New Perspectives on Dystopian Fiction in Literature and Other Media

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Edited by

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Saija Isomaa, Jyrki Korpua,
and Jouni Teittinen

In their introduction to *Dark Horizons* in 2003, Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan (2003, 1) state that dystopias portray fictional worlds that are "worse than the ones we live in". Today, one may hesitate before accepting this comparison without qualification due to some recent developments that seem to bring past and even contemporary dystopias much closer to reality. The most obvious is anthropogenic climate change, which poses a fundamental threat to all life on Earth. In 2018, the Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change (IPCC) gave our civilization twelve years to correct our way of living or else face the dire consequences outlined in its report (http://www.ipcc.ch/report/sr15/, 8 October 2018). Later reports by the United Nations and IPCC have been equally alarming, warning us of mass species extinction and global warming (see UN Report 2019; IPCC 2019). Already, the changing climatic situation is making itself felt via extreme weather conditions and globally increased aridity that, in turn, brings about consequences such as a longer and more severe forest fire season. Recently, the exceptionally destructive bushfires in Australia in 2019–2020 showed the devastating effects such phenomena may have not only on humans but also on wildlife, pushing some endangered species closer to extinction.

In addition, our societies are changing, and not always for the better. China, for example, is building a social credit system in which high technology and more traditional forms of official records are used to monitor and judge every move a citizen makes, ultimately aiming at "letting the trustworthy roam freely under heaven while making it hard for the discredited to take a single step" (Carney 2018). According to Xin Dai (2018), China is the first state to adopt reputation mechanisms such as blacklisting, rating, and scoring, which were previously used by private sector players to tackle governance and regulatory problems in social and economic realms. Thus China is taking a step from being a reputation

society towards a reputation state. If successful, by the end of 2020 China will have become "the world's first digital dictatorship", where technologies such as mobile apps and a network of 200 million CCTV cameras equipped with facial recognition, body scanning, and geo-tracking constantly survey the behaviour of all 1.4 billion citizens, that is, about twenty per cent of the world's population (see Carney 2018). The smart city of Guiyang (with an urban population of over three million) had its surveillance system installed already in 2017, and it took seven minutes for the security authorities to find BBC's John Sudworth when he was allowed to test the system (see the BBC's reportage from 25 December 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pNf4-d6fDoY).

The development in China is an extreme example of how dystopian visions of constant surveillance and the loss of privacy are being actualized in our world, but it makes clear that the genre's worry about a state-controlled future has not been groundless. Recently, especially after the beginning of Donald Trump's presidency in January 2017, dystopian fiction has gained unprecedented attention in popular culture. The interest in dystopias seems to signal both a widespread political uncertainty and the genre's ability to observe and criticize power relations. The publisher of Orwell's classic *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), Penguin USA, reported in January 2017 that there had been a 9,500 per cent increase in the sales of the book, and the publisher had ordered a print of 75,000 new copies to meet the demand (Freytas-Tamura 2017). Shortly afterwards, Margaret Atwood's feminist dystopia *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) rose to the top of Amazon's bestseller list and ended up as being the most read fiction book of 2017 (https://www.amazon.com/article/this-year-in-books?ref=SIN_TY17_V_2, retrieved 8 October 2018). It can even be claimed that Atwood's novel – or the character of the handmaid – has become a symbol for political resistance against abuses of power, its position reinforced with the novel's award-winning television adaptation of the same name by Bruce Miller and the international political resistance group named Handmaid Coalition, which claims to combat inequality under the slogan "Fight to keep fiction from becoming reality" (handmaidcoalition.org, 8 October 2018). The Handmaid Coalition has organized or inspired silent demonstrations of people dressed as handmaids around the world. The sequel of Atwood's novel, *The Testaments* (2019), won the 2019 Booker Prize for fiction along with Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other.* If dystopian fiction – in one of its many functions – is a canary in the coalmine, as Baccolini and Moylan (2003, 2–3) have suggested, then many have noted its existence and started monitoring its condition.

Recent developments in dystopian fiction

Recent years have witnessed a rise in climate fiction, young adult (YA) dystopias, and dystopian graphic novels, digital games, and films, to name a few burgeoning genres and forms that belong to the widening field of dystopian fiction as we understand the term in this book. What began as more or less satiric mappings of undesirable societies and futures in the secular literature of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have become a multitude of intertwined genre traditions that combine with each other and different genres and forms across media.

In this volume, we understand dystopian fiction as an umbrella term; it gathers together thematically close genres that often intertwine in individual works of fiction, whatever the medium. As we see it, dystopian fiction accommodates the different historical phases of the genre of dystopia, dystopian narratives of apocalypse, and post-apocalypse,[1] much of so-called climate fiction (envisaging the future course of climate change partly in tandem with environmental sciences),[2] and those subgenres of these categories that are addressed to some specific target audience and are moulded accordingly (e.g. YA dystopia). This broad understanding of the concept of "dystopian fiction" is contrary to what M. Keith Booker and

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[1] Post-apocalyptic fictions, defined as narratives of a world changed by some global cataclysm, need not in fact always be overtly dystopian, but may portray ostensibly idyllic back-to-nature scenarios or ideologically laden and usually masculinist fantasies of survival (intermixed with flat-out dystopian elements). While the post-apocalypse is thus arguably not delimited within the generic category of dystopia, in the main it falls under it. Previously, Claire B. Curtis (2010, 7) has distinguished between dystopian and utopian post-apocalyptic fiction, the latter using the destruction of the world to "usher in a new and potentially better one".

[2] Sylvia Mayer (2014, 24) has proposed a useful and intuitive division of climate (change) fiction, or cli-fi, into "narratives of catastrophe" and "narratives of anticipation". In the latter category, which includes titles like Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* (2012), "Large-scale catastrophe is envisioned, if at all, only as a possibility, usually signaled by the representation of weather anomalies and their socio-economic consequences that indicate the impact of global warming" (Mayer 2014, 26). While these modes may mix, for example through flashbacks or multiple temporal frames, it is the explicitly catastrophic climate change narratives that most aptly fall within the category of dystopia. The genre of climate fiction is often also taken to include narratives dealing with the geo-engineering of alien planets (e.g. Kim Stanley Robinson's *Red Mars* trilogy, 1992–1996), or decidedly weird fiction (e.g. Jeff VanderMeer's *Southern Reach Trilogy,* 2014), all of which may or may not be dystopian in character.

Anne-Marie Thomas have suggested in *The Science Fiction Handbook* (2009), which has separate chapters on dystopian science fiction and apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction. By our broad use of the term, we wish to emphasize the thematic connectedness and overlapping of these historical genres in our current culture to better understand the field they constitute.[3] Even if the genres might originally have been responses to either societal or environmental concerns, they typically imagine negative futures for humankind. Each focuses on some specific aspect of the undesirable future world, be it an apocalyptic chain of events leading to a great catastrophe, the struggle to survive and rebuild in a post-catastrophe world, or the condition of people living in totalitarian states that have usually been created as a response to a wide-scale catastrophe, such as a world war or a nuclear disaster.

Genre theories that underlie different approaches to dystopia have not been widely discussed in dystopian studies, but we wish to briefly justify our descriptive approach to the genres in this introduction, as it may seem alien to some. Our understanding of dystopian fiction is shaped by historical genre theory, which perceives genres as traditions of works that resemble each other in specific respects (see *Kinds of Literature* by Alastair Fowler, 1982). This theory does not assume a genre has an essence that remains the same through changes over time and place, and which can be expressed in a single definition. The "family resemblance" typical of works in a genre is based on the "generic repertoire" of that genre, that is, its historically widening pool of optional features from which each work in the genre (or the author) selects elements for its purposes.[4] As genres change over time, they cannot be defined in essentialist terms, but their historical stages can be described.

This anti-essentialist approach is both theoretically strong and practical in cross-cultural analysis, especially because it allows genres to change over time, adapt to different cultures and media, and combine with other genres in individual works. As we see it, this is what has been happening

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[3] Karen A. Ritzenhoff and Angela Krewani have used the term apocalypse as an umbrella term in their edited volume *The Apocalypse in Film: Dystopias, Disasters, and Other Visions about the End of the World* (2015), but we prefer the term dystopian fiction, as we think it better communicates what ties the genres together: their undesirability, or anti-utopian nature.

[4] In practice, this means that works in the same genre need not share a set of specific, "definitive" features (or more technically, necessary and sufficient conditions) to qualify as belonging to the genre as in essentialist definitions. Works in a genre do not share an essence, but resemble each other in certain respects.

with dystopian fiction from the very beginning, and it is also why there is such a wide variety and numerous traditions of dystopian fiction in different literatures and cultures. An important benefit of the approach is its inclusiveness: by not privileging genre definitions that are based on the characteristics of the genres in some of the dominating literatures, the variety of different cultural versions of dystopian fiction is made visible, appreciated, and included.

However, two remarks should be made. Firstly, as each Western literature and culture tends to have its own tradition of dystopian genres, we will not go into a detailed discussion of these forms in some specific culture in this short introduction; rather, we focus on general phenomena and trends that are likely to occur in many. Secondly, our choice of genre theory is to be contrasted with previous studies in the field that tend to suggest essentialist definitions, as well as those prominent definitions of dystopia and utopia that include contextual criteria for the genre. For instance, Darko Suvin (1979, 49) includes a criterion concerning the relationship between the imagined world and the author's community in his definition of utopia. According to Suvin (ibid.), "[u]topia is the verbal construction of a particular quasi-human community where sociopolitical institutions, norms, and individual relationships are organised according to a more perfect principle than in the author's community, this construction being based on estrangement arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis". Lyman Tower Sargent (1994, 9) defines the basic concepts from eutopia to critical dystopia with reference to authorial intention; for instance, a dystopia or negative utopia is "a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived". Our approach suggests that such contextual knowledge is not necessary for an audience to identify some representation as a dystopia or utopia on the basis of its textual (or audiovisual) features and to analyse it sensitively. Rather, claims concerning authorial intention (or rather realized intention, if any) or a work's relation to its contexts may result from such an analysis.

In an influential account, Tom Moylan (building on Sargent [1994] and others) suggests that the term "dystopia" be reserved for those narratives that despite the grim scenario (or rather through it) uphold some explicit or implicit form of utopian hope – belief in the possibility of radical societal transformation – while the fictions whose thorough pessimism allows for no such hope ought properly be called anti-utopian. Thus, according to Moylan (2000, 147), dystopias "negotiate the social terrain of Utopia and Anti-Utopia", drawing their critical political potential from

how these tensions are reflected on by the reader in her present society. While Sargent's and Moylan's analyses are apt and the consequent notion of critical dystopia is in many ways useful, we choose to posit utopia and dystopia as the governing genres, and consider their different variations as either subgenres or historical stages typical of some – but not necessarily all – literatures.[5] This follows from historical genre theory, which counsels the perception of similarities and continuities within traditions instead of an emphasis of dissimilarities.

Having originated in literature, dystopian fiction has turned out to be very flexible; it is capable of entering various forms across the media, as dystopian films, TV series, digital games, and graphic novels testify. Dystopian fiction has also been mixed with other genres that are not dystopian by definition – such as alternative histories and Gothic, horror, survival, and disaster fiction – and in this way penetrated into new areas within each medium. As a result, dystopian features can nowadays be found almost anywhere in the field of art, literature, and cultural production generally. Considering the world in which we live and the scenarios for the future offered by science, it is not surprising that dystopian fiction continues to be written, read, and examined.

Genres of the Anthropocene

Portrayals of oppressive societies and apocalyptic catastrophes can be found in the Bible and even earlier literature, endowing the imagery with cultural familiarity. Nevertheless, the modern dystopian genres have emerged and developed mostly since the end of the nineteenth century,

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[5] There is also the aspect of cultural differences at play. Not all literatures are equally conveniently described with concepts that are created on the basis of historical dystopias in certain major literatures. For instance, in Finnish literature the dystopian genres emerged properly only in the 1990s, and critical utopias typical of the English-speaking world of the 1960s and 1970s cannot be found without considerable effort in that literature. To allow variation, more general terms are used. In the frame of historical genre theory, "manifestation of the utopian imagination within the dystopias form" (Moylan 2000, 195) might refer to generic mixtures in which the utopian repertoire modulates works of dystopia, or even to works that are dominated by the genre of dystopia but still leave room for hope of a better society, and hopefulness itself not necessarily sufficient to invoke the genre of utopia. However, despite theoretical and terminological differences vis-a-vis previous studies, the genre phenomena under discussion remain roughly the same.

and they express and encapsulate visions, fears, and risks typical of our time, often stemming from the development of science and technology. For instance, dystopian states typically use high technology to govern their citizens, while ecological catastrophes typical of apocalypses, post-apocalypses, and climate fiction are usually caused in part by human technology. In this sense, dystopian fiction can be considered a category of stories that are critical of the consequences of science and technology. It thus constitutes a reaction against the master narrative of the Enlightenment that considers science, technology, and education as the means for creating a better future for humankind (see, e.g. Stock 2013, 115–117). In dystopian fiction, science and technology often serve or produce undesirable or morally dubious, sometimes destructive, purposes and consequences.

As such, dystopian fictions can be understood also as genres of the Anthropocene, a proposed geological epoch that is characterized by large-scale human effects on the planet; it has been widely discussed since the beginning of the twenty-first century (see, e.g. Correia et al. 2018). According to Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer (2000, 17–18), the Anthropocene refers to the epoch "in which humans have become the single most potent force in shaping terrestrial and marine ecology, global geology, and the atmosphere". Alan Mikhail (2016) notes that many researchers suggest the end of the eighteenth century as the beginning of the epoch, but other timings have also been discussed.[6] The growing human impact is related to the intertwined development of science and technology during the last few centuries, which has ultimately given us the capacity to destroy the planet for the first time in human history. The genres of dystopian fiction have developed during the suggested Anthropocene epoch, and they tend to focus on imagining the negative effects of human technology and science on human societies and the environment, thus discussing the dangers of technology and the human impact on the ecology of the Earth in the realm of fiction. Climate fiction in particular is closely tied to the climatological research that fuels the discussion on the Anthropocene.

However, despite its links with scientific and societal discussions of technology, ecology, and the Anthropocene, dystopian fiction is still fiction that draws on various cultural sources and creates literary worlds of its own. This is why the genres should be analysed also on their own

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[6] Mikhail (2016) points out that especially the years 1610 and 1964 have been discussed as the beginning of the period, the former marking the year after which atmospheric CO_2 levels have increased, and the latter marking the year when radioactive markers from the 1945 nuclear bombs were first measured in tree rings, marine sediments, and soils across the globe.

terms and as literary and audio-visual traditions, and not just in connection with, for instance, discussions of ecology and technology. Observed as such, some trends can be pointed out. Some very popular twentieth- and twenty-first-century book and/or film series such as *The Lord of the Rings*, *Star Wars*, *Harry Potter*, and *The Hunger Games* have all used conventions of dystopia in their portrayal of bad or worsening societies and rebellion against them, making the story type familiar to contemporary audiences.[7] One side-effect of the growing popularity of dystopian fiction is that it seems to have gained cultural independence from its thematically, narratologically, and historically close connection with science fiction and become recognizable in its own right, without reference to sci-fi or speculative fiction as a necessary interpretative frame.[8] This has to do also with the fact that diverse, ancient genres – from religious apocalypse to utopia – come together in contemporary dystopian fiction.

Another tendency in dystopian fiction seems to be its growing entertainment value (see, e.g. Baxter, Grubisic, & Lee 2014, 7–10; Morrissey 2013, 189). The early classical dystopias of Zamyatin, Huxley, and Orwell were hardly intended as being primarily – or even secondarily – entertaining. By contrast, commercialized movies and digital games that employ dystopian conventions in their worldbuilding are usually expected to offer enjoyable experiences for the consumer. Whereas classical dystopias tend to crush the rebellion that is the focus of interest in those works, contemporary dystopian fiction seems to prefer survival stories that offer glimpses of hope to the audiences.[9] The possibility of

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[7] In *The Lord of the Rings*, Dark Lord Sauron's objective is to rule all of Middle-earth with his dark and dominating powers. It is for the protagonists representing "the free peoples of Middle-earth" to oppose this. In *Star Wars* episodes I–VI, the emerging empire ruled by Emperor Palpatine, aka Darth Sidious, is a totalitarian dystopia against which the Jedi rebel. In the *Harry Potter* series, the emerging society ruled by Voldemort is a racist and totalitarian one, and Panem in *The Hunger Games* is also obviously a bad totalitarian society based on violence and suppression. All of these dystopian regimes are defeated at least temporarily in the works.

[8] This is reflected in the fact that many so-called literary authors, such as Atwood or Emily St. John Mandel (whose *Station Eleven* won the Arthur C. Clarke Award for Science Fiction in 2015), are averse to associating their dystopian speculations with science fiction.

[9] Yet it is obvious that any rigid categorization within dystopian fiction is probably incorrect, as already in the "first" classical dystopia, Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1924), there is a survival story of the unlawfully pregnant O-90, who evidently succeeds in escaping from the One State. By contrast, Lars von Trier's film *Melancholia* (2011)

surviving a dystopian world is important in digital games, where part of the motivation to keep playing derives from the possibility of at least having a chance of surviving, if not changing the world for the better (see and cf. Markocki 2016, 123). However, there are dystopian games, such as *Bioshock Infinite* (2013, Irrational Games), where the protagonist dies at the end. In contemporary mass-market films, dystopian features are commonly combined with elements from survival and disaster films, creating apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic worlds or totalitarian societies as milieus for action.

Societal dystopias

New Perspectives on Dystopian Fiction in Literature and Other Media gathers together chapters that revisit dystopian classics from new perspectives or offer new readings of less researched works. Although the majority of the chapters investigate literature as a medium for dystopian visions, this book also illuminates aspects of contemporary dystopian fiction in television, graphic novels, and digital games.

The first six chapters of this book focus on analysing portrayals of dystopian societies. To better appreciate the historical variation in the genre, it is worth briefly outlining the path before introducing the ways in which societal dystopias are approached in this volume.

Despite its centrality, societal dystopia is not the oldest of the dystopian genres, with modern apocalyptic fiction winning the title by dating back to the beginning of nineteenth century.[10] The first societal dystopia, Yevgeny Zamyatin's novel *Мы* (*We*), was published only in 1924 as an English translation. Naturally, there were works that anticipated the genre but did not yet give form to its repertoire as we nowadays know it. One such work is *The Time Machine* (1895) by H.G. Wells, in which a depiction of the dystopian society of morlocks and eloi is embedded in a time-travel narrative. The society in which the servant class of morlocks has developed to be more intelligent than their masters and started to take advantage of the situation is identifiably a dystopian one, but it is not a full-blown classical

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offers no hope of surviving the end of the world, but shows how it can be faced in a dignified manner.

[10] We refer here to apocalyptic fictions such as *Le Dernier Homme* (1805) by Jean-Baptiste François Xavier Cousin de Grainville and *The Last Man* (1826) by Mary Shelley.

dystopia that focuses on portraying a totalitarian society and a rebellion against it. Similarly, when exploring later depictions of bad societies in fiction, it is worth noting that sometimes such a portrayal is embedded in another narrative and does not constitute the main focus of the work.

The portrayed society itself may also differ from the model offered by the tradition of classical (and critical) dystopias.[11] Apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction – which typically focus on depicting either apocalyptic catastrophes or post-apocalyptic struggles for survival – may especially portray communities and societies that are dystopian, even if not in the classical manner. The proximity of the genres that we refer to collectively as dystopian fiction also shows in the way in which many classical or critical dystopias are actually framed in relation to the apocalypse: the bad society is created to better survive apocalyptic events such as a severely polluted environment, large-scale war, or climate change. For instance, the society of Gilead in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) arises as an effort to cope in the chaos of a more or less collapsing ecosystem and a raging war with a neighbouring state. Even the World State in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) was created after the Nine Years' War and the great Economic Collapse, when the only two options available were destruction or World Control, the latter bringing about the World State. It might be fair to note here that sometimes in literary history, apocalypses have been represented as giving rise also to utopian societies, as in *Herland* (1915) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, in which a volcanic eruption and its aftermath erases men and leads to the creation of a flourishing society of women. Even so, tying a catastrophe together with an undesirable society is unsurprisingly the more common tendency.

New Perspectives on Dystopian Fiction in Literature and Other Media commences by taking a fresh look at some of the genre's classic and newly canonized works, including both prose fiction and comics. For a reader not thoroughly familiar with the coordinates of the tradition of dystopias, the six chapters of Section One also serve as a useful introduction to some of the genre's constitutive dynamics: totalitarian state versus the struggling individual (discussed by all chapters save Suoranta); varieties of oppressive strategies from direct physical violence (in particular the chapters by Kivistö

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[11] On the concept of critical dystopia, see for instance Moylan 2000, 194–195. The concept is often used to distinguish the pessimistic classical dystopias from later, more optimistic or critical variations of the genre. As we see it in this introduction, "critical" dystopias belong to the genre of societal dystopia as one of its historical variations or subgenres, so there is no need to refer to the types as separate traditions of literature.

and Korpua) to more covert ideological, emotional, and psychological coercion (in particular the chapters by Isomaa and Suoranta); the real-life political and societal conditions underlying the dystopian scenarios (the chapters by Korpua and Samola); and the protagonists' negative emotions (the chapter by Isomaa) and various strategies of resistance (in particular the chapters by Kaukiainen, Samola, and Suoranta). Typically, societal dystopias focus on portraying characters that rebel against society, and this classical story type still gives form to even the most recent works of the genre.

A lot has been written about the classics of dystopia, but there is still room for new explorations. Saija Isomaa examines emotions in classical dystopias, suggesting that despite the received view of science fiction and dystopian fiction as being intellectually oriented genres, emotions play a central role in dystopias and merit an exploration in their own right. Isomaa first explores the collective cultures of emotions in *We* by Zamyatin, *Brave New World* by Huxley, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by Orwell and claims that these emotion cultures are designed to maintain the status quo, with each novel focusing on characters that do not conform to it. She proceeds to examine character emotions that are mainly negative, varying from anxiety to hatred, and suggests that they reveal the shortcomings of the particular society. Isomaa suggests that since emotions play a pivotal role in the genre, they should be discussed in the descriptions of the genre.

Sari Kivistö also starts from the experiences of characters in a dystopian society by exploring pain and suffering in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Kivistö notes that dystopian societies are based on injustice and gravely violated individual freedom, making it impossible for an individual to live a morally right life. This leads to innocent suffering that is not the consequence of moral failures or a punishment for sins. Rather, suffering is deprived of its personal content and made a social and political issue, and even a central goal of the political powers. Kivistö analyses the famous torture scene in Room 101 as a spectacle of power: causing pain to others means absolute power over them, and the extreme pain of torture serves as a means to remind Winston Smith of the absolute power and control of the Party over the individual. Kivistö suggests that the life of Winston Smith is still ethically significant, even if he cannot change the society or even properly fight for an ethical life against the collective evil. According to her, acknowledging the negative sides of life and uprooting hollow fantasies is part of Orwell's negative poetics.

From feminist dystopias to utopian possibilities

Surprisingly many of those works that depict bad societies are written in the tradition that began with Zamyatin, as also the chapters in Section One of this book exemplify. Hanna Samola shows in her chapter how Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* has served as a generic model for the renowned Finnish writer Johanna Sinisalo, who has written a feminist dystopia of her own, *Auringon ydin* (2013, *The Core of the Sun*). Samola's chapter also opens up a view of how dystopian genres migrate between literatures. Interestingly, dystopia was an international genre from the very beginning, the genre classics belonging to different literatures. In his chapter, Jyrki Korpua discusses how the crisis of English identity in the 1970s and 1980s is illustrated in two English political dystopian graphic novels, Bryan Talbot's *The Adventures of Luther Arkwright* and Alan Moore's *V for Vendetta*. Both graphic novels feature a dystopian society ruled by a totalitarian dictatorship. Samola and Korpua note the analysed works' connections to today's political climate, the rise of nationalism, and neoconservatism.

Kaisa Kaukiainen's chapter discusses YA dystopias, and her analysis shows that this tradition is also closely connected to that of classical dystopia via, for example, the thematics of dictatorial surveillance and violent societal hierarchy. In fact, the link between YA fiction and the tradition of dystopia comes naturally, and doubtlessly accounts in part for the young genre's booming success: by portraying weak or absent families and parents, systems of rigid authority, and a challenging environment that requires individuals to struggle and create alliances to survive, dystopian fiction offers an interesting arena for treating topics central to YA literature, such as individual identity, human and societal relations, and the meaning of life. The model of living offered by the previous generation is typically not satisfactory and fit for life in an apocalyptic, dystopian world; the young generation has to find its own path, usually by rebelling against the authoritarian system and creating a new social order of its own.

Unsurprisingly, dystopian works often portray a group of people tied together through bonds of solidarity, friendship, or love in order to face the undesirable conditions. Such small communities are the space or shelter where humanity – or the remnants thereof – can be renewed even in the bleakest of times. Indeed, Kaukiainen notes that YA dystopias generally feature happier endings than their classical counterparts, and she further argues that whereas classical dystopias usually carry an anti-religious sensibility, YA dystopias often have a distinct spiritual or post-secular undertone alongside the more visible criticism of institutionalized and

dogmatic forms of belief. This trend also carries over to post-apocalyptic dystopias: we might mention as prominent examples Jean Hegland's popular *Into the Forest* (1996, filmatized in 2015), where the two protagonists, free of civilization's shackles, eventually seem to achieve a near-mystical connection with nature; and *Memory of Water* (2012) by Emmi Itäranta, which taps into the imagery of East Asian wisdom and Zen.

The idea of a close relationship between utopian and dystopian visions is commonplace in research, and it is repeated in many forms. Dystopias are utopias gone wrong, or utopias for only some, or they aim at the same purpose as utopias – that is, to make their audiences critically evaluate and perhaps improve their own societies. Even in the bleakest dystopias there is often a place of survival to be found for some people for some time, sometimes even permanently, as when the illegally pregnant O-90 in Zamyatin's *We* manages to escape the One State to live with the savages. Utopian hope seems to be a phoenix, incinerated in the flames of the apocalypse time and again only to arise anew from the ashes – in *Into the Forest*, it is literally the burning of the protagonists' home that finally sets them free – forever believing in the possibility of a new beginning. The dystopian dichotomies of fear and hope, and risk and possibility, seem to pervade many works in which some other genre takes precedence.

Esko Suoranta's chapter on Thomas Pynchon's most recent novel, *Bleeding Edge* (2013), which innovatively brings the tradition of dystopian studies to bear on Pynchon, makes for an important reminder that a narrative need not wear its utopian or dystopian heart on its sleeve. The chapter focuses on the novel's depiction of virtual reality as a space of possibility for both sinister and utopian trajectories. While Pynchon's novel has mainly been discussed as dystopian, with the emphasis placed on its cyberpunk sensibility and the usurping of the virtual world by corporate capitalism, Suoranta shows how the possibility of utopian escape and multivocal meaning-making refuses to be quenched. As in the real-life technological trajectories we currently witness, utopia and dystopia often figure as potentialities or virtualities that may also shift with the perspective and ideology adopted. As Suoranta notes, "[s]uch fiction shows that the contemporary world is in fact characterized by competing tendencies with both dystopian and utopian overtones", the complexity of which is sometimes better brought home by interpretatively ambiguous works à la *Bleeding Edge* than by (in Suoranta's words) "imagin[ing] what the world after the deluge might look like". This is not to say, of course, that post-apocalyptic visions could not also provide vital and varied perspectives on the world, and it is to these that we now turn.

Post-apocalypse, or rebooting civilization

In accord with this volume's broad understanding of dystopian fiction, Section Two delves into different depictions of post-apocalyptic worlds. The post-apocalyptic setting, which has featured in literature since the early nineteenth century and gained prominence after the horrors of the Second World War, is going through another, notably long renaissance this century.[12] It has indeed become one of the major post-millennium trends in both fiction and its academic study.[13] While the genre often overlaps with dystopia (apocalypses may, after all, occasion new forms of totalitarian reign), its frequent narratives of barren wastelands and last-man survivors also provide something like a counter-image to the highly organized and often technologically advanced societies we encounter in the classics of societal dystopia.

Gary K. Wolfe (2011, 104) has argued that stories portraying the end of the world are convenient for exploring two favourite themes in science fiction: the relationship of humanity to its environment, and the impact of technology on human behaviour. Normally, sci-fi discusses the latter theme by introducing new technologies to the world (what Darko Suvin refers to as "novum"), but post-apocalyptic stories take the contrary approach of removing even the technology familiar to us. This also makes possible a creative treatment of humanity's relationship to its environment. However, fiction has also increasingly started to portray more primitive, post-apocalyptic totalitarian societies that attempt to dominate the survivors in a world of scarce resources, as in Itäranta's *Memory of Water* (2012), bringing the genres of societal dystopia and post-apocalypse closer to each other and merging their features in a new way.

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[12] As the most visible extra-literary developments responsible for the genre's recent popularity, Hyong-jun Moon (2014, 9) lists "the terrorist attack of the Twin Towers on September 11, the outbreaks of lethal viruses and epidemics such as SARS and H1N1 virus, the recurrence of mega-scale natural disasters due to climate change, and a prolonged recession in the capitalist economy". One should not, however, overlook the role of the market in boosting lucrative trends.

[13] Apocalypse is usually understood in popular culture as "the end of the world", but theoretically this not the case. Originally, the theological term "apocalyptic" comes from the Greek *apokálypsis* meaning "unveiling", "disclosure", or "revelation" (McGrath 2011, 444). In popular apocalyptic fiction, the apocalypse is seen usually as the destruction of "our world". Complete destruction of the old order and the (possible) construction of a new order is typical of contemporary apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction (Seed 2003, 82).

The concepts of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction are sometimes used rather loosely in research. For instance, *The Last Man* (1826) by Mary Shelley has been named the first novel in both genres, even if it lacks a prominent convention of post-apocalyptic stories: the survival of some of humankind.[14] Taken literally, the two terms seem to suggest a simple distinction between stories that focus on portraying a major catastrophe and the events leading to it, and stories that focus on portraying post-catastrophe conditions and events.[15] A more historical approach taking into account the often more varied narrative trajectories of (post-)apocalyptic fiction has managed to make more detailed distinctions between the traditions and their variations. It has been noted that whereas apocalypses focus on catastrophes, many post-apocalyptic stories actually portray survival and new beginnings, the apocalyptic catastrophe destroying the organized society and creating a state of nature that calls for the creation of a new social contract (see, e.g. Curtis 2010, 1–2). Still, a simple dichotomy between pre- and post-catastrophe stories does not cover the variety of this kind of fiction, as a number of works offer a broader palette of events before, during, and after the apocalyptic catastrophe.[16] Such works may combine the genres creatively, or create altogether new types of work. The popularity and versatility of dystopian fiction guarantees that new types and combinations keep emerging.

Depictions of major catastrophes that wipe out most of humankind are naturally far older than the tradition of modern apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic fiction dating back to the nineteenth century. For instance, the Bible's story of Noah is actually an apocalyptic story with glimpses of the post-apocalyptic condition. It is a version of the widely distributed flood myth that originated in Mesopotamia. This myth has been rewritten in many ways also in modern apocalyptic and climate fiction, since a rise in

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[14] For instance, M. Keith Booker and Anne-Marie Thomas (2009, 53) mention this novel as being usually considered the first post-apocalyptic science fiction tale. This is probably due to its portrayal of deserted cities and other post-apocalyptic scenes. For Elena Gomel (1995, 343), it is the first apocalyptic novel. Considering the work's focus on events leading to the destruction of humankind, the latter interpretation is more convincing. Nota bene: *Le Dernier Homme* by Jean-Baptiste François Xavier Cousin de Grainville was published already in 1805.

[15] This is basically the standard textbook distinction between the genres. See, for instance, the glossary in Booker and Thomas's *The Science Fiction Handbook*, 2009, 321–322 (apocalyptic fiction) and 328 (post-apocalyptic fiction).

[16] Recent examples include Steven Amsterdam's *Things We Didn't See Coming* (2009) and Emily St. Mandel's *Station Eleven* (2014).

sea level is one of the concrete consequences of climate change, actualising the flood myth and its cultural underpinnings.[17] The post-apocalyptic world in Noah's story differs from most modern post-apocalyptic fiction in that it is allegedly a better world, purified – at least momentarily – of evil by God and not characterized by desperate struggles for survival. In the religious myth, those who survive are worthy and chosen to survive to construct a better world. In our contemporary thinking, this kind of teleology and optimism is severely challenged, belief in divine providence having long lost its previous appeal.

However, it should be noted that even in modern post-apocalyptic fiction, portrayals of the end of the world as we know it may have utopian overtones. Gary K. Wolfe (see 2011, 103) claims that the end of the world may also be perceived as an arena for portraying "heroic action" and the "true values" of individual effort and courage in starting the world over from the ashes. Despite the different ways of evaluating the end of the world and its aftermath, Wolfe (ibid., 106) claims that end-of-the-world narratives usually have five major stages of action: 1) undergoing the cataclysmic event; 2) travelling through the resulting desolation; 3) settling down and starting a new community; 4) encountering the newly antagonistic nature; and 5) waging a final battle to decide the new world's prevailing values. According to him, this formula can be used creatively, for instance by skipping some of the parts or by expanding some stage of action to fill almost the whole story, but it still captures the essence of the story type. Another way to approach the post-apocalypse as a narrative genre is to concentrate on the ways in which the post-apocalyptic world is structured in relation to its pre-apocalyptic counterpart, the latter very often approximating the world roughly contemporary to the presumed reader. Wolfe (see ibid., 103 ff.) has claimed that it is typical for post-disaster stories to defamiliarize familiar environments but keep the geographical references verisimilar enough for comparison, even enabling the reader to trace the places on current maps of, for example, North America, the contrast making visible the devastation brought by the disaster. The past may also live on in the memories of characters who survived the cataclysm, their memories being another device for contrasting the past and the post-disaster present.

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[17] On the connection between the flood myth and contemporary climate fiction, see Trexler 2015: 82 ff. Trexler prefers to use his own term, "anthropocene fiction".

Articulating the post-apocalypse

In this volume, Jouni Teittinen and Mikko Mäntyniemi explore notable contemporary post-apocalypses, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) and Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy (2003–2013), especially its first installment *Oryx and Crake* (2003). These two works have become standard reference points in post-apocalypse studies, and they feature centrally both thematic and structural elements representative of much of the genre. Such thematic foci include, as Teittinen notes in his chapter, "kin and other, humanity and animality, memory and forgetting, and language and sociality", and in Atwood's case, we might add the pointed emphasis on (and questioning of) reckless technological development and the abuse of non-human nature. In their very different ways, both McCarthy and Atwood also pose the question of a new post-apocalyptic beginning – even if they do not wholly withhold hope, they do ration it strictly.

As regards their form, the *The Road* and *Oryx and Crake* are set to a large extent around travelling – as Petter Skult (2019, 82) has noted, the genre as a whole makes frequent use of the Bakhtinian chronotope of the road – and around the tensioned differential between the pre- and post-apocalyptic worlds. It is the latter topic that serves as the main focus for Mäntyniemi and Teittinen. In his chapter, "This future past: Parsing post-apocalyptic temporality with Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*", Teittinen focuses on the temporality of the future anterior ("what will have been"), typical of post-apocalyptic fictions, with a particular emphasis on how *The Road* prompts us to imagine a cancelled future. Mikko Mäntyniemi's chapter, "Folds around the end: Open and closed temporalities in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy", likewise engages the folded structure of (post-)apocalyptic temporality, this time primarily via the narratological notion of analepsis. Together, the chapters' complementary perspectives of narrative theory (Mäntyniemi) and a more general, partly philosophical approach (Teittinen) produce a nuanced understanding of post-apocalyptic temporality.

Dystopian worlds are a trend also in digital games, and scenarios from global pollution to totalitarian regimes have been worked into interactive game worlds.[18] Despite their popularity, dystopian games have not been

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[18] What is specific about the digital game as a medium is the user's ability to interact with the game world, sometimes even influence the whole of it, and decide how it develops, provided that game developers have made it possible in the game mechanics. See Markocki 2016, 122–123, 125, 128.

widely discussed within games studies. In her chapter, Sari Piittinen contributes to this field of study by analysing how the repertoire of the Gothic contributes to the creation of the dystopian game world in *Fallout 3* (Bethesda Game Studios 2008). *Fallout 3* is a post-apocalyptic action role-playing game that is set in the year 2277 (on an alternative time line), two hundred years after a nuclear war has turned the world into an anarchist chaos. Piittinen shows how the game makes use of monsters such as mutants and Gothic villain-heroes also for cultural and political commentary. The treatment of the game's Ghouls can even be interpreted as a commentary on the othering and unjust treatment of minorities existing in our world, the creatures being not only producers of terror but themselves victims. Ethical questions also concern the player's choices vis-à-vis how she reacts to monsters and monstrosity, and in general to the game's devastated milieu: unlike with literary dystopias, in the dystopian game world the player has to ponder first-hand what avenues of action the changed situation offers, including moral decisions. From the standpoint of genres, Piittinen's chapter adds yet another genre – the Gothic – to the long list of historical kinds that merge with and colour the modern dystopian genres and anchor them to the previous traditions of fiction. In *Fallout 3*, the post-apocalypse is the dominant genre; it uses the generic repertoire of the Gothic creatively for its own purposes, reinvigorating itself in the process.

Threatened environments and collective responsibility

Whereas the first three chapters in Section Two largely focus on the dynamics of constructing a post-apocalyptic dystopia in the works analysed, the three remaining chapters shift the emphasis further towards specific thematics connected with the apocalypse and post-apocalypse. As previously suggested, a work may use the repertoire of a genre to a different extent, the most elusive uses producing a colouration of the genre in a work that is dominated by some other genre. Genres typically co-occur with each other in a work so that one is more dominant than the other(s), and the chapters in this section focus on works not customarily categorized as predominantly post-apocalyptic but still obviously use some of its conventions for their purposes. Instead of focusing on detailed genre analyses, the chapters discuss the kinds of problems and perspectives that the post-apocalypse poses.

Essi Vatilo's contribution to the volume concerns the question of collective responsibility in the television series *Battlestar Galactica* (2003–

2009) and its prequel *Caprica* (2009–2010). The utopian aspirations of *Caprica*'s world turn apocalyptically sour when the combined technologies of artificial intelligence, robotics, and virtual reality get out of control; the former series deals with this aftermath, including the guilt, regret, and blame for the destruction of most of human civilization. Vatilo's chapter also resonates with Suoranta's analysis of the dystopian and utopian valences of virtual reality, which not only catalyses *Caprica*'s apocalyptic disaster but also very literally sets the stage for humanity's darker side – from drugs to virtual human sacrifice – already in the preceding technological "utopia" (much like HBO's recent hit series *Westworld*). In any case, what Vatilo's analysis prompts us to consider is "a new way of thinking about responsibility", a demand exceedingly topical in the current technologically, environmentally, and politically complex context. The dire consequences of current actions are sometimes impossible to exactly gauge beforehand – fundamentally insidious *threats* rather than principle calculable *risks* (see Van Wyck 2005) – and it is impossible to lay the blame on any one individual's door. Agency and thus responsibility is collective and distributed in a complex – which is not to say equal – manner.

Like Hanna Samola's chapter in Section One, the co-authored contribution by Juha Raipola and Toni Lahtinen concerns the Finnish author Johanna Sinisalo. While Samola's chapter touches tangentially on the relation to nature – *The Core of the Sun* features the growing and eating of chillies as an act of rebellion against the technocratic regime – in *Birdbrain* this relation takes centre stage, as its two protagonists set out on a trek into Tasmania's wilderness. Through an incisive reading of the novel's multiple intertexts (reminiscent of Samola's approach), Raipola and Lahtinen highlight the intertwined colonializations of people and nature, as well as the paradoxically consumerist fantasies of escaping civilization. Ultimately, the novel, whose uncanny developments reveal its dominant genre to be the Finnish Weird, grows into "a dystopian allegory about the troubled relationship between human and non-human nature", demonstrating yet another way in which certain genres seem to gravitate towards dystopian ones. The discussion of human and non-human agents is one angle that unites the final chapters of Section Two.

Maria Laakso's chapter approaches tales about animals, particularly Richard Adams's *Watership Down* (1972), as post-apocalyptic dystopias. As is often the case with post-apocalyptic narratives, in chosen non-allegorical animal dystopias, human greed and selfishness are to blame for the destruction, but the issue is given new weight by the defamilizaring perspective of the animals. As we now live through the Earth's sixth mass

extinction event, this time occasioned by humanity, there may be more worlds about to end than we can fathom.

The two final chapters, by Laakso and Raipola and Lahtinen, may raise the objection that they are too set in the present (or even the past, as in Laakso's older animal narratives) to qualify as dystopias, which is typically defined as futurally speculative fiction.[19] In the frame of historical genre theory, these objections are not valid, since a work need not use all features of the generic repertoire to belong to the genre. In the context of ecological disaster, it should also be noted that if the future as we (presume to) know it is indeed "already ruined" by climatic processes now underway, and we thus inhabit a sort of epistemic and existential, increasingly fragile bubble, the understanding of dystopia as a future state of affairs becomes more ambiguous. As Raipola and Lahtinen note, it is "our uncomfortable role [...] to live within the unfathomable presence of environmental disaster". While one of the most salient ways of attempting to face this presence – this disastrous present – is paradoxically to imagine its future, it is equally the case that we may use narratives of present disasters in order to think about their future course. With the slow violence of climate change, its slow apocalypse, the actual and the supposedly speculative are not always easily discernable (McMurry 1996; Nixon 2013). The allegoricity of *Birdbrain* also reflects this.

While the final chapters vary in their main focus, each raises decisively the question of ethics and responsibility, as well as the challenge of encountering the non-human other. In Vatilo's chapter, we face the problem of collective responsibility for the coming disaster, before and after the fact, as well as the (failed) challenge of co-existence with a non-organic other. In Raipola and Lahtinen's chapter, the uncanny other that rouses the doomed appetite for appropriation is the (fantasy of) non-human nature itself; but it is also, beyond allegory, the actual environment that calls for recognition and responsibility. In Laakso's chapter, we are privy to a heterodox perspective on familiar narratives that makes us re-think the extent of their

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[19] Instead of defining a set of essential genre features that a work has to exemplify in order to belong to the genre (as in essentialist genre theories), we prefer a more flexible, anti-essentialist but historical understanding according to which genres are historical families of works that resemble each other but do not necessarily have any feature that is shared by each and every work in the genre. This means that a work may belong to the genre of dystopia even if the story is not set in the future, provided that it has some other features typical of the genre. This leaves room for creativity and historical change that are typical of fiction. About this Wittgensteinian understanding of genres, see Fowler 1982.

easily trivialized disaster, their proper ethical weight; the challenge of the encounter is here placed first and foremost with the reader.

Sibylline fictions?

Dystopian fiction is a curious phenomenon in the history of literature. Drawing inspiration from religious eschatologies and utopias but adding a critical, secular, and often pessimistic edge, these modern stories of societal and environmental horror increasingly affect our thinking of the future and our perception of the world around us. Some of the stories – such as zombie apocalypses – might be categorized as pure fantasy or perhaps allegory, but especially those visions that are written in accordance with real-life developments and scientific scenarios demand a different response. The time of utopias seems to be over for now, and the accompanying belief in our ability to control our destiny with the help of science and technology has been forcefully called into question. Notwithstanding their merits, it seems that science and technology are also the central means for creating totalitarian hi-tech societies and bringing about environmental change and post-catastrophe worlds, dystopian fiction making this very clear through its detailed, experiential imaginings of undesirable future worlds. Considering the central role that the grim future visions have in current popular culture, fiction seems to be regaining some of its power to affect its audiences in these momentous matters, however individual readers, spectators, or gamers decide to interpret the various dystopian scenarios they meet.

Extrapolating the future is seldom successful, and fiction remains fiction, however convincing its scenarios may seem for some. Nevertheless, the very act of speculating about the future seems appealing for many, and dystopian fiction excels in this area of thought. As mentioned earlier, Raffaella Baccolini's and Tom Moylan's metaphor of dystopia as a canary in the coal mine emphasizes its warning function. In the same vein, dystopian fiction could also be compared to the mythical characters of Cassandra and Cumaean Sibyl, whose prophecies were truthful but hardly believed by anyone around them. Even so, and perhaps fittingly, a more ordinary figure in the popular discussion on the severity of global threats is doubtlessly the boy who cried wolf.

"Who will survive and what will be left of them?" the poster for the horror movie *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974, dir. Tobe Hooper) asks dramatically. The forthcoming years and decades will again show where the flames of dystopia will flare up, in what form, and who will survive. And

then, if the faraway spectres of real-world dystopia do reach our doorstep, we might also ask, what semblance of us – of lives and values cradled in the relative comfort of this good ol' world – will be left in the survivors. The question will not only be who survives, but what in them survives, and what then. What next. What now?

Post Scriptum

This introduction is written in the midst of the dystopian COVID-2019 pandemia which threatens the world and is a disastrous challenge for our lives, health care systems and global economy.

Acknowledgements

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