Paradigmatic Shifts in Dystopian Fiction: The Growing Appeal of the Genre for Young Adult Readers

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Mag. Daniel STEINEGGER

am Institut für Anglistik

Begutachterin:
Ao.Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr.phil. Maria Löschnigg

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Daniel Steinegger
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1. Introduction

The Giver shrugged. “Our people made that choice, the choice to go to Sameness. Before my time, before the previous time, back and back and back. We relinquished color when we relinquished sunshine and did away with the differences.” He thought for a moment. “We gained control of many things. But we had to let go of others.”

“We shouldn’t have!” Jonas said fiercely.” (Lowry 1993: 91)

Dystopian fiction has been around for quite a while now, warning us about the possible dangers of changes in society and technology. Novels of this genre present us with strange and nightmarish worlds, with little hope for the people who call them their home. Interestingly, dystopian fiction appears to have undergone a significant change regarding target audience. In recent years, an increasing number of dystopian novels that have been published are aimed at a young adult readership, which is rather unusual for a genre that has always been closely associated with adult literature. Books such as Suzanne Collins’ The Hunger Games were met with tremendous critical and commercial success, and have led to a significant number of sequels and books of similar nature being released. The question arises if this current trend is solely the result of the popularity of certain genre-blurring novels such as The Hunger Games, possibly in connection to a clever marketing campaign instigated by the publishers, or if the dystopian genre in general features traits that appeal to young adult readers. In other words: What makes those books so significantly more appealing to modern readers than classic dystopian novels?

This paper analyzes classic dystopian works such as George Orwell’s 1984, Ray Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451 and Alduous Huxley’s Brave New World, and compares them to modern dystopian novels which are marketed for a young adult target demographic, such as Lois Lowry’s The Giver and Veronica Roth’s Divergent, Neal Shusterman’s Scythe and the already mentioned The Hunger Games. For a better understanding of the generic make-up of the books in question, the definition and nature of dystopian and young-adult fiction are closely inspected. Basic thematic and structural elements of both genres are evaluated and matched on the basis of a wide variety of modern and classic dystopian works, to determine the compatibility of the two genres. A close examination will reveal in which way those works are similar and in which way they differ from each other. Finally, a poll has been conducted to
determine current trends and preferences of modern day readers in terms of genre, characters and specific elements of fiction, such as for example happy endings.

The main goal of this thesis is the exploration and identification of possible factors that are responsible for the sudden success of this recent combination of genres, that is, of dystopian fiction and young adult literature. The essential question which arises from this generic combination’s success is: what did those books do right?
2. Exploring Dystopian Fiction in Young Adult Literature

You do not have to be an avid reader to have noticed a recent trend in popular literature. Numerous popular book series that were published in the last few years were met with enough critical and commercial success to be soon followed by a movie adaptation. Many of those literary works that rose swiftly in popularity have one major thing in common: they are works of dystopian fiction, geared towards young adult readers. The reason why this is rather intriguing is that for many decades books of the genre of dystopian fiction were almost always written for an adult target audience. This is of little surprise, as dystopian fiction has its roots in satire and political commentary, and was therefore originally primarily intended for an adult rather than adolescent audience. Nonetheless, certain recent books of this genre have been marketed specifically for a younger audience, and were greatly successful. To determine why this shift has happened, a more detailed analysis of these genres is needed.

When it comes to determining genres, occasionally the question arises as to why genre theory or distinctions are actually helpful or necessary. First of all, books are very diverse, with a multitude of possible stories, tropes, settings, topics and approaches. Many factors overlap and more and more combinations of existing elements lead to a multitude of hybrids, making the task of assigning genres to books more complicated every year. New genres arise as single tropes (such as for example an outbreak of a virus leading to a widespread zombie plague) gain enough popularity to spawn a multitude of books that revolve around a similar topic, adding even more possible categories for the increasingly difficult task of assigning genres. Secondly, many readers are not able or willing to connect their reading preferences to certain genres. To them, the appealing factors arise from elements that cannot so easily be identified and thus cannot be explained by putting a label on a book that reads “science-fiction” or “romance”.

Despite the aforementioned difficulties, genres do serve a purpose. Karen Coats claims that genres set expectations for a book, and enable us to form evaluations about how successful it is within its category (cf. Coats 2017: 311). She mentions that theory is an overarching system of ideas or a model that serves to explain a group of things. It helps us to understand why it exists, and how it works the ways it does (cf.
Coats 2017: 84). Mike Cadden agrees that genre distinctions are important for setting expectations for readers and help them finding what they like. He adds that they help us understand fields better, serve to track changes and innovations and give scholars insight into shifting cultural aesthetic values as well (cf. Cadden 2011: 302, 303). Cadden continues by comparing genres to a nexus, a core of connections and links to other genres. They can be structurally defined (such as science-fiction or fantasy) or age based (such as books for children or young adults). Furthermore, Cadden suggests that the categories linked by the nexus have a hierarchy, which changes what a book can be (cf. Cadden 2011: 303). Strictly speaking, books exceed the sum of their parts, and two works containing the same elements can vastly differ, depending on how much focus is put onto each of them. Coats introduces a different version of categorization, referring to three key terms necessary: form, genre and mode (cf. Coats 2017: 312). According to her, form describes the physical way a text is presented (such as comic, film, novel or picture book), while genre refers to the content or subject matter of a text, which can be distinguished in a broader sense (such as fiction or non-fiction) or by branches and subcategories (such as fantasy or science-fiction). Lastly, mode describes the text’s approach to the subject matter (such as tragedy, comedy, satire, romance or irony), which often overlaps with other approaches (cf. Coats 2017: 313-314).

The following subchapters venture to discover a genre definition of dystopian fiction as well as young-adult literature (provided it can actually be classified as such). Existing definitions and elements of said categories are discussed, evaluated and adapted in order come up with a satisfying generic category.

2.1. The Dystopian Genre – Definition and Setting

The genre of dystopian fiction relies heavily on literary world building. Fictional societies are a key element of the genre, which means that establishing an effective setting is crucial. As the name might imply, the dystopian genre has its roots in the utopian literature, a term that was coined by Sir Thomas More’s fictional narrative Utopia (1516), which describes an island inhabited by a harmonious and superior society. By nature, this place is fictional and does not exist, hence the name 'Utopia', a Greek term for 'no place'. (cf. Rabkin 1983: 1) The idea of a good place that is not a
place is significantly older however, and often attributed to Plato (cf. Aldridge 1984: 3), and his *Republic*, a dialogue written by him, containing the idea of an ideal city based on a theoretical discussion about the question “what is justice?”. This idea was for example taken up by writings such as Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* or the aforementioned *Utopia* by More. Consequently, the genre of anti-utopian fiction emerged from critical view of the utopian idea. Heavily influenced by H.G. Wells’ books and his fight against taboos, conventions and a planless greedy society, the major anti-utopian authors, such as Alduous Huxely, C.S. Lewis, E.M. Forster, Evgenii Zamyatin and George Orwell were born around the time of the publication of Wells’ novel at the end of the 19th and beginning of 20th-century (cf. Hillegas 1967: 5-6). The major works of the genre of dystopian fiction include *Brave New World* (1932), *That Hideous Strength* (1945), *The Machine Stops* (1909), *We* (1921) and *1984* (1949). According to Philip Stoner, the novel *We*, by indirectly criticizing the Russian political system, marked the birth of the modern dystopia and redefined the genre (cf. Stoner 2017: 1).

Dystopia, in that sense, is not solely a ‘utopia in reverse’, but rather a singular category that evolved out of a 20th-century shift of attitudes toward utopia (cf. Aldridge 1984: ix). Dystopian novels introduce a bleak, frightening scenario, often in the future, where most of the people live by standards most of us would deem undesirable. Again, this genre’s name is derived from old Greek, as ‘dystopia’ can be translated to as: ‘bad place’ (cf. Rabkin 1983: 1). Unlike the post-apocalyptic genre, which deals with living in a non-functional society after a catastrophe and the resulting struggle to survive, the people living in a dystopia do uphold some form of functional society or government. Unfortunately for them, this does not turn out in their favor, as this government usually occupies an antagonistic role in the story. As a consequence, the typical narrative structure of dystopia, according to Moylan, is the presentation of an alienated character’s refusal of the dominant society (cf. Moylan 2000: 147). As a counterpart to utopian fiction, the dystopian genre distinguishes itself through a highly negative portrayal of society. This is often achieved by introducing a culture or government with a twisted sense of morality, social norms that seem unacceptable by our standards, or even one that holds any moral standards at all. It is notable however, that moral standards differ from individual to individual and may shift over time. One man’s utopia can easily be another man’s dystopia. For example, if we look at More’s *Utopia* with today’s standards, the lack of
choice and privacy depicted in his work may incite us to think that there are prices too steep to pay for a peaceful community. Furthermore, many fictional dystopias began with best intentions, trying to establish a utopia that makes life better for all of its inhabitants. Unfortunately they soon took a turn for the worse, such as the societies depicted in Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), Lois Lowry’s *The Giver* (1993), Neal Shusterman’s *Scythe* (2016) or the aforementioned *Brave New World*. In Margaret Atwood’s *Heart Goes Last* (2015) for example, greed and corruption took its toll on the system:

“You don’t honestly believe this whole operation is being run simply to rejuvenate the rust belt and create jobs? That was the original idea, but once you’ve got a controlled population with a wall around it and no oversight, you can do anything you want. You start to see the possibilities. And some of those got very profitable, very fast.” (Atwood 2016: 172)

In many works however, the dystopian regime was solely established to exercise power and to regulate certain parts of the population, such as in Alan Moore’s and David Lloyd’s *V for Vendetta* (1982), Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaids Tale* (1985), Kōshun Takami’s *Battle Royale* (1999), Suzanne Collin’s *The Hunger Games* (2008) or the aforementioned *1984*. Marjorie Warmkessel states that a common theme in dystopian fiction is a totalitarian government that controls the lives of its citizens. There exists no freedom to choose, no tolerance to diversity and a general lack in creativity (cf. Warmkessel 2017). Mark Roberts Hillegas describes dystopian novels such as *Brave New World* or *1984* as follows:

Appalling in their similarity, they describe nightmare states where men are conditioned to obedience, freedom is eliminated and individuality crushed; where the past is systematically destroyed and men are isolated from nature; where science and technology are employed, not to enrich human life, but to maintain the state’s surveillance and control of its slave citizens (Hillegas 1967: 3).

Another definition for this genre was provided by Justin Scholes and Jon Ostenson (cf. Scholes & Ostenson, 2013: 11). They view 20th-century dystopian fiction as response to the First World-War as well as a counter to earlier fictional utopias. According to them, dystopian fiction satirizes utopian ideals or describes societies where negative social forces have supremacy. They also claim that a major element of this genre is the fact that humanity is the cause of its own nightmarish situation, and society is to blame. Scholes and Ostenson list themes of dystopian fiction which include:
• Unjust Laws and excessive measures of the police
• Pressure to conform
• Media manipulation and propaganda
• Measures to cover up flaws and lies within society
• Suppression of arts
• Limited or complete lack of individual freedom.
• Division of people into groups with different privileges
• Little hope for change
• Human lives have low value
• Flawed and abused technology
• The Suppression of emotion.

(cf. Scholes & Ostenson 2013: 11)

Philip Stoner claims that the political environment under Russia’s Stalin inspired the tropes of 20th-century dystopian literature (cf. Stoner 2017: 2). According to him, those tropes include an oppressive government, regulation of the arts and original thought, themes of self-exploration, a female instigator and a bleak ending (cf. Stoner 2017: 2-8).

As it can be seen, many different definitions for dystopia exist as well as multiple elements attributed to them. There are countless possible methods as to how these elements are incorporated into the novel, making the world undesirable for the author and readers, but not all of them have to be applied in a single story. In fact, they may rather determine which sub-genre a novel belongs to. Aldridge roughly groups dystopian fiction into two main strands: those centered on a scientific impact, and those heavily impacted by political thought (cf. Aldridge 1984: 66). Novels of the former category include settings which are heavily influenced by a scientific breakthrough or new technology, such as The Machine Stops by E.M. Forster, where humanity is sustained by and dependent on a global machine. The latter category focuses on a culture or society with a specific political structure that could be classified as dystopian or undesirable, such as 1984 by George Orwell, which is describing a government that is subjecting their citizens to poverty, lies and torture to maintain absolute control over them. These two manifestations of dystopian fiction, as suggested by Aldridge, may also have an impact on other sub-genres the
respective novel may belong to, such as political fiction, historical fiction, speculative fiction or science fiction.

Further variations of the genre can be found in the term ‘anti-utopia’, which is often used interchangeably with “dystopia” (cf. Hillegas 1967: 3). Swift states that the latter derives from the former, which has its roots in the perceivable impact of 19-century technology on the natural and social environments (material progress against the natural world and human nature), whereas ‘dystopia’ emerges from the response to the 20th-century experiences of the ‘police-surveillance state’ (cf. Swift in Moylan 2000: 138-139). He concludes that whereas anti-utopias preserve something of utopian hope, dystopias abandon all hope. Anti-utopians believe that in a society that strives for a single concept of perfection, it is the very nature of man that prevents the happiness of all, due to his ambivalence, temperament and diversity (cf. Van Heteren 1997: 65). Furthermore, dystopias as a literary form are set between utopias and anti-utopias drawing on both subgenres as a form of hybrid textuality. While all dystopian texts present a highly negative social alternative, some contain a utopian tendency as they maintain a horizon of hope, whereas others retain an anti-utopian disposition that excludes all transformative possibility (cf. Moylan 2000: 147).

In summary, dystopian literature could roughly be described as fiction that deals with the horrors of human society. It usually does so by introducing a scenario containing a community where people live under unpleasant or even frightening circumstances, usually as a result of changes in society and technology. Novels such as 1984 or Brave New World are prime examples for this genre, describing nations that subject their citizens to measures of oppression and absolute control, as well as displaying complete disregard of human rights and life. The methods how they do it differ from story to story however, with a few common elements that most dystopian settings contain.

2.1.1 A Rift in Society

Dystopian fiction usually depicts people being oppressed and discontent in some way or another, and this is often achieved by a class system or similar form of separation of society. This may be a result of religious or cultural beliefs, as it is and was often the case in human history, but may also be a consequence of uneven distribution of
wealth or even due to technological or scientific reasons. As mentioned before, the
dystopian genre usually deals with some form of governmental oppression and
control of the citizens, which is often achieved by separating and categorizing them,
physically as well as socially, und consequentially causing an (usually intended)
inequality among them.

Atwood’s novel *The Handmaid’s Tale* serves as a prime example for a grave social
imbalance. In the Republic of Gilead, due to religious extremism, women are
deprived of several rights, especially those who are designated solely for the purpose
of bearing children, that is, the ‘handmaids’. For example, numerous basic amenities
such as coffee, cigarettes or liquor are forbidden, and hitting these women is legal as
long it is done with bare hands (cf. Atwood 1998: 14, 16). Even worse, women are
bereft of their freedom, and issued to men who have the sufficient status and
connections for specific task areas such as household chores or even as an

In Huxley’s *Brave New World*, citizens are ranked according to five social castes
(named after Greek letters) they are specifically bred for. Not only do they enjoy
different privileges according to the caste they belong to, they are also color-coded
and face prejudice among other citizens:

"Alpha children wear grey They work much harder than we do, because they're so
frightfully clever. I'm really awfully glad I'm a Beta, because I don't work so hard.
And then we are much better than the Gammas and Deltas. Gammas are stupid.
They all wear green, and Delta children wear khaki. Oh no, I don't want to play
with Delta children. And Epsilons are still worse. They're too stupid to be able …"
(Huxley 1932: 50)

The graphic novel *The Snowpiercer* by Jacques Lob and Jean-Marc Rochette is set
in a frozen world where the last remains of mankind keep living on a moving train
with 1001 cars. As the last remaining hospitable space is composed of a single train,
its inhabitants occupy a social rank based on the class and position of their train
compartment. While the ruling class members indulge in earthly pleasures and
occupy whole wagons, the tail end wagons are filled with malnourished people, living
in cold and confinement. (cf. Lob & Rochette 1882: 11, 44, 67) To the protagonist
Proloff, who comes from the tail end of the train, death seems to be a preferable
alternative, as he explains to the lieutenant who asks him why he takes the risk in
leaving his wagon (fig. 1).
Death is not only an alternative but a constant uncertain factor for the inhabitants of the districts in Panem as described in Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games*. As a punishment for an earlier uprising, the districts are under oppression by the capitol, which denies them proper food, hunting tools and other commodities while citizens of the capitol spend their lives in utter luxury. Those districts are strictly isolated from each other, as a means of social control:

> It's interesting, hearing about her life. We have so little communication with anyone outside our district. In fact, I wonder if the Gamemakers are blocking out our conversation, because even though the information seems harmless, they don't want people in different districts to know about one another. (Collins 2008: 177)

Even worse, people who inhabit the districts spend their lives in constant fear, as an annual lottery could mark them as players in the titular hunger games, a death match held by the capitol, where only the sole victor survives. Furthermore, citizens have the option to apply for so-called ‘tessera’, which grants them food and supplies for one year in exchange for a higher chance to be selected in the games. Due to the constant lack of food in the districts, many people are forced to take tesserae, which leads to a growing contempt against those who manage to have a little more wealth than the others. The protagonist Katniss is well aware that this is just another tool to
cause misery in the districts and to sow mistrust among its inhabitants, lowering the chances of a possible rebellion:

You can see why someone like Madge, who has never been at risk of needing a tessera, can set him off. The chance of her name being drawn is very slim compared to those of us who live in the Seam. Not impossible, but slim. And even though the rules were set up by the Capitol, not the districts, certainly not Madge’s family, it’s hard not to resent those who don’t have to sign up for tesserae. Gale knows his anger at Madge is misdirected. On other days, deep in the woods, I’ve listened to him rant about how the tesserae are just another tool to cause misery in our district. A way to plant hatred between the starving workers of the Seam and those who can generally count on supper and thereby ensure we will never trust one another. “It’s to the Capitol’s advantage to have us divided among our-selves,” he might say if there were no ears to hear but mine. (Collins 2008: 13-14)

A similar strategy was employed in Koushun Takami’s novel *Battle Royale* (1999) by the fascistic Republic of Greater East Asia, which regularly pits high-school students into a death-match with their classmates. While it is officially handled as a military experiment, government official and supervisor Kinpatsu Sakamochi explains its true purpose towards the end of the novel:

I’ll tell you now, this country needs the Program. The thing is, it’s not an experiment at all. Come on, why do you think we have the local news broadcast the image of the winner? Of course, viewers might feel sorry for him or her, thinking, the poor student probably didn’t even want to play the game, but had no choice but to fight the others. In other words, everyone ends up concluding, you can’t trust anyone, right? Which would extinguish any hope of uniting and forming a coup d’etat against the government, hm? And so the Republic of Greater East Asia and its ideals will live on for eternity. (Takami 1999: 596)

In *The Heart Goes Last*, society within Consilience is divided into two groups, the people living in their designated houses and the prisoners of Positron. While the former live their daily lives in a rather ‘normal’ fashion, the prisoners are restricted to a specific area and are granted less freedom and commodities. Unlike in most caste systems, the two groups switch every month, granting the residents a sense of fairness and equality, which is of course only partly true, as not only do members of surveillance have certain privileges, such as access to cars, but are also excluded from the switch cycle. In addition to that, they are also able to manipulate identity codes to alter the privileges and shifts according to their needs (cf. Atwood 2016:
It even goes so far that the male protagonist believes the management member Jocelyn to have absolute control over him:

Jocelyn could erase him. She could just wave her hand and reduce him to zero. She never said so, but he knew she had that power. (Atwood 2015: 150).

Furthermore, specific demographic groups are even denied participation in the positron project, such as homosexuals. (Cf. Atwood 2015: 262)

An interesting form of separation is provided by the Young Adult dystopian novel Scythe, written by Neal Shusterman. In its futuristic setting, the world is governed by the Thunderhead, an artificial intelligence, which at the same time fulfills the role of a global information and communication network similar to the internet, as well as a guide and even a foster parent. Scythes on the other hand, are denied the help of the Thunderhead, as their position in society and their ‘line of work’ demands them to be absolutely independent from the artificial intelligence. In addition to that, Scythes do not fall under the jurisdiction of the regular society, and form a self-governing body that exists parallel to the rest of mankind (cf. Shusterman 2016). Although they can practically demand anything from the normal citizens, their status and their power over life and death will always separate them from society, just as Scythe Curie laments in her diary:

> For our own peace of mind, we scythes must retain a certain level of separation from the rest of humanity. Even in the privacy of my own home I find myself wearing only the simple lavender frock that I wear beneath my robes. Some would call this behavior aloof. I suppose on some level it is, but for me it’s more the need to remind myself that I am “other.” Certainly, most uniformed positions allow the wearers to have a separate life. Peace officers and firefighters, for instance, are only partially defined by their job. In the off hours they wear jeans and T-shirts. They have barbecues for neighbors and coach their children in sports. But to be a scythe means you are a scythe every hour of every day. It defines you to the core of your being, and only in dreams is one free of the yoke. Yet even in dreams I often find myself gleaning. . . .
> —From the gleaning journal of H.S. Curie (Shusterman 2016: 76)

### 2.1.2 Cogs in a Great Machine

In dystopian fiction, societies often not only separate their subjects, they also classify them, and in turn assign them to their designated roles. As inhabitants of dystopian
societies usually have little to say in the matter, conformity serves to regulate and oversee the citizens, while the regime makes sure that every cog in the machine follows its task, and nothing else. Freedom is limited and choice abandoned in order to bestow absolute control to the government. The idea of an efficient and involuntary categorization of citizens conducted by the society appeared early in human history with Plato’s thoughts. In his *Republic*, an important pillar consists of a regulation that each person is educated to fulfill the one job he or she is best qualified for by native talent, as well as educated in such a way that the functionality of the society is dependent on him or her doing their job. As a result, the cohesion of the *Republic* depends on every citizen’s acceptance that they are powerless alone and completely dependent upon the skills of the other citizens (cf. Rabkin 1983: 6). Choice and free will is abandoned in this system, and gives way to a system that bestows everyone with a role he or she has to fulfill, regardless of their ambitions or preferences.

In the fictional world of Ayn Rand’s novella *Anthem*, the government pursues an extreme form of collectivism, and everything is conducted on behalf of the greater good. Instead of choosing their own professions, citizens are assigned to their jobs by the Council of Vocations. In contrast to Plato’s idea however, citizen’s aptitudes are seemingly ignored when it comes to determining their roles. Due to that, Equality 7-2521, the protagonist of the novel, is assigned the role of a street sweeper, a position without any power or influence at all. When he later discovers a light bulb from days long forgotten and manages to power it with electricity in his secret hideout, he decides to share his technology with all of humanity, which has relied on candles up until now. The council of scholars however, dismisses his discovery because it was not permitted and conducted by the community, and because Equality 7-2521 was assigned the low role of a street sweeper (cf. Rand 1938: 26).

The inhabitants of Ember, titular city of Jeanne DuPrau’s novel *The City of Ember* find themselves in a situation similar to those in *Anthem* as, per tradition, everyone is assigned to their job randomly during Assignment Day at the age of twelve (cf. DuPrau 2004: 5). Even fewer choices are offered to the citizens of the community in Lowry’s *The Giver*. Not only the jobs are assigned by those in power, but also their partners and children, all according to a set of clear rules and restrictions:

Two children – one male, one female – to each family unit. It was written very clearly in the rules. (Lowry 1993: 8)
In Huxley’s *Brave New World* citizens are not just assigned their jobs, they are bred for them. Social caste and profession is predetermined at birth in the hatcheries, tailoring each individual human for a specific role in society (cf. Huxley 1932: 17-18). Growth rate and even intelligence of the yet unborn citizens are tempered with and adjusted according to caste, all under the pretense of a beneficial community (cf. Huxley 1932: 23-24). Similar to the citizens in *Brave New World*, the oppressed women in *A Handmaids Tale* are named and color coded according to their rights and forcefully assigned task areas. Wives wear blue clothes, daughters are dressed in white, ‘Marthas’, who handle domestic work, are clad in green. Those who are involuntarily assigned to bear the children of men with infertile wives are called ‘Handmaids’, and don a red dress (cf. Atwood 1998: 8, 24) In Atwood’s other dystopian novel, *The Heart Goes Last*, new citizens in Consilience may apply for three different jobs, but are ultimately issued jobs by the management, sometimes with consideration of their previous profession (cf. Atwood 2016: 59, 96). The assigned task can change at any time, should the Human Resources department request it (cf. Atwood 2015: 129-132). This later happens to Charmaine for dubious reasons:

“...Aurora’s face relaxes a millimeter. “You’ll get new cards and codes if- she catches herself – “when you’re re-verified. Until then, it’s a trust issue.” (Atwood 2015: 131)

Professions are also rather predetermined in *The Hunger Games* as well, as the districts of Panem are specialized on certain industries such as agriculture, fishing or coal mining (cf. Collins 2008: 65).

Categorization of its citizens plays a major part of the plot in the dystopian novel *Divergent*. In a post-apocalyptic Chicago, citizens are divided into five different factions, based on their disposition and personality. Although everyone is allowed to choose their faction freely they are subjected to an aptitude test at the age of sixteen to determine their disposition and compatibility for the five factions, and the protagonist is well aware that it is not well received when someone chooses a different faction than the one the aptitude test suggested (cf. Roth 2011: 5). Joining a faction yields a heavy impact on their members, as they have to leave their family permanently, should they belong to one of the other factions (cf. Roth 2011: 24). They also dictate their members’ norms and even idle behavior. For example, the Abnegation faction which houses the protagonist Tris and her family, restricts her usage of mirrors, forbids the celebration of birthdays and frowns upon her display of
curiosity (cf. Roth 2011: 1, 2, 12). Even worse, failing the aptitude test renders the participant factionless, forcing them to live in poverty and discomfort, divorced from society (cf. Roth 2011: 20).

If classification and forced allocation of work does not yield the expected results, conditioning of the citizens would be another method to make sure everyone plays their part. In *Brave New World*, citizens are tailored to their roles at birth, sometimes through harsh conditioning:

“We condition the masses to hate the country,” concluded the Director. “But simultaneously we condition them to love all country sports. At the same time, we see to it that all country sports shall entail the use of elaborate apparatus. So that they consume manufactured articles as well as transport. Hence those electric shocks. (Huxley 1932: 18)

Conditioning of children is also a strategy of Oceania in *1984*, raising them as part of their spy network from an early age:

By careful early conditioning, by games and cold water, by the rubbish that was dinned into them at school and in the Spies and the Youth League, by lectures, parades, songs, slogans, and martial music, the natural feeling had been driven out of them. (Orwell 1947: 38)

An alternative way to ensure conformity that is sometimes employed in dystopian fiction is the suppression of emotions, often through the use of drugs such as in *The Giver*:

Jonas brightened. He knew about the pills. His parents both took them each morning. And some of his friends did, he knew.

[...]

Then, in the same way that his own dwelling slipped away behind him as he rounded a corner on his bicycle, the dream slipped away from his thoughts. Very briefly, a little guiltily, he tried to grasp it back. But the feelings had disappeared. The Stirrings were gone. (Lowry 1993: 35, 37)

In *Scythe*, the emotions of humans are restricted by ‘emo-nanites’ in their blood, but it is actually their immortality and their way of living associated with it that truly limits their emotions:

We are not the same beings we once were. Consider our inability to grasp literature and most entertainment from the mortal age. To us, the things that stirred mortal human emotions are incomprehensible. Only stories of love pass through our post-mortal filter, yet even then, we are baffled by the intensity of longing and loss that threatens those mortal tales of love. We could blame it on our emo-nanites limiting our despair, but it runs far deeper than that. Mortals fantasized that
love was eternal and its loss unimaginable. Now we know that neither is true. Love remained mortal, while we became eternal. (Shusterman 2016: 110)

2.1.3 Big Brother is Watching You

For further control of their subjects, dystopian regimes often employ numerous methods of control and supervision, often going as far as using espionage to spy on their own citizens. This is quite a common feature associated with fictional and non-fictional police-states, causing constant fear and paranoia in society. Measures of observation come in great variety, such as overt or covert surveillance personnel or a vast array of surveillance tools and -technologies.

Especially in technologically advanced settings, a vast network of cameras is often employed by those in power to stay informed about everything that happens in their domain, which is precisely what the creator of the train ‘Snowpiercer’ does in the graphic-novel of the same name (cf. Lob & Rochette 1884: 128). Similarly, in Allegiant, the third novel of the Divergent-trilogy, it is revealed that the faction of the Dauntless, which is believed to be tasked with the protection of the city, is secretly observing it with security cameras hidden everywhere within the city (cf Roth 2013: 128-128). Less secretly is the observation of the deadly spectacle of The Hunger Games, as Katniss reminds us:

Not alone though. No, they've surely got a camera tracking me now. I think back to the years of watching tributes starve, freeze, bleed and dehydrate to death. Unless there’s a really good fight going on somewhere, I’m being featured. (Collins 2008: 151)

Even the Consilience and the Positron prison in The Heart Goes Last are equipped with advanced surveillance technology to monitor and control the inhabitants, ranging from simple spycams to facial-expression analyzers, able to uncover forms acting or suspicious behavior from non-conformists (cf. Atwood 2016: 179). In addition to that, black surveillance cars roam the street regularly, leaving the citizens puzzled as to whether they are manned or drones (cf. Atwood 2016: 96). The inhabitants of the communities in The Giver have to live with a similar lack of privacy, as they are constantly monitored by drones and cameras. Should the citizens break a rule or show unusual behavior, such as wearing their hair ribbons wrong, they are instantly reprimanded via one of the many speakers:
Everyone had known, he remembered with humiliation, that the announcement ATTENTION. THIS IS A REMINDER TO MALE ELEVENS THAT OBJECTS ARE NOT TO BE REMOVED FROM THE RECREATION AREA AND THAT SNACKS ARE TO BE Eaten, NOT HOARDED had been specifically directed at him, the day last month that he had taken an apple home. No one had mentioned it, not even his parents, because the public announcement had been sufficient to produce the appropriate remorse. He had, of course, disposed of the apple and made his apology to the Recreation Director the next morning, before school (Lowry 1993: 22).

Even without a vast array of surveillance technology, the populace sometimes still cannot avoid the watchful eye of the regime. In many dystopias, the people themselves serve as tool for surveillance, may it be willingly as employed spies or only as a small link in a chain of rumors and chatter, ready to tell on their fellow citizens for their own profit. As mentioned in before chapters for example, the citizens in the poor districts of Panem in The Hunger Games are purposely kept malnourished and undersupplied, unless they voluntarily increase the risk of having to fight in the governments death matches by taking tesserae. This strategy creates envy and mistrust between those who have little and those who have even less, leading to citizens who do not shy away from acting as informants and handing each other in to the authorities (cf. Collins 2008: 13-14). This actually happens to Guy Montag, the protagonist of Ray Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451. His efforts of hiding forbidden books in his home are thwarted when friends of his wife inform the authorities about his transgression, leaving him at the mercy of his superior, the head of the firemen (cf. Bradbury 1953: 109). A more organized spy network is employed by the Republic of Gilead in The Handmaid’s Tale, and is called ‘The Eyes of God’. Those ‘Eyes’ infiltrate society to report any transgression of the strict laws to the government. While they can sometimes be identified by their black outfits and eye-pins, they often blend in the general populace, meaning that any member of society, even the suppressed women, can be part of the spy network (cf. Atwood 1985: 17-18).

A vast surveillance network, consisting of several specialized bureaus, is used by the government of New England in V for Vendetta (cf. Moore & Lloyd: 1982: 7). The departments are named after body parts that are analogies for their respective functions, such as ‘the Eye’, which concerns itself with video surveillance, ‘the Ears’
which is tasked with wiretapping, and ‘the Nose’ whose purpose is to investigate possible threats to the government (fig.2).

Fig. 2: The different departments of the regime, reporting to its leader

One of the prime examples for massive surveillance is George Orwell’s classic dystopian novel 1984. Its protagonist Winston lives in the police-state Oceania, where citizens are under constant surveillance through ‘telescreens’, which are mounted everywhere, sometimes even in private homes, hidden behind furnishing (cf. Orwell 1983: 189). Furthermore, the “Thought Police”, a form of secret police, which includes a vast network of spies who are conditioned from early youth, is constantly monitoring the citizens. It goes so far that even children are systematically turned against their parents to spy on them, making even the most intimate individuals possible informers (cf. Orwell 1983: 133). Winston feels that the only thing safe from the omnipresent eyes and ears of the telescreens are his thoughts,
however he anticipates that as soon as he is caught by the party and brought to the Ministry of Love, even those cannot be concealed when he is objected to drugs and torture:

One did not know what happened inside the Ministry of Love, but it was possible to guess: tortures, drugs, delicate instruments that registered your nervous reactions, gradual wearing-down by sleeplessness and solitude and persistent questioning. Facts, at any rate, could not be kept hidden. They could be tracked down by enquiry, they could be squeezed out of you by torture (Orwell 1983: 210).

Even in the utopian gone dystopian world of Scythe, everything is under the strict eye of the Thunderhead. Streetcams are constantly monitoring most of the cities, however, the public video recordings are all stored in the network, accessible for all of the citizens. The problem for everyone (except for the Thunderhead) is the fact that all the video data is not organized by camera or location, but rather linked by concepts, such as traffic patterns or people with similar strides (cf. Shusterman 2016: 230). While normal citizens may request the Thunderhead for AI guidance to find what they need, Scythes and their apprentices, such as the protagonist Citra, are denied the assistance of the Thunderhead, leaving her to search on unguided, unsure if she is observed on her own:

She wondered if, even in its silence, the Thunderhead was watching what she did. My, oh my, you’ve been picking through my brain, it would say if it were allowed, with a virtual wink. Naughty naughty. . (Shusterman 2016: 230).

2.1.4 A Sinister Regime

Ultimately, the governing force in a dystopian society is often responsible for more than just robbing people of their choices and keeping a close eye on them. While the former is usually the initially more apparent inconvenience of the dystopian society, in many cases there are significantly worse downsides to the Regime, unnoticed by most of the populace, until it is too late. In comparison to the aforementioned aspects of dystopian societies, this one is arguably the most common: the total disregard for human rights and life. Based on terrible regimes, nightmarish societies and police states, dystopian novels frequently feature themes such as death penalty, systematic persecution and murder, human or organ trafficking and slavery.
Life is cheap in dystopian worlds, and many works of this genre feature a society which at least contains some form of death penalty and/or birth control. For instance, in *The Giver*, members of society who are caught for transgression of the rules for the third time are executed. Even worse, infants who do not fulfill expected standards for weight and behavior are put to death, in a regulated and ruthless form of culling the weak (cf. Lowry 1993: 143). In the extreme collective society in *Anthem*, the death penalty is applied to those who dare to speak the word ‘I’, making sure to eradicate all individuality in the system (cf. Rand 1938: 17). In *Divergent*, citizens are categorized and join different factions based on their aptitude. Occasionally, citizens show aptitude for multiple factions, making them ‘Divergent’. They are thus considered difficult to control and are consequently killed by those who are in power (cf. Roth 2011: 258).

Some of the most prominent examples for violations of human rights are the ministries of the Oceanic society in Orwell’s *1984*. In a methodical fashion, they exact lies, war, torture and starvation upon their citizens through their ministries. On top of everything, their actions are shrouded in deceit and fabrication of truth to purposely dislocate the citizens’ sense of reality, all in order to uphold their rulership (cf. Orwell 1983: 184, 185). Should citizens object, rebel or even be too smart for their own good, they are arrested, tortured and brainwashed. Eventually, the troublemakers face a destiny worse than death: conformity.

‘No! Not merely to extract your confession, not to punish you. Shall I tell you why we have brought you here? To cure you! To make you sane! Will you understand, Winston, that no one whom we bring to this place ever leaves our hands uncured? We are not interested in those stupid crimes that you have committed. The Party is not interested in the overt act: the thought is all we care about. We do not merely destroy our enemies, we change them. Do you understand what I mean by that?’ (Orwell 1947: 319)

The atrocities can also take the form of mass entertainment in some dystopias. Similar to games, executions and battles in the Colosseum in ancient Rome, persecution, battles and killings as forms of mass entertainment are occasionally present in dystopian societies. Collin’s novel *The Hunger Games* features a prime example for this. In its titular games, the capitol forces two randomly elected citizens between the age of twelve and eighteen of each of the controlled districts to participate in a brutal deathmatch with only one possible victor and survivor. Viewing
this event is mandatory, and it is broadcasted to the capitol and all twelve districts. In this way it serves as a form of entertainment for the upper class living in the capitol, as well as a display of power to suppress the lower districts (cf. Collins 2008). Violence of human rights as entertainment is also present in Fahrenheit 451, where mass media has taken a turn for the worse. Police operations such as manhunts are streamed in mass media as a form of TV-show, serving as entertainment for the masses (cf. Bradbury 1953: 126).

In some of the worst cases, humans are reduced to objects or resources belonging to a higher power. This complete disregard of human rights and even life is often the ultimate demerit of an evil regime. In Kazuo Ishiguro’s Never Let Me Go for example, the school of Hailsham keeps its students reclusive and in a tightly controlled environment. Soon it becomes apparent that all students are actually clones created to serve as organ banks for people outside the school grounds, and are not considered as normal humans. The authorities of Hailsham are entirely aware that the clones usually die after a few operations, when enough of their organs have been extracted (cf. Ishiguro 2012: 89). Atwood’s novel The Heart Goes Last also revolves around a similar topic. Within the ‘Positron-project’ select few law-abiding and obedient citizens are charged with the execution of criminals. They are forced to handle the morally questionable task or risk being executed themselves (cf. Atwood 2016: 173, 204). What begins with a method to dispose of troublemakers and support the Positron-project financially, quickly escalates to a dystopian nightmare. The management succumbs to megalomaniac tendencies, eager to earn more profit, and as a consequence, more people are brought into the Positron from outside for execution and organ harvesting (cf. Atwood 2016: 172-173). Atwood’s other dystopian novel The Handmaid’s Tale features a similar dehumanizing topic, as due to a drop in fertility rates, the few remaining fertile women are forced into slavery by the government. They are systematically assigned to men of high social status, and have to bear their children (cf. Atwood 1998: 17-18).

But atrocious deeds are not always directed towards humans. The Government in Fahrenheit 451 forbids the possession and use of books, and its firemen are trained to burn them on sight, mercilessly destroying art, culture and knowledge in the process. Fireman Montag has not any problem justifying himself, as he is not physically harming the citizens themselves:
You weren't hurting anyone, you were hurting only things! And since things really couldn't be hurt, since things felt nothing, and things don't scream or whimper, as this woman might begin to scream and cry out, there was nothing to tease your conscience later (Bradbury 1953: 34).

The government in *Fahrenheit 451* is not the only one that destroys knowledge and culture on purpose. In Alan Moore’s and Lloyd David’s graphic novel *V for Vendetta*, Norsefire, the political party leading England, systematically bans works of art such as paintings and books (fig. 3), as V explains to his ally Evey (cf. Moore & Lloyd: 1982: 10).

![Fig. 3: V showing Evey the culture she was withheld from her](image)

The same goes for the citizens of the world state in *Brave New World*, as the reader discovers when John inquires the citizens about Shakespeare:

"Do they read Shakespeare?" asked the Savage as they walked, on their way to the Bio-chemical Laboratories, past the School Library.
"Certainly not," said the Head Mistress, blushing.
"Our library," said Dr. Gaffney, "contains only books of reference. If our young people need distraction, they can get it at the feelies. We don't encourage them to indulge in any solitary amusements." (Huxley 1932: 109)

Significantly more is withheld from the members of the community in *The Giver*, as they are not only missing memories of history and culture, but are also oblivious to certain basic concepts such as love, war and even colors.
“You’re beginning to see the color red.”
“The what?”
The Giver sighed. “How to explain this? Once, back in the time of the memories, everything had a shape and size, the way things still do, but they also had a quality called color. (Lowry 1993: 90)

2.1.5 Masking the Truth

If we look at the sinister regimes depicted in dystopian fiction and the horrendous deeds they inflict upon their citizens, it raises the question of how the oppressing force is getting away with its malevolent deeds. Recurring aspects of the ruling power in the dystopian genre also include propaganda and lies, devised to control the masses and mask the regime’s malicious scheme. This is sometimes the reason why the dystopia appears as a utopia in the beginning, but often the truth is quite apparent to the reader at a later stage. Constant lies and the absence of truth typically prevents the society from mending the system, because to fix something one has to admit that it is broken first. The concealment of truth is often the key factor as to why the situation in these fictional societies is so dire. In City of Ember by Jeanne DuPrau, the titular underground city is slowly falling apart, as the machines and supplies it is depending on are expiring. The mayor of this city is one of the few to know the truth about this problem and decides to keep it hidden while accumulating his own personal stash of supplies, planning to leave the whole city to their grisly fate. (Cf. DuPrau 2013: 164) Still, people do have their suspicions, as repeated power shortages and light failures remind the citizens that someday, the lights might go out and never come back on. Nonetheless, they prefer not to think about it (cf. DuPrau 2013: 4-5). Lies and deceit are further reinforced with threats as the protagonist Lina Mayfleet gives in to her natural curiosity, and starts to uncover the truth behind the power outages and supply shortages. When she confronts the mayor, she is dismissed with a threat:

Lina started to speak, but the mayor held up his hand. It was an oddly small hand, with short fingers like ripe peapods. “Curiosity,” said the mayor. “A dangerous quality. Unhealthy. Especially regrettable in one so young.”
“I’m twelve,” said Lina.
“Silence!” said the mayor. “I am speaking.” He wriggled slightly from side to side, wedging himself more firmly into the chair. He’ll need to be pried out of it, Lina thought.
“Ember, as you know,” the mayor went on, “is in a time of difficulty. Extraordinary measures are necessary. This is a time when citizens should be most loyal. Most law-abiding. For the good of all.” (DuPrau 2013: 217)

In *The Snowpiercer*, a similarly grisly fate is covered up by political lies. The protagonist discovers that the government aims to disconnect the train’s tail end to decrease the train’s weight and unburden the engine. As those cars host numerous people (living in outrageous conditions), they claim to evacuate them properly before the decoupling (cf. Lob & Rochette 1984: 88). Proloff soon learns however, that this is a ruse, and the government plans to disconnect the tail end-cars with all inhabitants, along with several members of an aid organization which are considered a political threat, condemning them all to a death in a frozen and uninhabitable world (fig. 4).

![Fig. 4: Proloff Uncovering the Politician’s Evil Scheme](image)

A very proactive form of lying to the masses is usually employed by dystopian regimes through propaganda. Slogans that promote the superiority of the regime are
often used, such as ‘Strength Through Purity, Purity Through Faith’ and ‘England prevails’ in *V for Vendetta* (cf. Moore & Lloyd: 1982: 3), ‘A MEANINGFUL LIFE’ in *The Heart Goes Last* (Cf. Atwood 2016: 162), and ‘War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, Ignorance is Strength’ in *1984* (cf. Orwell 1947: 6). In some instances, history and facts in school books and official records are altered to ensure the compliance of its citizens to its government and the obliviousness to its deeds, such as the ministry of truth does in *1984* (cf. Orwell 1947: 44) or the Republic of Greater East Asia in *Battle Royale*:

Shuya really did like literature. Even if the stories and essays in the textbooks were inundated with slogans in praise of the Republic or some silly "ideology," Shuya managed to discover words he liked. (Takami 1990: 461)

Forms of euphemism are commonly applied by dystopian regimes to whitewash their atrocities. Very often, practices, groups or items are labeled in a form that obscures their true purpose, or at least gives them a less dangerous appearance. In Lowry’s *The Giver*, euthanasia and death penalty, applied to flawed newborns, rule-breakers or elderly people is never openly labeled as such. Instead, those who are put to death are “released from society”, which reflects the common belief of the citizens in this matter, as they think that those who are ‘released’ are being sent elsewhere and never return to the community (cf. Lowry 2008: 61). In her stay in the Positron prison, Charmaine, one of the protagonists of *The Heart Goes Last*, is tasked to execute alleged troublemakers who are later harvested for organs. This practice is officially labeled as ‘special procedure’, and to further ease her conscience she considers herself as angel of mercy:

She strokes the man’s head, smiles with her deceptive teeth. She hopes she appears to him like an angel: an angel of mercy. Because isn’t she one? Such men are like Stan’s brother, Conor: they don’t fit anywhere. They’ll never be happy where they are – in Positron, in Consilience, maybe even on the entire Planet Earth. So she’s providing the alternative for him. The escape. (Atwood: 96)

To ‘complete’ is the term the guardians of the Hailsham school in Ishiguro’s novel *Never Let Me Go* use for the death of their students, after they are forced to donate enough of their organs to have a fatal effect on them (cf. Ishiguro 2012: 8, 281). In *Scythe*, the term that is used for the official killing of citizens permitted by the government is ‘gleaning’:
It begins on day one of apprenticeship—but we do not officially call it “killing.” It’s not socially or morally correct to call it such. It is, and has always been, “gleaning,” named for the way the poor would trail behind farmers in ancient times, taking the stray stalks of grain left behind. It was the earliest form of charity. A scythe’s work is the same. Every child is told from the day he or she is old enough to understand that the scythes provide a crucial service for society. Ours is the closest thing to a sacred mission the modern world knows. (Shusterman 2016: 3)

Many dystopian governments label their officials in a way that seems less harmful to citizens than they actually are. In The Handmaids Tale, soldiers of the regime are labeled ‘Guardians’ and ‘Angels’, while the secret police is called ‘Eyes’ (cf. Atwood 1998: 17-18). The so called ‘Peacekeepers’ are a police force in The Hunger Games punishing those who break the strict laws of the capitol (cf. Collins 2008). In Fahrenheit 451 ‘Firemen’ do not prevent fires, but are tasked by the government to burn books on sight. However, this deceptive labeling is rather meant to fool the extratextual reader than the intratextual citizens, as most of them cannot remember what the original purpose of firemen actually was (cf. Bradbury 1953). The mislabeling can go as far as blatantly stating the opposite of the truth, for example in the novel 1984, where the ministries are oppositely named for what their function encompasses:

Even the names of the four Ministries by which we are governed exhibit a sort of impudence in their deliberate reversal of the facts. The Ministry of Peace concerns itself with war, the Ministry of Truth with lies, the Ministry of Love with torture and the Ministry of Plenty with starvation. These contradictions are not accidental, nor do they result from ordinary hypocrisy; they are deliberate exercises in DOUBLETHINK. For it is only by reconciling contradictions that power can be retained indefinitely. In many cases, the lies and half-truths of dystopian government take an even more prevalent role, when applied as propaganda, often employed through media. (Orwell 1983: 272-273).

2.1.6 A Lack of Alternatives

How such an obvious violation of human rights remains unnoticed or unchallenged by the masses may seem baffling to the reader, even more so, considering how blatant and unsubtle propaganda and cover-ups are often portrayed. However the lack of resistance against the regime is often justified by the fact that citizens are desperate. Many works of dystopian fiction are set in a world or country where war or
disaster rages and the oppressive government is the only chance of law and order the people have, forcing them to choose between the lesser (or less obvious) evil. Several of them bridge into the post-apocalyptic genre, such as The Snowpiercer, where another ice-age hast occurred. Here, the alternative to a one-train society ruled by hedonistic first-class passengers and oppressing violent military forces is a frozen wasteland, where all life has disappeared and the promised land does not exist (cf. Lob & Rochette 1884: 53). It goes so far that some of the tail-end passengers view death as a preferable alternative to both (cf. Lob & Rochette 1884: 15). In City of Ember, due to the underground location and the complete lack of portable light sources, it is impossible for the citizens to explore the surroundings of the city (cf. DuPrau 2013: 66). Any attempt to venture out leaves the would-be explorer stumbling in the dark:

He rambled on. “Be brave, I said to myself. I kept going and going, but then all of a sudden I thought, anything could be out here! There could be a pit a thousand feet deep right in front of me. There could be…something that bites. I’ve heard stories…rats as big as garbage bins…And I had to get out of there. So I turned around and I ran.”

[…] But you didn’t find anything? Or see anything?” Lina asked, disappointed. “Nothing! Nothing! There is nothing out there!” His voice became a shout and his eyes looked wild again. “Or if there is, we can never get to it. Never! Not without a light.” (DuPrau 2013: 64-65)

Often, the evil regime deliberately takes advantage of the circumstances, such as in The Heart Goes Last, where the leaders of the Positron know fully well, that people would do anything to escape the lawless chaos outside the gates:

In fact, they’ll have to leave because Positron wants you to take a good look at the alternatives before deciding. As they have good reason to know, it’s a festering scrap heap, out beyond the Consilience gates. People are starving. Scavenging, pilfering, dumpster-diving. Is that any way for a human being to live? (Cf. Atwood 2015: 162)

Sometimes, the gruesome world outside the boundaries of society is just a façade to keep its inhabitants frightened and obedient. In Ishiguros Never let Me Go, the children of Hailsham are subjected to rumors and horror stories of ghosts and mutilated bodies, spread by the guardians, who invoke fear of the forests and surroundings outside of the school:

There were all kinds of horrible stories about the woods. Once, not so long
before we all got to Hailsham, a boy had had a big row with his friends and run off beyond the Hailsham boundaries. His body had been found two days later, up in those woods, tied to a tree with the hands and feet chopped off. Another rumour had it that a girl’s ghost wandered through those trees. She’d been a Hailsham student until one day she’d climbed over a fence just to see what it was like outside. [...] The guardians always insisted these stories were nonsense. But then the older students would tell us that was exactly what the guardians had told them when they were younger, and that we’d be told the ghastly truth soon enough, just as they were. (Ishiguro 2012: 59)

This form of conditioning even goes so far as to leave the children scarred for life, as some of the fear of the outside still remains when they are older:

Because maybe, in a way, we didn’t leave it behind nearly as much as we might once have thought. Because somewhere underneath, a part of us stayed like that: fearful of the world around us, and—no matter how much we despised ourselves for it—unable quite to let each other go. (Ishiguro 2012: 126)

In some cases, people cannot even determine the status of the world as well as the quality of life outside of the regime, simply because not anyone knows (at least officially) what has happened to the outside world. In Roth’s *Divergent*, the prime purpose of a whole faction called the “Dauntless” is to guard the fence that surrounds the destroyed and slowly rebuilt city of Chicago. The protagonist Tris is completely oblivious who or what they are supposed to protect them from however (cf. Roth 2011: 7). Only significantly later on, in *Allegiant* (the third book in the series) it is revealed that Chicago is one of many secure environments which serve to protect the genetic purity of those living inside from the genetically damaged individuals living outside the walls (cf. Roth 2013: 124).

2.1.7 Point of View

The narrative situation can have a significant impact on how a story is presented by a book, and the same is true for dystopian fiction. For example, Orwell’s *1984* employs a third-person figural point of view with a focalizer, which allows the reader almost direct access to the thoughts of the protagonist Winston as they happen. As Winston serves as a focalizer, descriptions and events in the novel are filtered by his mind.
His earlier thought returned to him: probably she was not actually a member of the
Thought Police, but then it was precisely the amateur spy who was the greatest
danger of all. (Orwell 1947: 79)

Assumptions made by Winston prove untrue over the course of the plot, as the
narrative dramatically destabilizes his reality, and consequently the reader’s sense of
the powers working against him is intensified. By establishing such close
identification with the protagonist’s point of view, the narrative engages the reader’s
multiple protagonists, with the focalizer switching back and forth. *City of Ember, 
Battle Royale, The Heart Goes Last* and *Scythe* for example, switch back and forth
between their protagonists and focalizers, recounting the stories and thoughts from
different perspectives. Occasionally, dystopian works employ a first-person narrative,
looking at the gruesome reality through the eyes of the characters. Works such as
*The Hunger Games* or *Divergent*, narrate the story from the first-person
(homodiegetic) perspective of the protagonists. In *Anthem* this perspective has the
additional effect of conveying the collectivist thoughts of this society, as the
protagonist constantly refers to himself as “We”.

It is a sin to write this. It is a sin to think words no others think and to put
them down upon a paper no others are to see. It is base and evil. It is as if we
were speaking alone to no ears but our own. And we know well that there is
no transgression blacker than to do or think alone. (Rand 1947: 17)

The dystopian graphic novel *V for Vendetta* constantly employs antagonists as
focalizers, showing an totalitarian regime from a completely different viewpoint (cf.
Moore & Lloyd 1982: 2). For example, the reader is shortly allowed to have a look at
the perspective of Chancellor Susan, the leader of the government (fig. 5).
Fig. 5: Chancellor Susan Justifies his Deeds

To conclude, dystopian fiction usually describes negative or even nightmarish societies. The setting and the circumstances vary widely, but there are common elements that connect fictional (and sometimes even non-fictional) dystopias, such as a heavily divided society, strict rules and a lack of freedom, massive surveillance, a dangerous and harmful authority and lies or deception to mask its deeds. Plotlines frequently contain a conflict with the government, usually due to the discovery of its true nature and hidden secrets by the protagonist. This usually leads to attempt of liberation, through rebellion or flight, which may or may not be successful. While those features might seem attractive to teenagers, it still needs to be determined in which way those elements are adapted to fit books geared towards young adults.

2.2. On Young Adult Fiction

Books that are geared towards young adult readers are a rather new trend when compared to the evolution of written fiction. According to Marjorie Warmkessel, this genre started in the 1960s with books such as The Outsiders (by Susan E. Hinton), Are you there God and It’s me, Margaret (by Judy Blume), but it was not until the late 1990s, when young-adult novels were aggressively marketed as such (cf. Warmkessel 2017: 22). Mike Cadden claims that the young adult genre evolved out of the novel tradition of the Bildungsroman (cf. Cadden, 2011: 310). Katherine Bucher notes that this genre separated itself from children’s literature in the 1960s, and addressed problems of growing up. As with many genres, what exactly falls
under the category of ‘young-adult’ is tricky to define. Bucher stresses that the definition is very problematic and there is not any clear consensus. If the age of the target audience is the main criterion, then 11-18 years seems to be common, but multiple different age groups, such as 11-16, 10-21 or 12-22 could apply too. Therefore, the target audience may well be a question of marketing and the publisher of the literature in question (cf. Bucher Katherine 2013: 4). In addition to that, Karen Coats states that young-adult literature is defined by the audience, not the writers (cf. Coats 2011: 323), while Jonathan Stephens suggests, that ‘young-adult’ is an age demographic as well as a genre (cf. Stephens 2007: 41). A study conducted by the Bowker-company in 2012 indicated that 55% of buyers of books aimed at children between 12 to 17 (designated as young-adult books) are 18 years or older, up to an age of 44. 78 percent of those buyers stated that they purchased the book for their own reading (cf. www.bowker.com 2012). This could be the result of what Karen Coats describes as ‘crossover phenomenon’, (cf. Coats 2011: 322) which occurs when books written for children or teens become popular with adults and vice versa. This may further lead to the question, whether a strict target audience actually matters for the genre of young-adult novels. Ultimately, Stephen Roxbourgh claims that there is not any difference between the adult and the young-adult novel: there may be distinctions, but it is not a different art form. Additionally, while the young-adult literature designation is based on the audience, one has to consider that audience is a moving target. He also brought into mind that we cannot even agree on what a young adult is, let alone young-adult literature (cf. Roxbourgh 2005: 4, 5).

Deborah Stevenson provides the example of 18th-century novels, which were aimed at young readers, targeting people we would now consider as fully adult. According to her, the 20th-century creation of the young-adult genre expanded the categories of non-adult readers (cf. Stevenson 2011:180). Coats adds that constantly changing cultural conditions and definitions make young-adult literature tricky to theorize (cf. Coats 2011: 320). She later states that some people use genre to refer to children’s literature as a whole, with young-adult as a separate distinct genre, which according to her, implies that young-adult contains some similarities of subject matter (cf. Coats 2017: 315)
With several different definitions and opinion about what exactly describes young adult literature, it might me easier to look at a variety multiple characteristics commonly associated to it, rather than a single explanation or designation.

### 2.2.1 The Characteristics of Young Adult Literature

As mentioned before, there is not any clear definition of the genre ‘young-adult fiction’. Many people state different opinions about what criteria fit this genre. Jonathan Stephens for instance defines the genre as follows:

> As I see it, the label “Young Adult” refers to a story that tackles the difficult, and oftentimes adult, issues that arise during an adolescent’s journey toward identity, a journey told through a distinctly teen voice that holds the same potential for literary value as its “Grownup peers. (Stephens 2007: 40-41)

Stephens also lists a couple of characteristics that are defining for the genre of young-adult literature (cf. Stephens 2007: 41):

- Books are written about teens, with a teenager as protagonist
- The narrative voice is first person most of the time (about two in three)
- The story includes a journey toward identity
- The story tackles adult issues in teenage lives (such as mental sickness and kidnapping)
- The book holds the same potential for literary value as grownup novels

According to Katherine Bucher, literature written for young adults should follow the following criteria: They should reflect the young adults’ age as well as their development by addressing their readers’ abilities and interests, they should deal with contemporary issues and problems adolescents can relate to, and they should consider contemporary world views such as global politics and gender diversity. (cf. Bucher 2013: 10). Bucher also lists some characteristics of young-adult literature such as the inclusion of young protagonists and characters and the focus on themes that interest young people. It reflects the changes adolescents experience with conflicts, and shows how they are learning to take responsibility for their own actions.

Stephen Roxburgh suggests three elements that most often dominate in young-adult narratives: they are plots of character, the characters tend to be adolescent and
the point of view is often first person (Roxbourgh 2005: 4). He also mentions, however, that the subject matter, the age of the protagonist and the point of view only describe the young-adult novel, they do not define it. Books such as *Catcher in the Rye*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Robinson Crusoe* are all narrated from the perspective of a young adult, but were not marketed as young-adult novels (Roxbourgh 2005: 4-5).

Another approach is given by Mike Cadden, who states that young-adult books are usually about change and growth, and are either a full blown novel of growth (Bildungsroman), or of character change (Entwicklungsroman), as the primary subtext of this genre is usually about identity construction (cf. Cadden 2011: 307). Cadden also notes that, despite some shared elements and tendencies, there are certain differences between literature for children and young adults. For instance, children’s books try to please and feature happy endings. They rather feature mythic elements akin to fairy tales, unlike young-adult novels, which are rather crisis driven and often feature an apocalyptic plot. Additionally, children’s books emphasize a return to home, while young-adult books prefer a plot revolving getting away from home. Furthermore, in contrast to children’s literature, novels for young adults represent all modal possibilities, such as tragic or dystopic. Cadden further explains that the young-adult novel, despite having thematic and structural tendencies of its own, blends with the novel for adults in its employment of themes. He theorizes that due to its stronger similarity to the adult novel than to children’s literature, the young-adult novel is rather a subset of the former, while the latter is a genre on its own (cf. Cadden 2011: 307). Despite of that, Cadden admits that the fantasy novel unites both audiences, being highly popular for both, children and young adults, especially the subgenre of high fantasy (cf. Cadden 2011: 310). Ultimately, Cadden summarizes the goals of the young-adult genre as the triumph of the unified self, able to grow, and integration of a self which is partly or almost entirely determined by society, and even when it tends towards dystopia, the character shows capacity for self-recognition (cf. Cadden 2011: 310).

Even though many positive and valuable elements are attributed to young-adult books, as seen above, they are not always seen in a positive light.
2.2.2. Young Adult Literature - An Ill-fated Genre?

Young-adult literature often has a bad reputation when it comes to quality and literary value. Jonathan Stephens states that YA-literature is often accused of being somewhat simplistic, only for children, less than literary, not serious enough for use in schools, written by amateur writers and basically a marketing ploy (cf. Stephens 2007: 34). According to Cindy Lou Daniels, some believe that young-adult literature is unworthy of serious evaluation. In contrast to that, she describes the genre as an overlooked and underappreciated genre, which has recently begun to attract the critical attention it deserves. Daniels also mentions that this is mainly a problem of labeling: despite being different from children’s literature, young-adult literature is often grouped as a sub-division of this genre. According to her, contemporary critics often do not recognize this, which results in young-adult literature not being taken seriously (cf. Daniels 2006: 78-80).

Karen Coats shares the opinion of young-adult literature not being taken seriously critically. She mentions that many perceive this genre as an entrée into sophisticated reading, but not very sophisticated by itself, despite showing a richness in character portrayal, beauty of language and thematic significance. She also calls into question how people are supposed take young-adult literature seriously when their success depends primarily on the responsiveness of a readership, who are undergoing a change (cf. Coats 2011: 321).

According to Chris Crowe, young-adult literature is considered bad because it does not include classics and supposedly corrupts the young (cf. Crowe 2001: 146). While he praises the genre’s ability to provoke critical thinking and provide hours of pleasure for most readers, he suggests that one of the main problems is this genre’s lack of classics. Books for young adults and teenagers have not been around long enough to stand a chance against literature such as Beowulf (cf. Crowe 2001: 147). Crowe explains that some adults believe young people should only read canonized literature, because anything else will weaken the mind and waste educational time. Another problem, according to him, is the bad reputation of the quality of certain examples of the genre. Bad books lead to people dismissing the entire field, despite the range of quality being comparable to that in adult literature (cf. Crowe 2001: 146). Crowe also mentions that another concern towards young-adult books, is the recent
popularity of bleak themes, such as rape, mental illness, violence or murder (cf. Crowe 2001: 148). Finally, the last problem comes with the labeling. Crowe notes that teenagers want to be seen as adults, so labeling books that mark them as less than an adult seems repulsive to them (cf. Crowe 2001: 147).
3. Dystopian Literature – the Classics

As mentioned in the previous chapter, dystopian literature has a long tradition, being around for more than a century. Several of those books are well-known, serving as examples for their genre, and reminding us of the dangers that might arise from deep within a society. Understanding those books might provide insight on the genre’s conventions, tropes and history, and will lead to a better understanding of their genre.

Popular works of dystopian literature include George Orwell’s 1984, Alduous Huxely’s Brave New World and Ray Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451.

3.1. 1984

Published in 1949, George Orwell’s 1984 gave a grim perspective of a possible future, where freedom and safety of the individual citizen is heavily limited by the totalitarian government. This is partly achieved by technology, such as the two-way always-on telescreens which serve to monitor citizens everywhere, even in their homes. Citizens of Oceania live in constant fear of the Thought Police, as any rule transgression or suspicious behavior could lead to their arrest.

It was terribly dangerous to let your thoughts wander when you were in any public place or within range of a telescreen. The smallest thing could give you away. A nervous tic, an unconscious look of anxiety, a habit of muttering to yourself – anything that carried with it the suggestion of abnormality, of having something to hide. In any case, to wear an improper expression on your face (to look incredulous when a victory was announced, for example) was itself a punishable offense. There was even a word for it in Newspeak: facecrime, it was called. (Orwell 1947: 79)

Furthermore, propaganda, heavily supported by the media, spreads lies and half-truths to ensure the loyalty and patriotism of the citizens as well as to justify their government’s methods. Practices such as the constructed languages of ‘Newspeak’ and ‘Doublespeak’ emphasize censorship and the use of euphemisms within Oceania, to quell any rebellious thoughts.

The story of the novel follows outer party member Winston Smith, who is assigned to rewrite history records for the government. His life starts to become conflicted, when
he secretly starts writing a diary that criticizes the government, and at the same time falls in love with his co-worker Julia. After they have an affair, they are invited to join the resistance, but are lured into a trap and transferred to the Ministry of Love, where they are tortured. While being brainwashed, Winston learns the truth about the inner party and Big Brother, and is ultimately re-educated by the Ministry.

Orwell’s novel employs a third-person limited point of view, with protagonist Winston as the focalizer of the story. The reader has access to his thoughts and anxiety, which is prevalent, as he is constantly subject to the fear of being caught for his rebellious thoughts.

The sweat started out on Winston’s backbone. A horrible pang of terror went through him. It was gone almost at once, but it left a sort of nagging uneasiness behind. Why was she watching him? Why did she keep following him about? Unfortunately he could not remember whether she had already been at the table when he arrived, or had come there afterwards. But yesterday, at any rate, during the Two Minutes Hate, she had sat immediately behind him when there was no apparent need to do so. Quite likely her real object had been to listen to him and make sure whether he was shouting loudly enough. (Orwell 1947: 79)

1984 shows how a police state could control and suppress its citizens even without heavy use of brutal force, through massive surveillance and propaganda. This nightmare vision has its origin in human history, inspired by practices such as propaganda and secret police during the Cold War and Second World War. While the basic concept had already been used in literature, such as in Yevgeny Zamyatin’s We in 1920, Orwell’s novel stays a true classic, and is an integral part of the reading lists of many schools. Later dystopian works such as the graphic novel V for Vendetta (1982) by Alan Moore and David Lloyd or the movie Equilibrium (2002) by Kurt Wimmer present similar settings, continuing the trend of police states in dystopian fiction.

3.2. Brave New World

In contrast to 1984, Alduous Huxley’s Brave New World, published in 1932, is set in the futuristic World State of London, where everything and everyone is designed to be in their designated place and be happy with it. Genetic engineering and conditioning divides its populace in five different social casts, each with their
designated capabilities and assignments. While the upper castes are intellectual and retain some form of independence, lower castes are basically engineered to serve as mindless work-slaves. While everyone is designed to be content with his or her place in society, further happiness is ensured by the issuing of the drug Soma.

The plot of *Brave New World* follows Bernard Marx, a discontent psychiatrist of the upper-class of society. Due to his criticism on the system, his director threatens him with exile to Iceland. While on a holiday in a ‘Savage Reservation’ with his friend Lenina, they meet Linda, a former member of the World State, as well as her son John. Together, they return to London, where John experiences a culture-shock due to the different customs and life-style. His strive to understand and adopt the lifestyle of the ‘Brave New World’ fails, so does his attempts to change the system, until he ultimately gives up on the world and himself.

*Brave New World* serves as a classic example for a utopia gone dystopia. Instead of a totalitarian regime such as in *1984*, the society in *Brave New World* is designed to make every citizen happy and content. Unfortunately, this makes them also oblivious to the radical changes in society, and the means by which this world was achieved. People are practically enslaved and made docile with drugs and genetic engineering, while freedom is hampered as everyone’s place in society is predetermined. Even the torture of infants in the name of science is perfectly normal in this ‘utopian’ society:

Their little bodies twitched and stiffened; their limbs moved jerkily as if to the tug of unseen wires.

“We can electrify that whole strip of floor,” bawled the Director in explanation. “But that’s enough,” he signaled to the nurse. The explosions ceased, the bells stopped ringing, the shriek of the siren died down from tone to tone into silence. The stiffly twitching bodies relaxed, and what had become the sob and yelp of infant maniacs broadened out once more into a normal howl of ordinary terror. (Huxley 1932: 16)

The novel is written from a third person omniscient point of view, with different focalizers over the course of the story. The supposedly utopian society is witnessed from Bernard’s point of view, who is widely dissatisfied with it, due to him being different from the other Alpha-Plus citizens:

Too little bone and brawn had isolated Bernard from his fellow men, and the sense of this apartness, being, by all the current standards, a mental excess, became in its turn a cause of wider separation. That which had made Helmholtz so uncomfortably aware of being himself and all alone was too much ability. What the
two men shared was the knowledge that they were individuals. But whereas the physically defective Bernard had suffered all his life from the consciousness of being separate, it was only quite recently that, grown aware of his mental excess, Helmholtz Watson had also become aware of his difference from the people who surrounded him. (Huxley 1932: 50)

Through his eyes, the readers witnesses *Brave New World*'s society through a rather critical point of view, as Bernard is rather discontent with them. That changes however, when he meets John and presents ‘the savage’ to his fellow citizens in London, leading to rise in popularity for both of them:

Success went fizzily to Bernard’s head, and in the process completely reconciled him (as any good intoxicant should do) to a world which, up till then, he had found very unsatisfactory. In so far as it recognized him as important, the order of things was good. But, reconciled by his success, he yet refused to forego the privilege of criticizing this order. For the act of criticizing heightened his sense of importance, made him feel larger. (Huxley 1932: 105)

With Bernard undergoing a significant change by betraying all the values he seemingly established in the first part of the book, he gradually loses his appeal to the reader he gained when he was the skeptic underdog. The story’s perspective then shifts to John as new focalizer, who is even more bewildered and appalled by the lifestyle of the people in the cities.

The Savage nodded, frowning. "You got rid of them. Yes, that's just like you. Getting rid of everything unpleasant instead of learning to put up with it. Whether 'tis better in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing end them… But you don't do either. Neither suffer nor oppose. You just abolish the slings and arrows. It's too easy." (Huxley 1932: 162)

*Brave new World* successfully reminds the reader that one person’s utopia can easily be another person’s dystopia. Perfection can easily come at the price of freedom, overindulgence in simple pleasures at the cost of austerity and decency. In addition to that, the novel also demonstrates that it proves to be impossible to change a system when people are content with it.
### 3.3. Fahrenheit 451

Another classic, Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*, published in 1953, is named after the temperature books need to catch fire, and fittingly revolves around firemen. In this society however, those firemen do not distinguish fires (as all houses are fireproof), but rather the opposite: as a result of the government banning the possession and usage of books, the official department of firefighting has changed its main responsibility to the incineration of those illegal items, no matter the cost.

The story follows Guy Montag, the protagonist of *Fahrenheit 451*, who is dedicated to his work as one of said firemen. Doubts about his occupation arise however, when one day a woman dies during a raid, choosing to burn alongside her beloved books. Montag gives in to curiosity and secretly takes home several books, much to the dismay of his wife. While he studies the illegal writings of old, he discovers the value of literature, and allies himself with people who think alike. Their plans of rebellion are foiled however, when Beatty, chief of the firemen, finds out about the stolen books, and confronts Montag. The resulting inferno leaves the ex-fireman running for his life, trying to escape the clutches of a society that traded independent thinking for happiness, and intellectuality for a thirst for violence.

Similar to 1984, Fahrenheit 451 is narrated in a third-person limited omniscient point of view with protagonist Guy Montag as the focalizer. Montag’s thoughts and feelings accompany the reader, who experiences first-hand how the main character of this novel gradually shifts from being a supporter of the dystopian government to its adversary, and how his rebellious actions have an inner effect on him:

> The numbness will go away, he thought. It'll take time, but I'll do it, or Faber will do it for me. Someone somewhere will give me back the old face and the old hands the way they were. Even the smile, he thought, the old burnt-in smile, that's gone. I'm lost without it. (Badbury 1953: 74)

As the reader has to learn about the other characters and the events of the world through the eyes of the protagonist, a significant amount of the background is conveyed through dialogue:

> Beatty knocked his pipe into the palm of his pink hand, studied the ashes as if they were a symbol to be diagnosed and searched for meaning.
"You must understand that our civilization is so vast that we can't have our minorities upset and stirred. Ask yourself, What do we want in this country, above all? People want to be happy, isn't that right? Haven't you heard it all your life? I want to be happy, people say. Well, aren't they? Don't we keep them moving, don't we give them fun? That's all we live for, isn't it? For pleasure, for titillation? And you must admit our culture provides plenty of these."
"Yes." (Badbury 1953: 57)

Bradbury’s dystopian story revolves around the themes of extreme censorship and mass-media consumerism in society. People are not allowed to read or own books, however this restriction is barely necessary, as most citizens are perfectly content with other, less complex and inconvenient forms of entertainment, such as soap operas and fun parks. Those few intellectuals that cannot abstain from written literature are ostracized and their possessions burned. Manhunts for those criminals are in turn presented as another form of entertainment, broadcasted right into the high-tech televisions in every citizen home.

As in many dystopian works, this social nightmare started out with the best intentions, as becomes apparent when captain Beatty explains the situation to the protagonist. Years ago, the government decided to ban texts and items that would offend people, to keep them happy. Eventually an increasing number of minorities called for censorship of certain books or parts of it, until books were banned altogether.

Montag could lip-read what Mildred was saying in the doorway. He tried not to look at her mouth, because then Beatty might turn and read what was there, too. "Colored people don't like Little Black Sambo. Burn it. White people don't feel good about Uncle Tom's Cabin. Burn it. Someone's written a book on tobacco and cancer of the lungs? The cigarette people are weeping? Burn the book. Serenity, Montag. Peace, Montag. Take your fight outside. Better yet, into the incinerator. Funerals are unhappy and pagan? Eliminate them, too. Five minutes after a person is dead he's on his way to the Big Flue, the Incinerators serviced by helicopters all over the country. Ten minutes after death a man's a speck of black dust. Let's not quibble over individuals with memoriams. Forget them. Burn them all, burn everything. Fire is bright and fire is clean." (Badbury 1953: 57)

To replace the books, the society has established mindless forms of entertainment, simple enough so that nobody would get offended. The result is an anti-intellectual society, obsessed with reading comics, watching rocket cars and soap operas on their parlor-screens as well as going to fun parks that encourage violent behavior. In
contrast to many other dystopias, the change has not been forced on the society by
the government or technology, but rather happened because people decided on their
own accord:

"Remember, the firemen are rarely necessary. The public itself stopped reading of
its own accord. You firemen provide a circus now and then at which buildings are
set off and crowds gather for the pretty blaze, but it's a small sideshow indeed, and
hardly necessary to keep things in line. So few want to be rebels any more. And
out of those few, most, like myself, scare easily. Can you dance faster than the
White Clown, shout louder than 'Mr. Gimmick' and the parlour 'families'? If you
can, you'll win your way, Montag. In any event, you're a fool. People are having
fun. (Bradbury 1953: 83).

Despite everything is designed to make the citizens happy, people notice the
detrimental effect it has on society:

"I'm afraid of children my own age. They kill each other. Did it always used to be
that way? My uncle says no. Six of my friends have been shot in the last year
alone. Ten of them died in car wrecks. I'm afraid of them and they don't like me
because I'm afraid. My uncle says his grandfather remembered when children
didn't kill each other. But that was a long time ago when they had things different."
(Bradbury 1953: 27).

While the general idea of censoring through book burning is rooted deeply in the
history of mankind, Bradbury's dystopian novel is an iconic example for it. Later
works, such as the light novel *Library War* (2006) by Hiro Arikawa, or the movie
that this iconic trope of dystopian fiction has made its transition into modern works.
4. Contemporary Dystopian Novels and Generic Transitions

In the past few decades, many works of the dystopian genre took a different approach, trying to appeal to another, younger target audience. Dystopian fiction for young adults has risen to a trend that has been met with notable critical and commercial success. While dystopian novels aimed at an adult audience are still being published, such as Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaids Tale*, or Hugh Howey’s *Silo* book series, books of this genre are more often than not marketed towards younger readers. Works such as *The Giver*, *The Hunger Games* or *Divergent* are exemplary for this kind.

4.1. Dystopian Literature – A Genre in Transition?

As mentioned in chapter 2.2, young-adult literature was marketed aggressively only in recent years. Novels that try to appeal to an audience somewhere in between readers of adult novels and books for children contain elements that are particularly interesting for adolescent readers, who are eagerly looking for books with themes they can relate to and protagonists they can identify with. Recently, an increasing number of those novels have been part of the genre of dystopian fiction, a combination that was very untypical until the 21th-century. Towards the very end of the last millennium however, young-adult dystopian novels have not only started to get published frequently, but have also begun to appear in bestseller lists all across the world. The start of this trend was arguably marked by Lois Lowry's *The Giver*, a book which was published in 1993. It features a teenager as protagonist who has to live up to enormous expectations, while trying to decide what is right and what is wrong in a world full of rules and regulations. While the setting is comparable to classic dystopian novels, the protagonist is rather atypical for this genre, effectively merging young-adult literature and dystopian fiction.

While *The Giver* was successfully published and other dystopian novels have aimed toward a younger audience, such as *Battle Royale* (1999) by Takami Koushun, *Mortal Engines* (2001) by Philip Reeve, *Feed* (2002) by M.T.Anderson or *City of Ember* (2003) by Jeanne DuPrau soon followed, it still took a few more years for this
combination to become popular. Well into the 2000s and 2010s, more dystopian books for young adults such as *Unwind* (2007) by Neal Shusterman, *The Hunger Games* (2008) by Suzanne Collins, *The Maze Runner* (2009) by James Dashner, *Ready Player One* (2011) by Ernest Cline or *Divergent* (2011) by Veronica Roth were successfully published. When a Hollywood movie adaptation of *The Hunger Games* was released in 2012, it was met with enormous critical and financial success, and it did not take long for the market to adapt. In 2014, movie adaptations of *Divergent*, *Maze Runner* and the (by then 21 years old) *The Giver* all joined the ranks of young-adult dystopian movie adaptations, all with the intention to benefit from the sudden rise of popularity of young-adult dystopias. Up until now, the genre still retains its popularity, as novels such as *Scythe* (2016) and its sequel *Thunderhead* (2018) by Neal Shusterman are successfully published, and movie adaptations of novels such as *Ready Player One* and *Mortal Engines* were recently released in 2018.

The question that arises is what caused this sudden success of works of this genre? Was it due to clever marketing, or is this success rather the merit of modern dystopian works, such as the one mentioned in this chapter? Could it rather be related to changes that characterize our modern world? Or have the sensibilities on interests of young adults shifted? To get to the bottom of the matter, a further analysis of said titles might prove advantageous.

### 4.2. The Giver

Written in 1993 near the end of the last millennium, Lois Lowry’s *The Giver* belongs to the earliest books of the new wave of young-adult dystopian novels. Like many dystopias of old, it depicts a seemingly-utopian society that quickly turns out less than ideal upon closer inspection.

The story revolves around Jonas, who is on the brink of becoming twelve years old. In his secluded community, children who enter this age take part in the ceremony of twelve, where they are assigned their future occupations. To Jonas surprise, he is selected to do a task that is reserved for a single individual per generation, the role of the receiver. He enters apprenticeship under the former receiver (who now calls himself ‘the giver’), and soon finds himself overburdened by the responsibility and insight bestowed upon him. Through his training, Jonas finds out the truth about his
community: Memories and concepts of everything that was deemed harmful and unstable were eradicated from the minds of the people within the community, and are stored in a single person who is supposed to bear the burden for them. This person is Jonas himself, the receiver of memories. As he is becoming more and more discontent with his role and the state the community is in, Jonas tries to find a way to change it for the better. He ensures the help of his mentor, and together, the giver and the receiver devise a plan to change the world they live in once and for all.

*The Giver* tells its story in a limited third person perspective, with protagonist Jonas as the sole focalizer. As the narrator has limited knowledge, the reader, along with the young receiver, discovers more and more curious novelties of the world the story takes place:

But suddenly Jonas had noticed, following the path of the apple through the air with his eyes, that the piece of fruit had--well, this was the part that he couldn't adequately understand--the apple had changed. Just for an instant. It had changed in mid-air, he remembered. Then it was in his hand, and he looked at it carefully, but it was the same apple. Unchanged. (Lowry 1993: 23)

Inner feelings and conflicts are of the protagonist are recounted regularly, when Jonas acquires new truths and revelations about his society and the world he lives in:

Now Jonas had a thought that he had never had before. This new thought was frightening. What if others – adults – had, upon becoming Twelves, received in their instructions the same terrifying sentence? What if they had all been instructed: You may lie?

His mind reeled. Now, empowered to ask questions of utmost rudeness – and promised answers – he could, conceivably (though it was almost unimaginable), ask someone, some adult, his father perhaps: “Do you lie?” (Lowry 1993: 68)

Themes of *The Giver* are similar to other books about societies that are utopian as well as dystopian, depending on the point of view. Similar societies, such as in *Brave New World* also depict a community where people live oblivious, yet generally happy and content. In the community of *The Giver*, people achieved security and equality, but are blind to the costs: they have sacrificed knowledge, art and even love for it. Protagonist Jonas, perceiving the world through the eyes of an innocent and curious child, is striving to learn as much as he can about it. When he finally learns more than everyone else in his community, he regrets his decision, unable to cope with the immense spectrum of knowledge and emotions he gained:
Jonas did not want to go back. He didn't want the memories, didn't want the honor, didn't want the wisdom, didn't want the pain. He wanted his childhood again, his scraped knees and ballgames. He sat in his dwelling alone, watching through the window, seeing the children at play, citizens bicycling home from uneventful days at work, ordinary lives free of anguish because he had been selected, as others before him had, to bear their burden.

But the Choice was not his. He returned each day to the Annex room. (Lowry 1993: 116)

As a young-adult novel, *The Giver* concerns itself with numerous themes of adolescence. One of the more prevalent ones is newly gained responsibility. Early on, Jonas shows little confidence in living up to the expectations the community has put in him, which comes with little surprise, as he is selected for the most important and most difficult role in society. For Jonas, as with many other teenagers, self-doubts are his greatest enemy:

For a moment he froze, consumed with despair. He didn't have it, the whatever-she-had-said. He didn't know what it was. Now was the moment when he would have to confess, to say, "No, I don't. I can't," and throw himself on their mercy, ask their forgiveness, to explain that he had been wrongly chosen, that he was not the right one at all. (Lowry 1993: 116)

Fortunately for Jonas, he soon finds help in the old receiver of memories, the giver, who not only assumes the role of Jonas’ mentor, but also acts very caring towards him. In this way, *The Giver* not only portrays an interesting dystopian setting for young readers, but also provides them with someone they can identify with: a smart and sympathetic young protagonist whose self-confidence is severely weakened by the crushing responsibility bestowed upon him, looking for a mentor who can provide him the guidance he desperately needs.

4.3. *The Hunger Games*

Suzanne Collins' bestseller *The Hunger Games*, published in 2008, quickly gained popularity with over 500,000 ratings on goodreads.com (cf. www.goodreads.com 2012). The story takes place in an unspecified time in the future, where the USA is divided into twelve districts, ruled by the oppressive capitol. As if police brutality, strict laws and malnourishment was not enough, the capitol established the titular “hunger
games”, an annual tradition of forcing citizens of each district fight against each other to the death in an arena, and broadcasting it as a show for everyone to see.

Protagonist Katniss Everdeen tries her best to take care of her apathetic mother and little sister Prim, even if that means she has to break the law and hunt in the woods. When one day Prim gets chosen as a tribute to participate in the deadly hunger games, Katniss immediately volunteers, saving her sister from a grim fate by taking her place in the games. This soon leaves her caught up in a deadly net of violence of lies however, since everyone is keeping appearances for the show and forging alliances as there can only be one victor and survivor.

The dystopia depicted in The Hunger Games takes the form of a traditional totalitarian regime, much like the superstate Oceania in 1984. The oppressive capitol keeps a firm grip on its citizens through armed police forces and restricted access to supplies such as food. To make things worse, the capitol established a tradition of letting its citizens fight against each other to the death in a tightly controlled environment, similar to the Republic of Greater East Asia in Takami’s Battle Royale:

The rules of the Hunger Games are simple. In punishment for the uprising, each of the twelve districts must provide one girl and one boy, called tributes to participate. The twenty-four tributes will be imprisoned in a vast outdoor arena that could hold anything from a burning desert to a frozen wasteland. Over a period of several weeks, the competitors must fight to the death. The last tribute standing wins. (Collins 2008: 18)

As there can be only one survivor of the games, mistrust among the tributes spreads quickly, even among those from the same district. As The Hunger Games features an autodiegetic narrator, the reader can experience the ongoing mistrust that even borders on paranoia through the eyes of the protagonist. In this way, we experience first-hand how Katniss struggles to trust anyone, even the boy from her own district, who makes romantic advances to her:

[…]You should wear flames more often," he says, “They suit you.” And then he gives me a smile that seems so genuinely sweet with just the right touch of shyness that unexpected warmth rushes through me. A warning bell goes off in my head. Don’t be so stupid. Peeta is planning how to kill you, I remind myself. He is luring you in to make you easy prey. The more likable he is, the more deadly he is. But because two can play at this game, I stand on tiptoe and kiss his cheek. Right on his bruise. (Collins 2008: 70).
As the story advances, the early mistrust and urge to survive pale in comparison to another emotion: when Katniss experiences more and more about the sinister deeds of the capitol, fury fuels her actions as she becomes a symbol for the rebels. Soon the protagonist is caught in the middle of an uprising, leading the rebels in a fight against the government in the third book of the trilogy, *Mockingjay*:

“I want to tell the rebels that I am alive. That I’m right here in District Eight, where the Capitol has just bombed a hospital full of unarmed men, women and children. There will be no survivors." The shock I’ve been feeling begins to give way to fury. "I want to tell people that if you think for one second the Capitol will treat us fairly if there’s a cease-fire, you’re deluding yourself. Because you know who they are and what they do." My hands go out automatically, as if to indicate the whole horror around me. "This is what they do and we must fight back!"

I’m moving in toward the camera now, carried forward by my rage. "President Snow says he’s sending a message. Well I have one for him. You can torture us and bomb and burn our districts to the ground, but do you see that?" One of the cameras follows where I point to the planes burning on the roof of a warehouse across from us. "Fire is catching!" I am shouting now, determined he will not miss a word of it, "And if we burn, you burn with us!" (Collins 2010: 99).

Among the rage, the paranoia, the dutifulness and the ability to survive, what makes Katniss’ so relatable for young readers is that her adventures are not only thrilling to the reader, but also depict a story that revolves around self-finding, as is hinted cleverly in the book:

I knelt down in the water, my fingers digging into the roots. Small, bluish tubers that don’t look like much but boiled or baked are as good as any potato. “Katniss,” I said aloud. It’s the plant I was named for. And I heard my father’s voice joking, “As long as you can find yourself, you’ll never starve.” (Collins 2010: 53)

Themes such as mistrust, especially in love, and fury against injustice and authorities are important experiences every teenager has to make. The Hunger Games successfully combines topics that are important for dystopian as well as young-adult fiction, such as independence, trust and rebellion, which could very well be the reason for the overwhelming success of this novel.
4.4. *Divergent*

The 2011 debut novel of Veronica Roth, *Divergent*, is set in a sealed-off post-apocalyptic Chicago in an unspecified time in the future. What remains of society has been split into five different factions with a strong emphasis for two particular character traits: Abnegation, who value altruism and selflessness, Erudite, who value intelligence and knowledge, Dauntless, who value strength and courage, Amity who value peace and harmony, and Candor, who value honesty and order. At the age of sixteen, all citizens of Chicago have to take an aptitude test that determines which faction they are suited for best, followed by the choosing ceremony where they have to choose the faction they want to join for the rest of their life.

The plot of *Divergent* follows sixteen year old Beatrice Prior who is about to take her aptitude test for the choosing ceremony. After her test results end up inconclusive, the administrator tells her she is a ‘Divergent’, advising her not to tell anyone about her results. She explains to Beatrice, that Divergents such as her are considered hard to control due to their diverse character traits, and that they are disposed of by the government should they be discovered. Beatrice and her brother proceed to the choosing family, and decide to join Dauntless and Erudite respectively. While undergoing the rigorous training of the Dauntless, Tris, as Beatrice decided to call herself after her initiation, learns about a planned attempt of the Erudite faction to overthrow the Abnegation government by injecting drugs in members of the Dauntless. Together with her instructor and ally Four, she manages to prevent a massacre and foil the plans of the Erudite. Tris’ story continues in the sequels *Allegiant* and *Insurgent*, where she leads the remaining Dauntless and factionless in a full-scale rebellion against the Erudite. Ultimately, they learn that Chicago was sealed-off and constantly supervised by the Bureau of Genetic Welfare in order to conduct an experiment to increase the number of Divergents within the walls. This experiment served to recover mankind’s genetic pureness, which had suffered greatly after a failed attempt of genetic manipulation, aimed to remove genes which were claimed to be responsible for murder and other crimes, leaving only a fraction of the populace genetically pure or ‘Divergent’.

Similar to *Brave New World*, the world of *Divergent* is characterized by its division into different groups, which have their fixed, predetermined place in society. As in
many dystopias, freedom is largely hampered by an authority that aims to control the fate of their citizens, and a society that is dictated by strict laws and customs. Again, the origin of these circumstances was well-intended, as the five factions were created to eradicate what people considered the causes of war: Selfishness, ignorance, cowardice, aggression and duplicity. As people blamed different emotions, society split into factions that divided even friends and families, as in the world of *Divergent*, factions are valued above all else, and are chosen for a lifetime.

“Our dependents are now sixteen. They stand on the precipice of adulthood, and it is now up to them to decide what kind of people they will be.” Marcus’s voice is solemn and gives equal weight to each word. “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.” (Roth 2011: 42)

For young Beatrice Prior, this means having to choose between staying with her family in a faction she does not feel any connection to, or joining the exiting looking life of the Dauntless, while at the same time having to hide her unique potential from those who consider it a threat. In that sense, *Divergent* is also about life choices. At the choosing ceremony, Tris is very conflicted about her goals and beliefs. Similar to *The Hunger Games*, the novel is narrated in first person by the protagonist, and through her eyes, the reader experiences how she tries to make a decision that is going to impact her entire life:

My eyes shift to the bowls in the center of the room. What do I believe? I do not know; I do not know; I do not know.

“Those who blamed aggression formed Amity.”
The Amity exchange smiles. They are dressed comfortably, in red or yellow. Every time I see them, they seem kind, loving, free. But joining them has never been an option for me.

“Those who blamed ignorance became the Erudite.”
Ruling out Erudite was the only part of my choice that was easy.

“Those who blamed duplicity created Candor.”
I have never liked Candor.

“Those who blamed selfishness made Abnegation.”
I blame selfishness; I do.

“And those who blamed cowardice were the Dauntless.”
But I am not selfless enough. Sixteen years of trying and I am not enough.
My legs go numb, like all the life has gone out of them, and I wonder how I will walk when my name is called. (Roth 2011: 42-43)

While the dystopian society of *Divergent* provides an extreme example, the problem of finding their own path in life is a common dilemma for teenagers. Tris’ choice not only determines her future career and social environment, but also the person she is supposed to be: Does she consider herself as smart, brave or selfless? When taking the aptitude test Tris counts on others to provide her with the answer she seeks and to point her in the right direction, however she is left disappointed when her administrator reveals to her that being a Divergent, she does not have any clear predisposition. Just like so many teenagers, she has to make that choice by herself.

### 4.5. *Scythe*

*Scythe*, a very recent novel written by Neal Shusterman in 2016, narrates the story of a young man and woman who are taken into apprenticeship of an executioner in a technologically highly advanced society. In this world, the technological standards of humanity have evolved to such an extent, that an artificial intelligence called “The Thunderhead” was given authority over everyone and is taking care of the needs of all citizens. The Thunderhead’s superior technology even allows hospitals to rejuvenate and revive dead people, abolishing death almost completely. To counteract overpopulation, humanity established the order of the Scythes, officials tasked to ‘glean’, to randomly and objectively end the lives of chosen humans permanently. To support their task, Scythes are granted total authority and are untouchable by the Thunderhead, which in turn also denies them any direct help from it. As a result, the Scythedom governs itself through a set of strict regulations and a high council. Taking all this into account, *Scythe* appears rather utopian than dystopian in nature: humanity has achieved an exceptionally high living quality while still enjoying a considerable degree of personal freedom. Thunderhead, the governing body, actually has the best interests for humanity at heart. Unlike many science fiction novels, the posing threat that inevitable arises actually does not stem from the powerful artificial intelligence, but rather from the humans that are not controlled by it: the Scythes.
The plot revolves around two teenagers, Citra Terranova and Rowan Damish, who are both taken into apprenticeship under Scythe Faraday, competing to be his successor. While distanced at first, the young apprentices start growing fond of each other, as well as their master. In a grim turn of events however, authorities decree that the disciple who successfully finishes their training and becomes the successor shall glean the other one, leaving the two young comrades in a deadly dilemma. Things start to get worse, when their mentor Faraday suddenly perishes. While Citra continues her apprenticeship under the wise Scythe Curie, Rowan is assigned to the devious and bloodthirsty Scythe Goddard. Despite being separated, both teenagers try their best to uncover a plot that not only reveals the true fate of their master, but also a malicious intrigue that threatens to shake the foundations of the scythedom, and the lives of every single human along with it.

Scythe’s society differs greatly from most dystopian novels. At first glance, it might not even seem less like a dystopian than utopian: Due to technological advances and the development of the overarching AI called “Thunderhead”, humans have gained basically everything they want. Occupations are mostly unnecessary and mere pastime, crimes outside of insignificant juvenile pranks are practically unheard of, a vast amount of knowledge is available for everyone and so is the guidance of the all-knowing AI. The citizens are not being suppressed and racism is basically eliminated. Most strikingly though, medicinal technology has allowed humanity to defeat any form of illness, and ultimately, even aging and death, making every human theoretically immortal. As a result, the only downside of Scythe’s society has emerged: to prevent overpopulation, someone has to die, leading to the establishment of the Scythedom to enforce a form of birth control. With a 1% chance to get killed in 100 years, it seems like a small price to pay for total freedom, absence of pain and knowledge for everyone. The system is fallible though, just as its creators, and the power and permission to kill unopposed in the wrong hands can turn a utopia into a nightmare. This, in turn, raises the question who could be trusted with the power to take the lives of others, provided there should even be such an individual. In the novel, two teenagers unexpectedly find themselves in a position that promises them the power over life and death, and while in constant conflict of whether they actually want it or not, they have to stop those who gladly abuse it.
Scythe is narrated in a third person point of view, with the focalization switching back and forth between the two protagonists. The reader experiences the inner conflict of Rowan and Citra respectively, as they are undergoing a training they initially do not want:

Citra could not believe she was actually going through with this. What secret, self-destructive part of herself had asserted its will over her? What had possessed her to accept the apprenticeship? (Shusterman 2016: 48)

The constant theme of morality and the value of human life is also an important part of growing up, as our opinion on it determines our compatibility with our fellow human beings. Many teenagers might have experienced reflective thoughts such as Rowan’s during the time he is under apprenticeship of the homicidal Scythe Goddard:

I am apprenticed to a monster. Scythe Faraday was right: Someone who enjoys killing should never be a scythe. It goes against everything the founders wanted. If this is what the Scythedom is turning into, someone has to stop it. But it can’t be me. Because I think I’m becoming a monster, too. (Shusterman 2016: 317)

In this way, Scythe not only depicts an ambiguous dystopia, with free citizens and benevolent technology, but also shows themes typical for young-adult literature, such as self-exploration, finding his or her place in society, gaining responsibility and choosing what is morally right and wrong.

4.6. Dystopian Fiction Today

With the sudden increase of dystopian works and the new direction the genre was heading at the beginning of the new millennium, it was only a matter of time until its popularity was greatly enhanced. According to the Reason Magazine, the number of English-language dystopian novels published from 2000 to 2009 quadrupled that of the previous decade, and by 2014 when the article was released, this record was already surpassed (cf. Sturgis 2014: 46).

According to the website www.goodreads.com, the percentage of works classified as dystopian on the website sharply increased in recent years (cf. www.goodreads.com 2012), as shown in the corresponding graphic (Fig. 6).
Does this boom in popularity arise from a new genre-combination based on pitting teenage protagonists against a fictional negative society, or is it simply a ‘fading trend’, as Karen Coats claims (cf. 2011: 361)? Amy Sturgis mentions that this tradition is nothing new, referring to authors such as Robert Heinlein, Andre Norton and Poul Anderson who wrote books in the 1950s to 80s which were labeled as juvenile science-fiction, but would nowadays be classified as YA dystopias (cf. Sturgis 2014). Furthermore, she blames today’s generations’ loss for wonder and mounting anxiety for the recent growth of the genre, with science often portrayed as the problem rather than the solution:

Those Golden Age dystopian visions were balanced by another subgenre of juvenile science fiction popular at the time: tales that portrayed the future as exciting new territory full of marvels and possibilities. Contemporary scholars classify these books as "sensawunda" works, because they conveyed a sense of wonder in contemplating tomorrow.

There is no modern-day equivalent of the "sensawunda" novels. Their heroes—scientists, inventors, entrepreneurs, explorers—are the children of progress, curiosity, innovation, and hope. Today, the only genre targeted at young people that rivals the popularity of worlds gone wrong is fantasy (Sturgis 2014).
Additionally, she notes that today’s protagonists face significantly more bleak scenarios and a higher death toll, compared to Heinlein’s heroes, calling it the greatest shift in young-adult dystopias over recent decades. Sturgis concludes that technophobia, anti-modernity and the absence of sensawunda, along with reduced ambitions of the protagonists; pessimism and disrespect for authority are to blame for the change in young-adult dystopias (cf. Sturgis 2014).

Philip Stoner, in turn, offers a completely different theory about the success of young adult dystopian novels: According to him dystopia remained a dark themed adult genre until the 1980/90s, when it appeared as a young adult genre. Stoner credits *The Giver* for leading the genre to becoming largely aimed at young adult readership, with *The Hunger Games* as its prime example (cf. Stoner 2017: 1). He further explains, that *The Giver* expanded the genre by taking the tropes he considers as elementary for dystopian fiction (as mentioned in chapter 2.1) and adding themes of self-exploration (cf. Stoner 2017: 15). Through expansion of the theme of self-exploration, dystopian works are likely to appeal to an age group that is naturally rebellious against parental and other disciplinary figures (cf. Stoner 2017: 19). In addition to that, Stoner mentions political reasons for the shift: The recent increase in political awareness in the present generation (cf. Stoner 2017: 18), as well as the end of the Cold War led to a removal of a constant reminder of totalitarianism and utopian ideas it embodied (cf. Stoner 2017: 15). Furthermore, Stoner adds two reasons for the genre shift, which contradict those brought up by Sturgis: First, he mentions the increasingly positive endings of modern novels. Stoner claims that the bleak ending which is prevalent in the dystopian classics has been redefined to a more ambiguous ending:

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 (Stoner 2017: 17).

Secondly, Stoner indicates an increase of interest in modern readers in themes revolving around technology, which contributes to the affinity to a genre which is heavily focused on technology (cf. Stoner 2017: 19).
Another point is brought up by Rebecca Totaro, who suggests that writers of utopian (or dystopian) fiction try to educate their readers through entertaining them, by letting their novels’ protagonists suffer, hope and take action toward an improved future, and the readers alongside them (cf. Totaro 2003: 135). In relation to the merge of the utopian (or dystopian) and young adult genre, she claims:

The overlap between young adult and utopian fiction is large and merits further attention, and although perhaps, in the end, there are no limits to suffering when one is a young adult, patterns in utopian fiction show us that there are uses for this suffering. Out of it, one may, slowly, with hope and action, emerge into a less painful adulthood (Totaro 2003: 135-136).

The children’s desire for entertainment is brought up in particular by author Monica Hughes, who emphasizes that children are easily bored if nothing happens in a story (cf. Hughes 2003:156). She claims that: “No matter how intellectually stimulating to the constructor of a future an idea may seem, if it does not connect with the young reader, it will not work” (Hughes 2003: 156)

However, Hughes stresses that while you may lead a child into the darkness, you should never turn out the light (cf. Hughes 2003:156). She also advises against a ‘happily ever after’, as utopian worlds are often not realized at the end of the novel, but rather promised to the protagonists, provided that they continue to work together and are aware of the causes of the dystopia they have escaped from (cf. Hughes 2003: 160).

Marjorie Warmkessel theorizes that teenagers are relating to dystopian fiction because they see their own world as a dystopia (cf. Warmkessel 2017: 25). She brings up the example of high-school students who are enjoying little autonomy and independence, with many rules and regulations that seem arbitrary to them. Warmkessel also notes that one of the common themes in dystopian fictions consists of the fact that older generations are (intentionally or unintentionally) responsible for the less-than ideal situation the characters and society find themselves in (cf. Warmkessel 2017: 25).

NPR reporter Elissa Nadworny agrees that another hallmark of dystopia – especially the young adult genre is how messed up grownups are (cf. Nadworny 2017). According to her inquiries, it has to do with relatability, as teenagers often find themselves with the whole world against them. In an Interview with psychologist
Lawrence Steinberg, Nadworny learns that teenagers are very responsive to emotionally arousing stimuli. Steinberg explains that when teenagers feel sad, they often put themselves in situations that increase their sadness, through music, television and literature, which according to him, explains the appeal of dystopian novels. He also mentions the importance of questioning and trying out of different identities to teenagers, particularly with the help of a safety net these books offer. In another interview, featuring Jon Ostenson, the latter states that in dystopia, teenagers see echoes of a world that they know (cf. Nadworny 2017). Young-adult dystopian books do not always include a happy ending, as they are all about choices, consequences and ethical grey areas.

Karen Coats mentions that young-adult novels tend to be more interrogative of social constructions and institutions than children’s literature (cf. Coats 2011: 322). In their article featured in the Alan Review in 2013, Justin Scholes and Jon Ostenson also note that teenagers approaching adulthood begin to pay more attention to structures and systems that lie ahead (such as career and lifestyle choices), even abstract ones (such as moral standards) (cf. Scholes & Ostenson 2013: 14). They also list three specific elements that appeal to teens and are prevalent in dystopian fiction: inhumanity and isolation (inhumane society and arbitrary categorization), age and conscience (overcoming challenges as part of coming of age as well as establishing an identity) and relationships (platonic as well as romantic) (cf. Scholes & Ostenson 2013: 16). The last part in particular seems prevalent in modern young-adult fiction. However, as Scholes and Ostenson argue, relationships in young-adult dystopian fiction are attractive not only as such, but rather due to the way in which they are utilized: they incite the protagonist to take action and shape their thinking about the society similar to a catalyst. They impact the way they see the world, the actions they take and the level of the responsibility they feel toward another person (cf. Scholes & Ostenson 2013: 18-19).

Author Philip Reeve states that the reason for the success of young-adult literature is the fact that in in those books, the individual can make a difference, and courage and ingenuity can overcome the most dreadful circumstances (cf. Reeve 2011: 36). He also mentions that during adolescence, teenagers (who are bridling against authority) can draw a bleak satisfaction from imagining adult society reduced to rubble (cf. Reeve 2011: 35). Reeve adds that these books contain a strong element of wish
fulfillment, letting the readers recast themselves as rebels against some future tyranny. One aspect young adult dystopian literature is lacking according to him however, is a sense of humor or satire. The new dystopian format for young adults is very serious, Reeve laments, and as there too much pessimism and hardly any optimism in popular sci-fi, there exists a lack in counterbalance to it (cf. Reeve 2011: 36).

Reasons for the success of the genre-mix might also differ depending on the novel in question. Dan Hassler-Forest attributes the success of the Hunger Games franchise to the combination of Orwellian dystopia, gladiatorial rebellion similar to Spartacus and female centered romance adventure genre (cf. Hassler-Forest 2016: 136). In addition to that, he claims that ambivalence is a primary reason for the overwhelming success of The Hunger Games, as it combines fantastic storyworlds with politically radical themes (cf. Hassler-Forest 2016: 148-149).

Carrie Hintz, on the other hand, claims that The Giver sensitized readers to the important subgenre of utopian and dystopian writings for children and young adults (cf. Hintz 2002: 254). According to her, a major quality of young-adult dystopias is their advancement on a particular type of utopian pedagogy, namely political action addressed within the developmental narrative of adolescence, such as is prevalent in the novel The Giver. In addition to that, the frequent presence of shame and confusion of the protagonist add to the dramatic tension, making their political actions heroic, as they need sufficient courage and resolve to make agonizing choices (cf. Hintz 2002: 255-256).

One of the most decisive factors in the question of what makes young-adult dystopian novels so popular might be the protagonists. Scholes and Ostenson explain that dystopian fiction feature protagonists who are questioning the underlying values of a flawed society as well as their identity within it (cf. Scholes & Ostenson 2013: 14). Their choices carry enormous consequences, hence teenagers, who feel a similar weight on their shoulders, can connect with these protagonists so well. Hintz states that compared to adult protagonists, young protagonists of dystopian fiction not only possess an unclouded perspective, they also show young readers what they themselves can do, giving them the impression that they have the capacity to remake and revision society anew (cf. Hintz 2002: 256, 263). Reeve adds that protagonists of young-adult dystopian fiction are capable of looking after themselves, and are strong
heroes, unlike protagonists portrayed in classics such as *1984* and *Brave New World* (cf. Reeve 2011: 36).

In sum, it appears difficult to determine the specific reasons for the popularity of young adult fiction, as preferences of modern young readers are apparently hard to determine, such as whether they have an affinity to science and technology, or rather an aversion. Suspected pessimism and a preference for more hopeful endings seem similarly contradictory. Common themes attributed to the success of young-adult dystopian literature, however, are rebellion and mistrust towards authorities, older generations and existing social constructions, as well as the presence of a conflicted but strong protagonist, who strives to make a change while at the same time undergoes a journey of self-exploration.
5. A Survey on Reading Preferences

Along with this thesis, a survey was conducted to determine the current reading preferences of avid readers of fiction in order to resolve the reason for the success and popularity of modern dystopian young adult literature. The majority of volunteers for this survey were recruited from www.Wattpad.com, an online social community for readers and amateur writers.

Fig. 7: Age of the Survey Participants

To ensure a broader audience and due to Bowker’s study’s conclusion indicating that the popularity of young adult fiction is not exclusive to teenagers (see chapter 2.2), no age restriction for participants of the study was imposed. As a result, the participants’ age ranged from 16 – 40 years (fig. 7). Only nine of the readers involved in the study were teenagers, roughly one fifth of the participants. The majority of those participating in the study belonged to an age range between 20 – 27 years, making up two thirds of the group.
Fig. 8: Gender of the Survey Participants

According to the statistics, almost three quarters of those participating in the study were female (fig. 8). A study conducted in 2014 by the popular webpage www.goodreads.com revealed that in 2014, men and women read the same number of books if you look at works from all publishing years. Women tend to stay more on trend however, as according to the webpage, they have read twice as many books published in 2014 than men.

1) Lesen Sie gerne Bücher aus dem Genre „Dystopie“? / Do you like books from the genre of „dystopian fiction“?

Fig. 9: Question 1 - Popularity of the Dystopian Genre

The first and probably most important question directly addressed the appeal dystopian fiction has for readers, as a cornerstone to determine its popularity. More
than half of the participants stated to like dystopian fiction, and only six percent claimed they dislike it (fig. 9) demonstrating that years after the commercial success of *The Hunger Games*, dystopian fiction is still strongly appreciated by the readers.

2) Wie regelmäßig lesen Sie Literatur (Bücher, etc.)? / How regularly do you read literature (books, etc.)?

Fig. 10: Question 2 – Reading Regularity

The second question aimed at finding out which percentage of those who partook in the study are avid readers. About one third of the participants claimed to read literature on a daily basis, and almost half of the other participants indulge in books at least on a weekly basis (fig. 10.)

3) Bevorzugen Sie lieber modernere Literatur (1990er und neuer) oder ältere Literatur? / Do you prefer modern literature (1990s and newer) or older literature?

Fig. 11: Question 3 – Popularity of Classics
To determine how popular classics are among readers nowadays, this question was included. As dystopian works which are aimed towards young adults are usually modern books, this question should help discerning whether the cause of a possible preference for modern dystopian literature lies within the genre shift, or rather in a dislike of classic themes and style of writing. The result revealed a strong trend towards modern literature, as stated more than half of the participants expressed this preference (fig. 11). In contrast, only eight percent claimed they prefer older literature, with the rest of the participants stating no particular inclination towards either one.

4) Bevorzugen Sie männliche oder weibliche Protagonisten/Protagonistinnen? / Do you prefer male or female protagonists?

50 Antworten

Fig. 12: Question 4 – Gender of Protagonists

In recent decades, the number of female writers has increased tremendously, and so has the number of female protagonists. Women depicted as main character are rather an exception than the norm in dystopian classics, which greatly contrasts to with modern works. With bestsellers such as The Hunger Games or Divergent, female leads are more prevalent now than ever, and question four was intended to determine whether or not this reflects the preferences of modern readers. The result of the poll depicted that participants were largely indifferent, with most of them stating they preferred neither gender when it comes to protagonists (fig. 12). Only one third of them showed an inclination towards either gender, with male leads being slightly
more favored. An interesting fact concerning this question is that while on the whole readers are more likely to prefer protagonists of their own gender, male readers are much less likely to express preference for one gender, whereas female readers are more than four times as likely to prefer one gender over the other. Furthermore, while none of the male readers expressed a preference for a female lead, a significant amount of female readers stated to favor male protagonists over female ones.

5) Bevorzugen Sie Bücher mit alleinstehenden Handlungen, oder Buchreihen mit fortgesetzter Handlung? / Do you prefer books with a standalone plot, or book series with a continuous plotline?

50 Antworten

Fig. 13: Question 5 – Standalone Books Versus Book Series

Another feature significantly more prevalent in modern dystopian works compared to classic ones is the existence of sequels. Question number five was included to determine whether readers prefer standalone works or books that are part of a series. The results showed no particular preference, as more than half of the participants show no particular preference with the remaining participants almost evenly split towards either opinion (fig. 13).
6) Legen Sie Wert auf Action in Literatur? / Is action of importance to you when reading literature?

50 Antworten

Fig. 14: Question 6 – Action in Literature

The following questions were included to determine a predilection of modern readers regarding specific elements of storytelling. Question number six inquired the readers if they like action elements in the stories they read. Half of the readers stated they do not cherish it particularly, while the remainder tended towards favoring action, with twenty-eight percent of the participants stating it is an important element to them (fig.14).

7) Legen Sie Wert auf Romantik in Literatur? / Is romance of importance to you when reading literature?

50 Antworten

Fig. 15: Question 7 – Romance in Literature

Similar to the preceding question, the seventh question inquired about the preference of romantic elements in fiction. Among the participants, romantic elements are
significantly less appreciated than action, however with one third stating a clear dislike (fig. 15).

8) Legen Sie Wert auf ein Happy Ending in Literatur? / Is a happy ending of importance to you when reading literature?

50 Antworten

![Pie chart showing the responses to Question 8: Happy Endings in Literature.]

Fig. 16: Question 8 – Happy Endings in Literature

Question number eight asked whether a positive fate of the protagonists sparks the interest of the readers. The genre of dystopian fiction in particular, often incorporates grim conclusions to emphasize the underlying criticizing message of the work, and thus rarely contain a happy ending. Surprisingly, more than half of the participants expressed indifference towards a positive conclusion of the story, and only sixteen percent stated that they do, in fact, appreciate a happy ending (fig. 16).

9) Legen Sie Wert auf Fantasy-Elemente in Literatur? / Are fantasy elements of importance to you when reading literature?

50 Antworten

![Pie chart showing the responses to Question 9: Fantasy Elements in Literature.]

Fig. 17: Question 9 – Fantasy Elements in Literature
The ninth question aimed to determine the popularity of fantasy elements in literature. Unsurprisingly, more than one third of the readers who did partake in the survey stated that fantasy elements are important to them, and only twenty-two percent stated the opposite (fig. 17).

10) Legen Sie Wert auf Science-Fiction Elemente in Literatur? / Are science-fiction elements of importance to you when reading literature?

Fig. 18: Question 10 – Science-Fiction Elements in Literature

In contrast to fantasy elements, science-fiction elements are significantly less popular among the participants of the survey. While only sixteen percent stated to value them in literature, more than twice the amount of the readers stated that science-fiction elements are not important for them (fig. 18).

11) Legen Sie Wert auf einen Bezug zu wahren Begebenheiten in Literatur? / Are connections to historical events of importance to you when reading literature?

Fig. 19: Question 11– Importance of Historical Events in Literature
Far more disfavored were connections to historical events. While only eight percent claimed to cherish works that are somehow tied to our history, more than half of the participants of the survey declared that said aspects are of no importance to them (fig. 19).

12) Lesen sie gerne Literatur aus dem Genre „Post-Apokalyptisch“? / Do you like literature from the genre “post-apocalyptic”?

Fig. 20: Question 12– Post-Apocalyptic Literature

Question number twelve was included to determine the popularity of post-apocalyptic elements among modern day readers, as the post-apocalyptic genre is rather close to the dystopian one, due to its grim world-view. While in many dystopian novels the dystopian world emerges from a gradual shift in culture or technology, in numerous occasions the genres intertwine with the dystopian society having its roots in the aftermath of some form of apocalyptical event. Marjorie Warmkessel explains, that the circumstances that led to the creation of the sociopolitical structure described in dystopian fiction are usually catastrophic, with the potential survivors of the disaster trying not to repeat what they interpret as the mistakes of the past (cf. Warmkessel 2017: 23).

The survey revealed that this genre seems to be favored by many, as half of the partakers stated that they like literature associated with it (fig. 20). In contrast to that, only twenty-two percent admitted that they are not fond of post-apocalyptic literature, less than half of those are in favor of it.
The thirteenth question did not specifically ask about books, but rather about the popularity of adaptations of literature, such as movies, comics or video-games based on books. Adaptations have risen in popularity in the last few years, and their number has gone up tremendously, as mentioned in chapter 4.1. This may support the hypothesis that adaptations play an important role in the popularity of modern dystopian novels, as many of them have spawned at least one major motion picture. *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* trilogies were both adapted into commercially successful movie series, while adaptations of titles such as *The Giver* were met with less success. Unsurprisingly, the partakers of this survey were very positively inclined towards adaptations, with more than half of them stating that they do like them (fig. 13). Contrary to that, only twelve percent expressed a dislike of adaptations.

The last question simply requested the partakers of the survey to state their favorite dystopian book, as well as their favorite book in general. While some participants refused or were not able to answer this question, the results were as follows: While a wide variety of novels were named, of the 50 participants, 24 listed an adult novel as their favorite novel, while 22 listed one that is frequently tagged as young-adult novel. A large amount of works mentioned were fantasy novels, mainly *The Lord of the Rings*, the *Harry Potter* series and the *Song of Ice and Fire* series. Regarding the question that asked for dystopian works exclusively, only 17 named a novel aimed at
adults (only *Brave New World*, 1984, *Fahrenheit 451* or *The Handmaid’s Tale* achieved multiple mentions), while 22 of the participants named a young-adult novel (with *Divergent* mentioned four times, and *The Hunger Games* mentioned ten times). The result of this question suggests that when it comes to dystopian novels, works aimed at young adults are more popular than those aimed at an older audience.

In summary, the results of the survey partly matched my expectations. Genre-elements such as fantasy, dystopian and post-apocalyptic are still popular with modern readers, while opinions on science-fiction elements are rather mixed. It came as a surprise however, that action-elements proved to be more favored than romance-elements by the participants of the survey, as well as the rather negative opinion on happy endings. Concerning modern marketing trends, while readers were rather indifferent about books being published in series, their response towards adaptations were generally favorable, which came as little surprise, considering how successful the majority of the recent adaptations of young-adult literature are. Most striking however, was the negative opinion concerning classic literature, suggesting the popularity of modern dystopian fiction might be a result of them simply not being classics, rather than them containing elements of young-adult fiction. When I inquired some of the partakers of the survey personally about this topic, I was told that they do not like the writing style and characters of the classics. To further investigate this matter, a more detailed survey that aims to inquire its partakers about specific preferences concerning writing style and characterization in literature is suggested.
6. Conclusion

The answer to the question of what has led to the success of the merge of the young-adult and dystopian genres is not a simple one. It would be easy to claim that young adult themes successfully integrated into novels containing classical dystopian elements would do the trick, as they apparently go together so well. Suppression through authorities, discovering the truth of how the world works, exploring one’s own beliefs and ideals, and finally rebellion: what sounds like a rough plotline of many dystopian novels could also very likely be a description of puberty. As mentioned in the chapters before, young-adult novels are also often criticized as too pessimistic and bleak, which arguably makes them highly compatible to the frightening worlds of dystopias.

If you look at it in more detail however, things start to contradict each other. Is the smartphone-generation increasingly more technophile, which leads to an increased interest in a genre so focused on technology, as Stoner claims? Or are modern teenagers rather technophobic with a loss for wonder, which draws them to a genre that depicts technology rather as a problem than a solution, as proclaimed by Sturgis? Have readers become too pessimistic as a result of the accumulating problems of today’s world, causing them to prefer bleak, dystopian stories, or is the reason for the recent success of this genre the change to a tendency for more ambiguous and hopeful endings compared to the classics? Could it be that dystopian fiction for young readers was popular all along, but just not labeled as such (as suggested by Sturgis)? And most important of all, can we even attribute the success of these novels to cleverly integrated themes aimed at young adults, when a substantial amount of them is read by readers who are significantly older? Even then, young-adult novels appear to be more than the sum of its parts: Fahrenheit 451 deals with themes of self-finding and rebellion too, 1984 features a protagonist hopelessly in love, and Anthem features a teenage protagonist who is dissatisfied with his place in society. Still, they are neither considered as young-adult novels, nor do they attract young readers in a manner that novels such as The Hunger Games do.

One of the most striking revelations of my survey was the discovery that readers strongly favor modern books over classic ones. It is not a secret that bibliophiles are not only concerned about what is written, but also how it is written, and classic novels
do not seem to have the same appeal to modern readers as contemporary books because of stylistic differences. Despite of their alleged indifference towards sequels and trilogies, modern readers seem to enjoy long adventurous tales. While classic dystopian novels usually had one installment, happy to make their point and be done with it, modern works often stretch over many books, introducing a multitude of different characters, story arcs and plot twists. Classics such as *1984* or *Brave New World* served to warn us of the dangers of society, whereas books such as *The Hunger Games* do so as well, but entertain us at the same time. They present capable, strong and relatable protagonists fighting against all odds alongside their allies, suffering together with the readers but at the same time showing them what they are able to achieve in the world. Modern dystopian novels, such as *The Hunger Games*, took up something old and presented it in a new way, one that is seemingly more appealing for modern readers, no matter the age.
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