

**Gender Qualities Essential to Survive
in Dystopian Societies:
As Exemplified by *Psycho-Pass* and
*Homestuck***

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Introduction

At the beginning of the 20th century, the genre of utopia in literature found its logical conclusion in dystopia, which, like utopia before, is a schematic, exaggerated description of a society that usually exists in isolation (sometimes on a planetary scale, without alternatives) and in the near future. Whereas utopias describe the “ideal” structure of a future society, dystopias hyperbolize certain problems of real or imagined societies to emphasize the dangers that await humanity inclined to construct an idealized society by simplifying the reality.

20th was the first century to see two world wars, the atomic bomb, a series of genocides, and a global confrontation in a new form - the Cold War; it is only natural that the genre of dystopia flourished. At the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, mass culture came to love dystopias, and so did Japanese animation. Many anime dystopias such as *Akira* (1988), *Ghost In the Shell* (1995), *Evangelion* (1995-1996), and later *Psycho-Pass* (2012) or *From the New World* (2012-2013) became milestones of the genre.

Cyberpunk is one of the most popular forms of Japanese dystopia, owing its emergence to the American writer William Gibson. In the Western (especially in North American) popular culture, the leading positions are retained by classical dystopia, often describing societies that have survived an apocalypse.

In my work, I focus on the gender aspect of dystopia and look at what roles are assigned to female and male characters, what are their typical vices and virtues. I analyze and compare popular dystopias to determine the image of the future society in these works as well as the image of the future female and male.

1. Japanese anime *Psycho-pass* and North American Web-comic *Homestuck*

In order to compare the roles assigned to male and female in the two types of dystopian societies, cyberpunk and post-apocalypse, I have decided to dwell on one popular and significant work in each of the genres. The two selected works appeared roughly at the same time, and, in my opinion, clearly reflect the current development trends of cyberpunk and classic dystopia.

Japanese cyberpunk is represented by the anime *Psycho-Pass* (the first season was realized in 2012-2013), released on screens in the form of an original TV series and directed by Katsuyuki Motohiro and Naoyoshi Shiotani. The first season consists of 22 episodes.

One of the co-directors of the series confesses that *Psycho-Pass* was inspired by Western specimen of the cyberpunk movie genre, in particular, *Gattaca* (1997), *Brazil* (1985), *Minority Report* (2002), as well as the iconic *Blade Runner* (1982)¹. The last two films are

based on the works of Philip K. Dick, an American writer who made a significant contribution to the development of dystopia. The action in *Psycho-Pass* takes place in the near future Japan: according to the director Naoyoshi Shiotani, “instead of pushing it directly 100 years in the future and all the technology, we wanted to dial back into the 80s detective drama feel. I don't think most Hollywood movies do this as much, like *Blade Runner*”².

Psycho-Pass was licensed by Funimation in North America and gained great popularity among Western audiences.

The work selected to represent post-apocalyptic dystopia in this paper is *Homestuck* (2009-2016), a North-American web comic, written, illustrated and animated by American author and artist Andrew Hussie. The comic combines static imagery, animated GIFs and chat logs, as well as music, animations and Adobe Flash games. Despite the complex structure, the main part of the web-comic is text illustrated with pictures, and as such must be identified as a piece of literature. However, the interactive element, when the reader actively participates in the narrative, which is achieved through browser video games, animated videos and musical accompaniment, sets *Homestuck* apart as a new original web-comic genre. In addition, as the author was publishing the chapters in 2009-2016, he managed to keep the audience on their tiptoes due to the complicated and non-linear plot and a variety of unpredictable characters. And numerous references to the actual mass culture allowed *Homestuck* to gain immense popularity among Western young audiences.

Among other things, the design of some of the main characters in *Homestuck* resembles the classical

pictorial style of Japanese anime (e.g., the character named Dirk Strider is armed with a katana and wears anime triangular glasses, referring the reader to Kamina, the anime character from *Gurren Lagann*), although the author Andrew Hussie denies direct influence of this anime on his work. However, it cannot be denied that *Homestuck* contains references not only to the Western, but also to the Japanese mass culture.

Thus, in this paper, I compare two dystopian works that were created at about the same time and in which both their own characteristics and the mutual influence of cultural traditions are visible.

The story of *Psycho-pass* takes place in an authoritarian future dystopia, where omnipresent public sensors (Sybil system) continuously scan the mental states of every passing citizen. The resulting assessment is called a Psycho-Pass (サイコパス). When the calculated likelihood of an individual committing a crime, measured by the Crime Coefficient (犯罪係数) index, exceeds an accepted threshold, he or she is pursued, apprehended, and killed if necessary by police forces. The story follows two protagonists, Shinya Kogami and Akane Tsunemori among other members of Unit One of the Public Safety Bureau's Criminal Investigation Division.

Shinya Kogami is one of the elite police officers called Enforcers. His task is to kill people whom the system recognized as socially dangerous due to their high Crime Coefficient index. However, he himself, like other "Enforcers" is selected for innately high Crime Coefficient, marking as "latent criminal"; he and others are overseen by police Inspectors, who have the jurisdiction to shoot them with their special guns Dominators should they pose a danger to the public.

As the story progresses, we learn that Kogami himself was an inspector, but after a criminal killed his partner, he became hardened and his Crime Coefficient became dangerously high. The main purpose of all his life is to find this criminal and finish him.

The main heroine, Akane Tsunemori is a new police Inspector at Unit One of the Public Safety Bureau's Criminal Investigation Division. She and her group investigate the works of Shogo Makishima, a prolific criminal mastermind.

Shogo Makishima is a Criminally Asymptomatic (免罪体質) – he is persistently assessed as having a low Crime Coefficient by the Sybil System in spite of his actions and plans, thus protecting him from Dominator shots.

The Enforcers and Inspectors start hunting Makishima, who aims to destroy the society created by the Sybil System because he does not want to live in an utopian society.

Meanwhile it turns out that Sibyl is a hivemind of similarly asymptomatic individuals and it wishes Makishima to join the system. He disagrees and escapes.

At the end of the story, Kogami finds Makishima, who still tries to destroy the system, and, despite all Akane's attempts to stop him, he still kills his longtime enemy and disappears.

Homestuck centers on a group of teenagers who unwittingly bring about the end of the world through the installation of an upcoming computer game.

This web-comic can be attributed to such genres as action-adventure, apocalyptic, dystopia, comedy-drama and science fantasy. Its plot is complicated, and its length is considerably huge: over 8000 pages.

As it stated on the comic's website,

“it's a tale about a boy and his friends and a game they play together.

On his 13th birthday, John Egbert starts playing a mysterious videogame called Sburb. Unfortunately, this triggers the apocalypse. Fortunately, he and his friends can make things right—if they can beat the game. They'll need a lot of teamwork, a little luck, and some inspired shenanigans along the way to make it through this mind-bending, genre-defying adventure”³.

As John and his friends begin to explore the world of *Sburb*, they are harassed by a group of twelve Internet trolls who have played a version of the game before. Further contact with the trolls reveals that they are not human at all, but an alien species actually called "trolls". As the trolls gradually become more important to the story, the narrative shifts to a side story arc exploring the nature of troll society which turns to be dystopian and the specific sequence of events that led to this group to enter the troll version of *Sburb*. The trolls' arc concludes with them winning their game and originally creating the humans' universe.

Gradually, the plot becomes more and more complicated, new characters come into play.

The readers open the future of the planet Earth, which is ruled by the leader of the trolls. Skillfully using human stupidity and self-interest, she seized power over the whole planet (as far as we can judge), and now humanity is on the verge of extinction (only two people are alive), and earthly cities are flooded and the planet is in decline.

Trying to save the situation and win the game, the heroes lose and die several times. For many of them, the

only way to a final victory is to recognize their own shortcomings and come to terms with them.

In the final battle against Lord English, who symbolizes the absolute brutal evil, sinister Jack Noir, who repeatedly killed the main characters and their parents, and against the tyrannical empress of trolls, their weaker opponents, whose constant defeats and losses taught them sympathy, mutual handwork and team work, manage to defeat them. Then the winners create a new universe.

2. Dystopian societies: differences and common places

Both works describe dystopian societies. Their distinguishing features are the following:

Psycho-pass: totalitarian control over the mental state of citizens that helps determine their position in the society; immediate death awaits violators of public order; society is governed by individuals who do not obey the laws and moral rules of the society.

Homestuck: society is divided into castes by race (depending on the color of the blood); violators of order are punished with death; society is controlled by aliens, i.e., a group of persons whose position in relation to this society is “alien”, they came from outside the society.

Differences in the image of societies:

Psycho-pass: there is no criticism of the existing order, it has some definitely positive characteristic: for

example, there are almost no crimes in the future Japan. Protagonists do not oppose the existing order: on the contrary, they support it. Some express regret for the past structure of society, where a person had more freedom of choice and expressions, but none of them try to destroy the new order. Such attempts are made only by the antagonist.

This type of society is described as cyberpunk.

Homestuck: the new totalitarian order is depicted exclusively in a negative light, as imposed from the outside (humanity is enslaved by aliens) and destructive (Earth is on the verge of death). The protagonists oppose this order, and the culmination of the work is the final battle with the oppressive ruler-aliens, who have established this totalitarian order on Earth. Humanity in this case is also on the verge of death. In other words, ordinary normal persons cannot survive in this society, and they have only one way to survive - to fight against this society.

Such societies are described as dystopia.

3. Gender qualities essential for surviving in dystopian societies

According to the generally accepted opinion, certain traits of character and behavior are inherent in men and women. For example, courage, determination, directness, and pronounced leadership qualities are considered to be traditionally masculine traits. In turn, women are required to be compliant, emotional, obedient and tolerant. They should be able to listen and understand the interlocutor, should be ready to compromise. Traditionally, it is also believed that a man

should take the lead in a relationship, he must make non-ambivalent decisions, and the woman is supposed to be led and play a subordinate role. Often in patriarchal societies, women's qualities were negatively colored as something primitive, chthonic, and unclean, close to the animal, the biological origin of humans. At the same time, being a man, a bearer of male qualities, was considered a privilege and marked the bearer as belonging to a sublime, spiritual, rational principle. Nowadays, the active influence of the third wave of feminism and post feminism have redefined the traditional gender roles and their meanings significantly in modern mass consciousness, and it is thus interesting to trace the results of this rethinking in the two works selected for this study.

In *Psycho-pass*, the bearer of the traditional feminine is the main character, Akane Tsunemori. She is a brave girl who is not afraid to doubt the correctness of her decisions or to ask advice from other people. She is sociable, quickly finds a common language with colleagues. She is compassionate, positively thinking, and not prone to depression. It is precisely for these qualities that she was given the responsible role of inspector. Throughout the series, she is trying to find a solution that would suit everyone, trying to save her colleague detective (Shinya Kogami) from the fate that he condemned himself to (in other words, he seeks vengeance the murderer (the antagonist) for the death of his partner, thereby condemning himself to destruction, while Akane wants the murderer to stand trial and be convicted of crimes under the laws of the state). In addition, she manages to cope with herself after the antagonist kills her best friend, and, unlike Shinya Kogami, she finds the strength not to sink down to

personal revenge. Thus, we can say that her ability for self-control and tolerance is significantly higher than that of Kogami and Makishima (the antagonist), who have more pronounced masculine qualities.

Kogami and Makishima, the two main male characters are the exact opposite of Akane. They are aggressive, ruthless, resolute and self-righteous. Both are individualists, and because of that, they oppose themselves to society. Although one of them is a criminal, and the second is a detective, they neither of them fits into the legal framework of society. One of them actually dies in the end of the story and the other one disappears in the end of the first season.

Thus, it can be concluded that people with pronounced feminine character are best adapted for survival in the conditions of a near future society (which, despite all its dystopian features, also has a number of advantages over modernity, such as low crime, stability, security, high level of citizens' prosperity). They have a high level of the so-called "emotional intelligence"; they are characterized by optimism, pragmatism, the ability to compromise and flexibility of thinking. At the same time, people with pronounced traditional masculine qualities cannot survive in the new order – for that they are too independent, uncompromising and stubborn.

Further it should be added that in *Psycho-pass* the bearer of traditionally feminine qualities is the female character Akane Tsunemori, while the traditionally masculine qualities are represented by two male characters, a detective and a criminal. However, this does not at all stop other characters professing clearly opposite-gender qualities (for example, one of the Public Safety Bureau's Criminal Investigation Division

officers, Shion Karanomori (a woman), demonstrates pronounced masculine qualities and, apparently, is in a love relationship with a female colleague). Thus, it can be said that gender qualities do not have to coincide with the character's sex.

The *Homestuck* characters are playing a computer game, and the key to their victory is a set of aspects⁴. The aspects may be active and passive. They also can be described in the Taoist terms Yin and Yang⁵.

As the story progresses, it becomes clear that characters with pronounced masculine (Yang) aspects are to be defeated in the long run, and those who have managed to reveal their feminine (Yin) potential are able to win a seemingly hopeless game.

The passive aspect of Yin represents the female qualities of character in their traditional sense: gentleness, compassion, emotionality, and tolerance. Since this aspect is designated as negative in the mass consciousness, it often causes the web-comic heroes who possess them to reject it subconsciously and try to adhere to more active tactics.

For example, one of the main characters, Dave Strider, has long opposed his own nature (conditioned by the passive aspect), trying to imitate his brother, a bearer of a pronounced masculine, active aspect. The attempts at being a hero like his older brother lead Dave to death in one of the alternative storylines. As a result, he manages to survive only in one and only scenario - accepting himself as he is (which turns out to be much less heroic than he would like to appear, and instead much more sensitive and soft). He then gets the chance to talk with his elder brother and accepts him with all the flaws and virtues. As a result, they find a common

language, reunite and fight side by side against a common enemy.

Another main character, the cherub Calliope, has long been under the influence of her tyrant brother, who personifies the destructive masculinity. She is sure that she must give in and lose to him, because he is stronger and more decisive, and she concedes to him until the time of a decisive battle comes. However, in the end it turns out that her female qualities are enough to defeat her evil brother and to create a new universe. On the other hand, just as traditionally feminine qualities such as empathy, kindness, gentleness and the ability to accept and recognize the feelings of another (i. e. tolerance) are required to win and create a new world, pronounced masculine qualities turn out to be ruinous for the characters that possess them, and for the world as a whole. So, for example, the leader of a group of trolls who plays analogue of Sburb on their planet, ultimately realizes that his insatiable desire for power has led the whole group of players to defeat, and some to death. Still another hero, the already mentioned Dirk Strider, notes that his and his friends' session was empty, and all his attempts to lead and be an active leader were fruitless⁶. He is one of the characters with the most pronounced active Yang aspect, but all his fine leadership qualities and warrior skills turn out to be useless to the dying, apocalyptic world of his session. As a result of the session, realizing his uselessness, Dirk, like a true samurai, commits a kind of suicide, refusing to help his surviving comrades as everything starts collapsing. A similar fate - death - awaits the main antagonists fighting for the destruction of the world. And, while Hussie does not deny the importance of masculinity, valor and leadership, as the main

characters cannot do without these qualities, he appears to make it clear that compromise, tolerance and harmony (again, traditional female qualities) are important here. Thus, even in a society of classical dystopia, under the conditions of post-apocalypse, the most viable are characters who are able to rethink and accept their femininity. Characters who have realized that feminine qualities are as valuable and meaningful as masculine.

Conclusion

Thus we can say that by 2010 there appeared a number of popular culture works demonstrating a positive perception of traditionally feminine qualities. This trend can be traced both in Western and in Japanese cultural traditions.

Moreover, to quote Russian theorist of literature and modern culture Dmitry Bykov⁷, we can observe in modern popular culture a drift to the priority of “feminine” qualities over “masculine” ones⁸. Characters with feminine qualities are no longer considered as weak and passive; moreover, they gain an advantage in the new world of the future.

¹ “Directors's Panel with Katsuyuki Motohiro, Naoyoshi Shiotani, and Atsuko Ishizuka”, Anime News Network, <https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/convention/2013/sakura-con/5>(accessed December 15, 2018).

² *Ibid.*

³ “INFO: Learn More About the Homestuck Universe”, Homestuck.com, <https://www.homestuck.com/info-story> (accessed December 15, 2018).

⁴ “Force and flow the aspects aren’t the only existential duality at play in classpects”, A Medium Corporation (US), <https://medium.com/@RoseOfNobility/force-and-flow-the-aspects-arent-the-only-existential-duality-at-play-in-classpects-fd1c3958314c> (accessed December 15, 2018).

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ “Act 6 Act 5 Act 1 x2 Combo”, Homestuck.com, <https://www.homestuc>

k.com/story/5830 (accessed December 15, 2018).

⁷ Bykov is a Russian writer, poet, and publicist, literary critic, teacher of literature. Until 2014, he worked as a professor at the Department of World Literature and Culture at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, and also collaborates with Moscow State University of Education. In 2015 the TV channel “Dozhd” launched the program “One Hundred Lectures with Dmitry Bykov”. In the cycle of literary lectures, Dmitry talked about Russian literature from 1900 to 1999. As part of the cycle, Bykov also gave lectures about world literature and also focused on some works for children and young people. The cycle went out until December 2017.

⁸ “Harry Potter and Cold War: Lecture of D. Bykov”, Youtube.com, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9E1PwM_GVu0 (accessed December 15, 2018). ; “Harry Potter – Gospel of Rowling: Lecture of D. Bykov”, Ok.ru, <https://ok.ru/video/531039390377> (accessed December 15, 2018). ; “Harry Potter and Rewriting of History: D. L. Bykov”, Facebook.com, <https://www.facebook.com/BykovDmitriyLvovich/posts/1225745650802925:0> (accessed December 15, 2018).

In particular, Bykov himself has noted such a shift in *Harry Potter (1997-2007)*, where Harry Potter, the protagonist of the main cycle of books, belongs to the house of Gryffindor (a pronounced masculine type), but already his son, who became the hero of a later work, *Harry Potter and The Cursed Child (2016)*, falls into Slytherin. Bykov sees feminine Yin essence in the methods of Slytherin, and concludes that nowadays feminine qualities (diplomacy, ability to listen to the interlocutor, tolerance) are more in demand than the masculine pressure and aggression.