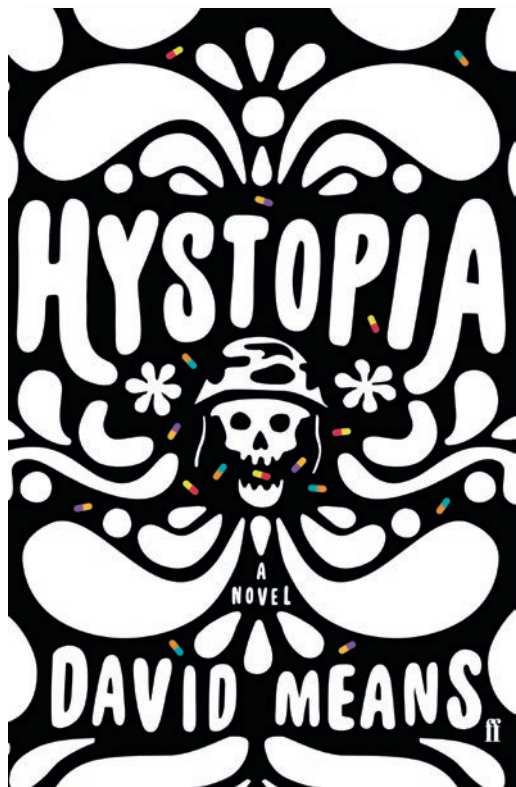


# Reader's Guide



*Hystopia*  
is David Means' first novel

## Hystopia David Means

Faber & Faber

[www.themanbookerprize.com](http://www.themanbookerprize.com)

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## About the author

David Means' second collection of stories, *Assorted Fire Events*, earned the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize for fiction and a National Book Critics Circle nomination. His third book of short stories, *The Secret Goldfish*, received widespread critical acclaim and was shortlisted for the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Prize. His fourth book, *The Spot*, was selected as a 2010 Notable Book by *The New York Times*, and won an O. Henry Prize. His books have been translated into eight languages, and his fiction has appeared *The New Yorker*, *Harper's Magazine*, *Esquire*, *Zoetrope*, *The Best American Short Stories*, *The Best American Mystery Stories*, *The O. Henry Prize Stories*, and numerous other publications. He lives in Nyack, New York, and teaches at Vassar College.

## About the book

The bitter end of the 1960s: JFK's third term in office. Vietnam rages on. A new federal agency, the Psych Corps, maintains the nation's mental health by wiping soldiers' memories through drugs and therapy, while those beyond help roam at will, re-enacting atrocities on civilians.

This is the vision of Eugene Allen, a twenty-two-year-old Vietnam vet, writing this book-within-a-book at the heart of *Hystopia*. *Hystopia* reveals the crazy reality of trauma, both national and personal.

## Discussion points

In *Hystopia* several submerged ('enfolded') stories of trauma are eventually shared, revealing a common bond between characters who were previously unaware of their connection. What are the ramifications of repressing our own stories? What aspects of storytelling is *Hystopia* exploring?

Are there hints that Eugene Allen may have written the author and editors notes that accompany the novel, *Hystopia*? What would the implications be if Allen wrote the entire text of the book?

The character named Hank has a strange relationship with nature, and in particular trees. What is the significance of his desire to find a Queen Tree? What is the significance of nature in *Hystopia*?

There are many allusions to other war novels — from Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* to Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* — in *Hystopia*. Are there also allusions to American involvement in the Iraq War?

In an interview with the *Guardian*, Means said that history is sometimes delusional. Is there something uniquely American in denying historical truth? Is this impulse related to trauma?

Are there indications in *Hystopia* that an entire culture — and therefore an entire country — can be morally injured by the collective trauma of a war? If so, what role does storytelling play in the struggle to heal this injury?

If there were a process to erase traumatic or bad memories, would you submit to it?

## Themed reading

Ernest Hemingway *A Farewell to Arms*  
Joseph Heller *Catch-22*

## Useful links

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/may/21/hystopia-david-means-review>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/24/books/review/jay-mcinerney-reviews-hystopia-by-david-means.html>

<http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2016/05/hystopia-david-means-review/481635/>