

CL 494: Contemporary Dystopian Fiction

Burcu Kayışcı Akkoyun, Spring 2026¹

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Course Schedule: TTh 782

TB 122 | TB 122 | M 2171

Office hours: TTh by appointment

Course Description and Objectives

CL 494 explores contemporary dystopian (short and long) fiction and examines the ways in which dystopian narratives may be understood as aesthetic responses to socio-political, cultural, and environmental issues in the contemporary moment. The course focuses on Anglo-American texts that succeed the classic examples of the genre so that we could identify (con)textual continuities, shifts, and disruptions between real and imaginary pasts, presents, and futures.

I expect those who are interested in CL 494 to have a solid idea about, if not a solid foundation in, the generic conventions and themes of utopian and dystopian fiction. We will begin by contextualizing the complex dynamics between utopian imagination and dystopian visions. We will then seek to understand the nuances and shifts revealed by our emphasis on the contemporary as well as the common thematic trajectories of literary dystopias such as totalitarian control, social alienation, and manipulation of language and history. Here are some questions that may guide our reading process and discussions: How do fictional “bad places” pertain to our crisis-ridden present and not-too-distant future? Are literary dystopias still effective thought-experiments and tools of critique? Is

¹ This is the draft syllabus.

there any (estranging) value left in imagining (worse) alternatives? I do not expect us to arrive at definitive answers but to open up discussion that welcomes different and sometimes opposing viewpoints.

Course Structure and Requirements

- You are allowed **four absences** during the semester. Further absences will impact your attendance grade negatively.
- If you have a **conflict** with another course and you are unable to change your schedule, please send me a screenshot of **your schedule showing the conflict by the end of the second week**. It is your own responsibility to notify me.
- Having a medical report may justify your absence, but having too many absences **even with a report** means that you are not attending and participating in class discussions.
- Your active participation is essential to maintain a productive learning environment. **Do not automatically assume that you will get full points by coming to classes. You must earn the participation grade like the exam grades.**
- You will have **one midterm and one final** for the assessment of the course. I will provide you with further information about their time and format in due time.
- If you have a medical report, you may take the make-up midterm exam upon notifying me. For the final exam, you must submit your report to the Dean's Office. You may take the final make-up only if it is approved by the relevant committee. I have no say in this matter.
- There will also be an in-class response essay, and no make-up unless you have a medical report. I will provide you with further information about its time and format in due time.
- Readings will be available as soft copy. I may share additional texts on Moodle.
- The weekly reading list or schedule may change with prior notice depending on the circumstances and our in-class pace.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this course, you should be able to demonstrate an understanding of the evolution of dystopia as a literary genre in line with the pressing issues of the late twentieth and twenty-first century. You will develop a conceptual and theoretical framework of the genre by situating the texts within broader historical, political, and cultural contexts.

Required Texts

Short fiction

“Time capsule found on the dead planet” (2009) by Margaret Atwood

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/sep/26/margaret-atwood-mini-science-fiction>

“The Veldt” (1950) by Ray Bradbury

“The Subliminal Man” (1963) by J.G. Ballard

<https://readerslibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Subliminal-Man.pdf>

“Pump Six” (2008) by Paolo Bacigalupi²

Novels

H(A)PPY (2017) by Nicola Barker

ZED (2020) by Joanna Kavenna

Venomous Lumpsucker (2022) by Ned Beaman

Critical sources

“Dystopia: The Dream as Nightmare” in *Narrating Utopia* by Chris Ferns, 1999, pp. 105-130

Liquid Modernity by Zygmunt Bauman, 2000, pp. 1-15; pp. 53-90

Introduction to *Liquid Surveillance* by David Lyon and Zygmunt Bauman, 2012

“Dystopia in the Twenty-First Century” by Gregory Claeys in *Dystopia: A Natural History*, 2016, pp. 497-501

“It's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism” in *Capitalist Realism* by Mark Fisher, 2009, pp. 1-11

Class Policies

Respect, honesty, solidarity

- Respect is about **following the classroom etiquette** and contributing to not only a productive but also **a safe and positive learning environment**. We must listen to each other attentively even though we disagree at times.
- We must also maintain clear and transparent communication: I will make sure that I respond to your emails as soon as I can, but **only within reasonable working**

² Depending on the course of our schedule and discussion pace

hours. Please ask/ tell me whenever you have any issues/concerns rather than worry over hearsay. We can always arrange office hours.

- If you are a student with learning or other disabilities (or any other issues), please inform me in person or via email during the first week of the class so that necessary arrangements can be made.

Avoiding Plagiarism

- For written assignments, you must follow the **MLA (Modern Language Association) guidelines** for formatting and citation. Here is the latest edition: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_formatting_and_style_guide.html.
- All sources must be properly cited; otherwise, you are committing plagiarism, that is, presenting the words or ideas of another person as if they were your own. Not only direct quotations and facts but also paraphrases of ideas must be properly documented. If you have any doubts about whether/how you should cite a source, please ask me BEFORE you submit your work.
- Plagiarism also includes submitting papers or work you have used for other courses (your own or others'), buying papers online or having others write papers for you: no such work will be accepted.
- **Any instance of academic dishonesty will be subject to appropriate sanctions. For more on plagiarism and how to avoid it, please see:**

<https://westlanglit.bogazici.edu.tr/en/undergraduate-study-basics>

Final Grade Breakdown

A. Class participation and discussion	10 %
B. In-class response	20 %
C. Midterm exam	35%
D. Final exam	35%

Grading Scale:

AA (100-90), BA (89-85), BB (84-80), CB (79- 75), CC (74-70), DC (69-65), DD (64-60), (fail) F (59-0)
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Weekly Reading Schedule (subject to change on notice)

W 1	T Feb 10	Course introduction and syllabus overview
	Th Feb 12	Contemporary / Dystopia: conceptual and critical framework “Time capsule” by Atwood
W2	Feb 17	Conceptual and critical framework cont. (Ferns & Bauman)
	Feb 19	Conceptual and critical framework cont.
W3	Feb 24	Conceptual and critical framework cont. (Lyon & Bauman); “The Veldt” by Bradbury
	Feb 26	“The Veldt” cont.
W4	March 3	“The Subliminal Man” by Ballard
	Mar 5	Claeys & Fisher
W5	Mar 10	Claeys & Fisher cont.
	Mar 12	In-class response on critical framework
W6	Mar 17	<i>H(A)PPY</i> by Barker
	Mar 19	<i>H(A)PPY</i> cont.
W7	Mar 24	<i>H(A)PPY</i> cont.
	Mar 26	<i>H(A)PPY</i> cont.
W8	Mar 31	<i>ZED</i> by Kavenna
	Apr 2	<i>ZED</i> cont.
W9	Apr 7	Midterm
	Apr 9	<i>ZED</i> cont.
W10	Apr 14	<i>ZED</i> cont.
	Apr 16	<i>ZED</i> cont.
W11		SPRING BREAK
W12	Apr 28	“Pump Six” by Bacigalupi
	Apr 30	<i>Venomous Lumpsucker</i> by Beauman
W13	May 5	<i>Venomous Lumpsucker</i>
	Ma 7	<i>Venomous Lumpsucker</i> cont.
W 14	May 12	<i>Venomous Lumpsucker</i>
	May 14	Overall Review