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Dystopia



Dr Grace Halden, Senior Lecturer in
Modern and Contemporary Literature

A resource pack for Further Education
(OCR), Foundation Year, and Level 4.

ABOUT ME: GRACE HALDEN

I teach the genre of dystopia at all levels - further education, foundation year, BA, MA, and PhD.

Studying dystopia helps us think about pressing sociological, environmental, political, and scientific concerns that are part of our every day lives. The genre of dystopia highlights potential ramifications of current and potential developments in our societies and cultures. Moreover, dystopian fiction can reflect on historical events and crises which, fiction reminds us, should never be repeated.

In this resource pack you will find excerpts from fiction and key critical sources to help support you as scholars exploring the genre of dystopia.

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Texts used

Pat Frank, *Alas, Babylon* (1959)

Ray Bradbury, *There Will Come Soft Rains* (1950)

Judith Merrill, 'That Only A Mother' (1948)

Mordecai Roshwald, *Level 7* (1981)

Agustina Bazterrica, *Tender is the Flesh* (2020)

Chuck Palahniuk, *Fight Club* (1996)

William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (1984)

Dystopia: A Genre



Dystopian Literature



A short overview of dystopia:
definitions, themes, and
connection to utopia

Definitions

DYSTOPIA: “An imaginary place or condition in which everything is as bad as possible; opposed to UTOPIA”

**EXAMPLE:
DICTATORSHIP**

DISASTER: “An event or occurrence of a ruinous or very distressing nature; a calamity; *esp.* a sudden accident or natural catastrophe that causes great damage or loss of life.”

**EXAMPLE:
FLOOD**

APOCALYPSE: “More generally: a disaster resulting in drastic, irreversible damage to human society or the environment, *esp.* on a global scale; a cataclysm”

**EXAMPLE:
NUCLEAR WAR**

*Oxford English Dictionary

Many scholars conflate or unite these terms

“[T]he notions of ‘dystopian’ and ‘apocalyptic’ are not mutually exclusive terms. Indeed, they often overlap in the texts examined here, or they may have a causal relation to one another (e.g. a dystopian society could trigger an apocalypse and conversely, a dystopia could arise from the ruins of an apocalyptic event). We also treat them together because we feel that it is worthwhile and necessary to investigate not only the stories themselves, but also how they reflect who we are now (i.e. in terms of our collective anxieties, hopes, values, assumptions, etc.) and, in this process, the presumed genre distinction does not matter. Despite apparent differences in theme or setting, they have, at least superficially, similar ways of engaging readers as they generally make use of problematic issues that are recognisable in our contemporary condition (whether that be current concerns for potential global catastrophes or the fear of an upswing in authoritarianism, surveillance society, etc.) as a basis for their troubled and troubling conceptions of a future world that could arise from the present.”

Joe Trotta, Zlatan Filipovic and Houman Sadri (eds), *Broken Mirrors. Representations of Apocalypses and Dystopias in Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 2.

THEMES



Unpack these themes fully.

Example:

DISASTER: destruction of environment, town/state/country/world, of structure, natural, manufactured, destruction of inner and outer spaces, destruction of genome/people/identity, etc.

RELATED THEMES

CONTROL *by government, group, aliens, technology*

CONFORMITY *challenge to individualism, demand for compliance, oppressive structures*

SURVEILLANCE *challenge to freedom, way to uphold conformity, oppressive structures, inability to effect change*

PROPOGANDA *the 'selling' of the dystopian world as ideal/inescapable and/or the demonisation of alternatives*

DEHUMANISATION *placing humans under such pressure and in situations that strips them of basic human traits/behaviours/options*

CHALLENGES TO FREEDOM *freedom of thought/movement/expression/belief/action*

IS UTOPIA THE OPPOSITE TO DYSTOPIA?

DEFINITION: Utopia is an imagined place or state in which everything is perfect.

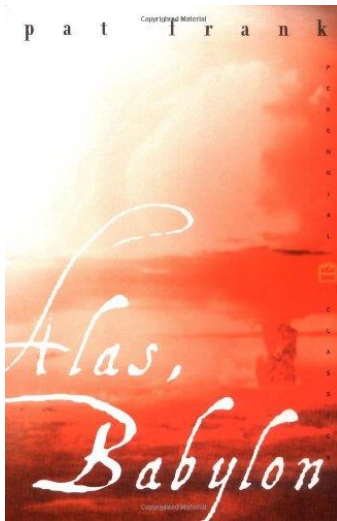
“The thing is, while a dictionary may have you believe that dystopia is the opposite of utopia, they aren’t really opposites. They’re more like Yin and Yang, or maybe Jekyll and Hyde; inextricably linked. One man’s utopia can easily be another’s dystopia”.

Dave Golder. *Dystopia Utopia Short Stories*. 2016.
London: Flame Tree.

There are many texts which might seem like dystopian narratives but actually reveal an inner utopia.


Example: *Alas, Babylon* by Pat Frank (1959) tells the story of a nuclear war in which an American suburb faces radiation poisoning and the complete disintegration of society. There are looters, rapes, and suicides. However, in the dust of the former town rises a fairer community in which all races and genders are equal. Trade not capital fuels the new society meaning that there is no division of rich and poor and class does not exist. What’s more, miraculously, the radiation seems to be targeting the criminals (the looters). The world

left behind by the nuclear bomb is preferable than the world that came before it.



In fact, title *Alas, Babylon* is a reference to ‘Book of Revelation’ which forms the final testament in the Christian Bible (New Testament).

In ‘Revelation’ (also known as the ‘Apocalypse of John’) John prophesies the fall of Babylon: ‘Alas! Alas! You great city, you mighty city, Babylon! For in a single hour your judgment has come.’ John speaks of the Apocalyptic demise of the city which has become a ‘dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit [...]’. Babylon is mentioned many times in the Bible but in ‘Revelation’ Babylon is destroyed. In Frank’s novel, the destruction of ‘Babylon’ (here an American suburb) is a righteous, holy, and desirable event which ushers in a new utopian vision of America. So, for Frank, a little dystopia is just what is needed to secure utopia.



ANALYSIS OF TWO TEXTS

A brief examination of two
post-World War Two
dystopian texts

THERE
WILL
COME
SOFT
RAINS

THAT
ONLY A
MOTHER

APOCALYPSE



Ray Bradbury's

*There Will Come Soft
Rains* (1950)

WHAT ARE WE LEARNING?

Theme (apocalypse) and theory (scholar Hannah Arendt)

THEME

Apocalypse is just one theme of many that can typify the genre.

READ FULL TEXT HERE: [7_There Will Come Soft Rains by Ray Bradbury.pdf \(btbooces.org\)](#)

“In the living room the voice-clock sang, Tick-tock, seven o'clock, time to get up, time to get up, seven o'clock! as if it were afraid that nobody would. The morning house lay empty. The clock ticked on, repeating and repeating its sounds into the emptiness. Seven-nine, breakfast time, seven-nine!”

there will come soft rains...

THE SUN CAME OUT FROM BEHIND THE RAIN. THE HOUSE STOOD ALONE IN A CITY OF RUBBLE AND ASHES. THIS WAS THE ONE HOUSE LEFT STANDING! AT NIGHT, THE RUINED CITY GAVE OFF A RADIOACTIVE GLOW WHICH COULD BE SEEN FOR MILES. THE ENTIRE WEST FACE OF THE HOUSE WAS BLACK, SAVE FOR FIVE PLACES. HERE, THE WHITE SILHOUETTE OF A MAN MOVED A LAWN. THERE, AS IN A PHOTOGRAPH, A WOMAN BENT TO PICK FLOWERS. STILL FARTHER OVER, THEIR IMAGES OUTLINED IN ONE TITANIC INSTANT, A SMALL BOY, HANDS FLUNG INTO THE AIR... HIGHER UP, THE IMAGE OF A THROWN BALL... AND OPPOSITE HIM, A GIRL, HANDS RAISED TO CATCH THE BALL WHICH NEVER CAME DOWN...



THE FIVE SPOTS OF PARIT... THE MAN, THE WOMAN, THE CHILDREN, THE BALL REMAINED! THE REST WAS A CHARCOAL LAYER... -WOOD-



How is personification used in this introduction and why?

ANALYSIS

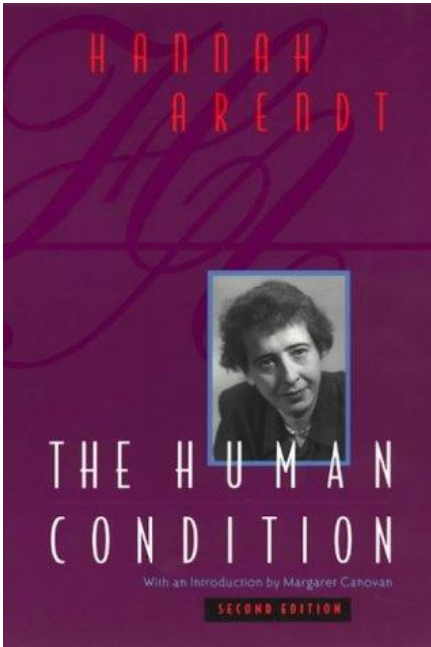
What's interesting about this introduction is that the reader is not introduced to a human character but are instead introduced to technology. The voice that we hear is that of a clock and it is reminding an unseen character to wake up. We have personification in the line 'as if it were afraid that nobody would' and later the reader learns that there are no human characters in Bradbury's story. The personification of technology is even more important because the technology is burdened with acting in place of traditional human characters.

There is repetition throughout this story through words that suggest emptiness absence, voids, and silence; this adds to an overall atmosphere of loneliness. In this first paragraph we also have a sense that the technology is calling out to human character and the lack of response is ominous and this feeling of unease the reader might experience is sustained to the end.

Now read the rest of the story.

Bradbury introduces his two memory tapes and a disembodied voice alerts missing human occupants as to what the calendar has scheduled for the day and these reminders speak of very human activities such as acknowledging a birthday and anniversary and of paying bills.

Partly the unease the reader may experience is through observing the robots going through routines that are designed to support human life. Machines that are designed to support the labour, work, and action that typifies human living as theorized by philosopher Hannah Arendt.



Arendt wrote the book called *The Human Condition* (1958) in which she spoke of three elements of human existence which underpin what it means to be a human being and these conditions are

labour work and action.

Labour means the physical maintenance of the body such as needing to eat to keep the body alive, sustained, and healthy. Work refers to our ability to create things of value (for example to be able to create art or create physical structures like buildings). Action is a little bit more complicated and refers to all social endeavors, such as the ways in which we create community and groups. For Arendt, being able to engage in the world and engage with others is the highest form of human activity.

Why is Hannah
Arendt a useful
scholar when
thinking about
Bradbury's text?

“In the kitchen the breakfast stove gave a hissing sigh and ejected from its warm interior eight pieces of perfectly browned toast, eight eggs sunny side up, sixteen slices of bacon, two coffees, and two cool glasses of milk.”



In this example we see technology producing food sustenance for the labouring body.

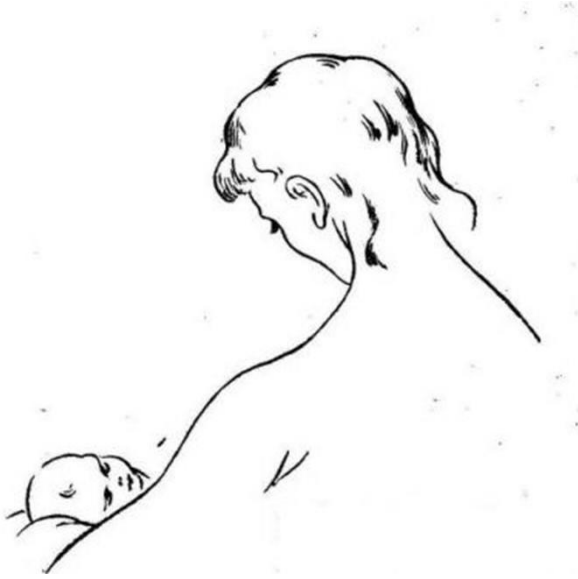
In the next quote we see a reference to human action through reference to human social workings:

"Today is Mr. Featherstone's birthday. Today is the anniversary of Tilita's marriage. Insurance is payable, as are the water, gas, and light bills.

Throughout this story we encounter the work of the human which is the technology that has been left behind. These incredible pieces of technology continue to work long after humans have departed: they act as artefacts of human endeavor.

I'm using Arendt as a simple way to highlight the significance of technology and lack of human character in the story. As the machines left behind are still attempting to support human life from the literal maintenance of the body to facilitating socialization.

FAMILY



Judith Merrill's 'That Only A Mother' (1948)

WHAT ARE WE LEARNING?

Bradbury's text dealt with anonymous victims, Merrill's details how apocalypse impacts people, society, and families

READ FULL TEXT IN:

The Science Fiction Hall of Fame: Volume One, 1929-1964, ed. by Robert Silverberg (New York: Orb, 1998), pp. 281-90

CONTEXT

Unlike in Bradbury's text that sees the aftermath of a nuclear war through complete destruction, in Merrill's text, the destruction is slow and lingering. Whereas in Bradbury's text the disaster was immediate through fire and blast (hence the burns and rubble), in Merrill's texts the destruction comes from radiation.

'That Only a Mother' is set after an atomic war and follows a young mother called Margaret who gives birth to a severely mutated child as a result of radiation contamination. The revelation of the child as profoundly deformed is not revealed until the end of the story in which Margaret's husband Hank returns home and witnesses his child's 'sinuous, limbless body'. The inevitable implication of the text is that Hank will murder the child as foreshadowed by the infanticides mentioned earlier in the text.

Hank, as the quintessential protector of the home, experiences a surge of violent impulses when he is faced with mutation: 'his fingers tightened on his child'. From fighting the war in the external space, Hank must now vanquish the enemy from his own home – an act which will simultaneously 'correct' the blood line of his American family and help to remove the

mechanization caused by the bomb. The story warns mothers that a future war will not occur in the distance as it did with Japan; Merrill suggests that the threat will enter the home.

‘That Only a Mother’ highlights the threat of mutation on a domestic level. The threat in ‘That Only A Mother’ is to family genealogy and of the enemy invading the domestic space. Merrill is most famous as an editor of sf anthologies and for her early sf, ‘That Only A Mother’ and *Shadow on the Hearth* (1950). Both texts feature the role of the housewife during a nuclear war in which the domestic space is threatened. ‘That Only A Mother’ has earned the title as one of the most anthologized sf texts. Merrill, who was also a prominent peace and antiwar activist, responded to the nuclear threat of the Cold War by internalizing nuclear fears and representing the domestic space as under attack from insidious and invisible forces such as radiation and mutation.

In the following extract, taken from the end of the story, Hank returns to war to meet his child for the first time.

EXCERPT

“Why, the little rascal.” He burst into relieved laughter. “She looks like one of those potato-sack racers they used to have on picnics. Got her arms pulled out of the sleeves already.” He reached over and grabbed the knot at the bottom of the long nightie.

“I’ll do it, darling.” Margaret tried to get there first.

“Don’t be silly, Maggie. This may be your first baby, but I had five kid brothers.” He laughed her away, and reached with his other hand for the string that closed one sleeve. He opened the sleeve bow, and groped for an arm.

“The way you wriggle,” he addressed his child sternly, as his hand touched a moving knob of flesh at the shoulder, “anyone might think you are a worm, using your tummy to crawl on, instead of your hands and feet.”

Margaret stood and watched, smiling. “Wait till you hear her sing, darling – “

His right hand traveled down from shoulder the shoulder to where he thought an arm would be, traveled down, and straight down, over firm small muscles that writhed in an attempt to move against the pressure of his hand. He let his fingers drift up again to the shoulder. With infinite care he opened the knot at the bottom of the nightgown. His wife was standing by the bed, saying, “She can do ‘Jingle Bells,’ and – “

His left hand felt along the soft knitted fabric of the gown, up toward the diaper that folded, flat and smooth, across the bottom end of his child. No wrinkles. No kicking. No...

“Maggie.” He tried to pull his hands from the neat fold in the diaper, from the wriggling body.

“Maggie.” His throat was dry; words came hard, low, and grating. He spoke very slowly, thinking the sound of each word to make himself say it. His head was spinning, but he had to know before he let it go.

“Maggie, why... didn’t you... tell me?”

“Tell you what, darling?” Margaret’s poise was the immemorial patience of a woman confronted with the man’s childish impetuosity. Her sudden laugh sounded fantastically easy and natural in that room; it was all clear to her now. “Is she wet? I didn’t know.”

She didn’t know. His hands, beyond control, ran up and down the soft-skinned baby body, the sinuous, limbless body. Oh God, dear God – his head shook and his muscles contracted in a bitter spasm of hysteria. His fingers tightened on his child – Oh God, she didn’t know...

Analyse this extract.

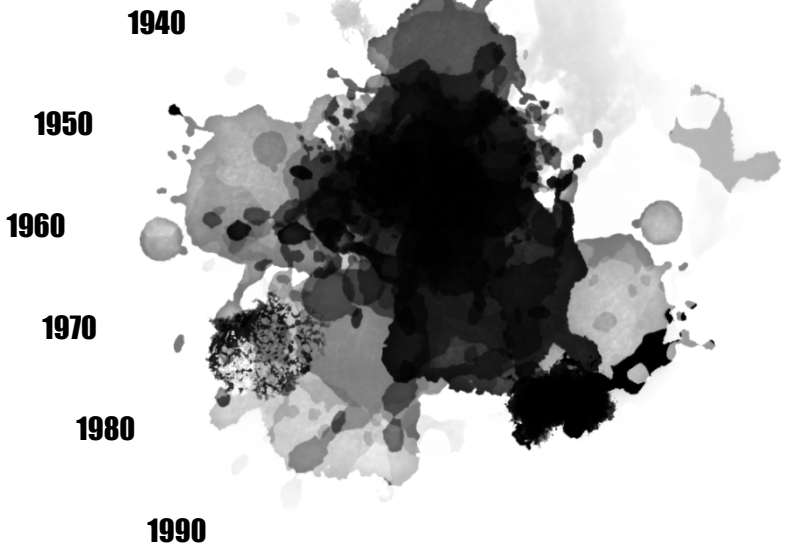
Think about how the reality of the child’s condition is revealed.

Consider how maternal love is portrayed in this extract.

What happens at the end of the story?

Why does Hank react in this way?

Timeline of Major Events



*Focus: technology, disaster,
politics, and theory*

1940-1950

WAR WW2 (1939-1945): The war accelerated science and technology.

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY + WAR 1941: Guinea Pig Club was formed by Archibald McIndoe with 39 patients. An early example of plastic surgery: severely burnt and injured soldiers were rebuilt by the surgeon McIndoe in highly experimental surgery (hence the term Guinea Pig): from false eyes to skin grafts.

NUCLEAR 1942: first sustained nuclear chain reaction

THEORY 1943: Existentialism is launched in the wake of Jean-Paul Sartre's Being and Nothingness.

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY 1944: DNA is discovered by Oswald Avery. The key to life.

WAR + NUCLEAR DISASTER: Hiroshima (August 6, 1945) Nagasaki (August 9, 1945). WW2: nuclear weapon- the atom bomb. Hundreds of thousands died from: explosion burns, debris, radiation sickness, and related illnesses both at the time of impact and due to radioactive fallout. By the end of 1945 140,000 were dead in Hiroshima and 70,000 in Nagasaki. The Atom bomb promoted science to a position of ultimate power.

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY 1946: first entirely electronic computer is built

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY 1948: the theory of the Big Bang is proposed by George Gamow

WAR 1948: the Cold War starts when the USSR blocks Berlin

POLITICS 1949: Communism takes over China

POLITICS 1949: North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is established.

COLD WAR, 1949: Soviet Union tests 'First Lightning' (known as 'Joe-1' in America), their first atomic bomb test.

SOCIETY 1949: The Doomsday Clock (Bulletin of Atomic Scientists) is set at 3 minutes to midnight following the Soviet Union's first nuclear test.

1950-1960

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY + NUCLEAR January 31, 1950: US develop Hydrogen Bomb. The Hydrogen Bomb is considered to be the most deadly weapon created, considerably more destructive than the A-Bombs dropped on Hiroshima. They test the bomb in 1952 at Eniwetok Atoll.

SOCIETY 1950: McCarthy's anti-communist witch hunts

WAR 1950-1953: Korean War (police action)
Communist North Korea attacked democratic

south Korea. The communist invasion provoked action from the UN led by the USA.

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY 1952, 1 November: Hydrogen bomb test, *Ivy Mike*. Proved to be over 450 times more destructive than the A-Bomb released over Nagasaki

SOCIETY 1952: Great Smog of London. Killed over 4,000 people initially. 12,000 in total. Ramifications of pollution.

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY 1953: Progress is made in genetics: Watson and Crick discover the double-helix DNA structure

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY 1954: FORTRAN: first computer language programming

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY 1954: First successful organ transplant. Kidney. Heart: **1967**. First child born from a transplanted ovary: **2008**. First complete facial transplant **2010**.

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY + NUCLEAR 1954: First atomic submarine is launched. US 'Nautilus.'

WAR 1954-62: Algerian War

SOCIETY 1955: Modern Civil rights movement begins when Rosa Parks refuses to move to the back of the bus

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY 1955: Polio vaccine is successfully tested. Hopes for miracle cures are on a high.

WAR 1955, 1st November: Vietnam war starts (lasts until 15th May 1975, US gets involved)

predominantly from 1964) There is some discrepancy about the exact date of the war.

WAR 1955, 1st: Suez Crisis

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY 1956: Arguably the birth of AI. Dartmouth Conference

SPACE: 1957, 4th October: Sputnik Satellite blasts into space signalling the start of the space race.

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY 1958: The computer modem invented.

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY 1959: The internal pacemaker invented

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY 1959: microchip invented.

SPACE: 1959, 12th September: Soviet launch rocket to the moon - crash landed (first earth object to collide with the Moon)

SPACE: 1959, 26th October: First look at far side of the Moon - discovery of mountains and seas

1960-1970

SPACE: 12th April, 1961: First man in space. Space race is won by Soviet Union. Beat the USA. Major Yuri Alexeyevich. Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev: "The flight made by you opens up a new page in the history of mankind in its conquest of space."

SPACE: 1961, 5th May: Commander Alan Shepard becomes first US astronaut in space

WAR + NUCLEAR 1962: The Cuban Missile Crisis/ Bay of Pigs - world on the brink of thermonuclear war. Both SU and US armed nuclear weapons in a 48 hour standoff.

ENVIRONMENT: 1962: Rachel Caron's *Silent Spring* about environmental and human danger appears in the *New Yorker* and goes on to become a best-selling environmental science book.

SPACE: 1963, 16th June: Soviet Lieutenant Valentina Tereshkova becomes first woman in space.

SOCIETY 1963: JFK is assassinated

SOCIETY 1963, August 28th : MLK gives his I Have A Dream speech.

THEORY: Marshall McLuhan speaks of a Global Village. Media theorist notes how technology (especially the TV) will act like a nervous system and link humanity together globally. "Today, after more than a century of electric technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned." - Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 1964. Worth considering how this is apt, not only for television, but for other major technologies such as the internet, Skype etc, and how this will be relevant to AI in the future.

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY: 1966 The Bar Code.

SOCIETY: Abortion is legalised in England.
Legalised in USA in 1973.

WAR: 1967: Six Day War

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY 1967: First Heart Transplant by Dr Christiaan Barnard. The patient died 18 days after - but it worked.

SOCIETY 1968: Martin Luther King is assassinated.

SPACE: 1968, 24th December: Astronauts beamed back television pictures and narrated what they could see. Great effort was made to give viewers a 'real ' experience and include them. The narration included descriptive language and inclusive pronouns. The moving final images of the Moon were accompanied by this verse from Genesis 1 (9-10): "And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good."

SPACE: 1969 21st July: First Man on the Moon. American Neil Armstrong has become the first man to walk on the Moon. Armstrong declared: "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." Followed by colleague Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin. The pair planted the Stars and Stripes flag and a plaque bearing President Nixon's signature and an inscription reading: "Here men from the

planet Earth first set foot upon the Moon July 1969 AD. We came in peace for all mankind." In BBC footage scenes worldwide were shown of celebrations, individuals praying and people of all race, cultures and ages watching publicly on huge screens. After the Moon images were transmitted scenes were shown of people celebrating dressed as extraterrestrials

http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/july/21/newsid_2635000/2635845.stm

http://news.bbc.co.uk/player/nol/newsid_652000/0/newsid_6526800/6526815.stm?bw=bb&mp=wm&news=1&bbcws=1

SPACE: 1969, 19th November: Apollo 12 lands on Moon. Commander Charles "Pete" Conrad and Lieutenant-Commander Alan Bean

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY 1969: US creates ARPANET (precursor to the internet)

1970-1980

ENVIRONMENT: 1970: Earth Day on April 22, saw 20 million Americans protest against damage to the environment and speak out about their concerns over the treatment of the planet.

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY 1970s: first computer virus: the Creeper detected on ARPANET. The Reaper program combated the Creeper. From Virus' came malware, including adware, spyware and so on. Currently, the major culprit is the

internet and the major producer of malware is China.

<http://www.engadget.com/2010/03/29/symantec-names-shaoxing-china-worlds-malware-capital>

SPACE: 1970, 14th April: Apollo 13 near disaster

SPACE: 1971: Apollo 15 finds Genesis Rock

Discovery of rock estimated at 4,500 million years old may date back to the Moon's origins.

See:http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/august/1/newsid_4101000/4101579.stm

ENERGY: 1973: Energy. Although energy problems occurred before this date, in 1973 the 'energy crisis' became an international issue and recession worsened due to many factors, one contributing problem was a dramatic increase in oil prices.

SOCIETY 1973: homosexuality is no longer classed as a mental illness in America.

POLITICS: 1973: The 'Watergate Hearings' began and were televised. Faith in the Presidency was shaken and Nixon was forced to resign

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY 1973: First Mobile Phone.

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY 1974: Nanotechnology. Although it has been around for a while it was first defined by Norio Taniguchi in 1974 at Tokyo

Science University. From the 80s Nanotechnology started to become 'known' more widely.

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY 1975, 15th April: Karen Anne Quinlan sparks a debate about technologies influence on life and death. Quinlan (21years old) lapsed into a coma - while she didn't suffer brain death she had entered a vegetative state. Prior to 1970 Quinlan would have died, but in 1975 technology was used to keep her alive by machine. It was 10 years before Quinlan was severed from life support and allowed to die. The question of what 'human is' became a focus - are we human when we suffer brain death? What is a quality of life? What is death? See: 20th Century History - Alex Axelrod(1999) pg 380-1

WAR 1975, 15st May: Vietnam war ends starts when Saigon falls to the North Vietnamese

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY 1978 , 25th July: First 'test tube' baby. Louise Brown becomes the first child conceived outside the worm (in vitro) to Lesley Brown. The Archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh, Cardinal Gordon Gray said: "I have grave misgivings about the possible implications and consequences for the future." This technology inevitably led to cloning. For the church, blasphemy had occurred - it was now possible for a virgin to give birth thus desecrating the miracle of Christ's creation. And additional worry started to germinate: was marriage under threat? Single

women would eventually be able to obtain sperm from a bank and conceive a child without being in a relationship. For all the positive outcomes of the Brown's 'miracle' a lot of questions were raised.

See:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/july/25/newsid_2499000/2499411.stm

SPACE: 1979, 24th December: Europe launches first rocket, Ariane 1 from France Guiana.

NUCLEAR DISASTER 1979, March 28th: Three Mile Island Meltdown

1980-1990

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY 1981: IBM launches the personal computer.

WAR 1982: Falklands War

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY 1983: AIDS virus is diagnosed for the first time. The diagnosis created a religious and moral backlash against what was cruelly considered a homosexual plague of biblical intent.

SOCIETY March 23, 1983: The Star Wars program. President Reagan proposed the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) dubbed 'Star Wars'. The relatively implausible project involved creating a shield against missiles and developing space and airborne weapons consisting of lasers, x-ray, optical and infra red as well as radar. In short, lethal laser

beams fired from both earth and space were to be developed. The technology for such a construct didn't exist and the project was ultimately classed as SCIFI. Yet, both Reagan and Bush ploughed over \$30 billion into the project. The nickname came from the Star Wars films due to their futuristic ambitions.

SPACE: 1983, 18th June: First American Woman in space. Sally Ride.

DISASTER 1984, December 3rd: Bhopal disaster. Industrial tragedy resulting in the death of between 2000 and 15000 individuals (depending on the report) and countless permanent injuries (over 500,000) such as brain damage and blindness.

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY 1986: Synthetic skin invented

NUCLEAR DISASTER: 26th April 1986: Chernobyl Disaster

WAR 1986: US Bombs Libya. USA attacks Libya after terrorist attacks.

SOCIETY 1987, October 19th: Black Monday

ENVIRONMEN 1987: Montreal conference. 70 nations agree to help save the Ozone Layer

SPACE: 1988, 29th September: American shuttle, Discovery, is launched.

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY 1988: Abortion pill invented.

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY 1988: Prozac introduced

SPACE: 1989: Voyager 2 Neptune

SOCIETY 1989, June 3rd: Tiananmen Square Massacre

SOCIETY 1989: Berlin wall falls.

1990-2000

THEORY: 1990s Faith Popcorn coins new terms: "cocooning," "down aging," "socioquake," etc to describe our new technological influences and status.

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY 1990s The Internet. Without a precise origin date (mainly developed after ARPANET 1969) the Internet boomed in the 90s as the average household became connected.

WAR August 2, 1990 - February 28, 1991): Persian Gulf War.

WAR 1990: Ethnic wars in Yugoslavia

SPACE: 1990, 24th April: Hubble telescope launch. The telescope can zoom as far as the edge of the (known) universe.

SOCIETY 1992 Earth Summit the first in Rio, the second was in 1999 in Kyoto. Only in the 2007

summit did America finally agree to sign targets for cutting CO2 emissions.

SOCIETY 1994 First black President of South Africa - Nelson Mandela

WAR: 1994 Genocide in Rwanda

TERRORISM 1995 US domestic terrorism - the bombing of a federal building in Oklahoma.

SPACE: 1995, 9th February: First black man in space.

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY 1997 First cloned mammal. England cloned a sheep. Dolly.

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY 1997 DeepBlue beats human world chess champion Garry Kasparov

8 Dystopian Texts

The Machine Stops by E. M. Forster (1909) - Earth cannot sustain human life; humans live underground and are controlled by a machine.

It Can't Happen Here by Sinclair Lewis (1935) - a dictator rises in America, following a similar trajectory to Adolf Hitler

Fatherland by Robert Harris (1992) - an alternate history set in Nazi Germany 1964

A CLOCKWORK ORANGE BY ANTHONY BURGESS (1962) - DETAILS A SUBCULTURE OF YOUTH CONTROLLED EXTREME VIOLENCE AGAINST A CONTROLLING STATE

Red Clocks By Leni Zumas (2018) - inspired by Atwood, abortion is illegal in America (written before Roe v Wade was overturned)

The Bees

By Laline Paull (2014) - follows the life of a sanitation bee in a beehive and the rejection of 'service', class, and caste.

PARABLE OF THE SOWER BY OCTAVIA E. BUTLER (1993) - A CLI-FI NOVEL FOCUSING ON CLIMATE CHANGE

THE WINDUP GIRL BY PAOLO BACIGALUPI (2009) - A BIOPUNK PIECE CHALLENGING CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

UNSEEN EXTRACTS

Roshwald, Mordecai. *Level 7*. 1981. pp. 120-1.

At 11.00 hours we received another order, from a different voice this time: "Press Button C2, press Button C3!"

We pushed and waited again.

There were only three buttons left unpushed—the supposedly most dangerous ones, which controlled the batteries of 'rigged' bombs. Their radioactivity would make the areas they hit uninhabitable not just in the immediate future but for years to come. Perhaps for generations.

It had always been doubted whether these bombs would be used at all, for in all probability their effect would not be limited to the territory directly hit but would also spread to neighbouring countries. And there were no grounds for annihilating neutrals. Even more to the point, these bombs might endanger our own existence. No country wants a suicidal war!

"Or does it?" I began to ask myself; but the thought was quickly banished from my mind by the loudspeaker (in its original voice): "Attention! Push Button A4, push Button B4, push Button C4!"

I glanced at the clock—11.15 hours—and pressed the three buttons. Then I looked up at the map, and was puzzled to find that no black marks had appeared. I pushed the buttons again. Nothing happened.

Then the loudspeaker—it was voice number two again—practically shouted: "Officer X-117! Push Buttons A4! B4! C4!"

I turned and looked at X-117. He was sitting in his chair staring at the buttons, while his arms hung limply as if some-

one had severed the nerves. He did not stir, but there were some sounds coming from his lips.

They were hardly audible, but after a while I could make out what he was saying: "No! Anything but those! Not Buttons 4! I can't kill my mother! No, not those . . ."

The Operations Room door suddenly swung open and two men—from the medical department, I think—dragged X-117 from the room. His arms were still hanging limply, and as he staggered out of the doorway he went on repeating: "No! Not Buttons 4 . . ."

I had no time to reflect on what had happened. X-107 entered the room and quietly took X-117's place at the other table. X-137 came in behind him—apparently to replace me if necessary.

The loudspeaker sounded again (by now the time was 11.20): "Push Button A4, push Button B4, push Button C4!" This time it went without a hitch.

At 11.21 hours today the 9th of June, I was through with my daily duty. As a matter of fact, I was through with my life's work. I had done my job. My function as PBX Officer was completely fulfilled.

The loudspeaker said: "You are free, gentlemen. You may go to your quarters or, if you prefer, stay to watch the results of A4, B4 and C4."

X-107 and X-137 remained behind to see what happened. I came back here to my room and lay down.

JUNE 10

So the war is over. It started yesterday at 09.12 hours, as far as our offensive action was concerned, and it ended when our last missiles exploded in enemy territory at 12.10 hours.

The whole war lasted two hours and fifty-eight minutes—the shortest war in history. And the most devastating one. For

Things to consider

The title *Level 7* refers to the lowest level of an underground nuclear shelter occupied by 500 military personnel who are programmed to respond to an attack by the enemy with nuclear force. Through the first person perspective of X-127, the reader experiences life within the claustrophobic quarters of Level 7 and witnesses the extinction of mankind. The identity of the warring countries is hidden and, through this anonymity, the text becomes relevant to every armed nation. Unlike many sf texts of the time, the text features human extinction as radiation leaks through all seven levels until X-127, the last surviving human, dies mid-sentence.

In the extract think about:

1. The use of factual language
2. The role of the loudspeaker
3. How identity is suppressed
4. What clues we are given in the extract to who X-127 is
5. What form is this novella written in?

Agustina Bazterrica, *Tender is the Flesh*. 2020.
pp. 1-2

Carcass. Cut in half. Stunner. Slaughter line. Spray wash. These words appear in his head and strike him. Destroy him. But they're not just words. They're the blood, the dense smell, the automation, the absence of thought. They burst in on the night, catch him off guard. When he wakes, his body is covered in a film of sweat because he knows that what awaits is another day of slaughtering humans.

No one calls them that, he thinks, as he lights a cigarette. He doesn't call them that when he has to explain the meat cycle to a new employee. They could arrest him for it, even send him to the Municipal Slaughterhouse and process him. Assassinate him, would be the correct term, but it can't be used. While he removes his soaked shirt, he tries to clear the persistent idea that this is what they are: humans bred as animals for consumption. He goes to the refrigerator and pours himself cold water. He drinks it slowly. His brain warns him that there are words that cover up the world.

There are words that are convenient, hygienic. Legal.

He opens the window; the heat is suffocating. He stands there smoking and breathes the still night air. With cows and pigs it was easy. It was a trade he'd learned at the Cypress, the meat processing plant he'd inherited from his father. True, the screams of a pig being skinned could petrify you, but hearing protectors were used and eventually it became just one more sound. Now that he's the boss's right-hand man, he has to monitor and train the new employees. Teaching to kill is worse than killing. He sticks his head out the window. Breathes the thick air; it burns.

He wishes he could anesthetize himself and live without feeling anything. Act automatically, observe, breathe, and nothing more. See everything, understand, and not talk. But the memories are there, they remain with him.

Many people have normalized what the media insist on calling the “Transition.” But he hasn’t because he knows that transition is a word that doesn’t convey how quick and ruthless the process was. One word to sum up and classify the unfathomable. An empty word. Change, transformation, shift: synonyms that appear to mean the same thing, though the choice of one over the other speaks to a distinct view of the world. They’ve all normalized cannibalism, he thinks. Cannibalism, another word that could cause him major problems.

He remembers when they announced the existence of GGB. The mass hysteria, the suicides, the fear. After GGB, animals could no longer be eaten because they’d been infected by a virus that was fatal to humans. That was the official line. The words carry the weight necessary to mold us, to suppress all questioning, he thinks.

Barefoot, he walks through the house. After GGB, the world changed definitively. They tried vaccines, antidotes, but the virus resisted and mutated. He remembers articles that spoke of the revenge of the vegans, others about acts of violence against animals, doctors on television explaining what to do about the lack of protein, journalists confirming that there wasn’t yet a cure for the animal virus. He sighs and lights another cigarette.

Things to consider

Tender is the Flesh was originally published in Spanish in 2017. Cannibalism has been legalized and protagonist Marcos supplies human meat in society. Human meat is called Special Meat and humans specially bred for consumption are called First Generation Pure.

In the extract think about:

1. How the human body is described
2. What conditions are established to ‘explain’ cannibalism?
3. How is language used to convey character?
4. The power of words to secure compliance

Chuck Palahniuk. *Fight Club*. 1996

You don't say anything because fight club exists only in the hours between when fight club starts and when fight club ends.

You saw the kid who works in the copy center, a month ago you saw this kid who can't remember to three-hole-punch an order or put colored slip sheets between the copy packets, but this kid was a god for ten minutes when you saw him kick the air out of an account representative twice his size then land on the man and pound him limp until the kid had to stop. That's the third rule in fight club, when someone says stop, or goes limp, even if he's just faking it, the fight is over. Every time you see this kid, you can't tell him what a great fight he had.

Only two guys to a fight. One fight at a time. They fight without shirts or shoes. The fights go on as long as they have to. Those are the other rules of fight club.

Who guys are in fight club is not who they are in the real world. Even if you told the kid in the copy center that he had a good fight, you wouldn't be talking to the same man.

Who I am in fight club is not someone my boss knows.

After a night in fight club, everything in the real world gets the volume turned down. Nothing can piss you off. Your word is law, and if other people break that law or question you, even that doesn't piss you off. In the real world, I'm a recall campaign coordinator in a shirt and tie, sitting in the dark with a mouthful of blood and changing the overheads and slides as my boss tells Microsoft how he chose a particular shade of pale cornflower blue for an icon.

The first fight club was just Tyler and I pounding on each other.

It used to be enough that when I came home angry and knowing that my life wasn't toeing my five-year plan, I could clean my condominium or detail my car. Someday I'd be dead without a scar and there would be a really nice condo and car. Really, really nice, until the dust settled or the next owner. Nothing is static. Even the Mona Lira is falling apart. Since fight club, I can wiggle half the teeth in my jaw.

Maybe self-improvement isn't the answer.

Tyler never knew his father.

Maybe self-destruction is the answer.

Things to consider

Fight Club features an anonymous narrator who invades support groups as a grief tourist. With Tyler Durden, the narrator establishes a club for men in which physical violence acts as therapy. At the end of this satirical novel, we discover that Tyler and the narrator are the same person.

In the extract think about:

1. How does this text negotiate self and body?
2. What masculine figures appear in this extract?
3. What types of 'fight' are dealt with here?

William Gibson. Neuromancer. 1984.

Case was twenty-four. At twenty-two, he'd been a cowboy, a rustler, one of the best in the Sprawl. He'd been trained by the best, by McCoy Pauley and Bobby Quine, legends in the biz. He'd operated on an almost permanent adrenaline high, a byproduct of youth and proficiency, jacked into a custom cyberspace deck that projected his disembodied consciousness into the consensual hallucination that was the matrix. A thief, he'd worked for other, wealthier thieves, employers who provided the exotic software required to penetrate the bright walls of corporate systems, opening windows into rich fields of data.

He'd made the classic mistake, the one he'd sworn he'd never make. He stole from his employers. He kept something for himself and tried to move it through a

fence in Amsterdam. He still wasn't sure how he'd been discovered, not that it mattered now. He'd expected to die, then, but they only smiled. Of course he was welcome, they told him, welcome to the money. And he was going to need it. Because -- still smiling -- they were going to make sure he never worked again. They damaged his nervous system with a wartime Russian mycotoxin. Strapped to a bed in a Memphis hotel, his talent burning out micron by micron, he hallucinated for thirty hours. The damage was minute, subtle, and utterly effective.

For Case, who'd lived for the bodiless exultation of cyber space, it was the Fall. In the bars he'd frequented as a cowboy hotshot, the elite stance involved a certain relaxed contempt for the flesh. The body was meat. Case fell into the prison of his own flesh.

Things to consider

A leading example of Cyberpunk, this novel is the first in a trilogy (The Sprawl Trilogy). Henry Case is a hacker who must tackle an all-powerful, sentient, artificial intelligence called Neuromancer. In Gibson's Sprawl Trilogy, human bodies are 'jacked' into technology to enter the matrix.

In the extract think about:

1. How is the body portrayed in this extract?
2. How is cyberspace described?

Secondary Sources

Technology and Dystopia

SOURCE:

Beauchamp, Gorman. "Technology in the Dystopian Novel." *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 32 no. 1, 1986, p. 53-63. *Project MUSE*, [doi:10.1353/mfs.0.1315](https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.0.1315)

EXCERPT:

"The question that I want to consider in this paper then is this: is the technology in dystopian fiction merely an instrument in the hands of the state's totalitarian rulers, used by them to enforce a set of values extrinsic to the technology itself, or is it, rather, an autonomous force that determines the values and thus shapes the society in its own image, a force to which even the putative rulers—the Weil-Doers and Big Brothers and World Controllers—are subservient? This question reflects, of course, the debate about the nature of technology and its potentially dehumanizing and destructive effects that has raged since the advent of the Industrial Revolution. If we divide the antagonists in this debate into technophiles and technophobes—admittedly far too simplistic a division—then we can characterize their positions as follows.¹ The technophiles contend that technology is value-neutral, merely a tool that can be used for good or ill depending on the

nature and purposes of the user. Man, that is, remains in control, remains the master of his creations—though, of course, he can be an evil master and "misuse" them. The technophobes, by contrast, view technology as a creation that can transcend the original purposes of its creator and take on an independent existence and will of its own, like the monster in Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* who declares: "You are my creator, but I am your master—obey" (167). The technophobe's Frankenstein complex—as Isaac Asimov has termed this view (xi-xii)—implies, in turn, a technological determination operating in history."

Major events and impact on dystopian literature

SOURCE:

Sicher, Efraim and Natalia Skradol. "A World Neither Brave Nor New: Reading Dystopian Fiction after 9/11." *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, vol. 4 no. 1, 2006, p. 151-179. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/pan.0.0057.

EXCERPT:

"Both natural and man-made disasters leave deep impressions on the imagination and on philosophy. For example, the 1755 Lisbon earthquake destroyed an imperial capital equivalent to the size of prewar London and made

a laughing-stock of Leibnizian optimism in Voltaire's *Candide*. Yet natural disasters do not usually have political, military, and historical significance and, unlike 9/11, are rarely thought of as marking the end of an era. 9/11 was an intrusion of the real that made it impossible to un-imagine dystopia as nightmare or fantasy. It is not a matter of whether or not utopian thought is still sustainable or practical, but of what has happened in postmodern fiction under the impact of a real collision of reality and imagination. This destruction was not just another demonstration of a culture of after-images but a singular event, perhaps an ur-event, which showed that the world was in a permanent state of unending disasters.

[...]

What 9/11 has shown is that the relationship of the real and the imagined in dystopian fiction has been reversed, since hypermediated image has eclipsed the event and fiction has become lived experience. There is an uncanny sense of an end that has been almost predestined, like Winston's feeling of *déjà vu* in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* when he enters the Golden Country and makes love with Julia in a Miltonian Paradise, a scene he has dreamed. Indeed, the topos has been reworked enough times in literature to be uncannily familiar. Read in this context, T. S. Eliot's remark in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" about the duty of any true artist to "live . .

. in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past" (1976: 22) acquires a new and sinister meaning."

21st Century Dystopias

SOURCE:

Gonnermann, Annika. "The Concept of Post-Pessimism in 21st Century Dystopian Fiction." *The Comparatist*, vol. 43, 2019, p. 26-40. *Project MUSE*, [doi:10.1353/com.2019.0002](https://doi.org/10.1353/com.2019.0002), p. 26-7.

EXCERPT:

"Especially dystopias seem to express most aptly the *zeitgeist* of the 21st century, a way of life conditioned by existential fears such as the global financial crisis of 2008 or the impending disaster of climate change, resulting in a pessimistic outlook to the future. This article is therefore going to focus more narrowly on more recent dystopias and the kind of pessimism displayed within their narrative frameworks: written in an era of Fisher's "capitalist realism," contemporary dystopias like Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) and M. T. Anderson's *Feed* (2002) are informed by the late-Fukuyamaist notion of non-alternatives to neoliberal capitalism, most notable by the absence of a subplot or resistance. As Mark Fisher writes, "once, dystopian films and novels were exercises in [...] acts of imagination" (2), but now, following the dissolution of the

Soviet Union in 1991 and the concomitant disappearance of communism as a serious model for social organisation, dystopias can no longer "look to the Eastern bloc for a site of economic otherness" ([Shonkwiler and La Berge 5](#)). Unable to avoid the "burden of their own inevitability" ([Stableford 278f.](#)), more recent dystopian fiction is the product of a climate pregnant with a latent Fukuyamaism, i.e. the sense that we have reached the end of history in the form of liberal, capitalist democracy ([cf. Fukuyama xi](#)). The two novels in question spearhead a contemporary literary movement that presents readers a world void of alternatives besides neoliberal capitalism. I refer to this impression with the term "post-pessimism," i.e. the understanding that neither an optimistic nor pessimistic attitude is justified due to the lack of alternatives. This term is directly inspired by Fisher's writing on capitalist realism, and his concept "reflexive impotence" ([Fisher 21](#)), a nonchalant, almost stoic acceptance of the status quo."

The Handmaid's Tale and Erasure

SOURCE:

Stein, Karen F. "Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*: Scheherazade in Dystopia." *University of Toronto Quarterly*, vol. 61 no. 2, 1991, p. 269-279. Project MUSE muse.jhu.edu/article/512570, pp. 270-271.

EXCERPT:

“Atwood's novel inscribes a contemporary nightmare, the erasure of speech. Government restriction of speech and storytelling is an important theme in twentieth-century dystopian fiction, as in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* or Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. Gilead, the patriarchal, fundamentalist society in Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel, has silenced women and rendered them invisible. The narrator, whose birth name we never learn, creates her subjectivity through her narrative. Although she is marginalized by her society, her use of narrative opens a space for her within the cramped quarters of Gilead. Reading the handmaid's tale, we are drawn into complicity with her in the illegal act of narrative: our reading validates her narrative and her subjectivity. Yet, at the same time, all readings also distort and change her narrative, as we shall see. The story moves by flashback, meditation, and present-tense narration as the narrator pieces together what she remembers of her past life and knows of her present situation. Through her storytelling, she grows more politically aware and self-conscious. She resists the reduction of Gilead (her 'reduced circumstances') by small acts of self-assertion, by fantasies of becoming strikingly visible (she imagines stripping in front of the guards at the barriers) and by the act of narrating her tale and thereby constructing a self. Offred's storytelling violates the rules of Gilead, for handmaids are supposed to be not only speechless but invisible as well. Yet, dressed in

their red robes and white wimples, they are highly visible. Colour-coded in this way, the handmaids become interchangeable, identified only by their biological function, child-bearing. To complete their loss of individuality, the handmaids lose their names as well. Each is labelled as a possession of the Commander she serves. When a new handmaid replaces Offred's neighbour, Of glen, she answers Offred's surprised query: 'I am Ofglen' (363). This casual acknowledgment of their infinite interchangeability seems to me the most chilling moment of the novel. Forbidden to acknowledge their names, their selves, they must submit- to their use as objects, possessions."

Margaret Atwood and Feminism

SOURCE:

Neuman, S. C. (Shirley C.). "'Just a Backlash': Margaret Atwood, Feminism, and *The Handmaid's Tale*." *University of Toronto Quarterly*, vol. 75 no. 3, 2006, p. 857-868. *Project MUSE*, doi:10.1353/utq.2006.0260, p. 857.

EXCERPT:

"Between 1965, when Atwood wrote her first published novel, *The Edible Woman*, and 1985 when she published *The Handmaid's Tale*, women – especially middle-class women like Atwood's heroines – had seen major improvements in their access to higher education and the professions, in

employment equity, in access to legal abortion, and in divorce law. Atwood herself had been embraced as a feminist novelist by a panoply of writers and critics representing a wide variety of feminist positions.² She had responded initially by resisting the label *feminist* (a label that she noted was sometimes used by reviewers to dismiss her early work), then by carefully defining the kind of feminist she was. By 1976, she described herself as 'probably ... a feminist, in the broad sense of the term' (Sandler, 56), but in a 1979 interview she also found the term insufficiently 'inclusive' of her interests (Gerald and Crabbe, 139). When *The Handmaid's Tale* was about to appear, Atwood gave an interview to feminist theorist Elizabeth Meese, in which she iterated her definition of feminism as a 'belief in the rights of women ... [as] equal human beings' but in which she also firmly distanced herself from feminist or doctrinaire separatism: she would have no truck with attempts – feminist or otherwise – to control what people write or say, and 'if practical, hardline, anti-male feminists took over and became the government, I would resist them' (Meese, 183). She had put the matter more positively two years earlier, just before she turned to the writing of *The Handmaid's Tale*: 'Am I a propagandist? No! Am I an observer of society? Yes! And no one who observes society can fail to make observations that are feminist. That is just ... commonsense' (Jamkhandi, 5)."

Atwood and the Future

SOURCE:

Snyder, Katherine V. "'Time to go': The Post-apocalyptic and The Post-traumatic in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*." *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 43 no. 4, 2011, p. 470-489. *Project MUSE*, doi:10.1353/sdn.2011.0057, p. 470-1.

EXCERPT:

“The future as imagined in dystopian speculative fiction must be simultaneously recognizable and unrecognizable, both like and not-like the present (see [Suvin 71](#); see also Appleton, Howells, and Mohr). In order to grasp the caution offered by the tale, we must see the imagined future in our actual present and also recognize the difference between now and the future-as-imagined. Thus, the reader of such fiction must sustain a kind of double consciousness with respect both to the fictionality of the world portrayed and to its potential as our own world's future. In Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, for example, we find a near-future world that both approximates and projects forward from the political, socio-economical, technological, and climatological givens of our present moment. In the near future as imagined by Atwood, elites work and play in manicured gated communities, while everyone else is relegated to dangerous urban jungles known as pleeblands; biotech corporations command their own secret police forces such as the CorpSeCorps (short for Corporation Security

Corps, but also, more grimly, Corpse Corps); genetically engineered life forms are trademarked and marketed for medical purposes and lifestyle enhancement; and the dire effects of rising sea levels and droughts associated with global warming are accepted by a younger generation that mocks the nostalgic longings of their parents and grandparents for a long ago golden age. The futurist setting of the novel suggests that we are at risk of coming to such a pass, though some readers may feel that this is already substantially, if not literally, the way we live now.”

George Orwell and the Future

SOURCE:

Posner, Richard A. "Orwell Versus Huxley: Economics, Technology, Privacy, and Satire." *Philosophy and Literature*, vol. 24 no. 1, 2000, p. 1-33. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/phl.2000.0015, p. 15

EXCERPT:

“Because there is so little futurism in Orwell's novel, he had no reason to set it in the *remote* future; he was extrapolating only modestly from contemporary conditions; one can imagine Soviet leaders reading *Nineteen Eighty-Four* for ideas. ²⁴ Yet, oddly enough, Huxley's far-futuristic extravaganza comes closer to

describing our world. The reason is not that Huxley could foresee the future (no one can) but that science is the story of our time, and Huxley was genuinely interested in science and his interest is reflected in his novel.²⁵ Although Soviet-style brainwashing undoubtedly had considerable effect on the minds of the people of the communist countries,²⁶ the rapidity and completeness with which communism collapsed (today only Cuba and North Korea are genuinely communist countries) demonstrated its ultimate ineffectuality. The combination of techniques described in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* seems frighteningly plausible, but this is a tribute to Orwell's artistic imagination. The system he describes is not realistic.²⁷ To see this, one need only ask who is to man all the telescreens. There are several in every apartment and office occupied by members of the Party--of whom there are a total of about 45 million, for we are told that 15 percent of the population belongs to the Party and that Oceania's total population is 300 million--and it is implied that all the telescreens are manned. Suppose there are 100 million telescreens; that would probably require 10 million watchers.²⁸ This is a clue to the element of fantasy in the novel, which is important to an understanding of it as literature."

Orwell and terror

SOURCE:

Thorp, Malcolm R. "The Dynamics of Terror in Orwell's '1984.'" *Brigham Young University Studies*, vol. 24, no. 1, 1984, pp. 3-17. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43041004>. Accessed 11 Dec. 2022, p. 10-11.

EXCERPT:

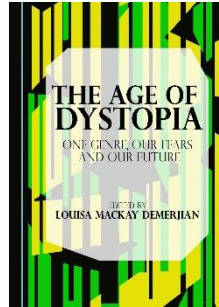
"Terror in 1984, however, goes beyond the technology of espionage and of beating people into submission. It involves even more than scientifically devised means of mass psychology. The essence of the new despotism of 1984 is the use of subtle means of manipulating perceptions of reality. Terror involves mind control. "Reality," it is emphasized, "is not external. Reality exists in the human mind, and nowhere else." The Party determines what is truth. An explicitly behaviorist assumption of the book is that by controlling the environment, especially perceptions that are fed into the mind, the Party can make people believe anything that it wants them to. Logical inconsistencies that cannot be eradicated through control of information are rationalized through the intellectual device of "double think" - the process of holding two contrary opinions as truth simultaneously, in spite of contradictions. Individual interpretations of truth are heresies, in the eyes of the Party; the "truth" must be interpreted for you."

Pedagogical Resources

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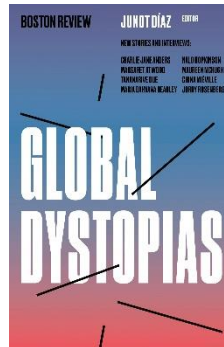
Scholarly Books

Louisa MacKay
Demerjian (ed)
The Age of Dystopia
One Genre, Our Fears
and Our Future
2016



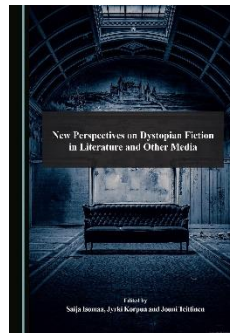
*Lots of
useful
essays –
several on
Margaret
Atwood!*

Junot Díaz (ed)
Global Dystopias
2017



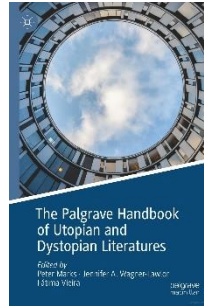
*Dystopian
short stories
and
interviews
(including
Atwood)*

Jouni Teittinen (ed)
*New Perspectives on
Dystopian Fiction in
Literature and Other
Media*
2020



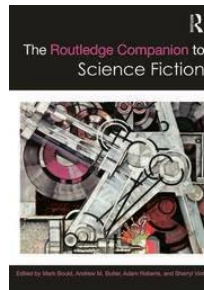
*Critical
essays on
literature,
television,
and digital
games.*

Fátima Vieira (ed)
*The Palgrave
Handbook of Utopian
and Dystopian
Literatures*
2022



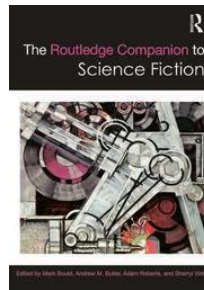
*Essays on
Anti-Utopia,
Dystopia,
and Critical
Dystopia are
useful!*

See: 'Dystopia' by
Graham J. Murphy
in *The Routledge
Companion to Science
Fiction* (2009)



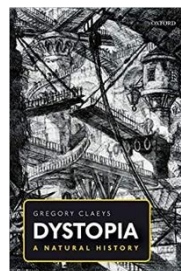
*Murphy
draws on
Dystopia
history,
context, and
key SF texts*

See: 'Utopia, dystopia
and science fiction' by
Peter Fitting in *The
Cambridge Companion to
Utopian Literature*
(2010)



*Argues that SF
is key to
understanding
trends in
utopian and
Dystopian lit*

Gregory Claeys
*Dystopia: A Natural
History*
(2018)



*Chronology of
the genre and
theoretical
overview – with
reference to
history*

Thank you for using this resource pack

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The Department of English, Theatre and Creative Writing is proud of its research culture and industry impact. Our Department was ranked 1st in London and 2nd in the UK, in the Times Higher Education subject rankings, in the most recent Research Excellence Framework (2021).
