UTOPIA

The word utopia comes from the Greek words ‘ou’ (=not) and ‘topos’ (=place). Thus, its meaning would be “no place”. Still, there is another possibility of the word’s origin, namely from the eutopia which is pronounced exactly the same as utopia. Eutopia is made up of the words ‘eu’ (=good) and ‘topos’ (=place) and therefore means “good place”.

Indeed, a utopia is somehow both. It describes a non-existing, perfect society.

The term first came up when the English cleric Thomas More published his book “Utopia” in 1516. In this book, More describes an ideal community living in perfect harmony and peace. This community lives quite isolated on an island. Nevertheless, a class system exists and some people even own slaves. Hence, it is doubtful whether this society would nowadays still be regarded as perfect.

In modern literature, utopias are often placed in the future or at unreal places, for example in the universe on a different planet. This allows the reader to believe in the possibility of a utopian society. It sometimes also aims at criticizing the current status.

DYSTOPIA

Dystopia, the antithesis to utopia, derives from the Greek words ‘dis’ and ‘topos’ which mean ‘bad place’. So, dystopias describe a future, inhuman, fictional society, worse than the current society by visions of moral or totalitarian control, poverty, oppression (→ slavery), starvation, corruption, terror, etc. Mostly these are exaggerated depictions of already existing problems (cf. extrapolation), simply in its worst-case scenario. Therewith the author warns the people as he tries to prevent further developing of a certain trend by illustrating its possible extent and consequences.

Often, utopias turn into dystopias in order to stress the non-existence and impossibility of a perfect world. In the beginning, the illusion of a disciplined, sorted and classified ‘perfect’ society is created which starts cracking and in the end the ‘cruel truth’ is unearthed.

The protagonist in a dystopian society might either try to escape the oppressive authority or he just questions the social system itself; he also can slowly realize the falseness of the society or shows the reader the bad characteristics of the seemingly utopian world.

The term was first used by the English philosopher and economist John Stuart Mill in 1868. Even though the First Industrial Revolution and its technical progress were seen as a positive turn, at the end of the 19th century, during the Second Industrial Revolution, the people started worrying and became averse to the change’s speed. Pessimistic visions of the future became even more common after the two World Wars and the totalitarian control of especially the Third Reich.

The best-known examples of a dystopia are Aldous Huxley’s ‘Brave New World’ and George Orwell’s ‘1984’.
Science fiction can be described as a phantasy story, based on at least parts of scientific laws, whose course might be possible in the future. The terms was first used in 1929 and its most famous authors are Jules Verne (20,000 Leagues Under The Sea), Ray Bradbury (Martian Chronicles) and Arthur Clarke (Space Odyssey). Dystopias also often employ science-fiction as Orwell (1984) or Huxley (Brave New World) as technology and progress do not always mean something good. Furthermore, Mary Shelley’s ‘Frankenstein’ (1810) is seen as a gothic science-fiction novel, as the topic is basically the monster which came into being through the scientific ambition of the professor and the creation’s consequences. Shelley wanted to criticize the thoughtless creation and development of technical progress during the Second Industrial Revolution.

George Orwell: 1984

The novel “1984” by George Orwell is a dystopia and it was published in 1948. It tells the story of Winston Smith who lives in the fictional Oceania, which is strictly controlled by the Thought Police and the ruling party INGSOC (= English Socialists). One method they use in order to control society is the introduction of a ‘Big Brother’. The citizens of Oceania are frightened by posters entitled “Big Brother is watching you” so that they feel more insecure and respect the authority of the government. Moreover, the party has three slogans (‘War is peace’, ‘freedom is slavery’ and ‘ignorance is strength’) and four ministries were introduced, the Ministry of Truth, the Ministry of Peace, the Ministry of Love and the Ministry of Plenty. However, these ministries do not secure the values they stand for, but instead they aim at preventing them. Beside this, Orwell also introduced a new language for this novel, Newspeak. This implies that terms intended against the ruling party cannot be said anymore, since they have been cut off from the vocabulary. Also, it means that the citizens cannot utter criticism of the government and their freedom is limited.

In addition, we also watched a short scene from the film version. The scene was quite at the end of the movie and it showed the torture of Winston, because he had illicitly fallen in love with a girl named Julia. Winston is brought to the notorious Room 101 and there the police use rats, which Winston fears the most, in order to make Winston betray Julia.
Kazou Ishiguro: **NEVER LET ME GO**

This dystopia from 2005 is about clones that grow up in a boarding school called Hailsham separated from the environment. They only exist in order to donor their organs to the persons from who they are cloned.

The main characters in the novel are the clones Kathy, Tommy and Ruth.

In class we talked about two excerpts from the novel. In the first, Kathy asks why clones are treated the way they are. The answer is that most of the people were happy about the progress in medical science and did not ask where all the organs come from. And after they knew the truth about the clones that are made to die, it was irreversible due to the advantages they had already gotten from the organ donations.

In the second excerpt Kathy and Tommy attack a former guardian from Hailsham after they have been separated after school.

We had to carve out the attitudes of the world and of the guardian toward the clones.

These were our main results:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude of the world towards the clones</th>
<th>Attitude of the guardian towards the clones</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- no human being</td>
<td>- clones have souls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- “shadowy objects in test tubes”</td>
<td>- clones can be as sensitive and as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- no identity/personality</td>
<td>intelligent as normal humans when</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- something lies in the dark</td>
<td>they are raised in a human</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- no going back</td>
<td>environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- less human</td>
<td>- Hailsham students are better off than</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- only existing to supply medical</td>
<td>clones at other schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>science</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⇒ Acceptance or superiority?

Additionally, we said that the story features extrapolation. This means that it is aiming at warning of certain current tendencies while transforming them into the past.
Margaret Atwood: Oryx and Crake

This dystopian novel whose topic is genetic engineering treats of ‘Snowman’ who is the only human left on earth after a virus that eradicated everyone else and devastated the planet. While living together with humanoid creatures, the Crakers, and some superficial animal cross-species like the wolvog (wolf + dog), the rakunk (raccoon + skunk) and the pigoon (transgenic pig), Snowman tells his story before destruction through flashbacks. The reader gets to know that ‘Snowman’, once called Jimmy, lived in a world where genetic engineering was normal. His childhood friend Crake tried to create an immortal, perfect, human race that has no bad traits, supported by Oryx with whom Crake has a relationship. After Jimmy accepted Crake’s offer to work in his company, Jimmy also develops a relationship with Oryx but Crake does not know. During the narration of the past, the ‘present’ is also described by Snowman. Therewith the reader finds out that the utopian, immortal, bad-character-free Crakers do show behavior of the characteristics Crake tried to breed out. To add, these creatures, also called the ‘Paradice models’, lack of interest in art, culture, love and religion, they also cannot read or write. So the typical dystopian aim, which is to make the reader think about the criticized topic, is achieved also by its open-ending. The impact of the newly created, boosting ‘synthetically’ world is scrutinized and makes one think about the rightness of this science. The question of where one has to draw the line is left unresolved.

These were our tasks and results in class:
Crase and Jimmy discuss about the Crakers’ lack of interest in art and their animal-like behavior concerning mating and reproduction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Crake</th>
<th>Jimmy/ Snowman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attitude towards mating and art</strong></td>
<td>Humans:</td>
<td>Humans:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➔ hormone robots</td>
<td>➔ Challenge, excitement, chase, free choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➔ their mismatching is</td>
<td>➔ Mismatching is inspiration for poetry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of needless despair</td>
<td>➔ Art only thing that is left over when ‘civilization is dust and ashes’ -&gt; human is defined by art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(to Crake’s mind the)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>better propose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crakers:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➔ fulfil biological purpose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➔ father not measuring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➔ art is not needed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Presentation of the character</strong></td>
<td>Rational thinking, no emotions, self-confident -&gt; hubristic</td>
<td>Skeptical, emotional, traditional, critical, likely to blush, passionate -&gt; a humanist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Gattaca**

Gattaca is a film by Andrew Niccol from 1997. It depicts a future society in which there are “valid” and “invalid” persons. Valid are those who are genetically engineered and invalid persons are born naturally. The movie tells the story of Vincent Freeman. He was born naturally, but since the scientific engineering of genes at this time becomes popular, his parents have also another son who is “valid”. Vincent thus grows up in a society in which he is not as accepted as his brother. Still, he dreams of becoming an astronaut which only valid persons can be. *Hence, he starts a cleaning job at the aeronautics and space organization Gattaca.* With the identity of Jerome Morrow he gets the job he always wanted, a flight to Titan, the biggest moon of Saturn.

In class, we watched the first few scenes from the movie and we had to do the following while-viewing tasks:

1. **How is the world of Gattaca introduced and which atmosphere is created?**
   - colors: dark, monotonous, white, one color is in each scene superior
   - sounds: sad, melancholic
   - architecture: wide, futuristic, clean, round, colorless
   - space: many trips to planets/moons, >12 launches every day
   - clothing: suits, severe
   - facial expressions: rare emotions, self-confident, sure

2. **How is the importance of a person’s genes reflected?**
   - very important
   - every decision is based on it
   - “invalid” people: no chance to get a good job
   - “genoism”

3. **How do Vincent’s parents react to the diagnosis of the geneticist after his birth?** (= the geneticist says that Vincent has a life expectancy of 30 years due to a heart defect)
   - desperate, but also proud
   - still want another healthy child

4. **What are the two possibilities of conceiving a child?**
   - birth
   - laboratory (called “natural way” in the movie)

5. **What effects does Anton’s (Vincent’s brother) birth have on Vincent’s life?**
   - Vincent feels inferior
   - Anton is taller
   - The two boys often do a swimming contest and Anton always wins

![Image of Vincent Freeman and Jerome Morrow]
**Equilibrium**

In a future world in which a third world war has taken place, emotions are suppressed by a drug named Prozium in order to avoid further wars. Moreover, any kind of art, music and literature is forbidden and non-observance of the new laws passed by the regime, the so-called Tetragrammaton, is punished with a sentence of death. Preston is a member of the Clerics who defend these laws and kill those ‘Sense Offenders’ (the people who fight the Tetragrammaton). He starts to change his mind when he accidentally misses a dose of Prozium and starts to feel. Therefore, it is a typical dystopian movie.

Our task in class:

We watched the first few minutes of Equilibrium where Preston tracks a Sense Offender and murders him. Afterwards, he and another man are burning the Mona Lisa.

1. What is the task of ‘grammaton Cleric’?
   - Destroy the ability to feel
   - seek people who did not take their pills

2. By which means do they perform?
   - Catch people and kill them -> violently

3. What is the role of art in this society?
   - Unimportant
   - Has to be destroyed
   - Hidden from people