

**CHARLES UNIVERSITY IN PRAGUE  
FACULTY OF EDUCATION  
Department of English Language and Literature**

**BACHELOR THESIS**  
**Dystopian elements in Ken Kesey's *Sailor Song***  
**Dystopické prvky v *Námořnickově písni* Kena Keseyho**

Jakub Brych

Thesis Supervisor: Mgr. Jakub Ženíšek, Ph.D.  
Study Programme: Specialisation in Education  
Branch of Study: English Language – Czech Language

2018

I hereby declare that this bachelor thesis, Dystopian elements in Ken Kesey's *Sailor Song*, is the result of my own work and that all the used sources have been properly cited. I further declare that this thesis was not used to obtain another academic title.

Prague, July 12<sup>th</sup>

.....

Jakub Brych

**Acknowledgements:**

I would hereby like to thank Mgr. Jakub Ženíšek, Ph.D. for the valuable advice he provided regarding the compilation of this thesis.

## Content

1.	Introduction .....	7
2.	Theoretical part: Dystopia – a classification .....	11
2.1.	The ideological demarcation of dystopia and related forms.....	11
2.2.	The environmental element in dystopias .....	14
2.2.1.	Ecocriticism and ecocide .....	14
2.2.1.1.	Values and dangers of ecocriticism .....	16
2.2.1.2.	Concerning nature .....	17
2.3.	The author’s perspective.....	17
2.3.1.	Kesey’s attitudes to novel as a literary form .....	18
2.3.2.	The question of subjectivity and interpretation .....	20
2.4.	The contemporary critical reception of Sailor Song.....	21
2.5.	Kesey’s previous novels – a comparison.....	22
3.	Practical part.....	24
3.1.	Kesey’s vision of the future.....	24
3.1.1.	Elements of Kesey’s dystopia.....	25
3.1.1.1.	The state of the environment .....	25
3.1.1.1.1.	Climate .....	25
3.1.1.1.2.	Concerning fauna.....	26
3.1.1.1.3.	Chemicals .....	28
3.1.1.2.	Politics .....	29
3.1.1.3.	Social issues.....	30
3.1.1.4.	The albino issue.....	32
3.1.1.5.	Religion .....	33
3.1.1.6.	The cataclysmic event .....	34
3.1.2.	The formal characteristic of Sailor Song’s dystopia .....	35
3.1.2.1.	Proportional analysis of setting and plot .....	36
3.1.2.2.	Chapter analysis.....	37
3.2.	The importance of style .....	42
4.	Conclusion.....	44

**Abstract:**

This bachelor thesis deals with the novel *Sailor Song* by Ken Kesey and the dystopian elements employed in it. It aims to analyse the prevailing purposes and utilization of these elements in the text as well as the formal and ideological nature of the novel's dystopian setting. Its further concerns are the extrinsic factors of its genesis, including statements and facts from the author's life, as well as the context of his previous works. The goal of the thesis is to assess all the gathered information and based on it create a complex image of what message the author is trying to convey with the novel and what method he uses to do it.

**Key words:**

Sailor Song, Ken Kesey, dystopia, ecocriticism

**Abstrakt:**

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá románem *Námořnickova píseň* Kena Keseyho a dystopickými prvky v něm obsaženými. Klade si za cíl prozkoumat převažující účely a užití těchto prvků v textu a formální a ideovou povahu dystopického prostředí románu. Dále se věnuje vnějším okolnostem jeho vzniku, včetně prohlášení a skutečností ze života autora, a rovněž také kontextu jeho předchozích děl. Cílem této práce je zhodnotit nashromážděné informace a na jejich základě vytvořit celistvý obraz toho, co autor zamýšlel svým románem vyjádřit a jaké k tomu užívá postupy.

**Klíčová slova:**

Námořnickova píseň, Ken Kesey, dystopie, ekokriticismus



## 1. Introduction

*“There are crimes that are truly uncomely. With crimes, whatever they may be, the more blood, the more horror there is, the more imposing they are, the more picturesque, so to speak, but there are crimes that are shameful, disgraceful, all horror aside, so to speak, even far too ungracious...”*

— *Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Demons (Appendix – Stavrogin’s Confession, 79)*

There is a certain tendency to perceive Ken Kesey and his works as somewhat rebellious, even anti-social. The general notion of his persona has mostly been formed by his first and most famous novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* and his widely-known connections to the Beatniks. And although these impressions are quite understandable and even correct to a certain degree, they are still a little too simplistic, disregarding the complexity of Kesey’s literary work, as it often happens to art when it gets into the hands of general public, left defenceless against their eagerness and harshness. The tendency to typify literature and art in general has always been here, it is so typical of mankind, and Kesey’s opus was no exception. A misconception of it being a direct challenge of the society’s current state arose quickly and Kesey himself gradually gained a reputation of a dire opponent of the establishment. Of course, in his own way, he was, but not purposefully. His way of life was by no means ordinary and his inclination to the hallucinogenics and close relations with some affiliates of the Beatnik movement as well as many other individuals, generally perceived as decadent and socially undesirable, helped fuel this general notion. This partly faultily constructed public persona significantly influenced the way his works have been received. The case of *Cuckoo’s Nest* is the most apparent one. This book is widely understood as an epitome of protest fiction and a straightforward allegory of the so-called “system”, an ideological typification which may in fact be seen as a downright misleading interpretation of its message.

The conflict between McMurphy and the Big Nurse is far from being a plain clash of Good and Evil, the Good being epitomized by the untrammelled and life-affirming free spirit, and the Evil by the deliberate institutional oppression devoid of any meaning beyond its own self-serving purpose. On several occasions, Kesey denounced this interpretation himself, “this is the thing about *Cuckoo’s Nest*: people think that Big Nurse is the villain; she’s not the villain; she is a minion of the villain. But she is not the villain; the villain is something else. If you reduce it to her being the villain, it loses its importance.” (Parker,

102) It is therefore a misconception to either substitute these characters for general positive and negative values in life or interchange the author and the main character of the book. McMurphy may have possessed several character traits Kesey is known for, yet the transition of these is not an attempt at projecting oneself into the fictional character, but rather a secondary semi-intentional identifying with it through letting it resemble its creator, yet not just him alone, as a key inspiration for McMurphy was Kesey's friend Neal Cassady. That is admittedly the tricky part for the reader – to avoid such rushed and simplifying conclusions about the character and the novel itself. McMurphy is not shorthand for „good” and although he makes an ultimate sacrifice in the end, the aim is not to turn him into a hero. Just like that the Big Nurse is not a stereotypical villain. There is a more profound issue that plagues the world Kesey wrote about. Two things stand out the most in the story – misunderstanding and weakness. Many forms of weakness and many instances of it, laid out on the scale from positive to negative, covering the whole spectrum. If the novel was intended to be a plain reflection of the society, it would be faulty to interpret it as a place of conflict between those who are oppressing and those who are oppressed, it should more likely be seen as a picturesque display of people in dire situations, all isolated and unable to maintain a satisfactory grasp of their lives.

So, when a proper thought is given to it, the „blackandwhiteness” of the story slowly merges into a far less definite shade of grey – a not at all unusual turn, yet one the audience often likes to neglect in its search for an ultimate truth and therefore one we often need to be reminded of in order to take a more measured approach to literature and all art for that matter. The reason why this is invoked in the preview to the analysis is that when reading *Sailor Song*, the third novel by Ken Kesey, there are some elements that might just make us slip into this comfortable typifying attitude and miss the opportunity to get acquainted with some potentially stimulating ideas of a late genius' mind. Together with *Sometimes a Great Notion*, *Sailor Song* lies in the shadow of Kesey's debut novel – the disproportion of the attention and recognition between the first and the other two novels is in fact huge, the *Cuckoo*'s position of an all-time classic making it even harder to assess *Sailor Song* properly and get the public to recognize its possible hidden qualities. Because of its smaller appeal to masses along with less of a potential for superficial interpretation and general simplification the novel has but a little chance to prove its worth and stand out, yet still it deserves more recognition than it has received so far

The task here is to look beyond the “genre tag” of the book and ponder a little how it is really composed, whether it was the author's sole intention to present a zeitgeist-based

novel to the world as a way of expressing his own paranoia and appealing to the paranoid tendencies of the readers or if it is a less definite and more valuable choice in terms of conveying a general and timeless message, a horror sprung out of the deeds of its characters pushed to the emotional and existential edge. A “Dostoevsky” way, we might call it, as that is exactly how Fyodor Mikhailovich used to direct his characters and construct his stories – with extremities.

Though it is no novelty in Kesey’s writing to expose characters to borderline situations and states of mind while employing strong links to their environment, in *Sailor Song* it was the first time he had used a futuristic time setting and a hypothetical image of the world. It may be the result of the timespan in which the book was written – both of Kesey’s previous novels were produced in an outburst of creativity, being more tied to the moment of their creation than the third one. Many things happened between the publishing of *Sometimes a Great Notion* and *Sailor Song*. Could it be the lengthiness of its genesis that resulted in its different conception of time and space? And why is Kesey dedicating so much space to seemingly meaningless characters and plot twists? Is it a deliberate thing, an intentional choice of writing style employed with a specific ideological purpose or is there no true meaning in it and Kesey just thrives on his “pointless” episodic anecdotes? Is there something worth noting, something the readers, erudite or not, have been missing the whole time? Was Kesey’s third novel not truly understood and remains unappreciated to this day? Did we all miss something that Kesey intended for us to discover?

And what is even this dystopian world Kesey had created. What are its prominent features? A closer look at the actual form of this fictional world is necessary in order to describe it in complexity and create some sense of its place among other representatives of the genre. As the genesis of the novel took place mostly in the 80s, several decades had passed since the publishing of the classical dystopian novels by the great dystopian authors. The genre underwent a development with different topics emerging as its primary focus over the years. Time periods came and went and different issues needed to be tackled. It is therefore interesting to look at *Sailor Song* in the context of its present circumstances in which novels presented more specialized forms of dystopia as well as compared to the canonical pieces in which the vision of the dystopian world is more general and compact, influencing all aspects of human life.

Some insight can be distilled from interviews with the author. If we are to create a complex image of his work we need to pay attention to these bits as well. In the case of *Sailor Song*, there potentially is a sufficient amount of background information for the thesis

to work with in reaching a successful, or at least partly successful conclusion. Despite not being a big fan of interviews, throughout his life Kesey gave a number of them. What we need to search for in these supplementary materials, is all sorts of information, from personal, to factual. If we are to determine as much of the circumstances of the novel's genesis, any piece of information is relevant – Kesey's various states of mind, his opinions on other art, even general stances in relation to the literary community and literature as such, all of that can provide us with an answer to the questions: Why go back to novel after 28 years? Why use futuristic setting? Why dystopia? And why this particular kind of dystopia? Nevertheless, the first step on this journey towards a better understanding of Ken Kesey's *Sailor Song* is, in fact, our attempt to better understand the dystopian genre as such.

## **2. Theoretical part: Dystopia – a classification**

*“Dystopia’s foremost truth lies in its ability to reflect upon the causes of social and ecological evil as systemic. Its very textual machinery invites the creation of alternative worlds on which the historical spacetime of the author can be re-represented in a way that foregrounds the articulation of its economic, political and cultural dimensions”.* (Moylan, 22)

### **2.1. The ideological demarcation of dystopia and related forms**

Although evil (mentioned in the quote above) is a rather tricky concept to work with (as are, in fact, all such absolute terms), when writing about dystopia – it seems like quite an apt choice. The reason is that in most visions of dystopian visions the state in which the reader finds the fictional world, either based on the actual one or entirely fabricated, is usually deformed in a way that the general contemporary audience would perceive as wrong and negative, and the cause (in many cases a new sovereign entity or a cataclysmic event of some sort) often is somewhat morally or formally twisted, inhuman, horrific, etc. – in one word, “evil”. But evil as a concept only has a limited power. It may be depicted as something generically scary and taunt the reader with its inherent horribleness, but in such case it simply stops there. Images of devils and demons are limited to cheap and shallow scares – a horror with a short lifespan and limited aftermath.

The true power lies in depicting the evil easily recognizable in the present, here and now, in the actual world, not restricted to a fantastical vision or a nonsensical, unfathomable world, but a reflection of horror that is familiar, one that is just at the moment being either denied, overlooked or established as a taboo by the society. The consequence of encounter with such evil is far more severe than those of generic visions limited to cheap horror as nothing is more horrifying than being forced to discover dormant evil in one’s closest surroundings or even in oneself. As Sargent summarizes it, “The traditional dystopia was an extrapolation from the present that involved a warning.” (Sargent, 8) Dystopias warn us from this sort of omnipresent, “human-induced” evil.

Yet, the term ‘dystopia’ only covers a certain segment of the vast grounds that are the hypothetical visions of the world. Bearing in mind that the genre of dystopian novel has changed significantly over the decades that had passed since the publishing of the first modern dystopias, it is of utmost importance for it to be properly defined and later identified in the context the novel. A simple label of dystopia is not enough in this case, as it is not a

direct opposite of utopia, despite an existing and wide-spread notion of that being so. The term utopia, although often being used as a name for a positive vision of the future, is generally regarded as neutral, only used to describe a non-existent place, its translation from Latin being “no-place”. The prevailing quality of the term, therefore, is its overall unattainability rather than a degree of convenience for its inhabitants. For a more detailed description of various types of utopian works it is essential to establish an apt set of terms. Sargent’s nomenclature is a good example of a systematic approach to the issue:

“Utopia – a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space.

Eutopia or positive utopia – a non-existent society described in considerable details and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which the reader lived.

Dystopia or negative utopia – a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which the reader lived.

Anti-utopia – a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as a criticism of utopianism or of some particular eutopia.

Utopian satire – a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as a criticism of the contemporary society.

Critical utopia – a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended for a contemporaneous reader to view as better than contemporary society but with difficult problems that the society may or may not be able to solve and which takes a critical view of the utopian genre.” (Sargent, 9)

Claeys alludes to this in his study, stating, “Following Sargent (1975), then, we can agree that ‘anti-utopias’ should be separated from dystopias insofar as the former reject utopianism as such, whereas the latter do not, or do so more obliquely. This definition does not privilege texts which retail ‘hope’, or those which propose utopian as opposed to non-utopian alternatives.” (Claeys, “Dystopia: A Natural History” 290)

Embracing this system and its criteria for the classification of utopian literature makes it possible to sort the particular texts with higher accuracy and employ a more detailed approach to the literary analysis. Yet at the same time, a necessity arises to not only consider the elements of the text itself but the author's artistic intention as well in order to determine the text's classification, as this regard is a part of the process of classification. As difficult as it would be to achieve this piece of information, it would then become a very useful part of the textual analysis, as the plain interpretation of a particular text and subsequent conclusion would not necessarily have to be in accord with its actual impact on the reader; a seemingly negative ending to a dystopian novel does not automatically carry a negative message. Moylan wrote on this issue, "even if a work is fully on the side of Anti-Utopia in form and affiliation, readers or audiences may well respond with resistant and utopian attitude—perhaps finding in the very closure of a certain text a chilling view of the present that counterfactually produces hope rather than the capitulation the text itself invites." (Moylan, 157-158)

To determine the intended purpose of a dystopian text, there has to be available a statement of the author in which he explicitly declares his own idea of what message the story should convey. If there is no such information, we are only able to deduce a hypothetical intent of the author from the text itself through an analysis of its outcome and the potential it has for further interpretation along with the possibility of it containing other less apparent ideas. Additionally, an investigation of the author's bibliography and prevailing ideological trends might prove to be useful in such evaluation even though such approach does not endorse the most recent developments of literary scholarship, as the overall tendency since the 1960s has been to relegate authorial intent to the background.

Concerning the difference between dystopia and anti-utopia, Moylan cites Peter Fitting's interesting approach based on their emphasis on either setting or plot.

"a possible distinction between dystopia and anti-utopia might lie in seeing the former in terms of setting and the latter in terms of plot.' In light of this suggestion, the dystopian narrative of revolt or possible revolt that expresses a utopian pessimism tends to privilege the setting (generated in what I term the iconic register of the text) by developing its surplus utopian possibilities in the extensive details of the alternative world (located, for example, in an unconquered enclave or in economic or political contradictions that are not resolved or controlled). In contrast, a text with an anti-utopian stance tends to favor a linear plot (developed in the discrete register) wherein revolts

are decisively crushed, with no slippage or surplus of dissent or opposition in society.”  
(Moynan, 156)

Adopting this approach is potentially useful as it draws attention to the content and makes determining the prevailing constituent of it the prevailing criterion in the issue of what its intended purpose might be. With these two classifications being perceived as counterparts in a certain regard, the space between them can be used as a scale onto which we are able to place particular texts based on the “proportional” representation of the two peripheral approaches in them and through that reach a complex conclusion as to what their purpose is.

## **2.2. The environmental element in dystopias**

*“It was the mystical rather than the scientific aspects of ecology which forged a crucial bond with the history of utopian thought, helping to redefine notions of eutopia (and hence of dystopia)”. (Claeys, “Dystopia: A Natural History” 259)*

Not all the dystopian visions are, however, as complex as the canonical works of Orwell or Zamyatin, not all of them are full-fledged dark visions where all aspects of life have been impacted by general decline. Probably the simplest way to categorize dystopian novels is the one used by Claeys who distinguishes between “three main, if often interrelated, forms of the concept: the political dystopia; the environmental dystopia; and finally, the technological dystopia, where science and technology ultimately threaten to dominate or destroy humanity.” (Claeys, “The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature” 5) Although it is impossible to completely separate these three aspects of dystopia as they practically always go hand in hand, the main concern of this thesis is the second one, and therefore the remaining two will only be of interest when being closely connected to the main topic.

### **2.2.1. Ecocriticism and ecocide**

Possible depletion of Earth’s resources is something believed by many to be at hand. Nature’s capacity to sustain life in all its forms has its limits and we might not be very far from transgressing them. The urge to reflect these grim prospects in literature therefore resulted in an accented tendency to portray such ecological catastrophe over the past

decades. “The disenchantment with political systems fostered by Orwellian dystopias helped to feed the conviction that the essential problem afflicting eutopian ambitions lay outside the arena of party politics, arising from such ecological problems as population expansion and environmental pollution, whose potential ill-effects put those of tyranny somewhat in the shade.” (Stableford, 270)

By the end of the 1960s a new word, *ecocide*, emerged, out of the need to give a name to the growing danger. “*Ecocide* is the extensive damage to, destruction of or loss of ecosystem(s) of a given territory, whether by human agency or by other causes, to such an extent that peaceful enjoyment by the inhabitants of that territory has been or will be severely diminished.” (Hall, 63) To this day, several states across the globe have adopted laws against *ecocide*, acknowledging the severity of such a threat.

The concern for the decline of the ecosystem and “*ecocidal*” tendencies resulted in the growing number of works centred around the role of nature under the influence of mankind. As the writers arguably started “to shift from representation of nature as a theatre for human events to representation in the sense of advocacy of nature as a presence for its own sake” (Franková, 214); a new field of literary theory began to be formed. *Ecocriticism* sets as its goal to examine the relationship between humans and nature in literature and furthermore – regarding nature as a concept in relation to humans, as there is an apparent problem in separating these two – as Glotfelty puts it, “*Ecocriticism* takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature. As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land.” (Glotfelty, 14)

It is apparent that *ecocritical* values in the affiliated literature significantly overlap with those of cautionary ecological dystopias, their utmost concern being the future of nature and the environment and us humans in it, no matter what the accompanying circumstances are. Nevertheless, a potential problem lies in the requirements an *ecocritical* viewpoint has on literature as a work of fiction. There is a danger of schematic approach to the eventual evaluation of such pieces. This danger dwells in the possible tendency to extreme glorification of the image of nature as well as a one-sided approach to the assessment of the content of the hypothetical literary work.

### **2.2.1.1. Values and dangers of ecocriticism**

“Putting something called Nature on a pedestal and admiring it from afar does for the environment what patriarchy does for the figure of Woman. It is a paradoxical act of sadistic admiration.” (Morton, 5) With this rather dramatic statement, Morton points out the potentially counterproductive tendencies within the ecocritical literary community. The most apparent problem here is the risk of creative stereotype among the affiliated artists – a risk common to all ideological movements throughout history. There is the question of artistic expression and the measure to which a poetic depiction of an (in this case) ecological issue is being portrayed on one side, and the importance of the practical purpose of a given text, as well as the problem of the likely to occur repetitiveness of specific topics and their relevance in the context of the scientific/literary community on the other.

In theory, a work of fiction which seeks to draw critical and scholarly attention has two main layers – the aesthetic and the “moral” layer. This also extends to those works of fiction that touch on ecocriticism. To succeed (to convey its message), such literature needs to find a functioning balance between the need to inform or “manifest” certain things, and the effort to aesthetically impact its reader. Therefore, what Morton warns against (among other things) is a certain self-containment. A movement of literary people with a very specific common interest and, what is most important – on the verge creating a sense of a communal environment may quite easily end up writing more with respect to each other than to a wider audience, thus limiting the desired general benefit of their work and getting stuck in an ideological circle.

The aesthetic part of ecologically concerned literature is as important as its practical focus. Though even literature with a solely pragmatic concern may live up to ecocritical standards in terms of its ideological contribution, only dwelling on that would be potentially harmful, leading the literature into shallow waters of stereotypical moralities. Therefore, it is the job of the ecocritical community to employ a complex approach to all possible literary works and examine them accordingly, with proper attention to their every aspect. Similarly, ecocriticism should abstain from excessively romanticizing nature – apart from too much poetic value being a potential distraction for the reader (there is only so much aesthetic appeal an audience can take in), ecocriticism (and any criticism, for that matter), requires a significant portion of self-reflection, the capacity to constantly examine itself in order to ensure its objectiveness and aptness. Leaning too much on the poetic side of ecological fiction might lead to losing touch with these qualities. Morton expresses it neatly,

“Ecocritique is critical and self-critical. This is the proper sense of critique, a dialectical form of criticism that bends back upon itself.” (Morton, 13)

### **2.2.1.2. Concerning nature**

Back to “not putting Nature on a pedestal.” Both – pragmatic ecocriticism as well as idealistic natural romanticism, require a definition, yet not an overly strict demarcation – the natural sphere must not be separated from the human sphere and vice versa, the natural ways and rules are not to be perceived as absolutely good and as a road to redemption for anyone who would embrace them. Nature is not separable from basic human morale and even from human actions in general. There is a basic dialectic relation between the two, which is potentially much less one-sided than many might think. Nature is then inherently hard to define and more or less may be taken as a counterpoint to all things artificial as well as those intentionally and vainly destructive. Morton has a very useful description (which is surprisingly poetic), “Nature wavers in between the divine and the material. Far from being something “natural” itself, nature hovers over things like a ghost. It slides over the infinite list of things that evoke it.” (Morton, 13)

Therefore, any text in any way concerned with nature does, whether the author is aware or not (and whether he/she has a clear intention to define it or not), have its own specific stance in relation to it, the concrete instances being numerous – from militant to accepting, with the middle being taken by those striving towards a compromise.

### **2.3. The author’s perspective**

*Sailor Song* as a novel is different in many respects from Kesey’s previous works. Although it shares some of the topics, it differs considerably in terms of setting, narration and timbre. Even the genesis of *Sailor Song* was very different from that of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* and *Sometimes a Great Notion*. While Kesey’s first two novels were created in a rather short span of time and there was a relatively small gap between them, *Sailor Song* took much longer to write and followed after a long twenty-eight years pause, in which Kesey did not cease his literary activity, but focused on different forms and genres. A more complex notion of why the gap between the second and the third novel was so long and more importantly – why it even ended, could provide a better perspective of Kesey’s intentions and ideas behind the *Sailor Song*, especially in terms of his choice of formal elements of the text.

In 1984, Kesey's son Jed died in an accident. This tragedy was arguably (and understandably) one of the main reasons Kesey's pause was so long. Kesey mentions it while introducing *Sailor Song* in a magazine, "There's nothing quite as nice as finishing a thing you've been struggling with for a long time. When I lost a kid, that sort of took the wind out of my sails, but then I got back into it really strong in the last few years." (Gilder) and though it probably is not ideologically connected to the novel itself (at least not provably), there is, nevertheless, one aspect which might (albeit loosely) be relevant to *Sailor Song*.

Six years after the death of his son, Kesey published his children's story *Little Tricker the Squirrel Meets Big Double the Bear* and the year after that also *The Sea Lion*, a tale around which the *Sailor Song* was eventually built.

"When I began *Sailor Song* I didn't have the story thought out, just the vision of what happens when a movie company comes to a little Alaskan town and takes it over. I needed a story within the story; I wanted it to be an ancient-seeming story, around which the larger tale could be folded. Then, as Larry McMurtry says, it was the job of the fiction writer to make stuff up, so I made up *The Sea Lion*. Although the two stories pretty much evolved together, the ideas behind *The Sea Lion* began when my brother and I went up to see an Indian storyteller in Washington up on the slopes of Mount Saint Helens." (Parker, 166)

### **2.3.1. Kesey's relation to novel as a literary form**

If we want to fully understand Kesey's motivation for writing *Sailor Song* and for the way he wrote it, we should explore his situation as a writer in the context of the literary community. Going back to a classical form the novel certainly is, especially after such a long pause and engagement in other ways of artistic expression, is something quite surprising, even more so, that in this case Kesey opted for elements of a genre never before approached by him.

Though being a prolific writer, Kesey never was a fully engaged novelist. Despite novel being a suitable literary form for his first two big stories, his subsequent activities were headed in different directions – the children's stories he had published seem to be the thing he cared for the most, as he expressed himself, "I just came back from a book tour, in which I had Viking not just line me up with bookstores where I was just reading and signing my book but also line me up with theatres where I could perform my children's stuff. It made a lot more sense; also, it was a lot more colourful. When you're up there with robes and masks

and monsters and dance and drums, the story gets up off the page and moves around.” (Parker, 127)

Kesey’s disenchantment with the literary “scene” was a significant cause of his distancing from writing novels – loss of belief in its authenticity, as well as in the creative process behind it. Simply put, Kesey did not wish to be a part of this “writers for writers” community, and he never really was to the full extent. There is a certain sensical faultiness in a work of fiction concerned with general topics being intended to appeal rather to the audience within the literary society than the general public. In the light of that, publishing novels became a thing of prestige as well as a sort of obligation for a writer to stay in the general notion. As Kesey said, “It’s kind of like a compulsory in the Olympics: every so often you’ve got to write a novel to make people pay attention to the other stuff you’re doin’.” (Parker, 127).

Gradually, Kesey inclined more and more to the children’s stories. On one occasion, he talked about his experience with writing children’s literature and how it was specific: “When you’re writing for kids, all you have to have is a good story; it will be accepted. Also, you can tell whether it works when you read it to a kid. It’s hard for a writer to tell when a novel works.” (Parker, 164) and elsewhere, “It’s got to make it according to that kid’s set of rules, and I think those rules keep you pretty honest.” (Parker, 137)

Whether this was his main motivation, is not clear and cannot be determined with certainty. There might, however, be a link between the loss of Kesey’s son and his newly emergent affection for the children stories and the way they perceive them (the interest in the aforementioned live performances is something Kesey had always been known for – he may even have preferred it to the written art). “The storyteller was there to begin with. He used the fire and he used his voice; he used shadows and monsters and he used poetry and music. And all those things worked on the audience. When you just get into print, you reduce the input quite a bit.” (Parker, 127). There is clearly a strong fascination with the young reader on Kesey’s side, due to the aforementioned reasons. Whether there was a connection between the death of Kesey’s son or not, it is apparent that by the end of the 1980s, Kesey directed his interest towards a younger audience and his attitude towards the novel as a literary form had waned. However, it may be possible, that it was this very tendency, that in the end led him back to the novel.

“Kesey chose to include his *Sea Lion* tale for children, making it an important part of the book’s storyline. This afforded us the chance to discuss his feeling about children’s stories, beginning with why he got involved with the form in the first place.

“I’m really certain of my kids’ books,” Kesey said. “I’ve read them and performed them enough to know that this is a working piece of stuff. You are not telling stories that are meant to explore the psychological depths of a character—you are just trying to tell a story, like Poe or Zane Grey. And that’s just so much more interesting to me.”” (Parker, 136) Being based around this particular children’s story, we may assume that *Sailor Song* ultimately is very much a product of Kesey’s affection for children’s literature.

### 2.3.2. The question of subjectivity and interpretation

Additionally, there is always the problem of the reader and the way a person interprets literature. And it is important to note that the general audience’s tendency to overinterpret was something Kesey was not very fond of. Neither was he a fan of the urge common among writers to insert a great deal of allusions in their text in the pursuit of the maximum degree of intertextuality and variety of topics – the “easy” way to achieve the status of an intellectual. Kesey criticized this tendency.

“INTERVIEWER: In *Sailor Song* there is a conflict about how to read the Indian story, “The Sea Lion.” One character sees it as meaningless for American audiences looking for symbols and plots. Do you believe stories should have a discernible meaning?

KESEY: I’m for mystery, not interpretive answers. When I was working on *Caverns* [a collaborative story with the students of his writing class], I found out that one of the problems was that students kept looking for the answers to symbolic riddles and believed that modern fiction is supposed to supply you with the answer. The answer is never the answer. What’s really interesting is the mystery. If you seek the mystery instead of the answer, you’ll always be seeking. I’ve never seen anybody really find the answer, but they think they have. So they stop thinking. But the job is to seek mystery, evoke mystery, plant a garden in which strange plants grow and mysteries bloom. The need for mystery is greater than the need for an answer.

INTERVIEWER: How did the class show its desire to provide an answer?

KESEY: One student tried to tie *Caverns* up in a Buddhistic bag. There were thirteen of us contributing to the book. Without telling any of us, he introduced into the last chapter four pages of material that was pure *Diamond Sutra*; it came from the Rajneesh. He was a disciple all along and he had been keeping this in his mind. His answer was

the same kind of dogma that people spout when they think the answer is Christ or environmental awareness. Anytime they do that they're already joining with the forces of ice-nine-hard mud." (Parker, 168)

Although Kesey naturally did not avoid intertextuality (which would even be impossible, at least on the subconscious level), it is apparent that he strongly resented purposed accumulation of allusions and the need for thematic connections and supplying plain and clear answers. Yet there is also a statement of his which provides a rather straightforward summary of the novel's theme, "It's built around the question: Does love make any sense at the end of the world? If all this stuff we hear predicted is really about to happen, is there any sense in feeling, having families and so forth?

But I was pleased to learn that there were not a lot of bleeding corpses left over. The end of the world isn't as bad as we're led to believe." (Gilder) It certainly does not summarize or simplify the whole text, yet the plainness of this statement (to some extent) undermines the support of ideological ambiguity Kesey had declared earlier. The novel naturally contains much more, storywise, than what Kesey had mentioned in the quote, his opinion is, however, a strong determinant in the evaluation of the novel's message.

#### **2.4. The contemporary critical reception of *Sailor Song***

*Sailor Song* was not received as positively as its predecessors. It was deemed outdated, even shallow. The critics generally praised Kesey's writing, yet were not very fond of the novel's story and themes. The general consensus that could be derived from the preserved reviews seems to be that "Kesey is still Kesey", meaning that his position in the society has not changed and neither have his stances. Essayist Fred Haefele called the book "painfully dated" (Haefele), reviewer Christopher Bray wrote that "Swollen and meandering, the book is short on narrative thrust" and that "[Kesey] is out to defend the soul of The Novel. He wants to save it from the phoney frontages of the post-modern, and to offer a vision of the real world." (Bray). There is a tone of condescending irony in this statement, suggesting that in the reviewer's opinion, Kesey's alleged effort to preserve the novel in its archaic form is somewhat anachronistic. The question here is whether this really was Kesey's intention and if it indeed was, how much of a role it played in the genesis of the novel. Given his withered affection for the form, it is likely that this tendency is just a secondary product of a simple necessity to write.

Gregory McNamee wrote this: “the Kesey of *Sailor Song* aches with nostalgia ... he may not have liked the Reagan-Bushian end of his time on Earth, but Kesey was an optimist all the same, a better angel of the ‘60s. Slight though the plot of *Sailor Song* may be in comparison with his earlier novels, Kesey is incapable of writing a bad sentence, and this book makes for a fine countercultural entertainment.” (McNamee) Here the sense of irony is present as well, albeit less intense. What stands out, however, is the word “entertainment”, signalling a possible specific attitude the author has towards the novel. And although Mr McNamee probably (no matter whether intentionally or just subconsciously) meant it as a simple descriptive comment on the nature of the novel, with possible negative connotations in terms of its alleged intellectual lackings, it is quite an important statement, as it just happens to hint at Kesey’s natural talent for humour, which is one of the key topics of this thesis. It was mentioned in many contemporary reviews of *Sailor Song* although not fully appreciated, at times it even received unfavourable critique. Other concerns included the novel’s “deus ex machina” ending as well as its narrative focus and general content. Journalist Charles Perry criticised the novel, “It looks as if Kesey has never quite escaped the intellectual cul-de-sac that led him to throw LSD parties instead of writing. Perhaps this is actually an attempt at a novel without any search for meaning, a novel about immersion in life. Nearly all the story action takes place in four chapters, and the remaining 17 concern themselves with inconsequentialities, mostly loafing, drinking and chat.” (Perry) Here there is yet another hint at the value of Kesey’s writing style, which concerns itself a little with how the very text is structured and how its message is conveyed – the style is quite positively an integral part of the message, there is clearly an “intention” in this vaguely defined narrative structure, a potential for meaning and significance in a seemingly disorganized, vaguely focused and planned, and daring style. And although it can be said with confidence that Perry is not exactly fond of this aspect of the novel, for the cause of this thesis, his observation is a fairly intriguing point, something that can just as well be considered positive – a huge benefit of the novel, and therefore presents a truly useful argumentation for the practical part of this thesis.

## **2.5. Kesey’s previous novels – a comparison**

The dystopian setting is an absolute novelty for Kesey. Sci-fi elements, consistently functioning as satire and not static genre props, never appeared in any of his two previous novels. In fact, Kesey never showed any interest in technological aspects of the society in

his novels, and even in *Sailor Song* there can really be found no fascination with the subject as such. The futuristic elements, including the dystopian setting, are all employed in other literary pursuits within the book. Kesey stated, “When I started, I’d planned to have it in contemporary time, but I haven’t been able to keep ahead of the truth. One of the events was going to be a big oil spill. So I had to move it into the next century, and even now it’s catching up fast.” (Gilder). This statement is a valuable contribution – it reveals a part of Kesey’s intention with the novel. Though not openly disclosing his plans or describing them in detail, he states that he planned a gas spill as an important condition for the story. This ecological disaster, therefore, was probably an essential part of the novel, given that the time shift was made (at least partly) because of it, which would give more weight to the environmental message of the text.

Yet despite the apparent affection for nature and all things natural, Kesey has never been a full-fledged environmentalist and never really became an actual ecological activist. There only is this prevailing topic of conflict, not necessarily of the artificial and natural, but often thematically close to it, and the motif that connects all three novels is native inhabitants of a certain area, most prominently – Native Americans. In *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* it is through Chief Bromden, especially in the part where he is reminiscing about his home, in *Sometimes a Great Notion* it is Indian Jenny and in *Sailor Song* it is all the descendants of the early aboriginal people, or “DEAPs”. In one interview Kesey explicitly states this after recollecting the very original inspiration for his debut novel.

“When I first came to Oregon, I’d see Indians out on the scaffolds with long tridents stabbing salmon trying to get up the falls. The government had bought out their village, moved them across the road where they built new shacks for them. ... this Indian consciousness has been very important in all of the stuff that I write. It’s not just in *Cuckoo’s Nest*. The character Indian Jenny in *Sometimes a Great Notion* is very close to the character of Alice in *Sailor Song*. It is the dispossessed Indian spirit that’s trying to reconnect with the white male spirit.” (Parker, 155).

This is apparently a major recurring topic for Kesey and in *Sailor Song* it actually has a prominent part. It is tightly connected to the environmental issue – it basically is the main embodiment of this issue in the novel. There is a clear development in how Kesey approached the issue over the years, but it is clearly discernible that this concern represents one of the essential grounds of his literary efforts.

### **3. Practical part**

In this part of the thesis, several constituents of the novel will be analysed separately, as well as in various relations within the framework of the text. The individual topics addressed in the analysis will be listed and assessed in terms of their prominence in the novel, and the acquired information will be used to determine the message or messages the author presumably intended to communicate in the novel and the role the listed topics play in communicating that message. Furthermore, formal classification of the fictional world of *Sailor Song* will be carried out with regard to the various taxonomic methods specified in the theoretical part. Additional regard will also be given to the importance of the author's writing style as a crucial element of the novel's overall ability to convey its intended message.

#### **3.1. Kesey's vision of the future**

*Sailor Song* is set in the near future, approximately between 2010 and 2020 (the novel having been written during the 80s), in the fictional Alaskan town of Kuinak. The world in this time period faces general pollution, global warming and other problems of global scale. Storywise, the novel could be viewed as a mixture of a cautionary reminiscent sci-fi and a purposefully trashy adventurous pulp fiction. For the most part, it follows the character of Isaak Sallas, a former eco-terrorist.

The main plot of the novel revolves around a film crew coming to Kuinak to shoot a costly book adaptation and the clash of the common town folk with the commerce brought about by the film's production. As the basic values of the people involved are put to a test, the conflict is resolved by a *deus ex machina* in the form of a magnetic storm which destroys all digital technology.

Kesey created a future sheath with vanity and resignation and centred around a prototypical antihero. There are however very specific and quite original aspects to this futuristic vision, defying the stereotypical notion of Kesey as a plainly rebellious writer. In this part of the thesis, analysis of various constituents of this dystopian world will be carried out and a conclusion as to what message it conveys and what the possible intentions of its author were, will hopefully be reached.

### **3.1.1. Elements of Kesey's dystopia**

Kesey's dystopia is a rather modern one – far from the complexity and severity of the Orwellian classics. It does not involve much oppression, war, any form of physical violence, torture or imminent harm. Kesey only focuses on several aspects of the fictional world, the most prominent of them being the damage humankind has inflicted on the environment.

#### **3.1.1.1. The state of the environment**

The fictional world of *Sailor Song* strongly reflects the environmental crisis the society had brought about in the second half of the nineteenth century, especially the eighties, during which the major part of the novel was written. Its main concern is mankind-induced climate change and its various manifestations, related issues being the social and political factors.

##### **3.1.1.1.1. Climate**

“So it came down to Alaska, the Final Frontier as far as this sick old ballgame goes. Top of the ninth . . .

For one thing, Alaska is a field vast enough to still be relatively unpolluted, for all the oil spills and garbage dumps. It has a land area of five hundred eighty-six thousand square miles, or three hundred seventy-five million acres. Even now, in the twenty-first century, most of this acreage is still utterly untrod by the foot of White Man, or Red or Black or Yellow Man; or any mammal's foot at all for that matter, when you get down to the inch-by-inch. It's empty. Life flourishes essentially along its stretch of shoreline, of which there is more, mile-by-measured-waterfront-mile, than there is along all the other waterfronts circling all the rest of the United States” (Kesey, 43-44)

The climate is dramatically different from today. The negative prospects of global warming have come true. Kesey portrays Alaska and Kuinak as the last place on Earth still retaining normal conditions. “Due to its uniquely protected location, Kuinak has remained remarkably untouched by the ravages of the twenty-first century. The temperatures are still much like always, average thirty- seven to sixty-five degrees in summer, and seven to thirty degrees in winter” (48). The temperatures in the rest of the world are much higher than regular temperatures today or in Kesey's days. “You know what the temperature was in New

York yesterday? One-twelve [°F]. It never dropped below a hundred until just before dawn. Read the paper. No offense, but you guys have got a grubby little paradise here and don't have a mother clue." (113) According to the National Centers for Environmental Information ("National Temperature and Precipitation Maps."), the average temperature in the state of New York in July 2017 was between 80 and 90°F (which equals approximately 26 and 32°C), with the highest values never surpassing 100°F (approx. 38°C). 120°F (approx. 49°C) mentioned in the quote is therefore diametrically higher.

Kesey also emphasizes the uniqueness of Alaska among the countries of the world, "From Alaska there's no place left to go. There used to be Brazil, but they cut it down to pay their Third World debt to the First and Second, who fed it to McDonald's. Over ten zillion sold.

There was hope for a time that it might be Australia, but that hope proved to be just another Victorian whimsy, riddled with white ants and racism. Africa? Africa never had a chance; the wheel was rigged before it was even invented by riggers of every persuasion. China? The legendary Sleeping Giant woke up in economic chains and smog. Canada? Nutted by resourcers while the hosers watched hockey and drank beer." (43)

Kesey very early on foreshadows that the status quo of Kuinak being a provincial town, keeping its peaceful nature, is merely temporary, and its current conditions are an article the rest of the world undoubtedly will sooner or later attempt to usurp.

### **3.1.1.1.2. Concerning fauna**

Being foremost a fisherman town, Kuinak's riches lie mainly in its fishing grounds, them being one of the last preserved areas with a sustainable source of fish on Earth. The rest of the world's seas are polluted by an oil spill (the one that along with other things made Kesey set the story in the future). "The only thing that revealed the blight beneath the surface was the paltry number of boats. Just a couple of crabbers, some longliners, and a few gillnetters still making desultory sets along the once-vigorous fishing grounds. Barely a dozen. And this wasn't even an odd-number year, this was an even-numbered year. For a while some good runs had come in on the even-numbered seasons—seasons not affected by the two- or four-year cycle since the '89 spill—but lately those runs had diminished even with redoubled efforts at the hatcheries." (124)

Another element of Kesey's depiction of the negative marine situation is the occurrence of hagfish, or "slime eels" – the sea scavengers, whose presence indicates an increased number of corpses, which is their main source of food. "'Look at the beauties! Class Cyclostomata, family Myxindae, species myxine glutinosa pacifica. Literally, 'gooey mess.' And they are not eels, Mr Carmody. Hagfish is what they are traditionally called.'" (257)

Kesey also includes depictions of other animals being victims of the mankind's disregard for nature – the very first event of the novel is an encounter with a cat whose head is stuck in an empty mayonnaise jar. "The cat pirouettes back to face the sound, still swaying upright, bottled head tipped backward. This tortured position seems to be the only way the animal has found to keep an air passage open at its throat." (4) Due to its appearance, it is at first mistaken for a demon – a rather ominous symbol and an effective analogy of the nature's stance against mankind. Furthermore, close to the location of the first scene, a huge garbage dump is situated, which serves as a sanctuary for once domesticated, now wild hogs, who are used to living off waste. Kesey describes them as "wild hogs rooting amidst the burning debris—charred, savage, prehistoric things, with hide like armour plate and bristles like eight-penny nails, swallowing salmon heads whole right along with plastic milk bottles and Pampers" (13). Pigs function very well as beings analogical to humans since they are said to be quite intelligent and with regard to the genre of this novel – since they are the main protagonists of Orwell's *Animal Farm*. Kesey alludes to this analogy as he endows them with personality, letting the leading hog have a name and even speak. "The pigs kept running until they reached the mountainous Kuinak Town Dump up at the tree line. One boar named Prigham, young and Mormonesque, proclaimed "This is the place," and they dug in." (13) This huge pile of waste inhabited by hogs becomes quite symbolic in the novel – it is an effective social analogy within its pages and a rather self-explanatory element. Its importance in the story is most significantly noted when it is removed for the purposes of the soon to be built amusement park – it comes as a shock, the fact, that such an enormous accumulation of filth somehow had been disposed of. A similar location to this one is the nearby "Tire City", a huge amassment of tires originally intended for recycling, that was eventually inhabited by new settlers. Again, Kesey creates an inhabitable space out of a dump to intensify the notion of vanity and pollution.

The influence of humans on animals can also be seen in the scene where the character of Greer finds drunk mice in the engine of a boat. "'The mice have become gas-heads, mon. I read in New Light that it's happening at dockside pumps all along the coast; if the pump

hoses aren't screened, mice crawl up in them by de mother wads." He opened the grips and dropped the drowned rodent over the side." (24) And on the same page, the first mention of animal suicides occurs. "Another symptom of the e-fect, is what New Light claims. Even the animals be committing suicide."

"Sounds like New Light is still beaming out the same old bull."

"Hey, all those beached greys in San Diego? The deer laying down on highways in Idaho and Utah? Woo." (24) The alleged reason for this is that the animals are "depressed" (25). Kesey in a way separates wild and domesticated animals, with the latter somewhat adapting to the deteriorating conditions in the closer surroundings of the human habitats while the former, tied more or less strictly to nature, seem to be losing their will to live. It is a clear attempt by Kesey to depict nature as a sort of omniscient entity, whose strength (or alternatively, patience), proportionally decreases with the mankind's negligence; this relationship thus exceeding a regular causality, in which damage is only inflicted by direct contact. This is a sort of transcendental damage which is inflicted on the spiritual level.

#### **3.1.1.1.3. Chemicals**

Kesey, however, does not only focus on the damage which nature suffers. One of the main tragedies caused by human activity happens to the main character, Isaak Sallas. His daughter is born with the so-called "cleft spine", a defect which in her case results in regular amassing of fluids inside her skull. The child eventually dies following a technical failure of a suction device which was supposed to maintain her condition within reasonable measures. Salas's wife never recovers and leaves him. Sallas blames the defect on his past in the army as well as the pesticides he works with while piloting the crop dusting aircraft for his tragedy. "The clandestine flights in the venomous little Nightmoths; the pesticido planes; the subversion of a natural process in the name of a Bug-Free Drug-Free Thug-Free World. And it works—infinitesimal alterations at the genetic level. And why not? It makes sense, it preserves personnel, it saves money and it keeps the collateral damage at a minimum. Of course, there was always the possibility that if you mess around with it long enough you might get some of it on you." (129). Here, Kesey presents a vision of the future in which there had been no significant regulations of the chemical procedures in agriculture and genetic alterations had proved to be harmful even in a very small amount. Kesey also adds another depiction of the government's disregard for deteriorating quality of nature's resources, this time it is dirty water. As he puts it, "thousands of women, balancing on their

heads buckets and jars and pots of Central Valley tap water. They were shown lined out for miles along the shoulder of the highway, barefoot and bleeding like medieval penitents, with their watery offering to the state legislators. They carried only one sign: “If it’s so pure—you drink it.” That was enough to get them arrested for unlawful demonstration along a public thoroughfare. They were hauled off by the busloads.” (130)

### 3.1.1.2. Politics

Although the novel does not deal extensively with the political aspects of its world, there is a prevailing notion of a powerful bureaucratic apparatus at work, most times being represented by the United Nations. The UN seems to be functioning more or less the way it functions nowadays, yet there appear to be somewhat stricter measures in its operations, including regulations and worldwide supervision over transport and markets. Kesey reveals the severe measures at the beginning, describing the way UN dealt with AIDS, “When the worldwide UN AIDS inoculations wiped out the disease at its source—the dirty dick—it also seemed to wipe out a great deal of such urges as give rise to spreading the disease. Male ardor cooled and never rekindled.” (3) Another of these acts is the ban of naturally made alcohol and replacing it with an artificial alternative, referred to as “recon booze”.

All encounters of the main characters and the UN are of somewhat negative nature. “Like all legitimate pursers the drop readouts were monitored by strict international regulations; times and positions were outlinked directly to UN stations up and down all the fishing grounds. A seine had to be dropped, circled, set and closed in less than forty minutes, and out of the water in under an hour. One minute longer and a UN warden would be chopping his way to your coordinates.” (385) The way the UN is portrayed in *Sailor Song*, it seems, that in Kesey’s world, the political system shifted to a sort of sub-state level.

Mentions of specific countries appear scarcely and usually have only a loose connection to the story. The main effect of these fragments of information is the notion of the decaying state of political affairs in the world. “Wayne Altenhoffen’s editorial essay on the Tyranny of the Majority consumed a full hour of concentrated attention. Altenhoffen was once again decrying the administration’s policy in Chile, calling it “just another megalomaniacal move by the mad Ahab at the helm of our poor ship of state.” The fact that the recent polls showed that ninety-two percent of the American public supported the annexation only added fuel to Altenhoffen’s argument.” (260) Here Kesey uses a move of a hypothetical leader of the USA to illustrate the current state of the affairs, elsewhere,

however, he also mentions a controversial environmentalist act, “Playing poison politics was one thing, poisoning politicians was another, especially those bi-vi sister senators from Colorado joined at the spine. Leonard had cancelled his membership after watching the televised trial. And not a moment too soon. When The Hague declared the whole organization was guilty of “flagrant societal infractions” and its members were “nothing more than biological Bolsheviks,” all Hollywood turned against the Old Greens.” (393) It is not entirely certain to what extent the intention of this part is serious and to what it is ironic. Kesey does not provide more detailed description of the trial with the “Old Green” – the environmentalists and the political power (this time not specifically named). What this passage, however, does determine with absolute certainty, is that there exists a bilateral animosity in the issue of environmentalism and that there is an ongoing conflict around it in the world.

### **3.1.1.3. Social issues**

In social terms, *Sailor Song* is mostly limited to the inhabitants of the central town of Kuinak. The population of the town is an amalgam of American citizens, immigrants from various corners of the world and so-called “DEAPS” – an abbreviation of the “descendants of the early aboriginal people”. These include members of all the Alaskan tribes (e.g. Aleut, Eskimo, Tlingit, etc.) who live in the western society. In the depiction of these descendants, Kesey continues in the tradition started by his take on the native Americans in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*. He focuses on their living conditions and how well they fit in the society. The range includes those who have blended successfully, like the character of Alice Carmody, who despite a hot-blooded nature, adapted to the western culture. The exact opposite of that is the case of the DEAP nicknamed “Daddy-daddy”. He regularly abuses his daughter and takes advantage of his family. “The youngest of the girls wore a feathered headdress with bells on the band. She was on all fours at the father’s front, groaning through her nose and jingling like a reindeer. Alice had to fight to keep her three cups of coffee from surfacing to join the action.” (170) Daddy-daddy is an example of the kind of natives “caught” between their natural ways and those of the western people and ended up living on the edge of society, descending into moral depths (seen from the perspective of general morale). Here again, Kesey is somewhat ambiguous, refraining from direct judgement of any side. He merely presents a problem of the society, intensifying the notion of general moral decay. The very negative extreme of the social scale Kesey presents rather

incidentally, as complementary piece information among other general statements. “The station, KDEAP, boasted five call letters instead of four and regularly interrupted network shows to air local bingo winners or Yupic talk shows intended to thwart the rise of Deap suicides.” (108) The “rising number of suicides” is quite in concord with the general timbre of the novel; it accentuates the suicidal, or at least apathetic tendencies, and yet again, Kesey does it quite subtly, with little emphasis, it is but a mention not followed by any further information,

“At the end of the story, the reporter (probably Altenhoffen) made the point that it would have taken more than mere money to field the twenty-two team members required by the ASHA safety code. The male enrolment for all four grades for the forthcoming year was projected at being less than twenty. This made Ike feel worse than ever. He remembered attending a football game the first fall he had come to town; the benches had looked full and prospering. What had happened to the supply of students? Implant contraceptives had all but eliminated unwanted pregnancies, but a simple shot could open up a window of fertility, anytime. Family size had remained constant. So what had suddenly happened to the students?” (261)

The fact that Kesey never stresses such disturbing information and only serves it as a certain addition to the main plot creates a sense of unease because seen by general logic such important issues should be addressed on a much larger scale than they are in the novel.

Apart from heavy use of the artificial alcohol (“Ike shrugged. “Practically everybody’s drunk these days, Alice . . . practically all the time.” (350)), people in the town of Kuinak, and in fact, in all of the world, have a strong habit of using “scoot”, a fictional artificial drug in the form of a tea, which stimulates organism and has very small side effects. Since all the “vegetable psychogens” are gone from the world (34), it became the main narcotic in the world and therefore also in Alaska, “scoot was hands down the major drug-abuse problem in Alaska. A lot of the young highliners did a lot of scoot during the grueling salmon sessions.” (34) Kesey achieves two things with the creation of this synthetic drug – firstly, it is yet another manifestation of the UN regulations, the fact that the natural drugs have been completely obliterated shows the power of the organization, and secondly, it is a useful display of the mankind’s priorities – developing a more elaborate drug seems to be of more importance than pretty much anything else.

But the main failure of men and one of the main topics of the novel is the short-sighted greed. It is one of the issues Kesey puts a major stress on – the small-mindedness of people,

which makes them powerless against evil and greed, both inside and outside. The majority of the town's population falls for the suspicious promises of the wicked film crew, disregarding not only the fact, that their intentions are purely opportunistic, but also that the main motivation of the crew leader is vengeance. Kesey illustrates that quite typically of him with this sermon: ““cast your bread upon waters but not your pearls before swine. Thus I beg you all to remember: ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit though they have not an invitation to the rich man’s hall.’ Blessed. O blessed indeed! A-men!”

“A-men!” They answered, fast, ready to get on to the bread and pearls and swine. „O Amen a-men!”” (94) Kesey, known for his unscrupulousness, does not hesitate to depict the crowd's psychology in a negative manner and with a sufficient dose of mockery. However, he manages to balance this out, as he is apparently aware of how unwise it is to condemn the wit of the common people. This he shows especially on one occasion when a character borrows words from Alexis de Tocqueville only to use them harshly to criticize the majority, “The Dumb Is Always Righter Than the Smart Because There's More of Us!’ Tocqueville's warning creeps irrevocably closer and closer to becoming fact.” Kesey immediately downplays this statement through the main character, which shows that it is not his own stance and thus manages to retain certain neutrality.

#### **3.1.1.4. The albino issue**

There is one motif in *Sailor Song* that draws attention mainly because of its seemingly plain and uncovered meaning. The main antagonist of the story, Nicholas Levertov – is an albino. He is the primary destructive force motivated mainly by his lust for vengeance. Furthermore, Levertov is born from an incestuous rape, which is revealed in the final part of the book. Whether Kesey intended this to be a metaphor for the “white man” destroying the other races is not known – there are only scarce occasions on which the matter is mentioned and neither of them gives clear evidence of the purpose with which Kesey made this artistic choice. ““Papa warned me from the first that they are all of them jinxes. Born that way. I didn't believe it, naturally. I was only fifteen and he seemed, you know, special. Now, I have to say I think I agree with Papa: bad luck is born in them.”” (18) The only possible clue is that all the judgment that appears on accord of Levertov's attribute is harsh and unmerciful and often comes originates from characters of lower respectability – that way it would be possible for Kesey to create some counterweight to the simplistic and one-sided interpretation of an albino man representing the oppressive white race.

### 3.1.1.5. Religion

The question of religion in relation to Ken Kesey and especially his literature is a delicate one. In the interview mentioned in the corresponding section, he expressed his dismay concerning the fact that people have a tendency to seek religion, and especially Christ pretty much behind any literary metaphor or allusion. His own words were “I’m for mystery, not interpretive answers.” (Parker 168) It is apparent that his intention is a variety of interpretations, rather than a single and universal key to the text. Yet, as the inspiration for the title of the novel he chose Leonard Cohen’s song Suzanne (included even in the preface of the novel), which has an obvious biblical basis:

“And Jesus was a sailor  
When he walked upon the water  
And he spent a long time watching  
From his lonely wooden tower”  
(preface)

The titular sailor in the *Sailor Song* is the main character of Isaak Sallas. Given his arch, there is no doubt that Kesey has this character in mind as a messianic figure. Besides being a fisherman, Sallas provides the rebellion against conservative society with a symbol, to which they can rally (124), which could be viewed as a paraphrase of the Cross, he, in a way, sacrifices himself for the others towards the end of the novel (481) and at the absolute finale, he emerges out of the ocean encumbered with a great number of various animals he saved from the “divine” storm; a clear similarity to Noah. Kesey even goes as far as including an actual passage from the Bible, which yet again alludes to the messianic nature of Sallas, ““But there was in this little town a good man, a man poor but wise; and he, by his wisdom, he deliver the town. Yet did anyone thank that poor man? Did anyone in the entire town remember him in their prayer?”” (94)

However, Kesey does not idealize the character. He endows him with many flaws and several failures over the course of the book, the most prominent of them being the unsuccessful speech (414). Sallas also does not show much interest in Christianity and Bible which can be observed in the scenes involving his religious wife (1, 456). The result of these contradictory tendencies seems to be one – that Kesey’s intention in this case was creating

a sort of a compromise of the human and the divine, a messianic figure suitable for the sort of a cataclysmic event depicted in the *Sailor Song*.

An issue, in which Kesey quite likely has a clear and definite stance, is the religious cults – one passage of the book involves such an organization, rather loosely tied to the main story, yet relevant in its connection to the cataclysmic finale. The character of Reverend Thadeus Greener is a rather prototypical cult leader – his practices include false prophecies and forced obedience of his followers, all with nothing but selfish intentions. Here again, it seems that Kesey utilizes the “godliness” of Isaak Sallas, the very reasonable spiritual figure to vanquish the opportunist deceiver, as Sallas is not only able to resist the charisma of the Reverend, ““Please, my brothers,” he said. “Sit.” He pointed the digging fork at a wooden church pew against the side of the car. Archie and Greer obeyed at once. Ike continued to stand, squinting in the sun.” (146), and later it his him, who outwits the Reverend and miraculously knocks him down with a single strike. In this case, Kesey does not leave much ground for speculation, in fact, he leaves none. There is no redeeming quality to the behaviour of the Reverend and no other circumstance, that would suggest a different interpretation of this episode.

#### **3.1.1.6. The cataclysmic event**

The encounter with Greener, however, draws more attention to the issue of “the world’s end”. There are mentions of it throughout the story, possible foreshadowing and among others even allusions to Yeats’s *Second Coming* (“O yes, they have to agree, circling satisfied in their wry gyre . . . only in America.” (265, 272)), it is however in this part where it comes to actual speculation about it and the form it might possibly have. Kesey uses the character of Greener, who is an embodiment of a superstitious religious fanatic and creates a counterpart for him in the character of the extremely intelligent Billy “The Squid” Bellisarius, who embodies science and reason. Their feud is centred around the nature of the world’s end. ““That was the bone of contention. Poem by Frost. Fire and Ice,’ I quoted it at him in the course of our colloquy. ‘Some say the world will end in fire and some say in ice’” (157) Fire here represents the superstitious and ice the scientific. But Kesey yet again evades siding with either of these visions. He consistently keeps foreshadowing a big climactic event, mentioning strange occurrences (“The strange wind came shrieking out of the northeast, made a little hop over the Aleutians, then banked hard left. It cut across coastal towns with such keen delicacy that many of the anesthetized citizens never noticed they’d

been cut.” (340)) and in the end, he creates an “end”, that is, in fact, no end at all. In the novel’s finale, Kesey lets a magnetic storm hit the town and the rest of the world. Yet, this storm is not nearly universally fatal, it is a mere “do-over”, a way for the nature to sort of re-establish itself as the main power on Earth. The magnetic poles switch places and destroy all the digital technology in the process. This kind of climax signifies mainly two things – it is absolutely not in the power of the mankind to guess how the world is going to end and that there exists no possible way for mankind to fight the conglomerates, only nature can do that.

### **3.1.2. The formal characteristic of *Sailor Song*’s dystopia**

According to Sargent’s classification, *Sailor Song* fits in the label of dystopia without any question. It is in all respects “a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which the reader lived” (Sargent, 9). It is of course up for dispute to what extent the category of the contemporaneous reader’s opinion of the nature of the proposed fictional world in relation to his own is objective, therefore this respect requires a certain amount of tolerance and generalization – yet we can quite safely assume that the state of the fictional world Kesey created in *Sailor Song* would seem considerably and indisputably worse to majority of readers than the actual world of the 80s and 90s.

Technically, it is possible for one text to possess characteristics of dystopia and anti-utopia at the same time. Sargent has a determinant in terms of separating dystopia from anti-utopia is the text’s relation to the utopian genre itself. Anti-utopias should have a quality that “a contemporaneous reader to view as a criticism of utopianism or of some particular eutopia (Sargent, 9). *Sailor Song* focuses mainly on the portrayal of the worsened life conditions of the world and moral decay of mankind – it does not include any motifs that would suggest its critical stance concerning utopianism or any other specific positive utopia (eutopia). It, however, does possess certain traits thanks to which it could be labelled a “utopian satire”. In the description of utopian satire, Sargent does not specify the degree of convenience of a proposed fictional world for its inhabitants – the merit here is how directly it is aimed at the current society and a critical assessment of it, which *Sailor Song* is – it is quite arguable that one of Kesey’s main motivations while writing the novel was a critical opinion of the way humanity is behaving. In fact, this portion of its ideological basis is particularly prominent,

just as it is in the case of all dystopian novels, whose time and location are set not very far from the present – the familiarity of the fictional world makes it very easy to relate to it and to properly appreciate the differing elements.

Yet, *Sailor Song* does not fit in Sargent’s category “critical dystopia” – despite the somewhat similar name, this category is more strictly demarcated and requires the fictional world to be perceived as positive by the contemporaneous reader – that is factually incongruous with regular dystopias and therefore with *Sailor Song* as well.

To sum it up, from the viewpoint of Sargent’s classification, it is legitimate to claim that *Sailor Song* is a very typical dystopia that contains all its necessary features, and which also possesses a strong satirical capability, which is mainly achieved through its authentic portrayal of the fictional world and the hypothetical outcomes of the dangers the world was facing at the time of the novel’s genesis.

The other take on this issue – Peter Fitting’s idea cited in Tim Moylan’s *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*, has a different approach. ““a possible distinction between dystopia and anti-utopia might lie in seeing the former in terms of setting and the latter in terms of plot.”” (Moylan, 156) Fitting uses as the determinant the emphasis of a purposed text on either setting or plot. Moylan embraces this idea and attempts to develop it – according to him, “utopian pessimism tends to privilege the setting” (Moylan, 156) and “a text with an anti-utopian stance tends to favor a linear plot” (Moylan, 156). That would suggest that each of these two categories has a different basis, that each of them has a different, albeit interlaying, set of traits and patterns. This would not at all be in concord with Sargent’s view, yet such classification would be quite inspiring nonetheless.

### **3.1.2.1. Proportional analysis of setting and plot**

Moylan specifies his division – according to him, dystopias would be “developing its surplus utopian possibilities in the extensive details of the alternative world” (Moylan, 156), while a fictional anti-utopian world would be a place “wherein revolts are decisively crushed, with no slippage or surplus of dissent or opposition in society.” (Moylan, 156) The elementary difference in this categorization could quite simply be expressed as “static” versus “dynamic”. In dystopias, the conflict would dwell primarily in the dissent of various locations, e.g. communities, cities, states, etc. It would be based mainly on the factual and technical differences of places, and those differences, the tension between a supposed “good” place and “bad” place would then have its effect on the reader. On the other hand,

an anti-utopian text is in this categorization focusing on plot, therefore on the story, on the characters, on the events. In such a text, there is no comparison of what is “good” and what is not – the conflict here springs out of the human element in the equation – that being the reader. His own subjective sensibility determines the impact of the text, albeit on a smaller, “intimate” scale – on the larger scale which works with general human values, the effect is determined by the very fact that humans are concerned in the text.

Naturally, very few utopian novels would only fit into single one of these categories – most of them undoubtedly possess features from both, and we can assume, that a big number of texts would be a balanced-out mixture of them. Therefore, this classification would not be a matter of assigning texts into one of the categories, but rather finding its place on a scale between them.

As this sort of research is nowhere near exact science, such categorization would by no means be subject to strict objectivity. The attempt to place *Sailor Song* somewhere on this notional scale will be based on two things – a brief and rough analysis of the proportional representation of narration and description in the text and simple subjective reader’s notion, with an additional consideration of some of the reviews cited in the theoretical part.

### **3.1.2.2. Chapter analysis**

*Sailor Song* has 21 chapters and an appendix. The length of the chapters varies, as does their nature, from strictly epic to almost entirely lyrical, or descriptive. Their length as such will be considered as well, yet with regard to the aforementioned non-exact nature of this research the extent of this consideration will not be great and also will not (cannot) be fully defined.

#### Chapter 1 (1-10)

##### *Dream of Jeannie with Light Grey Matter*

This chapter has two epic parts, both encounter of the main character with someone else – the first with a wildcat, the second with another character. Most of the chapter is taken up by these narrative units, with only small passages of exposition and descriptive information.

Chapter 2 (11-21)

*Hog History Duck Gutters and a Rum Soaked Rag*

The second chapter has a long descriptive historical passage concerning the location of the previous encounter. At the very end, a short epic passage follows.

Chapter 3 (22-42)

*Silver Fox Wing-Sail a Pet Blizzard Ghh-zz*

This chapter includes a lot of narration, a long passage concerning fishing and character interaction, only a few descriptive, non-epic passages, mainly serves as an introduction to various characters and at its end, it establishes the main plot of the book.

Chapter 4 (43-50)

*Damsels in Distress Demons from the Past Yachts from the Future*

This chapter is almost entirely descriptive – concerns the whole area in which most of the story takes place, historical and almost scientific data.

Chapter 5 (51-69)

*Strip of Worthless Mud Crossways in Her Craw*

The first half of this chapter concerns the history of one of the characters, the other develops the plot.

Chapter 6 (70-92)

*Bark Us All Bow-Wows of Folly*

The sixth chapter start with a description of an important organization in the story, then a major part of the chapter concerns further development of the plot.

Chapter 7 (93-117)

*By the Long Grey Beard and Thy Glittering Eye Whyfor Thou Soppest Me?*

This chapter extensively contributes to the plot development – concerns the mentality and actions of a big group of characters, introduces one of the main topics of the story.

Chapter 8 (118-162)

*Keep Flying Speed Jook 'Em Blindsight*

Chapter 8 is a start of a significant digression of the narrative – a seemingly pointless and unrelated issue is introduced with new characters and new locations. Around a fourth of the chapter is taken by the main character's historical description.

Chapter 9 (163-225)

*Here Is Potlach for One and All Into the Firepit and Gone for Good*

The whole chapter takes place in the initial basic location, concerns encounters of one of the side characters with another character with great impact on the story of the first one, the essential children's story is included in its full length.

Chapter 10 (226-263)

*The Prickle-Eye Bush,*

*It Grieves Me Heart Full Sore . . .*

*If I Ever Get Out Of The Prickle-Eye Bush*

*I'll Never Go In It Anymore . . .*

Further development of the digressive storyline, introduction to new characters, more seemingly unimportant episodes.

Chapter 11 (264-289)

*The Trainer Lunged with Hut Rod The Beast Arched Backward . . .*

Key elements of the main plot are introduced, antagonists are developed, important character meetings and clashes, the end of the digression – the narration is finally unified, almost entire chapter is epic and plot-stirring.

Chapter 12 (290-312)

*Looking Back Through Scratched Crabbe Glass*

The continuing stirring of the plot, most of the chapter is again epic, critical points of the plot are foreshadowed, description is at minimum.

Chapter 13 (313-339)

*To the Ships of the Sea and the Women of the Land*

This is another digressive chapter mostly concerning storylines of two characters, storylines that have little to do with the main plot and focus entirely on the development of the characters' relationship.

Chapter 14 (340-364)

*Straight from the Pole Sudden As a Spear*

In this chapter, main plot is further developed, more foreshadowing of events to come takes place, a small part is taken up by the history of the main antagonist.

Chapter 15 (365-379)

*Should We Give Our Hearts To a Dog to Tear?*

Major part of this chapter is devoted to a dog funeral, other events are triggered there, most of the chapter is epic.

Chapter 16 (380-392)

*The Ways of Man Are Passing Strange*

*He Buys His Freedom and He Counts His Change*

*Then He Lets the Wind His Days Arrange*

*And He Calls the Tide His Master*

Mostly epic, contributing to the main plot, revelation of an important piece of information is made.

Chapter 17 (393-399)

*Mistreated Mammals Enlarging the Pool*

This chapter is one self-contained story of one of the characters, with a small contribution to the plot. Given its time-placement before the events of the previous chapter, it could be considered a historical description.

Chapter 18 (400-425)

*Destry Rides Again*

There is no description in this chapter, a large number of episodes, all of them concerning the main plot and main characters, several essential character collisions take place.

Chapter 19 (426-441)

*Rave Like a Madwoman Don't Pussyfoot*

The trend from the previous chapter continues, character arcs are headed towards conclusions, several big revelations take place, no description.

Chapter 20 (442-481)

*Look Out Shit Here Comes the Fan*

The plot reaches a critical point, heads for resolution, several characters are in critical situations, foreshadowed threats are about to be revealed.

Chapter 21 (482-526)

*Blackjackatcha!*

Chapter starts with a seemingly digressive and unrelated scene of a less than important character, then gets into a chain of very abrupt jumps from one character's situation to another, most arcs are resolved, main characters are united at the end, finale is quick, undefined, partly open.

Appendix (529-533)

Entirely descriptive – concerned with various aspects of the novel's location – geography, geology, botany, etc.

As is apparent from the chapters' descriptions, the main plotline of *Sailor Song* tends to be incoherent in certain regards, especially in terms of story-building. The opinion of Charles Perry was that *Sailor Song* might have been "an attempt at a novel without any search for meaning, a novel about immersion in life. Nearly all the story action takes place in four chapters, and the remaining 17 concern themselves with inconsequentialities, mostly loafing, drinking and chat" (Perry) certainly seems to be quite fitting for the most part. Kesey indeed dwells and thrives on various elements in this novel, that seem to be of little to no value to the plot or to the reader for that matter. If all extra material is excluded, the main plot of the novel takes only a little space, being rather short and simple. The rest of the space is taken by extra storylines and, at least at the beginning of the novel, lot of descriptions, sometimes having whole chapters reserved for them.

The notion then is that the accompanying circumstances and unrelated excursions to other locations seem to outweigh the importance of the plot, however essential the topics

conveyed by it are for the author and the reader alike. Kesey does a remarkable job of creating a lively and familiar world with additions of small and subtle negative elements to it, thus creating an organic and genuine sense of unease. Applying the principle of comparison from Fittings categorization the quite apparent conclusion is reached that in case of *Sailor Song*, there is a prevailing concern with the setting (that including the general static qualities of the characters) and that therefore, with respect to fittings classification, it is, again, a clear case of dystopia.

### **3.2. The importance of style**

All those seemingly pointless passages in *Sailor Song*, however, deserve attention too. The novel is serious in its nature, pondering important issues of its own time, as well as those of ours, almost thirty years after its release. But Ken Kesey never was the kind of writer who would adamantly pursue seriousness in his works, not even in those big novels – there is little of the technical and purposely elaborate, his concern is mainly with the characters and the world he is building and therefore if he decides that the “hero” of the story will travel to some remote location to save a group of characters that the reader has no idea who they are, and the whole episode ends with an absurd trolley ride on a mountain railway, it, in fact, is exactly what the reader wants, or at least should at least partly want from Kesey. The substantial part of the novel truly is “loafing, drinking and chat” as Charles Perry very aptly remarks. The added value in this, in the heart of this deadly serious story is Kesey’s distinctive and unscrupulous irony.

The intriguing thing Kesey does is how he blends the genre of dystopia, an instance of it, that is at its core rather prototypical, with components of low forms and genres. He does not hesitate to populate his dystopian novel with obscure characters with obscure names, obscure desires, and obscure manners. He deals with serious topics in an utmost unserious way and manages to insert in his story that not easily definable and even less easily achievable common warmth, of which the only objectively describable characteristic is “pointlessness”, as that is the quality that goes hand in hand with authenticity and genuineness, provided it is used naively and straightforwardly, otherwise it usually loses its effect. With this, Kesey manages to effectively stretch the ideological scale of his novel – accommodating profound topics next to displays of lowliness, even vulgarity, all with equal attention to detail.

The idea of Ken Kesey being primarily rebellious is, therefore, an obstacle in the analysis of *Sailor Song* and would be an obstacle in an analysis of any other of his works. Kesey manages to build a bridge between genres and that is the important value of this novel. Rebellion in the final outcome often leads to division or conflict, yet in *Sailor Song*, Kesey proves to be able to achieve unity by merging together two literary worlds and approaches that can seldom be seen working in harmony.

#### 4. Conclusion

The dystopian elements have a significant role in *Sailor Song*. In the utmost accord with the essential traits of the genre, the novel strives towards a wide-scaled reflection of social, environmental and political issues of its time. Ken Kesey utilizes these dystopian elements primarily to establish a functioning hypothetical future, in which certain negative aspects of the author's contemporary world have been deliberately intensified and further developed in order to clearly articulate imminent danger to nature and mankind alike.

Additionally, it has been discovered, that there is a disproportion in the distribution of the elements – most are to be found in the expositional and descriptive passages, employed in the construction of the setting of the novel, while the plot has shown to be rather general, with no prominent signs of the dystopian genre. No particular attitude to the utopian genre or any specific representative of it was detected either. Therefore, there are no transgressions in form from dystopian to the antiutopian and the final outcome of the dystopian aspect of the novel should be interpreted as is.

The principal issue, because of which Ken Kesey had opted for the dystopian setting, is the environment and its imminent decline caused mainly by mankind's doing – the depiction of the damage caused to various ecosystems is the vital subject in the novel. The support for this claim can also be found in the fact, that, in various forms, Kesey has dealt with this topic in several of his works and stated himself that it was one of the main motivations for writing the novel.

The reason for Kesey's return to the novel as the form of choice for his new story is still not entirely clear, although a possible answer lies in the idea, that it never was Kesey's intention to stop writing novels for such long time and that the cause of the long pause lied in personal issues, which might not only have had an influence on his general productivity, but on his artistic focus as well. These issues might even have played a role in the genesis of the novel as according to Kesey's words – it was developed on the same ideological ground as the short children's story included in it (published independently prior to it).

Finally, a detailed assessment of the book's topics and form suggests that a potential one-sided and simplistic view of Kesey's persona as rebellious, in the conventional understanding of the word, which is likely to occur in the reception of the text by members of the general audience, can prove to be rather harmful, as *Sailor Song* shows a balanced approach to its subject matter and manages to convey a dystopian world that is both aggressive in its criticism and kind in its appreciation of life as such.

## Works Cited:

Bray, Christopher. "In defence of America's soul: Sailor song by Ken Kesey: Black Swan pounds 6.99." *Independent*, 31 Jul. 1993 <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/book-review-in-defence-of-americas-soul-sailor-song-by-ken-kesey-black-swan-pounds-699-1458484.html>. Accessed 20 April 2018.

Claeys, Gregory. *Dystopia: A Natural History*. Oxford University Press, 2017.

Claeys, Gregory. *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Dostoevsky, Fyodor M. *Stavrogin's Confession*. Martino Fine Books, 2014.

Franková, Milada. "Dystopian transformations: post-Cold War Dystopian Writing By Women." *Brno Studies in English*, vol. 39, no. 1, 2013, pp. 211-226.

Gilder, George, et al. "Introduction by the author: writers of some of the season's most intriguing titles think aloud about the nature of their inspiration." *Publishers Weekly*, 30 Mar. 1992, p. 21+. *Literature Resource Center*, <http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A12103129/LitRC?u=karlova&sid=LitRC&xid=a8c84397>. Accessed 25 Mar. 2018.

Glotfelty, Cheryll, and Harold Fromm. *The Ecocriticism Reader*. The University of Georgia Press, 1996.

Haefele, Fred. „Seeking Ken Kesey Part II.” Washington Independent Review of Books, 12 Apr. 2012. <http://www.washingtonindependentreviewofbooks.com/features/seeking-ken-kesey-part-ii>. Accessed 20 April 2018.

Hall, Matthew. *Exploring Green Crime*. Macmillan International Higher Education, 2015.

Kesey, Ken. *Sailor Song*. Penguin Books, 1993.

McNamee, Gregory. *Appreciations: Ken Kesey's Northern Exposure*. *Kirkus Reviews* [online]. 2008, 76(19), 1026-1026 [cit. 2018-04-20]. ISSN 19487428.

Morton, Timothy. *Ecology Without Nature, Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*. Harvard University Press, 2007.

Moylan, Tom. *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*. Westview Press, 2000.

“National Temperature and Precipitation Maps.” *National Centers for Environmental Information*, 20 Apr. 2018, <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/temp-and-precip/us-maps/1/201707?products%5B%5D=nationaltavgrank&products%5B%5D=nationaltmaxrank&products%5B%5D=nationaltminrank&products%5B%5D=regionaltavgrank&products%5B%5D=regionaltmaxrank&products%5B%5D=regionaltminrank&products%5B%5D=statewidetavgrank&products%5B%5D=statewidetmaxrank&products%5B%5D=statewidetminrank&products%5B%5D=divisionaltavgrank&products%5B%5D=divisionaltmaxrank&products%5B%5D=divisionaltminrank#maps>

Parker, Scott F. *Conversations with Ken Kesey*. University Press of Mississippi, 2014.

Sargent, Lyman T. “Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited.” *Utopian Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1994, pp. 1-37.

Perry, Charles. “Far North by Northwest.” *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, edited by Tom Burns and Jeffrey W. Hunter, vol. 184, Gale, 2004. *Literature Resource Center*, <http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/H1100055050/LitRC?u=karlova&sid=LitRC&xid=28b00cbe>. Accessed 25 Mar. 2018. Originally published in *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, 30 Aug. 1992, p. 3.

Stableford, Brian. “Ecology and Dystopia.” *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*. Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 259-279.