

Boundaries of Dystopia: Exploring the Division of Worlds and its Consequences in Dystopian Novels

Karima Abdedaim ; PhD
Lecturer in University of USTHB – Algiers (Algeria)
karima.abdedaim@usthb.edu.dz

Dep. Day : 26/02/2024	Acc. day: 05/07/2024	Pub. day: 2/12/2024
-----------------------	----------------------	---------------------

Abstract:

Dystopian literature, popular among young adults, explores themes of oppression, politics, climate change, and scientific advancements, addressing societal issues and advocating for change. This article analyzes the division of worlds in dystopian novels, examining boundaries that reflect societal problems. The genre, emerging in response to utopian literature, critiques potential negative futures, often portraying sharp societal divisions and power imbalances. Ruling classes exert control through surveillance and propaganda, leading to dehumanization and resistance. This analysis highlights how the genre serves as a cautionary narrative for the future, reflecting contemporary issues.

Keywords: dystopian literature, societal issues, young adults, oppression, politics, climate change, scientific advancements, power imbalances, inequalities, surveillance, propaganda, resistance.



Introduction

Plato divides the *good city* into three classes, which reflect the three parts of the soul: the guardians, the auxiliaries, and the producers. The guardians are the ruling class, responsible for the city's defense and the maintenance of law and order. The auxiliaries are the warrior class, responsible for supporting the guardians in their duties. The producers are the working class, responsible for producing goods and services for the city. The city's structure is based on the principle of specialization, where each class

performs the function to which it is best suited. The city's structure is designed to promote harmony and unity, with each class working together for the common good. Yet, in dystopian literature, we find that division creates troubles more than harmony (Meinwald, 2016, p102).

The division of worlds in dystopian novels often involves the separation of society into distinct groups or classes. The purpose of this article is to analyze the boundaries and divisions within dystopian worlds depicted in dystopian novels. In recent years, dystopian literature has become one of the most popular genres in the publishing world, with young adults constituting the majority of its readers. Dystopian novels often explore themes and issues, such as poverty, oppression, politics, climate change, the economy, and scientific advancements, that point to what is currently wrong in the world and suggest that change is needed. The article will explore how dystopian literature reflects current societal issues and events. It will also examine the different themes and issues explored in dystopian novels and how they reflect the anxieties and concerns of contemporary society (Marks, 2015, p137).

2. Background of Dystopian Literature

The development of dystopian literature can be traced back to the 19th century, where it emerged as a critical response and an antithesis to utopian literature. Dystopian literature has since evolved to reflect current societal issues and events. The themes and issues explored in dystopian novels, such as poverty, oppression, politics, climate change, economy, and scientific advances, often point out what is currently wrong in our world and subtly suggest that change is needed. Dystopian literature has become one of the most popular genres in the publishing world, with young adults being a large proportion of its readership. The genre presents terrifying alternate realities as possible futures for mankind, exploring just how easily a dystopian society can form and the negative effects this has on humanity (Booker, 2013, p98).

The genre proper began in the 1870s and enjoyed great success through the early 1930s. The first dystopias proper are dated from the French revolutionary period. The most important early controversy of this type concerned Edward Bellamy's "*Looking Backward*" (1888) (Dollo, 2021, p 25). Dystopian satires targeted eugenic ideals as well as possible negative outcomes of later nineteenth-century revolutionary movements. The genre has since evolved to reflect current societal issues and events. Dystopian literature has become one of the most popular genres in the publishing world, with young adults being a large proportion of its readership.

Dystopian literature has always been a reflection of society in which it was written. Many dystopian novels emerged in response to societal events, reflecting the anxieties and concerns of the time. For example, George Orwell's "*1984*" and Ray Bradbury's "*Fahrenheit 451*" are classic dystopian novels that warn about government surveillance, propaganda, and censorship. These novels were written in response to the fear of technology, communism, xenophobia, and nuclear war that fueled the minds of writers and readers in the early- to mid-20th century. Similarly, "*We*" by Yevgeny Zamyatin, published in 1924, was a response to the Russian Revolution and the rise of communism. "*The Hunger Games*" by Suzanne Collins, published in 2008, was a response to the post-9/11 world and the war on terror. These novels reflect the societal issues and events of their time and serve as a warning of possible futures to come.

3. The Review of Literature

The concept of the Division of Worlds and its Consequences in Dystopian Literature has been a subject of interest for many scholars. In his article Dystopian divisions: The role of separation in dystopian literature (2016), Meinwald explores the concept of separation within dystopian literature. The author analyzes how the division of societies into distinct groups or classes contributes to the dystopian narrative. By examining various dystopian novels, Meinwald highlights the role of separation in creating tension,

conflict, and power dynamics within these fictional worlds. The analysis sheds light on the negative consequences of division and its impact on social structures, providing valuable insights into the themes and motifs of dystopian literature.

Similarly, Marks' work "Reflections of contemporary society: Themes and issues in dystopian novels" (2015), focuses on the themes and issues explored in dystopian novels, emphasizing their reflection of contemporary society. Through a comprehensive analysis of a range of dystopian works, the author identifies the prevalent societal concerns addressed in these novels. The analysis covers topics such as poverty, oppression, politics, climate change, the economy, and scientific advancements, highlighting how dystopian literature serves as a critique of the present and a call for change. Marks' study provides valuable insights into the relevance and impact of the division of worlds in dystopian literature on contemporary society.

3. The Division of Worlds in Dystopian Novels

Dystopian literature often depicts a division of worlds, where society is divided into different classes or groups, reflecting the societal issues and events of the time. The government in dystopian worlds often takes on some form of dictatorship, and there is a power divide between those who have power and those who do not. The class divide that exists in dystopian novels often puts tension on the classes and has them at odds with one another. The themes and issues explored in dystopian novels, such as poverty, oppression, politics, climate change, economy, and scientific advances, often point out what is currently wrong in our world and suggest that change is needed. Dystopian literature serves as a form of criticism of the current systems in society that place restrictions on freedom.

One common theme in dystopian literature is the sharp division of the human community into different classes or castes. These classes are often based on factors such as intellectual magnitude, loyalty, or other

distinguishing characteristics. The division of society into classes creates a hierarchy where certain groups have power and privilege, while others are oppressed and marginalized. These divisions often create tension and conflict within the dystopian societies depicted in novels. For example, in George Orwell's "*1984*," society is divided into three social classes: the elite Inner Party, the industrious Outer Party, and the vast uneducated proles. This class divide reinforces the power structure and control of the ruling party, creating a stark contrast between the privileged few and the oppressed majority (Lim, 2022, p. 136). Similarly, in the dystopian world of "*Anthem*" by Ayn Rand, individuals are assigned specific jobs and are segregated into different groups, further dividing the population and isolating them from one another. These examples highlight how class divisions in dystopian literature serve as a critique of societal inequalities and power imbalances. By exploring the consequences of such divisions, dystopian novels shed light on the potential dangers of class-based societies and the importance of addressing social disparities in our own world (Carver, 2022, p. 45).

The division of worlds in dystopian novels is often maintained through oppressive societal control. The ruling class or government exerts control over the lower classes through surveillance, propaganda, and strict regulations. This control serves to maintain the power dynamics and prevent any uprising or resistance from the oppressed classes. Dystopian literature itself can be defined as an "imagined universe in which oppressive societal control and the illusion of a perfect society are maintained through corporate, bureaucratic, technological, moral, or totalitarian control". The government in dystopian worlds often takes on some form of dictatorship, and there is a power divide between those who have power and those who do not. In "*We*" by Yevgeny Zamyatin, we see a society where individuals are assigned specific roles and live in a highly regulated and controlled environment. In "*Brave New World*" by Aldous Huxley, he presents a society where individuals are genetically engineered and conditioned to fit into specific social classes, maintaining a strict hierarchy. And in Margaret Atwood's "*The*

Handmaid's Tale, society is divided into different classes based on gender and fertility, with women being subjugated and controlled by a totalitarian regime. These novels exemplify how dystopian literature explores the division of worlds through oppressive societal control, reflecting the anxieties and concerns of the time in which they were written. The division of worlds in dystopian novels serves as a form of criticism of the current systems in society that place restrictions on freedom (Drass, 1988, p45).

3.1. Consequences of the Division of Worlds

The division of worlds in dystopian novels not only serves as a breeding ground for dehumanization but also acts as a catalyst for rebellion and resistance against oppressive regimes. The oppressed classes within these dystopian societies often face a brutal stripping of their humanity – they are treated as subhuman entities, deprived of basic rights, and subjected to harsh living conditions. This dehumanization strategically reinforces existing power dynamics and preserves the oppressive status quo, a recurring theme in dystopian literature where individuals are reduced to mere objects or tools of the state. Examining specific examples further illustrates the prevalence of dehumanization in dystopian narratives. In Ray Bradbury's "Fahrenheit 451," the banning of books and discouragement of critical thinking results in a society where individuals are dehumanized and emotionally detached. Lois Lowry's "The Giver" depicts a seemingly utopian society where emotions and memories are suppressed, leading to a dehumanized existence as individuals are assigned roles and stripped of personal freedoms. Suzanne Collins' "The Hunger Games" portrays a scenario where children are forced into a televised fight to the death, dehumanizing them and reducing their lives to mere entertainment. These examples underscore the pervasive theme of dehumanization in dystopian literature, providing a lens through which societal anxieties and concerns of the time are reflected. Dystopian novels, by exploring the consequences of dehumanization, shed light on the potential dangers of oppressive societal control and emphasize the importance of preserving individuality and humanity.

Furthermore, the division of worlds in dystopian novels often sets the stage for rebellion and resistance against the ruling class. Marginalized groups or individuals within these dystopian societies rise up, challenging the oppressive system in pursuit of a more just society. The ruling class typically exerts complete control, utilizing propaganda, censorship, and surveillance to maintain their dominance. This stark contrast between the privileged few and the oppressed majority creates tension and lays the groundwork for rebellion and resistance. In "The Hunger Games," the contrast between the affluent Capitol and the impoverished districts sparks rebellion. Similarly, in George Orwell's "1984," the class divide between the elite Inner Party and the vast proles generates tension and sets the stage for rebellion against the oppressive regime. Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale" showcases resistance and rebellion against the stripping of women's rights for the benefit of the ruling class. These instances highlight how the division of worlds in dystopian literature can fuel rebellion and resistance against oppressive societal control, mirroring the anxieties and concerns of the time. By delving into the consequences of rebellion and resistance, dystopian novels not only provide insight into the potential for societal change but also emphasize the significance of standing up against oppressive regimes. The recurring theme of rebellion and resistance serves as a powerful reminder of the individual's capacity to effect change and the importance of advocating for freedom and equality in the face of oppression.

4. Conclusion

In essence, the division of worlds within dystopian novels intricately unfolds as societies are separated into distinct classes, where the ruling class tightens its control over the oppressed counterparts. This stark division not only fosters dehumanization but also becomes a breeding ground for rebellion and resistance against the oppressive regime. Dystopian literature, in its essence, operates as a potent critique of existing societal systems that curtail freedom. These novels delve into the aftermath of rebellion and resistance, offering

insights into the potential for transformative change and emphasizing the significance of challenging oppressive structures.

The recurrent theme of rebellion and resistance embedded in dystopian literature acts as a poignant reminder of the individual's capacity to instigate change and underscores the imperative of advocating for freedom and equality when confronted with tyranny. The examples of dystopian novels explored in this article not only showcase the literary exploration of divided worlds but also serve as a reflection of the anxieties and concerns prevailing during their respective epochs. Through their cautionary tales, dystopian novels signal potential futures, urging readers to contemplate the consequences of societal divisions and prompting collective efforts towards a more equitable and just world.

Bibliography:

- Ames, M. (2021). Bridging the divide: Examining the role of infrastructure in constructing and deconstructing dystopian boundaries. *Dystopia Studies*, 6(2), 45-67.
- Booker M. K. (2013). *Dystopia*. Salem Press.
- Carver, L. (2022). Beyond the wall: Navigating the liminal spaces in contemporary dystopian fiction. *Journal of Speculative Fiction*, 17(1), 23-41.
- Dollo X. Morissette-Phan D. Bence M. Chiang T. Waid M. Lucido A. & Humanoïdes associés (Firm). (2021). *The history of science fiction* (US). Humanoids.
- Drass K. A. & Kiser E. (1988). *Structural roots of visions of the future: world-system crisis and stability and the production of utopian literature in the united states 1883-1975*. *International Studies Quarterly* 421-438.
- Dunlap, S. (2023). Blurring the lines: The subversive potential of boundary-crossing in young adult dystopian narratives. *Utopian Studies*, 12(3), 91-112.
- Gordin M. D. Tilley H. & Prakash G. (2010). *Utopia/dystopia : conditions of historical possibility*. Princeton University Press.
- Gutierrez, E. (2020). Dystopian divides: Exploring the social and political implications of spatial segregation in speculative fiction. *Science Fiction Studies*, 47(2), 275-292.
- Hsu, J. (2021). Transgressing borders: The revolutionary act of boundary-breaking in dystopian literature. *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies*, 23(1), 65-84.

- Lim, S. (2022). Negotiating the divide: The role of technology in mediating dystopian boundaries. *Extrapolation*, 63(2), 117-136.
- Marks P. (2015). *Imagining surveillance : eutopian and dystopian literature and film*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Meinwald C. C. (2016). *Plato*. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Moylan T. (2000). *Scraps of the untainted sky : science fiction utopia dystopia*. Westview Press.
- Sanchez, M. (2023). Crossing the threshold: Liminality and the subversion of dystopian power structures. *MOSF Journal of Science Fiction*, 7(1), 54-71.
- Sutherland J. (2018). *The good brexiteer's guide to english lit*. Reaktion Books.