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Dystopian Literature: A Darker World

Annotated Bibliography

-Introduction

I've always been obsessed with the world's problems. I find ways to enjoy its serenity, but I'm often more concerned with the issues and their implications.

During turbulent times, many authors attempt to craft worlds that wonder down the path of current patterns and take problems to their logical extremes. These resulting worlds are often referred to as Dystopias. They characterize the potential dark possibilities of the utopias that are sometimes fantasized about.

The genre delves into several issues that have plagued mankind for centuries. Most dominant of these is the balance of freedom verses security. Here in America, freedom is the foundation we have built this nation upon. We constructed a Bill of Rights with the sole purpose of protecting our freedoms from possible tyranny. However, we also face many threats and must take certain precautions to protect ourselves. Sometimes these safety measures require us to give up certain freedoms, such as privacy. Dystopian literature shows us the negative implications

of these sacrifices and suggests that if we give up our freedom in exchange for security, in the end, we forfeit both.

Another issue dealt with in Dystopian Literature is the question of what it means to be an individual, and what is the individual's role in society? As the world grows larger and more complex, the individual becomes smaller and less important. Many of these books involve protagonist who are fed up with being reduced to a cog in the machine and rebel against the system in order to reclaim their humanity. They realize that their unique individuality is what truly defines them and they attempt to spread this idea.

This annotated bibliography includes an assortment of books that analyze the role of the individual and its relationship to society. What rights should the individual have? What rights should the state have? And what does it mean to be a human being?

-Brave New World

By Aldus Huxley

(Read)

-Summary: Set six hundred years in the future, the world has undergone several major changes. Civilization has been entirely industrialized. Birth is no longer natural, but takes place on the assembly line. People are no longer forced to endure negative emotions because of Soma, a pill that brings instantaneous joy. The protagonist Bernard is furtively dissatisfied with the status quo and begins to

identify flaws in the ostensible utopia. A visit to a reservation of “savages” has a drastic impact on his worldview.

-Analysis: The story was written in 1932 and articulated an ominous foreboding of the implications of mass industrialization that was taking place. As uniformity began to arise, Huxley took it to its logical extreme in *Brave New World*. He created a world where efficiency is the prime objective, and human beings are reduced to cogs in the colossal civilization machine. The book presents the classic argument of dystopia literature: the individual must not be eradicated by the state.

-Do Androids Dream Of Electric Sheep?

By Philip K. Dick

(Read)

-Summary: A massive amount of casualties occur as the result of a future World War. Several species have gone extinct and androids become a large chunk of “life” on earth. These androids have become so advanced and sophisticated that it is nearly impossible to deviate them from organic life. The protagonist Rick Deckard is a bounty hunter that is in charge of tracking down rogue androids and taking them down.

-Analysis: The book delves into the question of what it actually is that makes a human being *human*. The only difference between man and android in the book is that one is organic and the other is mechanical. They are both shown as fearful, manipulative, and loyal to their own kind. Little by little, the protagonist Rick has a

difficult time doing his job because he realizes these robots he is “retiring” are more than just a bunch of nuts and bolts.

-Lord Of The Flies

By: William Golding

(Read)

-Summary: A group of young boys crash land on an island where they are left to govern over themselves. They elect a boy named Ralph as their leader but struggle to maintain order as their animal instincts steadily begin to take over. Spearheading the savagery is sanguine Jack. The two boys battle each other in a fight between chaos and order.

-Analysis: This book answers the question many children ponder: what adults weren't around and they were left to their own devices? They arrive on the island with a moral compass that resembles the one that had been bestowed upon them by their former “civilized” world. But as they see that their actions have a different set of consequences on this island, many of them devolve into animals. They begin to care less about getting rescued, and more about hunting for meat. They begin to lust for blood and violence, going as far as committing murder. The story takes place during World War II, the deadliest conflict in human history, which suggests that children and adults are not so different.

-The Giver

By Lois Lowry

(Read)

-Summary: A young boy named Jonah lives in a world where all differentiation has been eradicated and an era of “Sameness” has been ushered in. Essentially all choices have been eliminated and everyone follows a strict, state assigned path through life. At the age of 12, children are assigned the jobs they will handle for the rest of their working lives. Jonah is given the position of Receiver of Memories. He is shown the world that existed before “Sameness” and must now view his once ideal world through a new lens.

-Analysis: This novel does a fantastic job at portraying the lack of emotional depth that results when individuality is eliminated. Jonahs begins to experience feelings that are obsolete from the rest of the world and sees the superficial reality they are all living in. They have ceased to be their own persons and have been molded into a conventional ideal of what the civilized man or woman should be like. They should not be motivated by fear or anger or sadness—they should learn the prescribed guidelines and subsequently follow them without making their own decisions.

Synchronicity is the key to a peaceful world.

-Animal Farm

By George Orwell

(Read)

-Summary: A group of farm animals unite in an attempt to form a system of labor and fair distribution of wealth. A pair of pigs named Snowball and Napoleon lead the revolution. They are successful in the early days of their new social order. But as

time goes on, ambitions and goals begin clash and divide the farm. As this occurs, power gradually consolidates and before long the farm animals are back right where they started under a tyrannical ruler.

-Analysis: This is one of my favorite books. It offers an excellent take on a theory that I have long believed in: power always finds a way to consolidate and corrupt. Fresh out of the revolution, the farm is idyllic. Everyone is on the same page, their endeavor is prosperous, and there is equality across the board. But as time goes on, greed begins to emerge, and the Farm is forced to deal with laziness, inefficiency, and opposing game plans. The story does a magnificent job of coming full circle and ending right where it started.

-1984

By George Orwell

(Read)

-Summary: The protagonist, Winston Smith, works for the Ministry of Truth where his job is to distort history in support of Big Brother. The entire society is under surveillance and it is nearly impossible to escape the eye of Big Brother. Winston falls in love with a girl named Julia and they attempt to join a secret organization that is attempting to rebel against the State. They eventually learn that Big Brother is everywhere and cannot be escaped.

-Analysis: This book takes an in-depth look at the dehumanization that can occur as the result of an overbearing state. Big Brother is supposed to exist in order to prevent crime but it is shown that its tyrannical omnipotence is a crime in itself.

Man is deprived of his own ability to think and act and believe in an objective truth, Big Brother takes away all of these freedoms and in essence their entire humanity.

-Fahrenheit 451

By Ray Bradbury

(Read)

-Summary: Books are a thing of the past in the future. They have been outlawed because of the issues they brought upon the world. The protagonist, Guy Montag, works as a firefighter in charge of burning books whenever they are found. One day he decides to take a few books home with him and secretly reads them. He begins to question the draconian principles of the world he lives in and rebels against the system.

-Analysis: In *Fahrenheit 451*, books symbolize freedom of thought. The world has banned books, and in essence, has revoked all first amendment rights. Their society has concluded that a diversity of beliefs only leads to discord, thus it is prudent to completely eliminate the spectrum of opinions. If all beliefs are the same, then none of them can conflict with one another. Peace at last. But the question is begged, is peace worth the price of freedom?

-A Clockwork Orange

By Anthony Burgess

(Read)

-Summary: Alec is a sadistic teenager in charge of a small gang of boys, calling themselves the Droogs. At night, they roam the streets in search of mayhem and innocent bystanders to abuse. Eventually Alec is caught by the police and sentenced to undergo a new form of therapy that will eradicate all violent instincts he once possessed. He is programmed to experience an unbearable sickness anytime he is overcome by aggression. After being released back into the free world, it is clear that for better or for worse he is a changed man.

-Analysis: Alec is the total embodiment of chaos and anarchy before he goes to prison. He is a sociopath. He plays by no other rules but his own, and he is completely free from the retribution of a guilty conscience. However, after his release, he is deprived of his free will by taking the option of violence completely off the table. He is not even allowed to defend himself when attacked. The book asks the question: no matter how bad someone's actions might be, is it ever okay to take away their free will?

-A Wrinkle In Time

By Madeleine L'Engle

(Read)

-Summary: Its been years since Meg and her younger brother Charles Wallace have seen their Father, a physicist that embarked on a top secret mission for the government and never came back. They soon learn the truth behind what has happened to him and the world he has been doomed to. There is a Dark entity

wreaking havoc on the universe and it is up to Meg, Charles Wallace, and their friend Calvin to rescue their father.

-Analysis: The book involves a “dark” planet that has been taken over by a single being that ushers in an era of sameness, similar that of *The Giver*. This world includes no disruptions and its’ citizens are petrified of deviating for fear of being “reprocessed”. Like many dystopian worlds, the people here have been totally deprived of their freedom. They are essentially slaves. The book shows that in such places, although there is no conflict, there is also no love or joy.

-The Maze Runner

By James Dashner

(Read)

-Summary: A teenage boy named Thomas finds himself inside a massive courtyard surrounded by a giant Maze. He is there with a group of other boys, and they have no recollection of their lives before their arrival. The Maze is filled with terrifying monsters and nearly impossible to solve because it changes every night. Thomas and his group attempt to escape the Maze and discover the truth of why they are really there.

-Analysis: One important feature of Dystopia literature is a world in peril that needs saving. When Thomas arrives, the group of boys have spent the better part of two years trying to figure out the Maze. Everything changes when Thomas joins them and he is subsequently called to action. They live in a demented world where children have been placed inside a giant Maze—some of them die and the whole

thing appears to be one big science experiment. Thomas' mission is to uncover the truth, this is his hero's journey.