

Dystopian Literature ENGL5650 / Fall 2017



Term: Fall 2017
ENGL 5650
Course #: 14406
LNCO 3875; MW, 3-4:20

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Description

Dystopian fiction often imagines bleak, post-apocalyptic futures that are controlled by totalitarian regimes, subjugated by technology run amok, devastated by environmental disaster, or blighted by plague and/or all manners of contagion. As negative as these imagined worlds might be, however, they nevertheless manage to do productive, even positive, cultural work in our own. By focusing on and exaggerating contemporary problems—by making a *space* for them—dystopian fiction has the potential to open up new frontiers in the real world. Our emphasis throughout this upper division class will be how this potential manifests in a variety of literary texts and cultural objects.

Objectives

The objective of this course is to familiarize students with the historical development of utopian and dystopian literature so they can think, speak, and write critically about this important literary genre. Through a close examination of texts within a *wide* range of cultural and artistic forms, students will be able to formulate critical responses to the following set of questions: What common themes, motifs, and images recur in utopian literature? How does a utopian impulse shape our understanding of culture and society? How does it respond to, challenge, perpetuate, and/or shape particular social, political, and cultural events in America and abroad? In addition to these important questions, we will consider as a *primary* focus how it is that the aesthetics of utopia—in literature, art, and popular culture—help inform our conceptions of ideal and disastrous communities in the real world.

Texts

Margaret Atwood	<i>Oryx and Crake</i> (required)
Octavia Butler	<i>Parable of the Sower</i> (required)
Ernest Cline	<i>Ready Player One</i> (required)
Kazuo Ishiguro	<i>Never Let Me Go</i> (required)
Grant Morrison	<i>We3</i> (required)
H.G. Wells	<i>The Time Machine</i> (required)
Yevgeny Zamiatin	<i>We</i> (required)

Other Texts

Miscellaneous essays—and other shorter reading materials—will be distributed in class or linked to a shared folder.