20th-21st 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
INTRO: CHARACTER & PLOT

- Basic dystopia character types
- Significance of character types -> how these influence story events
- Characters in readings:
  - how these fit or don’t fit basic character types
  - fit into 1 or more types
INTRO: CHARACTER & PLOT

General rule of thumb:

- If characters fit more than 1 type = more complex, “literary” story
  - Unexpected events
- If characters fit 1 type only = formula fiction
  - Expected events
**Dystopia Context**

**UTOPIA = NO PLACE – IMPOSSIBLE PERFECTION**

**DYSTOPIA = NOT GOOD PLACE – BROKEN WORLD**

Dystopia caused by:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Failed utopia:</th>
<th>Post-Disaster Situation:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Progress breakdown</td>
<td>• Made by people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Utopia doesn’t benefit all -&gt; pockets of oppression</td>
<td>• Made by Nature</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Dystopia Types & Traits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Disorder</th>
<th>Social Order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• No central authority</td>
<td>• Centralized control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No order to people/things → uncomfortable climate</td>
<td>• Pre-planned life = attitudes, goals, actions, relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Violence → Resource fight → Fragmented groups → no “common good”</td>
<td>• Pursue higher value distanced from oneself = common good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pursue a personal goal → Survival or other → goal may help others or only self</td>
<td>→ Virtue &amp; Purity, 1984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Rebuild → Maybe hope</td>
<td>→ Authenticity, Blade Runner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>→ Isolation, Machine Stops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>→ Perfection, Perfect Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>→ Happiness, Brave New World</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Rebel → Rebuild → Maybe hope</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Knowing what belongs in dystopia means audiences and authors understand that the same conventions – traits – belong in this type of story.

Video: How readers and authors know what belongs in “dystopia” 0:05 to 1:00
Who lives in the not-good-place?

How do they survive? Do they thrive?

What do they want? Does this change over time?

What do characters do to get what they want?

How do their choices impact others?
Choices about character affect story events:

- How do survivors get along in not-good-place? What do they do?
- Can the not-good-place be fixed? How?
- Who wants to fix it? Who does not?
- Into what can the not-good-place be fixed? What do you need for this fixed world?
ACTIVITY: CHARACTER ROLE PLAY

5 groups, 5 characters, 5 goals:

- What is the character’s goal?
- What does the character need to get what they want?
  - Tools (thing, skill or ability)
  - Attitudes
  - Allies
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHARACTER</th>
<th>GOAL</th>
<th>Tool</th>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>Allies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taylor -</td>
<td>“Planet of Apes”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Neville –</td>
<td>“Omega Man”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wall-E -</td>
<td>“Wall-E”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katniss –</td>
<td>“Hunger Games”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nemo –</td>
<td>“Matrix”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Is world tolerable or intolerable? Survive or change the world?

Attitude affects choices:
- Accept or rebel? Loner or collaborator?
- Stay the same or change over time?
- Naïve to mature? Disillusioned to idealist?
Common types:

- **Loner, cowboy hero** – independent survivor; could be hard-boiled/tough; take risks; has special tool/skill

- **Collaborator** – Suave, cynical; recognizes society’s rotten core but accepts it because he/she benefits; face-off with hero; tempt hero to “dark side”
Common types:

- **Evil villain** – Rules over weak others; enjoys freedom of disordered world; fulfill desires/primitive impulses; may be insane/tyrant, dark twin to hero

- **Group follower** – Community worker-bee; follower of established order or follower of rebel leader; survival motivating value
Another scheme for classifying dystopia characters:

- Video: Sheep, Dogs and Pigs character types: 4:00 to 7:48
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SHEEP</th>
<th>DOGS</th>
<th>PIGS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Followers don’t complain</td>
<td>Either:</td>
<td>• Top of social pyramid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No control</td>
<td>• See system as it really is</td>
<td>• Benefit from system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Don’t change</td>
<td>• Don’t question it b/c they benefit</td>
<td>• Set rules or created world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Need external force to change world for them to grow</td>
<td>• Can’t see system as it really is</td>
<td>• Know it’s morally wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Can’t change</td>
<td>• Accepts costs – benefits worth the negative side-effects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
READINGS: CHARACTER TYPES

Loner/cowboy - Bear’s heroine in “Deep Blue Sea”

- Goal is to get to San Francisco and deliver box = Doing job = survival and gives her freedom (motorcycle) -> delivering box can save others
- Risk taker – nemesis wants box; can take her bike away -> hero defies nemesis
- Ethical dilemma – job/tool keeps her alive -> but delivery of box helps others
- Delivery box = saves her honour/real freedom
READINGS: CHARACTER TYPES

Follower to hero - Butler’s Rye, “Speech Sounds”

- Goal is to survive, see relatives -> dodge dangers
- Helped by stranger – becomes open to a relationship -> more than survival is possible
- Relationship cut short by violence -> risk self to help children -> children have speech
- Emerge out of self-concern/seeking her relatives to protect children -> new beginning/family
- Possibility of recovering speech/non-violence
Follower to villain - Emshwiller’s “hero,” “Killers”

- Goal is to survive, find brother -> life of drudgery and serving – no pleasure
- Dodges dangers to help hide enemy-stranger -> Hopes for relationship with stranger -> more to life than survival
- Stranger revealed – other woman attracts him -> hero’s jealousy leads to exposure of stranger as “enemy” -> perpetuate social order - no change
Characters shape events that happen in story - events shape character development & action

Traditional dystopia -> character change doesn’t usually lead to social change

Modern dystopia -> character change can happen -> lead to social change
PLOT: ELEMENTS OF STORY

- Exposition
- Conflict
- Rising Action
- Climax
- Falling Action
- Resolution

BEGINNING  MIDDLE  END
**PLOT: ELEMENTS OF STORY**

- **Beginning** - sets stage, introduce characters/conflicts (rising action)
- **Climax** - high-point, conflict fully exposed
- **Declining action** - threads gathered together/explained – motives revealed
- **Conclusion** - last state of affairs, most issues tied off
COMMON DYSTOPIA PLOTS

- Perfection never achieved: Utopia that progress/solution promised never fully realized or breaks down entirely
- Kunstler’s World Made By Hand -> centralized authority/economy -> life of luxury (computer or oil-based) falls apart -> must create new world -> success uncertain (WMBH, 22-24)
Last man meets last woman: Literal or figurative last two people in world come together to create pre-dystopic moral environment

Butler’s “Speech Sounds” or Emshwiller’s “Killers” - thwarted romance plot -> must make future on own without partner (SS, last page)
Dystopia Plots Cont.

- End of world hope lost: Imagine worst possible scenario if things don’t change -> no chance for betterment
- Emshwiller’s “Killers” -> hero reverts to society’s practice of killing strangers -> continues war/violence caused by jealousy/self-interest (K, 265-66)
End of world hope gained: Face worst possible scenario -> but solution for change also shown

Butler’s “Speech Sounds” & Bear’s “Deep Blue Sea” -> character reversal – replace self-interest with care for others –> plant seeds for change even at cost to self survival (DBS, 234-35, 243)
ACTIVITY: GOALS & CHOICES

5 groups, 1 person in each who has read the stories (group guide). Answer:

- What is the character’s goal? What do they need to get goal?
- Who/what is the obstacle? How do they overcome obstacle?
- How does their choice change them and society?
## GOALS, CHOICES & PLOT RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plot-Drivers</th>
<th>Killers</th>
<th>Speech Sounds</th>
<th>Deep Blue Sea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal &amp; tool to get goal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obstacle &amp; how to get around it</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on self &amp; society</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PURPOSE OF CHARACTER: SUM UP

1. Characters drive story events
2. Characters like people the reader know from life -> Repeated use makes genre familiar
3. Readers expect formula -> Over time, exert less effort reading -> Accept author’s world
4. Innovative writers = use character types to get #2 and make “fan base,” but also adapt character -> create “surprises” => artistry
FILM, CHARACTER & PLOT

Other character types & situations – truth-teller and victim; social beneficiary and the socially exploited

- “On the Beach” (1957)
  - Drunken vet vs. newly wed
- “Elysium” (2014)
  - haves and have-nots
  - victim in “faceless” bureaucracy