

# Utopian and dystopian fiction

**Utopian fiction** is the creation of an ideal world as the setting for a novel. **Dystopian fiction** is the opposite: creation of a nightmare world, sometimes also described as "the victory of forces of reason over forces of kindness". Both are commonly found in science fiction novels and stories.

## Etymology

The term "utopia" is combined from two Greek words — "no" (οὐ, ou) and "place/land" (τόπος, topos), thus meaning "nowhere" or more literally, "no-place/no-land". It could also be considered to come from the two Greek words "good" (εὖ, eu) and, again, "place/land" (τόπος, topos). The word "utopia" was created to suggest two Greek neologisms simultaneously: *outopia* (no place) and *eutopia* (good place). In this original context, the word carried none of the modern connotations associated with it.

The word *utopia* was first used in a literary context by Thomas More in his work *Utopia*.

The first use of the word "dystopia" has been credited to John Stuart Mill in 1868, whose knowledge of Greek would suggest that he meant it as a place where things are bad, rather than simply the opposite of Utopia. The Greek prefix "dys" or "dis" signifies "ill", "bad" or "abnormal", whereas "ou" means "not".

## More's Utopia

Thomas More depicts a rationally organized society, through the narration of an explorer who discovers it - Raphael Hythlodæus.

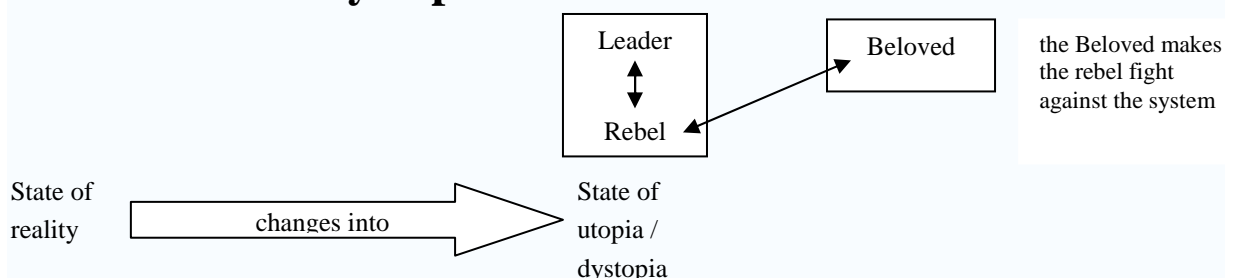
Utopia is largely based on Plato's *Republic*. It is a perfect version of The Republic where the beauties of society reign (eg: equalism and a general pacifist attitude), although its citizens are all ready to fight if need be. The evils of society, eg: poverty and misery, are all removed. It has few laws, no lawyers and rarely sends its citizens to war, but hires mercenaries from among its war-prone neighbours.

Utopia also reflects More's commitment to Christianity, as the people are united by belief in a Supreme Being, a priest administers the island's religious affairs, and belief in what is essentially the Christian Afterlife is mandatory. Furthermore the Utopians are depicted as readily accepting of Christian doctrine when introduced to such by European visitors. More extends the communism of property to all citizens, reflecting his familiarity with the early Christian society described in the Biblical *Acts of the Apostles* (Acts 2.44-45, 4.32-35). Furthermore, vices commonly condemned by the Catholic Church (to which More belonged), such as pre-marital sex, prostitution, adultery, gambling, theft and drunkenness, are outlawed and severely punished.

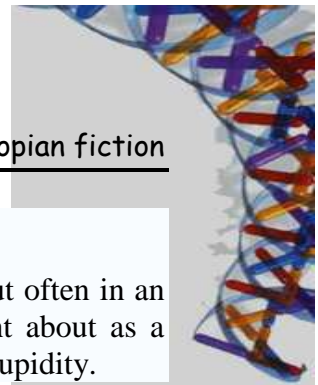


Generally, many works of utopian fiction depict an outsider, a time-traveler or a foreigner, who can be shown the features of the society so that they can be shown to the reader. Dystopias usually include elements of contemporary society and function as a warning against some modern trend. Often, the warning is against the threat of fascism in one form or another.

## Basic model of dystopian fiction



adapted and abbreviated from wikipedia.org „Utopia“, „Utopian and dystopian fiction“, „dystopia“, Wenzel’s lecture „Utopian Novel in English and American Literature“



## Common traits of a dystopian society

The overwhelming majority of dystopias have some connection to our world, but often in an imagined future or an alternate history. Furthermore, the dystopia was brought about as a result of human action or inaction, whether stemming from human evil or mere stupidity.

Dystopian societies usually exhibit one or more of the traits on the following list	"The Island"		
	true	false	not shown
• A Utopian society with at least one fatal flaw.			
• An apparently Utopian society, free of poverty, disease, conflict, and even unhappiness. Scratching the surface of the society, however, reveals exactly the opposite. The exact problem, the way the problem is suppressed, and the chronology of the problem form the central conflict of the story.			
• Social stratification, where social class is strictly defined and enforced, and social mobility is non-existent.			
• A nation-state ruled by an upper class with few, or no, democratic ideals. The lack of democracy becomes a dystopian feature when the government is clearly imposed by force on a citizenry capable of self-government.			
• Conversely, a ruthlessly egalitarian society, in which ability and accomplishment, or even competence, are suppressed or stigmatized as forms of inequality.			
• Total control by the state of all economic activity. Private ownership may still exist, but the owners are controlled by the state. Black markets may exist, or not, but on the whole, freedom to engage in economic activities is severely limited in these dystopias.			
• State propaganda programs and educational systems that scare most citizens into worshipping the state and its government, in an attempt to convince them to believe that life under the regime is good and just.			
• Fear of, or disgust at, the world outside the state.			
• A common view of traditional life as primitive and nonsensical.			
• Alternatively, complete domination by a state religion.			
• The "memory" of institutions overriding, or taking precedence over, human memory.			
• A penal system that lacks due process laws and often employs psychological and/or physical torture.			
• A lack of the key essentials of life for many citizens, as with food shortages. If the cause of this is clear, it is not natural disaster or crop failure, but deliberate engineering.			
• Constant surveillance by governments or other agencies.			
• Absence, or total co-option, of an educated middle class (such as teachers, journalists, and scientists) who might criticize the regime's leadership.			
• Militarized police forces and private security forces.			
• The banishment of the natural world from daily life.			