

“THE MACHINE STOPS”: DYSTOPIAS, REAL AND IMAGINED

FSP: 101-09

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OFFICE HOURS: WEDNESDAY, 11-1 AND 4-5

MEETING TIMES: TUESDAY AND FRIDAY, 12:30-1:50, SCP 116

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Over the past century, authors and film-makers have captured many of our communal anxieties about the future in both novels and films known as dystopias. This course will explore how real-life social unrest and anxieties about issues such as technological and medical innovations, religious and cultural trends, international conflicts, and political policies are reflected in fictional dystopic texts. We will question how evolving dystopic fantasies have mapped many of the changing concerns of each new generation over the last hundred years.

We will focus on British and North American novels and films in addition to non-fiction works that complement each dystopia; Readings will begin with classic works by E.M. Forster and Ayn Rand, leading up to more contemporary authors such as Octavia Butler and Margaret Atwood. The film version of *The Hunger Games* will be juxtaposed with the more realistic but strikingly similar depiction of American social inequality in *Winter's Bone*. The course will culminate in a special unit on the recent proliferation of young adult dystopias by authors such as Nancy Farmer and Cory Doctorow. The young adult unit will include forming a book club with several middle school students from the Trenton School District; the book club will read one young adult dystopia and complete a culminating activity.

COURSE PURPOSE & LEARNING GOALS

The Freshman Seminar Program is designed to give incoming students an engaging and rigorous intellectual experience. Students will work closely with the professor in a small community of learners to develop the skills and habits of scholarship that will support them in their future academic growth. The course requires students to participate in intensive reading and writing activities, some of which are independent and some collaborative; this approach is intended to help scaffold students' transition to college-level work by offering frequent opportunities for instructor and peer feedback.

The learning goals of this course include the following:

- Develop greater proficiency with the conventions of academic written and spoken discourse
- Demonstrate an ability to participate actively in a seminar discussion by adopting a critical and reflective stance; students are expected to grow in their ability to articulate and synthesize information and knowledge, make connections between classroom texts and personal, historical, and global texts, challenge peers and instructors in a thoughtful,

civil manner, take intellectual risks, and interrogate the assumptions of self and community.

- Adopt an inquiry-oriented approach to scholarship in which the course participants generate a research agenda that engages their intellectual wonder and connects to real-world problems
- Approach literature through a critical lens that allows the reader to understand the transactional nature of the reading experience
- Understand the ways in which literature can serve as a socio-cultural artifact that speaks to the political, historical, and cultural context that produced it and consider the ways in which our current notions reshape the text.
- Engage in community-based learning that broadens the cultural perspective of the participants; model the process of deep intellectual engagement with text by acting as a discussion facilitator with younger students in the surrounding community.

COURSE MATERIALS

Required Books: Students may purchase print or digital versions

- *Anthem*, by Ayn Rand
- *Little Brother*, by Cory Doctorow
- *Parable of the Sower*, by Octavia Butler
- *The House of Scorpion*, by Nancy Farmer

Required Films (available on-reserve at the library)

- *1984*
- *Children of Men*
- *Handmaid's Tale*
- *Hunger Games*
- *Winter's Bone*

Stories and Excerpts (available on Canvas)

- *Utopia* (Excerpt), by Thomas More
- *Wool*, by Hugh Howey
- *The Machine Stops*, E.M. Forster
- *Nickel and Dimed* (Excerpt), by Barbara Ehrenreich
- *Harrison Bergeron*, by Kurt Vonnegut

Additional Articles and Essays Posted on Canvas

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

I. Class Participation

10%

To receive full credit for class participation, students must meet the criteria below. Any area that the student does not satisfy will result in the loss of one percentage point.

- Student participates regularly, actively, and frequently in every class discussion (except those for which the student has an excused absence).
- More than 2 unexcused absences from class discussion will result in the loss of 1 percentage point of participation credit for each missed discussion.
- Persistent lateness or early-leaving resulting in significant time lost from class participation may be considered an additional absence.
- Students may make up the participation credit for up to two discussions by submitting a 2-page summary of each reading that was assigned that day.
- Student listens to and responds to peers thoughtfully.
- Student's comments are insightful and demonstrate careful reading or viewing of all class materials.
- Student is prepared for all moderator and facilitator responsibilities.
- Student is not afraid to take risks, challenge ideas, and think unconventionally; student does not wait passively to find out "the right answer."
- Student uses electronic devices only to take notes or conduct research at appropriate times during class; student is never observed using phone or computer for communication or social media unrelated to class.
- Students who have an emergency situation step outside the room to use cell phones; otherwise, no cell phone use during class.
- Students arrive on-time for class every session unless prior arrangements have been made with me.

II. Reading Response

20%

Assignment: Students will be expected to keep a record of responses to the different novels and films that will be explored in class. Students will practice responding to texts in different ways, using different formats. These include:

- **Commentary:** Informal commentary of the reading/viewing selection. This should not be a summary, but a critical response to some aspect of the text. (Approximately 2 single-spaced pages)
- ***Critique:** Criticism of the text in which you identify something about the author's intent or craft that you resist while reading. The writing style alienates you as a reader, or the author's vision seems deeply flawed, or a character strikes you as an unfair generalization of a larger social group. What do you think the author is getting wrong? (Approximately 2 single-spaced pages)
- ***Motif:** Identify a symbolic element of the text (word, image, character trait, plot device, etc) that repeats throughout the work to develop a pattern. After proving that the pattern exists, theorize how this motif might represent a particular idea or intention of the author. (Approximately 2 single-spaced pages)

- Discussion thread: Participate in a thoughtful and critical examination of the text through an on-line discussion thread with at least two other members of class.
- Textual annotations of during-reading responses: Be attentive to your aesthetic reading of the text and use a note-taking system to document your visualizations, thoughts, questions, and connections.
- ***Point of view response:** Consciously adopt a perspective different from your own while reading (for example, how might a middle school student react to this text? How might a recent immigrant respond to this vision) and reflect on how identity shapes our reading of cultural artifacts. (Approximately 2 single-spaced pages)
- Synchronous chat: While viewing a film with at least two other students, maintain a synchronous digital chat that documents your reactions to and questions about the film. You may use any forum that allows you to digitally capture the chat in a way that can be submitted either during class or through Canvas.
- Fan fiction: Allow yourself to be inspired by one of the texts in order to create a brief work of fan fiction in any mode: graphic, linguistic, musical. Create a work that extends or reimagines some element of the story.

III. Historical/Sociocultural Perspective Paper (1): 5-7 pages 15%

Each film or novel we have explored so far was produced in a particular social, political, historical, and cultural context. How does the text reveal a particular anxiety of the society in which it was produced? Provide textual and historical research to support your claim.

IV. Synthesis Paper (2): 5-7 pages 15%

We have explored the concept of dystopia through multiple genres and media. What is a pattern that you have identified in many of these different texts? What binds them together? Trace a common thread through at least 3 different texts (novel, short story, essay, film) and explore the meaning of this commonality. What does it tell you about the ways in which we as a society look to the future to combat our current fears? You might choose a particular character archetype, a plot device, a recurring symbol, a stylistic similarity; you might even choose to explore the ways in which these are similar in terms of *what they ignore*.

V. CEL: Middle School Book Club 10%

You and a partner will mentor 6th grade students through book clubs. You and your club will decide on a book to read from the list of young adult dystopias. Before each meeting, you and your partner will complete the reading and determine possible discussion questions, activities and prompts. In these discussions, you will guide conversation about not only the fears and anxieties revealed in the book, but also what fears and anxieties students have about our world today. A concluding event will bring all the book clubs together.

At the conclusion of the book club, you must submit a copy of your discussion questions, your activity plan, and a 2-page reflection on the experience.

VI. Dystopia Presentations 15%

As part of the culmination of the course, you will design a multimedia presentation that addresses a current anxiety prominent in America today and explore the dystopian vision that might emerge from this concern. For example, the nation has been struck with many tragic natural disasters with seemingly increasing frequency over the past decade; some argue that residents should not be given federal funds to rebuild in areas that are prone to natural disasters. What might happen if the government passed laws restricting building in coastal areas or tornado alley? What might our country look like in a hundred years? How might the American dream be reshaped? What are the costs and benefits of trying to defend ourselves against nature through government intervention?

VII. Final Paper Revision: 8-10 pages 15%

Choose one of the 2 main papers you wrote this semester and revise it for the final. You must take into account the comments and feedback that you received on the paper, but you must also add at least 2 additional sources to extend the paper.

Grade Distribution

A = 95.0-100	C = 73.0-76.9
A- = 90.0-94.9	C- = 70.0-72.9
B+ = 87.0-89.9	D+ = 67.0-69.9
B = 83.0-86.9	D = 63.0-66.9
B- = 80.0-82.9	D- = 60.0-62.9
C+ = 77.0-79.9	F = Below 60

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance

Class discussion is considered the main vehicle for learning in a seminar setting; therefore regular and *active* participation is absolutely essential so that all students may not only develop academically but contribute to their peers' learning as well. Absences will only be excused if documentation is provided that shows the student was absent due to a mandatory college function, severe illness, or death of a loved one. Students who must miss classes due to participation in a field trip, athletic event, or other official college function should arrange with their instructors for such class absences well in advance. In every instance, however, the student has the responsibility to initiate arrangements for make-up work.

TCNJ's attendance policy is available on the web:

<http://www.tcnj.edu/~recreg/policies/attendance.html>

Late Work and Extensions

Whether or not a student is present in class, all written assignments must be submitted to Canvas by the deadline in order to receive credit. No credit will be given for late work.

Extensions will only be given under the following circumstances: A student who needs an extension must contact me at least 24 hours before the deadline, explain the situation, provide

documentation, and receive approval from me verbally or via e-mail for a modified deadline. Extensions will only be given for severe illness, death of a loved one, or other extreme situation.

If the emergency occurs after the 24 hour window and the student does not have time or the ability to contact me, that student should submit a “work-in-progress” of the assignment to Canvas or my office and contact me as soon as it is feasible and safe. A work-in-progress can be documented by submitting rough notes, an outline, a partial draft—anything that can prove that you did not wait until the day before an assignment was due to even begin it.

Academic Integrity Policy

Academic dishonesty is any attempt by the student to gain academic advantage through dishonest means, to submit, as his or her own, work which has not been done by him/her or to give improper aid to another student in the completion of an assignment. Such dishonesty would include, but is not limited to: submitting as his/her own a project, paper, report, test, or speech copied from, partially copied, or paraphrased from the work of another (whether the source is printed, under copyright, or in manuscript form). Credit must be given for words quoted or paraphrased. The rules apply to any academic dishonesty, whether the work is graded or ungraded, group or individual, written or oral.

Every paper assignment for this class must be cited and referenced using MLA format unless otherwise stated.

TCNJ’s academic integrity policy is available on the web:

<http://www.tcnj.edu/~academic/policy/integrity.html>.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Policy

Any student who has a documented disability and is in need of academic accommodations should notify the professor of this course and contact the Office of Differing Abilities Services (609-771-2571). Accommodations are individualized and in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1992.

TCNJ’s Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) policy is available on the web:

<http://policies.tcnj.edu/policies/viewPolicy.php?docId=8082>

Tentative Course Schedule (Subject to Change)			
Session Date	Topic	Essential Questions	Assignments Due for this Session
Tuesday, August 27	Introduction	How do we define utopias and dystopias?	
Friday, August 30	Introduction	What are the historical origins of the concept of utopias?	Excerpt from <i>Utopia</i> , by Thomas More (on Canvas)
Tuesday, September 3: No Class, Monday Schedule			
Friday, September 6	Moving Underground: Technology and Isolation	Guest Presentation on CEL: Brittany Ayedelotte How did the concept of a dystopia	<i>The Machine Stops</i> , by E.M. Forster (on Canvas)

		emerge in speculative fiction? How might a dystopia be viewed as an artifact of cultural anxiety?	
Tuesday, September 10	Moving Underground: Technology and Isolation	What are some of the tropes of dystopic writing that have developed over the past century? How might a modern imagining of an underground world reveal how our concerns have shifted from Forster's time?	<i>Wool 1</i> , by Hugh Howey (on Canvas) Reading Response Opportunity 1
Friday, September 13	The Communal versus the Individual	Are we really all created equal? How can power be distributed fairly?	<i>Harrison Bergeron</i> , by Kurt Vonnegut (on Canvas) <i>Anthem</i> , by Ayn Rand: Chapter 1 Reading Response Opportunity 2
Tuesday, September 17	The Communal versus the Individual	What is the difference between community and conformity? How does conformity empower the elite?	<i>Anthem</i> : 2-6 Writing Workshop for Paper #1
Friday, September 20	The Communal versus the Individual	What happens when the needs of the individual compete with the needs of the community?	<i>Anthem</i> : Finish Reading on Communism (on Canvas) Reading Response Opportunity 3
Tuesday, September 24	Surviving Surveillance: Privacy in the Age of Big Brother	What is the relationship between privacy and sense of self?	Viewing Workshop: <i>1984</i>
Friday, September 27	Surviving Surveillance: Privacy in the Age of Big Brother	What role does the media play in shaping our fears? What role do our fears play in shaping our media?	Reading on WWII (on Canvas) Finish viewing <i>1984</i> (Film on reserve in library)
Tuesday, October 1	Surviving Surveillance: Privacy in the Age of Big	What are we willing to sacrifice our privacy for?	<i>Little Brother</i> , by Cory Doctorow: Pages 1-100

	Brother	What does the right to privacy mean?	Reading Response Opportunity 4
Friday, October 4	Surviving Surveillance: Privacy in the Age of Big Brother		<i>Little Brother</i> : 101-250 Reading on The Patriot Act (on Canvas)
Tuesday, October 8	Surviving Surveillance: Privacy in the Age of Big Brother		<i>Little Brother</i> : Finish Writing Workshop for Paper 1 Draft
Friday, October 11	Gated Communities: Keeping Us In, Keeping Them Out	What role do race and ethnicity play in our current conversations about immigration?	Paper 1 Due in Canvas by class time. Begin viewing <i>Children of Men</i> in class.
Tuesday, October 15	Gated Communities: Keeping Us In, Keeping Them Out	In what ways do we create real and artificial boundaries in our communities?	Finish <i>Children of Men</i> (Film on reserve in library) Reading on Immigration (on Canvas) Reading Response Opportunity 5
Friday, October 18	Gated Communities: Keeping Us In, Keeping Them Out	What are we trying to keep in? What are we trying to keep out?	<i>Parable of the Sower</i> , by Octavia Butler: Pages 1-50 Reading Response Opportunity 6
Tuesday October 22	Gated Communities: Keeping Us In, Keeping Them Out	How do social hierarchies realign during times of social upheaval?	<i>Parable of the Sower</i> : 51-100 Reading on Hurricane Sandy (on Canvas)
Friday, October 25	Gated Communities: Keeping Us In, Keeping Them Out		<i>Parable of the Sower</i> : Finish Writing Workshop for Paper 2
Tuesday, October 29: No Class, Mid-semester Break			
Friday, November 1	Separating Church and State	What happens when faith and law collide? What happens when science is not good enough?	Handmaiden's Tale (Film on reserve at library) Reading Response Opportunity 7

Tuesday, November 5	Synthesis Paper Writing Workshop		<i>House of the Scorpion:</i> Youth
Friday, November 8	Beyond Frankenstein: Fear of Modern Monsters	How do we define our humanity? What do we consider monstrous?	<i>House of the Scorpion:</i> Middle Age Reading Response Opportunity 8
Tuesday, November 12	Beyond Frankenstein: Fear of Modern Monsters		<i>House of the Scorpion:</i> Old Age
Friday, November 15	Beyond Frankenstein: Fear of Modern Monsters	What are the ethics of genetic research? What problems are posed by the potential of new knowledge?	<i>House of the Scorpion:</i> 14 and begin <i>La Vida Nueva</i> up to 31 Reading Response Opportunity 9
Tuesday, November 19	Beyond Frankenstein: Fear of Modern Monsters		<i>House of the Scorpion:</i> Finish
Friday, November 22	Poverty and Power: Living in a Real Dystopia		<i>Hunger Games</i> Peer-workshop for Paper 2 draft Paper due in Canvas by Sunday, November 24th at midnight.
Tuesday, November 26	Poverty and Power: Living in a Real Dystopia	What are the invisible dystopias that exist in our country today? How fair is a meritocracy?	<i>Nickel and Dimed</i> excerpt: On Canvas <i>Winter's Bone</i> (Film on reserve in library) Reading Response Opportunity 10
Friday, November 29: No Class, Thanksgiving Break			
Tuesday, December 3	Dystopia Presentations		
Friday, December 6	Dystopia Presentations		
Final paper due Friday, December 13th by noon in Canvas			