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Philip Stoner

Dystopian Literature:
Evolution of Dystopian Literature
From *We* to the *Hunger Games*

Dystopian literature has long been a vessel for political commentary dating back to the 19th century. The genre was redefined in 1921 when Yevgeny Zamyatin wrote the dystopian novel *We*. This novel is largely considered to be the birth of modern dystopia. *We* influenced the use of dystopian literature as political commentary by using it as a vessel for direct analogy for existing Russian political system under Lenin and Putin. *We* also expanded on the theme of personal discovery and the importance of the arts in dystopian literature. The tropes that were established in *We* have remained staples of the evolving dystopian genre. The dystopian genre remained a dark themed, adult genre, highly reflective of the work of Zamyatin, until the 1980s and 1990s which introduced the idea of dystopia as a young adult genre. Dystopias did not become popular in the young adult genre until 1993, when Lois Lowry released *The Giver*. Lowry's novel built upon the existing tropes of the genre, and she expanded on the idea of dystopia as a means of personal discovery. After 1993 the dystopian genre became largely aimed at young adult readership. *The Hunger Games* is a prime example of contemporary dystopian fiction in the young adult genre. The evolution of the genre can be linked to political developments, as well as the development of the theme of self-discovery within the genre. This paper will explore the importance of *We* in the development of 20th century dystopian tropes, fully define the genre and common tropes of traditional 20th century dystopian literature, examine how the genre is used as political commentary, and explain how and why the genre transitioned to the young adult genre while still maintaining many of the traditional tropes.

We:

The dystopian genre existed before Yevgeny Zamyatin, but the 20th century iteration of the genre is owed to the work of Zamyatin and his novel *We*. Vladimir Lenin, who strongly constricted the freedom of artists in Russia, ruled the government in Russia in the 1920s. He insisted that what Russia needed was a unified, singular face that promoted the ideas of Marxism. This included employing artists by the state to produce “state approved” works of art that promoted unity and the Marxist ideal. Lenin was also obsessed with technology and wanted that reflected in the work of artists in Russia (Hutchings, 91). This idea outraged Zamyatin, who was involved with the Serapion Brothers, a group of antiestablishment artists. Zamyatin wrote many different anti-establishment essays that led to his arrest on several occasions. *We* was meant to be the literary cap on his anti-establishment work, but he was not able to get it published in the Soviet Union because publishers were afraid of the retribution of the government. Zamyatin secretly sent a copy of *We* to England in 1924. *We* was very well received in England and was published almost immediately. In 1931 Zamyatin appealed to Joseph Stalin, the then ruler of the Soviet Union, to grant him an exile so that he could leave the country. In this letter Zamyatin wrote, “[t]rue literature can only exist when it is created, not by diligent reliable officials, but by madmen, hermits, heretics, dreamers, rebels and skeptics” (Zamyatin 8). This quote captures how oppressed Zamyatin believed the arts to be in Russia. This oppression obviously served as a motivation for his desire to leave his homeland. Stalin ultimately relented because he wanted to be rid of him. This political environment became the inspiration for 20th century dystopian literature, and it helped establish the tropes of the genre that lasted up to the contemporary iterations of it.

Oppressive Government:

The single most defining attribute of dystopian literature is the presence of an oppressive

government body. In *We* this body is known as the “One State.” This entity is highly reflective of Lenin and Stalin's Russian government. For instance, in *We* everything is highly focused on the use of technology and mathematics. At the beginning of the novel, D-503 finds the highly technical, dehumanized world to be very appealing, but as the novel progresses his perspective changes to one of general dislike to where he sees it as “gray glassy” and “unalive.” This is meant as a commentary on what Lenin idealized as the best means of culture. Furthermore, Zamyatin directly criticizes Lenin's oppression of the arts by parodying the idea of state employed artists. This can be seen in the novel when D-503 is talking about the poets that are employed by the One State. For instance, D-503 states, “today, poetry is . . . civic service; poetry is useful. . . . Our poets no longer soar in the empyrean; they have come down to earth; they stride beside us to the stern mechanical March of the Music Plant, . . . the majestic echoes of the Hymn to the One State” (*We* 68-69). This is commentary on the oppression of artists by Lenin and Stalin and the use of artists as a means of propaganda. This lack of artistic honesty was the aspect of the culture in Russia that Zamyatin hated the most. He believed it to be completely undermining to the arts in general, and represented a lack of respect for the essence of the arts (Hutchings 88). Furthermore, there are repeated references to the culture and society in *We* being a transparent society where everything is monitored so that nothing is different and undermines the established order of The One-State. For example, while talking about securing permission to lower his blinds, which is only given on designated sex days, D-503 says, “we live our lives in full view, perpetually awash with light, in among our transparent walls, woven from the sparkling air” (Zamyatin 19). This is a prime example of the transparency and lack of privacy that is created by The One-State to exercise control over its people. The people are encouraged to accept this control and lack of privacy, and at the beginning of the novel D-503 considers it a

comforting thought to have “someone’s vigilant eye lovingly protecting you from the slightest mistake, from the slightest misstep” (Zamyatin 59). These aspects of *We* that reflect the Russian government in the 1920s become the basis of the oppressive government trope that prevails in 20th century dystopian literature.

Regulation of the Arts and Original Thought:

This is another very defining trait of 20th century dystopian fiction that finds its roots in Zamyatin's writings. In *We* the One-State suppresses individuality of thought and artistic expression in favor of being the same, which they believe promotes peace. This sort of suppression can be witnessed in *We* in a scene where D-503 is taken, by I-330, to a room containing a piano, which is an ancient, outlawed device. The fact that the piano has been outlawed by The One-State is a good example of the oppression of artistic expression that is meant to comment on the Russian government’s own oppression of the arts. This idea of music being outlawed is further expressed when D-503 is talking about music and says, “how pitiful that whimsical music of the Ancients, delimited by nothing except wild fantasy” (Zamyatin 19). This is reflective of The One-State's perspective of music as a tool for personal expression and longing, which is of course outlawed in this culture that is obsessed with oneness and order. As mentioned above, the government also limits the fiction and poetry that is produced, and rather creates government approved poetry that promotes the ideals of The One-State. Furthermore, another means of control that is enacted by The One-State also limits people’s ability to keep their own children. Instead of being raised by the biological parents, children are raised in child rearing stations. This is done to prevent the potentially damaging relationships between parent and child that could undermine the stability of The One-State. Also, the people are limited in their individuality in the means of their dress, they are all made to wear grey-blue jumpsuits.

This is to limit the personal expression of dress. They also no longer have names but are identified by number/letter classification, such as D-503 and I-330. These are all attempts at limiting the existence of self in preference to a communal oneness that is intended to promote peace and order. These are all also direct analogies for what was happening politically in Russia at the time that Zamyatin was writing *We*. He saw the government in place under Lenin and then Stalin as a controlling regime that was attempting to limit people's rights and freedoms through policing and government sanctions on non-approved artwork. For instance, the Russian government had a secret police that was in charge of policing and removing what the government considered dangerous propaganda. Often disobeying the government decrees on art would result in people either being killed or arrested and sent to the gulags (“Joseph Stalin”).

Self-Exploration:

While Zamyatin meant much of *We* as political commentary on the totalitarian government in Russia at the time, he also explores the idea of self-exploration as a means of commentary on those who blindly followed the regime in place. For instance, Zamyatin considered the artists in the futurist movement that accepted the government restrictions and helped propagate them, to be willingly blind and aiding the oppression of self that was taking place in the culture at the time. In an essay entitled *Moscow and Saint Petersburg*, Zamyatin states that “the Futurists had willingly forsaken their independence for the subservience to the newly established government” (14). This is a perfect embodiment of what Zamyatin was meaning to comment on with the themes of self-exploration in *We*. For example, the primary character, D-503, is repeatedly faced with situations where he must choose between independent thought and conformity to The One-State. The first one of these choices arises when he is taken to an old house by I-330, which is in direct violation of his mandated activity for that day, and he

is faced with reporting it and getting I-330 in trouble, or not reporting it and continuing to disobey the government. He of course does not report it, but at this early stage of the book D-503 is still making excuses for his rebellious behavior because he is afraid of rebelling (Zamyatin 28). Furthermore, we see the conflict of self with oppressive government in the fact that D-503 begins to have dreams after this first act of rebellion. Dreams are strictly forbidden and are supposed to be reported because they tend to indicate that someone is not happy with their current life. Having dreams is considered to be a sign of illness by The One-State. This is evident when D-503 is reflecting on his dreams and thinks, “we, here and now, know that dreams are a serious psychic disease. I also know: until now my brain was chronometrically regulated and gleaming, a mechanism without a single speck, but now.... Yes particularly now: I feel a kind of foreign body in there, in my brain, like a fine eyelash in the eye” (Zamyatin 30). At this point D-503 considers his dreams, which represent the struggle of his individuality, to be a sickness and something that can and should be cured. This regulation of dreams is clear commentary on what Zamyatin considered the willing sacrifice of self that the Futurists were doing in favor of cooperation with the government. Many of the situations that D-503 finds himself in that are in rebellion to the “One-State” are instigated by the female character of I-330, which leads to the next trope that Zamyatin established in 20th century dystopian fiction: that of the female instigator.

Female Instigator:

In *We* Zamyatin uses the character of I-330 as a means of influencing the actions of D-503 and the development of his individuality. This becomes a trope of the major 20th century dystopian fiction that follows. While this particular aspect does not comment on the Russian society as directly as the others, it does work as a commentary on the idea of love, which

Zamyatin saw as being limited in the oppressive government. This commentary on love, which is romantic in nature in *WE*, serves as a commentary on the concept of love in general. The idea of love for one's fellow man, the love for one's art, and the love for one's self, all of which Zamyatin considered to be under attack in the totalitarian regime in Russia. This is evident in the statements by Zamyatin in his essays that condemn the move toward technology, industrialization, and futurism that Zamyatin considered forces that dehumanized people and made them nothing but cogs in a machine (Hutchins 89). The commentary on the dehumanizing potential of these forces is found in the relationship between D-503 and I-330. The love between them as a means of stimulating D-503's individuality is seen when he is writing about "The One Vote" which is the most important annual holiday where the government is reelected. Here D-503 writes:

I want only one thing: I-330. I want her to be with me, each minute, every minute, alone with her. And what I wrote just now about the One Vote is all irrelevant, not what I meant, and I cross it all out, tear it up, and throw it out. Because I know (call it blasphemy) the only holiday is when I am with her, when she is near me, side by side. Without her, tomorrow's sun will only be a little tin circle and the sky will be tin, painted blue, and I myself will be. (Zamyatin 122)

This is a clear example on how Zamyatin meant this to be commentary on the individuality of love, and how that is in contest with the oppressive government of The One-State. The use of a female character as the instigator of D-503's discovery of his individuality is a vessel that is supposed to represent the importance of love, in all its manifestations, to individuality.

Bleak Endings:

The last trope that Zamyatin established that is predominate in 20th century dystopian

fiction is the idea of bleak endings. This is meant as direct commentary on where Zamyatin thought that totalitarian cultures were headed if they did nothing to resist the governments in place. This theme is seen in *We* toward the end of the novel when, in response to the increasing rebellion, The One-State announces that there will be a mandatory operation called “The Great Operation” that will cure people of all unhappiness. “The Great Operation” is revealed to the people in a newspaper article that proclaims:

YOU WILL BE PERFECT, YOU WILL BE MACHINE-EQUAL. THE PATH TO ONE-HUNDRED-PERCENT HAPPINESS IS CLEAR. HURRY ALL OF YOU- YOUNG AND OLD- HURRY TO UNDERGO THE GREAT OPERATION. HURRY TO THE AUDITORIUMS, WHERE THEY ARE PERFORMING THE GREAT OPERATION. ALL HAIL THE GREAT OPERATION! ALL HAIL THE ONE STATE! ALL HAIL THE BENEFACTOR! (Zamyatin 158)

This is a clear example of Zamyatin commenting on not only the dangers of allowing someone else to dictate what will make you happy and controlling your life, but it is also commentary on the dehumanization that Zamyatin saw taking place. The line “YOU WILL BE MACHINE-EQUAL” is further commentary on the Futurist movement in Russia that celebrated the dehumanization of people. D-503 undergoes this operation, as do the majority of the populace, which leads him to disregard everything that he had felt and written before as being pure madness (Zamyatin 198). This is Zamyatin's warning to the Futurists and all others that followed these totalitarian governments as to where they may be heading if they surrender their individuality over to the government.

The Expansion of These Tropes:

These tropes that Zamyatin established in *We* as social commentary became the defining

characteristics of popular dystopia. Several of the most prevalent examples of these tropes being taken and used in later popular dystopias are *1984* by George Orwell and *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley. In fact, George Orwell has stated that he was greatly influenced by Zamyatin, and actually wrote a review of *We* in 1946. In this review Orwell wrote:

The first thing anyone would notice about *We* is the fact--never pointed out, I believe--that Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* must be partly derived from it. Both books deal with the rebellion of the primitive human spirit against a rationalized, mechanized, painless world, and both stories are supposed to take place about six hundred years hence. The atmosphere of the two books is similar, and it is roughly speaking the same kind of society that is being described though Huxley's book shows less political awareness and is more influenced by recent biological and psychological theories. (2)

Here Orwell is pointing out some of the ways that Huxley's work was influenced by Zamyatin, after admitting that his own work was. Huxley and Orwell are only two examples of a genre that remained largely defined by these motifs for decades. Upon a close reading and examination of *1984*, the influence of Zamyatin that Orwell admitted to is very apparent.

1984:

Oppressive Government: This is the first trope that was established by *We* that is predominate in *1984*. In *1984* the government is called “Big Brother,” and there are posters placed throughout London that proclaim “BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU” (Orwell 2). This is the first example of the oppressive government in *1984*. Another similarity that it has to the government in *We* is that “Big Brother” tells the citizens of London what they must do, and schedule a majority of their time. Furthermore, the government requires that all citizens keep their TV screens on in their houses at all times so that they can be monitored when they are

alone. Another way that the government reflects the ideas established in *We* is in the embodiment of “The Thought Police” which is the police force that is employed by the government as a means of controlling what people do through fear. Furthermore, in *1984* the government controls all aspect of the media and reports obscure details about war that is constantly plaguing the government, but never supplies any information. This is meant as a means of keeping the people of London scared so they rely on the government (Orwell 20). They also destroyed much of the history and literature of the past as means of creating the reality that the people live in. For example, Winston, the main character, works in the “Records Department” which controls all records and media. All newspapers that Winston deals with are sent to a secret room where everything is checked and corrected by government representatives before they were released. Here Orwell writes, “[t]his process of continuous alteration was not only applied to newspapers, but to books, periodicals, pamphlets, posters, leaflets, films, sound-tracks, cartoons, photographs- to every kind of literature or documentation which might conceivably hold any political or ideological significance” (Orwell 35). This is a prime example of the way that the government in *1984* controlled all forms of media and makes it conform to the reality that they want to impose on their people. This is similar to the way that the poets in *We* are used to further the power and control of The One-State.

Regulation of the Arts and Original Thought: Here Orwell takes it a step further than Zamyatin. In *1984* no one is allowed to produce any form of art. In fact, Winston keeps a diary of his thoughts, this act of itself is considered to be a “Thought Crime” which is punishable by death or imprisonment, regardless of the content of his diary. Thought crime is considered to be one of the most extreme crimes in *1984* because it undermines the oneness that they have established. The extreme nature is captured when Winston writes in his diary, “Thoughtcrime

does not entail death: Thoughtcrime IS death” (Orwell 26). The government also restricts human companionship. Winston has no friends in the novel, and he does not socialize with anyone outside of politically acceptable conversations that promote the government. This is very similar to the way that The One-State regulates human companionship in *We*. Another prime example of the oppression of original thought and art is the motto of “Big Brother” that reads, “WAR IS PEACE. FREEDOM IS SLAVERY. IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH (Orwell 2). This phrase reoccurs repeatedly throughout the book, and it perfectly embodies how the government perceives original thought and artistic expression. There is a constant drive in both *1984* and *WE* toward oneness, which the governments sell as the root to happiness.

Self-Exploration: The diary that Winston keeps is an excellent example of his desire for individuality that is separate from the government. Unlike D-503, Winston is represented as someone who often questions the government, but does not have any motivation to do anything about it. Similarly to D-503, Winston explores his individuality in the embodiment of dreams. This is seen when Winston is dreaming about his mother. On this dream Winston reflects that the death of his mother, over 30 years ago, was tragic, and that tragedy was no longer even possible in the current society. While reflecting on this, Winston decides that tragedy “belonged to an ancient time, to a time when there was still privacy, love, and friendship, and when the members of a family stood by one another without needing to know the reason” (Orwell 27). This is a perfect embodiment of the self-exploration taking place in the character of Winston because here he is directly questioning the government’s restrictions of basic human traits, such as love, which define people. Furthermore, Winston is finally motivated to act directly against the government by a girl named Julia, who works in the same building as him. He had not had much interaction with Julia before the point that she discreetly slips him a note that reads “I LOVE YOU” (Orwell

91).

Female Instigator: The note that Julia slips to Winston is really the beginning of this trope in *1984*. It works in a very similar fashion as the relationship between I-330 and D-503 in *We*. Obviously, as expressed in the above quote, Winston already sees the restriction of love and companionship to be a horrible thing that the government is doing to its people, but this acts as the instigating factor that motivates him to do something about his current situation. For instance, he is motivated to small acts of rebellion at first, such as holding her hand at a mandatory government event (Orwell 98). This eventually leads Winston to sneaking away with Julia where they can be alone. Similarly to I-330 and D-503, Julia works as the motivating factor for the protagonist Winston and his discovery of self. For instance, Julia and Winston fall in love in the book after escaping several times to be together. The use of a love affair as the cause of the rebellion of Winston by Orwell is meant to have the same effect as the use of the love affair in *We*. It offers love as the alternative to the oppressive government that seeks to control and dehumanize people.

Bleak Ending: The final trope that is reflected in *1984* is that of a bleak ending. In *1984* this ending is presented in the character of O'Brien. O'Brien is another person with whom Winston works, to whom he thinks he can relate. At one point O'Brien invites Winston to his house and gives him a book, which is of course a direct violation of government laws. Julia and Winston think they have found someone who is part of the resistance and sympathizes with their hatred of "Big Brother" (Orwell 89-102). This turns out not to be true as O'Brien betrays them and has them arrested by "The Thought Police" and taken to the "Ministry of Love." After beatings and interrogations, O'Brien eventually brings in a cage containing a rat, which happens to be Winston's greatest fear, and straps it to Winston's head so that, after lifting a series of gates

in the cage, the rat would eat Winston's face. At this point Winston screams, “[d]o it to Julia! Do it Julia! Not me! I don't care what you do to her. Tear her face off, strip her to the bones. Not me! Julia! Not me!” (Orwell 240). This represents the government’s victory over Winston by making him betray Julia. Here Orwell is channeling the idea of the loss of self that is present in *We*. Even though Winston chooses himself over Julia, which can be seen as a selfish act, by betraying Julia he is rejecting the idea of love, which is being used to represent the concept of humanity. In this context, he is rejecting the idea of humanity to survive, which parallels D-503’s choice to have the “Great Operation.” The reader sees the loss of self in Winston’s actions at the very end of the book where he is seen sitting in a coffee shop watching the news and readily agreeing with everything the government is saying. This is intended to represent the conformity to oppression that the genre is warning against.

Fascism and the Cold War:

As is clear in the works of both Zamyatin and Orwell, both of whom are considered highly influential in the dystopian genre, early 20th century dystopia was meant as a commentary on the frightening reality of totalitarian governments. For Zamyatin, he grew up in one, and obviously was greatly influenced by that experience. In contrast, Orwell was highly influenced by Zamyatin and the great threat that totalitarianism represented. The world had suffered extensively under the hands of a totalitarian government, that of Nazi Germany, and this concern about this happening again became prominent in literature, particularly in the dystopian genre, which had been established as a vessel of commentary on totalitarian governments by Zamyatin when he wrote *We*. This trend of dystopian fiction as a warning against totalitarian, Utopian societies continues for decades after the publishing of *We* and *1984* largely due to the Cold War. As Derek Maus writes in *Series and Systems: Russian and American Dystopian Satires of the*

Cold War; the Cold War acted as a constant reminder to people of the totalitarian governments of the past, such as those of Hitler and Stalin. He goes on to say that dystopian fiction that came out during the Cold War is meant as a warning against utopian concepts or desires. Furthermore, he claims that Russia was not the only nation to have utopian ideals or aspirations. He claims that:

The American Dream had promised an expansive future, and what we now find as a melancholy loss of faith in America's exceptionalism, a sense of tarnished morality at odds with official propaganda upholding American's innocence and good will... the more liberal writers are obsessed with American's loss of goodness and righteousness, a claim that had stemmed from the promise of liberty and justice for all and that had always seemed to justify America's prosperity. Many of these writers were children in the 1950's... and were bombarded in grade school with statements that our national fairness, honesty, prosperity, and good will made America the best nation in the world, a utopian state realized rather than something needing to be striven for. (Maus 76)

Here Maus is arguing that the Cold War pitted two superpowers, both with utopian dreams, at odds with each other. This cultural combat which pitted two differing ideals of utopia against each other, helped to maintain the current pattern of dystopian fiction. It was Zamyatin who used dystopian fiction as a commentary on a totalitarian society that promised its people utopia that worked to define dystopian literature. Dystopian literature continued to follow the model established by Zamyatin, and remained largely unchanged for decades because the Cold War reminded people of the dangers of totalitarianism and the drive for utopia. It is only after the end of the Cold War in 1991 that the face of the dystopian genre began to change. The primary change that can be witnessed in the dystopian genre after the Cold War is its subtle shift toward the young adult demographic. This shift in theme from dark, adult fiction to young adult fiction

is most easily attributed to *The Giver* by Lois Lowry.

The Giver:

The Giver, published in 1993, was not the first young adult dystopia written, but it was the most successful and helped to shift the genre to a predominately young adult demographic. Although it is aimed at a young adult readership, *The Giver* still incorporates many of the same tropes that were established by Zamyatin so many years before. However, because of the lack of a personal experience with totalitarianism, and the end of the Cold War, which for many seemed to end the idea of a mainstream nation functioning in a totalitarian system, *The Giver* is far more concerned with the past and what we learn from those memories. This is in contrast to the traditional, adult dystopias that were used as warnings. This is the first example of how the classic dystopian tropes evolved to fit their newfound readership.

Oppressive Government: While there is a distinct presence of an oppressive government in *The Giver*, it is far less violent than readers had seen in classic works such as *We*. There is no “Thought Police” as in *1984*, and people are generally happy with the restricted lives that they live. Even the violence that does take place is very subtle and shaded. For instance, sick children and old people are released from the community, which actually serves as a code for killed. Furthermore, the government assigns every citizen a job at age twelve based on their skills that will best serve the society as a whole. This takes place at a ceremony called “ceremony for the twelves” (Lowry 56). Every person must dedicate themselves to their assigned job. This differs from the violent, overtly oppressive societies that existed in the early 20th century, but nonetheless is a representation of an oppressive governmental system.

Regulation of the Arts and Original Thought: Obviously there is oppression of original thought because people are not allowed to choose their career paths for themselves.

There is also an incredible stress put on politeness in the society. In addition, everyone is required to take a drug that restricts sexual urges and emotions. Furthermore, there is no color in the world because color can have such a profound emotional effect on people. In fact, the mandatory drugs that people take actually remove their ability to see colors. This complete removal of color is a clear restriction of the arts because so much art is motivated by the emotional connection that people have with colors. There is also no music. This is evident when the giver shows Jonas a piano and Jonas hears music for the first time (Lowry 122). Obviously since this is the first time that Jonas has heard music, there is no music in the community, which is a prime example of further restriction of the arts. The government intends people to be dedicated to their work so that they have no time for artistic expression. The restriction of music and art that is prevalent in *The Giver* is an obvious harkening to the tropes established by Zamyatin.

Self-Exploration: This is one of the largest themes in *The Giver*. Because totalitarian governments no longer loomed large in American culture when *The Giver* was published, its focus shifted to themes more relevant to its young adult readers. The self-exploration in *The Giver* is embodied in the character of the giver himself. The giver is responsible for all the memories of the community and must pass them down to Jonas because he is the new giver. It is through these experiences of pain, love, happiness, and joy that no longer exist in the regulated society in place that Jonas learns what it is to be different and individual. For instance, he is given memories that range from snow sledding, to fighting in a war. Before Jonas received these memories he had no idea what cold felt like, and especially not what killing someone was like. These unique experiences that Jonas receives changes how he sees his community and life in general.

Female Instigator: This theme does not really exist in *The Giver*. Jonas does have a crush, but he is not motivated by it as much as he is motivated by his relationship with an unwanted child named Gabriel. This child was due for releasing, and it is Jonas's desire to save him that motivates him to rebel openly against the society. Even though *The Giver* modifies this trope of the female instigator, it maintains the essence of the trope by having the protagonist motivated to act against oppressing because of human compassion. The female instigator trope was meant as a vessel to highlight the importance of love to humanity, and *The Giver* maintains that focus, just in the embodiment of the baby Gabriel, rather than a female character. The adaptation of this trope is a major shift that is seen in the new young adult dystopias, as many of the protagonists become women.

Bleak Ending: This is another trope that has been redefined in the young adult genre. *The Giver* still has bleak elements to its ending, but it ends more on an ambiguous note, rather than a bleak one. After Jonas escapes the community, he and Gabriel seek another community while hiding from the searchers that are sent to find them. While the book never states if they found the community and survive, it ends on a note that leaves it open to interpretation. The ambiguity of the ending of *The Giver* is a clear distinction that is made between classic adult dystopias, and the new young adult dystopias. This shift is largely due to the fact that young readers want a dream to look up to, not a definitive ending that leaves them without any hope. This is a major shift in themes that is expanded on as the dystopian genre evolves. It is a clear indicator of the shift in focus from dystopia as a warning to dystopia as a means of remembering.

Shift to Young Adult Demographic:

While *The Giver* was the first popular young adult dystopian novel, it has certainly not been the last. Since its publication the genre has become almost exclusively aimed at young

adults. There are many reasons that this shift in theme and intended audience has taken place. A primary reason, as addressed above, has been the ending of the Cold War and the removal of that constant reminder of totalitarianism and utopian ideals that it embodied. As this primary influence of the dystopian genre disappeared, many younger writers began to redefine it for a new generation. In this shift dystopian authors have redefined the purpose of dystopia and modified some of its most classic tropes.

One of the reasons for the shift toward the young adult readers is the increasing political awareness in this generation. The reasons for the increase in political awareness among youth in this generation are most easily attributed to the prevalence of the Internet. For example, Pasek, Kenski, Romer, and Jamieson report in an experiment that measured what form of media youth use to gain political knowledge, that “using the Internet to get information was the most popular form of media use, with 58.3% of youth reporting that they do it most days of the week” (124). This increase of political involvement helps account for the popularity of the highly political genre of dystopia among youth readers. With young adults involved in politics, it makes logically sense that it transfers to their personal interests. For instance, on the prevalence of political themes in dystopian fiction and the prevalence of dystopias among young readers, Carrie Hintz writes, [t]he fact that these utopias are read comparatively early in a child's political development gives young people the impression that they have the capacity to remake or revision society anew” (263). This seems to be part of the focus of authors like Lois Lowry, who present a dystopian world where a youth can make a powerful impact for the better. This theme is continued from Lowry into more contemporary dystopias.

The prevalence of technology, as seen above with the internet, is also a contributing factor to the shift in dystopian literature toward a younger audience. Dystopias have always been

concerned with technology. For example, *We* was placed 600 years in the future, and it addressed the theme of technology undermining humanity. Ever since Zamyatin's work, this has been a prevalent theme in dystopian fiction. Now as technology has become more readily available, this fear of it has dissipated to a degree. The wide spread nature of technology in the newest generations has doubtlessly contributed to the interest in a genre that is so heavily focused on technology. Oskar Gruenwald explores the idea of what he calls "techno-utopia," which is essentially dystopian fiction that is concerned with technology. He explores the increase in the marketability of techno-utopia in a world where technology has reached unforeseen heights. On this topic he writes, "The thrall of this is thus re-enforced by a culture that places a high value on science and technology, adumbrated by a commercial ethos fed by the practical applications of marketability of high-tech products that seem to create their own demand. Just ask kids what they want for a present: a doll, a train, or an iPhone?" (12). This quote essentially implies that with the increase of technology and its prevalence among young people, that this transfers to the literary field and increases interest in genres, particularly dystopia, that are centered around technology. Furthermore, the warnings that classic dystopian fiction had about the potential destructive power of technology is all the more relevant to a young generation that is surrounded, informed, and in many ways dependent on technology.

Another reason that accounts for the shift to young adult readers is an expansion on the classic theme of self-exploration. These dystopian worlds have a clear appeal to an age group that is naturally rebellious against parental and other disciplinary figures. Philip Reeve addressed the appeal of dystopian literature to young adults in *The Worst is Yet to Come*. In this article Reeve writes:

The attraction of such stories for teenage readers is clear. Stuck in those awkward years

between childhood and full adulthood, bristling against the authority of parent and high school teachers, they can draw a bleak satisfaction from imagining adult society reduced to smoking rubble. They are also, perhaps, becoming aware of the deep injustices in the wider world, which dystopian fiction often reflects. (35)

This idea of struggling against an establishment has a clear appeal for readers who are at the age of cultural rebellion against their parents. This reasoning may also account for the increase in female protagonists in young adult literature. For instance, the young adult dystopias are appealing themselves to the struggle of identity that all young people must face. This struggle for identity is even more prevalent among young female readers because society still has a plethora of prescribed behaviors and attributes to which young women feel encouraged to conform. While this struggle for identity is no doubt also present for the young adult male reader, the outside, societal pressures are significantly lesser than those ascribed to young women. For example, Margaret Finders talks about identity of young girls in her book *Just Girls: Literacies and Life in Junior High*. In this book Finders separates girls at this age into the categories of “social queens” who conform to media pressures about identity, and “tough cookies” who are seeking their own personal identity and don’t really fit in. Using this model of separation she explores the role that literacy has on identity for girls at this formative age:

The Social queens were becoming exactly what the marketers have trained them to be, consumers and competitors for men’s desires... While the social queens rehearsed their roles to secure their place in society through romance and commodities, the cookies were reminded again and again that there was no place for them. (128)

This quote helps to capture the extent to which young girls still feel pressures to conform to some pre-established societal expectation, even in a post feminism world. It is because of this

struggle for personal identity that young girls must face that we see a great deal of female protagonists present in young adult fiction.

The combination of the end of the Cold War with the elements listed above has worked to evolve the genre of dystopian fiction from an adult genre that was full of darkness and warning, to a young adult genre that is driven by political involvement and struggle for self-identity. However, despite this rather drastic shift, the motifs that were made popular and almost obligatory by Zamyatin remain a defining influence on the contemporary, young adult dystopian genre. These new influences, as well as the remaining influences of Zamyatin are readily apparent in one of the most popular young adult dystopian works, *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins.

Hunger Games:

Oppressive Government: This motif is very prevalent in *The Hunger Games*. Here Panem represents the oppressive governmental force. Panem is often referred to in the book simply as the “Capitol,” after the ruling city. The oppression is apparent when the reader is told of a rebellion that took place at some point in the past that led to people being divided into distinct, separated districts. This was an attempt to divide and control the people to prevent another uprising. Much like the case of *We* and *1984* the people in the districts live in fear of government peace keeper forces that reside in all the districts. This idea of rule through fear is also seen in the existence of the Hunger Games themselves. Because of the rebellion, every district must send a boy and a girl tribute, randomly selected, to compete in a fight to the death in a tournament against the tributes of other districts. This instills fear in every citizen that they may have to fight in the games at some point. Furthermore, the idea that you may have to kill your neighbor if you are both selected helps to keep people divided. Also similar to the systems in *We*

and *1984* the “Capitol” sells compliance as the means of being happy. A relatively new element that *Hunger Games* introduces to this motif is the idea of economic control. For example, the districts are all described as being very poor, and there is a clearly defined distinction in economic class of the rulers and the citizens. This can be seen in that fact that Katniss, the main protagonist, must break government laws and hunt outside the grounds of her district just to feed her mother and her sister (Collins 7). Furthermore, the reader sees this distinction in economic class clearly when the tributes from District 12, Katniss and Peeta, arrive at the Capitol. Here Katniss is observing the city and thinks, “[t]he cameras haven’t lied about its grandeur. If anything, they have not quite captured the magnificence of the glistening buildings in a rainbow of hues that tower into the air, the shiny cars that roll down the wide paved streets, the oddly dressed people with bizarre hair and painted faces who have never missed a meal” (68). Here the Capitol is juxtaposed to the barren, harsh environment of the districts.

Regulation of Arts and Original Thought: In *The Hunger Games* much of the suppression and regulation of arts is through keeping the populace in a state of constant work and fear. The districts are all expected to produce a particular resource for the “Capitol.” Often the quota that the “Capitol” expects the districts to meet keeps the citizens too busy to partake in artistic expression. This form of oppression is very similar to the one seen in *The Giver*. This variation on this motif that is present in the new generation of dystopias comments on the contemporary cultural tendency for people to be very busy. Furthermore, much like the governments in *We* and *1984* citizens are not allowed to speak out against the “Capitol” in any fashion. For example, this regulation of thought and expression is seen when Katniss is reflecting on the “Capitol” and thinks:

When I was younger, I scared my mother to death, the things I would blurt out about

District 12, about the people who ruled our country, Panem, from the far off city called the Capitol. Eventually I understood that this would lead us to more trouble. So I learned to hold my tongue and to turn my features into an indifferent mask so that no one could ever read my thoughts. (7)

Here the correlations to the suppression of the “Thought Police” and the “One-State” are clear. This control of thought is further seen in the fact that all TV broadcasts are controlled from the “Capitol” and they only play propaganda, much like the TV screens in *1984*.

Self-Exploration: As stated before, the motif of self-exploration became a major focus in the shift to the young adult genre. In this case, we see this self-exploration as Katniss is struggling to find an identity that sponsors will respond well to. Sponsors are people who bet on the games and give helpful gifts to the tributes that they like the best. In this process Katniss is repeatedly disgusted by what is expected of her to be appealing to the sponsors. Here the struggle for personal identity against the expectations of the society is clearly highlighted. As mentioned above, this struggle was a focus of the new iteration of young adult dystopias, particularly for girls, and the reader sees it clearly represented here in the struggle of Katniss against the expectations of the “Capitol.” Furthermore, the struggle of morality becomes a theme in the book as Katniss is faced with having to kill twenty five other people to survive the Hunger Games. Ultimately, she ends up working with several of the other tributes, rather than killing them. For example, a young girl named Rue is one of the tributes, and Katniss comes to see her as a sister and actually risks her life for Rue. This further develops the theme of self-exploration and self identity in the face of oppression. This struggle is very similar to the ones that are seen in the earlier 20th century dystopias, as well as *The Giver*. For instance, Katniss’s connection with Rue and her willingness to risk her life for hers mirrors the connection of Jonas to the baby Gabriel.

Female Instigator: Much like *The Giver*, *Hunger Games* modifies this motif to better fit its young adult readership. For instance, Katniss is highly motivated by her compassion for her little sister, Primrose. This is shown in her volunteering for the Hunger Games after Primrose was originally selected. While this is not a direct rebellion against the laws of the “Capitol,” it is a rejection of the selfish, violent system because of the love she has for her sister. Furthermore, the reader sees Katniss similarly motivated by compassion for Peeta, which leads her to directly rebel against the “Capitol.” This is seen at the end of the book when Peeta and Katniss are the last two tributes alive and Katniss refuses to kill Peeta. Here she comes up with a plan where she and Peeta would both eat poisoned berries, in so doing robbing the “Capitol” of having a victor to the Hunger Games. The “Capitol” relents and allows them to be the first co-victors (Collins 403). Here the reader sees Katniss directly motivated by her compassion for people to lead her to rebel against the oppressive government. This variation on the instigator motif mirrors what Lowry did with the use of Gabriel as the instigator in *The Giver*. While not being exact replicas of the traditional motif, both of these examples serve to capture the concept of love and compassion as being defining traits of humanity that must be preserved in the face of oppression.

Bleak Endings: The variation on this motif that is present in *Hunger Games* is very similar to the ambiguous ending that one sees in *The Giver*. Even though Katniss is able to save herself and Peeta at the end of the book, the “Capitol” is clearly displeased and there is a looming feeling of potential danger that surrounds the end of the book. This can be seen in the end of the book when Haymitch, Katniss’s mentor, tells her, “[y]ou’re in trouble. Word is the Capitol’s furious about you showing them up in the arena. The one thing they can’t stand is being laughed at and they’re the joke of Panem” (Collins 416). Much like the ending of *The Giver*, this provides the reader with some sense of accomplishment and victory, while still providing a

warning of the struggle to come. This is a message clearly aimed at the young adult readers of these books that encourages them about what they have come through, while still warning them about the struggle that they will face in their futures. The use of the ending as a warning is similar to the endings of *We* and *1984*. However, this is probably the motif that has evolved the most because the genre is no longer so focused on warning people about the dangers of political systems, but rather preparing them for the struggles of the contemporary world.

Conclusion:

Dystopian literature established a clear identity in the early 20th century with the work of Yevgeny Zamyatin, Aldous Huxley, and George Orwell. The 20th century iteration of the genre provided readers with poignant political commentary that acted as a warning about the looming threat of totalitarianism. Like any literary genre, it has evolved as society has changed. Even through the evolution, dystopian literature is still easily identifiable and distinct from other genres due to the motifs established in the early 20th century. The new generation of young adult dystopian literature still ascribes to modified versions of these motifs. However, due to the change in the political landscape they have a decreased focus on political commentary, and an increased focus on the idea of self-identity. Due to the prevailing motifs of dystopian literature, it is fairly easy for young adult authors to plug characters into a dystopian landscape and create a book that sells. This has led to a general decrease in quality that has accompanied the shift to young adult readers. The early 20th century dystopias have gotten a great deal of critical attention and are widely academically studied works, while the new iterations have lost this academic respect that has been given to their predecessors. Despite the examples of contemporary authors taking advantage of the genre, there is still value in the study of these novels. While there is an obvious decrease in the academic quality of the writing in the new generation of dystopian

literature, this new generation of dystopian literature provides an interest example of the evolution of literature with society.

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