

## CL 494: Contemporary Dystopian Fiction

Burcu Kayışcı Akkoyun, Fall 2023<sup>1</sup>

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**Course Schedule:** TTTh 782

TB 490 | TB 490 | TB 240

**Office hours:** Thursday 14.00-16.00<sup>2</sup>

### Course Description and Objectives

CL 494 explores contemporary dystopian (short and long) fiction and examines the ways in which dystopian narratives may be understood as aesthetic responses to socio-political, cultural, and environmental issues in the contemporary moment. The course focuses on texts that succeed the classic examples of the genre so that we could identify (con)textual continuities, shifts, and disruptions between real and imaginary pasts, presents, and futures. We will also turn to visual representations to discuss how different aesthetic choices inform our interpretation of specific works.

I expect those who are interested in CL 494 to have a solid idea about the generic conventions and themes of utopian and dystopian fiction. We will begin by revisiting the complex dynamics between utopian imagination and dystopian visions to refresh our memory. We will seek to understand the nuances revealed by our emphasis on the contemporary as well as the common thematic trajectories of literary dystopias such as totalitarian control, social alienation, and manipulation of language and history. Here are some questions that may guide our reading process and discussions: How do fictional “bad places” pertain to our crisis-ridden present and not-too-distant future? Are literary

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<sup>1</sup> This is the draft syllabus.

<sup>2</sup> We can arrange appointments by email as well.

dystopias still effective thought-experiments and tools of critique? Is there any (estranging) value left in imagining (worse) alternatives? I do not expect us to arrive at definitive answers but to open up discussion that welcomes different and sometimes opposing viewpoints.

## **Learning Outcomes**

Upon completing this course, you should be able to demonstrate an understanding of the evolution of dystopia as a literary genre in line with the pressing issues of the late twentieth and twenty-first century. You will develop a conceptual and theoretical framework of the genre by situating the texts within broader historical, political, and cultural contexts.

## **Class Policies**

**\* One word to rule us all: respect.**

### **Respect is about:**

-following the classroom etiquette

-contributing to a safe learning environment, i.e., listening to each other attentively even though we disagree at times.

-maintaining clear and transparent communication: I will make sure that I respond to your emails as soon as I can, but only within reasonable working hours. Please ask/ tell me whenever you have any issues/concerns rather than worry over hearsay circulating in chat groups etc. We can always arrange office hours.

\* If you are a student with learning or other disabilities (or any other issues), please inform me in person or via email during the first two weeks of the semester so that necessary arrangements can be made.

## **Required Texts**

### **Short fiction:**

“Harrison Bergeron” (1961) by Kurt Vonnegut

<https://www.tnellen.com/cybereng/harrison.html>

“The Subliminal Man” (1963) by J.G. Ballard

<https://readerslibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Subliminal-Man.pdf>

“Pump Six” (2008) by Paolo Bacigalupi

“Time capsule found on the dead planet” (2009) by Margaret Atwood

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/sep/26/margaret-atwood-mini-science-fiction>

“Covehithe” (2011) by China Miéville

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/apr/22/china-mieville-covehithe-short-story>

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/apr/15/oil-stories>

### **Novels:**

*Children of Men* (1992) by P.D. James [& *Children of Men* (2006), dir. by Alfonso Cuarón]

*The Power* (2016) by Naomi Alderman

*Exit West* (2017) by Mohsin Hamid

### **Critical sources:**

“The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited” by Sargent, especially pp.1-13.

“Dystopia: The Dream as Nightmare” in *Narrating Utopia* by Chris Ferns, pp. 105-130

“Dystopia in the Twenty-First Century” by Gregory Claeys in *Dystopia: A Natural History*, pp. 497-501.

“It's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism” in *Capitalist Realism* by Mark Fisher, pp. 1-11

\*Short stories and articles will be shared electronically and/or compiled in a course pack upon request.

\*I may assign additional readings depending on the pace of our class discussions.

### **Course Requirements and Grading**

<b>A. Active class participation</b>	10 %
<b>B. In-class response</b>	20 %
<b>C. Reading quizzes and/or discussion posts</b>	25 %
<b>D. Final exam</b>	40%
<b>E. Creative project</b>	5 %

### **Grading Scale:**

**AA (100-90), BA (89-85), BB (84-80), CB (79- 75), CC (74-70), DC (69-65), DD (64-60), (fail) F (59-0)**

**A. Active participation: This is a reading intensive course, and I expect you to come to class prepared.** A high participation grade depends on critical engagement with the readings / assignments, and active participation in discussions and in-class exercises. I will be taking attendance, and failure to attend classes regularly without

medical reports or continuously coming late will negatively impact your participation grade. After four absences, you will also waive the opportunity to receive feedback on your assignments. For personal issues or emergency situations, please contact me before or after class.

**B. In-class response:** We will use class time for this assignment in which you will be given a specific prompt and critically respond to a work we will have discussed. Your response must be well-organized with clear textual evidence. I will provide the details in due time.

**C. Reading quizzes and/or discussion posts:** I will give you announced quizzes that cover the details of the assigned reading for the day. Alternatively/ additionally, I may share mini prompts on certain weeks to keep the conversation going on the discussion board. There will be no makeup for the missed quizzes, so it is your own responsibility to plan your attendance. I will clarify the requirements of this category once the student number is set.

**D. The final exam (date and format TBA):** The final exam will cover all the materials we will discuss throughout the semester. The questions will be comprehensive and comparative. I may also give you (brief) new materials as part of the exam. To be admitted to the final, you must fulfil the attendance requirement.

Keep in mind that regular attendance and critical engagement with the texts in class will reflect positively on your performance in the final exam and your overall grade.

For all assignments, you must follow the MLA (Modern Language Association) guidelines for formatting and citation. You can access the latest edition here:

[https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/mla\\_style/mla\\_formatting\\_and\\_style\\_guide/mla\\_general\\_format.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_general_format.html)

All sources must be properly cited otherwise you are committing plagiarism (i.e. presenting the words or ideas of another person as if they were your own). Not only direct quotations and facts but also paraphrases of ideas must be properly documented. If you have any doubts about whether/how you should cite a source, please ask me BEFORE you submit your work. Plagiarism also includes submitting papers or work for other courses (your own or others'), buying papers online or having others write papers for you: no such work will be accepted. I trust that you will honor this code of ethics, especially in an online environment. Any instance of academic dishonesty will be subject to appropriate sanctions.

**E. Optional creative project:** If you prefer to do this project, you will have a chance to approach dystopian imagination from a more creative perspective. You are basically free to do any project you want as long as it relates to our texts and class discussions. Options are many, but here are some suggestions: depicting your own dystopia, recording a video/podcast about a relevant topic, rewriting certain parts of the novels or creating new parts for them... This should not be about getting a grade, but expressing yourself and your interest in the topic.

## Weekly Reading Schedule (subject to change on notice)

<b>W 1</b>	<b>Th Sep 28</b>	Course introduction and syllabus overview
<b>W2</b>	<b>T Oct 3</b>	Contemporary / Dystopia: conceptual and theoretical framework “Time capsule” by Atwood
	<b>Oct 5</b>	Conceptual and theoretical framework cont: Sargent and Ferns
<b>W3</b>	<b>Oct 10</b>	“Harrison Bergeron” by Vonnegut
	<b>Oct 12</b>	“The Subliminal Man” by Ballard
<b>W4</b>	<b>Oct 17</b>	<i>Children of Men</i> by James
	<b>Oct 19</b>	<i>Children of Men</i>
<b>W5</b>	<b>Oct 24</b>	<i>Children of Men</i>
	<b>Oct 26</b>	<i>Children of Men</i>
<b>W6</b>	<b>Oct 31</b>	<i>Children of Men</i>
	<b>Nov 2</b>	Film Screening: <i>Children of Men</i> , dir. by Cuarón
<b>W7</b>	<b>Nov 7</b>	In-class response
	<b>Nov 9</b>	Claeys & Fisher
<b>W8</b>	<b>Nov 14</b>	Claeys & Fisher cont.
	<b>Nov 16</b>	“Covehithe” by Miéville
<b>W9</b>	<b>Nov 21</b>	<i>The Power</i> by Alderman
	<b>Nov 23</b>	<i>The Power</i> cont.
<b>W10</b>	<b>Nov 28</b>	<i>The Power</i>
	<b>Nov 30</b>	<i>The Power</i>
<b>W11</b>	<b>Dec 5</b>	<i>The Power</i>
	<b>Dec 7</b>	“Pump Six” by Bacigalupi
<b>W12</b>	<b>Dec 12</b>	<i>Exit West</i> by Hamid
	<b>Dec 14</b>	<i>Exit West</i>
<b>W13</b>	<b>Dec 19</b>	<i>Exit West</i>
	<b>Dec 21</b>	<i>Exit West</i>
<b>W 14</b>	<b>Dec 26</b>	Overall Review