

## VERKLARING KENNISNEMING REGELS M.B.T. PLAGIAAT

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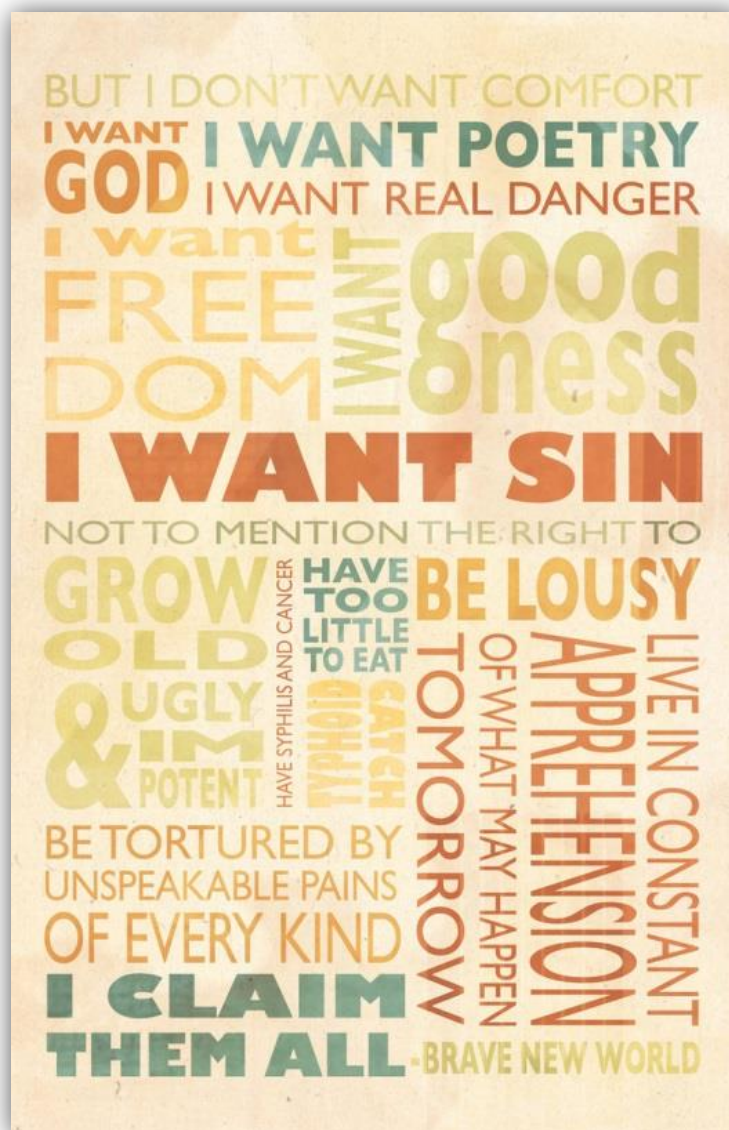
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# The Transformation (or Disfiguration) of the Dystopian Genre

From Classic to Young Adult Dystopias

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MAYBE THIS WORLD IS ANOTHER  
PLANET'S HELL.

- ALDOUS HUXLEY

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# Introduction

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The dystopian genre has always been popular, but ever since *The Hunger Games* was published the genre has received an immense boost. Consequently, it has gone through many changes, but there are some people who would argue that these changes were not for the best. For example, there are people who think that young adult literature has degraded the dystopian genre. In other words, some people believe that the quality and value of the dystopian genre has been lowered and that it has been reduced to an inferior type (OED, degradation). Ruth Graham writes in an article that “adults should feel embarrassed about reading literature written for children” (Graham 2014). In this article she finds *Divergent*, another YA dystopia, “trashy” and not “serious literature” (Graham 2014). Graham also mentions that YA literature is unrealistic and only exists to give teenagers the endings they want to see (Graham 2014). An article by Ewan Morrison argues that the dystopian genre from twenty years ago was a good “education tool” for both adults and children (Morrison 2014). In addition, he mentions that “[t]his generation of YA dystopian novels is really our neoliberal society dreaming its last nightmares from communism, socialism and the planned society” and by writing “a story we can tell to children [...] we’ve calmed the child inside us” (Morrison 2014). Morrison claims that the dystopian genre, by being transferred to YA literature, has lowered in quality and lost its original purpose of educating people (Morrison 2014).

The issue here is whether this statement is true or not. In a matter of a century the whole world has changed. There has been an increase in technological and scientific progress, and let us not forget the invention of the internet. Nowadays information is available everywhere and to everyone. There has been a shift in power over time; for example, where first Europe was the most powerful continent, it is now North America. Moreover, people

mass produce and mass consume; everything can be replaced. All these changes have been part of the transformation of the dystopian genre. To properly conclude if it has changed negatively or positively, this thesis will look at two novels, one being *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, an adult classic dystopia. The other novel will be *The Maze Runner* by James Dashner, a YA dystopia. Both novels are part of the canon of their respective literatures and will therefore serve as good examples. The research question is as follows: has young adult dystopian literature transformed into a degraded form of the genre due to the changes that happened over time?

# Part One:

## Explaining Key Concepts

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### **Utopia & Dystopia**

Utopia is a word coined by Thomas More in his novel *Utopia*, which describes an ideal world. This term resulted from the humanistic ideology that arose during the Renaissance period in which More lived. Fátima Vieira writes in an article that the term was “based on the discovery that the human being did not exist to accept his or her fate, but to use reason in order to build the future” (Vieira 4). The word has an ambiguous etymology. It consists of the two Greek words ‘ouk’, meaning ‘not’, and ‘topos’ which means place. As Vieira mentions in the article, “utopia is thus a place which is a non-place, simultaneously constituted by a movement of affirmation and denial” (4). However, More coined another word which makes the word even more ambiguous. In *Utopia* the people think that the island should be called Eutopia instead of Utopia. Eutopia means in Greek ‘good place’, when put together with the word utopia it creates the idea that utopia is “the place that is simultaneously a non-place (utopia) and a good place (eutopia)” (5). Successively, John Stuart Mill found that when utopia was “too good to be practicable” (16), then there should be another term to refer to a place which is “too bad to be practicable” (16). Therefore, Mill coined the word dystopia in 1868 for a speech, consisting again out of two Greek words. The first is ‘dys’ which means “bad, abnormal, diseased” (16), and ‘topos’, which means place. To get a complete picture of the word, the Oxford English Dictionary defines it as follows: “an imaginary place or condition in which everything is as bad as possible” (OED, dystopia). While a dystopian society is often a very bad place, its aim is not to frighten the reader into despair. Its real aim is to make the reader realise “that things may go either right or wrong, depending on the moral, social and civic responsibility of the citizens” (Vieira 17). However, a dystopia should leave room for



improvement and hope, otherwise it would fail in its mission (17). Throughout several great historical moments, which imbedded fear in humanity, writers have tried to warn their readers “that there is still a chance for humanity to escape, normally offering a glimmer of hope at the very end of the narrative” (17). These dystopian novels are often called “critical dystopias” (17). These are texts “that maintain a utopian core at their center, a locus of hope that contributes to deconstructing tradition and reconstruction alternatives” (Lacey 106). The opposite of critical dystopias is classic dystopias. These “[articulate] a warning that awakens the social consciousness to the societal problems of the prospective future” (Bernardo 173). According to Taylor Andrew Loy the difference between critical and classic dystopias is that critical dystopias “leave both the protagonist and the reader with an open-ended conclusion”, whereas classic dystopias have “bleak endings” (Loy 14). In general, critical dystopias are considered to have a more hopeful core, while classic dystopias offer a more bleak view with no definite answers.

### **The Big Three**

*Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley will be used as the main example of a classic dystopia. This novel is part of the Big Three: three influential works which are part of the canon of dystopian literature. Apart from *Brave New World*, *We* by Yevgeny Zamyatin and *1984* by George Orwell are also part of the canon. These dystopias seem at first glance to depict a utopian society. As in most dystopias, the main characters start out as naïve and passive; they only start to see something wrong with their society the moment they are introduced to another key character. In *We* and *1984* the main male characters change their opinions on their society when they fall in love with a key female character. In *Brave New World* it is John the ‘Savage’, a person who has lived outside the dystopian society, who shows the reader the hypocrisy of the society. In addition, they also have in common that difference in their society

has been eradicated; the day-to-day schedule of its citizens is completely regulated by a higher force, and there is always someone watching you, whether it be the Guardians, fellow brainwashed citizens or Big Brother. In addition, according to Susan Bernardo, the Big Three belong to the classic dystopias, since they try to create social awareness of the problems in society; critical dystopias would “attempt to provide answers to the unchallenged problems in dystopian novels like *1984*” (Bernardo 173), but with the Big Three this is not the case.

The structures of these classic dystopias seem to follow the formula created by Thomas More. In *Utopia* each chapter discusses aspects of that society, for example marriage, science and religion. While the Big Three are not so literally chaptered, they do touch all of the same subjects, resulting in a fully fleshed out society. For example, all three touch on the subject of technology and science, power, and play. In addition, they show the dangers these aspects could cause in the future. *Brave New World* has a very gradual way of explaining all three of those aspects and Huxley made clear what the dangers were.

It is not a big surprise that these three particular novels are nowadays known as the Big Three. The previous paragraphs have shown that all three share common traits and have been studied widely. However, dystopian fiction has not confined itself to literature for adults. First in children’s literature, but then later in young adult literature, dystopias also became increasingly popular.

### **Young Adult Literature**

The young adult genre is relatively new. According to Michael Cart, previous president of the Young Adult Library Services Association, adolescents “were given their own distinction as a social demographic” during World War II. In addition, the first book published for adolescents was *Seventeenth Summer* by Maureen Daly in 1942 (Strickland 2013). Before that there was only a division between adult and children’s literature. The term ‘young adult’ itself

was only coined during the 60s by the Young Adult Library Services Association, with as goal to be able to represent children from the age of twelve to eighteen. However, YA is not only read by young adults. YA literature has proven to have a crossover appeal and according to Rachel Falconer, this idea of blurry lines between genres can actually be traced back a long time. She says that authors such as C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien “have long attracted a broad spectrum of readers” (Falconer 11). Crossover literature goes back even to the seventeenth century (12), but Falconer mentions that what really “kick-started the millennial crossover phenomenon was the unforeseen popularity of J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter series with adult readers” (15).

Thanks to its appeal to adults, young adult literature has an enormous audience. A study showed that more than 55% of the buyers of YA novels were actually people over the age of eighteen, with the largest part being aged 30 to 40 (New Study). YA literature has dominated the publishing market “for more than two decades” (Walter 2014) and while adult literature is often described as more serious, Walter mentions that “young adult fiction is the most serious literature in contemporary culture” (Walter 2014), contradicting the statement by Graham and Morrison mentioned in the introduction. In addition, Walter also states that it are the allegories and metaphors “that really underlies the success of young adult literature today” and that these two literary devices appeal to both young adults and adults (Walter 2014).

The dystopia genre is the most popular genre within YA literature. According to Scott Westerfeld, a YA dystopian author, the popularity of dystopias “is partly thanks to high school being a dystopia” (Miller 2010). Walter uses the example of *The Maze Runner*, which depicts “an adult world that has escalated to such technological complexity that we are all lost within it”, to prove that YA literature often has crossover appeal, since it does not only warn teens against adult reality, but the adults themselves as well (Walter 2014). *The Maze Runner* is one of the novels that shows how much YA dystopian literature has been influenced by

modern society; media, film and games have taken over the world. *The Maze Runner* is heavily influenced by videogames, following the story of a boy who has lost his memories and has to find a solution to a problem, in this case a huge maze. In addition, the writing style for dystopian literature has changed over time. For example, the form of classic dystopias resembled More's writing style; while the Big Three were not as literally chaptered as *Utopia*, they all touched on similar subjects in a systematic way. However, YA dystopias often have a much faster moving plot, which causes the form to lose detail.

The important dystopian aspects discussed earlier, technology and science, power, and play, also make an appearance in YA dystopia literature. However, they appear in different forms, and possibly with a different focus. While many adults read YA, the novels in YA are written for adolescents, so there are bound to be differences between the aspects in classic and YA dystopias. To be able to determine the similarities and differences all three aspects will be discussed in separate chapters.

## Part Two: Technology & Science

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Just as the dystopian genre has changed over time, there have also been advancements in technology and science. These advancements inspired fear; technology and science are powerful tools and could be used to exercise power over others. These fears have resulted in dystopian novels such as *Brave New World* and *The Maze Runner*. However, there is a gap of almost eighty years between the novels; Huxley published his novel in 1932 and Dashner in 2010. Consequently, the view on these technological and scientific advancements differ in the two novels, but curiously enough also show similarities.

For someone who wrote his novel in the 1930s, Huxley already showed great insight into future developments concerning technology and science. On the subject of science Huxley wrote that the “theme of *Brave New World* is not the advancement of science as such; it is the advancement of science as it affects human individuals” (Huxley xliv), and the people in *Brave New World* are greatly affected by the advancements of science and technology. An example is the Bokanovsky’s Process. The process is described as follows: “a bokanovskified egg will bud, will proliferate, will divide. From eight to ninety-six buds, and every bud will grow into a perfectly formed embryo, and every embryo into a full-sized adult. Making ninety-six human beings grow where only one grew before” (3-4). This process mirrors Huxley’s fear of mass production and mass consumerism; Margaret Atwood writes in the introduction to the novel that Huxley “was still in shock from a visit to the United States” (Huxley xiii). Individuality is annihilated by creating a hundred duplicate people at the same time. Huxley shows here the eugenics theory in its full-fledged form. The Oxford Dictionary defines eugenics as “pertaining or adapted to the production of fine offspring, esp. in the human race” (OED, eugenics). By controlling how many clones are made from one embryo,

the quality of offspring can also be controlled. Consequently, the Bokanovksy Process ensures the Controller of the State an easy to control citizenry.

Another way for the leader of the State to control its population is the behavioural conditioning of babies. By using electric shocks children evolve a ‘natural’ distaste for certain objects. For example, the Director shows a group of students the teaching process, where he explains that they condition people to hate or love different things according to their caste (18). The Director says that “[a]ll conditioning aims at that: making people like their unescapable social destiny” (12). Huxley based this practice on Ivan Pavlov’s theory of behavioural conditioning. Pavlov proved his theory by making a dog associate sound with food. The dog started to salivate when it heard a specific sound, even when it was not presented with food (Cherry). Similarly, children in *Brave New World* are taught with electrical shocks to avoid things such as flowers and books (Huxley 17). According to Jerome Meckier, “Huxley condemned Ford, Freud, Pavlov, and J.B. Watson, Pavlov’s American follower, by imagining the brave new world as the harmful society their ideas could produce in conjunction” (Meckier 231). Therefore, it seems that Huxley’s aim by enabling behavioural conditioning in his novel was to show his disdain for these ideas. In addition, it can be seen as a warning to the readers. For example, one person who was warned by Huxley’s novel was bioethicist Leon R. Kass. Kass was appointed “to chair the President’s Council on Bioethics” by George W. Bush in 2001 (Morgan 127). Kass found that the “singular but careless pursuit of technology” in *Brave New World* threatened society (128), and that “the nightmare of contentment presented in the novel results from tampering with nature” (131). According to Morgan, Shanahan and Welsh, Kass hereby implicitly states that the “dehumanization presented in Huxley’s novel is a direct consequence of technology” (131). While the writers of the article argue that Kass was wrong in his assumptions, it does show the impact *Brave New World* had on people.

While Huxley shows great insight into future technological and scientific developments, the State in *Brave New World* is actually against science. The Controller, Mustapha Mond, right-out says that “science is a public danger” (Huxley 200). However, Mond does admit that science has enabled the society that they live in, saying that “it has given us the stablest equilibrium in history” (200). Huxley’s fear for mass production also shines through in Mond’s speech. Mond mentions Ford, the founder of the Ford Motor Company. Ford has received a God-like state in the society of *Brave New World*, thereby replacing religion by technology (Attarian 2013). According to Mond, “[o]ur Ford himself did a great deal to shift the emphasis from truth and beauty to comfort and happiness” (Huxley 201), and that “mass production demanded this shift” (201). He states that people would do anything for a quiet life, and that this went at the expense of truth, but it fostered happiness (201).

As stated in the introduction to this thesis, some people feel that the dystopian genre has been tainted by YA literature. Supposedly, *The Maze Runner* should therefore offer a more simplistic view on technology and science. Dashner wrote his novel in the twenty-first century in which video games and digital connectivity are very common. According to Miller, the plot of *The Maze Runner* “is a scenario often found in video games” (Miller 2014). Additionally, Dashner mentioned in an interview that he himself uses social media such as Twitter and Facebook to come in contact with his readers. On the other hand, he also names technology crime as one of his biggest fears for “our collective children’s future” (On the Red Couch 2014). While it does have its shortcomings, it is not a degraded form of literature, it merely uses technology and science in a different way.

Technology in *The Maze Runner* comes in the form of the maze itself and the Grievors inside it. While the boys inside the maze live a simple life – they farm, keep animals – the maze around them is high tech. The walls of the maze are made of massive stone blocks, but

they can still be closed at night. Thomas describes it as follows: “the enormous stone wall to the right of them seemed to defy every known law of physics as it slid along the ground, throwing sparks and dust as it moved, rock against rock” (Dashner 28). Thomas compares the moving of the massive stone walls with sliding glass doors; they move with the same ease (28). Later in the novel Thomas again remarks that the moving of the walls “defied any sense of physics. It seemed impossible” (109). The technology behind the moving slabs of stones is never explained.

Another scientific invention which is not explained in detail is the Griever, an odd creature who roams the maze at night in great numbers. Thomas’ first impression of the Griever is that they look “like an experiment gone wrong – something from a nightmare” (124). The Griever is an odd combination of animal and machine; their bodies “resemble a gigantic slug, sparsely covered in hair and glistening with slime [...] It had no distinguishable head or tail, but front to end it was at least two metres long, a metre thick” (124). To make the Griever even more terrifying – or maybe more confusing – there are retractable spikes moving in and out from their bodies (124). In addition, there are some “randomly placed mechanical arms stuck out here and there, each one with a different purpose. A few had bright lights attached to them. Others had long, menacing needles. One had a three-fingered claw that clasped and unclasped for no apparent reason” (124-25). To summarise the descriptions of the Griever, they are man-made creatures, part animal and part machine, and it seems that Dashner tried to create the worst possible, most weird looking, creature in existence. Moreover, they lack the depth and complexity of the technological and scientific inventions explained in *Brave New World*.

It is true that both technology and science are less credible in *The Maze Runner*, purely because the reader is supposed to just go with the ideas and not question the mechanics behind, for example, the maze. *Brave New World* does offer explanations, and the ideas such



as the Bokanovsky Process are based on real life theories such as eugenics. However, this does not mean that the YA dystopian genre is a degraded form. While *The Maze Runner* may not offer detailed explanations, it does offer new and fresh insights into the fears surrounding technology. As explained in the introduction of this chapter, technological and scientific advancements inspire fear in people. Moreover, due to the popularity of games and the internet, new fears have surfaced. Technology and science in *Brave New World* are used in a classic way; it keeps the population under control, in such a way that the people do not even seem to notice it. In *The Maze Runner* technology and science revolve around the game-like storyline. From the Gladers losing their memory, to the walls of the maze moving, it is all to make it harder for the Gladers to complete the game. Play and technology are closely linked in this case; the fourth chapter will show how this gamelike aspect is a departure from the collaboration between technology and entertainment in *Brave New World*. In its own way, *The Maze Runner* uses technology and science in a modern way, even though Huxley portrays a modern insight into the future. To conclude, technology and science are not of less value in YA dystopian literature, it is merely used in a different way as opposed to the classic dystopias.

## Part Three: Power

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One of the main aspects in dystopias, whether they are written for adults or young adults, is power. Most dystopian societies are ruled by a totalitarian ruler and the civilians have no say in the matter of ruling the country or state. However, each dystopian novel projects its own view on power, and there are some clear similarities and differences between the classic adult dystopia *Brave New World* and the YA dystopia *The Maze Runner*.

Power exists on several levels, one of which is at state level. In this respect *Brave New World* and *The Maze Runner* are somewhat similar; they are both special cases, since neither of them conform to the usual form. Most classic dystopias have a strict totalitarian ruler who mostly stays in the shadows; for example the mysterious Big Brother in *1984*. However, in *Brave New World* the reader gets the opportunity to learn all about the Mustapha Mond, the World Controller in question. The reader gets to see him through the eyes of other characters and later in the novel also gets a chance to get into his mind when he explains the workings of the State to John the Savage. This somewhat intimate relationship with the totalitarian ruler cannot be found in any of the other novels in the Big Three. Both in *We* and *1984* the rulers are only mentioned or described in passing, but never in such a detailed manner as in Huxley's work. *The Maze Runner* is set apart in a similar way. While most YA dystopias also have a clear totalitarian power, such as President Snow in *The Hunger Games*, the maze in *The Maze Runner* is ruled by an organisation called WICKED. At the end of the novel, it is revealed that a woman called Ava Paige is the chancellor of the organisation. The epilogue consists of an email sent by Ava Paige to her associates, from which can be concluded that she is in charge of the experiment and leads a group of people. However, it does not become clear whether she is in charge of the whole organisation, and whether WICKED has replaced

the government. This shows that both novels offer an original and versatile perspective on totalitarian rulers in dystopias.

Apart from the totalitarian rulers in the novels, power also plays a role on a personal level. Characters struggle with their positions within their respective communities. In *Brave New World* John the Savage and Bernard are the characters who feel out of place. However, John seems to be in between worlds; he does not completely belong in the Reservation and neither in the State is he at home. He is used by Bernard, who was ridiculed because of his odd behaviour, as a means to gain more respect. Bernard turns John into some kind of attraction; all the people in the State want to meet the Savage. He controls where and when people are allowed to meet John, hereby enforcing his own position. In the end, he loses this power when John decides to stop cooperating, and people go back to treating Bernard as before. Power is only obtainable as long as others cooperate; it is hard to gain and easy to lose. In *The Maze Runner* there is a similar situation. The Gladers have set up a small community which resembles a democracy, and within this space they have limited power. While most decisions are voted upon, it seems to be generally accepted that Alby, one of the first Gladers to arrive in the maze, is the leader. However, with power come responsibilities and often rivalry, such as making decisions that keep the Gladers safe, which not everyone always agrees to. Gally is one of those characters, and he is especially antagonistic towards decisions made or instigated by the hero of the novel, Thomas. Thomas wants to leave the maze, but Gally is afraid of what will be waiting once they leave and would rather stay inside. He tries to rally the other Gladers to his cause, and in the end Alby assumes similar opinions and even burns the map of the maze. Power in *The Maze Runner* is a little bit more subtle than in *Brave New World*, but on personal levels it is present in both novels.

The levels on which power plays a role seem to correspond with both novels. However, the main difference in power between *Brave New World* and *The Maze Runner* can be found in the kinds of power which are used. Mustapha Mond in *Brave New World* uses fear in an indirect way; by making the lives of his citizens comfortable and full of pleasure, they find the idea of being sent away terrifying. In a conversation with John, Mond mentions that “we make them hate solitude; and we arrange their lives so that it’s almost impossible for them ever to have it” (Huxley 207). Mond threatens to send Bernard to a Sub-Centre in Iceland if he does not start behaving according to the norms. At first Bernard does not think this will ever happen, but when he arrives at the Reservation with Lenina, he receives a call from Helmholtz, who informs Bernard that he is indeed to be transferred to the Sub-Centre. The threat then becomes real, and with that Bernard’s fear also becomes reality and he finally succumbs to Lenina’s encouragements to take soma, a drug which allows people to forget their troubles without side-effects on short term. Mustapha Mond wanted Bernard to act more like the other citizens of the State, which meant among others taking soma, and by threatening with a transfer Mond managed to get Bernard to change. In addition, since Mond was afraid Bernard would change other people’s perspectives on the State, in Iceland “he [would] have small opportunity to lead others astray by his unfordly example” (Huxley 130). Bernard begs Mond not to be sent away, on which the Controller states that “one would think he was going to have his throat cut” (199), while Mond believes the islands not to be so bad. According to him, the islands offer individuality; all people who “have got too self-consciously individual to fit into community-life” are on that island (200). This does not show great menace on the part of the Controller; he is actually portrayed as a good and thoughtful person. Mustapha Mond seems to be able to make rational choices and does not take on the role of an evil and irrational ruler. However, this might just be pretence. According to Jan Wellmann our society has become numb to all the information and surveillance that people are subjected to

(Wellmann 2014). In addition, the people in *Brave New World* have become numb to surveillance. Surveillance goes even as far as technologically and scientifically controlling people's behaviour and life. However, the citizens of the State do not seem to mind this; they have become passive and indifferent. In this way, power in *Brave New World* is very subtle. The Controller is not portrayed as a totalitarian ruler who has to be feared, but he can actually be reasoned with and seems to want the best for his people. However, all the while he does make sure his people are easy to control by using technology and drugs to keep them in check.

Power in *The Maze Runner* is clearly present, and is not as subtle as *Brave New World*. WICKED is clearly in charge and uses the maze and the Grievers to control the Gladers. The Creators of the maze use manipulation to let others do the dirty work for them; the Creators manipulate Gally in such a way that he eventually turns against his friends, thereby creating another obstacle Thomas has to overcome. Just like the citizens of the State, the Gladers are being controlled by a power greater than them. Their memories are erased and they arrive in the maze in a certain order, Thomas and Theresa are the last two, and are the catalysts for the last test: escaping the maze alive. The Creators only appear near the end of the story, but Dashner makes it clear from the beginning that someone or somewhat is controlling the environment and the people within it. Information is limited and controlled by the Creators, which means that the Gladers know what WICKED wants them to know. This puts WICKED in a very powerful position. In addition, the control of information in *The Maze Runner* mirrors that of our own world. The positive side to the internet is that everyone has access to information, but this also offers a position of "digital tyranny" (Wellmann 2014). This could lead to digital totalitarianism, and according to Wellmann, "Google already controls two thirds of the information we access on the internet" and already has ties with the NSA and CIA. Just as in *The Maze Runner*, there is no privacy. The Gladers are watched day and night

with the help of beetle blades; a tiny, lizard-like, device with cameras as eyes (Dashner 64). Comparatively, Google shares and disclose information with anti-terrorist organisations. It has yet to go wrong, but the possibility according to Wellmann is definitely there.

The dystopian genre has changed from *Brave New World* to *The Maze Runner*, and with that the perception of power has also changed. The World Controller in Huxley's novel is much more present than in other classic dystopias, enabling the reader to learn and maybe even sympathise with the totalitarian power. Dashner's YA novel seems to follow the usual form, in which the rulers are kept in the shadows for most of the novel. On the other hand, *The Maze Runner* is also a special case since there is not one ruler in place, but a whole organisation which has taken the role of totalitarian power. Another similarity is the portrayal of fear of technology. Wellmann talked about digital totalitarianism in his article, and both novels seem to comment on this. Huxley shows how people can become numb and passive to surveillance and control because of the accessibility of pleasure. Dasher, on the other hand, shows how information can be manipulated or even withheld to create a false truth. The Gladers are fed a false reality and are constantly manipulated in the experiment set up by WICKED. However, the fear of surveillance and manipulation seems to have gotten greater in the twenty-first century due to the internet and Google. While Huxley was afraid of mass production and mass consumerism and what this could do to people, Dashner shows what will happen if people have access to powerful technology. The same fears exist, and power is still a very constant subject in dystopias, whether they are classic or young adult. However, power can nowadays also be obtained through online sources, which is what many dystopias nowadays focus on.

## Part Four:

# Play

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Many dystopian authors have speculated what our entertainment will look like in the future. In *Brave New World* entertainment and pleasure have taken over society and are used to control the populace. Play comes in the form of soma, the drug that allows the citizens of the State to go on weeklong holidays. In addition, there are the feelies, films that allow people not to only enjoy a film through sound and sight, but also through touch. Play in *The Maze Runner* takes on another form, which is representative of many other YA dystopian novels. The story in itself is a game and it revolves around finding the solution to a complicated and mechanised maze.

Power and play go hand-in-hand in *Brave New World*; entertainment is used to keep the population under control. Mustapha Mond, the Controller of the State, mentions that “[s]o many of the natural impulses are allowed free play, that there really aren’t any temptations to resist” (Huxley 209). By creating all these pleasurable opportunities, the people of the State have no reason to complain. The whole society of the State is geared towards happiness, and its enemy is knowledge. Therefore, it is important to keep the citizens preoccupied, by manufacturing and distributing, for example, the drug soma. According to Mond “[y]ou can carry at least half your morality about in a bottle” (210) since it can make you “calm your anger, [...] reconcile you to your enemies, [...] make you patient and long-suffering” (210). Soma is described as having “[a]ll the advantages of Christianity and alcohol; none of their defects” (46). Noticeably, this particular use of drugs can already be seen in our own world. According to Brendan O’Neill, “drugging the populace” is one of the things Huxley predicted and came true (O’Neill 2013). An example of a drug which is overprescribed according to O’Neill is Ritalin, a drug used in the treatment of ADHD, to “kids who seem overly pesky”

(O'Neill 2013). He mentions another article in which it says that drugs such as antidepressants are being overprescribed (Boseley 2013). It seems that nowadays people would rather suppress their feelings than deal with them, which is exactly what happens in *Brave New World*. This again ties in with Huxley's fear of mass production and mass consumerism. Soma is widely available; it is even handed out after the Deltas, people in one of the lower castes, have finished their work. John the Savage tries to make the distributor realise that soma is "poison to the soul as well as body" (Huxley 185) and funnily enough the distributor agrees with him, but beseeches John to let him get on with the distribution. In addition, when John implores the Deltas to throw all soma away, they are shocked and eventually attack John. To subdue the mass of Deltas, a soma vapour is used, which exemplifies how soma is used to control people.

Another way to keep the citizens of the State happy are the feelies. The feelies are films that do not only satisfy the eyes and ears, but also touch. The citizens in the State are encouraged to such a communal activity when they need distraction; they are not supposed "to indulge in any solitary amusements" (Huxley 142). This lack of individuality is also the reason for why John the Savage finds the State's society repulsive. John finds that "the feelies promote voyeurism, showing publicly and en masse what should be intimate, individual experience" (Frost 146). However, a difference is made between the old and new ways of entertainment. John at one point calls the feelies "plays" (Huxley 193) because it is the only thing he knows through reading Shakespeare. However, this is not an accurate description. Plays convey beauty and sophistication and often carry meaning, while the feelies are described by Mond as being empty; "[t]hey mean themselves; they mean a lot of agreeable sensations to the audience" (194). The only purpose of the feelies is to make people happy. According to Mond, "[u]niversal happiness keeps the wheels steadily turning; truth and beauty can't" (Huxley 201). This drive for happiness can already be seen in real life as well. Brendan O'Neill gives David Cameron, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, as



example. Cameron created something which is called the ‘happiness agenda’ which supposedly would help to create a happier society (O’Neill 2013). Therefore, another prediction of Huxley may be coming true. It shows that his fears and ideas were well-founded. In the case of *Brave New World*, entertainment and pleasure are used to keep the populace happy, and by keeping them happy they can be kept under control.

The idea of play takes on another form in *The Maze Runner*. Whereas *Brave New World* offers a glimpse of future entertainment and pleasure, the setting of *The Maze Runner* represents a game in itself, namely that of a maze. The Gladers are tasked with solving the maze. While Dashner’s novel resembles a video game, it does not contain the same perks. For example, in a video game the gamer can reset the game and start over, while the Gladers have no such option, and actually play for their lives. Aside from the maze being a game in itself, there are no further mentions of entertainment or pleasure in the novel. Whereas *Brave New World* focuses heavily on different kinds of pleasure and happiness, *The Maze Runner* focuses on how happiness can be obtained through a gamelike experiment. After all, the Gladers may be the cure to a highly contagious virus. However, the maze is not for public entertainment, such as the games are in *The Hunger Games*. The Maze Trials are not designed for entertainment and pleasure, but exist purely for scientific reasons.

While play takes on another form in *The Maze Runner*, it does have something in common with *Brave New World*. In both novels play and power are closely connected. In the case of Dashner’s novel, the maze is controlled by the Creators and is in truth an experiment. It is not explained in the first book, but later on in the series it is explained why the Gladers have to go through these experiments. Thomas and his friends could possibly provide the cure to the Flare, a virus that attacks the brain. Therefore, their brain activity needs to be recorded in several challenging situations. After completing the maze, the Gladers meet Ava Paige, who is in charge of the experiment. She tries to explain that the experiment was necessary,

and that “[o]ne day you’ll all be grateful for what we’ve done for you” (Dashner 352), and that “all things happen for a purpose” (357). However, the maze was a very dangerous place and many children died trying to solve it. Therefore, the idea of play in *The Maze Runner* is very much associated with danger and death. This hard and merciless kind of play is a reoccurring motif in most of the YA dystopias; for example, the games in *The Hunger Games* are a means of entertainment, but it means danger and most likely death for most of the participants. Another example is *Divergent* by Veronica Roth, in which children have to complete tests, which are also quite dangerous, before they are allowed to join a certain faction. Another reoccurring motif in these gamelike experiments is the idea that “the adults are the oppressors” and “the children are the liberators” (Young 2011). The adults use the games to restrain the children, whereas the children use these games “as vehicles for liberation” (Schager 2014). In all three of the YA novels named above, the adults are in control of the games. In *The Maze Runner*, the Creators are in charge, in *The Hunger Games* it is Seneca Crane and in *Divergent* it is Eric Coulter in association with Jeanine Matthews. Consequently, many adults find “the violence of some of these stories [...] horrifying, and depressing to think about” (Craig 2012). Thus, it sometimes seems as if the action and brutality are meaningless and are only there to make the story more exiting. Moira Young, a YA author, supports this claim, saying that “[t]eenagers like to read dystopian fiction because it’s exciting” and that “the story comes first, and the setting [...] is of secondary importance” (Young 2011). This statement assumes that the play factor, which is so heavily present in YA dystopias, has no educative purpose. However, Amanda Craig writes in her article that her daughter proclaimed that she and other children of her generation, are “thinking about politics, and the future” (Craig 2012). Play in YA dystopias is therefore not only about mindless action, it also serves to bring problems of our world to light.

In conclusion, play is dealt with in different ways in *Brave New World* and *The Maze Runner*. *Brave New World* focuses heavily on entertainment and pleasure brought on by mass production and mass consumerism, and shows how that affects a society. On the other hand, *The Maze Runner* is a game in itself. The story is reminiscent of a video game, where the main character wakes up in a strange environment and has to solve a puzzle, in this case a maze. A similarity between *Brave New World* and *The Maze Runner* is that both novels show how closely play and power are connected. Soma and the feelies are all used to keep the populace happy, and by keeping them happy they can be controlled. The maze in *The Maze Runner* is a controlled environment which is completely regulated by the Creators. While other forms of play such as entertainment and pleasure do not make an appearance in Dashner's novel, it still makes young adults think about the future. Therefore, YA literature has not degraded dystopias when it comes to element of play; it can be seen as a broadening and enrichment of the genre.

## Conclusion

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There are some people who believe that YA literature has degraded the dystopian genre. Graham finds that YA dystopias are not to be considered literature (Graham 2014), and Morrison believes that the dystopian genre has become less educational and more romanticised (Morrison 2014). The research question of this thesis was: has young adult dystopian literature transformed into a degraded form of the genre due to the changes that happened over time? To research this properly, this thesis compared *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, a classic dystopia, and *The Maze Runner* by James Dashner, a young adult dystopia novel, based on three important elements in dystopian literature, namely technology and science, power, and play.

Technology and science are extremely important in *Brave New World*. Huxley shows the impact of advancements in both fields; for example, cloning and behavioural conditioning have enabled the leader in the novel to easily control the population. In fact, elements of power and play in *Brave New World* all serve the same purpose, namely to control the citizens in an indirect way. Indirect, because the people of the State do not seem to notice their lack of freedom; they see nothing wrong with their society as long as they can keep their comfortable and entertaining life. The same happens in *The Maze Runner*, but the children are very aware that they are being controlled; for example, they live at the centre of a maze and the Creators control this maze. In addition, play takes on another form in Dashner's novel. Whereas Huxley portrayed elaborate ways of future entertainment, the play aspect in Dashner's novel exists in the setting. The maze represents a game in itself; the Gladers are mostly focused on finding a solution to the maze and do not know other forms of entertainment. While YA dystopias are different in some ways from the classic dystopias, they still contain all the important elements.

The main difference between the two novels is that the elements of technology and science, power, and play are often explained in less detailed ways in *The Maze Runner* than in *Brave New World*. While Huxley explains his ideas and processes, such as the Bokanovksy Process, in detail, Dashner seems to have focused more on the action and pace of the story. However, this is not a bad thing. On many of the ‘must read dystopias’ lists that can be found on the internet, YA dystopias are always present and even dominate some lists. They are not merely on the list because they are action-packed; they are of value. The authors of classic dystopias saw dangers in the future of humanity. As a result they speculated and wrote to address and alert readers. The authors of YA literature have the same goals. In fact, they introduce new dangers and create new possible futures, thereby only enriching the genre.

In conclusion, YA literature has not disfigured the dystopian genre; it has broadened and enriched it. Classic and YA dystopian literature should not be seen as separate, but together as one genre. By combining all these views by all these authors, a bigger and more complete picture can be drawn of our future, and perhaps a more suitable solution can be found to the problems of this world.

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