

Human Rights Violation in Dystopian Narratives: Literary and Legal Perspectives

Summary

Dystopia is a genre whose engagement in socio-political matters is widely recognized. Taking its inspiration from the alarming tendencies in the world in which the author lives, dystopian fiction can be read as a critical commentary of the existing status quo. The first, classical dystopias, which enabled the definition of the genre, emerged as reactions to the atrocities of the first half of the twentieth century, which included two World Wars and the rise of totalitarianism. Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1924), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) offer a satirical critique of the makeup of the societies based on totalitarian principles, which disrespect humans and their dignity. The imagined societies the novels depict are reflections of the oppressive, twentieth-century systems, which to a great extent violated human rights. The creation of the three dystopias coincides with the formulation of the legal document that refers to the question of fundamental rights of individuals. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) is the first international document that delineates the basic principles of humanity, which at that time were blatantly disrespected by totalitarian states. The creation of the "imagined reality" of the legal text was also influenced by the horrors of the twentieth century. What is important in the context of the present considerations, instead of projecting a dystopian extension of the status quo, the document formulates and promotes a utopian contrast to the dystopian narratives.

The juxtaposition of literary dystopias with the Declaration in this dissertation serves to demonstrate that dystopian fiction is of a particular legal value. The systemic violation of the basic principles of humanity remains the main source of horror and terror experienced by dystopian citizens. The disrespect for the fundamental rights of individuals is reflected in the creation of fictional dystopian worlds. The law-oriented content, although usually not explicitly given, is at the centre of the narratives. In order to extract the legal meaning and imagination present in dystopian texts, the application of the legal doctrine seems indispensable. Therefore, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides an analytical tool that enables the identification of the violation of the fundamental values of humanity within the fictional societies as well as the deconstruction of mechanisms of terror and

exploitation applied by the dystopian states. The study of the representations of human rights violations in dystopian fiction is based on the analysis of three classical dystopias and supplemented by a selection of feminist dystopias, that is Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993), Leni Zumas's *Red Clocks* (2018). While the first group of novels provides the fundament for the analysis, the latter supplements the general discussion with the human rights perspective focused specifically on the gender-based discrimination – the issue considered relevant by both dystopian writers and legal scholars.

The dissertation comprises an Introduction, one theoretical and five analytical chapters and the Conclusion. The Introduction delineates the principle aims of the dissertation. Chapter One sets the legal and literary contexts and provide theoretical and historical background for the study. Subsequently, each of the analytical chapters presents the legal interpretation of different groups of rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the application of the legal reasoning onto the fictional worlds of the selected dystopian novels. Chapter Two focuses on the general principles of human rights, as expressed by articles 1 and 2, and their reference to all six dystopian novels selected for the dissertation. Chapter Three addresses the personal liberties and presents an analysis of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Zumas's *Red Clocks* within the context of articles 3 through 11. Chapter Four comprises the discussion on the violation of rights of individuals within the community (articles 12 through 17) as well as the spiritual, public and political liberties (articles 18 through 21) in Huxley's *Brave New World* and Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. Chapter Five is an interpretation of Zamyatin's *We* and Butler's *Parable of the Sower* within the context of the disrespect for economic, social, and cultural rights addressed in articles 22 through 27. Chapter Six includes a transfer of the interpretation of articles 28 through 30 onto the fictional realities of all six dystopias. The Conclusion presents a summary of the dissertation and delineates a possible area of further research.

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