

CONTEMPORARY YOUNG ADULT DYSTOPIAN FICTION

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Abstract:

Young Adult fiction has always been looked as a writing that is naïve and predominantly pointed to a particular audience. But in fact, in the rest years the genre has gained recognition on its own. It deals with pressing themes from sexuality to alien invasion. This paper tries to show the current state of contemporary young adult fiction. Climate change, conformity, and alien invasion might be the important themes that is discussed in dystopian young adult Literature. But it must also be understood that all these issues are not far off, and they are true in every manner. Thus, the relevance of dystopian fiction to the present point in literary history is validated. This paper proposes to highlight these issues in the contemporary young adult dystopian fiction.

Keywords: Dystopian fiction, Hunger Games, Young Adult Fiction.

The world of young adult fiction has been changing rapidly. Children and young adult fiction in the present time seems to be going through a metamorphosis. Young adult fiction always seems to be concerned with providing psychological insight into the mind of teenagers. Ever since the great publishing phenomena of *Harry Potter*, publishers have been looking for books that would break the market. After the *Twilight* success, readers were looking for another magical world, but all of a sudden an imaginary utopian world was discarded and a dystopian world was embraced by readers. People became more interested in reading about end of the world scenarios.

The novel that changed the young adult scenario to be crowded with dystopian theme is *Hunger Games* by Susan Collins. This novel established a new craze for dystopia. Then similar

novels got published and each one had its own fan base. These novels tend to frighten readers about a post-apocalyptic scenario. It also deals with future wars and how they would destroy the future of the world. There are many scenarios imagined in many of the dystopian novels in recent years. Some of novels deal with war and future technologies. And other works focus on global warming.

Many of the latest works have dealt with climate change and political upheaval. These are the issues that are discussed by myriad novels in the young adult scenario in this decade.

In most of the young adult novels the young protagonist in many scenarios adapt and survive in troubled times. The point of young adult fiction seems to be about survival. Even though dystopian fiction talks about the end of the world scenario, the characters are shown in a positive light. They are shown to overcome all the hurdles that is shown in their way.

There are some common themes in dystopian literature. Some novels deal with Global warming. They focus in the scenario in which the world comes to an end in some terrible accident like earthquake or Tsunami. Many movies have capitalized on this climate related scenario, but at present there are many books that deal with such climate changes. These environmental changes are not confined to only natural causes, but also many epidemics.

The world has seen the terrifying face of corona virus, and some of the novels have dealt with such disastrous epidemics. For example novels like *World War Z* have dealt with an epidemic that makes the people in contact with it as Zombies. The current scenario is almost the same, the new epidemic makes everyone feel that they are all in a dystopian novel. It has always helped young readers to understand the current situation with more clarity.

Another form of dystopian fiction that is becoming more popular is the fiction that deals with conformity. A small look at the history of how conformity novels came into shape will be useful. Critics have pointed out that it was solely the reflection of the fascist regime. The cautionary tales that appeared in the mainstream literature suddenly began to dwindle by the second half of the century. This was because the fascist regime has come to an end. People were not willing to accept a cynical reality and they “chose to carry on the fight for self-determination, economic and social justice, and personal freedom and fulfillment in a world of peace and plenty for everyone”(Moynan 68).

This fueled the rise of the literary utopia. This utopia differed from the traditional expressions by choosing a much more critical attitude towards their own oppressive impulses. They offered better alternatives for the socio-political systems. They also used some literary tactics in the form and also in the content. However, by the 1970s the utopian literary scenario had changed. The world was not getting better. There were reports about rising unemployment, homelessness, reports concerning irreparable damage to the rainforest and records about increasing acts of violence against women and gays. The free market also become ruthless, and they undermined the social rights as many corporations quickly expanded itself across national borders. The result was devastating, and imaginative literature took another dark turn:

By the end of the 1980s-moving beyond the engaged utopianism of the 197-s and the fashionable temptation to despair in the early 1980s- several sf writers confronted the decade's simultaneous silencing and cooptation of Utopia by turning to dystopian strategies as a way to come to terms with the changing social reality. Works by Octavia E. Butler, Cadigan, Charnas, Robinson, Piercy, and Le Guinrefunctioned dystopia as a critical narrative form that worked against the grain of the economic, political, and cultural climate. (Baccolini, 3)

The modern stories incorporated the stories and genres and they were mixed when it came to dystopian fiction. The totalitarian climate become clear in this fiction. Many novels used this as the setting for the stories. These stories tried to incorporate the totalitarian viewpoints. The ruling powers are primarily concerned with maintaining control and consequently have a rather unhealthy fixation with "the Other, the alien and the subversive"(Gottlieb 35). These outcasts then serves as some kind of targets for licensed acts of violence.

Adult novels like *1984* have always warned about a dystopian society in which everything is controlled by an authoritative government. This idea of conforming to a Government is a scary idea, and many have written extensively on the idea. Many movies have always explored in this idea, and *Hunger Games* by Susan Collins certainly taps into this motif of fear and conformity. Reality television is combined with a quest for the hungry. The government controls everyone. The protagonist Katniss is clearly aware of her injustices. At this point in her life, though, she has learned how to live inside them, and she has no clear thought about altering things. However, as her younger sister Prim is arbitrarily chosen as a tribute to brutal annual tournaments, the brutality of the authorities becomes personal. Katniss' encounters

at the Hunger Games fuel her frustration at what has become of life in her society — a bohemian in the capital, poor in the districts — and how the Games are used to manipulate and bully innocent people. She is angered by the extreme passion of many for the brutal Hunger Games, and is perhaps more angered by the complacent mindset that prevails everywhere else. When she realises how inexpensive life has been, she's driven to the brink and she's ready to do everything she can to change things.

Although today's teenagers develop in environments that are not quite as barbaric or distorted as those commonly portrayed in dystopian texts, the increasing awareness of the world around them represents the considerable development of teenage readers. As the characters of dystopian YA novels come to understand the reality about the cultures in which they exist, they sometimes feel alone, alienated from families and peers who do not have the same perspectives. As a result, one of the conflicts they face is to determine if they can trust their perception of the shortcomings of their culture and their plans to take corrective steps.

In a similar way there are novels like *Divergent* by Veronica Roth. These series of books conclusively deal with such conformity. Each clan in the story is selected based on certain tests, and it is more of a caste system. They have to follow their clan rules and regulations. These are popular young adult fiction books that deal with certain topics and ideas.

In the last decade many young adult novels that deal with end time scenarios involving aliens have propped up. For example, *The 5th Wave* by Rick Yancey has become a popular book, and the premise is about aliens destroying earth, though there are many novels that deal with such situations this novel deals with young adults and their response to alien invasion. This novel always teaches survival techniques that are useful in such a crisis. These dystopian novels even though deal with morbid topics they also have positive characters that somehow fight and overcoming their bleak situation. This is one of the important, and vital points about the necessity of dystopian fiction in these times. They are like survival guides to teenagers and adults alike.

Climate change, conformity, and alien invasion might be the important themes that is discussed in dystopian young adult Literature. But it must also be understood that all these issues are not far off, and they are true in every manner. Climate change is a global crisis, and even teenagers are taking part in the discussion, and all this awareness is partly due to books that deal

with climate change. Books on conformity are becoming more popular as people see the growth of polarization. Governments all over the world try to control the data of their citizens, and using this they try to control their privacy as well. Anyone posting against the state is taken as prisoner in many parts of China, and many places around the world. This is in a way a control of freedom, and dystopian fiction in many of the young adult fiction has shown such a tyrant world could exist.

The core of young adult dystopian fiction is how the characters at one point become rebels, and how they rebel against the status quo. All the major characters in these novels will be against the status quo. For instance, the protagonist in *The 5th Wave* seems to be against an entire alien invasion and also their agenda, this might be normal, but an alien also rebelling against its own forces is definitely against the status quo. Many of the characters are like this, and they fight against the norms.

Young adult fiction that deals with dystopian themes also explain new scientific inventions. From microchips to chemical weapons which will be used in future war zones are also examined in the novels. They are used in the novels as a device to propel the story forward. So in short almost all the novel in Young Adult Dystopia are similar a mirror image for all the contemporary cultural issues. The fear of the future, and how to overcome it is all examined. Young adult Dystopian Literature seems to be a disputed one on whether it is force to reckon with or some kind of juvenile fantasy that will not likely be happening in the near future. These are the questions Young Adult literature critics are pondering about.

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