

## **Making Babies – Women in Dystopia Lecture**

02/03/23

Day 1: Jane's Lesson

### **Notes:**

- Student made an essay about the Japanese manga called 'Bleach', looking at the cultural difference of Eastern and Western worlds – how it did well in Japan and in European culture it did shit.
- Looking at Berlin in 1927, what was happening at the time?
- 'Women's bodies as sites of 'repression and possession' they are inferior but still exploitable and colonizable because superior systems can dispose of them at will'
- Storytelling and conflict: what's at stake for our characters?
- 'People are what happens to them. All stories should start with character.'
- Strong female character 'Starr' from 'The Hate You Give'

### **PowerPoint Notes:**

- Systems of oppression: space, language, and the physical body
- Women's bodies as sites of 'repression and possession' (Wolff, J. (1990). *Feminine sentences : essays on women and culture*. Oxford: Polity.) they are inferior but still exploitable and 'colonizable', because superior systems can dispose of them at will.
- Representation: who is 'allowed' to act/have agency/make things happen?
- What is an author/director/designer setting out to show?
- Space, Language/speech, Thought, Actions -- Those on the 'outside' are blamed, excluded, repressed, manipulated; cast out.
- The dystopian world as narrow/tall/divided -- People in them as 'lands' to be invaded, colonized, and defeated
- In contemporary dystopian narratives, women are given room to redefine the role of women in dystopian fiction.
- Female character transformed from a counterpoint for the protagonist, to the protagonist herself.
- Dalcher, a retired theoretical linguist, said she was inspired in part by the women's marches around the country after the 2016 election. -- "I thought, there must be a ton of people who are watching this and rolling their eyes and saying, I wish they would just shut up," she said. "What better way to force somebody into submission than to take away the one thing that makes them human, language?"
- 21st century suppression/oppression of women -- Reproductive rights, the right to wear what she chooses, the right to vote, to drive, to petition for divorce, to go to school, to work ...
- Atwood on *Handmaid's Tale*: "When I wrote the book, I wished we would not be in a situation where these protests would become necessary. There's certainly a very concerted push toward making women's bodies a possession of the state in the United States." -- Journalists, critics and scholars have evidenced the allegorical connection between Gilead's reality and the contemporary political context of several nations
- "The moment that we're in is terrifying for a lot of women, and the story that Margaret Atwood created captures that fear so incredibly well,"

- (Lori Lodes, an adviser for Demand Justice, a liberal advocacy group that organized the recent protests at the Senate)

## CONTEXT

**In informed Practice you're opening a discussion *around* the subject, not *about* the subject.**

You're always looking from the *outside* in: you're asking important critical questions about context –

historical/social/economic, etc; about characterisation, *representation*:

- What are characters there to do?
- What *do* they do?
- Who has a voice?
- Are they allowed agency? An *active/pro-active* role?
- Who is allowed to 'win'/survive/protect others/fall in love/fight back on their terms?
- Can they dominate a scene? Can they take down another character?
- Can they be aggressive/passionate/predatory?

## ***Dystopia***

1600 words on:

- *Meaning*
- *Subtext*
- *Context*
- *Theory*
- *Psychology*
- *Behaviour*
- *Representation*
- *Narrative/character choices*

## **Space:**

- To confine
- Spaces re-purposed as an extension of the 'authority'.
- An expression of reach, power
- To supervise
- To surveil
- To exclude
- To divide
- To control
- To 'other.'

## **Speech:**

By limiting language, those in power spread only **necessary concepts and messages**, and eradicate unwanted ideas.

- 'Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it.' *Orwell, G. (1949). 1984. Harlow: Pearson Education.*
- '... it will be our duty to compel them to be happy. But before resorting to arms, we shall try the power of words.' WE (on D-5003's diary on the spaceship *Integral*'s mission to bring 'happiness without freedom' to other planets. *Evgenii Ivanovich Zamiatin and Lodge, K. (2020). We. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press.*

- 'Sonia doesn't know what the wrist counters do, other than glow brightly and show her numbers and pulse against her wrist, one time for each word she speaks. We've been careful to keep this secret from her.' *Dalcher, C. (2018). Vox. Penguin.*

### **Bodies:**

By 'limiting' bodies, those in power can shape the 'perfect citizen', docile and obedient.

- Otherness seen as threatening.
- Allows for/justifies the **marginalization** or exclusion of sexual, ideological, or racial "others".

*'Modesty is invisibility,' said Aunt Lydia. 'Never forget it. To be seen— to be seen—is to be'— her voice trembled— 'penetrated.'*

### **A woman's place:**

Power is the patriarchy

Women as objectified and disempowered

Psychologist Karen Horney(1885-1952) described how, rather than responding to each woman as a unique, complex, and therefore, potentially fearsome being, men split the concept of Woman into pairs of stereotyped antitheses:

- saint/sinner,
- virgin/whore,
- nurturing mother/devouring stepmother,
- angel/witch.

Objectifying women and casting them as praiseworthy or blameworthy types diminishes the threatening power which women hold for men.

in early dystopian adventures, like the Time Machine (1895), or We by Yevgeny Zamyatin (1921), female characters

are mostly there to catalyse action on the part of the male protagonist.

### **Female Gothic:**

Beyond narrative/mise-en-scene/character, the novel speaks to the world the author is living in.

It can ask questions of it, unpack, criticise, or celebrate its ethics/politics/culture.

In 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century novels fictional female characters reflected the roles women were expected to fill at the time & place of writing.

The classical Georgian/Victorian 'heroine' was to be passive, submissive, meek, and adoring. And for those women who weren't, some stories would serve as 'warnings' of what happens to women who do not fit into socially accepted roles.

Once in a while, a heroine would rise above the expected roles yet in the end, she would return to the domestic area in which she was expected to be, or she would be destroyed.

*'Monsters* are particularly prominent in the work of women writers, because for women the roles of rebel, outcast, seeker of truth, are monstrous in themselves.

For a man to rebel, to leave a comfortable home and to search for truth are noble acts.

Thus, this pattern of behaviour is expressed in the heroic epic.

For women, however, such assertions of questing self-hood have been deemed bizarre and crazy; consequently the Gothic mode -- and in particular the concept of self as monster -- is associated with narratives of female experience.

[ ]In their Gothic narratives women reveal deep-seated conflicts between a socially acceptable passive, congenial, "feminine" self and a suppressed, monstrous hidden self.'

Monsters and Madwomen: Changing Female Gothic

Karen F. Stein. In *The Female Gothic*, ed. Julian E. Fleenor (Montreal: Eden, 1983), pp. 123-37

- In Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, the darker, monstrous, more sexual, angry self, Bertha, is killed in order that the more moderate, more controlled self, Jane, can live within the limitations imposed by society.
- The 'madwoman' serves as a symbol of the inner turmoil, the suppressed, monstrous inner self that so fascinated and appalled the Victorians in equal measure.
- Monsters and Madwomen: Changing Female Gothic
- Karen F. Stein. In *The Female Gothic*, ed. Julian E. Fleenor (Montreal: Eden, 1983), pp. 123-37

The first permanent and recognisable change of such roles in literature becomes obvious at the turn from the 19th to the 20th century.

From the Gothic towards Modernism.

The time marked the rise of the women's liberation and suffrage movement with sweeping changes occurring in many issues of gender and social class.

For the next hundred years, the roles and characteristics of women in literature underwent a greater change than in all previous centuries put together.

In *Brave New World* (1932) where babies are produced in laboratories and drug-fueled/emotionless sex is encouraged; procreation and the entire idea of 'motherhood' is utterly horrifying:

### Quotes:

"Reuben was the child of Polish-speaking parents."

The Director interrupted himself. "You know what Polish is, I suppose?"

"A dead language."

"Like French and German," added another student, officiously showing off his learning.

"And 'parent'?" questioned the D.H.C.

There was an uneasy silence. Several of the boys blushed. They had not yet learned to draw the significant but often very fine distinction between smut and pure science. One, at last, had the courage to raise a hand.

"Human beings used to be ..." he hesitated; the blood rushed to his cheeks. "Well, they used to be viviparous."

"Quite right." The Director nodded approvingly.

"And when the babies were decanted ..."

"Born," came the correction.

"Well, then they were the parents—I mean, not the babies, of course; the other ones." The poor boy was overwhelmed with confusion.

"In brief," the Director summed up, "the parents were the father and the mother." The

smut that was really science fell with a crash into the boys' eye-avoiding silence. "Mother," he repeated loudly rubbing in the science; and, leaning back in his chair, "These," he said gravely, "are unpleasant facts; I know it. But then most historical facts are unpleasant."

*'Weena had been hugely delighted when I began to carry her, but after a while she desired me to let her down, and ran along by the side of me, occasionally darting off on either hand to pick flowers to stick in my pockets.'*

*'... taking Weena like a child upon my shoulder, I went up the hills towards the south-west.'*  
Wells, H.G. (2008). *The Time Machine*. New York, N.Y.: Baronet Books.

Mackintosh: "I felt like I didn't need to invent a disaster, because there was already a disaster happening."

## **1984**

'Unlike Winston, [Julia] had grasped the inner meaning of the Party's sexual puritanism. It was not merely that the sex instinct created a world of its own which was outside the Party's control, and which therefore had to be destroyed if possible. What was more important was that sexual privation induced hysteria, which was desirable because it could be transformed into war-fever and leader-worship.'

'Tacitly the Party was even inclined to encourage prostitution, as an outlet for instincts which could not altogether be suppressed. Mere debauchery did not matter very much, so long as it was furtive and joyless, and only involved women of a submerged and despised class. The unforgivable crime was promiscuity between Party members.'

## **WE:**

'A Number may obtain a licence to use any other Number as a sexual product [ ] on sexual days the numbers also receive a certificate permitting the use of curtains. This right exists in our State for the sexual days. Normally we live surrounded by transparent walls which seem to be knitted from sparkling air; we live beneath the eyes of everyone, always bathed in light. We have nothing to conceal from one another.'

In early novels the female character could often be viewed as a catalyst or 'trigger' for the action – a plot 'device' for adventure, only to step aside for the male protagonist once that action is in play.

The male protagonist has initiative, is resourceful and clever.

He's an 'Everyman' who begins to question the society in which he lives. They go on to elicit, with varying degrees of success, some kind of change.

As in the Garden of Eden, **it is Eve**, who, in the story, guides the man's will towards change.

## **[The Time Machine \(1960\)](#)**

**[Dir: George Pal](#)**

The Time Machine (1960) – Dir: George Pal

Everywoman: the eternal counterpoint. She can be active aide in rebellion or sexual partner, but her role is only ever as helpmeet.

## **Good sci-fi books to look at:**

Oryx Crake

Brave New World

WE

VOX

Jane Eyre

Monster theory Jeffrey Jerome cohen (seven thesis of monsterring)

The time machine

The power (naomi alderman)

Homework: Watch the film 'Metropolis' by Fritz Lang

Notes from watching clip from 1984:

- Bleak lighting
- Joyless, depressing
- Communication is limited
- Clothing is important – all characters meant to wear same thing, so any other clothing is somewhat promiscuous