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**Eckart Voigts and Alessandra Boller, eds. *Dystopia, Science Fiction, Post-Apocalypse: Classics – New Tendencies – Model Interpretations*. Trier: WVT, 2015. 440 pp.**

Five-hundred years after the publication of Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), the fictional exploration of new societies is as topical as ever, although for the last century it has mainly appeared in the darker form of dystopia. Considering the great interest in dystopian fiction among scholars, teachers and students, the present handbook is a welcome addition to the publisher's series "WVT-Handbücher zum literaturwissenschaftlichen Studium." While most well-known dystopias are also covered in numerous companions to the science fiction genre, with its concise format, up-to-date information and coherent dystopian focus, the present volume certainly fills a gap. In contrast to comparable edited volumes on the topic<sup>1</sup> and several encyclopaedias and a companion that cover the whole range of utopian literature, the handbook format aims to combine great breadth and depth for a wide readership and thereby offers itself as an ideal reference book.

The editors' introduction to *Dystopia, Science Fiction, Post-Apocalypse* takes on the challenge of defining and differentiating the three terms of the book's title, explains the general approach, and works as a disclaimer for the unavoidable omissions in the overall corpus. Based on the observation that "the field of contemporary dystopian narratives is marked by generic hybridity," the editors not only advocate a trans-generic but also a trans-medial approach that includes many narrative media (prose, film, graphic novels, video games) and literary genres that overlap in their "dystopian concerns" (6). While the introduction serves its purpose well, the discussion of science fiction and dystopia is somewhat problematic. The desire "to shed the term sf entirely" and to better replace it with "speculative fiction" (5) contradicts not only the title of the volume but is also inconsistent with the fact that many contributions therein use SF as a term and genre without hesitation. Perhaps it would have been more helpful to explain why most dystopias can be categorised as science fiction, but not vice versa, and to introduce the apocalypse as a common device to authenticate drastic changes in society (or even its absence) which tend to be for the worse in dystopian fiction. However, the overlap and interconnectedness of the three key terms in the title become more apparent from the first chapter on, which discusses H.G. Wells' *Time Machine* and *War of the Worlds* as early dystopian SF, with the focus on evolution and progress as double-edged concepts. Along with the insight that progress is a highly ambiguous notion, Richard Nate's suggestion that dystopia and utopia can often be "two sides of the same coin" (25) is another critical trajectory that develops through the whole volume.

The twenty-five chapters of the volume broadly follow a chronological order from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, which allows the reader to trace general developments of dystopian fiction. Additionally, most chapters begin with a short historical outline that helps to locate the chosen aspects (e.g. totalitarianism) and appropriate examples (e.g. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*) within the dystopian tradition. The foci of the chapters relate to many different categories, but one could broadly differentiate them into the two main groups of themes (e.g. degeneration, biotechnology, eugenics/reproduction, totalitarianism, isolation, violence, religion, ecology, apocalypse) and cultural movements (e.g. feminism, posthumanism, postcolonialism, cyberpunk, surrealism, postmodernism), which tend to come with distinct modes of narration and preferred settings. Two chapters focus on narrative media outside the main corpus of literature and film (graphic novels, video games), while the last essay uses a target audience (young adult fiction) as a framework to shed light on dystopian fiction and its appeals. In several chapters, literary texts are discussed in combination with their cinematic adaptations, which are sometimes better known than the novels, for instance Philip K. Dick's "Dystopian Androids" (ch. 7) in the film *Blade Runner*. In total, the volume includes basically all well-

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan, eds. *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*. New York: Routledge, 2003; and Fátima Vieira, ed. *Dystopia(n) Matters: On the Page, on Screen, on Stage*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013.

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known authors of anglophone dystopias and a number of writers one rarely finds in existing overviews of dystopian fiction (e.g. J.M. Coetzee, David Mitchell). Similarly, due to the diversity of the twenty-five essays, an impressive number of different novels, short stories and films are covered, ranging from a short mention to a longer discussion of key texts.

In general, the contributions do not aim at exhaustive readings but at setting dystopian works into perspective, ranging from their political, scientific, economic and philosophical context to genre history and intertextual references. This contextualising approach makes the volume especially valuable, since it not only provides manifold connections between individual works and chapters (sometimes pointed out explicitly), but also indicates many possible academic approaches to dystopias. While all of the essays have the discussion of key works at their heart, several chapters provide a model analysis that exemplifies the usefulness of certain theoretical concepts as critical tools. Most of these concepts and approaches already have a considerable tradition in the study of SF and dystopia, such as Foucauldian biopower and heterotopia, Baudrillard's taxonomy of simulacra, or Haraway's posthuman cyborg. Regarding genre theory, Darko Suvin's notion of 'cognitive estrangement' as a feature of both SF and utopian literature is repeatedly employed, while several chapters discuss dystopia as a fluid and ambiguous category with theoretical underpinnings. In particular the concept of the 'critical dystopia' (coined by Lyman Tower Sargent, but greatly developed by Tom Moylan), for narratives that resist closure and point to the overlap of utopia and dystopia, is exemplified in two chapters that mainly draw on feminist works. To facilitate the usefulness of the essays as an overview and starting point for further critical discussions, each chapter includes two bibliographies of secondary literature. The first one is annotated and highlights some good introductions to the respective works, authors, or themes, while the longer list of "Further Secondary Literature" includes the remaining sources.

Although it will hardly surprise anyone, it is noteworthy that the volume is almost exclusively devoted to anglophone works of fiction (esp. from the UK, the US and Canada), while repeatedly a Russian author (Y. Zamyatin), and occasionally a Polish (S. Lem), French (M. Houellebecq) or German one (J. Zeh) is mentioned as context. However, this restriction is common practice and it is the stated focus of the handbook, which is rather an advantage for its use in English departments. As a side note, the scholars most often cited are Tom Moylan and Darko Suvin, the literary work most often referred to is *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (with *Brave New World* as a close second), and more pages are devoted to the fiction of Margaret Atwood than to any other author. The detailed discussion of her *MaddAddam* trilogy and many other works from the 21<sup>st</sup> century shows that *Dystopia, Science Fiction, Post-Apocalypse* is not only up-to-date, but clearly supportive of the dynamics of dystopian fiction.

In this handbook, scholars of dystopia and science fiction will certainly find aspects or works of interest that are not on their radar yet, but it seems especially suited for lecturers and students who want to delve more deeply into the field of dystopian fiction. The interest of students in dystopian works seems to be considerable, and the present volume could be a great starting point in the library for research papers and theses. Considering this, the book would have profited from an index and robust binding, but these are minor flaws. The editors have clearly succeeded in compiling a handbook that covers the classics as much as new tendencies, while the contributors' model interpretations introduce key aspects of the works in a non-dogmatic, contextualising way. The essays are written in a lucid style that refrains from using jargon or hyperbolic arguments, the chapter headings are transparent and the texts deliver what they promise. Due to the wide coverage of works and aspects of dystopian fiction, the concise outline of the chapters and their high readability, *Dystopia, Science Fiction, Post-Apocalypse* is a great reference book for a wide readership and therefore highly recommended.

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