in New Crete seem to not care about free time or past-time activities. Servants, as well as commons, are content with working every day for the good of their community. Edward wonders how they are content without any entertainment or past-time activities:

‘These villagers work all day and all night,’ I said to myself, ‘and not because they’re exploited by a tyrannous squire or mill-owner but, I suppose, because their backward economy doesn’t allow them to let up for a moment. Or perhaps because they really enjoy work, poor blighters! But no evening paper with the list of tomorrow’s runners, no football-pool coupons to fill in, no Odeon round the corner, no variety programme on the radio, no nine o’clock news, not even any nine o’clock. Nothing but work and custom, and more custom, and custom again and, for a treat, Uncle reciting his bed-time story of the footprint on the sand. Terrible!’ But here I was breaking my resolution to leave the past alone; besides, I wasn’t even sure whether I was being sarcastic about my own age or about New Crete. [...]’<sup>122</sup>

As explained in the chapter four, money, as well as technological requisites were abandoned. According to The Brief History, the Rogue Trinity consists of three Gods humans fabricated while they only cause great suffering and problems for the people in the past:

“The sword decides,” rumbled the God of Robbers;  
“Science is Truth,” the God of Reason piped;  
“And each man has his price,” chanted Dobeis;  
“All else is superstition,” roared the Rogues.  
Nimuë heard their chorus...<sup>123</sup>

People before the New Crete focused too much on waring, cold scientific facts and money, which ultimately lead to their fall.

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<sup>119</sup> “‘The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas’ - Ursula Le Guin,” HCCS Learning Web, <https://learning.hccs.edu/faculty/emily.klotz/engl1302-6/readings/the-ones-who-walk-away-from-omelas-ursula-le-guin/view>.

<sup>120</sup> Vieira, “The Concept,” 5.

<sup>121</sup> “Why Technology Is Created & Revised.” Study.com. February 18, 2016. <https://study.com/academy/lesson/why-technology-is-created-revised.html>.

<sup>122</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 149–150.

<sup>123</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 138.

Dystopian authors often use new technologies in their novels to point at the possible menace scientific progress can cause if misused. Technology brings new fears because of their use in wars, as they bear the potential to cause great damage (or eventually even mass destruction). This turned out to happen in the novel in an indefinite future after Edward's era:

‘I see that you still burn wood in your grates,’ I said. ‘Prophets of my epoch have promised a future in which atomic energy will supersede wood, coal and electricity in domestic heating.’ ‘That was a very temporary future, and, according to the Brief History, not at all a happy one. [...]’<sup>124</sup>

A different approach is taken in *Brave New World*, where technology practically rules over human life and creates artificial experiences.<sup>125</sup> This approach is to be expected since the setting in the novel is dystopic while the New Cretan one is a utopic one.

As utopias and dystopias, together with islands, are often places designed for change (whether by the author of the novel or given the notion the island topos brings), there are variety of approaches on the ways of how the main character (mainly a singular, although featuring of multiple protagonists can be seen as well – for example in the *Brave New World* with Bernard and Lenina) is introduced or placed in the story and its settings. Two main ways of this exposure are used frequently – the protagonist happens to appear to an unknown world to them, and the new environment is there to change them in a variety of ways. This approach is more often seen in utopian novels, albeit it is not given – in the dystopic novel *When the Sleeper Wakes* by H. G. Wells, the main character falls into a deep sleep and wakes up in a dystopic future.<sup>126</sup> In the science fiction novel *The Corridors of Time* by Poul Anderson, the protagonist Malcolm Lockridge is able to access multiple time periods, from which he is eventually able to choose one in which he wants to settle.<sup>127</sup> The second approach introduces the protagonist already being a part of the world, while he is either trying to somehow change the world from within, or escape by other means. The prime example of this narrative is Winston from *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, who decides to rebel against the oppressive norms.<sup>128</sup> In *Brave New World*, Bernard too wants to escape the oppressive patterns, as he is placed in a class with strict rules.<sup>129</sup>

Other novels with interesting motives the protagonist has for their journey to a different environment, are for example *Island* by Aldous Huxley or *Web* by John Wyndham. *Island* is the utopic counterpart of Huxley's previous dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In *Island*, the main character Will Farnaby finds himself stranded on an island called Pala. His motivation for the journey to Pala

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<sup>124</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 4.

<sup>125</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 1–10.

<sup>126</sup> HERBERT GEORGE WELLS, *When the Sleeper Wakes* (S.l.: ARCTURUS PUBLISHING LTD, 2020): 9–28.

<sup>127</sup> Poul Anderson, *The Corridors of Time* (London: Readers Union, 1967).

<sup>128</sup> Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

<sup>129</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 110.

is shallow, but as he gradually gets to know the new world he appeared in, his attitudes start to change.<sup>130</sup> In *Web*, characters visit an island under the vision of creating a utopian world, only to get destroyed by its inhabitants.<sup>131</sup> In *Seven Days in New Crete*, the main character is invited by people competent enough and willing to help him settle in the unknown world he is now part of, guiding him during difficult situations and throughout the cities and their surroundings. New Creteans also try to introduce their way of life, customs and other things that may be difficult for Edward to understand. Throughout the whole story, Edward is often speculating about the new world around him and whether the life in New Crete is better or worse than life in his own era. Some aspects of this world appear to be more efficient and convenient; others seem rather backwards or restrictive to him. His arrival to New Crete was voluntary, as New Creteans asked him beforehand should he mind visiting their world. With a rather unfortunate fate the boys from the novel *Lord of The Flies* by William Golding are met when they are stranded on a deserted island without any help and with only little hope for a return home. They definitely did not choose to crash there on their own and are victims of bad luck and unfavorable consequences.<sup>132</sup>

As mentioned in the theoretical chapter, novels also tend to make assumptions based on gender. In New Crete this can be seen in various instances:

‘Where do women come into this system?’ ‘We maintain it, because we act directly on behalf of the Goddess. We appraise men; we don’t compete with them. Naturally, they treat us as the superior sex.’ [...] ‘Of course we work. But in every estate women have different fields of action from men. There’s no competition between the sexes.’ ‘Do men never appraise women?’ ‘That isn’t the custom.’ ‘It seems a rather one-sided arrangement.’ ‘Yes, but the men are satisfied and we don’t complain.’<sup>133</sup>

Women are more of an expansion of the Goddess herself, while men should love, as well as respect, the power of the Goddess:

I found that it was a general rule for men to address the Goddess with an adoration compounded of love and fear, whereas women addressed her familiarly as a friend, colleague or mistress, according to their estate.<sup>134</sup>

In *Lord of the Flies*, no female character appears, which Golding apparently comments on by saying “a group of little boys is more like scaled down society than a group of little girls will be.”<sup>135</sup> It is evident that the male author of the 20<sup>th</sup> century still held rather essentialistic and biased opinions regarding gender and sex.

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<sup>130</sup> Huxley, *Island*.

<sup>131</sup> John Wyndham, *Web* (London: Michael Joseph, 1979).

<sup>132</sup> William Golding, *Lord of The Flies* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999).

<sup>133</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 114–115.

<sup>134</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 44.

<sup>135</sup> About Lee-James Bovey Lee-James and About, “William Golding Top Ten Quotes,” Book Analysis, February 21, 2022, <https://bookanalysis.com/william-golding/best-quotes/>.



As the scope of the thesis also focuses on the comparison of the New Cretan era with the 20th century as well as settings of other utopic and dystopic stories, it seems worthy to also recognize the subject from today's point of view, as it, quite frankly, changed rapidly in only a few decades. *Seven Days in New Crete* offers certain themes and views that are generally seen as awkward, inappropriate, or downright unacceptable and insulting, since our society progressed towards greater acceptance and insight.

The first shocking finding is the blatant homophobia and transphobia. Given the midst of the 20th century's disapproving view on the LGBT+ community (as it is called today), it is not surprising Graves's obvious confusion of the terms homophobia and transphobia with each other. An incident that happened during the creation of the novel seemed to strengthen Graves's belief that any perversion clashing with his notion of the White Goddess's superiority is to be punished – an editor who rejected the novel died by asphyxiation while dressed in women's clothes, hanging from a tree.<sup>136</sup> The same fate of elimination also awaited everyone and everything disabled or in other ways not fitting a certain functionality in the New Cretan world. As bad things (in the manner New Cretans deemed them) deserved to perish by the hand of the magicians, New Cretan customs treated anything other than heteronormativity by the capital punishment. It can be argued that a capital punishment for not conforming to the general idea of heteronormativity, being impacted with even a small disability, not respecting restrictive customs (based on a religious faith), or just simply happening to be a nonconforming individual is not exactly consistent with today's views and pursuit for a tolerant and accepting society. In the same way it is at odds with the utopic notion of a just society with content people having the same rights.

'There's no healing without destruction.' 'But do you sometimes kill people?' She looked serious. 'Sometimes. That's the least pleasant part of our calling.' 'Whom do you kill? Personal enemies? Or public ones?' 'Bad people.' 'What do you mean by bad?' 'Bad is when, for example, a calf is born with two heads, or a hen crows and doesn't lay eggs. Or when a man behaves like a woman –' '– What, you kill your poor homosexuals? That seems a bit hard.' Sally went on unperturbed. 'Or when a man deliberately violates custom, and his estate, that is to say his class, repudiates him.'<sup>137</sup>

The next rather bald offense regarding racism can be found in the scene where Edward finds himself in the Nonsense House, surprised by one of the machine concepts:

Before the abolishment of machines and other inventions, a machine named Cic-Fax existed: Cic-Fax was a complicated device, invented a few hundred years later, for the artificial insemination of one species by another, by what they called chromosomic inflexion: several extraordinary new animals were produced that way by the Logicalists, including the bear-rabbits which were still roaming about the Indian Bad

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<sup>136</sup> Graves, *Robert Graves*, 148–149.

<sup>137</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 111–112.

Lands a century or two ago. [...] ‘I think they’re extinct now,’ the ex-captain went on calmly, ‘along with the vulture-nightingale and the negro-mandrill. Perhaps it’s as well – they did a deal of damage to crops on the frontier farms. [...]’<sup>138</sup>

Surprisingly, a few exceptions that allow New Cretans to either not follow customs, experience adventure out of the New Crete altogether or just feel a thrill that is otherwise nonexistent. The first exception to the conformity of New Cretans happens when people retire:

When they had “more white hairs than coloured’ they could become elders if they pleased and were then treated with peculiar respect; they were emancipated from custom while in their club-houses but required to behave, elsewhere, with appropriate dignity and reserve.’<sup>139</sup>

A surprising glimpse of unconformity and advancement is what Edward finds when he steps inside the Nonsense house. The Nonsense house is a place where elders are free to do whatever they please while not being seen as a lout or outcasted – as they would otherwise be should they deviate from the customs. They are only able to live freely in this building and obey the customs once they leave it. In this rather extravagant place, Edward finally observes – outside of the impropriety of the room decoration, which is in no way as modest as the other rooms in New Cretans houses:

He finds out that thanks to the absence of customs, New Cretans are far more sexually active and free than before they retire. Oddly enough, when observing the strange world of The Nonsense house, quite a few books can be found after all – they are hidden here, written by the elders. It is unknown how and when the residents of The Nonsense house first learned how to read, since they are only allowed after their retirement. There is library full of literary works in the billiard-room. Paper and books are, under standard circumstances, forbidden in New Crete:

discontinued almost at once – paper was no longer used even for wrapping or for toilet purposes – and all records of real importance were thereafter engraved on thin plates of gold or silver. For the rest they used slates, clayboards, tally-sticks and their memories; but mainly their memories.<sup>140</sup>

Apart from writing and reading, elders seem to be interested in astronomy, mythology and science in general. It is shown that elders would truly love to reinvent some of the forgotten inventions again – “Apporteur”, which appears to be today’s camera, as it was “an apparatus for creating a temporal discontinuum and photographing scenes of the past within a limited range of time and space.”<sup>141</sup> Edward is surprised by another re-invention he finds in the Nonsense House – a paper and an ink, which is something New Cretans abolished as well, only ever writing on boards

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<sup>138</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 154.

<sup>139</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 45.

<sup>140</sup> Graves, *Robert Graves*, 55–56.

<sup>141</sup> Graves, *Seven Days*, 154.

that are reserved for the most important poems. There, elders are observed to be interested in many aspects not so unfamiliar to Edward.

During Edward's pondering about New Crete and contrasting it with his epoch, he also often becomes conflicted – there are times when he prefers his era's own customs, at other times he appreciates the current ways more. He even becomes unsure about which of the two realities are more ridiculous in their essence.<sup>142</sup>

To briefly conclude this chapter, it is to be noted that the novel's utopian setting offers various compelling ideas worth contrasting not only with other utopian, dystopian, and otherwise fantastic literature, but also to analyze it in the context of its time as well as with today's viewpoint. Controversial moments appearing in the novel would definitely be worth analyzing in a separate paper.

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<sup>142</sup> Graves, *Robert Graves*, 149–150.

## CONCLUSION

The main aim of this thesis is to analyze and define the island motives and the portrayal of the New Crete in Robert Graves' novel *Seven Days in New Crete*. Islands, whether real or literary, had a prominent influence on people's imagination. These imaginary notions gave birth to exuberant number of various portrayals regarding people's individual take on their idea of islands. Connotations ranged from a dreamy ones about islands as a paradises and ideal societies to more pessimistic or darker takes deeming islands as places destined for prisons, spaces of backwardness and limitations, both physical and literary. Islands tend to evoke nostalgic feelings as well as encouraging mythological fantasies. This paper introduces several of these notions – for example island ideas' tendencies to insularity, autonomy, but also backwardness, stiffness or nostalgia. The introduction of the general meanings of the terminological names, such as utopia and dystopia, which are prominently portrayed on islands or their setting is very 'island-like', is also present. Island topoi, together with the utopic and dystopic notions, adopted themselves into the literary fields remarkably, and their influence on the literary discourse can be seen in many influential novels.

*Seven Days in New Crete* is a novel displaying plentiful of portrayals characteristic and intrinsic to islands as an imaginary place in people's minds. Although the place in which the storyline takes place is not a literal island itself, it demonstrates a multitude of qualities traditionally attributed to islands. These are introduced in the theoretical chapter, where, initially, the essential terms of topos, utopia, and dystopia are characterized for the analytical chapter to be correctly understood. The island-like nature of the world of New Crete is essentially based on its origins as a small community located on the island of Crete, from which its successful culture expanded to surrounding areas. The historical background regarding the birth of the New Cretan civilization also offers an interesting take on the possible future humanity could face if people are not careful with technology.

The first chapter deals primarily with the island attributes of insularity, autonomy, self-sufficiency and self-governance that are characteristic for the portrayal of the New Crete. The insular nature is tied firmly with the historical origins of the New Cretan territory, as its roots trace back to artificially build and isolated enclaves made with the aim of creating the perfect place for living, free from modern conveniences and build on a simple basis. The civilization located on Crete rapidly gained independence from the outside world and set clear characteristics and specifics – mainly its disdain of modern technology and return to the pagan roots and simplicity of life. The strict rules on which this success is based on helped the newly formed civilization became fully autonomous and self-sufficient despite its territory no longer being just one island exclusively. The discipline of New Cretans proved essential for the functioning of their self-sufficient agriculture which is able to fully satisfy the needs of every inhabitants, meaning no one suffers any hardships or hunger. In this sense

it can be concluded the place displays the classical portrayal of the utopian vision of a perfect society without any depravity. The self-governance, fully independent from the outside world, is supported by the societal division into estates, where people fulfill certain strictly given roles that allow the society to operate as intended. People of New Crete otherwise live a very simple life, are bound by customs, and restricted according to the estates. Although it is proposed that every member of society is happy, it is obvious that magicians are the most privileged. Every modern invention and discovery is abolished, as they were the reason for the fall of past societies. These glimpses of the past which can be seen remembered throughout the story are clearly dystopic, as people due to their greed and aversion to spirituality destroyed themselves. However, due to the New Cretans' tendency to simplify things to the core, they tend to misinterpret and outright change the memories of the past.

The second chapter then expands more on the specific picture of the people, environment, and customs and how the strict perfection ultimately leads to the need for change in New Crete's stale existence. The importance of magic, which origins trace back to the Goddess, a deity New Cretans held in the greatest regard, is displayed in its everyday presence. The magical evocation of a foreign element in the form of Edward, a poet from the past, eventually brings a literal new wind of change to New Cretan sterility, promising to introduce different life free from the strict perfection and cyclicity of New Cretan ways. The idea of changeability, which is often attributed to islands as well as the idea of the island as an insular, backward place is perfectly exposed in the New Cretan's refusal to change their old ways and clinging to what is known and safe. Except for the New Cretan's strict nature, it was the magic that helped them stand their ground against modern weapons threatening their piece.

Graves' own restless inner and personal life is what propelled him to interject his feelings and ideas into a story about a society worshiping and living on the premises of the White Goddess, a mythological notion was obsessed with for some time and wanted to portray some of her aspects into a fantastical story. Nostalgia, as well as longing for pastness and mythological fantasies which are associated with island topos, can be seen in various aspects of his work. His struggle with love life is mirrored in the characters of Sally and Sapphire, which are compared with Edward's significant women in his period named Erica and Antonia, Graves clearly reflects his former lover Laura and current wife Beryl, as well as his own experiences with women and his subjective and sometimes rather essentialist ideas about them.

In the last analytical chapter, the novel is discussed in a broader context. The utopic and dystopic implications can be detected in the novel. An idea that although Seven Days are regarded as a utopia, the very fact that the Goddess is omnipotent can be seen as a dystopic theme of totalitarian rule, which can be contrasted with Big Brother in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The utopian society in which everyone is happy is also not apparent – even though the wars in New Crete are merely games and

no one dies in them, two times a year a ritual sacrifice in the name of Goddess takes place, which (with implied violence, murder and cannibalism being part of the ritual) takes place in New Crete. The dystopic idea of one individual's suffering being the fuel for other's happiness is contrasted with *The Ones who Walk Away from Omelas*, where a small child is kept in misery which is the only way how every other person in Omelas can be happy. This combines utopic and dystopic notions and creates interesting paradox. The role of the main character in the story and the consequences for them is also discussed in comparison to the willing voyage to the Pala island in *Island* or the unfortunate involuntary stranding in the *Lord of the Flies*. Lastly, some controversial remarks are pointed out about the story *Seven Days in New Crete* from today's point of view. It is obvious that issues such as homophobia, homosexuality or racism were still prevalent in the times Graves wrote his story, and their portrayal seems rather offensive to nowadays reader.

It can be argued that due to Graves' unusual take on the idea of utopia, the story is rather a critique of utopic notions. Thus, *Seven Days in New Crete* offers multitude of diverse ideas and thought and arises new points of view, as it contrasts various societal settings as well as offers almost poetic imaginary of the fruitful island topos. He perfectly portrayed the island setting on a non-island area using the typical attributes islands are most known for – insular nature, autonomy and self-sufficiency. Tendency to backwardness and refusal to change, often attributed to islands, is displayed as the New Cretan refusal of any progress and keeping static order.

One can only hope that one day this novel gains more attention and consideration by the public, as it is one of the less-known works of Graves, despite clearly worth recognizing.

## RESUMÉ

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá zobrazením ostrova a ostrovních motivů v románu *Seven Days in New Crete* v románu Roberta Gravesa, jež byl vydán v roce 1949. Děj románu se odehrává v imaginárním světě zvaném New Crete (česky Nová Kréta), jež se nachází na území dnešní jižní Francie. Hlavní postavou je básník Edward Venn-Thomas pocházející z první poloviny dvacátého století. Ten je pomocí magických sil povolán do neurčité budoucnosti, kde se setkává se společností obyvatel této „Nové Kréty“. Tito Krétané se odprosili od všech technologických vynálezů z dob minulých a žijí jednoduchý bezstarostný život pod nadvládou Velké Bohyně. Důvod jeho povolání je prostý – Velká Bohyně si ho zvolila jako toho, kdo má v této nudné a příliš dokonalé době rozsít chaos a vytrhnout obyvatele Nové Kréty z jejich stereotypního stylu života.

Cílem práce je nastínit zajímavé ostrovní aspekty tohoto románu, stejně tak jako porovnat jej s dalšími díly, jež se zabývají tematikou ostrova, dystopií či utopí.

Analytická část představuje a vysvětluje několik těchto pojmů – například tendence představ o ostrovech tíhnoucích k uzavřenosti, autonomii, ale také zaostalost, ztuhlost nebo nostalgii. Je zde krátké pojednání o termínu topos, který je svým způsobem problematický pro svou nejednoznačnost. Rovněž tato část pojednává o termínech jako jsou utopie a dystopie, které jsou často situovány na ostrovech, nebo je jejich prostředí velmi podobné tomu ostrovnímu. Zobrazení ostrova se společně s utopickými a dystopickými představami v průběhu času ujalo v literatuře jako velice prominentní témata a jejich vliv na literární diskurz lze spatřit v mnoha zásadních románech, včetně románů jako *1984 (Nineteen Eighty-Four)* nebo *Konec civilizace (Brave New World)*. *Sedm dní na Nové Krétě* je román vykazující množství vlastností, jež jsou pro ostrovy charakteristické a často neodmyslitelné.

Přestože místo, kde se děj odehrává, není ostrovem jako takovým, dokazuje výskyt kvalit tradičně připisovaných ostrovům. První analytická kapitola popisuje detailněji jakým způsobem se Gravesovi povedlo vytvořit uzavřenost a autonomii Nové Kréty. Ta vznikla na základě experimentů s lidskými osadami, které byly uměle vytvořeny, sledovány a odtrhnuty od zbytku civilizace ve snaze stvořit umělou, ale dokonalou funkční civilizaci. První počátky civilizace Nové Kréty začala právě na ostrově Kréta, ale později se rozrostla i do okolních teritorií – zanechala si však svou typickou povahu, a to striktní důraz na uzavřenost před světem a vlastní sebeurčení. Právě díky disciplíně a nesmlouvavosti obyvatel Nové Kréty se jim až do příchodu Edwarda dařilo poklidně vést svou civilizaci dál. Funkčnost systému zajišťuje rozdělení obyvatel na „stavy“, které určují jejich postavení a povinnosti vůči společnosti. Obyvatelé až pobožně dodržují zvyky, jež vycházejí z básní oslavující Velkou Bohyni. Ta je všemohoucí entitou a prokazuje magickou moc, jež také propůjčuje kouzelnickému stavu. Tato posedlost však zavedlo společnost Nové Kréty k stagnaci a vyčpělosti, kterou se právě Bohyně rozhodla změnit příchodem Edwarda. Tento odpor ke změně se často

připisuje právě ostrovům, jež jsou často vnímány jako netknuté, neměnné a stále entity neochotné jakékoliv změny či interakce s okolím. Dalo by se říct, že tento stereotyp román zobrazuje velmi přesvědčivě. Změna přijde skutečně až v Edwardovým příchodem.

Gravesův neklidný vnitřní a osobní život byl popudem ke vnesení svých pocitů a myšlenek do příběhu o společnosti uctívající a žijící podle Bohyně, mytologické představě, kterou byl Graves tou dobou posedlý. Jeho cílem bylo vykreslit aspekty bohyně do imaginárního příběhu. Nostalгии, stejně jako touhu po minulosti a mytologických fantaziích, které jsou často spojovány s ostrovy, lze vidět v různých aspektech jeho práce. Lze si povšimnout že v postavách Sally a Sapphire, které jsou srovnávány s Edwardovými osudovými ženami z jeho období Ericou a Antonií, Graves zrcadlí svůj vztah k bývalé milence Lauře a současné manželce Beryl, stejně jako jeho další zkušenosti se ženami a jeho subjektivní představy o nich.

Lidé na Nové Krétě žijí vcelku jednoduchý život, jsou vázáni svými zvyky a omezení podle statků, obojí je velmi striktní. Ačkoli se zdá, že je každý člen společnosti šťastný, je zřejmé, že kouzelníci jsou nejvíce privilegovanými lidmi. Všechny moderní vynálezy a objevy jsou zrušeny, protože byly příčinou pádu minulých společností. Tento pohled na minulost, který se prolíná celým příběhem, dobře odráží představu o ostrovu jako něčem původním, neznalém civilizace a moderních vynálezů. Kréťani pokrokem obecně pohrdají a tvrdí, že lidé se kvůli své chamtivosti a averzi vůči duchovnosti zničili. Vzhledem k tendenci novokrét'anů zjednodušit věci do úplného základů však mají tendenci dezinterpretovat či úplně měnit vzpomínky na minulost. To způsobuje paradoxy, protože určité básně popisující minulé události jsou spojeny se špatnými historickými postavami. Jedinou výjimkou z přísných zvyků jsou novokrétští staříci, kteří se podle všeho zajímají o starý způsob života i o jeho objevy. Toto jim je povoleno na speciálním místě zvaném Dům nesmyslů (The Nonsense House). Celkově lze říct, že svět Nové Kréty je velice autonomním a má tendenci se izolovat, přesně tak, jak se často připisuje ostrovům.

V poslední kapitole tato práce zdůrazňuje další zajímavé poznatky a propojuje je kontextuálně s dobou, kdy byl román napsán, tak i s dobou dnešní. Román je také kontrastován s dalšími významnými i méně známými díly, jež buď prokazují jisté ostrovní motivy, či je jejich příběh značně utopický či dystopický. Zajímavý kontrast nabízí utopické zobrazení Bohyně (která ač není vyloženě krutá a přísná na své vyznavače, je stále všemohoucí a má vládu nad celým světem) s Velkým bratrem v dystopickém *1984*. Obě tyto entity mají absolutní moc a jakákoliv vzpoura končí neúspěchem. Také jsou zde zřejmá další utopická témata – například války které jsou na Nové Krétě pouze hrami a nikdo v nich nezemře. Naopak se ale dvakrát ročně koná rituální oběť ve jménu bohyně, která (s implicitním násilím vraždou a kanibalismem jako součást rituálu. Dystopicko-utopická představa, že utrpení jednoho jedince je zdrojem štěstí druhých je též patrná v románu *Ti, kteří odcházejí z Omelasu*. Zde



je malé dítě drženo v bídě, což je jediný způsob, jak mohou být ostatní lidé v Omelasu šťastní. Tato kombinace utopické a dystopické představy vytváří zajímavý paradox.

Práce také přemítá nad rolí hlavních postav v příbězích a důsledcích, které to pro ně skýtá - například ve srovnání dobrovolnosti cesty a následného pobytu na ostrově: je možné pozorovat dobrovolnou plavbu na ostrov Pala v románu *Ostrov*, ale také nešťastné a nedobrovolné uvíznutí malých chlapců v *Pánovi much*. Hlavně pak v dystopických románech si hlavní hrdina přeje z izolujícího prostředí vymanit. Poukázáno je také na některé kontroverzní momenty v příběhu jako je rasismus, homofobie či transfobie, jež společnost v polovině 20. století stále víceméně tolerovala. Je zřejmé, že v dobách, kdy Graves psal svůj příběh, stále převládaly předsudky a jejich velice nevybíravé zobrazení v románu se dnešnímu čtenáři může zdát velmi urážlivé. Toto vše může odkazovat na ostrovní tendenci k zaostalosti, jež jim bývá připisování, ač ne vždy spravedlivě – jak bylo zmíněno, v reálném světě soběstačnost ostrovů není tak úplně možná. Proto často ostrovy spoléhají na okolní země, což je nejlépe vidět v případech souostroví, jež spolu spolupracují, namísto aby se uzavírali před světem.

Tato práce dokazuje, že *Sedm dní na Nové Krétě* obsahuje nespočet ostrovních motivů a jakým způsobem je toho dosaženo – především nastavením společnosti a rolí Bohyně. Jako spekulativní utopický román tot dílo také kontrastuje utopické představy s v tou dobu nelehkou situací v 20. století. Dalo by se tvrdit, že vzhledem ke Gravesově neobvyklému pojetí utopie a výsledným vyústěním děje vedoucím k jejímu neúprosnému zničení, je příběh spíše kritikou utopických představ, než jejich adorace. *Sedm dní na Nové Krétě* ale díky své fantaskní a spekulativní povaze nabízí mnoho rozmanitých myšlenek a idejí a otevírá nové úhly pohledu, kontrastuje různé typy společností a prostředí, a nabízí téměř poetické zobrazení rozmanitých ostrovních motivů. Lze jen doufat, že jednoho dne si tento román získá větší uznání a pozornost veřejnosti, jelikož se jedná o jedno z méně známých Gravesových děl - ačkoliv je na něm co objevovat.

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