



Dystopian worlds: literary visions of disaster

Start date 14th May 2017 **End date**

Venue Madingley Hall
Madingley
Cambridge

Tutor Dr Jenny Bavidge **Course code**

Director of Programmes Emma Jennings

For further information on this course, please contact Public Programme Coordinator, Clare Kerr
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To book See: www.ice.cam.ac.uk or telephone 01223 746262

Tutor biography

Jenny Bavidge is University Senior Lecturer and Academic Director for English at ICE and is a member of the English Faculty. She is a Fellow of Murray Edwards College, University of Cambridge. Jenny took her BA in English Literature and Language at Worcester College, Oxford and then an MA and PhD at Royal Holloway, University of London. She is President of the [Literary London Society](#) and sits on the committee of the [Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment](#).

Course programme

09:30

Terrace bar open for pre-course tea/coffee

10:00 – 11:15

Session 1: Dystopias, Past and Present

In this opening session, we'll take the long view of the dystopian genre, looking back to Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*, written in 1815, and considering the varying forms the dystopian novel has taken. We'll look particularly at Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and discuss the core theme of so many dystopian visions: the struggle of the individual against oppressive power.

11:15

Coffee

11:45 – 13:00

Session 2: Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

Margaret Atwood's 1985 novel *The Handmaid's Tale* takes us into the terrifying world of Gilead, as the author speculates about the future in which women are denied freedom and all expressions of sexuality are rigidly controlled. The clever narration of *The Handmaid's Tale* enhances and extends the story it tells, so we'll look carefully at the plot and form of the novel.

13:00

Lunch

14:00 – 15:15

Session 3: Ruins and Visions

In this session, we will examine our fascination with the style and look of dystopian worlds. We'll consider the attraction of ruins and also think about the history of cinematic dystopias from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* to Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later*, and the influence of visual art on these designs.

15:15

Tea

15:30 – 16:45

Session 4: Circles and Ends

Our final session will focus on Dave Eggers' 2013 novel *The Circle*, set a very little into the future of our present times. In this imagined world, social media and multinational tech companies are the enemy, poised to take over the inner lives as well as the outer realities of the novel's characters. We'll think here about ideas and themes which call back to *Brave New World* and consider other dystopias written in the 21st century.

16:45

Day-school ends

Course syllabus

Aims:

To discuss several major works of dystopian literature and to understand them in a political and literary context.

To encourage critical interrogation of the pleasures and ethics of dystopian fiction.

Content:

The vision of a dystopian future has preoccupied many novelists in the 20th and 21st centuries and the dystopian novel has had several functions: it has registered fears about technology and the effects of modernity upon the human body and soul; it has imagined the potential outcomes of political ideologies and cultural tendencies; it has often dramatised the struggle of the individual in the face of oppressive government or institutions. During the course of this day school, we will discuss the uses and the attractions of the dystopian genre and its relevance for our current political and cultural climate. We will focus on the political dystopia, but we will also examine the differences between different types of dystopian fiction, from the ecogothic to the feminist dystopia, taking in alien and zombie invasions along the way.

Presentation of the course:

The day school will be split into four sessions, each with a different theme. There will be short, informal lectures followed by group discussion and we will close read sections from the course texts.

As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:

- Get to know the novels in question in greater depth and gain a useful frame of reference for further exploration of the dystopian genre;
- As far as is possible with such gloomy subject matter, to enjoy discussions of the nature and function of dystopian literature.

Reading and resources list

As we'll be taking *Brave New World* (1931), *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and *The Circle* (2013) as our main texts for the day it would be very useful if attendees could read them in advance. We'll be referring to a number of novels and films throughout the day so if you have time for any reading or viewing before the class or would like to follow them up afterwards, here's a list of relevant films and novels:

Novels

The Last Man Mary Shelley (1826)
The Time Machine H. G. Wells (1895)
It Can't Happen Here Sinclair Lewis (1935)
Fahrenheit 451 Ray Bradbury (1953)
The Children of Men P.D. James (1992)
The Hunger Games Suzanne Collins (2008)
The Road Cormac McCarthy (2006)

Films

Metropolis (Fritz Lang, 1927)
Soylent Green (Richard Fleischer, 1973)
Bladerunner (Ridley Scott, 1983)
28 Days Later (Danny Boyle, 2002)
The Day After Tomorrow (Roland Emmerich, 2004)
Children of Men (Alfonso Cuarón, 2003)

Listed below are a number of texts that might be of interest for future reference, but do not need to be bought (or consulted) for the course.

Author	Title	Publisher and date
Booker, M. Keith,	<i>Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research Guide</i>	Greenwood Press, 1994
Booker, M. Keith,	<i>The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature: Fiction as Social Criticism</i>	Greenwood Press, 1994
Claeys, Gregory, ed,	<i>The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature</i>	Cambridge UP, 2010.
Moylan, Thomas,	<i>Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia</i>	Westview Press, 2000.
Basu, Balaka, et al eds.	<i>Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults: Brave New Teenagers</i>	Routledge, 2013.

Additional information

Venue

Details of how to find Madingley Hall can be found on our website:
<http://www.ice.cam.ac.uk/who-we-are/how-to-find-the-institute>

Refreshments

Tea and coffee and lunch will be provided. If you have any specific dietary requirements or allergies and have not already advised us, please inform our Admissions Team on ice.admissions@ice.cam.ac.uk or +44 (0)1223 746262.

Note Students of the Institute of Continuing Education are entitled to 20% discount on books published by Cambridge University Press (CUP) which are purchased at the Press bookshop, 1 Trinity Street, Cambridge (Mon-Sat 9am – 5:30pm, Sun 11am – 5pm). A letter or email confirming acceptance on to a current Institute course should be taken as evidence of enrolment.

Information correct as of: 28 April 2017