20^{th}-21^{st} C. Dystopia Fiction: Endings and Beginnings

Week 1: Intro to Dystopia
Week 2: Character & Plot
Week 3: Setting & Point of View
Week 4: Scenarios – Environmental & Nuclear Disaster
Week 5: Scenarios – Biological & Social Disaster
Week 6: Purpose of Dystopia – Warn, Entertain & Imagine
INTRODUCTION

- Science fiction vs. dystopia fiction
- Global problems = disease, climate, socio-political & economic turmoil
- Dystopia origins = 19th c. sci-fi & fantasy
- 1950s = dystopia genre unique
SCI-FI TIMELINES

19th c. Sci-Fi
- Mary Shelley
- Edgar Allan Poe
- Jules Verne
- H.G. Wells

20th c. Sci-Fi
- Asimov
- Clarke
- Heinlein

20th C. Dystopia
- Forster
- Huxley
- Orwell
Sci-Fi = use of science & tech to:

- Change Earth
- Go beyond Earth’s boundaries
- Explore other worlds in universe
- Interact in alternate realities or with alien civilizations
Dystopia focuses on:

- Post-apocalypse Earths -> worst case scenarios
- Comments on its own era’s problems in tales of the “future”
- Nuclear era -> socio-political and climate crises
What do you already know about Dystopia?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Films</th>
<th>Books</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Mad Max”</td>
<td>“Close Encounters”</td>
<td>2001 Space Odyssey</td>
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<td>“The Road”</td>
<td>War of the Worlds</td>
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<td>“Omega Man”</td>
<td>“Solaris”</td>
<td>Martian Chronicles</td>
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<td>“Hunger Games”</td>
<td>“The Martian”</td>
<td>1984</td>
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<td>“Matrix”</td>
<td>“War of the Worlds”</td>
<td>Brave New World</td>
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<td>“Outland”</td>
<td>“Time Machine”</td>
<td>The Road</td>
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<td>“Blade Runner”</td>
<td>“Contagion”</td>
<td>Do Androids Dream</td>
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<td>“Wall-E”</td>
<td>“Martian Chronicles”</td>
<td>of Electric Sheep/Blade Runner</td>
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<td>“Nausica”</td>
<td>“I, Robot”</td>
<td>I Am Legend</td>
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<td>“Contact”</td>
<td>“Terminator”</td>
<td>Scarlett Plague</td>
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<tr>
<td>“1984”</td>
<td></td>
<td>World Made by Hand</td>
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- Canticle For Leibowitz
- Cyberpunk
- The Machine Stops
- Journey to the Moon
- Time Machine
- War of the Worlds
- Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy
- Stranger in a Strange Land
- I, Robot
Dystopia and TED Talks

Video: How to recognize dystopia (to 1:38)

Key idea: Dystopia = a society where:

- Distancing between technocrats and normal population -> Loss of control/freedom to “perfect” society
WHAT DYSTOPIA LOOKS LIKE
DYSTOPIA ALSO LOOKS LIKE THIS
“Science fiction... is speculation about how changes in circumstances will affect the human condition,
and science (and particularly technology...) is one of the major influences on change.
So science fiction is shaped by the reality we share.”
# Sci-Fi vs. Fantasy vs. Dystopia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Science Fiction</th>
<th>Dystopia</th>
<th>Fantasy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Real</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Unreal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What can be</td>
<td></td>
<td>• What can’t be</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Scientific knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Imagination</td>
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<td>• Technical application</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>• Impractical speculation</td>
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</table>
WHERE WILL SCIENCE TAKE US?

- Early sci-fi excited about scientific progress
- Science => Progress
  - Progress => Knowledge
    - Knowledge => Truth
      - Truth => human betterment
WELLS VS. VERNE

- Wells wins -> imagination and invention over “realistic” science
- “Golden age” sci-fi carries on Wells’ tradition in 1950s
- Inspires scientists to realize imaginings in functional technology
“Science fiction is not, was not, and will not be an escape literature – the “safe” fantasy... that... is becoming... more popular. (My type of science fiction) never pretended it was kidding and has been the non-escape literature that seeks to meet the problems of tomorrow.”
DYSTOPIA OR UTOPIA?
DYSTOPIA’S CRITICISM

- Frankenstein -> criticism of science without responsibility
- Vain pursuit of knowledge => neglect of moral duties
  - Violate autonomy of living creatures
  - Create conditions for crime/destruction/social regression
## WHAT IS SCIENCE?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Science of Scientists</th>
<th>Dystopia’s Science</th>
<th>Science of Sci-Fi</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Real</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Measurable</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Immeasurable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Attainable</td>
<td>• Elite power</td>
<td>• Impossible?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Solutions</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Progress</td>
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WHAT IS PROGRESS?

Scientific progress = achievable goals realized one step at a time within a certain period of time

Utopian goals = what can’t be reached or even approached or rationally pursued because impossible to achieve
Progress = what can be attained step by step AND what should be attained

Progress must be measured not just in material terms (physically possible) but

Also in moral terms – ought this to be pursued and made real?
BRITISH SKEPTICS OF PROGRESS

Aldous Huxley, author of Brave New World:

“The worst enemy of life, freedom and the common decencies is total anarchy; their second worst enemy is total efficiency.”

“Specialized meaninglessness has come to be regarded... as a kind of hallmark of true science.”
Dystopia’s key message = pursue goals that benefit human beings

BUT

Problem: How do we know what goals are worthwhile – that will benefit human beings? Do we need to test and try out ideas?
Plato’s allegory of the cave = inhabitants of a cave chained in darkness -> only see shadows on a wall

- rebel escapes to the surface -> reality is not shadows but the Sun and 3D objects

- **Plato’s solution** = republic of reason -> dystopia for some, utopia for others
George Orwell, author of 1984:

“Power is not a means, it is an end. One does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution; one makes the revolution in order to establish the dictatorship.”

“All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.”
Dystopia Today

- Dystopia 1920-1940s = growing luxury/technology -> imperialism -> wars to “end all wars”
- Dystopia 1950s = cold war, global competition -> social, environmental and nuclear disasters
- Dystopia post-1960s = individualism -> every utopia is a dystopia for someone
Let’s go back to How to recognize dystopia (start at 4:48)

What does it take to make your perfect world?

What are the costs to individual freedom in so doing?
Dystopia arises from skepticism about Progress untempered by moral questions about freedom.

Result = authors with diverse political beliefs – Kunstler to Atwood – share doubt about the Progress narrative.
End of the World as We Know It:

- A “dystopia” story about how dystopia stories usually work
- Atypical “hero” = passive alcoholic, waiting
- Banality of the end - no bang, a whimper
- “End” occurs every day, right now, when we lose our loved ones
World Made By Hand:

- Fictionalizing his non-fiction theories
- World post-oil not necessarily worse off
- Resurrection of rural life -> danger but closer contact with Nature and people
- No centralized authorities -> self-made
The Water Knife:

- Corporate control over water in US south
- Illegal migrations from South to North
- 3 viewpoints:
  - Reporter
  - Corporate muscle (Waterknife)
  - Poor orphan – vulnerable class
Film “1984” is a classic image of dystopic world

But a British show from the 1960s, The Prisoner, explores energetically the theme of utopia as dystopia – what is the Village?

The Prisoner (0:00- 4:00 & 26:41 - 27:40)