

**(IM)PERFECT WOMEN IN (IM)PERFECT WORLDS:
DYSTOPIAS, UTOPIAS, AND FEMINISM AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 21ST
CENTURY**

Organized by: Student Feminist Society and Faculty of Humanities at Nicolaus Copernicus University

Conducted in: English

Took place on: 14-15 May 2021

Took place in: Toruń (online)

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“(Im)perfect women in (im)perfect worlds: Dystopias, utopias, and feminism at the beginning of the 21st century,” a conference for students, young scholars, independent researchers, and literature enthusiasts, took place on 14th and 15th May 2021. Due to the restrictions caused by the ongoing pandemic, the conference was organised remotely, which contributed to its international character.

The conference began with a keynote lecture by acclaimed scholar Dr Adam Stock from York St John University. His presentation, entitled “A past imperfect and transient presence: migration and the dystopian experience of border spaces,” outlined some dystopian aspects of immigration and sparked a lively discussion during the Q&A session. Our second keynote speaker, Dr Nelly Strehlau from Nicolaus Copernicus University, closed the conference with a paper devoted to representation of COVID-19 pandemic in the American media, entitled “Precarious Lives during the Pandemic: An Introduction to a Discussion.”

The conference gathered nearly twenty aspiring scholars from different corners of the world and inspired all the participants to engage in discussions

and share their perspectives on the conference themes. Presentations were divided into six thematic panels: “Cultural narratives and women,” “Visions of diversity and sameness,” “Crossing boundaries,” “Contemporary concerns,” “Women in time,” and “Gendering science and media.”

The first session comprised papers that described narratives about female characters in realist and non-realist dystopian societies. The papers used this perspective to comment on women’s experience as depicted in Buchi Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood* and Ayobami Adebayo’s *Stay With Me* (Noah Oladele from Obafemi Awolowo University), as well as in three dystopian video games: *BioShock Infinite*, *The Last of Us*, and *Horizon: Zero Dawn* (Dagmara Solska from the University of Gdańsk); the third paper focused on the depiction of trauma in the popular young adult book series *The Hunger Games* (Agnieszka Staszak from Nicolaus Copernicus University). The second session centred around the notion of rebellion against oppressive standardisation of behaviour and appearance. It began with a paper that characterised the utopian “You-Niverses” in Africanfuturist young adult novels by Nigerian and Nigerian-American Afrofeminists: Nnedi Okorafor’s *Who Fears Death*, Tomi Adeyemi’s *Children of Blood and Bone*, and Akwaeke Emezi’s *Pet* (Funmilayo Akinpelu from Central European University). The session continued with an analysis of silencing intimacy in Japanese culture based on Yasunari Kawabata *Thousand Cranes* and Fumiko Enchi’s *The Waiting Years* (Katarzyna Stępień from Nicolaus Copernicus University), and finally, drew attention to the impact of beauty standards on women, based on Frances Cha’s *If I Had Your Face* and Mika Ninagawa’s *Helter Skelter* (Agata Rupińska from Nicolaus Copernicus University). The last panel on Friday featured only one presenter (Aleksandra Sieradzka from Nicolaus Copernicus University), who discussed the film *Jennifer’s Body* through the lens of subversive potential of the female body as a site of monstrosity in cinema.

The second day started with a session devoted to contemporary social and ecological problems, consecutively describing the environmental turn in

dystopian fiction and the presentation of Omar El Akkad's *American War* and Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* as eco-dystopias (Natalia Bracikowska from Nicolaus Copernicus University), the Black experience, and anti-capitalist critique in political hip hop and movies by Boots Riley (Dawid Smyk from Nicolaus Copernicus University), and taking on narratives of post-binary future constructed by the anti-gender movements in Latvia. The next session comprised papers which focused on the representation of women in dystopian literature. It began with a presentation dedicated to the redefinition of traditional gender categories in selected contemporary feminist dystopian novels (Aleksandra Pogońska-Baranowska from the University of Warsaw), followed by an analysis of Elizabeth Bear's novel *Carnival* as an example of a dystopian matriarchy in the 21st century (Magdalena Dziurzyńska from the University of Wrocław), and a discussion of the imbalanced representation of women and men in Cixin Liu's *Remembrance of Earth's Past* trilogy (Paweł Oleksak from Nicolaus Copernicus University). The last session of the conference comprised presentations related to stereotypes in science and medicine. The first paper described the somatisation of femininity and presented psychiatry as a means of reinforcing the status quo of scapegoating (Alex Lubiński from Nicolaus Copernicus University), the second paper analysed neurosexism and how science is used to justify gender stereotypes (Martyna Kopeć from Nicolaus Copernicus University), and the last paper addressed the seemingly utopian and idealised image of women promoted by the social media based on the study of the phenomenon of the "Instagram face" (Paulina Szczepaniak from Nicolaus Copernicus University).

The international conference "(Im)perfect women in (im)perfect worlds: Dystopias, utopias, and feminism at the beginning of the 21st century" aimed to create a space for young scholars to exchange ideas and explore the aforementioned topics. The inspirations we have found during those two days will undoubtedly have an immense impact on our future research. The organisers hope that the conference succeeded in bringing attention to a wide

range of subjects, showcasing the continuing relevance of the notion of dystopia.