

ENGL 3404: Studies in Popular Texts: “Dystopian Tales and Alternative Futures”
T/Th, 1:00 – 2:25
Carey Mickalites

Do you ever feel like you’re living in a dark, “dystopian” time? You’re not alone! Dystopian tales, stories that give form and expression to our collective fears, have long enjoyed a popular status. And yet maybe part of that popularity comes not only from the “relatability” of all that is horrific about the human experience, but for the way dystopian fantasies often contain utopian possibilities, thereby summoning our desire for a better world, for alternative futures that are not foredoomed by historical realities like authoritarianism, racism and sexism, or even the apparent inescapability of capitalism’s destructive tendencies. In other words, we will spend some time reveling in texts that deal with our darkest fears, while asking how they point to the possibility of a better world.

We will study literary works, film, and select works in criticism and philosophy. I will include some classic texts and tales by the likes of Mary Shelley, H.G. Wells, George Orwell, and Margaret Atwood, as well as works chosen by students through a poll. The course should appeal to students in Literature, Creative Writing, Rhetoric, Philosophy, History, and the Social Sciences.

Students will conduct a series of short writing assignments, undertake a creative project or presentation, and write a final research paper on a topic of their choice.

For questions or suggestions, please email Dr. Mickalites: cjmcklts@memphis.edu