An Exploration of Dystopian Literature

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Chapter 1: What is Dystopian Literature?

The genre of dystopian literature has boomed since the start of the Millennium as it has become the forefront of young adult reading. With the emergence of film adaptations of books, series such as The Maze Runner and The Hunger Games have brought in millions of fans to the genre. It’s critical to understand the origins of the term dystopia to get a true sense of what differentiates this style of fiction from others. The term is derived from the word utopia which describes a place or society in which everything is perfect: an example is the Garden of Eden. A dystopia is the antonym of utopia and describes a place or society in which there is mass suffering and oppression. Dystopian literature harnesses this concept to create a setting in which a totalitarian government or dangerous environment creates this suffering. Most authors provide a connection to the real world that possesses political implications: “Science fiction writers foresee the inevitable, and although problems and catastrophes may be inevitable, solutions are not” (Isaac Asimov 1). The Maze Runner series by James Dashner, a popular collection of dystopian novels, is set in a world in which climate change has scorched the earth, causing disease, famine, and disastrous weather. The setting is an analogy to the crippling effects climate could have on future generations if we do not take care of the earth. Often, the novels in this genre have an underlying warning of some sort of how society could end up if the right changes
aren’t made. Other novels such as Fahrenheit 451, by Ray Bradbury, expose the dangers of mass media and how literature is an important aspect of culture. In the setting of the novel, books are illegal and free speech is limited. If someone is caught reading or in the possession of books, they are sent to jail and the books are promptly destroyed. This setting is about the growing power of mass media and its power in our culture. The presence of a setting that has underlying connections to modern problems is the most defining characteristic of the dystopian genre. This genre of literature has been deemed speculative fiction as it “offers a vision of the future” (Atwood 1).

Literature in this genre also shares many other themes due to the dystopian setting at hand. The quest for survival can be found in almost any novel in this genre. Characters’ biggest enemies are often the government or the environment as they attempt to escape or solve the oppression. In Lord of the Flies by William Golding, a group of boys are stranded on an island to survive alone with no adults or signs of help. Ralph, the main character, is banished from the group of boys and must survive on his own. Ralph, similar to other protagonists in this genre, is the underdog and must survive based on his instincts. Characters’ quest for survival can often be attributed to the theme of apocalypse that is commonly present in dystopian literature. An example is The Maze Runner in which most of the Earth has deteriorated and the characters pursue the common goal of escaping and finding utopia. The characters from both novels are presently the underdogs
in the efforts to survive in their own dystopias. The themes of dystopian literature have an
integral role in creating the proper tone for the genre.

Another defining value of dystopian literature is the suspenseful, action-filled nature of the
novels. Essentially every moment in dystopian novels provide important detail to the story as
there is little break in the development of the plot, and characters find themselves jumping into
dangerous situations page after page. Most books follow the same plot line of the risk of death
gradually rising until it peaks at the climax and the characters survive and achieve their goal.
There is almost always an impending threat or choice that slowly approaches and characters are
forced to fight the threat or give up. In The Giver, by Lois Lowry, Jonas, the main character,
lives in a society where all emotions have been removed and the society operates almost
robotically. In the novel, if anyone is unable to function in society they are euthanized as they
serve no purpose in living. Jonas learns that the baby, Gabriel, that his family is looking after
must be euthanized because the baby has trouble sleeping. Jonas wants to save Gabriel’s life, but
he knows it would go against his community’s rules and he would be punished. Jonas decides to
save Gabriel from being euthanized by stealing and escaping the community. In this instance, the
threat is imminent death of Gabriel, and Jonas’ decision risks both of their lives.

The protagonists in dystopian literature are almost always heroes as they attempt to change or
solve the problem at hand. The protagonists generally are the most respectable characters, have
high moral regard, and are good leaders. Thomas from The Maze Runner is all three. He becomes the leader of a group of people he had just met and leads them to a place away from the apocalyptic setting of their world. The protagonists in other novels have some mindset or perspective that differentiates them from the rest of the population. This mindset often relates to the setting or the central problem at hand. These characters are given the opportunity to act upon their thoughts or to simply live with it. An example can be found in Fahrenheit 451, when the protagonist, Guy Montag becomes engrossed in reading books despite it being illegal. When he is caught, he is faced with the decision to burn his books and his house or to try and escape. Guy, like all other protagonists in this genre, chooses to not be a part of the problem and he escapes after killing the captain who ordered him to burn the books.

Dystopian literature has developed in response to growing political and cultural changes in our society. It is defined as a sub-genre of science fiction but it contains underlying truths about our world. These stories are structured around what our society could potentially become if the source of these problems remain unchecked. The genre could be considered propaganda or even satire as it creates a version of reality that expresses the extremes of our society. Interestingly enough, this genre is geared towards young adults, perhaps the most receptive age group. “In the many dystopian novels of today, an apparently bleak world is re-imagined and lit up by children who understand clearly what is worth saving as they step from childhood to adulthood.
Frequently, family is let go while friendship or trust in others becomes the future foundation.

Navigating that space is what all adolescents need to do which is why they like this kind of fiction so much” (The Guardian 1).
Chapter 2: The Setting of a Dystopian Novel

The most defining traits of dystopian literature are its apocalyptic setting and the underlying connections with the real world. This connection to the real world is often the cause of the suffering or mistreatment. There are often political or social implications between the lines of each story. Authors have the power to create a story around their belief and provide evidence for it through the story they create. Margaret Atwood, a Pulitzer Award winner and well-known dystopian writer, describes how she creates the setting of a dystopian novel: “take an idea from current society and move it a little further down the road. Even if humans are short-term thinkers, fiction can anticipate and extrapolate into multiple versions of the future” (Atwood 1). For this reason, dystopian novels are almost always set on Earth rather than an imaginary planet or other places. The setting is also the source of the conflict in each respective novel. The setting ultimately is a challenge or problem for the characters to solve or escape. The setting is also integral in creating the themes as most of them can be attributed to the struggle at hand.

The most common storyline in dystopian literature involves controlling governments that inhibit the rights of the people. In Fahrenheit 451, Guy Montag’s rights are restricted as he is legally not allowed to read books or literature of any sort as the government has mandated that all books are to be burned. The society discourages free-thinking and believes the information within books is too powerful: “A book is a loaded gun in the house next door...Who knows who
might be the target of the well-read man” (Bradbury 62). Ray Bradbury’s underlying message is that books and knowledge are powerful and are something that cannot be replaced with technology. Another example of a controlling government is found in The Giver which entails a society that is void of emotion, color, or any aspects that differentiate humans from one and another. “The community of the Giver had achieved at such great price. A community without danger or pain. But also, a community without music, color or art. And books.” (Lowry). There are many interpretations of the message behind the novel, generally, Lois Lowry is emphasizing the freedom of choice and being different from others. Others believe Lois Lowry was warning readers of the dangers of sameness that can be found in communism or socialism and that there is no such thing as a perfect world or society.

Dystopian novels can also be used to push social issues such as climate change. The setting in The Maze Runner series is a futuristic version of the Earth in which the sun has scorched the surface and catastrophic temperatures and weather are destroying the planet. Millions of people are killed and the human race is threatened to become extinct as diseases emerge as a result. The obvious message behind the series is that we should care more for our environment so it does not destroy the Earth for future generations. This message is rather common in recent dystopian literature as the issue of climate change is more relevant than ever. “If you look at the causes that lead to most dystopian societies, the catalyst is generally the destruction of the environment…”
Huge environmental disasters cause the glades from The Maze Runner universe” (The Guardian 1). Also, the issue of the Earth greatly deteriorating due to climate change is much more likely than an authoritarian government in the U.S.

Dystopian novels also warn readers of the effects of technological control. Novels like Brave New World, by Aldous Huxley, explore these dangers as the government has created a society that is controlled entirely by technology that is meant to maximize human happiness. Humans are grown and brainwashed at a young age to always be happy and to take drugs if they don’t feel happy. Humans are pre-designed into different classes in which individuals are almost identical. Huxley cleverly designed the setting of the novel so it would involve popular English landmarks as if he were envisioning the future of England. Huxley fears that technology could potentially go beyond being a tool for improving everyday life and shift into an omnipresent threat to freedom. He also fears that technology will eventually come to replace religion: “God isn't compatible with machinery and scientific medicine and universal happiness. You must make a choice. Our civilization has chosen machinery and medicine and happiness.” (Huxley 132). In the ever-advancing world, we live in, dystopian authors present technology as if it could develop into a threat in the future.

The one aspect that differentiates dystopian literature from other styles of fiction is the connection to real-world problems in the form of the setting. “We admire dystopian novels
because, by giving us worst-case scenarios of the future, maybe our current society can be jolted enough to avoid those scenarios eventually happening in real life” (Astor 1). In a way, authors in dystopian literature use their works as a way to voice their opinions on humanity’s weaknesses or wrongdoings. Dystopian fiction serves as a warning against utopian thought as it expresses the consequences of it.
Chapter 3: The Characters in Dystopian Novels

The characters in dystopian literature are not quite as universal as the settings and themes that make up each novel. Generally, there is going to be a protagonist that makes escaping or solving the central conflict of the novel his main concern. This protagonist is either a dystopian hero as they solve the problem at hand or they simply are the protagonist as they avoid the problem entirely. Regardless, both types of protagonists have different mindsets or perspectives that differentiate them from what the majority believes. Protagonists are the ones rejecting the system and refusing to conform to what controls them. They are underdogs to the setting in their pursuit of change: they can be alone or accompanied by a group of characters that support their cause. These protagonists have many common traits that help them survive in these apocalyptic settings. In each of these dystopian heroes, there is an innate sense of rebellion that tells them that whatever is going on is against the natural balance of life. It’s this trait that leads them to become the main character of dystopian novels. Without dystopian protagonists there would only be a sad story of a future society that is unchanging: “These fictional characters and groups of people are necessary, set apart from mediocrity and the masses; without them, there wouldn’t be an interesting story to tell.” (Anthony 1).

Thomas from The Maze Runner is the perfect dystopian hero, he embodies many of the traits that make him a dystopian hero. When he first emerges into the maze he has no memory of who he was in the past and must rely solely on his instincts to survive. His instincts tell him that he needs to take action and find a way out of the maze with the help of the other boys: “Thomas knew he was a smart kid- he somehow felt it in his bones. But nothing about this place made any
sense. Except for one thing. He was supposed to be a Runner. Why did he feel that so strongly?” (Dashner 65). In this instance, Thomas’ instincts guide him to his first step of escaping the maze. Thomas is also an excellent leader, despite being the newest member of the maze, he quickly climbs the social ladder and is elected leader through his courageous acts. Thomas successfully leads the group beyond the maze and further discovers what their purpose is. Thomas is notably one of the most selfless characters in the novel. When one of the boys becomes trapped outside of the maze, Thomas runs out of the maze into almost-certain death to save the boy’s life: in the space of only a few seconds, he learned a lot about himself. About the Thomas he was before. He couldn’t leave a friend to die” (Dashner 120). Whether it is life or death, Thomas has made it his cause to find a solution to the deterioration of the Earth. He narrowly escapes death several times without backing down and continues to chase his goal until he succeeds in the end. Thomas is ultimately the best example of what it means to be a dystopian hero. Guy Montag in Fahrenheit 451 is a different style of a dystopian protagonist. He, unlike Thomas, has little or no allies and must survive on his own. He still has strong survival instincts and a sense of doing right even if it goes against the majority. Since he is on his own, instead of trying to solve the problem, Guy realizes his only option is to escape from this society. Thomas and Guy are different for the reason that Thomas is a hero because he solved the problem and saved many lives while Guy avoided the problem. Regardless, both characters were underdogs in their separate situations and the odds were heavily against them.

Dystopian protagonists either have a group of people with the same goal helping them or they have little to nobody helping their cause. In The Maze Runner, Thomas is accompanied by a group of boys that escaped the maze with him and are now helping him on his mission. Through
the many life and death situations they encounter, they maintain a strong trust in each other and survive through this sense of cooperation: “The most important thing is we all have each other. We’re in this together” (Dashner 245). They act as a team and when one struggles they are strengthened by the rest of the group. This ultimately becomes one of their weaknesses as they leave behind a friend and almost all get killed trying to save him. On the other hand, in Fahrenheit 451, Guy Montag is on his own except for his mentor Faber, an old English teacher that teaches him about literature. Without a group of allies supporting his cause, Guy can’t enact change as he has little power, all he can really do is escape the problem itself.

Dystopian protagonists respond to each setting in a different manner but it can be simplified and narrowed down to a formula. The protagonist will first recognize that there is oppression or unbalance of some kind and then question the establishment or source of the problem. They feel as though they are trapped and must do something about the conflict. This feeling may be shared by other characters but they are often too timid to speak out about it. The protagonists are left with the decision to become one with the conflict or to make a change. Almost all dystopian novels end with a happy ending of the protagonist solving the problem or escaping the problem, although there are exceptions. An example of this structure is found in Jonas, the protagonist of The Giver. Jonas initially recognizes that his society is devoid of the parts of life that are enjoyable when he is given memories. He understands that life in his community is unpleasant without emotion, color, or memories so he is left with the decision to keep the community that way or make a change. Jonas chooses to make the change and the story ends on a positive note.

The other characters in dystopian fiction possess some importance in relation to the plot. These characters can be placed into three different categories based on their relationship with the
protagonist: they can support them in their cause, oppose them, or be indifferent to them. The antagonists in this genre support the problem addressed in the setting. Captain Beatty in Fahrenheit 451, is the lead antagonist and the captain of burning books. The antagonist in The Maze Runner known as Rat-man is the creator of the maze the characters are initially trapped in. The characters that choose to support the protagonists act as either followers to their leader or as mentors to them. The second category describes the allies of the protagonist which in this case would be Thomas’ group in The Maze Runner or Faber from Fahrenheit 451. These characters exist to assist the protagonist and provide them what little support they can as the protagonist is already the underdog. The last category describes the people that are a part of the problem but don’t oppose or support what the protagonist is doing. These people have little importance in the plot of dystopian literature, they are just present to contribute to the setting. An example could be the citizens in the community in The Giver or the cranks found in The Maze Runner. Neither of these groups help nor stop Jonas or Thomas in the pursuit of their respective goals.

The protagonists in dystopian literature set themselves apart from other characters by thinking differently and recognizing the need for change within society. Though not all of them are considered heroes, they have many characteristics in common that set them apart from other characters. Without their presence and desire for change dystopian fiction would be without a plot: “Without these [heroes], there would be no story, no promise for change, no successful revolution” (Anthony 1).
Chapter 4: The Lessons behind Dystopian Literature

Although dystopian literature is considered fiction there is still much that can be learned from the genre. The issues in dystopian fiction are directly derived from the weaknesses of our society. As a society, we are supposed to learn from the mistakes made by those in the novel and make a change for the better. Dystopian novels can also prepare us for events happening in the present: “One can also relate 1984’s extreme surveillance with the present-day whereby in 2013, following Edward Snowden’s story regarding the NSA’s mass surveillance, the novel saw a huge rise in sales of over 5,000%.” (Henry 5). Outside of the setting, we can also learn important values through the protagonist and other characters. A dystopian protagonist is supposed to, in a way, act as a role model for readers. The hope is that readers will pick up on the desirable traits of that character.

The dystopian genre warns readers of the dangers that extremism beholds. This is very much a reflection of the polarizing political climate in the United States today. “In the U.S. the "all or nothing" view of politics seems more ingrained than ever.” (Dayton). This value is reflected in Aldous Huxley’s Brave New World. The novel is set over 400 years in the future in a society in which technology shapes and controls everything. Humans are grown in bottles and brainwashed at a young age to be happy and obedient in everything they do. People are given drugs called soma whenever they feel unhappy so that their lives are completely devoid of any negative
emotion. All human culture has been eliminated and all forms of entertainment are purely synthetic. Huxley’s novel is purely a lesson for all that teaches the dangers of extremism in the form of a radically authoritarian government. Another example of the dangers of extremism in government is Ray Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451. This novel is set in a society where all books and forms of literature have been illegalized and burned to discourage free thinking. “Do you ever read any of the books you burn?” [Captain Beatty] laughed. “That's against the law!” (Bradbury 8). Society is instead engrossed in technology and superficial forms of happiness to keep citizens occupied. The story of Fahrenheit 451 teaches readers how free-thinking is one of the most important freedoms one can have. When it becomes restricted individuals in society become one and the same: “With school turning out more runners, jumpers, racers, tinkerers, grabbers, snatchers, fliers, and swimmers instead of examiners, critics, knowers, and imaginative creators, the word 'intellectual,' of course, became the swear word it deserved to be.” (Bradbury). The moral is that individuals will become identical in a society that inhibits their rights as individuals.

One of the most important values taught through dystopian literature is social responsibility and consciousness. Social responsibility is defined as “an ethical theory that an entity be it an organization or individual has an obligation to act to benefit society at large” (Cambridge Dictionary). Social consciousness is simply the ability to distinguish what is morally right and wrong in society. Both terms go hand in hand as they are very similar. “While no one is
purposefully reading YA dystopians for the lessons they can teach, they can make readers aware that paying attention to how society functions is important.” (Garretson 1). An example of both of these terms is found is The Giver. In Jonas’ community where all color, emotions, and memories have been collected and suppressed by the previous leaders so that the future generations would not feel their pains. Jonas feels as though society is missing out on the beauty of life: “It's just that... without the memories it's all meaningless.” (Lowry). Jonas comes to the decision of releasing all the emotions, colors, and memories into the society or to let them live as they have been. Jonas chooses to release these suppressed feelings so that citizens now have a sense of what life really is. This is an example of social responsibility as Jonas recognizes what is best for the benefit of society and accomplishes it. Readers recognize that Jonas acted upon his own free will to better society and learn this valuable lesson. In another instance, Jonas exhibits social consciousness as he saves the life of an infant who is going to be euthanized. Traditionally, in this society babies that are not big enough are seen as weak and to be put down because they are considered a waste of resources. Jonas understands that the execution of the child is not morally right and acts upon it.

In numerous dystopian novels, there is a sense of cooperation to accomplish a common goal. Whether that goal is saving the world or escaping oppression, the task could not be accomplished by the protagonist alone without the assistance of other characters. Thomas’ group in The Maze
Runner is a very close-knit group that trusts and relies on each other throughout the series. Their pursuit of a common goal and the adversity they face brings them closer together similar to a team: “we were way more than close. Things happened. We remembered stuff. Made new memories.” (Dashner). As the series progresses the group is given more daunting trials that they must overcome. Thomas alone would be no match for the challenges the group faced but with the help of his team, he and his group escape the virus that plagues the Earth. Similarly, readers can learn to become optimistic when the odds are stacked against them. The underdog theme is present in any dystopian novel and especially in The Maze Runner. Despite being at odds with their given situations, characters generate optimism for whatever they do because the smallest amount can make a difference.

Dystopian fiction, because it mirrors our society and presents an alternate reality of it, can be used as a source of learning. By assessing the problems within the societies in these novels we can better understand our weaknesses as a society. Through this lens, we can prevent those same problems from occurring in our future. The characters within the dystopian genre can also be a source of learning. Values of social responsibility and awareness are portrayed as protagonists champion their cause. However, humans are only capable of so much individually, dystopian novels teach that with the help of a team anything is manageable. Each of these are reasons why dystopian literature remains a core aspect in the part of middle and high school curriculum.
Chapter 5: Why Dystopian Literature attracts the Young Adult Audience

In concept, dystopian literature is rather simple and predictable, so one might wonder why these books are selling at such a rate. The answer lies within the psychology of a teenager as they make up the vast majority of the readers of this genre. Various characteristics of dystopian literature attract this distinct audience. This style of writing creates a sense of relevancy and relatability to teenagers through the use of a number of different tools. Among these tools are the use of teenagers as protagonists, themes that relate to the lives of teenagers, and settings that incorporate modern problems. Outside of this sense of relatability, authors craft stories that easy to follow and straightforward so it does not leave teenagers bored while reading. These are among the many elements that authors include to bring this young adult audience.

Teenagers now are growing up in an ever so uncertain era of the earth’s timeline in which political and social problems dominate our American society. Many young adults are unsure about the world they will find themselves in as an adult. The authors of the dystopian genre include one of these social or political problems as the source of the conflict. As readers dig further into each novel “[They] consider how these dystopian societies relate to the real world.” (Jones). Novels such as The Maze Runner or The Giver lead readers to question their own governments and society. The idea is that the novels will warn readers about these potential problems so that they might be prevented in the future. Most importantly, this element teaches
readers that their actions now can positively or negatively affect the future. The setting had much to do with the psychological appeal of dystopian literature.

The dark, hopeless tones that often can be found in dystopian literature are essential in attracting the young adult audience. Teenagers love zombie and doomsday movies in the same way that they enjoy novels that feature the world ending. This sense of hopelessness imagines society in a way that has been previously unexplored. Another theme of dystopian literature that teenagers enjoy is rebellion. Novels such as Fahrenheit 451 or The Giver involve the protagonist rebelling against the institutions that control society. These institutions are seen as corrupt or tyrannical and a need for change is necessary. Dystopian novels essentially glorify rebellion as they oftentimes present it as the moral and good option. Teens love this theme because the young adult years are often when you begin to disagree with those that have authority over you and feel as though they have too much power. Both of these themes are popular in the dystopian genre and generally in society. The Joker, one of the most popular movies in recent times features both themes of darkness and rebellion. The movie was considered “unfortunately realistic nightmare” or “dark [and] ominous” (Roeper). Despite the darkness, the movie possessed people still flocked to the theaters to watch the movie as if it encouraged the audience to come see for themselves. This remains true for dystopian literature as novels often contain death and injustice.
The characters of the dystopian genre play a major role in the psychological appeal to teenagers. Readers find the characters easy to relate to as they are often teenagers too. As readers churn through books they begin to grow attached to characters. The characters begin to serve as the reader’s emotional link to the novel. Readers will feel as though they’ve established a relationship with a character and will want to continue turning the page so they can discover the fate of said character. Authors create this relationship by ensuring that the protagonists always make the right choices and are very respectable. Readers can learn a thing or two from the characters as they face adversity left and right yet they still manage to emerge victorious in the end. These same characters also go through many of the emotions teens do nowadays. In The Maze Runner series, Thomas and the rest of the group are trapped in the maze and feel powerless as they are essentially at someone else’s mercy. Teenagers often feel powerless in the same sense as they are restricted by their parents, school, or societal norms. These novels can empower teens to believe they are capable and independent. Throughout each novel, readers will follow the development of each character as they are shaped by the successes and failures they endure during their journey. Most characters feel as though they don’t have a true identity at the beginning of each story, but by the end, they have a better understanding of who they are and what their role is. Many teenagers relate to this thought as they are beginning to escape adolescence and emerge in adulthood and they hope to find their role in society. The characters
in dystopian novels teach readers that their identity will come in due time as it did for Thomas in the Maze Runner.

Dystopian novels are attractive to their young adult audience for another reason: the stories are fast-paced and straight to the action. It’s commonly known that teenagers have a short attention span and reading books is already enough of a task for them. Dystopian authors engineer these stories to have action occurring on every page and suspense always at a high in order that their audience never loses interest in the novel. Other small elements that appeal to young adults can be found such as comic relief. With all of this action going on there must be some break to it. Authors include comic relief to change the tone of the novel and to add more entertainment. Without this comic relief and tension breaking these novels could be considered adult novels. Lastly, almost all dystopian novels end with a happy ending as the protagonist's work and sacrifices have paid off in the end. This teaches readers an important lesson that the only way to find results is through hard work and sacrifice.

The psychological appeal of dystopian novels comes down to how readers relate to the elements in each novel. Authors create these novels to provide teenagers with characters, themes, and a setting that they find some connection to. In doing so, readers will find lessons between the lines, develop relationships with the characters and resonate with the setting. These are among the many elements that define the dystopian genre and attract its young adult audience. Authors
hope that in writing these novels they enable and empower these teens to be their own heroes if the time is to come.
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Dystopian literature is a genre of fictional writing used to explore social and political structures in a dark, nightmare world. The term dystopia is defined as a society characterized by poverty, squalor, or oppression and the theme is most commonly used in science fiction and speculative fiction genres. Works of dystopian literature must walk a fine line between evoking the sensations of fear and inducing a sense of futility. By proving a completely perfect society is not possible - showing the awful results of what happens if the goal is social perfection rather than incremental social improvement - dystopia shocks the reader into accepting humanity's flaws as ineradicable and thereby working toward a better society rather than an ideal one. This is a list of notable works of dystopian literature. A dystopia is an unpleasant (typically repressive) society, often propagandized as being utopian. The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction states that dystopian works depict a negative view of "the way the world is supposedly going in order to provide urgent propaganda for a change in direction.". Gulliver's Travels (1726) by Jonathan Swift. The Last Man (1826) by Mary Shelley. Are dystopian ideations an exploration of our deep-seated fears of totalitarianism? Is it an exploration of the limits of human greed & control? Is it an interesting psychological experiment? Thus, the market for dystopian fiction expands in film and literature. Increases in technology also mean greater access to information and issues than ever before. Twenty-first-century problems might not be more calamitous or more deserving of criticism than those of previous eras. Throughout this literary exploration, I also devoured science fiction on screen, everything from the original Star Trek and The Prisoner to Planet of the Apes, from Blade Runner to Dark City and Batman Begins. Having been born in 1967 into an intensely Goldwater household and coming of age in the 1980s near a number of Titan II missile silos, I was very much a child of the Cold War, adamantly pro-liberty and just as adamantly anti-Soviet. The purpose of this Imaginative Conservative Guide to Dystopian Literature (of which this essay is the first part) is to think about the most successful and important of the dystopias of which writers have conceived over the past century or so.