

Dredging the Depths of Dystopian Despondency

Appendix 1

Dreadful Dystopian Dregs Rating Scale

To help you decide which depressingly dystopian novel to read, do the following:

1. Complete the rating scale below.
2. Total your score out of 25.
3. Consider any score below 17 as a reason to change books, in which case ...
4. (Optional step) Switch books and return to #1 above.

1. After reading the first page of the dystopian novel, I thought what I read was				
dull = 1	a little dry = 2	interesting = 3	entertaining = 4	enthralling = 5
2. After reading pages 19, 47, 74 and 91 of the dystopian novel, I thought what I read was				
so likely to fill me with soul-destroying despair that I haven't the moral strength to read more = 1	ok = 2	nice = 3	so fascinating that like at a car-wreck I did not want to avert my gaze = 4	the work of a genius who has seen the rot around the core of our society = 5
3. The front and back jacket tell me				
"burn it" but I will contain my pyromaniac urges knowing that 451 degree flames could hurt me or my class = 1	despite the usual puff prose of back-jacket blurbs, this is just not for me = 2	maybe I can slog painfully through it = 3	I'll like it since the blurbs are written by people whose tastes seem to reflect mine or whose authority I respect = 4	I must have this book. If there are not enough copies in the class, I'll borrow one on loan between school or public libraries in order to have the privilege of reading it = 5
4. Based on the responses on the rating scales of my classmates who also have the book and on evidence of their work habits related to reading				
I'm on my own with this book literally or figuratively = 1	(Gulp!) what do I do now? Will I have to motivate them to read? = 2	we can share some good insights about the book = 3	some will likely read more than superficially, and do some thinking and research on it, therefore = 4	all the group members will want to read, think, talk, research and share interesting ideas = 5
5. In my estimation, the issues addressed by this book are				
not current, out of date = 1	current but somewhat trivial = 2	current but not particularly applicable to adolescents = 3	important issues for us to discuss = 4	current, important even urgent issues to discuss = 5

Appendix 2 **Categorising Dystopias**

This is an attempt to categorise dystopia. It is a difficult task as dystopias often are complex constructions and tend to borrow components from other dystopias. For instance, Blade Runner can, to one degree or another, be said to contain elements from cyberpunk dystopias, tech noir dystopias, overpopulation dystopias, capitalistic dystopias and so on and so forth. Consequently, one depiction may occur in several different categories.

Source: Exploring Dystopia <http://www.dystopias.tk> 20-11-2003

Totalitarian dystopias

As the name suggests, totalitarian societies utilise total control over and demand total commitment from the citizens, usually hiding behind a political ideology. Totalitarian states are, in most cases, ruled by party bureaucracies backed up by cadres of secret police and armed forces. The citizens are often closely monitored and rebellion is always punished mercilessly. Stories taking place in totalitarian dystopias usually depict the hopeless struggle of isolated dissidents. Totalitarian dystopias have, in general, dark psychological depths and strong political qualities. Hitler's Third Reich and Stalin's Soviet Union were real examples of such societies.

Examples: *We* (novel), *Fatherland* (novel; TV movie).

Bureaucratic dystopias

Bureaucratic dystopias, or technocratic dystopias, are strictly regulated and hierarchial societies, thus related to totalitarian dystopias. Where totalitarian regimes strive to achieve complete control, bureaucratic regimes only strive to achieve absolute power to enforce laws. When totalitarian regimes tend to found their own laws, bureaucratic regimes tend to defend old laws. The law always seem to stand in conflict with rational thinking and human behaviour. To change status quo, even everyday procedures, is a long and difficult process for the citizens. It goes without saying such dystopias have strong satirical qualities and to some extent surreal qualities as well.

Examples: *Brazil* (motion picture), *The Trial* (novel; several TV plays; TV movie).

Cyberpunk dystopias

A cyberpunk society is essentially a drastically exaggerated version of our own. Cyberpunk is a heterogeneous genre, but most dystopias have the following settings: the technological evolution has accelerated, environmental collapse is imminent, the boards of multi-national corporations are the real governments, urbanisation has reached new levels and crime is beyond control. Important, but not necessary essential, concepts in cyberpunk are cybernetics, artificial enhancements of body and mind, and cyberspace, the global computer network and ultimate digital illusion. Cyberpunk stories are often street-wise and violent. It is debatedly the most influential dystopian genre ever.

Examples: *Neuromancer* (novel; comic), *Blade Runner* (novel: *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*; motion picture; comic; computer game), *Matrix* (motion picture), *Strange Days* (motion picture).

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Tech noir dystopias

Tech noir is a hybrid between high-tech sci-fi and hard-boiled film noir. It is mainly a cinematic genre, more seldom literary, and as such difficult to demarcate and define, just like film noir. Tech noir is related to cyberpunk and often labelled as such, but tech noir dystopias usually have more psychological and existential depth. The atmosphere is more mesmerising, threatening, gloomy and melancholic than in average cyberpunk and the approach on technology, urbanisation and environment is much more complex. The spectacular contexts in tech noir dystopias are mainly backgrounds for intellectual experiments, in most cases extremely innovative and imaginative.

Examples: *Blade Runner* (novel: *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*; motion picture; comic; computer game), *Dark City* (motion picture), *The City of Lost Children* (motion picture), *Brazil* (motion picture).

Off-world dystopias

This is not an established label, but is supposed to cover all dystopias located to outer space. In these stories, man's exploration of the universe did not become the happy adventure everyone expected. Colonisation of other planets equals heavy industrialisation and interstellar war between distant civilisations equals mechanised slaughter. Off-world dystopias are often closely related to cyberpunk dystopias or at least tend to borrow cyberpunk features. It goes without saying this is a heterogeneous genre and most alien horror stories technically belong here. Considering the almost unlimited possibilities, this genre is underdeveloped.

Examples: *Alien* (motion picture: part of series; novelisation; computer game), *The Forever War* (novel), *Outland* (motion picture; novelisation).

Crime dystopias

Crime dystopias may have different settings. These societies have been infested with grave criminality and the authorities are about to lose control or have already lost it. This criminality may span from street crime to organised crime, more seldom governmental crime such as corruption and abuse of power. The authorities often use drastic and inhumane measures to fight the moral decay, perhaps out of desperation, perhaps out of necessity. The society is often in imminent danger of becoming totalitarian. Crime dystopias are not seldom political statements, usually of a radical and controversial nature.

Examples: *A Clockwork Orange* (novel; motion picture), *The Last Will of Dr. Mabuse* (novel; motion picture), *The Escape from New York* (motion picture: part of series).

Overpopulation dystopias

The population of the world has grown dramatically and the limited resources of our planet are exhausted. Mankind is living in despair and society is in imminent danger of becoming or has already become social-darwinistic. There is an enormous wealth gap between the rich and the poor, and military and police are used to control the starving masses. There are many parallels between overpopulation dystopias and cyberpunk dystopias, especially when speaking of environment and urbanisation. This

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kind of dystopia is rather rare, which is surprising: it may become an imminent problem in the near future.

Examples: *Make Room! Make Room!* (novel; motion picture: *Soylent Green*), *Stand on Zanzibar* (novel).

Leisure dystopias

Leisure dystopias are probably best described as utopias gone wretched or failed paradise-engineering projects. In these societies, all problems have been solved, at least officially, and all citizens are living in wealth and happiness. Unfortunately, this is often achieved by suppressing individuality, art, religion, intellectualism and so on and so forth. Conditioning, consumption, designer-drugs, light entertainment and similar methods are widely used in order to combat existential misery. Conformity is encouraged as it makes it easier to control the population. The government's means of control are always of a very subtle nature and open repression is basically non-existent. Leisure dystopias are not very common nowadays, probably as Utopia is almost extinct as concept.

Examples: *Demolition Man* (motion picture), *The Joy Makers* (novel), *Things to Come* (motion picture).

Apocalyptic dystopias

Mankind, or sometimes a single nation or an ethnic group, are facing Armageddon, be it nuclear war, gigantic meteorites or nature disasters. The main focus may be political, but nevertheless may apocalyptic stories expose the dark psychological depths of mankind. The victims of the apocalypse may be egoistic, short-sighted, cynical and opportunistic, even in the very moment of annihilation. Actually, it is questionable if apocalyptic stories really are dystopian, but they usually have strong dystopian qualities. So-called techno thrillers, WWII scenarios, would technically belong to this category.

Examples: *Dr. Strangelove* (novel: *Red Alert / Two Hours to Doom*; motion picture), *Japan Sinks* (novel; motion picture), *Until the End of the World* (motion picture).

Post-apocalyptic dystopias

The cause is nuclear war, environmental collapse or deadly epidemics. The effect is usually anarchy and survival of the fittest, and not seldom a regression to feudalism as well. Many, although far from all, stories taking place in post-apocalyptic dystopias are simple action adventures with few, if any, depths. There are often obvious parallels to epic western movies as well as a grim sense of humour. A common plot includes a cynical lone-wolf anti-hero who reluctantly aids a small community which is trying to re-establish civilisation and has to fight brutal and savage bands of raiders.

Examples: *Road Warrior* (motion picture: part of series), *Waterworld* (motion picture), *The Omega Man* (motion picture), *Warday* (novel), *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (novel), *The Chrysalids* (novel).

Alien dystopias

Earth has become occupied or infiltrated by another species from some distant solar system. The take-over is not seldom of a stealthy kind, an obvious parallel to Cold War paranoia. In many alien dystopias, the Nazi rule in Europe during WWII is an evident source of inspiration: oppression and rebellion, resistance and collaboration. The occupiers almost always display a grave lack of empathy and tend to

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treat human beings as worthless slaves, primitive animals or even mindless prey. At their very best, alien dystopias deal with culture shocks in intelligent and imaginative ways.

Examples: *V* (TV series), *The Tripods* (TV series), *Battlefield Earth* (novel; motion picture), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (motion picture; two remakes).

Surreal dystopias

Those dystopias are perhaps better described as twisted dreamscapes. They are more or less dark, claustrophobic societies on the borderline of reality and tend to be diminished to suggestive backgrounds for personal transformations. The hero always lose orientation under the influence of e.g. paranoia, insanity, disease, drugs, perversion or violence. Those dreamscapes are perhaps not real dystopias, but they definitely have dystopian qualities and interesting psychological depths. Surreal dystopias often borrow aesthetic features from film noir and tech noir.

Examples: *Videodrome* (novel; motion picture).

Uchronian dystopias

Uchronian stories are alternative histories, so-called What if? stories. In most cases, uchronian dystopias deal with different outcomes of World War II and the Cold War. Besides being interesting intellectual experiments, they tend to explore nightmare societies in suggestive ways and emphasise the importance of fighting such systems. Uchronias often have an impressive accuracy when dealing with historical facts. This is basically the only dystopian category in which the stories explicitly may take place in the present or the past.

Examples: *Fatherland* (novel; TV movie), *SS-GB* (novel), *USSA* (novel), *The Man in the High Castle* (novel).

Machine dystopias

In machine dystopias, man has become just another production asset. The workers have to adapt to the machines, and not vice versa. Consequently, work is monotonous and dangerous. Efficiency is the goal and uniformity is the means. If there are any pleasures, they equal mindless consumption. Machine dystopias express fear of technology, not seldom in a naive manner, and it goes without saying they are more or less out-dated today. Nowadays, their artistic qualities are more interesting than their political. Nevertheless, they may say something about the conformity of modern civilisation.

Examples: *THX-1138* (motion picture), *Metropolis* (novel; motion picture).

Pseudo-utopian dystopias

Your utopia might be my dystopia and vice versa. Creators of utopias often have a very clear picture of their personal paradise and they dislike people who dare to criticise their dreamscapes. Many so-called utopias are strictly hierarchical, not to say militarised or even crypto-totalitarian. The ruling class is an intellectual elite with absolute power and dissidents are threatened with disdain or even cruelty. It goes without saying that external enemies are dealt with mercilessly, almost sadistically. Technically, most

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utopias belong to this category. In my opinion, there cannot be such a thing as a perfect society, as everyone has their own picture of Utopia. Let us all keep on dreaming, though.

Examples: *Starship Troopers* (novel; motion picture), *Utopia* (novel), *A Modern Utopia* (novel).

Feminist dystopias

As the name suggests, feminist dystopias deal with oppression of women. The feminist dystopia is built on patriarchal structures and the role of woman has been diminished, e.g. to house-keeping and breeding. The society is often totalitarian or at least crypto-totalitarian, sometimes with more or less obvious parallels to fascism as represented in Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany. To one degree or another, all dystopias are patriarchal, but in feminist dystopias it is explicit.

Examples: *Walk to the End of the World* (novel), *Woman at the Edge of Time* (novel), *Bulldozer Rising* (novel).

Time-travel dystopias

In these stories, dark ages are waiting ahead: nuclear war, artificial intelligence take-over, environmental collapse, plagues etc. In most time-travel stories, agents are sent to our time in order to change history. As the name suggests, time-travel dystopias usually focus more on how certain events can change history, rather than the actual out-come. Consequently, future nightmare societies are often vaguely described and not seldom rather shallowly crafted in such stories. The purpose is to play with our fear of the future and emphasise that we can create our own future. It goes without saying they may be quite idealistic, sometimes even naive.

Examples: *The Terminator* (motion picture: part of series), *12 Monkeys* (motion picture), *Planet of the Apes* (novel; motion picture: part of series, remake), *Millennium* (novel; motion picture).

Capitalistic dystopias

The capitalistic dystopia does not differ too much from our own reality. Often, it is a brutal parody of modern civilisation. Capitalistic dystopias are always merciless consumption societies: commerce is the first commandment and ethics is merely a marketing tool. Mega-corporations rule the world and there are no longer such things as integrity, dignity, compassion or faith. The protagonist seldom fights the system, simply because it is impossible: the oppressor is faceless and collective. Capitalistic dystopias basically equal cyberpunk dystopias nowadays.

Examples: *The Space Merchants* (novel), *Robocop* (motion picture: part of series; TV series), *Neuromancer* (novel; comic), *Brave New World* (novel; TV movie).

Source: *Exploring Dystopia* <http://www.dystopias.tk> 20-11-2003

Appendix 3 Group Meeting #1 Questioning the Dystopian Novel

Instructions

1. Compare questions with the members of your group.
2. Collectively answer questions where two or more have similar questions.
3. Have two or more respond to questions that occur only once.
4. Note their answers for future reference.
5. Give especial thought to the theories described in the novel or in the background of the novel. For instance, for The Fountainhead, what do you notice about “individual” and “society” that belongs to Ayn Rand’s “positivist” theory about the USA and Russia?
6. Write the following predictions:
 - Action: What will happen to a society that follows the path outlined in the novel?
 - Thesis: What will the author try to prove with the novel?
 - Successful Argumentation: What will the author actually prove?
7. Sign, collate and submit your work as above.

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Appendix 4 Dredging the Depth of Dystopian Despondency

Task:

1. Read the following quotation by Dr. Connie Bray about typical dystopian fiction used in high schools: “We cannot teach these novels in dystopian units because they are, in fact, reality.”
2. Argue for or against this as your thesis statement in an essay of no more than 1500 words of exquisite and meaningful prose. Note that you will need to alter the point of view, a verb or a pronoun.
3. Be sure to include multiple points of excellent evidence from your novel in support of your points.
4. Include either the system of thinking from your secondary source as a heuristic tool in the analysis
Or
Include a particularly authoritative, meaningful and pithy quotations from the secondary source.
5. Prepare an essay in MLA format with appropriate font, size, layout, citations, style and language.

En route:

1. Select a novel using the trusty reading scale.
 2. Read it attentively and critically. That is, think about the work you will do with it as you read.
 3. Bring to the first meeting of your novel group at least one question for each of the following categories:
setting theme protagonist antagonist minor characters

style structure tone
- NB:** A question along the lines of “What is the...” where the completion is a word from the list is insufficient for this discussion, disloyalty to your novel group and a disservice to yourself. Better questions might start with “how” or “why” and involve complex, critical analysis.
4. Bring to the second meeting of your novel group three meaningful quotations from the secondary source, or an explanation of the system of thinking described in the secondary source. For instance, if Karl Marx’ Das Kapital were your secondary source, explain his critique of capitalism and his advocacy of communal property as a more equitable solution.
 5. Bring to the third meeting of your novel group a graphic organizer for the novel showing the essential elements of it along with supporting details in the form of quotations and page references. This graphic organizer can be a plot diagram, a mind map or an essay analysis and planning sheet.
 6. Bring your completed essay to the fourth meeting of your novel group in order that you may share your introduction and conclusion with your classmates, and turn in the complete essay to your teacher.

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Pairings of Dystopian Fiction and Secondary Sources		
Dystopian Fiction	Secondary Sources	Other Suggestions
<i>The Wanting Seed</i> by Anthony Burgess	Roger Lewis' biography of Anthony Burgess	Consider too his book on Attila the Hun.
<i>Exit to Reality</i> by Edith Forbes	<i>Another World is Possible</i> by David McNally	Clifford Pickover's neo-reality books might help here. View <i>The Matrix</i> time permitting.
<i>Oryx and Crake</i> by Margaret Atwood	<i>Dead Man in Paradise</i> by J.B. Mackinnon	Atwood's <i>Bodily Harm</i> could help link these two and elucidate a theme in <i>Oryx and Crake</i> .
<i>Ape and Essence</i> by Aldous Huxley	Nicholas Murray's biography of Aldous Huxley	Consider also, time permitting, <i>Jacob's Hands</i> , <i>Brave New World</i> , or <i>Island</i> .
<i>Brave New World</i> by Aldous Huxley	<i>Jacob's Hands</i> , also by Aldous Huxley	Consider also, time permitting, <i>Ape and Essence</i> , Nicholas Murray's biography, or <i>Island</i> .
<i>The Road</i> by Cormac McCarthy	<i>Race Against Time</i> by Stephen Lewis	View <i>No Country for Old Men</i> .
<i>1984</i> by George Orwell	Emma Larkin's <i>Find George Orwell in Burma</i>	You may want to recollect, read or reread <i>Animal Farm</i>
<i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> by Margaret Atwood	<i>Virtual War</i> by Michael Ignatieff	<i>Oryx and Crake</i> bears some strong resemblances to <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> in terms of theme, structure and narrative voice.
<i>The Fountainhead</i> by Ayn Rand	<i>The Rights Revolution</i> by Michael Ignatieff	<i>We the Living</i> , <i>Atlas Shrugged</i> , <i>Anthem</i> all flog the same philosophical equine.

Note: Other possible pairings should be discussed and approved by the teacher.

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Appendix 5 **Dystopian Novels and Secondary Sources: Instructions for Group Discussions**

1. Form groups by novel.
2. Select a speaking order for the **quotations**. Please note that should one person have decided to read the large parts or the entire secondary source, this person should wait until others have presented their quotations before laying out the structure of thinking in the secondary source and its application to the dystopian novel.
3. The first reader provides context for the first selected quotation, then the quotation itself, followed by some ideas about how it connects to the structure, style, theme or tone of the novel.

A Sample Reader's Comment on the Quotation

When reading *Exiles* by Ron Hansen, I found a section where the great poet Gerard Manley Hopkins is on his death-bed. His family, who had rejected and largely ignored him for his abandonment of their Anglican religion in favour of Catholicism, arrives to hear him say weakly "I shall have to give you a tour" of the Jesuit residence despite the fact that he couldn't move, was "emaciated and as white as his sheets". Then after reciting parts of "The Wreck of the Deutschland", a poem about a shipwreck, especially the lines where the nuns aboard the sinking ship shout

Remember us in the roads, the heaven-haven of the Reward:

Our King back, oh, upon English souls!

Let him easter in us, be dayspring to the dimness of us, be a crimson-crested east

Gerard begins to slip into sleep. This serves as his last prayer, then he says "I'm so Happy. I'm so happy" to his mother and is gone. This quotation about a ship sinking where many lives were lost is much like our primary text "Bottled Rabbit" where simple pleasures like sun through an oilcloth, the heritage passed from generation to generation in Newfoundland's outports, and the sensory joys of food are to be taken at face value. Despite the ironic commentary of the CBC reporter, we are to treat the experience as authentic, genuine and meaningful. There is an epiphany in Babstock's poem as in Hopkin's.

Gerard Manley Hopkin's poem seeks to memorialize the ship's passengers and crew like "Bottle Rabbit" seeks to preserve a recipe, an experience and relationships. The rabbit too is preserved, quite literally. Easter and rabbits are, of course, associated not just in popular culture as harbingers of hidden chocolates but in a religious sense as new birth, resurrection and the announcement of "reward" for those who follow the King of Heaven. Although Babstock's poem seems rooted in this mundane world, it is filled with reverence for sensory experience. Thematically, there are similarities; in structure there are advances in Babstock over Hopkin's peculiar style.

Hopkins' "sprung rhythm" is like the push and pull of Babcock's lines and of his hand in the sealer jar. Hopkins, an older poet, can use end rhymes with serious intent. Babcock plays with our expectations by burying them in the prose-like sentences he uses to build his free-verse.

4. Clarification and responses to questions should follow the explanation of the quotation.
5. The second member does the same for a quotation; the rest follow suit.
6. All continue until their stock of quotations, their ideas for interpretation or brains are exhausted, at which point anyone who chose to use the secondary source as a heuristic should launch into a detailed explanation.
7. Each group member now does the following:
 - * thanks the others for their ideas
 - * thinks about the others' quotations and explanations
 - * writes a thesis statement about the primary novel in the form of a complex sentence
 - * submits the thesis along with the quotations or heuristic to the teacher for marking.

Appendix 6 Visions of Dystopia: The Graphic Organizers' Meeting

Instructions

1. Form groups based on the dystopian novel you are reading.
2. Knowing that you live in a cyberpunk dystopia where each of you is programmed to present the information on your schematic or graphic organizer dispassionately, give an organized presentation of the facts of your novel without any value judgements.
3. After each round of presentations, again in cyberpunk mode, each group member should perform one of the following functions. You may choose to assign these at the beginning of the meeting or do this at each round.
 - The Spock-Machine points out errors in logic as would Spock on Star Trek
 - The FBI-bot points out errors in fact, and asks for “Just the facts, ma’am”.
 - The Cyborg states how a pure machine could have better presented the information in another form of graphic organizer
 - The Sherlock notes any signs that taboos or laws of our society have been broken by the author of the novel or the presenter, denounces them, and threatens to blast away any paper evidence of deviation in thinking with a ray-gun à la Denis Côté
 - The Auntie Newspeaker notes any vague, baffle-gab or colloquial terms, and offers meaningful replacements from personal vocabulary or a thesaurus.
 - The Colombo-Crawler, named after Robert Colombo, the famed Canadian who made his living by publishing books of quotations, counts the number of direct quotations versus the number of paraphrases of parts of the novel. The CC also adds quotations to the presentation of fellow Bots, as deemed necessary.
4. At the end of the conversation among the reading group members, do all the following:
 - Thank your partners, to the extent justified, for their ideas which may help you confirm your thinking about the novel, change your thinking about the novel, or, help you organize your thinking both in your mind and your essay.
 - Sign and submit your graphic organizer
 - Complete the meta-cognitive questions below and submit your answers.

Meta-Cognitive Questions

1. What made you choose the particular graphic organizer that you used for this round of reading? How effective was it in recording and sorting information?
2. How did the organizer shape the information and thus your thinking?
3. How has reading this dystopian novel affected your view of yourself, your locality, and the world? Has it made you hopeful or despondent? Why?
4. What is your perception of the satire in the novel? Is it “corrosive” or “a rollicking fun-filled, joke-packed adventure story about the end of the human race” or something else?
5. How can reading about human suffering be a pleasurable experience for you and others?