

Broken Mirrors: Defining the Three Types of Memories in Dystopian Literature

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A dystopia is a place where authority holds the power to control the development of identity. The term dystopia was created by John Stuart Mill in the nineteenth century. During the nineteenth century, there was an expanding volume of literature that could be categorized as dystopian literature, set in an alternative reality and centering on an individual who challenges limitations placed upon them socially, politically, and cognitively. These limitations are discovered early on by characters in texts to delineate their way toward rebellion.¹ A common aspect of dystopian literature is using “unambiguous didacticism with escapist release from everyday norms.”² Unambiguous didacticism is intended to teach the reader a lesson without sending any conflicting messages during their reading journey.

Characters within dystopian literature are unable to recognize that their society is imperfect until they gain awareness of the forces shaping their quotidian existence. Rebekah Fitzsimmons and Casey Alane Wilson describe dystopian literature as a three-phase process of acquiring knowledge, recognizing larger-scale issues, and trying to regain control. They state that “phase 1 establishes the rules and realities of the dystopian world and places the protagonist in direct conflict with that system through a ritualized rite of passage symbolizing coming of age.”³ Phase one places emphasis on an individual beginning to conflict with societal views. The character starts to mature toward adulthood through their desire to make societal change. Carter Hanson argues that a character’s desire for social change stems from feeling trapped in structured societies.⁴ In response, characters start a rebellion toward the source of conflict. When an individual resists the system, they will become aware of how homogenized they felt. In phase two of Fitzsimmons and Wilson’s process, dystopian literature “expands the world of dystopia beyond the protagonist's home to show that the protagonist's problems are only a small part of the larger dysfunctional system.”⁵ Upon reflection, a character receives knowledge about their unjust environment. They are “expected to rebel and push boundaries” to fight for change.⁶

This rebellion can only occur when a character recognizes dystopian attributes of their society. A dystopian setting is typically isolated, censored, and involves “cognitive estrangement.”⁷ Cognitive estrangement is when an individual experiences a new reality that lacks similarities from their current world. A lack of similarities between worlds reflects the fact that “protagonist[s] often harbors outsider feelings as a result of either tragic circumstances or an encounter with a knowledgeable individual or rebellious figure who exists outside full control of the dystopian society.”⁸ Although characters feel like outsiders after their encounter, individuals in dystopian worlds use their newfound knowledge to challenge the standards that suppress their freedom. In the final phase of Fitzsimmons and Wilson's claim, they state that to challenge societal standards, characters will align with others: “[...] Phase 3 forces alliances to shift as new forces (re)appear to align the balance of power.”⁹ When faced with conflict, a character will join forces with others to unite and address community matters. This needed unity within dystopian literature sends a message to readers that change is not just a one-person battle.

Dystopias focus on citizens shaping their identity through experiences and reclaiming their lives. The most common theme is how political control impacts our freedom of speech and knowledge: “The path to dictatorship often starts with rolling back freedom of speech or otherwise making it more difficult for the press to operate.”¹⁰ Within dystopian literature, there is a constant battle regarding limitation or censorship of information and speech. Due to the push against censorship, there is a noticeable shift against traditional ideology toward a more modern generational perspective.¹¹ Dystopian literature’s purpose is to negate censorship and address the imperfections of society. As a result, characters demand systematic change on societal issues.

Although dystopia remains a widely researched genre of literature, few scholars focus on how memory correlates to dystopic environments. Much research surrounding dystopian literature has centered on limning the characteristics of the genre and applying feminist theory. In my research, I've drawn a productively eclectic range of texts, including "classics" such as *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Giver*, contemporary bestsellers such as *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent*, and twentieth-century forerunners such as *Herland*, to argue that there are three types of memory found within dystopian texts: historical, virtual, and personal. Historical memory is formed around collective cultural experiences and past events. Virtual memory uses technology to archive lived experience. Personal memory stems from the individuals' experience. Directing attention to memory allows us to appreciate the intertextual relationship between novels past, present, and future. I argue that in dystopian texts the role of memory has shifted over time: in older works the dystopian regimes attempt to erase memory; in newer works, to replace it.

Dystopian regimes target our memory because it is the foundation of our identity and allows us to understand ourselves through our stored thoughts. Adela Catană and Mary-Jane Rădulescu explain how memory works: "The human brain can register, store, and retrieve almost all the sensory processes of knowledge we experience during our lifetime, enabling us to learn, solve problems, be creative, interact with others and master our identity."¹² When memories are manipulated, it can be detrimental to the person's identity. Memory can be understood as "a string of bead-like sensations and images, all separate."¹³ Once the bead-like images separate, an individual begins to unravel and lose sight of how their identity was put together. This unraveling creates the effect of an identity amnesia. With identity amnesia, an individual forgets memories that correlate to their individuality. Lack of individuality creates a world void of meaningful behaviors and thinking, which is a perfect way to construct a dystopian reality.

A recurrent theme in dystopian literature is the manipulation of memories to form a mindless population. Dystopias disconnect individuals from reality through memory. Since memory is connected to our culture and experiences, removing that leads to a "disconnection from the material world" and can "collapse divisions between generations" by erasing the memories that older people have and younger people lack.¹⁴ When a character discovers factors influencing their perception of memory, they use that as motivation to fight the system. Dystopian fiction sends a message to readers that without a personal repository of our experiences, culture, and individual information, we are only shells of ourselves. When we restrict our understanding of memory to a single diffuse definition, we misconstrue the variety of strategies used to achieve control in these dystopian texts. In this paper, I consider historical, virtual, and personal memory in turn, moving from the most public to the most private forms of memory manipulation. In each section, I show how dystopian regimes in older (early-twentieth century to mid-twentieth century) texts and newer (late twentieth and early-twenty-first century) texts manipulate memory through various strategies. Both older and newer texts work toward the same goal of rewriting human character to reshape society.

Historical Memory

Historical memory covers any past event that shaped our world. If history is fabricated, it can lead to irrevocable identity damage. In dystopian literature, history is often tampered with by people of power. Higher-ups in society can erase or replace history without people knowing. Individuals are unaware of the historical falsification in dystopian literature, showing how easy it is to manipulate marginalized groups. Jorge Da Silva claims, "officially sanctioned truths reveal what *had* to happen [...] fake history is justified history," creating a story where the narrative

justifies their actions.¹⁵ Manipulating citizens' memories into thinking there are no faults in their society creates a collective ignorance about past and present events.

Characters' historical memory in dystopian literature can be split into two subtopics in which the government manipulates past and present events: collective memory and cultural memory. Collective memory consists of shared experiences and information from a national perspective: "the importance of collective memory is that it is directly related with the formation of social identity because identities exist with reference to the past."¹⁶ We develop a sense not only of our national identity but also of ourselves based on our personal connections to the collective memory such as politics and family history. If memory has been interfered with, it creates an issue of trying to recall authentic information about society and leads us to develop our identity based on shaky foundations. Our learned values from a national perspective become useless if rewritten with lies, leading to a further identity disconnect.

Cultural memories can complicate collective memory when our national stories conflict with those told by smaller groups of which we are a part. Community values, beliefs, and customs that remain unchanged throughout generations are grounded in our cultural memories. Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka claim that "cultural memory has its fixed point; its horizon does not change with the passing of time."¹⁷ In dystopian literature, if that constant is interrupted with false information and memory manipulation, there will be a cultural identity rupture. Hanson describes this as a type of "cultural amnesia by depicting the suppression of historical memory as a tool of social control and the production of infantile citizens."¹⁸ If this constant changes, people will find themselves distancing themselves from their own identities. This distance occurs because our identity is deeply rooted to our past. Dystopian literature often uses historical memory control to falsify the past and therefore change the present. Falsification of the past shows readers how vulnerable and trusting the characters are toward authority figures. Many people remain unaware of what manipulation is occurring, but those who find out, fight the system. When studying historical memory in dystopian literature, I found an array of texts that include governments that distort the past such as *1984*, *Fahrenheit 451*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Divergent*, and *Herland*. These texts show how easily people conform to societies without question and the challenges of uncovering the hidden truth of history.

Fahrenheit 451 (1953) by Ray Bradbury and *1984* (1949) by George Orwell highlight this conformist impulse. *Fahrenheit 451* follows fireman Guy Montag, who is required to burn any book found. After contact with a nonconformist, Montag recognizes that the books he burns are important repositories of cultural and collective memory. As a response, Montag begins to steal books and read them. Likewise, *1984*'s character, Winston Smith, is employed by the Ministry of Truth. At his job, he is required to alter, destroy, or rewrite historical records. As the story progresses, he questions why these documents need to be changed. Montag and Winston fight to reclaim their cultural and collective memories by gathering pieces of the past. Both individuals recognize that falsifying and erasing the past leads toward ignorance. They use memory to fight against the system: "memory is the ultimate act of resistance to the totalitarian state."¹⁹ Montag secretly reads books and memorizes passages, whereas Winston memorizes the old historical documents. Dystopian literature works toward manipulating historical memory, both culturally and collectively, to distract the characters from what is occurring in their worlds. Historical memory is the easiest to manipulate because if a society is unaware of the lies being told, then they have no reason to not trust their government.

Government trust cannot be questioned if citizens are censored to history. In *Fahrenheit 451*, all firemen are given an instructional guide: "Established, 1790, to burn English-influenced

books in the Colonies. First Fireman: Benjamin Franklin.”²⁰ The average fireman would not be able to detect the falsified history. Montag becomes a threat to his higher-ups because he is actively trying to learn and develop a sense of historical memory that they worked so hard to erase. In *1984*, Winston worked in a department responsible for manipulating documents: “Thus, history is continuously rewritten. This day-to-day falsification of the past, carried out by the Ministry of Truth, is as necessary to the stability of the regime as the work of repression.”²¹ His job description normalizes individuals tampering with historical memory to make them believe that they are doing it for the betterment of society, though the narrator acknowledges this is not the case. The purpose of this is not actually to replace information but rather to increase confusion, resulting in memory erasure. In both texts, people with power are suppressing cultural and collective information to preserve a fictitious peace.

Fahrenheit 451 and *1984* share endings that call attention to the consequences of characters that act dissidently to disturb their government's superficial peace. At the end of *Fahrenheit 451*, Montag is hunted down by a mechanical hound, while being recorded for the media. Montag ultimately gets away, but the media pretends to find him. People are oblivious to the fact that their memory is being controlled and information is being erased. Towards the end of *1984*, Winston is tortured for fighting against memory control, resulting in him becoming a follower of the “Big Brother” mind manipulation. Unlike Montag, who was chased out of his home, Winston was coerced to follow the government. These texts show how easily a system can break down any opposition when the public feels there is no need for resistance. Citizens lack any form of historical memory to have the ability to question why resistance is necessary.

A character's inability to self-reflect on necessary actions can be compared to the qualities of a mirror. Both *Fahrenheit 451* and *1984* use mirrors to reflect a character's tenuous connection to historical memory. Throughout *Fahrenheit 451*, mirror imagery is used as an analogy to compare a character's reflection to their inner thoughts. Granger, a former author in the world of *Fahrenheit 451*, tells Montag, “we're going to go build a mirror-factory first and put out nothing but mirrors for the next year and take a long look in them.”²² Granger means that they are going to find a way to help guide others toward societal awareness. He wants to help people remember themselves and reflect on the identity they lost when becoming vulnerable with the wrong people. On the other hand, *1984* rarely uses mirrors, which makes their appearances more significant. Physical mirrors are not common in *1984*. Winston faces a mirror when he is being tortured for his actions against the Ministry of Truth: “What are you? A bag of filth. Now turn around and look into that mirror again.”²³ During this moment, he cannot recognize himself. In this case, the memory resembles a broken version of Winston's identity. Since he learned the truth about his society, he became a new person. Forcing him to look into a mirror while degrading him for his knowledge is an attempt to break that self-connection.

The Handmaid's Tale (1985) by Margaret Atwood likewise focuses on how a character's self-connection is broken down by society's historical memory control. The text is about a woman named Offred, who was removed from her family to become a handmaid. Offred's job is to bear the child of a commander named Fred. The story has a political foundation where destruction of historical information is normalized. When Offred becomes a handmaid, she is stripped of her birth name, taking away a fundamental part of her identity. By stripping her name away, Offred is further distanced from the person she used to be. Before Offred is paired with a family to be a handmaid, she must train for her future living situation. All handmaids are given a room with limited resources: “Time here is measured by bells, as once in nunneries. As in a nunnery too, there are few mirrors.”²⁴ The lack of mirrors within their training aims to

disconnect handmaids from their cultural and collective backgrounds. If they cannot see themselves, it is easier to manipulate their identity. Lack of access to mirrors can be symbolic of how the handmaids are trained to forget their values, customs, and families to conform to their new lives. Handmaids are forced to suppress previous family contact and communication. Offred is being trained to forget herself and is being taught to act like a different person.

One of the main ways trainers try to replace Offred's identity is by distancing her from her memories. Before Offred became a handmaid, she had a daughter and a husband named Luke. Offred explains that "our happiness is part memory. What I remember is Luke, with me in the hospital, standing beside my head, holding my hand, in the green gown and white mask they gave him."²⁵ Past memories of family relation hold importance because it connects the character to their identity. As time continues, it becomes harder to recall these previous memories. Recollection of prior memories becomes difficult because they are no longer allowed to associate themselves with the past. Dystopian literature in newer texts work toward distancing individuals away from their identity. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, they do this by replacing her prior memories through training and structured roles. Offred's role is to act in favor for the family she is a handmaid for and forget about her past. She tries to hold her previous life close to her to fight back against the circumstances she now lives under. The historical memory disconnect in this dystopian text is not only happening to Offred, but also to other handmaids. Handmaids are facing a historical collective disconnect when being stripped of their pasts.

Stripping away characters' pasts is at the heart of government control in *Divergent* (2011) by Veronica Roth, which depicts a society that is controlled by faction expectations. Beatrice Prior, the protagonist, lives in a society where her future is determined by a series of tests under a simulation serum. The simulation results will place citizens into one of five factions: Abnegation, Amity, Dauntless, Erudite, and Candor. When an individual identifies with more than one faction, they are categorized as Divergent. Beatrice's test results labeled her as Divergent, but to safely live in her society her identity must remain hidden. As a cover-up, Beatrice chooses to become part of the Dauntless faction. Originally, Beatrice was from a faction called Abnegation. Within this faction, citizens are expected to be selfless. Their faction was designed to help others and to put themselves second. In Abnegation's society, nobody was allowed to have a mirror. During one of Beatrice's tests, she was presented with a mirror: "I turn toward it, confused. That isn't right. I am not allowed to have mirrors."²⁶ As I have shown above, dystopian literature commonly uses mirrors as an analogy for self-reflection. In Beatrice's case, the mirrors are a test to recognize whether she remembers reality outside of her experiences in Abnegation. A mirror reflects reality whereas memory control alters our perception of ourselves and reality. Removing mirror access to a selfless district symbolizes the vulnerability a citizen has toward their political system. When Beatrice joins Dauntless, she has access to mirrors. During this time, we see her gain a sense of awareness surrounding society's faults.

This self-awareness becomes important when Beatrice is put through intense training that interferes with her historical memory. Like *The Handmaid's Tale*, Beatrice is not allowed to contact her family and is told that her new family is Dauntless. When she is being trained to be a part of Dauntless, the faction is breaking her down, surpassing the amount of reshaping that her original faction did to create a new identity. The Dauntless leaders have the inductees jump from trains and do intense fighting. These training procedures are designed to be dangerous and challenging to reshape the identities of those in the faction. Originally, Beatrice was raised within the Abnegation faction. In Abnegation, she is taught to always put others before herself. The Abnegation faction strips Beatrice from expression, making her wear neutral colors and have

a neutral appearance: ““The gray clothes, the plain hairstyle, and the unassuming demeanor of my faction are supposed to make it easier for me to forget myself, and easier for everyone else to forget me too.””²⁷ Although these two factions are exceptionally different, they both aim to replace past experiences and create a new identity around faction values.

The factions are created to replace historical memory with a new identity shaped around a faction. Within each faction, each citizen is only allowed to have cultural and collective memory that is associated with the group. Roth later reveals in her *Divergent* series that there is a world outside of the factions. The world outside of the factions show how removed people are from the nation’s history. In *Dauntless* trials, the simulations purposely manipulate past memories to try to distance individuals from their identity. During one of Beatrice’s trials, she had to go against four of her fears: “In the past four days, I faced four fears. [...]. In the third, I watched as my family slowly bled to death.”²⁸ The simulation showed her family bleeding to death to desensitize Beatrice from her own emotions. The faction's aim was to replace Beatrice’s emotional connection to her past cultural and personal memories with *Dauntless* values.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman displays memory control in a different light, based on characters' lack of access to the historical information in *Herland* (1915). *Herland* is about a group of men that come across a hidden country where women have reproduced without males. When the men first encountered the women, they were surprised by their appearance: “Nobody will ever believe how they looked.”²⁹ Male society was built upon lack of interaction and documentation about females, resulting in a collective and cultural disconnect through memory.

Virtual Memory

Technological evolution has become the essence of our future. Technology can be an effective tool in day-to-day life if used in moderation. However, if this moderation exceeds a healthy balance, it can take over an individual’s life. Dystopian literature commonly emphasizes the potential disadvantages of excess and dependence surrounding technology usage. Kristie McDuffie explains, “texts present traditional literacies as a means of personal agency and freedom amidst controlling societies facilitated by technology.”³⁰ McDuffie discusses how residents of dystopian societies may be under the impression that technology is beneficial, but it is taking over their lives. She further explains that in the most extreme cases, dystopian citizens find themselves losing essential life skills such as “literacy and cognitive ability.”³¹

Dystopian literature often exaggerates the reliance on technology to demonstrate people losing themselves in the media. The representation of technology is used to warn readers about a potential dystopic future where they become robots to their own creation. Virtual memory is a form of technology used by humans to store their experiences and assist their daily lives. With virtual memory, dystopian literature highlights the loss of memory control to a technological platform. People in dystopias rely too heavily on technology and are manipulated to trust all media. With unsuspecting minds, many dystopian citizens begin to lose sense of their biological ability to process memory: ““Biological memory is alive. Computer memory is not.””³² Since computer memory is nonliving, dystopian literature suggests that individuals are losing parts of themselves that make them human. Tim Van der Heijden suggests “that we currently witness a new kind of memory practice enforcing an attentive shift from technologies of memory to a memory of technologies.”³³ Heijden is commenting on the shift of using technology as a secondary source of remembering information versus the loss of biological processes within the brain. This shift is due to human’s reliance on using technology for storing information. A shift of memory placement from a biological standpoint to a technology standpoint puts our past, present, and future at risk: ““High-tech world threatens to make categories like past and future,

experience and expectation, memory and anticipation themselves obsolete.”³⁴ Dystopian realities that focus on virtual memory rid people of being capable to cognitively process their experiences privately. Most virtual memory is openly accessible to the public, leaving no individuality or room for personal growth in dystopian societies. Texts like *The Giver*, *Feed*, *The Hunger Games*, *The Maze Runner*, *The Circle*, and *The Every* emphasize a citizen’s overreliance on technology. Due to this overreliance, people within these dystopian societies lose the ability to remember using their own cognitive ability.

The Giver (1993) by Lois Lowry takes this to an extreme, depicting a society of people unable to experience pain or hold memory. Jonas, the protagonist, is a twelve-year-old who becomes known as the Receiver of Memory. Jonas is thus responsible for obtaining years-worth of experiences and emotions that his society cannot access. His body can be seen as a piece of technology because he is the only one able to access and control memories. In Jonas’s world, “memories are completely removed from the collective consciousness.”³⁵ Similar to aspects of historical memory, sometimes virtual memory will destroy access to past collective and cultural accounts. *The Giver’s* society does this to create a generation of ignorance and further promote technology as the sole focus of society. Individuals who lack knowledge of the past will not seek past documents and will not recognize they are nonexistent.

The only person with access to such documents in *The Giver* is Jonas. The novel uses Jonas as the exclusive keeper of memory to show disconnection between those with and without memory access. As Jonas receives memories, he starts to feel alienated from his own family: “This is due to the fact that family units lack any sources of group memory, while the formal practices of society are completely disconnected from the past.”³⁶ He cannot tell his family about what happens at work. His job is to receive memories from The Giver of memories through physical contact. With every memory given, The Giver begins to lose the memories as Jonas retains them. Currently, in Jonas and The Giver’s society, they are the only ones that can hold onto memory. However, once Jonas receives all The Giver’s memories, The Giver will no longer be able to access the given memories.

Throughout the text, the narrator depicts this dystopian world void of color. Once Jonas starts receiving memory, he can see color. The fact that nobody else can see color beside The Giver and Jonas symbolizes how these two characters can see past the fake utopia their society presents. Monica Toma discusses how surveillance is used to keep citizens in the book from thinking and retaining memory: “In order to manipulate every aspect in the life of the community members, the authority infiltrates both private and public spaces by making use of loudspeakers and microphones that not only penetrate the households, but also cover every inch of the city.”³⁷ The only people within the text with the ability to turn off the loudspeakers are The Giver and Jonas. Their ability to shut off the loudspeakers symbolizes the power memory retention has over attempted control of information. Toma discusses how powerful social structures can be in terms of human mind control.³⁸ *The Giver* shows us how virtual memory control alters citizens’ perceptions of the environment and themselves.

Since Jonas is receiving memory from The Giver, there is a technological archive shared between the two of them. One of the memories The Giver shows Jonas is sledding down a hill in the snow. After showing this memory, The Giver changes the story to exhibit pain: “Then, the first wave of pain. He gasped. It was as if a hatchet lay lodged in his leg, slicing through each nerve with a hot blade. In his agony he perceived the word ‘fire’ and felt flames licking at the torn bone and flesh.”³⁹ In response to the pain, Jonas awakes from the simulation and immediately wants “relief-of-pain.” Jonas’s society uses “relief-of-pain” to create a world where

negative emotion does not exist. The Giver declines Jonas's request because as the receiver, Jonas must hold onto all feelings and memories that others cannot hold. Their world uses virtual memory control to replace memory with a bubble-wrapped society.

Virtual memory control prevents these people from experiencing all of life; they only see the sugar-coated version. *The Giver* uses mirrors to represent self-reflection. The text states, "Mirrors were rare in the community; they weren't forbidden, but there was no real need of them, and Jonas had simply never bothered to look at himself very often even when he found himself in a location where a mirror existed."⁴⁰ Jonas's world has no mirrors to symbolize the lack of drive individuals have to reflect on their lives. Within Jonas's society, people are unable to look different from one another. With a world void of color, people are conformed to be presented the same. These characters are described as having the same race, eye color, hair color, clothing color, and more. Since everyone is similar, there is a lack of expression and individuality in their society, resulting in there being no need for mirrors. Virtual memory control takes away the ability to cognitively question reality beyond surface level.

Feed (2002) by M.T. Anderson draws attention to the addictive nature of technology by showing how constant access to information does not equate to using it. The story follows a teenager named Titus as he navigates his world with constant media access. Feed – the technological platform installed in the brain of citizens – is used by citizens every day in Titus's world. His world promotes consumerism and displays the environment dying around him in his everyday life. Titus's environment deteriorating symbolizes the cognitive damage amongst people from overreliance of technology: "Mental and literate deterioration is extensive in this futuristic world, where environmental ruin is so widespread that other planets are the suburbs and air is manufactured."⁴¹ People who use Feed have become excessively reliant on the platform performing their everyday skills and cognitive processes such as storing memory.

Titus and his friends consistently communicate, store memories, and live through their Feed channels. The platform promotes users to focus on the materialistic aspect of life. Since the Feed platform misdirects its users, the importance of education and real-world events are forgotten. McDuffie explains, "characters in *Feed* theoretically have access to almost infinite quantities of both personal and cultural memory but create a world devoid of historicity."⁴² Due to virtual memory control, their world is incapable of understanding the value of having a memory outside of technology. Titus's society has become accustomed to being handed information through advertisements or pop-up information, causing them to no longer think about aspects of life outside of what is presented to them. *Feed* works as a text where memory is being replaced with useless information that people are trained to view as important.

When Titus meets a girl named Violet, who questions the Feed's importance, he is forced to acknowledge the negative sides to Feed. Because she lives in a tech-controlled world, Violet was given the installation to conform with the population. Despite this, Violet's installation began to fail. Her Feed installation ties the program to her physical health, meaning the more it fails, the more she suffers. Violet begins to lose her memories and ability to function: "The Feed is tied into everything. Your body control, your emotions, your memory. Everything. Sometimes Feed errors are fatal."⁴³ Feed is attached to every cognitive system in the brain. Once it malfunctions, so does the person. When she notices her physical health declining, she confides in Titus. She emphasizes the fact that she is losing all her memories because they are connected to Feed and not to her own biological processes. To save some of her memories, Violet sends them virtually to Titus. Memories can be sent to one another and deleted from Feed. Titus can delete these memories because every individual in his dystopian society relies on technological storage

to save their experiences. He is not aware of how much power he holds with the ability to share and delete memories from the world forever. Titus' society lacks the ability to feel emotional connection to someone else's experiences. If a memory is shared, the emotion is not attached to it. So, when Titus deletes Violet's memories, he is unable to understand how detrimental his actions are. The structure of the Feed platform shows how virtual memory control shifts biological functions to technology functions. Basic human functions such as storing information as memories becomes a process done technologically. Individuals such as Titus no longer view experiences as valuable, they view them as disposable.

The Hunger Games (2008) by Suzanne Collins and *The Maze Runner* (2009) by James Dashner both show human life as disposable through risking the lives of people to serve the needs of those in power. *The Hunger Games* follows Katniss Everdeen who lives in a society divided by districts. Every year, each district has a reaping event where children are forced to participate in The Hunger Games. The government designed these games to keep citizens from rebelling. Each Hunger Games is unique, blending new technology features with different locations for the event. On the other hand, *The Maze Runner* is built to find a cure to a deadly virus by placing humans into a maze where they lose all recollection of themselves and the past. The only aspect of themselves that the people in the maze remember is their name. Thomas, the protagonist, works with others inside the maze to figure out a way to escape and survive.

In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss takes the spot of her younger sister in the reaping. When she is selected, she is forced to train and publicly speak for the media. The media coverage is designed to control citizens and help them forget the past and work toward a conformable future. Under surveillance, Katniss is pressured to act a certain way to please the Capitol of Panem and its viewers. As she begins to act for the purpose of the games, she starts to internalize the false persona she is creating. Her fake persona leads to the internalization of false memories. Katniss talks about how the government mandates specific messages to be heard by all people: "The only time you can count on [the electricity] is when they're airing the Games or some important government message on television that it's mandatory to watch."⁴⁴ When the government plays messages, they aim to distract citizens from real-world events.

The Capitol of Panem has a great technological focus to distract citizens from current events. This becomes more evident in the following texts of the trilogy. Catană and Rădulescu talk about one of Collins' books in the trilogy manipulating Peeta's memories – the other contestant who is from District twelve and works with Katniss in the games – to turn against Katniss: "Peeta's memories about Katniss, the girl he loves, are distorted on purpose, making him feel threatened by her."⁴⁵ The Capitol of Panem is using technology to virtually reconstruct Peeta's memories. They are purposely using memory manipulation to manipulate his perspective of others and his prior experiences. The leaders in *The Hunger Games* series aim to replace memories with false ones to enforce political power over citizens.

The Maze Runner uses technology to manipulate Thomas's memory even before he awakes in the maze. Thomas was put into the maze and had his memory technologically erased to help the people inside the maze escape: "His memory loss was strange. He mostly remembered the workings of the world—but emptied of specifics, faces, names."⁴⁶ The creators of the maze start by stripping people of their memories and putting them in a place where they face danger. They do so to see how the teens would react when placed in an environment where they need to fight for survival. They are not only fighting physical threats, they are fighting personal issues such as regaining their memory.⁴⁷ Within the maze, there are mechanical threats known as Grievors. They can inject people with a serum that negatively impacts memories.

When Alby, a teenager in the maze, was stabbed by a griever, he could not control his body. Alby states, “‘don’t know what happened. It was like ... something was controlling my body. I’m sorry....”⁴⁸ Alby experiences technology developed to take control of the human brain’s functions. In this situation, Alby is struggling to form words to explain what has happened to his body. We see a similar experience happen to Violet in *Feed* where she cannot speak properly. Technology within dystopian literature is commonly used to disconnect individuals from their ability to function without dependency on a creation. The creators of the maze manipulate their subjects technologically to the point of them questioning their sanity. *The Maze Runner* shows the extent to which authority figures will go to find solutions to widespread issues. The creators replace their memories with their experiences in the maze to try and find a cure for the apocalyptic conditions of the outside world. However, it disconnects individuals from their true selves and leaves them feeling empty.

Both *The Circle* (2013) and *The Every* (2021), written by Dave Eggers, draw attention to the future risk of technology through creating a virtually controlled world where people consent to surveillance. *The Circle* follows a young adult named Mae who is hired into the Circle, which is a company that controls and develops most of the technology within their society. Her society is progressively becoming more technology-reliant, making it impossible for people to live in a world without a technological presence. Mae joined the Circle without knowledge of how controlling the technology was over privacy and memory. She becomes aware of this controlling nature and is forced to conform with the company's views. *The Every* sequel is a text about a woman named Delaney who joins the Circle some years later with the purpose of shutting it down. Delaney purposely presents ideas to the company in hopes that others will see how absurd their policies have become. However, each time Delaney presents a ridiculous program, people end up loving the platform. Mae is currently the CEO of the company and monitors Delaney’s behaviors without her knowing. At the end of the book, Mae kills Delaney.

Long before Mae becomes a killer, she joins the company with the intention of maintaining a stable job with her friend Annie. However, Mae became obsessed with technology, while Annie began to feel averse to the system. When Annie started to feel disdain toward the company, she was institutionalized. Like *The Circle*, in *1984*, Winston was institutionalized and tortured to follow his society’s views. Mae was told lies and controlled by the authority figures in the company; the company made her livestream her whole life: “Bailey managed to announce the capper to it all—that Mae, in the interest of sharing all she saw and could offer the world, would be going transparent immediately.”⁴⁹ The company believes that keeping “secrets” and not sharing all information about day-to-day life is selfish. The Circle made it impossible for Mae to have her own memories. Being monitored constantly, day-to-day, takes away individuality and expression. When everything is monitored, it takes the importance away from experiences. Every moment begins to be viewed the same without emotional attachment to experiences. People are living through media and are unable to connect with experiences, especially if they are only viewing other people’s shared moments. Mae became a walking piece of technology used to promote the Circle’s purposes.

To drive Mae to the point of livestreaming her whole life, the authority figures gaslight her into thinking privacy was wrong. Like other dystopian texts, Mae’s boss uses a mirror analogy to compare human presentation to a mirror: “‘And to prevent us from feeling, as you did, that some distorted view of ourselves is presented to the world. It’s like a broken mirror. If we look into a broken mirror, a mirror that’s cracked or missing parts, what do we get.”⁵⁰ He compared lack of transparency to a broken mirror in which people only see parts of a whole

truth. However, full transparency can be seen as an illusion. If people are mandated to constantly broadcast their lives, they will feel more obligated to portray fake emotions and do less enjoyable things for the purpose of pleasing others. Mae is being manipulated into thinking that everybody needs to be aware of her own experiences and process of developing memories.

In the sequel, *The Every*, we see the end results of this process. The point-of-view switches to a young woman named Delaney who is determined to bring down the Circle. Mae and her friend Wes are working alongside one another to go destroy the company. However, Wes ends up feeling satisfied with the amount of validation he is receiving from the company and leaves Delaney to bring down the Circle alone. Delaney “had to think about how she’d speak from then on. She knew she was on camera, that she’d be on camera, multiple cameras, at all times on campus.”⁵¹ There is constant surveillance around Delaney, and she must change her identity to fit the company’s expectations. At the Circle, nobody was allowed to delete their livestreamed experiences or past memories, they are accessible to everyone. Delaney was aware of the extreme danger the Circle platform presented to citizens. She watches others lose their personal memories, identities, and selves to the platform. In the end, Delaney does not win against the system, showing how systems with power will silence minorities to gain control.

Personal Memory

Our personal memory is built upon our unique experiences. Unlike historical and virtual memory – which are structured around group trends – personal memory focuses on a single individual and their struggles. Commonly in dystopian literature, personal memory is altered by disconnecting a character from others. Dystopic societies cause the loss of personal memories by deliberately tampering with people’s memories. The goal is to create a division between authority figures, whose identities are intact, and the individual to make each character suffer in their own way. Often, these characters can recognize mistreatment through their society’s attempt to distance them from their identity and its roots in memory. In this section, I will show how each of these individuals are affected by societal manipulation in relation to their cognitive processes and what happens when our most intimate sense of self is threatened.

In *1984*, Winston’s ability to create meaningful personal memories was altered via government control of relationships. The party, also known as Big Brother, makes decisions on family matters. Big Brother has allowed Winston to marry a woman named Katherine. Because having no freedom to make personal choices is normalized, Winston has no sense of autonomy. He is manipulated into thinking that family structures cannot be built naturally. The party purposely erases the concept of authentic relationships and families to mentally constrict others from forming meaningful connections. It was not until Winston meets Julia – a romantic interest from the Fiction Department – that he realizes how distant he has become from his wife: “She [Julia] described to him, almost as though she had seen or felt it, the stiffening of Katharine’s body as soon as he touched her, the way in which she still seemed to be pushing him from her with all her strength, even when her arms were clasped tightly round him.”⁵² He feels no connection to Katharine and begins to question reality when developing the ability to think against the norms of society. His personal memory struggles to understand the difference between personal satisfaction and conformity. As he starts to become emotionally understanding through his relationship with Julia, he is punished by the government. Authority figures detain Winston from society and torture him due to his genuine connection to Julia. Winston’s personal experiences are controlled by the ideology pushed upon him by his government about emotional connections. As soon as he develops a sense of identity through his relationships, he is tortured to remember his personal experiences as a negative aspect of his life.

Similarly, in *F451*, Montag begins to recognize the negative aspects of his life through a genuine connection with a character named Clarisse. Through their relationship, he recognizes that he has no emotion toward his wife Mildred. Montag's society constructs an environment where personal thoughts cannot be expressed. Citizens are constantly fed entertainment, especially from televisions, to get them to stop thinking. When Montag meets Clarisse, he begins to feel a division between his past and present self: "And suddenly she [his wife] was so strange he couldn't believe he knew her at all."⁵³ Thanks to Clarisse, Montag realizes that his personal memory of his relationship feels staged. He was put into a position of marrying a stranger and romanticized his life to the point where he saw no wrong. Montag's personal memory was shaped by his societal standards to the point where he did not even realize he barely knew the woman he married. Montag tries to reclaim his personal memory by rebelling against his society's law of keeping books. When Montag is chased out of his community for his attempt to fight against government corruption, he meets other escapees. During his short introduction to the others, he watches his town get bombed. While watching his community be blown up, he finally remembers aspects of his marriage to Mildred that he previously forgot about. Montag regaining his personal memory at this moment is important because the government is gone. This moment symbolizes how the government has control over all personal experiences in Montag's society and it needs to be destroyed for individuals to regain a sense of self.

The government in *The Handmaid's Tale* works similarly. Offred experiences personal memory disconnect through her forced sacrifice of her memories. When she is forced to become a handmaid, she must forget her past name and prior life, much as Montag slowly does. Offred states, "They [my family] might as well be nowhere, as I am for them. I too am a missing person."⁵⁴ In dystopian literature, it is common for individuals to be stripped from their prior lives. There needs to be a disconnect to others to promote personal memory struggles. Offred struggles with holding onto her prior memories as she tries to hold onto who she previously was and maintain an identity beyond her role: "From time to time I can see their faces, against the dark, flickering like the images of saints, in old foreign cathedrals, in the light of the drafty candles [...] I can conjure them but they are mirages only, they don't last."⁵⁵ Offred tries to remember her prior experiences, however, since her society pushes handmaids to forget their old lives, she begins to struggle with maintaining her memories.

In *Divergent*, family communication is stripped from Beatrice Prior in a similar attempt to replace her old life. She is forced to forget her past life in Abnegation and directed to focus on creating a family connection with the Dauntless group. Beatrice explains, "I feel uncomfortable, like I'm wearing someone else's skin. If I'm not careful, I could die. I can't even trust the leaders of my faction. My new family."⁵⁶ Her biological family was built upon trust and love, while in her new faction, she struggles to form a connection to others. Beatrice feels like an imposter in her own skin and fights to hold onto her personal memory of her family. During the process where she transitions into a new faction, she is forced to use a serum that puts her into a simulation. This simulation is a life-like setting where illusions of her personal experiences will be altered to scare and harm her. The purpose of this serum is to break individuals down to be able to mold them into behaving in a specific way. The factions are designed to act as a wall between a character's personal memory and their expected memory within their new groups.

In *The Giver*, Jonas and his mentor are walled off from others because of their access to memories. Their wider world is void of color representing the loss of memory amongst citizens. Young Jonas is given the job of receiving memories of all human history from The Giver. As he receives these memories, he begins to see color in the world. The Giver tries to explain the

concept of color to Jonas as he receives memories: ““Once, back in the time of the memories, everything had a shape and size, the way things still do, but they also had a quality called color.””⁵⁷ Color is often used as a form of expression and can conjure many emotions to people. A world without color can be seen as expressionless and dull. In Jonas’s unique case, color symbolizes the personal memories he is starting to form while others cannot. He can understand, feel, and gain knowledge about topics that others cannot. Since this development of memory is new to Jonas, he feels disconnected from reality. He can no longer relate or build reciprocal relationships with others beside The Giver. Jonas’s personal memory was long controlled and surveilled, but as he gains awareness, he struggles to understand society.

Extreme surveillance is also presented in *Feed*, in which every individual is expected to get a technological chip installed into their brains. The story follows Titus, who has overly relied on his short-term memory thanks to technology. Susan Gathercole defines short-term memory as recall of “events that occurred in the very recent past, where the delay between presentation of the material to be remembered and remembering is measured in terms of seconds and possibly minutes rather than hours or days.”⁵⁸ Most of society has begun to use technology instead of their own biological processes to record memories. After a memory is recorded, everyone has access to replay those memories or send them to someone else. Violet, who was in love with Titus, lost her personal memories to the platform: “It [her message] was all about how she had lost her memory, and how sometimes she couldn’t move parts of her.”⁵⁹ Due to the technology failing, Violet was unable to remember her prior memories and ultimately lost her life to the platform. In the dystopian world of *Feed*, the importance of personal memories has been lost to the overconsumption of technology. Without personal memories, people begin to rely on video memory to recall events with being able to emotionally connect with the past. Relying on storing personal memory into a drive also presents the issue of permanent erasure.

The Hunger Games controls personal memories by distancing an individual from their actual self by deleting their connections and replacing them with a scripted self. Part of the annual games requires tributes to present themselves live. Katniss is required to put on a fake persona with another person from her district named Peeta. They pretend to have a romance in front of millions of people to persuade them to support them in the games. Before the games, they are assigned a team to help them with wardrobe, interviews, training, and more: “Tomorrow night will be our televised interviews. I guess the whole team will have their hands full readying us for that.”⁶⁰ Katniss is trained to forget her prior self and to become a scripted tribute. As she develops this new persona, she has a difficult time differentiating her real self and her scripted self, especially with her relationship to Peeta. *The Hunger Games* creates a world where people are unable to recognize themselves due to scripted enforcement of behaviors.

The Maze Runner is structured around a social experiment that scripts people’s behaviors by making them forget their personal memories. When the Gladers are put into the maze, they are given a serum that makes them forget their name, background, and how they got placed there. One of the Gladers, Chuck, states, ““I want to go back to my family. Whatever’s there, whatever I was taken from. I wanna remember.””⁶¹ He struggles to picture a life outside of the maze and fantasizes a past and a future he will never have. Chuck tries to form family connections in the maze to make up for the personal disconnect he feels. The maze designers control how much everyone remembers. They purposely rid the Gladers of their memories to see how they would survive without a connection to their personal lives. Many Gladers struggle to grasp the idea of not having access to their past memories and fight to regain them.

Both *The Circle* and *The Every* follow women who are being told that their recorded experiences are the equivalent of personal memories. Mae joins the company with a strong sense of who she is. As time passes, she is forced to constantly share her personal life. The company's motto is "All that happens must be known."⁶² The motto is seen as a positive message. However, the company is passively saying that every experience must be publicized without telling individuals directly that they will have no privacy. When Mae becomes valuable to the company, she adapts an identity around authority expectations. She starts to forget her own values, relationships, and prior experiences. A similar disconnect can be seen in *The Giver* when Jonas receives new memories that make him unable to relate to his family. In Mae's situation, she was able to hold genuine connections but lost sight of them. To fight against the system that Mae conforms to, a woman named Delaney joins the company in the sequel, *The Every*. Delaney is forced to present a fake version of herself through her interactions: "Most of her social media interactions had been faked; that really was a new low, Mae thought. What about Delaney was authentic, after all."⁶³ Ultimately, she is killed trying to bring down the program, proving that characters cannot retain their personal memory without risk of danger.

Personal memory within dystopian literature is altered or reshaped to fit a society's agenda. Our identity is primarily constructed around our memories. Without unique memories, people easily conform to society's expectations without question. If our world filtered out personal memories, people would struggle to fight back against a system constricting them to think toward a common agenda. Hanson states that "that individual memories exist embedded within frameworks of group memories."⁶⁴ Our historical memory cannot exist without personal memories while virtual memory is a technique used to eliminate personal memories from naturally developing. An individual's ability to freely think enhances our collective memory from a national perspective. Filtering personal memories and thoughts limits our common knowledge and ability to understand unique experiences of the world.

Conclusion

The dystopian genre has become a literary tradition that acts as a warning for individuals concerning the limitations of memory control. Even though memory is at the core of dystopian literature it is commonly overlooked. Many readers and scholars do not recognize the significance of memory. The less control a character has over their memory, the more corrupt the government is within their society. It is our duty as a society to learn from these dystopian novels and apply our newfound knowledge toward everyday life. We do not want to become broken mirrors; we want to maintain a strong ability to reflect on our society and our own actions.

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