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Fear and Loathing in Dystopia: The Ruckwartsroman and the Narrative of Fear

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FEAR AND LOATHING IN DYSTOPIA:
THE *RÜCKWÄRTSROMAN* AND THE NARRATIVE OF FEAR

by

Brooke Vaughan

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

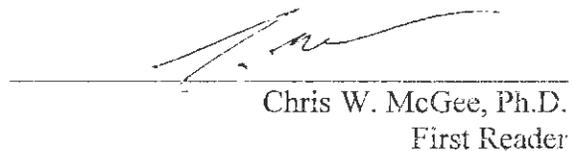
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Master's Thesis

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“As the sound of the playgrounds faded, the despair set in. Very odd, what happens in a world without children’s voices.”

Children of Men

“There are two kinds of fears: rational and irrational—or in simpler terms, fears that make sense and fears that don’t.”

Lemony Snicket

Introduction

Balaka Basu, Katherine Broad, and Carrie Hintz, editors of *Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults: Brave New Teenagers*, note that dystopian young adult literature “engages with pressing global concerns” such as freedom and the merging of technology and self, and “when directed at young readers, who are trying to understand the world and their place in it, these dystopian warnings are distilled into exciting adventures with gripping plots” (1). To be sure, turning on the news is a daunting task today; images of Islamic State militants terrorizing towns and Ebola ravaged villages fill the screen no matter what station you turn to. With the ever-present images of death and destruction flooding the airwaves, it makes sense that the texts written and marketed for a teen audience would offer a way for readers to grapple with these atrocities in the safe confines of a narrative. Furthermore, Melissa Ames says these texts feed on post 9/11 fears of terrorism and a world at war, and thus “they present fictional fear-based scenarios that align with contemporary cultural concerns...they all provide social commentary that is relevant to society today” (4). To this end, YA dystopia does seem to emerge from a *perceived* social need to correct the trajectory of our nation, calling attention to the problems present in our own times.

Dystopian young adult literature is not a new phenomenon in the publishing world. Called speculative fiction and sci-fi, the idea of a world that has fallen apart has long captivated audiences because of their “what if” quality that places the story far outside of their current world. George Orwell’s *1984* tells the story of Winston Smith’s futile struggle against Big Brother, and Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, about a

future London run by the World State; these texts were, at one point, teens' first introductions to a dystopian world. Though not directly marketed to teens and frequently banned across the country, these texts have been given to teens and deemed an appropriate medium to show young adults about all the ways that the world can go wrong while still teaching them that the problems they encounter are reparable. As the predecessors for young adult speculative fiction, these texts present a world that in some ways mirrors our own, but that more often than not has been destroyed by human folly. There is a push to present the troubles of the world as adult-created when these same stories are written for young readers, centering the teen protagonist as world savior and as the only one able to see the solution to the problem clearly. The placement of the young adult protagonist as the hero of the text not only forces readers to question why the adults are unable to save themselves, but why the young protagonist is the only viable world savior.

Dystopia is a complicated genre that is more than just the opposite of utopia, comprised of a multifaceted definition that attempts to answer all of the questions the genre raises. Ephraim Sicher and Natalia Skradol contend that there are actually three branches to this speculative space: utopia, anti-utopia, and dystopia. Sicher and Skradol note that if a utopia is an all-perfect world, then the anti-utopia is the "mocking, contrary, echo" of the utopia (155). That is, the anti-utopia is the obverse of the utopia as it attempts to deride utopian ideals—it takes utopian leanings and ridicules them in order to point out the fallacies of the genre. Further, "Dystopia (which should be distinguished from anti-utopia) is not so much an argument against utopia, as its obverse, a utopia that will inevitably go wrong; it is utopia discovered to be the 'bad place'" (155). The

dystopia establishes itself in pursuit of utopia, but is eventually led off course through political struggles and self-promotion until we are eventually left with the ruins of the utopia—the dystopia. The speculative fiction author often creates this space of the dystopia in order to mirror our own, setting up our present-day society as the ideal that the dystopia strives to reacquire.

In a separate vein, Gregory Claeys argues that the definition of dystopia boils down to “governance or behavioral regulation through fear” (156). By creating fear of those in power, the dystopia is able to police their citizens, thereby creating an undesirable place to live. Dystopias are, by this definition, the product of a utopian ideal, because:

There is something inhuman (and thus potentially dysfunctional or dystopian) in the idea of a utopia which requires that human society as currently constituted be replaced...by a social order based on different...characteristics [from current archetypes].

These characteristics are usually based on uniformity, conformity, and unanimity. (Sicher 155)

The society in Lois Lowry’s *The Giver* quartet begins with this very idea of Sameness, and as the novel progresses we see that this Sameness removes everything that makes us human in the first place, including color vision and the experience of pain. In order to combat the uniformity and the dystopianism of his society, Jonas must leave the confining barrier of his village, thereby returning all of the memories of pain and suffering that he gained from his study as the next Giver of memories to the other citizens of his town. For Jonas, as is common across Young Adult dystopic literature, the teen

protagonists become more and more rebellious against their society as they refuse to inherit the problems running rampant and seemingly unchecked, instead revolting against the status quo in order to bring about a new world order—or rather an old world order as the goal is to return to the way things were before the dystopia came to be; in the case of the novels in this thesis, that “before time” is the current day we live in while reading the narrative, and in a world in which the age of the person no longer means anything in terms the balance of power or work loads, the resolution comes about when being a teenager means something again. Teenage protagonists face an entirely different set of challenges than their adult counterparts, the least of which is coming of age in a world ruled by fear, and the problems of the young adult dystopian novel are borne of our modern-day fears—adult fears of adulthood itself, and of the power the teen wields in our society.

For the purpose of this thesis, I will be working from a composite of the above definitions to establish an understanding of a dystopian world. I use *dystopia* to describe a world in which society started as a utopia “based on ideals of universal reason and happiness” (Sicher 156), but that ultimately uses fear and aggression to correct undesirable traits, eventually leading to the discovery of the underlying corruption that removes the society from its utopian roots and in which the division of age again has meaning. These undesirable traits include anything and everything from free thinking to skin color differences, and they are generally, in terms of the texts, eliminated to create a more uniform society that in the end recognizes its own shortcomings through the triumph of the teenage protagonist. This definition reflects the recent trends in dystopian texts, namely the more popular ones such as the *Divergent* series and *The Giver* Quartet,

in which these societies are established to eliminate the supposed ills of our present world but that ultimately take a turn for the worse in their pursuit of perfection.

In my research I have discovered that many of the texts that are touted as featuring positive and progressive teenage leads actually take away much of the young adults' agency by reducing him or her to a shell of their former self. This regression is what I have termed *Rückwärtsroman*, or a novel that travels backwards in the maturation of the protagonist, and is found more often in dystopian Young Adult texts than critics and fans admit. Regression, at its core, requires that the protagonist lose a piece of himself or herself, reverting them to a fractured state far removed from where they began the series or narrative. There is not a term for those texts in which a character dies in the end or becomes a drug addict or becomes mentally unstable; these texts are not *Bildungsroman*, hence the need for the *Rückwärtsroman*. For this thesis, I will use this term to describe those texts that do not fit the *Bildungsroman* model of maturation and growth, instead presenting protagonists who revert to a more fragmented state of being, including the possibility of a protagonists' death. In creating these texts and characters, the authors of these fanciful worlds present questions of what it means to be a teenager in the dark times they have created, often mirroring our own real world events and presenting terrifying portraits of the negative side effects of being a strong female in a male-dominated landscape or an independent teenager under the "evil" adults' rule. Further, I will be working from the premise that the *Rückwärtsroman* must come from a dystopian text; this is not a problem novel that is solved by the adults of the narrative but it is a text where the problems are created by the adults, rectified by the teenager, and in which the adult again regains control once the teen has righted the ills of the world.

Beyond all of this, the *Rückwärtsroman* is a text that either participates in or comments on adult fears of teenagers, justifying the need to end the novel with the adults back in a place of power and the teenagers returned to a subservient role. To be sure, this relinquishing and reclamation of power can only take place within the confines of a fantasy novel as this is the only place where teens or females can experience the sort of freedom that comes with a dystopian world; it is only in these novels that the “abnormal” protagonist can experience liberation and agency, but in the end this must be surrendered back to the adults in the texts.

According to Britain’s Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), paedophobia, or the fear of young people, is on the rise as violence and drugs flood the media. A recent report from the IPPR found more than one million British adults considered moving because of a high population of teenagers in the area, and many admitted to being afraid of physical violence and verbal abuse at the hands of teens (Verkaik and Akbar). But is this why we do not trust present-day teens? Is this why we must rely on imaginary futuristic young adults to clean up the messes that present day adults and teens leave behind, forcing the next generation to clean them up? Why do we feel as though modern-day teens are incapable of solving the problems of the world? Or does this adult fear of the scary teenager stem from the adults’ own fears about the world around them? Setting these tales in a futuristic society allows the reader to say, “At least we aren’t this bad off,” interpellating teens into adult ways of thinking and behaving while still recognizing that the problems of the fictional world are a result of current societal habits. Ames argues that Young Adult dystopian texts “present fictional fear-based scenarios that align with contemporary cultural concerns...[in that] they all provide social commentary that is

relevant to society today” (4). Future woes caused by natural disasters are the result of our disregard for global warming, and theocratic government rule stems from an inability to curb religious extremism. The adult author is constantly confronted with images of war and death in the news, and these texts take an adult centered subject and attempt to explain it to teens, including an ending that says that the problems of the world can be solved when all is said and done. Creating these stories with their hopeful resolutions acts as a form of catharsis, soothing the worries the adult author has about their own inability to control anything around them as they become another cog in the wheel.

The near future seems an odd place to raise questions about present trends in our society, but setting these wildly popular texts in a world that once mirrored ours says quite a bit about the author’s fears of modern day teens. One of the first things we learn to recognize in our readings of literature is the setting, the place and time that the events of the story take place, and how these shape our understanding of the story, but when an author chooses to set his or her narrative in a futuristic world we are forced to find parallels between this imaginary world and our own, calling attention to the future woes that stem from current failures. Ames again argues that dystopian “narratives play upon deep, unresolvable fears from ‘reality,’ exaggerating (and sometimes solving) them in fictional scenarios...it is the young people—willing or not—who must confront these fears and ultimately solve the problems that spawn them” (6). The young adult’s confrontation of these plights, both inside and outside the text, is not a desire for a return to incorruptibility, for as Sicher and Skradol state, “there is no return to innocence because there was none (154),” rather the young adult is seeking a world where they are able to choose who ultimately holds the power—both physically and emotionally.

Eventually, the adult authors create these now dystopian worlds in an effort to return to a sense of normalcy, to remove the “evil” adults from the equation and allow teens to be teens again once the “good” adults are back in charge. This is, once again, the adult author using the teen protagonist as a metaphor for his or her own life to create meaning in adulthood. Our teen years are an especially complex time fraught with feelings of maturity and childhood at once—while we like to believe that we are old enough to make our own decisions, we are still consciously aware that we are helpless without the support of an adult figure. As adults, we realize that we must become somewhat responsible but that there is little in our lives we are able to control for ourselves. The adult author, in creating the teenage protagonist, is passing along their fears of adulthood as they try to grapple with them in real life, creating a symbolic stand-in for themselves; with their fear of inadequacy in the face of adulthood, the adult author creates a teenager whose life is just as restricted as they feel in adulthood to attempt to wrestle with their feelings of incompetence. Using a teen protagonist is a way for the author to not only perpetuate the belief of an uncontrollable life, but by the end of the narrative the metaphorical adult is able to overthrow the forces that seek to represses them, thereby allowing them to fully embrace the freedom that we are told comes with age and giving both the teenage reader and adult author the satisfaction that comes with a positive narrative resolution.

The author of the Young Adult dystopian text portrays the world as an inherently bad place and in doing so instills in the teen the fear of adulthood and the feelings of inadequacy that it brings. In this ploy, the young adult fears the destruction of modern day society, but the end of the novel or series tells them that the problems of the world are reparative and reconciliation comes at the hand of the teen protagonist. These texts

provide hope that the young adult, usually unwillingly, can and will remedy the problems of adult society. In the case of most of the more recent dystopian texts, given that many of the authors are females, these texts likewise speak to underlying fears of being a woman, both today and in the future. More importantly, being an adult female in a society dominated by males or a female author in a field dominated by males, the fear of invisibility is transformed in the texts into a teenage hero who, though generally marginalized, is able to overcome the hurdles that come with being a woman that society has placed in front of her. In this, the adult author is using the young adult protagonist as a metaphor to represent their own fears and anxieties of adulthood and their inability to control the world around them. One of the ways that these teens must learn to deal with the inequalities in their world is to mature and grow into an adult outside of the established pattern of adulthood that surrounds them while reestablishing a division between adulthood and the teenage years.

In a fantasy world dominated by male heroes it is often difficult to stand out as a strong, independent female, but recent Young Adult dystopian novels aim to present a new sort of hero for our future society, thereby attempting to empower the youth of today. Stuart Hall notes, “there are heroines, but the very concept seems to operate on decisively masculine terrain” (qtd. in Jones and Watkins 1). Dudley Jones and Tony Watkins argue that what we know as “heroines” are “defined by their difference from heroes...[Texts have historically] offered girls models of passivity and subordination: They were depicted as pretty adornments, enduring suffering passively and waiting to be rescued by the courageous actions” of their male love interest (1). More recent texts such as Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games* and Veronica Roth’s *Divergent* trilogies, along

with various other series and stand-alone texts, present readers with a young adult female who is not only able to think for herself, but who is ultimately the one able to bring down the totalitarian government she was born into. In doing so, the adult author is imagining a world in which they, themselves, are able to overthrow the “higher powers” that seek to restrict their agency and freedom.

I take my argument of the *Rückwärtsroman* one step further by exploring how gender is performed in the various narratives I analyze in this thesis. Sure, dystopian texts are directly connected to the social issues and threats felt by average citizens, but I also contend that the popularity of these texts goes far beyond the need to appeal to societal fear and nihilism by acting largely as an arm of third wave feminism—a call to arms, in fact, for young girls to take control of their lives and reach beyond what society tells them is expected of women. These texts function as a way for female readers to grapple with the disparities between men and women in a safe environment where everything is resolved by the end of the novel while the male reader is confronted with an Other outside of his scope of experience. The adult male author is thereby using the feminized protagonist to create a safe place to confront the horrors of a world they themselves cannot comprehend, while the young male reading the female protagonist is asked to imagine himself as someone he can never be—someone born female and thereby automatically Othered. Martha Nussbaum asserts that,

Identifying with a woman in a drama, a young male spectator would find that he can in some sense remain himself, that is to say, a reasoning human being with moral virtues and commitments. On the other hand, he discovers through this identification much that is

not his own lot: the possibility, for example, of being raped and being forced to bear the enemy's child; the possibility of witnessing the deaths of children whom one has nursed oneself; the possibility of being abandoned by one's husband and in consequence totally without social support. He is brought up against the fact that people as articulate and able as he face disaster and shame in some ways that males do not; and he is asked to think about that as something relevant to himself. (94)

The male, in identifying himself as the One, is forced to acknowledge the plight of the Other when reading literature. As he reads the texts, the male reader is required to confront the fact that the world is vastly different for women than it is for men; the male reader can leave these texts knowing that the difficulty of being a woman is not something he will ever experience, but the female reader is forced to live in this place of fear everyday of her life. In creating these female characters, the author is not only presenting the young reader with a strong voice for female readers to emulate and male readers to empathize with, they are also using their texts as a platform to attempt to inspire social change...at least on the surface. The *Rückwärtsroman* endeavors to dismantle this idea by creating a text that acknowledges the problems inherent in reaching adulthood and commenting on the fallacy of adult fears.

But are we, to borrow Anna Altman's phrasing, "welding brass tits on the armor," creating characters who are only titular women (143)? In creating female characters, the authors of these texts must recognize that,

...for the male hero 'society itself provides the map which charts the route' of the quest. A woman hero has no such map of established symbol and ritual: She may choose to travel the accepted routes to selfhood marked 'men only' and face ridicule, hostility, and in many cases a dead end precisely because she is a woman; or she may be forced to find a different route altogether. (Altman 151).

Many recent YA texts are choosing to follow the second route, creating female characters that buck tradition and strike out to create an independent identity, but more often than not, the departure from the "men only" path weaves its way back to this starting place, removing the protagonist's agency and ultimately leaving her with very few options upon the completion of her quest. The *Rückwärtsroman* addresses these lack of options by pointing out that, although it may seem progressive throughout the narrative, the end of the text leaves the protagonist in a more regressed state than the one when he or she began their quest.

While I agree that the ever-present specter of domestic terrorism looms large in the background of our collective unconscious, even as young adults try to figure out where they belong amidst the chaos, I contend that the ubiquity of dystopian young adult novels has more to do with marketing stratagems and the need to keep young readers in a place of panic about what *could* happen than offering truly subversive stories to fight a corrupt system. When the unimaginable comes to life, it is "an intrusion of the real that [makes] it impossible to un-imagine dystopia as nightmare" (Sicher 152), leaving us in a state of perpetual fear of the worst-case scenario because we have seen it come to

fruition. Authors of Young Adult texts feed on this fear, asking us to ponder what would happen if this tragedy were to occur on a global scale, or how we would cope in the face of a natural disaster; would we come together and turn to religion as so many did post-9/11? Would we wage war on those who wronged us? Or would we rebuild our world in an attempt to create a utopian society? These questions, and many others, have kindled the resurgence of dystopian landscapes in YA literature, but amid these inquiries is an underlying current of fear that permeates the genre, both of the female and of the teenager himself or herself.

In this thesis I argue that, although popular critics may argue otherwise, recent Young Adult dystopian narratives do not offer the *Bildungsroman* model that is popular in many text, rather they present a regressive *Rückwärtsroman* that diminishes the power and maturity that the protagonist gains throughout his or her journey to save the world from itself while reaffirming adult fear of teenagers and the threats they can pose to the social order. In “Suzanne Collins’ The Hunger Games and the Fear of Female Empowerment,” I investigate Katniss in her role of female protectress as I track her descent from fierce huntress to drug-addled teenager in order to reestablish the good adults of the novel as the center of power. “Wildin’ Teens in Neal Shusterman’s Unwind Dystology” looks at the relationship between the three main protagonists of the novel and how the adults’ fear of teenagers influenced the choices that brought us to the time of the narrative. Finally, in “Meg Rosoff’s *how i live now* and the Didactic *Bildungsroman*,” I look at what an actual *Bildungsroman* set in a dystopian future looks like and how these characters both regress and grow into a different version of themselves in order to teach a lesson to the reader about self-harm and the potential benefits of teenage sex. In the end, I

argue that more popular texts such as The Hunger Games series and the Unwind dystology reinforce both female and teenage submissive narratives by providing their protagonists with a temporary sense of agency before removing it through death or a fragmented mental state, while the less popular texts such as *how i live now* are able to offer a different outcome for a strong female protagonist because they do not have to appeal to the societal expectations for women in the world.

Suzanne Collins' The Hunger Games and the

Fear of Female Empowerment

One of the most popular YA series in the last five years is, without question, Suzanne Collins' The Hunger Games series. Equal parts adventure, action, and romance, the books in the trilogy—*The Hunger Games*, *Catching Fire*, and *Mockingjay*—explore what it means to be a teen growing up under political turmoil and strife while trying to maintain as much of their childhood as possible, a childhood that would be as close to our current idea of innocent and protected as possible. This is not a new story for dystopian fantasies, but Collins' texts are ubiquitous because the novels focus on a teen girl who defies stereotypical depictions of women as she uses her wit and lack of charm to bring down the authoritarian government. As is the story of almost all YA novels, it is the protagonist of Collins' tale, Katniss Everdeen, who is responsible for carrying the weight of the rebellion against the evil and oppressive Capitol and ending the tyranny the Districts have endured for decades. More than telling the tale of a society saved by a young teen—as is the overwhelming trope found in recent YA novels—Collins uses the text to examine her own fears concerning the fear of the female mind and body that are still prevalent in society.

Despite how far feminism and the “modern woman” have come in the last fifty years, some still believe that women should be the submissive, passive partners in any romantic relationship, and Katniss attempts to destroy this stereotype head-on. Strong and independent, after the loss of her father Katniss becomes the protector and provider for her mother and sister, taking to the woods to hunt and gather enough food to feed them

and trade at the local black market. Her ability to hunt, and hunt well, becomes Katniss' calling card as she uses her skills with a bow to hunt the other tributes in the Arena, recalling images of the mythical Amazons who were the epitome of strong women. She is able to anticipate where her target will move next and kill them swiftly and efficiently, with Peeta even noting that his own father buys squirrels from her because she kills them right through the eye without tainting the precious meat (*The Hunger Games* 89). It is her ability to use this masculine image of the bow and arrow to her advantage that sets Katniss apart from the other girls in her district and impresses the judges in the final round of pre-game testing, forcing them to provide her with a bow in the arena just so they can see what she can do. Katniss uses the feminized image of the Amazonian women to take as much control of her life in the Games as she possibly can. In contrast, Peeta passively accepts his role as the spectacle in the Games and thus embraces as more "womanly" role.

Not long after the release of the second movie in the franchise, *Catching Fire*, an interesting article emerged that labels Peeta as the perfect Hollywood boyfriend, with Katniss acting as the dominant, more masculine partner in the relationship. The author of the piece, Linda Holmes, notes, "one of the most unusual things about Katniss isn't the way *she* defies typical gender roles for heroines, but the way Peeta, her arena partner and one of her two love interests, defies typical Hollywood versions of gender roles for boyfriends" (Holmes). By turning the gendered norms on their heads, Collins creates a world in which the physically strong and mentally sharp man must defer to his female counterpart to figure out how to save themselves and their families from the Capitol and President Snow. Holmes further argues that because Peeta is inherently good and knows

how to bake he is somehow less masculine than his leading lady, despite his physical strength and mental acuity. This, of course, presupposes a set of written rules governing the way that we see men and women in “traditional” relationships, something that Holmes fails to acknowledge as being inherently problematic. Kathryn Strong Hansen notes that the “...act of finding herself through her father’s guidance finds potent expression in the many pieces of her identity that come from him; indeed, Katniss’ gender identity has been more strongly shaped by stereotypical masculinity than by traditional femininity” (163). Katniss only has male friends—really just one friend, Gale—and she was taught to hunt and survive by her father, so when he passes she must take on the masculine role of provider and hunter to ensure the survival of her mother and sister. So are we then, to borrow Anna Altman’s phrasing, simply welding brass tits on the armor that is the male hero? Are we simply using the male form and turning Katniss into the feminized hero young girls “need” in today’s society?

Altman notes that we usually see female heroes who are only “nominally women,” those who are simply playing the part of the female but who, underneath it all, are men pretending to be women. I tend to agree with Altman’s assertion that we are simply feminizing a masculine role, and Katniss lacks the stereotypical markers that would make her female. While this is not necessarily a bad thing, it does complicate the matter because we are only told that she is female rather than *knowing* she is. In order to make Katniss into the perfect woman who sponsors would want to spend their time and money keeping alive, Katniss must be stripped down to the bare bones and rebuilt into the female ideal. One of the requirements leading up to the actual games is the forced interview on live television in order to attract sponsors who will donate gifts to keep the

tributes alive in the arena so her handlers must make her as attractive as possible in order to draw in as many potential sponsors as she can. One of the first things noted about Katniss as they prepare for these interviews is how much work her prep team must do to get her ready—lots of waxing and shaving and scrubbing is necessary to make her seem less manly (*The Hunger Games* 61-2). Next, Cinna, her personal stylist, puts Katniss in the most delicate of pink dresses, making her look like a young girl who is innocent and girly—pretty far from who Katniss really is. As she is forced to go through the lessons of how to act and speak, Katniss notes, “By the end of the session, I am no one at all” (*The Hunger Games* 118). She is no longer the girl who hunted and gathered to provide for her family, and she has not yet become the mockingjay who will act as the symbol of the rebellion; rather she is no one, a girl who is a blank slate and can be molded into whatever shape her handlers deem appropriate. Maybe what Holmes is actually arguing is the fact that, despite how far we believe we’ve come in terms of female empowerment, we are still shocked to see a woman take the lead in saving the world that is assumed to be our very near future after she has been broken down into nothingness and rebuilt into a visually striking young woman, because obviously we cannot have just any average looking woman save the world. While Holmes does make an interesting argument about the fierceness of Katniss and her ability to take on the corruption of the Capitol, she fails to acknowledge the broken Katniss we meet in *Mockingjay*, the Katniss who is eerily distant and drugged to the point of numbness.

Upon my first reading of *The Hunger Games* trilogy, I was so proud that young female readers would have a heroine to look up to who is not afraid to stand up to the injustices in her world; it wasn’t until I read the books again with a critical eye that I

noticed they were rife with problematic portrayals of women and that our supposed heroine was really just a pawn in a larger game the adults were playing. After surviving the 74th Hunger Games and the Quarter Quell, it is understandable that Katniss bears some emotional scars, but she makes a change from the radical girl who snuck out into the woods to hunt for her family to one who accepts her role as the mockingjay with only a few concessions. In the final installment of the trilogy, Katniss is asked to be the mockingjay, the symbol of the rebellion against the Capitol. In return, Katniss asks only that the rescued victors not be tried for any crimes committed while under Capitol control and that she be the one allowed to kill President Snow. Outside of these demands, Katniss passively accepts the fact that she has to become the one to speak for the rebellion, limiting her ability to speak for herself and, in some cases, even taking away her voice completely. In fact, Susan Shau Ming Tan argues:

Katniss has become a subject of the Symbolic, accepting her desire to live while acknowledging the more complicated desires that dwell alongside this more primeval one: the desire for others to live, the desire for expression, the desire to define herself. It is this self-knowledge, this voice, that leads to her own unexpected role as revolutionary symbol. Katniss becomes a figure of enormous power, a power nebulously described. (58-9)

Here, as in the text, she is not described as a person, as a human being capable of higher thought or speech, but rather as a symbol, as an object to own and manipulate; she has regressed into a shell of the girl she once was. Plutarch tells Katniss that they rescued her because “you’re the mockingjay, Katniss... While you live, the revolution lives” (386), to

which her only thought is “I am the mockingjay. The one that survived despite the Capitol’s plans. The symbol of the rebellion” (*Catching Fire* 386-7). No matter how she may wish to define herself, Katniss is only able to think of herself as the symbol of something larger rather than being a person in-and-of herself; she acknowledges that she is merely a pawn in the bigger game. In her desire to allow others to live, such as Peeta and Gale, Katniss loses herself to the larger picture and thereby loses her ability to speak for herself.

As is the case in nearly all adolescent novels, the main focus of Collins’ text is power: power over, power to, who has the power, and who wrests the power away. According to Roberta Trites, “In adolescent novels, protagonists must learn about the social forces that have made them what they are” while simultaneously trying to break free from the powers that be (3) Baccolini and Moylan note “...the process of taking control over the means of language, representation, memory, and interpellation is a crucial weapon and strategy in moving dystopian consciousness to an action that leads to a climactic event that attempts to change the society” (6). The power in *The Hunger Games* trilogy comes from the ability to oppress individuals with fear of destruction and by limiting their access to basic necessities such as food and water, and because of this the rebellion is able to play on this fear and use it to show the people of Panem that the way they are fighting the Capitol is the only way to fight. Katniss is drawn into this power struggle because she seems to be the one who gets under President Snow’s skin the most since she outsmarted him with the poisonous berries in her first Games. In these first games, Katniss is a smart, outspoken girl who will do anything to save Peeta, but she is unable to maintain this version of herself as she is constantly beaten down by President

Snow's regime. Because of Snow's hatred for Katniss and the rebellion, the rebellion leaders use her as a tool to anger the Capitol as they work to bring down the tyrannical administration, using her mostly as a figurehead who spouts propaganda on the national television networks. We like to believe that Katniss is a leader because she wants to be, because she wants to save her family, and while this may be true for a portion of the text, she eventually is forced to do the bidding of the adults in charge of the rebellion instead of constantly trying to please President Snow. This regression is what, in my mind, shifts these texts from a tale of growth to *Rückwärtsroman* as Katniss is unable to grow since she is constantly shaped into another weapon the rebellion can use against the Capitol, relinquishing any power she has over her own self or body.

In many dystopian fantasies, the protagonists are facing social forces in the form of adults yearning for the ultimate power and, in the end, the teen must be the one who fends off the total subjugation of their people—a story not unlike the actual (or perceived, depending on who you're talking to) feeling of being a teenager forced to listen to the adults around you. The Hunger Games then becomes increasingly attractive to teen readers because “the teenage audience for these novels and films is primed to respond to stories of resistant individuals (a stand-in for oppressed teens)” (Schmidt), but, says Kimberley Reynolds, the “wounded child may symbolise a damaged self...it may equally stand for a damaged culture” (91). In light of this, The Hunger Games then forces us to question what it means to be a teen, as well as to reflect on the culture that produces these damaged teens in the first place. Katniss not only represents our fear of our spirit being broken, she also highlights our fear of a culture that is beyond repair while still simultaneously providing hope that the problems of our world can be fixed. We are

presented with a young girl who cannot maintain her own identity as she must conform first to the Capitol ideal then to the rebellion's symbol, and as a result she regresses to a state of fear and anger that she hasn't experienced since her father died.

Strong, fierce, and independent, Katniss is everything society is beginning to teach women we can, and are allowed, to be, yet despite Katniss' phenomenal strength and fortitude, Collins is unable to escape the traditional view of women as mentally delicate creatures who are unable to cope with daily life and the world around us. Now, this is not to say that what Katniss endures is an everyday adventure for the rest of us, but by the end of the series Katniss is far from the woman we met at the beginning of the narrative, and not in a positive way. After enduring the Games, Katniss notes, "...I can interrupt [Peeta's] sleep two or three times on a bad night [of nightmares]. [I think] about how long it can take to calm me down" (*Catching Fire* 86). The Katniss we meet in *The Hunger Games* is no stranger to a nightmare, often dreaming of her father's death in the coal mines or losing her sister, Prim, but for a long time she has never needed anyone to help her through the night, she simply woke up and went back to sleep once she reassured herself that everything is as it should be. Now that she has supposedly "won" the Games, she is unable to sleep on her own, wracked with dreams and guilty about killing other children in the Games, and requires Peeta, a man, to calm her back to sleep. Holmes' argument, then, becomes invalid as she ignores this Katniss and Peeta who seemingly fit the traditional roles society has ascribed to the genders—women as delicate and mentally unstable and men as the strong protector and shield. Granted, Peeta also suffers from nightmares, but his do not wake him screaming and crying as Katniss' do, rather he is paralyzed when he wakes and is unable to move or make a sound, reaffirming his manly,

stoic nature. While I am no medical expert, I think it is safe to say that anyone who survives/wins the Hunger Games would suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, including Katniss. PTSD is a disease that affects those who have been through enormous traumas and is often untreated and/or unrecognized in the world of Panem, given that her mother was unable to deal with the loss of her husband and became catatonic, forcing Katniss to care for Prim by hunting and gathering. By the end of the second book in the series, *Catching Fire*, Katniss begins to show serious signs of her PTSD, including her inability to sleep and her quick temper, fulfilling the stereotype that the woman's mind is a fragile and delicate thing that must be protected.

Most Young Adult texts follow the pattern of the teen protagonist learning a lesson and growing into a more mature individual, the definition of the *Bildungsroman*. Ming Tau notes, "*The Hunger Games* trilogy is ostensibly a *Bildungsroman*," despite the fact that maturation is a difficult process in Panem (56). I disagree with her assertion that this is a coming of age tale given that Katniss does not mature so much as she simply ages. This text is far from being a *Bildungsroman* as Katniss does not grow or mature into her own; rather by the end of the series she has regressed into a shell of her former self, a term I call the *Rückwärtsroman*, or the relapsing novel that features a character moving in a backwards motion from their foundation, thereby ending in a more regressed state than they originated. Any change in Katniss that we see throughout the texts are all carefully orchestrated acts on the part of her handlers and the rebellion to either help her win the Hunger Games or to help the rebellion defeat the Capitol. She speaks up, when told to. Katniss fights the planes bombing innocent civilians, when told not to. Everything that she does and says is not an act of maturation but rather a regression or stasis, oft

reverting to a childlike state of insubordination and mistrust. In fact, Katniss becomes even more regressed when she becomes addicted to morphling, crippling her mind into only thinking about the drug and how she can possibly get more into her system. In her regression, Collins shares in the fear of the female that the text supposedly advises against. After Katniss outwits the gamemakers, she takes control of the Games and changes the course of the entire country, but once the wrongs have been righted, she must relinquish her power back to the “good” adults.

The fear of the female mind is easily enhanced by creating a woman who is unable to mentally deal with the circumstances in her life, and one of the main plot points in *Catching Fire* is Katniss and Peeta’s return to the Arena to participate in the Quarter Quell, a match that happens every twenty-five years and is special from the others, as well as Katniss’ emotional inability to deal with her return. After enduring the first Games and coming out mentally scarred, Katniss is forced to relive the trauma by participating in the Quell against Peeta and to keep up the ruse/not ruse that she is in love with him and has been for years. Playing on her delicate nature as a woman, Peeta confesses on live television that he and Katniss got married in secret and that she is pregnant, prompting a vicious reaction from the audience that a pregnant teen would be forced to fight to the death. This game ends much differently than the others, though, as there is no victor in the end—only those who survive and those who do not when Katniss destroys the dome surrounding the Arena and is rescued by Haymitch and the other members of the rebellion. We cheer and are excited that we do not lose our main character to the arena, but the rescue is not without sacrifice—Katniss is severely injured

and Peeta is unable to be saved, a fact that sends her into a tailspin of anger, hatred, and depression.

To combat her rising panic, Katniss is given a heavy dose of a sedative that renders her nearly unconscious. Once she realizes the loss of Peeta, Katniss receives an injection that “causes sedation, not sleep, so I am trapped in fuzzy, dully aching misery for what seems like always...Maybe I’m already going crazy and no one has the heart to tell me. I feel crazy enough” (*Catching Fire* 388). It is her welcoming dull numbness that begins Katniss’ addition to morphling and changes her from a pawn of the Capitol to a pawn of the rebellion. Katniss’ anger and rage is kept under control by administering a heavy cocktail, initially against her will, making her all the more susceptible to the will of the adults surrounding her. Katniss’ belief that she is also going crazy plays into the old adage that no one recognizes their insanity if they are actually insane—is she actually losing her mind or is Katniss just reeling from the loss of a loved one? To everyone around her, and to readers, it is fairly obvious that Katniss is starting to lose her grip on reality as she becomes much more angry at the world around her, the gamemakers, and the Capitol itself. Her anger drives her out of District 13 to fight the Capitol, but Katniss can often be found after hiding in small closets or in her room, safe from those around her but not from herself. This sort of anger is not a part of her growing up, as we generally like to believe that we are better able to control our anger as we age, but Katniss is unable to reel in her feelings and often lashes out at those who are doing their best to help her, again a sign that this is a *Rückwärtsroman* as Katniss reverts to a less established state of adulthood and the course of the novel is again dictated by Collins’ involvement in the fear of female agency.

If we base our beliefs about females on fiction writers' ideas, then women would need to remain indoors as docile, beautiful creatures, and in writing Katniss' eventual downward spiral, Collins is only reaffirming the model of the weak woman locked indoors for her own safety and mental stability. The above scene of Katniss questioning her own sanity is reminiscent of the short story "The Yellow Wallpaper"; each tells the story of a woman who is trapped within her own mind with no hope of escape, and when she does find freedom from her confines, she fears for the world outside and seeks the comfort of her own space. The unnamed protagonist from "The Yellow Wallpaper" finds comfort in the patterns on the wall in her small attic room, while Katniss is at peace in the confines of the woods, boxed in by the trees and streams, safe from the watchful eye of the Capitol with its eyes and ears everywhere in town. When Katniss leaves the confinement of the woods, she begins to unravel at the expanse of the world she knows nothing about, at first astounded at the vastness of Panem and later terrified of the world outside her small bedroom. In both stories, the young woman is treated as if she is crazy, leading her to believe that she is actually going insane. One of the major differences, though, is that Katniss is forced into her insanity through the overuse of morphling, a drug that is administered both intravenously and orally and sounds much like our modern day morphine, a drug known to be highly addictive, coupled with her trauma at the hands of the Capitol. In fact, Katniss develops an addiction to morphling so strong that "when the craving for it hits, accompanied by tremors and shooting pains, and unbearable cold, my resolve's crushed like an eggshell. I'm on my knees, raking the carpet with my fingernails to find those precious pills I flung away in a stronger moment" (*Mockingjay* 376). In her moments of clarity, Katniss recognizes that she does not like the feeling of

the morphing or the way that she craves them to go about her daily life, but when she starts to feel the withdraws hit her she must have the drug immediately and will do just about anything to get it. Like any good addict, the disease comes with moments of strength and weakness, moments when the body and mind want to quit and ones in which the mind and body will do anything they can to score another fix. The only way to control Katniss is to drug her, and when the drug becomes too much, she must rely on the adults of the rebellion to supply her with the only thing that keeps her going on as the mockingjay.

From the beginning of *The Hunger Games* throughout the rest of the series, Katniss is forced to say and do whatever her handlers see fit, though she does sometimes struggle with this. For their very first appearance for the audience, Peeta and Katniss agree to do whatever their handlers tell them to, even if it means wearing a cape of fire that will surely kill them, sitting like a lady like Effie demands, or speaking to the crowd like a friend the way Cinna advises (*Hunger Games* 68, 125, 127). As soon as she is forcibly conscripted into the Games, Katniss' language is restricted to that which is deemed appropriate by Effie Trinket and the Capitol, removing her ability to voice her own opinion like an Avox, a tongue-less servant who is physically no longer able to speak for himself or herself. The main conflict of the text, then, comes back to Trites' belief in the power of power and the power over; in this case it is the power over language and who has the right and the ability to use it that drives the action of the third book in the series. In order to keep teen subjects in line, "discursive power, exercised in the reproduction of meaning and the interpellation of subjects, is a complementary and necessary force. Language is a key weapon for the reigning dystopian power structure"

(Baccolini and Moylan 5-6). Thus, the idea of power in dystopian texts, and *The Hunger Games* specifically, directly links back to who can speak and who cannot, who is the One and who is the Other. And while these novels are far from a postcolonial text in which the non-white character is unable to speak¹, they do represent a class of people (teenage women) who are unable to use their voices for their own benefits, who are unable to say what they think and how they feel without someone telling them they are crazy or that they are too young to understand. Again, Katniss reverts to a state before the loss of her father, before she was able to barter and trade for the survival of her family.

Beyond her inability to speak, when Katniss is given the opportunity to speak to the masses it is as the voice of the rebellion, quoting line by line the propaganda District 13 wants spewed about how they are still alive and well. During one of these Propos, as Haymitch calls them, Katniss uses her own words to convey her feelings after the Capitol bombs a hospital filled with injured civilians. As she turns to the camera and yells to the Capitol, “If we burn, you burn with us!” (100), in both the movie and the novel there is a sense of power in her words, an anger that has been unleashed that was once tamed by the morphling. Here, Katniss is able to use her words to send a message to the Capitol that “fire is catching,” letting them know that her group in District 13 is not the only rebellion fighting back. But the words are not exactly hers, as she has often been called the Girl on Fire by both the media and her own prep team, and with the use of the mockingjay symbol Katniss is telling the Capitol that people are beginning to listen to the Girl on Fire and believe that the mockingjay is a symbol of hope they can cling to. Katniss is

¹ Katherine R Broad makes a very interesting connection between Thresh, a contestant in the first Games with Katniss. According to Basu and Broad, Thresh is described as being animalistic, thus reducing him to the subaltern of the postcolonial era. (117)

essentially saying that *she* is catching, that the “symbol for revolutionary power” is doing exactly what she was designed and groomed to do (Tan 59). So, once again, Katniss’ words are not her own, thus the power of the novel still rests with the adults calling the shots.

After reading the text for a second time, I began to wonder if Katniss is ever able to speak for herself or make any decisions for herself. For me, the answer is no—everything she does is predicated by a negative event that drives her motivations: when her father dies her mother becomes catatonic, forcing Katniss to learn to hunt and trap so that her family does not starve; when she finally kisses Gale Hawthorne, her supposed cousin who is in love with her, Katniss must pretend to be in love with Peeta to appease President Snow; and when a plot engineered by Gale to finally break into President Snow’s living quarters by killing small children with bombs disguised as gifts kills her younger sister Prim, Katniss must end her friendship with Gale to maintain her last shred of sanity. It is this last event that then leads to Katniss’ eventual marriage to Peeta, and while I once argued with my friends that the only reason she and Peeta are together is because they are broken in a way that only the other understands, I now believe that it is *only* because Gale killed her sister that Katniss marries Peeta. Throughout the series Gale and Peeta are the only two potential love interests introduced to us—because we obviously cannot have a Young Adult text without the obligatory love triangle—and when she rejects one, she must pair with the other. Katniss and Peeta must rely on each other because neither is a complete individual on their own, and Katniss’ reliance on a man removes her agency as a strong, independent woman and places her back in a more stereotypical female role.

At the end of the text we are presented with a strong Katniss and a weak Peeta, as he often suffers from flashbacks to his time in the Capitol and is forced to ask Katniss if her love is “real or not real” (*Mockingjay* 388). Peeta again becomes the “Hollywood girlfriend” who is constantly questioning whether the love of his partner is a real love or not. And while Katniss will always tell him that it is real, she does so because telling him the real reason behind their relationship would ruin him. In the end, Katniss, though free from the Games and the oppressive regime of the Capitol, is still unable to speak for herself, reaffirming her place as a cog in the metaphorical wheel and her position and the subjugated female in this *Rückwärtsroman*.

Wildin' Teens in

Neal Shusterman's Unwind Dystology

There are numerous books and movies that depict how the US will rally when faced with an attack on our nation, but the most recent dystopian Young Adult novels create an insular world that is not created by an attack from the outside, rather it is borne of unrest inside our own borders. As a good Southern girl, I learned about the Civil War throughout my K-12 years, and being a native Richmond-er I learned to take pride in our part in the Civil War, nefarious though it was. So what, then, given all of the destruction and death that the war brought about, would cause our nation to go to war with itself all over again? If we believe Neal Shusterman, the possibility of our country going to war with herself comes from the question of a woman's right to an abortion, and ultimately her own life. In deciding a woman's right to choose, the future United States creates a policy that would allow children to be undone, to be erased from public records, creating the literal regression of the *Rückwärtsroman* by physically erasing the teens from their own history. As a whole, the entirety of the text fights back against this unwinding, but the end of the series removes the power of the teen by establish adults as the head of power over the teens' lives.

In the world of Shusterman's novels, Pro-Life and Pro-Choice advocates have finally come to an agreement that satisfies both sides' position on life by creating a policy that allows a child to be both born and un-born in the same lifetime. This agreement, known as the Unwind Accords, mandates that if a woman conceives, she must carry the child to term and raise him or her until the age of thirteen. If at that time the parents

decide that the child is no longer wanted, they are able to Unwind their own child, removing all traces of him or her from any public record beginning six days pre-conception, all the while using nearly all of their body parts to help others who are willing to pay for the unwound organs and limbs. Thus is the basis for the *New York Times* bestselling Unwind dystology, a series rife with political underpinnings and power struggles that are both old and new to the field of Young Adult dystopias. These texts wind up as political propagandas warning against the damages of a conservative agenda. In the end, these struggles boil down to the author's own fear and sense of inadequacy in the face of adulthood, ultimately winding up far from the adult the protagonist may have hoped to be as they struggle to find their place amidst the new world order and undermining the progressive narrative the rest of the series promotes.

Unwind, the first book in the dystology, a portmanteau of “dystopia” and “tetralogy”, introduces us to the three main characters we follow on their individual journeys throughout the series: Connor, Risa, and Lev. All three teens are supposed to head to Happy Jack Harvest Camp to be unwound, though they are all headed there for different reasons, but as is the case of most YA novels in general things do not go as planned on the teens' way to camp. Throughout the series, it is frequently noted that many teens are sent to the Harvest Camps because they are simply too much for their parents to handle—delinquency, drug usage, and disrespect are among the top reasons—and that is how we are introduced to Connor. Connor's parents feel they can no longer control his disruptive behavior and sign the Unwind Order, scheduling his removal one day before they go on a family trip to the Bahamas. Unlike Connor, Risa never had a family to call her own; as a ward of the state, she simply became Risa Ward, a girl who

was forced to literally play for her life in a piano recital. If she played perfectly, they could do something with her and save her from harvesting, but she misses a single note in her performance and is loaded onto a bus full of other Wards who failed to impress. The character most separated from the worlds of Connor and Risa is Levi, Lev for short, who comes from a large family of ten children. As the tenth child in his extremely religious family, Lev knows from the beginning that he is to be a tithe, the ten percent given back to the Lord that the Bible demands. Though their backgrounds may be different, the three main characters are on the same path as they are shipped off to be unwound. Through a series of events, the three teens are thrown together and must learn to navigate a world that wants them gone, but in typical YA fashion, Risa, Lev, and Connor refuse to be erased without a fight.

Both adolescence and adulthood are fraught with confusion and stress that seem nearly insurmountable, and the texts written for teens by adult authors take these fears and translate them into a manageable medium that allows the readers to grapple with these stressors in a safe space. Roberta Seelinger Trites notes that the expected pattern in adolescent literature is the struggle for power. After all,

Without experiencing gradations between power and powerlessness, the adolescent cannot grow. Thus, power is even more fundamental to adolescent literature than growth. During adolescence, adolescents must learn their place in the power structure. They must learn to negotiate the many institutions that shame them: school, government, religion, identity politics, family, and so on. They must learn to balance their power with their

parents' power and with the power of the other authority figures in their lives. And they must learn what portion of power they wield because of and despite such biological imperatives as sex and death. (x)

Young Adult Literature, as a whole, works to establish the protagonist with his or her own power within the larger power structure at play in the text. In my Children's and Young Adult Literature courses we often discuss who has the power in the text, where that power comes from, and how the child/teen can access that power. Young Adult Literature authors use these power plays in their attempt to inculcate the child reader into the established world order. Once the teenager has matured and been interpellated into these structures, they will become the adult who then has the power over the next generation of teens, but as adults soon realize, the power is not really ours to give and take, that Althusser's Ideological and Repressive State Apparatuses control us long after Young Adult texts say they will.

One of the big talking points among Young Adult literature scholars is agency, especially when the adults give the teens the answers they need to solve whatever problems arise in the world of the novel. I read through the first novel of the series, *Unwind*, and was extremely confused about why this was the world that came to be; it was not until the second book in the dystology, *UnWholly*, that we are told about the Heartland War, the second civil war to take place on American soil. As things begin to spin out of control at the Graveyard—the home of teens running from their own unwindings—the Admiral, the former leader of the Graveyard, returns to help Connor reestablish his authority over the rest of the unwinds. It is during their meeting that the

Admiral first berates Connor for not knowing about the “terror generation,” “the Teen Uprisings,” or “the Feral Flash riots” (248), before giving him the information he need to look up on the Internet in order to find out what brought them to this place of moral panic. Connor quickly accesses the Internet once the Admiral leaves and finds stories of teens marching on Washington in protest of the schools closing. In one news clip, “The reporter calls it ‘The Teen Terror March,’ already putting a negative spin on the rally. *‘This is by far the largest flash riot anyone has ever seen’*” in opposition to the schools closing (*UnWholly* 257). Another clip shows “some political pundit” discussing the economy and the failure of public education, noting “*A nation of angry teenagers with no jobs, no schools, and too much time on their hands? You bet I’m scared—and you should be too*” (257, emphasis in original); all-in-all a conversation that has been broadcast on our current news stations with increasing frequency as Millennials fear for their own future. More than the Millennials’ fear, the adult’s fear of the teen becomes a prevalent factor in *Unwind* as they try everything in their power to get rid of the problem generation they, themselves, have created. In expressing this fear, the adults are expressing their own shortcomings in raising said generation. In the end, the only way to deal with the problems they have created is for the adults to take the teens back to a primal state where they are able to control and regulate all parts of the teenager. In doing so, Shusterman’s novel becomes the definition of the *Rückwärtsroman* as the teen is sent backwards to a place where they no longer exist so that the adults are able to maintain their tenuous control over all aspects of the teenagers’ lives.

President Franklin Roosevelt is famously quoted for saying “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself,” and while this is a noble idea that inspired many in the early

20th Century, Shusterman's novels point to a fear beyond that which Roosevelt spoke of, instead focusing on a fear of the teen and the power they are able to wrest from the adults in the text. Connor is the first protagonist we meet in this world, and as he is collected for transport to the Harvest Camp we are able to see him fight back against the Juvenile Authority, he even manages to shoot one of the officers with his own tranquilizer gun, incapacitating the man and further aiding in his escape. In his flight Connor is able to rescue Risa and Lev from the same fate, sending them all on the run from the Juvies. This daring getaway lands Connor the title of the Akron AWOL, someone of near mythic proportions who inspires others to try and fight back against their own unwindings. AWOLs are a wanted class in the novels and everyone from Juvenile Officers to Parts Pirates want to collect them for rewards, but none is as widely publicized or hunted as the Akron AWOL—his very existence endangers the precarious balance that the adults have on society because he was able to wrest power from the adults. This realization hits Connor and his friend Hayden like a ton of bricks because, "Once education was restructured and corporatized, [the adults] didn't want kids knowing how close they came to toppling the government. They didn't want kids to know how much power they really had... The Unwind Accords wasn't just about ending the war—it was also a way to take down the terror generation" (*UnWholly* 258). As Connor notes, the adults of the novel do not want the teens to know how close they came to changing the future of the nation so they censored the very education the teens were resisting. By standardizing the education that the teens receive, or do not receive as the case may be, the adults remove any mention of their own misdoings in shaping the teens' futures, instead whitewashing the past to make the adults the one who hold all of the power.

The entire premise of the Unwind Accords is that once a child reaches the age of thirteen, the first year of their teenage years, their parents can decide whether or not they want to move backwards in time and erase the child's existence, but this seems to be the only way that adults can wrest power away from the teenagers and take back control over their country. Whenever teens are able to escape from their unwindings, the teenagers become de-facto adults that have no real idea how to be the grown ups in a town filled with runaway teens (though, to be fair, none of us really knows how to be an adult). In acting as the adults in their world, the teens become nothing more than the "bad" adults that were in charge to begin with, reverting to the only method of control that they have been shown their entire lives. The control exercised by the teens circles back around to the fear that adults have of the teens and again justifies their need for unwinding, but through the process of unwinding the teens, the *Rückwärtsroman* is made real and the fear of the teens is able to be erased from the collective conscious, calling attention to this very fear in the current world.

For the authorities, the only way to maintain their power is to terrify the teenagers into submission; as the teenagers enter puberty and begin to find out more about their own power and the world around them the adults must constantly dangle the threat of unwinding over their heads in order to produce the model citizen. From the ages of thirteen to eighteen there is the chance that the teen can be unwound for any reason the parents see fit, but to minimize this risk the teen should always remember that, while their parents and the government cannot technically kill them, they can be erased from history and broken down into the smallest of parts for use on another human. The only way to control these teens is to convince them that they are replaceable but still necessary

to the order of the society. While our society likes to place unfair expectations on women, in the world of the Unwind Dystology the fear of the teenager is more prevalent than the fear of the female that Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* explores.

With Risa there is, as with Katniss, a fear of the female and her potential power and agency, but overall Shusterman's texts speak to adult fears about teens and the power they can potentially tap into. Whether it is the fear of the teen's power over the adult, the power over their own futures, or the power to cause mayhem, the adult author is projecting his own fears about teens onto his text. In calling these teens feral, the authors of the news articles, and Shusterman himself, diminish the power that the teens have over their own identity, thereby reverting them to a more retrogressed condition. The Unwind dystology feeds on the fear that adults have of the teenage years while also creating a didactic lesson that teaches children to behave...or else. The *Rückwärtsroman* goes far beyond the practice of unwinding as Shusterman frequently calls out this practice as a negative one, instead he attempts to bring to light the problems inherent in culling teenagers to promote ideal citizenship. The *Rückwärtsroman* comes into the picture due to the ending of the series that presents a child-like happy ending in which the protagonists are back together and the "good" adults are back in charge of the society, an ending in which the problem of unwinding is erased because of the discovery of stem cell research.

Risa begins her journey as a ward of the state who is literally unable to perform up to standards so she is sent to the harvest camps. Risa is left paralyzed as the result of a terrorist attack from the waist down, rendering her unable to walk and in a wheelchair for the foreseeable future. She is, as Altman says, "singled out, marked" as Othered from the

rest of the characters in the novel, setting her up to be the perfect heroine (146). She is seemingly irreparably damaged in the first novel of the series, *Unwind*, but in the second novel, *UnWholly*, she is forced to accept an unwound spine that allows her to walk again. In exchange for her spine, Risa must fake a relationship with the reconstructed boy, Cam, who is nothing but the pieces and parts of other unwinds. For the majority of the second novel, Risa is used only for her status as a woman in order to make the unwound boy seem more human. In this instance, as in many others throughout the texts, Risa is only used as a means to an end, she is only good because of her femaleness; she becomes a secondary character to the male dominated text.

For the entirety of the first novel, we hear all about the process of unwinding and how the teens imagine it happening, but it is not until the end of the novel that we get to experience, first hand, an unwinding. In the section titled “Harvest,” we get the following description of what it takes to unwind a child: “It takes twelve surgeons, in teams of two, rotating in and out as their medical specialty is needed. It takes nine surgical assistants and four nurses. It takes three hours” (*Unwind* 288). The government has the harvesting down to a science, and the very next chapter we get to experience the unwinding of a boy named Roland. When Roland is on the table, he asks if he will be put under anesthesia so that he cannot feel anything, but the nurse that sits with him throughout the procedure tells him that “By law, we’re required to keep you conscious through the entire procedure... You have a right to know that’s happening to you, every step of the way” (288). Oddly, Roland has a right to know about everything the adults are going to do when dismantling his body, yet he has no control over the fact that he will be unwound. Throughout the unwinding of Roland, the doctors are so nonchalant about what they are

doing that they have the time to talk about whether the Lakers or the Bulls will win the playoffs, completely detached from the job that they are doing (*Unwind* 293). This process is not what truly makes this text a *Rückwärtsroman*. Yes, the adults are literally turning time backwards in order to erase history and turning the teens from actual people to a commodity that are worth more for the sum of their parts than the whole. However, the real regression in this novel is, again, found at the ending of the narrative when the teens must turn their power back over to the adults. The unwinding process in the novel is merely a means to an end for the teens to oust the “bad” adults and allow the adults that “should” be in power to once again govern the society.

In many of the recent Young Adult dystopian novels there is a love story, usually a love triangle, which winds up at the center of the literary universe, and unfortunately the *Unwind* dystology is unable to escape this trope, though it explores love and gender in a rather interesting way. As is the story with most YA romances, the relationship often begins with a bit of distaste for one another, with Connor even quipping to Risa “When you met me, you accused me of not thinking enough” (*UnWholly* 84). Early on, Connor is established as the stereotypically masculine teen, fighting whenever he feels like he is being disrespected and making sexual overtures towards Risa, and by contrast, Lev is introduced as the sweet, more docile male in the trio. Risa is a gentle, talented female who wants nothing to do with either Lev or Connor at first, only acting as Connor’s girlfriend in order to avoid unwanted attention from the more aggressive males in the AWOL Underground Railroad. All three of our major characters undergo radical changes throughout the course of the novel. Lev is the more docile of the male characters in the novel, mirroring Peeta from *The Hunger Games* trilogy, and as a tithe, he accepts

his role as the sacrifice his parents must make to God as their ten percent...until he becomes one of the most feared teens in the nation.

When Connor sets Lev free from his escort to the Happy Jack Camp, Lev is initially outraged that anyone would take away his right to be tithed. It is not until he enters into the world of underground radicals who are hell bent on destroying the camps that he becomes the more “manly” of the pair. Lev joins a group known as Clappers, a bunch of teens and young adults who lace their own blood with highly volatile explosives that are set off when their hands are clapped together. Lev becomes the perfect convert, so dedicated in his beliefs that he breaks into the camp where Connor and Risa are in order to blow up a harvest center. Lev’s willingness to die to defend his beliefs is not necessarily a masculine trait, rather it echoes the radical terrorist that we see on the news and in media reports.

The fear of teenagers is not a new phenomenon as news outlets have long been reporting that teens have taken to the streets and are terrorizing their neighborhoods, but what these reports are actually doing is re-instilling in adults the need to control the story that is told about teens in addition to the teens themselves. Around the time of the 1960s and 1970s, youth culture began to turn away from the established order of adulthood that dominant culture told teens was their inevitable future, creating a moral panic among adults. In the 1970s, Stanley Cohen offered the following definition of the term “moral panic”:

[It occurs when] a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interest; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical

fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians, and other right-thinking people. (qtd. in Welch 4)

This moral panic is a result of a larger group of individuals deeming another to be a threat to their well-established norm, of a group telling another that they are lesser-than in order to attempt to control their actions. Shusterman places this moral panic in a place not far into our own future, in a time when teens have been so beat down by the system that was supposed to turn them into productive citizens that their only recourse is to riot and strike back against the establishment. Instead of being relieved or happy when the government closed the schools and turned them into corporatized industries, the teens sought out the only option they saw: to use their power as “terrifying teens” to cause the moral panic that led to the Heartland Ward which predicated the novel and steals the teens’ agency, reverting the teen to a state of nothingness. Because the teens began to recognize their own power and the power they had to control their own future, the adults of the novel created a way to eliminate their fear of the teen. In creating the Unwind Accords, Shusterman turned his novel into a literal *Rückwärtsroman* where the only solution the adults can come up with to battle their fear of the teenager is to regress them to a state of nonexistence, and in doing so Shusterman follows the pattern established by other Young Adult dystopian novels of using the adult fear as an excuse to control the teen. No matter how much power the teen has, once the world is righted the teen must return their power to the adults.

At the center of the novels is a thread of fear that is visceral in its intensity; meant to unsettle and unnerve, the actual process of unwinding points out just how plausible the

entire system is amid the current political climate. When I first read *Unwind* I was unsure about how I was supposed to feel about the text; should I be engaged? Disturbed? Nauseated? This text is one that is not only entertaining with the multiple viewpoints and fast moving plot, but it also forced me to stop and think about the reason this could be such a plausible idea. The premise of Shusterman's novels may seem far-fetched on the surface, but each novel presents real-life cases that mirror the underlying plot of the texts, and he does not shy away from showing exactly what he used as a source, giving credence to the idea of Unwinding. Each novel is broken down into multiple parts, and while some parts begin with an epigraph that leads into the following chapters, some feature news articles from current times, complete with URLs that can easily be found online.

Shusterman divides all of his novels into separate parts, and Part Six of *UnWholly* is another case of his meshing fact and fiction in his novels. Part Six, entitled "Fight or Flight" begins with a brief list of news links acquired from a Google search of the term "Feral teenagers" (305). Shusterman notes that he returned roughly 12,000 results in 0.12 seconds, with headlines such as "Random rants about feral teenagers" to "'Feral' teenagers beat man to death" (305). I decided to conduct my own Google search of "Feral Teenagers," and my search, done three years after *UnWholly* was published, returned 395,000 results in 0.38 seconds—this is over thirty-two times more results in just three years. Again, headlines include: "Feral youths: How a generation of violent, illiterate young men are living outside the boundaries of civilised society" from the Daily Mail, "Feral teen 'gang' continues to terrorise young family" from the Irish Independent, and "Groups Of Teens 'Wilding' Force San Leandro Police To Formulate New Game Plan"

from CBS San Francisco. It seems that in just three years teens have become more violent, but I believe that the adults are simply becoming more fearful of teenagers' power over their own lives—something they were seemingly unable to do when they were teenagers themselves. I remember many of these news reports from the summer of 2014 as teens would band together and violently attack random people on the street, all in the name of fun. There is something very animalistic, not only in the acts themselves, but also in ascribing the term “feral” and “wilding” to teenagers, and if we are going to debase them to the level of an animal, then the adult is responsible for properly training them or putting them down, as the adults do in the world of Unwind. Fear of these “very unruly” teens that the adults have created by closing the school and limiting their access to jobs is a direct result of the adults' “solutions,” and by reverting to calling them animals, the adults are removing any agency the teens may have over themselves and turn their tales into a sort of *Rückwärtsroman* in which the regression is the fault of adults perception of teens. Connor notes that, “He should have realized things with the [Anti-Divisional Resistance] were not as they appeared as soon as they accepted the Admiral's suggestion that Connor be the one to run the [Graveyard], rather than installing a more experienced adult” (*UnWholly* 88). In removing their power and reestablishing the adults as the authority figures, Shusterman places the blame on the adults' shoulders rather than blaming the teenagers.

The section titled “Transit” focuses on Connor, Lev, and Risa moving along through the Underground Railroad of Unwind safe houses and for the first time the epigraph has a connection to the story as a whole rather than the one section. Pulled directly from BBC News, the story of Ukrainian Maternity Hospital Number Six is the

perfect real-world parallel to *Unwinding*. The story noted that several mothers gave birth to healthy babies in Hospital Number Six, only to have them taken away and later told that the infants did not make it; the reality of the story is that the newborn organs were removed and the bodies were broken apart to access the stem cells in the marrow (*Unwind* 119). I did not want to believe that this was a real story, so I quickly opened my computer and plugged in the URL only to find that this was an ongoing investigation, with Ukrainian officials visiting the hospital and conducting interviews with staff and mothers. Once I read the full article, it all began to fall into place how easy it was for Shusterman to find supporting material for his work. In paralleling *unwinding* and the story of Maternity Hospital Number Six, Shusterman is able to take the fear of death and translate it into a fictional world, a space where it is much easier to grapple with the horrors found in our current times. As teens are presented with fact as fiction, the fear of the teens, and of the next generation as a whole, becomes self-evident, passing on the adult fears through narrative.

At the end of the final book in the dystology, *UnDivided*, the three main characters are reunited on their various journeys to take down the tyrannical government. In the forced happy ending, the teens, when they combine their collective bargaining and fighting powers, are able to put an end to the practice of *unwinding* once they figure out that the main antagonist, Proactive Citizenry, has been keeping the secret of stem cell research to themselves, a field of study that has the power render the need for *unwinding* null. Though it is quite obvious from the beginning of *Unwind* that this is a political call-to-arms, by the end of *Undivided*, Shusterman is clearly using the teenage protagonists to make his own social commentary about the direction that our nation is headed in terms of

political leanings. Using stem cell research, a liberal-backed idea, as his basis for saving the lives of teenagers across our nation, Shusterman seemingly puts an end to the *Rückwärtsroman* by removing our need to rewind history, to go back to a time when certain teens did not exist, but the teens end up back where they started, at a place with no agency and where the adults are in charge of the teens' lives, continuing the regressive narrative established with the process of unwinding.

When Young Adult authors create their texts with a teen protagonist in mind they are passing along their own fears of both adulthood and their own inadequacy as adults to the character, forcing him or her to deal with the problems that the author cannot solve. Because the Unwind dystology is set in the not-so-distant future, modern-day adults bear some of the responsibility for the problems they are now facing in the novel, but in the end the “children and young adults are generally in the center of the action or set of concerns, sometimes even bearing the major responsibility for the formation, survival, or reform of the society” (Hintz and Ostry 1). It becomes the responsibility of the young adult protagonist to fix a world that he or she knows very little about but, once it is fixed, the teen must relinquish their power back to the adults because this is the only way that a dystopian world can be repaired.

The teen has not been in the world long enough to know how things used to be or why they are the way they are, but the adults still rely on the teen to figure out where they went wrong in the past and find the solution to get them back to a place before the utopian archetype began to degrade. Following the same pattern found in Children's Literature, the teens in the Young Adult dystopian novel are able to see what the adults cannot—or will not—and it is their responsibility to pick up the slack that the adults have

created. In the future of the Unwind dystology, the adults have every right to fear that young adults will repeat the same patterns that brought about the Heartland War in the first place, yet by creating a subaltern class without their own place in the world, the adults are, in actuality, just setting themselves up for another battle with teens over their right to live the way they see fit.

Meg Rosoff's *how i live now* and the

Didactic *Bildungsroman*

A commonly held misconception concerning Young Adult literature is that texts written for young adults should teach a lesson to the young reader dictating how they should behave while molding their minds in an effort to create the perfect global citizen. The fact of the matter is that the texts that most excite Young Adult scholars are those that shy away from teaching a lesson—the books written purely for literature's sake; texts that create for the reader a way to escape and enter another world without being didactic assume a reader who is capable of discerning fiction from reality. One such text that tries to achieve this is *how i live now*, Meg Rosoff's 2004 Young Adult novel that tells the story of Daisy, a fifteen-year-old New Yorker sent to live with her extended family in the English countryside as the world sits on the brink of World War III. Told from Daisy's point of view, Rosoff offers the reader a view of gender that does not assume a rigid dichotomy between male and female. Through Daisy's story of survival in war-torn England, Meg Rosoff presents gender as a liminal space in which her protagonist is unable to fully assimilate into one identity or the other and challenges how readers view the gender binary while they learn the sort of lesson typically found in the Young Adult problem novel. In creating characters who, to the very end, refuse to conform to societal expectations of gender, Rosoff avoids the trope of the regressive dystopian narrative explored earlier in this thesis, though she is unable to escape from the didacticism of the YA novel.

When the story opens, Daisy arrives in London to discover that she has no cell service and therefore no way of contacting her best friend back home in New York, leaving her to actually spend time with her extended family that she does not know. Daisy finds that fitting into a family she has never met before is much easier than she originally thought after her father and stepmother send her to England to try and help her overcome some of her emotional issues. Daisy says that both the country and the people are so achingly familiar to her that it makes her dizzy (Rosoff 172), and she feels at home in this foreign country like she never did in New York City. The joy of her newfound family is short lived, as her Aunt Penn must leave the children to travel to Oslo, Norway, in an effort to diffuse the escalating tensions around the globe. Soon after she departs, Daisy says that the first act of the new war was when “a bomb went off in the middle of the big train station in London” (24) killing hundreds of people. At first, the cousins are able to live a carefree life sans adults, but inevitably the war catches up with them as the army commandeers their palatial estate to use as headquarters, sending the cousins in different directions across the countryside. It is the terrorist attack that sparks the events of the novel and the acquisition of their home that forces them into the woods, driving each of the cousins to embrace and grow in their individual gender identities as they toy with the boundaries expected from traditional gender norms while still maintaining their own ideas of what it means to be a teenager in a world torn apart.

For the characters in Rosoff’s novel, constructing a personal identity in a time of crisis is paramount to the *Bildungsroman* model of maturity and growth, and Daisy manages to embrace her own identity amidst the war-torn countryside. Kristine Miller notes that, “the protagonists of children’s war literature model the process of identifying

and articulating the place of individual citizens within the social and political context of a world at war” (273), and “rather than shaping individual identity primarily as a means of promoting social change, a great deal of contemporary children’s war literature acknowledges the fundamental importance of *reconstructing* personal identity in a world changed by terror” (280, emphasis my own). Our identities are shaped by the circumstances around us, and in order to survive in the midst of warfare, the characters in the novel must reestablish their own identities in the face of a changing landscape far outside of their control. War literature featuring young adult protagonists requires that the characters face their own ideas of maturity, and so in turn must the reader. Rosoff’s characters are constantly pushed against their own ideas of their personal identity when war breaks out, whether they reject the social norms or conform to traditional expectations, and, as is the case of Edmond and Daisy, they play with the permeable barriers of gender. What Rosoff does differently in *how i live now* is that she does not displace her own fears onto the teen and there is no fear of teenage agency evident in the text, rather Rosoff displays a fear of adults and the power they hold to carry out evil acts against unsuspecting innocents and how those innocents survive in the aftermath of the tragic event.

Popular Young Adult Literature that features depictions of war, such as *The Hunger Games* and *Ender’s Game*, allow the young reader to imagine where they would fit in the context of a global battle and what role they could play to better serve their country. Piper finds that her role in the family during the occupation is as homemaker and, as Daisy points out, is not something that nine-year-olds in New York would typically do (12). As the supply lines are disrupted, cutting off essentials to the entire

country and forcing food rationing, Piper takes command of the domestic sphere and prepares all of the family meals. When the family decides at one point that it is a good idea to move down to the lambing barn in order to try and avoid the war, Piper “hiked all the way back to the house and gathered some blue eggs and dug up some early potatoes” and prepared a small meal for everyone in the barn (Rosoff 27). From there on in Piper assumes the responsibility of making sure that the family is fed—when she and Daisy are lost in the woods and trying to find their way back to the rest of the family, Piper continues to provide for the duo as she points out edible nuts and plants along the way. Like Piper, Osbert, as the oldest member of the family, feels it is his responsibility to protect the family. When the war first begins, Osbert and his friends form a secret club that sneaks around trying to gain as much information as possible about the war so they can relay it back to others in their town. Furthermore, when the British Resistance shows up to appropriate the family estate, Osbert “went off in the truck with the army guy and came back all beaming with a job,” which winds up being that he has to be the one to tell the others to pack a bag because they are being forced to leave (Rosoff 68-9). In the weeks and months following the initial terrorist attack, each teen in the novel is able to recognize the role that they must take in the resistance, though it may not always be what they expected. Often times, the Young Adult protagonist is forced to adapt who they are to persist in a world that has been wrecked by war as they attempt to reconcile it with what they know the world to be. In doing so, the teens of Rosoff’s novel consciously act as mature young adults as they fight to survive when the world as they know it has been torn apart.

One of the main story lines that carries throughout the text is the incestuous love affair between Daisy and Edmond, and Rosoff's depiction of the relationship not only repositions the power dynamic between the cousins, but the relationship also functions as a way to bring about the *Bildungsroman* model that the novel achieves in the end. Martha Billips examines the ways in which texts that include instances of incest structure the plot lines around the relationships and the resulting female disempowerment that she feels must inevitably follow. Billips argues that, "what at first might seem like consensual and lateral relationships actually display significant imbalances in power. The male in each case benefits from the prerogative of travel and autonomy available to him in a patriarchal culture: he has more knowledge of the world...and more sexual experience, and is slightly older" (129). For Billips, incestuous relationships situate males as the instigators and do not represent any form of actual romantic attachment. In the case of Edmond and Daisy, the opposite is essentially true as Edmond is not able to move around as freely in newly terrorized England as Daisy and Piper, mostly crippled into stagnation because of his innate need to help others, this is most evident when he witnesses the murders at Gateshead Farm crippling him into stagnation while Piper and Daisy traverse the English countryside and find their way back home. Eventually, Edmond is captured "by soldiers, not our soldiers...[who] held him for over a month" (189), causing him untold mental anguish and trauma. Rosoff does not shy away from the relationship between the pair, refusing to conform to societal expectations regarding teen relationships. Unlike Katniss, Daisy is not put off by the thought of a relationship between herself and a man; instead, she embraces the idea of being with Edmond, even noting how lost she would be without him at several points throughout the text. Rajaram

Sitaram Zirange notes, “Conventional romance is based on the notion of patriarchy. It encodes ‘female values’ of love and relatedness as well as ‘male aggressiveness’ and competition,” but the dystopian genre as a whole undermines the patriarchal power structure at play (91). Dystopian narratives already set up the world in their pages as our world flipped on its head, so it stands to reason that within the world of the dystopian society romantic relationships would also enjoy the freedom to explore the bounds of what a “traditional” relationship would look like. Daisy and Edmond are able to explore their relationship because the world is not as it once was and there are no adults around to regulate their love.

Instead of viewing Daisy as a victim of an incestuous relationship with her younger cousin, Rosoff contradicts the expected gender roles and establishes Edmond as the emotionally fragile one in the relationship. When Daisy arrives in England, she frequently points out the various psychiatric visits she endured, like when she quips, “What have I ever said that’s so riveting to anyone but myself? Shrinks don’t count. They listen for cash” (37). Unlike Katniss who is crippled by her mental problems and her slight drug addiction, Daisy is able to poke fun at the thought that there is something wrong with the way she thinks, even joking at times that she has been forced to visit a psychiatrist by her parents. Rosoff refuses to apologize for Daisy’s mental illness—she accepts it and moves on rather than dwelling on the fact that Daisy has seen a psychiatrist or two during her years of battling anorexia. Billips, in her exploration of the effects of incest on the participants, points out that, “for women, such experiences can lead to madness, institutionalization, and repeated victimization...they can also contribute to a fragmentation of consciousness” (137). The problems that Daisy faces—aside from being

lost in the woods in a foreign country with a nine-year-old—are established long before she ever meets and falls in love with Edmond, and it is their relationship that acts as a catalyst for her change and her ability to overcome any mental illness from which she may suffer. One of the definitions of the *Bildungsroman* is that it is a coming-of-age tale, the kind of narrative that tells the story of a main character learning about him or herself as they grow into a more mature version of himself or herself, and although it may be an unconventional text, Rosoff's novel truly shows a character who develops into her own person without the influence of the adults around her, though it is predicated by actions on behalf of the adults.

After trekking through the woods for months, Daisy and Piper find their way back to the family farm where Daisy's father is eventually able to get her brought back to America. After a six-year absence receiving treatment and undergoing mental health help, she returns to the family she left behind and discovers that Edmond just showed up at the house one day "sick and starving and silent" (Rosoff 189). When she first sees Edmond upon her return to England, she immediately notices that "his arms were covered in scars—some new, some healing over, some disappearing into thin white lines...[and] the same thin lines [were] etched around his neck and he'd developed a nervous habit of running his fingers along the ridges over and over again" (180). As noted above, Billips argues that familial incest trauma leads to a splitting of one's consciousness, so Edmond's cutting not only acts as a means of release for the atrocities that he witnessed, but he also feels the need to punish himself for circumstances that were far out of his control, like the separation of the family. Edmond's act of cutting is his attempt to let his memories and experiences from the war come to the surface and allows him to inhabit the

stereotypical female realm. Much like Peeta, Edmond becomes the perfect Hollywood girlfriend, as he is forced to rely on his more dominant partner to care for him when he is unable to care for himself. However, unlike Katniss and Peeta, who wind up together only because they are unable to survive without someone who has been through the same traumas they have, Edmond and Daisy experience completely different traumas on their individual journeys home and are together because they fought so hard to get back to each other. It may sound cheesy and the stuff of everyday Young Adult romances, but the fact that Edmond and Daisy's relationship is established before the war is what differentiates their relationship from that of Peeta and Katniss—they are each their own person without the other, but they stay together because they love each other beyond what they lost in the war.

Edmond's act of self-harm is a physical representation of his mental anguish, and he cuts himself in order to release the pain that results from his inaction at Gateshead Farm. Jennifer Miskec and Chris McGee argue that Edmond practices self-harm as a way to "express himself and to deal with [the] overwhelming pain" his psychic ability forced on him as he watched the slaughter of innocent men, women, and children (173), and the empathy consumes him for those who were murdered. Edmond's ability to empathize with the victims of the carnage of war again emphasizes his breaking of the gender binary since empathy is stereotypically a trait assigned to females, while Daisy seems to lack this trait in her personality. Edmond's entire act of cutting situates him in a traditionally female context because, as Miskec and McGee note, females are far more likely to practice cutting than their male counterparts (167). While Edmond's practice of self-harm presents for the reader an example of the liminality of the gender binary, Daisy both

embraces and rejects stereotypically female roles, and though she does not practice cutting, she practices another form of self-harm through self-starvation or anorexia. Looking at Edmond alone this text would appear to be a *Rückwärtsroman* as he eventually regresses to a non-verbal state and resorts to self-harm, but when taken in conjunction with the main protagonist, Daisy, the text becomes a *Bildungsroman* as she is able to overcome her own practice of self-harm, and she eventually is able to come into her own as a more mature young adult and is able to care for Edmond when he needs her the most.

Rosoff hints at Daisy's battle with anorexia nervosa from the very beginning of the novel without ever explicitly stating that she suffers from the disease, but instead of the disorder consuming her, Daisy says that she actually practices self-starvation as a means of self-control. Throughout the text, Daisy often mentions how cold she is as a result of her lack of subcutaneous fat tissue, retreating under blankets or into the direct sunlight to stay warm. But while she suffers from the consequences of the disease, like fatigue and an inability to regulate body temperature, she says that she has actually come to enjoy the feeling of being in a state of starvation. Contrary to what Susan M. Gilbert and Sandra Gubar note in their seminal work *The Madwoman in the Attic*, in which they argue that society encourages women to remain "sick" because "the girl...desires literally to 'reduce' her own body" in order to maintain the ideal of Coventry Patmore's "Angel in the House" (1933), Daisy practices anorexia not in an effort to lose weight or reach an unhealthy ideal, rather she is trying to preserve herself and prevent her imagined death at the hands of her stepmother, Davina the Diabolical. The entire narrative is told from Daisy's point of view so the readers only know what she tells decides to tell them,

but this is the very reason that we have to believe her account of her step-mother's attempt to kill her, farfetched though it may be. An unreliable narrator is still the narrator of a text and as such we are coded to believe what they say as fact. Additionally, Daisy thrives from being in the woods with Piper—she learns about herself and the trek winds up as Daisy's *Bildungsroman*, forcing her to mature and come to a point where she begins to reject her childish musings and antics about her potential starvation. The fact that this maturation takes place in the woods breaks the belief that women cannot thrive in the open, that they need the confinement of the home to be at ease. It is in the woods that Daisy recognizes that her anorexia is harmful rather than beneficial to her well-being for the first time.

In one of Daisy's musings on days-gone-by, she tells the story of why she began starving herself in the first place, and it is Daisy's reclamation of her anorexia as a force for good that allows her to play with the permeable binary of gender and follows her on her *Bildungsroman* journey. Christine Wilkie-Stibbs maintains that, "Daisy's refusal of food, hinted at throughout the narrative...is the...expression of a failure of self-love" (252). Daisy's refusal of food has nothing to do with not loving herself, rather it is an act of self-preservation because, as Gilbert and Gubar point out, "[it is unfortunate that] in our own era, [the desire to be beautiful] has spawned innumerable diets and 'controlled' fasts, as well as the extraordinary phenomenon of teenage anorexia," but "to be trained in renunciation is almost necessarily to be trained to ill health, since the human animal's first and strongest urge is to his/her *own* survival, pleasure, assertion" (1933, emphasis in original). Daisy does not reduce herself in order to fit in with the ideal of the perfect woman, but she does refuse food as a way to protect herself from death at the hand of her

stepmother, and as human beings our strongest desire is to protect and preserve ourselves. Rosoff once again rejects the societally expected reaction to anorexia, instead creating a text that celebrates anorexia as a means of saving Daisy's life in the woods. Her celebration of anorexia could be *Rückwärtsroman* as she embraces a child-like belief that the practice is good for her, but her eventual victory over the disease makes the text a perfect example of a *Bildungsroman*.

Without a doubt, anorexia nervosa is an extremely harmful disease that causes numerous health issues, but for Rosoff these issues are placed on the back burner since the condition can be used as a way for Daisy to survive with little to no food. Through her years of anorexia Daisy taught herself to enjoy the feeling of being hungry because it is something she is good at (Rosoff 44), and while her decision to continue practicing the disease leads to several health issues, in the end, it is her anorexia that allows her to survive in a world torn apart as she stumbles through the woods in search of the home she only recently discovered. Miskec and McGee point out that texts featuring self-harm issues "turn their gaze toward social constructions of gender and in particular toward what the body means in a given culture, who owns it, and what one can do to her own body" (174), and it is Daisy's reclamation of anorexia as a beneficial tool to her survival that not only brings her back to Edmond, but that also reverses the gendered boundaries that society would force them into. Daisy's anorexia is a reclamation of her body and the limits that society would place on her, as one of the teens' only means of control in their life is over what happens to their body and how they use their body for their own pleasure. It is hard to imagine a text about a young anorexic woman in an incestuous relationship as a *Bildungsroman*, but Rosoff manages to create a teenage female

protagonist who learns from her time in the woods and who overcomes her anorexia on her own terms without the help of any adults. Granted, as a teen who is anorexic, we cannot really call Daisy a reliable narrator since hers is the only opinion we get on the matter, but to discount her experiences and her accounts of what happens would be to take away her power and linguistic agency as a teenager, something that Rosoff refuses to do and that makes Young Adult scholars cringe. Unlike Collins and Shusterman, Rosoff does not conform to the trope of the Young Adult dystopian novel that regresses the protagonist to a place far removed from that in which they started. Instead, Rosoff uses the dystopian setting to help the teenagers grow into mature young adults who are able to function on their own in a world without adults or authority figures to regulate their comings and goings.

Daisy's rejection of the dichotomy between rigid gender roles through her reclamation of her anorexia is counter-balanced by her conformity to traditional expectations, both in the way she cares for Piper in the woods and her short-lived comfort in confinement. Daisy relishes the limiting space of the small attic she moves into, describing the space as "the kind of room a monk would live in—small and plain with thick white walls...and suddenly that room seemed like the safest place I'd ever been in my life" (Rosoff 9), confirming what Gilbert and Gubar argue when they say that women "might develop pathological fears of public places and unconfined spaces" (1933). While Daisy enjoys the limitation of the attic room, she reverses Gilbert and Gubar's notion of the confined woman since she actually thrives and recognizes that her anorexia is detrimental to her health when she and Piper are forced to traverse the woods on their own. And although Daisy, like many characters in literature, exists in a state of liminality

between the genders, Rosoff uses Daisy's ability to embrace both sides of the binary to help along her *Bildungsroman* journey and her coming of age as a more mature young adult.

When Daisy first arrives at the family farm in England, she is unashamed of her gaunt appearance and revels in the feeling of starvation, while Edmond embraces the "too cool for school" image with his quirky underage driving and smoking, but Daisy's journey through the woods with Piper causes her to reevaluate her beliefs on the positivity of starvation. Daisy remarks, as she and Piper bathe in a river, that "for the first time I noticed how skinny Piper was which once upon a time I would have thought was a good thing and now I thought was just what happens when you're nine years old and don't have enough food to grow properly" (Rosoff 130). Her trek through the English countryside forces Daisy to reevaluate whether starvation is actually a good thing, and she begins to focus on the food surrounding them and tries to find as much food to provide herself and Piper with the necessary nutrients to survive. Once she returns to the United States and spends time in a mental hospital, her "willingness to eat confused and annoyed the staff" (Rosoff 167). Daisy regains her health and returns to England where she finds a despondent Edmond. Daisy must take charge in order to get Edmond healthy again, acting as his caretaker and companion. And while the reader does not know if this every fully happens, Rosoff does give a small glimmer of hope when, in an incredibly sappy moment, Daisy vows to love him until he is better. When we first meet Daisy, this is not something she was capable of doing—loving another person—but through her time with her extended family and her experiences in the woods with Piper Daisy is able to

look outside of herself to find that she has matured as a result of her journey across the English countryside.

The terrorist attack that acts as the catalyst for the events of the novel actually forces the characters to restructure their identities amidst the atrocities of war. Daisy and Edmond are separated when the bombing of the London train station leads to the military taking over their house, and the two are forced to form their own sense of self in order to figure out what is worth fighting for, and Daisy says it best when she tells the reader at the very end that “fighting back is what I’ve discovered I do best” (Rosoff 194). Daisy’s anorexia enables her to survive in the wilderness with little-to-no food as she watches Piper waste away in front of her. Edmond, on the other hand, is mentally broken from his experiences in war torn England and also plays with the gender divide, in that Daisy becomes the breadwinner and caretaker of the family while he retreats within himself and appears half-starved when she returns to England, in addition to his practice of self-harm. Both through her reclamation of her anorexia and her conformity to the societal expectations for a woman, Rosoff’s depiction of Daisy illustrates that it is never quite possible to truly conform to one side of the binary over the other, providing for the reader a depiction of a permeable binary.

Up until now I have not really addressed the “didactic” portion of the title of this chapter, and I have danced around it throughout, but while I do believe that this is an incredibly progressive text it still has didactic underpinnings that I feel detract from the overall positivity of the text a bit. As I have pointed out previously, the main storyline that follows Daisy throughout the narrative is her anorexia nervosa, and it is this condition that I want to focus on now. Generally, a Young Adult text that explores any

condition such as anorexia would fall into the problem novel category in which the teen protagonist is all patched up and healed, with the help of the adults of the novel, by the end of narrative. The difference between *how i live now* and the typical problem novel is that there is no adult present in Rosoff's text to guide the teen through their recovery and to help them realize their true potential. Instead what we have in the narrative is a young adult who is able to learn for herself that her habits are self-destructive and overcome them on her own terms. Because Rosoff's text is outside the beaten path—that is, while her text was made into a movie, it went direct to DVD in the United States—it allows her play with the boundaries of what is acceptable in a text for young adults, Rosoff is able to create a *Bildungsroman* model that, though it teaches a lesson in the end about the negative effects of anorexia, is able to show actual maturity and growth amid a war-torn landscape, something that both Collins and Shusterman were unable to do.

Conclusion

In dystopian literature, the idea of our very own world coming to an end strikes fear into the hearts of readers everywhere, but the fear that lies at the center of most of the more popular narratives is the fear of the teenager and the power they wield in shaping the future of our nation. Authors who create these teens in popular Young Adult fiction are not only establishing a set of tropes that have come to define the genre as a whole, but they are using the texts to forbear their own fears and sense of inadequacy when it comes to adulthood. Whether through the murder of innocent children for sport or for medical advancement, the authors create stories that tell the teens just how vulnerable and dispensable they can be to our national wellbeing. However, what the texts are doing as well is creating a safe space to tell teens that the problems of the world are reparative, so long as the teens can become adolescents again once they are able to save the world. As such, Young Adult dystopian authors have unknowingly created a genre I call the *Rückwärtsroman* to try and cope with their own fears concerning the trajectory of our nation and world as a whole.

If the *Bildungsroman* is a novel dealing with the formative years of adolescence as the young adults grow and mature throughout that time, then the opposite must be a text that reverts to a more regressed or backwards state than the character's starting place. It may be a mouthful, but the *Rückwärtsroman* encompasses the trend that I was seeing throughout the novels I read, and obviously there are many more that fit the category than I explored in this thesis, most notably, Veronica Roth's *Divergent* trilogy ends in the death of the main character as she saves the world. Though it may be marketed as a teen

romance novel, this series inevitably follows along the dystopian narrative of a world torn apart, and really there is no more regressed state for a character than her own death. The main character of the series dies because she has special characteristics that make her powerful beyond what the government can conceivably control, so in the end she must sacrifice her own life in order to save the rest of her community, and the fear that is expressed in the novels discussed in this thesis is based on media propaganda and the political underpinnings that are present in each one. Beyond the regression of the main protagonists, these texts that I identify as *Rückwärtsroman* unknowingly feed into the fear of the teenager or they comment these fears in order to draw attention to the problems inherent in fearing them, though in the end they are still unable to escape the trope of the retrogressed protagonist.

I often wondered while writing this thesis where the fear originated, whether it is internal or external, and I finally decided that the answer is both; the fear of the teenager comes from the authors' own memories and emotions of their formative years, while media reporting and political jargon help to shape the narratives trajectory. Michael Welch argues that it is the "oddball" youth who pose the problems when he notes, "Together, the media and members of the political establishment publicized exaggerated claims of dangers posed by unconventional youths; in turn, inflammatory rhetoric was used to justify enhanced police powers and greater investment in traditional criminal justice apparatus" (4). The outsider teen sparks a fear of the unknown that must be dealt with by publishing unfounded accusations against teenagers as a whole, creating the need for greater police presence and harsher penal punishments for minor infractions—thus is the basis for the society in *Unwind*.

In 1989, a group of five teenagers were accused, and later exonerated, of attacking and raping a jogger in New York's Central Park, causing media outrage at the new practice of "wilding" in which roving bands of teens lurked around town waiting to cause mayhem. Using terms such as "wilding" and "hoodlum" to describe teenagers acting out creates a sense of panic in the audience that these teens are on a mission to harm for the fun of it, while it also aims to dehumanize the adolescents who may or may not be associated with criminal activities. As seen in both *The Hunger Games* and *Unwind* series, the best way to control the panic raised by the unruly teens is to enact laws that govern the way that these teens are seen in society. Welch notes, "...panic typically manifests in lawmaking designed to combat a putative problem. Moreover, it is at the legislative level of moral panic that the nature of the problem becomes increasingly politicized and criminalized..." (9). For the children in *The Hunger Games*, the law says that they are to become entertainment spectacles for the adults of the Capitol to bet on like race horses in a fight to the death; in the world of *Unwind* the teens are literally dismantled into the smallest of pieces for the benefit of the rich who can afford the new, younger body parts. The teen becomes commodity that can be easily bartered and sold, all because the adults of their world are scared of what will happen if the teen recognizes their own power and takes control of their lives.

For me, the standout text in my research is *how i live now*, a novel that is both an extremely gratifying read for me, but also is one of those novels that brings something new to me every time I read it. This entire thesis has been about how the narrative of fear becomes the *Rückwärtsroman* in Young Adult dystopian narratives, but with Rosoff's text there is a visible change in Daisy that sets this text up to be my *Bildungsroman* of the

bunch, though not necessarily a perfect one. Not only does Daisy change physically as she overcomes her eating disorder, but she grows emotionally into a more mature version of herself, no longer practicing self harm in order to reduce herself into the smallest version of herself she can be. Rosoff is able to create a character and a text as a whole that shows growth and maturity, while other Young Adult dystopian authors must regress their protagonists into the smallest versions of themselves, begging the question: why must we, as adults, portray teens to be savage and brutal erasing who they are as human beings and solidifying our place as the more mature rule makers? There is also something to be said about the fact that all of these texts feature images of war and destruction, as if the only time that teenagers are allowed into power is when the world or our country is at war. However, once the war is over, the teens relinquish control back to the adults in power since this is supposedly the natural progression of things. In the case of Rosoff's text, though, there is no one for Daisy and Edmond to return power to, as the assumption is that Aunt Penn was killed in Norway at some point during the war.

Dystopia is a complicated genre that has been explored for a teen audience for decades. In recent years, the texts have taken real-life scenarios and placed them into a fictional setting as a way for the teens to grapple with the injustices they see in the world. Outside of the teen reader, the adult author uses the teen protagonist to relay their fears about both adulthood and their own sense of inadequacy onto a teen protagonist where it is seemingly acceptable to be confused about the way of the world. In the end, these adult authors are passively asking teenager to buy into their beliefs about the power structure that in place and the ways in which in these can be dismantled and reestablished. In the end, the young adult must be brought into the fold of the societal regime in order to finish

rectifying the problems the adults created. Unfortunately, the majority of recent dystopian Young Adult texts fall prey to the *Rückwärtsroman* model of the regressed teen at the end of the text. When all is said and done, the teen protagonist is no longer in control of their own destiny, again being forced to rely on the adults who are back in charge and falling back into their societally expected position.

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