

From Zero to Hero:
An Analysis on The Character Development of Female
Protagonists in The YA Dystopian Novels *The Hunger Games*
and *Divergent*

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Abstract:

Young Adult Dystopian Fiction narratives have become popular and influential novels not only among its intended audience but reaching all ages readers as titles top the bestselling charts. As a popular genre, this dissertation ponders on the lack of character focused studies about the female characters in said genre. This paper explores YA dystopian fiction's frequent themes as a preface to the analysis on the character development of female protagonists in two YA Dystopian novels: Katniss Everdeen from *The Hunger Games* trilogy and Tris Prior from *Divergent* (2011). This character analysis begins by exploring the protagonist's upbringings as outcasts, then following them as their stories start, disrupting their ordinary lifestyle. After being introduced to a foreign setting, they both have to undergo a transformative journey resulting in the disposal of their old identities as outcasts. Consequently, their makeovers attract fame and attention, giving both heroines influence and reassurance. After being categorized by their governments as threats to their oppressive regime, they are forced to lead double life, performing to the public as a different individual than to their friends and family. Regardless, people inspired by the protagonists' acts of bravery and defiance begin to voice their opinions, leading the way to the beginning of their revolution. As the influential and powerful figure they have become, the protagonists assume the role of the leader their society needed, guiding them to freedom. However, the lives of their loved ones end up paying the price for the greater good, leaving the heroines as victors surrounded by grief. They end their journey on a bittersweet note, choosing to move forward as they hope for a better future.

Keywords: Young Adult Dystopian Fiction; Suzanne Collins; Veronica Roth; Female Heroes' Journeys; 20th century North-American fiction

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Introduction

In the realm of character development, many have endeavoured to examine heroes' journeys. In fact, according to Robert Segal, this topic of study dates back to 1871: "when the English anthropologist Edward Tylor argued that many of them [heroes] follow a uniform plot, or pattern" (7). Ever since, scholars have created their own theories and character development templates such as the Monomyth structure by Joseph Campbell. This analysis commonly known as The Hero's Journey stands out as one of the most well-known and it describes the different stages the hero seems to fall into during their adventure. However, like many others, this model focuses on fiction male heroes who are called upon an adventure from the ordinary world to the "region of supernatural wonder" (Campbell 23), not on teenage girls from YA¹ dystopian fiction. The editors in charge of *Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults* explore the genre and define it as writing capable of "engaging with pressing global concerns" (1) with simple and captivating narrative styles such as journal entries or first person narration which results in accessible literature for younger readers. It focuses on fictional societies that can be seen as potentially worse than the reader's own, leaving them to reflect about their situations, showing them "how not to build a better world" (Basu et al. 3). The aim of this analysis is to look into the character development of female heroines in two widely known YA dystopian characters: Katniss Everdeen and Tris Prior from *The Hunger Games* Trilogy and *Divergent* (2011) respectively, analysing each step of their journeys.

Females from this YA genre have been analysed after scholars and audiences began to recognize the impact these types of character seem to have on the mainstream audiences. Lykke Guanio-Uluru's study on female focalizers from *The Hunger Games* and *Twilight* stands out as an influential text for the development of this dissertation. Guanio-Uluru chooses to scrutinize only the gender performance in each book while studying the feminist traits in both female main characters. Other studies broadly criticise whether they would serve as positive female role models or not, such as studies done by Katherine Broad's *The Dandelion in the Spring* or Clair Curtis' *Educating Desire, Choosing Justice?* Most studies revolve around what these characters can provide the audience instead of the characters themselves. Therefore,

¹ YA referring to the literary genre Young Adult.

Guanio-Uluru's study served as a beacon for the need of a deep character-focused analysis on this type of popular character: the young female hero of dystopian adventures.

The choice of which novels should be the centre of this study proved to be quite easy. Ever since its publication in 2008, *The Hunger Games* written by Suzanne Collins has "outstripped all of its competitors" (Basu et al. 1) and, according to *LA Times*, the novels have become a "literary phenomenon with sales to date more than twelve million copies" (Fritz), especially after the film adaptations of the novels successfully established themselves as blockbusters. The main character, Katniss Everdeen, is written as a fearless and smart teenage girl with the power to inspire a revolution despite of her humble and exiled upbringing. Therefore, Katniss Everdeen will be one of the subjects of this analysis. Many authors began to benefit from the YA Dystopian novel's rising popularity, as the author of *Divergent* (2011), Veronica Roth, successfully did. But Roth was able to secure more than a few sales after joining the trend. *Divergent* (2011) became the leader of the *New York Times* bestseller list as the movie adaptation hit theatres with big celebrities such as Kate Winslet and Zoe Kravitz among its cast. Even *Elle Magazine* claimed that Roth dethroned Suzanne Collins as "the reigning queen of dystopian YA fiction" (Codinha). The transformative journey that the main character, Tris Prior, undergoes before stepping into the shoes of the liberator of her community relates to the one seen in Katniss Everdeen, both proving to be similar and popular figures in the genre. The structure of this dissertation will run as follows. Firstly, in order to better understand the genre, we will be taking a look into its frequent themes and common story lines. Subsequently, the analysis will begin introducing a summary of both works, in order to get the reader acquainted with the source materials. Next the analysis will be structured in six different stages, representing the six different phases that the characters experience. It will begin with The Outcast, followed by The Forced Choice, The Makeover, The Dangerous Spotlight, The Acceptance of The Role, and finishing with The Bittersweet End. To complete this dissertation, a conclusion will be found at the end, as well as the works cited section.

All throughout this dissertation MLA would be used for citation and format style.

1. Young Adult Dystopian Literature: An Overview.

For the past two decades, young adult dystopian fiction novels have been front lining the bestselling book charts, proving to be one of the most lucrative and outstanding genres of the twenty-first century (Basu et al. 2). As many other literary genres like science fiction or fantasy, YA dystopian novels tend to adopt popular narrative styles and forms such as the romance, the adventure story and the Bildungsroman (Basu et al. 6). This blend of dystopian themes and popular stories not only allows scholars and readers to further categorize each novel, but also expands the genre's possibilities, in terms of storytelling. Yet, scholars have pointed out this combination is a mere product of the rise in popularity of the dystopian tale. Basu, Broad and Hintz call attention to the fact that "placing a story of whatever genre in a dystopian setting seems to be a good way to raise sales" (6). However, there are certain parallelisms between the YA dystopian themes and the narrative intentions of said popular plots that make the mixing inevitable.

1.1 Frequent themes in Young Adult Dystopian Literature

YA dystopian stories cover multiple themes, that is to say, not every novel labelled as this genre displays the same themes and preoccupations exclusively. Still, there are multiple topics that emerge with regularity and are very present in the genre. As young adult stories, these novels more often than not have the concept of identity as one of their persistent themes. Furthermore, scholars such as Balaka Basu have further categorized this phenomenon of exploration of a personal identity in different categories depending on external factors that influence the characters (19). From the search of one's own identity, seen in Lois Lowry's *The Giver* (1992), to the examination of how the main character can relate to their surroundings, such as their society, as appears in Kiera Cass' *The Selection* (2012), their natural environment, present in James Dashner's *The Maze Runner* (2009), their government, evident in Marie Lu's *Legend* (2011), or the technology of their world, which can be seen in Lauren Oliver's *Delirium* (2011) and in Scott Westerfield's *Uglies* (2005). This search for identity often is inspired by social interactions where the main characters' beliefs are challenged or put into question (Basu 19). In *Delirium* (2011) Lena's own vision for her future is disrupted after meeting the rebellious Alex, similarly, in *Legend* (2011) June's trust in her family transforms into wariness

after spending a night alone in her impoverished city. The questioning of the main character's situation in society, identity and even alliances is frequently the catalyst for moving the plot forward.

In the typical fashion of teenage attitudes, the theme of angst over the mainstream's influences and society's power is very much present, especially when in relation to their post-apocalyptic realities, natural disasters, and social injustices. Here is where the dystopian nature of the narrative becomes pertinent, mainly due to the fact that this theme tends to be the foundation of the story and what many readers are hooked by. Nowadays, citizens are very much aware of the environmental crisis the world is suffering, alongside the consequences that pollution may cause, bringing a sense of foreshadowing of the future to these dystopian tales. Alexa Weik Von Mossner recalls this relation in *Hope in Dark Times* and identifies it as disturbing: "This dystopian scenario is eerily related to what we hear today from climatologists, sociologists, and political scientists concerned with the possible future effects of climate change and resource depletion" (70). Placing a young adult character fighting against governments in the name of the environment and a better society, seems to mirror teenagers' desires to be able to perform such defying acts in their everyday lives. Drawing from their angst over the neglect of such important social and ecological issues, teenage activists can see themselves in this genre's characters such as Cinder from *The Lunar Chronicles 1* (2012) who willingly puts herself in harm's way in order to stop an evil regime's plans to contaminate the world. On the other side of the coin, the worlds that are depicted in YA dystopian fiction books are nothing but an inevitable view of the future that awaits us, and as John Green points out "It's gonna be bad" (1). This suggests a duality in the genre that is often present: the pessimistic and inescapable view of the future while still showing the happy ending the heroes fight for. Hope seems to be placed on top of a rug of despair, which Von Mossner sees as undividable, "(this genre) necessitates the presence of hope in an otherwise perhaps dreary fictional future" (80). Running along the theme of angst and teens fighting for what they believe in, a theme that seems to be featured constantly is politics. Is common to read about main characters that rebel against their evil leaders because of their oppressive agendas, very notable examples include *The Hunger Games* trilogy or *Divergent* (2011). Main characters often strive for equality and a 'more fair' world which reviewers like Lisa Arter have labelled as the teenage drive to question the status quo (557).

A story about the future, for the most part, drags with itself the presence of technology and science advancements. These elements can simply be a characteristic of the dystopian world or can be decisive in the plot. In the case of *Across the Universe* (2011) by Beth Revis,

the fact that they are living in a technologically advanced spaceship years after the apocalypse, is simply a part of the story, not the driving force. However, in the case of *Uglies* (2005) or *Delirium* (2011) their stories are tied to the inescapable surgery that would either take away their ability to love or completely change their appearances, both possible as a result of the technology and science of their worlds. In the case of the latter, these dystopian narratives aim to criticize the narrow line between the advancements in technology and human beings as another emerging theme (Basu et al. 12).

After an overview of the recurrent themes in this genre, their connections with other popular genres are more than evident. For instance, the ever so popular genre in young adult storytelling, the Bildungsroman, is a staple of YA Dystopian fiction since almost all books deal with the search of an individual identity and follow their characters to tell a coming-of-age story. The Adventure story seems as an undeniable narrative to tell, especially against the mind frame of rebellious teens fighting for a better world. Additionally, the romantic story, is usually the only deductible part of YA dystopian books but they seem to drive the story forward as a means of character motivations and “possibilities for social change enacted in the novel” just as Basu, Broad and Hintz explain in the introduction to *Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults* (12).

2. A Look into Two Dystopian Female Heroes' Journeys: Katniss Everdeen from *The Hunger Games* Trilogy and Tris Prior from *Divergent*

As *The Hunger Games* trilogy and *Divergent* are going to be used as the two main literary sources in this dissertation, it would be preferable to begin with summaries of both stories. *The Hunger Games* trilogy contains *The Hunger Games* (2008) as the book number one, *Catching Fire* (2009) as the sequel and *Mockingjay* (2010) as the third and final instalment to the series. This YA dystopian fiction trilogy played a key role in establishing its genre's popularity by topping the bestselling charts for many consecutive years, proving to be a prime subject for analysis. Throughout the three novels we follow Katniss Everdeen, a brave teenage girl living in a postapocalyptic United States of America renamed Panem. Everdeen grew up in the poorest district of the country hunting animals to feed her sister and mother. Her adventure begins after her own sister, Prim, ends up being drafted to participate in the nationwide famous Hunger Games which forces Katniss to volunteer in her place. The Hunger Games are a TV broadcasted competition where two teenagers from each of the twelve districts are trapped inside of an arena until only one survives. Concluding the first book, Katniss outrageously fools the government while surviving the last battle and saving her district teammate Peeta Mellark alongside with her, robbing the audience from having only one champion. The next two books continue to tell Katniss' story as she faces the consequences of her actions and deals with her new role as the leader of a revolution against the authoritarian regime of Panem.

Beatrice Prior's story is narrated in the 2011 bestseller *Divergent*, where we are introduced to a futuristic Chicago divided into factions. Dauntless, Abnegation, Candor, Amity and Erudition are the five factions that split all citizens according to their moral values. Bravery, selflessness, truthfulness, kindness and intelligence are the five core values that separate Chicago in order to ensure a peaceful coexistence. Beatrice Prior, or Tris Prior, is the protagonist of this YA dystopian tale as she navigates through her initiation and uncovers the secrets of the city. She learns she was born a Divergent, a dangerous but useful trait to have. Alongside her partner, Tobias, and friends she is able to disrupt evil and corrupt plans to damage and control all the citizens of Chicago. Her main story arch begins and ends in *Divergent* (2011). However, Chicago's story and Tris' involvement in it is further explored in *Insurgent* (2012), *Allegiant* (2013) and *Four* (2014), which due to lack of relevance will not be explored in this dissertation.

2.1 The Outcast: The Heroine's Upbringing

The Cambridge Dictionary defines the word *outcast* as “a person who has no place in their society or in a particular group, because the society or group refuses to accept them”, a description that accurately defines the state of heroines before the beginning of their journey in *The Hunger Games* (2008) and *Divergent* (2011). Both Katniss and Beatrice/Tris grow up in the neglected part of their societies, separated from adventure and trapped in monotony. Looking closely at them, we can distinguish two paths of becoming an outcast: the self-made path and the path enforced by society. Katniss Everdeen of *The Hunger Games* was born in District Twelve, a district where resources are limited, and starvation is the norm. She describes herself as ordinary and quiet, especially after understanding that voicing her opinions would “only lead us to more trouble” (*THG* 4). Even her appearance seems to be similar to those from the poorest families in her district, on the contrary to her mother who “always looks out of place, [...]with her light hair and blue eyes” (4). In her defence, Katniss explains how Mrs Everdeen grew up in a more privileged part of town as a healer, only to leave her ‘better’ life behind after getting married. Katniss uses this analogy between their looks to further emphasize how insignificant she believes she is in society at large, reinforcing our view of her character as an outcast. Even in the least important and neglected part of the country, she manages to be neglected, often alone or disrespected. However, most of the instances where we can see Katniss being disrespected is often self-inflicted, marking her beginnings as a self-made outcast. After describing herself as plain, Katniss does not appear to believe others might think highly of her. For instance, after her sister Prim pays her a compliment, she does not accept it: “‘You look beautiful’ says Prim in a hushed voice. ‘And nothing like myself’ I say” (7). She even admits to “keep to herself” (6) at school while ignoring children her age. This pessimistic attitude towards herself and specially her disinterest in her community can be linked to her father’s tragic death, a traumatic event that marked the end of her childhood. After Mr Everdeen’s death, Mrs Everdeen entered a severe depression episode, leaving Katniss and her sister without food or clothes. This forced an eleven-year-old Katniss to abruptly “(take) over as the head of the family” (12), a common characteristic in YA dystopian fiction. The premature end of childhood can be one of the best tools to provoke dystopia, as Eckart Voigts and Alessandra Boller point out in *Young Adult Dystopia: Suzanne Collins’ The Hunger Games Trilogy*; since utopian ideals are heavily connected to childhood, the ending of this stage of life can cause the opposite environment: dystopia (413). However, this usage of a forceful

beginning into adolescence, not only serves as a typical characteristic of the genre, but as a breaking point for the heroines where they realize their position in society.

In *Divergent*, Beatrice Prior is the premier example of the traditional outcast in both her small faction community and in society at large. In this futuristic Chicago, the faction you choose to be in has a higher value than family or individualism. While all factions work, study and live in the same city, each citizen can be easily classified by their appearance and manners. Beatrice grew up in Abnegation, the simplest out of all the factions from Chicago where vanity is frowned upon, the rules are followed, the clothes are grey, and selflessness is expected. The core values of her faction rely on living to serve the community. To Beatrice's dismay, her action towards her community always seems to fall short compared to her family, especially in comparison to her brother Caleb. He possesses their "mother's talent for selflessness" (Roth 9) and is not afraid to reprimand Beatrice whenever she does not follow the code of conduct. In chapter two, she reminisces about her earliest memory of Caleb, who criticized her for not lending her toys to other children (18). Needless to say, Beatrice is an outcast in her Abnegation community after not being able to fulfil the role placed upon her. Furthermore, the whole faction of Abnegation is the subject of bullying in the city. They are called 'Stiffs' as a critic to their rigid and firm lifestyle: "'Out of my way, Stiff,'" he snaps, and continues down the hallway" (14), and since fighting back would not be considered altruistic, they see Abnegation citizens as an easy target. Both heroines grow up believing they did not belong in their community after rejecting or begin rejected by the people, categorizing their first stage in their hero's journey as an outcast.

2.2 The Forced Choice: The Beginning of the Journey

The heroines' journey begins the moment their monotonous and exiled lifestyle ends abruptly as an unexpected turn of events changes their situations. Both Katniss and Beatrice are forced to spontaneously make a decision that initiates their transformation from outcast to hero. These choices are made at big and public events that the characters dread and sometimes fear. For Beatrice, this event is the Choosing Ceremony, where she has to decide whether to stay on her faction with her family or not, deserting them forever. At the beginning of her story, Beatrice was quite sure about wanting to leave her original faction due to her outcast status in it. She acknowledges her efforts for fitting in her community often fall short or never "feel genuine" (Roth 32), reinforcing her idea of wanting to choose a community more appropriate towards

her strengths. Regardless of her desires to leave, she still experiences trouble with the idea of leaving her family, “It is on these mornings that I feel guiltiest for wanting to leave them” (10), revealing the emotional connection and loyalty she feels towards her family. This trait has proven to be characteristic of female characters in young adult dystopian novels by authors such as Patricia Kennon in *‘Belonging’ in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*. Kennon relates the existence of female characters with a strong emphasis on family values (44), thus explaining the internal conflict Beatrice undergoes. The remorse and uncertainty regarding the abandonment of one’s faction proved to be common in Chicago’s society but the idea of being more allegiant to family than the faction is contrary to society’s beliefs, consequently creating the mantra: “Faction before blood. More than family, our factions are where we belong” (Roth 50) in order to eliminate all the ties to family once the faction is chosen.

The correct choosing of the faction is considered as the most important selection of their lifetime, thus, an aptitude test was implemented in order to ease minds and serve as a guide in the decision. Beatrice claims that test will “show me which of the five factions I belong in” (11), fully trusting in the test results. The trust quickly transforms into despair once she realizes the test cannot calm her uneasiness: her results came back inconclusive, categorizing her as a divergent individual. At this point in the story, the heroine-to-be grows anxious and doubtful as the Choosing Ceremony approaches, battling with her moral duty to her family and her new information about herself. Previously to the test, she relied upon the results to choose for her, as if she were giving all the responsibility of the decision away. However, in order for a heroine’s journey to begin, the choice must be done individually as the first step into her new identity.

As for Katniss, the event that served as a catalyst of her journey is the Reaping, an annual event where the tributes for the Hunger Games are chosen. Similar to Beatrice, one of Katniss’ main concerns is her family. After becoming the head of the family at such a young age, she developed a sense of duty and devotion towards her sister. Hence when Prim, her sister, is randomly chosen as a contestant in the Hunger Games, she is left stunned and asking to herself “Hadn’t I done everything?” (*THG* 5). Katniss began to panic as she watched her sister walk towards her imminent death. This is the instant where reality is shifted for Katniss and she volunteers in order to take her sister’s place. This act is met with hesitation and surprise. She narrates how “radical” (6) her actions seem compared to the rest of the district citizens:

There’s some confusion on the stage. District 12 hasn’t had a volunteer in decades and the protocol has become rusty. [...] In some districts, in which winning the reaping is

such a great honour, people are eager to risk their lives, the volunteering is complicated. But in District 12, where the word tribute is pretty much synonymous with the word corpse, volunteers are all but extinct. [...] Family devotion only does so far for most people on reaping day. (*THG* 6)

This bold act represents the moment she made the decision of sacrificing her life in order to save her sister, leaving herself behind. Her choice was done in a moment of high tension but aligned with her ideals and main priorities in life: the survival of her family, even if that meant never seeing them again. Similar to Beatrice who decided to follow her instincts and stayed true to desires to leave her faction, choosing Dauntless instead of her family's Abnegation, she left her family unwilling to stay in a place where she would have to lie about her ideals. Beatrice stayed true to herself as her parents wanted, even if that meant being separated from them. Both choices remained aligned with what the protagonist's main preoccupations are but resulted in what they feared the most: being apart from their families. As Katniss volunteers for her sister, she is taken away to the Capitol to begin her training as contestant in the Hunger Games, the same destiny that awaits Beatrice as she is taken to Dauntless to begin her new life. The direct consequence of the forced choice is the separation of the known environment into the unfamiliar territory.

2.3 The Makeover: Physical Transformation to Fit the Oppressive Society

In many other analyses of the character development of heroes, there comes a time in their journey when they leave their place of comfort and adventure into the unknown. For female heroes in these two YA Dystopian novels, their third stage also involves an introduction to foreign territories, but it is marked by the physical and mental transformation they undergo. The word 'makeover' is defined by The Cambridge Dictionary as "a set of changes that are intended to make a person or place more attractive" and in the year 2021, the application of 'makeovers' is frequent in many teen films such as *Moxie* (2021) and in many popular movies from the past two decades, for instance in *The Princess Diaries* (2001) and *The Breakfast Club* (1985), normalizing makeovers and embracing them as part of pop culture. However, some scholars, such as Tania Lewis, claim that this phenomenon of makeovers can be traced to the Victorian Era, a time of industrial revolution and social turmoil that brought importance to proper behaviour and books on how to achieve it. Lewis argues that the presence of makeover-

type of activities in media and books are a clear example of how the “modern advice culture, since the nineteenth century, has sought to provide social, moral and personal guidelines for everyday living” (447). Lewis reinforces her statement by adding how in times of uncertainty, people rely on popular trends and guides in order to feel a sense of security. After looking into the current programming in television, it is abundant the amount of transformation and makeover television series that can be found in multiple networks all over the world. From *Queer Eye* (2003-07), to *She’s All That* (1999) and *How Do I Look?* (2004-12), the makeover trope is a staple in many mainstream programs as they transform an outcast individual into a socially acceptable being against the frame social and economic uncertainty of the last twenty years. A makeover is what Katniss and Beatrice have to endure after being abruptly introduced into their new surroundings in order to shed their old outcast identity. But, regardless of both characters’ experience of this transformation, they show two distinct intentions and motivations for it, in order to survive in their new surroundings. Katniss is forced into a new aesthetic to fit the society she is entering while Beatrice takes it upon herself to change the way she is perceived, resulting in both changing their reputation among the other citizens.

The moment Katniss Everdeen arrives to the Capitol, where its aesthetics rely on extravagant fashion and colourful makeup, it is made apparent that her looks do not match society’s expectations. From the instant she first interacts with people from the Capitol, is clear how unpolished her appearance is in order to participate in the Hunger Games with the support from audiences. This support or favouritism from spectators is crucial in order to survive longer inside the Games since they have the power to send medicine, tools and even food to them. However, to get special treatment in form of sponsored gifts, the tributes have to appear desirable, as Katniss explains, the Hunger Games are not meant to be a “beauty contest” but it is factual that “the best-looking tributes always seem to pull more sponsors” (66). In Katniss’ case, her mentor Haymitch mentions how “once the stylists get a hold of you, you’ll be attractive enough” (66) remarking how insufficient her appearance seems in comparison to the beauty they are used to from other districts. Furthermore, she is forced to comply and do as her stylist commands in order to fit in, she is scrubbed, shaved, and washed until not only dirt was removed but “at least three layers of skin, turning my nails into uniform shapes, and primarily, ridding my body of hair” (71). However, this enforced makeover does not only alter her physical appearance but proves to have an effect on her identity as well. In the first interaction she has with her stylist team, they dehumanize her previous appearance, diminishing her old looks for being different: “Excellent! You almost look like a human being now!” (72). Remarking on the fact that she was an outcast up until that moment, preying on her rejected

status and devaluing her as less than a human being before the change. Katniss' physical makeover is done without any regard to her wishes or without having any control over her appearance. It is Cinna, her main stylist, that constructs her new image, hoping she will grow into it. Cinna claims to be impressed and inspired by her bravery with her sister and wants her and Peeta to be "unforgettable" (77). Since her actions during the Reaping catch the attention of the audiences for its brave nature, Cinna and her mentor Haymitch, strategize to continue this image of the brave girl from District 12 by dressing her in flames for her debut, and nicknaming her "Katniss, the girl who was on fire" (77). This new persona of the Girl on Fire is created by her team in order to boost her chances of being supported while in the Hunger Games, giving her a new identity in front of the masses. The success of their strategy seems evident when the audiences begin to obsess over Peeta and Katniss, leaving her to realize that "no one will forget me. Not my look, not my name. The girl who was on fire" (81). Even though her makeover focuses on her outside appearance, it leads the way for her reputation and state of mind to change. This is the moment Katniss' mentality begins to shift and allows herself to believe she is more than an outcast from a poor district and more than a nobody: "For the first time, I feel a flicker of hope rising up in me. Surely there must be one sponsor willing to take me on! And with a little extra help, some food, the right weapon, why should I count myself out of the Games?" (*THG* 81)

As far as her personality is concerned, her mentor and team believe it is also in need of a makeover. According to Haymitch, she has "as much charm as a dead slug" (136), which in the competition translates to the inability to attract multiple sponsors. She also privately expresses how bigoted the Games are, asking herself "why am I hopping around like some trained dog trying to please people I hate?" (*THG* 136). Unexpectedly for Katniss, her personality transformation in the eyes of the masses by the way of Peeta, the other tribute from District Twelve, when he confesses his romantic feelings towards her during a televised interview. Afterwards she is seen as "desirable" and part of the "star-crossed lovers from District Twelve" (158), ensuing her to have "sponsors lined up around the block" (160). Katniss is advised to agree and act jointly regarding their romantic involvement, creating more layers to her new public identity.

As Beatrice is introduced to her new community, it is clear that her reputation precedes her. She arrives to Dauntless as the only Abnegation initiate, becoming the 'Stiff' of the group, recalling to the insulting nickname from her old faction. She, however, decides to build her new identity by herself. The moment she arrives to her new surroundings, she volunteers to be the first jumper, the first initiate to be able to jump off a ledge and into the compound's

entrance. This act establishes the first pledge to volunteer as the bravest individual. Therefore, Beatrice decides to claim a new title, sparking surprise as she jumps: “A Stiff, the first to jump? Unheard of” (Roth 60). As she is celebrated as the first jumper, people begin to take interest in her. She is asked about her name but hesitates as she realizes the power she holds to change it, “a new place, a new name. I can be remade here” (60), choosing to be called Tris. In contrast to Katniss’, Tris’ makeover is more gradual, and begins with a change in her attitude and mentality that later translates to her appearance. But in similar fashion to Katniss, she also feels the need to change her appearance in order to survive her new surroundings. Even if she claimed her new title, her old nickname, Stiff, is still her identifier due to her looks. Her friend Christina mentions how unmemorable her appearance is, mainly because “all the Abnegation look the same to me” (80). Consequently, to shed that part of her past identity, she allows herself to be the subject of a makeover, changing her hair, clothes, make up, and even tattooing herself to match her faction’s bold aesthetic. But instead of beautifying her appearance, her goal is to be different to her ‘unrecognizable’ self, “who cares about pretty? I’m going for noticeable” (87). Deeper into her initiation, her friends remark how she looks “brave, dauntless” (114), even if she does not recognize herself in the mirror: “I see a stranger, [...] she can’t possibly be me, though she moves when I move” (119). Ultimately, it is her attitude combined with her new looks that catches the attention of others, slowly introducing her into their society, finally getting rid of her outcast identity: “I’m pretty sure we can’t call you Stiff anymore” (224) declares a Dauntless member to Tris after witnessing her during an initiation exercise. It is worth mentioning that Tris’ transformation is not only motivated by her desire to dispose her old outcast identity but by the danger that she finds herself in. Similar to Katniss, Tris also is in grave danger as she realizes what being Divergent means: “you’re Divergent. [...] Unless you want to wind up dead at the bottom of the chasm, you’ll figure out how to hide it” (255). Therefore, her desire to blend in among other regular Dauntless citizens quickly shifts into a need to look and act the part.

Katniss and the now named Tris go through a physical and mental change that disposes of their old identities with the goal of being respected and acknowledged in their new surroundings. For Katniss, she needs to be noticed as to get a better chance to survive, while Tris needs to blend with her community in order to survive. At this point in their journey, they naïvely feel confident as they rely on their appearances and ephemeral fame to ease their paths. In contrast to their initial reputation, they feel recognized and respected. However, they still are the girl from District 12 and the Stiff to the eyes of many. Since changing one’s identity is

not simply done by switching hairstyles and makeup, they now need to prove they are the personality they portray to be to the masses.

2.4 The Dangerous Spotlight: The Heroine's Double life

For the heroines' journeys to continue, they have to uphold the new public persona and reputation they have gained. However, they quickly realize how their outward identity is not necessarily who they are internally, marking the leading of a double life as their next step on their journey. Tris is perceived as a true Dauntless initiate and future leader but realizes how difficult it is to hide her Divergent status and disagreement towards the government officials. She is referred to as "too Dauntless for the other transfers" (271) or is reassured of her place in the faction by her instructor: "You belong with us" (274), evidently showing how others positively respond to her new image, making assumptions of Tris' character off of it. Likewise, Katniss is seen as a bold, passionate, and loving contestant who is supportive and appreciative of the government that saved her and Peeta from the Games. Yet, she is modest, eager for a revolution and resentful towards the President. Both Katniss and Tris find themselves in danger after their morals, intentions and beliefs do not match the public persona they have created, forcing themselves to sustain their new image in order to please those in charge.

In both *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent*, as in most YA Dystopian novels, societies are ruled by authoritarian regimes, as explained on the introduction to "Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults", in this genre "rigid and repressive regimes are often enforced through the enslavement and silencing of citizens" (4). Their rulers are portrayed as ruthless and threatening, but they are often disguised as secondary characters at the beginning. In *Divergent*, we meet Jeanine Matthews early on as a mere politician. It is not until she begins questioning Tris about her aptitude test that the readers get to witness her presence as an antagonist. Tris realizes that "she is lying to me, [...] she is sniffing around for the Divergent" (Roth 358), to later be Matthews revealed as the mastermind to an attack on Abnegation in order to size up Chicago. In the case of *The Hunger Games*, the presence of the abusive and authoritarian government is clear from the beginning "taking the kids from our districts, forcing them to kill one another while we watch – this is the Capitol's way of reminding us how totally we are at their mercy" (*THG* 8), but we don't meet the head of the government, the President Snow, till the very end of the first book, when the readers can finally identify a clear villain. Up till that moment, Katniss' main antagonists were starvation, death, other tributes of the

Hunger Games, and society at large. Consequently, this introduction of antagonists coincides with the moment the protagonist realizes her newfound optimism and safety is short lived, finding themselves in more danger than before. This can be seen as an anticlimactic moment in their story arch since all the hopes and goals the protagonist once had suddenly disappear, leaving the characters to acknowledge the unauthenticity of their new images. For Tris, this moment translates to being successfully initiated and accepted into the faction of Dauntless as she discovers the plans to attack on Abnegation are made through “brain-dead, obedient, and trained to kill [...] perfect soldiers” (418): the citizens of Dauntless. She uncovers her status as Divergent does not only help her through the aptitude test and initiation exercises but prevents her from succumbing to the mind manipulation that her new faction is being subjected to. Subsequently, she forces herself to carry on with the image she established for herself, trying to convince those in power of her innocent and supportive intentions: “You think we convinced him you’re just a silly girl?” (Roth 367). As for ‘the Girl on Fire’, Katniss, this pivotal moment in her journey occurs right after she claims Peeta and herself as the two victors of the 74th Hunger Games, defying the government ruling of having only one winner could be crowned as victor, “without a victor, the whole thing would blow up in the Gamemakers’ faces. They’d have failed the capitol!” (402). Katniss crafted a plan to commit suicide alongside Peeta, wholeheartedly knowing they would rather have two victors than none at all, bending the rules of the Games. Up until that point, she believed all her troubles rested on surviving the Games and returning home alive. Despite of her successfully doing so, her intelligence and strategic thinking to win defying the regime’s rules placed a target on her back, compelling her to maintain her image. Right after outsmarting the government to win alongside Peeta, her mentor Haymitch brings her up to speed with her new situation, advising her to keep up her appearance in order to survive: “You’re in trouble. Word is the Capitol’s furious about you showing them up in the arena. The one thing they can’t stand is being laughed at [...] your only defence can be you were so madly in love you weren’t responsible for your actions” (*THG* 416).

At this stage on their journey, ‘the First Jumper’ and ‘the Girl on Fire’ are upholding their double identities. They recognize their government leaders as their antagonists, the ones who have to be pleased and convinced that the ‘innocent girl from a modest family’ opposes no threat to their evil schemes. “Convince me” (*Catching Fire* 29) warns President Snow to a nervous Katniss, similar to what Tris keeps reminding herself whilst talking with Jeanine Matthews “I should be what she expects” (Roth 259). The concealment of their true emotions and intentions in order to comply and survive becomes essential. Tris continues to portray her image of the innocent, hard working and perfect Dauntless initiate while Katniss presents

herself as the in-love, sweet and grateful Hunger Games victor, both suppressing their real identities. In *Divergent*, this can be seen from chapter nineteen through chapter thirty-one whereas in *The Hunger Games* trilogy, the focus on Katniss' double life becomes central to the plot of the second book, *Catching Fire* (2009). However, the heroines are unable to keep on supporting their fake personas for long. Claire P. Curtis analyses the apathy of female characters in postapocalyptic dystopian works. Curtis highlights how the readers not only expect the main characters to identify the injustices they witness in their societies but to fight them as well: "These books are set up so that the reader can see how someone 'just like them' can play an active role in making the world more just" (92). Curtis even points out the assertiveness present in Katniss' character. The moment when she volunteers for her sister Prim is mentioned in her article *Educating Desire, Choosing Justice?* remarking how unlikely would be to read a story where Katniss allows her sister to go off to the Hunger Games, not looking beyond her "desire for personal safety" (92). Characters like Katniss and Tris who are described with such bravery and active personalities are hard to believe as compliant and submissive individuals to regimes preying on destruction and the endangerment of innocent people. That is why both heroines are not able to uphold their fake images for long.

2.5 The Acceptance of The Role: When the Mockingjay is Born and Divergents are Exposed

Approaching the end of Katniss' and Tris' journey means observing the process of acceptance of their role as heroines. They begin to realize how unsustainable and unmoral the preservation of their double life is. All through out *Catching Fire*, Katniss is able to witness the tyranny of President Snow who, apart from being the creator of the deadly Hunger Games, also targets her loved ones. From the extra surveillance around her home, the whiplashing of her friend Gale and to her forceful return to the Hunger Games alongside Peeta, she realizes her situation will always be dangerous. Adding to her feeling of unsafety, her fame and influence is established all throughout the country. Many people recreate her signature looks since "everyone wants to wear the winner's token" (*CF* 78) and both Peeta and her are "what no one wants to miss at a party" (78). Is not until she combines her established fame and influential status with her real morals and intentions that she marks the beginning of the revolution. However, even with power over the popular mind, she knows how challenging it is to assume

the role of a leader: “you have to stop running and turn around and face whoever wants you dead. The hard thing is finding the courage to do it” (118). Thus, she is unable to accept the role of “the symbol of the rebellion” (387) by herself believing she is not good enough to lead people, “no wonder I won the Games, no decent person ever does” (117). Many people close to Katniss, such as her mentors and friends, begin to be aware of the desires of other citizens. Oppressed people begin to rebel to the systems they once followed after Katniss’ small acts of defiance such as volunteering for her sister, showing kindness to other tributes, and outsmarting the Capitol in order to survive the games:

You haven’t hurt people - you’ve given them an opportunity. They just have to be brave enough to take it. [...] People who want to fight. Don’t you see? It’s happening! It’s finally happening! If there’s an uprising in District Eight, why not here? Why not everywhere? This could be it. (*Catching Fire* 100)

As a result of rebellious citizens, people around Katniss begin to take notice of her potential to free the country, sadly those in power realize it too, tightening their grip on Katniss’ free will. After President Snow is not pleased with her actions, he decides to destroy her self-esteem by the way of threats as an attempt to erase her as a rebellious public figure: “I see the end of hope, the beginning of the destruction of everything I hold dear in the world” (75). From this point on, her mentor and friends take control over her rebellious image, without Katniss’ knowledge. Haymitch, her mentor, points out her impulsive behaviour displayed all throughout her journey and poor planification skills: “So it's you and a syringe against the Capitol? See, this is why no one lets you make the plans” (384), justifying their reasons to craft an “elaborate plan in which I was a piece, [...] used without consent” (385). Regardless of her initial shock, Katniss realizes how essential she is in the liberation of her country, but most importantly, in the liberation of her friends who are being hold captive under President Snow’s wrath. Similar to when her sister was chosen as a tribute on the Hunger Games, Katniss agrees to accept her role as leader in order to save her loved ones as well as all of those citizens willing to fight alongside her. Also, she begins to acknowledge how her power and influence runs deeper than new looks and fame: “I am the mockingjay. The one that survived despite the Capitol’s plans. The symbol of the rebellion” (387).

Across the last chapters of *Divergent*, Tris is forced to be a soldier in the destruction and annihilation of her previous faction, placing her family there in direct danger. However, similar to Katniss, Tris is confronted with a situation that she can no longer be compliant to:

the death of her loved ones. She is exposed as a “divergent rebel” (Roth 427) to Jeannine Matthews, who places Tris and her partner Tobias under arrest and plans on killing both. However, Matthews chooses to diminish Tris’ morale by controlling Tobias’ mind, using him as a weapon. Having to fight her partner takes a toll on her, losing all hope she once had, “I feel numb inside” (435), leaving Tris to surrender and await her imminent death. Against all odds and everything Tris expected, her mother crafted a plan to save her and use her as a leader. As a fellow Divergent, her mother begins to indoctrinate Tris with knowledge about their being Divergent. Tris begins to understand the reasons why she never felt as part of the community and why her Divergent status is essential for the releasement of their people: “we can’t be confined to one way of thinking, and that terrifies our leaders” (442). Tris finds herself in the middle of the beginning of an uprising against being controlled. She recognizes how important her status is to free all factions, but most importantly, all her mind-controlled friends: “I feel like someone breathed new air into my lungs. I am not Abnegation. I am not Dauntless. I am Divergent. And I can’t be controlled.” (443)

At this point in both heroines’ journeys, they begin to recognize themselves as people in charge of masses, with a goal and will power enough to fight against injustices. But this time, they are willing to fight for strangers, not only their friends and family. The acquisition of a collective responsibility combined with their personal motivations and influences marks the acceptance of their roles as leaders, letting the end of their stories to begin.

2.6 The Bittersweet End: The War and Its Aftermath

It is common knowledge how many traditional stories and children books conclude with ‘and they lived happily ever after’ where the heroes are victorious, and the villains defeated. But, for some heroes, the ending of their tales does not mean a happy ending entirely. Usually, YA novels showcase an ending that is both happy and sad, according to Weik Von Mossner “The young reader expects—and needs—stories that are gripping but nevertheless offer at least a promise that a better world will be possible” (70). Therefore, the reader expects Katniss to live peacefully with her sister and mother in the countryside surrounded by nature and her friends, leaving the Hunger Games as a distant memory. They might also expect Tris to grow old with Tobias and her friends, finally free to be her Divergent self. Sadly, for the optimistic reader, their expectations do not match the endings of their stories.

Tris begins her position as leader right after witnessing the murderer of her mother. She is tested again when one of her friends is ordered under mind-controlling technology to kill her, leaving Tris no other choice but to shoot her friend. After being a spectator to such traumatic incident, she begins to toy with the idea of surrender “I clamp my hand over my mouth to muffle the sound and scream again, a scream that turns into a sob” (444). Until she uses the memories of those she has lost, her mother and Tobias, as encouragement: “I hear him telling me to be brave. I hear my mother telling me to be brave. I am brave” (447). In fact, she holds on to more than just bravery. Tris travels to where all the officials are in order to shut down the simulation, freeing all the citizens of Dauntless. Along the way she realizes how much her character has evolved, leaving behind her fears and insecurities, “They think that because I’m small, or a girl, or a Stiff, I can’t possibly be cruel. But they’re wrong” (462). Her ending is met after successfully freeing all of Dauntless soldiers and rescuing Tobias. They decide to flee to another faction while all the lives she has lost begin to weigh down on her, after her morale. She is marked by loss and grief, leaving the impulsive and brave ‘Stiff’ behind: “We are creatures of loss; we have left everything behind. I have no home, no path, and no certainty. I am no longer Tris, the selfless, or Tris, the brave. I suppose that now, I must become more than either” (Roth 487).

Katniss finally takes on her role as the symbol of the rebellion, leading attacks to the Capitol where President Snow hides. Along her way she gains followers and supporters to her cause but is burdened with the traumatic memories from her last experiences at the Hunger Games. She unravels mentally while trying to lead the country, leaving some to believe of her insurability to be their leader. She is seen as a potential martyr since “dead or alive, Katniss Everdeen will remain the face of this rebellion. [...] Think of the Mockingjay and in her you will find the strength you need to rid Panem of its oppressors” (*Mockingjay* 294). Seeing as her image is used by others once more, she decides to adventure alone to the belly of the beast, only to find out her friends and family have followed her. She witnesses her friend Gale consumed by “rage and hatred” (388) and the murderer of her friend Finnick after saving her. But what leaves a powerful impact on Katniss is the murder of her little sister, Prim. Following her footsteps, Prim joins the revolution as a medic, only to be caught in the crossfire. After the war, President Snow is defeated, and Katniss is left with an emptiness inside in the shape of her sister. She decides to go back to her old house, now vacant and surrounded by ruins, a place far away from any other person: “I no longer feel allegiance to these monsters called human beings, [...] something is significantly wrong with a creature that sacrifices its children’s lives

to settle its differences. The truth is, it benefits no one to live in a world where these things happen” (*Mockingjay* 377).

The journey of the heroines from *Divergent* and *The Hunger Games* trilogy can be characterized as bittersweet. They defeat their villains and successfully free their societies. Tris is able to run away with Tobias and Katniss finds herself growing old alongside Peeta. Sadly, they have to mourn the lives of all the people they once loved: their families. The lives lost at the expense of the greater good can be seen as sacrifices, but when most of the lost souls are young, the tale takes a quick turn to end as a tragedy. Susan Louise Stewart explains how “the sacrifice of the young for the good of the community makes these kinds of narratives simultaneously striking and horrifying” (162). Regardless of their personal peaceful and seemingly happy ending, their journeys’ end is marked by tragedy, leaving our heroines slaves to their traumatic experiences. Choosing not to be consumed by grief, both heroines continue with their lives while remembering the fallen. At the end of *Mockingjay* Katniss narrates her story to her children as she hopes for a better future for them, remarking how “there are much worse games to play” (438).

Conclusions

Ever since 1871 (Segal 7), the study of character development of heroes in fictional stories was devoted to the analysis of male heroes who were introduced to a “region of supernatural wonder” (Campbell 23) away from their ordinary world. This study is now known as *The Hero’s Journey* or *The Monomyth*, popularized by Joseph Campbell in 1949. Others like David Adams Leeming in 1981 or Phil Cousineau in 1990 were inspired to further analyse the character development of the same male heroes from fictional stories. In contrast to the abundance and popularity of said studies, the analysis of the character development in young female heroes from Young Adult Dystopian Fiction books has scarcely been done since the popularization of the genre.

This dissertation analyses the character development seen in Katniss Everdeen from *The Hunger Games* trilogy and Tris Prior from *Divergent*, summarizing their journeys and each step they experience along their story. At first glance, the journey they undertake seems dissimilar from Campbell’s classic scheme, but after the analysis we can point some similarities among the contrasts. Campbell categorizes the first “great stage” (28) as separation or departure, where the heroes are introduced in their worlds and then called upon an adventure

to fulfil a quest away from their surroundings. Next, they are presented with “the trials and victories of initiation” (28) marked by their journey discovering the new world and achieving the goal of their quest. Finally, their last part is categorized as their journey back to their homeland leaving the new world behind. At first glance, Katniss and Tris do experience similar situations: they are separated from their homes, they endure a transformative journey in their new homes and end their journey away from the new world. But a key element in the journeys of these two female heroines from YA dystopian stories is their rooted responsibility towards their families and communities combined with pressure from an oppressive government. In contrast to Campbell’s structure, Katniss and Tris do not have the luxury of refusing or even questioning the separation from their homes, nor do they have the opportunity to safely return to their unchanged home at the end of their stories: the end of their stories cannot be labelled as the stage of “freedom to live” (29) just like their beginnings do not have the “refusal of the call” (28). Furthermore, Katniss and Tris are young girls dealing with the search of their personal identities alongside the expectations of their communities regarding their innate braveness. They begin their story with the goal and intention of protecting their families only to lose them for the greater good, slaving their endings to grief and trauma. I believe the female heroines from YA dystopian novels have a darker and somewhat traumatic story, raising the question of how worthwhile is to fight for freedom if your loved ones are not able to experience it. As mentioned above, the YA dystopian genre tells futuristic stories mirroring the concerns of the young generation such as corruption, social and political oppression, and individuality, which is heavily reflected on and directly influences the character’s journeys. The stories from this genre are seen as possible outcomes of the future, charging them, and thus their main characters, with the responsibility of not only solving their personal ‘quests’ but also the whole community’s. A study analysing the difference between the development of female and male protagonists from this genre should be conducted next, to further study if these heroines’ journeys are filled with expectations and responsibilities due to their gender performance, which is the prediction the author of this dissertation personally conducts.

In addition, this provides a good starting point for discussion and further research, such as: Could stories like these ones influence a new social justice movement, since banners with quotes from these books have already been seen in popular protests? What does the popularity of these characters say about the historical moment at which the works were written? Is there a need for female heroines to come to the forefront and provide alternative models of leadership?

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