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Engl 112B

May 10, 2015

Annotated Bibliography on Dystopias

You, Me, And All Dying People

Dystopias in Young Adult literature is a peculiar genre, and yet very popular among teens. What does that mean for our youth? That they are a sadistic bunch and enjoy the torture of characters in a distraught world whilst they get to sit in a luxurious VIP booth up in the sky nibbling on a bag of chips and drinking a large soda? I mean, why else would somebody enjoy the deaths of family members and friends, moral dilemmas, identity issues, and whatnot? Well, people don't exactly *enjoy* such things. Though the VIP booth is rather true, think about it. No, the exact reason why teenagers enjoy dystopias is...not exact. The genre of dystopias is so very broad that it inherently covers many cultural issues, even if the culture is completely made-up. Ursula K. Le Guin says, "For fantasy is true, of course. It isn't factual, but it is true. Children know that. Adults know it too, and that is precisely why many of them are afraid of fantasy. They know that its truth challenges, even threatens, all that is false, phony, unnecessary, and trivial in the life they have let themselves be forced into living. They are afraid of dragons, because they are afraid of freedom." This can be found in Chapter 7 of *Literature for Today's Young Adults*. I absolutely agree with Le Guin in this notion; dystopia, which is an extension of the fantasy genre, is made-up and yet holds many true problems. While under the genre of an epic, *The Odyssey* by Homer is one of the most memorable canonical books I have read in my childhood and I revisited it in a different class. During this revisit, I was guided through the truths that the epic had portrayed which I missed the first time. There are so many things to learn from the Odyssey that has to be treated pragmatically: the dichotomy of choice between Scylla and Charybdis, the temptations you face when reaching your goals, your loyalty despite far better riches, and so much more. Paolo Bacigalupi, author of *Ship Breaker*, agrees with this notion that dystopia is simply another way of truth-telling. "Quality of life is significantly reduced from our present circumstances, and judging from teenagers' responses, they crave precisely that sort of truth-telling. Which doesn't really surprise me. As a teen, I remember that I craved truth-telling as well, and devoured it wherever I could find it."

But why are Young Adult books on dystopia so popular? That is because life isn't so simple; there aren't always exact answers for exact situations. Each situation is unique enough to pinpoint a pragmatic issue, yet broad enough to target an audience. And for each of these situations, the answer is never the same. For example, how does one deal with a dysfunctional family? One answer may be to leave home for a while, another might be therapy, or even, I say this reluctantly, suicide. Add a bit of a twist, oh say, an international war, and you've got a book that piques young readers whilst allowing them to connect with the characters.

Work Cited

Bacigalupi, Paolo. "Craving Truth-Telling." *NY Times*. The New York Times. 17 December 2012.

Web. 11 May, 2015.

Le Guin, Ursula K. "Fantasy, Science Fiction, Utopias, and Dystopias." *Literature for Today's*

Young Adults. 8th ed. New York: Pearson Education, Inc. Chapter 7. PDF File.

Annotated Bibliography

Dystopia Novels

*All summaries are taken from <http://www.goodreads.com/>

1. Collins, Suzanne. *Hunger Game*. Scholastic Press, 2008. Print. (Unread)

Summary: The nation of Panem, formed from a post-apocalyptic North America, is a country that consists of a wealthy Capitol region surrounded by 12 poorer districts. Early in its history, a rebellion led by a 13th district against the Capitol resulted in its destruction and the creation of an annual televised event known as the Hunger Games. In punishment, and as a reminder of the power and grace of the Capitol, each district must yield one boy and one girl between the ages of 12 and 18 through a lottery system to participate in the games. The 'tributes' are chosen during the annual Reaping and are forced to fight to the death, leaving only one survivor to claim victory. When 16-year-old Katniss's young sister, Prim, is selected as District 12's female representative, Katniss volunteers to take her place. She and her male counterpart Peeta, are pitted against bigger, stronger representatives, some of whom have trained for this their whole lives. , she sees it as a death sentence. But Katniss has been close to death before. For her, survival is second nature.

2. Rosenblum, Gregg. *City 1: A Revolution 19 Novel*. HarperTeen, 2015. Print. (Personal read)

Summary: In the explosive conclusion to the thrilling Revolution 19 series, the time has come to win the cities back from the bots—or die trying. After finally reuniting at a rebel camp, siblings Nick, Kevin, and Cass are willing to do anything to stay together—and free their parents from bot rule. But the leader of the rebel camp has her own ideas. Cruel and determined, General Clay won't let anything stand in the way of her plan to destroy the robots and all the brainwashed humans. This means their parents' lives are at stake, but Nick, Kevin, and Cass can't desert the rebels when they're so close to freedom. How far will they go to save the world they believe in? Created in conjunction with Alloy Entertainment; Howard Gordon, the showrunner of *24* and Showtime's Emmy Award– and Golden Globe–winning *Homeland*; and James Wong, the executive producer of *American Horror Story*; *City 1* is the gripping finale to the exhilarating Revolution 19 series.

3. Dashner, James. *Maze Runner*. Delacorte Press, 2009. Print.(Unread)

Summary: *If you ain't scared, you ain't human.*

When Thomas wakes up in the lift, the only thing he can remember is his name. He's surrounded by strangers—boys whose memories are also gone.

Nice to meet ya, shank. Welcome to the Glade.

Outside the towering stone walls that surround the Glade is a limitless, ever-changing maze. It's the only way out—and no one's ever made it through alive.

Everything is going to change.

Then a girl arrives. The first girl ever. And the message she delivers is terrifying.

Remember. Survive. Run.

4. Card, Orson Scott. *Ender's Game*. Tor Science Fiction, 1985. Print. (Partially read)

Summary: In order to develop a secure defense against a hostile alien race's next attack, government agencies breed child geniuses and train them as soldiers. A brilliant young boy, Andrew "Ender" Wiggin lives with his kind but distant parents, his sadistic brother Peter, and the person he loves more than anyone else, his sister Valentine. Peter and Valentine were candidates for the soldier-training program but didn't make the cut—young Ender is the Wiggin drafted to the orbiting Battle School for rigorous military training. Ender's skills make him a leader in school and respected in the Battle Room, where children play at mock battles in zero gravity. Yet growing up in an artificial community of young soldiers Ender suffers greatly from isolation, rivalry from his peers, pressure from the adult teachers, and an unsettling fear of the alien invaders. His psychological battles include loneliness, fear that he is becoming like the cruel brother he remembers, and fanning the flames of devotion to his beloved sister. Is Ender the general Earth needs? But Ender is not the only result of the genetic experiments. The war with the Buggers has been raging for a hundred years, and the quest for the perfect general has been underway for almost as long. Ender's two older siblings are every bit as unusual as he is, but in very different ways. Between the three of them lie the abilities to remake a world. If, that is, the world survives.

5. Farmer, Nancy. *The House of The Scorpion*. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2002. Print. (Unread)

Summary: Matteo Alacran was not born; he was harvested with the DNA from El Patron, lord of a country called Opium. Can a boy who was bred to guarantee another's survival find his own purpose in life? And can he ever be free?

6. Roth, Veronica. *Divergent*. Katherine Tegen Books, 2011. Print. (Unread)

Summary: In Beatrice Prior's dystopian Chicago world, society is divided into five factions, each dedicated to the cultivation of a particular virtue—Candor (the honest), Abnegation (the selfless), Dauntless (the brave), Amity (the peaceful), and Erudite (the intelligent). On an appointed day of every year, all sixteen-year-olds must select the faction to which they will devote the rest of their lives. For Beatrice, the decision is between staying with her family and being who she really is—she can't have both. So she makes a choice that surprises everyone, including herself. During the highly competitive initiation that follows, Beatrice renames herself Tris and struggles alongside her fellow initiates to live out the choice they have made. Together they must undergo extreme physical tests of endurance and intense psychological simulations, some with devastating consequences. As initiation transforms them all, Tris must determine who her friends really are—and where, exactly, a romance with a sometimes fascinating, sometimes exasperating boy fits into the life she's chosen. But Tris also has a secret, one she's kept hidden from everyone because she's been warned it can mean death. And as she discovers unrest and growing conflict that threaten to unravel her seemingly perfect society, she also learns that her secret might help her save those she loves . . . or it might destroy her.

7. Lowry, Lois. *The Giver*. Ember, 1993. Print. (Unread)

Summary: Jonas's world is perfect. Everything is under control. There is no war or fear or pain. There are no choices. Every person is assigned a role in the Community. When Jonas turns twelve, he is singled out to receive special training from The Giver. The Giver alone holds the memories of the true pain and pleasure of life. Now, it is time for Jonas to receive the truth. There is no turning back.

8. Orwell, George. *1984*. Signet, 1949. Print. (Unread)

Summary: While 1984 has come and gone, Orwell's narrative is more timely than ever. *1984* presents a "negative utopia", that is at once a startling and haunting vision of the world — so powerful that it's completely convincing from start to finish. No one can deny the power of this novel, its hold on the imaginations of entire generations of readers, or the resiliency of its admonitions — a legacy that seems to grow, not lessen, with the passage of time.

9. Homer. *The Odyssey*. Penguin Classics, 2006 (original date 850 BC). Print, song. (Personal read)

Summary: The *Odyssey* is literature's grandest evocation of everyman's journey through life. In the myths and legends that are retold here, renowned translator Robert Fagles has captured the energy and poetry of Homer's original in a bold, contemporary idiom and given us an *Odyssey* to read aloud, to savor, and to treasure for its sheer lyrical mastery. This is an *Odyssey* to delight both the classicist and the general reader, and to captivate a new generation of Homer's students.

10. Bradbury, Ray. *Fahrenheit 451*. Voyager, 1953. Print. (Unread)

Summary: The terrifyingly prophetic novel of a post-literate future. Guy Montag is a fireman. His job is to burn books, which are forbidden, being the source of all discord and unhappiness. Even so, Montag is unhappy; there is discord in his marriage. Are books hidden in his house? The Mechanical Hound of the Fire Department, armed with a lethal hypodermic, escorted by helicopters, is ready to track down those dissidents who defy society to preserve and read books. The classic dystopian novel of a post-literate future, *Fahrenheit 451* stands alongside Orwell's 1984 and Huxley's *Brave New World* as a prophetic account of Western civilization's enslavement by the media, drugs and conformity. Bradbury's powerful and poetic prose combines with uncanny insight into the potential of technology to create a novel which, decades on from first publication, still has the power to dazzle and shock.

11. McCarthy, Cormac. *The Road*. Knopf, 2006. Print (Unread)

A father and his son walk alone through burned America. Nothing moves in the ravaged landscape save the ash on the wind. It is cold enough to crack stones, and when the snow falls it is gray. The sky is dark. Their destination is the coast, although they don't know what, if anything, awaits them there. They have nothing; just a pistol to defend themselves against the lawless bands that stalk the road, the clothes they are wearing, a cart of scavenged food--and each other.

The Road is the profoundly moving story of a journey. It boldly imagines a future in which no hope remains, but in which the father and his son, "each the other's world entire," are sustained by love. Awesome in the totality of its vision, *The Road* is an unflinching meditation on the worst and the best that we are capable of: ultimate destructiveness, desperate tenacity, and the tenderness that keeps two people alive in the face of total devastation.

Dystopia Video Games

1. *Danganronpa: Trigger Happy Havoc*. Spike Chunsoft, 2010. Video Game.

Summary: The story takes place at Hope's Peak Academy, an illustrious private school that only accepts "super" students: the best of the best of the best. The criteria extends to any niche, so in addition to super-geniuses and super-athletes, they take super-idols, gang leaders, and geeks. Makoto Naegi, the protagonist, is still baffled as to how he got in, as his only outstanding trait seems to be his super "good" luck - and that's only because he was randomly chosen to be accepted by the school. In fact, he hasn't even started his first day of school when he suddenly loses consciousness and wakes up in a creepy alternate version of the academy. It's soon revealed that Makoto and fourteen other new students have all been abducted by a sadistic teddy bear named Monokuma, who refuses to let them leave. The only way out of the locked-down dark school is to graduate...by killing another student. Once a murder is committed, Monokuma holds a trial so that the class can try to figure out which one of them is the culprit, culminating in a vote. If they make the right choice, the murderer will be messily executed. Make the wrong choice,

and not only does the murderer escape, but the rest of them will take the punishment in their place...

2. *Fallout 3*. Bethesda Softworks, 2008. Video Game.

Summary: You, the Lone Wanderer, are a young inhabitant of Vault 101. The Vault has supposedly been sealed for the last 200 years, with nobody entering or leaving it. All was going well until your father, James, disappeared from the vault without any explanation. During the ensuing commotion, you also escape the vault and set off in search of your father.