

HOPE IS NOT A MISTAKE: THE IMPORTANCE OF

COMMUNITY IN DYSTOPIAN MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

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Studies show that after major global catastrophes, there is a surge in popularity of the Dystopian genre. Many major theorists propose that society returns to Dystopia in order to find hope where we see none in our own lives. This thesis argues that this hope stems from the sense of community that characters form in the face of adversity within Dystopian landscapes. Drawing from Benedict Anderson's definition of "imagined communities," I have traced this thread of community throughout four works: *The Running Man* by Stephen King, George Miller's film *Mad Max: Fury Road*, *The Hunger Games* trilogy by Suzanne Collins, and *Cloud Atlas* by David Mitchell. A thorough analysis of these texts demonstrates that the narrative construction of communities plays a crucial role in the Dystopian genre. This thesis serves as a catalyst for a conversation within the genre about the importance of the bonds formed by characters within Dystopian works.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Dystopia: the word seems to be everywhere today, appearing in everything from bestseller book reviews, to the newest film hitting cinemas, to *Vanity Fair* think pieces. The current global political climate is saturated with impending doom, the constant worry that something terrible lurks around every corner, and has been since the tragic events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. It is vitally important that we, as a global society, understand the kind of community we should seek to attain.

For this reason, my thesis will explore the importance of communities within Dystopian media. The questions I will use to guide my discussion are as follows:

1. What is the importance of community (as defined by Benedict Anderson) within the movement?
2. Does the sense of community change between Negative Utopias (works that show the faults of our own society) and Anti-Utopias (works that show the faults in attempted Utopias)
3. Can a Negative Utopian or Anti-Utopian work end on a hopeful note without community?

To answer these questions, I will construct a history of the Dystopianist movement and show how it has evolved since its conception. This will involve looking at several classic Dystopian works and placing them within their historical context.

I will also perform several close readings of more modern Dystopian works, and show how communities function within each one. It is through the analysis of such works that I will show that studying Dystopia in this day and age is not only still relevant, but vital to our future. Why do we continue to generate, consume, and study Dystopian media, as a general population? Perhaps it is because of the strong bonds of community that we see within these works. Societies across the globe have formed similar bonds, and seeing this reflected in this genre validates the decision to continue to build these connections. This thesis will explore the theme of community that I have found within contemporary Dystopian works.

#### **FOUNDING TEXTS AND HISTORY OF THE MOVEMENT**

Dystopianism has its roots both in Utopianism and science-fiction: the centre of a Venn diagram of two overlapping genres. The Dystopian movement finds its home as a part of the Utopian movement, in addition to being a distinct subgenre of science-fiction. Science-fiction as a genre began with Mary Shelley; according to eminent science-fiction author Isaac Asimov: "Mary Shelley was the first to make use of a new finding of science which she advanced further to a logical extreme, and it is that which makes Frankenstein the first true science fiction story" (97). Mary Shelley became the mother of science-fiction in 1818, and one hundred years later Yevgeny Zamyatin became the father of Dystopianism. Although the word *Dystopia* has existed since the mid eighteenth century, the first truly Dystopian work was Russian author Zamyatin's

novel *We*.<sup>1</sup> Following these works, Aldous Huxley published *Brave New World* in 1934, and George Orwell published *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in 1949. Zamyatin's novel was born of post WWI political dissatisfaction in Russia, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Brave New World* were born from *We*.

It is from *We* that Dystopianism has taken its most recognizable characteristics; these now-familiar concepts that were born in *We* are dominant in Dystopian works to this day. While there are many definitions of Dystopia, no scholar has yet created a list of identifiable Dystopian characteristics, other than a few sarcastic and nonacademic thinkpieces denouncing the “clichés” of Dystopianism. Thus far, I have found no real “litmus test,” no scholarly checklist from an established theorist that is helpful in identifying commonly used Dystopian themes and tropes.

The closest thing to such a list I have been able to find was created by a highschool teacher. Junius Wright included a description of Dystopian characteristics in his lesson plans on Apple's *Nineteen-Eighty Four* themed commercial introducing the Macintosh computer for the teaching website ReadWriteThink

- Propaganda is used to control the citizens of society.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Milner argues in his essay “Need It All End in Tears?: The Problem of Ending in Four Classic Dystopias” that *R.U.R.*, published and performed in 1921 is the technical predecessor to Zamyatin's *We*, which was written in 1920 but not published until 1924. However, I would argue that *R.U.R.* is not truly dystopian until the epilogue. What Čapek wrote instead was a prologue to an Anti-Utopia. The play follows a factory, Rossum's Universal Robots, and their attempts to make more and more advanced robots to perform menial labor for the human race. Inevitably, the improvements made on the robots make them too self-aware, and they revolt against the humans. In the epilogue, we see a now Anti-Utopian world ruled by the robots, sprung from the utopia attempted by the men running Rossum's. While I can see the basis of Milner's argument, because the first three quarters of the play is utopian, I politely disagree with his analysis.

- Information, independent thought, and freedom are restricted.
- A figurehead or concept is worshipped by the citizens of society.
- Citizens are perceived to be under constant surveillance.
- Citizens have a fear of the outside world.
- Citizens live in a dehumanized state.
- The natural world is banished and distrusted.
- Citizens conform to uniform expectations. Individuality and dissent are bad.
- The society is an illusion of a perfect utopian world. (Wright)

It is from his example that I build my own list of common characteristics to be found both classical and modern Dystopias. Whereas Wright's criteria are taken from the long history of Dystopia, mine focuses solely on characteristics that have their roots in *We*.

In Zamyatin's work, there are many recognizable ideas that are introduced. For example, in *We*, all of the characters have names like D-503, which takes away their individuality. Before the beginning of the novel, the Two Hundred Years War leaving only 0.2% of the population, and the remaining citizens are seeking out life on other planets to start fresh. Because of this event, there exists a totalitarian government, ruled over by the god-like Benefactor that must be obeyed completely and without thought. This government constantly monitors the population, which is facilitated by all buildings being made of glass. The government invades each aspect of everyday life, requiring forms to be completed for the act of sex, and removing children from families to be raised by the state. The distribution of propaganda is used ensure obedience; even art is

made only to praise and glorify The Benefactor. In addition to government-positive propaganda, there is also propaganda against the old ways, before The Benefactor took power. There are apartment “museums” showing life before The War as being less than the new order, and stressing how “bad” the freedoms and luxuries of the past were. The citizens are taught to fear of anything beyond The Wall that surrounds their city.

It is from these details that I have drawn my own list of characteristics, now commonly found in most Dystopian works:

1. A complete lack of individuality or other forms of automatization
2. Totalitarianism
3. Constant monitoring of the population
4. Unnecessary and invasive bureaucracy
5. Complete obedience to the state
6. Propaganda produced to control this obedience
7. A cataclysmic event wiping out the population
8. A distrust of anything outside their own strictly controlled world
9. An underground anti-government rebellion
10. The idea of a better place outside of the Dystopian society, to which its members could potentially escape

Throughout my close readings of each selected texts, I will use these characteristics to show continuing trends in the genre. Of course, not each text contains all ten tropes, but the majority of Dystopian texts contain a large percentage of these concepts.

Orwell and Huxley brought these criteria into their own respective works, in writing *Nineteen-Eighty Four* and *Brave New World*. They were undoubtedly influenced by Zamyatin's work, since "George Orwell, author of 1984 [sic], managed to find and read it. Orwell thought that Aldous Huxley, author of *Brave new World*, had probably read it" (Zamyatin v). For instance, although Winston Smith, the protagonist of Orwell's novel, does have a full name, he is referred to by the government as "6079 Smith W" (Orwell 36). Orwell's government is certainly the most famous, giving modern society the phrase "Big Brother," in reference to an all-seeing, all-knowing governing body. Even if they have not read the book, most people are aware of the Party's motto of "WAR IS PEACE, FREEDOM IS SLAVERY, IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH." But Orwell's government goes even further than merely observing its citizens: "The two aims of the Party are to conquer the whole surface of the earth and to extinguish once and for all the possibility of independent thought" (193). This lack of individuality, especially the references to citizens by numbers rather than proper names, mirrors characteristics of Zamyatin's own Dystopian society.

Furthermore, The Party could change history, erasing and re-writing facts and events as they so pleased. Winston observes that if the Party wanted to make two plus two equal five, the rest of society had no choice but to accept the Party's decision as the new truth (80). The Party is ruthless, forcing citizens to police their own thoughts by means of crimestop, the act of stopping oneself from thinking any "dangerous" thoughts. To further explain the idea, "Crimestop, in short, means protective stupidity" (Orwell 212). Most frighteningly, the Party has no interest in the wellbeing of its citizens,

"[they] are interested solely in power" (263). They are shown as being more than willing to torture or even kill those who dare to oppose them.

In Huxley's *Brave New World*, government propaganda is rampant. The World State's motto of "COMMUNITY, IDENTITY, STABILITY" (3) is omnipresent, children are played messages telling them to conform and be pleased with their social caste while they sleep (27), and things like human rights are merely a "throwback" to a time long ago (102). The goal of such propaganda is simple: "making people like their inescapable social destiny" (16). As with *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the aim of the government is to keep people ignorant of what goes on outside of their immediate perception.

In *We*, it is explained thusly: "Freedom and crime are so indissolubly connected to each other, like ... well, like the movement of the aero and its velocity. When the velocity of the aero = 0, it doesn't move; when the freedom of a person = 0, he doesn't commit crime. This is clear. The sole means of ridding man of crime is to rid him of freedom" (Zamyatin 33). The citizens must remain stupid and happy to not have any desire to revolt against the government. If they do not know they are being oppressed, they cannot strike out against their oppressors. All three works clearly reflect a fear of an oppressive government. The governments in these three works are all seeing, all knowing, and all consuming. They control every aspect of the lives of their people. What these works do not have, which more and more Dystopian works of today do, is a sense of community.

## DYSTOPIA TODAY

Dystopian media, despite being seemingly everywhere, is difficult to properly define. It has roots in the Utopianism movement, started by Thomas More with his publication of *Utopia* in 1516 (Sargent, *A Very Short Introduction*). It also, however, shares history with the science-fiction genre, which science-fiction and Dystopian theorist Darko Suvin defines as "a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (*Metamorphosis* 72). This makes it somewhat tricky to work within, since it overlaps two genres.

Due to its dual citizenship, if you will, the concept of Dystopia is hard to pin down. Furthermore, *community* is also something of an amorphous term which requires some narrowing and clearly defined borders. I will use Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* to define this term more clearly, and as a lens through which to view my chosen Dystopian works. My first chapter will be spent defining the parameters I am using for both the Dystopian movement, as well as the idea of community.

The second and third chapters of my thesis will concentrate on two sub-sections of Dystopianism: the Negative Utopia and the Anti-Utopia. While these categories fall under the general umbrella of Dystopianism, they each have separate defining characteristics. I have chosen two Negative Utopian works and two Anti-Utopian works, all of which I will analyse within the parameters I had set in the first chapter. By the end,

I hope to present a clear view of what community means in a Dystopian landscape, and why it is important.

While the conversation about Dystopianism is ongoing, due to the rapid production of Dystopian works, it is mostly taking place in either academic journal articles or mainstream media magazines. The latest theoretical work was published by M. Keith Booker in 2012, and before that was Tom Moylan in 2000. Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent did release a reprint of their Uystopian theory book in February of this year, but the only new addition was a short chapter at the end about the rise of Young Adult Dystopian fiction. As such, all major theoretical works are between five and thirty-five years old.

While this does make my research more difficult, it also gives me an opportunity to refresh the conversation. I feel the idea of community in Dystopianism is important to discuss, given the rise of popularity of the Dystopian movement. Community has become increasingly important in Dystopian works, and it is a trend that I wish to explore in some depth. I also feel that I can contribute to the ongoing discussion of the movement in a new and meaningful way, which is my longterm goal with this thesis.

## CHAPTER II

### INTRODUCTION TO DYSTOPIAN MEDIA

#### MAJOR THEORISTS

One of the major difficulties with such a broad genre is in narrowing down terms and definitions. As Gregory Claeys and Lyman Sargent argue, "... it is best to think of Uystopia and Uystopianism as what are called 'essentially contested concepts' or concepts that are thought of in ways that do not merely diverge but are, at least as currently understood, fundamentally incompatible" (5). Therefore, it is necessary that the list of theorists from whom I draw my analysis is both small and compatible.

M. Keith Booker's introduction to his collection of essays, *Critical Insights: Dystopia*, mentions Lyman Tower Sargent and Tom Moylan as revered theorists in the genre. In Sargent's work, he points to Darko Suvin as a vital theorist in terms of science-fiction and Dystopianism, and this is how the basis for my core group of Dystopian theorists was formed. For the purposes of my thesis, I will be engaging primarily with these four major theorists in the Dystopian movement: Booker, Sargent, Moylan, and Suvin. Across my research, these were the names I saw referenced most often as having contributed important theoretical work to the movement. Additionally, in reading their theoretical works, I would find mentions of at least two of the other theorists. Because of this circular referencing, and because their theories and ideas seemed to be so fundamental to the understanding of Dystopianism, I decided Booker, Sargent, Moylan, and Suvin would be the best foundation for my research.

Sargent and Suvin approach Dystopianism from a historical standpoint, and have, in essence, laid the groundwork for many other theorists. Most of the scholarly articles and theoretical works that I have found on the subject drew their definitions of Utopia and Dystopia from either Sargent, Suvin, or both. Sargent's work covers more ground than Suvin's, as Sargent reaches as far back as the Bible to build his history of Utopianism and how it resulted in Dystopianism. This makes his view of the genre very broad, which could potentially be useful for future work of my own in this genre. Contrarily, Suvin is not as far-reaching, but he does cross over into science-fiction proper. Though not all of his theory is strictly Dystopian in nature, there is a heavy overlap in the two genres. Suvin's science-fiction work is incredibly useful in looking at some of the works that also overlap these two genres, such as *Cloud Atlas*.

Booker and Moylan provide a more recent look at Dystopianism, relatively speaking. While Sargent and Suvin historicize the movement, Booker and Moylan focus more on more contemporary works, and the resurgence of Dystopianism. Booker continues a thread started by Sargent; every resurgence of Dystopianism falls in line with world-wide catastrophic events. His work explains the current popularity of Dystopian media, post 9/11, and how this current upward trend in the production and consumption of Dystopian media is in line with a historical trend. He also suggests that this is not a brief phenomenon: "Nevertheless, the growing popularity of young-adult Dystopian fiction and its subsequent spillover into film suggests that the form will remain vital for the foreseeable future" (Booker 14). This means that it is possible for me to continue to contribute to the genre behind this thesis, which is my ultimate goal.

These two theorists also share the outlook that Dystopian media has the opportunity to be hopeful. For instance, Moylan points out that most Dystopian media begins, metaphorically speaking, extremely darkly and slowly grows lighter as we reach the end of the story. This is, he explains, because “Dystopian narrative is largely the product of the terrors of the twentieth century” (xi). His point of view is that we crave a hopeful ending on Dystopian works because our own future looks so frightening.

This is where I feel I must acknowledge Rafaella Bacciolini, due to both her work with Tom Moylan as well as her views on Dystopianism and hope. It is through an article of Bacciolini’s that I came to realize that the works in this genre could be read as hopeful rather than pessimistic, which, as I have stated in my introduction, is at the heart of my argument. However, Bacciolini is primarily a Women’s and Gender Studies theorist. Therefore in most overviews of Dystopian theory, she is only mentioned in conjunction with Tom Moylan, and while she has co-edited a collection of Dystopian theory essays alongside Moylan, she has produced only a few short essays of her own. I will use her in conjunction with Moylan to show the ultimately optimistic outlooks in Dystopian media.

As for the concept of community, which is central to my own analysis, I will be using Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*. Anderson pushes the idea of community and nationality beyond the boundaries of simple geography. Because most Dystopian media does not provide recognizable geographical boundaries, Anderson’s more abstract concepts and definitions fit well within the genre. Each theorist I have chosen has a unique point of view on the genre, and in conjunction with each other, they will help inform my work.

## DEFINITIONS OF DYSTOPIA

While there is a long and complex history of Utopianism dating back to the Ancient Greeks and spanning across cultures, the literary genre did not begin until 1516 when Thomas More wrote *Utopia* (Claeys and Sargent). Though the word *Utopia* has become synonymous with a paradisiacal place, it actually derived from Greek and if one breaks it down etymologically it means “no place,” as in a place that doesn’t exist. The etymology is as follows: “The word [Utopia] is based on the Greek *topos* meaning place or where, and ‘u’ from the prefix ‘ou’ meaning no or not. [...] As a result the word ‘utopia’, which simply means no place or nowhere, has come to refer to a non-existent good place” (Sargent, *A Very Short Introduction* 2). While my thesis focuses on the **Dystopian** genre, it is first necessary to understand what, precisely, **Utopianism** is. I use the terms Utopianism and Dystopianism to refer to the overall movement, as one would Modernism or Post-Modernism. To properly understand Post-Modernism, one must consider it within the context of Modernism. So too is it with Dystopianism and Utopianism.

In my exploration of the movement, I will be using two definitions of *Utopia*: one by Sargent and one by Suvin, both of which will provide the basis for the lens through which I view Utopianism and, subsequently, Dystopianism. Sargent’s definition of Utopia has, by and large, become the standard definition among theorists in the movement, and is as follows:

A non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space. In standard usage utopia is used both as defined here and as an

equivalent for a eutopia or a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which the reader lived (*A Very Short Introduction* 6).

In short, a Utopia is a world that does not yet exist, usually created by the wishful thinking of the author. It is what the author wishes to see in the world, or what they hope the world might be like at some undetermined point in the future.

Sargent also references Darko Suvin in his work, citing Suvin's following definition as equal to his own:

[...] a literary genre or verbal construction whose necessary and sufficient conditions are *the presence of a particular quasi-human community where socio-political institutions, norms, and individual relationships are organized on a more perfect principle than in the author's community, this construction being based on estrangement arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis* [emphasis his] (*Positions and Presuppositions* 35)

These definitions have been used again and again throughout Dystopian theoretical texts as a basis for understanding and categorizing the origins of the movement. Since the movement has been so broad, spanning across centuries and moving through many countries, it is, as Claeys and Sargent stated, a difficult thing to properly define. For this reason, it is most useful to have two definitions upon which most scholars seem to agree.

Moving on to *Dystopia*, the word was first noted as being used in a work by Henry Lewis Young in 1747: “More invented the word [Utopia], and new words have been added to describe different types of utopias, such as ‘Dystopia’ meaning bad place, which, as far as we know, was first used in 1747 by Henry Lewis Young (b.1694) in his *Utopia: or, Apollo’s Golden Days*, and has become standard usage” (*A Very Short Introduction* 4). However, the genre itself was not fully conceived until after World War I. Both Booker and Sargent argue that the original birth and subsequent resurgences of the Dystopian genre are due to global tragedies and a feeling of unrest among the majority of the population. As Sargent highlights, “And with World Wars I and II, the flu epidemic, the Depression, the Korean War, the war in Vietnam, and other events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Dystopias [sic] became the dominant form of utopian literature” (*A Very Short Introduction* 26). Each new wave of war, sickness, and tragedy brought on a fresh bout of anxiety about the state of the world. These anxieties were reflected in the evolution of the Dystopian movement.

With each catastrophic global event, tension and fear among the general population grew, requiring some form of outlet through which authors and readers alike might find catharsis. In response to distrust of the government and the idea of the nation-state, new works were produced to reflect the public’s outrage at the violence and terror they saw in the world. Utopianism, Dystopianism, and their subgenres flourished during these dark times. As Utopianism as a literary movement evolved over the years, it began to separate into multiple sub-categories. The most commonly used

categorizations of these sub-categories belong to Sargent, who divides them into the following more specific groups:

**Dystopia, or negative utopia** – a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived.

[...]

**Anti-utopia** – a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as a criticism of utopianism (“Three Faces” 9).<sup>2</sup>

I will be categorizing my own readings into the two Dystopian categories that Sargent provides, Negative Utopia and Anti-Utopia.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

As both Booker and Moylan underscore, Dystopian works reflect the fears of the era in which they are written. Therefore it is appropriate that Dystopianism was born out of the end of the First World War, and the conflicts that lingered in the minds of the public. The war brought forth concerns in regards to technology and the potential growth of power in the government. There was also a fear of attempted as that is visible in these works. As the world was being rebuilt, there was an uncertainty of what it could become.

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<sup>2</sup> Sargent also brings in the ideas of “Utopian satire” and “Critical utopia” (“Three Faces” 9), which I will not be using here.

Zamyatin penned *We* in 1920, just two years after the end of the First World War. Being so close to the war makes his writing even more poignant, and makes his criticisms of post-war society that much more clear. Gorman Beauchamp states: "So resonant is *We* with the complex ideological struggles of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that to isolate even the most salient influences in the intricate tapestry of the novel is no easy task" (57). Indeed, it is difficult to pinpoint the greatest fear expressed in the novel, as each one is given equal gravity. The misuse of technology, the insidious growth of the government, and the potential attempts at creating a Utopia that would inevitably fail are all presented as equally worrisome. Zamyatin, of course, coming from Russia, had a unique point of view. "Having himself lived through, and supported, a revolution of utopian aspirations, Zamiatin [sic] early on perceived its pernicious consequences – a decade before the rise of Stalin – and portrayed them with prophetic insight" (Beauchamp 57). These lived experiences bleed through into Zamyatin's writing, presenting a terrifying future where humans are considered to be simply another kind of machines. His fears were not unfounded, given that "... the Soviet regime has never allowed his novel to be published in Russia" (Beauchamp 57). The world Zamyatin presents in *We* is not merely speculation, but for him, a chilling reality.

Both Orwell and Huxley were British, and therefore saw a different, but no less horrifying side of the war. The war gave Orwell a deeply pessimistic outlook on the future of England, and by extension, the world. For instance, "... long before 1984 [sic] was written, events in Europe had shown him that no 'remedy in human nature' could prevail against the organized assaults of fascism and communism, bolstered as they

were by armies and massive armament as well as by control of the press" (Steinhoff 147). The control of the press is especially noticeable in *Nineteen-Eighty Four*, with the way history is written, edited, and rewritten by the government whenever it pleases. His protagonist is an editor for the government, making revisions to any documents that require changes after the Party announces a new part of history (Orwell). This reflects the kind of propaganda produced by England and its allies, against their enemies in the war.

Moreover, the living conditions of the citizens of Oceania mirror the wartime conditions that Orwell would have lived under during World War I.

The conditions that make life in Oceania so disagreeable had their counterparts in wartime England, and it was reasonable that Orwell should think that tyranny would inflict the same blighting effect as the war had done, creating shortages, disorganizing transport and services, oppressing the spirit, and destroying the solaces that nature had once afforded (Steinhoff 149)

The citizens of Oceania live off of government sanctioned rations, with Victory brand alcohol as their one luxury (Orwell). The living conditions of the citizens reflect those of Orwell and his fellow Londoners during the war, while the despotic government shows Orwell's fears for the future of his country after the war.

Lastly, there is Huxley's vision of the failed Utopian future in *Brave New World*. As Matter states, "... *Brave New World* describes what Huxley fears may be man's future. He seeks to warn his readers that 'utopia' must be avoided" (97). While on the surface, the World State seems to run like a well-oiled machine, it hides a more insidious

government. People are designed, or “deanted,” based on the needs of society rather than simply being allowed to be born and grow freely. Citizens are kept complacent through the use of drugs and mindless activities (Huxley). In contrast to *We* and *Nineteen-Eighty Four*, there is little “futuristic” technology. Huxley explains his choice in the foreword to the 1946 publication of the novel: “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. The triumphs of physics, chemistry, and engineering are tacitly taken for granted” (qtd in Matter 103). It is interesting to note that Huxley does not specify whether he means that science is taken for granted within his novel, or in real life.

Through the descriptions of technology in the novel, he likely is referring to both. Several characters discuss the Nine Years War and the atrocities therein in a deeply casual manner: “... the explosion of the anthrax bombs is hardly louder than the popping of a paper bag. [...] An enormous hole in the ground, a pile of masonry, some bits of flesh and mucus, with the boot still on it, flying through the air and landing, flop, in the middle of the geraniums” (Huxley 48). Rather than expressing horror at the bloodiness of the war, they call it a “splendid show” (Huxley 48), a biting criticism of the horrors of trench warfare and the new weapons technology were able to produce during the war.

These works are products of their time; having come out of a war that ended more than it was actually won, the world view was generally rather bleak. It is for this reason that *We*, *Nineteen-Eighty Four*, and *Brave New World* all have revolutions that ultimately fail. There was no hope for a better life or much optimism to be seen during the rebuilding after World War I, and so there was no hope for the protagonists. There is

a sense of isolation and helplessness in these books, the idea that even if one tries to make a change, any attempt is useless. It should, however, be noted that in each case, the protagonist fails because they choose to remain isolated rather than joining a community offered to them.

The protagonist in each work (D-503, Winston, and Bernard, respectively) is slightly apart from this society of obedient drones. They have thoughts, ideas, or physical characteristics that are contrary to the ideals the government has put in place. Due to these differences, the protagonists are each offered the chance to join a revolutionary movement that could potentially overthrow the oppressive government in place. While each protagonist joins the movement for a short time, at a crucial moment each of them betray the revolution. In the end, the tyrannical government remains firmly in place due to the selfish acts of a singular character working against the community.

It is possible that had D-503, Winston, and Bernard not betrayed their community of potential revolutionaries, something might have changed in their respective societies. D-503 joins the rebellion because he falls in love with its leader, I-1330. However, once his involvement is discovered by the One State, he gives over the secrets of the rebel organization, and with it, 1-1330 (Zamyatin). Similarly, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Winston joins the revolution to overthrow the Party and Big Brother along with them because of a woman: Julia. They are both captured and tortured to glean information on the revolution. Though he endures the first round of torture, when it worsens, he turns against Julia, and Julia against him (Orwell).

Bernard's situation is slightly different in *Brave New World*; although he does not betray anyone, he misses an opportunity to potentially make changes in his society. When he brings John and Linda back from his vacation in the New Mexico reservation, which lies outside the influence of the World State and its government, he immediately begins showing them off. Instead of listening to their new ideas about freedom and imagination, or learning about how their society operates outside of the World State, he exploits John. He displays him at parties as The Savage and basks in the attention and higher position in society it brings him. Because John and Linda are outsiders and not under the influence of the World State, Bernard could use them to promote free thinking and fresh ideas, potentially causing a revolution amongst society to push back against what the government mandates. However, he chooses to use them only as novelties to gain notoriety, which ends up killing John and landing Bernard in exile.

These failed attempts at revolution reflect the fears of post-war society, the concern that despite the terrors of the war, nothing will truly change in the world. There is also a dismayed sense of isolation, which is reflected in the solitude of the protagonists. The fact that the protagonists choose to remain solitary suggests a feeling of detachment after the war, the fear of being alone. Because these authors saw no real resolution to the terrors of war in their own lives, their respective Dystopian worlds end in much the same way.

## **DEFINITION OF COMMUNITY**

These three founding Dystopian works show an emphatic failure of the protagonists to form a community in the face of a Dystopian landscape. In contrast, the

works I have chosen to analyze (*The Running Man* by Stephen King, George Miller's film *Mad Max: Fury Road*, *The Hunger Games* trilogy by Suzanne Collins, and *Cloud Atlas* by David Mitchell) are all able to show how communities can be successfully formed within a Dystopian setting. To understand the importance of these communities, the question must be asked: what, exactly, constitutes a community?

There are certain assumptions that may be made about the idea of community, or nationhood. In his book, *Imagined Communities*, Anderson uses the concepts of community to discuss nation-states. *Merriam Webster* defines a nation-state as: "A form of political organization under which a relatively homogeneous people inhabits a sovereign state; especially: a state containing one as opposed to several nationalities."

The *Oxford English Dictionary* provides us with this more expansive definition:

An independent political state formed from a people who share a common national identity (historically, culturally, or ethnically); (more generally) any independent political state.

A nation-state may be distinguished from states which comprise two or more historically distinct peoples, or which comprise only part of a historical people.

However, such distinctions are frequently problematic.

Anderson, however, problematizes the very idea of attempting to define a nation-state or nationhood. He posits: "Nation, nationality, nationalism – all have proved notoriously difficult to define, let alone to analyse. In contrast to the immense influence that nationalism has exerted on the modern world, plausible theory about it is conspicuously

meagre” (3). For this reason, using Anderson and his unconventional method of discussion the idea of community existing outside of the typical idea of “nation.”

While Dystopian landscapes run parallel to our own, they are *not* our own, and so it becomes difficult to define a nation without recognizable geographical borders. That is not to say that our world is a Utopian state, but rather a gray area that exists in between the two. Even within our own world, and our own society, the idea of a nation is complex. We attempt to contain it within concepts that we understand, such as geographical boundaries, but there are concepts and cultures which expand beyond these things. Even renowned historian and political scientist, Hugh Seton-Watson, had to admit defeat: “Thus I am *driven* to the conclusion that no ‘scientific definition’ of the nation can be devised; yet the phenomenon has existed and exists” (qtd. in Anderson 3). If there is no “scientific definition,” how, then, are we meant to explore the idea of nationhood or community? This question becomes even more complicated when we bring it into the Dystopian genre.

Many Dystopian works demolish concepts such as geography, simply setting their characters in the distant future in a vaguely recognizable place, or a place that was once ours but has changed so vastly that it cannot be called the country it once was. How, then, do we define a nation, if pre-conceived borders and identifying marks are taken away?

I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know

most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of communion (Anderson 6).

In other words, it is a nation that the characters create amongst themselves; it is more of a found family than it is a country.

There are four critical parts of this definition that must be considered: that it is *imagined*, that it is *limited*, that it is *sovereign*, and that it is a *community*. Although these criteria apply to Anderson's definition of a nation, I am using them to define what I mean when I use the word "community" in my thesis. Although I am not discussing nations or countries, but rather smaller groups of people, Anderson's definitions can still apply to my idea of community.

The first criteria for the community is that it is *imagined*. Anderson hypothesizes that it is print-based technology, or in some cases digital technology, that allows us to imagine ourselves as a community. Though outlets such as newspapers, television, and the internet, we can connect with people we have never met and yet still feel a camaraderie with them. Dystopian texts such as *Nineteen-Eighty Four* show the dire consequences of this notion taken too far. When media is controlled solely by the government, so too is the imagined camaraderie. We see this in *The Running Man*, where the consumption of media is government mandated (King), or in *Hunger Games*, where the Capitol controls any and all news stories that reach the various Districts. Each District only knows the goings-on of their own District, other than what the Capitol tells them, which cuts them off from the rest of the country and prevents them from banding together against the Capitol (Collins).

In these and other similar narratives, the characters' community is imagined for them by the government. This idea is both undermined and redefined when the characters begin rejecting the idea of this government-defined communities and start forming their own. The difference between their found communities and the mandated ones is that the found communities are no longer imaginary. That is to say, they are built through meeting people face to face and forming bonds with them. For this reason, these communities, or found families, are stronger than the ones outlined for the characters by their government. They are no longer imagined, but real and solid, which gives the characters something more tangible to fight for.

This is also why it is important that these communities must be *limited*. In most Dystopian texts, the government reaches too far into the lives of their citizens. Government rule becomes an inescapable part of everyday life for the characters, which is deeply problematic. It is for this reason that when the characters form their own communities, they tend to be small. A limited community is something that has the ability to look out for the best interests of the entire group, rather than something that imposes its own ideals onto a larger group.

These communities are *sovereign* because there tends to be an instigator of the community, someone who is looked upon as a leader. The problem arises when the Dystopian community looks upon the oppressive government as their leader. It becomes a return to monarchs and dictators, where one person or one small group of people ruled with a God-given right. We see this in *Fury Road*, with the leader Immortan Joe. Even his name implies that he is somehow holy and infallible (Miller). When the smaller

communities are formed, the instigator or leader is equal among the other members.

There is no one person who is considered above anyone else, which is critical for the group's survival. In this way, the newly formed communities push against the idea of a sovereign rule. This type of governing is unnecessary, even dangerous to their new definition of community.

Although it might seem circular to define a community as being a *community*, Anderson uses the word in a very specific way within his definition of a nation. Anderson explains the aspect of *community* in a nation as follows: "Finally, it is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (7). It is this "deep, horizontal comradeship" that is most important in the way that I define community. The protagonists of *The Running Man*, *Fury Road*, *Hunger Games*, and *Cloud Atlas* all prove how deep this bond goes by being willing to sacrifice themselves for their respective communities. At some point during their story arc, a moment comes where they must make a choice whether or not to sacrifice themselves for the sake of the community, and each of them are willing to take that risk. This is a vital part of these Dystopian communities, as well as a crucial part of the protagonists' character development.

To push the idea even further, we could consider the following: "It would, I think, make things easier if one treated it as if it belonged with 'kinship' and 'religion', rather than with 'liberalism' or 'facism'" (Anderson 5). It is through this definition that it becomes clear exactly how important the idea of community is, in a Dystopian setting.

When the idea of a nation crumbles around a civilization, the members of that former nation must band together to survive. It is these connections that bind characters together in a manner that becomes vital to the new community “existing” past the end of the work.

## METHODOLOGY AND SELECTED TEXTS

For this thesis, I will be doing a close reading of a few selected texts, using Anderson’s lens of community to analyze them. The works I plan on closely analyzing are split into two groups: the Anti-Utopias and the Negative Utopias. While we tend to call the genre as a whole “Dystopia” for ease of identification, a true Dystopia or a “Negative Utopia” as defined by Sargent is an “if this continues on” tale, warning us as readers of our current actions and their ultimate consequences (*A Very Short Introduction*). In this grouping we have works by Stephen King such as *The Running Man* as well as George Miller’s most recent *Mad Max* film, *Fury Road*. An Anti-Utopia is a story which shows an attempted Utopia that ultimately fails (*A Very Short Introduction*). The novels I include in this subgenre are Suzanne Collins’s *Hunger Game* trilogy, and part of the novel *Cloud Atlas* by David Mitchell.

I must acknowledge the fact that there are multiple adaptations of each of the works that I have chosen to include in my thesis. *The Running Man* was adapted into a movie in 1987, but because the plot of the film does not at all follow the plot of the book, I will not be using the film in my analysis. *Mad Max: Fury Road* has several comic books that were published after the release of the film. These comic books are all written by the director, George Miller, and considered supplemental information to

the plot of the film. For this reason, I do refer to comic books, since they are officially part of the *Fury Road* canon and provide valuable context for my argument.

The *Hunger Games* trilogy was also adapted into several films. While the plot followed closely enough to the books, the marketing surrounding the films undermine the points I feel the books were attempting to make. The films focus on the romantic aspects, asking audiences to choose between Team Gale or Team Peeta. CoverGirl and China Glaze released makeup lines inspired by The Capitol and each District. For these reasons, I have chosen not to include the films in my analysis. The Wachowskis turned *Cloud Atlas* into a film in 2012. The screenplay was written by Lana Wachowski, who altered the endings of several of the character arcs. While the heart of the story remains the same, due to the fact that so many details were changed which are crucial to analysis, I have chosen to exclude the film from my thesis. For these reasons, I have chosen to confine my analysis to the original texts, with the exception of the supplementary *Fury Road* text.

King's novella *The Running Man* centers around the character of Ben Richards, an impoverished citizen of the futuristic Co-Op City, who sacrifices himself to a televised man hunt to win money for his wife and sick daughter. *Fury Road*, the latest installment in the *Mad Max* film series, rejoins the eponymous Max as he becomes an unwilling participant in a rebellion against the tyrannical ruler of a city in the middle of the wastelands that make up Miller's future-Australia.

I have chosen these works due to a similar theme: they both show a singular character, or characters, coming together to form groups during timeframe of the

novel or film. This allows me to trace the steps of a singular (or as I call them “lone-wolf”) character throughout their individual narrative arc and see if there are missteps and failings, and where they might be. Having both sides of the coin, so to speak, allows me to directly compare the singular character attempting to survive in a Dystopian landscape with the community that attempts to survive in the same landscape, and why one may be more successful than the other.

The *Hunger Games* trilogy follows Katniss Everdeen, who volunteered to take the place of her sister in a government sanctioned fight to the death among two dozen children and eventually becomes the figurehead of a revolution against the same government. *Cloud Atlas* is an intertwining of six stories, wherein the protagonist of each tale is a reincarnation of the last protagonist. “The Orison of Sonmi~451,” the fifth and seventh parts of the eleven-part book, is the confession of a fabricated human, Sonmi~451, who helped begin an abolitionist movement to free her fellow fabricants from their oppressive human creators and owners.

I have chosen the *Hunger Games* novels because they have, in essence, rebooted the genre. As Claeys and Sargent have noted, there has been a rise in the number of Dystopian works, specifically Young Adult Dystopian works, which have been produced since 9/11. The call special attention to *Hunger Games*: “At the time of writing Suzanne Collins’s *Hunger Games* trilogy (2008, 2009, 2010), with a film released in 2012 and more thereafter, is the best known example of this phenomenon” (525). Though the Dystopian movement never went away, interest lessened for a period of time, and rekindled with the success of the *Hunger Games* books and subsequent

movies. Additionally, the government figure in *Hunger Games* makes an effort through the eponymous games to actively separate the characters and turn them against each other. This ultimately fails, and a revolution against the government begins nonetheless, with Katniss as its figurehead.

I want to study *Cloud Atlas* because it is a fascinating outlier among my chosen works. The character of Sonmi~451 is not human, which provides another perspective on the idea of community. Through my analysis of the work, I want to explore an expanded idea of community, the question of whether non-humans such as robots can form communities, and if these communities are the same as human communities.

As Anderson poignantly states, “Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as *willingly to die* [emphasis mine] for such limited imaginings” (7). Although Anderson refers to this concept in a negative light, his wariness with regards to such a willingness centers around the idea of people willing to die for an idealized version of a nation-state. However, through close readings of my selected texts, I wish to turn Anderson’s pejorative statement on its head and show its positive possibilities. The difference lies in *what the person is willing to die for*. If, as in the texts I will study over the next two chapters, the character is willing to sacrifice themselves for the community they have formed, it could be viewed as something positive. In fact, it is this fraternity and self-sacrifice that we see in many Dystopian works that can give us the strength to move forward in our own, often dark and frightening world.

## CHAPTER II

### NEGATIVEUTOPIAS

#### INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I will be discussing the subgenre of Dystopian Fiction known as **Negative Utopia**, and will move on to discuss the **Anti-Utopia** in Chapter Three. The Negative Utopia is a cautionary look at the near future, a signal to us as readers that if society does not change its ways, we are doomed to the future as the author describes it. The “ways” that society must change lest we perish range from scientific, to governmental, to economic, or even cosmetic, depending on the prevailing societal fears at the time that the author is writing. As such, most Negative Utopias tend to be set closer to our own time, or in a place that are almost recognizable as our own.

For example, both Stephen King’s *The Running Man* and Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* happen to take place in the year 2025, both in a fictionalized version of America. King mentions cities like Boston and New York, but his protagonist is from the fictional Co-Op City. *Oryx and Crake* is set in New New York, which was formed after the coastlines were washed away, taking the original New York with them (Atwood). This places them in a genre that I would define as “Dystopian present”; that is, a universe that is parallel to our own, in the not too distant future. Dystopian present works do away with ideas of space travel and do not vault the reader hundreds or thousands of years into the future, merely a few decades. These settings read as being closer to our current reality, as though they could happen tomorrow.

Conversely, Anti-Utopias tend to be flung far into the future, or set on another planet entirely. The worlds are a reflection of our own, but a distorted one; there are sometimes incredibly advanced technologies or creatures not yet known to our world that, stylistically speaking, set the world further apart from ours than a Negative Utopia. This stylistic choice makes perfect sense, as a utopia must first be created in order to fail, thus making the story an Anti-Utopia.

While Anti-Utopias explore what may happen in a few centuries time, Negative Utopias closely examine our fears and trepidations about our society as it currently stands. While Anti-Utopias suggest that a worse future will happen if society attempts to make a Utopia and fails, Negative Utopias focus on what society is doing already to drive itself towards a bleak future. As such, Negative Utopias “reflects the fear that things might get much worse” (Claeys and Sargent 5). In the case of *The Running Man*, King looks at the concern of an overreaching government and a vast power imbalance between the upper class and lower class. Miller, through his *Mad Max* films, most especially *Fury Road*, takes a more ecological standpoint; what will happen when we mismanage our resources to the point where these resources run out? Both works highlight the fear that the established nation-state is not the right kind of community; it is not a community worth living in or dying for. Instead it is something to fight against, to rework until a proper working community is formed. These Negative Utopias are consequences of our own actions as a society; they are a fear that if we do not stop and change the way in which society works as soon as possible, this is our future.

## THE RUNNING MAN

While Stephen King is known mostly for his horror novels and terrifying short stories, he has also written several Dystopian works. In *The Running Man* and his other Dystopian novels, "... King both employed and modified the dystopian convention of using a dialogue between the protagonist and a member of the ruling elite to demystify and interrogate structures of power" (Texter 43). This is vital to the breaking down of a Dystopian regime because it begins to equalize those in power and those without it. By crossing what is an impenetrable barrier in most Dystopian novels, such as *We* or *Nineteen Eight-Four*, King has his characters begin to subvert the perceived touchability of the leaders of his Dystopias. While these leaders seem unreachable, they are not invulnerable. With many of these rulers, such as The Benefactor in *We*, there appears to be some sort of metaphorical force field separating them from the rest of the nation over which they rule. By having his protagonists reach through this barrier, King proves that these Dystopian leaders *can* be reached, and therefore destroyed.

This is shown especially well in his novel, *The Running Man*. Douglas W. Texter provides us with a perfect summary of the plot in his article, "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Dystopia: The Culture Industry's Neutralization of Stephen King's The Running Man" :

The plot of *The Running Man* is simple. Ben Richards, a twenty-eight-year-old unemployed "wiper" for General Atomics, needs to buy medicine for his infant daughter, Cathy, who is dying of the flu. Richards' wife, Sheila, works as a prostitute in order to feed the family. Richards cannot find employment because

GA has blacklisted him for insubordination. Desperate to save his daughter and not wanting his wife to continue to turn tricks, Richards auditions as a contestant/victim on one of the reality television shows produced by the Games Commission for broadcast on the Free-Vee Network. (45)

If this plot sounds oddly familiar, similar themes can be found in Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* trilogy, though the victims of the games in those novels are not always voluntary. Clearly, there is something about the idea of pain for public entertainment that resonates with writers of Dystopian literature.

In *The Running Man*, the poor who are considered otherwise unemployable must make their money in other ways. Some turn to prostitution, like Richards' wife. Others volunteer themselves for various games available to watch on the Free-Vee network, a government mandated television installed in every home, which must be turned on twenty-four hours a day. There are the unexplained but horrifying sounding *Fun Guns*, *Swim the Crocodiles*, *How Hot Can You Take It*, or *Dig Your Grave*. The readers do get an explanation of the game *Treadmills to Bucks*: a contestant with heart, liver, or lung problems would be forced to run on a treadmill and be asked trivia questions every two minutes. For every minute they ran they received ten dollars, every question answered correctly earned fifty dollars, and fifty dollars is deducted for every question answered incorrectly. The game ends when the contestant is no longer able to compete (King). The most popular, which means of course the most dangerous, is *The Running Man*.

If a contestant is chosen for *The Running Man*, as Richards is, he must survive one month hunted by government hired hitmen, bounty hunters, and citizens alike. For

every hour he survives, his family is given one hundred dollars. For each policeman or hitman he kills, he is rewarded an additional hundred dollars. If he survives the entire month, he receives a grand prize total of one billion dollars. The contestant is given a twelve hour head start, \$4800 in pocket money, and a handheld video camera with which he must make regular tapes to send in to the station. Citizens are rewarded if they send in a report that leads to the contestant's capture. This is the world in which Ben Richards lives, where people are encouraged to turn on each other for government sanctioned paychecks.

The United States as presented in *The Running Man* is meant to be a reflection of our own; the wealthy run the government, the middle class live comfortably enough, the poor lower class struggles for every dollar they earn, and air pollution is slowly killing us all. Free-Vee, the government mandated television programming, is used as a tool to spread propaganda and a means of controlling the masses. While there is a clear line dividing each class with the unspoken law that this line is not to be crossed, the destitute conditions of the lower classes force them to fight amongst each other as well. It pits neighbor against neighbor, quite literally, as one of the ladies in Richards' building is constantly threatening to turn Sheila Richards over to the police for prostitution. It is this distinct lack of kinship that makes what Richards achieves by the end of the novel so improbable and so magnificent.

Ben Richards, our protagonist, begins the novel a mostly solitary man. He has his wife and daughter, but that is the only community he has around him. And yet when he is chosen to be The Running Man, he is forced to form bonds and alliances in what is

literally a live or die situation. The leader of the Games Commission, Killian, gives him a piece of advice before the game begins: “And stay close to your own people. ... Not these good middle-class folks out there [in the audience]; they hate your guts” (King 74). Which is true; the negative propaganda the Games Commission puts out about Richards turns the general population against him, as well as offering rewards for his capture. It is this situation that makes it vital that Richards forms a community of his own.

While he spends part of the game trying to get by on his own terms, this method is far from successful. Within the first few days, a black market salesmen from whom he buys supplies alerts the police to Richards’ location. He is nearly caught several times despite being in disguise, and then is forced to burn down the YMCA for fear of being captured by the hitmen who have discovered his location. After he is resigned to being caught, he finds help in unlikely places. He meets a young boy named Stacey quite by accident, while attempting to find shelter after setting fire to the YMCA (118). Stacey originally helps Richards for the fee of three dollars to buy medicine for his little sister, but even after he and his older brother Bradley discover who Richards really is, he brings him into his home and gives him food and shelter.

These are what Killian, the head of the Games Network, had referred to as Richards’s “own people” (King 74); Stacey and Bradley are, like Richards, lower class. As Texter points out, “... [King’s] United States at the end of the first quarter of the twenty-first century is sharply divided along a suburban-bourgeois/urban lumpen-proletariat fault line” (45). That is to say, the wealthy and even the middle class are not to be trusted, not by the lower class to which Richards and Bradley belong. To Richards, it

makes sense to trust Stacey and Bradley because they are in similar positions. They have sick little girls they need to support, and they have no reason to put faith in a government system which allows such things to happen. It is not the fact that they both belong to the lower class that brings them together, but their situations and the hardships they face that help them to bond.

Almost immediately, Bradley begins coming up with plans to help Richards stay on the run. Richards is required to mail in two tapes of himself to the Games Commission by midnight each day, or else he is disqualified. This means that it is very easy for someone to track him through the post, but Bradley offers to have the tapes sent to him, and he will send them in, making it look like Richards is staying in one place (King 149). Additionally, Bradley arranges a car for them, even donning a disguise himself to drive them across state lines (King 140), giving Richards the address of a friend who will hide him once he reaches his destination.

At first Richards thinks Bradley is doing this for money, which Richards tries to give him, only to be refused.

"Then why?" Richards asked flatly. "Why are you doing so much? I can understand you hiding me out. I'd do that." ...

"If we doan stick out our necks for our own, they got us." (King 150)

Despite everything, despite all the risks he is clearly taking, Bradley is willing to help Richards because they come from the same community. Bradley and Richards have formed a bond through their shared adversity.

Though Richards had originally entered the game to take care of his wife and daughter, his attitude and goals both change drastically as Richards nears the end of his race. In a moment of quiet reflection, he realizes that:

... an unwilling change had come over him during his five days on the run.

Bradley had done it – Bradley and the little girl. There was no longer just himself, a lone man fighting for his family, bound to be cut down. Now there were all of them out there, strangling on their own respiration – his family included (153) Because of Bradley's kindness, Richards attempts to speak out against the pollution that is choking the lower classes, only to be silenced by clever media editing on the part of the Games Commission. In his required videos, Richards reads statistics about air pollution and encourages people to go to their local libraries to learn more about what the government is hiding from them. However, the Games Commission censors these tapes, dubbing Richards' message with violent hate speech instead. Nevertheless, the effort was made, and Richards' perspective changes going forward. It is perhaps also because of this change that Richards reaches out to someone outside of his originally perceived community.

Originally, Richards hijacks the car of middle-class housewife Amelia Williams out of necessity (King 201). However, during their harrowing cross country road trip, followed relentlessly by both police and bounty hunters, they form a kind of bond. Richards has several chances to kill Amelia, and does not take them. Likewise, Amelia has several chances to betray Richards, and does not take them. In the end, the authorities have to drug Amelia to get her to admit anything (King 249). There is even

something of a touching moment between them, while they are on the airplane that Richards hijacks: "He suddenly realized that Amelia Williams was holding on to his shoulder with both hands. ... *Dear God, she's never flown either!*" (King 261-2). Here, in a moment of fear, Amelia reaches out to Richards for comfort.

This is vital to Richards' expansion of his community, since he has now crossed class boundaries, something he had previously been warned not to do. This shift defies established though unspoken rules about what can and cannot be a community within the world of *The Running Man*. The government, through Free-Vee propaganda that enforces a steep division between the classes, had managed to keep the classes from interacting with each other. This propaganda created prejudices between the lower and middle classes to perpetuate a false animosity, to keep them from banding together against the upper classes. By simply interacting with a member of the middle class, Richards throws this entire system off balance.

While his connection with Bradley's family is important, Richards's relationship with Amelia is revolutionary. Anderson's reference to theorist Ernest Gallner points to this exact phenomenon: "Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it *invents* nations where they do not exist" (qtd in Anderson 6). In other words, Richards did not suddenly realize he was part of a larger community all along. Rather, he forms communities where they did not exist before, bringing someone from a class that was meant to hate him in a system that is deeply reliant on keeping the classes apart. By doing so, Richards radically alters the entire shape of his world by defying the government-made communities and forming his own that undermine the rules that had

been previously set in places. This defiance is what makes the formations of communities in Dystopian landscapes so vital. It is only by working together with others that Richards is able to begin to change things, perhaps for the better.

Unfortunately, Richards does not live to see his Negative Utopia destroyed, or even witness the beginning of an uprising. After being chased down by bounty hunters with Amelia by his side, Richards manages to secure a small plane and take the lead bounty hunter hostage. Under the ever-present eye of the media, Richards is given an offer: give up and become a bounty hunter, in exchange for being allowed to live. It is revealed to him that his wife and daughter had been killed ten days earlier, which solidifies Richards's decision: he gives Amelia a parachute to save her, and steers the plane into the television network building. This is how the novel ends, "... with an incredibly ghastly scene: an eviscerated protagonist flying an airliner into a high-rise office complex" (Texter 44). And yet, this does not mean there is no hope for Richards' society.

Sometimes death is necessary in order for change to happen: "Yet the deaths that structure the nation's biography are of a special kind ... But to serve the narrative purpose, these violent deaths must be remembered/forgotten as 'our own'" (Anderson, 205-6). Because Richards was willing to sacrifice himself for his newly founded community, it solidifies the bond he has created with Bradley, Amelia, and potentially the community surrounding them. The crash was televised, which means Richards's final act of defiance was seen by the entire nation. Yes, Richards himself died, but he spared Amelia by giving her a parachute before the plane crash, making her a survivor to this

grim tale. Because she witnessed his kindness, it is possible that she will go on to tell his story. It is possible that Bradley will do the same. It is possible that some sort of change will happen. As King states at the very beginning of the novel, “The door at the other end opened (there was *always* a door at the other end...)” (King, 27). This hints at the idea that perhaps Richards’ end was not for nothing.

### **MAD MAX: FURY ROAD**

The latest instalment of the *Mad Max* series, *Fury Road*, begins somewhat in medias res; the viewers are given the causes of an apocalypse in the form of soundbites, taken perhaps from old news reports. This is the only information that is given to explain the catastrophic events that turned the world from the just-barely-Negative Utopian landscape of the original *Mad Max* film, where there was still a functioning government, to the post-apocalyptic wastelands of *Fury Road*. Though it is clear that *something* has happened to “kill the world,” as one of the characters phrases it, the viewers are not given specifics. All that is explained is that several wars happened, one over oil and one over water, and these wars destroyed most of the world’s resources. Water is now scarce, and fresh food and vegetation are practically extinct in these new Wastelands.

Viewers of the *Mad Max* series know that some sort of apocalypse has happened before the start of the series, but we are given few clues as to the cause of it. Some scant details are given at the opening of the film, where Max’s opening monologue is interspersed with overlapping voices.

“Why are you  
hurting these  
people?” “We are killing  
for guzzolene – “ “Our bones are  
poisoned.”

“It’s the Oil Wars  
– “ “The world is  
actually running  
out of water.” “Thermonuclear  
experiments – “

“Guzzolene – “  
“Terminal  
freakout point – “ “The earth has  
gone sour – “

“The Water  
Wars – “  
“Mankind has  
gone rogue,  
terrorizing itself - “ “We have  
become halflife.”  
stupid.” (Miller)

These small pieces of information come together to become a half-formed picture of events: the Oil and Water wars pitted people against each other, and they began killing almost indiscriminately. At some point either during or after the wars, a sickness began to spread, the results of which are seen in *Fury Road*. Society as a whole has crumbled, resources have dwindled, and the inhabitants of *Fury Road* are living in the Wastelands, doing their best to survive.

There are still pockets of civilization: GasTown, The Bullet Farm, and The Citadel, all run by the despotic leader Immortan Joe. Joe and The Citadel have the largest source of clean water in this particular area, as well as a greenhouse. When Joe took The Citadel by force after the Oil and Water Wars, he sent out his best men to refurbish an old oil refinery and an abandoned lead mine. These became GasTown, which produced “guzzolene,” and The Bullet Farm which produced ammunition. The Citadel itself was built on top of an aquifer, giving Joe the largest source of clean water in the Wastelands (Miller et al).

Because Joe has the water (or aqua-cola, as it is referred to in the film), he has the power. “I am your redeemer!” declares Immortan Joe from the top of his tower, calling down to the wretched masses below. “It is by my hand you will rise from the ashes of this world!” (Miller) But like so many of the people in this world, Joe himself is sick, propped up by his soldiers and surviving only through a complicated oxygen mask. The first image we see of Joe is of him half collapsed, being maneuvered into his armour by his soldiers and fitted with an oxygen mask that seems to be the only thing keeping him alive. This shows a return to the idea of a sovereign leader. Because Joe controls the water and food sources, he is seen as some sort of god to the people he rules. While Joe’s rule is accepted and he is indeed worshipped and feared, it seems to be mostly due to the support of his personal soldiers and his control over the water, not out of any sort of love or respect. The Citadel is a kingdom, but not a community.

This is further emphasized with the group of soldiers known as The War Boys, who serve as Joe’s personal army. While the War Boys may seem like their own

community, in truth they are a number of single persons who have been pushed together by circumstance. They fight not necessarily for Immortan Joe or even for each other, but for the chance to reach Walhalla. Walhalla is their afterlife, the place that only warriors may reach if they die gloriously in battle. The War Boys are a cult, not a proper community as Anderson defines it, and are only together because their ruling government has forced them to be.

All of the War Boys are sick with whatever cancer inflicts the majority of the population, but to die of their illness would not be a noble death. As Nux, one of the drivers in Joe's army, says, "If I'm going to die, I'm going to die historic, on the Fury Road!" (Miller). The religion of the War Boys refers back to Huxley's Fordism in *A Brave New World*, as both are centred around auto-mechanics. The film shows the War Boys linking their fingers together to form the symbol of a V8 engine, praying, "By my deeds I honour him, V8" (Miller), much like Huxley's giant T in place of a cross. Again, this harkens back to the idea of a sovereign nation-state, something that needs to be broken away from if a proper community is to be established. Like Fordism, this religion is a means of controlling the War Boys. It gives them something to focus on that is not rebellion.

This is the "nation" to which the viewer is first introduced: a collective of single people centred on an old and infirm leader who only holds power due to his control of the water, and to the loyalty of his War Boys. This loyalty, however, is based solely on the idea that by fighting for Immortan Joe, they will make it to their glorious afterlife,

“McFeasting with the heroes of [their] time” (Miller). For this chance at eternal glory, they are willing to fight and die.

It is these War Boys who kidnap Max at the beginning of the film. When we first meet Max in *Fury Road*, he is feral. His family, his wife and young son, were killed by a rogue gang. He has been wandering the wastelands for an undefined amount of time. Contrary to the earlier films, where he often gives lengthy speeches, Max barely speaks here. He is kidnapped by scavengers and everything he has left is taken from him; his car and his jacket, which are his only remaining possessions. He is reduced to something less than human, harvested for blood to give to the cancer-ridden War Boys.

When the War Boys are called to war, Max is strapped to the hood of a car and brought with them, like a living IV stand. He is even referred to by the name “Blood Bag” by Nux, the War Boy he was given to. It is during the battle that he is able to escape, forcing Nux to go with him, as they are chained together. Here he meets Furiosa, a high ranking official in Joe’s army. Furiosa has orchestrated the escape of Joe’s many Wives, who wish to be free of the Citadel and the oppression they face there. Through Furiosa and The Wives, we meet our first true community as Anderson defines it. It is a kinship, a found and formed family rather than a group of individuals. It is this family that Max eventually finds himself joining, fighting, and ultimately is willing to sacrifice himself for.

While their initial bond is undeniably a shaky one at best, Max joins their band in search of what they call The Green Place. For them, this is a place of hope, where their lives will be better. Max refuses to give anyone in the group his name, determined only to ride with them to find his own freedom, and is given the name Fool by Furiosa, which

serves as a kind of induction ceremony. Despite this, Furiosa accepts him into their group, trusting him with helping with a vital part of their mission. This trust is not fully returned until later, when Max turns over his weapons to let Furiosa take over a shot, knowing by now that she is more experienced in weaponry than he is.

Eventually, the War Boy Nux abandons his army and joins them as well, seeing that what this group, this new found family is striving for is better than what Joe has to offer. During the fight to bring back The Wives, Nux nearly dies three times, but manages to survive each time. He takes this as a sign that he is not yet wanted at Walhalla, and he has failed somehow. One of The Wives, Capable, assures him that it means he is meant for greater things, which causes a shift in Nux's view of the world, and more importantly, in his loyalties. Unlike what he was with the War Boys, Nux is now truly part of a community.

Over the course of mission, we see Max begin to come out of his feral state and become a member of the community which is comprised of Furiosa, The Wives, and now Nux. Max even makes a dangerous mission out into the battlefield to collect more weapons, more ammunition, and new shoes for Nux. This is his first truly selfless act, something that is done for the betterment of the entire community and not only for himself. Although the collection of the weapons and ammunition was necessary in order for the group to move forward, there was no reason for Max to waste his time to look for shoes. It is an act of sacrifice, risking his life to make a member of his community more comfortable. This shows that he cares not just for the war being fought, but for the people in it.

Though The Green Place no longer exists, the all-female society that lives there, the Vuvalini, are still alive. However, this group of women have no desire to do anything but live out the rest of their lives in the Wastelands, away from men. The Vuvalini know Furiosa, since she had lived with them as a child. Because of their connection to Furiosa, they agree to join the rest of the group, merging two established communities together to form a larger, stronger one. This merger is critical, as it brings together two groups of people who have opposite ideals. While the Vuvalini are warrior women, they only fight those who attack them first. They are content to live peacefully away from The Citadel. Furiosa, The Wives, Max, and Nux had all fought hard to achieve their freedom before realizing that there was no true freedom to be found in the Wastelands. They are not ready to accept their circumstances, as the Vuvalini have. Despite these differences, both groups form a “deep, horizontal comradeship” (Anderson 7). They are not merely *imagining* their community, but living it in a very tangible way.

Together, they decide to take the Citadel for themselves. This plan, proposed by Max, is accepted by the rest of the community almost immediately, showing that he has been taken in and become part of this odd little family. Nux even says, “It feels like hope” (Miller). However, it is not until during the heat of the battle, when Max finally reveals his name to the group, that he accepts them in return. This reveal happens as Furiosa lies dying in Max’s arms. Without showing any sort of hesitation, Max gives her his blood in a risky transfusion, saving her life. Again, he shows the willingness to sacrifice himself for the people in his community.

Before this moment, Max had been almost feral. The years of surviving on his own had stripped his humanity from him, leaving him a shell of a man who barely remembers his own name. Max has very little dialogue in *Fury Road*, a stark contrast from his first appearance in the 1979 film. In the first film, Max is eloquent, often giving near-Shakespearean speeches. The transformation from this to a man who speaks mainly in grunts and single word sentences is evidence of too many years spent alone. Joining this community restores Max's humanity, and makes him whole again.

The battle is harsh, and not everyone survives. But many of the Wives still live, as do Furiosa and some of the Vuvalini. Max survives, as he has always done, but this time he has potentially found a place where he belongs. The change will take time, as there are still those at the Citadel loyal to Joe, but in the final few minutes of the movie we see that there are so many more who are happy to be free of his control. Our final shot of Max is of him standing at the edges of the crowd, facing the wastelands. This leaves Max's decision open-ended: either he can return to his life on the road, or he can stay and remain with his new family at the Citadel. The choice is left to the viewers just as much as it is left to Max.

#### **TEXTUAL PARALLELS**

Ben Richards begins his story living only for his immediate family, his wife and sick daughter. Throughout the game, he makes connections with another family from similar circumstances. Bradley and his family open his eyes to larger problems in the country, such as the pollution that is killing the lower class, and Richards's community expands to include the people affected by this plight. He starts using his media influence

to try and make major changes in the country. Not only that, but he crosses class lines and brings Amelia into his community. By extension, this new community could include anyone Amelia shares Richards's story with. In the end, Richards causes a cataclysmic event that could hopefully startle the world into re-forming into a better version of itself.

This brings us, next, to Max. It is from *Fury Road* that I draw my title. During his journey, Max tells one of the other members of his newly formed community, "Hope is a mistake, you know." But we see throughout his narrative that this is not true in the least. When Max begins his journey, he is solitary. Whereas Richards has only his wife and daughter to think about at the beginning of his arc, Max's world centers around the fact that he has lost his wife and son. Over the course of the film, he slowly earns the trust of Furiosa, who founded the community of The Wives. By earning Furiosa's trust, Max is allowed to enter this community, and this allowance forces him to reformulate his entire outlook on life. He stops caring only about his own survival and begins caring for the group as a whole.

Nux may seem like an outlier, since he began his story arc already in a kind of community. However, as previously stated, the War Boys were not any real sort of community but rather a group of people fighting for themselves. There is no real bond that exists between the members of the cult, unlike the bond between the members of the community that forms around Furiosa. As a solitary character fighting for himself, Nux tries and fails three times to reach his promised land. Once he joins the community of Furiosa, The Wives, Max, and the Vuvalini, he has a proper community to fight for. In

the end, he sacrifices himself in battle for his newfound family. His death is witnessed, as his religion dictates, which implies that he is finally able to reach Walhalla.

The protagonists of *Mad Max: Fury Road* are searching for a better life outside of the oppression they experience. “Whatever happens,” says Toast, one of the women in the group, “We’re going to The Green Place” (Miller). While they are not able to find the original place they were searching for, they are able to make their own Green Place in the end by reclaiming The Citadel for themselves and the oppressed people there.

In both works, the protagonists are able to band together and form a community that, it is implied, will eventually overcome the hardships of their respective Negative Utopian settings. They make increasingly self-sacrificing gestures towards the compatriots they have gathered along the way to not simply prove their loyalty to their new community, but to learn what a *true* community is. As Anderson says, it is because of this comradery that Richards, Max, and Nux are “*willingly to die* for such limited imaginings” (7).

## CONCLUSION

Both *The Running Man* and *Mad Max: Fury Road* end somewhat ambiguously. While there is no evidence of immediate change to the Negative Utopian environment, there is the promise of change to come at some point in the future. *The Running Man’s* climax seems very bleak on the surface. The protagonist dies in a fiery crash, taking dozens, possibly hundreds of people down with him. The readers are not allowed to see the rebuilding of society after such a catastrophic event. Instead, the ending is left up to

the readers to decide, which is what makes the ending ambiguous. The readers can choose to find hope in it, if they so wish.

In an interview about *Mad Max: Fury Road*, director George Miller describes Max as: “The trapped, wild animal in the story. He’s not ready yet. [...] The man who said hope is a mistake, he’s given them and her [Furiosa] hope, but it’s not for him” (Hewett). In the original script as Miller wrote it, Max was meant to join Furiosa and the others at the top of the Citadel. This, however, felt wrong to both Tom Hardy, who played Max, and Miller as the scene was filmed. As Miller says, Max is not yet ready for life at the Citadel. He points out that the movie takes place over three days, and while Max has evolved enormously as a character, his past as an almost feral creature is not very far behind him. Therefore, while he can give hope to the rest of his community, he is unable to accept it himself yet. It is the “yet” that Miller uses which makes the ending ambiguous, hinting at the possibility for Max to return to the Citadel some day.

I believe that this hope is necessary to have a functional Negative Utopian work. That is to say, a Negative Utopia that works in a way that gives readers the possibility of a better world beyond the uncertainty they are currently experiencing. As Thomas Moylan states in his book *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*, “... some [Negative Utopian texts] affiliate with a utopian tendency as they maintain a horizon of hope (or at least invite readers that do) ... ” (147). To expand this idea further, allow me to propose the following: readers and viewers flock to Dystopias *because* of these ambiguously hopeful endings. We as a society crave this hope to bring us through our own dark times. In other words:

Instead of providing some compensatory and comforting conclusion, the critical dystopia's open ending leaves its characters to deal with their choices and responsibilities. [...] We need to pass through the critical dystopias of today to move toward a horizon of hope. (Baccolini 521).

It is this ambiguity that serves to make us as readers and consumers of this genre *more* hopeful. The ambiguity allows us to imagine what happens beyond the last page of the novel, or the last frame of the film.

Troy Bordun takes exception with this ambiguity, specifically in Mad Max. He calls Furiosa's takeover of the Citadel "unquestioned" (77) despite the fact that we see, at most, the first five minutes of her return to take Joe's place. Bordun also makes claims that the Citadel's "supply of H2O [...] may not last through the following the month" (77). Again, there is no *canonical evidence* from the film that supports this theory, other than the words of a vastly untrustworthy dictator. "Do not, my friends," Immortan Joe states at the beginning of the film, "become addicted to water. It will take hold of you, and you will resent its absence!" (Miller). However, this statement means next to nothing coming from the man who wields his control over the water supply to give himself more power.

Finally, Bordun's main point of contention with the open ending of the film is political: "The people celebrate their mutual confusion about the enclave's economic and political system. [...] If citizens cannot understand their political system, and are still aroused by the power of their celebrity leaders, there is little hope for a just and ethical society" (78). It is no surprise that they have not yet made a plan for a new political and

economic system; the scene Bordun describes takes place in the last two and a half minutes of the film. The movie does not show Furiosa being “accepted,” merely returning triumphant after having killed the former dictator of the Citadel. The movie ends on the image of Furiosa releasing the water to the masses, which is all that is required for the viewers to see that this is a new era of leadership. If viewers are bogged down in political and economic planning, the message gets overlooked and the purpose of the work is rendered defunct.

While the results of Furiosa’s rule are not included in the film, what *is* seen is her offering of water to the people. This, and what is seen of her character throughout the film, are enough to imply that Furiosa will be a kind and generous leader. Yes, Richards crashed his plane into The Games Commission office building, but this may well be the cataclysmic event needed to forcefully reboot the entire way the government operates in his world. Although the effects of Richards’s sacrifice are not immediately obvious, the reader is able to imagine for themselves what sort of future might come of such a brave act. Because of this open-endedness, readers are able to project their own ideas onto the works, deciding for themselves what they want the new future to look like.

A central part of this hope is the concept of community. As I explored in the first chapter, when a protagonist rejects the idea of community, nothing is changed. It is only through the banding together of often unlikely groups of people that the overturning of the status-quo is possible. There is strength in numbers, and it is through the power of a community effort that change, even revolution is possible within these Negative Utopian landscapes.

## CHAPTER III

### ANTI-UTOPIAS

#### INTRODUCTION

The subgenre of Negative Utopia highlights society's mistakes, the details of which are chosen by the respective authors, by showing a world that could happen if these mistakes are not rectified. Contrarily, Anti-Utopia shows the reader a world made worse by changes that are too extreme. For the most part, as with authors such as Zamyatan, Huxley, and Orwell, the Anti-Utopia focuses on too much control being given to the government, resulting in an overpowerful nation-state that dictates the minutiae in the lives of its citizens. We see this also in Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* trilogy, and David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*. In these scenarios, the government is given all the power, and the society in each story is relatively helpless to the demands of the powers in control. This results in discontentment in the members of the society often leading to a revolution. Whether or not the revolution succeeds depends on the strength of the bond of the society involved.

In these Anti-Utopias, there usually has not been a worldwide apocalyptic event destroying society, as with some Dystopias. There is, however, a significant power imbalance, as Claeys and Sargent point out: "Somewhat more precise, thus, is the description of dystopia as 'a utopia that has gone wrong, or a utopia that functions only for a particular segment of society' "(3). This means that the attempted Utopia seen in the story has worked out rather well for those who have formed it and remain in charge.

However, due to the tyrannical rulings of those in power, the rest of society is not quite so lucky; the rich get richer, and the poor must survive on whatever remains.

Alternately, those in the ruling government have all the power while the average citizen is vastly oppressed. In both instances, there is a massive imbalance. Whereas Dystopias focus on the idea of what devastation may occur if society does nothing to change, Anti-Utopias address the fear of what happens when there is too much change.

To fully explore Anti-Utopias, it might be prudent to return to the idea of what a Utopia is. A look at Suvin's definition of Utopia will help to produce a better picture of Anti-Utopia: "*...the presence of a particular quasi-human community where socio-political institutions, norms, and individual relationships are organized on a more perfect principle than in the author's community...*" (*Positions and Presupposition* 35). His definition of an Anti-Utopia, then, builds off of this original definition.

Anti-utopias can, of course, be obtained from the above definition simply by changing 'a more perfect principle' into 'a less perfect principle' – and making a community claim to have reached perfection is in the industrial and post-industrial dynamics of society the surefire way to present us a radically less perfect state (*Positions and Presuppositions* 36)

Although both Dystopias and Anti-Utopias present a "less perfect principle," as Suvin phrases it, they do so in different manners. Dystopias show it through exaggerating the specific worries of the author, whether it be corporations, the environment, or health concerns. Anti-Utopias focus mainly on the systems of organization, such as the government or big corporations, and the fear that they will become too powerful.

After all, “Big Brother Is Watching” has become a part of the vernacular since the Orwell published *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Sales of the book have risen dramatically over the past year, reflecting a current global fear of inflated, misused government power in this age of “alternative facts” (Neary). In her *Hunger Games* trilogy, Suzanne Collins addresses the concern of the government becoming too far reaching. Her world of Panem, a fictionalized future version of the United States, is ruled over by President Snow in the Capitol. The citizens of Panem live in fear of Snow and his apparent omniscience, his almost god-like rule over the country that demands the sacrifice of two citizens from every district each year for the annual Hunger Games (Collins). David Mitchell shows the dangers of big corporations through Sonmi~451’s story in *Cloud Atlas*. The story takes place in Neo Seoul, a major city in distant future where Korea has been unified. Each citizen has a minimum amount of money they are meant to spend in this new hypercapitalistic world of consumerism taken to the extreme (Mitchell). Both texts show different aspects of the concerns that Anti-Utopias address with regards to systems of organization taken too far.

## THE HUNGER GAMES

Collins’s trilogy, comprised of *Hunger Games*, *Catching Fire*, and *Mockingjay*, presents multiple aspects of an Anti-Utopia. In the first novel, readers see the devastation in which the average citizen of Panem lives. We learn the terror of the titular Hunger Games, in which children are made to fight for their lives for the entertainment of the Capitol, the ruling power. Each district is surrounded by electrified fences, making escape next to impossible. In *Catching Fire*, we see the Capitol itself,

which is a stark difference from the living conditions of the average citizen. Food appears at the press of the button, and fashion seems to be at the forefront of everyone's minds. The Capitol lives in luxury at the expense of the other districts of Panem. Lastly, in the last half of *Catching Fire* and the whole of *Mockingjay*, Collins shows us what is necessary to overthrow such a powerful regime, and the sacrifices that must be made to do so.

The first novel opens on the day of the reaping, the random choosing of which boy and girl from each district are to compete in the Hunger Games. It is here that the readers learn the history of Panem, and why the Hunger Games were brought about. Panem began as North America as we know it today, but a long string of natural disasters left the continent with few remaining resources. Wars were started over the last of the natural resources, and from these wars Panem was created, with the Capitol at the center of thirteen districts. Each district has a specialized export. For instance, the main sources of food are Districts 4, 9, 10, and 11 which provide fish, grain, meat, and other agricultural items, respectively. District 12 is a coal mining district, District 7 manufactures lumber, and so on and so forth.

The creation and division of the districts in Panem is very deliberate on the part of the Capitol. All resources go to the government, and the government distributes them as it deems necessary. Each district has an assigned task, a designated area of expertise, which minimizes the need for communication between the districts. This allows the Capitol to control the districts strictly, forming their communities for them. It takes away the possibility for individual expression as much as possible; citizens are fishermen, or

coal miners, or lumberjacks, and nothing more. Communication between districts is prevented by the Capitol. This goes back to the classic Dystopian tradition of the government dehumanizing citizens to keep them in line.

After a brief era of peace, the districts attempted to rebel against the Capitol, but twelve were quickly defeated. The thirteenth, which produced nuclear weapons, was destroyed completely. The Treaty of Treason was formed to guarantee peace among the districts. This also resulted in the Hunger Games, a yearly reminder that rebellion must never be attempted again. Each of the districts must present two tributes, one girl and one boy, to fight to the death in the Games. The event is televised, and mandatory for every citizen to watch (Collins). The action of forcing the population to watch as their children die is yet another means by which the Capitol keeps their control over the people of Panem.

The names are drawn at random at the reaping. Every year starting at the age of twelve, each child's name is entered into the bowl. This means that the older the child is, the more times their name is in the bowl. Children also have the option of entering their names multiple times to obtain extra food and resources for their family. The last child standing wins (Collins). This is a clear exploitation of the underprivileged classes by the government. Not only does each district lose two children every year, the lack of basic necessities forces these children to essentially barter their lives to provide food for their families.

Despite having witnessed the atrocities of the Capitol's rule, the protagonist, Katniss, is more or less accepting of the way things are. She is aware that the system is deeply flawed, and muses at the beginning of the series:

Taking the kids from our districts, forcing them to kill one another while we watch — this is the Capitol's way of reminding us how totally we are at their mercy. How little chance we would stand of surviving another rebellion. Whatever words they use, the real message is clear. "Look how we take your children and sacrifice them and there's nothing you can do. If you lift a finger, we will destroy every last one of you. Just as we did in District Thirteen." (*The Hunger Games* 19)

Although she is by no means blind to the barbaric nature of the Capitol or the Games, she has also seen what happens when one tries to go against the system. While out hunting, Katniss witnesses two teenagers attempting to escape the district. Almost immediately, they are captured by the Capitol and taken away (Collins). Even though her longtime friend Gale suggests running away and finding a life away from the district, she dismisses the idea as impossible. Gale's offer has romantic undertones, the suggestion that the two of them might run away somewhere and begin their lives together as a couple. She rejects this possibility of romance and of community out of an instinct of self-preservation. From the beginning of the series, Katniss is determined to simply survive and attempt to keep her family alive.

Like Ben Richards or Max Rockatansky, Katniss is satisfied with staying alive and not much more. The Capitol has told her she need not concern herself with anyone

outside of her own district, or even those within her district, and so she does not. That is, however, until her younger sister Prim's name is pulled during the reaping. Immediately, Katniss volunteers herself in her sister's place. She and the boy chosen as tribute, Peeta Mellark, are quickly taken away to the Capitol to be prepared for the Games. At the Capitol, they will receive training in various forms of combat, be given brand new haircuts and clothing, and be subjected to interview after interview. After all that is finished, they will be sent into the arena to fight. In essence, they are not only being prepared to become public spectacles, but also being groomed for death.

The journey to the Capitol allows Katniss to see what lies beyond District Twelve. Per the Capitol's laws, districts are not allowed to communicate with each other. This is to prevent any chance of districts coming together to form a rebellion. This specific type of separation is explained as follows in *The Utopia Reader*, "It is also helpful to stress that many Dystopias can be conceived as portrayals of societies where individuals are alienated from each other and destroy 'society' by undermining institutions of mutual support" (Claeys and Sargent 4). Although Katniss is aware of the segregation, because it had been put in place long before she was born, it is simply another part of her life. She and the other citizens of Panem seem to follow this law strictly, as no communication between the districts is mentioned. Additionally, it is clear from Katniss's uncaring attitude towards anyone besides her immediate family unit that this strategy has worked; everyone keeps to their own business, and no anti-Capitol talk spreads outside of the districts.

She even refuses to bond with her fellow tribute, Peeta, since she will still have to kill him in the end. Katniss explains, "Kind people have a way of working their way inside me and rooting there. And I can't let Peeta do this. Not where we're going. So I decide, from this moment on, to have as little as possible to do with the baker's son" (*The Hunger Games* 49). Both the Capitol and Peeta attempt to form their own narratives for her; Peeta announces during a live interview that he is in love with Katniss, and the Capitol begins pushing a star-crossed lovers story, manufactured to garner attention and sympathy from the public. Katniss does not fall into step with this comradeship that is being forced on her. As with Gale, she does not see a point in making alliances when they could so easily be broken. Instead, she is determined to endure the entire ordeal on her own.

This plan starts to crumble when she meets Rue during training. Rue is a twelve-year-old from District 11 who reminds Katniss of Prim. Although Katniss eventually becomes the figurehead of the rebellion, the revolution begins with Rue. Rue is the same age as Prim, the sister Katniss left at home, the sister that Katniss is fighting in place of in the Games. It is because of the similarities between Prim and Rue that Katniss is drawn to Rue. She forms an alliance with the younger girl, and they help each other survive for several days. For the first time, Katniss herself attempts to initiate the formation of a community. More importantly, she does so not to save herself, but to save someone else. Alliances are encouraged during the Games, though they come with the knowledge that you will eventually have to kill the other members. This is not what

happens with Katniss and Rue. Instead, when Rue is struck down, Katniss holds a funeral for her.

She does this with the awareness that the Games are televised, and her funeral will be seen by not only all twelve districts, but also The Capitol. A funeral is unheard of in the games, and Katniss buries Rue in flowers as an act of defiance:

I can't stop looking at Rue, smaller than ever, a baby animal curled up in a nest of netting. I can't bring myself to leave her like this. Past harm, but seeming utterly defenseless. To hate the boy from District 1 [who killed Rue], who also appears so vulnerable in death, seems inadequate. It's the Capitol I hate, for doing this to all of us. [...] I want to do something, right here, right now, to shame them, to make them accountable... (*The Hunger Games* 236-7)

It is clear that it is not the fault of the boy from District 1 that Rue is dead. After all, he is only a boy, and it was not his choice to be in the Games. He was only trying to survive as best as he could. It is the fault of the Capitol for sending these children out to kill each other for the entertainment of the Capitol.

Later during the Games, another girl has Katniss pinned down and is about to kill her, but her life is saved thanks to the boy from District 11, Thresh, who had come with Rue. He states, in no uncertain terms, that this act was because of what Katniss had done for Rue, and not simply for Katniss. Her act of giving Rue a proper burial had positive repercussions, earning her at least a small bit of trust with one other tribute. With this action, a small community begins to form around Katniss. This memorial to

Rue continues on into *Catching Fire*, when Peeta paints Rue's funeral scene during training as a sign of protest to the Games.

With regards to Peeta, Katniss's eventual alliance with him begins reluctantly. Eventually, she finds him injured and at the brink of death. Because her mother was a healer, Katniss tries to fix Peeta's injuries, and decides to nurse him back to health. It is during these days of hiding and recovery that their bond begins to form. This would not have been possible without Katniss having first opened herself up to the idea of community with Rue. She had seen Peeta earlier in the Games, but had hid from him rather than attempting to make contact. However, her bond with Rue was so deep and profound that it allowed her to consider the possibility of forming a friendship with Peeta, as well.

The Capitol sees this bond and decides to change the rules for the extra entertainment value: two people can win the Games, so long as they are from the same district. This is to continue the story of Katniss and Peeta being star-crossed lovers, to further impose this imagined amorous connection onto them. Again, Katniss rejects the Capitol's version of Peeta and her's relationship, forming a friendship with him on her own terms. As with Rue, Katniss rebels against the government's idea of alliances and forms her communities with whom she wishes, in the way that she wishes. At the end of the Games, it comes down to Katniss and Peeta, who think they have won. The Capitol decides to revert back to the old rules, since they have the power to do so. Tired of being victims of the Capitol and wanting to save them both, Katniss suggests she and Peeta eat a handful of poison berries together. By *both* of them choosing to die by their

own hands, they are rebelling against the unfair systems put in place. They are not dying for the Capitol, but for each other.

The Capitol does spare both of them, only to drag them back into the Games again the next year. In *Catching Fire*, the 75<sup>th</sup> Annual Games take place, which means it is a special anniversary with special rules for the Games. These rules mean that only previous winners of the Games can participate, which bring Katniss and Peeta back to the arena. Before the 75<sup>th</sup> Games begin, however, Katniss and Peeta must tour the districts as victors of the previous games.

When they reach District 11 they make a public address to the citizens of the district, and both of them talk about how important Rue was to the two of them, going off of the Capitol's script for their tour speech. In response, an older man whistles to them, using the same tune that Rue and Katniss had used to signal to each other. The entire crowd presses three fingers to their lips, then raises their hands in salute, a gesture used in District 12 that Katniss had taught Rue: "It means thanks, it means admiration, it means good-bye to someone you love" (*The Hunger Games* 24). Because of this act of rebellion, the old man is killed, and Katniss sees for the first time what consequences her actions have. Because she was in the midst of the Games, she was unable to see any reactions, either from the districts or the Capitol, towards her acts of rebellion. Now, however, she can see that she has inadvertently begun a small but fierce revolution.

After the victor's tour, it is time to prepare for the Games once more. This time, when Katniss and Peeta reach the Capitol, they immediately start assessing their

competitors for potential alliances. Because of Rue, and because of the bond they formed in their first round of the Games, they realize that surrounding themselves with community is the only way to survive. They join forces with Finnick Odair and Mags from District 4, Johanna Mason from District 7, and Beetee and Wiress from District 3. Mags had sacrificed herself when Annie, a young woman with whom Finnick was in love, was chosen in the reaping. Instead of forcing Annie to endure the games for the second time, Mags willingly volunteers in her place. This shows that she had already formed a community among the victors in her own district, and chose to extend this bond towards the other members of her new community in the Games.

During the Games, when both Peeta and Mags are injured by a poisonous fog and must be helped through the landscape, Mags sacrifices herself by staying behind to allow Peeta to be saved. Even in the short time that they are together, they are able to form enough of a comradeship that Mags is willing to give her own life to save Peeta and the rest of her community. They all come from similar circumstances, in that this is their second time in the Games, but their bond goes deeper than that. They take turns standing guard, share knowledge of the arena as it is acquired, and show themselves to be willing to sacrifice their lives to save another member of their group.

By a twist of fate and some careful planning of their coach, the tributes that Katniss and Peeta choose to ally themselves with are also part of an underground rebellion against the Capitol. Unfortunately, the system of the rebellion is revealed to be no better than the Capitol. The revolution is led by Coin, who has her own aspirations of becoming president. Most of Coin's followers follow her every word as law, obeying

orders blindly. This is a return to a sovereign rule, much like Immortan Joe's rule over The Citadel. Katniss realizes that not only must she work to defeat Snow and the Capitol, but also Coin and the followers who want to put her in Snow's place rather than entirely revolutionizing the way Panem is run. Among these followers is Gale, Katniss's friend from District 12. In his obsessive dedication to Coin, Gale kills Katniss's sister, Prim, to advance the movement. Worse than that, he shows no remorse for his actions.

It was Prim that Katniss had decided to fight for in the first place, and her loss is devastating. Again, Gale attempts to make her a part of a community that Katniss wants no part in. Gale, like the other supporters of Coin, want Katniss to be the leader of the revolution, but only if she meets their specifications for what sort of leader she should be. She had already been reticent to the idea of joining Coin's cause, but the loss of Prim helps Katniss make her ultimate decision to reject the rebellion as a whole and trust only those in her own personal community.

In the end, it is Katniss's core community whom she carried over from the Games that goes against both Coin and Snow. All of them realize that it is exceedingly dangerous to go against both the rebellion and the Capitol, but are willing to do so nonetheless. Finnick ends up dying in the final fight for freedom, but his sacrifice makes it possible for the community to move forwards towards victory. During the final confrontation between the rebels and the Capitol, Katniss has a choice to kill either Coin or President Snow. Realizing that letting Coin become the new president would only lead to more tyranny, Katniss shoots Coin. Snow is killed in the confusion and stampeding afterwards. In this act of killing Coin over Snow, Katniss has a kind of revelation. She

thinks beyond herself and her immediate community for the first time and is able to look a few steps ahead to see what the outcome of her actions might be.

If she kills Snow, then the figurehead of the Capitol is dead, Coin replaces him, and it is possible that nothing else changes beyond that. But if Coin is killed, there is a chance for a completely fresh start. Katniss's judgement turns out to be correct, as both the Capitol and the rebellion are overthrown in that final fight. The Hunger Games are abolished under the new order, and a new time of peace begins.

## CLOUD ATLAS

*Cloud Atlas* is a novel in fifteen parts, by author David Mitchell. The story follows a soul that is reincarnated across six lifetimes until it meets a satisfactory ending with its soulmate. The section, or the lifetime, that I will be focusing on is “The Orison of Sonmi~451,” which takes place in the Anti-Utopian “corpocracy” of Nea So Corpos, a technologically driven future imagining of Korea. A corpocracy is a massively capitalist society where consumerism reigns supreme. Each citizen is given a quota of how much money they must spend every year, or else they will be found guilty of an anti-corpocracy crime. There are those who are of lower “strata,” or status, who live in poverty. Much of the world is uninhabitable, either underwater or contaminated by radiation and poisoned soil. Despite this, most upper strata humans seem to live in a Utopian society. They have access to all the resources they could possibly want and are able to achieve higher education relatively easily. Moreover, they have androids to do all the hard work for them. While most of the humans live in ideal conditions, they have an

entire slave race of manmade androids called “fabricants” that perform all manner of undesirable tasks for them.

When the readers first meet the fabricant Sonmi~451, she has been arrested for being part of an abolitionist movement and she is telling her story to an archivist as part of her trial (Mitchell 185). Fabrications like Sonmi are grown in “wombtanks,” in “clusters of embryo fabricants suspended in uterine gel” (323). But this is not Sonmi’s true community, only the one in which society has placed her. Sonmi describes to the archivist the connections she makes, first with two other “fabricants,” or human-like creatures fabricated for the purpose of working, and then with a “pureblood,” or a human. Purebloods have “souls,” or computer chips embedded in them to let them travel from place to place freely. Fabricants do not have these souls, and are trapped in their respective areas of work. Every morning they are shown a video of what happens if they work hard and are able to retire, and every night they drink an amnesia inducing substance to help keep them complacent.

This use of robots and androids in the Dystopian movement casts an interesting light on the idea of community, and asks the question: what can androids teach us about community? While Sonmi and her fellow fabricants are built from biological material rather than circuits and gears, they would unquestionably fit into the definition into Booker’s definition of an android: “An android is an artificial being (usually biological, but possibly electromechanical or some combination of the two) that has been designed to look, and sometimes to act, like a human being” (*Historical Dictionary* 26). Robots and androids are often used interchangeable within the genres of science-fiction and

Dystopia, as both of them “signify primarily electromechanical devices (often humanoid and typically endowed with artificial intelligence) that can perform a variety of functions, partly through programming and partly through their own ability to act autonomously” (*Historical Dictionary* 244). This ability to act autonomously brings into play interesting moral dilemmas explored in many science-fiction and Dystopian works<sup>3</sup>. Mitchell also introduces these dilemmas in “The Orison of Sonmi~451.”

Robots or androids in the Dystopian genre are often employed as surrogates to discuss the concept of humanity. They also put a kind of buffer between the reader and some of the subjects that are explored. Because they are not fully human, it may seem more acceptable to use them for menial labor or undesirable tasks. As the android David 8 explains in the viral video released for the film *Prometheus*, “I can carry out directives that my human counterparts might find... distressing, or unethical” (*Weyland Industries*). In other words, science-fiction and Dystopia use androids as a narrative device to address ethical issues we may not be comfortable applying to humans. Sonmi herself brings this up in her interview:

*Popular wisdom has it that fabricants don't have personalities.*

This fallacy is propagated for the comfort of purebloods.

*'Comfort'? How do you mean?*

To enslave an individual troubles your consciences, Archivist, but to enslave a clone is no more troubling than owning the latest six-wheeler ford, ethically.

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<sup>3</sup> Some examples include Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and Ridley Scott's subsequent film adaptation *Blade Runner*, William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, the *Prometheus* and *Alien: Covenant* films from Scott's *Alien* series, among many many others.

Because you cannot discern our differences, you believe we have none. But make no mistake: even the same-stem fabricants cultured in the same wombtank are as singular as snowflakes. (Mitchell 187)

Sonmi's analysis of how humans use fabricants as they would their car shows the problematic nature of the existence of fabricants. As she points out, even "same-stem" fabricants, meaning those who are born in the same cluster such as the Sonmis or the Yoonas, are individual beings. They are able to think and to feel for themselves. This makes the ownership and usage of a fabricant more akin to slavery than it is to buying the newest vacuum cleaner, as humans tend to treat their fabricants. It is for this reason that the abolitionist movement exists, to free the fabricants and bring equal rights to all citizens of Nea So Corpos, human or not. The movement was formed to give equal quality of life to the "downstrata," or lower classes, and fabricants alike. The ultimate goal was to eliminate the disparity between the classes and give fabricants the same rights as humans.

Originally, Sonmi is assigned to be the fabricant Yoona~939's partner, but through interactions outside of their assigned work, the two become friends. Yoona sneaks the two of them out of their quarters at night and show her books; human artifacts hidden in their employer's personal supply cabinet. Sonmi is hesitant at first, because being out of bed past curfew, breaking into their superior's storage locker, and looking at human artifacts are all punishable by either zerostarring (not receiving one's yearly promotion) or death. However, she trusts Yoona, and follows her, "Yoona took my hand: I hesitated. [...] But my sister's will was stronger than mine. She pulled me

through, shut the door behind us, and whispered, ‘Now, dear sister Sonmi, you are *inside* a secret’” (Mitchell 191). It is through these adventures and sharing of secrets that they become bonded, and Yoona begins to call her “sister Sonmi.” While the use of “sister” or “brother” among the fabricants is not uncommon, it goes much deeper for Sonmi and Yoona. Sonmi takes the title to heart, forming a bond with Yoona that goes beyond working together or both of them being fabricants.

The second friendship is made when Sonmi is transferred from the fast-food restaurant where she works to a university, following “[her] sister” Yoona’s attempted escape and death (194-5). At the university she meets a male fabricant, Wing~027. It is Wing who begins Sonmi’s education by telling her “You must learn how to read, little sister” (207). Again, we see the term “sister” used, showing kinship between the two fabricants despite not technically being related. It is also important to note that once Sonmi does begin her education, she names Orwell and Huxley as her favourite authors.

Unfortunately, this friendship is shortlived, as Wing’s owner accidentally kills him in a chemical fire. Sonmi expresses grief for her lost friends, and anger at their senseless deaths. When asked what she felt after the death of Wing, she answers, “Fury. ... I had never felt such fury” (Mitchell 210). Sonmi also compares them to the purebloods that owned them, saying “Yoona~939 was worth twenty Boom-Sooks, and Wing~027 worth twenty Min-Sics, by any measure” (210). Since fabricants are meant to be calm and complacent at all times, it is clear from this vehement expression of emotion that Sonmi felt a deep connection to her self-claimed sister and brother. “I still miss her,” she tells the archivist (221). They are also meant to obey the catechisms which state that they are

to love the consumers (Mitchell). Because Sonmi has placed her fellow fabricants above purebloods, the consumers and owners who the fabricants are meant to love and respect, she is showing disrespect to the consumers and therefore breaking one of the catechisms that she was so afraid to go against before Yoona. These small acts of rebellion shows that Sonmi is able to overcome her programming to achieve a deep comradeship.

The last connection Sonmi makes is with Hae-Joo Im, an abolitionist disguised as a student at Sonmi's university. It is Hae-Joo who frees Sonmi and leads her to rebel against the society in place, against the oppression of her kind. "Initially, he irritated me a lot," Sonmi admits. However, Hae-Joo does something that wins her over, in the end: he refers to her as a person (225). It is this small token that begins to endear Hae-Joo to Sonmi. "My decision was based on character," she explains, "I could only hope time would prove it well founded" (313). Her decision to trust and befriend Hae-Joo is justified when later, during the course of their rebellion, Hae-Joo and Sonmi meet up with a fellow abolitionist, An-Kor Apis. An-Kor tells Sonmi, "You have chosen your friends wisely, Sonmi. Together, we may change corporcratic civilization out of all recognition" (318). These connections are important in a way that goes beyond merely surviving in an Anti-Utopian universe; they are vital for the upheaval of that very universe.

Sonmi's knowledge of her potential effect on future generations is made clear during her trial, in her conversation with the Archivist. No longer is she Sonmi~451, dinery servant, but Sonmi the revolutionary.

We see a game beyond the endgame. I refer to my *Declarations*, Archivist. Media has flooded Nea So Corpros with my Catechisms. Every schoolchild in corpocracy knows my twelve ‘blasphemies’ now. My guards tell me there is even talk of a statewide ‘Vigilance Day’ against fabricants who show signs of the *Declarations*. My ideas have been reproduced a billionfold.

*But to what end? Some... future revolution? It can never succeed.*

As Seneca warned Nero: No matter how many of us you kill, you will never kill your successor. (Mitchell 349)

Even though Sonmi will be put to death, there is not only the hope but the firm knowledge that her message has already spread across civilization. Additionally, Sonmi’s growth as a person – I say *person* because Hae Joo Im has referred to her as such, and she accepted this title – in the way she speaks of herself during her interrogation. By referring to herself as Seneca, she acknowledges her own growth; from Sonmi~451 the fabricant, to Sonmi the Philosopher, and eventually Lady Sonmi the goddess. As Zachry says in his tale, “Sonmi’d been birthed by a god o’ Smart named Darwin, that’s what we b’liefed.” (Mitchell 277) Because of the formation of the novel, Sonmi’s story does not end with her death but instead moves forward in time to her next reincarnation, and forward in the book to the following chapters.

The formation of *Cloud Atlas* allows for a meta-commentary on this idea of connection in spite of adversity. Each narrative is nested within the other, they mirror each other, they repeat the same themes or rather, the same lives. More specifically, the same soul in different lives. Mitchell himself presents meta-commentary on his own

style through the character of Robert Frobisher, one of the reincarnations of this same soul, who describes his latest musical composition thusly: “In the first set, each solo is interrupted by its successor: in the second, each interruption is recombined in order. Revolutionary or gimmicky?” (445). While it might, indeed, be gimmicky, this nested style of storytelling firmly underlines the importance of connection in *Cloud Atlas*.

These connections take place both within each story, and across the lifetimes of the reincarnated souls, echoing the theme back and forth as the stories progress, reaching their respective climaxes, and moving into the denouement. It can be seen most clearly in the chapter “Sloosha’s Crossin’ An’ Ev’rythin’ After,” which takes place after Sonmi’s story, chronologically. While the abolitionists’ efforts may not have had an effect within Sonmi’s lifetime, hundreds of years later in a vastly different society than the one in which she lived, Sonmi is worshipped as a goddess.

Valleysmen only had one god an’ her name was Sonmi. Savages on Big I norm’ly had more gods’n you could wave a spiker at. Down in Hilo they prayed to Sonmi if they’d the moodin’ but they’d got other gods too, shark gods, volcano gods, corn gods, sneeze gods, hairy-wart gods, oh, you name it, the Hilo’d birth a god for it. But for Valleysmen savage gods weren’t worth knowin’, nay, only Sonmi was real. (Mitchell 244)

According to Zachry, Sonmi is revered above all. Some people claim to see her walk amongst them, it is said that she heals the sick, and when a “thruesome’n’civ’lized Valleysman” dies, Sonmi is there to take their soul and help it be reborn, “an’ so death weren’t so scrysom for us, nay” (Mitchell 244). She has transformed from the head of

a revolutionary movement to a spiritual guide and source of inspiration for an entire people. How this happens over the course of the years separating the two stories is ambiguous, but the “how” is less important than the fact that it does happen.

Because of her actions and the connections and community made during her life, Sonmi was able to extend this far past her death. Zachry’s story takes place hundreds of years after Sonmi’s, but there is no trace of the oppressive and totalitarian society that was present in Sonmi’s time. Adam’s story is set centuries before Sonmi, but we can see a mirror of Sonmi in Adam’s desire to change the world and start his own abolitionist movement. So in this way, she did succeed in her quest to free her people and the others who were oppressed in her society. Sonmi was not able to see the outcome of her actions, but they were undeniable.

### **TEXTUAL PARALLELS**

Claeys and Sargent present an interesting angle from which to view Anti-Utopias: “The concept of ‘dystopia’ presents still further definitional problems. It is sometimes conceived as a ‘bad’ or ‘worse’ place. [...] The same logical problems present themselves here, as with utopia as a ‘better’ place: Worse than what? Worse for whom?” (Claeys and Sargent 3). So both the *Hunger Games* books and “The Orison of Sonmi~451” revolve around these ideas of “a Utopia but for whom.” We see glimmers of it in *The Running Man* and *Fury Road*, but the difference is much more pronounced in *Hunger Games* and *Cloud Atlas*. Due to the fact that we as readers are shown the Capitol in such detail, and because we see how upstrata, or higher class, humans live versus how

fabricants and downstrata humans are forced to live, because we see how fabricants are treated like objects, we are able to feel this difference in a much more visceral way.

In *Hunger Games*, the readers are able to see day-to-day life for the lower classes, which is made up of everyone who lives in the districts and not the Capitol. Wages are very low, and so these district citizens are forced to beg, barter, and steal to obtain food and basic amenities. The only other option available is to trade the lives of their children for rations by entering their names into the reaping multiple times in exchange for “extra” food. Other necessities such as electricity or clean water are only available sporadically, often only during the annual showing of the Games.

Meanwhile, the fortunate citizens who live in the Capitol experience only the best of the best. Lavish banquets are held every day, fashion reigns supreme, and all they need worry about is whether or not their hair color is in season. The stark difference between the two shows exactly why the *Hunger Games* books are Anti-Utopia; a Utopia was attempted, and works, but only for a fraction of the population.

The same sort of discrepancy between the classes is seen in Sonmi’s story. Downstrata citizens are unable to find work because fabricant slave labor is free. Consumers are shown abusing fabricants with no consequences. At one point, a child-sized fabricant is thrown off a cliff because the owner wasn’t satisfied with her performance as a new doll for his daughter. Even more horrifying, fabricants are forced to work towards an unachievable goal, being promised retirement after twelve years only to be killed and recycled for food and spare parts. Sonmi herself witnesses the

process in which fabricants are liquidated and parceled out into nutrients to feed other fabricants.

Both Katniss and Sonmi are aware of the dreadful conditions in which they lived versus the abundance in which the upper class lived. While they both had already decided to attempt to fight against the circumstances that caused the disparities between the classes, seeing the differences up close helped to strengthen their resolve. Before, rebellion had been something of an abstract thought. Once the protagonists realize that there are other people involved, people with whom they can feel a kinship, the thought of helping these people becomes much more tangible.

Furthermore, both the Capitol and the corpocracy have severe consequences for attempting rebellion. Katniss sees what happens to a girl and boy who attempts to escape District 12; the boy is never seen again and is presumed dead, and the girl is taken to the Capitol, has her tongue removed, and is forced into silent servitude for her behavior. This punishment, however, is mild in comparison to the Games themselves. The Hunger Games were created as both a reminder of and a punishment for the rebellion against the Capitol. District 13 was allegedly obliterated during the rebellion, and now each district must sacrifice two children every year as a penalty for daring to defy the Capitol.

For Sonmi and the other fabricants, strict obedience is required. Those who follow the rules and obey them to the letter are rewarded with retirement after their allotted years of servitude. For Sonmi and the other fabricants who work at the dinery, this means twelve years of ten day work weeks and nineteen hour workdays. Each

morning, the fabricants are shown a video of retired fabricants running along a beach in Hawaii, which reinforces their good behavior. Each year of labor is marked with a star on their collars. If a fabricant disobeys, their owners threaten to either not give them a star that year, or to take away stars, lengthening their required time of service. In the case of Yoona, extreme disobedience is met with death.

Equally important to the act of rebelling is the reason for rebellion. For both Katniss and Sonmi, one of the core reasons for joining the resistance movement, outside of the poor treatment of their people, is family. More specifically, they join for their sisters. In Katniss's case, her sister Prim was chosen as District 12's tribute for the Hunger Games. Rather than allow her sister to go through the torture of the Games, she volunteers herself as tribute instead.

Once Katniss reaches the Games, she finds Rue, a girl the same age as Prim. The similarities between them are what cause Katniss to take Rue under her wing and attempt to protect her from the games. It is Rue's death and the funeral that Katniss gives her that sparks the new evolutionary movement against the Capitol. So, too, does Sonmi find sisterhood with Yoona. It is because of these sibling-like relationships that both protagonists are able to form such strong bonds later on. For both Katniss and Sonmi, everything begins with their sisters.

## **CONCLUSION**

As with *The Running Man* and *Fury Road*, these novels also have deeply ambiguous endings. While Collins does write an epilogue with a glimpse of Katniss and Peeta's life twenty years after the deaths of Snow and Coin, nothing is shown of the new

government. The readers are told that the Hunger Games have been abolished, but nothing more. This allows readers to project upon the story whatever governmental system they might see fit.

The one thing the epilogue does do is show the reader the endurance of Katniss's bond with Peeta. Although most of her community does not make it through the revolution, Peeta is still by her side at the end of everything. In the epilogue, they have two children together, which shows the continuation of this community. It demonstrates the possibility of Katniss's community to expand into something greater, something spanning generations. It is because of this, because of Peeta, that readers are able to be truly hopeful about the future of Panem.

Unfortunately, Sonmi's ending is not quite so happy. Like Ben Richards, Sonmi had to die in order for her revolution to succeed. However, as she tells the Archivist, her views and her hopes for the future have already been broadcast across Nea So Corpos. Her message has already spread far enough that she does not only hope, she *knows* that someone will take these ideas and do something good with them. And Sonmi is right: although we do not see the process, we see that her ideas have made her into a goddess within a few generations. However, this is not the "true" ending of the book; Sonmi and Zachry's chapters are situated in the middle of the book, and the second half of each of the first chapters follow them, so that the book ends with the first story.

Moving backwards in time but forwards in the book, the second half of Adam Ewing's story reflects the same themes as Sonmi's. Adam is an American notary in the nineteenth century, who travels to Australia on business for his father-in-law. Adam's

father-in-law is a strong supporter of slavery, but because of his experiences abroad with a slave named Autua who saved his life, Adam decides to join the abolitionist movement. It is his story, being placed both first and last among the nesting narratives, that provides the ambiguous ending of the book.

As the book ends, Adam imagines a potential confrontation with his father-in-law about slavery and abolitionism. Although his father-in-law (hypothetically) argues that any efforts made by Adam would be only a drop in the ocean, Adam replies “Yet what is any ocean but a multitude of drops?” (Mitchell 509) These are the closing lines of the book; the reader does not see the carrying out of Adam’s potential actions. It does, however, seem clear that this is a reflection of Sonmi’s own actions to free her people.

As with the Negative Utopian texts, the Anti-Utopian texts do not end neatly. The readers are given open-ended outcomes with no real closure. However, as with the Negative Utopian texts, the readers are then allowed to decide for themselves what the details of the new world are. Because things are implied, rather than shown, it leaves room for us readers to make a satisfactory ending for ourselves.

The idea of a “happy ending” is an ambiguous sort of creature, due to the fact that “happy” is a deeply subjective idea. No amount of detail that an author could put into building a world after a Dystopian rule could ever live up to each individual reader’s idea of what the perfect new world would be. In this way, the ambiguous ending *is* the ideal ending, and has greater potential to leave readers both satisfied and hopeful.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

#### LOOKING BACK

Throughout my thesis, I concentrated on exploring three main questions. The first of this was more overarching than the others: what is the importance of community within Dystopianist literature? The very simple answer would be that communities are incredibly important within the movement, but it goes much deeper than that. More important than simply having a community is the way in which the new community undermines and overthrows the previously established communities. They were not, however, the “right” kinds of communities. By “right,” I mean healthy and supportive of its members, not lead by ruthless despots, and not built around those in power getting more power while they oppress everyone they feel are below them. I have drawn these criteria from the texts I have analysed over the course of this thesis.

The kinds of community that are needed in these landscapes are those that work for the people and are run with the populace’s best interests in mind. This may require sacrifice and, moreover, it requires a willingness to sacrifice oneself. The bond has to be deep enough within the community to support the idea of and individual sacrificing themselves for the greater good. In other words, these communities push against and away from the idea of a state and shift towards something new and different.

Both Negative Utopias and Anti-Utopias rebel against the idea of a state, whether that state is a governing body or a corporation that has taken control of the

world of a particular Dystopian work. As Moylan observes, the idea of the state is being overturned in most Dystopian media:

From Yevgeny Zamyatin's OneState to Margaret Atwood's Gilead, the state is a major target of critique in the classical dystopian narrative. Yet in the dystopian turn of the closing decades of the twentieth century, the power of the authoritarian state gives way to the more pervasive tyranny of the corporation. Everyday life in the new dystopias is still observed, ruled, and controlled; but now it is also reified, exploited, and commodified. (*Dark Horizons* 135)

King shows his readers one example of this authoritarian state in *The Running Man*, wherein the oppressive power is a government that acts like a corporation in the way that it commodifies its citizens. In King's future United States, people can sell themselves to game shows, being tortured on live television to make a small amount of money.

The protagonist, Ben Richards, subverts this exploitation by forming a community that revolves around mutual trust and respect for the other members of the community, rather than selling out one's fellow man. He does begin the story fighting only for himself and his immediate family, but expands his idea of family to include Bradley's family, as well as Amelia. Despite the fact that he is surrounded by a country full of people who would be willing to turn him in for a few hundred dollars, he manages to find a handful of individuals in whom he can place his trust. Because of this, and because of his willingness to sacrifice himself to make a statement against the government for the sake of his people, Richards's new community successfully undermines the one that the government attempted to force on him.

Shifting gears to *Mad Max: Fury Road*, Miller shows a return to the sovereign state, wherein one singular person is held as the supreme leader of the state. In the case of *Fury Road*, Immortan Joe is the ruler of The Citadel, holding its citizens hostage by controlling the limited resources. Joe also commodifies his citizens by taking the men inflicted with cancer and using them as his personal soldiers, which he calls his War Boys. Through propaganda and brainwashing, he convinces these War Boys that it is an honour to give their lives for him, and that dying in combat for him is the only way to reach their desired afterlife in Walhalla.

There are several characters in *Fury Road* who aid in the upending of Joe's cult-based state. The first is Furiosa, who helps Joe's Wives escape his grasp. The second is the titular Max, who begins as an outsider and solitary character, but eventually joins Furiosa's community based on mutual trust and respect, similar to Richards in *The Running Man*. Lastly, there is Nux, a War Boy who tries and fails to reach Walhalla by fighting for Immortan Joe. Furiosa and The Wives are the ones who started the rebellion against Joe's dictatorial state, and are later aided by Max and Nux to make what began as a revolution into a new community that goes against the boundaries Joe had set in place.

Max is much like Richards in that he begins his personal story arc with only one aim: to survive. As he joins Furiosa and The Wives, his view of survival changes from something singular to something that involves the entire community. They are willing to make sacrifices for each other, which is proven both by Max venturing out into the

active warzone to retrieve supplies for the group, and also Max giving Furiosa a lifesaving blood transfusion.

In the same vein, Nux's goals change from obtaining glory for himself in Walhalla to helping his newly formed community find success. His repeated trying and failing to die in the glory of battle while under Joe's rule shows that Joe's sovereignty is not the correct sort of community. Nux attempts to sacrifice himself for a leader who does not care about him beyond the fact that he is a useful tool in battle, which goes against what I have built as my definition of community throughout this thesis. Towards the end of the battle, he once again sacrifices himself, this time so that The Wives are able to get away safely. It is because of this particular kind of sacrifice, made out of love for his found family, that Nux is finally able to find peace and reach Walhalla.

From government-centered states, let us move to the second half of Moylan's discussion regarding the focus of Dystopian media: corporations. Moylan goes on to say:

Serving as a reminder of what a socially responsible state might once have meant to its citizens, a shadowy version of the former U.S. government exists; but, under neoliberal discipline, it has become a minor adjunct, if even that, to the corporations that ravage the environment, privatize towns and public services, and enslave people as indentured servants. (*Dark Horizons* 138)

While *The Running Man* and *Mad Max: Fury Road* are more focused on overbearing governments as their source of and reason for a Dystopia, *The Hunger Games* trilogy and "The Orison of Sonmi~451" use the commodification of people as their target for criticism.

Although it is true that Suzanne Collins places the Capitol, the ruling government of Panem, as her main antagonist, it is not necessarily the fact that there is a ruling government but rather the way that The Capitol treats its citizens that is the point of contention. After the first rebellion, The Capitol founded the Hunger Games as a way of not only showing their power but also providing themselves with grotesque entertainment. They force children to fight each other to the death and turn it into some sort of pageant, complete with dazzling costumes and complex storylines that they themselves create for the contestants.

Katniss, the protagonist of the series, defies the way in which The Capitol attempts to turn her into a product to be sold by the media to the rest of the country by not accepting the story they have set in place for her. Despite the fact that members of different districts are not meant to form alliances for reasons beyond their own individual survival, Katniss finds a kind of family with Rue, a young girl who reminds Katniss of her sister. Not only do they become friends, but Katniss holds a funeral for Rue when she is killed, in direct defiance of the government. Although The Capitol tries to sell her and the boy from her district, Peeta, as star-crossed lovers, she instead forges a bond of friendship with him. This friendship carries them to the end of the Games, when Katniss and Peeta both agree to die for one another instead of either of them winning the Games.

This defiant mindset stays with Katniss through the rest of the series, as well. When she and Peeta are thrown into the Games for a second, they immediately begin looking for potential alliances amongst the other competitors. They begin the Games

with a new community, which proves to be beneficial for them in the long run. This community more or less stays together when the rebel movement against The Capitol begins, and becomes Katniss's core family through the war that she finds herself to be the face of. Even within the revolution, there are false images and false friends that are being forced on Katniss, but she keeps hold of the community she has chosen for herself in the face of everything.

Similarly, Sonmi~451 has a community forced upon her by the corporation in power. Nea So Corpros controls all commodities in the future-Korea of "The Orison of Sonmi~451." This corporation manufactures fabricants, like Sonmi, to perform slave labour for them. It is among these fabricants that Sonmi is meant to find her community, according to the corporation that made her. While she does grow close to two particular fabricants, it is because of her own choosing and not that of Nea So Corpros.

Additionally, Sonmi does something that goes against her very programming: she befriends a human. Fabricants are only meant to communicate with other fabricants, unless their owners require them to do otherwise. Her very friendship with Hae Joo Im is revolutionary. It is these small acts of rebellion – sneaking off at night with Yoona, befriending a pureblood – that allow Sonmi to further defy her programming and take part in the movement to bring justice to her people. It is clear to me, through the close readings I have done with these texts, that the undermining and overthrowing of oppressive powers within a Dystopian landscape would not be possible without the protagonists first being part of a community.

What makes these communities and found families so remarkable is their ability to be formed across boundaries. In each work that I have analyzed in my thesis, there are boundaries set in place by the government, society, geography, or some other outside force. In each work, the characters come together despite these confines. They are able to reach across the lines and form bonds with people they may not have even met otherwise. This need for friendship in the face of adversity is a common thread that runs through all four works.

The second question I wished to address was whether or not the sense of community changes between Negative Utopias and Anti-Utopias. This original question changed somewhat during the course of my research; rather than comparing and contrasting the two subgenres, I focused more on each individual work, and how communities functioned on a case to case basis. Because of this, I did not fully answer the question I set out to explore. What I did find was that while the needs for the community changes from work to work, based on each specific landscape created within that work, I noticed no major differences between Negative Utopias and Anti-Utopias. It is, of course, entirely possible that when looking a broader sample size of works, I would be able to find greater differences. From what I have observed, in both Negative Utopias and Anti-Utopias, the protagonists seem to form a small group of people they deem trustworthy. Additionally, there is usually the possibility of the expansion of the community after the end of the work. This is a question I might like to return to, at a later date, since I inadvertently left it by the wayside during my research.

Lastly, can Negative Utopias or Anti-Utopias end on a hopeful note without community? Once again, this question shifted due to deeper research into the genre. As far as I have seen, the answer to this is no. However, there are hundreds of works I have not read, and the four examples I have used in this thesis are by no means all-inclusive or wholly representative. It is possible that examining a larger sample of works would disprove this, but my research thus far supports the idea that a community is necessary for a hopeful ending in Dystopianist works.

The question I did address, though almost by accident, was: “In what way does community make Dystopian works hopeful?” As I have discussed in great depth during my analysis, the works I have read all have ambiguous endings. That is, the story does not end particularly well or particularly poorly. People involved in the revolution against the oppressive powers die, but that does not mean the outcome is negative. As I have discussed, the sort of community that we find in Dystopian works *requires* this kind of sacrifice. The bond of the community must be strong enough that sacrifices are willingly made for the good of the community, and the revolutionary movement to which the community belongs.

It is these bonds that are forged within Dystopian settings that allow the readers to have hope. The fact that communities *can* be formed is, in and of itself, a hopeful thing. Because details are not given as to the rebuilding of the respective worlds post-rebellion, it is up to the readers to decide what we feel is the ideal world for that particular setting. It also allows us to look at our own uncertain future and remain hopeful.

## MOVING FORWARD

I affectionately refer to these as my “had I world enough and time” reflections. Moving forward, I would very much like to expand my research into more works and more subgenres within the Dystopianist movement. I have had many good examples of works that involve community within Dystopian landscapes recommended to me that I have not been able to include, due to time constraints. I have many half-read books that would have been fascinating to read more in depth and include if possible. *The Dog Stars* by Peter Heller, for example, or Neal Stephenson’s *Diamond Age*. I also wanted to include more films, such as *Snowpiercer* or *Battle Royale*. I had originally planned on including more than four works, but had to focus my research to fully give each work the attention it deserved.

Additionally, I’ve concentrated on Western Dystopiansim; Stephen King and Suzanne Collins are both American, David Mitchell is British, and George Miller is Australian. If I moved forward with this work, I would of course include Dystopian works from other cultures. There are a few East Asian works that I have read or watched outside of this project; *Never Let Me Go* and *Battle Royale* are Japanese, *Snowpiercer* is a Korean film. I have not yet touched on African or South Asian Dystopias, but that is something I would like to change in potential future research.

I would also like to expand the genres I include. So far, I have used the term “Dystopian media” to include books and films, but that can be expanded as well. There are plays such as Samuel Beckett’s *Fin de Partie* (or *Endgame*), among others. Videogames have a huge Dystopian contingent, and the videogame industry is growing

as a storytelling device. Television shows are something of a subset of films, but have different narrative capabilities.

I consider zombie-based Dystopias to be their own category, but one that is worth exploring. Works that involve robots or aliens provide an opportunity for cross-sectional communities. Despite all of the work that I have already done in this area, I feel there is more to explore. I have the feeling that a greater sample size would help strengthen my argument further. After all, in the sciences, a sample size of four would be dismissed out of hand. While I have done in-depth research and analysis on these four works, expanding the sample size could potentially open myself up to different kinds of communities. While I believe that I will continue to find that community plays a vital role in Dystopian works, I think it would behoove me to continue to test my theory over and over again, across different modes and different specific themes.

There is also the possibility of interdisciplinary research within Dystopian Studies. One could go into Disability Studies with characters like Peeta or Furiosa, both of whom are amputees. Haley Mowdy's thesis, "Dystopia Across Cultures: Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Global Dystopian Fiction," works with both Women's Studies and Global Studies. There is so much opportunity for expanding discussions in the Utopian and Dystopian movement, and I am very excited to be a part of this growing conversation.

In closing, I feel that the research I have started here is very important to the current conversation about Dystopianism. As I stated in my introduction, we live in deeply uncertain times. Every day, something frightful happens somewhere in the world. And so we as a society continue making and continue consuming Dystopian works as a

means of coping with reality. I think the discussion of community within this movement is vital, because that is what the world needs right now; we need to know that we can band together under even the worst of circumstances, and overcome whatever fear and uncertainty we may have. This is precisely why I want to expand my research. I think that through this thesis, I have shown the importance of community. However, by expanding and moving into different modes and themes, I can prove this argument in a much more in depth and global manner.

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