

# The Age of Dystopia



# The Age of Dystopia:

*One Genre, Our Fears  
and Our Future*

Edited by

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*For my family*



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## INTRODUCTION

George Orwell's *1984* is the expression of a mood, and it is a warning. The mood it expresses is that of near despair about the future of man, and the warning is that unless the course of history changes, men all over the world will lose their most human qualities, will become soulless automatons, and will not even be aware of it.

—Erich Fromm

“It’s a sad commentary on our age that we find Dystopias a lot easier to believe in than Utopias: Utopias we can only imagine; Dystopias we’ve already had.”

—Margaret Atwood

In what ways are we now living in an *Age of Dystopia*? What dystopian themes have become less speculative and more familiar? Reading classics like *1984* and *Brave New World*, it is striking to recognize Orwell’s telescreens in our smart phones and flat screen televisions. It is no longer surprising to see notices such as “THIS AREA UNDER SURVEILLANCE” or to see cameras picking up our every moves; it is impossible to know when someone is really watching but as with Bentham’s Panopticon, we must always assume we are being watched in the same way that Winston Smith assumed he was constantly being monitored. Scientific advances make Huxley’s image of engineered babies not that far-fetched, which makes the question of what *should* be done more pressing as the list of what *can* be done becomes more and more extensive.

Dystopian works reflect society’s worries. What do we have to worry about? Income inequality, the financial crisis, power in the hands of a few—a few anonymous, wealthy and powerful elite—which brings to mind the elite group of the Party insiders in *1984*. Science and technology are impacting our lives and changing who we are as people when few of us understand how these things—genetic engineering, software engineering—are done. Climate change—we don’t know what the seasons will be like over time and we don’t know how many cities are going to be under water or, on the other end of the spectrum, completely dried out. We don’t know how our changing environment will impact food production but we know that there are pollinators at risk. Some argue that genetically

modified food production is the answer but others argue that the unknown potential impacts may bring more instability and make the situation worse in the long run. The world is more “connected”—financially and technologically—than ever before and while that could mean that we all keep each other afloat, it could mean we all go down together.

## Our Text

The first half of this book examines some of the literature, drama, film and television produced in recent years and endeavors to put it in context. In “Dystopia and the Promethean Nightmare,” Riven Barton shows how dystopian works reflect the changing content of our “collective nightmare” and our “fear of our own ‘progress.’” Patricia Stapleton’s “‘The People in the Chaos Cannot Learn’: Dystopian Vision in Atwood’s Maddaddam Trilogy” shows the parallels between the science and technology in our world and that of Margaret Atwood’s recent dystopian trilogy. Terra Walston Joseph considers how Atwood’s trilogy treats the topic of global capitalism, specifically the unforeseen, or at least unacknowledged, casualties of the global economy. Karen F. Stein compares and contrasts Atwood’s trilogy and the older *Lilith’s Brood* by Octavia Butler in the ways in which they speculate about the future of humanity. Finally, Jeanne Tiehen considers how dystopian plays serve up warnings about the dangers of science without limitations.

The second half of this book focuses on dystopian works geared toward young adult audiences. First, Laura Poladian asks whether or not it is appropriate for young people to be reading stories with traumatic events portrayed such as those in the *Hunger Games* trilogy and how those young readers might be impacted by their reading experience. Next, Molly Brost considers how surveillance impacts self-definition, relationships and power dynamics between the watched and the watcher. Then, Nicole duPlessis looks at the significance of literacy in the world of Panem. My chapter asks the question of how we are shaped by our environments and what circumstances allow for heroism in young adult dystopia. Finally, Charlotte Beyer widens the scope as she considers the relationship between context, landscape and gender codes in *Vulture’s Gate*, an Australian young adult novel.

## Reason to Hope

The recent popularity and scope of dystopian literature does seem to signal something about our society, or as Atwood puts it “is a sad

commentary on our age” (Atwood, “Writing Utopia” 95). But if dystopia provides a warning, there must be potential for change and therefore hope for the future.

Referencing the television show *The X-Files*, Jeremy Adam Smith and Pamela Paxton write about its motto and the American mood:

In fact, “trust no one” has essentially served as Americans’ motto over the last two generations. For 40 years—the years of Vietnam, Watergate, junk bonds, Monica Lewinsky, Enron, the Catholic Church sex scandals, and the Iraq war—our trust in each other has been dropping steadily, while trust in many institutions has been seriously shaken in response to scandals.<sup>i</sup>

However, Smith and Paxton say their research suggests that “humans are hardwired to trust” and that our society’s broken trust can be rebuilt. Again, the parallels between our real world and that of dystopian worlds become apparent; worlds might fall apart but, *if* we heed the warnings, there is hope for the future.

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[http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/americas\\_trust\\_fall](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/americas_trust_fall)

## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> “This trend is documented in a variety of national surveys. The General Social Survey, a periodic assessment of Americans’ moods and values, shows a 10-point decline from 1976 to 2006 in the number of Americans who believe other people can generally be trusted. The General Social Survey also shows declines in trust in our institutions, although these declines are often closely linked to specific events. From the 1970s to today, trust has declined in the press (24 to 11 percent), education (36 to 28 percent), banks (35 percent to 31 percent), corporations (26 to 17 percent), and even organized religion (35 to 25 percent). And Gallup’s annual Governance survey shows that trust in the government is even lower today than it

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was during the Watergate era, when the Nixon administration had been caught engaging in criminal acts. It's no wonder popular culture is so preoccupied with questions of trust." (Smith and Paxton)

## CHAPTER ONE

# DYSTOPIA AND THE PROMETHEAN NIGHTMARE

RIVEN BARTON PHD

“A world of fear and treachery and torment, a world of trampling and being trampled upon, a world that will grow not less but *more* merciless as it refines itself. Progress in our world will be progress toward more pain”  
(Orwell *1984*)

The shadow of the modern, industrial and post-industrial eras is manifest as the dystopian nightmare of popular fiction. The disturbing world described in George Orwell’s novel *1984*, points to an innate fear of our own “progress.” Our obsession with the post-apocalyptic and dystopian in contemporary fiction is an indication of a larger need to acknowledge the shadow of all this “advancement” and to take into account the tremendous environmental, psychological, and sociological destruction that it has caused over the last few centuries. The dystopian landscape is one where the virtues of the individual and the family are trampled upon and destroyed in the name of development and control. We have paid a heavy price for our technologies and conveniences, and like Dr. Frankenstein, we unconsciously fear that we will not be able to control the monster of our own creation. Dystopian fantasies allow us to acknowledge these collective shadows in a space and temporality safely outside of our everyday existence. They highlight our collective fears and allow us to process them in a nightmarish fantasy. In this paper I will be looking at dystopian fiction from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present, its reflection of our collective cultural fears as well as our unconscious desires for the future.

The millennial obsession with the apocalypse marks the end of an epoch. Apocalyptic thinking acknowledges the loss of a former way of life. People become apocalyptic when the traditional mores, beliefs, and societal constructions no longer resonate with an emerging zeitgeist.

Dystopian fantasies, as well as apocalyptic projections, often accompany large cultural and technological shifts. They give a fictional voice to that which is too terrifying or disorienting for the collective to express outwardly. According to Jungian Psychologist Edward Edinger in his book *Archetype of the Apocalypse*, dystopian and apocalyptic fantasies act to reorient humanity away from aspects of civilization that have grown stale and inappropriate, in order to promote new and more viable ways of operating collectively. They both acknowledge what has become incongruous in the present culture and lament what has been lost from the past.

The swiftness and totality of cultural change since the industrial era is unprecedented in human history. The utopian projections of the Enlightenment period and its endless praise and hope for human ingenuity, collided with the unforeseen consequences of industrialized society. The swiftness of the change made the collective reconciliation between these two seemingly opposed realities difficult. The severity of the dystopian projection is in direct correlation with the overtly positive utopian projections placed on the hopes and goals of an era. According to C. G. Jung, there is an overarching process within the psyche to maintain and regain balance when a particular figure, image or ideal is thought of only in solitary terms, such as all good or all evil. This natural correction process that he calls enantiodromia (CW 6 709) is a tendency for things to become their opposites and emerges when a projection becomes too completely one-sided. The overtly utopian projections of the Enlightenment period and the subsequent industrialized and commercial cultures bred dystopian projections not only to compensate for its one sidedness, but also to acknowledge the shadow of the lived experience. It is this lived experience that differentiates the dystopian from the apocalyptic.

An apocalypse is an end: it is the moment of judgment. The apocalypse is defined as “The complete final destruction of the world” or “an event involving destruction or damage on an awesome or catastrophic scale.” (Oxford). The term apocalypse is Biblical and it comes from the Greek *Apo* and *Kalypto* which means to “take away” and “to cover and hide.” It is a punishment or a final judgment for human sin and hubris. On the other hand, dystopias signify a continuation of life after the apocalypse has already happened. Regardless of how horrible it may be, a dystopia is not an end, but a struggle for continuation. They are shadow projections of current society, hyper-exemplifying problems and potential fears that already exist. A dystopia is:

a futuristic, imagined universe in which oppressive societal control and the illusion of a perfect society are maintained through corporate, bureaucratic, technological, moral, or totalitarian control. Dystopias, through an

exaggerated worst-case scenario, make a criticism about a current trend, societal norm, or political system (*readwritething.org*).

The emphasis on the future creates an important distinction between a dystopia in the contemporary sense, and other imaginary, sick or dysfunctional societies. Religion, mythology, and folklore are filled with tales of dystopian-like societies. The horror stories of overtly gluttonous, violent, or morally depraved communities acted as fables, warning people against the dangers of behaving in culturally unethical ways. Often these depraved communities were severely punished or completely obliterated in the apocalyptic wrath of the gods. However, more modern or contemporary versions of dystopias are almost entirely set in the future. They too act as warnings not of the repetition of past punishments but of a new possibility all together. The dystopias of the present are not frightening because of a proposed retribution from a divine being but are terrifying because of their familiarity. The possibilities presented in these fictions, although highly exaggerated, are reminiscent of contemporary society. They are less allegorical about human folly in general, and more specific to the actual dangers that current society could potentially create in the future. Dystopias are direct reflections of our own societal fears.

### **The Modern Dystopia: Collectivism and the Industrialization of Humanity 1800-1950**

The industrialization and modernization of the cities of Europe and the United States was almost complete by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Mechanization had become the norm and was applied to almost every function of society and life including food production, manufacturing, communication, and transportation. Almost everything that had been previously done by hand was replaced by machine. Efficiency and productivity became undeniable virtues of the post-industrial world. In addition to the large scale production and distribution of goods came new ideas about how these goods should be distributed and shared; how society itself could become more efficient and unbiased. While many of these notions initially had utopian projections, their actual implementation sometimes had horrific consequences.

The rise of fascism in Europe along with the industrialization of warfare left a shadow on the human conscience that could not be erased. Dystopian literature emerged out of early 20<sup>th</sup> century America and Europe, not because it was a fantasy, but a witnessed reality. The two

world wars, destruction of pastoral life, the industrialization of cities, and environmental degradation, all made a dystopian reality seem like a very real possibility. The consequences of applying the virtues of efficiency and productivity to human life and the natural world brought about unforeseen costs to life itself.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have given us as much terror as we can take. We have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one, for the reconciliation of the concept and the sensible, of the transparent and communicable experience. Under the general demand for slackening and for appeasement, we can hear the mutterings of the desire for a return of terror, for the realization of the fantasy to seize reality. (Lyotard 81-82)

In our efforts to gain knowledge and understanding, for efficiency and control, we often forgot to pause and ask ourselves about the moral, social, and environmental consequences of our actions. Post-modern philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard's lamentation of the price of the "whole and the one," speaks to the terror and destruction that the past two centuries have produced in pursuit of the sensible, the comprehensible, and the productive. The great dystopian novels of early twentieth century fiction: *Brave New World*, *Anthem*, and *1984*, all feared the loss of individual identity and the utility of humanity. They feared that the tireless pursuit of the One, would lead to the sacrifice of the many. The Self, who had been the ultimate triumph and hero of the Enlightenment, was suddenly threatened by the mechanization and collective organization of early modernity. The emergence of communist and socialist principles, along with the dangers of totalitarian regimes in Europe, made the threat to individual autonomy and freedom a palpable reality. Individuality gained almost religious implications and rose to the status of a martyrdom in these fictional narratives. The idea that the individual ego could be obliterated by a fascist regime was not an abstract notion, but an observed reality. The result was the emergence of new fields of study such as existential philosophy, psychology, and of course the proliferation of dystopian literature. The "I" suddenly found itself at odds with the One, the whole, and the collective.

The ultimate tragedy for the modern, dystopian, protagonist is not the loss of life, but the loss of individual identity. Take for instance Ayn Rand's dystopian novel *Anthem*. The protagonist has been robbed of all individual distinctiveness: name, the choice of work, partner, home, or even the ability to be alone. He does not even have the word "I" that can indicate his singularity. In the introduction he tells us: "Our name is

Equality 7-2521" (6). "All men are good and wise. It is only we, Equality 7-2521, we alone who were born with a curse. For we are not like our brothers. And as we look back upon our life, we see it has ever been thus..." (7) Though he is born and raised in the collective, his life experience is distinctly "other," he cannot fit into the machine. He finds himself in an existential conundrum where he begins to question everything around him and the entire structure of his society. He is searching for the identity that is not the collective "we," but the unique "I." Indeed in the end of the book the final climax and triumph for the protagonist is the discovery of the first "sacred" word "I" and the second "sacred" word "EGO."

Again in *Brave New World* and *1984* we see the protagonists struggle with their own identity against and outside of the collective societal norm. The protagonists feel trapped in a life where there is no hope for the future, and no memory of the past. Their lives do not belong to themselves. Their sole purpose is to serve society. They are cogs in a larger machine that must operate efficiently and be detached from personal outcome or reward. Complete and unquestioning obedience is required. Individual preference is of no concern or value and any emphasis on personal choice is dealt with swiftly and with severe punishment. Human beings are treated with the hyper efficiency of a factory. These factories and machines that were supposed to minimize labor and increase productivity are envisioned as nightmares of consumption. The horrific living and working conditions of industrial era factories are seen as ubiquitous inevitabilities in these fictional dystopias. The lives of the characters are filled with endless, mindless work and drudgery. The allusion to mechanized slavery reminds the reader of factory conditions and industrialized animal production. Instead of more leisure time and freedom as was promised by the mechanization and industrialization of the world, people began to find themselves working harder and longer than ever.

The fear of industrialization and its cooption of identity is evident everywhere in modern dystopias. Any reference to personal heritage or history is obliterated in these fictional societies. In the opening scene of *Brave New World*, the reader finds herself on a tour of a baby factory where children are created and manufactured in test tubes and jars and then properly "conditioned" according to the different jobs that they will fulfill in their adult lives. Each fetus is given a prescribed amount of intelligence sufficient enough for him or her to accomplish assigned tasks, but not enough for them to question their assignments. The terms "mother" and "father" are dirty, primitive words in a world where children are

raised, trained, and conditioned from their very conception to not prefer anything outside of society. Similarly in *Anthem* the children were not raised by biological parents, but institutionalized in large dormitories where they were conditioned to obey and eventually fulfill their duties. Families were portrayed as taboo in all three of these novels. Even in *1984* where families were depicted as an unfortunate necessity, children were conditioned from an early age to be spies and were encouraged to turn on their parents, thus destroying the sacred familial bond.

Along with questions of personal identity and purpose, the loss of family and personal history is ubiquitous throughout dystopian fiction. The family is genetic memory. It situates one in space and time; history and biology. It is family that gives us our uniqueness, our separate identity, and our differentiated tribe, regardless of how small it might be. The loss and destruction of the family means to symbolically destroy one's connection to history. Part of what makes a dystopia so disturbing is its lack of context. Even if we are told the reasons or events behind the collapse of the society, which often we are not, there is always an element of the unknown, something incongruous that leaves us feeling slightly disturbed and off kilter.

In modern dystopian literature the identity of the self and the continuity of the family are consciously and systematically destroyed by the ruling factions of the society. However, as we start to move into the post-modern, questions regarding origin, identity and self, become far more elusive. Dystopian portrayals of origins move from a highly regulated and oppressive system, to one that questions origins themselves. The destruction of identity is not explicit in post-modern dystopias, but implicit in its entire fabrication.

### **The Post-Modern Dystopia: The Self as Other 1965-1995**

The term post-modernism, which in a philosophical context is generally thought to have emerged in the late 1970's with Lyotard's publication of the *Postmodern Condition*, and continued through the mid to late 1990's, generally deals with questions of reality, the loss of reference, and even definition. According to *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

That postmodernism is indefinable is a truism. However, it can be described as a set of critical, strategic and rhetorical practices employing concepts such as difference, repetition, the trace, the simulacrum, and hyperreality to destabilize other concepts such as presence, identity, historical progress, epistemic certainty, and the univocity of meaning. (1)

It is this very loss of the referential that becomes the primary conundrum in the post-modern, dystopian narrative.

The 1970's, 80's, and 90's were marked by huge technological shifts. Computers were beginning to become commonplace, the field of robotics was growing, and a newly conceived Internet was just beginning to emerge. There were, throughout this time period, ethical and philosophical questions about the growth and potential of technology. Could it become more powerful than us? Could it become autonomous? When does a creation become something "other" of its own accord? In post-modern literature and discourse the sense of the "other" takes precedence. The protagonist of the post-modern dystopia is not just an outside observer evaluating society, but instead questions every aspect of what he previously considered his reality. The protagonist's issue moves from the modern "Who am I?" to the post-modern "What am I and am I even real?" Post-modern dystopias are worlds of replication and simulation. The two fictional works that I will deal with here, the films *Blade Runner* and *The Matrix*, both deal with simulated versions of reality.

In the 1982 film *Blade Runner*, the world is populated by a series of androids, or "replicants" who were designed and manufactured to be soldiers, workers, and sexual surrogates in a dystopian world of the future. The replicants, in this world, have become so human that they are virtually impossible to tell apart from "real" human beings. They have even begun to develop their own emotions and desires begging the questions: "What does it mean to be human?" Again, in the film *The Matrix*, the diversion between perceived "reality" and actual objective, "autonomous" reality is brought into question. This film takes place in the 1990's in a seemingly ordinary time frame and reality. However, throughout the film, the protagonist discovers that everything he thought was real is actually an illusion. The world that he thought he was living in had been destroyed long ago. The "actual" world had been overtaken by sentient machines that use human beings as batteries, kept in a constant state of artificial sleep. What they thought was reality was actually a manufactured dream.

This disconnection from reality was a reoccurring theme during the post-modern period. The notion that something could become so convincingly and repeatedly replicated that it became something entirely other and autonomous from an original is what philosopher Jean Baudrillard called a simulacrum: that is a copy of a copy of a copy so far removed from the original that it no longer holds reference to it (*Simulacra and Simulation*). The simulacrum, from this perspective is no longer a simulation, but something else entirely. In *Blade Runner*, the replicant is

no longer an android, nor is it human, but something other entirely. Brian Massumi writes in *Realer Than Real* that:

The simulacrum is less a copy twice removed than a phenomenon of a different nature altogether: it undermines the very distinction between copy and model...A copy, no matter how many times removed, authentic or fake, is defined by the presence or absence of internal, essential relations of resemblance to a model. The simulacrum, on the other hand, bears only an external and deceptive resemblance to a putative model. The process of its production, its inner dynamism, is entirely different from that of its supposed model; its resemblance to it is merely a surface effect, an illusion (2).

By blurring the line between what is real or original, and what is a copy or simulation, the protagonist in the dystopian fantasy experiences “otherness” not just because he is different from the society around him, but because the authenticity of his experience is unverifiable. In the film *Blade Runner* the juxtaposition between real and simulation is exemplified by two of the main characters: Rick Decker, a Blade Runner agent who is hired to hunt down and “kill” the replicants, and Rachel, a replicant who believes she is human. Throughout the film we are uncertain of the “real” identity of either character. Decker, who is supposed to be human, has never actually tested himself to find out if he is indeed real. He is without real connections or history. In contrast, Rachel, who is supposed to be a replicant, has memories, emotions, and dreams. The real and the unreal have collided in this fantasy, making the question of otherness not just one for the protagonist, but for the society as a whole.

In the movie *The Matrix*, identity is again brought into question. The human body, the physical identity has become disconnected from the perceived reality of the individual. While in reality their bodies are rendered inert and used as batteries to power the machines, their minds are caught up in a vast collective dream that they perceive to be real. Again, this scenario evokes questions: “Which is real? The body or the dreamed identity?” Here too the “other” is not just the individual, but is the illusion of the entire society. While the modern protagonist resisted assimilation, the post-modern wondered if it had already happened and he just didn’t know about it.

In the post-modern, the sense of history and fantasy has become distorted. Knowledge and memory of the past do not guarantee its existence. Rachel thought she was real because she remembered her “childhood,” however, these “memories” were only implanted and simulated. Similarly, in *The Matrix* all of Neo’s memories of childhood

were digital programs, locking him in an artificial time period which had long since passed. Rachel and Neo were not born and raised, but created for a purpose. The family is destroyed because what is human has been destroyed. Like the modern dystopian projections of industry and the factory, post-modern dystopias feared the domination of technology. In our unbridled Promethean desire to control the world with our inventions, we fear the abduction of our reality. Indeed the destruction of the world in dystopian fantasy is seen as already complete.

Besides questions of identity, loss of family, and the debates with reality that dominate dystopian fictions, the loss and restriction of the natural world is also a reoccurring theme. The dystopian landscape is bleak and formidable. Access to nature is limited or non-existent. It is a world dominated by human beings in every aspect and destroyed by our excesses. While the protagonists in post-modern and modern dystopias contend with finding their place in a world already coopted and destroyed by human excess and folly, contemporary versions rally against it. As the very real consequences of “progress” over the past two centuries have begun to manifest themselves in Climate Change and other environmental and social problems, the fear has moved from a hypothetical dystopian future, to an acknowledgement that the dystopian may be already happening. The question then moves from “Who am I?” and “What is real?” to “What can I do to change what has already begun?”

### **Contemporary Dystopia: The Savior and the Martyr 2000 to the Present**

The contemporary protagonist in dystopian fiction knows who she is. She sees the world around her and is aware of its implications and consequences. Unlike the modern or the post-modern protagonist, the contemporary dystopian hero is not looking for her identity, but her purpose. She is not drawn into the story by existential anxieties, but is forced into confrontation with a world beyond her power and her will. The contemporary protagonist finds herself as “other” because it is her very being that makes her the antithesis of society itself. While the previous versions of dystopias discussed were all narrated from primarily adult, male perspectives, the contemporary protagonist is predominantly adolescent and female. Both the victim and the hero, she is pulled against her will into a totalitarian, patriarchal underworld, forced to emerge as a warrior and a symbol of defiance. The adolescent girl portrayed in contemporary fiction is distinctly Artemesian in nature: she is fierce and heroic, a natural leader and a symbol of salvation for her fictional world.

Artemis is the virginal goddess of the wild. She is the shadow of her twin brother Apollo, god of logic and light. She represents the divine balance to over-rationalized thinking and operation. She is the goddess of the waxing and waning of the moon, instinct and change. Armed with a bow, she is the untamed, virginal goddess of the hunt, a fierce defender of the young and the vulnerable, particularly adolescent girls and women in childbirth. It is her job to protect the innocent and virginal against violation, sexual or otherwise.

In contemporary dystopian fictions such as *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, *Revolution*, and the film *Children of Men*, the adolescent girl emerges as the reluctant heroine in a post-apocalyptic landscape. The cultural atmospheres of these fictional worlds represent a perversion of our own cultural ideals. Extreme inequality, limited personal freedoms, and the maldistribution of food and wealth are all prevalent in these dystopian atmospheres. In contrast, the lives of our protagonists and their families are strikingly primitive and plagued by deprivation and repression. The emergence of our young Artemesian heroines from such dire origins not only highlights their abilities to be defenders of the weak and the poor, but exemplifies their perseverance and symbolic capacity to inspire those around them.

The etymology of the word Artemis is not Greek, but is thought to be derived from the Hellenic word Arktemis, meaning “bear” or “north.” One of her incarnations, known as the Brauronian Artemis, related more closely to her tribal origins where she was the divine patron of a bear cult that emerged on the Northern shores of Attica. Once every five years at her temple in Brauron, little girls from Athens would gather and dress up like bears. They wore saffron robes to represent the animal’s natural coloring and acted like ferocious bears, growling and frightening the people in honor of the wild and untamable goddess. This encounter with the bear spirits was thought to be incredibly powerful for the young girls. In a culture that was as misogynistic as ancient Greece, it was vital for the mental health of the women to have an outlet for their strength and vitality. Women were not allowed to convey these animalistic behaviors at home, but in reverence to the goddess, these little girls were allowed the freedom to growl and embody the nature of animal and hunter.

Though we are no longer plagued by the extreme patriarchy of ancient Greece, contemporary women, particularly adolescent girls, are still hounded by unhealthy type-casting, body images, and gender stereotypes. In many ways, girls are still given the impression that their power lies solely in their beauty and sex appeal. The heroines in these contemporary fictions, however, offer a different model. The young women of these

stories are still extremely beautiful, but their power is their own: they are fierce, knowledgeable, and independent. These heroines not only know how to empower themselves, but create revolutions from the examples of their strength.

The women in these dystopic fantasies find themselves in worlds rife with exploitation, perversion, and voyeuristic fantasy; however, what makes these young women particularly remarkable is that they are able to endure these violations without being fundamentally tainted or traumatized. They utilize the violations as fodder for resistance and the questioning of the status quo. In Artemesian myth, the goddess responds to violation with swift and harsh punishment. In the tale of Acteon, when the unfortunate hunter accidentally stumbles upon the bathing goddess, Artemis responds by turning him into a stag that is hunted and killed by his own hounds. The archetypal Artemesian woman utilizes the strength of the violator against himself. It is Acteon's expert training of his hounds that ultimately becomes his own downfall.

In a similar turn of fate, Katniss Everdeen, in *The Hunger Games*, utilizes the platform of her own exploitation to empower herself and inspire a revolution. The "Games," a gladiator style reality television show where children are pitted against one another in a fight to the death, are used as voyeuristic tools of control and entertainment. Katniss, however, seizes the opportunity to have the country's attention and plays upon their empathy to save both herself and her companion, while simultaneously exposing the gross exploitation and brutality of the ruling factions. Comparably, Charlie, in the television show *Revolution*, utilizes the tragedy and misfortune in her life to fuel her resolve to overthrow the fascist, dominant regime. The attacks on her own person and the deaths of her loved ones, particularly her brother, not only fail to repress her, but radicalize and inspire her. Artemis is immune to the pressures of the collective and the "civilized" world. It is not in the Artemesian nature to languish in the comfort of the cultivated world, nor is she one to tremble before an impending threat. This indifference to collective manipulation can again be seen metaphorically in the *Divergent* novels where the main character, Tris, is found to be immune to the serums and inoculations used to control the populations of her world. Again it is this inability to be manipulated that allows her to expose the hypocrisy and manipulation of the controlling regime.

The last and perhaps most unique example of Artemesian resilience comes from the main character in the film *Children of Men*. Kee could easily be described as both an Artemesian figure, and a Madonna symbol. The film, which takes place in the not-so-distant future in London,

portrays a world where the women have all become infertile and no child had been born for over 18 years. The society has become increasingly xenophobic and racist. Kee, a young immigrant woman of color, is the sole pregnant woman on earth. She is both reviled for her status as an immigrant and a foreigner, and revered for the promise of life in her womb. Again this young heroine becomes a paradoxical symbol: she represents the lowest tier of society, but holds the hope of the entire world in her very body. It is this juxtaposition of strength and weakness that makes her, like the other contemporary heroines, inspiration for movement and change. These characters bring attention to the marginalized factions of society: the weak, the repressed, and the violated, while overseeing and facilitating the birth of a new paradigm. Like Artemis, they are acting as midwives to collective change.

The choice of Artemis as a redemptive figure, whether conscious by the authors or not, is particularly relevant in this first half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. If indeed, as I have proposed, these dystopian fantasies are recognitions of our own industrial hubris, then it is the goddess of the wild who gives voice to the voiceless and the planet as a whole. Unlike the journey of the hero, the heroine's journey is one of descent and re-emergence. It is the journey of the earth and the seed, the movement deep into darkness before the emergence of spring. The journey of the heroine follows the path of Inanna and Persephone into the underworld. In alchemy it is the *nigredo*, or *putrificatio* stage, the necessary destruction of the *prima materia* before it can be transformed into the philosopher's stone or emerge as a new paradigm. We must experience, even if just imaginarily, the degradation and destruction of our predominant paradigm or myth in order to allow a new one to emerge. Apocalyptic fantasy has been the constant companion of large cultural shifts. The transition of each millennia has been accompanied by dreams and predictions of the end of the world. The old gods must die and fertilize the ground to give strength to the emergence of a new mythos. The goddess is the appropriate guide. She acts as the psychopomp, navigating the worlds and guiding us through the acknowledgement of our own cultural shadows. This is not the place of the hero but the realm of the heroine.

With the fictional death of one historical perspective comes the opportunity for the emergence of another. Fiction allows us to explore truths that would be otherwise outside of what is culturally acceptable or even conscious. The problems that we face in the twenty-first century are not limited to topography, national boundary, or even individual ecosystems, but are deeply integrated into the life-community as a whole. While this can be overwhelming, we can use story as a bridge. Fiction

allows us to explore that which is unthinkable, unapproachable, taboo, or overwhelming. The dystopian in popular fiction acts as a mirror of our collective fears and as a warning of potential behaviors. It can bring about awareness and help us to play out our collective shadow in a place and time safely separate from our own, engaging in the dangers and fears of a future while addressing the challenges of the present.

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## CHAPTER TWO

# ‘THE PEOPLE IN THE CHAOS CANNOT LEARN’: DYSTOPIAN VISION IN ATWOOD’S *MADDADDAM* TRILOGY

PATRICIA STAPLETON

### Introduction

Dystopian texts and films reflect political and cultural fears of their era. During the Cold War, the destructive Godzilla was an embodiment of the devastation wrought by the nuclear bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and anti-Communist paranoia can be found in stories about body snatchers and pod people. Among recent dystopian fiction, a common theme reveals how afraid we are of our own “progress” – human development that leads to natural disasters, world-ending climate change, and science and technology run amok. Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy lays bare these fears.<sup>1</sup> As she notes in the final volume’s acknowledgments, “Although ‘MaddAddam’ is a work of fiction, it does not include any technologies or bio-beings that do not already exist, are not under construction or are not possible in theory.”<sup>2</sup> Atwood takes advancements in science and technology, specifically in the field of genetic engineering, and walks us through them to their apocalyptic results.

This chapter addresses the key elements of the dystopian world that Atwood envisions in our near-future: the rising power of multinational corporations; the disintegration of the political state; an almost complete environmental collapse; the cresting fever pitch of human egotism; and the arrival of a posthuman future. It shows how in Atwood’s dystopia, human greed and narcissism, coupled with unrestrained scientific advancements, are pushing humanity to the brink of extinction. These themes mirror central fears in American culture. In particular, the chapter focuses on how developments in biotechnology contribute to these trends, linking the main components of the apocalypse in the *MaddAddam* series to the arguments

made by environmentalists and by opponents of genetic engineering. In this way, the chapter argues that Atwood's fiction reflects the political and cultural fears of our present era: namely, that humans are too narcissistic to learn in the chaos they have created.

### **Science fiction as reflection and speculation**

Before delving into the details of Atwood's dystopia, we must first address how analyzing science fiction (sf) can reflect the political and cultural fears of our time and speculate about the conditions of our future. Neil Gerlach and Sheryl N. Hamilton provide a broad review of the ways in which sf studies have become incorporated into social science and humanities studies.<sup>3</sup> Gerlach and Hamilton point to the 1970s as a time when sustained use of sf in the social sciences began, with academics in anthropology, sociology, and political science using sf as a pedagogical tool for teaching social theory.<sup>4</sup> In this way, sf narratives provide students with illustrative examples of social structures, problems, and relationships.<sup>5</sup> But the role of sf has evolved from that of a pedagogical tool into "an intellectual mode with a direct cultural impact on technoscientific practices and futurological thinking."<sup>6</sup> Thus, sf authors have engaged more directly with critical social analysis, which in turn has revealed sf texts to be situated "in larger sociocultural contexts, with the work of criticism itself becoming a form of social analysis."<sup>7</sup> As a result, by analyzing sf texts and offering critiques of them, we are able to provide insight into particular moments in history and culture. Moreover, sf narratives can reveal the fears we have about our future.

The sustained presence of dystopianism and apocalyptic visions in sf narratives can be traced to the post-World War II era, when humanity pondered the possibility of complete annihilation at its own hands. Andrew Feenberg tracks the development of doomsday myths in the nuclear age, and concludes that anxieties about the bomb also invoked worries about other natural disasters of a planetary scope.<sup>8</sup> Science fiction as "the literature of the 'other' culture, the culture of science and technology" captured the feelings of the postwar era in two strands: one "spread apocalyptic fears," while the other "played on emerging dystopian anxieties."<sup>9</sup>

Apocalyptic narratives center on the inability of humans to control the knowledge they have turned into power. Feenberg notes that "In the postwar years a constant theme recurs both in serious essays on public policy by scientists and in science fiction: knowledge of man has lagged behind knowledge of nature, and the rift between the two explains the