

Dotopia

If this world is a dystopia, given all the problems that surround us, why do we need to make it worse?

Dystopias resemble the folk stories my grandma told me when I was little—terrifying, but also real enough to be true. They put me to sleep somehow, and I changed the stories in my dreams. Utopia is maybe similar to this process: falling asleep and dreaming of change.

We conjure worse case scenarios readily, but struggle to imagine best-case narratives. Dystopia is easy to imagine, because it seems to surround us: government control, propaganda, censorship, etc. It seems real because these problems exist in society. Utopia, on the other hand, seems too good to be true, because the ideals underpinning such fantasies don't exist anymore.

Two years ago, I took a Modern World Humanity class that covered ideologies like communism, nationalism, imperialism, enlightenment, and the industrial revolution, along with texts arguing how they would lead to a better society, a utopia. For contrast, we read *1984*, *Brave New World*, and *Mein Kampf*. As our final class assignment, we were required to write a short story. It could follow either model. At first, I'd wanted to write a utopic story—but this was harder than it seemed. The world's chaos blocked my imagination. I chose dystopia instead, feeling there were things I could warn people about: the threat of technology, how politics serves limited groups of people. Now, when I return to that story, it leaves me hopeless and full of despair, because I changed my ordinary day-to-day fears into their ultimate nightmares.

Nowadays, dystopia surrounds us everywhere—in books, movies, television series. It has become a dominant theme. Like in my story, this culture leaves us feeling helpless. I remember reading *1984*. It took me a year to finish it, because I found its themes so terrifying: totalitarianism, government oppression, ideological brainwashing, the way they forced ideals upon society. This resonated with me, because I recognized I was surrounded by these problems to an extent. The themes represented in the novel existed in reality.

Yet dystopias may also be valuable because, by warning us about the future, they offer the possibility to change it. This is why, in my poems, I talk about past experiences but from an angle never before considered, hoping that, through my writing, mistakes won't be repeated again in the future.

Differing from utopia, however, is my focus on writing not for some abstract ideal, but for the generation to come. To make sure I did something to improve the world, and make a difference in the lives of my loved ones. When I write about past experiences, my intent is to transform the past into a better future, similar to how I dreamed of folk tales as a girl

To preserve the warning of dystopia while emphasizing utopia's promise, I developed the concept of Dotopia, through which I imagine the future to be a better version of the past. By that, I mean that the story signals that a tragedy has already taken place; the major action of the story has ended, but through the perspective of a character in the future, resolution is still possible. For example, in my poem "Du'a," Du'a is stoned to death. Other poets and writers showed hatred, revenge and anger telling her story. But Du'a forgives those who stone her, and talks with the stones to show the other side of love.

Dystopias are like silence; the longer you sit with them, the sooner you'll confront your deepest fears. Utopias, on the other hand, lull you into the feeling that there is nothing wrong.

Since it is difficult for us to imagine utopia, and dystopia already surrounds us, let's keep the promise of utopia and the warning of dystopia—the opposite of what we have today, when worst case scenarios paralyze us, and few have the faith that anything can be changed.