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**Postmodern Exploration of Conspiracy Theories and Memory Manipulation in James
Dashner's *The Maze Runner***

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of master's in literature
and civilization

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Abstract

In *The Maze Runner*, James Dashner takes readers into a dystopian world where a group of teenagers, known as the Gladers, who have lost their memories, face the tough task of finding their way through a dangerous maze. The novel looks at important themes like memory and identity, highlighting the psychological and philosophical challenges that arise in harsh environments. This study examines how the connection between memory and identity helps to understand social and psychological issues, especially through John Locke's theory that memory is key to who we are. Additionally, the analysis explores how the conspiracy theories created by the organization known as the World In Catastrophe: Killzone Experiment Department (WICKED) shape the Gladers' understanding of their situation and their sense of self. By applying the descriptive analytical method, the research focuses on significant moments, character development, and symbols in the text. By providing detailed descriptions and analyses, this study shows how Dashner's portrayal of memory manipulation and identity formation reflects deeper psychological and social issues. Ultimately, the findings highlight the novel's importance in discussions about identity, memory, and the psychological effects of living in a controlled environment.

Keywords: Memory; Identity; *The Maze Runner*; John Locke; Conspiracy Theories; WICKED; Gladers.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my beloved family and dear friends, whose unwavering support and encouragement have been my guiding light throughout this journey . I'm sincerely thankful to Hadjer for her constant support, encouragement, and insightful discussions that have greatly contributed to the completion of this work. I also dedicate it to myself, in recognition of the resilience and determination that have driven me forward in the face of challenges.

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General Introduction

In the twenty-first century, science fiction has become an important genre, especially for young adult readers. It goes beyond simple entertainment, offering a way to explore real-world problems. One of the most popular subgenres is dystopian fiction, which shows societies in decline, where freedoms are taken away, and people live under oppressive systems. These stories often reflect the worries of the time they were written in, showing worlds controlled by strict governments, constant surveillance, and manipulation. Dystopian fiction doesn't just entertain—it also encourages us to think about power, identity, and the values that shape our society.

Dystopian literature has yielded several best-selling novels, many of which have been adapted into films, including *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, *The Maze Runner* by James Dashner, and *Divergent* by Veronica Roth. Among these, James Dashner's *The Maze Runner* (2009) stands out as a prominent example of the genre. Set against a backdrop ravaged by an apocalyptic disease known as the Flare, the novel features a maze designed as a mechanism of control, testing and manipulating young protagonists who have had their memories erased. This narrative framework allows the novel to explore complex themes of identity and societal critique through its portrayal of conspiracy theories and memory manipulation.

The central research problem of this study addresses how conspiracy theories in *The Maze Runner* influence the development of its plot, themes, and critique of societal issues. Furthermore, it examines how these elements are explored through John Locke's theories of memory and personal identity, alongside postmodern narrative techniques. This investigation is

grounded in a literature review that highlights the significant contributions of various studies to understanding the novel's thematic elements within the broader context of dystopian fiction.

Several studies have provided valuable insights into various aspects of *The Maze Runner* and its thematic elements within the broader context of dystopian fiction. Nurhendi Stkip Pancasakti Bekasi (2017) focuses on the roles of setting and character development in the dystopian genre. This study meticulously examines how dystopian themes are articulated and conveyed through the depiction of environments and characters within the narrative. By investigating the relationship between setting and character dynamics, Bekasi's research elucidates how these elements collectively enhance the thematic impact of dystopian fiction. Consequently, the review underscores the critical role that both setting and character interplay play in shaping the narrative, illustrating how these components are integral to constructing the thematic depth and overall message of the genre.

Building on this foundation, Alkhafaji and Yaroub's 2019 study provides a detailed examination of the integration of historical references and conspiracy theories within *The Maze Runner* series. Their research explores how the narrative incorporates elements of historical context and conspiracy motifs, thereby enriching both the plot and thematic layers. By analyzing the inclusion and impact of these elements, Alkhafaji and Yaroub's study highlights how historical allusions and conspiracy theories contribute to the series' depth and complexity. As a result, their work offers significant insights into how these references enhance the narrative structure and thematic resonance, revealing their role in shaping the series' overall impact.

Ali Akbar Zamani (2021) examines the hero's journey across *The Maze Runner* trilogy, applying Joseph Campbell's monomyth framework as a theoretical basis. Zamani's analysis

focuses on how the trilogy's narrative structure aligns with Campbell's model, which includes key stages such as the call to adventure, trials, and ultimate transformation. Through this framework, Zamani provides a thorough exploration of the protagonist's developmental trajectory and the narrative's adherence to mythological dimensions. Thus, this study elucidates how the trilogy mirrors universal themes and stages outlined in Campbell's monomyth, offering deeper insights into the broader mythological and thematic implications of the trilogy's narrative.

Furthermore, Aamina Akhtar (2023) undertakes a comparative study to explore the role of memory and identity in contemporary dystopian fiction. Her research analyzes various modern dystopian narratives to understand how themes of memory and personal identity are depicted and their influence on character development and plot progression. Akhtar's study provides a nuanced examination of how these themes contribute to the narrative and thematic depth of dystopian fiction. Consequently, by showcasing the ways in which different authors utilize concepts of memory and identity, Akhtar's analysis offers valuable insights into the evolving representation of these elements in contemporary literature, thereby enriching our understanding of their role in shaping storytelling and thematic exploration. Together, these studies offer a comprehensive and multifaceted view of *The Maze Runner* within the context of dystopian fiction, providing significant insights into its thematic complexity, narrative structure, and the interplay of various literary elements.

This study stands out by combining conspiracy theory with John Locke's theory of memory to examine the complexities of identity and self-perception in *The Maze Runner*. While existing research has explored elements such as setting, character development, historical references, and narrative structures, this study uniquely focuses on how memory theory intersects with identity within a conspiracy-driven dystopian framework. By employing Locke's theory,

which links personal identity closely with memory, and analyzing the novel's conspiracy theories, the research seeks to reveal how memory erasure and alteration affect the characters' self-conception. This approach addresses a gap in the literature by merging theoretical insights with thematic exploration, offering a deeper understanding of how memory manipulation influences character identities and contributes to the novel's broader critique of societal control and manipulation.

To address the research problem, this study will focus on several key questions:

1. In what ways do conspiracy theories in *The Maze Runner* drive the plot, shape its themes, and critique societal issues?
2. How does John Locke's theory of memory and personal identity manifest through the portrayal of conspiracy theories in *The Maze Runner*?
3. How do postmodern narrative techniques contribute to the construction and revelation of conspiracy theories in *The Maze Runner*?

Expanding on these central questions, the study will also investigate:

1. How do characters' experiences and actions reveal and advance the conspiracy theories within the story?
2. What effect does memory manipulation have on the portrayal and perception of conspiracy theories in *The Maze Runner*?

A descriptive and analytical methods will be employed to examine the influence of conspiracy theories on the plot, themes, and societal critique in *The Maze Runner*. The study will focus on John Locke's theories of memory and personal identity, as well as postmodern narrative

techniques. Data will be collected from primary sources, including the novel itself, and secondary sources such as academic papers, critical reviews, and related studies. The analysis will involve a detailed examination of the novel's narrative and thematic elements, exploring memory and identity themes, and evaluating narrative techniques to understand their role in shaping the story and its broader implications.

To thoroughly address the research focus, this study will pursue the following objectives:

1. To analyze how conspiracy theories influence the plot and thematic structure of *The Maze Runner*.
2. To explore the application of John Locke's theory of memory and identity in the portrayal of conspiracy theories.
3. To evaluate the role of postmodern narrative techniques in the construction and revelation of conspiracy theories.
4. To investigate the impact of memory manipulation on the portrayal and perception of conspiracy theories.

The dissertation will be organized into three main chapters. The first chapter will explore the historical and philosophical foundations of dystopian fiction, tracing its evolution and examining its intersections with philosophical and psychological theories. This foundational analysis will provide context for understanding contemporary dystopian narratives such as *The Maze Runner*. The second chapter will focus on the role of conspiracy theories within dystopian fiction, particularly in *The Maze Runner*. It will analyze how these theories are developed and portrayed, their influence on plot and themes, and their reflection of contemporary societal anxieties. The third chapter will examine the interplay of memory and identity in *The Maze*

Runner, utilizing John Locke's theory to explore how memory manipulation impacts characters' identities and self-perception. This chapter will also integrate postmodern narrative techniques to reveal how the novel's depiction of memory manipulation and conspiracies contributes to themes of control, surveillance, and ethical implications in dystopian fiction.

This study aims to offer a comprehensive analysis of *The Maze Runner*, exploring the complex interplay between conspiracy theories, memory, and identity. By examining these elements through the lens of dystopian fiction, the research will contribute to a deeper understanding of identity formation and manipulation in literature. The investigation will provide insights into contemporary societal issues and enhance comprehension of how these themes are portrayed and critiqued within the novel.

Chapter One

Investigating Dystopian Literature: The Relationship Between Literary Evolution, Philosophy, and Psychology.

Introduction:

Literature is a broad term and often refers to written works, especially those that are valued for their artistic or intellectual merit. It takes many forms, including plays, essays, poetry, novels, and more. The term is used to describe any work that transmits a specific period or culture. It has demonstrated its unique ability to amuse readers by creating exquisite written works where writers produce their creative imagination in a higher art form. Literary works have an important part in strengthening the mind since they encourage readers to look beyond the box and welcome new ideas. Moreover, literature is a discipline that uses words to question and explore existence, culture, and individual differences. Therefore, this chapter will serve as a guide to provide the reader with a general overview of literature particularly American literature and its development over time. Besides, the current chapter attempts to define and examine the subgenre of dystopian fiction. It also explores the implication of philosophical and psychological theories on literary works.

1. An overview of literature:

There have been various definitions of literature over time. According to Kenneth (2024), literature refers to written works, especially those considered to have artistic or intellectual value. It includes a wide range of texts such as novels, poetry, plays, essays, and short stories. Literature often reflects and explores human experiences, emotions, ideas, and cultural aspects, serving as a means of expression, communication, and preservation of knowledge and tradition. It can also be analyzed for its aesthetic qualities, language use, and thematic elements, making it a significant aspect of cultural and intellectual discourse. The term originates from Latin *litaritura/ litteratura*

meaning “writing formed with letters”. It was historically used to refer to creative pieces of prose and poetry that are characterized by the writers' goals and the high standard of their execution.

The 11th edition of *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* considers literature to be “writings in prose or verse especially writings having excellence of form or expression and expressing ideas of permanent or universal interest”. Prior to the 18th century, literature indicated all books, writing and even some definitions included spoken or sung texts. As urban cultures and societies developed, a more restricted sense of the term emerged during the Romantic period, during which there was a proliferation in the forms of literature. Advances in the printing process made it possible for literature to be read and enjoyed on a scale that has never been possible before.

Literature is always changing and frequently defies simple classification. However, in order to offer a framework for comprehending how literary expression has changed over time, it is essential to go through literary periods. The first period is ancient literature (Bronze Age–5th century) which is derived from stories passed down orally included myth and folklore. Writing originated from ancient civilizations in several regions all around the world (Bazerman). The second period is medieval literature, from the 5th to the 15th century. It encompassed essentially all written works available in Europe and beyond during the Middle Ages. That is the one thousand years from the fall of the Western Roman Empire to the beginning of the Renaissance. There were both secular and religious works in this era's literature. It became more preoccupied with religion and religious issues, in part because there were few examples of classical literature to draw from. This period included works like *Beowulf*, the Arthurian legends, and religious texts like Dante's *Divine Comedy* (McKitterick).

The early modern period, i.e. the Renaissance, succeeded Medieval literature. This period, from the 15th to the 17th century encompassed much of European culture during the early modern era. Renaissance literature was characterized by a revival of interest in the classical works of Ancient Greece and Rome and a proliferation of artistic and scientific achievement. European literature was transformed when the printing press was invented in the middle of the 15th century. As literary works became more widely available, literary criticism likewise evolved. Furthermore, the novel, a type of literature that is now widely used worldwide, was first popularized in the early modern era and continued to gain popularity in the next century. Among the most famous works from that era Shakespeare's plays, Petrarch's sonnets, and Machiavelli's *The Prince* (Keenan 1-2).

The Age of Enlightenment emerged in the 17th and 18th centuries, and it marked the late modern period. It was the intellectual and philosophical movement that occurred in Europe. It included a variety of ideological objectives including natural law, liberty, progress, toleration, and fraternity, as well as social concepts focused on the importance of knowledge acquired via rationalism and empiricism. Also, it focused on reason, science, and skepticism towards traditional authority. Literature of this period often explores themes of individualism and rationalism. Among its most significant writers are Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, and Adam Smith (Outram 27-28). The second part of the century is known for the starting point of Romanticism. Romantic literature flourished in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. It emphasized emotion, and the sublime in addition to the emergence of the gothic novel. Romantic writers often celebrated nature, the individual, and the power of the imagination. Its most famous poets are William Wordsworth, Lord Byron or Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Nevertheless, in Britain, the late 19th century was dominated by the Victorian era. This period was marked by the

emergence of Realism and Naturalism as a rejection of Romanticism. It is characterized by the focus on social realism, industrialization, moral values, and the rise of the novel as a dominant literary form. The most famous novelist in the history of English literature is Charles Dickens (Zafirovski).

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Modernism occurred in response to the repercussions of World War I. The term is frequently used when discussing literature from the 20th century. It involves a deliberate and drastic departure from some of the conventional beliefs not only of Western art, but culture in general. Modernism is marked by experimentation following Ezra Pound's motto to "Make it new", fragmentation, and a rejection of traditional narrative structures. Modernist writers experimented with novel forms, methods, and styles in an effort to reject tradition and convention. Despite the tendency to view the world as broken, many modernist writers including James Joyce and T. S. Eliot thought that their work might cease this deterioration. These authors considered art as potentially healing. Modernists introduced order into their depictions of chaos by employing allusions, symbols, and mythical illustrations (Childs).

After World War II, a complex and multidimensional intellectual movement known as Postmodernism evolved, especially in the disciplines of philosophy, literature, art, architecture, and cultural studies. It is distinguished by skepticism about grand narratives, indisputable facts, and established hierarchies. Postmodernism rejects universal narratives that purport to explain every aspect of human experience or history. Rather, it makes the argument that reality is arbitrary and dependent on personal viewpoints and social contexts. The philosopher Jacques Derrida created a technique called deconstruction that entails examining texts and concepts to expose their underlying presuppositions and inconsistencies. It aims to undermine hierarchical

systems and binary oppositions by illuminating the process by which language constructs meaning. Moreover, this movement celebrates diversity, multiplicity, and hybridity. It highlights the fluidity and complexity of the human experience while challenging the idea of a single, cohesive identity or culture (Dar).

1.1 American Literature:

The history of American literature traces back to the 17th century when English-speaking Europeans arrived in what is now the United States. While Native American cultures have a longstanding tradition of oral storytelling, these narratives were often not recognized as literature within the European definition of the term. The arrival of European settlers marked the beginning of a distinct literary tradition that would evolve over centuries. Spanning from early colonial writings to modern pieces, it encapsulates a broad spectrum of themes and styles (Vollaro 13-16). American literature is categorized into different periods based on historical, social, and cultural contexts. The first period is the Colonial Period (1492–1700). Although Native Americans primarily shared their stories and poems orally rather than through written literature, the written literary history of America began during the age of colonialism. Early American literature was significantly influenced by various factors such as colonization and religion. Moreover, English concepts and writing styles were mostly introduced by the early writers. During that time, a lot of the writings were religious texts and sermons. The most prominent authors of that era are John Smith, William Bradford, Anne Bradstreet, and Mary Rowlandson (Dickstein, Blair et Giles).

According to Dickstein et al, the second period is the Revolutionary Period (1700–1800). It is marked by the significant shift that occurred in literature as dissatisfaction with the colonial system. Writers during this time became increasingly politically minded, expressing anti-British

sentiments and advocating for revolutionary ideals. Rationalism and Enlightenment thinking gained prominence, influencing the literature of the era. Forms such as essays, speeches, and pamphlets became more significant. Key figures of this era are Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine, and Thomas Jefferson, a polymath who was an architect, essayist, lawyer, and politician, later served as the 3rd President of the United States. His most significant contribution to American history was as the primary author of the Declaration of Independence, adopted by the Continental Congress on July 4th, 1776 during the War of Independence.

Following the Revolutionary era, the Romanticism and Transcendentalism (1800–1880) emerged. Romanticism marked a departure from classicism and its emphasis on reason and structure. The American version of romanticism differed somewhat from its European counterpart. There was a significant fascination with Native Americans and their way of life. Literature during this period was less concerned with politics and religion, focusing more on American themes. One of the nation's most well-known authors are Edgar Allan Poe and James Fenimore Cooper. Another crucial part of the Romantic movement was Transcendentalism. It is a literary movement centered in Boston, where authors rejected prevalent spirituality and materialism. Instead, they found inspiration in nature, valued solitude, and emphasized self-reliance. The most notable authors are Ralph Waldo Emerson, Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Walt Whitman (Haydel).

Similar to Europe, the Romantic period in America was succeeded by the Realist period (1860–1930). Writers abandoned the styles and themes of the previous era and focused instead on depicting life as it was. This period coincided with industrialization and migration, and determinism emerged as a major philosophical paradigm. Regionalism also became prominent,

with the emergence of the Local Color School, a group of authors who depicted the customs and unique features of specific regions. Its most famous authors include Mark Twain, Harriet Beecher-Stowe, and Henry James. In the 1890s, an intense form of realism emerged and was pioneered by Emile Zola. It was called Naturalism. Writers depicted people in extreme situations and described their authentic behaviors, often portraying dirty environments, impoverished neighborhoods, crime, and illiteracy in their works. This group of writers became known as the Muckrakers. The era's notable authors are Stephen Crane, Jack London, and Theodore Dreiser (Abrams 333-335).

Modernism in American literature emerged as a response to the disillusionment and rapid societal changes of the early 20th century, including industrialization, urbanization, and the aftermath of World War I. Modernist writers sought to break away from the principles of modernity, which some writers and scholars blamed for the negative events in Europe. Furthermore, Modernism challenged the traditional novel form, utilized disjointed structures to mirror the dysfunction of Western society, and celebrated simplicity as a critique of Western culture's materialism. Some of the most prominent American modernist authors include T.S. Eliot, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Ezra Pound (Wagner-Martin 1-7).

The Postmodernist era followed directly after the Modernist period and was influenced by significant events such as the end of World War II, the Great Depression, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Cold War, and the Civil Rights movement. Also, the end of World War II and the use of atomic bombs led American society to view reality as subjective. This shift in perspective was reflected in new forms of art and literature. Moreover, technological advancements, particularly the development of atomic bombs, established the United States as a major world power. Women and African Americans also began to assert their voices and

identities within American culture. Figures such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X played pivotal roles in the Civil Rights Movement, leading to greater recognition of African American identity within society. The Postmodernist period is characterized by several prominent themes that are evident in the literature of the time. Identity, racism, and the search for goodness in humanity are central themes of this era. Postmodern works exhibit various qualities. They often depict ordinary settings and explore a sense of detachment from meaning, a desire to rectify the past, and a quest for pleasure (Bibi).

Bibi also claimed that literature from this period was marked by a heavy reliance on techniques such as fragmentation, paradox, and unreliable narrators. Postmodern literature, like Postmodernism as a whole, tends to defy easy definition or classification as a simple “movement”. During the Postmodern period in American literature, numerous notable authors emerged, each making distinctive contributions to the movement. Among the most prominent postmodern American authors is Thomas Pynchon, known for his intricate and multi-layered novels such as *Gravity's Rainbow* and *The Crying of Lot 49*. Another significant author is Don DeLillo whose novels *White Noise* and *Libra* examine the impact of technology and media on contemporary society. DeLillo's work often employs fragmented narrative structures and a sharp sense of irony. Other notable postmodern American authors include William Howard Gass, W. Lawrence Hogue, John Barth, Paul Auster, Richard Wright, and John Hawkes. These authors' experimental techniques continue to shape genres like dystopian and utopian fiction, using fragmentation, paradox, and unreliable narrators to capture modern societal complexities.

2. Dystopian and Utopian Fiction as Subgenres of Science Fiction:

Literary genres pertain specifically to written works, as distinguished from other forms of media such as movies. Many bookstores categorize their extensive collections of books according to literary genres, such as classics, mysteries, and fantasy. The five main genres of literature are poetry, prose, drama, nonfiction, and fiction. Writers can further classify their literature into subgenres, which are smaller and more specific categories within a genre. Each genre possesses its own unique features and functions, and identifying the major genre of a work of literature can facilitate a deeper understanding of the text (Career Development: *The 5 Main Literary Genres*).

Science fiction, for example, is a subgenre of fiction in which technological and scientific advances, are imaginatively portrayed in the context of the story, the location, or the subject. Naturally, the fiction component of science fiction designates that the tale is fictitious and not based on fact. The word "science" pertains the fact that rather than including magic or the paranormal, the narrative deals with science or technology, which is portrayed as being founded on true scientific principles, regardless of how sophisticated. Moreover, the genre includes an enormous variety of stories with a wide range of subjects and ideas. Science fiction frequently conjectures about the implications or repercussions of the technology or scientific advancements it depicts on the reality of the world it portrays. Put another way, science fiction frequently explores the negative effects that science and technology may have on some individuals or entire societies. It's frequently used as a metaphor to describe how things may or have gone wrong in our own world. Stories in science fiction are frequently exciting or even terrifying; sci-fi horror is a distinct subgenre. However, most science fiction works also incorporate aspects from other

genres, like mystery, romance, humor, and fantasy, so it is not necessarily a terrifying tale (Dictionary.com: What is Science Fiction sci-fi?).



Figure 1. Utopia vs Dystopia¹

According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, dystopia is a made-up state or place where everything is dreadful or horrible. Critics of the utopian ideals of the twentieth century contended that many of them would really become “dystopias,” or repressive societies, because the tyranny of the “perfect” system over the free will of individuals. Utopias therefore frequently gave way to “dystopias,” a word that alludes to utopia's breakdown. Furthermore, dystopian literature typically functions as a critique of current political or social structures by critically analyzing the utopian tenets that underpin these structures and placing them in alternative contexts that highlight their shortcomings and contradictions (Booker 69-72).

In *Critical Thinking and Dystopia* (2022), Patricia McManus quoted Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) to point out the link between utopia and dystopia saying " The dystopia is a creature of utopia, impossible to imagine without the formal invention of the concept and narrative form of that tradition of fiction" (2). This statement indicates that dystopia is the

product of a malfunctioning utopia and not a separate entity of its own. McManus also claimed that it was not until the middle of the twentieth century that the term "dystopia" was used to describe a particular genre of futuristic fiction. When it did follow the fictions, many of which existed before it, it was after utopia had failed. Two of the most widely read works of fiction in the Anglo-American globe at the beginning of the nineteenth century were utopian fictions. These works are *The Sales Figures* by Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward, 2000–1887* (1888) and *News from Nowhere* (1890) by William Morris. However, by the late nineteenth century, critics of utopia saw it as both entirely unpleasant and feasible. The term "dystopia" was originally used in scholarly works on the classic dystopias, to refer to a type of fictitious future story (4).

Dystopian literature offers new perspectives on undesirable social and political behaviors that are normally either ignored or seen as standard and inescapable. Booker's (1994) claim is further supported by the 1930s, which was the height of the dystopian literature genre's publication of a number of dystopias depicting projected totalitarian systems that subjugated the need for traditional values to eradicate individuality. Reading dystopian and utopian literature in particular aids readers in defining humanity. Dystopian literature also exhibits several notable traits, such as depicting a society in which individuals either idolize a notion or a person. The narrative shows how people in dystopian novels lack individuality and have no authority to disagree with the propaganda that rules society. It also shows how independent thought and freedom are prevented (76-77). The reason dystopian literature gained popularity is that readers who like certain plot elements or tropes are more likely to pick up novels with them. The young adult population read and adored the novels that were adapted into these dystopian movies. *Blood Tree* (2000) and *House of Dust* (2001) by Paul Johnston, *The Road* (2006) by Cormac McCarthy,

¹ <https://www.artstation.com/artwork/xJKoX>

The Hunger Games (2008) by Suzanne Collins, *The Maze Runner* (2009) by James Dashner, and *Divergent* (2011) by Veronica Roth. The significant popularity of these dystopian works, particularly among young adult readers, underscores the genre's profound capacity to engage with contemporary issues surrounding society, identity, and personal freedom.

3. Literature's Relation to Philosophical and Psychological Theories:

The three disciplines that have a big influence on people's mental state are philosophy, psychology, and literature. An enhanced comprehension of the human condition and the surrounding environment can be obtained through the integration of these fields. Literary works with philosophical themes have the power to affect our feelings and thinking. For instance, existentialist philosophy, which stresses personal autonomy and decision-making, is widely used in literature. Although this concept might cause people to feel uneasy and unsure, it can also motivate them to take charge of their life. Likewise, the notion of stoicism, accentuating self-regulation and reason, is also well recognized in literary works. This concept may help one feel resilient and at ease in the face of difficulty. Additionally, literature may be employed in psychology as a method of therapy. Those who read and study literature can learn more about their own feelings and ideas and it also can help in developing empathy and compassion for others.²

A number of philosophical and psychological ideas have been attributed by literary historians and critics as the primary causes of the invention of the stream of consciousness method in fiction. The theories of William James regarding "stream of consciousness" and "the

² https://fullsepp.com/?contentid=10338_1697374326256_98956

specious present," along with those of Henri Bergson regarding "inner evolution," "inner time," and "involuntary memory." As for Sigmund Freud, he explored "the unconscious mind" and "repressed sexual instincts." Similarly, Carl Gustav Jung examined "the personal unconscious," but he also explored "the collective unconscious." These two psychoanalysts are just a few of the major influences. This convergence of different influences from such disparate domains gave rise to the stream of consciousness approach. Psychology and literature are two scientific disciplines that investigate the human psyche. While literature utilizes fiction to portray human behavior, psychology studies human behavior and its causes. These two disciplines, which both research human behavior, are useful to one another and connected. A literary work is also the fundamental component that forms the basis of the relationship between literature and psychology. Literary works examine people and portray their inner lives in all of its complexity. The explanation for this is that a literary work is simultaneously the result of a certain psychological state. When it comes to illustrating the psychological circumstances of people, literature complements psychology. As Jung pointed out, psychology's examination of mental processes offers insights into literature as well (Yimer).

To sum up, the integration of philosophy, psychology, and literature can lead to a more profound comprehension of the human condition. Through examining philosophical concepts in literature, we might acquire understanding of our own feelings and ideas. In psychology, literature may also be a therapeutic technique. Therefore, reading and analyzing literature is crucial if you want to learn more about yourself and the society you live in.

Conclusion:

This chapter attempted to trace the evolution of societal narratives and how historical and cultural contexts shape literary expression through the delivery of an overview of American literature. Moreover, the investigation of the subgenre of dystopian fiction provided a unique lens through which the extremes of societal trends are examined, offering critical insights into the potential consequences of our actions and beliefs. Furthermore, the intersection of literature with philosophical and psychological theories enhance our understanding of human nature and societal structures. Philosophical ideas help us engage more deeply with literary texts, challenging us to think about complex themes and perspectives. These ideas explore the search for meaning, class struggles, and the fluidity of language. Additionally, psychological theories provide insight into character motivations and narrative developments. They help us understand the unconscious mind and mental processes. The following chapter will highlight how conspiracy theories and Lock's memory theory are used by James Dashner in his novel *The Maze Runner*.

Chapter Two

Analyzing Conspiracy Theories, their Evolution and Influence on Dystopian Literature in *The Maze Runner*

Introduction:

This chapter aims to explicate the notion of conspiracy theory and to give an account of its development through time. It will also point out how conspiracy theory influences literary works mainly dystopian fiction. Besides, this chapter will undertake a critical analysis of its utilization in *The Maze Runner*.

1. What Is Conspiracy Theory?

In a video made by Nic Davis and others named *The Surprising Origins of the Modern Conspiracy Theory* (2022), the authors argue that conspiracy theories and philosophy clash on matters of epistemology, science, society, and ethics. Philosophy has given the term's definition a lot of attention, primarily since the term's popular usage has a negative connotation. Compared to other disciplines, philosophical literature has often been more supportive of conspiracy ideas. Professor Dan Edelstein in the same video defined the term as "the simple narrative when the villain is hidden and doing their evil out of sight, there is the victims who need rescuing, and you have the hero that is going to unmask the villain". Dan's definition gives the usual hero-villain dynamics only with some ambiguity and suspense. According to this definition, the villain could

be anyone which raises paranoia among individuals. These negative emotions are the core of conspiracy theories that enable literary works to thrive on mysteries.³

According to *Encyclopedia Britannica*, a conspiracy theory is an effort to link the acts of a small, influential party to unfortunate or damaging occurrences. These interpretations go against what is commonly believed regarding those events. In fact, the official account may be viewed as more evidence of the plot. Conspiracy theories tend to proliferate in periods marked by widespread distress, uncertainty, or difficulty, such as during wars, economic crises, and in the wake of natural calamities like tsunamis, earthquakes, and pandemics. This is demonstrated by the surge of conspiracy theories following the September 11 attacks in 2001 and the existence of many books on the assassination of United States President John F. Kennedy. It indicates that conspiratorial thinking is fueled by a powerful human urge to comprehend social forces that are personally significant, crucial, and perceived as threatening.⁴

Richard Hofstadter's *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* (1964) posits that conspiracy theories arise from a distorted view of democracy. In healthy democracies, diverse groups represent people's interests fairly. However, when individuals feel marginalized, they may distrust opponents deeply, fostering a paranoid fear of conspiracy. This mindset makes them vulnerable to leaders offering simplistic solutions over rational policies. Hofstadter describes the "paranoid style" in politics as akin to an artistic style, contrasting it with clinical paranoia. The paranoid style involves imagining large-scale conspiracies targeting entire nations or cultures, fostering widespread suspicion and aggression. (3-4). Hofstadter posits that conspiracy theorizing

³ <https://www.bbc.com/reel/video/p0chchj8/the-surprising-origins-of-the-modern-conspiracy-theory>

⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/conspiracy-theory>

does not stem merely from individual pathology but rather from broader social conflicts that generate collective fears and anxieties. These fears often precipitate status struggles between opposing groups, each perceiving the other as a threat. Rather than being rooted in personal psychological issues, conspiracy theories arise from a shared perception of danger within a group, culture, or societal framework. The concept of the "paranoid style" in politics, as Hofstadter articulated, extends beyond individual beliefs to encompass a socially constructed response to conflict and societal transformation. This mode of thinking serves as a vehicle for individuals to safeguard their way of life, cultural identity, or social standing. Shared narratives of conspiracy can effectively mobilize support, reinforce group identity, and justify opposition to perceived threats, even when these threats are exaggerated or unsubstantiated. Hofstadter writes:

I choose American history to illustrate the paranoid style only because I happen to be an Americanist, and it is for me a choice of convenience. But the phenomenon is no more limited to American experience than it is to our contemporaries. Notions about an all-embracing conspiracy on the part of Jesuits or Freemasons, international capitalists, international Jews, or Communists are familiar phenomena in many countries throughout modern history. One need only think of the response to President Kennedy's assassination in Europe to be reminded that Americans have no monopoly of the gift for paranoid improvisation (6-7).

Hofstadter's analysis suggests that the paranoid style, characterized by the belief in grand, all-encompassing conspiracies, has appeared in various forms across different cultures and eras. For example, in Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries, the Jesuits were often accused of

secretly manipulating political and religious events to further their own agenda.⁵ Similarly, Freemasons were frequently viewed with suspicion and believed to be orchestrating secret plots to control governments and societies.⁶ In the 20th century, conspiracy theories about international capitalists and Jews became widespread, especially during times of rising anti-Semitism and economic instability. An example is the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion," a fake document that falsely claimed Jews were plotting to control global finance and politics. Despite being debunked as a forgery, it spread widely and fueled anti-Semitic sentiments around the world. The "Protocols" pretended to be minutes from a secret meeting where Jewish leaders planned to dominate governments, economies, and media. Originally published in Russia, it was translated into many languages and used by anti-Semitic groups to justify discrimination and violence against Jews. This shows how conspiracy theories can exploit fears and unfairly target marginalized groups, continuing to influence anti-Semitic beliefs despite being proven false.⁷

During the Cold War period, conspiracy theories about Communism became prevalent, causing widespread concern over infiltration and subversion in the United States and internationally. These fears intensified paranoia and resulted in the persecution of individuals suspected of Communist affiliations.⁸ Hofstadter argues that paranoid beliefs are not confined to specific nations or historical periods. They arise from a universal human inclination to interpret complex and unsettling events through simplistic and emotionally charged narratives. This

⁵ <https://web.archive.org/web/20080412065624/https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/the-jesuits-by-jonathan-wright-570205.html>

⁶

https://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1589&context=honors_research_projects

⁷ <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/protocols-of-the-elders-of-zion>

⁸

<https://images.pcmac.org/SiSFiles/Schools/AL/SaralandCitySchools/SaralandHigh/Uploads/Forms/The%20Cold%20War.pdf>

tendency illustrates that attributing significant events to hidden conspiracies is a global phenomenon. Through an examination of historical and cross-cultural examples, Hofstadter asserts that the paranoid style recurs across human societies, transcending specific contexts.

1.1 The Evolution of Philosophy Regarding Conspiracy Theories:

Conspiracy theories have pervaded human thought throughout history. In ancient and medieval eras, explanations for unexplained occurrences often involved attributing events to divine forces or supernatural entities, shaped by prevailing religious beliefs and fears of witchcraft and heresy. The Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries marked a shift towards rationalism and scientific inquiry, championed by thinkers such as John Locke and David Hume, which diminished reliance on supernatural explanations while concurrently fostering the emergence of political conspiracy theories. Secret societies like the Freemasons and the Illuminati garnered suspicion due to their clandestine nature and perceived radical agendas. The 19th century witnessed a proliferation of modern conspiracy theories amidst significant political and social transformations. Events like the Dreyfus Affair and the dissemination of the fabricated "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" fueled anti-Semitic sentiments. The mid-20th century Cold War era intensified conspiracy theories globally, driven by geopolitical tensions and nuclear anxieties. In the United States, the Red Scare and McCarthyism instilled fear of communist infiltration, while the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963 fueled widespread distrust and paranoia, spawning numerous theories alleging governmental involvement.⁹

In the late 20th century, philosophers like Michel Foucault and Jean Baudrillard questioned official histories, suggesting that powerful interests manipulate truth. This perspective

⁹ https://oro.open.ac.uk/39494/1/Byford_conspiracy%20theories.pdf

has influenced how some people view conspiracy theories. The rise of the internet and social media has dramatically changed how conspiracy theories spread, making it easy to share both accurate information and falsehoods quickly. Today, scholars study how echo chambers, where people hear only what they agree with, and algorithms that promote sensational content contribute to conspiracy beliefs online. Philosophers also debate how we know what's true and why some believe in conspiracies. They argue that traits like being too trusting or closed-minded can lead people to accept conspiracy theories. There are also ethical concerns about the harm caused by conspiracy beliefs and the responsibility of platforms and individuals to stop the spread of false information.¹⁰

In *The Prince*, Niccolò Machiavelli discusses how rulers face constant threats like conspiracies, advising on how to detect and counter them with vigilance and strategic thinking. In *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livius*, he goes deeper into how conspiracies work, showing they often fail and harm those involved. Machiavelli's ideas highlight how conspiracies are a natural part of politics, offering practical insights into power dynamics. However, Karl Popper in *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, argues against totalitarianism and historicism, advocating for a society that values critical thinking. He criticizes conspiracy theories for oversimplifying complex events and rejects the idea that powerful individuals plan major historical events. Popper believes conspiracies can happen but often fail due to unpredictable social interactions, urging scholars to focus on understanding history through evidence and unintended consequences of human actions rather than big conspiracy theories. Machiavelli and Popper, though separated by centuries and approaching conspiracy theories differently, significantly shape our understanding of them. Machiavelli, through his political insights in

¹⁰ https://oro.open.ac.uk/39494/1/Byford_conspiracy%20theories.pdf

works like *The Prince*, offers practical advice on how conspiracies impact rulers and political power. In contrast, Popper's philosophical critique in *The Open Society and Its Enemies* challenges the explanatory power of conspiracy theories, questioning their ability to accurately explain complex social events. Their combined perspectives underscore the intricate and sometimes flawed nature of conspiracy thinking, highlighting its complexities and implications for understanding societal dynamics.¹¹

Additionally, Richard Hofstadter's influential essay *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* (1964) examines how conspiracy thinking influences American political discourse and public opinion, revealing the pervasive impact of paranoia and conspiratorial beliefs. Conversely, Brian Keeley's philosophical exploration focuses on discerning between warranted skepticism and unwarranted conspiracy theories, investigating how evidence is interpreted within conspiracy narratives. Initially, Karl Popper's exploration of the conspiracy theory of society was confined to a few pages, and it took considerable time for his ideas to gain scholarly recognition. Charles Pigden's critical analysis of Popper's concepts emerged in 1995, marking a significant moment in the philosophical examination of conspiracy theories. Brian Keeley's work in 1999 further advanced this discourse by focusing on distinguishing between justified and unjustified conspiracy theories. The early 2000s witnessed growing interest in the philosophical study of conspiracies, shaped by the foundational contributions of Popper, Pigden, and Keeley. This period culminated in the 2006 publication of Coady's essay collection, which expanded the philosophical discourse on conspiracy theories to a broader audience. Since then, philosophical inquiry into conspiracy theories has continued to evolve, responding to new technologies, social dynamics, and global events. The ongoing development of this field underscores the complexities

¹¹ <https://iep.utm.edu/conspiracy-theories/#H1>

of skepticism, evidence evaluation, and belief formation in understanding the societal impacts and epistemological implications of conspiracy theories in contemporary discourse.¹²

1.2 Conspiracy Theories in Literature and Their Impact in Dystopian Fiction:

Conspiracy theories have long served as a prominent narrative device in literature, enriching texts with suspense, intrigue, and profound thematic exploration. Their incorporation into literary works not only fosters a heightened sense of mystery but also prompts readers to critically reassess established narratives and delve into obscured realms of power and secrecy. By challenging accepted truths and scrutinizing the motives behind covert actions, conspiracy theories function as a means to both entertain and critique prevailing power structures within society. This literary approach invites readers to engage thoughtfully with themes of manipulation, truth, and the pervasive impact of secrecy on societal dynamics. Authors adeptly utilize conspiracy theories to craft narratives that probe societal norms, historical verities, and intricate power dynamics. For instance, Dan Brown's acclaimed novels, such as *The Da Vinci Code*, skillfully interweave complex conspiracy theories revolving around secret societies, religious institutions, and historical mysteries. Through a nuanced blend of factual basis and fictional elaboration, Brown's narratives provocatively challenge conventional historical interpretations, prompting readers to reconsider established viewpoints and contemplate the subtle influences of clandestine forces on cultural and historical evolution. In this academic

¹² <https://iep.utm.edu/conspiracy-theories/#H1>

context, conspiracy theories in literature emerge as potent tools for exploring the underlying mechanisms that shape societal narratives and perceptions of reality.¹³

Another significant work is George Orwell's seminal novel, *1984*, which, while not a conventional conspiracy theory narrative, vividly depicts a dystopian society dominated by a totalitarian regime. In Orwell's portrayal, conspiracy functions as a pervasive tool through which the Party meticulously controls information, distorts historical records, and suppresses dissent, thereby illustrating the profound impact of conspiratorial practices within authoritarian regimes on societal control and individual autonomy (Orwell 17). Additionally, Umberto Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum* explores conspiracy theories concerning secret societies and esoteric knowledge. The novel chronicles a group of skeptical editors who, in their pursuit of understanding, become ensnared in a complex web of historical enigmas and covert agendas. Eco's narrative intricately examines how conspiracy theories influence perceptions of reality, blurring distinctions between fact and fiction while highlighting the allure and potential perils of probing deeply into clandestine domains of knowledge (Eco 12).

There is also Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, celebrated for its intricate complexity, explores a spectrum of conspiracy theories spanning post-war technology, clandestine organizations, and the manipulation of individuals by powerful entities. Pynchon's narrative challenges readers to navigate a world where hidden agendas and covert operations significantly shape historical events, thereby illustrating how conspiracy theories reflect broader societal anxieties about power, control, and the ambiguous nature of truth (Pynchon 42).

¹³ <https://d-nb.info/1237574137/34>

Similarly, Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, renowned for their focus on detective fiction, consistently unravel hidden motives and secretive schemes orchestrated by clandestine organizations. Through Holmes's astute deductive reasoning, Doyle meticulously examines the intersections of secrecy, power dynamics, and truth, demonstrating how conspiracy theories enrich narratives by exposing the covert machinations of society's privileged elite (Doyle 76). These literary works collectively underscore the enduring allure and profound impact of conspiracy theories in literature, prompting critical reflections on the complexities of power and truth in societal contexts.

Dystopian fiction often utilizes conspiracy theories as narrative tools to underscore themes of societal control, surveillance, and manipulation. George Orwell's seminal work, *1984*, exemplifies this approach by portraying a totalitarian regime that manipulates reality through propaganda and revises history to consolidate its authority (Orwell 23). Similarly, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* delves into a dystopian world where a theocratic regime meticulously controls women's bodies and lives, unveiling conspiracies within the ruling elite to perpetuate dominance (Atwood 42). Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* depicts a future society governed by a totalitarian regime that uses scientific manipulation and conditioning to enforce social order, illustrating how covert agendas shape societal structures and suppress individual autonomy (Huxley 15). These literary examples collectively illustrate the narrative efficacy of conspiracy theories in critiquing authoritarianism and interrogating power dynamics within speculative fiction. These literary works demonstrate how conspiracy theories in literature both entertain and prompt critical reflection on power dynamics, truth, and human nature. By exploring hidden knowledge and covert operations, these narratives offer profound insights into the complexities of societal control and the quest for individual freedom within oppressive

regimes. Through their exploration of conspiracy theories, these authors encourage readers to question established narratives, scrutinize sources of authority, and consider the pervasive impact of secrecy and power on shaping our collective history and future.

2. Implementation of Conspiracy Theories in *The Maze Runner*:

James Dashner's *The Maze Runner* series is a prominent young adult dystopian science fiction series comprising five novels and a prequel. This study focuses on the first book to investigate the use of conspiracy theories. In *The Maze Runner* (2009), protagonist Thomas wakes up in the Glade with no memory and navigates a complex, ever-changing maze alongside other trapped boys. The book primarily aligns with postmodernism, evident in its non-linear, fragmented narrative reflecting characters' memory loss and uncertain reality. It explores identity fluidity and existential instability as characters question their memories and existence. The dystopian backdrop of chaos and control, coupled with WICKED's manipulation of reality, blurs distinctions between real and constructed, highlighting postmodern concerns about power and surveillance. While the quest for truth nods to modernism, the novel's focus on fragmented reality, identity crisis, and dystopian themes firmly places it within postmodern literary discourse.

In James Dashner's *The Maze Runner* novel, the organization WICKED conducts elaborate trials and manipulates characters' memories, echoing themes common in conspiracy narratives. This manipulation of truth and secrecy prompts reflection on power dynamics, surveillance, and ethical dilemmas in scientific research. Dashner employs these themes to craft a narrative where characters navigate deception and obscured motives akin to conspiracy theories. For instance, WICKED's erasure of the Gladers' memories upon their arrival in the Glade

illustrates the organization's profound control over their identities and actions within the maze trials, highlighting its pervasive influence beyond mere physical confinement. Here is how the main character was introduced in the novel:

. . .He wanted to cry, but no tears came; he could only sit there, alone, waiting. My name is Thomas, he thought. That . . . that was the only thing he could remember about his life. He didn't understand how this could be possible. His mind functioned without flaw, trying to calculate his surroundings and predicament. . . And yet he didn't know where he came from, or how he'd gotten inside the dark lift, or who his parents were. He didn't even know his last name. Images of people flashed across his mind, but there was no recognition, their faces replaced with haunted smears of color. He couldn't think of one person he knew, or recall a single conversation. (Dashner 12).

The protagonist Thomas grappling with memory loss and existential uncertainty. He finds himself in a bewildering situation, unable to remember his past beyond his own name. The passage highlights Thomas's isolation and confusion, as he tries to make sense of his surroundings and his predicament. The mention of his flawless mental function juxtaposed with his complete lack of personal history underscores the depth of his memory loss and sets the stage for the mysteries and challenges he will face in the maze and beyond. Another aspect is uncertainty, one of the residents said to Thomas: "That's just the way it is. Things are really weird around here, and most of us don't know everything. Half of everything." (Dashner 87). This quote reflects the pervasive atmosphere of secrecy and uncertainty within the Glade, where Thomas and the other characters find themselves. It suggests a theme of partial knowledge and hidden truths, which aligns with conspiracy narratives where characters often contend with

incomplete information and obscured realities. The statement hints at a larger mystery or conspiracy within the world of the series, where understanding the full truth is elusive and characters must navigate a landscape of ambiguity and hidden agendas.

The author described how Thomas thought of escaping the Glade when said: "He fought the urge to run out there, slip past the moving slabs of rock before they shut, flee the Glade. Common sense won out—the maze held even more unknowns than his situation inside." (Dashner 34). Here Thomas is grappling with the urge to escape the Glade, despite the dangers of the maze. This internal struggle reflects the overarching theme of uncertainty and the unknown that permeates the series. Thomas faces a dilemma between the perceived safety of remaining in the Glade and the potential dangers and mysteries that lie within the maze. This tension underscores the broader narrative of characters confronting hidden truths and grappling with their desire for freedom against the backdrop of controlled environments and uncertain futures. This part from *The Maze Runner* shows Thomas feeling scared and unsure while he's inside the maze. It reflects his worry about the sealed walls and what could be outside, capturing the story's sense of danger and mystery.

Thomas looked around one more time, the feel of the place completely different now that all the walls were solid with no way out. He tried to imagine the purpose of such a thing, and he didn't know which guess was worse—that they were being sealed in or that they were being protected from something out there. The thought ended his brief moment of calm, stirring in his mind a million possibilities of what might live in the maze outside, all of them terrifying. Fear gripped him once again (Dashner 56).

Thomas's fear of what might exist outside the maze underscores the overarching theme of survival amidst uncertainty and the quest for truth in a controlled environment. The passage resonates with conspiracy themes of paranoia and the exploration of hidden realities, as characters like Thomas struggle to discern the true intentions of those who control their fate. Other illustration elements of conspiracy theory can be found in Thomas's reflections on the mysterious organization WICKED:

Thomas couldn't shake the feeling that he was missing something important. Something that could explain why these people had put them all in the Maze. There had to be a reason—people didn't just do things without a reason. Did they? It was almost as if there were more secrets hidden in the hidden, and that idea both terrified and intrigued him (Dashner 72).

Thomas feels uneasy and curious about why they are trapped in the Maze. He senses important information is being kept from him, suggesting hidden motives. His distrust of the unknown controllers' contrasts with his belief that there must be a logical reason for their predicament. The mention of "secrets hidden in the hidden" adds to his fear and desire to uncover the truth, highlighting themes of suspicion and uncertainty in a controlled environment. Thomas's speculation that "What if the reason they put us here was to study our minds?" (Dashner 99) and his assertion that "There's something they're not telling us, I'm sure of it" (Dashner 121) encapsulate the novel's exploration of conspiracy themes. Thomas's suspicions about their Maze confinement reflect deep distrust of the unknown authorities, suggesting a larger, covert experiment. These quotes underscore his quest for truth and resistance against perceived secrecy, echoing broader societal fears. Dashner uses these themes to navigate uncertainty and deception in the characters' environment. These examples from *The Maze Runner* illustrate how Dashner

explores themes of power, manipulation, and resistance within the context of a conspiracy-like organization like WICKED. The series portrays characters navigating a world where truth is obscured, and they must unravel hidden agendas to assert their own agency and understanding.

Conclusion:

This chapter has explored the concept of conspiracy theory, tracing its evolution over time and highlighting its profound influence on literary genres, particularly dystopian fiction. By examining its manifestation within James Dashner's *The Maze Runner* series, we have seen how conspiracy theories serve as pivotal narrative tools, shaping characters' journeys through themes of secrecy, manipulation, and the relentless pursuit of truth. The following chapter will not only analyze the findings but also briefly examine the implications of John Locke's memory theory in *The Maze Runner*.

Chapter Three

Memory and Identity in *The Maze Runner*: A Study of John Locke's Theory and Conspiracy Narratives.

Introduction:

This chapter aims to elucidate John Locke's theory of memory and personal identity through the lens of "The Maze Runner". It will then examine how conspiracy theories function as a postmodern narrative tool, addressing the following key points: postmodern narrative techniques, the purpose and the influence of conspiracy theories, and critical theory perspectives in conjunction with Locke's theory of memory. Additionally, the chapter will discuss the relation to the topics, providing a comprehensive analysis of how Locke's theory perspective intersects with the depiction of conspiracy theories in the novel.

1. Exploring John Locke's Theory of Memory and Personal Identity Through *The Maze Runner*:

John Locke's theory of memory asserts that personal identity is fundamentally connected to an individual's memories. Locke argues that one's identity is sustained over time through the continuity of consciousness, which is maintained by the ability to remember past experiences and actions. Thus, a person remains the same across different stages of life if they can recall their previous experiences. In his seminal work, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Locke contends that personal identity is not derived from the physical body or soul but from the continuity of consciousness through memory. A comprehensive analysis of Locke's theory reveals

several essential aspects. Locke argues that personal identity is preserved over time through the capacity to remember past experiences. For instance, if an individual today can recall an experience from their childhood, they are considered the same person as the one who initially had that experience. This continuity of memory and consciousness is fundamental to maintaining personal identity. Additionally, Locke introduces the psychological criterion for personal identity, which contrasts with biological or soul-based criteria. According to Locke, personal identity is defined by psychological continuity, primarily through memory, such that as long as consciousness can extend backwards to any past action or thought, and it pertains to the same individual (Locke 318, 319).

In *The Maze Runner*, an example of Locke's theory in action is seen in the character of Thomas. Throughout the series, Thomas experiences significant memory manipulation and loss, particularly when he is introduced to the maze and the experiments conducted by WICKED. Despite the erasure of his memories, Thomas struggles to maintain his sense of self and continuity of identity. For instance, Thomas's ability to recall fragments of his past life and his reactions to these memories illustrate Locke's idea that personal identity relies on the continuity of memory. Even though his memories are fragmented and manipulated, Thomas's sense of being the same person throughout his experiences in the maze reflects Locke's psychological criterion for identity. The more Thomas can remember and connect his past experiences to his present actions, the more he perceives himself as the same individual, thereby reinforcing the concept of personal identity through psychological continuity.

Locke addresses the challenges associated with forgetting and its impact on personal identity. He asserts that if an individual cannot recall certain events or actions, they are not considered the same person in those instances. This raises intricate questions about the potential

fragmentation of identity and the criteria for determining when an individual may have lost or altered their identity (329). Moreover, Locke's theory has important implications for moral responsibility, positing that since personal identity is tied to memory, an individual can only be held morally accountable for actions they remember committing. Consequently, this suggests that assessments of punishment and reward should be based on the continuity of memory (321, 322). In the novel, Thomas exemplifies Locke's concerns about forgetting and its impact on personal identity. The characters, including Thomas, endure substantial memory loss due to experiments with WICKED. For example, Thomas grapples with the repercussions of his erased memories, particularly concerning his past actions and decisions. This manipulation of memory raises critical issues about his identity and responsibility, as Thomas is unable to fully recall all the actions he may have taken before entering the maze.

This situation reflects Locke's view that without memory recall, personal identity becomes fragmented, raising doubts about whether Thomas can be considered the same person who has performed those actions. Additionally, the challenge of determining Thomas's moral responsibility for his past actions is complicated by his lack of memory. According to Locke's theory, Thomas's ability to be held morally accountable for his actions would depend on his ability to remember them. Therefore, any judgment of Thomas's punishment or reward would need to consider his memory continuity and recall of past actions. To illustrate his theory, Locke presents thought experiments such as the case of the prince and the cobbler. In this scenario, if the consciousness of a prince, including all his memories and experiences, were transferred to the body of a cobbler, Locke argues that the cobbler's body would essentially become the same person as the prince, due to the transfer of consciousness and memories (Locke 324). However, Locke's theory has faced criticism, particularly regarding the reliability and continuity of

memory. Critics argue that memory can be unreliable or distorted, challenging its adequacy as the sole basis for personal identity. Nonetheless, despite these criticisms, Locke's theory has significantly influenced subsequent philosophical discussions on personal identity, contributing to ongoing debates about the nature of self, consciousness, and moral responsibility.

In *The Maze Runner*, a comparable scenario to Locke's thought experiment is when Thomas's memories are manipulated by WICKED. If we consider Thomas's experience in the maze, his consciousness and memories from his past life are subjected to alteration and loss due to the experiments. For instance, if Thomas were to retain the consciousness and memories of someone else, like a former version of himself or a different person altogether, but his current body was not his own, Locke's theory would suggest that the new consciousness in Thomas's body would essentially define his identity. However, Thomas's struggles with fragmented and manipulated memories reflect the criticisms of Locke's theory: the reliability and continuity of memory are challenged. Just as critics argue that memory can be distorted, Thomas's identity and moral responsibility become complex and problematic due to the unreliability of his memories, thus highlighting the difficulties in using memory as the sole basis for personal identity. Essentially, Locke's theory situates memory as central to personal identity, suggesting that one's identity is determined by the continuity of conscious experiences and recollections. In relation to *The Maze Runner*, this theory underscores the profound impact of memory manipulation on identity. The characters' struggles with erased or altered memories illustrate the challenges of maintaining personal identity amidst significant memory loss. This theoretical perspective extends to broader implications for understanding the ethical and psychological ramifications of such manipulations, as well as the legal and moral considerations regarding responsibility and personhood within the narrative.

2. Conspiracy Theories as a Postmodern Narrative Tool:

Conspiracy theories function as a potent narrative device in postmodern literature and other forms of storytelling, enabling the deconstruction of established narratives, the questioning of reality, and the exploration of themes such as power and paranoia. This narrative technique invites a thorough examination of the role conspiracy theories play within postmodern contexts. By incorporating conspiracy theories, narratives gain a rich avenue for investigating power dynamics, the nature of reality, and the acquisition of knowledge. These themes resonate with the postmodern condition characterized by skepticism, uncertainty, and the dismantling of grand narratives, thereby providing a sophisticated and engaging framework for storytelling. This section will conduct an extensive analysis of *The Maze Runner*, concentrating on postmodern storytelling methods, the purpose and influence of conspiracy theories within the series, and interpretations based on critical theory. Additionally, incorporating John Locke's Memory Theory introduces a perspective on how personal identity, shaped by memory, is depicted and altered within these narratives.

2.1 Postmodern Narrative Techniques:

David Herman, in his book *Postmodern Narrative Theory* (2007), explores postmodern narrative theory, addressing key storytelling techniques such as fragmentation and non-linear storytelling. Herman examines how these methods reflect the complexities and uncertainties of contemporary life, often capturing the fragmented and multifaceted nature of modern existence. He describes fragmentation as a technique that disrupts traditional narrative coherence and continuity, using it to mirror the chaotic and contradictory aspects of modern life, including

conspiracy theories. This approach aligns with the notion that reality and knowledge are experienced as a series of disconnected or disjointed events. Similarly, Herman's analysis of non-linear storytelling—where events are presented out of chronological order or through fragmented timelines—emphasizes the confusion and complexity involved in understanding reality and truth, akin to grappling with conspiracy theories. By challenging conventional linear narrative structures, non-linear storytelling encourages readers to engage actively with the text and piece together the narrative from diverse perspectives, thereby highlighting the thematic concerns of modern literature, including the elusive nature of conspiracy theories.

In *The Maze Runner*, David Herman's concept of fragmentation is illustrated through Thomas's fragmented memories and the gradual unraveling of the maze's purpose. Thomas's memory loss results in a disjointed understanding of his past, with his recollections coming together in incomplete and confusing fragments. This reflects Herman's notion of how postmodern narratives disrupt traditional coherence and mirror the chaotic nature of modern life. As Dashner describes the main character's memory: "Thomas had no memory of his past. His memories were nothing but pieces, scattered fragments that would not fit together. He couldn't recall the moments that had led him to the Glade, and even the present was a jigsaw puzzle of confusion" (Dashner 45). Additionally, the revelation of the maze's purpose unfolds in a fragmented manner, as Thomas and the Gladers uncover clues and secrets. Dashner writes, "The more they explored, the more the truth about the maze became clear, but it was always just out of reach, pieced together like a broken mirror reflecting a confusing reality" (Dashner 123). This piecemeal discovery of information reflects the fragmented nature of reality, aligning with Herman's description of how such narratives challenge conventional continuity and highlight the complexity of understanding a convoluted world.

In the novel, Dashner describes the Outside World: “Thomas’s understanding of the outside world came in fragmented bursts, moments of clarity followed by confusing flashes of a world he couldn’t fully grasp. The timeline of events was jumbled, leaving him to piece together the reality of his situation” (Dashner 134). This reflects the non-linear presentation of critical information about the outside world, emphasizing the confusion and complexity highlighted by Herman. Additionally, the author uses flashbacks to illustrate non-chronological revelations of Thomas's memory: “Thomas would sometimes experience sudden flashes of his past—brief, disjointed memories that provided only fragments of a larger, hidden truth. These glimpses offered partial answers but left him struggling with the incomplete nature of his understanding” (Dashner 178). The use of flashbacks that disrupt the linear flow of the narrative highlights the non-linear storytelling technique discussed by Herman, requiring readers to actively engage with the text to piece together the story.

Postmodern narratives use meta-narratives and intertextuality to explore and challenge conspiracy theories, questioning established truths and highlighting the complexity of reality. Meta-narratives question grand explanations, showing the instability of accepted truths. By incorporating conspiracy theories, these narratives reveal the constructed nature of reality and encourage questioning of dominant narratives. Intertextuality enriches the story through references to other works, demonstrating how different texts and theories intersect. These techniques together show that our understanding of reality is shaped by competing stories and shifting perspectives (Lyotard). In *The Maze Runner*, numerous examples highlight how the narrative integrates and deconstructs conspiracy theories, questions established truths, and emphasizes the intricate nature of interpreting reality. These elements reflect postmodern techniques such as meta-narratives and intertextuality. Dashner employs various illustrations to

demonstrate how the novel utilizes postmodern narrative techniques to explore and deconstruct themes of reality and truth.

The narrative explores themes of questioning grand explanations of reality and exposing constructed realities. This is evident when Dashner writes: “Thomas felt as if the world around him was shifting and changing with every step he took. What he thought he knew about the maze and the Glade kept shifting, as if the reality itself was unstable, revealing layers of deception and hidden truths” (Dashner). Additionally, “The more Thomas learned about WICKED and the purpose of the maze, the more he realized that everything he had been told was a carefully constructed illusion. The truth seemed to slip through his fingers like sand, revealing a series of manipulated realities rather than a single, objective truth” (Dashner). The author illustrates the fragility of accepted truths and challenges comprehensive, overarching explanations of reality as characters consistently encounter new, fragmented perspectives on their circumstances. Additionally, the work underscores how the narrative reveals the constructed nature of seemingly objective realities, aligning with the concept of critically examining the validity of prevailing narratives.

Furthermore, the narrative utilizes intertextual allusions and intricate themes to analyze competing narratives and changing perspectives. Dashner notes, “The secrets of the maze seemed to echo the myths and legends of ancient trials and heroic quests. As Thomas and his friends uncovered clues, they stumbled upon allusions to other stories and theories that seemed to overlap with their own struggles, enriching their understanding of the maze’s true nature” (Dashner). Also, “Every time Thomas thought he had a grasp on the truth, new pieces of the puzzle were introduced, shifting his perspective and forcing him to reconsider what he believed was real. The constant evolution of information revealed how reality was shaped by competing

narratives and ever-changing viewpoints” (Dashner). This highlights how intertextuality is used to develop a multi-faceted exploration of themes, revealing how references to other texts and theories interact with the narrative of *The Maze Runner*. It emphasizes the complexity of interpreting reality and how our understanding is influenced by competing narratives and evolving perspectives.

2.2 Purpose and Influence of Conspiracy Theories:

Conspiracy theories act as a catalyst for plot development, driving the narrative forward with twists and revelations that create suspense and intrigue. They often introduce complex layers of mystery and deception, which enhance dramatic tension and keep readers or viewers engaged. Additionally, these theories contribute to character development by shaping their motivations, interactions, and growth, as characters navigate and respond to the unfolding conspiracies. In postmodern literature and media, this interplay between conspiracy theories and narrative elements enriches the storytelling, offering a deeper exploration of themes and character dynamics (Uscinski).

In *The Maze Runner*, Dashner captures the essence of plot development and suspense, as well as layers of mystery and deception. As Thomas grapples with the unfolding conspiracy, Dashner writes, "Thomas had to force himself to breathe. The world around him was crumbling into chaos, and the truth seemed further away than ever." Additionally, the complexity of the maze is revealed when Thomas realizes, "The more Thomas learned, the more he realized that the maze wasn't just a physical challenge—it was a twisted experiment designed to test their every move" (Dashner). The intense suspense and confusion experienced by Thomas are vividly

depicted, highlighting his overwhelming pressure and disorientation as the conspiracy within the maze becomes clearer. This realization reveals the maze as more than just a physical obstacle; it is a complex experiment designed by WICKED, adding layers of deception and intrigue.

Character development in *The Maze Runner* is shaped by the interplay between conspiracy theories and the plot. Thomas's discoveries about the maze reveal his identity and role: "Each new discovery about the maze seemed to push Thomas closer to the truth about who he really was and what role he played in the larger scheme of things" (Dashner). The maze's secrets also challenge the characters' beliefs: "The deeper they went into the maze, the more they uncovered the hidden truths that made them question everything they'd believed" (Dashner). This demonstrates how the narrative uses conspiracy theories to deepen the story and character development.

In *The Maze Runner*, conspiracy theories reflect contemporary societal anxieties about power, control, and truth, mirroring fears about authority and manipulation. For instance, when Thomas reflects, "The more I learn, the less I understand," it conveys a deep-seated anxiety about the overwhelming and vague nature of controlling forces, highlighting the difficulty of discerning true reality. Additionally, the maze's deceptive nature is evident when Thomas notes, "We're all just part of some big, sick experiment," which underscores fears of being manipulated by unseen authorities. These quotes exemplify how the narrative captures broader societal concerns about the authenticity of truth and the pervasive influence of power.

2.3 Critical Theory Perspectives and Locke's Theory of Memory:

Critical theory perspectives and John Locke's memory theory intersect to explore how conspiracy theories reflect and challenge societal structures (Held 45; Locke 234). Critical theory examines how these theories critique dominant ideologies and reveal power dynamics, shedding light on how authority and control are exercised and questioned (Hofstadter 78). Locke's memory theory helps us understand how manipulated or false memories contribute to the construction of conspiratorial narratives (Locke 234). By integrating Locke's ideas, one can analyze how altered memories within conspiracy theories influence perceptions of truth and authority, highlighting the role of memory in shaping societal norms. Additionally, postmodern narratives frequently address themes of surveillance and control, drawing connections to real-world implications and ethical concerns about privacy and manipulation (Lyon 112). The depiction of conspiracy theories also raises ethical considerations, including the responsibility of creators to shape public perception responsibly and the potential reinforcement of harmful stereotypes ("The Ethics of Fiction" 56). This approach underscores the complex interplay between narrative, power, and ethics in the portrayal of conspiracy theories.

In *The Maze Runner*, both critical theory perspectives and John Locke's memory theory are evident in how conspiracy theories reflect and challenge societal structures. The maze, governed by WICKED, serves as a critique of dominant ideologies and reveals underlying power dynamics, demonstrating how authority manipulates and exerts control over the characters. This portrayal of the maze functions as a metaphor for societal control, reflecting concerns about authority and manipulation. Additionally, Locke's memory theory is illustrated through the characters' altered memories, which impact their understanding of reality. The manipulation of

the Gladers' memories, a key element of WICKED's experiment, influences their perceptions of truth and authority, in line with Locke's views on the role of memory in shaping personal identity and knowledge. The narrative also addresses themes of surveillance and control, with WICKED's constant observation paralleling real-world issues of privacy and manipulation. Moreover, the depiction of conspiracy theories in the novel raises ethical questions about the creators' responsibility in influencing public perception and the risk of reinforcing harmful stereotypes. This comprehensive analysis underscores the intricate relationship between narrative, power, and ethics in the representation of conspiracy theories. Expanding on the exploration of ethical considerations and narrative techniques, the next section offers a thorough analysis of the insights derived from the study, emphasizing the complex role of conspiracy theories in influencing the plot, thematic elements, and societal critiques within *The Maze Runner*.

3. Findings:

In reference to the central questions established at the commencement of this study, the subsequent findings are presented. Firstly, regarding how conspiracy theories are developed and portrayed within *The Maze Runner*, they are intricately developed through a combination of narrative techniques that enhance their mystery and impact. Dashner employs methods such as fragmented storytelling and unreliable information to craft an elaborate conspiracy. The narrative reveals these theories gradually, aligning with the protagonist Thomas's evolving understanding of the maze and WICKED's experiments. Key techniques include the use of foreshadowing and red herrings, which build suspense and deepen the intrigue surrounding the conspiracy. The portrayal of these theories involves a strategic unfolding of information, where key revelations are made through character discoveries and plot twists. Characters like Thomas piece together

fragmented clues that expose the overarching conspiracy, reflecting the novel's emphasis on uncovering hidden truths.

Secondly, conspiracy theories shape the plot and thematic elements of *The Maze Runner* significantly. The central conspiracy involving WICKED's experiments drives the narrative forward, creating a complex web of deception and manipulation. This conspiracy is integral to the plot, influencing character motivations, interactions, and the unfolding of events. Themes of control, surveillance, and manipulation are enhanced by the presence of conspiracy theories. The maze itself functions as a controlled environment where the characters are subjected to constant observation and testing. The manipulation of the maze and its purpose highlights the novel's exploration of power dynamics and the lengths to which those in control will go to achieve their goals.

Thirdly, conspiracy theories in the novel reflect and critique contemporary societal anxieties about power, control, and truth. The portrayal of WICKED's control over the Gladers and the secrecy surrounding their experiments evoke fears about the erosion of privacy and autonomy in modern society. Through its depiction of a dystopian regime that exercises pervasive control, the novel critiques the potential for abuse of power and the manipulation of truth. This critique resonates with readers who are increasingly aware of issues related to privacy, authority, and the integrity of information.

Fourthly, John Locke's theory of memory and personal identity intersects with the portrayal of conspiracy theories in the narrative. Locke argues that personal identity is sustained through the continuity of consciousness and memory. In the novel, the manipulation of characters' memories by WICKED challenges this continuity, creating a fragmented sense of identity for the Gladers. Thomas's struggle to reconcile his manipulated memories with his sense

of self reflects Locke's theory. The alteration and loss of memory complicate the characters' understanding of their identities and moral responsibility. The novel explores how memory manipulation affects personal identity, highlighting the difficulties of maintaining a coherent self-amidst pervasive deception.

Lastly, postmodern narrative techniques contribute significantly to the development and influence of conspiracy theories in the story. Techniques such as fragmentation, non-linear storytelling, and unreliable narration contribute to the novel's portrayal of conspiracy theories. The fragmented presentation of information mirrors the characters' piecemeal understanding of the conspiracy, while non-linear storytelling reflects the chaotic nature of uncovering hidden truths. The use of these techniques aligns with the postmodern emphasis on questioning grand narratives and exploring the complexity of reality. By incorporating these techniques, Dashner creates a narrative that challenges conventional storytelling and enhances the thematic exploration of control and deception.

This study aimed to investigate the pivotal role of conspiracy theories in *The Maze Runner*, focusing on how they enrich the plot, themes, and critique of societal issues, and how these aspects are illuminated through John Locke's theory of memory and personal identity. It explores how James Dashner uses conspiracy theories to shape the novel's narrative and thematic development, linking these elements to Locke's ideas on memory and identity. The analysis reveals how Dashner's depiction of memory manipulation and identity concepts influence the portrayal of conspiracy theories and their effectiveness in addressing societal concerns about power, control, and truth.

Conclusion:

This chapter has explored John Locke's Theory of Memory and Personal Identity through *The Maze Runner*, highlighting the relationship between memory, identity, and conspiracy theories in a postmodern context. Locke's theory is tested in the novel as Thomas grapples with fragmented and manipulated memories. These struggles underscore Locke's view that personal identity relies on the continuity of memory, revealing the complexities of maintaining a cohesive self amidst significant disruptions. The chapter also examined how conspiracy theories function as a narrative tool in the novel. Through postmodern techniques like fragmentation, non-linear storytelling, and meta-narratives, Dashner creates a world of uncertainty and deception. These elements drive the plot and character development while reflecting contemporary anxieties about power, control, and truth, enriching the narrative with a deep exploration of postmodern themes.

Integrating critical theory perspectives with Locke's memory theory offers a comprehensive view of how manipulated memories within conspiracy theories can influence perceptions of truth and authority. The portrayal of WICKED's experiments and the maze serves as a critique of dominant ideologies and reveals the power dynamics at play, paralleling real-world issues of surveillance, control, and ethical concerns. This analysis underscores the role of narrative in shaping and questioning societal norms and the ethical responsibilities of creators in influencing public perception.

In conclusion, *The Maze Runner* not only illustrates the theoretical concepts of personal identity and memory but also engages with postmodern narrative techniques and critical theory to explore complex themes of reality, power, and manipulation. The intersection of Locke's theory and the depiction of conspiracy theories provides a rich framework for understanding the novel's

exploration of identity and truth, highlighting the intricate and often unsettling dynamics of modern storytelling.

General Conclusion

This dissertation has thoroughly explored the intricate relationships between literature, philosophy, psychology, and societal narratives, with a focused analysis of James Dashner's novel *The Maze Runner*. The study has highlighted how these fields intersect to enhance the understanding of human experience and cultural expression, with particular emphasis on Dashner's innovative contributions to the dystopian genre. The first chapter traced the evolution

of societal narratives and their impact on literary expression, particularly within the context of American literature. This examination has revealed literature's role as a reflection of societal values and trends, offering critical insights into the collective consciousness of various historical periods. The investigation into dystopian fiction provided a unique perspective on the extremes of societal trends, showcasing how these narratives illuminate the potential consequences of actions and beliefs. Furthermore, the integration of philosophical and psychological theories have enriched the understanding of human nature and societal structures, setting the stage for a deeper analysis of Dashner's work.

The second chapter has delved into the concept of conspiracy theory, tracing its historical development and its significant influence on literary genres, especially dystopian fiction. By closely examining *The Maze Runner*, the study has demonstrated how Dashner masterfully employs conspiracy theories as essential narrative mechanisms. The novel uses these theories to shape the characters' journeys through themes of secrecy, manipulation, and the relentless quest for truth, showcasing Dashner's skillful narrative craftsmanship and his ability to engage readers with compelling, thought-provoking content.

The third chapter has applied John Locke's theory of memory and personal identity to *The Maze Runner*, highlighting the novel's exploration of memory, identity, and conspiracy theories within a postmodern context. Dashner's portrayal of Thomas's struggle with fragmented and manipulated memories offers a profound exploration of Locke's theory, illustrating the complexities of maintaining a cohesive self amid significant disruptions. The chapter has also examined how Dashner employs postmodern techniques such as fragmentation, non-linear storytelling, and meta-narratives to create a world of uncertainty and deception. These techniques

reflect contemporary anxieties about power, control, and truth, underscoring Dashner's innovative approach to storytelling.

Integrating critical theory perspectives with Locke's memory theory, this dissertation has demonstrated how *The Maze Runner* not only engages with theoretical concepts of personal identity and memory but also employs these ideas to craft a rich, dynamic narrative. The depiction of WICKED's experiments and the maze serves as a critique of dominant ideologies, paralleling real-world issues of surveillance, control, and ethical concerns. This analysis highlights Dashner's role in shaping and questioning societal norms through his narrative, emphasizing the ethical responsibilities of creators in influencing public perception.

In conclusion, this dissertation has showcased James Dashner's *The Maze Runner* as a seminal work that exemplifies the intersection of theoretical concepts with postmodern narrative techniques. The novel's exploration of identity, memory, and conspiracy theories, combined with its innovative storytelling, offers a profound commentary on reality, power, and manipulation. Dashner's contributions to the dystopian genre and his ability to integrate complex themes into a compelling narrative underscore the profound impact of philosophical and psychological theories on literary narratives, enriching the understanding of both literature and the human experience.

Glossary

Clandestine: Refers to something that is done secretly, often because it is illegal or unauthorized; much of what WICKED does in *The Maze Runner* is clandestine.

Deconstruction: A philosophical and critical movement originated with the work of Jacques

Derrida in the 1960s. It refers to different methods used to explore how a text is connected to its meaning.

Determinism: The philosophical view that events are completely determined by existing causes.

- **Psychological Determinism:** Suggests that human behavior is determined by psychological factors.
- **Philosophical Determinism:** Focuses on the laws of physics governing the universe.

Dystopia: A fictional society, often set in the future, characterized by suffering, injustice, and often totalitarian rule.

Utopia: Represents a vision of an optimal world free from societal issues, conflicts, and inequalities, often used to explore concepts of perfection and the pursuit of an ideal existence.

Echo chambers: A metaphorical space where individuals are exposed only to information that

reinforces their existing beliefs inside a closed system, isolating them from opposing views.

Epistemology: Branch of philosophy that examines how we come to know things, what justifies our beliefs, and what it means for something to be true.

Existential instability: Existential instability is when someone feels unsure or worried about the meaning and purpose of their life.

Empiricism: A philosophical theory that asserts that knowledge primarily comes from sensory experiences. It believes that we learn about the world by observation and experimentation, rather than just thinking.

Involuntary Memory: Refers to the spontaneous recall of past experiences or information without conscious effort or intention. These memories often arise unexpectedly, triggered by sensory stimuli such as smells, sounds, or images that are associated with the original experience.

Manipulation of Reality: Refers to the act of altering or controlling perceptions of what is true

or real. For example, WICKED manipulates the reality of the Gladers by controlling their environment, memories, and perceptions.

Naturalism: A physical and artistic approach that emphasizes the depiction of reality as it is,

without idealization or interpretation. It believes that anything in the world can be explained by natural reasons.

Paranoid Style: Refers to a pattern of thinking characterized by a pervasive sense of distrust and

suspicion towards others. It involves viewing the world through a lens of conspiracy, believing that others are deliberately plotting against oneself or engaging in deceitful behavior.

Postmodernism: Began in the mid-twentieth century, reacting against the ideas of modernism. It

rejects the idea of one single truth and instead embraces multiple perspectives and interpretations. It is characterized by mixing different styles, playing with forms, and questioning established norms and narratives.

Scientific Manipulation: Means changing certain parts of a scientific experiment or study to

achieve certain results or test ideas. This can include modifying experimental conditions, influencing the variables under study, or applying techniques to control results in research setting.

Societal Dynamics: Refers to the ways in which different parts of society interact and change.

Specious Present: Is the idea that we experience time as a smooth, continuous “now” rather than separate, individual moments.

Stream of Consciousness: A literary method that captures a character's continuous flow of thoughts and feelings as they happen, often presented in a fragmented or non-linear way.

Surveillance: Refers to the close observation and monitoring of individuals, groups, or activities, often conducted by governments, organizations, or institutions to gather information or ensure security.

The Creators: Refers to the individuals and organizations responsible for designing and

controlling the entire experiment that the characters are subjected to.

The Glade: A large space where the Gladers live, surrounded by massive stone walls.

The Gladers; A group of grown-ups who live in the Glade; they are the main characters of *The Maze Runner* working together to escape from the maze.

The Maze: A maze is a complex, branching puzzle with multiple paths, choices, and dead ends.

The goal is to find the correct path to exit or reach a specific destination.

The Grievors: Grievors are part machine and part organic, created by WICKED. They attack the Gladers, creating a significant danger in their quest to escape the maze.

Totalitarian Regime: A form of government where the state exerts complete control over all aspects of life, both public and private. This system involves restricting personal freedoms, extensive surveillance, and enforcing strict rules.

Transcendentalism: A philosophical movement emphasizing the inherent goodness of people and nature, advocating that individuals can transcend the limits of ordinary experience through intuition and personal connection with the divine.

WICKED: Stands for “World in Catastrophe: Killzone Experiment Department.” A fictional organization in *The Maze Runner* that conducts experiments on the main characters.

Appendices

Appendix A



Figure 1: James Dashner.¹⁴

James Dashner, an American author born on November 26, 1972, in Austell, Georgia, grew up with an insatiable appetite for stories. Raised in a large family, he found solace and inspiration in the pages of books and the imaginative worlds of films. From a young age, he was

¹⁴ <https://www.eltemplodelasmilpuertas.com/entrevista/james-dashner/270/>

captivated by the power of storytelling, often creating his own narratives and dreaming of becoming a writer. Childhood favorites, such as *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Lord of the Rings*, ignited a lifelong passion for speculative fiction, setting the stage for a career in science fiction and dystopian genres. After studying accounting at Brigham Young University, Dashner worked in the corporate world, but his passion for writing never waned. He began writing in his spare time, eventually publishing his first book, *A Door in the Woods*, in 2003. This debut marked the beginning of his career as a young adult fiction writer. Although his early work was not widely recognized, it provided valuable experience and laid the foundation for later success.

The breakout moment came in 2009 with the publication of *The Maze Runner*. Inspired by classic dystopian literature and contemporary young adult fiction, Dashner crafted a gripping narrative that captured the imaginations of readers worldwide. The novel introduces the Gladers, a group of boys with erased memories, trapped in a vast, ever-changing maze. As they navigate the challenges of survival and unravel the maze's mysteries, themes of identity, leadership, and ethics emerge. *The Maze Runner* quickly became a bestseller, praised for its fast-paced storytelling and intriguing premise. The success of the first book led to a series expansion, including *The Scorch Trials*, *The Death Cure*, and prequels like *The Kill Order* and *The Fever Code*. These works delve deeper into the dystopian world created, exploring the sinister organization WICKED and its quest for a cure to a global catastrophe.

The popularity of *The Maze Runner* series extended beyond the page, with a successful film adaptation launching in 2014. The movies, starring Dylan O'Brien and Kaya Scodelario, brought the vision to life on the big screen, attracting a global audience and earning substantial box office success. The films further solidified the author's status as a key figure in young adult fiction, expanding his influence and introducing the work to new fans. Beyond *The Maze Runner*,

versatility is demonstrated through other series such as *The 13th Reality* and *The Mortality Doctrine*. These explore themes of parallel realities and virtual worlds, showcasing the ability to blend science fiction with adventure and ethical dilemmas. The distinct style, characterized by fast-paced action and complex characters, continues to resonate with readers and push the boundaries of young adult fiction.

In 2018, allegations of sexual harassment led to professional and personal challenges. The publisher, Penguin Random House, severed ties, and he faced scrutiny in the public eye. Despite these setbacks, writing has continued, focusing on personal growth and reflecting on the journey as an author. The contributions to young adult literature are marked by the creation of immersive worlds and thought-provoking narratives. Works, particularly *The Maze Runner* series, have left a lasting impact on the genre, inspiring a new generation of readers and writers. As new stories and themes are explored, the legacy as a storyteller remains secure, offering thrilling adventures and insights into the human condition. Through creativity, resilience, and an unwavering passion for storytelling, he has established himself as a significant figure in contemporary young adult fiction. The journey from a young dreamer in Georgia to a globally recognized American author is a testament to the enduring power of imagination and the transformative nature of stories.

From: *jpgdb.com*

Appendix B

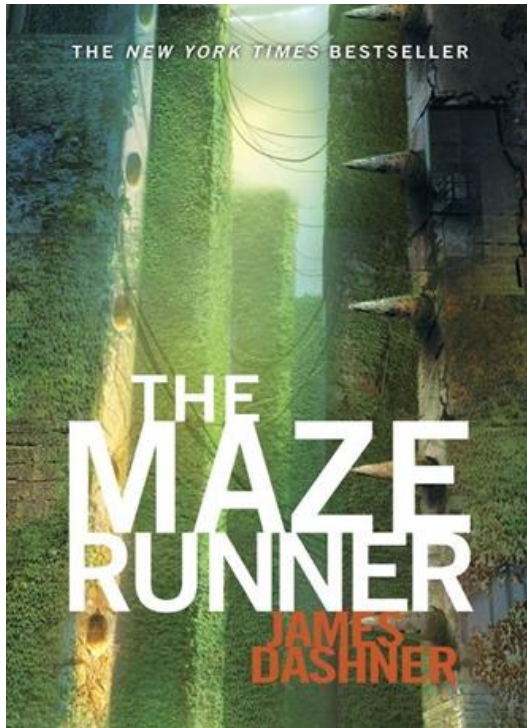


Figure 2: *The Maze Runner* by James Dashner (2009).¹⁵

James Dashner's *The Maze Runner* is set in a dystopian future where a group of boys, known as the Gladers, are trapped in a massive, ever-changing maze. The story begins with Thomas, the protagonist, arriving in the Glade with no memory of his past, other than his name. Surrounded by high stone walls and a labyrinthine maze that opens each day and closes every night, Thomas soon learns about the maze's dangers, including the monstrous creatures called Grievers. His interactions with key characters help him understand the structure of the Glade and

¹⁵ <https://owlishbooks.com/2017/08/18/the-maze-runner-james-dashner/>

the intricacies of its inhabitants. Thomas's curiosity, bravery, and determination drive him to explore the maze and challenge the status quo, revealing his emerging leadership qualities. This transformation becomes pivotal with the arrival of Teresa, the first girl sent to the Glade. Her arrival represents a major turning point in the narrative, as she brings a cryptic message indicating imminent change. Teresa's role becomes clearer as she discloses her knowledge of the maze and her telepathic connection with Thomas, which unveils their pasts and the experiment conducted by WICKED (World In Catastrophe: Killzone Experiment Department). This experiment aims to test their survival skills and find a cure for the global disease known as the Flare.

As the maze's patterns shift and the Grievors' attacks intensify, tensions among the Gladers escalate. Thomas, alongside Minho and Teresa, discovers a way to escape the maze by deciphering its structure and patterns. Their successful escape reveals the true nature of their situation and leads them to a dystopian world ravaged by the Flare, exposing them to the harsh reality of their environment and WICKED's true intentions. In the Glade, leadership is exemplified by Alby, who maintains order and structure among the Gladers. As one of the original members, Alby's extensive knowledge of the maze, coupled with his strong leadership skills and sense of responsibility, underscores his commitment to the group's safety. Despite his initial stern demeanor, Alby's genuine care for the community and his complex relationship with Thomas highlight the burdens of leadership. Supporting Alby is Newt, his second-in-command, who is known for his calm and rational approach. Newt's empathetic and responsible leadership style helps stabilize the Glade, and he plays a crucial role in mediating conflicts. His interactions with Thomas are essential for helping him integrate into the community and grasp the rules of their environment.

Minho, the Keeper of the Runners, is vital for navigating and mapping the maze. His skill and bravery make him a key figure, although he is initially skeptical of Thomas. Minho's eventual mentorship guides Thomas in understanding the maze and uncovering its secrets, proving essential to their survival and escape efforts. In contrast, Gally emerges as a prominent antagonist. His aggressive behavior, resistance to change, and protection of the status quo create significant tension within the Glade. Driven by fear and self-interest, Gally's confrontational nature serves as a foil to Thomas, complicating his efforts to alter the system. Overall, *The Maze Runner* explores themes of leadership and resistance to change through its richly developed characters. Their interactions and conflicts drive the narrative, highlighting the complexities of human behavior and the challenges of confronting an unknown and dangerous world. Through Thomas and his companions, Dashner examines bravery, leadership, and the quest for truth in a perilous environment.

From: *medium.com*

Appendix C



Figure 3: A Griever.¹⁶

The film adaptation of James Dashner's *The Maze Runner*, directed by Wes Ball and released in 2014, brings the novel's dystopian narrative to life with a strong focus on survival and mystery. Praised for its gripping portrayal of the maze's dangers and the Gladers' complex relationships, the film captures the suspenseful atmosphere and thematic depth of the book. It effectively visualizes the Grievers as mechanical, part-organic monstrosities designed to prevent escape, enhancing the film's appeal to both fans and new viewers.



Figure 4: The Maze.¹⁷

In *The Maze Runner*, the maze is a vast labyrinth surrounded by shifting stone walls that reconfigure nightly, with only limited daylight for exploration. Its interior is inhabited by deadly mechanical creatures called Grievers, designed to prevent escape and ensure security. This ever-changing environment forces the Gladers to constantly adapt and strategize. Minho, the Keeper of the Runners, is crucial in this effort; he maps the maze daily using sticks, placing markers to track shifting pathways and identify routes, all while navigating the maze's dangerous corridors and evading lethal Grievers.

From: *imbd.com*

¹⁶ https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1790864/?ref_=tt_mv_close

Appendix D

James Dashner's *The Maze Runner* series extends its intricate narrative through its sequels and prequels, each contributing unique elements that deepen the dystopian world introduced in the original novel. *The Scorch Trials* continues the saga by transitioning from the confined labyrinth of the maze to the harsh, sun-scorched landscape of the Scorch. Here, Thomas and his fellow Gladers face a new set of challenges in a desolate wasteland ravaged by the Flare virus, which has turned people into dangerous, zombie-like creatures known as Cranks. This installment broadens the series' scope, introducing a more complex dystopian world fraught with additional dangers and tests devised by WICKED to further evaluate the Gladers' endurance and adaptability. As the characters navigate this treacherous environment and uncover more about their past, the stakes are significantly raised, revealing deeper layers of conspiracy and WICKED's manipulative strategies.

Building on this escalating tension, *The Death Cure* marks the climax of the main trilogy with a dramatic and decisive resolution. In this final installment, Thomas and his companions confront the ultimate stages of WICKED's trials, culminating in a climactic battle against the organization. *The Death Cure* delves into the true nature of WICKED's experiments and its underlying motives, focusing on themes of sacrifice and redemption. The resolution of the overarching conflict highlights the characters' growth and their ultimate quest for freedom, providing a poignant conclusion to the series. To enrich the narrative further, the prequels offer critical backstories that illuminate the origins of the dystopian world. *The Kill Order* shifts the focus to the early days of the Flare virus outbreak, exploring the initial chaos and societal

¹⁷ <https://medium.com/@pbrijesh21/summary-of-the-maze-runner-by-james-dashner-19d6558d7d23>

collapse that led to the maze trials. Through the experiences of new characters affected by the outbreak, this novel provides a broader perspective on the world's descent into ruin, enhancing the reader's understanding of the series' setting and foundational events.

Complementing this, *The Fever Code* offers an in-depth look at the creation of the maze and the establishment of WICKED. By detailing the development of the maze as an experimental facility, this prequel explores the motivations behind WICKED's design and the scientific and ethical considerations that influenced the trials. *The Fever Code* provides crucial context for the main series, elucidating the maze's design and the purpose behind the trials, thereby enriching the reader's comprehension of the series' central conflicts. Together, these books expand the world of *The Maze Runner*, offering new perspectives and dimensions to its dystopian universe. By exploring themes of survival, resistance, and identity, they contribute to a comprehensive and engaging narrative that captivates and challenges readers, further developing the intricate storyline introduced in the original novel.

From: jamesdashner.com

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الملخص

تدور رواية "عداء المتأهة" لجيمس داشنر في عالم ديستوبي حيث يجد مجموعة من المراهقين أنفسهم محرومين من ذكرياتهم السابقة ويُجبرون على التنقل في متأهة معقدة. تستكشف الرواية موضوعات البقاء والسيطرة والهوية، مقدمةً

تعليقًا عميقًا على التحديات التي تُواجه الأفراد في البيئات القمعية . تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل كيفية استخدام العناصر الديستوبية في الرواية كإطار لفحص القضايا الاجتماعية والنفسية المعقدة . كما تبحث الدراسة في دور نظريات المؤامرة، مع التركيز على كيفية تلاعب منظمة WICKED بشخصيات "الجليدز"، مما يؤثر على تطور الحبكة ويشكل فهم الشخصيات لوضعهم . بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تستعرض الدراسة العلاقة بين فقدان الذاكرة والهوية ومفاهيم جون لوك الفلسفية، خصوصًا فيما يتعلق بتأثير فقدان الذاكرة على تصور الشخصيات لذواتهم . باستخدام منهج وصفي وتحليلي نوعي، تقدم هذه الدراسة تحليلًا متعمقًا لموضوعات الرواية وشخصياتها وتقنيات السردية . يُعتبر هذا المنهج فعالًا بشكل خاص في الكشف عن طبقات المعنى داخل النص وعكس الهموم المجتمعية الأوسع . في النهاية، تؤكد الدراسة على أهمية الرواية في النقاشات المعاصرة حول السيطرة والهوية، مسلطة الضوء على التداخات النفسية والاجتماعية للعيش في بيئة قمعية ديستوبية .

الكلمات المفتاحية: عالم ديستوبي؛ فقدان الذاكرة؛ نظريات المؤامرة؛ منظمة WICKED ؛ جون لوك؛ الهوية .