DISOBEDIENT YOUTH: POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT AND GENRE RESISTANCE IN CONTEMPORARY YOUNG ADULT DYSTOPIAN FICITON

A Thesis By

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INTRODUCTION

Questioning tradition, taking risks, enduring torture, leading revolutions, facing death—the heroes in dystopian literature for young adults are anything but childish. The claim that "children are our future" pervades public discourse in the United States today, so perhaps it's no wonder that popular contemporary novels present youthful protagonists who are literally shaping the future. These heroic adolescents simultaneously straddle the innocence and infinite possibility of youth, and the agency and ability of adulthood. Thus, they seem perfectly situated to lead the way to a utopian future. But at what cost? Young adult dystopian protagonists are thrust into heroic roles as a result of the fetishizing and glamorizing of youth and innocence. As heroes, they not only work toward change but also become the embodiments and manifestations of revolution and utopia in their worlds. They are innately idealistic visionaries whose eyes are wide open simultaneously to the pain of injustice, and to a hopeful future. They have access to intuitive knowledge and skills, because they are as yet untouched by the corruption of the adult world. Yet they never stay safe—these young heroes are forced into adult narratives and adult politics as leaders of resistance and victims of gruesome violence—and thus they are burdened with immense, inappropriate responsibilities. What does it say about contemporary politics that these heroes are given all these positive attributes and abilities—and pitted against extreme responsibilities and, with terrifying frequency, sacrificed?

Young adult fiction has experienced a boom in publication and readership in recent years including a startling number of dystopian novels for an adolescent audience. The young adult dystopian novel is more than just a marketing phenomenon; the novels of this sub-genre consistently tackle the complex relationship between adolescence and political involvement. Marginalized within the conventional political structure and acceptable forms of dissent yet

youthfully drawn to change and rebellion, young adult heroes establish their citizenship and political commitment through resistance and civil disobedience. This thesis explores the ways that the image of the Romantic child and the adolescent period of development interact with the traditional conventions of the coming of age novel, dystopian, and civil disobedience narratives present in these novels and ultimately result in unique and unreasonable pressures placed on the adolescent protagonist illuminating the contradiction in discourse that links hope to young people. The constant adherence to adult elements of classic genre reflects young adult awareness of the adult gaze and expectations of adherence to gender and age performance.

The young adult stage of life is itself a nebulous period which is unclearly separated from childhood and adulthood, and the genre of young adult literature reflects this fluidity. However, in my exploration I will focus on texts "which have an implied teenage audience" and either "feature protagonists of secondary school age (twelve to eighteen years), or it is reasonable to suppose, would be read by those in this age group" (James 5). Utopian and dystopian literatures are similarly complex and difficult to define. The term "utopianism" is defined by Lyman Tower Sargent as 'the dreams and nightmares that concern the ways in which groups of people arrange their lives and which usually envision a radically different society than the one in which the dreamers live" (qtd. in Hintz and Ostry 2). The term "utopia" is used as the umbrella term for such imagined societies and "eutopia" and "dystopia" refer to the two specific branches. Lyman Tower Sargent designates "eutopia" as societies "that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which that reader lived" (qtd. in Hintz and Ostry 3) while dystopia represents societies that present a society that is meant to be seen as noticeably worse. Originating as an extremely adult genre, tied closely with political and social commentary, the dystopian genre is necessarily changed when adapted to young adult audiences.

In order to gain a nuanced understanding of the influences of established genres and resistance in young adult dystopian novels, I will explore two young adult dystopian series: Suzanne Collins' *Hunger Games* trilogy, and Lois Lowry's *The Giver* series. I chose novels written specifically for young adult audiences (not repurposed for young adults or just incidentally read by them) with a strong reliance on traditionally dystopian elements. I also chose novels that could be considered part of this current boom in young adult dystopian literature, and more broadly, part of the deluge of books responding to the growth of young adult readership, financial success of the young adult genre, and academic attention which shapes this post-*Harry Potter* world.

Again, following the lead of *Harry Potter* and other classic young adult fantasies like *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Earthsea Cycle,* many of the books within the current young adult dystopian genre are published as a series. It seemed fitting, then, to focus on novels that exist within a series and are thus more representative of the genre. The immense popularity of the young adult fantasy series has been staggering, with the "release parties at bookstores and libraries, the same-day delivery from Amazon, the race to be the first to read the latest volume, and the little kids lugging around the tomes to show that they too were in the loop" (Schneider 29). While this level of excitement and anticipation is a recent phenomenon in some ways, it recalls the tradition of earlier fantasy series like J.R.R Tolkein's Lord of the Rings, a "groundbreaking series" (Schneider 29) in its own time.

Because they are series novels concerned with young adults working to dismantle the dystopian worlds around them, changes observed through the course of these series must be taken into account. While *The Hunger Games* and *The Giver* are indisputably dystopian, works

later in the series are less clearly defined. *Messenger,* the final book of *The Giver* series, especially represents a world that resists the dystopian genre. When viewed as a sequel to *Gathering Blue,* it can be considered an example of the new world created after characters begin to break from the dystopian structure. *Mockingjay,* similarly, is situated at the end of *The Hunger Games* series and represents the fruits of some of the political resistance to the dystopian state, at times moves away from the dystopia label. It is important to include these books in the analysis as they provide the symmetry and finality necessary to understand the growth of characters and worlds as well as the results of political endeavors for the young adult characters.

The Giver, Lois Lowry's first novel of *The Giver* series, won the 1994 Newberry Medal for the "most distinguished contribution to American literature for children" ("The John Newberry Medal"). Published in 1993, *The Giver* is one of the earliest examples of the current trend in dystopian fiction for young adults. With time, *The Giver* has received honors and critical acclaim and has entered into the standard curriculum for many schools. *The Giver* can easily be considered the closest thing to a canonical text of the young adult dystopian genre. *Gathering Blue* and *Messenger*, the next two books in the trilogy, were published in 2000 and 2004 respectively.

While *The Giver* experienced a gradual ascension to popularity and increased readership, *The Hunger Games* books exploded onto the scene in 2008 when *The Hunger Games* was first released and immediately enjoyed a large and enthusiastic readership among young adults. *The Hunger Games* and *Catching Fire* both made the *New York Times* bestseller list for a children's series ("Children's Series") and *Mockingjay* was a spectacular overnight success, with more than 450,000 books sold during the first week of its publication. ("Mockingjay") Finally, *The Hunger*

Games movie hit theaters on March 23, making $155 million on its opening weekend, the third biggest opening in Hollywood history (Barnes). While these young adult trilogies commanded the attention of a huge amount of young adult readers through differing means, it can be agreed that they are both extremely influential and important examples of the young adult dystopian genre.

Looking at these novels, which were chosen for their notable popularity and qualities which typify the young adult dystopian genre, it is possible to identify patterns and commonalities which will help in understanding this emerging genre—specifically, the ways that the unique mix of multiple genres present in these novels have new and complex effects. While it is both impossible and unproductive to attempt to establish and work within absolute generic categories, to continue a fruitful discussion on generic influence, it is helpful to utilize Fowler's "family resemblance" theory. Fowler, author of *Kinds of Literature,* suggests that through the family resemblance lens, "representatives of a genre may then be regarded as making up a possible class whose septs [clans or classes] and individual members are in relation in various ways, without necessarily having any single feature shared in common by all" (qtd. in Frow 54). This strategy creates a space for recognizing traditional elements and a "common core" (Frow 54) of a genre while acknowledging the possibility of deviation. I will utilize a framework of fundamental elements of each genre to view moments in the texts where the tensions of the different genre elements manifest upon the figure of the protagonist, their choices, person, and narrative. Both series will be analyzed, with a focus on the young adult protagonist, in terms of the Bildungsroman, dystopian, and civil disobedience conventions and deviations from these conventions unique to the young adult genre. Within these thematic and generic analyses, a careful focus will be placed on the adolescent characters' unique positions and the ways that

traits of the developmental period change the effect of the generic structures resulting in illumination of the cultural significance of young adulthood.

Finally, young adult literature serves an important practical purpose outside of its function as entertainment considering the pivotal period of growth and development in which the books are being read. Developmental scholars like Piaget, Kohlberg, Gilligan and others agree that, "young readers do not process information in the same way as adults, and as a result their literature will need to be more concrete and clear" (O'Sullivan 62). Thus, there is a unique sense of responsibility on the part of the author of young adult literature to positively impact the social growth of readers (Duin). Certainly it is reductive and inaccurate to read young adult protagonists as models of behavior which young adult readers will read and imitate exactly (Hubler). Indeed, this seems to completely ignore young adult agency and the variety of individual responses. However, young adulthood is a culturally constructed category understood to be a period of physical, emotional, and intellectual sensitivity and maturation, and young adult authors are seen to be burdened with unique responsibility to their readers to positively influence as they undergo social development (O'Sullivan). Thus, it is possible to observe the direction of authorial intent to shape young adults in the careful decisions made in these novels.

I acknowledge that I am no longer included within the age category of the young adult period as a college student having recently exited the bounds of the young adult age group. I cannot read from the perspective of a young adult but can offer a perspective that is one step removed. I recall reading *The Giver* as a young adult, and I approach these novels now, identifying and invested as a young person, but also from a critical and slightly removed space. I cannot make statements or assumptions about general young adult reader responses, but I can speak to the work of the novels and the implications that protagonist role models may have and

the ways that they seem to be situated to influence young adult readers. I focus on the work itself, understanding it to have also been written by an adult reflecting their[1] own thoughts and expectations of adolescents through the text.

Finally, unlike children's literature, young adult literature is frequently segregated sharply along a gender divide. Mirroring common readership divide among adults, young adults girls commonly enjoy both traditionally "masculine" and "feminine" plots while young adult boys typically avoid "feminine" novels (Cole and Kelly 122). According to Cole and Kelly, "specifically, in our male-dominated literary curriculum, females have grown up reading literature from the male perspective and in a male voice" (Cole and Kelly 122) and thus have a learned appreciation for masculine texts. While this thesis will frequently refer to male and female adolescents as "young adults" collectively, referring to general developmental changes and marginalization experienced by both male and female adolescents, certain young adult literary genres sharply and consciously divide readership, choosing to adhere to traditional understandings of young adult male and female interests. However, the adult dystopian genre has commonly appealed to both men and women, and this trend is reflected in the fairly evenly divided readership of young adult dystopian literature in general and the two young adult dystopian series chosen here, specifically. Gender and sexuality are common tropes of the dystopian tradition, taken up and exaggerated or repressed as a means of highlighting oppression and destructive othering in dystopian nightmare worlds. In general, this oppression within dystopian narrative structures often manifests in the treatment of adults and young adults as

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[1] Despite the common rule that "forbids treating *they* as singular," (Curzan 870) this thesis will utilize a singular *they* in such situations as suggested by Anne Curzan in "Says Who? Teaching and Questioning the Rules of Grammar".

homogenous, uniform, and childlike by the state, imposing a more "interchangeable" (Nikolajeva 105) view of gender.

This interchangeable and reductive view of gender often presented problematically in dystopian texts is further compounded with the fraught position of young adults in relation to outward understandings of their traditional gender performance. Young adults face a crucial period of learning gender performance as they physically develop and learn to assimilate to adult gender norms. While children are traditionally assigned more feminine traits of passivity, innocence, and compassion; young adults are transitioning away from the associations of childhood. Gendering of the young adult category as a whole is much more complicated, then, as they are placed in the divide between the more feminine attributes of childhood and the traditionally masculine agency and power of adulthood. The unique capabilities identified in these characters, vital to their status as heroes, lies in their capacity to maintain both feminine and masculine traits simultaneously. We also see a mix of powerful young adult female characters and compassionate and nurturing young male characters, suggesting that the young adult characters are in a space where they are free to defy or expand conventional constructions of gender performance. Yet this resistance can only occur in small ways and is only excusable because the young characters are transitioning and are thus free to perform gender in ways that may be seen as unsustainable and temporary. In the end, the most salient aspect of their gender performances and limitations is the lies in the way it is mostly ignored. While these characters are clearly placed within the confines of adolescent transition there is no discussion of their maturing gendered bodies. Instead, these characters are imbued with the strengths of transition to adulthood, but are denied access to gender awareness, exploration, or empowerment.

***Brief Synopses of* The Hunger Games *and* The Giver**

Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games* trilogy is set in a future world in which the United States has been destroyed and the nation of Panem has risen in its place. 13 Districts make up the nation of Panem and they are ruled over by the cruel and lavish "Capitol." The story begins 74 years after Panem's "Dark Days" when rebels from the oppressed Districts rose up against the Capitol but were defeated. As punishment for this rebellion, the Capitol establishes a yearly Hunger Games, selecting a boy and girl tribute from each district to leave their homes and fight to the death in a televised arena. The protagonist, Katniss, is a young girl from the poor, coal-mining District 12 (Appalachia) who volunteers to take the place of her younger sister as a tribute in the Games. The trilogy follows her as she is sent into the Hunger Games arena twice, surviving its perils and returning to incite a rebellion that ultimately destroys the Capitol.

Though loosely tied together through connected characters, *The Giver, Gathering Blue,* and finally, *Messenger,* are works that can largely stand alone. *The Giver* follows Jonas, a 12-year-old-boy living in a community that has embraced "Sameness," an intensely ordered world without fear, pain, or prejudice, sacrificing love, colors, and knowledge of history. On his twelfth birthday, Jonas is chosen to be the Receiver of Memory, a position of great honor in the community. He quickly learns that with this honor comes great responsibility and sacrifice, for he must receive all the memories of the past from his mentor, the Giver, and carry them so that the community is spared the burden of knowledge. He begins to feel isolated with all his beautiful and painful memories in such a simple, bland community and struggles to understand his role. Eventually, he and the Giver make plans for him to escape the community and thus force the citizens to face the memories and learn to deal with them.

Gathering Blue, the second book in the *Giver* collection, is set in a world totally unlike the ordered community of *The Giver.* The reader is introduced to Kira, a young girl who was born with a twisted leg, a father who was mysteriously killed before her birth, and a recently deceased mother. The authority in the village, the Council of Guardians, conducts business and settles disputes in the community, however, they are relatively remote from the harsh, everyday life of the village and the daily struggles to survive. After her mother's death, her fantastic skill weaving threads saves her from almost certain exile and death as a burdensome member of the community, and she is instead granted an honorable position by the Council as the official weaver of the ceremonial robe. The robe tells the history of the world and each year, the citizens gather to hear the tale and see the robe. With her wild young friend Matt and a fellow artist named Thomas, she comes to understand the lies upon which her community was based and the truth about her parents' mysterious deaths.

Messenger follows Matty who has grown from the wild, mischievous Matt from *Gathering Blue* into a more educated and civilized young adult. At the end of *Gathering Blue* it is revealed that Kira's father was discovered to be alive and living nearby in the idyllic "Village," a nurturing community where weak and flawed outcasts are welcomed. Matty begins to observe a general darkness creeping into Village and Forest which ultimately results in the ruling to close the border and build a wall to keep out non-citizens, a decision representing the decay of the central values of openness in the utopian-like community. Matty is sent on a journey into Forest to bring Kira to Village before it is closed. Matty also has a power to heal the suffering and dying and in the end, Matty uses his gift to heal Forest and Village at the cost of his own life and is posthumously awarded his true name and role in Village, Healer.

CHAPTER ONE: ADOLESCENCE

The characters of *The Hunger Games* and *The Giver* trilogy happen to be clearly situated during the adolescent period of transition. Within their dystopian worlds they are distinctly placed within a special category separate from childhood and adulthood. In *The Hunger Games,* the special period of adolescence is clearly marked off by the period of eligibility (between 12 and 18) to be selected as a tribute in the Hunger Games and Katniss is 16 at the start of the first novel. In *The Giver* Jonas approaches the important Ceremony of the Twelve when twelve-year-old children of the community symbolically step into young adulthood through a ritual in which they are presented with their new careers in the community. After the ceremony, Jonas and his peers are no longer children but are not yet full adults as they have their identity designations but still must undergo further training for these positions. In Kira's world in *Gathering Blue,* a citizen's age is represented through the number of syllables in their name. Kira's name has two syllables suggesting that she has passed through the childhood period of one-syllable names to earn a second syllable in her adolescence. Finally, in *Messenger* Matty earns the second syllable of adolescence and is also on the cusp of receiving his true name and role in Village. This separation and exaggeration of the definition of the adolescent time is useful in clearly establishing these characters as exaggeratedly adolescent and thus makes room for the authors to make statements about the purpose and meaning of the young adult time of life.

The following section will look at the history and psychological traits of the adolescent period of development as well as trends and characteristics specific to young adult literature. It's important to understand the way that the character and growth of adolescents occurs and

manifests in order to later understand how this creates a unique lens through which they interpret adult genre conventions.

Romantic Childhood

As young adulthood is defined in opposition to childhood, it is important to understand common theories of the nature of childhood. The classic Romantic perception of children as "innocent and pure, close to nature and God, possessing greater imaginative powers than adults," (Hintz 6) builds on basic understandings of childhood as free from sexual maturation, socialization, and corruption. In the Romantic view, children have new souls recently arrived in this world, as yet untouched by human flaws. Thus, the Romantic child has access to intuitive knowledge, instinctive morality, and an innately hopeful vision for their future which can be considered vital tools for creating utopia. Also, in Romantic literature, childhood is connected to deep feelings of nostalgia and yearning for the simple and magical time of life that was childhood, in some ways a utopian place (Austin). There is a common link between the conceptualizations of childhood and conceptualizations of utopia. According to Hintz and Ostry, "there is a long tradition of thinking of childhood itself as utopian, a space and time apart from the corruption of everyday adult life" (Hintz and Ostry 5). Too young and unaware to participate autonomously in the daily activities of the adult sphere, children are situated as outsiders with unique perspectives free from socialization and indoctrination. While, this may or may not reflect the actual experiences of young children, these dominant conceptualizations shape the treatment of youth in literature.

Adolescence is inherently influenced and informed by these conceptualizations of childhood; especially early views of childhood which referred to a much larger period of time

often included young adulthood (Austin 77). The adolescent transitions from the stage of weak yet innocent childhood to an agentic yet socialized adulthood. Young adult literature, however, ultimately demands more of the adolescents in this period. Instead of leaving childhood behind completely and assimilating into the adult world, the ideal protagonist in young adult dystopian literature is expected to continue straddling the two categories. According to Hintz, "Good citizenship within the ideal society (or in opposition to the dystopian society) is figured as a process of both achieving the autonomy of adulthood and keeping the clarity of vision held by a child" (Hintz 263). Young adulthood is defined through its proximity to both adulthood and childhood and as a transition period between the two when the youth is not quite in either category. Young adults and young adult heroes demonstrate their adolescence by representing the aspects of both childhood and adulthood while being denied by both categories. As a relatively recent, socially constructed category, it is important to understand the historical influences that shaped the literary representations of adolescence.

A Brief History of Adolescence

In general, mainstream histories of adolescence follow the normative understandings of youth and leave out alternative experiences that may have coexisted. In "Adolescence in Historical Perspective," John and Virginia Demos trace the development of the concept of dominant experience of adolescence in the United States. They suggest that "the concept of adolescence, as generally understood and applied, did not exist before the last two decades of the nineteenth century" (J. Demos and V. Demos 632) especially considering that the word "adolescent" itself is a relatively recent term that "was only beginning to come into common usage in Postbellum America" (Marshall-Rubin 15). While adolescence is presently considered

to be an irrefutable phase in the course of development, certain historical factors had to be in place before it could emerge as stage of life distinct from childhood and adulthood.

It is commonly supposed that adolescence emerged as a distinct category in the life cycle in response to technological advances which allowed for greater freedom and increased time for education and development. Erik Erikson, a leading scholar in the field of developmental psychology states in his book, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* that as technological development "put more and more time between early school life and the young person's final access to specialized work, the stage of adolescing becomes an even more marked and conscious period and…almost a way of life between childhood and adulthood" (Erikson 128). More specifically, J. Demos and V. Demos cite the transition from an agricultural-based economy in the United States, to an industrial one. While the work of an agricultural structure makes similar demands on adults and children, creates stability in passing on social identity, and establishes a focus on home life, the transition to an industrial world and city life allowed youth more freedom and choice. Without a clear "economic function" (Demos and Demos 637) within the family unit in an industrial environment, adolescents were forced to seek purpose and identity outside of the family. The young adult was no longer a "miniature model of his father" (J. Demos and V. Demos 636) but had to seek out their own career and identity. Seeking beyond the family was encouraged by the increased proximity of adolescents to each other in urban settings which allowed for the construction of a separate and unique youth culture "where a clear-cut, if temporary, identity comes ready-made" (J. Demos and V. Demos 637). As a period of transition and change, adolescence continues to be a unique and separated period of shifting extremes, contradictions, with an emphasis on identity formation.

The Adolescent Period

The adolescent period is most obviously characterized by the extreme physiological changes that occur. This outward physical maturation is often used as a symbolic representation for the inward changes that occur during this turbulent time. However, at the simplest level, these changes bring the presentation of physical appearance to the forefront. The effect, according to Erikson, is that "the growing and developing youths, faced with this physiological revolution within them, and with tangible adult tasks ahead of them are now primarily concerned with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared with what they feel they are" (qtd. in Marshall-Rubin 16-17). The physical changes can create a sense of adolescents being on display to their peers and adults. Thus, Erikson describes adolescents as "sometimes morbidly, often curiously, preoccupied with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared with what they feel they are" (Erikson 128).

Bodily changes necessitate a reevaluation of identity. No longer in an inconsequential and youthful body, adolescents must establish a new sense of self that includes their physical maturation. As the outside world begins to interpret the adolescent's physical appearance as adult, the adolescent feels pressure to embrace an adult identity and values to match. The adolescent begins seeking out a system of ideas to "have *faith* in" (Erikson 128) and serve. Erikson acknowledges the other extreme of this impulse in which "the adolescent fears a foolish, all too trusting commitment, and will, paradoxically, express his need for faith in loud and cynical mistrust" (Erikson 128). Thus, adolescence is a time of trusting and questioning. During this phase, adolescents also seek to act on their newfound beliefs and exert their developing agency and freedom. New to the world of independence, there is often a more conscious application of choice amongst adolescence and a greater fear of losing this new freedom.

In the quest for identity and expressing newly acquired autonomy, adolescence becomes a time of experimenting and rebellion. Erikson states that, “should a young person feel that the environment tries to deprive him too radically of all the forms of expression which permit him to develop and integrate the next step, he may resist” (Erikson 130) and respond with passionate rejection and rebellion. In the end, Erikson believes that adolescents developing in an oppressive environment, “find a greater sense of identity in being withdrawn or in being delinquent than in anything society has to offer them” (Erikson 254). Thus, as adolescents negotiate their identity and sense of belonging in the world of adults, they commonly rebel and question the systems in place. This process of rebellion as a natural part of the adolescent stage helps explain why young adults resisting dystopian politics resonates so much with adolescent readers. Adolescents are already considered explorers and rebels and therefore, logically fill that role more literally in literature.

Considering the importance of sexual maturation during this time period, gendered cultural and historical perspectives of adolescence should be especially prevalent. A gendered discussion of adolescence by Erikson’s, however, is only briefly mentioned. Erikson speaks of the different sequences of female development suggesting that females put off identity development and instead prepare themselves for the romantic world in order to attract a male companion who will be integral to their identity. Gilligan, instead, suggests that for women, identity development is not delayed but that, “intimacy goes along with identity, as the female comes to know herself as she is known, through her relationships with others” (Gilligan 12). Overall, Erikson’s analysis of adolescence is understood in terms of a default male norm. The young adult female’s development, then, is put in terms of deficiency and deviance from the norm just as adolescence is more broadly portrayed as a deviant period outside the norm of

adulthood. Even Erikson, a foremost researcher on adolescence, referred to adolescence as a "condition" (Erikson 254) needing resolution. This is indicative of a larger trend among critics of trivializing and minimalizing the complex experience of young adults, instead simply encouraging assimilation into adulthood thus devaluing, delegitimizing, and marginalizing the adolescent stage as a whole.

Finally, it is important to understand the position of adolescence as it relates to the modern technological world. In his book *Growing Up Digital,* Don Tapscott labels young adults born after 1977, who grew up with computers and television, the "Net Generation" (qtd. in Dresang 6). These adolescents are uniquely defined by their lifelong access to television and computers and the possibilities and independence these resources allow. Access to the internet, especially, has changed the way that young adults interact with the world and adults. Instead of the normal power relationships between adolescents and adults, adolescents are "developing a new, dynamic relationship with adults—a relationship that finds children often acting as partners with their elders rather than fixed in a position of powerless dependency" (Dresang 53). Young adults growing up in a digital age have technological understanding and skills that gives them greater independence and value. While this thesis is concerned with young adults relating to works of print, it is important to recognize that technology and increased interaction with their peers influences these works and general literary culture.

Trends in Young Adult Literature

According to the U.S Census Bureau, "Over the past decade, adolescents have been one of the fastest growing segments of the U.S. population" (qtd. in Koss 563). This growth in size of the young adult audience has resulted in a corresponding growth in young adult literature seeking to capture the interest of this new "market" (Koss 563). A study by the National Endowment for

the Arts suggests that the young adult population experienced the most drastic area of growth in readership, increasing 21% between 2002 and 2008 (*Reading on the Rise).* The genre of young adult literature is quickly becoming an extremely lucrative one as teens flock to purchase the newest popular series or see their favorite books adapted for film. However, while young adult literature is certainly experiencing a unique period of growth and change presently, as a genre it has roots necessary to set the stage for these current trends.

According to Kathryn James, author of *Death, Gender, and Sexuality in Contemporary Adolescent Fiction,* "young adult fiction was well established as a literary genre in English-speaking countries by the late 1960s" (James 5). The beginnings of the modern genre of young adult fiction can be seen as authors shifted away from the moralizing "junior novels" (Bleich 12) of the 1930's-1950's to "New Realism" (Bleich 13) in the 1960's with authors attempting to more accurately reflect the experience of adolescence. While realistic and classic fairytale literature continues to please, more recently there is also a growing trend toward darker, fantastic literature for young adults. It is out of this vein that we see dystopian literature for young adults emerging. Young adults are being exposed to a whole new world of dystopian fiction outside the canonical dystopian texts like *1984* and *Brave New World* and the young adult dystopian market is expected to grow with publishers planning to release "dozens of new dystopian titles over the next few years" (Springen). Dystopian fiction has been popular for a long time, but the trend amongst young adults is certainly something new. Some critics, seeking an explanation for the sudden young adult readers' and authors' fascination with dystopian scenarios, have cited the trauma and shock from 9/11 as a recent event spurring an interest in harsh realities and dystopian imaginings (Springen). Lois Lowry herself reflects on the relationship between her novels and the trauma of 9/11 saying in a speech, "watching the towers crumble and collapse, fantasy

receded and became real. My own words seemed eerily prophetic…" ("Beginning of Sadness" 9) She goes on to explain how she decided to continue writing novels with dark realities for young adult readers after recalling a beloved teacher she had when her father was away at war. The teacher "didn't tell me to cover my eyes. She told me to read. And she told me what to read, and how to talk about it, and where to find comfort in words" ("Beginning of Sadness" 9). This sets the scene for the dystopian spirit of playing out anxieties about the future through a narrative mapping possible scenarios and warnings.

In general, however, criticism analyzing the young adult phenomenon tends to focus on young adult literature in terms of its popularity and power to promote literacy rather than its content. Koss suggests that overall, there has been "little explicit examination of the body of literature published for today's teens" (Koss 563). The prevailing attitude about young adult literature is that its popularity can be usefully harnessed in the classroom as a last resort for hopeless, disinterested readers. "In sharp distinction to the canon of the classics, young adult literature continues to struggle to find a permanent, respected place in mainstream school curriculum" (Christenbury 16). Like any genre, however, there are good and bad examples of young adult literature and "good young adult literature shares with the classics all the marks of literary excellence and, further, consistently inspires student reading response" (Christenbury 16). Instead, these novels can present complex representations of young adult culture, though, at the same time, they are often riddled with pressures to grow up. ~~Braithwaite~~ Trites addresses this contradiction, saying, "Texts accomplish this delegitimization by conveying frequently to readers the ideological message that they need to grow up, to give up the subject position culturally marked 'adolescent'" (~~Braithwaite 5~~ Trites 83). This delegitimization is seen in these young adult dystopian texts as the young adult narrative is expected to fit into adult genre constraints

which devalue the unique young adult period. The Bildungsroman, especially, as a genre focused on coming of age and achieving adulthood, emphasizes the importance of exiting adolescence and privileges adulthood at the expense of the young adult experience.

CHAPTER TWO: BILDUNGSROMAN

As defined by Dilthey, the Bildungsroman novel traditionally follows a character "who enters into life in a blissful state of ignorance, seeks related souls, experiences friendship and love, struggles with the hard realities of the world and thus armed with a variety of experiences, matures, finds himself and his mission in the world" (Dilthey qtd. in Longrie 8-9). One of the most crucial identifiers of the Bildungsroman genre is its intent to "condition and form the reader" (Kuzniar 287). Bildungsromane*,* like young adult novels, take on the lofty task of informing and influencing the reader through the growth and experience of the protagonist. Implicit in this goal is the assumption that "human perfectibility is possible and that historical and social progress will foster the ample development of the various aspects of the protagonist's personality" (Pappas 354). The protagonist's experience in the novel and the reader's experience are frequently conflated and the novel "depicts a world and all of life as experience—as a kind of school—through which all must pass" (Longrie 19).

Some common themes of the Bildungsroman, as enumerated by Peggy Brown, include, "the influences of childhood, the conflict of generations, provinciality versus the city, self-education, alienation, ordeal by love, the search for a vocation, a working philosophy and eventual integration (or sometimes failure to integrate, withdrawal or alienation)" (qtd. in Pappas 354). The protagonist is often born into humble beginnings inspiring high hopes for the future which is compounded with a "sense of entrapment" at home (Vera-Rojas 130) pushing the protagonist to seek a future outside of their known environment. Compelled from their humble homes, Bildungsroman protagonists enter the real world and encounter educational experiences and trials along their journey. These trials call upon the protagonist to perform "heroic deeds and

actions" (Vera-Rojas 130) and eventually come to adulthood through these trials. In this way, young adult characters are presented as incomplete and "other" at odds with the normative and valued traits of adulthood and in need of education and reform through the novel.

Young Adult Protagonist as "Other"

From the beginning of their narratives, the reader is introduce to protagonists humbled by the circumstances of oppressive dystopian structures, almost ensuring that change in the novel will be positive progress for the characters. The protagonists have been further isolated and distinguished from their surroundings, imbued with outsider status from the start. This sense of not belonging drives them to question the world around them and opens the possibility of finding something different for themselves. They stand out from adults and their young adult peers through their physical differences, unique gifts, and strong morality.

From birth, Kira was on a path for a different life. She was born with a twisted leg, but was spared execution due to her flaw, as was the custom in her village. Kira's childhood was shaped by her disability and the limitations it created, "unable to participate because of her flawed leg, she had watched from the sidelines with envy" *(Gathering Blue* 8). She was slow and restricted in movement and was rejected by her peers as a viable playmate or possible romantic interest. Her options for being useful in the community and sustaining herself were limited and thus, unlike her peers, she was pushed at an early age to prove herself and consider alternative lifestyles. While Jonas's community prided itself in weeding out difference and flaws through careful genetic engineering of infants, some genetic variance made its way past their careful process. Jonas describes his uniqueness in a world of uniformity, saying, "Almost every citizen in the community had dark eyes…But there were a few exceptions: Jonas himself, and a female Five who he had noticed had the different, lighter eyes" *(The Giver* 20). Jonas is reminded of his

unique eye color (he has blue eyes, though in their black and white world, he merely detects the lighter shade) after noticing the trait in the "newchild," or infant, Gabriel as well. "He was reminded that the light eyes were not only a rarity but gave the one who had them a certain look—what was it? *Depth*, he decided" *(The Giver* 21). Finally, in *Messenger,* Village is a collection of people discarded or exiled from their homes because of deformities or injuries, so as an able-bodied young adult who chose to leave his home and relocate to Village, Matty naturally stands out. All three are automatically set apart from their peers and community due to physical appearance, outward signals that their nature and future are unique.

In the oppressive dystopian worlds of these novels, children's gifts are not nurtured or encouraged, thus, these young adult protagonists further distinguish themselves through their natural talents. Young adult artistic skill and inherent knowledge is highlighted most in *Gathering Blue* as Kira and her fellow young artists are discovered by the Council of Guardians and put to work developing art at the bidding of the state. Kira describes her almost magical skill with threads and weaving as "far beyond her mother's teaching" highlighting how, "without instruction or practice, without hesitancy, her fingers felt the way to twist and weave and stitch the special threads together to create designs rich and explosive with color" *(Gathering Blue* 20). Her talent makes her different from her peers and neighbors in a world where everyone is struggling to survive and there is very little time for art or beauty. Her skill would not have been encouraged or taught in such a world where it would be seen as a pointless luxury, and therefore could only spring up as it did: magically and unbidden. Her mother shows her inspired work to a member of the Council and soon after, her mother mysteriously dies and Kira is taken to live in the Council building as an artist apprentice.

Her position as a resident artist, in charge of mending the sacred robe which tells the history of the world, further isolates her from her community. Her lifestyle quickly becomes vastly different from that of her old life and the life of her neighbors. Most of the citizens live in poorly constructed "cotts" or cottages and work hard each day cleaning, gathering water, finding food, and tending their homes and families. Kira's new life in the Council building is organized by the Council to give her time to focus fully on the repair work for the robe so she is given servants and brought prepared meals daily. Such a luxurious and separate lifestyle is a source of tension between her and her old neighbors. She is rarely out in the village, the first time she sees many of her old neighbors again after her move is at the annual Ceremony when the robe is worn by the Singer and the history is told. She and the two other young artists sat in seats of honor near the front. "A murmur passed through the audience and Kira felt her face flush in embarrassment. She didn't like being singled out. She didn't want to sit here at the front" *(Gathering Blue 177).* Her skill earns her alienation and rejection from the daily life of the community and ultimately makes the community inhospitable to her.

Jonas is similarly singled out from his peers in *The Giver* due to his ability to "See Beyond" *(The Giver* 60-64). Jonas describes tossing an apple back and forth and all of a sudden, "the apple had *changed.* Just for an instant. It had changed mid-air, he remembered. Then it was in his hand, and he looked at it carefully, but it was the same apple" (*The Giver* 23-24). Jonas' seeing beyond is his ability to perceive color in a world of black and white. While the rest of his community saw exactly what they were programmed to see, Jonas had the capacity to see a whole different world.

He is further singled out from his community on the day of the Ceremony of Twelves and is called up at the very end, receiving a longer introduction, introducing him as the new Receiver

of Memory, a rare and highly honored position. There is only one Receiver, and Jonas is chosen to be the next one, after being trained by the current Receiver whom he calls the "Giver." The Chief Elder explains the qualities of a Receiver and adds that the final quality is "'one which I can only name, but not describe. I do not understand it. You members of the community will not understand it, either'" *(The Giver* 63-64). She is referring to the Capacity to See Beyond which the community cannot begin to fathom. Thus, the role of Receiver is an inherently isolated one. There is only one acting Receiver at a time and he is unable to speak of his experience with others. Jonas quickly begins to understand the isolation of a life as Receiver as the memories from the Giver teach him heightened feelings, thoughts, and understanding, and in many ways, lead him to see and experience a totally different world from the one of his family and friends. The Giver warns Jonas that while he will be able to apply for a spouse and children just as other citizens do it is more complicated for him because he cannot share his true thoughts, feelings, or work with them. Ultimately, it is the pain he experiences that make Jonas different and alone. "*They have never known pain,* he thought. The realization made him feel desperately lonely" *(The Giver* 110). His skills and honored position negate any integration or enjoyment of his community.

While Katniss is not presented as a character abundant in natural gifts, her skill as a hunter and an archer is somewhat remarkable. While her father introduced her to hunting, it is clear that he was not alive long enough to train her thoroughly enough to account for her skill. Admiring Gale's talent for setting snares, Katniss acknowledges, "it's more than experience. It's a natural gift. Like the way I can shoot at an animal in almost complete darkness and still take it down with one arrow" *(Catching Fire* 6). Her ability to feed herself and her family utilizing unconventional means, mostly avoiding the Capitol's established structure for working and

surviving (District 12's mining industry), is certainly a talent. She is already known throughout the district due to her hunting and gathering as many of the district citizens are her customers. However, Katniss is most clearly defined and horrifically distinguished from her peers by her designation as a tribute from District 12. This position implies immediate separation from her family and home and total isolation in the arena as she must fight all the other tributes. Katniss faces death in the arena or continued isolation back in her district if she wins, the remaining tribute returning home victorious and yet distinguished as a ruthless survivor and killer.

Matty is also isolated from his community due to his skills and position. Matty's job as messenger outwardly distinguishes him from other citizens in Village who are not able to travel freely in Forest. "Others from the Village rarely ventured into Forest. It was dangerous for them. Sometimes Forest closed in and entangled people who had tried to travel beyond" *(Messenger* 8-9). Matty, on the other hand, is able to freely explore Forest and is therefore singled out as an important member of Village at an early age. "He was swift and quiet in the woods, and he could feel the direction of things without landmarks…Matty simply *knew*" *(Messenger* 8-9). His knowledge of Forest leads him on a journey in *Gathering Blue* to find a plant that makes the color blue for Kira and he ends up at Village for the first time where he eventually relocates permanently. However, in *Messenger*, it is revealed that Matty's true gift is healing. "Steeling himself against the painful vibrating shock that he knew would go through his entire body, Matty placed his left hand on the mother dog, his right on the puppy, and willed them to live" *(Messenger* 4). Matty's magical ability even separates him from other young adult protagonists like Jonas and Kira whose skills seem to be more abstract and less concretely useful.

Finally, beneath all these outward abilities and innate oddities, the protagonists are from the very beginning, distinguished from their neighbors by their unique vision and moral

character. Everything is stacked up against these characters from feeling at home at their starting points. Their beginnings conspire to push them out of a home and onto the path of other experiences and ordeals, to seek alternatives to their isolated and alienated present.

Leaving Home

Jonas's home situation seems healthy and happy, but is complicated beneath the surface. He has an active and complete family structure but this family was assigned to him, as all families are arranged in the community, and his true parents are unknown and lost to him. In his community, families are not lasting or loving units that could tie citizens down to them; they are concerned only with practical child-rearing and community organization. Katniss, on the other hand, loses her actual father and the support of her mother and much of her young adult sense of self is informed by these losses. When her father died, her mother was paralyzed by the loss and Katniss was forced to abruptly leave behind the simplistic childhood stage and learn to take care of her mother and sister. Kira observes the passing of her mother in the opening of *Gathering Blue*; "As she watched the spirit of her mother drift away, she had seen the cindered fragments of her childhood life whirl into the sky as well" *(Gathering Blue* 2). With a father killed years before, supposedly by a beast during a hunt, Kira is left alone to fend for herself in a hostile village. Her case is taken to the Council of Guardians and she is eventually assigned a guardian, Jamison, from the Council and makes her home as a kind of surrogate daughter of the state. Matty's family is only seen briefly in *Gathering Blue* when Kira tries to visit him in his home in the harsh and depressing Fen. With no father to speak of, Matty had only a hostile and careless mother and younger brother, neither of whom is he very attached to.

An unstable home life is vital in these novels, adding to the protagonists' existing sense of alienation and uncertainty, driving the Bildungroman growth. Familial loss or instability

pushes the young adult protagonists to begin aggressively searching for defining identities and a sense of self as a family structure is no longer available as a formative and secure source in these stories. These unconventional, unstable, and unfulfilling family structures establish a lack of nurturing and possibility in the opening environments of the protagonists. At a most basic level, there are no obvious compassionate and loving caregivers and guardians in the lives of these children who are available to model successful adulthood, guide these young people through adolescence, and pass on a sense of identity and purpose. The loss of a parent or the lack of familial happiness is an important motivating force in these stories. The young adults cannot rely on their family to define them and guide them safely. They are forced into greater experimentation and exploration by leaving home.

For Kira and Katniss, home is forcibly taken away from them. In many ways, the carefree ease of the childhood home was taken away from Katniss at the moment of her father's death. However, Katniss is physically forced out of her childhood home when she is chosen as a tribute to be sent to the Capitol and then to the Games. Later, Katniss's home and all of District 12 are literally destroyed by Capitol bombs. Similarly, the death of Kira's mother signals the end of Kira's childhood and soon after, Kira loses her physical home as well when her "cott," or house, is destroyed to cleanse the village of the dangerous illness that took her mother. She still clings to the plot of land where her home had stood, hoping to rebuild and remain there but is informed by Matty that the other women of the village want her land. Thus, she is thoroughly shut out of her home and forced to move on completely. In their storylines, Kira and Katniss are forcibly pushed out of their childhood homes and forced into a new world of experiences and trials, forced to suddenly and urgently assimilate adult behaviors and identity.

Moving to a new "home" offered by the Council of Guardians in the state building itself, Kira faces new challenges and oppression that make it difficult for her to feel at home. She is assigned to Jamison, a member of the Council, who becomes her "overseer," *(Gathering Blue* 58) giving her work for the Council, and checking up on her progress and behavior. Little Matt, ever observant and forthright, innocently asks Kira at one point, "'you don't be captive here, do you?'" *(Gathering Blue* 62) She denies it at the time she comes to realize that his initial interpretation was correct. A vague feeling of entrapment in the Council building grows until she comes to realize that she is a captive, guarded closely by the Council in order to harness her gift of weaving. She compares her history with that of her friend Thomas, a fellow young Council, who tells her of being locked in his room as a younger boy. Kira responds in shock at such blatant captivity but Thomas responds easily, suggesting his captivity was really protection and structure for the young artists. Despite this argument, in the end, Kira can't ignore the clear oppression and entrapment of her home with the Council and is again pushed to demand a home that allows her freedom.

Jonas is not forced out of his home but experiences intense feelings of captivity and oppression that cause him to seek escape. After observing his father Releasing a newborn twin and discovering the truth that Release is actually murder, Jonas is unable to return to his family home and instead stays with the Giver for a night. While he does physically leave his home at this moment, much of Jonas's growth and trials in the world occur within the community itself as the Giver shares difficult memories with Jonas. In a way, he leaves his community home every time the Giver lays his hands on Jonas's back to transmit a memory of another place or another time. Finally, at the end of the book, with the Giver's help, Jonas makes plans to leave the community. While this comes at the end of Jonas's narrative in *The Giver*, the trials and changes

he undergoes are implied when the reader sees him again in *Messenger*, older and wiser as Leader, a position of leadership and power within Village.

As mentioned earlier, Matty feels very weak ties to his home in the Fen and leaves to search for blue dye for Kira. In *Messenger* Matty makes a home in Village but is compelled to exit in response to the negative shifts of Village's values and a sickness in Forest. As a messenger he leaves in order to warn travelers that Village will be closed, but he also leaves in order to return to his original home to get Kira and bring her to Village. Matty most clearly models the young adult quest concept as he searches first for the elusive blue, later for family, and finally a cure to the sickness in the world he observes. It is during these quests and explorations outside of the safety of a home space that the protagonists come to find identity and independence. In the system of their home life there is no room for exploration or radically different growth. Leaving home creates opportunities and formative experiences not possible in the small theoretical space of family and tradition.

Female Bildungsroman and Romance

The Hunger Games, stands out somewhat from the other novels in that it fits another common Bildungsroman form*,* specifically the female Bildungsroman with Katniss as a somewhat Gothic heroine. Romantic relationships and gendered concepts of character formation are emphasized in the traditional narrative of the female Bildungsroman. "Given the privilege bestowed upon masculinity in the patriarchal organization of the Victorian era and as represented in fiction… there are radical differences to be considered when analyzing a female Bildungsroman" (Maier 319). One important difference is the emphasis on the romantic plot and the actions of the romantic heroine. An important subplot of Katniss's struggle to "come of age" and understand herself is her romantic explorations and Katniss's exploration of romance and

sexuality is similar in many ways to that of leading women in Gothic and Harlequin romances. In fact, some aspects of the antiquated infantilization and desexualization of grown female heroines in Gothic romance are extremely relevant to the narrative of the young adult female experimenting with romance.

Much of Katniss's experience of romance is complicated by the Games beginning with Peeta's declaration of love for her in front of all of Panem. According to Tania Modleski in her book *Loving with a Vengeance*; the romantic lead in Gothic and Harlequin novels is often thrown into "circumstances where she can work on the male's sexual desires and yet not be held responsible for 'the consequences'" (Modleski 43). The Games certainly serve this purpose for Katniss as she is forced to go along with a show of love in order to remain competitive and popular in the Games. The Games create a convenient pretense for an overtly intimate relationship with Peeta, and at the same time she is left with an excuse for her behavior when she leaves the arena. Outside the arena she is free to explain her actions during the Games however she wants, and even to settle on an ambiguous and unsatisfactory explanation of her feelings.

Just as romantic freedom is allowed when she has excuses that preserve her from seeming forward or romantic, Katniss, as a romantic heroine, is seen as attractive and desirable due to her innocence and lack of interest in romance. Modleski writes that a Gothic heroine is seen as "virtuous only insofar as she remains ignorant and confused about the matters the reader clearly comprehends" (Modleski 33). When Peeta declares his love for Katniss, she is genuinely surprised and embarrassed and thus she is establishes as an object of desire in the eyes of the audience while remaining innocent. She is immediately made more attractive and memorable through Peeta's attempt to frame her as an innocent "heartbreaker" *(The Hunger Games* 135). Katniss experiences the perpetual embarrassment of the romantic heroine which implies her

awareness of her own inexperience. She is sexualized through her lack of sexual awareness. Peeta points out Katniss's appeal to the audience saying, "'It's like when you wouldn't look at me naked in the arena even though I was half dead. You're so…pure,' he says finally" *(Catching Fire* 216). Thus, much of Katniss's appeal is her lack of awareness of her worth and attractiveness.

Most importantly, in a dystopian world of constant surveillance and televised spectacle, is Katniss's sense of being watched as she learns to think of herself as a desirable being. In the romance narrative, the romance heroine that wishes to attract attention, "'must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself'" (Berger qtd. in Modleski 29). Katniss learns to watch herself in the arena, quickly choosing words and behaviors that make her sympathetic not only to a suitor, but to Panem viewers as a whole who could potentially sponsor her in the arena and help her survive. She is followed by this sense of being watched and peer pressure to behave in accordance to the wishes of her viewers, as expressed through her mentor in the arena and even after reentering the real world: as the Mockingjay she is expected to act with an awareness of being watched. She must work to seduce the districts, in a way that seems organic and unwittingly persuasive, as a means of inspiring their commitment to the rebellion.

Trials and Transformation

After rejecting the physical or mental space of home, the protagonists are thrust out into the world as they seek to define themselves through experiences and trials. Each character undergoes moral growth and change tested and solidified in moments of trial and critical decisions. It is in these defining moments of choice that the protagonists take on adult morals, responsibility, and identity.

Kira's disability and the loss of her father before she was born altered the course of her life irrevocably, thus, her greatest trial tempts her with alternatives to both of these realities. At the end of *Gathering Blue,* she finally discovers that the Council lied about beasts and her father actually survived an attack from Jamison and went to live in Village, a community full of disabled people that embraces differences and tolerance. Her final disillusionment with the Council and the appearance of her father, offering to take her to Village, come together to stage the perfect trial for Kira. At the beginning of the novel, Kira would see everything she had ever wanted in the offer to live in Village with her father where she would be cherished by the community and family. Thus, her refusal to accompany him reveals Kira's true growth. Kira comes to the difficult realization that while her village was never an ideal home for her, she considers herself a citizen and feels an adult sense of accountability. She decides to stay and change her village, demanding an end to the lies of the Council and the cruelty of the citizens. "'One day our villages will know each other,'" *(Gathering Blue* 214) she promises her father, choosing to take on the burden of turning her village into the haven that she always wanted.

At the beginning of *The Giver,* Jonas' friend mentions applying to transfer to another community and Jonas expresses his inability to fathom such a desire. Thus, Jonas's true test of moral growth lies in his final decision to leave the familiar community. "Jonas reached the opposite side of the river, stopped briefly, and looked back. The community where his entire life had been lived lay behind him now, sleeping. At dawn, the orderly, disciplined life he had always known would continue again, without him" *(The Giver* 165). His test comes down to the strength of his desire to experience for himself the feelings and passions he has glimpsed indirectly through the Giver's memories. Justifying his decision to himself, Jonas acknowledges that "if he had stayed, he would have starved in other ways. He would have lived a life hungry

for feelings, for color, for love” *(The Giver* 173). Jonas’s decision demonstrates that he has truly learned the power and importance of feelings, love, and individuality from the Giver and can no longer imagine a life without them, though it costs him the only world he knew.

Through the course of the three novels, Katniss prioritizes survival and family above everything, and thus, her big trial involves a decision that actually jeopardizes her family and her survival but benefits her community. Instead of continuing to prioritize her own and her family’s well-being over all else, Katniss decides not to run away from Panem but to stay and “cause all kinds of trouble” *(Catching Fire* 118-119) for the Capitol, choosing to work for the broader cause as the Mockingjay, the symbol of the revolution. Taking on this role jeopardizes her safety and thus the safety of her family if they ever fell into the hands of the Capitol, but she recognizes her power to create change and accepts that responsibility despite the sacrifices. Katniss’s greatest trial comes at the end when she decides to kill President Coin, the leader of District 13 and the rebellion. Due to her naturally rebellious spirit she was predisposed to align with the rebels but comes to question their goals and tactics during the war. She is chosen to execute President Snow, leader of the Capitol, symbolically ending the reign of the Capitol, but in the moment of the execution, she changes her mind and shoots President Coin instead. Killing Coin demonstrates Katniss’s realization that while she’d like to believe in the rebellion, the two regimes and their leaders were too similar and equally worthy of her distrust and dissent.

Finally, Matty’s great trial comes at the very end of *Messenger.* As a sensitive and compassionate child, he struggled in the harsh environment of the Fen and his move to Village in *Messenger* shows Matty’s desire to find a happy home. The book is full of excitement as Matty anticipates his future job in his community, blossoming romance and relationships, and his future life in Village in general. Yet Matty must give up his life to heal Forest and Village, accepting

that he will not be a part of their future, but that his healing gift holds him responsible. "He gave himself to it willingly, traded himself for all that he loved and valued, and felt free" *(Messenger* 165-166). In the end, Matty gives his life to reaffirm the beliefs of Village, that flaws and differences are beautiful and there should be a space in the world where they can be fully cherished and explored. Enduring all these trials and tests, the young adult protagonists emerge from the ignorance and freedom of youth to responsibility, citizenship, and purpose of adulthood. The trials are markers of growth, outward signals to the reader of the distance they have come from their carefree childhood.

Not only does the narrative itself demonstrate the growth and development of a young adult character, but the novel itself seeks to act as an influential and developmental tool to readers simultaneously. The Bildungsroman seeks to simultaneously indoctrinate and empower readers. This idea of indoctrination, treating readers like children and direction learning and thought, while well-intentioned, is complicated when viewed alongside the sinister goals of the dystopian state.

CHAPTER THREE: DYSTOPIA

In his book *Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research Guide,* Keith Booker defines dystopian fiction as a "critique of existing social conditions or political systems, either through critical examination of the utopian premises upon which those conditions and systems are based or through the imaginative extension of those conditions and systems into different contexts that more clearly reveal their flaws and contradictions" (*Dystopian Literature* 3). Dystopian works focus on the ways present trends may negatively influence the future by portraying the nightmarish possibilities. These dystopian worlds are situated to work as "cautionary tales," (*Dictionary of Alternatives* 81) extrapolating a negative future from the present and thus persuading the reader of the danger of current decisions. Commonly in dystopian literature, "the problems of human freedom are played out against the backdrop of a strong state, technological matrix, or military industrial complex" (*Dictionary of Alternatives* 81) representing out of control advancements and reform.

Thomas More's *Utopia*, published in 1516, certainly "inaugurated a tradition" (Hintz and Ostry 2) of writing that has grown into our modern understanding of utopian literature. Though More's work can arguably be seen as an important piece of the history of the utopian genre, it is not necessarily the starting point. More's word "utopia" itself was constructed from the Greek words for "no place" and is a pun on the existing Greek word for "happy place" (Nelson 890). The concepts of utopian and dystopia similarly predated More. According to Booker, hints of dystopian writing can be seen in the writings during the time of the ancient Greeks and "by the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, writers like Jonathan Swift were writing works that were centrally informed by dystopian energies" (*Dystopian Literature* 5). Booker credits the age of Enlightenment and the new importance of science and logic for a further "explosion of

utopian thought and a corresponding wave of dystopian reactions" (*Dystopian Literature* 5). Enlightenment brought a new world of understanding and new hope for attaining higher levels of understanding and with this knowledge utopia seemed possible. With new dreams of utopia come critiques and the manifestations of fear of the utopian impulse in the form of dystopian writing. In the twentieth century, dystopia became a more common form than utopia and Booker suggests that this shift toward portrayals of nightmarish imaginings of the future was a reaction to an "air of crisis," (*Dystopian Literature* 5) that he recognizes in twentieth-century scholarship and culture and "parallels the rather dark turn taken by a great deal of modern cultural criticism" (*Dystopian Literature* 5).

Dystopian energy is focalized through the impulse to extrapolate the trend of social ills or utopian imagining into the future and exaggerate the nightmarish consequences of enacting such a belief system fully. Thus, there is already a close relationship between the present and future in dystopian novels as their very premise is built on drawing out the thoughts of the present into the future. According to Archer-Lean, "The source of the dystopian world here lies in the relationship between the present and the future" (Archer-Lean 5-6). This is further emphasized in young adult dystopian literature as youth are seen as present embodiments of the future as well. Their lives, actions, and education are already closely tied to imaginings of the future world. Young adult dystopia, then, is a fascinating category as it places an adolescent on the verge of leaving childhood for adulthood in a world in which the utopian dreams of childhood have already gone horribly awry.

The element of social critique that is so central to the purpose of adult dystopian literature is also emphasized within the young adult genre. The general focus on teaching and shaping the reader in young adult literature is compounded with the cautionary tale element of the dystopian

novel to create an extremely didactic impulse in these novels. However, while adult dystopian novels are free to clearly extrapolate the ills befalling mankind and especially the protagonist, young adult authors are hesitant to present such an utterly hopeless and ruined world to young readers. Miller acknowledges that, because of this, adult dystopian are commonly "grimmer," but young adult novels are also somewhat more ambiguous and "equivocate when it comes to delivering a moral" (Miller). While the characters of young adult dystopian fiction may be disillusioned, harmed, or even defeated in some ways by their dystopian world, there is always continued hope that something better can follow after their sacrifice and suffering.

Order and the Dystopian State

A common aspect of many adult dystopian narratives is the portrayal of an extremely organized and controlled state that is deeply and constantly present in the lives of its citizens. According to scholars of dystopian literature Scholes and Rabkin, dystopian fiction "always reduces the world to a 'State,' and presents us with the struggles of an individual or a small group against that State" (qtd. in Stewart 32). Reducing complexity for the sake of efficiency and order is a common impulse in dystopian worlds, usually accomplished by the state. The extreme model of order and manipulation represents the nightmarish realization of utopian attempts to organize a political structure which leaves no room for variance or individuality. Establishing order and control in these dystopian worlds involves an over-reliance on scientific advancements, uniformity over individuality, elimination of anomalies, and clearly prescribed roles.

Much of the changes and organization in these dystopian worlds are made possible by scientific advances. Science is seen as more objective, logical, and efficient than humans, thus an over-reliance on science in these worlds of order and uniformity makes sense. In the world of

The Giver, the community long ago moved to "Sameness" or a world of complete equality and uniformity among citizens free of individuality and differences. Under the philosophy of Sameness and with the aid of scientific advances, the community reduced the world to black and white, engineered systems to stabilize and control weather, and developed a streamlined system of reproduction that involves genetic manipulation and surrogates. *The Hunger Games* similarly portrays a future world of scientific advancement and standardization with the invisible and constant surveillance mechanisms of the Capitol, hovercrafts, force fields, and home appliances. These advancements are not used to improve the lifestyle of the average citizen, but instead seem to be merely for the sake of the elite and the state's efficiency in controlling and observing citizens. In general, science is seen as a threat in these novels, often disadvantaging average citizens, which seems to represent uniquely adult fears of constant technological and scientific advancements which seem like a visible step into the future. This doesn't seem to speak to young adult relationships with technology which are often less threatening and possibly empowering.

This extreme organizing and trust in the system of government in general can even be seen, as mentioned earlier, in the clear delineation of the stage of adolescence in these books. There is a strong sense of the division of labor among the masses as they serve the whole state in these dystopian worlds and adolescents are marked off clearly in their specific role. In *The Giver*, the familial structure is standardized and clearly outlined. Each family has one mother, one father, one boy, and one girl and applications are involved in each step of the process of building a family. Within the domestic sphere, each family member understands their clearly defined role and engages in the corresponding work. This is so extreme that a family that loses a child in an accident can expect to receive a "replacement child." *(The Giver* 44) In this world, children are all alike in their uniform role as "child," and can therefore be replaced. In *The Hunger Games,*

the districts are carefully organized to serve the Capitol, each assigned a different industry which employs a majority of its citizens and is left ignorant of the skills and procedure of the industries of other districts. This specialization is efficient but creates citizens without any global awareness and is therefore only able to understand their local experience. Within the public realm of *The Giver*, each adult has a clearly prescribed role in order to facilitate the smooth working of the community economy which the government controls. According to Latham, the society in *The Giver* is "the quintessential utilitarian society, in which even memories and pain can be compartmentalized and relegated to a specific person" (Latham 147). Each member of Jonas's community receives a role that they are expertly trained for and that other members of the community are free to be ignorant of. The Giver explains to Jonas the "real reason The Receiver is so vital to them, and so honored. They selected me—and you—to lift that burden from themselves'" (*The Giver* 112-113). These assignments of tasks conferred upon citizens are meant to fulfill the needs of identity and purpose in their lives. While the lives of community members are simplified through the specialized division of labor, dividing up information so starkly leaves no room for empowered, agentic citizens and presumes that average citizens will not participate in political decision-making.

Differences and anomalies in these dystopian worlds are viewed as threats to stability and are actively eliminated or punished. Twins and underdeveloped babies in *The Giver* are seen as dangerous to the equality and efficiency of the system and are therefore "Released" or put to death. The community also resorts to Release as a penalty for citizens that cannot function properly in the community. "For a contributing citizen to be released from the community was a final decision, a terrible punishment, an overwhelming statement of failure" (*The Giver* 2-3). This sacrifice is seen as justified, again, for the continued effectiveness of the community as a

whole. In *Gathering Blue,* Kira's twisted leg was seen as a dangerous anomaly in the village and Matty later explains that in the village, "flaws like that were not allowed. People were put to death for less" *(Messenger* 6). These differences are seen as problems to the organization of work and expectations of citizens and thus these figures are often sacrificed and prioritized beneath the importance of the state's function. There is no room in this structure for the young adult protagonist to freely explore their differences or understand them as anything beyond flaws or dangerous mistakes in the system.

Not only does the state discourage differences, but it also actively enforces uniformity. A homogeneous public is much easier to legislate and understand and the state benefits from establishing this type of uniformity in each citizen's perception of themselves. Citizens are less likely to revolt or question the structure if they identify with their outwardly complacent neighbors. This structure, however, makes exploration and the development of a complex understanding of identity, much more difficult for growing adolescents. There is no room within this structure for young adults to experiment with different identities before adulthood. Clinging to any sense of self becomes a necessary act by adolescents as a means of expressing their individuality. Before entering the Games, Peeta expresses a desire to "die as myself" (*The Hunger Games* 141). This is his meager attempt to exert some autonomy within the limiting world of Panem. Not only does the state seek to stamp out any individual thought, it also seeks to get rid of even basic humanity and human nature.

The State as Parent

This strict organization and order in these worlds leaves little room for individuality and in many ways reveals the state's disregard for individual citizens, treating them like children to maintain the status as unquestioned guardian and guarantee a decided upon outcome for the

community. According to Don Latham in “Discipline and Its Discontents: A Foucauldian Reading of The Giver” the system of *The Giver* can represent an exaggerated period of childhood “with no pain and no unpleasantness” (Latham 135-136) while simultaneous making true childhood impossible. In *Gathering Blue*, the Council of Guardians literally assigns a statesman to act as her parental guardian. In *The Giver,* this idea of the state as a parent, guiding and punishing its citizens, is employed more broadly. When Jonas begins to learn of alternative worlds through the memories he receives he begins to wonder why the citizens aren’t given choices as the people of the past were. He eventually concedes that “‘we don’t dare to let people make choices of their own’” because that is “‘definitely not safe’” and people might “‘chose *wrong’” (The Giver* 97-99). The burden and danger of choice is not risked on average individuals in the community and is instead left to the trained Council of Elders, or really, to the people that made the decisions long ago and set the community rules in place. Further, the burden of knowledge is relegated to certain citizens and the rest are protected from knowing difficult truths. The rest of the community is not considered mature enough to deal with knowledge of the past and memoires and are indulged to continue in their contented ignorance. The treatment of average citizens in these novels mirrors the distrustful and marginalized treatment of children and young adults.

Propaganda and Lies

While denying citizens access to important information and generally controlling the flow of knowledge, the state in dystopian novels frequently relies on propaganda and the dissemination of lies that support stasis and control. The authorities in *The Hunger Games, The Giver,* and *Gathering Blue* all utilize the tactic of information control through propaganda to maintain stability and discourage rebellion. In *The Hunger Games,* the Capitol lies about the

survival of District 13, the one district to successfully resist the Capitol during the rebellion. Instead, the Capitol recites the yearly history of Panem, explaining that after the "Dark Days" of rebellion, "twelve were defeated, the thirteenth obliterated" *(The Hunger Games* 18-19). The Capitol emphasizes that the rebellion was a time of darkness, calling it the "Dark Days" to stress that the rebellion had negative results and thereby discourage another uprising. Covering up the successful resistance and negotiation of freedom in District 13 allows the Capitol to continue their domination by creating an image of unfaltering control. The completely destroyed District 13 serves as a warning to the subjugated peoples that another rebellion attempt would be similarly devastating.

In *The Giver* the most notable lie disseminated to the public is the euphemism, "Release." The ambiguous word is left purposefully unclear and the young Jonas can't imagine that it means anything more than leaving the community, when in reality it is a clever euphemism for the death penalty. In a community where mistakes are not tolerated, the old are not necessary, and birth anomalies are considered dangerous, it is important that the public be accepting of government-controlled murder. It is an important tool behind the effectiveness and order of the community. While most citizens have no interaction with Release and have no idea what it is, Jonas's father must actually perform the procedure on newborns that do not fit the community's requirements and thus he represents a citizen brainwashed by the propaganda of the government into performing a morally questionable task.

Finally in *Gathering Blue,* much of the stability of the governmental structure is accredited to the people's fear of dangerous beasts in the woods. Kira discovers later, however, that there were never any dangerous beasts in the woods, and that stories were fabricated by those in power as a tool to reinforce their control. This system of control and propaganda

represents a warped fostering of education. The lies and misinformation coming from the state, similarly, do not create a space for young adults to come to a true understanding of their world through established channels. According to Marshall-Rubin, in the dystopian setting, “Adolescents can struggle with finding the answers, as their former primary sources of information—parents, teachers, and other authority figures—often become untrustworthy or flawed in the minds of teenagers” (Marshall-Rubin 85). Instead, young adults in these dystopian worlds must learn about their world without the help of the authority figures in their lives, and instead seek the truth on their own.

Surveillance

Another important element of dystopian control commonly employed in classic dystopian literature is the presence of the state in the daily lives of the people through surveillance. This hyper-awareness of the gaze of the state shapes the actions of young adult protagonists and other citizens. This is compounded with the adolescent tendency to be more acutely aware of appearance and feel the gaze of peers and authority figures. This creates an extreme sense of being watched and a system of intense pressure on the protagonist to constantly perform. In the arena, Katniss is constantly aware of the Capitol and all of the districts watching her every move. The consequences of behaving inappropriately while being watched by Capitol officials are with her at all times. In the world of *The Giver,* noticeable surveillance takes on a much more intimate and low-tech style. Jonas recalls an awareness of “the increasing level of observation. In school, at recreation time, and during volunteer hours, he had noticed the Elders watching him and the other Elevens” *(The Giver* 15) as they prepared to be assigned their community jobs. Similarly, Kira, in *Gathering Blue* is aware that all her work and her daily activities are monitored by her

guardian, Jamison. The knowledge of this constant surveillance influences the way citizens behave.

More insidious and dangerous in the lives of the rebellious youth in these novels is the hidden tools for surveillance established by the state to address undesired behaviors or subversive actions. In *The Giver,* loudspeakers are present in all areas of the community and "allow centralized monitoring of activities, perhaps through hidden cameras as well as microphones…like the ubiquitous telescreens in 1984 that proclaim Big Brother's pervasive presence" (Latham 138). It is unclear how the community monitors the citizens, and this mystery creates an eerie and intense feeling of being watched as if by a magical, godlike being. Similarly in *The Hunger Games,* there is a hidden aspect of the surveillance in Panem. While the public is aware of the constant surveillance of the tributes during the Games, there is a vague sense that average citizens are also being watched. In the woods outside of District 12, Katniss thinks, "Even here, even in the middle of nowhere, you worry someone might overhear you" *(The Hunger Games* 6). Again, this surveillance is unseen and unexplained and therefore takes on a rather magical quality, creating the sense that the eye of the Capitol is inescapable. The citizens are thus left again to experience the world as childlike subjects, bewildered by the parent/state with access to supreme knowledge. The information gained through this type of surveillance is fuel for leverage and control. However, this mysterious and magical technique of pervasive surveillance is somewhat undercut in *The Hunger Games* by the reader's awareness of the history of Capitol surveillance. It is explained early on in the novel that during the rebellion, the Capitol relied on jabberjays, birds genetically modified to overhear rebels planning and repeat their words to Capitol officials. This system was simple enough that the rebels were relatively quick in catching on and sabotaging the surveillance with false information. Though the new

rebellion effectively matches the Capitol's technological attacks the rebels never attempt to explain or undermine the surveillance that surrounds them. It is taken as a given in their present dystopian world.

Beyond surveilling the community through technological means, the most effective attempts to control the feelings and thoughts of the people employed by the state in these novels is the use of citizens themselves as enforcers of law for their neighbors and friends. In *Gathering Blue,* Kira unknowingly reports Annabella, the elderly woman who teaches her the art of dying threads, for suggesting that there aren't any beasts in the forest to fear. Kira goes to Jamison wondering about this information, and the next morning she is told that Annabella has mysteriously died in the night. Silenced for daring to challenge official propaganda, Annabella's small resistance is brought to the state's attention by the unwitting Kira. In *The Giver* it is even clearer the ways that community members monitor each other and enforce state rules. Means of constantly checking up on peers are incorporated into the daily routine of life in the community. After any action that does not fit in with the carefully planned routine of the community, community members require an immediately apology from the transgressor. This system is especially apparent among the youths who are still getting used to the rules of the community and must constantly apologize to their peers for their mistakes. The apology and its acceptance are immediate and routine and reinforce the importance of the rules.

Family units specifically, watch each other through daily "telling of feelings" and dream sharing. Feelings and dreams are two aspects of life in the community that the state cannot directly watch or control. Thus, it is left to family members to encourage each other to share their feelings and dreams and correct any problems. At dinner, Jonas's family members each share their thoughts and feelings from the day and help each other work through those feelings so that

they are left content and empty at the end of the day. No feelings of frustration with the way things are run is allowed to fester in the mind of a citizen as these are the feelings that lead to discontent and rebellion. Similarly, families share their dreams with each other each morning, relying on family members to correct or report the citizen experiencing strange dreams that do not fit with the community model. When Jonas has his first sexual dream, he reports the feeling to his parents who respond by immediately putting Jonas on pills to repress his "Stirrings" or initial sexual desire. The community ingeniously enlists families to police themselves against such subtle threats.

Finally, Latham suggests that "the most effective means of surveillance at work in the community in Lowry's novel is the self-monitoring that has been instilled in people" (Latham 139). Jonas learns to censor himself, recognizing moments for apology, even requiring precise language of himself when the reader sees his thoughts on the page. He learns to continually share his feelings and dreams and allow his family to correct any wrong or dangerous ones. In the beginning of the novel, Jonas plays the most active and effective role in his own surveillance and censorship. For a young adult struggling to find a place in society and experiment with different identities, it's difficult to explore when you feel constantly watched and judged. This is compounded with the already existing adolescent sense of being watched and judged by peers. This emphasis on presentation and appearance can be paralyzing and stagnate change and expression of self possibly resulting in backlash and resistance.

Disillusionment

In the adult dystopian narrative, the protagonist is faced with mounting examples of the hidden sacrifices and loss in their dystopian world, leading them to break free from the brainwashing that tells them the state structure is the best way or the only way. This

disillusionment with the dystopian structure is present in the young adult dystopian novels and functions as a "coming of age" within the political system, layered on top of the Bildungsroman story arc. As the young adult novel follows the adolescent preparing to enter adult society, the structure of society becomes clearer and the adolescent is ushered out of the idealism of childhood through disillusionment and recognition of the complex systems of adult society. The process of entering adulthood, then, is conflated with political awakening and "political action is addressed within the developmental narrative of adolescence" (Hintz 254). The struggle between the simultaneous processes of integration upon entering adulthood and disillusionment with the system is the tension at the heart of young adult dystopia. In the end, the combination of dystopian disillusionment and the development narrative "becomes almost an exaggerated way for the young adult to find his or her voice, and this voice is seen having a deep effect on a wider society" (Hintz 255). Layering these two processes of development suggests that political awakening is a vital and compulsory part of the process of entering adulthood.

Disillusionment with the political system is presented largely as a gradual process for young adult protagonists, yet there are important moments of sudden realization. For Jonas, he is blissfully ignorant of any darker side of his community until he gets his placement as Receiver and discovers that his instructions for the position allow his to lie to his family and friends, in fact, demand it. "What if *others—adults—*had, upon becoming Twelves, received in *their* instructions the same terrifying sentence? What if they had all been instructed: *You may lie?*" (*The Giver* 71) He becomes aware that not everything is as it seems in his community, he could seek the truth by asking his family but "he would have no way of knowing if the answer he received was true" (*The Giver* 71). This creates a subtle shift in the way Jonas relates to his world. While he still holds that most of the systems of his world are good, he begins to realize

that not everything is perfect and learns to rely his own perceptions and logic to understand right and wrong for himself. Jonas continues to gradually learn more about past alternatives to the community through the memories he receives and begins to question whether the world of Sameness in his community is the best. However, it isn't until he finally discovers the truth about his community's policy on Release that he can no longer pretend that he lives in a benign utopia. "*He killed it! My father killed it!* Jonas said to himself, stunned at what he was realizing. He continued to stare at the screen numbly…" *(The Giver* 150-151) After watching his own father "Release" a newborn twin, Jonas can't ignore that his community is built on a foundation of deception and murder. "Jonas felt a ripping sensation inside himself, the feeling of terrible pain clawing its way forward to emerge in a cry" *(The Giver* 150-151). Jonas is brutally awoken to the truth of the community he has trusted for so long, and experiences almost physical pain in response.

Kira's realization is much more gradual. She becomes suspicious of the presence of beasts in the forests surrounding her village and she begins to wonder about her freedom as an artist in the Council's care. It isn't until she sees the shackles on the legs of the Singer, a fellow artist, that she understands the extent of the Council's control and deception. "The guardians with their stern faces had no creative power. But they had strength and cunning, and they had found a way to steal and harness other people's powers for their own needs" *(Gathering Blue* 211-213). She sees her mother's death for what it was, a means of getting total control over her and her skill. She understands the lie of the beasts as a tool to create fear and underscore the power of the Council. But most importantly, she sees the ways that these things can be changed. Her disillusionment with the Council's system is inextricably linked to hope for a better future.

Katniss, on the other hand, sees the cruelty of the Capitol every day in 12 and is never brainwashed enough to believe that the way the Capitol controls Panem is a good system. However, she is convinced that there is nothing she could ever do stop the Capitol, so Katniss's true disillusionment moment, is a moment of realizing change is possible and resistance is necessary. After the death of Rue in the arena, Katniss is filled with renewed anger at the inequality inherent in the Capitol's system. "Gale's voice is in my head. His ravings against the Capitol no longer pointless, no longer to be ignored. Rue's death has forced me to confront my own fury against the cruelty, the injustice they inflict upon us" *(The Hunger Games* 236-237). She is determined to stand against the Capitol in that moment.

While disillusionment involves realizing the flaws in the system, these young adults transition into productive dissent following their moments of realization instead of remaining paralyzed by disappointment and shock. They feel a sense of responsibility to follow up their realization with action, sharing their knowledge and adding to a discourse of dissent in the political structure, the first step toward resistance and civil disobedience.

CHAPTER FOUR: YOUNG ADULT CITIZENSHIP AND ACTIVISM

Citizenship

After leaving the Ceremony of the Twelves, in which Jonas and the other children from his year received their career assignments, Jonas pronounces himself to be a "citizen-in-training" *(The Giver* 72). Young adults in dystopian fiction, and indeed, adolescents in general, occupy a somewhat unclear position with regards to citizenship. This ambiguity, in turn, leads to uncertainty about young adult political rights, duties, and power. Broadly definied, citizenship is comprised of both a formal legal status and active responsibilities; citizens are not just "passive recipients" (Williams and Invernizzi 10) of rights but must consistently earn them through performance of duties. Thus, young adolescents unable to exercise certain aspects of citizenship such as voting, may still participate in citizenship duties by obeying the law, expressing opinions in political arenas, and following current events. Guaranteed access to some form of citizenship, young adults are often left with indirect and unconventional channels of involvement while excluded from direct control.

At the heart of the ambiguity surrounding young adult citizenship is the fact that while some young adults may be able allowed to participate in the legal system formally, for many young adults, "the exercise of other rights often occurs mainly through their parents—'citizenship by proxy'" (Bynner 49). This ambiguous status is highlighted by Wallace when discussing the "liberal individualistic notion of citizenship" which "disguises the fact that different citizens have differential access to citizenship which depend upon not them as individuals but upon their position in the family" (Wallace 14). Thus, through the unclear boundaries of citizenship and the denial of youth involvement in normative reform systems,

young adults as political actors are marginalized, undervalued, and excluded. The emphasis on adolescence as a transition period automatically sets young adults apart from their adult counterparts, relegating them to a place outside of full citizenship and rights which "fundamentally imposes a second-class status" (Noguera, Ginwright, and Cammarota xix) upon them. Similar to any other politically or socially marginalized group, adolescents are seen as lacking when held up against the normative "adult template" (Williams and Invernizzi 14) of citizen. And just as other politically marginalized groups have sought access to power and reform through available yet unconventional means, young adults engaging in these alternative strategies for citizenship and political engagement have been consistently trivialized and delegitimized.

Beyond being pushed to the borders of political involvement, adolescents are often actively discriminated against and feared by adults. Youth seeking out unconventional means of reform come to represent unfamiliar change and rebellion which is unstable and seemingly dangerous. Overall, this fear translates into further marginalization and exclusion. "Surveys show that anger at and fear of youth is the only bigotry that crosses the political spectrum" (Noguera, Ginwright, and Cammarota 310). This bigotry further complicates adolescents' ability to create positive change and participate effectively as citizens especially when they are only active in politics through opposition and resistance. In her essay "Dissident Citizenship," Holloway Sparks asserts that the task of expressing opposition to political systems is a crucial aspect of citizenship and successful democracy. Since young adults can't participate in many normative aspects of politics, dissent and opposition and other "creative oppositional practices" (Sparks 75) are valuable means of engaging with the political structure and expressing their citizenship. Noguera, Ginwright, and Cammarota assert that "a concern for social justice should be one

aspect of citizenship. An ability to recognize injustice and a willingness to act to correct it is a desirable trait for the citizens of any democracy. *Activism* is one term for such behavior" (Noguera, Ginwright, and Cammarota 291).

Young Adult Activism

At its core, activism is "behavior to promote causes, to change the status quo" (Noguera, Ginwright, and Cammarota 291). Thus, it is inherently separate from traditional civic modes of reform, like voting. Driven by a sense of injustice, activists engage in a variety of actions outside of the traditional legal structure in an attempt to influence their causes. Noguera, Ginwright, and Cammarota see young adults as especially situated to embrace an activist approach to citizenship. "Throughout history, youth have been the segment of the population most likely to refuse to accept the status quo and to act to change society for the better…youth are just starting out on their adult lives and thereby look for a better world" (Noguera, Ginwright, and Cammarota 291).

While adult activism is much more visible and legitimized in the scope of history, there is a rich history of young adults engaging in activism as well. Starting with the children engaging in labor strikes in 1828 (Zimmerman), many of the early historical accounts of youth activism were connected to working conditions for adolescents. The newsboy strike of 1899, garment factory strikes in the early 1900s, coal miner strikes, all involved young adults protesting unfair treatment, unsafe conditions, and low pay in their jobs. In the 1950s and 1960s, children took part in activist actions as part of the civil rights movement, and were "sent in to lead protesters in hopes that they would not be harmed as adults would be" (Zimmerman). While these examples demonstrate at least some historical presence of young adult activists, there are few individual young adults activists remembered by history. Two such icons are Linda Brown and Ruby

Bridges, both young girls who gained attention by attending segregated schools during the civil rights movement (Zimmerman). It is clear through the historical examples available that young adult activism is relegated to issues considered young adult specific or appropriate, like schools, child labor laws, and keeping the peace during protests. The underrepresentation of young adult activists historically and relegation of activists to specific issues only is yet another manifestation of the marginalization of political adolescents.

Within the worlds of *The Giver* and *The Hunger Games,* the dystopian political structure is already oppressive and set up to stifle the voices of its citizens, not to mention its youth. In *The Hunger Games,* the citizens of Panem have absolutely no access to the decision-making machine of the Capitol. There is no mechanism for citizens to vote, make choices, or even organize peacefully for change. Only resistance and outright rebellion present routes for citizens in Panem to change the structure. In District 13, things seem to be much better, yet while fourteen-year-olds are treated as respected soldiers and every refugee from District 12 was "granted automatic citizenship by the authorities of 13" *(Mockingjay* 8), there is still little room for deviation and dissent. Katniss complains about President Coin of District 13, saying, "she can't stand any dissent, even if it's fair'" *(Mockingjay* 63-64). In District 13, the political structure is much more formalized but similarly exclusive. There is a centralized group in command that collectively makes decisions with the ultimate decisions going to President Coin. Despite having a much more transparent and egalitarian system among those in command, regular dissenting citizens do not have access to command decisions.

Similarly, in *The Giver*, there are some systems in place for change, but they are largely superficial and inaccessible to the average citizen. Jonas describes the process of changing a rule

in his community describing how the Council "would simply fret and argue about it themselves for years, until the citizens forgot that it had ever gone to them for study" *(The Giver* 13-14). Despite the clear process for dissent, there is no driving force or urgency behind the suggested reforms to push for resolution and the structure is so arduous and slow that citizens are deterred from even considering it a reasonable option. *Gathering Blue* presents a political structure completely dominated by an inner circle of Elders which establishes channels for conflict resolution to the average citizens but citizens are incapable of raising any opposition to the Council of Elders itself. Finally, *Messenger* presents an alternative community in which the political structure is extremely open and accessible to citizens yet it is rarely utilized. The Leader of Village (Jonas) assures the citizens that "'the right to dissent is one of our most important freedoms here'" (Messenger 50). Dissent is encouraged and citizens are able to bring an issue to all of Village for a fair vote.

CHAPTER FIVE: CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

The final broad category at play in these novels, civil disobedience, is defined by the philosopher John Rawls as "a public, nonviolent, conscientious yet political act contrary to law usually done with the aim of bringing about a change in the law or policies of the government" (qtd. in Erickson 564). At the heart of civil disobedience is willingness to "suffer inconvenience, expense, threats, real danger, and eventually punishment" (Erickson 565) in the name of justice and opposition. This willingness to be punished for beliefs is a striking representation of the protestor's commitment to a "higher cause" (Erickson 564) afforded priority above the broken law. Civil disobedience is thus premised on the belief that there is a higher truth beyond man-made law and progress to be made with laws currently in place. This willingness to sacrifice is compounded with civil disobedience's close ties to spectacle and publicity as tools to create change. The publicity affords a uniquely clear public image of civil disobedience which is often associated with dedicated, self-sacrificing leaders of civil disobedience like Henry David Thoreau, Mohandas Gandhi, and Martin Luther King Jr. These leaders epitomize the dedication to higher callings through their unrelenting sacrifice of their own well-being in pursuit of reform and progress toward their vision of a better world. These visionary leaders present purified selves to "ensure their actions are based on disinterested motives" (Calvert) which further sets them apart and reinforces their resistance.

Young adults are generally well situated to become involved in civil disobedience and political change because they have a vested interest in the future organization as it is their future. At the same time, they are new to the world and have not integrated traditional conceptualizations of politics, thus they are freer to think outside the established structure and

imagine more radically different futures. This spirit of openness to possibility makes them ideal figures to spark political change. Kira says to her friend Thomas of the blank spaces on the robe where the future will be told, "'you and I? We're the ones who will fill in the blank places. Maybe we can make it different'" *(Gathering Blue* 159). Kira feels empowered and hopeful and can't help but believe that the future is up to them and can be whatever they decide. Jonas also fittingly addresses his musings on the future to the newchild Gabriel, saying, "'things could be different. I don't know how, but there must be some way for things to be different'" *(The Giver* 128). They are willing to dream big and reject structure completely, instead of just focusing on individual problems within structure, are empowered and hopeful and thus make ideal leaders of civil disobedience. While ideally characterized to participate in civil disobedience, young adults have an unclear relation to disobedience historically as they cannot take part in all aspects of the civic process. Though tales of young adults coming of age through political awakenings in clearly unjust dystopian worlds contain expectations of activism and civil disobedience as a moral imperative, it is unclear to young adult protagonists and readers what form young adult civil disobedience should take.

Thoreauvian Resistance

According to Patricia Erickson, "Thoreau's essay 'Civil Disobedience' is perhaps the best-known American statement on the right of the solitary individual acting alone against government that had allegedly abused its authority" (Erickson 567). Thoreau protested the Mexican-American war by refusing to pay taxes to support the U.S military endeavor. He was jailed for his disobedience and wrote his famous essay in response, arguing that "societal reform does not occur through politics" (Erickson 567) but instead through individual awareness, contemplation, and private resistance. At its core, "Civil Disobedience" presents a rather radical

view of the role and limitation of government. “This American Government,—what is it but a tradition, though a recent one, endeavoring to transmit itself unimpaired to posterity, but each instant losing some of its integrity?” (Thoreau 385) Above the law, Thoreau places the importance of the individuals’ quest for what is right which becomes their duty to convey to the inherently corrupt government. In his model, it may not be the duty of the citizen to single-mindedly work to eliminate a wrong, but he must at least “wash his hands of it, and, if he gives it no thought longer, not to give it practically his support” (Thoreau 393). There is a lower requirement of public display and organizing in Thoreau’s sense of civil disobedience but he expects the sentiment of reform and resistance to pervade every aspect of an individual life. “Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine,” (Thoreau 396) he writes.

This style of civil disobedience is much less visible and much more personal. It’s more about expressing individual disapproval of the actions of the state and thus cleansing the self of association with the wrongs of the government. Jonas engages in this type of disobedience when he refuses to take the pills for sexual “Stirrings” required by the state. No one sees him decide to throw away the pill, and yet it is an important act of disobedience. Jonas does not stand publically against the pills to suppress sexuality or try to garner support for his choice in any way. He merely refuses to be a part of an aspect of the government that goes against his beliefs and demonstrates a lifestyle of integrity and conscientious decision-making.

This commitment to *not* doing something as a means of expressing disapproval is a complicated one. In some ways, this refusal to participate can be seen as a detriment to reform energies. Refusing to participate as a symbolic act can come dangerously close to choosing to exit the community and reject the system altogether rather than attempt fixing it. The ambiguous effect of this type of action is an issue that comes up frequently in the novels. Jonas chooses to

escape the community altogether rather than remain and squander his life. Matty chooses to simply leave the Fen and travel to Village, instead of staying and seeking to reform his home with Kira. Finally, in the epilogue of *The Hunger Games* series, it is clear that Katniss has a chosen a life as far away from the state as possible. She leaves the world of politics completely, totally oblivious to the new government being built without her. These are moments when their actions are unclearly tied to politics and reform, but there are moments of public and active disobedience in the novels as well.

Performative Civil Disobedience and Media

Thoreau's model of individual responsibility and the indirect role in politics through a refusal to participate in systems deemed unjust is somewhat different from the modern definition of civil disobedience. The term is usually used in association with public actions meant to engage with the political structure and directly try to change it by changing the minds of the masses and creating a movement demanding change in the formal political sphere. While both were greatly influenced by Thoreau's teaching, a shift to this more public, movement-building model of civil disobedience is associated with the two civil disobedience leaders, Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. A little more optimistic about the system of government, there is a sense in the work of King and Gandhi that achieving their political goals would ultimately leave them with a state that they could condone. Their work is also on a larger-scale, focused less on the individual experience and more on gaining support and building a movement. However, the individual and conscience were still important, and Gandhi specifically "thought that individuals should resort to civil disobedience only after careful consideration and only those who are qualified should practice it" (Erickson 567). Qualified individuals would be people that have a history of obedience and respect for the law. This stipulation leaves young adult access to civil

disobedience ambiguous as it is tied to their ability to behave as a good citizen in other aspects in order to earn the right to challenge the government.

While civil disobedience has been associated with public displays and performance, more recently it has been transformed again by the media. In the 1950s and 60s, television became more widely popular and this shift happened to coincide with the advance of the civil rights movement. Jenice View, in her essay on the civil rights movement, explained how media affected resistance both positively and negatively. Television allowed the common American access to the scenes of civil disobedience and protest, finally making the cruel treatment and oppression of black protestors more obvious and salient to viewers. This allowed viewers at home, unconnected to the movement and previously unconcerned, to be drawn in by the images of violence and sacrifice and respond by pressuring the state. However, View suggests that mass media also "glamorized the product (the marches, the rallies, the arrests, etc.) at the expense of the long, sometimes boring, and always difficult process of organizing" (View) and tied the work inescapably to individuals, especially charismatic leaders, thus often devaluing the work of vital behind-the-scenes players. And in the present world, with the internet and television programming, media plays an even more vital role in politics and reform efforts as viewers are inundated with news and events. As an action tied to performance and witnessing reality as a means of creating change, the world of reality TV and 24 hour news must necessitate a change in perception. Civil disobedience is further complicated in these novels as it is often in direct opposition to the constant surveillance typical to dystopian states.

According to Mark Andrejevic in *Reality TV,* "Big Brother may have been portrayed as hostile and forbidding during the Cold War era, but he is currently receiving a glossy Hollywood makeover as a poster boy for the benefits of high-tech surveillance" (Andrejevic 95). While

associated with surveillance, in general, the internet allows more interactivity and reality TV boasts to be a more democratic media in which anyone can find fame. Reality TV, according to Andrejevic, is “the latest and most self-conscious in a string of transparently staged spectacles” (Andrejevic 3). Suzanne Collins admits that her inspiration for the surveillance and intensely media driven culture of *The Hunger Games* was inspired by her own experience switching back and forth between war coverage and a reality TV show (“Author Talk”). *The Hunger Games* clearly explores what civil disobedience would look like in such an extreme exaggeration of our own media saturated world. As Katniss quickly learns, all this media and propaganda makes it confusing to understand how to interpret “reality” she witnesses and how to represent resistance in a meaningful way in the media-driven world.

Performance in The Hunger Games

When Katniss’ sister’s name is drawn to be the female tribute from District 12 and Katniss volunteers to take her place, everything becomes about the performance and surveillance of the Games. Katniss’s selflessness and authenticity is established in this moment of organic emotion and dedication to her sister, but it paradoxically sets the stage for her influence as a kind of reality TV celebrity and performer. Every moment of the Hunger Games is recorded and edited, creating a virtual gladiator arena or reality TV show of the contestants. However, while the spectacle and surveillance established by the Capitol is seen as unnatural in the series, it is complicated by the fact that spectacle and carefully crafted images are important for the rebellion as well. Katniss struggles to balance the disgustingly fake, manipulative, and destructive lies of the Capitol with the theatrics and witnessing required for survival and effectively challenging the system. Despite her aversion to the lies and spectacle of the Captiol, Katniss engages in the performance and spectacle of the Games to survive. Katniss allows herself to be appropriated by

her stylist, Cinna, who creates a clear, marketable image for her. “The creature standing before me in the full-length mirror has come from another world” *(The Hunger Games* 120-121). Not only does she describe herself as a “creature” but she further separates the image from herself by observing her mirror image in the third person, at odds with the “me” outside of the mirror. Similarly, Katniss and Peeta create a false image of romance in order to gain interest and sympathy from viewers.

As the revolution grows, the rebels begin to utilize moments of spectacle as acts of civil disobedience and movement building. Before entering the arena a second time, the victors chosen as tributes again (and secret allies to the rebellion) use their fame and the spotlight to challenge the authority of the Capitol by questioning the Games. Each victor shares a logical argument against the Games that is strategically targeted at the Games and not directly at the Capitol itself. And finally, in an unprecedented show of solidarity, the tributes that are soon to be thrown into the arena and forced to kill each other, take hands and stand on the interview stage united. The image of the tributes standing together makes it to the districts for just a moment before the Capitol cuts the feed and the spectacle of seeing tributes from the districts not only reject the Capitol’s culture of hate and competition, but actually embrace each other and physically demonstrate their unity, is groundbreaking for the movement.

Later, the rebels demonstrate their power and continue subverting the Capitol’s message by hacking into the Capitol’s newscasts and displaying their own images. Katniss recognizes the effectiveness of the rebel tactics, but she can’t help but begin to notice the similarities between the Capitol and rebel strategies to sway Panem and disseminate their message. When she begins her grooming to become the face of revolution she points out, “As a rebel, I thought I’d get to look more like myself. But it seems a televised rebel has her own standards to live up to”

(Mockingjay 60). And while her usefulness to the cause is understood quickly to arise out of organic and unscripted moments, she is still strategically dressed up and placed in particular situations to yield a specific message from the rebels. In the end, even Katniss's life is expendable in the name of the rebels' image. She is sent into combat, knowing that injury and death are possibilities, purely for the sake of inspirational footage. Though they may have different goals, the public acts of civil disobedience performed by the rebels mirror the propaganda and callous tactics for spectacle and control that the Capitol relies on. Spectacle and the act of witnessing are powerful tools of both propaganda and civil disobedience.

Young Adult as Witness

At the heart of the discussion of public spectacle and performance of civil disobedience is the power of witnessing. According to John Durham Peters in his article on witnessing, "to witness an event is to be responsible in some way to it" (Peters 708). The young adult protagonists in these novels are placed in positions in which they witness something and become responsible as witnesses, to preach this truth. Peters explains these two aspects of witnessing as the process of observing something and the process of testifying these observations.

Katniss is a witness to the crimes of the Capitol, and later the rebellion, and is compelled to testify what she sees in opposition. Witnessing the death of the young tribute, Rue, in the arena was a striking moment of transformation for Katniss. "Something happened when I was holding Rue's hand, watching the life drain out of her. Now I am determined to avenge her, to make her loss unforgettable, and I can only do that by winning and thereby making myself unforgettable" *(The Hunger Games* 242). The waste of the young, resourceful child, full of promise and possibility, dying for the Capitol's entertainment was too strong a vision for Katniss and she could no longer escape the truth of the Capitol's evil. "Rue's death has forced me to

confront my own fury against the cruelty, the injustice they inflict upon us…I want to do something, right, here, right now, to shame them, to make them accountable" *(The Hunger Games* 236-237). Similarly, in *Mockingjay* Katniss witnesses the death of her beloved little sister, Prim, killed in a bombing most likely orchestrated by the rebels despite their imminent victory and staged as a final evil act on the part of the Capitol. This moment of witnessing led her to ultimately lose sympathy for the rebellion's single-minded attempt to over-throw the Capitol and cavalier sacrifice of innocent lives along the way.

Similarly, Jonas is designated as a witness in his community through his role as Receiver. He witnesses the good and bad of the world through the memories he receives and is called to represent this truth and understanding through his actions. Jonas's name already "recalls that of Jonah, a scapegoat of the Old Testament" (Latham 146) and the concept of prophet as witness and martyr developed in early Christianity (Peters 708). The witness is an important legal position as well as a person who recalls information and aids the state in making a decision. This definition is also particularly important in the dystopian world in which the experiences and ideas of citizens are often undervalued and ignored and the government does not seek to take them into account when making policy. It also creates a connection between the work of witnessing and testifying that these adolescents do and the ultimate goal of trial and reform in government. In their special position as innocent witnesses, young adults are ideally situated to serve as symbolic representations of resistance.

Iconic Leaders as Symbols of Resistance

The history of civil disobedience is strongly associated with iconic figures, like Thoreau, Gandhi, and King who utilized civil disobedience tactics in their work. These activists embodied the causes that they worked for and were often symbols of the change they sought to realize. Far

from being distant political figures, their lives were considered relevant to their civil disobedience work. As civil disobedience involves public displays of moral judgment and resistance, the figures performing the act become inextricably wrapped up in the act itself. While these great men grew to become symbols of their movements, they also built and steered them. The same cannot be said of the young adult resistance leaders of these novels. While the young adult protagonists grew to epitomize the image of the resistance and rebellion in their worlds, they are not in the same situation to control the direction of the change they are a part of. At one point, the Giver reminds Jonas, "'I have great honor. So will you. But you will find that that is not the same as power'" *(The Giver* 83-84). This gets to the heart of the young adult struggle against entrenched authority in which they seek and inspire change but are not empowered to control the movement that they spark.

Becoming lost in the image of civil disobedient also implies some aspect of isolation, separation, and loss of human complexity. Especially for young adults, already actively seeking identity definition, the process of becoming defined as a representative of change is particularly all-encompassing and isolating. A sense of self and complex identity is lost in the simplifying needed to become a symbol of resistance. Jonas as Receiver, Kira as the artist, Matty as Healer, and Katniss as Mockingjay; these young adult protagonists are already being shoved into a defining and reductive role. Not to mention that young adults often serve as representatives of hope and change as a group already. These leaders of their peers are further isolated and appropriated by the movements they wish to be a part of. Kira may symbolically influence the future through her work on the representation of history on the robe yet, in the dystopian world at the beginning of *Gathering Blue,* it is clear she will not get to be a part of the planning process for the change she symbolizes. Jonas is similarly assigned his role as honored community figure

and does not get to chose it or the structure of the system it represents. His person is obscured by the title "Receiver" and his life is relegated to the background as he lives in the memories he must receive. Young adults are already marginalized through their age and ambiguous citizenship, not to mention the marginalization and loss of individuality and humanity under the oppressive dystopian regimes of these books.

Not only does Katniss occupy a special position between childhood and adulthood that makes her the perfect symbol of the vision and autonomy of the revolution, she is also in a special position as a disobedient victor of the Games. She is known throughout the districts due to her victory and this publicity is crucial in her success as a symbol of the revolution. However, if she was merely a ruthless and skilled player in the Capitol's Games, she would not be an effective representation of the uprising. It was her rejection of the brutality of the Capitol through her approach to the Games that made her the ideal rebel tool. She is also an ideal leader because her stylist makes her an unforgettable figure in the Games from the beginning. Incorporating fire into her costumes, establishing her as "the girl on fire" (*The Hunger Games* 207) a perfect metaphor for her role as the spark for the revolution. At the same time, however, Katniss herself acknowledges that the costumes she is put in before entering the arena make her look like an "unearthly being," (*The Hunger Games*207) already she is a stronger, more alien, more perfect version of a girl. While this image makes her seem more intimidating to her competitors, it also makes her seem less human.

The rebels in Panem appropriate Katniss as the face of the revolution and she experiences unique pressure as a young adult embodying a revolution. Her image progresses from the "girl on fire" who sparks the revolution unintentionally with her actions, to the Mockingjay, symbol of the rebels. While she begins as the spark for the revolution through her own actions and

personality, she is slowly appropriated and interpreted and loses herself in the cause. She is also distanced from the actual work of the uprising because of the way she is idealized and used as a symbol. She is not the official organizer, or the executor of change, but the inspiration and the embodiment of the cause. “When they chant my name, it is more of a cry for vengeance than a cheer…And I know that there’s nothing I could ever do to change this” (*Catching Fire* 71-72). This image of young adults occupying the privileged space of inspiration but unable to actually influence the vision of their own future creates a complex message of expectation and political involvement for young readers.

Finally, Katniss becomes the Mockingjay, it is not just her token or her pin; she becomes the Mockingjay herself, the embodiment of the revolution. At the interview before entering the arena a second time, her stylist creates an elaborate costume that literally transitions her from the girl on fire to the Mockingjay. As she spins, her plain white dress is burned away and she is left standing in an outfit of white and black made completely of feathers. She enters the arena a second time, no longer a girl, but a symbol of the revolution. Her choices are no longer her own, and her actions are even more highly scrutinized by both the Capitol and the rebels. When she breaks out of the arena for the Games she is immediately rescued by rebel forces. “‘We had to save you because you’re the mockingjay, Katniss…While you live, the revolution lives’” (*Catching Fire* 386-387). It is only then that Katniss comes to understand the rebellion and her role in it. Even then she does not call herself a leader of the rebellion; instead, she recognizes herself as merely a symbol of the rebellion. And as a symbol, she is put in an interesting position between power and powerlessness.

Only when she is rescued from the Games and taken to District 13 is she given information on the rebellion that had been going on around her. She is later told that they

“couldn’t risk” (*Catching Fire* 386) telling her and Peeta the truth about the extent and organization of the rebellion. Thus, her role as the symbol of the revolution leaves her without control or input and her worth is as an object, a face, to be used. In the end, the rebels treat Katniss much as the Capitol would. To truly be the Mockingjay and stand for the revolution she must lose herself and commit to being idolized and ignored. Ultimately, the revolution demands her to sacrifice her humanity for the cause, as the Mockingjay must support the direction of the revolution including the deaths of many in the name of the rebels’ vision of the future. Her honesty and believability, traits that earned her the position as Mockingjay to begin with, are left wrongly left out of the organization of the rebellion.

Believability of Disobedience

Central to the success of civil disobedience and resistance in persuading observers is the believability of the action premised on the purity of character and commitment to a higher aim demonstrated in the personal lives of actors helping their acts to ring true to witnesses. Young adults are in special position with regards to these requirements as they are automatically seen as outside the corruption of adult the adult world and therefore most likely do not resist for selfish or dishonest reasons. Thus, they are already more believable when they are called to engage in acts of civil disobedience. Also, they are more believable because they have more to lose in the face of a paternalistic state. Young adults are still dependent on their parents or surrogate parents like the state, and as such, disobedience and estrangement from authority is more dangerous and thus as weightier action.

Driven by a higher power and system morals, conventional civil disobedience figures like King and Gandhi find the motivation to reject lesser man-made laws. Their statements and actions are believable and therefore convincing because they are driven by forces considered

stronger than the law they break. The young adult activists in these novels have even less experience with the systems of law and logic of the process and therefore must fight for change based on intuition and feelings rather than theory or experience. The reader never sees Katniss reasoning out and weighing the different choices of government and structure in the *The Hunger Games,* instead, her actions are completely motivated by instinct. Even when she is outwardly unsure of who to resist and what kind of change to work for, she continues to automatically act against entrenched authority. In fact, Katniss never really ties herself down to the minutiae of mundane politics to throw her support in favor of a specific type of reform. Instead, she is committed to the abstract power of reform and revolution in general.

Without an awareness of the history of the process or even developed language tools to articulate their thoughts and judgments, the actions of the young adult protagonists are clearly driven by local desires, instinct and emotion. Jonas slowly learns pieces of memories and assimilates them into his understanding of the world, but he does not know how elders long ago made the decision to go to Sameness. Instead of viewing the choice rationally and considering the perspective of these individuals from the past, Jonas immediately condemns the switch to Sameness, insisting, "'we shouldn't have!'" *(The Giver* 95) While Jonas's judgment is formed on very little biased information, his ruling becomes the truth of the novel, reinforced by the Giver's weightier perspective and agreement. The Giver says, "'You've come very quickly to that conclusion,' he said. 'It took me many years. Maybe your wisdom will come much more quickly than mine'" *(The Giver* 95). But Jonas's response is not wisdom; it is the language of emotion and desire arising from the desirable memories the Giver supplies him in the beginning. "'But anyway, I was thinking, I mean feeling, actually, that it was kind of nice, then'" *(The Giver* 126). While he quickly qualifies these thoughts, emphasizing his objective awareness that a world

without Sameness is “dangerous,” *(The Giver* 126) he can’t escape the feelings of love and happiness that he enjoyed. His judgment of the injustice of Sameness is unapologetically tied to unfounded and vague emotional explanations, yet this is called wisdom. Jonas’s judgment is never questioned and his disobedience is seen as heroic and right. It’s clear that such blind and unfounded decision-making is redeemed by the image of the trustworthy youth, pure and intuitive. Unlike the adult civil disobedience leaders from history who grew to understand a higher power or system of morality through personal experience, trials, exploration, and education; Jonas’s morals and sense of purpose are formed from a pre-existing intuitive knowledge and the observation and absorption of the memories of others.

Kira similarly shows an active disregard for the culture and knowledge she learns in her community or even her own logical observation, relying instead on her intuition and vague feelings. She describes the custom of killing babies born with imperfections and acknowledges that in her community it is considered “the merciful thing” but persists in expressing her instinctual distaste, describing how the practice “made her shudder” *(Gathering Blue* 4). After the death of her mother and her move to the Council building, Kira is looked after by her defender Jamison who has saved her life and has given her a comfortable new position. She has no reason to fear or distrust the man who has cared for her yet she admits that “she was oddly fearful” *(Gathering Blue* 123) of him. In these moments, the author lays the groundwork for later revelations, and yet these omniscient premonitions are voiced by the young adult protagonist giving them undue prescience and wisdom. Understanding what they have not learned and acting as moral guides precisely due to their lack of experience or comprehension of the complexities of morality demonstrates a romantic perception of the intuitive childhood with awareness and a calling to a higher law above government compelling resistance. Their certainty and trust of an

innate system of belief makes them willing to endure suffering and sacrifice in the name of their morality, and witnessing suffering is an extremely believable and powerful tool for influencing people.

Martyrdom and Sacrifice

According to Halloway Sparks, it's not truly dissent unless there are risks. Only when the state is threatened by the questioning voice and enforces punishment is it considered truly dissent. Thus Sparks affirms that "a crucial element in the practice of dissident citizenship…is the discourse and practice of courage. One way to describe courage is as a commitment to resolution and persistence in the face of risk, uncertainty, or fear" (Sparks 76). Enduring pain and punishment is another means of demonstrating dedication to a cause and thus convincing witnesses of the actor's honesty and the truth of their actions. King and Thoreau committed acts knowing they would lead to jail time. Gandhi found success fasting, pressuring the state into negotiate instead of creating a martyr out of him. According to Peters, a martyr "uses his or her body as a spectacle of pain to convict the conscience of the observer" (Peters 714). While they may not have access to complex systems of media and propaganda to convey a message, each of the young adult protagonists have their bodies and the oppression acted on those bodies as tools for creating sympathy and support.

Like the civil disobedience hero, the young adult heroes endure pain and punishment for the greater good. The job of Receiver is literally one of individual burden and pain so community members can be spared. After an initial introduction to receiving memories in which Jonas experienced only happy things, the Giver introduces painful and sad memories and Jonas becomes aware that he has an isolated and painful future ahead of him. "'But it will hurt,' Jonas said. It wasn't a question. 'It will hurt terribly,' The Giver agreed" (*The Giver* 112). More

broadly, Jonas experiences the pain of disillusionment as he sacrifices his carefree childhood and innocent citizenship for the painful knowledge of the Receiver. Finding out what Release truly is Jonas describes the "terrible pain" *(The Giver* 150-151) he experiences. However, Jonas's role as a witness to pain for his community ultimately convinces Jonas that a change is necessary. Matty similarly experiences pain each time he attempts to use his gift of healing. His first experience with healing a frog is described, saying, "a painful kind of power surged from his hand, flowing into the frog, and held them bound together" *(Messenger* 42). Matty is literally and metaphorically bound to the creatures and world he seeks to fix. This is the weighty responsibility of the young adult protagonist in these novels; compelled by instinctive morals and gifts to create changed they are drawn into an inescapable cycle of pain and sacrifice.

Katniss willingly and unhesitatingly sacrifices her safety and well-being to care for and protect her family before the Games, risking the punishment of hunting illegally in order to bring food home. But her first public act of sacrifice is when she volunteers to take Prim's place as a tribute in the Games, knowing that she is most likely going to her death. In the arena, she puts herself in danger when she allies herself with Peeta who is slow and injured. "I've made myself far more vulnerable than when I was alone. Tethered to the ground, on guard, with a very sick person to take care of" *(The Hunger Games* 263). She sacrifices her security because she has a strong sense of morals and is called to honor beliefs above the rules and goals of the Games. Later, when she is actively working with the rebels, she is sent into battle simply to create opportunities for inspirational footage. "The idea of sending me into combat is controversial…If I perform well only in real-life circumstances, then into them I should go" *(Mockingjay* 76). Again, sacrifices for the cause are often tied to the all-important spectacle or public display of rebellion. Katniss knowingly enters into danger because she feels obligated to the cause. When

she first agrees to stay and fight for the revolution she acknowledges the risks: “Fighting the Capitol assures their swift retaliation. I must accept that at any moment can be arrested. There might be torture. Mutilation” *(Catching Fire* 122-123). Katniss’s disobedience is made more powerful through her awareness of the consequences and thoughtfully accepting them as the price of her resistance.

The process of resistance and political struggle is all about power—maintaining it or seizing it. Maria Nikolajeva, in *Power, Voice and Subjectivity in Literature for Young Readers*, observes that frequently, in response to these power struggles, “symbolic or real death seems to be the only possible solution, reflecting the adult author’s capitulation to the demands of adult norms” (Nikolajeva 203). Martyrdom, suicide, and death in general are present forces in the lives of these young adults especially as they seek to exercise resistance to power of their oppressive dystopian worlds. In *The Giver,* Jonas’s predecessor to the role of Receiver, Rosemary, chose Release instead of enduring the trials and burden of the position. Her choice to commit suicide as a means of escape from the role of Receiver is regarded ambiguously in the morality of the novel. While Rosemary’s suicide was painful to the community, the Giver continues to associate her choice with bravery and strength. In some ways she represents an inverted martyr, killing herself her belief and condemned by the community for her choice. While Jonas is forbidden from considering Release by the new rules for Receivers, he does dwell on the story of the young child Caleb who fell into the river and drowned. “‘I can’t request release, I know that. But what if something happened: an accident?’” *(The Giver* 143) Jonas seems seeks to create space for the possibility of his escape in some form. In some ways, Jonas’s final daring escape can be seen as a suicidal mission. He faces the unknown world with little preparation or direction and is fiercely

pursued by the community, facing certain death if caught. The ambiguous ending of the book leaves it unclear whether he made it to another place or died on the journey.

Growing up in District 12, death has always loomed near for Katniss. In the arena and during the rebellion, however, she begins to understand the power of her death as a force for the rebellion. While she is determined to fulfill her promise and return home to care for Prim, there is a sense that death is inevitable and Katniss begins thinking about fates worse than death. Katniss so constantly faces the possibility that her life will be sacrificed, that killing herself quickly and painlessly becomes a reasonable consideration. When she first offers Peeta the poisonous berries in the arena, she is already willing to sacrifice her life to stand against the Capitol. Before entering the arena the second time she meditates on sacrificing herself to save Peeta: "Because I will be more valuable dead. They can turn me into some kind of martyr for the cause and paint my face on banners, and it will do more to rally people than anything I could do if I was living" *(Catching Fire* 243-244). Katniss is aware that her death would solidify her as a martyr for the cause and inspire the Districts to continue the war against the Capitol. By the end of the series, Katniss reaches a point when she is not sure who to trust anymore and has seen herself do unspeakable things while a pawn of other people. She cannot trust herself and becomes determined to kill herself as a final attempt to protect others, this time from her own dangerous power. She no longer feels like she deserves to be a part of the envisioned world of the revolution. She was never meant to survive the revolution. She always set herself up to be sacrificed for the cause and is therefore, unable to find her role as a survivor and participant in the new world.

Finally, in *Messenger* we see the only completion of sacrificial suicide from the books. In response to the dark changes occurring in Village and Forest and the wisdom of Seer and Leader

is not enough to understand or change the negative energy taking root. Facing outright attacks from Forest and certain death at its hands, Matty instead chooses to actively give up his life by putting all his remaining strength into the earth through his gift of healing. “His brain and spirit became part of the earth…He gave himself to it willingly, traded himself for all that he loved and valued, and felt free” *(Messenger* 165-166). Matty’s suicide is only bearable to the reader because his action doesn’t immediately strike the reader as an act of suicide and it seems to be merciful when compared to the horrific suffering he would have endured in Forest. “He floated above, weightless, watching his human self labor and writhe” (*Messenger* 166).

How can the death of a protagonist fit into the hopeful young adult narrative? There are two possible explanations for Lowry’s decision to violate the unwritten rule of leaving hope for young adult characters. Firstly, in some ways Matty is always a distant character to the reader. He’s introduced in *Gathering Blue,* but he is not the main character and he wanders in and out of Kira’s story. His growth and maturation during the interval between *Gathering Blue* and *Messenger* is similarly unseen and the reader enters the world of *Messenger*, reacquainted with the very different young adult Matty. It can be argued, then, that it is really Kira and the beloved Village that are the main characters of these two books, and it seems that their “happily ever after” is achieved at the end through Matty’s sacrifice. Through this lens, the ending of this book is incredibly hopeful. Kira is united with her father and the village she always desired. She and Leader are brought together and Village goes back to being the paradise it was before. However, at the same time this interpretation raises some serious problems with the treatment of the character of Matty as merely a vehicle to connect the characters and bring about narrative desires. In another sense, this ending is the culmination of Matty’s development and solidifies a hopeful future for everything he holds dear. In *Gathering Blue,* the overlooked young boy is

intrigued by Kira's foreign concept of a "gift" which he understands to be something you give to someone to get them to "like" you "best" (*Messenger* 104). His sacrifice at the end of *Messenger* is the ultimate gift. Matty also seeks purpose and a position in the course of these books and with his sacrifice he finds his place in the community. "He became aware, suddenly, that he had been chosen for this" (*Messenger* 166). Matty finally receives his true name and his Village title, not Messenger as "'there have been other messengers, and there will be more to come,'" (*Messenger* 169) but Healer. Everything Matty loved and believed in was saved by Matty's sacrifice. "Back in Village, a breeze came up" (*Messenger* 167) and this breeze brings a return to normalcy among the citizens and Forest.

In general these suffering and sacrificing young adult leaders don't get to fully enjoy in the future that they worked to create. Whether it's Jonas who is forced to leave his home in order change his community, Kira who leaves the community she reformed in order to rejoin her father, Katniss who leaves the political sphere of Panem at the end of *Mockingjay*, or Matty who doesn't live to see the world he loves saved; these young adults do not enjoy the fruits of their labor. While these young adult heroes are doing the work to save their worlds and come to represent hope for a better future in their communities, the process of changing and disobedience implies this sacrifice. These young adults create hopeful worlds for their generation, but are not among those that get to fully appreciate the new world created. This seems to solidify their place in these narratives as tools of change merely, unable to transition out of that state and appreciate the accomplishment of their vision.

Reform vs. Revolution

The motivations of classic civil disobedience leaders comes from a place of love and respect for citizenship or a state, and disobedience grows from a desire to show respect by

demanding the most of it. Even Thoreau, whose writings express a disdain for the process of government in general, has respect for the role of the citizen and does seek to reform this, imagining a world in which the evil of government is lessened by the vigilance of intensely moral and active citizens. Katniss, Jonas, Kira, and Matty, on the other hand, do not seek to reform their system slightly. And except for Matty, the other three certainly do not resist and sacrifice as they do out of respect for the overall structure of the state and faith in its eventual perfection. Instead, they are open to totally drastic change, completely independent of the government system. None of them do the work they do, either, as a necessary step in the transition to assimilation. As mentioned earlier, none of these protagonists get to enjoy the changing world they help to create. In general, these characters are more interested in a total revolution of the way the world is structured and perceived and never consider slight reforms which would make their integration into society simpler. Instead, they seek to start fresh and rebuild a world of their own imagining, but it is left unclear what this better world would look like.

CHAPTER SIX: AMBIGUOUS ENDINGS

While there is certainly a great deal of tension and discomfort apparent in the assimilation of classic adult genre conventions into young adult literature, most of the conventions have the effect of becoming more pronounced and exaggerated when adapted. However, the endings of these narratives offer moments of true generic resistance. Taking the end of Katniss's story in *Mockingjay*, the end of Jonas's young adult story in *The Giver*, and the end of Kira and Matty's stories in *Messenger* as the "endings" of the narratives discussed, ambiguous tactics for narrative closure are utilized. This ambiguity goes against the conventional structures for resolution commonly employed in the classic Bildungsroman, dystopia, and civil disobedience trajectories and is a direct response to the unique demands of the young adult genre.

The goals of the young adult novel itself are many and complicated to begin with. The novel for young adults usually tries to present clear messages or lessons that can't be misinterpreted by young adults who are still developing their reading comprehension skills. But at the same time, it is important in literature for youth that the message remain hopeful in order to empower young adults and honor the happily-ever-after endings required of children's literature. These demands create a dilemma for the young adult author seeking narrative closure. Kay Sambell discusses this dilemma in his essay, "Presenting the Case for Social Change: The Creative Dilemma of Dystopian Writing for Children." He suggests that often authors manipulate the final pages in "an almost dancelike structure of progression and regression, oscillating extravagantly between signs of hope and fear for the protagonists' future" (Sambell 170). The ambiguity of the endings of these novels actually works to "destabilize the reader's certainty" (Sambell 171) as a means of allowing the possibility of all the traditional endings to

coexist. Sambell suggests that the ambiguous ending “represents a characteristic search for a narrative solution equal to the challenges of adapting the dystopian form for a young readership” (Sambell 171). The ambiguous ending suggests a hesitance to trust young adults to understand the call to action implied in the grim pronouncements of classic adult dystopia which may be misinterpreted as a despairing account of the inevitable demise of the world. At the same time, however, opening the ending up to a more ambiguous, yet hopeful conclusion actually creates more opportunity for interpretation. Sambell also implies that the uncertainty of these endings “present *explicitly* the possibility of a ‘theoretically safe world,’ which is capable, at least to some extent, of offering the view that benign forces can and do exist, and that ultimately ‘everything will be all right” (Sambell 169). Unlike the didactic nature of the conventional genres which encourage responsibility and change outside of the novel, according to Sambell, “the text itself becomes a space that sometimes tries to create conditions for young readers to rehearse…in an imaginative environment that is affirming and supportive, but which also articulates dark truths” (Sambell 173). The following sections break down the conclusions of the novels as they compare to the traditional endings of each of the three genres analyzed.

Bildungsroman

In general, the Bildungsroman in the young adult form is most significantly changed in that young adult novels do not follow the protagonist from childhood to adulthood but instead deal only with adolescent characters transitioning to adulthood through the course of the novel. Therefore, the young adult Bildungsroman has a smaller scope and is more fully focused on that moment of transition before entering adulthood. It still follows the “coming of age” narrative but it is concentrated in a smaller and more intense moment of adolescent transition. Similarly, because the novel does not map out a path into adulthood, the wrap-up of the Bildungsroman is

more complicated in young adult literature. While transformation is observed in the protagonist setting up a clear path to actualization and adulthood for the character, they have still just barely entered adulthood and their future remains largely uncertain. The implication is that they now have the tools to be successful in their future endeavors, but it is necessarily left ambiguous specifically how the character's future unfolds.

Sambell suggests that the "happy ending," which relies on a certain amount of stability and certainty, "is so pervasive that it amounts to an unwritten law in the production of children's books" (Sambell 165). At the heart of the Bildungsroman is the belief that human perfectability is possible and that, if open to it, society will foster a child's development, leading them to their "happy ending." This clear cut ending implies the achievement of a static world in which the character's story no longer needs to be told because the reader can assume a basic amount of unchanging happiness. In many ways, this space of fulfillment and permanent happiness is a profoundly utopian one. In "Lois Lowry's The Giver: Interrupted Bildungsroman or Ambiguous Dystopia?" Michael Levy suggests that, "utopias are static, virtually by definition. Having worked so hard to achieve a society in which there are no serious problems, the citizens of utopia want things to stay pretty much the way they are" (Levy 53). And while a Bildungsroman model "by its very nature implies change" (Levy 54) it is expected to culminate in some more static period of certainty and the young adult genre resists this certainty.

The scope of the novel doesn't include portrayals of these young adult dystopian characters in their future stable adult lives. Matty dies at the end of *Messenger*, so there is no stasis of adulthood for the reader to see. Kira's story ends with her arriving in Village to finally be with her father, an immediate future that is a kind of repetition of childhood, in which she'll finally get to enjoy having a father and living in a community where she is nurtured and treated

with respect. While the reader does get to peek into Katniss's future in the Epilogue and see her as an adult, married with children, this scene still resists any unchanging certainty. Instead, Katniss and Peeta are still plagued by the trauma of their horrible past and struggle with debilitating memories each day. We see the result of her coming of age influencing her both positively and negatively indefinitely into her future, and at the same time creating a sense of instability. The fight continues for her, just in smaller, more personal ways. And there is no certainty that the present structure of the state will remain peaceful and unobtrusive. Similarly with Jonas, the reader gets a peak into his future with his reappearance as Leader in *Messenger,* and these moments make it clear that while it seems he has found a place of honor and respect in the Village, the course of *Messenger* implies that he continues to fight to preserve it. There is no perfect adulthood or permanence at the end of these novels.

Dystopia

While the goal of dystopian works is to present harsh truths of social ills and future disaster in response to current social and political choices, there is a hesitance to present young people with hopeless situations. This dilemma is another source of the ambiguous ending. Contrary to the unambiguous doom commonly preached in adult dystopia, "the expression of moral meaning in the children's dystopia is often characterized by degrees of hesitation, oscillation, and ambiguity" (Sambell 164). Similarly, there is a reluctance to show the total defeat and ruin of the young adult protagonist who is often seen as a representative of the adolescent reader themselves. The main deviation from classic dystopian structure in young adult dystopia occurs in the treatment of disillusionment of the protagonist. Young adult protagonists experience a much more productive and less despairing period of disillusionment. Latham suggests that true rupture with the dystopian world or radical resistance does not occur in classic dystopian adult

literature (Latham 145). Young adults awakening to the ills of the dystopian world, however, are lead directly to resistance and hope for something better. Braithwaite suggests that this difference is “not unexpected, given the tendency of young adult fiction to have at least the possibility of a positive outcome” (Braithwaite 12). In general, the young adult authors veer away from the destructive and defeating disillusionment and “compromise the adult dystopian denouement” (Sambell 173) in favor of something more hopeful and fitting for young adults. While adult dystopian protagonists experience disillusionment and perhaps resistance, they are often ultimately defeated by the powerful dystopian structure. Young adult protagonists are free to consider acting as a force to change the dystopian structure they see. This alternative view of dystopian disillusionment and response seems to be uniquely influenced by the Romantic view of childhood that considers children to have a unique capacity to hope, imagine, and evade despair. Young adult protagonists are able to find ways to improve their own situation at least somewhat through the course of the novel. And yet, their resistance does not result in a permanent defeat of the dystopian structure either. While it is clear that the protagonists are not defeated or resigned to the state as in adult dystopias, it also is not clear that they have conquered the seeds of dystopia permanently through resistance.

Civil Disobedience

At the heart of civil disobedience theory there is a sense that overall positive change can be achieved eventually through powerful individual actions tied to clear goals and vision. In some ways, the conceptualization of civil disobedience itself can be considered utopian, clinging to utopian visions of the future that can be achieved through resistance and action, and also presupposing that increased awareness of injustice will inevitably lead to its alleviation. Tangled up with the dystopian structures of these novels, it is easy to draw connections between the

utopian longings of civil disobedience and the utopian impulses that grew into policies of a dystopian world. In general, the young adult narratives of these novels seem to resist these tenants of civil disobedience by exuding a general distrust of government or even a sense that government is inherently flawed. Their resistance is never tied to clear goals of a better political structure. The political structure, in general, at the end of these novels is left ambiguous and all the characters choose to ultimately exit the political system in some way.

Jonas' act of civil disobedience pushes him to leave his community behind without looking back. And while Jonas's old community is vaguely alluded to in *Messenger,* in that it has improved in some ways and has grown to appreciate Jonas's awakening and departure, it is unclear what type of political structure has arisen in place of the dystopian structure. Jonas says only that "'where I had come from, they were rebuilding themselves into something better'" *(Messenger* 29). While Kira does choose to stay in her home to fight for change, she eventually leaves and Matty says merely of her work that she "'made things change. Things are better now'" *(Messenger* 90). Even in Matty's near-utopian world, the political structure is left unclear and Matty's act of sacrifice is not tied to permanent improvement. It is uncertain how the political structure in Village will resist future corruption or destruction.

In *The Hunger Games,* Katniss is clearly disillusioned with government in general and the power of resistance and in the end, she creates a space for her family that is separate from the workings of the rest of the world. During the rebellion it is suggested that the rebels were interested in forming a republic system after the war, but it is left ambiguous how the political structure of Panem actually works out. Instead, Katniss focuses on the well-being of her family and the smaller concerns of her daily life in the rebuilt District 12. The overall feelings of peace and success suggest that Katniss and her family do find a way to live comfortably, but the

formula for this success is likewise left as an ambiguous fairytale. Katniss grows skeptical of the public spectacle and performance used as a tool of civil disobedience as well as oppression by the state. While it was vital to her that she be a part of the revolution, her disobedient and rebellious nature also prevents her from accepting the possibility of a permanent and acceptable new establishment and she ultimately finds peace only in getting away from the political structure completely.

Rebuilding, Decay, and Permanent Revolution

The progress of civil disobedience is further undermined by the cyclical representation of history in these novels. Young adults in these novels learn an extremely pessimistic historical perspective suggesting a constant fluctuation between periods of disaster and rebuilding. There is a unique awareness in all of the novels that the present world was built on top of failed worlds as all the novels are set in post-apocalyptic environments. Following periods of total destruction, the reality of the novel is tainted by this awareness that total destruction could always happen again. In *Gathering Blue*, Kira is able to study the history of her world through her close work robe. "In some places on the robe there was a feeling of entire worlds ending. Yet always there would emerge, nearby, new growth. New people" *(Gathering Blue* 117). Not only can she see a timeline laid out on the robe, but she can follow the repetitious pattern of destruction and hope, "Ruin. Rebuilding. Ruin again. Regrowth…The cycle was so regular that its pattern took on a clear form: an up-and-down movement, wavelike" *(Gathering Blue* 117-118). While Kira takes great hope in the expanse of the robe that is empty and will be written in the future, knowledge of the constant repetition of the historical cycle seems to undermine the possibility of lasting change in the future.

Not only do the worlds of the *Giver* books follow after apocalyptic destruction and rebuilding, but the course of the three novels actually portrays this fluctuation in history. While the carefully planned world of *The Giver* represents rebuilding in response to some drastic disasters of the past, when Jonas chooses to leave the community and unleash all the painful memories on the citizens, it is certainly a period of chaos and ruin. Later, from a distance, Jonas learns of the rebuilding of his old community. Similarly, in *Messenger,* citizens preserve artifacts from their old lives in a museum as a testament to the cruel and chaotic worlds from whence they came and Village represents a place of rebuilding and hope. However, even Village is not immune to the fluctuations of history between struggle and peace and goes through a period of corruption ultimately ended by Matty's sacrifice. And while they rebuild after this period, it is clear that this corruption could happen again.

At the end of *Mockingjay*, things have settled in the favor of the rebellion, but while the rebels don't anticipate any encroaches on their victory yet, they certainly don't expect peace to last forever. "'Now we're in that sweet period where everyone agrees that our recent horrors should never be repeated…But collective thinking is usually short-lived. We're fickle, stupid beings with poor memories and a great gift for self-destruction" (*Mockingjay* 378-379). This cynical view of the repetitive nature of governmental rise and fall, peace and rebellion, is reflected by Katniss's rejection of the current regime. Katniss even goes so far as to consider complete human destruction and "letting some decent species take over," *(Mockingjay* 377) as the most positive future. This statement implies a total rejection of the process she just took part in and the belief that lasting peace is not a possible future for humans.

In a world so saturated with proof of the inevitability of repeated destruction and rebuilding, it is difficult to maintain hope for a future of permanent utopia. Even utopian spaces

and symbols, things that represent utopian longing and imagining, are not permanent and decay in these stories. In *The Giver,* "Elsewhere" is set-up as a conceptual space including all things beyond the understanding of the community. When people die or exit the community, they are said to have gone Elsewhere, and when Jonas leaves the community, he clings to the possibility that Elsewhere is actually a tangible destination that he can arrive at. Within the confines of *The Giver,* it is left unclear whether or not Jonas does in fact come upon a tangible "Elsewhere" place which accepts him, or whether he goes to Elsewhere as heaven and dies at the end of the novel. However, it is clear in *Messenger* that Jonas survived his trip and actually did arrive at a physical location. It is no longer Elsewhere. It is Village. In *Gathering Blue,* Kira similarly dreams of "yonder" where it is said that the people know how to make blue dye. While "yonder" seems to be a vague, metaphorical idea, Matty attempts to travel there and yonder turns out to be Village as well. Once the metaphorical utopian spaces of Elsewhere and yonder become tied to a physical place, they can be subject to corruption and decay as seen in the faltering of Village.

Similarly, in *Catching Fire*, Katniss learns that District 13 may have survived the rebellion and is existing independently of the Capitol. It comes to represent a possibility of hope and a space of freedom to Katniss while she imagines it. Finally arriving at 13 in *Mockingjay*, however, Katniss is disappointed by the rigorous structure and the imperfect politics. The truly utopian space that Katniss seeks in the novel is expressed as an idyllic meadow in a lullaby she sings, an ambiguous space that Katniss is unknowingly working toward during the course of the novel. Instead of imagining a future world with a more stable and fair political structure, Katniss tries to imagine a world "'somewhere in the future, with no Games, no Capitol. A place like the meadow in the song I sang to Rue as she died. Where Peeta's child could be safe'" (*Catching Fire* 354). In some ways, Katniss reaches this place. She has children with Peeta and their

children take for granted the reality of the world in the lullaby and actually play in "the Meadow" (*Mockingjay* 389). While she achieves this image of utopia in some ways, it is not wholly perfect. Katniss and Peeta are plagued by the trauma and nightmares from memories of the Games and the war. Their utopian space is corrupted by the nightmares of the past. Again, once the utopian space of the Meadow becomes a tangible reality, the problems of human nature and corruption enter in.

These utopian spaces can only exist as ambiguous imaginings of "other" places defined merely in opposition to the present world. As soon as it gets out of the ambiguous stage and people attempt to live out utopia imaginings, human failings enter in. The utopian longings are simpler, natural spaces in opposition to the highly organized dystopian states and thus are lost when they are discovered and colonized. This seems to suggest that utopia can only exist as an unreachable, yet constantly sought place. There is a general theme of unreachable struggle towards an ambiguous future that is common in these stories. Sambell suggests that "accepting a final solution based on perfection and stability, humanity has perversely resisted and opposed life itself" (Sambell 166). Hope, these novels suggest, lies only in constant vigilance, revolution and trusting inspired and naturally rebellious youth.

According to Booker in *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature,* "Central to Foucault's model of history is his espousal of the need to further continual change through opposition to the existing order of society, but he refuses to propose an alternative order as the goal of this opposition" and instead espouses the idea of the "permanent revolution" (*Dystopian Impulse* 25). Booker suggests that this system of constant change is at odds with the stasis implied in utopian longing in dystopian works. This model resonates with the ambiguous dystopian endings of the young adult dystopian fiction studied here. Jonas and Katniss both have

dreams which manifest utopian longings, unseen places tied inextricably to struggle and defying completion. Jonas dreams of traveling on a sled, "Always, in the dream, it seemed as if there were a destination: a *something*—he could not grasp what—that lay beyond the place where the thickness of snow brought the sled to a stop" *(The Giver* 88). Katniss has a dream about a mockingjay that was really Rue, both symbols of hope and resistance, leading her through the woods. But when asked where the mockingjay/Rue led her in the dream, Katniss says simply, "'We never arrived…But I felt happy'" (*Catching Fire* 85). These dreams reflect the subconscious understanding that the stable utopian place cannot be achieved but there is a kind of utopian happiness experienced in the dream and the struggle.

Baccolini and Moylan suggest that these novels "allow both readers and protagonists to hope by resisting closure: the ambiguous, open endings of these novels maintain the utopian impulse *within* the work" (qtd. in Braithwaite 12). Instead of establishing a concrete message in the utopian space of the endings, these novels leave the future open-ended, providing closure only in the way they negate the dystopian world and look to constantly changing saviors. If young people are to be the arbiters of this philosophy of constant change, then as the previous young adults grow up, new young adults will replace them and will have to undergo the same period of questioning and rebellion, learning anew how to become leaders of revolution. In *Messenger,* Jonas and Kira are no longer empowered with the skills to save Forest and Village and it is, instead, the inexperienced Matty who is called to make sacrifices for change. Similarly, at the end of *Hunger Games,* we see an older, complacent Katniss who allows the burden of monitoring the state to be displaced onto her children. They must learn the history of the Games and be vigilant as they hold the keys to continue fighting for a peaceful world. Once again, the burden and hope for the future is placed on youth and the next generation of revolutionaries.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that the magnitude and sheer unconventional power of the young adult literature explosion demands attention. It is a movement. Young adult readers are making choices and expressing interest, standing together in a call to be heard. Their commitment, numbers, and energy inherently challenge canonical texts. They are creating their own canon that demands to be recognized. Critics may hem and haw debating the worth of young adult texts, presuming to take sides in response to this phenomenon, but this reticence has not slowed the mania nor damped the young adult reader's love for these books. Whether arguing that these books have no literary merit, or even that they are useful because they get kids reading and may lead them to one day approaching the classics, really, underneath it all, there is a basic bias against these books. There is a basic assumption that they are inferior because they are for young adults. They are for young adults and therefore watered down, juvenile, insubstantial and not eligible to compete with the classics. The precious, and apparently fragile, classics are safe for another day. But what will that next day bring?

For a culture anxiously reiterating that the children are our future, society sure is afraid of them and disappointed by them. Their taste and choices is frequently mocked and belittled. And when young adults refuse to heed this trivializing, rejecting society's rules and expectations? Adolescents are taking the derogatory label "young adult literature" and reclaiming ownership, making it something to cherish and love. They celebrate it and celebrate a unity of mind and community created by a fantastical world. It is important to recognize the power in these moments of unity and it is important to recognize the ways that young adults are treated as a marginalized group. This is an awareness that must be present in all critical work on young adult literature to come. Young adult dystopian literature can be empowering and inspiring, but only in

the ways that it respects and creates a space for reader interpretation and uniquely young adult experiences.

Yet young adult dystopian literature is built on a contradiction: "the voice of the challenging child is, in reality, the voice of an adult, the author" (Marshall-Rubin 18). The beloved young adult protagonists in these novels are formulated by adult authors preoccupied with the future growing from this particular historical moment and drawing on long-established genres. Compound this with all the unrealistic portrayals and glamorizing of youth and it is easy to feel that authors leave little space for the voice of the young adult reader. So how have these books resonated so profoundly with young adult audiences?

New possibilities emerge through the mingling of the old and new genres as well as the shared space of the adult author and young adult reader. While trying to adapt adult genres, the young adult novel necessitates a new look at the classic narratives. Just as the protagonists of the books push the boundaries of the rules of their dystopian worlds, the "rules" of the conventional genres are challenged and complicated by the spirit and expectations of the young adult form. The young adult protagonist, and by extension, the reader, makes demands of the genres, requiring more space for realistic experience, exploration, and rebellion. Ambiguous endings push the boundaries of the classic genres, creating space for young adult empowerment and freedom of interpretation. Young adults are trusted to interpret the uncertain endings individually and are freed from the adult control of knowledge. The ambiguous endings leave space for young adult ownership of the story and the future, creating space for their unique perspective and an ending that only they can write. The ambiguous endings grant the young adult protagonist more time to continue the story in any possible direction ensuring that revolution doesn't end with the novel. Instead, the message of the novel and the possibility in the figure of the young adult

citizen extend out into the world and seek to hold the reader accountable for the unfolding of history.

"Utopia" might be considered an idealistic word in our world, implying a naiveté or ignorance, but a world with no hope is similarly unimaginable. The books themselves are exercises in utopian imagining; presuming that witnessing through the form of the novel and learning vicariously through the experience of the protagonist can positively influence the reader and create a generation that can live out utopian visions. The possibilities of harnessing the utopian youth as a step toward creating a utopian world are reflected in the self-consciousness purpose of young adult dystopian literature that seeks to teach young adults and possibly influence their growth as a means of creating a utopian future through the next generation. Young adult literature is considered important in the ways that it influences and models the world to young adults who are still defining and understanding the world around them, but it is also important, more simply, in its basic assumption that influencing and modeling utopian and dystopian worlds in young adult fiction is a means of shaping young adults into citizens that will actually create and populate a future utopian world.

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