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LITERATURE

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Echoes of the Past: Nostalgia and the Utopian Spirit in Heather Swain's *Hungry* (2014)

Abstract. Despite ongoing technological advancements and improving socio-economic conditions, the contemporary projections of the future are increasingly marked with uncertainty and anxiety rather than hope and optimism. As dependence on capitalism, consumerism, and digitization has led to commodification of life, the fragmentation of stable communities, and spiritual impoverishment, modern humans increasingly turn to historical and mythical pasts to compensate for their disillusionment with an unsatisfying present. With the daunting prospects of the things to come, nostalgia is being increasingly recognized by critics and artists alike as a powerful meaning-granting mechanism—one that unlocks future possibilities rather than serving merely as a purely regressive and unproductive sentiment idealizing the past. But can nostalgia truly serve as the locus of future-oriented utopianism? Drawing on the theories of nostalgia (Svetlana Boym), retrotopia (Zygmunt Bauman), and mythophilia (Jeff Malpas), this paper analyzes the role of personal myths and collective nostalgias in igniting a utopian spirit in Heather Swain's novel *Hungry* (2014). Set in a technologically saturated world where the Earth's natural resources have been exhausted and flora and fauna decimated, the novel depicts a seemingly utopian social order in which synthetic nutrition and hormone-controlling inoculations introduced by the One World Corporation have eradicated physical hunger, saving humanity from global starvation. By juxtaposing individual endeavours with collective attempts to reclaim a past in which food functioned as both physical and spiritual sustenance, the novel warns against uncritical efforts to resurrect utopian models. Instead, it situates the utopian impulse within more reflective and creative personal practices that "look at the past critically and yearn for a different past, now, and desire a different future" (Baccolini 2007, 175).

Keywords: utopia, nostalgia, retrotopia, mythophilia, young adult dystopia

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1. Nostalgia: An Introduction

Despite ongoing technological advancements and improving socio-economic conditions, the contemporary projections of the future are increasingly marked by uncertainty and anxiety rather than hope and optimism. As our dependence on capitalism, consumerism, and digitization has led to the commodification of life, the fragmentation of stable communities, and spiritual impoverishment, modern humans increasingly turn to historical and mythical pasts to compensate for their disillusionment with an unsatisfying present. As Svetlana Boym observes, "[We are experiencing a] global epidemic of nostalgia, an affective yearning for a community with a collective memory, a longing for continuity in a fragmented world" (Boym 2001, 8). The same regressive tendency has been observed by the eminent Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman in his book entitled *Retrotopia*, in which he argues that contemporaneity is marked by a bizarre "U-turn of utopia"—a turn that looks backs to a vaguely remembered past rather than investing in the future (Bauman 2017, 9). As he states, it is a mentality "investing public hopes of improvement in the uncertain and ever-too-obviously untrustworthy future, to re-reinvesting them in the vaguely remembered past, valued for its assumed stability and so trustworthiness" (Bauman 2017, 9).

With the daunting prospects of the things to come, nostalgia is being increasingly recognized by critics and artists alike as a powerful meaning-granting mechanism—one that unlocks future possibilities rather than serving merely as a purely regressive and unproductive sentiment idealizing the past. But can nostalgia truly serve as the locus of the future-oriented utopianism? Drawing on the theories of nostalgia (Svetlana Boym), retrotopia (Zygmunt Bauman), and mythophilia (Jeff Malpas), this paper analyzes the role of personal myths and collective nostalgias in igniting a utopian spirit in Heather Swain's novel *Hungry* (2014). Set in a technologically saturated world where the Earth's natural resources have been exhausted and flora and fauna decimated, the novel depicts a seemingly utopian social order in which synthetic nutrition and hormone-controlling inoculations introduced by the One World Corporation have eradicated physical hunger, saving humanity from global starvation. By juxtaposing individual endeavours with collective attempts to reclaim a past in which food functioned as both physical and spiritual sustenance, the novel warns against uncritical efforts to resurrect utopian models. Instead, it situates the utopian impulse within more reflective and creative personal practices that "look at the past critically and yearn for a different past, now, and desire a different future" (Baccolini 2007, 175).

Defined broadly as "a mode of orientation toward the past" (DaSilva and Faught 1982, 54), the concept of nostalgia was coined in 1688 by Johannes Hofer, a Swiss physician. He fused two Greek words—*nostos* (return home) and *algos* (suffering or pain)—to describe the condition primarily affecting Swiss soldiers. It was understood as "the sad mood originating from the desire for the return to one's native land" (Hofer 1934, 381); put simply, homesickness. Categorized originally as a medical condition, the concept of nostalgia increased in its complexity in the 19th century when it was

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understood more as a mental illness which could lead to severe physical affliction (Starobinski 97)—an equivalent of the modern understanding of depression. The twentieth century, with the atrocities and destabilizations of the two world wars, intensified the understanding of nostalgia as a universal "longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed" (Boym 2001, 13) and rendered the past even more inaccessible. Mirroring a disenchantment with the broadly understood concept of progress and its attendant ecological destruction and spiritual displacement, twenty-first-century nostalgia is largely conceptualized as a reaction against present-day conditions, with nostalgic sentiment providing a temporary refuge from the burdens of contemporary life and the uncertainties of the future.

To better understand the complexity of this sentiment, Svetlana Boym's seminal text *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001) provides a crucial conceptual framework distinguishing between two modes of nostalgia: restorative and reflective. Restorative nostalgia, with its desire to "rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps" (Boym 2001, 41), operates with a sense of absolute truth and often underpins nationalist or ideological projects aimed at reconstructing the lost home and reviving a perceived golden age (Boym 2001, 41). In contrast, reflective nostalgia "thrives in *algia* … [i.e.] dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging" and "does not pretend to rebuild the mythical place called home" (Boym 2001, 41). Rather than seeking restoration, it questions the very act of remembering, foregrounding the constructed and often contradictory nature of memory. Seen in this light, nostalgia is understood not merely as an escapist impulse but also as a critical stance toward both past and present, enabling a reconsideration of what has been lost—not to restore it, but to open imaginative and ethical spaces for rethinking the future. By presenting alternative temporalities and divergent possibilities of development (Boym 2001, 49), reflective nostalgia aligns with a utopian spirit that resists closure and embraces openness of imagination.

Building on and complicating Boym's framework, Zygmunt Bauman's *Retrotopia* (2017) explores how contemporary societies increasingly turn to the past not just for comfort but as an alternative to an uncertain or threatening future. In the face of social fragmentation, ecological crisis, and technological alienation, individuals and collectives are "retreating from a discredited present and a feared future into a lost—irretrievable but urgently needed—past" (Bauman 2017, 5). Bauman's concept of *retrotopia* captures the paradoxical dynamic whereby the past is reimagined not only as safer and more coherent but also as more promising than what lies ahead. He defines retrotopias as "visions located in the lost/stolen/abandoned but undead past, instead of being tied to the not-yet-unborn and so inexistent future" (Bauman 2017, 3). Unlike utopian visions which project hope and progress onto a future that may never arrive, retrotopias anchor desire in memory, myth, and selective reconstruction of what is perceived as better times. They offer a sense of stability and identity by idealizing historical narratives, traditions, or cultural forms. Yet, retrotopias are not merely backward-looking; they actively shape contemporary social imaginaries, influencing how communities imagine solutions, forge collective belonging, and negotiate the tensions between loss,

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longing, and agency by incorporating dynamism and change into its fabric. Instead of aiming for "ultimate perfection," retrotopia acknowledges the non-final and dynamic nature of the social order it envisions (Bauman 2017, 6). This recognition opens space for continual adaptation and transformation—aligning itself with the strand of utopian thought that sees ideal orders not as fixed endpoints but as catalysts for continual recalibration in the real world. As Bauman observes, retrotopias unlike utopias rely on "the replacement of the 'ultimate perfection' idea with the assumption of the non-finality and endemic dynamism of the order it promotes, allowing thereby for the possibility (as well as desirability) of an indefinite succession of further changes that such an idea [utopia] *a priori* de-legitimizes and precludes" (Bauman 2017, 6).

Within the field of nostalgia studies, Jeff Malpas' theory of *mythophilia*—the desire for meaningful, place-bound narratives that structure human identity and belonging—introduces another layer to the discussion of nostalgia as a meaning-granting mechanism. In a world increasingly shaped by placelessness—whether through globalized networks, digital abstraction, or ecological devastation—Malpas argues that memory and myth become crucial mechanisms for re-establishing connection to the world. "Our identities are tied to places and narratives," he writes, "and when these are undermined, we become disoriented not just physically but existentially" (Malpas 2018, 33). For Malpas, nostalgia is not merely a longing for the past but a longing for emplacement—it is a "mode that involves both the spatial and the temporal, both memorial recovery and loss, both a sense of home and of estrangement" (Malpas 2012, 167). Even if memory reshapes the past in idealized ways, nostalgia is still grounded in a lived homecoming, however unattainable, and it carries the ache of displacement from a world that genuinely belonged to us. By contrast, Malpas describes *mythophilia* as a more detached form of yearning, one that "lacks any sense of pain, of *algos*, but strictly speaking also lacks any proper sense of home, of *nostos*, since it lacks any sense … that what is at issue is its own sense of itself, its own sense of identity" (Malpas 2012, 169). Mythophilia is not rooted in memory but in narrative: it longs not for what has been lived, but for what exists only in myth, legend, or utopian imagination. Whereas nostalgia maintains a fragile connection to place and identity through loss, mythophilia risks severing that connection by substituting mythic origins for lived history. For Malpas, this distinction is crucial: nostalgia reminds us of the fragility of belonging, while mythophilia, precisely because it lacks the pain of memory, can displace us into an illusory past.

2. Toward Utopian Nostalgia

The sense of disillusionment with the present—and its impending ecological, socio-political, or technological consequences—resonates particularly strongly in dystopian and anti-utopian fiction, where nostalgia for the past often emerges as either a quietly subversive or openly antagonistic force. In these narratives, longing for a time be-

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fore authoritarian control, environmental collapse, or hyper-technologization becomes a form of resistance—a way of reclaiming memory, identity, and emotional truth in systems designed to erase or manipulate all three. Dystopian regimes are typically constructed around a rigid presentism, promoting the now as the pinnacle of order and progress, while attempting to sever individuals from any meaningful connection to the past. This is powerfully encapsulated in the Party's slogan from Orwell's *1984*: "Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past." Such regimes, as seen in *1984*, Huxley's *Brave New World*, or Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, actively suppress nostalgia by means of ideological indoctrination, media saturation, and the systematic destruction of cultural heritage—including books, artifacts, and language itself. Within these worlds, nostalgia is treated not merely as sentimental weakness, but as a radical force—one capable of destabilizing the manufactured reality of the dystopian state. Whether it manifests as a yearning for literature and genuine human connection in *Fahrenheit 451*, or as a desire for truth and historical continuity in *1984*, nostalgia becomes the emotional and intellectual springboard for both individual awakening and potential collective resistance.

Far from being a regressive impulse, nostalgia can also be a form of cultural and existential critique—a way of naming what has been lost under modernity's progress narratives and envisioning new forms of life. This is particularly salient in dystopian or post-apocalyptic narratives like Heather Swain's *Hungry*, where nostalgia becomes a response not just to individual loss but to systemic erasure of cultural, ecological, and sensual ways of being. In this sense, nostalgia becomes not a longing for return, but a practice of hope—a utopian gesture grounded in memory yet reaching beyond it.

The potential of nostalgia in igniting a reactionary spirit against a status quo and in shaping the future is aptly mirrored in Heather Swain's anti-utopian young-adult novel *Hungry,* in which nostalgia is presented initially as a self-defensive myth-making mechanism of the main protagonist—Thalia Apple—against reality which, although technologically progressive and economically and socially sustainable, lacks meaning and continuity. In a world where the elimination of traditional food through synthetic nutrition known as Synthamill, together with hormone-controlling inoculations, is designed to address ecological crisis and maintain social and political stability, the protagonist's escapist fantasies about the past, her anachronistic fashion style, and her anti-establishment involvement with the Dynosaurs—experts in accessing the relics archive—collectively reflect her profound disillusionment with contemporary reality. Being a seemingly viable realization of the idea of progress based on independent food production protocols, highly-advanced technologization, and stable socio-political structures, the pseudo-utopian reality, created by a corporate authority called One World, fails to dispel Thalia's growing sense of spatial and existential displacement. Rather than indulging in rampant consumerism or immersing herself in virtual-reality pleasures offered by online social platforms, Thalia prefers to reminisce about preceding times when the Earth's natural environment was still intact: "What was Earth like when that light was being generated? Lush and green and teeming with

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life-forms Grandma talks about. The furry, the feathered." (Swain 2014, 27) or "I head south and imagine what it used to be like when people walked down sidewalks with animals on leashes and stopped at cafes for something to drink" (Swain 2014, 37). Through Thalia's longing for a lush, green Earth teeming with life and simple human rituals—such as walking pets or stopping at cafés—Swain's novel shows how reflective nostalgia serves not only as a rejection of sterile, overregulated progress, but also as a reimagining of a more emotionally and ecologically grounded existence. In this way, nostalgia becomes a quiet form of resistance that questions the sustainability of a future severed from nature, memory, and meaningful human experience.

3. Food as a Vessel of Reflective Nostalgia

While discussing the motif of food in literary utopias Artur Blaim observes that: "the subject of food does not occupy a key position in the utopian tradition, nor does it become the centre of interest in any utopian text, simply because in utopias its abundance is always taken for granted, the obsessive references to food and drink in the proto-utopian *Land of Cockaygne* being an exception rather than the rule" (Blaim 2013, 290). The same critical stand is represented by Lyman Tower Sargent who advocates that:

> The strength and weakness of looking at utopianism around an issue of food is that the material is generally buried in considerations of other issues. The weakness is that while you get descriptions of meals, rarely is the point the food, in fact there is little detail about food as food. The point will be about everything from the social structure of the society, as in More, or the way labour is distributed, as in Bellamy. (Sargent 2019, 27)

Taken together, these observations suggest that in most utopian writing, food functions primarily as a background element: its presence or abundance is assumed, and its role is largely to reflect social structures, labor arrangements, or the broader organization of society rather than to be explored as a topic in itself. However, in academic discourse, foodways have gained substantial attention, reflected in the growing body of interdisciplinary studies—from marketing to anthropology—affirming that eating embodies both a material and an ideal dimension (Simmel 1997, 130). According to Georg Simmel, the human act of eating expresses "a dialectic between the material dimension of food—the nutritional physical substance—and its ideal dimension—the practice of sociocultural codification" (Simmel 1997, 130). In the context of the global climate crisis, food not only signifies the needs of the individual biological body and the grammar of a particular society and culture (Retzinger 2008, 369) but also, our fundamental connection with the environment. Recognizing this relationship, more writers voice their concerns over environmental sustainability and food production and distribution protocols. Within a vast corpus of speculative fiction, utopian and dystopian narratives, as Warren Belasco notes, both reflect and influence debates about the future of food

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(Belasco 2006, 9), helping to illuminate the significance of food for the stability of political and social structures. Similarly, Paul Stock emphasizes that "through the idea of utopias—proposing them, countering them, anticipating them—we might be able to broker, or at least begin dialogue around what a just food system might look like" (Stock 2014, 4).

It is precisely against this longstanding tendency to relegate food to the margins of utopian world-building that Heather Swain's *Hungry* distinguishes itself, making food—and specifically its absence—the central organizing principle of her quasi-utopia. In Swain's imagined future, the elimination of hunger through synthetic nutrition (Synthamill) and hormone-controlling inoculations allows the ruling Corporation, One World, to eradicate conventional food production and distribution while simultaneously maintaining social and political stability. The Population Stability Act guarantees that "every person, regardless of birth circumstance, would receive inocs and nutrition from the government," (Swain 2014, 165) and as the leader of One World attests: "You have no idea what it was like when food supply diminished. The hoarding. The wars. The famine. Watching children die" (Swain 2014, 271). In this context, food—or its absence—becomes a lens through which social, political, and ecological concerns are examined.

In *Hungry*, Heather Swain employs food as the central conduit through which nostalgia is explored, framing it not merely as a desire for the past but as a deeply political and affective response to a dehumanized, technologically regulated future. Against this backdrop, Thalia's longing for real food emerges as a form of reflective nostalgia—a critical, emotionally charged mode of remembering that resists the total erasure of the sensory and cultural past. Her desire is articulated early in the novel with vivid specificity. In the prologue, she encounters a holographic tree and describes reaching for "something red and round … just a projection of the past … but it looks so real that I can't help myself" (Swain 2014, 1). The scene illustrates not only her hunger for sensory experience—sight, touch, and taste—but also the persistence of memory, even when mediated by artificial simulations, as a form of resistance to a culture that has attempted to erase the authentic materiality of food. This reflective longing is echoed in her conversation with her grandmother, who insists she would choose not synthetic sustenance but "the real thing. A perfect, red, round, crisp, tart apple" (Swain 2014, 26). The evocative language of ripeness, sharpness, and tang grounds the abstract desire for authenticity in sensory memory, reinforcing how the novel frames food as both material nourishment and cultural inheritance. The protagonist's name, Thalia Apple, deepens this thematic resonance. In Greek mythology, Thalia (thállein) means "to flourish, bloom, be luxuriant," and she is celebrated as a muse of pastoral poetry and fertility, evoking growth, natural abundance, and the rhythms of nature. The surname Apple amplifies this resonance, calling to mind one of the most archetypal fruits—an emblem of nourishment, temptation, and tradition. Together, the name evokes a character whose identity is entwined with mythic fertility and the timeless practices of food cultivation, suggesting that her nostalgic hunger is not merely personal but rooted in an ancestral, earth-connected legacy.

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Thalia's nostalgic hunger, therefore, is not a desire to restore a literal past, but a refusal to accept a sterile present in which food, memory, and intimacy have been abstracted or erased. This resonates closely with Svetlana Boym's definition of reflective nostalgia, which, unlike restorative nostalgia, does not seek to reconstruct the past but to inhabit it critically and imaginatively. Reflective nostalgia, Boym explains, "cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporal ambivalence," allowing the individual to engage in a dialogue between past and present (Boym 2001, 49–50). In this light, Thalia's engagement with food and her imaginative reconstructions of flavors she has never tasted represent such a dialogue—her nostalgic longing becomes an epistemological and ethical stance in a world dominated by amnesia.

Moreover, Thalia's food-based nostalgia reflects Zygmunt Bauman's theory of retrotopia, in which the past is not simply remembered but idealized as an alternative to a dystopian present. In Bauman's words, retrotopia emerges when the future loses its promise and the past becomes the only conceivable place where meaning resides (Bauman 2017, 5). However, Swain complicates this dynamic by presenting Thalia's nostalgia not as regressive but as generative. Her yearning for food is not a retreat into the past but an effort to reimagine what the future might look like if rooted in human sensuality, memory, and relationality. Food, in this context, becomes a metaphor for lost plenitude—an index of the bodily and affective dimensions of life that corporate rationalism has overwritten. Thalia's longing is thus not only emotional but ontological: it expresses a desire to reclaim the very conditions of being human in a post-natural world.

Finally, Thalia's nostalgia can be understood through Jeff Malpas's concept of mythophilia, which describes the human need for meaningful, place-bound narratives that shape and orient identity. For Malpas, modernity's abstraction from place and narrative produces a profound sense of existential dislocation. Thalia's food nostalgia counters this dislocation by invoking a world that was once narratively and sensorially rich. Central to this nostalgia is her grandmother's cookbook, a cherished heirloom containing family recipes and culinary traditions from a time before food became fully regulated and mechanized. The cookbook preserves memory, cultural identity, and embodied practices of cooking and eating, linking Thalia to a past filled with pleasure, care, and human connection. Alongside the imagined apple and the forbidden tastes, it operates as a fragment of a mythic past, providing guidance for navigating the alienated, technologically controlled present. These fragments do not offer a literal map back to that past; rather, they orient Thalia by reconnecting her embodied memory, sensory experience, and moral imagination. Through recalling recipes, savoring imagined flavors, or contemplating forbidden foods, she is reminded of practices that once structured daily life and social relationships—rituals of care, sharing, and attention to the pleasures and responsibilities of living. In this way, the fragments anchor her sense of self, shape her desires and model ethical engagement, showing how one can act meaningfully and attentively in a world that has abstracted both food and human condition. They function as navigational tools: not restoring the past, but enabling Thalia

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to negotiate identity, desire, and ethical action in a placeless world. As Malpas writes, mythophilia is "not a retreat into illusion but a condition for grounded and ethical existence" (Malpas 2012, 35). Thalia's nostalgic hunger is, therefore, a mythophilic gesture: a way of resisting the placelessness and sensorial flatness of her present by reattaching herself to meaning-bearing practices.

Through Thalia's yearning for real food, Swain articulates a complex, multidimensional nostalgia that is at once sensory, emotional, and political. It resists the totalizing logic of technological control and signals the need for a future that reclaims, rather than erases, the richness of embodied experience. In doing so, *Hungry* reconfigures nostalgia not as regressive sentimentality but as a utopian impulse—one that critiques the present and gestures toward a more humane, sensuous, and ethically grounded world.

4. Reflective Nostalgia and Affect

Apart from her immersive fantasies about food, the nostalgic sentiment of the main protagonist also manifests in her need for a sensory contact with relics of the past, as exemplified by her peculiar fondness for entering old, abandoned real-time shops and handling obsolete objects. In a society where people no longer feel, smell, or taste material food, individuals become considerably desensitized, as the sensory reactions normally triggered by eating are no longer activated. This diminished sensory engagement extends to social bonds: humans no longer require physical intimacy or proximity, and gestures of affection such as touching or hugging are considered unnatural and anachronistic, since most individuals rarely have the opportunity for physical face-to-face interactions. The absence of hunger also functions to suppress people's primal instincts, including sexual desire and intense emotional responses such as anger or love, which the novel presents as sources of humankind's evil and immorality. By controlling and optimizing people's chemical bodily reactions by means of personal computers called Gizmos, the One World Corporation controls emotional responses of individual citizens, ensuring simultaneously global emotional stability. This seemingly utopian practice is questioned by the representative of the revolutionary movement, Ana, who during an illegal gathering declares that in the past: "We had empathy. We had anger and jealousy. And what's more, we relished the unpredictability of all it. Those emotions made us human" (Swain 2014, 111). She further points out that humans can regain their 'humane' status only through a symbiotic relationship with nature: "We humans are at our greatest when we work in tandem with the universe, not when we fight against it" (Swain 2014, 111). By highlighting the connection between physical hunger and emotional responses, the novel suggests that the absence of food and hunger can have a dual function: on the one hand, it holds a utopian potential, promoting emotional stability, passivity, and, over time, social harmony and peaceful coexistence; and on the other hand, it performs an anti-utopian role, depriving people of aspects of their humanity tied to experiencing and processing intense emotions.

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The understanding of hunger extends beyond its purely "mechanical" function as a bodily process and can also be traced in the novel's depiction of its absence as a means of controlling independent intellectual thought and aspiration. As Daniel Rees observes, there is a parallel between bodily hunger and the appetites of the mind: "mental hunger is not simply a form of imitation of the physical processes of the body, but rather a reflection of the impulse of the mind to acquire and assimilate knowledge" (Rees 2015, 3). Consequently, the absence of physical hunger can lead to intellectual stagnation, as the mind operates according to similar principles as the body: just as the body requires food to survive, the mind requires mental stimuli in order to thrive. The suppression of physical hunger as a means of controlling independent intellectual thought is vividly illustrated in Swain's novel, where the human appetite for real food is replaced with illusory and superficial substitutes, such as omnipresent consumerism and virtual reality forms of entertainment, including EntertainArenas and Plug-ins, in which citizens immerse themselves in large-scale social games. As Thalia Apple aptly observes, "One World is very good at distracting most people from questioning the system by keeping everyone's belly full and brain entertained" (Swain 2014, 22). Occupying themselves with satisfying their consumerist appetites or immersing in virtual reality forms of entertainment, the society created by One World Corporation constitutes an amalgam of spiritless and socially detached individuals, an equivalent of Zygmunt Bauman's 'liquid society'—characterised by "individualisation, privitisation, marketisation, … the erosion of community" (Bauman 2017, 7). To compensate for their largely reduced sensory exposure and responsiveness, displaced individuals like Thalia resort to nostalgic sentiments which, marked by a high degree of fantasy and imagination and lacking a personally experienced past, constitute what Jeff Malpas calls 'mythophilia'—a longing not for what is remembered, but for what is known only through its retelling, through story and myth. When the reconstruction of the past which was not personally experienced is not possible, the process of mythmaking takes place. Obsessed with a past she cannot remember, Thalia mythologizes historical past so as to provide an existential mooring for her life.

Unlike restorative nostalgia, which seeks to reconstruct a lost world, Thalia's longing for the past is reflective: it questions the nature of what has been lost and why. In a society where food has been reduced to sterile nutritional supplements and sensory pleasure is regulated or banned, Thalia's yearning for real food—its taste, smell, texture, and social rituals—becomes an act of epistemological and ethical resistance. Her nostalgia functions as a critical lens through which the reader sees the spiritual starvation beneath a seemingly utopian social order. The One World Corporation has eliminated hunger through hormone-regulating supplements, but in doing so, it has also erased history, desire, and memory. Thalia's refusal to accept the state-imposed amnesia aligns with Boym's understanding of nostalgia as a "rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress" (Boym 2001, xv). Her longing is not escapist but insurgent—it seeks to rehumanize the future by reclaiming the textures of the past.

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5. Nostalgia and Collective Resistance

However, the nostalgic sentiment is Swain's novel is not confined solely to the sphere of mythmaking; it also extends to the revivification of past traditions, as exemplified by the resistance movement called Analogues. This group seeks to restore material food as a means of re-establishing human symbiosis with the natural world and to reawaken physical hunger, thereby recovering humanity's capacity to experience and process intense emotions such as desire, anger, and love. By supressing physical hunger and optimizing people's chemical bodily reactions through personal computers called Gizmos, the One World Corporation controls the emotional spontaneity and expressivity of individual citizens in order to ensure social stability. This seemingly utopian practice is challenged by Ana, the leader of Analogues, who, during a covert gathering, declares that in the past: "We had empathy. We had anger and jealousy. And what's more, we relished the unpredictability of all it. Those emotions made us human" (Swain 2014, 111). She further argues that humans can regain their "humane" status only through a symbiotic relationship with nature: "when we work in tandem with the universe, not when we fight against it" (Swain 2014, 111), and when they are "hungry for the give and take between the human being and the earth, for the life source that meant to sustain us" (Swain 2014, 112). Being spatially and temporally anchored in past experience, Ana's vivid memories of the primordial ecological balance between people and nature, as well as humans' inherent need to experience intense emotions, clearly echo Svetlana Boym's concept of restorative nostalgia, which emphasizes *nostos* (homecoming) and entails an active effort to return to a long-lost home. This stands in contrast to reflective nostalgia, which focuses on *algos*, the emotion of longing and loss (Boym 2001, 41). While reflective nostalgia "cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalizes space" (Boym 2001, 43), restorative nostalgia seeks to return to origins and to protect truth and tradition, even though its efforts may verge on the brink of artificiality and conspiracy. As Boym points out, restorative nostalgia "builds on the sense of loss of community and cohesion and offers a comforting collective spirit for individual longing" (Boym 2001, 42). The collective quality of this nostalgia, along with its urgent call to reinstate the past, is immediately reflected in Thalia's acts of defiance, manifested in her renunciation of the privileged life she enjoyed as the daughter of the Synthamill formula's inventor. Her revolutionary activism is directed toward restoring sustainable food-production protocols that would not serve as instruments for suppressing human instincts and enforcing social control, but would instead operate in full harmony with the laws of Mother Nature.

In sketching the dynamics between Thalia's mythmaking mechanisms and the collective attempts at revivifying the past, Swain introduces yet another model of restorative nostalgia, which in its extreme mythologization and primordial quality resembles Bauman's retrotopia, a back-ward looking model of utopia that negates future-oriented promise of utopia itself and instead seeks refuge in the imagined or remembered past. Having lost faith in the possibility of building an alternative society, Bauman's retro-

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topia derives its utopian energy from resurrecting imagined aspects and grand ideas of the past—real or mythologized—because their familiarity and predictability provide a sense of security and orientation. In this framework, individuals confront what sociologists describe as modern liquid society, characterized by the instability and flux of social structures, institutions, and organized sociality. Bauman identifies four primary ways in which people attempt to navigate this uncertainty: (1) a return to overarching authority or strong governance (back to Hobbes and his Leviathan); (2) retreat into small, tightly knit communities or identity groups (back to tribes); (3) acceptance or reproduction of social hierarchies (back to inequality); and (4) a turn toward intimacy, care, or dependence (back to the womb). These strategies illustrate the human impulse to restore predictability, meaning, and ethical grounding in a society where traditional structures are dissolving, leading toward the collapse of familiar social mechanisms (Kociatkiewicz and Kostera 2014, 105).

Based solely on farming and harvesting the only surviving plant kudzu, a shared economy with a distribution of work, ritualization, the farm utopia called the Hinterlands, to which Thalia is introduced, represents a utopia which seems to operate on the idea of tribal model of community solely dependent on the laws of Mother Nature and the concept of a primordial/pristine self not predetermined by cultural factors. A mythical garden where life is peaceful, balanced and completely nurturing because it is in a symbiotic relationship with Mother Earth. This mythical dimension resonates in the names of the community's leaders: Dr. Demeter, evoking the Olympian goddess of harvest and agriculture, guardian of grains and the fertility of the earth; and Gaia, recalling the primordial goddess, the ancestral mother of all life.

The quasi-utopian character of the community resonates in the passage when Gaia praises Mother Nature during a meal: "Mother of the Earth, giver of life, thank you for the sustenance that you provide for us tonight. Mother, you have brought me bounty from the forest and the fields! I dine on cooked kudzu leaves, mushrooms, corn, berries! What a feast of your delight! Please bless these workers. Keep them healthy and in your care" (Swain 2014, 320). Characterized by "rehabilitation of the tribal model of community, return to the concept of a primordial/pristine self predetermined by non-cultural and culture-immune factors, and all in all retreat from the presently held (prevalent in both social science and popular opinions) view of the essential, presumably non-negotiable and sine qua non features of the 'civilized order'" (Bauman 2017, 9), the community is thus presented not merely as a social experiment but as a symbolic reclamation of myth and archetype, positioning itself as an imagined alternative to the alienation of the technologized world. This in turn resonates with Boym's assertion that: "modern nostalgia is a mourning for the impossibility of mythical return, for the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values; it could be a secular expression of a spiritual longing, a nostalgia for an absolute" (Boym 2001, 8). The community's reliance on myth and ritual can therefore be read as a manifestation of this modern nostalgia—a collective attempt to recover an "enchanted world" in the midst of disenchanted, technologized existence. Its invocation of goddesses and return to a tribal

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model function both as critique and as yearning: critique, insofar as they resist the alienation of technological rationality; yearning, in their expression of a deep-seated desire for wholeness, stability, and communion with nature. In this way, the community dramatizes not only a retreat from the present order but also a persistent cultural longing for an alternative that seems forever just out of reach, suspended between utopian hope and the impossibility of return.

The utopian model of idyllic symbiosis with Nature, envisioned as a more humane and sustainable alternative to the suppression of hunger through synthetic nourishment, does have its costs, though. As an outside visitor to this community, Thalia discovers that even though the society acknowledges hunger as a natural and desirable bodily function: "I believe humans need to eat. It's hardwired into us" (Swain 2014, 35), she also learns that the system is based on profit as Dr Demeter uses human milk in order to grow embryonic stem cell lines from which he creates food for mass consumption not out of compassion and generosity but simply to profit from it and gain power: "We'll dominate the market and become the sole supplier of nutrition in the new world order" (Swain 2014, 351). What appeared initially an idyllic farm utopia turns out to be a dystopian nightmare, in which the motif of hunger and food is once again used to gain power and profit.

However, like many authors of young adult dystopias or anti-utopias, Heather Swain's novel offers a ray of hope for future generations. At the novel's conclusion, Thalia Apple finds a tangible space removed from the technological constraints of her regulated society—a utopian enclave where she and others can cultivate the land, harvest food sustainably, and live in harmony with the natural rhythms of the environment. This enclave represents a concrete realization of restorative nostalgia: rather than merely longing for the past, it channels knowledge, memory, and myth into practical, ethical and communal action, creating a microcosm where human agency, environmental stewardship, and social connection are actively practiced. By investigating the dynamics between individual nostalgias or myths and collective attempts of resuscitating past blueprints, Swain's novel emphasizes the potency of nostalgia in mobilizing young generations to engage critically with history and myth, understanding that radical restorations of historical or mythical models may lead to ideological extremism. In this respect, as Svetlana Boym observes, nostalgia should be both retrospective and prospective, that is "fantasies of the past determined by needs of the present should have a direct impact of the realities of the future" (Boym 2001, xiv). As she further notes, "Nostalgia itself has a utopian dimension, only it is no longer directed toward the future. Sometimes it is not directed toward the past either, but rather sideways" (Boym 2001, xvi). Seen in this light, it is only by critically and imaginatively navigating between the elusive spectre of the past and the distant horizon of the future that individuals can pursue or realize the utopian spirit in their future-oriented scenarios.

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