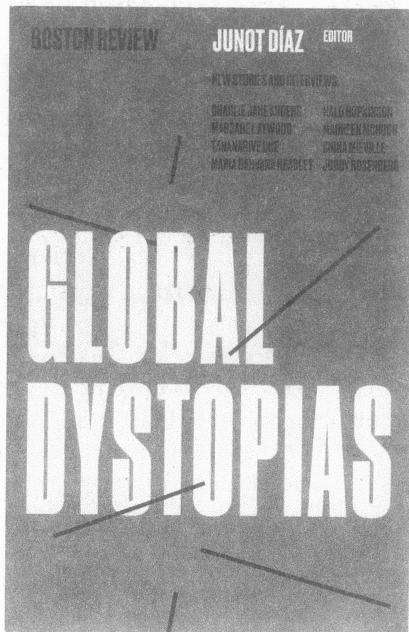


GLOBAL DYSTOPIAS

Edited by Junot Díaz
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Dystopia flourishes within the confines of the shadow that utopia casts in all directions in spacetime, and as such it is neither generic nor topical, but thematic. Recent polemics for and against the application of the term *global* to literature, meanwhile, bear the mark of a distracted moment. Conjoined, these two concepts—whose statuses remain nebulous—indicate our condition: postlapsarian, laborious, and bewildered. *Boston Review* Fiction Editor Junot Díaz states his curatorial vision of this new anthology, *Global Dystopias*, when he claims in a podcast interview that “we are at peak dystopia”; this conflation of life and literature makes the collection challenging, but also accounts for an earnestness that, despite the impeccable execution of these

original stories, essays, and interviews, addresses itself to genre in such a way as to miss an opportunity to disrupt the reader’s expectations of what a volume like this one might contain.

Several conceits climb to phantasmagoria on an infernal scale: “sky veins . . . invisible tracts in the air, leftover from the thermal mining of the atmosphere . . . run all the way into orbit, maybe beyond” (Jordy Rosenberg, “Sky Veins of Potosi”) and “If the research goes well, the benefits to society are limited only by the cadaver pipeline” (Charlie Jane Anders, “Don’t Press Charges and I Won’t Sue”). Henry Farrell’s opinion, in “Philip K. Dick and the Fake Humans,” that “Dystopias may sometimes be grimly funny—but rarely from

the inside” gets consistent support from the sparse social commentary that adorns these pieces, such as Anders’s line “A stereo system plays a CD by that white rock-rap artist who turned out to be an especially

dystopian spirit in literature, from hyperbole (“even on Youtube, you can taste the carcinogens”—Bould), to reportage (“social media manipulation . . . sows an existential distrust”—Farrell), to proposition (“the ontological

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stupid racist.” Several moments insist upon what it ought to be the reader’s privilege to supply instead: we are asked of the unwilling donor in a life transplant procedure, “Is Rachel a contrarian, a freethinker, or just kind of an asshole?” (Anders); a consumer who has switched off her robot mother and put it away in its box tells us that “It depressed me to see it there in the hallway, so normal-looking that it might have held anything” (JR Fenn, “Athena Dreams of a Hollow Body”); and a woman remarks of bickering with her wife that “here, at the end of the world, it’s okay that some things won’t be resolved” (Maureen McHugh, “Cannibal Acts”).

Some of the collection’s most satisfying moments, by contrast, are those in which Mark Bould’s injunction, in “Dulltopia,” to “dive into boredom” in response to ennui, finds expression not only as subject matter but also as verbal formulations: an inspector bleeds on a carpet, “adding her own claret to the pattern” (Sumudu Samarawickrama, “Adora”); a rapist relents, “unfulfilled by this abstract conference of flesh” (Thea Costantino, “Meniscus”); and white colonists “burst from their vehicles like sentient pus” (Maria Dahvana Headley, “Memoirs of an Imaginary Country”). The reader is privy to an ascending sense of the ambiguity of the

unease of a world in which the human and the abhuman, the real and the fake, blur together”—Farrell), and finally to aphorism (“the -topian drive is more contradictory and succulent than some of its vulgar advocates, no less than its critics, make out”—China Miéville, “A Strategy for Ruination”). The difficult ambivalence of this last quotation dwells in its expression as well as in its idea; placing more such confidence in the indistinct and uncertain might better serve devotees of this project and others like it.

The global abides in the subject matter of an artwork as the violence that enforces our state, and dystopia is but one spirit among many that animate an artistic medium during the creative process. These words don’t enjoy any distinction apart from being the terms du jour, and the concepts they signify are as good as others that we might use to explore our condition. If the impeccable tone of genteel public discourse in the United States has a thematic counterpart, a range of themes that is similarly restricted, then *Global Dystopias* expands that narrow area of contact with our collective unconscious. In doing so, this book takes part in a contemporary movement to search for a spirit portal to unlock.

—Erik Noonan