Harbinger of Doom: Dystopian Literature and Humanity’s Current Crisis

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis begins by discussing the origins, historical trajectory, and significant features of Dystopian Literature. Subsequently, it engages with the American culture's current infatuation with young adult dystopian literature and argues that the millennial generation, specifically, are the intended audience for these purported works of fiction which reflect millennials' growing awareness of the crises that exist on a societal and global level and their desire to rectify them. This work includes factual data that parallels the fictional allegories of novels such as, 1984 by George Orwell, Divergent by Veronica Roth, Oryx and Crake by Margaret Atwood, among several others. Lastly, through a critical lens this thesis will analyze the genre of dystopian speculative fiction and argue that there is a razor thin line between these so-called fictional dystopian landscapes and the alarmingly real issues of our distressed planet and disintegrating society.

Chair:

Signature

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"It's the action, not the fruit of the action, that's important. You have to do the right thing. It may not be in your power, may not be in your time, that they'll be any fruit. But that doesn't mean you stop doing the right thing. You may never know what results come from your action. But if you do nothing, there will be no result." - Mahatma Gandhi

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This is for everyone actively implementing change for a better world, now and into the future.
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INTRODUCTION
Welcome to Dystopia: The Perilous Times in Which We Live

*Dystopia: an imaginary place or condition in which everything is as bad as possible.*

Growing up in a few of the most liberal areas in California (Santa Cruz, the Bay Area, and Sonoma County), I realize that social activism goes far beyond something I've learned; it is ingrained in who I am.

The second semester of my junior year as a Sonoma State University undergraduate, I discovered that I was one unit shy of my Math and Sciences requirement. With Math being one of my most challenging subjects, I opted to take a Science course instead, Physical Anthropology with Michelle Markovics at Santa Rosa Junior College in the summer of 2012. Professor Markovics exposed me to the rapid extinction of animals and plants due to mankind, by both destroying and taking over their habitats, but also by deteriorating our planet and ozone. We also discussed genetically modified foods, watched the documentary *Food Inc.*, and then we were instructed to go home and read the labels in the food from our refrigerators and pantries to find corn-related ingredients, one of the most commonly genetically modified ingredients discussed in *Food Inc.* In addition, I learned how virgin trees are cut down to make Charmin toilet paper, Bounty paper towels and Kleenex. Prof. Markovics exposed me to the destruction of animal habitats and the rapid extinction of animals and plants that has been caused by the relentless deterioration of our planet and ozone.

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I was enthralled and eagerly looked forward to attending each session of this science class. Prof. Markovics informed us that we could read Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*. Already an Atwood fan, and an English major, I was more than happy to read a novel by one of my favorite authors. Little did I know that this one book would ignite a passion so great within me that it would become this, my thesis, and hopefully in the future my dissertation, and conceivably my life’s work.

Two summers later I reread *Oryx and Crake* along with the two books that complete the trilogy, *The Year of the Flood* and *MaddAdam*. I felt compelled to write about this new-to-me genre of dystopian speculative fiction. Thankfully, owing one of my professors a seminar paper, I spent the summer immersed in research and investigating every potential reality of the dystopian landscape Atwood had created. The terrifying truth began to set in; this so-called fictional world was merely a projection of the world we currently inhabit, and the terrors that Atwood had created really exist.

We are already living in Orwellian times, with “Big Brother” (also known as the United States government) watching and listening to our every moves or utterances, scanning our emails, completely eliminating the need for probable cause, and eradicating our freedom. In Giorgio Agamben’s, “The State of Exception,” he declares:

Modern totalitarianism can be defined as the establishment, by means of the state of exception, of a legal civil war that allows for the physical elimination not only of political adversaries but of entire categories of citizens who for some reason cannot be integrated into the political system. Since then, the voluntary creation of a permanent state of emergency (though perhaps not declared in the technical
sense) has become one of the essential practices of contemporary states, including so-called democratic ones.²

We have seen this after the World Trade Center was struck by two airplanes hijacked by terrorists on September 11th, 2001. The U.S. went into a state of emergency and shortly thereafter Homeland Security was created "to secure the nation from the many threats we face."³ This translated into the profiling of any person deemed suspicious, who, most often after 9/11, were Arab-Americans. A study done in 2006 showed that Arab-Americans were more fearful of being racially profiled by local police officers and federal agents than they were of being the victim of hate crimes.⁴ In the name of securing our nation, the government began to systematically profile an entire category of citizens, effectively considering them terrorists until proven innocent. Dystopian fiction represents the state of exception that Agamben discusses, and is the very real dystopia we are living in now. Similar to the oppressive governments that Winston Smith in 1984 or D-503 in Yevgeny Zamyatin's We encounter, our government has become voyeurs of our lives.

The USA PATRIOT Act, a sardonic acronym for "Uniting and Strengthening American by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism," was yet another highly effective means of circumnavigating the fourth (prohibiting unreasonable searches and seizures) and fifth (protecting our right to due process) amendments of the United States Constitution. Agamben elaborates on how the USA Patriot Act, issued on October 26, 2001, allows any person suspected of

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endangering “the national security of the United States” to be held against their will and “radically erases any legal status of the individual, thus producing an unnamable and unclassifiable being.” Not only can the government take away your rights; they can also take away your identity. By exposing people to the reality of the totalitarian state of emergency being implemented by our government and big corporations, humanity can enact change and regain a truly democratic state and way of life.

For the past year I have taught freshman English, but to me it has been so much more than that. Just as Prof. Markovics did for me, I’ve been exposing my students to the harsh realities of our disintegrating planet and devolving society, while instilling them with hope to overcome these seemingly insurmountable obstacles and realizing an ecologically healthy, liberal humanist society. How else do we instigate change if not by first educating the general population, and especially students, of our impending doom if we continue to follow our current trajectory? If there’s one thing I’ve learned about the millennial generation it is this: they are incredibly smart, socially conscious, and ready and willing to do whatever it takes to create for themselves a better future. In my research about millennials, I discovered that this is a generation of power-houses, world-changers, and highly evolved human beings.

Millenials get a bad reputation for being lazy, disengaged, and apathetic. Yes, they’ve grown up with technology at their fingertips, and yes, they appear to be more engaged with their cyber worlds than with the physical world around them. But let me be clear. That does not mean that they do not care about the current state of our planet and

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5 Agamben, Giorgio.
society; they care far more than we give them credit, because they are the ones who are inheriting this broken planet.

Classic dystopian literature is a projection of dystopia in the times in which they were written. When George Orwell wrote *1984*, he was protesting both capitalism and communism. Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* was spawned from witnessing Hitler’s book burnings. Anthony Burgess’s *A Clockwork Orange* was given life due to England’s proposed aversion therapy to cure juvenile delinquency. The young adult dystopian literature I explore is a direct reflection of the dystopia in which we are living. *Divergent*, written in 2010 by twenty-one year old millennial Veronica Roth, deals with factions (segregated societies, the one percent), and eugenics, as the government searches to create genetically pure individuals free from traits that would cause strife, war, and chaos. *Ready Player One* informs us that once our planet reaches the point of almost inhabitability, we can simply escape into a virtual world. Finally, *The Breeders* cautions against our eagerness to accept any synthetic alternative fuel source and other “clean, renewable” energies devised by big corporations for fear that humanity cannot possibly begin to consider the long term consequences which, in the case of *The Breeders*, is the almost complete extinction of women.

However, the book that, for me, started it all and is most compelling is Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*, a dystopian speculative novel which projects a future dystopia clearly defined by the potential outcomes of our current technologies. This is a world so terrifyingly close to our own, where big corporations become so powerful that they eliminate governments and rule every aspect of our lives, where we live off
genetically modified foods, live in guarded compounds, breed hybrid animals, and create super viruses meant to intentionally wipe out almost the entire human population; all things we are already experiencing now. This book compelled me to look at the dystopian genre in comparison to our own world.

Dystopian fiction is an increasingly popular genre that arose shortly around, and more significantly, after World War II. Novels like Brave New World by Aldous Huxley, Nineteen Eighty Four by George Orwell, and Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury captured the attention of the public due to their futuristic, yet all too eerily familiar, landscapes as well as their ability to shine a light on the public’s wariness of authority. These novels emerged at a time when people were disillusioned by the horrors of World War II, and still suffered its repercussions. In these novels the disenchanted masses were confronted by an indictment of totalitarian systems, causing them to rethink the ethics of previous firmly held beliefs such as eugenics and other atrocious beliefs developed in the name of scientific progress. While these barbarities were first brought to the awareness of the general public in the mid-nineteen hundreds, now, in the twenty-first century, with the effects of global warming, mass genocides, genetic research and testing, millions of people homeless, starving, and lacking clean water, dystopia has become more and more a reality.

In Chapter One, “The Literature of Madmen: The Voice of Protest,” I present a historical outline of the dystopian fiction genre since its inception. I will review its origins, historical trajectory, and the distinctive features of dystopian fiction. In Chapter Two, “The Bridge to Dystopia: Evolution and Apocalypse,” I examine the young adult
dystopian fiction genre, its characteristics, and an overview of the millennial generation, who are the target audience for these novels. I am primarily interested in how the young adult dystopian fiction genre serves as a reflection of the millennial generation’s recognition of our disintegrating society and planet, and how it functions as a means for their active desire to amend the dystopian landscape in which we are already living. In my final and third chapter, “Predetermining Catastrophe: The Razor Thin Line between Dystopian Speculative Fiction and our Current Realities,” I discuss the genre of dystopian speculative fiction and its similarities and differences from dystopian literature and science fiction. As well, I parallel the so-called fictional world created in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* to the terrifying realities of our own world.

While it may appear difficult to insert hope here, I truly believe that, in the hands of the millennials, the human race still has a chance to rectify the impending cataclysmic futures as portrayed in this literature. But the only way we can effectively change the world is by educating those who will be here long enough to make a difference.
CHAPTER ONE
The Literature of Madmen: The Voice of Protest

"True literature can only exist when it is created, not by diligent and reliable officials, but by madmen, hermits, heretics, dreamers, rebels and skeptics" – Yevgeny Zamyatin

Dystopian fiction represents the often underlying, sometimes blatant, social and political distress that permeates from the collective consciousness of the distrusting masses. Whether we’re suspicious of our government, our leaders, the system, or anything else that holds too much power over us, literature has always been an outlet for people to purge themselves of that which captivates them, both good and bad. The most powerful literature takes the form of protest, and dystopian literature is the voice of that protest. It unleashes an implicit warning of an impending future that can occur if we continue along the current social and political trends. These warnings, thinly veiled in the form of fiction, are merely projections of a probable future, a future just as disturbing as our current reality, but on a much grander and farther-reaching scale.

It is through disaster and tragedy that a new reality takes form; this reality is created through the process of reading and writing, through our thoughts, ideas, and fears, suggesting how we move forward. It exists in an intangible state until disaster strikes and we are forced to face the brutal truth: the world we live in is far from a utopia. This constitutes the main function of dystopian fiction. It shows us the catastrophic outcome of our current reality in an effort to alter our minds and actions so that we can create a better future for ourselves and the generations to come. I trace how dystopian literature took on its own form, disparate from its origins in science fiction, and how it has, and continues to, reflect the authors’ protest about their day and age, such as George Orwell and Aldous Huxley protesting war, as projected through an imaginative dystopian future.
The History of Utopia and Dystopia

We cannot discuss dystopia without first understanding the definition and history of the term utopia. The term utopia is derived from Sir Thomas More’s book titled *Utopia*, which was first published in Latin in 1516 and then in English in 1551. The literal translation in Greek, from which More derived the word, is “no place.” That would suggest that More intentionally created his *Utopia* as a fantasy, something non-existent. More’s title may have been ironic because the utopia he describes is much different from the morals and ideals he himself believed. For example, in *Utopia* the inhabitants of this mysterious island are polytheistic, divorces are easily obtainable, and euthanasia is socially acceptable. More was a staunch Catholic at the time he penned his novel, entering into the service of King Henry VIII just a year after *Utopia*’s initial publishing.

It is believed that this book was written as a form of protest, disparaging the political atrocities committed throughout Europe by the royal families in power. In Book One of *Utopia*, More addresses the evils of his time, such as corrupt kings heeding the advice of less than virtuous advisers “whom by their fawning and flatteries they endeavour to fix to their own interests.” More created himself as a character in his novel, speaking with other men who, like himself, act as ambassadors for their countries, all being men of high moral standing. These men critique the unscrupulous European royal

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courts and their methods of ruling, including certain appalling forms of torture: "There are dreadful punishments enacted against thieves, but it were much better to make such good provisions by which every man might be put in a method how to live, and so be preserved from the fatal necessity of stealing and of dying for it." As seen from that quote, More was a staunch believer that all men should be taught a trade in order to properly care for himself and his family. And more than that, each man should be treated justly. More sets the stage for Book Two in which he comes to the island of Utopia, resolving all of the problems that are listed in Book One.

More's *Utopia* is a community based on controlling individual impulses, a place where there is no envy of wealth or social stature, and no places to induce temptation like bars or brothels. More’s utopian society is supposed to be a model for social harmony, equality, and economic and political stability. In Utopia inhabitants have no private property, no lawyers, all people must work, and there exist several religions which are all tolerant of each other. Only one religion is not acceptable on the island of Utopia and that is atheism, because, according to More, they have no fear of afterlife repercussions so they do not have a problem upsetting the norm. Yet, even the atheists are encouraged to talk to a priest about their atheism until they realize the error of their ways, or else they are sold into slavery. Women are also allowed to be priests in Utopia. While some of the solutions More suggests contradicted his personally held beliefs, it is clear that More set out to create an idyllic world in which all people were treated equally.

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9 More. 11.
More's book is considered to be the first published piece of dystopian literature. He accomplishes this by laying out the steps a society would need in order to thrive, and while he does not explicitly warn of what would become of the society if they were to continue on their current course, it is implied throughout Book I. While More's utopian model is based on slavery, he suggests that men not be killed in battle, but rather captured and kept as slaves, earning their way to freedom. More's attempt at creating a utopian society had its challenges, yet it was profound because he created a revolutionary new genre of literature specifically for the often stifled voices of protest. This ultimately became the foundation for dystopian literature. More's *Utopia* established common themes throughout dystopian fiction, such as individual versus society, peace and war, and religious liberty. More's forceful expression of these themes clearly shows that one man's utopia is surely another's dystopia.

**The Origins of Dystopia**

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, dystopia "is an imagined place or condition in which everything is as bad as possible." Dystopian is "one who advocates or describes a dystopia," and "of or pertaining to a dystopia."10 Jeremy Bentham, a philosopher and reformist, used the term cacotopia in 1818 to describe "the imagined seat of the worst government."11 Bentham was attempting to institute political and social reforms, basing his protest on the theories of utilitarianism, which was "to promote the greatest amount of happiness."12 John Stuart Mill first used the term dystopia when referencing the British Parliament's policies in Ireland regarding women's suffrage in

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1868. He was likely unaware of how this term would become its own genre of literature and shape the views of millions of readers. At the time he was merely attempting to create the opposite meaning of More’s utopia. The significance of dystopia is that it originated as the opposite of utopia illustrating that dystopia cannot exist without utopia. This is why there are varied utopias and dystopias, as one version will not suffice for all. In creating utopias and dystopias, the authors are voicing their criticism of the world around them, as John Stuart Mill was protesting the treatment of women suffragists by the British Parliament. There is an inherent form of protest imbedded within both utopias and dystopias; their existence demonstrates humanity’s dissatisfaction with the world around them. Thus, dystopia, at its very core, has come into existence through the voices of protest.

The First Sci-Fi was Written by a Woman

In 1666 Margaret Cavendish, a fan of More’s Utopia, wrote The Blazing World, a utopian tale of a woman who is shipwrecked on an island and becomes an empress to the natives living there. Cavendish, being a woman writer in the sixteen hundreds, and the Duchess of Newcastle, was a literary spectacle due to being a woman, and her strong feminist protagonist in The Blazing World, who commands and receives respect from all other characters, male and female alike. The empress is a divine being, having the attributes of a god, displaying super powers when saving her people when their kingdom is threatened. Cavendish’s short tale is considered the only utopian fiction by a woman in the seventeenth century, and one of the first examples of science fiction. Cavendish was also praised as a scientist and philosopher. Her strong feminist leanings, critiques on war, politics, and gender roles were all quite unheard of for a woman of her day, which is what
makes her stand out amongst the male scholars of her time. Cavendish, through her marriage to Lucas Cavendish, was able to meet the famous philosophers of her day such as Thomas Hobbes and Rene Descartes. But due to her being a woman, these men would not directly interact with her. This sexism clearly troubled Cavendish, which is reflected in her utopian work, *The Blazing World*. The following passage transpires when the shipwrecked woman is first made empress and begins to observe the behavior of her citizens:

I never perceived any women in your Congregations: But what is the reason, you bar them from your religious Assemblies? It is not fit, said they, that Men and Women should be promiscuously together in time of Religious Worship; for their company hinders Devotion, and makes many, instead of praying to God, direct their Devotion to their Mistresses. But, asked the Empress, Have they no Congregation of their own, to perform the duties of Divine Worship, as well as Men? No, answered they: but they stay at home, and say their Prayers by themselves in their Closets.13

The blatant sexism that Cavendish herself experienced from her fellow authors and philosophers infuses her writing. Yet, in her tale she was able to reconcile these painful experiences by her Empress uniting men and women alike and making them equal. While the equality of women and men could not be realized in her time, she was able to imagine it in her utopia. Cavendish was a masterful writer, an accomplished philosopher, and revolutionary woman whose works set the stage for the burgeoning genre of science fiction, and its offshoot – dystopian fiction.14

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A Dystopian Leap into the Future

The next dystopian tale was not published until 1891 when Jerome K. Jerome wrote a short piece entitled *The New Utopia*. Jerome K. Jerome was an Englishman born into abject poverty, leaving home in his mid-teens to join an acting troupe in London, traveling throughout Russia, America and Germany. It was in his travels, inspired by his poor upbringing, that he became exposed to socialism, the driving force behind his short tale. In *The New Utopia* a man, after a night of drinking and reminiscing with friends about a socialist future, wakes up in the twenty-ninth century and is startled to find that the socialist society he and his friends had envisioned the night before is nowhere near as extraordinary as he thought it would be. When the man wakes up in his utopia all men and women have the exact same haircut, dress alike, and are nameless. The only way to identify individuals is by their number, even numbered for men and odd numbered for women. Marriage has been abolished because it privileges couples, and parenting is abolished as well, so there are no mothers or fathers also due to their inevitable concessions for their children; "Again, wherever the Family existed, there hovered, ever contending, the angels of Joy and Sorrow; and in a world where joy and sorrow are known, Equality cannot live." The scenario in which the man awakes is far from Jerome’s conceived utopia, yet it is exactly what would come to pass had his socialist ideals been made a reality. This reflects the obvious issue with utopias; each person’s utopia would vary widely and therefore no one utopia would suffice for all. Utopia is an ambiguous term, left open to interpretation. *Utopia, The Blazing World,* and

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16 Jerome. 3.
The New Utopia are the likely inspiration for the many, more popular dystopian novels that followed in the next fifty to sixty years.

The dystopian novel that is given the credit for inspiring most future dystopian literature is *We* by Yevgeny Zamyatin. Yevgeny Zamyatin was born in Russia in 1884. As a college student he became a Bolshevik, but was later arrested and exiled due to his political affiliation. Twice he was arrested and incarcerated for his political beliefs, spending several years in jails in deplorable conditions. These personal experiences he endured helped to inspire what is one of the most pivotal and foundational novels in the dystopian literature genre. Due to the publication of *We*, criminal charges were brought against Zamyatin, but he was acquitted, although all copies of his book were destroyed. Greatly dismayed by Russia’s anti-art and literature stance during the early nineteen hundreds, along with having read some H.G. Wells, Zamyatin was inspired to write *We*.17

In *We* the protagonist D-503 is introduced as a mathematician keeping a diary to convince others that the United States way of life is best and to catalogue his assembly of the spaceship, Integral. D-503 is a project engineer recruited by Benefactor to build a spaceship for the purpose of invading other planets and thus establishing the way of life of the OneState, a totalitarian government. It is when D-503 meets I-330 that his life as he knows it rapidly begins to change. D-503 is at first repulsed by I-330, but then he begins to fall for her and her defiant, blatantly rebellious ways against the enforcers, called Guardians and the Benefactor, the omniscient dictator that rules all. There is the Green Wall that separates the citizens of OneState from the untamed, verdant land.

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beyond the claws of the Benefactor. I-330 and her clan of rebels live beyond the Green Wall and plot to unseat the Benefactor.

While many events occur to upset the balance of life that D-503 once knew, it is the end of *We* that is so shocking. D-503 is caught helping I-330 and her people, known as MEPHI, but the Benefactor passes D-503 off as a mere dupe to MEPHI’s greater plan and gives him the option to repent or die. I-330 is given the same option, but she chooses death, her conviction unbreakable. D-503 is weak and chooses to be reprogrammed and reintroduced back into his now even more miserable existence as a peon worker for the Benefactor living under constant surveillance.18

An interesting coincidence is that the very same Jeremy Bentham, mentioned earlier as the coiner of the term cacotopia, was also the man who created the Panopticon, the “all-seeing” form of prison that is modeled in *We*. The Panopticon is described as a building, circular in shape, that has little cells within it that are all made of glass. In the center of this circle, throughout each level, there is a watchman, guard, or teacher, depending on the purpose for which the Panopticon is being used, that can look in but not be seen and therefore the people in the outer cells are never aware if they are being watched or not, with the theory being that because they do not know, they will always behave their best. Michel Foucault describes the Panopticon as a way of obtaining “a knowledge that now was no longer about determining whether or not something had occurred; rather, it was about whether an individual was behaving as he should, in accordance with the rule or not, and whether he was progressing or not.”19 Zamyatin

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brings the Panopticon to life with his housing in *We*. "Through the glass walls, I see myself, my room, my clothes, my movements – repeated a thousand times over."20 D-503 and every other member of OneState live in glass buildings, synchronizing movements, so that the Guardians can easily look in and see if anything nefarious is occurring, a life Zamyatin felt mirrored his own in Russia.

Zamyatin privately distributed *We* amongst his friends, warning them not to expose it for fear he would be executed. He lived in the Russian Panopticon, knowing that the walls had eyes and ears. A copy of *We* made its way to the United States and was published in 1924, causing Zamyatin to receive harsh judgment from the Soviet Writers' Union. He resigned and penned a letter to Joseph Stalin stating that, "no creative activity is possible in an atmosphere of systematic persecution that increases in intensity from year to year."21 He also asked Stalin for permission to leave the Soviet Union and live abroad. Zamyatin was promptly imprisoned, but with the help of his friend Maxim Gorky, he was granted asylum and fled to France to live out his last few years. Before his passing he encouraged others to write what he deemed "harmful literature," literature that disrupted the times in which it was written. He wrote, "Harmful literature is more useful than useful literature, for it is anti-entropic, it is a means of combating calcification, sclerosis, crust, moss, quiescence. It is Utopian, absurd – like Babeuf in 1797. It is right 150 years later."22 This exemplifies how the voice of protest in this seemingly harmful literature foreshadows a world to come and illustrates the necessity for literature that

challenges our beliefs and the ways in which we live. Yevgeny Zamyatin truly defined
dystopian fiction in every sense of the word. If it had not been for his personal struggles
with his native Russia and their dictatorship government, *We* may have never come into
existence, giving Zamyatin a voice of protest and setting the precedent for all dystopian
literature that has come since. *We* sets Zamyatin apart as the true father of dystopia.

The parallels between *We* and Jerome's *The New Utopia* reveal themselves with
the people not being given individual names, but numbers as identification. There is one
line in *We* that strongly resembles that of *The New Utopia*; “to be original means to
distinguish yourself from others. It follows that to be original is to violate the principle of
equality.” Subsequently, both texts argue that equality is only achievable if people are
indistinguishable from each other, if there is anonymity. Yet many dystopias set in the
future require that its citizens embrace uniformity, making them predictable and therefore
more easily controlled, a key feature in dystopian literature.

Stronger parallels lie between *We* and George Orwell’s *1984*, as well as Aldous
Huxley’s *Brave New World*. While Huxley insists that he never read, or even heard of
*We*, Orwell has claimed it was *We* that inspired him to write *1984*, writing, “It is the
study of the machine, the genie that man has thoughtlessly let out of the bottle and cannot
be put back in again. This is a book to look out for when an English version appears.”
Orwell reviewed *We* for the Tribune in 1946, just three years before he published *1984* in
1949. In this review he calls Zamyatin’s *We* a “one of the literary curiosities of this book-

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23 Zamyatin, *We*. 134.
burning age,” and often claims Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* “must be partly derived from it.”25 Orwell’s plot in *1984* is strikingly similar to *We*. In *1984* we have Big Brother, in *We* the Benefactor. Then there are the Thought Police, and the Guardians, Winston Smith and D-503, Julia and I-330, telescreens and Panopticon like glass buildings, OneState and Oceania, both men keep diaries, and the fact that at the end of each book, both men submit completely to the Benefactor and Big Brother, respectively. Yet it was Orwell who received fame and acknowledgment for his dystopian novel, while Zamyatin was rarely heard of, likely because *We* “was refused publication on the ground that is was ideologically undesireable.”26 Orwell was already famous for his other publications such as *Animal House*, and *Down and Out in Paris and London*, and had therefore, already established an audience, whereas Zamyatin was a refugee who could only pass on his work during his lifetime secretly to friends.

Orwell admits that *We* and Yevgeny Zamyatin were his inspiration for *1984* and in his letters to his friend Noel Willmett, he spoke of his growing fear of totalitarianism, another transparent dystopian theme in *1984*. Orwell worried that if the power was concentrated on particular groups of people, “(a) Stalin, (b) the Anglo-American millionaires, and (c) all sorts of petty fuhrers of the type of de Gaulle” these subversive forces could easily take over the world and create a completely totalitarian existence; “But if the sort of world that I am afraid of arrives, a world of two or three great superstates which are unable to conquer one another, two and two could become five if

26 Orwell, George. Review of ‘WE’.
the fuhrer wished it."27 This growing fear of totalitarianism was Orwell’s projection of a
dystopian future where the two or three superstates he speaks of - Oceania, Eurasia, and

Orwell’s eerie predictions have essentially come to fruition. Orwell wrote 1984 as
a warning to not allow ourselves to be taken completely over by a totalitarian regime, but
though many of us read his novel, we still somehow managed to live in a world where
Big Brother is always watching, and the Thought Police are ready to pounce at any
moment. Edward Snowden, a former member of the National Security Agency, informed
the American public that “Even if you’re not doing anything wrong, you are being
watched and recorded,”28 much like life in Orwell’s Airstrip One. O’Brien, a member of
the inner party who poses as a member of the revolutionary group known as “The
Brotherhood,” warns Winston near the end in 1984 that in the world of the future “There
will be no curiosity, no enjoyment of the process of life. All competing pleasures will be
destroyed. But always – do not forget this Winston – always there will be intoxication of
power, constantly increasing and constantly growing subtler.”29

The intoxication of power that O’Brien speaks of is all too real in our current
reality with the U.S. government declaring a state of emergency after the 9/11 terrorist
attacks and using it as a means to subvert democracy and realize Orwell’s greatest fear of
becoming a totalitarian state, just as it was for Orwell’s reality in the 1940’s. Orwell’s

28 Oliver, John, and Edward Snowden. "Last Week Tonight with John Oliver: Government Surveillance
1984 totalitarian themes had a direct correlation to both Hitler and Stalin, since he had witnessed the rise of both their reigns as well as Franco’s, and fascism. Both dictators had systematically declared states of emergency during their reigns using it as a means to eliminate anyone who opposed their dictatorships. While Orwell witnessed the rise of fascism with Franco, as well as the rise of both Stalin and Hitler, we have witnessed horrific events such as 9/11, the rise of ISIS, or the Islamic State, and the increasing awareness—thanks in part to Edward Snowden—that we are living in Orwellian times.

Huxley’s Brave New World continues the theme of totalitarian governments and a strictly regulated populace. In the World State we encounter a society that lives in a constantly drugged state thanks to their Soma, a drug readily supplied to all inhabitants of the World State by the government. This parallels the role of pharmaceutical companies in the U.S. today who keep citizens anesthetized in order to better control them. Each person in the World State is programmed since birth to accept their social standing and abhor or honor others. Everyone is genetically engineered to range from brilliant to stupid, with each person bred for their specific job and place in society. There is no deviation, until we meet John, The Savage. John was born on the reservation, a place that is considered wild and untamed. His only companions are his crazed mother, who is originally from the World State and has lost her mind for lack of Soma, and his collected works of Shakespeare. Being an original thinker and not programmed by the World State government, John is free to come to conclusions on his own. Yet, he becomes so vexed by the willingness to which all the citizens of the World State submit that he goes to live in a lighthouse, alone, to escape everyone.
John kills himself once he realizes that none of the World State citizens are able to survive without their carefully labeled and categorized identities. Although John was labeled a Savage, it is he, and he alone, in the World State who is truly free from the control of the government and societal ideals. Yet his freedom to think and be a unique individual in a society of clones causes him such utter despair in his solitude that he chooses death over a life of adhering to the World State standards.

Huxley’s projected dystopia rings disturbingly true to the current state of American society. Americans who seek the truth beyond what they are programmed to believe by the government, big corporations, and the surveillance of media conglomerates labeled as political adversaries who should fear elimination, much like the USA Patriot Act which “radically erases any legal status of the individual, thus producing a legally unnamable and unclassifiable being.”\textsuperscript{30} Huxley feared that the world would become like his fabled World State, and because of decrees like the USA Patriot Act, the world Huxley projected has come true.

Huxley published \textit{Brave New World} in 1932 as fiction, never fully realizing that his predictions of dystopia could become reality. His inclusion of genetic testing and research were likely influenced by Huxley’s grandfather, a biologist who had helped Darwin spread his hypothesis about evolution. Huxley’s grandfather was often known as “Darwin’s bulldog,” and two of Huxley’s brothers, Julian and Andrew, also went on to become renowned biologists, hence Huxley’s obsession with eugenics and dysgenics.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{30} Agamben, Giorgio.
And while there are faint mentions of eugenics in Zamyatin’s *We* with the citizens having pre-selected mates, Huxley claims to have never read Zamyatin’s *We*, although Orwell firmly believed Huxley to be lying.\(^{32}\) in *Brave New World Revisited* Huxley argues against over-population, rapidly increasing technology, and democracy; “This blind biological enemy of freedom is allied with immensely powerful forces generated by the advances of technology of which we are most proud.”\(^{33}\) Huxley believed that technological advances would be our society’s downfall, before we managed to over-populate the world and run out of resources. He also envisioned atomic and nuclear energy being used as weapons of mass destruction, ruining the planet, helping along his already grimly projected future. His predictions have been remarkably accurate thus far, as technological advances such as all gasoline-powered vehicles, the industrialization of food manufacturing, called Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs), and Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), emit ozone-depleting substances causing increased amounts of UV radiation, which causes skin cancer, cataracts, and compromised immune systems.\(^{34}\) According to the Environmental Protection Agency, “Since 1990, the risk of developing melanoma has more than doubled.”\(^{35}\) Huxley’s prediction that we will over-populate and run out of resources is also accurate, as both are predicted to occur by the year 2050.\(^{36}\) While these projections of planetary destruction in the future are alarming, it

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\(^{32}\) Owen. *The Guardian.*


\(^{35}\) “Ozone Good Up High Bad Nearby - Why Good Up High.” EPA.

is a future devoid of readily available knowledge, a key resource to all life, that is too awful to contemplate.

In 1951 Ray Bradbury published *Fahrenheit 451*, writing it in just nine days at the UCLA library. The apt title explains the temperature at which a book burns. The novel is short, yet poignant, describing a world where books have been banned and where firemen are the regulators who destroy any home found to have books within it. Montag, the story’s hero, is a firefighter, who, upon meeting his young neighbor, Clarisse, begins to question his life. She asks him “Do you ever *read* any of the books you burn?” He laughed. “That's against the law!” “Oh. Of course,” she responds.37 This simple question sets off a chain reaction in Montag’s life. Montag’s wife, Millie, is deeply conditioned by a small seashell-like device that is placed in her ear, and by the projector screens in which people called “family” spend their days gossiping and interacting with their television programs. These devices are much like our cellphones and flat screen televisions. “How do you get so empty?” Montag wonders about his wife, with her seashell clamped into her ear staring wide-eyed at the dark, blank ceiling.38 She loses count of the capsules she takes at night. They have a numbing effect, much like Soma in *Brave New World*. The first time we meet Millie is when Montag is calling help to have her brought out of her coma and back to life after she loses consciousness, and almost her life, due to the pills she takes. These pills are a way for Mildred to tune out of the world around her, much like humanity’s current compulsion to watch television or zone out on the Internet to escape reality, and their proclivity for medications to numb their senses. Bradbury

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38 Bradbury. 8.
employs these “pills” both literally and metaphorically to register his protest against society’s need for anesthetizing themselves.

However, it is one particular fire that Montag appears at, when an elderly woman declares that she would rather burn with her books than to live without them, that spurs Montag to take action. We then learn of his collection of contraband – books stolen from the homes he was supposed to have burned. The fire captain confronts him and Montag kills him. He escapes and comes across some strangers who have also exiled themselves or been exiled. As they sit amongst themselves discussing the literature they have memorized, “bums on the outside, libraries on the inside,”39 and their past lives as scholars and teachers, an atomic bomb destroys the city that Montag once called home. The men do not grieve, but instead forge ahead into an uncertain future, praying for a time when the literature inside their heads will be once again respected and honored.

Bradbury states that the inspiration for Fahrenheit 451 was Hitler. “When I was fifteen, he burnt the books in streets of Berlin.”40 He went on to learn about the burning of the Alexandria library. This greatly affected him, as Bradbury considers himself to be self-educated and he learned everything he knew from frequent trips to the library throughout his life. He said, “You don’t have to burn books to destroy a culture. Just get people to stop reading them.”41 Hitler accomplished this with his book burnings. While Bradbury is best known as a science fiction writer, it is his dystopian novel Fahrenheit 451 that has stood the test of time making him a legend. He even predicted flat screen

39 Bradbury. 166.
41 "Fahrenheit 451." The Big Read.
televisions that acted as a distraction from the impending war that was occurring in the novel.

Often F 451 is thought to be a warning about thought control or a response to Senator Joseph McCarthy’s investigations in the early nineteen-fifties to hunt communists. However, Bradbury explained in a 2009 interview with LA Weekly, that Fahrenheit 451 is a warning that we are the ones enslaving ourselves, not the government. Bradbury’s protest was against people anesthetizing themselves through technology, and of sleeping their way through their lives instead of living them. Technology today is constantly evolving and people have become captives to their devices such as cellphones and laptops. Living in a digital world, 35% of iPhone and Android users have admitted to checking Facebook or their email before even getting out of bed. As well, the average American is connected digitally between two and half and three and half hours a day, often more. Bradbury’s fears have been realized, much like many of the warnings from early dystopian literature.

These books - Utopia, The Blazing World, The New Utopia, We, 1984, and Brave New World, and Fahrenheit 451 - laid the groundwork for what is now considered dystopian literature. They established the common themes of the dystopian genre such as individual versus society, mind control, eugenics, totalitarianism, oppression, and the regimentation of society, to name a few. These works of art are just a few among the hundreds, if not thousands, that exist today. Brave New World, 1984 and Fahrenheit 451

are certainly the most popular and widely known, but they would not exist if it were not for their predecessors *We, Utopia, The Blazing World* and *The New Utopia*. We could not have dystopian fiction if not for its predecessor, utopian fiction, just like we could not have darkness without the light, or joy without grief. It is through these polar opposites, as evidenced in these novels, that we can investigate our own definitions of utopia and dystopia, and explore the concepts of these fictional worlds as parallel to the world we currently inhabit. Through dystopian literature we are warned to carefully examine our lives and take action to alter our destiny if it appears all too similar to the ones we have read about, much like the warnings predicted by both Bradbury and Huxley about our dependence on technology. These warnings instill a sense of self-reflection, causing us to grow and learn, and challenge the ideals that the government, big corporations, and media conglomerates so readily feed us.

Dystopian literature took its own form separate from that of science fiction by integrating the implicit warning of what could come to pass if we continue on the course we have already begun, whereas science fiction is strictly fantastical and often unrealistic. As Margaret Atwood puts it, “[Dystopian fiction] can explore the consequences of new and proposed technologies in graphic ways by showing them as fully operational.”

Regardless of the day and age in which the author wrote their work, each one was protesting the cultural and social trends of their time. Without the irrepressible voices of protest from the madmen, and women, of literature there may never have evolved this necessary genre of fiction. It is through the voice of protest that some of the most

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powerful literature spanning the centuries has emerged, and continues to evolve with each new generation.
CHAPTER TWO
The Bridge to Dystopia: Evolution and Apocalypse

Young adult dystopian fiction has had a massive upsurge in the past decade with novels such as the wildly popular trilogies: Suzanne Collin’s, *The Hunger Games*, Veronica Roth’s, *Divergent*, and Scott Westerfeld’s, *The Uglies*. When considering events such as 9/11, the War on Terror, climate change, the recession, and the omnipresence of technology, it makes sense that millennials are turning to young adult dystopian fiction (YADF) to comprehend the rapidly changing landscape around them. As the generations before them clung to novels like *1984*, *Brave New World*, and *Fahrenheit 451* to protest war and their distrust of authority figures, millennials require new, fresh, and modern literature that accurately reflects their outrage at our 24/7 news cycle plagued with war, “natural” disasters, school shootings, murders, and fears realized. In a study conducted by Psychological Science, “Americans have become significantly less trusting of each other and less confident in large institutions, such as the news media, business, religious organizations, the medical establishment, Congress, and the presidency.” Politically and socially conscious millennials recognize that there is clearly something wrong with the world they are inheriting and are seeking ways to comment on the crisis around us. Because millennials have grown up with technology at their fingertips there is often no way to escape the scandalmongering; it is everywhere on the internet, and is especially prevalent on the social media sites that teens most frequent, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Vine, Snapchat, and others. The outrages of the

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world are ubiquitous in our twenty-first century dominated by technology. Yet, millennials are utilizing our prolific technology to turn the tables on those who wish to anesthetize them. Young adult dystopian literature is a direct reflection of the current dystopia in which we are living.

**Bridging the Gap: The Jump to Young Adult Dystopian Literature**

“Equality and freedom are not luxuries to lightly cast aside. Without them, order cannot long endure before approaching depths beyond imagining.” – Alan Moore, *V for Vendetta*

Without the great works like Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We*, Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, George Orwell’s *1984*, and Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*, we would not have the popular YADF genre today. These forerunners in dystopian literature were among the first, and most widely popular, to shift the public’s perspective and make them question authority. These are the authors who first warned us of mind control and the loss of freedom. However, the genre did not stop with them. Authors throughout the nineteen sixties and up through the nineteen nineties continued to carry the torch of dystopian literature, ensuring that every generation had at least one or two dystopian novels that encapsulated their particular generation.

A handful of novels that deserve credit for bridging the gap between the earlier generation of dystopian literature and its current incarnation as YADF. The novels mentioned below are categorized as dystopian literature, not YADF, yet without them the many themes we see emerge in YADF would not exist. For example, Anthony Burgess’s *A Clockwork Orange*, written in the 1960’s, follows the violent exploits of Alex, a teen living in a dystopian England. Alex, who has a predilection for “ultra-violence” takes his gang of “droogs” on a violent crime spree. Due to a mutiny, Alex is left to face charges
for the murder of a woman whom they assaulted and who later died from her injuries.
While imprisoned, Alex is chosen to receive a behavior modification treatment known as
the Ludovico Technique, which in turn makes him nauseous at the mere thought of violence. Alex, a lover of classical music, is unable to enjoy his favorite song, Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, as it was in the soundtrack to one of the films used in his conditioning against violence. Once released from prison, Alex finds himself with the man whose wife he had killed. He confesses and is taken away by the police, who just happen to be his former “droogs.” The policemen then lock Alex in a room, blasting classical music and causing Alex to attempt suicide as his only escape. At the end of the novel, after surviving his suicide attempt, Alex questions his predilection for violence and wonders if his own children will have his same penchant for “ultra-violence.”

Burgess explains that he wrote *A Clockwork Orange* while researching aversion therapy to cure juvenile delinquency which was considered somewhat of an epidemic in England at the time. Burgess asks the age-old questions that recur in dystopian literature: “Is freedom of choice really all that important? For that matter, is man capable of it? Does the term ‘freedom’ have any intrinsic meaning?” These questions are the driving force behind many dystopian literature novels, before and after *A Clockwork Orange*, and they remain prevalent in YADF today, as seen in both *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* trilogies.

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A pivotal dystopian novel, Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, specifically touches on the freedom of women and what would occur if that freedom were corrupted. Published in 1986, *The Handmaid’s Tale* takes place in a post-apocalyptic America, in the so-called Republic of Gilead. Women have lost all power and women of breeding age have been stripped from their families and brainwashed, then kept exclusively for breeding purposes, “Now that she’s a carrier for life, she is closer to death.”48 According to the novel, a nuclear war produced children who are born severely deformed and are referred to as an “Unbabies.” These “unbabies” are promptly carried away and destroyed. If a woman is lucky enough to be able to give birth to a normal baby, she is still that much closer to death as these women are only given three opportunities to reproduce before they are taken away and forced to work in toxic wastelands leftover from the nuclear war. At one significant point in the novel a group of Japanese tourists come upon Offred, the protagonist, who is the captive of a wealthy official of Gilead, and her shopping companion, Ofglen. Offred is captivated by the Japanese women in their high heels and short skirts and painted nails. She remarks, “They seem undressed. It has taken so little time to change our minds, about things like this. Then I think: I used to dress like that. That was freedom.”49 These moments in which Offred breaks free of her conditioning and remembers what it was to be a free woman, a wife, and a mother, are some of the most poignant in the novel. The reader is reminded of the complexities of being a woman, of what being a woman means, and of how valuable freedom truly is. It is a reminder not to take for granted the liberties we have, while at the same time

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49 Atwood, Margaret.
protesting the actions to limit said liberties. Atwood's novel did something that no prior
dystopian novel had done; she gave us a female protagonist who illustrated what a world
where women are enslaved and exploited looks like. Atwood inspired YADF novels such
as, *The Breeders* by Katie French. Which follows in Atwood's footsteps and projects
Atwood's vision into the future by giving us a grim look at what life with a shortage of
women, and their enslavement, would look like. Lack of freedom is a recurring theme
throughout the dystopian genre, and its significance is furthered in Lois Lowry's YADF
novel, *The Giver*.

Lois Lowry's *The Giver* was released in 1994 and went on to win the Newberry
Medal, an award for children's books, selling over twelve million copies. Columnist
Kevin Fallon touts *The Giver* as, "the rare book that almost every American student was
forced to read at a point in their lives and actually enjoyed reading," reflecting that the
primary audience for this book are young adults. *The Giver* is set in a post-apocalyptic
United States where people live in controlled settlements. When Jonas, the 12 year old
protagonist who is chosen to be the "Receiver of Memories," which means that he holds
the memories of life before his world was carefully regulated and controlled, asks why
there is no more snow or seasons, and the old man who was the Receiver tells him,
"Snow made growing food difficult, limited the agricultural periods. And unpredictable
weather made transportation almost impossible at times. It wasn't a practical thing, so it
became obsolete when we went to Sameness." The old man goes on to explain how

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51 Fallon, Kevin.
even hills were leveled to create more of the “Sameness.” By removing anything unpredictable, the people in the world of *The Giver* were able to create routine, conformity, and the “Sameness” that makes them easy to control. Jonas is going through the changes that occur at puberty, making him a relatable character for young readers. When he begins to vividly dream his parents tell him that it is time for him to take “the pills,” pills that mute the world, drowning out color and sensation. This is how the “Sameness” is maintained. In *The Giver* it is not action packed, but its subtleties are what, from the first page, draws the reader into this world that is not immediately recognizable as post-apocalyptic. Notwithstanding, as the story unfolds it becomes clear that the world that Jonas lives in is regulated, controlled, and carefully monitored, much like the world we live in now where seventy percent of Americans take prescription drugs.$^{53}$

The use of medication to anesthetize has a parallel to our own world. Pharmaceutical companies are constantly pushing their next great cure-all drug. Five of the ten most profitable pharmaceutical companies are based here in the United States, with Pfizer being one of the most profitable, recording profits in excess of twenty-two billion in 2013.$^{54}$ A byproduct of the proliferation of pharmaceuticals has been their recreational use; “In 2009, 584,000 people age twelve or older became ‘new nonmedical users’ of OxyContin. A 2008 study found that 2.1% of eighth graders, 3.6% of tenth graders, and 4.7% of twelfth graders had abused OxyContin for nonmedical purposes at

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least once in the year prior to being surveyed." As in *The Giver*, these drugs are being used by children as young as our protagonist, Jonas. Pharmaceutical companies in America spend billions of dollars, more than even Big Oil and defense and aerospace companies, on lobbying, attempting to gain favorable treatment from legislators. The inhabitants of *The Giver* willingly absolve their personal freedoms for the greater good of all citizens by taking pills that desensitize them and keep them under the control of those in charge. Upon closer examination, it is evident that Lowry is protesting the way we as a culture anesthetize ourselves with medication, which allows the government, and the pharmaceutical lobbyists, to exert even more control over us.

Governmental control is the main theme of another novel, *V for Vendetta*. *V for Vendetta*, a graphic novel by Alan Moore and David Lloyd, is considered Moore’s finest and most political work. This novel is not explicitly intended for young adults, even though the sidekick of the protagonist is sixteen. But this novel exemplifies the common themes of dystopian literature such as government control, manipulated social roles, and individual versus society, and is about an oppressive government, the Norsefire fascist party. Following a nuclear war, the people in the 1990’s United Kingdom live in a police state where the ruling party either exterminates their opposition or puts them in concentration-like camps called “resettlement camps.” V, an anarchist who we discover was actually a prisoner at one of these camps, is enacting his revenge on the people who

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worked at the camp and who know his real identity. V takes a young woman named Evey under his wing, eventually imprisoning her under similar conditions that he endured at the hands of the resettlement camp doctors and workers attempting to show her what they’re up against. On November fifth, expressed by the saying “Remember, remember, the fifth of November,” V blows up the main buildings that house the Norsefire government, known as “The Eye, The Ear, and the Mouth.” When V is shot and killed, Evey dons one of V’s Guy Fawkes costumes and emerges as V leading people into anarchy against the executive branch of the government at 10 Downing Street.\(^{58}\)

It is transparent that \textit{V for Vendetta} stands for a protest of governmental control, a theme that is relevant here in America with the NSA watching American’s every move like that of The Eye and The Ear. The Mouth, the voice of the government, is a clear representation of the big media conglomerates that berate Americans with their 24/7 news cycle which instills fear and paranoia. One of the most powerful lines from the graphic novel is said by V; “People shouldn’t be afraid of their government. Governments should be afraid of their people.”\(^{59}\) Moore is encouraging the public to regain control of their government before it is too late, before matters such as human dignity are taken out of our hands and put into the hands of those in power who can manipulate our lives even down to our most basic makeup; our genetics.

Genetic cloning is yet another controversial issue amongst different countries; an issue that is realized in the 2005 novel, \textit{Never Let Me Go}, by Kazuo Ishiguro. While this novel is not considered YADF, it touches on themes that are further explored in the


\(^{59}\) Moore, Alan, and David Lloyd. 36.
YADF genre, as we will see in *Divergent*. The novel centers on fears surrounding genetic research and cloning. While genetic testing, research, and cloning have all been extremely controversial topics, especially during the 1990's and early 2000's, Ishiguro brings controversial issues, like that of human dignity and the rights, if any, of cloned beings, to light in his entrancing novel, *Never Let Me Go*, about a group of teens, led by Kathy, set in England in the late 1990's. In this novel,

Kathy and her friends Tommy and Ruth are students at an exclusive boarding school known as Halisham. It is eventually discovered that the students are in fact clones, a fact that an instructor let's slip, devised for the sole purpose of harvesting organs for their host, or the person from whom they were cloned. The novel focuses on the relationships between the young students growing up while bringing to light questions such as what makes a human worthy of dignity?

This is a question that parallels the lives of young adults, who often feel separated from society, stuck in a transitory stage between childhood and adulthood, leaving teens feeling as if they are in a world of their own. "Teenagers' lives are constantly defined by rules, and in response they construct their identities through necessary confrontations with authority, large and small. Imagining a world in which those authorities must be destroyed by any means necessary is one way of expanding that game. Imagining a world in which those authorities are utterly gone is another." Living a life within the delineated parameters of society is challenging for teens as they are attempting to made

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sense of, and break through, these boundaries and forge a place in the world uniquely their own.

**From Angsty Teenagers to Adult Millennials**

“For young readers, dystopia isn’t a future to be averted; it’s a version of what’s already happening in the world they inhabit.” – R. Kikuo Johnson

It wasn’t until World War II that young adults were given the moniker “teenagers,” effectively becoming their own demographic, separate from that of child or adult. The Young Adult Library Services Association coined the term “young adult” in the 1960’s to categorize the literature deemed appropriate for ages 12-18. 61 “Teens are caught between two worlds, childhood and adulthood, and in YA, they can navigate those two worlds and sometimes dualities of other worlds.” 62 As every adult knows, the teen years are often the most trying, a time to transition from an obedient child to a self-realized adult, a process which often involves pushing the boundaries set by parents and authorities as well as those set by society. Being a teenager is synonymous with being difficult, for it requires one to discover themselves – who they are, who they want to be, what they want, and how to get there – and there is no one who can answer these questions for them, as contemporary young adults in America. This is why the teen years are identified with feeling isolated, misunderstood, and filled with angst. Scott Westerfeld conjectures, "At home, in school, and in society at large, teens seek freedom, while adults seek to limit that freedom. A great deal of young adult literature centers on this theme of

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62 Strickland, Ashley.
teens asserting their independence, often with unintended consequences.\textsuperscript{63} Millennials are exploring new territories, either following in the footsteps of those before them or forging their own path ahead into the unknown. The generation known as "Millennials" is breaking all the records and boundaries of their predecessors and finding their own, unique voice in today's society.

Although the date range varies across sources, a study conducted by The Council of Economic Advisers for the White House has listed the age range of millennials as being born between 1980 and early 2000's. Therefore, both teens and adults make up the millennial generation who range in age from about fifteen to thirty-five. Millennials make up a large percentage of YA readers with 55% of YA books being purchased by adults aged eighteen and up, with the intended purchaser stating that 78% of the time they are purchasing the book for themselves.\textsuperscript{64} Millennials are considered the most diverse and educated generation in our nation's history, with sixty-one percent of adult millennials having attended college.\textsuperscript{65} Only six in ten millennials were raised by both parents. Twenty-one percent of millennials are married, which is half the percentage of millennial's parent's generation at this stage of life.\textsuperscript{66} Millennials are also the generation of technology with twenty four percent claiming that technology is what makes their

\textsuperscript{66} Madden, Mary, Amanda Lenhart, Maeve Duggan, Sandra Cortesi, and Urs Gasser.
generation distinctive. Paul Taylor, Executive Vice President of the Pew Research Center, states of millennials:

This is a generation that I think has been dealt a lousy hand. They've got a bad economy. Their family situations started broken, became broken, got recombined, whatever. The political system is looking pretty dysfunctional these days. There are mountains of debt that we're piling on this generation.

And yet the millennials are considered hopeful. The Pew Research Center’s comprehensive 2010 report on millennials is subtitled, “Confident. Connected. Open to Change.” Nonetheless, as Paul Taylor stated above, there is much more for the millennials to overcome.

Almost every YADF novel deals with some form of tyrannical and/or oppressive government systems, environmental crises, biological and/or reproductive issues, and lack of freedom or choice. The environmental crises are one of the most prevalent. Global warming is increasingly making more headlines with occurrences such as mysterious craters popping up in Siberia caused by methane exploding in the ground due to thawing of the permafrost. Temperatures have risen and were five degrees higher than average in both 2012 and 2013. Over a thousand sea lion pups have washed up, and are continuing to wash up, dehydrated and near death on the shores of California’s iconic beaches. Scientists are claiming the rise in sea temperatures have affected the main food sources of

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67 The Council of Economic Advisers.
the sea lion mothers causing them to leave their young for longer periods of time to seek food in deeper depths and farther offshore. The very real issues on our planet are definitely having an impact on the younger generations. They’re paying attention.

There is also the terrifying reality of our current government. Just last week forty-seven Republican senators undermined the President of the United States of America and wrote an open letter to the Iran’s top leaders stating they would not recognize a nuclear deal between Iran and President Obama. In late February 2015, just before midnight, Congress passed a one-week deal to deter the partial shutdown of Homeland Security, our nation’s supposed symbol of safety and security. Republican Peter King of New York tweeted about the event, “There are terrorist attacks all over world and we’re talking about closing down Homeland Security. This is like living in world of crazy people.”

This is the pulse that YADF reflects – living in a world where the people who run the government are perpetually too busy bickering and tearing each other down to enact positive change, and where critical issues like the causes and effects of global warming are being put on the metaphorical back burner while we watch helpless species suffer on the brink of extinction.

Dana Schwartz, a comedian and writer, recently started a Twitter account @Dystopian YA where she playfully heckles the genre by creating what io9 author, Lauren Davis, calls “The Ultimate Generic Dystopian YA Novel.” Some of the tweets

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include commonly used tropes of the genre such as “Adults don’t understand. All they’ve learned is how to go about their days without questioning anything,” and “Some things are more important than order! Things like independence and freedom!” Only Schwartz is clearly mocking the YADF genre, she is at the same time acknowledging common thoughts and feelings of teens and millennials living in today’s society: “None of us remember what is was like in the Before Time. I think they called it ‘America’,” and “Maybe the all-powerful Totalitarian government doesn’t know best after all. And maybe I can fight it.” Millennials relate to YADF because it reflects the very real, political, and worldly issues occurring in our world now, while at the same time unearthing the angst and oppression of living in such a volatile time, most especially as a teen on the brink of an uncertain adulthood. YADF creates a space for millennials to safely explore and extrapolate the potential outcomes of the very real issues they face today, how to overcome adversity and make their voices heard. Grounded in this knowledge, it is no surprise that seven out of ten millennials consider themselves social activists.

Another distinguishing factor for millennials is that technology has made it far easier to be a social activist. Millennials call to social activism is likely prompted by their dismay of their crumbling society and deteriorating planet. Thanks to a twenty-four-seven news cycle we are continually updated on happenings around the world, both good and bad, although it is almost always the bad that society is berated with. While at times it is

difficult to not feel overwhelmed by the endless barrage of fear as the news networks rarely inject hopeful or optimistic storylines. There is the opportunity to give to those in need. There are now several websites devoted to assisting those affected by tragedy such as gofundme.com, justgive.org, and many more. Yet the atrocities are what feeds and inspires the YADF authors. Madeline Ashby, a science fiction writer and strategic foresight consultant posits the reasons for the prevalence of dystopian novels:

This may be because dystopias are easier to write. We have examples of what they look like. We have sworn testimonies and film footage. We have embedded reporters. We have Twitter. That’s the thing about dystopias: they’re really just retellings of someone else’s suffering. You want to know what it’s like to live in an oppressive regime? Watch the news. It’s all right there, from the bottles of acid thrown in female students’ faces to the systematic abduction of future child soldiers to the automatic weapons pointed at peaceful protesters. There’s no need to imagine that future. It’s already here.75

While the future can often seem very bleak, it is the social activism of the millennial generation that reinforces their optimism and hope in a better future. Millennials are not naïve regarding the horrors Ashby speaks of, but they are also not willing to stand by and allow these things to happen. Author Gwenda Bond posits, “The beauty of well-aimed dystopia for teens is that it can potentially have a direct effect on what it’s arguing against, by speaking directly to the people best suited to alter the future.”76 Millennials are already redefining themselves in ways that have never been seen before in our history, such as being the most diverse and educated generation. They continue to project their themes of social and political consciousness into the literature of their generation with books like Divergent, written by millennial Veronica Roth.
Divergent

Veronica Roth was only twenty-two when Divergent was published. In Divergent Roth introduces Beatrice, or Tris, a sixteen year old girl living in a post-apocalyptic Chicago where the citizens are divided by their values into factions. These factions include Erudite – who value knowledge, Abnegation – who value selflessness, Dauntless – who value bravery, Candor – who value honesty, and Amity – who value kindness. Tris is from Abnegation, but on Choosing Day decides to switch factions and join Dauntless.

On Choosing Day, Marcus, an Abnegation leader, explains that,

Decades ago our ancestors realized that it is not political ideology, religious belief, race, or nationalism that is to blame for a warring world. Rather, they determined that it was the fault of human personality – of humankind’s inclination toward evil, in whatever form that is. They divided into factions that sought to eradicate those qualities they believed responsible for the world’s disarray.77

To fit into this world one must choose a faction. If a person does not fit into a faction any longer, or are unable to complete the initiation after switching factions, that person will be factionless – a lifelong punishment worse than death: “To live factionless is not just to live in poverty or discomfort; it is to live divorced from society, separated from the most important thing in life: community.”78 Community is what supports and guides humanity. It is a necessity for a full, healthy life. The problem is that Tris does not easily fit into one faction over another. She is really Divergent, meaning she has the ability to fit into multiple factions and not conform, thereby defying the ability to be controlled. Being Divergent is considered a threat to the faction system; all Divergents are sought out and killed.

78 Roth, Veronica.
Divergent also introduces Four, the mysterious, handsome trainer of the Dauntless initiates, and also Tris’ love interest. Four is among a handful of people who acknowledges Tris’s Divergent abilities, although he does not say so outright. Tris searches for answers about being Divergent, but none truly comes until she wakes up in Dauntless headquarters by the sound of her faction members preparing for battle. They are all under some sort of mind-control and begin marching towards the section of the city where Abnegation lives. When her path crosses with Four he squeezes her hand and quickly realizes that he too, is Divergent. Here, typical themes of YA literature, such as seeking love and a person with whom you can connect, and themes of dystopian literature, such as governmental control and individual versus society, intersect, establishing the marriage of YADF.

In Divergent the main themes of the YADF genre are evident through the unique and different Tris -- being Divergent, choosing a path different from that of her parents, falling in love with the mysterious boy, and eventually uncovering the plot of the Erudite faction seeking control by destroying the other factions. The obvious political leanings of the faction system, and how the Erudite seek total control, echo that of our own government. In Giorgio Agamben’s “State of Exception,” he conjectures that when a governmental body declares a state of emergency it is able to exert dictator-like authority, eliminating an entire group of people who oppose this oppression, much like the Erudite authorizing the eradication of an entire faction such as Abnegation. It is through the use of technology that Erudite is able to control the Dauntless and wipe out the Abnegation.

The serums that Erudite creates for situations, such as the aptitude test in the beginning of *Divergent* and the simulation serums used in the Dauntless initiation process, represent how technology can be easily manipulated.

As the narrative progresses in *Insurgent*, we learn that the factionless actually far outnumber those in factions, and they seek control as well, led by Four's long lost mother, leading to another battle in which all factions must work together to stop the factionless. The serums come to light again in *Insurgent* when Tris and Four seek shelter amongst the Candor, who require them to submit to their powerful truth serum in order to have Candor's protection. Under the influence of this truth serum, Tris is forced to admit that she killed her best friend's boyfriend, and her own friend, Will, upsetting her best friend Christine, as well as Will's sister, Cara. Four is also subjected to the truth serum and he is forced to confess that he is originally from Abnegation and that his father, Marcus, a well-known Abnegation leader, beat him throughout his childhood.\(^80\)

The most interesting aspect of *Insurgent* is that Tris and Four, after attempting to disband the faction system in *Divergent*, realize that they have to keep the factions intact in *Insurgent* in order to beat the factionless. The faction system in *Divergent*, in fact, serves as social commentary on our love/hate relationship with our government. Agamben's "State of Exception" postulates that the government implements totalitarianism after incidents of major crises for the sole purpose of control. In the case of *Divergent*, the protagonists realize that this state of complete control must continue, whether they agree with it or not, in order to suppress the factionless. Without

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governmental control, there would be total anarchy, yet with it millennials are keenly aware that we are being controlled and manipulated, a continued theme throughout YADF.

It is in the final book of the trilogy, *Allegiant*, that the most obvious protests of our current reality take shape. Tris and Four go beyond the gates of the city only to discover that they are really one of several controlled experiments throughout a post-apocalyptic United States, with the city formerly known as Chicago being the most successful of all the experiments. It is the people within the compound, known as the, "The Bureau of Genetic Warfare," like David, their leader, who actually created the serums, putting them in the hands of the Erudite leaders. The serums were used on Tris’s mother, Natalie, an outsider who, after observing the experiments at the Bureau of Genetic Warfare, opted to become a part of the Chicago experiment. This is why and how Natalie knew her daughter, Tris, was Divergent like herself. Tris, upon learning that David had worked closely with her mother, develops a bond with him as she tries to gather more information on her mother’s earlier life prior to the Chicago experiment. Meanwhile, Four, being suspicious of the Bureau of Genetic Warfare’s ethics, aligns himself with rebels who seek to take down the Bureau. These rebels are angered because the government sees them as genetically flawed and the reason for all the destruction.

The suspicion of the Bureau of Genetic Warfare echoes the sentiments of not only Huxley’s *Brave New World*, but also that of Burgess’s *A Clockwork Orange*. Creating genetically “perfect” humans, conditioning and training them for specific purposes, and then eliminating any that do not strictly adhere to the rules, like those in Agamben’s
"State of Exception" which states that anyone who does not adhere to this new, surveilled lifestyle are considered political enemies and are effectively incarcerated and/or eliminated – as seen with the profiling of US citizens after 9/11, the disregard for basic human rights in places such as Guantanamo Bay, and reflected in dystopian literature with *Divergent* where the factionless (who do not fit into any of the clearly defined social categories) are deemed lesser and are dismissed entirely from society.

The *Divergent* trilogy is a clear reflection of the millennial generation's suspicions of government, as well as a commentary on society and class in the form of factions. If we segregate ourselves to the point of factions like those of the fictional world in *Divergent*, we are likely to experience a similar outcome. The commentary in *Divergent* echoes the class system in *Brave New World* with their stupid epsilons, below-average betas, ordinary gammas, and brilliant alphas. Another theme is identity, a theme that is inherent as a person comes of age and attempts to figure out who they are and what they stand for. For this reason, millennials, and readers of all ages, are able to relate to the themes in these books; every person is familiar with discovering themselves, who society expects them to be, and who they want to be. *Divergent* makes a great point of this when the characters must make the choice of which faction they choose. Sometimes one must go against the tide, like Tris did when choosing Dauntless. She was able to face her fears, and because of this she grew stronger in herself, in her convictions, and in who she knew she wanted to be. For if we live in a segregated society of factions we will lose our individuality and the uniqueness that makes each person special. The cover of *Divergent*
states, “One choice can transform you.”81 This engages every reader, every person, because life is as simple as that; one choice, if you are brave enough to make it, can change your entire life. This statement embodies the millennial generation who have learned that no matter what your background, where you are from or how you were raised, you have the power and ability to become whoever you want to be through your choices.

The relevance, relatability, and reflection of the YADF genre in society today is pointedly clear when reviewing the following statistics on *Divergent*. In January 2014, The *Divergent* Trilogy claimed the top three spots on USA Today’s book list. According to publisher HarperCollins, the *Divergent* trilogy has sold over ten million copies.82 *Divergent* has also been turned into movies by Summit Entertainment, the same production company that turned the *Twilight* books into worldwide mega hits. *Insurgent* opened in March 2015 and made $4.1 million opening night. *Divergent* made $4.9 million on its opening night last March, 2014. *Divergent* grossed $138 million in international markets, while *Insurgent* had already reached $8.2 million based off its first two nights in international theaters.83 The success of these films, as well as the books, display how significant young adult dystopian fiction truly is, and how millennials turn to these novels and movies to make sense of the world around them. A study conducted by the Motion Picture Association of America in 2012, showed that the largest frequent

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81 Roth, Veronica.
movie-going age groups were eighteen to twenty four and twenty five to thirty nine, demographics of which millennials, both young and old, fit into. But most of all, these books and films suggest that millennials are not allowing themselves to be anesthetized by the growing conflicts around them. Like Tris and Four, they will rise up against their government and not allow themselves to be controlled.

**Ready Player One**

In *Ready Player One*, another group of young teens who avoid being controlled by a big corporation are Wade, Aech, and Art3mis. Author Ernest Cline created every gamers’ dream book when he wrote *Ready Player One*, in which we’re introduced to Wade Owens Watts, an eighteen-year-old who lives in a post-apocalyptic United States in 2044. Living in what is termed as the “Global Energy Crisis,” there are record numbers of plants and animals dying, mass homelessness and starving people, “messed up” weather, and wars continued to be fought for the very few resources leftover. As Wade says, “For me, growing up as a human being on the planet earth in the twenty-first century was a real kick in the teeth. Existentially speaking.” Wade is an orphan, living with his aunt in what are known as “the stacks,” a community of mobile homes stacked on top of one another. To escape his destitute existence, Wade plugs into what is known as the OASIS, the Ontologically Anthropocentric Sensory Immersive Simulation, which is an ornate and deeply complex version of the current Internet. Inside the OASIS is where Wade grows up, and where Wade can be anything he wants via his avatar. It is

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86 Cline, Ernest. 48.
where he has gone to school his entire life, and where he spends almost every second that he is not sleeping or eating. This is every gamer’s dream.

The OASIS was created by an odd eccentric, James Donovan Halliday, as a virtual reality playground, or “massively multiplayer online game” that made him “one of the wealthiest people in the world.” It is said that Halliday was diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome, making him extremely antisocial yet utterly brilliant. Autism is a growing concern as one in sixty-eight children in the U.S. has an Autism Spectrum Disorder as of 2014, a frightening statistic seeing that in the nineteen-eighties that statistic was one in ten thousand. Within the OASIS Halliday created galaxies full of different planets with every possible thing imaginable. Users can even create their own planets, complete with customized inhabitants, homes, vehicles, and animals. If an OASIS user can think it up, it can be brought into existence. When Halliday dies and leaves no heir he sets up a virtual competition in which the winner earns his entire fortune, all rights to the OASIS, and becomes sole owner and controller of Halliday’s company. In order to win players must find what is referred to in the book as “Halliday’s Egg,” or the “Easter Egg,” which can only be cracked if players are familiar with an overabundance of trivia and facts from the nineteen-eighties.

Though millions had tried for years to crack the code to find Halliday’s Egg, Wade Owens Watts, a self-proclaimed “gunter,” or egg hunter, is the first one to make it

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87 Cline, Ernest. 1.
89 Cline, Ernest. 5.
on the score board for Halliday's Egg. Wade immediately becomes an overnight success, and the most famous person in the gunter world. But the “Sixers,” the employees of the Innovative Online Industries (IOI), are now after him to learn his secret to success. Halliday had set up the OASIS to be free for all. Travelling within the OASIS and upgrading your planet, home, armor or vehicles, etc., cost online credits which is how Halliday was able to keep the OASIS free. If the Sixers win Halliday’s Egg they will make the OASIS a strictly for-profit enterprise:

IOI believed that Halliday never properly monetized his creation, and they wanted to remedy that. They would start charging a monthly fee for access to the simulation. They would plaster advertisements on every visible surface. User anonymity and free speech would become things of the past. The moment IOI took it over, the OASIS would cease to be the open-source virtual utopia I’d grown up in. It would become a corporate-run dystopia, an overpriced theme park for wealthy elitists.\(^90\)

As with most large corporations, IOI sought to cut off free access in order to make a profit. Because of this, Wade and his gunter cohorts are seeking Halliday’s Easter Egg to keep the OASIS free for all users. There is an obvious analogy here to big corporations that seek to make a profit from everything. The struggle between free access and corporate control can be reflected by companies such as Proctor and Gamble, whose brands range the breadth from beauty products like CoverGirl, Herbal Essences, Ivory, Pantene, and Secret, to household items such as Duracell, Tide, Swifer, Charmin, Crest, Gillete, and Oral-B, among others. Most homes have at least one of these products.\(^91\) PepsiCo is another conglomerate that on their website touts their “22 iconic, billion-dollar brands,” some of which are Fritos, Starbucks, Cheetos, Lipton, and Gatorade.

\(^{90}\) Cline, Ernest. 33.
prevalence of these products in our homes and their affordability, despite their often lack of nutritional value, are why Pepsi Co. experienced their 43rd consecutive annual dividend increase, up 7.3%, as of 2015. 92 And much like the major food conglomerates such as Cargill and Koch Industries, who are notorious for putting small farmers out of business, the IOI even goes as far as finding out where Wade lives in the real world in order to blow up his home if he does not divulge how he got through the first level of Halliday’s challenge. Wade declines and the stacks he lives in are destroyed, killing his aunt, her boyfriend, and his kind, elderly neighbor who always doted on him. After this occurs, Wade recruits the help of his friends, best friend, Aech, and love interest, Art3mis, to win Halliday’s egg, and free the world from the tyrannical objectives of the IOI.

Cline’s novel is a perfect representation of what is happening in our world today, as well as what may very well occur in our future. Halliday’s obsession with video games is a parallel to the millennial generation growing up with technology. It is through technology (the OASIS) that millennials live and thrive. But if some big corporation like the IOI, with unlimited resources, attempts to take over, or regulate, the users will fight back. This is analogous to the Occupy movements where people were protesting that the one percent have all the money and therefore all the power. The IOI are the one percent. The gunters are that ninety-nine percent attempting to reclaim their power. Cline’s clever use of video games speaks to the millennial generation through a lens they know and

grew up with, and shows them that if you work together, you can fight the one percent, or IOI.

It is difficult when authors like Dave Serchuk of Forbes refer to the Occupy millennials as “entitled” and states that “they are used to getting their way,” thus perpetuating the stereotype that millennials were raised believing that they are more special than previous generations. In a poll done in 2011 by The New York Magazine, out of the 100 Occupy protester polled, 50 of them were millennials aged twenty to twenty-nine. Forty-six stated that “Capitalism isn’t fundamentally evil, it just needs to be regulated,” while 79 believed that they occupation was successful because “We’re still here.” These statistics reflect millennials desire not for complete anarchy, but for an overhaul of capitalism and the way in which our government works. Movements like Occupy demonstrate millennials awareness of the critical problems hindering the way we live, and displays the peaceful ways in which we seek resolution. Serchuk cites millennial researchers and authors Neil Howe and William Straus, who echo Serchuk’s sentiment, explain that, “it’s been instilled in [millennials] that they are vital to the nation (....) they feel they are here to solve world problems that older generations have failed to solve.” YADF novels such as Ready Player One and Divergent reflect millennials’ desire to embrace this burden of fixing the world’s problems because they are hopeful for a better future, for themselves, and for the rest of humanity.


*Ready Player One* has hints of *Brave New World* and *Fahrenheit 451* but with a more hopeful outcome. Wade is similar to Montag who seeks to subvert the system, while at the same time he is like John the Savage, at times overwhelmed with the insanity of what the world has become. Yet Wade, unlike either of the protagonists from the older generation of dystopian fiction, is optimistic, resolute, and devoted to creating a better future for all, despite the deteriorating planet he lives on. Wade is determined to make life better no matter what obstacles lay ahead, similar to millennials.

**The Breeders**

Katie French’s *The Breeders* explores a world in which the population of women has severely dwindled and “free” women are nearly non-existent. The Breeders are a group of doctors who have almost every woman of breeding age held in their facilities where they perform experiments on them in the hopes of strengthening the population. One of the Breeder doctors creates a synthetic fuel due to the extinction of fossil fuels. The synthetic fuel was wildly popular and helped the air quality and eliminated fighting in the Middle East over crude oil, but there were adverse effects; fewer girls were born while the number of boys being birthed quadrupled and continued to grow. Hormone treatments didn’t work and suddenly human trafficking was a thriving business. Women became commodity, and due to their short supply, any woman of breeding age that was found outside of the Breeders compound could fetch a huge price tag, making even the poorest person set for life.

Riley, a sixteen year old teen, lives with her mother, step-father, her crazy, older great aunt, and younger brother out in a desolate New Mexico. They move constantly to avoid Riley and her mother being caught by the Breeders. One day the local sheriff of the
nearest town comes by and although Riley's step-father talks the sheriff away, the sheriff returns later that evening stealing Riley's mom and great aunt, and killing her step-father. Riley and her brother escape and must forge out on their own to survive. They are helped by Clay, the sheriff's teenage son, who has stopped agreeing with his father's corrupt ways. Initially, Clay, Riley and her brother, Ethan, are on the run, trying to escape the angry sheriff. But once Riley is told where her mother was most likely taken to, the Breeder headquarters, she changes their destination to find her mother. Living a life constantly on the run and looking over her shoulder, Riley has grown up to be wary of people. French is commenting on human trafficking, women's reproductive rights and issues, as well as the degradation of the environment.

Riley, Clay and Ethan encounter the Riders, a group of Neanderthal-like men who wear jewelry made from human teeth. They are the lowliest of low human traffickers. A fight erupts and Riley is shot. Clay realizes that the only way he can save her is to take her to the Breeders. When Riley wakes up and realizes where she is she immediately devises a plan to find her mother. She encounters Betsy, a teen girl who has lived her life in the Breeder facility. She is pregnant for the second time. She clings to her surroundings, considering the outside world to be a terrible, uninhabitable place. Riley also encounters Dr. Rayburn who tells her of the perils of how women became all but extinct. He informs her that the Breeders have perfected the process and can now birth girls successfully, as long as the birth mothers are safely within the walls of the facility, away from any remnants of the synthetic oil that caused birthing defects. Riley finds a basement room of deeply sedated pregnant women. Amongst them she finds her mother.
Clay returns to the compound with his father, the sheriff, and in their attempt to save Riley and her mother, the sheriff is killed and Clay is shot several times. Riley is able to sneak away and get her mother, with the help of Dr. Rayburn, and they escape with Ethan and a wounded Clay. They manage to drive for almost a full day, eventually running out of gas near an old church. Clay’s life hangs in the balance, despite Dr. Rayburn’s valiant attempts, and Riley’s mother finally wakes up from her stupor. Eventually Riley’s mother regains her strength and Clay slowly but surely recovers. They decide to move on and take over the town that belonged to the sheriff, reclaiming a safe space where Riley can be a free woman and no longer on the run.

In this novel, Riley is racked with guilt throughout. She believes it is her fault that her mother was abducted and that her step-father was killed. What motivates her is revenge. This is a common trope in YADF, also seen in *The Hunger Games* trilogy. Revenge, when mixed with teen angst, is a powerful motivator that draws in young readers. What makes *The Breeders* special is its similarity to Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, envisioning a life where women are a scarce commodity. In both novels women are used mainly for breeding and repopulating. Yet, in Offred we see a woman resigned to her position despite her moments of cogency. By contrast, in Riley we have that angsty teenage energy that causes her to keep fighting. This difference shows the generational gap between the two audiences. *The Handmaid’s Tale* was written during the 1980’s and therefore to a different audience who did not have the now commonplace concerns of global warming and the potential, long-term risks alternative fuels and energies that are ubiquitous to the millennial generation.
Another aspect of *The Breeders* to note is the lack of technology until we reach the Breeder facility is introduced. *The Breeders* is similar to *The Handmaid's Tale* because technology is all but lost in the Republic of Gilead. One of the luxuries Offred covets is reading old women’s magazines, as there is no Internet to peruse. The lack of technology in both these novels illustrates what a world without technology available to the general public would look like. This is a stark contrast to *Ready Player One* which takes place almost entirely in a virtual reality. The desolate landscape that *The Breeders* make borders the lines of speculative fiction. A world ravaged by a devastating population decline is not all that far from reality. These novels have traces of speculative fiction in them. There is that “what if” factor that is becoming more and more “what is.”

**Wariness of the Present, Hope for the Future**

*Human reason can excuse any evil; that is why it is so important that we don’t rely on it.* — Veronica Roth, *Divergent*

Patrick Jones, in “Mind Games: Mind Control in YA Literature,” posits “Perhaps the reason this theme of ‘individual versus society’ resonates throughout young adult literature is that it speaks directly to the essence of the adolescent experience. Fiction’s ‘individual versus society’ mirrors the questions taking place in homes and schools, that of freedom versus responsibility.”96 Each of these novels illustrates the theme of individual versus society. Tris must face off against the factions. Wade has to find a way to work with society to overthrow the IOI and Riley must overcome a society that considers all women breeders. But the individual versus society extends beyond YADF.

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It also resonates with Alex in *A Clockwork Orange* who still thirsts for violence despite his conditioning, and Offred, who must adhere to the rules of Gilead until she can escape it. Jonas refuses the pills that sedate his society so he can truly experience all that life has to offer, which leads him to leave his society. V, who was a prisoner of his society and who, upon his escape, is compelled to lead in anarchy against his corrupt society.

While this individual versus society is a direct response to the constant critiques and guidelines one receives as teens, it does not stop there, as these other dystopian fictions corroborate. And while the experience of being a teenager is definitely one that is unique to each individual, the overarching theme of individual versus society is much grander in the scheme of life as a seemingly never ending journey to forge one’s own path in a society bent on conformity and regulation.

What YADF’s popularity reveals about the growing fears of today’s youth is this: They see what is going on, they know what is going on, and they’re going to do their best job to help alleviate the crises humanity is experiencing, just as Wade does. The millennial generation does have hope for a better future, but they are not naïve to current state of our planet, nor the detrimental issues at hand. The cultural anxieties that exist within each of these novels, old and new, reflect the time period in which they were written: “Either dystopias are logical extensions of today, recognizably ourselves only worse, or our present world is utopia compared to a future wrecked by science or some human tendency, usually greed or fascism, and sometimes science.”97 The young adult dystopian fiction that is emerging within the past few years represents our collective

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consciousness about the state of our planet. There are changes we're experiencing now, but there are even more ahead. "The Future's Not Bright," as Gwenda Bond so aptly titled her article on YADF where she states that, "there are a steadily growing number of YA books that are indisputably dystopian in nature, with the wild success of *The Hunger Games* having kicked the trend into high gear." These books are growing in number and popularity because of that awareness of increasing problems both close to home and globally. YADF is a reflection of the dystopia in which we are already living. Yet YADF can only take us so far, since, due to the dire straits in which we are currently living, it is terrifying to consider the possibilities that the future holds.

Christina Sterbenz and Erin Brodwin list "15 Ways the World will be Terrifying in 2050," citing city populations tripling, pollution reaching levels like that in Beijing in major U.S. cities, limited water and food, the fish most commonly eaten now may be extinct, our rainforests could be completely decimated, and super viruses could wipe out huge portions of our global population, to name a few. These are the fears that resonate in YADF, but even more so in dystopian speculative fiction, a sub-genre of dystopian literature that often projects our current technologies and societal conditions into the future. It is predictions such as that of Sterbenz and Brodwin that take these so-called speculative fictions and bring them into reality through scientific data. To put it another way, we are currently living in a dystopia and these predictions warn us of what is yet to come. I argue that our dystopias are a logical extension of our current world. In my next

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98 Bond, Gwenda.
chapter I will clearly show how razor thin the line between our current reality and these so-called dystopian speculative fictions truly is.
CHAPTER THREE
Predetermining Catastrophes: The Razor Thin Line between Dystopian Speculative Fiction and our Current Realities

"[This] is for the people who don't switch off the news." – David Lloyd

While YADF acts as a reflection of the turbulent times in which we are already living, Dystopian Speculative Fiction (DSF) is clearly realized by imagining the possible outcomes of our current technologies. It shares aspects of the post-apocalyptic themes found in both the classical and contemporary novels of the dystopian genre while also integrating the futuristic elements of speculative fiction. This combination creates terrifyingly real scenarios that are not far off from the current state of our planet and society. DSF takes the technologies and scientific advances that we are practicing now and projects them into a not-so-distant future, revealing the potential dangers of capitalistic power and greed. In the following pages I will draw parallels between DSF literature and the turbulent times in which we are currently living, as well as shed light on the so-called fictional worlds created by dystopian authors George Orwell, Aldous Huxley, Ray Bradbury, Lois Lowry, Katie French, Veronica Roth, Ernest Cline, Kazuo Ishiguro, and Margaret Atwood. First establishing the dystopian speculative themes that exist within the novels of the authors mentioned in previous chapters, I will then turn my full attention to Margaret Atwood’s breakthrough DSF novel *Oryx and Crake*, which masterfully projects a dangerously accurate vision of the future if we continue to allow capitalism to prevail. *Oryx and Crake* provides me with the framework by which I will expose the razor thin line between DSF and the realities of the world in which we live today.
The Evolution of DSF

The novels discussed in previous chapters all have elements of DSF. These authors projected into the future the technologies and governmental control of the times in which they lived or live, some even predicting technologies before they existed. Huxley’s future which includes babies being born from test tubes and a society that has anesthetized itself with soma, the medication the government uses to sedate its population, has become all too eerily accurate. We have developed the technology to grow and even alter babies in petri dishes, and we have prescriptions for everything and nothing that ails you. Orwell’s “Big Brother” is alive and well in the U.S. government, as exposed by former National Security Agency operative Edward Snowden who states, as Orwell might: “If we sacrifice our values because we're afraid, we don’t care about those values very much.”100 Similarly, in 1984, we as a society have become complacent, allowing “Big Brother” to knowingly watch over every aspect of our lives, not fighting him in the name of safety and security from terrorists. And while we have not yet been deprived of books (or in our current times, the internet) as in Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451, in which he foresaw a nation captivated by our televisions, a universal form of escapism from the monotony of daily life and another way in which we have become slaves to the 24/7 news cycle, ruled by the big media conglomerates bent on anesthetization of society into submission. Finally, Lois Lowry’s The Giver demonstrates yet another form of brainwashing by eliminating emotional extremes such as love, hate, fear, joy, and pain, and removing the memories of times past. Americans are barraged with atrocities in our

24/7 news cycle, effectively brainwashing and anesthetizing our citizens by convincing them of what to believe and what to feel, or not feel.

*Divergent*'s factions are a reflection of the disparate socioeconomic, racial, cultural, and gender gaps that segregate the masses into manageable categories that the government is better capable of controlling. Veronica Roth, author of *Divergent*, envisioned a world where people were divided, but merely as an experiment for people who were considered genetically pure. Throughout history we have seen the government segregate people deemed less worthy, often justifying these actions with the misinterpreted science of eugenics, which I will discuss in greater detail later in this chapter.

The technologies that Ernest Cline speaks of in his novel, *Ready Player One*, exist today and are already a large economy all their own. Virtual reality used to be something that people wistfully dreamed of, like Star Trek’s holodeck, where anything the Star Trek crew members desired would be created. However, now technology has developed so rapidly that humans could realistically live their lives without ever leaving their homes. Food, amenities, anything one’s heart desires, can be delivered to your door. Through the Internet we can be engaged with family, friends, and lovers. They can immerse themselves in the real world where they can watch or read the news, spend hours watching videos on YouTube, lose half a day on social media websites, or escape into virtual worlds online such as the increasingly popular live action role playing games. Yet, in *Ready Player One* the characters are living in the virtual world to escape a crumbling Earth, ravaged by nuclear war and climate change. The virtual world we have created
has, and is, becoming all-consuming to the point where we very well could end up like the characters in *Ready Player One*, forsaking our real world for a richer, fuller life in virtual reality, forgetting about the deteriorating planet beneath us.

In *The Breeders*, the earth’s surface has become barely habitable and is described as desert-like due to climate change. The population of both men and women has drastically declined, yet it is women who have reached the brink of extinction due to the after effects of a synthetic oil that was created to alleviate the lack of crude oil, on which both our real world, and the world of the past in *The Breeders* runs on. At the time of its creation this synthetic oil was thought to save the world, but after years of use it leaked into the groundwater and ultimately became the demise of Earth’s inhabitants. In our current reality, billions of dollars are going into the research and implementation of alternative energy. But, as in *The Breeders*, we have no way of telling what the long-term effects of these proposed solutions will be.

Genetic research and testing is yet another billion dollar industry tied in closely with pharmaceutical companies looking for ways to make humans live longer, healthier lives. Kazuo Ishiguro touches on this hot topic in his novel *Never Let Me Go*. In this purely DSF novel we meet Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth, and follow their lives from childhood into adults. These three individuals live at Halisham, an elite boarding school often referred to with reverence from outsiders. Initially there appears to be no significant factors that make their coming of age any different from a regular person, except that one day, Miss Lucy, an instructor at Halisham, tells them “Your lives are set out for you. You’ll become adults, then before you’re old, before you’re even middle-aged, you’ll
start to donate your vital organs. That’s what each of you was created to do.” This ghastly realization does not make sense to the Halisham students in the beginning, and the story follows the characters’ slow realization of the truth. For readers, however, the quote is equally chilling. Genetic research is at the forefront of the medical frontier, yet, as Ishiguro posits, what happens when we breed clones exclusively for their parts? It is the stuff of science fiction, but it is not; it is actually DSF because the technologies are already being developed to create human clones. This is yet another area that I will highlight later on in this chapter through an analysis of Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*.

The dystopian landscapes that all of these novels share, while different, reflect the anxieties of the authors about the world around them. "All [dystopian authors], no doubt, write from the shared sense of dismay about modern life, though few seem to take on the revolutionary stages by which the world arrived in its dystopian state—the climate change, hydrogen bomb, license, or tyranny that had precipitated the fall." As this suggests, it is rare that the authors spend more than a few sentences to, at the most, a full page describing the transition into the desolate worlds that set the stage for their dystopias. Almost every novel previously discussed follows this plot structure and narrative device. Whether this is due to a lack of creativity, or because it is easier for DF authors to begin their story after the great destruction, this absence, to readers, often leaves much open for interpretation and speculation. It is not until we come to *Oryx and Crake*.

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"Crake" that we are given a grim, detailed blow-by-blow of how the world becomes a post-apocalyptic wasteland. And it was none other than the brilliant Margaret Atwood who was brave enough to tackle such an undertaking.

Margaret Atwood: The Reigning Queen of DSF

According to Atwood, The DSF genre explores "the consequences of new and proposed technologies in graphic ways by showing them as fully operational." Margaret Atwood achieves this in her bewilderingly too-close-for-comfort MadAddam trilogy: Oryx and Crake, The Year of the Flood, and MaddAddam. While the genre of science fiction has long been recognized as the work of pure imagination, it is DSF that has the ability to dishearten even those with nerves of steel with its ability to make seemingly imaginative landscapes painfully real and relevant in our tumultuous times. Katherine Snyder states; "Dystopian speculative fiction takes what already exists and makes an imaginative leap into the future, following current sociocultural, political, or scientific developments to their potentially devastating conclusions." However, the imaginative leap that Atwood makes in Oryx and Crake is not so imaginative. The issues that arise in Oryx and Crake touch so closely to home that when reading it you do not feel as though you are reading a work of fiction. Rather, the reader is experiencing a first-hand account of our impending cataclysmic future. One striking example is the way in which our food is produced and regulated in the future.

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You Are What You Eat

In *Oryx and Crake* the reader is introduced to food items such as ChikieNobs and SoyOBoyburgers. ChikieNobs are the evolution of a chicken, minus the head, beak, legs, and claws. “There’s a mouth opening at the top, they dump the nutrients in there. No eyes or beak or anything, they don’t need those.”\(^{105}\) The woman introducing Jimmy, Atwood’s protagonist, to these creatures goes on to explain, “that they’d removed all the brain functions that had nothing to do with digestion, assimilation, and growth.”\(^{106}\) This apparently resulted in “chicken” breasts that took only two weeks to be fully grown and ready for consumption. There are SoyOBoyburgers, which are genetically modified soy burgers in lieu of real beef. In Atwood’s dystopian world of the future, where real beef is a luxury, being extremely rare and reserved only for those with money to spend.

Knowing of the atrocities of commercial farming of animals such as cattle and pigs (e.g. methane gas destroying our ozone layers, run-off from these farms polluting our waters), Atwood’s text invites the reader to imagine what our speculative future would be like without factory farming. The answer lies in genetic warfare. Our first inklings of the repercussions of genetic warfare occur at a bonfire.

One of Jimmy’s earliest memories is of being at a bonfire of animals. There are cattle, sheep, and pigs piled high and being set on fire. He is there with his father, a genographer who works for one of the large corporations, OrganInc Farms, as well as one of his father’s co-workers. OrganInc Farms is a compound separated from “the Pleeblands,” or what we would call larger cities, although Atwood differentiates these

\(^{105}\) Atwood. 237.
\(^{106}\) Atwood. 238.
future cities by emphasizing that they are riddled with crime and lack governing force. Valuable researchers, like Jimmy’s father, live with their families on compounds, which are essentially their own walled and fiercely guarded towns complete with schools, restaurants, doctors, and the like. The strangeness of this scene of burning animals is due in part because of the fact that it is occurring on a compound, considering that the compounds are supposed to be protected from the diseases, plagues, and viruses of the outside world. Young Jimmy is concerned about the animals, seeing their open eyes and straight legs, but his father tells him not to worry and that they’re just a bunch of “steaks and sausages, only they still had their skins on.”107 What follows next is a profoundly telling conversation between the two men, Jimmy’s father and a fellow compound dweller/OrganInc worker:

“This is where it ends up,” said Jimmy’s father, not to Jimmy but to the man standing with them. “Once things get going” Jimmy’s father sounded angry; so did the man when he answered.

“They say it was brought in on purpose”

“I wouldn’t be surprised,” said Jimmy’s father.

“…”

“Drive up the prices,” said the man. “Make a killing on their own stuff, that way.”

“It’s a killing all right,” said Jimmy’s father in a disgusted tone. “But it could’ve been just a nutbar. Some cult thing, you never know.”

“…”

“The question is, how did they do it?” he said. “I thought our people had us sealed up tight as a drum.”

[The men speculate how this could’ve happened, who comes into the compounds – delivery vans and such. They assume a delivery person was bribed].

“This bug is something new though. We’ve got the bioprint.”

107 Atwood. 19-20.
"Two can play at that game," said the man.

"Any number can play," said Jimmy’s father.\textsuperscript{108}

Not only does this conversation give us clues into what life is like on the compounds—isolated, protected, and controlled; it also gives the reader an introduction to genetic warfare, the most common method of eliminating the competition in the world of \textit{Oryx and Crake}. The question remains: who benefits most by killing off the cattle, sheep and pigs? Is it the corporations who are creating their own meat-like substances, or the bioterrorists like the MaddAddamites, bent on destroying the corporations? An explicit answer is never given, but it is definitely implied: the corporations have the most to gain by eliminating the competition, the non-genetically modified food. With the real food gone, there is a market to replace it with their own genetically modified creations like ChickieNobs and SoyOBoyburgers.

With disturbing similarity, in the food industry today we have absolutely terrifying and unnamable substances constantly being integrated into our food without our knowledge. In 1986 pharmaceutical companies began to ingratiate themselves with the food industry. As a result, by using the knowledge of the pharmaceutical companies and incorporating their research into our food, the realization came to the executives that profits could skyrocket by adding addictive chemicals to our food. And the advertising companies are recruiting their next generation of addicts young. A study conducted in New York City stated that children aged eight to twelve years old see as many as twenty-one fast food advertisements a day, resulting in over seven-thousand fast food ads viewed

\textsuperscript{108} Atwood. 20-21.
a year. The study’s authors compared the prevalence of fast food to that of drugs. Some journalists have touted Taco Bell for openly admitting their use of other products in their meat, yet they don’t acknowledge that the meat used in the 88% beef mixture is most often “connective tissue, blood vessels, peripheral nerves, adipose tissue, cartilage, and bone along with muscle tissue.” In addition, fast food chains such as McDonalds, Burger King, Wendy’s, Carl’s Jr., and, again, Taco Bell, have products that list cellulose, or wood pulp, as an ingredient. Items such as chicken strips, biscuits, fish sandwiches, and many sauces and spreads all include wood pulp. Wood pulp is non-digestible, and as such it can sit in your stomach for the rest of your life. Consequently, the FDA has approved cellulose for human consumption. By mixing cellulose with other highly addictive ingredients, the unsuspecting consumer is poisoning their body. The U.S. government is knowingly giving food companies the green light to put wood in our food. This parallels the actions of the corporations in Atwood’s Oryx and Crake, as they eliminate the real food for genetically modified food. The question begs, what’s next for us? SoyOBoyburgers and ChickieNobs?

Genetically Modified Animals

In *Oryx and Crake* we are introduced to new hybridized animals such as: rakunks - a raccoon-skunk; snats - a snake-rat; wolvogs - a wolf-dog; glowing rabbits; bobkittens - bobcat-kitten (created to control the growing rabbit population); and pigoons - pigs that have human DNA and are used to harvest organs for humans. As a genographer for OrganInc Farms, Jimmy’s father is one of the top architects of the pigoon project: “The goal of the pigoon project was to grow an assortment of foolproof organs in a transgenic knockout pig host – organs that would transplant smoothly and avoid rejection, but would also be able to fend off attacks by opportunistic microbes and viruses, of which there were more strains every year.” Eventually, Jimmy’s father and his legion of microbiologists and genographers successfully grow “genuine human neo-cortex tissue” in the pigoons. While Jimmy’s father expresses hopes of curing stroke victims, among others, there is no real thought put towards what happens if, or when, these hybridized animals are set loose in the population.

After the BlyssPluss pandemic, which Crake, the antagonist, created to eradicate the human population, the pigoons are Snowman’s biggest adversary. Because of their human neo-cortex tissue, the pigoons are incredibly smart and are able to track, trick, and plot against Snowman. The wolvogs are also a problem for Snowman, as they look like man’s best friend, but in Snowman’s reality, they will tear you to bits. Even the bobkittens pose a threat, being small and cute like kittens but just as fearsome as the wolvogs, although smaller in size, and therefore easy to underestimate.

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113 Atwood. 24-25.
What is significant about these hybridized animals is that some of them already exist. In 2002, French scientists created the “Transgenic Bunny,” an albino bunny with a jellyfish gene that makes her glow green. The scientists accomplished this by injecting the albino rabbit embryo with a green fluorescent protein taken from a Pacific Northwest jellyfish. In 2005, researchers at the University of Nevada-Reno created sheep with partial human organs such as brains, hearts, livers, as well as other organs. One of the stem-cell scientists at the University of Nevada-Reno said that they “want to one day turn sheep into living factories for human organs and tissues and along the way create cutting-edge lab animals to more effectively test experimental drugs.” This is exactly what OrganInc Farms does in Atwood’s novel, albeit with pigs instead of sheep.

The parallels between DSF and current reality continue to be evidenced, for example, at Stanford a proposal was passed that allows scientists to create mice with brains made entirely from human brain cells. The committee even added an addendum stating that any mice that exhibit human-like behavior will be killed immediately. What constitutes “human-like behavior”? If the mice begin to speak in a language more advanced than squeaks or if they begin to walk upright? And while we have heard of pigs being used for human parts for the past decade or so, most recently Japanese scientists have created a new experiment that they are calling the “chimeric embryo,” after the lion-snake-goat hybrid monster of Greek myths. This process starts with a human embryo that is grown in a lab. Depending on the organ needed, the embryo is “coaxed into the genesis

of an organ,” then implanted into the host animal’s womb. Once the organ has fully
grown, the animal is slaughtered and the new organ is implanted into the human patient.
Dr. Hiromitsu Nakauchi of the University of Tokyo says that the development of these
chimeric embryo organs takes only fourteen days.\textsuperscript{117} That number is strangely familiar…
It takes only fourteen days for the ChickieNobs “chicken” breasts to fully form. These
adulterated animals represent the disparity, or sheer absence, of ethical arguments in
science today. There is the unspoken understanding that scientists test their theories on
animals prior to human testing. But what sorts of hybrid monsters are they creating each
time they fail? Or even each time they succeed? “Hybridity here represents the unnatural,
the transgressive, the grotesque and monstrous results of the technoscientific stupidity
and greed.”\textsuperscript{118} That greed stems from our current society and is echoed in Atwood’s \textit{Oryx}
and \textit{Crake}. From glowing rabbits to factory-farmed organs in animal hosts, this is
technology that we are already utilizing globally. Through speculative fiction that
expresses a forceful critical commentary, DSF novels seem to be asking the crucial
question: at what point do the atrocities done in the name of scientific progress cross the
line and become abominations?

\textbf{The Crakers or Eugenics of the Future}

Crake invented the Crakers, his genetically modified humans, to take over and
repopulate the world after he had effectively wiped out the rest of the human population
with the BlyssPluss pill, Crake’s means of mass genocide. Crake’s Promethean crimes
call into question the genetic altering of humans, but also bring into question the current

\textsuperscript{118} Hollinger, Veronica. "Stories about the Future: From Patterns of Expectation to Pattern
trends with geneticists around the world. One of Britain's leading fertility doctors, Lord Robert Winston, along with his colleagues, created a way to splice genes into sperm, which will make it significantly easier to alter the genetic makeup of an embryo. His intention for this scientific breakthrough is to ensure that the human organs made in host pigs will be less likely to be rejected after being transplanted into the human in need. Yet, even Lord Winston warns of the dangers that such technology can bring: "Given the desperation of people who want to enhance their children in all sorts of ways, humans might be tempted to use this and that therefore it does become a form of Eugenics." This fear is valid, as there are people who wish to genetically alter their children to have what they deem to be desirable traits. But if we begin to genetically alter humans, won't we effectively eliminate Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by playing God and wiping out natural selection? Bioethicist Jacob Appel states that, "Morally, there isn't that much difference between getting your child an SAT tutor and getting them into a good college, and making them a little bit more intelligent before they're born." Appel is touting our ability to make designer babies in the future, but there is no telling what hybridized monstrosities we could create, and how they would impact our already over-populated planet. Crake, in creating his own genetically perfect "Crakers," would probably agree with Appel, but Atwood is arguing against scientists like Appel who would use technology to create hybridized humans, much like the hybrid animals we are already creating.

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Eugenics originated in the late eighteen hundreds, shortly after Darwin’s theory of evolution emerged. Darwin’s cousin, Francis Galton, coined the term eugenics, altering Darwin’s theory of evolution into a process of selective human breeding to bring out specific traits. Due to the eugenics movement, women were regularly sterilized throughout the nineteenth century in both prisons and mental institutions in the United States. A famous example of this practice, brought before the Supreme Court in 1927, concerned a teenaged girl who had been repeatedly raped by a relative and therefore had had children out of wedlock being forced to have a tubal ligation. Supreme Court Judge Oliver Wendell Holmes declared that, “three generations of imbeciles are enough” and ordered that the girl be sterilized. This was not considered an atrocity back then because a war between the classes had been spurred by the eugenics movement: “The idea that the genetic quality of human populations should be improved upon by selective breeding practices, whereby society’s elites would curtail unnecessary reproduction by the ‘feeble-minded’ (a term... used as a catch-all for what the elites deemed socially undesirable people).” Eugenics was the elitists’ reasoning for ridding the world of the poor, the sickly, and the feeble-minded, just as Crake was attempting to do by first drastically reducing the human population with his BlyssPlus pill and then repopulating the world with his “perfect,” genetically created Crakers. This theory attracted the attention of Adolf Hitler, who, by practicing eugenics, destroyed millions of lives.

Eugenics is still practiced today, as shown in the California prison system.

Recently it was brought to light that at least 148 women have been illegally sterilized in California prisons. Some of these women say they were coerced, while others were completely unaware that the procedure was performed until they awoke from anesthesia. Dr. James Heinrich, who, according to prison records is responsible for over two-thirds of the tubal ligations at one prison, stated that sterilization was more cost effective “compared to what you save in welfare paying for these unwanted children – as they procreated more.” Administrators and doctors like Heinrich seem to be forgetting that, regardless of the fact that these women are incarcerated, even in prison their basic human right of well-being and health are protected. California also has a long history with eugenics, forcibly sterilizing women into the 1970’s at mental institutions. This is obviously a women’s rights issue, but more than that, it is a human rights issue. Even though eugenics remains a blemish in our history, people such as Dr. Heinrich and the administrators in the California prisons are perfect examples of how eugenics is alive and well in practice, despite our best efforts to suppress it. This scenario demonstrates the parallel between Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* in which eugenics is a means to repopulate the world, and U.S. society, in which people like Dr. Heinrich are attempting their own form of eugenics by sterilizing women he deems unacceptable to further the human population. Dystopian Speculative Fiction’s claims are not unwarranted, as the

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123 Campos, Paul.
125 Campos, Paul.
technology and practices of scientists and doctors are mirroring the plots and themes in this genre of literature.

**There’s Still Hope, or is there?**

While science fiction has created thousands of wonderful, exotic places for readers and viewers to escape to, DSF creates a time and place that can very well be right here and now. In an interview, Atwood draws a clear distinction between Science Fiction and her *MaddAddam* trilogy: “I hate to tell you this, but you will never actually go to a galaxy far, far away and encounter Darth Vader. That’s science fiction; it isn’t going to happen,” says Atwood… ‘But the stuff in these books?’ She leans forward. ‘*This could be you.*’” 126 Atwood’s quote is terrifyingly resonant. The world she has created in *Oryx and Crake* is reflective of historical and material realities, as I have argued throughout this chapter. Whether she has written these books as a political statement of our times, or more so as a warning of what can happen if we continue on our current trajectory, is left up to the reader’s interpretation. Atwood wrote *Oryx and Crake* as an explicit warning of what may come to be.

There are several steps that every person can make to help prevent the world that Atwood writes about. By making conscientious choices such as not supporting fast food chains and big name brands that use GMOs, cellulose, and other knowingly addictive chemicals in their foods, we send the message that we will not tolerate our food being tampered with any longer. We know that the mass production of meat is destroying our waters and our ozone, so if you can’t stop eating meat, try to limit your intake and be

conscientious about where your meat comes from. People should know where their food comes from and exactly what they’re putting in their bodies. Of course this also applies to the billions of creams and lotions we put on our bodies, as well as the supplements and pills that we imbibe each day. What if you are unknowingly already taking the next BlyssPluss pill? How do you know that you’re not? You can’t watch a half hour television show without being bombarded by at least a few commercials hawking the newest pill to cure depression, erectile dysfunction or vaginal dryness. While there are certainly medications that help improve the lives of many, there are more that do not. Our society is so caught up in fear-based living that we have to have the newest and best pill to cure everything that ails us. It’s BlyssPluss that they’re selling and people are buying it. Prescription pills are in every household. One evident result of prescription medication abuse being so rampant among teens is that we now have public service commercials asking adults, “Who else is taking your medications?”

And then there are the animals whose existence is solely as test subjects for making these pills. These animals live short, tortured lives so that we can relieve a headache, get thinner, and have clearer skin. Research on animals has led to medical breakthroughs that have cured Cancer and HIV. But with all our technological breakthroughs, hasn’t anyone found a way to not use animals to test our drugs? And then there is our food. In our culture we are conditioned to eat junk food because it is easy and quick, but after years of doing so people find themselves medication for diabetes or high blood pressure. We are addicts and the food and pharmaceutical companies are the drug pushers. They make billions of dollars on us whether we’re eating their junk food or taking their medications, or both. It is in their best interests that we be sick, which is why
they hook us when we’re young and keep us addicted for life – through sickness and in health, their pockets stay lined.

There is no sugar-coating it; the future is looks bleak. It is predicted that by 2050 nearly 6.3 million people will be living in large cities, making them ideal places for super viruses, or pills like BlyssPlus, to spread and wipe out large populations of people. Even today, more than 700,000 people a year are dying from infections that are resistant to the drugs once manufactured to cure them.¹²⁷ Our declining air quality is set to kill six million people a year by 2050, more than half the world will likely lack fresh water, and rising sea levels will flood low-lying cities like New York City and Calcutta, India.¹²⁸ Climate change will also make hurricanes and cyclones more frequent and much more powerful. And by 2050, the demand of crude oil is expected to increase 110% making it inordinately expensive: “OPEC has already predicted oil prices could explode to $200 a barrel.”¹²⁹ These predictions do not bode well. There is still hope, and it lies in education, and who better to trust with our future than the most educated generation yet, the millennials.

We must break free from the denial that shields us from the harsh truth and start educating people about what they are putting on and in their bodies, and into our planet and atmosphere. Oryx and Crake brings into our awareness the harsh realities of the world we are becoming. The line between fiction and real life is blurred. If we do not stand up for our rights and our freedom, our world will become like that of Atwood’s not-

¹²⁸ Sterbenz, Christina, and Erin Brodwin.
¹²⁹ Sterbenz, Christina, and Erin Brodwin.
so-imaginative future. It is not too late. We have a chance to stop the barbarity and fight for our lives, for our humanity, and for our world. Knowledge is power, and in this case, knowledge combined with right action can save all of our lives from the fate that befell the occupants in the world of Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*. 
CONCLUSION

Hope for Humanity

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." – Margaret Mead

Classical dystopian literature such as *We*, *1984*, and *Brave New World* was written as a voice of protest by the authors who projected their fears into the future. The young adult dystopian fiction authors have merely reflected their disenchanted views of society and the world in novels such as *Ready Player One*, *Divergent*, and *The Breeders*. Indeed, the most daunting of them all is, by far, dystopian speculative fiction, where the technologies that already exist now are being both reflected and projected into a dismal looking future.

Dystopian literature serves humanity, not only as a warning of varying potential dystopic futures, but as a means through which we can clearly and objectively see how the actions we take now can determine a better, more hopeful future. It is "an exploration of the beliefs and expectations we apply in real life to the organization of our attitudes and actions." Through dystopian literature we are made to question the actions of our government, big corporations, and the institutions that dictate our lives, as well as the societal standards under which we operate. We as readers must then question what it is that we believe in and stand for, and whether or not these beliefs we subscribe to either adhere with or disavow that of the constructs in which we live. Because dystopian literature often projects or mirrors our contemporary society, it offers a close-to-home reality that demands our utmost attention. Clearly, we do not want to live in the dystopian

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landscapes that exist within the novels I have spoken about. Yet, they exist as a call to action to prevent our lives from ending up like those of Jimmy/Snowman in *Oryx and Crake*, or Tris and Four in *Divergent*. It is admittedly difficult when reading dystopian literature to maintain hope, but hope is integral to all dystopian plots, whether it is explicit or not. The dilemma with dystopian literature is that it acts as a warning, a terrifyingly real warning, reminding humanity that we are *already living* in dystopian times.

Ray Bradbury wrote *Fahrenheit 451* long before we had flat screen televisions and cellphones practically adhered to our ears, but that is exactly what he foresaw with his wall-to-wall interactive screens, seashells clamped in ears, and prescription drug overdoses. “Overdosing is now the leading cause of accidental death in the United States, accounting for more deaths than traffic fatalities or gun homicides and suicides.”131 With the rise of drug overdoses, it makes one wonder why people choose to anesthetize themselves as Millie did in *Fahrenheit 451*. Has our world become too similar to the dystopian fiction that Bradbury created back in 1953? With the older novels such as *We*, *1984*, *Brave New World*, and *Fahrenheit 451* a common theme is the lack of hope: Winston in *1984* and D-503 in *We* are both reconditioned at the end of their novels and are sent back to their lives as cogs of the greater machine. The Savage in *Brave New World* chooses death over a life of servitude. Montag in *Fahrenheit 451* watches as his home and country are destroyed by nuclear bombs. Yet, he and his book-loving friends have faith that they will one day be of use. Overall, there is an absence of hope, as if all

will be lost if society ever turns into these super-powers. Notwithstanding, in young adult
dystopian fiction (YADF) hope is a defining factor.

In the *Divergent* trilogy Tris discovers the Bureau for Genetic Warfare and learns
the truth about her carefully controlled society. Although she dies in the end of the
trilogy, she does so admirably, so that people can live their lives freely. In *Ready Player
One* Wade wins in the end with the help of his friends, emphasizing the necessity of
teamwork. He beats the big corporation, IOI and keeps the OASIS free for all users. In
*The Breeders* Riley and Clay destroy the Breeders facility while saving her mother. They
escape and set off to reclaim Clay’s town as his own, to live in safety and peace. Why is
hope so explicit in the YADF genre?

YA authors ‘are using the dystopian genre to try to grapple with the issues of
today,’ says David Levithan, v-p and editorial director at Scholastic. But unlike
writers of adult fare, they are giving their downbeat stories an optimistic twist.
‘It’s about improving the dystopia rather than throwing up your hands and saying,
‘This is what we’re fated to be,’ he says. ‘We realize we could be these
characters.’

While dystopias acknowledge that at least things aren’t as bad as they could be, there is
still the built-in theme of “but it could be…” What differentiates the readers of the older
works like *1984, We, and Brave New World* from the readers of YADF is that now, after

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9/11, Hurricane Katrina, global warming, and all the other real catastrophes that have and are occurring, is that the millennial generation is active in implementing change.

Boyan Slat, just sixteen years old in 2011, came up with an idea of how to clean plastics out of our world's oceans. In August 2015, the now twenty year old, with over $120 million from backers in over 60 countries, has a test model being placed off the shores of Japan's Tsushima Island; the first of 24 planned models that are to be placed in the direct paths of the five main ocean gyres, which collect the most trash. Slat predicts that his platforms, designed to resemble manta rays, can clean up the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, a Texas-sized patch of garbage, mainly consisting of plastics, in less than ten years. The discoverer of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, scientist Charles Moore, predicted it would take 79,000 years to retrieve all the plastic. But thanks to the ingenuity and creativity of Slat, he found a way to make cleaning the ocean of plastics not only an impressive environmental feat, but also a profitable one, with estimates of $500 million a year by selling back the plastics for reuse.133 Slat is one of many young people whose faith in change for the better exceeds the despair of fate.

Is there a danger in labeling dystopian literature as fiction? While there are those readers who engross themselves in this type of literature, should the authors be more explicit in their warnings of the future? "If, as has been suggested, terminology is the properly poetic moment of thought, then terminological choices can never be neutral. In this sense, the choice of the term state of exception implies a position that takes on both the nature of the phenomenon that we seek to investigate and the logic most suitable for

understanding."\textsuperscript{134} As readers we seek to understand through both our intuition and our logic. By masking their predictions as fiction, are authors preventing readers from looking at the very real issues in their own lives? Margaret Atwood warned readers about her \textit{Oryx and Crake} trilogy stating, "I hate to tell you this, but you will never actually go to a galaxy far, far away and encounter Darth Vader. That's science fiction; it isn't going to happen... But the stuff in these books? \textit{This could be you}."\textsuperscript{135} We may not be facing Darth Vader, but we are facing climate change, pervasive technology, the threat of nuclear war, not to mention starvation, homelessness, and unlivable wages. At what point do we declare that dystopian literature is no longer fiction, but a scary foreshadowing of our future? When will authors be brave enough, like Atwood, to blatantly tell readers that this is no fictionalized account; it is happening now?

Dystopian literature may have started as the voice of protest, but now it has moved into a genre all its own, one foreshadowing the future. What started "as a semi-disguise or decorative front whereby [the authors of early dystopian literature] may criticize the present-day governments and institutions of the writer's own society when overt criticism might prove dangerous or fatal,"\textsuperscript{136} has evolved through YADF and dystopian speculative fiction (DSF) into similar themes such as totalitarianism and genetic warfare with an added twenty-first century spin. Still, the larger theme in all dystopian literature is what it means to be human. When Montag meets his fellow

refugees one tells him, “You’re not important. You’re not anything. Someday the load we’re carrying with us may help someone. But even when we had the books on hand, a long time ago, we didn’t use what we got out of them.”137 Being human means to constantly be learning. It is human resilience as an acknowledgement that what is happening in the world can be changed. The way things are now doesn’t have to mean that they’ll always be this way. Dystopian literature holds the key to the survival and betterment of the human species. Yet it also holds the keys to the dark places we can go if we don’t choose a different path. By viewing worlds more dystopian than our own we are given hope that there’s still a chance for a better future—only if the reader is able to lift the thin veil of fiction and discern the truth within its pages.

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