



# The image of Dystopian fiction and the cultural dialogues that they represent

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**Abstract**—The image of fiction over the years has taken human understanding into multiple perspectives though it is not a popular statement. While ‘the fact’ remains the key to understanding any time period, all the other genres of writing that contribute to the same time period should also be considered relevant. Dystopian fiction revolves around times of great pessimism and struggles but on keen observation, their existence seems to be calling out certain important aspects of the period. The article focuses on the question of the prominence of dystopian fiction within the cultural environment it represents.

**Keywords**—dystopian fiction, ideologies, the importance of literature, facts, fiction.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Edward Said the Palestinian American literary theorist and public intellectual best known for his substantial contribution to the post-colonial critical theory states in *The world, the text and the critic* that “literature is produced in time and in society by human beings who are themselves agents of, as well as somewhat independent actors within their actual history”. The best literary texts have come into existence from the very fact that the authors had experienced something or their anticipation giving rise to some of the greatest works of the time. A dystopia is a community or society that is undesirable or frightening. The word was first used by JS Mill in 1868 in his political speech on the state of Ireland, where he used the word in contrast with the term utopia. Dystopia is often defined as the opposite of Utopia; a fictional village created by Thomas Moore in his book. It represents his concept of an ideal society. The concept of utopia and dystopia have differed over the years according to the perception of the individual writers as each portrays what they believed in the vagueness of what is being defined as ideal and vice versa. Throughout the years however dystopian fiction has in a way ensured its existence within the history of the time, the article tries to give an insight into the topic.

## II. DYSTOPIAN FICTION

Humanistic geographer Kenneth Olwig argues that ‘when literature does achieve a faithful depiction of reality in this wider sense of what it ought to be and become, then it may indeed have some impact upon what reality becomes, although it cannot, of itself, change reality’ (Olwig 1981: 53). Fiction has often taken strong criticism for imposing its imaginations on reality while its more factual side when included is ignored mostly. The dystopian construct or imagination as Kolson Schlosser formulates is that ‘spatial imaginaries of the apocalypse are as commonplace as ever’ (307). The public domain is often a direct representation of the outcome of the personal spaces of the stakeholders involved. Within the development of more global and much sought-after media representations, it has often been recorded that those narratives within the social constructs get the representation due, thereby questioning an already existing image. But this wasn’t always the condition. The 1980s saw the rise of genres that criticized the geography of the political, economic, and social structure of the time. The recorded evidence suggests a gradual but steady growth in the genre, which points to the favour it has been gaining over time. From the previous century from the beginning of the greatest wars, the great depression the genre saw a rise in its popularity. And the

only viable explanation is that the genre was an indirect representation of the human mind and its pragmatic approach protesting through writings. We live entirely, especially if we are writers, by the imposition of a narrative line upon disparate images, by the "ideas" with which we have learned to freeze the shifting phantasmagoria which is our actual experience '(Didion, Joan - *The White Album*). Dystopian fiction has often given narratives very true but equally a product of fiction combined with political representations of the times. The culture developed and represented from these formed images are often much different from their historical and written narratives. While fiction remains the foremost important premise, the facts enclosed cannot be ignored. The portrayed truth and the portrayal of the truth debate within a cultural domain answer the question of the significance of dystopian fiction.

In his famous essay *On Liberty* (1859) JS Mill argues that a state should permit the publication of error because its publication might act as a powerful incentive to the forces of truth. The images formed through fiction are said to bring the readers different perspectives. While politics and religion get major representation in the texts, recent times have seen a rapid increase in ideological aggression when media, film, or write-ups are concerned. The cultural dialogues that are rising seem to be changing the premises to more aggression as it grows. The twentieth century witnessed the emergence of literary dystopia to a wider extent. The rapid changes in power strategies, political ideologies, and technical advancements prompted the writers of different periods to warn the society about what could be the near future adding their tinge of fiction to it. Tom Moylan states that "Dystopian narrative is largely the product of the terrors of the twentieth century. A hundred years of exploitation, repression, state violence, war, genocide, famine, ecocide, depression, debt, and the steady depletion of humanity through the buying and selling of everyday life provided more than enough fertile ground for this fictive underside of the utopian imagination". The collapse of socialism in the Soviet Union, and the model utopian experiment also contributed to the dystopian writings. The focus of the dystopian writers was always on the social crisis that they witnessed which they believed was paving the pathway for greater destruction. Erika Gottlieb attempts to define the western model of dystopia by stating that "the writer offers militant criticism of specific aberrations in our present socio-political system by pointing out their potentially monstrous consequences in the future".

### III. THE RELEVANCE

While realistic films and books seem to be on the top trending favourable genres, a genre that is entirely said to be out of imagination seems to be growing and does indeed look confusing. But when a closer look is taken at books like George Orwell's *1984*, it's all about the close monitoring of the people by the government, 'big brother is watching you'. Margaret Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale* talks about a patriarchal society where religion is a primary tool to manipulate the society. *Brave New World* questions the existence of truth among all the chaos. And then we realize that they all seem to be representing things that we have already seen or can easily be made possible in the future.

As an in-depth reading of the cultural dialogues that happen with a discussion of fiction. The audience always seems to be correlating to the fact that dystopian fiction is indeed something that they all relate to. When modern-day adaptations like Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games* came around, their nature seemed to be enticing as well as engaging to the audience. Books like *1984* and movies like them are used daily to question the foundation of multiple social situations that we often witness including politics and religion. The stupefied populace can any day be one of us or us as a whole and that is the triggering point of the functioning of the image of dystopian fiction.

### IV. CONCLUSION

Fiction indeed will always be fiction. Over the years, we have witnessed on multiple occasions how the smart usage of the available resources has had the right impact on society. All genres of writing contribute to different aspects of society and thus none remains superior nor does none deserve to be left out of the discussion. Dystopian fiction holds a powerful voice in the representation of the cultural climates but the reading depends on the reader and the discussion that follows. If a particular genre seems to have the power to change the course of the reading of the cultural dialogues, then in fact it deserves a bigger platform to be discussed and understood.

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